

## CHAPTER XVIII.

*IN WHICH SOME OF OUR FRIENDS FIND IT NECESSARY  
TO FIGHT—ALSO TO RUN.*

SO engrossed had these wretches been in their cruel sport that our two friends, Donnel, the largest and best developed boy of the small yard, and Keenan, the quickest, hardest, and most wiry, were upon them and among them before they had the least idea that an enemy was approaching. Percy's two friends (who had heard the little lad's shout for help) came upon the scene at a dead run; and such added impetus did they bring to bear on the young miscreants that, as they dashed into the crowd, they sent five or six sprawling to the ground. Nor did they give the astonished town-boys time or opportunity to recover themselves. Both, though famous among their fellow-students as peace-lovers and peace-makers, were, for all that, excellent boxers. So, without stopping to make any inquiries, or to count the number of their slain, they followed up their first onslaught by raining blows right and left upon Percy's tormentors.

In an instant there came a panic upon the crowd. It was highly increased when some one shouted:—

"Look out, fellows! there's a big crowd of college-boys coming."

This was too much for the general bravery. There was a lively scattering in all directions. But the victory was by no means complete. Buck, the pride and glory of a hundred village encounters, had a reputation at stake; and giving no ear to this warning, he addressed himself to John Donnel, who had already introduced himself, as it were, to Mr. Buck by giving that hero of a hundred village encounters a decidedly unpleasant rap over the eyes.

"Time, there, will you?" cried Buck. "Just give me time to get off my coat, and then I'll teach you a thing or two."

"I'll give you time to take off your whole wardrobe!" bawled John Donnel, the most peaceable and good-natured student in St. Maure's College.

While this interchange of civilities was going on, and the rough was whipping off his coat, George Keenan was busily attending to a short, thick-set, sandy-faced boy, who, second only to Buck in local fame, had held his ground along with his chieftain.

But Keenan's stunted form and slight build sadly deceived his opponent. That wiry, undergrown lad, with all the quickness and lightness of a cat, possessed in addition the strength of iron muscles. The second hero of the village started in with the openly expressed intention of "annihilating" Keenan. But so quick and fast did the blows come from George's fist that very soon he was fain to stand almost entirely upon the defensive. And he found presently that he was ill able to do even this. With every third or fourth blow, George broke through his guard. Presently the



second bully of the village, who "looked the whole world in the face, for he feared not any boy" (except Buck, of course), began to move slowly backward, endeavoring by this retrogression to keep the blows from his face. Keenan was by nature of a phlegmatic disposition, but his appearance and conduct on this occasion would hardly lead a spectator to suspect the slightest existence of any such negative quality in him. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes ablaze; and, as his opponent began to step back, he rushed upon him with ever-increasing heat and energy. Blow upon blow breaking through the fellow's guard sent him reeling from side to side. Harder and harder Keenan pushed him. The bully was losing heart. His lips had become puffy; his eyes were swelling fast; and soon he was unable to keep up even the pretence of a guard. Every blow now told on him, and he was obliged to yield ground more rapidly. He was soon close upon a tree, which, not having eyes at the back of his head, he could not, of course, perceive, and just as he had backed within two feet of it, George succeeded in dealing him a tremendous blow between the eyes—a blow which sent the back of the village hero's head with a resounding thwack against the tree. This was too much for the village hero. With a roar of pain, he turned tail and fled towards his dismayed companions, who had again gathered together, but at a safe and very respectable distance.

All this took place in not more than two minutes' time; and George, coolly adjusting his cuffs and smoothing down his hair, turned back to rejoin his friends. The scene had changed some-

what. The drunken man was now in a sitting posture, gazing about with a mixed expression of stupidity and surprise. His child, standing by his side, was watching the actions of John Donnel and Buck, who, at a little distance from Percy, were sparring warily. Percy, his clothes torn and soiled, had arisen, and was wiping the blood from his mouth. George hastened forward to watch the issue of the contest.

"Hadh't you better hold on?" said John to his opponent. "Your side have all gone. I don't care about fighting."

The answer to this was a blow on the face, which the bully, seeing John off his guard, contrived to get in.

John had relieved his conscience. It was now a question of defence.

"Keep steady, John," counselled Keenan. "Have a lookout for some mean trick. I wouldn't trust that fellow."

John was steady enough. No one since his first appearance at college had ever known him to be concerned in a fight; but it was not from fear, for he was indeed a most scientific boxer. When he and Keenan put on the gloves in the college play-room for a friendly bout, they were always surrounded by an admiring crowd, who, as a rule, were well repaid for their attention.

But on this occasion his opponent was not to be despised. Stouter and larger and older than John, he was also the stronger. It was a question of very great skill and inferior strength against great skill and superior strength. As for Buck, he had no doubts concerning the result.



For some time the sparring continued, wary on both sides. Several times Buck assumed the offensive; but he succeeded poorly in breaking John's guard. One of his attempts, indeed, resulted to his disadvantage. Before he could recover himself after a vigorous lunge, John caught him sharply behind the ear. Buck's confidence weakened, but his rage grew proportionately stronger, and expressed itself in a most villainous expression of countenance.

"Look out for the finger-trick, John," said George, in a voice so low as to be heard by Donnel alone. "If I can judge by the way that fellow's acting, he's going to try it on you. Shut your mouth tight."

Did John understand this hint of George's? It would appear that he did not, for he kept his mouth still slightly open, and even appeared to open it wider. And George was correct in his suspicions. Buck, seeing his opportunity, suddenly caught the left hand of John with his own left, and with the right tried to find his mouth. But John had heard and understood Keenan's hint. His mouth was at once closed tight, and before the vile trickster could recover his position, he planted two very telling blows on his face, one of them taking an eye.

The village hero of a hundred fights was somewhat disheartened. For the first time in years, he had met an opponent superior in skill to himself. He was now moreover at a disadvantage. His vision was no longer clear, and it was in vain he endeavored to keep track of John's rapid and aggressive movements. But he had one chance yet of

coming out with honor. He believed, and with truth (for he was the stronger and the heavier set), that if he could close with his adversary, the battle might yet be his. He drew back, therefore, little by little, intending at some favorable moment to rush in upon John. But Keenan, who kept his wits perfectly clear, perceived his intention.

"Keep your eyes open, John," he whispered. "He's going to close in on you."

A moment later, Buck, suddenly drawing back a few feet, made a savage, tiger-like spring at Donnel. But the most peace-loving student of St. Maure's had been awaiting and expecting this movement. He jumped quickly to one side, and as Buck passed by him, he dealt him a full, vigorous blow upon the ear, which sent the bully forward at such an increased rate of speed that he lost his balance and fell heavily to the earth.

A howl of rage and dismay arose from the fallen hero's sympathizers, who, however, still maintained their respectful distance. The strain on their already strained imaginations at seeing the village leader lying at the feet of a smaller boy—and a college-boy at that—was overpowering. And then their idol seemed in no hurry to vindicate himself. He lay prone upon the ground, and, if one could judge by his actions, had his doubts about the propriety or advisability of arising.

But the crowd had now recovered in some measure from their first panic. After all, it was not a party of college-boys, as they had been led to suppose, but only two students who had taken the field. One spirited youth, under a growing sense



of security, stooped and picked up a stone. His example was at once followed by several.

"John! Percy!" said Keenan, who was as cool as ever, "we've got to run for it; I think those fellows are going to stone us."

"Let them come on, the cowards!" said John. "Two can play at that game. I wouldn't run from them if they were a thousand."

"But think of Percy," pleaded George. "He's too delicate for this kind of amusement. It may be healthy enough for you and me. But don't be selfish; we must consider him."

John's common-sense asserted itself.

"You're right: we must save him. Come on, Percy."

Percy, during the progress of the fight, had been praying for his friends with all the earnestness and confidence of his pure and loving spirit.

"Don't mind me," he said. "Save yourselves, John and George; I'll stay."

"You must be crazy," said John.

"No, I'm not. Oh, please go. You'll get hurt."

"Oh!" said Keenan, "he's hurt his leg again. Did you ever hear of such legs?"

George had a keen sense of observation. Percy's ankle had been hurt in a fall, but he had made every effort to conceal his trouble from his two allies.

Even as Keenan made this announcement, a stone whistled by Donnel's head.

Donnel made a rush to catch up Percy; but Keenan was before him.

"No, you don't, John," he said, as he swung Percy

into his arms and set off at a run; "you're pretty well blown already, and I'm quite fresh."

Scarcely had they begun their flight towards the college, when a yell of rage flew up from the crowd—who had thus far kept their distance—followed by a shower of stones. It was really refreshing to see how lightly George sped along the road with his burden. His height and figure were beyond doubt very deceptive. Compared with lads of his own size, it might be said of him almost literally that "his strength was as the strength of ten."

"Oh, George," said Percy, "you'll be hurt on my account. Please let me down. I'm not afraid; and I think I can run a little."

"Keep quiet, you young John L.," George made answer. "This is just fun for me. Why, I can run near a mile with twenty pounds of dumb-bell, and you're not much worse; and besides, I haven't to run half so far."

In truth, one beholding George's face and expression might have judged that he was indulging in a mad romp.

The crowd behind were now in full chase, and of course were gaining on our runners.

"I say," said John, who was taking it quite easy, so as not to outstrip George, "they're getting too close; and I've got the most brilliant kind of an idea, and we ought both of us to be ashamed it didn't occur to us before. Let me hold part of Percy. Suppose I take his legs, for instance."

The suggestion was good and timely. To use George's phrase, they "divided Percy up," and then set forward at much increased speed.

This change was greeted by another howl of rage



from the pursuers, and another shower of stones, one of which struck George below the knee.

"Good shot!" exclaimed George. "My legs are the toughest part of me. Cheer up, Percy, we're getting close to the college. We'll be at the bridge crossing College Creek in two minutes. Brace up, my boy; you'll live to run away again."

"I'm not at all afraid," said Percy, with his beautiful smile, and fixing eyes full of confidence and gratitude upon his brave deliverers. "I know that I'm in good company."

"George," cried Donnel, suddenly, "aren't there two of our fellows walking along by Brown's Hotel just beyond the bridge?"

The crowd behind had so gained that matters threatened to come to a crisis. Another shower of stones might prove to be very dangerous.

George's keen eyes strained themselves in the direction to which John had called his attention. As he looked, his face changed from doubt to delight.

"Hurrah!" he said, "it's *Ryan* and *McNeff*."

There was magic in the word *Ryan*. Who, then, was *Ryan*? He was the stoutest and bravest young man in the large yard, with the additional glory of being the patriarch-student of *St. Maure's*. Naturally hot-tempered, and, in consequence, very troublesome to his prefects during his first and second years at college, he had in time succeeded so far in curbing his quarrelsome disposition as to use his physical powers only in self-defence or in helping the weak.

"*Ryan*! *Ryan*!" shouted John and George together.

"Oh, pshaw! he doesn't hear us."

Suddenly a loud, shrill, piercing noise rent the air. Percy, most luckily, had been cherishing Mr. Middleton's whistle as a sort of relic and keepsake.

*Ryan* and *McNeff* turned about at once, and immediately came down the road at full speed.

It might be mentioned here that the new champion, *Ryan*, was better known in the village than any living person not actually residing therein; and, especially in his earlier days, had frequently taught the village-boys many lessons not to be learned from books.

His appearance was enough. Stones dropped from hands just raised to throw them; and every mother's son of the pursuers wheeled about, and made with all earnestness for home.

"Hurrah!" shouted Keenan, as he and John reached the bridge and rested themselves against its railings, "the victory's ours. Cock-a-doodle-doo!" And he gave a novel and unique imitation of a hoarse rooster with an abnormal and remarkably uncommon crow.

"Never say die!" exclaimed Percy, getting upon his feet.

"And," added Donnel, "we'll live to fight another day, because we had sense enough to run away."