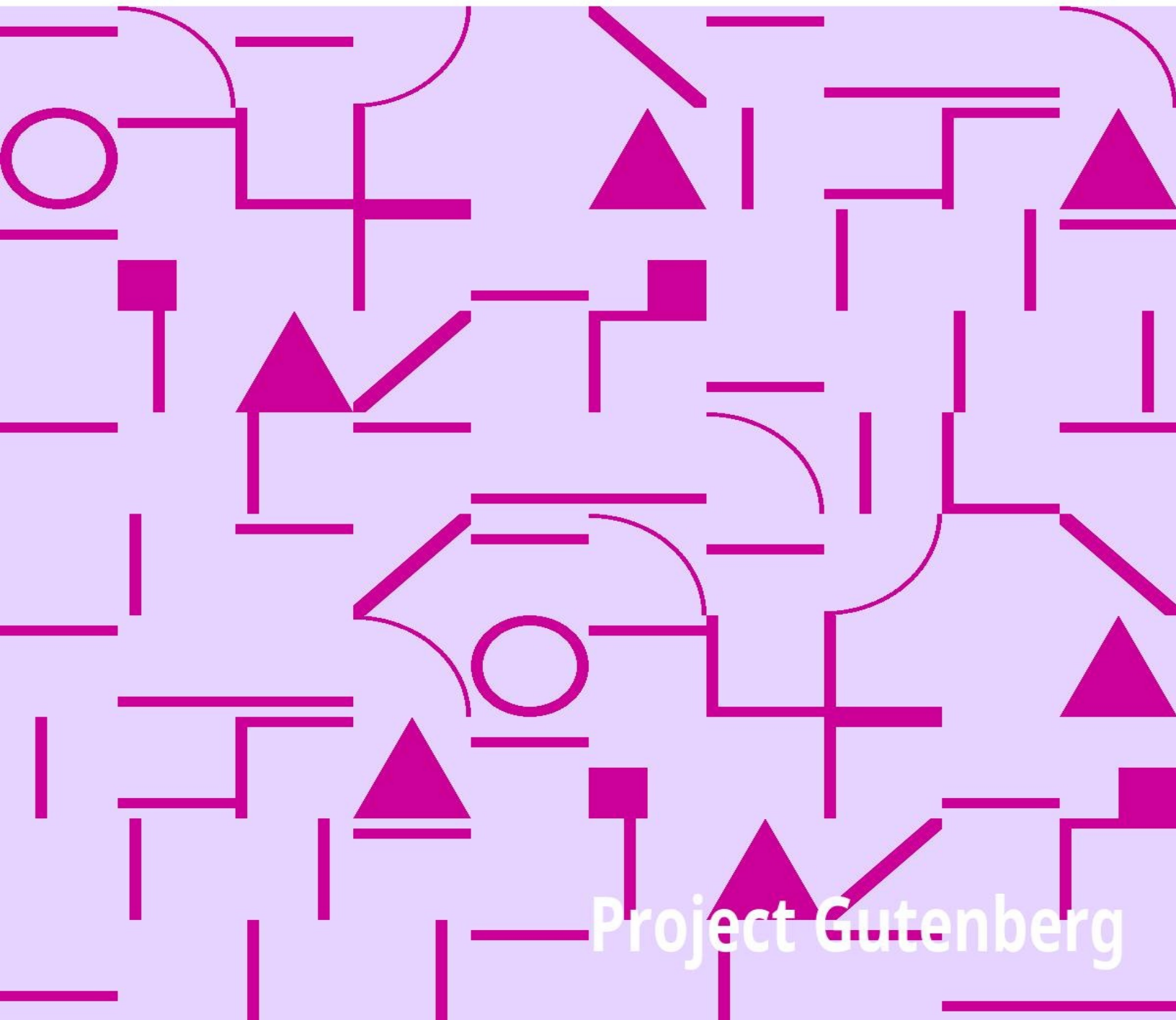


Dick Merriwell Abroad; Or, The Ban of the Terrible Ten

Burt L. Standish



Project Gutenberg

The Project Gutenberg eBook, Dick Merriwell Abroad, by Burt L. Standish

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org

Title: Dick Merriwell Abroad

The Ban of the Terrible Ten

Author: Burt L. Standish

Release Date: January 12, 2013 [eBook #41827]

Language: English

Character set encoding: UTF-8

***START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DICK
MERRIWELL ABROAD***

E-text prepared by Roger Frank
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team
(<http://www.pgdp.net>)

DICK MERRIWELL ABROAD

OR

THE BAN OF THE TERRIBLE TEN

By

BURT L. STANDISH

Author of the celebrated "Merriwell" stories, which are the favorite reading of over half a million up-to-date American boys. Catalogue sent free upon request.

STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS
79-89 SEVENTH AVE., NEW YORK CITY

Copyright, 1904 and 1905
By STREET & SMITH
Dick Merriwell Abroad

All rights reserved, including that of translation
into foreign languages, including the Scandinavian.

CONTENTS

- I. THE STORY OF QUEEN MARY.
- II. THE MEETING AT THE CASTLE.
- III. AT BEN CLEUCH INN.
- IV. BUDTHORNE'S STRUGGLE.
- V. LIKE A BIRD OF EVIL OMEN.
- VI. BUNOL'S PLOT.
- VII. DONE BENEATH THE STARS.
- VIII. BUNOL MAKES HIS DEMAND.
- IX. THE FIGHT IN THE CASTLE.
- X. THE HAUNTS OF ROBIN HOOD.
- XI. THE SPANIARD AGAIN.
- XII. THE STRUGGLE.
- XIII. PROFESSOR GUNN'S WILD RIDE.
- XIV. AN EXCITING CHASE.
- XV. THE HAUNTED MILL.
- XVI. SUNSET ON THE GRAND CANAL.
- XVII. THE RING OF IRON.
- XVIII. WHEN STEEL MEETS STEEL.
- XIX. THE BURSTING OF THE DOOR.
- XX. THE OATH OF TERESA.
- XXI. THE LAST STROKE.
- XXII. BEFORE THE PARTHENON.
- XXIII. FIGHTING BLOOD OF AMERICA.
- XXIV. MARO AND TYRUS.
- XXV. TWO ENGLISHMEN.
- XXVI. WAS IT A MISTAKE?
- XXVII. THE PURSUIT.
- XXVIII. DONATUS, THE SULIOTE.
- XXIX. IN THE CAVE.
- XXX. OUT OF THE TOILS.

DICK MERRIWELL ABROAD.

CHAPTER I.—THE STORY OF QUEEN MARY.

“Well, here we are, boys, in Scotland, the land of feuds, of clans, of Wallace, Bruce, Scott, Burns, and of limitless thrilling stories and legends.”

Professor Zenas Gunn was the speaker. With Dick Merriwell and Brad Buckhart, Merriwell’s friend and former roommate at the Fardale Military Academy, as his traveling companions, he had landed at Leith the previous day, having come by steamer from London. The three were now in Edinburgh, strolling down High Street on their way to visit Holyrood Castle.

It was nipping cold. There had been a light fall of snow; but the sun was shining, and the clear air, in strong contrast to the heavy, smoky atmosphere of London, gave them a feeling of lightness and exhilaration.

Perhaps it is not quite true to say it gave them all such a feeling, for there was an expression of disappointment on the face of the boy from Texas, a slight cloud of gloom that nothing seemed to dispel.

The old professor, however, was in high spirits.

“While we’re here, boys,” he said, “we’ll visit as many of the interesting places as possible. Already we have seen Scott’s monument, and to-morrow we will make an excursion to Melrose, and visit Melrose Abbey and Abbotsford. Later on, perhaps, we’ll run over to Loch Lomond and see Rob Roy’s prison and the cottage where Helen MacGregor, Rob Roy’s wife, was born. At Stirling we’ll feast our eyes on the Wallace Monument, which stands on the spot where the great hero defeated England’s army of invasion. Think what it will mean to stand on the field of Bannockburn!

“The English army, my boys, numbered one hundred thousand, while the Scots were less than forty thousand. But Scotland had not forgotten the terrible death of Wallace, who had been captured, carried to London, condemned to die, hanged, cut down while yet alive, to have portions of his body burned, and at last to be decapitated, his head being afterward placed on a pole on London Bridge. The Scottish army of forty thousand was led by the successor and avenger of Wallace, Robert Bruce, who achieved the marvelous object of driving the invaders from the country, fighting on until nowhere did an English foot crush the heather of Scotland.

“Ah! boys, these tales of heroism are the things to stir one’s blood, and make him feel that he might do great, and noble, and heroic things should the opportunity present itself. But in these prosaic, modern times men have little

chance to become heroes. Now I feel that I, Zenas Gunn—had I been given the opportunity—might have become a great leader, a great hero, and my name might have lived in history. I’ve always regretted the fact that I was born too late to take part in any of the great struggles for human liberty. I am naturally a fighter. I think that old rascal, Barnaby Gooch, found out that I possessed the courage of a lion and the ability to fight like blazes. When we return to Fardale, boys, he’ll find out something else, I promise you that. Yes, sir, he’ll find out that he’s not the whole thing at that academy.”

“I hope so,” muttered Brad. “I certain hope he’ll get all that’s coming to him.”

“Leave it to me,” nodded Zenas. “I’ll attend to that in due time. In the meantime, boys, we’ll travel and enjoy the things we see while we are educating ourselves at the same time. Ha! there is Holyrood Palace, once the home of that loveliest of women, Mary, Queen of Scots. And there is the chapel in which she was married to Lord Darnley.”

The grim old castle stood before them, its turrets and towers rising against the bleak mountain background in impressive grandeur. There was snow on the mountains, and this made the outlines of the castle stand out sharply and distinctly.

“Stand here a few minutes boys,” invited the old professor. “Before we enter the castle, which will open to admit visitors at eleven o’clock, let’s brush up a little on the romantic and pathetic history of Queen Mary. I’ve always taken the liveliest interest in the story of her career. You know that first she was married to Francis II. and lived in France. After Francis died she returned to Scotland where she was immediately surrounded by a throng of royal suitors. Out of them all she selected that handsome, egotistical, vain, selfish young reprobate, Lord Darnley, which was a frightful mistake, for in a short time he began to treat her with discourtesy and absolute brutality, drinking to excess and behaving in a manner that made him generally detested at court.”

“But I have read that Queen Mary transferred her affection to an Italian musician named Rizzio,” said Dick.

“Hum! haw! Haw! hum!” coughed the professor. “A slander invented by the scheming noblemen about her who wished to rob her of her power in order to advance their own selfish ends. It is doubtful if they made Darnley himself believe it, but they told him it would advance him, and he fell into the trap.”

“But historians say Rizzio was very handsome.”

“Some do, and some say he was very plain and uncomely. It is impossible to tell which story is true; but beyond doubt he was a splendid singer. It was his voice that first attracted Mary. One winter’s day, while at mass, she heard a rich,

sonorous voice of great sweetness and power ringing through the aisles. In answer to her inquiries concerning the singer, they told her it was Rizzio, private secretary to the ambassador from Savoy. Mary's taste in music was of the finest, and she became greatly interested. There is a famous painting by David Neil, which shows the queen standing on the palace steps and regarding Rizzio, who has fallen asleep, mandolin by his side, near at hand. In this picture he is represented as being very handsome; but artists, like poets, take license with facts."

"Is there any question as to the great friendliness that sprang up between them?" asked Dick.

"Oh, undoubtedly they became friends," nodded Gunn; "and in this friendship the scheming noblemen who surrounded the queen saw their opportunity. They did their best to arouse the jealousy of Darnley, filling his ears with lies. Darnley was still little more than a boy, and he easily became a tool in the hands of the schemers, who planned to murder Rizzio in Mary's presence, hoping perhaps that the terrible spectacle and the shock might kill her, which would leave Darnley in apparent power, but really powerless in the hands of the scoundrels who controlled him."

"Fine business for the countrymen of Wallace and Bruce!" growled Buckhart.

"In those times the nobility seemed very corrupt, in Scotland, as well as other countries. This band of reprobates carried out their bloody plot. They hid in Mary's bedroom, where they awaited their time. Mary was at supper with three friends in her library. One of the three was Rizzio. In the midst of it Darnley entered the room, took a seat beside the queen, put his arm about her and gave her the kiss of Judas. Then the murderous plotters suddenly appeared in the room, their weapons drawn. Instantly Rizzio started up, his face growing ghastly, for he knew his hour had come. He appealed to Mary, who answered that the king would never permit him to be slain in her presence.

"But Darnley attempted to hold her, and one of the ruffians placed a loaded pistol at her breast, while the others fell on Rizzio. In despair the doomed man caught at Mary's dress, for he was unarmed and could not make resistance. The assassins slashed at him with their gleaming weapons, and in the struggle the table with its dishes was overturned. Its lights were upset and extinguished, but some of the invaders had brought torches and by the flaring light the bloody work went on. As Rizzio's clutch on Mary's dress relaxed she fainted. He was then dragged out into a narrow passage, where he was stabbed until his shrieks became hushed by death. They say the stain of his blood still remains on the oaken floor, and undoubtedly it will be pointed out to us to-day."

“It’s a great thing, professor, to visit such spots,” said Dick. “I’ll never forget this bit of history after seeing and visiting the castle where it all took place.”

“The finest way in the world to learn history is to visit historic spots,” nodded the old pedagogue. “I suppose you both remember the rest of Mary’s story. The dastardly noblemen made her their prisoner, carrying her to captivity in a grim old castle on Lochleven. She was removed in the night, placed on a horse and compelled to ride at full gallop for several hours. When the castle prison was reached her brutal guards compelled her, under threat of death, to sign an abdication of the throne in favor of her son, at the same time naming one of the plotters, the Earl of Murray, regent, until the boy should come of age. Then she was left there, crushed and heartbroken.”

“But she escaped,” cried Dick.

“Yes, through the assistance of George Douglas, the son of her jailer, who had become so enamored of the sad and beautiful captive that he swore to save her, even though it cost him his life. One Sunday night as the queen sat in her window, gazing out on the placid bosom of the lake, she saw a boat silently approaching. In the boat was Douglas and his younger brother, who contrived to get hold of the castle key while the rest of the Douglas family were at supper. Without delay the daring youths locked the family in and hastened to set Mary free, rowing her across the lake and throwing the keys into the water.

“Mary assembled her followers, who hastened to flock to her support; but in a battle with the army of the regent, the Earl of Murray, she suffered defeat and again became a fugitive. For some time she remained hidden in Dundrennan Abbey, undecided what course to pursue. Some of her friends advised her to flee to France, but she decided to trust to the supposed friendship of her cousin, Elizabeth, Queen of England, and she fled across the English frontier. This was a fatal mistake, for Elizabeth had been her constant foe, fearing her claim to the English throne, and she was again cast into captivity. In the end she was falsely convicted of a conspiracy to assassinate Elizabeth, who was persuaded to sign her death warrant. When she was led to the block her executioners fell on their knees and asked forgiveness for the duty they were compelled to perform, which she freely gave, then entreated the women attending her not to weep, as she was glad to leave the world. Twenty years later her son was sovereign of both England and Scotland; and to-day the bodies of Mary and Elizabeth lie side by side beneath the same cathedral roof.”

CHAPTER II.—THE MEETING AT THE CASTLE.

After having the romantic story of Queen Mary thus repeated for them by the old professor, the boys felt a deeper interest in Holyrood Castle as they wandered through its rooms. The guide showed them through the Chapel Royal, which is a beautiful fragment of the ancient abbey, conducted them into the picture gallery and the tapestry apartment, gave them a chance to inspect Lord Darnley's rooms, and finally brought them to Queen Mary's apartments, showing where the queen had supped on that fatal night and pointing to dark stains on the floor of the narrow corridor outside, which, in broadest Scotch, he soberly declared "were made wi' th' blud o' Rizzio himsel'."

Throughout the inspection of the castle Dick was keenly interested, but he noticed that Brad remained gloomy and downcast in appearance.

"What's the matter, old man?" he finally exclaimed. "Why don't you brace up and chase that thundercloud off your face?"

"I can't," answered the Texan. "I can't help thinking something wrong has happened."

"Something wrong? Why, you're thinking of——"

"Nadia Budthorne and her brother," confessed Brad, flushing somewhat. "You know they were to meet us at the hotel in Edinburgh, and they have not done so."

"Brad, you've been smitten on that girl ever since you first saw her on London Bridge. I didn't think it of you, you husky son of the Lone Star State!"

"Now, don't try to kid me, pard!" growled Buckhart. "You can't say much, for if ever a fellow was badly smashed over a girl, you have been smashed over June Arlington."

"Oh, June and I are just good friends," Dick hastened to say.

"Good friends, indeed!" mocked the Texan. "Right good friends, and that's no lie! You were such a mighty good friend to her that you got her sneaking brother back into school after he had been fired, with the result that he put up a low-down job on you that caused you to be expelled. If you try to guy me any at all about Nadia Budthorne you'll certain hear a few remarks from yours truly concerning June Arlington."

"Oh, well," laughed Dick, "I admit you have me there, but how do you know that Nadia cares anything for you?"

"I don't know," acknowledged Brad, "and I sure opine that's what's keeping

me right well fussed up the most of the time. You know you were surprised yourself when we struck Edinburgh, and failed to find the Budthornes at the hotel where they agreed to meet us.”

“They came by rail, and I suppose they have visited Glasgow and other places on their way.”

“Pard, you know that any one who comes from London by rail would naturally visit Edinburgh first. I tell you I have a feeling that something is wrong. We lost track of Miguel Bunol, Heck Marsh, and Luke Durbin right away after the Budthornes left London, and I’m some afraid that onery gang followed Nadia and her brother up here into Scotland. If Bunol could meet Dunbar Budthorne alone, and get a chance to talk with him a few minutes, I reckon he’d get the fellow in his power again, for you must allow, partner, that he exercises some sort of baleful power over Budthorne.”

“I thought it possible we broke Bunol’s spell over Budthorne the night we proved to the latter that Bunol and the others had been fleecing him in a crooked manner at cards.”

“Temporarily we did, I judge; but you know Budthorne’s will power has been some weakened by drink, and he might cave in to Bunol again if the Spaniard found him.”

“I don’t think there is any great cause for worry, Brad. I believe Nadia and her brother will appear in good time.”

During this conversation the old professor had been talking with the guide. He now announced that he was ready to go, and soon the three were leaving by the castle gate.

Just as they passed through the gate they came face to face with two persons who were on the point of entering. They halted in surprise, for they were Hector Marsh and a corpulent, vulgar-appearing man known as Luke Durbin.

A growl of rage came from the throat of Brad Buckhart, and he planted himself in front of Marsh and Durbin, his fists clinched and his whole atmosphere breathing fight.

“Whatever are you two sneaking, onery, low-down coyotes doing here?” he roared, his rugged face dark as a storm cloud.

“My goodness! my goodness!” gasped Zenas Gunn, in great alarm. “Stop him, Richard, or he will attack them! We shall be arrested for making a disgraceful disturbance here!”

Dick caught Brad’s muscular arm in a grip of iron.

“Go slow, old man!” he said, in a low tone.

Neither Marsh nor Durbin acted as if the encounter had given them great surprise. Durbin was smoking a black, rank-smelling cigar, which he rolled into

the corner of his mouth, thrusting his pudgy hands deep into his trousers pockets, and surveying the trio before him with an air of insolent contempt.

Marsh exposed his teeth in a sneering grin.

“Why, hello!” he said, in a voice like the croaking of a bullfrog. “So you people are here, eh? What are we doing? Well, I rather guess we have just as good right to visit this old castle as you have.”

“Right,” said Durbin. “And he wants ter be careful about callin’ folks names, or he’ll git his block knocked off. See!”

Dick felt Brad’s arm quiver and the muscles tighten.

“I’d certain enjoy it a heap if either of you varmints would try to knock my block off!” exclaimed the Texan. “I’d enjoy it if you both tried the trick! Just break loose and sail right into me. I’ll stampede over you red-hot and a-whooping, as sure as I’m the Unbranded Maverick of the Rio Pecos!”

“You’re just as big a blower as ever,” said Marsh. “Why don’t you cut out that hot air and learn decency in your talk.”

“Learn decency! Whoop! Would I learn it any of you? Why, you crawling cur, you haven’t one decent bone in your body!”

“Stop him—Dick, do stop him!” gasped the professor. “He’ll get us into a broil!”

Dick’s good judgment told him that it was better to avoid an encounter at that time and place, and, therefore, he spoke a few words to Buckhart, seeking to quiet him.

“That’s right!” cried Marsh. “Better pull him away if you don’t want him hurt.”

“You’ll never harm any one,” said Dick, remembering Hector’s natural cowardice. “I don’t wish him to soil his hands on you, that’s all.”

“If the hot-air merchant wants ter fight,” said Durbin, “why don’t you give him all he’s lookin’ fer, Heck? We’ll jest step aside somewhere an’ you can knock the stuffin’ outer him. I’ll see that his frien’s don’t interfere.”

Marsh turned pale at the thought. He had not the slightest desire to meet Bradley Buckhart in a square fight, man to man.

“Oh, no!” he quickly said. “The fellow talks fight, but it’s all talk.”

“It is, eh?” cried Buckhart, attempting to free himself from Dick’s clutch and stride forward, a furious gleam in his eyes.

Suddenly the bold front Marsh had assumed disappeared. Knowing Merriwell’s disinclination to engage in a personal encounter unless forced to do so, and counting on the pacifying influence of Professor Gunn, the fellow had assumed an air of bravery that was entirely fictitious. Thinking the Texan might get free and come at him, he now dodged behind Durbin, crying:

“Keep your distance! I’ll have the law on you if you touch me! I can prove that we were going about our business when you stopped us.”

Buckhart paused in disgust, muttering:

“I might have known it! I didn’t stop to think what a coward he was at school.”

Durbin showed disappointment.

“Here, what are you dodging for?” he snapped. “You’ve tol’ me fifty times that that fellow was nuttin’ but a bag of wind, and that you could knock the tar out of him in a minute.”

“So I can—if I want to,” said Heck. “But I don’t want—at least, not here. There’s plenty of time. I’ll see him again. I’ll fix him all right.”

“Come along, Brad,” urged Dick. “Here come some other visitors from the castle. Don’t let them see you wasting words on such a worthless and cowardly scamp.”

Professor Gunn also took hold of the Texan and urged him to move away.

“It is the regret of my life,” said the old pedagogue, “that while the fellow was in school I did not sooner learn his true character. I am sorry he was permitted to remain there so long to contaminate other boys.”

“Bah, you old fossil!” croaked Marsh. “You’re an old back-number anyhow, and you’re not fit to teach a monkey school. Why don’t you go die and get yourself buried out of the way! You’d never be missed.”

“Outrageous—outrageous!” gasped Zenas, shaking his cane at the insulting chap. “I’d like to break this stick over your back, you scamp!”

“You never will, old lobster. If you should try it I’d give you a punch in the bread basket that would unhinge you.”

“Are you going to remain here longer and give him further opportunity to insult me, Bradley!” demanded Gunn.

“I’ll go,” said Buckhart, cooling down a little. “Dick is right about him. He is a pitiful coward, and any one who touches him will simply soil his hands.”

As they walked away Marsh continued to shout taunts and insults until they were quite out of hearing.

“Now what do you think about it, partner?” asked Buckhart, as they retraced their way into the city.

“About what?” asked Dick.

“About the possibility that there is something wrong, and that is why Nadia and her brother failed to meet us here. Marsh and Durbin are here, and you can bet your sweet life Bunol is not far away. They followed the Budthornes.”

“It may be that you are right.”

“I’m plumb certain of it. That gang has not given up the hope of again

getting hold of Dunbar Budthorne and squeezing money out of him. But what worries me most is the fact that Bunol has an infamous scheme to force Nadia into marriage with him. Just think of it! That sweetest of girls married to a snake like Mig Bunol! It's enough to make a chap crazy!"

"He'll never succeed in that, don't worry, Brad. She knows him, and she despises him quite as much as we do."

"But they may make her a right good lot of trouble."

"The fact that those fellows are here in Edinburgh would seem to indicate that the Budthornes must be in the city. Perhaps there was some mistake about the hotel where we are to meet them. We must search for them, Brad."

"That's the stuff, pard; we'll turn this old city over, but we'll find them."

"Dear me!" said Professor Gunn. "I hope there will be no serious trouble. I do hope we'll not get into a fight of any sort with those ruffians."

"But, professor," smiled Dick, "a short time ago, as you were recalling the fact that we are in the land of Wallace and Bruce, you said you knew there was good fighting stuff in you and you lamented greatly because you had never been given an opportunity to demonstrate what a hero you really are. It is possible you may have an opportunity while we are in Scotland. Who knows? I seem to scent fighting in the crisp air here."

"Goodness knows that's not the sort of fighting I meant! I could shed my blood joyfully for my country, or something like that; but fighting of any other sort is low and degrading and I abhor it—I abhor it."

Upon arriving at their hotel they found a letter there, addressed to Dick.

"A lady's writing," said Merriwell, in surprise. "Who can it be?"

He tore the envelope open. A moment later he uttered an exclamation, calling Brad and the professor to read it. This was all the letter contained:

"Dear Mr. Merriwell: We—my brother and myself—are stopping at Ben Cleuch Inn, which is near Kinross on Lochleven. Left Edinburgh suddenly because I saw Miguel Bunol there, and I believe he had followed us. This will explain why we failed to meet you as agreed. Hope you and your friends may be able to join us at Lochleven. We desire very much to see you again, if only to thank you for all your kindnesses to us. My brother is pretty well, although quite nervous. Your grateful friend,

"Nadia Budthorne."

On first reading this brief communication Buckhart looked relieved and delighted, but in a few minutes the shadow returned to his face, and it seemed

deeper than ever. Dick noted this and questioned him as to the cause of it.

“Oh, nothing,” answered the Texan somewhat gruffly.

“But it *is* something. I thought you would be pleased to hear from Nadia?”

“I am.”

“You look it!” said Merriwell sarcastically. “Here you have been worrying because she did not meet us, and now that you know where she is you put on a face like a funeral.”

“It’s all right,” muttered Brad, failing to meet his companion’s eye. “It’s all right! I don’t care!”

“What’s all right? What is it you don’t care about?”

“She didn’t have to write to me! She had a right to address the letter to you if she wished.”

Suddenly the truth dawned on Dick; Brad was hurt because Nadia had not addressed the letter to him.

“Well, you’re the limit for silliness!” Dick exclaimed.

“Perhaps I am,” grated Brad. “I can’t help it. I know I’m no prize beauty. I know that beside you I’m a half-finished shine. It’s all right! Of course, all the girls are bound to get struck on you. They can’t help it. But you’ve got girls enough!” he added, in resentful rebellion. “To say nothing of June Arlington, there is Doris Templeton and——”

Dick put an arm round his friend and laughingly checked him.

“Don’t be such an ass, old man!” he entreated. “Nadia Budthorne is a beautiful girl, but I’m not struck on her, and——”

“She is on you!”

“I don’t believe it.”

“Then explain some why she sent that letter to you. Why didn’t she address it to me or to the professor?”

“It just happened that way. You know I disguised myself as old Mr. Allsquint and in that manner exposed Bunol and his gang, and I suppose that is why——”

“Perhaps so,” admitted the Texan suddenly. “I reckon I am an ass, pard! I always was, and it’s becoming more and more natural for me. Of course you can’t be to blame if Nadia took a liking to you. Why shouldn’t she like you more than me? You’re the best chap in the world, and I’m just a very common and a very ordinary chump, without any particular polish and without any pretense to good looks.”

“Brad,” said Dick earnestly, “you are one of the truest, finest, noblest fellows alive. Any one who comes to know you well can’t help liking you; and as for good looks—well, you bear the stamp of a man on your face, and therefore in the very best sense you are handsome. Stop running yourself down. What shall

we do? Shall we light out of Edinburgh and make for Kinross and Lochleven to-day?"

"Instanter!" exclaimed the Texan eagerly. "Let's not lose an hour, pard!"

CHAPTER III.—AT BEN CLEUCH INN.

The Ben Cleuch Inn at Lochleven was kept by the Widow Myles, a plain, kind, motherly soul, the best part of whose life lay behind her.

The inn stood by the highway that wound close along the shore of the wooded lake, about a mile from Kinross.

In summers, visitors to Lochleven desirous of seeing Queen Mary's island prison often patronized the little inn, and the widow thus derived revenue enough to keep her in frugal comfort through the long winters.

In November the strangers were few and far between, and glad the widow was when one dropped in for a meal or a night's lodging. Doubly glad was she when two strangers, a young man and a beautiful girl of sixteen, came in a carriage to her door and bargained with her for rooms and board for several days, saying they expected to remain three days, and might, if they liked it, stay a great deal longer.

The landlady did her very best to please them, for they did not ask her to make her price smaller when she named it, and they readily paid for three days in advance. The girl, as Widow Myles could not help noticing, was very pretty, while the young man—her brother—looked pale and wearied and had about his face something indicative of weakness and irresolution. Indeed, he seemed on the verge of illness, and he permitted his sister to do most of the business with the landlady.

On the afternoon of the third day after the arrival of these guests another stranger appeared and stopped at the inn. He came afoot and wore a long, black cloak with a cape, while his wide-brimmed hat was pulled low over his eyes. His complexion was dark, and on his upper lip there was the shadowy outline of a new-born mustache.

Although the sun was shining without, there was snow on the ground and the air was nipping cold, which led the stranger to hold out his hands to the warmth of the widow's cheerful open fire, in the little sitting room, having removed his gloves and placed them with his hat on the floor at his side.

"It's cauld to-day, sir," said the widow. "Th' sun i' ower bright, but the air ha' a nippin' in it."

"Indeed it is cold, madam," said the young stranger, in a pleasant voice. "It is far too cold for comfort. It must be frightful up here in the dead of winter."

"Oh, it's na sa bad—na sa bad," protested the widow. "Wi' a guide roof ower

one's haid an' a warm fire to sit near, th' winter soon runs awa'. Ha' ye come fa'?"

"Not very far," was the answer. "To me it would be a great favor, my good woman, if you could give me a drink of something warm to start my blood."

"Tea?" suggested Widow Myles.

The visitor shook his head.

"I would prefer something warmer than that," he said. "Have you any whisky in the house?"

"I canna tell. I much doot i' I ha'!"

"Because if you have," said the stranger, jingling some money in his hand, "I'll pay well for a stiff drink."

"I may ha' a wee drap," confessed the landlady. "I sometime' ha' it far me'cine."

"It is for medicine I need it now, so if you will hasten, madam, you need but to name your price."

The widow disappeared. After about ten minutes she reappeared with hot water, whisky and sugar, at sight of which the face of the stranger showed his satisfaction. Deftly and with loss of little time the stranger mixed his drink, tasted it, smacked his lips over it and then asked the widow to name her price.

She declined to state a price, whereupon he placed two pieces of money in her hand, and when she saw their value she showered him with thanks and called down blessings on his head.

In this manner the stranger placed himself right with the widow, whom he engaged in further conversation as he stretched his booted feet to the fire and sipped his steaming drink.

"At this season I presume few are the visitors who come here to stop?" he questioned.

"Few ye ma' weel say," she nodded.

"Is your house empty at the present time?"

"Na, na! not quite sa bad as that."

"Then you have some guests?"

"I ha' twa."

"Two? How long have they been with you, madam?"

"They came three days gone, sir."

"And is it long you expect them to remain?"

"As to that I canna tell. When they came they said it might be they wud stay three days or more; but it is now the third day an' they have na spoke of leavin'."

"I hope my curiosity you will pardon, but it seems strange any one should come here at this season to remain so long. Where are they from, if you don't

mind telling?"

"I ha' na reason to know, for I didna ask them, but London I think ha seen them none sa lang ago."

"They are English?"

The widow slowly shook her head.

"They are na like th' English. I think they may be fra America."

"I presume they are man and wife?"

"Na, na; they are brother an' sister. A bonnie lassie is the girl, sir; but her brother seems na well."

"Not well?"

"Na, sir. He keeps over close to his room. If they came to see Queen Mary's prison they ha' not yet accomplisht it."

"It is not likely Americans would take so much trouble to get a look at Queen Mary's prison, madam. It must be they are here for some other purpose."

"Then what it can be heaven knows! Once I said to the lassie that her brother were fra too pale, an' I thought a wee bit o' whisky might be guide fa him; but she went white an' trembly an' begged me na to gi' him one drop o' it. She made me promise if he came and asked for it I wud say there was naething o' th' kind i' th' house. I ken she is feared to ha' him drink it."

The stranger smiled a little, and there seemed something a trifle sinister about his face in that moment.

"It is a man poor in command of himself that cannot drink when he likes and leave it alone when he chooses," he declared.

"Many a guide man canna do it."

"Well, I don't understand them. What is the name of this unfortunate man, if you don't mind telling?"

"It is Budthorne."

"Rather odd name."

"But I ha' na asked your name, sir. You are na English yoursel'?"

"No."

"Nor still American. I think you must be——"

"French? Well, you are right, madam. I am Henri Clairvaux, of Paris. Think not I am curious or prying. These questions I have asked merely the time to pass. I am walking through Scotland, but the weather is getting too cold, and I soon shall depart for the south. In winter I much prefer Italy to your bleak north country here."

At this the widow bridled a bit.

"Scotland alwa' ha' been guide enow fa me!" she exclaimed. "I ha' took notice it is alwa' th' weak that prefer the warm countries i' th' winter. I ha' been

thinkin' ma'hap it wud be well fa th' young man upstairs to go south fa th' winter time."

Outside the door there was rustling. The door was opened and a musical, feminine voice called to the widow.

The man in the cloak had his back toward the door, and he did not move.

Excusing herself, the landlady hurried from the room. The moment she was gone the stranger picked up his hat and gloves and hastily rose.

"It is well enough that she should not see me now," he muttered. "I must get out at once."

He clapped his hat on his head and pulled it hard down, taking pains to make the limber brim lap over his face. Then he swiftly crossed the room to the door, buttoning his cloak over his breast.

Pausing at the door, he listened.

"The coast is clear," he whispered; after which he stepped briskly out to the front door.

Just as he was passing through that door the girl came from another room and saw his vanishing back. She clutched at the widow, who had followed her.

"That man?" she cried, in a trembling, frightened voice. "Who is he?"

"He ga' his name as Henri Clairvaux, o' Paris," answered the Widow Myles.

"And lied!" panted the girl. After which she fled up the stairs to the room of her brother, her face ashen pale.

CHAPTER IV.—BUDTHORNE'S STRUGGLE.

The working of alcohol on some constitutions is remarkable. It is a singular thing that some men seem to keep themselves steeped in the poison for years without breaking down, while others rapidly go to pieces and become physical wrecks before its vitality-destroying influence. The latter class is by far the larger.

Occasionally a man whose nerves are deep set, whose constitution is ironlike and whose coarser nature predominates, persists in drinking regularly and heavily for years and seems to remain in good health. To those who know him well, and meet him day after day, he presents no abnormal aspect; but almost certain it is that drink has taken such a hold on him that he cannot appear to be in his natural condition unless he constantly keeps in his stomach enough of the stuff to intoxicate an occasional drinker to the point of reeling. Take it away from him and he collapses like a pricked bladder.

Dunbar Budthorne was a man without the stamina to withstand the blighting effect of constant drinking. The rapidity with which the stuff fastened its clutch upon him was appalling. His relapse when, at the entreaty of his loving and faithful sister, he stopped drinking and let it wholly alone, was pitiful.

Ever since arriving at the Ben Cleuch, Budthorne had been in a state of mental distress and physical collapse. The desire for drink was with him constantly, and in his soul a fierce battle raged unceasingly. In the night he rose and paced the floor of his room, his hands clinched, his nerves taut, mumbling, mumbling, mumbling. Every night, at his request, Nadia locked him in that room, keeping the key with her.

“You must master the desire, Dunbar, my brother,” she said. “You can do it.”

“Yes, by Heaven!” he cried, setting his teeth. “For you, Nadia, I will do it!”

“Not for me alone, Dunbar; for yourself, as well. You can see what you have come to in less than a year. A year ago you were not the slave of drink.”

“I should say not! And had any one told me I'd get this way in twelve months I should have thought him a fool. I don't understand it now. Nadia, why can other men drink when they choose, and let it alone when they choose?”

“Not all of them can, Dunbar, I am sure. I believe there are thousands just like you.”

“Perhaps you're right; they keep it hidden from others, or they do not realize it themselves.”

“That’s the way it is.”

“What a wise little chicken you are, sister! What a brave little girl! And what a worthless brother you have!”

Then she would caress him and pat him on the cheek, and tell him he was “all right.”

“All wrong, you mean. Sis, I’m going to make my share of the fortune left us over to you. I’ll do it at the first opportunity. I’ve made a hole in it already. Were I to keep hitting the booze, I’d go through the whole of it in another year.”

“But you have stopped, and you’ll never touch it again. You have escaped from those evil friends whose influence was ruining you. Their hold on you is broken.”

She did not chide him with his folly and weakness in ever becoming friendly with such unworthy companions. She did not remind him that Luke Durbin was a barroom acquaintance, a race-track gambler, and a creature he had been forced to introduce to her with a flush of shame on his cheeks. She knew he had thought of this with regret and remorse.

But it was not Durbin she most feared; it was the Spaniard, Bunol, who had been forced upon them by Durbin. She believed Bunol possessed some evil power of unknown force which he had exercised upon Budthorne, and the spell of which he had tried to cast upon her. Durbin knew about this mysterious power, and he had brought Bunol forward that the fellow might exercise it to accomplish the downfall of Budthorne and the snaring of his sister.

“Yes, their hold is broken,” he agreed. “We have our chance acquaintances which we met on London Bridge to thank for that. It was your scheme——”

“Not mine; Dick Merriwell did it. It was he who formed the plan to disguise himself as Mr. Allsquint and get into your room in London that night of the card party, where he exposed the cheating of Bunol, who was robbing you at cards.”

“A wonderful chap that boy is! I like him, Nadia, and I like his chum, the fellow from Texas. Don’t you?”

“I do, indeed. Brad Buckhart is splendid, and the old professor is a genial soul. I am sorry we were unable to remain in Edinburgh until they came; but Bunol was there, and I knew we might encounter him any time. I thought it best to come here, but I have written our friends, making an explanation, and I hope they will take the trouble to hunt us up.”

“If they do, it will be on your account, sis. Oh, yes it will! Look out for Buckhart, Nadia! The fellow is smitten.”

“Nonsense, Dunbar!”

“He is. I noticed how he held your hand as they were seeing us off at the station in London. His eyes followed you all the time. You’ll have a wild and

woolly Texan on your staff if you're not careful."

"I don't see that there is anything so very wild and woolly about him."

"Ha! ha! You resent that, eh? It looks suspicious, girl—very suspicious. Better be careful."

"Stop your teasing, Dunbar! I'm sure I don't care a snap about him, and I don't believe he cares anything about me. Why should he? We barely know each other; we may never meet again. He is only a boy——"

"And you're only a girl. Many a boy-and-girl affair has ripened into something binding. Better wait until you find out more about him. We know practically nothing."

"Oh, but I know he is a gentleman!" protested the girl. "If he were not he would not be with Dick Merriwell and Professor Gunn. I have seen him, too, when he dropped his Western manners and was as refined in every way as any one can be. You don't think all Westerners are wild and woolly, do you?"

"Far from it. I am sure a chap from that part of our country may be as much a gentleman as any one; but your earnest defense of him increases my suspicions. You'll have to be on your guard."

"Why don't you try to tease me about Dick Merriwell? I addressed the letter to him, telling him whither we had gone."

"All the more significant. The wise bird takes flight at first sight of the sportsman."

"You're perfectly tormenting, Dunbar! If you continue talking in such a foolish manner I shall think your brain is affected."

He laughed again.

"All right; I'll let up—for the time being. But I'll wager Buckhart shows up here as soon as possible after your letter is received, and he'll bring the others with him. We'll have them with us by to-morrow."

"I hope so," she confessed.

The thing predicted was to happen even sooner.

CHAPTER V.—LIKE A BIRD OF EVIL OMEN.

Having seen the back of the departing stranger, Nadia fled up the stairs to the room of her brother, who was lying on a couch and seeking to divert his mind by reading. He did not note that she was pale and agitated as she came in, but he saw her hurriedly cross the room to a window that commanded a view of the road which wound down toward the rim of Lochleven, where she drew aside the curtain and stood peering out.

“What is it, sis?” he yawned. “What do you see?”

She did not answer.

“Eh?” he exclaimed, putting down the book. “What are you staring at, Nadia?”

“Come here!” she whispered hoarsely.

Her manner and tone caused him to sit up at once.

“Is anything the matter?”

“Come quickly!”

He hurried to the window.

“Look!” she urged, clutching at his arm with her trembling fingers. “See that man going down the road?”

The stranger who had lately departed from the inn was walking briskly away, the cape of his dark cloak flapping about him, his head bent to the chill wind that was blowing. His figure, in spite of the folds of the cloak, seemed slender and graceful.

“I see him,” said Dunbar.

“He was here a few moments ago—in this house!”

“Well?”

“Do you see nothing familiar about him?”

“Why, it seems as if I—I——By the Lord Harry! I believe——”

Budthorne checked himself.

“You believe what? Who is it?”

“Nadia, it looks like Bunol.”

“Yes, it looks like him.”

“But it can’t be! Did you see his face?”

“No, nothing but his back as he passed out at the door.”

“It can’t be Bunol,” repeated Budthorne.

“Why not?”

“How could he trace us here?”

“How could he trace us to Edinburgh? How much easier to trace us from Edinburgh here than from London to Edinburgh!”

“I think he appeared in Edinburgh by chance, without knowing we were there.”

“I do not,” declared the girl decidedly. “I think he followed us in some manner.”

Budthorne did not like to believe this.

“You give him credit for the acumen of a Sherlock Holmes. Bunol is no detective.”

“He is a human bloodhound! You do not know how much I fear him, Dunbar.”

“You say that man was here in this house a few minutes ago?”

“Yes.”

“You have seen the landlady since?”

“Yes.”

“And questioned her?”

“I asked her who he was.”

“Her answer?”

“She said he gave his name as Henri Clairvaux, of Paris.”

“Then it is not Bunol, sister. Why are you so agitated? It is merely a resemblance. Were we to see his face, I am sure it would prove to be that of a perfect stranger.”

Suddenly she shrank back, lowering the curtain until she had partly concealed herself behind it.

“Look!” she exclaimed. “He has stopped before entering the woods! He has turned to look back! He has pushed the hat up from his forehead to get a better view! Look, Dunbar! Even at this distance you cannot fail to recognize him!”

“By Jove, you’re right, Nadia! It is Bunol, himself! Satan take the scoundrel! What is he trying to do?”

“He has located us here, and he will try to get you into his clutches again, Dunbar.”

“Confound him! He wants to keep away from me! I’ve had enough of him! He’ll find his day with me is past! He is wasting his time.”

“I fear him more than any one else in all the world,” confessed the girl.

“Don’t you be afraid, Nadia,” said her brother. “I’ll protect you.”

“But that man’s eyes—you cannot resist their evil power.”

“Don’t you believe it! I’m stronger now than I was. I have conquered my weakness for drink, and that was what enabled him to deceive me.”

He truly thought he had conquered, but the girl realized that the battle had only just begun, and that it was her influence and her watchfulness that had kept him from drinking since the night of the exposure in London.

Hidden behind the curtain, they peered forth and watched the man in the cloak. For a few minutes he remained gazing back at the lone inn, but at last he turned once more and, with his cape flapping wing-like about his shoulders, glided in the manner of a bird of evil omen into the bleak woods, which swallowed him from view.

“He is gone!” said Budthorne.

“But he will return,” declared Nadia. “What shall we do, brother—shall we flee from here?”

“No!” cried the man, flourishing his fist. “I’m no criminal, and I refuse to act like one any longer! Let him return! I am my own master, and a score of scoundrels like Miguel Bunol cannot make me hide in cover like a frightened rabbit. This thing must come to an end, sister. He believes we are afraid of him. I’ll show him his error. That is the only course to be pursued. It’s ridiculous to think of us running away from a common cur like that. If he annoys you or threatens you, I’ll have him arrested and locked up.”

Although his words were very bold, she had come to believe that he would weaken and fail when the critical moment arrived.

For a long time they sat in that room, talking of the matter, Nadia feeling doubts concerning the best thing to be done. Finally she exclaimed:

“If the friends we met in London were here they could advise us. I would feel safer, too. It might have been better had we remained in Edinburgh. It’s lonely here in the country, and I fear what may happen.”

The afternoon wore away. Night was at hand when both were startled by the sound of hoofs and wheels outside.

With her heart fluttering in her bosom, Nadia sprang up and rushed to the front window. A closed carriage had stopped before the door. Budthorne joined his sister at the window.

The carriage door opened and from it sprang two boys, followed more leisurely by a man past middle age.

A cry of delight burst from Nadia.

“Our friends have come at last!” she joyously exclaimed.

CHAPTER VI.—BUNOL'S PLOT.

The man who had said he was Henri Clairvaux, of Paris, was in truth Miguel Bunol, a scheming and villainous young Spaniard.

Bunol had first met Luke Durbin on the race track in New Orleans, and, being congenial rascals, they became very well acquainted. But Durbin was a rather slow, thick-witted rascal, while Bunol was quick, pantherish and full of crooked schemes.

It was some time after this meeting, that Durbin became acquainted in Chicago with Dunbar Budthorne, who had commenced a career of dissipation and seemed anxious to spend as swiftly as possible his portion of the fortune left him at the death of his mother.

Durbin saw his opportunity, and determined to help Budthorne get rid of that fortune. At that time Budthorne was plunging on the races, and Durbin professed to have "inside information" and tips of the greatest value. With the aid of assistants, who professed to be bookmakers or pool-room men, Durbin succeeded in getting several thousands of dollars belonging to the reckless young man.

This money he spent freely, and it simply whetted his appetite for more.

When Nadia Budthorne fully realized the pace at which her brother was going she devised the plan of inducing him to take her abroad, hoping that in this manner he would escape from his evil companions.

But ere leaving Chicago Budthorne went on one last spree, met Durbin in a saloon and told the rascal of his plans.

Durbin did not try to dissuade the fellow, but he took passage on the same steamer, and it was during the voyage across that Nadia suffered the humiliation of an introduction to the man, who succeeded in keeping Dunbar constantly under the influence of liquor and fleeced him awkwardly at cards.

In London Durbin ran across Miguel Bunol, who, with Hector Marsh, formerly a student at Fardale, as an assistant, was working a fake hypnotic and fortune-telling scheme.

Durbin told Bunol and Marsh about Budthorne and his pretty sister. They expressed a desire to meet Budthorne, and directly the three of them were concerned in the plot to ruin the young American.

But, as was entirely natural, being far shrewder than Luke Durbin, Miguel Bunol soon became the chief mover and head of the rascally trio.

On his first sight of Nadia, Bunol became infatuated, and two days later he announced to his companions that he was determined to make her his wife.

“All the money you can get from her brother, Durbin, you shall have—you and Marsh,” said the Spaniard. “I will help you get it from him, too. But for me I must have Nadia and her share of the fortune. My part of the graft this shall be.”

To this the others agreed, yet not without some growling from Durbin. Bunol, however, had the power to command and control the man, and he exercised this power with little difficulty.

In truth, the Spaniard possessed hypnotic influence, although he had not fully developed it. This influence he brought to bear on Budthorne. He likewise tried it on Nadia, but her mind was stronger, and she successfully fought against his baleful influence.

Budthorne refused to believe his sister’s assertion that his comrades were cheating and robbing him; but at last, through the cleverness of Dick Merriwell, they were exposed, and he swore he would never again have anything to do with them.

Fearing his will power would not be strong enough to hold out, Nadia had induced him to leave London and come north into Scotland, thinking the rascals might be tricked and baffled.

But Bunol had succeeded in tracing them, while Marsh and Durbin remained behind and watched Merriwell’s party, correctly fancying that Dick and his friends intended to join the Budthornes later.

Dick, Brad, and Professor Gunn were followed to Edinburgh by the two. In Edinburgh, by the merest accident, the scoundrels learned that the Budthornes had gone to Kinross.

Without the knowledge of Dick and his friends, the very train that bore them north to Kinross carried Marsh and Durbin in another compartment.

Thus the opposing forces were gathering at a point on Lochleven, where it seemed that another clash between them might occur.

Bunol had wired his pals in London, but not until after they had left for the north. He had received no answer from them.

Having left the Ben Clench and walked as far as the woods, the Spanish youth turned and looked back. His keen eyes surveyed the house, and even at that distance he fancied he saw one of the curtains move at an upper window.

“If they are looking,” he muttered, “I am now too faraway for them to recognize me.”

At the back of the inn he saw a small man appear and wave something white.

“It is well,” muttered the rascal.

Then he turned and disappeared into the woods.

The trees broke the biting wind, but Bunol cursed the cold and the country.

Coming to a little footpath where the thin snow showed the imprints of many feet, he turned off and walked a short distance to the shore of the lake, on which lay a stout boat.

Sitting on a fallen tree near the boat was a sandy-haired, bearded, rough-looking man, who had a rather brutal face, and, judging by his massive frame, possessed great strength.

“Well, MacLane, I am returned,” said Miguel.

The man nodded.

“I see ye are,” he said. “Did ye ha’ guid luck?”

“Oh, yes; you were right in saying my birds were at the Ben Cleuch. Now, if Aaron keeps his part of the contract——”

“Fear nawt, he wi’ keep it,” nodded MacLane. “Aaron kens Rob MacLane fu’ well, an’ he dare na disobey me. He will come.”

“I think he will,” agreed Bunol. “I looked back, and a small man waved something at me from the back of the house.”

“That were Aaron. I told him to follow ye, man, when he left, but to take guid care he were no’ observed. He will be here.”

“Well, I hope he comes soon, for this devil’s weather is uncomfortable.”

“Hoot man! Ye dinna ken what cauld weather is.”

“If that’s the case, I don’t want to know,” retorted Bunol. “This is quite enough for me.”

They sat on the log, talking in low tones, until a little, bent man, with a shawl wrapped about his shoulders, came gliding softly through the woods and stood before them.

“Here’s Aaron,” said MacLane. “Aaron, this is the man I would ha’ ye meet.”

Aaron said nothing, but surveyed Bunol with a pair of small eyes that were set close together and were filled with a light of mingled cunning and simplicity. It was not the face of a man to trust, yet for five years Aaron had been with the Widow Myles, and had seemed faithful as a grateful dog.

“Tell Aaron what ye want, man,” said MacLane. “He will do it.”

“Aaron, at the inn there are two guests—a brother and a sister.”

The little man in the shawl bobbed his little head.

“I will not attempt to explain my reasons to you, Aaron,” the Spanish youth went on; “but this night MacLane and I will get our hands on the man, and you must help us. You will be paid well.”

“I ha’ told him that,” interrupted the huge man. “I gied him the siller ye ga’ me. Did I no gie ye th’ siller, Aaron?”

“Yes,” said Aaron, “I ha’ the siller.”

“You shall have twice as much more if you follow directions faithfully,” promised Bunol, and the eyes of the little man glowed greedily. “If you are half as shrewd as MacLane says, you’ll get into no trouble over it. You wait on the guests at table?”

Aaron nodded.

“What does Budthorne drink at supper?”

“A cup o’ tay.”

“Well, see this package,” said the Spaniard, holding up a tiny package. “It contains a powder. To-night you must contrive to get it into Budthorne’s cup of tea.”

“It is poison!” said Aaron fearfully.

“Nothing of the sort. Budthorne has been a drinking man, but he is trying to stop. The effect of this powder will be to make him crazy for liquor. Twenty minutes after he takes the powder he’ll be ready to barter his soul for one drink. Then, Aaron—listen closely—you must contrive to meet him and tell him somehow that you can get him a drink. Tell him to step outside the house and come round to the back, promising to meet him with liquor, but state that the stuff is some you have stolen from the widow. Do you understand?”

“I do,” said Aaron. “But what will happen when he comes out?”

“MacLane and I will be hidden there. We’ll fall on Budthorne and carry him off. MacLane is strong as a giant, and we’ll have little trouble.”

“Na! na!” exclaimed Aaron. “It is I that will hae th’ trouble!”

“It is not necessary.”

“What can I say?”

“You must tear your clothes, rumple your hair, cover yourself with dirt, and half an hour after we have carried Budthorne away you may appear and tell how he came outside, you spoke to him, and then you both were attacked by a band of armed men, who struck you senseless. Of course you will not know what has happened to Budthorne.”

“I must ken, man,” said Aaron grimly. “I dinna want ma neck strecht. I canna hae hand in murder.”

Bunol laughed.

“But it’s not murder.”

“Then what is’t?”

“We are going to make Budthorne a prisoner for reasons of my own. He’ll not be harmed, and in due time he’ll have his liberty.”

Aaron seemed doubtful. He turned fearfully to MacLane.

“Maun I do it?” he asked.

“Yea,” growled the big man.

Aaron was afraid of MacLane, but now he almost fiercely declared:

“I will na do it ’less I know where ye tak’ him.”

“Why do you want to know that?” impatiently demanded Bunol.

“Ye ha’ to satisfy me,” stubbornly said the little man. “I ha’ to know ye really mean to keep him captive wi’out doing him harm. ’Less ye tell me where ye tak’ him, I will no do it.”

MacLane knew Aaron to be immovable as the Scottish hills once he had set his mind on anything, and therefore he turned to the Spanish youth, saying:

“Ye hae to tell him, man.”

“But can he be trusted?”

“Aaron will na dare to betray me, but he has his whims, an’ ye’ll hae to humor him.”

Bunol hesitated, not fancying the idea of trusting the little man with the foolishly shrewd face to such an extent.

“It’s against my judgment,” he declared.

“Then tak’ th’ judgment o’ Rob MacLane. Ye canna do anything wi’ Aaron till ye trust him fully, as he thinks he has tae trust ye.”

“All right,” said the Spanish youth. “He will be taken to the old castle on the island, Aaron.”

“Wha Queen Mary were kept a captive?”

“Yes.”

“An’ ye swear to harm him nawt?”

“Sure. I’m going to make his sister marry me. It’s a way they have in America of winning a bride. The Americans like it.”

“It’s a way they had years syne in Scotland,” chuckled MacLane, “only it was th’ lassie hersel’ th’ lover stole awa’.”

“Is that a’?” exclaimed Aaron, apparently relieved.

“That is all.”

The little man took the powder.

“I will do all ye ask,” he promised.

CHAPTER VII.—DONE BENEATH THE STARS.

The delight of Nadia and her brother at the appearance of Dick and his companions was great. Buckhart's face was crimson as he pressed the girl's hand, and she seemed somewhat confused. Dick she met with perfect frankness.

When the greetings were over and they had warmed themselves at the fire, the old professor went out and gazed long at Lochleven, over the wind-ruffled bosom of which the night was creeping.

"To-morrow," he said, "I will feast my eyes on Queen Mary's prison. What a grand thing to be here on this romantic spot! Ah, those old days when men fought and bled and died for their country!"

In spite of the appearance of Miguel Bunol, it was a jolly party that gathered about Widow Myles' table that night at supper time. Nadia had recovered her high spirits and was gay and vivacious, while her brother forgot for the time being the struggle against appetite that he had been making for the last few days and was the smiling, courtly, jolly young gentleman nature intended him to be.

Widow Myles herself sat at the head of the table, beaming on her guests. She had a face like a withered russet apple, and one knew at a glance that a generous, kindly old heart beat in her bosom. Naturally affable, the presence of so many guests at that season made her doubly so.

Brad had been placed in a chair opposite Nadia, much to his satisfaction, as it gave him an opportunity to watch her mobile, changing features. It seemed that each passing minute revealed for him some new and fresh attractiveness in the charming Chicago girl. He had been badly smitten before, but during that supper at the Ben Cleuch he fell head-over-heels in love with her. Boy love it was, perhaps, but none the less sincere. It might not last, but even though time brought a change, it would ever be a pleasant memory.

Aaron waited on the table. At this he was very deft, seeming to know precisely what was wanted at the lifting of the widow's finger.

"A peculiar servant you have, Mrs. Myles," observed Dick, at a time when Aaron was absent from the room.

"Ay," nodded the widow, her cap ruffles dancing. "Aaron is alwa' faithful."

"Has he been with you long?"

"Five year this snowfall, poor lad. He came trudging' to my door, barefoot, near dead wi' cauld, near perisht wi' hunger. I took him i' th' house an' gied him bread an' clauthes. I warmed his bones, an' sin' that day he has been wi' me."

“Is he trustworthy?”

“I wad trust him wi’ my life,” was her answer. “Th’ poor lad is not over bright, an’ yet he’s na fool. Have na fear he will molest your valuables. He is th’ watchdog o’ Ben Cleuch.”

Aaron returning at this minute, the conversation turned into another channel.

The old professor could not get over his enthusiasm at being there in that quaint little Scottish country inn.

“To-morrow, boys!” he cried—“to-morrow shall be a great day. We’ll visit Queen Mary’s prison.”

“Let’s all go,” proposed Dick.

“That’s the thing!” exclaimed Brad eagerly. “We’ll make a grand excursion to the old castle. Will you do it, Nad—er—ah—Miss Budthorne?”

“I think it would be fine,” she answered. “What do you say, Dunbar?”

“I’m agreeable,” said Budthorne, sipping at his tea. “I’ve been keeping too close in the house. Perhaps if I get out I’ll feel much better.”

Out of the corner of one small eye Aaron watched Budthorne drink the tea.

“Then it’s settled,” said Dick. “I suppose we can get a boat near here. I don’t fancy there are any of the old-time Scottish outlaws around here now, Mrs. Myles?”

“Na, unless ye ma’ ca’ Rob MacLane one,” was her answer.

“Who is Rob MacLane?”

“He i’ th’ Auld Nick’s own!” was the answer. “A bad egg, if e’er there were one. I’ these law-abidin’ times he minds na law, an’ he fears nane—man nor de’il. It’s a’ things he has done but murder, an’ I think soon to hear he has done that.”

“Well, well! this is interesting, indeed!” cried the professor. “Why don’t they arrest him and put him in jail?”

“Arrist Rob MacLane!” cried the widow. “It’s richt plain ye ha’ na heard o’ him! He i’ strang as twenty men, an’ na officer daurs to go take him. Twa o’ them tried it once, an’ wi’ his bare hands he near beat them both to death. One didna get over that beatin’ till the day he died.”

“He would have made a fine outlaw in the old days,” laughed Dick. “Where does this ruffian live?”

“Na man kens. Mayhap to-day he be here, to-morrow he is i’ th’ mountains far awa’.”

“How does he live?”

“He takes a’ he wants, an’ no man says him nay. Were he to come here the night, I’d gi’ him a’ he asked an’ be thankit for my life when he left.”

“Well, I’m getting some interested in Mr. MacLane!” exclaimed Buckhart. “I

don't suppose he is around here now?"

"I canna tell. He comes an' goes like the wind. He may be outside th' door this minute, or he may be i' Sutherland."

Dunbar Budthorne was doing his best to repress a peculiar sensation that was creeping over him. He wanted something, but for the time he could not imagine what it was. Of a sudden he knew, and he turned pale as the truth dawned upon him. He was ready to give anything or do anything for a drink of liquor.

While the others chatted on this restlessness and craving grew on Budthorne. Finally, politely asking to be excused and saying he was going to his room, he rose from the table.

His sister gave him a glance of questioning apprehension, but he smiled on her reassuringly.

"You're not ill, Dunbar?" she asked.

"Never felt better in my life," he answered, and her mind was relieved.

Outside the dining-room door he encountered Aaron, who had left the room ahead of him.

"I' there a'thing I could gi' ye, sir?" inquired Aaron, with the utmost deference and solicitude.

"No, nothing," answered Budthorne, and started to pass on.

Suddenly he paused and looked over his shoulder at Aaron, dimly seen by the faint light in the hall.

"Wait," he said in a low tone. "Come here a moment, Aaron."

The serving man stepped noiselessly toward him.

"Aaron, I'm not feeling quite right."

"Ay, sir; I thought ye lookt a wee disturbed. I hope ye are na ill?"

"I'm afraid I shall be unless I can get something to ward off the attack. Do you know if there is whisky or liquor of any sort in the place?"

Aaron seemed alarmed.

"I no hae anything to do wi' it," he hastily declared. "The widow alwa' keeps a wee bit i' a bottle, but I hae na richt to touch it, sir."

Eagerly, almost fiercely, Budthorne grasped the little man by his bony wrist.

"I must have something of the sort!" he breathed, huskily. "Aaron, you must get me some of the contents of that bottle!"

"I canna do it," declared the serving man, as if in great alarm. "Were I to touch it th' widow wud be sair mad wi' me."

"You need not let her know it. She'll never miss a little—enough for one good drink."

Still Aaron seemed alarmed.

"I ha' been wi' her five year an' no' once ha' I failed to mind her biddin'," he

said weakly.

“I’ll pay you—I’ll pay you well,” said Budthorne. “See, Aaron, here is money. Take it. Bring me enough for a drink from that bottle.”

He pressed the money into the hand of the little man, who seemed on the point of refusing it.

“She wi’ find it out, sir.”

“How? I’ll never tell her.”

“Ye sw’ar it?”

“Yes.”

“Na matter wh’ may hap, ye sw’ar ye willna tell Aaron gi’ ye one drop from that bottle?”

“I swear it! Hurry up, man, or I’ll explode for the want of a drink.”

“I canna gi’ it to ye here.”

“In my room, then?”

“Na! na!”

“Then where?”

“Ye maun meet me back o’ th’ house.”

“Anywhere, so that I get the drink. How can I do it? Hurry up!”

“Ye maun go out by th’ front dure; I’ll go out by th’ back. Step round the corner an’ find me at th’ back.”

“All right. But don’t lose time about it.”

“Have na fear.”

“Bring a big drink—a stiff drink. The longer I am without it the more I want.”

A few moments later Budthorne left the cottage by the front door. There was no moon, but millions of bright stars gleamed in the dome of heaven. The wind had fallen with the coming of night, but although it did not feel as cold, the temperature was much lower. To the east, close at hand, slumbered Lochleven; to the north, farther removed, rose the rugged Ochill Hills.

It was a night of peace and repose, with no suggestion of danger lurking near.

Within the cottage the merry party chatted and laughed about the supper table. Not until Budthorne had been absent some time did Nadia think of him again; but at last she began to worry why he did not return.

Finally she rose from the table, saying she would see what was detaining him.

“He has not been quite well of late,” she explained. “Of course I’m foolish to worry about him, but I can’t help it. He must be in his room. I’ll return in a few moments.”

She did return in a few moments, a frightened look on her pale face.

“He’s gone!” she said. “I can’t find him!”

At this moment the door leading to the kitchen was flung open by a heavy body striking against it, and into the dining room staggered Aaron, his clothes torn, his face pale, and a streak of blood across one temple.

At sight of him the others sprang up.

“What has happened?” cried Dick.

“I canna tell!” moaned Aaron. “Th’ guid young man asked me to meet him at th’ back o’ th’ house. When I did so an’ we were speakin’ together a band o’ men wi’ masks ower their faces sprang out upon us. One o’ them grappled wi’ me. I tried to tear fra him, an’ thin I saw all th’ stars o’ heaven fa’ on my haid. Next I found mysel’ strecht on th’ ground an’ th’ stars back i’ their places; but th’ young man were gone an’ th’ men ha vanished.”

Having made this explanation, Aaron fell heavily to the floor.

Nadia promptly fainted in Brad Buckhart’s arms. The old professor threw up his thin hands and looked quite helpless. The widow assisted Buckhart to take the senseless girl into the sitting room and place her on the couch near the crackling, open fire.

Dick Merriwell lost not a moment in kneeling beside Aaron and examining his injury. He found a very slight cut in the hair near the temple.

“Stop that groaning!” he sternly commanded. “You’re not even badly hurt; you’re scarcely scratched.”

“Na! na!” gasped the little man. “I think I maun dee!”

“You won’t die from anything that has happened to you to-night. Get up! Stop this foolishness! Why, I can’t even find a bump on your head, and there should be a swelling there if you were hit so frightfully hard. Sit up!”

Dick’s manner was commanding, and, although he continued to take on, Aaron sat up.

“Now, see here,” said young Merriwell, “I want you to tell me that story again, and tell it straight. Just what did happen outside the inn?”

Aaron repeated his tale, without much variation. Practically it was the same.

“Do you mean to tell me that little scratch rendered you unconscious, man?” demanded Dick. “Why, it wouldn’t hurt a sick kitten!”

“I were struck on th’ heid wi’ somethin’.”

“Where is the abrasion or the swelling?”

“I ken naething about abreesions, sir. A’ I know, the sky seemed to fa’ on me.”

There was insincerity in Aaron’s tones, and Dick doubted him.

“Get a lantern,” he ordered. “I suppose you have one about the place?”

“Ay.”

“Get up! Bring me that lantern, and lose not a second.”

He assisted the little man to his feet. Aaron professed to be weak and confused, but Dick placed a heavy hand on him, saying sternly:

“If you cause me delay, I shall suspect that you do it purposely. Budthorne is rich, and those concerned in any harm to him cannot fail to be punished severely. If masked men carried him off, a hundred armed hunters will be engaged to search for them and kill them like dogs when found. Those who are not killed will be arrested and imprisoned. Work hard and fast, Aaron, that you are not suspected of having part in this bad business.”

“Na one who knows poor Aaron will suspect him o’ any wrong,” was the fellow’s protest.

“You don’t know the manner of Americans. They suspect every one concerned in an affair until he is found guiltless. Is this the lantern, Aaron? Light it instantly and lead me to the spot where this struggle took place.”

Somewhat awed by Dick and feeling the power of the boy’s will, the serving man tremblingly lighted the lantern, after which he conducted Merriwell from the house to the spot where the encounter had taken place.

“Stand still,” ordered Merriwell, taking the lantern from the man’s hand. “Let me read the signs here.”

There were tracks in the snow and some indications of a struggle. At one point was an imprint that seemed to indicate a man had fallen there. Dick picked up something, glanced at it by the light of the lantern and slipped it into a pocket.

Anxiously Aaron watched the boy, about whose manner there was method that alarmed the servant. Somehow Aaron began to believe Dick was reading those imprints and footmarks like the printed words of a book.

He was not far from right.

“What have you found, pard?” It was the voice of Buckhart, who had issued from the back door of the inn.

“Budthorne was struck down by men who had been concealed behind this little building,” said Dick. “They stepped out upon him as he stood here at the corner of the building, with his back turned in their direction. Aaron stood in front of him. They struck him with a sandbag, or some muffled weapon that did not cut his head.”

“How many of them were there?”

“Four. Three of them lifted and carried him toward the road, two holding his arms, while the third had his legs. The fourth chap, who was the leader, walked in advance. Three of them do not belong hereabouts, but the fourth, a heavy man with very big feet, belongs in the country.”

“Guid Lord!” whispered Aaron to himself, “how do he ken a’ that?”

Dick's early training by the old Indian, Joe Crowfoot, was standing him in good stead now.

Holding the lantern low, Merriwell followed the tracks toward the road.

"It's likely they carried him off in a carriage, partner," said the Texan.

But when the highway was reached, where it seemed that the boy with the lantern could find nothing to guide him to any conclusions, Dick continued his search, seeming to pick out the trail amid the many imprints there.

"There was no carriage here," said the lad with the lantern. "They still carried him in the original manner."

"But they could not contemplate carrying him far in that way."

"Surely not."

"Pard, are you armed?"

"No; are you?"

"I'm a-heap sorry to say I'm not."

Aaron had followed tremblingly at the heels of the boys. Now Professor Gunn came hastening from the house and joined them.

"It's awful—perfectly awful!" he fluttered. "I fear the shock will kill his sister. She's in a dreadful condition. Boys, we must send to town right off for the officers. We are in danger of our lives. At this moment we are in deadly peril. I'm afraid out here where the ruffians may spring upon us, and I'm afraid in there with no one but a woman and a girl."

"Go back to the inn, professor," directed Dick. "Stay with the widow and Nadia."

"What if the ruffians come?"

"You'll be there to protect the ladies. It will give you an opportunity to display your heroism and fighting blood."

"But this isn't the right kind of an opportunity," said Zenas. "Boys, you are recklessly exposing your lives! Come back into the inn at once. I can't permit you to be so careless."

"You'll have to permit it now," retorted Merriwell.

"What, do you dare disobey my orders?"

"On an occasion like this, yes. It is necessary, professor."

Zenas gasped and hesitated.

"Do come in!" he urged. "What can I tell your brother if anything serious happens to you?"

"Tell him the truth, and he will be satisfied. I am doing what my brother would wish me to do."

"Dear! dear!" muttered Gunn. "I regret that we ever came here. I fear we'll all be murdered before we get away."

Mumbling to himself, he hastened tremblingly back to the inn.

“His courage has all oozed out,” said Dick.

“Waugh! I should say it had!” growled Brad, in disgust.

Aaron now attempted to frighten the boys by telling them how fierce the masked men were and how thoroughly armed.

“Singular you saw so much of them,” observed Dick. “Never mind if they are armed thus and ready to commit murder at the drop of a hat; we’ll do our best to trail them, just the same.”

“Right, partner!” cried Buckhart. “It’s up to us to do everything we can for the sake of Nadia. It hurt me a heap to see her heartbroken over her brother, and I couldn’t stay with her any longer. I told her we’d find him.”

Down the road went Dick and Brad, with Aaron following them like a dog.

They entered the woods, where the bare trees stood silent and grim, coming at length to the path that turned off toward the lake. This Dick took.

Reaching the shore, Merriwell quickly announced that Budthorne had been placed in a boat and taken away.

“That lad ha’ th’ power o’ a witch!” whispered Aaron to himself. Then he shook as he beheld Dick’s eyes fastened on him.

“Come,” said the boy grimly, “we can’t follow them on water, for that leaves no trail. We’ll return to the inn.”

As they entered the inn Nadia rushed at them, asking if they had learned where her brother was and what had happened to him.

“Not yet,” answered Merriwell; “but we’ll know all about it in a minute.”

“How—how will you learn the truth?”

“From Aaron,” was the quiet answer that made the little man gasp.

“Aaron? He——”

“He knows much more than he has seen fit to tell.”

“Guidness kens I ha’ told ye everything!” protested the alarmed man.

Dick’s dark eyes were fastened on Aaron, and to the latter they seemed to bore into his very soul.

“Sit there,” commanded the boy, pointing toward a chair.

Aaron felt that he was compelled to do so.

Dick drew another chair before the man, sitting where he could look him straight in the eyes.

“Aaron,” he said, “who is your best friend?”

“Mrs. Myles, sir.”

“Do you wish to ruin her?”

“Na, na; not for th’ world!”

“Do you know that what has happened here to-night will ruin her unless you

tell the whole truth and thus enable us to follow Budthorne's captors and rescue him?"

"Na, na!"

"But it will. The story will travel far and wide. Every one will hear how a young American, a guest at this inn, was captured by ruffians and carried off. Travelers will shun the place. Mrs. Myles will find her business gone. With no income, she'll soon come to want and suffering. Without money she'll be unable to buy flour, and meat, and fuel. There will be no warm fire on her hearth in the bleak winter, and she'll suffer from hunger. You will be responsible—you, the one she took in when you were in wretchedness, the one she has fed, and housed, and trusted."

Aaron held up his hands.

"I canna be to blame for it!" he cried.

"You will be. You met Budthorne out there by understanding. You knew those men were hidden behind the little building. You knew they meant to carry him away. You were not injured or struck down. You even cut that tiny gash on your own head with a common knife. Here it is. I picked it up where in your excitement you dropped it in the snow."

Dick produced and held up the knife.

Aaron's face was ghastly, and a terrible fear was in his eyes. This boy with the searching eyes knew just what had happened, and it was useless to lie.

"I canna tell!" moaned the little man. "Do na look a' me wi' them eyes! I canna tell! I canna tell!"

"My poor lad!" exclaimed the widow. "Do na fear, but speak out th' truth."

"He wi' kill me if I do!" whispered Aaron.

"No one shall harm you," promised Dick.

"You canna tell that, for you do na ken him."

"Whom do you mean, Aaron?" asked the widow.

"Rob MacLane," he breathed, shuddering with fear.

"Rob MacLane?" cried the landlady, in consternation: "Do na tell me he had hand i' this black work!"

The shivering little man nodded.

"Then," said the widow, "th' poor young man is lost forever an' there is na hope for him."

"You may as well confess everything now," said Dick, once more fixing Aaron with his piercing eyes. "It can do no further harm to you. Make a clean breast of it—for the widow's sake, for the one who has warmed, and fed, and trusted you."

"I will!" said the little man; and in shaking tones he hurried through the

confession.

When Dick heard that Budthorne was to be taken to the old castle on the island and held a captive there he sprang up, turning to Nadia.

“We will find a way to save him, Miss Budthorne,” he promised. “Trust us.”

“How can you—how can you against Miguel Bunol and this terrible ruffian, MacLane?” she cried. “Then Aaron says there were more than two of them who attacked Dunbar at the door and struck him down.”

“The other two were Marsh and Durbin. Marsh is a pitiful coward, at best, so that practically reduces their fighting force to three. There are two of us, Brad and myself.”

“And I sure allow we’ll make it a whole lot hot for those three fine gents,” said the Texan, whose fighting blood was beginning to course hotly in his veins. “We know Bunol and Durbin. MacLane may not be half as dangerous as he is pictured. Nadia, we propose to bring your brother safe back to you before morning. You hear me chirp!”

CHAPTER VIII.—BUNOL MAKES HIS DEMAND.

Miguel Bunol stood in front of his weak, helpless captive in a room of the crumbling castle of Lochleven. The bare room was lighted by a torch thrust into a great crack in the wall. There was no furniture in the place. Dunbar Budthorne sat on the floor, with his back against the wall.

Bunol's arms were folded. His head was bowed a little, and he was steadily regarding Budthorne from beneath his black eyebrows.

"Well," said the captive, weakly, "have you come to finish me?"

The Spaniard made a gesture of remonstrance with his gloved hand.

"How can you ask such a foolish question, my dear friend?" he said.

"Don't call me your friend!" exclaimed Budthorne, with a slight show of resentment and spirit. "I am no friend to such a wretch as you!"

"Then let me assure you that I am your friend. I am deeply interested in you, else I should not have taken all this trouble to-night."

Something like a mirthless, mocking laugh came from the lips of the prisoner.

"A fine, friendly act!" said Budthorne. "It is the act of a solicitous friend to fall on one, sandbag him and carry him off by force to a place like this, I suppose! Where are the rest of your ruffians?"

"They are near enough to come at my call should I need them," said Bunol. "Never mind them. I wished to have a little private chat with you, and they kindly retired to give me that privilege."

"What is your game, Bunol? Out with it!"

"Don't be in such haste. There is plenty of time. We have the whole night before us. Indeed, should you remain obstinate, we may have many nights before us. You are quite safe, my dear Budthorne, here in this old castle. At this season of the year there is no danger that troublesome visitors will come to inspect the stronghold that was once, long ago, the prison of Queen Mary and is now yours."

"If they should come——"

"If they should come—see that door? It can be closed and barred. Beyond it is another door that can be made secure. If troublesome persons came, they would never find you. In here you might shout until your throat you split without ever making them hear one faint cry. Have you ever heard of Rob MacLane? Well, some years there have been that he has lived with a price on his head, and

always he had found this a safe hiding place when in this vicinity. There is not one chance in ten thousand that your friends at Ben Cleuch will come here to look for you; but should they come they will find no trace of you.”

“You devil!” cried Budthorne.

“Just how it was I wished you to know before we began talking. Now, listen, my dear Budthorne. You are a very reckless and extravagant young man, wholly unfitted to handle large sums of money. This I have learned since my acquaintance with you. I have discovered that soon you will spend your own share of the fortune which you inherited, and then I am sure you will make inroads into that of your sister, who cares so very much for you that she is unable to refuse you anything. What you greatly need is some one to look after you and your sister and to prevent you from begging yourself and her. Who in all the world is better fitted for this than your very dear friend, Miguel Bunol?”

“What folly!” exclaimed the captive. “What are you driving at?”

“First I wish to prove that I am sincere in my protestations of friendship,” the Spaniard calmly continued. “When first I knew you, a certain man, who is now not far away, had chosen you as a victim to be despoiled of your money. He thought I might be of assistance to him in the pleasant occupation, and so he took me into partnership.”

“You mean that miserable wretch, Durbin!”

“I have called no names. At the outset I joined him, with no other thought than to obtain a portion of the spoils. But in time I came to admire you and care for you very much. It became a repulsive task for me to assist him in his bungling plans, but the money I needed, and you had so much that I felt you well might spare a little. Thus it went on. Then you did me the honor to present me to your lovely sister.”

“I was a fool.”

“No, for I learned to care a great deal for Nadia, and in time I decided that for her sake you must be saved. In order to save you I decided to marry her.”

In spite of his weakness, Budthorne struggled to his feet as if to attack Bunol, but he was forced to lean against the wall for support.

“Don’t excite yourself too much,” urged the Spaniard, with mock solicitude. “You are not strong.”

“No, no!” groaned Budthorne. “My legs will scarcely bear my weight. I believe you somehow contrived to drug me, you wretch!”

Bunol smiled, thinking of the drug he had given Aaron.

“You do me great injustice,” he protested. “Let me continue. I resolved to marry your sister, for I felt she stood in great need of a faithful guardian who would care for her tenderly and prevent you from squandering her share of the

fortune. Little by little I gained influence and control over you, and I should have succeeded in full but for the interference of that fellow Merriwell. He upset all my plans. Had those plans worked as they should, the moment I became sure of Nadia I should have cast aside both Durbin and Marsh. Rid of them, I could cause you to cease your recklessness and prevent you from squandering what remained of your fortune. You see, Budthorne, my intentions toward you were of the most friendly sort.”

“Bah!” cried the captive.

“After the exposure in London,” Bunol went on, “I succeeded in following you here, leaving Marsh and Durbin behind. With the aid of a faithful fellow, good fortune led me to meet, I planned to get hold of you, just as I have, in order to talk reason to you. I could have done very well without Marsh and Durbin, but it chanced that they followed Merriwell and his companions to Ben Cleuch, and they were passing on the highway when I hailed them. I thought it best to use them once more this night, and then to get rid of them forever. They think I am now trying to squeeze from you more money that is to be divided equally between us. Thus they deceive themselves. If you have in your head the reason you should, it is little they will get.”

“What are you trying to propose?” demanded Budthorne.

“That you swear to me by all you hold sacred, by the memory of your mother and the fear of God, that you will not prevent me from making your sister my wife, either by word, deed or suggestion. That is all I ask.”

“And if I do that—what then?”

“I will outwit the others. I will lead you from this place when they know nothing of it. We will take the boat and row away. When we arrive at the inn, I will tell how I found and rescued you from Rob MacLane, Hector Marsh, and Luke Durbin. You will say it is true, every word to the last. After that my own cards I will play, and your sister will I win, for I have the power to make her mine.”

Always self-confident to an amazing degree, knowing his influence over Budthorne, and believing he could force the man to do his will, Bunol believed that in this manner he might make himself a hero in the eyes of Nadia, might ensnare her in his hypnotic net, and might obtain her for his own at last.

But all the while he was playing double with Budthorne, for he had outlined his plan to Durbin and Marsh, promising to wring money from both brother and sister if he succeeded, and to divide liberally with his accomplices. Rob MacLane was to be paid a set sum for his services.

“What if I refuse?” asked Budthorne.

“Then I shall leave you here alone in the dark to meditate upon it a time.”

“You fool!” panted the captive. “You were crazy to fancy you could force me into such a thing! Not in a thousand years!”

Bunol shrugged his shoulders.

“It is you who are foolish,” he asserted. “Look into my eyes a moment, Budthorne, and——”

“No! no!” hoarsely cried the young man, as he suddenly started forward, his hands clinched, resolved to attack his enemy. “I’ll fight you here, man to man.”

The Spaniard struck those clinched hands aside and gave Budthorne a thrust that sent him again to the wall, against which he struck and then dropped to the floor.

“Very well,” said Miguel. “Having thought it over, you will change your mind, I believe. I will leave you to consider it all.”

Snatching the torch from the crack, he strode from the room, closing and barring the heavy door behind him.

CHAPTER IX.—THE FIGHT IN THE CASTLE.

The night was on the wane when Miguel Bunol returned and found the shivering, half-frozen captive stretched on the bare floor.

Budthorne lifted his head from his curled arms and looked at his enemy with eyes filled with fear and hatred.

“Leave me to die!” he hoarsely said. “You can never force me to sacrifice my sister!”

“Still obstinate!” sneered Bunol. “I had hoped to see a change in you. Unless you decide at once to comply, you will have to remain here through another day, for morning approaches, and we can leave this island only by night.”

“I’ll never give in! I’ll never surrender to your evil influence! You——”

The speaker stopped suddenly, starting up and listening, for from some distant portion of the old ruin came a sudden cry of alarm. This cry was followed by others and then a shot was heard!

For a moment, as Budthorne struggled to his feet, Miguel Bunol stood amazed and thunderstruck. Then he snarled out an oath and wheeled toward the door.

With a sudden burst of strength, Budthorne dashed at the fellow and leaped on his back, clutching him round the neck with both arms.

At the same time he lifted his voice and shouted for help.

Budthorne believed rescuers had arrived.

He was right. With muffled oars, a boat containing four persons had noiselessly approached the island, slipping into the dark shadows of its wooded shore.

The four in the boat were Dick Merriwell, Brad Buckhart, Zenas Gunn, and Aaron, the latter having provided the boat and accompanied them in the effort to find and rescue Budthorne.

Professor Gunn was shaking like a man with the ague.

“Bub-bub-bub-boys,” he whispered, as Dick and Brad cautiously stepped out of the boat, “I th-th-think I had bub-bub-bub-better remain here and gug-gug-gug-guard the bub-boat.”

“That’s right,” agreed Dick. “You’ll serve us better here than you will to go with us. But don’t go away. Wait for us, no matter what happens.”

Aaron, who was determined to undo the wrong Dick had led him to believe he had committed toward Widow Myles, led the boys under the crumbling wall

and into the grim and silent castle.

To Professor Gunn it seemed that ages passed, but at last his heart was sent quivering into his throat by the sounds that came from the interior of the ruin. There were hoarse shouts, a shot, and a muffled voice calling for help.

The professor wrung his hands.

“How can I ever tell Frank that I let his brother go to his death in this manner!” he moaned. “Both those brave boys will be murdered, and I feel that I am responsible for it.”

Within the castle the terrifying sounds continued for a time. At last the old professor was startled to see appear on a portion of the wall, faintly outlined against the sky, two dark figures. They grappled, one of them seeming huge and giant-like, while the other was much smaller.

Holding his breath in horrified suspense, Professor Gunn watched the brief struggle. The larger man seemed easily to conquer his antagonist, and the professor heard him hoarsely snarl:

“Ye runty de’il, ye ha’ played traitor on Rob MacLane, ha’ ye? It’s th’ last thing ye e’er do!”

Then the giant lifted the little man in his arms to hurl him from the wall.

At that moment another figure appeared. There was a flash of fire and the ring of a pistol shot.

The giant dropped the little man, flung up his hands and both plunged from the wall.

The shaking old man by the boat heard the one who had fired the shot exclaim:

“Great tarantulas! I sure opine that’s the end of both of them!”

It was Buckhart, the fighting Texan; but a moment later he had disappeared.

Then, as the still trembling professor crouched by the boat, he was startled to see two forms run past, one after the other. Directly the sound of oars came to his ears, and, peering out on the placid face of the cold lake, he beheld a boat that was being rapidly rowed away.

And he could have sworn there were three persons in the boat.

Miguel Bunol succeeded after much effort in tearing his assailant from his back and striking him down. Then the Spaniard fled from the room and down the stairs.

Bunol’s companions had been surprised and attacked. On account of the boldness of the assailants, they believed the force much larger than it was, and they lost no time in seeking to get away.

The light in the room was dashed out, and in the darkness the fight continued.

Aaron had singled out Rob MacLane, but the ruffian escaped by another door, and the little man followed him to the wall, where took place the encounter witnessed by Professor Gunn.

Marsh and Durbin had been fortunate in getting away in the dark passages of the old castle, and Buckhart followed Aaron in his pursuit of MacLane. Brad witnessed the peril of the little man, and fired to save him from being dashed from the wall. Following the shot, both men fell.

Buckhart retraced his steps and heard Dick calling to him. Guided by Merriwell's voice, he came upon Dick, who was supporting Budthorne with one hand and holding a torch with the other.

"Perhaps we had better get out of here before those chaps recover and realize there are so few of us," said Dick. "I think Budthorne is all right, and we've had great luck."

"Luck!" cried the fighting Texan. "No luck about it, pard! I opine it was a case of pure sand, and we won the game on our merits."

He then told what had happened on the old wall.

They lost no time in getting outside and aiding Budthorne to the spot where the terrified professor waited with the boat.

"But we're not going away without finding out what has happened to Aaron," said Dick. "Come on, Brad."

They went in search of the little man and found him under the wall, his leg broken. Near at hand lay another man, who had something worse than a broken leg, for a bullet had pierced his shoulder and his neck had been broken when he struck the ground.

Innocent persons in that part of the country would never more be terrorized by Rob MacLane.

After a long consultation with Budthorne and his sister, it was decided, on Dick's advice, that Dunbar and Nadia should quietly leave Scotland for Italy. Dick and Brad promised to meet them, if possible, after they had visited several points of interest in England, upon which the professor insisted.

CHAPTER X.—THE HAUNTS OF ROBIN HOOD.

“Well, boys,” said Professor Gunn, “we are at last in the very heart of Sherwood Forest, the haunt of Robin Hood, the outlaw.”

“There certain is a right good stretch of timber and some of the biggest trees I ever saw,” confessed Brad Buckhart; “but it doesn’t seem to me that it should have been such a mighty hard thing to hunt an old outlaw out of a place like this.”

“Times were different then, and you must not forget that, while Robin plundered the rich, legends have it that he was always kind to the poor, and, therefore, he had many friends who warned him of danger and gave him protection.”

Dick Merriwell, Brad Buckhart, and Professor Gunn were being driven in an open carriage through the noble and famous forest. All around them stood the mighty oaks, some of which, it was said, had withstood the storms of seven centuries. The westering sun of what had been an ideal autumn day gleamed through the branches on which the brown leaves rustled and where the squirrels chattered. The frozen ground was bestrewn with fallen leaves, which rustled in little flocks along the hard road when stirred by a passing breeze, seeming like startled birds.

Earlier in the day they had visited Newstead Abbey, the home of Byron, where two hours were spent. On leaving they drove through the ever-thickening forest to a little wayside inn, where they lunched. After a rest, they resumed their drive, it being their object to stop for the night at Robin Hood’s Tavern, an inn of which they had been told by their cockney driver.

“Is it really true, professor,” asked Dick, “that Robin Hood was of noble birth?”

The old pedagogue shrugged his shoulders and smiled a withered smile.

“That is a question no one can answer,” he declared. “It has been said that he was the outlawed Earl of Huntingdon, but such a tale may have come from the fact that the really noble qualities he betrayed seemed quite unnatural for a robber and outlaw, and were supposed to be possessed only by those of gentle birth. But here in this forest he roamed with Friar Tuck, Little John, Will Scarlett, Allen-a-Dale, and Maid Marion. Here he made merry and lived such a life of adventure, and ease, and pleasure, that he has been the envy of every romantic youngster to this day.”

“Did he live long?” questioned Buckhart.

“Tradition says he lived his roving, careless, jolly life until he became a very old man.”

“And how did he die? Was he executed?”

“Oh, no. Being somewhat ill, he trusted himself to the prioress of Kirkley to be bled, and she treacherously let him bleed to death.”

“Do you believe there really was a Robin Hood, professor?”

“Why not?”

“Well, you know the story has been doubted by students of history, many of whom assert that the story of his life is purely legendary.”

“Hum! haw! Haw! hum!” coughed Zenas. “Some of these students of history are cranks and doubters on principle. They think they impress people with their great knowledge, acumen and judgment by doubting everything there is any chance of doubting. You can doubt anything that happened say a century ago if you wish to. No matter how strong the proofs may be, you can say they were manufactured. Do either of you boys doubt the story of Paul Revere’s ride?”

“Of course not!” exclaimed Dick.

“I should rise to remark that we don’t,” burst from Brad.

“Well, I once heard a man, an educated man, a scholar, declaring that the whole yarn had been manufactured out of moonshine. He didn’t deny there had lived such a person as Paul Revere, for Paul Revere’s descendants still live; but he insisted and maintained that the tale of his midnight ride had been elaborated and cooked up to please those who wished to make a hero of a very commonplace man.”

“Great tarantulas!” growled Brad. “That gent certain deserved to be shot up some for making such foolish talk!”

“Do you really believe there was a Robin Hood, professor?” asked Dick, once more.

“I think there is no doubt that such a man lived,” answered the old man stiffly. “Perhaps he did not pass through all the stirring adventures credited to him, but I am satisfied that there was a Robin Hood. He was passionately attached to the chase, and he was bold enough to make free with the king’s deer, which angered the king, who summoned him to London. Thinking himself far safer here in this forest, which was then much more vast, having since been cut away to a great extent, he simply ignored the summons, upon which the king pronounced him an outlaw.”

The sun was low in the west, and the long shadows deepened in Sherwood Forest. Soon the sun set and night spread its wing over the ancient haunts of Robin Hood.

“How much farther to the tavern, driver?” asked Professor Gunn.

“Not hover four mile, sir,” was the answer.

Behind them on the hard road there sounded the clatter of hoofs and rumble of wheels. Looking round, they saw a closed carriage, drawn by two horses, rapidly approaching.

“Some one drives in a great hurry,” said Dick.

The horses were steaming as they whipped past at a favorable place for doing so. The curtains of the carriage were closely drawn, and not a soul save the muffled driver was to be seen.

“Those horses have been pushed right hard,” observed Buckhart. “Wonder who’s inside the old hearse.”

They crossed a stone bridge and followed the winding road on into a still deeper portion of the forest. The sun went down and darkness gathered.

At last a light glimmered cheerfully in the distance and a dog barked.

“That is Robin ’Oods Tavern,” said the driver.

“Glad of it!” exclaimed the professor. “It’s getting cold since sunset. Not quite as bad as it was in Scotland, but too cold for comfort while driving.”

“Why, I allowed it was some hot up round Lochleven in Scotland,” chuckled Buckhart. “We warmed things up one night. Eh, pard?”

“Rather,” agreed Dick.

Amid the massive oaks stood the little inn, with the light shining cheerfully from its windows. Soon they drew up before it, their journey ended for the night.

Outside the inn, with the horses unhitched and removed, stood the same closed carriage that had passed them on the road.

A hostler came to take charge of their horses, and they entered the inn, being greeted by the landlord, a ruddy-cheeked man, named Swinton, who was smoking a rank-smelling pipe. The landlord welcomed them in a hearty, cheerful manner, bidding them come in by the fire and get warm.

“It’s going to be a cold night, gentlemen,” he said.

“Cold, indeed, sir,” agreed the professor; “but your little house looks bright, and warm, and comfortable.”

“So I think you will find it. You will stay to sup with me?”

“We hope you can give us accommodations overnight. Have you two rooms, one with a fire in it?”

“I have just what you want, I believe—two rooms with a door between, and a grate fire in one of them. You may be as comfortable as you please here.”

By this time the professor had learned that it was always best to bargain in advance for accommodations in England, and this he proceeded to do, haggling in a good-natured way with the landlord, who at first asked an exorbitant price.

“We’re not millionaires, my dear sir,” said Zenas. “We’re just plain, ordinary people, traveling through your beautiful country. The pennies count with us.”

“You’re from America, are you not?” asked the innkeeper, seeming greatly surprised at this confession.

“We are, but not all Americans have money to burn, even though the most of them who come abroad wish people to think so.”

Finally the landlord agreed to a price a full third lower than he had originally named, after which, having ushered them into a room with an open coal fire, he went away to prepare their rooms for them.

A servant came and removed the wraps, saying they would be taken to the rooms upstairs. He also took charge of the big hand bag, which contained their nightdresses and such toilet articles as they always carried with them.

After a time the porter came and announced that their rooms were ready for them. At the foot of the stairs a maid with a lighted candle waited to escort them. She was a buxom, red-cheeked country girl.

“Be careful hof of the stairs, sir; they’re very steep sir,” she said to Zenas, giving him a smile that made him brace up wonderfully. “Hi ’ave to climb them hoften henough to know.”

“Er-hum!” coughed the old fellow. “They say climbing stairs is fine exercise—great for the complexion. But you don’t need anything to improve your complexion, my dear—it couldn’t be improved.”

“Ow kind you hare, sir!” she said, with a smothered laugh.

Dick was behind Brad, and he gave the Texan a pinch that caused him to utter a whoop.

“Ow, goodness!” cried the girl, in alarm.

“Don’t be frightened, my dear—don’t be frightened!” said Zenas quickly. “It’s only the boys.”

“Hit gave me ’art a hawful jump,” said the girl. “One gets frightened terrible in this ’ouse.”

“Get frightened here? Why?”

“’Avent you ’eard, sir?”

“About what?”

“This place is ’aunted, you know.”

“Eh? Hey? Haunted, did you say?”

“Yes, sir; they do say it’s the spirit of Robin ’Ood hissself that come ’ere, sir.”

“This is interesting—decidedly so!” said Zenas. “A haunted inn in the heart of Sherwood Forest! Why, I should think it would drive away custom if such a report got out.”

“Hinstead of that, hit brings people ’ere to see the place, sir. They seem to

take great hinterest in 'aunted 'ouses.”

She flung open the door of a room.

“'Ere is your rooms, sirs,” she said. “The fire is warm, and Hi 'ope you will be very comfortable. Is there hany thing I can bring you?”

They entered the first room, in which the fire was burning. It was fairly large and comfortable, with a big English bed, surrounded by curtains.

“Wait a minute, my dear,” urged the professor. Then turning to the boys, he said:

“Here, you youngsters, take that candle on the mantel and inspect your room. The door is open, I see.”

Dick gave Brad a wink and picked up the candle, starting for the adjoining room. The maid had entered the first room and was waiting, candle in hand.

“You may go with Richard, Bradley,” said Zenas, seeing that Buckhart lingered behind.

“All right,” nodded the Texas youth.

As he stepped past the girl he gave a puff that extinguished the candle in her hand. Then he swiftly strode into the adjoining room, closing the door behind him.

Immediately the old professor began to call loudly for Dick and Brad to return.

“Come back here, you young rascals!” he shouted. “What are you up to, you scoundrels? Bring that candle instantly! How dare you do such a thing—how dare you!”

“I'm so frightened!” fluttered the girl, catching hold of Zenas. “'Ave you a match, sir? We might light the candle, sir.”

Dick opened the door and peered back into the room, discovering the girl clinging to the professor.

“Here! here!” he cried reprovngly. “What are you doing, Professor Gunn? You're a married man. I didn't think it of you! I didn't think you would blow out the young lady's candle and attempt to kiss her in the dark. It's really scandalous! What would Mrs. Gunn say if she ever heard of this?”

“Oh, goodness! She'd have a fit!” confessed Zenas. “Bring that candle instantly! How in the world did this candle happen to go out?”

“Oh, I think you know how it happened,” laughed Merriwell.

“On my word I don't!” declared Gunn. “I believe that reprobate Buckhart did it!”

“But he didn't compel you to attempt to kiss the girl in the dark.”

“Oh, murder! I never touched her! She was frightened. She clung to me for protection.”

“Oh, all right,” said Dick; but his tone and manner seemed to indicate that he knew better and could not be fooled by such an explanation.

Zenas shook his fist at Dick in great excitement.

“If you dare hint that I was trying to kiss her, I’ll—I’ll—I’ll——”

He seemed unable to find words with which to complete the threat, and so he turned to the maid, anxiously urging her to attest that he had done nothing of the sort.

Behind the professor’s back Dick winked and nodded at her, making signs she understood.

“Why, sir,” she said, falling in with the joke, “Hi don’t hexactly suppose you hactually meant to kiss me, sir; but——”

“There it is professor—there it is!” cried Dick, while Buckhart laughed aloud. “She confesses that you really did do it, although she tries to shield you by saying it was an accident.”

“She didn’t confess anything of the sort!” palpitated Zenas, actually dancing in his excitement. “You’re twisting her language, you rascal! You’re perverting her meaning! You’re trying to ruin my reputation!”

“If she hadn’t said so with her own lips—the lips you tried to——”

“Stop it! stop it!” implored Zenas. “If you respect me in the least, I implore you to stop it! If you ever hint that such a thing happened, if you ever breathe a suggestion of it in the presence of my wife, I’ll——”

“Now, don’t threaten me,” said Dick reproachfully. “You know I’m your friend, and even though I have been saddened to know of your disreputable behavior, I’ll remain silent as the grave concerning it. Even though I may deplore your inclination to get gay with the girls, I’ll bury the black secret in my heart and never breathe a word of it to your lovely, delicate and trusting wife.”

“Lovely! Delicate!” gasped the old pedagogue.

“Don’t say a word against her, sir!” exclaimed Dick, with a pretense of righteous indignation. “She remains at home and permits you to travel abroad for your health, little dreaming that, while she thus sacrifices herself for your sake, you are carrying on scandalously with every pretty girl you meet.”

Zenas threw up his hands in despair, the expression on his face being so laughable that Buckhart with difficulty kept himself from roaring.

“I didn’t dream you could say such things of me, Richard!” groaned the old man.

“And I didn’t dream you would cut up so among the girls. Of course, I’ll keep still about it, and Brad will never say a word, but still it may leak out. It may get into the newspapers. You know there are representatives of the yellow journals of America in London. They may hear of it. It will make a breezy bit of

scandal—a juicy morsel—for them. How would this sound in one of their papers: ‘Professor Gunn Gets Gay With the Girls. Giddy Old Chap, Traveling in England, Tickles the Chambermaids——’”

With a genuine shriek of horror, Professor Gunn dropped on a chair.

“Stop! stop!” he yelled. “You’ll drive me to suicide!”

“But you know it may get into the papers,” Dick went on. “As I said, neither Brad nor myself will say anything about it.”

“Then how can it get out?”

“Why, the girl you tried to kiss may——”

“Never tried it—never!”

“Well, the girl who says you tried to kiss her——”

“Who says you did kiss her—by accident,” put in the boy from Texas.

“I stand corrected, and I accept the correction.” said Dick. “The girl who says you did kiss her by accident may happen to speak of it to other tourists. She may mention your name. It’s not unlikely some of those tourists may be newspaper men. If they are not, they may be friends of newspaper men. They may see an opportunity of making a good, spicy item out of it. Oh, there are ways enough for it to get into the American papers.”

“How can I prevent it?” groaned the tortured old fellow.

“Why, you might fix it with the girl,” answered Dick, again giving the maid a significant wink. “She’s a poor girl, but she’s honest and kind-hearted. She wouldn’t like to ruin you, and she’ll keep still—for an inducement.”

“Ow, Hi couldn’t think hof it——” began the girl.

Thinking she meant that she could not think of keeping still, Zenas sprang to his feet, cold perspiration starting out on his pale face.

“I implore you! I beseech you!” he cried. “I’m an honorable man, and I hold a position of trust and responsibility in America. If this thing gets into the American papers I’m ruined. Here, my dear girl, take this—take it and remain silent—for my sake.”

Eagerly he thrust a pound note into her hand.

“Ow, you hare so kind, sir—so very kind, sir!” she tittered, bobbing him a bow. “Hi’m ownly a poor girl, and Hi thank you for being so hawfully kind to me, sir. If there’s hanything Hi can do for you, sir, while you are ’ere——”

“You can,” said Zenas solemnly.

“You may depend hon me, sir. What is it?”

“Keep away from this room. Don’t come near it while I remain in the house. If you do these boys will see something further that is improper. Go at once. Every moment you remain adds to my peril. Go!”

“Very well, sir. Hi ’opes you ’ave a pleasant time while ’ere, sir. Hi ’opes

you henjoy your supper and your night's rest, sir. Good night, sir.”

Bobbing a bow to each of them in turn, she smilingly left the room.

CHAPTER XI.—THE SPANIARD AGAIN.

“I don’t think you’re really to blame, professor,” said Dick. “Indeed, I have often wondered in the past how you succeeded in warding off the attacks of the fair sex, who are continually besieging you. No one is to blame if he happens to be attractive and fascinating to women.”

The old fellow brightened up a little.

“That’s nonsense, Richard,” he said. “Of course, there was a time when the girls did chase after me more or less, but that’s gone by.”

“You know better, professor. In these days girls are learning to admire men of brains, and talent, and genius. You’ll have to be careful, professor. There’s something about you that fetches them every time.”

Zenas smiled.

“Do you think so?”

“I know it! I want to warn you for your own good. You’ll have to hold them off. If we go to Paris, you’ll have to be on your guard. They’re sure to throw themselves at you. Paris is full of pretty girls, they say, and they’ll keep you ducking. If you were inclined to be frisky, you could have a score of handsome women chasing you.”

“He! he!” laughed Gunn. “That would be embarrassing, but it would be rather exciting.”

He rose to his feet and threw out his chest.

“I don’t know but you are right,” he nodded. “Since crossing the pond I’ve noticed the ladies glancing my way and smiling on me. In London they smiled at me, and in Scotland the Scottish girls were inclined to give me the eye. I used to be quite a chap with ’em, but since getting married I’ve lived retired and kept away from ’em. I’ll have to look out or some of them will be trying to steal me.”

Buckhart turned a laugh into a severe fit of coughing.

“I’m afraid I’ve taken cold,” he barked.

By this time Dick had Professor Gunn thinking himself really a very captivating old chap with the ladies, and he began to tell how he had found it necessary to dodge them all his life.

“Stop it, pard!” whispered the boy from Texas. “If you don’t let up I’ll sure give myself away to him.”

Thus adjured, Merriwell finally quit egging Zenas on, but he improved an opportunity to slip out of the room and leave the professor relating some of his

experiences to Buckhart.

Dick descended to the lower rooms of the inn, entering the one to which they had first been ushered by the landlord.

A man in black clothes was half sitting, half reclining in a big easy-chair that was drawn up before the fire. Evidently he had been perusing a newspaper, over which, made drowsy by the warmth, he had fallen asleep. The paper was spread over his face.

At one corner of the glowing open grate was another chair, and Dick sat down in this.

“A cool night, sir,” he observed, by way of being sociable.

The man did not stir. Evidently he was quite sound asleep.

Dick took from his pocket a tourist’s map and began examining it. The old professor had stated that in a few days they would leave England for warmer countries to the south, but their exact route had not yet been decided on.

For ten minutes or more Dick studied the map closely, becoming quite absorbed in it. At last, although he had not heard a sound or observed a movement on the part of his companion, he was led to glance up quickly, feeling himself attracted by something.

The man in the easy-chair had permitted the newspaper to slip down just enough for him to peer over the upper edge of it.

Merriwell found himself looking straight into a pair of dark, magnetic eyes, which were fixed on him with a steady, intent gaze. As those eyes met Dick’s they did not waver or blink in the least, and thus the two sat perfectly still, Dick holding the map and having his head partly lifted, gazing at each other unwaveringly and in stony silence.

Almost instantly Dick knew he had seen those eyes before. There was something familiar about them. They gave the boy at first a queer, uncanny sensation, and something like a chill, followed by a tingling flush of heat, passed over him.

A sense of danger came to Dick Merriwell. He seemed to feel the influence of a strange, subtle power. Directly he realized that this unknown power emanated from those piercing dark eyes, and it seemed that in his ear his guardian genius whispered an anxious warning.

Immediately the boy roused himself and brought his own firm will to the task of combating the influence whose touch he had so distinctly felt. Summoning his spirit of resistance to the contest, he continued to watch the eyes revealed above the edge of the newspaper.

Neither man nor boy moved a muscle. In dead silence they remained thus, watching each other like panthers about to spring.

The fire glowed warmly on the hearth and a great clock that stood in one corner of the room ticked solemnly and regularly. Outside the wind rose in a great gust and swept with rushing sound through the branches of the trees. Ghostly hands, like those of restless spirits seeking admission from the darkness and the cold, rapped at the casement of a window.

Still the unknown man and the American lad sat motionless, gazing into each other's eyes.

The unvaried ticking of the great clock began to sound loud as hammer strokes.

Gradually Dick realized that he was obtaining the mastery. He had met and resisted the unknown influence the other was bringing to bear upon him, and his determination was conquering the subtle power of those magnetic eyes.

He called into action all the force of will he could command, knowing that he was defeating the object of the silent man before the fire.

Finally the man uttered a low exclamation of disappointment and anger, and the newspaper fell rustlingly from his face.

Dick sat face to face with Miguel Bunol!

"Curses on you!" hissed the Spanish youth. "Had you not looked up so soon I would have succeeded."

"Never!" retorted Dick. "It is not in you, Bunol, to conquer a Merriwell."

"We shall see."

"I should think you would know it by this time. What are you doing here?"

"That is my business."

"In which I am somewhat interested. How dare you show your face again?"

"Dare?" laughed the young Spaniard, harshly. "Did you think you could frighten me? Fool not yourself by such a fancy. I have a right to go where I choose, have I not?"

"You might find it unpleasant if you were to appear in the vicinity of Kinross, Scotland, about now. Of course you have a right to go there, if you choose, but you would be arrested if you did so."

"We are not in Scotland, Merriwell. This is England and the heart of Sherwood Forest."

"But the law is just as strong here as in Kinross. If Dunbar Budthorne were here he would——"

Bunol snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"He would do nothing at all. Had he sat before me, were he sitting thus now, I'd have him powerless to disobey my command—I'd have him subject to my every wish. I am his master, and he knows it."

"Still at Lochleven you did not succeed in forcing him into your dastardly

scheme—you did not compel him to aid you in your plot to marry his sister.”

“But for you, Merriwell, I should have succeeded. You ruined my plot. That very night, as I fled in a boat across the bleak bosom of the lake, I swore to turn my attention to you, and put you beyond the possibility of baffling me again. Now you know why I am here. What will you do about it?”

The Spaniard asked the question mockingly. He was flinging defiance in the teeth of the young American.

“You have selected a big task, Mig Bunol.”

“But I have sworn to succeed.”

“You will fail utterly and miserably.”

Bunol lifted one hand to caress the thin, black mustache upon his lip.

“That is what you believe,” he said; “but I know I shall not fail. At Fardale I hated you, but I forgot you after I left the school. Never again would I have given you a thought had you not crossed my path in London. You crossed it at a most unfortunate time for me, as then I was on the very verge of accomplishing my great object.”

“And that object was to ruin Dunbar Budthorne and to make his beautiful sister your wife.”

“I love her!”

“You love her! Never! You love nothing but your own selfish, villainous self, Bunol. You were interested in her, and fascinated by her, because of her beauty; but had she been a poor girl you would not have dreamed for a moment of marrying her.”

“How wise you are!” sneered Miguel, shrugging his shoulders. “Even if that is so, what does it prove?”

“It proves that you are a fortune hunter of the lowest and most contemptible sort.”

“Is it such a crime to be a fortune hunter, as you call it? What are the ruined and penniless noblemen of Europe who seek marriage with American heiresses?”

“You are not even in the class of those men, for, though they may be cads, and snobs, and weaklings, and utterly lacking in manly qualities, few of them are downright scoundrels and desperadoes. At least, they have titles to give in return for the wealth their rich wives will bring them; but you have nothing to give.”

“Yah!” snarled the Spaniard, showing his white, gleaming teeth. “You say things that sting, but some day your tongue will be silent with death!”

“Your threats do not disturb me in the least, Bunol, for I am confident that I shall live to see you hanged, as you justly deserve to be. Bunol, your power is broken and your great scheme has come to naught. You may as well seek other

victims, for never again will your fingers handle a dollar of Budthorne's money."

With a sneer on his dark face, the Spanish youth had listened to Merriwell's words.

"It is a great wonder you think yourself!" he cried. "You think you have defeated me. How little you know me, boy! Did you imagine you had thrown me off the track and would see me no more while abroad? I am here. From Edinburgh you I followed to Glasgow, from Glasgow to Dublin, from Dublin to Manchester, Sheffield and here. I chose this spot to appear to you again and to let you know I am on your track. All this time you have known nothing of it, and you have thought me frightened by what happened in Scotland. While you remained in Scotland I did not care to appear, as I knew you would try to have me arrested.

"In Dublin there was no reason why I should make myself known, nor yet in Manchester or Sheffield. Here we are far from any town and in the heart of a forest. True, your friends are within call of your voice if you lift it; but I, too, have friends ready to spring in on us at a signal. My friends are all armed, and it is short work they would make of two boys and a cowardly, withered old man. Ha! ha! Call, if you like! I am willing; I am ready. Utter a shout, and by the time your friends get down to this room you will be lying on this hearth in your blood."

"Are you trying to frighten me with such talk, Mig Bunol? You should know by this time that I am not easily frightened. You say you have followed me. That is good. While you were doing so Dunbar Budthorne and his sister were getting far beyond your reach. You have followed me in order to be near when they joined us again. That is it!"

Dick laughed triumphantly, for he had stated the reason why Bunol had so persistently dogged him about, and he felt that the fellow had been completely baffled.

Dick's laughter caused Bunol to turn pale with rage. He saw that the young American regarded him with positive contempt. In Dick he had not aroused an atom of fear—nothing but aversion, scorn and contempt.

"You cannot fool me!" he snarled. "The Budthornes are not very far away. If you live, you will meet them soon. I shall be there."

"Will you?"

"Yes! I know your cowboy friend has become deeply interested in Nadia, but—bah!—what is he? I can dispose of him so." Bunol gave a careless flirt of his hand.

"It's plain enough you do not know the kind of stuff that Brad Buckhart is made of."

“He is nothing but a blustering braggart.”

“He’s a fighter, every inch of him; fearless as a lion. It was his bullet that pierced the shoulder of Rob MacLane, the outlaw, on the wall of Lochleven Castle, and sent him tumbling to the ground, where his career ended with a broken neck, greatly to the relief of all honest people.”

“Still he is nothing but a blustering braggart, and any man of real courage can become his master. I mind him not. It is you I have set my heart to conquer and crush, and then Buckhart will be disposed of with ease.”

“How do you propose to carry out your little project with me?”

“Don’t think I’ll not find a way. If I chose, you’d never leave this inn alive. You’d never rise from that chair, unless it were to drop dead on this hearth!”

“If all this is true, why don’t you go about it?” cried Dick, his eyes flashing. “I’m watching you! I am waiting for you to begin!”

“I came here to force you to tell me where Nadia is.”

Once more Dick laughed.

“And you fancied you could succeed? You fancied you could force a Merriwell to do your bidding? Bunol, you are a greater fool than I thought!”

“Oh, laugh, conceited idiot!” snarled the Spaniard. “You may be laughing in the face of death!”

“In some ways you are amusing, as well as disgusting. Now I know why you sat so still on that chair and pretended to sleep with the paper hiding your face. Now I know why you permitted the paper to slip down until you could peer over it. You have discovered that with your eyes and your mind you can govern weaklings. Your success with Dunbar Budthorne caused you to think you might hypnotize me, and force me to tell you where you could find Nadia. You have failed. What will be your next move?”

“I have failed, and my next move may be to put you forever out of the way of causing me more trouble.”

“Begin!” was Dick’s challenge. “I am waiting! Do you fancy you can do it alone? or will you call your paid ruffians to your assistance? Call Durbin! Call Marsh! Durbin has none too much courage, and Marsh is a miserable coward. I am here in this room alone. Call them to your aid and let’s have it out!”

“How bold you are!” sneered Bunol, again. “But it is not on such as Durbin and Marsh I depend alone. A closed carriage passed you on the road shortly before you arrived here. I was in that carriage, and with me were men ready to cut your throat at a word of command from me. Should I give the signal they would come with a rush. Better be careful with that tongue of yours. If you do not arouse me too far, I may permit you to live yet a while longer; but in the end you shall die—and by my hand!”

Dick was becoming tired of the talk. He had fancied some one might enter the room, either the landlord or the friends he had left upstairs. Now, of a sudden, he heard a sound of heavy knocking coming from the upper part of the inn, as if some one were pounding furiously on a door.

“Your friends are growing impatient,” said Bunol. “They wish to get out, it seems.”

“Wish to get out?”

“Yes; they are locked in their rooms. One of my men attended to that after you left them, I presume. I gave orders to keep Buckhart and the old man away in case I found an opportunity to meet you face to face. But the place will be disturbed by the racket they are making. I hope you enjoy your supper here and your night’s rest. I’m sorry to say I have decided to leave you. It might be disagreeable if your party and mine were to remain beneath the same roof.”

Bunol started to rise from his chair, as if to depart.

Instantly, without warning and with a great bound, Dick reached the Spaniard and clutched him.

“Wait a minute!” he exclaimed. “Don’t be in such a hurry to go.”

With a furious exclamation, Bunol flashed out a knife and struck at the boy’s throat a blow that was much like a streak of lightning as the steel glinted in the gleaming firelight—a blow impelled by deadly hatred and murderous impulse.

CHAPTER XII.—THE STRUGGLE.

At times Professor Gunn became very garrulous, and on such occasions he invariably insisted that either Dick or Brad should listen to him. If both refused, he was mortally offended.

When Brad saw Dick had slipped away and left him with the old man he feared what was coming, and tried to edge toward the door; but Zenas promptly called him back, urged him to sit down, placed a chair before the open fire, and sat down himself.

“Now we’re comfortable and cozy,” said the old man. “Now we can chat, Bradley. I have a few things I wish to say to you. I have some advice I wish to give you, my boy.”

Buckhart smothered a groan.

“Won’t it keep until after supper, professor?” he asked.

“No, sir. I’ve been waiting for an opportunity to speak with you alone, and this is the time. I have taken note that you are greatly interested in Miss Budthorne. Now, you are young—far too young to fall seriously in love. Wait, sir; let me speak. I am doing this as a father. Indeed, I feel that while we are traveling together I must practically fill the position of father to you. You have some faults. I had faults when I was of your age. I wish to tell you a story, and at the end I will indicate the lesson it teaches.”

Zenas then began a long-winded series of reminiscences about himself and his boyish love affair, to which Brad was forced to listen, little dreaming that in a room below Dick Merriwell and his enemy, Miguel Bunol, were sitting face to face, watching each other with eyes that never wavered.

Only for Professor Gunn’s determination to talk Buckhart would have attempted to leave the room long before he did, and would have made a surprising and annoying discovery that came to him later when he tried the door.

“Whatever’s the matter with this old door?” exclaimed the Texan, when he found it refused to open before his hand.

“Perhaps it sticks,” suggested Zenas.

“Sticks—nothing!” growled Brad.

“Then what——”

“It’s locked!”

“Locked?”

“Sure as shooting.”

“It can’t be.”

“I opine I know when a door is locked,” said the Texan; “and this yere door is locked tight and fast.”

“How could it happen? I’m sure there is not a spring lock on the door.”

“Not at all, professor. I wonder some if this is one of Dick’s tricks. I wonder if he locked us in here?”

“Why should he do that?”

Brad did not explain that he fancied it possible Dick had done so in order to compel him to listen to the old man’s lecture.

“Wonder if there’s no other way to get out,” he growled. “Mebbe the door to the next room is not locked.”

He hurried into the adjoining room, but found, to his further disappointment and disgust, that the door leading from that room was likewise locked.

When Brad returned he began hammering on the door in earnest.

“Look out!” cried Zenas. “You’ll knock a panel out!”

“That’s what I sure will do!” roared the Texan. “I’ll certain bu’st a hinge off if Dick doesn’t hike this way and open things up.”

“Perhaps he didn’t lock the door.”

“Then whoever did? That’s what I’d like to know.”

A sudden thought flashed through Buckhart’s head. What if this locking them in was a trick to keep them away while an attack of some sort was made on Merriwell?

“I can pay for the door,” he muttered; “and I certain ain’t going to keep still when there may be devilry of some sort going on.”

Then he backed off a few steps and made a rush and a spring, flinging his shoulder against the door, with the whole weight of his body behind.

The door burst open with a crash. Brad stumbled out into the hall, nearly falling, but quickly recovering his feet.

As he did so a significant cry came to his ears, proceeding from the lower part of the building.

In another moment he was bounding recklessly down the dark flight of stairs.

In the meantime, Dick was having his hands full with the treacherous Spaniard. Bunol had whipped out his knife with astonishing swiftness and had struck a deadly blow at the boy’s throat.

Quick as he was, however, either Merriwell anticipated the movement or he was quicker, for he dodged and clutched the wrist of his enemy at the same time.

Bunol uttered a low exclamation of disappointed rage, attempting to wrench his knife hand free.

“No you don’t!” exclaimed Dick, holding fast with a grip of iron. “You

murderous dog! This ought to be enough to put you behind bars, and I think I'll see that you go there for a while."

"You'll never put me there!" palpitated the Spanish youth.

In the struggle to break away from Dick he dragged the boy back and struck against the chair on which he had been sitting, nearly falling to the floor.

"Furies!" he panted.

For a few moments in the first heat of the encounter Bunol possessed amazing strength, and he kept Dick busy on the defensive, but it was not long before the boy tripped his antagonist and flung him heavily.

The knife flew from Bunol's hand as he fell, clanging on the stone hearth, to lie gleaming in the glow of the open grate.

Although Dick had thrown the Spaniard, he found Bunol much like an eel to hold. The fellow slipped and squirmed, almost instantly writhing from beneath the American lad.

As the two started up and Dick reached to again clutch his enemy, the landlord came rushing into the room. His eyes falling on the combatants, he paused a second, aghast.

"What does this mean?" he cried.

Brad Buckhart was not a second behind the landlord, and his eyes recognized Miguel Bunol instantly.

A roar broke from his lips.

"Mig Bunol!" he shouted.

But when he sprang to take a hand in the conflict, the strong arm of the landlord blocked him off and flung him back, while that worthy again demanded to know what it all meant.

"Don't stop me!" snarled the Texan, his face pale with excitement and rage. "Let me get my paws on that varmint! I sure will have his scalp!"

"Keep him away!" cried Bunol to the landlord. "They are ruffians and robbers! This one tried to rob me right here!"

Although Dick had again grasped the Spaniard, the latter once more squirmed from his fingers and managed to recover his feet. Instantly he sprang toward the hearth, on which his deadly knife lay shining brightly in the light.

Dick had no thought of letting the fellow again get that weapon in his hand. Knowing he had saved his life only by the narrowest possible margin, he now launched himself from a half-crouching position at the Spaniard, hurling the fellow aside and against the wall.

"Stand there!" thundered Buckhart.

In Glasgow Brad had purchased a revolver. This weapon he now had in his hand, and its muzzle was turned toward Bunol.

“Stand there, or by the everlasting Rockies, I’ll bore you in your tracks!” declared the Texan.

Dick quickly snatched up Bunol’s knife.

The Spaniard stood at bay, his black eyes gleaming and his breast rising and falling with his panting breathing. He was like a ferocious wild animal that had fallen into a trap.

“See, landlord!” he cried. “Now they are ready to murder me!”

“I’ll have none of this in my house!” grated the innkeeper, and he unhesitatingly placed himself in front of Buckhart, who was thus prevented from using his weapon in case he wished to do so.

Dick took a step toward Bunol.

The Spanish youth saw his opportunity. He did not wait for Merriwell to again lay hands on him. Instead of that, with two pantherish bounds he crossed the floor, and another bound carried him, doubled into a compact ball, straight at a window.

There was a great crashing and jangling of glass as the desperate young villain shot through the window, carrying out sash and panes.

CHAPTER XIII.—PROFESSOR GUNN’S WILD RIDE.

Strange and unusual things were happening at Robin Hood Tavern that night. Perhaps not since the days of the famous outlaw himself had such blood-stirring events happened on that particular spot.

Professor Gunn held up his hands in consternation as the impetuous young Texas hurled himself crashing through the door.

“Dear me! dear me!” gasped Zenas. “What a boy! what a boy! Impossible to restrain him! Impossible to refine him! Sometimes he acts like other people, but at other times——Eh? What’s that?”

The old pedagogue heard the cry that caused Brad to gather himself and go bounding recklessly down the dark stairs.

“Sounded peculiar!” whispered Zenas, listening at the door. “I don’t like it! I fear something is wrong!”

Then he heard excited voices rising from below and distinctly understood Buckhart to shout the name of Bunol.

“Bunol!” gurgled the old man. “That scoundrel! That miserable villain! Is he here? Can it be possible?”

Something stirred in a dark corner of the hall. He saw the thing move and cried out:

“Who’s there? What are you doing? What do you want?”

There were two of them. They came out of the darkness swiftly and were upon him in a moment. Over their faces they wore masks, and the professor gave a cry of dismay as he saw a pistol in the hand of one of them. The weapon was pointed at Zenas, and the man who held it growled:

“Better keep still, guvner! If you raise a noise we’ll ’ave to shoot you, and we don’t want to do hanything like that.”

“Robbers!” whispered the old man. “This place is a den of thieves! We’ll all be robbed and murdered here!”

Had the door not been broken he might have tried to close and hold it against them, but now he was totally defenseless.

“Don’t shout, don’t speak, don’t heven whisper!” commanded the man with the pistol.

“All right,” said Zenas, disobeying the order. “I won’t make a noise. Take my money! I haven’t much. Be careful with that deadly weapon! It might go off by accident!”

They entered the room, while the commotion below continued.

“Hif you’re sensible, guvner,” said the one with the pistol, “you’ll get off with an ’ole skin; but hif you’re foolish Hi’m afraid you’ll get ’urt.”

“Don’t waste time in talk, pal!” growled the other fellow. “We’ve got to move lively.”

“Here’s my purse,” said Zenas, holding it out. “Take it—take it and go!”

One of the men took it, but at the same time he said:

“We wants you to take a little walk with us, guvner. Now you ’adn’t better refuse, for we’ll ’ave to shoot you hif you do. Don’t hask hany questions, but move and move in a ’urry. Right out of the door, guvner. March!”

They grasped him by the arms and he was unceremoniously hustled through the broken door. He thought they were going to take him toward the front stairs, but they forced him falteringly along a dark and narrow passage, coming to another flight of stairs at the back of the house, which they descended.

“What are you going to do?” whispered the agitated old man.

“Shut hup!” growled the fellow with the pistol. “Hif you hopen your ’ead hagain Hi’ll ’ave to shoot you.”

In the darkness they passed through a room at the back of the house and came to a door that let them out into the open air. The stars were shining brightly through the leaf-denuded branches of the trees.

Just as they reached the open air there was a crashing and jangling of broken glass at the front of the house.

The starlight showed Zenas that a pair of horses had been attached to the closed carriage he had observed standing near the building. A man was standing at the head of the horses. Another man was perched on the driver’s seat, holding the reins.

The man who had hold of Gunn now rushed him without loss of time to the carriage, the door of which was standing open. Without regard for his feelings, they lifted him bodily and pitched him into the vehicle.

He bumped his head and uttered a cry of pain and fear.

One of the men sprang in and perched upon his body. The other man followed. A whip cracked like a pistol, and with a jerk the carriage started.

“Pull in his legs, pal!” exclaimed the man astride Zenas. “You can’t close the door unless you pull in his legs.”

“Blawst ’is blooming legs!” came from the other man. “Make ’im pull ’em hup.”

“Pull up your feet, old man!” commanded the one who was holding Zenas—“pull them up, if you don’t want to lose the top of your head!”

“I’m a dead man!” groaned the old professor. “This is the end of me!”

He pulled up his legs, and the carriage door was closed at last.

While this was taking place the carriage had whirled out from the forest inn into the highway, with the horses at a dead run. Persons rushing from the inn were startled and astonished, but they gave their attention to the search for Miguel Bunol, who had lately leaped through one of the windows of Robin Hood's Tavern.

Zenas Gunn gave himself up for lost.

"Never thought I'd come to such an untimely end," he moaned. "Why did we ever visit Sherwood Forest?"

Suddenly he became frantic and began to shout for help. Three times he did this before the man astride of him could do anything to prevent it.

"For 'Eaven's sake smother 'im!" burst from the other man.

The fellow holding Gunn down got him by the throat and quickly checked the cries.

But those cries had been heard by both Dick Merriwell and Brad Buckhart.

The carriage bounced, and swayed, and rumbled over the forest road.

It was a terrible experience for Professor Gunn. The old fellow believed he had fallen into the hands of robbers, who were carrying him off with the idea of holding him for ransom.

Suddenly something happened. Some portion of the harness on one of the horses became unfastened, and the driver was compelled to pull up as soon as possible. He sprang down from the seat and made haste to fix the harness.

The horses had been excited and fretted by the manner in which they were whipped at the very outset. As the driver came alongside one of them the animal snorted, shied and sprang against its mate. The other horse gave a leap, and a second later both animals were running away.

The driver was jerked off his feet and dragged some distance. He clung to the reins, vainly endeavoring to hold the terrified creatures, but finally his hold relaxed and the animals raced on unguided, their fears seeming to increase as they ran.

At first the two ruffians inside did not realize what had happened, but soon they began to suspect that everything was not quite right.

"'E's drivin' 'orrid reckless, pal," said the one with the cockney dialect. "'E'll 'ave us hupset hif 'e don't look hout."

The carriage rocked and swayed, flinging its three occupants from side to side. At a sharp turn of the road it snapped round on two wheels, threatening to go over. Once the hub of a rear wheel struck the trunk of a tree and the carriage was flung violently to one side.

It was now the turn of Professor Gunn's captors to be alarmed.

“What’s he trying to do, get us all killed?” palpitated the one who had been holding the old pedagogue, but who was now occupied in taking care of himself, which was no small matter.

“Hi believe the ’orses are running haway,” said the other.

“Can’t the thundering fool hold them?”

“’E don’t seem hable to.”

Then they began shouting to the driver, but as there was no driver on the seat, they received no reply.

Down a hill and over a stone bridge went the runaway team. The hoofs of the horses clattered on the frozen ground and the wheels made a rumbling roar like sullen thunder. The woods echoed with these sounds.

Professor Gunn managed to sit up and drag himself upon a cushioned seat in a corner of the carriage. The curtain at the glass window was up, and outside the old man saw the trees flying past.

With his heart in his mouth, Zenas waited for the termination of that wild night ride, yet dreaded what it might be.

The ruffians were frightened indeed now. One of them succeeded in opening the door and shouted again and again to the man he supposed was holding the reins. The carriage swept close to a tree, the trunk of which struck the door and slammed it shut, driving the man’s head through the glass, which was shattered, and cut him in a manner that brought blood copiously.

The man was dazed. He fell back on Zenas, who thrust him off.

“The ’orses hare running haway and there is no driver!” cried the cockney.

Suddenly Professor Gunn was seized with a feeling of revengeful joy. He knew the men were frightened, and a singular sort of courage came upon him.

“Serves you right, you villains!” he shrilly shouted. “I’m glad of it! I hope they run until they smash everything into a million pieces!”

“Ain’t there any way of stoppin’ them, pal?” questioned one of the ruffians.

“No, Hi don’t believe there is.”

“Let them run! let them run!” laughed Zenas wildly. “You brought it on yourselves! It’s good enough for you! Going to carry me off and hold me for ransom, were you? This is what you get! I hope you enjoy it!”

“Shut up, you old fool!”

“I won’t shut up! You can’t shut me up! Ha! ha! ha! Let them run! let them run!”

Suddenly, with a fearful shock, one of the forward wheels struck some obstruction. The carriage careened into the air and over it went, being flung from the road and fairly against a sturdy tree. The horses tore themselves free from the ruined vehicle and continued their mad flight along the forest road.

The wrecked carriage lay overturned by the roadside, and from its shattered ruins came no sound to tell whether its occupants were living or dead.

CHAPTER XIV.—AN EXCITING CHASE.

The landlord of the Robin Hood had prevented Brad Buckhart from taking a flying shot at Miguel Bunol as the reckless young desperado leaped through the window. Had the Texan fired, being a wonderfully good shot, it is probable he would have “winged” the Spaniard, at least.

At the destruction of the window the excited landlord threw up his hands in despair.

The whole house was in an uproar. One or two frightened men came and peered into the room where the encounter had taken place, while the cries of frightened women could be heard coming from other parts of the building.

“What do you mean by such actions in my place?” shouted the enraged and exasperated landlord, turning on Dick and Brad.

“We’re not responsible any,” retorted Buckhart. “Whatever made you get in my way and keep me from salting that ornery Spaniard good and plenty?”

“Out and after him!” cried Dick. “Don’t let him get away!”

“He’ll have to pay for that window!” yelled the landlord.

Then Dick led the rush from the inn. The door was thrown open, and they ran out beneath the stars.

They were just in time to see the closed carriage, with both horses at a dead run and the driver mercilessly plying the whip, whirl out of the yard, turn to the right and go clattering and rattling away on the frozen road.

A moment later a horseman shot past the opposite corner of the building and turned to the left.

As he passed the windows from which the light was shining the Texan caught a glimpse of him.

“There goes the galoot hot foot!” he roared, and flung up his hand to shoot.

It was Dick who now grasped his arm and prevented him from firing.

“Steady, Brad!” cried Merriwell. “You don’t want the blood of that dog on your hands!”

“I certain would like to know why!” retorted the excited Texan. “It would give me a heap of pleasure to bore him for keeps!”

“Let him go and——”

Dick stopped, for from the rattling carriage which had already vanished beneath the great tress that lined the road came wild cries for help, which were suddenly broken and checked.

“Great horn spoon!” palpitated the Texan. “Did hear that, pard?”

“I did, and it certainly sounded like the voice of Professor Gunn!”

“Just what I thought. You don’t opine——”

But already Dick was rushing back into the inn, and Brad quickly followed him. Up the stairs they leaped, assailed by a new feeling of fear.

The broken door of the professor’s room hung on a single hinge, just as the Texan had left it. The light of the glowing fire and of a single candle showed them the comfortable interior of that room, but they saw nothing of Zenas Gunn.

“Professor——Professor Gunn!” called Dick.

“Where are you? Answer me—answer at once!”

But there was no answer.

“Search, Brad!” urged Dick. “He may have been alarmed by the uproar and concealed himself. Look on the bed behind those curtains! Look under the bed! Look everywhere!”

Even as he was urging his friend to do this Dick flung open the door of a wardrobe and looked within. Then he caught up the candle and hastened into the adjoining room, looking in every nook and corner, meanwhile continuing to call to Gunn.

A few moments later the two boys met in the first room and stood face to face, staring into each other’s eyes.

“Where is he, partner?”

“Gone!” said Dick. “Brad, that was the game!”

“I don’t just rightly see how——”

“First Bunol was to be given a chance at me. If he failed, the professor was to be captured and carried off. He was in that closed carriage!”

“Sure as shooting!”

“Come!”

The flushed, wild-eyed, excited landlord appeared in the door and attempted to check them, demanding why they had turned his house into a Bedlam.

Dick swept him aside.

“No time to explain now!” he declared. “We’ll explain to you later.”

The boys rushed downstairs once more, out of the inn and round to the stable. A hostler demanded to know what had happened.

“Hi’d like to ’ave you tell me what it’s hall habout!” he said. “Why did the gentlemen ’ave their ’osses taken hout and then ’ave them ’itched in hagain in such an hawful ’urry?”

They seized him and demanded to know where their own horses were. Their manner frightened him.

“Those men were ruffians, and they must be caught,” said Dick. “Help us get

our horses to pursue them. If you don't you may be taken as the accomplice of the scoundrels. It's worth a pound note to you, my man, if you get our horses out instantly and provide us with bridles for them."

This inducement led the hostler to move quickly. He found the bridles and brought out the horses. The boys lost not a second in helping bridle the animals. At the same moment, it seemed, both flung themselves astride the beasts. A cowboy yell broke from the lips of the Texan—a yell that sent his mount bounding forward with surprise and fear. Dick smote his horse with his open hand, which fell with a pistol-like crack on the animal's rump.

"Hold on!" shouted the hostler. "Where is that pound note you said I should 'ave?"

He ran after them, but neither of the boys paused a moment to respond, and quickly they vanished down the dark road that turned away beneath the great trees to the right. Back to his ears came the clatter of hoofs on the roadbed, receding and growing fainter in the distance.

Both boys were ready for any emergency as they galloped mile after mile along that road.

Twice they passed branching roads, but chose to stick by the principal highway, although it was impossible to say that they were following the right course by doing so.

"It's more than even, pard," said the Texan, "that the onery varmints turned off on one of those other roads. We're going her a whole lot on pure luck."

"We have to," said Dick.

Down a hill and over a bridge they flew. By this time the horses were breathing heavily and beginning to perspire. Their breath whistled through their nostrils and they would have slackened the pace had they been permitted.

On and on until at last, descending yet another hill, they came upon the wrecked carriage lying in a splintered heap by the roadside.

They flung themselves from their nearly exhausted horses, the creatures willingly stopping and standing with hanging heads and heaving flanks.

"Whatever happened here, pard?" cried Brad.

"Smash up," answered Dick. "Must have been a runaway and a bad one, too."

Amid the ruins of the carriage they found a man lying ominously still.

"Is it the professor?" whispered Buckhart, fearfully.

Together they dragged away some of the debris, and then Dick struck a match. The mask that had hidden the face of the man was covered with blood and partly torn away. His face was badly cut.

"Luke Durbin!" shouted the boy from Texas, as Merriwell fully removed the

bloody mask and held the match with the reflected light flung from the hollow of his hands.

“That’s who it is,” said Dick.

“And I opine he’s cashed in. This was the end of the racket for him.”

Dick struck another match.

“See!” he exclaimed, as the light of this second match fell on Durbin’s mutilated face. “He’s not dead!”

The eyelids of the man fluttered and his eyes opened. A groan came from his lips.

“It’s some rough,” said the Texan; “but you’ve got only yourself to blame for being here.”

The man’s bloody lips moved and he sought to speak, but the husky sounds he uttered could not be understood.

“Durbin,” said Dick, “your pals have left you here to die. Did you aid them in capturing and carrying off Zenas Gunn?”

Another painful effort to speak resulted in nothing that could be understood.

“Tell me the truth,” urged Dick. “You can see how they deserted you. Why should you shield them? Did you carry off the old professor? Can’t you answer? If you would say yes, close your eyes and open them again.”

Slowly the wretch closed and opened his eyes.

“Where is he? Where have they taken him?”

It was impossible for Durbin to answer in words.

The boys lifted him and lay him on the cold ground by the roadside.

“I judge he’s mighty near gone, partner,” whispered Brad. “It’s bad we have to lose time like this. We ought to be doing something for the professor.”

“We can’t leave this man to die here alone like a dog, no matter how bad he has been.”

“He sure has got what was coming to him.”

“But he’s a human being. Think of leaving any human creature to die here in such a manner!”

“Think of Professor Gunn!”

“If we find out without delay what has happened to the professor and where he has been taken, we must learn it through this man. In case he knows—which is pretty certain—he may tell everything if he finds he is going to die.”

“That’s correct, Dick. You’re always the long-headed one. But if he can’t talk, how are we going to learn anything from him?”

“If we had a stimulant or restorative of some sort——”

“Liquor?”

“Yes; as a medicine liquor is all right when properly used. As a beverage it is

poisonous.”

Although Dick fully believed in temperance, he was not a crank, and he knew that liquor had its good uses, although almost invariably it was put to a bad use.

“But we haven’t a drop of the stuff. What can we do?”

“Is there no way for us to get him back to the Robin Hood?”

“How’ll we make the raffle, partner?”

Dick meditated a moment. As he did so, both lads heard in the distance the sound of hoofbeats and the rumble of wheels, telling them that a carriage was approaching at a rapid pace.

“Somebody else driving a heap hard, Dick,” said the Texan. “Perhaps more trouble is coming.”

“We’ll have to be ready for anything. If it’s some one we do not know, we’ll appeal to him to take this man in and carry him back to the inn.”

They waited, Buckhart producing his pistol, while Dick led the horses aside beneath a tree.

Back along the road a short distance there was an opening among the trees, and soon the carriage, drawn by a single horse, came rumbling through this star-lighted spot.

Dick joined Brad.

“We’ll have to stop it, even if we scare the driver out of his wits,” he said.

The boys stepped into the road and called to the driver. Immediately a man rose up in the carriage and cried:

“Who are you? Have you seen anything of two boys on horses, riding as if pursued by Old Nick himself?”

“We’re the boys, I fancy,” confessed Dick. “You’re Mr. Swinton, of Robin Hood’s Tavern.”

It was the landlord, and he jumped out in a hurry when he found he had overtaken Dick and Brad.

“Look here, you chaps,” he cried, “don’t you think you can upset my house, smash windows and doors and run away without paying the damages! I’m an honest man, and what’s happened to-night at my place may ruin me. I demand damages, and you’ll have to pay ’em.”

“All right,” said Dick quietly. “Although we’re not responsible for the things that have happened, we’ll pay a reasonable damage charge if you promptly take into your carriage and carry to the inn a man who has been seriously injured here and may be dying. I’ll pay you for your trouble with him, too.”

Although still suspicious and doubtful, the landlord was somewhat mollified.

“How did it happen?” he asked, as he stooped and peered down at the injured

man.

“There’s the carriage,” explained Brad, “smashed a whole lot. I opine they had a runaway. Don’t waste time in asking other questions. Time is powerful precious to-night, and every minute counts.”

The injured wretch groaned as they raised him and placed him in the carriage, which the driver had already turned about. The driver proved to be the hostler, who reminded Dick that he had not received the pound note promised him.

“I’ll pay you as soon as we get back to the tavern,” was the promise. “Had no time to do it before.”

Before starting on the return, Dick made another examination of the injured man to see if his wounds were so serious that he might bleed to death on the way, but found that the cold air had caused the blood to congeal, and that there was no danger from the source feared.

Mounted and riding close behind the carriage, the boys turned their faces toward the inn, their hearts heavy in their bosoms, for the uncertainty of the fate that had befallen Professor Gunn oppressed them.

“For all of the accident and the smash-up,” said Dick, “Bunol’s game to carry off the professor has succeeded.”

“That’s right,” agreed Brad. “But why should he do anything like that? I confess it puzzles me up a plenty.”

“Recall his little trick at Lochleven.”

“That was some different. By getting hold of Dunbar Budthorne he hoped to force Nadia into a marriage with him. He reckoned that, to save her brother, she might hitch with him.”

“You don’t think he counts on murdering Zenas Gunn, do you, partner?”

“No; had he intended to murder the professor he would not have gone to so much trouble to capture him and run him off. The men who did that could have finished the old man in his room at the tavern while we were having our little racket with Bunol below. Bunol knows the strength of the law and fears it. He’s none too good or too timid to commit a cold-blooded murder, but he fears the consequences of such an act. To-night he told me he has dogged us everywhere since we left Kinross. We did succeed in fooling him by helping Budthorne and his sister to get away secretly. Having lost track of Nadia, Bunol has followed us, believing we would join the Budthornes sooner or later.

“Of late he has been growing impatient. Finding we contemplated visiting Newstead Abbey and the haunts of Robin Hood, he decided to strike a blow here in this forest. Some of his spies must have learned from our conversation and inquiries that we meant to remain overnight at Robin Hood’s Inn. Having

learned that much Bunol acted swiftly. Durbin was with him, and probably Marsh. He must have secured the aid of ruffians who were familiar with this part of the country. He had an idea that, could he meet me face to face and quite alone, he might exercise his newly discovered hypnotic powers on me, and this he tried to do to-night. But I know something about hypnotism myself, and I was able to combat him and defeat him on his chosen ground.

“He had prepared for defeat, having instructed his ruffianly tools to capture and carry off Professor Gunn, whom he knew to be timid, old, and incapable of making serious resistance. Through threats of what he may do to the professor he hopes to bring me to my knees. It is his object to conquer us now, Brad, for he is sure he can accomplish his designs on the Budthornes, once he can place us beyond interfering and baffling him. Without doubt he will threaten and frighten Zenas into telling him where to find Nadia Budthorne. I do not fear that he will seriously injure the old professor, unless Zenas was injured in the runaway and smash-up.”

“But Nadia!” cried Brad. “If he forces the professor to tell where Nadia may be found——”

“We’ll lose no time in sending a warning message to the Budthornes. Then it will be a race between us and Miguel Bunol out of England, across the Channel and down into sunny Italy. But Bunol will seek to baffle and delay us.”

“How?”

“By keeping Zenas Gunn a prisoner somewhere, knowing we’ll not leave England until we have found and freed him.”

“Great tarantulas! I reckon you’re right, partner! You’re a whole lot long-headed, and you have tumbled to his game. Whatever can we do?”

“We must beat him at that game.”

“Elucidate how.”

“This runaway and smash-up was something not reckoned on by Bunol.”

“Certain not.”

“Durbin was left for dead.”

“No doubt of it.”

“If Durbin lives long enough to talk, we may induce him to tell us where Zenas Gunn is to be kept a prisoner.”

“I sure hope so.”

“Then it will be our business to waste no time in finding the professor and setting him free. After that the race for Italy will begin.”

Buckhart was greatly stirred up over the prospect.

“If we permit that Spaniard to get ahead of us, pard, I’ll certain feel like committing suicide some!” he cried. “You made a big mistake when you kept me

from taking a crack at him with my gun as he went whooping away from the Robin Hood. If I had bored him——”

“We should have been arrested and compelled to stand trial. It is true we might have been acquitted; but shooting a human being, even though it may be a dastardly dog like Bunol, is mighty bad business, and I don’t believe you wish, any more than I do, to stain your hands with human blood.”

“I punctured Rob MacLane at Lochleven.”

“But it was only a flesh wound in the shoulder, and the authorities, who seemed relieved and pleased over the death of the Strathern outlaw, decided that the cause of his death was not the bullet wound, but came from a broken neck received when he fell from Lochleven Castle.”

“All the same,” muttered the Texan, in a low tone, “I don’t opine he’d taken that fall if I hadn’t fired at him. I saw he was going to murder Aaron by flinging him over, and I didn’t falter any at all in shooting. My conscience hasn’t troubled me much.”

“But with Bunol mounted on a horse and trying to escape from us, the aspect of the case would have seemed different. At least, that is the way I looked at it.”

“I suppose you’re right, partner, for you’re right as a rule ten times out of ten; but I’m powerful afraid Bunol will get a start on us now.”

“We’ll do our best to baffle him at his game,” said Dick. “This accident that befell Luke Durbin may enable us to defeat the Spaniard.”

“At the same time, it’s mighty sure to put Durbin out of the running, even if he doesn’t die, for I judge he’s badly busted up, and he won’t be so frisky and troublesome in future.”

“But for Bunol, Durbin never would have been a hard man to check. Bunol is reckless to the point of madness. He has resolved to possess Nadia Budthorne and her money——”

“But by the stars above us I swear he never shall!” cried the Texan fiercely.

When they reached Robin Hood’s Tavern once more, the boys, assisted by Swinton, lifted the injured man, who was still alive, and carried him inside, where he was placed on a bed.

“How far is it to the nearest doctor?” asked Dick. “This man is badly injured, and he must have medical treatment, if he does not die before a doctor can be brought.”

“It’s good ten miles,” said the landlord.

“Send a man for a physician without delay,” directed Dick. “I will pay all expenses.”

“It’s easy enough for you to say so,” returned the doubting keeper of the inn; “but I have not yet seen the color of your money, and my doors and windows

have been smashed, the people in the house, including my wife, nearly frightened to death, and the reputation of the place ruined. What have I done that all this misfortune should be heaped upon me?"

"Would you see this man die for want of medical attention?"

"How do I know what will follow before morning? There may be further trouble here. Besides myself I have but two men about the place, and I must keep them to protect the ladies."

"You will send a man for a doctor," said Dick, sternly. "Here, I have money to pay. Tell me what your bill is for the broken door and window, and it will be settled—unless you make it exorbitant. Tell me how much it will cost to dispatch a man on a horse for the doctor, and I will pay that, too."

At sight of the boy's money the landlord immediately became quite humble and obliging. He started to ramble in his statement concerning the damage done, saying no money could pay him for the injury to the good name of the house; but Merriwell cut him short, asserting he would settle that matter after he had seen the man start to bring a physician.

Within a short time the hostler was dispatched on a good horse, with instructions not to return under any condition without the needed physician.

"I feel better about that now," confessed Dick. "I wouldn't see my worst enemy in the condition of Durbin without doing what I could for him."

The injuries the man had received about the face were washed and dressed by Dick himself, while Durbin was given a little whisky, which seemed to revive him, although it was apparent to all that he might die within the hour.

Having done whatever he could to make the man comfortable, Merriwell sat down beside the bed and talked to him. At first it seemed that Durbin still remained unable to speak, but his wandering eyes gazed at Dick pathetically, as if he could not quite understand the boy.

"Durbin," said Dick, "I'm sorry for you; but you must know that you brought this upon yourself, and you cannot blame any one else."

The man moved his head the least bit from side to side.

"Your bones do not seem to be broken," the boy went on; "but your condition indicates that you are seriously—probably fatally—injured. You may not live an hour; you may die within ten minutes. You had a hand in carrying off Zenas Gunn. It was Bunol's plot, but it is likely you know that rascal's plans. The least you can do now is to tell me where the professor has been taken. For the sake of your own conscience, at least, you should tell."

The man was silent.

"You were deserted by your pals and left to die alone by the roadside. I have taken trouble to have you brought here, and I've sent for a doctor. In return for

this will you not tell me the one thing I want to know? Where has Bunol taken Zenas Gunn?"

The injured man's lips parted, an expression of great effort and distress came into his eyes, but the only sounds he uttered were a few painful gasps.

"Can't you speak?" asked Dick.

Again that faint rocking motion of the head from side to side.

"I don't opine he'll ever speak again, pard," whispered Buckhart, in Dick's ear. "He's done for, and we're wasting time in trying to get anything out of him."

"It's folly to attempt to search the country blindly to-night," said Dick. "Unless Durbin can give us a clue, we have nothing to work on."

Brad looked desperate.

"All right," he muttered. "You know best, partner. I opine I'd better trust the whole thing to you."

"Give me that whisky, Mr. Swinton," requested Dick.

The liquor had been weakened with water in a cup, and the boy again held this out to Durbin's lips. A little of the stuff passed into the man's mouth, and he swallowed it with great difficulty.

"Now," once more urged Dick, "try to tell me where they have taken Professor Gunn."

The man's lips moved again. Dick bent low over him, holding his ear down to listen, but he could catch no word, and the fear that Durbin would die without speaking grew upon him.

Looking straight into the pathetic eyes of the injured man, Dick said, in a tone of confidence and command:

"I will give you the power to speak. You shall speak! You can speak! Tell me at once where they have taken the professor."

For a moment there was absolute silence in the room. Both Buckhart and Swinton watched, breathless and awed, feeling that in some singular manner the boy was transmitting some strength of his own to the man on the bed. They felt as if something like a miracle was about to take place.

Finally Durbin's lips parted again, and, in a low yet perfectly distinct tone, he muttered three words:

"The—haunted—mill!"

CHAPTER XV.—THE HAUNTED MILL.

A branch of the Meden runs through the northwestern portion of that region still known as Sherwood Forest. At one time all that country was covered with one great, dense forest, but now there are many pieces of woods and a great deal of cleared country, with beautiful cottages and winding roads.

In a little, wooded valley stands an old, deserted mill. The broken water wheel is still and covered with rank moss and slime. The mill has settled on one side until it threatens to topple into the little basin above the almost vanished dam. It seems to cling to the old-fashioned stone chimney in a pitiful way for support.

This is known as the "Haunted Mill of the Meden," and tourists travel far to see it. Hundreds of artists have daubed its semblance on their canvases.

Years ago, it is said, the miller, crazed by solitude or something, murdered his beautiful daughter in the old mill and then committed suicide. The people of that region tell that the ghosts of both father and daughter visit the old mill nightly at the hour when the crime was committed, which was shortly after midnight.

The haunted mill stands about eight English miles from Robin Hood's Tavern.

A cold moon had risen in the east, and it was near the hour when the ghosts of the old mill were supposed to walk.

At least half a mile from the mill three horsemen had halted. They were Dick Merriwell, Brad Buckhart, and Swinton, the keeper of Robin Hood's Tavern.

Not only had the landlord's demands been fully satisfied and appeased by Dick, but he had been induced by the payment of a liberal sum to guide the boys to the haunted mill.

"You can't miss it," he declared in a low tone. "It's straight down this road in the wood yonder."

"But aren't you coming with us?" asked Brad.

"Ten pounds wouldn't take me nearer the mill at this hour," said the landlord. "I've kept my part of the agreement; I have guided you to it."

"Let him remain here," said Dick, "and take care of the horses. We'll go alone, Brad. We must leave the horses, for we do not wish to give Bunol warning that we are coming, and he might hear the animals."

"Mebbe that's a right good idea," nodded the Texan. "I don't opine a man as

scared as he is would be any good with us.”

So the horses were left with the landlord, who promised to remain and guard them until the boys returned.

“If you ever do return,” he added. “It seems to me as likely as not that I’ll never clap eyes on you again.”

“I hope you don’t think we’re going to run away?” exclaimed Dick.

“No, but I do think it likely you’ll run into plenty of trouble, considering the things those men did at my place. I don’t see why you do not wait until morning and gather a force to aid you. It’s the only sensible thing. What can two boys do against such ruffians!”

“We’re not the kind that waits a great deal,” said Buckhart. “I sure reckon you’ll find out what we can do, and the ruffians will find out, too.”

Both boys were armed. They lost no time in hastening along the road that led in to the dark woods which choked the little valley. It demanded plenty of courage for those two American lads to attempt such an undertaking in a strange country at such an hour, and under such circumstances; but Dick and Brad had the courage, and they did not falter.

The woods were dark and silent, and filled with many black shadows, although in spots moonlight sifted through the openings amid the trees.

Stepping cautiously and keeping constantly on the alert, the boys followed the winding road down into the valley, avoiding the patches of moonlight.

Finally a faint murmuring sound of water reached their ears. It came from the little stream that trickled over the broken dam.

A few moments later the boys saw the dark and forbidding outlines of the old mill. All about the mill reigned a stillness like death, broken only by the almost inaudible sound of trickling water.

“It sure doesn’t seem like there is much of anything doing here,” whispered Buckhart. “I hope we haven’t arrived too late, pard.”

“The only way to find out about that is to investigate,” returned Dick, in the same cautious tone.

They approached the mill, circling a last spot where the moonlight shone down through the trees.

True, their hearts were beating faster than usual in their bosoms, but they were fully as undaunted as when they had set out from Robin Hood’s Tavern.

The old mill was reached at last, and they listened as they stood close beside its rotting wall.

No sound came from within.

“Have you the candles, Dick?” asked the Texan.

“Sure,” was the assurance. “But we’ll not use them until we get inside.”

They tried the door, but it was fastened, and after a few moments they decided that it could not be opened from the outside unless the person who attempted it knew how.

“We’ll have to find a window that will let us in,” said Dick, in a whisper.

Fortunately, they had little difficulty about this, for the windows of the mill were broken, and, although they had been boarded up, the boards were torn away from one of them. This window was high, but Dick mounted on Buckhart’s shoulders and crept through it. Then he leaned far out and grasped the hands of the Texan, who followed him, but made more or less noise in scrambling up and over the sill.

“Hush!” warned Dick. “We’ll listen here a while to see if we have disturbed any one.”

The silence within the place was even more oppressive than that of the dark woods outside.

“I sure am afraid we’re on a Tom Fool’s errand, partner,” murmured Buckhart. “I’m almost ready to bet my boots that, besides ourselves, there’s no living thing in this thundering old building.”

“You may be right,” Dick admitted; “but we’ll search it from top to bottom before we quit. I hate to think that, in the face of almost certain death, Luke Durbin lied to me.”

“Mebbe he didn’t lie; mebbe Bunol changed his plan after that runaway and smash-up.”

“Perhaps so.”

“Light a candle, pard.”

“Not yet. We’ll prowl round a little first. Take care not to step into a hole or trap of any sort.”

They moved forward with the utmost caution, feeling their way along in the darkness. Soon they found a door that was standing wide open and passed into a sort of hall, beyond which another door opened into another part of the building, which Dick believed was the mill proper.

In spite of their caution, they had made some slight noises, Brad once striking the toe of his boot against some obstacle.

As they paused there in irresolution, something of a startling nature took place.

First through the empty hallowness of the vacant rooms echoed a groan that was most dismal and nerve-trying.

This sound was followed almost instantly by a shrill, piercing shriek, like that which might be uttered by some one in the agony of death!

Buckhart afterward confessed that his hair “certain rose up on its hind legs

and mighty nigh kicked his hat off.”

No wonder.

Such appalling sounds breaking in on the absolute silence of the place were enough to give a man of iron something more than a slight start.

The sounds died out as suddenly as they had broken forth, and the stillness that followed was disturbed only by the tumultuous beating of the hearts of the two boys.

Brad clutched Dick’s arm.

“Great everlasting tornadoes!” groaned the Texan. “That sure was letting it out some!”

“Just a little!” admitted Dick.

It did not take the boys long to recover from the shock, which was followed by a feeling of resentment, for both knew some one had sought to frighten them in that manner.

Neither of them believed in ghosts.

“Wherever did it come from, pard?” asked Buckhart, softly—“upstairs or down?”

Dick was compelled to confess that he did not know. The groan and the shriek had echoed through the empty rooms in a most deceptive manner.

By this time both lads had their revolvers ready for use.

They remained perfectly still for many minutes, listening for some new sound to guide them. Although they were wonderfully courageous, they knew they might be plunging into a deadly trap, and neither cared about throwing his life away.

Still they had come there for the purpose of trying to rescue Professor Gunn, and they did not propose to retire without doing their best to accomplish their design.

Finally they decided to investigate the upper portion of the mill, and on their hands and knees they crept up the stairs. They knew not what moment they might be attacked, and when they reached the top of the flight they more than half expected to be set upon without further delay.

After the startling sounds which had chilled and appalled them for a few moments, there was no further demonstration, and the deathlike silence of the place placed another strain upon their nerves, which seemed to grow more and more severe. Finally they felt that they would gladly welcome a noise of some sort.

The moonlight reached some of the upper windows of the building now, and it assisted them in exploring a portion of that floor. But though they went from room to room, they found up there no sign of any living thing.

“This is a whole lot disappointing, partner,” breathed the Texan. “There is nothing doing up here.”

“Evidently not,” admitted Dick. “Let’s go down. We have not half investigated the rooms below.”

They still believed it quite probable they would be attacked while in the old mill, but neither faltered. Down the stairs they went, and Dick led the way into that part of the building that had once been the mill proper.

Suddenly he stopped in the dark and put out his hand, checking Brad.

“Don’t move!” he warned.

“What’s the matter?”

Dick had heard the sound of running water rising from almost directly beneath his feet, and a cold breath of air came up and smote him in the face.

“Keep your revolver ready for use,” he said. “I’m going to light a candle.”

A moment later he struck a match and soon lighted a candle, which he had brought in his pocket, wrapped in a paper.

The light thus provided showed the boys that it was a fortunate thing that Dick had halted just as he did. Barely a step before him the flooring had rotted and fallen away, leaving a great opening down to the bed of the stream below.

“I’ll keep this candle going now,” decided Dick.

The investigation of that portion of the mill did not consume much time, and it was productive of nothing but disappointment.

“It’s a whole lot singular!” growled the Texan. “Partner, we know somebody was here a short time ago, for we heard the galoot groan and yell.”

“There must still be a part of the building we have not searched,” said Dick.

There was. They found a door leading from the hall into a short and narrow passage, which was blocked by still another door. The second door was securely fastened.

Their efforts to open it in an ordinary manner were wasted; but while they sought to do so they were surprised and interested to hear a strange thumping sound issuing from some part of the building just beyond that very door.

As they paused to speculate concerning the meaning of that thumping, another startling and disagreeable thing happened.

In the hall behind them there was a flash, and the loud and deafening report of a pistol smote upon their ears. At the same instant a bullet clipped past Dick’s ear and struck the candle in his hand, cutting it off close to the top and extinguishing it.

Buckhart turned in a twinkling and answered the shot by firing blindly back into the hall.

The flash of his pistol blinded Brad, but Dick—who had also wheeled and

was slightly to one side—plainly saw a man spring through a doorway and vanish from view.

Once more snatching out his own revolver and warning Buckhart against shooting him by mistake, Merriwell darted back into that hall and followed the man through the doorway.

He discerned a dark figure just slipping out through the very window by which the two boys had entered the mill.

Although he was tempted to fire on the fleeing man, Dick restrained the impulse, permitting the unknown to escape.

“He’s gone,” he explained, in answer to the eager questions of the Texan, who had followed closely. “Let him go. I’m for finding out as soon as possible the meaning of the thumping sounds we heard beyond that immovable door. Let’s look for something with which we may batter down the door.”

In the mill section of the building they discovered a huge, rusty hammer, and with this they returned and attacked the door, Dick having relighted his candle.

The sturdy Texan begged the privilege of smashing the door, and the old building resounded with the concussions of his blows. In a few moments he had beaten the door until it was split and ready to give way. A sort of fury seemed to possess him, and he soon smashed his way through the door and into the small room beyond.

Dick followed with the candle, the light of which showed them a human figure lying on the floor before them.

It was Professor Gunn, bound tightly with ropes wound and knotted about him and gagged in a manner that prevented him from making any outcry. However, he had managed to thump the floor with his feet when he heard the boys outside the door, and now his eyes were filled with an expression of untold relief and joy.

Dick lost not a moment in producing a knife and slashing at the cords which held the old man helpless. At the same time Brad removed the gag.

“Thank God!” mumbled Zenas weakly.

When they had freed him, he was unable to rise, so they lifted him between them and aided him from the room. Reaching the window by which they had entered, Brad sprang out, and Dick assisted Zenas in getting over the sill and lowering himself into the strong arms of the Texan.

Then Merriwell sprang out, drawing a deep breath of relief, for, regardless of the flight of the man who had fired the shot that extinguished the candle, he had feared another attack until all were clear of the building.

“Boys,” half sobbed the old professor, “I knew you would come! I knew you would rescue me somehow! But it seems as if I have been in the power of those

villains for ages.”

“Where is Bunol?” asked Dick.

“Gone.”

“Gone where?”

“He was here when they brought me to the place. He compelled me to tell him where he could find Nadia Budthorne, then he left me, with a single man to guard me until morning. With the coming of daylight the man was to get away, and I might have remained there until I perished from hunger or exhaustion if you had not come to my rescue. Oh, boys, you are jewels! You are the bravest, finest chaps in the world!”

“Bunol knows!” said Buckhart hoarsely. “He accomplished his purpose!”

“But we’ll baffle him!” cried Dick. “We’ll send a warning to the Budthornes the first thing in the morning, and then—then away for Naples.”

CHAPTER XVI.—SUNSET ON THE GRAND CANAL.

Venice, and sunset on the Grand Canal!

Nowhere else in all the world is there such a sight. For two miles this magnificent waterway; the main thoroughfare of the most wonderful city in the world, winds in graceful curves, with red-tiled, creamy white palaces on either hand. At all times it is a source of wonder and delight to the visitor, but at sunset and in the gathering purple twilight it is the most entrancing.

So thought Dick Merriwell, as he lay amid the piled-up cushions of a gondola that was propelled by a gracefully swaying, picturesquely dressed gondolier, one beautiful evening.

Brad Buckhart and Professor Gunn were in the gondola with Dick, and they, also, were enchanted and enraptured with the scene.

The mellow rays of the sinking sun touched the shimmering surface of the water, shone on the windows of the palaces, gleamed on the hanging balconies of marble, and made the Bridge of the Rialto seem like an ivory arch against the amber-turquoise sky.

There were many other gondolas moving silently along here, there, everywhere. On this great thoroughfare there was no rumble and roar of traffic. It was a street of soft silence, as Venice is the City of Silence.

“In a short time, boys,” said the old professor, in a modulated voice, that seemed softened by the influence of his surroundings, “you shall see Venice at her best, for the moon will rise round and full. When you have seen Venice by moonlight, you may truthfully say you have beheld the most beautiful spectacle this world can show you.”

“She ain’t so almighty bad by sunlight,” observed Buckhart.

“Ah, but time has worked its ravages upon her,” sighed Zenas sadly. “Once even the dazzling sun of midday could show no flaw in her beauty, but now it reveals the fact that, although she is still charming, her face is pathetically wrinkled. Ah! those splendid days of old—those days of her magnificence and grandeur—gone, gone forever!”

In truth, Zenas was profoundly moved as he thought of the past greatness and present state of this City of the Sea.

Still Dick remained silent. He was watching the sunset. Between him and the western sky seemed falling a shower of powdered gold, and yet this wonderful, golden light was perfectly transparent. Beneath the balconies and in the narrower

canals the shadows were growing deeper. Just then Dick thought that, no matter what disaster, what suffering, what sorrow might come to him in life, just to be there in Venice that night at sunset was joy and pleasure and reward enough to overbalance all else.

“Pard, are you dreaming?”

Dick turned his eyes toward the loyal Texan without moving his head.

“Yes, yes—dreaming,” he murmured.

“Of what?”

“Like the professor, of the old days—of the founding of this wonderful city by a mere handful of refugees, who fled before the devastating, barbarian army of Attila, well named the ‘Scourge of God.’ How little could they have dreamed—those terror-stricken refugees—of the wonderful future of this city of a hundred islands! I am dreaming of Venice at the height of her glory, of the power of the Doges, of the senators in their splendid robes, of battles and conquests, of riches and splendor, of pompous pageants, of Ascension Day, when amid the roar of cannon, the shouts of the people, and the throb of music, the Doge in his barge of gold flung a golden ring into the blue waves, announcing the wedding of Venice and the sea. Yes, I am dreaming—dreaming!”

“And while you dream, pard,” said Brad, “dream some of the dark deeds, the crimes, the Bridge of Sighs, the Council of Ten——”

A strange, half-startled exclamation came from the gondolier. He had paused, clutching his oar, leaning forward—apparently paying attention to their words for the first time. He could speak a little English, but Professor Gunn addressed him in Italian:

“What’s the matter, Reggio?”

“The boys, signor.”

“What of them?”

“They talk too much. It is not well. They should be more careful.”

“Careful? I do not understand you, Reggio. Why should they be careful?”

“I hear them speak of the Ten,” whispered Reggio, leaning forward. “It is very dangerous, signor. Nothing should be spoken.”

“Still I do not understand you,” persisted the amazed old pedagogue. “The time of the Council of Ten is past forever. There is now no longer danger that a citizen of Venice may be secretly denounced to the council, secretly tried and secretly executed. We know that at one time the despotism of this council was so great that even the Doge himself became a mere instrument in the hands of that body of tyrants. Now, however, there is no council——”

The agitation of Reggio had increased as Gunn was speaking, until now it became absolutely painful to behold. He was trembling violently, and with

shaking hand he entreated the old man to be silent.

“You know not, signor—you know not!” he whispered. “Beware what you say! If you continue to talk, I must decline to carry you in my gondola—you and the boys. We must part. I am a poor man. I need the money you pay me for my services. But most I need my life, not for myself alone, but for Teresa, my sister.”

“Man,” said Zenas, “you must be crazy! What harm could speaking of——”

“I pray you no more, signor—no more!”

“Well, wouldn’t that beat you!” said Buckhart, who understood a little Italian, and had succeeded in getting the drift of the talk. “What do you think of it, pard?”

“I do not know what to think,” confessed Dick, quite as much surprised and bewildered as Professor Gunn. “It is most remarkable. The man seems frightened. He actually pretends that we may place his life in peril by our words.”

“It may be some kind of a trick, Dick.”

“What kind of a trick can it be?”

“I don’t know, but I’m sure watching out constant for tricks by these dagoes. They’re a slippery set, and they seem to think travelers are fair and legitimate game for plucking.”

“Not all of them, Brad.”

“No, not all; but you know Naples is called ‘the city of thieves,’ and we certain found it that. This fellow has appeared a heap decent, and——”

“Just so. I’ve taken a liking to him. He’s positively handsome, and he seems honest. I’ve urged the professor to retain him while we remain in Venice. But now——”

“We can’t even discuss the history of the city in his presence.”

All effort to induce Reggio to explain proved unavailing. He declined to explain, and he continued to urge them—in whispers—to talk of something else.

“I suppose we had better humor him,” said Gunn. “I can’t understand it, but just to please him we’ll drop it now.”

“I sure judge he has a streak of the daffy in him,” nodded Brad.

The silver moon rose wondrously fair. The evening was cool, still not cold. The professor and the boys drew some wraps about their shoulders, having come prepared for the change in the atmosphere.

In the moving gondolas lights began to twinkle and gleam. Soft laughter floated over the water.

Reggio’s oar moved silently in the water, and the gondola glided through alternating patches of moonlight and shadow, glory and gloom.

Beneath the moon, Venice was indeed at her best. The defects of age, seen in the broad light of day, were now hidden by a silver veil. In places lights gleamed through the casements.

“Pard,” said Buckhart, after a long silence, “I’m a whole lot glad you were expelled from Fardale!”

“What’s that?” exclaimed Dick, surprised. “Glad I was expelled?”

“Sure!” nodded the Texan grimly. “If you hadn’t been expelled, we’d not be here together now.”

“That’s true enough.”

“Of course I’m plenty bitter on Chet Arlington, but I opine his day is coming. The professor will look out for that, all right. You’ll return to old Fardale in triumph after——”

“We’ll return together, Brad.”

“Yes, we’ll return together—after we’ve seen a right good lot of this amazing old world, and I allow you’ll be received back with high acclaim. I can see it now. I can see big Bob, Obediah, Chip, Gardner, Darrel, Flint, Smart, and all the rest of them, welcoming you back. Just to think of it stirs me some, you bet! There’ll be something doing at Fardale that day, Dick—you hear me gently gurgle! Then back to the diamond, the gridiron, the gymnasium—back to all things we love! And the yarns we’ll have to tell! The things we’ll have seen! Whoop! I’m sure busting just to think of it!”

Professor Gunn, who had been listening to the words of the boys, now observed:

“Youth and anticipation of the glories of the future! Two of the most joyous things in this old world, boys. Do you know, I’m glad myself that Dick was expelled. Remarkable, eh? Astonishing and shameful confession, hey? Well, it’s the truth. Why am I glad? Because it brought me the companionship of you two lads, something I needed. Yes, I needed it. I’m a pretty old man, boys, and I find myself inclined to look backward instead of forward. Instead of thinking of the joys to come, I find I’m inclined to think of the pleasures past. Now, that’s bad—very bad. When a man gets to living in the past, he’s in his decline—he’s beginning to decay—he’s pretty near the end of the road. It’s natural for progress to constantly look forward. Looking backward means retrogression. You boys have seemed to arouse in me the looking-forward spirit which I needed. I, too, think of the future and the pleasures to come. Therefore you have done me no end of good. Hum! ha! Ha! hum! I hope I’ve not interfered with your enjoyment of this glorious night by my little lecture.”

“What’s the matter with Reggio?” questioned Dick in a low tone. “He still seems excited. He keeps looking back, and——Why does he send the gondola

darting in here so suddenly?"

They had turned with a sudden swing from the broad canal to go speeding swiftly into a very dark and very narrow passage between high buildings.

"Why did you turn in here, Reggio?" demanded the professor, in Italian.

"Signor, it is best," was the half-spoken, half-whispered answer. "Question me not, but trust me. Soon we will be again on the Grand Canal."

"I certain believe the man is some bughouse," said Buckhart. "He's sure acting and talking a heap queer to-night."

"I think he is perfectly trustworthy," declared Dick; "and he's the handsomest gondolier in all Venice."

"You picked him out, pard, because he was handsome and graceful."

"No; because I believed I could read honor and sincerity in his face. I believed he could be trusted."

"If he's daffy, he can't be trusted to any great extent."

Out of the canal they sped, Reggio's body swaying rhythmically as he propelled the craft. He seemed almost feverish in his haste. Soon they swung again into another narrow channel, where it was very dark, Reggio turning his head to look round just as he did so. What he saw, if anything, caused him to increase his efforts.

They began to feel a touch of the almost fierce anxiety which had seized upon their gondolier. He seemed fleeing before something of which he was in mortal terror. In the moonlight, before they were sent rushing through this second dark channel, Dick had obtained a full view of the Italian's face. It was pale and set, and his eyes seemed glowing with strange terror.

What thing was this from which Reggio fled like a hunted man? What peril pursued him, seen by him alone?

"Reggio!" spoke Dick.

"Silence! silence! silence!" implored the man at the oar.

"He sure has gone lunny of a sudden!" whispered Brad. "There is no other explanation, pard."

"I don't like his behavior myself," confessed the professor. "He's getting me nervous. You know there are banded thieves in Venice, who prey on foreigners. Now——"

"There can be no connection between Reggio's singular conduct and the thieves of Venice," said Dick impatiently. "If he intended to rob us, he would not first excite our suspicion by his behavior."

"I judge that's correct," nodded the Texan. "I certain allow it's just a plain case of daffy on Reggio's part."

Once more they glided out upon the moon-lighted surface of the Grand

Canal, and the professor drew a deep breath of relief.

"This is good enough for us, Reggio," he said. "You don't have to take us through those dark alleys to amuse us."

But the man addressed did not seem to hear. He swung the craft into the shadow of the palaces at one side of the canal, still sending it forward with unusual speed. Other gondolas he avoided or passed with great skill. It was evident they attracted more or less attention by their surprising haste at that hour.

"I think, boys," said Zenas Gunn, "that it might be well for us to return to our rooms and dismiss Reggio."

But Dick's interest and curiosity had been aroused. Behind the peculiar behavior of the man he believed there was something worth understanding. He scented a mystery, and mysteries always aroused and interested him.

"I couldn't think of giving up this pleasure in the open air for our gloomy old rooms," he said.

"Nor I, pard," joined in Brad. "I slept a whole lot this forenoon, so that I'd not be at all sleepy to-night. Night certain is the time to enjoy Venice. I opine I'll get into bad habits about hours while we're here; but I can't help it."

"You boys are tyrants!" exclaimed the professor. "Who is the master here, may I ask? Am I taking you round, or are you taking me round?"

Dick laughed, and assured the professor that he was the one in supreme authority, which seemed to relieve and satisfy the old man. In truth, the boys did just about as they pleased, but they succeeded in this by making Zenas believe he was the one who wished to do the things that interested them most. In carrying this out, Dick was far more clever than Brad.

"Reggio seems to be behaving better," said Merriwell.

"Correct," nodded Buckhart. "Mebbe it was a fit he had. It seems gone now."

"Though he keeps looking back."

Once more Dick spoke to the gondolier, asking him why he had seemed to flee through those narrow and dark channels, and why he kept turning his head to stare behind them.

Reggio paused and leaned forward.

"Ah!" he said, in a very low voice, "you don't-a know. I—I feel-a it in da air." He spoke in broken English now.

"What did you feel in the air?"

"Death!" whispered the gondolier. "You don't-a know. You not see-a heem follow us. He follow. That why I hurry vera much."

"Whoop!" muttered Brad. "That's a heap fine! So we had a race with death, did we? Well, partner, if that isn't daffy talk, what do you call it?"

"Do you mean that we were really and truly pursued by anything, Reggio?"

demanded Dick.

“I mean-a it. Death he follow us. But mebbe he not-a after us. He follow no more now.”

CHAPTER XVII.—THE RING OF IRON.

A boat full of musicians appeared, gliding slowly past them in the moonlight, surrounded by many gondolas. To the throbbing of the harp and guitar, a score of voices were chanting an Italian song.

“Splendid! magnificent!” breathed the professor.

The singing ceased. The gondolas swung near the music barge, from which white, phantom hands were outstretched. Into those hands fell silver coins, and the gondolas swept away.

Dick spoke a word of command to Reggio, who quickly sent them close to the boat of the singers. Merriwell added his contribution to the collection the musicians were taking up.

“There’s still music in Venice,” said Dick, as they drifted away.

“But now,” said Professor Gunn, “the musicians are professionals, who take that way of making a living.”

“Then,” spoke Dick, “in a certain sense it is true that—

““In Venice Tasso’s echoes are no more,
And silent rows the songless gondolier:
Her palaces are crumbling to the shore,
And music meets not always now the ear;
Those days are gone—but beauty still is here.””

“Well quoted, my boy!” exclaimed the old pedagogue, in deep satisfaction.

“Let’s follow the music boat,” suggested Brad. “That singing has stirred up something a whole lot inside of me. I sure would like to hear some more.”

So Reggio was instructed to follow the musicians.

Some fifteen minutes later, perhaps, the music boat turned into a narrow, close canal, where all was darkness and gloom, with never a gleam of light, save from the gondolas, where lamps twinkled and moved like wills-o’-the-wisp. The boats were lost in the blackness of the place, the lights alone marking their movements.

“Another right fine place for a race with death, pard,” whispered Brad.

“Why have they turned in here?” whispered the professor apprehensively.

“We’ll find out,” said Dick. “We must be close to the Bridge of Sighs. Yes, you can see it against the sky. There it is.”

“With a palace and a prison on either hand,” murmured Zenas.

The beautiful bridge could be seen, buttressed by two great hulks of gloom. It was a ghostly place, and the cool air of the night seemed to take on a deeper chill.

The music barge floated beneath the arch of the bridge and stopped. Reggio permitted his gondola to slowly move along until it was also beneath the bridge. Above them was the terrible prison. Beneath them was the dark and sluggish waters. Dick thought of the headless bodies that once had awaited the changing tide that was to bear them away from that bloodstained spot to outer sea.

Suddenly the musicians began to play and chant a solemn song, full of sadness and despair. Enraptured, enthralled, their blood cold in their bodies, the boys and the old professor listened to the most thrilling and impressive music that had ever greeted their ears. In fancy, Dick seemed to hear the tread of the condemned passing over the bloody bridge, the moans of the dying within those black walls. The air shuddered and vibrated with the horror of it.

Never as long as life lasted could any of that trio forget that chanted song.

When it ended at last, they seemed turned to stone themselves. It was several moments before one of them stirred or even seemed to breathe.

“Let’s get out of here!” Brad finally suggested, chokingly.

“Grand, but terrible!” muttered the professor.

“I would not have missed it for worlds!” declared Dick.

Reggio swung the gondola round, and they were soon moving toward the open canal.

Just as they passed out of the deeper darkness, a black gondola swept close to them—so close that the two boats almost touched.

An unseen person reached forth a ghostly hand from between divided black curtains, and something was tossed through the air, falling with a little clang at the feet of Reggio. It sounded not unlike the ring of money.

Then the phantom hand disappeared and the gondola slipped swiftly into the blackness from which they had just emerged, being lost to view.

“What was it?” muttered Buckhart. “Did some one throw Reggio a coin?”

Dick grasped the arm of his bosom friend.

“Look!” he breathed. “Look at Reggio!”

The gondolier had not moved after the thing dropped at his feet. He was poised with his body swayed backward a little, and he seemed to be gazing with wide-open eyes at the mysterious object lying within ten inches of his feet. His attitude was expressive of the greatest horror.

“Whatever does it mean?” speculated the Texan. “He certain looks a whole lot alarmed.”

Dick started to speak to the gondolier, but checked himself and continued to watch the man.

Onward glided the boat, out into the full flood of moonlight.

Then the man at the oar could plainly see the thing that had been cast before him. Slowly, slowly, as if dreading to touch it, yet forcing himself to perform the act, Reggio stooped and picked it up.

“At last!” he muttered, with a choking sound—“at last it has come to me!”

“What is it?” questioned Dick.

“Death!” answered the man.

“Death?” exclaimed Professor Gunn. “Why, what do you——”

“See!” directed the gondolier, holding the object up in the moonlight. “Here it is! By this I am told that I must die!”

“What is it?”

“A ring of iron.”

“A ring of iron? What has that to do with your death?”

“It tells me that I am chosen. I have a few hours in which to settle my affairs and make ready. I knew that death pursued us to-night!”

“He’s still making crazy talk, pard!” declared Brad, who could understand Italian, although he made a mess in attempting to speak it.

“The man is not crazy,” asserted Dick positively.

“He sure talks that way.”

“There is something behind all this, Brad—something I’d like to understand.”

Professor Gunn continued to question Reggio. They seemed quite alone just then, with no other boats near them.

“I warned you not to speak of the Ten,” said the gondolier. “It is now too late.”

“But the Council of Ten no longer exists.”

“Not as once it did; but there is another. Oh, if I talk now it will only hasten the end! I am chosen, anyhow, and there is no escape! Little Teresa, my sister—what will become of her!”

The man seemed utterly crushed and hopeless. All the buoyant life and grace had departed from his body. His shoulders were bowed and his appearance that of one aged twenty years in a few moments.

“Boys,” said Professor Gunn, “there is something mighty singular and sinister back of this. That man is badly frightened.”

“Or doing stunts,” muttered Buckhart.

“No stunts,” asserted Dick. “His terror and despair is genuine. Evidently the iron ring is a sign of some sort. He believes that the receipt of it dooms him to

death.”

“Folly.”

“Perhaps not.”

For a little time now Reggio answered none of their questions. Finally he straightened up and looked around. He lifted his arms and stretched them out to the white buildings with a despairing gesture.

“Farewell—farewell, Venice!” he murmured, with a sob. “This is my last night with you! For the last time I look on your beauty! Before another night my eyes will be closed in the long, long sleep.”

Then suddenly he seemed to realize that the others were looking and listening. He threw back his shoulders, drew in a deep breath, and with that breath his manhood seemed to return. He made a careless gesture of his hand.

“It is nothing to you, signors,” he said. “Mind not anything you have seen or heard. But it is better that you should leave Venice, for I have spoken to you of the Ten.”

“But you have not explained—you have not told us what you mean,” said the professor.

“It is better that you should not know. Your knowledge would place you in peril. Talk no more of the Ten. Keep your lips tightly closed, if you value your lives—and leave Venice.”

“Well, I like that!” growled Brad, in a manner that plainly told he did not like it. “I opine we won’t be chased out of Venice in any such manner.”

“Not much!” declared Dick earnestly. “We’ll remain and solve the mystery of the Ten.”

In vain they tried to learn anything further from the gondolier. He became silent, and no amount of questioning elicited anything of a satisfactory sort.

“I must return to Teresa,” he finally said. “It is the last time I shall see her.”

He then insisted on taking them without delay to their lodgings. On the way, he swung the gondola into another dark and narrow canal. A peculiar whistle sounded from his lips, causing Professor Gunn, who was very nervous by this time, to give a jump of alarm.

“My! my!” muttered the old pedagogue. “I’m expecting anything to happen! I’m looking for assassins everywhere. Why did he whistle? What does it mean?”

The answer came in the form of a gleam of light from a window in the wall on their left.

Reggio uttered a soft exclamation of satisfaction.

“Teresa is waiting for me, signors,” he said. “I must hasten with you and then return.”

“So this is his ranch,” said Buckhart. “He camps here, I judge.”

But now a change came over the gondolier. The light above had been shut off suddenly. Darkness followed for a moment, after which the light gleamed again. Again it disappeared for a few seconds, and again it gleamed.

“Trouble!” hissed Reggio. “Teresa has made the danger signal!”

“Dear! dear! dear!” gasped Zenas Gunn. “This is terrible! It is so dark. In the light of day I am brave as a lion—I fear nothing. But this darkness is so treacherous that I—really I’m disturbed.”

“Signors,” entreated the gondolier, “I entreat you a moment to wait, till I see what danger it is that has alarmed my sister. When I have reassured her, I will hasten to take you on your way.”

“All right, Reggio,” said Dick promptly. “We can wait. In fact, we’re in no haste.”

“Hum! ha!” coughed Zenas. “I am in haste to get out of this dark spot—indeed I am!”

“But you would not leave a lady in trouble, professor?” remonstrated Dick. “I know you would not do that, for you are the soul of chivalry. Where the fair sex is concerned, you are ever ready to face peril or death.”

“That’s right,” agreed the old pedagogue, bracing up. “You understand me perfectly, Richard. You are a very astute lad. Reggio, we will wait.”

“And,” added Dick, “if you need our assistance, you may depend on us.”

The gondolier poured out his thanks, swung the craft alongside some dark steps, fastened it to a ring of iron set in the marble, and then stepped out, saying he would make great haste.

He had not ascended more than three of the steps when he paused. At the same moment, from some dark nook, a figure stepped out above him.

“Who is there?” challenged the gondolier.

“A friend, Reggio Tortora,” came the answer, in perfect Italian, the voice being soft and musical.

“A friend?” retorted the gondolier, suspiciously. “What are you doing here?”

“Waiting for your return.”

“Who are you?”

“You know me well.”

“I know you not.”

A laugh sounded low and soft in the darkness.

“Your ears must be losing their cunning, Reggio. Why, I should recognize your voice anywhere in all the world that I heard it. Come nearer.”

But the gondolier had been warned of death that hovered over him, and he did not move.

“If you are my friend,” he said, “why do you lurk like an assassin at my

door?”

Again that musical laugh echoed between those dark walls.

“You seem timid as a rabbit, Reggio. Is this the brave, careless Tortora I knew so well? It cannot be.”

The gondolier was angered by the mockery of the words and laughter, but he did not forget that the iron ring had fallen at his feet a short time before. Might this not be the man chosen by the Ten to strike the fatal blow?

“Reggio,” called Dick, standing up and preparing to step from the gondola to the steps, “if you need aid, you may rely on us.”

“You bet your boots!” exclaimed Buckhart, eager to do something. “Just say the word, Reg, and we’ll get right into the game. I’m beginning to spoil for a rumpus, and I’m the Unbranded Maverick of the Rio Pecos. When I get my war paint on and take to the trail, I’m a holy howler on ten wheels.”

“Boys, boys!” spluttered the agitated old professor, “do be careful! Don’t leave me here! I must protect you. I must take care of you. If any harm comes to you, I’ll never forgive myself.”

“Don’t worry, professor,” said Dick.

“Just keep your clothes on, professor,” urged Brad.

“There is but one,” said Reggio, in answer to Dick. “I need no aid in facing one man.”

Again the stranger laughed.

“Even though you are changed,” he said, “you yet have a little pride, my Reggio. But why should you fear me! I am here to do you a great service.”

“To do me a service?”

“Even so, my Reggio.”

“What service?”

“I would save your life.”

“How is that—how can it be?”

“You are under the ban of the Terrible Ten,” whispered the stranger, leaning forward in the darkness, and sending the words down the steps at the gondolier.

“How know you that unless you are my enemy—unless you are the assassin sent to do the deed?” demanded Reggio.

“I know many things, but my means of knowledge I keep in my own breast. You doubt me? I swear to you that I can save you, and will—on a certain condition.”

“No one condemned by the Ten has ever escaped,” retorted Reggio.

“You shall be the first—if you agree to terms I will offer.”

“What are the terms?” doubtingly inquired the doomed man.

“Will you accept them?”

“I will not become a murderer and a thief!” was the fierce retort. “I will not plunder and slay, and give one-half my evil gain to those criminals who hide their faces and are growing wealthy through the black crimes other men commit out of fear of them. I am a man! My ancestors were of the Castellani—the aristocrats of the red hoods. Never one of them has descended to the ranks of crime. It is because of that thing that I am now condemned to the assassin. The Ten claim they are the descendants of the black-hooded Nicolletti, and that they are avenging the old wrongs of their class. It is a lie! They are thieves and murderers, banded together for plunder. They strike no blows with their own hands, but they frighten others into doing the dark work and giving them half the plunder. Not even their tools know who compose the Ten, whose faces are always hidden. No man dares betray them by confessing. If he is caught red-handed, he takes all the blame, and tells it not that those who drove him to his crimes, and have shared his plunder, are the Ten, for if he should speak, he knows the ban of death will fall on all his family and all his blood relations.”

Repeatedly the stranger had tried to check the torrent of words flowing from Reggie’s lips, but his efforts had been unavailing. The speaker was aroused to a pitch of desperation, and he would not be silenced until he had finished.

“I fear not to speak!” he exclaimed. “I know I must die, for I have received the iron ring.”

“You fool!” hissed the other. “Do you not think of Teresa? What will happen to her if you talk like this?”

Reggie’s aspect of defiant rage suddenly departed, his shoulders drooped and he lifted his shaking hand to his eyes.

“Teresa!” he whispered. “Teresa, my sister! What have I done?”

“You have spoken like a crazy fool in the presence of foreigners,” declared the other man. “Still, besides them, I am the only one who has heard your words, and I am your friend. Their lips must be silenced, for if they speak one word of this, Teresa is doomed!”

Once more Reggio straightened himself somewhat defiantly.

“What mean you?” he demanded. “Their lips must be silenced, you say. What mean you?”

“You know.”

“They shall not be harmed while with me!” exclaimed the gondolier. “No man I have ever served has come to harm through me.”

“Oh, Lord, boys! Oh, Lord!” palpitated Zenas Gunn, almost overcome by horror. “Do you hear? Do you understand? They are speaking of murder—of killing us!”

“But Reggio is on the level,” said Dick.

“Great howling coyotes!” exclaimed Buckhart. “It begins to look some as if we were going to get mixed up with this Ten, whoever they are.”

“Tortora,” said the stranger, “you are a great fool! You will be slain, the strangers will disappear, and Teresa—it will be left for me to save her.”

“For you?”

“Yes.”

“Why, you?”

“Because she is the fairest flower of Venice! Because my sleeping dreams of her and my waking thoughts of her have brought me back to Venice from America, far over the seas.”

“By the saints!” cried Reggio, “you are Nicola Mullura!”

CHAPTER XVIII.—WHEN STEEL MEETS STEEL.

“At last you have named me!” laughed the mysterious man.

“You wretch!” panted the gondolier. “How dare you again show your face in Venice?”

“I am not showing it very much,” was the cool retort. “Even here, as near as we are, you could not see it well enough to recognize me. By day you might rake the city with a fine comb, and still you would not find me.”

“You are a thief, a murderer, and death will be yours if you are discovered!”

“Never fear, my Reggio,” was the mocking assurance. “I have friends far more powerful than the authorities of this city. My friends are of the Ten.”

“For whom you committed a hundred crimes before you were compelled to flee the country in order to save yourself from the hand of justice. Well might they be your friends!”

“You are very careless in your speech, Tortora,” said the one accused, still with perfect self-possession. “I will take good care of Teresa when you are gone. Trust her to me, my Reggio. In my arms she will be safe.”

“Rather than think she might become yours would I slay her with my own hand!” panted the gondolier. “What have you been doing? You have frightened her!”

“I knocked at the door and asked admission. She should have welcomed me with open arms.”

“I knew you had frightened her. She loathes you, Nicola Mullura.”

“She shall adore me.”

“In her room she has been shuddering and praying since you knocked at the door and demanded admission.”

“You shall soothe her and tell her I have come to take her with me to America, where, in the city of New York, I am already a great man with my people.”

“Never! How have you the impudence to place your feet on these steps! How did you come here?”

“I was brought. When Teresa declined to admit me, I decided to wait until your return, for I knew you were out in the city. I am here. Now we will go in together. You shall leave me with Teresa while you take away the foreigners and return.”

The man spoke as if fully confident that Tortora would comply. The

gondolier seemed hesitating, but suddenly he cried:

“As I must die, I’ll not leave you to torture my sister! The Ten will destroy me, but not until I have killed you, Mullura!”

“He has drawn a knife!” exclaimed Dick, noting as well as possible in the darkness the movements of Reggio.

“It sure is the real thing now!” said Buckhart.

“Terrible!” groaned Professor Gunn. “Where are the authorities? It should be stopped!”

Mullura had watched closely, and now he lost not a second in whipping out his own knife.

“Fool!” he sneered. “You are no match for me! I shall kill you, and save the Ten a task!”

Tortora held his knife at arm’s length toward the sky, as if invoking the assistance of a higher power. Then he started up the steps.

“Fair play!” cried Dick Merriwell, springing from the gondola. “If we can’t stop this business, Brad, we can see fair play!”

“You bet your boots!” roared the Texan, following promptly.

The professor called to them in the greatest consternation, but they did not heed his appeals.

Mullura waited for Tortora to come within reach. Being higher up, he had the advantage.

Suddenly the gondolier darted to one side and sprang up the steps until he was on a level with the other man. Mullura tried to prevent this, but he was not quick enough. He leaped forward, striking at the gondolier.

Reggio flung up his hand and warded the blow, the knives clinking as they met and rasping as they parted with a twist.

The gondolier gave the other a swing and then struck under like a flash, but Mullura leaped backward and escaped.

The struggle that followed was of a silent, deadly sort.

Dick and Brad pressed near to watch, but did not try to interfere between the men.

Suddenly a door was flung open and a fan of light flared out upon the steps. In the open doorway, holding a lighted candle above her head, was a girl.

Both Dick and Brad gasped as they saw her, for they were struck with the fact that she was wonderfully beautiful. She was not more than seventeen, with eyes and hair as dark as deepest midnight. Her features were finely molded.

The girl’s face was very pale and her lips were parted. She made a wonderful picture as she stood there peering out at the fighting men.

The light of the candle enabled the men to see how to get at each other.

Mullura cried:

“He forced it on me, Teresa! I do not wish to kill him, but now it is his life or mine!”

Saying which he crouched at a little distance. He sprang forward on the steps, made a false thrust with his knife that bore a dark stain, then plunged beneath the arm Reggio flung up.

It seemed that the gondolier would be cut to death in a moment, but he made a lucky clutch with his empty hand, and caught the wrist of his enemy, partly checking and turning the blow. He was wounded slightly.

Baffled in that manner, Mullura had the misfortune to slip on the steps while within the reach of Tortora. Before he could recover and save himself, the latter plunged the knife into his shoulder.

The stricken man broke the hold of the other, but up went one of his arms, and he reeled down the steps, on which his knife clanged, having fallen from his hand.

Reggio followed. His back was toward the light, but his manner was that of one who means to finish a task not yet accomplished.

Mullura tried to rise to his feet. He scrambled up, saw Tortora right upon him, leaped back, again lost his footing, and, a moment later, plunged with a great splash into the water.

The gondolier followed to the edge of the water, where he crouched, bloody knife in hand, watching for the man he hated to rise to the surface.

The water was ruffled and broken, but the ripples were caused by the man who had vanished, and they grew less and less. The head of Mullura did not rise into view.

“I opine the gent is done for,” muttered Brad Buckhart, finding his voice at last.

“I believe he is,” said Dick, speaking with an effort. “If so, he met his just due.”

“Nary dispute to make on that, pard.”

There was something of disappointment in Reggio’s manner as he rose to his feet.

“I wished to see him dead,” he muttered. “Still, I know he is done, and he will never touch Teresa with his vile hands.”

“I reckon he’s gone, all right, Reg,” said Brad; “but so is your gondola. It’s disappeared, and Professor Gunn has disappeared with it. Pard, we’re kind of left here, I judge.”

Already Dick had discovered that the gondola was gone.

With it had vanished the possibility of their immediately leaving the place by

water, as they had reached it.

“We’re stranded, Brad,” said Dick.

They called to Professor Gunn, but there was no answer.

“Courageous old boy!” muttered the Texan, with a show of anger.

“I don’t know that we can blame him much,” said Dick, seeking an excuse. “He’s very nervous, and the spectacle of Reggio and his antagonist fighting like tigers for their lives must have caused him to lose his head.”

“Oh, he’s all right,” said Brad hastily—“he’s all right when he doesn’t tell people how brave he is.”

In the meantime Reggio was reassuring his sister, who had seemed quite horrified by the spectacle of her brother engaged in the deadly struggle with Nicola Mullura. He placed his arm about her supportingly, speaking soft words into her ear. She was white, and the candle in her hand trembled violently.

“What can we do, Reggio?” questioned Dick, in very poor Italian. “The professor is gone, and the gondola with him.”

“Come in da house,” invited the gondolier, abandoning his own tongue for the time being. “Spik da English-a to me-a. I understand-a heem vera much-a well.”

“But he can’t understand your talk, pard,” chuckled Buckhart. “That’s a horse on you.”

“I suppose we had better accept his invitation. We can’t stay out here.”

“Sure—we’ll accept it,” nodded the Texan.

So they followed Reggio and his sister into the house, the door being closed behind them. They mounted some stairs, threaded a passage of several angles, and came to a lighted room.

“Teresa,” said Reggio, “I introduce-a you my ’Merican friends. They very fine-a gentleman.”

“Wow!” muttered Brad. “Our gondolier calls us his friends, pard!”

Reggio seemed to catch the meaning of Buckhart’s low-spoken words, which were not intended for his ears, for he straightened up with an air of pride, quickly saying:

“You hear me tell-a Nicola Mullura my ancestor they belong-a to da Castellani. Mebbe you no understand-a me? I spik to him in da Italian. I poor gondolier now. My family good one. Da blood-a of da gentleman run here in me-a. I no tell-a it ev’rybody. What da use? I tell-a you now. Da Mullura blood vera bad—vera bad. Da Mullura belong-a to da Nicolletti—common class-a. My sist’ she fine-a lady.”

This was said with considerable effort, and suddenly Dick began to understand that this Venetian gondolier really believed himself and his sister of

greater distinction than most of the foreigners he rowed about the city in his boat. Indeed, there was something that carried the impression that Reggio really believed he was unbending and bestowing on them a favor by permitting them to meet his sister.

“No offense, Reg, old man,” said Brad, in his frank, Western way. “I can tell that your sister is an aristocrat by looking at her. You don’t have to explain that any to me. She is all right, and so are you. I certain admire the way you polished off old Mul, out on the front steps. All the same, I didn’t think you had cooked his hash when you sheathed your knife in his dirty hide, and it was a surprise for the Unbranded Maverick of the Rio Pecos when he failed to rise to the surface after going in for that little swim.”

“His shoulder,” said Reggio; “I strike-a him in da shoulder. He no swim-a.”

“Well, it was a right fine job, Reg.”

The gondolier now questioned his sister in Italian, and she told him how she had endured terror while Mullura was outside the door, on which he knocked and knocked, demanding admittance. At first, on hearing his rapping, she took a candle and crept down to the door, asking who was there. He answered, saying it was a friend from her brother; but she recognized his voice, and fled back to her room, where she remained, praying that the door would not yield until her brother returned. After a time he ceased to knock, and she hoped he had departed. Still, knowing how bitterly he hated Reggio, she feared he was waiting to attack him at the door, and therefore she had given the danger signal by flashing the light when she heard her brother’s whistle.

Reggio explained how Mullura had attempted to force his attentions upon Teresa. He was a reckless character in Venice at the time, with a very black reputation, and the girl had shrunk from him with the greatest aversion.

On discovering that Teresa feared him, the fellow became more and more persistent in his annoying attentions. At last he insulted her, and then, burning with fury, Reggio sought the scoundrel, intending to kill him. They fought, but were separated before either had been harmed.

Then and there Mullura swore to obtain possession of Teresa and to kill Reggio if he lifted a hand to prevent it.

But directly after that the authorities obtained conclusive evidence that Mullura had been concerned in a number of crimes, the most dastardly being a cold-blooded murder. The fellow was forced to flee from Venice, much to the relief of both Reggio and Teresa. He emigrated to America, but sent back word that some day he would return and secure Teresa, in spite of herself and her brother.

All this was explained in a broken manner to the boys, upon which Brad

cried:

“Good riddance to old Nic! You won’t have to worry about him any more, Reg. Both you and your sister are safe.”

“No, no!” muttered the man, a dark shadow coming to his face. “Nicola Mullura gone-a, but I have-a da iron ring-a.”

At this Teresa, who understood a little English, gave a cry and caught her brother by the arm. In Italian she plied him with questions. At first he tried to put her off, but his manner added to her alarm, and she insisted that he should tell her the truth.

“I have-a to tell-a her!” he murmured sadly. “Mebbe bet’ tell-a her now. She find-a out prit soon, best I can-a do.”

Then he took her in his arms, looking sadly and lovingly down into her upturned face.

“Little sister,” he said in soft Italian, “my heart is sore, for it is true that the Ten have placed the death seal upon me.”

She cried out in horror, clutching him and clinging to him.

“No, no, no! Oh, Reggio, my brother, my dear, good brother, why should they do it? It cannot be true!”

“You know, little sister, that a Tortora never stained his hand with crime. The Ten live and grow fat on the proceeds of crime. Every man who fails to contribute his share of loot at their command is sure in the end to get the iron ring. When that happens, unless he is able to flee from Venice at once, he is doomed to die. I have no money. I cannot flee. The ring was tossed at my feet. Within twenty-four hours from the time it fell there I shall be dead. Poor, little Teresa! What will become of you?”

She put her slender arms round him and clung to him with fierce affection, as if she would in some manner protect him from the black peril that threatened. Again and again she cried that it could not be, this terrible thing. She drew him down, wound her arms about his neck and kissed him.

“Brad,” said Dick, in a husky voice, “we must save Tortora somehow.”

“Right you are, partner!” agreed the Texan heartily. “I was thinking of that some before getting a look at his sister; and I am thinking it a heap sight more since. However are we going to do it?”

“We must get him out of Venice before the blow is struck by the Terrible Ten.”

“Or take to the warpath and chaw up the Terrible Ten. That would suit me a heap better.”

“That’s out of the question. The only way is to smuggle Reggio out of Venice. I have a way. The fishing boats! They start out for the fishing grounds of

the open sea before daybreak. We must find a man who, for a sufficient bribe, will hide Reggio aboard his boat, take him out of the city, and keep him until we can get along with a little steamer. It will cost a lot of money, but what is money when a human life is in the balance!”

Reggio had been listening to Dick's words. He now put his sister gently aside, turning to the boy, placed his hands on Merriwell's shoulders, and spoke with deep feeling:

"A thousand times I thank-a you, my frien'! You good-a, kind-a! No use to try. No do-a it."

"Why not?"

The gondolier explained that in all Venice there was not one fisherman who would dare smuggle him away on learning that he had been condemned by the Ten, and had been given the iron ring. The man who did it would be assassinated in less than a day and a night after his return to the city.

"But why tell him that you have received the ring?" asked Dick.

For a moment Reggio's face brightened, and then the shadow returned and settled upon it.

"Would you hav-a me getta poor feesh'man killed?" he asked. "That what come-a to him. You gent'man-a. You save-a me from da Ten, but you gitta da in'cent man-a kill."

"Well, that sure takes the prize!" muttered Brad. "I'll never say again that a dago has no sense of real honor and justice. How many men would think of that? What would they care? To escape they would be willing to sacrifice a dozen innocent men. Pard, it sure is a whole lot amazing!"

Dick agreed that it was. Then he talked earnestly with Reggio, seeking to discover or invent some plan by which the escape could be contrived.

The gondolier insisted that all efforts were useless. Never had any man placed beneath the ban of the Ten escaped. He seemed to think the power of the Ten was almost infinite. In the old days the Council of Ten had possessed unlimited power, but even the original council, it seemed, had not been more dreaded than were the Ten of modern times.

At last Reggio said:

"You want-a do somet'ing for me-a? Good! You have-a da mon'. You honorable gent'man-a. See my little sister? I leave-a her all 'lone in da worl'. You take-a her to 'Merica? Over dere, in da cit' of New York-a live one Antonio Melino. He know-a me—know-a my father—know-a my sister. You take-a her to him; he take-a care of her. What you say to dat?"

"It shall be done!" cried Dick.

Then, of a sudden, came a loud hammering on the door at the foot of the stairs, heavy blows that resounded crashingly through that part of the building.

"They have come!" said Reggio, in Italian.

CHAPTER XIX.—THE BURSTING OF THE DOOR.

Plainly the door was being attacked by heavy instruments for the purpose of battering it down. Again Teresa clutched her brother and clung to him.

“Little sister, little sister,” he said, “if you cling to me so, how shall I defend myself?”

“I cannot lose you, Reggio!” she sobbed. “It is wicked! They shall not kill you!”

He implored her to release him.

“Let me go down and meet them,” he said. “If they come here to do the deed, then, in order to leave no living witnesses, they may destroy you and these good American friends who have promised to help you reach Antonio Melino.”

“Do you think the assassins have come to do the work?” asked Dick, his black eyes gleaming.

“I think so.”

“Then give us weapons! Let’s stand together! We can thin out this dastardly gang somewhat before they can do the job!”

“That’s the talk, pard!” shouted Buckhart. “Whoop! If we were supplied with shooting irons, we’d sure come pretty near wiping the old Ten off the map to-night. Give us something—anything! We’ll make a hole in the bunch! You hear me warble?”

“It is madness!” exclaimed the gondolier, as the blows continued to resound. “It means the death of all! Flee with Teresa! For her sake——”

Brad had been looking around. The room was rather poorly furnished. At one side sat a rude wooden table. This the Texan seized, turning it bottom up in a twinkling. Planting his foot upon it, the Texan grasped a leg of the table and gave it a mighty wrench, literally twisting it off. This leg he flourished over his head.

“Here’s my war club, pard!” he shouted. “I opine I can crack a head with that.”

Dick followed Brad’s example, and in a moment or two he had torn off another leg of the table.

Reggio looked on in wonderment. He could not understand why these American boys should sacrifice their lives for him. Never before in all his life had he seen boys like these.

Teresa clasped her hands and gazed at them also, her eyes kindling with unspeakable admiration.

Crash! crash! crash! sounded the heavy blows.

The door was falling.

Suddenly Reggio awoke. His bloodstained knife appeared once more in his hand, and he flourished it above his head.

“Let them come, then!” he cried. “If we all die, we’ll do what we can to destroy the Ten who have a hundred poor Venetians beneath their feet!”

“That’s the talk!” said Dick, whose face was flushed and whose eyes gleamed, “To the stairs, Reggio! Let Teresa hold the light, that we may see. There will be some broken heads before they do the job they have blocked out.”

“Talk about Texas!” burst from Brad. “Why, Texas is a Sunday-school picnic all the time compared with Venice! The wild and woolly West won’t seem half so wild and woolly to me if I ever get back to it.”

Teresa was brave. She caught up the candle, and said she was ready. As they hurried from the room to the stairs, the door fell with a sound of splintered wood.

“Just in time!” exclaimed Dick, hearing many voices and the sound of feet at the foot of the stairs.

They reached the head of the flight. Teresa was close at hand, and she held the candle as high as she could reach, in order that its light might shine down those stairs.

At the bottom of the flight were a number of men—not less than six or seven. They paused as the light revealed them.

Reggio Tortora gave a shout of astonishment.

“They are not the Ten!” he declared. “The Ten are always in cloaks and hoods.”

“Then who are they?” questioned Dick.

“Bravos, desperadoes of the city—men who rob and murder! They have been sent by the Ten, for——”

He stopped, catching his breath. Among those men, and at the head of them, he saw a man whose clothing still hung dripping damp upon his limbs. This man’s jacket was gone, and about his shoulder were many bandages. His arm was bound in a bent position to his side.

“Mullura!” gasped Reggie. “He still lives!”

“You’re right!” savagely retorted the leader of the bravos. “I still live, and I’ll yet have Teresa for my own! You shall die the death of a dog!”

“This is a whole lot interesting!” observed Brad Buckhart.

At this point Teresa produced a slender dagger, which she held aloft, crying down the stairs:

“Ere you put your hands on me, Nicola Mullura, I’ll plunge this into my

heart! It is my dead body you may obtain—no more!”

For a moment Mullura seemed taken aback. Then he forced a laugh, sneering:

“Very finely spoken, but your courage will not take you that far, beautiful Teresa. You’ll not be so foolish. I’ll take you with me to America, where I am a great man, and you shall be my wife. If your brother agrees to this, I will not lift my hand against him, even though he so nearly destroyed me to-night. Come, my Reggio, what say you?”

“Teresa, it is for you to answer,” said the gondolier.

“Then I will answer!” she exclaimed, her dark eyes flashing fire. “Not if he were king of all America would I consent!”

“You have had your answer, Nicola Mullura!” cried Reggio, in satisfaction.

“And it seemed good and hot,” chuckled Buckhart.

“Have it as you like!” snarled Mullura. “These men will soon overpower you. Your resistance will simply make them all the more furious.”

“Let them come on,” said Tortora; “but see that you come at their front. My knife found your shoulder a while ago. Next time, if the saints are with me, it shall find your black heart!”

“They are going to rush in a moment, Brad!” breathed Dick. “They are getting ready.”

“I’m ready, too,” declared the undaunted Texan. “I’ll guarantee that I’ll crack one head, at least, with this table leg!”

Dick was right. Mullura spoke to his companions in low tones. They gathered themselves, and with a yell, they came charging up the stairs.

“Whoop!” roared Buckhart. “Wake up snakes and hump yourselves! Now there will be doings!” The fighting Texan seemed in his element. His face glowed with a sort of fine frenzy.

Dick Merriwell’s eyes shone like stars. He laughed as he saw the bravos coming. It might be a fight to the death, but, with his blood bounding in his veins, he felt no thrill of dread. He was defending the innocent; his cause was just, and he gloried in the encounter.

The desperadoes flourished their gleaming knives, seeming to hope to intimidate the defenders in that manner. In truth, they were a savage-appearing set.

Reggio, too, was undaunted. The dauntless bravery of the boys was infectious.

There was little time to wait. Seeming to look at one man, Dick swung his club and smote another wretch over the head.

The fellow went whirling end over end down the stairs.

Buckhart dropped another in his tracks.

Reggio tried to get at Nicola Mullura.

“Come within reach of my arm, you dog!” he entreated. “America will lose one great man, who will return no more.”

But it was another of the ruffians who tried to get under the guard of the gondolier and drive his knife home.

Reggio was too quick for the man. He struck and thrust his own blade through the fellow’s forearm.

With a shriek, the wretch dropped his own blade, clutched his wounded arm, which quickly began to drip blood, and fell back against the man behind him.

“Oh! if you were looking for two kids who couldn’t fight any, you’re beginning to understand your mistake,” shouted Buckhart.

Mullura urged them on. Still he continued to take pains to keep beyond the stroke of Reggio. The gondolier taunted him with cowardice, and begged him to come nearer. In his desire to get at his enemy once more, he forgot the peril of the others.

Dick saw a bravo strike at Reggio, but Merriwell struck at the same time. His club fell across the arm of the ruffian, which was broken.

In that moment, however, Dick exposed himself, and one of the ruffians, who had been struck down on the stairs, crept up and clasped him about the knees.

The boy was pulled off his feet. He seized his assailant as he fell, and together they rolled down the stairs. Of course Merriwell’s club was lost, and he was compelled to fight the bravo hand to hand.

The man tried to get his fingers on Dick’s throat. Now, although a boy, young Merriwell was a trained athlete, and in the finest condition possible. If that ruffian fancied he was dealing with an ordinary boy who could be handled easily, he met the surprise of his life.

For a time they twisted and turned there in the gloom at the foot of the stairs. The boy baffled the ruffian in his efforts, all the while seeking to secure the advantage himself.

While this was taking place Dick heard a cry of distress from Teresa, and at the same moment the candle and candlestick fell on the stairs, the light being extinguished.

At this juncture Merriwell obtained a hold on the ruffian’s arm, giving it a twisting wrench that robbed the fellow of strength and nearly rendered him unconscious. In a twinkling the boy was the master.

Just then some one came hastening down the stairs and nearly fell over them. This person swore as he gathered himself up and rushed out on the steps.

Something led Dick to follow.

The darkness between the buildings was not as deep as that within, and he saw a man placing a huge bundle in a gondola that floated at the foot of the steps.

Something told Dick this bundle was Teresa. Unhesitatingly he leaped forward.

The man turned in time to meet the attack of the courageous lad. Just as Dick would have grappled with the fellow, he slipped. Before he could recover, he received a stunning blow that hurled him flat and helpless, although he was still conscious. He lay quite still, unable to lift a hand.

The man produced a knife, seemingly determined to finish the boy without delay. Although he realized his peril, young Merriwell could not lift a finger or make a move to save himself. As the desperado stepped toward him, the lad gave himself up as done for.

At that moment, unseen by the murderous thug, another dark form issued from the doorway onto the steps.

The man with the knife bent over Dick, lifting the weapon. A pantherish figure shot forward, and a club fell with crushing force on the head of the wretch, who was stretched prone and senseless beside his intended victim.

“This yere old table leg has sure done its duty tonight,” said a voice that thrilled Merriwell.

With a supreme effort Dick softly called:

“Brad!”

“It is you, pard!” exclaimed the Texan, in delight. “I certain was seeking for you some! What’s the matter? Are you hurt?”

“Give me a hand,” urged Dick. “I was stunned. You saved my life, Buckhart. That fellow would have finished me only for you and your table leg.”

In a moment Buckhart had Dick on his feet, supporting him with a strong arm.

“You’re not cut up, are you, partner?” anxiously inquired the loyal fellow. “I saw you go bumping down the stairs with one of the bunch, and I was a heap concerned for you. First opportunity I found I hiked to look for you. I thought mebbe that galoot with the sticker might be after you, and that’s why I lost no time in cracking him on the kabeza.”

“I don’t think I’ve been cut. Couldn’t tell just what did happen in the fighting, but I believe I’ll be all right in a few moments.”

“Then it’s up to us to do something for Teresa. I sure would like to know what has become of her. The gang up there are hunting high and low for her.”

“Why, one of them brought her down the stairs and placed her in this gondola. I’m sure of it.”

“Great horn spoon! Then it’s us to the gondola and away from here!”

“But Reggio?”

“We can’t do anything for him.”

“Why not?”

“They’ve finished him.”

“Killed him? Do you mean that?”

“That’s whatever. Teresa dropped the candle when she saw him knifed. Didn’t you hear her scream?”

“You’re sure—you’re sure Reggio was killed?”

“Dead sure, pard.”

“Then let’s get away in the gondola. If I was not mistaken in thinking this wretch placed Teresa in it, we can save her, at least.”

Dick was not mistaken, as they found when they sprang into the boat. Teresa lay unconscious amid the cushions.

By this time Merriwell had recovered his strength in a measure, and he started to cast off the line that held the boat beside the steps.

“The galoots are coming, pard!” hissed Brad, as he seized the oar.

The bravos were coming. Just as Dick freed the line from the iron ring, several of them hastened out onto the steps.

The Texan gave a great thrust with the oar, pushing the gondola away.

The voice of Nicola Mullura shouted to them, commanding them to stop.

“We’re in a hurry,” retorted Dick. “Our time is very valuable. We can’t stop just now.”

“Not even a little minute,” said Brad, as he continued to use the oar with as much skill as he could command.

“Look out, Brad!” shouted Dick, warningly, at the same time dropping quickly.

He had seen Mullura making a sweeping movement with his right arm.

Dick dropped barely in time, for through the air whizzed a knife, cast with great precision, and with such force that it clanged against the wall of the opposite house, dropping back with a splash into the water.

“A miss is as good as a mile,” said Merriwell. “But look out for yourself, Brad. Another may follow.”

Another of the desperadoes did cast a knife at them, but his aim was poor, and soon the gondola shot out from the narrow passage onto the bosom of a broader canal.

They came near colliding with another boat that was moving swiftly and silently along.

“Look out, there!” cried Brad. “Clear the trail for us, or you may get yourself

run down a whole lot.”

Behind the curtains of the other gondola there was a stir. The curtains parted and a familiar face peered forth in the moonlight.

“Hi, there—hey!” cried the excited voice of Professor Gunn. “Stop! stop! I have found you!”

“Professor!” exclaimed Dick. “Where have you been?”

“Seeking assistance. Looking for officers. Can’t find them. Had no end of trouble. Bless my stars! I was afraid I’d never see you boys alive again. Goodness knows I’m thankful to behold you!”

“But what made you leave us?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t intend to do it. I was excited. I confess I was excited. Who wouldn’t be under such circumstances? Two men—two mad men were trying to cut each other into shreds right before my eyes. I slipped the line from the ring. Didn’t know what I was doing. The tide carried the boat away. I clutched the oar and tried to row back. Made a mess of it, and lost the oar. In the midst of my excitement, after the tide had carried me out of that canal, a human head appeared beside the boat. Yes, sir—exactly so. A man was in the water. He was hurt, too. Swam with one arm. Other arm didn’t seem to have much strength. He appealed to me for assistance. Of course I rendered assistance.”

“Which certain was the worst thing you could have done,” said Brad. “That’s how Mullura escaped, Dick.”

“The man must be a fine swimmer. In some manner he swam under water after falling into the canal until the darkness of the place hid him completely.”

“It was a bad thing—a very bad thing,” agreed the professor. “The man was a wretch, a scoundrel, a villain!”

“Which sure are too soft names for him,” growled Buckhart.

The two gondolas were now side by side.

“Quite true, quite true,” agreed the excitable old man. “I found it out. But I couldn’t refuse to help a man in distress, you know. I helped him on board. He managed to pick up the oar. Then, using his uninjured hand, he rowed. I urged him to take me back to find you. He cursed me. He told me to keep still or he would cut my heart out. My goodness! I didn’t want him to do that! I kept still.”

“A most natural thing to do,” said Dick.

“I am glad you say so—very glad. Hum! ha! My position was unpleasant—decidedly so. But I kept still. He handled the gondola. He did it cleverly. But he lost no time in dodging into another canal. I remonstrated. I told him I did not like the place. It was too dark. He invited me to be quiet. I relapsed into silence. Here and there in the darkness he went. At last he stopped. He ordered me to land. I was compelled to do so. I didn’t dare raise another remonstrance. He left

me. I was in a scrape. Ha! hum! It was a very bad scrape.”

Plainly the professor was very anxious to set himself right in the eyes of the boys.

“After that?” questioned Dick.

“When he left me he told me if I raised a rumpus he would come back and slice me. I couldn’t get away, and I had no weapon to protect myself, so I was compelled to be quiet. I remained there until this gondola came past. Then I applied to the gondolier. Since that time I have been searching to find that canal where you were. That is all.”

In some respects the professor’s explanation seemed unsatisfactory, but, of course, the boys accepted it. Dick explained what had happened after the disappearance of Zenas, using as few words as possible.

“Dreadful! horrible!” cried the old man. “Can such things be in these days! But you rescued the girl?”

“She is here,” said Dick.

At this point Teresa, recovering consciousness, began calling for her brother.

Dick tried to soothe her, but, overcome by the memory of what she had beheld ere dropping the candle and fainting, the girl raved incoherently.

Dick and Brad quickly decided to abandon the gondola they occupied and take to the other. Merriwell picked Teresa up and stepped with her from one boat to the other, the Texan following.

“Now to our rooms,” said Dick. “That is our only course. We must take care of Teresa. We must protect her with our lives.”

“And you bet we will!” put in Brad.

“But I fear it is certain to involve us still further with the assassins known as the Terrible Ten,” sighed the professor. “Still, boys, you are right about Teresa. We must stand by her. We must do everything in our power for her. It is our duty as men and Americans.”

The gondolier was given directions, and he sent his craft gliding away.

“What puzzles me,” said Brad, “is that the rumpus made by that fight didn’t seem to stir up anybody much. That plenty of people heard it I am sure, but they didn’t come hiking to see what it was all about.”

“Because in that particular quarter of the city it is not safe to be too curious, I fancy,” said Dick. “I believe that explained why no one who heard the sounds of the encounter came to investigate. They all kept still and prayed that they would not be involved.”

“I have a theory,” put in Professor Gunn, “that the people of the city live in great terror of this awful Ten. They do not even dare speak of the Ten, but all the while they fear it as much as the old-time Council of Ten was feared. When they

hear anything like that encounter, they proceed to crawl into their holes and barricade themselves there until the storm blows over.”

“Well, it sure is high time something was done to put an end to such a reign of terror,” declared the Texan. “It’s up to us to expose the doings of the Ten. I don’t see why somebody hasn’t exposed them long before this.”

“It is doubtful if any foreigners, except ourselves, ever learned much of anything about the Ten,” said Dick. “That is one reason why there had been no exposure.”

The gondolier did not seem to hear a word of their talk. Professor Gunn now resolved to question him. The old man proceeded to ask him several things about the Terrible Ten, but the man at the oar shook his head and answered that he knew nothing of such a body. He even became somewhat angry when Zenas persisted in his questions.

“Signor,” he said haughtily, “why should you believe that I speak a falsehood? I am a poor man, and I attend to my own business. I have no time to listen to foolish gossip. You say there is such a body. I would not be impolite, signor, so I simply say that of it I know nothing at all. I must beg you to ask no further questions.”

Through all this Teresa had continued to mutter and moan about her brother. They could do nothing to comfort her. Dick tried it, but his Italian was poor, and he entreated the professor to say something soothing to the girl.

Gently the old man placed an arm about her shoulders.

“My child,” he said, “your brother was a brave man, but he could not escape the decree of this terrible band. He knew he could not escape, and he entreated Richard, as a great favor, to take you to America and deliver you to friends of your family who are there. This we shall do. Trust us.”

“I do trust you, signor,” she sobbed; “but I cannot forget the terrible thing I saw—my brother slain before my eyes! I can never forget that!”

“No wonder, dear child. You should be thankful you escaped from those men.”

“Until I am far away from Venice I shall not feel that I have escaped. Nicola Mullura will do everything in his power to place his bloody hands on me. I shall live in constant terror of him.”

“He shall never touch you!” cried Zenas. “Boys, she fears the wretch, Mullura, will get possession of her.”

“Teresa,” said Dick, using as good Italian as he could command, “we swear to defend you with our lives. You may depend on us.”

“You are such brave boys—such wonderfully brave boys!” murmured the girl.

“I can’t say it in dago talk,” put in Brad; “but you bet your boots, Teresa, that what my pard has promised, we’ll back up. You hear me shout!”

CHAPTER XX.—THE OATH OF TERESA.

Fearing she might do something rash in her distress and occasional spells of delirium, Dick and Brad took turns watching over Teresa that night.

The girl was given one of the three rooms taken by the professor and the boys in a private house. It was useless to urge her to retire. With the horror of what had happened, upon her, and in great fear that Mullura would find her, she kept her clothes on and slept on the outside of the bed. The door between that room and the adjoining one, in which the boys remained that they might be near her, was left slightly ajar at her request.

It was long past midnight before she slept at all. When they peered in, they discovered her lying staring up at the ceiling, her face pale and her lips moving, as if in prayer.

“Pard,” said Brad, “she sure is a right pretty girl.”

“She is,” agreed Dick. “But you mustn’t forget Nadia Budthorne, old man.”

“Now quit!” remonstrated the Texan soberly. “No danger that I’ll get smashed on this girl, partner. My sympathy for her is aroused a heap, that’s all.”

“When a fellow becomes very sympathetic for a pretty girl, he’s liable to fall in love with her. I fancy your sympathy was aroused for Nadia, to begin with.”

“Well, I don’t judge it was a case of sympathy between you and June Arlington.”

“She certainly deserves sympathy,” said Dick. “Think of her fine brother!”

“I don’t want to think of him!” growled the Texan. “Of all onery coyotes, he certain is the worst!”

“He’s about as bad as they make ’em,” nodded Dick.

“And to think that you even fancied there could be any good in him! Long ago you could have turned him out of Fardale by speaking a word, but you let up on him until at last he drove you out. Pard, I say fair and open that I like you a-plenty, but I do think you made a mistake with Arlington. You must know it now.”

Dick was silent for some moments.

“Perhaps you are right,” he finally confessed. “I suppose you are. But I had rather make a mistake by being too generous than to make one in the opposite direction. It isn’t natural for me to be easy with an enemy. I love revenge. But I took my brother for my model. I’m not sorry, either. I think I have changed my revengeful nature to a certain degree. The best friend Frank has in the world,

Bart Hodge, was originally his bitterest enemy. Had Frank been revengeful, Hodge might have been ruined. He says so himself. Even if Frank were to make a hundred mistakes in generosity, that one instance—that one good result—would more than outweigh them all. Had I been revengeful, I should have fought Hal Darrell to the bitter end. Such a struggle between us must have been disastrous for one of us at Fardale. I became satisfied that there was little chance that Arlington would reform, and, after becoming thus satisfied, I continued to be lenient with him. You know I gave my promise to his sister, and I couldn't go back on my word."

"She must be a whole lot sore with herself for exacting such a promise. Wonder what she thinks about it now?"

"I don't know. I'll know some time. But Arlington is not going to triumph in the end. I shall return to Fardale. We're both going back with the professor. Then it will be my day."

"And I sure hope you make the most of it. If you get your innings, it will be up to you to rub it into Arlington good and hard."

This led them to speculating about what was taking place at the old school while they were traveling in foreign lands. They remained talking in low tones until finally, on peering into the next room, it was found that Teresa had fallen asleep.

Brad went to bed, with the understanding that he was to be called at a certain hour for the purpose of remaining on guard during the latter part of the night. Already Professor Gunn was snoring in his room.

Buckhart was soon sleeping. About an hour later Dick heard a low, moaning sound coming from the girl's room.

He hastened to the door.

Teresa was sitting on the edge of the bed, her hands clasped over her heart, staring fixedly at the wall, the moaning sound issuing from her pale lips. Merriwell lost no time in reaching her side.

"What is it?" he asked. "Is there anything I can do, Teresa?"

"Look!" she whispered. "I see him—I see my brother, dead on the stairs! Nicola Mullura has killed him!"

"There, there!" said the boy, soothingly, trying his best to speak her language so she would understand. "You must sleep—you must try to forget it for a while."

Night passed and morning came, and a great change had come over Teresa. She even greeted her friends with a smile!

"I am glad to see you feel better, Teresa," said Dick.

"I do feel better, good friend. I am almost happy now."

“Great horn spoon!” muttered Brad. “And she saw her brother done to death last night! Trouble runs off these Venetians like water off a duck.”

They had breakfast, and through it all the girl maintained the same unnatural light and lively manner.

After breakfast she suggested that, in order to bring no further peril on them, she should depart.

“Not at all!” cried Zenas. “You must remain right here. I am going to the authorities. I am going to inform them all about this band of Ten. I’ll know if they will permit such a thing in Venice. They must bestir themselves! It is high time.”

“Then you may leave me here,” said Teresa eagerly.

At the first opportunity, young Merriwell called Brad into one of the other rooms.

“Brad, I want you to remain here and keep watch over Teresa,” he said. “She is not herself, and may do something rash. Professor Gunn and I are going to see the authorities. Then we’re going to see that a search is made for the body of Reggio. I don’t believe it will be found, for I have an idea that the assassins cast it into the water, and the tide has carried it far out to sea before this. Still it is our duty to have a search made for it.”

“Sure as shooting.”

“You’ll watch her closely, Brad?”

“She may object some, but I’ll do my prettiest, Dick.”

“Good! Now, I have to explain to her and urge her to remain here until we bring back some sort of a report.”

Teresa frowned and shook her head when he told her of the plan.

“I want no one to stay,” she said. “You shall all go.”

“Oh, no, no!” put in Professor Gunn. “We couldn’t think of that, my dear— couldn’t think of it. It wouldn’t be proper. Bradley will remain here to protect you from peril of any sort, and I assure you that he is a brave and noble lad. I do not think I quite understand him at school, but since seeing that he is brave as a lion and generous to a fault, I appreciate him fully.”

“Thank you, professor,” said the Texan. “You’re some complimentary this morning.”

“But not flattering. The truth is never flattery if it is spoken in the right spirit. I am proud to pay this tribute to your fine qualities. I shall be proud to do so before the entire school when we return to Fardale.”

“Oh, Jerusalem! don’t do that, professor!” gasped Buckhart, appalled. “I wouldn’t have you for a barrel of money!”

“Eh? Wouldn’t? Why not?”

“Why, I’d certain take to the tall timber on the jump if you did it. I’d hunt a hole and stay there till the fellows forgot it. They would guy me to death.”

“Would they?” cried Zenas, surprised and displeased. “Now, don’t you think anything of the sort! I’d like to know of them trying it.”

“But you wouldn’t know, you see.”

“You might tell me. It would be your duty to tell me.”

“People do not always do their duty in this world.”

The old pedagogue was surprised and puzzled. He had not fancied Buckhart a modest boy, but now, of a sudden, he realized that the Texan was genuinely modest in a way.

“We’ll say no more about it now, Bradley,” he said gravely. “I believe I am beginning to understand you more and more. You are a very singular lad—very.”

In spite of Teresa’s objections, Brad was left to look out for her, while Dick and the professor departed.

More than two hours later they returned. They had succeeded in reporting to the authorities, but their tale had been received with such apparent incredulity that both were vexed and angered. They had received a promise that the matter should be investigated. More than that, an official had accompanied them to the home of the Tortoras.

On arriving there they found the broken door had been restored and repaired, although not all the signs of the attack upon it had been hidden. There was no blood on the steps outside the door, nor on the stairs where Reggio had been stabbed by Mullura.

The body of the gondolier was not found.

The woman who owned the house explained that there had been carousing in the rooms the previous night, and that her tenants, apparently fearing ejection, had vanished ere morning.

“But they left all their belongings here,” said Professor Gunn.

“No, no!” exclaimed the woman. “They took everything. Not one thing belonging to them did they leave.”

She persisted in this statement, and all the questions put to her did not confuse her. She also declared she had found no trace of blood on the stairs.

“Then why have those stairs been washed this morning?” demanded Dick.

“It is my custom to have them washed every morning.”

“Question others in the house,” urged Professor Gunn.

But other people in the house were very loath to answer questions, and no satisfaction could be obtained from them.

“They are one and all terrified by the Ten,” asserted Dick. “They dare not confess that they heard the sounds of the fight last night. It is likely they have

been warned to be silent.”

“It’s a fine state of affairs!” exclaimed Zenas, exasperated.

The official made a gesture of helplessness.

“You see there is nothing that can be done, signors,” he said.

“And are you going to let this thing go right on in Venice? It will ruin your city. You may have kept it quiet thus far, but it shall be published to the world now. Travelers will cease coming here. Then what will you do? You live off tourists. But for them the city would go to the dogs in a short time. It’s up to you to take hold of this matter in earnest and bring this band of robbers and assassins to justice.”

“We care not for your advice,” was the haughty answer.

That ended it. Believing nothing could be done, Dick and the professor finally returned to their waiting gondola, and gave the gondolier directions to take them back to their lodgings. The official entered his boat and was rowed away.

Zenas fussed and fumed, but it was useless. Dick took it more calmly.

But when they reached their own rooms an unpleasant surprise awaited them.

Teresa was gone.

Likewise Brad Buckhart!

CHAPTER XXI.—THE LAST STROKE.

The landlady was called, but she declared that the boy and girl had left without her knowledge. She had not seen them go, and she had not the least idea whither they had gone.

“Strange Brad left no word,” said Dick. “He should have left a note, at least.”

But they found nothing to tell them what had become of the missing ones.

“This is awful!” exclaimed the professor, mopping his face with his handkerchief. “I fear some fearful thing has happened to Bradley. And we can do absolutely nothing with the authorities.”

“Come!” cried Dick. “At least, we can report it.”

They hastened to the steps and called to a gondolier who was slowly propelling his boat past.

“In this city it is impossible to follow a trail,” said Dick. “These watery streets leave no scent. A bloodhound would be useless here.”

They gave the gondolier his orders. He took them by several short cuts on the way to their destination. They were passing through a narrow canal when Dick’s attention became drawn by some mysterious influence to a dark door set in a wall some distance above the water.

Suddenly that door flew open before his eyes. Cloaked and hooded men appeared within the doorway, their faces concealed from view.

“Goodness!” gasped the professor, in astonishment. “Who are they Richard? What are they doing?”

Dick did not answer, for a strange thrill had shot over him at sight of those men, among whom a silent struggle seemed taking place.

All at once, before their startled eyes a human figure was hurled headlong from that mysterious doorway, whirling over and over in the air!

It was Brad Buckhart!

Dick recognized his friend. He saw Brad strike the water and disappear with a great splash. Then he called a sharp order to the gondolier.

The black door closed above them, and the mysterious men in cloaks and hoods were hidden from view.

It was not long before Brad rose to the surface, spouting water like a whale.

“Hello, pard!” he cheerfully called. “This ain’t the first time I’ve been in swimming with my clothes on.”

In a moment he was at the side of the gondola and drawn, dripping wet, upon

it.

“For the love of goodness, explain this, Brad!” urged Dick.

“Been back to our ranch?” questioned the Texan.

“Yes.”

“Get my note?”

“No.”

“That’s right queer.”

“Did you leave a note?”

“Sure thing. I left one telling you how I could do nothing with Teresa unless I held her by main strength. She became a whole lot unmanageable after you left. Reason didn’t cut any ice with her—none whatever. She was bound to go forth to some friends she knew. At last I opined I’d go with her, if she did go. I called a gondolier, and we hiked merrily on our way. She did have some people she knew, all right, and they live somewhere in this ranch. This is the back door. We entered from the front. The minute she got with her friends she allowed it was up to me to amble and leave her.

“Say, it’s no use trying to reason with a girl. Talk was wasted. She just got up and left me. I might have departed in peace, but I took a notion to explore the ranch. I prowled round through it. Don’t know how many rooms I roamed through, but finally I didn’t know which way to get out. I wandered through a passage and opened a door. Next thing I knew I was in trouble. I had stumbled right into a mess of galoots all sitting round solemn as owls in a circle. They wore black cloaks and hoods that hid their faces. Before I could say Jack Robinson they had me. I put up the best fight I knew how, for I judged they were going to do me for keeps. I don’t want to boast, but I certain soaked some of the bunch a few swats in the slats that they will remember. It wasn’t any use. They just hustled me along to that door up there and pitched me out into the drink. That’s the whole story, and here I am, a heap wet, but still lively and chipper.”

“Brad,” questioned Dick eagerly, “how many of those cloaked men were there?”

“Didn’t have time to count ’em. I know what you’re thinking, pard, and I certain agree with you that it’s some likely I ran slam into the Terrible Ten. I judge they were holding a council of war when I burst in on them.”

“And Teresa is somewhere in that building. Brad, we must make an attempt to find her.”

“Anything you say goes.”

“Boys, boys, boys!” spluttered the professor, turning pale. “You’ll come to your death through such rashness. I must object. I must protect you. It is my duty. What will Frank say if I fail to do my duty?”

But the boys were both reckless and determined. It was not long before they were at the front of the house into which Buckhart averred he had escorted Teresa. They landed on the steps, urging Zenas to wait for them in the boat.

Another gondola floated at the steps, the gondolier idly waiting for some one.

“This wasn’t here a short time ago,” said Brad. “Somebody has visitors in the house, I judge.”

They obtained admittance, but to their surprise Professor Gunn clung to them.

“I’m going to stick by you, even if it costs me my life,” he said.

Barely were they inside when they were startled by a scream.

“The voice of Teresa!” exclaimed Dick. “She’s up there somewhere!”

They rushed up the stairs. The door of a room stood open. In that room Teresa Tortora was struggling in the arms of a man, and that man was Nicola Mullura.

“I have found you, my pretty bird!” cried Mullura, in satisfaction. “I traced you here. Now you are mine, and you cannot escape!”

A door at the opposite end of the room, and directly behind the back of the desperado, suddenly and silently opened. Through the doorway stepped a man whose face was pale as death, and whose eyes shone with a fearful light.

Dick and Brad were turned to stone, for the man was Reggio Tortora, whom they had thought dead!

Tortora did not see them. His eyes were fastened on his sister and Mullura. With swift and noiseless steps, he rushed upon the man, clutching him about the neck and twisting him backward over a bent leg.

Mullura, being thus flung backward and held helpless, could look straight up into the face of Tortora.

“You dog!” panted Reggio. “You left me for dead last night, but a woman found me and bandaged my wounds. She kept me from bleeding to death, and now I am here to kill you! Your time has come, and you die the death you deserve!”

Then his hand, gripping a knife, rose and fell!

For a long time the Venetian police had been investigating the stories of the Terrible Ten. Already they had found sufficient evidence, but they were waiting for the proper moment to bag the whole Ten at a swoop.

On the very day that Reggio Tortora killed Nicola Mullura the police descended on the rascals, who had begun to create such a reign of terror in

Venice, and captured them all. The evidence against them was overwhelming, and the whole ten were given the full punishment which the law provided for their crimes.

As for Reggio, he easily satisfied the law that he had killed Mullura in defense of his sister, after Mullura had failed in an effort to assassinate him, and therefore, he was formally acquitted.

His escape from death he had truthfully described to Mullura ere striking the fatal blow. A woman whom he had befriended in the house where he lived had bandaged his wounds and hidden him away, although in mortal terror of her life while doing so. Of course she had declared, when questioned, that she knew nothing of the desperate encounter on the stairs.

The gratitude of both Reggio and Teresa toward their American friends was very great.

The joy of the girl who had thus found her brother may be imagined, but no words can describe it. It happened that Reggio had come to those friends for shelter, and thus he had been on hand when Mullura appeared.

“Well, partner,” said Buckhart, after all these matters had been settled, “we’ve certain had a warm time in Venice while it lasted. It was somewhat too warm, but this calm after the storm is altogether too calm. I’m getting a bit restless. I think we’d better float on.”

“So do I,” nodded Dick. “What do you say, professor?”

“All right, boys—all right,” nodded Zenas. “We’ll jog along into Greece, but it will be just like you to get into some sort of trouble there and keep me nerved up all the time.”

“Hurrah for Greece!” cried Dick.

CHAPTER XXII.—BEFORE THE PARTHENON.

“There it is, boys—there it is!” exclaimed Professor Zenas Gunn, in a voice that actually choked with deep emotion. “Behold ‘the casket of the rarest architectural jewels of the world—the temple-crowned Acropolis!’”

“She seems to be a right big old rock,” observed Brad Buckhart; “or is she just a hill?”

“Both a rock and a hill, Brad,” laughed Dick Merriwell. “It is mainly a natural mass of rock, but in places it has been built up by substantial masonry.”

“Correct, Richard,” nodded the professor, approvingly. “It is plain you have posted up on the Acropolis and that you remember something of what you read. I regret that, in spite of my advice, Bradley seems much disinclined to post himself in advance concerning the historical spots we choose to visit.”

“What’s the use?” said the Texan. “I know you’ll tell us all about them, professor, and I’ll remember it a heap better by hearing you tell it, than by reading it in a dry, old book. You have such a fascinating way of telling things, you know, that any one who hears you can’t help remembering every word you speak.”

“Hum! ha!” coughed Zenas, much flattered. “I presume that is true. I think it quite probable you are correct. Under the circumstances, Bradley, you are excusable.”

The two boys and the professor had arrived at the port of Athens near sundown the previous day. The sail through Grecian waters on a fine steamer was one long to be remembered. Repeatedly the professor reminded them that they were traversing the scenes of famous maritime adventures and struggles of ancient history, and that every shore they beheld had been made famous by poets, philosophers and wise men of the days when Greece was the pride, the glory, and the envy of the world.

Night had fallen before the trio reached the capital, which is located six miles from the port. Therefore, being tired and somewhat spiritless, they suppressed their desire to look around and waited for the following day.

And now, beneath the bright morning sunshine, they viewed the Acropolis, which, on account of its history, the professor declared was the most wonderful sight in all the world.

On three sides this great mass of rock and masonry, which looms above the modern city at its base, is practically perpendicular. On its summit stand the

white columns and pillars of its ruined temples, which two thousand years ago were perfect in their grandeur and which are conceded to have been specimens of architectural beauty never equaled in modern times.

“Think,” said the professor; “think of Greece in the glorious days when yonder rock was crowned with beautiful temples! We’ll mount to its crest, boys, and soon our feet may touch the very stones once pressed by the feet of Demosthenes. We will stand beside pillars whose shadows may have fallen on Pericles and Phidias. Is it not enough to stir a heart of stone! Let us hasten.”

The old pedagogue was actually trembling with eagerness and excitement.

“All right, professor,” said Dick. “Lead on and we’ll follow.”

“Yes,” said Brad, “hike as fast as you choose, and we’ll keep up with you.”

To their surprise they found the city very modern in appearance, and this surprise was increased on beholding a train of street cars drawn by an ordinary steam engine. Still the people were interesting in their native garments, and the language was what they had expected to hear.

At last they approached the Acropolis. As they drew near they beheld around its base a mass of ruins of the most picturesque character.

“Whatever sort of buildings were those, professor?” inquired the Texan.

“They were theatres,” answered the old man. “The theatre of Bacchus, of Odeon, and others stood at the base of the great rock. You behold the ruins of those theatres. Somewhere in this vicinity is the dungeon of Socrates, in which he drank the hemlock. We’ll find it ere we leave Athens.”

They were compelled to make inquiry of a peasant before they found the only path by which the great rock could be ascended. The professor found it necessary to rest several times before the summit was reached, but still his enthusiasm buoyed him up in a wonderful manner.

As they reached the plateau the professor turned to look back on the city spread below them.

“Yes,” he said, nodding and speaking as if addressing himself, “I had almost forgotten. Why, it was only a little more than half a century ago that Athens was demolished by the Turks. Hardly a house in the place was left in condition for human beings to inhabit it. That is why we see this modern city here.”

Although they did not betray it as much as did the professor, both lads were profoundly moved by their situation.

For a few moments Dick seemed to feel himself transported back to Fardale, and he saw himself in his little room poring over Homer’s electrifying verse or deep buried in Xenophon’s incomparable prose. He knew that from this hour, as he stood by the pillared gateway of the Acropolis, he would understand the old Greek poets and philosophers better and appreciate them more.

“Come, boys,” said Professor Gunn, in a hushed tone, “we’ll pass through this ruined gateway, which was called the Propylæa, and which cost two and a half million dollars. Think of that! Think of it, and then behold these ruins. Touch them reverently with your hands. You are treading on sacred ground.”

When they had passed beyond the ruined gateway all halted in wonderment, for before them spread the entire plateau and they saw it was literally bestrewn with fallen columns and shattered statues. And directly before them, at the highest point of the plateau, rose the ruins of a snowy white temple, the Parthenon.

The spectacle was one to render them silent and speechless. They stood quite still and gazed in awe at the ruins.

At last Zenas spoke. He had his hat in his hand, and he mopped his forehead with a handkerchief, although the day was cool.

“Words fail me, boys,” he said. “I wonder if you understand what it is to behold this spectacle. Look on this scene of desolation wrought by the hand of ruthless man. It is quite enough to make the gods weep!”

“However was she ruined, professor?” inquired Brad.

“It occurred something like two hundred years ago. At that time the Parthenon stood almost unchanged in its matchless magnificence. The Turks used it as a powder magazine. The city was besieged by an army of Venetians. They bombarded the town. One of their shells exploded in the powder magazine. Behold the result!”

“Say, that was a whole lot bad!” exclaimed the Texan. “It sure was a shame!”

“Let’s get nearer,” urged Dick.

They threaded their way amid the ruined columns and statues, drawing nearer to the ruins of the Parthenon. The professor told them how the Parthenon had been despoiled of its treasures.

At that moment they seemed to be quite alone on the plateau of the Acropolis, but suddenly, from amid the pillars of the temple, dashed a Grecian girl, who did not seem to be more than sixteen years of age. She saw them and uttered a cry.

A moment later two men appeared in close pursuit of her. Both were Greeks. One was a man of forty-five or a little more, while the other could not have been much past twenty-one. They shouted for the girl to stop.

She ran toward the boys and the old professor, and the cry that came from her lips was one of terror and appeal. Her pursuers were close on her heels.

“By the great horn spoon!” shouted Buckhart, “here is where we mingle in a red-hot old scrimmage, pard! There will be something doing on the top of the Acrop in a moment!”

“Boys, boys, boys!” exclaimed the professor, in great agitation and alarm. “Do be careful! Those men look dangerous!”

“Would you have us see a woman in distress without showing our manhood?” demanded Dick, as he also prepared for an encounter. “We’ll protect her, Brad.”

“Now you’re shouting!” cried the Texan. “We’ll certain check the careless behavior of those gents some.”

“Englishmen—good Englishmen!” cried the girl; “save me!”

She was panting and wild-eyed as she reached them. She seized Dick’s arm with her shaking hands. In truth she was very pretty, with clear-cut Grecian features and eyes as blue as the skies of Athens.

“We’re not Englishmen,” said Dick, “but you can count on us just the same.”

“You bet you can, just as long as the American eagle flaps its wings to the tune of Yankee Doodle,” asserted Brad.

Dick placed her behind them saying:

“Look out for her, professor, while we discuss the matter with these boisterous gentlemen.”

“Boys, boys, boys!” again fluttered the old man. “Do be careful! Do be discreet! You’ll get us all into no end of trouble.”

By this time the two men had reached the spot, and the elder at once demanded in Greek the possession of the maiden.

“Although we’ve scanned that language under compulsion,” said Dick, “we are not prepared to talk it. If you will use plain United States, we may be able to chat with you.”

With an assumption of politeness, the man immediately begged their pardon in fairly good English, saying he had not thought in his excitement to address them in other than his own language.

“The girl,” he said; “I take her.”

“Wait a bit,” remonstrated Merriwell, declining to move. “As you can talk a modern language, we’ll discuss this matter. The girl seems frightened. What is all the trouble about?”

The elder man drew himself up haughtily, while the younger glowered on the boys.

“It is no bus’ness to you,” was the answer.

“Then I opine we’ll have to make it our business,” muttered Buckhart.

“But she is frightened, and she seeks our protection,” said Dick. “It is the habit of all decent Americans to protect women in distress.”

“Let him not touch me!” entreated the girl, speaking again with that indescribably bewitching accent which Dick had noted in her first appeal to

them.

“She mere child,” said the man haughtily. “I am her uncle, and I take her.”

“Oh, you’re her uncle?”

“I am.”

“Well, tell us why she fled from you and seemed so excited and frightened.”

“No bus’ness to you,” again asserted the man.

“He want make me do something I hate!” exclaimed the girl. “He make me marree Maro.”

“Oh, ho! And who is Maro?”

The girl pointed at the younger man.

“And you do not wish to marry Maro?” questioned Dick.

“Oh, no, no, no!”

“Don’t blame you,” put in Brad. “If Maro wears that thundercloud on his mug all the time, he’d frighten a Hottentot, much more a civilized girl. Go change your face, Maro.”

The young man did not seem to understand this fully, but he darted a deadly look at Brad, then urged his companion to make a move at once.

“Look out, boys—look out!” panted Professor Gunn. “He says you are mere children and easily crushed. He wants to attack you at once.”

“Whoop!” cried Brad, squaring away. “Let him wade right in! Let them both break loose and come at us! They’ll find the children ready for business, you bet your boots!”

“Steady, Brad,” cautioned Dick. “We’ll fight if we have to.”

“And I sure reckon we’ll have to, pard.”

“It looks that way, but let’s not rush matters. Keep a cool head.”

Dick feared the men were armed, which would give them an additional advantage. Under ordinary circumstances it would not seem a difficult thing for them to obtain the mastery over the two boys, but those boys, in spite of their years, were remarkable athletes and clever fighters, and they believed they could hold the Greeks good play unless deadly weapons were produced. Neither lad counted on assistance from Professor Gunn.

The elder man grew impatient and again demanded possession of the girl, asserting that the boys would be punished for interfering, as he was the one who had sole authority over her.

“Where is her father?” asked Dick. “Is he dead?”

“Not dead,” explained the girl quickly. “In India. He leaf me with Tyrus.”

“So the old boy’s name is Tyrus?” muttered Brad.

“Tyrus Helorus,” said the man haughtily. “If wise, you not int’fere in Greece with one who have name Helorus.”

“The Helorus you say!” grinned Brad.

“That what I say!”

“Thanks! You’re so kind! I reckon we’d better introduce ourselves. Gents, this here is Dick Merriwell, a fighter from his toes to his scalp lock. He lives on scrimmages. To him a good fight is the breath of life. If he goes a whole day without a fight he loses flesh and becomes a whole lot downcast. I’ve seen him whip seven men in concussion. He looks young, but he’s fought enough to be older than these ruins. I’ll wager the contents of my warbags that the professor and I can sit down and look on comfortable while he wallops the both of you in one round.”

“That will about do,” muttered Dick.

“Wait,” urged Brad. “Don’t cut me out of presenting myself. I, gents, am Bradley Buckhart, from the Rio Pecos country, Texas, U. S. I’ve been brought up where they have man for breakfast every morning. It gets to be a regular morning treat for us in Texas. I am some off my feed just at present, not having had any man this morning. You’ve happened along just in time to relieve my famished condition. So sail in, both of you, and we’ll proceed to chew you up. You hear me sweetly carol!”

The Greeks looked at him in bewilderment, and well they might. It is likely that they took this talk for a bluff; but, if so, they were soon to learn that Brad Buckhart was one of those rare bluffers who invariably “made good.”

A silent chap with fighting blood in his veins is generally regarded as formidable and dangerous when aroused, but once in a while it happens that a talkative chap is just as dangerous.

Those who saw and heard Brad for the first time were almost certain to fancy he would show the white feather at the last moment. Those who had seen him often and knew him well never doubted that he would unflinchingly enter a den of roaring lions if he felt it his duty to do so.

The natural chivalry of Buckhart’s nature had been stirred by the appearance of the girl and by her appeal for protection, and therefore he was ready to lay down his life in defense of her right there on the plateau of the Acropolis.

It was but natural that Professor Gunn should be much alarmed over the situation, for he felt that, to a large extent, the safety of the boys was in his hands and he was responsible for them.

Therefore the old man now proposed that they should all go to a magistrate or some official who had proper authority and that the case should be submitted to him.

To his astonishment this seemed to infuriate both the Greeks. They cursed him and the boys for interfering and sneered at the proposal of submitting the

matter to any official. One more demand they made for possession of the girl, and it was plain they meant to take her by force if refused.

They were promptly refused by both boys, who placed themselves shoulder to shoulder in front of the shrinking maiden.

With a snarl of rage, the younger Greek drew a knife.

“Oh, heavens!” moaned Professor Gunn. “There will be bloodshed!”

Then, to his greater horror, he saw Dick and Brad attack the men, declining to wait to be attacked themselves.

CHAPTER XXIII.—FIGHTING BLOOD OF AMERICA.

It was Dick Merriwell's theory that in an encounter that promised to be unequal a sudden and surprising assault might more than outbalance the odds.

In this case he determined to put the theory to the test.

Brad understood Dick so thoroughly that it was not necessary for the latter to utter a word of command. He simply made a slight signal that was unobserved by the Greeks, and when he leaped forward the Texan was at his shoulder.

It was a daring thing to do, considering the fact that Maro, the younger man, had drawn a knife. Still Dick knew they would be compelled to fight or surrender the girl, and he had no thought of following the latter course. As it was necessary to fight, it was better to attack than to wait for the attack.

Merriwell singled out the man with the knife. Before the fellow realized what was happening, the boy was on him. Then Maro tried to lift the knife for the purpose of using it, at the same time uttering a snarl of astonished rage.

That snarl was broken midway, for Dick seized the fellow's right wrist with his left hand, preventing him from making a stroke with the gleaming blade. At the same time the daring American lad gave Maro an awful jolt with his right.

Dick knew how to put force into a blow, and he knew how to land a blow that would put the other fellow "all to the bad." That punch, backed with the boy's weight, simply knocked the wind out of his antagonist.

Then Dick gave the man's wrist a wrench that seemed to snap the bones. The knife flew from Maro's fingers and struck with a clang against a prone and headless marble statue.

Having succeeded thus swiftly in disarming the rascal and knocking the wind out of him, Dick felt confident that he had accomplished the most difficult part of the task.

In the meantime Buckhart, roaring like an angry bull, went at Tyrus Helorus. The older Greek was no mean antagonist. He side-stepped in a manner that enabled him to avoid the full fury of the Texan's rush, at the same time seeking to get hold of the boy with his powerful hands.

"Fool American!" he grated.

"Whoop!" shouted Brad, wheeling and coming at the man again. "Shades of Crockett and Bowie! you're some spry on your feet!"

The Greek clutched Brad's collar.

"Ha!" he cried in satisfaction.

“Ha! yourself, and see how you like it!” said Brad, as he delivered a body blow in the ribs.

But that blow, although struck with just as much force, perhaps, was not as effective as the one struck by Dick, for the reason that it did not land on the spot to count as heavily.

The Greek jerked Brad nearer and fastened both hands on him.

“Fool!” he said again.

Then he gathered the lad in his arms.

“I’ve been hugged by grizzly bears,” said Buckhart, in relating the adventure afterward, “but I certain allow that that old Greek gent sure could out-hug them all. When he closed in on me I heard a general cracking sound all round my anatomy, and I allowed at least nine of my ribs was bu’sted then and there. I sure did.”

In fact, Brad was robbed of his strength by that squeeze, and, for the time being, was helpless in the power of Tyrus Helorus.

Professor Gunn had been hopping round, first on one foot and then on the other. He was terribly excited, but suddenly, in a most astonishing manner, he flew at the fellow who seemed to be crushing Brad.

“Let that boy go, you wretch!” he cried, in a high-pitched voice. “Don’t you dare hurt one of my boys!”

Then he proceeded to claw at Tyrus in a manner that bewildered and confused the man for the time being.

The Greek relaxed his hold on Buckhart, enabling Brad to get a breath. With a wrench and a squirm the Texan twisted clear. He half dropped, and then his arms closed about the knees of the man. A moment later the Greek was lifted clear of his feet and pitched headlong against a marble slab.

The shock seemed to stun him.

“Much obliged, professor,” panted Buckhart. “You certain chipped into the game at just the right juncture.”

“Hum! ha!” burst from Zenas, who suddenly realized that he had done something. “They want to look out for me when I get started. I’m dangerous—exceedingly dangerous.”

By this time Dick had punished the younger Greek in a manner that led him to take to his heels in the effort to escape.

“Stop him!” shrilled Zenas.

“Let him go!” exclaimed the boy promptly. “If he’ll keep on running I’ll be pleased.”

Maro dashed in amid the ruins of the Parthenon and disappeared.

Tyrus lay where he had fallen.

“My goodness!” exclaimed Zenas, gazing in apprehension at the prostrate man. “I hope I didn’t kill him—I really hope I didn’t. Of course, it was in self-defense—or, rather, in defense of one of my boys; but still I hope I didn’t finish him when I struck him that last terrible blow.”

The old man seemed to really believe he had knocked the Greek down.

Dick turned to look for the girl. Pale and trembling, she stood with clasped hands, seemingly quite overcome by what had happened.

“Don’t be afraid, miss,” said Merriwell. “You are safe for the present.”

She gave him a flashing look of admiration from her splendid blue eyes. Then suddenly she seemed to think of the fallen man, and a moment later she was kneeling by his side, calling him by name and crying that he was dead.

“I do not think he is dead,” said Dick, attempting to reassure her. “Let me see.”

Even as the boy placed an inspecting hand on the breast of Tyrus the eyes of the man opened and he heaved a sigh. The girl gave a cry of gratitude and relief. He turned on her a glance that made her tremble, and in his native tongue he began to mutter threats which sent her to her feet like a startled fawn.

“Don’t waste your sympathy on him,” advised Merriwell. “A man who can growl like that isn’t badly hurt. He’ll be all right in a short time.”

“Then—then he make me marree Maro!” she gasped. “I better die!”

“What are we going to do about it, pard?” asked Brad. “Whatever can we do to help her?”

“That’s a puzzling question,” admitted Dick. “Evidently this man is her guardian, and we’ll get into no end of trouble if we try to take her from him. She ought to be able to appeal to the proper authorities for protection.”

“Tak’ me to Charlee,” entreated the girl.

“Charlie?” exclaimed Dick. “Who in the world is Charlie?”

“I love heem!” she declared. “He grandes’ man in the world! He grandes’ man ever live! I marree Charlee!”

“Ah, ha! So that’s the way the wind blows?” cried Dick. “There is another man in the case, and that’s why old Tyrus is trying to force you to marry Maro?”

She nodded violently.

“Charlee come to tak’ me to my father, in India,” she said. “When Maro find that so he come to Tyrus, say I never go, say I marree heem. Tyrus say I must marree Maro. Say I never meet Charlee no more. That brek my heart. I cry no, no, no! They tak’ me from home, so Charlee never find me when he come. They tak’ me where I have to stay in small room all time till Maro marree me. I geet out. I run. I come here. Charlee say he come here often look at ruins. I think he may come now. I wait. Tyrus and Maro come find me. I try to run. I see you. I

call for help. That all.”

“It’s enough!” cried Dick. “Where is this Charlie? We will take you to him.”

She shook her head in distress.

“He somewhere in citee,” she said, with a sweep of her hand.

“A whole lot indefinite,” observed Buckhart.

Dick asked the girl if she did not know in what hotel Charlie was to be found.

She did not.

“What is the rest of his name?” questioned Dick. “Do you know it?”

“Whole name Charlee Cav’deesh,” she declared.

“Cavendish?”

“That right.”

“It’s up to us, Brad,” said Merriwell, “to find Charlie Cavendish as soon as possible.”

“I opine it is,” nodded the Texan.

“In the meantime,” said the professor, “we’ll all be arrested for kidnapping the girl. Boys, boys, is it impossible for you to keep out of scrapes?”

“I’m afraid it is,” confessed Dick.

CHAPTER XXIV.—MARO AND TYRUS.

Having beaten off the two Greeks, neither of the boys had a thought of surrendering the girl. They were determined to protect her, no matter what happened, until they could get word to Cavendish, who, she asserted, was somewhere in Athens.

Tyrus made no objection when he saw the lads and the old professor departing with the girl in their midst. He sat up, staring after them, a wicked look on his face.

Barely had Zenas, the boys, and the girl disappeared from view when Maro reappeared amid the ruins of the Parthenon and ran swiftly to the spot where Tyrus sat.

“Why do you sit thus?” he demanded. “Did you not see them taking Flavia away?”

“I saw them,” was the gruff answer.

“Then why did you permit it?”

“Why did you permit it?”

“You are her uncle.”

“You are her lover.”

“But you have the power.”

“It is, indeed, little power I had after being dashed against this slab of marble.”

“But yours is the authority.”

“They are Americans.”

“What of that?”

“Americans recognize no authority but that of might. They are wonderful fighters.”

“They fight like fiends!” exclaimed Maro. “Who could think that those boys would dare attack us! And I was armed with a knife.”

“Little good it did you,” returned Tyrus, with a touch of scorn. “I had no weapon, and I would have mastered one of them had not the old man attacked me, scratching and clawing like a cat.”

“But you are going to let them carry Flavia away?”

“You have as much right to stop them as I have.”

“No, no!” almost shouted Maro, in great exasperation. “You have the right, for you are her uncle. You must do it!”

“I like not your language, Maro. No man has ever told me I must do a thing.”

“But you let them walk away with her?”

“Because the young man, strong and able to battle for his rights, fled and sought shelter in hiding. Maro, I sadly fear I have been much mistaken in you. I fear you are a coward.”

The younger man flushed with mingled anger and shame.

“What was I to do?” he demanded, seeking to justify himself in the eyes of Tyrus. “I saw that you were stretched prone upon the ground, and I feared you had been slain. I was disarmed, and that terrible American boy was hitting me so fast that the blows could not be counted. I knew that, in another moment, I would have all three of them upon me. I fled to save my life.”

“You saved it,” said Tyrus, still with that biting touch of scorn. “You saved your life, but it may be that you have lost Flavia.”

“Never!” grated Maro. “I will follow and take her from them!”

“Alone?” asked Tyrus, with that same manner. “You ran from one of them, but now you propose to follow and conquer all three of them. Indeed, Maro, your words and your behavior are inconsistent.”

“We are losing time!” exclaimed Maro.

“We? Why, I thought you were going to do it quite alone.”

“It is you who must lodge the complaint against them, as you did against the Englishman, for you are the uncle and guardian of Flavia.”

“Oh, so you advise that we seek the assistance of the law?”

“It is the better way.”

“In truth I doubted if you actually intended to attack those American fighters, even though you spoke so boldly. You have had quite enough of that, Maro. You still insist that Flavia must be your bride, even though you know now that she scorns you and would prefer death?”

“She is my light, my life! I must have her! You have given me your word that she shall be mine.”

“But I had no thought that she would make such a terrible resistance. She has ever been a good and dutiful girl since her father left her in my hands. I knew she was averse to you, Maro, but I fancied you could overcome her aversion, or that she would dutifully submit at my command. She has in her the spirit of her father’s family. He married my sister even though I hated him and sought to prevent the union. Maro, he loved her, which I hold to his credit. He was a good husband to her, and he nearly died of grief when she passed from earth and left little Flavia. It was for Flavia that he lived. Otherwise I believe he would have taken his life that he might join her. But when he met reverses and lost most of his little fortune, he felt that bad fortune had placed a blight on him while he

remained in his native land. He found an opportunity to go to India, and he left Flavia with me, charging me to be like a father to her. It is now said by this Englishman that he has prospered in life, and by this Englishman he sends a message which tells me to let Flavia return to him in care of the Englishman.”

“A trick! a trick!” cried Maro fiercely. “The letter was a forgery!”

“How do you know?”

“The Englishman and Flavia met before he presented that letter.”

“Which is true.”

“She fell in love with him.”

“Her behavior seems to denote it,” confessed Tyrus.

“She knew I wished to marry her and that you favored me.”

“Go on.”

“The Englishman smiled on her. She was deceived. She told him of her father. Perhaps she gave him some letters from her father. Either the Englishman forged the letter, or he employed an expert to accomplish it. In this manner he means to steal her from you and from me.”

“It is possible you speak the truth.”

“I know I speak the truth! I feel it here in my heart! He is deceiving her. He would take her away, pretending that it is his intention to conduct her to her father; but in truth he has no such intention, and when he becomes tired of her he will desert her. I am right, Tyrus. She will be left to die in some foreign land by this young dog of an Englishman, whose father is rich and who has money to fling about with a lavish hand. It is your duty—and mine—to save her from such a fate! Arouse yourself, Tyrus! Bestir yourself, and let’s do something without delay. The Englishman has been placed beneath arrest. It is our next move to enter complaint against the Americans and have them arrested also. It can be done.”

Tyrus bowed gravely.

“It can be done,” he agreed; “and, as you say, it may be our duty to see that it is done.”

“Then delay not. Every moment is precious.”

“Give me your hand,” said the elder man.

Maro assisted him to rise.

“It was a terrible shock I received,” muttered Tyrus, moving his shoulders and making a wry face. “It is most remarkable that my neck was not broken. Even now to move at all causes me discomfort, and to-morrow I fancy I will be exceedingly lame.”

“Think not of yourself,” urged Maro, burning with impatience and seeking to pull Tyrus onward. “Think of Flavia and your duty to her. Hasten!”

“Wait a little,” said the elder man. “I am dizzy. My head reels. It is a singular sensation, for all my life I have been strong as the horse.”

Indeed, he swayed and might have fallen but for the supporting arm of the young man.

“Oh, these Americans!” he muttered. “Even mere boys, scarce escaped from the nursery, seem to have the courage, skill and strength of men. What a wonderful people they must be!”

“Bah! I admire them not, for ever it is that an American and an Englishman will unite against one of any other nation. They speak one language, and there is between them a bond of sympathy stronger than they themselves dream. Has the Astrologer of Minerva not said that some day they will unite and rule the world. I admire them not, I tell you! Come, Tyrus, they will escape with Flavia, and we _____”

“We will find them, never fear. They shall soon be placed in confinement and kept there until Flavia is yours. I think I can walk now.”

“Then hasten, hasten!” urged the impatient and baffled lover.

CHAPTER XXV.—TWO ENGLISHMEN.

Zenas Gunn strutted like a peacock. He seemed to feel that he it was who had accomplished the feat of baffling the girl's pursuers. For a time he put aside his fear of further trouble over the affair, jogged along at her side and talked fluently with her in the language she could best understand.

They left the plateau by way of the marble gate and hastened to descend.

"Trust us, my dear child," said the professor.

"I do," she declared, smiling on him in a manner that made him throw out his chest still further. "But, oh, I fear Tyrus and Maro! They are determined that I shall never see Charlee again."

"Hum! hem! How long have you known this Charlie?"

"It is not long. He is the most beautiful man in all the world!"

"You should have seen me when I was younger," said Zenas. "I beg your pardon, but I do not think we have learned your name?"

"It is Flavia."

"Beautiful name," declared the professor. "Look out, my child, do not stumble there."

"There is no danger that I will stumble, but you——"

"Oh, I'm as frisky as a young colt! Didn't you see me put Tyrus to the bad a while ago? Don't worry about me."

"The old boy is getting along some!" observed Brad, speaking to Dick, as they followed Zenas and the girl. "It takes a young girl to wake him up and make him lively."

There was a shadow on Merriwell's face.

"It was our duty to protect the girl," he said; "but now it would be an absolute relief if we knew where to find this Englishman, Cavendish. There is going to be a great rumpus over this, and we may find ourselves in a pickle because we took the part of this maid of Athens."

"The Maid of Athens!" exclaimed Brad. "That's the title for her! It fits her. By the great Panhandle! if it wasn't for Nadia Budthorne——"

Dick laughed.

"Brad, you're smashed! She has a fellow—Cavendish. And that is not mentioning Maro."

"Hang Maro! He doesn't count any whatever."

"But Cavendish does."

“He’s lost in the shuffle.”

“Well, there is Nadia, and you——”

“She’s all right!” exclaimed Brad sincerely; “but she isn’t here, and I opine I’ve got a right to admire the Maid of Athens some.”

“But no right to make love to her.”

“No danger of that, pard,” grinned the Texan. “I never did cut much ice with the girls. You always were the one, and it’s a wonder to me that this girl didn’t forget Charlee the moment she placed her sky-blue eyes on you.”

“Oh, that will about do!” laughed Dick. “You’re forever imagining that girls are struck on me, when the fact is that they are not, and——”

“How about Doris Templeton?”

“Mere friendship.”

“Is that so? How about June Arlington?”

“Friendship just the same.”

“Well, then, how about——”

“That will do! Don’t try to make me out a chap with a dozen girls!”

The Texan chuckled.

“Don’t you get gay with me,” he advised. “I can come back at you good and plenty.”

By this time they were well down toward the base of the Acropolis. Suddenly Flavia uttered a wild cry of joy, broke from Professor Gunn and ran toward two men who were approaching.

One of the two was a very young man, with a delicate mustache on his lip, while the other was middle-aged, florid and puffy, carrying a heavy cane. The younger man had seen Flavia the moment she discovered him, and he sprang toward her, his hands outstretched.

“Galloping jack rabbits!” exclaimed Buckhart. “Whatever does this yere mean?”

“It means,” said Dick, with satisfaction, “that we’ll not have to search all over Athens for Charlee.”

“I’m almost sorry,” declared Brad, with a comical twist of his face. “She didn’t have time to discover how much superior I am to Charlee.”

Professor Gunn looked both relieved and disappointed. He had feared they would get into serious trouble, yet now he was disappointed by the appearance of the Englishmen.

For Englishmen they were, beyond question. The elder man had the appearance of a man of the world, given to special delight in the good things of life. He surveyed the boys and the professor with mild curiosity. His eyes were rather bleary and blood-shotten.

At first Flavia was too overjoyed to make an explanation, but finally, in a confused torrent of words, she told what had taken place on the plateau of the Acropolis.

The face of the young Englishman brightened as he began to understand how she happened to be escorted by Professor Gunn and the boys.

“So you went there thinking you might meet me, Flavia?” he said. “It was on my way to view those ruins that I first met you, and you remembered. I fancied you might, don’t you know, and that is why I am here now. I found you had been removed from your home, and I could not trace you. It is pure chance, but, by Jove! luck is with us.”

Then he turned to the Americans.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “my name is Cavendish—Charles Cavendish, son of Sir Henry Giles Cavendish, of Grantham. This is a particular friend of our family, Sir Augustus Camberwell. I wish to thank you most heartily and sincerely for your brave defense of Flavia. Permit me to shake hands with you all.”

“Yes,” said Sir Augustus, “very gallant, really. Just like you queer Americans. Never stop to inquire into an affair where a woman is concerned. Always go in and stand by the woman. Splendid sentiment, but dangerous.”

Sir Augustus now turned his attention to Flavia, at whom he gazed in a manner that Dick did not fancy.

“Very charming, my dear Charlie,” he admitted. “I’m beginning to understand how it happened. Oh, you rascal! Where would you be now if I wasn’t in Athens? Why, you would be in jail. It took my influence to get you out.”

“For which I thank you most sincerely, Sir Augustus.”

“All right, my boy—all right. But you want to remember my advice. You want to remember what I told you about getting in too deep. Oh, you rascal! you’re going to be another case with the girls, just as your father was before you. Many’s the little toot we’ve been on together, and Henry always was getting entangled with a female.”

“Well, what do you think of that, pard?” whispered Buckhart, in Dick’s ear.

“I think Sir Augustus is smelly,” was the answer.

Professor Gunn was likewise far from pleased. He regarded the older Englishman with an air of pronounced distrust and suspicion.

“Don’t worry about me, Sir Augustus,” advised Cavendish.

Just then, happening to glance up the path they had lately descended, Professor Gunn uttered an exclamation of alarm and warning.

“Look—look, boys!” he cried. “There come the Greeks!”

Maro and Tyrus were to be seen descending the path.

Flavia was greatly alarmed in a moment.

“Let them not touch me, Charlee!” she entreated, clinging to Cavendish.

“Never fear,” he said reassuringly. “They shall not.”

“But I opine we’d better be moseying along out of this,” said Buckhart.

To this the others agreed, and they lost no time in moving.

CHAPTER XXVI.—WAS IT A MISTAKE?

Although the Greeks pursued them into the city, they made no attempt to recover possession of Flavia.

What they did do, however, was something alarming.

At intervals they called to other men, friends or acquaintances, and many of these joined them in following the girl and her escort. This little band of dogged pursuers grew by ones and twos until there were in all at least ten of them.

Professor Gunn's agitation grew as the number of pursuers increased.

"Boys," he said, "I sadly fear we are going to have grave trouble. It would not surprise me if we were attacked and murdered right here in the city of Athens. I am in favor of calling for protection by the 'Agents of Peace,' as they call the police here."

"Now, don't you know, really I wouldn't do that," objected Sir Augustus Camberwell. "Really I wouldn't."

"Why not, sir?"

"On account of the girl, don't you understand! The blooming Agents of Peace might ask us to explain what we are doing with the girl and why we withheld her from her uncle, don't you see! Don't have anything to do with the Greek bobbies. We have but a short distance farther to go—a very short distance."

So the Agents of Peace were not appealed to by them, and at last they reached the hotel where Sir Augustus and Charles Cavendish were stopping.

"I have to thank you very much for your gallant protection of Flavia," said Cavendish, again shaking hands with the boys and the old professor. "She has explained fully how you risked your lives for her, as that crazy fellow, her uncle wishes her to marry, drew a knife on you. It is really wonderful that two boys and an old man should be able to stand those two ruffians off."

"Old man!" exploded the professor indignantly. "Who are you calling an old man, sir? I would have you understand that I'm younger than lots of men half my age."

"No offense, professor," Cavendish hastened to say. "You are indeed remarkably young for your years."

Zenas sniffed and hemmed in a manner that denoted he was not fully pacified.

Both Cavendish and Sir Augustus seemed anxious to get rid of the

Americans.

Maro, Tyrus, and the rest of the pursuers had now disappeared, and, therefore, Dick proposed that they should return to their hotel.

Not until they were far away and had failed to discover further signs of their pursuers did Professor Gunn throw off his nervousness.

“I tell you, boys,” he said, “this has been a very serious affair—very. Of course, we may yet have trouble over it. There is no telling. I can’t understand why we were not attacked by that band of men who gathered to follow us. It is certain that the Greek of to-day is not much like the Greek of old. In ancient times we would have been overwhelmed and slaughtered like dogs.”

Dick was silent and moody. He seemed thinking of something that was far from pleasant. Even after they had reached their hotel and were in their rooms he maintained an air of gloomy thought.

“Whatever is troubling you, pard?” questioned Brad, when the professor had retired to his room.

“I am thinking of Flavia—poor Flavia,” answered Dick. “Her situation bothers me, Brad. I almost fear we made a mistake to-day.”

“I’ve been thinking some that same way,” declared the Texan, springing up and beginning to pace the floor with long strides. “I sure didn’t like old Augustus any, and Cavendish didn’t hit me any too well. You don’t suppose that young snipe is fooling that girl, do you, Dick?”

“That is a hard question to answer. There is something queer about this affair. Flavia says Cavendish is going to take her to India, where her father is; but still they met by accident on the Acropolis or near it. If Cavendish was sent here by the father of Flavia, why didn’t he come direct to the girl?”

“You tell!”

“Sir Augustus is an old rascal, and from his manner I inferred that he held the idea that Cavendish is crooked. Brad, if we have been instrumental in getting that beautiful girl into trouble, instead of helping her out of trouble, I’ll never forgive myself.”

“What are we going to do, Dick?” asked the Texan, gravely.

“Perhaps it is our duty to go to the headquarters of the Agents of Peace and tell all about it.”

“And get up to our necks in trouble, sure as shooting.”

“I suppose so. Sir Augustus must have influence, for he got Cavendish out of the jug in a hurry.”

“Filthy lucre did it, partner. It will do almost anything in these days. Somehow I opine that old Tyrus doesn’t rate very high in the family line here, and it’s likely good coin would cause the authorities to wink at an intrigue

between a gay young Englishman and a girl of poor family.”

At this moment Professor Gunn came prancing back into the room, very much excited in manner.

“I was sure of it!” he squawked, shaking a quivering finger in the air. “I was sure I had heard of that old reprobate! I looked over my notes. Boys, he’s a miserable old rounder! He’s a man with a bad record! He ought to be in prison! He would be in prison if he had his just deserts! He disgraced himself and his family in England! He left his own country on account of his reputation. That’s the kind of man he is.”

“Who are you talking about?” asked Dick.

“Sir Augustus Camberwell,” answered the professor. “And he’s the friend of Cavendish!”

“Now we know how the land lays, partner,” said Brad.

Dick rose to his feet, catching up his hat and light topcoat.

“Come, Buckhart,” he said grimly.

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going out to get some air. I’m afraid we have been chumps of the chumpiest variety.”

“I’m with you,” said the Texan.

“Boys, boys, boys!” spluttered the professor. “I hope you are not going to do anything more that is rash. I can’t permit it. I must object. I must put my foot down.”

“Don’t worry about us, professor,” said Dick. “I feel the need of a brisk walk to cool off. My indignation is getting the better of me.”

Zenas hurried to the door.

“You shall not go until you promise me you will do nothing rash,” he declared. “I shall not permit you to leave this room.”

Dick managed to appease and reassure him in a short time, and soon he left the hotel, accompanied by his chum.

“What’s your plan, pard?” asked Brad, as soon as they were on the street.

“I’m going direct to Cavendish and Camberwell,” said Dick. “Unless Cavendish can satisfy me beyond the shadow of a doubt that his intentions toward Flavia are perfectly honorable, I’ll denounce him to the authorities, and push the matter against him, even if I go to jail myself for it!”

“Whoop!” cried the Texan. “That’s the stuff! We’ll take to the warpath, Dick, and there will be things doing in Athens. You hear me shout!”

CHAPTER XXVII.—THE PURSUIT.

Although it did not take them long to retrace their steps to the hotel where they had left the Englishmen and the Greek girl, they met with a most surprising disappointment when they arrived there. They were informed that Cavendish, Camberwell, and Flavia had just left in a closed carriage. The carriage was pointed out to them, just disappearing down a street that seemed to lead toward the outskirts of the city.

Only a moment was Dick Merriwell nonplused. Then he called for saddled horses, and the money he displayed brought him the assurance that his wants should be supplied.

“Lose not a second,” he ordered. “We must overtake that carriage.”

Buckhart was burning with impatience, but he bemoaned the fact that they were not armed.

“Oh, for a brace of revolvers now!” he cried. “If we had the guns we certain would take that girl away from them.”

“We’ll take her anyhow,” declared Dick grimly.

Brad did not ask how they were going to do it, for he had perfect confidence in his bosom friend. If Dick said they would do a thing, that settled it—it was as good as done.

So it happened that in a very few moments the two daring American boys were mounted and riding at a breathless gallop along the street of that Greek city.

The carriage had disappeared from view some time before, but the boys kept on, hoping fortune might be with them.

Not far from the outskirts of the city Dick paused to question some laborers. One of the men could speak good English, and he immediately declared that he remembered the carriage. He directed them, and they were soon galloping onward once more.

The street they now followed quickly brought them to the open country outside the city. In the distance lay some low, rugged hills, which from that point seemed rather barren and forbidding. The road led up a steep incline.

“Pard,” said Brad, “I’m sure afraid we’ve missed them. We can’t see anything of them anywhere.”

“Perhaps we have,” admitted Dick; “but let’s get to the top of this hill and take a survey.”

They clattered up the hill. Near the crest, the road wound round the shoulder

of an immense boulder, which was fully as large as a small cottage.

Sitting on the ground with his back against the rock and his body in the sunshine, being fully protected from the rather chill wind that swept the top of the hill, was a ragged beggar. He held out his open palm to them.

“Drachma,” he said. “Drachma.”

“Whatever does he mean by that?” asked Brad.

“Money,” said Dick. “Evidently he takes us for wealthy foreigners, else he would not ask for drachma, which has a value of something like twenty cents in our money.”

Dick produced a coin and tossed it shimmering toward the beggar, who deftly caught it.

Then the boy began to question him, using a little “modern Greek” and many signs. The beggar was grateful and seemed anxious to understand and aid Dick. He even rose to his feet and drew nearer.

Dick sprang down from his horse, giving the bridle into the hand of his companion. With his finger he swiftly drew a crude picture in a patch of dust beside the road. It was the picture of a closed carriage.

The beggar understood in a twinkling. He nodded excitedly, jabbering in his own language and motioning for the boys to follow him. Turning, he ran to the point where the road disappeared round the shoulder of the boulder, pausing again to beckon them on.

Merriwell leaped into the saddle and the two lads rounded the rock at the heels of the beggar. The man pointed along the road, and amid some bare trees on a slope half a mile away the carriage was plainly seen, a tiny cloud of dust rolling up behind it.

“Whoop!” shouted Buckhart. “There she is, pard! We’re still on the trail!”

They did not pause to thank the beggar, but were off down the hill, the hoofs of their horses ringing clear on the hard and stony road.

It was dangerous to ride as they rode, for that strip of road was anything but good. Still they took chances and dashed onward.

It seemed that some one in the carriage observed them, for they soon decided that the horses attached to the vehicle had been forced to greater speed.

“But they can’t get away from us now!” declared Dick grimly.

“What will we do when we overtake them?” questioned Brad.

“We’ll hold them up and find out what they are trying to do with Flavia.”

“It’s a whole lot queer they were able to get away from that hotel and out of the city without any of that bunch of Greeks interfering.”

“I’ve been thinking of that. After following them to the hotel, it seems that Maro, Tyrus, and their friends quit.”

“I certain am afraid the Greek of to-day is a sure enough quitter.”

“Look, Brad—look at the road yonder!”

“Horsemen, partner, and they’re riding good and hard.”

For a few moments a number of horsemen were in plain sight on another road, and it was plain that they were pushing their mounts. They soon disappeared from view behind an intervening ridge.

“They were Greeks,” said Dick.

“Sure thing.”

“The carriage has disappeared.”

“That’s right.”

“Brad, I think the road those horsemen were following intersects this road somewhere beyond that ridge.”

“I judge she does.”

“The occupants of that carriage could not see those horsemen.”

“Because the ridge shut out the view of the other road.”

“Exactly. But I think the horsemen knew the carriage must come round that ridge at the western end, and I believe they mean to intercept it where the roads cross.”

“Partner, I allow you have figured it out proper. That being the case——”

“Tyrus and Maro are leading the horsemen.”

“I’ll bet on it.”

“In which case there is liable to be bloodshed. Camberwell and Cavendish may be butchered by the engaged uncle and lover.”

“That’s whatever.”

“They may deserve it, but still it’s our duty to prevent it, if possible.”

Even while riding at full gallop the boys had managed to carry on this conversation. But now, as they reached the last declivity of the road, and were descending into the valley between the two ridges, Dick’s horse stepped on a loose stone and fell as if shot.

Had not Merriwell been an expert horseman that accident might have been fatal. He shot over the head of the horse, having managed to free his feet from the stirrups with the quickness of thought itself. Striking on his feet, he managed to keep up for two springs, and, when he did fall, he regained an upright position and wheeled so swiftly that it was almost impossible to say that he had been down at all.

As the horse rose Dick had the creature by the bit and was talking soothingly to it.

Having uttered an exclamation of dismay, Buckhart reined in as soon as possible and turned about. An expression of relief shot over his rugged face as

he saw his friend on his feet, holding the frightened horse by the bit.

“Good work!” shouted the delighted Texan. “It certain takes more than a little thing like that to put you down and out, partner.”

Dick managed to fling himself into the saddle. As his feet found the stirrups once more, he waved his hand to Buckhart.

Brad wheeled his own horse as Merriwell came alongside, and they were off again, making for the rise beyond the hollow.

Dick, however, quickly made an unpleasant discovery. His horse had been injured, and quickly showed signs of lameness as they struck the rise. In fact, the creature limped and betrayed signs of distress, beginning to fall back.

“Hard luck, Brad!” said Dick. “The beast is hurt, and will be scarcely able to hobble in a few moments.”

The other boy drew up somewhat, turning his head to anxiously regard his friend’s faltering mount.

“That’s right,” he said. “At first I reckoned you both had come through all right. If the horse is that lame as quick as this, it will be plumb done up in ten minutes’ time.”

“I’m afraid we won’t be on hand when the pursuers stop that carriage. Ten to one I’ll ruin this horse if I try to push him.”

Always sympathetic for dumb beasts, Dick was hurt by every hobbling stride of the animal he bestrode.

“Keep him going, pard,” urged the Texan. “This is a right desperate case, and you’ll not be to blame for the horse if he is ruined. I’m some anxious to see that the Maid of Athens gets a fair deal in the game, and I’m afraid the cards are stacked against her.”

So Dick urged the faltering horse onward, and they toiled up the road on which they had last seen the closed carriage.

Suddenly from beyond the ridge came electrifying sounds. The air bore to their ears the distant barking of firearms.

“I judge the scrimmage is on, Dick!” palpitated Buckhart. “The battle is taking place and we’re not in it. What a howling shame!”

“Wait, Brad!” cried Dick. “I’ve got to quit this horse. Your animal must carry us both.”

He leaped to the ground as the Texan pulled up. With another bound he was up behind the Texan. The lame horse was abandoned.

“Git!” cried Buckhart.

The animal bearing the double burden responded nobly. Up the road and round the shoulder of the ridge they went.

The shooting had ceased as suddenly as it began. All was silent before them.

That silence was ominous.

“I’m afraid we’ll arrive too late,” said Dick regretfully.

Soon they were dashing down the road. To the left they caught a glimpse of another brown highway, the one on which they had seen the galloping horsemen. It was plain that the two roads met not far beyond.

They had made no mistake in thinking it the purpose of those horsemen to intercept the carriage. The sound of firearms had told them that the meeting was not of a peaceful nature. Dick dreaded yet was anxious to know the result.

Beyond and beneath them was a gloomy hollow. But for the clatter produced by their own horse, they might have heard the echo of hoofbeats receding and dying out in the distance of that hollow. The nature of the landscape concealed from their eyes the road that led through it and into the rugged hills beyond.

Soon they came dashing into view of the carriage they had pursued. It was overthrown on its side. One of the two horses that had drawn it was down. The driver had managed to clear the other animal, which was taking all of his attention. He was the only human being in sight. As they came on, he gave them an apprehensive look, seeming on the point of abandoning the horse and taking to his heels.

“There sure has been the old blazes to pay there, Dick!” cried Brad.

All at once, as they drew near, out from the wreck of the carriage leaped a puff of smoke. A pistol spoke and a bullet sung unpleasantly near the boys.

“Mighty bad shooting,” observed the Texan.

He flung the horse to a stand. Dick was the first to leap to the ground. Advancing toward the carriage, peering forth from which he caught a glimpse of an ashen face, he cried:

“Let up on that carelessness! Are you trying to shoot up friends?”

Immediately the head and shoulders of a man rose through a shattered door of the carriage.

It was Sir Augustus Camberwell, and his whole appearance was that of a man so badly frightened that he was liable to do almost any freakish thing. He held in his hand the pistol with which he had fired at the approaching lads. A bit of smoke still curled from the muzzle of the weapon.

“Really is—is it you—my—my dear boys?” he chattered, seeming to shake all over like a man with the palsy. “I—I thought it was—those ruffians returned to—to finish me up, don’t you understand.”

“Yes, we understand,” said Dick. “You lost your wits completely. Lucky for us that your hand shook so you couldn’t hit a house when you fired.”

“I—I hope you will pardon me.”

“We’ll have to. What’s happened here?”

“Ruffians, highwaymen, cutthroats dashed upon us! Shot down one of our horses! Tried to murder me! Fell on Cavendish and dragged him forth! Seized the girl! Upset the carriage! That’s about all I know, don’t you know. I’m hurt. I fancy they thought me killed. I kept still. They left. Cavendish is gone. Girl is gone. Confound the girl! She made all the trouble. Cavendish was a fool! I told him so.”

“Why did you leave Athens?”

“Dangerous there. Greeks followed us to hotel. Knew a quiet place in a little village where Charlie and the girl could stay till he got ready to quit his foolishness. Thought the Greeks had gone to notify the authorities, and raise a row. Thought they were satisfied after they found where we were stopping. Saw nothing of them. Improved the opportunity to get away.”

It was not the habit of Sir Augustus to express himself clearly and concisely, but his condition of nervousness seemed to jerk the words out of him in an astonishingly crisp manner.

“What do you mean by saying that Cavendish and the girl could stay in your quiet little village until he quit his foolishness?” demanded Dick. “Do you intend to convey the idea that he was not going to marry Flavia?”

“Marry her?” cried Camberwell. “How ridiculous! Why, he would disgrace his family, don’t you know!”

Dick Merriwell’s eyes blazed with anger.

“Then it is evident at last that Charles Cavendish is as great a scoundrel as Sir Augustus Camberwell!” he said, in deep disgust.

“What, sir—what?” gasped the Englishman, in astonishment. “How dare you use such language to me!”

“Give it to him, pard!” advised Brad, who was standing near, holding the horse. “Tell him a few things good and plain.”

“You got off too easily,” said Dick. “They should have hanged you to the limb of a tree—and Cavendish with you!”

Sir Augustus choked and spluttered.

“Do you know whom you’re addressing?” he fumed.

“Yes; I’m addressing an old reprobate—a miserable old toad! I know your record, Camberwell. I know that you disgraced your family in England. I know you have left a track of wretchedness and ruin behind you all through life. And now you connive with a young reprobate to deceive an innocent and trusting girl! You plot to break her heart and destroy her! I cannot find words to tell you exactly what I do think of you. You ought to get twenty years in a Greek prison—you and Cavendish.”

“Be careful!” snorted Sir Augustus, rising to his full height and clambering

forth from the smashed carriage, while he shook his pistol at the daring American lad. "I have money and influence—and friends in Greece."

"I don't care what you have; you have entered into a dastardly plot, and I hope to see you properly punished."

"I knew nothing of it to begin with," averred the Englishman. "Charlie sent for me. I was his father's friend. Of course, I brought my influence to bear to have him released. I had no part in forging the letter. That was done before I knew Cavendish was in Athens. The girl knew the letter was forged. Don't think she is such an innocent little——"

"That's enough!" blazed Dick, taking a step toward the man.

Involuntarily Sir Augustus lifted the hand that contained the pistol. Like a flash the boy grasped the weapon, turned its muzzle aside and wrenched it from the grasp of the Englishman.

"You're not fit to handle such dangerous playthings," he said.

Brad had made a move to assist Dick, but he stopped, a grim smile on his face, for he saw his friend needed no aid.

"Why—why, you're worse than the ruffians!" gasped Sir Augustus.

"Look here," said the fearless American boy, "you had better keep a decent tongue in your vile mouth! Don't say a nasty word about Flavia, unless you're anxious to get hurt. Cavendish is a rascal, like yourself. He has led her to believe it is his intention to marry her. There is no question about that, for she told us so. She has fled from Maro, who would have married her any day, to this English reprobate, who only means to deceive her. But I fancy that Cavendish will get all that's coming to him, for doubtless both Maro and Tyrus, the uncle of the girl, are with the band that dropped on you here. It is mighty doubtful if you ever set eyes on Charles Cavendish again."

"If they dare injure him they'll suffer for it!" cried the Englishman. "If they are wise, they'll set him free without delay. I hope they do keep the girl, for he's crazy over her, and I can't swear he wouldn't be foolish enough to marry her."

Dick turned in disgust from Camberwell to the driver, who stood looking down mournfully at the dead horse.

"Can you speak English?" asked Merriwell.

"I spik it well," was the answer.

"Who attacked you here?"

"It was Donatus."

"Who is Donatus?"

"You never hear of him?"

"No."

"He outlaw. One time Suliote chief. Price on his head."

“And this outlaw, Donatus, led the men who attacked you here?”

“I have said it.”

“How did he happen to be so near the city?”

The driver shook his head.

“Some time he come into city. See hills yonder. He stay there much. Think he go there now. Take Englishman. Englishman have friends perhaps. They pay Donatus well if ever see him 'live again.”

“It's right evident,” said Buckhart, “that Mr. Cavendish is in a very bad scrape.”

“As he richly deserves to be,” declared Dick.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—DONATUS, THE SULIOTE.

Amid the wild and rugged Grecian hills lay a sheltered and secluded valley. Indeed, this valley was so secluded that a wandering traveler might chance upon it only by the rarest accident. All things favored the probability that he would pass near without ever dreaming of its existence.

It was night, and in this valley a fire burned, casting its shifting lights on the faces of a small band of men. In all there were eight. Kirtled, bearded, unkempt, picturesque ruffians they were, every man of them fully armed and looking the thorough desperado and cutthroat.

They lounged about the fire in various attitudes, with the exception of one who, at a little distance, walked back and forth in front of the black mouth of a cave. The latter was a guard.

The night wind had a chill in it, and they drew their robes about them, moving yet a little nearer the fire.

Two of them seemed unprepared to spend any time at night in lying before a fire in the open air, for they were unprotected save by their ordinary clothes. One was a man of forty-five, the other a youth of twenty-one.

The first was Tyrus Helorus; the second Maro Veturia. Finally the young man spoke to the other in a low tone.

“It is now nightfall, and there can be no further danger that possible pursuers might see us leaving this place. Let us be going.”

“Be patient,” answered Tyrus, in the same guarded tone. “When he is willing that we should depart, my friend, Donatus, will speak. He is buried in thought now.”

As he said this, he shifted his position slightly in order to observe the figure of a bearded man that reclined on his elbow almost opposite them, gazing straight into the changing flames. The figure was massive, yet graceful. The curling beard was dark, as were the eyes. His face was that of one used to command. It was cruel, yet in a way strikingly handsome.

This was the man who called himself Donatus and who dared lead his lawless band to the very gates of Athens. Indeed, for all of the price on his head, it was said he often entered the city unaccompanied.

Donatus was a Suliote, at one time a chief, but robbed of his power by the government which refused to recognize his authority and which dispersed and intimidated his followers. In vain he had sought to return to the old ways of

living. Being baffled, he became an outlaw indeed, preying on his fellow men. With the exception of Tyrus and Maro, these were his followers.

“I like not that look on his face,” muttered Maro. “I don’t know why I fancy it, but I’ll swear he is thinking of my Flavia this minute.”

“Hush!” cautioned Tyrus, in alarm. “Be careful what you say, if you value your life!”

Suddenly, like a flash of lightning, the dark eyes of Donatus were lifted and fastened inquiringly upon them.

“Why speak in whispers, Tyrus, my friend?” he demanded, using the Romaic speech, with which he did not seem wholly familiar. “If you have anything to utter, you need not fear to speak out.”

Instantly Tyrus would have risen, but the chief made a gesture that bade him remain as he was.

“We did not wish to disturb you, chief,” asserted the elder Greek: “It was plain you were buried in thought.”

“I was. I was thinking of my youth and of my home far from this spot. For some time I have longed to return there, Tyrus; but I have not wished to go empty-handed.”

“By the stories they tell of you, you should have riches to-day.”

Donatus made a slight, careless gesture with his hand.

“Who gets money as I have and keeps it?” he said. “It is a desperate and precarious life, Tyrus, and the rewards do not compensate for the dangers. I came to Athens to seek certain men of influence to interpose in my behalf and seek for me a pardon, with the understanding that I should forever abandon the life I have led in recent years. Chance threw me in with you, a friend who once concealed me when armed enemies were close on my track. I promised you then that if the opportunity ever came Donatus would repay the debt. You appealed to me in your distress, saying the Englishmen had stolen your niece.

“I called some of my followers, who in disguise had entered the city with me. If you had advised it, we would have attacked the Englishmen then and taken the girl from them. But you were afraid, Tyrus, that it would create an uproar, and as a result that it must become generally known that you had consorted with Donatus, the outlaw. You said wait, and we waited. Fortune came our way, for the Englishmen fancied they saw their opportunity to escape with the girl, and they lost no time in trying it. We were watching every move, and they played the game to suit us when they hastened with the girl from the city. In the open country we could work, and we did work. One poor fool of an Englishman we left on the road, permitting him to think he had deceived us, while, at your suggestion, we took the other one. He is now a prisoner in the

cave yonder, where also the girl is safely stored.

“I am sorry, Tyrus, that I could not please you and your young friend by cutting the young Englishman’s throat. Had I known that was why you wished me to carry him off, I might have left him behind with the old fool who played that he had been killed, when we took good care to kill nothing save a horse. But now I am glad that we took the trouble, for one of my men tells me he is the son of an aristocrat and that the man we left behind is rich. It is well. A satisfactory ransom must be paid before the young Englishman is set at liberty. Thus through a friendly act I shall be able to turn an honest coin. Already I have dispatched a faithful fellow who bears a message to the other Englishman, stating that when I have received ten thousand drachmas I will set my captive free.”

“If you get it, you will not return empty-handed to your home,” said Tyrus.

“It was not of money I was thinking when I spoke thus,” asserted Donatus. “I am getting on in years. Long have I dreamed of an ideal who should make my home complete by sharing it with me. This day I saw her.”

“A woman?”

“The flower of Greece! I was thinking of her as I gazed into the fire.”

The hands of Maro suddenly closed and a wild light came into his eyes. He rose to his feet.

“Chief,” he said, boldly addressing the Suliote, “if we do not return to Athens ere another dawn, suspicion will fall on us. We must be going.”

“Would you depart so soon? Shall I send one of my men to conduct you and show you the way?”

“If you will.”

The brigand leader rose. There was a pantherish grace in every move, in spite of the fact that he was a large man. He spoke to one of the band, and the fellow sprang up.

“Bion, bring horses for my friends and conduct them on the way until they are safely on the road to the city.”

In a few minutes Bion returned from the darkness, leading two saddled horses. The chief explained that the man would accompany them on foot, being a fleet runner.

Maro had become very nervous. Now he demanded:

“Where is the third horse?”

“The third?” questioned Donatus. “There are but two of you.”

“You have forgotten Flavia?”

“Indeed not. I have remembered her well.”

Maro was pale, holding his excitement in check with difficulty.

“Then I will walk and she shall ride,” he said. “Have her brought.”

Barely a moment did Donatus hesitate, and then he gave the order that the girl be brought.

Soon one of the men conducted her from the cave before the mouth of which the guard paced. She was almost deathly white. Her eyes were wide with fear, but she pressed her lips together and tried to retain command of herself.

Never in all her life had Flavia looked more beautiful than at that moment. Donatus folded his arms on his broad chest and gazed at her with a singular expression in his eyes.

“Maid,” he said, “your uncle and your lover are about to depart. Your lover has demanded that you shall accompany him. Are you ready to go?”

“Come, Flavia!” cried Maro, holding out his hands to her.

She shrank from him.

“No!” she cried; “I do not wish to go with you! I will not go with you!”

With a single stride Donatus reached her and placed his left arm about her with almost crushing fierceness. His other hand he flung out toward Maro.

“You have her answer!” he said. “She remains, and you go without her!”

With a cry of terror, Flavia tried to break from the powerful arm that clasped her. This she could not have accomplished of her own strength, but Donatus released her, and she reeled away.

Maro sprang forward to support her, but she saw him and whirled in a twinkling, rushing back to the protection of the brigand chief, who smiled as he again clasped her with his arm.

“She has made her choice,” he said. And then in a voice unintelligible to them he added: “I shall not return empty-handed to my home!”

Maro was distracted. He clutched Tyrus by the arm, panting:

“Is this your friend? Is this the man whose life you saved? See how he repays you!”

Tyrus was greatly agitated.

“Donatus,” he said entreatingly, “have you forgotten? She is my niece. It is I who have the right to take her.”

“For years,” said the chief, “I have dreamed of her face. To-day I saw it for the first time.”

“But it is not because of you she chooses to stay. She does not understand. She does not know you mean to keep her for yourself. It is the Englishman of whom she thinks.”

“She will forget him soon when he is gone. With the money I shall secure through him I may buy my pardon. She shall be mine!”

Now Flavia did understand, and once more she struggled for her freedom, crying out in her horror of them all.

At this juncture, from some distant part of the valley, came startling sounds. Several pistol shots were fired in rapid succession. In a twinkling every brigand was on his feet, their weapons ready.

Donatus had wheeled toward the sounds, which ceased as suddenly as they began.

Behind the chief's back Maro seized the girl, hissing into her ear:

"Foolish Flavia! Will you give yourself up to this brigand? Do not think he will let the Englishman have you. He means to keep you for himself."

She stood like one turned to stone, unable to decide what should be done. In that moment she seemed so beset and entangled that there was no possible escape for her. She could not depart and leave Cavendish in that dark hole, yet if she remained she might be forced to become the bride of Donatus, the brigand.

Maro was likewise in a fearful state of mind. Suddenly he snatched out a pistol and threatened her with it.

"I had rather kill you with my own hand than leave you to either of them!" he hissed.

She clutched the pistol in his hand with both of her hands and sought to wrest it from him. In the struggle it was discharged.

Donatus, the Suliote, gave a great start and then his legs buckled beneath him and he fell prone to the ground.

Instantly Maro relaxed his hold on the pistol and sprang away. When the brigands who remained by the fire turned to look they saw their chief stretched on the ground, while the smoking pistol was clutched in the hands of the horror-stricken girl.

Instantly they were upon her. They wrested the weapon from her and pinned her arms at her side. One knelt beside the chief and made a hasty search for the wound.

"Kill her!" snarled a little ruffian, flourishing a knife. "Cut her throat! She has slain Donatus!"

He made a slash with the gleaming blade, as if he would sweep it across the throat of the girl.

It was the voice of Donatus that checked them and kept them from doing her fatal harm. He had lifted himself to his elbow.

"Hold!" he commanded, in the tone none dared disobey. "Hold her fast, but harm no hair on her head. Where is Ruteni? Let him see how badly I am wounded. Place her in the cave and guard her well."

Then Flavia managed to drag those who had clutched her until she was near enough to sink on her knees beside the wounded and bleeding brigand.

"Oh, I did not mean to do it!" she sobbed. "Believe me, I did not mean it! I

tried to wrest the weapon from Maro, and it was discharged.”

The face of Donatus, outcast and wretch that he was, lighted with a great look of relief. With an effort, he lifted a hand and touched her tangled hair.

“I believe you, Flavia,” he said. “You shall not be harmed. You shall remain with the Englishman.”

Then he gave a few low-spoken orders, and Maro saw Flavia led away toward the cave.

“Where is Ruteni?” again demanded Donatus. “Am I to bleed to death for need of a little care?”

Soon the man called for came running from the darkness and dropped beside the chief. He carried on his person a leather case, containing some instruments and bandages, and he began at once to look after the wound by the light of the camp fire.

“What was the firing I heard, Ruteni?” asked the chief.

“Some one succeeded in passing the guards at the entrance to the valley, chief.”

“Succeeded?” said Donatus, as if he could not believe it. “How many of them?”

“Only one. He was crawling on his stomach like a serpent when they saw him and fired. He sprang up and ran.”

“Into the valley?”

“Into the valley, chief. But he is only one, and he cannot escape. They will capture him.”

“Who could it be? Who would dare attempt such a thing? Ruteni, how badly am I wounded?”

“I fear it is serious,” was the answer.

Water had been brought, and a few of Donatus’ band were watching the work of Ruteni, seeming benumbed and dazed by what had happened. The chief saw them and said:

“Go! Help search for the one who entered the valley. Bring him hither, dead or alive. I am still your chief, and shall be as long as I breathe.”

The men obeyed at once, and besides Donatus and Ruteni only Maro and Tyrus were left by the fire.

The guard still paced before the dark mouth of the cave, in which Flavia had once more been placed.

“It is now our time!” whispered Maro, in the ear of Tyrus. “I have recovered my pistol, and you are armed. Here are the saddled horses. Donatus is helpless. If necessary, we can slay Ruteni and the guard, and we can be away with Flavia before the others return.”

Tyrus grasped the wrist of his desperate companion.

“I think too much of my life to try it,” he declared. “If you attempt that, you do it alone, and you will be slain. Do not be a fool!”

Finally there was a great commotion in another portion of the valley. A single shot was fired, but shouts of triumph came faintly through the darkness.

“They have captured the spy!” said the chief, with a smile of satisfaction on his ashen face. “Are you done, Ruteni?”

“I have done everything possible, chief. The wound is in your lung. If you do not bleed internally——”

“If I do—what?”

“I fear you’ll not see the rising of another sun,” was the frank answer.

“And to-day, for the first time, I gazed on the face of the maid of my dreams. Do all dreams end in disappointment? Ruteni, roll me a cigarette.”

The man had placed a robe, on which Donatus reclined. Ruteni rolled a cigarette and placed it between the bearded lips. Then he struck a match and lighted it.

Donatus drew in a whiff of smoke and coughed. A fleck of blood appeared on his lips.

“Take it, Ruteni,” he said sadly, surrendering the cigarette. “Throw it away. I cannot smoke. To-day I found the one of my dreams. Am I to die thus soon by

her hand?”

Some of the brigands came marching out of the darkness, bringing in their midst a prisoner, his hands made fast behind his back. He was a mere boy, with a tanned and rugged face and a fearless manner.

“Is this the spy?” asked Donatus, in surprise, as the captive stood near the fire. “Who is he?”

“I know who he is!” cried Maro furiously. “Only for him and that other American all this trouble would not have come, for we should have captured Flavia this morning. I entreat the privilege of slaying him with my own hand!”

The captive was Brad Buckhart.

CHAPTER XXIX.—IN THE CAVE.

As he spoke those fierce words, the young Greek drew a knife. His face was convulsed with passion and hatred for this daring American boy who, he believed, had caused him so much trouble. He longed to rush at Brad and stab him to the heart.

The manner of the Greek was enough to warn the Texan of his danger.

“Whoop!” cried Brad. “If the gent is anxious to enter into a carving contest, just give me a toadsticker and I’ll show him my style. I opine I can interest him some.”

Donatus weakly waved his hand.

“I am wearied,” he said. “I must rest. When I have rested I will say what shall be done. Until that time, place the boy in the cave.”

“But, chief, he is——”

The wounded brigand cut Maro short with a flashing look from his still terrible eyes.

“What I have said I have said,” he declared. “Those who dare disobey me invite destruction.”

Then, as directed by him, Buckhart was marched away to the cave, before which the guard still paced to and fro.

Maro sank down, his face wearing a look of bitter disappointment. Tyrus squatted beside him, whispering in his ear:

“Be content that your life is still spared, boy. It was in wrenching the pistol from you that Flavia caused the accidental shooting of Donatus. I feared you would be slain for that. The girl, the Englishman, and the hated American boy are in the cave. They are guarded. Donatus is sorely wounded and may die. Pray the gods that we may escape with our lives.”

“And is this Donatus the man you befriended?” exclaimed Maro bitterly.

“Hush, you fool!” warned Tyrus; but the eyes of Donatus were closed and he seemed to be sleeping.

Brad Buckhart had looked around for Flavia and Cavendish. In the blackness of the cave he could see nothing. The men who escorted him left him, after warning him that he would be shot down the moment he tried to step forth, unless given permission to do so.

Then they departed. He saw their forms silhouetted for a moment against the glow of the fire as they passed from the mouth of the cave. Then the guard’s

dark figure paced slowly across the opening.

“Well, here I am!” muttered the Texan. “I sure opine I’m in a right bad scrape, and I’ll have to depend hugely on my pard to pull me out.”

“It is indeed a bad scrape you are in,” said the voice of a person near at hand in the darkness of the place. “How in the world did you get here?”

“Hello!” cried the Texan, in surprise and satisfaction. “Is that your gentle warble I hear, Cavendish?”

“Yes, I am Charles Cavendish, a free-born Englishman, here held captive by these dirty Greek brigands! Some one will pay dearly for it, too!”

“Fighting mad, I see,” half chuckled Buckhart. “Well, old man, this comes of monkeying round the Maid of Athens.”

“The Maid of Athens? What are you doing, quoting Byron?”

“I opine it was Byron that made me call her that, and I’ll bet a bunch of Texas longhorns that Byron’s maid wasn’t any prettier than Flavia.”

“Do you understand that, Flavia?” questioned the voice of Cavendish. “Did you catch the compliment of this devil-may-care youngster who is in the trap with us?”

“I hear heem,” was the answer, in a voice that made Brad start! “same time the English is hard to comprehend’.”

The Texan whistled.

“So Flavia is here with us, eh? And Maro outside! I don’t quite understand it.”

Cavendish explained as well as he could.

“I fancy I came near being shot,” he went on, “when I saw that Greek ruffian catch Flavia in his arms. They warned me I’d be shot down the moment I thrust my nose out of this cave, yet my blood boiled when he clasped her. However, he kept her from Maro, and now he’s in a bad way himself. Boy, I fear you and I will not live to see the rising of another sun. I fear these ruffians will cut our throats. As for Flavia, my soul shudders when I think what may become of her.”

“It shudders some, does it?” said Buckhart, with a touch of unspeakable scorn. “Well, I opine you see now, Mr. Cavendish, what a long-eared jackass you made of yourself by fooling round an innocent girl in this country. You sure brought it on yourself by trying to deceive her.”

In the gloom of the cave Cavendish stirred suddenly, and Brad fancied he could see the figure of the man risen to a standing attitude.

“Why do you say that?” hotly demanded the young Englishman. “Deceive Flavia? How dare you accuse me of such a thing!”

“Steady, you!” growled the Texan, not a bit abashed by the evident rage of the other. “I want you to know that my pard and myself have seen and talked

with that blear-eyed old reprobate, Sir Augustus Camberwell. We found him in the midst of the wreckage after the brigands jumped you on the trail. He was so nervous he was ready to shoot at his own shadow. We chinned him some, and he gave it to us straight that the whole affair was brought about because you met the girl by accident and took a fancy to fool her some. He allowed you never had the least idea of marrying her.”

Flavia had listened to all this and understood it. Now she uttered a cry and clutched at the young Englishman.

“Charlee!” she gasped; “Charlee, it is not true?”

Cavendish placed his arm about her waist and drew her close to him.

“It is not true, sweetheart!” he declared, with deep earnestness. “I must confess that Sir Augustus thought so, for he could not understand that I, a son of the house of Cavendish, could possibly mean to treat in an honorable manner a poor Greek girl of no family whatever. I tried to tell him that I was in earnest, but I found that he would turn against me the moment he believed it, and do everything in his power to separate us. The only way to obtain his assistance, which I needed very much, was to let him believe I was playing the scoundrel in this manner. That is why I permitted him to think so.”

Needless to say Brad Buckhart had listened with deep interest to these words. He now stepped forward and his hand found Cavendish’s shoulder.

“How about that forged letter?” he asked.

“I confess it was forged,” was the instant answer. “I met Flavia by accident and fell in love with her at first sight. She tells me that she loved me the moment her eyes met mine. We met several times, and she told me of Maro, and how her uncle was trying to force her into a hateful union with the fellow. We knew Tyrus Helorus would be enraged if I simply presented myself and stated that I wanted Flavia for my wife, so we concocted a scheme we fancied might work. Flavia told me all about her father, where he was in India and all that. I secured the service of an expert with the pen, and the rascal forged a letter purporting to be from Flavia’s father. The letter introduced me to Tyrus, who was directed to deliver Flavia into my care, as I would take her to her father in India.”

“That was some slick,” commented Brad.

“But it didn’t work with Tyrus,” said Cavendish. “The old man smelled a rat, you know. He pretended to think it all right, and he promised that Flavia should prepare for the journey. But he whisked her away and hid her from me. I found her, and then he had me arrested on some sort of a complaint. I was locked up, you understand, and I’d be there now only for Sir Augustus, who used his influence to get me out. That’s how I became tangled up with him, don’t you know. And now here we are. What the deuce are we going to do?”

Brad found Cavendish's hand in the darkness and gave it a hearty grip.

"Even if I am in a right tight predicament myself," he said, "I'm sure glad my pard and I concluded, after leaving Sir Augustus, to try to find out what had happened to Flavia and you. Cavendish, we may all go over the range into the unknown country beyond, but the jig's not up, by a long shot."

The Texan lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Listen: My pard and I both got into this valley, though I was the only one seen. If those cutthroats hadn't been miserable bad shots, I'd been peppered full of holes. They shot all round me. Then something tripped me as I was scooting, and they had me before I could recover. Here I am; but Dick Merriwell is somewhere out in the valley, and I'll wager every hoof on the Bar Z that we hear from him before morning. You want to hold yourself ready to move a whole lot lively when he takes a hand in the game, for he plays his cards to win and makes no false moves. You hear me chirp!"

CHAPTER XXX.—OUT OF THE TOILS.

The mists of early night had dissolved in the valleys. Above the hills the pale stars glittered as the night wore on. Donatus, the Suliote, still reclined by the fire, his head pillowed on the saddle. Over him a faithful follower had spread a blanket to protect him from the cool night air.

The fire sank lower. Even Maro, with his heart of fire, had at last fallen into slumber.

The guard who had passed before the mouth of the cave, now unreached by the firelight, seemed grown weary, for he made his beat with less frequency and regularity. Once he disappeared for such a length of time that Buckhart was tempted, for all of the danger of being shot, to peer forth. But before the Texan brought himself to the point of risking the peril the guard reappeared, a blanket wrapped about him, pacing with slow step across the opening.

Flavia slept, her head pillowed on Cavendish's lap. The Englishman had removed his coat and spread it over her.

"Poor girl!" he muttered, as he did so. "It's a beastly shame! She'll get her death in this blooming hole!"

"Death isn't the worst thing that can happen to her," said the Texan, in a whisper. "But we'll hope for better luck. Cavendish, I'm sure afraid something has happened to my pard. I'm afraid to wait longer for him to move. Are you in for taking a chance?"

"What sort of a chance?"

"A desperate one. The band is asleep, though they're all sleeping with weapons in their hands. The guard seems to be the only one awake, and I judge he's half asleep."

"Go on."

"We'll creep close to the mouth of the cave. The fire is down so it no longer shines in at the opening, and we can get right close without being seen. When the guard passes, we'll jump him. I'll try to get him by the wozzle and shut off his wind so he can't peep. We'll have to move a whole lot hasty, and if he raises any sort of a racket to awaken the others, it will be a run for our lives, with bullets chasing us. But remember that the gang shoot mighty bad. What do you say?"

"Flavia?"

"Of course we'll take her. You'll have to explain it to her."

“She may be killed when they begin to shoot?”

“Better that than for her to be carried off by these cutthroats.”

Cavendish shuddered. The thought of placing the beautiful girl in such peril of instant death was horrible to him. He bent in the darkness and gently kissed her parted lips.

“Charlee!” she murmured.

“With my life I’ll protect you!” he whispered.

“Wake her,” urged Brad impatiently. He had resolved on action, and every moment seemed precious now.

Cavendish kissed her again and then gently aroused her. She was frightened at first, but he succeeded in soothing her.

“You are with me, Flavia,” he said.

“My Charlee!”

“Yes.”

“Oh, I dream such terrible thing!”

“Tell her our plan,” directed Brad.

Cavendish did so.

“You may be kill, Charlee!” she whispered, in terror.

“It is the only chance. We must try it. Remain here, Flavia, while we creep close to the mouth of the cave and attempt to overpower the guard. If we fail and he raises an outcry, we will knock him down at least, and try to secure his weapons. If you see us do that, come quickly and be prepared to run with us into the darkness. Are you brave, Flavia?”

“You make me brafе, Charlee. You brafest, bes’ man in whole world!”

Even as he closed her loving lips with another kiss a surprising thing happened. Brad saw the guard halt at the mouth of the cave and look intently toward the dying fire and the dimly seen sleepers about it. Then the fellow stepped into the cave!

The Texan gathered himself panther-like for the spring.

“Hist!”

The guard had paused, and from his lips came a sibilant sound.

“Englishman here? American boy here?” he asked, in a whisper.

“Whatever does this mean?” thought Buckhart, hesitating.

“Other American boy send me,” declared the guard. “He have horses ready. He pay me to help. I am sic’ being outlaw. He gif me drachma ’nough to make me rich. I leaf this countree, lif hones’ some other countree. I help you ’scape. You come now! Quick!”

“Great horn spoon!” breathed the Texan. “My pard has made a move! I knew he would! Oh, he’s a bird, you bet your boots! But I don’t see how he worked the

trick of bribing the guard.”

“Don’t be fool!” hissed the man. “No time for waste! Come now!”

He found Brad and thrust a weapon into his hand.

“Perhap’ have fight,” he said.

The Texan doubted no longer, for his fingers gripped the butt of a pistol.

“Come, Cavendish!” he palpitated. “Here is where we prance forth and trust to fortune and the sagacity of Dick Merriwell, the cleverest chap on two legs. You hear me gurgle!”

They followed the stooping, muffled guard. The moment they were outside the mouth of the cave he turned sharply to the right and hastened into the enfolding gloom. They kept at his heels.

They had not gone far when Buckhart espied a prostrate figure on the ground. It seemed like a dead man, and the Texan paused, not a little startled.

“What’s this?” he whispered.

“He tied, gagged, make no trouble,” explained the guard. “I take care of that. Horses ready this way.”

A loud cry rose behind them. They turned in alarm, but saw in the dim firelight a man bending over the prostrate figure of the chief, who had seemed to be sleeping.

That cry brought the brigands to their feet. The fire was stirred up. They saw Ruteni kneeling beside Donatus.

“He is dead!” declared Ruteni sorrowfully. “While we thought him sleeping, he died!”

Maro and Tyrus were looking on. They saw the brigands gather sorrowfully about their dead leader. A look of great satisfaction rested on the face of the young Greek, and, seeing this, Tyrus hastily advised him to conceal his feelings.

After a little, Maro asked that the captives should be brought from the cave.

Two of the brigands hastened to bring them forth, but quickly they reappeared, declaring that the captives were not there.

Snarling forth his fury, Maro caught a brand from the replenished fire and dashed into the cave. He was gone but a few moments when he reappeared, almost frothing in his madness.

“I have been deceived!” he cried. “While I slept you dogs stole Flavia away. Miserable, crawling things, where is she? Bring her to me without delay, or I swear I’ll see that you all are delivered over to justice!”

One of the brigands swiftly approached him.

“You threaten us!” he said—“you, whose pistol slew our chief! I saw it all! But for your weapon Donatus would be living now. This for Donatus!”

Like a stroke of lightning he drove his knife into Maro’s bosom.

The valley was left far behind. The stars were beginning to pale. Still that muffled figure astride the horse in advance led them on.

They had trusted him. He had led them to the waiting and saddled horses, and he had led them from the valley, near the entrance to which another dark figure lay prone, but squirmed and rolled to get away from the hoofs of the passing horses.

But Brad Buckhart could stand it no longer. He urged his horse to the side of the mysterious figure, about whose shoulders the robe flapped in the wind.

“Hold on here, you!” cried the Texan. “You told us my pard had bribed you, but we reckoned we would combine with him a heap soon after leaving that cave. Where is he?”

“When we leave cave you see man on ground, tied, gagged, still?”

“Sure thing.”

“That not him. You see ’nother man when we ride out from vallee?”

“Yes.”

“That not him. First man guard cave; other one guard vallee. American boy say him lif with Injun in America. Him creep on both. Jump on backs. Fix them. Tie fast and gag. Old Joe Crowfoot teach American boy trick. Him take clothes from both men all he need. Brigands see him then in dark think him one of them. You want see American boy? Ha! ha! ha!”

“May I be shot!” growled the disgusted Texan. “I’m the biggest fool outside the bughouse, you hear me!”

Then, with a swift movement, he reached out, caught at the muffling robe and jerked it away, flinging it aside.

The gray light of dawn was in the eastern sky toward which the face of the supposed guard was turned. It was a laughing face, that of a daring American boy—Dick Merriwell!

“Brad, you’re easy,” he cried.

“Dead easy!” admitted Buckhart. “But you’re a wonder!”

They looked back. Cavendish and Flavia had permitted their horses to slow down. Their figures could be seen against the pearl gray of the sky. He leaned toward her—she leaned toward him—their lips met.

Dick and Brad were too far away to hear her whisper:

“My Charlee!”

THE END.

HAND BOOKS

We have a line of the best and cleanest hand books ever published. They are known as DIAMOND HAND BOOKS. Each one was written by a man or woman thoroughly conversant with the subject he or she treated. The facts are presented in an especially attractive manner so that every one who can read, can understand.

HERE ARE THE TITLES

- No. 1—Sheldon's Twentieth Century Letter Writer, By L. W. SHELDON
- No. 2—Shirley's Twentieth Century Guide to Love, Courtship and Marriage, By GRACE SHIRLEY
- No. 3—Women's Secrets; or, How to be Beautiful, By GRACE SHIRLEY
- No. 4—Sheldon's Guide to Etiquette, By L. W. SHELDON
- No. 5—Physical Health Culture, By PROF. FOURMEN
- No. 6—Frank Merriwell's Book of Physical Development, By BURT L. STANDISH
- No. 7—National Dream Book, By MME. CLARE ROUGEMONT
- No. 8—Zingara Fortune Teller, By a Gypsy Queen
- No. 9—The Art of Boxing and Self-Defense, By PROF. DONOVAN
- No. 10—The Key to Hypnotism, By ROBERT G. ELLSWORTH, M.D.
- No. 11—U. S. Army Physical Exercises, Revised by PROF. DONOVAN
- No. 12—Heart Talks With the Lovelorn, By GRACE SHIRLEY
- No. 13—Dancing Without an Instructor, By PROF. WILKINSON

Price 10 cents per copy. If sent by mail, 3 cents must be added to the cost of each book to cover postage.

STREET & SMITH, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK

TWENTY BOOKS EVERY BOY SHOULD READ

Frank Merriwell's School Days. By Burt L. Standish. New Medal No. 150, 15c.
Tom Temple's Career. By Horatio Alger, Jr. New Medal No. 400, 15c.
Jack Lightfoot, the Athlete. By Maxwell Stevens. New Medal No. 399, 15c.
Gascoyne, the Sandalwood Trader. By R. M. Ballantyne. New Medal No. 471,
15c.
Lyon Hart's Heroism. By Oliver Optic. New Medal No. 528, 15c.
Storm Mountain. By Edward S. Ellis. New Medal No. 550, 15c.
The Camp in the Foothills. By Harry Castlemon. New Medal No. 562, 15c.
Ted Strong, Cowboy. By Edward C. Taylor. New Medal No. 498, 15c.
The Motor-Cycle Boys. By Donald Grayson. New Medal No. 655, 15c.
When Fortune Dares. By Emerson Baker. New Medal No. 721, 15c.
Pirate Island. By Harry Collingwood. Medal No. 69, 10c.
20,000 Leagues Under the Sea. By Jules Verne. Medal No. 112, 10c.
The Midshipman, Marmaduke Merry. By W. H. G. Kingston. Medal No. 111,
10c.
Friends Though Divided. By G. A. Henty. Medal No. 145, 10c.
The Deerslayer. By J. Fenimore Cooper. Medal No. 148, 10c.
Campaigning With Braddock. By William Murray Graydon. Medal No. 216,
10c.
The Young Bank Clerk. By Arthur M. Winfield. Medal No. 269, 10c.
Neka, the Boy Conjuror. By Capt. Ralph Bonehill. Medal No. 250, 10c.
Campaigning With Tippecanoe. By John H. Whitson. Medal No. 372, 10c.
Rob Ranger's Mine. By Lieut. Lounsbury. Medal No. 236, 10c.

Complete List of S. & S. Novels sent anywhere upon request

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, NEW YORK

***END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DICK MERRIWELL
ABROAD***

***** This file should be named 41827-h.txt or 41827-h.zip *****

This and all associated files of various formats will be found in:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/4/1/8/2/41827>

Updated editions will replace the previous one--the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from public domain print editions means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for the eBooks, unless you receive specific permission. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the rules is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. They may be modified and printed and given away--you may do practically ANYTHING with public domain eBooks. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

*** START: FULL LICENSE ***
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS
WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg-tm License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is in the

public domain in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg-tm works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg-tm name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg-tm License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg-tm work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg-tm License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg-tm work (any work on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is derived from the public domain (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is posted with

the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg-tm License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg-tm License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg-tm.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT,

INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete,

old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated

equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.