

TIP TOP WEEKLY

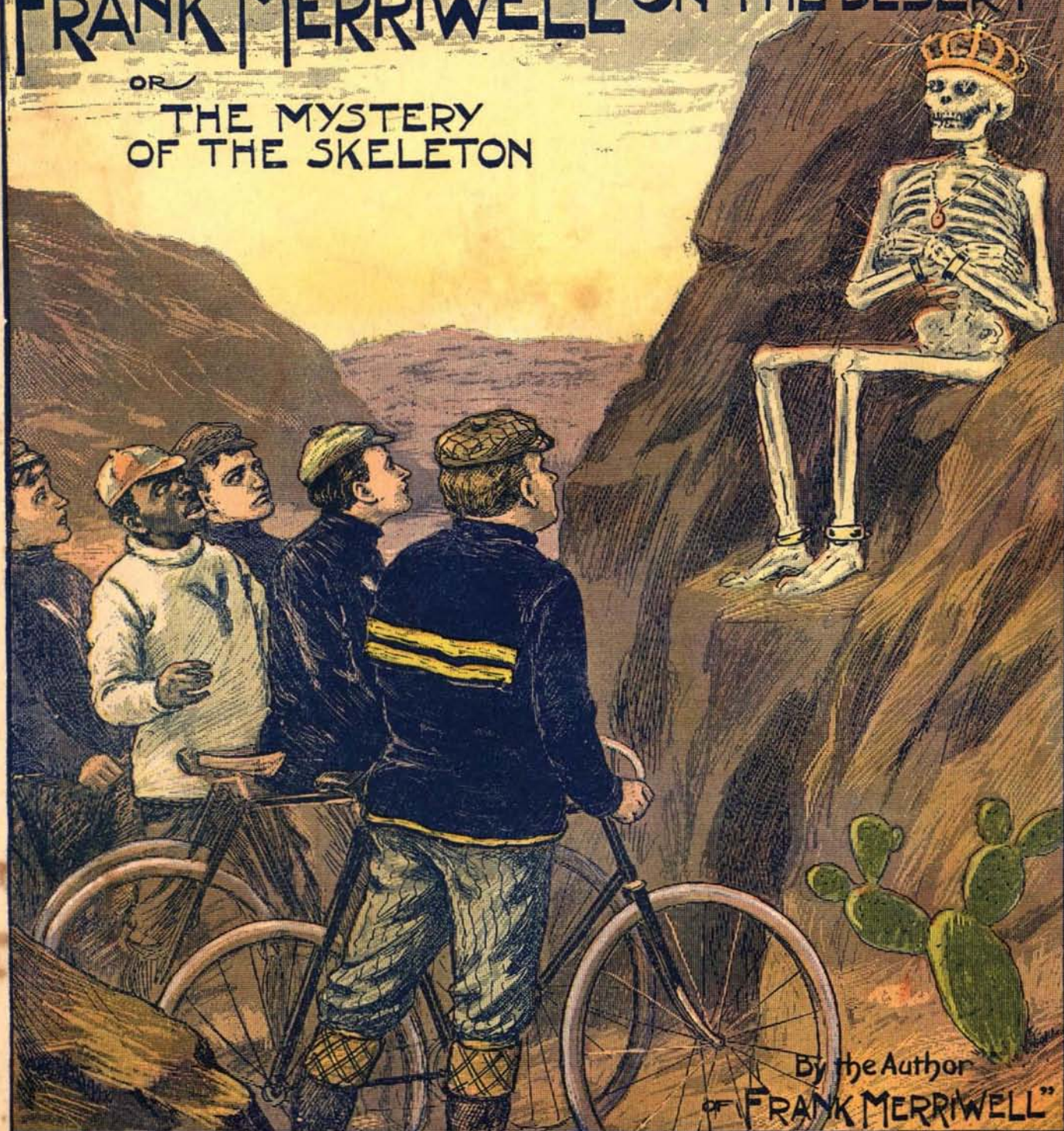
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June 26, 1897.

Vol. 1. No. 63.

Price Five Cents.

FRANK MERRIWELL ON THE DESERT OR THE MYSTERY OF THE SKELETON



By the Author
OF "FRANK MERRIWELL"

THE BOYS STARED IN ASTONISHMENT AT THE MARVELOUSLY BEJEWELED SKELETON.

TIP TOP WEEKLY.

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FRANK MERRIWELL ON THE DESERT

OR,

The Mystery of the Skeleton.

By the Author of "FRANK MERRIWELL."

CHAPTER I.

PILGRIMS IN THE DESERT.

"Land ob watermillions! mah froat am done parched so I ain't gwan teh be able teh whisper if we don' find some warter po'erful soon, chilluns! Nebber struck nuffin' lek dis in all mah bawn days—no, sar!"

"You're not the only one," groaned Bruce Browning. "What wouldn't I give for one little swallow of water!"

"We must strike water soon, or we are done for," put in Jack Diamond.

Toots, the colored boy, who had spoken first, began to sway in his saddle and Frank Merriwell spurred to his side, grasping him by the arm, as he sharply said:

"Brace up! You mustn't give out now. The mountains are right ahead, and——"

"Lawd save us!" hoarsely gasped the darky. "Dem dar mount'ns had been jes' as nigh fo' de las' two houah, Marsar Frank. We don' git a bit nearer 'em—no, sar! Dem mount'ns am a recepshun an' a delusum. We ain't nebber gwan teh git out ob dis desert—nebber! Heah's where we's gwan teh lay ouah bones, Marsar Frank!"

"You are to blame for this, Merriwell," came reproachfully from Diamond. "You were the one who suggested that we should attempt to cross the Great American Desert. We could have gone round to the north, and——"

"Say, Diamond!" cried Harry Rattleton; "riv us a guest—I mean give us a rest! You were as eager as any of us to try to cross the desert, for you thought we'd have it to boast about when we returned to Yale."

"But we'll never return."

"Perhaps not; still I don't like to hear you piling all the blame onto Merry."

"He suggested it."

"And you seconded the suggestion. We started out with a supply of water that we thought would last——"

"We should have known better!"

"Perhaps so, but that is the fault of all of us, not any one person. You are getting to be a regular kicker of late."

Jack shot Harry a savage look.

"Be careful!" he said. "I don't feel like standing too much! I am rather ugly just now."

"That's right, and you have been the only one who has shown anything like ugliness at any time during the trip. You seem to want to put the blame of any mistake onto Merry, while it is all of us——"

"Say, drop it!" commanded Frank, sharply. "This is no time to quarrel. Those mountains are close at hand, I am sure, and a last grim pull will take us to them. We will find water there, for you know we were told about the water holes in the Desert Range."

"Those water holes will not be easy to find."

"I have full directions for finding them. After we get a square drink, we'll feel better, and there'll be no inclination to quarrel."

"Oh, water! water!" murmured Browning; "how I'd like to let about a quart gurgle down past my Adam's apple!"

"Um, um!" muttered Rattleton, lifting one hand to his throat. "Why do you suppose a fellow's larynx is called his Adam's apple?"

"Nothing could be more appropriate," declared Bruce, soberly, "for when Adam ate the apple he got it in the neck."

Something like a cackling laugh came from Harry's parched lips.

Diamond gave an exclamation of disgust.

"This is a nice time to joke!" he grated, fiercely.

"The matter with you," said Rattleton, "is that you've not got over thinking of Lona Ayer, the Mormon's daughter whom you were mashed on. You've been grouchy ever since you and Merry came back from your wild expedition into the forbidden valley of Bethsada. It's too bad, Jack——"

"Shut up, will you! I've heard enough about that!"

"Drop it, Harry," commanded Frank, warningly. "You've worn it out. Forget it."

"Great Scott!" grunted Browning. "I believe my bicycle is heavier than the dealer represented it to be."

"Think so?" asked Rattleton.

"Sure."

"Then give it a weigh."

Browning's wheel gave a sudden wobble that nearly threw him off.

"Don't!" he gasped. "It's not original. You swiped it from the very same paper that had my Adam's apple joke in it."

"Well, it was simply a case of retaliation."

"I'd rather have a case of beer. Oh, say!—a case of beer! I wouldn't do a thing to a case of beer—not a thing! Oh, just to think of sitting in the old room at Traeger's or Morey's and drinking all the beer or ale a fellow could pour down his neck! It makes me faint!"

"You should not permit yourself to think of such a thing as beer," said Frank, jokingly. "You know beer will make you fat."

"Don't care; I'd drink it if it made me so fat I couldn't walk. I'd train down, you know. Dumb bells, punching bag, and so forth."

"Speaking of the punching bag," said Frank, "makes me think of a good thing on Reggy Stevens. You know Stevens. He's near-sighted. Goes in for athletics,

and takes great delight in the fancy manner in which he can hammer the bag. Well, he went down into the country to see his cousin last spring. Sometime during the winter his cousin had found a big hornets' nest in the woods, and had cut it down and taken it home. He hung it up in the garret. First day Stevens was there he wandered up into the garret and saw the hornets' nest hanging in the dim light. 'Ho!' said Reggy. 'Didn't know cousin had a punching bag. Glad I found it. I'll toy with it a little.' Then he threw off his coat and made a rush at that innocent-looking ball. With his first blow he drove his fist clean through the nest. 'Holy smoke!' gasped Reggy; 'what have I struck?' Then the hornets came pouring out, for the nest was not a deserted one. They saw Reggy—and went him several better. Say, fellows, they didn't do a thing to poor Reggy! About five hundred made for him, and it seemed to Reggy that at least four hundred and ninety-nine of them got him. His howls started shingles off the roof of that old house and knocked several bricks out of the chimney. He fell down the stairs, and went plunging through the house, with a string of hornets trailing after him, like a comet's tail. The hornets did not confine themselves strictly to Reggy; some of them sifted off and got in their work on Reggy's cousin, aunt, uncle, the kitchen girl, the hired man, and one of them made for the dog. The dog thought that hornet was a fly, and snapped at it. One second later that dog joined in the general riot, and the way he swore and yelled fire in dog language was something frightful to hear. Reggy didn't stop till he got outside and plunged his head into the old-fashioned watering trough, where he held it under the surface till he was nearly drowned. The whole family was a sight. And Reggy—well, he's had the swelled head ever since."

Rattleton laughed and Bruce managed to smile, while Toots gave a cracked "Yah, yah!" but Diamond failed to show that he appreciated the story in the least.

However, it soon became evident that the spirits of the lads had been lightened somewhat, and they pedaled onward straight for the grim mountains which had seemed so near for the last two hours.

The sun poured its stifling heat down on the great desert, where nothing save an occasional clump of sage brush could be seen.

Heat shimmered in the air, and it was not strange that the young cyclists were disheartened and ready to give up in despair.

Suddenly a cry came from Diamond.

"Look!" he shouted. "Look to the south! Why haven't we seen it before? We're blind! Water, water!"

They looked, and, at a distance of less than a mile it seemed they could see a beautiful lake of water, with trees on the distant shore. The reflection of the trees showed in the mirror-like surface of the blue lake.

"Come on!" hoarsely cried Jack, as he turned his wheel southward. "I'll be into that water up to my neck in less than ten minutes!"

"Stop!" shouted Merriwell.

Jack did not seem to hear. If he heard, he did not heed the command. He was bending far over the handle-bars and using all his energy to send his wheel spinning toward the beautiful lake.

"I must stop him!" cried Frank. "It is a race for life!"

CHAPTER II.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

A race for life on the great desert, beneath a burning, pitiless sun!

Frank Merriwell forgot that a short time before Jack Diamond had accused him of leading them all to their doom by

inducing them to attempt to cross the barren waste—he forgot everything save that a comrade was in danger.

No, he did not forget everything. He knew what that race meant. It might exhaust them both and render them unable to ride their wheels over the few remaining miles of barren desert between them and the mountain range. When Diamond learned the dreadful, heartsickening truth about that beautiful lake of water it might rob his heart of courage and hope so that he would drop in despair and give himself up to death in the desert.

Frank would save him—he must save him! He felt a personal responsibility for the lives of every one of the party, and he had resolved that all should return to New Haven in safety.

“Stop, Jack!” he shouted again.

But the sight of that beautiful lake had made Diamond mad with a longing to plunge into the water, to splash in it, to drink his fill till not another swallow could he force down his throat.

Madly he sent his wheel flying over the sandy plain, panting, gasping, furious to reach the lake.

How beautiful the water looked! How cool and inviting was the shade of the trees on the other shore! Oh, he would go round there and rest beneath those trees.

Frank bent forward over the handle bars, muttering:

“Ride now as you never rode before!”

The wheel seemed to leap away like a thing of life—it flew as if it possessed wings.

But Frank did not gain as swiftly as he desired, for Diamond, also, was using all his energy to send his bicycle along.

“Faster! faster!” panted Frank.

Faster and faster he flew along. The hot breath of the desert beat on his face as if it came rushing from the mouth of a furnace. It seemed to scorch him. Fine

particles of sand whipped up and stung his flesh.

But he minded nothing save that he was racing to save the life of his friend and comrade. His teeth were set, and there was a look of undying determination on his dust-clouded face.

Gaining—yes he was gaining at last! But slowly—far too slowly!

“Faster! faster!” he panted once more, speaking to his wheel, as if it were a thing of life and could understand. “On, my silent steed! We must stop him soon!”

He heard a strange laugh—a wild laugh.

“Heaven pity him!” thought Frank, knowing that laugh came from Jack’s lips. The sight of that ghostly lake has nearly turned his brain with joy. I fear he will go mad, indeed, when he knows the truth!”

On sped pursued and pursuer, and the latter was still gaining. Frank Merriwell had engaged in many contests of skill and endurance, but never in one where more was at stake. His success in overtaking his friend meant the saving of a human life—perhaps two lives.

Now he was gaining swiftly, and something like a prayer of thankfulness came from his lips.

Once more he cried out to the lad in advance, but it seemed that Diamond’s ears were dumb, for he made no sound that told he heard.

One last spurt—Frank felt that it must bring him to Diamond’s side. He gathered himself, his feet clinging to the flying pedals as if fastened there.

A slip, a fall, a miscalculation might mean utter failure, and failure might mean death for Diamond.

Now Frank was close behind his friend. He could hear the whirring sound of the spokes of Diamond’s wheel cutting the air, and he could hear the hoarse, panting breathing of his friend.

A steady hand guided Merriwell's wheel alongside that of his friend; a steady and a strong hand fell on the shoulder of the lad who had been crazed by the alluring vision of the lake in the desert.

"Stop, Jack!"

Diamond turned toward his friend a face from which a pair of glaring eyes looked out. His lips curled back from his white teeth, and he snarled:

"Hands off! Don't try to hold me back! Can't you see it, you fool! The lake—the lake!"

"There is no lake!"

"Yes, there is! You are blind! See it!"

"Stop, Jack! I tell you there is no lake!"

Frank tried to check his friend, but Diamond made a swinging blow at him, which Merriwell managed to stop.

"Wait—listen a moment!" entreated Frank.

But the belief that a lake of water lay a short distance away had completely driven anything like reason from Diamond's head.

"Hands off!" he shouted. "If you try to stop me, you'll be sorry!"

Frank saw he must resort to desperate measures. He secured a firm grip on the shoulder of the young Virginian, and, a moment later, gave a surge that caused them both to fall from their wheels.

They were whirling along at such speed that it was no light thing to take a fall, but down they went together, and, by a good stroke of fortune, they happened to fall clear of the wheels.

As Frank had pulled Diamond toward him, he fell beneath, and the shock when he struck the ground drove the breath from his body. It also robbed him of strength for a moment.

Over and over they rolled, and then lay in a limp heap on the desert, where

the earth was hot and baked and the sun beat down with a fierce parching heat.

Diamond was the first to stir, and he tried to scramble up, his one thought being to mount his wheel again and ride onward toward that shimmering lure.

Frank seemed to realize this, for he caught at his friend, grasped him, and held him fast.

With a mad exclamation, the hot-blooded Southerner turned and struck Merriwell in the face with his clinched fist.

It was a feeble blow, for the shock of the fall had deprived Diamond of no little strength, but it stung, and it aroused Frank in a marvellous manner.

Then there was a furious struggle there on the desert, Diamond making a mad effort to break away, but being held by Frank, who would not let him go.

The eyes of both lads glared and their teeth were set. Frank tried to force Diamond down and hold him, but Jack had the strength of an insane person, and, time after time, he flung his would-be benefactor off.

The eyes of the young Virginian were red and bloodshot, while his lips were cracked and bleeding. His cap was gone, and his straight dark hair fell in a tousled mass over his forehead.

Occasionally muttered words came from Diamond's lips, but the other was silent, seeming to realize that he must conquer the mad fellow by sheer strength alone.

So they fought on, their efforts growing weaker and weaker, gasping for breath. Seeing that fierce struggle, no one could have imagined they were anything but the most deadly enemies, battling for their very lives.

At last, after some minutes, Diamond's fictitious strength suddenly gave out, and then Frank handled and held him with ease. Merriwell pinned Jack down and held him there, while both remained mo-

tionless, gasping for breath and seeking to recover from their frightful exertions.

"You fool!" whispered the Virginian, bitterly. "What are you trying to do?"

"Trying to save your life, but you have given me a merry hustle for it," answered Frank.

"Save my life! Bah! Why have you stopped me when we were so near that lake?"

"There is no lake."

"Are you blind? All of us could see the lake! It is near—very near!"

"I tell you, Jack, there is no lake."

"You lie!"

"You have been crazed by what you fancied was water. Some time you will ask my pardon for your words."

"You will ask my pardon for stopping me in this manner, Frank Merriwell! You did it because I was the first to discover the lake! You were jealous! You did not wish me to reach it first! I know you! You want to be the leader in everything."

"If you were not half crazy now, you would not utter such words, Jack."

"Oh, I know you—I know!"

Then Diamond's tone and manner suddenly changed, and he began to beg:

"Please let me up, Merry—please do! Oh, merciful heaven I am perishing for a swallow of water! And it is so near! There is water enough for ten thousand men! And such beautiful trees, where the shadows are so cool—where this accursed sun can't pour down on one's head! Please let me up, Frank! I'll do anything for you if you'll only let me go to that lake!"

"Jack, dear old fellow, I am telling you the truth when I say there is no lake. There could be no lake here in this burning desert. It is an impossibility. If there were such a lake, the ones I asked about the water-holes would have told me."

"They did not know. I have seen it, and I know it is there."

Frank allowed his friend to sit up.

"Look, Jack," he said; "where is your lake?"

Jack looked away to the south, the east, the north, and then toward the west, where lay the mountains.

There was no lake in sight!

CHAPTER III.

ON TO THE MOUNTAINS.

"Where—where has it gone?" slowly and painfully asked Diamond. I am sure I saw it—sure! The lake, the trees—all gone!"

"I told you there was no lake."

"Then—then it must have been a mirage!"

"That is exactly what it was."

With a deep groan of despair Diamond fell back limply on the sand, as if the last bit of strength and hope had gone from him.

"This ends it!" he gasped. "What's the use of struggling any more! We may as well give up right here and die!"

"Not much!" cried Merriwell, with attempted cheerfulness. "That is why I run you down and dragged you from your wheel."

"What do you mean?"

"I knew the mirage might lure you on and on into the desert, seeming to flee before you, till at last it would vanish in a mocking manner, and you, utterly exhausted and spirit-broken, would lie down and die without another effort."

Jack was silent a few moments.

"And you did all this for me?" he finally asked. "You pursued and pulled me from my wheel to—to save me?"

"Yes."

Another brief silence.

"Frank."

"Well, Jack?"

"I—I think I struck you."

"Yes," said Merriwell, cheerfully; "but you were too exhausted to hurt me. It didn't amount to anything."

"But I struck you, just the same."

"Sure."

"I was mad."

"You looked it."

"My thirst—the sight of what I took to be water—the shadows of the trees! Ah, yes, I was mad, Frank!"

"Well, it's all over now."

"Yes, it is all over. The jig's up!"

"Nonsense! Get a brace on, old man. We must get to the mountains. It is our only chance, Jack."

"The mountains! I never shall reach the mountains, Frank. I am done for—played out!"

"That's all rot, old fellow! You are no more played out than I am. We are both pretty well used up, but we'll pull through to the mountains and get a drink of water."

"You never give up."

"Well, I try never to give up."

"Frank, I want you to forgive me for what I said before we saw the mirage. You know I was making a kick."

"O, never mind that! It's all right, Jack."

"I want you to say you forgive me."

"That's dead easy. Of course I forgive you. Think I'm a stiff to hold a grudge over a little matter like that?"

Diamond looked his admiration from his bloodshot eyes.

"You're all right, Merry," he hoarsely declared. "You always were all right. I knew it all along. Sometimes I get nasty, for I have a jealous nature, although I try to hold it in check. I never did try to hold myself in check in any way till I knew you and saw how you controlled your tastes and passions. That was a revelation to me, Merry. You know I hated you at first, but I came to admire you, despite myself. I have admired you ever since. Sometimes the worst side of my nature will crop out, but I always know I am wrong. Forgive me for striking you."

"There, there, old chap! Why are you thinking of such silly things? You are talking as if you had done me a deadly wrong, and this was your last chance to square yourself."

"It is my last chance—I am sure of that. I am played out, and I can't drive that wheel further. It's no use—I throw up the sponge right here."

A look of determination came to Frank's face.

"You shall not do anything of the kind!" he cried. "I won't have it, Jack!"

Diamond did not reply, but lay limp on the ground. Frank put a firm hand on his shoulder, saying:

"Come, Jack, make a bluff at it."

"No use!"

"I tell you it is! Come on. We can reach the mountains within an hour."

"The mountains!" came huskily from Diamond's lips. "God knows if there are any mountains! They, too, may be a mirage!"

"No, no!"

"Think—think how long we have been riding toward them and still they seemed to remain as far away as they were hours ago."

"That is one of the peculiar effects of the air out here."

"I do not believe any of us will reach the mountains. And if we should, we might not find water. Those mountains look baked and barren."

"Remember I was told how to find water there."

But this did not give the disheartened boy courage.

"I know you were told, but the man who told you said that at times that water failed. It's no use, Frank; the game is not worth the candle."

Then it was that Merriwell began to grow angry.

"I am ashamed of you, Diamond!" he harshly cried. "I did think you were built of better stuff! Where is your backbone! Come, man, you must make another try!"

"Must?" came rather defiantly from Jack. "I'll not be forced to do it!"

"Yes you will!"

The Virginian looked at Frank in astonishment.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that you will brace up and make an attempt to reach the mountains with the rest of us, or I'll give you the blametest licking you ever had—and

there won't be any apologies afterward, either!"

That aroused Jack somewhat.

"You—you wouldn't do that—now?" he faltered.

"Wouldn't I!" cried Frank, seeming to make preparations to carry out his threat. "Well, you'll see!"

"But—but——"

"There are no buts about it! Either you get up and make one more struggle, or I'll have the satisfaction of knowing you are not in condition to make a struggle when I leave you. That is business, and it's straight from the shoulder!"

Diamond remonstrated weakly; but Frank seemed in sober earnest.

"I believe it would do you good," he declared. "It would beat a little sense into you. It's what you want, anyway."

A sense of shame came over Jack.

"If you've got enough energy to give me a licking, I ought to have enough to make another try for life," he huskily said.

"Of course you had."

"Well, I'll do it. It isn't because I fear the licking, for that wouldn't make any difference now, but I can make another try for it, if you can."

Frank dragged the other boy to his feet, and then picked up their fallen wheels. Jack was so weak that he could scarcely stand, seeming to have been quite exhausted by his last furious struggle with the boy who had raced across the desert sands to save his life. Twice Frank caught him and kept him from falling.

"What's the use?" Diamond hoarsely whispered. "I tell you I can't keep in the saddle!"

"And I tell you that you must! There are the other fellows, coming this way. I will signal them to ride toward the mountains, and we will join them."

Frank made the signal, and the others understood, for they soon turned toward the mountains again.

Then Merriwell aided Jack in mounting and getting started, mounting himself after that, and hurrying after the Virginian, whose wheel was making a very crooked track across the sand.

When it was necessary Frank supported Jack with a hand on the arm of

the dark-faced lad, speaking encouraging words into his ear, urging him on.

And thus they rode toward the barren-looking Desert Range, where they must find water or death.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE WATER HOLE.

They came to the mountains at last, when the burning sun was hanging a ball of fire in the western sky. From a distance Merriwell had singled out Split Peak, which had served as his guide. At the foot of Split Peak were two water-holes," one on the east and one on the south.

First Frank sought for the eastern water-hole, and he found it.

But it was dry!

Dry, save for the slightest indication of moisture in the sand at the bottom of the hole.

"I told you!" gasped Diamond, as he fell to the ground in hopeless exhaustion. "There is no water here!"

"Wait," said Frank, hoarsely. "We'll see if we can't find some. Come, boys; we must scoop out the sand down there in the hole—we must dig for our lives!"

"By golly!" said Toots; "dis nigger's reddy teh dug a well fo'ty foot deep, if he can fine about fo' swallers ob wattah!"

"A well!" muttered Rattleton. "We'll sink a shaft here!"

"Well, I don't know!" murmured Browning.

So they went to work, two of them digging at a time, and, with their hands, they scooped out the sand down in the water-hole. As they worked a little dirty water began to trickle into the hole.

"Yum! yum!" muttered Toots, his eyes shining. "Nebber saw muddy wattah look so good befo'! I done fink I can drink 'bout a bariel ob dat stuff!"

They worked till quite exhausted, and then waited impatiently for the water to run into the hole. It rose with disheartening slowness, but rise it did.

When he could do so, Frank dipped up some of the water with his drinking cup, and gave it to Jack first of all.

Diamond's hands shook so with eagerness that he nearly spilled the water, and

he greedily turned it down his parched throat at a gulp.

"Merciful goodness! how sweet!" he gasped. "More, Frank—more!"

"Wait a bit, my boy. You have had the first drink from this hole. The others must take their turn now. When it comes round to you again, you shall have more."

"But there may not be enough to go round!" Jack almost snarled. "What good do you think a little like that can do a fellow who is dying of thirst? I must have more—now!"

"Well, you can't have another drop till the others have taken their turn—not a taste!"

When Frank Merriwell spoke like that he meant what he said, and Jack knew it. But the little water he had received had maddened Diamond almost as much as had the mirage. As Frank turned toward the water-hole, Jack started to spring upon him, crying:

"We'll see!"

"Hold on!" said Browning, as one of his hands went out and grasped Diamond. "I wouldn't do that. You are excited. I reckon I'll have to sit on you, while you cool off."

Then the big fellow took Jack down, and actually sat on him, while the Virginian raved like a maniac.

"Poor fellow!" said Frank, pityingly. "He has almost lost his reason by what he has passed through."

One by one the others received some of the water, and then it came Jack's turn once more. By this time he was silent, but there was a sullen light in his eyes. When Frank passed him the water in the drinking cup he shook his head, and refused to take it.

"No!" he muttered. "I wont have it! Drink it all up! You don't care anything about me! Let me die!"

"Well, hang a fool!" snorted Browning, in great disgust.

"Say, jes' yo' pass dat watah heah, Marser Frank, an' see if dis coon'll refuse teh let it percolate down his froat!"

"Yes, give it to Toots!" grated Diamond. "You more think of him than you do of me, anyway! Give it to him!"

"Don't chool with that fump—I mean don't fool with that chump!" snapped

Rattleton. "Let him have his own way! He's got a bug in his head; that's what ails him."

"Let him alone, Bruce," said Frank, quietly. "I want to talk to him."

"He struck at you behind your back."

"Never mind; he won't do so again."

"Oh, you don't know!" muttered Diamond.

"Yes I do," declared Frank, with confidence. "Never mind us, fellows. I want a little quiet talk with Jack."

They understood him, and the two lads were left alone.

Frank began talking to Diamond in a smooth, pleasant way, appealing to his sense of justice. At first Jack turned away, as if he did not care to listen, but he heard every word, and he was affected.

"You are not yourself, old fellow," said Jack, softly, placing his hand gently on Diamond's shoulder. "If you were yourself, you would not be like this. It is the burning desert, the blazing sun, the frightful thirst—these have made you so unlike yourself. I don't mind anything you have said about me, Jack, for I know you are my friend, and you would not think of saying such things under ordinary circumstances. A little while ago, away out on the desert, you told me as much. It was then that reason came back to you for a little time. Knowing how you have suffered, I gave you the first drink from this water-hole. The water ran in slowly, and I did not know that there would be enough to go round twice. You were not the only one who had suffered from thirst, but the others made no objection to your having the first drink—they wanted you to have it. But it was necessary that they should have some of the water, so that all of us would be in condition to search for the other water-hole. Surely, old fellow, you see the common sense in this. And now, Jack, look—the water has cleared, and more is running into the hole. It will quench your thirst, and you will be yourself again. You are my friend, and I am yours. We stand ready to fight for each other at any time. If one of my enemies were to try to get at me behind my back, why, you would——"

"Strangle the infernal cur!" shouted Diamond. "Give me that water, Frank!"

You are all right, and I'm all wrong! Just let me have a chance to fight for you, and see if I don't fight as long as there is a drop of blood in my body!"

Merriwell had conquered, but he showed no sign of triumph, although he quietly said:

"I knew all the while, dear old fellow; in fact, I believe I know you better than you know yourself."

Then, when the others came up, ready to jolly Diamond about refusing to drink, Frank checked them with a gesture.

Jack felt better when he had taken the second drink of water. As water had risen in the hole, all the boys were able to get another round, and the spirits of all of them were raised.

"I believe we have some hard bread and jerked beef, haven't we, Merry?" asked Browning.

"Yes."

"Well, we are all right, then. Can't knock us out now. All I need is a good chance to rest."

"Oh, you need rest!" nodded Rattleton. "You always need that. You can take more rest and not complain than any fellow I ever saw."

"Young man," said Bruce, loftily, "it won't work. I refuse to let you get me on a string, so drop it."

"You'll be lucky if you get out of this part of the country without getting on a string with the other end hitched to the limb of a tree."

"That reminds me," drawled Bruce; "at the last town where we stopped, I asked a citizen if there were any horse thieves in that locality, and he said there were two of 'em hanging round there the night before."

"Yes," nodded Harry, "that was the place where they said they were going to stop lynching if they had to hang every durned lyncher they could catch."

"Boys," laughed Merriwell, "we are all right. When you chaps get to springing those things, I feel there is no further danger. We'll pull out all right."

"Suttinly, sar," grinned Toots. "I's gwan teh bet mah money on dis crowd ebry time, chilluns. We's hot stuff, an' dar ain't nuffin' gwan teh stop us dis side ob San Frandisco—no, sar!"

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERIOUS SKELETON.

Finally, refreshed and filled with new hope, the boys mounted their wheels and started to seek for the second water-hole.

Frank led the way, and they turned to the south, riding along the base of some barren cliffs.

"Are you sure we'll be able to find our way back to the water-hole we have left if we fail to discover the other one?" asked Rattleton.

"I am taking note of everything, and I do not think there will be any difficulty," answered Frank.

They had proceeded in this manner for about two miles when they saw before them a place where the barren cliffs opened into a pass that seemed to lead into the mountains.

"There is our road!" cried Merriwell, cheerfully. "It should lead us straight to the second water-hole."

"Yah! yah!" laughed Toots. "Cayarn't fool dat boy, chilluns! He knows his business, yo' bet! Won't s'prise me a bit if he teks us stret to a resyvoyer—no, sar!"

They made for the pass, and, in a burst of energy, the colored boy spurred to the front, taking the lead.

Of a sudden, as they approached a point where the bluffs narrowed till they were close together, the negro gave a sudden wild howl of terror, tried to turn his wheel about, and went plunging headlong to the ground.

"Scrate Gott!" gasped Rattleton. "What's struck him?"

"Something is the matter with him, sure as fate," said Frank.

Toots was seen to sit up and stare toward the wall of stone, while it was plain that he was shaking as if struck by an attack of ague. Then he tried to scramble up, but fell on his knees, with his hands clasped and uplifted in a supplicating attitude, while he wildly cried:

"Go 'way, dar, good Mr. Debbil! I ain't done nuffin' teh yo'! Please don' touch me! I's nuffin' but a po' good-fo'-nuffin' nigger, an' I ain't wuff bodderin' wif—no, sar! Dar am some white boys wif me, an' I guess yo'll lek them a heap sight better. Jes' yo' tek one of them, good Mr. Debbil!"

"Has he gone daffy, to?" muttered Frank, in astonishment.

Then the boys came whirling up and sprang from their wheels, at which Toots made a scramble for Frank, caught hold of his knees, and chatteringly cried:

"Don' yeh let him kerry me off, Marser Frank! I knows yo' ain't afeared of nuffin', so I wants yeh ter protect po' Toots from de debbil wif de fiery eyes!"

But Frank was so astonished that he scarcely heard a word the colored boy uttered.

Seated on a block of stone in a niche of the wall was a human skeleton. It was sitting bolt upright and seemed to be staring at the boys with eyes that flashed a hundred shades of light.

"Poly hoker—no, holy poker!" palpitated Harry, leaning hard on his wheel. "What have we struck?"

For a time the others were speechless.

Wonderfully and fantastically was the skeleton decorated. On its head was a rude crown that seemed to be of glittering gold, while gold bracelets adorned its arms. About the fleshless neck was a chain of gold, to which a large locket was attached, and across the ribs was strung a gold watch chain, while there were other fantastic and costly ornaments dangling over those bones of a human being.

The eyes of the skeleton, flashing so many different lights, seemed to be two huge diamonds of enormous value.

No wonder the young cyclists stared in astonishment at the marvellously bejeweled skeleton!

"Well," drawled Browning, with his usual nonchalance, "the gentleman seems to have dressed up in his best to receive us. Someone must have sent him word we were coming."

Toots, seeing the others did not seem frightened, had got on his feet and picked up his bicycle.

"Goodness!" muttered Diamond. "If all those decorations are solid gold, there is a small fortune in sight!"

"What is the meaning of this, Frank?" asked Rattleton. "How do you suppose this skeleton happens to be here?"

"Ask me something easy," said Merriwell, shaking his head.

"The skeleton must have been decor-

ated in that manner by some living person," asserted Rattleton.

"But where is that person?"

"Not here, that is sure."

"It may be a warning," said Jack, gloomily.

"Warning, nothing!" exclaimed Frank. "It is plain the thing has been left there by some person, and we are the discoverers. It must be that the skeleton is that of some poor devil who perished here for want of water."

"And it may be that the one who placed it there perished also," said Rattleton.

"Very likely."

"In which case," came eagerly from Jack's lips, "all that treasure belongs to us! Boys, it is a wonderful stroke of fortune! We have made enough to take the whole of us through Yale, and——"

"If we ever get back to Yale, old fellow! This unfortunate fellow perished here, and our fate may be similar."

"Boo!" shivered Browning. "That's pleasant to think about!"

"More than that," Frank went on, "the treasure does not belong to us if we can find the real owner or his heirs."

The excitement and interest of the boys was great. They were eager to examine the decorations of the mysterious skeleton.

"We'll stack our wheels, and then one of us can climb up and make an inspection," said Frank.

So they proceeded to stack their wheels, Toots observing:

"Yo' can fool wif dat skillerton if yo' wants to, chilluns, but dis nigger's gwan teh keep right away from it. Bet fo' dollars it will jes' reach out dem arms an' grab de fir' one dat gits near it. Wo-oh! Land ob wartermillions! it meks me have de fevah an' chillins jes' to fink ob it!"

"We'll draw lots to see who goes up," said Frank, winking at the others. "You will have to go if it falls to you, Toots."

"Oh, mah goodness!" gasped the frightened darky. "I ain't gwan teh draw no lots, Marser Frank—no, sar! I's got a po'erful bad case ob heart-trouble, an' mah doctah hab reckermended dat I don't fool roun' no skillertons. He said

it might result distrust if I boddered wif skillertons."

"What's that?" cried Frank, sternly. "Would you drink your share of water when water is so precious and not take even chances with the rest of us in any danger?"

"Now, Marser Frank!" cried the darky, appealingly; "don' go fo' to be too hard on a po' nigger! De trubble wif me is dat I'm jes' a nacheral bo'n coward, an' I can't git over hit nohow. Dat's what meks mah heart turn flip-flops ebry time dar's any dangar, sar."

"But think of the treasure up there that we have found. If it should fall to you to investigatc, and you were to bring down that treasure, of course you would receive your share, the same as the rest of us."

"Lawd bress yeh, honey! I don' want no treasure if I've gotter go an' fotch hit down. I'd a heap sight rudder nebber hab no treasure dan git wifin reachin' distance of dat skillerton—yes, sar!"

"Don't fool with him, Merry," said Diamond, impatiently. "Of course you don't expect to send him up, and you won't think of giving him any part of the treasure."

Frank flashed a look at the Virginian, and saw that Jack was in earnest.

"You are mistaken, old man," he said. "I do not expect Toots to go up there, but, if there is a real treasure and it is divided, you may be sure he will receive his share."

"Oh, well!" cried Jack, somewhat taken aback; "of course I don't care what you do about that, but I thought you were in earnest about what you were saying."

"The trouble with you," muttered Rattleton, speaking so low that Jack could not hear him, "is that you never see through a joke."

"Come," spoke Browning, "if we've got to take chances to see who goes up and makes the examination, come on. I hope to get out of it myself, but if I must, I must."

"We need not take chances," said Frank, promptly. "I will go."

"It will not be difficult, for it is no climb at all," said Jack. "Two of us can

swing ourselves up there in a moment, and I will go with you, Merry."

Then it was that Rattleton suddenly gave a great cry of stupefied amazement.

"What's the matter?" asked Merriwell. "Look! look!" gasped Harry, pointing toward the niche in the rocks. "The skeleton—it has disappeared!"

They looked, and, dumb for the time with amazement and dismay they saw Rattleton spoke the truth.

The mysterious skeleton had vanished!

CHAPTER VI.

"INDIANS!"

"Gone!" cried Jack.

"Sure!" nodded Frank.

"Lordy massy sakes teh goose-grease!" gasped Toots, again shivering with terror. "Didn't I done tole yeh, chilluns! If yo' know when yo' am well off, yeh'll git erway from heah jes' as quick as yeh can trabbel! Oh, mah goodness!"

Shaking in every limb, the colored boy tried to get his bicycle out from the others, lost his balance, fell over, and sent the entire stack of wheels crashing to the ground.

"Well, this seems to be a regular sleight-of-hand performance," coolly commented Browning. "Now you see it, and now you don't; guess where it's gone. It drives me to a cigarette."

But he discovered that his cigarettes were gone, which seemed to concern him far more than the vanishing of the skeleton. He declared he had lost a whole package, and seemed to feel quite as bad about it as if they were solid gold.

Rattleton was excited.

"What sort of pocus-hocus—no, hocus-pocus is this, anyway?" he spluttered. "Where's it gone? Who wayed the old thing a took—I mean who took the old thing away?"

"It couldn't have gone away of its own accord," said Frank, "so some one must have removed it."

"Don' yeh fool yo'se'f dat way, Marser Frank!" cried Toots, sitting up amid the fallen wheels. "Dat skillerton am de berry ol' scratch hisse'f! De next thing some ob dis crowd will be disumpearin' dat way. Gwan teh git kerried off, chilluns, if yo' don' git out ob dis in a hurry."

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Diamond. "You make me tired with your chatter!"

"Mistah Dimund," said the colored boy, with attempted dignity, "if yo'll let dat debbil kerry yo' off yo'll nebber be missed—no, sar."

Jack pretended he did not hear those words.

"Here goes to see what has become of the thing!" cried Frank, as he scrambled up to the niche where the skeleton had sat.

"I am with you!" cried Diamond, as he followed Frank closely.

Reaching the nook in the face of the cliff, they looked about for some sign of the skeleton that had been there a short time before, but not a sign of it could they see. The ghastly thing was gone, and the glittering ornaments had vanished with it. The block of stone on which the object had sat was still there.

"Well, fat do you whind—I mean what do you find?" cried Rattleton, impatiently.

"Not a thing," was the disgusted reply. "It has gone, sure as fate!"

"So have my cigarettes!" groaned Browning.

"The treasure—is any of that there?" asked Harry, eagerly.

"Not a bit of it."

"Well, that's what I call an unfair deal," murmured Bruce. "It is a blow below the belt. If the old skeleton had desired to go away, none of us would have objected, but it might have left the trimmings with which it was adorned."

Frank was puzzled, and the more he investigated the greater grew his wonder. He knew they had seen the skeleton, yet it had vanished like fog before a blazing sun.

Jack shrugged his shoulders and shivered, saying:

"There's something uncanny about it, old man. I believe it is a warning."

"Nonsense!" cried Frank. "What sort of a warning?"

"A warning of the fate that awaits all of us."

"You are not well, Jack."

"Oh, it is not that! First we see a lake of water, and that disappears; then we see this skeleton, and now that has van-

ished. You must confess that there is something remarkable in it all."

"The vanishing of the mirage came about in a natural manner, but——"

"But you must confess there was something decidedly unnatural about the vanishing of the skeleton."

"It was removed by human hands—I will wager anything on that."

"Then where is the human being who remove it?"

"I don't know."

Unable to remain below, Rattleton came climbing up to the niche.

"I've got to satisfy myself," he said, as he felt about with his hands, as if he expected to discover the vanished skeleton in that manner. "I can't see how the blamed old thing could get away!"

"Well, you can see quite as well as we can," acknowledged Frank. "It is gone, and that is all we can tell about it."

The boys satisfied themselves that the thing had really disappeared, and they could not begin to solve the mystery. After a time they returned to the ground.

"It am de debbil's work!" asserted Toots. "Don' yeh mek no misteks 'bout dat, chilluns."

They held a "council of war," and it was resolved that they should go on through the pass and try to find the second water-hole before darkness fell.

Already night was close at hand, and they must needs lose no time.

"We can come back here in the morning and see if we're able to solve the mystery," said Merriwell. "I, for one, do not feel like going away without making another attempt at it."

"Nor I," nodded Rattleton.

"It is folly," declared Jack, gloomily. "I say we have been warned, and the best thing we can do is get away as soon as possible."

"By golly! dat am de firs' sensibul fing I've heard yo' say in fo' days!" cried Toots, approvingly.

They picked up their wheels, and soon were ready to mount.

"Here's good-by to the vanishing skeleton for to-night," cried Frank.

He was answered by a wild peal of mocking laughter that seemed to run

along the face of the cliff in a most remarkable manner.

"Ha! ha! ha!" it sounded, hoarsely, and "ha! ha! ha!" came down from the rocks, like a mystic echo.

"O-oh, Lordy!"

Toots made a jump for the saddle of his bicycle, but jumped too far and went clean over the wheel, striking his knee and turning in the air, to fall with a thump on the back of his neck.

"Mah goodness!" he gurgled, as he lay on the ground, dazed by the shock of the fall. "De ol' debbil done gib meh a boost then fo' suah!"

The other lads looked at each other in perplexity.

"Well, wh-wh-what do you think of that?" stammered Rattleton.

"He ought to file his voice, whoever he is," coolly observed Browning. "It's a little rough along the edges."

"It strikes me that somebody is having fun with us," said Merriwell, a look of displeasure on his face.

"What are we going to do about it?" asked Harry.

"We don't seem able to do much of anything now. Come on."

Toots scrambled up, and they mounted their wheels. As they started to ride away, a hollow-sounding voice cried:

"Stop!"

"Oh, riv us a guest—I mean give us a rest!" flung back Rattleton.

"Stop!" repeated the mysterious voice. "Do not try the pass. There is danger beyond. Turn back."

"I told you it was a warning!" cried Jack. "What do you think of it now?"

"I think somebody is trying to have a lot of sport with us!" exclaimed Frank.

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Not a thing. I don't propose to pay any attention to it. Come on, fellows. We must have more water, and there's none too much time to find it before dark."

Diamond was tempted to declare he would not go any further, but he knew the others would stand by Frank, and so he pedaled along.

As they drew away from the spot where they had seen the skeleton, they heard the mysterious voice calling to them again, commanding them to stop and

turn back. Thus it continued till they had ridden on so that it could be heard no longer.

Despite himself Frank had been impressed by what he had seen and heard, and a feeling of awe was on him. Ahead the shadows were thick where the dark cliffs seemed to come together, and there was something grim and overpowering about the bare and towering mountains that sullenly frowned down upon the little party.

The boys were silent, for they had no words to speak. Each was busy with his thoughts, and those thoughts were not of the most pleasant character.

A feeling of heartsickening loneliness settled down upon them and made them long for the homes that were so far away. What satisfaction was there, after all, in this great ride across the continent? They had encountered innumerable perils, and now it seemed that they were overshadowed by the greatest peril of all.

How still it was! The mountains seemed like crouching monsters of the great desert, waiting there to spring upon and crush them out of existence. There was something fearsome and frightful in their grim air of waiting.

The whirring of the wheels was a warning whisper, or the deadly hiss of a serpent. As they passed between the frowning bluffs, which rose on either hand, the whirring sound seemed to become louder and louder till it was absolutely awesome.

Frank looked back, and of all the party Bruce Browning was the only one whose face remained stolid and impassive. It did not seem that he had been affected in the least by what had happened.

"He has wonderful nerve!" thought Merriwell.

Diamond's dark face seemed pale, and there was an anxious look on the face of Rattleton. Toots betrayed his excitement and fear most distinctly.

Frank feared they would not get through the pass in time to find the second water-hole, and he increased his speed.

The ground was favorable for swift riding. At that time Merriwell thought it fortunate, but, later, he changed his mind.

Of a sudden the pass between the

bluffs ended, and they shot out into a valley or basin.

A cry of astonishment and alarm came from Frank's lips, and he used all his energy to check and turn his flying wheel.

Before them blazed a fire, and around that fire were gathered—

"Indians!" palpitated Harry Rattleton.

CHAPTER VII.

BLUE WOLF TRIES THE BICYCLE.

"Indians!" echoed Jack Diamond.

"Indians?" grunted Bruce Browning, astonished.

"O-oh, Lordy!" gasped Toots. "Dis am whar a nigger boy I know is gwan teh lose his scalp fo' suah!"

"Turn!" commanded Frank—"turn to the left, and we'll make a run to get back through the pass."

But they were seen, and the redskins about the fire sprang to their feet with loud whoops.

At the first whoop Toots gave a howl and threw up both hands.

"Don' yo' shoot, good Mistar Injunses!" he shouted. "I's jes' a common brack nigger, an' I ain't no 'count no-how. Mah scalp wouldn' be no good teh yo' arter—"

Then he took a header off his wobbling machine and fell directly before Jack, whose bicycle struck his body, and Diamond was hurled to the ground.

"Stop, fellows!" cried Merriwell. "We mustn't run away and leave them! Come back here!"

From his wheel he leaped to the ground in a moment, running to Diamond's side. Grasping Jack by the arm he exclaimed:

"Up, old fellow—up and onto your wheel! We may be able to get away now! We'll make a bluff for it."

But it was useless, for Jack was so stunned that he could not get on his feet, though he tried to do so.

Toots was stretched at full length on the ground, praying and begging the "good Injunses" not to bother with his scalp, saying the hair was so crooked that it was "no good nohow."

Up came the redskins on a run and surrounded the boys, Bruce and Harry having turned back.

Browning assumed a defensive attitude, muttering:

"Well, if we're in for a scrap, I'll try to get a crack at one or two of these homely mugs before I'm polished off."

There were seven of the Indians, and nearly all of them carried weapons in their hands. Although they were not in war paint, they were a decidedly ugly looking gang, and their savage little eyes denoted anything but friendliness.

"Ugh!" grunted the tallest Indian of the party, an old fellow with a scarred and wrinkled face.

"Ugh! ugh! ugh!" grunted the others.

Then they stared at the boys and their bicycles, the latter seeming a great curiosity to them.

"Well, this is a scrolly old jape—I mean a jolly old scrape!" fluttered Rattleton. "We're in for it!"

Toots looked up, saw the Indians, uttered another wild howl, and tried to bury his head in the sand, like an ostrich.

Frank singled out the tall Indian and spoke to him.

"How do you do," he said.

"How," returned the Indian, with dignity.

"Unfortunately we did not know you were here, or we should not have called," explained Merriwell.

The savage nodded, the single black feather in his hair fluttering like a pen-nant as he did so.

"Um know," he said. "Um see white boy heap much surprised."

"Jee! he can talk United States!" muttered Rattleton.

"Talk it!" said Bruce, in disgust. "He can chew it, that's all."

"I trust we have not disturbed you," said Frank, calmly; "and we will leave you in your glory as soon as my friend, who fell from his wheel, is able to mount and ride."

"No, no!" quickly declared the tall Indian; "white boy no go 'way. Injun like um heap much."

Browning lifted his cap and felt for his scalp.

"It may be my last opportunity to examine it," he murmured.

"But we are in a hurry, and we can't

stop with you, however much we may desire to do so," declared Frank, glibly. "You see we are on urgent business."

"Yes, very urgent," agreed Rattleton. "Smoly hoke—no, holy smoke! don't I wish I were back to New Haven, New York, any old place!"

"White boys must stop," said the big savage. "Black Feather say so, that settle um."

"I am afraid it does," confessed Browning.

Diamond got upon his feet, assisted by Frank.

"Well," he said, somewhat bitterly, "this is what we have come to by failing to heed the warning we received!"

"Don't go to croaking!" snapped Rattleton. "These Indians are peaceable. They are not on the war path."

"But they are off the reservation," said Frank, in a low tone; "and that is bad. They have us foul, and there is no telling what they may take a notion to do."

"It's pretty sure they'll take a notion to do us," sighed Harry.

The tall Indian, who had given his name as Black Feather, professed great friendliness, and, when the boys told him they had been looking for the water-hole, he said:

"Um water-hole dare by fire. Good water, heap much of it. Come, have all water um want."

"Well, that is an inducement," confessed Browning. "We may be able to get a square drink before we are scalped."

It was with no small difficulty that Toots was forced to get up, and, after he was on his feet, he would look at first one Indian and then dodge, and look at another, each time gurgling:

"O-oh, Lord!"

And so, surrounded by the Indians, the boys moved over to the fire, which was near the water-hole, as Black Feather had declared.

"Well, we'll all drink," said Frank, as he produced his pocket cup and proceeded to fill it. "Here, fellows, take turns."

While they were doing so the Indians were examining their bicycles with great curiosity. It was plain the savages had never before seen anything of the kind, and they were filled with astonishment

and mystification. They grunted and jabbered, and then one of them decided to get on and try one of the wheels.

It happened that this one was the smallest, shortest-legged redskin of the lot, and he selected the machine with the highest frame.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "White boy ride two-wheel hoss, Injun him ride two-wheel hoss heap same. Watch Blue Wolf."

"Yes," said Browning, softly, nudging Merriwell in the ribs with his elbow, "watch Blue Wolf, and you will see him smash my bicycle. I sincerely hope he will break his confounded head at the same time!"

"White boy show Ijun how um git on," ordered Blue Wolf.

"Go ahead, Bruce," directed Frank.

"Oh, thunder!" groaned the big fellow. "I'm so tired!"

But he was forced to show the Indians how he mounted the wheel, which he did, being dragged off almost as soon as he got astride the saddle.

"Ugh!" grunted Blue Wolf, with great satisfaction. "Um heap much easy. Watch Blue Wolf."

"Yes, watch Blue Wolf!" repeated Browning. "It will be good as a circus! Oh, my poor bicycle!"

With no small difficulty the little Indian steadied the wheel, reaching forward to grasp the handle bars while standing behind it. The first time he lifted his foot to place it on the step he lost his balance and fell over with the machine.

The other Indians grunted, and Blue Wolf got up, saying something in his own language that seemed to make the atmosphere warmer than it was before.

The bicycle was lifted and held for the little Indian to make another trial. He looked as if he longed to kick it into a thousand pieces, but braced up, placed his foot on the step and made a wild leap for the saddle. He missed the saddle, struck astride the frame just back of the handle bars, uttered a wild howl of dismay, and went down in hopeless entanglement with the unfortunate machine.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRANK DOES SOME TRICK RIDING.

"Wow!" howled Blue Wolf.

"Oh, my poor bicycle!" groaned Browning, once more.

The fallen red man kicked the bicycle into the air, but it promptly came down astride his neck and drove his nose into the dirt.

"Ugh!" grunted the watching Indians, solemnly.

"Wloop!" roared Blue Wolf, spitting out a mouthful of dirt.

Then he made another frantic attempt to cast the machine off, but it persisted in sticking to him in a wonderful manner. One of his arms was thrust through the spokes of the forward wheel to the shoulder, and as he tried to yank it out, the rear wheel spun round and one of the pedals gave him a terrific thump on the top of the head.

"Yah!" snarled the unlucky Indian.

"Two wheel hoss kick a heap," observed Black Feather.

Blue Wolf tried to struggle to his feet, but he was so entangled with the bicycle that it seemed to fling him down with astonishing violence.

Then as the noble red man kicked and squirmed and struggled, the bicycle danced and pranced upon his prostrate body like a thing of life.

"O-o-oh!" wailed Blue Wolf, in pain and fear.

Toots suddenly forgot his fears, and holding onto his side, he doubled up with a wild burst of "coon" laughter.

"Oh, land ob wartermillions!" he shouted. "Dat bisuckle am knockin' de stuffin' out ob Mistah Injun! Yah! yah! yah! Lordy! lordy! 'Scuse meh, but I has teh laff if it costs me all de wool on mah haid!"

Browning folded his arms, a look of intense satisfaction on his face as he observed:

"I have made a discovery that will be worth millions of dollars to the Government of the United States. Now I know a swift and sure way of settling the Indian question. Provide every Indian in the country with a bicycle, and there will be no Indians left in a week or two."

"Gamlet's host—I mean Hamlet's

ghost!" chuckled Rattleton, holding his hand over his mouth to keep from shrieking with laughter. "I never saw anything like that before!"

Merriwell sprang forward and assisted Blue Wolf in untangling himself from the wheel, fearing the bicycle would be utterly ruined.

The little Indian was badly done up. His face was cut and bleeding in several places, and he was covered with dirt. With some difficulty he got upon his feet, and then he backed away from the bicycle, at which he glared with an expression of great fear on his countenance.

"Heap bad medicine!" he observed.

It seemed that the other Indians were really amused, although they remained solemn and impassive.

"Give me hatchet!" Blue Wolf suddenly snarled. "Heap fix two wheel hoss!"

He would have made a rush for the offending wheel, but Frank held up a hand warningly, crying:

"Beware, Blue Wolf! It is in truth bad medicine, and it will put a curse upon you if you do it harm. Your squaw will die of hunger before another moon, your children shall make food for the coyotes, and your bones shall bleach on the desert! Beware!"

Blue Wolf paused, dismay written on his face. He longed to smash the bicycle, but he was convinced that it was really "bad medicine," and he was afraid to injure it.

"Say, that is great, old man!" enthusiastically whispered Rattleton in Merriwell's ear. "Keep it up."

"Blue Wolf not hurt two wheel hoss," declared Black Feather, who seemed to be the chief of the little band. "Want to see white boy ride."

"Do you mean that you want me to ride?" asked Frank.

"Ugh!"

"All right," said Frank. "I'll show you how it is done."

Then he motioned for the savages to stand aside.

"No try to run 'way," warned Black Feather. "Injun shoot um."

"All right, your royal jiblets. If I try to run away you may take a pop at me."

They made room for Frank to mount and ride.

Standing beside the wheel Frank sprung into the saddle without using the step, caught the pedals and started.

The savages gave utterance to a grunt of wonder and admiration.

Frank had practiced trick riding, and he now proposed to exhibit his skill, feeling that it might be a good scheme to astonish the savages.

He started the bicycle into a circle, round which he rode with the greatest ease, and then of a sudden he passed one leg over the frame, and stood up one one of the pedals, which he kept in motion at the same time.

The Indians nodded and looked pleased.

Then Frank began to step cross-legged from pedal to pedal, passing his feet over the cross bar of the frame and keeping the wheel in motion all the time.

A moment later he whirled about, and with his face toward the rear, continued to pedal the bicycle ahead the same as if he had been seated in the usual manner on the saddle.

"Heap good!" observed Black Feather.

Then, like a cat Merriwell wheeled about, lifted his feet over the handlebars to which he clung, slipped down till he hung over the forward wheel, placed his feet on the pedals, and rode in that manner. This made it look as though he were dragging the bicycle along behind him.

There was a stir among the Indians, and they looked at each other.

Without stopping the bicycle, Frank swung back over the handle bars to the saddle. Having reached this position, he stopped suddenly, turning the forward wheel at an angle, sitting there and gracefully balancing on the stationary machine.

"Heap much good!" declared Black Feather, growing enthusiastic.

"Oh, those little things are dead easy," assured Frank, with a laugh. "Do you really desire to see me do something that is worth doing?"

"What more white boy can do?"

"Several things, but I'll have to make a larger circle."

It was growing dark swiftly now, the sun being down and the shadows of the

mountains lying dark and gloomy in the valleys.

"Go 'head," directed Black Feather.

Frank started the bicycle in motion, and then, with it going at good speed, he swung down on one side and slowly but neatly crept through the frame, coming up on the other side and regaining the saddle without stopping.

"Pale face boy great medicine!" said Black Feather.

"Ugh!" grunted all the Indians but Blue Wolf.

The little savage was looking on in a sullen, wondering way, astonished and angered to think the white boy could do all those things, while he had been unable to mount the two wheeled horse.

"How do you like that, Black Feather?" asked Frank, cheerfully.

"Much big!" confessed the chief. "Do some more."

"All right. Catch onto this."

Then away Frank sped, lifting the forward wheel from the ground and letting it hand suspended in the air, while he rode along on the rear wheel.

"Merry is working hard enough," said Rattleton. "I never knew he could do so many tricks."

"There are lost of things about that fellow that none of us know anything about," asserted Browning, who was no less surprised, although he did not show it.

"He is a fool to work so hard to please these wretched savages!" muttered Diamond.

"Now, don't you take Frank Merriwell for a fool in anything!" came swiftly from Harry. "I never knew him to make a fool of himself in all my life, and I have seen a good deal of him."

"Well, why is he cutting up all those monkey tricks? What will it amount to when it is all over?"

"Wait and see."

"The Indians will treat us just the same as if he had not done those things."

"Perhaps so."

"Of course they will!"

"Now, Black Feather, old jiblets," cried Frank, in his merriest manner, "I am going to do something else. Get onto this."

Sending the bicycle along at high

speed Frank lay over the handlebars and swung his feet into the air till he held himself suspended in that manner, head down and feet up.

The Indians were more pleased and astonished than ever.

"Oh, it's all in knowing how!" laughed Frank, as he gracefully and lightly dropped back to the saddle.

Again the Indians grunted.

"Now, Black Feather, old chappie," said Frank, "I am going to do the greatest trick of all. I'll have to get a big start and have lots of room. Watch me close."

Away he went, bending over the handlebars and sending the bicycle flying over the ground. He acted as if he intended to make a big circle, but suddenly turned and rode straight toward the pass by which they had entered the basin. Before the Indians could realize his intention, he was almost out of sight in the darkness of the young night.

CHAPTER IX.

BROWNING'S RUSE.

Sudden howls of rage and dismay broke from the Indians. They shouted after the boy, but he kept right on, quickly disappearing from view.

"There," sighed Browning, with satisfaction, "I told you he was not doing all that work for nothing, fellows."

"He's done gone an' lef' us!" wailed Toots.

"That's what he has!" grated Diamond—"left us to the mercy of these miserable redskins! That's a fine trick!"

"Oh, will you ever get over it!" rasped Rattleton. "Why shouldn't he? He had his chance, and he'd been a fool not to skin out!"

"I thought he would stand by us in such a scrape as this."

"What you thought doesn't cut any ice. He'll come back."

"After we are murdered."

Rattleton would have said something more, but the Indians, who had been holding an excited conversation, suddenly grasped the four remaining lads in a threatening manner.

"Oh, mah goodness!" palpitated Toots. "Heah is whar I's gwan teh lose mah

wool! It am feelin' po'erful loose al ready!"

Browning was on the point of launching out with his heavy fists and making as good battle of it as he could when he heard Black Feather say:

"No hurt white boys. Make um keep still, so um not run 'way off like odder white boy. That am all."

"I'll take chances on it," muttered Bruce, giving up quietly.

The four lads were forced to sit on the ground, and some of the savages squatted near. The fire was replenished, and the Indians seemed to hold a council.

"Deciding how they will kill us," said Diamond, gloomily.

"Nothing of the sort," declared Rattleton. "See them making motions toward the bicycles. They are talking about the wonderful two-wheeled horses."

"Gracious!" gasped Toots; "dat meks mah hair feel easier!"

Browning held a hand on his stomach in a pathetic manner.

"Oh, my!" he murmured. "How vacant and lonely my interior department seems to be! Methinks I could dine."

"The hard-bread and jerked beef," whispered Jack. "It is in the carriers attached to the wheels."

"Yes, and we had better let it remain there."

"Why?"

"These Indians look hungry, too."

"You think——"

"I do. They will take it away from us and eat it if we bring it out. That would leave us in a bad fix."

"But they can get it out of the carriers."

"They can, but they won't."

"Why not?"

"They are afraid of those bicycles—so afraid that they will not go near them. Therefore our hard-bread and jerked-beef is safe as long as we let it remain where it is."

Harry agreed with Bruce, and they decided not to touch the food in the carriers; but all were thirsty again, and they expressed a desire to have another drink from the water hole.

To this the Indians did not object, and they took turns at drinking, although the

water did not taste nearly as sweet as it had the first time.

Having satisfied themselves in this manner they sat down on the ground once more, being compelled to do so by the red skins, who were watching them closely.

"They have us in a bad position in case they take a notion to crack us over the head," said Harry. "We wouldn't get a show."

"Mah gracious!" gurgled Toots, holding fast to his scalp with both hands. "We's gwan teh git it fo' suah, chilluns! De fus' fing we know we won't no nuffin'!"

"We must get out of this somehow," muttered Bruce.

"That's right," nodded Jack. "Merriwell has taken care of himself, and left us to take care of ourselves."

He spoke in a manner that showed he felt that Frank had done them a great wrong.

"It's a good thing he got away as he did," asserted Harry. "Now we know we have a friend who is not a captive like ourselves, and we know he knows the fix we are in. You may be sure he will do what he can for us."

"He'll do what he can for himself. How can he do anything for us?"

"He'll find a way."

"I doubt it."

"You have become a great doubter and kicker of late, Diamond. It is certain the loss of that Mormon girl who married the other fellow has soured you, for you were not this way before. Why don't you try to forget her?"

"I wish you might forget her! You make me sick talking about her so much! I don't like it at all!"

"If you don't like it lump it."

Jack and Harry glared at each other as if they were on the point of coming to blows, and this gave Browning an idea. He saw the Indians had noticed there was a disagreement between the boys, and he leaned forward, saying in a low tone:

"Keep at it, fellows—keep at it! I have a scheme. Pretend you are fighting, and they will let you get on your feet. When I cry ready we'll all make a jump for our wheels, catch them up, place them in the form of a square, and stand

within the square. The redskins are afraid of the wheels—think them 'bad medicine.' They won't dare touch us."

Browning had made his idea clear with surprising swiftness, and the other boys were astonished, for they had come to believe that the big fellow never had an original idea in his head.

Both Jack and Harry were taken by the scheme, and Diamond quickly said:

"It's a go. Keep on with the quarrel, Rattleton."

Harry did so, and in a very few seconds they were at it in a manner that seemed intensely in earnest. Their voices rose higher and higher, and they scowled fiercely, flourishing their clinched hands in the air and shaking them under each other's nose.

Browning got into the game by making a bluff at stopping the quarrel, which seemed to be quite ineffectual. He seemed to try to force himself between them, but Rattleton hit him a hard crack on the jaw with his fist, with which he was threatening Diamond.

"Scissors!" gurgled Bruce, as he keeled over on his back, holding both hands to his jaw. "What do you take me for—a punching bag?"

"You have received what peacemakers usually get," said Harry, as he continued to threaten Diamond.

The Indians looked on complacently, their appearance seeming to indicate that they were mildly interested, but did not care a continental if the two white boys hammered each other.

Jack scrambled to his feet and dared Harry to get up. Harry declared he would not take a dare, and he got up. Then Bruce and Toots lost no time in doing likewise, and, just when it seemed that the apparently angry lads were going to begin hammering each other Browning cried:

"Ready!"

Immediately the boys made a leap for the bicycles, caught them up, formed a square with them, and stood behind the machines, like soldiers within a fort.

The Indians uttered shouts of astonishment, and the four boys found themselves looking into the muzzles of the guns in the hands of the savages.

"What white boys mean to do?"

harshly demanded Black Feather. "No can run away."

"Heap shoot um!" howled Blue Wolf, who seemed eager to slaughter the captives. "Then no can run away."

"Hold on!" ordered Browning, with a calm wave of his hand. "We want to parley."

"Want to pow-wow?" asked Black Feather.

"That's it."

"No pow-wow with white boys. White boys Injuns' prisoners. No pow-wow with prisoners."

"No!" shouted Blue Wolf. "Shoot um! shoot um!"

"Land ob massy!" gurgled Toots. "Dey am gwan teh shoot!"

"Black Feather," said Browning, with assumed assurance and dignity, "it will not be a healthy thing for your men to shoot us."

"How? how?"

"Do you see that we are protected by the 'bad medicine' machines? If you were to do us harm now, these machines would utterly destroy you and every one of your party. The moment you fired at us these machines would be like so many demons let loose, and as they are not made of flesh and blood, they could not be harmed. Not one of your party could escape them."

The light of the fire showed that the Indians looked at each other with mingled incredulity and fear.

"Scrate Gott!" muttered Rattleton. "Is this Browning I hear! How did you happen to think of such a bluff?"

"Have to think in a case like this," returned the big fellow, guardedly. "I think only when it is absolutely necessary. This is one of those occasions."

The Indians got together and held a consultation.

"Can't we make a run for it now?" asked Diamond, eagerly.

"We can," nodded Bruce, "but we won't run far. They'd be able to drop us before we could get out of the light of the fire."

"What can we do?"

"Why, we'll have to——"

Browning was interrupted by a clatter of hoofs, which caused him to turn toward

the east. The Indians heard the sound, and they turned also.

Then wild yells of terror rent the air.

CHAPTER X.

ESCAPE.

Coming through the darkness at a mad gallop was what seemed to be the gleaming skeleton of a horse. The ribs, the bones of the neck, legs and head, all showed plainly, glowing with a white light.

And on the back of the horse, which had sheered to the north and was passing the fire, sat what seemed to be the skeleton of a human being, the bones gleaming the same as those of the horse.

It was almost astonishing and awe-inspiring spectacle, and it frightened the Indians greatly.

"Howugh—owugh—owugh!" wailed Black Feather, dismally.

Then the savages dropped on their faces, covering their eyes, so they could not see the skeleton horseman.

Almost at the same moment as the horseman was passing the spot the ghastly-appearing thing seemed to give a sudden swing about and completely disappear.

"Poly hoker!" gasped Rattleton. "It's gone!"

"That's right!" palpitated Diamond—"vanished in a moment!"

"Oh, mah soul—mah soul!" wailed Toots. "Dat sholy am de ol' debbil hisse'f, chilluns! When we see it next it's gwan teh hab one ob us fo sho!"

"Hark!" commanded Browning.

The beat of the horse's feet could be distinctly heard, but the creature had turned about and was going back toward the pass through the bluffs.

Chucker-chucker-chuck! chucker-chucker-chuck! chucker-chucker-chuck! came the ghostly sounds of the galloping horse.

"It's turned about!" gasped Harry, in astonishment.

"It's going!" fluttered Jack.

"And we'd better be going, too!" put in Browning.

Then with a familiar whirring sound something came flying toward them through the darkness, causing Toots to utter a wild shriek of terror.

Into the light of the camp fire flashed a boy who was mounted on a bicycle, and they saw it was Frank Merriwell.

"Away!" he hissed, as he flew past them. "Make straight for the pass by which we entered this pocket. I will join you."

Then he was gone.

Browning gave Toots a sharp shake, fiercely whispering:

"Mount your wheel and keep with us if you want to save your scalp! If you don't you will be left behind."

Then the boys leaped upon their bicycles and were away in a moment, before the prostrate Indians had recovered from the shock of terror given them by the appearance of the skeleton horse and rider.

For the time Bruce Browning took the lead, and the others followed him. Toots had heeded the big fellow's warning words, and he was not left behind.

Barely had they passed beyond the range of the firelight and disappeared in the darkness when wild yells of anger came from behind them, and they knew the Indians had discovered they were gone.

"Bend low! bend low!" hissed Diamond. "They may take a fancy to shoot after us! Stoop, fellows!"

Stoop they did, bending low over the handle bars of their bicycles.

Bang! bang! bang!

The Indians fired several shots, and they heard some of the bullets whistle past, but they were not hit.

"Well, that's what I call luck!" muttered the young Virginian.

"What do you call luck?" asked Rattleton.

"The appearance of that skeleton horse and rider in time to scare the Indians and give us a chance to get away."

"Oh!" said Harry, sarcastically, "I didn't know but it was Merry's return. I told you he would not desert us."

"I wonder how he happened to come back just then?"

"He came back because he was watching for an opportunity to help us, and he saw we had a splendid chance to get away while the redskins were scared by the appearance of the horse and rider. You ought to know him well enough to know

he is not the fellow to desert his friends in a scrape like this."

Diamond was silent.

"I wonder where Frank is?" said Browning. "He said he would join us, and he is——"

"Right here, old man," said a cheerful voice, as a flying bicycle brought Merriwell out of the darkness to Browning's side. "This way, fellows! We'll hit the pass and get out of here as soon as we can."

"Lawd bress yeh, Marser Frank!" cried Toots, joyfully. "I didn't know's I'd see yeh no mo', boy!"

"I hope you didn't think I had left you for good?"

"No, sar!" declared the colored boy. "I done knows yeh better dan dat, sar! I knowed yeh'd come back, but I was afeared yeh'd come back too late, sar. Dem Injunes was gittin' po'erful anxious fo' dis yar wool ob mine—yes, sar!"

"Well, I am glad to know you thought I would not desert you. I don't want any of my friends to think I would go back on them in the hour of need."

Diamond was silent.

The pass was found without difficulty, and they went speeding through it.

"How did you happen to turn up just then, Frank?" asked Harry.

"I was waiting for a chance to come to you, and I saw the chance when that horse and rider frightened the Indians."

"The horse and rider—where are they?" asked Browning.

"Gone through the pass ahead of us."

"Mah gracious!" exclaimed the colored boy. "What if dat ol' debbil teks a noshun teh wait fu' us?"

"What sort of ghost business was it, anyway?" questioned Rattleton. "It seemed to be a skeleton horse and a skeleton rider, and it disappeared in a twinkling. I will admit this skeleton business is beginning to work on my nerves."

"It is rather creepish," laughed Frank; "but I do not think it is very dangerous."

"All the same, you do not attempt to explain the mystery."

"Not now."

"Not now? Can you later?"

"Perhaps so."

"It is plain he knows no more about it

than the rest of us," said Diamond. "As for me, I am getting sick of seeing vanishing lakes and vanishing skeletons. If I get out of this part of the country alive, you'll never catch me here again."

"Meh, too!" exclaimed Toots.

"Well, I don't know as any of us will care to revisit it," laughed Frank. "Anyway, we have been very lucky in escaping from those Indians. That you can't deny."

"You fooled them easily," said Rattleton.

"Yes, and they did not even take a shot at me, which was a surprise. I expected they would pop away a few times."

"What are we going to do after we get out on the open desert again?" asked Jack. "It seems to me we'll be as bad off as ever."

"We'll have to go round the range to the south, or wait for the Indians to get away from that water hole, so we can go through the mountains as we originally intended."

"The Indians may not go away."

"I rather think they have been scared so they'll not hang round there long. I don't fancy they'll be anywhere in the vicinity by morning."

"If they are gone——"

"We'll be all right, providing we can make our hard-bread and dried beef hold out till we can reach one of the small railroad towns.

"How far away is the railroad?"

"Not much over fifty miles."

"That is easy!" declared Rattleton.

"We can make it on a spurt!"

As they reached the eastern opening of the pass, their attention was attracted by a bright light that seemed to shine out from the very niche where they had found the jewel-decorated skeleton.

CHAPTER XI.

GONE!

"What does that mean?" exclaimed Jack, in astonishment.

"Land ob wartermillions!" gasped Toots. "It am de debbil's light fo' suah, chilluns! Don' yeh go near it!"

"By Jove!" cried Frank. "That is worth investigating! Come on, fellows!"

He headed straight toward the light,

and as they came near the niche they saw the bejewelled skeleton was again seated as they had seen it in the first place, and a bright flood of light was shining upon it from some mysterious place.

"It's back!" exclaimed Harry, in astonishment.

"Sure enough!" said Frank. "It is on deck again."

"I tells yeh to keep away from dat skillerton!" shouted Toots. "Hit am gwan teh grab yo' this time if yo' gits near hit!"

"We'll take chances on that," declared Frank. "This time we won't give it time to get away, but we'll go right up and examine it."

"That's what we will!" agreed Harry.

But even as he spoke, the light disappeared, and this made it impossible for them to see anything up there in that dark nook.

"Ha! ha! ha!"

Again they heard the mocking laughter, smothered, hollow and ghostly in sound.

"Somebody is having lots of fun with us," said Frank, as he leaped from his wheel. "It may be a good joke, but I fail to see where the 'ha, ha, comes in.'"

"Is the skeleton gone?"

"I don't know, but I'll mighty soon find out."

Without hesitation he swung himself up to the niche in the rocks, and Rattleton followed, determined that Frank should not go alone into danger.

Harry afterward confessed that he was shivering all over when he climbed up there in the darkness, but his fear did not keep him from sticking to Merry.

A cry broke from Frank's lips.

"What is it?" called Browning, from below.

"By the eternal skies, it's gone again!"

"Didn't I tole yeh!" cried Toots, from a distance. "Come erway from dar, Marser Frank! If yo' don', yo' 's gwan teh be grabbed!"

"It is gone!" agreed Rattleton. "This beats the Old Nick!"

Again they heard that mocking laugh, which seemed to come down from some point above their heads.

"Wooh!" shivered Harry. "That sounds pleasant!"

"Hang it all!" exclaimed Frank, in a voice that indicated chagrin. "I don't like to be made fun of this way! If we don't solve this mystery before we go away I shall always regret it."

"Beware!"

It was the same voice that had uttered the warning when they were riding into the pass, and now, in the darkness of night, it sounded even more dismal and uncanny than before.

"Come out and show yourself," called Frank.

To this there was no answer.

For some time the boys remained there, but they were forced to abandon the task of solving the mystery that night. Frank descended to the ground with no small reluctance, and Harry kept close to him. They mounted their wheels and rode away once more, fully expecting to hear the mocking laughter, or the ghostly voice calling after them. In this, however, they were disappointed, as nothing of the kind happened.

After they had ridden some distance, Frank proposed that they halt for the night.

"We are in for an open-air camp to-night," he said. "It is something we did not expect, but it can't be helped, and as the night is not cold I think we can get along all right. We need rest, too."

"That's right," agreed Bruce. "I feel as if I need about a week of steady resting, but I don't care to take it here."

"How about the Indians?" asked Jack. "We are not very far from them, and they might find us."

"I scarcely think there is any danger of that."

"Why not?"

"Those redskins were so badly frightened that they'll not go hunting after white boys to-night. It is more likely they will skin out and make for the Shoshone Reservation, on which they must belong."

"But what if they should happen to follow us?" Jack persisted.

"We must take turns at standing guard to-night, and the guard should be able to give us warning of danger in time for us to mount our wheels and get away."

It was plain that Diamond was not in

favor of stopping there, but he said no more.

Fortunately the night was warm, so they suffered no discomfort by sleeping thus. No dew fell out there on the desert.

It was arranged that Diamond should stand guard first, while Frank came second, with Toots for the last guard toward morning.

They ate some of the hard bread and jerked beef and then threw themselves down, with their bicycles near at hand, so they could spring up and mount in a hurry if necessary.

Browning was the first to stretch himself on the ground, and he was snoring almost immediately. The others soon fell asleep.

The rim of a round red moon was showing away to the eastward when Jack awoke Frank.

"How is it?" Merriwell asked. "Have you heard or seen anything suspicious?"

"Not a thing," was the reply. "All is still as death out here—far too still. I don't like it."

"Well, it is not real jolly," confessed Frank, with a light laugh; "but I don't think we need to be worried about visitors, and that is one good thing."

Jack was fast asleep in a short time.

Morning came, and Toots was the first to awaken. Dawn was breaking in the east as he sat up, rubbing his eyes and muttering:

"Good land! dat am de hardes' spring mattrus dis coon ebber snoozed on—yes, sar! Nebber struck nuffin' lek dat befo'."

Then he looked around in some surprise.

"Gracious sakes!" he continued. "Whar am de hotel? It done moved away in de night an' lef' us."

It was some time before he realized that they had not put up at a hotel the night before.

"Reckum dis is whar we stopped las' night," he finally said. "I 'membah 'bout dat now. We was ter tek turns watchin'. I ain't took no turn at all, an' it's mawnin'. He! he! he! Guess de chap dat was ter wake me fell asleep hisself an' clean fergot it. Dat meks meh 'bout so much sleep ahaid ob de game."

He was feeling good over this when he noticed that three forms were stretched

on the ground near at hand, instead of four.

"Whar am de odder one?" he muttered. "One ob dem boys am gone fo' suah. Land ob wartermillions! What do hit mean? Dar am Dimun, an' dar am Rattletum, an' dar am Brownin', but whar—whar am Marsers Frank?"

In a moment he was filled with alarm, and he lost no time in grasping Harry's shoulder and giving it a shake, while he cried:

"Wek up heah, yo' sleepy haid—wek up, I tells yeh! Dar's suffin' wrong heah, ur I's a fool nigger!"

"Muts the whatter?" mumbled Rattleton, sleepily. "Can't you let a fellow sleep a minute? It isn't my turn yet."

"Yoah turn!" shouted Toots. "Wek up, yo' fool! It's done come mawnin', an' dar's suffin' happened."

"Eh?" grunted Harry, starting up and rubbing his eyes. "Why the moon is just rising."

"Moon!" snorted the colored boy. "Dat's de sun comin' up! An' I don't beliebe yo' took yoah turn keepin' watch."

Browning grunted and rolled over, flinging out one arm and giving Toots a crack on the neck that keeled him over on the ground.

"Landy goodness!" squealed the darkey, grasping his neck with both hands. "What yo' tryin' ter do, boy? Want ter kill a po' coon? Nebber seen such car'less pusson as yo' am, sar!"

"Oh, shut up your racket!" growled the big college lad. "I'm not half rested yet. Call me when breakfast is ready."

"Yo' 'll done git yeh own breakfas' dis mawnin', sar; but befo' dar's any breakfas' we's gwan ter know what has become ob Marsers Frank. He's gone."

"Gone?" cried Bruce, sitting up with remarkable quickness.

"Gone?" ejaculated Harry, popping up as if he were worked by springs.

"Gone where?" asked Diamond, also sitting up and staring around.

"Dat's jes' what I wants ter know, chilluns," declared Toots. "Dat boy ain't heah, an' I's po'erful feared de old skillerton debbil has cotched him."

"Why—why," said Jack, "I woke him and he took my place."

"But nobody roused me," declared Rattleton.

"Nor me," asserted Browning.

"Git up, chilluns—git up!" squealed Toots, excitedly. "We's gotter find dat boy in a hurry! 'Spect he's in a berry bad scrape!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

By this time the boys were fully aroused. An investigation showed that Merriwell's wheel was gone.

"Didn't I tole yeh old debbil skillerton would done cotch some ob us!" cried Toots, in great distress.

"I hardly understand what the skeleton could have wanted with Merry's wheel," observed Browning.

"G'way dar, boy! Didn' de skillerton ride a hawse!"

"And you think it is an up-to-date skeleton that has decided to ride a bicycle hereafter. In that case, I congratulate Mr. Skeleton on his good sense."

"It must be that Frank has gone on a ride without saying anything to us," said Jack. "I do not see any other way of explaining it."

"But why should he do such a thing?" asked Rattleton.

"That is where you stick me."

Browning slowly shook his head.

"It is remarkable that he should do such a thing without saying anything to us," declared the big fellow.

"And he must have taken that ride in the night," said Jack.

"While he should have been on guard," added Harry.

The boys stood looking at each other in sober dismay.

"It isn't possible that Merry could have gone daffy," muttered Rattleton.

"He is too well balanced for that."

"I don't know," came gloomily from Diamond. "This dismal, burning desert is enough to turn the brain of any fellow."

"Yah!" cried Toots. "Don' yeh git no noshun dat boy ebber had his brain turned! It am de weak brains dat git turned dat way. His brain was all right, but I jes' know fo' suah dat he hab been cotched."

"And I suppose you want to riun away as soon as possible before you are 'cotched?'"

Then the colored boy surprised them all by saying:

"No, sar, I don' want teh go 'way till we knows what hab become ob Marser Frank. Dat boy alwus stick by his frien's, an' dis coon am reddy teh stick by him, even if he do git cotched."

"Good stuff, Toots!" cried Rattleton, approvingly. "You are all right! If anything has happened to Frank we'll know what it is or leave our bones here."

The boys were worried. They hurriedly talked over the remarkable disappearance, trying to arrive at an understanding of its meaning.

At length it was agreed that Frank might have gone back to try to solve the mystery of the skeleton, and then they decided that two of the party should remain where they had made their night bivouac, while the other two proceeded to search for Merriwell.

Diamond insisted on being one of the searchers, and Rattleton was determined to be the other, so Browning and Toots were left behind.

The boys mounted their wheels and rode back toward the pass through the bluffs.

Diamond was downcast again.

"Everything is going against us," he declared. "There is fate in it. I am afraid we'll not get out of this wretched desert."

"Oh, you're unwell, that's what's the matter with you!" declared Harry, scornfully. "I'll be glad when you are yourself again."

"That's all right," muttered Diamond. "You are too thoughtless, that's what's the matter with you."

They approached the spot where the mysterious skeleton had been seen, and both were watching for the niche in the rocks.

Suddenly they were startled by hearing a wild cry from far above their heads and looking upward they saw Frank Merriwell running along the very brink of the cliff, but limping badly, as if he were lame.

But what astonished and startled them

the most was to see a strange-looking, bare-headed man, who was in close pursuit of Frank. Above his head the man wildly flourished a gleaming long-bladed knife, while he uttered loud cries of rage.

"Smooly hoke!" cried Harry. "Will you look at that!"

Diamond suddenly grew intensely excited.

"What can we do?—what can we do?" he exclaimed. Frank is hurt! That creature is running him down! He will murder him!"

"If Merry had a pistol he would be all right."

"But he hasn't! We must do something, Harry—we must!"

"Neither of us has a gun."

"No, but—"

"We can't get up there."

"But we must do something!"

"We can't!"

Jack grew more and more frantic. He leaped from his wheel and seemed to be looking for some place to try to scale the face of the bluff.

"Oh, if I could get up there!" he groaned. "I'd show Frank that I was ready to stand by him! I'd fight that man bare handed!"

And Rattleton did not doubt it, for he well knew how hot-blooded Diamond was, and the young Virginian had never failed to fight when the occasion arose. He would not shirk any kind of an encounter.

Merriwell saw them and shouted something to them, but they could not understand what he said.

"Turn! turn!" screamed Jack. "You must fight that man, or he will stab you in the back! He is going to strike you!"

Frank seemed to hear and comprehend, for he suddenly wheeled about and made a stand. In a moment the man with the knife had rushed upon him and struck with that gleaming blade.

A groan escaped Jack's lips as he saw that blow, but it turned to a gasp of relief when Frank stopped it by catching the man's wrist.

"Give it to him! Give it to him!" shrieked Diamond, dancing around in a wild frenzy of anxiety and fear.

Then the boys below witnessed a terrific struggle on the heights above them.

The man seemed mad with a desire to plunge the knife into Frank, and it was plain that Merriwell did not wish to harm the unknown, but was trying to disarm him.

"What folly! what folly!" panted Diamond. "He'll get his hand free and stab Merry sure! Beat him down, Frank—beat him down!"

Once Frank slipped and fell to his knees. A fierce yell of triumph broke from the man, and it seemed that he would succeed in using the knife at last.

With a groan of anguish, Diamond covered his eyes that he might not witness the death of the friend he loved. For Jack Diamond did love Frank Merriwell, for all that he had complained against him of late.

A cry of relief from Rattleton caused Jack to look again, and he saw Frank had regained his feet and was continuing the battle.

And now the man fought with a fury that was nerve thrilling to witness. His movements were swift and savage, and he tried again and again to draw the knife across Frank's throat.

Jack and Harry scarcely breathed until, with a display of strength and skill, Frank disarmed his assailant by giving his arm a wrench, causing the knife to fly through the air and fall over the edge of the cliff.

Down to the ground below rattled the knife, and then Diamond said:

"Now Frank will be able to handle the fellow!"

But flinging his arms about the boy, the man made a mad effort to spring over the brink. For some seconds, locked thus in each other's arms, man and boy tottered on the very verge, and then they swayed back.

Frank broke the hold of the man, striking him a heavy blow a second later. The man reeled and dropped on the edge of the precipice. He scrambled up hastily, but a great slice of rock cleaved off beneath his feet and went plunging downward.

Then the watching boys saw the unknown tottering on the brink, wildly waving his arms in an endeavor to regain his balance. Frank sprang forward to aid him.

Too late!

With a wild scream of despair, the strange man toppled over and whirled downward to his death.

"It's all up with him, poor fellow," said Frank Merriwell, as he stood near the body of the unknown man, looking down at the face that was white and calm and peaceful in death.

Frank had disappeared from the top of the bluff while Jack and Harry were bending over the fallen man, and had reappeared nearly twenty minutes later by swinging down from the niche in which the mysterious skeleton had been seen.

"Who is he?" asked Harry.

"What is he?" asked Jack.

"I am afraid those questions cannot be answered," confessed Frank. "That he was a raving maniac I am sure, and he lived in a remarkable cave close at hand; but who he is or how he came to be there in that cave I do not know."

"Well, how you came to be up there with him running you down to stick a knife in you is what I want to know," said Harry.

"That's right," Jack nodded. "Explain it, old man."

Then Frank told them how, after the moon rose the night before, he had taken his wheel with the intention of riding around the camp, feeling he could keep watch as well that way as any. After the moon was well up, he saw there was no one anywhere about, and a desire to revisit the spot where they had seen the skeleton seized upon him. He rode to the spot, but there was no skeleton in the niche among the rocks. Leaving his bicycle, he climbed up there to examine once more, and to his astonishment, found that what seemed to be a solid, immovable stone had turned in some manner, disclosing an opening.

Then, with reckless curiosity, Frank resolved to investigate further, and he descended into the opening, found some stone steps, and was soon in a cavern. The first thing he discovered was the skeleton, still decorated as the boys had seen it in the first place, and he remained there till he found how it could be placed in view on the block of stone and then

removed in a twinkling. He also found a lamp with a strong reflector, which had thrown its light on the skeleton from a hole in the rocks. There was another opening near that, where a person in the cave could look out on the desert, and Frank knew the ghostly voice they had heard must have come from that place.

Merriwell continued his investigations, having lighted the lamp, by the light of which he wandered through the cave. Suddenly he came face to face with an old man, who seemed surprised, but spoke quietly to him.

The old man declared he was "Professor Morris Fillmore," but did not say what he was professor of, and he volunteered to explain everything to the boy.

This he did, telling how he worked the skeleton to frighten away those who might molest him in his solitude, as he wished to be alone. There was another entrance to the cave, and in a large, airy chamber a horse was kept. The horse was coal black, but on one side of him was drawn the outlines of the skeleton frame of a horse, and the strange old man explained that he had a suit of clothes on one side of which he had traced the skeleton of a human being. This had been done with phosphorus, and it glowed with a white light in the darkness.

The old hermit had entered the pocket and ridden near the camp of the Indians. When he turned about the skeleton tracings in phosphorus could not be seen, and so the ghostly horse and rider seemed to disappear in a most marvelous manner.

Frank questioned him concerning the treasure, and the man seemed to grow excited and suspicious. He said something about the treasure being the property of some one who had fled from the Destroying Angels of the Mormons in the old days, but had perished in the desert. Frank was led to believe that the skeleton was that of the original owner of the treasure.

But when the boy would have left the

cave the strange man told him he could not do so. He informed Frank that he could never go out again, and then it was that the boy became sure Fillmore was crazy.

As the man was armed, Frank decided to use strategy. First he sought to lull the man's suspicions, and after being watched closely for hours he found a chance to slip away.

Almost immediately the man discovered what had happened, and pursued. By chance Frank fled out through a passage that led upward till the top of the bluff was reached, but he fell and sprained his ankle, so he was unable to get away. The hermit followed, and the mad battle for life took place.

"Well, this is amazing!" gasped Jack. "What are you going to do with that treasure?"

"Take it to some place for safe deposit and advertise for the legal heirs of Professor Millard Fillmore."

"And if no heirs appear——"

"The treasure will belong to us."

Frank's plan was carried out. All the treasure was removed from the cavern, in which the mysterious old hermit was buried. The hermit's horse was set free, and the boys carried the treasure to Ullin, Nevada, where it was shipped to Carson and deposited in a bank there.

"If it is not claimed in a year's time, boys," said Frank, "we will go about the work of having it evenly divided among us. In that case we will have made a good thing out of this trip across the continent."

"Hooray fo' us!" shouted Toots.

[THE END.]

The next number (64) of the Tip Top Weekly will contain "Frank Merriwell's Underground Search; or, Saving the Buried Heiress," by the author of "Frank Merriwell."

TIP TOP WEEKLY

A PUBLICATION FOR YOUNG AMERICANS.

NEW YORK, JUNE 26, 1897.

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A "MOTTO" CONTEST.

A Motto for the Tip Top Weekly.

FIRST PRIZE—TEN DOLLARS IN GOLD.

The readers of this publication are invited to suggest a fitting motto for the Tip Top Weekly, a motto that can be adopted and placed permanently upon the first cover page. In writing it special attention must be paid to brevity and conciseness. The policy of the weekly must be considered, and the motto must be both attractive and well sounding. The less words, the better.

PRIZES.

- \$10.00 IN GOLD FOR THE BEST MOTTO.
- \$5.00 FOR THE SECOND.
- \$3.00 FOR THE THIRD.
- \$2.00 FOR THE FOURTH.

The contest will close SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 1897.

(The motto must be written upon this coupon).

I suggest as a motto for the TIP TOP WEEKLY

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N. B.—Competitors are not limited to one trial, but can send in as many suggestions as they please, using a coupon with each suggestion.

Address TIP TOP WEEKLY "MOTTO" CONTEST,
STREET & SMITH, New York City.

Talks With Tip Top Readers.

Your attention is particularly called to Mr. Burt L. Standish's next story (Tip Top Weekly No. 64). It is entitled "Frank Merriwell's Underground Search; or, Saving the Buried Heiress." The name, attractive as it is, gives only a faint idea of the thrilling adventure encountered by Frank and his faithful companions while unearthing a weird mystery. It is undoubtedly the most interesting story yet written by the talented author, and it will go far to convince the readers of the Tip Top Weekly that they are right in so lavishly praising their favorite publication.

In obedience to our promise we have inaugurated in this number a new prize contest. Its simplicity and interest is plainly apparent, and the details are such that any reader can participate. Mark this sentence well—any reader can participate. In those four words can be found the keystone of the Tip Top Weekly contests. Our prize competitions are not intricate, puzzling or tedious. They are so invented that any or all our readers can take part. In the present case, a motto is called for. This publication is now more than a year old, and it is time that its motto be announced. It is fitting that the readers should select one, as it is to them we appeal, and from them we expect both interest and encouragement. Now see what you can do in this matter. Study the terms carefully and do not forget that there is money in it. See next column for particulars.

While on the subject of contests it will be well to remind you that the list of prize winners in the "Summer Sport" contest will be announced in No. 64, next week's issue of the Tip Top Weekly. Perhaps you have won a watch. Fifty are to be given away.

No. 66 will contain the "Prize Plot" story written by Mr. Standish after an outline submitted by Mr. Harry S. Adair of McCounelsville, Ohio. The story is extremely interesting and is based on an exceedingly clever plot. Do not fail to read it. The title will shortly be announced.

A new series of stories on a subject of timely interest to all boys will be commenced in No. 67. Frank Merriwell is the hero, of course, and all the old favorites, Bart Hodge, Barney Molloy, Ephraim Gallup and others will be reintroduced. Tell your friends of the promised treat.

Answers to Correspondents.

B. L. W., Newark, N. J.—1. You will see by reading the notice in "Talks with Tip Top Readers" that your wish has been anticipated. You are not alone in the request to have Bart Hodge reintroduced. A multitude of letters on that subject have been received. 2. J. E. Duffy holds the record for kicking the football from a drop kick, 168 feet 7½ inches.

C. C., Georgetown, Col.—1. You have no cause to worry, as you are only one inch under the average height for a boy fifteen years of age. 2. There is no recipe to increase your growth. Help nature all you can by outdoor exercise, keep in good health and good humor, and you will, no doubt, grow to be an average sized man.

L. J. W., Johnstown, Pa.—1. Clog dancers do not, to our knowledge, use any preparation to "limber up" their joints. Practice and a certain leg exercise is all that is required to make them supple. 2. Boys between the ages of fourteen and seventeen years may, with the consent of their parents or guardians, be enlisted to serve in the navy until they shall arrive at the age of twenty-one years. 3. Write to the commandant of the Washington Navy Yard. 4. The pay for musicians in the navy is much larger than the pay of ordinary seamen.

BINGO.

Bingo was a dog.

Bingo was exceedingly black. Eyes, skin, hair, everything about Bingo, except his disposition, was of the most sombre hue. He had the most charming qualities as an offset to his funereal coloring. He was intelli-

The Sad Fate of a

Fireman's Dog.

gent, he was kind, he was unselfish, he was faithful, and he was devoted to his vocation.

Both his parents were French, so, according to the law of canine genealogy, Bingo was a French poodle.

Bingo came into the possession of a fireman when he was a very young and utterly ignorant little poodle. The puppy was trained with the greatest care, and Bingo became a fire-dog.

A fire-dog is one which lives in a fire-station and takes an active interest in conflagrations.

The fireman taught Bingo many tricks and accomplishments, but where fires were concerned the dog picked up everything by himself. In this particular station the horses are kept in stalls close to the engine. Everything is arranged so that there will be no delay in starting off for the fire the moment the alarm is sounded. The harness hangs from the ceiling, high enough from the ground to allow the horses to come under it.

The moment the alarm sounds the horses start with the greatest alacrity, trot to the engine, and put themselves in position to be harnessed. By the time they are there, the firemen are sliding down the smooth round pole which goes from the ground floor of the engine-house up to the room where they sleep.

The harness is dropped on the horses, the buckles made fast in a jiffy. The driver vaults into his seat, and in a moment more the engine is galloping full tilt through the busy streets, the firemen hoarsely shouting to warn vehicles and pedestrians to get out of the way. It is a most exciting sight to see the horses bounding along, the heavy engine rattling and saying over the stones.

Bingo soon determined what his function was, and he acquitted himself of it with the most ardent zeal. This, of course, was after he had grown up and had reached maturity. When he was a wobbly little puppy, and when later he was a thoughtless, giddy young dog, he did not go to fires, but was fed and trained upstairs.

But he grew to be very strong, although he was never very large. His hair was clipped, so that he looked somewhat like an African lion. It was cut very close in places, but was left thick around his shoulders and head, with a tuft on the end of his tail. He had little amulets of his own hair on his legs, and a little clump on his hanches.

His black shiny eyes glistened from beneath the silky hair that hung over them, and he looked so keen and quick that one felt obliged to be very clear and precise with him, because he had the air of not being able to lose any time in foolishness.

Bang! bang! bang! would go the gong. The horses would come clattering forward, trampling the floor with their sounding hoofs, and at the same moment Bingo's cheery bark was heard, as he scurried around in mad anxiety to get everybody off all right to put out the fire. Oh, how important he felt when the alarm was given and he felt called on to contribute to the good of the community by his generous efforts!

After the engine had started out he tore along ahead of it, turning round now and then to see that it was following, and dodging around among the feet of the horses and the vans that he met. He barked all this time with a tremendous sense of his importance, as if proclaiming, "Clear the way, good folk! Clear the way! There is a fire, and we are in a hurry to put it out!"

Bingo used to follow the men who went into the burning building, and would frequently make his way to the roof. It was his chief delight to get near the fireman who was directing the stream upon the fire.

When the fire was out, he trotted back with the proudest air of complacency, and upon returning to the engine-house he would frisk among the burly firemen as if courting attention and praise for his services.

One cold, bright night in December, the fire-alarm sounded. The horses sprang to the engine. There was the rush of firemen, but there occurred for some reason or other a moment's delay. Bingo was skipping around, in great distress of mind at this hindrance. There was that fire burning, and where was he?

As soon as the doors were opened he charged madly forward. Some one was in his way, however, and in dodging him he flung himself against a door-post. The shock was so great that he was thrown back, and fell under the hoofs of the horses as they charged out. A heavy hoof with its iron shoe crushed down upon his side.

Poor Bingo! When the engine had passed over him, he feebly and painfully dragged himself toward one of the stalls for the horses. He was panting, and once or twice he uttered a feeble whine. There was not one of those he loved most near at hand to comfort him. They were at the fire. He would never go to a fire again. He raised his head and looked around the familiar station with a sigh; then his head fell heavily to the ground, and Bingo was dead.

Punishing an Elephant.

Some elephants resemble men in their liability to sudden outbursts of passion, and in their exhibition of remorse when, the passion having subsided, they see the results of their violent temper. An illustration of an elephant's violence and contrition is given by the author of "Rough Notes of an Old Soldier."

While the party was in camp, a Mahout went with his elephant to cut forage. As he was binding it in bundles the elephant began to help himself, and knocked about the bundles already tied up.

The Mahout punished the beast for his disobedience by a blow on the shins, which so enraged the elephant that he seized the man with his trunk, dashed him to the ground, and trampled him to death.

No sooner had he killed his keeper than he repented, roared, and bolted for the jungle to hide himself. Six other elephants, guided by their Mahouts, followed him. On being driven into a corner he surrendered, and was led into camp a prisoner, and chains were placed on his legs.

Then came his punishment. An elephant was placed on either side, each holding a heavy iron chain. As the dead body of the Mahout was laid on the grass before him, the elephant roared loudly, being perfectly aware of what he had done.

A Mahout ordered the two elephants to punish the murderer. Lifting the two heavy chains high in the air, with their trunks they whipped him with these iron whips until he made the camp echo with his roars of pain. He was then picketed by himself, and an iron chain attached to his hind leg, which he dragged after him on the march.

VIGOROUS KISSING.

Mother—"Bobby, come right up stairs this instant and change your shoes and stockings."

Bobby—"They isn't wet."

Mother—"Indeed they are, just soaking. I can hear them 'sop, sop, sop,' whenever you walk."

Bobby—"That's Sis and Mr. Nicefello in th' parlor."

SLOW TORTURE.

Teacher—"In China criminals are frequently sentenced to be kept awake until insanity and death results. Now how do you suppose they keep them from falling asleep?"

Little Girl (eldest of a small family)—"I guess they gives 'em a baby to take care of."

Sports and Pastimes.

Bicycle Training.

"It is advisable before commencing to train," says Zimmerman, "to consult a physician and to be carefully examined to see that you are thoroughly sound; if you are not, it would be folly for you to begin. Be careful as to diet, retire early and abstain from smoking and alcoholic drinks. Smoking depresses the heart and shortens the wind, while drinking strains the blood. I have beaten many a man who would have had a far better chance, and perhaps beaten me, if he could have let liquor alone.

Hints from Three Experts.

"I do not train or ride during the winter, but take a complete rest. In my opinion this is a better course for the American rider to pursue than to attempt to keep in condition all the winter.

ROAD TRAINING.

"Most men should commence training on the road at least a month before the first race, but I take a much longer time to get fit. My consolation is that I keep in form longer than usual, generally right through the season. This preliminary road riding, like everything connected with training, must be done in a systematic manner. The morning exercise should be taken from one and a half to two hours after breakfast. I do not believe in taking any exercise before breakfast, as some advise. I have tried it, but it was not a success; it seemed to me like trying to run an engine without fuel. One and a half or two hours after breakfast ride from eight to ten miles on the road.

"Train for the distance which after experience you find the best adapted to your capabilities. Some men have the power to stay long distances at a moderate pace, but cannot sprint at all, while others can do just the opposite. A very few can do both.

WON IN THE LAST QUARTER.

"When you have found out the distance which suits you best, try it about once a week. Let some one hold a watch on you, and time each quarter of a mile. At each succeeding attempt try to improve the previous quarter a little, but hold enough in reserve to ride the last quarter the fastest.

Laurens Meintjes says:

"I begin to prepare for the racing season in the spring. My preliminary consists of a ten-mile spin about ten o'clock A.M. I ride at a slow but steady pace; after I have finished I get a good rub down and rest quietly for a couple of hours, when I enjoy a two-mile walk at an ordinary gait. Coming back to my training quarters, I again mount my machine and reel off about twenty miles, going free and easy.

"The early part of my ride is confined to slow pace, which I gradually increase and finish with a sprint at top speed. This work I continue for another month, when I begin to sprint quarters and halves. Having satisfied myself that I am thoroughly fit, that my wind is good and I am willing to wind up with a strong sprint, I start for the race meets. After that the work you get in your race will be quite enough to keep you on edge, provided you diet yourself. I eat everything and anything I like except pastry. I never use liquors, but am an inveterate smoker."

WALTER SANGER'S ADVICE.

Walter Sanger says:

"Before doing any work at all the stomach must be got into shape by a thorough physicking, which relieves the system of all biliousness. This leaves the body in a very weak condition, and it must be strengthened gradually by keeping very quiet and eating light food, such as milk toast, soft boiled eggs, etc., for a few days, after which more strengthening food may be taken.

"The first three days very little exercise is sufficient—three to six miles a day, at about a 3:20 to 3:30 gait. This should be gradually worked down day by day, until at the end of a few weeks the pace is brought down to about 2:50. The third week will show a more rapid change in the condition of the man; the miles will be rolled off at about a 2:30 to 2:20 clip, and the distance by this time will be lengthened to about nine miles each day.

"A little faster work may now be indulged in, and half a mile can be reeled off at about a one-minute clip (paced), to show the condition of the man in regard to endurance. If he is found wanting he must again return to plugging; but if he has the required endurance, he may start to sprint a short distance.

"It is at this point that the trainer should get in his fine work, turning the superfluous flesh into muscle. After each work-out the man should have a thorough drying with coarse towels, followed by a most thorough massage, every muscle being worked and manipulated."

A Wonderful Bicycle Palace.

One of the most striking features of the Paris exhibition of 1900 is going to be, so it is said, a most remarkable "bicycle palace," to be designed and built especially to do honor to the wheel. It will be used for the display of the cycle in all its forms, from the first crude two-wheeled walking machine to the delicate mechanism of the present day.

The exact dimensions of the structure have not yet been decided upon; but the plans provide accommodation for seven thousand persons on the ground floor.

The ground surrounding it will be circular, with paths like spokes leading to the common centre. All the windows are likewise to be circular, with spoke frames and with a small round colored pane in the middle to indicate the hub.

The main entrance will be entirely of marble, cut in the form of immense bicycle forks, while overhead will rest a huge handle bar of burnished steel. A number of smaller rooms will lead off from the main floor, separated only by festooned curtains made entirely of such netting as is usually employed on ladies' bicycles.

At either end of the main floor will be a monster wheel, with illuminated tires. These wheels will revolve from the opening to the closing of the exhibition. Apart from the light produced in this manner, the only illumination will be large bicycle lamps. Every seat in the building will be made of parts of bicycles, though many of them will be so arranged as to be far more comfortable than even the very latest novelties in saddles. Curved and straight handle bars will be used for backs, and cushioned wheels in some cases for seats, while the chairs will be held up by different parts of the frame.

The exhibits will be guarded from the visitors' curious touch by a series of cycle chains; and the lecturers, of whom there will be a plentiful supply, will travel about the building on wheels.

Refreshments will be served by a busy corps of cyclist attendants mounted on bicycles, and it is promised that the manner in which they will conduct their evolutions will be truly remarkable.

Each pillar of the building will be decorated with cycle chains and surrounded at short distances by tires. Even the floor will represent the wheel. Circular tiles are to be inlaid with spokes, and the triangles formed by the meeting of every three circles will be filled by tiles representing small cycle frames. There will, of course, be a lively jingle of bicycle bells, this being the only form of signaling allowed in the building.

All the doors are to be locked at night with bicycle locks, and a number of special gendarmes will patrol the grounds on wheels.

Every seat in the building will be pneumatic, and be supplied with a bell. The main floor is, of course, to be kept clear for the public performances and contests. There will be only one exhibit in the centre of the room. This will consist of a number of the very latest inventions in the bicycle world, the whole to be surrounded by a monster electric unicycle, the invention of a Parisian electrician. This feature, however, may be changed in case a more advanced invention is received.

The roof of the building will be festooned, the girders being made of steel, with every conceivable part of a bicycle woven into the designs. Orders have already been placed in England for the manufacture of all the pottery to be used in the building. Every piece will be made bicycle fashion; cups, saucers, plates—in fact, even the forks used will represent the wheel, having only two prongs, and being made in the manner of bicycle forks.

Applause.

(Letters from TIP TOP WEEKLY readers are always acceptable. Views and suggestions will be welcomed.)

Otsego, Mich., May 29, 1897.

Dear Sirs: I am happy to congratulate you on account of the Tip Top Weekly. Its name fits it only too well. I have read all of the numbers from No. 1 to the present time.

Yours respectfully,
Hiley Kirnan.

Dear Sirs: I am also here to congratulate you. The Tip Top is the best book I have ever read, and I hope you will continue on with the success you are making.

Yours truly,
Ralph and Matt Merry.

Marion, Iowa, May 29, 1897.

Dear Sirs: I am a reader of the Tip Top Weekly. I thought I would let you know what I think of it. I think they are the best papers published, and hope you will have great success.

Yours truly,
Joe Mullalley.

Chicago, Ill., May 29, 1897.

Gentlemen: We take the greatest pleasure in letting you know what we think of the Tip Top Weekly. It is a very interesting paper and we have been reading them since No. 1 was published. We hope you will continue its circulation as long as we live. We remain

Yours truly,
Miles Novy,
Emanuel Ascher,
Maurice Wolpe.

Greenwich Conn., May 25, 1897.

Dear Sirs: I have read your Tip Top Weekly from beginning to present date and I want to make a move that you publish them twice a week, because I cannot wait sometimes for Saturday to come.

Respectfully,
R. Peck.

Norfolk, Va., May 31, 1897.

Dear Sirs: I write you a few lines to let you know what we think of your new Tip Top Weekly. We take it every week in our club, and think it contains the best stories of any five-cent library we ever read. Hoping your stories will continue as good as they have been, I remain,

Yours truly,
Wm. E. Sadler, Secretary.

A. Ayers, President.
J. W. Grimstead, Treasurer.

Troy, N. Y., May 28, 1897.

Dear Sirs: I have read Tip Top Library from No. 12 up to No. 59, and think they are the best books out. Long live Tip Top.

Fred. M. Cohen.

AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHY.

Many people imagine that a photographer's camera is a difficult machine to handle, and that the work is dirty and disagreeable. All this is a mistake. Photography is a clean, light, and pleasant accomplishment, within the reach of all. The camera will prove a friend, reporter, and helper. With a very inexpensive camera any boy or girl can now learn not only to take good pictures, but pictures that there is everywhere a demand for at remunerative prices. A complete guide to this fascinating art, entitled AMATEUR MANUAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY, will be sent on receipt of ten cents.

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