A hoarse voice called him to stop. But he had no intention of stopping, even though he recognized the voice as that of Stephen Hodgman, the proctor.
CHAPTER I.

BACK AT YALE.

At last Dick Merriwell and his chum Brad Buckhart has escaped from the mob of laughing, shouting, sunburned fellows who had surrounded them from the moment they had set foot on the campus, all eager to shake their hands and welcome them back to Yale.

Somehow it seemed as if they were trying to make up by their enthusiasm and the warmth of their greetings for the absence of so many familiar faces, and for a while they succeeded.

Merriwell was profoundly moved. With his own class gone—scattered to the ends of the earth—it did not seem possible that he could have so many friends left at college, and his fine face glowed with pleasure, mingled a little with surprise, as he grasped the hands of men whom he barely knew by sight, but of the genuineness of whose enthusiasm there could be no question.

He had been dreading this moment from the time they had left Montana, and throughout the long journey east the feeling had intensified almost with each succeeding mile.

All the way from Butte their party had been a large and merry one. Besides Tommy Tucker and Bouncer Bigelow, there was Grant Ballinger, whose amazing recovery of his lost memory had been brought about by Dick and Doctor Glenny, the famous specialist, of New York; and Mrs. Ballinger, a frail little woman, on whose refined face were traces of the suffering she had undergone during those long, heartbreaking months that her son was missing. Even now she could not bear to have him out of her sight. Then there was Doctor Glenny’s daughter, Dorothea, a charming girl of twenty, who was as palpably interested in Grant Ballinger as he in her.

The first break came at Chicago, where Doctor Glenny and his daughter stopped over for a few days; and after that they reached New York all too soon. Here Ballinger and his mother left them, the former expressing every intention of turning up in New Haven as soon as the pressing business connected with his father’s estate had been settled.

Worst of all, Bouncer Bigelow departed with them, his round face wearing a most lugubrious expression, his eyes frankly moist. He was going into his father’s office in Wall Street, and loathed the idea; but as he shook hands sorrowfully with the little group in the
Grand Central Station, his mind was too full of regret at parting with the best friends he had ever had, to leave room for anything else.

Tucker was going on to Boston, and it seemed positively unnatural for them to get out of the train at New Haven and leave him. As they stood on the station platform they had a last glimpse of his face wreathed in what was evidently intended to be a cheerful grin, but which was a woeful failure.

Consequently it is not to be wondered that Dick looked forward with considerable apprehension to their return to Yale. All the old, familiar surroundings would be there, but how would it seem without the old, familiar faces? For with most of us it is friends who make life worth living, not places.

Then came the swift reaction as the crowd of fellows surrounded them, fairly sweeping them off their feet. The air rang with eager question and answer, with joke and laughter, the rapid-fire volleys of give-and-take jest and persiflage; old and tame worn, perhaps, but revivified by the eternally youthful spirit of the place. And when at last they broke away and, running up the stairs of Durfee, burst into their old rooms, which looked almost as if they had left them but the day before, Dick felt that his forebodings had been unnecessary.

Possessed of a rather less sensitive nature, Buckhart had never had any misgivings. He had been sorry to part with Tucker and Bigelow, of course. He would probably miss them, but he and Dick would be together; and for the moment that was enough—that, and the fact that they were back in the old rooms facing the dear old campus.

He flung his bag into a corner and stood in the centre of the room, his face flushed and his eyes sparkling.

"Wough!" he exploded. "This sure is all to the good, pard! I feel like I wanted to yell the roof off, or turn handsprings all over the place."

Merriwell had stepped to the window, and his eyes were greedily drinking in the details of the campus, with its scattered knots of laughing, gesticulating men; which every now and then broke up suddenly as the fellows made a rush toward some newcomer, laden with bags and golf sticks, tennis rackets, and a host of other things; all of which were instantly dropped to the ground, while they shook hands joyously, asked and answered the stock questions of where they had been and what they had been doing all summer, and then launched into a discussion of who was back, had anybody taken so-and-so's choice rooms in Vanderbilt, what was the latest football talk, and so on indefinitely. The picture was completed by the presence of wide-eyed youngsters in groups of twos or threes, in it but not of it, bearing the stamp of freshmen as plainly as though they had been placarded.

With a happy sigh, Dick turned back into the room. "By Jove, it's good to be back!" he said. "I never knew how homesick I was for it all until we got here. Did you see Crowfoot?"

"Sure," the Texan returned promptly. "What's the matter with the chief? Why didn't he come up?"

"He said he would a little later, after we had unpacked and settled down," Dick answered.

"That sure sounds like Joe," Buckhart commented. "Always afraid he's butting in, or some fool idea like that."

Dick picked up his suit case and carried it into the bedroom, where he at once opened it and placed the contents, in or on top of, the dresser. When he returned to the sitting room, Buckhart was standing by the window intently surveying the crowd on the campus.

"Anything special doing?" Merriwell asked, dropping into a chair.

The Texan looked around at him.

"N-o," he said slowly. "I was just seeing if I could get my blinkers on old Blessed's cheerful—"

He broke off abruptly and gave a sheepish grin.

"By George, pard!" he exclaimed. "I'm sure getting plumb looed. I clean forgot he was gone. I wonder where he is about now?"

"Didn't he say he had a job offered him in Providence?" Dick asked. "Anyhow, he promised to write as soon as he was sure we were back."

Buckhart did not answer. He was looking out of the window again.

"Thundering pile of strange galoots around, aren't there?" he commented.

"Freshmen," his roommate returned iconically. "I'd hate to say how many are registered this year."

Suddenly the Texan plunged halfway out of the window, gesticulating frantically.

"Samp, you old son of a gun," he roared, "come up here! You too, Lance! What the deuce do you mean by staying away so long?"

He stepped back into the room grinning from ear to ear, there was a swift pounding of steps on the stairs outside, and the next instant a loud knock on the door.

"Come in!" the two seniors yelled in concert.

The door swung quickly open and two sun-browned, bright-eyed fellows entered rather hesitatingly. The
foremost was Sampson Elwell, a tall, lanky Hoosier, with straw-colored hair and a face which was not unattractive. His companion, Lancelot Fair, slim, rosy-cheeked and blue-eyed, looked as mild and innocent as a baby; but a closer acquaintance with him had revealed the fact that he was considerably more sophisticated than he seemed.

"Howdy, fellers," Elwell grinned. "We heard you were back, but kinder felt a little bashful about intruding—"

"Oh, that be hanged!" Buckhart exclaimed, seizing his hand. "We were just wondering where in thunder everybody was keeping themselves. How've you been, old buck?"

Without waiting for a reply, he turned to Fair.

"Don't shake the arm off my partner, Lance," he said with a grin. "Mebbe he'll have some use for it after you gents are gone. How are you, anyhow? How's it feel to be a soph?"

Lance smiled.

"Pretty good. Haven't had much time to adjust ourselves, but Samp and I had been looking over the freshmen bunch a little. Most of them look the way I felt a year ago—very much out of everything, and awfully green, though they try and pretend they're not."

"And, by jinks, I bet they feel purty homesick!" the Hoosier declared with relish.

Merriwell laughed.

"What a difference one short year will make," he remarked. "I expect you two will develop into the most bloodthirsty sophs that ever walked."

"By hocus, we got to git even with somebody!" Elwell declared with a grin. "We were made fools of last year, and I want to see somebody else do stunts now."

"I opine you'll have all the chances you want, old boy," Buckhart declared. "It's up to you to start the ball rolling. You hear me gently warble."

"Sit down, fellows, and tell us how things went this summer," Dick put in. "What have you been doing with yourselves."

They accepted his invitation, and for fifteen or twenty minutes chatted about their rather uneventful summer; for the Hoosier had spent it working on the Indiana farm, while Fair replenished his pocketbook by acting as chauffeur for some wealthy summer people who had a place near his home up in New York State.

They were both of no particular wealth or so-called social standing, but Merriwell and Buckhart had found them honest, manly, straightforward fellows, and liked them. Dick had met Fair the year before on the train as he was returning to New Haven, and had been the means of rescuing him from a couple of unprincipled seniors who had come very near cheating him out of his money in a card game.

During the year he had seen rather more of the boy than a senior usually does of a freshman, and, through Lance, had met his roommate, Elwell, who was possessed of a certain dry humor which both he and Buckhart found very amusing.

After the sophomores had taken their departure, there was silence for a time in the room. Then the Texan looked across the table at Dick.

"Funny, I should make such a thundering howl about those fellows, wasn't it?" he remarked in a puzzled manner.

"They're a pretty good sort, both of them," Dick returned. "I've always liked them."

"Oh, sure, I know that," Buckhart said quickly. "They're all to the good; but to hear me talk you'd sure have a notion that they were the best friends I ever had."

He got up and began to walk restlessly about the room. Now and then he paused and inspected some picture in an absent-minded way as if he had never seen it before; once or twice he picked up a book from the table, only to put it down again after reading the title. Finally he stopped by the window and looked thoughtfully down on the almost deserted campus.

"Seems thundering queer, pard," he mused presently in a subdued voice, "not to have old Big Roll in and break the springs of the chairs, or Tommy sitting around cracking stale jokes and spilling cigarette ashes over everything, or Blessed Jones looking like he'd just buried his fourth grandmother, or Rob— Oh, hang it all! let's light up. This twilight's sure getting on my nerves."

Dick was lying back in a Morris chair, his hands resting on the arms, his head against the cushion and his eyes staring into vacancy. He did not seem to hear Brad's words, and gave a start when the Texan struck a match and lit the double student lamp on the table.

Then he looked up at his chum, blinking a little in the sudden glare of light.

"What the mischief are you thinking about," Buckhart inquired shortly.

Dick hesitated.

"Oh, I don't know," he returned slowly. "I was just wondering where all the fellows were and what they were doing with themselves to-night."

CHAPTER II.
FOUR CRONIES.

It was ten o'clock. The hands of the clock behind the bar at Hutton's indicated the hour, but the timepiece was of that discreet variety which does not strike. The proprietors of the place were too clever to have anything about which would so forcibly remind the lingering customer of the swift passage of time.

About a round table in one corner four fellows were lounging. The air above them was hazy with the smoke of cigar and cigarette, but then, the air of Hutton's was not noted for its extreme clarity or purity. Before each man stood an empty glass, and that it was not the first was evident from the little rings of moisture scattered over the table top.

Neither was it to be the last, apparently. One of the men, tall, slim, and narrow-shouldered, with a thin, hatchet-face and glinting dark hair, reached out a carefully manicured hand and struck the bell sharply.

"Well, fellows," he remarked. "Let's have another."

The youth on his right moved uneasily.

"Haven't we had about enough, Mac?" he expostulated. "Seems as if it was time we were getting home to bed."

Mac Gebhard laughed loudly, while the other two men seemed equally amused.

"By Jove, Fitz!" Jim Blackmer exclaimed. "Don't tell me you're going to be a quitter. After staying with the bunch for three years, I hope the responsibilities of being a senior are not going to turn you into a spoil sport. Why, it's only ten. The night is young yet."

He was short and squarely built, with the peculiarly soft, flabby figure of a man who gives full rein to his appetites. His face was rather puffy, with full, red lips, which were in odd contrast to the washed-out almost fishy blue eyes. His taste in dress was loud. He affected startling checks, flashy neckwear, and wore a great deal of jewelry. His reputation about college was that of a sport, whose chief interests in life were eating, drinking, and gambling.

The waiter appearing, the three men promptly ordered "the same." The fellow addressed as Fitz hesitated an instant and then followed their example. "The same" was a rye high ball.

Eric Fitzgerald was short and slim and agile-looking. He was well built and looked as though he might have done something on the track if he had been so inclined and trained for it. Not at all good looking, there was a certain odd charm about his freckled face, with its slightly turned-up nose and jolly, laughing, brown eyes. It was the face of a fellow who would take chances, who might be reckless to the last degree—a regular dare-devil, in fact; but he did not look like one who would do anything underhand. At the present moment his cheeks were flushed, his eyes overbright, and there was a slight blurr in his speech. He was evidently somewhat under the influence.

Whisky, glasses, and siphon were set down on the table, and each man mixed his drink. Then they lifted their glasses, with a muttered word, and drank.

Fitzgerald gulped down nearly the whole of his at a swallow, to the accompaniment of a most peculiar facial contortion, which Gebhard observed with amusement.

"Why the deuce do you make a face like that, Fitz?" he inquired. "You look as if you were taking an awful dose."

The slim fellow grinned.

"Thinking how fleeting the pleasure was, I guess," he returned. "Why the mischief do they make the glasses so small, I wonder?"

"Because they're not in business for their health," responded Blackmer. "You shouldn't be so grasping, Fitz. You can always order one more."

"So long as you've got the price—yes," returned Fitzgerald quickly.

"For heaven's sake don't begin to talk that way," drawled Horace Smilie, the fourth member of the party. "If there's one thing I detest it's a fellow who's always counting the cost of things. You're not developing into a tight-wad, I hope."

It was quite true that Smilie disliked counting the cost of things. It was noticeable that he carried this distaste to such an extreme that he seldom mentioned money and parted with as little of it as he could. Not being possessed of a well-filled purse, he found it very convenient to affect this idiosyncrasy, and to be seized with absent-mindedness, sudden and complete, when the time came for paying the bill. It was a simple method, and he had probably succeeded in getting as much out of life with as little return as any man in college.

This constant dropping off into periods of thoughtfulness had given his face a dreamy expression which some had characterized as poetical. To add to the illusion, he wore his blond hair rather long in carefully arranged disorder, and affected eyeglasses with tortoise-shell rims and a wide black ribbon.
CHAPTER III.

THE ONE WHO WOULDN'T TAKE A DARE.

Try as they might, the others could not persuade him to change his mind. He had said he was going home, and he evidently meant it.

At the first signs of approaching departure Smilie resumed his glasses and fell into a daze, his eyes fixed dreamily on the discolored ceiling. He might have spared himself the trouble, however, for the little fellow paid the bill without question, and, arm in arm, they saliled forth into the street.

Beyond a slight stagger as they came out into the cool night air, Fitzgerald walked with perfect steadiness, talking a blue streak all the way up Chapel Street, and when they reached State, he broke into a song.

Gebhard promptly squelched him. He was not at all in a cheerful mood after the shock he had just experienced, and, moreover, he was busily casting about in his mind how a portion, at least, of that roll could be safely transferred from Fitzgerald's pocket to others which were not so well filled.

They had almost reached the college grounds before an idea came to him. Rounding a corner, his eye fell on a painter's ladder lying beside the near-by house, while tucked away under the edge of the stoop, but visible in the electric light, was a paint pot and brushes.

Flashing a look around, he saw that no one was in sight. Then he stopped on the pretense of tying his shoe lace.

"Makes me think of our first year to see all the freshmen walking around the campus to-day," he remarked as he stooped over.

Blackmer and Smilie looked frankly amazed at this line of talk, but Fitzgerald was quite ready to let loose on any subject.

"Happiest days of our life," he declaimed, leaning against the iron railing. "Like to be a fresh this minute."

"We did have some dandy old times, didn't we," Gebhard said enthusiastically. "Remember the time we painted Umpty-Eleven all over the base of old Abe's statue?"

The little chap chuckled.

"Do I? Well I guess, yes! That was fun, sure enough!"

Mae Gebhard paused a second to wink at his companions, who at once perceived that there was method in his madness. Then he turned back to Fitz.

"I was always sorry nobody had nerve enough to paint old Abe all over," he said in a tone of well-simu-
lated regret. "That would have been something worth while—something no class had ever done before. It's too bad you didn't feel equal to it when I made the suggestion, Fitz."

The slim chap looked at him in astonishment.

"First I heard of it," he said quickly. "Nice time to mention things you ought to have called my attention to three years ago."

"Why, you must have forgotten," Gebhard exclaimed. "I did suggest it, and you thought it was too risky. You remember, don't you, Horace?"

Smilie nodded with great conviction.

"Sure. It was down at Fred's place, wasn't it?"

"Rot!" retorted Fitzgerald. "You can't make me believe that story. I was never afraid to do anything in my life. I never took a dare. I'd have been tickled to death with a game like that if I'd only thought about it."

The cool night air was driving away the effects of the whisky he had drunk, for he spoke distinctly and with considerable emphasis.

Gebhard hesitated a second.

"Oh, what's the use of bothering with it now?" he said with the air of one who is willing to pass over an unimportant matter, but whose mind is unchanged.

"I didn't blame you at all at the time, for it would have been a dangerous piece of business."

"That be hanged!" snapped Fitz angrily. "I'm not afraid! I'd do it this minute if I had some paint and a ladder."

Gebhard smiled slightly.

"Well, here's a ladder," he said, pointing to the one on the ground behind the iron fence, "and from the looks of this house, I should say there might be paint about; but I think we'd better let it go. It's late, and—"

"Hanged if I'll let it go!" the slim chap exclaimed. "You've said I was afraid to do it, and I'm going to show you. I'll bet you anything you like that I can paint old Abe from top to toe without being caught. There's your chance to make some coin if you're so sure I haven't got the nerve."

Though this was exactly what he had been aiming to bring about, Gebhard still pretended to hesitate.

"But we're seniors now, and it's different," he objected. "You know what it means if you're caught."

"I'm not going to be caught!" retorted Fitzgerald.

"I'll bet you fifty dollars I'll do the trick without being caught. There! Take it or leave it!"

"Well, since you put it that way, I'll be a sport and take you up," smiled the tall fellow. "Even money, and you've got to do the job to-night."

"Sure. Now let's find the paint."

He vaulted the fence and quickly discovered the paint pot on which Gebhard had had his eye from the beginning.

"It's red," he chuckled, peering into it. "Won't Abe look pretty all over red? Here, take it, Mac, and give me a hand with the ladder."

With a quick glance around to see that there was no one watching, they hoisted the ladder over the fence and hurried toward the campus with it.

Five minutes later they stole silently around the corner of the library and approached the spot where stood the statue of Abraham Pierson, the first president of Yale.

It was very dark. There was no moon, and in the shadow of Dwight Hall they had a moment's trouble in locating the statue. But at last they found it and placed the ladder against the pedestal. Then, paint pot in hand, Fitzgerald put his foot on the bottom rung.

"You fellows keep watch now," he whispered, "and pipe me off if any one comes. I don't so much mind losing the bet, but I'd rather not get pinned if I can help it."

"You leave it to us," Gebhard said soothingly. "We won't let you get pinned."

With no further words, the little fellow climbed nimbly to the top of the ladder and commenced to slather paint over the head and face of the dignified figure.

By this time his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness and he could distinguish the handsome features he was disfiguring. For a moment he suffered qualms.

"By Jove, old fellow!" he murmured. "It's a rotten shame to treat you like a wild Indian, but I've never taken a dare yet, and I don't propose to begin now."

He continued his work swiftly and methodically without once looking down. Even if he had, the darkness would have prevented his seeing the muttered exchange of words between Mac Gebhard and the dreamy Smilie. He would have been astonished could he have seen the gleam which lit up those poetic eyes as the fellow nodded comprehendingly and then made off through the darkness as fast as he could go.

As the minutes flew along, Fitzgerald worked with feverish haste. Presently the venerable Pierson was a mass of sticky red down to his waist, and the little fellow moved around the stone pedestal and attacked
the folds of the long cloak. That done, he came back to the front and started on his right leg. Another couple of minutes and the job would be completed.

Suddenly he heard an exclamation of alarm from below, followed instantly by the sound of Gebhard's voice, pitched in a thrilling whisper:

"Quick, Fitz! Some one's coming!"

The slim chap did not cease his work for an instant.

"I'm most through," he said in a low tone. "Got to make a good job of it."

"Hurry! hurry!" gasped Gebhard. "They're almost here!"

The next instant Fitzgerald heard the sound of running through the grass and knew that his friends were seeking safety in flight.

Feverishly he dabbed the brush over the right foot and with a single fling of his arm threw the contents of the pail over the left leg of the statue, gave it a slash or two with his brush to spread it around, and then leaped to the ground and darted across the front of Dwight Hall.

He was none too soon. Behind him came a shrill whistle from the watchman, probably, and a hoarse voice calling him to stop. But he had no intention of stopping, even though he recognized the voice as that of Stephen Hodgemann, the proctor.

"Gosh, that's Stealthy Steve!" he muttered. "If he catches me, it's all up with yours truly!"

That the pursuit had at once commenced was quite evident from the sound of running behind. The shrill whistle also continued intermittently, and Fitzgerald wished he could throttle the man who was blowing it. In about two minutes he would have the campus aroused, to say nothing of the cops patrolling on Elm Street.

"Nice scrape, I'm in!" he muttered. "Where the mischief can I go?"

Most of the windows were dark; but in Durfee two lighted squares showed that some one was still up. He had no time to reach his own rooms in Lawrence, so, without hesitation, he plunged into the near-by entrance and ran lightly up the stairs of Durfee.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE COMPACT.

'All evening Dick Merriwell's rooms had been filled with a laughing, joking crowd of fellows. Joe Crowfoot had been there, and Eben Lamb, and many of the new senior class dropped in one after another to welcome back two of the most popular men in college.

But for the past hour they had been gone, and Merriwell and his chum were left alone. With the departure of the last man, they had slipped off their outer garments and donned dressing gowns and comfortable slippers, and in this attire they sat in the study, one on each side of the table.

Dick held a book in his hand, but it did not seem to interest him absorbingly. Now and then his eyes left the printed page and wandered dreamily about, or fixed themselves thoughtfully upon some object which it was quite plain he did not see at all, so immersed was he in his own thoughts.

Buckhart had long since let the newspaper he had been looking over fall into his lap, and he lay back in the chair, staring at the ceiling.

For a long time not a word had passed between them. Then the Texan heaved a tremendous sigh.

* Dick looked up quickly.

"What's the trouble, Brad?" he asked.

Buckhart gave a sudden start and withdrew his eyes from the ceiling.

"Trouble? What do you mean, pard?" he asked.

"Why, just now you gave a fearful sigh, and I wondered what was ailing you."

"Oh, did I?" the big Westerner inquired sheepishly.

"I didn't mean to. I don't feel a whole lot good tonight. Reckon that salad we had for dinner didn't agree with me any."

"I thought something was the matter with you," Dick returned. "You've been awfully glum ever since the fellows left."

Buckhart straightened up on his chair.

"Humph!" he remarked. "You sure haven't been a heap talkative yourself, pard, if any one should ask me."

Merriwell hesitated a moment.

"Perhaps that's the effect of the salad, too," he said presently. "I've certainly felt a lot better than I do at the present moment."

Buckhart did not answer, and for a space silence descended again upon the room. Dick had not returned to his brown study, however, though he seemed to be thinking hard. Presently he shot a glance at his chum, and, at the sight of the Texan's gloomy expression, his brows wrinkled slightly and he nodded his head the least bit. At last a slight smile curved the corners of his lips—a rather wry smile, it was, too—and he sat up more erect in his chair.
“Say, old fellow,” he remarked slowly. “I think I know what’s the matter with me.”

Buckhart looked swiftly toward him.

“What?”

“I’m homesick for the boys,” Dick confessed frankly, “It’s that and nothing more. It seems so lonesome not to have them around, and I can’t help thinking about them and wondering where they are and what they are doing.”

For a second the Texan gazed straight into the eyes of his chum. Then he brought his great fist down with a thump on his knee.

“By George, pard!” he exclaimed. “I reckon you’ve hit the bull’s-eye. I opine that’s just what’s troubling me, and I never knew it. I’ve been wondering why in thunder I felt so mean and onery, and couldn’t get Big and Tommy and the rest of ’em out of my nut. Gee! You wouldn’t think it would make a fellow feel that way, would you?”

“It’s perfectly natural,” Dick returned quickly.

“After the way we’ve been associated for all these years, it would be queer if we didn’t miss them. But we’ve got to make the best of it, Brad. We can’t sit around this way and mope. The boys are gone and nothing we can do will bring them back.

“If we’d graduated we certainly shouldn’t be with them now, we probably wouldn’t even have seen each other. That’s surely a lot to be thankful for. At least, you and I are here together in the dear old place. We’ve got one whole, long, glorious year before us, and we mustn’t waste any of it with vain regrets or useless longings for the unattainable. I’m afraid it will pass only too quickly as it is, and we must make the most of every moment.

“We’ll have to make new friends, that’s all. There’s an old saying that there are as many fish in the sea as ever were caught, and we know what a lot of good fellows there are right in our own class. It’s just happened that we haven’t been thrown with them, that’s all.

“I don’t mean by this that I want to forget the old friends. I don’t think I could do that if I wanted to. They have a place which can never be filled by any one else. But we’ve got to brace up and not think of ourselves or our longings.

“It’s one of the sad things about life—real life out in the world—that a fellow seems to make friends only to lose them again. You can’t carry every on about with you, and I believe if we just go into things heart and soul as we’ve always done, and make the best of what we’ve got, we’ll have a bully year before us. Don’t you think so, old fellow?”

As Merriwell finished speaking, Buckhart sprang to his feet, his face glowing and his eyes alight with enthusiasm.

“By thunder, you’re right, pard!” he exploded. “That’s the right line of talk, and I’ve been a sure enough idiot not to have got it into my nut before. You won’t see the Untamed Maverick of the Pecos wasting any more time crying for the moon. I reckon we ought to extract every tone of enjoyment out of this last year there is in it; and if we don’t, it sure won’t be the fault of yours truly. Your hear me shout!”

Their hands met in a firm clasp as the bargain was sealed, and from that moment life somehow took on a rosier tinge. In a way, they had put the past resolutely behind them, and their eyes were upon the future, which loomed big and bright ahead of them, full of the promise of good times, hard work, indoors and out, the making of new friendships and renewing of the old. Through it all ran that fascinating charm of the unknown and the unexpected, which only the future holds.

They had scarcely resumed their seats, when all at once, from the campus without, came a shrill whistle, followed instantly by another.

“Humph! What the deuce is up, I wonder?” the Texan said curiously.

The next moment the whistle was repeated, then came the sound of swift footsteps on the stairs and a quick rap on their door.

“Come in,” Dick called without hesitation.

The door swung open instantly, and a slim, lithe fellow, with a keen, freckled face, entered swiftly and closed it behind him.

For a moment he did not speak, but stood against the door, looking at Merriwell, an expression of surprise in his bright eyes. His face was flushed and his breathing a little irregular, as if he had been running; otherwise he was quite undisturbed. Both Dick and Brad recognized him as a fellow they had often seen about the campus, though they did not know his name, and they waited with considerable curiosity for his explanation of the sudden and rather untimely visit.

“Can you hide me here for a little while?” the slim chap asked presently, in a calm but perfectly serious voice, quite as though he were requesting the loan of a match.

Dick raised his eyebrows.
"Why, I guess so," he returned. "What's the matter?"

"I've just killed a man," was the astounding answer, made in a most casual manner.

Merriwell's eyes twinkled.

"Is that all?" he inquired. "You don't look very murderous."

"From a child I was cursed with an ungovernable temper," the little fellow explained. "It's been the bane of my life; and now—and now, I fear it has been my undoing."

His voice faltered with extreme realism, but he recovered himself quickly.

"If you will help me," he went on, with unruffled calm, "I should suggest haste. The police, you know—"

He broke off abruptly as the unmistakable sound of tramping on the stairs came to their ears; and Dick, who was watching him closely, saw a look of real concern flash into his eyes for an instant and then vanish.

Evidently the affair was more serious than he had at first supposed, and without an instant's hesitation he pointed to the bedroom door.

"Inside there!" he said tersely. "The closet!"

With a couple of bounds, the slim fellow crossed the room and disappeared; Dick snatched up his book, and Brad, following his example, grabbed a paper.

The footsteps sounded loudly in the hall without, and the next moment came a thundering rat-tat-tat on the door.

CHAPTER V.

THE WORST FELLOW IN COLLEGE.

Before either of the fellows could bid the unknown caller enter, the door was flung open hastily and their astonished glances rested on the tall, slim form of Stealthy Steve, the proctor. His face was flushed, his hands clenched, his whole form trembled with rage or some equally consuming emotion. Behind him peered the face of the watchman.

The proctor bounced into the room as though he had been shot from a catapult.

"A disgraceful affair!" he snarled. "In all my experience I have never known anything more outrageous! You'll regret this night's work bitterly, young man—bitterly!"

Buckhart's face flushed angrily and he half started from his chair, but Merriwell looked up at their angry visitor with perfect coolness.

"If you could manage to be a little more definite, Mr. Hodgeman," he said calmly, "we might understand what you are talking about."

The proctor's eyes fairly popped out with rage.

"How dare you?" he frothed. "You know perfectly well what I'm talking about, and your insolence won't help you a particle."

Dick's eyes narrowed a little and he rose suddenly and faced the angry man.

"Mr. Hodgeman," he said in a low, level tone, "I am not accustomed to have any one tell me I lie. I repeat, that I have no more idea of what you mean than the man in the moon. You will either conduct yourself a little more reasonably, or I must ask you to leave the room."

The proctor gasped and took an involuntary step backward. As he did so, he seemed to take in for the first time the dressing gowns, slippers, and general state of negligee of both men, and a look of bewilderment came into his face. They certainly could not have been out in those rigs, and there had been no time for them to change. Was it possible that he had made a mistake?

He swallowed hard once or twice, all the time peering keenly at Dick's face from under his bushy eyebrows.

" Didn't you just come in?" he asked at length in a more moderate tone.

" I did not," Merriwell returned tersely.

"Do you mean to tell me you haven't been out tonight?" Hodgeman snapped, controlling himself with evident difficulty.

"Since coming in from dinner, neither Buckhart nor myself has stirred out of these rooms," Dick answered.

The proctor looked unconvinced. Then his eye fell on the book which Merriwell had laid aside and the paper Brad still held in his clenched hand.

"Reading, eh?" he inquired sarcastically. "Strikes me it's rather late to be sitting up reading a novel with the term opening to-morrow morning at eight."

Dick was quite unruffled.

"Possibly," he said calmly; "but I have never heard that there was any law against it."

Hodgeman was furious. He peered around the room suspiciously, but there was absolutely nothing out of the way. He had run up the stairs of Durfee perfectly confident that he could put his hands on the man who had committed the dastardly outrage of
painting the venerable Pierson red, and now he was balked—checkmated.

He had no doubt in his mind that Dick Merriwell was the guilty man, but there was not an atom of proof, and the fact made him wild with impotent rage. He glanced at Dick's face again, and the look of quiet amusement on it was the last straw.

"I'll get you yet, Merriwell!" he snarled. "You may be clever, but I'll get you yet!"

"You're perfectly welcome to get me, as you call it, any time you are able, Mr. Hodgeman," Dick returned. "I'm not ashamed of my doings. I should suggest, however, that you take a more seasonable occasion. You, yourself, have commented on the lateness of the hour. I hope I won't appear inhospitable if I ask you to bid us good night and allow us to seek the repose you consider so necessary for the ordeal to-morrow."

It was not the most politic thing in the world deliberately to antagonize the irate proctor in this way; but Dick was only human, and the man's manner and language had ruffled him rather more than he showed. Consequently he could not resist the opportunity to twit him in a mild fashion at his failure to accomplish his purpose.

As for Hodgeman, he glared at Merriwell as if he would have enjoyed eating him; and then, without another word, he whirled around, hurried into the hall, and slammed the door behind him.

"The onery varmint!" exploded the Texan. "What in thunder does he mean by breaking in here with that line of talk? He's off his trolley!"

Dick looked thoughtfully at his friend.

"Not so far off as you think," he returned slowly. "He was on the trail of some one and thought I was the one, that's all. I was foolish to talk to him the way I did, but I couldn't resist the opportunity."

"What the mischief did you say?" Buckhart inquired with considerable vehemence. "You weren't half strong enough for the miserable snake in the grass. Just because he's proctor he thinks he's got a license to spit out anything that comes into his fool head. I sure wish I'd got my jaw working. I'd have given him a spiel that would have surprised him a-plenty. You hear me shout!"

"That's just the reason I wanted to get him out of the room," Dick smiled. "I had a notion you couldn't hold in much longer. I wonder what the trouble's all about, anyhow?"

"Have the minions of the law departed?" inquired a voice coolly. "Is the coast clear?"

Looking quickly toward the bedroom, Merriwell saw the curly head of the stranger protruding from the doorway.

"Yes, they've gone," he said quietly.

"I am eternally your debtor, gentlemen," the slim chap said suavely, as he came forward. "You have saved me from a horrid fate."

"In which case," Merriwell smiled, "the least you can do is to tell us what you've done."

The stranger raised his eyebrows in hurt surprise.

"But I have already told you," he protested, "that in a moment of fearful passion I slew a man."

Dick was about to make a bantering reply when his eye suddenly fell on the slim chap's right hand, which he had hitherto held behind his back. It was smeared with red.

For an instant he was really startled. Then he remembered the faint odor of paint he had noticed at the first entrance of the stranger, and he settled back in his chair with a look of amusement on his face.

"Wouldn't it be wiser to wash off the traces of your bloody deed before you go?" he asked quietly.

The little fellow followed the direction of his glance and gave a well simulated start of horror.

"Out, damned spot!" he quoted in a sepulchral tone. "'Not all the perfumes of Arabia will sweeten that little hand.'"

Dick's eyes twinkled.

"You might try turpentine," he suggested.

The stranger gave a sudden chuckle.

"Not a bad idea," he said quickly. "I will."

He settled his cap firmly on his curly hair and thrust both hands into his pockets.

"Gentlemen," he resumed in his grandiloquent tone, "words have not been coined by which to properly express my gratitude. I can only assure you both that from this day henceforth you can count on Eric Fitzgerald to his last cent or the uttermost drop of blood in his body."

As he uttered the name both men gave a start of surprise.

"Fitzgerald!" the Texan exclaimed sharply. "The worst fellow in Yale!"

Dick made no remark. He was eying the youth before him with fresh interest.

Fitzgerald pulled off his cap and bowed to the ground. When he lifted his head his face was slightly flushed, perhaps from the sudden stooping over, and there was a smile on his lips.

"I have never agreed with the immortal Bill, when he naively asks, 'What's in a name?' he remarked
nonchalantly. “A name is everything, and as I listen to the words of our renowned Texan I feel that I have not lived in vain.”

He laughed gayly, but to Dick’s sensitive ear it rang a little false.

“Gentlemen, I thank you for that title,” the slim fellow went on, his hand on the doorknob. “It will make me the envy of many. I thank you for saving me from disgrace and capture, and say good night.”

“Good night,” came pleasantly from Merriwell’s lips, while Buckhart growled out something unintelligible, which might have been taken for almost anything.

As Fitzgerald slipped quietly through the door and closed it softly behind him, there was a smile on his lips and his whole bearing was one of jaunty satisfaction; but Dick had caught a fleeting glimpse of his brown eyes, and the look in them was far from being one of elation.

It was the look of a man who had been brought suddenly face to face with something the existence of which he had totally failed to realize. There was shame in it, and actual physical pain, which caused a responsive thrill of pity in Merriwell’s sensitive nature, and made him very thoughtful.

CHAPTER VI.
WHO DID IT?

The moment they emerged from Durfee next morning, Merriwell and Buckhart knew that something unusual had taken place on the campus. A great mob of fellows were congregated over by Dwight Hall, and they at once strolled across to see what was up.

They had not gone much more than half the distance before they saw only too clearly.

Glistening in the bright morning sun was the statue of the venerable first president of Yale, smeared from head to foot in a thick coat of bright red paint, appalling in its crudity, a sickening eyesore and incongruity in the setting of mellow stone and dark, restful green.

Dick gave an exclamation of regret.

“What a beastly shame!” he exclaimed hotly. “I didn’t know there was a fellow in college who would commit a piece of vandalism like that.”

He stopped abruptly as his mind flashed back to the occurrences of the night before. This, then, was the meaning of the stain of paint on Fitzgerald’s hand, and all the rest of the disturbance; and Brad, who was watching him closely, saw him press his lips tightly together and frown.

“There’s not much use going any farther, is there?” Dick said the next instant. “We can see all we want to from here, and I’m hungry.

“I’m usually ready for almost any kind of a lark,” he went on, as they turned away; “but that sort of senseless ruining of valuable property is a little beyond me.”

“It sure looks as if that was what our friend Fitz was up to last night,” Buckhart observed. “I opine that gent will get it where the chicken got the axe if he isn’t plenty cautious.”

Dick nodded silently, and the subject was dropped. It was not until just as they were getting up from the breakfast table that he resumed it again.

“About Fitzgerald, old fellow,” he began hesitatingly, “if I were you, I wouldn’t——”

“Now, pard,” the Texan broke in reproachfully, “you’ve sure known me long enough to cut out all that sort of spiel. You know I wouldn’t peach on a fellow no matter who he was. You hear me talk!”

“Of course, I do,” Merriwell answered quickly. “I was only going to suggest that neither of us say anything, even to the boys, about what happened in the rooms last night. You know, in talking the thing over we might very easily let something slip if we weren’t cautious; and I think it would be better if we kept mum for a while, anyway.”

“Sure thing,” Buckhart agreed readily, though his face expressed a momentary surprise at his chum’s earnestness.

Naturally the painting of the statue caused a good deal of excitement and was the principal topic of conversation throughout the corridors and various lecture rooms that morning. The general opinion seemed to be that it was the work of some particularly exuberant and daring freshman, and a good deal of surprise was expressed that they had started in so soon.

Rumors were rife that Steady Steve had nearly caught one of the culprits the night before; some even said confidently that the names of the fellows were known and that they would be summoned before the dean, who was furious and had taken the matter into his own hands.

It can be safely said, however, that when Merriwell was summoned to the dean’s office about the middle of the morning, there were but two men in the entire col-
lege who connected that incident with the topic they had been discussing with so much vigor.

As his chum arose calmly and followed the attendant out of the room, Buckhart looked a little uneasy, while for a singlet instant the freckled face of Eric Fitzgerald turned white.

If Dick felt any uneasiness as he entered the office where the dean sat alone, with the exception of his stenographer, he did not show it. With perfect self-possession, he closed the door behind him and walked over to the desk.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Merriwell," the dean said pleasantly. "Take a seat."

Dick returned his greeting and sat down by the desk.

"The—er—proctor seems to entertain some suspicion, Mr. Merriwell, that you were concerned in this outrage last night," the older man began without any delay. "I scarcely think so myself, but I can neglect no clues. Where did you spend last evening?"

"In my rooms, sir," Dick returned. "My roommate and myself did not leave them after we came in from dinner. There were a number of fellows there during the evening, and after they had gone we got into dressing gowns and sat down to read."

"Then you knew nothing of this vandalism which was committed until Mr. Hodgeman told you of it?"

"We did not know about it until this morning," Dick answered. "Mr. Hodgeman came to our rooms rather late last night, but he did not tell us what had happened."

There was a momentary silence as the dean studied the frank, open face of the man before him. Then he nodded briskly.

"Thank you very much," he said quietly. "That will be all, I think. I'm sorry to have troubled you."

"No trouble at all, sir," Merriwell answered as he arose.

A moment later he was out of the building and crossing the campus. One of the first fellows he met was Eric Fitzgerald, who had plainly been waiting for him, and who, in spite of the efforts he made to conceal his feelings, was palpably worried.

As Merriwell reached him Fitz looked eagerly into his face.

"Is it—er—all right?" he stammered.

"Is what all right?" Dick inquired slowly.

The slim chap gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, I thought he had you in to ask about last night!"

"He did," Dick returned, smiling a little.

"You fixed it all right, then," Fitzgerald said eagerly. "He doesn't know?"

Merriwell's eyes narrowed.

"I didn't fix it at all, Fitzgerald," he said emphatically. "I wouldn't do that for you or anybody else. It happened that the dean asked me questions which I could answer with perfect truthfulness, without giving you away."

An expression of intense relief flashed over the little fellow's face.

"Gee-whiz!" he exclaimed thankfully. "I'm glad of that. I was worried for fair when you went in there. I've wriggled along so far, and I certainly wouldn't like to be fired out at this stage of the game."

Dick made no answer, and for a time they walked along in silence. Presently Fitzgerald looked up at him quickly.

"Say, Merriwell," he burst out, "I felt mean as dirt last night to put you in the position I did with Stealthy Steve; but, honest, there wasn't another way out of it. I just had to run into Durfee to escape being caught, and you were the only fellow awake."

Dick looked at him keenly.

"Just what do you mean, Fitzgerald, by the position you put me in?" he asked slowly.

"Why, of having to lie to Stealthy Steve, of course."

Merriwell stopped still where he stood and his face grew stern.

"Now look here, Fitz," he said quickly, "you don't know me very well, and we may as well have an understanding first as last. I should like you to get it through your head that I have a constitutional objection to lying. I have never done so, and I don't propose to begin now. I didn't lie to Hodgeman last night—didn't even act a lie, which is sometimes as bad as telling one.

"He thought all along that I was the one he was after, and the questions he asked were all from that point of view. I answered them all truthfully. The only thing I didn't do was to tell him that his man was hiding in the bedroom closet. I didn't feel called on to give him that information gratuitously, and it's the only thing you have to thank me for."

Fitzgerald was watching him with a look of admiration.

"But what would you have done if he asked whether there was any one else there?" he questioned eagerly.

"I should simply have refused to answer his question," Merriwell returned promptly.
"But what if he tried to search the rooms?" persisted the little fellow.

Dick smiled.

"I should probably have expressed indignation and politely but firmly put him out."

Fitz drew a long breath.

"Gee, I wish I had that strength of character!" he sighed.

"Do you know, Merriwell," he went on confidently, "I hate a liar like poison; but I don't fancy there's a fellow in college that tells more of them than I do. I just can't seem to help it, and I hate myself like all creation for doing it. Somehow, I seem to be always getting into tight places that I couldn't possibly get out of if I told the truth. If I could cut it out I'd be the happiest man alive."

Dick hesitated for a moment. He had a feeling that, though Fitzgerald seemed to be thoroughly in earnest, he wasn't the sort of fellow who would take advice readily.

"Well, of course that's all up to you," he said at length. "You can stop lying if you really make up your mind to. Why don't you let up a little on the scraps? Then perhaps you wouldn't have so much temptation to tell untraths."

The slim chap grinned.

"Oh, say!" he protested, "life wouldn't be worth living if I didn't do something now and then to keep my blood in circulation."

"Tell me, Fitz," Merriwell asked slowly, "do you honestly feel proud of last night's achievement?"

The little fellow's face flushed and he averted his eyes.

"Well, no," he returned, in a subdued voice, "to tell the truth, I don't. But the fellows said I was afraid, and I've never taken a dare in my life."

"What fellows?" Dick asked quickly.

"Oh, Mac Gebhard, Smilie, and Blackmer. Mac was the one who brought up the subject. Said he dared me to do it in our freshman year, and that I had cold feet; but I know he was wrong, for I'm sure I'd have jumped at the chance three years ago."

Dick's face took on a look of keen interest.

"Well, what then?" he questioned.

"Of course, I told him I wasn't afraid of anything," Fitz returned quickly, "and bet him fifty that I'd paint Abe from head to foot without being caught."

"Did he take you up?"

"Sure. Mac's a sport, all right. Then the fellows helped me carry the ladder over and kept watch while I did the painting. If it hadn't been for them Steamy Steve would have caught me with the goods."

Merriwell looked at him for a moment in thoughtful silence.

"What became of the fellows afterward?" he asked presently.

"Oh, they beat it, of course," the slim chap answered. "I didn't see them until this morning. Mac wasn't any too chipper at losing the fifty, either."

"He paid up, I suppose?" Dick said casually.

"Well, no," Fitzgerald confessed. "He's a little short just now, but he will, all right. Mac's a sport."

"It didn't occur to you as a little odd that Steamy Steve should be on the job at that hour of the night, I suppose?" Merriwell inquired.

"Why, no," Fitz answered. "He's always snooping around."

They had reached the entrance of Durfee, and Dick paused with one foot on the step.

"Drop around and see me some time when you haven't anything else to do," he invited cordially.

The curly-haired fellow looked at him in surprise.

"Why, I thought——" he stammered.

"He stopped, and Merriwell looked at him inquiringly.

"Well?"

"Why, I didn't think you had any use for a fellow that trained with my crowd," Fitzgerald said hesitatingly.

Dick smiled.

"I haven't any particular use for your crowd, Fitz," he said pleasantly "but I do like you, and I should be glad if you'd come around whenever you feel like it." A look of pleasure flashed into the slim chap's face and his eyes brightened.

"If you really mean it, I'll come," he said quickly. "Of course I mean it," Merriwell laughed as he started up the steps. "Otherwise I shouldn't have asked you. So-long."

"By-by," returned the other quickly. "Some of these days I'll take you up."

Settling his cap firmly on his head, he turned on his heel, and started briskly across the campus, whistling merrily.

CHAPTER VII.

A GOOD SAMARITAN.

Jim Blackmer did not room on the campus. He always contended that there was much more freedom in outside lodgings, and for the last two years he ocu-
pied a sitting room, bedroom, and bath on Chapel
Street.
In their furnishing and decoration he had allowed
his tastes full sway, and the result was certainly strik-
ing.
To begin with, Blackmer hated anything which
savored of subdued coloring. The exact hue did not
much matter so long as it was bright and cheerful,
as he termed it and he had collected in his sitting
room the most appalling combination of various shades
of red, yellow, bright green and vivid blue—a fear-
ful, inharmonious medley, which he thought very
tasty.
The pictures were entirely of a sporting variety,
mingled with many highly colored prints and some
photographs of chorus girls. The mantelpieces were
covered with steins and beer mugs, which were not
entirely for decoration.
There were few, if any, books to be seen; but the
table was laden with sporting magazines and papers,
ash trays, pipes, cigar and cigarette boxes and a host
of other things, strewn about in the greatest disorder.
One was more apt to find a cigar butt on the mantle-
piece, or thrust down between the cushions of a Morris
chair, than in an ash tray, and frequently the de-
spairing landlady had removed beer bottles from under
the sofa, taken them out of the fireplace, and even
from the confines of the bathroom.
Once she had discovered a partly emptied whisky
bottle, minus the cork, tucked into one of a pair of
riding boots which Blackmer had purchased in a mo-
ment of enthusiasm, together with an entire riding
outfit. He had used them only once, owing to the
hard work involved, but occasionally he had a habit
of arraying himself in them and dropping in casually
on an acquaintance as though he had just come from
a ride. It was very effective.
Mrs. Pullen could put up with a good deal, for
Blackmer paid his rent with fair regularity and was
so easy going that he never noticed whether his rooms
were swept every week or once a month; but the dis-
ccovery of the whisky bottle in the boot was almost
the last straw.
“Gracious heavens!” she exclaimed, drawing it forth.
“What next, I wonder? It’s a mercy he didn’t put it
in the other end down and waste all that good licker.
It’s so good for medicinal purposes, too. I’ll just
find a cork and keep it in case of a cold.”
Which she did; and it was not the first time, either.
Colds were strangely frequent with Mrs. Pullen.
Blackmer often had a few congenial fellows in for
a quiet game, and to-night one of these little affairs
was in progress—or, rather, nearly at an end.
Generally they lasted to all hours of the morning,
but to-night Fitzgerald’s roll had been quite exhausted
by eleven o’clock; and the other three fellows knew
one another too well to expect any coin to be forth-
coming from each other.
They might, it is true, have gone on playing, ex-
tracting I O U’s from the little chap; but as soon as
his money was gone Fitzgerald began to issue written
orders on Gebhard.
“What haven’t paid bet yet, ol’ fel’,” he chuckled thickly.
“You c’n be m’ banker.”
He laughed hilariously as though he considered it
a side-splitting joke; but the others did not seem to
see anything humorous about it. Gebhard dropped
his cards, with a yawn, drained what was left in his
tall glass, and rose to his feet.
“Don’t feel much like poker to-night,” he remarked,
lighting the butt of his cigar over the lamp. “How’s
the allowance, Fitz, old boy?”
“Not mush left,” the curly-haired chap returned
cheerfully. “Starve soon.”
Blackmer laughed loudly, but with little heartiness.
“Oh, they’ll send some more from home as soon as
you get strapped,” he said, reaching for a cigarette.
“You’ve got to have coin, you know. They’ll have to
send you a check.”
He spoke hopefully, quite as if the check was com-
ing to him; and in truth he had always managed to
get his share of the little chap’s remittances.
The latter shook his head positively, and kept on
shaking it in a maundering way as though he never meant
to leave off.
“No use,” he murmured sadly. “Not bit use. You
don’ know broth’r John. Broth’r John’sh firm—awful
firm.”
He got on his feet unsteadily, and, staggering to the
Morris chair, plumped himself down in it.
There was silence for a time. Blackmer rested his
elbows on the table and watched the slim chap fur-
tively; Smilie was dreamily shuffling the cards over
and over again; Gebhard leaned against the mantel, a
deep scowl on his face, and his black eyes fixed in-
tently on the curly-haired fellow in the big chair. He
had fully expected to pay his bet—if he ever paid it
at all—with money won from Fitzgerald, and it was
most exasperating to find that this would be impossible.
It had always been so absurdly easy to win money
from the little fellow, who invariably got “lit up”
with the second or third drink, that the three men had
come to look on him as a perfectly legitimate source of supply, and had even grown to count beforehand on just how much they would extract from him in this way.

Apparently these good times were at an end, and the idea did not add to the good humor of any of them.

Suddenly Gebhardt threw his butt into the fireplace and reached for his hat.

“Well, I'm off,” he said shortly. “By-bye.”

“Say, wait s'ckond,” protested Fitz, rousing himself. “I'll go wi' you.”

But his words were addressed to empty air, for Gebhardt had disappeared through the door, slamming it behind him.

The slim chap looked at the others in an aggrieved manner.

“Whatcher matter wi' him?” he inquired.

Neither of them replied. Smilie was showing unmistakable signs of instant departure, and Blackmer, scenting the prospect of having the almost helpless Fitz left on his hands, grabbed the dreamy one by the arm.

“Wait a minute,” he whispered sharply. “You've got to take him along.”

Smilie protested.

“I'm not going that way,” he snapped. “I don't want to be bothered.”

“Oh, pifflie!” Blackmer exclaimed. “You don't have to take him all the way. Drop him anywhere in the next block, so he won't get back here. He'll manage all right, or if he don't, some cop will look after him.”

He laughed callously, as though the prospect struck him as very amusing.

The result was that, after some coaxing, Fitz was induced to accompany the erstwhile dreamy Smilie—now decidedly snappy—downstairs and into the street.

They kept together until the corner was reached, and there, a discussion arising as to which way they should go, Smilie promptly dropped his arm and left him.

Deprived of support, the little fellow swayed back and forth helplessly for a few moments, and, finding that the pavement had a tendency to rock up and down, he staggered to a near-by step and dropped down on it.

Five or ten minutes later, Dick Merriwell, returning from a call, discovered him still sitting there, snuggled close against the iron post, which he was embracing fondly.

Taking in the situation at once, Dick stopped abruptly and looked down at him in silence.

“'Llo,” Fitzgerald remarked thickly, but with perfect good humor. “Lovely—hic!—c-c-creatur' here, but s-s-shy. S-she—hic!—won't s-speak to me.”

Dick choked suddenly.

“Better not waste any more time here, then,” he said quietly. “Come along, Fitz; I'm going your way.”

A look of maudlin surprise came into the little fellow's face.

“Why, its—hic!—Merri'l,” he exclaimed. “S-sure I'll come along.”

He dropped the post and staggered to his feet. Dick wasted no time, but grabbed his arm at once and started down the street toward the campus.

At first Fitzgerald was for making all sorts of little excursions down side streets, into doorways, or even shop windows; but, finding that Dick was quite firm, he presently gave up these attempts and came with him docilely enough, though with considerable unsteadiness.

Merriwell knew that he roomed in Lawrence Hall, but just what part of it he had no idea. Luckily at the entrance he encountered Blair Hildebrand, a senior, whom he knew and liked, and together they managed to get Fitzgerald upstairs and to bed.

“Had no idea you were chummy with Fitz,” Hildebrand remarked, as they were coming downstairs.

“He certainly is stewed for fair to-night.”

Dick laughed.

“I'm not exactly chummy with him,” he said quickly. “I found him sitting on some steps in Chapel Street, and could scarcely go on and leave him there.”

“Oh, I see,” Hildebrand returned. “Too bad he gets loaded so often. He'd be a blamed good sort if it wasn't for that—and the rotten crowd he goes with.”

He stopped at a door on the second floor.

“Well, this is my station,” he went on. “Won't you come in?”

“No, thanks,” Merriwell answered. “It's pretty late, and I want to hit the downy. Good night.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TEXAN MYSTIFIED.

The first afternoon of football practice was over, and dusty, perspiring men in groups of twos and threes were hastening across the field to the dressing rooms, which were soon filled to overfilling.

More than fifty men had turned out on the field, and the coach, Bill Fullerton, together with Buck-
hart and Merriwell, had been busy weeding out the undesirable material and making up a tentative eleven, as well as a good scrub team.

Five of last year’s eleven had departed with the graduating class, but Fullerton had hopes of filling their places acceptably. He was overjoyed that Dick and Brad had returned for another year, for at the end of the preceding season he had been down in the dumps at the prospect of their leaving with the rest. When practise was over he stood with them by one of the goal posts, discussing, in his sharp, incisive manner, some of the more promising candidates for the open positions.

In the dressing room more than one man was sick at heart, as well as sore in body; for Fullerton was a hard taskmaster, and never minced his words. He believed in telling a man just what he thought of his playing, and then some; with the result that, while it spurred most of the men to greater efforts, a certain few bitterly resented what they considered his unjust discrimination.

Morgan Grath was one of this sort. Though a junior and a fellow who had come out for football every year, he had never gotten farther along than playing on the scrub; for he had a case of abnormally swelled head and a violent temper, which he made no effort to curb.

He had been tried in one or two games the past season, but had been thrown out for slugging; and Buckhart had sworn at the time that he would never give him another chance.

The result was, that Grath hated the Texan like poison, hated Fullerton with almost equal vehemence, disliked Merriwell because he was Brad’s closest friend, and never lost an opportunity to sneer at either of them.

To-day, fully expecting to be given a position on the regular eleven, he had been furious when it had been made up without him, and had scornfully declined to play right end on the scrub.

Now, in the dressing room, he was mad through and through; and, as he yanked off his jersey, he was expressing himself with much bitterness to Fred Maitland, one of his particular friends and a fellow who disliked Buckhart and Merriwell simply from unreasoning jealousy at their success in Yale athletics, and their extraordinary popularity.

"That bragging, blustering cow-puncher never was fit to be captain of the eleven," frothed Grath, who seldom paused to consider what he said when he was angry. "The idea of throwing me down and putting Kilpatrick into the line! Rot! He and Dick Merriwell go around like little tin gods on wheels!"

"Merriwell didn’t look like any little tin god last night when I saw him reeling across the campus with Fitzgerald," sneered Maitland maliciously.

Grath looked up quickly, his eyes sparkling with interest.

"Drunk?" he asked eagerly.

"Drunk as lords, both of them," returned Maitland quickly. "They had a hard job to navigate at all."

They had not attempted to moderate their voices. In fact, Maitland seemed rather anxious than otherwise to have the fellows about hear what he was saying; for when he had finished speaking he stole a look around to see how his information was received.

His eyes encountered those of Blair Hildebrand, who stood in the doorway and had apparently heard only the last part of his remarks.

"Merriwell drunk?" exclaimed a husky sophomore. "I never heard of such a thing!"

Hildebrand stepped into the room.

"No, nor anybody else," he said scornfully. "Was that who you were talking about, Maitland?"

"Yes, it was," returned Maitland boldly, though secretly he was a little nervous at the look in the stalwart guard’s blue eyes. "I saw him staggering across the campus last night with that soak Fitzgerald, and he could hardly walk."

Hildebrand gave a short laugh and turned carelessly to his locker.

"Use your eyes a little more the next time, Maitland," he said sarcastically. "You don’t seem to be able to distinguish the difference between a fellow that’s soused and one who is taking him home. Merriwell picked Fitzgerald up on Chapel Street, and was helping him to his rooms. I happened to meet them at the door, and went up with them. You ought to know better than to accuse Dick Merriwell of such a thing. He never touches a drop."

Maitland flushed scarlet at the other’s tone, turning back to the growling Grath without a word.

"Humph!" muttered the latter spitefully. "If he doesn’t drink, he’s certainly taken up with a bunch of lushers. I’ve seen him chumming more than once this week with Fitz."

And so had Brad Buckhart.

Several times during the past few days he had observed the growing intimacy between his roommate and Eric Fitzgerald, with mixed feelings. At first he had been merely surprised. He supposed that the little fellow had taken advantage of Dick’s good na-
ture and forced his company upon him, but very soon he discovered that it was Merrriwell who was taking the initiative.

"I sure don’t savvy what he sees in the little runt," he grumbled to himself one evening when Fitz appeared as if by invitation and spent a couple of hours in their rooms. "He’s got the worst reputation of any fellow in college, lishes like a fish, and travels around with a crowd of rotten dead beats."

Not for the world, however, would he say a word to Dick. If his chum didn’t want to explain the matter to him, he wasn’t going to be nosy; and, anyhow, he told himself, it didn’t make any difference to him who Dick went with.

But in spite of all this, Bukhart did mind, and he was just a little sore, and a good deal mystified to be kept in the dark.

Walking home that night, he and Dick were both full of football, and discussed nothing else but the prospects for a corking eleven, the capabilities of various new men, changes in the rules, and so on, indefinitely.

As they opened the door, Brad was discoursing volubly on a pet play of his; but the rush of words stopped like magic as his eyes fell upon the slight figure of Eric Fitzgerald lolling in a chair by the window, looking as irritatingly pert and chipper as ever.

"Hello, fellows," he grinned. "Just back from practise?"

"No, we’ve been having a game of croquet," snapped Buckhart sourly, as he strode into the bedroom and slammed the door.

Fitz raised his eyebrows whimsically as he looked at Merrriwell.

"Your friend the cow-puncher doesn’t like me very well, does he?" he remarked.

"He’s just been helping the new captain wade through fifty candidates to pick out twenty-two," Dick returned evasively. "That’s a job to try the patience of a saint, and Brad’s far from being that."

He was well aware of the Texan’s dislike for the slim chap, and had done his best to combat it—so far in vain.

The next instant Fitzgerald sprang up and faced Merrriwell, his face grown strangely serious, for him.

"I’m a chump, Merrriwell," he burst out—"a beastly chump! I don’t see why it is you’re so decent with me."

"What’s troubling you now?" Dick asked quietly.

"Oh, last night!" Fitz said bitterly. "I was stewed—soused—pickled to the gills. You brought me home, didn’t you?"

Dick nodded silently.

"I thought so," the slim chap went on quickly. "I have a sort of hazy recollection of your picking me up somewhere and taking me to Lawrence. Gee! How I hate it all—hate myself—hate everything!"

"They say that ‘morning-after’ feeling isn’t pleasant," Merrriwell observed.

"It isn’t only that, it’s the booze," Fitz returned quickly. "I detest the beastly stuff, and about two drinks is all that’s necessary to send me clean off my nut."

Dick looked at him in astonishment.

"You don’t like the taste of it?" he questioned.

"I loathe it!" exclaimed the other vehemently.

"Well, why under the sun do you drink it?" was Merrriwell’s not unnatural inquiry.

"To keep with the bunch," Fitz returned promptly. "If you don’t, you’re not a good fellow. You’re out of the running altogether."

Dick smiled a little.

"I’ve managed to keep pretty well in the running without it," he commented.

"Oh, well, you’re different. You’re the best athlete Yale ever had, and that makes up for it. Now, a fellow like me—"

"Can do without it just as well as I can," Dick broke in quickly, "and be just as popular. This talk about having to drink to be a good fellow is all rot. A man who never touches a drop is always respected, and nearly always liked. If he’s not popular it isn’t because he doesn’t drink; he wouldn’t be any more of a favorite if he took to boozing—probably not half so much.

"Of course, there are always a lot of cheap sports everywhere who sneer at everything decent, temperament included, and would have you believe it’s unmanly to be on the water wagon; but those are not the kind of men who count. Their opinion isn’t worth a picayune."

He stopped and looked keenly at the curly-haired chap before him.

"By the way, Fitz," he inquired, "where were you last night?"

Fitzgerald hesitated.

"Oh, around at Blackmer’s rooms," he stammered.

"Poker?" Dick hazarded.

The slim chap nodded.

"Lose much?"

"All I had in my clothes. I generally do; I’m an
awful dub at the game. But this time I was wise enough not to have very much."

"I see," Dick said gravely.

There was silence for a moment.

"Look here, Fitz," Merriwell said suddenly. "Do you think it was a very decent sort of thing for your friends to turn you loose in the street to find your way home in the condition you were last night?"

The little fellow flushed painfully and dropped his eyes.

"I don't think—they'd do that—deliberately," he faltered. "They aren't the sort to throw down a pal. I—I sort of remember coming downstairs with somebody—don't remember who. Something must have happened."

He hesitated, casting about in his mind for some way of excusing his companions of the night before. All at once his eyes brightened.

"Perhaps I wouldn't come," he said hopefully. "Perhaps I just sat down where you found me and wouldn't move. I've done that before."

A look of regret came into Merriwell's fine eyes. It was a pity that such loyalty should be wasted on such unworthy objects. He knew a good deal about Fitzgerald's three cronies, and would have liked very much to open the boy's eyes regarding them; but he felt that he had said enough for one day. Better let that soak in before he tried any more.

"Perhaps that's what happened," he said quietly.

The clock struck, and the slim chap sprang to his feet abruptly.

"By Jove, I didn't know it was so late!" he exclaimed. "I must go. Awfully sorry to have kept you so long, Merriwell."

As he started toward the door an idea came suddenly into Dick's mind.

"Say, Fitz," he called, "if you must drink, why not try gin?"

The little fellow turned in amazement.

"Gin?" he gasped. "Great Scott! I'd be under the table before I began."

"Not if you drank the chaser and left the gin," Merriwell smiled. "Once or twice I've found it expedient to make use of such a trick, and it worked to a charm."

Fitzgerald's freckled face was wreathed in smiles.

"Gee-whiz, that's a dandy idea!" he chuckled. "Say, that's all to the good, isn't it? I'll try that the very next time, you bet your boots! Much obliged, Merriwell. You've probably saved me from a drunkard's grave. By-by!"

"Good night," Dick returned. "Come and tell me how it works."

"I sure will," chirped Fitz. "Good night."

The door slammed, and he raced downstairs and out on the campus. As Dick watched him scudding across to Lawrence, his eyes grew serious.

"What a sprinter that fellow would make if he'd only try," he murmured regretfully. "It's too bad."

CHAPTER IX.

THE POWER OF PERSUASION.

"Say, pard, what in thunder do you see in that little runt, anyhow?" Buckhart burst out suddenly.

All evening he had been thinking over the strange intimacy which was developing between his chum and Fitzgerald, and had arrived at the state of mind when it was simply impossible to hold in for another minute.

Dick looked up from his book.

"Fitzgerald, you mean?" he asked quietly.

"Sure thing," the Texan returned. "I don't seem to savvy the game at all. The other night you were talking about making new friends, and all that; but I sure didn't think you were going to start in with a little soak like that."

Merriwell closed his book and laid it on the table.

"Fitz really isn't a half-bad sort down at the bottom," he said slowly. "The trouble is he's traveled with a beastly lot of cheap sports ever since he came to college, who have got him into bad habits. If he'd cut them out, I think you'd like him."

The Westerner made an impatient gesture with his hand.

"Great Scott, pard!" he exclaimed. "You sure don't expect to reform all the soaks in New Haven, do you?"

Merriwell hesitated.

"Well, hardly," he returned. "But I really like Fitzgerald, and I want to help him. It's all poppypo-cock about his being the worst fellow at Yale. He's just bubbling over with high spirits and ginger, and they've got to find an outlet somehow. That's how he's acquired his reputation.

"There isn't a vicious trait in him, and I'd rather have a fellow of that sort than one of your narrow-minded men who are always on the lookout for flaws in other people's characters, and generally develop into sneaks themselves. If I can get him away from
the crowd of suckers he trains with, I'm sure he will turn out all to the good."

"Humph!" snorted Buckhart. "I opine you've got a job ahead of you to do that."

Dick smiled at the big fellow's vehemence. "Just wait and see, old man," he said calmly. "Try not to be prejudiced against him before I've had a chance to show you. You can trust me not to take up with any one mean or underhand, can't you?"

"Oh, sure, I know you won't do that," Brad returned grudgingly. "I'll try and muddle myself when he's 'round; but, honest, pard, I don't allow I could ever like him, so don't you expect it."

"I won't," Dick said soberly.

But inwardly he was smiling. Several times before Buckhart had very successfully overcome just such a prejudice as this, and it would not be Merriwell's fault if he did not do it again.

Luckily the Texan went out that evening before Fitzgerald appeared. Dick did not accompany him, for he rather expected that the little fellow would be over to tell about the results of his gin drinking; and, sure enough, a little after eight he pranced into the room fairly bubbling over with good spirits.

"It was great!" he exclaimed, dropping into a chair. "You're a public benefactor! Never had a better time in my life. Stayed with the boys all evening, and drank nothing but water."

Dick smiled. "Did your sudden switching over to gin cause any comment?" he inquired.

"Well, I should say yes!" the slim chap grinned. "They all wanted to know where the mischief I got the habit; and I could see they expected me to be under the table in no time at all."

He stopped and looked at Merriwell slyly. "I hated to disappoint them, you know," he chuckled.

"It was the most realistic performance you ever saw. Irving wasn't in it with little Fitz. I tell you, old fellow, it was more fun than a barrel of monkeys fooling them that way."

He laughed joyously at the recollection. Then suddenly his face clouded, and he looked at Merriwell with serious eyes.

"Do you know, Merriwell," he said slowly, "I begin to wonder if you're right about that bunch? I heard one or two things—— Well, they thought I was drunk, of course, and perhaps they were a little off themselves."

Dick saw instantly that the little fellow's belief in his friends was wavering. Evidently something had occurred the night before when they thought him drunk, but when in reality he was more sober than they, which had aroused Fitzgerald's suspicions as to the genuineness of their friendship.

Merriwell felt that the situation was a delicate one which he would have to handle with extreme care. If he showed too plainly his desire to turn Fitz against the associates of three years, it might have just the opposite effect. The innate loyalty of the little chap might blind him to the truth and undo all that Dick had worked so hard to bring about.

Consequently he abruptly changed the subject. "I was touring all through your State this summer," he remarked casually.

Fitzgerald gave an exclamation of surprise. "Really?" he asked eagerly. "Were you in Ellsburg?"

"Yes; we stopped there overnight and had a fine time."

"At the Tremont, I suppose?" Fitz questioned. "No; you've got another guess coming," Dick answered.

"Gee! You didn't get roped in at the Paxton House, did you?" the slim chap exclaimed. "That's a bum joint."

"We didn't have to stay at any hotel," Dick smiled. "We were royally entertained at the home of Mr. John Fitzgerald."

"John—my brother!" gasped Fitz. "Well, I had no idea you knew him. Why didn't you tell me before?"

"We only met them out there," Merriwell returned, "but I like him tremendously. He's a splendid fellow, and you've got a mother, Fitz, who's one in a thousand."

Fitzgerald flushed a little. "You're right," he said swiftly; "there isn't anybody like her. I'd hate like the mischief for her to know—— Oh, hang it all, a fellow's got to do stunts some time! He can't stay tied to an apron string all his life."

"She didn't give me the impression of one who would want to keep anybody from doing what they liked, provided it was nothing to be ashamed of," Merriwell returned quietly.

"No, mother's not the sort that wants to know what you're doing every minute of the day; but she wouldn't like—— she wouldn't understand——"

The flush deepened in his face and he stopped abruptly.

"Say, how did you come to meet them, anyhow?"
he went on quickly, in a tone which was meant to be casual, but failed dismally.

"It was about fifteen miles out of Ellsburg," Dick answered easily, "on a lonely road which seemed to be miles from anywhere. We were having trouble with the car—short circuit of the electricity—and I'd worked over it for nearly an hour without finding it. You know a short circuit is about the most baffling thing to locate. I was beginning to think I should never get it, when we heard a horn, and the next minute another car pulled up alongside and stopped.

"A good-looking chap of about thirty was driving, and in the tonneau were two ladies. He got out at once and asked if he could help me. I told him what the matter was, and he pulled off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and worked with me over the beastly thing for an hour and a half before he located it.

"Spoiled their ride, of course, for by the time we had the car working it was too late to do anything but turn around and go home. He didn't mind in the least. When he found we were Yale men, he insisted that we all go back and spend the night at his place; and he certainly gave us the time of our lives." Fitzgerald's eyes brightened as he listened. "That's like John," he said quickly. "He's all to the good. That must have been while I was staying up at the lake."

His eyes grew thoughtful and he relapsed into a brown study. Dick watched him keenly, wondering just what he was thinking about, and if it was a propitious moment for imparting a bit of information he had lately acquired. At length he decided to risk it.

"By the way, Fitz," he said suddenly, "we were commenting the other day on the peculiar coincidence of Stealthy Steve happening to be out on the campus at the very time when you were doing your little stunt of painting. I found out the reason last night."

The slim chap looked up quickly.

"You did?" he asked eagerly. "What was it?"


A look of astonishment and disbelief flashed into the little fellow's eyes.

"What?" he gasped incredulously.

"It's a fact," Dick nodded. "I got it from the watchman himself."

Fitzgerald gazed at him in silence, his eyes wide with amazement.

"But—nobody—knew," he stammered, "except us four."

"All the same, somebody told," Dick assured him positively. "Hodgeman was just leaving the basement to go home—he'd stopped there to get some papers—when a chap dashed in and said some one was painting the statue of Pierson over by the library."

The little fellow's eyes hardened and his mouth squared.

"Who was it?" he ripped out.

"Man with long hair and eyeglasses," Dick returned significantly. "A fellow by the name of Smilie, I believe."

An angry flush mounted to Fitzgerald's temples, and his teeth closed with a snap.

"Smilie!" he grated—"Horace Smilie, the man I thought was my friend! If I don't get square with that sneak, my name is Dennis! But what was his object? Why do you suppose he did such a thing as that?"

"You had money up, hadn't you, which would be lost if you failed to finish the job?" Dick asked quietly.

"Of course," returned Fitz quickly; "but the bet was with Mac Gebhard."

"From what I have heard of the men," Merriwell said slowly, "I fancy it was all in the family. They've worked together before."

For a moment the slim chap did not speak. The color ebbed from his face, leaving it rather pale; his eyes were hard and bitter.

"Tell me what you've heard about them," he said at last. "Is it possible that I've been a blind sucker all these years and never knew it?"

"It looks a little that way," Merriwell answered quietly. "The trouble is, Fitz, that you're not in the running with a bunch like that. You have decent principles, whereas I hardly think they are ever troubled with scruples of any sort. Men of their stamp are restrained from doing even worse things than they have done only by the fear of being caught—of being found out."

"There are fellows like that everywhere. You'll find them in every college, and in every walk of life; but you will also find that their circle is very small. Very seldom will men of the right sort have anything to do with them. Just think it over for a moment. Smilie, Gebhard, and Blackmer haven't many friends, have they?"

Fitzgerald shook his head slowly.

"No, not many," he acknowledged.

"Let me tell you what I heard a man say the other night," Dick went on quickly. "He's one of the best fellows in the senior class. Comes from a fine fami-
ily, is on the eleven, and decidedly popular. He happens, by the by, to be the one who helped me put you to bed. Well, as we were coming downstairs, we stopped for a minute while he unlocked his door. ‘Too bad Fitz gets loaded so often,’ he remarked. ‘He’d be a blamed good sort if it wasn’t for that and the rotten crowd he goes with.’”

The little fellow dropped his eyes swiftly, and a dull red mounted into his cheeks.

“That’s Hildebrand,” he muttered. “A fellow I’ve always wanted to be friends with, if he’d ever have let me. I thought he was stuck up.”

“He isn’t—a bit,” Merriwell said quickly. “He likes you, but he can’t stand for your friends.”

Fitzgerald raised his head swiftly; his eyes were blazing.

“What else?” he rasped. “Tell me what else you’ve heard about these friends of mine!”

He snapped out the word in accents of the utmost contempt.

“I might tell you a lot more,” Dick said calmly, “but I think you had better find it out for yourself. You’ll get at the truth at first hand that way. You’ll get right down to the bottom, and never afterward will there be a shadow of a doubt in your mind as to just what sort of men they are.”

“But that isn’t fair!” Fitz protested. “You’ve started the ball rolling, and you ought to go on.”

Dick shook his head.

“No,” he persisted, “it’s up to you to finish the job properly; but I don’t mind telling you a good way to go about it, which has just come into my mind.”

The slim chap straightened up suddenly and leaned across the table, his eyes fixed intently on Merriwell.

“What is it?” he asked eagerly.

For perhaps ten minutes they conferred in low tones. Little by little Fitzgerald’s face cleared and his eyes brightened. Once or twice he chuckled and brought his fist down on his knee with a bang. When Dick had finished speaking the curly-haired fellow sprang to his feet, his face wreathed in smiles.

“Bully!” he cried enthusiastically. “I’ll do it this very night, if I can find them. By George! That’s great! How the deuce do you think up all these stunts, Merriwell?”

Talking all in a breath, he snatched up his hat and dashed to the door without waiting for an answer. The next instant he had disappeared, and Dick heard him rattling downstairs like one possessed. Then the outside door slammed.
genially. "We were just wondering what had become of you. What'll you take?"

"Gin," the slim chap answered readily.

"Three rye high balls and a glass of gin," Gebhard ordered of the waiter, who had appeared from the bar.

"Still keeping up the gin racket, I see," Blackmer chuckled. "You'll be a real out-and-outer before long, Fitzy, my boy."

"Such a crude drink, though," Smilie drawled. "I really don't see how you can stand it."

"Oh, I like the taste," Fitz declared unblushingly. "I get tired of nothing but whisky, and gin makes a nice change."

When the drinks arrived, he kept his eye fixed on the half glass of water intended for a chaser, which was so like the gin in every particular that not one man in a thousand could have told the difference, and, after the waiter had departed, he lifted it in the air.

"Here's how," he murmured, draining it at a swallow.

Coughing a bit, he took up the gin and seemed to drink a little of it, though in reality he barely wet his lips.

Very soon he began to grow mildly hilarious. Another round of drinks was ordered, and, after they had been downed, he was cutting up all sorts of capers.

Presently Horace Smilie suggested a little game, and Fitzgerald fell upon his neck and embraced him warmly.

"Good ol' Smilie," he chortled, mussing the careful disorder of the dreamy one's locks and twitching off his glasses as though by accident. "Good ol' Smilie! Poker! Thatch what! Thatch man's game. Got a roll 'night. Letch have game."

"Stop mauuling, you idiot!" snapped Horace crossly, as he pushed the little fellow back into his chair. "You're drunk."

Fitz fixed upon him a maudlin stare which was a work of art, and shook his head sadly.

"Smilie says 'm drunk," he said, in a tearful voice. "Not drunk, am I, old pal?"

He cast an appealing glance at Gebhard.

"No, of course you're not," returned the latter promptly. "Only feeling a little good. Just right for a nice game of poker."

"Thatch what," returned the little fellow, cheering up instantly. "Got roll 'night."

After several attempts, he found the inside pocket of his coat and drew forth a roll of bills which made three pairs of eyes glisten with cupidity.

"Thatch stuff," he chuckled—"real stuff. Have nother drink, ev'body."

Blackmer controlled himself with an effort, as he reached forward and caught the little fellow's hand before he could strike the bell.

"Wait till after the game, old fellow," he protested. "We want to play now."

But Fitzgerald was obstinate, and absolutely refused to play before another round of drinks had been ordered and consumed. Then he sat back in his chair with a comical assumption of gravity.

"Let th' game—hic!—proceed," he commanded.

His companions noticed, however, that he still had the sense to restore the roll of bills to his pocket.

The poker game which followed was an absolute farce. Fitzgerald reeled in his chair and made an apparently drunken attempt to fix his attention on his cards, but it is safe to say that each one of his three companions knew more about the hands he held than he did himself. They made no bones at all of peering over his shoulder, signaling to each other, and behaving in a generally free-and-easy manner.

At length, as the slim chap apparently became more and more helpless, they resorted to the trick of giving him whatever cards they chose, generally dealing him a fine hand so as to tempt him to reckless betting, only to pick out a better one for themselves and scoop in his chips at the end.

It was robbery pure and simple, and they might as well have taken the money out of his pocket.

At the end of an hour Fitz, though seemingly pretty far gone, called for another drink, and, despite the expostulations of the others, he had his way. He had scarcely swallowed the gin—this time it was the real article, though the first he had taken that evening—before he stumbled to his feet, waving the empty glass.

"Glor'us drink—hic!—gin!" he mumbled thickly. "Fraid 'm I'll s-s-stewed."

The glass fell from his nerveless fingers and was shattered to bits on the floor; he reeled and clutched the chair back for support. Then, mumbling incoherently, he collapsed into his seat and his head fell forward on the table, scattering cards and chips on all sides.

There was a moment's silence, and then Gebhard uttered an angry curse.

"Dead drunk!" Blackmer exclaimed crossly.

"I never saw him so bad before," remarked Smilie, with a frown. "It's that gin. I told him it was a nasty drink."
“Curse the fool!” rasped Gebhard. “Why the deuce couldn’t he wait till we’d won all his coin?”
Blackmer looked at him with a significant leer. “Why go to the bother of winning it?” he said, with brutal frankness. “He’ll never know the difference, and it wouldn’t be the first time.”
“Oh, hush!” exclaimed Smilie nervously. “Don’t say such things. Some one might hear you.”
He glanced anxiously at the closed door.
“Shucks!” returned Gebhard. “There’s no one to hear. Turn him over, Jim, and see if he’s all right.”
Together they took the little fellow by the shoulders and raised him up from the table. His head flopped back limpily and his eyes were closed.
“Lemme alone,” he muttered. “Want—hic—sleep!”
The two fellows let go their hold, and, with a grunt, Fitzgerald dropped back on the table.
“He’s gone, all right,” Gebhard remarked. “His breath reeks with it. I guess Horace is right. It’s the gin. Must act different from whiskey.”
“He drank more of it, that’s all,” retorted Blackmer. “No wonder he’s under the table after lushing five or six glasses straight. Well?”

There was a significant pause as each man looked questioningly at one another. Then Gebhard seemed to make up his mind, and, with a swift motion, he plunged his right hand into the breast pocket of the little fellow and drew out a thick roll of bills.

“Whew!” whistled Blackmer. “That’s something of a wad. He must have made a haul somewhere. How much is it?”

Gebhard resumed his seat and began counting out the bills on the table, the other two looking on with greedy interest. As he progressed, their expression changed to one of disappointment, for, with the exception of the yellow-backed wrapper, the bills were all ones and twos, and totaled up to less than fifty dollars.

“Forty-eight dollars!” Gebhard exclaimed, as he put down the last bill. “Gosh, what a cheap skate! All chicken feed, and I thought there was a couple of hundred if there was a cent.”

“Still, forty-eight divided by three is sixteen plunks apiece,” Blackmer remarked. “And, in my present state of empty pockets, even that isn’t to be sneezed at.”

“Hadn’t we better leave him a couple of dollars,” Smilie suggested tremulously. “He might suspect, you know.”

“Not he,” sneered Gebhard. “He’s the easiest sucker that ever came down the pike. Haven’t we cleaned him out times without number without his getting wise? No, sir, sixteen dollars is little enough without wasting any of it on him. We’ll take the whole of it, Horace, and be thankful for small favors.”
The loud laugh with which he followed the remark was suddenly broken off with a choking gasp, as he gazed straight into the clear, intelligent eyes of Eric Fitzgerald, who had slightly raised his head from the table and was surveying Gebhard with an expression of utter loathing and contempt.

“Not this time you won’t!” came in a scornful voice, as the slim chap sprang lightly to his feet and faced the guilty trio with flashing eyes. “I think I’ll take the whole of it myself.”

Before any of them had recovered from their petrifying amazement, he leaned over the table, and, snatching up the bills, thrust them into his pocket.

CHAPTER XI.
THE REASON WHY.

“You dirty, thieving scoundrels!” he cried, in a tone of scathing contempt. “So this is how you’ve worked your precious game for all these years, is it? What a poor fool I must be to have let such a rotten lot as you take me in! By Jove! It’s enough to make a fellow hate himself to think that he’s wasted three goods years of his life—three of his college years—doing the sucker act for a bunch who are not fit to lick a decent fellow’s shoes.

“Bah! It’s sickening! I didn’t believe there was a man in Yale who would stoop so low as deliberately to get a fellow drunk and then rob him. And all the time he’s sober soft-soaping him with that talk about being his friends! Friends! You don’t know the meaning of the word. You’d steal the pennies off a dead man’s eyes, you scum!”

The faces of the three men before him were pictures, and not attractive ones, at that. Horace Smilie, white with fear, crouched in his chair, watching the angry fellow with terror-stricken eyes. He was absolutely petrified, and the little fellow’s insults fell upon deaf ears. He could only realize that he had been caught red-handed.

As for Gebhard and Blackmer, surprise, rage, humiliation, and fear flashed across their faces in quick
succession. They were humiliated beyond endurance at having been fooled; for, though they did not yet understand how it had been done, they realized instantly that Fitzgerald had been entirely sober from the beginning.

They were furious to have to sit there and listen to his scathing words, knowing all the time that he was not the sort of fellow who would stop there. By morning the thing would be known throughout the university. They would be ruined and disgraced before every one, and forced to leave New Haven instantly to escape the anger of their fellow students, if not the actual arm of the law.

As Fitzgerald finished speaking, Gebhard sprang to his feet, his face white with rage and fear, and darted toward the door.

“Grab him, Jim!” he ripped out hoarsely. “We’re ruined if he leaves this room.”

Blackmer made a lunge at the little fellow, and received a swift jab on the jaw which sent him sprawling.

“Come on, all of you, you scum!” cried Fitz joyously. “I’m just itching to spoil your faces, you rotten thieves! Why don’t you do something, you coward?”

This last remark was addressed to Horace Smiley, who cowered in the chair, unable to move. Finding that he could not goad the man into even a pretense of action, the little chap deliberately twitched the glasses off the tall fellow’s nose and dealt him a resounding buffet on the side of his face with his open palm. Smiley promptly dropped in a heap on the floor, and lay still.

By this time Blackmer was on his feet, his face purple with rage, and, advancing on Fitzgerald, his big fists doubled, a look of fury in his eyes which boded ill for the cocky little chap. Gebhard leaned against the door, watching eagerly.

“Give it to him, Jim!” he rasped. “Lay him out! It’s the only way.”

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before there came a sharp knock at the door behind him.

“Come in,” called Fitz blithely, the fire of combat glittering in his eyes. “Come right in and see the fun.”

With a gasp of dismay, Gebhard flung himself against the door and tried to keep it closed; but, in spite of his efforts, the panel was shoved steadily open, and the next instant Dick Merriwell stepped into the room, his cool, smiling eyes taking in the situation at a glance.

“I rather thought I’d find you here, Fitz,” he remarked calmly. “You seem to be enjoying yourself.”

His lips twitched as he looked from one to the other of the three men.

“By Jove, Merriwell, I am just beginning to have a good time!” the slim chap grinned. “Come on, you cur, and take your medicine!”

But somehow the appearance of Merriwell had taken all the fight out of the would-be sport, and he backed away from Fitzgerald, his face pale and terror in his eyes. Smiley was making desperate but unsuccessful attempts to crawl under the table, while Gebhard, the picture of dismay, leaned against the wall, biting his fingers nervously.

As his eyes traveled swiftly over the three faces, Fitzgerald dropped his fists and turned to Dick with a shrug of his shoulders.

“Look at them,” he said contemptuously—“just look at them! A lot of curs! They’re not worth soiling a fellow’s hands with. Come on, let’s get out of here. I’m sick of the sight of them!”

Silently Dick turned, and together they walked out of the room, without bestowing another glance at the men, passed swiftly through the bar, and stepped into the street.

The slim chap drew a deep breath.

“That’s the end,” he said quickly. “No more for mine. By heavens! To think of the years I’ve wasted on those bums, and if it hadn’t been for you I should probably have gone on to the end of the course. What’s the matter with me, anyhow? Am I weak-minded, or lacking, or what? It doesn’t seem possible that a fellow could go so long without getting wise to those curs.”

Dick smiled a little.

“I don’t suppose for an instant that they commenced their game right away,” he said. “It was probably a gradual development—so slow as to be almost imperceptible. No doubt at first there was no trickery about it. Very likely they may even have been half-way decent chaps. There must have been something about them which attracted you, unless you were thrown in with them from the very first.”

“I reckon that was it,” the slim chap said meditatively. “When I first struck New Haven I didn’t know a soul and Gebhard was very decent to me. We roomed together the first year, and I got to like him pretty well. I don’t believe he could have been so low down then.”

“Probably not. I expect it was when they found
you got under the influence so easily that the temptation for crooked work was too strong for them, especially if you were well supplied with money and they were not.”

“Yes, I’ve always had plenty of coin up to this fall,” Fitz said readily. “John’s shut down on me lately, though. Perhaps he had an idea where it was going. Well, let’s not talk about it any more. It’s not a very pleasant topic. I’ve never thanked you for coming in so opportunely just now. How the deuce did you know I was there?”

“Guessed it,” Dick returned. “After you’d left me to-night, it occurred to me that perhaps those chaps might turn ugly when they found their game was up. So I gave you time to work your little stunt, and then sallied forth. Looked in at Fred’s place, but there was nothing doing there, nor at a couple of other joints; but a fellow told me you often dropped in here, so I waltzed over. The bartender wasn’t for letting me in, but, while I was arguing with him, I heard the scuffle inside, and just came.”

“Lucky you did, too,” commented Fitzgerald. “My dander was up for fair; but both those fellows are a lot heavier than I am, and they were certainly desperate.”

By this time they had reached the entrance to Durfee and halted at the steps.

“Won’t you come in?” Merriwell said cordially.

“Not to-night, thank you,” the curly-haired fellow answered. “I’m going home to bed and luxuriate in the sensation of being decent at last. Good night.”

When Fitzgerald reached his rooms he lit the lamp on the table and stood in the middle of the study in perfect silence for fully five minutes. An odd sense of freedom had come over him, as if he had just been released from an unpleasant thralldom, and presently he squared his shoulders and threw up his head joyously.

“No more of that rotten whisky!” he exclaimed aloud. “No more gambling with those bums! By Jove, what a fool I’ve been! Why didn’t I cut it out long ago? What a lot I’ve missed!”

He sighed a little, and glanced down at the table. A letter lay there, and he snatched it up, his eyes aglow.

“It’s lucky she never knew,” he murmured, as he tore it open. “And now she won’t have to.”

His eyes traveled rapidly over the closely written pages. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of surprise.

“What’s this? Merriwell written to John?” he cried.

As he read further his face flushed, and the hand which held the letter trembled a little. When he had finished he stood quite still for a moment, staring at the opposite wall. At length he took up the letter again and read a portion of it aloud in an indistinct, rather husky, voice:

“John has just had a letter from that very nice Mr. Merriwell, whom we met out here last summer and whom we all liked so well. When he was here I asked him, of course, if he knew you, and found he did not. I thought it a little odd. I suppose a mother always thinks her geese are all swans, and I know that my boy is worthy the friendship of any man who ever went to Yale, but he explained it by the fact that you were in another class.

“He said that the college was so large that it was seldom members of one class knew those of another intimately, unless they played baseball or some other game.

“Well, after this long preamble, I’ll go on about Mr. Merriwell’s letter to John which only came this morning. He says he has met you and likes you very much. As he expresses it, he thinks you a ‘good sort.’ This did not surprise me, of course, but it was very pleasant to have such things said by this young man, who, John tells me, is a splendid fellow, and the most popular man in college.

“I hope you will like him as much as he seems to care for you. He is the sort of man I would like to think of as your friend.

“Write me soon, dear boy.

“YOUR LOVING MOTHER.”

The slim chap’s voice faltered, and, as he reached the end, the letter slipped from his fingers and fluttered to the floor. The next instant he had flung himself face downward on the couch and buried his face in his hands.

“Like him!” he exclaimed brokenly. “Like him! As if that was all there was to it! As if I had only
to like Dick Merriwell to make him my friend! I'd give anything in the world if he was—really that."

Presently he sat up, his eyes suspiciously red.

"By Jove, that was a dandy thing for him to do!" he burst out. "I wonder why he did it? I wonder why he's had anything at all to do with me? It can't be because he likes me. There must be some other reason. Perhaps he'll tell me if I ask him."

Dick Merriwell finished reading the letter which Fitzgerald had thrust into his hand, and slowly returned it to its envelope. There was an odd expression in his face as he raised his head and looked into the slim chap's eager brown eyes, but for a moment he did not speak.

"Well?" Fitz questioned presently. "Why did you do it? Why did you go to the trouble of bothering with me at all?"

"There were two reasons," Dick answered slowly. "When I was at Elsburg last summer your mother and your brother were very good to me, and even in the short time I was with them I grew to like them both immensely. Before I left there your brother and myself were talking over college matters, and he spoke of you."

"Of me!" Fitz exclaimed, in surprise. "You didn't know me then."

Dick's eyes twinkled.

"No, but he did," he said smilingly. "He seemed to have a pretty good idea of how you were spending your time here, and it worried him a lot. When he helped me out with the car I told him that if there was ever any way in which I could return his kindness, I hoped he would call upon me. That night while we were talking he reminded me of that, and said there was something I could do if I only would."

He hesitated an instant and looked quizzically at Fitzgerald's rather flushed face.

"He told me he was afraid you weren't training with the right crowd, and asked me if I wouldn't make a point of looking you up and doing what I could to—well, to show you the error of your ways! He said it would be better if I said nothing about having talked with him about you, because you were apt to be a little

hot-headed and resentful of advice. Consequently I went ahead on my own hook and did my best. You see, I'm perfectly frank with you."

Fitzgerald did not say anything for a moment. Then he raised his downcast eyes.

"I expect John is right," he said, in a low tone. "I am pig-headed, and if I had known at the beginning that he had been talking about you to you and had asked you to—er—look after me that way, I'd have gone off in a rage, and been worse than before."

There was another pause, during which the slim chap seemed to be doing a lot of thinking.

"You said there were two reasons," he said abruptly. "What was the other one?"

"You," Dick returned promptly.

"Me?" exclaimed Fitz. "Why, what do you mean?"

"Just that," Dick smiled. "Before I knew your name, I rather liked you, and afterward it seemed a rotten shame that such a good fellow should be wasting his time with that gang of cheap sports. I didn't know they were any worse than that then, but it was bad enough."

"You liked me that first night?" the curly-haired fellow faltered incredulously.

"Dick nodded silently. An eager light leaped into Fitzgerald's eyes, and he caught his breath with a swift, sudden intake.

"And—how?" he stammered.

"Just the same, only more so," Merriwell smiled.

THE END.

The story we have for you next week is of a new variety and different from anything you have had in this weekly for some time. It is about Indian magic and mystery, and the tale is full of weird happenings. Your old friend Brad Buckhart has, unconsciously to himself, a leading part in many exciting events which happen on the way to a most astonishing climax. As the story unfolds, your interest and sympathy will be aroused to the limit; and when you have reached the end you will feel that you have read one of your favorite author's most original tales. The title is "Dick Merriwell's Vantage; or, The Hindoo Mystery." Out next week in No. 755.
HINTS ON THE USE OF DUMB-BELLS.

For preliminary practice the dumb-bells should not exceed six pounds each in weight. For boys four pounds will be sufficient to start with. First, take up the bells and raise and swing them from the standing position. Stoop, seize both bells, recover upright position, and raise them above the head. Repeat this by lowering the bells to the ground, bending the knees, and then raising on the upright position. Moving the bells in horizontal and slanting planes forms the next exercise. Then comes circular movements, first with one bell, then with the other, and finally with both at once. These are succeeded by various elbow exercises, the spread arms and the head swing, shoulder feats, thrusting or striking motions. You cannot acquire these by merely verbal descriptions. The names of the movements indicate sufficiently what they are, and these, with the exercise also of a little common sense, should enable you to use the bells, after a time, with dexterity. Be sure, however, and not overdo it at first.

DYING WORDS.

"Men must endure their going hence, even as their coming hither; ripeness is all."—Shakespeare.

"It is well."—Washington.

"I must sleep now."—Byron.

"Kiss me, Hardy."—Nelson.

"Head of the army."—Napoleon.

"Don't give me the ship."—Lawrence.

"Let the light enter."—Goethe.

"Into thy hands, O Lord."—Tasso.

"Independence forever."—Adams.

"The story ceased to be told."—Haller.

"Is this your fidelity?"—Nero.

"Give Dayroles a chair."—Lord Chesterfield.

"It is the last of earth."—J. Q. Adams.

"God preserve the emperor."—Haydn.

"A dying man does nothing well."—Franklin.

"Let not poor Nelly starve."—Charles II.

"What is there no brying death?"—Cardinal Beaufort.

"All of my possessions for a moment of time."—Queen Elizabeth.

"It matters little how the head lieth."—Sir Walter Raleigh.

"Close my hands, my dear friend. I die."—Alfieri.

"I feel as if I were to be myself again."—Sir Walter Scott.

"Let me die to the sound of delicious music."—Mirabeau.
the stand. He saw the thundercloud on my face, and, looking up quickly, he said, "Do you want me to do it, son?"

I wanted to chastise him, but I couldn't bring myself to do it, so I left him there, sitting in an easy-chair, the open Bible in his lap.

In about five minutes I heard a terrible commotion coming from the barn. I rushed to the window and looked out, being just in time to see half the hens go running, and flying, and cackling out of the open door. Then came the rooster, fleeing for his life, with Jim in mad pursuit. The rooster ran around the house, and that boy was hot after him. I rushed out and joined in the chase, my object being to get my hands on Jim. Round and round the buildings we went. At length I came upon Jim in the blackberry patch down behind the stable. The rooster had become entangled among the bushes, and so Jim caught him. The boy was sitting on the ground, holding the rooster under his left arm, head downward, while he calmly plucked feather's from the unloving owl's tail.

"What are you doing?" I thundered.

"Just getting some feathers for my cap, so I can play Injun, uncle," he innocently replied.

I snatched up the rooster, but found the owl had already been so choked beneath the boy's arm that it would be necessary to kill it without delay.

"I will see you later!" I roared, as I hastened away to dispatch the rooster.

"Never mind about it," cooed Jimmy, calmly placing the captured feathers in his cap. "I am going on the warpath soon."

When I had been away a few minutes, I had determined to let that kid know who was master about the place, but I was unable to get my hands on him.

The next thing I heard was a wild series of yells coming from the chamber above the carriage house. The loose boards of the flooring rattled beneath dancing feet, and the howls to be heard frightened the dog of my next neighbor, who lives half a mile away, so he crawled under the barn and refused to come forth for seven hours.

"Bang!"

It was the report of a gun, and it came from the open chamber. I remonstrated and kept my door, but the rusticated gun barreled. I rushed toward the carriage house, filled with a horrible fear that the boy had accidentally shot himself.

"No hurrying up the stairs, when—"

"Bang!"

"Whoop! Big Injun! Head shot!"

It was the narrow escape of my life, for the charge of shot raked off the whole top of my hat and combed my hair in beautiful pompadour style. The boy was firing at a mark across the stairs, and he did not see me at all.

In about three seconds he felt it! He wasn't able to sit down when he awoke that night.

The next day I sent him back to his mother, writing her as follows:

"I return your 'dear little Jimmy' to you. Send on the cholera, if it comes. I prefer it to your 'quiet, harmless child.'"

And now my own sister does not speak to me when we meet. She cannot forgive me:

Still, I have no regrets.

FISHING FOR GANDERS.

The men of a certain Maine regiment, which was in the enemy's country during the Civil War, considered the order "no foraging" an additional and uncalled-for hardship. One afternoon a gander was seen beating a rapid retreat from the rear of a farmhouse near by, closely pursued by a gander with wings outspread, whose feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground, and from whose beak issued a succession of angry screams. The fugitive was not reassured by the cries of the gander's partner. He said, "Hold on, man, hold on; he won't hurt you!"

"Call off your gander, Call him off!" shouted the flying soldiers.

Neither man nor gander stopped until inside the camp lines, where the soldier's friends relieved him of his fierce pursuer with the aid of the butt of a musket.

"Do you think that gander was going to chase me like that and live!" said the soldier, as he surveyed the outstretched bird; but he said nothing of the baited hook, with codline attached, which might have thrown light on the unfortunate gander's strange actions.

LEARNING SELF-RELIANCE.

"Jim, my boy," said my mother, "the horses are sold. You will have to walk home from school now. And you will be the only protector that Hite, your little sister, will have. Be careful; but don't be afraid when you come through the gully by the pine trees. Nothing can harm one whom God takes care of and who is learning to be self-reliant.

My mother did not say all this straight off. She sabboted it out. For the reason why the horses were sold was that my dear father was but two weeks in his grave. I was but eight years old, yet I put this and that together enough to know, in my childish way, that, to me, strange mystery of life—namely—we were now poor.

I sabbicted with my beautiful mother, you may be sure. But that morning I trudged away with my fortune made. That lonely evening of winter, as the last snows glistened on the piney dark, I braced up, I held my little sister's hand hard. I remember that the big tears of excitement and grief rolled silently down on my jacket, but I did not cry aloud. No, we were learning to take care of ourselves. We, who had never been allowed to go out of the dooryard without an attendant, came through the woods all safely and alone. It made a man of me, if ever I have been one; it was the beginning of a discipline, rough and harsh, that I have since imposed on myself. Under God's care, rely on yourself. Never ask another to do for you what you can do for yourself.

The above incident was related to Harkeley Harker by one of the foremost men in the United States to-day. He believes it worth repeating, and has secured the privilege of setting it down here, suppressing only names.

And may it not be added that loving parents, who have the means, often overdo the care they bestow on the children, "lest they get hurt, or lose?" Are there not many,—oh, so many,—who go beyond their means loading themselves up with burdens that strain father's wage and break mother's nerves, to save the children the need of caring for themselves? Should not a little fellow have some chance at self-reliance while he is growing up? He will have need enough of it later on. Is there not something better, anything more hearthbreakingly than the condition of a pampered child, girl or boy, when suddenly orphaned! She knows nothing of the cares. And the father, when he comes, has no chance to defend her. How much better had she been at least taught to go round the block alone after dark, or repair borrowed garments, or read the face of a stranger.

A beautiful light shines upon your path, boys and girls. It is a lantern in an angel's hand. God keeps a clean-hearted girl with His own drawn sword. You do know a bad face on the street car, you do know a mean voice that accosts you in the twilight, much clearer often than older people. You shrink from evil. You like and dislike by "feeling" a danger. You can do very much in boyhood and girlhood to cultivate the habit of self-dependence. Not that you should ever reject parental care, but that you should seek to relieve it.

There is a sea captain whose face is a favorite on his famous steamer as it enters port along the Atlantic shore somewhere between Portland and New Orleans. I must not tell you where. But all the traveling world knows him, and the magnificent floating palace of which he is in proud charge. When he was a fisherman's little son, one day the smack lay at the Gloucester dock unloading, and the father went ashore leaving the lad in the cabin alone. It happened that some disagreement between the fish merchant and the child's father called both men to a justice's court at afternoon, and at night, and the son was left to the sea and the smack, and the young deckhand was left to his own resources. A young deckhand is a young deckhand, and of course the mate sympathized with his absent captain. Rushing down into the cabin the mate saw the boy of ten years, and half in pity, half in perplexity, he exclaimed:}
APPLAUSE.

A Weekly all Boys Should Read.

I would rather read than write letters, but I would like to say a few words about "Tip Top." I think it is a weekly that all boys should read. I have been reading it about three years, and I have read a lot of the other boys' stories. I used to have read nine different stories in the Boston weeklies, but since I started reading "Tip Top" I have joined the Y. M. C. A., and have learned a lot about athletics. I have got a number of boys and girls to read the weekly, and hope they like it more.

W. MASTERS.

Toronto, Canada.

His Enthusiasm Gets the Better of Him.

I think "Tip Top" is a weekly that any father should let his son read. Its stories are clean and healthy, with just the necessary excitement to make a fellow feel as though his life is not nearly for something. They are not bloodthirsty like some other novels, but good and clean all the way through. I like the book for these reasons. I am not alone in feeling as though Frank and his crowd are helping all the boys around the world. I have subscribed fifteen boys in my locality to read "Tip Top." I like Frank, and Brad, and Captain Wiley better than Dick's crowd. This, of course, is not saying that I do not like Dick's crowd, good out of it. I used to have a boy named Tom, but Frank and his crowd are my favorites. Dear old Brad! I wish he was here, as I admire "The Unbranded Maverick from Pecos." Excuse the length of my letter as my enthusiasm got the better of me.

WILLIAM CARPENTER.

Stories Give Him a Higher Ideal.

I like "Tip Top" because the leading characters in the stories set an example to be brave, true, and always ready to do anything. It has given me a much higher ideal for boys than I had before I commenced to read the weekly. I have made all my neighbors get "Tip Top," and after they have read one copy they find out how good it is, and then they buy the weekly regularly themselves.

LOUIS APPEL.

Why It Makes a Hit With Him.

It has been two or three years ago since I have written to the Applause, column of dear old "Tip Top." During that time I have got over a dozen persons to take the weekly, and they all agree with me in saying it can't be beat. The reasons that "Tip Top" has made such a hit with me is, first, on account of the manner in which the athletic contests are described; second, on account of the many philosophical lectures contained in the stories, and third, on account of the many humorous observations that can be perceived.

An admirer of "the ideal publication."

Summit Hill, Pa.

"Dale Sparkfair.

Why "Tip Top" Deserves It's Name.

"Why do I read 'Tip Top'?" This is a constant question put to me by many. I say because it is one of the most up-to-date and interesting weeklies published. "Tip Top" has done much to give me up my "bad habits," and has made me realize more clearly the better kind of life that should be led by all boys. "Tip Top" certainly deserves its name.

S. J. BLACK.

In a Class by Itself.

"Tip Top" stands in a class by itself, having few equals as a weekly. I thank "Tip Top" for its suggestions in helping me to become a pitcher. It has also taught me to try to keep a cool head when excited. I have got six boy friends and a few girls to read "Tip Top," and they think it contains some of the best stories they have ever read. My favorite characters are Frank and Dick. Brad, Chester, and June Arlington, and Hodge. I think June is the girl I like Dick. W. VOKE.

West Philadelphia, Pa.

Ideas from "Tip Top" Useful in Debate.

I like "Tip Top" best of any weekly that is published because there is a clean story every week for the small sum of five cents, and it is better than most any other publication for the money. The ideas in "Tip Top" have given me many pointers that I can use in debate. It has done me much good. I have tried to follow the footsteps of Elsej, and Jina, and June. I am recommending it to girls very freely, and if they have brothers who will not let their brothers read it and thereby do them good, if they smoke or drink.

ELISE FREIBERG.

Holyoke, Mass.
Talks with your Chum
Proh Fourtmen

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 Merrivell’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.

The Secret of Health.

PROF. FOURMEN: Please tell me what to do to build myself up like I ought to be. Here are my measurements: Age, 24 years; weight, 155 pounds; height, 6 feet ½ inches; chest, normal, 39½ inches; thighs, 21 inches; calf, 14 inches; waist, 28 inches. I have never taken any training of any kind, but I have always had plenty of hard work. For some reason or other I get about every disease that comes along. What is the reason?

Bucyrus, O.  FRANK P. GOWANAN.

You are too light in weight for your height, but this is probably due to your recent illness. To some extent, all of us may suffer from exposure, indiscretions, or the ignorant ails of our ancestors. By care and right living we may lessen those evils to a degree and enjoy good health. A man worn out by one occupation may find refreshment and rest by turning to something entirely different. Do not carry anything to excess. Let tobacco and alcohol alone. To have a healthy body you must have a healthy mind. Cold water, moderate exercise, and proper nourishment are the greatest tonics in the world. Moderation in all things is the secret of health.

Education Leads to Success.

PROF. FOURMEN: I am strong and healthy, and am 15 years of age. My parents died three years ago, leaving me without any means of support, since when I have worked at all kinds of odd jobs, barely making a living. I have a great desire to go to school. I have tried again and again to obtain a situation, but it seems impossible for me to succeed. I have had but very little schooling in the past, and would do all in my power to get more. Will you please advise me, and tell me the best road to success?

Salt Lake City, Utah.  A. B. EVANS.

Life means work, hard work, and plenty of it. Even those who succeed in gaining high places in the world do so only by incessant perseverance. To get an education is not so hard. There are doubtless public schools near you, and probably free night schools during the winter season. If you cannot attend the former, then certainly the latter are open to you. Let us assume, however, that you can attend neither, then you can undertake to study by yourself. The usual text-books can be purchased very cheaply, or even borrowed, such as a grammar, history, geography, arithmetic, and so on, from which you can acquire the rudiments of knowledge. From these you can advance by reading instructive books, until you are sufficiently educated to join some reading course. Thus your road to success leads by way of education.

Advice for a Weak Heart.

Will you kindly tell me whether I can become an athlete with these measurements: Height, 6 feet ½ inches; weight, 150 pounds; age, 17 years 4 months; chest, 35 inches; waist, 25½ inches; thigh, 10 inches; calf, 12½ inches; ankle, 9 inches; biceps, 10½ inches; forearm, 10 inches; wrist, 6½ inches; neck, 23 inches. Do you think a nervous heart should prevent me from going in for athletics? I work in a law office, and study at night. What branch of athletics do you think I am most fit for? What are my weak points? Could I become a runner or basketball player by plugging and training hard? Kindly advise me concerning my heart.

Brooklyn, N. Y.  William M. Grovenor.

If you have a weak heart we cannot recommend you to take any form of violent exercise or to go in heavily for athletics. Do not attempt to imitate the feats of stronger companions in either running or basketball. Your measurements average pretty well on the whole, although you are shy on chest development, for which we would recommend deep breathing exercises. Owing to your sedentary life you should try and keep yourself in good condition by light daily exercises. Calisthenics, light dumbbells, or any sort of outdoor work exercise would be good for you, while walking would develop your calves and thighs, which are not quite up to the standard measurements.

Farmer or Brakeman.

PROF. FOURMEN: I would like to know in regard to working on a railroad as baggage master or brakeman. What wages do they receive, and at what age should I start? I am 17 years of age, healthy, but not strong.

Cumberland, Md.  J. J. WILEY.

Concerning the wages for the vocations mentioned by you, it would be best to ask some one in the service of the road that runs through your town. Age is not so much a requisite as strength. If you are not strong you cannot be safely intrusted with the handling of heavy freight, such as would be the case if you were a baggage-master, nor yet could you successfully serve as a brakeman in the management of a heavy train. If you have a fondness for heavy work you would do well to enter the railroad shops which are situated in your city. There you will have an opportunity to acquire a knowledge in the practical work of mechanical engineering, and fit yourself for the place of fireman or engineer on a locomotive, both places of considerable trust, and much more remunerative than either that of brakeman or baggage-master. There is farming to be done in your vicinity, why not turn your hand to that occupation? It is far more lucrative than working on a railroad.

Dumb-bells Strengthen the Biceps.

PROF. FOURMEN: I am 14 years 8 months old; my weight is 100 pounds; biceps, left arm, 8½ inches; right arm, 9 inches; chest, not expanded, 29 inches; expanded, 32 inches; waist, 20 inches; thighs, 10 inches; neck, 12½ inches; calves, 12½ inches; left forearm, muscles ten; right forearm, muscles ten; right forearm, muscles ten, 5½ inches. How are these measurements? I would like to ask a few other questions. 1. How is this training: Rise at 7:30; cold bath; 15 minutes’ exercise; run half mile on toes daily; luncheon at 12:30; dinner at 7:30; 15 minutes’ exercise before retiring. I never drink tea or coffee. 2. Do I take enough exercise? If not, how much ought I to take? 3. My biceps are weak; how can I strengthen them? 4. I live in a very mountainous region, and I climb about 1000 to 2000 feet every week; what muscles does that develop? 5. When I run about one mile, I have sharp pains in my right side. How can I prevent this? 6. What part of my body do I need to develop?

Waynesville, N. C.  J. B. V. D.

You seem to have a pretty fair average development for a boy of your years and weight, though you are somewhat shy on chest measurement. Deep-breathing exercises would be good for this. Try dumb-bell work for 20 or 30 minutes a day. If you haven’t a pair of dumb-bells, use light flatirons. By working half an hour every day any lad may develop himself from the waist up to the full extent of his abilities. During these exercises deep breathing should be persisted in. The training you describe is very good for a beginner. The answers to all your questions may be found in “Frank Merrivell’s Book of Athletic Development,” with much good advice on muscle building and general exercise necessary to physical development.
Tip Top Baseball Tournament for 1910 Is On

CONTEST CLOSES OCTOBER 15

PLAY BALL AND WIN A CLUB OUTFIT

It's up to you, boys, to land the prizes.
Get after them. Do your best.
Make the scores that will put you in right for first or second place.

The rules of the contest for 1910 differ somewhat from those of last year. Read all about it in the form below:

PLAYER'S CERTIFICATES.

In fairness to all the clubs that enter this contest, and that there may be no doubt as to whom the prizes should go, Tip Top has decided to require a certificate from each member of the nine as well as the Club Certificate. Below is the coupon which each member should cut out, sign and give to the manager of the nine that he may send it along with the Club Certificate. Write in the names of the clubs that played, the date of the game, the score and the name of the winner.

PLAYER'S CERTIFICATE.

TIP TOP BASEBALL TOURNAMENT FOR 1910.

This is to certify that I have played in the game between the ____________________________ and the ____________________________ on ____________________________ and that the score was ____________________________ in favor of ____________________________.

(Signature.)

TO DECIDE A TIE.

Should there be a tie in runs and games played, or two or more clubs in the highest-score class, such tie will be decided by the batting and fielding record of the tied clubs. The one having the better record in that respect will be declared the winner. The captains of competing teams are advised, therefore, to preserve the general, or detailed score, of every game played, but not to send it to Tip Top with the Club Certificate. You will be called upon for the general score only in case your club should be one of those in a tie.

CONDITIONS OF CONTEST.

The two teams which, at the end of the season, have the highest average—that is, play the greatest number of games, score the most runs, and lose the least number of games—will be declared the winners. Of these two the one having the higher average will be declared the TIP TOP CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM OF THE ALL-AMERICAN BASEBALL TOURNAMENT OF 1910, and will receive a beautiful silk pennant bearing suitable words. Each winning team will receive a full equipment, consisting of trousers, shirt, stockings, shoes and cap for nine members. For each game played the score, signed by the manager, must be sent to the editor of Tip Top. The manager must see to it, also, that every player of his nine signs one of the certificates printed at the left of this—the one headed, "Player's Certificate." Each player must sign a separate certificate, and these—nine in all for each game—must accompany every Club Certificate—sent to this office. To substantiate the score, get your postmaster, or one or more of the newshawks of whom you buy your Tip Tops, to sign the Club Certificate on the line printed at the bottom. When possible, send in newspaper accounts of the games. No notice will be taken of any score not entered on a Club Certificate cut out of Tip Top; nor will any notice be taken of a score not accompanied by a signed Player's Certificate for every member of the nine.

CLUB CERTIFICATE

1910—TIP TOP BASEBALL TOURNAMENT—1910

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WINNER ____________________________  FINAL SCORE ____________________________  MANAGER ____________________________

Newspaper or Postmaster Signs Here.
EARLY NUMBERS OF THE TIP TOP WEEKLY WILL BE FOUND IN THE NEW MEDAL LIBRARY

A few years ago, we were obliged to disappoint thousands of boys who wanted the early adventures of Frank and Dick Merriwell which were published in TIP TOP, because we did not have copies of the numbers that contained them. It was impossible for us to reprint TIP TOP WEEKLY, so we made the stories up in book form and published them in the NEW MEDAL LIBRARY at intervals of about four weeks beginning with No. 150. Here is a list of these splendid books which contain Nos. 1 to 485 of TIP TOP WEEKLY. Our experience with these books has taught us that thousands of boys are overjoyed at this opportunity to secure their favorite stories in a more permanent form. PRICE, FIFTEEN CENTS.

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563—Frank Merriwell's Pursuit.
566—Dick Merriwell Abroad.
569—Frank Merriwell in the Rockies.
572—Dick Merriwell's Pranks.

Published About July 5th.

575—Frank Merriwell's Pride.

Published About July 26th.

578—Frank Merriwell's Challengers.

Published About August 16th.

581—Frank Merriwell's Endurance.

Published About Sept. 6th.

584—Dick Merriwell's Cleverness.

Published About Sept. 27th.

587—Frank Merriwell's Marriage.