They handled that dainty, yet sturdy shell lovingly, for upon it depended the hopes of good old Yale.
CHAPTER ONE.

ON THE BRIDGE.

Yale's defeat by Harvard at New London continued to be a wound that would not heal. Even the often repeated excuse that the blue had lost two of her best oarsmen at the last moment was no curing balm for that wound, for everyone knew the result would have been the same had not Barry and True- man been suspected by the faculty for purloining a book from the University Library. Gibbons, the stroke-oar, the man on whom the greatest reliance was necessarily placed, had collapsed in the boat shortly after the first mile of the course was covered. No one had dreamed this thing might happen, least of all Gibbons himself.

Coach Ives had been blamed for his failure to gage correctly the extent of Gibbon's strength and to fore- see that the nervous, high-strung stroke-oar, whose rowing had been so promising and so perfect, could not stand the terrific strain of that early struggle to keep pace with the wonderful Harvard crew.

In those last days at Yale's Ferry just before the race many things had happened to affect a man like Gibbons. The loss of Barry and Trueman had dis- turbed him greatly, for no man was more loyal to the blue than he, and no one could possibly feel a keener desire to win, or greater dread over anything which seemed like a forewarning of disaster. The coach had not foreseen the effect of superstition on this man, who, in spite of his intelligence, secretly believed in signs and omens.

After it was all over and Harvard had paddled across the finish-line with the Yale boat far, far behind and containing only seven men, the stroke-oar having been taken off by the launch, it was learned that the final undoing of Gibbons came when his oar touched the floating body of a dead man in the water. He had seen a corpse, whose sightless eyes seemed to look straight into his own, and instantly he became a nerveless, useless dead weight in the boat.

Talking of these things, many a Yale man claimed that it was simply a clean case of hard luck that had deprived the New Haven lads of the race. There were others, however, soberer and more discerning, who knew Harvard had turned out the finest and most perfectly finished crew in her whole history, and these men doubted if Yale could have won even had no misfortune befallen her.

The thing uppermost in the minds of all loyal
students at New Haven seemed to be the absolute necessity for the blue to bring forth a crew capable of regaining her lost prestige. Of course there was talk of track sports and baseball, but in these things it seemed probable that Old Eli would stand as well as usual, while there was uncertainty and doubt regarding what might happen in June at New London.

One-half the crew, not to mention the cockswain, would be new men. Of the other half, Damon and Spotwood, the fellows who had been taken from the Varsity four to fill out the vacancies made by Barry and Trueman, would in all probability row again. Still, they were not regarded as regular members of the old crew. The four new men to fill places in the boat had been more or less prominent in rowing since their freshman days. They knew the style, the stroke and many other things demanded of them, and yet they were not veterans.

Harvard would have six of her old crew, and there were Yale men who confessed in secret that they feared or believed the crimson would win again. This year the Varsity men had begun work earlier than usual. The coach had thought it advisable to give more than ordinary attention to the Varsity during these early days when every one with ambition to pull an oar found a chance to show what he could do in the tank.

It is the practise of coaches to give great attention to the freshmen in the first few weeks of tank work, for from the freshman crews come the material for the Varsity. When the candidates are called out, the coach has his opportunity to look them over and get a line on new material for future seasons. To his ears may come reports of various men who should make good, but for the most part he is ignorant of what he will have to work with until he has tested his material in the tank.

At first the coach pays little attention to the stroke of the men he is trying out, his principal object being to discover the candidates who have the stamina to stand up under the training they must go through. He soon eliminates the weaker ones, and then more attention is given to stroke and form. In ten days he cuts down the squad of ambitious oarsmen fully one-half. Sometimes not more than a third of the original candidates remain to continue work at the rowing-machines.

The next cut comes with the appearance of rowing upon the water, and this time the men dropped are those who betray inadaptability to conform to the teachings of the coach regarding proper position and the stroke in vogue and in demand.

But Ives, anxious as any one regarding the Varsity, gave no more than half his usual time to the freshman after water-rowing began. Day by day he stuck to the Varsity boat, watching the men with his calm, hawklike eyes, seeking to divine their every weakness of mind as well as of body, for he was a man who realized that the mind exercises a strong influence upon the body, and this conviction had been redoubled through the collapse of Gibbons.

In college there was one man who betrayed almost as much interest and anxiety as the coach himself. That man was Merriwell, who, day after day, was seen watching the work of the candidates in the tank and who, later on, spent no little time observing the performances of the crew. He talked often with Ives, and Ives himself declared that Merriwell was thoroughly up on the methods of rowing taught by him.

With the approach of outdoor baseball practise it was supposed that Dick's time would be wholly absorbed by work upon the diamond, but still he found time now and then to note the progress and development of the rowers. How he did this was a source of more or less mystery and wonderment, for, with everything else, he persisted in maintaining his standing in his classes.

Few realized Merriwell's methodical methods of making every minute and every hour of the day count. Not that he never relaxed, for he knew the value of relaxation and diversion for the hard worker. Had he found so much of relaxation, the strain upon him would have proved even more than an iron man could withstand. His method of putting aside troubles and cares and study and worry gave many the impression that, to a great extent, he was of a happy-go-lucky temperament and a man who accomplished wonderful things without any great strain or effort. Only Buckhart, his roommate, realized the really marvelous amount of work that Dick did.

A "greasy grind" Merriwell was not, but when occasion demanded he could "cram" like a fiend. Fortunately, it was seldom that he found such cramming compulsory, for through his own systematic, methodical ways he seldom fell back in any particular line of study. When he studied he put his mind on it, concentrated, shut everything else out. No thoughts of baseball or rowing or the alluring yet electrifying languors of new-born spring, with its smells of fresh earth, running sap and opening buds, were permitted to unlock the barred doors of his mind.

One sunny afternoon two Yale men walked out onto the long bridge from which they could see the
Yale boat-house with the flag idly flapping above it. Near the middle of the bridge they paused and leaned on the rail.

Both were smoking. One of them had a pair of field-glasses in a case slung over his shoulder by a strap. His name was Jackson Colcord, and he was a shrewd, discerning fellow whose opinions regarding college athletics were generally considered sound by those who knew him best.

The other was Lynn Hartman, a somewhat dissipated-looking youth, who took something of pride in his reputation as a sport and a plunger. Hartman had lately begun cultivating the society of Colcord for his own private reasons, of which the desire to get the man’s opinions of various athletic matters stood foremost.

“It’s time for the crew to come out,” said Hartman.

“T’ll be launch waiting.”

Colcord looked at his watch.

“Not quite time,” he said. “They are there. They will come out directly.”

Neither gave much heed to the craft moving upon the harbor and the river. Their attention was fixed on the boat-house.

The little tug used by the coach appeared prepared, with steam up and everything ready for the start.

“Ah!” breathed Hartman; “I see them starting out.”

“There they come,” said Colcord, removing his glasses from the case and adjusting them to his eyes.

Out of the boat-house came the crew, poising the craft aloft. They handled that dainty yet sturdy shell lovingly, for upon it depended the hopes of good old Yale.

“Some fellows besides the crew are there also,” observed Lynn. “There’s Ives. Who is that chap with him?”

Colcord lifted the glasses to his eyes and adjusted them.

“It’s Merriwell,” he said.

“Oh, that man!” muttered Hartman. “Great Scott! I should think he’d attend to his baseball. It isn’t right for him to spend so much of his time chasing up the crew.”

“I don’t suppose he’s needed at the field now. He’s in perfect condition, and there is such a thing as too much field work for a man like him.”

“Perfect condition!” said Hartman. “That’s all I hear about him. Any one would think him a model that all men should try to reach.”

“In many ways he is,” nodded Colcord, watching the crew lower the shell carefully and daintily into the water. “Are you aware that Merriwell is the best developed man in college to-day?”

“No.”

“He is. I’ve seen his measurements set down on paper. I’ve gone over them carefully. Hartman, those measurements are perfect. If ever there was a perfect man physically, it’s Dick Merriwell. But that’s not all. Mentally he’s a marvel. His brain development seems quite as remarkable as his body development. He’s a man among thousands in both brain and body. Any unprejudiced person who has watched this fellow, as I have for the past two years, must know and acknowledge these facts.”

CHAPTER II.

THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE SHARK.

Hartman was chewing somewhat viciously at the end of his black cigar.

“I suppose that’s all true,” he finally admitted.

“The man must be all you claim, Colcord, but still, there’s something about him that annoys me expresslessly. I don’t know as I can tell you just what it is, but when I see him go into this thing, that thing or the other, and always make good, it irritates me. If he’d only fail now and then, I could like him better.”

“I think I understand,” nodded Colcord, who had lowered his glasses. “Still, you don’t seem to realize that the man does fail occasionally.”

“Does he?”

“Sure.”

“I’d like to know when.”

“He doesn’t win all the games he pitches when playing baseball. He doesn’t carry through all the things he attempts on the gridiron. In many other things he tries repeatedly before he succeeds.”

“But he always does succeed eventually.”

Colcord nodded.

“That’s the thing that irritates you. Hartman. It’s the one most marvelous characteristic of the man. Other fellows might get discouraged over failure or decide that a thing wasn’t worth doing if it cost so much effort; failure simply seems to spur that man to more determined endeavor, and he never lets up until he succeeds. It is his victories of this sort which are remembered, while his failures are forgotten. That’s why it happens that so many men regard him
as a fortunate chap who has accomplished surprising feats, often by pure luck. I'm not denying that singular, mysterious element of luck which influences so many of us most decidedly, but it's only occasionally that, in the long run, luck is the deciding factor of a man's career. He may have so-called streaks of good or bad fortune, for which he himself is in no way responsible; but the fortune of years, of protracted periods, of a lifetime, almost invariably is the outcome of a man's own nature. So-called good luck has ruined hundreds of men, and apparent bad luck often is the best thing that can befall a person."

"I don't see how you make that out, Jack. Explain yourself."

"Haven't you ever seen a man ruined by suddenly and unexpectedly falling into a large amount of money which fortune seemed to dump into his lap without his deserving it in any way whatever? I have. I know two chaps who were decent, industrious fellows until good luck of that sort befell them. Both were ruined by it. They became spendthrifts and dissipated the fortunes they had never earned... It doesn't take a man long to get away with a small fortune in these days. He can blow it in a few months if he sets about it industriously. Both these men of whom I speak went through with everything, and by the time they were down to rock-bottom again their natures had become so altered that they no longer had the energy or courage to resume former habits of industry. They felt they'd had their chance and thrown it away, and, discouraged and disheartened, they simply quit—they became useless, worthless chaps.

"On the other hand, many a fellow who possesses a little something and is getting along comfortably without much effort may be aroused by a calamity of some sort that takes away the little that he has. He wakes up, decides that he will have to hustle for himself, and hustles. In time he accomplishes worthy things and success comes his way. It tastes good and it spurs him to fresh and renewed efforts, and eventually he rises to a height he never could have reached only for that arousing piece of bad luck, which was really the best luck he could have had. Oh, yes, Hartman, I believe in luck, but I don't believe good luck and bad luck is always precisely what it seems when it first appears to us. There they go!"

The crew was in the boat, which had been pushed off from the boat-house float. The coach was on board the tug, that now puffed and fretted as it swung round and headed in the proper direction. They could see Ives lifting his megaphone. They heard him speaking to the rowers. They beheld the oar-blades drop simultaneously into the water and saw the bodies of the rowers sway with the first stroke.

Merriwell was standing on the float watching these movements. At that moment a careless observer to whom he was a stranger might have fancied him a chap with any amount of leisure time.

Away went the boat, the oars rising and falling, seeming like the legs of a huge spider that was running swiftly and smoothly over the surface of the water.

The tug bearing the coach steamed after the rowers, keeping somewhat to one side and slightly astern. The voice of Ives, calling through his megaphone, floated to the ears of the two Yale men on the bridge. They heard him speaking to first one man and then another, calling them by numbers and giving them instructions. Twice he spoke sharply to number four, the man in the waist of the boat.

"That's Spotwood," said Hartman. "He's a conceited ass, and he fancies his position on the crew is assured."

"A fancy that may be suddenly taken out of him," said Colcord. "He's a fine oarsman, but he's grown a bit careless, and carelessness is something Ives won't tolerate. I'd like to see Merriwell stroking that crew."

"Merriwell?"

"Yes."

"Why, he——" "Oh, I know we can't spare him from the nine, but still, I believe he'd make a great stroke for us. He has the knowledge and the rowing ability, for he's rowed and he's studied the methods and styles of rowing in vogue here ever since entering college. That's how it happens that Ives has permitted him to coach the freshmen this year. He's full of vim, ginger, and the proper spirit to enthuse men to do their level best. With him stroking the Varsity this year, we'd be dead certain to win—there would be no question about it."

"There it is again!" muttered Hartman. "That's the irritating point. You, like the great majority of Yale men, regard that fellow as an all-round wonder."

"He is."

"Still, you're not one of his particular friends. You don't belong to his circle of chums."

"No, I've never got in with Merriwell's crowd. While I may believe in the value of his principles, like many another man, I don't always live up to my convictions. I use tobacco too much. I drink—some; and I do other things that I know are harmful and enervating. If I belonged to the Merriwell set, I'd
forever have him to remind me by his example that I was yielding to inclinations I knew must be detrimental. You see I'm really a coward, Hartman—a moral coward. That's the way with a great many of us. We know our mistakes and weaknesses, but we obstinately decline to recognize them. I've never detected a taint of this moral cowardice in Merriwell."

"Oh, the man's a paragon!" sneered Lynn, viciously flinging his half-smoked cigar over the rail into the water. "Perhaps he's never had such weaknesses and the inclination to dally with things detrimental."

Colcord shook his head gravely.

"That man's full-blooded, more or less impulsive, and naturally the sort of a fellow to go in for anything that he fancied might give him passing enjoyment. He loves life and a good time. I believe it's only because he has set himself resolutely to resist the common inclinations to small vices that he's now the sort of a fellow that he has become. That he has a fiery temper two or three occurrences had proven beyond dispute, yet he possesses the courage and the will-power to hold that temper in restrain unless provoked beyond endurance."

"Well, let's not talk about him any more. Those fellows are hitting up a beautiful stroke, Jack."

"Yes, they're pulling handsomely together. I've hopes that Yale will come back into her own at New London this year. If she does, however, she will row the greatest race in her history."

"For a man who wants to take, a chance," smiled Hartman, "it's going to be something of a question how he'll place his money. Of course I prefer to bet on my own college, but, at the same time, I'm not a blind ass who lets patriotism pilfer his pocket. If you tell me when we get up to New Haven that Yale stands a pretty fair chance to win, I'm going to back our crew."

CHAPTER III

THE STREET FIGHT.

They were still leaning on the rail and watching the Yale crew, who had dwindled to a series of spots far away toward the breakwater, when a man sauntered out onto the bridge, passed them, turned round, repassed them and retraced his steps.

Happening to glance round, Hartman saw the fellow's retreating figure and recognized him.

"Ah!" he said unpleasantly, "there's my friend, Shaw. Wonder what he's doing around here?"

"Shaw?" said Colcord, dropping his field-glasses back into the case and snapping the cover down.

"Your friend, Shaw? I had an idea that few fellows willingly recognized that man as a friend."

Hartman laughed.

"Possibly you missed the sarcasm in my words," he said. "No, I don't fancy Preston Shaw has a great many friends. A cold-blooded, treacherous skunk like him can't have, you know."

"Seems to me I heard a rumor that you and he had been mixed up in some little unpleasantness."

"If you've met Mr. Shaw lately, you may possibly have observed that for some days he wore a beautiful pair of black eyes. I handed them to him."

"Oh, it was a fight, them."

"Not much of a fight," derided Lynn. "He didn't put up any great scrap."

"What was the cause of the unpleasantness?"

"As dirty a trick as ever one man played on another. You know about the private running-match between Merriwell and Silver, of course?"

"I didn't happen to get out to the track to witness that interesting event, but I heard about it."

"And of course you know that everybody has been touting Silver as the fellow with the flying feet—the man who would make new running-records for Yale?"

"Yes, I've heard that talk. I regard Silver as a good runner, considering the fact that he's come to the front so fast of late."

"But he's had the heart taken out of him," declared Lynn. "That match with Merriwell did it. I'm afraid he will never again have the sand to do his best in a hard race."

"If so, he never could be the man to make any new records for Yale. Such a defeat for Merriwell simply would have renewed and increased his determination to win. Go on with your explanation."

"Shaw knew Silver had challenged Merriwell to that race. He came and told me about it. I had faith in Silver, and Shaw professed to believe the fellow could beat Merriwell. He asserted that he was going to put his money up on Silver. I believed him. I had decided to back Silver myself."

"Poor judgment, Hartman."

"Perhaps it was, but I didn't think so at the time. Now what do you suppose Shaw did?"

"I'm a very poor guesser."
“Do you know Daggett?”

“Daggett? I don’t believe I do.”

“He’s that fellow who loans money to chaps who are hard up, taking such securities as they can provide, but exacting the most cold-blooded usury for every loan. Sometimes they call him Shylock.”

“Oh, yes, I know who he is—a mighty sneaky, shifty-looking chap.”

“Well, what does Shaw do but go to Daggett and give him a hundred dollars, with instructions to get a bet with me, backing Merriwell. Think it over, Jack. You’ll get an idea of the full extent of Shaw’s double-faced treachery. When he professed to me that he believed Silver could win he was lying like a trooper. All the time he was confident that precisely the other thing would happen. He even claimed he had overheard Merriwell acknowledge that Silver had him pumped off his feet in a cross-country run. That was a lie.

“I’m not often lured into a trap, but I put my foot into that one. When Daggett came around, flourishing Shaw’s money and offering to back Merriwell, I took him up. See this ring? I didn’t happen to have a hundred dollars in my pocket, so I put up fifty plunks and let my ring represent the other fifty. After the race was over I got the money to redeem my ring and went to Daggett after it, for the stakeholder had turned it over to him. I entered his room without knocking and found Daggett handing the winnings over to Shaw. It took me just about one second to understand the whole dirty, sneaking, underhand game. Then I sailed into Shaw and punched him a few times. That’s how he happened to have those black eyes. I got the ring, too, and I didn’t hand over any money to redeem it. Since then I’ve paid no attention to Shaw, although he’s forever bobbing up wherever I go.”

“That’s just about what I’d expect of a man like Shaw,” said Colcord. “Have a fresh cigar, Hartman. Let’s saunter back.”

They both lighted fresh weeds and turned back toward the city. After leaving the bridge, they followed a street which led some distance along the water-front in the direction of the Yale boat-house. Many laborers and rough-looking characters were seen. As they were passing a saloon upon the corner four men, who were unmistakably foreigners, blocked the sidewalk. Hartman pushed against one of them in order to keep from stepping off the walk into the mud.

In a moment, with a snarling oath, the man turned and struck Lynn a staggering blow. He was an Italian, and he called out to the others in his own language, whereupon all four of them sailed into the two Yale lads.

Attacked in this sudden and unexpected manner, Hartman and Colcord were rapidly getting the worst of it. The ruffians came at them like enraged beasts, seeming determined to knock them down and beat them into insensibility.

A man stepped out of the saloon and stood regarding the encounter without offering to lift a hand or call for assistance.

Hartman saw this man and perceived that it was Shaw, whose cold face wore a vicious expression of satisfaction.

Colcord saw the man also, and called to him.

“Help!” he cried. “We’re Yale men; you’re a Yale man.”

“Go to the devil, both of you!” muttered Shaw.

But suddenly another person came rushing toward the spot and lunged into the fight, his arms shooting out like piston-rods and his fists smacking against the heads of the ruffians. He knocked two of them down in a twinkling, and then, backed by Hartman, who had a cut and bleeding lip, he went after the remaining two, hammer and tongs. Colcord had been dazed by a blow, but he recovered in time to prevent one of the men who had been knocked down from leaping at the back of the courageous fellow who had interfered.

This fellow was none other than Dick Merriwell. Coming from the boat-house, he had seen the street fight and recognized the Yale youths who had been set upon by those ruffians. That was enough to send him rushing into the fight like a whirlwind.

The encounter did not last long after Merriwell’s arrival. Amazed and dismayed, the assailants uttered cries and oaths in various languages and made haste, one after another, to take to their heels. One of them was down on the broken sidewalk, and Hartman lifted a foot to kick him in the face.

With a thrust Merriwell sent Lynn staggering aside.

“The fellow’s got his medicine, Hartman,” said Dick. “Never kick a man when he’s down. His mates have skedaddled, and he’ll hardly be fool enough to look for any further scrap.”

The man rose. He was a young Italian, not at all bad-looking, although roughly dressed. One look he gave Dick, and there seemed something like surprise in his dark eyes. Then, without a word, he also took to his heels.

Shaw had vanished.
CHAPTER IV.

REGGIO MELITO.

On the sunny afternoon of a spring day, following a rainy morning, Merriwell found himself in the heart of New Haven's shopping district. The sunshine had brought shoppers out in great throngs, and the streets were athrob with life. In that vicinity trolley-cars, trucks, private carriages and vehicles of all kinds were numerous to the point of threatening traffic congestion.

In crossing the street a little girl not more than seven years old, wearing a clean print dress but rather shabby shoes, got in the way of a span of prancing horses and halted in terror and bewilderment, hugging to her breast a newly bought, undressed doll with wide-open, staring blue eyes. She started to turn back, but discovered that she could not do so, uttered a cry of fear, then tripped and fell on the muddy stones directly in front of the horses.

 Ere Merriwell could reach her, a slender, dark-skinned, black-eyed young foreigner had seized the horses by their bits and set them back on their haunches. In another moment he lifted the child, picked up her doll from the gutter and placed her safely on the curbing. Thrusting the soiled, mud-dripping doll into the little girl’s hands, he turned furiously on the coachman.

"Pig-a-l!” he cried fiercely. "You try-a to kill-a da lit’ girl-a!”

In the open carriage was a haughty, middle-aged dame, who looked extremely annoyed.

"Drive over such a creature, John, if he gets in your way,” she said.

This seemed to excite the young man, who was an Italian, more than ever.

"You drive-a over da lit’ girl-a you kill-a her!” he shouted, approaching a step, his face full of indignation. "Mebbe you rich-a, but you no have-a right to kill-a da lit’ girl-a!”

The coachman lifted his whip as if to make a cut at the man, who nimbly sprang backward.

"Yah!” he snarled. "Is dis da Americ’ I come-a to where everybody have-a da chance—where everybody is on-a da equal?”

"Can you see an officer, John?” asked the woman.

"Call an officer and have the fellow arrested.”

"You have-a me—me—me arrest?” almost frothed the Italian, beating himself on the chest with his clenched hands. "You should be arrest yourself-a!”

"Such insolence!” breathed the haughty woman. "I never was so insulted in my life!”

But now the Italian youth turned to the little girl, who was holding her muddy doll and crying in a heart-broken manner.

"Don’t cry-a, don’t cry-a, lit’ girl-a,” he entreated in soft, liquid accents. "You no hurt-a.”

"My—my doll is all—all covered with—mud!” sobbed the child.

"Too bad-a! too bad-a!” murmured the man.

"I saved my—pennies till I got—twenty-nine cents—and I bought—me a doll. Mama let me—come out to the store—all alone—cause I wanted it—so bad. Now it’s all—all covered with mud. It’s all spilt."


Oddly enough, this roughly dressed youth had been wearing a pink carnation upon the lapel of his jacket. In a moment he removed it and offered it to the child.


From about his neck he removed the handkerchief he had been wearing, and, kneeling upon the sidewalk, he tried to wipe the mud from the doll and the bespattered dress of the sobbing child. She looked at him wonderingly, saying:

"I guess you can’t get it off. Maybe mama can wash it off.”

"Ahh! now dat-a so!” beamed the kneeling youth.

"But it never, never can be really clean and new, and I did want a new doll all of my own so bad—so bad!”

He rose and fished into his pockets, from which he finally dug out two nickels and three coppers.

"Look-a,” he said. "I have-a all so much of da mon’. You take-a it. Bimeby you buy-a nother doll-a.”

He forced the money into her muddy little fist, closing her fingers over it.

Needless to say, Dick Merriwell was watching this little drama with unspeakable interest. He was moved by the tenderness and generosity of this Italian youth, although, strange to say, he had recognized the man as one of the four ruffians who had attacked Hartman and Colcord—the one Hartman had tried to kick.

"Dare!” said the foreign youth; "you take-a da mon’, you buy-a da new doll’a bimeby prit’ soon-a. Dat good-a, good-a. If I have-a da more mon’ I
give-a you. Dat all I got-a now. Where you live-a? I take-a you home. Lit' girl-a like-a you get-a into troub' on da street.”

The haughty woman had descended from her carriage, bestowed a contemptuous look on the foreigner and the child and swept across the sidewalk into a store. The coachman sat stiff-necked and grim, apparently paying no further attention to the man and the child.

Taking the little girl’s hand in his, the Italian started along the street with her, talking in broken English, doing his best to cheer her.

Involuntarily Dick followed at a little distance.

They had not progressed half a block when suddenly the man stooped and picked up a purse.


He opened the purse, which was filled with bills and coins.


In another moment, however, a well-dressed woman, followed by a policeman, darted out of the crowd, uttered a cry and pointed toward the Italian.

“Here he is, officer!” she said. “There’s the man who stole my purse! He has it now!”

The officer lost no time in collaring the youthful foreigner.

“Caught with the goods!” he growled, as he took the purse from the surprised man’s fingers. “You’ll get your medicine for this all right.”

He handed the purse over to the woman.

“See if your money is all there, madam,” he said.

In a flutter of excitement, she made an examination and said she believed it was all there.

“You’re sure this is the man who robbed you?” asked the officer.

“Oh, yes!” she declared. “I saw him following me and looking at me. I noticed him in particular.”

“Such characters are dangerous, and they should be taken care of,” asserted the guardian of the peace.

“I trust you’ll come to the station, madam, and make a complaint against him?”

“Oh, I should dislike to do that, but——”

“It’s absolutely necessary. Really, you must do so. He’s evidently a common purse-snatcher.”

Suddenly the surprised and bewildered young foreigner roused himself.

“I no steal-a da mon’, he protested, while a crowd of spectators began to gather around. “I find-a it. I find-a it on-a da side-walk. I pick-a up da mon’.”

“Oh, that won’t go a little bit!” sneered the policeman. “You’ll have a chance to tell that to the judge.”

“I swear—a—I swear-a on-a da word of Reggio Melito. Where is da lit’ gil-a? She saw-a me pick-a up da mon’.”

But the frightened child had vanished.

“Stop that monkey chatter, will yer now?” came from the policeman. “Come along to the station-house.”

“Wait a minute, officer,” interposed Dick, stepping forward at this juncture. “I happen to know that this man has told you the truth. I saw him pick up the purse.”

The policeman gave Dick a scowl.

“Oh, you did, eh? You saw him pick it up, you say?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And this lady says he stole it from her. She saw him following her, too.”

“I’m certain the lady is mistaken on that point. She may have seen him before, but I know he did not steal the purse.”

“Well, if you know so much you can tell your story to the judge. I shall take the lady’s word. Come, madam, you must do your duty.”

Dick turned to the woman.

“Don’t you think it possible you’re wholly mistaken about this man?” he asked. “You didn’t see him steal your purse, did you?”

“No, but I saw him following me. I’m not mistaken, young man.”

“Very well,” said Dick, “then it will be necessary for me to appear in police court. I shall do so, for I know this fellow is innocent.”

Reggio Melito gazed at Dick in mingled alarm and wonderment. He remembered this clean-faced, hard-hitting young chap who had plunged into that street fight and done so much to put the four ruffians to rout. He likewise recalled the fact that Dick had prevented him from being kicked in the face when he was down and helpless to defend himself. He tried to speak, but his excited voice choked and his words, a mingling of English and Italian, were incoherent.

“Don’t be disturbed, my friend,” said Merriwell. “I’m going to stand by you, for I know you’re innocent of this charge.”

Then Reggio found his voice and chokingly expressed his thanks. Holding fast to his prisoner, the
TIP TOP WEEKLY.

In a moment his manner and bearing toward Dick underwent a peculiar change.

"Oh, Dick Merriwell, eh?" he said. "I've heard about you. I'm a new man on this beat."

"I thought so," nodded Merriwell. "I didn't seem to remember your face."

The policeman turned to the woman, and now his bearing toward her was greatly altered.

"A patrol wagon will be here directly," he said. "I'm not going to take this man to the station unless you will appear against him, for that would be useless. I shall release him. Here comes the wagon now."

There was a clanging of a bell, and a patrol wagon was seen approaching. At this the woman became almost panic-stricken.

"You'd better let him go," she said. "Really, I don't think there's sufficient evidence against him. I—I may have been mistaken. Perhaps I was."

The wagon came up and stopped. An officer sprang down and spoke to the policeman who still had his hand on Reggio's shoulder.

"This man," said the policeman, "was accused of stealing this woman's purse. She seemed positive of it, and therefore I took him into custody; but now she's changed her mind completely. She refuses to appear against him. Further than that, this young man here says he saw the dago pick the purse up from the sidewalk."

The officer who had arrived with the patrol gave Dick a look.

"Oh, how do you do, Merriwell," he said in a friendly way.

"How do you do, captain," responded Dick.

"Did you see the man pick up the purse?"

"Yes, captain, I saw him when he found it on the side-walk. I know he didn't steal it from the lady."

The captain questioned the woman, who acknowledged that she might be utterly mistaken, and, when he had heard her story and listened to her refusal to appear against the prisoner, he shrugged his shoulders and turned once more to the officer who had Melito in charge.

"No use to take him in," he said. "There's nothing doing. He would be discharged. If these people who make complaints won't appear, it's useless to make any arrests. Let him go, Kelley."

"All right, sir," said the officer, as he released Reggio.

The young Italian turned and seized Dick's hands.

"Oh, thank-a you, thank-a you!" he cried. "Reggio
Melito he will-a rememb' it. He never forget-a—never forget-a!

The police captain spoke to the driver of the patrol and jumped aboard. The wagon rolled away. The woman who had recovered her purse made haste to depart, and the curious crowd dispersed.

CHAPTER V.

HOT BLOOD.

Pancying he had obtained something more than a glimpse of Reggio Melito's true nature, Dick was curiously interested in the young foreigner. He had first seen the youth in company with, and evidently an accomplice of, ruffians, who had set upon Hartman without provocation, and plainly with the most brutal intent. Yet Reggio was a chap with a tender and sentimental side to his nature, one who could gaily wear a flower upon his shabby jacket and hesitate not an instant in bravely championing a child in peril.

Merriwell's curiosity led him to saunter along at Reggio's side as they chatted in a friendly fashion.

"You've not been long in this country?" questioned Dick.

"Oh, no; I com-a from Messina since da earthquake-a."

"From Messina, eh? Then you were there at the time of the earthquake?"

"I was there. I lose-a everything. I have-a da small biz. All gone-a, all gone-a."

"That was too bad. It was a great disaster."


Plainly he could not command English words to convey his terrified impressions of that awful night when the island of Sicily was shaken from end to end by the earthquake. His gestures and his looks were far more expressive than his language.

"How did you get away? How did you escape to America?"

"For a long time-a I save-a da mon' to set-a up my broth' in da biz. My broth', Lavello Genzaro, he come-a to Americ' two year ago. He have-a da hard luck. He write-a me he get-a da good biz if I send-a him da mon'. So I sav-a, but I no send-a him yet. I have-a da mon'. I hide-a it in da line of my jack'. When da earthquake it come-a, I grab-a da jack.'"

"And you decided to use that money to pay your own passage to America, instead of sending it to your brother. Is that right?"

"Dat-a right, dat-a right," beamed Reggio. "My broth', Lavello Genzaro, he ver' much disappoint when I come-a—when I no send-a him da mon'."

"You name is Melito. You call your brother Genzaro. How is that?"

"He marry my sis'."

"Oh, I see. He's your brother by marriage."

Reggio laughed and nodded his head vigorously.


With this explanation, Reggio's face grew serious almost to a point of sadness.

"I no want-a my sis' to marry Lavello," he confessed. "He have-a da bad fam'. Always in da trub'. He tell-a her how day get-a rich in U. S. Americ'. She run-a off with Lavello. They no get-a rich so fast-a. Bimeby they write-a. My sis' she write-a. She say they need-a da mon' to get-a da start in Americ', so I save-a up da mon'. I write-a, I say-a I save-a up da mon'. Bimeby I send-a it. That what make-a a Lavello mad-a when I use-a it to come to Americ'."

"What sort of business is your brother in?"

This question seemed to perplex Reggio.

"No can tell-a, no can tell-a," he answered, shaking his head. "He want-a da mon' for da big pian' on-a wheel. He say dat da way to git-a rich in Americ'. My sis', Iserna, much fine-a look-a girl. She no look-a so fine-a now. She change-a. All-a da same-a, if dey have-a da pian' dey go on da street and she pick-a up da mon'. Bimeby I get-a da good job. I earn-a"
da mon' to buy-a da pian'. Den we all get-a rich. Den we all-a go-a back to Sicily."

Dick smiled a bit as he thought how natural it was for these sons of sunny Italy to look forward forever to the time when they could return to their native land with a small fortune on which they could live comfortably for the remainder of their days.

They had now left the congested shopping section of the city and were slowly and aimlessly walking toward the water-front.

"Reggio," said Dick, "I saw you save that little girl from being run down by those horses."

"You see-a dat?" cried the young Italian in surprise. "You see-a dat man almost drive-a ove' da lit' girl-a?"

"Yes. I saw you stop those horses, and I watched you when you gave the child your last copper. That was a generous act, Reggio."

"Oh, no; dat 'mount-a to nothing. Dat mon' not 'nough-a to do-a me good-a. Da lit' girl-a she spoil-a da doll-a. She cry-a."

"Reggio, I'd like to loan you some money. You may need it until you can get work."

The Italian did not seem to understand until Dick brought forth his money and prepared to make an offer. Then, of a sudden, he demonstrated earnestly, almost fiercely.

"No, no!" he cried. "No take-a da mon'. Reggio strong-a. Look-a! can-a do da work."

"But times are not as prosperous as they might be, and you may not find it easy to secure work."

"I take-a da chance," said Reggio proudly. "No need-a da assist."

Then, as well as he could, he expressed his gratitude and showered thanks on this stranger who had stood by him in his time of trouble and had shown a disposition to assist him financially. Indeed, he seemed on the verge of embracing Dick. It was useless for the Yale lad to insist; he soon realized that his companion was grimly determined in his resolution to accept no money.

By this time they had reached the more squalid and disreputable portion of the city.

"Tell me," said Dick, "how did you happen to be concerned in that street attack upon two of my college-mates? You know what I mean. You remember me, I'm sure."

But a sudden look of alarm filled Reggio's eyes.

"No understand-a, no understand-a," he declared.

"Yes, you do," persisted Merriwell. "You were with three other men who set upon two chaps who at-

 tempted to pass you on the street. Was one of those men Lavello?"

"No understand-a, no understand-a," persisted Reggio.

"You need not be afraid of me. I've done you a favor, and all I ask in return is a simple, truthful answer to my question."

But now Reggio fell to chattering in mixed English and Italian that was absolutely incoherent save for his oft repeated declaration that he could not understand. It seemed apparent that he entertained a secret fear or dread of imparting any information about the matter, and finally Dick was disposed to give it up as a wasted effort.

Suddenly a slender, pallid, dark-eyed young woman, with a shawl over her head, came running toward them. She was poorly clothed, yet a bright ribbon or two adorned her person. Reggio perceived her and uttered a low exclamation of wonderment.

"My sis'!" he said—"my sis', Iserna! How come-a she here-a?"

The girl rushed up, seized her brother excitedly by the arm and began talking wildly to him in her own language. In a moment he was fully as excited as she.

"What-a dat? what-a dat?" he cried fiercely. "Lavello he strike-a you?"

For answer, she held back the shawl and displayed a bruise, already growing discolored, upon her cheek.

A terrible light crept into the eyes of Reggio Melito. He lifted his clenched fist above his head and hissed some words in Italian which Dick could not fully understand, but which seemed like a mingled threat and vow.

Suddenly the youth seemed to remember that the young American was present. He checked himself and turned his eyes on Dick.

"You see-a," he said in a low, tense tone. "I tell-a my sis' not to marry Lavello. Now he strike-a her."

Merriwell could see that the girl had been really handsome; indeed, she was still attractive, although her face was pale and there seemed something like a haunting sadness in her dark eyes.

"It's unfortunate," said Dick, who felt himself quite at loss for words.

"Look-a you! look-a you!" whispered Reggio. "Lavello must have-a da care. My sis' she is my sis'. I love-a her. Lavello, he shall not strike-a Iserna. If he do-a it some more-a, I will kill-a him."

"Be careful, Reggio. In this country that would mean certain punishment for you. You would be ar-
rested, tried, convicted and executed—and no friend could save you.”

“You think—a that make-a me fright’? No! You think-a I let-a a Lavello beat-a my sis’? No! Reggio will kill-a him! Look-a! look-a! I bring-a it with me from Messina. My fath’, one time he kill-a da man with it.”

From some hidden place he suddenly brought forth and displayed for a moment a long, keen dagger.

In spite of himself, Merriwell felt a cold chill flash over him. He knew something of the nature of these impulsive, hot-blooded people of that far distant earthquake-shaken island, and he was sure that Lavello Genzaro invited sudden death when he lifted his brutal fist against the sister of Melito.

On the opposite side of the street a man who happened to be passing glanced in curiosity and surprise at Merriwell and his two companions. Dick saw that man and recognized Preston Shaw, although the fellow turned his head away and hastened onward with quickened steps.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WRITING ON THE WALL.

Dick had something to think of as he walked back toward the college. He had been given a glimpse of a romance that threatened to terminate in a tragedy. With all the eloquence he could command, he had warned Reggio Melito against the rash act which he threatened. Nevertheless, he felt that his words might have little influence upon the youth who had been enraged by the brutal treatment of his sister.

The appearance of Shaw had also given Dick something to speculate over. What was the fellow doing down there in that quarter of the city? To be sure, his purpose might be innocent enough; but still something in his manner, in the way he had averted his face and hastened on when perceived, left the impression that he had not wished to be recognized.

Although he had not said as much to Hartman and Colcord, Merriwell had a suspicion that Shaw was the instigator of the attack upon them by that quartet of desperate men. Shaw had seen those men setting upon two of his college acquaintances, yet he had stood by and declined to lift a hand. Upon the appearance of Dick and the unexpected defeat of the thugs, Preston had made haste to vanish.

While Merriwell did not know the truth concerning the relations of Hartman and Shaw, he, like others, had heard rumors of the encounter in which Preston had been given a pair of black eyes. That Shaw entertained a cold, malignant hatred for him, Dick was well aware.

The man was dangerous, far more dangerous than an open, impulsive enemy. He was the kind to plot and scheme for the undoing and downfall of one he disliked, all the while keeping himself in the background. Whatever happened, he would be very careful not to become seriously involved himself.

Dick went straight to a lecture-hall, and, after his usual habit, shut out all disturbing thoughts, giving his full attention to the subject before him.

From the lecture he hastened to his room to leave his notes and go out for practise with the nine. He more than half-expected to find Buckhart waiting for him, but Brad was not there.

As he opened the door, however, he discovered a folded sheet of paper which had been slipped under it. When he picked the paper up and opened it he was given something of a start. Fairly in the middle of the sheet was the imprint of a black hand. Written around that hand in scrawling letters he read a brief message:

“Dik Merwel:—Bring five hundred dollars to black Wharfe tonite the twelf at midnite or die. You kno the black Hand. If you fale you will be kild.”

For something like a minute he stood holding that paper and studying the scrawling chirography upon it. Gradually a half-scornful smile crept over his face, and finally he laughed outright.

“What a poor sort of a joke!” he cried. “I wonder who ever devised such a silly scheme?”

Then he folded the paper, slipped it into his pocket, tossed his note-book on the study table and hurried away, slamming the door behind him.

Any one watching Merriwell at practise that afternoon could not have dreamed that anything had occurred to disturb him in the slightest. He was full of energy and bubbling over with good-nature. Nevertheless, at times, in spite of his usual success in dismissing all annoying thoughts, he could not help remembering the manner in which Reggio had hissed his threat against his brother-in-law as he displayed that slender, deadly looking dagger. Also, he recalled with great annoyance the “Black Hand” threat which he had found beneath his door.

Ere going out with Brad to dinner that night, he produced the paper. The Texan looked at it curiously, twisted his face into a grimace and inquired:
"What do you call it, pard?"
"Can't you read the writing on it?"
"Sure, although it's some difficult. How did you come by this charming little document?"
Dick explained.
"Wangh!" cried the Texan. "Some galoot trying to have fun with you, I opine."
"That's what I thought at first."
"At first? Don't you think so now, pard?"
"I don't know just what to think about it."
"Wow! You sure don't mean to say you're letting yourself get any wrought up over a fool trick like this? I certain couldn't think it of you."
"I'm not wrought up, Brad, but still I have a feeling that there's something behind it more than either of us realize. To-night is the twelfth."
The Texan dropped on a big Morris chair, slapped his knee and roared with laughter.
"Pard, I swear I believe you're nervous!"
"Not at all," was the calm denial. "Still, I'd like to know if anybody will think of being at Black's Wharf to meet me at midnight."
"Dick, if any one is there, it will be some fellow ready to give you the merry he-he in case you show up."
"I'd enjoy turning the laugh on him."
"You'll do that if you don't pay any attention whatever to this document. Burn it. I'll touch a match to it."
"Don't. I have a fancy for keeping it."
"Why?"
"Oh, I don't know; perhaps it may serve as a clue to the joker."
"Well, that's so. Keep it if you want to, pard, but don't worry yourself any at all over it. Come on, let's go eat. I'm hungry as a bear."

At least Dick's appetite was not at all disturbed by the Black Hand threat. After dinner he returned to his room for the purpose of getting in an hour or so of study, dropping Buckhart on the way, Brad having encountered some friends with whom he was inclined to linger.

Lights were gleaming in the windows of Durfee when Tucker and Jones found Merriwell pacing the floor of his room. He welcomed them cheerfully and invited them to sit down. A moment later Bouncer Bigelow strayed in.
"I don't see how you can shut yourself up here all alone, Dick," cried Tommy. "I've got a restless feeling in my bones. It's the season, I reckon. You know everything new comes with April,—new grass, new buds, new races, new everything—including neuralgia and pneumonia."

Bigelow was inspecting his derby,
"And I need a new hat," he said. "Anybody know a place where I can exchange an old hat for a new one?"
"Oh, yes," smiled Dick, "there are several restaurants in town."
"Don't I know it?" gurgled Bouncer. "That's how I came by this derby. Somebody got away with mine and left me this one, which was picked four or five years ago, at least."
"Unfortunately," said Merriwell; "but such things will happen occasionally. What's the matter with Jones? He seems buried in thought."
"That's right," chirped Tucker, "and a fellow who is buried in thought must have grave reflections."
"I was just thinking," said Blessed, "that I'm certainly all to the punk at baseball this year. Can't seem to get alive. Can't seem to wake up. Don't improve a bit. Verily, I believe my day is past and my sun hath set."
"Come off! come off!" cried Tommy. "You haven't got limbered up to it yet. Wait till the season opens for fair. You'll be there with the goods. Oh, I'm itching for things to commence to simmer."
saw you so restless. On my word, I believe you're nervous. Has anything happened?"

"Various things," admitted Dick. "When I entered this room after dinner it was dark. Somebody had been here ahead of me—somebody inclined to have a little sport with me, I fancy. Wait a minute, fellows. See that blank spot yonder on the wall?"

He pointed toward a bit of wall-space unoccupied by pictures or ornaments of any sort.

"Yes, we see it," said Tucker wonderingly. "What about it?"

"Can you read any writing on the wall there?"

"Writing? Say, what's eating you? Have you got them?"

"Keep your eyes on that spot. I'm going to turn off the lights."

In another moment the room was in darkness. Upon the wall glowed some faint, huge letters, gleaning and flickering with a yellowish, phosphorescent light. The tracing was faint, but yet distinct enough for them to read the words formed by those large, wavering letters. Those words were:

"Don't forget. To-night at twelve. Take heed or die! THE BLACK HAND."

Snap!—the lights came on again.

They looked at one another wonderingly. Then they looked at Merriwell. He was smiling a bit, but in his eyes there was an expression of annoyance.

CHAPTER VII.

PHILOSOPHY.

"Behold," said Blessed Jones solemnly, "like Belshazzar of old, ye have seen the handwriting on the wall."

"What's the joke?" inquired Tucker. "Where does the laugh come in?"

"I presume it is a joke," nodded Dick. "Some fellows have peculiar ideas about such things."

"It's all bosh about this Black Hand business, anyhow," said Bigelow. "I think the newspapers fill a lot of space about it in order that some imaginative reporters may make a living. I don't believe there is any such thing as the Black Hand. Do you, Merriwell?"

"Doubtless such a society exists," answered Dick unhesitatingly. "That it is an organization bound together by pledges, oaths, by-laws and penalties, with a head or a central governing body, no one seems absolutely able to prove. It seems more probable that gradually, bit by bit, the sign of the Black Hand has become the natural emblem of Italian blackmail. That these blackmailers are somehow bound together by a natural bond of sympathy and affiliation also seems probable, although there may not be any fixed organization. Unlike the rogues and thieves of Paris and London, the Black Handers apparently do not recognize the authority of a central government, although such government may exist. It is something strangely elusive, something so formless, even while it is so fearfully formidable, that thus far the law has been helpless to cope with it and crush it. The criminals, bandits and blackmailers of Italy have so worked upon the superstitious fears of the ignorant class that those people refuse in mortal terror to give testimony which might help in blunting out this great evil. Even the near relatives of the Black Hand victim will close their lips and decline to speak when the law attempts to learn the truth. The Black Hand exists and thrives on ignorance and fear. Until education emancipates those ignorant people from fear, there is little hope of putting an end to such a reign of terror. Oh, yes, Bigelow, there's such a thing as the Black Hand."

"Great hocus!" cried Tucker, with a touch of decision. "You don't fancy you've been singled out as a victim, do you, Merriwell?"

"Such a thing seems positively ridiculous. If you'll notice, the Black Handers operate among their own people. Italian bandits and criminals emigrate to this country in large numbers each year. In many cases they are forced to flee from Italy, where it has become too hot for them to carry on their unlawful business. Arriving in America, they find they can't carry on the style of plundering which they have followed in their own country. The methods of Black Hand blackmailers appeal to them. They look around and discover members of their own nationality who have become prosperous and accumulated a little property or wealth."

"These prosperous persons are singled out as victims. They receive blackmailing epistles, to which the Black Hand signature is appended. If they ignore these threats, which are generally repeated a number of times with increasing viciousness, some night they are stabbed in the back, or shot, or their places of business are burned. Perhaps their homes are blown up by bombs. In this manner the Black Handers maintain their reign of terror. To such creatures human life seems no more sacred than the lives of the lowest
animals. In order to reach a victim who has obsti-
nately refused to be robbed, they may drop a bomb
down the air-shaft of a bee-hive tenement-house and
maim or kill a dozen innocent persons. In this
country we’re rapidly finding the Black Hand a serious
and menacing problem. It is not a myth, Bigelow; it’s
the real thing.”

“But you’re not an Italian, Merriwell. There’s no
reason why any one should single you out. This must
be meant for a joke.”

“It looks that way,” nodded Dick, smiling.
And yet, even while he was inclined to believe the
whole business a silly and ridiculous jest, he could
not forget that fate had lately thrown him into an
encounter with Italian desperadoes. It seemed most
preposterous that Preston Shaw, aware of these things,
had sought to frighten Merriwell by fake and puerc-
Black Hand threats. Still, whenever Dick thought of
Reggio and Lavello, he could not help thinking of
Shaw at the same time. Nevertheless, he did not men-
tion this to these friends.

“Forget it, old chap,” cried Tucker. “If anybody
is trying to get gay with you, just let them go on with
their funny business until they make a slip and betray
themselves.”

“That’s good advice from a wooden-head,” said
Bigelow.

“From the mouths of fools shall come words of
wisdom,” droned Jones.

“Oh, you fellows are terribly facetious, aren’t you?”
sneered Tucker. “Never mind; you’ll get yours all
right, all right, when the time comes. I say, Dick,
how are things aquatic looking? Next to Ives him-
self, you ought to be the best informed man as to
Yale’s prospects on the water. Think we’re going to
have a winning crew this year?”

“The prospects look bright, Tommy,” answered
Dick, as he took down a Malay creese which had hung
above the mantel as an ornament.

They watched him as he carefully touched the keen
edge of the curving blade with the ball of his thumb.

Jones shivered.

“Put that thing up,” he growled. “It may be
poisoned.”

“Oh, no,” laughed Dick. “The people who use wea-
pons of this sort don’t poison them. A Malay who
runs amuck with one of these knives usually succeeds
in slashing, wounding and killing eight or ten people
before he’s finished off. A knife is a terribly deadly
weapon. I’d rather be shut up in a room with a man
armed with a loaded pistol than with one, thoroughly
desperate, whose weapon is a knife.

“There’s always a peculiar and terrible fascination
about encounters between human beings armed with
cold steel. Savages and the lower and more desperate
order of men prefer knives; but in those of higher
civilization the sword became the weapon most used
in duel and general encounters. The sword is simply
a lengthened knife, but with it a man seems to have
more chance to defend himself by strategy and skill.
It’s more refined than the knife. For that reason
dueling with swords became the civilized man’s
method of meeting and fighting his enemy.

“With the advance of education and civilization,
knives and swords are going out of use; but still there
are men walking the streets of New Haven to-day who
carry knives hidden upon their persons. Such men
are dangerous, and many of them are murderers at
heart, even though they may never have taken a human
life. Notice the newly arrived Italian emigrant as
he sits eating his black bread beside a railroad or a
ditch upon which he is employed as a laborer. In two
cases out of three he will bring forth a long-bladed,
wicked-looking knife with which he will cut his
bread.”

“And here we are back to the dagoes again,” gurg-
gled Bouncer. “We can’t seem to get away from
them.”

“There must be a fascination about cold steel,” said
Tommy. “Why, Dick, you yourself are an expert
fencer. You’ve spent time enough to acquire skill
with the sword or the rapier. Still you believe such
weapons the symbols of barbaric times and people.”

“Fencing,” said Merriwell, “is one of the finest ex-
ercises a man can take up. It makes him quick of eye
and brain, and it gives him suppleness and grace. I
assure you, fellows, it was never for the purpose of
preparing myself for duelling that I went in for
fencing.”

“Still,” whispered Jones, “you’ve fought with the
sword.”

Dick flushed a bit.

“Just as long as human beings preserve the old primi-
tive passions and impulses, men will fight. The man
who trains himself to use deadly weapons for the pur-
pose of shedding human blood is a prospective crimi-
nal. Still, circumstances may force you or I or any
one of us to defend ourselves from such a man. The
better we’re prepared, the more chance we’ll have of
living to a ripe old age and dying a natural death. I
don’t believe in fist fighting. It’s brutal. Yet the
chap who can handle his dukes is almost certain some
day to find such skill of value to him. I’ve said that
I had rather face a man at short-range who was
armed with a pistol than one armed with a knife. But
give me a good, stout cane, and I’ll take my chances
with the man who has the knife. I’ll do so because
I’ve studied fencing and acquired a certain amount of
skill at it.”

He returned the creese to its place above the mantle,
stepped over to a corner of the room and brought forth
a stout, yet slender and pliable, cane.

“This little stick once saved me from being chopped
up,” he said. “I’ve preserved it as a reminder of the
fact that I didn’t waste my time in learning to fence.
I’ll give any one of you leave to take that creese and
come at me here and now, and I’ll guarantee to dis-
arm him before he can scratch my skin with the
knife.”

“Thanks,” droned Jones. “That’s a pleasant and
agreeable offer, but I don’t think I’ll take it up. Per-
haps you could fight with a knife if you had to.”

Again Dick smiled.

“Perhaps,” he said mysteriously. “There’s a science
in such fighting, just as there is in sword duelling. I
confess that I once spent some time with a man who
gave me instructions in the art of self-defense with a
toad-sticker. I’ve seen one or two rather sanguine
knife-battles. Always the most skillful man was the
one who came off best.”

“Is there anything you haven’t tried you hand at?”
exclaimed Bigelow.

“Oh, yes, there are a few odd and outlandish
weapons with which I haven’t become familiar.”

“But as an all-round fighter from the gridiron to
the grave, your development is abnormal,” said
Bouncer.

“I’ve found both pleasure and advantage in it,”
nodded Dick, as he returned the cane to its corner.
“It’s a trite old saying that life is a battle, and a few
moralsists have tried to disprove the truth of it. But
its just as true to-day as it was in the time of the
cave-men. The only difference is that our methods of
fighting have changed. We now pursue the warfare
in commerce, politics and social life. We mask many
of our movements under the veil of diplomacy, and
diplomacy is practically synonymous with deception.
The brotherhood of mankind sounds good, and the
time may come when it will have a true and definite
meaning. But beware of the person who tries to ap-
peal to you with a lot of gush about such brotherhood.
The chances are four to one that he’s seeking to lull
your suspicions while he gets an advantage over you in
some direction.”

“I swear that sort of talk seems a bit odd coming
from you, Merriwell,” said Jones. “Why, you’re al-
ways eager to believe every man square and on the
level. You’re never unjustly suspicions.”

“I hope not. I try not to be. Suspicion is a canker-
sore that poisons the mind of the man who fosters it.
It’s better to be generous and deceived than to be
suspicious, and wrong one innocent person. Simply
because I’ve been deceived a number of times I’m not
going to permit myself to turn sour and regard every-
body as treacherous and untrustworthy. More than
once I’ve been deceived by those who had no malice
ward to me. They hurt themselves as much as or more
than they did me. Even at the peril of being con-
sidered an easy-mark, I’ve persisted in clinging to my
faith in the majority of humanity. We all make mis-
takes. We may hurt our friends through them. Come,
fellows, I’m going out. I feel oddly cramped in doors
to-night. Let’s get a bit of open air on the campus.”

“And let’s talk of more interesting topics,” pro-
posed Tucker, as they moved toward the door.

Dick turned off the lights and looked back at that
spot upon the wall. Those glowing letters were fading,
and some of them had already vanished entire or in
part. He shrugged his shoulders and closed the
door upon them.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN WITH THE KNIFE.

When Merriwell returned an hour later, accom-
panied by Buckhart, there was not a trace of the hand-
writing on the wall.

Dick told Brad nothing about it. They studied
until the little clock on the mantel struck ten, and then
Merriwell put aside his books, and five minutes later
Brad found him digging into the lower drawer of the
dresser, where he kept a strange collection of clothing
and articles of all sorts.

“What are you doing, pard?” asked the Texan.
“What have you dug out that old suit of clothes? Go-
ring fishing?”

“Hardly,” was the laughing answer. “I just took
a notion to make an inventory of this drawer. I’d al-
most forgotten what I had here. Look at this bunch of
stuff.”

He brought out a lot of crépe hair, false whiskers
and wigs, which he had used for masquerading pur-
poses on various occasions. The drawer likewise contained a make-up box, such as is the property of a great many actors.

Buckhart stood looking at his room-mate inquiringly.

“Anything doing?” he finally asked.

“Nothing worth mentioning,” replied Dick, as he began putting the stuff back into the drawer.

Nevertheless, Brad was not quite satisfied as he undressed and went to bed. He had a vague feeling that Dick was up to something, although it was plain he did not care to state what that something was. Under such circumstances the Texan repressed his curiosity and he was soon sound asleep.

Merriwell undressed leisurely. The wind was droning a bit dolefully about the windows, and the night was overcast, with the promise of rain.

When he had removed his outer garments Merriwell got into that old suit of clothes which he had left on top of the other things in the dresser drawer. They were shabby, almost ragged garments, and they made a great change in the appearance of the lad who was usually careful and almost immaculate in his dress. Before the mirror in the bathroom Dick tried several of the various moustaches and beards, finally selecting a rough and ragged set of whiskers, which seemed somehow to correspond with the clothes he had put on. He did not use any of the make-up, for that he considered unnecessary. With an old slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, his disguise seemed satisfactory. From the same drawer he also brought out a pocket electric flash-light, which he tested and found in working order. It was past eleven when he took the cane from its corner, turned off the lights and quietly slipped out, leaving Buckhart blissfully snoring.

At the outer door of Durfee he paused a moment, for he had no desire to be seen by students or a prowling watchman.

The campus was deserted, for the night air was raw and uncomfortable. Here and there lights gleamed from dormitory windows, and a sort of oppressive silence hung over the buildings.

He set forth with a quick step, mentally expressing a desire to get away from the campus ere he should encounter any one. In this he was successful, and soon he found himself on the street near the New Haven House.

From Elm Street across the Green came the sound of some students singing on their way to their rooms. Evidently they had been enjoying themselves, and Dick listened with a sensation of satisfaction to a clear tenor voice.

“O! the moon is shining bright to-night in Timbuctoo;
Come down and spoon with your baboon, who loves you true.”

They passed on up the street, and from the direction of the chapel came the sudden burst of a lively chorus in which a number of voices joined.

“Cheer up, cheer up, cherries will soon be ripe;
We’ll go a-Maying, Maying, through lover’s lane a-straying.
Look up, look up, blossoms are growing white—
Cherries will soon be ripe.”

As far as possible, Dick avoided the vicinity of the street-lights. He slouched along with a shuffling step, using his cane. His figure was a trifle bent, and to any one glancing at him casually he must have seemed like a middle-aged man.

Suddenly he came upon a policeman patrolling his beat. The officer looked at him sharply, but he did not falter or seem to pay any attention, and he was permitted to pass on.

Toward the water-front he made his way. He did not feel sure that he was not doing a silly thing, and yet a powerful impulse of curiosity led him.

Black’s Wharf was lonely and deserted. An old schooner lay rubbing against the spiles with the movement of the tide, its cordage flapping and slapping in the raw breeze. The water gurgled beneath the pier. The wharf buildings were shrouded in gloom. Out upon the harbor some lights gleamed. One red lantern shot a crimson, flickering glow upon the waves.

Dick approached the wharf with a certain amount of caution, although he was inclined to believe he had arrived there so much ahead of the time set that should others appear they would come later.

The smell of salt-water and tar was in his nostrils. He was fascinated by the loneliness which surrounded him. Even if he had come upon a useless errand, he felt that his time would not be wholly wasted, for this dreary, almost weird night aspect of the water-front was something worth seeing and feeling. His fancy pictured all sorts of dark and singular happenings. Truly, it was a place and a time for a crime.

The cane he held tightly gripped in his right hand. His left hand found the pocket flash-light and made sure it was ready for use. For fully ten minutes he remained there, watching and listening. The ripple and sob of the water grew to seem like soft, monotonous music. The yards of the old vessel creaked as the tide rolled her with an occasional grinding sound against the spiles. Save Dick no living person seemed awake or astir.
He stole forward, still keeping close to the side of the building. When he had reached its extremity he paused long enough to decide upon his next move. At one side of the wharf some old boxes and barrels were piled. From that point he decided that he could keep watch to the best advantage, and he made for them. One huge box, with the side torn out, yawned before him. His foot struck against a block of wood. Stooping, he placed that block within the open side of the box and seated himself upon it. The fitful wind whistled spasmodically and mournfully through the rigging of the vessel. A chill crept over Merriwell, and he found himself shivering a bit. Still he sat there, waiting as patiently as a red Indian.

"I'll not be likely to tell Buckhart about this," he thought. "Brad would give me the laugh. It must be near midnight now."

Far off in the heart of the city a clock began to strike.

Midnight had come.

Still he waited, and with each passing moment he became more and more convinced that the Black Hand warnings received were a foolish hoax. He began to dread the task of returning to his room. How could he be sure that the jokers had not watched him or would not be watching for him when he went back? They might be waiting to pounce upon him and give him the laugh. Something like resentment threatened to take possession of him, and he caught himself vowing that he would get even with any one who had attempted to make sport of him in that fashion. Then he fell to deriding himself because he had bitten at the bait.

Suddenly every nerve in his body grew tense. He caught his breath, remaining perfectly motionless with his eyes fixed upon a point of the dark shadows which hung heavy over the buildings of the old wharf.

He had fancied he detected something moving there. After a little, however, he told himself it must be no more than imagination. Still he remained motionless and waiting.

He was thrilled a second time by the belief that something, some living creature, was crouching over there in those shadows. It moved! He saw it distinctly this time.

"It can't be a man," he thought, "and yet it seems too large for a dog or any animal of that sort."

Out of the deeper shadows, with the silence of death, came another shadow. It was a man—a man who moved with the cautious, noiseless step of a cat.

Every nerve in Merriwell's body vibrated. Who was it? Was it some person who had come there by accident? The stealth and caution of the man's movements answered this question. Whoever it was, he expected to find some one else upon the wharf, and he was taking care not to be discovered.

Five long minutes passed, then the dark figure moved beyond the corner of a building and was gone. With all the caution he could command, Dick rose to his feet. His cane was still gripped in his right hand. In his left he held the flash-light. On his toes he moved toward the point where the unknown had vanished.

Beyond that corner there was a little recess between two buildings which stood not more than four feet apart. Dick found himself in front of that dark opening. Pointing the flash-light, he pressed the spring. A bar of light shot forth full and fair into the face and eyes of a man. With a snarl, the fellow who had been thus discovered leaped forward.

Merriwell was like a panther upon his feet. He sprang backward, the light glinting upon a knife uplifted in the hand of that man.

Swish!—the cane whistled through the air. It struck the man's wrist a cutting, stinging blow, and the knife fell with a clang to the timbers of the wharf.

"You whelp!" cried the Yale man.

In another moment the fellow who had been thus disarmed turned and ran away as fast as his legs would carry him.

Dick did not pursue.

He stooped and picked up the knife.

He had seen it before—in the hand of Reggio Melito!

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY.

Needless to say, this astonishing and nearly tragic adventure gave Dick Merriwell food for wonderment and speculation. Naturally, his first conviction was that Reggio had been concerned in the scheme to decoy him there to that lonely wharf at the hour of midnight, either for blackmailing purposes or for something of a criminal nature even more reprehensible.

This filled Dick with regret. Having seen the young Italian under favorable circumstances when Reggio protected the imperiled child upon the street and treated her with all the tenderness and sentimentality of an apparently gentle nature, Merriwell would
have chosen to believe him a romantic youth of that far away sunny land whose shores are laved by the waters of the mighty blue Mediterranean.

He had even pictured Reggio, with mandolin or guitar, singing in the soft moonlight beneath a rose-embowered, latticed window, and in his fancy he had seen at that window a white and shapely hand which plucked a rose and tossed it floating downward through the soft-scented air. He had imagined Reggio as one who would eagerly catch such a token, press it to his lips, hide it near his heart and wear it there until it faded, withered and crumbled.

But after all, this youthful Italian with the gentle manner and the dark, dreamy eyes was no more than a common desperado, fit to associate with such ruffians as had been his companions when Dick first saw him. Yes, fit for even lower and viler things. For was he not a night prowler, a being of darkness and shadows, a creature who carried a knife and whose heart was filled with evil and murderous purposes?

Dick's anger melted into regret. He felt that a little of his faith in human nature had been fished from him. He felt that henceforth he would be more inclined to regard seeming virtue and gentleness with suspicious eyes, wondering if after all something wretched and unworthy might not lie hidden beneath the most pleasing exterior. Was it possible that he who would risk his life for a child, who would seem all tenderness and sentiment, could really be so treacherous, so abhorrent, so much like a deadly viper?

With the knife hidden in his bosom, Dick returned to Durfee. He entered his room softly, turned on a single light and was relieved to hear Buckhart still snoring.

The disguise was removed and hidden away. For a long time Dick stood looking at that knife, thinking how swiftly with a single stroke, deftly and surely planted, it would put an end to a human life. He shuddered as he thought it possible that the bright blade might have been stained more than once by blood. Who could say?

Had he not thrown the full glow of that flash-light fair into the face of Melito, even the capture of the knife would not have convinced Dick that the prowler upon the wharf was the young Italian. But he had recognized Reggio, and the knife was not needed as proof to substantiate the evidence of his eyes.

"He must be a creature whose nature is beyond the comprehension of an American," decided Dick. "We find it difficult to understand the motives and impulses of people of Eastern countries. The Oriental mind, its methods of thought, its habits of worship and its views on morality are all beyond our ken. This must also be the case with certain grades of people in such countries as Italy and Spain. We cannot understand how it is that Spanish ladies enjoy a bull-fight. A refined Spaniard cannot comprehend how American gentlemen can find enjoyment in a prize-fight. For all of this night's adventure, I shall still believe there must be something good and gentle in the heart of Reggio Melito."

He wrapped the knife in a large silk handkerchief and slipped it into an inner pocket of his coat. Then he went to bed and sought to woo slumber, a task which he found somewhat more difficult than usual. Nevertheless, he succeeded at last, although he was disturbed by unpleasant dreams of black shadows skulking assassinlike in dark places, and the wailing of the wind became the mournful moaning of victims.

In the morning Buckhart remarked that Dick lacked his usual good nature and vim, seeming languid and weary, and Dick confessed that he had not slept well, although he refrained for the time from telling his friend of his remarkable adventure.

Thinking the affair over by day, Merriwell found it revealed still further perplexing features. That first Black Hand warning had been thrust beneath his door while he was assuring the police that Melito was not a purse-snatcher. Who had delivered the ominous message? Surely it could not have been any one unfamiliar with the dormitory. Undoubtedly the person who surreptitiously slipped that sheet of paper beneath the door was some one who knew Merriwell and Buckhart roomed there, and whose appearance in Durfee would seem natural and excite neither wonder nor comment.

Shaw!

The name flashed through Dick's mind. That fellow, cold-blooded, vindictive, revengeful, entertained a silent but bitter hatred for Dick. Still, it seemed incongruous, improbable, impossible, that a fellow like Shaw, American bred and born, should be concerned in a genuine Black Hand plot. The whole matter which at first had seemed like a puerile joke, had now assumed such hideous significance that, even while he wondered if it could not be, Dick was disinclined to believe it possible that Shaw was involved.

That day Dick spent even more time than he could spare searching for Reggio Melito—and did not find him.
In the evening, Tucker, coming to call, pushed open Dick's door and stood surprised at the spectacle before him.

Stripped to trousers, underclothes and rubber-soled shoes, their left hands wrapped about with towels, Merriwell and Buckhart seemed to be fighting. In their right hands each grasped a short, round, blunt stick of wood, with protecting iron guards like the guards of daggers. With these instruments they lunged and thrust and parried, all the while circling, advancing, retreating and resorting to various tricks and stratagems. Suddenly they closed, Buckhart struck, and the blow was parried. Like a flash Dick countered, and the blunt point of his wooden weapon touched the Texan directly over the heart.

Brad leaped back a moment too late.

"You got me then, pard," he confessed, pantingly.

"I'm a dead man. I sure allowed I knew something about this game, for old Jim Breeze, the best bowie-knife fighter in the Panhandle country, gave me a few lessons; but you've got me trimmed to a whisper."

Tommy came in and closed the door behind him.

"What are you fellows up to, anyhow?" he asked.

They laughed, and the Texan tossed his queer wooden implement upon the table and began unwinding the towel from his left hand.

"I allowed I could show Dick the genuine Sam Houston style of fighting with a bowie-knife," he explained; "but I've found out I'm a whole lot of a novice. This pard of mine is too swift for me."

Dick laughed.

"Our little talk last night about knife fighting brought on a discussion between Brad and myself today," he said. "I had these harmless wooden daggers fixed up in order to give Buckhart a chance to show me a few points."

Tommy seated himself on the arm of a Morris chair.

"It's my opinion," he stated, "that you might spend your time to better advantage. What good can it do any civilized human being to acquire such skill?"

"In all probability no good whatever," confessed Dick. "Still, I have a theory that we seldom learn anything that is absolutely useless."

But Tommy continued to wonder.

Near nine o'clock on the same evening Merriwell was sitting by his open window, drinking in the warm, balmy air, which was rife with the smells of springtime. He was there alone for the purpose of studying, but had not yet begun. He had not turned on the lights. To his ears floated the distant murmur of the city. From the flag-stone walks of the campus came now and then the tread of feet, and the sound of voices and laughter were borne on the breeze. Down by the Fence some fellows were smoking, their cigarettes and cigars glowing like fireflies.

Two men stopped directly beneath Merriwell's window and began conversing in low tones. At first Dick paid no attention to them, but suddenly he was electrified by two words which rose distinctly to his ears.

"Black Hand!"

Involuntarily he leaned over the sill and looked down. He could not recognize the men by sight, but their voices sounded familiar, and he knew directly that one of them was Del Kenniston, a fellow who had lately become the room-mate of Preston Shaw. It was Kenniston who had spoken those words. He was still speaking, his voice full of annoyance and earnestness.

"I tell you, Sprowl," he was saying, "there's something the matter with Shaw. I'm just beginning to understand why no one cares to room with him. I'd never gone in with him myself if he'd not urged me and agreed to pay the greater part of the expenses. It seemed like a good opportunity to economize, and so, in spite of my lack of liking for the fellow, I finally consented. But he's disturbing me. There's something preying on his mind. He's worried, and he can't seem to sleep. He goes out a good deal at night, and yet he's not the sort of a fellow to dissipate or carouse. He has no real friends—no chums. He can't seem to study more than five minutes at a time. He walks the floor a great deal, and when he does sleep he dreams and tosses and mutters and groans. He talks in his sleep, but usually his words are a mere jumble. Last night, however, he kept repeating something about a black hand. Once I thought he said there was handwriting on the wall. It's too much for me; I'll have to quit him, for it's getting on my nerves."

Kenniston's companion, Gene Sprowl, laughed.

"Shaw's the last fellow I'd ever fancy that way," he said. "Never supposed he had any nerves. He's usually cold-blooded as a fish. I haven't an idea what ails him, but I'll agree that such antics would be too much for me to stand. Let's go over to the Fence. Some of the fellows are talking baseball there."

They moved away toward the Fence.

Dick had been provided further food for thought.
CHAPTER X.
SOME SATISFACTION.

During such spare time as he could find for the next three days Merriwell searched unsuccessfully for Reggio Melito. He even neglected baseball practise and suffered a mild remonstrance from the captain and a reprimand from the coach.

He was not annoyed, however, by any further Black Hand warnings.

On the afternoon of the fourth day, while wandering through a poor quarter of the city where many foreigners dwelt in wooden tenement-houses, he was rewarded by seeing Melito, who came quickly forth from an alley, glanced hastily around and set off along the street at a rapid pace.

Merriwell followed, making sure Melito did not get out of sight for a single instant. After a time he quickened his steps to overtake the fellow.

Melito heard him coming and turned with a swift, suspicious movement. Recognizing Dick, he seemed both dismayed and relieved.

Merriwell, almost fancied the young Italian meant to run away.

"Hello, Reggio," he called pleasantly. "I thought it was you."

"How-a da do," murmured Melito. "How-a you come-a dis-a place?"

"I was looking for you."

"You look-a for me?"

"Yes."

"Why you look-a for me?"

"I want to have a little talk with you."


"If you're in such a great hurry I'll walk along with you."

"No, no," objected Melito. "No use-a."

"Reggio, I must have a talk with you. You're not afraid of me?"

"Me 'fraid-a? Why should I be 'fraid-a?"

"There's no reason, of course. I must ask you some questions, and I hope you answer me truthfully. Four nights ago I saw you on Black's Wharf at midnight."

Reggio pretended surprise and shook his head.


"Melito, I stood by you when that policeman was going to take you to the station-house. If I had not done so, you would have been arrested and convicted of stealing. You owe me something. I've been your friend."


"What I did was done from a sense of justice and the unwillingness to see you suffer punishment for a crime you did not commit. Reggio, I saw you protect that child. I saw you give her the rose from your jacket and all the money you had in your pocket. That interested me in you. Since then something has happened to disturb my faith."

"No understand-a, no understand-a," protested Melito. "No talk-a da good English. Bimeby maybe I understand-a; much-a in da rush-a."

He was nervous and anxious to get away, but Dick had no thought of letting him depart.

"I don't wish to think anything wrong of you, Melito, but unless you explain why you were there on Black's Wharf at midnight, armed with a knife and skulking in the shadows, I must suspect you of guilty purposes. You leaped at me with that knife."

"No, no, no!" cried the Italian vehemently. "You make-a da mistake-a."

"It's useless for you to deny it. I have proof."

Still Reggio persisted in that vehement denial.

Dick thrust his hand into the inner pocket of his coat and brought forth the handkerchief-swathed dagger. Removing the covering, he displayed the knife.

"It's your knife, Melito," he said. "You showed it to me yourself. The man who sprang at me from the shadows on Black's Wharf had this knife. I struck his wrist with a cane I was carrying, and he dropped it. That knife is yours, I say."

Melito wavered. The knife was his and he longed to reclaim it, for he was attached to it by a singular form of sentiment. Finally he muttered:

"Dat my knife-a. Somebody he steal-a dat knife-a."

"Melito, I was prepared with a pocket flash-light, and I threw the light full in your face. No matter how much you deny the truth, I shall still know it was you. Look! I haven't called an officer. We're face to face and man to man. There's a policeman yonder on the street at this moment."

Melito crouched and turned to glare in the direction indicated by a wave of Dick's hand. A blue-coated policeman was slowly sauntering away on his beat.

"I might call him," said Dick; "but I'm not going to. You've nothing to fear from such a source. I simply ask you to tell me the truth."
The Italian wiped his face with the handkerchief that was loosely knotted about his neck—the same handkerchief with which he had tried to wipe the mud from the dress of the little girl.

"Dat my knife-a," he acknowledged in a low tone.

"You give-a me my knife-a?"

"Take it," said Dick.

Melito grasped it eagerly and thrust it away in his bosom.

"Thank-a you! thank-a you!" he exclaimed gratefully.

"Now you can understand that I've no idea of getting you into trouble," said Dick. "The truth is all I ask. If you tell me the truth, I give you my word that I won't use it against you."

"I tell-a you one thing-a," whispered Reggio suddenly. "I no go-a to dat place to find-a you. Dat everything I tell-a you. I think-a I find-a some other bod' else-a. I hear-a you speak-a, and then I know-a I make-a da mistake. I swear-a—I swear-a by all da saints that I speak-a da truth."

"And I believe you, Melito. Now that you've told me this, why not tell me more?"


In Italian he gently bade Dick good-day, turned like a flash and went off almost at a run.

Dick let him go. He felt he had learned everything he could from Melito. Cajolery and threats could not draw a further confession from the man's lips.

"He was looking for some one else," Dick muttered. "At least, that's what he claims. If he does not lie, it's plain that the person for whom he was looking was in deadly danger. I'm more than half inclined to believe Melito spoke the truth."

\[ \text{CHAPTER XI.} \]

\textbf{THE WORK OF THE BOMB.}

When the Italian had disappeared, Dick retraced his steps to the vicinity of the alley, which he intended to enter. Coming in sight of it he stopped short; for another man had come hurrying swiftly forth from that alley, his manner suspicious and distrustful.

Merriwell stepped back into a doorway, for he had recognized Preston Shaw.

Shaw passed on the opposite side of the street without being aware that he was observed.

"The plot thickens," muttered Dick.

He entered the alley, which proved to be a sloppy place, redolent with the odors of back-yards and garbage. The buildings on either hand were old and dilapidated. A doorway opened upon some dark stairs; but there were other doorways, and who could say from which of them Preston Shaw had come?

Dick looked up at the dirty, broken windows above his head. One of them was opened, and a young woman looked out.

It was Iserna, Melito's sister. Behind her an angry voice called and the hand of a man seized her rudely by the arm and jerked her back. The window descended with a rattling bang which jarred loose a piece of broken glass that fell at Dick's feet.

In this manner Merriwell located the wretched tenement home of Lavello Genzaro. He had no further desire to linger there. His discoveries were sufficient to fill his mind with perplexing speculations. He no longer doubted that Shaw was somehow connected with those Italians, incomprehensible and inexplicable though it seemed. Naturally enough, although enraged against the fellow, Dick held him in absolute contempt.

Doubtless Shaw was in trouble over which he was greatly disturbed; but this was a matter of his own doing, knowledge of which gave Merriwell no feeling of sympathy for the man.

Even though he resolved to trouble himself no more about it, Dick was not to find it an easy thing to dismiss from his mind.

Early the following day, Tucker came bursting into Merriwell's room with a newspaper in his hand.

"When a Black Hand outrage comes as near home as this," he said, "it seems like pretty satisfactory evidence that such an organization exists. Look here, Dick, just read this article."

An Italian, Antonio Angelo, having been in America some ten years, had prospered in business. He was a barber with four chairs in his shop, over which he dwelt with his family. Twice he had complained to the police of receiving Black Hand messages. They had urged him to ignore such threats and keep still about them, and they had likewise promised him police protection. But at midnight a bomb, dropped into the barber-shop through a window that had been opened from the outside, wrecked the entire building, and one of Angelo's children had been killed, while all the other members of the family had suffered injuries.
"That's the real thing," said Tommy. "No fake about that. Nothing like a joke in that business, Dick."

Merriwell handed the paper back to Tucker.
"Yes, that's the real thing," he nodded. "That shows how futile and ineffective is the promise of police protection in such cases. If Antonio Angelo knows the truth about this matter, I doubt if he would dare tell it even now. It's this terror of these Black Hand scoundrels which serves as their protection and prevents the law from putting them in prison and making an end of the infamous business. Back of it all we are at fault for our failure properly to regulate immigration. We make a thorough inspection into the physical condition of every immigrant who lands on our shores, and those suffering from dangerous and contagious maladies are turned back; but there should be a system of looking into the moral records and histories of every man and woman who seeks admission from other lands. Unless these immigrants can give satisfactory evidence that they are desirable citizens, they should be rigidly rejected. All the riff-raff of foreign lands is dumped on our shores. Is it strange that the people of other lands regard this as a country of violence and crime? These foreign vagabonds come in here to pollute us with their poisonious contaminations. Crime begets crime. The children of criminals and degenerates are pretty sure to be criminals and degenerates themselves."

"But why aren't there laws made for our protection?"

"That's a question you may well ask, Tucker. Such laws aren't made because of the greed of big corporations who desire and demand cheap labor, for such laws would shut out a large percentage of these foreign laborers who work for starvation wages on our railroads and elsewhere. There's no sentiment in the greedy soul of a corporation. The only thing the big-moneyed interests of America seem to care for is more money and more power."

"But me have our law-makers, our congress, our——"

"Apparently owned and controlled by the moneyed interests. If the day ever comes when those law-makers are elected by the popular vote of the people, there will be a change."

"Are you a Socialist, Merriwell?"

Dick laughed at this question.
"Do you think me an impracticable dreamer, Tommy?" he asked. "No broad-minded, unbiased man of to-day denies the value of certain socialistic principles, but socialism as a whole is regarded as an impracticable dream. Just as long as human nature remains human nature, socialism will be impracticable and impossible. Nevertheless, the so-called radical of to-day may become the conservative of to-morrow. Both of our two great political parties have seen fit from time to time to take up and adopt certain principles which once were regarded as distinctly socialist. The time may come when every worthy principle of socialism will be put into practical use, with all the idealistic dreamings and impracticable theories discarded and forgotten.

This question of immigration of which we have spoken has a direct bearing upon that greater question, the labor problem, which year after year is growing more complex and more threatening. One thing which seems to prevent the accomplishing of any satisfactory solution of this problem is the rapid growth of population and the ever-changing aspects of supply and demand. The solution which might seem acceptable to-day may be wholly impracticable to-morrow. But," he added, with a laugh, "we have far profounder problems concerning us here at Yale,—how will we stand this year in baseball and who will win at New London."

National problems and Black Hand outrages were forgotten for the time being—by Tommy, at least.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FLASHING KNIFE.

A bent-backed, grimy old ragpicker was digging in an ash-can in an alley. He wore a patch over his left eye, and his face was hidden by a scrappy, filthy-looking beard. Apparently he was deaf, for he paid no attention to the jeers of a boy almost as dirty as himself who leaned from a window above his head.

Preston Shaw peered down the miserable alley and halted nervously as he beheld the ragpicker digging in the can. A second look convinced Shaw that he had nothing to fear from the aged scavenger. After furtively glancing up and down the street, Preston hastily entered the alley and dove headlong through the doorway that opened on a steep, black stairway.

It almost seemed that the ragpicker must have eyes in the back of his head, for the instant Shaw vanished he turned catlike and looked toward the doorway. Such treasures as he might hope to find in the can appeared forgotten. Gathering his pack over his
shoulder, he hobbled to the doorway and the shadows absorbed him.

The stairs creaked now and then as the ragpicker climbed them. Still he managed to ascend with almost marvelous silence. Two flights he mounted, his caution increasing with every step. Upon the second landing he halted in the darkness of the place, which was neither lighted nor ventilated by a window. The patch he had worn over his left eye in the outer air was thrust up on his forehead, as if in such gloom that eye was sorely needed to assist its fellow.

And now the bearing of the man was not that of one afflicted with deafness. On the contrary, he seemed listening with a particularly keen pair of ears. Beyond a closed door he heard a murmur of voices, but for a time the words spoken were indistinguishable.

Two men were talking in that room. Gradually, little by little, they became more earnest and more excited, and at intervals the ragpicker could hear one of them protesting with growing vehemence.

At length a third voice spoke, and it was that of a woman, who seemed to be pleading. Her language, however, was Italian.

She was answered harshly, roughly, by some one who spoke in her own tongue, and thenceforth she was silent.

"But I say I'm done with you!" cried a voice in English. "I had no idea of the mess I was getting into. I've paid you——"

"You pay-a me not much-a—only a very lit'l!" retorted the voice of the other man. "I need-a da mon'. Business much-a bad-a."

"That's right. Such business as yours is bad—thoroughly bad. Be careful, or you'll meet your finish in the electric chair."

"Bah! No dange'. Lavello Genzaro too sharp-a, too sharp-a."

"I don't know whether you were concerned in the blowing up of that barber-shop last night or not; but if you were——"

"Dat no biz to you-a."

"I'm glad it isn't. Look here, Genzaro, I'm going to cut you out. If I'd dreamed just what sort of a man you are, I'd dodged you like a snake in the beginning. I've paid you every cent I agreed to give you; but here's a little more money—all I have. It's the last you get from me—the last. Do you understand? I'll come here no more, and I'll have nothing further to do with you. I mean it. I'm in earnest."

The other man laughed.

"Maybe I no need-a more mon' from you-a, my friend. But if I need-a it, I come-a to you-a."

"Don't you dare! If you do, I swear I'll have you arrested!"

"No 'fraid-a dat. You have-a me arrest? Nev'! Nev'! You like-a me to tell-a 'bout fine-a joke-a? Nev'!nev'!"

"But if I should say to the police, 'That-man is a Black Hander,' what then?"

"I laugh-a at you. I say prove-a it. Who have-a da proof-a? Nobod'."

"For Heaven sake, let's call this business at an end!" cried the voice of the other man, who seemed positively beset with terror. "I'm going, and I tell you I'm done with you."

"Good-a day. Some time-a maybe Lavello need-a da mon'. Some time-a he ask-a you polite for da lit' loan-a. You ver' kind-a. You let-a me have-a da lit' loan-a, sûre-a, sure-a."

"I tell you no! I swear it! Let me get out of this infernal hole! You'll never see me here again!"

The old ragpicker fell back into the darkest corner of the landing, where he braced himself hard against the wall. The door opened and Preston Shaw rushed out, slamming it behind him. He stumbled on the stairs and fell half the length of them. Then he gathered himself up and went leaping like a terrified creature down the next flight.

The ragpicker crept out and listened once more at the door. He could hear the man inside laughing softly. He heard the woman talking again in the same pleading tones. She was answered scornfully, harshly, brutally. This did not repulse her now. Of a sudden she began upbraiding the man. Swiftly their voices rose in anger. It grew and intensified. They were reviling each other in the bitterest terms. Suddenly a scream cut the air and made the listener start
upright, straight as an arrow. There were signs of a struggle within the room, and then another scream, full of mortal terror.

Bang!—the ragpicker flung the door open and leaped through the doorway. A man, Lavello Genzaro, stood over a kneeling woman, Iserna, whose eyes were filled with aversion and whose trembling hands held up to him a tiny crucifix, while she was pleading for her life.

A wicked-looking knife was clutched in the fingers of Genzaro. His dark face was aflame with murderous passion.

The ragpicker made another leap, which carried him within reach of the man, whose neck he seized with a set of powerful fingers, and Genzaro was sent spinning across the floor to strike with a crash against the wall.

"You murderous whelp!" cried a clear voice, which was not the voice of an aged man.

The woman remained kneeling, praying to the saints.

Genzaro was momentarily surprised and dazed by this unexpected interference, but he recovered swiftly, glaring at the intruder.

"How you come-a here!" he snarled. "Get-a out! get-a out! Go quick-a!"

"And leave you to murder this helpless woman—not much! Drop that knife, or I'll have you arrested, you Black Hand dog!"


As he spoke Genzaro moved swiftly toward the door, placing himself between it and the other man. Reaching behind him, he closed the door, never for a second taking his eyes off the intruder.

"You fix-a up to fool-a me!" he panted. "Da whistle—da false whistle—you wear-a da false whistle! You hide-a your face! You spy-a!"

He who had appeared like a ragpicker lifted his hand and tore the dirty false beard from his face, flinging it disdainfully upon the floor.

The face revealed was that of Dick Merriwell!

"I'm no police spy," said Dick; "but I'm the friend of Reggio Melito—and his unfortunate sister."

"All-a da same you spy-a!" declared Genzaro harshly. "You never leave-a dis room! I kill-a you!"

For one instant Dick removed his eyes from those of the man, looking for something with which he could defend himself. A broken chair stood near, and he was ready to clutch it and swing it aloft. His right hand hung low at his side. Something touched his fingers—something cold like iron. Behind him a voice whispered:

"Take-a da knife! Lavello he mean-a to kill-a you!"

Dick's hand closed on the handle of the knife that Iserna had placed in his grasp.

Lavello seemed to see and hear everything. With a terrible cry of fury, he rushed at the youth.

Dick slipped to one side like a flash and avoided the downward stroke of Genzaro's knife. He tried to clutch the man's wrist and missed. In a twinkling the Italian was after him again. Again the knife was raised, and again Genzaro struck.

Dick knew it was a battle for life. With his own knife he turned that stroke, receiving not even a scratch.

Her eyes wide with terror, the kneeling woman held aloft the little crucifix, her lips moving in whispered prayer. She saw them go writhing, darting, squirming around the room, Genzaro seeking again and again to drive home a fatal stroke. Twice Merriwell's coat was slashed, and both times he escaped the knife only by his lightninglike movements and ready wit. Together his brain and body worked to save him from the assassin.

Genzaro was amazed and enraged by his failures. With each moment he seemed to grow fiercer and more determined, if such a thing was possible. That this youth who seemed no more than a mere boy could baffle him thus aroused his pride and resentment as well as his fury.

Only one trained to a high degree both in mind and body could have escaped sudden death at the hand of the enraged foreigner.

So absorbed were they that neither of them heard
the sound of heavy feet on the stairs. Dick was seeking by some stratagem to get the advantage of Genzaro, when the door was flung open and several blue-coated officers appeared.

The kneeling woman cried out in strangely mingled relief and alarm, while Genzaro crouched in his tracks and glared at the policemen.

"Spy-a! spy-a!" he screamed, again turning his eyes on Dick, who had retreated swiftly to the far side of the room. "I knew-a it!"

His hand swept through the air. A shimmering blade of steel flew across that room, and only by dropping instantly did Dick escape. The point of the knife pierced the wall, and the blade clung there, quivering and vibrating.

"Sieze him!" commanded the leader of the policemen, and they rushed toward the Italian.

Howling like a wolf, Genzaro whirled and flung himself in a violent leap at the window. There was a crash and a jangle of glass as he disappeared, carrying sash and all with him.

They found him lying down there in the alley with a broken neck.

* * * * * * *

The efforts of the police to wrest the truth from the lips of Iserna were wasted. Not even the "Third Degree" could have unsealed those lips. When she pretended that she did not understand, an interpreter was called. He, however, could get nothing from her.

Of course Dick was compelled to tell his story, but he did so without mentioning the name of Preston Shaw. What he had heard as he listened outside the door of that wretched tenement satisfied him that Shaw had little realized in advance the trouble into which he was getting himself. That he had been mortally terrified and fearfully punished by his terror, Merriwell knew. Furthermore, Dick had heard enough to satisfy him that Shaw could give no testimony of value as to whether Lavello Genzaro was or was not a member of the Black Hand society.

Iserna was finally released. She vanished at once. The police said that, she had left New Haven.

One day Dick went down to the railway-station to see a friend off—a friend who had been called home by the illness of a member of his family. The train was about to pull out when a hand touched Merriwell's arm and a familiar voice sounded in his ear.

Reggio Meltio was there.

"I thank-a you," said Reggio, beaming on Dick with a joyous countenance, as if never a trouble or a care had beset him in his life. "You do-a me da great fave. You save-a Iserna, my sis'. I go-a to New York-a, where I have-a da good job-a on da sub'. My sis' she work-a in da laund' where day wash-a da clothes. We get-a 'long-a fine-a, fine-a. You do-a da great job-a when you fight-a Lavello Genzaro. He have-a da fine skill with-a da knife-a. He kill-a one-a, two-a, three-a man-a in Sicily. Thank-a you. Good-by-a."

"Wait," said Dick. "Tell me one thing, Reggio. Who were you looking for on the wharf that night I found you there?"

Reggio smiled sweetly.

"I look-a for Lavello," he said. "I hate-a Lavello for da way he use-a my sis'. I hear-a him say he go-a down to da wharf-a dat night-a, and I look-a for him. I think-a maybe I find-a him and he no come-a back-a to bot' my sis' some more-a. Good-by-a."

"All aboard!" called the conductor.

Reggio leaped upon the steps, waved his hand gaily to Dick and was gone.

But there still remained one feature of the mystery that could never be cleared up. Yet Dick believed he knew how it was that those Black Hand warnings had greeted him in his room.

THE END.

The Next Number (679) Will Contain

DICK MERRIWELL'S EYE;

OR,

The Secret of Good Batting.

The Menagerie.

By GEORGE H. COOMER.

We may have seen a good many things of this kind, but what of that? The bustle around us, the pictures of unimaginable quadrupeds, the banners upon the great tent, and the grovel that comes through the canvas from the old lion, give us a Fourth of July enthusiasm. We approach the guardian of the two-feet opening, present the ticket bought of the man in the red wagon, and enter the arena. Once within the circle of black, dun, spotted, striped, and white exotic victims to the curiosity of man, who does not experience a feeling of disappointment? Is the lion ever as large as we had supposed lions grow, or as we think we remember to have seen them? Tigers and bears have shrunk, or imagination has played false with memory. Why had we not bought a big dog to serve as a standard for comparison? Then, when questioned as to the size of yonder old "grizzly," we might have said, "He is so many times as big as that dog.

The lithe and agile leopards, with their wonderfully rich coloring, long, graceful tails, and undulating motions, are very beautiful. They smack of the sultry Niger, the deep forests of Soudan or Ashantee. But there is a third inhabitant of the leopard cage, not as tawny as his fellows, but with larger, brighter spots, upon a lighter ground. This is the jaguar, a fierce and terrible animal. In the measureless wilds of Guiana and Brazil, woe to the unarmed traveler who crosses the path of such as he! The sight of him carries the imagination far away to the Orinoco or the Amazon. Here is the sallow conger, that under the name of "panther" figures largely in American border literature. The handsome, cat-like head, the short ears, the peculiar expression of strength and sinewiness in his limbs, the half-crouching gait, and that grace of movement inseparable from every member of the feline tribe, make him worthy of his name. What is this powerful creature of the stone-gray color, with the large, sorrowful eyes that so strongly express the intolerable pain of his slavery? Poor fellow! he will never more crouch among the clefts of old Aconcagua, or burst like a thunderbolt upon his prey through the interlocked luxuriance of a Venezuelan forest! He is the panther, though the assistant showman, in his endeavor not to rise above our comprehension, has called him a "panther," which name, with some people, means every wild animal of the cat family. In California he is called "the lion," and over all South America, "elko" is looked upon as one whose room is better than his company.

Here is another long-tailed-stranger, beautifully spotted. Not a leopard, certainly, but much like the jaguar. It is a panther.

Another panther?

"What! will the line stretch out to the crack of doom?"

Ah, but this is the "right Simon," the real African panther, formidable specimens of whose family were seen by Valliant, at the Cape. What a beautiful yet ferocious creature! He has brought that coat of his from the Limpopo, where he was wont to sun himself amid untold luxuriance, or creep at night time upon some unwary herd of zebras. From his large development of "secretiveness" he is more dreaded than the lion. He is first cousin to that old fellow with black stripes in the next cage, but that gentleman is from

"Green Bengal's palm groves."

and is known as the royal tiger of India. What is this striped monster but an overgrown cat? Yet at sight of him association wafts us to the sacred Ganges. How pleasant to have stumbled upon him in a jungle by the Brahmaputra! to have heard his long, piercing yell, and witnessed a display of his ivory, away
down on the howling peninsula of Malacca! "Chatter! chatter! chatter!"—monkeys! Never mind them—didn't give our fifty cents to see what is every day forced upon our notice, whether we will or not. Birds? What is this sickly-looking creature whose feathers all point the wrong way?

"The eagle, that bears the thunder of the grannie, Jove."

His image was borne by Caesar into Britain, and by Napoleon to Moscow. Oh, the misery of captivity, that can transform so pitiable an object the heaven-aspiring eagle! Nursed amid the everlasting glories of Mont Blanc, to become the dyspeptic-looking stock in trade of a traveling showman! Poor "bird of the mountain!" he looks as if he had been made the subject of a thousand Fourth of July orations.

"Long-tailed birds of paradise, that float through heaven, and cannot light," how did this enterprising Anglo-Saxon bring you down? You are far as dreams.

Quadrupeds again? Here is the llamas, with soft eyes, from the shadow of the grand old Anes; here the guu, with crooked horns, that once drank from the Zambesi, the awkward giraffe, and the much overpraised zebra. Here is the buffalo. He may once have cooled his shaggy flanks in the waters of the White Nile. The hyena looks at us with sharp and evil eyes; he likes not the turn things have taken; he would much rather have attended our funeral, with a fair prospect of afterward acting the part of a resurrectionist. No garrulous old lady, in anticipation of strong tea and gossip, loves a funeral better than the hyena. An ugly brute, this hideous ghoul-like African, physically (and if brutes have morals) morally. Were Satan to be painted with four legs, the hyena might stand by proxy as the model. The elephant, whose ancestral line reaches a pre-adamite period, submits with all the dignity of strength and royalty, and long descent, to the tyranny of his fate. With calm contempt he looks upon the little distinctions of human society, as the glories of his tribe beyond the "Glacial Period" of Agassiz, arise upon his imagination. As to his own personal reminiscences—he has trod beneath the date-trees of "Beled el Zerid," and heard the lion roar in the forests of Barca and Tunis. He has quenched his thirst in the fountains at the foot of the Atlas, and trumpeted his signals to his herd on the borders of Sahara.

With a Bayard Taylorski alacrity let us pass from the tropic to the pole, and here as he appears under the appropriate color of snow, let us shake paws, if we dare, with the mightiest of the ursine family. His kindred have long been great iceholders in the North. The story of the "old bear with her two cubs," shot by the sailors of an English ship, follows the present specimen as naturally as if pinned to his short tail. The want of refinement in his manners is owing partly to his early associations. Walruses, Greenland whales, and tumbling icebergs were his only tutors. He can swim the ocean like a sea-elephant, or mount the shores of a ship with the alacrity of a foremost hand. Truly "a huge great beast!"

And now, stopping to look once more at the brown Barbary lion and his reddish-yellow relative from South Africa, we think of poor Old Sam, when Crusoe shot the "fearsome great lion" that lay asleep on the African shore, and whose foot, as Robinson tells us, "was a monstrous big one;" or when, as his vessel lay in the inlet, he was frightened by the swimming toward him at night time some fearful creature. "We could not see him," says Crusoe, "but we might hear him by his blowing to be a monstrous, huge, and furious beast. Henry said it was a lion," he adds, and we wonder if it was really like the shaggy monarch that stands before us. In the midst of our musings we find ourselves in the hubbub of men, women, and boys in the street, with broken visions of lions and jaguars. Brazilian luxuriance, Arabian deserts, and Portuguese imagination's wave, like the "plumed crests" upon the battle-axe of Fleder.
I have induced all of my friends to read "Tip Top," and their only regret is that they did not read it sooner.

On all the characters in "Tip Top," I think Dick and Hal Darrell are the best. Hal is such a perfect type of the average boy.

Well, I think I have taken enough of your valuable space, so I will close, hoping this will escape the dreaded waste-basket, and wishing long life and prosperity to Burt L. and Street & Smith.

I am, and always will be, a "Tip Top" admirer.

A. M. VAN DYKE.

We could not find the heart to drop so earnest a testimonial out of sight, and so gladly give it space here.

(A letter from Iowa.)

After reading "Tip Top" as often as I can get them, for several years, I will say that it is the best five-cent weekly I ever heard of. It has caused me to get interested in athletics and college. I have managed to get several others interested in it, among them some grown persons.

There are several reasons why I like "Tip Top," chief among them being that the characters all seem real to life.

Wishing success to Burt L. and S. & S., I remain, very truly yours,

F. W. RIKER.

That is one of the secrets of the great success of Mr. Stansfield's work—his wonderful portrait-drawing, making his characters so true to life that we seem to know them as living, breathing boys.

Having read your king of weeklies for the past three years, I take the liberty of following the example of other readers and telling you what I think of dear old "Tip Top".

I think, as a weekly home paper for boys and girls, "Tip Top" has no equal, and both cover and contents proclaim it fit to adorn any table.

Every character of these wonderful stories is absolutely true to nature, and just as the reader would like to have them. Of the boys Frank and Dick come first, with Bart, Hal Darrell, Brad, Jack Diamond, Jack Ready, and Barney Mulloy in the order named. June is my favorite girl, with Inza, Doris, and Elsie close behind.

I was very sorry to hear of the death of Cap'n Wiley, and hope that some day he will rise from the dead and continue to stretch the truth as of old.

"Tip Top"'s influence over me is second only to that of my parents, and I must confess that its effect on my habits is really wonderful.

It has been my fortune to convert at least two dozen friends into steady "Tip Top" readers and ever-ready defenders, and I trust that I will be able to add many more to this list.

I will close now, wishing Burt L., Street & Smith, and all connected with "Tip Top," a happy and prosperous new year, and hoping that "Tip Top" will be as great in the future as it has been in the past. I remain a faithful Tip Topper.

New York City, N. Y.

EDWARD B. EGAN.

Still another candidate for special honors. Edward, we have placed your name among the elect, and thank you for the very kind words you write.

(A letter from Texas.)

I am twelve years old Christmas Day, and I have been reading the "Tip Top" for two years. My father has been reading it as far back as I can remember. He never misses a number, and we always look forward to Saturday night with keen delight. I loan my "Tip Top" to our friends and neighbors, and now I have over half a dozen constant readers. Frank, Dick, Bart, and Brad are so good and great and true I love them all. And I long to see Darrell become a stanch friend of Dick, for I could love him just as much. And dear little Doris last, but not least, is such a sweet and lovable girl.

So, wishing one and all a happy and prosperous new year, I remain your friend and constant reader,

HARRIET BROWN.

The same to you, friend Harris. Evidently your father knew a good thing when he saw it, and he is fully aware of the great benefits his boy must receive from personal contact with these.
TIP TOP WEEKLY.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS. EDITED BY PROF. FOURMEN.

NOTICE—So many inquiries reach us each week concerning the various manuals on athletic development, which we publish, that we have decided to keep a list of them at the head of this department. Any number can be had by mail by remitting 10 cents, and 3 cents postage, for each copy, to the publishers.

FRANK MERRIWELL’S BOOK OF PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT. THE ART OF BOXING AND SELF-DEFENSE, by Prof. Donavan. U. S. ARMY PHYSICAL EXERCISES, revised by Prof. Donavan. PHYSICAL HEALTH CULTURE, by Prof. Fourmen.

PROF. FOURMEN: I am a faithful reader of the “Tip Top Weekly” and all the Merriwells stories, and would like to know if I have a chance of becoming an athlete. My measurements are: Height, 5 feet 7 inches; weight, 135 pounds; chest, 35 inches; shoulders, 15½ inches; neck, 12 inches; biceps, 8 inches; wrists, 5½ inches; forearm, 9 inches; calf, 14 inches; ankle, 11 inches; thighs, 19 inches.

Yours respectfully,
MONROE BIRKLAND.

Chicago, Ill.

You should weigh 95 pounds, but you have a noble chest if it measures 33 inches normal, which is 3 inches above the average boy of your height. I should say you stood an excellent chance of accomplishing things in the athletic field.

PROF. FOURMEN: I have read the “Tip Top Weekly” for a long time, and therefore take the liberty to ask a few questions: I am 14 years 4 months old, weigh 115 pounds stripped, height, 5 feet 7 inches; chest, 34 inches; shoulders, 16 inches; neck, 13 inches; calf, 14 inches; ankle, 11 inches; biceps, 10 1/3 inches; shoulders, 16 inches; thighs, 19 inches; wrist, 6 1-3 inches; forearm, 10½ inches. 1. Which are my weak and strong points, and how can I remedy my weak points? 2. Will I make a good athlete? 3. When I jump I have a heart pain; what is the cause of it? 4. Am I too fat to be a good runner? 5. What are my chances of being a good baseball-player? 6. Football-player? 7. Skater?

Yours truly,
THOMAS PERIN.

Chicago, Ill.

You have a fine chest and weigh above the average. Perhaps you are too violent in your athletic work. If the pain causes you anxiety, have a physician examine your heart. If it is defective in the least you want to know it, so as to govern yourself accordingly. You should make a fine general athlete.

(A letter from New Jersey.)

PROF. FOURMEN: I am a constant reader of “Tip Top,” and take the privilege of asking you a few questions. I am 13 years 9 months old, weigh 85 pounds, and my height is 5 feet. My other measurements are as follows: Neck, 12 inches; chest, contracted, 28 inches; expanded, 30½ inches; biceps, right, natural, 9½ inches; expanded, 10½ inches; left, natural, 8 inches; expanded 9½ inches; left thigh, 18 inches; right thigh, 18¼ inches. 1. Are my measurements good? 2. If not, what can I do to improve them? 3. How can I enlarge my biceps? Thanking you for your trouble, I remain, yours truly, JOSEPH GRANT.

Measurements fully up to what they should be. Only constant work will give you larger muscles.

(A letter from North Carolina.)

PROF. FOURMEN: Will you kindly answer these questions? I wish to become an acrobat. What show have I, and what school do you advise me to go to? My measurements are: Height, 5 feet 7½ inches; chest, normal, 40 inches; biceps, expanded, 14½ inches; waist, 30 inches; height of arm, 14 inches dropped with either hand with heavy clothes on. I recently performed the feat of clinging myself with one finger of right hand while stripped. Can push 170 pounds high overhead with one hand; lift 2,000 pounds hip lift; good fencer and boxer, and am becom-
ing a good tumbler. Your valuable weekly and Physical Culture
Magazine are what made me what I am.

Yours truly,

JAY D. NEVELL

You certainly seem to be "getting there" friend. The only way
I can see, if you are determined to take up the life of a pro-
"essional athlete, is to connect yourself with some show, and thus
get in touch with the people in that line. Your progress upward
will then depend wholly upon your real ability, and your business
acumen. "Tipp Top" is proud to have been partly instrumental
in the building up of so fine a physique as you must possess.

PROF. FOURMEN: As I have been a reader of "Tipp Top" for
about five years, I will take the liberty to ask your advice on my
make-up. Age, 16 years; height, 5 feet 4 inches; chest, normal, 29
inches; expanded, 31 inches; waist, 28 inches; biceps, 10 inches;
wrisk, 6 inches; forearm, 9 inches; calves, 12 inches; weight, 100
pounds. Kindly tell me how I can gain weight and chest measure-
ment, and loses.

You need attention, my boy. Chest should be 33 inches normal;
weight, 110 pounds, and waist only 26 inches. I would advise
you to join a gym, the Y. M. C. A. if convenient, and there build
yourself up. Pay most attention to increasing the size of your
lungs.

PROF. FOURMEN: Will you please answer the following through
the "Tipp Top Weekly" as soon as you can? I am 17 years old;
small for my age, 4 feet 10 inches in height; weight, 87 pounds;
chest, normal, 20½ inches; expanded, 32 inches; waist, 27 inches.
I bowl, play football, baseball, and basketball, and go to bed at
9 and rise at 6. 1. What do you advise me doing in regard to
growing? 2. How are my measurements and weight, considering
my height? 3. Do I get enough sleep? 4. Kindly tell me if my
marks in school are good or bad; below are my records:
Two-mile run, 12 minutes; 1-mile run, 5½ minutes; 220-yard
run, 28 seconds. Yours truly,

Chicago, Ill.

1. just live a good healthy life, and don’t worry about the
growing part. You will be tall or short as Nature intended; but
it is pretty much in your power to decide the question as to
whether you will have a splendid, vigorous body and a clean
mind, or the opposite. 2. Weight; above the average, chest ex-
did, but you measure too much about the waist—it should
be 23 inches. 3. Ample. 4. Should say they are very good, indeed.

(A letter from Wisconsin.)

PROF. FOURMEN: As I am a steady reader of the "Tipp Top,"
I take the liberty to ask you about my measurements. Age, 15
years; weight, 110 pounds; height, 5 feet 2 inches; biceps, 10
inches; forearm, 9 inches; neck, 12 inches; thigh, 17 inches; calf,
12½ inches; waist, 28½ inches; chest, normal, 31 inches; ex-
panded, 33 inches; wrist, 6 inches. How is my expansion? Are
my measurements in proper proportion for my age? Please tell
me my weak points, and how I can remedy them. Thanking you
in advance, I remain, yours truly,

GEORGE SNELL

You might expand your chest a bit more, but on the whole it is
up to the point. Your waist is, however, 2½ inches too large, as
you weigh 10 pounds above the average. You can stand some
grilling athletic work. George.

(A letter from Pennsylvania.)

PROF. FOURMEN: Being an admirer and reader of "Tipp Top,"
I’ll ask you a few questions. Height, 5 feet 5½ inches; age, 15
years 10 months; weight, 163 pounds; neck, 14½ inches; chest,
33½ inches; chest, expanded, 37 inches; biceps, 10 inches;
expanded, 12½ inches; calf, 15½ inches; waist, 7½ inches; wrist,
30 inches; thigh, 21½ inches; ankle, 9 inches. How are my
measurements for a boxer? I am quick on my feet.

Yours truly,

GEORGE G.

Your weight is rather against you, as it is 44 pounds above
what the ordinary lad of your height sports. This shows in your
waist, 3 inches too large. You will have to train downward consid-
erably to make a clever boxer.

PROF. FOURMEN: I am sending you my measurements for your
examination. Age, 21 years; height, 6 feet 6 inches; weight,
190 pounds; stripped; shoulders, 22 inches; chest, 43; expanded,
45 inches; biceps, 16 inches, both left and right; thighs, right,
26½ inches; left, 26 inches; calves, 16 inches, both the same;
hips, 30½ inches. I take exercise every day, but as I do it every
day it has become just a matter of habit and in fine condition, but I do smoke a pipe during the day, but I have noticed at times that I would be much better off without.
Do you think it would hurt me if continued? With best wishes
for bright and prosperous years, I am, sincerely yours,

FRANK CONN

New York City.

You are a splendid specimen of physical excellence, Frank,
chest away up and weight fine in proportion to your height.
Perhaps the occasional pipe would not injure one so nearly
perfect, but the trouble is the habit becomes a chronic one, and
perpetual smoking is bad even for a giant. I think you would
be better off without, but please yourself. It is a pleasure to hear
from so hearty a young believer in physical culture.

(A letter from Illinois.)

PROF. FOURMEN: Having read the "Tipp Top Weekly," I take
the liberty of asking you a few questions. Age, 12 years, 9
months; height, 4 feet 9 inches; weight, 76 pounds; wrist, 5½
inches; chest, 26¼ inches; expanded, 29½ inches; neck, 12
inches; calves, 11½ inches; thighs, 16 inches; waist, 28½ inches;
shoulders, 14½ inches. How are my measurements and weight?

HAROLD HINCKLEY

Weight and chest fine, but I am afraid you must have put the
tape around your waist after a Christmas dinner, for you give it
at 28½ inches, when it should be only about 23 inches normal.

(A letter from Kansas.)

PROF. FOURMEN: Would like to hear what you think of my
measurements. My age is 8 years 7 months; height, 5 feet 9½
inches; chest, normal, 34 inches; expanded, 36¼ inches; waist,
29½ inches; calves, 13½ inches; ankles, 10 inches; neck, 14
inches; weight, 129 pounds; wrist, 6½ inches. Would be pleased
to know my faults, and what to do to mend them. I play second
bag at baseball.

H. M. BRYANT

Your chest, my lad, should be 37 inches normal, and you lack
some 15 pounds of being as heavy as you should. Secure a
manual and lay out a course which diligently follow, day by day
for six months, and then write and thank me, for I am sure you
will note a great improvement.

PROF. FOURMEN: Having read "Tipp Top" for a number of
years, I take the liberty of asking you a few questions. My
measurements are: Age, 15 years; height, 5 feet 7½ inches; weight,
137 pounds; chest, normal, 35 inches; expanded, 36½ inches;
waist, 29 inches; thighs, 20 inches; calves, 14 inches; biceps,
normal, 11 inches; flexed, 12½ inches. Kindly tell me
(1) What are my weak points. (2) How to train for the 120-
yard and 220-yard hurdle-races. Thanking you in advance, and
hoping to see this in print, I remain,

ONE OF "TIPP TOP'S MANY CANADIAN ARMIES".

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Weight good, waist just right, but you need a couple of inches
more about the chest to make you perfect. Daily practise, and
great care in eating, following the training-table rules given in
our manuals, will allow you to do your best at hurdles.

PROF. FOURMEN: Having read most all "Tipp Tops" from No. 1
up, I take the liberty to ask you a few questions. My measure-
ments are as follows: Height, 5 feet 8 inches; age, 16 years;
weight, 180 pounds; neck, 16 inches; around shoulders, 46
inches; chest, normal, 39 inches; expanded, 41 inches; waist, 33
inches; hips, 38 inches; flexed, 10 inches; biceps, normal, 13
inches; expanded, 14 inches; forearm, normal, 12 inches; expanded,
13 inches; wrist, 2½ inches. My records are: standing broad jump,
7½ feet; standing broad jump, 8 feet 9 inches; standing three
jumps, 28 feet 9 inches; standing long jump, and running
broad jump, 16 feet; running high jump, 4 feet 4 inches; 100-
yards dash, 11 seconds; shove up over head with one hand, 125 pounds, with two hands, 185 pounds. 5. What are my weak points? 2. What are my strong points? 3. How are my records? 4. How are my measurements? 5. What am I best suited for, boxer or wrestler? Thanking you in advance for answering these questions, I remain,

W. A. L. Timpson, Texas.

Whew! you are 40 pounds heavier than the average, and your chest a couple of inches to the good; waist, 7 inches too large. You certainly must be a second "Big Bill Taft" as he was at Yale. It would be manifestly impossible for you to cut down to the average. Your records are very good, especially when one considers your height. How do you do it, citizen? Keep up vigorous work—you can stand it.

Prof. Fourmen: Being a stanch admirer of "Tip Top Weekly," and having read that excellent publication for over five years, I take the liberty of asking the following question: How are my measurements? Age, 17 years 4 months; height, 5 feet 9 inches; weight, 190 pounds; biceps, flexed, 12 inches; across shoulders, 17½ inches; waist, 7 inches; ankles, 9 inches; neck, 14½ inches; calves, 13 inches; thigh, 22 inches; chest, normal, 44 inches; expanded, 37 inches; waist, 27 inches. Please tell me how they measure the reach of prize-fighters, and what is my measurement there? I play baseball, football, basketball, soccer, run, play ice-hockey, and skate. Tell me a good way to build up the chest, for I want mine to be below the standard. Also a good diet to keep my blood in order. I have quite a few bad habits, you see. What is the best exercise to develop the back? I row quite a lot during the summer months. During vacation I lose weight instead of gaining it. Probably swimming causes it, as I exercise in that manner very much. Hoping to see this in print soon, and thanking you in advance, I am, very sincerely,

Jack Whiting.


Weight, 17 pounds shy; chest, 4 inches ditto. You will find all your questions answered, and diet for an athlete, in one of our manuals. It would occupy too much space here.

(A letter from New Mexico.)

Prof. Fourmen: Age, 14 years 2 months; height, 5 feet 6½ inches; weight, 119½ pounds; chest, 34 inches, normal; expanded, 38 inches; waist, 28 inches; biceps, normal, 9 inches; expanded, 11 inches; forearm, 9½ inches; thigh, 15½ inches; calves, 13 inches; neck, 13½ inches; shoulders, 17½ inches. Please tell me how my measurements are, and also how I can improve my weak points. A loyal "Tip Topper." feed Renshaw.

You are all right, comrade. The difference of 4 inches between what you give in chest figures leads me to suspect that you may have deflated your lungs when taking "normal," and that they are easily 35 inches, the size required. Continue to keep in good condition by careful exercise and diet.

(A letter from British Columbia.)

Prof. Fourmen: Having read "Tip Top" for the last year or so, I am taking the liberty to send you my measurements and ask you to express your opinion about them. I might add that I always enjoy every word I read in the above, and that my parents think that they are the best juveniles published for boys of my age. Here are my measurements, what do you think of them? Height, 6 feet 1½ inches; chest, 33 inches; waist, 27 inches; thigh, 18 inches; calves, 9 inches; ankle, 5 inches; neck, 12 inches; biceps of arms, 7 inches; forearm, 6 inches; wrist, 4 inches. My age is 14 years 1 month. I would be pleased to hear any of your advice which may assist me to gain better strength, health, or speed, as I am interested in sprinting. Thanking you in advance, I am, yours truly,

Tots Hummer.

You have just "shot up" my boy, and consequently, as it always the case in rapid growth, the rest of your measurements are greatly out of proportion to your height. You should really build up to weigh about 175 pounds and have a chest measuring 41 inches, normal. It will require hard work, but in the end it pays to lay in a foundation in youth. Write again in six months and tell me what improvement you have made.

TIP TOP BASEBALL TOURNAMENT FOR 1909

The great interest taken by enthusiastic amateur baseball teams all over the country in our contests for some years past has induced us to once again enter the field with a tempting offer. So here it is, boys: The two teams which, at the end of the season, have the highest average—the members of which play the greatest number of games, score the most runs and have lost the least number of games, will be declared the winners. Of the two winning teams, the one having the higher average shall be the winner of the Tip Top Championship Tournament for 1909, and will receive a beautiful silk pennant bearing a suitable device. Each winning team will receive a full equipment, consisting of trousers, shirt, stockings, shoes and cap for nine members. When possible send newspaper accounts of your games also to substantiate the score. Don't fail to send in your coupon at once. No notice taken of any score not entered on a coupon cut out of Tip Top. Coupons must be properly filled out, one for each game.

1909—TIP TOP BASEBALL TOURNAMENT COUPON.

NAME OF TEAM.

NAME OF TEAM.

TOWN.

TOWN.

STATE.

STATE.

OPPONENT'S NAME.

OPPONENT'S NAME.

POSITION.

POSITION.

Pitcher

Catcher

1st Base

2d Base

3d Base

Short Stop

R. Field

C. Field

L. Field

FINAL SCORE.

FINAL SCORE.

MANAGER.

MANAGER.
ALL OF THE BACK NUMBERS OF

TOP WEEKLY

THAT CAN NOW BE SUPPLIED

PRICE, FIVE CENTS PER COPY

If you want any back numbers of our weeklies and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained direct from this office. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Ave., New York City
We know that there are thousands of boys who are very much interested in the early adventures of Frank and Dick Merriwell and who want to read everything that was written about them.

We desire to inform these boys that numbers 1 to 396 are pretty well out of print in the TIP TOP WEEKLY, but all of them can be secured in the numbers of the NEW MEDAL LIBRARY given below.

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