STEPPING SWIFTLY FORWARD,
FRANK SAW A SMALL OBJECT LYING
IN THE PALM OF OLD CROWFOOT'S HAND.
FRANK MERRIWELL'S LOYALTY;

OR,

The Land of the Lost People.

By BURT L. STANDISH.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE TRACKLESS FOREST.

It was noonday, but in the heart of that tropical virgin forest reigned restful, perpetual twilight. On every side as far as the eye could reach the monstrous trees towered skyward like pillars on some cathedral, supporting the thick canopy of green through which the sunlight filtered down in dancing golden splotches, quivering now and then like things alive as the breeze stirred the interlocked branches far above.

The wood was strangely free from undergrowth. Here and there great vines encircled the massive trunks like serpents, twisting and twining around and around the trees until some of them were half buried.

The place was very still. Rarely there came a flash of brilliant crimson or dazzling greenish-gold as some bird winged its way through the solitudes, screaming shrilly as it went. There were no other sounds of beasts or men.

But presently the silence was broken by a distant crackling of twigs, the rustling of heavy tramping among the litter of dead leaves, and the murmur of voices, growing swiftly louder. And then a single figure, mounted on a plodding burro, came into view, followed quickly by another and another until there were four of them riding in single file in a devious, winding course among the trees.

They were all roughly dressed in a curious composite manner which was half Mexican, half American, and their clothes bore every evidence of having met with hard usage; for they were soiled and torn and altogether decidedly disreputable in appearance.

The leader, tall, well built, and handsome, was Frank Merriwell; but it is quite safe to say that few of the friends who knew him only as the head of one of the greatest schools for boys in the United States would have recognized him in his present guise.

He wore no coat, only a rough cotton shirt which had been slit in a number of places from pushing through the dense, thorny undergrowth before entering the forest. His trousers of well-worn buckskin were tucked into the tops of heavy, muddy boots. His hat was a Mexican sombrero which had evidently once been of fine quality and probably ornamented with the...
usual amount of gold and silver trimming; but it had degenerated into a limp, spotted thing, fit only for the ash barrel.

Behind him rode Jim Silver, slim, blue-eyed, and good-looking in the Mexican suit which became him extremely. He was followed by a young Irishman, Terry Fitzpatrick, while Park Davis was the name of the one who brought up the rear. Fitzpatrick and Davis looked like hoboes, with misfit garments and three days’ growth of beard.

All of them were in high spirits. Nearly a week had passed since Merriwell and his two companions had rescued Fitzpatrick, a young mining engineer in the employ of the Pablo-Mystery Mining Syndicate, from the prison at Las Medidas, into which he had been secretly thrown by the governor of Sonora for having given moral encouragement to the revolutionary party.

The rescue had been cleverly planned by Merry, but the resulting pursuit by a company of soldiers, who had some bloodhounds with them, nearly proved to be their undoing. They had narrowly escaped by taking refuge with a strong force of revolutionists headed by Pedro de Cordova, one of the best-known leaders in Central Mexico.

They had kept with De Cordova for several days, and before leaving him had furnished themselves with the clothes they wore at present, the burros they were riding, and an ample supply of ammunition and food.

The clothes, which had been especially selected, were in the nature of disguises, and they certainly accomplished the purpose for which they were intended. No one would have suspected them for an instant to be anything but what they seemed—a party of miners out of a job, or prospecting among the mountains for new veins.

This had been done from force of necessity. Merry well knew that by this time the news of their audacious deed had probably been sent to the officials of every town within a radius of many hundred miles, with warnings to have a strict watch kept for their appearance, and orders for instant arrest in case they showed up.

No one would ever hear the real facts of the case, of course. The governor of Sonora would scarcely be likely to let it be known how Fitzpatrick had been seized forcibly at night and hurried to the prison without a shadow of justice. It would never do to spread it abroad how the young Irishman was kept there in close confinement and how his captors had suavely denied any knowledge whatever of his whereabouts, at the very moment when they had resolved to do away with him in cold blood.

The report would go forth that there had been an insolent forcing of the prison to rescue a particularly important criminal, and that the immediate apprehension of all concerned was desirable. There would probably be a large reward offered, and Frank realized that they could scarcely hope, under these conditions, safely to reach the frontier by any of the regular routes.

He had determined, therefore, to make his way northward through the vast stretch of mountainous, forest-clad region, much of which was almost unexplored, and come out somewhere near the border line of New Mexico or Texas at a point so far distant from Las Medidas that there would be scarcely a chance of any one having heard of them.

The first two days of their journey had been hard traveling. The country was very mountainous, and it seemed as if they were always on a slant. They would spend hours toiling up a precipitous slope, leading the burros, for it was impossible to ride, only to linger a few moments on the crest before dipping down into the valley on the other side.

What vegetation they had encountered was of the most disagreeable sort, consisting mainly of thick, thorny bushes, mingled with impenetrable mesquite and clumps of cacti; and they were correspondingly relieved that morning when they came down into a wide, level valley with its growth of primeval forest and cool, refreshing shadows.

CHAPTER II.

SHADOWS THAT MOVED.

"This is all to the good," Silver declared enthusiastically. "It beats that blamed mountain climbing hollow. My legs are sore yet from yesterday."

Merry smiled a little.

"Have you any idea how many miles we made in twelve hours?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, forty or fifty, easy?" the curly-haired youth responded airily.

"You've got a fine idea of distances," Frank returned ironically. "We didn't do ten—and down. As for the distance in a straight line, I should be very much surprised if it was more than a mile and a half."

Silver's eyes widened.
“Say!” he exclaimed incredulously. “Is that straight? Aren’t you joshing?”

Merry shook his head.

“Not a bit. I’m perfectly serious.”

“Gee-whiz! Why, at that rate, we’ll strike the good old U. S. in about two years, won’t we?”

“Just about,” Merry smiled. “I hope we’ll be able to make a little better time than that for most of the way, though. It’s only this up-and-down business that’s so slow. We’ve covered more ground already this morning than we have all the rest of the three days put together.”

“We’re heading about due north, aren’t we?” Park Davis inquired.

Merry took out a small compass and glanced at it.

“A little west of north, Park,” he returned. “This is the valley De Cordova told us of which we could follow for fifty miles or more before taking to the heights again. He’s never been here himself, but some of his men knew about it.”

“Doesn’t look as if any one had ever been here before,” Fitzpatrick commented, with a wave of his hand. “I wish I had some of these trees near a railroad. I’d retire with a fortune and live on me come ever afterward.”

“You certainly could,” Frank agreed. “Some day, I suppose, all this country will be opened up and developed, but it won’t be in your time or mine. The difficulties of bringing a railroad through these mountains would be enormous, and I don’t believe they’d pay the cost of construction in fifty years.”

“Aren’t there any people at all living around here?” Silver asked curiously.

“None that I know of, except the tribe of Yaquis which De Cordova told us of,” Merry answered. “But in a stretch of thirty thousand square miles which are practically unexplored, there might be any number of people no one knew anything about. There have been rumors, you know, from time to time, of tribes of Aztecs—remnants of the ancient people of Mexico who were conquered by the Spaniards three hundred years or so ago—having been heard of from some mountain wilderness.”

“You mean tribes that have no communication at all with civilization?” Silver asked interestedly.

Frank nodded.

“Yes, they’re supposed to have retired to the most inaccessible parts of the country to escape slavery at the hands of the Spaniards, and never to have ventured forth again. Of course, I have no idea how much truth there may be in these stories. Those I have heard are vague and indefinite enough. One I remember in particular which got our old professor of archeology at New Haven terribly wrought up. He had so much faith in the tale—it had been brought into the City of Mexico while he was there one winter hunting relics—that he got up an expedition and spent two months trying to verify it. They had a fearful time making their way through the wilderness, and more than once they were on the point of giving up the search and turning back. But at last they found the stone city just about where the guide had sworn it was.”

“Found it?” exclaimed Silver, in amazement.

“Yes, they found the city, all right,” Frank explained, with twinkling eyes; “but that was all. There wasn’t a living soul in it, for the simple reason that it had been deserted hundreds of years ago and was in ruins. The Mexican had seen it from a distance while prospecting, and the buildings were so well preserved that he thought they must be inhabited. From that, you see, was but a short step to saying that he had seen a strange tribe of natives. The professor said there wasn’t a doubt of its having been deserted for at least two hundred years, possibly more. However, he found a splendid lot of relics, and was probably almost as well pleased as if he’d found people. That’s one of the ways, you see, that a story of this sort gets started.”

“But how about those Yaquis, Mr. Merriwell?” the young Irishman inquired presently. “Didn’t Cordova say they were on the war path, and warn us to look out for them?”

Merry’s face grew serious.

“He did. They give no mercy to any white man they run across, and small wonder. To them a white man means a Mexican, and they have every reason for a bitter, unquenchable hatred for a people who are waging against them a war of extermination or eternal slavery. But I hardly think we shall have any trouble with them. From what De Cordova said, I imagine their headquarters are farther south and beyond the range of mountains to the east of us. They make things miserable for prospectors and any one else coming up from the plains, now and then raiding an isolated mine or two; but there would be no reason whatever for their coming in this direction. To tell the truth, I’m rather in sympathy with the poor devils than otherwise.”

“You bet!” Fitzpatrick agreed emphatically. “Here’s hoping they win out against the greasers.”
A little later they halted at a stream and had something to eat.

After lounging about for half an hour, they started on again.

All that afternoon they kept steadily on, talking now and then or keeping silent as the spirit moved them. The forest seemed endless; its character was practically unvarying.

At length, one by one, the little spots of quivering sunlight disappeared. It was not yet four o’clock, but the towering bulk of mountain to the westward had begun to cast its shadows on the forest below it.

Slowly, insensibly, the atmosphere of soothing, refreshing coolness vanished and gave place to a harsh, cold, almost menacing air. It was not that the actual light lessened greatly, but the quality was different with the withdrawal of the direct sun rays.

The tree trunks seemed higher and more gaunt; their color had changed from a warm brown to a cold gray. In front of them the vista widened out deceptively. It was as if one could see for miles through the monotonous, never-ending forest; and yet, looking closer, each individual object was less distinct.

The change was felt imperceptibly by each one of the party, and their conversation languished. Presently Frank found himself gazing fixedly at a point some distance ahead and a little to the right. For an instant he could have sworn that something dim and shadowy had moved a little there, but the next moment he frowned a bit and shrugged his shoulders at the trick the waning light had played upon his nerves.

Suddenly Jim Silver broke the silence.

“What sort of animals do they have around here, Mr. Merriwell?” he asked.

Frank reined in his burro abruptly, half turning.

“Deer, jaguars, I should fancy, among the larger ones,” he answered quietly. “Higher up we'll run across mountain lions and bears, no doubt.”

Silver hesitated for an instant.

“They don’t have any—monkeys or gorillas, do they?” he asked slowly.

“No. Why do you ask that?”

Merry’s voice was quiet and matter of fact, but there was a curious expression of intentness in his eyes.

Silver grinned rather sheepishly.

“I thought I saw something move over among the trees,” he explained. “I reckon it was this queer light, though. It makes you think you see things——”

“Which way did you see it?” Frank broke in swiftly.

Silver waved his hand to the right.

“There; but it must have been a shadow. I don’t see it——”

He broke off abruptly, puzzled by the quick hardening of Merry’s face as he glanced keenly about. The next instant Frank had turned and was riding toward a little group of close-growing trees ahead of him.

“Come on, boys!” he called, over his shoulder. “Beat it sudden!”

His voice had an odd, ringing quality which affected them strangely. Each one of them had heard it before on widely varying occasions, but, different as these had been in most particulars, they had one important quality in common—the presence of acute, physical danger. Peril of any sort always seemed to act like a tonic on Merriwell. It made his blood flow more swiftly through his veins; it brought a sparkle to his eyes and bright color to his cheeks. Somehow it seemed almost as if he welcomed it.

Puzzled, bewildered, but thoroughly roused, the three men followed their leader at a gallop; and when he reached the trees and leaped to the ground, they were beside him in an instant.

“Throw your burros!” he directed. “Make a circle of them, and tie their legs with your bridle reins. Hustle, now! There isn’t a minute to spare.”

It was not an easy job, for the burros objected strenuously to being thrown; but, spurred by command in Frank’s voice, they did it. In three minutes the circle, helped out by the bulky tree trunks, was complete.

Merry threw himself down inside it, revolver in hand. The others mimicked him mechanically, still wondering.

“The Yaquis,” he explained, in a low tone. “That’s what you saw, Jim. It’s what I saw a moment ago and thought it was imagination. I don’t know what they’re doing here or how they got wind of us; but they’re here, and we’re in some bad fix.”

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD INDIAN.

It would scarcely have occurred to any of the three younger men to characterize their position by a term so mild as that. For an instant their hearts quailed and their faces turned a little white as they realized their frightful danger.
If it was indeed true that the Yaquis had discovered them and were creeping to attack they were in almost hopeless straits. In the midst of a wilderness where they had seen no human being for three days; there was no possible chance for aid. Too well they knew the merciless nature of this Indian tribe to expect quarter.

Every eye was turned swiftly and apprehensively toward the silent forest. Such an intense stillness brooded over everything that it seemed almost incredible. Merriwell must be mistaken.

It was the calm before the storm. Suddenly the silence was split by a chorus of yells, hideous and appalling. Shadows leaped up from all about them, and the sharp crack of muskets added to the din.

The tension was broken with the first sound of attack. Before that the cold, eerie ghostliness of the forest, with its flitting shadows and intense stillness, had wrought a little on the nerves of the three younger men; for the apprehensive waiting for something to happen is usually far more trying than the actuality.

So, with the first shot, their nervousness dropped from them, and they waited calmly, almost eagerly, for Merry's signal to return the fire.

The latter purposely delayed giving it. If his conjecture that their assailants were Yaquis was right, there was but one slight hope of their escaping a massacre. If he could only make the Indians understand that they were not Mexicans, but Americans, it might possibly stop their onslaught. It was a slim chance indeed, but even that would totally vanish were they to return the fire and anger the natives by killing one or more of their number.

So he held his hand and waited for a cessation of the hideous turmoil which accompanied the advance.

Presently this died down a little, and Merry raised his voice in a sudden shout:

"Americanos! Americanos!"

Apparently they paid no attention to it. It was doubtful, indeed, whether the majority of the assailants even heard him; for they came on without a pause, slipping forward from tree to tree without exposing more than an arm or a leg, but gradually narrowing the inclosing circle.

The four men were safe for the moment, sheltered behind the bodies of their burros; but this could not last long. As soon as the Indians had advanced close enough, they would make one swift rush in overwhelming numbers; there would ensue a brief, fierce hand-to-hand struggle, which could have but one termination.

Merry was about to give the word to fire whenever there was the slightest chance of hitting anything, when, absolutely without warning, a tall, lean, fiercely painted figure flashed out from behind the great tree against which he crouched and, with a single leap, cleared the low barricade and seized Frank in his arms.

It was done so suddenly that Merry had no time at all to turn and meet him. His arms were pinioned to his sides by a grip of steel. He was helpless.

Silver, lying next to him, saw the peril he was in and, whirling about, took swift aim and pulled the trigger of his revolver.

There was a flash of flame, a splitting report, and the Indian rolled sideways into the little circle, dragging Frank with him. At the same moment he spoke, and the words almost paralyzed Merry with amazement and struck him momentarily dumb.

"Ugh! Paleface brave heap quick with gun. Most perforate old Joe's hide—make-um a stiff of him. That bad for Strong Heart. Mebbe other Injuna not know-um him. Make-um stiff of him, too."

It was old Joe Crowfoot, the aged Indian chief who had been Merry's lifelong friend, on whom he had not laid eyes in months!

Frank swiftly recovered his presence of mind.

"Don't shoot, Jim!" he cried. "It's all right."

Then he turned to Crowfoot, who had released his grip and was sitting cross-legged on the ground, calmly regarding Merriwell with twinkling, beady eyes.

"Crowfoot, you old sinner!" he exclaimed. "You've certainly given me a surprise or two in my life, but this beats them all. What in creation are you doing here? But wait! Are those howling dervishes out there your friends?"

The chief nodded calmly.

"Heap friend," he grunted. "We hunt-um together."

"Then kindly ask them to cease favoring us with their attentions for a while," Merry requested. "Somebody might get hit. Just tell them we're not Mexicans, but Americans. That may stop them."

Without rising, Crowfoot gave vent to a sudden, piercing yell, which he followed up by a few words shouted in an unknown tongue. The effect was instantaneous. The dropping fire ceased at once. The yells broke off abruptly, and, in the silence which followed, the chief turned back to Merry, paying no at-
tention to the wondering, dazed looks of the three young fellows, who watched him with wide-open eyes and mouths, as if they could scarcely believe their senses.

Frank seized the old Indian’s hand and shook it heartily.

“By Jove, Shangowah!” he exclaimed, “I’m plenty glad to see you. I can hardly believe it’s really you. If you’d dropped out of the sky to help us, you couldn’t have come at a better moment. How are you, anyway?”

“Heap poor!” returned the redskin mournfully.

“Old Joe he got rheumatism again. All knocked out. He too old to go on war path. Should stay by fire in wigwam. Bimeby pretty soon he croak.”

His attitude was dejection itself, but the strength with which he gripped Merry’s hand, and the vigor with which he shook it, somewhat belied his words.

Frank laughed.

“Same old bluffer, I see,” he chuckled. “That song and dance may work with some people, but I should think you’d know better than to try it on me. But what do you mean by going on the war path, Joseph?”

For an instant Crowfoot looked a little confused. Then an expression of wondering innocence came into his face.

“Old Joe he say war path?” he asked quickly. “He no mean that. He mean hunting. No game left up north. He pike south. Kill-em deer, bear, big cat. Make-em seem like old time when buffalo plenty thick.”

Merriwell looked at him keenly for a moment in silence. For an instant he seemed about to speak; then he changed his mind, rising to his feet.

“Well, I’m certainly glad you showed up when you did,” he remarked. “Another ten minutes and we should have been mincemeat. These friends of yours are Yaquis, I suppose, and took us for Mexicans?”

Crowfoot nodded.

“They death on greaser,” he explained. “Kill-em plenty much. One, he see-em four men riding; have clothes like greaser. He come quick an’ tell others. They hustle, but no come up till pretty dark. Old Joe with ’em. No think to find Strong Heart here, so no look close.”

“Luckily there’s no harm done so far,” Merry said, “unless you’ve managed to kill some of our burros. I certainly hope you haven’t, for that would cripple us a lot. Who’s the chief of your party?”

Again Crowfoot showed momentary signs of slight embarrassment. To Merry, who was watching him closely, his withered face bore for an instant the unmistakable expression of one caught doing something he ought not to.

“Old Joe he all chief they got,” he confessed, after a slight pause. “Make-em bum chief, but better mebbe than not at all.”

“Humph!” commented Frank shortly.

He made no further remark at the time, but inwardly he was convinced that Crowfoot was hiding something from him which it would be well to find out.

By this time some of the Indians could be seen approaching slowly. Silver and his other two companions, though still totally at sea regarding the whole matter, had recovered their composure and were getting the burros on their feet.

One only was found to have been killed. The others had a few slight flesh wounds, mere grazes, most of them, which would in no way interfere with their usefulness.

“Well, we’ve got out of this luckily, boys,” Merry said cheerfully. “I want you to shake hands with the chief here. His name is Shangowah, though among the whites he is known as old Joe Crowfoot. If it hadn’t been for his unexpected presence here we should probably have been reduced to the nature of human colliders by this time.”

The chief shook hands with becoming gravity, and then, turning to his followers, gave them a rather lengthy explanation of the state of affairs in their own tongue. When he had finished the attitude of the latter toward the whites was decidedly more genial. They nodded and smiled and made other gestures of friendliness, and then set about gathering wood for a fire, since it was now almost pitch dark.

In less than five minutes a great blaze had been kindled. It crackled cheerily, driving away the shadows and making an altogether different place of the gloomy forest, which now bustled with life and action, as the Indians dragged up the carcass of a deer to be skinned and cut up for supper.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAND OF DREAD.

Supper was over and they were all sprawling comfortably at a little distance from the fire. A feeling of the utmost contentment and relief was upon them at the happy conclusion of what had, for a time,
threatened to bring their journey—and all other worldly business—to an abrupt and untimely conclusion.

Crowfoot sat beside Merriwell, wrapped in a soiled red blanket which he had resumed at the sudden termination of the attack. He was puffing at an old, black, incredibly filthy pipe with every appearance of the greatest enjoyment.

He had been listening with much interest to Merry's account of the incidents which had brought him and his friends into this wilderness, and seemed not a little satisfied at the manner in which Perez, the prison jailer, had been outwitted, to say nothing of the repulse of the Mexican soldiers on the mountainside.

His comments were terse and to the point, and, having made them, he relapsed into a meditative silence which was almost a doze.

Presently it was broken by Merriwell.

"Well, Joseph," he remarked calmly, "this is about as good a time as any for you to tell me the real reason for your being here. You don't suppose, of course, that I was taken in by that yarn about hunting? A man doesn't travel a thousand miles to shoot a few deer and bear when he can get them much nearer home. Nor is he made leader of a band of Yaquis on account of his ability as a hunter—of beasts. It is also my first experience of seeing a chief painted for the war path when he goes out after deer. You've taken it off, by the way, haven't you?"

The aged redskin mumbled and glanced at Frank with an expression of admiration on his wrinkled face.

"Strong Heart he no fool," he grunted. "He no got bats in his coconut. Old Joe sure enough hunt, but not deer. He hunt greaser. Hate greaser like snake. When he hear-um Yaquis brothers hunt greaser, he think-um mebbe he get a few scalp. Plenty long time get no scalp. No can take scalp up north. Men too fussy there; no like see fresh scalp. Hair too short, anyhow. Barberman do heap fine biz. Greaser snake, but have plenty fine scalp. Get-um big bunch."

"You old reprobate!" Frank exclaimed. "You're quite equal to such a performance. That's why you didn't tell me at first, I suppose. You knew I'd object to such doings."

Crowfoot nodded.

"'Fraid Strong Heart no like," he explained. "Such thing get his goat. Why? Greaser dead; scalp no good to him. Plenty fine ornament on wigwam. Why not take?"

Merry shuddered a little.

"If you expect to travel with me, Crowfoot," he said emphatically, "I can’t have that sort of thing. It's barbarous and a relic of the dark ages. But perhaps you don't intend to join our party? Maybe you'd rather stay here—and hunt?"

Old Joe shook his head.

"Strong Heart mebbe have trouble; mebbe want help. Old Joe go long case he wanted."

He hesitated an instant and then looked keenly at Merry.

"Strong Heart know the way?" he asked in a curiously intent voice.

Frank shook his head.

"No. The Mexican I told you of gave me directions as far as the end of this valley. After that he said we would have to turn slightly east and cross the great plateau of the Sierra Madre Mountains. He has never been there, but he had a map, and that seemed the only route we could take."

There was an odd look in the Indian's black eyes which Frank had never seen there before; a look of indecision.

"No can go south, or east?" he asked presently.

"I don't see how," Merry answered. "You know yourself how hot these greasers will be on our trail. There wouldn't be a chance in a thousand of our getting through any civilized part of the country. Besides, we've made such a good start it seems to me we ought to go on."

Crowfoot shook his head.

"But north," he muttered, half to himself. "No good that way."

Merry frowned. For an instant he was slightly inclined to irritation at the old fellow's persistence. Then he realized that there must be some underlying reason for his dislike to their proposed route. Crowfoot was not one to be influenced by a whim.

"What's the matter with the north?" Frank asked quickly. "Why is that direction worse than any other?"

"Old Joe he know not," the Indian answered evasively. "Bad medicine there—heap bad luck."

He turned suddenly and called to one of the Yaquis who sat about smoking and drowsing. The fellow arose promptly, and, crossing to Crowfoot's side of the fire, hunched down on the ground.

At once the chief began to pour forth a stream of words, not one of which was intelligible to Merriwell. Not being able to understand what was said, he
kept his eyes fixed on the fellow's face in the hope that he might learn something in that way.

The Indian was a decidedly superior specimen of his race, being tall and splendidly developed, with rippling muscles and tremendous depth of chest. His face was rather pleasant-looking and bore evidence to more intelligence than is usually seen in men of his type.

For a moment he listened to Crowfoot's words with perfect calmness, but with a light of undoubted interest in his dark eyes. Then a startling change came over him.

His eyes widened suddenly and a look of unmistakable horror came into them. His jaws came together with a snap, the muscles about his mouth quivering nervously. At the same instant he made an extraordinary motion with one hand across his breast which seemed to Merry exactly as if he were crossing himself.

The latter's interest was now thoroughly aroused. What could Crowfoot be possibly saying that would have such an extraordinary effect? What was there about the chief's words to stamp the man's face with that sudden, unquestionable print of fear?

If there was a shadow of a doubt left in Frank's mind as to the nature of the emotion which was overpowering the Yaqui, it was removed the next instant when the man began to speak.

The words broke from his lips with a quick, staccato emphasis which was unmistakable. His voice trembled a little and rose higher and higher as he poured out the volume of sound. When he had finished he made that curious crossing motion with his arm again and gazed squarely at Merriwell, a look of stupefied amazement in his eyes, as if he were wondering whether the latter had gone mad.

For a time Crowfoot did not speak. He sat hunched over, his beady eyes fixed on the fire, pulling thoughtfully now and then on the empty pipe, which gave forth a whistling sound.

For a time Frank waited patiently. Then, as the silence became prolonged, he grew impatient.

“Well?” he questioned abruptly. “What does he say?”

The chief raised his head.

“Ugh!” he grunted. “He says things old Joe no understand. He say devils live in mountains there. He say no man go there ever come back. Devils eat 'em up.”

“Devils!” Frank exclaimed. “What does he mean by that? He's talking nonsense!”

Crowfoot shrugged his shoulders.

“No savvy,” he commented. “Mebbe not so much nonsense. Mebbe some true.”

“Perhaps there's a hostile tribe living up in the mountains,” Merry suggested. “That would account for no one coming back. Has he ever been there himself? Has he ever seen these creatures he talks about?”

Turning to the Yaqui, the chief put a brief question to him. The fellow instantly shook his head emphatically and made vehement gestures of dissent, at the same time pouring out a volume of words in that same excited staccato he had used before.

“He no there himself,” Crowfoot explained, when the man had finished. “He say he no go there for all the dough in his country. He know-um three, four men make journey; all eat up but one.”

“But one, eh?” Frank remarked. “Well, he came back, I presume? What did he have to say? Did he see the devils? What did they look like?”

A shadow passed over the Indian's face.

“He no tell. He cracked, nutty, weak in th' eoke. He talk all time about something they no understand. Snakes, he say, big like his leg. That all. He croak pretty quick.”

He hesitated an instant and then went on more slowly.

“This man say he have strange mark on back. Round, 'bout so big.”

The chief indicated with his hands a circle, perhaps three inches in diameter.

“It all red like fire; have holes in like pins. Bimeby he swell up an' kick-um the bucket.”

An expression almost of bewilderment came into Merriwell's face as he listened to this disjointed, seemingly senseless statement. He could make neither head nor tail of it.

“That's all rot, you know, Crowfoot,” he said presently. “There are no snakes anywhere near that size in Mexico. No snake that ever lived would leave such a mark as you describe. Very likely the man lost his way in the forest and wandered about for days without food or water until his mind gave way. Perhaps he was stung or bitten by a number of poisonous insects, though I can't account for the circular mark. However, I don't see that the story is going to make any difference in our plans. We've simply got to go this way to reach the United States in safety. We've made such progress that it would be folly to turn back simply because of a wild, improb-
able tale which has doubtless started in the superstitions of the natives from seeing or hearing of something they could not understand."

He turned suddenly to his three white companions, who had been interested listeners to the conversation.

"You boys have a say in this, of course," he said quickly. "If you’d rather not face this dangerous region of the Yaqwis, why we’ll have to plan out something else; though, at the moment, I must confess I can’t think of a route which will take us out of this country so quickly and safely."

"On with the dance," chuckled Terry Fitzpatrick. "I’ve niver laid eyes on a divvle yet, an’ always wanted to. This is the chance of a lofetoinin.”

The others being equally emphatic in their agreements, Frank glanced at the chief.

"It’s up to you, Shangowah," he remarked.


CHAPTER V.

PARK VANISHES.

At daybreak next morning they made a start. The Yaqwis were returning to their village on the heights above, and Frank decided to accompany them that far in order that he might replace the burro which had been killed. He also offered to buy one for Crowfoot, but the chief decided that his own legs, though much enfeebled by rheumatism and old age, were still strong enough to support him.

Toward ten o’clock they reached the sheltered, wooded plateau where the village stood and were received with much interest by the simple natives who dwelt there.

They had, indeed, some difficulty in getting away. A rumor of their intentions had spread like wildfire, and when the time for departure came, men, women, and children crowded around them, begging and beseeching them not to go.

Though none of the white men could understand a single word, the meaning was perfectly evident from the pleading look in their faces and the note of desperation and horror in their voices.

Frank firmly resisted the importunities, however, and explained, through Crowfoot, that there was no other alternative than the northern route. He added that the people must not be afraid, for they considered themselves quite a match for all the evil creatures who might dwell among the mountains.

At last they were off, but, looking back presently, Merry saw that the entire population of the village had assembled and were standing, a strangely serious, utterly silent crowd, gazing after the plodding burros with such strained, anxious, hopeless looks that, for the first time, he began to wonder whether there might not, after all, be some remote foundation for their superstitious fears.

Was it possible that there could be some fierce tribe of people living in that rocky wilderness, at war with all mankind, whose ferocious exploits might have lead them to be called "evil beings?"

It was hardly probable, but he resolved, nevertheless, to keep his eyes open and be on the alert for anything.

As for the snakes, there was quite possibly some truth in that reference. The size, of course, must have been greatly magnified, but the lower reaches of the mountains make admirable hiding places for reptiles of all sorts. For them, too, a close watch must be kept as they went forward.

The others rode along in fine spirits, talking, chaffing one another, and occasionally giving vent to bursts of song. Since their narrow escape of the day before and the assurance of the Yaqwis that there were no more hostile tribes to be met with, they had come to regard the expedition in the nature of a lark.

For a time their way led along the plateau, which swerved gradually to the eastward, narrowing toward the upper end to a deep, cañonlike slit between two mountains.

All about them to the north and east the Sierras struck their teeth into the skies of everlasting blue. Range after range of them, rough, dark, and jagged, rose one above the other as far as the eye could reach. Their lower slopes were clothed in deep, luxuriant green, above which came the bare, gaunt, lifeless rock; and higher still, on some towering, isolated peaks, was the cold, sparkling glare of eternal snow.

Seaming the sides of the mountains were countless dark lines which Merry knew to be rifts and gullies worn by turbulent streams racing down the steep slopes. Here and there loomed gashes made by cañons or narrow valleys, into some of which they would doubtless have to descend to reach the heights beyond.

But, bathed in the transforming, golden radiance
of the sun, clothed with the luxuriant mantle of living
green, alive with darting flecks of scarlet or of green-
ish-gold, the whole scene was softened and made beau-
tiful.

The cañon led into another which, in its turn, climbed to a second forest-clothed plateau, where they passed the night around a blazing cheery fire.

By noon next day they had done some hard climb-
ing and had dipped down again into the valley be-
yond, which proved to be long and winding, with a slight, but steady, upward grade.

This continued all the afternoon, the ascent growing steeper as they advanced until by nightfall they had emerged onto a flat, open space which extended north-
ward as far as they could see, apparently terminating at the very foot of the towering, rocky wall crowned with jagged peaks and battlements, toward which they had been headed ever since they left the Yaquis vil-
lage.

All the next day they labored over this stony plain, and with each hour Merry became more and more dubious as to the possibility of their surmounting the tremendous cliff before them.

He had counted on the ascent being much more gradual. It looked now as if they would have to turn directly to the east or west and journey far enough one way or another to circle around the obstacle in front.

Nothing could be definitely decided, however, until they came nearer the precipice. As the afternoon wore on, he was a little encouraged to notice the beginning of an upward incline at this end of the plain, which increased as they went forward.

But with this encouragement another difficulty was presented, which, while being far from insurmount-
able, cut their speed at least in half.

All about them were scattered rocks in infinite con-
fusion. They lay about in heaps or great single masses, having apparently fallen from the heights above. Some of them were bowlders of immense size which towered far above their heads and effectually cut off anything like an extended view on any side. Others were smaller, but no less troublesome, while filling the spaces between the large masses was a rubble of broken pieces spread so thickly over the ground that they had to dismount and lead the burros; and even then it was almost impossible to proceed beyond the slowest sort of a walk.

It was most exhausting work, and by the time they stopped for the night they were all so dead tired that they bolted their supper almost in silence and threw themselves down wherever they happened to be, to fall instantly asleep.

Merriwell was the first to awaken next morning, and the instant his eyes were open he sat up with a low murmur of surprise. It had been quite dark when they stopped the night before, so that they could see nothing of their surroundings, but, considering the slow progress necessary to cross the stony stretch, Frank had no idea that they had come so near the great cliff.

But now the half light showed it plainly, towering above them to a perfectly appalling height—sheer, precipitous, menacing, in its tremendous bulk. The base must have been a quarter of a mile from their camp-

ing spot, but the shadowy, looming granite seemed actually to lean outward as if it were on the point of toppling over and grinding them to powder beneath its awful weight.

As Merry sprang to his feet he was conscious of a sort of smothering sensation which was distinctly unpleasant.

He swiftly threw it off, however, and looked about him with eager curiosity.

The sun had not yet risen above the serrated peaks to the eastward. There was a faint touch of rose in the hard, gray-blue sky, but it had no softening effect upon the cold desolation of the rocks about him and, as he stood there shivering a little in the cool breeze, Frank thought he had never seen so cold, so barren, so utterly lifeless a spot.

The table-land was too high and too broad for him to see any of the forests and vegetation which clothed the lower slopes of the distant mountains. There was no living thing as far as the eye could reach—noth-
ing but rock, gray, black, and menacing; piled up in strange, fantastic masses; scattered underfoot or towering overhead. On every side the horizon showed only the jagged, encircling peaks of barren gray. It seemed as if there could be no human being within a radius of hundreds of miles, and yet he knew that only a day's journey to the south lay green-clothed valleys and sparkling streams.

Worst of all was that monstrous wall which barred their way ahead, rising sheer a thousand feet or more without a break. It was utterly impassable, and he realized at once that it was going to add immensely to their difficulties.

But Merriwell's was not a nature to remain long discouraged. If they could not surmount the cliff they would have to find some way around it. What
was more vital and pressing, they must find water very soon or else be seriously hampered. They still had a little in their canteens, but it was very little; for the hard work of the previous afternoon had been extremely thirst producing, and the burros were already on short allowance.

The first thing to do would be to make a thorough search for a stream of some sort. Surely there must be at least one cascading down from the heights above.

With this thought in mind, he at once roused the others, and they set out, leaving Park Davis to start the spirit lamp and make coffee from some of their scanty store.

Almost at once they lost sight of one another, for the scattered rocks and bowlders made it impossible to see more than a dozen yards in any direction; but, under Frank's direction, they spread out along the face of the cliff. The instant one found water of any sort he was to raise a shout which would bring the others to him.

Merry's search was quite fruitless. He went straight to the face of the towering rock and, turning, followed along its foot, but there was no sign of a stream or even a hollow where water might have collected.

He persevered, however, continuing on for quite a distance, and then he heard Crowfoot's voice raised in a quavering whoop from somewhere to his right.

"Old Joseph's found something," he murmured, with satisfaction. "I ought to have known he'd be the one. He can fairly smell out almost anything."

At once turning in that direction, he hurried along, and in five minutes came up to the chief, who stood by a shallow pool in a rocky hollow which had been saved from evaporation by a huge slab of stone leaning slantwise over it, one end resting against a bowlder, thus protecting it from the direct sun's rays.

There were not more than two or three gallons there, but it was fairly sweet and fresh and amply sufficed for their wants at present.

Silver and Fitzpatrick presently appearing, they all filled their canteens and started back toward their camping place.

"We're certainly up against it," Frank remarked, as they strode along toward the camp. "We can't go forward, and as soon as we've had breakfast we'll start out to find a way around."

"Doesn't look as if that would be easy, either," Silver remarked, with a backward glance at the cliff.

"I think we'll be able to make it," Merry said reassuringly. "And if the worst comes to the worst, we can go back to the last valley and take that turn to the right we passed day before yesterday."

Fitzpatrick smiled wryly.

"It's not crazy I am to hoof it over that plagued rocky place again," he murmured. "Me feet are most wore through stepping on sharp stones."

"We'll trust it won't be necessary," Frank said hopefully. "Well, here we are, and that coffee smells mighty good. Let's get busy and make a quick start."

They came out into the little circle where the burros stood, and Merry glanced about in a puzzled way.

"Where's Park, I wonder?" he remarked.

The place was just as they had left it. The four burros were hobbled in a group a little distance off, their packs lying on the ground beside them. The blankets on which the men had rested were scattered over the rocks, while close at hand stood the spirit lamp, burning merrily under the coffeepot, which was sending forth the delicious aroma that had assailed their nostrils.

But that was all. Park Davis had disappeared.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TUNNEL IN THE CLIFF.

For a moment no one spoke. Then Frank broke the silence.

"Strange he should go away and leave the coffee," he remarked. "It's just about ready to boil over."

Stepping forward, he lifted the pot off the lamp and blew out the flame. When he straightened up there was a frown on his face. It was rather curious that Davis should have left the place at all. There was no reason for his doing so.

"He must be about here somewhere," he muttered. Then he put his fingers to his lips and blew a shrill whistle which echoed and reechoed from the frowning cliffs above.

They listened intently, but no response came.

"Park!" Merry shouted the next moment. "Where are you?"

There was no answer.

By this time the faces of the three men had grown serious and there was an anxious flicker in the eyes with which they regarded one another in questioning silence. Crowfoot had detached himself from the little group and was walking swiftly about the rocks, stoop-
ing over with his beady, sparkling eyes fixed intently on the ground.

Presently Frank raised his voice and shouted again, but there was no answering sound save the mocking echoes that hurled his own words back at him in rapidly diminishing cresendo.

Terry and Jim Silver looked swiftly at each other. There was something creepy in the intense stillness; something incomprehensible about the sudden utter vanishing of a man in this desolate, uninhabitable wilderness, causing their nerves to tingle and bringing a flicker of apprehension into their eyes.

Where could he have gone? They had not been twenty minutes away from the circle, but the next instant he raised his head and thrust out one hand toward Merry.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed again. "See!"

Stepping swiftly forward, Frank saw lying in his palm a small flat pearl button such as is worn on soft shirts of both flannel and cotton.

A loose button is usually of little significance. They come off at the least provocation and with an annoying frequency which shows clearly the innate perverseness of inanimate things.

But there was something about this particular button which brought an anxious frown to Merry's face and caused him to press his lips tightly together.

It had not dropped off of its own accord because of the weakening of the thread. It had been torn bodily away from the shirt and brought with it a little irregularly square bit of blue flannel.

Frank did not speak at once. He was looking intently into Crowfoot's eyes, and something he saw there brought a curious glint into his own and made him grit his teeth.

The next instant the Indian was back on his hands and knees crawling swiftly over the rock.


All the while he was progressing over the rocky ground with the swiftness of a cat, Merry close by his side, the latter's keen, all-seeing eyes taking in quite as much as did those of the redskin.

Suddenly Crowfoot stopped abruptly and dropped forward until his face almost touched the ground. Then he straightened up.

"Ah!" he muttered triumphantly. "Men carry him off. Two, mebbe three—not more. No wear shoes; no wear moccasins; no bare feet. Have somethin' flat on feet. They creep up behind white brave; make-um no sound. Grab him. He fight; he kick. No use."

Silver and the young Irishman stood by with widened, astonished eyes.

"But who could there be to do that?" gasped the latter. "What could they want with Parks?"

"Yes," put in Silver swiftly; "and why didn't he yell? He knew we'd hear him?"

"No yell 'cause something over mouth," explained the redskin. "Old Joe no savvy who strange men be. Mebbe ones Yaqui tell-um 'bout."

Frank, who had been verifying Crowfoot's astounding discovery, arose to his feet. His eyes flashed, his fists were tightly clenched, and his whole air was one of purposeful determination.

"It doesn't matter who or what they are," he said tersely. "They've carried off Davis, and we've got to get him back. The most important question is, where have they gone? They must be hiding somewhere in this wilderness, and we've got to get busy right away and trail them."

He turned swiftly to Crowfoot.

"You follow up the trail, Joe," he urged. "We'll hustle back and pack up the burros. There's no telling where this chase will take us, and it will only waste a few minutes to get them ready and bring them along. You understand? Follow the trail as fast as you can, and we'll be after you in a few minutes. If we don't catch up with you pretty quick, just give a yell."

Grunting acquiescence, the Indian again bent low over the ground, while Merry and his two companions hurried toward the burros.

There was nothing for the animals to eat, but they were given a good drink of water while the packs were strapped to their backs. All the loose articles, including the blankets and spirit lamp, together with what food Davis had taken out, were hurriedly crammed into the packs, and they started off.

Terry and Silver led the burros, leaving Frank free to follow up the trail, and as they went they munched
some crackers which they had hastily extracted from
the packs at Merry’s suggestion; for it was the only
sort of breakfast they would have that day.

Their progress being rather faster than Crowfoot’s,
they caught up with him in some twenty minutes and
found him still keen on the scent.

The trail led toward the great cliff, but in a widely
slanting line which, if it continued as it had begun,
would reach the rocky wall at a considerable distance
beyond the shallow pool of water Crowfoot had dis-
covered an hour before.

Frank’s opinion was that the unknown individuals
would swerve even more sharply to the right and skirt
the rock to some point where they could circle around
it, or else dip down from the plateau through canons,
perhaps, to the lower valleys.

He had but the vaguest conjecture as to who these
men were. They were undoubtedly the “evil beings”
of whom the Ysquis were in such terror, and were
probably, in reality, a tribe of fierce Indians who in-
habited the unexplored wilderness, making war on
every one who came their way.

Park’s position was, therefore, a desperate one.
They could have but one object in capturing him alive,
and Frank shuddered as he thought of it. Not a mo-
ment must be wasted; every nerve must be strained
to find and rescue him before it was too late.

Just why the men had not attempted to ambush and
kill off the entire party was a puzzle. They must
have some special reason for wanting to capture them
alive, in which case they would probably return for
that purpose as swiftly as possible, with reinforce-
ments; which was another potent reason for trying to
catch up with them before they could reach the rest
of their tribe.

The trail avoided intervening boulders now and
then, but keeping to the same general direction. The
piled-up rocks grew thicker and thicker as they neared
the frowning wall of granite, and Frank began to
wonder why they persevered in climbing over so many
obstacles and did not turn off sooner.

Presently he became convinced that they did not
mean to turn off at all. The base of the cliff was
almost at hand. Crowfoot bounded along, guided by
displaced rocks and pebbles. Suddenly, with a gut-
terful shout, he darted forward and disappeared around
the corner of a great, roughly squared mass some
twenty feet high, which had seemed to rest directly
against the face of the precipice.

Merry, following at his heels, gave a low cry of
amazement as he saw that there was a hollow behind
the big boulder about four feet wide, through which
it took but an instant to slip. And there, barely vis-
ible in the semigloom, he found himself staring into
dark aperture like the mouth of a tunnel opening
straight into the face of the massive, insurmountable
wall.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SMILING VALLEY.

Crowfoot had vanished, but in a moment he re-
appeared again, his wrinkled face wearing an expres-
sion of satisfaction.

“Him fine place,” he grunted. “Old Joe think him
go through rock. Meebe go down to hot place.”

“We’ll follow wherever it goes,” Merry said quickly.

“The question is, can we get the burros through?”

Measuring the aperture with his eye, he decided
that it might be possible. It was almost six feet high
and a little more than half as broad. With the packs
taken off, the animals could easily make their way
through it in single file.

Stepping outside again, he surveyed the place curi-
osly. It was wonderfully well hidden. One might
pass within a few feet and never suspect its existence.
Then he discovered an amazing thing. The edges of
the hole were roughly squared, and here and there
could be plainly seen the marks of chisels in the rock.

It was not wholly, as he had at first supposed, a
natural tunnel but to some extent the work of man.
It was possible, of course, that nature had left some
sort of an opening here, but that it had been increased
in size by human hands there could be no shadow of
a doubt.

The discovery was bewildering. It was incredible
that ignorant savages could have accomplished such
a piece of work, and yet here was the evidence before
his very eyes.

But there was no time to waste over the puzzle now.
Silver and Fitzpatrick arriving with the burros, Frank
instantly set about removing the packs, tying them se-
curely on top of the saddles, so that they would clear
the edges of the tunnel.

That done, Crowfoot took the lead and Merry fol-
lowed, with the first burro behind him. The animal
objected decidedly to venturing into the dark hole,
and if required force as well as persuasion to induce
him to make the attempt.
But at length he was well started, and the others followed without much difficulty.

The place was dark as a pocket. Though he knew that Crowfoot was within a few feet of him, Merry could not see even the outline of his spare, stooping figure following the windings of the tunnel, one hand touching the rocky wall.

Underfoot, the floor was fairly smooth and level—decidedly too much so for it to be the unaided work of nature.

On they went, twisting and curving through the darkness; but presently a little gleam of light appeared in the distance, twinkling like a star. It shone at the end of a long, straight stretch down which they hurried at a dogtrot, so anxious were they to reach the end and see what was before them.

The light grew brighter, showing the roughly squared outlines of an opening which was much the same as that by which they had entered. They saw the flicker of sunshine outside, and then, making a last, swift spurt, they hurried out of the tunnel into the glorious, dazzling sunlight of another world.

Moment after moment passed in tense, breathless silence as the four men stared, and stared, and stared at the amazing scene spread out before them. It was incredible—unbelievable! They rubbed their eyes, wondering if the thing was some mirage or optical delusion. But when they looked again it was still there, solid, substantial, and utterly strange.

They were standing upon a broad, shelflike rock, high up upon the side of a mountain, and looking down upon a fair, smiling valley far, far below. The bottom of this valley was fresh, and green, and blooming, and almost in the center glittered the gently ruffled waters of a lovely lake.

The whole depression was perhaps a dozen miles across, and was girt in on every side as far as they could see by walls of rock almost perpendicular and vastly high.

But the amazing, almost incredible, thing was not the wonderful fertility and beauty of the place—though these seemed strange enough in contrast to the barren wilderness the party had just quitte—but the fact that, clustering all about two sides of the placid sheet of water were houses; not rough huts of logs or flimsy branches, but stone houses, solidly built in rows on what must be streets, and, farther up the hillside from the lake, embowered in the green of trees and shrubbery.

No wonder they stared amazed and unbelieving.

No wonder they could not credit the evidence of their senses at the sight of this town, which was almost a city, in the midst of a wilderness, trackless and unknown.

Swiftly, without a word, Merry unstrapped the small but powerful field glass which hung at his side, and adjusted it. For a long time he gazed through it at the valley below, and then slowly lowered it.

“It’s the real thing, boys,” he said quietly. “Those are houses, all right, and amazingly well built, at that. I can see regular streets, and some of the buildings are huge. There are people about, too. I can make them out quite clearly, like little puppets crowding the streets.”

“But what is it?” gasped Silver. “Who are they? What does it mean?”

Frank did not answer at once.

“I don’t know,” he confessed at length. “The only possible thing I can think of—and that seems wild and absurd—is that we have stumbled upon a remnant of the Aztec people who have been hidden here for centuries, and are unknown to civilization. The buildings look a little like ruins I have seen in southern Mexico and Yucatan, and certainly they were never built by the Indians.”

His companions digested this extraordinary theory for a moment in silence.

“But they’ve got Davis, haven’t they?” Silver asked presently. “What in the world are they going to do with him?”

Merry’s eyes narrowed.

“If these people are Aztecs or their descendants, there’s but one answer to that question—sacrifice,” he returned swiftly. “Their religion was the bloodiest one in all history. They sacrificed hundreds of lives every day to their horrible gods; they probably do so still as far as they are able. There’s no other reason I can think of for their capturing him alive, and if we’re going to do anything to help him we’ve got to start right now, and hustle.”

There was no thought of drawing back, no momentary hesitation in one of the four men. A face might pale a little at the thought of the frightful peril into which they were venturing, or the muscles of a mouth twitch unconsciously; but the idea of abandoning their comrade to his fate and seeking by instant flight the safety which might yet be theirs entered no single mind.

Swiftly the burros were put in motion down the narrow, rugged trail which led from the plateau to
the forest-covered slopes, and thence to the valley below.

This time it was Merrifell who took the lead and hastened forward, choosing the way. He held the field glass in one hand, and every now and then he paused an instant to direct it searchingly down the slope.

All at once he gave an ejaculation as he saw suddenly appearing, on a road which wound, ribbonlike, from the forest across an open plain toward the town, a small group of men. There were four of them, of which three were dressed in light-colored, loose tunics, while the other, whose hands were tied behind him, wore darker clothes and unmistakable trousers.

"We're too late to catch them!" he exclaimed. "They'll reach the town long before we can get down through the forest."

He glanced swiftly about him, and then his keen, narrowed eyes swept over the whole panoramic view spread out before them as if he were striving to hit upon some plan. Then he started forward again.

"Come on, fellows," he urged grimly. "Hustle! We've got to get into shelter among those trees before any one sees us."

Down the rough path they hurried, dragging the reluctant burros behind them almost at a run. Something in their leader's manner infected them with hope. Evidently he had a plan of some sort.

Five minutes later they reached the edge of the wood and plunged into its friendly shade. But even here Merry did not halt, though he slackened his pace a little.

"The minute those fellows reach the town," he explained presently, "they'll spread the news of our being out there beyond the tunnel, and I expect half the population will be tearing up here to capture us as soon as they hear about it. We've got to get away from here, and a good, long, slow, too. When they find that we have disappeared it may not occur to them, to be sure, that we have found the tunnel, but it's best to be on the safe side."

He stopped a moment, and, raising the field glass, looked down through a break in the trees.

"They'll reach the first houses in about five minutes," he commented.

Then he waved his hands toward the distant part of the valley, beyond the lake.

"You see the forest yonder?" he queried. "Notice that there's much more of it than on this side. Well, it's up to us to get over there in short order. If they do any searching, it won't be so far from the tunnel. They'll never suspect that we've made a complete circuit of the valley."

"But Davis," objected Silver; "how in the world are we going to get at him?"

Frank smiled grimly.

"I don't know exactly," he returned. "It all depends on where they put him. But, rest assured that we'll do something. And we've got one powerful advantage over these fellows, unless I'm very much mistaken, which may accomplish wonders."

He tapped the revolver hanging at his side significantly, and Silver understood.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TEMPLE AND THE TREE.

Keeping close to the edge of the wood, they hurried along as fast as they could, pausing now and then at openings through which a view of the distant town could be obtained.

At one of these, Merry gave a quick exclamation.

"Ah! I thought so. They've begun to spread the news, and the people are scurrying about like mad. The minute they can collect a large enough party they'll be up here. We've got plenty of time, though. They'll make straight for the tunnel first, and when they find us gone, will probably search the plateau before coming back on this side. We ought to be around the end of the lake by that time. Now, to keep an eye on Park."

This was rather difficult. Could they have stood still at one point and watched carefully what was going on, Frank might easily have been able to follow Davis and his captors with the glass. But, moving steadily on from gap to gap, as they did, it was harder.

He saw them hurry through the long street which bordered the lake, a swiftly increasing crowd around them. Then he lost them in the general confusion which the arrival of a white man seemed to have aroused among the people.

It was a long time before he located him again, and in the meantime he watched a large party of the white-clad men hurry out from this end of the town and start up the slope.

At last the searching glass found again the group in the town. They were still on the lake road and had
almost reached a great building, which had caught Merry’s eye before.

It stood on the distant edge of the town, and was by far the largest and most imposing edifice in the place. It was not built of the same gray granite which formed the other, smaller houses, but of a curious black basalt, which, together with its great size and severely simple construction, produced a peculiarly somber effect.

There were massive columns at the front, and the whole was surrounded by a network of walls, courts, and smaller buildings, which made it look like a small town in itself.

Frank had fancied, long ago, that it must be a temple of some sort, and now he was convinced of this as he watched the three men force their captive up the wide stone steps and disappear through massive swinging doors.

He saw, with some hope, that the building, with its surrounding walls and appendages, stood at one end of the town, with nothing but fields, dotted with groups of trees, beyond. It would be far more easily approached than if it had been in the midst of the busy thoroughfares near the lake, and, with a gleam of resolution in his eyes, he left the opening in the trees and hurried on again.

By the time the approaching party of men had reached the mouth of the tunnel, Frank and his companions were three miles distant, and beginning to descend through the trees toward the lake.

The forest here dropped almost to the water’s edge, and Merry saw, with some slight uneasiness, that the lake itself approached very close to the massive, frowning cliffs, which at that point towered straight upward for approximately two thousand feet without a break.

It proved to be a tight squeeze. They found that, though the rippling little waves actually lapped the foot of the rocky wall for a distance of some fifty yards, they were just able to wade the burros across. As it was, they were wet to their waists, but that was a matter of small moment considering what they had escaped.

On this side of the lake the woods were wilder and the undergrowth much more dense. Their progress was correspondingly slow, and it was dusk before they had made the wide circuit and reached a point about a mile from the temple and so high above it that they had an extended view of the whole city.

It was the first time they had really been able to take it all in, and they were struck with the orderly laying out of the place, the wide, paved streets and remarkable strength and solidity of the buildings. The glimpse was a brief one, however. The darkness dropped swiftly, cutting off everything but the twinkling lights in the houses or the gleam of flaring torches carried through the streets, and they at once turned their attention to supper and a discussion of what their method of procedure had better be.

The moon rose about eight o’clock, and, as it was almost in the full, Merry proposed that they venture down and spy out the surroundings of the temple in order to decide how to set about the rescue of Davis. So much depended on a thorough knowledge of the lay of the land that the whole night might not be ill spent in acquiring it.

So it was that the great, yellow moon, sailing majestically above the frowning cliffs of the strange valley, found them spread along the foot of one of the inner walls of the temple. They had reached that point without much difficulty by threading a maze of courts and gardens, all of which had been deserted.

And now, as they lay in the shadow of the wall, watching the silvery radiance creep slowly over buildings, and trees, and grassy plots alike, Frank discovered a curious thing. All about him were carvings and ornamental stonework, rich, intricate, and beautiful, but worn and crumbling with age. They were centuries old—how many centuries no man could tell; for in a climate like this things keep almost indefinitely.

He looked about him keenly, and presently, when they had climbed the wall and stood in the black shadow of the temple itself, he saw that it was all the same. Everything was old, nothing new. Here and there, where repairs had been absolutely necessary, they had been made in a rough, crude manner, which was in such vast contrast to the original work that it showed plainly the amazing deterioration which must have taken place, not alone in the skill, but in the intellect of the inhabitants. It was quite possible that they were not even of the same race as those who built the city, but some aliens who had found it deserted and taken up their abode there.

It was an interesting supposition, but there was no time to follow it up now. So far, they had done very well, but they must go on.

Above them loomed the gloomy shadow of the basalt walls. They were at the back of the temple, and but one more barrier intervened between them and a vast, open court, larger than any they had yet traversed, from which Merry hoped they might obtain access to the building itself.
He was almost certain that Davis was confined somewhere within it, and he had resolved that, if a good opportunity arose, he would attempt the rescue that very night, trusting to the sudden surprise and the immense superiority their weapons gave them, to break through any opposition and reach the tunnel mouth. Once there, they could hold the place indefinitely against any force, and, if they could manage to block the entrance, would escape unscathed.

A tree of the evergreen variety, growing close to this wall, made access to it easy; and its thick branches, spreading over the stonework, were ample protection against possible observers.

Climbing to the top, the four men halted there a moment to get their bearings.

Flooded by the moonlight, the wide, open space was light as day. Just below them was a level platform made of huge slabs of stone, which extended a little way from the building and then stopped abruptly. The whole place was bare and unornamented, but this they felt rather than consciously noticed, for their entire attention was riveted upon the strange, uncanny object which stood in the middle of the space about fifty feet beyond the edge of the stone terrace.

It was a tree, but quite the most extraordinary one they had ever seen. The trunk was very thick and squat. It had no leaves, but branches only; and these branches, drooping from where the trunk ended, about twenty feet from the ground, were long and slim and trailed the ground.

For an instant they watched it, puzzled, curious. And then each man felt a creeping shiver of stupefying horror come over him.

There was no breath of wind stirring, and yet those snaky branches moved! Swiftly, restlessly, they waved to and fro, running over the ground, pausing for a second, creeping on again, rising sometimes into the air and intertwining with one another, but never still.

And all the time there came from them a harsh rustling sound, like the slipping of some loathsome reptile through thick bushes, which struck upon the raw nerves of the dazed watchers and made them quiver.

CHAPTER IX.
THE SACRIFICE.

Merry watched the thing with a strange kind of fascination. Instantly he realized that this was what the poor, crazed Yaqui had meant by his babble of ser-
Before he could reply to Silver's whispered question, a curious, low murmur sounded faintly in the distance. It was like the chanting of many voices, and was either a long way off or else muffled by the intervening walls.

Louder it grew, and louder still, and then Merry perceived that it came from the temple. He had just time to give a quick, whispered command to drop behind the wall, when a pair of high, massive doors in the rear of the great building swung suddenly open, the weird chant striking loudly on his ears as an orderly procession of black-robed men filed slowly out and down the steps to the stone terrace.

Within the temple they had apparently carried torches, for, from his hiding place among the thick branches of the fir tree, Merry caught the smoky glare of them in a vast, vaulted hall inside the doors; but as they neared the open court, bathed in the silvery radiance of the moon, each torch was suddenly extinguished as if plunged into water.

On came the procession in orderly array, their voices raised in that monotonous chant, crude enough and with no real music about it, but possessing a strange, eerie quality which set one's nerves on edge and started shivers running up and down the spine.

The men were all clad in somber black robes, but their heads were bare and their faces uncovered. Reaching the edge of the stone terrace, they spread out into a half circle, in the center of which one figure stood out clearly in the moonlight, tall, spare, and commanding.

He was dressed in black, as were the others, but on his breast was embroidered in gold a crude representation of a blazing sun. But it was not that which riveted Merry's attention, nor the plain gold circle which was bound around the scanty white locks above his forehead. It was the face beneath it—the face of a very old man. The skin, darker in color than a Mexican's and lighter than a full-blooded Indian, was like dried parchment etched with millions of lines that concentrated about the eye sockets and the fleshless lips. The eyes alone showed no signs of age or decreasing vigor. They were black as night and full of life and sparkle and utterable cruelty.

As the last man stepped into his place in the circle, the chant ceased abruptly, and in the silence which followed, the old man said something in a quick, imperious tone, motioning at the same time with a skinny arm toward the open doors.

As Merry looked quickly thither, he felt a sudden clutching at his throat, for, coming down the steps were half a dozen men, differently clothed, and carrying spears, and in their midst two figures. One, whose dark skin showed him to be a native, tottered along, his head hanging and every movement showing that he was almost dead from fright.

The other, walking easily, with head erect, was Park Davis.

With a sensation of dull despair, Frank watched them cross the terrace and join the group of black-robed priests. He saw the latter close around the two, and behold the armed men retire into the temple and close the doors behind them. He had hoped that the sacrifice would not come so soon. He had supposed that it would be scheduled to take place in daylight, before a great mob of people, thus giving him time to attempt a rescue before that happened.

Then, suddenly, he was galvanized into life again as his eyes flashed for an instant toward the horrible tree. The branches had ranged themselves on the side facing the terrace, and were writhing and twisting in a perfect fever of unrest, as if the loathsome thing actually sensed in some way the near presence of so many human beings.

Merry felt the sweat spring out in little beads all over his forehead. He knew now how the sacrifice was going to be made. There was to be no quick, comparatively merciful, stabbing of the victim upon a stone altar, as in the ancient days when the Aztecs ruled all Mexico.

A human being was to be given alive to the monstrous tree?

Swiftly, silently, he slipped down behind the wall and joined his crouching companions. Fitzpatrick stood next to him, and Frank pressed his lips close against the young Irishman's ear.

"They've got Davis out there," he breathed. "I'm afraid they're going to give him to the tree. If they do, we've got to rush the crowd. There won't be much chance of our getting away alive, but we can't stay still and let such a horrible thing happen. Have your guns out, and be ready when I give the word. If we can't do anything else, we can at least give them something to remember us by. Tell the others, and be ready."

Fitzpatrick nodded. His face was white as death, but his jaw squared determinedly and one hand closed over the butt of his revolver. Merry knew that he could be counted on as long as there was a breath left in his body.

When he had resumed his place on the wall and
peered out through the thick branches of the fir, he
saw that two of the attendants had advanced and were
binding the native prisoner to a low, long, wooden
framework which had wheels. Davis stood by the
side of the aged priest, his hands tied behind his back
and his eyes riveted on the writhing, twisting tree
which he was apparently seeing for the first time.

His face was ghastly. His eyes were wide and
staring and full of a strange glare which was almost
the light of madness. His lips twitched convulsively.

The binding of the native finished, the priest faced
the tree, and, with both hands raised aloof, began a
short chant or invocation in a high-pitched, quavering
voice.

When he had finished he gave a peremptory signal
with one arm, and the low, barrowlike arrangement
was pushed slowly forward by the attendants. As it
neared the tree and the restless branches writhed to
meet it, the poor, crazed wretch gave vent to a shriek
of mortal terror. Frank caught a single glimpse of
the snaky branches coiling around the body, heard the
rendering of the ropes as they parted, and then he
turned away his head, unable to watch what followed.

He saw the priest catch Davis by the arm and turn
him so that he faced the tree. It was as if he wished
the captive to see what was in store for him, and there
was a look upon his wrinkled face of such fiendish,
cruel joy as made Frank long to put a bullet through
him. But he held his hand, for he was not quite
certain whether Park's turn was coming next or
whether this was simply a refinement of cruelty to
show him what doom he was to expect.

Frank had scarcely turned his glance away from
the tree to the group standing at the edge of the terrae,
when, without a sound, Davis tottered a little,
reeled against one of the men standing near, and top-
ppled forward, mercifully unconscious.

At a sharp order from their leader, two men came
forward and picked him up. For a moment they stood
there, and then, in response to a second command,
carried him back into the temple.

Frank breathed a low sigh of relief. Evidently
Davis was not to meet his fate that night.

With his head resolutely turned away from the
monster in the moonlight, Merry watched the band
of priests keenly. For a time they stood there in
perfect silence, feasting their eyes on what was taking
place before them, and he thought he had never seen
such brutality and raving cruelty as was stamped
on their faces, one and all.

Presently the chant began again, the procession
formed, and slowly the line of somber figures mounted
the wide, stone steps and disappeared, pair by pair,
through the great, swinging doors.

For an instant it seemed almost as if the whole
awful thing had been a dream. With the closing of
the doors the black temple became still and lifeless as
to a tomb. No light glimmered save that of the moon,
which bathed everything in its soft, silvery radiance.
No sound broke the stillness of the night. Even the
tree had ceased to rustle.

Merry shot a quick glance at it.

The branches were quiet at last, clustering close to-
gether in a kind of knot over a deep cavity he had no-
ticed in the thick trunk.

CHAPTER X.

PRISONERS OF THE TEMPLE.

Merry found his three friends crouching against the
wall just as he had left them. The young Irishman
looked up, his face still white and his teeth chattering
a little from nervousness.

"They didn't——" he whispered brokenly. "That
awful cry—I thought——"

Frank shook his head.

"It was some one else," he explained, in a low tone;
"one of their own race. Perhaps the man was a crimi-
nal, and deserved punishment, but not the fearful one
he got. Davis was brought there only to look on.
They wanted to show him what was in store for him,
I suppose. Luckily he fainted."

He paused, and his teeth were heard grating to-
gether.

"The fiends!" he hissed. "To think of such awful,
cold-blooded atrocities going on! What are the peo-
ple thinking of? Why don't they rise up and throw
every one of those priests to their own horrible tree?
Why don't they rid the land of the whole brood, and
live in peace?"

Then Merry's face calmed a little, and his voice
was lower and more even as he went on:

"We must make the attempt to-night. There's
nothing to be gained by delay, and to-morrow may be
too late."

"Do you mean to break into the temple?" Fitzpat-
rick asked.

"I don't think we shall have to break in," Frank
explained. "I heard no sounds of locks or bolts when
the doors closed after them. No doubt they have no fear or thought of any one invading the place. It is well guarded."

He shrugged a bit at the thought of what sort of a guardian stood beyond the wall.

"It has probably never occurred to them that we have penetrated into the valley at all," he continued. "They think, no doubt, that we fled back over the rocky plain the way we came. As for the natives here, they must be a spiritless lot, and thoroughly cowed to let such things continue. The priests have no fear of them. We'll wait here until well into the night, and then steal through the doors into the temple. There's just a chance that we may release Park and break away safely. There may be no guards on watch, but if there were a thousand I should still attempt it. Better to die fighting in an attempt to save him than leave him to a ghastly fate, the memory of which would haunt us all our lives."

There was a low murmur of acquiescence from the others. Even the taciturn Crowfoot granted an assent, and then silence fell. They asked no questions as to what had taken place beyond the wall. They did not want to know. They had seen the tree and heard that single awful shriek of agony, and could guess the rest.

Slowly, silently the minutes passed and lengthened into hours. The silvery moon swung on in its steady sweep across the infinite arch of sky, blotting out the glittering stars and clothing everything with a transforming radiance almost as bright as day.

It crept along the grass of the little court, shone on the walls of stone, bringing into clear relief the ancient, crumbling carvings and intricate tracery, illumined the scattered trees and shrubs; but on the somber basalt of the looming temple it seemed to have no effect. It was as if the gloomy, intense black actually absorbed the light, determined to let no ray penetrate to the mysteries that might be behind its walls.

So, hour after hour passed with scarcely a sound from the four men, save now and then a restless movement as one changed his position, or a half-unconscious sigh to show that they were not asleep.

Frank's mind was busily active in thinking and planning for the next step. At length he pulled out his watch and held it out into the strip of moonlight, which had almost reached his curled-up feet. It was nearly one o'clock.

Slipping back the watch, he arose silently.

"Well, boys," he said, in a low tone, "it's time we were getting busy."

Instantly they stood beside him, thankful that the long, tedious period of waiting was over. Crowfoot gave himself a little shake. Silver hitched up his belt a bit and swung the holstered gun a trifle more toward the front. The young Irishman was smiling, a grim, unpleasant smile, which boded ill for any of those black-robed demons should they come within his reach.

And so, though not a single word was spoken, Merry's swift, searching glance told him that each one of these men were ready for what might come, and that they were entering upon the desperate enterprise ahead of them with the determination to win or die fighting.

One by one they scaled the wall and dropped softly to the terrace beyond. The tree was again in motion. Its horrible repast finished, the restless, gliding branches were writhing ceaselessly about in search of more.

Swiftly they turned their backs upon the monstrous thing and crept up the stone steps to the great doors.

Here they paused for a moment, while Merry bent his head and listened. 'He heard no sound, no slightest movement. If there were men on guard in the great hall, they were silent as the dead.

He put his hand against one door and pushed steadily and gently. It gave slowly. Little by little the crack widened. Presently he thrust his head cautiously through the opening and looked about.

The apartment was so vast that it seemed illimitable. A double row of massive pillars supported the roof, which was quite lost in the shrouding gloom, and these pillars seemed to stretch on indefinitely, until they, too, were lost to sight in the darkness.

One single spot of light—a tiny, flaring flame from a curious earthenware lamp set in a bracket on the wall—served only to accentuate the surrounding blackness; but, as far as Frank could see, there was no human being to see their stealthy entrance.

A moment later he had slipped inside, and the others followed softly in single file.

And now came the difficult part. Which way were they to go? How were they to locate the one place in this great labyrinth which hid their friend?

Merry tiptoed forward a dozen steps, and looked about him. The flickering light sent strange shadows dancing to and fro like things alive, or as if they were the spirits of the countless priests who had thronged this ancient place through past centuries, come back
to gaze with wonder on this stranger who dared venture into the sacred precincts of their temple.

But they were only shadows, and he did not heed them. His eyes were fixed upon a wide, open archway to the right which seemed to lead into a long, lofty corridor; and a moment later he was stealing thither. The others he had cautioned to stay in the shadow by the doors, refusing, even, to let old Joe accompany him. They were not needed unless a struggle should take place, and would only be in the way in a matter where perfect silence and absolute caution were necessary to success.

The corridor was long and wide, and, like the larger hall, was paved with stone. On either side were doorways leading into rooms which seemed empty. Merry listened carefully before each door for sounds of breathing, but there were none.

At the end of the corridor he paused before an opening covered with a long, heavy curtain; and presently from behind it came the easy, regular breathing, as of some one sleeping.

He went no farther in that direction. Evidently this was not the part of the temple where prisoners were confined; it was more likely the residence of priests or attendants. So, returning to the central hall, he crossed it, and, as he had hoped, found a corresponding opening on the other side.

Through this he walked cautiously. A curtain like the other covered the opening at the end, but, thrusting it softly aside, Merry’s outstretched fingers encountered the metal bars of a grating.

His heart leaped. This looked more than promising, and, listening, he presently became conscious of the more or less regular breathing of a number of persons.

He hesitated, debating what he should do. Were the men beyond those bars prisoners or the attendants of the temple? It seemed scarcely likely that any but captives would be so confined, and yet he could not be sure. Knowing absolutely nothing of the customs of these strange people, how could he be sure that it was not the habit of the priests to keep their guards or servants shut up in this odd fashion?

He wished fervently that he could strike a match for a single instant, but he did not dare. And then, as he waited, every sense alert, a sound fell upon his ear which made him start slightly and lean nearer the metal grating.

It was a sobbing sigh, full of anguish, mental or physical. And then a whisper came out of the darkness—not loud, but swift, intense, and freighted with suffering:

“Another night like this will put me plumb daffy.”

It was the voice of Park Davis!

With trembling, eager fingers, Frank felt for the catch or lock of the gate, and presently his hand struck a heavy metal bolt thrust into a deep groove in the stone.

He drew it swiftly and noiselessly. The gate creaked a little as he pushed it open and stepped through, but he did not falter. He even risked striking a match so that he might get his bearings, for he felt sure that none but captives were here, and they would be hardly likely to sound the alarm.

The flame sprang up brightly, and he saw that he was at the beginning of a long, stone corridor, low-roofed and narrow, on either side of which ranged the barred openings of small cells.

In the one on his left, close by the door, was the youth for whom he had risked so much. He lay face downward on the stone floor, his head buried in his outstretched arms; but, as the match flared up, he sprang to his feet like a flash, drawing his breath with a sudden, hissing sound.

Then his eyes met Frank’s, and into them there flashed a look of utter incredulity. Merry swiftly raised one finger to his lips as a caution for perfect silence, and blew out the match.

As he felt for the bolt of the cell door, which he had seen to be much the same as that through which he had just come, he heard a low, strained whisper from the nerve-racked youngster within:

“It can’t be true! I didn’t really see him! I’m going mad!”

“Hush, Park!” Frank breathed softly, as his fingers drew the bolt slowly from its socket. “We’ve come to get you out. But don’t make a sound, or they’ll hear.”

The next instant he pushed the door open slowly, and, reaching in, caught Davis by the arm. The boy came swiftly, clutching his hand as if he never meant to let go; and when he reached the corridor beyond the barred gate, he threw both arms about Frank’s neck in an almost hysterical frenzy of joy.

“I—never—expected to see—any one—again!” he half laughed, half sobbed. “I ‘most went crazy. If I’d had a gun, I’d sure have shot myself. They got my nerve with—that—that— You don’t know what——”

He broke off, overcome at the recollection, and a tremor ran through his body.
Merry put one arm about his shoulders.
“I know,” he whispered. “I saw. We were ready
to come to your rescue then, if we had to. But it’s
all right now, Park. Only we mustn’t make a sound
getting out of here for fear we’ll rouse some of these
hounds of darkness.”

Davis dropped his hands, and, turning, started along
toward the great hall. Suddenly he stopped and
caught Merry by the arm.

“They’re shut up back there—a dozen of them,” he
his. “Waiting for that awful thing.” Can’t we let
them loose, Frank? Can’t we just slip the bolts and
let them get away as well as they can? Think of them
waiting—waiting, and thinking. They won’t make a
sound, Frank, I know they won’t.”

For an instant Merry hesitated. Then, without a
word, he turned back. Though the doing of this thing
might ruin them utterly, it should be done. After
what he had seen that night he simply could not go
away and leave these men—natives though they were
—to their frightful fate.

Swiftly they reached the first cell and unbarred the
door. The occupant slept but lightly, and as the grat-
ing opened he sprang up with much the same terror-
stricken hiss which Davis had given.

“Tush!” whispered Frank.

He drew the fellow forth and struck a match. The
man shrank back from the light with a low moan of
fright; and then insued a swift, graphic pantomime.

Merry pointed to Park and then to the latter’s open
cell door. Then he raised one finger to his lips, sweep-
ing his hands about the narrow hall with a motion as if
drawing a bolt. Lastly he pointed toward the outer
corridor.

For a moment the native looked dazed and fright-
ened. Then—he was seemingly an intelligent fellow
with level, honest-looking eyes—a gleam of under-
standing and hope flashed into his face. The next in-
stant he turned swiftly to the door nearest him and
put his hand on the bolt.

Merry nodded and blew out the match. Then he,
too, started unbolting doors, and presently a low rustle
sounded in the place, quickly followed by brief, whis-
pered words and stealthy, pattering feet.

Not three minutes later they slipped through the
grating and made their way back toward the central
hall, the dozen odd natives creeping like dusky shadows
in their wake.

They reached the archway and hesitated an in-
stant. Merry could see, crouching in the shadow by

the great doors, the dim figures of Crowfoot, Terry,
and Silver. Not a sound broke the stillness. They
would escape without a struggle, after all.

He stepped quietly forward, and, as he did so,
came face to face with the tall, aged priest, who ap-
peared at the same instant from the shadow of one of
the huge pillars.

CHAPTER XI.

RETRIBUTION.

For one brief instant not a sound broke the still-
ness of the gloomy place. The black-robed priest
seemed as if rooted to the ground. The wrinkled
face turned almost white, and into the gleaming, black
eyes there flashed a look of terror as he gazed in horri-
fied amazement at this white man who had so sud-
denly appeared before him.

Then his lips parted. Merry lunged forward to
stifle the cry, but was too late. Something shot
through the air behind him, as if propelled from a cat-
apult, striking the priest full on the chest. At the
same time two muscular hands closed about his skinny
windpipe, shutting off his breath and causing his face
to purple with congested blood.

It was the native whom they had first released and
who had seemed so much above the ordinary in looks
and intelligence.

At once a frightful struggle arose which could have
but one termination, the rousing of the whole build-
ing.

With a desperate energy and fierce strength that
seemed out of all proportion in one so lean, and old,
and shriveled, the priest writhed, and twisted, and
fought tooth and nail to escape from that choking
grip. Back and forth they swayed—for, oddly enough,
they had not fallen to the floor—and then, incredible
as it may seem, the old man tore himself lose from
the other’s grasp, and, turning, fled straight for the
great outer doors, his younger antagonist in hot pur-
suit.

At their heels ran the others, for already came the
sound of distant shouts of alarm and the trampling
of many feet. Into the peaceful moonlight they
rushed, a scattered mob, intent only on scaling the wall
in safety before they could be captured.

But, as he ran across the stone terrace, Merriwell
beheld a strange, an awful, thing.

The priest, frantic with terror and blind with fright,
heedless apparently of everything save the swiftly pur-
suing feet, ran straight on, stumbling a little as he left the pavement and struck the ground beyond, but still keeping his balance.

Straight on he rushed, heedless of the fate awaiting him—heedless until it was too late. Straight on he ran to where the snaky, rustling branches of the monstrous tree curled, and withered, and twisted in a perfect ecstasy of eagerness. Straight on toward the dreadful thing which he had cherished and tended, and into whose horrid embrace he had sent so many countless souls—the thing which knew no difference between friend and foe, and welcomed as eagerly the priest who worshiped it as the lowest slave.

Too late, he saw.

With a shrill scream, he stopped short and tried to turn back, but one of the branches caught him by the ankle and threw him to the ground. Another came swiftly to the assistance of the first, coiling around his body and lifting him into the air.

The native who followed leaped back just in time to escape the deadly hold of a third branch, and then, seeing that he had been vouchsafed a vengeance deadlier by far, a retribution more just and more terrible, than any he could have hoped for, he turned and fled to the wall and scrambled over.

As he dropped out of sight into the little moonlit court beyond, Merry had one last glimpse of the doomed priest caught in the trap of his own contriving, struggling, clawing, rending the air with eldritch shrieks of horror, being hauled slowly upward by the coiling branches. The great doors had burst open, and a crowd of dazed, gaping attendants and other priests stood there petrified at the awful fate which had overtaken their leader.

Then the picture vanished, and Frank ran swiftly across the court to where the last of the fugitives—Crowfoot, in fact, taciturn and absolutely unflustered as ever—was scrambling over the second wall.

They did not pause, but made straight on, anxious to escape from the confines of the temple to the open country beyond. At any moment the pursuit might commence; for, though Merry was not at all sure any of them had been seen by the temple attendants, he knew that the instant the escape of the prisoners was discovered, a strenuous effort would be made to recapture them.

As he ran, he was thinking quickly. Why not abandon their burros and make directly for the tunnel? They would manage to get along somehow without supplies, and, perhaps, if they dawdled, their escape might be cut off.

Hurriedly he outlined the plan to his companions, who agreed at once. They were ready to do anything, undergo any hardship, if only they could make their way quickly from this awful valley.

So it was that, when they had scaled the last wall and dropped into the field beyond, they turned abruptly toward the town, hoping to make their way through it before their escape had been discovered and the inhabitants aroused.

At their evident determination, the group of natives stopped short, and the leader called out a few words in a quick, anxious tone. Then, realizing evidently that he was not understood, he spoke again, this time rather haltingly, in what was plainly another tongue.

Crowfoot gave a sudden start.

"Waugh!" he ejaculated. "Him talk Yaqui."

He turned to the fellow and spoke rapidly for a second, and the man’s face lit up joyfully as he poured out a hurried stream of words in return. Crowfoot looked quickly at Merry.

"Him say no go that way," he explained. "Him know way out this side. Go down to desert, but what matter so long as get away?"

Frank gave a quick exclamation of delight.

"A way out on this side?" he cried. "Make sure he’s right, Crowfoot. Ask him again. We can’t afford to slip any cogs at this stage of the game."

The redskin repeated the question, and the native nodded emphatically, with swift gestures of both hands up the hillside to the north.

"Him say sure," old Joe remarked. "Him been through. He say he big gun in town, but get-um mixed up with old priest, who shut-um him up. He say he show."

Without hesitation, Merry turned and followed the native up the hill. The others had already taken to their heels and were scurrying up the slope toward the thick woods half a mile away, evidently determined to lose no time in placing as much distance as was possible between themselves and their pursuers. It spoke well for the gratitude of this one man that he had risked capture by delaying to show his rescuers a better and surer way of escape.

They had almost reached the woods when Merry, who had been keeping an almost continuous watch to the rear, saw the great front doors of the temple thrown suddenly open and a number of figures, some bearing torches, pour down the steps. At almost the same moment there sounded on the still, peaceful air
a rolling, reverberating clang, as if a sheet of metal was being beaten.

Instantly the natives redoubled their efforts, fairly racing over the ground, with frightened backward glances, while their leader, though he did not quit Merry's side, gave a quick, muttered exclamation of uneasiness.

"Him say that alarm," commented Crowfoot. "Wake-um up people; start hunt. Somebody beat-um big tin pan, mebbe. We got to hit high places now."

"Ask him if this place he is taking us to is far off," Frank directed quickly.

"Three—four mile," the redskin returned, after he had put the question. "Him say hard climb with burros; must go slow."

"Well, if worst comes to worst, we can abandon them," Merry remarked; "though that would hamper us a lot."

A moment later they reached the welcome shadow of the forest, and each one of them breathed an involuntary sigh of relief. They did not pause here, however, but hurried on to the place where the burros had been left. The animals were at once loosed and the packs thrown on, during which process the natives exhibited every sign of uneasiness and fear.

There was a delay of scarcely five minutes, however, before they were in motion again, climbing the slope as fast as the laden beasts could be urged.

The forest was strangely quiet. At first a few distant shouts and yells reached their ears, and spurred them to greater haste, but presently even these died away; and Merry took occasion to find out from Davis how it was that he had been captured so suddenly and so silently.

The youngster flushed a little shamefacedly.

"I don't know any more than you do," he returned. "Of course I wasn't thinking of anything like that. It didn't seem as if there could be a strange human being within a thousand miles of our camp, so I didn't keep any sort of a lookout. I was squatting down by the coffee, which I had just put on, when all at once something thick and white dropped over my eyes and mouth. I was grabbed on both sides and lifted off the ground. You bet I kicked and wriggled and did my best to get away, but it wasn't a bit of use. They half carried, half dragged me over the rocks for a long distance, and then all of a sudden it got dark. I could see that even through the bandage.

"After a little we came into the light again, and they took the thing off my eyes. You could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw where I was, with the valley below and the lake and a real town. I let out a yell for you fellows, but I knew it wasn't any use, from the grins on their faces. They didn't even try to stop me making a racket, but tied my hands behind my back and started me down the path. I hung back and made one break to get away, but got stuck in the leg with something sharp. After that I saw it wasn't any use.

"Down we went through a lot of woods and out onto a flat place. Before I knew it we struck the town, and I had to pinch myself to make sure I was awake. There were real houses—blamed big ones, some of 'em—and crowds of people in the street dressed in queer kinds of white things, where we thought was nothing but wilderness.

"The galoots came hustling around, shoving and yelling. Seems like they'd never laid eyes on a white man before.

"The guys that had me didn't stop for nothing. They just hustled on like they sure was anxious to get somewhere, and get there quick. I kinda thought they didn't seem to be any too friendly with the people in the streets, but maybe that was just imagination. Well, we got to that big, black building, and when they shoved me through the doors into the biggest room I ever saw, I felt sort of shivery."

He hesitated for an instant, shaking his head soberly.

"I'd have felt worse yet if I'd known what was coming," he went on, in a low tone. "They took me to that old varmint, who seemed powerful glad to see me, but he made me feel queer and sort of gone inside. He looked so blamed old and so rotten wicked. I was put into a cell, and for some time they let me alone. Then they came and got me and the fellow in the cell next door, and took us out into that big room. When I heard that queer singing and saw
all those fellows in black clothes I knew something was coming."

He paused again, and his face worked convulsively at the remembrance.

When I saw that—horrible thing, I thought—I'd sure gone bughouse," he continued falteringly. "It was a tree—but alive! The branches were like snakes. And then—that poor devil—— But you saw; you know. I can hear his scream now. I'll—never forget it as long as I live. Everything went black then, and when I woke up I was back in the cell, afraid to think, afraid to move."

His voice choked, and again he was silent, stumbling onward at Frank's side.

Merry dropped one hand reassuringly on the younger's shoulder, and presently he explained simply and briefly the supposed nature of the monstrous tree. More than once during the short recital Davis shuddered from head to foot, but in the end he seemed somewhat relieved to know that what he had seen was nothing supernatural.

By this time they had reached the rocky slope above the trees, and could not progress beyond the slowest walk. There were yet no signs of pursuit, and they began to hope that the search was being conducted in the direction of the tunnel at the other side of the valley.

As they plodded slowly upward, Frank took the opportunity of questioning the native leader, through Crowfoot, about himself and the strange people who dwelt in the valley.

His name was Nizoc, he said, and he was the head of one of the ruling families of the nation. They were Aztecs who had made their way into the valley ages ago and taken possession of the deserted city they found there, which, by the way, was called Tizan. Few of them ever ventured out of the valley, but, years before, he had gone several days' journey to the south and had encountered a tribe of darker-faced Indians, with whom he tarried for a while, and learned their tongue and some of their customs. Ever after that he had been regarded with fear and hatred by the high priest, Zorella, on account of the knowledge he had obtained.

It appeared that this Zorella was a man of more than ordinary shrewdness and ability, who had, little by little, undermined the authority of the three rulers, which for ages back had been chosen from the principal families, until he obtained the upper hand and almost supreme power. And this power he exercised, not for the good of the people, but to further his own cruel aims.

Upon inquiry, Merry learned the amazing fact that the existence of the devil tree was known to no one save Zorella, his assistants, and the attendants of the temple. The people at large knew, of course, that, from time to time, some of their number were taken to the temple and never reappeared, and they supposed that it was for the purpose of sacrifice to the gods in the manner that it had always been done. But the temple and its surroundings was considered so sacred, and so terrible a curse had been pronounced by Zorella against any venturing near it, that the existence of the monstrous thing had remained a secret.

Nizoc had long suspected that there was something strange and unknown behind those walls, and it was while investigating the matter secretly that he had been seized and thrown into the cell, only to be taken out a little later to be shown the awful fate in store for all who rebelled and plotted against Zorella's rule.

All the time the story was in progress they climbed on and on until it seemed as if they must soon reach the very clouds. The exit on this side, it appeared, was not a tunnel like the other one. It was a narrow, difficult path over the very top of the tremendous cliffs which hemmed in the valley.

Presently they reached a little plateau, which formed a good spot in which to rest the winded animals.

Merry went over in his mind the details of the strange tale.

"Ask him what he is going to do now?" he said abruptly to Crowfoot.

"Him go with paleface," the Indian returned promptly, having put the question. "Him no stay here; get killed. Heap much cold feet."

Frank's eyes flashed as he turned directly to the native.
"Ask him why he does not stay and strive to save his people from this horrible yoke?" he exclaimed, in a ringing voice. "Zorella is dead; let him stir up the people to a rising before a successor can be chosen. They outnumber the priests and guards; all they want is a leader who is brave, and not afraid to risk his life. Why does he not make himself that leader? Why does he not gather together every man in the valley and fall upon these foul fiends? Root them out like so many reptiles; kill them, every one, and destroy that monstrous tree. Then, and only then, will there be peace and happiness in this lovely valley."

He turned and waved his hand toward where, over the tops of the trees, they could see the town nestling beside the lake, silent and peaceful in the waning moonlight.

"This is his country—his home. Better far for him to die fighting, if need be, for the freedom of his people than fly like a coward, to wander, a stranger in a strange land, and leave them to their fate."

There was an indescribable quality in his voice, a mingling of persuasion and of command, which thrilled the hearts of every one who heard it. Nizoc himself, though he did not understand the words, seemed to catch something of the meaning from the eloquent, thrilling tone of Merry's voice.

When Crowfoot had translated the speech, the native's face flushed darkly, his lips trembled, and, with tightly clenched fists, he turned toward the valley, his eyes drinking in every detail with a sort of desperate longing.

Moment after moment passed in silence; but at last he looked at Merriwell and made an unmistakable gesture of assent with both hands, at the same time pouring out a rapid stream of eager words.

"He stay," Crowfoot announced. "He thank-un paleface. He got dander up now. Strong Heart make him do right."

Merry smiled, and, stepping forward, held out his hands to the native. For a moment Nizoc seemed not to know what he meant, but when Frank gripped his fingers tightly, he understood, and returned the grasp heartily.

"I hope he'll win out, and I believe he will," said Merry. "Ask him to point out the way, Crowfoot, and find out if we can travel it alone. We should be getting on."

The path over the mountain proved to be clearly enough defined from this point on, and, when Nizoc had showed them where it started, they mounted swiftly in single file.

Presently there came a sharp turn around a rocky shoulder, and before he disappeared from view Merriwell looked back.

The natives were standing in a close group listening to the impassioned words their leader was pouring out. They seemed to be almost, if not quite, won over to his point of view.

As Frank hesitated at the turn, they all looked up, and when he waved farewell each one threw up a hand in an answering salute. Then Merry moved on, and the picture vanished, but not before he had caught the expression on Nizoc's face—the jaw squared determinedly, the mouth firmly set, the eyes gleaming with the light of enthusiasm and fixed purpose. It was the face of a man who would win or die fighting.

"And I don't think he'll die," murmured Merriwell, a grim smile of satisfaction on his face. "I rather think those murderous priests will get all that's coming to them, and a little bit more."

THE END.

In the columns of Tip Top, week by week, you have all sorts of stories of sport, athletics, city life, and adventure in the open country, but in the next issue you will be treated to a very unusual story of keen adventure of the romantic sort. Frank Merriwell seems always to find something doing, wherever he goes, and when he struck turbulent Mexican country there was rather more doing than usual. Plots within plots and romances within romances were the order of the day, and Merry turned a trick or two that made the government sit up and take notice, to say nothing of changing the eventful course of a few lives. The title of the story is "Frank Merriwell's Bold Play; or, The Check-mating of Felipe Lopez." No. 778. Out March 11th.
SAVED BY A HORSE.

By WILL DUNTON.

"Charley, Charley!" called Mrs. Wood, as she entered her son's bedroom about twelve o'clock one bitter cold night in January.

"Wake up. Laura is very sick." 

"What's the matter? Laura sick?" asked the boy, springing up. Yes, she has taken cold, and complains of heart cramps. I do not know what to do. I have tried several things, but none of them seem to do any good."

"Shall I go for Doctor Weston?"

"It would be best to have him. But it is awful cold out, and I am freezing heavily.

"I won't mind that, mother. I'll hurry on my clothes, and start at once."

"Do, then. Tell the doctor he must come at once."

"I will."

The Wood family were four in number. Mr. and Mrs. Wood, Laura, and Charley. Laura was a girl of eleven, and Charley a bright, manly fellow of fourteen. They lived in a trim house, three-quarters of a mile from Grayport, a thriving country town, where Charley earned three dollars a week in a hardware store. Mr. Wood was a traveling agent for a manufacturing company in the same place, and at this particular time was away on a two weeks' trip.

Having dressed himself in an incredibly short time, Charley put on his overcoat, wound a tippet around his neck and head, donned his hat, and left the house. Doctor Weston lived on the other side of Grayport, and he had a mile's journey to reach the residence.

As he have said, it was bitter cold. The lazy, generous flakes whirled down to such a degree that nothing could be seen twenty feet ahead. Undaunted by this, however, he started courageously, and soon was on his way leaving behind him dog-trot footprints in the eight inches of snow that covered the ground.

But running as fast as he could, it was fully half an hour before he reached the doctor's residence. He was thoroughly tired by the run, and when he rang the bell he sat down on the piazza railing to rest himself.

"Who's there?" came through the speaking tube, in the familiar voice of the doctor.

"It's I—Charles Wood," replied the boy.

"What do you want?"

"My sister Laura is very sick. Mother would like you to come and attend her at once."

"What is the matter?"

"I don't know exactly. She has a heavy cold and complains of cramps in the heart."

"Then I'll hurry as fast as I can. If you will wait ten minutes you can ride back with me in my cutter."

Now, undoubtedly, this would have been the best thing for Charley to do. But, like any other person in a similar situation, ten minutes seemed to him like an age.

"No, doctor, I am much obliged," he replied. "I'll start at once, and let mother know that you are coming."

"Very well, then," answered Doctor Weston.

Having rested himself, Charles started on the return. It was much colder now than it had been, and the soft flakes had given way to fine, hard particles, which the wind drove piercing into his face. The snow, too, lay deeper, and rendered his progress slow. In half an hour he found himself, thoroughly exhausted, only halfway home.

I wish I had accepted the doctor's invitation to ride," he said to himself, as he stood still for a moment, trying to catch his breath. "I don't seem to be returning as fast as I came. I wonder if the doctor is behind me."

He listened attentively, but no sound broke the stillness. Occasionally a blast of wind swept through the trees, but that was all.

"It won't do for me to stand here," he continued. "I would freeze to death in five minutes," and he staggered on through the blinding snow.

But to walk through nearly a foot of snow is no easy task, and with the cutting wind blowing directly in the face it is well-nigh impossible.

Charley grew colder and colder; it seemed to him that he had never been so cold before. Several times he missed the way, too, and once, when he stumbled, he rolled over and sank deep down into a hollow.

This frightened him, and he tried his best to see ahead and keep in the right way.

But now a drowsy sensation began to steal over him, and in-
stead of being cold, his body began to become of a sluggish warmth. His head sank down on his breast and he felt, oh! so slow.

"I sit down under the tree over there and rest for a moment," he thought, and started to carry out his idea.

Before he could take three steps he sank to the ground. He attempted to rise, but found he had not the strength to do so.

The awful truth rushed to his mind:

"I am to die in the snow!"

Those were the last words he said.

The snow and the snow came down faster than ever. It took but a few moments to cover him, and then no one would have suspected that under that unbroken sheet of white lay a human form.

It was nearly quarter of an hour after Charley had summoned him that Doctor Weston entered the cutter which his colored boy brought from the stable, and started on his way to the Wood cottage. He was well wrapped up in an immense fur overcoat and a couple of buffalo robes, and nothing but a small part of his face could be seen as he grasped the reins and guided his faithful horse, a magnificent bay, down the side street and out of the town.

"Come, Hero, get up," he called. "We must hurry, or we may be too late. Faster."

And Hero, being an intelligent horse, understood what was said, and began to increase his speed.

The snow was left behind, and he was well on the road. Here the fury of the snowstorm was more felt, and the doctor, knowing that Hero would keep his gait and the road without urging, seated himself deep in the robes, and was soon lost in reverie.

His meditations were interrupted by the sudden stop of Hero. He was thrown forward against the dashboard, and the shock brought him to his full senses in an instant.

"Hello! What is the matter now?" he said to himself. "I wish I could see ahead."

But that was impossible. The blinding snow hid everything from view.

"It's no use. I must go on. Get up, Hero."

Hero would not get up. He only pawed the snow with his hoofs, and gave a loud snort.

"Something must be the matter," the doctor continued. "Perhaps there is something the matter with his harness. I suppose I will have to jump out and see."

Doctor Weston crawled from the robes, and carried out his idea. A careful examination convinced him that the entire running gear and all was in perfect order.

"I can't see what the matter is. Can't you tell me, Hero?"

Hero gave another snort. Then, greatly to the doctor's surprise, pawed the snow carefully in front of him, and, lowering his head, grasped a dark object by his teeth and raised it up. Doctor Weston uttered an exclamation:

"Great Caesar! It's Charley Wood!"

In the twinkle of an eye he placed the boy's form in the cutter. Then Hero was set to quickest of trots. The willing animal, in five minutes, brought the cutter to the Wood cottage.

Here Charley was taken in, and, after hard work, resuscitated. Laura's sickness proved but slight, and the doctor turned all his attention to the half-frozen boy.

It took a week for him to recover. When he came downstairs for the first-time, and sat by the fire, he said:

"It was queer, mother, just like going to sleep."

"It was a sleep, Charley," replied his mother; and as she turned, she added to herself: "And had it not been for intelligent Hero, it would have been the sleep of death!"

A TOOTLE.

"How long does the train stop here, porter?" asked an old lady.

The porter replied: "Four minutes; from two to two o'clock."

"Does that man think he is the whistle?" mused the old lady.

A FURLough.

"What is a furlough?" asked the teacher.

"It means a rule," was the reply of Mary.

"Oh, no," replied the teacher, "it doesn't mean a rule."

"Indeed, it does," said Mary. "I have a book at home that says so."

"Well," said the teacher, now thoroughly interested, "you may bring the book to school, and we'll see about it."

The next day Mary brought a copy of a pretty little carriage-head. "Do you think she would?"

"No," said the child, "I'm sure she wouldn't."

"Don't you think I have enough money to buy you?" asked the friend.

"It isn't that," said the child; "but there's six of us, you see, and mother wouldn't like to break the set."

WOULD BREAK THE SET.

"I wonder whether your mother would sell you to me?" said a lady with a pretty little carriage-head. "Do you think she would?"

"No," said the child, "I'm sure she wouldn't."

"Don't you think I have enough money to buy you?" asked the friend.

"It isn't that," said the child; "but there's six of us, you see, and mother wouldn't like to break the set."

WORSE AND WORSE.

Traveling Inspector of Schools (after severely cross-examining the terrified class)—"And now, boys, who wrote 'Hamlet'?"

Timid Boy—"P-p-please, sir, it wasn't me."

Traveling Inspector (the same evening to his host, the squire of the village)—"Most amusing thing happened to-day. I was questioning the class, and asked a boy who wrote 'Hamlet,' and he answered tearfully, 'P-p-please, sir, it wasn't me!'

Squire (after loud and piteous burst of laughter)—"Ha! Ha! That's good. I suppose the little rascal had done it all the time."

PILLS.

He is an ugly, bullying boy; big for his age, and big for his clothes. There is certainly nothing whatever in Pilcher—or that foolish Pills as he is usually called—that his companions can care for, still less admire. He is no good at games—no does he excel in his lessons; he has been in the Lower Third over a year, and has already turned fourteen. The bigger fellows, of course, are indifferent as to his existence; the Lower School boys despise him; the smallest kid in the school feels entitled to toter Pilcher about at pleasure.

Now, young Bernard Rylands is a very different sort of boy. His eyes are bright blue, and his face is oval—"quite like a girl," you would say, until you saw him captains the Fourth in the football field, or spurring in the school handicap. A year ago he was frank and boisterous, but, alas! he has been made a pet of by the bigger fellows, and is a changed character. True, he has not lost his pluck, and his running and kicking power; but he has learned to think it a grand thing to put on a swagger, and quite a little and look down on his two chums, since now he can associate with Upper School chaps.

"He's getting too cheeky," his class companions would say, as they sat on the hot-water pipes in the classroom; "he's not what he used to be, that's certain. He thinks he can crow over us much as he likes. Then it's no good trying to reform him, if that stupid lout, Pills, will go on over all the place for him."

And, strange as it may seem, this much-despised, dull-looking boy, who hated all the rest of his schoolfellows alike, had a deep-rooted affection for little Bernard Rylands, which did not change with the latter's rapidly altering character. He would follow him about like a dog, and joyfully perform all sorts of little services which, while they gained him but scant thanks from Rylands himself, only brought him into ridicule with the other chaps.

The Fourth" football match is knocked on the head!" said Barlow, walking into the classroom one Wednesday afternoon.

The members of the various fifteens were all ready attired for play, and a great arisen from every player present.

"What utter rot!"

"What an abominable swindle!"

"Just when we've changed our 'bags, too!"

The question was what to do with themselves, now that the match was postponed. But most schoolboys are only too glad to do anything but Greek verbs, etc., so soon the party had dispersed at the last afternoon.

Rylands decided to take a walk on the beach, and, being in football costume, thought he might possibly try a run to keep in trim for the sports, which were to take place in a few weeks.

With a bright, warm sun, and the same afternoon Pilcher, regardless of consequences, had cut "foober," and was rambling
along the shore. Just now he was sitting down and lazily throwing pebbles into the calm sea, watching the spreading rings they made on the surface of the water as they sank. Behind him was Bernard, breathing a little heavy and short. The path up the cliff is some distance round the bend, where it is lower and less perpendicular. Many a story did the fishermen tell of people the cruel tide had overtaken; for at high tide the water washes the cliffs right over. But Bernard was keeping his head, for there was not the beach before the water has reached the extremities of the bend.

"I must have been sitting there a very long time, when he was startled by a voice shouting to him. He looked up, and perceived a form in jersey and knickers hanging him some hundred yards off.

"The match must be over," said he to himself, and I'd bet get off pretty quickly. If that chap catches me, he's certain to give me a cut. Besides that," he added, as he got up and commenced to jog to the end of the narrow strip of beach, where the incoming tide had already reached the cliff.

"I shall have to wade it as it is. I never noticed how time was going. If that fellow doesn't hurry up, he'll have to swim for it.

He doesn't seem to be in much of a hurry, anyway. Why, it looks as if he's limping.

Just then the figure in the jersey yelled out to him again.

"Why, it's little Bernard!" exclaimed Pilcher, turning round sharply. "He's evidently hurt himself, and he ran toward Rylands.

"Hurry up, you fool!" shouted Bernard, sinking on the ground. "I've sprained my ankle! Right, don't stand and stare like that! Help me, man, help me, man!" And at his voice, his helper got down on his hands and knees, and we shall both have to swim for it, and I shall never be able to help you with my foot like this. That's right; make yourself useful if you can, you idiot! I've gone on, little thinking how his careless words hurt him."

"I wish Berkeley or Hikis were here. They'd get me out of this in no time.

"It took a long time to get the boat off the injured foot. This, by the way, was done very carefully.

"That's all right. Now I'll shift for myself," said Rylands at last. "You hook on and get across quick. What you're not going? Well, I say, Pigs, you're not such a funk as I thought, although you do cut a sorry figure.

"They were making for the outlet as quickly as Rylands' ankle would permit. The sea was already washing the cliff to some depth now, and all along the beach the water was but a few feet distant from the road.

"Why, I do believe you'll have to swim across," said Bernard, when they saw how deep the water was. "Leave me, swim across, and tell them to send a rope from the top. Why, I forget of course, you can't swim. We're in a beastly fix."

Meanwhile "Pills" had been eagerly scanning the summit of the cliff.

"Rylands?" cried he suddenly, "there's some chap up there. Look!"

"So there is!" said Bernard. "Let's yell to him!"

"Ahoy!" yelled Pilcher and echoed the return.

A startled sea bird flew out from its home in the rock above and swept slowly out to sea.

The waves were breaking over their feet as they stood looking upward, waiting for an answer.

Again they hailed.

This time they were answered from above.

"Any one below there?"

"Pilcher made a trumpet of his hands.

"Two of us. Get a rope from the coast guards!"

Then there was silence again. The person on the top of the cliff had evidently gone for help.

But unhappily, as the afternoon had gone on, a wind had arisen, and the waves were now splashing with some violence against the base of the rock. As the beach shelved down from the cliff, the two boys fought hard to lose their footing, and then rolled away by a retreating wave. They had moved along the shore to the place least approached by the water, and were standing facing the advancing waves.

"Oh, yes," said Bernard, and there was something suspiciously like a sob in his voice as he pronounced the words, "I've behaved like a cad to you all along. Can you ever forgive me for it? I'm awfully sorry, and—and you're a brick, Pilcher. Will you let me climb?"

Pilcher's heart gave a great bound.

What cared he for the danger of their position? He had gained the friendship of the boy, whom for long past he had followed in the hope of gaining a kind word.

There, standing with their backs to the cliff, knee-deep in the water, these two boys grasped hands and became friends.

For quite half an hour they stood there. Their position was now most serious. Rylands, being a head shorter than Pilcher, was in the greater danger. Once already had the waves broken right over him, and it helped not that they did not come very soon, it seemed certain that he would lose his foothold and be carried out to sea. Pilcher was better off, yet kept his head above water. One wave would have washed Rylands right away, had not his companion seized him in the nick of time.

Quick, get on my shoulders," he cried, "or you'll be carried away. All right, don't mind me. I'm taller than you are, dear Bernard; it hasn't reached my head yet. Anyhow, it won't make matters any worse for me, the fact of my having you on my shoulders. Catch hold of this piece of rock sticking out of the cliff up there. It'll keep us from being swept away. They ought to be here with the rope soon."

"His voice was choked by a wave washing over his head—"I believe I hear them coming."

Help had indeed come. Above the noise of the wind they heard the welcome shouts of the rescuers above.

"Pills, old chap," said Bernard, "you're the bravest fellow in the world, and—and we'll be chums for always."

Again they grasped hands.

And then the rope came.

HE WAS FOR SQUARE BUSINESS.

The piano-organist had put his whole soul into his performance. A ten-cent piece was thrown him, and he accepted it with a smile and a bow. Then an expression of doubt swept over his face, and advanced to within speaking distance of his mouth. He tittered softly.

"Excuse me," he said, "but you tell me one thing, if you will."

"What is it?"

"You see, you new customer of mine. I wish you to tell me if you pay for 'nuthin' tune, or for me to go 'way."

SELF-ESTEEM.

Druggist—"Huh! You seem to think you are the boss of this establishment."

New Clerk—"Oh, no, sir!"

Druggist—"Then why do you talk like an idiot?"

THAT CIRCUS PARADE.

When the circus came to the town of Little Peddlington, it was announced that a grand street parade would be given at a certain hour upon a certain day.

All the people, as a matter of course, turned out to witness it, and the procession duly took place. It was not as imposing a pageant as that of a Barnum, but still it was considered a very gorgeous affair in Little Peddlington.

There were live lions in cages, but they were old and feeble monarchs of the forest, and allowed the little boys to poke them through the bars and yell at them with impunity. Still, they were real lions—or had been, before they became so reduced in spirit and circumstances as to be compelled to take to the show business—and that was something.

The lions might have passed muster in Little Peddlington, but the "magnificent trained elephant, bought at enormous expense from His Imperial Highness, the Maharajah of Seringapatam," was a dead failure. This was a sad blow to the inhabitants of Little Peddlington, for they had looked forward to the elephant as the chief attraction of the circus parade. What made their disappointment all the more severe was the fact that, at starting, "the magnificent trained elephant" was the greatest success in the procession.

Punctually at the hour advertised, the elephant led off the procession, and the delighted spectators applauded enthusiastically. True, the elephant was rather smaller than what the public had been led to believe, but what it lacked in size it evidently made up in intelligence, for, as it pounded along, majestically leading the procession, it waved its trunk gracefully, and bowed to the spectators, first on the right side, then on the left.
"How wonderfully trained!" exclaimed some.

"Could almost believe that it was gifted with reason, just like a human being," said one, and there was no doubt that the late property of the Maharajah of Seringapatam was installed first favorite in the public opinion of Little Paddington.

Unfortunately, however, a slight incident now occurred, which speedily deprived it of its pride of place in popular favor, and tended seriously to lower Little Paddington's opinion of elephants in general, and the Maharajah of Seringapatam's in particular. It appears that one of the mischievous urchins of the town, who formed one of the great crowd that walked beside the center of attraction, took it into his head to pinch one of the hind legs of the elephant, whereupon the animal directed a vicious kick at its tormentor. This, in itself, would not have surprised the beholders, but it did surprise them to hear a particularly distinct human voice from inside the animal's interior crying:

"Now, then, drop it, will ye?"

Slowly it began to dawn upon the spectators that there was more in the elephant, purchased from the Maharajah of Seringapatam, than met the eye, and they urged on the little local arab to repeat the pinching process, which he did, with increased vigor.

"Christopher Columbus!" shouted the voice from within.

"I ain't going to stand this for no circus show in creation."

Up went the rear of the elephant, and the hind legs, leaving behind them the body and head of an overgrown boy, who, squaring up into fighting attitude, hurled defiance at the crowd.

"I know as I'm a fraud and a swindle, and have come down to be the hind legs of a hellephant, but I can knock the sawdust out of any clothooper in this town, anyway."

The front legs of the elephant were meanwhile struggling gamely on, but the elephant's center of gravity had not been regulated for it to go as a biped. The result was that after a few ineffectual struggles, the hind portion settled down like a ship at sea, and the front legs went up in the air, while a piteous voice screamed:

"Let me out this, or I'll be choked."

The people pulled the front legs out of the animal, and thus saved another human being from an untimely end. The circus proprietor rode up, in a fearful state of mind, and commenced lashing the elephant's front and hind legs with his whip; but the damage was done. The show was a dead failure, and the residents of Little Paddington lost their faith in elephants forevermore.

MISERIES OF SUBURBAN LIFE.

Mrs. Suburb—"You are very late to-night. Supper was ready two hours ago."

Mr. Suburb—"Yes, I missed the 5:17 train, and had to take the 5:19."

Mrs. S.—"But that is only two minutes."

Mr. B.—"Yes, my dear; but the 5:17 comes straight through, and the 5:19 stops at 173 stations before it gets here."

FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING.

There was a young lady of Crewes, Who wanted to catch the 2:22; Said the porter, "Don't hurry, Or scurry, or flurry; It's a minute or two 2:22!"

Says she, "There are two couples more, Who will take the next train at 4:4; They will all have their trunks, Please secure lower bunks, And have checks 4 4 4 4!"

They were joined by four more at 8; Says one, "I've some plums 4 2 8; Although they were fine, She could not eat nine, So the 8 8 8 8 8."

APPLAUSE

This is the "Get Together" Department. Here, every week, the "Tip Top" friends chat with the editor and with each other. The "Tip Top" family knows no geographical boundaries: all over the great round earth, from North to South, the members stand shoulder to shoulder with Burt L. Standish for truth, honor, strength, courage, and clean living. Many letters are received—letters of comradeship, praise and friendly criticism—and while we have not sufficient space for their immediate publication, they are all welcomed, in turn, to their place by the fireside.

"Tip Top" a Loyal Friend.

This is my first attempt to write, but I can say that Tip Top is a loyal friend because it has stopped me from smoking and drinking. I give three cheers and a tiger for Tip Top and Street & Smith.

Moses Weiss.

Cohoes, N. Y.

Better Than Novels.

I have read all kinds of the novels, but I have found out now that Tip Top is the best. The other novels are not to be compared with it. I like Frank and Dick Merrwell, Bart Hodge, Brad Backhart, Ina, and Elise.

Preston Allen

Memphis, Tenn.

Persuaded Others to Read "Tip Top."

I have been a constant reader of Tip Top for over four years, and not seeing any letter from Carbondale, I thought I would write. Many boys thought I was foolish for reading Tip Top, so I persuaded one boy to read one. Now he is as taken up in it as I am, and reads every one he gets hold of. My favorite characters are Frank, Dick, Bart, Brad, Tommy Tucker, Ina, and Doris. I close with three cheers for Tip Top, B. L. S., and Street & Smith.

Charles Tohey.

Carbondale, Pa.

From the Pine Tree State.

Tip Top is the king of weeklies. It has done me much good. I think it is a clean weekly. Burt L. is one of the best authors out. Please print this in the Applause column. This is the first time I have written to the Applause column. I hope it will escape the wastebasket. Tip Top is a wonderful weekly; it has done much toward making me a healthy boy. I am trying to follow Dick's example. I like Dick, Brad, Tommy, and Blessed Bouncer best; and Frank, Bart, Barney, and Joe. Oh, I cannot forget Captain Wiley and Obed. I think June ought to marry Dick. Dear June! Three cheers for everybody in Tip Top.

Kitty Elwell.

W. Buxton, Me.

The Subtle Way of the Author.

As I have read Tip Top for years, I wish to say a few things about the editor. Mr. Standish has one of the most subtle ways of getting en rapport with his readers, and you cannot understand how it is as you read. The magnetic force vibrates throughout your body and mind, sending your blood flowing faster with its pure and healthy suggestions, which are the truth. But like all the truth, we have to admit it even to ourselves. He has a way of getting down into our very souls and fanning the spark that threatens to go out back to life and happiness. I think this is the best weekly for boys that is published. And any one does not have to be ashamed to read it anywhere. Hoping to see this in print, I will close with hearty wishes to B. L. Standish and Street & Smith for a happy New Year.

Harry Wedg.

Richmond Hill, L. I.
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.


For Lame Boys.

Prof. Fournier: As we are both readers of Tip Top, we are taking the liberty of asking a few questions. By answering these you will oblige quite a number of "Tip-Toppers." What is a good branch of athletics for boys moderately lame in one leg to enter? The injury is permanent. What should be the chest and arm measurements of a boy 5 feet 4 1/2 inches tall, and a boy 5 feet 9 1/2 inches tall? Should a laboring man take exercise other than his work? There are two of us lame. We can both swim and ride a bicycle. One of us can skate. We are both able to walk long distances. One of us can run fairly well. We box some and play scrub games of baseball. V. C. and H. B. Middleton, Mich.

There are many branches of athletics open to boys that are slightly lame. Swimming is ideal, and you are fortunate in being able to do it. Much depends on the seat of the lameness. If it is in the hip, you should be very careful in exercising, but a lameness of the foot should not prevent you from indulging in some of the quieter field sports. You might be able to put the shot or throw the hammer. Rowing and sculling might be excellent for you; and in outdoor games you can indulge freely in the good old game of golf. Anything you like is good for you, if you use care not to overtax your weaker leg. The normal chest of a boy 5 feet 4 1/2 inches in height should measure 37 to 38 inches; that of a boy 5 feet 9 1/2 inches, 42 to 43 inches. It is impossible to state the arm measurements. The arm muscles of men differ greatly in size, and a very strong man may have a smaller arm than a man of inferior strength. If a man's work consists of severe manual labor, he does not require additional exercise, but he should take breathing exercises, and strive to keep his body in good proportion.

Omitted His Height.

Prof. Fournier: I weigh 115 pounds, and am 14 years old; chest, 34 inches; neck, 13 1/2 inches; waist, 27 inches. Tell me am I built for a wrestler? U. McMahon. Brooklyn, N. Y.

In giving your measurements you left out the most important thing of all: your height. Without the height it is impossible to make any calculations of proportion and development. A height in fair proportion to your measurements would be about 5 feet 4 inches. A man's adaptability to wrestling is very much a matter of his taste and ambition. If you really desire to become a wrestler, you should develop your muscles and weight accordingly, and begin at once to wrestle, with careful attention to the science of the sport and the rules which govern it.

A Large Neck.

Prof. Fournier: As I have been reading Tip Top for some time, I take the privilege of asking your opinion as to my measurements. Age, 14 years 7 months; height, 5 feet 7 inch; weight, 93 pounds; neck, 13 inches; waist, 28 inches; chest, 31 inches. Please tell me my weak points and how to remedy them. Winona, Miss.

E. H. B.

Your measurements are very good, but you should develop your chest by regular breathing exercises, and use dumb-bells, chest weights, etc. Your neck is larger by two inches than that of the average boy of your size, but that is not to be regarded as a detriment.

Beautiful California.

Prof. Fournier: I have been reading Tip Top for the past eight years, also your chummy talks with myself and other readers who from time to time have asked your advice upon certain subjects of which we had no knowledge, and I must say that your athletic talks have aided me physically and mentally. And as I consider you an old friend of mine, I am taking the liberty of addressing you personally. Now, one of the Los Angeles newspapers issues every winter a special number of the paper, setting forth in graphic detail Southern California and its wonders. I beg to state that I am sending you, under separate cover, a copy of this paper, which I am sure will interest you, and I hope that it will also serve to dispire to you the idea many of you Easterners hold, namely: That there is nothing in California but its climate. Los Angeles, Cal.

The beautiful and interesting number of the paper mentioned has been received, and it adds fresh enthusiasm to our already high opinion of California. We wish all "Tip-Toppers" might unite in a pleasure jaunt to the fair country in which this correspondent is privileged to reside.

Three Sports.

Prof. Fournier: Being a reader of Tip Top, I take the liberty to ask a few questions. I am 4 feet 11 inches in height; weight 97 pounds; age, 15 years 6 months; chest, 30 inches; calf, 10 inches; neck, 12 inches; waist, 24 inches. I play the three leading sports for boys—baseball, football, and basket ball, and am also a good runner. What are my weaknesses, for I surely must have more than one? How are my measurements? Do I play too many sports, and which one should I drop? W. M. T. Philadelphia, Pa.

Your measurements are very good, and from what you say it is impossible to discover any weaknesses. Your waist might be a bit larger, and your chest more fully developed, but the good exercise in the sports you mention will develop you rapidly. There seems to be no necessity for giving up any of your games. They generally occur at different seasons of the year, and it is only necessary to give earnest attention to the sport of the season to become proficient in it.

Dramatic Criticism.

Prof. Fournier: I would like to ask you a few questions, and if you would answer I would be very much obliged. I am 15 years of age and am working for a theatrical newspaper, and my aim is to be a dramatic critic. Could you tell me what books or papers I could buy to get further into the art of reviewing shows? Included you will see one of my reviews. Chicago, Ill.

Isadora Scharf.

The first and most important thing to acquire in preparing to become a dramatic critic is a good knowledge of the English language. You must be as well grounded in grammar and rhetoric as though you were to become a writer of essays or novels. Then you should read the works of the great dramatists, and all obtainable books on the history of drama and the stage. You can obtain from a public library the "Reminiscences" of the great critic, William Winter, and it will give you a good insight into the work. Your review is very good, but you must bear in mind that the work of the critic is not merely to tell his readers the story of the play, but to tell them of its literary and dramatic quality, and of the technical and artistic work of the actors. The greatest help in studying any branch of the writing art is to read constantly the works of its greatest exponents.
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Here is a list of these splendid books which contain Nos. 1 to 509 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 compact and permanent form. Price, Fifteen Cents per copy.


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Published about February 21st, 1911.
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