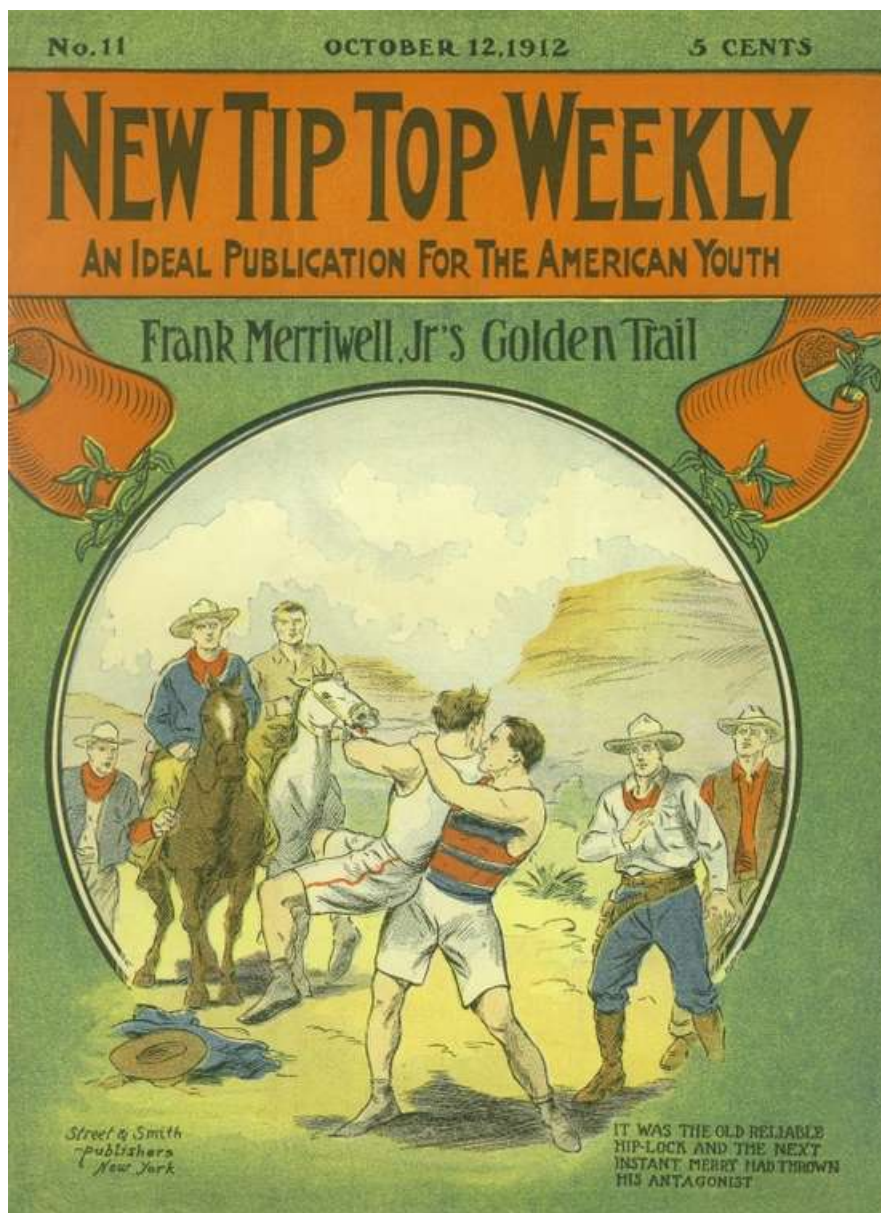


Standish, Burt L.



Frank Merriwell,
Junior's, Golden Trail
or, The Fugitive
Professor

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TIP TOP WEEKLY

AN IDEAL PUBLICATION FOR THE AMERICAN YOUTH

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Frank Merriwell, Junior's, Golden Trail;
Or, The Fugitive Professor.

By Burt L. Standish.

CHAPTER I.
DREAMS AND OMENS.

"Look here, you fellows," cried Ballard, "if I don't get this out of my system I'm going to explode. It will only take a minute or two, and—"

"Go on and explode," cut in Clancy unfeelingly. "Can't you see that Chip and I are busy?"

"But this dream was a corker, Red, and I—"

"For the love of Mike, Pink, I wish you'd *cork*. Wait till the work out there is wound up and then you can—wow! How was that for a tackle, Chip?"

Three separate and distinct times, there in the grand stand, Billy Ballard had tried to tell his chums, young Frank Merriwell and Owen Clancy, of a dream he had the night before. It seemed to have occurred to suddenly, for the forenoon and part of the afternoon had slipped away without any attempt on Ballard's part to rehearse the fancies that had afflicted him in his sleep. But now he was feverishly eager, and the rebuffs he took from the annoyed Clancy only exasperated him.

It was hardly an opportune moment, however, to talk dreams and omens. Merry was wrapped up in a practice game of football, and was alternately scrutinizing players and hastily jotting down notes with a pencil. Clancy was not making any memoranda, but snappy work on the gridiron was claiming his full attention. With a sigh of resignation, Ballard bottled up his remarks and sat back on the hard boards.

Only Merry and his two chums were in the grand stand. The practice game was between the regular Ophir Athletic Club eleven and a scrub team. It had been put on for Frank's exclusive benefit.

For two straight years the O. A. C. had gone down to inglorious defeat before their rivals from Gold Hill—thirty-six to nothing on last Thanksgiving Day—and the sting of those defeats had made Ophir pessimistic and their eleven a joke. Another Thanksgiving Day was less than two months ahead, and the Ophir fellows were turning to Merriwell for help. They felt that if any one could pick an eleven from the club members and round them, into winning form, it was he, and he alone.

This was not the first practice game staged for Merriwell. The first one had degenerated into a farce, for the spirit of fun had taken untimely grip of the players and a promising exhibition had gone to pieces on a reef of horseplay. Spink and Handy, for the club, had waited upon Merry and tendered apologies, and a second game had been arranged. Circumstances over which Merry had had little control had kept him away from that second game; and now, four days later, the Ophir eleven were gallantly retrieving themselves.

The two teams had ranged themselves across the field, and a scrub foot had booted the oval well down toward the regulars' goal. A nervous full back waited to receive that opening kick, while his teammates rushed at him to form their flying screen of interference. The ball evaded the arms that reached for it, while another back fell on it and kept it clear of the clutches of a scrub end.

Frank scrawled a note on the paper that lay on his knee. "That's Leversee," he remarked, "but I think he'll steady down."

"That scrub end is faster than a streak of greased lightning, Chip," commented the admiring Clancy. "Good material, what?"

Presently came the first scrimmage, and a regular half back, all beef and brawn, went down in a flurry. The scrub defense was like a stone wall. It was the second down and four yards to gain. The regular interferers dashed to get around one end of the line, but were flung to right and left, and the runner, dropped more than a yard short of the required distance.

The regular full back retreated for a punt. Fast and far the ball sailed into the scrub field, which proved that the back's feet were not nervous, no matter if his hands and arms had been a trifle unsteady.

"Bully!" muttered Frank, and scrawled another notation.

The scrubs, going up against the regulars' defense, found it impossible to make any decisive gains. Vigor and rocklike endurance marked the clashes, and both regulars and scrubs had to punt and punt again. Fake plays were riddled by swift and sagacious end rushes, for one side or the other, hurling attacks against the center were crushed and flung back; and, more and more as the battle raged, it became evident that the regular eleven, while good, were no whit better than the scrubs.

The fight in the first half was carried into the last minute of the play. The whistle separated the combatants, and neither side had scored.

During the interval that followed Ballard sought to tell his dream, Merriwell and Clancy, however, were in close and earnest conversation regarding the players and had no time for anything not connected with the game.

"With material like that to choose from, Chip," said Clancy, "it ought not to be much of a trick to select an eleven that would put it all over Gold Hill."

"From all I can hear, Clan," Merry answered, "the Gold Hill bunch is a fast one. I don't know what we can do. The Ophirites are liable to hit, their funny bone in the last half and turn the performance into a farce comedy."

"Never again, Chip. Once was enough."

"What happens once is always liable to happen again," Frank answered, "although I'm hoping for the best."

His fears were not realized. The last half of the game, although faulty in spots, was, on the whole a creditable performance. Merriwell was more than pleased. When Spink and Handy, dusty and breathless, halted on their way to the showers and the dressing rooms to ask his opinion, Merry gave them the praise that was their due.

"We can make up an eleven here that ought to do things to Gold Hill, fellows," said he.

"They say that Gold Hill is so sure of getting our scalps for the third time," said Spink, "that they haven't begun their fall work."

"Which makes everything look all the brighter for Ophir," laughed Frank. "Too much confidence is worse than not enough. You seem to think that I can help you, although I—"

"It's a cinch you can help us!" broke in Handy. "Wasn't your father the star coach at Yale?"

A slight frown crossed Frank's face.

"Don't try to pin any of dad's medals on me, Handy," said Frank. "I didn't inherit any of his coaching ability. Dad gave me a good, clean bringing-up. Ever since I've been old enough to waddle, he has made me stand on my own feet. If you fellows are bound that I can help you, I'll give some suggestions and do my best. I'll get the suggestions in shape and give them to you in a day or so."

The regulars and scrubs, who had grouped themselves at a little distance behind Spink and Handy, gave a delighted cheer. Frank, putting away his pencil and paper, smiled as he watched them trot away toward the gym.

"Now," said Ballard, with a show of injured dignity, "I wonder if you fellows can spare a little of your valuable time?"

"What's biting you, Pink?" inquired Frank.

"It's a dream," said Clancy derisively. "Pink has been seeing things at night, and he has been boiling over to tell us about it ever since this practice game started. Why don't you get a dream book, you crazy, chump," he added to Ballard, "and figure the visions out for yourself?"

"Or a joke book," said Frank. "You can do about as much figuring from that as from anything else."

"Oh, blazes!" exclaimed Ballard. "Don't make light of this dream. I just happened to remember, since we reached this grand stand, that I've had it three nights in succession. When a dream comes to you three times like that it's supposed to mean something."

"Sure," agreed Clancy, wagging his head; "it means that for three nights you have—er—eaten not wisely but too well. How's that, Chip? Pretty good, eh?" He straightened up, looked grave, and went on to Ballard; "Dreams, William, are the result of tantrums in the tummy. You load up a suffering organ with grub that's so rich it affects the imagination; consequently, when the razmataz, in a state of coma, projects itself into the *medulla oblongata*—"

Ballard, yelling wildly, made a jump for Clancy. Merry, however, had already taken hint in hand.

"That sounds too much like Professor Phineas Borredaile," said Frank. "Call off the dog, Clan;" and he smothered his redheaded chum and pushed him down on the hard boards.

"I'll be good, Chip," murmured Clancy, in a stilted voice. "Take your hands, off my face and let me breathe."

Frank released him with a laugh, and Clancy smoothed himself out.

"I was only expounding," explained the redheaded chap, "and now that the prof isn't around to do it, a substitute has to take hold."

"Pink isn't the only one who has taken a foolish powder," said Merry.

"And, talking about Phineas, what do you suppose the old fossil is up to?" Clancy went on, just a shade of anxiety sifting into his tones. "It's four days now, since he suddenly made up his mind to go over Gold Hill. What did he go for? And why is he staying away? We haven't heard a word from him since he left."

Merriwell looked serious.

"All that has been bothering me, Clan," he acknowledged "Since we found the prof in that deserted, mining camp, and helped him file a location on that mining claim, we're responsible for him, in a way. He need, looking after, and we haven't been on the job at all."

"After you disappeared mysteriously the other night," remarked Clancy, "Mr. Bradlaugh had an idea that you had gone over to Gold Hill to see the prof. Mr. Bradlaugh called up the Bristow Hotel, at the Hill, and talked with Borrodaile. He said he hadn't seen you, on—"

"I know about that," Merry interrupted. "That was four days ago, and we haven't seen Borrodaile nor had a word from him since. Honest, fellows, I'm getting worried. Before we started out here this afternoon I asked Mr. Bradlaugh to try and get the prof on the phone, and to ask him when he intended coming back to Ophir. Until I hear from dad, in answer to that letter I sent the night I was taken out to the Bar Z Ranch, I won't know what we're expected to do with the prof. Meanwhile, we've got to keep an eye on him. He's the sole owner of a rich mining claim, and he's about as capable of looking after his interests as a blanket Indian."

"That's right," assented Clancy. "Borrodaile can tell you all about the Jurassic Period, and can give you the complete history of the Neanderthal man from A to Izzard, but I'll guarantee to sell him a gold brick in five minutes. As for business—well, he doesn't know any more about ordinary, everyday business than a—er—troglodyte, whatever that is."

"My dream was about the professor," struck in Ballard.

Merry and Clancy turned at that and gave their chum some attention.

"Come over with it, Pink," said Frank. "There's nothing in the dream, of course, but the fact that the professor figured in it proves you were fretting a little on his account yourself."

"Well, it was like this," returned Ballard, glad that the opportunity had finally come to relieve his mind. "I seemed to be back in that pile of ruins that used to be Happenstance, the played-out mining camp. From that claim of the professor's stretched a row of nuggets, clear from the Picket Post Mountains to Gold Hill. They were big nuggets, too, running all the way from one the size of my hat to a whole lot as big as a washtub—"

"Whew!" grinned Clancy. "Go on, Pink; don't mind me."

"The nuggets," proceeded Ballard, frowning at Clancy, "were arranged like stepping-stones—one here, another a few feet beyond, and another beyond that, and so on."

"Regular golden trail," laughed Clancy. "That was some dream, Pink."

"The professor," resumed Ballard, "was running along the trail, hat off, his bald head glimmering in the sun, and the tails of his long coat flying out behind. Three or four nuggets behind him, running after him as fast as they could go, were several hard-looking citizens. That's about all. For three times, now, I've seen the prof chased over that golden trail by desperadoes. I've never be able to see how the chase came out, for always, just at the critical moment, I'd wake up. What do you think of it?"

Before Frank could answer, some one appeared in the clubhouse door, across the athletic field from the grand stand, and trumpeted Merriwell's name through his hands.

"Hello!" answered Frank, getting up and shouting.

"Mr. Bradlaugh wants you on the phone," came the answer.

Without delaying, Frank leaped the rail in front of him and sprinted for the clubhouse. Ballard and Clancy followed, but at

a more leisurely pace.

"That dream of yours, Pink," averred Clancy, on the way across the field, "was a 'happenstance'—like the old, played-out town we found in the Picket Posts."

Ballard merely grunted. It was plain that he had his own ideas on the subject of that dream.

On reaching the clubhouse the two lads found Merry just coming away from the telephone. His face was clouded, and there was an anxious light in his eyes.

"What's wrong, Chip?" inquired Clancy.

"Borrodaile isn't in Gold Hill," was the answer. "He left the Bristow Hotel three days ago, and hasn't been seen since."

Professor Phineas Borrodaile had for years been an instructor in an academy in the middle West. His health failing, he was ordered to Arizona. The dry, invigorating climate had worked wonders in thousands of cases similar to the professor's, and there was every reason to believe that the professor would be greatly benefited, if not entirely cured of his malady.

At the last moment before starting Borrodaile had happened to think of an old letter from a nephew of his who had been engaged in the mining business in a camp called Happenstance, in southern Arizona. The professor looked up the letter. The writer of it had died years before, and the camp of Happenstance had had its day and was now deserted and lost among the Picket Post Mountains. What made the letter of especial interest to the professor was the fact that it gave the location of a ledge of gold, not far from the old Happenstance placerings.

A bee began buzzing in the professor's bonnet. It was this: He would get out of the world; in the old, lost camp he would recover his health by living the primitive life. Also, being next of kin to his late nephew, he would find and possess himself of the ledge of gold.

Some months after Professor Borrodaile had put his plan into execution, young Merriwell received a letter from his father, in Bloomfield, rather mysteriously requesting him to pay a visit to the lost town of the Picket Posts and to report at length upon anything he might find in the only habitable building of the camp. Aided by a prospector named Nick Porter, Frank and his chums visited Happenstance and there found the professor. They had adventures in helping the professor get his location notice on file, and only Merry's fleetness of foot and good judgment saved a prospective bonanza mine for Borrodaile.

Very strangely the professor had left Ophir for Gold Hill not many hours after he had come with Frank and his friends from Gold Hill to Ophir. The youngsters were not his guardians, however, and did not feel authorized to interfere too much in his affairs. Merry thought it best to go slow in the matter until a reply had been received to the report which he had sent to his father. Six days or a week would be required in forwarding a letter to Bloomfield and receiving a letter in reply. Meanwhile four days had elapsed, and Borrodaile had dropped completely out of sight.

Knowing the professor to be inexperienced in business affairs, Merriwell had begun to worry about him. There were unscrupulous men in plenty who would not hesitate to take advantage of him with the idea of securing his very valuable mining claim. The telephone message from Mr. Bradlaugh, therefore, was quite disturbing.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed Ballard, when Merriwell reported the professor missing from Gold Hill, "so you think there's nothing in that dream of mine, eh? This news from Gold Hill shows that it amounts to something."

"What the mischief do you think is going on, Chip?" asked Clancy.

"I'm up in the air and haven't an idea," replied Frank.

"Mr. Bradlaugh asked me to come over to his office in town for a conference."

"We'll have to hit the golden trail," declared Ballard, "and run it out to a finish. We've got to be mighty quick about it, too, or there's no telling what will happen to the old prof."

"Show us your nuggets as big as washtubs, Pink," grinned Clancy, "and I'm willing to begin to sprint."

"The dream was only a warning. It didn't suggest what we were to do, or how we're to go about it, but just gives us a hunch that Borrodaile needs help."

"That's the trouble with dreams—there's too much guesswork about 'em. If you have one, and something happens that seems to tally with it, why, you're apt to take it for granted that you had a hunch. I'll bet you've had thousands of dreams about things that never happened, and yet here you're picking out one that appears to jibe with the prof's absence from Gold hill, and trying to make us think it's a warning. Stuff!"

"You're too free with your snap judgments, Red," said Ballard solemnly, "but wait a while and you'll change your tune."

Merriwell was already on his way out of the clubhouse, Clancy and Ballard gave up their discussion and hurried after him. The clubhouse and athletic field were less than a mile from the town of Ophir, and the three friends were soon jogging along through the sand on their way to Mr. Bradlaugh's office.

Bradlaugh was president of the O. A. C., and Western representative of the syndicate that owned the big mine and stamp mill to the south of town. It was the mine that had made the straggling settlement of Ophir a possibility.

"It will be at least two days more before I can hear from dad," Merry remarked, just as they struck into the main street of the "camp," "and before we interfere too much with the professor I think we ought to learn from headquarters just how far we ought to go."

"Oh, bother that!" exclaimed Clancy. "If the old boy's in danger, Chip, we can't hang back waiting to hear from Bloomfield."

"Sure we can't. We're making a guess, though, when we figure that he is in any sort of trouble. Just because he can't be located is no sign he's shooting the trouble chutes."

"Yes, it is!" averred Ballard stoutly. "That dream I—"

"Oh, cut out the dreams and forebodings, Pink," broke in Frank, "We're dealing with facts now and not with a lot of bunk superstitions."

That dream had become Ballard's hobby, and he was in a fair way of riding it to death. Although he was easy going, and rather lazy when circumstances gave him the chance to be, yet he straightened suddenly at Frank's sharp fling at his delusion, and was on the point of flashing a keen retort. Before he could speak, however, Frank had turned in at Bradlaugh's office.

Mr. Bradlaugh sat at his desk, smoking a cigar. He welcomed the lads cordially and waved them to chair.

"What do you think about Borrodaile, Frank?" he asked, coming right down to the main subject.

"I think," was the prompt answer, "that he has a head that's stuffed with knowledge—but it's not the sort of knowledge that will help him hang on to that bonanza mining claim of his."

"My motion to a t, y, ty. He can go back to Caesar's time and tell you how the old Romans used to do business, but he's as innocent as a babe in arms about the way business is done in this day and age of the world. He needs looking after, or some one will get that claim of his for a song—and then forget the singing part. Have you any idea why he went back to Gold Hill after he had just come from there."

"No, sir. That was the night"—and a flicker of a smile crossed Merry's face—"when I went out to the Bar Z Ranch, and before I had left I didn't know he had gone."

"Hum!" Mr. Bradlaugh sat back in his chair and peered into the vapor that floated above his head. "Boys," said he, when he finally lowered his eyes, "I have a feeling that some one is trying to victimize this professor of yours; in other words, that evil forces are at work to swindle him out of his claim, or, perhaps, to get it in some way even more desperate. I don't want to alarm you unnecessarily, but it's the part of wisdom to consider this matter in the worst light possible, and then to go to work along that line. If we're mistaken in our conclusions, well and good. Better that, you know, than to think nothing is wrong, to let matters drift, and then to find that the professor has been swindled or"—he hesitated—"or that he has disappeared, never to return."

All three of the boys at that gave a jump of consternation.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Clancy, "you don't have any idea that the harmless old fossil has been put out of the way?"

"No," was the reply; "and yet there are people who would put him out of the way, if, by so doing, they could show up with a quitclaim deed to that wonderfully rich gold mine. If the professor were gone for good, you see, no one would appear to question the validity of the legal document. Such things have been done. I mention it in this case merely as a possibility. Then, again, we have to consider it as a case of mere swindling. The professor, I think, could easily be victimized. My most hopeful view is this: that Borradaile has simply gone off somewhere, without any plotters tagging to his heel, and that he will present himself in due course with the claim still in his possession. It is best, though, to put the worst construction on his absence; then, if my last theory proves correct, we shall all be happily disappointed."

Frank drew a deep breath.

"I haven't felt like butting into the prof's affairs too much," said he, "until I hear from dad."

"I think you're amply warranted in going ahead and looking for him," said Bradlaugh.

"Sure. What would you do, Mr. Bradlaugh? Go over to Gold Hill and try to pick up some clues there?"

"That might be advisable; just at present, however, I have another line of investigation in mind. I don't suppose you have forgotten Nick Porter, the old prospector who took you out to the deserted camp in the Picket Posts?"

Clancy began to laugh.

"It's a cinch," said he, "that we'll never forget old Silent Porter and his whisky bottle. I suppose he used the fifty dollars Chip paid him to grubstake himself, and that he's now, in the deserts looking for a mine?"

"That's what he wanted the fifty for," answered Bradlaugh, "but after he got it he seems to have delayed going into the hills. Next day after you lads got back from Happenstance, Porter went to Gold Hill. The spree he had there on that fifty has been the talk of the town. He's a disreputable old chap when in his cups, and I'm wondering if he knows anything about Borrodaile's disappearance."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Merry. "I wouldn't put it past him any. He was with us when we came back from Happenstance, and I remember now just how he looked when he saw a sample of the wire-gold ore."

"He was ready to throw a fit," said Ballard, "because he had been all through the Picket Post range and had never found any gold there. I'll bet a farm you can nail this thing to Nick Porter."

"Don't be hasty about that," warned Bradlaugh. "It's only a theory, and I believe every man ought to be considered as honest until he proves himself otherwise. Porter is merely a subject for investigation, that's all."

"Then," said Frank promptly, "we'll go over to Gold Hill this very night and begin investigating him."

"You won't have to go to Gold Hill. I've heard from our super at the mine that Porter returned here this afternoon, looking a good deal the worse for wear. After supper you can visit the mine and have a talk with the prospector. You'll know what angle to give your investigations, Merriwell."

"But he may pull out for the hills while we're delaying here in town!"

"He'll have to get money for another grubstake before he goes any more prospecting. Even if he has the money—which is hardly possible—the super, on my orders, will delay him if he tries to leave."

Here was a sample of Mr. Bradlaugh's thoughtfulness which Merry deeply appreciated.

"We'll be at the mine this evening, Mr. Bradlaugh," said he, "and if Porter knows anything about the professor's absence, we'll do our best to find out what it is."

"My car would be at your disposal, but just now it's in the repair shop," went on Mr. Bradlaugh. "There are a couple of motor cycles at the mine, though, if you find it necessary to go anywhere in a hurry. Pardo, the super, will be glad to let you take the machines."

Frank thanked Mr. Bradlaugh for the offer, and started to leave.

"Just a moment," said the older man. "How did the boys shape up in the practice game?"

"Fine!" Merriwell answered.

"I suppose after you have located the professor and extricated him from any troubles he may have fallen into, you'll do your best to give us an eleven that will make the Gold Hillers eat crow instead of turkey for Thanksgiving?"

There was a twinkle in Mr. Bradlaugh's eyes as he spoke.

"I'll do what I can, Mr. Bradlaugh," Merry answered; "you may depend on that."

"I am depending on it. It seems to me that the son of the greatest baseball pitcher and football half back Yale ever produced is well qualified to give Ophir a winning eleven. Good luck to you and your friends, Merriwell. Wind tip this business of the professor's as soon as you can and then get back on the football job. If I can help you in any way, call on me."

As Frank, after murmuring further thanks, was about to step through the office door, Woo Sing, roustabout Chinaman at the Ophir House, stepped up on the porch with a yellow envelope in his hand.

"Whoosh!" gabbled Woo Sing, his parchmentlike face splitting in a wide grin, "my looker fo' you, Missul Melliwell."

"Is that telegram for me?" demanded Frank.

"Allee same," answered the Chinaman, passing it over.

Frank tore open the envelope and read the message then, with a long whistle, he returned to put it in Mr. Bradlaugh's hands. Mr. Bradlaugh read as follows:

"FRANK MERRIWELL, JUNIOR, Care Ophir House, Ophir, Ariz., via Gold Hill:

"Good work! Watch Borradaile carefully. Don't let him out of your sight. Important. Letter on the way.

"YOUR FATHER."

Mr. Bradlaugh also gave a long whistle as he sank back in his chair thoughtfully and with the message in his hand.

It was eight o'clock in the evening when Merry, Clancy, and Ballard reached the mine and went hunting for the office of Pardo, the superintendent.

The surface activities of a big gold mine, in full operation at night, are as weird as they are interesting. The boys were deeply impressed as they looked down into the valley where the mining, milling, and cyaniding were going on.

The stamp mill, where the ore was pounded to powder and robbed of its gold, was a huge, ramshackle structure. Although it had a framework of heavy timbers, yet the strong skeleton was but loosely covered with boards. Through wide cracks and many gaps in the sides of the building a flood of light poured out, and the thunder of a hundred stamps filled the camp.

Glimmering lights dotted the shadowy depths of the valley—some shining through the windows of rough dwellings and others moving about in the hands of workers. From the open door of, a blacksmith shop poured a yellow glow from a forge, and against the roar of the stamps arose the musical clink of hammer on anvil.

This blacksmith shop happened to be the first building the boy passed on entering the camp. They stopped and asked the smith where they would find the superintendent's office. The brawny fellow turned from the anvil, stepped to the door, and pointed.

"There's the super's office, younker," he said to Frank, "where ye see them two lights close together. Mebby he's there, an' mebby he's over to town; anyways, the assistant super is on deck."

A person had to shout in order to make himself heard in the steady tumult of the mill. Frank bawled his thanks, and he and his two comrades pressed on toward the twin lights indicated by the blacksmith.

These lights, it was presently discovered, came through two windows of a small office building. A man was sitting out in front, tilted comfortably back in a chair and smoking a pipe. He was a vague figure in the shadows, and the visitors could not see very much of him.

"Is this Mr. Pardo's office?" Frank inquired, stepping close to the man and lifting his voice.

"You've struck it," was the sociable rejoinder.

"Are you Mr. Pardo, the superintendent?"

"Strike two, my lad."

"Well, my name's Merriwell, and I—"

"And you've come here for a talk with that old hassayamper, Nick Porter!" finished Pardo. "Mr. Bradlaugh has put me next." The super laughed. "I suppose you know what a brilliant talker the prospector is?"

Unless violently agitated, about the only audible sound Porter ever made was a grunt.

"We know all about that," Frank answered.

"Well," continued the super, "after the way he went off the handle in Gold Hill he seems to be less talkative than usual. And less audible," he added. "Whenever he bobs up in Ophir he makes it a rule to hang out in this camp, mainly because one of our crusherman on the night shift is an old friend of his. But he's a crusty old curmudgeon, and I never hanker much to have him around. He's up in the head of the mill with Joe Bosley now. Come on, Merriwell, and I'll show you and your friends where to find this precious prospector."

The obliging superintendent got out of his comfortable chair and started along a camp trail that led up a steep incline. Along the top of the rise showed one side of the mill glowing ruddily against the night sky.

Here there was a long, elevated platform upon which ore from the mine was unloaded. A man could be seen moving spectrally around and shoveling ore into a crusher set in the mill wall.

Pardo paused, halfway up the low hill and drew Merriwell toward him.

"That's Bosley, the crusherman," said he. "He'll tell you where you can find Porter. Bring the prospector to my office, if you like. It isn't quite so noisy as the mill, and you can talk to better advantage."

The super turned and went back. Frank and his friends moved on to the ore platform, jumped to the top of it, and yelled their query at Bosley.

"Nick?" the crusherman bawled, leaning for a moment on his shovel, and appraising the boys as well as he could. "Oh, he's communin' with himself in the feed loft. Right through that hole," he finished, pointing to an opening in the wall, "and down the steps."

Frank led the way through the opening, and, at the foot of the steps, he and his chums found themselves in a small inferno. The bright, shimmering stems of twenty batteries, each of five stamps, were marking time before their eyes like, a row of steel soldiers. Each stamp weighed eight hundred and fifty pounds, and it rose and fell ninety-five times to the minute. The uproar was steady and deafening.

Ore feeders were shoveling crushed ore into the stamp hoppers. Frank's eyes ranged over the sweating, seminude, powerful figures as they worked. He could see nothing of Nick Porter.

While Frank's eyes were searching the loft, Clancy nudged him with an elbow. Frank turned, and Clancy made signs and pointed. Looking in the direction indicated by Clancy's finger, Frank saw the slouching form of Porter, the prospector.

He was sitting on a keg in an angle of the wall. He was leaning back against the boards behind him, a cob pipe between his teeth. His eyes, peering out of the jungle of beard that covered his face, were fixed speculatively on the three boys.

Merry immediately stepped to the prospector's side. "Hello, Porter!" he yelled in his ear.

The prospector probably grunted, although Frank could hear nothing.

"I want to talk with you for a few minutes," Merry went on, in a manner calculated to disarm any suspicions Porter may have had. "Come up to the super's office, will you?"

He stepped back. The prospector sat still on the keg for a moment, then slowly knocked the ashes from his pipe and stood up. Frank was congratulating himself that Porter was to make for Pardo's office without any further persuasion; but in this he was mistaken.

Clancy stood on the prospector's right, Merry in front of him, and Ballard on the left—between the spot where, Porter was standing and the opening that led into the feed loft. The prospector slipped his pipe into his pocket, moving in a slow, sluggish way that suggested weariness.

He was not weary, however. Suddenly, without warning of any sort, he put out one arm and threw Clancy sideways, so that he fell over a heap of crushed stone. Another moment and Porter had leaped for a flight of stairs and had vanished downward into the body of the mill.

It was all so quickly done that Frank was taken by surprise. The thought flashed through his mind that Porter, unless he knew something about Professor Borrodaile and suspected why the boys were there, would not be showing his teeth in that fashion. An instant after the prospector had disappeared down the stairs, Frank jumped after him. Ballard followed close on Frank's heels; and Clancy, hastily picking himself up, stifled an exclamation of anger and rushed after Ballard.

The stairs led down to the floor where the boxes were placed, and where the plates, whose silver recovered the gold from the ore, stretched the length of the mill. Amalgamators and battery men were going and coming through all the pounding racket of this part of the establishment, but the prospector had somehow managed to lose himself.

So suddenly and completely had Porter disappeared that it seemed little short of magical. Frank took three or four steps from the foot of the stairs, peering along the row of plates covered with dirty water from the battery boxes, and looking back into the shadowy recesses under the ore loft.

He was asking himself if Porter would have had time to get away into the darkness back of the batteries, when a red-shirted amalgamator stepped to his side.

"Lookin' fer Porter?" he yelled.

Frank nodded.

"He ducked out o' the door yonder," and the amalgamator, with a jerk of his thumb, indicated an opening that led out into the night.

Ballard was nearest the door. He had heard the amalgamator, and whirled like lightning and dashed out of the mill and into the darkness.

Frank was tight at his heels, while Clancy brought up the rear of the little file of pursuers. The noise was not so deafening outside the mill, but the boys were blinded temporarily by their quick transition from the bright glow of the mill to the outer gloom. They stared around them, but could see nothing of the prospector.

Ballard, however, heard something or other which gave him a clew. "This way!" he shouted.

Frank heard his chum's feet swiftly crunching the sand and gravel, and followed the sound. In a moment or two his vision cleared somewhat and he was able to see several rows of huge wooden tanks. A plank incline led to the top of one row, and Ballard could be distinguished racing up the incline. Beyond Ballard, traveling at speed over a plank gangway that spanned the tanktops, was a burly figure silhouetted against the lighter gloom of the night. With a shout to Clancy, Merriwell hustled after Ballard.

Those tanks were part of the cyanide plant, wherein the refuse of the mill was treated with deadly cyanide of potassium for recovering what little gold was left after the refuse, or "tailings," had come from the stamp mill.

The cyanide plant, presumably, was familiar ground to Porter, whereas the boys had never seen it before. In the gloom the prospector could navigate across the big vats with something like accuracy, while the boys carried on their pursuit at a tremendous disadvantage.

Recklessly Ballard ran on. Merriwell called a warning to him, but Ballard either did not hear it or else paid no attention.

The form of the prospector, leaping and plunging onward, sprang from one row of vats to another. Each row was a little lower than the row to the north, so that the tiers took on the form of a flight of giant steps.

Porter gained the top tier, and stood for a moment on a plank spanning a vat that was three or four times as large as any of the others. Ballard climbed to the same plank. Porter dropped down with a savage, snarling cry. Clinging for a moment to the edge of the tank, he twisted the plank from under Ballard's feet. Ballard dropped with a splash.

"Merciful powers!" yelled a voice in wild alarm. "Get him out, quick! That's the solution tank and is filled with cyanide!"

Merriwell's heart almost stopped beating. In a gleam of light from the mill he saw the white, drawn face of Pardo peering toward the spot where Ballard was splashing in the deadly cyanide solution. An instant later he bounded to the rescue.

CHAPTER IV.
A CLOSE CALL.

Just one thing saved Ballard from going over his head into the cyanide solution, and that was this: Porter had not twisted the plank off the rim of the tank, but had manipulated it in such a way as to cause Ballard to lose his footing and drop into the poisonous liquid beneath. As Ballard dropped, he flung out his arms, seized the plank, and so kept head and shoulders out of the cyanide. Had he gone under or swallowed even a few drops of the deadly stuff, that pursuit of the savage prospector would have had a tragic termination. Ballard, kicking around in the solution, was trying to drag himself up on the plank as Merry crept toward him.

"Steady there, Pink!" called Frank. "Don't splash the stuff around, and keep out of it as much as you can. It's a deadly poison."

"Never mind me," cried, Ballard. "Keep after that confounded prospector He'll get away if you don't."

"You first, old chap," Frank answered. "It has a scurvy trick Porter played on you, and—and it might have resulted fatally. Now, then!"

Gripping his chum by the arms, Frank heaved him upward until he was on his knees on the plank.

"Want any help?" came the agitated voice of Clancy, from just below the solution tank.

"No," answered Merriwell, "we're making it all right."

"Drop him over the side," called Pardo, "here, over in this direction. There's a tank of clear water next to the solution vat, and the quicker your friend rinses that cyanide out of his clothes, the better."

"Oh, hang the cyanide!" shouted Ballard. "I was only half into the stuff, anyhow. Stop Porter, if you can. The brute is guilty of something or he wouldn't act like that."

"Drop into that tank of water, Pink," ordered Merry, "or I'll throw you in."

Ballard, without further discussion, lowered himself down into the reservoir of water that supplied the mill and kicked around in it for a few moments; then, drawing himself up on the rim of the vat, he jumped off to the ground at the superintendent's side. Merry and Clancy quickly joined him.

"Say," cried the startled Pardo, grabbing Ballard by the arm, "did you swallow any of the solution?"

"How could I?" was the answer. "I only went in to the waist."

"Got any cuts or sores on the lower part of your body?"

"No."

"By gorry," declared Pardo, "you're a lucky kid all right. Cyanide of potassium is the most virulent poison known. If a person scratches his finger on the tin in opening a case, and gets some of the solution in the cut, in less than fifteen minutes he's a goner. You don't know, son, how much you've got to be thankful for."

Now that it was all over, and Ballard was beginning to realize how deadly was the bath in which he had been plunged, a few cold shivers started up and down his spine.

"My skin is getting up and walking all over me with cold feet," said he. "I've got to warm up, and right now there's only one thing I want, and that is to get my hands in Porter's whiskers and twist his neck. Let's hotfoot it around and see if we can find him."

"This way, my lads," shouted Pardo. "If the thing has happened that I've got in my mind, there's no use in hunting around this camp for the prospector. We'll find out in a brace of shakes."

With Pardo leading the way, the boys ran to a corral on the other side of the camp. Pardo stopped. The corral gate was swinging open.

"That looks," he commented, "as though some one had taken out a horse in a hurry. I'll just go in and see if Porter's horse is tied in its usual place. If it isn't, why, we can make up our minds that—"

Just at that moment a man approached from the corral. The boys jumped forward instinct spelled by the thought that it might be Porter. But it was not.

"That you, Cummins?" called the super.

"Yep, Pardo, it's Cummins," was the answer.

"Seen anything of Nick Porter?"

"Jest about. Say, Nick Porter stormed in here a minute ago, got the gear on his bronk in record time, an' was off and away afore I could git close enough to find out what was up."

"Which way did he go?" demanded Frank. "Toward town?"

"Nary. I rushed around the corral jest in time to see him p'intin' for Pete Loco's, which is right the other way from town."

"He's made a get-away, boys," said Pardo, "and you might as well give him up."

"We're not going to give him up," Frank answered decidedly. "We've got to keep after him, and run him down. It's—it's important."

"Well, now," protested the super, "you'd better think twice about that. Porter has shown that he won't stop at anything. He don't want to talk with you, does he? He's shown his teeth once; next time he does that he'll probably bite, and bite hard."

"We'll look out for ourselves," put in the impatient Clancy. "He's the fellow we want, Chip. Why did he turn on us as he did if he hasn't a guilty mind?"

"You think," spoke up Pardo, "that he knows what has become of your friend, the professor? Mr. Bradlaugh told me, over the phone," he explained, "why you wanted to talk with Porter."

"It's a cinch, strikes me," answered Merry, "that Porter can tell us something about the missing prof. Wouldn't you figure it out that way, Mr. Pardo?"

"Well, yes," acknowledged the superintendent. "I don't know but I would. What I'm trying to get at is this: Old Nick Porter has proved that he isn't a safe proposition for you boys to tackle."

"You don't know us, Mr. Pardo," laughed Clancy. "That wasn't a fair shake the prospector gave us on top of those cyanide tanks. We ought to keep right after him. If we come close, we'll land on him by strategy."

"That's the talk, Red!" approved Ballard, through his chattering teeth. "I'll furnish the strategy, if Chip should fall down on it. Let's get to moving. Three horses, Mr. Pardo, if you can spare 'em."

"You haven't the slightest notion where Porter is going," said the super, plainly disapproving the plan of the boys to follow Porter, and marshaling every argument he could against it.

"Where can he go along that trail toward Pete Loco's?" returned Frank. "There are only two places the trail leads to—one is Loco's and the other is McGurvin's. The trail stops at McGurvin's."

"We haven't a horse for you. All that's left in the corral is the prospector's pack burro."

"How about the two motor cycles?" Frank asked. "Mr. Bradlaugh said you had a couple of the machines here, and that we would be welcome to them if we found they'd come handy."

"Well, yes," said Pardo, "I've got the motor cycles. If you insist on going after the prospector, you can take them. But they'll only carry two—one of you will have to stay behind."

"We'll draw straws, Red and I, to see who stays," chattered Ballard.

"No, you won't," cut in Merry firmly. "Pink, you've done enough for one night, and have thrown a scare into me that I won't get over in a hurry. You want to warm up, and the best way for you to do that is to sprint for town, kick off those cyanide-soaked clothes, and get into bed."

"Now look here," Ballard protested, "I'm just as able to go on with this chase as either you or Red. I've got an ax of my own to grind, too. Remember, Chip, I'm the one that Porter dropped into the solution tank. The prospector owes me something for that. Let Clancy go back to the hotel—"

"You're as wet as a drowned rat, Pink," struck in Clancy, "and if you don't go back to town Chip and I will worry our heads off about you."

"Oh, yes, you'll worry a lot," derided Ballard. "The excitement is just beginning, and I'm entitled to a little of it."

"There are only two motor cycles, Pink," argued Merry, "so only two of us can go."

"I'll ride the burro," suggested Ballard desperately.

"And we'd go to the Picket Posts and back while you were getting to Loco's," laughed Clancy. "You for town, Pink. Don't hang back. Maybe you'll dream some more."

"You go to blazes," growled Ballard, seeing that the argument was already decided against him and that his protests were only delaying the pursuit.

"Where are the machines, Mr. Pardo?" asked Merry.

"This way," the super answered, and led the boys to an adobe storehouse not far from the corral.

The motor cycles proved to be twin-cylinder, highpowered machines.

"They're loaded with gasoline and oil," said Pardo, "for we always keep them in trim for an emergency."

The gas lamps attached to the front of the motor cycles were lighted, and two penciled gleams searched out the ground far in advance.

"Porter has a good, long start of us," remarked Clancy, an exultant note in his voice, "but on these buzz buggies we ought to be able to travel a dozen yards to his one."

"I don't know whether I ought to let you go," said Pardo. "I'd go on one of the machines myself if the assistant superintendent wasn't away so that I am needed here. What will Mr. Bradlaugh say?"

Merriwell laughed at the super's foolish fears.

"Mr. Bradlaugh knows us better than you do, Mr. Pardo," he answered, "and he'll say you did just right to let us have the machines and take up the chase where we dropped it at the cyanide tanks."

Merry, astride his wheel, was cranking with the pedals. The engine began to pop and sputter and was finally crooning its steady song of speed. Clancy had likewise turned his own engine over.

"I wish you luck, anyhow," said Pardo.

"We'll find that golden trail of yours, Pink," joked Clancy, "and bring you one of the nuggets as a souvenir."

"Just bring back your scalp, Red," answered Ballard. "That's all the souvenir I want."

Frank dropped a foot and gave his Machine a hunch forward. The pneumatic tires touched ground, the iron rests folded up automatically, and he started through the gloom toward the trail that led to Pete Loco's. A moment later Clancy darted after him.

CHAPTER V.
ON TO HAPPENCHANCE.

The boys were not long in discovering that the two motor cycles they were riding were fine machines. With the searchlights boring long holes in the dark, Merry and Clancy seemed fairly to fly over the trail. It seemed to them as though they had hardly started before the mass of deep shadow which marked the location of Loco's adobe lay almost in front of them on the right.

The house was dark. Frank, after getting out of the saddle, examined his watch under the lamp.

"Ten o'clock," he announced to Clancy. "The Loco family must all be in bed, Clan."

"Rout some one out, Chip," said Clan, "and see if you can pick up any news. While you're doing that I'll skirmish around and see if there is a recently ridden horse at Pete's hitching pole or in his corral."

Frank crossed the open space that lay between the road and the adobe and drummed on the front door with his knuckles. After two or three attempts he succeeded in arousing some one who demanded to know what was wanted.

"I want a word with Pete Loco." Frank called.

The door was unbolted and drawn open, revealing a swarthy-visaged man in shirt and trousers, holding a candle.

"What in blazes d'ye want?" asked the man with the candle in no very pleasant tone. "I'm Pete Loco."

"Any visitors staying with you to-night, Mr. Loco," Frank inquired.

"I reckon not! Think this here's a hotel?"

"I'm looking for a prospector named Porter. The last we saw of him he was coming in this direction."

"Nick Porter? He's over to the mine. Seen him there this afternoon."

"He's not there now. He left the mine and came this way."

"Well, I haven't seen him, an' he ain't here."

With that Pete Loco shut the door, and Frank could hear him shoot the bolt. Turning away, Frank met Clancy just coming around the corner of the house.

"Loco says he doesn't know anything about our man, Clancy," reported Frank.

"I guess he's telling the truth, Chip," Clancy replied. "I can't find any extra live stock around, and it's hardly possible, anyhow, that Porter would stop such a short distance from the mine. It's a safe bet that he's gone on to McGurvin's."

Frank was in a quandary.

"This adobe," said he, "is at the forks of the trail. One branch goes to the mine and Ophir, and the other leads to Gold Hill. It's just possible that Porter took the Gold Hill fork and didn't go on to McGurvin's."

"He wouldn't do that, Chip." Clancy answered. "If he had wanted to go to Gold Hill he would have turned north from the mine and taken the shorter road through Ophir."

"Unless," Frank qualified, "he had reasons for not wanting to pass through Ophir. Porter might have thought that we would use the telephone if he went that way, and have some one stop him."

"Tell you what we can do," Clancy suggested, taken somewhat with Merry's logic and yet not quite satisfied to recede from his own position, "we can go on to McGurvin's; then, if we don't overhaul Porter on the road, or pick up any clues at McGurvin's, we can come back and take the Gold Hill fork from here. We can get over the ground like an express train with these machines, and can ride circles all around that horse that carried the prospector away from the mine."

"Good!" agreed Frank. "We'll see how long it will take us to get to McGurvin's. It's only seven or eight miles."

"Hit 'er up, Chip," cried the redheaded chap; "you won't find me taking any of your dust."

Once more they got their machines in motion along the trail. The going was none too good, and Merry got his machine going at a pace that might have been reckless had not the brilliant, far-flung rays of the searchlight laid the way so

clearly before his eyes.

"That the best you can do?" called Clancy, whirring along at his chum's side.

"This will do," Frank answered. "We're not on a boulevard, remember."

Clancy gave a laugh of sheer exhilaration, for the thrill of that wild dash through the night and across the desert was in his veins.

"We'll be running Porter down before we can see him, Chip," he called, the wind of their flight casting his words behind him in splintering echoes.

But Merriwell had no fear of that. If Nick Porter had ridden hard, he would already have had time to cover the distance between the mine and McGurvin's.

McGurvin's ranch was the last place, short of Happenstance in the Picket Post Mountains, where water could be secured. Surely, if Porter had come that way, he would stop at the ranch. He had left the mine too hurriedly to equip himself with water canteens and rations for a prolonged stay in the desert. Frank's hopes were mounting high as the motor cycles devoured the distance that separated their riders from McGurvin's.

At last, in fifteen or twenty minutes—certainly less than half an hour—the mad pace was slowed as the destination hove duskily into sight. A yellow gleam showed at one of the windows of the ranch house, and suggested that the proprietor might be entertaining a caller.

The machines were halted at a little distance from the dwelling, and Merry stole forward to reconnoiter, ere announcing himself in person to McGurvin. There was no curtain at the window through which shone the lamp-light, and the lad crept up to it and looked into the room. Only one man was visible, and that was the ranch owner himself. He sat by a table, reading.

"I guess we're off the track, Roper," said Frank, rejoining Clancy. "I can't see any one but McGurvin through the window, and he's spelling out the news in a paper. If Porter was there, he and McGurvin would certainly be together."

"Not so certainly, Chip," answered Chancy. "Let's look in the corral for a tired horse. If we find one, then surely it's Porter's, and Porter has got into the house and gone to bed."

Only one horse and a burro were found, and the horse showed no evidence of recent hard riding. Frank was deeply puzzled.

"If the prospector came this way," said he, "there would be nothing else for it but for him to stop here. He wouldn't dare go on into the desert without food and water."

"Possibly he stopped, got what he wanted, and went on," Clancy hazarded.

"No, Clan. We can't be much more than half an hour from the mine; if we suppose that Porter had a full hour the start of us—it couldn't have been more than that—then he had only an hour and a half to ride here, and no time to pick up food and water and push his tired horse on into the desert. We'd better go back to Loco's and take the fork to Gold Hill."

"Let's not be in a rush, Chip. Now that we're here, we'd better find out what McGurvin has got to say."

"Of course," Frank returned, "we'll have a word or two with the rancher before we turn back."

The rancher was not surprised to have visitors drop in on him at that hour. The better part of his income was derived from the sale of water, brought up from his well by burro power, to prospectors and others who happened along that way. Such customers were liable to straggle in from any quarter at any hour.

"Pears mighty like I've seen you fellers some place before," said the rancher, staring hard at the boys. "Say," and his face cleared, "wasn't you along this way a few days ago with Barzy Blunt an' some more, runnin' some fool race or other?"

He referred to the "relay Marathon," which Frank and his chums had run against Blunt and his cowboy friends, to file in Gold Hill a location notice of Borrodaile's claim.

"Yes," smiled Frank, "we're the fellows."

"Well, sufferin' Mike!" guffawed McGurvin. "Sot down an' be sociable, can't ye?"

"We're in something of a hurry, McGurvin," Frank went on, "and can't stop long. Do you know a prospector named

Porter?"

McGurvin's face went blank, and he dug his fingers into his tousled hair.

"Not Andy Porter, from up Phoenix way?" he asked. "Squints with his off eye, and walks with a limp?"

"No," Frank answered, "this man is a big fellow, whiskers, ropy hair, gray eyes."

"New one on me," said McGurvin.

"Then, you haven't seen anything of him?"

"Nary a thing. What's he done? Stole a hoss?"

"We don't know what he has done, McGurvin. All we want is to have a talk with him. Can you spare us a couple of canteens, full of water, and a bag of rations—enough for two or three meals?"

"Shore," answered the rancher, "that's what I'm here fer. Dollar fer the water in the canteens, an' two dollars fer the canteens; then another two dollars fer the hand-out. Makes five, don't it?"

McGurvin had the reputation of being more or less of a robber. Having a monopoly of the water in that locality, he set his own prices, and did not fear competition.

"Five dollars is all right, McGurvin," said Frank.

"Blunt was out this way this afternoon, with a couple his pards," remarked McGurvin, unaware of the bomb was exploding. "They watered up, rested a spell, an' hiked on to the Picket Posts."

Merry was startled, but contrived not to show it. Clancy jumped, but his chum gave him a warning glance.

"Hustle around and get those supplies for us, please," urged Frank. "We're in a hurry."

"Hosses to water?" queried the rancher, starting for a rear door.

"No horses, McGurvin.

"Ottermobile, I reckon," deplored McGurvin. "If them things git too thick in the desert they'll be the ruination of me. I'll have yore stuff ready in ten minutes."

He went out through the door, Clancy leaped excitedly toward Merriwell.

"What's on your mind now, Chip?" he whispered. "Why the grub and water?"

"I made up my mind, all of a sudden, to extend this of ours to Happenstance."

"You're crazy!" gasped Clancy. "How can we find the way? It would be hard enough in broad daylight, but at night we'd get all twisted up, and end by losing ourselves in the foothills. If we're going to Happenstance, Chip, we'd better camp right here until morning, then cross the rough country when we can see what we're about."

"I had made up my mind to go on to-night," Merry answered, "even before McGurvin told us that about Barzy Blunt."

"Gee, but that was a bombshell! What do you suppose Blunt is doing out this way?"

"It's possible he may know something about the professor. Why did he go on to the Picket Posts? What business has Barzy Blunt got around the old camp of Happenstance, where the professor's claim is located? Before McGurvin told us Blunt had gone in that direction, I had made up my mind that we ought to take a look at the deserted town; now that I know Blunt is there. I am more anxious than ever to get to the place."

"But what about Porter?"

"Where he has gone is a mystery," said Merriwell, "but I think Blunt and his cowboy friends offer a more promising clew to the prof's whereabouts. We'll forget about Porter for the present, and give our attention to Blunt."

They talked in whispers for a short time longer, and then sat back suddenly in their chairs as McGurvin came into the room with two filled canteens and a small canvas bag of rations.

Merry exchanged five silver dollars for the supplies, and then the rancher followed the boys out and watched them while they started their machines.

"A couple o' gasoline go-devils, by thunder!" muttered McGurvin. "All kinds o' ways o' beatin' a man that sells water out o' his rights. If ye didn't have them contraptions, ye'd be shackin' along on a couple o' bronks, an my well 'u'd bring me in two bits a head fer each of 'em."

The rancher was still sputtering as the boys raced off through the starlight, heading into the desert. As soon as they were well away. McGurvin's wrath died in his throat, and he gave vent to a husky chuckle.

"On ter Happenstance, or I'm a Piute!" he muttered jubilantly. "Go it, you crazy galoots—but I 'opine ye won't find what ye're a-lookin' fer."

Still chuckling, he turned back into the house and pounded on a stovepipe that ran through the ceiling and into a room overhead.

"Have they gone, McGurvin?" came a muffled voice from above.

"I reckon they have, Nick," laughed the rancher; "they went pippity-poppin' away, each of 'em on a couple o' wheels run by gasoline."

"Where'd they go?"

"Happenstance, I reckon. Leastways, they headed inter the desert, p'intin' thataway."

A satisfied grunt echoed from above.

"Lucky I hitched yore bronk out in the scrub," went on McGurvin complacently. "I'll bet a-plenty them kids was nosin' around afore they come in here. But they didn't find nothin', nary, they didn't."

"*Buenas noches*, Mac," called down the man upstairs, "I'm turnin' in."

The words were followed by a faint echo of hoarse laughter. McGurvin caught up the sound with some heartiness as he locked the door, blew out the light, and went groping through the dark for his own bed.

CHAPTER VI.
A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

The entrance of Barzy Blunt into that mystifying tangle had been as sudden as it was unexpected. And yet, knowing Blunt as he did, Merry wondered that he had not thought of the fellow before.

Blunt was a young cow-puncher, who boasted of being a "homemade" athlete, and would take a back seat for nobody, least of all young Merriwell. He was not exactly "cracked" on the subject of his prowess in athletic sports, but his views were certainly warped. Obsessed with the idea that it was his duty to take Merriwell down a peg. Blunt was continually, and in the most weird and wonderful ways, contriving to force Merry into tests of strength and skill.

Merry had shown Blunt his heels in a hundred-yard dash, and at least once had put him on his back in a catch-as-catch-can wrestling bout. It was at Blunt's suggestion that the relay Marathon was run, with the professor's claim as the prize: and it was by a plot of Blunt's that Merry had been lured to the Bar Z Ranch, where, as Blunt had planned. Merry pitched against the cowboy in a baseball game. Frank and his chums had won the relay Marathon and Frank had pitched his cowboy team to victory. Yet Blunt still refused to be satisfied.

The "Cowboy Wonder," as Blunt called himself, had been reared by a man who had implanted in his growing mind a vast array of false notions. By these, the Wonder regulated his conduct, with a result that was ludicrous at times, and at other times almost tragic.

There was something about the queer fellow that young Merriwell liked. And yet, while he sympathized with Blunt to a certain extent, he was forced to condemn his rashness and dare-devil behavior.

"Clan." said Merry, as he and his chums moved on into the trackless desert, "while I sat in McGurvin's adobe it flashed over me, all at once, that we had forgotten something about Professor Borrodaile which might possibly explain his absence."

"What was that?"

"Why, you remember how we left Happenstance in such a hurry, the time we went to the place and found the prof?"

"We were chased out by Blunt and his puncher friends."

"Not exactly. We were hurrying out ahead of them in order to reach the automobile and beat Blunt to Gold Hill with the professor's location notice. Well we were in such a rush that Professor Borrodaile had to leave his luggage behind. Now, wouldn't it be the natural thing to suppose that the prof returned to Happenstance after his goods and chattels?"

"Holy mackerel!" exclaimed Clancy. "You've nicked it, Chip! That's just what the harmless old fossil has done. He wanted his trunk, and he slipped out of Gold Hill and went after it. We're thick, all right. It's a wonder that some of us didn't think of that earlier in the game. I shouldn't be surprised if we found the prof back in his old place in the only house left in Happenstance!"

"It's possible," said Merry. "Anyhow, that's the idea that flashed through my mind as I sat talking with McGurvin. And that's the reason I contracted for the canteens, the water, and the rations. Then, when McGurvin said what he did about Blunt, I was more anxious than ever to keep on to Happenstance."

"What do you think Blunt has got up his sleeve this time?"

"He's so full of wild ideas that there's no telling. If the professor is in Happenstance, then Blunt has some reason for following him there."

"And out of it all, Chip." declared Clancy, "there's going to come a contest of some sort between you and Blunt. The fellow's crazy on the subject of getting the better of you in some feat of strength and skill. Can't he ever be satisfied?"

"Seems not," Frank answered. "Sometimes I have a hunch that I ought to hang back and let Blunt make a winning. If that's what he wants, why not humor him?"

"Not on your life!" protested Clancy promptly. "You've got to meet Blunt at every point, and trim him well. I think he's 'yellow,' anyhow."

"You and I will never agree on that," said Merry. "There's good stuff in Barzy Blunt, and some day he's going to see the error of his way, and reform. When that happens, you'll find he has the making of an all-round star athlete."

Clancy muttered something under his breath. Whatever it was it certainly was not creditable to the Cowboy Wonder.

"We're getting into the hills," observed Clancy, shifting the subject, "and now, if we don't get lost, it will be because your bump of location is a lot better than mine."

Merry had the habit, at all times, of keen and careful observation, he had made but one trip to the old camp of Happenstance, but circumstances, at that time, had conspired to fix the route to it firmly in his mind. He had gone to the lost town of the Picket Posts in the Bradlaugh car, guided by Nick Porter, but he had ridden back to McGurvin's on a horse, accompanying the runners in the first lap of the relay race. So he had been able to use his faculty of observation to some purpose.

Could he follow the course by night, with the mountains a constant guide by day, all but blotted out in the starlight? He believed he could; and now the test of his confidence was at hand.

His keen eyes watched the ground as it ruffled into low foothills. Although he laid a zigzag course as his searchlight brought cactus clumps and thorn bushes into view, in the main he succeeded in dodging obstacles, and yet held to a fairly direct route. A mound of rocks, stark and almost shapeless in the gloom, guided him like a fingerboard; or a flat-topped hill, or a peculiar-shaped valley between two uplifts, set him on the right track. Mile by mile the black mountains came closer, and then Clancy himself began to pick up a landmark or two which he recognized.

"Chip," he cried, "you're a wonder! Unless I'm badly mistaken, we just passed the valley where we left the car when Porter led you, and Ballard, and I into the gap that cuts through the mountain wall to Happenstance."

"That was the valley, Clan," replied Merriwell, "and there's nothing very wonderful about getting back to it, either. It's just a matter of minding your P's and Q's, and remembering a thing or two. We couldn't take the car through the gap, but I believe we can make it with these machines. We'll go around the hills instead of over them."

Then began a sinuous weaving back and forth, following the seams in the uplifts and mounting steadily toward the narrow gap. The pace was slow and labored, but Frank unerringly traced the way until the motor-cycle lamps flung their round, yellow eyes squarely into the fissure of the mountain wall.

"Maybe there isn't anything wonderful about this," called Clancy, as Frank led the way into the narrow passage, "but—well, it gets my goat. Poor old Pink is missing the time of his life. Now, if we can find Borrodaile, and jog him into a realization of where he is and what he has done, we'll just about make a good night's work of it. It's a relief to know that the prof hasn't been in danger of being bunkoed out of his gold mine."

"We don't know that yet," Frank called back over his shoulder. "Don't take too much for granted, Red. This move on Happenstance may be putting us clear off the scent."

"I'll bet something it isn't," said Clancy, with supreme conviction.

Emerging from the pass, the boys descended into a circular valley, in whose center shapeless ruins covered all the old-time glories—such as they were—of a once bustling mining camp.

The searchlights pierced the vast heap of debris, and revealed the cluttered lane which had once been the town's main street. Carefully Frank steered through the passage and came at last to a halt in front of the only four walls in the place that remained standing. Here was the building in which they had discovered Professor Phineas Borrodaile, living alone in primitive surroundings and trying to imagine him self a troglodyte.

"Hello, professor!" shouted Clancy.

His voice echoed back and forth between the cliffs that rimmed the valley, but brought no answer.

"Not here!" he exclaimed, in a voice of profound disappointment.

"You really expected that yell would bring him?" Frank asked.

"I really did. Hang the luck! Say, Chip, I guess the theory won't hold water. The prof is still mysteriously absent, after all."

Merry had removed the lamp from his machine, and was standing in front of the old door. It was swinging by one rusty hinge, and he pushed it wide open.

"Look out for snakes, Chip!" warned Clancy.

Cautiously the boys pushed through the doorway and into the room that lay beyond. They looked around them, as Merry flashed the beam of light over the ruinous walls. Instinctively a gasp of surprise escaped them.

A cot had once stood at the side of the room, and there had been an oil stove in the place, and a shelf with some books, a chair, a trunk, and a few other odds and ends of primitive housekeeping. But now there was nothing. Every object had been cleaned out of the place and only the bare walls remained.

"Professor Borrodaile isn't here, Clan," said young Merriwell presently. "But he has been here, and made off with his plunder, that's plain. The question is where is the professor now?"

It was a startling discovery the boys had made; not in itself alone, but in the question to which it had given rise.

CHAPTER VII.
WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE.

Merry sat down on a chunk of adobe which had fallen out of the wall. Placing the lamp in the niche left by the chunk in its fall, he hooked up a knee between his hands, and grew thoughtful. Clancy found a seat for himself, and waited for the result of his chum's reflections. He waited so long that he became impatient.

"What's at the back of your head, Chip?" he asked. "There isn't a thing at the back of mine."

Frank dropped his knee, and looked at his watch.

"It's one o'clock in the morning," said he. "Let's have lunch."

"An ounce of grub is worth a pound of theory any old time," said the redheaded fellow cheerfully. "I'll lug in the canteens and the chuck bag."

He went out and returned with them, and he and Frank got busy with some sardine sandwiches, crackers, and cheese which McGurvin had provided for a "hand-out." The water in the canteens was refreshing, and likewise the fare, rough though it was.

"In the first place, Clan," reasoned Merry, "we've got to consider that it isn't exactly a cinch that Borrodaile has been here. It's probable, but not absolutely certain. Some desert Arab may have raided the place and carted away his stuff."

"Not likely," returned Clancy, swallowing a mouthful of sandwich. As he was about to take another bite, he had a thought that caused him to look up quickly. "Unless," he added. "Blunt and his friends did the looting. They came this way during the afternoon. They're not here now. Where are they?"

Frank shook his head.

"You might just as well ask where Porter is, or the prof," said he. "It's hopeless to try to keep track of Barzy Blunt, or to figure out from what he's done, what he's going to do next. From what McGurvin said, I thought Blunt had come here with some of his friends. Maybe he did. Possibly he collected the professor's goods and chattels and rode off with them. It isn't likely, though. Cow-punchers wouldn't be apt to do all that freighting on horseback. Would they take the trouble to balance a cot across one of their horses and ride away with it? Or the professor's trunk? I guess Blunt and his friends wouldn't have much use for the professor's plunder; so it's a fair surmise they didn't take it. Some one else did, that's evident. The testimony all points to the professor himself."

"He left Gold Hill to come to Happenstance," remarked Chancy. "Why didn't he tell us about it? It couldn't have been such an awful secret he had to keep it to himself."

"It's a deuce of a hard thing to figure out," said Merry. "I don't think we ever will understand it until Borrodaile bobs up and clears away the mystery himself. I've a hunch that Blunt is the key to this riddle of the professor's whereabouts. The Wonder may be somewhere around—that is, if McGurvin wasn't lying."

"You can bank on it, Chip, that a robber like McGurvin wouldn't tell the truth if it was to his interest to tell something else."

"He said he didn't know Nick Porter, a man who has been roaming these deserts all his life. If that's the truth, it's remarkable."

"Now you're getting back to Porter again. I thought we had agreed to let him go, and pin our faith to Barzy Blunt."

"Blunt, I think, is our best bet. I merely rang in Porter to give you my estimate of McGurvin's truthfulness. Porter couldn't have been at the McGurvin place, or we'd have found his horse."

"That's so." Clancy yawned. "I move we stay here all night and knock around a little in the morning. A good deal of the night has gone, anyway, and I guess we can stick out the rest of it in Happenstance. What do you say?"

"It's important to locate the professor," said Merry. "Dad's telegram puts that right up to us. Now that we're here, we'd better wait until morning and see if anything develops. We'll bring in the machines, hunt a couple of soft rocks, and see if we can't get a little sleep."

The motor cycles were trundled into the old house, the light put out, and the lads lay down on the old clay floor with lumps of broken adobe for pillows. In spite of the hard beds, the lack of even the most meager comforts, both Merry and Clancy were soon asleep.

Merry awoke, with a beam of sun in his eyes. He sat up, staring incredulously around him, and could hardly believe that several hours had passed. The sun was shining into the old ruin through the hanging door. Merry looked over toward the spot where he had last seen his chum, and found that Clancy was also sitting up.

"Top of the morning to you, Chip," grinned Clancy. "How many lumps on your backbone? I've counted a dozen on mine. This mattress was harder than the one in our room at Pophagan's—and that's going some. Any new theories this morning?"

"Haven't had time to think up any," laughed Merry. "It doesn't seem more than a minute since I put out the light and—er—turned in. What's happened, since I closed my eyes, is a perfect blank. How about that spring? It isn't big enough for a cold plunge, but we can duck our heads. Maybe that will clear our brains a little."

"Me for the spring!" cried Clancy, bounding to his feet.

Leaving the old house, they hurried to the spring, which they had located on their previous visit to Happenstance. The water was cool and clear, and the pool into which the water dripped was big enough for a partial ducking. Handkerchiefs served for towels, and there was a lot of good-natured joshing as the chums dabbed away at their dripping faces.

"On the way back to the grub bag," Clancy finally remarked, "I move that we make a detour by way of the ledge and the professor's mine. Let's make sure, Chip, that the claim is still there. Maybe it has vanished, like the prof."

The claim was found where it had been left, although some of the ore had vanished. The shelf was gouged and disfigured as though some one had put down a blast, blown a hole in the vein, and then taken away a lot of the ore.

"By Jove," exclaimed Merry, "here's something else we might lay to Blunt. I don't think, though, that he'd come here and steal any of the professor's ore."

"I've got my own ideas about that," said Clancy. "Some one has been here, anyhow. Did the professor do this, when he came for his household goods?"

"He wouldn't know how to drill a hole, cap a fuse, and touch off a stick of giant powder. No, Clan, it wasn't Professor Borrodaile. The deeper we get into this business, the more complicated it becomes."

The outcropping of ore was wonderfully rich. It was of the sort known as wire gold, and the rock was covered with a fuzzy yellow web of pure metal. What ore had been blown out by? the blast had been gathered up slick and clean.

"A bagful of that stuff," said Merry, "would mean a whole lot in dollars and cents. Somebody has been 'high grading.'"

"And he dropped a little of his swag as he went off with it," added Clancy, stepping off a few yards from the ledge and pointing to a bit of ore that lay on the ground. "There is some of the fellow's loot," Clancy went on. "It lies gold side up, and shimmers in the sun like a double eagle."

He looked at the sample for a few moments, and then slipped it into his pocket.

"Finding is keeping," he grinned. "This ought to pay you back, Chip, for the five you gave McGurvin in exchange for stuff that was actually worth about ten cents."

Frank ran past Clancy for a couple of rods straight out into the valley.

"It was a thundering bad leak, Clan," he called, stooping down and gathering in another ore sample. "That makes two chunks of the stuff the thief lost. He was probably in a rush to get away, and didn't notice how the ore was dribbling out."

"Wait a minute, Chip," said Clancy, "and let's figure this down as fine as we can. There are prints of a horse's hoofs along the course where this ore was dropped. Ballard ought to be here to do the Sherlock Holmes racket for us. I'm not very swift at this detective business, but I'll take my oath the thief loaded his bag of loot on a horse."

"You don't think, do you," said Frank dryly, "that he'd carry a bag weighing two or three hundred pounds over his shoulder? Of course, he had a pack animal. It wasn't a horse, though, but a burro."

"How did you guess it was a burro?"

"Small hoofmarks."

"Oh, scissors! Of course, of course! This claim of the professor's is too valuable to be left unguarded. He ought to begin working it, or else sell it to some one who'll see that it's taken care of. Let's take our gold ore and make tracks for the

chuck sack. I fell hungry, somehow."

As they started across the valley, at a distance of perhaps a hundred feet from the spot where Frank had picked up the second bit of ore, they found another. Fifty feet from that they found a fourth piece; and then as they paused at the lane leading through the heart of the ruined camp, their eyes, wandering toward the took-in one glittering point after another—each point a scrap of wire gold, glimmering in the sun.

"The thief left a trail," exclaimed Merry, "from ledge directly to the gap."

"And how much farther, Chip?" asked Clan excitedly. "Say, maybe we can follow that trail and find where the fellow went!"

It was a startling proposition, and yet one that might be easily demonstrated.

"We'll try it," said Frank, "but not till after breakfast. Come on, Clan, and we'll take another fall out of our rations; then ho, for the golden trail!"

As Merry spoke, a queer idea popped suddenly into his mind. He stopped short and stared at Clancy. The latter evidently was fired with the same notion.

"Ballard's dream!" muttered Clancy, rubbing a hand over his wet hair. "Hang it all, Chip, this is quite a jolt to a fellow who isn't at all superstitious. The golden trail! Why, Pink saw it three times hand running, in his sleep!"

Merriwell was not superstitious, and had no patience with any one who was. He was forced to admit, however, that a strange coincidence had developed in the matter of Ballard's dream and the discovery that had just been made.

"Pink dreamed of nuggets as big as washtubs," said the marveling Clancy, "and they were arranged like stepping-stones, and stretched from the professor's claim to Gold Hill."

By that time, Merry had got himself in hand. He laughed softly.

"Yes, Clan," said he, "I remember. These pieces of ore are not nuggets, however, and if the whole golden trail was raked together, I don't believe it would come anywhere near filling even a small-sized washtub. And I'll bet the trail doesn't lead from here to Gold Hill."

"In the dream," went on Clancy, "Pink saw a gang of toughs chasing the prof along the row of nuggets."

"Which is about as consistent as dreams usually are. If Professor Borrodaile wanted to get away from the toughs, why did he keep on his yellow stepping-stones? Why didn't he duck aside and hide in the bushes? All foolishness, Clan. Let's go and eat."

Making their way back to Professor Borrodaile's old lodgings, the boys ate a hurried breakfast. They were thrilled with the novel idea of following the trail of ore, and, perhaps, of overtaking the thief.

"The fellow, whoever he is," said Clancy, "may be able to tell us something about the professor."

"Everybody we run across out here is liable to be mixed up with the prof's disappearance," answered Merry.

Before starting, the two motor cycles were gone over carefully. Only a small amount of attention was needed to put them in trim for the morning's work. At last, with their canteens freshly filled and hung across their shoulders, and the dwindling bag of rations secured to Clancy's machine, they got clear of the old ruins and made their start along the golden trail.

The scattered ore led upward and through the gap, then out on the farther side and into the foothills. Nor did the trail, after getting away from the circular valley, point toward Gold Hill. On the contrary, it bent in the opposite direction.

"Here's where the facts knock another hole in Ballard's dream," said Frank. "Gold Hill is northwest of us, and the ore takes us southeast."

"We haven't any gasoline to waste, Chip," remarked Clancy, "and if we go very far in this direction we're liable to get hung up in the desert with a couple of dead engines."

"The reservoirs were still when we left the mine, Clan, and I guess, if we were careful, we can make the round trip without having to walk part of the way. If the golden trail promises to lead us too far, we'll hide the machines somewhere and go over some of it on foot:"

The man with the burro and the leaky ore bag had naturally hunted for the easiest way through the hills. His devious course bothered the boys a little in keeping track of the pieces of dropped ore. The pieces lay on the ground at irregular intervals. Sometimes there would be two samples within three or four yards of each other, and then perhaps the boys would have to go three or four hundred feet before they found another. At such times the hoofmarks of the burro served as a guide.

"That thief is a mighty careless sort of a man," said Clancy. "It's a wonder he didn't notice what was going on, and stop the leak."

"Strikes me," answered Merry, "that he walked, and led the burro. If that was the case he wasn't in a position to see that the loot was getting away from him."

For at least a mile the golden trail zigzagged through the foothills. Finally it came out on a level stretch of ground, partly covered with a chaparral of greasewood, ironwood, and paloverde.

Frank had been noticing for several minutes that the single set of burro tracks had grown into a veritable clutter of hoofprints. A good many of the prints were large enough to suggest that horses had passed over the golden trail.

Merry and Clancy were discussing the additional tracks as they wheeled out upon the flat bit of desert. They could make nothing of them, and the anxiety they caused was presently lost in another discovery: They had reached the end of the

line of ore!

Try as hard as they could, not another piece of wire-gold ore could they find. The thief, it appeared, must have discovered the hole in the bag, at that point, and have repaired it.

Still searching, and hoping against hope, the boys presently came close to the edge of the chaparral. Then, with stunning abruptness, a voice shouted from among the bushes.

"Now, then, pards, make a surround!"

It was a familiar voice. Merry as not so startled that he failed to realize that.

The chaparral shook and rustled with the movements of horsemen. In a moment four riders plunged into view and drew rein on each side and in front and rear of Merriwell and Clancy. The surprised lads recognized the fellows at once.

They were some of the cowboy athletes from the Bar Z Ranch—Blunt, the Cowboy Wonder, and his particular cronies, Ben Jordan, Bandy Harrison, and Aaron Lloyd.

"Whoop!" exulted Blunt, his spirited black horse rearing under his firm grip on the reins. "Look who's here, pard! It's Merriwell, by glory! Chip Merriwell, the son of his dad! Merriwell, the silk-stocking athlete! We're diamonds in the rough, pards, but he's cut and polished until he dazzles the eyes. Well, well! What do you think of this?"

Merry was conscious of one thing, and that was that the present meeting in the desert was due to chance alone, and not to any plotting on Blunt's part.

"Whoop!" jubilated Blunt's three companions, put to it somewhat to curb their restive mounts.

"Hold still, Frank, you crazy fool!" cried the Wonder, slapping his horse about the ears with his hat. "He's scared of those chug-chug bikes, same as the rest of the bronsks. Whoa, I tell you!"

Blunt was a master horseman, and soon had his plunging steed steadied down. Clancy looked up into the face of the Cowboy Wonder and scowled.

"You're the limit," he grunted. "I guess Chip will believe you've got a yellow streak, after this."

A smile, mirthless and ugly, crossed Blunt's bronzed face. Leaning forward along his horse's neck, he fixed his sloe-black eyes on Clancy's.

"Yeller streak, eh?" he echoed. "What is there, in this, to make Merriwell think I've got a thing like that?"

"Of course," flashed Clancy, "you touched up the professor's claim for the trail of ore we've been following front Happenstance."

"That's a lie," snapped Blunt. "We're cow-punchers, and homemade athletes, but we're not sneak thieves. We were on our way to a ranch beyond the Picket Posts after, a bunch of Bar Z strays. We watered, late yesterday afternoon, at the spring by old Happenstance, and we reached the range we were bound for at ten o'clock last night: Couldn't find the cattle we were looking for, and we started back an hour before dawn this morning. We struck that trail of ore half a mile from here, and turned back to run it out. Right in this place she petered out. While we were thinking about continuing on to McGurvin's, we heard you two popping this way, and took to the brush in order to give you a little surprise. That's the truth of it, and you can believe it or not?"

"I believe it, Blunt," Merry answered, with a restraining glance in his chum's direction. "Now that we have met you, possibly you can give us a little information. We're looking for the professor. He suddenly dropped out of sight, and we're anxious to locate him and get him back to Ophir."

"Wow!" exclaimed Ben Jordan. "Do we all know anything about this perfesser? Well, I reckon. Why, he's—"

"Cork!" shouted Blunt sharply. "You chaps keep still about the professor. I'll do the talking on that point." He turned in his saddle to face Merriwell, "We can tell you a whole lot about this professor of yours," he went on, "but I've an ax to grind, Merriwell, and the information is going to cost you something."

"I thought that was your stripe," sneered Clancy.

"Oh, you did? Say, if I wasn't so teetotally wrapped up in Merriwell, I'd give a little attention to you, my buck."

"What is the information going to cost?" asked Frank.

"It's going to cost you a fight—with me. Sabe? If you can put me down for the count, Merriwell, we'll not only tell, you what we know about Borrodaile, but we'll turn in, every man jack of us, and help you get hands on him."

That was Barzy Blunt to a hair. He never allowed a chance for a contest with young Frank Merriwell to get past him.

"Give him his wish, Chip—or let me," growled Clancy. "He ought to have a little sense pounded into that head of his, and here's an opening."

"If you're hankerin' fer a go, Redhead," called Ben Jordan, "mebby I could oblige."

"No," put in Frank. "This little matter is between Blunt and me. We've got the center of the stage, and were going to keep it. The rest of you can look on." He turned to the Cowboy Wonder. "Sparring is all right, Blunt," he continued, "but, if it is all the same to you, why not settle, the matter catch as catch can? I have already taken one fall out, of you, but you have always claimed you could have turned the tables on me if the bout hadn't been interrupted."

"I'm agreeable!" answered Blunt cheerily. "Best two out of three," he added, slipping out of his saddle and handing his reins to Randy Harrison. "Hitch, pards, and gather 'round. A diamond in the rough is going up against this polished article from the East. Watch me juggle with him." He threw up his head and roared in a kind of chant: "I'm Barzy Blunt, of the Bar Z Ranch, known to fame as the Cowboy Wonder! Whoop!"

"Whoop!" howled Blunt's three companions, leading the horses back toward the chaparral.

Frank had already begun to strip to the gymnasium clothes which he wore beneath his ordinary apparel as under garments. His sleeveless shirt he took off as well, thus matching the Wonder who was also stripping to the buff.

Merry knew that the cowboys would play fair, as they understood the word. They showed their sportsmanlike spirit by agreeing that Clancy should act as referee.

"If you're ready," said Clancy, "get busy!"

Warily the two wrestlers faced each other. Again, as in the relay Marathon, Merry was contesting with Blunt for the benefit of Borrodaile. And Merry, although the Wonder was a quick and powerful antagonist, was determined to win, and to do it handily.

CHAPTER IX.
A SHARP CLASH.

Barzy Blunt was a splendid specimen of physical development. His shoulders were broad, his chest deep, and there was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on his whole body. Under his clear, white skin the muscles tensed and flowed, as he crouched, and approached and retreated warily, looking for an opening. His movements were swift and graceful, carried out with a precision and certainty that not only claimed, but received, Merriwell's silent admiration.

But if Blunt was a fine specimen of a "homemade" athlete, Merriwell's more scientific training revealed him a shade better on every one of Blunt's points, admirable though they were. If Blunt's appearance suggested excellence, young Frank's spelled perfection. Even the cowboys, Blunt's partisans, could not refrain from exclamations that honored the "polished gem from the East." Nevertheless, the Bar Z fellows kept all their encouragement for their own champion.

"He's got nothin' on ye in weight. Barzy!" called Aaron Lloyd. "Flop him! Jump in an' turn him over!"

"For the honor of the ole Bar Z, Barzy!" whooped Ben Jordan.

"It's yore bout, pard!" cried Bandy Harrison.

Suddenly the two wrestlers rushed at each other. By a quick movement, Blunt secured a hold which Merry did not fancy, and he slipped out of his grasp. On the marble whiteness of Merriwell's bare back four livid streaks showed, and a flick of red oozed from one of them.

"First blood fer Barzy!" howled Harrison. "Ye left the mark of yer claws on him, pard! Don't let him git away from ye."

Again the two came together, and Blunt once more succeeded in getting under Merriwell and snapped, him over for a quick "flop." Merry, however, broke the hold as he went down, twisted to hands and knees, and bobbed up two feet away and again facing his antagonist.

The cowboys were wildly exultant. They believed that Barzy Blunt was showing his superiority in these initial moves.

But they were mistaken. Merry was merely trying out his adversary and calmly studying his weak and his strong points at the game.

Blunt, through lack of proper training, was making the grave mistake of using all his strength on what might be termed nonessentials. In wrestling, no more strength should be used than the moment calls for, a reserve being held for the supreme moment.

When the wrestlers came together for the third time, the time-honored hold of "one over and one under" was secured, and Merry was satisfied. From this, after a minute of squirming and twisting, Merry slipped to an arm-and-neck hold, his left hand about the back of Blunt's neck, right hand locked in his left elbow. Blunt began to kick.

"Stop that!" Clancy ordered sternly.

"Never mind, Clan," said Merry, "I've got him now."

With a swiftness and ease beautiful to see, Merriwell thrust his left foot between Blunt's kicking extremities, pushed the left arm farther, and completely around his neck, clung like a leech to his left elbow, twisted on his toes, bent his knees, and heaved upward. Blunt was lifted clear of the ground on Merry's back. It was the old reliable hip lock. The next instant, Blunt had fallen. Merry was on top and Blunt's shoulders squarely on the ground.

"First fall for Chip Merriwell," sang out Clancy. "He's a chip of the old block in more ways than one."

Blunt got up, smiling. It was his old, mirthless smile, and, like a barometer, announced his rising temper.

The second round was a little more exciting. Possibly Merriwell, wishing to encourage Blunt, gave him the initial advantage. A minute, or a minute and a half of fierce, silent struggling followed, Blunt blowing like a grampus and Merriwell taking it easily.

With an arm clasped around Merriwell's neck, Blunt labored tremendously to turn him over. Merry, however, was like a rock, and all the cowboy's efforts failed. He expended a vast amount of strength, which was exactly what Merry wanted.

Then, with startling suddenness, Merriwell from a rocklike, passive defense became the aggressor. He seemed to yield to Blunt's pushing and hauling, but that supposed yielding was a sorry disappointment to the cowboy. Somehow, Merry regained his feet; then, in a flash, Merry's right arm had Blunt's head in chancery, with Blunt at his back. With a

marshaling of his reserve strength, Merry turned the Wonder a somersault and laid him stunned and flat on his back.

"Well, I'll be blamed!" exclaimed Jordan, rubbing a dazed hand across his forehead. "That's the best I ever seen, an' no mistake."

"How the jumpin' sand hills did he do it?" murmured the bewildered Harrison.

"He's sure some on the wrestle!" exclaimed Aaron Lloyd.

"Second fall," announced Clancy crisply. "Two straight for Chip Merriwell, and he wins."

Frank, breathing a little hard, hurried to kneel at Blunt's side.

"Didn't hurt you, did I?" he asked anxiously.

Blunt sat up and stared at him, smiling wrathfully, and his jet-black eyes two points of flame.

"No, you didn't hurt me," he answered. "I'm all rawhide and whalebone, and it isn't in you to hurt me. Confound you, I'll get you at something or other yet. Want to spar with bare knuckles?"

"Not to-day," Frank answered. "A bargain is a bargain, Blunt. I won this set-to in a couple of straight falls. Now, tell me what you know about Professor Borrodaile."

Jordan brought Blunt's shirt, and began pulling it over his head. Harrison rushed to the horses and returned with a canteen. Blunt took a long pull at the canteen, and got up.

"If you're afraid to spar—" he began, but Clancy interrupted him.

"You've lost out, Blunt, and Merriwell has bought and paid for the information about Professor Borrodaile. Give it to him."

"That's right, old pard," put in Lloyd. "Come across, or let some o' the rest of us."

"I'll do the talking." Blunt answered. "Yesterday afternoon," said he, "we stopped for a while at McGurvin's. While we were watering the bronks, I looked up and saw a man's face at an upstairs window. It was the face of this professor of yours."

"Great Scott!" gulped Clancy, staring.

"At McGurvin's?" demanded Merry, no less excited.

"Yes, at McGurvin's. I asked Mac what the professor was doing in his house, and he answered that what I didn't know wouldn't bother me. It was none of my put-in, and so I let it go at that, There's something else to it, too. Tell what you found out in Gold Hill, Aaron, two days ago."

Merry and Clancy turned their eyes on Lloyd.

"I was there fer the ranch mail," began Lloyd, "an' Nick Porter was crookin' his elbow a-plenty. And talking a heap, too. In front of the Red Light he had a feller in flashy clothes with a sandy mustache, and the two was goin' it some in the gab line. I was leanin' against the front of the Red Light, at the time, a-readin' a letter, an' I couldn't help hear a little of what them two said. 'Sam'll put down a hole an' blow out a bag o' samples,' says Porter, 'an' bring 'em round about to Mac's. Turkeyfoot'll take the perfesser on from Mac's to the old camp the mornin' after Sam gits through. Arter loadin' up with the perfesser's plunder, he'll bring him back to Mac's, an' Mac'll hold him. Then you, Heppner, can go out to Mac's Tuesday artnoon an' make yer play.' That's all," finished Lloyd.

"Aaron didn't remember all that until after I'd seen the professor at the window," interpolated Blunt. "Then, as we were riding on, he let it out."

"Blazes!" exclaimed Clancy. "There's a scheme on to rob Borrodaile of that claim of his!"

"Looks thataway," said Lloyd passively.

"Who is this Sam that was to get the bag of samples and take it to McGurvin's by a roundabout way?" queried Merriwell.

"No sabe."

"He's the fellow that had the leaky bag and dropped this trail of ore! Who's Turkeyfoot?"

"Feller that lives out o' Gold Hill a ways. Does freightin'."

"The way I size it up," said Frank, "the professor hired this Turkeyfoot to come to Happenchance with him and get the goods he had left there. They halted at McGurvin's place long enough to give Sam time to do his blasting and make off with the samples. Then the professor and Turkeyfoot went to the claim, got the professor's goods, and went back to McGurvin's; and there, fellows, the professor is being held until this man in flashy clothes comes out and does something to beat Borrodaile out of the claim."

"That's you," said Blunt. "To-day's Tuesday; and it's this afternoon that the business is to be pulled off. The thing to do is to hike for McGurvin's and nip the affair in the bud. Mac is on the side of the opposition, and so is Sam, and Turkeyfoot, and the flashily dressed juniper. That makes four, Merriwell, and there are only you and Clancy to see this game through. We'll help. That was part of the bargain, and we Bar Z fellows stand up to our agreements."

"We were at McGurvin's, last night," remarked Frank, puzzled. "There wasn't any one there but the rancher himself."

"Shucks," said Blunt, "you're easy. There might have been a houseful, and you none the wiser. McGurvin's so crooked he can't walk around his house without running into himself. Everybody knows that."

Merry's dark eyes began to flash,

"This is an outrage!" he exclaimed. "McGurvin, and all the rest who are working with him, ought to be arrested!"

Blunt laughed.

"What do you want to arrest him for?" he asked. "Beat him at his own game and let it go at that. Climb aboard your chug bikes, and we'll mount and hurry along with you. We can get to the ranch in time to make McGurvin and his bunch look two ways for comfort."

Merriwell realized the need of hurry. The sun was climbing toward the zenith, and afternoon, and the working out of the plot against Borrodaile, would soon be at hand. Without further delay he got into his clothes; then he and Clancy started their machines and headed for McGurvin's. The cowboys galloped along just behind them.

CHAPTER X.
FOILING THE PLOTTERS.

Merriwell and Clancy had to diminish their speed in order to let the cowboys keep them in sight. This was annoying, and Merry formed another plan and slowed to a halt in order to broach it to Blunt.

"Clancy and I," said he, as Blunt and his friends galloped up, "can cover the ground between here and McGurvin's four times as quick as you fellows. I think we had better push on."

"What's the use?" Blunt demanded. "We'll all get there before afternoon."

"Suppose the man with the flashy clothes and the red mustache should take it into his head to come to McGurvin's before afternoon?"

"Then maybe it's too late. Possibly he's there now."

"We'll go on and see," said Merry. "You fellows can lope along and get there in time to help Clancy and me, if we find they're too many for us."

"Correct, Merriwell. We'll come a-smoking."

Frank and Owen ducked through the rough country like a couple of meteors. The daylight was all they needed to help them in their flight over a course so carefully covered the night before. Again, as once before, the professor's claim was at stake, and the motorcycles were pushed to, the utmost in an attempt to reach McGurvin's and head off the scoundrelly work of the plotters.

It seemed almost no time at all until the verdant spot, irrigated by McGurvin's well, came into view in the distance across the bare sands.

"We'll make a detour, Clan," said Merry, "and come up on the ranch from the rear. There are only two of us, you know, and we will have to proceed with care if we don't want to spoil everything."

"Sure," Clancy promptly assented. "We'd better leave our machines in the brush somewhere, and move up on the adobe on foot. If we don't, McGurvin will hear us."

This plan was carried out. The motor cycles were left at a safe distance, and the lads crept cautiously forward under the screen of McGurvin's corral. Corn was growing in the irrigated truck patch, and Merry and Clancy got into it and moved upon the house.

Presently they began to hear voices; then, catching a glimpse of McGurvin's hitching pole, they saw a saddle horse secured there.

"Looks like our man was here already," Merry whispered in his chum's ear.

"Where is the talking coming from?" returned Clancy. "It seems pretty close."

"We'll find out."

On hands and knees the boys crept on, screened by the broad leaves of the corn. Presently Merry reached the edge of the cornfield, and paused. The shady side of the house was not over twenty feet from him, and there comfortably seated, was a florid, flashily dressed, red-mustached person. Opposite him, in another chair, was not less a personage than Professor Phineas Borrodaile. He was looking over his glasses in consternation at the man with the red mustache. Grouped in the background were McGurvin and two flannel-shirted, rough-looking Arizonians.

It had been a happy inspiration of Merry's to hasten on ahead of the cowboys. It was not afternoon, yet already the stage was set and the play for the professor's claim was being made. Clancy gripped his chum tensely by the arm. They did not speak, even in whispers, but crouched at the edge of the corn and watched and listened.

"Yes, indeed," the professor was saying, in his cracked voice, "you aver rightly, Mr. Heppner, that this is a remarkable country, most remarkable. Over in the Picket Post Mountains, if you please, I have seen misty island-like protuberances, resembling greatly the post-pliocene crannoges of the Roscommon loughs. Now—"

"Call off the dog, professor," interrupted Heppner. "I'm a government agent, and I'm here on business. See? You didn't know you'd jumped a mining claim belonging to McGurvin, but such is the fact. This will have to be straightened out, or the responsibility will rest heavily upon you. Now, speaking personal, I'd hate a heap to see you sent to jail, seeing as

how you're in this country for your health. Jails ain't a health resort, by any manner of means. What do you propose to do about this?"

"Dear me!" murmured Borrodaile, taking off his hat and rubbing the top of his bald head. "I am not dishonest, gentlemen. I assure you that I want only to do what's right. The claim I located was discovered by my nephew; and I am his next of kin. I supposed, you understand, that it was rightfully mine."

"Sure," answered the bogus government agent heartily, "I can see right where you made your mistake. How could you know that, in the years that followed your nephew's discovery, the claim was located again by McGurvin, there? When did you locate it, Mac?" he asked, turning on the rancher.

"Night onto two year ago," asserted McGurvin solemnly.

"There you are!" exclaimed Heppner triumphantly. "McGurvin has done the assessment work, so it belonged to him. And you jumped it. State's prison offense, professor."

The professor shuddered.

"I didn't intend to do any wrong," he answered.

"Ignorance of the law," expounded Heppner, "excuses no one. Still, speaking personal, I'm here to let you off light. You've had a lot of trouble in this matter, and McGurvin is willing to give you a hundred dollars for that. You will have to sign a quitclaim deed, though, so as to clear up the title. I call that," beamed Heppner, "mighty generous."

"A heap more'n I ort ter do," said McGurvin, in a burst of frankness.

"More'n I'd do, Mac," said one of the two others.

"Ye know, Sam," whimpered the rancher, "I allers was troubled with enlargement of the heart, I reckon, someday, it'll be the ruination o' me. Ain't that so, Turkeyfoot?"

"Not as nobody can notice," replied the other bystander. "All I wants is to see the pefesser git his rights. I was totin' his stuff ter town, an' I'm in his pay. I stick fer the hunderd, an' you can whine all ye darn please."

"Mr. Turkeyfoot," said the professor, casting a grateful look at that noble gentleman, "I shall never forget your loyalty and kindness to me. If you insist, I will accept the hundred dollars, and sign this quit claim. All I want is to do what is right. *Otium oum dignitate*, that is my motto, and what I am seeking. Such matters as this, in which I have unwittingly erred, distress me greatly."

Heppner had pulled a paper and a fountain pen from his pocket.

"There ain't no odium attached to this move, professor," he said reassuringly. "You have done wrong, but you are doing your best to make amends." He got up and handed the pen to the professor, and then opened out the paper. "Sign there," said he. "Mac," he added, "have your hundred dollars ready."

McGurvin went down into his trousers, fished up a roll of bills, and held it in his hand, eying it hungrily. The professor, hunting for a place on which to write, stood up and laid the paper against the wall of the house.

Merry was astounded to think that Borrodaile should prove so lacking in ordinary understanding as to take the words of that gang of tricksters in such a matter. But he was child, so far as business affairs were concerned. It was easy to make him believe anything, so long as his particular field of knowledge was not intruded upon.

Something had to be done, and Merry was not long in doing it. A bold move was necessary. If Heppner ever got that signed quitclaim deed in his hands, the transaction would be badly complicated.

Starting up, Merriwell jumped clear of the cornfield, dashed across the space separating him from the group of men in the shade of the house, and, before the astounded plotters could interfere, he had reached over the professor's shoulder, snatched the paper out of his hands, and torn it to bits.

"Blast ye!" roared McGurvin, jumping forward savagely. "What right you got buttin' in?"

Sam, Turkeyfoot, and Heppner likewise confronted Merry with flaming eyes and twitching, angry faces. The professor fell back, astounded.

"Merriwell!" he gasped, lifting a hand to his forehead.

Clancy, losing not a moment, jumped to place himself at his chum's side.

"You're a pack of curs!" cried Merriwell, "and you're trying to swindle the professor out of a bonanza mining claim. You—"

With a snarl of rage, all four of the plotters began closing in on Merry and Clancy.

CHAPTER XI.
THE COWBOYS SAVE THE DAY.

For a few moments matters took on a serious aspect for the two boys. The quitclaim deed, however, had been destroyed, and there was no fear that Professor Borrodaile would again fall into Heppner's trap. Frank had counted upon this, and had even figured that he would have to take a few hard knocks in bringing it about.

Heppner, fairly boiling, was rushing at Merry like an unleashed tornado. McGurvin, too, was plunging toward him from the right. Sam and Turkeyfoot were making Clancy the object of their attack.

Merry felt that Heppner was entitled to a little something as a memorial of the plot that failed. So, dodging the bull-like rush of McGurvin, he jumped at Heppner, and his doubled fist shot out like a battering-ram.

"Oof!" Heppner grunted, flinging up his arms.

Frank's knuckles had landed on the point of his heavy, brutelike jaw, in just the place best calculated to make a man see stars, and, incidentally, to teach him a lesson.

The "government agent" reeled back and staggered groggily. McGurvin, swearing furiously, flung his arms around Frank from behind.

"I'll wring yer neck fer ye, you young terror!" threatened the rancher.

And it was at that moment, when Merry and Clancy were hard beset, that a Bar Z yell floated down the breeze. It came with an accompaniment of wildly galloping hoofs. High above the tumult and the shouting arose the voice of Barzy Blunt:

"Hang to it, Merriwell! We're on the way!"

The coming of reënforcements had a dampening effect upon the ardor of McGurvin, Sam, and Turkeyfoot. The rancher released Frank and started at a hurried pace for the other side of his house. Sam and Turkeyfoot also attempted to decamp, but they were not quick enough.

The cowboys, throwing themselves from their horses, rushed pell-mell to take a hand in the conflict. Such a ruction appealed to them, and they proceeded to wade into Sam and Turkey foot. Frank and Blunt went on a hurried search for McGurvin.

The rancher was finally located, barricaded behind a locked door, and he was breathing fierce threats of ravage and slaughter.

"Keep away from me, or I'll fill ye fuller o' holes than a pepperbox!" was one of the rancher's many remarks.

Blunt, laughing loudly, threw himself against the door. With Frank's help, it was kicked open. And McGurvin did not shoot. It transpired that he had nothing to shoot with. He tried to fight, but Merry and Blunt got him in hand and dragged him out of doors.

"Tell us about this, you blamed coyote," said Blunt, "and be quick. You've got about as much grit as a chipmunk, and if you don't talk we'll show you a trick or two that will make you wish you had."

"What you a-tryin' to do, Barzy?" asked McGurvin in an injured tone. "Takin' the part o' this Eastern crowd agin' me?"

"Pah!" exclaimed the Cowboy Wonder, in disgust. "I'm no friend of yours, you old tinhorn. What were you trying to do? Out with it."

"It wasn't me, Barzy," whimpered McGurvin, "it was Heppner—Heppner from Tombstone. He put it all up—him an' Nick Porter."

"Put what up?"

"Why, this scheme to beat the perfesser out o' that claim o' his. I was drawed inter it innercent like."

"Yes, you were mighty innocent!" put in Frank scathingly. "You pretended that you had located the professor's claim a long while ago, and that the professor had jumped it. Heppner professed to be a government agent sent here to straighten the matter out, and you were to give Borrodaile a hundred dollars for a quitclaim deed to the mine."

"A hundred dollars?" gasped Blunt. "Great snakes! Why, that claim's worth thousands. The professor stood for that yarn?"

"They had him scared stiff," said Merriwell. "He was signing the deed when I jumped out of the cornfield and grabbed it away from him."

"It was Heppner's doin's," insisted McGurvin. "He was ter gi' me a hundred for helpin' him."

"You were to sign the quitclaim over to him, eh?" asked Blunt.

"That's the how o' it, Barzy. He's a villain, that Heppner person, but I was took in by his wiles."

"How much was Sam to get?" asked Merry.

"He was gittin' another hunderd fer the bag o' samples, an' fer helpin' in other ways."

"And Turkeyfoot?"

"Another hunderd was comin' ter him, same's to the rest o' us."

"How about Nick Porter?"

"Dunno how much he was ter git. He told Heppner about the perfesser an' the claim in the fust place, so I reckon he come higher. The perfesser is kinder weak in the headpiece. He'd b'leeve anythin'. Nick Porter tole me so when he was here last night."

"Oh!" said Merry. "So Porter was here, was he, when Clancy and I came looking for him?"

"Well, yes. I didn't say nothin' ter you about it, Merriwell, bec'us I didn't dare. Porter would 'a' killed me, if I had."

"You're a skunk!" gritted Barzy Blunt.

"Where's Porter now?" demanded. Frank.

"He hiked out early this mornin'. Say, Barzy, I heerd ye wasn't no friend o' Merriwell's."

"I'm not," was the answer. "I made a bargain with him, and this is part of it."

"Where are the professor's goods and Turkeyfoot's wagon?" Merry questioned.

"Out in the scrub," was the rancher's reply. "So's Sam's burro, which he took when he went arter the ore t'other day. Sam was gittin' the ore ter show Heppner. He lost part o' it on the way here, but enough was left ter make Heppner open his eyes a whole lot. He allowed it was the richest claim he ever seen."

"Yes," remarked Blunt, "we know all about Sam's losing the ore. But for that golden trail, Merriwell, you and I would never have got together out there in the desert, and this scheme against the professor might have worked to a fare you well. I'd never have butted in, if you hadn't bested me with two straight falls."

"Have you been keeping the professor here against his will?" demanded Frank of McGurvin.

"Nary, I wasn't. Turkeyfoot had him skeered. He tells the perfessor there's a gov'ment agent arter him, named Heppner, an' that the claim he thought he located he really jumped. That was Turkeyfoot's part a' it—puttendin' ter be the perfesser's friend an' goadin' him on ter fall in with Heppner's plan. Oh, Turkeyfoot's a missable skunk, all right."

"The professor stayed here because Turkeyfoot told him to?" asked Frank, far gone with wonder on Borrodaile's account.

"That's the how of it, an' I'm givin' it to ye straight." Clancy had come up during part of the talk with McGurvin, and presently Ben Jordan arrived with Turkeyfoot, and Harrison and Lloyd with Sam. The professor, dazed and bewildered, came pottering along presently, and stood off at a distance while he tried to adjust his wits to the sudden whirl of events.

"Where's Heppner, Clan?" Merry asked.

"Concluded he hadn't better stay, Chip," Clancy explained. "Just as the cowboys got here, Heppner jumped to the back of his horse and began hitting the high places. He took your mark along with him, though," the redheaded chap finished, with a laugh.

Merry walked over to Borrodaile and laid a soothing hand on his shoulder.

"Wake up, professor," said he. "It's all over, and you've still got your claim."

"My boy," answered the professor, still a little "flighty," "I don't want that claim if it's not legally mine."

"It is legally yours. Heppner was only pretending to be a government agent, and McGurvin never saw the claim."

"Well, well!" murmured the professor, mildly surprised. "Then they were dishonest?"

"I should say!"

"But Mr. Turkeyfoot is my friend. He thought I had done wrong, and he fought loyally to get me off and to make McGurvin give me a hundred dollars."

Clancy turned away to hide a laugh.

"Turkeyfoot deceived you, just as the others did," Frank explained patiently. "You hired him to go to Happenstance after the stuff you had left there?"

"Yes. We came thus far on our way, and Mr. Turkeyfoot explained how I had laid myself liable to fine and imprisonment for stealing a claim. He said I must remain here at McGurvin's for a time, and—er—keep shady. That is the term he used, I believe. Well, I kept shady until he came to go to the old town. Then, when we returned from there, I had to keep shady again. A little while ago Mr. Heppner arrived, saying he represented the government, and—and—Well," and the professor drew a long sigh, "I'm glad to know I haven't stolen anything from anybody."

"Why did you leave Ophir for Gold Hill?"

"Mr. Porter told me about Mr. Turkeyfoot, and said he was the one to go out and bring in my personal effects, You had had enough trouble on my account, Merriwell, and I did not want to bother you further. Yet it seems," he finished regretfully, "that I have done the very thing I tried not to do."

"I'm going to take you back to Ophir," declared Merry, "and do what I can to look out for you."

"I am quite capable of looking out for myself, Merriwell; nevertheless, I shall be glad to have you near me to offer advice. Your father had a very good business head, and I presume you are likewise gifted." His face brightened perceptibly as he went on: "While returning from Happenstance with my personal effects, I clipped a really excellent specimen of amorphous diapase from a reef among the hills. The cellular crystallization of the diapase is intensely interesting. It will give me pleasure to show it to you, Merriwell, and—"

"Never mind that just now, professor," Frank answered. "Turkeyfoot is getting ready to take you on to Ophir. Clancy and I have a couple of motor cycles, but we're going to load them in Turkeyfoot's wagon and ride with you."

"Just why do you inconvenience yourself in that manner?"

"To make sure that nobody takes the mining claim away from you between here and the Ophir House," said Frank.

The professor looked puzzled, but was wise enough not to ask Merriwell to explain.

THE END.

"Frank Merriwell, Junior's, Competitor; or, The Honor of the Game," is the title of the story that will be found in the next issue of this weekly. In this story, Barzy Blunt is defeated by young Merriwell in another feat of strength and skill, and he begins to see light. Frank gets a letter from his father which is full of interesting surprises. You will find this narrative of the doings of Chip Merriwell and his chums to be full of incident and sustained excitement. It is No. 12, and will be out October 19th.