He thought of what the boys would say if he did not try to do something. So, choking down his fears, he plunged into the fray again.
Frank Merriwell's Comprehension;

OR,

THE MAKING OF VINCENT SCHUYLER.

By BURT L. STANDISH.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOY WITH THE BRUISED FACE.

"You could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw his face in the hall just now!" exclaimed Bart Hodge, dropping down in a chair beside Frank Merriwell's desk.

"Looked as if he had been fighting, did he?" Frank questioned, as he laid aside his pen and folded his arms.

"By George, yes!" returned Merriwell's chief assistant. "And got the worst of it, too. But how he ever came to get into a scrap beats me. Why, he's a perfect sissy, Frank—the kind to think he's just about killed if he smashes a finger, and gets tired after he's pulled the chest weights a dozen times. I sized him up as a sort of 'mamma's boy' without an ounce of spirit in his overgrown body."

Frank smiled a little at his companion's emphatic manner. Hodge was an admirable instructor for the boys—quiet, patient, and a splendid disciplinarian; but he had a habit when alone with Frank, of giving his plain, unvarnished opinion in a way which was, to say the least, forcible.

"You haven't quite sized him up right, Bart," Merriwell returned quietly. "I'll admit that when he first came Schuyler was all you think him, and more. I gathered from his uncle, Ralph Blake, who is an old friend of mine, that the boy has been pampered and petted and coddled from his very cradle. His mother is a widow, and Vincent is her only child. You know what that usually means?"

Hodge nodded emphatically.

"They're generally spoiled darlings," he said shortly.

"Exactly," Frank went on. "And this case was a little worse than the ordinary run, from the fact that Mrs. Schuyler had the notion firmly fixed in her mind that the boy's heart was weak. Ralph tells me that the fellow never had to lift his finger. Everything was done for him, and the result was that he was rapidly developing into the worst sort of a prig and mollycoddle. I am happy to say, however, that the events of the past few days have gone a long ways toward waking him up."

Bart Hodge raised his eyebrows.

"What events?" he questioned.
“Beginning with the day little Hicks fell through the ice down on the pond. It seems that Schuyler was chasing Hicks on account of some trick the boy had played on him——.”

“But can he skate?” Bart broke in amazedly.

“Yes, and pretty well, too,” Frank answered. “I imagine it is about his one accomplishment. Hicks broke through the ice near the dam, and, instead of trying to pull him out, Schuyler stood there petrified and let him go down twice. If it hadn’t been for Eric Carpenter, who plunged in just in time, the boy would have been drowned.”

“He’s a coward, then,” Hodge commented shortly.

“No, I don’t think he’s quite that,” Frank returned. “He simply hasn’t a particle of self-reliance, and, brought up the way he’s been, that isn’t surprising. It was the first time he had been placed in a situation requiring swift thought and nerve, and he didn’t rise to the occasion. He was dazed. At least, that’s the way I figure it out, and I have been watching the boy carefully.

“Well, the result of that fall-down was that the boys sent him to Coventry. They thought he was a coward, and showed their displeasure by having nothing whatever to do with him. It’s a way boys have, you know, of taking the law into their own hands, and it’s something against which we are powerless. You can’t force one fellow to speak to another if he doesn’t want to. It hit Schuyler pretty hard, I imagine; but I believe it did him a lot of good, in that it made him realize where he had been at fault.”

A light seemed to break upon Bart’s mind.

“So that’s why he was so keen about his exercises the other day,” he exclaimed. “He picked up wonderfully, and I couldn’t imagine what the reason was.”

“That was probably it,” Frank smiled. “I purposely let the matter go on for a couple of days in the hope that it would have a good effect. Then yesterday I gave the boys a short talk on ‘self-reliance.’ Schuyler followed it closely, and I had hopes that he would take it to heart. From what you tell me, and from a bit of conversation I chanced to overhear as I was passing through the corridor last night, I begin to think he has.”

“What did you hear?” Hodge asked curiously.

Frank smiled.

“It was very little, and the eavesdropping was quite unintentional on my part. Young Payne was telling something to a group of boys, and they were so interested in the recital that they did not see me coming. He said that ‘Venus’—I judge that’s the name they’ve given Schuyler—saw Bill twisting Hicks’ arm and flew at him like a perfect tiger. Bill smashed him all up, of course, but——. Then Payne’s eyes fell upon me, and the story came to an abrupt finish.”

“Well, I’ll be hanged!” ejaculated Hodge. “He started the thing himself, then. But who is Bill? There are half a dozen of them in the school.”

“I don’t know, of course,” Frank returned; “but I have a suspicion that it was Bill Runge. He’s got a quick temper, and has shown bullying traits more than once.”

“Whew!” whistled Bart. “Runge’s as strong as a bull, too! No wonder the kid looked as if he’d been through a threshing machine. By Jove, Frank! That Runge ought to be handled without gloves, if he’s been up to his old tricks again.”

Frank’s eyes were stern.

“Exactly what I propose doing,” he said tersely. “He’s been warned once, and if I find out he’s responsible in this case, he’ll have to go.”

“Why don’t you ask Schuyler?” Bart queried, with twinkling eyes.

He knew his friend’s distaste for information obtained in this way, and had not the least idea that his suggestion would be entertained for an instant.

Frank did not answer at once. There was a thoughtful look on his face as if he were turning the matter carefully over in his mind. Presently he raised his head, and as he looked at Bart his eyes gleamed and his lips twitched slightly.

“T think I shall,” he said quietly.

Hodge was rather surprised, but he made no comment other than to say:

“No doubt it’s the quickest way. Schuyler will be ready enough to tell you.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” Merriwell returned. “If I were, I shouldn’t ask him. I have a notion that he’s improved in more ways than one during the past week, and I’m going to find out.”

Hodge glanced at his watch and then arose to his feet.

“I hope you’re right,” he said emphatically. “The kid has risen a hundred per cent in my estimation in the last few minutes, and if he refuses to tell who was responsible for smashing him up I’ll think even more of him, though I would like to settle with the fellow who did it.”

He walked to the door and then paused with one hand on the knob.
"I'm going over to the gym," he said. "Do you want me to send Schuyler here?"
"Yes, if you will," Frank answered. "Tell him I'd like to talk with him for a few moments."

CHAPTER II.
THE TEST.

Ten minutes later there came a hesitating knock on the door.
"Come in," Frank called pleasantly.
The portal was swung slowly open and a boy of about sixteen entered. He was rather tall and fairly well built, though with a decided tendency to fleshiness. His face was a pleasant one, and would have been actually good-looking had it been less plump. At the present moment it was disfigured by several prominent bruises and cuts. It was, moreover, unnaturally pale, and the boy was very evidently suffering from extreme nervousness.

"Good morning, Vincent," Frank said quietly.
"Good morning, sir," replied Schuyler. "You—wished to—see me?"
"Yes," returned Merriwell. "Will you take a chair?"
He indicated one which stood beside the desk, and Schuyler came forward slowly and seated himself on the very edge of the seat. His face flushed crimson under Frank's steady gaze, and he dropped his eyes to the floor.

"I am a little surprised, Vincent, to learn that you have been fighting," Frank said presently.
The boy did not raise his eyes.
"Y-yes, s-sir," he faltered.
"From the looks of your face I should say that you got the worst of the encounter," Merriwell went on.
"Was the thing forced on you by some one older and stronger than yourself?"

Vincent hesitated, clenching and unclenching his hands nervously.
"No, sir," he said at length, in a low tone. "That is—"
He broke off abruptly and flashed a pleading glance at Frank:
"Must I answer that question, sir?" he stammered.
Merriwell smiled slightly.
"Not unless you wish to," he returned quickly. "I only asked it because I thought you might wish to complain of some one having taken an unfair advantage of you."

Vincent gave a sigh of relief.
"Oh, no, sir," he said hurriedly. "I don't wish to complain of any one. I was to blame. I—started it."
Merriwell lifted his eyebrows.
"I am sorry to hear that, Vincent," he said gravely.
"While I believe that every boy should learn how to handle his fists, it should not be to enable them to go about picking quarrels or venting grievances. The man who knows how to defend himself is usually far less likely to get into brawls than one who does not. The very knowledge that he can whip another man usually makes him put up with a good deal before he takes advantage of his skill. To my mind, a man should fight only in self-defense or when aiding some one who is being downtrodden or bullied."

Schuyler suddenly opened his lips as if he meant to speak, and then closed them tightly again. There was a look of approval in Merriwell's eyes as he watched the boy's struggle. Vincent was certainly learning, and learning fast.

"Somehow, I have a notion that this instance might fit your case," Frank said pleasantly; "so we'll drop the subject for this occasion. Have you ever taken any boxing lessons?"

Vincent glanced at him in surprise.
"No, sir," he said quickly.
"Then you know nothing whatever of the art of self-defense?"

"No, sir; not a thing."
"Would you like to learn?"
A look of joy flashed into the boy's face.
"You bet!" he exclaimed. "Er—I mean, yes, sir."
"Good. I'll see if I can't manage to give you a lesson myself later in the morning. It's something every boy should be familiar with, and I am glad you feel as you do about it. I think that is all just now, Vincent. I'll send word to you if I can manage to spare a half hour."

The boy rose to his feet, his eyes shining.
"That will be splendid, Mr. Merriwell," he said.
"I'm awfully much obliged to you, and I'll do my best to learn."

Once outside the door, he sped along the hall, his face flushed and his eyes sparkling. It seemed incredible that Frank had really offered to teach him to box. Perhaps some day he would be able to make a better showing if he ever had to stand up before Bill Runge again. He could never hope to lick the big, brawny bully, but he might at least be able to get in a blow or two. He had been like a child in the big fellow's hands the day before when he had flown
at Runge to save little Hicks, and, in spite of the fact that he had been nearly frightened to death, he felt the humiliation of being nothing more than a punching bag for the bully.

Hurrying out of the building, Vincent turned toward the gymnasium.

“I’m awful glad I didn’t have to tell,” he thought to himself. “Runge is a beast and I hate him, but I wouldn’t like to tell. The fellows would all be down on me again.”

In the dressing room Reddy Payne, “Fatty” Hicks, and several other boys were dawdling, anxious to hear the results of Vincent’s interview with Mr. Merriwell.

“Well?” Reddy questioned eagerly. “Did he ask you about the fight?”

Vincent nodded.

“I knew he heard,” groaned the red-haired fellow. “He was right on top of us last night before I saw him. What did he say when you told him about Bill?”

“I didn’t tell him,” Vincent said slowly.

“You didn’t tell him!” repeated Reddy, his voice shrill with surprise. “Do you mean to say——”

He broke off, unable to put his ideas into words.

“I asked him if I must answer the question,” Vincent explained, “and he said not unless I wanted to, so I didn’t.”

Reddy made a sudden dive and enfolded Vincent in a bearish embrace.

“Come to my arms, oh, child of my heart!” he grimmed. “You’re a brick, Venus! To think you never told on Bill after the beastly way he mashed you up! I don’t believe I could have kept still. You’re a corker! You’re one of the bunch, all right!”

Vincent flushed with pleasure. It was worth all he had gone through to hear such words from Reddy’s lips.

“I didn’t think I ought to talk,” he said, in a low tone. “I didn’t think you fellows would like it.”

“Nobody would have blamed you much if you had,” Payne remarked. “Runge’s a rotten bully, anyhow, and he ought to be found out. But it was all the danger of you to keep still.”

The other boys departed in haste to prevent Bart Hodge coming to look for them, and also to spread the news of Schuyler’s rather unexpected behavior. Reddy lingered a moment while Vincent opened his locker and began to strip off his clothes.

“He’s going to give me boxing lessons, Red,” he said eagerly.

“Who—Mr. Merriwell?” Payne asked, in surprise.

Vincent nodded.

“Yep. Some time this morning, if he can.”

“Great!” exclaimed the red-headed chap approvingly. “He’s the dandiest boxer you ever saw. I don’t believe a lot of the profesheyes could touch him. Well, I’ve got to tear myself away. Hustle up, you fat lobster, and get to work losing some of that blubber that incases your lovely person and makes you look like a pork barrel.”

Vincent grinned, and Reddy pranced to the door of the gymnasium. Reaching it, he turned suddenly, his freckled face wreathed in a sly smile.

“Gee! I wouldn’t be in your place for money,” he remarked with significant emphasis. “They say Mr. Merriwell bangs the fellows about something awful while he’s teaching them. Says it’s good for ‘em to learn to take punishment. I’m sorry for you, Venus, awful sorry; but I’ll promise to come to the funeral.”

With which parting fling, he disappeared, leaving Vincent a prey to rather mixed feelings.

CHAPTER III.

REDDY GETS A MONEY ORDER.

In the first burst of enthusiasm at the prospect of learning how to use his fists, he had given no thought to the hard work which would be necessary to develop any sort of skill in that line. He had read a good deal in stories about how the hero stood up in immaculate evening dress and calmly knocked out two or three ruffians without so much as turning a hair or bruising a knuckle; and when Frank brought up the subject of lessons in the art of self-defense, Vincent’s mind had leaped across the intervening gap of hard work and toilsome learning to the time when he should be an adept, able to perform some of the phenomenal deeds about which he had read with such interest.

Reddy’s ominous words brought home to him a realization that it was not going to be such a simple, easy process, after all; and his heart sank within him at the thought of what he might have to undergo.

The boy had changed a good deal in the past few days, but he had by no means reached the point when he could look with equanimity on the prospect of undergoing hard knocks and possibly being hurt. The habits and point of view of years were too strongly fastened on him for that. In moments of great excitement or tension of mind, he might get mixed up in a scrap, as he had done yesterday with Bill Runge; but it was a different matter deliberately to enter upon
something which he was pretty sure would result in hard knocks.

"Of course, I know Mr. Merriwell wouldn't bang me around," he muttered, as he got into his gymnasium suit; "but I'm afraid it's going to be awful hard."

However, he couldn't back out now. He would have to go through with it; but the prospect was not as pleasant as it had been a little while before.

Hurrying out to the gym, he got busy with his exercises, which now came much more easily than they had at first.

"I wonder if old Schnitzle could be right about my heart," he speculated as he pulled the weights with rhythmic regularity. "I certainly don't loose my breath so quickly as I did at first, and yet I don't see how Doctor Lansing could have made such a mistake."

Doctor Lansing was the doctor in Auburn who had attended him for several years. He was of a type happily rare, with a keen eye for the main chance. Mrs. Schuyler was wealthy and had, moreover, a firm conviction that her son was suffering from a weak heart. Instead of attempting to put her right, the doctor had simply allowed her to continue in that belief, though he knew there was nothing radically wrong with the boy at all. This enabled the old fraud to go on pocketing his rather large fees with complacency.

Knowing nothing of this, and having an ingrained belief in his physical disability, Vincent had naturally been incredulous when Doctor Schnitzle, the resident physician of the school, had pronounced him perfectly sound.

Presently Bart Hodge, making his rounds through the gymnasium, paused in front of Vincent.

"Comes a little easier now, doesn't it?" he remarked pleasantly.

"Yes, sir," the boy returned. "A lot easier."

"Keep it up, Schuyler, and you'll find that it will be child's play before you know it. You've taken hold very well."

Vincent's face flushed with pleasure at these words of commendation, and he finished his exercises without a pause. The keen-faced instructor was rather chary of his praise, and Schuyler was much encouraged thereby. He did not know how much his behavior of yesterday had raised him in Bart's esteem.

Through for the day, Vincent paused to watch various boys going through some evolutions with Indian clubs. Chief among them was a tall, handsome fellow with curly, yellow hair and blue eyes, who surpassed all the others in his dexterity and skill.

Ray Ewry was very spectacular. Quick, lifhe, and muscular, he seemed to have no difficulty at all in performing feats in the gymnasium which other boys could accomplish only by hard work and much practice. Being inordinately fond of admiration, he delighted in flying about on the trapezes or rings to the accompaniment of the "ohs!" and "ahs!" of a group of admiring spectators.

For that very reason he had taken a sort of liking to Vincent Schuyler, treating him with the careless condescension of one who looks down from an unassailable height of superiority upon a poor, struggling mortal beneath. A keen observer might have noticed that he was not so enthusiastic about fellows like Eric Carpenter, who equalled or surpassed him in various branches of athletics.

Presently the exercise ceased, and, dropping the clubs to the floor, Ewry smiled at Vincent.

"Hello, Venus," he said carelessly. "Thinking of taking up the clubs?"

"Gracious no!" Vincent returned quickly. "I could never do anything with them."

He hesitated an instant, and then went on rather wistfully:

"You seem to do everything better than the other boys. Don't you ever have to work hard? or does it just come naturally easy?"

Ewry looked gratified. This was the sort of thing he loved.

"Why, sure I have to work," he answered. "Only, after you've reached a certain point, it isn't so hard. You'll get there all right, if you only keep it up. Of course, you may not be able to do things the way I do, because you're not built the same way; but you'll be a great sight better than you are now."

With an agile leap, he caught one of the rings and swung himself up to it with amazing ease. Vincent watched him a bit enviously for a moment and then passed on to the dressing room.

"He's a dandy chap," he thought to himself. "I think I admire him more than any fellow in the school."

He took a shower and then hustled into his clothes. He was just looking about for Reddy Payne, when Eric Carpenter, the captain of their company, and also of the school hockey team, appeared in the doorway. He was tall, slim, and well-developed, with dark hair and eyes, and one of the best all-around athletes at Farnham Hall. His eyes brightened as they fell on Vincent's face.

"You're all to the good, old fellow," he said quickly, bringing his hand down with a resounding smack on
Vincent’s shoulder. “Reddy was telling me about it. You’re coming down to the pond this afternoon, aren’t you?”

Schuyler nodded happily.

“Yes, if you can spare your skates,” he answered. “I’ve sent home for mine, but they haven’t come yet.”

“Sure thing,” Eric returned. “Keep ’em as long as you like. I haven’t used them since I got my new pair.”

He left Vincent glowing with the pleasant consciousness of virtue rewarded. He was so glad he had done the right thing, and how fine it was to have the boys treating him as one of them again. Those awful days when no one would speak to him seemed like a bad dream.

He waited while Reddy dressed, and then the two went over to the dormitory for a few minutes before dinner time. Payne was expecting a letter from home, and Vincent went up to his room with him to see if it was there.

It must have come in the morning mail, for it lay on the table; and the red-headed chap snatched it up with an exclamation of satisfaction and slit the envelope with a dexterous movement of his fingers. The next instant he gave a gleeful chuckle as he plucked out a bine, printed slip.

“Gee-whiz!” he chortled. “Twenty dollars! Dad’s a coxer! That’s about twice as much as I expected.”

Vincent’s face took on a curious expression, seeing which, Reddy proceeded to explain.

“It’s my birthday,” he said quickly, “and Dad’s sent me this money order as a present. Now, don’t you give it away,” Venus, or the fellows will raise Cain with me. Say, I haven’t had so much cash since last Christmas. What do you say to having a treat at Applesnack’s right after dinner? I’ve been strapped for an age and my mouth certainly does water for an ice-cream soda and some candy. Old Applesnack’s put in a soda fountain, you know.”

“I’m with you, all right,” said Vincent.

The next moment his face clouded.

“Oh, the mischief!” he exclaimed. “I forgot.”

“Forgot what?”

“Mr. Merriwell was going to give me a lesson in boxing some time to-day,” Vincent explained. “I can’t go till that’s over.”

“I’ll wait for you, then,” Reddy returned promptly. “He’ll probably take you right after dinner. There’s the bell now. Come on.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE TREAT AT APPLESNACK’S.

This proved to be the case. Coming out of the dining hall, Vincent was told to report at the gymnasium in ten minutes.

He made his way thither in fear and trembling. He almost wished now that Frank had not offered to teach him to box. It would be such hard work, and very likely he’d be knocked around a lot. Probably he would not be able to learn at all.

“Oh, dear!” he murmured gloomily. “I wish I hadn’t said I wanted to do it.”

However, it was too late to back out now. He would have to go through with it, no matter what happened, or how much he might dislike it. But his heart was beating rather unevenly as he stepped inside the empty building and closed the door behind him.

Three-quarters of an hour later, he emerged and darted around to the front of the dormitory where Reddy was waiting rather impatiently for him. His eyes were bright, his face flushed, and his expression anything but woe-begone.

“Thought you were never coming,” Reddy said, rather shortly, as he arose from the steps.

“I hurried as fast as I could,” Vincent returned apologetically. “Got into my clothes in about three seconds.”

They turned down the drive toward the road to the village, and the red-headed chap glanced at his companion’s flushed face.

“Well, how was it?” he inquired. “Get knocked around much?”

“Not much,” Vincent answered quickly. “It was dandy! Mr. Merriwell’s the corkingest teacher I ever saw. He makes everything so plain and so interesting, and he didn’t hit me once.”

“Ah, but wait,” Payne said sourly. “That’s only his way of luring you on. Pretty quick he’ll begin to get in his fine work, and then—look out. He’s a perfect fiend when he gets going.”

Vincent laughed.

“You can’t fool me, Reddy,” he retorted. “You did have my goat this morning, but I ought to have known that Mr. Merriwell wasn’t that kind. I never saw such a man as he is. Why, a fellow can’t help learning when he explains something. And did you ever see such arms as he’s got? I thought Ray Ewry had dandy muscles, but Mr. Merriwell’s beats him all to pieces.”

“Ewry!” snorted Reddy contemptuously. “Why, Mr. Merriwell could take him and break him to bits.
Ray don't amount to a whole lot. He's a good deal of a bluff. You don't mean to say, Venus, that you've let him take you in with his circus stunts in the gym and his condescending airs?"

"I don't see why you say that," Vincent remarked. "I think he's fine. Why, if I could do some of the things he does, I'd be so stuck-up you wouldn't have anything to do with me."

"Shucks!" snapped Reddy. "What good are they, I'd like to know? If he's such a wonderful athlete, why didn't he do something at football? Why don't he show up better on the hockey team? Eric only keeps him on because he can't find any one else to take his place. Don't talk to me about Ray Ewry!"

Though Vincent did not continue the argument, he was far from being convinced that his companion was right. Reddy was probably a little sore because the handsome blond fellow did things so much better in the gym than he did.

They walked along for a few minutes in silence, but the red-headed chap was not one to keep still for long at a time. Presently his freckled face was crinkled into a grin.

"I did have you guessing this morning, didn't I?" he chuckled. "Did you really think Mr. Merriwell was going to wipe up the floor with you and bang you black and blue all over?"

Vincent flushed a bit.

"I don't s'pose I thought that, but I was worried," he confessed frankly. "It's all right now, though. Boxing isn't any cinch, but I believe I'm going to like it."

Presently they came within sight of the village, crossed the bridge and made their way at once to the post office, where Reddy proceeded to cash his money order with expedition.

"Gee! I feel like a bloated millionaire," he chuckled, with an admiring glance at the bills in his hand. "Don't they look nice, Venus? Think of all the treats that are tied up in that green paper!"

Schuyler's mouth was fairly watering.

"Don't spend so much time looking at it," he admonished. "Where's the place where they have the ice-cream soda?"

"Applesnack's." Reddy returned, bestowing the money carefully in his wallet and returning that to his pocket. "It's just down the street a-ways."

"Let's get down there. I feel as if I just couldn't wait. I've got to write mother to send me some coin. I don't know why I didn't think of it before I came. Uncle Ralph said I wouldn't have any way of spending it, though."

"Humph!" exclaimed the sophisticated Payne. "That's what all your relatives say. They don't seem to think a fellow wants a treat now and then, or has any use for the tin when he's in a place like this. Wonder how they'd like it without a cent in their clothes."

They entered Applesnack's store in haste, and presently each was reveling in a large glass of chocolate soda. Not a word was uttered during the process of consuming these dainties, only little grunts and sighs of appreciation; but when the empty glasses were finally set down on the counter, each boy's face wore an expression of beatific contentment.

"That touches the spot, all right," Vincent remarked. "Don't it? Let's have another," Reddy returned recklessly.

His companion was more than willing, and their glasses were receiving the last delightful touches of foamy joy when the door opened and Fatty Hicks, Ray Ewry, and Squint Butler entered.

"Oh, look who's here!" chirped Hicks, advancing with gleaming eyes.

"Look what's here, I should say," growled Butler. "Guzzling chocolate soda, and me stone-broke. Ain't it awful, Mabel?"

He glanced at Ewry, but that youth shook his head.

"Same here, Squint, old boy," he said wryly. "Haven't got a cent to my name. My allowance isn't due till Monday."

In some manner Ewry had acquired a reputation of coming from a family of wealth and culture. He was always making apparently casual references to his father's importance as head of a New York bank, and spoke carelessly of money as if it were something so common that it was of no account; but it was noticeable that he never seemed to be supplied with an overabundance of cash.

Reddy was in a generous mood.

"Have one on me, boys," he said with the careless nonchalance of unlimited resource. "This is my treat."

His invitation was accepted with alacrity and without question. Providence was kind that day, and the three boys consumed their sodas to the last succulent drop, thankful that they had appeared at the psychological moment.

But when Reddy drew out his wallet and carelessly tossed a five-dollar bill to old Applesnack, Fatty Hicks' eyes bulged.
"Golly!" he cried. "Pipe the millionaire, fellers! Ain't he the cheese!"

Payne smiled condescendingly and allowed him a peep at the other bills in the wallet.

"That isn't all, either," he remarked, picking up his change.

"Somebody left you a fortune, Red?" smiled Ray Ewry.

"Hist!" put in Butler, in a sepulchral voice. "Can't you see he's dynamited the post-office safe. Something tells me the crime of the century has been committed."

Reddy contorted his face into a horrible scowl and clutched Butler by the arm.

"Not a word!" he hissed. "Keep silent as you value your life. I'm a desperate man!"

"Lend me a half, Red?" Fatty Hicks besought, as they made their way into the street.

Having a passion for candy and sweets, the short, square chap was perennially hard up.

"Nix!" returned Reddy promptly.

"I'll pay it back to you Monday, sure," promised the little fellow.

"Tell that to your grandmother!" retorted Payne. "I know your tricks, you little heathen. You'd have one big gorge on it, and I'd never get a cent out of you."

"Honest to gosh, I'll pay you!" vowed Hicks fervently.

"Nothing doing."

Hicks' expression was so woebegone that one would have thought his entire future depended on that half, but when he found that Reddy was adamant he perked up again and began to whistle a tune.

"Who's going down to the pond?" he inquired, as they crossed the bridge on the way back to the school grounds.

"I am, for one," Reddy returned, "as soon as I get my skates."

"Me too," Vincent put in. "I promised Eric I'd come down."

Ray Ewry smiled.

"Carpenter going to put you on the hockey team?" he inquired, with a faint note of sarcasm in his voice.

"Oh, no," Vincent explained hastily. "He just wants me to keep on with my skating. He thinks it a fine exercise."

"And, of course, you take everything he says as gospel," Ewry sneered.

"Well, he ought to know better than I do," Vincent returned a bit doubtfully. "He's such a fine athlete."

"Of course," repeated the tall, blond fellow.

But, from the tone of his voice, Schuyler gathered that he was on anything but good terms with Eric. He was a little sorry, for he had a sincere admiration for Ewry, and was beginning to like Eric far better than he had at first, when the slim, dark youth had seemed so brusque and stuck-up. He thought that two such nice fellows should be the best of friends. But Schuyler had a good deal to learn yet in the matter of character reading.

CHAPTER V.
VINCENT PLAYS HOCKEY.

Reaching the school buildings, the boys all hustled upstairs for their skates. Vincent snatched his up from a chair and then hurried down the hall to Reddy's room.

The door was closed, but he pushed it open without the formality of knocking, and was somewhat surprised to see his friend in the alcove smoothing down the spread of the bed. As the latch clicked, he straightened up swiftly and glanced around.

"Oh, it's only you, Venus," he said, with a grin. "I was just stowing away my little bank account. Afraid I might lose it if I carried it down to the pond. All ready?"

"Yep."

Grabbing up his hockey stick and skates, Reddy followed Vincent out of the room, and, closing the door, felt in his pocket for the key.

"Jinks!" he grunted, after he had gone through every pocket. "Where'd I leave the slippery thing?"

"Oh, don't bother," Vincent put in, eager to be gone. "Nobody's going to snoop around."

"That's right," agreed his companion. "They're all down at the pond. Let's hustle. We've lost about half of the afternoon already."

They flew out of the house and down the path which led to the pond, urged on by the shouts and yells and general signs of merriment which proceeded from the boys already assembled on the ice.

It was an inspiring scene, full of life and color, and the boys could scarcely get their skates adjusted quickly enough in their eagerness to become a part of it.

As they glided out toward the middle of the large expanse where most of the fellows were congregated, Eric Carpenter hailed them.

"Hustle up, Red!" he called. "Where the deuce have you been? We're waiting for you. Seen Ewry?"
"Sure," returned Reddy, approaching the captain of the hockey team. "He’s up in the dorm, getting his skates. We just got back from the store."

Carpenter frowned.

"That’s like him," he grumbled, "keeping the whole bunch waiting while he takes his own sweet time. I’d fire him off pretty blamed quick if I could only get some one to put his place. He isn’t worth a whole lot, anyhow."

He paused abruptly, his eyes fixed on Vincent, who was gliding toward them, and a look of surprise flashed into their depths.

"Hello, Venus!" he said the next instant. "Say, kid, do you know you haven’t got a half bad stroke? Where’d you learn to skate?"

An expression of surprise came into Vincent’s face, and his cheeks flushed with pleasure.

"Why, at home, in Auburn," he answered quickly. "Uncle Ralph made me learn when I was a kid. I don’t believe I was very crazy about it, but he stuck at it and taught me himself."

"He did a good job," Carpenter commented shortly. There was a moment’s pause, during which Eric glanced impatiently up the hill, but there was no sign of the delinquent Ewry.

"Drat his buttons!" muttered Carpenter.

Then he turned swiftly to Vincent.

"Ever play hockey, Venus?" he asked.

Schuyler shook his head.

"No, never," he answered.

"Well, why don’t you try?" Carpenter went on rather sharply. "It’s a great sight more fun than just skimming about doing nothing. I tell you what, I’ll put you into the second team this afternoon, if you say so, and run one of their men into Ewry’s place. We can’t wait for him any longer."

Vincent hesitated. Hockey had always seemed to him a fearfully rough game, where fellows were every now and then taking awful falls or getting smashed with each other’s sticks. He was not at all keen about it, but he cared too much for Eric’s good opinion to refuse outright.

"I don’t see how I can," he said doubtfully. "I never played in a game in my life. I won’t know what to do."

"Oh, you’ll pick that up quick enough," Carpenter answered. "It’s simple enough. I’ll give you a few points before we start, and you’ll catch on to a lot by watching the other fellows. Come ahead, you’ll find it’s good fun when you get started."

"Yes, be a sport, Venus," urged Reddy.

Between the two, Vincent was finally persuaded. A hockey stick was secured, and almost before he knew it he found himself swooping along the ice, doing his best to snatch the puck away from one of the fellows, who was equally determined to propel it toward the goal.

He did not succeed, of course. Just when he thought he was going to have everything his own way and was deciding where he would send the hard rubber disk, there came a swish of his opponent’s stick through the air, and the puck careened slant-wise across the ice to where another boy had skated swiftly up to receive it.

Vincent gasped with surprise and stood gaping after it. Then it slowly dawned upon him that he would have to think quick and act quicker if he wanted to succeed at this game. He had been entirely too deliberate.

He plunged into the game again, but with little more success. To begin with, he was too timid and uncertain to accomplish anything. His attention was taken up more with keeping out of harm’s way than in getting the puck from his opponents.

Eric Carpenter sized him up very soon and presently paused an instant as he was passing Vincent.

"Get into the game!" he urged emphatically. "Don’t be so scared. You won’t get killed. You can’t expect to do anything by hanging around on the outside. Go into it for all you’re worth and forget about yourself. That’s the only way you can learn."

Then he raced off, leaving Vincent overcome with chagrin and mortification. Why did he ever consent to play this miserable game? He was not going to risk his life by getting mixed up in one of those fearful melees which occurred now and then when the two sides clashed together in a fierce battle over the puck. Eric had no right to ask him to do it. That sort of thing was not his idea of fun.

But presently came the reaction as he thought of what all the boys would say of him if he did not try to do something. So, choking down his fears, he took a fresh grip on his stick and plunged into the fray again.

Presently he began to get into the spirit of the thing. He soon found that the scrimmages which had looked so desperate from a distance were not so very awful. There was a certain fierce joy in darting in upon a man and slipping the puck from under his very stick. This did not happen very often with Vincent, but the very difficulty of it, endowed the performance with an added fascination.
The spirit of combat—of emulation—was in his blood. The swift rush across the smooth ice thrilled him. It was a pretty good game, after all. He was glad he had consented to play, and before a great while he was patting himself on the back at the improvement he was making.

His fall was sudden and complete. He was stationed some thirty feet from his own goal, which was being hard pressed by the opposing team. The puck seemed to come down the line with lightninglike rapidity, zigzagging from one side to the other, despite the desperate attempts of the fellows to stop it.

All at once it came dashing toward a man near the middle, who missed it with his stick. The rubber struck against the edge of his skate, and as it flew off at an angle, Vincent made for it as fast as he could dig his skates into the ice.

The boy on the opposite side, who had missed it, also strained every effort to reach it first, and, being a little nearer, he succeeded. Swiftly swinging his stick, he brought it down with all his strength, not, as he had intended, on the side of the puck, but full against Vincent's ankle, which clumsily intervened just in time to receive the blow.

An excruciating pain shot straight up his leg to the very thigh, and, with a sharp cry, Vincent dropped to the ice as if he had been shot.

CHAPTER VI.
THE TENDER STREAK.

"Gee-whiz, I'm sorry, old fellow!" exclaimed the boy who had done the mischief, as he bent over Schuyler.

"It's broken!" moaned Vincent, gritting his teeth with the pain. "The ankle's broken!"

The game was instantly suspended and every one crowded around the prostrate boy. Eric Carpenter dropped down on his knees and felt carefully around the bone.

Vincent cringed under his touch and moaned again.

"Don't—oh, don't touch it!" he cried. "It's broken!"

Carpenter looked puzzled.

"Seems to feel all right to me," he returned. "I don't believe it's anything more than a bad crack."

He stood up and caught hold of Vincent's hands, at the same time motioning another boy to take him under the arms.

"Just stand up, old fellow, and see if you can bear your weight on it," he urged.

Vincent was horrified.

"Oh, I couldn't!" he gasped. "It would kill me!"

Notwithstanding his protestations, the boys got him on his feet, and, with many groans and facial contortions, he allowed himself to be propelled to the bank and carefully lowered down on it.

"How's she feel now?" Eric asked rather shortly.

"A—little—better," faltered Vincent.

It did not seem possible that the bone was not shattered into fragments, and yet he had to acknowledge that the pain had lessened slightly. Perhaps it was the sort of numbness which comes with paralysis of the nerves. Perhaps he would be crippled for life. Perhaps he might never be able to walk again. It was a dreadful thought, and a cold chill went up and down his back.

"You'll be all right pretty quick," Carpenter said, with an almost indifferent air. "Here's Ewry. He'll play for the rest of the game."

For some ten minutes Ray Ewry had been sitting calmly on the bank, his skates by his side, watching the progress of the game with a very curious expression on his face. When he had come within sight of the pond and seen the contest in full swing, he had been furiously angry. They had not thought him of enough importance to wait for, evidently. Who had taken his place?

Presently his quick eyes discerned Vincent Schuyler flying about in the thick of the fray.

"So that's it, is it?" he muttered angrily. "The cheeky dubs, to do a thing like that after the decent way I've treated him. I'll make him wish he'd kept out of my pie."

Reaching the bank, he discovered that Vincent was playing on the second team, a member of which was taking his own place in the other. But this did not much lessen his feeling of displeasure with the new boy. He had consequently rejoiced secretly at Vincent's downfall.

"Come on, Ewry," Carpenter said, turning away from Vincent. "Finish the game."

Ewry smiled calmly.

"You didn't seem to think I was worth waiting for when you started, I notice," he remarked.

Carpenter frowned.

"A lot of practice we'd have gotten if we'd done that," he returned shortly. "Come ahead, unless you want to leave the team for good."

This was rather more than the handsome, blond
fellow had bargained for, and it took the wind out of his sails at once. He had too good an opinion of his own abilities to imagine for an instant that Carpenter would actually consider letting him go, and the words of the captain were something of a shock.

Grumbling a little, Ewry adjusted his skates deliberately and then joined the others on the ice.

Vincent paid little attention to the short altercation. He was so cut to the quick at Eric's amazing callousness in leaving him there alone that he had thoughts for little else.

"It's cruel!" he almost sobbed. "How could he do such a thing when I can't stir my foot! I ought to be carried back to the school at once and have the doctor make an examination. I know the bone is broken. I'll never be able to walk again. I'll be a helpless cripple all my life because of this. Oh, why did I ever play in that dreadful game! Why didn't I refuse, and I should be all right now?"

Some people find an amazing consolation in self-commiseration. They find a pleasure, almost, in making themselves believe that they are downtrodden victims of fortune. Vincent might have gone on indefinitely bewailing his sad fate had he not come to a sudden realization that the pain in his ankle had almost ceased.

"It's impossible!" he muttered. "It must be paralysis."

Gingerly—very gingerly—he assayed to move one toe. So far as he could judge, it seemed to be perfectly flexible and quite under control. He wobbled the rest. They also were in good shape. It was amazing.

Then, with extreme care, he turned his foot a little and was surprised to discover that it was done with ease and a total lack of pain. Could it be possible that his ankle was not broken after all?

It seemed to be not only possible, but true; and a rush of shame overwhelmed him as he realized that what he had made such a tremendous hue and cry about was, simply and solely, a whack on his ankle bone, extremely painful for a few moments, but totally without any lasting effects.

"What an awful idiot I am!" he muttered, his face crimson. "A perfect baby to make all that fuss over nothing. I don't wonder Eric didn't want to bother with me any longer. Gee! I'd like to kick myself good and hard."

He had a feeling that the boys would jolly the life out of him if he went back on the ice, so he slipped off his skates and climbed back to the path.

It was almost time to go in, anyway, so he would not lose very much. The next time—if another time ever came—he would try and not make such an ass of himself.

It was almost dusk when he ran up the stairs of the dormitory building. Turning the corner, he saw a small figure appear suddenly at the other end of the corridor and come rapidly toward him. Whoever it was had come out of one of the rooms at that end, either Ewry's, Reddy's, or his own, he was too far off to see which. For a moment he wondered who it was.

Then, coming closer, he recognized Patty Hicks.

"Thought you were down at the pond," he remarked carelessly. "You haven't been up here all afternoon, have you?"

The little fellow, usually so pert and saucy, seemed oddly embarrassed by the question.

"Oh, no," he answered. "I came in about ten minutes ago and was just getting a book out of Ray's room. He said I could borrow it."

As he spoke he held up a small volume, but Vincent noticed that he did not raise his eyes, but kept them fixed on the floor.

"You're not sick, are you, Fatty?" Schuyler asked quickly.

Hicks shot a quick glance at his face and then looked away.

"Gracious, no!" he exclaimed. "What makes you think that?"

"You seem so quiet," Vincent chuckled, as he went on toward his own room.

The little fellow made no retort, but scurried on to his quarters near the stairway, and before Vincent could unlock his own door, he heard a bolt snap and knew that Hicks had locked himself in.

Without giving the matter further thought, he proceeded to wash up, and had finished and seated himself in the easy-chair to read for a few moments before supper when the door was thrown open and Reddy Payne entered.

"Cough up, Venus," he chuckled. "I'm onto your little game; but say! you certainly gave me a deuced of a shock for a minute!"

Vincent looked bewildered.

"What in the world are you talking about, Red?" he asked.

Reddy grinned.

"Clever," he murmured; "beastly clever; but you can't fool your uncle with that innocent look. The joke was on me, all right, but let's have it back now."

By this time Vincent's mouth was frankly open.
"Honest, Red, I haven't an idea what you mean," he said dazedly. "I haven't got anything of yours."

The expression of utter bewilderment on his face was unmistakable; and, as he saw it, the grin disappeared swiftly from Reddy Payne's freckled countenance and his bright blue eyes narrowed.

"Is that straight?" he asked shortly.

Schuyler nodded.

"Sure as anything you know," he returned emphatically.

There was a pause, during which the sharp blue eyes of the boy at the door seemed to probe Vincent to the very soul.

"My wallet's gone," he said slowly. "Somebody's been in my room this afternoon and wiped it."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MISSING MONEY.

"Gone?" Vincent gasped incredulously.

Reddy nodded emphatically.

"Yes, gone," he retorted. "Swiped—pinched—stolen; unless somebody's playing a trick on me."

"But are you positive?" questioned Vincent.

Even as he spoke, he realized the absurdity of his question. But his mind was in such a whirl that he hardly knew what he was saying.

"Of course I am!" snapped Payne. "You don't s'pose I'd be making all this fuss if I wasn't? There isn't a sign of the wallet where I put it under the mattress. It's vanished."

"But who under the sun would take it?" Schuyler asked quickly. "Who knew—"

He broke off abruptly as the realization came suddenly to him that he himself was the only one who knew of Reddy's hiding place. He had seen his friend place the wallet there before they went down to the pond. And close upon the heels of that thought came the remembrance that he had urged Reddy to come away without locking the door.

His face paled swiftly, and a look of horror came into his eyes.

"Reddy!" he gasped. "You don't think that I——"

His pleading eyes finished the sentence which his lips refused to utter.

His companion did not answer at once. His bright eyes were fixed keenly on Vincent's troubled face.

"No, I don't reckon I do, Vin," he said quietly, at length. "I don't think you'd do a dirty trick like that; but it seems awful queer that you should be the only one who knew where it was."

Vincent gave a sigh of relief.

"It's dreadful!" he exclaimed. "And I told you not to bother to hunt up the key, but leave the door unlocked. But I couldn't do such a thing, Reddy—I just couldn't!"

In spite of his trouble and perplexity, Payne could not help smiling a little at Vincent's desperate earnestness.

"No, I don't believe you could," he said reassuringly. "I thought you might have taken it as a joke though. But, since you didn't, we've got to find out who did?"

"Don't you think some one else might have done that—taken it as a joke, I mean?" Schuyler asked hopefully.

Reddy hesitated, his forehead crinkled in a dozen worried wrinkles.

"I don't know," he said doubtfully. "It's possible, of course, but it doesn't seem likely. No one else knew where it was, to begin with."

"Was the spread mussed, or anything like that?" Vincent asked after a moment's thought.

"No. It looked just the way I left it. You wouldn't have known any one had touched the bed. It was only when I reached under to take out the wallet that I found it was gone."

"Maybe it slipped farther back," Vincent suggested. "Nix. No chance of that. I ripped the whole bed to pieces and threw the mattress off on the floor, but there was nothing doing."

There was silence for a moment, and then Reddy sat down in a chair opposite Vincent and cupped his chin in his open palms.

"Let's dope the thing out systematically," he said quietly. "To begin with, there were only three fellows beside you and me who knew I had that money. Ray Ewry, Fatty Hicks, and Squint Butler. Now it must have been one of you four. I'm just putting you in because you knew, not because I have the least idea you did it."

As he spoke there came suddenly into Vincent's mind his encounter with little Hicks in the corridor only an hour before. The fellow had certainly behaved strangely, and not at all like himself. He had come out of one of the rooms at the end of the corridor, too.

He said he had been to get a book from Ray Ewry's room, and the book was in his hand, but it was quite possible that he had lied. It was so dark at the time that Vincent could not tell whether he had come from the west or the east, but this was the road he would have taken to reach the room that Vincent knew so well. His companion had seen that. He had seen the fellow's thin face, his long, thin neck, and hisഷe.

On leaving the office it seemed odd to him that he did not know of the fellow. That was a fact that had made the case seem more serious to him. It was not as if the fellow was unknown. He had met him before; he would know, at least, whether he was absent or present. And yet he did not.
Ewry’s room or not. It might as easily have been Reddy’s.

But it did not seem possible that Hicks could be a thief. He was a mischievous little rascal, to be sure, always up to some trick or practical joke; but he wasn’t the sort of boy who would deliberately steal.

He might have taken the pocketbook to plague Reddy, though. That would be very like him.

Vincent hesitated, wondering whether he had better mention the matter to Payne or not. He did not want to bring unjust suspicion on any one. Perhaps Fatty had taken the wallet as a joke and meant to return it as soon as Payne had been well frightened by its loss.

Schuyler finally decided that he would say nothing now of what he had seen, but would get Hicks by himself directly after supper and find out the truth.

“It does seem to me, Red,” he said presently, “that this must be a practical joke. None of those fellows strike me as boys who would really steal. Ewry’s people are well off. Hicks or Butler might take it for the fun of seeing how you’d go up in the air and make a fuss; but they wouldn’t take it to keep.”

Reddy pondered over this idea for a few moments.

“There is something in that,” he confessed presently. “They’d certainly have the laugh on me if I raised merry thunder all over the place about having my wallet pinched, and then have them slip it back in my room. I would feel a bit cheap.”

He was still thinking about it when the supper bell rang.

“I reckon I’ll take your advice and keep my mouth shut for a while,” he said as they hurried out into the hall. “I won’t give them a chance to crow, and, when they find I’m not saying a thing about it, they’ll have to bring it back.”

At the supper table Vincent made a point of carefully scrutinizing the faces of the three boys who were under suspicion. Fatty Hicks sat beside him, and there was not the least sign in his manner that he had anything on his mind. He seemed to have fully recovered his usual spirits, and laughed and joked through the meal with all his customary light-heartedness.

Over the way, Ray Ewry, handsome and serene as ever, had not a shadow on his handsome face. He seemed to have gotten over his grouch entirely, though he did not address Eric Carpenter except when it was absolutely necessary, and then only in monosyllables. To the other boys, however, he was amiability itself. It was as if he thus endeavored to show his displeasure with Carpenter; but the slim, dark fellow at the head of the table seemed blissfully unconscious of it.

Farther down the long board, Squint Butler ate his supper in his usual placid, unruffled manner. From the amount of food he put away his appetite was evidently unimpaired.

Vincent was puzzled. Each one of these boys was far calmer, to outward seeming, than he himself; and yet one of them must know what had become of Reddy’s wallet.

As soon as the meal was over and they filed out into the hallway, Vincent sought out Fatty Hicks and penned him into an out-of-the-way corner.

“That was a smart trick of yours,” he said firmly, “but Reddy’s onto you. You might as well give it back to him.”

The short chap’s eyes opened to their widest extent; likewise his mouth.

“What you giving us, Venus?” he inquired, in astonishment. “Talk United States, will you?”

“I’m talking about the wallet you took out of Reddy’s room,” Vincent retorted quickly. “I suppose you thought you’d scare him into thinking that some one had stolen it; but it didn’t work.”

Little Hicks’ eyes threatened to pop out entirely.

“You got another guess coming, Venus,” he returned promptly. “I don’t know nothing about Reddy’s wallet, or any other. Wish I did.”

Schuyler eyed him keenly.

“You mean to tell me you didn’t take Reddy’s wallet from under his mattress this afternoon?” he asked slowly.

Hicks shook his head emphatically. The corners of his mouth drooped.

“I didn’t take nobody’s wallet—ever,” he whined. “I think you’re mean to say such a thing.”

“What were you doing when I met you in the corridor this afternoon, then?” Vincent demanded.

“I was getting a book out of Ray’s room,” Hicks explained, in an agrieved tone.

“You looked as if you’d been doing something you ought not to,” Vincent said sharply. “You looked just as you do when you’re up to some of your tricks.”

The short chap dropped his eyes.

“Well,” he began slowly, “Ray didn’t say I could have the book, and I was afraid you’d tell him. I said he told me I could have it, but he didn’t. Now, I suppose you’ll go and give me away.”

Vincent hesitated an instant. Hicks evidently had something on his mind, but just what it was he couldn’t be sure.
"Can you cross your heart, Fatty, and swear honestly that you weren't in Reddy's room this afternoon?" he asked presently.

Hicks looked him straight in the eyes.

"Honest to gosh I wasn't!" he said fervently. "Cross my heart I haven't been there since night before last."

There was no questioning the earnestness of the little fellow. His very eyes were truthful, and Vincent let him go without any further questioning.

As he mounted the stairs to go to his room, he was all at sea. If Hicks hadn't taken the wallet as a joke, then who had? It must have been Butler, who, though not so constantly mischievous as Fatty, did occasionally indulge in practical jokes. Almost unconsciously, he left Ewry out of the question. Ray was above tricks of that sort, and, as for his really taking the wallet for its contents, such an idea never entered Schuyler's head.

He and Reddy talked the matter over at great length before going to bed, but neither of them could come to any definite conclusion. It was altogether puzzling, and they finally decided to wait and see if the next day did not bring out some new developments. If nothing new turned up, then Reddy was determined to go to Frank, and see if he could take any steps toward recovering the money.

CHAPTER VIII.

EWRY QUITS THE TEAM.

In the morning mail next day Vincent received a long letter from his mother. It was fond and loving, and into it the indulgent Mrs. Schuyler had tucked a ten-dollar bill.

Vincent put that carefully away in his pocket, smiling as he read the postscript to the letter.

"Use the inclosed bill in any way you wish, my dear boy. Your Uncle Ralph assures me that there is no way of spending money in a little country place like Bloomfield, but I hate to think of your being entirely without it."

"She's a brick!" murmured Vincent, as he folded the letter and returned it to the envelope. "I certainly can use it at Applesnack's. Uncle Ralph makes me sick talking the way he does about not needing it. I'll bet he could spend it, all right, if he were in my place."

There were no new developments concerning the wallet that morning, and Vincent became more and more worried about it as the day wore on. He was, in fact, more distressed than Reddy himself, who seemed as frisky and full of fun as if nothing out of the way had taken place.

But Reddy was a boy who could never take things very long to heart. He was troubled at the loss of his money, to be sure, but he did not allow it to worry him to the exclusion of everything else.

Vincent, on the other hand, was more seriously inclined. He had besides, a feeling that he was in a way responsible for his companion's loss in that he had advised him not to trouble to lock his door. As a result, he went about all morning with a quiet, thoughtful mien, while Payne was lively as a cricket.

Once on the pond, however, he quickly forgot everything else in the joy of skimming over the smooth ice. He had never imagined that he could become so fond of any exercise as he was of skating. But it was his one accomplishment. Here he found himself equal with the other boys and superior to many of them; and it was a great satisfaction, and something which was distinctly novel, to feel that he had to take odds from no one.

To his astonishment, Eric Carpenter put him onto the second hockey team in place of a boy who had showed up poorly the day before.

"You can do better than Goodhue if you try," he said. "You want to remember what I told you yesterday. Just forget about yourself, and pay attention to getting the puck down the line. And if you get a whack on the shin or fall on your neck, don't think you're killed. It takes a good deal to kill a fellow, you know, Vin."

Schuyler grinned sheepishly.

"I was an awful ass, wasn't I?" he confessed.

Eric laughed.

"You're not the first one who thought his leg was broken when he got a crack on the ankle bone," he chuckled. "It's all in the day's work. You've got to go through that sort of thing so's to teach yourself not to yell every time you're hurt. I don't guess you'll do that again."

"I certainly won't," Vincent returned firmly. "I'd try not to holler if I really did get something broken."

"That's the right spirit," Eric said approvingly. "You'll make good, old fellow. With a little more practice you'll be a heap sight better than Ewry. He's got such a case of swelled head that he thinks every thing he does is just about right, and you can't teach him a thing. Well, get into line, boys. It's time we started."

This was the signal for practice to begin, and the players gathered around at once. Another practice on the pond was arranged, and the work began in a brisk manner.

This was the result of the work the day before. It seemed that Ewry had said something to the boys, for they were in a bustle to do their best. The result was a decided improvement.
The last words were uttered in a quick, emphatic
 tone, as he glided away from Vincent, leaving the
 boy gaping in astonishment.

"He can't mean that," he muttered, as he skated
 rapidly to his position. "He's just encouraging me a
 little. It's impossible that I should be better than Ray
 Ewry, or anywhere near as good."

Still the thought that he might some day be in the
 class of which his hero was the head stimulated him
 to put forth every effort, and the result was that he
 made a very good showing.

Before an hour had passed he had lost all thought
 of any possible danger to himself and flung himself
 into the game with a zest and vigor which surprised
 not a few of the boys, who had set him down the day
 before as pretty much of a softy.

He had one or two pretty bad tumbles, to be sure,
 but he picked himself up without a word of complaint
 and went on with the game in a dogged way which
 made Eric Carpenter mentally pat him on the back.

Though he was very far from realizing the fact,
 Vincent was putting up a better game than the su-
 perior Ray Ewry, who, possibly because of his dislike
 for Carpenter, or his notion that since it was only a
 practice game he did not have to try, did his part in
 a languid, haphazard manner which made Eric long
 to take him by the scruff of the neck and shake a little
 sense into him.

"By thunder!" he exclaimed. "If I wouldn't like to
 give him a good facing and wake him up! He can do
 better than that if he only has a mind to; but he just
doesn't try, because he's got a groutch against me."

The climax came when Ewry let the puck go by him
 in a perfectly inexcusable manner, and Vincent, who
 was on the alert, sent it flying back toward the goal.
 This starting a play which ended in a score for the sec-
 ond team.

Carpenter could no longer contain himself.

"If that's the best you can do, Ewry," he snapped,
 "you'd better hand in your resignation. You had no
 business at all to miss that. You've been simply
 rotten all afternoon. Why don't you put a little gump-
tion into your work? Why, Schuyler, here, who never
 had a stick in his hand before he came to Farnham, is
 a heap better than you are."

Ewry's face flushed and his eyes narrowed.

"Put him on the team, then!" he retorted angrily.
 "He can have my place and welcome. If you think
 I'm going to stand for your high and mighty airs any
 longer, you're mistaken. You strut around like a little
 tin god on wheels, but you can't boss me. I'm done."

Without waiting for a reply, he turned and skated
 toward the bank, giving Vincent, as he passed him, a
 look of hate which cut him to the quick.

Carpenter's face was livid, but he managed to keep
 his temper.

"Good riddance," he commented shortly. "We won't
 have any trouble in filling his place in time for the
 game with Wellsburgh."

He hesitated and his eyes ranged swiftly over the
 faces of the fellows who had been surprised and in-
terested listeners to the unexpected flare-up.

"Somebody get Goodhue back, and we'll finish the
 afternoon with him," he said quietly. "There isn't
 more than half an hour left. I'll think the matter over
 to-night and decide who to put in Ewry's place."

When the game was over, he approached Vincent,
 who was still troubled at the venomous look which
 Ewry had given him as he left the pond.

"You were fine, old fellow," Eric said heartily. "If
 you only keep that up I might do a great sight worse
 than put you on the team."

"I wish you hadn't brought me into that discussion,
 though," Schuyler sighed. "Now Ewry will think I've
 been manœuvring to get his place."

"What do you care when you know you haven't?"
Eric smiled.

Vincent hesitated.

"Well, I like him, you know," he returned slowly.
 "He's always been very decent to me; but now, I sup-
 pose he'll hate the sight of me."

There was a moment's silence, during which the
 smile left Carpenter's face.

"I'm sorry I said what I did, then," he said quietly.
 "I was pretty hot under the collar, though, and spit out
 just what came into my mind first. It happened to be
 true, too. You put up a much better game to-day
 than he did."

He hesitated an instant and then went on:

"Don't you think that if a fellow is going to hate
 you for such a thing as that, his friendship can't be
 worth much?"

"I suppose that's true," Vincent admitted, after a
 moment's thought. "Well, the thing's over and done
with. I don't suppose there's any use worrying about it, one way or another."

Dropping down on the bank, they took off their skates.

"Gee!" Carpenter exclaimed the next minute. "You haven't got any ankle supports, have you?"

"No; ought I to have them? You didn't say anything about such things."

"Reckon I forgot," Eric admitted. "You ought to wear them, though. Much less chance of turning your ankle, you know. I'll see if I can't get you a pair."

"What do they cost?" Vincent inquired.

"Oh, about fifty cents," the other answered. "I rather think Dangerfield has an extra pair he'll sell you. I'll ask him if you like."

"Wish you would."

Schuyler felt in his pocket and drew out the ten-dollar bill he had received from his mother that morning.

"You can pay him out of that," he said, handing it to Eric.

The latter laughed and waved it away.

"You don't expect Bob would have change for a tenner, do you?" he smiled. "Wait till you get it broken. You must be flush, old fellow."

"It's all I've got," Vincent returned as they sprang up and started toward the school. "I'll change it tomorrow at Applesnack's. Come down and I'll give you a treat."

CHAPTER IX.

THE TELLTALE WALLET.

After supper Vincent and Reddy retired to the former's room to talk over matters. The red-headed chap perched himself on one corner of the table, while Vincent sat down beside it and rested his chin on his hands.

"I can't dawdle around any longer," Payne said emphatically. "I'm going to see Mr. Merriwell the first thing to-morrow morning and tell him all about it. I don't care whether it is a joke. Nobody's got any busi-

ness to play that kind of a trick on a fellow, and he deserves all he'll get. And I'm not at all sure it is a joke. Looks pretty much like earnest to me, and you bet your life I'm not going to lose nineteen dollars without putting up a big bowl! It makes me mad every time I think of it."

"I don't blame you a bit," Vincent returned slowly. "It's a beastly thing to think about anybody, but it certainly does look as if the fellow who took the wallet means to keep it. He'd surely have brought it back by this time if he meant it for——"

He broke off abruptly as a sharp rap sounded on the door.

"Come in," he called.

The latch clicked and Eric Carpenter entered and closed the door behind him. In one hand he carried a pair of leather ankle supports which he tossed on the table.

"There you are," he said. "Got 'em for forty-five cents, but it's lucky I didn't try to get Bob to change your tenner. He was down to a handful of chicken-feed, and a mighty small one at that."

He dropped down in the easy-chair, and Reddy at once pricked up his ears.

"A tenner!" he exclaimed. "Does my hearing deceive me? You must have made a raise, Venus. Yesterday you were strapped for fair. Who'd you work this time?"

Vincent laughed.

"Didn't have to work anybody," he returned. "Got a letter from home this morning, and in it was a nice, clean ten-dollar bill. Mother said she thought I might be able to use it. Can I? Well, I should say yes!"

"Lucky dog," sighed Payne, slipping off the table.

"We'll help make it fly to-morrow. Eh, Eric?"

Carpenter nodded emphatically.

"Surest thing you know," he smiled. "That's my specialty—spending other people's money."

Reddy yawned and glanced carelessly around the room.

"What's become of all your lovely face-washes, Venus?" he inquired suddenly. "I don't see 'em."

Vincent flushed a little.

"I threw them out," he confessed.
“What!” gasped Reddy, in mock dismay. “Threw them out! Mrs. Markham’s Face Balm, and all the rest? Don’t tell me you threw away Clarissa’s Cold Cream!”

“Well, no,” Vincent grinned. “Clarissa’s on the washstand. Did you want to apply some?”

“I might,” Reddy returned, “if she’s good for chapped hands. But what a thundering waste of good lotions! Didn’t they eradicate the pimples quick enough?”

“You go to grass!” retorted Schuyler, his face very red.

The face lotions and toilet waters with which he had come to Farnham Hall so well provided were a sore point with him. Reddy and some of his friends had been in high glee when they discovered the many bottles and jars, and had promptly christened their owner “Venus,” a name which had lasted considerably longer than the lotions, for Vincent had fired most of them out in disgust the next day.

Reddy chuckled gleefully and sauntered carelessly over to the bookcase. He had guessed from the way in which Carpenter took possession of the easy-chair that he had something to say to Vincent, so the red-headed chap promptly gave him the opportunity, hoping thus to be rid of him the sooner so that they might resume their discussion of the lost money.

His surmise proved quite correct. The moment his back was turned, Carpenter leaned toward Schuyler a little.

“I’ve been thinking over that vacancy in the team, Vin,” he said, in a low tone, “and I don’t see how I can do better than to let you try and fill it.”

Vincent could scarcely believe his ears.

“You can’t mean that, Eric!” he exclaimed. “Why, I’m nowhere’s near good enough.”

“I’m a better judge of that than you are,” Carpenter replied emphatically. “The only thing you lack is practice. You’ve got a corking stroke and good speed. To tell the truth, it’s puzzled me a lot to know how you ever came to be so much at home on the ice.”

His tone was candid in the extreme, and Vincent smiled wryly.

“You mean when I’m such a dud at everything else?”

he put in. “Well, you see, at home, where we have a big lake, there’s generally good skating for three months out of the year. Everybody learns about as soon as they walk, and a fellow that can’t get around on the ice isn’t in it. They have all sorts of social stunts there, you know. My uncle made me learn when I was a little kid, and I’ve kept it up ever since, even though I wasn’t very crazy about the exercise, just because it was the thing, I suppose.”

Eric nodded comprehendingly.

“I see,” he returned. “Well, I’m jolly glad you did. It helps me out a lot.”

“But the fellows on the second team, Eric,” Vincent put in anxiously, “some of them must be a great sight better than I am.”

“They may know the game better,” Carpenter explained, “but they’ve none of them got your speed or quickness. They’re a scrub lot, anyhow. We’ve got a pretty poor bunch of skaters this year. They say that last year they had a peachy lot who beat everything they went up against. That’s the way things vary. None of the fellows stay here for longer than a year, you know, and that’s an awful handicap in any sport. If it wasn’t for Mr. Merriwell, the school would never do anything at baseball or football; but he seems to work up a good team every year.”

He paused an instant, and then went on quickly:

“All you want is practice, Vin. The first game isn’t until a week from Saturday——”

“I don’t see Clarissa,” came in Reddy’s dulcet tones from the alcove. “She isn’t on the washstand.”

“Look in the top drawer, then,” laughed Vincent.

“The game with Wellsburgh High School is a week from Saturday,” repeated Carpenter. “That gives us about ten days, and you can do a pile of work in that time. Of course it will be hard work. You’ll have to spend every spare minute on the ice; but if you keep on the way you’ve begun, I haven’t a doubt you’ll make good. What do you say, kid?”

Schuyler’s face glowed. This was so much more than he had ever dreamed of that he could scarcely believe in his good fortune.

“Of course, I’ll take you up,” he returned eagerly.
“And I’ll do my very best to make good. I can hardly——”

He paused, his eyes fixed upon Reddy Payne, who had emerged from the alcove and stood there with a strange expression on his freckled face which Vincent could not understand.

“Didn’t you find the cold cream?” he asked quickly.

“No,” returned Reddy slowly, his snapping blue eyes fixed keenly on Schuyler’s face. “But I found something else.”

His voice was cold and hard. Vincent had never heard him speak that way before, and an inexplicable sense of dread swept over him, taking a little of the color from his face, and sending an anxious flicker into his brown eyes.

“Wa—what do you mean?” he stammered. “What have you found?”

“This!” exclaimed Payne.

He flung up one hand suddenly, and Vincent saw that it held a dark leather wallet.


CHAPTER X.

ACCUSED!

Not a sound broke the tense stillness as Vincent gazed in petrified bewilderment at the pocketbook in his friend’s hand. What did it mean? What could it mean? He did not understand. Then suddenly it occurred to him that this must be one of Reddy’s jokes. That was it—a joke. He gave a gasp of relief and laughed nervously.

“Gee-whiz, Red!” he exclaimed. “You got me that time, sure. For a minute I thought you were in earnest.”

Payne’s eyes flashed ominously.

“Earnest!” he cried. “I am in earnest. Did you think it was a joke? That wallet was in your washstand drawer. How did it come there? and where’s the money that ought to be in it?”

“But how could it be there?” protested Schuyler.

“I didn’t put it there. I’ve never seen it since you paid for the treat at Applesnack’s.”

“Oh, tell that to your grandmother!” Reddy snapped hotly. “That sort of thing don’t go down with me. You fooled me last night with your innocent ways, but you can’t do it again. You may as well fork out that coin first as last.”

Vincent sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing. Petted and coddled as he had been all his life, he was not the sort who could stomach being called a thief.

“You’re a liar!” he cried fiercely. “You take back what you said, or I’ll make you swallow your words.”

“Try—just try!” Reddy shrieked. “You’re a thief, that’s what you are!”

With a muffled cry, Vincent darted at him, but he was brought up short by a grip on his shoulder. Eric Carpenter, amazed and bewildered at the extraordinary turn things had taken, had sprung to his feet just in time to prevent a rough-and-tumble fight.

“Easy, easy,” he said sternly. “None of that, now! Shut your jaw, you little wild cat!”

This last was addressed to Reddy, who was on the point of adding a few choice remarks to those with which he had already favored Vincent. At the sight of Carpenter’s face, however, he managed to choke them down.

“Now what in thunder is all this row about?” demanded Eric, still keeping a good grip on Schuyler’s arm. “What is all this talk you’re-making, Payne, about stolen money? First I’ve heard of it.”

“I left my wallet with nineteen dollars in it under the mattress yesterday,” sputtered Reddy; “and when I came in from the pond it was gone.”

“Didn’t you lock your door?” Eric inquired.

“I didn’t have the key in my pocket, and Schuyler said not to bother about it. Everybody was down at the pond.”

“Schuyler saw where you hid the wallet?” questioned Carpenter.

“Of course he did,” snapped Reddy. “And he came back to the house before any one else did. So he could sneak in and——”

“You’re a liar!” broke in Vincent fiercely. “I didn’t touch——”
“Now look here,” interrupted Carpenter; “if you two can’t tell this thing without flying at each other’s throats, I’ll march you over to Mr. Merriwell, late as it is. Tell your story, Payne, without any comments or innuendoes; and you keep your mouth shut, Schuyler, till he’s through. Then you can have your say.”

Both fellows had cooled down a little by this time, and Reddy managed to give the details of the robbery and the circumstances leading up to it, briefly and concisely.

When he had finished, Eric was silent for a few moments. His face was serious and his eyes grave. Presently he turned to Vincent.

“What made you suggest to Payne to keep this quiet?” he asked. “Don’t you know that Mr. Merriwell wishes to hear of this kind of thing instantly?”

“I only said that because I thought some of the fellows had taken it as a joke,” Vincent explained. “It didn’t seem as if any of those boys could really have stolen it. If Reddy made a big fuss which got all over the school, and then had the money brought back, every one would have the laugh on him. I wish to goodness I hadn’t said anything about it, now.”

Again Eric hesitated for an instant.

“You didn’t have any money yesterday, I understand,” he commented; “and yet to-night you offered me a ten-dollar bill to pay for those supports. Doesn’t that strike you as a little incongruous?”

“Yes,” put in Reddy triumphantly. “Where’d you get——”

“Shut up!” snapped Carpenter fiercely.

The red-headed chap promptly subsided, and Eric turned again to Schuyler.

“I got that in a letter from home this morning,” Vincent explained quickly.

“Was it just put in the letter without any mention made of it, or did your mother speak about it?” Carpenter asked quietly.

“She mentioned it in the postscript,” Vincent said eagerly. “I’ll show you the letter.”

He thrust his hand into his pocket, expecting to draw forth the envelope which he remembered placing there that morning. But his fingers encountered noth-
"I won't run away, Reddy Payne," he flared up, "and you know it! I'll stay right here and make you sorry you've behaved so rotten mean to me."

Carpenter drew the impetuous boy out of the room with no gentle hand. Before he closed the door he looked back at Vincent.

"Good night," he said, in a low tone.

The boy at the table made no answer. With mouth firmly set and chin squared, he glared at Carpenter so fiercely that the latter instantly repented of his good intentions and closed the door with a bang.

"I won't waste any sympathy on him," he thought to himself. "Hardened little devil! All that agony put on for effect. I'd never have thought it of him."

He might have changed his mind had he caught a glimpse of the face of the boy in the room back there. The door had no sooner closed than his air of contemptuous bravado vanished as completely as if it had never been, and his face took on an expression of such utter despair as would have moved a heart of stone.

A thief—they thought him a thief! The boy he thought his friend, and that other whom he had always looked up to and admired, believed him guilty of this contemptible thing. It seemed incredible, and yet it was true.

The remembrance of Reddy's insults only brought a flush of anger to his cheeks and made him clench his fists furiously. He would be even with him some day. But the thought of that look of coldness and suspicion in Eric Carpenter's eyes was intolerable. He had wanted so much to have Eric think well of him, and until now he had succeeded.

But that was all over. After this, the tall, slim, curly-haired fellow Vincent had come to like so well would probably have nothing more to do with him. He would fill the coveted place on the hockey team with some one else.

It was heartbreaking. He had been so happy and proud to have been offered that place! It had seemed too good to be true, and now it wasn't true.

With a choking sob, the boy dropped his head down on his outstretched arms and his shoulders heaved convulsively.

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CHAPTER XI.

FRANK MERRIWELL'S COMPREHENSION.

Despite the bright winter sunshine which streamed into Vincent's window and awakened him to a new day, the world looked very dark.

But one thing prevented his giving way to utter despair, and that was his faith in Frank Merriwell.

"He won't believe in a thing which never happened," he muttered, as he plunged his face into the bowl of icy water. "He'll see that I just couldn't have stolen that money. I don't care if things do look bad for me. I'm sure he'll understand."

It was this hope which buoyed him up and enabled him to appear at breakfast with a calm, though serious face, which gave no hint of the mental suffering he had gone through the night before, and once more confirmed Eric Carpenter's belief that he was thoroughly hardened.

Directly breakfast was over, the latter proceeded to Frank's office, accompanied by Reddy and Vincent. The two boys did not exchange a single word while they waited in the outer office for Eric to explain things to Merriwell.

Reddy was still on his high horse and apparently had not recovered from his indignation of the night before. But had he been never so pleasant, even conciliatory, Vincent felt that he could not have brought himself to speak to the boy whom he had thought his friend, and who had yet shown so little sign of true friendship.

Somehow, he felt that, were their positions reversed, he could never have believed such things of Reddy, even if the evidence had been strong against him. He would have been more loyal to his friend than that.

It did not occur to Vincent to consider their widely varying natures, which were as opposite as the poles themselves, or he might, perhaps, have understood. Nor did it occur to him that, in spite of his scowling face and general air of frigidity, Reddy Payne might be filled with doubt as to whether he had so firmly believed the night before was true after all; and deep down in his heart he might regret passionately the things he had said to Vincent under the influence of his hot temper.

Be that as it may, both boys sat on the bench with their heads down.
their eyes fixed straight before them, each apparently totally oblivious of the other’s presence, until Eric appeared and summoned Reddy into Frank’s private office.

He was there about twenty minutes, and when he came out he hesitated an instant before Vincent, his face a little flushed and his lips parted as if he wanted to say something. But Schuyler’s air of uncompromising stoniness seemed to discourage him, and he passed on without speaking. A moment later Eric appeared again, called Vincent into the room, and then left it, closing the door softly behind him.

Frank was seated at his desk and, as Schuyler entered, he glanced up pleasantly.

“Good morning, Vincent,” he said quietly. “Will you sit down here?”

Schuyler responded to his greeting in a low tone and took the seat which had been pointed out.

“Carpenter and Payne have given me the facts of this very unfortunate occurrence,” Merriwell began in his agreeable, musical voice. “And I should like to ask you a few questions, Vincent.”

Schuyler glanced at him swiftly. His tone was not at all as if he were speaking to a boy of whose guilt he was convinced, but rather that of a man seeking for information. At once Vincent’s heart warmed toward him.

“I shall be glad to tell you anything I can, sir,” he answered.

“First let us get the main thing settled,” Frank continued, his eyes fixed on the boy’s face. “Carpenter says you deny taking the wallet or having any knowledge as to how it came to be in your washstand drawer. Is this true?”

“It’s true as gospel!” Schuyler exclaimed. “I give you my word I had nothing whatever to do with it. Why, I couldn’t steal, Mr. Merriwell—I just couldn’t. Won’t you believe me?”

He fixed his pleading eyes on Frank’s face, and for a full minute there was silence in the room, as the man’s dark, piercing orbs seemed to search out the boy’s very soul. Apparently he was satisfied with what he saw, for presently he nodded slightly and his lips curved in a smile.

“Yes, I believe you,” he said quietly.

A feeling of such intense relief and thankfulness came over Vincent that for an instant he could not speak. He dropped his lids that Frank might not see the bright glitter of tears which he could not repress, and his mouth quivered a little with the intensity of his emotion.

“Now that’s settled, I want to ask you a few questions,” Merriwell resumed cheerily. “Have you any reason whatever for suspecting any of the three boys who knew of the existence of this money?”

Vincent hesitated, thinking of his encounter with Hicks in the corridor that night. He did not believe the stocky little fellow had stolen the money, but he could not rid his mind of the thought that his behavior had seemed suspicious.

“I want you to be perfectly frank with me, Vincent,” Frank said encouragingly. “Don’t keep back anything for fear of injuring some one else. To my mind there is nothing more contemptible than a boy who is continually running to his teachers with stories of the misdeeds of his comrades. Such a boy is generally cowardly and treacherous, and is either looking for revenge for some fancied wrong or seeking to curry favor in his master’s eyes by his sneakling actions. But this is quite a different case. A theft has been committed, and under peculiarly contemptible conditions. Until that culprit is discovered, several innocent boys will necessarily remain under suspicion. It is therefore your duty to tell me of anything, however slight, which may have aroused your suspicion in the matter. You need have no fear of harming any one, Vincent. I think you can trust my judgment not to go astray.”

Thus encouraged, Schuyler told in a few words of his meeting little Hicks in the hall, and of the latter’s rather odd actions. He went on to explain of his subsequent talk with the boy, which had been so barren of results.

To all of this Merriwell listened with the utmost attention.

“That’s very interesting, Vincent,” he said, when the boy had finished. “I shall keep it in mind when I talk to Hicks. That is all you can think of?”

“Yes, sir.”
"That will do for the present, then," Frank said pleasantly. "If you should find that the attitude of your comrades is not quite all you could wish to-day, I don't want you to be downcast or discouraged. Remember that the truth usually comes out sooner or later, and that I shall be doing my best to get at the bottom of things. Just go about your work as if nothing out of the way had happened, and try to keep a firm hold on your temper, even if you do get a little riled now and then."

Schuyler rose to his feet with a determined look on his face.

"I will, sir," he said emphatically. "You've braced me up so that I feel as if I could stand almost anything from the boys."

He walked toward the door and was just going out when Merriwell called him back.

"Oh, by the way, Schuyler," he said quickly. "I had hoped to give you another lesson with the gloves to-day, but we'll have to put that off until to-morrow. After that I want to take you regularly every other day."

"All right, sir," Vincent returned. "I'll be looking forward to it."

He found that the details of the robbery seemed to have spread over the school like wildfire, and had it not been for his talk with Frank, he would have been driven almost mad by the scornful attitude of almost every boy toward him. It was worse by far than their behavior after he had made such a fool of himself when Fatty Hicks fell through the ice.

But, conscious of his innocence and of Merriwell's belief in him, he managed to get through the morning without any actual encounters, though more than once he had to grit his teeth and dig his finger nails into his flesh to keep from flying out at some particularly aggravating tormentor.

What hurt him almost more than anything else was the way in which Ray Ewry looked him straight in the face without so much as the flicker of an eyelash, while passing him in the hall. From the very first day at Farnham Hall he had picked out Ewry as a fellow whose friendship he would prize highly, and up to yester-day they had been on very friendly terms. Since the episode on the pond, however, the handsome blond fellow had not spoken to him, and now he gave him the cut direct.

By dinner time Schuyler was pretty well down in the dumps, but he went doggedly up to his room afterward and, taking skates and hockey stick, made his way to the pond, though he would a thousand times rather have gone off somewhere by himself where he would have had a little respite from the intolerable jibes and sneers and looks of contempt which greeted him on every side.

"I said I'd go ahead as if nothing had happened," he muttered, bending over to adjust his skates, "and I mean to do it. I wouldn't be going off for a walk if nothing had happened. I'd be here, and I mean to stick it out."

It was in this spirit that he approached Eric Carpenter, where he was assembling the hockey teams in the middle of the pond.

"I don't suppose you want me on the regular team," he remarked with a very convincing air of indifference; "but perhaps you have no objection to my playing on the other."

Carpenter hesitated an instant, trying to stifle the surprise which he felt at the amazing affrontery of the fellow.

"No," he said stiffly. "You can play if you like."

His tone cut Schuyler to the quick, and a flicker of pain crossed his face. Then, without a word, he turned and glided over to his position. It was even harder than he had expected.

When the game began, however, he tried to forget his troubles by throwing himself into it heart and soul. And he played that day as he had never done before. He seemed to be all over the pond at once, skating with amazing speed and sureness; absolutely fearless in the way he plunged into the midst of mêlées and snatched the puck away from fellows who had played hockey for more years than he had days; reckless to the point of folly, and yet, constantly using his brain at every move, in this brilliant exhibition which, at length, positively forced admiring comments from the reluctant lips of his companions.
CHAPTER XII.
THE END OF IT ALL.

"Vincent!" screamed Mrs. Schuyler, in a tone of horror. "Oh, my poor, dear boy!"

For a moment Schuyler gazed at her with mouth and eyes open to their widest extent, doubting the very evidence of his eyesight. He had never seen his mother so wrung up before. What had happened? What could possibly have happened to bring her here?

As he hesitated, she waved her hand frantically to him, and Vincent, instantly abandoning the puck, flew toward her over the ice with strong, swift strokes. In a moment he had reached her side, for in her excitement, Mrs. Schuyler actually stepped down on the ice to meet him.

"My poor, dear boy!" she cried again, throwing both arms impulsively about his neck. "Oh, it's awful!"

Still in a daze, Vincent kissed her hurriedly.

"What is it, mother?" he asked anxiously. "What is the matter?"

"How could you!" she breathed, in accents of fond reproach. "Oh, that dreadful game!"

Vincent, utterly at sea, glanced at his Uncle Ralph and was surprised to see an expression of the utmost satisfaction and approval on Mr. Blake's face.

"What's the matter with the game?" he asked, turning again to his mother.

"How can you ask such a thing?" his mother said reprovingly. "Have you forgotten your weak heart, Vincent? How could you go into such a rough, brutal sport? Why, it's a wonder it did not kill you!"

"Oh, bother!" the boy returned in a tone of annoyance. "There's nothing the matter with my heart, mother. I like the game, and it does me good."

Mrs. Schuyler could scarcely believe her ears.

"Vincent!" she exclaimed severely. "You surprise me! How can you stand there and say such a thing to me! You must be crazy."

"But there isn't, I tell you," Vincent returned positively. "Doctor Schnitzle examined it and said I'd outgrown any trouble I might have had. I've been taking all kinds of exercises, and he says I can play any games I want to."

Mrs. Schuyler gasped. Was this the son she had always pampered and surrounded with loving care? Was this the boy whom she had scarcely let out of her sight for fear he would ever exert himself? It was as if her Vincent was gone and some strange changling had been put in his place. She looked at him closely, but even her anxious eyes could see only a change for the better. His face was flushed with a healthy color; his whole being seemed to irradiate health.

"But Doctor Lansing——" she faltered.

"Doctor Lansing's a fool!" Vincent retorted shortly. "All these years he's pretended there was something the matter with me, when there wasn't, at all. He's kept me from doing everything that other boys do, and I hate him!"

Mrs. Schuyler was stunned. As in a daze she turned her eyes to Ralph Blake, and the expression of satisfaction and thorough approval which she saw on his face seemed to arouse her.

"This is your doings, Ralph!" she exclaimed. "I don't know how you've brought it about, but I shall put a stop to it at once. You've urged this man Merrick to encourage Vincent in all sorts of things which are fatal to one of his condition."

The smile vanished instantly from Blake's face.

"Really, my dear Harriet," he said hurriedly, "I had nothing whatever to do with it. You heard what Vincent said about the doctor finding his heart sound.
Doctor Lansing’s diagnosis must have been—or wrong.”

“Don’t talk nonsense!” retorted his sister severely. “Doctor Lansing is a thoroughly capable physician and a most estimable man. It’s much more likely that this little country doctor is a fool. But I shall put a stop to all this at once.”

She turned to Vincent, her mouth firmly set. “It is fortunate, my dear boy, that I decided to run down here and see for myself what sort of a place this was and how you were getting on,” she said decidedly. “I was a little suspicious when I got the letter you wrote asking to be taken away. Your telegram followed so quickly that I let things go for the time. But I never imagined anything like this. I don’t blame you, Vincent, for the way you are behaving. You have evidently been deceived by the man who runs this school and persuaded into doing things which are perfectly suicidal. But it must stop at once. You must either promise me never to play this dreadful game, or any other at all approaching it in roughness, or I shall take you home with me at once.”

Vincent’s face fell. “Oh, mother, don’t make me promise that!” he pleaded. “I don’t want to stop it. It’s a splendid sport, and, honestly, it doesn’t do me a bit of harm. I’ve felt ever so much better since I have been playing it.”

But Mrs. Schuyler was adamant. “I know what is best for you, my dear,” she returned firmly. “You must stop it at once, or I shall have to take you away. I’m not at all sure that wouldn’t be the best plan in any case.”

Vincent was heartbroken. He could not bear the thought of giving up all the things which he was just beginning to enjoy. What would the fellows think? What would they say? Bitterly he pictured the way they would look down on him and call him “sissy,” and “mamma’s boy.” It was awful.

He was about to make one more effort to change his mother’s mind, when he heard his name shouted from the other end of the pond.

“Schuyler—oh, Schuyler! Mr. Merriwell wants you.”

Turning swiftly, he saw Frank standing on the bank close to where the path from the school ended. Two boys were with him, and it was one of these who had yelled at Vincent.

“Mr. Merriwell wants me,” he said quickly. “I’ll be back in a minute, mother.”

Without giving her time to expostulate, he turned and skated swiftly down the pond to where the little group stood apparently waiting for him. As he came up he saw that the boys were Reddy Payne and Eric Carpenter. Merriwell was smiling.

“I have some good news for you, Schuyler,” he said quickly. “It would have kept, perhaps, until you returned to the school; but I had a notion that you might like to hear it now, so I came down.”

He paused, and Vincent looked eagerly at him, his heart beating a little unevenly.

“Yes?” he breathed tensely.

The smile vanished from Merriwell’s face, and his eyes grew very serious.

“The thief has been found,” he said quietly. “I am sorry to say that it was Ray Ewry, who is leaving the school by the next train. Acting on your hint as to having seen Horace Hicks in the corridor the night the money was taken, I had a talk with the latter and found that he had seen Ewry coming out of Payne’s room earlier in the afternoon. He asked Ray what he was doing there, and the latter told him it was none of his business and threatened Hicks with all sorts of consequences if he told any one of what he had seen.”

He paused an instant, and Vincent, who was listening with intense interest, asked quickly:

“But what was Hicks doing in Ewry’s room when I saw him? Or wasn’t he in that room?”

“Yes, that part of his story was true enough,” Frank returned. “He suspected that Ewry had taken something from Payne’s room, and, after Ray had left the building to come down here, Hicks stole up to his room to see if he could find out what that something was. He was just coming away from there, having found nothing, when he encountered you. The book he carried was simply a blind in case he met Ewry or any one else.”

“Acting on that information, I summoned Ewry, and, with very little persuasion, he confessed the whole
thing. He had been hard pressed for money, and the sight of Payne’s wealth, exhibited at the store, I believe, tempted him. Waiting until he thought all the boys were out of the dormitory, he went into Payne’s room and searched until he found the wallet under the mattress. He was sorry afterward that he had yielded to the impulse, but, having taken it, he dared not give it back.”

“But how did the wallet come to be in my washstand?” Vincent asked quickly.

Merriwell frowned.

“That part of the affair shows a meaner, more contemptible spirit than even the stealing,” he said sternly. “For some reason connected with the hockey team, Ewry seems to have taken a sudden and violent dislike to Schuyler, and, in order to revenge himself on him, as well as divert suspicion from himself, he placed the wallet there. It was outrageous, and something which I could never pardon or forget in a boy. But he has left the school for good; you are none of you ever likely to see him again, so we can consider that part of the subject closed. It should be a lesson to you all, however, in more ways than one. It shows what a temptation a large amount of money may be, to begin with. I have always been against boys having more than a moderate amount of spending money, and now I hope you understand my reason. But, more than that, all of you must realize how unjust and even cruel it is to judge a person hastily and upon insufficient proof.”

He paused and glanced at Payne, whose face was flushed scarlet. Reddy dropped his eyes and gulped hard. Then he glanced timorously at Vincent.

“I’m awful sorry, Vin,” he faltered. “I’ve been rotten mean to you about this. I wish you’d just kick me all over the pond. I think it would make me feel better.”

Vincent hesitated an instant, but he was not the sort to harbor a grudge for very long. Besides he was so full of joy and thankfulness at the happy outcome of the affair that he would have treated even Ray Ewry with tolerance.

“Don’t you care, Red,” he said generously. “Things did look pretty bad for me last night, but it’s all right now. Give us your fist, and we’ll forget all about it.”

He extended his hand, which Reddy grasped and shook fervently. As he dropped it, Eric Carpenter stepped forward.

“Won’t you count me in on that, too, old fellow?” he said contritely. “I must have been a blind bat to think that you could ever have done anything so contemptible. I’ll know better another time.”

Vincent felt a glow of thankfulness come over him as he gripped the slim, muscular fingers of the boy he admired so much and whose good opinion he was so anxious to keep. He had it now and it would be no fault of his if he did not keep it always.

“You’ll take that place on the team, now, won’t you?” Eric went on, in a low tone, as their eyes met.

“You played the game of your life to-day, Vin. It was corking! If you only keep that up we’ll lick Wellsburgh out of their boots.”

The smile vanished from Schuyler’s lips, and a look of despair filled his eyes. In the interest and excitement of clearing up the mystery of the stolen wallet, he had momentarily forgotten his mother and the emphatic stand she had taken in regard to his playing hockey, or any other game.

“Oh, Eric, I can’t!” he groaned.

Carpenter looked at him in astonishment.

“You can’t!” he exclaimed. “What’s to hinder?”

“I can’t ever play hockey again?” Vincent said despairingly.

Carpenter looked as if he thought the boy had gone crazy.

“I don’t see what you mean,” he said, in a bewildered tone. “Why, you put up as good a game this afternoon as any fellow in the school.”

Vincent flushed a little.

“It isn’t that,” he explained, in a low tone. “It’s my mother. She won’t let me play. She thinks I’ve got a weak heart and that violent exercise is bad for me. She says if I won’t promise never to play hockey, or anything else worth while, again, she’ll take me away from the school.”

Carpenter’s jaw dropped.

“Oh, gee!” he exclaimed. “That’s a pickle, isn’t it? What are we going to do?”

The next instant his eyes flashed significantly toward
Frank, who stood at a little distance talking to Reddy Payne.

"Put it up to him," he whispered. "Maybe he can do something."

A look of hope flashed into Vincent's face. Why had he not thought of that before? If any one in this world could persuade his mother it would be Frank Merriwell.

Swiftly he stepped to the man's side, and the next moment he was pouring out his woes into Frank's sympathetic ear.

"Your mother here?" Merriwell exclaimed, when the boy had finished. "I should like very much to meet her. Where is she? Oh, I see."

His eyes brightened as he saw his friend Ralph Blake, with Mrs. Schuyler by his side, walking slowly toward them.

"Don't worry, my boy," he went on quickly. "She doesn't understand the facts, that's all. I'm sure she will listen to reason."

Just what Frank said to his mother Vincent never knew. He watched the handsome man walk swiftly toward the couple on the bank, removing his hat as he approached them; saw him shake Mrs. Schuyler's hand, and was an interested observer of the conversation which followed.

It was rather a long one, but presently his mother turned and beckoned to Vincent, who snatched up the skates he had just removed and sped toward her over the frozen ground.

As he came up, Ralph Blake and Merriwell started ahead up the path together, leaving Vincent to follow with his mother.

"An extremely interesting and attractive man, my dear," she remarked after a moment's silence. "Quite my ideal for the head of a large boys' school. I dare say he is popular among you?"

"You bet he is!" Vincent returned warmly. "The boys would do anything in the world for Mr. Merriwell. He's the dandiest man I ever saw."

"My own idea precisely," Mrs. Schuyler said, with a slight touch of complaisance in her voice. One would have thought that she had made the discovery before any one else had thought of the matter.

"I am looking forward with a good deal of interest to inspecting the school," she went on. "Ralph tells me it is quite unique. Says there isn't another like it in the country."

"I don't believe there is," Vincent answered. "I know I'd hate awfully to go to any other after having been here."

During the slight pause which followed, Vincent glanced swiftly at his mother, wondering if she was ever going to mention the subject in which he was so wrapped up.

"—er—seem to have labored under a slight misapprehension regarding this game you were playing," Mrs. Schuyler said presently. "Mr. Merriwell tells me it is very beneficial to the general health, and not nearly so rough as I supposed. Since you seem so set on it, Vincent, perhaps it would do you no harm after all, if you played it—in moderation, you understand."

With an exclamation of joy, the boy caught his mother in both arms and squeezed her tight.

"You're a perfect brick, mother!" he cried. "You don't know how happy you've made me."

"Dear me, how very strong you are, Vincent!" Mrs. Schuyler gasped.

She straightened her bonnet, which had been knocked somewhat askew.

"I'm very glad if I can make you happy, dear," she said quietly.

And for the first time she wondered a little whether this strange, new son of hers was not an improvement on the one who had vanished so completely.

THE END.

"Frank Merriwell's Young Acrobat; or, The Boy from the Sawdust Ring." That's the story for next week, No. 766; out December 17th. It's a corking winter story, all ice and snow and sleigh bells. In it we get a glimpse of Inza, Frank's pretty wife, and the newest Merriwell, young Frank, Jr., a dandy little kid. There's a dog in the story, too; just such a jolly, intelligent, noble dog as some of you own, and all of you ought to own. What about the "young acrobat"? Well, he is still another character, but you must wait and read about him.
A Short Story by Your Favorite Author.

"THE BOY WHO DASSERT."  
By SURT L. STANDISH.

"Oh, I dissent!"

A burst of laughter and ridicule came from Ned Sawyer's companions. It was the same old plea. Whenever there was any risk to be taken, no matter how insignificant, Ned simply "dissent." His way of escape. "He ain't got the pluck of a sick cat" sneered Jack Clayton contemptuously. "See me."

With that he swung himself out on the tree branch that dangled over the small waterfall, hanging with his toes less than six inches above the brink.

He had some trouble in getting back to solid ground, but the feat was successfully performed.

With one exception, all of Jack's companions did the same thing, the weight of some bending the limb till the toes of their shoes were dampened by the water.

Ned Sawyer was the exception. He was a boy who never participated in any of the daring ventures often made by the reckless youths of Cliffstown, and almost everybody who knew him believed he was lacking in courage. It was his usual protest that he "dissent.

In fact, Ned regarded himself as a coward, and he hated himself for it.

Many a time he had resolved he would never again say he "dissent." but never was the resolution made that it was not broken.

When he came to actually face peril of the most trivial nature his heart settled, his flesh shuddered, and his strength deserted him.

"I'll tell you what fellows," cried Frank Forrest, when all but Ned had swung themselves over the water and again reached the ground, "we'll have to call Ned the Boy Who Dassert."

"That's so," agreed Tom Washburn. "Hooray for Dassert Sawyer!"

The youths all laughed and cheered in derision, while Ned shrank away, his face burning with shame, and his heart hot with anger against himself and all the world.

From that day he was known in Cliffstown as "Dassert" Sawyer, or "the Boy Who Dassert." In time, his given name seemed to have been forgotten, save by his parents and his sister Amy.

Amy was a pretty little girl, with a kind and gentle heart and a mirth-loving spirit, and she felt keenly her brother's disgrace.

"Ned knew it. "Oh, Ned, Ned!" she one day exclaimed, when he had betrayed a pitiable lack of courage, "why aren't you like other boys? Haven't you a bit of nerve?"

"Not a little bit," sadly replied her brother, his shame being plainly apparent. "I reckon it must be water in my veins, instead of blood."

"Nothing could have cut him deeper than the contempt with which his sister did her best to conceal it, and there were times when he would go away all along to some secluded spot, where he could "hate himself" without being disturbed.

The other boys never invited Ned to take a hand in their manly and daring sports, and they only spoke to him in derision when they addressed him at all.

He was a sensitive lad, and all this cut him deeply, though he tried for a long time not to betray the fact.

Gradually he fell away from the others and became solitary in his habits, but he still remained the butt of ridicule.

He was obliged to endure scores of practical jokes intended to be a betrayal of his crowing weakness, and at times he was really treated in a brutal manner by some of the bullying lads.

"Some day I'll run away and never come back!" he told himself, time and again.

More than once he set the date on which he would leave Cliffstown forever, but as the time approached, his courage ebbed.

He never ran away. Cliffstown was a little place in Northern Maine—a remote country village, surrounded by the great pine forest. There the winters were long and the ground deeply covered with snow.

Sled rides were favored by the younger people of the small village. Several times during the winter would a large sled be packed with merry lads and lasses, who would enjoy a long evening of fun through the darkness, the echoes of the dark woods with their hilarious songs and laughter.
The moon and stars were overhead, Cliftown miles away, and the wolves close behind.

Behind? No! Out of the black forest on either hand came form after form, that sped along with the horses and sled.

Their eyes gleamed like coals of fire, and at times the moonlight showed the glint of their cruel teeth.

The cracking of the driver's whip and his stentorian shouts seemed to keep the animals at bay for a time; but how long would it last?

New Sawyer made no sound. He crouched in a corner of the sled, his face pale as that of a dead person.

The girls held in their hands the windlasses, to keep the team together, for the blue light on the trappers' faces were starved and wringing with their hands, while the boys were excited to a pitch beyond reason.

Nearer, nearer pressed the wolves. How strangely silent they were! They seemed to make never a sound, as they raced like ghosts across the snow. But their eyes—those tiny balls of fire burned in the blackness of the deeper shadows!

Tom Washburn seemed to have forgotten his revolver, for he made no move to use it.

Suddenly a wolf sprang at one of the horses. He did not seize a hold, and fall back among his fellows.

For the first time, a snarling howl arose—a sound that froze the blood of more than one who heard it.

The wolves grew bolder; another leaped at the horses, causing the animals to shy aside. They were quaking with terror, but the lame horse was plainly becoming lazier with each passing moment.

And Cliftown so many miles away!

Finally one of the savage pack obtained a hold upon the "off" horse. The noble beast of burden uttered a scream of pain and fear.

With a skilful stroke of his long-lashed whip, the driver dislodged the wolf and the animal snarled and snarled venomously as it rolled over and over in the snow.

The horses were now running away, and it was all the driver could do to keep them in the road. They did not need the touch of the whip to add to their speed.

All at once a scream came from one of the girls. It was Amy Sawyer's voice.

A large wolf had fastened its fangs in her clothing, and was clinging there!

Tom Washburn fell over in his anxiety to get out of the way, and he scarcely knew his revolver was snatched from his hand.

Crack! The report was somewhat muffled, for the muzzle of the weapon was pressed against the head of the wolf.

The creature fell back dead, and was instantly pounced upon by its comrades.

Ned Sawyer had saved his sister!

He it was who snatched the revolver from Tom's hand and fired the fatal shot.

Amy's cry of horror had pierced his soul and awakened all his slumbering courage.

In the moment he seemed changed from a pale-faced coward to a lad of pluck and manhood. He stood erect in the rear end of the sled and watched the snarling pack, the deadly revolver held in a hand that did not quiver.

Quickly the wolves were after the fugitives again, having left the cleanly picked bones of their late comrade behind them.

It did not take the ravenous creatures long to overtake the sled, and then the revolver in Ned's hand spoke once more.

A wolf was hit but did not fall, although he snarled viciously at the wound, showing his evil teeth.

The pack was close.

They sprang from the sled, and one daring fellow leaped at the boy's throat.

Again the revolver cracked, and the venturesome creature fell back to be torn and devoured by its mates.

Two more shots were left, and it was soon necessary to use them both.

Neither bullet was wasted. Two wolves fell, and again the pack stopped to rend them.

On, on flew the horses, although the lame animal was fast becoming a drag on its mate.

Suddenly, almost without warning, both horses slumped and chewing sticks a "soft cup" in the road, the snow being loose and yielding beneath the frozen top packing.

As soon as he could recover, the driver sprang from the sled, crying out for the boys to assist him in getting the horses up.

Fortunately, the wolves were some distance behind, still quarreling over the carcasses of their late companions.
Ned Sawyer was the first to answer the driver's appeal. Fortune favored them, for the horses were aided to their feet, and they seemed more sure.

"Pile in!" commanded the driver, as he held the lunging animals down. "Be lively!"

"Here come the wolves!" howled Joe Clayton. Into the sled they tumbled. Ned Sawyer was behind.

He did not get into the sled, but, like a flash, suddenly caught the whip from the driver's hands and gave the snorting horses a notable kick that sent them lunging along the road once more. A shriek of horror came from many a throat.

Ned was left behind! Away flew the fear-maddened horses, and those on the sled saw the boy who was left turn in the middle of the road, just where the full light of the moon fell upon him, and calmly face the oncoming pack of famishing and furious wolves.

In his right hand he held the long-lashed whip; in his left was the empty and useless revolver.

Ned's sister sprang to her feet, shrieking:

"Stop! stop! Save him—save my brother! Let me go!"

She would have leaped from the sled, but they held her fast.

The driver yelled at the flying horses, trying to urge them to a still faster speed.

Amy stared and struggled till Ned could be no longer seen, and then snuffed in the forms that held her.

The party of armed searchers that went out from Cliffton on a wild leap into the unknown was fully expected to find nothing more than the bones of the brave boy who had sacrificed himself for his companions.

It was plain Ned had formed some plan of holding the wolves at bay long enough to give the fugitives a fair start, for the pack had not pursued the sled beyond the point where the horses fell.

But Ned Sawyer was not dead. They found him clinging to the branch of a supple and bending tree, his feet scarcely beyond the reach of the gleaming teeth that snapped at them every few moments.

Though nearly frozen numb, Ned had managed to beat off the animals with the whip whenever they attempted to spring upward and drag him from his insecure perch.

It was a crowd of wildly cheering men who brought the hero back in triumph to Cliffton, and there was great and untold rejoicing in that little settlement.

Amy was simply hysterical when she clasped her arms about her noble brother once more, and she declared she was prouder of him than she could be if he were President.

Well might she be.

Ned was never again called "The Boy Who Dissent."

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**TIP TOP WEEKLY**

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**A BLESSING IN DISGUISE.**

"What ails you, Charles?" asked Mrs. Lemon, as her husband came down to breakfast upon morning.

"I have got a confounded headache," replied the husband, in a sad tone.

"You have taken cold; you are sick," added Ellen Lemon, with a glance of anxious sympathy at the sufferer.

"I have a tremendous pain in my back; my hips seem to snap with pain," said Charles tried to eat a bit of beetsteak; but he could not do it. Then he tried the rolls, but they were equally repulsive. He drank a cup of tea, and rose from the table. Throwing off his dressing gown, he took up his coat.

"What are you going to do, Charles?" asked Mrs. Lemon.

"Going to the store.

"Indeed, you must not. You are not fit to go out.

"I must go to the store. If it is only for an hour.

"You must not go out, Charles.

"But, my dear, it is absolutely necessary that I should go this morning.

"You are more fit for the bed than the store. Positively, you must not go out of the house to-day.

"I have important business that requires my attention.

"The house is in a much busier state to-day.

"Don't feel able to go, that is a fact," he continued, after looking about in his usual condition a little more carefully.

The anxious wife carried the day. Charles threw off his coat and resumed his dressing gown. Seating himself by the fire, he gazed lugubriously at the glowing coals.

"The most unfortunate time in the world to be sick," muttered Charles.

"You must take things as they come," replied his wife.

"I would rather have given fifty dollars than be sick to-day.

"We cannot choose our own time to be sick.

"It will be more than fifty dollars damage to me to be away from my business to-day.

"Fifty dollars is not to be compared to one's health, or with the moral and religious discipline, which we all need.

"I shall lose the best trade I have had come in my way for a year.

"No matter.

"Smith and I were going to buy up Elkis' notes to-day.

"Elkis' notes? He is a bankrupt.

"He never failed.

"What do you want of his notes?

"Elkis is honest.

"He has nothing to pay with.

"We can buy them for fifty cents on a dollar.

"What of that, if Elkis is worth nothing?

"That is the joke. Now I can bear a little more hot water.

"What is the joke?

"Smith, who has been up in the country, got back last night. He has just learned that Elkis' father is dead.

"Well.

"His father was rich, and had only two children. Elkis' share will be at least ten, and perhaps fifteen thousand dollars. So you see, these notes will be worth one hundred cents on a dollar, principally and interest.

"Who holds the notes?

"Harrison; he offered them to Smith a day or two ago for fifty cents on a dollar; but Smith laughed at him, and told him he would not give him twenty-five.

"Of course he will not sell them for fifty now.

"Yes, he will; you see, he does not know that Elkis' father is dead, and has left him property. He will not be likely to find it out for a day or two. Smith told me about the matter last night; he has not the money to buy them, but I can raise it. So you see I should make five or six hundred by the operation, and Smith would make as much more.

"But, Charles, would it be honest?

"Honest? Why not?

"You are going to cheat Emerson, the holder of these notes.

"Cheat him! Nothing of the kind!

"It is no better than cheating.

"I don't understand it so.

"You are going to take advantage of Emerson's ignorance of the facts in the case.

"He is responsible for his own ignorance, not I. Am I to furnish him with business ability, with business information? Confound my back! How it aches!

"Now get into bed, and you will sweat it off. You are not to take advantage of his ignorance. Suppose you should go to the bank with a check for a thousand dollars, and the teller should give you two thousand, or two bills sticking together. Would it be honest for you to keep both?

"That would be a mistake.

"So it would be if Emerson should sell you notes for one-half their value, because he was not in possession of a fact which has accidentally come to your knowledge.

"That is his lookout.

"But his ignorance is not owing to any want of diligence or ability on his part. He has as much right to this information as Smith or yourself. You have obtained it by accident.

"Charles got into bed, and sundry comforters were piled upon him. His head ached, and his back ached, and this effectually dried business and the store out of his mind.

The sweat removed his pains, and the next day he was decidedly better, but very weak. He had no disposition to go out, and fixed himself in the large rocking-chair before the fire for the day. He tried to read a little, and a good book happening to be near him, he picked it up and grasped a few of its big thoughts. These opened a train of reflection in his mind, which not only pernecrates the brains of men of business.

"Business is in a serious mood. The conversation with his wife, who was a good and pious lady, had produced a deep impression upon his mind. Natural enough—and it is natural in seasons of affliction and sorrow—he began to review his past life—a work where the cares of business often prevent him from performing. He was alone with himself. He had already proceeded far enough to condemn the transaction which his illness had prevented him from engaging in; he fully made up his mind that it
would have been dishonest to cheat Emerson, to take advantage of a good man's confidence, and then to publish the information which he and Smith had obtained by accident, and not by superior business ability and forethought.

This transaction was only the representative of others of its kind, in which Charles Lomon had hesitatingly engaged. The standard of business did not condemn it, and he had come to believe that such circulations were entirely honest and upright. His reflection removed his impression. The golden rule of Jesus Christ would not tolerate such a cheat. It was overreaching his neighbor; it was not doing as he would be done by, and he resolved to square his business by the rule of Christian truth and justice, whether he grew rich or poor.

On the fourth day he went out to his shop, big with great resolutions—resolutions to shun what was evil, to permit no temptation of great profit to lure him into a dishonest or a mean transaction.

About a fortnight after his illness, Smith dropped in one evening to see him. He had bought Elkins' notes of Emerson, though it had been only by mortgaging the furniture in his house that he had raised the money. He was in a "tight place now," and had come to ask assistance of Lemon.

"So you bought Elkins' notes?" asked Charles, after some talk about indifferent matters.

"Yes—contended them," replied Smith. "What is the matter? Didn't you make a good thing of it?"

"No."

"Didn't?"

"No, sir."

"Why, I thought it was a sure thing. You know we were certain of ten or twelve hundred dollars clear profit."

"I know we were," replied Smith dolefully.

Charles was astonished. He had considered it a sure thing, and he saw the quiet smile that played upon his wife's countenance, and which seemed to say, "Iniquity shall not prosper in the land."

"How was it?" asked Charles.

"You were lucky not to go into it," replied Smith. "I should have gone into it, if my sickness had not prevented me from going out to raise the money. Isn't Elkins' father dead?"

"Yes."

"He has left nothing, then?"

"Yes; he left about twenty thousand dollars."

"Then the notes are good, of course?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"It seems that when our Elkins went into business, his father supplied him with his capital, ten thousand dollars, with the understanding that this sum was his share of his father's estate. The old man made a will giving the other ten thousand dollars to Elkins' brother. The notes I hold are not worth five cents on a dollar. In short, Elkins has gone into chancy, and has no assurance."

Smith wanted to borrow a thousand dollars to raise the mortgage on his furniture. Charles could not lend it to him, and he left. Those notes finally ruined him. Charles Lomon congratulated himself on his escape.

"Your sickness has saved you from the loss of five or six hundred dollars," remarked Mrs. Lemon very quietly.

It had saved him more than that—it had saved him, it may be, from a life of dishonesty—from being a sharper and a villain. He has not made a fortune yet; but he has all he can ask of this world's goods, and a brighter hope of riches in that world where money has no value.

APOLOGETICAL.

"Wx hopk," recently said a leading article in a Western paper apologetically, "that our readers will pardon this appearance of this "wxxk's Intelligencer," and thy spectaculz mysteriosob abism of a certain lxxte. Shooting Sam Dibax yesterdax campx into our office and allowed that as bx was going shooting, and had no ammunition, bx would likz to borrow somx of our typx for shot. Bx forx wx could prxxrent ix, bx had grabbed all the lxxtxes out of thx most important box and disskeptvs us. Our scrpx for bx is bx emptaxing our stock, if all those who wxxr bx shot by Sam will saxx bx chargx when bx is pickx out of thxm and return it to us. "Nxxw" mind if it is bittxrcd a lxxtx."
TIP TOP WEEKLY.

Talks with your chum
by Prof. Fourmen

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

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

Telegraphy.

Prof. Fourmen: I am fourteen years old and have not had very much schooling. I want to become a telegraph operator. Are the wages good, and where would I have to go to learn? Antoinette Patterson, A. S. Sloane.

The best plan is for you to enter some small office as a messenger, and if the operator or superintendent is willing to teach you, you ought, in six months or so, to be able to earn something as an operator.

Te become a good operator requires a bright mind and a fair education. The dull receiver will miss half the words or get the sense wrong; the ignorant receiver, however bright or however quick his ear, will slip into mistakes that will spoil the work and ruin all chance of promotion.

The pay ranges from $20 to $120 a month. But remember, that a common operator is not worth much. The only way to get good pay is to become an uncommon operator, and to accomplish this, unremitting study and attention are of vital importance.

Hypnotism is Dangerous.

Prof. Fourmen: Would you advise a young man, 17 years old, who is a good hypnotist, and can secure a good manager for fifty per cent of the profits, to go on the stage and travel as a hypnotist? Where can I get a good work on that subject—hypnotism?

Salem, Ohio.

F. T. Barnes.

I most decidedly advise you not to go into the business. Hypnotism is a science which is in its infancy, and dangerous in the hands of an amateur. In my opinion, it should be used only by experienced physicians in the practice of their profession.

Besides this, it is impossible that you, at your age, can understand very much about it. And, to put it on the lowest possible grounds, I doubt very much if you would be able to satisfy an audience.

Better abandon the idea, my boy, and turn your attention to something in which you can do yourself more credit, and be of more advantage to the community at large.

Becoming an Author.

Prof. Fourmen: I am nearly sixteen years of age, and am employed in a publisher's office at a salary of $5 a week, but it seems, however, that I was meant for an author, only I have not the necessary education, having left school when I was in the fourth grammar grade, nor have I any means to obtain one. I spend all my spare hours at home, writing and reading. I know a popular author, and go to see him very often. This gentleman is very kind to me; he advises me to continue in his pursuit; but what sense is there in writing, if you cannot in some future time make at least a slight success? can you suggest any way in which I might be able to do some kind of home work, and at the same time attend day school?

P. E. Merrill.

Detroit, Mich.

For success indomitable perseverance and some genius are es-
sential. You cannot expect to become an author without a good education. A correct style, with a good knowledge of grammar and composition are the first requisites.

If you can attend college and devote yourself to the study of ancient and modern literature, then you will have made a good beginning. To write stories one must have imagination and a good general knowledge. In other words, it would not do to describe an episode in Bar Harbor, and refer to the characters as walking in the woods, when, perchance, there may be no woods there. Thus you see authorship is something one should not attempt without some or even a great deal of knowledge.

Many of the best writers of to-day have been newspaper men. Some have been editors of local papers, and it is a good way to start. Begin your literary career as a reporter, gain your knowledge in this way, write about things with which you are familiar, and in time the way will become clear to you. Read short stories of city life and try to imitate them. In that way you can accomplish best, we think, that which seems to be your ambition.

Wearing a Belt.

Prof. Fourmen: Being a reader of "Tip Top" for over two years, I now send you my measurements for your criticism. At the time of my last letter, I was 6 feet 1 inch in height, 155 pounds; chest, expanded, 36 inches; waist, 31 inches. Please tell me my weak points, and how to remedy them. Does wearing a belt affect the body in any way? JAMES P. QUINN.

Boston, Mass.

Your measurements are excellent, with the exception of the waist, which should not be over 27 inches. It is much better to wear a belt than suspenders, as the latter drag continually upon the shoulders. To be sure, a belt constricts the abdomen, but that will do no harm if your abdominal muscles are properly developed; and the belt is an excellent support.

Veterinary Surgery.

Prof. Fourmen: I am a great friend of animals, and am desirous of studying veterinary surgery, without going through a school, and can it be studied to a certain extent through books. Can there be any veterinary colleges, or do they all require pay? Where are they situated?

A. J. Searles.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

It is not easy, under any circumstances, to study such a subject as medicine without actual contact with the object, and hence it will not do to consider the possibility of becoming a veterinary surgeon without hospital practice. Perhaps you can make arrangements to learn the rudiments of the profession you mention by studying with some one who practices surgery at some stable. This is sometimes possible, and would be much easier for you. Would it not be well for you to secure an appointment in connection with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and perhaps make an agreement with them so that a portion of your time could be devoted to the study of veterinary surgery. In this way you could apply the practical knowledge gained by your connection with the society to the theory as studied at the college.

We believe there is no free institution where you can study the subject mentioned, and consequently the course which we recommend here may prove the means by which you can obtain the maximum education at the minimum expense. At all events, it is not difficult to try, and, therefore, the opportunity is before you to put it into practice if you wish.

Small Waistlad.

Prof. Fourmen: Please tell me my weak points. Age 18 years 6 months; height, 5 feet 10 inches; chest, 38 inches; calves, 15 inches; waist, 26 inches; thighs, 27 1/2 inches. C. Boreis.

Norfolk, Va.

Your measurements are excellent, but your waist can stand a slight increase.
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 501 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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