One of the Worst.

JACK AUSTIN was born with a peculiar talent for getting into trouble under the most favorable conditions. I have known him for some ten years, and I have never yet found his equal.

This happy faculty of his was illustrated in a decidedly striking manner on the very occasion of our first acquaintance. I was spending a week on my uncle's ranch in Fresno, California, and while riding about the place on horseback one morning my attention was attracted by a horse and rider standing near a small clump of trees at one end of a large field. The horseman had dismounted, and, with a heavy stick in his hand was cautiously advancing toward some object which I could not see at that distance. I rode up to him—he was so much interested in his occupation that he failed to notice my approach—and saw that he was about to do battle with a large rattlesnake which lay coiled up immediately in front of him, its cruel little yellow eyes glistening with rage, and its forked tongue darting rapidly in and out between its fangs. So intent was the rider with the reptile that he not only did not notice my approach, but was totally unaware of the fact that another rattler was swiftly approaching him from behind. Fortunately I discovered the thing in time to stop it, and reaching down from my saddle, I dealt it a blow that paralyzed it for a moment, and then hammered it with a stone until its head was reduced to a flat membrane, although its rattles kept knocking against each other for fully ten minutes after I had laid aside the stone. Jack (it was he, of course), meanwhile, had disfigured the face of his snake "beyond all hope of recognition," as they say in railway accidents, and was leaning contentedly over the limp body, watching the reptile's dying spasms with much interest. Finally he picked the creature up, put it carefully in his pocket, and turned to mount his horse, when he saw me, as I stood, a few paces off, watching him with much amusement. He returned my gaze for a moment, remarked, "Rather large snakes you have around here," and placed his hand upon his horse's mane preparatory to springing into the saddle when his eyes fell upon the other rattler that I had been engaged with. "What! another of the brutes? Where did he come from?" and he looked at me for an answer.

"I found him hurrying to the assistance of your friend," I replied, "and thought it best, on the whole, to prevent him from carrying out his charitable designs. He objected, with fatal results, as you see."

The young fellow turned a little pale, and then remarked, "I don't see but what I owe you about all the gratitude I can express for doing me a very valuable service."

He held out his hand, which I grasped cordially, and thus began our acquaintance.

I found that he was visiting the different Fresno vineyards, being very much interested in grape raising, and was, in addition, a guest of my uncle's for the night, the arrangement having been made without my knowledge. He lived in Orange, N. J., and was a Sophomore at Princeton, having come West to spend his vacation. He had seen about as much of Southern California as he cared to, however, and as I was on the point of returning to my own home in Boston, we arranged to come East together.

I found him one of the most entertaining fellows in the world; he felt very grateful to me for saving his life, as he put it, and told me much about himself and his family. I saw a good deal of him that summer, and in the winter visited him at his home, where I met his mother, a charming old southern lady, who thanked me, with tears in her eyes, for my "brave rescue of her son." I tried to persuade her that fighting rattlesnakes was my chief amusement, and that they were far from being as formidable as they were reported, anyway; but it was useless, and I was treated like a prince of royal lineage by the whole family.