FRANK MERRIWELL
OR. FIRST DAYS AT FARDALE

Burr L. Standish

THE DOG WITH A SNAPPING HOWL LEAPED STRAIGHT FOR FRANK'S THROAT.
CHAPTER I.
FRANK MAKES A FOE.

"Get out!"
Thump! A shrill howl of pain.
"Stop it! That's my dog!"
"Oh, is it? Then you ought to be kicked, too! Take that for your impudence!"

Cuff! A blow from an open hand sent the boyish owner of the whimpering poodle staggering to the ground, while paper bags of pop-corn flew from his basket and scattered their snowy contents around.

"That was a cowardly blow!"

The haughty, over-dressed lad who had knocked the little pop-corn vender down, after kicking the barefooted boy's dog, turned sharply as he heard these words, and he found himself face to face with a youth of an age not far from his own.

As they stood thus, eyeing each other steadily, the two boys presented a strong contrast. The one who had lately been so free with foot and hand had a dark, hand-some, cruel face. He was dressed in a plaid suit of a very pronounced pattern, had patent leather shoes on his feet, and a crushed felt hat on his head, wore several rings on his fingers, and had a heavy gold double chain strung across his vest, while the pin in his red necktie was set with a "sparkler" that might or might not be genuine.

The other lad was modestly dressed in a suit of brown, wore well-polished shoes and a stylish straw hat, but made no display of jewelry. His face was frank, open, and winning, but the merry light that usually dwelt in his brown eyes was now banished by a look of scorn, and the set of his jaw told that he could be firm and dauntless.

This was Frank Merriwell, who had just stepped from the train at Fardale. Frank had noticed the other boy on the train, and wondered if he, too, were on his way to Fardale, but the haughty, exclusive carriage of the stranger had prevented any attempt at scraping an acquaintance.
Now, however, Frank had no hesitation in addressing the fellow who had struck the pop-corn vender.

"Who are you? and what right have you to meddle?" demanded the haughty youth.

"My name is Merriwell, and I have a right to meddle because you just struck one who is smaller and weaker than yourself. I may be a little fresh, but it's my way, and I can't help it; I always take the side of the under dog."

"Do you mean to call me a dog? Take care! My name is Bartley Hodge, and my father——"

"Never mind your family history; I don't care if your father is Grover Cleveland. You kicked that dog out of pure viciousness, and you struck the boy because he dared say a word in defense of his own. If he had been your size you wouldn't have hit him quite so quick."

"I may take a fancy to hit you."

"You'll tip the beam at fifteen pounds more than I, but you are at liberty to hit me if you can. If you try it, I'll agree to give you such a thrashing as you deserve, or my name's not Frank Merriwell."

Bartley Hodge hesitated. He was angry, but there was something about the bearing of the boy in brown that made him fancy Merriwell would be a hard customer to handle.

"Bah!" he cried, snapping his fingers.

"I wouldn't lower myself to fight with you."

He turned and walked away, while Frank helped the owner of the dog gather up his spilled corn.

"Say, what aainty!" exclaimed the vender, regarding Frank with admiring eyes. "That fellow looked like he could eat you, but he couldn't bluff you a little bit. I'll bet you can do him!"

"Well, I don't know about that," laughed the boy in brown. "But I think I should have been able to make it rather interesting for him."

"Have you come here to attend the academy?"

"Yes."

"I guess that's what t'other fellow's come for. He's gone to look after his luggage. There's the expressman down at the end of the platform. He will take you and your trunk to Snodd's for half a dollar."

"Who is Snodd?"

"Why, he lives down at the Cove, and he always keeps a lot of the felons who come to git into the academy till after they are examined and accepted."

"Then to Snodd's I go, but I think I'll walk. How far is it?"

"A good mile."

"Just enough to stretch my legs after the long ride on the train. I'll get the expressman to take over my trunk, and I'll give you a quarter to show me the way to Snodd's."

"Done!" cried the barefooted boy. "I'm your huckleberry!"

Frank sought the expressman, and gave him the trunk check, together with a quarter to pay him for moving the trunk, paying no heed to Bartley Hodge, who was regarding him with an insolent sneer. Then he returned to the young pop-corn vender, who whistled to his pupee, and they started on their tramp from the station to Snodd's.

The station was situated on the outskirts
of the village of Fardale, a place of not more than one thousand inhabitants. Fardale was nestled among the hills which here reached down to the very sea-coast, and, in the yellowish-blue haze of a warm spring afternoon, it looked like a very pretty little place indeed.

It had been Frank Merriwell's ambition to go to West Point, but Horton Merriwell's influence had not been powerful enough to induce the Congressman from their district to recommend Frank, there being at least a dozen other applicants, so, as the next best resort, the boy was sent to Fardale.

Fardale Military Academy was modeled as far as possible after the great school at West Point, and was in many respects a most successful imitation. The students at Fardale, however, were a little wilder and harder to manage than those who went to the Point, for the fathers of unruly and wayward sons often sent them to this private military academy to have them "toned down."

For all of this, not every one could get into Fardale Academy, as every applicant was forced to pass examination, and not a few of those who came to Snodd's as candidates for admission failed from utter unworthiness, being usually advised to return home and attend common school another year or more.

Frank Merriwell grew jolly as he tramped along the road with the boy and dog for companions. He seemed to forget his encounter with Bartley Hodge till there came the rumble of wheels, and, looking round, he saw the express wagon coming, with Hodge seated on his trunk behind the driver.

"Here comes that other feller," said the barefooted lad. "He don't walk any, he don't. He's goin' to the academy sure, and I bet you and him has trouble."

"It is possible we may," admitted Frank, quietly. "I am always making enemies, and I have started in first-rate here."

Bartley Hodge's eyes glittered as he saw the two boys and the dog. He reached over and appropriated the driver's whip, and, as the express wagon rolled past, he leaned out and gave the poodle a cut that sent the unfortunate creature rolling and howling into the ditch.

In an instant the jolly look had vanished from Frank Merriwell's face, and he started forward a step, as if he thought of rushing after the wagon and dragging the vicious youngster out into the dust of the road.

"Now I know he is a coward and a bully!" muttered Frank.

The barefooted boy went down on his knees in the ditch and gathered up the poodle, caressing and patting the whining creature.

"Oh, if I was big enough, I'd lick that feller!" he cried, his eyes filling with angry tears.

"Never mind," said Frank. "I'll do it for you."

"Will you, honest?"

"Well, I'll do my best."

"He's bigger than you."

"I know it."

"I'd just like to see the scrap," said the urchin. "Can't you fix it so I'll be there? My name's Tad Jones, and I bring milk to Snodd's ev'ry morning."

"Well, Tad, I'll see what can be done
for you. Hello! I suppose that is the academy?"

"Yes, that's it."

Below them lay a beautiful, sheltered cove, with wooded hills beyond. At the western extremity of the cove were the academy and surrounding buildings, the chapel, gymnasium, mess-hall and riding-hall.

Frank was most agreeably surprised, for, as Fardale Academy was a private school, he had not looked for anything nearly as pretentious.

He stood surveying the place for some minutes, questioning Tad Jones, who was ready with answers for everything, and then, having Snodd's pointed out to him, a big, old-fashioned house on the nearer side of the Cove, he gave the lad the promised quarter, and started down the road alone.

Little did Frank Merriwell dream of the struggles, trials, defeats, disgraces, battles, and triumphs that lay before him, and little recked he of the new life he was to lead at Fardale.

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CHAPTER II.

FUN AT SNODD'S.

It was not far from sunset when Frank reached Snodd's; he found his trunk at the door, and Snodd himself was there to meet him.

Mr. Snodd was a lanky, farmerish-looking man, with a nanny-goat wisp of a beard on his chin. His clothes showed he was in the habit of making an effort to keep "dressed up," but didn't know how. He squinted keenly at Frank as the lad came up and said:

"Are you Mr. Snodd?"

"Wal, yas, I guess I be," replied Snodd, as if somewhat in doubt himself.

"Be you the feller what owns this trunk?"

"Yes."

"Goin' to the academy?"

"If I am admitted."

"Hum! Wal, you didn't ride over from the station?"

"No; I preferred to walk."

"Yas; saved a quarter that way. Now I don't know's we'll be able to keep you here. An't but one room left, an' you won't want to pay what I ask."

"How do you know?" asked Frank, in surprise. "What gave you that impression?"

"Wal, I kinder cal'lated so from what I've heerd of ye. I never let nobody beat me down."

"How much do you ask for the room and board by the week?"

"Four dollars, and that is cheap as——-"

"I'll take it, and here is the money for one week in advance."

Mr. Snodd gasped, slowly taking the money Frank promptly handed over.

"I kinder guess there's some mistake somewhere," he said. "Feller that come ahead said you'd try to beat me—said you was so blamed mean you walked over, stead of payin' the expressman another quarter to fetch ye."

"So Mr. Hodge has begun thus soon," said Frank, grimly. "He was right; I did walk over, instead of paying a quarter to be brought by the expressman, but I wanted to stretch my legs, and I gav' Tad Jones a quarter to show me the way here."

"Eh! Is that so! Paid a quarter an' walked! Wal, I guess you ain't so gol
derned mean as ye might be. An' you've paid a week in advance, which t'other feller an't done. I guess you're all right, an' if you'll ketch holt, we'll have your trunk up stairs in two shakes.'

They carried in the trunk, and Mr. Snodd sat his end down to introduce a buxom, smiling girl who appeared in the hall.

"This is my daughter Belinda; Belinda, this is a new academy feller. What'd you say your name was?"

Frank gave his name and acknowledged the introduction, after which the trunk was carried up stairs and deposited in a small, neat room, the one window of which looked out on the academy buildings.

"The bell will be rung for supper purty quick," said Mr. Snodd. "Better git ready to come down."

Then Snodd left him, and he immediately proceeded to wash and make himself presentable.

While thus engaged he heard a familiar voice outside, and he knew Bart Hodge was near at hand.

Frank's door was open on a crack, and to this he slipped, peering out.

Hodge had met Belinda at the head of the stairs, and, considering himself something of a masher, he was straightway doing his best to "make a hit" with the girl.

From his position Frank could see them plainly, and he also saw that the doors of several other rooms were slightly ajar, and he could see more than one curious boyish eye peering from the cracks.

Hodge was being watched by Snodd's boarders.

"You have a charming place here," said Bart, in his most fetching way.

"Do you really think so?" smiled Belinda.

"Sure. But it's not half so charming as you are yourself. I was afraid it would be rather dull here, but now I am sure I shall find it pleasant and agreeable."

"Hodge is putting up a pretty bluff," thought Frank.

Belinda blushed and looked down. She had a pitcher of water in her hands, having been on her way with it to one of the rooms.

"We always try to make it pleasant for all our boarders," she said.

"But I trust you will try to make it exceptionally pleasant for me," insinuated Bart, drawing a bit closer. "A moonlight ramble along the shore would be charming—with you."

"You are rather bold."

"I can't help it, Belinda—what a sweet name—how poetie! You have the brown eyes of a fawn. The sight of those tempting lips makes me burn with a desire to taste their dewy freshness. Belinda, give me a kiss! Give me just one, and I will—"

"Get out!"

Splash! The contents of the water-pitcher struck him full in the face just as he was attempting to take the coveted kiss. With a gurgle of astonishment, he sat down heavily on the floor, gasping and dazed, while Belinda flitted away, laughing merrily.

"Oh, Belinda!" shouted one of the eavesdroppers. "How could you be so cruel!"

And a roar of laughter came from half a dozen rooms.

Realizing that he had been seen and heard, Hodge scrambled to his feet and bolted for his own room, dripping with water.

Laughing at his foe's discomfiture, Frank finished making his toilet, and he had been ready some time when the supper-bell rang.

The boys trooped down to the dining-room, where Snodd introduced Frank all
around, ending by presenting him to Mrs. Snodd, a large, jolly-looking woman.

Hodge did not show up till the lads were seated and had begun to eat, Belinda serving. When Hodge appeared, the delay was explained, for he had changed his clothes throughout, and removed all traces of the ducking he had received at the hands of Belinda.

His face, however, was flushed, for he could not fail to note the sly grins of the boys as they were introduced. Frank was very grave, bowing slightly to Hodge, although he received no more than a cutting stare in return.

Being something of a ventriloquist, Frank resolved to have some fun with his enemy, so he made one of the other lads, Winslow by name, seem to observe:

"It is a very wet day, Mr. Hodge."

This caused the others to grin still more broadly, while Hodge stiffly returned:

"I hadn't noticed it, Mr. Winslow."

"What are you speaking to me for?" demanded Winslow. "I didn't address you."

"Yes, you did," returned Bart, sharply.

"You are a—a—mistaken," said Winslow, who had a peppery temper.

Immediately Frank made another fellow by the name of Gray seem to inquire:

"Mr. Hodge, don't you think Belinda is a sweet name—very poetic?"

"I don't know as it's any of your business what I think!" snapped Bart.

"Who are you talking to?" asked Ned Gray, as Hodge glared at him.

"I am speaking to you, as you had the insolence to speak insultingly to me first." "I didn't say a word to you!"

"You did!"

Ned Gray looked as if he longed to punch Bart's head; but at this moment Frank made Barney Mulloy seem to observe:

"Whin do yez inexpct to take thot ramble along th' shore in the moonloight, Misher Hodge?"

"I'll take a ramble with you, you Irish chump!" cried Bart, now thoroughly enraged; "and I'll punch your head, too!"

"Plewhat's thot?" cried Barney, promptly rising to his feet. "Is it me ye are athter addressin' yer remarks to, ye splpane? Oi'll break your face!"

"Boys! boys!" cried Mrs. Snodd, in amazement and alarm. "What's got into you? You are behaving in a most ungentelemanly manner."

"That's so, by gum!" agreed Snodd. "Never knowed no fellers to act like this at the table before sence we've bin taking applicants to board."

"Ixcuse me," said Barney, as he sat down; "but it shtarted me blud a bit to hiv thot crayther call me a chump whin Oi niver spoke a word to him in all me loife."

"Never mind him," Frank made Belinda appear to say. "He's in love, you know, and—"

"I won't stay here to be insulted!" cried Bartley Hodge, as he angrily tore out of the room, slamming the door behind him, but failing to shut out the roar of laughter that broke from the boys.

CHAPTER III.

A COWARDLY ASSAULT.

"Av all th' big shtuffs Oi'ver saw, thot fellly takes th' cake!" declared Barney Mulloy.

"He didn't seem to like it when you asked him if he didn't think Belinda a sweet name, Gray," cried Sam Winslow. "But I didn't ask him anything of the kind," rather warmly asserted Ned Gray. "I never opened my mouth to him till he spoke to me."

"Oh, come, now!" exclaimed several of the others. "We heard you."

"I tell you you're mistaken; but Winslow fired the first shot when he said it was a very wet day."
FRANK MERRIWELL.

"But I never said it, you know," cried Winslow. "I heard somebody say so, but it wasn’t I."

"If this keeps up, Barney will deny he said anything about taking a ramble along the shore in the moonlight," said Ross Kent.

"An’ it’s th’ truth Oi’d be shpakin’ av Oi did say so. It’s niver a wrrud av th’ sort did Oi say to th’ b’y."

The boys looked at each other, greatly mystified, failing to observe the merry twinkle in Frank’s eyes. As for Frank, he was not going to give away the trick just then, as it might afford him some sport in the future. He felt that he had squared with Hodge for trying to prejudice Snodd against him; but there was another account to settle. He did not forget that he had promised Tad Jones that he would give Bart a thrashing.

"I don’t think you spoke to Hodge at all," smiled Frank. "I’m sure I didn’t hear any of you say a word to him till after he spoke to you."

Frank spoke the literal, truth, but the others were inclined to regard it as a joke. In order to divert their thoughts and prevent a further discussion of the matter, Frank told a funny story that seemed applicable to the occasion, setting the whole table in a roar of laughter, and causing Hodge to be forgotten for the time.

Being a born diplomat, Frank decided that then was the accepted time to make himself solid at Snodd’s, which he proceeded to do by keeping up a string of funny stories and witty sayings that convulsed the boys and made them decide that he must be a jolly good fellow.

When supper was over and they trooped from the dining-room, Frank was surrounded and carried off to Ned Gray’s and Ross Kent’s room, where there was a little "gathering."

"Make yourself at home, Merriwell," invited Gray, offering the only chair in the room. "Kent and I take turns at this when we do not have company. When we have company, we sit on the floor and let our feet hang down. Be patient till I produce the baleful nicotian."

He plunged headlong into his trunk, and soon produced cigarettes, which he passed around, observing:

"Life really isn’t worth living, fellows; have a cigarette with me."

The cigarettes were of the big, fat, Turkish variety.

"I seldom smoke," Frank declared, "but I will join you now."

As he reached out his hand, he noticed that one of the cigarettes seemed of its own accord to slip into his fingers, and he instantly decided that it had been "forced" upon him by Gray, as a sleight-of-hand performer forces a card.

Instantly Merriwell was suspicious, feeling sure that the boys had gathered to see some kind of a trick played on him.

"Fire away," directed Ned Gray, placing some matches on the stand. "Smoke up, boys!"

He set the example by lighting his own cigarette.

Frank was not backward, but he took care not to draw too hard on his.

Suddenly a dog was heard whining at the door.

"Get out!" shouted Gray, flinging a slipper against the door and settling back comfortably on the bed.

The dog barked angrily.

"Somebody drive that creature away, please," said Frank. "Dogs make me very nervous."

Ned placed his cigarette on the edge of the stand and went to the door.

This was even better than Frank had expected.

It had been his intention to attract the attention of the boys to the door long enough for him to light another cigarette with his, which he would fling out of the open window. Now he proceeded to ex-
change his for Gray's, and no one observed the swap.

"There isn't any dog here," said Ned, in disgust, as he closed the door and came back. "The creature must be out doors somewhere."

He picked up his cigarette and gave a long pull at it.

Sizz—bang!

The cigarette burst into flame, and, with an exclamation of astonishment and dismay, Ned flung it to the floor, where it lay and sizzled, while a long, green snake seemed to writhe and crawl out of it.

"Behold!" cried Frank, soberly, rising to his feet— "behold this solemn warning! That shows what cigarettes lead to—delusions, red fire, jim-jams. I swear off on the spot."

Out of the window he flung his own cigarette.

"Well, I'll swear off myself if I ever make another bungle of that sort," declared Ned, rubbing his eyes and flushing as he heard the laughter of the boys. "You're the first fellow to come here and escape this dose, Merriwell."

"Then I have much to be thankful for," said Frank, smiling, as he saw the green snake crumble to ashes.

"Oi say, b'ys," said Barney, "are yez in fer a bit av foragin' this noight?"

"Foraging?"

"Yis."

"Where? What do you mean?"

"It's a roight foine lot av coider Snodd has bottled in the celly, an' Oi know a way to rache it."

"Cider!" gurgled Ross Kent, striking an attitude. "A nectar for the gods!"

"A necktie fer th' gods!" exclaimed Barney. "Oi niver hearrud it called thot before."

"How can we reach this glorious cider?" asked Sam Winslow.

"By th' roadway dure," replied Barney. "Oi know a way to open it."

"Then it's cider—good old-fashioned cider—will wet our parched tongues this eve. Are yon with us, Merriwell?"

"Yis," demanded Barney, "are ye wid us, or ag'in us?"

"I trust you will excuse me this time, as I am going over to the academy this evening to see Lieutenant Gordan. Under ordinary circumstances, I would be more than delighted to be with you."

In vain they urged him, and they discovered that Frank was one of the kind of boys who are not easily coaxed or driven against their will.

Frank listened a while to the plans of the boys, and then he begged to be excused, and left them.

He soon left the house and made his way over to the academy, where he sought and found Lieutenant Gordan.

Arrangements had been made by letter, so that his coming was expected, and, in a short time, they were seated in a quiet room, where his preliminary examination was begun.

In less than an hour, the lieutenant said:

"I scarcely think there will be any trouble but you will pass all right, Merriwell; but it is well enough to brush up on certain points, to make sure."

Then he told Frank what studies to take up, escorted him to the limit of the academy grounds, and bade him good-night and good-luck.

Frank was feeling light-hearted and well-satisfied as he turned his face toward Snodd's. At last he had reached Fardate, and there seemed no obstacle in the way of his admission to the academy.

True he had made an enemy of Bart Hodge, but he was not afraid of Hodge, and he did not anticipate much trouble from the fellow.

He knew little of Hodge's vindictive, vengeful nature.

Frank whistled a merry tune as he walked briskly along.

Suddenly, without the least warning, some one leaped upon him from the
shadow of some bushes at the road-side, and he received a blow on the head that sent him staggering.

Before he could recover, his unknown assailant was on him, and they grappled.

The fellow quickly pressed a handkerchief over Frank's mouth, nose, and eyes, at the same time bearing him backward to the ground.

The handkerchief gave out a strong, pungent door that seemed piercing to Frank's brain, and robbed him of what little strength the blow had left him.

His resistance was feeble and ineffectual, and he felt his senses beginning to reel.

When he tried to cry out, no more than a murmuring groan escaped his lips.

Bright lights broke like rockets before his eyes, and he heard sweet music, mingled with the tolling of heavy bells.

Then these sounds drifted away—away—away—

CHAPTER IV.

BARTLEY HODGE'S LITTLE GAME.

Mr. John Snodd was preparing to retire for the night when Bartley Hodge put in an appearance and drew him aside, whispering in his ear:

"Mr. Snodd, there have been burglars in your cellar to-night."

"What's that?" shouted the man, in astonishment. "Burglars! You're foolin'!"

"Sh! Easy!" cautioned Bart. "I am not fooling. I am in earnest. I saw them slip out by the rollway door. There were several of them, and all carried something."

"Wal, I'll investigate this right off. I'll——"

"If you waste time that way, you may lose them all," said Bart. "I followed one of them, and I think I can take you to him now."

"Ye do, hey? Then, by gum! I'm with ye! Just you wait till I git my old gun."

In a few seconds Snodd was ready with the old-fashioned musket. Hodge advised him to take an unlighted lantern, which might be needed, and, when this was secured, they started out, taking the road toward the Cove.

Bart moved swiftly and with confidence, urging Snodd to hurry, for the man was inclined to hang back and be cautious.

"I don't care about runnin' up ag'in a gang of burglars," he said.

"There's no danger of that," assured Bart. "Only one of them came this way."

Down near the shore Hodge suddenly paused and pointed to a dark figure lying on the ground at one side of the road.

"What's that?" he whispered.

Snodd's teeth chattered, as he cocked his gun and pointed it at the object.

"It's one of them burglars!" he said, excitedly. "If the critter jumps at us, I'll fix him!"

"Don't shoot!" cried Bart, catching the arm of the excited man. "I don't think he'll hurt us. He seems quiet enough."

Then the boy advanced boldly, yet with some show of caution, and halted near the prostrate form.

"Hello you; what's the matter?" he asked. "Why don't you get up?"

There was no reply; the prostrate figure did not stir.

"Light your lantern, Mr. Snodd," advised Bart. "We'll see what's the matter with this fellow."

Snodd's fingers were so unsteady that he was forced to light three matches before he could light the lantern. After a while, however, he succeeded.

"Let me have the lantern," said Bart, as he took it from the man's hands.

"This fellow smells as if he had been drinking, and I rather think that is the matter with him."

Snodd sniffed the air.
"By gum! you're right," he agreed. "It does smell that way. Mebbe he an't one of the burglars at all."

"Well, we'll soon find out. Take a look at him, Mr. Snodd, and see if you know him."

The light was flung full in the face of the prostrate individual, and both man and boy uttered exclamations.

"Great ginger!" cried Snodd, astounded. "It's that last feller that came here to go to the academy."

"That's so," said Hodge. "Its Merriwell. I wonder what the matter with him can be? Is he hurt, or has he been——?"

"Whew!" sniffed Snodd. "Can't ye smell it? It's cider, sure as ye live! Why, here's a bottle—an' here's another! It's my own cider, too—some I put up six years ago. Here's a bottle that's broke. His clothes is wet with it! He's full of cider clean to ther nozzle! He's drunk!"

"Oh, no!" retorted Hodge, as if he could not believe such a thing possible. "He isn't drunk—he can't be!"

"I tell ye he is!" snapped Snodd, who was beginning to fume with rage. "He's stole my cider from the cellar, an' he's filled his elf chock-full of it. He's drunk as a lord!"

"I can hardly believe such a thing possible," came from Bart, as if he really were very reluctant to think it true.

"I wouldn't thought it of him myself," acknowledged Snodd. "He appeared like a purty respectable feller. But here's the proof, and this will cook him so he'll never git inter Fardale Academy. They don't take no young drunkards in there."

It was with the greatest difficulty that Bart Hodge suppressed a chuckle of satisfaction. In his treacherous heart he was crying:

"There, Mr. Frank Merriwell, I rather think I have fixed you this time!"

Snodd stirred Frank with his heavy boot, roughly commanding:

"Wake up, young feller—wake up, I say. Come, come! I ain't goin' ter fool much with you, by gum! You'll pay for this cider, an' then you'll pack your things an' git out of my house about as quick as you know how."

"He's dead to the world," said Bart. "He's apt to lay like this for hours. Better leave him here to sleep off his drunk."

"That's so," said Snodd. "I'll lock up the house, and then he will have to pound around a while before he gets in. 'Sole my cider, did he! Got full on my cider, did he! Wants ter go to Fardale Academy, does he! Wal! wal! wal!"

"Come," urged Bart, "let's leave him."

The man seemed rather reluctant. Once more he bent over Frank, and then he sniffed the air again, observing:

"Seems ter me I smell somethin' else besides cider."

"I don't see how that is possible," said Bart, nervously. "He is so saturated with cider that I can't smell anything else. Come on, Mr. Snodd."

"Just pick up these bottles of cider. I ain't goin' to leave it here for him to guzzle when he comes around ag'in."

So they picked up the bottles that lay about, with the exception of two that were broken and three that had been empied, and moved away, leaving Frank still unconscious by the road-side.

Bart Hodge found it difficult to keep from chuckling aloud, so great was his satisfaction. In his mind he pictured Frank being turned from Snodd's, refused admission to the academy, and going back home in disgrace.

"He won't bother me any more," thought the youthful schemer. "I have done for him."

Mrs. Snodd was anxiously awaiting the return of her husband, and Belinda had refused to retire till her father came in. They both flew at him the moment he appeared.

"Did you find a burglar?" they fluttered.
"Yas," nodded Mr. Snodd. "We found one of 'em, but I guess he hadn't stole nothin' more than cider."
"Did you catch him? Did he show fight?"
"He wasn't in any condition to show fight, for he'd been monkeyin' with that cider, an' that stuff's got lots of kick to it. He's down here 'side of the road a piece, full as a tick. I don't b'lieve you can guess who it is."
"Crazy Day?"
"Crazy nothin'! It's that, new feller that came here last—Merriwell."
Belinda gave a little scream of astonishment, and Mrs. Snodd showed surprise.
"Who'd ever thought of him?" she cried. "Why, he appeared like a perfect young gentleman."
"He certainly did," agreed Belinda; "and I can't hardly believe it of him now."
"Wal," said Snodd, "I saw him with my own eyes, an' here's my cider that was layin' all around on the ground beside him. That's proof enough for me. We left him right there to sleep off his booze, and he can stay out to-night. When he shows up in the mornin', I shall invite him to pack his bandbox and git. Then I'll report him at the 'cademy."

So Snodd locked up the house with Frank Merriwell outside.

It was some time later that Frank slowly recovered consciousness. His first sensation was one of nausea, while there were dull pains in his head. He tried to move, but it was some time before he could summon energy to do so, and when he did stir it brought a groan from his lips.
"I wonder what has happened?" he speculated. "My stomach feels as if I had been chewing tobacco. My head aches as if it had been hit with a brick. Hit? Wasn't it hit? It seems as if I remember something of the sort."

After some time it all came back to him—the sudden attack of the unknown enemy, the blow, the struggle, and the strange odor that robbed him of his senses.
"I wonder if that is all it robbed me of?" he muttered, as he struggled to a sitting position and felt in his pockets.
"Here is my purse, my watch, my ring is on my finger, and all my property seems here. That was a queer way for a robber to use a chap."

Not knowing how long he had lain there, he got upon his feet as soon as he was strong enough, and made for Snodd's, staggering and weak. He felt his clothing wet, and the smell of the cider came to his nostrils, but it was so mingled with that other smell that had overcome him that he could not tell what it was.

Snodd's was dark and still; no lights were to be seen. Frank tried the door, and found it locked. He did not feel like making a racket and waking Snodd up, so he wandered about the house, looking for some means of reaching his room. Ned Gray's curtains were drawn close, but he fancied he saw a gleam of light, so he picked up some small pebbles and tossed them against the glass of the window.

In a few seconds the curtain was run up, the window opened, and Gray's voice called down cautiously:
"Who's there?"
"It's Merriwell," replied Frank.
"Won't you please come down and let me in? I'm locked out."
"Down in a minute," was the assurance, as Gray's head disappeared.

Frank went around to the door and waited. He was feeling decidedly ill, and he longed to be in bed.

Pretty soon Gray opened the door cautiously, asking:
"Where on earth have you been till this hour, Merriwell?"
"What time is it?"
"Not far from midnight. Where've you been?"
"Oh, over to the academy."
"That bluff don't go, for the regulations there don't allow anything of the
sort. But it's all right; I'll never chirp. Won't you come into my room. We're
having a little game, and drinking up some
of Snodd's cider. It's great stuff. Come
in."

But Frank begged to be excused, and
he lost no time in getting into his own
room, undressing, and rolling into bed. It
was some time before he got to sleep, but
when he did so, he slept soundly till morn-
ing.

Little did he dream of the surprise that
awaited him. He arose and dressed with
care, changing the soiled suit he had worn
the day before for a light suit from his
trunk. His head was a trifle sore where
his mysterious foe had struck him, but be-
yond that, he did not seem to feel much
the worse for his night's adventure.

When the breakfast bell rang, he went
down.

Snodd met him in the hall, and said:
"I've hitched up a team, an' there's a
boy waitin' at the door to take you an'
your trunk away from here. You can git
breakfast at the village."

"What does this mean?" asked Frank,
in utter amazement.

"It means that I know you for a thief
and a drunkard, an' I don't propose to
keep you under this roof another minute!" hotly declared John Snodd.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE GAME FAILED.

"Thief! Drunkard! Mr. Snodd, are you
crazy?"

"No, sir."

"Then what can you mean?"

"Just what I say, by gum!"

Frank's face was flushed, and he looked
proudly indignant.

"You have no right to call me a thief
and a drunkard, sir! I never stole any-
thing in my life, and I do not know the
taste of liquor."

"Wal, you know the taste of cider;
purty gol dern well, an' it's no use fer
you to deny that you sacked lots of my
bottled cider out of the suller last night,
for you was seen carryin' of it off, and I
saw ye arter that a-layin' 'side the road
down by the Cove, drunk as a lord, with
the bottles scattered all around ye. Oh,
you're caught! Go right back and pick
your trunk, an' I'll help ye lug it out to
the wagon. It's no use to parver, fer
when John Snodd sees a thing with his
own two good eyes, he comes purty blamed
near knowin' of it."

Frank was nearly overcome with aston-
ishment and indignation, but he fully re-
alized what it meant to have such a charge
proved against him, and that served to
calm him somewhat.

"Mr. Snodd," he said, steadily, "there
is a mistake here, and I trust you will give
me a show to prove my innocence."

"You can't do it. Didn't I say I saw ye?
An' I wasn't the only one. You was seen
by another, and there he is."

Bart Hodge had appeared at the head of
the stairs, and halted there. His eyes were
fixed on Frank, who fancied he saw a
gleam of triumph in their depths.

"I'm sorry for you, Merriwell," mur-
mured Bart, with mock solicitude and
sympathy. "If I'd known it was you, I
wouldn't have said a word; but when I
saw four or five dark forms come out of
the cellar, and scurry away, I was sure
they must be burglars, so I told Mr.
Snodd, and we followed down the road
till we found you."

A light began to dawn on Frank.

"I've been the butt of a rather tough
joke," he said, with a rueful smile.
"That is plain enough."

"Oh, you can't fool me that way," de-
clared John Snodd, stubbornly. "You was
drunk, for we smelled the cider on yer
breath."
"What time was this?"
"Bout half-past nine."
"What time did you see the burglars come out of the cellar, Hodge?"
"It was exactly eight-thirty, for I looked at my watch."

"Well," said Frank, with satisfaction, "I fancy I shall be able to prove an alibi, for I was with Lieutenant Gordan at the academy till nine o'clock, as he will testify. This being true, you will readily see that I could not have been one of those who entered your cellar and stole your cider, Mr. Snodd."

For a single instant Snodd seemed slightly taken aback, but he quickly recovered.

"If you didn't go into the cellar, you know who did. You can't deny it."
"No, I do not know who did."
"But you know something 'bout it; I can see that in your face. Now, don't you know something 'bout it?"
"I—I——"

"That settles it; you might jest as well confess. You let somebody else steal the cider, an' then you got drunk on it. The partaker is just as bad as ther thief, an', in this case, I think he's wuss, fer he didn't have the courage to help git the stuff he wanted. You let somebody else take all the resk, and then you took your share of the stolen cider. I don't propose to keep no such boy in my house, so you can pack up an' git."

By this time all the boys in the house were listening, having been attracted by Snodd's high words. They were gathered at the dining-room door and at the head of the stairs.

Mrs. Snodd and Belinda were also listening, while at the open front door the face of Tad Jones appeared. The urchin was loyal, and he cried:

"If this is the feller you want me to drive over to the village, Mr. Snodd, I'm goin' to tell you I don't take no stock in his being drunk on your cider. He's a boss feller, and I'll stick by him!"

"Thank you, Tad," smiled Frank. "I won't forget you when that little picnic comes off—the one I promised you we should have."

Tad grinned.

"I kinder guess you feel like having it more than ever now," he said.

"Mr. Snodd," spoke Frank, soberly, "at least, you will give me a chance to tell my side of the story."

"It won't do no good."

"Perhaps not, but I will tell it. As I said, I was with Lieutenant Gordan till nine o'clock, as I can prove by the lieutenant. I left the academy to come home, and I was a little more than half-way here when somebody suddenly jumped out of some bushes at the side of the road, and struck me a terrible blow on the head. The bump is in evidence now, and it's pretty near as large as a hen's egg. I wasn't quite knocked out, but the fellow grappled with me, and held something over my nose—a cloth that was saturated with chloroform, or something of that sort. He threw me to the ground, and that was the last I knew till I awoke hours later and found myself there, with a pain in my head and a sick feeling in my stomach. My first thought was that I had been robbed, but I found my money and valuables untouched, and I have not been able to understand the meaning of it all till the present time."

"That's a purty slick yarn, but it's fishy."

"You do not believe me?"
"Hardly."
"I have told you the truth; I don't know what more I can do."
"You can pack up an' git."
"You are still determined to turn me out?"
"I be."

Once more Frank glanced at Bartley
Hodge, and again he saw the triumphant gleam in the dark eyes of his enemy.

"You seem to be pleased about about it, Hodge."

"On the contrary," asserted the hypocritical young rascal, "I am sorry that I had anything to do with it; but you can't expect anybody with sense to believe your story."

"Can't I?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, I believe it, pop," Belinda declared, coming to the front. "I know he told the truth, for there wasn't any lie in his face."

"Thank you, Miss Snodd," said Frank, bowing gallantly. "I'll not forget your confidence in me."

The girl blushed furiously, and retired in sudden confusion.

"Proof is proof," shouted Snodd. "Pack your trunk, young feller!"

"All right," said Frank, quietly. "It is useless to say anything more about it. I will pack up and go."

"Hold on!" cried Barney Mulloy, forcing his way forward. "It's nivver a bit ye'll do that same, Merriwell, me b'y. Av yez pack an' move, it's th' whole gang av us will move wid yez. Eh, b'y's?"

"You bet!" shouted the boys, with the exception of Hodge.

"It's mighty little we think av a snake," continued Barney, giving Bart a meaning look. "And it's meslif can break th' face av th' spalpae th' spoy."

"And as for stealing the cider," put in Ned Gray, "we are all of us ready to swear that Merriwell had no hand in that, though he and Hodge were the only ones in the house who did not take a hand. The rest of us, one and all, were in it, so you will have to fire the gang if you fire one, Mr. Snodd. And if you report one of us at the academy, you will have to report us all."

Snodd was taken aback. He did not fancy the idea of losing all his boarders.

"But—but how'd Merriwell happen to have any of the cider?" he asked.

"That was a little joke of ours," explained Sam Winslow, readily, to the surprise of the others and the utter amazement of Bart Hodge. "He wouldn't drink any of the cider—said it was against his principles—so we ambushed him and reported him. Then we left the cider all around by way of a joke. Hey, boys?"

"That's what we did," agreed the others, in chorus, Hodge alone remaining silent.

"Wal," said Snodd, slowly, "all I've got ter say is that it was a gol derned poor joke, an' you fellers will have to pay for the cider. I guess you needn't pack up, Merriwell."

"Whoop!" cried Tad Jones. "What's the matter with Merriwell?"

"He's all right!" shouted the boys.

"Three cheers for him!" squealed Tad. "Hip, hip, hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" roared the boys.

"And a groan for Hodge!" cried Tad. A most dismal groan sounded through the rooms.

Bart's face grew pale, and his eyes blazed with disappointment and rage.

"That's all right, fellows," he said, huskily, his voice far from steady. "If you'd taken me into your confidence, all this racket would have been saved. I didn't know it was Merriwell till we found him in the road."

He turned and hurried away to his room.

"Come to breakfast, boys?" called Mrs. Snodd.

The boys gathered about Frank, singing, as they escorted him to the dining-room:

"For he's a jolly good fellow,
He's a jolly good fellow,
Which nobody can deny."
CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT.

"I'm stuck on the way you fellers pulled me through that scrape," said Frank, as the boys gathered in Ned Gray's room after breakfast. "But I'm blessed if I see just why you knocked me over and left me with cider bottles scattered all about me last night."

"We didn't," said Ned.
"Didn't?"
"No."
"But you said you did."
"And got you out of a bad scrape by saying so; all the same, we didn't know a thing about it till we heard it from Snodd."

Frank whistled.
"I fancied this mystery solved," he said,
"and now it is deeper than ever. If you fellows didn't do the trick, who did?"
"You tell."
"I can't."
"There's a gint Oi'd kape me oie on, av Oi war in yure place, Merriwell," said Barney Mulloy. "That gint's name is Bart Hodge. Av he an't a snake, Oi dunno."

"Oh, I have an old score to settle with him," said Frank. "Gray, will you bear a challenge for me?"
"Sure!" cried Ned, delighted.
"All right. Give me paper and ink."
"A duel!" cried the boys, delightedly.
"He'll have to fight you, Merriwell, or he'll never stand much show in the academy."

"Oh, I fancy he will fight all right," smiled Frank. "It strikes me he will be quite ready, if he is sure he will have a fair show."

"That's what he shall have."

Frank quickly wrote the challenge, which he inclosed in an envelope, and intrusted to Ned Gray, who assured him that it should be delivered at the first opportunity.

A short time later, Frank made his way with the others toward the academy, where his studies were to begin, and where for the next ten days he was to do his best to fit himself for examination.

From a distance they saw a corps of cadets march straight as a ruler across the grounds and disappear in the big building, and Frank wondered if all of his present companions would be successful in passing muster and getting into the school.

Although Lieutenant Gordan had seemed to believe there would be no trouble about Frank passing, Merriwell himself resolved not to fail from any fault of his own, and he began study in earnest, reviewing old ground and fitting himself for the examination to come.

Hodge was so confident that he refused to waste his valuable time in brushing up on things he had already studied till he was quite sick of them all, and he rather openly expressed his contempt of so much red tape.

"This is different than it is at West Point," he said to one of the applicants, who did not happen to be boarding at Snodd's. "They are not going to refuse any of us here, unless they have to, you may gamble on that."

"But we'll have to study after being admitted, and we may as well get at it now." "Rot!" returned Bart, contemptuously.

"If anybody thinks I am going to kill myself with study here, he's a fool."

As he happened to be unpopular with the boys at Snodd's, Hodge took care to work himself into the good graces of the fellows who were stopping at the village until they were admitted. As he was well provided with cash, and inclined to spend it freely, this won him temporary friendships later on.

Hodge showed no surprise when Ned Gray soberly presented him with Frank's challenge that noon. He read it with a
sneer on his face, and then tore it up, saying:

"I will find a friend who'll see you, Gray, and make arrangements."

"Very well, sir," bowed Ned, stiffly.

That afternoon Hodge's friend showed up. He was a big, bullying fellow from Michigan, and his name was Hugh Basbridge. It was said that he had tried to get into West Point, had been sent there, but failed to pass at the examination.

It did not take the boys long to make terms. It was decided that the fight should take place that very night in Chadwick's pasture, which was not far from Snodd's. The weapons were to be bare fists, and the battle was to be a finish.

When Gray reported to Frank, the latter felt something like a pang of shame, for he was not a bullying or fighting character, but then he thought of the debt he owed Hodge, and hardened his heart to his finer feelings.

Bart took supper at the village that night, and did his best to make himself "solid" with the boys who were stopping there temporarily. In this he succeeded very well, as was shown by his backing when the boys assembled to witness the fight that night.

It was ten-thirty when all arrangements had been made, and the two lads faced each other in the hollow of Chadwick's pasture.

Both had stripped off their coats and vests, bound their suspenders about their waists, and rolled up their sleeves. Their heads were bare.

Although there was but the ghost of a moon, it was a fairly light night, so one boy could be distinguished from another at a distance of several yards.

In some way a number of cadets had scented the fight and found a way to slip out of the academy grounds and reach the spot.

Bits of fire here and there told that the boys were smoking cigarettes freely.

They talked guardedly, for the night was still, and sounds would travel a long distance.

Tad Jones was on hand, quivering with excitement.

"Give it to the duffer!" he had whispered to Frank. "Remember how he kicked my dog and then cut it with the whip."

Tad did not mention the blow he had received himself.

Frank suspected that Bart had somehow been at the bottom of the trick played on him the night before, and he was confident that his enemy had done his best to spoil his chance of getting into the academy.

This was quite enough to make any spirited young fellow long to punch another's head.

Ned Gray had whispered to Frank just before the two boys stood up to face each other:

"This is different from a sudden fight, Merriwell. In ordinary cases, I believe in getting in the first blow, and that is all well enough now, if you can do it without exposing yourself to a bad counter. But if you have any skill at boxing, take my advice and feel of him a while."

As Frank said nothing to this, Ned went on:

"In that way you may be able to find his weak points, and then you must sail in and do him. Don't let him wind you."

"Time!" called the referee, softly but sharply.

Then the two foes stood face to face in their white shirts.

"Shake hands!" was the stern order.

Both seemed to hesitate, and then Frank put out his hand, which Bart barely touched.

Then came the word that put them both on the defensive, and the fight had begun.

Hodge launched himself at Frank, who fell back before the rush, dodging and avoiding his enemy.
FRANK MERRIWELL.

It was instantly seen that both lads knew something of the art of boxing, and the spectators were breathless with interest.

In the dim light all their movements could not be followed as well as they might under other circumstances; but both were seen to feint and cut and lunge and parry and dodge.

Then, of a sudden, they came to close quarters.

**Smack—smash—smack!**

Three blows were struck in swift succession, and Hodge got in two of them, both of which were light, however, when compared with the smash he received on the check.

Hodge staggered and then lunged at Frank, who avoided him by a nimble leap.

From this moment the fight was fast and fierce, but Frank kept his head in a wonderful manner, while Hodge grew furious with rage.

"I'll fix you yet!" he grated, as Frank avoided one of his swinging blows.

"You did your best to fix me last night," returned Merriwell.

"You and I both can't attend Fardale Academy!"

"It looks that way."

At each other they went, but Hodge was beginning to breathe heavily, while Merriwell still held himself in check, waiting the proper time to force the battle.

Tad Jones could scarcely keep from whooping with excitement. He did not understand why Frank held off, and he longed to shout to his friend to sail in and win.

At length, Frank decided to take the offensive, and straightway he began to tap Hodge in a merciless manner. He soon had Bart's nose bleeding.

Twice Bart clinched, but Frank threw him heavily and broke away.

In a short space of time Bart received such punishment as he had never endured before, but he was stuffy, and he would not give up. He took his "medicine" like a man.

The boys could not help admiring his grit. Even Frank confessed to himself that Hodge had sand to spare.

Bart grew weaker and weaker, till at length Frank was able to send him staggering at every other blow. He was knocked down repeatedly, yet he came up and resumed the fight before he could be counted out.

"Will he never cry enough?" thought Frank, whose conscience smote him every time he struck his sorely punished enemy.

Suddenly there was a great flurry of excitement, and a cadet broke into the circle, crying softly:

"Scatter, boys—scatter! Old Gunn's got wind of this some way, and he's right here with Colonel Hicks! Dust!"

There was a wonderful scattering, and Frank found himself left alone, feeling rather dazed and bewildered.

He did not wish to leave any of his clothing to be captured as evidence against him, for he knew discovery meant that he would be refused admission to the academy, so he groped around on the ground for his coat.

Suddenly he felt himself grasped by strong hands.

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CHAPTER VII.

A PEACE OFFERING SCORNED.

A voice hissed in his ear!

"Phwat are yez doin', Merriwell, me b'y? Shkip' av ye don't want to be caught!"

It was Barney Mulloy.

"My coat and vest!" gasped Frank. "I can't leave them to be found. I must——"

"Run, ye gossoon! The b'ys hev all yer shtuff. Av ye're caught, it's niver a bit will ye git into th' shkool. Here they coom!"
Several dark forms were hurrying toward them through the darkness.

Barney literally dragged Frank away, and as the two lads started to run, a stern voice called:

"Halt!"

"Like an express train we will—Oi don't think," muttered the Irish lad. "Av ye catch us, ye'll nade wings on yer fate."

Frank was a good runner, and, having recovered from his dazed condition, he kept at Barney's side with ease.

If they were pursued at all, their pursuers soon gave up, seeing the hopelessness of trying to overtake them, and they got safely away.

As they were clambering over the fence at the further extremity of the pasture, a figure uprose before them, and a voice called:

"Is that you, Merriwell?"

"Sure," returned Frank.

"I just found out you weren't with us, and turned back to see what had become of you," said Ned Gray. "I was afraid you had fallen into the hands of Old Gunn, and I knew your cake was dough if you had."

"I don't know but I should if it hadn't been for Barney," said Frank. "He stood by me, and got me away."

"Ye can count on me, Merriwell, me b'ya," assured the Irish lad. "O'll shtick to yez like a porus phlaster, so Oi will."

"Come on," urged Gray. "Let's get into Snodd's without delay, for we don't know what Old Gunn may be up to."

Ned had Frank's clothes, and the hero of the late encounter put them on as he ran with his two companions on either side. They struck a dog trot, and held steadily to it.

"Hodge has some sand," observed Gray.

"He has lots of it," agreed Frank, rather enthusiastically. "I took a strong dislike to the fellow to begin with, but he has risen in my esteem fifty per cent."

"He wouldn't croak."

"Not till he was clean knocked out, and every time I struck him I felt like a cur, for he had worn himself out, and he was easy."

"Begobs, it's mesilf as thinks he wouldn't have felt vehrly bad av it had been th' other way," said Barney.

"That's right," Gray affirmed. "If the tables had been turned, Merriwell, he'd have used you worse than you did him."

"Perhaps so."

"Oh, there's no doubt about it. He's ugly, I can see that, and he is proud. It was his pride more than anything else that brought him up to the scratch when he was barely able to stagger to his feet in time to keep from being counted out."

"He may be all roight, Merriwell, me b'ya," put in Barney; "but, av Oi wur you, Oi wouldn't give him a good chance to hit me a swhipe in th' back av th' neck when Oi wasn't lookin' thot way."

"I think I have pretty nearly squared my account with him," said Frank, who was not inclined to hold a grudge.

"Mebbe he'll think there is a balance on th' other soide now."

"Well, that is for him to say."

All was quiet in the vicinity of Snodd's as they approached the house, and they wondered if all the boys were in.

The door had been left unlocked, and they found it still remained so, enabling them to slip into the house softly, without any trouble or disturbance.

"Who's that?" whispered some one, in the darkness of the hall.


"Good stuff!" softly exclaimed the unknown. "All the fellows are in now. I will lock the door. Hodge is in your room, Gray, with some of the fellows, who are fixing him up. Merriwell did give him a terrible hammering."

The carpeted stairs gave out no sound as they ascended, and they were soon at the door of Ned's room, where a soft, peculiar
knock caused a key to turn in the lock.

"Come in, Merriwell," invited Gray.

Frank hesitated. His first fancy was that Hodge would think he had come there to gloat over his triumph, if it could be called a triumph; but he quickly decided he would show by his manner that he was ready to bury the hatchet and call the matter squared.

So the three lads and the one who had received them in the hall all slipped quietly into Gray's room, which was already well filled with fellows who were smoking cigarettes and discussing the fight, while they watched one of their number apply handkerchiefs dripping with cold water to Bart Hodge's cut, bruised, and discolored face.

Frank had not realized how embarrassing the situation would be until he was well into the room, and it was then too late to retreat. There was a moment of silence, while the boys stared and hesitated.

It was in this emergency that Sam Winslow showed his tact.

"Hello, Merriwell!" he greeted, heartily. "We didn't know what had become of you. Glad you came in, for now we can congratulate both you and Hodge. It was a pretty little scrap, and as clean a display of sand as I have seen in a long time. You both came off with honors."

"That's right," agreed the others.

"You are both to be congratulated."

"Thank you, fellows," said Frank, after another moment of hesitation.

But Bart Hodge said nothing, and, after one glance at his late antagonist, turned away.

The situation was still awkward, and then, with the generous impulse that ever comes to an honorable and victorious enemy, he advanced toward Hodge, saying:

"I am glad the fight is over, and I am glad it came out a draw. I am willing to let by-gones be by-gones and bury the hatchet. Will you shake hands, Hodge?"

He held out his hand.

Hodge tore the wet handkerchiefs from his face and flung them into the washbowl, straightening up stiffly, as he fiercely retorted:

"The fight did not come out a draw! Look at my face! You have scarcely a mark! You were the best man to-night, Merriwell, but this matter does not end here!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I will not shake hands with you, and I will meet you again when I'll be able to do you worse than you did me to-night. I am not the kind of a fellow that forgets or forgives."

"All right," said Frank, quietly.

"Have it so, if you will. I am sorry, but I can't help it."

"If you had a little more decency, you would not have come here now," came bitterly from the lips of the dark-faced boy. "You knew you had the best of the fight, and you knew I was in this room; but you——"

"I came to see if there was not a show to call the matter quits."

"And have it flung in my face that you licked me in an open fight! But you didn't lick me!"

"I did not say so"

"And you never will lick me," Hodge hotly declared. "If we ever come together again, I'll be ready for you. I know your tricks now. But you want to remember that I told you once that both of us could not attend Fardale Academy."

"I remember it."

"Well, I am going to tell you so again. That's all I have to say, and you are welcome to think what you please about it."

Then Hodge returned to the wet handkerchiefs, and his manner showed that he had said all he meant to say.
CHAPTER VIII.

"KIMBO."

It was generally conceded among the boys that Merriwell had done the manly thing, and Hodge had shown himself a sniker and a cad by his refusal to shake hands.

By his apparent courage, Bart had won a place in the esteem of the fellows at Snodd's, and he might have been popular had he met Frank in the spirit that Merriwell showed; but it was his thought that Frank would be regarded as the victor, and would be the most popular, which was something that would make friendship between them impossible.

In his heat, Bart had said something that he afterward regretted. He had openly declared that both Merriwell and himself could not attend Fardale Academy, and he afterward realized that should anything happen to his rival, he had placed himself in a position that must bring suspicion upon him.

When he thought of this he was intensely angry with himself, and he slept very little that night, twisting and turning, moaning through dreams of deadly conflicts with his enemy, awaking with set teeth and foam-flecked lips, and longing for morning to come. Indeed, he suffered all that a proud and haughty spirit which has been humiliated can suffer and is certain to suffer.

He dreamed of challenging Merriwell to deadly conflict, and a dozen times he seemed to face his foe with pistols or rapiers, only to find that he could do him no harm, which added to his distress and rage.

Then he would moan:

"I'll kill him! I'll kill him yet!"

And it was not till the gray light of another day showed faintly in the east that he slept without dreaming, utterly worn out by the wretchedness of the night.

For Frank, the night had not been entirely without dreams, but they were far pleasanter than those that visited his enemy. He dreamed of home and his boyish sweetheart, and then came visions of success at Fardale Academy, and of happy days to follow.

Again it happened that Hodge did not appear at the breakfast-table with the others, nor did he show up at the Fardale Academy that day, sending an excuse that he was ill in bed. As he was not already a scholar, and it was for his own interest that he should be there to work for admission, no comments were made on this excuse and no one was questioned.

It seemed that all the cadets who attended the fight in Chadwick's pasture had been able to get back to their rooms without being detected, which was a very fortunate thing for them.

Frank was intercepted by a corporal who said his name was Miles, and who politely invited him to the barracks, at the same time saying some very complimentary things. Frank hesitated, something telling him he had better keep away; but Miles was so polite, pleasant, and persuasive that it was not easy to refuse, so he went along.

On their way to the, to Frank, mysterious portion of the academy, Frank observed that Miles seemed troubled with an odd cough, and that, for some reason, the three or four cadets on guard seemed strangely attracted by something that caused them to stand rigidly with averted faces while Miles and his companion passed.

The smile on Miles' face broadened as they reached the door of a room at the extremity of the corridor. He pushed the door open without ceremony, motioning for Frank to enter.

In another moment Frank found himself in the presence of more than a dozen cadets, the door closed behind him, and Corporal Miles was gone.
“What’s this—what’s the meaning of this intrusion, sir?” cried a strapping fellow who looked fierce enough to eat Frank.

“Er—er—I beg to be excused,” stammered Frank. “I was invited here.”

“Invited here? By whom, sir?”

“By Corporal Miles.”

“Corporal Miles! There is no such person in this academy. This intrusion by a civilian is unprecedented. How did you pass the guard?”

“They turned their backs on me, and—”

“What’s that?” roared the strapping fellow, apparently greatly incensed. “Do you accuse the cadets of Fardale Academy with neglect of duty? Do you dare make such a charge? It cannot be you know the grave import of your words!”

“I don’t accuse anybody of anything,” laughed Frank, shortly. “I think I have made a mistake, and I will get out.”

But it was not so easy to get out as it was to get in, as he quickly discovered, for the door of the room had been made secure. Then he realized that he had been trapped to provide some amusement for the cadets.

“Not so fast, sir,” said the big fellow.

“For all we know, you may be a spy here, with intentions hostile to the peace and prosperity of this institution; or there may be a still graver charge than that hanging over you. What is your name?”

Realizing that he might as well make the best of it, the unfortunate “civilian” replied:

“Frank Merriwell.”

“Merriwell, Merriwell? Seems to me I have heard that name before. Weren’t you concerned in some kind of a rowdiss or a fight, or something of that sort—last night?”

“If—I believe so.”

“Exactly, sir. Now, will you be good enough to name your opponent in that disgraceful affair, and likewise any and all persons present.”

It was a command, and Frank immediately took alarm. Perhaps, after all, this trick was an attempt to force him into giving away the names of the offenders, which might mean something serious for the offenders themselves, so he promptly retorted:

“No, sir, I will not.”

“What?” roared the big cadet, as if he doubted the evidence of his ears. “Do you know the penalty of thus defying me, Major-General Hardtack, and these other members of the grand general court-martial? It means that you will be immediately condemned to suffer kimbo.”

“And what is kimbo?”

“It is a Greek noun, the name of the most terrible and soul-racking punishment known to military life.”

“Then I suppose I shall have to suffer kimbo.”

“You absolutely refuse to name any of the parties concerned in this disgraceful and brutal affair?”

“You have guessed right.”

“And that in the face of the most terrible punishment known to military life?”

“Right again.”

“You are mad!”

“Not yet; but I expect to be when I get kimbo,” smiled Frank. “I’m a trifle unpleasant when I get mad.”

Immediately “Major General Hardtack,” as the strapping fellow had called himself, made a signal to his companions, and a double circle was formed entirely around Frank. Not one of the cadets smiled, but all looked as if they were participating in the most serious affair possible.

“Gentlemen of the grand general court-martial,” said the big fellow, “you have heard the words of this intruder, and I leave it to you to state how he shall be punished.”

As one person, they all said:

“Kimbo!”
"Then his doom is sealed. Bring forth the implements of torture."

Immediately a plug of very black chewing tobacco and a cigarette were handed to "Major General Hardtack," who received them, and turned to Frank, saying:

"You will first be expected to take a chew of tobacco, smoke this cigarette, and sing a comic song, all at the same time. That is the first stage of kimbo."

"But I never smoked a dozen cigarettes in my life, and it makes me sick to chew tobacco," protested Frank.

"I warned you that kimbo is the most terrible punishment known to military life, and this is but the first degree. The horrors that are to follow will make you regret that you ever aspired to become a cadet at Fardale Academy. Open your mouth, sir, and proceed to gnaw off a generous chew of this tobacco. In the meantime the cigarette will be lighted for you, and I advise you to be thinking of a song."

Frank's eyes flashed. He looked around and measured the strength of the enemy. He could not and would not chew tobacco, and it began to look as if he must fight.

At this moment, however, the door was suddenly flung open from the outside, and the excited face of "Corporal Miles" appeared.

"Skip, fellows—lively!" he hissed.
"There's a pink haze on the luna!"

Out of the room dusted those cadets in an astonishing brief space of time, leaving Frank alone and rather dazed. Then he heard the quick tramp of feet, and the face of Lieutenant Gordan appeared at the door.

CHAPTER IX.

AN INTERRUPTED PICNIC.

"'Merriwell!'"

The lieutenant was surprised, and his face showed his displeasure.

"How does this happen?" he immediately demanded. "How is it I find you here?"

"Because I was fool enough to accept an invitation to come here," replied the boy, frankly.

"Who gave you the invitation?"
"I do not know his name."
"A cadet?"
"Yes, sir."
"Describe him."

Frank hesitated.

"I—I hardly think I can," he stammered. "In fact, sir, I did not observe him very closely."

"Whom did you meet here?"
"A number of cadets."
"You would be able to identify some of them if you saw them again?"
"I might be able to, but I would not."

A queer twinkle showed for a moment in Lieutenant Gordan's eyes, but his face remained as grave and stern as ever.

"You must be aware that the cadets have perpetrated a very serious offense in thus bringing a person who is not yet a student at this academy to this room, which happens to be unoccupied at the present time. It is quite probable that they did not have the friendliest motive toward you, and you would have suffered some indignity if I had not scented something wrong. I was just a moment too late to catch any of them, but, if you choose, you may be able to aid me in identifying the offenders."

"No, sir, I cannot do it."
"Very well," said Lieutenant Gordan, and somehow Frank fancied there was a ring of approval in his voice. "Without your aid, I shall, beyond a doubt, be unable to do anything more than see that the sentries are reprimanded. You will do well not to let anything of this sort occur again. I will now see that you get out of the barracks without further molestation."}

Frank followed the lieutenant from the room, and they proceeded down the hall past the rigid sentries, who saluted punctu-
tiliously, and looked as innocent as lambs. Mr. Gordon, however, made them all uneasy by pausing to note down the name of each one, which told them there was trouble ahead.

The lieutenant escorted Frank from the building and clear of the grounds, giving him some very good advice at parting.

As for Frank, he felt that he was lucky to get off as well as he had, for he realized that he had permitted himself to be led fairly into the jaws of a very nasty trap, for which he blamed himself alone. He caught himself wondering what would have followed the first degree of "Kimbo" if he had been forced to take that degree, and he shuddered at the thought of trying to sing a song while chewing tobacco and smoking a cigarette.

"Those fellows are so fierce to haze somebody that they couldn't wait for the plebes to get into the academy," muttered Frank. "But I wonder why they chose me? Have they a particular grudge against me? Have they taken a dislike to me as soon as this?"

He did not know it was because they had really taken a liking for him, and wanted to see what kind of stuff he was made of; and he did not know he had done a very proper thing in failing to recognize any one of them well enough to describe him.

Frank decided not to relate to the fellows at Snodd's what had occurred. He felt that the least said about the matter the better.

It was a well-known fact that as soon as a lad became a plebe at Fardale Academy, he was destined to suffer hazing; and in this case the students had been unable to repress their intense longing to "get a go" at one of the new boys. Having become prominent through his fight with Hodge, Frank was chosen.

Frank did not know what result came of Lieutenant Gordon's investigations; but he bore no grudge against his late captors, and it was his hope that they might get off without severe punishment.

The following day Frank was notified by Miss Snodd that she had invited several girls from the village school to spend Saturday afternoon with her at the Cove, where they would have a picnic, with Snodd's boarders as representatives of the sterner sex.

Frank promised to be on hand.

Saturday came, and a dozen laughing, merry girls came with it. There were introductions all around, and then they trooped off toward the Cove, the boys carrying the lunch-baskets, a tennis and an archery outfit, with other needed things, which loaded them well, while the girls flocked on in advance, chattering in a light-hearted way.

Among them all, one dark-haired, red-lipped jolly girl had instantly attracted Frank, who saw in her an ideal that had long haunted his youthful fancy. At first it almost seemed that he had known her before, but on hearing her name he realized that this was their first meeting.

For a moment Inza Burrage's dark eyes had looked straight into his brown orbs, and Frank had felt his heart leap into a sort of fluttering tumult that was a new sensation to him, although he had left a little sweetheart at home, one for whom he had fancied he cared a great deal.

Inza was just a jolly, light-hearted, unaffected girl, and, after that first glance, she seemed to pay no more attention to Frank than she did to any of the other boys in the party.

Down by the Cove was a pretty little grove close to a field that was level and grassed like a fine lawn. In the grove was a long picnic table, with plank seats around it, and on the field near by the archer's target was set, and the tennis court lined off.

The girls spread the table for the picnic supper, decorating it with green things from the woods and the wild flowers of
late spring-time to be found in field and dell.

The boys were at their best, and Barney Mulloy babbled with Irish wit till he was repressed by Sam Winslow, who feared the girls would think them a lot of silly fools if they continued to laugh so much.

Hodge and Merriwell took care to avoid each other, but both were merry, and it happened that both were attracted by the same loadstone—Inza Burrage. And so it came about that, unwittingly, they found themselves thrown much into each other’s company after the first.

Hodge was a handsome fellow, having a polished manner and a most captivating smile, so he soon became a great favorite with the girls, and Frank was not a little chagrined to see that Inza seemed to enjoy his company.

Becoming aware of Merriwell’s preference for the dark-haired girl, Hodge redoubled his efforts to win her favor, and his heart was filled with triumph when he saw that he was succeeding.

“I’ll show the fellow that he doesn’t cut any ice in a case like this,” thought Bart.

While some of the party amused themselves at archery, others played tennis, or sat about and chatted.

The tennis players were chosen by lot, and the first four happened to be Merriwell, Hodge, Miss Burrage and Miss Snodd. And then, to cap Frank’s dismay, Hodge secured Miss Burrage as a partner.

Frank was too gentlemanly to show his chagrin, and Hodge was far too shrewd to let more than a gleam of triumph appear in his eyes.

Inza was as lithe and light of foot as a fawn, while Belinda was rather buxom and heavy, and it seemed to Frank that Hodge was thoroughly triumphant for the occasion.

The first set began with Inza serving, and Belinda made a successful return, which was promptly volleyed by Bart, who succeeded in placing a smashing drive where Frank could not handle it, and his soft laugh of triumph brought a bit of hot blood to Merriwell’s cheeks.

Now it happened that Frank was really an expert at tennis, and this first “break” came through his own discomfiture at the situation, as much as by Hodge’s skilful return. He was instantly put on his mettle, and, as the game progressed, he showed that he was thoroughly capable of taking care of his division of the court.

But Hodge was also a most skilful player, and the two sides were not fairly matched, as Inza was much more light and deft than Belinda, so Frank and his companion were getting the worst of it.

Frank could feel his cheeks burning as he heard the watching girls speaking most complimentary of Bart’s beautiful playing, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he kept from losing his nerve and invading his partner’s territory on occasions when he felt that he might successfully return a stroke that she was almost sure to miss.

Midway in this game came a startling interruption.

Tad Jones appeared running toward the party and waving his hands wildly, while he screamed something that they did not catch at first, although a big, four-legged creature came into view not far behind the boy, apparently in hot pursuit.

“Listen!” cried Frank. “What is he saying?”

They listened, and heard Tad shriek huskily:

“Run! run! run! Mad dog! Mad dog!”

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE BATTLE.

“Mad dog!”

Some of the boys took up the cry, and the girls screamed.
It was a moment of great excitement and confusion.

Tad Jones was running for his life, and behind him reeled a red-eyed, foam-dripping creature that was terrible to see.

It was in truth a mad dog, and a monster at that.

"Run, girls—run!" shouted the boys.

Some of them did run, and some seemed paralyzed with terror, quite unable to get away.

Inza Burrage started to flee into the woods, but tripped and fell heavily to the ground.

"Oh, I have sprained my ankle!" she cried, her face pale with pain and fear.

Bart Hodge flung aside his racket and started precipitately for the shelter of the woods.

"Help me, Mr. Hodge!" called Inza, getting upon her feet, but falling again the moment she tried to bear her weight on the injured ankle.

Bart did not seem to hear the cry, for he kept on, unmindful that several girls were cowering together, seemingly dazed and helpless.

Belinda Snodd ran like a deer, and quickly vanished in the grove.

Seeing this, Frank sprang to the side of Inza Burrage. Without a word, he caught her up in his arms and ran with her to the other girls, where he gently placed her on the ground.

Then he was seen to reach into his pocket and produce a stout clasp-knife, the blade of which he quickly opened.

A desperate light was shining in his eyes as he faced toward the oncoming boy and dog.

"What are you going to do?" panted Inza. "You are not going to fight the dog?"

"Yes!"

"He will kill you!" she screamed.

"Remember that one scratch from his teeth means sure death!"

"I know that!"

"Then run—run!"

"And leave you and these girls to be bitten by that beast! Not much! Better that he should bite one than a dozen."

If ever a boy looked like a born hero, Frank Merriwell did at that moment.

Inza Burrage felt herself thrill with admiration, for all of the terrible peril.

"Run!" shrieked Tad Jones, once more.

"Mad dog! mad dog!"

Frank caught up several coats which the boys had discarded, wrapping them swiftly around his left forearm to the elbow, covering his hand and wrist with many thicknesses.

Tad Jones plunged past, and the terrible dog was close upon them.

It was a moment of such peril as Frank Merriwell had never known before, and it was not strange that his face was pale as marble; but he did not tremble, and his nerves were steady as though made of steel.

His eyes were fixed on the snarling, frothing, ery-eyed dog, and he placed himself fairly in the creature's path.

At that moment he murmured something. Perhaps it was a prayer for strength.

The dog's long teeth gleamed through the bloody froth that flew from its lips and covered its breast. It saw Frank, and, with a snapping howl, leaped through the air straight for the boy's throat.

Frank put up his muffled left arm, and the creature's powerful jaws closed upon it, seeming to crush the bone.

It was with no little difficulty that Frank kept from going down before the shock of the beast's assault, although he had braced himself to withstand the force of the spring.

However, he kept on his feet, and, with all his strength, he drove the blade of the knife into the dog's left side, hoping to reach the creature's heart.

The force of that stab caused the dog to release its hold, but then it seemed to have made the beast fiercer than before.
Again it hurled itself at the boy’s throat, and again its jaws closed on that muffled arm.

The girls were screaming now, horrified beyond measure at the spectacle of the mad battle going on before their eyes.

Inza Burrage alone seemed silent. She was not conscious of any pain in her injured ankle, but her hands were clasped and her eyes were fastened on Frank Merriwell.

“What a brave, noble fellow he is!” her white lips whispered. “How terrible that he should give his life for us! How grand!”

Frank’s jaws were set, and his face was working with emotions that controlled him, but over all could be seen the determination to keep the mad dog from the defenseless girls—to kill the creature.

Once—twice the dog sent him staggering; once he dropped to his knees, and it seemed that he would fall prostrate and torn by those deadly teeth. With the energy of an iron machine, he rose to his feet, still slashing and cutting with his gory knife.

The dog was covered with blood, which was streaming from a dozen wounds, and still the strength of the beast appeared to increase, if anything, which was easily explained, as Frank’s strength was diminishing.

The muffling coats about the boy’s arm were rent and hanging in rags, and his arm felt as if the dog’s teeth had already torn the flesh to the bone.

How much longer could he hold out? Was he to fail after all? Would the dog leave him mangled and torn to mangle and tear the helpless girls?

Where were the other fellows? Why didn’t they come out with clubs and stones and beat the dog to death?

He was beginning to stagger, and a mist drifted before his eyes, while a feeling of unutterable despair came over him.

The end was near!

Again the dog leaped at his throat, an he scarcely had energy enough to protect himself with his muffled arm.

Once more he struck with the knife, and then he felt it slip from his fingers.

He was weaponless!

This seemed to arouse him a bit, and, with all his strength, he fastened his hand upon the dog’s throat, clenching there, for all of the beast’s efforts to close upon his unmuffled arm.

Everything was swimming about him, and he felt that he was on the verge of falling unconscious. His white lips parted, and he faintly gasped:

‘Rui, girls! I can’t—I can’t——’

Then something seemed to explode in his brain with a terrific crash, and he dropped senseless to the ground, still clenching to the throat of the dog.

CHAPTER XI.

IN A VAULT.

The great crash which Frank heard was the report of a gun, and the muzzle of the weapon had touched the dog’s side when it was discharged.

Boy and dog dropped to the ground, and neither made an effort to rise, although the bloody beast quivered and kicked a few times.

“By thunder!” gasped John Snodd, as he wiped the sweat from his forehead with his coat-sleeve. “By thunder! I rather think I’ve fixed that critter!”

He held the smoking gun in his hand; he had come up during the last few moments of the battle between the boy and dog.

“Tad came to warn us, Mr. Snodd explained, “an’ I sent him down here, while I went to git my gun. While I was gittin’ the gun, the darned dog skived past; but I follered as soon as I could, an’ I got here jest in time.”
"Is he dead?" asked Inza Burrage.
"Guess he is, 'b'gosh!" nodded Snodd.
"I had the end of the gun right up ag'inst him when I fired."

"I mean Mr. Merriwell," explained the girl. "Oh, he fought so nobly to save us! And to think he must die from hydrophobia! It is frightful!"

She covered her face with her hands and shuddered.

Snodd kicked the dog to make sure the animal was dead, and then he tried to take Frank's fingers from the creature's throat, which proved a most difficult thing to do.

"Reg'ler death grip," commented the man.

Some of the boys came hurrying out of the woods armed with rocks and clubs, and all looking rather shamefaced.

Bartley Hodge was nearly the last one to appear, and even he did not look pleased when he saw Frank stretched on the ground, white and motionless.

"Has the dog killed Merriwell?" he asked.

"If he hasn't, Merriwell has nothing to thank you for!" came scornfully from Inza Burrage's lips. "You all ran and left him to fight the dog alone."

"I ran to find a club," muttered Bart.
"It was folly to stay and let the dog chew me up without any weapon to show fight with."

"You did not think of us—you simply thought of yourself. But for Frank Merriwell, we might all of us have been eaten up. He is a brave, noble fellow, and the rest of you are——"

She stopped short, but Barney Mulloy was ready to finish.

"—as foine a set av furrust-class cowards as Oi iver set me oies on, an' it's me-things wan av th' soame! Av any respectable person iver spakes to me again, Oi'll be so ashamed aff thim that Oi'll cut thim dead, so Oi will."

Snodd was examining Frank, and he now said:

"I don't seem to find no place where the dog has bit this feller. The stuff he had wrapped around his arm kept the critter from sockin' its teeth in there."

"He has fainted from exhaustion," said Ned Gray. "Let's make a stretcher and carry him to the house."

"In the meantime," directed Sam Winslow, "somebody send over to the academy for Doctor Brown."

It was found necessary to make a stretcher for Inza Burrage, or for some of the boys to carry her between them, and the latter course was decided on. Bart promptly offered his services, but he was utterly discomfited when the injured girl selected Ned Gray and Ross Kent, giving him a look that plainly expressed her utter contempt for him.

In the midst of these preparations, Frank stirred, drew a long, deep sigh, and opened his eyes.

In a moment Inza managed to reach him, crying, sharply:

"Water—somebody bring some water from the spring in the woods."

The water was quickly brought, and, with her handkerchief, she bathed Frank's face, still holding his head in her lap. He looked up at her, their eyes met, and he smiled faintly, as he said:

"I didn't let the dog bite you, did I?"
"You saved us all," was her feeling reply. "It was so brave and noble to do such a thing for us!"

"For you!" he whispered, and the warm color came back in a flood to her face and neck.

Bart Hodge saw all this. His hands were clinched, and he ground his teeth with rage and jealousy.

"It's Merriwell's luck!" he muttered.
"Anybody could do what he did if they had thought of it."

It is the thinking of the right thing to
do that nine times out of ten makes the hero.

Hodge set off for the house, intensely disgusted with everybody and everything.

From the window of his room, some time later, he saw the picnickers approaching. Gray and Kent were carrying Inza Burrage, while Frank was walking behind, surrounded by an admiring throng of boys and girls.

"And I don't believe the fellow was so much as scratched by that dog!" grated Bart, whose intense hatred of Frank had returned with redoubled force.

He was right. Doctor Brown, from the academy, had already examined Frank, and had failed to find the slightest abrasion to indicate there was danger that the brave boy would suffer hydrophobia. The escape was certainly most marvelous.

Miss Burrage was taken home in a carriage, and Frank had so far recovered as to drive.

Bart literally gnashed his teeth as he saw them depart, and he renewed his vows of vengeance on Merriwell.

For all of these vows, Hodge seemed to shun Frank during the days that followed closely. He was away at the village much of the time, and he did not mingle with the other boys at Snodd's, for he could not bear to see Merriwell lionized.

Frank began to think that he would have no further trouble with Hodge.

He was to discover his mistake.

It was the day before the examination of the applicants for admission to the academy. Frank was returning to Snodd's in the dusk of early evening, having been to the village for the mail, and, incidentally to get a glimpse of Inza Burrage at the window of her home as he passed.

Between the Cove and the village was the cemetery, and Frank was passing this when he saw a figure skip over the fence and disappear amid the tombstones.

Frank did not believe in ghosts, and his first thought was that somebody must be up to mischief.

"I'll try to follow that fellow," he muttered, and over the fence he went.

He soon saw a dark form hurrying forward amid the tombstones, and, with great caution, he followed.

Not far from the centre of the cemetery was a large family vault of stone, and near this the person Frank was following was joined by someone else. Here they stood, and he could hear them talking in low tones, but could not distinguish their words.

"I'll get nearer," was his resolve.

Making a half-circle, he came up behind the vault and crept close upon the unconscious pair.

Reaching a point where he could hear them plainly, he was surprised to recognize the voice of Bartley Hodge.

"I'll pay you well to help me do the job, Bascomb," Bart was saying.

"First pay me as you agreed for showing you a place to put him in," said Hodge's companion, and Frank recognized the voice of Hugh Bascomb, one of the village applicants for admission to the academy.

"All right," agreed Bart. "Here's the dough."

"Now," spoke Bascomb, after a pause. "You've got the key, and have seen the place. What do you want me to do?"

"Help me, as I said. I tackled him once alone, to say nothing of our fight. I heard the fellows at Snodd's planning to steal cider from the cellar, and I swiped a lot after they had carried off a load. Then I laid for Merriwell on the road, jumped on him when he came along, gave him a crack on the head, and chloroformed him. When I left him, he was stretched beside the road with cider spilled over his clothes, and bottles of cider scattered all around. Then I told Snodd I had seen a burglar sneak out of the cellar, and I got the old man to take a gun and a lantern and fol-
now me. Of course, I led him to Merriwell, and Snodd thought the fellow was dead drunk. That would have fixed Merriwell if the blooming idiots at Snodd’s hadn’t stood in for him and sworn they would all leave if he was fired or reported. Snodd gave in, and Merriwell said; but he doesn’t know now who it was that put up the job on him, though I suppose he suspects.”

“You are mistaken, Hodge,” said a cool voice. “I know all about it now.”

Bart gave a cry of astonishment and alarm as a dark figure stepped around the vault and confronted him.

“Merriwell!”

“Yes,” said Frank. “And I must thank you for explaining things so beautifully. I now know beyond a doubt just how much of a scoundrel you are.”

Hodge seemed to recover swiftly.

“How did you come here?” he asked.

“I walked.”

“You followed me—you played the spy! Perhaps you’ll wish you hadn’t!”

Like a cat, he leaped forward and clutched Frank, crying to Bascomb:

“Now’s our time! I’ll make it fifty! Give it to him!”

Frank made one sharp effort to fling Hodge off, and then he dropped to the ground, stunned by a blow delivered by Bascomb.

“Quick!” panted Hodge, as he bent over the fallen youth. “Here’s the key! Open the door!”

Bascomb hesitated; but Hodge fluttered:

“I’ll make it fifty, and our word is as good as his when he gets out, which won’t be till it is too late to pass examination. Open the door, I say!”

The huge key grated in the rusty lock, the bolt slid back, and the door was slowly forced open.

Frank realized what was taking place, and he tried to sit up, but Hodge forced him back, pinning him to the ground with one knee, as he hissed:

“Now give me a hand here, and in he goes!”

The dazed boy was lifted and dragged along the ground over the single step and into the darkness of the chilly vault, where he was unceremoniously dropped to the ground.

Then he heard retreating footsteps, heard the heavy door grate on its unused hinges, heard the bolt shoot into the lock, and knew he was a prisoner.

A prisoner in a cemetery vault!

CHAPTER XII.

ON HAND.

Frank struggled to his feet and staggered to the door, which he vainly tried to open. Then, in sudden frenzy, he beat upon it with his bare hands, shouting for aid.

The sound of his voice seemed to stun him, and he finally became silent, exhausted.

It was some time before he could consider the matter calmly, and then he began to see that Hodge had played a trump card.

“He has taken the trick, and won the game,” muttered the unfortunate captive.

But the fellow was a greater villain than Merriwell had thought possible.
"He means to keep me here till after examination to-morrow—probably till the next day. Who will believe my story? It will be thought that I did not have the courage to appear at examination—that I hoped to get into the academy without being examined. Both Hodge and Bascomb will deny having seen me at all, and, in such a case, their word is as good as mine.

Oh, I am done for!"

Something stirred in the darkness, sending the blood rushing icily to his heart.

It was an uncanny place, and he could but think of corpses and ghosts.

Again something stirred, and he pressed himself back against the door, a choking in his throat, listening with intense horror.

Squeak! squeak! squeak!

Rats! A new horror was added to his situation. He knew not how many nor how bold the repulsive little creatures might be. Were they fierce enough to attack him?

Surely the situation was one to appall the stoutest heart.

* * * * *

The day for the examination of applicants for admission to Fardale Academy arrived, and the candidates presented themselves at the academy.

Under the eye of Professor Gunn, a number of cadet officers assigned the applicants to seats and set them at their tasks.

Lieutenant Gordan was present, and, looking the candidates over, he failed to see the face of Frank Merriwell.

"What is the meaning of this?" thought the lieutenant. "Why isn’t Merriwell on hand?"

Selecting one of Snodd’s boarders, he asked:

"Where is Merriwell? He isn’t here."

It happened that Bartley Hodge was the one addressed, and he calmly replied:

"I do not know anything about Merriwell, sir; have not seen him in the last two days."

Barney Mulloy heard this and looked at the lieutenant as if he had something to say, which led Gordan to ask him if he knew anything of Merriwell.

"Av ye plaze, sor," replied Barney, "he wur not in his room larst noight, an’ not wan av us has seen anything av him this doay."

"And you won’t be likely to see anything of him this day," thought Hodge, exultantly. "Merriwell’s goose is cooked."

And then a gasp that was almost a cry of amazement and horror came from his lips.

The door had opened, and Frank Merriwell, escorted by a cadet officer, entered the room.

Merriwell was neatly and tastefully dressed, appearing none the worse for his confinement in the cemetery vault.

Hodge turned pale as death, and shook like a leaf in a strong breeze, while Hugh Bascomb was literally paralyzed with amazement and dismay.

Merriwell had escaped from the vault in time to present himself at the examination—but how?

Both Hodge and Bascomb expected to be denounced without delay, but, instead of that, Frank did not seem to notice them at all, and he went at once about his tasks.

It was a long time before Bart could recover sufficiently to set to work in earnest on the problems, and when he finally did
so his mind would stray now and then to speculation on the manner of his foe’s escape.

The applicants were given two hours and a half to work out the tasks. Some submitted their answers long before the expiration of that time, and some were still studying over them perplexedly or sitting in blank despair when the time expired.

Hodge and Bascomb left the room some time ahead of Frank, and when he appeared they were waiting for him.

“Well, Merriwell,” said Bart, with an attempt at bravado, “I see you got out in time to show up, and I confess that you have beaten me. But what are you going to do about it?”

“I haven’t decided yet,” was the quiet reply; “but I can break you both at this school if I choose.”

“I don’t see how. Our word is as good as yours, and you have no proof beyond your own statement—”

“That’s where you make a mistake, for I have proof. It happens that you were seen to drag me into the vault and lock me in there. The person who saw you do this was the one who released me, and, if I bring him forward to testify against you, your chance of getting into the academy will be slim.”

Hodge and Bascomb exchanged glances. They realized that Merriwell had them at his mercy, and both weakened.

“I say, old man,” said Bart, appealingly, “let’s drop it—let’s call by-gones by-gones, as the saying is. If you blow on me and I am stopped from getting into the academy, it will be a dreadful blow to my mother. I confess that I have used you dirty, and I am ashamed of it. I ask you now to forgive me.”

“Same here,” said Bascomb, although the words plainly cost him a great effort. Frank was not maliciously revengeful, and so he said:

“You both deserve a square licking, and it would please me to give you what you deserve; but I’ll agree not to spoil your chances by blowing—that is, not for the present. We’ll see how you handle yourselves in the future.”

Hodge and Bascomb both thanked him, and he left them.

“That fellow is dangerous,” said Bascomb.

“You are right,” nodded Hodge. “He knows too much for our peace of mind. But what are we going to do about it?”

“We may be able to do something in the future,” was the significant reply. “There will be hot times in this academy if all three of us get in.”

“You bet!”

The following day the alphabetical list of the admitted applicants was read, and in turn came Bascomb, Hodge, and Merriwell. A few had failed to pass the examination, but Barney Mulloy, Ned Gray, Sam Winslow, and Ross Kent were on the list.

Tad Jones was on hand to congratulate Frank at the first opportunity, but he declared:

“You was just dead slow to let Hodge and Bascomb in. I knew Bart Hodge was up to something, and I’d been follering him for two days when I heard him and Bascomb agree to meet at the vault. I don’t like grave-yards much, but I thought I’d be there, and I was, which was a
lucky thing for you, else you'd never showed up at examination.

"That's right, Tad," admitted Frank.
"I owe you a big debt. But I couldn't quite bring myself to expose those fellows, for it might have been the very thing that would have given them a bad turn in life. I like a joke myself. This was rather serious, but perhaps they will let me alone after this."

Perhaps!

THE END.

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