Dick Merriwell's Sympathy;

OR,

HELPING A BOY IN NEED.

By BURT L. STANDISH.

CHAPTER I.

THE DOGS AND THEIR MASTER.

"Listen!" exclaimed Ned Fairmont, stopping in his tracks with his left hand uplifted. "There are those hounds again. Hear them?"

Dick Merriwell paused, dropped his Winchester into the crook of his left arm and cocked an ear to windward.

"Sure," he nodded. "I've heard them faintly at intervals since we got the sound of them in full cry over by Bald Mountain."

Faint and far away sounded the musical baying of hounds. The voices of the dogs came clear and sweet down the frosty forest aisles. There was a tingle in the air, and just enough snow upon the ground for good tracking. The pools in the hollows were frozen over, but the ice was thin and treacherous.

"Those dogs are not running rabbits, Merriwell," said Fairmont, as the baying became more and more distinct. "I'll bet something they're after a deer, and it wouldn't surprise me if the animal came down through this runway."

"But it's against the law to hunt deer with dogs." Fairmont drew the heavy glove from his right hand and unbuttoned his fur-lined hunting jacket, in order to reach his watch.

"Almost eleven o'clock," he said. "It looks as if we stood a fine chance to lose our dinner if we stay out until we stalk a deer. If that animal comes down through here we might——"

"Wouldn't we make ourselves amenable to the law if we shot a deer in front of dogs, even though the dogs didn't belong to us?"

"I don't see why," laughed Fairmont. "We're not responsible for what somebody else's dogs may do. We have no dogs of our own. If another man's hounds happen to drive a deer our way we have a right to shoot it."

The long-drawn baying of the hounds suddenly burst forth into a wild, sharp chorus that sounded surprisingly near at hand.

"They're certainly hot on the animal's track," said Dick.

"And beyond doubt they're coming straight this way!" exclaimed Fairmont, tingling with excitement. "The deer is going to follow this runway. Get be-
hind these spruces, Merriwell. You can have the first shot. I'll conceal myself farther down the runway and take a crack at the deer if you miss."

"Just a moment, Ned," said Dick. "You're dead sure we won't be breaking the law? You're absolutely certain we won't become involved in trouble if we shoot this deer in front of those dogs?"

"You leave it to me, Merriwell," laughed Fairmont. "I know the high sheriff of the county. He's a particular friend of my father's, and we could fix it up even if we were caught hunting with our own dogs. My old man has influence and a pull, you understand. Get in behind those spruces, quick! The deer is liable to show up any minute."

Merriwell hid himself behind the spruces, selecting a position which enabled him, although effectively concealed, to get a good view of the runway. Looking up the little valley, he could see the blue sky beyond the end of the archway of trees. Down the runway lay Hornet Creek, a fairly sizable branch of the turbulent Swiftwater.

The action of Dick's heart was accelerated, and he felt his blood tingling in his body as the baying of the hounds became more and more distinct with each passing moment. For a little he almost fancied he was on the verge of an attack of "buck fever." A breath of air stirring the branches of an oak near by sent two brown leaves fluttering downward like wounded birds. The maples and nearly all other deciduous trees were bare of leaves, but those dead and curled amid the branches of the oak still clung tenaciously to their stems, as if the tree had been loath to yield to the reign of winter.

Suddenly Dick became cool and calm, although there was still a delicious feeling tingling within him. His right hand bared, he pushed off the "safety" with his thumb and was ready for business.

Fairmont had concealed himself farther down, and both the young hunters were so effectively hidden that there was not one chance in a thousand of their detection by a dog-pursued deer. The wind also was right, so that the animal could not get their scent.

Nearer and nearer came the dogs, filling the forest with their wild clamor. With his gun lifted and ready, Merriwell leaned forward, watching, expecting any instant to see the deer come flying down the gully.

There was a sudden crashing sound in an unexpected direction. Straight across the gully upon the far side, up amid some thick bushes, a figure burst into view.

It was a tall, bearded man, who came bounding down the slope dodging this way and that amid the trees. In his hand he carried a rifle.

"Hello! hello!" exclaimed Dick mentally. "There's the hunter himself. Well, he looks like a poacher. He looks like a lawbreaker. He certainly must be a desperate character."

In truth the man looked like a desperate character. His teeth could be seen through an opening in that ragged beard. His eyes seemed to flash beneath heavy, bushy eyebrows. His clothes were rough and patched. On his feet were long-legged boots, into the tops of which his trousers were carelessly tugged. On his head was an old fur cap with the fur almost wholly worn away. Despite the chill crispness of the weather, the man's woolen shirt was open at the neck, exposing a bit of his brawny chest.

Dick could hear him panting as he came leaping and dodging down the slope. Once the man's foot slipped or caught, and he uttered an oath as he nearly fell. But, with the agility of one much younger, he maintained his equilibrium and flung himself at last into the shelter of some low bushes well down toward the bottom of the runway.

Already Dick Merriwell had decided that he was not at all anxious to shoot the deer himself. He would let this poacher, this lawbreaker, do that. And when it was done, it would be an unwise thing to permit the man to know his act had been witnessed by others. For men who defied the game laws—especially men who looked like the bearded giant kneeling behind the low bushes on the opposite side of the gully—were in nine cases out of ten individuals who held human life of scarcely more value than that of beasts. One might have dealings with a poacher with perfect freedom and security as long as the lawbreaker was unawares by any condition which would awaken the primitive passions of his nature. But it would not be healthy for an innocent hunter, even, to detect one of these poachers in the act of breaking the law.

For a moment Merriwell was tempted to let the man know there were other human beings in that vicinity. Then he thought of Fairmont, and realized that his friend must have seen the poacher and must be aware that the man was hidden yonder behind those low bushes. Fairmont, at whose camp, Balsam Bungalow, Merriwell was stopping, knew the ways of these lawless hunters of the great woods, and if he thought it best why did he not step forth and make his presence known?
While Dick asked himself this question the deer appeared far up the runway and came flying down beneath the overarching trees. It was too late now, Merriwell decided, and so he kept still, watching and waiting. His blood was leaping, his nerves quivering like violin strings, and his whole being beset by sensations impossible to describe.

The dogs were close at the deer’s heels. They appeared up there at the crest of the ridge, from which the runway cut a V-shaped figure against the gray-blue sky, and all the woods rang with their wild uproar.

Straight down the middle of the runway flew the deer. Dick expected to see a puff of smoke from the midst of the bushes opposite and hear the sharp report of the death-dealing rifle. He looked to see the deer go down, for at such close range the hunter, who doubtless was a splendid marksman, would certainly smash the creature’s forward shoulders.

But, to Merriwell’s amazement, the deer passed and flew onward down the glen, while of a sudden the crouching man rose, having dropped his rifle, and leaped down into the path of the pursuing dogs, uplifting his voice in shouts which could be heard above the barking of the animals.

"Here, drat yer, Turk, come here!" he roared, flinging himself at the leading dog. "Come here, durn yer hide! Ah! yah! I’ve got yer!"

His hands fastened on the leather collar of the deerhound, and with a surge he flung the creature off its feet and snapped it to the ground, causing the dog to set up a sudden whining howl of pain.

At the same time the man yelled at the other dog.

"Rouser—you, Rouser, come here! Come here, you brute! I’ll kick the head off yer if you don’t mind!"

Evidently Turk was the leader, for Rouser, despite his wild excitement in pursuit of the deer, stopped reluctantly, and slowly turned to obey the command of his master.

"Come here—come right here!" insisted the man, slapping his leg with his open hand. "You’re a pretty pair, ain’t yer, breaking loose at this particular time and trying to git your master into trouble? I ought to skin yer both alive. But you’re good dogs—you’re mighty good dogs. I can’t blame yer much. Why, when I heard you arter that deer I got the fever myself. It was mighty hard letting the critter go by, but I ain’t doing no shooting hereabouts today."

While he talked he had brought forth a rope about ten or twelve feet in length with a snaphook at either end. These hooks he clicked into the rings upon the dogs’ collars, and then, holding the rope by the middle, he had them well in leash.

They fawned upon him now, betraying their affection for the man who could handle them and who had more than once displayed his mastery over them.

"Oh, yes; oh, yes, you rascals!" half laughed the huge man, as the dogs licked his hands and leaped around him. "You ought to be glad to git off without a hiding. You’ve give me a good run of it this morning, ain’t yer? But I ketched yer at last. Now I’ll pick up my gun and we’ll git home lively before we run into some unpleasant, disagreeable folks who might take to asking questions that wouldn’t be easy to answer."

CHAPTER II.

THE POACHER’S STORY.

Ned Fairmont stepped forth from his place of concealment.

"Oh, Branch!" he called. "How are you?"

The man had just picked up his gun. With the weapon ready, he whirled like a flash, half lifting it, the muzzle turned toward Fairmont.

Dick Merriwell’s heart leaped into his mouth, and instantly he threw the butt of his Winchester against his shoulder and drew a bead on the owner of the dogs.

"Don’t shoot!" he cried. "If you do, you’re a dead man!"

The bearded giant jerked his head round and looked over his right shoulder. He saw Merriwell’s head and shoulders rising above the clump of spruces, and he likewise saw the rifle pointed straight at him.

There was a moment of silence, and then the man huskily said:

"Well, you’ve got me. You’ve caught me foul. But yer didn’t ketch me killing no deer in front of my dogs."

Fairmont advanced, smiling.

"Why, we’re not looking for you, Branch," he said pleasantly. "It’s all right, Dick. He won’t hurt me. We’re well acquainted."

"Why, is it you, Mr. Fairmont?" breathed the giant, in surprise and evident relief. "I didn’t know you at first. You see, I was fold a day or two ago that some parties was a-planning to ketch me deer-hunting—with dogs, and I thought mebbe you was the gents. Who’s t’other feller?"
"A friend of mine," answered Fairmont. "We were out still-hunting, and we heard your dogs; decided they were running a deer and the creature would come down this way, so we got out of sight and waited. If you hadn't happened along I presume we would have found it possible to get back to the bungalow for dinner and take a deer with us."

"You was going to shoot that deer?"

"Yes. The dogs didn't belong to us, you know. It's not our fault if some strang dogs happen to drive a deer our way, is it?"

The man called Branch grinned in the depths of his ragged beard.

"Sartin not," he agreed. "Why didn't you shoot the critter?"

"I gave my friend the best position," said Fairmont, with a motion toward Dick. "He didn't see fit to shoot."

"Hardly," laughed Dick, who had lowered his rifle and stepped forth from the scrub spruces.

"You see," continued Fairmont, still speaking to the owner of the dogs, "your unexpected appearance rather upset our arrangements. I imagine Merriwell thought, as did I, that you were going to get that deer yourself."


"Well," drawled the man, as he tucked his rifle under one arm and brought forth a plug of tobacco, from which he twisted a chew with his stout, yellow teeth, "it was sartinly a monstrous big temptation. I admit I had mighty hard work to refrain. Why, I could have dropped the critter in its tracks. But I'm not hunting any to-day—not with dogs."

"You think the wardens are looking for you, eh? Is that it?" questioned Fairmont.

"I've had friendly word that they're around these parts," said Branch, as he rolled the tobacco into his cheek. "They'd like to ketch me again. They've got it in for me, you know. I s'pose old McClenen is behind it. Dern his hide! He ain't satisfied with arresting my Jack on a lying charge and holding him down there in the county jail at Creston arter they're ketch a tramp with some of the loot that was stole."

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

"Down, Rouser—down!" growled Bill Branch, giving one of the dogs a cuff.

After a moment's hesitation he decided that he would tell the story.

"You've allus treated me square, Mr. Fairmont," he said. "You hired me one year as a guide, and you backed me up when they made some lying charges agin' me and tried to git me into trouble. I ain't forgot that; no, sir! I used to have an idea that all rich men was alike, and that they didn't none of them give a poor man a square deal. I know now that there's a difference. All the same, old Henry McClenen is a skunk. He's got so much money he don't know what to do with it, so he comes up here and he buys miles and miles and miles of this ere woods and mountains, and he builds himself a fine camp that's elegant enough to be a mansion for most folks. Then he runs his wire fence round a big lot of his woods, and he raises deer on that fenced-off land, so that when he wants to do so he can turn 'em loose and give his friends a lot of sport shooting tame deer."

"Fine business, ain't it? He's got a pull, he has. He can do anything he likes, regardless of the law. Don't I know? Didn't he bring a whole lot of rich folks up here one year out of season and turn some of his deer loose so that they could hunt 'em? And when there was a complaint made agin' him whatever come of it? Did they arrest him? Did they bring him to trial? No, sir! That's what a rich man can do; but if one of us poor devils happens to kill a deer out of season or hunt with dogs, we git arrested and fined and sent to jail for it. It looks to me as if the laws weren't made for the rich to mind. They was made—a good many of them—to make it harder for us poor people to git along and remain honest."

"They've had me once, I done my time for hunting out of season, and when I come out I had made up my mind that I'd be mighty careful in future not to run agin' the law. But it wasn't long before I see others a-doing it without nobody making trouble for 'em. Why, down at the Great Notch Hotel they serve venison in different forms with it out of season for venison. But nobody has ever seen any calves killed thereabouts or shipped any to the hotel. If they know you down there, they'll tell you on the side that what's marked venison on their bill of fare is good venison. The wardens know it, too. The wardens know old McClenen hunts deer any season he wants to, regardless of the law. Why don't they arrest him? Why don't they git after the Great Notch House?"

"Don't ask me," said Fairmont. "You know the answer as well as I do."

"You know the answer," growled Branch. "Them folks has got a pull, and they can fix it up with the politicians and the high sheriff and the wardens. I ain't got no pull, and so if there's no meat in my house, and I happen to shoot a deer out of season,
and I’m ketched at it, they send me to the county jail and make me pay a fine. Let me tell you something. There’s a man what pays me so much every time I hang a deer in a certain tree. There’s never been no written contract atween us, and no one has ever heard us making any sort of an agreement. When I git a deer and I need some money, I hang it on that tree. Next day it’s gone, and some time within a few days that man drops round and hands me over the price without no witness to see him do it. I ain’t a-calling his name, for I know he’s not responsible. But I’ll guarantee I know where them deer go, every one of them. They help furnish the veal down at the Great Notch House.”

“I shouldn’t wonder if you’re right, Bill.”

“I’m plumb sartin I’m right,” growled the giant. “But what good would it do me if I was to tell in court what I know? I couldn’t prove it, and the consequences would be I’d just git soaked all the harder. So I have to look out—I have to look out and not git ketched. Being warned that they was looking for me, I’m taking particular pains. My dogs broke loose some time last night. They was gone this morning. I knowed they’d run the first deer they could git scent of, and so I’ve been out trying to git hold of ’em all the morning. For even if I wasn’t with the dogs and the wardens should see ’em, they’d shoot Turk and Rouser. They’re two mighty valuable animals, Mr. Fairmont. I can’t afford to lose them.”

“You spoke about your son, Jack. What’s happened to him?”

“Oh, yes, I was going to tell you. You know some years ago how my oldest boy, Tom, was arrested on a false charge and locked up down at the county jail. You know how they chopped him in with a tramp and a burglar. The tramp was covered with crawling things, and so was my boy arter he’d been kept there a while with them two critters. He was always an honest boy, Mr. Fairmont, but he learned some bad things with them two men. They couldn’t prove nothing agin’ him when they brought him to trial; but he’d been kept in the jail for near three months waiting for court to set. Them three months was his ruin. I dunno where he is now. Before he skipped he broke into two or three of the camps and stole stuff. When he heard there was a warrant sworn out for him he just pulled up and got away. He’s never come back. That’s the way my boy Tom was ruined, sir. I believe he’d been as honest and square as any man if they hadn’t put him in with a dirty tramp and a burglar, who give him lessons in crime.”

“And that’s not the first time such a thing has happened,” muttered Dick Merriwell.

“And now,” continued Bill Branch bitterly, “they’ve gone and arrested my youngest boy, Jack. He ain’t only fifteen, but they’ve arrested him, and they’ve got him down there in the county jail waiting for trial.”

“Oh what charge?” asked Fairmont.

“Breaking and entering. Old Hen McClellan’s boy, Phil, was the one what swore out the charge agin’ my boy. He claimed that Jack had broke into his camp and stole stuff. Since then there’s been a tramp ketched with some of the plunder in his possession, but they’re still holding my boy down there at Creston, and mebbe they’ve got him in a cell with other criminals what will teach him the same sort of lessons that was taught my Tom. You see, old McClellan’s son he’s got it in for me and my family. He tried to shine up to my girl, Rose, last summer, but she wouldn’t have anything to do with him. One time when he met her at Iron Forge he had been drinking, and he tried to kiss her right before a lot of his friends. ‘She smacked him with her open hand and knocked him flat. Ever since then he’s been watching for a chance to soak us. Now he’s got it, and he means to make the most of it.’

“Dad—oh, dad!”

The clear, ringing call echoed through the wood.

A girl in short skirts appeared up the slope and come running down toward them, her dark hair falling in loose ringlets upon her shoulders. Her cheeks were flushed and her manner was excited.

“That’s Rose!” exclaimed Bill Branch. “There’s something up. There’s something the matter, else she wouldn’t be here.”

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CHAPTER III.

ROSE BRANCH.

Despite the fact that the girl was light-footed, quick, and sure of step and displayed a certain ease and grace of bearing, Dick saw that she was sturdy of limb and possessed the strength and endurance of one who had been reared in the woods and lived close to nature.

Her dark hair, which was naturally wavy and inclined to curl, was held back by a knot of crimson ribbon. There was another knot of crimson at her throat, and this touch of color gave her a certain picturesqueness which was distinctly striking. She wore
a loose, short blouse and a skirt which reached only a short distance below her knees. Her legs were hidden by buckskin leggings, and on her feet she wore water-proof moccasins.

Although her clothing was rather light, the flush in her cheeks seemed to indicate that the blood ran warmly in her veins. Her eyes were dark and clear. Her face was tanned a healthy brown. When parted, lips full, red, and curving revealed some good strong white teeth. Her throat was full and round and smooth, and there was something musical in her clear, strong voice.

Dick Merriwell had scarcely expected to see such a vision there in the deep woods, and he caught himself staring at her almost rudely.

She came flying down the slope and paused a short distance away, her dark eyes surveying the two young men whom she had found in company with her father.

"What's the matter, gal?" asked old Bill. "What's brought yer out here so fur?"

She evaded the question by saying:

"So you've caught the dogs, have yer, dad?"

"Yep, I got the dratted critters at last. This is Mr. Fairmont, Rose. You've heard me speak of him. He was the feller that give little Jack the shotgun. I dunno the young gent with him."

Ned Fairmont bowed, cap in hand.

"It's a great pleasure to meet you, Miss Branch," he declared, with all the gallantry he might have expressed in words and bearing had she been a society girl of Saratoga or Newport, as were many of his fair friends. "Permit me to introduce Mr. Merriwell."

The color in the girl's cheeks heightened.

"I'm certainly glad to know yer, Mr. Fairmont," she said. "You was good to our little Jack, and dad has always said you're the only rich man who is white all through. How do you do, Mr. Merriwell?"

"Miss Branch," said Dick, as he bowed with that fine way of his which was not expressive of gallantry overdone, but which somehow was perfect, polished, and complete in its manly politeness, "Mr. Fairmont and I were complaining that our luck was poor this morning. We'll have no further cause to growl. Indeed, it has suddenly become one of the pleasantest mornings I've spent in the big woods."

Only for his manner and the indescribable tone in which the words were spoken this might have sounded a bit flat and tame. Coming from the lips of almost any other person it would have fallen dead. But Fairmont noticed that the heavy-lashed lids of the girl's dark eyes drooped slowly, and he knew Dick's words had produced an effect far deeper than Merriwell had intended they should.

"Is anything wrong at the house, Rose?" asked Bill Branch. "You needn't be afeared of Mr. Fairmont nor his friend. I cal'late they wouldn't make no trouble for any of us."

"You can be dead certain of that, Branch," assured Fairmont.

The girl drew nearer.

"There's been a man at the house looking for you this morning, dad," she said.

"Hey? A man looking fur me?"

"Yes."

"When was he there?"

"'Bout two hours ago. He came up from the direction of P'izen Pond."

"What did he want?"

"Well, I dunno. He asked to see the dogs."

Bill Branch scowled.

"Oh, he did, hey?"

"Yes, dad."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him the dogs had broke loose last night and you was out a-looking for them."

"What did he say to that?"

"Not much, only he asked how long you had been away. I told him ever since right arter breakfast. He talked some more, and I cal'late he was trying to trip me up, for he spoke about you taking the dogs with you. I told him sharp that you didn't take 'em, but you went hunting for 'em. He asked if there was any deer around."

"Warden or spy, sure as shooting!" exclaimed Branch.

"I sort of took him for that," nodded the girl.

"What kind of a looking critter was he?"

"Tall and long-armed, with a bunch of whiskers on his chin and one eye that squinted."

"Hop Higgins!" growled Branch. "They've sent him over from Comas County. They thought mebbe I didn't know 'bout him, and so he'd be able to ketch me. What become of this gent, Rose?"

"He went back down the old road toward P'izen Pond. There was another man waiting for him."

"Oh, another man, hey?"

"Yep, dad. I cut across through the slashing and saw them away down the road just passing out of sight. The second man was smaller than the one that came to the house, but I can't tell how he looked except that he was dressed in black. He wasn't carrying no gun."
Bill Branch turned to Fairmont and Merriwell.

"Gents," he said, "if these ere sneaking spies should arrest me for dogging deer to-day, mebbe I'll call on you to witness that I wasn't a-doing anything of the sort."

"If such an accusation is made against you, Branch," said Fairmont immediately, "don't hesitate to call on me."

"And don't leave me out," urged Dick Merriwell. "Even if it should cost me any end of inconvenience to testify I'd appear for you."

"Thank ye, young gents—thank ye heartily," said Branch, with sincere feeling in his voice. "Only for such as you I might believe, as some other folks do, that all rich people was agin' the poor. That's the idee my boy Tom—poor feller!—got into his head arter being juggled for something he had no hand in and associating with the scum down there in Creston jail. And I couldn't help feeling mighty that way myself when they took little Jack and locked him up and kept him arter there was no reason for keeping him. Say, Mr. Fairmont, mebbe you might be able to say a word for my boy Jack. You know that skunk Phil McClellen, don't yer? Couldn't you induce him to let up on the kid?"

"I know McClellen," nodded Fairmont; "but I'm afraid I haven't much influence with him. We're not on the most friendly relations. In fact, he has a grudge against me because I got a camp site he wanted himself and so forced him to find another. But I'll tell you what I'll do, Bill; I'll see Judge Hammond down at Creston when we go out a few days from now and put in a good word for the boy. I'll do my best to have the judge release Jack, and I think I can fix it all right. At any rate, they should accept proper bail for his appearance in court."

"They will," nodded Branch eagerly. "But how was I to raise a thousand dollars for bail? And there wasn't nobody hereabouts would risk so much on little Jack. They thought he might run away, you know. I s'pose they figured at first that he must be guilty, and so he'd skip if he got the chance."

"Bill, will you guarantee that the boy shall appear in court to answer to the charge against him if the charge is pressed?"

"Yes, sir, I'll promise the kid shall be there."

"Then," said Fairmont, "I'll go his bail and send him back to you as soon as we get out of the woods. We won't be more than three or four days, for Merriwell can't stay longer."

 Dragging the dogs, Bill Branch took two long strides toward Fairmont, whose hand he grasped in a crushing grip.

"If there's ever anything I can do for yer, sir," he said, his voice a bit unsteady, "you can bet your life I'll be there."

Rose Branch drew near, lifting her heavy eyelashes to cast one flitting glance at Dick.

"It's very good of you, Mr. Fairmont," she said, putting out her own hand. "They've kept Jackie down there a long time now, and I know he must be dreadful homesick."

"I don't think there'll be much trouble in getting him out, Miss Branch," smiled Fairmont.

A few moments later Bill Branch and his daughter climbed the slope. The weary dogs, their tongues hanging from their mouths, followed at the man's heels. The girl turned to look back at the two young men below and waved her hand. They lifted their caps, and then she followed her father into the depths of thick evergreens and passed from view.

CHAPTER IV.

SCHOOLS OF CRIME.

"Well," said Fairmont, "what do you think of her, Merriwell?"

"Crude, uneducated, but wonderfully attractive," answered Dick. "Given certain chances, she would be a very handsome girl."

"I've always heard she was a good looker, but this is the first time I've ever seen her. Her old man has been rather careful with her. He doesn't let her attend the dances over at Flume Falls. That's where society hereabouts enjoys the diversion of the light fantastic every Saturday night throughout the winter. I've been there. About every other dance they have a grand knock-down and drag-out. It seems a part of the programme for the gentlemen of this region to get well filled with redeye and proceed to chew each other up. A dance without a fight is a tame affair."

Dick laughed.

"Yes," he said, "I know something about such dances. They were once a great deal more common than they are now. In the old days almost any country dance meant the pulling off of at least one personal encounter during the evening."

"Rose Branch would surely be the belle were she to attend the Flume dances," nodded Ned. "I can imagine these strapping woodsmen and ruralites scrap-
ping over her favors. By his appearance, you might not fancy Bill Branch a man with sufficient good sense to keep his daughter away from such a place, but it's certain that he has kept her away."

"Unless she has stayed away from choice, Ned. Perhaps she doesn't care for such dances."

Fairmont shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

"Not likely," he said. "She was brought up here in the woods, and she knows little or nothing of a different life. To the people of this region the Flume dances seem all right, and a girl like that would scarcely have the good judgment to discriminate and keep away. Oh, no, I give her parents the credit. They say her mother is a woman of some intelligence."

"Then let's presume it's her mother who has restrained the girl," said Dick. "It's my opinion that Rose is impulsive, and perhaps a trifle thoughtless."

"And susceptible," laughed Fairmont. "Great Scott! but you struck home with your smooth compliment at the very outset. You put the red flag into her cheeks and had her looking for something on the ground. You've got a way with you, Merriwell."

"Now, I declare, Fairmont, it was wholly unintentional. I simply tried to be agreeable and courteous."

"Oh, I don't mean to infer that you did it intentionally, but it's a sure thing that, were you that kind of a man and thus inclined, you could turn the girl's head without half trying. Not that I think she's a bigger fool than other girls of her age, but she's simply unsophisticated and natural and inclined to believe all flattering remarks are sincere."

"But I was sincere in what I said," protested Dick. "Really, you know, this morning was something of a disappointment to me until that girl appeared. I have an eye for the beautiful, the picturesque, and the striking. Just take a glance up that slope. The ground is white with snow, the trees are open up to a point where the evergreens begin. She came suddenly through those evergreens and ran down the slope toward this spot. It was like a vision, and it reminded me somehow of Diana, the huntress. She was graceful, fearless, and sure-footed. She was the personification of youth and freedom and a certain wild innocence. Just the sight of her, as she came running down that slope, repaid me well for my morning's tramp and disappointment, and I'll not forget it in a long time. Were I an artist, I'd try to put the picture on canvas."

"Oh, ho; oh, ho!" laughed Fairmont. "You're a person of impressions yourself. Well, if you're satisfied with the morning I suppose we may as well abandon the idea of shooting anything and strike back for the bungalow. It will be time for dinner when we get there."

"I'm agreeable," nodded Dick.

They turned up the runway.

"I suppose I'll be taking a chance by going bail for the boy," muttered Ned; "but I said I'd do it, and I will."

"I hardly think you'll be taking a great risk. Branch insists that it's persecution. He claims there's no reason why the boy should be held longer."

"Yes, I know, but Tom Branch was a bad pill. He certainly went wrong beyond question."

"You heard his father tell why."

"Yes, I heard the old man's ideas of it, but it doesn't seem reasonable that a young fellow should be turned to the bad so easily unless his inclinations lead him in that direction."

"Ned, there's a point in the life of thousands of young fellows at which they may be turned in either direction by the slightest influence. If a good influence is brought to bear upon them, they become honest men and respected citizens. If a bad influence takes possession of them, they become bad men. I have a belief that hundreds upon hundreds of naturally honest chaps have been ruined in our jails and institutions where, through some youthful folly, they have been confined in company with criminals of the most degraded sort. Our jails, Fairmont, as conducted today, are schools of crime. Nine out of ten are overcrowded, unsanitary, and neglected."

"A person arrested and held on suspicion is often incarcerated in such vile places in company with the worst of crooks. There he hears the stories of crime and learns how to pick pockets, to rob dwelling houses, and to crack safes, perhaps. His impressionable mind is filled with base and vicious thoughts and ideas. He is given a false view of life. Embittered by the injustice to himself, he is in precisely the mood to strike out upon a career of crime and retaliation against society. I tell you, Ned, there are few things more harmful than the unthinking punishment of youths and boys for petty offenses."

"You, I, and almost any fellow we know might have been arrested and punished by law for some petty lawbreaking which we did as boys. We might have been branded as criminals. Our lives might have been embittered. Especially had we been poor might this
have happened, for then there would have been no one to take an interest in us and to see that we got a fair, square, merciful deal. Preachers and reformers are crying out against the terrible wave of crime which is sweeping over our land. Let them begin their work of reformation by cleaning up our jails and establishing juvenile courts where youthful offenders may be shown the error of their ways and placed on probation instead of being sent to spend weeks and months in company with wretches who will degrade them both morally and physically."

"Good idea, Merriwell," agreed Fairmont. "Your brother had some original ideas, and has done a great work for the advancement and uplifting of the American youth. It's apparent to me that you're destined to do as great a work—perhaps a greater."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Dick. "I have my doubts if any one will ever be able to do a greater work for the boys of this country than my brother has done and is doing. I am glad you promised to bail Jack Branch out of the county jail. If you hadn't made such an agreement I should have done so myself. I should have taken the chance, Fairmont."

"And what if you had bailed the boy out only to have him skip and betray you? What if it had cost you a thousand dollars, say, for your little experiment? Wouldn't that have been discouraging?"

"I should have been sorry, but not discouraged," said Dick. "I should have felt that one failure of this sort was no reason why I should neglect any future opportunities to put out a helping hand to other unfortunate lads."

"You Merriwells are queer," laughed Fairmont. "You all seem to be thinking more about other people than about yourselves."

Fairmont seemed wholly familiar with the forest, for without consulting a map or compass he chose his direction and swung steadily on, confident that he was taking the shortest and most direct route to Balsam Bungalow. The law did not require that he should employ a guide, and his familiarity with these great forest, stretches made it unnecessary for him to do so.

Suddenly two men appeared at the edge of a clearing, and one of them hailed Fairmont and Merriwell. He was a tall man, and he carried a Winchester rifle. His clothes from head to heel were those of a woodsman who knew the proper garments to wear in that region. He had a tobacco-stained bunch of whiskers upon his chin. His left eye drooped at the corner near the temple, where there was a tiny scar which had plainly come from a wound or injury of some sort.

This man advanced with long swinging strides, followed by a rather short, somewhat plump, smooth-faced individual in shiny black clothes and incongruous long-legged boots. The man in black trotted like a dog at the heels of his companion.

"Hey there, you fellers!" cried the tall man. "Hold on a minute; I want to see you!"

"Hello!" breathed Dick. "If I'm not mistaken, those are the two men Rose Branch saw on the road to Poison Pond."

CHAPTER V.

THE GAME WARDEN.

"You fellers ain't seen no dogs a-running deer to-day, have yer?" inquired the tall man. "I could hear some hounds a while ago, but I don't hear nothing more of them, and there ain't been no shooting, either."

"You're right, Merriwell," muttered Fairmont, as he stood looking the tall man over. "That's the person Bill Branch called Higgins. He's evidently a warden."

"Hold on! hold on!" panted the little man, as he scrambled and crashed through a fallen mess of tops, over which his companion had strode with perfect ease. "You've nearly killed me this morning. I fear I shall never reach Flume Falls alive. I fear, like the Israelites of old, I'm doomed to wander forty years in the wilderness."

"Aw, shut up!" growled the tall man. "I told yer I'd get you over to the Falls if it didn't interfere with my business. It's business before anything else with me. I'll land yer there, parson, if you stick by me."

"But I'm nearly exhausted and ready to perish," croaked the little man, rolling his eyes upward in despair.

"Well, you can rest while I'm questioning these fellers. I s'pose mebbe I've made yer stretch them short legs some a-chasing me through the woods and me trying to head off them dogs. I'd like to know what in—"

"Don't swear, Mr. Higgins—I beg you not to swear!" gasped the little man. "You've shocked me frightfully with your outbursts of violent language."

"Ahem!" coughed the tall man. "It's been enough to make anybody swear. Three times I reckoned they dogs was coming my way and laid to head 'em off,
only to have 'em turn and take another direction. But now I'll be——"

"Please—please don't say it!" gasped the little man in black, clasping his hands nervously.

"I'll be hanged if I've heard a sound for the last half hour or more. Last I did hear, they certain was close at the deer's heels, for it was a deer they was running. Mebbe they run the critter down in a bog somewhere. And me not there to shoot 'em! Why, if I could only get them dogs in the act of running a deer there'd be no trouble about soaking their owner. Have you gents heard anything of them dogs?"

"You're a game warden, aren't you?" asked Fairmont.

"If I be," was the retort, "I judge by the appearance of you fellers that you're not poachers or pot hunters. Legitimate, honest deer hunting is all right, and it's the wardens what will give you sportsmen a chance at it. You've got to stand by us, or the pot hunters will clean the deer out of these woods. There's a certain offender living in these parts who's proved rather hard to ketch. Mebbe you know the man I mean? His name is Branch. I've got every reason to believe it was his dogs we heard running deer a while ago. He's a damned——"

"Oh, Mr. Higgins, please don't swear!" gasped the parsonish-appearing little man.

"He's a damaging the deer hunting in these parts," finished the warden, giving the man in black a contemptuous look. "I've been told to get him, and I always obey orders."

"Well, Mr. Higgins," said Fairmont, "you may have some trouble yourself about getting him honestly and squarely. I happen to know Bill Branch. I saw him only a short time ago. My friend and I saw his dogs running a deer."

"Aha!" cried the warden. "There's evidence!"

"Wait a minute, Mr. Higgins," said Fairmont. "The dogs were running a deer of their own accord."

"That doesn't make any difference. Their owner was responsible. He's got to keep his dogs chained up."

"We heard them coming," continued Fairmont, "and we stepped into the cover of some brush. While we were thus hidden Branch himself came running down into the gully, through which it seemed the dogs might pursue the deer. He hid himself close by. Then came the deer, with the dogs hot on its track. I expected to see Bill Branch shoot that deer."

"Well, didn't he?" asked the warden in surprise.

"No. He could have done so with ease, but he let the deer go. When the-dogs came along he leaped out and caught them. As soon as he got the leader the other one quit. He had brought a rope, and he had them both hooked up in double-quick time. Then Mr. Merrwell and I stepped out and spoke to him. We had a talk with him. According to his statement, the dogs broke loose last night, and they gave him a run for it before he caught them."

At this point Hop Higgins made a few remarks that caused the little man in black to block both ears with his fingers.

"You see, Mr. Higgins," said Fairmont, when the exasperated and disappointed game warden had ceased to heat the surrounding atmosphere with his language, "the man you're after was not dogging deer. My name is Fairmont, and I own Balsam Bungalow on Lake Shadow. I know Branch. I have employed him once or twice. If necessary, I would go into court to testify in his favor."

"Somebody's been warning him," growled Higgins. "Somebody's told him I was arter him."

"Don't you think, sir, that it would be a good plan to give some attention to these rich men who break the game laws hereabouts?"

"Huh!" grunted Higgins. "I dunno what you mean."

"I presume you've never heard that venison is served regularly at the Great Notch House? I presume you're wholly unaware that Mr. Henry McClellan has entertained friends at deer hunting in the closed season?"

The warden scratched at the roots of his bunch of whiskers.

"They ain't been no complaints about the hotel," he said, "and I don't cal'late anybody would care to meddle with Henry McClellan. Why, he owns a good part of these ere woods. He's spent lots of time and money a-raising deer and turning them loose. He's one who complains against the pot hunters."

"And simply because he's rich and influential he can shoot deer any season he likes without danger of arrest."

"I cal'late he turns more deer loose than he ever shoots."

"But that doesn't give him a license to break the law. A poor pot hunter who happens to want some meat for his own family sees Henry McClellan and his rich friends shooting deer regardless of law and restriction. There's an example, and the pot hunter or poor man sees no reason why he shouldn't do the same."
"I ain't here to discuss or argue over any such matters. I'm here to do my duty and obey orders. It's likely somebody give old Branch warning. Mebbe you was the one who done it."

He glared at Fairmont.

"If I had known you were coming," retorted Ned coolly, "I might have warned him."

"Oh, is that so? You have the nerve to tell me that, do you?"

"Why, it doesn't take any nerve to tell you that. I am a person who likes to see a poor man given the same sort of a deal that a rich man gets. Here's Branch's boy, only fifteen years old, jailed down at Creston on a complaint which every one knows can't be proven. That's persecution, Higgins. Together the wardens and the sheriff's deputies are doing their best to make thoroughbred criminals out of Bill Branch and his son. They succeeded with the oldest boy, and now they're trying it on the youngest one."

"Well, you needn't glare at me, young feller. 'Tain't none of my business. I know what I have to do, and I do it. Come on, parson. As long as we can't ketch them dad-blamed, consarned, confounded law-breakers—"

"Careful, Mr. Higgins—do be careful!" entreated the little man. "Don't be violent!"

"I say, as long as I can't ketch them dogs running deer this morning I'll show you the way over to the Falls. It's a good ten mile farther than it was when we first heard the dogs, and ten mile through the woods is something of a tramp."

"Oh, goodness! I'll never get there alive! I'm perishing from exhaustion and hunger already. Is there no human habitation near? Is there no place where we may find food and a shelter? To-morrow will be soon enough."

"I dunno of any place unless these young fellers will take us in and put us up," said Higgins.

"You'll excuse us," came promptly from Fairmont. "There's McGinty's at Spruce Head, only about fifteen miles or so from here. You can get put up for the night at McGinty's. So-long, Mr. Higgins."

With Merriwell at his side, Ned once more resumed the tramp to Balsam Bungalow.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ENCOUNTER IN THE WOOD.

The game warden glared after them, and then he shouted:

"You go to——"

"Oh, don't—please don't!" squawked the little man wildly. "Don't shock me with such language, Mr. Higgins!"

"What do you think of the parson, Merriwell?" laughed Fairmont, as they again plunged into the woods.

"Fake," said Dick curtly.

"Then you don't believe he's the real thing?"

"He's as poor a fake as I ever saw. His efforts to play the part of a parson were most amusing."

"What do you think he is?"

"I have an idea that he's the warden's assistant."

"Well, they got little satisfaction out of us, but I feel sure they're going to make no end of trouble for Branch. If they crowd that man too hard they will drive him into some desperate and regrettable act."

The wood became too thick for them to carry on the conversation with ease, and finally they proceeded in silence, Fairmont still leading the way. They were in the midst of a thicket when, of a sudden, the sharp report of a rifle rang through the wood.

At the same moment Fairmont's cap, which he had pushed up on his head in order to wipe his brow, was clipped by a whining bullet and knocked to the ground.

"Great Cesar!" exclaimed Ned in dismay. "Look at that! Somebody came near putting a bullet through my head."

Merriwell plunged forward and tore his way through the tangled bushes, breaking out into a strip of timber where the trees were scattering and far apart.

Through this scattering timber at a distance of twenty-five or thirty rods Merriwell discovered, as he had fancied he would, the person who had fired that shot. The man stood there with his rifle in his hands, staring at Dick in unmistakable astonishment and agitation.

"You idiot!" cried Merriwell, running toward the fellow. "What do you mean by such crazy folly?"

"Aw! aw! I beg your pawdon, thir," stammered the fellow.

"Toodles—oh, Toodles!" shouted another man, appearing some distance to the right. "What were you firing at?"

The fellow who had fired the shot dropped the butt of his rifle on the ground and leaned upon it to support himself, his knees trembling beneath him. He was an undersized, insipid-appearing chap, with a weak, receding chin and an abnormally big nose. From head to foot he was dressed in brand new buff-leather hunting clothes.
"Aw! aw!" he gasped. "By Jove! don't you know, weakly, I thought it wath a deer. Yaas."

Merriwell came dashing up and paused scornfully to survey the agitated sportsman.

"You're one of those freaks who go into the woods and shoot people," said Dick furiously. "You came within an inch of killing somebody that time."

"Weally, I beg pawdon!" stammered the pale and trembling chap. "J—I heard a noith in the bushes, and I thought perhaps it wath a deer. Yaas."

Fairmont came hurrying up, his bullet-cut cap in his hand.

"Just take a look at this, my friend," he said, holding out the cap, "and you'll realize how near you came to killing me."

"Dweful narrow ethcape, yaas," said the stranger; "but a mith of as good as a mile, don't you know. Anyhow, you should have hollered. You should have let me know it wathn't a deer."

"Now, what do you think of that, Merriwell?" exclaimed Fairmont, in angry disgust.

"I think this careless chump needs to have a little sense shaken into him," said Dick, as he seized the fellow by the collar and gave him such a shaking that his teeth rattled.

"Here! here! Stop that! Hands off that man!" cried the second stranger, as he ran toward them.

"Gvacious thakes alive!" spluttered the fellow Dick had shaken. "Why don't you thnap a perthon's head off? Look here, thir, what wight have you to put your nasty hands on me? I'm Perthy Toodles, a gentleman, thir, and you have intuhluted me."

The other man dashed up and confronted Dick. He was a tall, dark chap of twenty-two or three, with a flushed face and the general appearance of a man who dissipated. With his rifle in his left hand, he put out his right as if to push Dick away.

"Yes, what do you mean by putting your hands on Toodles?" he snarled. "If you want to put hands on anybody, try me."

"If you had fired that shot, which came within an ace of killing Fairmont," said Dick, "I'd put my hands on you in a minute."

"Oh, I don't know about that!" sneered the other.

"You evidently noticed Toodles' size."

"See here, McClellan," spoke Fairmont, holding up his cap. "Just take a look at this. Your friend Toodles heard us coming through that thicket and fired at us in a murderously reckless manner. It's only by the rarest good fortune that I'm still alive."

"Oh, is it you, Fairmont?" exclaimed the dark fel-
should not have the same privileges as the rich Henry McClellen."

"Oh, are you a pot hunter?"

"He lookth like thuch a cheap creature, yaas," simpered Toodles. "He ought to be awested for malicious athault and battery."

"Oh, you know a great deal about my father, don't you?" cried young McClellen contemptuously. "It's plain you're in sympathy with pot hunters and poachers, if you're not one yourself."

"We're not inclined to have any further wrangle with you fellows," said Fairmont. "You're supposed to be a man of some sense, McClellen, and you can see how near this chap came to putting a bullet through my head."

"Oh," said McClellen coarsely, "that would have been unfortunate—for Percy."

Fairmont flushed.

"Which is your insulting way of saying that it might have been a good thing for other people. You can't forget the old grudge, can you, McClellen? You're a vicious, revengeful man, aren't you?"

"Don't get to calling names, Fairmont!" rasped the dark-faced chap, "for if you do I shall be tempted to pull off my coat and give you a thrashing."

"Before you begin on him," said Dick, "you might work off a little of your superfluous energy on me. I'm the original offender in this present matter, and it would give me great pleasure to let you thrash me—if you're capable."

"Oh, there's no question about my ability," flung back the other.

"Go for him, Phil!" urged Toodles excitedly.

"Thasmh him faw me! I'd like to thee you do it. You thaw him put hith nawsty hands on me."

"Oh, he won't fight," scoffed McClellen. "He's a bluffer—like Fairmont."

Neil's hand was on Dick's arm.

"I don't think we can afford to have a personal encounter with these chaps," he hastily murmured in Dick's ear. "It's not your quarrel, anyhow. I'm the one who was nearly shot—"

"But I'm the one who gave that careless little pup a shaking up," laughed Dick, "and, therefore, if either of his friends wish to pick it up they're welcome to come see me."

Merrwell's fighting blood was thoroughly aroused and leaping hotly in his veins.

"By thunder!" roared Darcy, the big man. "If you don't thump that fellow, Phil, I certainly shall!"

"Both you and Toodles are my guests," said Phil McClellen loftily, "and it's my duty and privilege to protect you from insult. It won't take me five minutes to give this cocky chap a handsome polishing off. If he's not bluffing, he'd better pull off his jacket and square away."

As he spoke McClellen passed his rifle over to Darcy and began to unbutton his own hunting jacket.

Dick Merrwell laughed out loud now.

"Standing around here chiming is a bit chilly in this atmosphere," he said. "A little scrap will warm me up and give me a good appetite for dinner."

He passed his Winchester to Fairmont and began stripping off.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT.

Observing Fairmont's insistence that he was the one who should meet McClellen, the latter derisively cried:

"Oh, never mind, I'll give you your opportunity after I'm through with your friend. It won't take me long to settle his hash."

Percy Toodles was delighted. He caught and held McClellen's jacket and cap, grinning idiotically all the while.

"Wemember what he did to me, old fellow!" he cried. "Thank him good!"

McClellen stepped out, and Dick promptly advanced to meet the fellow. Merrwell had unbuttoned the cuffs of his woolen shirt and quickly rolled the sleeves above his elbows. A pair of fine sinewy forearms was revealed.

"Fair play now," called Fairmont. "Fight like gentlemen."

"Perhaps your friend doesn't know how to do that," said Darcy.

McClellen put up his guard and stood ready in a
manner which indicated that he knew something of the science of sparring. Observing that Dick had not lifted his hands from his sides, he cried:

"Are you ready?"

"All ready," answered Merriwell.

Immediately McClellan sprang forward and struck straight and hard at Dick's face, thinking to catch the Yale youth unprepared.

Still with his hands lowered, Merriwell sidestepped and ducked.

McClellan's fist shot over Dick's shoulder, and then he was tripped by Merriwell's outstretched left foot and came near plunging forward to the ground. With great difficulty he succeeded in avoiding the fall.

"Yah!" he snarled. "Dodge, did you?"

Whirling, he found Merriwell facing him, still with his hands at his sides. And Dick was laughing—laughing in a manner which filled McClellan with unspeakable fury, for it seemed expressive of the utmost contempt and derision.

"Laugh! laugh!" shouted the millionaire's son, as he again sprang forward. "I'll wipe that smile off your face!"

Like a flash Dick's hands came up. He parried two swift blows and gave McClellan a body jolt that produced a grunt, getting away even as he struck.

"Gwacious thakes!" gasped Toodles. "He's as slippery as an eel! Look out for him, Phil!"

"Oh, stand up and take your medicine!" growled Darcy. "This is not a pouring match; it's supposed to be a fight."

Fairmont's blood was tingling. He knew Merriwell was a skillful boxer, and he saw that Dick was inclined to play with his opponent. But he likewise knew that McClellan had a reputation as a fist fighter, and he feared that Merriwell might make a mistake by dallying.

"Get to him, Dick!" he urged. "Don't wait!"

"He won't have long to wait," scoffed Darcy. "Phil will get him with one of those swings in a minute."

Led on by Merriwell's manner, McClellan followed up, striking again and again. Suddenly he received a stinging blow on the mouth which cut his lip and started the blood.

"Oh, gwacious!" spluttered Toodles. "Juth look at that! He hit Phil!"

"Come, fight like a man!" rasped McClellan, almost blinded with anger. "If you're going to run away and——"

His words were checked by still another blow, this time fairly on the nose. That organ immediately contributed a profuse flow of crimson.

Toodles grew pale and shuddered at this sight.

"Oh, look at Phil!" he moaned. "He's all covered with blood! It itherly dreadful! By Jove! it itherly horrid!"

"That won't hurt you, Phil!" snarled Darcy, crowding forward. "Little taps like that don't count. Soak him on the jaw!"

"Hold on," objected Fairmont. "Don't get in their way, please. Give them plenty of room."

"Perhaps you're looking for some trouble with me," snarled the huge fellow. "If you are——"

"When this is over you can try your hand on me, Mr. Darcy, if you're anxious to do so," flared Ned.

The dripping blood ran from McClellan's chin and stained the trampled snow beneath their feet. The man began wheezing with an unpleasant sound, but the glare in his bloodshot eyes was deadly.

"Oh, I'll reach you—I'll reach you yet!" he muttered through his clinched teeth, as he swung still more wildly and recklessly.

His reach led him into exposing himself, and Dick had no trouble in landing blow after blow, some of which made the fellow stagger and nearly sent him down.

Percy Toodles clasped his trembling hands in anguish.

"Oh, thay, Bob!" he moaned. "He's weakly wal-loping Phil! He's wealy giving him a dreadful dwubbing, don't you know! Yaas! I think we'd better stop it. I thay, Phil, don't you want uth to stop it?"

"Keep away!" panted McClellan. "I'm all right! Let me alone! I'll get him!"

Once or twice the fellow touched Merriwell with a spent blow, which did no harm.
TIP TOP WEEKLY.

Out of some thick scrub spruce crept an excited spectator, who was at first unnoticed by any one. It was a thinly clad boy, not over fifteen years of age, although rather large for his years. His face was contorted, his fists clinched, and his eyes danced with joy.

"Smash him! Soak him!" he whispered, as Merriwell continued to punish his opponent. "Give it to him! Oh, if I was only doing that!"

Little by little the boy’s excitement led him nearer until he had joined the trio of spectators. Still, not until he shouted joyously when Dick finally knocked McClellan down was any notice taken of him.

"How do you like it?" screamed the boy. "Send me to jail, will yer? I swore I’d pound yer up if I ever got the chance. Now somebody else is doing it for me."

At the sound of the boy’s voice Fairmount turned his head and looked at the lad.

"Jack Branch!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "What’s he doing here? I thought——"

But again the fight absorbed Fairmont’s attention, and the boy was forgotten.

The lad continued to laugh and exult as McClellan, having risen to his feet, resumed the fight, although now groggy and showing that his strength was rapidly failing.

Indeed, the fight was so one-sided that Merriwell, having whipped the man to his satisfaction, begged McClellan to quit.

"You’ve had enough," said Dick. "Why don’t you stop?"

"I’ll never stop, curse you!" frothed the enraged man.

Percy Toodles was actually shedding tears.

"I’m tho thorry!" he sobbed, rubbing his knuckles into his eyes like a great booby. "I didn’t think it possible thuch a thing could happen! I thay, Darcy, why don’t you stop them?"

"He told me not to meddle," muttered Darcy bitterly.

For some time the big man had realized that McClellan had met one who was more than his match. He was now well satisfied that Dick Merriwell was a skillful boxer with whom McClellan had not the slightest show in the world. More than that, Darcy’s anger had cooled somewhat, and he doubted if he himself would be any match for his friend’s antagonist.

Seeing that McClellan would not quit, Merriwell sought to end the fight with a knockout. Several times he reached for the groggy man’s jaw. Finally he landed fairly.

CHAPTER VII

THE DESPERATE BOY.

Upon the trodden snow McClellan sank in a limp, nerveless heap.

Laughing wildly, the boy sprang forward and bent over the fallen man.

"You got it! you got it!" he shouted, shaking his fist at the defeated fighter. "You sent me to jail! Oh, I’m glad I was here to see you get this thrashing!"

Dick stood looking at his defeated antagonist with an expression of regret and pity in his dark eyes.

It had been a long time since he had engaged in such an encounter, and, as usual, when it was over he felt humiliated and debased. Toodles continued to snuffle and sob, while Bob Darcy knelt beside McClellan and rubbed his face with snow.

Fairmont spoke to Dick, but Merriwell said:

"Never mind me. See how bad that fellow is hurt. He wouldn’t quit, and I had to put him out. That was the only way to finish it."

Beneath Darcy’s administrations McClellan finally stirred, gasped, and made an effort to rise.

"Let me—let me up!" he wheezed. "I’ll—I’ll fight him still! I’m—not—whipped."

"And that’s good sand," said Dick, with a thrill of admiration. "At any rate, Mr. McClellan is no quitter."

"You can’t fight any more, Phil," said Darcy.

"He’s too much for you. He put you out."

Still, in spite of his condition, the man struggled to rise, and finally, overcome by weakness, he fell back into his friend’s arms.
"Oh, you've got it good—you've got it good!" exulted the boy. "I'll never forget this."

"Who—who's that?" exclaimed McClellan, seeing the lad.

"Who am I?" the boy cried, again stepping near.

"I'm Jack Branch. You know me. You trumped up a charge against me and sent me down to Creston. You knew, I didn't break into your old camp. You was a-gitting even 'cause my sister resented your insults. You thought she'd be delighted to have you, a rich man's son, a-chasing her up. She knew ye."

"That boy—that boy here?" muttered McClellan.

"How did he get out?"

"Oh, I got out. They couldn't keep me, and they'll never take me back there."

McClellan, assisted by Darcy, rose to his feet. He presented a pitiful spectacle as he stood there leaning against his friend's shoulder. In a moment, however, he seemed to summon his strength, and he took one step toward the boy.

"Broke jail, did you, you little thief?" he cried.

"I rather fancy you'll go back."

"Keep away!" snarled the boy, retreating swiftly.

"Don't you put a hand on me!"

"He's a jailbreaker," said McClellan. "Grab him, somebody!"

But Fairmont stepped between the man and the boy.

"Even if he has broken out of Creston jail, McClellan," he said, "I wouldn't touch him if I were in your place. You know he speaks the truth when he says the charge against him was false. The real thief was caught, yet by your influence, or that of your father, the boy was still held in jail. I had decided this day to offer bail for his release."

"Oh, you were anxious to meddle with my affairs, were you, Fairmont?" muttered McClellan resentfully.

"You were going to side with this son of a poacher, a pot hunter, were you?"

"I proposed to see fair play, that's all," was the retort. "If he had not escaped I'd had him out within a week."

"Well, he's an escaped jailbird now. Go for him, Darcy! Get him!"

Darcy had placed his own rifle and that of McClellan in a standing position against the trunk of a tree. The boy sprang toward those weapons and caught one of them up, holding it threateningly.

"Try to put a hand on me and I'll shoot!" he almost screamed. "I tell you they'll never take me back to that hole!"

With the gun in his hands he backed away, still threatening them.

"He's got my rifle," said McClellan. "He's carrying it off. There's evidence for you. There's proof that he's a thief."

The boy continued to retreat until he had reached the spruces in which he was hidden at the beginning of the fight. There he paused and suddenly flung the rifle on the snow at his feet.

"There's your old gun!" he cried. "I ain't going to steal it! You called me a thief when I wasn't. You've given me the name, and now mebbe I'll git the game. Good-by."

Into the spruces he plunged, vanishing from sight.

"Better let him go, Phil," advised Darcy. "If he's broken jail it will do him no good. They will get him."

"I thay, Phil," said Toodles. "I'm dweedful thorry, don't you know. I think it ith a shame. Yaas. Let's go to the camp. I'm thick—I'm weakly thick."

"Gentlemen," said Fairmont, "I hope you'll remember that we were not at all anxious for this fight. You forced it upon us."

"I don't thay how you can thay that!" cried Toodles.

"That wuffian washed out and nearly shook my head off. That ith what tharted it."

"No one can regret this unpleasant affair more than I," said Merriwell, as he rolled down his sleeves and put on his coat. "Still, I can't feel that we were in any way to blame."

McClellan gave him a look of hatred.

"What's your name?" he asked. "I may see you again some time."

"My name is Merriwell."

"Merriwell?"

"Yes, sir."
"Not Dick Merriwell, of Yale?"
"Yes, I'm Dick Merriwell, of Yale."
"Gwat! Theasar's ghost!" gasped Toodles. "No wonder he wath too much for Phil!"

McClellan did not speak for some seconds, during which he looked his late antagonist over from head to foot.

"I've heard of you," he said slowly. "It seems that the reports concerning you were not exaggerated. You're a pretty good man with your dukes, but I'll not forget you just the same. Some day I'll square this score—with interest."

CHAPTER IX.

AT BALSAM BUNGALOW.

The boy hid himself in the wood and waited until Merriwell and Fairmont came along on their way to Balsam Bungalow. Suddenly he stepped out and spoke to them.

"I want to thank yer, Mr. Fairmont," he said. "I want to thank yer for speaking up fur me the way you done. I didn't know that I had a friend anywhere except my own folks. I callated the whole world was agin' me."

"That was a mistake, Jack," said Fairmont kindly, "You mustn't get such ideas into your head. But how do you happen to be here? Were you released?"

"I guess not!" exclaimed the lad. "Snifty Jim and Mugsy Peters put up a job to break jail, and Jim he let me in on it. You see me and him got to be pretty good friends. He's a slick one. Why, they've had him up lots of times, but it's pretty hard to keep him, you bet. Once he done three years, but 'twas under another name, he said, and nobody round here knew about that."

"Fine society for a boy like this, Merriwell," said Fairmont.

"What did I tell you?" nodded Dick. "It's a first-class method of teaching crime."

"I callate they got Mugsy," said the boy sadly, "and I dunno but they nabbed Snifty, too. . If they didn't, he'll show up hereabouts pretty soon, for we've planned it, me and him, to travel together. He's been all over the country, he has. Why, he's seen San Francisco and Seattle and New Orleans and all them big cities. He says it's great traveling around and bumping your way and cracking a crib now and then when there's a good show to make a fat haul. Why, don't you know, one time Snifty stole eleven hundred dollars right in broad daylight and got off with the spondulicks, too. He had a ripping old time while it lasted."

"And this is the sort of a man you're going to travel with, eh?" said Fairmont. "Why, you don't want to have anything to do with him. You'll stay at home, Jack—that's what you'll do."

"Stay at home? What for? If I stay they will pinch me and take me back to Creston. No, sir! After I've seen my folks once and had a word with sis I'll pike out of here, and they'll never ketch me round these parts again."

"We'll talk that over," said Fairmont. "This very day I promised your father I'd go down to Creston and offer bail for you. They couldn't prove the charge against you. You'll be cleared all right, and I doubt if the case is ever brought to trial."

"Can't they prove it? Now, don't you think it, Mr. Fairmont. Why, Snifty says rich folks can prove anything they want to against poor people. He says that's always the way, the rich walk over the poor and grind them into the ground. He's right, too. Look what they done to my brother. Look what they tried to do to my old man."

"Jack, I want you to come along to my camp. If you go home you may get into trouble. Perhaps the officers will be looking for you there. I know there's a game warden and a strange man up here now. We met them only a short time ago. Come to Balsam Bungalow, and I'll give you a feed that will fill you, and I've an idea that you may be hungry."

"Hungry!" cried the boy. "I'm almost starved to death. I ain't had a mouthful in twenty-four hours."

Fairmont had little trouble in inducing the lad to accompany them. On the way the boy exulted over the manner in which Dick Merriwell had whipped McClellan.
“I saw them fellers first,” he said, “and I hid in the spruces so they wouldn't see me. I heard them coming over across, and I saw that sheep-faced feller shoot. Next thing you rushed out and shook him up, and I jest had to put my hands over my mouth to keep from hollerin’. Then I saw Phil McClellen running toward you, and if I'd had a gun I'd shot him sure. Oh, it was a good thing for him I didn't have no gun! I jest stayed there and watched and I saw the fight. Holy smoke!—wasn't it a dandy! Didn't you soak him good! I guess he'll remember it. You certainly trimmed him handsome.”

His admiration for Merriwell was unspeakable.

In time they came in sight of Balsam Bungalow, located on the shore of a lake which was surrounded by rugged, wood-clad hills. Smoke was rolling up from the big stone chimney of the camp, and Fairmont's guide and cook was chopping wood near by. The woodchopper heard their voices and stopped, swinging the blade of his axe into the bole of a fallen tree and leaving it there.

“I don't see you bringing in any deer, boys,” he called. “Reckon you've had bad luck to-day.”

“Well, not so bad, Joe, taking everything into consideration,” laughed Fairmont. “How long before you'll have dinner for us?”

“Got everything ready and waiting,” was the answer. “Took a chance on it that you'd show up. There's a roast of venison in the oven and plenty of baked potatoes, along with corn bread and coffee. How will that do?”

“How will it hit you, Jack?” asked Fairmont.

“Oh, for goodness' sake don't talk about it!” said the boy. “Just give me a chance to get at that grub. I'm plumb ready to keel over.”

The bungalow was large, and roomy, and comfortable. A royal fire was blazing and crackling upon the stone hearth in the big main room. The table was set, and Joe lost no time in bringing forth the food he had cooked. When he appeared with a big, smoking roast of venison on a platter Jack Branch gasped.

“Sit down, my boy,” invited Fairmont. “Don't wait for manners in this case. A person half starved is excusable if he doesn't stand on etiquette.”

Dick had washed up in the kitchen, and he joined them quickly.

“I've got my appetite with me, too,” he said. “Talk about tonic! Why, two days in these woods is better than all the medicine ever bottled.”

The manner in which they ate complimented Joe's skill at cooking. For a time the boy attended strictly to the satisfying of his ravenous appetite, but finally he permitted Dick to draw him into conversation. Before the meal was over Merriwell had fairly won the confidence of the unfortunate lad.

CHAPTER X.
WINNING THE BOY.

While he was clearing the table after dinner, Joe, the guide and cook, overheard a few remarks regarding the fist fight in the forest which greatly aroused his curiosity. Begging pardon, he asked some questions and was given a brief account of the affair and what had led up to it. He was also told of the meeting with Bill Branch and the game warden and “parson.”

“Parson, eh?” grunted Joe. “A little, round-faced smooth-spoken, oily sort o’ critter? Did he have blue eyes and one upper front tooth that was twisted round crooked? Did he talk like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth? Did he make gestures with his open hands, palms upward, like a sheeny?”

“That's a fairly good description of him and his peculiarities, Joe,” smilingly nodded Fairmont.

“Then I know the critter,” growled Joe. “It was Job Briggs. I've had some dealings with him. He tried to get me once for killing out of season. He's a regular warden, but they shift him 'round from place to place, and he generally succeeds in catching somebody fool by pertending he's a sport from the city, or a business man broken down from overwork, or a college professor rusticating in the woods for his health, or something of that sort. I'll bet he'll turn up at the home of Bill Branch to-night and git in and try to trap old Bill by pertending he's friendly and sympathetic and leading Bill into telling things about hisself.
“Oh, I know the skunk’s game, and I ain’t got no use for spies. An honest warden’s all right, and there’s plenty of critters breaking the game laws that ought to be shoved for it. If everybody got a square deal I call’te Bill Branch would obey the laws as well as other folks. It’s only because he sees people breaking them laws and getting off through a pull or influence of some sort, or because they’re rich, that he thinks he has as much right to disregard the laws as they have.”

“That’s right,” cried the boy, his eyes flashing. “I’ve heard my old man say some of the game laws was foolish, but that they was better’n no laws at all, and he’d stand by ‘em if they was admiristered fair and square without favor nobody. It’s only ‘cause he knows how rich folk’s like old Hen McClellen can do just as they please that makes him sore.”

Merriwell and Fairmont exchanged significant glances.

“Well,” grinned Joe, brushing back his long dark hair, which, with his swarthy complexion, made him look like a half-blood Indian, “I’m glad to hear that Hen McClellen’s uppish son got a good hammering. Mebbe it will take some of the conceit out of him. He ought to get it took out. He’s a high roller, anyhow. Hits the booze hard. Why, time after time he’s brought lots of his chums up to Whispering Pine Camp, as he calls the place, and had whole cart-loads of booze shipped in, and they’ve just kept tanked up, and raised merry blazes, and howled and sung like Indians till it’s a wonder they didn’t scare all the game out o’ this ’ere section.”

“Oh, he got his—he got his!” exulted the boy, giving Dick Merriwell a look of admiration. “I never saw a prettier sight, and I’ve seen two or three over at Flume Falls.”

Later on the boy begged a pipe and tobacco from Fairmont, and sat smoking before the fire with evident gusto.

Merriwell, seated near, once more led Jack Branch into conversation. Although the boy was evidently very bitter and revengeful toward McClellen, and the degraded influence of Snifty Jim upon his mind was all too apparent, Dick believed the lad was not naturally vicious. His talk betrayed the fact that he entertained a strong feeling of affection for his parents, and for his sister in particular. But the crooks with whom he had become familiar while confined in the county jail had impressed it upon him that he was tainted with the stigma of crime, which would cling to him for all time. They had given him an altogether false impression of life, and it was plain their tales of roving adventure and illegal plunder had appealed to his imagination, and led him to believe that such a career was preferable to the life of an honest poor man.

In time Dick fell to telling the boy of Frank Merriwell’s school and his work for the poor and deserving lads who came into his charge. He told of many boys who had been regarded at home as incorrigible, bad, or vicious who had passed through a remarkable change at Farnham Hall, and afterward developed into square, manly, upright fellows, admired and respected by every one.

He also took pains, without making his object too apparent, to paint the black side of a career of lawbreaking. He skillfully indicated the inevitable downward course of one who permitted himself to stray from the narrow path of uprightness and wander forth upon the broad road of iniquity. Although he spoke quietly, in a mild conversational tone, his words were wonderfully potent in picturing the consequences of crime. He spoke of the beauties of nature—the open world, the fields, the woods, the streams, and the mountains—and how good it was to live among them. Then he pictured the suffering of one who loved such a life of freedom, but who found himself, through his own lawbreaking, arrested, convicted, and condemned to a cold, narrow, iron-barred stone cell, where he must spend weeks, or months, or years.

Fairmont did not interrupt. Sitting apart, he listened to Dick’s words, fully as enraptured and enthralled as the listening boy. He knew Merriwell’s object, and he saw that Dick was making a powerful impression on the lad’s mind.

Dick finished by assuring the boy that he was not branded as criminal, and that he had friends who would see that he got a fair deal. Fairmont would
go down to Creston and stand bail for him if he would promise to appear when court sat, in case the complaint against him was pushed. Furthermore, Fairmont would get the best lawyers to defend him, and, as the real thief had been apprehended, Jack certainly would be cleared, which was something that should give him great satisfaction and was most earnestly to be desired.

If he ran away it would be a practical confession of guilt—at least, most people would regard it as such. Exonerated, he could return unashamed to his home, and thus he would bring joy to the hearts of his father, his mother, and his sister, whom he professed to love. Should he persist in his plan to run away, it would add to the sorrow and shame of his unfortunate mother, who had suffered greatly on account of the misfortune which had befallen her eldest son.

When Dick had finished he permitted the boy to sit there before the fire, his pipe forgotten in his hand, thinking and meditating. By the slowly changing expression on the lad's face Merrriwell seemed to read his thoughts. Once when Dick knew bitter, revengeful thoughts were creeping back into Joe’s mind he spoke again, and talked a little while to divert the course of the boy's meditation onto pleasanter things.

Finally Dick turned a look upon Fairmont, nodding slightly and making a gesture toward the boy.

Fairmont rose, stepped forward, and dropped his hand on Jack's shoulder.

"Jack," he said, "you believe I'm your friend, don't you? Even if I am supposed to be rich, I'm not the sort that crowds the poor, am I?"

"No, sir," was the immediate answer, "you never done that. My dad he always said you was a mighty decent sort of a feller. I guess you're my friend, all right."

"Well, then, won't you trust me? Won't you give me a chance to show that fellow McClellen up by standing behind you and proving that this is a case of malicious persecution? That will make him look pretty cheap. If I'm a rich man who is on the square there must be others, Jack, and so the things Snifty Jim told you about all rich people being hard on the poor were not true. You can see that he lied to you about that. If he lied to you about that why didn't he lie about other things? He did, Jack. If you believe him it will be your ruin. If you trust me I'll back you up and see that you come out on top. What do you say?"

"I'll trust yer, Mr. Fairmont," cried the lad, springing up and grasping Ned's hand.

CHAPTER XI.

M'CLELLEN BAFFLED.

It was near sunset when the guide, who had gone to bring a pail of water from the lake, came rushing into the camp crying:

"There's a big buck on the point up above! If you want a shot at him look alive."

"Go ahead, Merriwell," cried Fairmont, catching up Dick's rifle and thrusting it into his hand. "You haven't shot a deer. Get that buck if you can."

"Yes, we need him," grinned Joe. "If we get him I can pay back the venison I borrowed day before yesterday so that we might be dead certain of deer meat while Mr. Merrriwell was here."

The guide took his own rifle, and Dick followed him from the camp. Fairmont and Jack Branch stepped outside and stood by the door watching them as they ran down toward a certain spot on the shore where some thick trees would hide them from the eyes of the deer on the point above, which was so far away that it led Ned to remark:

"If Merrriwell gets the buck at that distance he will do some tall shooting. It wouldn't surprise me if he failed to touch him."

"He'll git him," declared the boy. "I've got an idea, Mr. Fairmont, that he can shoot jest as well as he can fight. Dunno why I should think so, but I do, just the same."

They saw the guide tiptoeing down behind the trees with Dick following closely. They saw Joe pause and reach out with his left hand to grasp and draw aside a branch. Apparently he spoke in a whisper or very low tone to Merrriwell, who edged out until he could peer past the tree and see the point of land far above.
Quickly lowering himself on one knee, Dick took almost instant aim and fired.

A huge antlered buck had entered the water off the point to drink, breaking the thin shore ice, of which there happened to be a little. A moment after the rifle spoke the deer was seen to give a leap, and nearly fall. Wheeling, it sprang from the water and disappeared almost instantly into the wood, Merriwell getting a second shot ere the creature vanished.

"You sartinly hit him," cried Joe. "I thought he was going to drop right there, but they're monstrous hard to kill.

"That's a dead deer," said Dick, rising. "He won't run far."

"Did you get him?" cried Fairmont.

"Yes, I got him," Merriwell answered confidently. "Joe and I will go and bring him in."

"Mebbe," muttered the guide; "but you can't always tell. Anyhow, it's likely you hurt him so bad that a second shot would finish him. The only trouble is it is so blamed near dark that we'll have to hustle if we find him to-night."

A little more than half an hour had passed when, as it was growing dark and they were following a trail of blood upon the snow, they came upon the dead deer. Although one of the bullets had touched the animal's heart, it had run some distance into the wood before falling.

"Say, you sartinly put that bullet in the right place, Mr. Merriwell," exclaimed Joe. "I thought mebbe you was too confident about getting him, but I see I was mistook. You nailed him with both shots. He's a beaut. Look a' them antlers. If we can get him down to the point it will be easy enough to launch a canoe and come arter him."

It was not so difficult getting the deer down to the point, but by that time it was pitch dark. Standing on the point they could see a light gleaming to the northwest upon the lake shore.

"That's McClellen's place, Whispering Pine Camp," said Joe. "It's three good miles over there, and some hard traveling through the woods."

The deer was left on the point, and they retraced their steps to Balsam Bungalow.

As they approached the bungalow they distinctly heard the sound of loud and angry voices in altercation.

"Somebody's there," said Joe. "Somebody's shown up while we was away, and they're sartinly raising a rumpus. Come on and we'll step in by the back door. If they're making any trouble for Mr. Fairmont we'll take a hand."

Hastening to the kitchen door, they entered. The interior of the kitchen was dark, but a figure rose before them, and in an excited whisper Jack Branch cautioned them to keep still.

"They're after me!" palpitated the boy. "They've got a deputy sheriff in there, and he's come to take me back to Creston. I won't go! I'll fight! I'll do anything before they shall take me back there! Mr. Fairmont is trying to stand 'em off, but they're bound I'm here, and they're dead set to git me."

"Who are they?" asked Dick.

"There's the feller you walloped, McClellen, and the big one that was with him, besides the deputy sheriff," answered the boy.

"Three of them!" muttered Joe. "And Mr. Fairmont's standing 'em all up, eh! Well, I call'e 'll jine him."

Saying which, he opened the door that led into the big living room, stepped through, and closed it behind him.

Dick was left alone with the boy.

"Hello!" grunted the guide, as if greatly surprised.

"What's the rumpus here, Mr. Fairmont?"

A leathery-faced, savage-looking man turned instantly toward the speaker. His companions were McClellen and Bob Darcy.

"Hello, Joe Atkins," said the fierce-looking individual. "I guess you know me. I guess you know Chepas Perkins."

"Sartinly I do, Perkins," nodded Joe. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm after a jailbreaker. I'm arter old Bill Branch's kid what got out of Creston jail day before yesterday along with two others. We've got the other ones, and Mr. McClellen tells me the boy is here."
“Mr. McClellen ain’t looking very well this evening,” observed Joe, as he inspected the bruised and battered countenance of the millionaire’s son. “He must have fell down and bumped himself most remarkably.”

“You’d better not get insolent!” exclaimed McClellen. “You may find yourself in trouble along with Fairmont for harboring an escaped criminal.”

“The boy’s no criminal until he’s convicted as such, McClellen!” exclaimed Fairmont, his eyes flashing. “You know as well as I do that he’s innocent. I’m going to see that he gets justice, too. If there was a law that would reach you for malicious persecution of an innocent lad I’d take particular pains to see if I couldn’t make you go some.”

“I ain’t here,” shouted Perkins, “to argue whether the boy is innocent or guilty! I’m here to git him!”

Through a window at the sheriff’s back Joe Atkins saw a face—the face of Dick Merriwell. Dick made a significant gesture, and then for a single instant Jack Branch peered in at that window. A moment later both had vanished, and Atkins chuckled softly.

“What be you laughing at, Joe Atkins?” snarled the deputy sheriff. “Mebbe you’ll laugh out t’other corner of your mouth if you git arrested. You’d better be careful. Mr. McClellen has a heap of influence around here.”

The guide turned and stood his gun upon the floor, leaning it against the wall.

“Just so you won’t be able to back up a claim that I threatened you with firearms, Perkins,” he said. “You’ll observe that I’m empty-handed and making no trouble whatever for yer.”

“But Fairmont has refused to let us look into the kitchen,” said Perkins.

“He certainly did,” nodded McClellen. “I’ll swear to that,” growled Darcy.

“Oh, I think you must be mistook,” protested Joe mildly. “There ain’t nothing in the kitchen but what he’d jest as lief you’d see as not.”

“I—”

Fairmont started to speak, but the guide made a quick gesture and interrupted him.

“There ain’t a thing there but what you’d jest as lif they’d see as not, Mr. Fairmont,” he declared. “Jest invite them to step into the kitchen and look for themselves.”

Fairmont understood.

“It makes me sore to have these fellows come here without a search warrant and announce that they’re going to ransack my camp,” he said. “That’s what stirred my blood. However, if they want to look into the kitchen let them do so.”

Joe turned and flung the kitchen door wide open, making a sweeping gesture with his hands.

“Walk in, gents—walk in,” he said. “I’ll light a lamp for yer so you can peek around. Look into the flour barrel and the china closet and under the cook stove and any old place yer want to.”

True to his word, he did light a lamp in order that they might inspect the kitchen to their satisfaction. Fairmont’s refusal to admit them to that room had caused them to neglect the sleeping rooms on the other side of the camp. Finding no one in the kitchen, they hurriedly turned to the sleeping rooms, which were likewise searched without success.

“The kid has gone, Perkins,” said McClellen regretfully. “There’s a man disappeared with him, too. It would give me great pleasure to see Dick Merriwell arrested on the charge of aiding an escaped criminal.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIRE, AND AFTERWARD.

The boy insisted on going home at once. Frightened, he again thought of taking flight, and, in order to calm him, Merriwell stuck by him.

It was a long, dark tramp through the wood, but Jack Branch had such knowledge of the country that he came through at last and pointed triumphantly to a gleaming light which he declared shone from a window of his home.

“But you can’t git back to Balsam Bungalow alone, Mr. Merriwell,” he said. “I didn’t want you to come, but you would.”

“I’m not going back just now, Jack,” said Dick. “I’m going to have a talk with your father and
mother. That’s the principal reason why I came along with you, although I did think it possible you might get lost alone in the woods, and to spend a night under such circumstances would have been cold and lone-
some business.”

“You’re a right good feller, Mr. Merriwell,” said
the boy, “and I——”

He stopped short, for between them and the gleam-
ing light they saw a dark moving figure which seemed
coming swiftly toward them.

“I wonder who it is?” whispered Merriwell, facing
round with his rifle, which he had brought along, gripped and half lifted.

A soft, whining sound came through the dark-
ness, followed immediately by the low, suppressed
voice of a girl.

“Be still, Rouser! Stop that noise, Turk!”

“Why, it’s Rose—it’s my sister!” gasped the boy,
in surprise. “The dogs are with her. Oh, Rose! Hey, Rose!”

Through the gloom they saw the girl stop in her
tracks as if amazed and alarmed by that call. One
of the dogs growled a bit, and it seemed that she
bent and put her hand on the creature’s head.

“Rose!” called the boy. “Don’t you know me?
It’s Jack—Jack, your brother.”

With a little gasping, gurgling cry she ran for-
ward. He sprang out to meet her. The dogs came
frisking around them, and then, scenting Dick, turned
suspiciously upon him.

“It’s a friend of mine, Rose,” explained the boy.
“He’s stuck by me. He’s the greatest feller you ever
saw. Why, he give Phil McClellen the almightyest
pounding I ever saw anybody get. Yes, he did—he
walloped McClellen beautiful. Down, Turk! Here,
Rouser, let him alone!”

“Careful, Jack!” breathed the girl. “I’m taking
the dogs away to hide them. There’s a warden and
another man in the house what are bent on shooting
Turk and Rouser. Dad he told them the dogs be-
longed to me—he told them how I picked berries and
earned the money to buy both when they was only
little puppies. That didn’t make no difference. They
said they’d been running deer and they was bound to
shoot them. So I sneaked out and got ’em from the
shed and started into the woods to hide ’em some-
where, though I didn’t know what I could do.”

“Well,” said Merriwell, “it’s evident you’ve had an
unpleasant call from Hop Higgins and the parson.
Let’s consider this matter a bit.” He revolved the
situation in his mind. “I’ll tell you what can be
done,” he said. “I’ll take the dogs back to Balsam
Bungalow. Sell them to me, Miss Branch.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t sell Turk and Rouser for any-
thing!”

“Sell them to me,” repeated Dick. “I’ll give you a
price for them, and you shall keep them for me as long
as you choose. I’ll leave them here in order that I
may have them to hunt rabbits with should I ever re-
turn—but it’s doubtful if I return.”

“But I—I don’t understand,” said the girl.

“Then I’ll explain. I’ll buy these dogs and take
them back to Balsam Bungalow. You can tell the
wardens that you have sold them to me. Let Higgins
and his running mate come to Balsam Bungalow and
try to shoot these dogs if they dare! I give you my
word they won’t shoot your dogs while I have them.
When I go out of the woods I’ll return the dogs to
you.”

“Oh, you’re very kind, sir,” said the girl; “but are
you sure you can save poor Turk and Rouser that
way?”

“I’m pretty sure. Here’s a five-dollar bill which I
give you for the dogs. It’s understood that they are
mine now.”

She did not want to take the money, but he in-
sisted that she should, explaining that he could not
conscientiously assert that they belonged to him un-
less such a transaction was made. Finally he had his
way.

“I’ll go back with yer,” said Jack, “until you’re
near enough so that yer can’t get lost in returning to
the camp. Rose will come with me. You needn’t
worry about us. We both know the woods and I’ll
have her company on my way home again.”

It was arranged this way, and, with the dogs at
their heels, they turned their faces toward Balsam
Bungalow.
Choosing to make the shortest possible cut which would bring them nearer to Shadow Lake, they had covered some miles when from elevated ground they saw a gleam of light like a distant fire.

"It's over by the lake," said the boy. "It's over in the direction of Phil McClen’s camp. I hope the thing is burning."

It was Dick who insisted on investigating, and, following an old wood road, they ran toward the lake. Before long the crimson glow ahead of them shone through the trees, and there was no longer any doubt that it was a sizable conflagration.

"It's McClen’s camp sure!" shouted the boy exultantly. "It's burning down!"

The odor of smoke drifted in upon them. The light of the fire fell redly upon the snowy ground. Before long the road brought them out in full view of the burning building. It was in truth Whispering Pine Camp.

Two minutes ahead of Dick and his companions, Phil McClen returned, panting and excited, with Bob Darcy lumbering heavily at his heels.

Wringing his hands, Percy Toodles stood helplessly, gazing at the burning building. He was unaware of the presence of McClen and Darcy until the former seized him fiercely by the neck and shouted in his ear:

"How did it happen? How did the camp get on fire?"

"Gnomicus shakes!" sobbed Percy. "I cawn't tell! Weally, you know, I fell asthleep in my chair waiting for you to return. There wath a fire in the fireplace, and the first thing I knew I woke up most chocked with thmoke. The fire all wound my feet with blazing. I nearly burned to death, old fellow. I juth got out alive, that ith all."

"Oh, you poor fool!" cried McClen. "You let it get on fire while you snoozed!"

With a snap he sent Toodles staggering, to fall in a limp and wailing heap upon the ground.

"This is the end of Whispering Pine Camp," said McClen, throwing up his arms helplessly. "The whole thing is gone, and not a cent of insurance."

Of a sudden he reeled, as if struck a heavy blow. Then, with trembling hands and frantic haste, he felt through the pockets of the coat he wore.

"I have papers—valuable papers—in my other coat! They're inside that building!" he shouted. "I must save them!"

"Here, Phil!" roared Darcy, as he made a grab at McClen. "Don't you try it! You'll cook if you do!"

McClen escaped his comrade's clutches and dashed toward the burning building, the front door of which was yawning wide. Lowering his head, he rushed in there like a person madly flinging himself into the mouth of a huge furnace.

"Great heavens!" groaned Darcy, aghast. "He's a goner! He never can get out alive!"

Then came Merriwell with the wildly barking dogs and the boy and girl following closely. Dick had seen the frantic owner of Whispering Pine Camp rush into the burning building.

"Why didn't you stop him?" he demanded of Darcy. "It was suicide!"

"Stop him!" said Darcy. "I couldn't. Yes, it's suicide."

Near at hand lay the lake with the light of the fire flaring far out across its placid bosom.

Snatching a handkerchief from his pocket, Merriwell rushed to the water's edge, where a thin coating of ice crashed beneath his feet. The handkerchief was plunged into the water, following which Dick folded it and bound it over his mouth and nose. Thus protected, to the horror of the witnesses, he followed Phil McClen into that flaming furnace.

Blinded, beaten down by the scorching heat, Merriwell searched for McClen. Something tripped him, and there as he fell he found the man gasping and writhing upon the floor.

Seizing McClen by the shoulders, Merriwell attempted to drag him toward the door. Dick kept himself down, knowing that the air must be clearer near the floor.

It was no strange thing that he should fail to find the door. Where he fancied it was he found only
the solid wall of the camp, with the flames crackling and leaping and laughing like fiends above his head. He was breathing now with the utmost difficulty, every breath causing him most intense anguish. His eyes were blinded, his head swam. Still he struggled on, only to fall at last, overcome.

Jack Branch had been seized by his sister as he attempted to follow Dick Merriwell into the burning building.

"Let go!" he screamed. "Let go, Rose!"

"Please don't, Jackie!" she entreated wildly. "You shall not!"

"Think I'm going to let that feller roast in that place?" he screamed. "He's a corker, he is! He's the finest feller I ever see! He said he'd stick by me, and so did Mr. Fairmont. I'm going to stick by him now. Let go!"

With a wrench he tore himself free. Horrified, she saw him plunge in at the open doorway; but barely a moment later he reappeared, dragging something behind him. That something to which the boy clung was the limp figure of Dick Merriwell, whose right arm was still locked fast around Phil McClellen. Alone and unaided, Jack Branch succeeded in dragging them both out over the threshold. He had found Dick within a few feet of the door, where Merriwell had sunk, overcome and exhausted.

Darcy rushed forward and gave the boy a helping hand. Perkins, the deputy sheriff, who had become tangled in a thicket, made his appearance at this time and gave such assistance as he could.

Merriwell's hair and eyebrows were scorched. Fortunately, the dampened handkerchief had kept him from inhaling the scorching hot air, and his burns were not serious.

But McClellen, recovering consciousness, moaned and writhed in pain.

"Poor fellow!" sobbed Rose Branch, as she witnessed his suffering. "Oh, if there was only a doctor here! What can we do for him? We must do something."

Even Jack Branch no longer held resentment for the suffering man.

A canoe came skimming across the fire-lighted sur-

face of the lake, propelled by paddles in the hands of Ned Fairmont and Joe Atkins. They had seen the glow of the fire and made haste to launch the canoe and paddle from Balsam Bungalow. Merriwell saw them as they were landing and called the attention of the others.

"Great Scott, Dick!" cried Fairmont, as he saw Merriwell. "What happened to you?"

"Oh, I'm all right, old man," was the answer; "but this poor chap is suffering. He went in there for something, and I tried to pull him out. Only for Jack, however, we'd both have been cooked in that furnace."

McClellen was lifted and carried to the canoe.

"We'll get him to the bungalow as soon as we can," said Fairmont, "then some one must go for the doctor. Sweeny, who lives out at the Ford, three miles from the bungalow, has a horse."

"I'll go for the doctor," cried Jack Branch. "I'll bring him."

"Then get into this canoe," cried Fairmont. "We can't lose any time."

* * * * * * *

Late the following afternoon Bill Branch, followed by Jack, appeared at Balsam Bungalow.

"I've come arter my gal," he said. "The boy tells me she stayed here 'cause the doctor said somebody other take keer of that critter McClellen, what got roasted some when his camp burned last night. There ain't no reason why my gal should do anything for a McClellen."

"He's right," said a low voice from one of the sleeping rooms, the door of which stood wide open.

"There's no reason why she should have done anything for me. Rose, your father is right. He has come for you. Before he takes you away I want to have a few words with him. Won't you ask him to come in?"

Fortunately, McClellen had not been fatally burned in the fire. Nevertheless, his injuries were serious, and the doctor had said that his face, now covered with bandages, would forever bear the searing marks of the flames.

Rose Branch stepped out to meet her father. The
color which usually dwelt in her cheeks was gone, and she seemed pale and wearied.

"Dad," she said, "Mr. McClellan wants to say just a word to you."

"Well, I ain't got nothing to say to him," growled Bill Branch. "Here's my boy that he's tried to make out a thief. Why, Rose, I didn't s'pose you'd lift a hand to do anything for that dog, but Jack says you stayed here to help take keer of him 'cause the doctor thought he ought to have some female around."

"Dad, if you'll jist look at him you'll understand," whispered the girl. "He's asked to see you a minute. Won't yer come in—for my sake?"

Shrugging his shoulders, the man permitted her to lead him into the room. When he saw that bandaged face and head, from which two eyes peered from seared and lashless lids, Branch stepped forward slowly and stood beside the bed.

"I'm glad you came in to see me, Mr. Branch," said McClellan. "They have sent for my father, and I suppose he will get here by to-morrow morning. You don't care about that. It's nothing to you. My father wants a gamekeeper and fence tender, a man who will look out for his miles of fences which run through the woods over yonder and inclose a large part of his property. It's a good-paying position for a trusty man. If you'll permit it, I'll recommend you."

"Me?" cried Branch, astonished.

"Yes, you. The wages will be seventy-five dollars a month. That's more than you can make any other way hereabouts, and it's a steady job. Will you take it?"

"What, from a McClellan? From one who has tried to make my Jack out a thief and criminal?"

"Wait just a minute, Branch," pleaded the unfortunate man. "I've something more to say. I shall withdraw my charge against the boy. Since I've been lying here I've realized the uncertainty of life, and I've had many other thoughts which never came to me before. I did your boy an injustice. I'm sorry for it. I have told Rose this. By and by, perhaps, if I get well—and I expect to do so—and I'm not repulsively hideous, I may have something else to say to your daughter, Mr. Branch. Never mind that now. Will you bury the hatchet? Will you forgive and forget? Will you accept the position which I am sure you may have at a word from me? This is no case of charity. My father wants such a man, and commissioned me to find and engage one while I'm up here on this outing."

Bill Branch cleared his throat.

"I dunno, I dunno," he muttered. "I'll think it over. Mebbe—mebbe I'll take the job. Seventy-five dollars a month is mighty good pay. Why, young feller, I'm sorry for yer. As long's you feel that you want to do the right thing you'll find Bill Branch is going to meet you halfway. I reckon we can come to terms. We'll talk it over arter you git up around."

Then he turned to the girl.

"Rose," he said, "mebbe you might be needed here some more. If you be, you can stay as long as you like. I—I dunno—I don't think—I've got anything more to say."

Then he bolted out of the room, and as he was leaving the camp Dick Merriwell met him and grasped his hand.

"Congratulations, Branch," he said. "McClellan came to his senses when I told him how both he and I owed our lives to your brave boy, who pulled us out of that burning camp last night."

**THE END.**

The next number of Tip Top (715) will contain a story sure to delight everybody. It will take you, in the company of Dick Merriwell and other chaps you like, into the great forests of Michigan; and if you don't say that the tale Mr. Standish here unfolds is a crack-a-jack, the editors who have read it are far off in their guess. The title is, "Dick Merriwell in Lumberland; or, The Men of the Big North Woods." These men are a hardy lot, brave, and staunch friends of fair play; but one is a bully whom Dick is obliged, for an interesting reason, to take in hand. And the way he performs that duty is well worth your while to read about. Remember that the number in which this story will appear is 715, and don't let anything interfere with your getting it.
RUNNING AWAY FROM HOME.

A boy in Toledo, O., who signs himself C. G. H., has the running-away-from-home bee in his cap, and asks your editor for advice. It leaks out, from one or two things that C. G. H. says in the course of his letter, that he wants to join the navy; but his trouble is with his aunt and uncle, who have brought him up. He dreads the time when he will have to ask them, and is afraid that they will put a veto on his ambition. So he wonders if it wouldn't be a good way out of the difficulty just to run away from home.

"Tip Top's" young correspondent says that his aunt and uncle have been good to him. That being the case, C. G. H., you are under a double obligation to be straightforward and good to them. Leaving them secretly and causing them anxiety and pain would not be a fair return for the kindness which you say they have shown to you.

The many way is to go to them, state your wish to be a man-of-war's man, and if they are loath to part with you just yet, or object to the naval calling, talk the matter over with them, reason it out, and no doubt you will come to an agreement satisfactory to all.

As to running away, lad, that is not what it is cracked up to be by some fellows who like to tell an entertaining story. The fact is, that if you come to a town like New York without money in your pocket you'll wish you had stayed at home.

Boys think it is great fun to rough it in a big town. There is about as much fun in it as in a toothache. You have great fun going about with a hungry stomach; you have a bully time making your bed on a park bench in the cold; you just scream with laughter when a policeman tells you to move on. Needless to tell you that your editor is speaking ironically—that is, saying just the opposite of what he means. Of course, there is no fun at all in being homeless and hungry in a big town, or a little one, either.

No, C. G. H., you can find a better way to enter upon the career that attracts you—a better way than the one you are tempted to take. Start right by choosing the manly course; otherwise you won't go right in the navy or anywhere else.

WINNERS OF CHAMPIONSHIP HAPPY.

NEWPORT, R. I., November 19, 1909.

MESSRS. STREET & SMITH.

DEAR SIRS: I have received your notice that the Trojans have won the "Tip Top" Baseball Championship. I am tickled to death.

Will send measurements for the outfits inside of two weeks.

Yours very truly,

ALLAN L. LANGLEY,
Manager of Trojans.

AMERICAN COLLEGE YELLS.

Here are some of the college cheers which you were told would be published in this number.

They are given in response to many inquiries by "Tip Top" readers as to what is the yell of that, that, or the other college.

The collection—probably the most extensive one ever made—is presented in three parts—one part appearing each week.

PART II.

John B. Stetson.—"Boom-a-racket, cheese-a-racket, Sisboom ah! Stetson, Stetson, Rah! Rah! Rah!"

Johns Hopkins University.—"Hullabaloo, canuck, canuck! Hullabaloo, canuck! Hoorah! Hoorah J. H. U! Hurrah J. H. U!"

Kansas City University.—"K. C. Varsity, Rip, Rah, Roe, Rrp, Rah, Gee Haw, K. C. U!"

Kansas Wesleyan University.—"Hi Ki, Westi Hi Ki O!"

 Kentucky University.—"Hoo-gah-hah, Hoo-gah-hah, K. U. K., U., Rah, Rah, Rah!"

Knox.—"Zip rah! Boom rah! Knoxia! Knoxia! Knox! Knox! Knox! KNOX!"

Lafayette.—"Ra, Ra, Ra! Lafayette, Yette, Yette, Yette!" (three times.)

 Lawrence University.—"Rah Rah! L-A-W-R-E-N-C-E! Bit! Boom! Bah! Woosh!"

Lebanon Valley.—"Chee-he! Chee-hi! Chee-ha! Ha! ha! Lebanon Valley, Rah, Rah, Rah!"

Lehigh University.—"Hoo-ray-ray! Hoo-ray-ray! Ray, ray, ray, Lehigh, Lehigh, Lehigh!"

Leland Stanford, Jr., University.—"Rah—Rah—Rah—Rah!—Stanford!"

Louisiana State University.—"Hobble, Gobble! Razzle, Dazzle! Siss, Boom, Bah! Louisiana! Louisiana, Rah, Rah, Rah!"

 Manhattan.—"Rah! (nine times) Manhattan!"

 Marquette.—"Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah! Marz-et-a, Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah!"

Marquette.—"Chee, Che-ha Che-he-ha-ha! Marquette, Marquette, rah rah rah!"

 Maryville.—"Howee, how! Chilhowee! Maryville, Maryville, Tennessee! Hoo-rah, Hoo-rah, Maryville, Maryville, Rah Rah Rah!"


 Mercer Univ.—"Phizz, Sizz, boom! bah! Mercer! Mercer! Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah!

 Miami University.—"Rah —Rah —Rah —M-I-A-M-I —Mi-am-i, Mi-am-i!"

Michigan Agricult.—"Rah! Rah! Rah! Uz! Uz! Uz! M. A. C. Tiger!"

Mississippi A. & M.—"A. & M. C. A. & M. C., Miss., Miss., A. & M. C!"

Monmouth.—"Ho rah Ho roo Depa la Depa loo Rah si ki yi, Hot, cold, wet or dry, get there Ebi, Monmouth!"

M. Holyoke.—"H-o-o-o-yoake, H-o-o-yoake, Hol-yoake, are we! (The cheer is sung by the girls.)

Mt. Union.—"Karo, Kero, Kiro, Kee! Rah, Rah, Rah, for M. U. C! Alkezenion, Alkezenion! Rah, Rah, Rah, for old Mt. Union!"
**TIP TOP**

**Weekly.**

Trinity (N. C.)—"Rah, rah, rah, hip-poo-pee-phiz-boom-tiger-hipporah-hipporah Trinity!"

Tufts—"T-u-t-t-s-Rah, rah, rah!" (three times.)

Tulane University—"Rah! Rah! Zip! Boom! Ah! Rah! Rah! Rah!"

Tuskegee Institute—"Tuskegee, Rah, Rah! Tuskegee, Rah, Rah! Hurrah, Yoo, Rah, Tuskegee!"

University of Alabama—Alabama-Alabama-Alabama—Hot Stuff-Hot Stuff-Hot Potsulah!


**Part III, next week—"TIP Top Weekly," No. 715.**

"TIP TOP" TRIED AND TRUE.

**Written by a regular reader of this weekly.**

To us an inspiration keen
Will "TIP Top Weekly" be fore'er—
This fascinating magazine,
Each week so welcome everywhere.
Through thick and thin by it we swear,
For sweeter hours we never knew
Than those which we have share
With "TIP Top Weekly," tried and true.

This weekly, interesting, clean,
Before our eager eyes lay bare
A charm of character and scene
That drives away all woe and care.
And lifts our hearts from dull despair
Into a world of brightest hope.

Of all our joys we least can spare
The "TIP Top Weekly," tried and true.

Its like the world has never seen.
It stands alone, beyond compare.
Upon this continent serene
For us no greater joy is there.
A love that nothing can impair—
That's known and felt the country through—
Deep in our hearts we'll always bear
For "TIP Top Weekly," tried and true.

L'Envol

Dear Prince, this is our earnest prayer:
May fate not diminish from our view
This sweet delight, this treasure rare,
The "TIP Top Weekly," tried and true.

A JOLLY OLD FIRE HORSE.

Fifteen years in the so-called "blare district" of New York is a record for a fire horse. This is the length of service put in by Dick, the horse that takes Chief Worth to fires in the wholesale dry-goods district.

When he became a member of the fire department, Dick was young and strong, and it sometimes required two men to drive him, each holding one rein. Even to-day when the horse feels good it takes skill and watchfulness on the part of Chief Worth and his driver to keep him going where he ought to go.

Dick is naturally a mischief-maker, and in addition to his own tricks he has picked up certain habits from drawing a chief's wagon, which has the habit of way when running through the traffic of the crowded city to a fire. For instance, Dick will turn out for cars, but not for trucks. He has become accustomed to dodging around street cars, but expects all other vehicles to give him a clear road. If left to himself he would bring the wagon home in sections after rubbing hubs with the trucks.

Dick has also some fixed ideas about working. He will gladly go to night fires, but rebels at answering day alarms. He will go to the pole, which is the fireman's way of describing a fire horse taking his position at the apparatus, for the alarms that will come two, but all others he disregards, and he practically has been led out for alarms beginning with other figures.

This is due to the fact that in his years of service he has become used to working at night fires, and he has also learned that it is only to the 1 and 2 alarms that he goes.
In the house he finds chances to make trouble. His favorite trick is to ring the bell on the apparatus. In the middle of the night, when the men are asleep in the bunk room, and the man on watch on the apparatus floor is perhaps dozing, Dick steals out to the cell, sticks his head through the ladder, and takes hold of the bell rope with his teeth. A few vigorous tugs and the bell resounds worse than the regular alarm gong.

It not only startles a newfangled just learning to do his walking on wheels, but it gives a little decoration to a man inclined to be superstitious. Many firemen believe it is the "gang putting up a trick on them" until they catch the horse behind him and tease him.

Dick does not miss any chance to make trouble. He never stands in his stall as another horse would. He turns himself around the other way, for no known reason except that he can reach the horse behind him and tease him.

It is at fires that Dick gets in his best tricks. He is an invertebrate forager, probably yielding to a primitive instinct handed down from some ancestor whose business it was to find food for the marhs and foals. As long as he has been a fire horse he has been known to rummage garbage barrels.

He will travel in search of barrels, and on several occasions he has wandered away from the fire and the chief and driver have had to hunt for him.

Dick has been known to cross from one side of the Bowery to the other, draw the wagon in along the curb as if he were being guided, and when the driver of the pump and his crew had been tantalized in the meantime, start baying for bananas. In one case he did not await an invitation from the promoter of the pump, but straight off reached for a hand of bananas.

The Italian discovered the robber in time to grab the stick that holds up the cart and make a pass at the horse. Dick drew back his head and then reached for the fruit. Again the man leveled a blow at the horse and again Dick drew back his head. They went on this way for some time, and forth and back, the peddler trying to hit the horse on the head and at the same time draw his pigeon off of danger. The horse was too skillful a piper for him, and he got a bunch of bananas in his teeth in spite of the efforts of the vendor to protect his stock. Dick gets lots of practice at this kind of work, for he goes to most of the fires in the push cart district on the East Side.

Buster, the fireman, has a riding companion, but they do not get on together. Buster, the Dalmatian bloodhound that goes to fires with Chief Worth, has nipped Dick's legs and Dick has let his hoofs fly at Buster's head.

The Italian, the man, and the chief and the dog are outdoors ahead of him, and takes his position under the front axle, and just back of Dick's hind legs. If the wagon does not get back, Dick is to blame, and to stir him up he bites the horse's legs.

Dick does not stand for that, and his answer is a quick, short spurt of Buster's head. Buster, of course, sidesteps, for Buster in his own ways measures up to Dick.

**COW TREES.**

Groves of cow trees, such as are to be found in hilly districts of certain parts of South America, are said to be a wonderful sight. These trees, which, it need scarcely be said, do not actually resemble cows, grow to great height, yet for lengths of perhaps fifty feet they are quite without branches. Near the top they expand into thick heads of foliage, however, and display a network of leaves and branches. The leaves are thick and ribbed, and often grow to be a foot long. To walk in such a grove, among the bare trunks and underneath the obscuring upper foliage, is not unlike passing through some dim, old pillared temple of past ages.

And if you remained long enough, until daylight or evening, you might have the surprising pleasure of seeing the natives come to milk the cow trees. The fluid is drawn into the heart of the trunk. From this lade there pours a milky fluid much esteemed as a drink by some. If this fluid is put aside for some time, a thick white cake forms at the top of it, while beneath that remains only a clear liquid.

The fruit of the tree is also esteemed as food. It is of moderate size, and contains one or two nuts, which are said to rival strawberries and cream in their flavor. And this is not all. A kind of bread is made from the bark of the tree, and is said to be almost as nourishing as wheaten bread.

**APPLAUSE.**

Teaches Him Coolness in Danger.

I would like to tell you what "Tip Top" is doing for me, and what I am doing to get others to read it. "Tip Top" has shown me how to control my temper and to be level-headed in times of danger. It has shown me how to build up my body and to think higher and nobler thoughts. In return for all this I try to help "Tip Top." When a boy or girl comes to me for something to read I lend them some Merrifield stories. When they have read them they come back for more, and when they bring me books they are Merrifield stories. Now every boy and girl with whom I am on trading terms read the Merrifield stories.

Foster G. Hubbard.

You talk as if you had just stepped out of some Merrifield story; and that is the sort of talk your editor likes to receive.

Go on in the way you have started, and if you are as sure of everything as you are of the good that "Tip Top" has done you, no one will beat you much in the Marathon of Life.

**Has Put New Life into Him.**

Being a constant reader of "Tip Top," I have grown to admire it greatly. It is a pleasure to read of the courage shown by Frank and Dick Merrifield. Before I read this weekly I was lazy and dull, but I seemed to put new life into me. Now I row a boat, play rugby, baseball, and golf. I am manager and captain of a baseball team. I think the characters Burt L. Standish uses in "Tip Top" and Medal Library are more like true life than any I have ever read about. George C. Penny.

Glenville, L. I.

This is the sort of letter your editor likes to receive; it gives him more pleasure than mere praise for "Tip Top" without specifying in what way the weekly has benefited you. Congratulations to you, George, for the splendid progress you have made in outdoor sports.

**Gives Advice Worth Remembering.**

I want to say first what I think of your weekly. I am pleased to see how many young Americans take pleasure in reading it. I never read a "Tip Top" without finding a desire to read it right along. The advice it gives boys is worth remembering, and for a work of fiction I think it cannot be equaled, Dick and Frank Merrifield being my favorite characters. I have been pushing "Tip Top" along, and have got several of my friends to read it, and I will say that "Tip Top" is the best fiction a boy can read. Malvin Denger.

Smicksburg, Pa.

You show that you are frank and believe in saying what you think in a straight-out way. And that's the best way, after all. In a very few words you have hit off the qualities that make "Tip Top" the right reading for boys—young or old.

**Brings Cheer to Hospital Patients.**

We have been reading "Tip Top" for over six years, and when we are through with them we hand them to friends or I take them to the men's ward of the hospital near here. I think they are tip-top, and I would recommend them to any one. Let us know in what number Frank M. got married, so I can purchase it. Wishing every success to the "Tip Top" and the originators, I am.

A "Tip Top" Reader.

Frank Merrifield took the matrimonial leap in No. 48 of "Tip Top." Unfortunately that number is out of print, but the story it contained will appear in time in the Medal Library. It is fine of you to send copies of "Tip Top" to the hospital. This is an act of consideration for others your editor likes to hear that a Tip-Topper has performed.

**Wants a Canadian Boy in the Stories.**

Being a constant and ardent reader of the "Tip Top Weekly," I write to let you know how much I enjoy it. I have read a great many "Tip Tops" and practically all the Merrifield stories in the ten and fifteen-cent books. I assure you that there is no one who enjoys better than I do the Merrifield brothers. I have succeeded in getting ten of my chums to read it, and hope to get more. There are only two
things that I dislike about "Tip Top," and these are that I can hardly wait for it to come out, and there is not a Canadian boy in any of the stories. I would like very much to see Mr. Standish introduce a Canadian boy in his "Tip Top" series. Hoping that you will not think me forward, and promising to do my best to help get others to read "Tip Top," I remain yours very sincerely,

J. L. Gallagher.

Unless some one can invent a way to make the Saturdays come closer together, your editor is afraid that you'll have to wait every week for "Tip Top" to appear on its appointed day. As to the introduction of a Canadian lad, who knows what pleasant surprise Mr. Standish may have in store for the boys on your side of the border?

"Tip Top" Doing a Great Work.

For nine years I have read and digested the contents of "Tip Top Weekly." I can safely recommend it to any American boy—or man, for that matter. The Merriwell stories are well written, much more so than people think who do not read them. It is indeed a great weekly, and is doing a great good. It creates a taste for other good literature, and a distaste for the unwholesome same sort. I am for "Tip Top" and all its characters, and of course I'm "there strong" for Mr. Standish. The girls who come and go and touch your imagination are all interesting. Long live "Tip Top!"

D. S. Faw.

Fre.

Your testimonial is one that every boy may well think about, and show to those who are immediately interested in what he reads. To create a taste for other good literature is an effect which your editor considers of great importance, and one for which Mr. Standish—needless, to tell you Tip-Toppers—has always striven.

Changed His Sister's Opinion.

Not having written to the Applause column before, I take pleasure in doing so. I think Frank and Dick Merriwell are the greatest models for boys. Reading about them made me quit smoking and take to athletic exercises. My sister at first ridiculed me for reading them, but I induced her to read them, and now she thinks them fine. I have induced ten boys to read them, and we have formed a club called Loyal Tip-Toppers. My favorites of the old set are Frank, Bart, Bruce Browning, and dear old Jack Ready. From the new set my favorites are Dick, Brad, Lance Favi, Bob Singleton, and Ellew Sampson.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Jos. Ehmsch.

Whole Block Eager for Them.

I have been reading your weekly for the past six years, and they have been weekly published. When I began reading it I was the only one on our block doing so. After three months everybody on the block was crazy over them. My favorites are Frank, Dick, Bart, and young Joe Crowfoot.

New York City.

Walter Kimmer.

Tried to Read Other Weeklies.

I have been reading the "Tip Top" for two years, and have never missed a number. Now I can't get along without it. I loaned some to my friends, and now they all buy it every week. One thing it has done for me is: I used to smoke cigarettes, but now I haven't smoked one for nine months. After a while it seemed too long to wait for "Tip Top" to come in, and I tried to read other weeklies, but none of them suits me like "Tip Top."

Duluth, Minn.

John Peterson.

Different When They Know.

I am a lover of "Tip Tops," and have read quite a few of them. I have read the first few, "an ideal publication for the American youth," just fit them, I found myself in many ways a Chester Arlington, and tried to remedy it. Some people say "Tip Tops" are not good reading, but when they learn what they are it is quite different.

Charles Napiers.

Rochester, N. Y.

No Stories to Excel Them.

I have been reading "Tip Top" and the Merriwell stories in the fifteen-cent size, and I don't believe there are any stories to excel them. I have followed some of the advice I obtained from "Tip Top," and I certainly have found it to be good advice. It has helped me more than I ever thought it would. I try every day to be like Frank and Dick, and especially to control myself as they do, and I am certainly succeeding. If every boy would read them and try to be like Frank and Dick he would certainly come out all right. I for one am going to try harder every day to be like them, and I know I can if I will. Will have to close now with the best wishes for the success of "Tip Top," the best book published for the American boy. I am, yours very truly,

B. Hoffet.

Why Thousands Like "Tip Top."

Please send me the six post cards of the principal characters of "Tip Top." It will be a simple matter to tell why I like "Tip Top." I like it for the same reason that thousands of other boys do. It has such fine stories of manly courage. I think Dick Merriwell a model for any boy, I like Tommy Tucker best. I have loaned a number of copies to my friends, and they are reading them now every week. It has helped me to stop smoking, which I might not have done had I not read it. Three cheers for Burt L. Standish.

La Verne Fontaine.

Johnson City, Tenn.

Holds "Tip Top" in High Esteem.

Being a reader of the "Tip Top Weekly" for almost three years, I thought I would write to you and tell you that I never before read such good stories. I have read Alger and Optic, but neither of them equals "Tip Top" in my opinion. Being manager of a baseball Club, I invited my players to read "Tip Top," which all did, and they have continued to do so.

Utica, N. Y.

Rufus Elefant.

Highly Moral and Entertaining.

I have been a "Tip Top" subscriber for three years. I have caused several boys of my town to read your weekly, I like "Tip Top" for its high moral teaching and for its entertaining stories.

Langdale, Ala.

I. B. Vinson.

Made Time Fly Too Quickly.

I have not seen very many letters from our city, so I thought I would write to you. I was once unfortunate enough to have a leg and an arm broken. While I was laid up one of my friends who reads "Tip Top" brought me all the weeklies he had. With these "Tip Tops" the time flew by only too quickly. Since then I have read it regularly, and I have got fourteen of my friends to read it. My favorites are Frank, Dick, Dale, Joe Crowfoot, and Brad.

Orville Sandefur.

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 King of Weeklies. Get in line, boys and girls, and strive to have your name at the head of the list.

J. McNamara, Yonkers, N. Y.

Orville Sandefur, Indianapolis, Ind.

C. A. Hoyt, Toledo, Ohio.


Aea Evans, 55 Paul Avenue, Pittsburg, Pa.

Leopold A. Maurer, 1712 North Sixth St., Phila.

Foster G. Hibbard, Perry, Me.

Arthur J. Olsen, 10 Mt. Auburn St., Cambridge, Mass.

J. Thompson, Trenton, Ont., Canada.

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.

FREE POST CARDS—They will be sent to you if you tell us: Why you like Tip Top; what it has done to help you; what you are doing to help others by getting them to take Tip Top every week. Do this, and you will receive by mail a set of six colored post cards with like-like pictures of the principal characters in the Merriwell stories. Address your letters, "Street & Smith, 78-90 Seventeenth Avenue, New York City," and write in one corner of the envelope, "Tip Top Post Card Offer."
With Your Chum, Prof. Fourmen.

So many inquiries reach us from week to week concerning the various manuals on athletic development, which we publish, that we have decided to keep a list of them standing here. Any number can be had by mail by remitting 10 cents, and 5 cents postage, for each copy, to the publishers.

Frank Merrill's Book of Physical Development.
The Art of Boxing and Self-defense, by Prof. Donovan.
U.S. Army Physical Exercises, revised by Prof. Donovan.
Physical Health Culture, by Prof. Fourmen.

Prof. Fourmen: As I have been a reader of "Tip Top" for nearly a year and a half, I will take the liberty to ask you about my measurements. Age, 14 years 9 months; weight, 119 pounds; height, 5 feet 4 1/4 inches; waist, 29 inches; calves, 14 inches; ankles, 9 inches; wrist, 7 inches; neck, 13 inches; chest, normal, 34 inches; expanded, 36 inches; biceps, 11 1/4 inches; forearm, 11 1/4 inches. Will you please tell me which are my weak points? I am a graduate of a college which I think is not a very good institution. I am a lover of all kinds of sport. I play baseball, basketball, tennis, and hockey, and I have also done some running. Does a five-mile run do any harm to a boy like me? I am a lover of Tip-Topper.

You take too much belt; your waist should measure 26 inches; your chest is to the good; your weight is about right. Running won't hurt you if you do it in moderation. Five miles, I think, is too much. Better cut that in half and increase it gradually.

Prof. Fourmen: I am 18 years old; weigh 118 pounds; height, 5 feet 4 1/4 inches; waist, 28 inches; expanded, 30 inches; calves, 11 1/4 inches; wrist, 5 5/8 inches; ankles, 9 inches; neck, 12 inches; chest, normal, 32 inches; expanded, 34 inches; knees, 21 1/4 inches. What can I do to grow taller? What can I do to grow heavier? What is the best cure for catarra? My ankles and knees are weak; how can I strengthen them? A. McNeil.

West Newton, Mass.

You are a little shy on chest measurement; otherwise you are about right. Bring up your chest by exercise in breathing and with dumb-bells. I can't tell you how to grow taller. Commit a doctor about the catarra.

Prof. Fourmen: I consider myself quite an athlete, being a football player and a sprinter. I would be greatly favored if you would point out to me the weak spots in my physique according to the following measurements: Weight, 142 pounds; height, 5 feet 5 inches; waist, 28 inches; expanded, 30 inches; calves, 11 1/4 inches; thigh, 21 1/4 inches; calf, 14 inches; forearm, 10 inches; biceps, 13 1/4 inches; wrist, 6 inches; reach, 68 inches; waist, 31 inches; neck, 15 inches; age, 15 years 7 months. A Tip-Top AMIBRNER.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

You weigh too much by 20 pounds to be in good athletic trim. As to chest, you are O.K. You should get three or four inches off your waist. This can be done by exercise and abstinence from fattening foods.

Prof. Fourmen: Will you please give me your opinion of the following measurements: Age, 15 years 7 months; height, 163 pounds; height, 6 feet 3 1/4 inches; neck, 14 1/2 inches; forehead, 10 1/4 inches; wrist, 7 3/4 inches; biceps, 11 inches; calf, 13 1/4 inches; shoulders, 19 1/2 inches; thigh, 21 3/4 inches; chest, normal, 30 1/2 inches; expanded, 32 inches; waist, 24 1/4 inches. Do you think I could become a good pitcher? Please give me the measurements of a man 6 feet 3 inches tall. Thanking you in advance, I remain a faithful Tip-Topper. ELSINO AREAS.

Mesa, Wash.

For your height you ought to weigh a few pounds more to be up to the right average, but you have plenty of time before you to take on weight; probably the years will fix you up in that respect. Your chest can grow larger without danger of your becoming chaste. Three inches less of measurement at the waist would give you a better proportion there. Yes; you ought to make a good pitcher. The athletic measurements for a man 6 feet 3 inches tall are about: Weight, 172 pounds; chest, normal, 41 inches; waist, 32 inches; hips, 38 1/2 inches; thighs, 23 inches; calves, 13 1/4 inches.

Prof. Fourmen: I would like you to pass on my measurements. Age, 14 years 6 months; height, 5 feet 6 inches; waist, 30 inches; chest, normal, 33 1/2 inches; expanded, 34 1/2 inches; calf, 13 1/4 inches; thigh, 21 inches. CHAS. E. BURDEN.

New York City.

For your age you are built in the proper proportions.

Prof. Fourmen: Will you kindly let me know what is the best exercise to gain weight, and 17 years old; height, 5 feet 9 inches; chest, normal, 33 inches; expanded, 35 1/4 inches. My chest and shoulders are very narrow. Do you think there is any chance of my becoming an athlete? Will you kindly tell me what exercise is good for broadening the shoulders and enlarging the chest? I have one of Frank Merrill's books on physical development, but there are so many different exercises I really don't know which one to start on.

Annapolis, Md.

An AMIBRNER of "Tip Top."

Your chest is much too narrow; you ought to measure 38 inches to be up to the average of an all-round athlete. Take up any of the exercises recommended in Frank Merrill's Book on Physical Development, and in time you will be likely to get the desired result. Exercise alone will not bring up your weight, of course. It must be attended by a nourishing diet that has, as well, weight-increasing properties.

Prof. Fourmen: Are these measurements good, and if not, how can I improve them? Chest, normal, 27 1/2 inches; expanded, 31 3/4 inches; biceps, normal, 8 inches; expanded, 9 1/4 inches; forearm, 7 3/4 inches; wrist, 5 1/4 inches; waist, 25 1/2 inches; hips, 30 inches; thigh, 17 1/4 inches; neck, 11 1/4 inches; calf, 11 1/4 inches; ankle, 7 3/4 inches; height, 4 feet 10 1/2 inches, in stockings; weight, 81 pounds, stripped. I will be 12 years old in October. I play baseball, basketball, football, and all other sports. I am a great fond of long-distance walks. I am much better at long-distance running than at short, as my wind is pretty good. I have an exercise, and use it every morning.

New York.

A WAITING TIP-TOPPER.

The measurements show you to have a good average figure of the type suitable for athletic achievements. I detect a slight tendency to stoutness in your waist measurement—it ought to be an inch less. Good that you are fond of walking and running; keep up this exercise, but don't overdo the running.

Prof. Fourmen: As we have been readers of "Tip Top" for a number of years, we take the liberty of asking you to consider our measurements. E. D.'s are as follows: Age, 16 years; height, 5 feet 7 inches; chest, normal, 33 inches; expanded, 35 inches; neck, 14 inches; waist, 31 inches; calf, 13 inches; thigh, 18 inches; forearm, 10 inches; biceps, 9 inches; expanded, 10 inches; wrist, 7 inches; weight, 133 pounds, in street clothes. E. F.'s are as follows: Age, 14 years; height, 5 feet 4 1/4 inches; weight, 109 pounds, in street clothes; chest, normal, 32 inches; expanded, 34 1/4 inches; waist, 26 1/2 inches; across shoulders, 15 inches; around shoulders, 34 inches; biceps, 9 inches; expanded, 10 inches; forearm, 9 1/4 inches; wrist, 6 1/4 inches; calf, 13 1/4 inches; neck, 12 1/4 inches; thigh, 18 inches. J. A. P.'s are as follows: Age, 16 years; height, 5 feet 5 inches; weight, 120 pounds; chest, normal, 34 inches; expanded, 36 inches; across shoulders, 18 inches; around shoulders, 41 inches; waist, 27 inches; thigh, 18 1/4 inches; calf, 14 1/4 inches; biceps, 9 inches; expanded, 11 inches; forearm, 10 1/4 inches; wrist, 7 inches; neck, 14 1/4 inches. Yours truly.

THE ATHLETIC THREE.

Austin, Ill.

E. D.—A boy of your age and height should have a normal chest of 36 inches; weight 125 pounds, stripped, and measure 37 inches at the waist. E. F.—You should weigh 112 pounds; your chest should measure 33 inches, normal; you should have a 26-inch waist. J. A. P.—You should weigh 115 pounds; measure at the normal chest 34 inches; at the waist 26 1/2 inches. All the figures I have given you, boys, are based upon what is regarded as a fair average for all-round athletes.
E A R L Y  N U M B E R S  O F  T H E  T I P  T O P  W E E K L Y
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The following books in the NEW MEDAL LIBRARY contain numbers 1 to 433 of the TIP TOP WEEKLY. Many of the individual numbers before 433 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.

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