Again and again the laughing mocking rider circled close on guard to dodge the swinging loop.
Dick Merriwell's Ranch Friends;

OR,

SPORT ON THE RANGE.

By BURT L. STANDISH.

CHAPTER I.

HOW IT HAPPENED.

The Bar Z ranch presented an amazingly lively spectacle.

At first glance one might have fancied the round-up was on; but this was not the proper season for such an event, and there was a certain air of gaiety and freedom from care about the cowpunchers who had gathered there from surrounding ranches which seemed to indicate that this was a time of festivity. Furthermore, in a group gathered near the cool, whitewashed 'dobe ranch house there were a number of ladies, and two or three more of the same sex could be seen, mounted on ponies, riding up from the direction of the Big Basin, the Bar Z's immense artificial water reservoir, that had been formed by throwing a dam across the narrow outlet of a valley through which flowed a spring-fed stream; the waters of which sank and were lost beneath the sands three or four miles further on to the southeast.

In former days before the building of this reservoir, although the springs never ran wholly dry, there were periods in the dry seasons when the water supply was pitifully inadequate to take care of the great herds. In those times, when it grew very dry indeed, and the outlying water holes for miles around became mere mud sloughs or dried up entirely, hundreds of cattle sometimes came in and stood around the diminished springs, fighting and crowding to reach the muddy water, many of the weaker ones being kept away until they sank and perished within view of their owner.

Now, however, by his foresight in forestalling against these droughts, "Old Man" Buckhart, as he was universally called, had the satisfaction of knowing there was no reason for losing a single steer or cow that had strength enough to get in to the reservoir to drink at regular intervals.

Of course the range in the immediate vicinity of the ranch, with the exception of a section fenced off with barbed wire and reserved for the horses, was so thoroughly grazed over that it became necessary for the herds to go far in search of feed. Each night, near sundown, the cattle might be seen coming on a run from all directions, headed for the reservoir. Having quenched their thirst, the animals would straightway turn about and set off again at a dead run.

While Old Man Buckhart had made his money
mainly in the cattle business, he did not spend as much time as formerly upon the ranch. Affairs at the Bar Z were left in charge of Mr. Edward J. Smith, known as "Cyclone," a thoroughly competent and honest foreman, quiet and slow-spoken, rough in outward appearance, but really a polished gentleman and a Yale graduate. Trusting Smith thoroughly, Mr. Buckhart could give more of his attention to the banking business in San Antonio and to his real estate projects and schemes in Houston. He had been away upon a business trip at the time of Brad's arrival at the Bar Z, accompanied by Dick Merriwell.

In San Antonio Old Man Buckhart had met one of his nearest neighbors, Thack Bunker, proprietor of the Twin Star Ranch, and this gathering at the Bar Z of people from the Twin Star, the Circle Cross and the Dipper was the outcome of that meeting. Just now Buckhart was explaining to Seth Egleston, of the Circle Cross, and Spot Johnson, of the Dipper. The trio were sitting close to the shady side of the ranch house.

"You see, gentlemen, Bunker and I got to talking baseball, a right queer subject for us, perhaps. I don't know just how it came up, but I was telling about my boy Brad's success in getting onto the Yale 'varsity nine, as catcher, and how he was home, along with young Merriwell, his chum, who is Yale's star pitcher. We'd had a couple or so, and maybe I got to bragging a little. You know how such things come around, and really, though I don't intend to let him know it, I'm mighty proud of that boy of mine. He's stubby and obstinate as the devil, but when he makes up his mind to do a thing he usually gets there with both feet. An obstinate person who fizzes in his undertakings is no good; but one who succeeds can be tolerated, and may even be admired."

"The boy sartain comes by it natural enough, Buckhart," grinned Spot Johnson, sucking at his old pipe. "He takes it direct from his paw. If ever that was an obstinate man, it's you. Why, I remember when you took this yere Bar Z Ranch, which was then reckoned a mighty undesirable property, only fit for a lazy greaser to get a hand-to-mouth living on. Nobody had ever succeeded special well with the Bar Z, but you gits hold of it, builds your reservoir, opens the springs wherever you can find 'em, introduces new methods in the cattle business, and leaves some of us in the lurch who laughs at you a plenty twenty-five years ago. It was your example that encouraged me to follow suit and locate the Twin Star. It was your example that brought in other gents hereabouts to follow cattle raising in a country that once was thought only fit for greasers and Injuns. You've got wuss'n anybody by the rustlers, for they strikes onto your range almost immediate they comes over the river. Yet you makes it so warm and interesting for them that now we all gets along fairly comfortable, only being bothered by the varmints now and then. It was your obstinacy that won out; Buckhart. Yes, the boy sartain takes it natural from his paw.

Egleston, sometimes called Silent Steve, simply grinned a bit and nodded.

"I reckon that's why I'm inclined to be some tolerant with him," said the owner of the Bar Z. "I wanted him to take a course at Harvard, but he set up an opposition and proclaimed that it was Yale or nothing for him. That made me warm, and I proceeded to inform him that it would be Harvard or nothing. To cure him I sent him out on patrol duty, and you all know what a lonesome, soul-withering job that is. I judged it would cure him in a hurry, but to my surprise he stuck to it and seemed to enjoy it. At intervals I inquired if he was ready to pull his picket pin and strike the trail for Cambridge, Massachusetts, but invariably he replied that he preferred to continue grazing on the home range. All this made me madder and madder; but finally, when he got mixed up in that rustler business and the whoels held him for ransom, threatening to chop off his fingers at intervals and express them to me, I grew regretful that I'd been so insistent. Getting him off safe and sound with all his fingers intact, I became so jubilant that, under stress of emotion, I yielded and permitted him to pike out for New Haven instead of Cambridge.

"Well, gentlemen, as near as I can judge, the boy is doing pretty well there. He's no brilliant wonder in his studies, but his rank sheets show that he's due to get by and come off with his sheepskin unless he has a severe relapse in the future. That's satisfactory to me, for, considering my own backwardness and the way I had to plug and grind in order to pull through, I'm not looking for Brad to stand at the head of his class. I don't expect him to deliver the valedictory."

"I've observed some," said Johnson, "that a whole lot of these yere brilliant geniuses at college pans out second or third-raters when they break loose from the high culture and education corral and takes to roaming the range with the rest of the big herds. Mebbe they has sense enough as stable critters, but they find it right hard picking up their feed in competition with other cattle when they have to hustle for themselves. If I had a son, I'd be some reluctant to have him wear the
brand of any one of those education factories. I cal-
late them places spoil as many youngsters as they help."

"It depends on the man, Spot," declared Buckhart.
"You can't make a fast-stepper out of a dray horse.
I'm willing to admit that a college education doesn't
do much of any good for a fool. It's liable to fill his
head with a heap of false notions. It's liable to make
him think he's too good to travel in the same class and
do the same sort of work as some other men who
haven't had his advantages. He may sit back and wait
for the world to recognize his wonderful talents and
abilities, in which case he will fare tough on the range
in bad weather. He will see men who never had any
advantages in particular, but who have plenty of hustle
and pluck, getting a start on him and leaving him in
the lurch, which will be liable to sour him considerably
and make him turn pessimist. Of all pitiful fools the
youthful pessimist is the most to be pitied."

"That thar word 'pessimist' sounds good to me,"
nodded Johnson; "but sometimes when I listens to you
I long for a dictionary handy and convenient. But go
on and tell us how it was you got into this little engage-
ment with Bunker."

"As I was remarking, we met up down in San An-
tone, and we got to talking baseball. I spoke about my
boy, and the fact that he was at the Bar Z, along with
Merriwell, the great Yale pitcher. Then Bunker he
observes that the Twin Star can get together a baseball
team able to wipe up the earth with anything we've
got on the Bar Z. That disturbed me some, and I
came back with a statement of doubts. I remarked
that, having my boy and Merriwell for a battery, I
reckoned we could collect a nine that would trim the
Twin Star to a whisper. Our conversation became
somewhat heated. Bunker informed me that he had a
pitcher among his men who was better than Merriwell
or any other college twirler in the country. I presume
I laughed at him some irritating, for he rose up and
offered to make a little wager. He agreed that we
might use Merriwell and my boy as battery, while he
would make up his team from the men on his ranch,
getting a professional catcher to hold Colt, the pitcher
he boasted about. You see, that would give each team
one outside member—one man besides the regulars
who rightfully belong on the Bar Z and the Twin Star.
I agreed to that prompt enough, and we put up a thou-
sand dollars each to back our teams. Joe Stetson, of
San Antone, was chosen stakeholder, and he came along
with me to witness the game. We sent out invitations
which brought these people here, and this afternoon the
Bar Z and the Circle Star will have it out to a finish."

"Waal, Buckhart," drawled Johnson, knocking the
ashes from his pipe by rapping the bowl against his
boot heel, "don't you go for to get the notion that
you're going to have a walkover with that bunch, for
you'll be monstrous deceived. Thack Bunker knows
baseball pretty well, for he was one time interested
financially in the Southern League. I hears that he
drops a comfortable roll at it."

"Which appears to indicate that his judgment wasn't
any too good, after all, Spot," said the owner of the
Bar Z. "I'm not worrying any. No matter who wins
out, I hope the game will be warm enough to provide
amusement for the spectators."

CHAPTER II.

GOOD WORK.

Two girls on horseback, both riding with the grace
and ease of perfect horsewomen, approached the ranch
house.

"My daughter and her friend," said Spot Johnson,
putting up his pipe. "That thar gal of mine would
travel no end of distance to see a real baseball game.
Since she went East to boarding school she's got the
baseball bug the wust way. She takes all the papers
and reads nothing but the baseball games. She knows
more about Christy Mathewson, Hans Wagner, Na-
opoleon Lajoie, and the rest of their bunch than she
will ever know in a thousand years about the famous figger-
heads of history, like George Washington, Napoleon
Bonaparte, and Anthony Comstock."

"Who is your daughter's friend, Johnson?" inquired
Buckhart. "She has a somewhat unusual habit in these
parts. She's worn a heavy veil ever since arriving here
at the Bar Z."

"Shh!" breathed the owner of the Dipper. "Don't
embarrass her by speaking about it in her presence.
You see she's a mighty fine little gal, but she's met with
a misfortune—she's met with a misfortune."

He repeated those final words in a solemnly signifi-
cant manner, which somehow seemed to suggest that
Stella Johnson's friend and companion, a petite, grace-
ful little creature, was hiding by means of the veil a
physical disfigurement of some sort.

"Oh!" grunted Old Man Buckhart, "excuse me."

"You're certain excusable," said Johnson, rising as
the two girls approached and drew rein.

Stella Johnson was a tall, slender blonde with deep
blue eyes and a somewhat sallow complexion. She had
The Johnsons, together with others from the Dipper, arriving late the previous night, Mr. Buckhart had not yet met Spot’s daughter. He now rose and was introduced by Johnson to the tall blonde and her somewhat mysterious veiled friend, Señorita Pepita. The little girl bowed her head and murmured a greeting in Spanish as the rancher, wide brimmed hat in hand, saluted her courteously. The veil was indeed so baffling that scarcely any idea of Pepita’s looks could be obtained; but, judging by her voice, she should have been attractive.

Mr. Buckhart was chatting with the girls when a tall, bronzed, clean-cut youth in woolens, chaps, sombrero, and spurred boots came out of the house. In a second Stella’s eyes measured him up, and she spoke to the rancher in a low tone.

“Isn’t that your son’s chum, Dick Merriwell?” she asked. “I’m sure it is, for I saw him pitch against Harvard once. Of course he looks differently in this outfit, but it must be Merriwell.”

“Sure,” nodded the owner of the Bar Z. “Would you like to meet him? Oh, Dick, I say, just a word with you.”

Merriwell approached at once.

“Let me introduce Miss Johnson, Merriwell. This is Miss Johnson’s friend, Señorita Pepita.”

Dick’s hat was in his hand, and he would have acknowledged the presentation with a steep bow; but Stella Johnson put out her gauntlet-gloved right in an almost mannish manner, saying enthusiastically:

“It’s just jolly to meet the famous Dick Merriwell of Yale, away out here in Texas. I am delighted.”

Of course Dick protested that the pleasure was his and shook hands with her. Then, noticing that Pepita was inclined to follow Stella Johnson’s example, he shook hands with her likewise, and was somewhat amazed to receive a quick, significant, telegraphic pressure of his fingers. Pepita murmured merely a word, yet he was struck by the sudden conviction that he had heard her voice before.

Stella Johnson could talk college and professional baseball with any one, and for some minutes she kept Dick busy.

“Next to you, Mr. Merriwell,” she said frankly, “I consider Sparkfair, of Harvard, the best college pitcher we have to-day. I met him last year. He’s a nice fellow, you know, but an awful jollier. You never can tell when he’s serious, and he’s liable to jest and make light of the most solemn subjects. I’ll own up that I couldn’t quite understand him, and he kept me guessing the most of the time.”

Dick laughed.

“That’s Dale Sparkfair all right. He’s exceedingly irrelevant and volatile—sometimes annoyingly so. But he can pitch, and I think you do me too much honor in placing him second.”

“Oh, no,” declared the girl, shaking her head. “I consider him a brilliant pitcher, but his volatile temperament, as you call it, is just the one thing which prevents him from being a perfect marvel. Even baseball he can’t take seriously.”

“Some men take it too seriously.”

“That may be true, but when a man is fighting for the honor of his college he’s got to be serious. He’s got to feel that every moment of the game counts for something, and any little carelessness or foolish frivolity on his part may bring defeat to his side. Sparkfair’s only failing is, that he can’t be really and truly serious for five consecutive minutes. Now, I’m sure you get as much sport out of life as he does, and I’m likewise sure that you know how to be serious as well as gay.”

“There are times when a man has to be serious, whether he would or not,” said Dick. “Still, I’m inclined to think that most persons take life far too seriously, which is quite as much a mistake as to take it too frivolously.”

“Tell me, do you really think you can win the game this afternoon?”

“Really, I can’t answer that question, Miss Johnson. All I know is that we’re going to do our level best to win. You see the Bar Z team has had little chance to practice together, although we’ve put in two days of work since Mr. Buckhart wired us about the game. We haven’t got any really fast men, but all our players know something about the game. Of course they are sadly in need of practice.”

“I’m afraid,” said the girl in a low tone—“I’m afraid the Twin Star will prove too much for you. Of course you and Mr. Buckhart can’t play the whole game alone. The best battery in the world can be defeated if it isn’t given some sort of support. I’ve been told that the Twin Star team has played several match games this season. Of course, I’d like to see you win, but—”

“Don’t wager any money on us, Miss Johnson,” laughed Dick.

“Do you know anything about Charlie Colt, the Twin Star pitcher?”

“Very little.”

“They say he was a marvel two years ago.”
"There have been a great many marvels who wouldn't appear such in these days. Why did he quit the game? Do you know, Miss Johnson?"

"He had a brother who was killed in professional baseball, and I've heard he vowed he'd never play another professional game. They have got Snipes Hammond for a catcher, too, and he's one of the best in Texas. So you can see that you'll be up against a great battery. I met Colt a short time ago, and he told me the Twin Star would beat you to death."

Dick's dark eyes flashed, although his mouth smiled. "I've known such cocks sure men to meet with great disappointment," he said. "We certainly shall not let them beat us to death if we can help it."

"Well, you have my best wishes, Mr. Merriwell," said Stella. "I don't like Charlie Colt any too well. He's dreadfully conceited, and he's bothered me more or less."

"You have my best wishes also, señor," murmured the hidden lips of Pepita. "Although I have never seen a game of baseball, I have a feeling that you will win."

Stella laughed lightly at this. "My friends always have the good will and best wishes of Pepita," she said. "Are you going to ride, Mr. Merriwell?"

"I am if I can find my saddle horse, though I'm half inclined to think Brad has the pony."

Although Johnson suggested that the girls had better come in out of the hot sun and rest, they were disinclined and rode away once more.

Dick found his pony, saddled up, flung a rope over the saddle horn and galloped down to join a bunch of cowboys with whom he fancied he might find Brad.

Young Buckhart was not there, but Charlie Colt was one of the group.

"So this is the great Dick Merriwell," laughed Colt, with a mocking twinkle in his eye. "Glad to meet you, Merriwell. According to newspaper reports, you're the real thing as a college pitcher. We'll try not to abuse you this afternoon."

"And that's very kind," returned Dick, suppressing any sign of irritation which the man's mocking manner might have aroused. "Of course you intend to put it all over us."

"Oh, yes, I don't reckon we'll have much trouble about that. For plain cowpunchers, I will say that we've got the greatest bunch of sluggers you ever faced. There's not a real weak hitting man on the team, although our greaser, Pablo, is the weakest, perhaps. I hope you chaps can stick it some, for it would spoil the fun to fan you regularly."

Colt was conceited and irritating, and it was evident that he held college pitchers in light esteem.

"You look rather like the real thing in your cowboy outfit, Merriwell," he commented. "Ever on a ranch before?"

"Why, yes," returned the Yale man; "this is not my first appearance."

"Why do you carry that rope? Just for show?"

"I notice that a great many of the men carry ropes. I presume they come handy to tie things with."

"Oh, sure," laughed Colt; "though if you've got one that's been worked pliable for noosing, and it happens to belong to a real puncher, he will cuss some if you cut it up to tie things. Of course you'll take your cowboy rig back to Yale and show it off to your friends. If they happen to have any tableaus or entertainments, you can dress up and make a hit posing in that rig."

"An excellent suggestion, Mr. Colt. I'll bear it in mind."

As he rode away, Dick heard the fellow chuckling softly behind his back. It was plain Colt took him for a thorough tenderfoot.

Miss Johnson and Pepita had ridden down toward the reservoir, where a large number of cattle were gathered. They gave no heed to the animals until suddenly a huge steer sprang out of the bunch and came charging toward them. The creature had been attracted and aroused by the scarlet, gold-braided jacket worn by little Pepita.

"Look out!" cried the blonde, reining her pony round and starting off at a gallop. "Get away from that creature, Pepita!"

The señorita's horse shied and snorted as the steer charged. A moment later the veiled girl reined the animal round and rode away, but the steer turned like a flash and came on in pursuit. It was a long-legged, raw-boned creature, swift of foot as most horses.

Looking over her shoulder, Stella Johnson cried in alarm.

"Ride, Pepita—ride!" she called.

Two men beheld the girl's predicament, comprehended her danger, and came dashing toward her from opposite directions. One was a tall, raw-boned cowboy by the name of Bill Horn; the other was Dick Merriwell.

As he spurred his horse onward, Dick removed the rope from the saddle horn, opened the noose deftly, and held it ready for use.

Colt and the others whom Merriwell had lately left
saw what he was doing while spurring after him, and wondered what he expected to accomplish.

Bill Horn yelled like an Indian as he swept down toward the pursuing steer.

Suddenly, as Dick Merriwell drew near, Pepita’s horse stepped into a hole and went down, flinging the girl over its head.

Merriwell was swinging the loop of the lariat, closing in on the steer within reasonable roping distance. Suddenly he made the cast, and the rope went writhing and squirming through the air like a long, slender snake.

The throw was perfect, for the loop dropped over the steer’s horns.

The pony bestrode by Dick set himself for the shock, and the rope, made fast to the saddle horn, twanged like a bowstring.

The steer was flung at full length upon its side within ten feet of the fallen girl, over whom it cast a shower of dirt.

At the same instant Bill Horn swept past, swinging far down from his saddle and reaching for Pepita’s sash with one big hand. His fingers caught and gripped that sash. The sash held, and the girl was snatched up, lifted, and hoisted lightly in front of Horn.

Still, every witness knew Bill Horn would have arrived a second too late to save Pepita only for Dick Merriwell’s fine work with the rope.

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CHAPTER III.

ROPEd.

“Luck!” cried Charlie Colt—“nothing more. The boy couldn’t do it again in a thousand times trying.”

Yet Dick had snapped the noose free from the horns of the steer and was coiling it as he rode away. The stunned and bewildered animal gathered itself up, shook the dust from its, red eyes, and turned back toward the herd, apparently thoroughly satisfied.

Half the people gathered at the Bar Z had witnessed this affair, and many of them, like Colt, were disposed to believe Dick Merriwell’s performance with the rope the result of good luck rather than especial skill. There were some, however, who knew better, and they were the men who had seen Merriwell ride Squinty’s man-killing cayuse some days before. Already the boy from the East had made a number of warm friends and admirers among the Bar Z outfit. They had found him quiet, unpretentious, and not at all inclined to posing or boasting, all of which counted for a great deal with such men.

When he was sure the steer was no longer to be feared, Bill Horn drew rein and waited for the man who had caught Pepita’s pony to bring the animal up. The pony was limping slightly, and every one felt it to be a marvel that the creature had not broken a leg.

“I begs your pardon for being some rough, señorita,” said Horn; “but under the circumstances I don’t ‘low I had time to be gentle and polite. Howsoever, I reckon you owes your personal safety to that kid Merriwell, not to me. He sure has got the goods, and he delivers ’em when they’re required.”

“I—I thank you, señor,” breathed Pepita, making sure that her veil had not become detached. “It was very kind and very brave.”

“Not at all, not at all,” spluttered Bill. “It wasn’t nothing worth mentioning, nohow. I’m al’us ready and willing to do my prettiest for the ladies, though they never takes to me a great deal. Mebbe that’s my fault, though, for up to date I ain’t never seen but one of your sex that upsets me complete and makes me willing to leave my happy home for her. She was jest about the cutest little bunch that ever batted a black eye at a man and made his heart turn flipflaps. Her name was Anita, and her old man had the misfortune to be related brotherwise to Castro, the rustler, which makes him think it healthy when the knowledge becomes public to take Anita and slip over in the direction of Mexico. I’ve been lonesome as a yaller dog ever since, though I s’pose likely it was the best thing that could happen to me. You see, I’m a sort of a has-been, or mebbe more correct, a never-was, and ‘twa’n’t at all likely that a pretty little bunch like Anita would get smit on a weather-scarred old two-legged critter like me. Excuse me for imparting so much of my private and personal affairs, but somehow when you spoke so soft and musical a-thanking me for what I really didn’t do, you reminds me of Anita. Of course, that’s because you’re Mexican, and she was Mexican, too.”

“But you’re an American, señor. Why should you care for a Mexican girl?”

“Wow! Say, they’re just about the most fetching little critters on the face of this yere globe. They’ve got eyes, and they sartain knows how to use ‘em. I reckon mebbe it’s a good thing for the boys that you wears a veil constant, for I opine you’ve got a pair
of eyes also and likewise. "Tain't right to get us poor devils all stowed up and then leave us to mope and dream and neglect our regular occupations. If the women only realized how mortally they can upset us susceptible men, I'm afraid things would be a heap sight wuss than they are. Here comes your friend."

Miss Johnson rode up, slipped from her saddle, and clasped Pepita in her arms.

"Oh, it was terrible!" she exclaimed. "When I saw your horse fall, I thought you'd be killed. Are you hurt, dear?"

"No, I think not, though I was stunned for a moment."

"It was Dick Merriwell who saved you from being killed."

"Sartin sure," agreed Bill Horn generously. "He roped that thar steer clever and scientific."

"I'm still of the opinion," said Colt, who had likewise drawn near and stopped, "that Merriwell made a lucky throw. I don't believe he could rope a standing cow."

"Waugh!" exploded Bill Horn. "Mebbe he couldn't, but I holds different idees, my friend. I opines he could take you out of your saddle the first time east."

"I'm willing to let him try it all day," said Colt. "I'll give him ten throws, and he'll never touch me."

"Come here, Merriwell!" roared Horn. "You've got to reduce the size of this gent's head, or else he'll never find another hat to fit him."

"What's the matter now?" inquired Dick.

"This person remarks that you ropes that thar steer by cold luck. I thinks different, and I've stated that you can drop a noose over his head the first time trying, both to be mounted, and him to give you a chance by getting within casting distance."

"Oh, never mind that," said Dick, as, hat in hand, he turned to the two girls. "Señorita Pepita, I trust your fall did not hurt you much?"

"I don't think it hurt me at all, señor, but I'm told that I should have been killed only for you. I owe you so much!"

"Horn is the one you should thank, señorita."

"Not by a long shot," contradicted the cowboy. "I saw I wasn't going to get there in time. I was just going to empty my gun at the critter when I observes you ready to cast the rope. Then I relies on you, and I makes me no mistake."

Again Charlie Colt laughed, which seemed to irritate Bill Horn unspeakably.

"Sometimes you wise gents go wrong sizing people up," he said. "If you want to satisfy yourself a-plenty concerning Dick Merriwell's ability to drop a rope over your head, just ride out and let him try it before this assemblage."

"I'm waiting," said Colt. "When he's ready to give his exhibition, he will find me doing my part."

At last Dick was irritated into action.

"As long as you're so insistent," he said, reaching for his recoiled lariat, "we'll try it once."

"As many times as you choose," called Colt.

Out into the open they rode, Dick gathering the coiled rope in his left hand, with the noose held properly in his right.

"Ready!" called Colt.

He touched his pony with the spurs, and the animal leaped forward, circling in front of Dick. Colt watched Merriwell leaning well forward, with his right arm bent and ready for use. At the pressure of his knee his horse swerved away.

"Why didn't you throw?" he shouted over his shoulder.

Dick made no answer.

The man came round and drew near again, still on guard. Dick sought to close in, but the fellow was away again.

Again and again the laughing, mocking rider circled close, ready to dodge the swinging loop. Several times Dick realized that the cast might prove ineffectual, and therefore he held his hand; for it was no such simple matter to rope a watchful, heady horseman as it was to noose a running steer.

Colt grew bolder and more mocking. Suddenly Dick touched his pony lightly with the spurs and shot forward, judging correctly the swerving movement of the other man. That movement brought Colt directly back to Merriwell, which forced him for a moment to take his eyes off Dick.

In that moment Merriwell sent the noose shooting through the air. It sailed straight out, with the remainder of the rope squirming in pursuit, and dropped beautifully over Colt's head and shoulders.

With a slight jerk, Dick drew the noose taut, again touching his mount with the spurs to prevent the animal from setting itself, which would have snapped the captured man from the saddle.

A great shout went up from the spectators.

"Yi, yi, yi, ye-ee-ee!" shrilled Bill Horn exultantly. "Didn't I tell yer he could do it?"
CHAPTER IV.
THE STORY OF THE ARMLESS PITCHER.

In San Antonio Old Man Buckhart had thoughtfully purchased the uniforms of a recently disbanded baseball team, eleven suits of varying sizes, consisting of gray caps, shirts, and pants, and red stockings. He had also brought to the ranch an ample supply of baseball shoes, twenty or more fine bats, mitts and gloves galore, a body protector, a catcher's mask, and a few other little things which he fancied might be needed by the team.

The Twin Stars were also provided with uniforms, and therefore when the two teams appeared on the field that afternoon they strongly resembled "the real thing." It is true that several of the Bar Z bunch were rather heavy and awkward in practice, giving their opponents more or less amusement, but upon the field the Twin Stars bore themselves after the manner of professionals.

Ned Smith, the foreman of the home ranch, commonly known as Cyclone Smith, was the captain of the Bar Z outfit. Arriving at the field ahead of the visitors, Smith at once sent his men out to practice, and gave them nearly ten minutes of good, lively work. Merriwell limbered up his arm gently, but refrained from exerting himself much or working too long before the real business of the game began.

Finding the Twin Stars waiting and amused over the exhibition of the locals, Smith called his men into the bench and surrendered the field to the enemy.

It chanced that Ebenezer Q. Duck, known on the ranch as "Circus" because of his claim that by "profession" he was a circus man, seated himself between Dick Merriwell and Brad Buckhart. Duck was to cover the infield at shortstop, and he had demonstrated that he was not wholly unqualified for that position. He was a tall, lank, long-legged, thin-necked, solemn person, whose habitual sad cast of countenance seemed to indicate that he was constantly on the verge of tears. One could not look at Duck without feeling sympathy for a person so weighted down with the woes of the world.

"I presume," he mournfully observed, "that I shall be somewhat to the punk segregating around shortstop's position. An extremely protracted period of time has elapsed since I last played baseball. Nevertheless, I'm not wholly unfamiliar with the intricacies of the game. Oh, yes, I've been there—I've played, it some. I'll tell you how I happened to get into it, if you don't mind harkening to the tale."

"Go ahead, Duck," nodded Dick. "We can listen to you and watch those fellows practice at the same time."

Merriwell found no small amusement in the wild, weird reminiscences of a "tumultuous career" which often flowed from the lips of the old circus man.

"Well," said Ebenezer, "along in umpt-y-six, or about that date, anno domino, I was traveling with a one-horse circus run by old Pop Selling. We had haydogs of paper, and we simply plastered the country with posters advertising 'the most marvelous, amazing, astounding, gorgeous, glittering array of talent ever seen under canvas.' It's true we didn't have half the people and half the attractions advertised, and it's likewise true that the people we had, one and all, were compelled to do double and treble service, appearing in various feats under different names. Nevertheless, we were traveling over a new route, working the haysed country, and we managed to get along fairly well, despite the fact that on an average one town in three exhibited its displeasure over our failure to deliver the goods promised by rising up en masse and chasing us in a running fight, between the hours of midnight and morning, over into the adjoining township on our way to the next stand. We got so we expected these little skirmishes, and grew dejected and disappointed if they failed to materialize about so often. However, and likewise, that has nothing to do with my story.

"As I heretofore remarked, we were prospering fairly well until we collided with an opposing attraction in the form of the Eclipse baseball team, an independent organization towering those same rural regions. The Eclipser claimed to have a never-beaten record, and they certainly were toyng with the Joshua teams of the back counties. On their list they had the names of a number of national celebrities of the diamond. I don't know whether all of these famous baseball stars ever played with the Eclipse organization, but I do know that one or two of them, once good men, but eventually curdled by the big teams, were actually traveling with the outfit when we struck 'em. Nevertheless, they were fast enough to make the country teams which they met seem like never-wasers.

"They really had a corking pitcher by the name of Lantry. This Lantry's one failing which kept him from shining as a star of the first magnitude in the baseball zenith was his proneness to look on the corn juice which biteth like a serpent and stingeth more severely than a whole colony of yaller wasps. About so often Lantry would get beautifully ossified. The Eclipse manager had been fairly successful, however; in keeping him straight, and when he was straight he
could hand up the most bewildering array of shoots and benders that ever dazzled a batter.

"Goshen, Indiana, was the town in which we first encountered the Eclipsers. They were billed there to play on the same afternoon that our circus was advertised to give a performance. The denizens of Goshen and its back pasture suburbs appeared in vast hordes, and old Pop was overjoyed with the prospect of a big attendance, which would give him money enough to treck on his way rejoicing, and likewise soothe the disturbed and unsatisfied minds of his performers, with whom he was in arrears, by doling out a little of the needful.

"Well, boys, the populace enjoyed our street parade, which they could observe free and without cost, but when the hour for the big show to begin arrived, barely twenty paid admissions had been taken. The crowd was all over at the baseball field watching the game between the Eclipsers and the locals. Old Pop surveyed the circle of empty seats, and then broke the peace, ruptured the Decalogue, and shattered the Ten Commandments with his remarks. I never before listened to language of such a humid and pungent nature. Really, I feared he would explode a blood vessel or something of that sort, and I made a rapid calculation of my loss of salary in case he dropped dead in his tracks. He survived, however, but he refused to perform, and notified the emaciated audience that those who had bought tickets would receive their money back as they passed out.

"Pop was so extremely exasperated that he wouldn't even linger in Goshen to give the evening performance. Having cursed the town and the Eclipse baseball team up hill and down dale, he gave orders for us to pull up stakes and get under way to our next destination.

"But alas and alack! when we arrived in Squeezeport, we found that the Eclipse baseball team was advertised to appear there upon the same date. They appeared, and our disastrous experience of Goshen was duplicated. I tell you, boys, that made us all think a few solemn thunks, for, if such a calamity was to pursue us, it would not be long before the whole show would take the same route as the powder mill in which one of the workmen thoughtlessly lighted his pipe. In order that we might find out just how the land lay, old Pop wired on to Huckleberry Centre and learned that the Eclipsers were to play there also upon the day that we were to appear. Then the old man called us together for a council of war.

"We cussed and discussed the situation for some time. Some of the hotheaded members of our tribe suggested that we should go forth and fall upon the Philistines, otherwise the Eclipsers, and slaughter them hip and thigh. Fortunately, cooler counsel prevailed. It was Dingle, the trapeze man, bareback rider, and bearded lady of the side show, who suggested another course of action, which was finally agreed upon. Dingle proposed that we should make up a ball team and go out and challenge the Eclipsers. This we finally did, pressing into service every male member of the company with the exception of Bizoque, the aimless wonder, and even Biz pleaded and begged for the privilege of playing.

"As usual, the Eclipsers had a walkover with the local team. When the game had ended with the score something like thirty to nothing in favor of the visiting organization, old Pop strode forth onto the diamond and loudly challenged the Eclipsers to tackle us, promising to wipe up the sod with them if they dared accept.

"They accepted. The game was one of the most painful events of my lucid memory. We went to bat first, and Lantry struck out the first three men in order. When the shades of evening gently closed over the pastoral landscape that first inning was still in progress, with the score about fifty to nothing in the enemy's favor and only one man out. Darkness stopped the play, but, as five complete innings had not been gone through, old Pop claimed that it was no game.

"Imagine the dense cloud of dejection which hung like a pall over our organization that night. Apparently we were up against it for fair. There seemed nothing to do but change our route and make sure we were not going to encounter the Eclipsers on future dates. It was too late, however, to cut out Huckleberry Centre, and so we promulgated along to that place, hoping against hope that the citizens of Huckleberry would prefer a circus to a baseball game. Not so, however. For the third time we found ourselves looking disaster and dissolution square in the stony eyes. I think old Pop meditated susandonde. I could see that his hitherto vigorous and active mind was giving way under the dreadful strain, for, when some one proposed that we should tackle the Eclipsers again, he burst into a frothing fit of laughter that chilled my blood.

"'If we only had a pitcher,' said Bender, the human snake, 'we might stand a chance against them. Our crying need is a twirler who can put 'em over with all the skill and speed of their man Lantry.'

"At this juncture Bizoque, the aimless wonder, proposed that he should try his hand—or, rather, his foot
—at pitching. At first this offer was received with more or less scornful derision and harsh hilarity. Then Bizoque called to our attention the fact that for the greater part of the season he had provided amusement for the yaps, who lingered around the circus to watch everything they could behold free and without price, by throwing baseballs at the negro who offered his head for a target thrust through a slit in a huge strip of canvas. He likewise reminded us that he had become so skillful in this performance that he could pop the coon on the cocoonut twice out of three times. As he had worked up great speed, his feat—no pun intended—was regarded with apprehension and terror by the colored gentleman.

"Boys, it may seem somewhat remarkable that a man without arms could do such a thing; but I will explain that old Bizoque was born armless, and since childhood he had been using his feet as other persons use their hands. According to the theory of evolution and adaptation to conditions, this was a perfectly natural result. You may not believe me, but it is a fact that Biz had used his toes so much, as other people use their fingers, that those toes had grown to be almost as long as the fingers upon an ordinary man's hand, and were fully as pliable and serviceable. Bizoque could write the finest copper-plate chirography that I ever beheld. He could likewise thread a needle or handle a knife and fork with the artistic skill of the most adept. Many a time have I sneaked out to watch him plug the nigger, and laughed myself sore over his performance. Oh, it was a rare treat to see him poise himself on his left foot, grasp a ball with the long, flexible toes of his right foot, and hand up a curve which nearly always shot in and struck the colored individual between the blinkers!

"After we had thought Bizoque's proposition over a bit, we decided that it wasn't so preposterously foolish as it had seemed at first, and finally we agreed to tackle the Eclipsers again with Biz in the box.

"Of course, the manager of the Eclipse outfit gave us the laugh and the fan-aside when we challenged him again at the termination of the regular game that day. Nevertheless, old Pop, who had braced up, was desperate, and he offered to wager fifty dollars that we could trim those fellows. This proposition was promptly snapped up, and we squared away for business.

"This time the enemy went to bat first. Say, when they saw our pitcher they had spazazams. They simply laughed themselves into convulsions. The first batter up was laughing so hard that the tears streamed down his face, and I don't think he saw one of the three balls Biz pushed over the centre of the pan. Therefore, ere he realized it, he had been called out on strikes.

"Observing the fate of his comrade, the next hitter took precautions not to be caught that way. He was ready to knock the cover off the ball, and Bizoque knew it was up to him to use due precaution and skill. Oh, great Alexander! I'll never forget that palpitating moment! Every man of us on the team was overwrought with suspense and anxiety—with the possible exception of Bizoque himself. Twining his pencil toes about the horsehide, Biz poised himself with his left foot on the rubber plate and gave a most bewildering flourish with his right leg. In the midst of that singular whirling, twisting motion he delivered the ball.

"The batter was totally unprepared, and stood there gawking with his mouth wide open as the sphere cut the outside corner of the pan. A strike was called. The catcher returned the ball, and Bizoque caught it deftly with his foot. Almost instantly, without any preliminary swing whatever, he shot it back over the pan for the second called strike.

"Then the batter's companions roused themselves and yelled for him to wake up and hit. The fellow grabbed his slugger, set his teeth, and squared away. He had seen an exhibition of the armless wonder's speed, and he felt that he could eat speed.

"But when Biz pitched again, once more using that tremendously amazing delivery, he passed up a ball which seemed to hang suspended in the air, and the gent with the club nearly yanked his head off striking too quick.

"You should have heard the roars of applause which rose from the delighted assemblage. You should have seen the looks of dismay which settled on the faces of the Eclipsers. To make a long story short, although those fellows settled down and tried their level best to hit Bizoque, they couldn't do a thing that day. The mere fact that they were batting against a pitcher who pitched with his foot instead of his hand seemed sufficient to put them all to the bad. It's true that two or three of their steadiest and best hitters did land against the horsehide, but the best they could do was to pop up little flies or hit easy grounders into the diamond. Only one man hit a liner, and the ball went straight at our pitcher, who snapped up his foot like a flash of lightning and caught it easily.

"Their ill success had a most depressing effect on Lantry, and in the seventh inning we fell on him with vigorous violence and pounded over five runs in con-
cussion. Those five runs won the game, which terminated with the score five to nothing in our favor.

"That night old Bob Selling's circus disbanded, and the great Selling baseball team started on its famous tower of the country. We played the smaller towns at first, but, gradually growing bolder and cocky, we ventured into larger and still larger places, and finally appeared only in cities.

"Naturally, we advertised our armless pitcher most salubriously, and that card was sufficient to draw the greatest throngs ever seen at baseball games outside of the big leagues. As we always made it a point to play for two-thirds of the gate money if we won and one-third if we lost, you can understand that we soon were living on the fat of the land and rolling from place to place in Pullman cars. Old Pop was a gent, and he treated us right. Our salaries were elevated, and nearly every man on the team was getting better money than the average player in the American League, while Bizoque received the modest little income of two hundred dollars a day. Of course, he didn't pitch the entire game every day we played, but he always started in and footed 'em off for the first three innings or so. In this manner we satisfied the spectators who had coughed up their good money to see our wonderful pitcher. Pop had taken on three other first-class pitchers, who worked in rotation when Bizoque was not on the slab.

"I think we would have made our everlasting fortunes if a frightful calamity had not befallen us in Kansas City. It was there that, in sliding feet first to second, as he always slid when it was necessary, Bizoque was spiked. The Kansas City second baseman did not spike him intentionally, however. It was an accident pure and simple, but alas! a horrible one to contemplate, for the spikes of the second baseman, who chanced to step on Bizoque's right foot, cut off two of his toes so that they barely dangled by shreds of skin. From that day on Bizoque was out of baseball. He could pitch no more, even after his wounds healed.

"In his case, however, the misfortune did not fall so heavily as upon the rest of us, for some weeks before a young and beautiful heiress, having seen him pitch, had fallen desperately in love with him, and pursued us from town to town. She nursed him tenderly during the time he was laid up, and, as it happened to be leap year, asked his hand—I mean his foot—in marriage. He closed with her, and the last I heard of him he was living like a prince in Philadelphia, where he and his charming wife moved in the most exclusive and aristocratic circles."

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"Play ball!" called the umpire.

As the regular professional umpire engaged to take charge of the game had not appeared, it had become necessary to fill his place with another man, and Squinty, a cowboy of the Bar Z, who claimed to have an intimate knowledge of the game, had been chosen and accepted by the managers of both teams. Squinty was a wizened, sour-looking little runt of a man, who constantly seemed to wear a frown.

"Pard," said Brad Buckhart, "I don't opine you'll get much the best end of it with that gent as umpire. He doesn't love you extensively."

"Oh, I hardly think he will give me a bad deal," said Dick, "for his sympathy must be with the Bar Z."

Smith and Tom Glade, the two captains, had tossed a coin to see which team should go to bat first, and fate had decided that it should be the home players.

On the book of the scorer the teams were recorded as follows:

**Bar Z.**
- Smith, 3d b.
- Jim, cf.
- Brad, c.
- Dick, p.
- Circus, ss.
- Horn, 1st b.
- Dixie, 2d b.
- Turner, rf.
- Jefferson, lf.

**Twin Star.**
- Brackett, cf.
- Bowie, 1st b.
- Bitters, f.
- Hammond, c.
- Glade, 2d b.
- Baster, rf.
- Colt, p.
- Ambler, ss.
- Pablo, 3d b.

"Start her off, Cyclone!" called Brad, as Smith chose a bat and stepped out to the plate.

It was a strange and interesting spectacle. In the background stood the white ranch house, the outbuildings, and the corral. To the south lay the reservoir, with some cattle lingering near it. The spectators were the cattlemen, cowpunchers, and ladies gathered from the surrounding ranches. A canvas awning had been erected to shelter the ladies from the sun, and they were one and all provided with camp chairs. The men, however, stood around on both sides of the diamond or sat upon the ground. A number of Mexicans and a few half-blood Indians were present.

Charlie Colt was on the slab. He had shed his cowboy clothes and was now dressed in the uniform of the Twin Star nine, which became him rather well. In a way, he was a good-looking fellow, and he seemed to know it. Before delivering the first ball, he looked around to make sure that his companions were in their
proper positions, signaling for the outfielders to move over a bit to the left.

"Never mind, Charlie," cried Glade. "They won't hit it out there, anyhow."

Colt smiled and turned to take the signal from Suke Hammond, the professional catcher, who was now crouching behind the pan.

The Twin Star players began coaching like professionals.

"Whip it over, Charlie!" cried Brackett from centre field.

"Give him the bullet ball," suggested Bowie, the first baseman.

"Be careful not to hit him with the speed ball," urged Ambler.

"They'll all look alike to you to-day," called Bitters, the right fielder.

Colt nodded his head a bit, lifted himself on his left foot, swung his arm with a motion intended to put speed into the ball, and sent the first one whistling across Smith's shoulder.

Cyclone struck a trifle too slowly.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Hammond, as the ball spanked into his mitt. "He couldn't see that one."

"Do be careful," urged Glade laughingly. "It would be a shame for you to kill any one in the first inning, Colt."

The Twin Star pitcher received the ball from Hammond and took time to glance toward the ladies beneath the awning before delivering it again.

The next one was a trifle wide, and Smith let it pass, Squinty calling a ball.

"Almost pulled him!" roared Bowie. "He came near biting."

Colt was deliberate in his movements, carrying himself in a way calculated to worry the batter.

Smith went after a drop and missed again.

"Got him!" yelled Bitters. "He'll never touch it."

"Never in the world!" shouted Brackett.

The Twin Star pitcher "wasted" another ball.

Then he put one over close and high.

Smith dropped back just enough to meet the ball with a gentle swing, and bunted a little Texas leaguer over Ambler's head.

The foreman of the Bar Z showed that he could get down to first in lively fashion, and only swift fielding on the part of Brackett kept him from trying to make second.

The Bar Z crew yelled their delight over the performance of Cyclone.

“Oh, can't we hit it—can't we!" bellowed Bill Horn, galloping down onto the coaching line. "What do you think about it now?"

Colt frowned, and then remembered and recalled his smile.

"Never mind that, Charlie," said Glade. "He'll die there. Let him try a steal if he dares."

Jim, the cook, was the next man up. Although he did not look it, Jim knew the fine points of the game, a fact which he quickly demonstrated by laying down a bunt off the first ball pitched by the Twin Star twirler.

On that bunt Smith romped to second.

Colt, although taken by surprise, went after the ball swiftly, scooped it, turned sidewise, and made a beautiful snapping throw to first, getting the runner by a dozen feet.

"That sure is playing the game some," laughed Brad Buckhart, as he grasped the bat and prepared to face Colt.

"You bet your boots!" bellowed Bill Horn. "A good clean hit scores Cyclone. Biff it, Brad! Hit it dead centre, boy!"

Dixie, a man hailing from some one of the Southern coast States, was on the coaching line back of third base.

"Come, Cyclone," he drawled softly. "ye've got to get a tally fo' us. When Brad hits, you-all want to go some."

Colt had made his mistake of treating Jim with disdain and delivering an easy ball to bunt, but he had no idea of bungling in such a fashion with Brad, for he knew beyond doubt that the man who made the Yale varsity as catcher must have something of a batting eye. Anxious to prevent the scoring, the Twin Star pitcher put himself in a hole by trying hard to pull Brad. Apparently Squinty had a good eye for balls and strikes, despite his seeming defect of vision, for he refused to call strikes on the rancher's son when Colt put three balls, one after another, just outside the proper limits.

"Whooppee!" bellowed Horn. "He's going to walk you, boy. He's afraid of you. Well, the next gent is just as dangerous, and mebbe somewhat more so. Let him fill the cushions, and then we'll clean 'em off with a homer."

But Colt grimly settled down and whipped two air scoopers over the inside corner, whereupon the Twin Stars coached applaudingly.

"You're just monkeying with him, Charlie," chuckled Glade. "Now you've got him. He's yours. He can't touch it."

But Brad judged the swerve of the next shoot handsomely and landed on the ball with terrific force.
It was a long drive to centre field, seeming at first like a safe hit which must give young Buckhart two sacks or more.

Nevertheless, with fine judgment, Smith waited a short distance off second, watching to see what success Brackett, the centre fielder, would have.

Brackett was going after the ball hot, and suddenly the captain of the home team decided that he might get it.

Instantly on making such a decision, Smith leaped back to second, planted one foot on the sack, and headed toward third, set in perfect form to make a quick start.

The manner in which Brad had pounded the horsehide brought a shout from the spectators and caused many of the ladies beneath the awning to rise from their camp chairs. Then a hush fell on every one. They saw the fielder leap forward with his gloved left hand outstretched. They saw the ball strike his hand and stick there.

At the same instant Bill Horn roared:

"Go, Cyclone—tear up the turf!"

"Come on!" called Dixie wildly; "come on, Cyclone!"

Smith shot away from second, stretching his legs and making his feet fly as he covered ground in the direction of third.

Brackett gathered himself as quickly as possible, swinging round, shifting the ball from his left hand to his right, and throwing to third. It was a fine throw, everything considered, and both coaches yelled for Smith to slide.

The foreman of the Bar Z slid to the sack and was tagged a moment too late.

Squinty, who really seemed "on the job," had rushed over toward that corner of the diamond and crouched to watch the play.

"Safe!" he squealed, with outstretched hand, palm downward.

Although Smith's performance was applauded, the knowledge that two of the home players were out filled the anxious Bar Z rooters with concern.

Dick Merriwell was seen taking his place in the batter's box.

"Yip, yip, ye-ee!" yelled Bill Horn. "Here's where we score. We'll have one run, anyhow."

Beneath the awning some of the ladies clapped their hands, and the men in their immediate vicinity heard them telling one another what a handsome chap Dick was. Even Stella Johnson seemed to believe that Merriwell was almost sure to get a hit. Pepita, sitting near her friend, had nothing to say; but her little brown hands were tightly clasped, and she leaned forward, seemingly breathless, as she peered through the veil which still hid her face.

Although he pretended disdain for the Yale pitcher Colt had learned to respect the youth. In his heart, however, was hidden a feeling of chagrin and jealous anger toward Dick, whom he longed to fan.

With Horn and Dixie both coaching loudly, and Smith dancing off third ready to scoot for the plate, the excitement of the moment became intense.

Colt received a signal from Hammond, and shook his head. The next signal caused him to repeat that head shake, and then he evidently got what he wanted, for he faced third and lifted the ball, covered and hidden by the glove he wore on his left hand. It was a sharp out-curve, and Merriwell, after starting his bat from his shoulder, stopped short and let the sphere pass.

"One strike!" rasped the unpleasant voice of Squinty. Yet the curve had carried the ball beyond the outside corner of the plate.

The Bar Z men groaned, while the Twin Stars applauded the decision.

"Pretty work, Colt," chuckled Hammond. "You fooled him all right, all right."

Charlie Colt smiled, although he knew in his heart that he had not deserved the advantage given him by the umpire's decision.

The next ball was far too close, compelling Dick to get back in order to escape being hit.

"Two strikes!" came from Squinty.

"Come, come, Squinty," cried Smith; "keep your eyes open. What's the matter with you? Give us a square deal."

"Rotten! rotten!" shouted Bill Horn. "It nearly bored him in the slats."

"Don't kick, don't kick," came from Glade. "He's your own umpire. He's all right. Of course those were strikes."

"Sure they were," agreed the catcher. "Don't mind that fake dodging game, umpire. Don't let him work you with it."

Dick gripped his bat and tapped the rubber plate with the end of it, setting himself in position once more.

Colt took lots of time and finally pitched one that sped past nearly as high as the top of Merriwell's head when he stood erect. Hammond smothered the ball and jerked his hands down with a lightning-like move-
ment, checking them on a level with the batter’s shoulders.

"Three strikes!" cried Squinty. "You’re out!"

CHAPTER VI.
RANK UMPIRING.

Old Man Buckhart growled and swore.

"What’s the matter with that man’s eyes?" he rasped.

"As my boys remarked," said Thack Bunker, "he’s your own umpire. You hadn’t ought to kick a whole lot."

"He’s the only man we could get for an umpire. If the fellow that agreed had shown up it would be different. You know as well as I, Bunker, that the last ball was higher than the boy's head."

"But the batter was a-crouching some," said Bunker. "That makes a difference."

Brad Buckhart was sore.

"Put on your spectacles, Squinty," he growled. "We can’t afford to stand for that sort of a deal in a tight place. You robbed us of one run, anyhow."

"Who’s umpiring this game?" demanded Squinty savagely. "I opine I can judge balls and strikes from my position some better than you can standing off to one side. If I’m going to act as umpire I propose to do it proper, and I won’t stand for a whole lot of back talk."

"I suppose you’ll fine anybody who talks to you?" said Brad.

"If I can’t fine 'em, I can put 'em out of the game," returned the wizened puncher.

Brad strapped on the body protector and secured the mask. Then he called Dick, and they exchanged a few low words.

"Chew it over," laughed Glade from the bench. "Why didn’t you fix it up in advance? You fellows have been playing together long enough to have those little matters understood between you."

"That there last ball was certain too high, Charlie," muttered Bowie as he and Colt seated themselves side by side on the bench.

"That’s not for us to complain about," chuckled the Twin Star pitcher. "I intended it to be high. I had two strikes on the man, and there was no need of giving him a good one."

"I don’t opine," said Bowie, grinning, "that you stands in with the umpire on this?"

"I don’t have to," retorted Colt sharply. "I’ll take care of my position without any assistance from the umpire."

Dick knew he had been given a rank deal, but he declined to let it irritate him, as that might affect his pitching.

The supporters of the home team cheered their players and then quieted down to watch the work of the famous Yale battery.

Bracket, Twin Stars’ centre fielder, was the first man to face Merriwell.

Dick began with a sharp, high in-shoot, which crossed Brackett’s shoulders, cutting the inside corner. Brackett slashed at it.

"Strike!" said Squinty.

A drop followed, and again Brackett missed.

"Strike two," announced the umpire.

"Stop jabbing, Brack," called Glade. "Just lean against that speed. Don’t swing your head off."

Apparently the next ball was delivered by Dick with the intention of using as much speed as possible, but it was the “knuckle ball,” and it came up dead slow, taking a slight curve as Brackett swung.

Again the batter missed.

"You’re out," said Squinty.

Glade grabbed Bowie’s elbow, hissing:

"Wait for ‘em. Don’t be in too much of a hurry."

"Well," grinned Old Man Buckhart, "I reckon that boy can pitch some. That was almost too easy, Bunker."

"One strike-out doesn’t win this game," retorted Bunker. "Wait till my boys fall on him, and you’ll see the air ship go up."

"If you wait for that, I’m of the opinion that you’ll get rather tired, Bunker."

Bowie jogged out to the pan and let Dick’s first ball pass. Although the outside corner of the pan was clipped, Squinty declared a ball.

Dick tried the inside corner.

Squinty called another ball.

Then Merriwell put one straight over, hoping to get it past Bowie with the desire of learning just how rank Squinty dared be. The batter, however, met that ball and laced it out for two sacks, greatly to the uproarious delight of the Twin Star crowd.

Brackett and Amble bobbed up onto the coaching lines and began chattering. Amble did all kind of grotesque stunts to divert the pitcher’s attention, while Brackett talked to Merriwell, contrary to rules.

"Get ‘em over, old fellow!" cried the latter. "You’re wild! Steady now, Merriwell! See if you can find the pan. He’ll biff it a mile if you do. He’ll put it into
the reservoir. Wait, Merriwell! Hold on! Let her go!"

Dick whipped the ball over and Bitters fouled it.

"Just a minute, umpire," called Buckhart. "How long since the rules permitted a coacher to talk to the pitcher?"

"I'm not talking to him any," said Brackett; "I'm talking to myself. I can talk to myself, can't I?"

"Play ball," said Squinty.

"Wait! wait!" cried Brackett. "He's wild! He'll walk you! Make 'em be good, Bitters!"

Twice Bowie was driven back to second, and then of a sudden Merriwell crooked the sphere over the inside corner.

Bitters let it pass.

"Ball!" cried Squinty.

"Would you kindly give me a corner once in a while?" requested Dick.

"I'll give you what you get," retorted the vicious little umpire. "You 'tend to your business, and I'll look after mine."

Feeling that it would be impossible to get a called strike unless he cut the plate in halves, Merriwell bent one squarely over the middle.

Bitters hit it along the ground toward Circus.

The shortstop of the home team lunged after the ball and let it go bounding gayly between his legs and away into left field.

Bowie tore over second and was sent home by Ambler.

Out in the field old Jim got the ball and made a wild and weird throw to the plate, lining it ten feet above Brad's head.

Bowie scored, amid the shouts of the Twin Star spectators.

On the bench Colt was chuckling.

"That ought to put the great Yale pitcher up into the ozone," he said. "It will rattle him some, I'm thinking."

Circus was the picture of unspeakable sorrow.

"I've been riding cayuses so long," he observed, "that I can't seem to get my 'boofs together. My feet don't seem to enjoy each other's company."

"That's only one run, pard," said Buckhart. "Never mind it."

Bitters had taken second on Jim's throw to the pan. It was now Suke Hammond's turn to show what he could do with the willow.

"It will be a shame to win this game in the first inning," grinned Hammond tantalizingly. "We want to make it as interesting as possible, you know. We want to be considerate for you poor deluded chaps. Put the ball right over, Merriwell, and I'll strike out."

Dick decided to put it right over, for he knew he could not expect to get fair play on the benders with which he might fool the batters. If the Twin Star men declined to swing on the corner cutters Squinty would give them their bases on balls.

When Merriwell assumed a certain position in the box Brad knew there was no need to give a signal, for it meant that the Yale pitcher would try his remarkable combination ball. Dick did try it on Hammond, whipping two of them straight over in quick succession, and the Twin Star catcher nibbled at both. He was amazed at his failure to touch either of them, muttering to himself:

"What the devil kind of a twist was that? It looked like a new one to me."

It was a new one to him, and Dick used it again for a strike-out, after deliberately sending one wide of the pan.

"That's the stuff!" roared Old Man Buckhart. "That's the way to cook 'em! Don't let them have another run!"

Bunker laughed softly.

"He can't strike everybody out," he said; "and, judging from what I've seen so far, he won't stand much of a show to win unless he does."

Colt joshed Hammond as the discomfited catcher returned to the bench.

"What was the matter, Suke?" he asked. "Got a little dust in your eyes? Did that speed bother you? Why, I thought you liked speed."

"It wasn't speed that did it," declared Hammond.

"He put some kind of a twist on that ball that I never saw before. I'd like to know what kind of a curve it was."

"Bah!" scoffed Colt. "It wasn't anything unusual. I was watching. He simply put it over swift, with a little jump on it. I watched the way he delivered the ball, and I'll guarantee to hit it the first crack if he tries it on me."

"Perhaps you can," said Hammond; "but you'd better wait till you have a go at it before you talk so cock-sure."

Again as Glade got into position to bat Brackett talked to Dick.

"Try that speed on this boy, old fellow," he invited.

"Come now, Merriwell, give him one of those. Perhaps you'll strike him out, too."

"On your toes, Bitters!" shrieked Ambler, doing a
war dance back of third. "Glade will soak it. Score on a hit. Dig up the range when he lands against it."

Dick put the first ball across Glade's knees, just high enough for it to be fair, but again he got the butt end of the deal, for Squinty refused to call a strike.

"You've got to soak 'em straight over waist high, pard," said Buckhart in disgust. "We're playing against ten men to-day."

Merriwell wondered if Glade would swing on a waist-high ball, and he tried a bender, putting it over.

The Twin Star captain made a foul.

"Strike," said Squinty slowly.

"He sure hates to call 'em," said Brad.

Dick tried a high drop. The ball shot downward and was good for a strike when it passed Glade, but still Squinty brazenly declined to allow it.

The combination ball was resorted to once more.

Glade missed it.

"Two strikes," muttered Squinty.

"Speak up! speak up!" roared Bill Horn. "I can't hear yer over here."

Suddenly, to the surprise of Glade, Merriwell pitched left-handed. It was a slow ball and the Twin Star captain, recovering quickly, got his bat round in time to meet it.

It was a liner straight at Dick, who took it without moving out of his tracks.

In spite of the umpire's rank unfairness, the visitors had been held down to a single run in the first inning.

CHAPTER VII.

CIRCUS CONNECTS WITH THE BALL.

"We never can win with this sort of umpiring, pard," said Brad. "It sure was the worst deal I ever saw. Why, that dried-up little galoot wouldn't give you anything."

"I didn't get much, that's certain," said Dick.

"Get much! You got it in the neck. It was simply awful. The old man is bound to set up on his haunches and howl like a wolf if this keeps up. It will be a wonder to me if the boys don't Lynch Squinty after the game. He's had it in for you ever since you rode his cayuse, but he ought to have better sense than to show his animosity so plain."

"I don't know what we're going to do if we can't get a square deal from him," said Smith. "He's the only man present fit to umpire a game."

"Well, he sure isn't fit to umpire one."

"But there's no one else in the crowd who knows the rules. Everybody who knows them is playing."

"Well, if you can stand for it, Cyclone, you're some different than I reckoned."

"I don't propose to stand for it without raising a kick," said Smith. "I kept still as I could, just to see how far he would go. I wanted to satisfy myself that he really meant to be crooked."

"I opine you're well satisfied?"

"I hardly think there's a doubt about it. Let's see what he will do with us in this inning."

Circus, who felt himself responsible for the run obtained by the Twin Stars, was first man to face Colt. The visiting pitcher stopped and stared hard at the tall, lank, doleful batter.

"Yes," he laughed, "it's your funeral, Lengthly. I see you're expecting it."

"Close the valve, please," entreated Circus, "and shut off that escaping gas. Project the horseside across the rubber plant and let me see if I've forgotten how to swing a baseball baton. Once on a time, when I was traveling with Eightpaws' mammoth circus——"

"I declare if he ain't going to tell a story!" shouted Bill Horn. "Cut it off, Circus! Look out what you're doing!"

For Colt had snapped over a swift one and caught Circus napping.

"Strike!" called Squinty briskly.

"I'll relate that little reminiscence at some future period or semicolon," said Ebenezer Duck, lifting his bat languidly. "Still, I give you the word of a pernaturally truthful person that the absorbing narrative is worth listening to."

Colt disdain'd the batter, thinking the man a bungler, who could neither field nor hit. With this idea in his head, the Twin Star pitcher flashed another swift one on a level with Duck's belt.

The tall shortstop of the home team brought his bat around sharp and square, and met that speed. It was a wonderful drive far over the head of Brackett in deep centre.

Old Man Buckhart rose to his feet with a yell and waved his sombrero as Circus raced over the sacks. There were few among the sad man's intimate companions who had dreamed that he could handle his long legs with such wonderful cleverness, for he covered ground with tremendously swift strides which literally ate up space.

Brad Buckhart whooped like an Indian. He was on the coaching line at third as Duck came flying up from second.
“Home!” he shouted, although Brackett, in centre field, had secured the ball.

Brad felt that Circus could score unless his speed slackened.

Brackett sent the ball to Glade, who had gone out a short distance to take it.

Glade turned and lined it to Hammond.

But there was no chance of catching Circus, for the man’s speed had actually seemed to increase in the final stretch from third base to the plate. In his last jump he shot into the air, turned a somersault, struck both feet full and fair upon the plate, and went spinning over and over with half a dozen hand springs beyond it.

“Whoa! whoa!” he finally yelled. “Somebody stop me! When I get to going this way I’m liable to mix my brains all up.”

The Bar Z crowd roared with laughter and then gave Circus a cheer.

Old Man Buckhart thumped Thack Bunker between the shoulder blades.

“What do you think of that?” he cried.

“Monkeys shined,” drawled Bunker. “They don’t amount to anything.”

“He tied the score with his monkeyshines. I reckon that amounts to something.”

“The game is too young for that to be considered.”

“Well, certainly you’ll allow that he got a beautiful bingle off your great pitcher.”

“He won’t get another one to-day,” prophesied Bunker. “Colt sort of misjudged him, that’s all.”

Circus seemed on the verge of weeping as he seated himself beside Dick Merriwell on the bench.

“I meant to hit that ball a little harder,” he said.

“I didn’t want to put it over into Mexico so early in the game, but I sort of hate to hurry around the bases that fashion, and I came near miscalculating and only getting a three-bagger. Once on a time I was playing with the Golden Stars, the greatest baseball aggregation ever seen on e pluribus unum soil. We had a series of three games with the Eat-’em-aliases, a rival organization that somehow got the notion they could beat us. In those salubrious days I had a great trick of batting the ball right up into the air until it passed from sight in the direction of the zenith. The captain of the Eat-’em-aliases was aware of my proclivity, and for an unsuspected reason upon the day of the opening game he insisted that all the balls used should be marked with the date.

“It came up to the ninth inning with the score two to one in favor of the Eat-’ems. Two men were out and one lonesome fellow on first base when I set forth to wag the wagon tongue. Everything depended on little Ebenezer. I felt the mighty weight of responsibility upon my shoulders.

“The pitcher was a holy terror. He was a strike-out artist who had the reputation of always fanning a batter in a tight pinch. Nevertheless, or never the more, whichever way you may choose to put it, I set my teeth and made up my mind to lift the ball in the direction of Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, or some of those heavenly bodies which we perceive twinkling in the blue vault of Heaven upon cloudless nights.

“I met the first ball the pitcher projected. I got under it handsomely, and away it went skyward. While players and spectators stood watching that ball and seeing it grow smaller and smaller until it became no larger than a marble, no larger than a pea, and finally vanished from view, I cantered serenely over the sacks, with one man ahead of me, and scored. The outfielders stood with their heads tipped backward and their eyes gazing up searchingly into the sky for at least half an hour, waiting for the ball to come down. At the end of that time it had not reappeared, and the umpire gave the Golden Stars the game by a score of three to two.

“Now, listen attentively to the soul-harrowing sequel. While we were in the midst of a game upon the following day I again hit the ball straight up into the air, knocking it out of sight. In about five minutes, while the fielders were watching for the horsehide to return earthward, some one gave a shout and pointed toward a tiny speck that was swiftly descending from the distant dome of blue. It grew larger and larger, and the centre fielder of the opposing team finally got under it and caught it. It proved to be a baseball, but when it was examined, that ball bore the date of the previous day. It was the same ball that I had batted into the air at the critical moment of the first game. When this fact was demonstrated to the umpire he reversed his decision of the day before and gave the game to the Eat-’em-aliases by a score of two to one.”

“That was, indeed, most unfortunate,” laughed Dick.

“It has ever been thus with my fondest efforts,” said Circus, “and yet people wonder why I am oppressed by a constant cloud of sadness.”

While Circus was relating this amazing yarn Bill Horn had gracefully succeeded in striking out.

Dixie followed with a bid for a hit, but Amble got
back under the batter’s little Texas leaguer and gobbled it.

“You see, Buckhart,” said Thack Bunker; “you see how she goes. Accidents will happen, of course, but your team ain’t got no show whatever in this game.”

“If we had a good umpire,” retorted the owner of the Bar Z, “we wouldn’t have much trouble in giving you a run for your money.”

“I wouldn’t grumble about the umpire if he was one of my men,” grinned Bunker. “I judge he’s going to give you everything he can.”

Turner fouled the ball four times and then missed it cleanly, which finished the Bar Z’s second turn at bat.

The score was tied, but, coming to bat last as they did, the advantage was still with the Twin Stars.

CHAPTER VIII.

HEAD WORK.

Dick was not inclined to believe Squinty had been bought by the Twin Stars. It was his conviction that the man’s dislike for him was the cause of his unfair umpiring. With Squinty refusing to give corners, there was not much chance for the pitcher to exercise his skill in deceiving batters. Therefore he decided to try keeping the ball over the plate, relying to a considerable extent upon his support. Nevertheless, he felt certain that the Bar Z would lose if the Twin Stars hit the ball a great deal.

Buster, the first man up for the Stars in the second, looked like a slow, sleepy fellow, although he was put up for a slugger. Dick sized him up as one of those men who do a great deal of wild swinging, but nearly start the stitches in the ball when they land on it.

With this in his mind, Merriwell began by shooting over a straight one before Buster was fully prepared for it. The man struck too late, and his manner of handling himself satisfied Merriwell that he was not wrong in his estimate.

The next ball was high—possibly a trifle too high. It looked good to Buster, however, and he tried to meet it. The result was a foul, which counted against the hitter as the second strike. With deliberate intent, Merriwell threw the next ball behind Buster’s back, making a most awkward performance of it and getting it so wide that Buckhart barely cuffed it down with his big mitt.

“Say,” shouted Hammond, who was waiting to coach at first, “you’re not pitching to the third baseman.”

Brad snapped the ball back to Dick as quickly as possible and stepped into position. No time was wasted in signaling. Buster had lowered his bat, grinning, while many of the spectators laughed aloud, and Dick put another straight one over the centre.

The big batter saw the ball coming and realized that it would cut the rubber in halves. He made a feeble effort to hit it, but was far too slow, and Squinty sadly announced the third strike and the out when the ball spanked into Brad’s mitt.

“Well, you certainly were easy, Buster,” scoffed Charlie Colt, trotting out promptly with his stick. “He never used a curve on you.”

Colt took a position with his bat high and held far back behind his shoulder. In such form it would be difficult for him to swing down to meet the low ones.

Dick put one over, just knee high. It was straight and tempting, but Colt struck over it with a scooping downward movement.

“Strike,” sighed Squinty.

Immediately the Yale lad landed up another in precisely the same place.

Again Colt failed to get his bat down to hit the ball.

“Strike two,” moaned Squinty.

When the third low straight ball came whistling over and Colt missed that also, Buster gave a whoop of derision.

“He pitched only three to you,” cried Buster, “and they were all straight and in the same place. I didn’t see you start any conflagration.”

“He won’t fool me that way next time,” muttered the discomfited Twin Star pitcher.

“Things seem to be going somewhat better,” observed Old Man Buckhart, beaming on Thack Bunker.


“Thought you didn’t have any real weak ones, Bunk? Thought your bunch were all hitters?”
TIP TOP WEEKLY.

"Oh, some's better than others, of course. Bimby they'll get a-plenty used to your pitcher and make him suffer acutely."

"Mebbe so, mebbe so; but I'm reckoning they won't fill him with anguish unendurable."

Ambler, the Twin Star shortstop, stood up to the plate in good style, and Dick could not seem to discover any weakness in his form. He was one of those chaps a pitcher has to try out in order to find what sort of a ball to use on him.

Noticing that the fellow was alert and ready for anything as soon as he stepped into the box, Merriwel tried a bender.

Ambler struck it at fine form and hit a slow grounder toward Circus.

"Dig! Run it out; Hit the high places!" yelled Hammond. "He'll let it go through him."

But this time Circus scooped the ball cleanly and made a fine throw to Bill Horn. Horn froze to the ball and squeezed it hard.

There seemed something like a sob in Squinty's voice as he declared the third put-out.

"I judge that's going some, Bunker," said Old Man Buckhart. "Now we're certainly even with you. This game promises to be fairly interesting for the spectators. I don't believe the people who have traveled some distance to see it will go away feeling their time has been wasted."

"Wait till the top end of our batting order gets against your Yale pitcher again," said Bunker, "They'll riddle him."

"That was almost too easy, pard," smiled Buckhart, as Dick came in.

"It worked that time," nodded Merriwel; "but it won't work every time. It won't be long before those men will get onto it that I'm using the straight one, and then I'll have my troubles. I'll have to shift over. The only way I can get anything like a fair deal from Squinty is to keep the batters swinging. If they refuse to swing he will decline to call strikes."

"That gent is certain going to make himself more unpopular than ever," muttered the rancher's son, "and that is saying a great deal. Why, if this game reached a critical point and he was to hand it over to the Twin Stars by a rank decision the boys would try to lynch him sure. They're a-plenty enthused now, for they're beginning to reckon that we have a chance to win."

"It was pretty pitching, Merriwel," drawled Smith. "There was lots of luck in it," said Dick, declining to take credit for his work, although he really deserved it, having sized the batters up correctly and made it impossible for Squinty to rob him in a single decision. This was headwork on Dick's part, for had he given either Buster or Colt exactly the sort of ball desired, one or both of them might have hit safely and hard.

It is the heady pitcher who succeeds best. Such a man, having brains and the ability to size up batters quickly and accurately, will do better work, with good control, than another man who possesses all sorts of speed and curves and simply "beefs 'em over." Many a seemingly speedy youngster, reckoned by his friends as sure to develop into a great pitcher, has proved to be a great failure simply because he lacked headwork. Even curves, speed, and control, all combined, cannot lift a pitcher into the first class unless he has the further necessary qualifications of brains and nerve.

Jefferson, shoulder-bound in his left arm, had been placed at the foot of the Bar Z's batting list, even though it is possible he knew more about baseball than several of the men above him. Colt now took this man in hand and fanned him quickly, Jeffrey being unable to get his bat around to meet the burning hot ones the Twin Star twirler sizzled across the rubber.

"That star pitcher of ourn is jest getting warmed up some," observed Bunker. "You watch a while, and you'll see the smoke rolling out of his shoes."

But when Colt used the same speed on Smith, the foreman of the Bar Z seemed simply to thrust out his bat and held it in position to meet the ball. In this manner he lifted a little Texas leaguer into right field and again reached first by fast running.

Once more Horn and Dixie were on the coaching lines. The big first baseman roared and capered. The man from the South drawled coaxingly in his coaching, pleading with Smith to get off and purloin second.

Smith tried it on the first ball pitched to Jim, who, knowing what was in the air, swung his bat wildly without trying to hit.
Hammond proved that he had "a good throw," for, unmindful of the swinging bat, he took the ball cleanly and sent it on a line to Glade.

Glade was in the proper position to get the runner, being close behind the base line and about three feet away from second in the direction of first. When Smith slid, the Twin Star captain simply tapped him quickly with the ball, and Squinty announced the put-out.

"Oh, everybody can steal," scoffed Bowie from first. "Our catcher can't throw any at all. He's got a crottery wing."

"We just thought we'd try him out," drawled Dixie. "Got to find what you fellows can do."

"Haw, haw!" laughed Thack Bunker. "You see how it is now, Buckhart. I don't reckon you'll get another run to-day. When that long-legged varmint who cracked out the homer comes up next time, you'll see Colt make a monkey of him."

"Mebbe so," nodded the Bar Z owner serenely. "Time will tell. I'm some inclined to think you've got the foolish habit of counting chickens before they're hatched, Bunker."

In spite of Colt's skill, old Jim, the cook, poked a hot one through Amble and reached first.

Brad was up, and he was given a cheer by the Bar Z sympathizers.

Perhaps never in his life had Brad more desired a hit. Colt fooled him at the start with a splendid drop, and then wasted two. The young Texan gripped his bat and waited for the next one, feeling sure the Twin Star pitcher would try to put it over. He was not mistaken, and Colt slanted one onto the inside corner.

Brad seemed to know what sort of a shoot the ball would take even as it left the pitcher's fingers, for he stepped forward and nailed it, bat and ball cracking like a pistol shot.

It was another long drive to centre field. This time Brackett managed to get under the horsehide sphere by great running, made a jump for it, caught it, dropped it, and caught it again before it could touch the ground.

A howl of joy went up from the Twin Star crowd.

CHAPTER IX.

HOLDING THE LEAD.

In the last of the third Dick continued to keep the ball over the plate, resorting to various devices to deceive the batters. Twice he pitched unexpectedly with his left hand, and only once during his entire turn on the rubber was Squinty given a chance to rob him. That once the batter misjudged the ball and let it divide the plate without swinging.

Squinty brazenly pronounced it a ball.

Brad kicked fiercely, but Dick shrugged his shoulders and laughed. This one bad decision, however, did no damage, for Pable fanned, Brackett was out on an easy grounder toward first, Dick covering the sack while Horn handled the ball, and Bowie popped up an easy foul for Buckhart to snother.

Old Man Buckhart lost no chance to rub Bunker's fur the wrong way.

"Why," said he, "these star batters of yours don't look any better to me than the tail-enders. I judge this walkover you expected isn't going to materialize, Bunk."

"Wait some, wait some," returned the Twin Star man. "This yere game isn't fairly started yet. When my boys get to going you'll never see them again for the dust they'll kick up."

Colt did his prettiest to fool Dick, but Merriwell reached for an outcurve, caught it near the end of the bat, and drove it on a line over the head of the frantically jumping right fielder. It came near being another home run. Buster woke up, however, and hustled in a most amazing manner, getting the ball back into the diamond in time to hold the runner at third.

"Now," roared Horn, "we're going to score some. Wallop it again, Circus. Give it another clout like that last one."

"Alas!" sighed Circus, "I fear I've used up my allotment of hits for this game."

Colt took care not to give the lengthy fellow what he wanted, and Duck tried in vain to lace out another hit. He was quickly fanned, which caused him to retire to the bench after the manner of a condemned man going to execution.
“That’s the stuff, Charlie,” laughed Glade. “You’ve got his alley. He will never repeat that accident. Take care of big Horn and our Yale friend will die on third, for the next fellow couldn’t hit a balloon.”

Colt got two strikes on Horn in double quick order.

Then a startling thing happened. On Hammond’s throw back to the batter Merriwell was seen scooting for the plate at top speed.

Several of the Twin Star men yelled warningly.

Hammond jumped forward to cover the pan, and Colt reached eagerly for the ball, anxious to stop the daring steal. His throw, however, was hasty and bad. It made Hammond reach and probably was responsible for his muff. At any rate, he did not hold the ball, and Merriwell slid home, bringing a chorus of sharp barking yells from his comrades on the bench.

Old Man Buckhart once more thumped Thack Bunker between the shoulder blades.

“What do you think of that?” he shouted. “That’s the speed boy for you. Can he play baseball—can he?”

“It sure was luck,” said Bunker, with a slight intonation of disgust. “If our catcher had held the ball he’d got that chap dead easy.”

“Mebbe so,” nodded Mr. Buckhart cheerfully; “but I judge the youngster reckoned it might be a muff just as it was. You thought you had a bunch that could wipe up the earth, didn’t you, Bunker. You told me they could, didn’t you? Just observe how we’ve picked up a collection of has-beens to support our Yale battery and are making good with them. We lead you one now.”

“But the innings aren’t even yet. Wait till they are before you reckon on that lead, Buckhart.”

Bill Horn struck out.

Dixie followed with a pop infield fly, and the Bar Z bunch returned to the field.

Bitters, one of the Twin Stars’ crack hitters, smote the first straight one Dick passed up. It was a long fly to centre field, and Jim made a distressing muff of it.

Bitters held up at second base.

“Now we’re going,” cried Glade. “Send him along, Hammond.”

Suke Hammond nodded. Although he had done nothing with Merriwell in the first inning, he was now filled with confidence and a conviction that he was “due for a hit.”

He seemed to gauge the ball correctly, for he smashed it high and straight, slightly to the left of Merriwell.

Dick shot his hand outward and upward. The ball struck the ends of his gloved fingers, and he stopped it just enough for Dixie to take it ere it dropped to the ground.

Bitters, quick of thought, had seen Dick fail to stop the ball, and he started for third. Therefore Dixie simply stepped onto the second for a quick double play.

When Bill Horn realized what had happened he lay down upon the ground and rolled over, shouting with laughter.

At this juncture Thack Bunker lost a great deal of his cool indifference and swore roundly, to the intense amusement of Old Man Buckhart.

“Talk about horseshoe luck,” snarled Bunker, “what do you call that?”

“Why,” said the Bar Z owner, “I call it right clever playing. Merriwell stopped the ball and pulled it down just enough for Dixie to catch it, so that they could work a double play on it. If Merriwell had caught it, your man on second would have hugged the sack and they would have had only one out. Science, Bunker—why, that’s the most scientific piece of baseball you ever saw. You’re learning a whole lot about the game today.”

“Oh, rot! That style of talk certainly makes me a-plenty weary, Buckhart.”

“If you’re weary now, you’ll be plumb tired to death when the game finishes.”

“Well, of all rotten things!” yelled Colt from the coaching line. “That was something awful!”

Horn gathered himself up and jumped over to Colt, whom he stroked tenderly upon the back.

“Poor child!” he said. “Don’t cry! Maybe papa will bring the candy, after all.”

“Get out!” snarled Colt. “Don’t to be so blame funny. Keep your paws off me.”
Bill retreated to his position as Squinty sharply ordered play.

Captain Glade was the next batter. He, too, was clever with the stick, and Dick was unable to fool him. He hit safely into right field and went down to second on the first ball pitched to Buster.

Brad made a beautiful throw to Dixie, who should have had the runner by ten feet, at least. The second baseman dropped the ball just as he put it onto Glade, and the Twin Star man was safe.

"Now, Buster," cried Glade, "fall on one. This is the time you hit."

Once more Dick tried to catch Buster off guard, succeeding in getting two strikes on him; but at last the slow fellow woke up and pounded the horsehide furiously.

Far out in the field Jim made a fairly good run and pulled the ball down with one hand.

The Bar Z had held its lead on even innings.

CHAPTER X.
CHANGING UMPIRES.

By this time the visitors were thoroughly aroused to the fact that the walkover they had expected was not materializing.

"You've got to hold them down, Colt," said Glade in a low tone, as he walked out with the pitcher. "We've got to fight like blazing for this game."

"It makes me sick," growled Colt. "We ought to trim that bunch easy. Why, I don't see how it is we haven't pounded Merriwell out of the box already. He hasn't got anything. He's using a straight ball and laying it right over. Every man ought to hit him hard. Wait till I get at him next time."

In the fifth Colt did pitch beautifully, only one man getting to first on an error. He even struck out Smith, who had seemed to find him easy in the first and third, the man on first died there, and the Twin Stars came to bat determined to even things up.

"Give me some of that easy stuff you're handing out, boy," invited Colt, as he stepped forth briskly with his bat.

A moment later he fiercely dashed the bat to the ground, for he had boosted a high foul into the air, and Buckhart was under the ball.

"Drop it!" yelled Colt.

But Brad did not drop that kind. He smothered the ball, and the disgusted pitcher retreated to the bench, muttering savagely to himself.

Amble, who followed, should have been an easy out, for he batted a pretty grounder to Smith. The Bar Z foreman scooped the ball handsomely and proceeded to throw it ten feet over Bill Horn's head.

Amble went all the way round to third before Horn could chase the ball down and send it back into the diamond.

"Now we score!" cried Glade. "Take the lead! Break up the game, boys. We've got to do it."

Pablo hit the first ball Dick pitched to him. It was a weak little bounder, but Amble had started for the plate and there was no stopping him. Seeing that the runner was too far down the line to be caught, Dixie listened to Merriwell's shout to throw to first, getting Pablo.

"That ties it," said Glade in satisfaction. "Now we'll proceed to canter away."

But there was no cantering just then. Brackett rylled a slow one to Dick and was thrown out, although he showed his spirit by trying hard to reach first.

"It looks better now, Buckhart," grinned Thack Bunker. "We're even with you. I judge the boys are sort of fooling along so they won't disappoint the crowd."

"That sounds well to you, perhaps," was the rejoinder; "but you know better. You know they've played as if their lives depended on the game."

In the sixth inning neither side scored. For the Bar Z Brad went out on a fly, Dick got first on an error, Circus pounded the air, and Horn put an end to the suspense by rolling an easy one ahead of him toward first.

In the last half Squinty gave Dick a rack deal on balls and strikes, but the eagerness of the Twin Star players to hit prevented him from throwing the game to the visitors.
“Here’s the fatal seventh,” cried Bill Horn. “Start us off, Dixie. We’ve got to have some runs right here, and we’ll get them.”

But neither Dixie, Turner, nor Jefferson could do anything with Colt. In turn all three went down before the man’s pitching.

“Look here,” said Colt, as his team mates gathered around him at the bench, “I’m going to show you how to win this game. Merriwell is putting the ball straight over. That umpire has something against him, and he won’t give the boy any sort of a show. Just watch me and follow my example.”

Then he walked out to the plate, refused to swing at a single ball, and was handed a passed to first by Squinty.

Ambie had sense enough to follow Colt’s example, and he, too, was given a pass.

Pablo, however, could not restrain a nervous inclination to hit at the good ones, and he was fanned.

“Play the game, Brackett,” cried Colt. “Here’s where we win.”

“If you do,” growled Buckhart, “I opine there’ll be a lynching on the Bar Z to-night. I wouldn’t be in Squinty’s boots for a cool million.”

The situation was dangerous. Dick knew the peril of it and tried to pull Brackett with benders. Finally, after two strikes and three balls were called, Merriwell put a straight shoulder-high one over the pan.

Brackett dropped his bit and started for first.

“Go down,” said Squinty. “It was too high.”

“You’re a liar!” roared Horn.

Squinty’s hand dropped instantly toward the place where he usually carried his pistol, but the weapon was not there.

“Mebbe,” he rasped, “you swallers that sometime, Horn.”

“Not if I knows it,” retorted the big first baseman.

“You’re trying to throw this game.”

The bases were full and only one man out. Fearing the angry spectators would interfere if the umpire walked another man, and having confidence in himself, Bowie tried for a hit. Three times he struck at the ball, making two fouls and then missing cleanly.

On third, Colt raised a bowl.

“Why don’t you wait?” he cried. “He can’t put them over. Wait, Bitters, and he will force a run.”

Dick whipped the first one over the inside corner.

Bitters let it pass.

“Ball one!” shouted Squinty.

“Rotten!” cried Brad. “It was over.”

Dick curved the second ball across the middle.

“Ball two!” declared the umpire.

Behind the plate the Texan frothed.

“Are we going to stand for this?” he cried.

“Play ball!” shouted Glade. “Do you think your own umpire isn’t going to give you all that’s coming. Stop kicking.”

Old Man Buckhart rose to his feet. There was a grim look on his face.

“I judge,” he said, “we’d better take that umpire out.”

“You can’t take him out,” said Bunker. “You put him in there yourself. I’m satisfied with him. Besides, there’s no one else to fill his place.”

“I was just thinking,” said Mr. Buckhart, “that it would be proper to remove him in order to save his life. You can observe that the boys are some angry. If he forces a run here, they will climb all over him.”

Indeed, every member of the Bar Z team was angry.

“Play ball!” rasped Squinty. “Keep going, or I’ll forfeit the game. Play ball!”

“Here, Brad,” said Dick quickly, “let’s see if he will dare call this one a ball.”

He sent one straight over, and Bitters, realizing it must be fair, tried to hit it. The ball dropped, and the batter missed.

“Stop it! stop it!” shouted Colt. “He can’t get the ball over.”

The next one was an in-shoot, cutting the inner corner of the plate.

“Three balls!” cried Squinty.

Brad held the ball and stepped onto the plate with it as the rest of the Bar Z players rushed in a body at Squinty. They surrounded him, and there seemed every possibility that he would be mobbed then and there.

A dust-covered man who had ridden up, accompanied by two other men, leaped from his horse and touched Old Man Buckhart upon the shoulder.
When Old Man Buckhart spoke in that manner no wise person ventured to disobey him.

"Don’t touch him, boys,” said the Bar Z owner. “Let the varmint go."

They stood back, and Squinty left the diamond, hissed vigorously. He turned his steps toward the bunk house, muttering bitter oaths.

The new umpire went in.

Immediately Dick resorted to all the skill at his command, crooking them over for Bitters and getting his due.

As a result, Bitters fanned in short order, and the seventh inning terminated with the score tied.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BRAVEST MAN.

It was amazing what a difference this change of umpires seemed to make with the Bar Z batters.

Smith, the head of the list, came up in the first of the eighth and hit safely. Jim sacrificed him to second. Then Brad landed on one of Colt’s benders and straightened it out for two sacks, scoring Smith.

Dick hit a long fly to right field, which Buster succeeded in holding.

On the catch Brad went to third.

With two out, Circus once more smote the ball fairly and sent it far over the centre fielder’s head. It was another home run.

Thack Buckner looked sick.

“It sure is too bad, Bunker,” said Old Man Buckhart. “Really, I’m sorry she’s going to wind up this fashion. Nevertheless, it’s been a pretty good game. We only intend to beat you a little, ’cause we don’t want to hurt your feelings too much.”

Bill Horn came near duplicating the performance of Circus, but Brackett was playing deep and succeeded in getting back far enough to take Horn’s wonderful drive.

“The game is ours, boys,” said Smith. “It’s all settled.”

“It sure is,” laughed Brad Buckhart. “Just watch my pad pitch, with a square umpire giving the decisions.”

Indeed, the game was won, for not a man who faced
Merriwell in the eighth or ninth inning got a hit off him. His pitching was too much for the Twin Star batters to fathom.

At the beginning of the ninth inning one of the men who had accompanied the new umpire found Señorita Pepita and whispered something in her ear. He was a Mexican, and what he said caused the girl to start and betray some agitation. A moment later she excused herself, saying that she would go to the house. The other ladies were so absorbed in the game that they gave little heed.

Instead of going to the house, Pepita hastened to find and saddle her horse. Straight away to the south she rode as fast as the pony would carry her. Five miles distant there was a small timber motte, toward which she headed.

Not until she was within a mile of the motte was she aware that a horsemann was following her. Happening to look back, she discovered to her dismay that Squinty was in pursuit. Immediately she urged her pony on at a still faster pace.

But Squinty, knowing he had been seen, gave his horse the spurs and rode hard to overtake her. His vicious little eyes were glittering with an evil light, and his heart was fierce with a wild and desperate resolve.

"I don't know what the devil she rides down this way for," he muttered; "but I do know she starts out at the right time to suit me. She won't go back to the Bar Z to-night. I reckon dead sure I makes no mistake about her. She's Anita Lopez, old Manuel's gal. She's thrown me down hard on various other occasions, but she'll sing soft and gentle when I get my hands on her."

He was not mistaken in thinking the girl whom Stella Johnson had introduced at the Bar Z as "Pepita" was Anita Lopez, the daughter of Manuel Lopez, whose brother, Castro, the rustler, was the hated pest of that region.

But he did not know that in the timber motte toward which they were headed Manuel Lopez waited in concealment. He did not know that Lopez had fallen in with the regular umpire and the guides and shown them the right course to the Bar Z. He did not know that by one of the umpire's companions, the Mexican, Lopez had sent word to his daughter that he was near and would appear at the ranch that night unless she joined him immediately.

A strange attraction had drawn Anita back to the Bar Z. She had left her father in a little Mexican town beyond the Rio Grande and next appeared at the Dipper Ranch. Stella Johnson had listened to Anita's story, had sympathized with her, and had planned that she should witness the baseball game upon the Bar Z.

Discovering that Squinty was in pursuit, Anita was terrified. She knew the wizened little cowboy hated her father most bitterly and would take special delight in delivering him into the hands of the cowpunchers. With this in her mind, she bore away to the right of the timber motte instead of entering it.

As the fleeing girl and her pursuer swept past the timber some one in concealment of the thickets fired three shots at Squinty. The bullets whistled and whined about the man's ears, but did not touch him.

Squinty swore and kept straight on in pursuit of the girl. When Anita attempted to circle to the right with the evident intention of heading back toward the ranch, he quietly cut her off. His horse was faster than hers, and he laughed triumphantly as he closed in.

"Oh, you can't git away, my beauty," he muttered. "I've got ye sure."

Neither of them was aware of the fact that their movements had been watched through a powerful field glass in the hands of Brad Buckhart. At the close of the game Brad, perceiving the two riders far away to the south, had hastened to the house, secured the glass and focused it upon them.

Less than ten minutes later, with Merriwell, Horn, and several others, the Texan was galloping southward. Squinty finally ran the girl down. Coming up beside her exhausted horse, he leaned over, clasped her about the waist, and snatched her from the saddle.

"Ha, ha!" he cried. "Now, my little peach, I've got you. Now, let's remove this veil."

He tore the veil from her face as he spoke and shouted his satisfaction.

"I knew it!" he cried. "I knew it!"

She struggled, but the little wretch was wonderfully strong, and her efforts were ineffectual.
"No use, Anita," he said; "I've got you. You're mine. You have thrown me down times enough. There won't be no more of it."

Suddenly she uttered a cry.

"Look!" she exclaimed. "They're coming—they're coming from the Bar Z!"

Squinty turned his head. Far back across the plain he could see a cloud of dust raised by the hoofs of galloping horses. He could see nearly a dozen mounted men coming at full speed.

Swearing fiercely, he drove the spurs deep and headed toward another tiny timber motte. He knew, doubly burdened as he was, his horse could not hold out in such a race.

Half an hour later Squinty knelt in the edge of the timber, the girl bound and prostrate beneath one brutal knee, while he waited, pistol in hand, for those horsemen.

It chanced that Bill Horn had gotten off ahead of the others and held his advantage. He was coming now, fifty rods in advance of the rest.

"I'll get him first," said Squinty, trying to take careful aim.

He knew his nerves were quivering, yet he felt sure he would hit Horn.

In the face of a fusillade of bullets Bill Horn came straight on. Once he gave a jump in the saddle, but did not swerve the slightest in his course.

Squinty leaped to his feet as it seemed as if Horn would ride him down. The big man drew his horse to a stand with a single surge and flung himself from the saddle.

For the last time Squinty fired, with the muzzle of his pistol so near that some grains of powder were blown into Bill Horn's face. The bullet seared Horn's cheek.

When the others came up Horn had Squinty pinned to the ground and was holding him there.

"Here's the varmint, boys," he said, his voice a trifle husky.

They seized Squinty as Horn rolled over upon the ground.

"He's wounded!" cried Dick Merriwell. "There's blood on his shirt. Let me look, Bill—let me look."

A girl, white and panting, crept toward Bill Horn and lifted his head upon her lap.

"Oh, he mustn't die!" panted Anita. "He's brave! I thought you brave, Señor Merriwell, but he's braver than you. He's the bravest man I ever saw."

Horn smiled weakly.

"I sort of reckoned—I knew you, little gal," he whispered. "You didn't fool me a heap with that veil, but I keeps my mouth shut. What are the boys doing with Squinty?"

"I don't know," she answered. "They have taken him away into the timber."

"Then it's good-by to Squinty," said Bill. "He's done his last dirty trick. I wonder how hard I'm hit, Merriwell?"

Dick had been cutting open the man's shirt.

"I don't know, Horn," he said; "but I don't believe you're done for by any means. I think the bullet glanced on a rib. I'll plug the wound. We'll have you back to the Bar Z and fix you up all right."

"Little gal," said Horn, "you've got to come back with me. You've got to nurse me. I reckon you'd do that much, won't you?"

"Sí, señor—sí, sí!" she breathed, a strange look in her eyes. "I'll do anything for you!"

"Anything, Anita? Will you marry me?"

"Sí, señor," she whispered still more softly, "I will gladly marry you."

"Then," said Horn exultantly, "I wouldn't die if I was riddled with twenty bullets!"

THE END.

The Next Number (698) Will Contain

Frank Merriwell at Phantom Lake;

OR,

THE MYSTERY OF THE MAD DOCTOR.

Among the Dolomites.

It is eight summers ago, but that day stands out vividly in my recollections of an altogether memorable holiday.

The month was August.

We had spent the night at Toblach, and long before the other hotel guests were out of bed we were having our morning coffee and rolls, with delicious honey, on the veranda of the inn, and trying to forecast what sort of a day's journey lay before us. Then we made our start.

To save ourselves a tiring and very uninteresting trudge over a flat piece of country, we took the train to a place called Immenken, some half a dozen miles or less away. There we got out, and after lingering for a few minutes in the little sleepy village to provide ourselves with a couple of stout, serviceable alpenstocks, we set out on our long journey.

It was very pleasant going, for the first few hours. The sun had not yet mounted high, and our route was a shady one. The dew still lay heavy on the grass, and the air was sweet with the scent of the larch woods through which our path ran.

My companion was an old fellow traveler, and as we went we could each realize the other's feelings. To both of us there came a delightful sense of freedom. The day was all before us. The path was all unknown: we "had not passed this way heretofore." Loiter we must not: that we knew; but there was no need for haste; and it was delicious to stop a moment now and again and plunge our hands and wrists into the cold water of the torrent whose course we were following.

On our left lay the thick woods. On our right, across the stream, rose the rocky walls of the valley. Our route was clear enough as far as that. But after a time the valley opened out, and then our right direction was not by any means so plain. However, we inquired of some villagers, and if we did not entirely comprehend the exact phrases they used, we understood the first part of their instructions, and again started off, this time almost at right angles, if I recollect rightly, to our previous path.

We crossed the river and struck up another valley. It was much broader than the one from which we had just emerged, and unhappily the track was far from plain. The ground was dotted with dwarf pines and juniper bushes, with intervening patches of short grass and flowers.

By this time the sun was high. The air was heavy and warm, redolent of pines; and the temptation to fling oneself down under the spreading boughs was strong indeed. It would have been blissful to stretch our limbs on the dry sward and close our eyes and dream. But doubts as to the length and nature of the route kept us going.

At last we reached the head of the valley. The rushing torrent which had gladdened us earlier in the day was now far up on our left; and a dry water course lay before us, its white stones almost hurting the eye with their cold glare. We crossed over and took shelter from the noonday sun in a group of trees on the farther side.

We also debated. The guide books had led us to believe that we should find a rest house somewhere hereabouts. But, look in any direction that we would, no sign of human habitation met our eyes. We seemed the only living beings in the valley. And we wanted that rest house rather badly, not so much for the rest as for the meal it would be able to offer us. We had eaten but little since our last night's dinner, and Harris twiddled and thick worried stockings were oppressive things to wear in that tropical atmosphere. Yet it would set us up again, and the sooner we had it the more acceptable it would be.

It occurred to us that the likeliest place for such a house would be close to the track. But where was the track?

Well, we found it at last. It led onward, and it led upward. This was disappointing, for we could see a good deal of the hillsides, and no house was visible. We had nothing to say against climbing, but we should have preferred not doing it on an empty stomach and in the hottest part of the day.

However, there was no help for it. Having struck the track, we followed it. It was a toilsome one, but the flowers that grew to right and left of it delighted every turn. Never had I seen on a mountainside such a wealth and variety of blossoms: Alpine roses, red, but un-roselike, with their dark-green leaves; gentians, with their lovely blue; monkshood, in the snow; and spires; cranebill, with its mauve petals, and many an other humbler flower.

But, here, so eager were we to push on to that elusive rest house, that we missed the track, and finally pulled ourselves up on a path that most certainly led downward. "This can't be right," we both exclaimed simultaneously, but where the right track was now we neither of us could see.

Suddenly we caught sight of a figure—the first human being we had seen for hours. It proved to be a grave old goatherd. Brown as a berry, poor as a church mouse, speaking a language that neither my companion nor I could interpret, our meeting with him was, nevertheless, the most welcome of encounters.

For not only did he offer us each a draught from his wooden bowl of warm goat's milk, in which a few dry crusts of hasty bread were soaking—the two or three sips we took were most reviving—but he left his meal to put us on the right track again.

It was good to know we were going by the proper path once more, but nothing seemed to lessen the heat and weariness of that early afternoon trudge. The sun, as we mounted higher, and the cheering sight of the wretched shanty we were every minute expecting to catch a glimpse of was still unpromising.

How we both escaped a touch, and more than a touch, of sunstroke is to this day a mystery. My friend had a soaked sponge, and used it freely, but even this was only an alleviation, and it was really fortifying food we needed.

On our left the great detached masses of the Drei Sinnen (the meaning of the name we had difficulty in catching) rose against the sky—massive and formidable and impressive. I have seen so little in a condition to appreciate mountain scenery.

But the path came to an end at last, and the long trudge—we must have mounted somewhere about four thousand feet in that trudge—landed us at last—at last—at the rest-house door. I remember throwing myself down and falling into the sleep of sheer bodily fatigue with the sun still high in the heavens; a sufficiently uncommon and disagreeable experience for me, however refreshing it may be to many persons.

I awoke with strange sounds in my ears and looked about me. Then I realized where I was. The mountain world lay to me—"Purple rocks and finny spire," and thunder was reverberating among those jagged heights.

It was time to start. The sun that had tried us so pitilessly during our upward climb was westering fast, and before we began the descent his brightness had become overcast with clouds.

Dark—black, over-frightening—clouds, and rushing through our path lay. The trees were pines for the most part, and the downward track was steep in places. Following the brawling torrent through the valley, we emerged at last at the Landro Hotel, standing in its pretty grounds.

It was vexing to tire pilgrims to learn that the rooms we had written for could not be ours, and to have to trudge on along the main road to Schludernsch. But the evening meal and the well-earned night's rest brought kindlier thoughts toward the piece of the Tyrol that lay behind us; and it was with a springy step and pleasant expectations that we strode down the road next morning on our way to the Tre Croce and Cortina.

One word about the Dolomites as a place for climbers. Frankly, I may say, the many peaks and cliffs of this most picturesque region did not tempt us. We were on our way to Pontresina, where the snow mountains awaited us, and where before our engstimmer rattled us away from the "Kronenhof!" at the end of our stay, we had gone through some experiences that will ever be among our most cherished recollections.

But snow climbing is one thing and rock climbing is another. To a cragsman born or made the bare wrinkled spurs and precipices of the Dolomites are of a different class to us; they looked—crude. It was only when the late afternoon sun played on their rugged, scarred faces, making them glow almose with the colors that charm the eye of the traveler among the ruins of Petra, that we began to get the impression of treacherous toughness that most of them give.

Many of the mountains look brittle, like burnt brick, and,
indeed, I believe they have the reputation of being so. A characteristic of the town is the number and variety of "chimneys" and "galleries," of which the expert climber avails himself, though much ticklish work is sure to have to be done with the rope, on the outside.

A Perilous Situation.

As early as the year 1855 old Martin Driscoll began trapping in the region lying between the upper Des Moines and the Big Sioux Rivers. He had weathered the Indian raids of 1857, 1860, and 1862, and many a milder peril. But his favorite story—told as a huge joke upon his son, young Martin—concerned an adventure that befell that youth when, as a lad of twelve, he went on his first real "trap" with his father.

On the west bank of Rock Creek, a small branch of the Big Sioux, old Martin had built a log cabin, and bither he had resorted for several years, so that the creek had come to be recognized by other trappers as his "preserve," which they never invaded.

This year old Martin reached the spot a little later than usual, and the molested game seemed to be waiting for him. But risk was waiting, too, for the tall grass of the bottom land had ripened and dried, and the danger of fire was imminent.

"We'll have to wait, though," said old Martin, "till the wind's somewhere in the east, so that we can buck fire from the creek. That'll fix us all right."

So they waited—for an east wind. A week went by. Every evening, when old Martin came in from setting his traps, he scanned the horizon and sniffed the air anxiously for any threat of a prairie fire.

Young Martin meanwhile stayed at the cabin; for as his father's apprentice it was his part to dress the pelts, cook the biscuits, and at his leisure fish for pickerel in the creek. Sometimes, by way of diversion, he climbed a tall, dry cottonwood that stood close beside the cabin, and roosted, boy fashion, in the top.

"Mighty poor business, this waiting for a wind," said old Martin one morning. "I'm off down the creek to-day, and probably won't be back till late. But if there's any sign of fire I'll be off for the back. You can tend to the traps up the creek. So look sharp, sonny, and don't be scared if I don't come in till midnight."

The old trapper shouldered his gun, along with a back load of traps, and strode away across the bottom land.

It was nearly noon when young Martin came back from his trip up the creek. He brought in two beaver skins and several muskrats. The first he "stretched" upon circular hoops of grapevine, and the latter on bent willows. Then he ate his dinner and lay down on the bank for a nap.

When he awoke the wind was sousing at the great rate outside, so he found a smell of smoke in the cabin. He jumped up and ran out. There was a stiff southwest blowing a gale such as sometimes sweeps across these ocean-like expanses of Western prairie. The sun was almost hidden by a gray haze, and the smell of smoke was too strong to be mistaken.

The cabin door opened toward the east. He ran round on the other side and took one frightened look to westward. The wind was sweeping up the valley. Not more than a mile distant, and reaching up over the bottom on both sides of the creek, a low, dense cloud of smoke came rolling on, with vengeance yellow gleams flashing from its abe face. Already he could hear the crackle of the flames; and with each gust of wind the smoke grew thicker and hotter.

Confused and bewildered by the nearness of the danger, he tried to think of some way of escape. The creek! That would not do, for the water was but not more than knee-deep, and the low banks were overhung with tall grass and shrubs almost as dry as tinder.

"What a fate!" he cried. "I must set a back-fire. It's my only chance." He rushed into the cabin again, and tumbled eagerly in a creek between two logs, where the precious box of lucifers were kept. But not a match could be laid hands on. His father had put the box in his pocket—no time to take it. Meanwhile the fire was coming on at a fearful rate, almost keeping pace with the wind as it swept over the tall, dry grass. Soon the trapper began to drive into the cabin, and the roxy outside was deafening.

Martin sprang out of the door half wild with terror. The black smoke cloud, driven almost straight before the wind, had swooped down upon the cabin. The hot wind almost scorched his face as it whistled by the corner.

Filled with consternation, half dazed, indeed, Martin leaned on the cabin, pressed his hands to his hot cheeks, and looked up into the smoke andinders. It was that instinctive, upward glance so natural to one in trouble. But as he looked, he caught sight of the top limbs of the tall cottonwood, and a gleam of hope shot to his heart.

Clambering to the roof of the cabin, he seized the nearest limb and swung up into the tree. Then he climbed for dear life's sake.

The leaping flames were so near that the heat scorched his hair and neck, and instantly he seized the limb upon which Gasping for breath, he climbed on, with blistering face and smarting eyes, until he had nearly reached the topmost limbs.

There, in a great spire of fire, he caught a breath of fresher air.

The smoke cloud, driven straight ahead by the wind, did not rise to the top of the cottonwood. But Martin had not climbed an instant too soon. The red tongues of the flames, pointing at him and blown out by the wind, were hardly a hundred yards away.

Through the smoke he caught a glimpse of a deer fleeing blindly for its life, with its head thrown back and its tongue hanging out. Above the roar he heard a sudden scratching on the tree below him—and a panther, with hair scorchcd, dashed up the cottonwood trunk, past him, to the very top of the tree. But young Martin had little fear of the beast. It seemed a fell prowling from the common danger—a danger so appalling that each had little thought for the other.

With his hand behind his back, he looked straight down the creek, and saw the whole face of the earth involved in flame.

"Mercy!" young Martin cried. "The shanty's a-goner—and so am I! This old tree's hollow at the butt!"

Worse still, the tree stood on the leeward side of the cabin, not three feet distant from the walls. While Martin gazed in consternation, the log that the cabin took fire, and a streak of flame shot downward and outward on each side, and in five minutes the whole structure was a furnace of fiery heat. To descend past it, or climb into it, was impossible.

"No use," the lad thought despairingly, "no use trying to get past that. I've got to go down with the tree!"

He looked to see where he might expect to alight. The tree would fall with the wind of course. He could feel it bend to the gusts.

"I'll drop me on the other bank of the creek—and the panther along with me," he concluded. "We'll both break our necks."

Several minutes of suspense elapsed. The cabin seemed to be melting away into a heap of red coals. Then suddenly the tree snapped, gave an outward lurch, and Martin felt himself swinging off into space, and in a moment finding himself lying into space. Into space. Into space.

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TIP TOP ROLL OF HONOR.

Following the suggestion of Mr. Burt L. Standish, that appeared in his letter to Tip Top readers in No. 480, the following loyal Tip Toppers have won for themselves a place on our Honor Roll for their efforts to increase the circulation of the King of Weeklies. Get in line, boys and girls, and strive to have your name at the head of the list.

R. F. Vanatta, Denver, Colo.
E. P. Slocum, Iowa.
R. A. Lee, West Virginia.
Russell Ransom, Virginia.
E. J. Silverman, Oklahoma.
William Quackenbush, Albany, N. Y.
Frederic B. Eastman, Canada.
Allan F. Malone, Arizona.
V. D. Reynolds, New York State.

The names of other enthusiastic Tip Toppers will be added from time to time. Send in the result of your efforts to push the circulation of your favorite weekly and win a place on the Roll of Honor.

APPLAUSE.

Owing to the large number of letters received, the editor of Tip Top cannot undertake to secure their publication under six weeks. Those who contribute to this department must not expect to see them before that time.

FREE POST CARDS—Any boy who writes us, telling why he loves Tip Top, and what the magazine has done for him, as well as what he is doing on his part to increase its circulation, will, upon request, receive a set of six fine post cards of the principal characters in Tip Top free by mail. Be very sure and address your letter "Editor Tip Top Weekly Post Card Offer."

(A letter from Oklahoma.)

I love "Tip Top" because it is literature after my own heart. The leading characters and their trials and triumphs and adventures all go to make up a story that surpasses anything I have ever been able to get hold of. It is needless to say that I never miss a chance to praise "Tip Top," no true-hearted Tip-Topper would. I loan and give my "Tip Tops" to friends and acquaintances to read, and by so doing have got several young people and a few older ones to reading and praising "Tip Top." Three years ago a friend of mine gave me a few copies of "Tip Top," and I read them and went back and got all he had and devoured them also, and ever since I have been taking the magazine regularly, and doing the same thing my friend did to cause me to become a staunch admirer of "Tip Top." I loan my copies. Of the characters I like Frank, Dick, Dale, and Brad. Chet is all right, too. Of the girls I admire June best, but of course I like all the good girls, but I couldn't stand for that Zona. I could not remember all the characters that I liked, there were so many. So wishing long life to Burt L. Street & Smith, and "Tip Top," I remain,

CHAISMIZI.

Thanks, Charlie. We know you are bound to do your level best to circulate such good and uplifting literature among the lads of your acquaintance.

(A letter from New Jersey.)

I have long been an interested reader of your famous publication, and I can say that it is the best and most instructive weekly ever published. At first I was not allowed to take it, but my mother, reading "Dick Merriwell's Influence," soon quieted the objection. I have loaned copies to about ten boys, and all but one of these soon became interested. I am very much enthused over the characters, and of them all I like Dick best; but every other friend of both Dick and Frank find a place in my heart. I close my rather lengthy letter by giving three cheers and a hurray for R. L. Standish, Street & Smith, etc. but not least, "Tip Top." Hoping to see this in print, I remain,

SAMUEL, NEWARK.

Here it is, comrade, with many thanks for the good work you are doing across the tempestuous Hudson.

(A letter from Kansas.)

After reading every "Tip Top," with pleasure and profit, I want to add my opinion to the thousands of others of your highly interesting magazine. As an old-timer, I'll truthfully say, it is a magazine of worth and merit for boys from twelve to twenty-one, as it promotes outdoor life, which in turn gives health and strength, and makes the young man lead a clean, moral life. Not a "Tip Top" was sold here until I organized a club comprised of fifty members, and I shall keep the good work up. Yours truly,

MAY McNaught.

Thank you.

(A letter from California.)

I will tell you why I like the "Tip Top." It is the best weekly and the cleanest of all magazines, and teaches everybody how to be healthy and strong and learn how to play different games. It has taught me to take part in all sports. I am doing my part by establishing a club, and we purchase all the "Tip Tops" that we are able to get. I remain a loyal "Tip-Topper."

HENRY LORRIS,
President Tip Top Social Club.

What more could we ask? It is a mutual benefit affair—"Tip Top" assists its readers and in return they proceed to boost the circulation of the weekly. We fancy that idea more than we can say.

I have read the "Tip Top" for about six years, and think there is nothing like it. My husband is a literate reader of "Tip Top," as I am, and we often have a friendly dispute as to who shall read it first. I think Frank and Dick are ideal American boys, and I like all the characters in the stories, especially dear old Brad. I have encouraged quite a number of young people to begin reading "Tip Top," by giving them our back numbers. Wishing success to Burt L. Standish and Street & Smith, I remain a "Tip Top" reader.

MRS. T. F. CULLEY,
care of F. M. Ind. Tel. Office.

La Conner, Wash.

It gratifies us very much to know that we have so good a friend out in that far-off country, and "Tip Top" thanks this correspondent most heartily for the kind greeting she sends.

(A letter from Michigan.)

Thought I would write again to your Applause column, as I didn't see my first letter in "Tip Top," It is the best magazine in the country, and it truly deserves its name. I have been a subscriber about a year and wouldn't be without it. Is Frank's
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 have been a constant reader of the "Tip Top Weekly" for three years, and although I have tried several other papers, I think yours is undoubtedly the very best. Will you please tell me my weak points in measurements and a good way to remedy them? Age, 15 years; weight, 133 pounds; height, 6 feet 6½ inches; chest, contracted, 32½ inches; normal, 34½ inches; expanded, 37 inches; waist, 26½ inches; neck, 14 inches. When I was 16 years old I grew 6 inches in a year. I think this accounts for my light weight. Hoping to see your answer in print, I am, very truly,

John B. Billee.
Charleston, S. C.

For one who "shot up" so rapidly you are doing fairly well, and by giving a fair amount of time to athletic work, in a few years you probably may round out just as you should. Your goal is a chest measuring 41 inches normal, and a weight of about 172 pounds.

(Equation from Virginia.)

PROF. FOURMEN: I have read "Tip Top" for four years, and take the liberty of asking you a few questions. Age, 15 years; height, 5 feet 4 inches; weight, 119½ pounds; chest, normal, 31½ inches; expanded, 35½ inches; waist, 27 inches; thighs, 19½ inches; calf, 13½ inches; wrist, 7 inches; biceps, normal, 9 inches; expanded, 10½ inches; forearm, 10½ inches. What are my strong and weak points? Thanks in advance. A "Tip Top" forever.

Clarence Mitchell.

A bit too heavy—0 pounds. Chest should be 33 inches. Altogether you are in pretty good trim, and with a little work can become perfect.

(Equation from Texas.)

PROF. FOURMEN: Having been a reader of the king of weeklies, "Tip Top," for about six years, I take the liberty of asking a few questions and sending my measurements. They are as follows: Age, 14 years 9 months; height, 5 feet 7 inches; weight, about 128 pounds; chest, normal, 32 inches; expanded, 40 inches; waist, 26 inches; biceps, normal, 10 inches; flexed, 11 inches; thigh, 21 inches; calves, 14 inches; wrists, 6 inches; neck, 13 inches. How are my measurements? What are my weak points? How may I overcome them? Thanking you in advance, I remain a loyal Tip-Topper.

K. Ben Benham.

You weigh 23 pounds too much. Otherwise you are all right. Running will cut this down, but at the same time you might take up a training diet as given in athletic manuals.

(Equation from Michigan.)

PROF. FOURMEN: Being a constant reader of "Tip Top," I take the liberty to ask you to criticise my measurements. I am 16 years 2 months old; height, 5 feet 3 inches; weight, 122 pounds; neck, 13½ inches; waist, 29½ inches; chest, normal, 32 inches; expanded, 40½ inches; thighs, 13 inches; calves, 13 inches. With the "Tip Top" continued success, and hoping to see this in print, I remain a loyal Tip-Topper.

P. H. S.

Your chest is good, but I would like you to reduce your waist some. It is 4 inches above the normal, yet you only weigh a few pounds in excess of the average. To accomplish this you will

As a loyal Tip-Topper I feel it my duty to write you a few lines about what your magazine has done for me and what I have done to help the good cause along. I have been a reader of "Tip Top" for the last four years, and every Saturday I go to my newsdealer to get the latest copy. I like "Tip Top" because it contains good stories, and each and every chapter is different. Also because it points out the bad effects that narcotics and liquor have on the user. I have always done my best to help circulate the "Tip Top Weekly" among my friends. Having to see this in print, I will close with the line of M. V. L. H.

In a nutshell, my boy, you have described what our publication stands for. We hope you will long find benefit in reading of the Merriwells.
have to diet some and indulge in all gymnastics that bring the muscles of the torso into active play.

**PROF. FOURMEN:** Having read "Tip Top" for a long while, I would like to ask your advice as to my physical development. Age, 16 years; weight, 122 pounds; height, 5 feet 5 inches; in stocking feet: breadth of shoulders, 17 inches; neck, 13 inches; at base of neck, 1½ inches; chest, normal, 3¼ inches; expanded, 35½ inches; biceps; normal, 9½ inches; expanded, 10¼ inches; forearm, normal, 9 inches; expanded, 10¼ inches; wrists, 6½ inches; hips, 27 inches; waist, 25½ inches; thighs, 18 inches; calf, 12½ inches; ankle, 8 inches. While being measured I was stripped. Will you please show me my weak parts and how to remedy them. I can box as high as twenty-five rounds before getting tired, with any one my size, or ten rounds with anybody up to 20 pounds over my weight.


**A DEFENDER OF THE MANLY ART**

In weight, son, you are rather ahead of the game, but you lack some 3¼ inches about the chest, which you would do well to resolve to win.

---

(A letter from New York.)

**PROF. FOURMEN:** Having been a reader of "Tip Top" for some time, I take the liberty to send in my measurements. They are as follows: I am 12 years and 10 months old; height, 5 feet 3¼ inches; weight, 98 pounds; chest, normal, 3¼ inches; expanded, 35¼ inches; waist, 28 inches; biceps, normal, 8½ inches; expanded, 9¼ inches; forearm, 9 inches; wrist, 6¼ inches; neck, 12 inches; thigh, 20 inches; calf, 13 inches; ankle, 9½ inches; shoulders, 15 inches. Please tell me my weak points. Hoping this will escape the waste-basket, I remain a most enthusiastic 'Tip Topper.'

**CARRET J. FORSTER**

You should weigh about 117 pounds, and have a chest, normally, 35 inches. Daily runs will harden your muscles and improve your wind, but above all you should get a manual and set to work building up your lungs. These have a tremendous influence in making a successful sprinter or long-distance runner.

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**PROF. FOURMEN:** I am a reader of the "Tip Top." I take the privilege of asking you a few questions. I am 17 years old; height, 5 feet 7½ inches; weight, 222 pounds; chest, normal, 3¼ inches; expanded, 36 inches; neck, 13½ inches; hips, 30 inches; calf, 13½ inches; waist, 8 inches; ankle, 7½ inches. What are my weak points? What exercises and training should I take to make a pitcher this summer? Do I weigh enough? Am I short for my age and weight? Hoping to see this in the "Tip Top," I am, as before, Scouting Jack.

La Moive, N. D.

Your weight is about 18 pounds in excess. You have a fine chest. Your hips and calves both fall a bit below the average. This makes me feel sure that your extra weight must show in your waist. It should be 25 inches, but I wager it is much more. Take general exercises that make you perspire freely. Running will cut down your weight.

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**A LETTER FROM MASSACHUSETTS.**

**PROF. FOURMEN:** My measurements are: Height, 5 feet 6 inches; weight, 132 pounds; chest, 31-3½ inches; waist, 32 inches; calf, 15 inches; biceps, 13 inches. I am fairly strong, but I have poor wind. Please tell me what position on a football team I am adapted to, and how I should train for it. I drink coffee black and smoke a pipe three times a day; are these harmful habits? With many thanks, I am respectfully, H. E. Ross.

Consider what the measurements of an average athlete of your height should be and you cannot fail to note just where you fall short. Weight, 120 pounds; chest, normal, 35 inches; waist, 27 inches. You have poor wind because your chest is too small, your weight too heavy, and your waist very large. I would certainly advise general exercises to alter these extremes. And you would certainly be better off without the coffee and tobacco. As to the position you should play in football, that must depend entirely upon what you can do best. Without good wind your running must be weak. Build up first of all.

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**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 fewest games, will be declared the winners. Of the two winning teams, the one having the higher average big and will be declared the Tip Top Championship Team of the All-American Baseball 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 made out, one for each game.

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**1909—TIP TOP BASEBALL TOURNAMENT COUPON.**

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**WINNER** | **FINAL SCORE** | **MANAGER**
ALL OF THE BACK NUMBERS OF

TIP TOP WEEKLY

THAT CAN NOW BE SUPPLIED

PRICE, FIVE CENTS PER COPY

If you want any back numbers of our weekly 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
The following books in the NEW MEDAL LIBRARY contain numbers 1 to 417 of the TIP TOP WEEKLY. Many of the individual numbers before 417 are entirely out of print so that the thousands of boys who are interested in the early adventures of Frank and Dick Merriwell and who want to read everything that was written about them, will welcome this opportunity to secure their favorite reading in a form that is more readily preserved. PRICE, FIFTEEN CENTS.