

**FRANK MERRIWELL
DOWN SOUTH**

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Frank Merriwell Down South by Burt L. Standish

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BURT L. STANDISH

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DOWN SOUTH**

Frank Merriwell Down South

BY

BURT L. STANDISH, *7 send.*

AUTHOR OF

"Frank Merriwell's School-Days," "Frank Merriwell's Chums,"

"Frank Merriwell's Foes," etc.

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Frank Merriwell Down South.

CHAPTER I.

A WONDERFUL STORY.

"It is in the heart of the Sierra Madre range, one hundred and twenty-five miles west of Zacatecas," said the dying man. "Across the blue chasm you can see its towers and turrets glistening in the sunshine. It is like a beautiful dream—dazzling, astounding, grand!"

"He wanders in his mind," softly declared Professor Scotch. "Poor fellow! His brain was turned and he was brought to his death by his fruitless search for the mythical Silver Palace."

The man who lay on a bed of grass in one corner of the wretched adobe hut turned a reproachful look on the little professor.

"You are wrong," he asserted, in a voice that seemed to have gained strength for the moment. "I am not deranged—I am not deceived by an hallucination. With my eyes I have seen the wonderful Silver Palace—yes, more than that, I have stood within the palace and beheld the marvelous treasures which it contains."

The professor turned away to hide the look on his face, but Frank Merriwell, deeply interested, bent over the unfortunate man, asking:

"By what route can this wonderful palace be reached?"

"There is no route. Between us and the Silver Palace lie waterless deserts, great mountains, and, at last, a yawning chasm, miles in width, miles in depth. This chasm extends entirely round the broad plateau on which the wonderful palace stands like a dazzling dream. The

bottom of the chasm is hidden by mists which assume fantastic forms, and whirl and sway and dash forward and backward, like battling armies. Indians fear the place; Mexicans hold it in superstitious horror. It is said that these mist-like forms are the ghosts of warriors dead and gone, a wonderful people who built the Silver Palace in the days of Cortez—built it where the Spaniard could not reach and despoil it."

Despite his doubts, the professor was listening with strong interest to this remarkable tale.

The fourth person in the hut was the Dutch boy, Hans Dunnerwust, who sat on the ground, his back against the wall, his jaw dropped and his eyes bulging. Occasionally, as he listened to the words of the dying man, he would mutter:

"Chimminy Gristmas!"

For several weeks Frank Merriwell, our hero, Hans, his chum, and Professor Scotch, his guardian, had been exploring the country around the city of Mendoza, Mexico. They had come to Mexico after having numerous adventures in our own country, as related in "Frank Merriwell Out West," a former volume of this series.

Only a short hour before they had run across the sufferer, whose head seemed so full of the things he had seen at what he called the Silver Palace. They had found him almost dead in a hut at the edge of a sandy plain, suffering great pain and calling loudly for aid. They had done what they could, and then he had begun to talk, as related above.

With surprising strength the man on the bed of grass sat up, stretching out his hands, gazing across the sunlit sand-plain beyond the open door of the hut, and went on:

"I see it now—I see it once again! There, there—see it gleaming like a dazzling diamond in the sunshine! See its beautiful towers and turrets! That dome is of pure gold! Within those walls are treasures untold! There are great vaults of gold and silver ornaments, bars and ingots! There are precious stones in profusion! And all this treasure would make a thousand men rich for life! But it's not for me—it's lost to me forever!"

With a stifled moan, he fell back into Frank's arms, and was lowered on the bed of grass.

Professor Scotch hastily felt the man's pulse, listened for the beating of his heart, and then cried:

"Quick, Frank—the brandy! It may be too late, but we'll try to give him a few more minutes of life."

"That's right!" palpitated Frank. "Bring him back to consciousness, for we have not yet learned how to reach the Silver Palace."

"There is no such place as the Silver Palace," sharply declared the professor, as he forced a few drops of brandy between the lips of the unfortunate man. "The fellow has dreamed it."

"Perhaps."

"Perhaps! Why, Frank, I took you for a boy of more sense! Think—think of the absurdity! It is impossible!"

"It may be."

"I know it is."

"Vell, maybe you don'd nefer peen misdooken, brofes-sor?" insinuated Hans, recovering for a moment from his dazed condition.

The professor did not notice the Dutch boy's words, for the man on the bed of grass drew a long, fluttering breath and slowly opened his eyes.

"I thought I saw the palace once more," he whispered. "It was all a delusion."

"That is true," nodded the professor, "it is all a delusion. Such a place as this Silver Palace is an absurd impossibility. The illness through which you have passed has affected your mind, and you dreamed of the palace."

"It is not so!" returned the man, reproachfully. "I have proof! You doubt me—you will not believe?"

"Be calm—be quiet," urged the professor. "This excitement will cut your life short by minutes, and minutes are precious to you now."

"That is true; minutes are precious," hastily whispered the man. "It is not the fever I am dying of—no, no! The water from the spring you may see behind the hut—it has destroyed many people. This morning, before you came, a peon found me here. He told me—he said the spring was poison. The water robs men of strength—of life. I could not understand him well. He went away and left me. I could see him running across the désert, as if from a plague. And now I am dying—dying!"

"But the Silver Palace?" observed Frank Merriwell. "You are forgetting that."

"Yah," nodded the Dutch lad; "you peen forgetting dot, ain'd id?"

"The proof," urged Frank. "You say you have proof."

"Yah," put in Hans; "you say you haf der broof. Vere id peen?"

"It is here," declared the unfortunate, as he fumbled beneath the straw. "You are my countrymen—you have been kind to me. Alwin Bushnell may never return. It is terrible to think all that treasure may be lost—lost forever!"

"Who is Alwin Bushnell?"

"My partner—the one who was with me when I found the palace."

"Where is he now?"

"Heaven knows! He went for another balloon."

"Another balloon?"

"Yes; it was with the aid of a balloon that we reached the Silver Palace. Without it we could not have crossed the gulf."

"Absurd!" muttered the professor.

Despite the fact that the word was merely murmured, the miserable man on the bed of grass did not fail to catch it.

"Oh, I will convince even you!" he exclaimed, gasping for breath, and continuing to fumble beneath the straw. "You shall see—you shall know! But our balloon—we had no means of obtaining a further supply of gas. It was barely sufficient to take us across the gulf, with a few pieces of treasure. We struck against the side of the bluff—we were falling back into the abyss! Barely were we able to scramble out of the car and cling to the rocks. Then we saw the balloon rise a little, like a bird freed of burden; but it suddenly collapsed, fluttered downward, and the mists leaped up and clutched it like a thousand exulting demons, dragging it down from our sight. We crawled up from the rocks, but it was a close call—a close call."

He lay exhausted, his eyes closed, his hand ceasing to fumble beneath the straw. Once more Professor Scotch gave him a little of the brandy.