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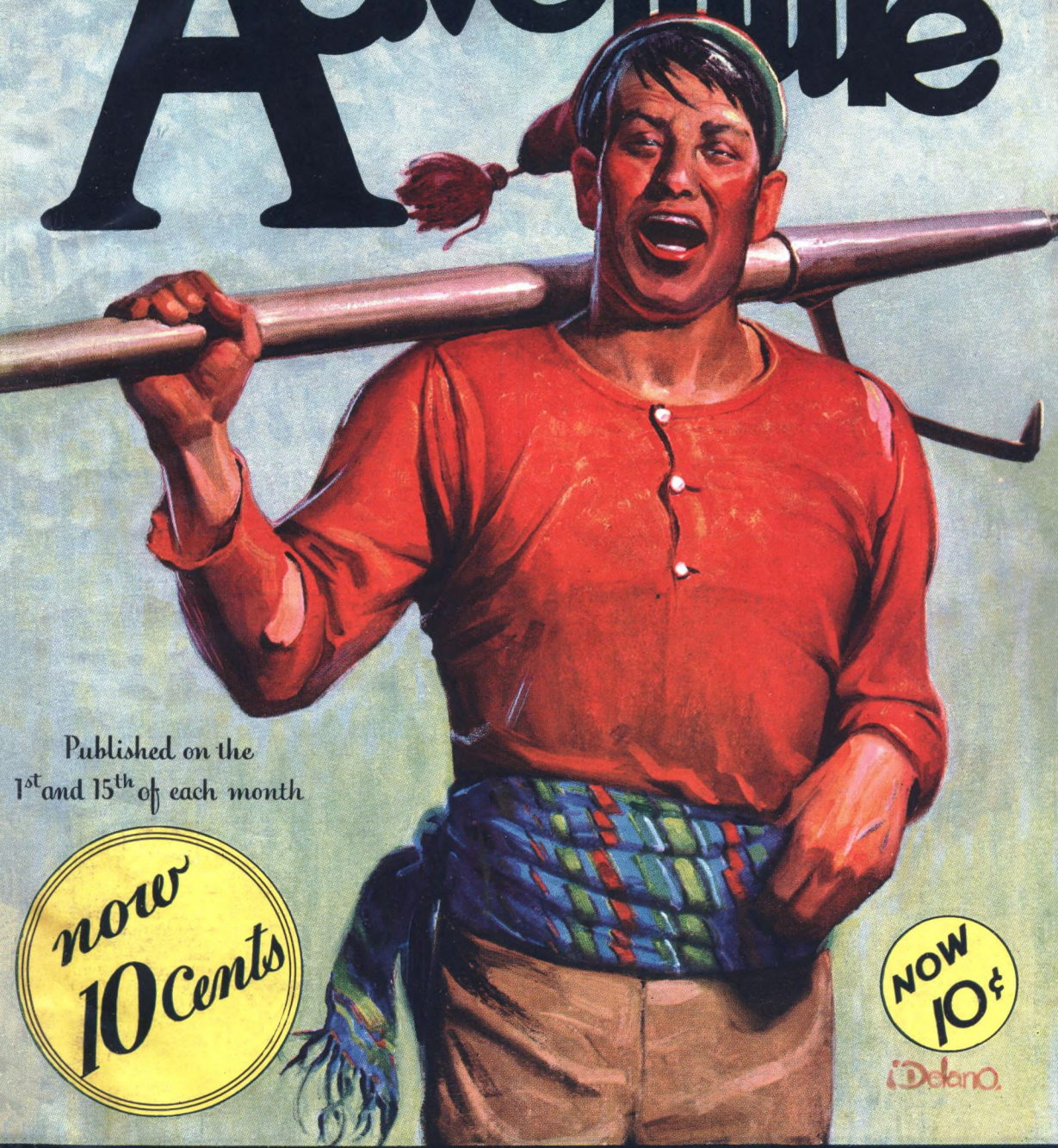

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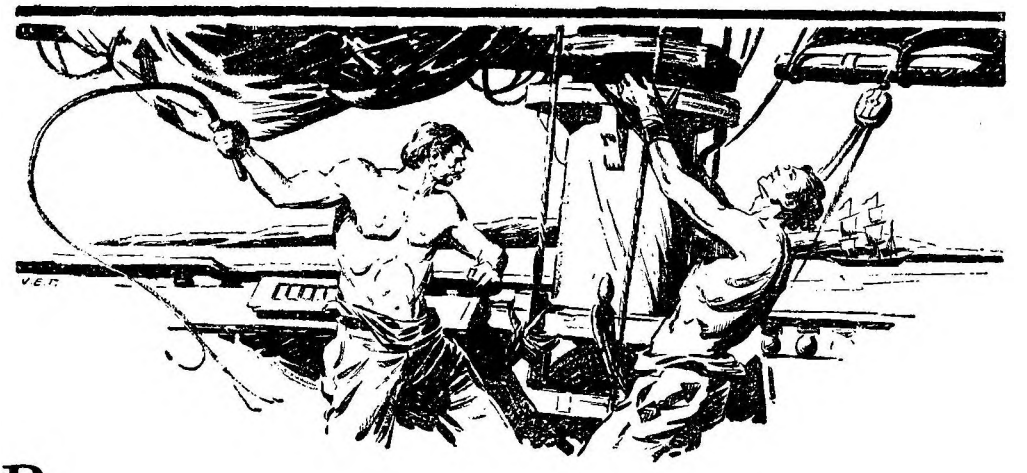
1932
VOL. LXXXIII No. 6

for September 1st

A. A. Proctor
EDITOR

Cover Design by Gerard C. Delano *Headings by V. E. Pyles*

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y., U. S. A. Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; W. C. Evans, Secretary; Fred Lewis, Treasurer; A. A. Proctor, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription, $2.25 in advance. Single copy, Ten Cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional.



Beginning

The BROAD ARROW

By WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE

CHAPTER I

A BOTANY BAY DOZEN

FROM the deck of the *Success*, moored off Point Mackelyne, the view of the harbor was charming. The day was peaceful and mellow, a golden day made to lie in the sun and hatch dreams.

A million sparkles of light were reflected from the waves as they rippled gently in from Sydney Heads. Fairy islands studded the water, and inlets of mystery hid behind green promontories. Nature smiled benignly on a picture gay and serene.

Port Jackson hummed with life. Through the strait a Portsmouth schooner beat in from the open sea, sails spread. An East India merchantman disgorged its cargo at one of the wharfs. A London steamer rode at anchor, and one from Hongkong was slipping from a pier to head for home. Boats plied busily about the harbor.

The hearts of many of those on the schooner lifted at sight of this magic haven. They had reached their journey's end to begin a hazard of new fortune. Failure that had dogged their steps and made wanderers of them was shaken off. When their eyes fell upon the *Success* they could not know that this hulk cast a shadow of gloom over the entire land. They saw the flag of England flying bravely at the masthead; under that banner Anglo-Saxons had persistently carried civilization to the seven seas.

Henry Killough, a captain in her Majesty's army, walked the deck of the *Success* jauntily smoking a cheroot. To the ship's surgeon, who leaned indolently against the rail, he called a challenge.

"Give you two to one in fives he yelps, Perry."

Doctor Perry shook his head. He was a lank, red faced man of about forty.

"Not good enough. If I bet you'd have Oakes cut him to ribbons."

"I'll have him do that whether you bet or not," Killough said vindictively. "A lag's a lag. I'll teach Mr. John Haxon, if that's what he calls himself, that he can't come the gentleman on me."

Perry drew out his watch and glanced at it. He had to be present officially at this flogging, as he had been at a hundred others, but he was eager to get back to the snug officers' cabin aft where a decanter of rum was waiting for him. He yawned.

"Are they going to take all day to bring this fellow up?"

The captain grinned. On this particular occasion he expected to enjoy more than usual the disciplining of a prisoner.

"I don't suppose he's in such a devil of a hurry as you," he said.

Killough resumed his walk, squaring heavy shoulders in the red coat as he fell into his stride. Automatically he noted that an armed soldier was in each of the sentry boxes by the forecastle head and that others were stationed fore and aft. By the flogging frame he stopped to speak to a man in baggy gray trousers and shapeless yellow jacket striped with black. In the fellow's hand was a heavy leather whip with nine lashes.

"No malingering, Oakes," the officer said curtly. "If you don't give him all you've got I'll have your own back tickled for you."

The convict touched his forehead obsequiously. He was a villainous ruffian, lowbrowed and squat. Three of his front teeth had been knocked out.

"Watch me, your Honor," he said in a wheedling voice.

"Take your coat off and get your back into it," Killough ordered.

"Yes, sir."

The captain rejoined the doctor. Killough was a large man, too big and bulky, too coarse of fiber, to be an athlete. Women generally voted him handsome, but there were dissenting voices. He had a classic nose, high color, cold, protuberant blue eyes, and a sensual mouth. Those with whom he associated as an equal usually called him a good fellow, though they did not entirely trust him. It was known that a dozen men in his command would be glad of the chance to shoot him in the back if it could be done safely.

Flanked by two soldiers, the prisoner appeared at the head of the companionway. He too wore the yellow jacket, which marked him one of the more dangerous convicts. He walked with a shuffling gait, for two iron rings were fastened to his ankles and connected by a heavy chain that dragged along the deck. Yet in spite of the chain, the costume and the shaved head, the man was remarkable. He had personality. The fear of what he had to undergo did not daunt him. Fierce eyed, he glanced around the deck like a conqueror.

When the soldiers stripped off his yellow jacket a magnificent torso was revealed. A sculptor would have rejoiced in the muscles of the flat back, in those of the shoulders flowing into the neck as smoothly as the swell of the sea. The flesh was rough with crisscross scars left by the whip.

The doctor voiced impersonal admiration.

"By jove, Killough, he's a fine animal. Look at the biceps on him. See the power in the back and shoulders. Notice how he slopes down to the hips. Like our friend Bendigo,* but far more graceful."

Captain Killough's laughter held an ugly note.

"He won't look so pretty when Oakes is through with him. How about that bet? It's still open. Two to one he breaks down."

The officer had not chosen to lower

* William Thompson, known as Bendigo, was then champion heavyweight of England.

his voice or to curb his evil joy.

The victim turned, and the eyes of the two men met. If ever bitter and contemptuous hatred flamed it was in the look the convict gave Killough. No wonder the transported man had been labeled dangerous. A newly caged tiger was no less tamed than he. It was strange, but the eyes that gave way at last were not those of the man sentenced to a Botany Bay dozen,* but those of the officer.

Killough tried to save face by a jeer.

"Hope you'll enjoy the taste of the cat I'm giving you, Mr. John Haxon, since you say that's your name. It's a lesson for your damned impudence. Next time you don't see me when I pass it will be fifty. Understand?"

The convict understood. He knew it would have been fifty this time except for the government ruling limiting the first flogging on the boat to twenty-five. It was not necessary to tell him that Killough intended to goad him into breaking rules whenever he could, and that this first visit to the triangle would not be the last. But he said nothing, except with his murderous eyes. Menace smoldered in the long, hot gaze he fastened on his tormentor.

THE redcoat ripped out a furious oath.

"String him to the flogging frame. Serve 'em up red hot, Oakes. We'll see if he's as cocky when I'm through with him."

The doctor had been watching Haxon.

"I'll take that bet, Killough," he said. "I'm laying a fiver against a tenner."

"Done," snapped the captain.

After the victim had been strapped to the triangle Perry stepped forward a few feet. It was his official duty to count aloud the strokes and to make sure the convict did not die under the whip. Oakes shuffled to his position. Short though he was, his frame showed great muscular power. Arms and shoulders bulged with knots.

The whip whined through the air and descended heavily upon the naked flesh of the shackled man. The muscles quivered, but not a sound escaped the lips of Haxon.

The whip of the flogger moved with rhythmic regularity like a flail. Each stroke ripped away the skin and brought a spurt of blood. Doctor Perry kept the count audibly. After the twelfth he made a sign to Oakes and stepped to the triangle. Holding his coat back to prevent it from getting stained, he leaned forward and felt the pulse of the victim. Then he moved to his former place and nodded to Oakes to continue. Not even a whimper came from the man whose back was being cut to ribbons. Perry counted to fifteen — twenty — twenty-five.

With a malicious smile the doctor turned to the burly officer.

"Much obliged for that tenner, Killough. Soon as I saw his eyes I knew he'd take it standing."

Killough cursed.

"I'll break him. Watch me. Scum like that can't stand up to me. Next time he gets fifty and I double the bet." He turned to a sergeant. "Give him a salt bath and put him in the tiger's den."

A soldier stepped to the captain and saluted.

"Boat alongside, sir. Major Day coming aboard with visitors."

From the water's edge outside the ship came voices, one of them gay with a little ripple of laughter in it.

"Good gad, he's bringing ladies with him!" Killough cried. "Hustle this beggar below. Quick. Before they see him."

Soldiers closed in front of the flogging frame while Killough moved to head off the visitors.

He was too late. A tawny head, warm gold, appeared above the deck. Its owner stepped from the ladder. She was followed by another young woman, by an older woman and by a middle

* A Botany Bay dozen was twenty-five lashes with the cat-o'-nine-tails.

aged man in the uniform of a major.

Killough bowed stiffly from the waist above the hand of the older woman, a false smile on his face.

"Honored, I'm sure, Mrs. Day. 'Pon my word, the presence of you ladies brightens the lives of us poor sea dogs."

Mrs. Day was an angular, broad shouldered woman, with the air of one born to command.

"We're not *de trop,* Captain, are we?" she asked, aware of his discomposure.

"Not at all, Mrs. Day." He cleared his throat. "If I'd been given an hour's notice to—er—clean the brasses, you know, and swab the decks—"

The girl with the tawny head interrupted, smiling provocatively at him.

"If you'd been given notice, you'd have persuaded father to change his mind. No, no! We're beginning to think this must be a pirate ship the way you shush us from it. Aren't we, Mary? And we mean to find out, don't we?"

The fine gray eyes of Mary McQueen were on a tour of inspection of the ship. She understood that her friend's question had been a rhetorical one and did not call for an answer.

Mrs. Day reproved her daughter.

"That will do, Victoria. It's not necessary for you to be saucy. The fact is, Captain Killough, I thought it would be a good thing for the girls to see how our good laws punish crime and protect society."

"Er—yes, indeed, Mrs. Day. To be sure."

The captain was stuck. He could not look behind him to find out why the confounded soldiers were so slow getting that fellow below decks.

"And so we're here," Victoria contributed gaily.

Killough looked at her, a sulky fire smoldering in his eyes. She was not a girl one could forget, not with that lithe grace of body and the quick, inviting lights in the big green eyes so disturbing to a man's peace of mind.

"Delighted, Miss Victoria, 'pon honor," the captain lied, blocking with his big body the view of the flogging triangle.

The girl dropped him a little curtsy,

"And now, please, kind sir, if you're ready—" she said, with her dazzling smile.

Mary McQueen gave a little cry of dismay. The group of men around the flogging frame had made a shift. They were just starting to hustle away a man who clung to the framework of the triangle. His head drooped as if he were sick and faint. Well he might be, for his back was a bleeding pulp of lacerated flesh.

Victoria glanced at her friend and was struck by Mary's look of fixed horror. The girl was gazing at something across the deck. Quickly Victoria sidestepped Killough and glanced past him. What she saw shocked her profoundly. As long as she lived she was never to forget it. The sight would stab her memory many a night in the darkness when sleep evaded her. For what followed stamped the picture on her mind and branded it.

Some one called brutally in a low voice, "Step lively, fellow!' and flung a yellow jacket over the tortured back. That the man was a convict Victoria knew by the gray trousers marked with the broad arrow. His shaven poll alone would have told her so.

The felon turned and gazed at Mary. The girl's first thought was that he looked more like a wild beast than a man. A five-day beard bristled on his face. Yet it could not hide the sinister scowl, the hard mouth, the tigerish eyes. He looked a thorough villain, capable of any crime. From her earliest impression Mary was snatched into another. Savage and dangerous he might be, but there was something admirable in the indomitable face, in the fine slope of the neck into the shoulders. The fellow might be a ruffian, but he was an Apollo.

Throwing off those who held his wrists, the man shrugged the jacket from his shoulders and strode forward to the group of visitors.

"Too late," he jeered bitterly. "Unless you'd like to have Captain Killough order me twenty-five more."

"Get this scoundrel below," Killough roared to the soldiers, his face red with anger.

"Why so much hurry?" the prisoner asked hoarsely. "Let 'em see how your good laws punish crime and protect society, what they do to a man because he won't be a whining, crawling sneak."

"What's this, Killough?" Major Day snapped. "You know the rule. All punishments to be in the morning."

"A special case, Major. Terribly sorry—" Killough whirled furiously on the sergeant. "Didn't you hear me? Get this lag out of the ladies' sight."

A strangled cry of horror died in Victoria's throat. She was gazing at the convict, all the color stricken from her face. Like a magnet, the terror in her eyes drew his. The shaven head slowly turned and the man's gaze plunged into hers. The girl felt herself drowning in pools of passionate hatred. Fear rose from her bosom and choked her. It couldn't be he. It wasn't possible. In two years a man could not have changed so.

Yet conviction surged through her and robbed her limbs of strength. She felt herself lifted on a wave of dizziness. Everything in the world was blotted out except that terrible face filled with contemptuous anger. It had risen from a living grave to accuse her. From the hell to which her faithlessness had consigned them those burning eyes had come back to cry aloud her sin.

The legs of the girl buckled under her weight. The world went black before her eyes.

CHAPTER II

THE INCORRIGIBLE

MAJOR DAY was a nervous little man, inclined to be testy and fussy. He had the manner more of a school teacher than of a soldier, though more than once he had distinguished himself in ticklish places under fire.

"A most distressing scene to the ladies," he said irritably. "And all your fault, Killough. Entirely so. We have a rule. You break it. Frankly, I'm not pleased."

It was the morning after the flogging. They were in the officers' cabin aft on the main deck. A companionway led down to it from the high poop. Sunshine filtered through the skylight and showed a snug retreat. The room extended the full width of the vessel and was furnished with comfortable armchairs and sofas. Through the cabin ran the rudder shaft, and around this was a table, above which was suspended a swinging rack containing decanters of liquor, a sugar bowl and glasses.

Killough helped himself to half a tumbler of rum before he answered.

"Oh, come, Major. Be fair. How did I know you were going to bring the ladies? Damme, you can't blame me for that, after you told me you had no intention of being bullied into it."

The major stiffened.

"I don't like your choice of words, Killough. I didn't say bullied, as you know very well. And that's not the point—not the point at all. I make a rule, and you deliberately break it. Why? For what reason?"

"This fellow was impudent. He was asking for the cat, and I damned well saw he got it."

"He couldn't wait till morning, I suppose?"

"He could, but I couldn't," the captain replied sulkily. "The way to handle these fellows is with a heavy hand, Major. Take my word for it. That's the only thing they understand, the scoundrels."

"I don't agree with you. There's too much flogging, both of the convicts and of our own soldiers. Dammit, they're Englishmen, just as we are. We don't go at this the right way. And I'll tell you something else, Killough. There's a rising tide of sentiment both at home

and in New South Wales here against so much brutality. The thing is always coming up for discussion in parliament. I want to get in step with the times," Day concluded weakly.

"Nonsense, Major," Killough rapped out. "I don't call that scum Englishmen. They wouldn't be here if they weren't villains."

"You beg the question, Captain," retorted his superior officer stiffly. "I'll grant you that most of the convicts who have been transported in the past fifteen years are criminals, though not all of them. I knew an officer in the British army sent out here because he killed a man in a duel. When I was a lad and came out the first time in this ship we had aboard two men transported for life because they had been seconds in a prizefight where one of the principals chanced to be killed. A dozen of the young fellows in chains were nothing but village poachers. Irish rebels were shipped to Van Diemen's Land. The whole system was outrageous."

"Of course, if you're setting out to be a reformer, Major," Killough said with a thin, satiric smile.

"We needed reformers," Day said hotly. "On this very ship more than a hundred men, women and boys died during one voyage from the horrible sanitary conditions."

"That was a long time ago, Major."

"It was. Thank God we've improved some things, but we're still a long way from where we should be."

"No doubt," Killough assented, tongue in cheek. He understood that Major Day had neither the power nor the character to work any change. All he could do was to protest weakly, as a salve for his conscience. "I'm only a plain, blunt Englishman, and I do my duty as I see it. I don't propose to mollycoddle these ruffians."

"Neither do I, but I think we'd get farther if we recognized that they are human. Now about this man, Haxon. I want to see him."

Killough evaded, hoping that he would be able to deflect his superior officer from this talk with the convict.

"I'm sorry about Miss Victoria," he said. " 'Pon my word, it was enough to upset any one, the way that villain glared at her. Hope she wasn't too much disturbed, Major."

"She was in hysterics half the night. We had to send for a doctor." The major hesitated, then decided to mention what was on his mind. "Fact is, Killough, she had a bad shock. Victoria imagined that this Haxon was a—a young man she used to know rather well at home."

An odd film of wariness banished expression from Killough's protuberant eyes.

"Naturally enough. She was frightened. She could imagine anything."

"Quite so. That's what her mother and I told her. But she's completely upset. I want to talk with this Haxon, so that I can assure her she is mistaken."

"Don't you think it would be unwise for you to see him, sir? Undermining discipline. That sort of thing. Better just let the thing go."

"No. I have promised Mrs. Day I would see Haxon, just to relieve Victoria's mind."

"I quite get your point, but perhaps I had better see him for you. I'll find out all about him and report to you. I'd really much prefer that. Wouldn't want the beggar to think you were questioning what I'd done, you know."

Killough proposed this suavely, with a confident manner.

Day shook his head.

"No. I've promised my wife. Will you have Haxon sent up here?"

"If you say so, sir. But he's a desperate character. I'd better stay with you."

The major smiled, sarcastically.

"I think not, Killough. It's quite possible I can look after myself."

The younger officer gulped down the remainder of his rum, put down the glass and stared at it gloomily. He had very good reasons for not wanting Day to

get mixed up in this Haxon business, and since he hoped some day to be the major's son-in-law it was necessary to make no mistakes. The thing was to let sleeping dogs lie, if he could.

KILLOUGH always played his own hand, and with a certain dogged patience. In the end he usually got what he wanted. It was because he wanted Victoria Day that he had been transferred to her father's regiment and gone with it to this last frontier of the empire. There was nothing scrupulous about him. By chance he had stumbled on a secret she was desperately anxious to keep hidden, and by means of it he intended to bring her to terms. But her father must be kept ignorant of it.

"My idea, Major, is that we should maintain discipline at all costs. Once these lags get the notion there's dissension among us, or even any question of criticism of one another, we'll have outbreaks and troubles in plenty. This Haxon has set himself to defy us, and he's a kind of leader. Other convicts watch him to see how far he can go. He came to us with a bad reputation from the quarries. He was always being put in solitary or getting the cat. I've looked his record up since yesterday. At Toongabbee he incited a rebellion and was sentenced to two hundred lashes. It shows what a hardened ruffian he is when I tell you he took 'em without a whimper."

Day nodded.

"Just as I thought. It's quite clear that flogging does him no good, but drives him into further insurrection. I'm going to have a talk with him."

"Would it do any good to talk with a tiger in a jungle?" Killough asked impatiently. "You don't understand these fellows. Haxon would cut your throat as quick as he'd wink."

"I'll see him here."

The captain flushed with anger, but he knew he had gone as far as he safely could without arousing suspicion. Moreover, argument would do no good. Day had the obstinacy sometimes characteristic of weak men.

"Very well, Major. I'll have him sent to you." Killough rose to go. Very casually, over his shoulder, he asked a question. "By the way, what young man did Miss Victoria mistake Haxon for?"

"Young Geoffrey Blake, nephew and heir of Sir Eustace Blake. Don't suppose you ever met him. I never did myself. When my daughter knew him I was in service at Jamaica."

Killough deliberated for a scarcely perceptible moment before he answered.

"Yes, I've met Blake. Knew him at school. Later, too. Here and there. Once at your sister's house, I think. Never did like him. He was an arrogant, overbearing scoundrel. Went wrong, you know, and disappeared. But he was a gentleman. I'll say that for him. This ruffian doesn't in the least resemble him."

"Glad to hear that. The thing has got on my daughter's nerves. I gather from Mrs. Day that Victoria and young Blake were quite—er—friendly, you know. It will relieve her mind to know this Haxon is another man."

"You still think it best to see him alone?"

"Yes."

Haxon was brought into the cabin. The guards left him alone with the major. He was dirty and unkempt, as all the convicts on the *Success* were. A high fever was running in his veins—the effect of the Botany Bay dozen. A sick man, he found it difficult to drag his heavy chains. But he was still savage, sullen and undaunted.

Major Day repressed an impulse to tell him to sit down. It would not do, of course, though he could see the man was haggard and exhausted. Instead, he poured three fingers of rum into a tumbler.

"Drink that," he said.

Haxon looked at him with dark defiance, then reached for the glass and took the contents at a gulp.

"What is your name?" the officer asked.

"You know my name," the convict answered sulkily. "It's on the register."

Day rapped on the table sharply with his knuckles.

"Don't be insolent, my man. I've sent for you to talk with you. I'll not put up with impudence. Your name?"

"John Haxon."

"Say sir."

"Sir."

"A lifer?"

Haxon nodded.

"Sent out for what?"

"For murder."

"You've been in trouble ever since you came out."

The transported man said nothing.

"Your reputation is bad. As a prisoner, I mean. You incited rebellion among the other government men at Toongabbee, I'm told."

The convict neither admitted nor denied. He glared steadily in silence at the major.

"Have you any complaint to make about your treatment here?"

The man's harsh, jangled laughter startled Day. It was as far from mirth as any sound he had ever heard.

"No complaint," he said with savage bitterness. "The last man who complained got a dose of fifty with the cat to teach him better."

Day dropped that line of inquiry. It had been an absurd question. Prisoners were not invited to air their grievances.

"My man, you'd get along better if you tried to keep the rules instead of defying your guards," the officer said sharply.

"Did you bring me up here to tell me that? I thought you always told it with the cat," the convict jeered.

"Say sir."

Haxon said it, and contrived to make of the word a sneer. He added fiercely:

"If you've got me here to find an excuse to flog me again, you can cut out the parson's sermon. I'll be damned if I stand both."

The major rose angrily.

"No wonder you draw punishments. You deserve them for your insolence. I didn't bring you to this cabin to find fault with you or to make trouble for you, but you're such a ruffian you go out of your way to force me to it."

"I thought all the time that was what you wanted. How many?" demanded the man in the yellow jacket.

Day banged his fist on the table.

"Can't you get it through your stubborn head that I don't want to torture you? I thought maybe I could find a way to set you on the right path. But I can't. I give it up. Nobody could while you're in your present frame of mind."

THE prisoner leaned forward, tiny beads of perspiration on his forehead. His lips were white, his cheeks pale. He was still in constant pain; he felt very weak. His stomach had not been able to retain any of the vile rations offered the convicts, owing to the nausea resulting from the flogging yesterday. But his sunken eyes blazed with passion.

"Do you think you are God, Mr. Jailer? Can you give me back the life they've taken from me—the friends, the decencies, the human rights? Can you blot out the hell I've lived in and have got to live in till I die? Can you turn me again from the wild beast I am to the boy who played football at school?"

It was as if the man's despair had swept away the dam of silence he had built around his feelings. The major said nothing. There was nothing to say.

"You'd like me to be humble, wouldn't you?" Haxon went on wildly. "That's what Killough wants—to break me body and soul because he hates me and always has hated me ever since I thrashed him when we were boys for bullying a little fellow. Take him a message from me. Tell him he can kill me but he can't break me. I'll die cursing him with my last breath. And tell him to take care never to give me a

chance to get my fingers on his throat, for if he does I'll tear the life out of him like the wolf he says I am."

The words poured out of the man in a stream of inconceivable bitterness.

"You know Captain Killough well?" asked the major, surprised.

"Never mind about that," Haxon said savagely. He paused, to get again a grip on himself. "I know what a brute he is. I know he's a liar and a perjurer."

"Where did you go to school with him?"

"You needn't try to gammon me."

Day had come at last to the question for which he had been trying to find an opening.

"Is your real name Haxon?"

The felon relapsed into sullen silence.

"Or is it Geoffrey Blake?" the officer continued.

"No, it isn't," the convict growled.

"Do you know Geoffrey Blake?"

"Never heard of him."

The denial came too violently. Day suspected it was not true.

"Where did you go to school with Killough?" the major asked a second time. "He went to Rugby. Was it there?"

"No." The convict added, harshly, "I'll say no more."

"Very well. As you please. But think it over. I'll leave orders that if you come to your senses and want to see me your message will be delivered. Until then I can't do anything for you."

Haxon flung one last bitter challenge at him.

"Am I asking you to do anything for me but let me alone?"

Major Day called the guard and gave orders to the sergeant.

"He's a sick man. Treat him as one. Put him in the vacant cabin next to the second mate. And ask Dr. Perry to step this way."

As usual, Perry had been drinking. He drank steadily day and night. That was the reason why he was surgeon on a prison ship instead of the owner of a first class private practise.

The major asked him if he would give some attention to the prisoner, Haxon.

"He's sick, though still stubborn as the devil. I feel sorry for the fellow. My guess is that he used to be a gentleman," Day added.

"I think so," Perry agreed. He added, with a sardonic smile, "The *Success* is quite a house of refuge for ex-gentlemen. He's a well plucked devil. I'll say that for him. Took all Oakes had to give and never batted an eye."

"He doesn't seem to get along with Killough," Day said.

The statement sounded like a question.

"I don't suppose Killough is exactly popular with the prisoners. He doesn't believe in sparing the rod, you know."

"I know." Abruptly the major flung out a feeler. "This fellow Haxon seems to think Killough has a down on him."

"Any of them are likely to feel that after a visit to the triangle."

The doctor reached for the rum decanter and a glass.

"You don't think yourself that Haxon has a just grievance?"

The doctor eyed the liquor he had poured.

"Killough's policy is to break their spirits. He thinks we'll have less trouble with them if they are forced to grovel. If any lag is independent, he takes it as a personal affront."

"I don't think it's the right policy, Perry."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and drank the rum.

"If you crush a convict, he'll never amount to anything as a citizen after he becomes a ticket-of-leave man," Day continued.

Killough opened the door and walked into the cabin. After Perry had gone he asked with elaborate carelessness what the major had found out.

"I've transferred him from the tiger's den to the empty cabin next to Smith. He's a sick man," Day said.

"Been malingering, has he?" the captain sneered.

"You ought to know him better than that, Killough. He's a game cock if I ever saw one. Better put a guard at the door until he goes back to the lower deck."

"He seems quite to have won your sympathy, sir."

"Haxon is a soul in hell," Day replied, ignoring the jeer. "Think I'll deal with him myself in the future if he gets fractious."

"If you say so, though it's a mistake, Major." Killough's leaden eyes watched closely the face of his superior as he put his next question. "Told you some cock and bull story about his past life, I expect, didn't he?"

"Nothing, except that he once went to school with you," Day answered coldly. "You didn't mention that to me."

"Doubt if it's true. Don't recollect any one of that name, though of course when I was in the sixth, I didn't know all the cubs in the lower forms."

The major looked directly at him.

"I think maybe his name was Geoffrey Blake then."

"Did he say so?" Killough asked quickly.

"No. He said it wasn't—said he'd never heard of Blake. I don't believe him."

"Absurd, sir. I knew Blake, as I said before. He was a bad lot, but he isn't this ruffian. It is believed that Blake committed suicide."

"I'm disturbed. I don't know what to tell my daughter."

Killough sat down at the table beside the major.

"I'll tell you what to tell her. Say he's not the man. That will be the truth. Then get rid of the fellow."

"Get rid of him? How?" asked Day, startled.

"We've just had a call to assign a dozen more men to the road gang at Parametta. Why not send this Haxon as one of them? If the fellow is disturbing Miss Victoria's peace of mind, it's a wise move to send him away. Don't you think so?"

Major Day grasped at the suggestion. From every angle the idea appealed to him. It would remove the man from the vicinity of Victoria. It would free the major of responsibility for him. And it would take the fellow from under the authority of Killough, and by changing his environment perhaps make conditions easier for him. Decidedly it would be best to send him to Parametta.

CHAPTER III

ON THE CHAIN

CAPTAIN KILLOUGH was in attendance himself at the blacksmith shop near the end of the pier to see the twelve prisoners from the *Success* put securely on the chain. He did not intend to leave any chance of escape through negligence. To each man's traveling irons was attached a steel ring through which the long heavy chain passed, to be locked at each end. The captain carefully inspected the locks.

From the road camp back of Parametta a ticket-of-leave man had been sent to bring back the chain gang. He was a big, repulsive ruffian, with all the marks of vicious degradation. To Killough his manner was one of oily deference. He reserved his harsh brutality for those not in a position to resent it. Having been through the inferno himself, he gloated at the chance to make others suffer.

Killough pointed out to the paroled felon several individuals of the group being transferred to his care and contributed information as to their characters.

"They call this fellow Slim the Dip. A sly scoundrel full of palaver. Lazy. But the cat makes him jump. I recommend it for him . . . This one is a filthy brute. Inclined to be impudent. I took that out of him—eh, Hawkes? I've taught you better manners, haven't

I? You're grateful, I'm sure."

The ticket-of-leave man, who answered to the name of Atkins, showed a pair of wolfish teeth in a wide grin.

"I'll try to keep on educating him, Captain."

In front of the sixth man Killough stopped. He poked the ferrule of his cane into the man's ribs.

"Name of Oakes. A useful beggar to use as a flogger. He can put fifty within a space of six inches wide. Works better if he's given a Botany Bay dozen himself occasionally."

"Good for all of 'em," Atkins suggested. "Makes the beggars step lively."

When he came to Haxon, the redcoat's face grew malevolent.

"This one is the worst devil of the lot," he said. "A trouble maker of the most dangerous sort. Look how he glares at me. He'd like to murder me now. All he asks is a chance. Look out for him. You've got to break his spirit."

"They say I'm first rate at that, sir," Atkins said with gusto.

"You'll need to be if you don't want your throat cut by this villain. He's a bad lot."

Haxon appeared not to hear him. The convict was gazing across the sunlit harbor to the floating hell he had just left. The sails of the *Success* were spread, and on them was printed the broad arrow denoting her a prison ship.

"Ought to have been scragged back in England," Killough went on. "Missed the rope by a hair's breadth. Unfortunate that he did, but it can't be helped now. All we can do is—"

The head of Haxon turned slowly until his eyes, burning with contemptuous hatred, rested on those of his enemy.

"Not your fault. You did your best to have me hanged by false testimony. When my hour comes—and it will come—the devils in hell will pity you."

A chill ran down Killough's spine. He thought for the moment that he was listening to the voice of destiny. Then he pushed the impression from him and anger flared. With his cane he struck Haxon on the cheek, raising a weal from ear to chin.

"I always knew you were a coward. From the time we were kids at Oak Manor," the felon said.

Killough glared at him and turned away with an oath.

The ticket-of-leave man cracked a greenhide whip he carried, throwing out and drawing back the long lash expertly along the line of the chain gang.

"Hump yourselves," he ordered. "You're working for Mr. Atkins now, and when I give a cove the word, he jumps."

The convict gang moved up the hill into the city. Sydney was a well built town with fine public buildings and residences. Many of the shops were as handsome as those in Regent Street, but beside the expensive stores were the box huts of the early settlers. For the capital of this new world in the antipodes was just emerging from the state of a ramshackle frontier town to civic consciousness. Goats scampered out of the way of blooded horses drawing fine carriages. Even in George Street, the principal thoroughfare, squalor elbowed wealth, tin-roofed shanties neighbored pretentious business blocks. From the fashionable Lyons Terrace, where houses rented for three hundred pounds a year, one could look down upon the brush *gunyahs* of the bushmen who still infested the suburbs begging for food and farthings.

Except in the residence sections, public houses could be found everywhere, prolific as the semi-tropical vegetation. Australia was then a heavy drinking colony, young, hotblooded, given to the prodigal exuberances of life. It excelled in sports. The men of the back blocks were daring riders and good shots. They plunged into dissipation recklessly.

At Bridge Street Atkins disappeared into a place of refreshment, leaving his

squad in the care of two deputies. The sun was broiling down on the dusty road, so the guards had beer brought them and squatted down in the shadow of the wall. The convicts were lined against the opposite wall in the hot midday rays. None of the passers gave the government men the slightest attention. A chain gang was too common a sight to attract comment.

THE life of the city flowed past. It came in landaus, gigs and phaetons, raising great clouds of dust in its wake. An old man dashed along in a perfectly appointed tandem, by his side a lovely young girl.

One of the guards grinned.

"Old Sykes. You've heard of the old rip, Tim. A ticket-of-leave man. Worth a cool hundred thousand sterling and yet can't read or write. Everything the scamp touches fair turns to money."

He was typical of the time and place. A dozen former convicts had become wealthy in wool, business, or banks. They were among the substantial citizens of the community, though a social line was drawn between them and those known as free colonists.

A two-wheeled cart filled with wool and drawn by five yokes of huge bullocks lumbered toward one of the pounds of the city. It had come from an out-back sheep station. By the side of the outfit walked a ragged driver under a sugarloaf shaped grass hat, his long hair falling almost to his broad shoulders. He wore fustian trousers and a dark blue cotton shirt with sleeves rolled to the shoulders of his hairy, brown arms. Expertly he cracked a whip with a twenty-foot thong, pouring out an almost steady stream of profanity as he went.

The crack of his whip had not died away before a group of back block squatters cantered out of one dust cloud into another. All of them were bearded and splendidly mounted. They rode like centaurs, in costumes of patched fustian, worn old boots and torn shooting jackets.

After two hours Atkins returned, drunk and noisy.

"Get going, you scum," he ordered.

The crack of his stock whip sounded, and with it a yelp from one of the chained men. Atkins gave a shout of glee. Expertly he had taken six inches of skin from the bare shoulder of a felon with the tip of the lash.

The overseer herded his gang down to the river and boarded a sternwheeler for Parametta. The boat thrashed its way into the bush, leaving the city behind it. Atkins tilted back a chair under an awning, where he could look down on his charges, and continued to devote himself to drink. The two assistants took care of the felons.

On both banks the forest crowded close to the stream. There were many varieties of harsh, narrow leafed gum trees. At times a park opened, or a stretch of scrub. Here were bastard myall bushes and the flaunting glory of the waratah. From a gaunt eucalyptus a pair of laughing jackasses flung out discords. Parrakeets hung head downward from the limbs of trees or flew screeching in droves across the river, longtailed and strong in flight, with red bills and eyes—brilliant clouds of pink, blue, green and salmon.

The men in the chain gang sat huddled on the hot deck. Dull eyed, they watched the panorama sweep past them. The loveliness of the bush in the translucent evening light, under the intense gold and silver sky peculiar to Australia, meant nothing to them. They lived in elemental emotions, brutelike, responsive only to hate, fear, hunger, thirst, fatigue and pain. Years in the hulks, at the quarries and with road gangs had completely brutalized them. Treated far worse than caged wild beasts, they had responded as beasts.

The contractor who had the road gang, expecting Atkins to reach camp the first night, had given the overseer no money for food. The convicts were

herded hungry into their sleeping quarters, a slab built, zinc-roofed cabin in a clearing on the edge of Parametta.

All day Oakes had endured the murderous looks of his companions. Now he made a whining appeal to the ticket-of-leave man.

"Don't leave me alone with that mob of cross coves," he begged. "I'll never come out alive. For the love of Gawd, Mr. Atkins. Six of 'em I've had to flog on the *Success*. Put me somewheres else tonight."

The paroled man read stark terror in Oakes' eyes. He burst into laughter. This was the kind of game he liked.

"Your friends won't bear a grudge just because you tickled their backs a little—not these lambs. You'll have a nice cozy night talking over with them old days on the *Success*. Lord love ye, I was on that hell myself when I came out. Been cut to ribbons on it many's the time." Atkins turned to the others on the chain. "You'll be good to your dear friend Oakes, won't ye, boys, and tuck him up comfy for the night, remembering how kind he's been to so many of you?"

A man named Brady broke into a harsh laugh.

"We'll remember that, boss."

"Stow your gaff, fellow," Atkins snarled. "And listen: I don't care what you do to this sneak if you don't cripple him. But if you lay him out so he can't work, I'll teach you what a real flogging is, my hearties. I've got a special cat you'll like—pickled in brine, with each tail a double twist of whipcord and nine knots in it. It'll make you sing. So smoke that in your pipes."

The door had hardly been locked behind the prisoners when pandemonium broke loose. The cabin became riotous with oaths, blows and obscenity. Enraged men were fighting to get at Oakes.

Presently from inside a voice called.

"Better come and get this precious beauty if you don't want to collect him in a basket."

Atkins decided to take this advice. When at last they dragged Oakes from his assailants, the face and body of the man had been beaten so that he could scarcely stand.

The flogger groaned with self-pity. From head to foot he was a mass of bruises. Panic was still in his heart. He knew that if he had not been rescued the infuriated convicts would have hammered him to death.

Atkins grinned maliciously at him.

"So you made all that fuss, did you? Started a row with your pals so they couldn't sleep? That don't go with Bully Atkins. See?"

The ticket-of-leave man had a short rawhide whip in his hand. He wound the lash heavily half a dozen times around the legs of Oakes.

"Please don't send me back," the wretch begged between howls. "I'd never come out alive."

"And small loss you'd be." Atkins called to a deputy, "Chain him to that gum tree for the night."

Those in the shanty still yelled their rage, furious at being robbed of a victim. Atkins paid not the least attention to them. He retired to the nearest public house.

For hours the good people of Parametta listened to a bedlam of shrieks, curses and hysterical laughter from the cabin.

CHAPTER IV

"FOR DOING IN A COVE I DIDN'T LIKE"

SINCE his chain gang had to tramp more than twenty miles in the bush before reaching camp, Atkins grudgingly made arrangements with the wife of a shanty keeper for a breakfast of oatmeal porridge and pancakes. The contractor, by name McQuirk, would grumble at the expense but would meet the bill.

The town clock struck ten before the overseer could bring himself to leave the public house where he was drinking.

The transported men could mark the progress of his approach by the loud cracking of the whip. Haxon would have liked a chance to use that greenhide on its owner.

Along a clay road the party plunged into brush so dense that the view was completely cut off. Overhead, clouds of white cockatoos went screaming past. The screech of the laughing jackass could be heard. Yang-yangs chirped continuously.

The chain gang moved to the side of the road to make room for a dozen long-horned oxen drawing a wagon. They were hauling wool to Port Jackson. The driver was a bearded six-footer in home-made flannel shirt and moleskin trousers. He was lean, lank, brown—a typical native Australian. After he had passed out of sight the crack of his long whip could be heard for a quarter of an hour.

A couple of neat, smart stockmen wearing cabbage-tree hats with chin straps stopped Atkins to ask if he had seen anything of a mob of stray horses. Plainly they were squatters, young Britishers with stations in the neighborhood. They were frank, cheery young fellows, with open, manly faces. One glance was enough to show they were not new chums* or jackaroos. They wore neither coat nor waistcoat, and their broad hats were set at a jaunty angle. A semi-tropical sun had burned them to a smooth, deep brown. Dust covered their top boots and filled every wrinkle of their trousers and blue-checked linen shirts. They were the first squatters Haxon had seen who seemed to take any interest in their personal appearance. They called each other Stuart and Halliday.

"Going far?" asked the one named Stuart, his kindly gaze sweeping compassionately over the ironed men.

He was tall and fair haired, with long silken mustachios, and an auburn beard flowing over his chest.

The ticket-of-leave man answered surlily. He did not get along with gentlemen-squatters as well as he did with shanty keepers. Most of the settlers with whom he was acquainted spoke to him only briefly and in the way of business. This was not because he was an ex-convict, but because he was overseer to a flogging master and was known to be brutal to the men in his care. Such men as Major McQuirk chose for supervisors were fellows who would get work out of the assigned men at any cost.

"Other side of Liverpool. McQuirk's road gang," he said.

"We're going back through Liverpool soon as we pick up our mob," Stuart mentioned. "Likely get there before you do. My word, it must be hot traveling on foot. Tell you what we'll do. Leave word at Warren's tavern to serve a mug of beer all around at our expense, if you don't mind."

"I'm not allowed to serve my lags liquor," Atkins said. "But that doesn't go for self and deputies. We'll say thanks, boss."

Halliday leaned a forearm on the pommel of his saddle.

"Oh, come, mate. You wouldn't call a swig of beer on a hot day liquor, would you? Let the poor devils have their drink. It's little enough they get."

"We don't baby our men, if that's what you're getting at," the overseer told him with a snarl.

"I'll swear you don't," came in a growl from the convict ranks.

Atkins whirled.

"Who said that?" he demanded.

None of the men on the chain answered.

"If I have any more of that, I'll cut your heart and liver out," the ticket-of-leave man threatened with a foul curse.

Stuart rode close to Atkins and put his horse between the ruffian and his men. He passed the overseer some silver.

"Be a good fellow," he urged.

Atkins changed his tune.

* A new chum was an Englishman just out from home. A jackaroo was one who had come to a station to learn the sheep or cattle business, working in exchange for his keep.

"All right, sir. If they step along and don't make any trouble."

Unexpectedly, from one of the shackeled men there came a bitter refusal.

"I don't want any of your damned beer."

Stuart looked at the man who had spoken. He saw a young fellow, splendidly built, gazing up at him with dark, fierce eyes. The man was dirty, unshaven and unkempt, but he carried himself as a chained barbarian king might have done at a Roman triumph.

The squatter understood without further explanation. For the defiant soul of the felon stared out of the sunken eyes. The man would accept no kindness. He would not relinquish one jot of his hatred of a world that had taken from him everything life had to offer, and had given him instead pain and shame and degradation. Stuart was shocked at the glimpse into hell he had seen. This convict had once been a gentleman. Now he wore the yellow jacket of an incorrigible.

"Sorry," Stuart said gently. "No harm meant, you know."

Atkins pushed forward, flourishing his whip.

"Haxon, eh? Impudent again. I'll take that out of you, my fine fellow."

"Oh, no!" the squatter begged. "I didn't mean to make trouble. He can do as he pleases about the beer."

"I'll show you if he can," the overseer blustered. "He'll toe the mark and do as I say." He turned to the two guards. "Get the fellow off the chain and trice him to a tree. Strip him. We'll see how he likes a stock whip cracked at him."

A second time Stuart maneuvered the ticket-of-leave man to one side. He did not waste any words.

"How much?" he asked.

"For me to let the beggar off? It will cost you a guinea, mister. Better keep your money. I'll show you a treat. He's a wrong cove anyhow, this Haxon. Tried to start a rising of the croppers once." Atkins grinned. "If you'd like to look at his back, it'll tell you what he got for that. A bad 'un, mister. Don't let him gammon you."

Jim Stuart would have given another guinea for the chance to tell and show this man what he thought of him, but he had to keep a civil tongue if he wanted to help and not injure Haxon.

"Maybe he got off to a bad start," he suggested. "Sometimes a man does. This fellow has something in him, or he had once. He's got pluck. I'd bet ten bob on that. To say that any game man is all bad is bally bosh. Don't you think so?"

"Captain Killough of the *Success* warned me to look out for him. Said he'd cut my throat soon as wink. Those were his very words, sir. I'll take my affydavy."

"I know Captain Killough," the squatter said, with a certain reserve that was almost frosty. "This man has been under him?"

"Got a Botany Bay dozen from the captain early this week for giving him too much lip," Atkins said virtuously. "He's a tough duck. Needs the cat and plenty of it. Trust me to see he gets it often and hard."

"What was he transported for?" asked Stuart.

"Don't know." The overseer turned to Haxon. "You—No. 12,111! What did they send you out for?"

"For doing in a cove I didn't like," the man on the chain said, eyeing Atkins with a sinister look.

TO BE CONTINUED

GRASS MONEY

By STANLEY VESTAL

INSPECTOR MacDonald shoved his hat to the back of his head and frowned. His thick hair, grown gray in the Indian Service, bristled from beneath the wide brim, as he shifted a black cigar to the left corner of his mouth and stared severely at his young subordinate across the office table. George Roberts, agent at Flat Rock, was comparatively new to the Service, but not so new that he could fail to recognize the signs of the old man's anger. For when MacDonald shoved his hat back everybody in that Service knew that trouble was ahead.

For a week the inspector had been going through the papers and affairs of Flat Rock agency with the thoroughness for which he was notorious, and what he did not know about them that sultry Summer morning was not worth knowing. George Roberts knew he was in for it.

Flat Rock had always been a sore spot. The Indians there were split into bitter factions—the wild band camping remote from the agency, sullen and suspicious; the tame Indians hanging around the commissary, idle and sycophantic. The schools half filled, the farms untilled, the pastures unfenced, while able bodied men lived upon Government rations, dancing, feasting and racing ponies. The commissioner had thought a new man might straighten things up, and Roberts had been sent there. But it was clear that the inspector was not satisfied with his work.

"This agency needs a man with fight in him," MacDonald declared.

"But I don't want to fight," Roberts protested. "I came here to civilize these people, not to fight them. It takes time to win the confidence of these old chiefs, and without them behind him a man might as well quit. And I don't intend to quit!"

"Then bring them to heel. You have the authority, you have a force of Indian police, you can call in the troops if necessary. Yet, so far as I can see, you have done nothing. All the old abuses still go on. The chiefs are insubordinate, the reservation overrun by rustlers, who graze their cattle on your grass in defiance of the legal lessees.

And now this morning we find this letter from the sheriff stating that horse-thieves are making their headquarters here, under the protection of one of your headmen!"

Roberts would have spoken, but the inspector gave him no opening.

"Oh, I know you sent a policeman down this morning to see about it—but only because I demanded it. Take my word for it, Roberts, you're got to use force with these fellows. It's all they understand. Remember, I was an agent myself for twenty years."

"I know. In the Pueblo country, wasn't it? Well, the Pueblos always were tame. But these Plains Sioux are a different proposition. Fighters, every one."

"Right, and it will take a fighter to handle them. I warn you, if you don't reform your agency yourself, from within, somebody else will do it from outside, and without you."

Abruptly, Roberts got up and stood looking out the window, his cold pipe in his hand. His eyes ranged over the green prairie, stretching miles away to the blue breaks beyond the river, swept over the old log buildings, the newer frame structures, the hovels and teepees on the flat, the trim barracks and white flagstaff of the Army post.

He was no hireling; he loved the place, the people, Indians, halfbreeds and all. His father had been a trooper there; he himself had been born there; it was home to him. To leave it would be the cruelest blow of his life. And to be kicked out—

The inspector followed him to the window.

"That's what I mean," he went on. "Look there!"

Up the trail a pinto was fox-trotting toward the agency. On its bare back rode an old Indian, hatless, straight as an arrow. His bow legs were curved to the arc of the animal's barrel, his hips were swathed in a dingy blue blanket, his long braids were flying in the wind. He was leading a black horse with an empty saddle.

"That's Chief Mad Wolf," Roberts explained. "I don't see much of him. Wonder what brings him here today?"

The inspector launched into another lecture, but Roberts did not hear him. With a shock of amazement, he recognized the black saddlehorse. It belonged to Sergeant Lone Man, chief of the Indian Police, sent down to Mad Wolf's camp that morning to expel the unauthorized cattlemen from the reservation. But—where was Lone Man? Silently, Roberts watched Mad Wolf tie the horses to the rack outside. Then, with a shake of the head, he slumped into his chair again. Something had gone wrong; it had been a mistake—the inspector's mistake—to send Lone Man down there.

Immediately afterward there was the sandpaper sound of moccasins in the outer office. Mad Wolf strode in, threw a glance of contempt at three old Indians who sat patiently awaiting their turn with the agent, thrust aside the clerk who would have barred his way, and stood before the two men at the table. For a moment he stared haughtily down at them.

"Where's your interpreter?" the inspector demanded. "What does he mean?"

"I don't need an interpreter," Roberts answered wearily; he signaled the chief to begin.

Mad Wolf spoke at once, briefly, forcefully.

"You sent a policeman to my camp to take my friends away and drive their cattle off my grass." He flung a shining police badge on the table. "Here is his badge. His horse is outside. And here," he said grimly, producing an Army Colt, "is his revolver. I took them from him, and I brought them back."

The chief still held the weapon in his hand. Roberts interpreted for the inspector.

"You killed him?" MacDonald demanded.

"I do not fight with women," was the

chief's answer. "He is a woman, like all these agency Indians. Why don't you get brave men for your policemen? Lone Man was ashamed to come back, so I brought his things. I am no thief, but I am chief of my camp. Nobody can come into my camp and take away my friend. The next man who tries it, I will kill."

"Who is your friend?"

"Red Head."

Roberts knew who that was—Red Borke, king of the gang who had usurped the Indians' grass.

"Your friend has no right on this reservation. Uncle Sam has already leased your grass."

Mad Wolf grunted.

"My friend gives me more than Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam sells my grass and keeps the money, but my friend gives me ponies—ten good ponies—for my grass."

"Uncle Sam spends that money on you and your children. He feeds you, he sends them to school—"

"To make women of them, like that Lone Man. I want my sons to be men, not women. As for the things Uncle Sam gives me for my money, I don't want them."

THE old man's angry eyes glared round the office. In the corner stood a typewriter on its table, all new and shiny. Mad Wolf deliberately turned the Colt upon the idle machine and pumped four bullets into it. The typewriter jumped, rolled over and crashed upon the floor.

Inspector MacDonald was on his feet. But Mad Wolf did not fall back.

"That for you," he said, coolly, and fired another shot into the floor between the man's feet.

Then, with a grin, he tossed the empty weapon upon the table and stepped swiftly out of the room, laughing as he went at the pale faces and cowering figures of the clerks, at the three agency Indians tumbling down the steps outside. A moment later they heard his pony's hoofs galloping away to the river camps.

Inspector MacDonald rushed to the window, leaned out to watch.

"He has stopped at the schoolhouse . . . He's gone in. . . He's driving the children out! . . . He's taking two of them up behind—and away he goes!" The inspector turned upon the agent who still sat at his desk, inactive. "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Roberts tapped on the table.

"I told you that method wouldn't work, Inspector," he said. "There's something in what the old man says. You see, he's a big chief, a great man—in his way. Once, they say, he rode alone into the camp of some hostile Indians, went into the chief's tent and carried him off—alive. He's a fighter!"

"Didn't know you liked fighters." The tone was scornful.

"I don't—unless they have something to fight for. But I like Mad Wolf. I only wish he would work with me."

"I don't blame you," was the inspector's caustic comment.

A titter ran through the outer office, where the frightened clerks were pulling themselves together. Roberts reddened, but did not look up or stir.

The inspector spoke testily, striving hard to control his temper.

"You're going to sit there and let those rustlers and horsethieves make this reservation their hangout, are you? You're going to let an old buck come in and shoot up your office, and never do a thing about it? I'll tell you—"

Roberts looked up at the angry man, and his jaw set.

"Grass will grow again, Inspector, but dead men won't come back. If I send any one down there, there's sure to be a fight. Don't you see? It isn't money the old man wants, it's—"

"Never mind what *he* wants! I'll tell you what *I* want. I want this mess cleared up, now, at once. I leave here tomorrow at noon. Unless you can straighten things out before I go, I'll recommend your removal. Get to work,

or pack up. That is my last word!"

Inspector MacDonald shoved his hat back even farther on his head.

"The responsibility is mine, then, this time. All right. But it's understood that I handle the thing my own way? I don't want a fight."

MacDonald snorted.

Roberts, red in the face, but with jaw set and eyes burning, picked up the smashed typewriter and placed it carefully upon the table. He put the sheriff's letter into his vest pocket, dropped the police badge into one coat pocket, the empty revolver into the other and, taking his hat from its peg, walked out to the horse-rack, untied the reins of Lone Man's black and got into the saddle. Then he set off at an easy fox-trot on the trail of the rebellious chief.

MacDonald left the door and sat down at the table to complete his report—that paper which would send young Roberts about his business.

"Might as well have it ready," he grumbled to himself. "Stubborn fool!"

IT WAS mid-afternoon when Roberts reached the river camps and began his search for Mad Wolf and the missing children. But he could not find them. Tent after tent he visited in vain. If children were there, they were hidden under the blankets of their parents' beds. And with every moment he felt the growing scorn and mockery of the men and women with whom he talked.

They would tell him nothing. Some met him with a bland assumption of ignorance, some with a plain, "No savvy"; and others with covert smiles and jeers. Wherever he went a crowd of young men, muffled in their blankets, followed, pressing upon him, jostling him, eager to start a quarrel. Every one, it seemed, had a chip on his shoulder, was ready to fight at the drop of a hat.

At the ford on Deer Creek, where the trail was hidden by the timber, Roberts found two horsemen awaiting him. He knew them both—Black Bear and No Heart, two young men who had finished the agency school and were then employed as herders for the Government cattle. Being herders, he knew they had a right to carry weapons; they would be armed. He rode up to them and halted.

"Father," said Black Bear, "we could not speak in the camps. But, if you are looking for Mad Wolf, we know where he is. His camp is downriver, at the mouth of the creek. You will be killed if you go down there."

"Thank you, my friends. That is where I am going now."

He spurred his horse and, without looking back, rode on down the trail. The young men remained silent, sitting their horses. When he turned at the next twist in the winding trail he saw them there, talking together; then the timber shut them from his view. But all the afternoon he had an uneasy feeling that he was being followed.

THE thronging teepees, brown with smoke, huddled together on the flat at the mouth of the creek. He was surprised at the number of them; evidently Mad Wolf's band had gained adherents since his rebellion of the morning. And there was an ominous silence, an abnormal lack of movement about the tents. No horses ranged the prairie; all were tied up beside the lodges. Though it was almost time for the evening meal, the cooking fires were not dancing as usual beside the tents, there was no bustle of women, no playing children, no singing, no drums. All was as tense and silent as could be. Even the dogs were quiet.

Roberts rode on, right up to the edge of the camp, where the dusty wagon ruts led straight in among the teepees. And there, seated beside the trail by the first tent, was Mad Wolf surrounded by his warriors. Some had their faces painted, and all were muffled in blankets. Under those blankets, Roberts knew, were concealed revolvers and rifles, ready at a moment's notice. He reined in his horse, dismounted and tied

the reins to the wheel of a wagon parked there. Then he advanced to the chief.

Not a word was uttered. The Indians stood motionless, all eyes fixed upon the agent. For a long minute there was no sound but the light rustle of the cottonwoods. Then Roberts spoke.

"That white man, Red Head, is in your camp. He must go to jail. Bring him to me."

Mad Wolf smiled grimly.

"You have heard my words. Red Head is my friend. If you try to take him out of my camp, you will die at this place. I am chief here."

"Yes, you are chief here. That is why I say, bring me that Red Head. He is a liar, a thief and a murderer, and he must go to jail."

While Roberts was talking, he heard horses come up and stop behind him. But he would not turn to see what they were; he knew he must show no trace of fear. If they shot him from behind—Then he observed that the chief was no longer looking at him, but at those behind him, and that he was not pleased. Roberts glanced round and saw that his two herders, Black Bear and No Heart, were standing behind him, their revolvers in hand, covering the chief.

"Go away," said Mad Wolf. "This is not your affair. You are just schoolboys; you can not fight. What are you doing here?" The old chief was taken down a peg.

Black Bear answered:

"We are young men, but we are not afraid to die. If there is killing here, Mad Wolf will be the first to fall. We stand here defending our chief, the agent."

There was an angry glitter in the old man's eye; it was clear to Roberts that he was not afraid. One movement of his finger might start the fight—and Roberts wanted no trouble. All he wanted was his own way.

He turned to the herders.

"My friends, you are brave to come here. But you know I did not ask you to come. I want no fighting among my Indians. I want them all to be brothers. Put up your guns and go home."

Reluctantly, the two young men dropped their weapons into their holsters, mounted and rode away, pausing on the hilltop to watch and listen, out of range. Roberts knew that their coming was a play in his favor. If he were killed, they would know who had caused it. And he saw that Mad Wolf had the same thought.

Roberts turned to the chief.

"You see what women my schoolboys are!"

Mad Wolf looked a little sheepish.

"Yes," he answered. "I did not think they had that much nerve."

Roberts pressed his advantage.

"I am like those schoolboys," he bragged, in the regular Indian fashion. "I knew when I came here that you were foolish, that you were leading these young men on the wrong trail. But I am not afraid. I knew when I came here that my body would be food for the dogs of this camp. I threw my body away before I came here. And now I am here, and that white man must go to jail. You say you are chief of this camp. All right then, bring him out."

"I will not bring him out."

"Then I will go in and bring him myself."

"If you try to go into my camp packing that gun, you will be killed."

"Good," said the agent. "You say you are chief here. I am chief of the whole reservation. It is the same with me as it is with you. You do not obey my orders, but I will obey yours."

He jerked the gun from his pocket and flung it on the ground in front of the chief. It was empty, anyhow, but the chief did not know that.

"Now," said Roberts, "I am going in and bring out Red Head."

As he stepped forward there was a movement of the young men to block his path. But Mad Wolf made a gesture, and they fell back.

"Let him go," he said. "What can he do?"

Perhaps he was glad to have this agent, whose methods were so unexpected, taken over by Red Head himself. Red Head could take care of himself; one white man would know how to deal with another. Roberts advanced alone through the camp. Not a soul followed him, not a single person was in sight. But he knew that, from every teepee, eyes watched his progress, intent upon the coming struggle.

In the middle of the camp a covered wagon—a chuck wagon—stood beside a dirty teepee. The Indian tents, as usual, all faced the east. But this one faced the west, and Roberts knew that it must belong to some squaw-man, some ally of Red Borke's. His man would be in that tent.

Outside of it a cooking fire smoked the flanks of an old coffee pot perched precariously upon the coals, and around this squatted three untidy white men. Their chaps and big hats identified them as members of Red Borke's gang. But Borke was not among them.

"I'm looking for Red Borke—" Roberts began.

"He ain't here," one of the gang replied, his tone insolent, his hand near his holster.

Roberts saw that the man was lying. Even in the twilight, that was clear.

A bellow from inside the teepee broke the silence.

"Here's Red Borke, if you're lookin' fer him!"

Roberts turned to the dingy tent, lifted the door flap and placed a foot inside. Then he stooped, pushed through the low doorway and stood erect inside. At his feet lay a red pool of embers, which was whipped into a flicker of flame as the wind of the open door struck it. The light of that fire showed Roberts that the tent contained one man—a man crouching on the bed across the fire, a man with a flaming red shock of hair, a fierce and brutal face, and a Colt ready in his hand.

"Who are you?" he growled.

"Agent Roberts, of this reservation. I've come for you. You know why."

Red Borke laughed.

"Well, Agent Roberts, I ain't comin'. You can git out now. Or, if you want to shoot it out, fill your hand an' let's go. I ain't had an Injun agent fer supper fer a long time."

"I have no weapon, and I don't want a fight," said Roberts. "But don't forget, this land belongs to Uncle Sam. If you kill anybody here, you'll hang for it inside the walls of the Federal prison. Now you come with me, turn back the horses you've stolen, get your cattle off this Indian grass, and serve your term. That's all I want of you."

Red Borke was choked with rage.

"*That's* all you want, is it? Why, you pup, you can't talk to me like that. Git out of here before I beat you to death."

He jumped up, the long barrel of his weapon raised.

"If you strike me, it will only—"

RED BORKE sprang into action. He stood over the fire, in the middle of the lodge, and his face was no longer human. The rage of the killer was upon him. Down came the heavy steel barrel, again and again, as Roberts, cowering away from the savage attack in that narrow tent, tried to fend off the cruel blows that rained upon his head and shoulders. Blood streamed down his face, and outside he could hear laughter, some one calling out—

"Kill him, Red!"

Roberts had no chance to get through the door; he was trapped. One blow took him on the right shoulder, shattered the collar bone. His right arm went limp, and another smashing blow struck his unprotected head on that side. A sheet of flame rushed up before him, and he went down in a clatter of pans and kettles. For a moment he lost consciousness, then his senses dimly surged back.

Red Borke, gun in hand, was standing over him, gloating, cursing, threatening.

But Roberts was too sick and dizzy to heed. He lay on his broken shoulder, unable to rise, even when his faintness had drained from him. He had drawn up his knees in the agony of his injuries. There he lay, looking up into the brutal face of the murderer.

Red was triumphant.

"Now, I'm goin' to hog-tie you an' hand you over to them Injuns. I reckon they know right smart about torture. When the chief gets through with you, maybe you'll learn to mind your own business."

Red squatted again, and reached behind his bed to find a length of rope there. He found it and came crouching nearer, gun still in hand, gloating over his prisoner like a cat over a mouse.

Roberts, sick and gasping, felt his old stubbornness flooding back. Physically, he didn't care what happened any more. But in his mind, every fiber of the man revolted against being dragged out, tied hand and foot, before his Indians. To them, he knew, honor was more than life, shame worse than death. If Red Borke hog-tied him, his control over the Sioux would be forever broken.

With a sudden heave, which hurt his wounded shoulder cruelly, he kicked out with both feet. His boot heels took Red Borke on the ankles, knocked his feet from under him. Down he went, cursing, hands in the air, and the seat of his trousers landed square on the red pool of glowing embers in the middle of the tent.

The cursing was succeeded by screams of agony. Red dropped his weapon, sent the rope flying up against the tent poles, thrust down his hands to raise himself from that torturing bed of coals. He rolled over on the bed, his bare hands brushing frantically at the burned flesh. Instantly Roberts twisted from off his wounded shoulder, grabbed up the revolver in his left hand and, somehow, managed to find his feet.

There he stood, panting, covering his enemy.

"Come on, now," he said quietly. "You're going with me."

The nose of the Colt pointed steadily at the outlaw's chest.

Red Borke, whining and protesting, staggered to his feet, hands in the air.

"Keep 'em down," Roberts commanded, "and keep your mouth shut."

He pushed the man through the door ahead of him, and came out right at his heels. The three men beside the fire squatted there, frozen with astonishment. Roberts swung the Colt toward them.

"On your feet, men. Hands up. Now, one at a time, unbuckle your belts and let them fall. You first—" and he indicated the man nearest him. "Good. Stand aside. And keep your hands up."

In a few moments the three men had dropped their belts and stood before him, disarmed.

"Now, march," Roberts commanded, and he herded the crestfallen quartet before him to the chief.

The Indians were surprised to see that procession approaching. When it had halted on the trail, the chief spoke up testily.

"Why do you bring my friend here carrying that gun?" he demanded.

"You know why. I had to take it from him to keep him from killing an unarmed man. He is a brave man, your friend. I came to save him from being hanged, and he tried to kill me. I told you he was a liar, a thief and a murderer; now you can see for yourself that he is a coward too."

The chief stirred uneasily, but the stubbornness in his eyes remained. They did not waver.

"All the same," he said, "this man is my friend. He gave me many ponies."

"Where did he get those ponies?" asked the agent.

"He told me he bought them from a white man," the chief replied.

"He is a liar," declared Roberts. "And you were a fool to believe him. Read that."

Awkwardly, yet without losing his

command of the prisoners, he managed to slip the sheriff's letter from his vest pocket and let it flutter toward the chief.

Mad Wolf took the piece of paper, fumbled with it and answered—

"I can not read it."

"No, you are just the same as blind, because you can not read the white man's writing. And so every bad white man can make a fool of you. And you want to take your sons out of my school and raise them up just as blind as you are. Where is your son? He is not blind like you. Let him read it."

Without a word, the old chief handed the paper to his son, who stood behind him, a blanket awkwardly draped over his blue school uniform. Bashfully, under all those eyes, the boy took the sheriff's letter and slowly spelled out the words, his lips moving as they formed the letters. Then he translated for his father and the listening braves. The whole story was there, even to the description of the stolen animals. There was silence. No comment was necessary.

"I told you this man was a liar and a thief, and you have seen what a coward he is," Roberts went on. "Do you know what the white man's law is for those who shelter thieves? They go to jail along with those they shelter. There is room in the guardhouse for two of you."

"I did not know he was a liar," the old man countered.

It was the first sign of weakening. But Roberts knew the trail was long to victory. He waited.

"All the same," said Mad Wolf, bracing himself under the eyes of his braves, "this man's cattle have eaten my grass. Who is to pay me for that grass?"

Roberts laughed.

"Let the cattle pay you. They have no right on your grass. Your young men have guns. Let them shoot the steers and fill their bellies with the meat made from their grass. I will look another way. I have never seen them; what do I care what becomes of them?"

There was a ripple of satisfaction from the young Indians. It was clear that the suggestion pleased them. It was not lost upon Red Borke and his companions, who stood fuming while the talk went on. Borke broke in:

"Say, what's all this talk about? Me an' the chief understand each other. I don't savvy their lingo. But if you think you can take four of us single handed to the agency, in the dark, with your wing busted, you're crazy. The chief won't let you, an' if you try it—"

"Shut up!" said Roberts, knowing in his heart that the outlaw was right.

"Damn you, you know you can't get away with it!"

MAD WOLF read the contempt in the outlaw's tone and gesture. His son quickly translated their talk. Mad Wolf took new heart. He could not yield. His honor, his pledged word was at stake, his authority as chief in his own camp.

"I will never go to jail," he declared. "I will die fighting first."

"You will go to jail unless I step between you and the soldiers," Roberts came back at him. "Unless these men are in the guardhouse before noon tomorrow, I will go away. Another man will be your agent, and he will send soldiers down here. You will go to jail, and if you fight your bones will be lying on the prairie. Have I ever lied to you?"

"Not yet," said Mad Wolf, distrusting all white men after the betrayal he had just experienced.

"Well, I am not lying to you now. If you hide this white man, who has lied to you and cheated you, and tried to kill me, your best friend, you will know what to expect."

Mad Wolf got to his feet.

"But I have passed my word," he said. "I can not take back my word. I have said that no man can come into my camp and carry this Red Head away. If you try it, then I will kill you.

I am a chief. I am not afraid."

Roberts sized up the chief for a moment. There was no doubt that he meant what he said.

"What about your children? Will you bring them to school again?"

"Why should I?"

"Because it is best for them."

"I will think about that."

"Good. You are a brave man and an honest man and, when you have thought about it, I know what you will say. You will bring them tomorrow to the agency—before noon—and then, perhaps, I will be able to save you from the soldiers."

"But I can not let you take these white men," the chief protested.

"Good again. This is your camp. You are chief here. When you bring your children to the school tomorrow, you can bring these white men too."

He paused for a moment to let that sink in. Then he handed Red Borke's weapon to Mad Wolf.

"Here is the gun of that liar, coward and thief," he said.

Mad Wolf was speechless with surprise as his fingers automatically closed about the butt of Red Borke's Colt.

"Now," said Roberts, "I am going home to get the doctor to fix up my shoulder that your friend has broken. If you let him get away, if you do not bring him before noon tomorrow, I shall be gone. There will be no one between you and the guns of the soldiers."

Quickly Roberts stepped to his horse, untied the reins and swung himself into the saddle. Without looking back, he rode away at a walk.

Behind him he heard the jeers of Red Borke, but he paid no attention. His eyes were fixed upon the two herders waiting on the hill. It would be a comfort to have somebody with him on the long ride home . . .

At nine o'clock next morning Agent Roberts, with his face pale and his arm in a sling, sat at his desk in the office. Opposite, fuming and skeptical, sat the inspector and the sheriff, whom he had summoned. Ten o'clock passed, and eleven; yet their caustic comments made no visible impression upon the agent. Finally, as the hour hand of the office clock swung toward twelve, there was a commotion outside. Roberts stepped to the window. He saw children swarming into the schoolhouse, he saw Red Borke and his pals marching dejectedly into the guardhouse, and in the road below was bunched the stolen herd of ponies.

"Take a look, gentlemen," Roberts said, and stepped aside.

The same moment Mad Wolf came striding into the room.

"Father," the old chief said, "I have done as you told me. I was foolish, but that is rubbed out now. My ears are open for your words."

"Good," said Roberts. "I need men like you to help me. So I am going to make a policeman of you." Taking Lone Man's shiny badge from his pocket, Roberts pinned it on the old chief's breast. "Hereafter it will be your duty to see that all children at this agency attend school every day. Go now, ride through the camps and announce to the people what I have said."

"How," said the chief, and stalked out, visibly swelling under the glory of this unexpected honor.

He was hardly outside, before they could hear his deep voice challenging the tribesmen to disregard his new authority.

Inspector MacDonald crumpled up the report he had prepared, and tossed it into the waste basket.

"All my work for nothing," he grumbled.

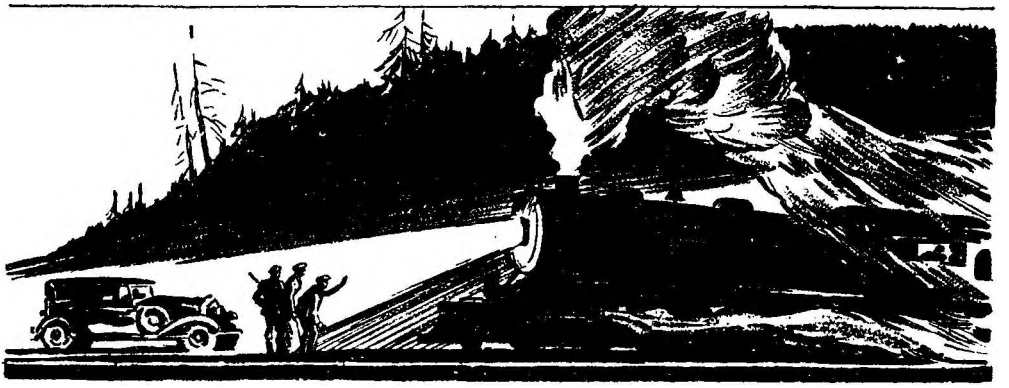
Then he jerked his hat forward over his bushy brows and slapped the agent on the shoulder. Roberts winced from the blow.

MacDonald broke out—

"Sorry, my boy, but you do the damnedest things!"

Roberts smiled.

"But, Inspector, I had to. If I had sent police or troops down there, there was bound to be a fight!"



WHISPERING RAILS

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

THE Shoshone Limited, crack flyer of the St. Paul, Yellowstone & Puget Sound, was strumming the fishplates at a fifty-mile clip. She was on time to the tick of a watch, and Conductor Tod Murphy, riding the rear sleeper, knew they had just flashed by Mile Post 176. It was a moonless midnight and he could see nothing from the windows; however, thirty years on this Sweetwash division had given Murphy an uncanny feel of its rails. Every curve, grade, frog, fill, cut and windbreak had, to him, an echo peculiarly its own.

"We stop at Broom's tank," he said to Brakeman Pliny.

Pliny, tall, lantern jawed, with eyes dull but not dumb, gaped at him.

"We always do," he said vacantly.

The Limited, both eastbound and westbound, always took water at Broom. Except for the tank, a siding, a box car depot and a section house, nothing was there.

"Yeh," explained Murphy, displaying his latest train order to the brakeman, "but tonight we pick up the G. M's private car. It's spotted on the Broom siding and we got to snake it along to Great Falls."

"What the devil," said Pliny, "would the G. M. be doing at Broom?"

Murphy explained that General Manager Wallace Bexman had for the past several days been scouting a newly surveyed cut-off, through Cracked Mountain, in company with General Superintendent Twyman, Chief Engineer Tom Starch and Division Superintendent Kettle. This cut-off, if ever built, would take off at Broom.

The train hummed on. At 12:08 it flashed through Crazy Indian without losing speed.

"O. T's balling the jack." Pliny grinned, as he made his lantern ready for the chore of coupling on private car 999 at Broom.

Conductor Murphy arose and pulled a cord three times, by which he signaled to the engineer, "Stop at next station."

The speed slackened as they crackled over the east frog at Broom and glided past a lonely coach spotted on the siding. Just beyond the western frog

loomed three dark silhouettes—section tool shed, section house and tank. The engine stopped smoothly beside the latter.

By now Conductor Murphy and Brakeman Pliny were on the rear platform of the rear Pullman. Pliny swung gracefully to the ground. Lantern in one hand and switch key in the other, he walked back a few paces to unlock the switch. As he did so Murphy looked forward, from the car step, and saw the fireman illumined against the cab lights. He was atop the tender and was swinging the tank spout into position.

The box car depot gave no sound or light; the Broom operator was a day man and would now be asleep. Neither did the section house show any signs of life. In fact, the only light at Broom came from the switch lamp, the eye of which turned from green to red as Pliny threw the switch. Even the switchlight, Murphy noted, was dim, as if the oil had burned low.

After allowing time for the water to be taken on, Pliny signaled with his lantern for the train to be backed in on the siding. The engine crew, by virtue of its own copy of the train order, knew what the backing was for. The chain of Pullmans rolled slowly backward, twisting in upon the siding. Pliny walked ahead of it to make the coupling.

Conductor Murphy remained on the rear platform. As he drew near to private car 999, he heard a voice call to him from its forward vestibule.

"Dey's plumb tuckered out, Mistah Conductah," the voice called, "an' dey don't want to be woke up."

Murphy, smiling, waved an acknowledgement. Dimly he saw a black faced man wearing a white jacket, presumably the private car's attendant, who at the next instant disappeared within.

Pliny's lantern was talking to the engineer.

"Hit her easy," cautioned Murphy. "It's not etiquette to bump a G.M, a G.S, a chief engineer and a division super outa bed."

"They won't know we've hooked 'em till they wake up at Great Falls," answered Pliny — and the couplings bumped ever so gently.

Murphy was pleased. He could well understand the fatigue of four elderly, white collar officials who for two days had been tramping the cut-off survey. No doubt they were soundly asleep.

In fact, in the stillness just after the coupling was completed, Murphy distinctly heard a snoring within car 999.

WHEN the connections were completed the train moved slowly forward and halted when it was again entirely on the main line. Pliny, having followed afoot, turned the switch and locked it. Murphy, who was looking back from the open upper half door at the rear of what was now the next-to-last coach, saw the switchlight change from red to green; again he noted that it burned dimly, as if the oil were low.

Pliny, who had already transferred the markers from the rear of the last Pullman to the rear platform of the private car, climbed aboard the observation. Murphy, a coach ahead of him, congratulated himself that General Manager Bexman's party had not been wakened. The train started and quickly gained speed.

Murphy relaxed. His tickets were all punched and his passengers were all abed. The train carried no day coach. It had dropped its diner just after supper and wouldn't pick up another until an hour before dawn.

Murphy, lingering there on the next-to-last platform, continued to look back from the open upper half door. He could see the receding switchlight at Broom. Suddenly that light disappeared. Since the track was straight, Murphy knew that the light had gone completely out.

It had, he recalled, been fading all the while. He made a note to report the fact to the roadmaster, who in turn would rebuke the section foreman at

Broom for failure to keep the switch lamp filled with oil.

Murphy now closed the upper half door and looked at his watch. It was 12:23. After awhile he decided to go back through the private car and join Pliny on the observation platform.

Stepping across to the forward vestibule of car 999, he found the door there not locked. Had it been locked, he could have unlocked it with his train key.

He entered the car. Its first walled-off compartment was a kitchenette. Rounding this, Murphy passed across a private dining area; beyond this, another walled-off portion of the car marked the position of three staterooms. A narrow aisle to one side of these connected the dining area with the parlor, or observation lounge, which occupied the rear third of the car's length.

The attendant was not in sight. Probably he was on the rear end talking to Pliny, thought Murphy. Careful not to awaken any one, he moved along the narrow aisle past the three stateroom doors.

These three doors were closed. But just as Murphy came by it, the last door opened suddenly. An arm shot out and grasped him by the throat.

Lower down, a second arm shot out and grasped the conductor's ankle. It tripped him. Two unseen men, lurking in that stateroom, held him. A third man, masked, appeared from the dimly lighted observation lounge and struck with a club. A split second before it crashed on Murphy's skull, he recognized it as a pick handle.

With a groan Murphy collapsed in the aisle.

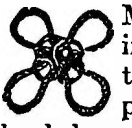
He did not entirely lose consciousness. Stars were shooting at him and he was groggy, but for no instant was he out. The two men who had grasped him from the stateroom now emerged. They likewise were masked. A fourth and fifth captor then came from another stateroom.

All five were masked with a black cloth which, in each case, extended from pate to chin. Murphy was too groggy to distinguish details of their several builds; but he saw that all were garbed in rough, dark clothing except one, who wore a white jacket with brass buttons. It was the uniform jacket which might have been worn by the car's porter. This man, however, was no menial; for in a tone of authority he now gave an order to his fellows—

"Tie him up; then toss him in there with the shack."

Two of them rolled Murphy flat on his stomach; they bound his feet securely with rope; his hands they tied behind his back. They took his wallet, which contained more than a hundred dollars, as well as an envelop containing four hundred dollars of cash fares. They took his train book and a pouch of tickets. They even took his train orders. They left nothing.

All this while the Shoshone Limited was hurtling on through the night at a speed of fifty miles an hour.



MURPHY kicked lustily, but impotently. He was dragged to the forward stateroom and pitched headfirst therein. He landed across the prone figure of Brakeman Pliny, who, likewise bound hand and foot, was unconscious.

By now Murphy realized that the general manager's party was not, as it should be, aboard this private car.

Bexman and his party must have been held up somewhere out on the prairie while reconnoitering the cut-off. In any event it was clear that five desperados had supplanted them as tenants of car 999. Why?

There could, thought Murphy, be only one answer. The purpose was to rob this train. And these fellows had improved on the usual technique of train robbing; they had boarded the limited without firing a shot; they were riding it now, in full command of the coaches, without having exposed their hands to the engine crew. The train was thumping along, on time, passengers all asleep,

the engine crew serenely unaware of trouble. The two who might otherwise warn them—Murphy and Pliny—were already secure.

The door of the stateroom was slammed shut and Murphy heard a key turn in the lock.

"Pliny!" he whispered hoarsely.

No answer.

"We're scuttled, Pliny," he called out.

This time the brakeman stirred and inquired thickly—

"Where's the G.M?"

"Go ask a policeman," groaned Murphy. "My guess is he's tied up in some arroyo, near Broom, along with Twyman, Starch, Kettle and a negro porter."

As Murphy's brain cleared he could more and more understand the genius of the coup. The five proper occupants of this car had been kidnaped, not for ransom, but merely for detention while assailants established themselves on the train. One of them had donned a white coat and stood on the front platform while the train was being backed in on the siding. He had called to Murphy in a faked negro speech. His mask, seen dimly in the dark and at a distance, had seemed to be a black face. Actually he was white, and probably the leader.

Murphy could now hear him, beyond the locked door, giving directions.

"Scout the train, end to end. If the Pullman con's awake, put a stick on him. They's seven sleepers, so they ought to be seven shines. Look 'em over."

Why look over the porters? Murphy asked himself. Why not go directly about the business of looting the unsuspecting passengers? Or were these fellows more ambitious? Did they intend to crack the mail coach?

The train thundered on. By the shrill tenor of the rails as it shot across a trestle Murphy knew they were eight miles out of Broom.

There was a long, bleak wait. Finally whoever had gone forward to scout the sleepers returned. Murphy heard his report, spoken in a whisper.

"Didn't run into nobody but this shine."

"Shove him in there with the con and the shack."

In a few minutes the door was opened. A Pullman porter, bound and unconscious, was toppled into the stateroom. The door was slammed shut and locked.

"What about the Pullman con?" a voice asked.

"Poundin' his ear in a berth. Other shines are curled up in the washrooms. We're ridin' purty. When we stoppin' her, boss?"

The most authoritative voice answered—

"About six mile this side of Brixton."

Murphy could hardly believe his ears. He knew it was sixty-four miles, or a ninety-minute run, to Brixton Junction. Brixton itself was at the end of the Brixton branch. This transcontinental train, of course, did not turn out on the branch; it kept to the main line.

The man must have meant to say "six miles this side of Brixton Junction," thought Murphy. Even that was unthinkable, for the engine crew certainly wouldn't run sixty miles without any communication from the conductor.

"Pliny," said Murphy, "did you hear what he said?"

"He said six miles this side of Brixton," moaned Pliny.

A voice beyond the door said—

"Stick your beak out, big boy, and see if they's a clear board at Frenchman."

Evidently these fellows knew the division, thought Murphy. They were nearing the town of Frenchman. Had the conductor been free and unharassed, he himself would be looking ahead to read the board.

A voice reported—

"They's a slow board at Frenchman."

"A 19 order, likely. Grab it, big boy," came the response.

At that same moment the engineer, obviously in obedience to the order board ahead, began slowing the train.

To a rail length Murphy could tell where he was, as box cars on the Frenchman siding rattled hoarsely by him. He knew, now, that they were gliding at half speed past the depot.

A moment later he heard a voice.

"Here it is; it says we go in the hole at Dogtown for No. 4."

With a shock, Murphy realized that at least two of the raiders must be seasoned trainmen. Pliny's hat and coat, he noted, were missing. One raider must have donned this coat and hat, and stood on a vestibule step as the train glided by the Frenchman depot. His crooked elbow must have hooked an order, ten or fifteen seconds after the fireman had hooked the cab's duplicate of that same order.

Plainly these fellows had stolen the train, bodily. Beyond doubt they meant to operate it, expertly, to a spot of their own choosing.

There must be, reasoned Murphy, at least two crooked railroaders directing this gang. Who, he wondered, might those two railroaders be? The conductor began running over in his mind the roster of trainmen on this and adjacent divisions.

Car 999 had been picked up at Mile 185. Frenchman was at Mile 201 and Dogtown at 209. At about Mile Post 208 Murphy heard the raiders exchange signals with the cab. The train slowed down, finally coming to a dead stop.

BY CONTRAST, the night became as silent as a tomb. Murphy sensed that the fireman had climbed down from the cab, walked ahead and was engaged in unlocking and throwing the switch of the Dogtown passing track. In a moment the train crawled slowly forward a little more than its own length.

"Grab that lantern, big boy, and that ring o' switch keys," spoke a gruff voice. "You're the shack, so do your stuff."

Three minutes later No. 4, eastbound, thundered past. It rattled No. 5's windows and went screaming on.

No. 5 crawled forward and again on to the main line. This time Murphy sensed that one of the raiders, with a lantern, was out closing the switch and locking it. After that he would wave a highball to the engine.

The train moved forward and gained speed. Soon it was humming sweetly over the fishplates, exactly as it would have been had Murphy himself been on the job.

A voice grumbled:

"We're seven minutes late. We better make that up afore we get to the Junction."

"Yeah," answered some one. "And why not?"

On two counts, Murphy was more than amazed. First that these raiders should give a hang about being seven minutes late; second that they should presume to have any control over making it up.

A moment later the stateroom door opened. Two of the masked men came in and stooped over Murphy. They unbound his feet but not his hands. One of them jerked him upright. Physical resistance did not occur to Tod Murphy, who was slight of build and sixty-four years old. His gun, of course, had been taken at the first encounter.

They prodded him now out into the lounge of the private car. He faced five masked men, the least of whom was nearly twice his own weight. One of them had replaced his white coat with a dark one; now they all looked quite alike.

One of them presented a cocked revolver to the conductor's ribs.

"It goes off," he warned, "if you yap till I say so. When I say so, you talk. You spiel out just what I tell you to spiel out—no more, no less. Get me?"

Murphy, wincing at the pressure of the gun, nodded.

One of the five raiders was left to guard Pliny and the porter. The other four formed in single file with Murphy. Two raiders, one with a gun and the other with a pick handle, went first.

Then came Murphy. Two other raiders brought up the rear.

In this formation the five advanced the length of the train, traversing, in turn, seven sleepers. They passed silently up seven long, green curtained aisles. The two leading men were ready to strike on sight, in case they encountered a porter, a curious or sleepless passenger, or the Pullman conductor. Murphy now understood the strategy of the earlier reconnaissance; its purpose had been to keep this later parade from being delayed or embarrassed.

The passage was made swiftly, without challenge. Reaching the first Pullman, they rounded its washroom aisle to the front vestibule. Once they were all in that vestibule, the door was locked behind them. They stepped across to the rear platform of a combination mail and baggage coach. Only that single coach now separated them from engine and tender. The Shoshone Limited, like many modern transcontinentals of exceptionally fast schedules, did not carry an express car. Murphy knew that the car ahead was turned baggage end back, mail end forward, and manned by two armed men.

One of the masked men pressed his revolver against the small of the conductor's back. The bore seemed like a hot ring branding his flesh.

"Knock," the man instructed in a whisper. "Call out and say it's Murphy, and you want in. Say that and nothin' else."

"I'll see you in hell first," retorted Murphy angrily.

"That's exactly where you'll see me," threatened the other. "Only you'll be there first."

The pressure of the gun ran chills up Murphy's spine. It was obey or be shot. In a desperate hope that the expression on his own face might warn the guards in time for them to draw weapons and defend the car, he knocked.

A voice from within the baggage car called—

"That you, Murph?"

Murphy answered without hesitation: "Yes. Let me in."

The door was opened.

INSTANTLY three of the four raiders charged through it and began shooting. The surprise was complete. One of the baggagemen, before he could produce a weapon, was shot through the leg and then belted down with a pick handle. Murphy heard the other guard howl as a bullet bit his cheek, saw him go down under the rush of two raiders. Three shots finished the fight. With the train roaring along at a fifty mile an hour clip, those shots could not be heard by the crew in the cab ahead.

Murphy was hurled in upon the baggage car floor. His hands, all the while, had been bound. His shins were now secured tightly together again and a cloth was stuffed into his mouth. He lay wretchedly on his back while the two baggagemen were similarly bound and gagged.

The train thundered on. A whistle from the engine told Murphy that they were bearing down on the highway crossing at Mile 213.4. A few seconds later his ear caught two swiftly successive tones and he knew they had flashed through a pair of cattle guards. Groggy, wretched and faint though he was, Conductor Tod Murphy could still translate the whisperings of those rails over which he had ridden for thirty years.

"We'll take the hoghead next," growled a voice.

One of the raiders remained on guard over the three bound and gagged trainmen. The others pitched mail bags aside until they cleared a passage to the front door. They had taken keys, as well as wallets, from the baggagemen. Murphy saw one of them unlock the forward door. As it opened, the sounds of the engine roared with new volume upon them. Murphy could see the black swaying façade of the tender. A spark flew over it and into the baggage

car.

Murphy saw three of the raiders stealthily climb an iron ladder from the blind baggage to the tender's top. They disappeared, forward. They were creeping on to surprise the crew in the cab.

The surprise, thought Murphy bitterly, was sure to succeed. For he knew Ollie Tracy, at this speed, would be leaning out and intently scanning the track ahead. The fireman, most likely, would either be shoveling coal or looking ahead from the other window of the cab.

Above the roaring of the engine's drivers, the conductor heard nothing of the conflict.

His first knowledge of the result was when one of the raiders returned jubilantly to the baggage car.

"We got a new hoghead and fireman," he crowed. "Didn't lose a turn o' the wheels, neither."

The man was still masked, as was also the one who had remained with Murphy and the baggagemen. Murphy realized with dismay that Tracy and his fireman must have been struck down, and that two of the raiders had taken over the duties of enginemen—and with practised hands, because the train was actually gaining speed.

It hurtled on through the night, streaking down the tangents, rocking around curves, thundering along as if Tracy himself were at the throttle. Murphy heard a trestle rumble beneath him, and then came the hollow roar of a tunnel. Had he been looking out in broad daylight, he could not more surely have known where he was.

Faster! A sway rolled Murphy and he bumped against the baggage car wall. Sixty miles an hour, he estimated. The interloper at the throttle would soon make up those seven minutes of time.

Again Murphy conned his memory of the divisional roster, seeking to select an engineman whose character might fit the peculiarly bold genius of this crime. He knew now that they meant to take the entire train out on the Brixton branch, where no other trains would be passing, and there, amid a desolation of badlands, loot it at will.

One chapter of the looting had already begun; for the two raiders in the baggage-mail car were already sorting out the registered stuff.

Murphy watched them while miles and minutes passed, and while the fishplates clicked. Here, he knew, was a humiliation which he could never outlive. Forevermore he would be a jest among railroaders. Pirates had boarded and scuttled his train. More than that, he had actually backed in upon the Broom siding to pick them up.

The rails now whispered to him that he had just passed Mile Post 218. A moment later the engine whistled a single long blast.

Why? Murphy became strangely alert. Why whistle here, since there was no grade crossing, town or siding in the next five miles?

And then a metallic clatter told him that they had just passed through the iron truss spanning Sweetwash Arroyo. Was the engineer such an amateur that he presumed he need whistle for a bridge? Or had he whistled in sheer triumph?

With other torturing considerations weighing on his heart, Murphy soon forgot this one. In ten minutes he heard the engineer whistle again. This was scheduled, he knew, for the train must be approaching the town of Deep Wells.

Echoes whined from a freight on the Deep Wells siding, and they roared by the depot at fifty-five miles an hour. Murphy could visualize the Deep Wells night operator, who would now call the dispatcher at Great Falls and report that No. 5 had gone by four minutes late. Murphy knew they were four minutes late because a clock on the baggage car shelf announced 1:29; they should have passed Deep Wells at 1:25.

"He's ballin' the jack!" crowed one of the masked men.

With his companion, he had just finished sorting the registered mail.

LABOR had warmed both of the bandits and one of them now opened the sliding side door for fresh air. Murphy, with the gag in his mouth, had nearly suffocated. With dead eyes he looked out and saw the black night clattering by. The hoarse succession of echoes rattled discordantly within his brain. He aged with every click of the rails. And yet his mind fastened, subconsciously, upon the message of every click, echo and lurch. He knew definitely that this present lurch to the left was the curve at Mile 231. It was a six-degree curve, but he who held the throttle took it at fifty miles an hour. Then the train straightened on a tangent and rushed onward.

Suddenly one of the raiders seemed to remember that the prisoners were gagged. There could have been no purpose in gagging them except to prevent an outcry at the moment the front door had been opened, an outcry which the engineer might possibly have heard.

One of the masked men now removed the gags.

"Yell your heads off, suckers," he jeered. "Nobody's gonna hear."

One of the baggagemen did yell, profanely. The other only groaned. Murphy lay quiet and—it was all he could do—gave ear to the whispering rails.

A swing to the right. This, he knew, would be the long, four-degree curve at Mile 233.5. Suddenly he realized that the speed was much slower. The train dropped twenty miles, taking the curve, he calculated, at about thirty miles an hour.

Engine trouble! Murphy exulted. The amateur cab crew, he guessed, was falling down on the job. The steam pressure must be dropping. Why else was the limited now making only freight train speed?

Then, to the dismay of the conductor, the speed increased. The train shot forward along a new tangent and thundered forward at thirty-five, forty, fifty miles an hour. The whistle screeched for Roundup. They roared past the Roundup depot at a fifty-five mile clip. Murphy knew that it was only seven miles on to Brixton Junction.

They made the seven miles in eight minutes.

By schedule and route, No. 5 should have kept the main line and pressed on toward the division point of Great Falls.

But he who held the throttle stopped just short of the switchblock at Brixton Junction. Here there was not even a depot; there was nothing except a pair of rusty rails curving off to the north. Murphy, lying forlornly on the baggage car floor, sensed that the fireman had climbed down and was throwing the switch. The train now crawled forward, clicked over a frog, bent sharply to the left, drawing finally into the clear on the branch track. Again a brief stop. No doubt the man who remained on the rear end, guarding Pliny and a porter, was closing the switch.

The train now moved north at about thirty miles an hour. They were running, Murphy knew, over rails which had never before supported the weight of an all-steel sleeper. The Shoshone Limited was fading into lonely badlands beyond which lay only the ruins of Brixton—the ghost town whose decrepit barrooms had long ago become a roost for owls and bats.

Once ore had come from it by the trainload. The rails of the branch had now long been rusting and the ties rotting. The only reason the track hadn't been pulled was that occasionally some of the old Brixton slag, dumped in mountains there, was hauled to the main line for ballast.

Along this wretched, weed grown track now ran, at about half main line speed, the Shoshone Limited. Here was a humiliation which plunged a final iron into the soul of Tod Murphy.

He could picture the reactions of the dispatcher at Great Falls. The Roundup night man would by now have wired in

that No. 5 had gone by only two minutes late. Between cigarets, the dispatcher would be waiting to hear from Antelope. When Antelope failed to report, the dispatcher would presume a wreck. Failing to locate a wreck, or any sign of No. 5, the man would go crazy. He would tear his hair and rave at this train which, like a sprite, had completely vanished.

The more so because four high officials were supposed to be aboard. For the first time in an hour Murphy himself thought of the general manager, the general superintendent, the chief engineer and the division super. Where were they now? By all odds they must be somewhere near Broom, most likely tied up in some gully.

The bandit at the throttle took the rotten trestles of the branch cautiously. He came to a stop, exactly as predicted, six miles short of Brixton.

With his fireman, he came immediately to the baggage car. The sacks of registered mail were kicked out upon the ground. The four men then made certain that the ropes which bound Murphy and the baggagemen were secure.

That done, the four men, each with an empty mail bag, passed through the rear door of the coach.

In surprise, Murphy noted by the baggage car clock that it was only 2:35 A.M.

The sliding side door was still open. Murphy wriggled toward it to peer into the night. He saw the black silhouette of an automobile parked on the prairie not far away. It was a touring car with curtains drawn. Faintly Murphy could hear the hum of its motor.

THE driver of this car, he reasoned, was another of the gang. It was plain that he had been posted here with a vehicle in which all could escape once the raid was completed. Deserting the train here on this branch would vastly aid in the getaway; it would now take much longer to raise the alarm than it would have taken had the train been left on the main line.

With the train motionless, Murphy could hear many sounds which he could not have heard had the train been moving. The first shrill sound which came to him was the shriek of a woman. Soon a pandemonium of cries, queries and commands came from the Pullmans.

He understood that the passengers were being looted, berth by berth. Every purse, billfold, watch and diamond ring would soon be sacked. It would make a sizable haul, when combined with cash sifted from the registered mail; for Murphy knew that a wealthy clientele patronized this transcontinental train.

He heard shots. He presumed that the shooting was purely for intimidation.

In a surprisingly short time it was all over. The conductor saw one of the masked men run from the train to the parked automobile; he carried sacks of loot, which he delivered to the car. The other four raiders came along the right of way and picked up the bags of registered mail.

A few minutes later the auto pulled away with all the crooks and all the loot aboard. Its track, Murphy realized, would be lost at the first pavement. In the meantime here was an all-sleeper train stranded on the Brixton branch.

It was an obese Pullman conductor, pale and half dressed, who finally arrived to cut Murphy free.

Murphy staggered to his feet, then jumped to the ground. He ran to the engine. He found Fireman Ben Shales trussed hand and foot in the cab. Engineer Tracy was not bound. He was sprawled there with his skull crushed, quite dead. Shales, in hysteria, told of the assault. Two masked men had completely surprised them; one had struck Tracy with a fifteen-inch spanner.

By the time Shales finished his account, Brakeman Pliny appeared, hot and limping. He reported that the sleepers were milling with outraged pas-

sengers, but that no one was hurt.

Tears flooded to Murphy's eyes and his face was haggard.

"Carry Tracy to the baggage car," he directed.

Then, with a dogged effort, he took command of himself and the train.

"Able to run an engine, Ben?"

Shales insisted that he was. The steam pressure was low by now. While Shales worked on it, Murphy conferred with Pliny, who agreed to pinch hit for the fireman.

Shales backed eight miles to Brixton Junction. Murphy rode car 999. Day was dawning when No. 5, in reverse, arrived at the junction. Seeing a clear block, Murphy signaled Shales to back in on the main line. From there the fireman drove forward, without dispatched protection, and pulled the train to a halt on Antelope siding.

"Where you been? Dispatcher's been raisin' hell!" bawled the Antelope operator, who came running from the depot.

Ten minutes later Murphy got a clear track to Great Falls, which was only ten miles farther on. Once the train was headed along that last lap, Murphy collapsed. Only sheer nerve had kept him conscious for the past three hours. The shock had all but finished him. His physical distress, initiated by the blow on his head, had been acute all the while. Far more so had been his mental agony. Now, with the train coasting safely into Great Falls, which in any case would have been the end of his run, Conductor Tod Murphy collapsed dead to the world in private car 999.

The Pullman conductor put him to bed in the general manager's stateroom. At Great Falls car 999 was shunted upon a siding. With new crews No. 5 went on. For an hour Murphy was unconscious and for another hour delirious, still in the private car's stateroom and now under the eye of a company doctor.

At eight o'clock in the morning Murphy fell into a normal sleep. At nine he awoke, feeling sick and old, but entirely rational. He looked across the track yard and saw excited groups of railroaders in front of the Great Falls depot.

He recognized Doctor Merle Shattuck, who sat beside his berth.

"The G.M. said hold you right here," said Shattuck. "Wants to get a first hand report from you. He's coming along on No. 7."

"What happened to him?" Murphy inquired weakly.

"He, along with Twyman, Starch and Kettle, were slugged about three miles north of Broom. Masked men—Bexman says they saw no faces. A sheepherder found them in an arroyo about daylight and took them to Broom. Bexman phoned Great Falls just as your train pulled in here. When he learned you'd already been put to bed in this private car, he said keep you right here till he could talk with you. I told him you were in a dangerous condition, from shock, and that you can't work for a week. I recommended you be sent on to the company hospital at Shoshone. 'O. K,' said the G.M. 'Leave him in my car and I'll deliver him to Shoshone.'"

Murphy smiled wanly. General Manager Bexman, he knew, was his friend. Thirty years ago Bexman had been a messenger boy while Murphy had been a yardmaster's clerk.

"But I'm not going on to Shoshone," the old conductor said doggedly.

"Why not?" challenged the company doctor.

"Because nobody can hijack my train and get away with it," answered Murphy with spirit. "I'm staying right here till I put a finger on those fellows."

The doctor, not taking him seriously, went out and strolled over to the depot.

LEFT alone, a definite stubbornness took hold of Tod Murphy. He resolved he wouldn't go to a hospital. He would stick right here on the Sweetwash division until he had solved and avenged last night's crime. He knew that a score of possemen must already have

left town to track the raiders.

"They'll get nowhere," worried Murphy, tossing on the berth. "Those birds had a start of hours. They buried the loot where it'll never be found, then scattered. Six of 'em! And two of 'em must be railroaders."

He repeated the last phrase to himself a dozen times. His feverish mind clung to it. Railroaders!

The county sheriff, who had already interviewed Brakeman Pliny, came in. He received Murphy's version of the holdup, then bustled away.

"Sheriffs and bloodhounds 'll get nowhere," Murphy told himself. "It'll take a railroader to catch 'em. It'll take a railroader to catch railroaders."

A few minutes later No. 7 pulled in. It delivered four exasperated officials of high rank. Three of them, Twyman, Starch and Kettle, went into a huddle with the sheriff. From his window Murphy could see them talking over there by the depot, as mad as hornets. The fourth official, General Manager Wallace Bexman, was a man of less explosive temperament. He came directly to his own private car.

Bexman had a physique as slight as Murphy's, an iron-gray mustache, white eyebrows and kindly blue eyes.

"Well, Murphy," he said, "car 999 got you in this jam, so the least it can do is pull you out of it. Lie right where you are and it'll take you to Shoshone on No.—"

"Give me a break, Mr. Bexman," interrupted Murphy pleadingly.

Bexman eyed him keenly. He could see that the conductor had something more than a fever on his mind.

So Bexman sat down and carefully trimmed a cigar.

"Shoot," he said, when it was lighted.

"The break I want," said Murphy, "is to make my regular run on No. 6 tomorrow morning, back over the Sweetwash division."

"Why?" inquired Bexman, surprised.

The doctor had told him that Murphy shouldn't work for at least a week.

"To test out a couple of clues," answered Murphy. "I figure I can find out the names of those raiders, and where they hid the loot."

Bexman became alert.

"What clues?" he asked sharply.

"Clues that wouldn't mean a thing 'cept to a railroader," said Murphy. "A jury'd miss 'em a mile; so would the sheriff. An ordinary policeman would laugh at them. But you and I, Mr. Bexman, are railroaders."

"I hope so," returned the official.

He waited, knowing better than to pump Murphy. He trusted the veteran conductor. And Murphy trusted Bexman. They had climbed the same ladder, these two; it made no great difference, man to man, that Bexman had climbed higher than Murphy.

"Will you give me a break?" inquired the conductor eagerly.

"Why not?" countered the G.M. between puffs of his cigar. "Maybe I'll throw in with you on your two clues, and we'll run 'em down together." He felt a lump on the back of his head and added wryly, "You see, Murph, they treated me almost as rough as they did you."

"When they had me trussed up on the floor of the baggage car last night," said Murphy, "I could see nothing. But the rails whispered. They always do on my own run. I knew to a phone pole where I was every minute."

Bexman nodded. This he understood quite well.

"I knew we were at Mile Post 219," said Murphy, "when the crook hoghead blew a blast on his whistle."

"Road crossing or town?" inquired Bexman.

"Neither. There's no operating reason why he, or any other engine driver, should whistle at Mile 219. But he did. Why?"

"Any hunches?"

"Yes. At Mile 219 there's a bridge over Sweetwash Arroyo. Not far up that creek lives a woman named Katie Harris; she's the widow of a ranchman.

There's a certain engineer on the extra list of this division, I happen to know, who keeps regular company with her."

"Humph!" exclaimed Bexman.

He waited, pulling at his mustache and puffing his cigar.

"The name of this extra hogger," said Murphy, "is Hamish. Hamish had a regular freight run until he spilled a train of apples. They demoted him for that and put him on the extra list; he's been sour and sore ever since. He lives right here in Great Falls."

"Humph! And this extra list hogger has been keeping company with a widow ranchwoman who lives upcreek from Mile 219, eh?" exclaimed the G.M. "In the habit of saluting her every time he passed with a train, was he?"

"Yes. That, you know, gets to be a habit. A hogger seldom passes a farm where his wife or his girl lives, without whistling a salute. Hamish has done that for a year or more, at Mile 219. Let's suppose he was the crook hogger on No. 5 last night. The Sweetwash bridge suddenly looms up ahead. Instinctively, from habit, he toots the whistle."

"Only half convincing," objected Bexman, after a long deliberation. "The whistle might have been merely triumphant, or derisive."

"Wait until you hook it up with my second clue," returned Murphy. "This fellow highballs on at about fifty-five an hour. He takes curve after curve at full speed. But at the comparatively flat curve at Mile 233.5 he slows to half speed. Once he's around that curve, he opens her up again and hits sixty. Get it?"

"No."

"It was at curve 233.5," explained Murphy, "that Hamish spilled his train of apples."

Bexman blinked; then conviction leaped in his eyes. Being a railroader, he knew the ways of his kind. He knew that once a certain curve has wrecked an engineer, he is quite likely to take that curve cautiously for all the rest of his operating life.

"Murph," applauded General Manager Bexman, "I've an idea you'll get further on this case than all the cops, sheriffs and bloodhounds in Montana. What do you want me to do?"

"First," returned Murphy, "please don't mention Hamish's name till I give the word."

"Done," agreed Bexman.

"Next, please go over to the trainmaster's office and get a list of crews, both trainmen and enginemen, regulars and extras, who were on runs last night."

WITHOUT a word Bexman departed on the errand. He was a big man—big enough to take orders from a conductor when the latter was better informed than himself.

He returned shortly, handing a list of crews to Murphy. Murphy studied it, and saw that Extra Engineer Hamish had not been on duty last night. Murphy made a mental list of others who had not been called out within the past twenty-four hours.

"What next?" inquired Bexman.

"Next," answered Murphy, "let's ride my hunch and lay a trap for Hamish. We want *all* of those crooks, but the man we want first, and most, is Hamish. O.T. Tracy was murdered. And it was Hamish who took O.T's place at the throttle."

"Well?"

"I want to be called for my regular run on No. 6, due out of here at eight o'clock tomorrow morning."

Bexman frowned.

"But you're in no shape," he objected. "Doctor says you got to lay off work for a week."

"Bunk!" retorted Murphy. "Yeah, the doc says I had a shock, but the only thing that's badly shocked and shattered is my pride as conductor of the Shoshone Limited. There's a cure for it. The cure is for me to take my regular run and nail Hamish, his pals and the loot."

Bexman, loath to defy the orders of a doctor, argued.

Murphy compromised.

"All right, let me stay right here where I am now, and you have this private car hooked on No. 6. I'll sit here in the observation lounge of this car, and agree not to leave it. List me nominally as conductor, since it'll be my own regular run. Put on a ticket collector, or train auditor, and any experienced brakeman. Between them they can relieve me of all routine work. I'll sit here in car 999 and spring a trap. If it works, by the time we reach Twin Buttes I'll have every crook booked."

Bexman was dumbfounded.

"Without setting a foot off of car 999?" he challenged.

"Without setting a foot off of car 999."

"Are you framing a fight on the run, or anything which would discommode or alarm passengers?" persisted the G.M.

"The passengers won't even quit being bored," promised Murphy, "and we'll pull into Twin Buttes right on time."

As Bexman continued to hesitate, Murphy argued:

"Our having a hunch Hamish was leader of that gang, and proving it on him, are two different things. The sheriff would bobble it. He'd arrest Hamish on my tip—and spoil everything. The other crooks would be warned and get clean off. We'd fail to convict Hamish. Which would leave us with the loot lost, a lot of lawsuits from passengers and a black eye for the Sweetwash division. All I ask is that you let me pick the cab crew and the engine that pulls No. 6 out of here tomorrow morning."

"Ah!" exclaimed Bexman. "And I presume you nominate Hamish for hog-head?"

"Sure. He's a good one. Had a pile-up one time, but who hasn't? He's a perfectly safe bet to pull 6 from Great Falls to Twin Buttes. For fireman I nominate Ben Shales, the boy who witnessed the murder of O.T. Tracy. Since Tracy's dead, some extra list engineer has to be called for the run. It might as well be Hamish as any one else. For an engine I'd like the 1405, which is the same jack on which Tracy lost his life."

Bexman was a man of quick decisions, and he made one now. He agreed on the cab crews and the engine and promised to fix it up with the trainmaster. He also agreed that Murphy could be nominal conductor on his next regular run, provided that a train auditor and senior brakeman handle all duties of both transportation and operation, and that Murphy remain, a semi-invalid, in car 999, which was to be hooked on the end of the train.

Twenty-one hours later No. 6, the sister Shoshone Limited, arrived from the west. She was strictly on time. She changed engines and took on new crews. Engine 1405 was coupled ahead and car 999 behind.

The choosing of an engineer from the extra list caused no comment. Regular engineers were scarce, for most of them wanted to attend Tracy's funeral. Engineer Hamish expected a call, and was ready.

A Swede named Jorgensen was called for brakeman. He was instructed, privately, to assume the routine operating duties of conductor. A train auditor was aboard to handle transportation. Murphy rode the cushions of car 999.

With Murphy were General Manager Bexman, General Superintendent Twyman, Chief Engineer Tom Starch and Division Superintendent Kettle. Kettle, bald and rotund, was the youngest of the group. Twyman was a tall, portly man wearing a baggy Palm Beach suit and a Panama hat. It was his habit, while talking, to play with his watch chain. He was constantly forgetting that the raiders, evening before last, had stolen this watch chain; thus, in fingering for it now, he would grasp nothing. This futile effort, constantly reminding him of the indignity, never failed to make him mad.

Tom Starch was tall, lean, red and bald. His temper was brittle; for thirty-

six hours he had been boiling.

"We know everything the G.M. told us," complained Kettle peevishly as No. 6 pulled out. "He told us about Bridge 219 and curve 233.5, but that's all."

"That's all Murph came across with," insisted Bexman.

"What the hell else you got on Hamish, Murph?" growled Tom Starch.

"Not a thing," admitted Murphy.

He was seated in uniform at the open window of the stateroom. The screen had been removed so that, whenever he wished, he could lean out and look ahead.

Starch snorted. He thought Murphy was crazy, and said so profanely. Kettle agreed with him. Twyman fumbled absently at his vest, found only a button, tore it off savagely and threw it away.

And yet General Manager Bexman held to his faith in Murphy.

"Car 999 was the egg which hatched the trouble," he said gravely, "so let Murphy ride her to a showdown. I'm stringing along."

NO. 6 cleared the Great Falls yard and hummed smoothly into the Sweetwash run. She passed Antelope on the dot; nine minutes later she cracked over the frog at Brixton Junction.

"He's balling the jack," said Murphy, his watch out. "About fifty-five miles an hour. He hasn't shut her down for a curve yet. Time him at curve 233.5."

Out came Kettle's watch, which was brand new. He scowled fiercely at it, since it reminded him of a recent loss. He stood ready to time the mile from Post 234 to 233.

Without a slowdown, they flashed through Roundup.

A tension grew as they neared Mile Post 234. Three timers caught it to the second as they passed. Immediately the train began losing speed.

From end to end of a long flat curve within that mile the train made only half its normal speed. Kettle announced that the mile was completed in two minutes and eight seconds.

Then the speed increased to nearly a mile a minute.

"It begins to stink," admitted Starch gruffly. "But it doesn't prove a thing. What next?"

"Listen for his whistle at the Sweetwash bridge," insisted Murphy.

No. 6 rattled on down the division. The engine whistled for a highway crossing, and later for Deep Wells. After Deep Wells, Murphy waited tensely for Mile 219.

It came—and there was no whistle. The train rattled over the bridge and on.

Starch scowled at Murphy. Murphy had lost ground, even with Bexman.

"Bats in your belfry, Murph," said Kettle.

"I don't know why he didn't whistle at that bridge," answered Murphy defensively. "He always has before. He certainly did night before last on No. 5."

"You mean some other hogger did," corrected Twyman.

"I mean Hamish," retorted Murphy. "Who else but Hamish would slow for only one curve on the division? Hamish and four helpers held up that train."

"Any idea who those helpers were?" challenged Starch.

"Yeah," snapped Murphy, "and we're getting closer to 'em every minute."

The others became alert. This was the first hint of suspicion directed toward any one but Hamish. Bexman asked quietly—

"Who do you think they are, Murphy?"

"Who," countered Murphy, "had the best chance to board a private car parked at Broom on a dark night?"

"Any gang could have done it," retorted Kettle.

"What gang had the best chance?" insisted Murphy.

"I'll bite. What gang *did* have the best chance?" asked Starch.

"The section gang," answered Murphy.

The others stared at him.

"The Broom section gang," repeated

Murphy. "There's four men on that gang, three laborers and a foreman. And who's the foreman? If you'll look it up on the roadmaster's payroll, you'll find his name's Harris. And if you'll look up his pedigree, you'll find he's a brother-in-law to the widow ranchwoman who lives just upcreek from Sweetwash bridge."

The others grew serious. Murphy was beginning to tie up his leads. Still, Hamish had failed to whistle at the Sweetwash bridge, so that thread seemed to be broken. Only his habit of blowing at the bridge could connect him with the name of Harris.

"The number of men on that section crew is exactly right to round out the gang," reminded Murphy.

"No—it lacks one," objected Starch. "Counting the bird who drove the automobile, there were six of 'em."

Murphy ignored Starch and went on: "One of 'em knocked me over with a pick handle. What's a pick handle? It's a section hand's best friend. All right. And the Broom switch lamp wasn't filled with oil that evening. Looks like those fellows had something else on their minds."

There was an indecisive discussion. Twyman was inclined to line up with Bexman in supporting Murphy. Starch and Kettle remained unconvinced.

"We'll test it at Broom," offered Murphy.

"Test what?" asked Kettle testily. "You want us to stop at Broom and haul the section gang in here on the carpet? No good, Murphy."

"I coaxed a favor out of the roadmaster," said Murphy. "I asked him if there isn't some piece of equipment at Broom that needs replacement. He said that for a long while he's meant to replace the east switch stand there. I asked him if he could arrange to have it done today. When I told him why, he agreed. The roadmaster happens to be a lodge brother of O.T. Tracy's. He wired the Broom section foreman that he's shipping a new switch stand for the east headblock at Broom, by deadhead baggage on No. 6 today. The section gang is instructed to meet us, receive the new switch stand and install it immediately."

"Why all this rush for a new switch stand at Broom?" wondered Kettle.

"It's just a scheme," explained Murphy, "to have the section gang on hand, unsuspectingly, when we make our regular water stop at Broom."

"Well?"

But at that moment they heard the engine whistle for Broom.

The train began slowing for the tank. Murphy put his head out of his window and looked ahead.

NO. 6 halted with her tender spotted neatly at the Broom tank. Intense anxiety lined Murphy's features. He was plunging to the limit on a few slender threads of logic, one of which already seemed to have snapped. Was he wrong? Why had Engineer Hamish, today of all days, failed to whistle at Bridge 219?

By leaning far out of the window, Murphy could now see Fireman Ben Shales atop the tender. Shales was reaching forth to bring the hinged spout into position.

In the cab ahead of Shales sat Hamish on his stool.

On the ground half a car length to the rear of the tender stood a section foreman and three laborers, all four garbed in overalls and slouch hats. The baggage car door slid open and Murphy saw a switch stand handed out to the section men. The baggage car door was then immediately closed.

Shales was squatting there on the tender while the huge stream poured into the tank.

Murphy now drew his head in from the window. He did so merely to keep the section gang from seeing him; he did not want them to suspect that he had any special interest either in the business of filling the water tank or the unloading of a switch stand.

Bexman and his fellow officials were watching Murphy curiously. Without a word he left them seated in the lounge and went out upon the observation platform.

Minutes passed. Then Murphy heard Brakeman Jorgensen exchange signals with the cab. Two toots, and the wheels began to turn slowly. Water had been taken and No. 6 was moving on.

Murphy remained there on the rear platform. In a moment this platform cleared a man who had been walking along the cinders toward the back end of the train. He was Section Foreman Mike Harris, a tall, swarthy fellow whom the conductor knew by sight.

Murphy said, "Hello, Harris," and waved a hand idly.

Harris stooped indecisively. His face, Murphy thought, looked strained. He stood there by the track staring at him as the platform rolled slowly past.

A moment later Murphy's car cleared the section tool house, which was to the right of the track. Then the section dwelling house. Then the water tank. By this stood two section men, at whose feet lay the new switch stand. The third laborer was not immediately in sight. Murphy wondered where he had gone, but in a moment saw him appear from between section house and tool shed.

The train was by then several hundred yards down the track, and gaining speed. It passed the box car depot, and within the car Murphy saw the face of Operator Boyd Madigan, now on duty. Murphy caught Madigan's eye and nodded; Madigan returned the nod.

The train gained speed. Looking back, Murphy could see that all four section men had come together in a group at the tank. Murphy then went inside the car lounge and joined Bexman, Starch, Twyman and Kettle.

Knowing that the next curve bent to the left, Murphy now looked ahead from a left window. When the train, at full speed, was in a complete arc on this curve, Murphy could easily see the fireman's side of the locomotive in profile.

What he next saw elated him. For he caught a signal from Shales. The fireman's left arm hung downward out of his cab window in such a manner that a white handkerchief, held in his hand, could not have been seen by Hamish on the other side of the cab. Shales waved this handkerchief three times.

Murphy turned exultantly to Bexman.

"I'm positive now," he asserted, "that the No. 5 raiders were Hamish and the Broom section gang. I can't yet prove it in court, but it's bound to be a fact."

"Why?" demanded the four officials in chorus.

"Because Shales has just signaled me that he obeyed my instructions at Broom."

"What instructions?" demanded Starch.

Murphy explained:

"When Shales was on top the tender just now taking water, he caught the eye of Section Foreman Harris who stood on the ground at the baggage car door. Shales beckoned cautiously; as Harris approached, Shales took out a pocket notebook, pretended to write a few lines, tore out the page, folded it, then handed the folded note down to Harris.

"With a cautious glance over his shoulder at Hamish in the cab, Shales whispered, 'Beat it back to the rear end and give this to Conductor Murphy. If I took it back myself, Hamish would want to know why.'

"Shales then put a finger to his lips, shutting off questions from Harris. He turned his back on him. There was nothing Harris could do but start walking back toward the rear end with the note. If guilty, he would be not only curious but alarmed—alarmed enough, I think, to unfold the note and read it as he walked back."

As Murphy paused, Bexman nodded approvingly.

Starch grumbled—

"Not bad, if it works, Murphy."

"It *did* work," asserted Murphy, "because Harris did not deliver the note!"

"What," inquired Kettle eagerly, "did

the note say?"

"I wrote it myself," said Murphy, "on a page of Shales' notebook before we left Great Falls. It said, 'Have just picked up a red hot tip in this cab. Take it from me, the hand on the throttle now is the same one that beaned Tracy. He's armed. To avoid a fight on the run, I suggest you wire ahead for a posse to meet this engine at Twin Buttes.'"

For a moment the others stared amazedly at Murphy. Then Starch snorted—

"A pure bluff!"

"A bluff which the section foreman did not call," was Murphy's defense. "The known fact is that he did not hand the message to me as I passed him."

"Which proves absolutely nothing," derided Starch, and Kettle was inclined to agree.

But Bexman came to Murphy's aid.

"Yes, Tom, it proves that Harris had some reason to suppress the message."

"He started back this way with it," said Murphy, "because he was several car lengths east of the tank when I passed him. A puzzling thing is that one of his three men must have dodged behind the section house just after unloading the switch stand. I did not see him dart away, but I did see him return just before we were out of sight."

Twyman, nervously twisting at a vest button, arose and paced the floor. Bexman discussed the issue academically with Kettle, while Starch scowled through the rear glass at the receding track. The train was pounding along at sixty miles an hour, about four minutes late.

"Well, Murphy," challenged Kettle, "what next?"

"Next," said Murphy, "the Broom operator, Madigan, will send me messages at every station between here and Twin Buttes. Madigan will keep me informed about the actions of the section gang. They have orders to set up a switch stand only about five hundred yards from Madigan's window. Will they do it? Or will they break and run?"

"They'll stand pat," snapped Starch.

"Would you, if you were in their shoes, and were a partner in crime with Hamish?" challenged Murphy.

There was a hot debate.

"Harris," pointed out Bexman, "knows it's the same engine and the same fireman. If guilty, he knows Hamish killed Tracy. In which case he'd realize that Shales, firing today, might easily pick up a tip which could convict Hamish. It's a bomb under the section gang—a bomb which will explode when we reach Twin Buttes. From the section foreman's standpoint, Shales will report his tip there—and the Twin Buttes police will come hotfoot to Broom to find out why Harris suppressed the message to Murphy."

"I'm betting," said Murphy, "that the section gang will throw down its tools and run. Their only vehicle is a gasoline section car. If they run east, Madigan will wire all stations east; if west, he'll wire all stations west. Or they might send one man to shift the cache of loot in case Hamish, under third degree treatment by the Twin Buttes police, tells where it is."

AS MURPHY finished speaking, the train whistled for Crazy Indian. A moment later the speed slackened, evidently for a slow board.

They passed the depot at about twenty-two miles an hour. Shortly the brakeman came in with a telegram, hooked on the run, for Murphy.

Murphy's brow was beaded with sweat as he broke it open. With his fingers trembling, he read:

"MURPHY, CONDUCTOR NO. 6,
CRAZY INDIAN:

IMMEDIATELY UPON DEPARTURE OF NO. 6, SECTION FOREMAN HARRIS AND SECTION HANDS GOMERS, JUDD AND MIGGS TOOK NEW SWITCH STAND TO EAST SWITCH BLOCK, ABOUT FIVE

HUNDRED YARDS EAST OF DEPOT, AND BEGAN INSTALLING. THEY ARE ALL FOUR WORKING THERE NOW.

—MADIGAN, OPERATOR, BROOM."

Chagrin almost crushed Murphy. He had expected anything but this. Kettle, after reading the message, said—

"Your plot's blown up higher'n a kite, Murph!"

And Starch, in his ridicule, was unmerciful.

"Harris didn't deliver the message," he rasped, "merely because it didn't suit him to play messenger boy to a fireman. Chances are he thought Shales was kidding him."

Murphy's chin sunk dejectedly. But Bexman continued staunchly to support him.

"No, Tom," he objected. "In that case the section foreman would have told the fireman to go to the devil, instead of starting back toward the rear end with the message. I still think Murphy's theory of the crime is O.K. It simply means that Harris couldn't be trapped into flight."

"Anyway, we're caught out on a limb," grumbled Kettle, as the train gained maximum speed and drove down a long tangent for Staked Mesas.

"We'll hear again from Madigan at the Mesas," said Murphy, entirely without enthusiasm.

Since the Harris crowd hadn't taken flight immediately, they were not likely to flee at all.

Ten miles and twelve minutes later they heard Hamish whistle for Staked Mesas. Again a decreased speed indicated that a message would be taken on the fly.

"Hamish," suggested Murphy, "should not become suspicious because of slow boards at every station. With four high officials riding the train, we'd naturally be shipping a lot of wires."

Again the brakeman came in with a telegram. Murphy read aloud:

"MURPHY, CONDUCTOR NO. 6,

STAKED MESAS:

HARRIS AND HIS THREE MEN STILL ERECTING SWITCH STAND. THEY'VE BEEN AT WORK THERE CONSTANTLY SINCE DEPARTURE OF NO. 6.

—MADIGAN, OPERATOR, BROOM."

Again Murphy felt bitter chagrin. His case seemed hopeless.

Again Starch jeered at him.

"You might as well throw away your badge and gun, Murphy. You'll make no pinch on this trip."

He was referring to the fact that Murphy was, in common with all conductors of inter-State trains, a deputy United States marshal. Murphy winced under the jibe.

Miles and minutes passed, and Murphy aged with each of them. The others sat there solemnly, and only Bexman was sympathetic.

After a weary while the train began slowing for Two Wagons.

The message which the brakeman hooked at Two Wagons was exactly the same, word for word, as the one received at Staked Mesas.

"Give up, Murph?" derided Starch.

"It simply means that Harris is a stiffer bluffer than I am." Murphy sighed heavily.

Another somber silence as the train rattled on down the main line. Finally it began slowing for Victor.

They eased by the Victor depot, after which the brakeman appeared with another wire from Broom.

"You're good, Murph," taunted Starch, "at taking it on the chin."

Listlessly Murphy opened the telegram. But as he began reading, the others saw his face flush. His slight frame grew tense. Then he arose and read shrilly:

"MURPHY, CONDUCTOR NO. 6,

VICTOR:

SECTION FOREMAN HARRIS HAS BEEN MAKING A SUCKER OUT OF ME FOR THE LAST FIFTY MINUTES. FOUR SECTION HANDS HAVE BEEN WORKING

CONSTANTLY AT EAST SWITCH BLOCK. ONE IS HARRIS; TWO ARE GOMERS AND JUDD. BUT THE FOURTH IS NOT MIGGS. THIS FOURTH HAND HASN'T LIFTED ANYTHING HEAVIER THAN A CIGARET, AND I GOT SUSPICIOUS. FOUND A PAIR OF FIELD GLASSES AND NOW SEE THAT THE FOURTH HAND, WEARING OVERALLS AND A BLACK SLOUCH HAT, HAS THE FACE OF A WOMAN. LOOKS LIKE KATIE HARRIS, THE FOREMAN'S SISTER-IN-LAW, WHO AT ODD TIMES HAS KEPT HOUSE FOR THE SECTION GANG. DIDN'T KNOW SHE WAS HERE. IT MEANS THAT MIGGS HAS HAD A FIFTY MINUTE START OUT OF BROOM.

—MADIGAN, OPERATOR, BROOM."

Despair forsook Murphy. He waved the telegram and shouted:

"I've got 'em! It's just the link I lacked, and it ties every thread. It even explains why Hamish did *not* whistle today at Bridge 219."

The train was well out of Victor by now, rambling exactly on time down the last nine miles of the division.

Bexman, Starch, Twyman and Kettle suddenly became almost as jubilant as Murphy. Not even Starch could deny that there must be some reason for the sudden substitution of a woman for the section hand at Broom.

"Here's the case," explained Murphy exultantly. "Night before last Hamish whistled at Bridge 219 to let the widow ranchwoman, Katie Harris, know that the holdup had succeeded and that she must cut across country in her automobile to a point on the Brixton Branch. She did. Naturally she wore overalls and a slouch hat, so that her silhouette seen by passengers would look masculine.

"No doubt she was in the habit, anyway, of wearing overalls around her own ranch. All right: They made the getaway and buried the loot. Then Katie had to deliver the five railroad men back to their stations so that their absence wouldn't be noted the next day. She delivered Hamish somewhere near Great Falls and he walked in. Then she doubled back toward Broom.

"By then it was nearly dawn. They didn't want Operator Madigan to hear an auto being driven up to the section house at that hour, so they cached it in some arroyo a few miles away and walked in for breakfast. The woman has been in the section house ever since. If found there, she's simply keeping house for the section gang, a thing she's done before. Better still, she could be their alibi if they were questioned. She could swear they didn't leave Broom that night—and no one would think Katie herself had helped with the job.

"This morning Shales' message to me, intercepted by Harris, frightened them," continued Murphy. "They think Hamish will be arrested on arrival at Twin Buttes. So they sent Miggs to shift the cache of loot."

Murphy recalled that as No. 6 had pulled out of Broom he had seen only two section men at the tank. Then a third had appeared from between the section house and tool shed. That third hand, he knew now, had been Katie in overalls and slouch hat, Miggs having already withdrawn.

"She was," put in Bexman, "a perfect alibi against Miggs' departure. Or would be if Madigan hadn't used those field glasses. Miggs could shift the loot from a dangerous cache, return to Broom, and Madigan might have sworn that he was there all the time."

The train pounded on toward Twin Buttes. They'd be there in seven minutes and Kettle was already writing telegrams. He addressed them to all sheriffs and officers along the division, instructing them to trace Section Hand Miggs, who was undoubtedly afflight from Broom. Tracking Miggs to a spotted car, and thence to a cache of loot, would solve everything.

Murphy relaxed in weary relief. Bexman congratulated him. Even Starch spoke a word of praise.

And now No. 6 was clattering over a

succession of frogs, rattling by strings of spotted cars, bearing down upon the depot at Twin Buttes. Here was the end of the run for the engine crew, although the train crew must go on to Circle City.

Kettle went to the front vestibule with his telegrams. He hopped off while the train was yet moving and dashed away to file his messages and to consult with local officers about arresting Hamish.

Twyman, Bexman, Starch and Murphy remained in car 999. As the train came to a dead stop, Murphy looked out of a window and ahead. He saw Fireman Ben Shales jump from the cab and come running back. He had so instructed him. The fireman must officially report to Murphy that he had handed Harris a message for the conductor at Broom, so that the section foreman's suppression of that message could be used as an excuse to confront the gang at Broom.

Shales ran along the platform on the station side of the train. On the off side was a wide ladder of tracks, spotted with freight cars and cabooses. Shales had just reached the steps of car 999 when, to the complete surprise of Murphy, he staggered. The fireman fell to the platform with a yell; he arose immediately, enraged and with blood on his cheek.

It seemed to Murphy that he had heard a steam connection, or a warped rod, pop just beneath him.

Then the truth flashed.

Murphy crossed to an open window on the opposite side of the car lounge. On the next track was a string of box cars. Murphy was just in time to see a man, with a pistol in hand, and wearing overalls and slouch hat, dodge around a box car. Instantly Murphy whipped out his own pistol; he fired twice through the window.

The range was only from track to track; Murphy saw his man pitch forward. He lay there, writhing, beneath a box car coupling.

Murphy's own face was white as he turned to Bexman.

"All we need to know," he said, "is the location of the No. 5 loot. And with two bullets in his back that fellow'll have no reason to keep secrets."

"What fellow?" bawled Starch, rushing to the window.

"Section Hand Miggs. We misjudged him. Instead of retreating, he attacked. Came along with us to prevent Shales from telling tales on Hamish. Dived under the train at Broom—and rode here on the rods of car 999."

CONTRABAND

By GORDON CARROLL

UNDER a sullen sky, ribbed with thin strata of windblown gray like the surface of the sea, two vessels steamed southward through Chosen Strait, gateway to the China Sea and to Port Arthur beyond, where the Russian fleet languished behind an unyielding Japanese blockade.

On the Fusan side of the strait a dingy, rust streaked freighter moved slowly, almost ponderously, trailing a curtain of heavy smoke from her lone funnel. She was paced on the port beam by a Japanese torpedo boat, one of the patrol force which, since the turn of the month, had kept the strait clear for Admiral Togo's warships.

From the freighter's bridge, Neelson, burly British skipper, regarded the newly arrived destroyer with steady gaze, observed the dull waters of the sea curl into foam at her bow. Five minutes passed, with no indication or warning of the stranger's mission. Neelson finally moved away from the rail, rammed one hairy fist in his pocket and addressed Ordway, his gnarled and wizened mate.

"She's sticking close, ain't she?" he vouchsafed, nodding toward the torpedo boat.

Ordway glanced up, shifted his quid of tobacco, spat carefully overside.

"Yeh," he agreed in a husky voice.

At ten knots, the destroyer moved steadily, neither ahead nor behind, and Neelson began to sense his own ship was under unusual scrutiny. It puzzled him, for he had nothing to conceal. The *Kataska* of Chefoo, Chinese owned, was from Vladivostok to Shanghai with hides and sulphur; there was naught to distinguish her from scores of other shabby tramps that plied the strait on peaceful mission.

Neelson, vaguely restless, moved back to the bridge rail and scratched one grizzled cheek in meditation. This inquisitive torpedo boat, black and low on the water, had arrived to intrude upon the even drift of his thoughts.

Neelson was an honest, stolid man, who worked for honest shipowners. Bluff and broad shouldered by nature, twenty years as coastal master had tended to widen his girth; brought, also, to his mirror a hint of graying hairs above the temples, and finally rewarded him with an unruffled outlook upon the vagaries of life.

He had, in the years, come to like the

routine of his daily existence; he disliked the smallest interruption. At his present age he contemplated serenely the end of his span in a snug retreat ashore, bolstered by the savings of a frugal disposition. Any other destiny was outside his calculations; his whole life, from the first, had been directed to this end.

However, in recent weeks, the Russians and Japanese had set to war with alarming rapidity, disrupting Neelson's habitual complacency—and, likewise, the orderly conduct of coastal shipping. True, cargo rates had soared upward, but the movement was accompanied by a corresponding increase in naval interference from Tokyo. Against his will, Neelson was forced to admit the danger of the latter fact; and it rankled him. With each succeeding day, he had awaited invasion of his maritime rights; an impertinent interruption to his trade. Nothing serious, of course, but merely meddlesome. Such, for instance, as appearance of this Japanese destroyer on the beam.

Ordway's throaty voice broke into his reverie.

"There she goes!" the mate cried.

Aboard the torpedo boat a string of colored buntings suddenly fluttered from the masthead. A short pause, while activity came to the freighter's bridge. Neelson moved closer to the telegraph control; Ordway strode to the flag locker. Then the *Kataska's* signal halyards rippled, crossed, began to move aloft, bearing the reply. Somehow, the halyards intertwined, caught with a jerk. The flags halted halfway, whipping and tangling in the breeze.

Without warning a gun spoke from the torpedo boat's forward deck; spoke in a quick flash of flame, like an electric arc, and died as quickly. Neelson stood rigid, appraising the patch of spume beyond the *Kataska's* bow. By slow degrees a suffusion of blood darkened his cheeks, and he began to curse, grimly yet with admirable restraint. So too did Ordway, at his side.

"Damn 'em for nosey!" the skipper mumbled, looking at Ordway.

But one hand, nevertheless, reached out and moved the telegraph control. Down in the bowels of the *Kataska* a bell faintly jangled; the throb of the engines fell to a faint beat; the displacement wave began to thin and curl inboard.

"Don't understand it, I don't," Neelson volunteered. "The Japs know we're clean!" He tweaked his ruddy nose between thumb and forefinger; then glanced straight into Ordway's eyes. "Make ready for 'em," he said. "Mind you, Mister, smooth-like. We ain't looking for trouble."

Ordway went grumpily down the ladder, muttering to himself in ill concealed exasperation.

ALREADY the freighter was coming to a gradual stop, while aboard the Japanese destroyer a small boat had been lowered. At the distance, a scant quarter-mile, the sailors' white leggings and caps were visible against the darker hue of their ship. The yellow men were going overside swiftly, tumbling into the boat.

Neelson, pausing in his restless movements, stared upward once, to where the *Kataska's* twisted signal halyards were etched against the slate sky—a sky beginning to promise nightfall in the west. Then he allowed his eyes to pass over the Chinese sailor at the wheel in cursory fashion, dropped his roving vision next to the telegraph control. "Stop," the indicator read.

Neelson's lips silently formed the word and, in accompaniment, a queer light came to his blue eyes. He was not sure he understood. He frowned in puzzled manner and then entered the bridge house, thence to make his way to the cabin below, where the ship's papers reposed.

When he returned to the bridge the destroyer's small boat was halfway to the *Kataska's* side. Neelson hung over the port rail and appraised the boarding

party, watched the oars break the surface in long, steady sweeps, observed the precision of the rowers' movements. High in the bow a Japanese officer stood with one hand on hip. He was a trim, square figure, clad in blue; the jaunty set of his cap bespoke aggression. Neelson, responding to an inner warning, thought again to caution Ordway, standing on the deck below.

"Mind now," he called. "No funny business. We must treat 'em right."

Ordway nodded, and sourly spat once more above the rail.

The small boat came up under the freighter's side, her fenders rubbing along the rusty plates while a bluejacket clutched at the hanging ladder. As the man moved in his seat, a bayonet gleamed above the gunwale, like the glint of a menacing eye. Neelson, staring bleakly down on the scene, knit his brows; a muscle twitched in his leathery cheek. Downright queer, this show of force!

The bluejacket was halfway up the ladder now, his body swaying gently to the play in the ropes. Neelson regarded the round top of the man's cap, caught next a fleeting reflection of metal from the shoulder badges. As though the flash of brass was added warning, Neelson felt a presentiment of disaster born within him. It was a faint foreboding; almost too vague to analyze. But it remained inside, to puzzle and goad him.

Grudgingly, he transferred his gaze from the sailor to the torpedo boat on the beam, rolling gently in the long, oily swells. At her stern flew the Imperial flag, the banner of the Rising Sun. It proclaimed, with blood-red flame, that war was upon the commercial seas. War— Neelson growled deep in his throat.

The Japanese sailor reached out one hand, grasped the deck rail, pulled himself over. The lieutenant followed; then four more of his uniformed crew, until their boots clattered on the plating. Ordway, coming to life with a start, moved some distance aft, behind him a handful of Chinese deckhands, emotion masked in the impassivity of their yellow faces. The mate's feelings were betrayed only by clenched jaws, and his eyes, which peered like beads from beneath the soiled brim of a pilot's cap. The Japanese lieutenant hooked one thumb in the belt about his tunic and struck an important pose.

"The captain?" he said in a clipped, grating voice. "Where is he?"

In response, Ordway glanced to the bridge, but already Neelson was coming down the ladder with slow, measured movements. He touched the deck and turned, hands rammed deep in the pockets of his duck jacket. His tone was gruff.

"Captain Neelson. *Kataska,* Vladivostok to Shanghai. Hides and sulphur."

"Your papers, please."

Neelson withdrew one hand from the jacket and proffered a sheaf of documents. The lieutenant accepted them without display of interest, shuffled them loosely, lowered his head to study one inscription. Neelson quickly decided he did not like the fellow's manner. It was too cursory, too insolent. The presentiment of danger returned to him suddenly, two-fold. Then the Japanese looked up, eyes inscrutable beneath the patent leather vizor.

"We must search," he said.

Neelson felt a flush come to his cheeks, and his body stiffened instinctively. For a brief moment he looked about him, as if to marshal the scene. Ordway had not moved; he leaned against the deckhouse, his mouth a thin line, his bleak eyes smoldering. The Chinese deckhands had drifted farther aft and, gathered in a huddle, whispered among themselves. In front of Neelson stood the lieutenant and, beyond his blue clad shoulder, four stolid sailors, rifles at their sides. The officer, awaiting reply, moved one hand idly, crackling the papers. The sound galvanized Neelson, and unconsciously he took a step forward.

IT HAPPENED like a flash. The officer moved swiftly to one side, closer to the rail, ripping out a terse order as he sprang. A navy boot scraped the deck plates, and a man's breath was inhaled sharply. Metal brushed against metal. Then Neelson halted, and found himself gazing into a rifle muzzle. The tip of a bayonet was held steadily, not six inches from his chest. Beyond the blade, a cold, blue barrel; and, clutched about the wooden stock, two yellow hands, smooth and muscular. The Japanese sailor's black eyes, cold as slits in a mask, gazed into Neelson's blue ones, silent and unquestioning, serving notice of obedience to further command.

Neelson controlled himself with effort. He swallowed once, wet his lips with the tip of his tongue and glanced swiftly at Ordway.

"Come on, Mister," he said evenly. "We go above."

A short silence fell, while Neelson, across the intervening distance, pleaded mutely with the mate for discretion. Slowly, unwillingly, Ordway's knotted fists unclenched at his sides, and he edged forward along the deckhouse, in the direction of the bridge ladder. Aft, the Chinese crew melted away in a patter of scurrying sandals. Neelson, already in motion, placed his foot on the lowest rung, leaving the deck to the Japanese. Behind him trailed Ordway, moving grudgingly, muttering beneath his breath, shaking his head until the pilot's cap teetered to an alarming angle.

Once more on the bridge, Neelson stood with his feet wide apart and inhaled a deep breath, then expended it in a mighty gust. His hands, where they hung at his sides, slowly contracted, until the knuckles showed white through the mahogany skin. Ordway paused a moment before shuffling closer.

"What's their game?" the mate asked.

Neelson rewarded him with a desolate stare.

"How the hell do I know?" he answered. "But, mind you, it ain't a good one. I feel it inside." He smote his chest; and a bitter note crept into his voice. "I knew 'twas coming, right along. For weeks, I mean. War's scant help to the likes of us. It ain't our business."

Ordway pondered the words, and the quid of tobacco moved to his other cheek.

"But they ain't going to find anything below decks," he protested defensively. "That is, nothing but what we got a right to carry."

Neelson's face cracked in a condescending sneer.

"Mebbe so! But I feel something else, inside me."

He moved away and stood on the wing of the bridge, morosely staring at the torpedo boat, which had moved closer, until only a few hundred feet separated the two vessels.

A strained half hour passed. From the bridge, Neelson heard occasional noises below—the clatter of booted feet, the clank of accouterments, doors opened and shut. Each sound spelled certain fact for him; he listened while hatch covers were ripped off and measured footsteps vanished into the holds. Then the Japanese lieutenant came forward on the port side, calling in a shrill voice. Neelson moved slowly to the bridge ladder and clambered down. Again he stood solidly on his own deck, hands behind him, shoulders hunched forward.

"Well?" he invited.

"You carry contraband of war," the yellow man said calmly.

A red haze came swiftly to cloud Neelson's vision. He trembled as if he had been struck a heavy blow; sudden weakness gripped his muscles. Seconds passed, while he felt the rush of blood pounding through his temples. Then slowly the storm abated, and he saw the yellow face before him once more. It was the same in every detail—the black eyes, the high cheekbones, the thin lips. But somewhere in the linea-

ments Neelson sensed a smile, vague yet insolent. He tried to speak, and found the words choking in his throat. The other's tongue moved instead.

"I stay aboard, Mister. My men, too. Tonight we go to Nagasaki."

Neelson finally regained his voice.

"Say, what're you trying to do, hey? Who d'you think—"

The Japanese shrugged.

"You explain at Nagasaki," he said suavely, and turned on one heel.

In a moment he was gone down the deck, calling to his four armed men.

Neelson's hulk stood rooted to the deck plates. Somehow, he was unable to comprehend. The whole thing was too incredible, too sudden. The *Kataska* seized, himself detained? A trip to Nagasaki? These things happening to Neelson, an honest skipper? It couldn't be. It was all a joke! There was no contraband aboard this ship. The Japanese officer was mistaken. A little explanation would set everything aright.

But there was no indication of a mistake as the swarthy lieutenant went up to the *Kataska's* bridge and took charge. Nor did the arrival aboard of six more sailors from the torpedo boat savor of a joke. The seizure of the freighter was smooth and complete; it was done with oiled precision, as if the venture had been rehearsed. In finality, there were ten rifles to quench the flickering spirit of resistance.

Bleak of eye and hurt to the pit of his soul, Neelson wandered about like a man possessed of acid reflections. Even Ordway, the lines in his weathered face grown deeper, gave the skipper wide berth, as the older man blundered here and there, mumbling to himself, his hands opening and closing in convulsive gestures.

It was a strange sight, the wizened mate thought, and quite terrible. Somehow, it commenced to frighten him, so at sundown he went below to the privacy of his cabin, leaving Neelson in the ship's chartroom, breathing noisily and staring about in a stark, bewildered manner. Up on the bridge the Japanese lieutenant had swung the *Kataska* toward Nagasaki, and her engines were turning a fraction over ten knots.

WHEN morning came the *Kataska* was berthed at the naval piers in Nagasaki; and the smile Neelson had divined on the lieutenant's face widened in measure with the growing day. Soon, other yellow men, trim in Imperial uniform, came clambering up from the quay alongside and, after hasty conference, announced confiscation of the ship.

Neelson's protests went unheeded. He took his papers, now soiled with much handling, and waved them under the lieutenant's nose.

"Look here!" he roared. "What's the matter with these? All in order, I tell you! What's this business about? Trying to make a monkey out o' me, you are!"

"We are sorry, very sorry, Captain," one officer interjected.

"Sorry, hey?" Neelson's voice filled the small, paneled cabin. "But what about me? What about this ship, her charter, crew's pay, all that?"

"It will be fixed, Captain—later."

Neelson's face turned crimson with rage; the veins on his temples stood out like cords. He was in the grip of a tremendous upheaval of spirit—of anger and bewilderment mixed, of perplexed fury. Then the red flush slowly faded; he shrugged in knowledge of defeat. He flung the papers to the table.

"Later, eh?" he sneered. "Oh, I know your game! You want the cargo for yourself. What d'you care for Chinese registry? Naught! Ship owners can't do anything; you got 'em bluffed, over there." Neelson's arm made a sweeping motion in the general direction of the Yellow Sea and, beyond, China—a forlorn, helpless China. "I'll wager if this was the British flag, you'd—"

But the Japanese officers quietly turned their backs to leave the cabin, suave and triumphant. Neelson's

bronzed fist closed once more in rage, and the words came huskily from his throat.

"Slick, ain't they, Ordway? Yellow tripe! They can use this stuff below decks. Short o' war supplies, they are. But you and me?"

One sinewy arm waved about Neelson's head, and for five minutes he bared his innermost thoughts in blasting language. Then he quietly buttoned his duck jacket and spoke in a more contained voice:

"Come on, Mister. Let's go ashore and have a drink."

Later, they sat in a cool Nagasaki bar, while Neelson puffed on his thin cigar in silence. Occasionally he stole a glance at Ordway, but the mate was absorbed in his own thoughts. Neelson suddenly spat out a bit of tobacco leaf.

"Look here, Ordway—we figger to lose on this deal, eh? There's twenty quid gone for you and myself, not to speak of charter fees, and the like, and the whole blasted cargo. Now, *we* don't stand for such! The Japs ain't going to do anything about damages; they're too busy with this war—the ruddy thieves! —but there is still the Russians to figger on. I was just thinking—"

The skipper's voice trailed off in studious thought. Ordway banged his glass on the table to attract attention of the bartender. Then he pursed his thin lips pensively, preparatory to speaking; but Neelson waved one hand in interruption.

"Wait!" the skipper said. "I'm thinking."

Ordway remained silent. Five minutes passed, in which time the drinks were brought. Neelson tossed away his half smoked cigar, reached for one of the glasses. Then his heavy shoulders leaned over the table in confidential manner.

"Listen, Ordway! We stand to lose, eh? You and me, who's been in this business, off and on, a score of years. The Japs ain't going to pay a cent; no, sir, not a cent! I know! Now it's up to us to reim—reim—say, what's that word?"

"Reimburse, you mean?" Ordway volunteered after a short pause.

The mate did not seem to be particularly interested in the trend of the conversation. The knowledge that he had been done out of eight quid by a bunch of thieving Japs was uppermost in his mind.

"That's it!" the skipper cried. "Reimburse ourselves. There's several ways. I was thinking if we could get over to Shanghai, there's a fellow there I know who might do us a turn; mind you, of course, for value received. He figgers like I do, that the Russians pay well for coal and such. He put it to me some weeks back, and I said no. But that was before these blasted Japs rooked us. Now, the fellow in Shanghai said—"

Ordway's interest grew rapidly, until he became all attention and pushed his glass to one side, so he could lean closer to Neelson. The skipper talked steadily for several minutes in a low tone. When he had finished, he pushed his chair back abruptly, scraping the rough floor.

"What d'you say, now?"

Ordway drained his drink at a gulp.

"I say," he remarked huskily, wiping his lips with one cuff, "that we stand to make. You figger smart."

They arose from the table, settled their score at the bar and stepped out into the narrow street. Through the motley crowd they made their way, shaping course for the Nagasaki waterfront, where Neelson was to look for a shipmaster friend, sailing soon to Shanghai.

NOW it was three weeks later, and at the Yellow Sea's horizon, the Autumn sun, a smoky oval of tarnished copper, had begun to sink into the bank of haze through which it had peered all day. To the northwest, the fog, triumphant at last, had beaten the breeze, and was massing heavily, like unbleached wool. There was not a ripple on the oily surface of the sea; and the host of twinkling

fingers, already radiating from Chefoo Light, proclaimed advent of a thick Chihli night.

As the sun's faint afterglow spread across the seascape, Neelson, now captain of the S.S. *Canton Prince*, changed course to make the Chefoo headland. He came up from the ship's chartroom, and confronted the dying light in the west. His face had changed somewhat since the departure from Nagasaki. It was thinner now, and his stare seemed to radiate a gleam of sullen purpose. The earlier complacency had vanished, making way for tiny wrinkles about the eyes, and a leaner jaw.

He glanced once toward Chefoo Light in reassurance and then, ramming hands deep into his pockets, paced the bridge, step for step, with the saturnine Ordway. While the Malay quartermaster nearby blinked patiently behind the wheel, they talked in undertones of the visit to Shanghai and their mission there; of certain conversations in a warehouse at Tsingtao and, finally, of the topic now continually in their minds —the war being waged to the north between Russia and Japan.

A slight hint of concern crept into Neelson's voice.

"With Kuroki's army at Tehlitz, it's little further for the Japs to go."

Ordway rubbed his stubby chin.

"Mebbe take 'em a month, say."

"H-m-m. Mebbe three weeks. No method of telling, the blinking Japs move so fast." He added an afterthought, "Damn 'em!"

Both men lapsed again into silence, their minds now transported to besieged Port Arthur, one hundred miles away, where the Russian defenders lay trapped between the Gulf of Liaotung and Korea Bay. But their silent speculation was not of a cursory nature; instead, it concerned the *Canton Prince*, which had a rôle to play in this distant naval drama.

Down in the freighter's holds, carefully disguised, was a cargo of Welsh coal; black diamonds, the Russians termed it, for the use of their blockaded fleet. Coal was worth gold, the furtive agent in Shanghai had said, and he had laid gold on the table. At the moment, Neelson's only remaining question was—

Could the *Canton Prince* elude the Japanese patrol?

Neelson thought so; his leathery mate likewise.

It was stark business, this blockade running. Contraband was contraband, and scant mercy shown the captured ship. But to balance this danger was the canker in Neelson's heart, the spot that had burned there ever since the *Kataska* was seized.

Honest trading? How could seafaring men be honest when the Japs used trickery? The *Kataska* lay at Nagasaki, empty of cargo, her peaceful goods piled on the naval pier. Payment? None! There'd never be payment! But if that was the Japs' game, two could play at it. Meanwhile, money came from other sources. Such was the rule of war.

The leaden sea washed along the *Canton Prince's* sides, quiet and smooth, like gray paint; the engines pounded in steady pulse. Neelson stared again at Chefoo Light, blinking like a malignant eye, then broke the silence with his gruff voice.

"H-m-m," he repeated. "Mebbe take Kuroki three weeks. I don't care—all we want is a couple more days."

To which Ordway replied with a slow nod.

There was no bother about pilots in Chefoo's open roadstead; and as the minutes passed and Neelson made the headland, he swung the *Canton Prince* in behind a Lampson Line freighter, puffing along under thick coils of smoke, and followed her stern light, growing more yellow in the fading day. His eye remained on the great cloud of black from her funnels which, also blanketed by the mist, trailed heavily to the surface. Then he glanced quickly up at his own funnel. A similar deadweight of burned Japanese coal hung in a motionless curtain astern. Neelson ceased his

pacing and addressed Ordway.

"Tell the engineer I want to see him."

Ordway went down the ladder monkey-wise, and in five minutes a small, whiskered figure stood at the skipper's side—the engineer, who had been recommended by the agent at Shanghai. His eyes, beneath a greasy cap, were sharp; one smudged finger touched the vizor.

"You wanted me, sor."

Neelson, as if his thoughts had been suddenly interrupted, stared down from superior height.

"Huh? Oh, yes, McLorr. Have you got the Welsh trimmed?"

The sharp eyes lighted shrewdly.

"Aye. Tha' 'Japanese' on top will just be takin' us in."

Neelson nodded in satisfaction; the engineer clattered down the ladder. Ordway, returned from his errand below, walked over to the starboard rail, and began to con the lights now twinkling on Chefoo Bluff. The mate's mind had commenced to revolve about what, for him, was an intricate problem in mental arithmetic. He was attempting to decide just what two thousand rubles a month would amount to, when prorated on a per diem basis. How many quid, for instance? But it was too great a problem for a mind that disliked figures, and he finally abandoned the effort. Anyhow, the sun now was low enough for the purpose, so he sent a Chinese deckhand to take in the sun bleached ensign at the *Canton Prince's* stern.

The freighter had begun to glide in among the warships, the great gray vessels of the Allied fleet, gathered at Chefoo for diplomatic purposes, and other reasons more material. Neelson took the *Canton Prince* astern of the British line, then inside the Austrian warships. Next came the French cruisers and then, as the *Vicksburg* and the American tenders drifted by, Neelson's Chinese boatswain and winchmen clambered up on the forepeak, where Ordway joined them, his cap slanted at a jaunty angle. They were right under Chefoo Bluff now, with its countless lights dancing across the unruffled harbor.

THE whir of a windlass ahead announced that the Lampson Line freighter had let go her anchor. Neelson, still breathing the heavy smoke from the other's funnels, brought the *Canton Prince* in between her and a China merchant, and dropped the hook. The rumble of the engines ceased and comparative quiet reigned on the decks, save for the chattering of the Chinese crew. Ordway came back to the bridge, mopping his forehead with an oil stained handkerchief.

"Hell!" he grumbled. "That Jap coal stinks!"

Neelson smiled.

"We'll soon be rid of it."

"Right!" Ordway sighed. "Soon, thank God!"

Before ten minutes had elapsed the Chinese customs boat was alongside, its wooden fenders scraping rust from the larger ship's plates. The little white haired inspector came up the ladder, face pointed and pinched like a terrier's. Soon he satisfied himself that the *Canton Prince* was carrying a cargo of Moji coal to Chinwangtao, and had merely put in to Chefoo to take water, and the one hundred tons of Chinese cargo consigned to the treaty port of Newchwang.

Neelson's papers were all in order; the skipper proffered them with a heavy hand. Once he smiled covertly as the dwarfed customs man turned his head away for a moment. The smile said that things were moving smoothly, cleanly. Neelson cast a reassuring glance at Ordway, standing behind the yellow man. Then the inspector was gone down the ladder and the tiny tender vanished, puffing valiantly, as though her ancient engine was new this day.

Ordway leaned one elbow on the rail.

"The Chink took things right enough," he vouchsafed. "I'm glad you spent so much time prettying the

papers. Slick job."

"Yes. Such work's no waste of time." Neelson spat from the wing of the bridge to the smooth water below. "I think I'll be going ashore."

"And me?" Ordway put in quickly.

Neelson frowned.

"You stay here," he said gruffly. "Remember Tsingtao?"

Ordway did remember, and his face revealed it; a sullen but abashed smile crossed his features.

"All right," he grumbled.

And then he placed his other elbow on the rail, there to sulk in moody silence while Neelson went below to change into shore clothes. Somewhere in Chefoo a Russian agent, interested in the *Canton Prince's* cargo, waited for the skipper.

When Neelson clambered down the freighter's ladder, clad in trim serge, Ordway wrinkled his nose at the retreating figure. Damn it, wouldn't Neelson ever forget that last bottle of Scotch at Tsingtao?

Neelson selected a sampan from the cluster of hopeful boatmen swarming about the *Canton Prince's* ladder, and went shoreward, his mind vaguely anticipating, among other things, the luxury of a hotel dinner, washed down by a bit of warming wine. The sampan brought up to the sea wall, and Neelson, throwing a coin to the bottom of the boat, climbed the worn steps. A throng of idle Chinese was crowding the Bund, but the lounging figures made way for the burly master, who shaped a course for the center of the town. While he walked briskly, Neelson wondered how the Russian agent ashore would communicate with him; wondered, although he knew such details had been arranged in advance.

But just then, as the cable office came into Neelson's vision, an incredibly dirty coolie trotted to the skipper's side. They progressed together for fifty feet, while Neelson was conscious of slant eyed appraisal of his profile. He passed muster, for the coolie suddenly saluted him with a jerk at the ancient cloth cap. But the pidgin words came from one corner of the yellow man's mouth, an arm's length away, though he seemed not to speak.

"All right, master. Mister Craddock he say at the Beach Hotel have got."

Neelson nodded his head; his lips, too, barely moved.

"All right, boy," he said.

He smiled—Craddock! A good, substantial name. Sufficient to allay suspicion. One of the skipper's hands surreptitiously dropped a coin to the dust underfoot; the coolie slowed as Neelson maintained his stride. While the latter passed the cable office, behind him, on the walkway, the bedraggled coolie seemed intent on tying a loosened thong to one of his sandals. He palmed the coin and slunk away.

Neelson, the passing shop lamps reflected in the brass buttons of his jacket, proceeded directly to the Beach Hotel, entering by the bar entrance. He stepped into the cool, raftered room, deserted save for a handful of casual drinkers at the bar, and two bluff men who sat at a table, off to one side. Neelson glanced at the latter pair, shipmasters by their attire, and suppressed a groan. But it was too late; they had recognized him, and were in no mood to be denied. An air of alcoholic friendliness radiated from the table.

"Hullo, Neelson!" one of them called. "Heard you'd been sent to Odaka for hard labor."

They chuckled at this sally. The second man added:

"How in hell did you get clear of Vladivostok? Break through the pickets? Come on, have a drink!"

Neelson, no other choice confronting him, sat down at the table and helped himself from the squat brown bottle.

"I've been away for a bit. The Russians talked a lot about my old hooker, but they finally let her go. Couldn't find a thing, they couldn't, though they searched like hell. But it's rough, I say, on the coast trade."

"What've you got now?" asked the man who had retrieved the bottle.

"*Canton Prince.* Old tub chartered to load coal for the Pechili Lumber Company."

"Yeh, I know her," said the second skipper, flicking the ash from a long, thin cigar. "Converted Finnell boat, ain't she?"

Neelson nodded, and carelessly fingered the top button on his jacket. He'd told some pretty good lies, so far; but there was other business that needed his attention in this hotel. However, the shipmaster was persistent.

"Purty fast for the coal trade, ain't she, Neelson?"

"I ain't figgered her as such," he responded, shrugging. "Depends on what you call fast."

He arose from the table abruptly; he'd have to get away from these two, he warned himself. They knew, or thought they knew, too much. His plans could brook no interruptions. He ordered the pair a drink from the bar, tossed the money to the polished counter and moved rapidly into the hotel proper. Behind him he left the two shipping men staring at each other. One of them finally found his voice.

"Hell, that Neelson's getting windy, ain't he?"

"Yeh," the other agreed readily. "And what about, I'd like to know?"

OUT of sight of the bar, Neelson strolled casually into the entrance hall, ordered a yellow boy to hold him a seat for dinner, and sauntered over to the desk, where he scanned the visitors' list with suppressed curiosity. Halfway down the page was the name he expected; he made a mental note of the room number. He moved across the hall, halted casually in front of an automatic gambling machine and played two dollars through the slot, before he edged for the stairway. The few men seated about seemed intent on their newspapers, and Neelson suddenly vanished from sight.

The hotel's upper corridor smelled of damp and mold, and he traversed half its length before finding the number he sought. Neelson smoothed his serge jacket with a sharp jerk on the lapels, felt for the crackle of papers in an inner pocket, and knocked on the door, three loud raps, then a soft one. A voice responded. He turned the knob and entered.

Craddock, a tall, blond youth, who might have been an Englishman save for the vague Mongolian cast in his countenance, arose from a chair. He appraised Neelson in a glance, then extended an open palm. Neelson placed in it a slip of paper, on which the agent in Shanghai had written a cryptic sentence. The message proved satisfactory, for Craddock, after a swift reading, smiled almost at once, extending his hand again, this time to welcome his visitor. Smoke from a slender cigaret curled upward from his lips.

"Well, Captain Neelson, I'm glad to see you. How are your nerves? Pretty fit, eh? You've got a damned good night."

The skipper smiled sardonically.

"Yeh, a good night. Promise of it made me come earlier than I figgered; but I might have picked a gale of wind if I'd had choice."

"Then why not wait?" the other put in quickly, on a note of alarm. "Why go at all? You know we can't take any chances on—"

"Because," interrupted Neelson, beneath shaggy brows, "I heard they were watching off Shantung for direct sailings to Gulf of Chihli ports. This spell of smooth weather 'twill be sounding caution, I'd say. As it was, we were hailed by a Jap cruiser yesterday."

"Yes?" the blond youth queried.

The cigaret was burning to a long ash in his hand.

"Yeh. If we'd been bound for any other port but Chefoo, she might have stopped us, and I ain't wanting that. The Japs get smarter all the time, see?"

"That's true," the other agreed.

Then he waited again for Neelson to speak; but the skipper first stuck one fist in his pocket and stared slowly about the room. When he spoke, his voice held a new note.

"I'd like to see the color of the money. Half down, I think."

Craddock stood silent for a moment, then moved across the straw matting to the writing table, where a black metal box sat upon the blotter. He unlocked the container and, lifting the lid, extracted a thick bundle of crisp notes.

"How much was it?" the youth asked idly as he riffled the currency between thumb and forefinger.

Neelson eyed him bleakly.

"You know, all right! Fifteen thousand rubles."

"Fifteen thousand rubles it is, then," Craddock retorted smoothly, and began to count out the bills. He reached thirty and extended the packet. "That right?"

Neelson recounted the notes and nodded. He prepared to place them in an inner pocket; the youth raised one slim hand.

"Say, wouldn't you like me to keep the money for you? You know where you're going, and the chances you're taking."

The grim smile reappeared on Neelson's face.

"Ain't no worry about *that*," he said. "I'll take it."

He thrust the packet out of sight and patted the serge.

Craddock shrugged.

"You know best." He crossed the room again and relocked the box. "When will you sail?" he queried over one shoulder.

"Soon as the Chinese cargo is aboard. I figger you sent the lighters out, right off?"

"Oh, yes. They're alongside your boat now."

"The rest of the papers?"

"They'll be aboard by ten o'clock. Damned good thing we don't have to deal with the consul, eh?"

Craddock's thin lips curled.

"Yeh. You want to see these papers, here?"

Neelson indicated the pocket of his coat, where he carried a sheaf of ship's documents.

"No—not necessary."

"Well, 'tis goodby, then." He stretched out one muscular paw and grasped Craddock's lean hand.

"Yes," the other responded. "Goodby—and good luck. When d'you expect to get back to Chefoo?"

Neelson cleared his throat gruffly.

"That," he said, "depends a hell of a lot on the weather—and the Japanese."

He went out into the corridor and closed the door. Walking toward the stairway, he patted the packet of notes in his coat. Not bad money, it wasn't! Figuring everything went through according to schedule—and why shouldn't it?

The weather was with them; the Welsh coal bunkered tightly beneath the false cargo, the *Canton Prince's* engines prepared and willing for the task ahead. His plans, and Ordway's, were airtight. There'd be no repetition of the *Kataska's* fate. They were ready for any Jap alarm, and had a high trump up their sleeves, if needed. Fifteen thousand rubles down, the balance on return. A good profit! Yes, sir, he was satisfied. This war wasn't so bad, after all!

In the hotel room, behind the closed door, the tall, blond Craddock also smiled. Neelson was a good man. He had a grudge against the Japs; he should get through. God knows, the fate of the Russian Pacific Squadron, trapped in Port Arthur, might hang on the *Canton Prince's* cargo. She *must* get through! And fifteen thousand rubles? Craddock laughed. Hardly a farthing, considering the stakes. Perhaps it was well for both sides that Neelson didn't know everything.

Again on the ground floor of the hotel, Neelson sauntered into the dining room and sat down to his long anticipated dinner. For a moment he felt a

pang for Ordway, who was eating aboard ship. Then it vanished. From the smooth look of Neelson's face he might have been as unconcerned about the fifteen thousand rubles in his pocket as if he had merely drawn a skipper's fifteen quid per month. He reached for the wine card.

LATER that night the two coasting masters whom Neelson had discovered in the hotel bar were returning to their respective ships. They came down to the Bund, arm in arm, a bit the worse for the third brown bottle. As their sampan took them under the stern of the Lampson Line freighter, riding at anchor in the oily harbor, one of the men half arose from his precarious seat to scan the other ships close by. There were a half dozen familiar silhouettes, but no trace of the *Canton Prince* and her squat funnel. The coastal man's voice was querulous as he remarked:

"Hell! Neelson's pulled out with that hooker of his! Fellow didn't look like he was in such a hurry." He scanned the heavens with one bloodshot eye. "Wonder what the glass says? 'Course, Neelson knows this harbor like the palm of his hand; mebbe he's gone to another anchorage."

His companion pondered for a minute.

"I'd say," he finally observed judiciously, "that Neelson'll figger himself damned lucky if he drops his hook where he hopes to by sundown. That's a fact, and I'll bet on it!"

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean Neelson's steaming for Port Arthur with doused lights!"

"Hell—don't be funny!"

The sampan drew up under the ladder of a coaster, rusty and smoke stained, and the first man prepared to catch the rope. As he set foot on the ladder, he addressed a parting shot to his companion, who was contemplating him with owlish eyes.

"Funny? Say, Mister, since when did the Pechili Lumber Company ferry coal in a sixteen-knot hooker?"

But the observation about the *Canton Prince's* doused lights was not exactly accurate, for by the time the two coastal masters were settled in their bunks for the night, Neelson's freighter was steering for Howki Light with all the outward appearance of an honest ship. Her lights were showing as clearly as possible in the thick night, and the long ribbon of smoke that trailed her wake was not unduly dense, as might have been the case had she steamed under forced draft.

Yet Neelson, from where he stood forward of the wheel house, could note unusual activity on the ship's decks. There was a great deal of thumping and hammering, and the patter of sandaled feet on the plates. He chuckled; so, too, did Ordway, who was once more in good spirits.

"The Chinks work fast, eh?" Neelson observed.

"Yeh," responded Ordway. "Who wouldn't, at double pay?"

After taking in her small cargo at Chefoo, the *Canton Prince's* booms had been lowered and lashed, the hatches battened. But now, only one hour out of the roadstead, the winches were uncovered again and the booms freed. The latter, on the forward mast, had been shipped out over the side, as if in readiness to take cargo once more. The deck below the bridge was filled with the shadowy figures of the yellow crew, as they obeyed nasal orders from the boatswain.

Neelson surveyed the scene serenely, then strolled to the telegraph control. He moved the brass handle. Immediately the *Canton Prince* vibrated to the increased beat of her engines as the grimy stokers added knots to the log.

Ahead, the night was growing thicker, and before ten minutes had passed Neelson had difficulty in distinguishing the lines of the forepeak from his vantage point on the bridge. Ordway cleared his throat nervously.

"I'll be going for'ard," he said.

"Uh-huh," Neelson agreed.

Ordway vanished down the ladder, leaving the skipper alone on the bridge, save for the Malay at the wheel. In the glow from the binnacle, the helmsman's brown face was immobile as carved mahogany; he seemed to have no thoughts, no emotions. It was, to him, just another night's work.

Down on the forward deck, Ordway pattered about in the darkness, inspecting the work of the yellow crew. Occasionally his voice was heard, conversing with the boatswain, who answered in monosyllables. At last Ordway seemed satisfied, and he strode farther forward to the paint locker, while the boatswain rounded up the deck hands. Ordway opened the door to the locker, allowing the ribbon of light from an oil lamp within to seep outward into the fog, now drifting about the forepeak in heavy folds.

One by one, in dim silhouette, the Chinese seamen passed the entrance, each receiving a belaying pin from Ordway's hands. Every alternate man received, too, a length of half-inch manila rope, which he knotted loosely around his waist. The rope was new, and cut cleanly in sections of about eight feet.

Finally the distribution was completed, and the yellow crew, silent yet nervous in their movements, vanished to different stations on the ship.

THE locker door clanged shut on a metallic note. Neelson rubbed his hands together in satisfaction as he stared down from the bridge through the gloom. Then Ordway departed the locker and moved aft, halting once along the port bulwark to inspect a rope ladder which hung overside, as if in preparation for visitors. He apparently was content with the lashings, for after a brief pause he resumed his stride, returned to the bridge ladder and mounted rapidly.

"Everything's fit," the mate volunteered.

"Good!" replied Neelson. "There'll be no hitch—if we need to use it?"

"No—not if we need it."

The two men commenced pacing to and fro, each wrapped in his own reflections, which were strangely alike. They were thinking of the *Canton Prince's* precious cargo, of the blockaded Russian fleet ahead, of the peril of the Japanese patrol, of the fifteen thousand rubles strapped in Neelson's money belt. And, occasionally, each thought of the *Kataska* and her fate.

An hour passed as the mist swirled about the wheel house; then suddenly a voice from the forepeak reported the Howki Light. The sailor's words were muffled in the sodden night, but they brought instant movement to the bridge.

Neelson and Ordway went down to the chartroom, and in five minutes the new course was set and marked off. Neelson returned on top and, motioning the Malay away from the wheel, put the helm over until the *Canton Prince* was headed north, her bow coming across with a soft swish, disturbing the placid surface of the sea. Meanwhile Ordway had whistled to the boatswain, and in quick time masthead, side and stern lights had been brought in, still burning, to be placed in the lamp room. With the disappearance of the flickering wicks, the ship became a thing of utter darkness plowing through a world of black. The only illumination was in the engine room, where the ports were shrouded, and the faint glimmer from the binnacle. The Malay now had returned to the wheel.

The shrewd McLorr, deep down in the hull, was doing his best with the engines. The moving mountains of metal trembled and surged and, as the speed was maintained, a glow began to appear at the top of the *Canton Prince's* funnel. It was the only visible sign of her at a distance of fifty feet, save for the white phosphorescent race churned by her propeller. The mist had gathered rather than dispersed, and the darkness ahead of the vessel seemed to loom like an opaque wall, impenetrable

to the beam of the hull. Ordway returned from an examination of the patent log.

"Sixteen, point two," he exulted, his face cracked in a grin. "Who'd 'a' thought it?"

Neelson did not reply. He was wondering, at the moment, whether all their care and preparation would go for naught. They had planned from the first on being hailed by a Japanese patrol; it was only for an emergency that they had plotted further. But from the look of this night they had little to fear. Only a stroke of ill luck could betray the *Canton Prince's* movements; or an overzealous Jap patrol boat, combing the sea through this sodden fog. Neelson doubted the latter eventuality; the yellow vessels probably were keeping close inshore. But as to the former —a touch of ill luck? Well, he didn't know. His luck of late had been poor; but tonight he hoped for better.

The fifteen thousand rubles were strapped in a belt about his waist; he could feel the pressure of the leather on his skin. At least, the money was safe. As for the other possibilities, the night could take care of itself. If it came to a showdown, they were ready. Smartly ready.

The current was with the vessel. As Neelson figured it was setting to the east, he held the *Canton Prince* due north, cleaving the Strait of Chihli. He went down to examine the chart again. As he reappeared on the bridge he remarked to Ordway—

"We'll either be clean through in two hours, or we'll be on the rocks."

The mate grinned confidently.

"I'm taking the chance."

Neelson stamped his boots on the dripping deck, for the night now was wet and cold and penetrated to a man's inner being. Most of the crew, searching for warmth, were huddled below the forepeak; not a sound had come from the Chinese for more than an hour. Shrouded in the dank mist, they waited patiently for the order which might come at any moment, or might never be spoken. Decision lay with the fates—or the Japanese.

The only lights aboard the *Canton Prince* were the screened binnacle, and the faint glow at the funnel. Neelson compressed his lips into a thin line. Within another forty-five minutes he would have nothing to fear but drifting mines. After that, it was plain sailing, for he knew the coastal rocks and ledges as well as the next veteran. He was confident of getting through. Here it was, the blockade nearly run, and not a sign of the Jap! His luck was changing for the better, Neelson decided. Yet no one could say he hadn't been prepared for the worst.

BUT what was that? Neelson's body jerked as if he had been flicked with a whip. Ordway pattered across the bridge and stood by Neelson's side, alert and taut, one shoulder brushing the skipper's rigid arm. Both men peered intently into the wall of opaque gray that met their vision off the starboard side. Out there, somewhere, something seemed to break into the monotonous throbbing of the *Canton Prince's* engines.

"D'you hear it?"

Neelson's voice was strained to a high pitch. The nervous tension of the night had suddenly crystallized in his question.

Ordway nodded violently. The two men moved with one accord to the starboard wing, where they leaned over the rail with eager ears. Two minutes passed in utter silence. Then Neelson straightened up, his face relaxed once more. There was nothing out there; nothing. Fear had made fools of them.

But hold up! There it was again, and clearly. Neelson's fingers tightened on the cold, wet rail. No mistake, this time; the sound was self-explanatory to seafaring men. The peculiar pant of a torpedo boat, a small craft; a Japanese patrol . . . With a flash, the vision of the

Kataska's seizure swept over Neelson's memory. His fingers remained clutched on the rail, and the muscles in his jaw knotted. This time, he was glad to say, things would be different—the odds had changed.

The lookout had the sound now, for he was craning on the forepeak; the echo of his muffled whistle reached the bridge, where it struck ears attuned to every noise. But Neelson paid the signal scant attention; already his eyes had caught a faint smudge of black in the enveloping wall of mist. It was a dark body, close to the surface, indistinct in outline, yet moving parallel to the *Canton Prince's* course, and pacing the freighter in every thrust of the propeller.

Neelson's eyes strained at the object, but he need not have bothered. For at this moment the closed shutter of a searchlight was folded back, and a beam of heavy yellow, faltering in its struggle with the mist, cleaved the night. Its source was the small boat on the beam, and its illuminating power, though dull and diffused at first, was sufficient to inform both crews.

Neelson cursed spontaneously. The searchlight was fixed on the *Canton Prince's* funnel, but its reflected brilliance cast an aura over the bridge, revealing the drawn lines in the skipper's face, and the narrow, beady eyes of Ordway.

"Small torpedo boat," Neelson said.

He wondered for an instant: Was this Jap all alone, close in to Port Arthur? Or had the *Canton Prince* cut across a roving patrol line? The next few minutes would tell.

"Get the lights shipped again, Ordway," he snapped. "Keep your eyes sharp for more of the devils. If there are, we'll have to run for it; if she's alone, well—"

He glanced meaningly at the blurred outlines of the booms on the forward deck, swung overside. Ordway moved away, his boots scraping dully on the ladder.

Meanwhile the searchlight was sweeping back and forth over the freighter's full length, seeking to ascertain the exact nature of the craft it had discovered. By degrees the patrol boat moved closer in, until the intervening distance was so decreased that the beam overpowered the fog, and made the *Canton Prince* stand out boldly against the night, from her rust streaked superstructure to her water line.

Suddenly the freighter's mast light twinkled in the mist. A deckhand came up to the bridge and replaced the green and red lamps. Neelson stood expectantly on the wet planking, awaiting the inevitable hail. There was movement on the *Canton Prince's* forward deck, as the Chinese crew came to life with a start, flexing their arms to stir circulation, each yellow man clutching a belaying pin. Then the hail from the torpedo boat, intensified by megaphone, knifed the night.

"Ship ahoy! What ship is that?"

Neelson cupped his hands and shouted:

"*Canton Prince!* British! Shanghai to Newchwang!"

The Japanese officer either did not understand, or made it appear so. The megaphone rasped out a strident order—

"Stop, or we fire!"

Ordway returned to the bridge, his lips curled in a cold smile. Not far away, Neelson stood with one hand on the telegraph control, silent inquiry in his steady glance.

"It's all right," Ordway said quickly. "She's alone. Everything's ready."

The telegraph handle moved. The throbbing of the engines ceased.

"Stop!" the megaphone shrieked.

"She's stopped!" Neelson bellowed.

Then a smile came to his lips, too; everything smooth, so far. The Jap was solitary. If she wanted to come alongside, fine. Arrangements for the reception were complete, with special deck space set aside for the visitors, once aboard. But thank heaven the craft was alone!

IT TOOK the *Canton Prince,* running at a fraction over sixteen knots, some little time to come to a halt. The torpedo boat accepted the opportunity to add to her information, and circled about her quarry, the beam of the searchlight probing to every spot on the freighter's deck. Once the ribbon of silver fell on the outswung booms forward, and Neelson held his breath. But the light passed on, and the skipper's muscles relaxed. The opaqueness of the fog made the ship's smaller details obscure, he decided; he uttered silent thanks.

The English speaking officer on the megaphone kept up a running fire of queries. He wanted to know more about the *Canton Prince*—her cargo, her destination, what she was doing at this spot, and other things. Finally he shouted—

"Why your lights all out?"

"Electric lighted ship," Neelson called quickly in reply. "Dynamo gave out. Had to light lamps."

"Don't understand. Stand by for line. Am coming alongside."

"There's a ladder to port," Neelson confided expectantly.

"Coming to port," the megaphone replied.

Neelson's fingers unclenched. The Jap had taken the bait!

The torpedo craft turned about, shut off the searchlight, reduced her speed to passageway, bore down upon the *Canton Prince.* From the bridge, Neelson now could make out the shape of the small craft in more detail. She was a squat, stubby vessel, about one hundred feet in length. Low to the water as she was, Neelson could actually glance down into her two small funnels, where they emitted an occasional fan of fiery sparks. Lights twinkled in the Jap's wheelhouse; one or two ports showed yellow in the night. Neelson's eyes glinted, as he recalled the *Kataska's* fate. He wondered where these yellow ports would be in another half hour; pondered, although he felt he knew.

Ordway whispered in his ear:

"She's coming in to take it, all right. About forty men aboard her, I figger Mebbe a few more or less."

Neelson nodded. Ordway vanished suddenly, then reappeared on the forward deck, where he stood, every sense alert, by the outswung booms. There were a few pants from the Jap's oscillating engines, the chime of a small bell, a slight tremor through the *Canton Prince's* plates, and the patrol was alongside. The glow died from her funnels; Neelson and Ordway now were able to look directly down on her decks, where the white topped caps of a score of sailors were visible, like bobbing, ghostly disks in the dark. One of the Japanese threw a line upward to the freighter, and it was made fast to a nearby bridge support, although an impartial observer might have thought there were more suitable holds offered, in other places.

The first man of the boarding party was swinging himself up the hanging ladder when Neelson's harsh voice roared from the bridge.

"Let go!" The words split the night, then were swallowed up by the fog.

Ordway's hands, gripping a heavy hammer, rose above his head and two resounding blows were heard. The hammer ascended and fell, ascended and fell, like an omnipotent pendulum.

Then there was a splintered, grinding crash overside as a steel patent anchor, with a forty-foot drop below its outspread flukes, fell from the *Canton Prince's* booms and tore through the deck and fore compartment of the torpedo boat. The thin plates gave way with the sound of tearing paper; bolt heads snapped with a crisp ping. The gloom was filled with the noise of crunching metal and the startled cries of the Japanese.

But for the moment there was neither point nor purpose to the bedlam of voices, each raised on a note of frenzied alarm and bewilderment. In the shadow of darkness, close under the

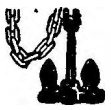
freighter's high sides, no one aboard the torpedo boat sensed the warning of catastrophe.

It was only when the deck of the small craft began slowly to cant that knowledge was born; swift, harsh knowledge that disaster had arrived from somewhere in the confining shroud of the night. Then one voice, more stentorian than the others, began to take command, and roared orders above the confusion. There was a concerted rush by the Japanese sailors to the starboard rail, where the two hulls rubbed together; the yellow men came across the deck swiftly, boots clattering on the metal.

High above their heads, leaning over the *Canton Prince's* bulwark, was Ordway, who had not moved since his hammer fell for the second and last time. He was immovable, graven, almost brooding, until he glimpsed the Japanese crowding the rail. There was faint light coming from the torpedo boat's deckhouse, a dim yellow glow to illuminate the huddled mass of figures, herded like sheep, jostling one another, temporarily bereft of senses and volition. Then Ordway cupped his hands before his mouth and shouted, his husky voice breaking into the confused babble.

"Take the ladder!"

On the slanted deck below he was heard. The stentorian voice of the officer was raised again, and the huddle of sailors, stirred into action, moved as one man along the rail, perhaps a dozen feet aft, where the ladder from the *Canton Prince's* deck trailed down into the darkness, until its end lay within their grasp. Yellow hands began to clutch at the lowest rung.



THE first Japanese boarding officer, who had clung startled to the top of the ladder while confusion reigned aboard the torpedo boat, felt the ropes sway to the touch of another hand below him. He came to life abruptly, raised himself to the *Canton Prince's* bulwark, and blinked vacantly across the freighter's shadowy deck. He was in the grip of sudden shock; the crash of the anchor and the bedlam aboard his own craft had paralyzed mind and muscles.

Like a blind man, he gaped at the scene before him, where a leering face had just taken shape in the darkness. Then his slant eyes opened wide in knowledge beneath his cap vizor, and he made frantic effort, unconscious yet rapid, to lower himself below the bulwark. But he had gaped a moment too long.

A Chinese deckhand, rearing high in the gloom, darted out talon-like fingers to clutch his jacket in iron grasp. With the other hand, the Chinese brought a belaying pin down on the Japanese's head—brought it down neatly, but with restraint. A dull thump, a labored breath, and the officer's muscles relaxed; he fell in a huddle to the freighter's deck, unconscious, limp, like a sack of rags.

As the boarder dropped, Ordway sprang to life close by, and in an instant he was at the fallen man's side. Another instant and he had found what he sought. His left hand held the leather holster, the right pulled the flap loose, and then he arose, clutching the cold, metallic butt of a Mauser pistol. The touch of steel sent a tingle whipping through Ordway's body—a tingle of confidence—and he returned to the bulwark with new assurance, the blue barrel of the gun pointed overside.

Behind him, meanwhile, a hawk-like Chinese seaman had snatched at the fallen officer, rolled the body across the deck toward the forward hatch and, with dexterity born of nimble fingers, lashed the Japanese hand and foot. The manila rope, new and cut cleanly, trussed the captive tight. The seaman, his task swiftly completed, left the helpless form on the deck and ran back to where his stealthy mates were huddled at the top of the ladder.

Ordway still loomed motionless at the bulwark, a shadowy figure graven in the

night. But from beneath the brim of his pilot's cap the mate's sharp eyes had missed nothing. He noted the slant of the torpedo boat's deck, estimated roughly the number of minutes before the sea would score its inevitable victory, weighed the possibility of miscarriage in his and Neelson's plans. However, there was nothing to worry about so far, and his fingers only closed more tightly on the pistol.

The second ascending Japanese reached the *Canton Prince's* bulwark and also blinked vacantly across the darkened deck. Then he, too, before he could move or utter a cry, felt a blow on the head and felt consciousness depart in whirls of sparks and fire. Like his ill fated companion, he dropped limply to the deck, a groan ripping from his lips. The sound galvanized Ordway, waiting expectantly, and he spun around to face the freighter's deckhouse, his voice seeking out the Chinese boatswain from the cluster of crouched figures.

"Get the Jap's pistol—quick!"

But already the man was reaching for the weapon, and Ordway, a cold glint in his eyes, turned about once more, again to rear his shoulders across the bulwark. This time the blunt barrel of the Mauser was trained upon the huddle of Japanese, and the mate's voice, harsh and rasping, held a weight of menace.

"Down there, below! Drop your guns —or we cut loose of you!"

As the warning left his lips, Ordway elevated the pistol barrel, aimed into the enveloping gloom above the sea, pressed the trigger quickly; then once again. There were two streaks of orange flame, the spat of two bullets, a faint haze of burned powder. Then the muzzle, trailing wisps of vapor, again bore upon the figures below.

"D'you hear?" he cried.

But his query was needless. Overside, the shrill babble was cut off swiftly, died to a whisper; the menacing tones of Ordway and the bark of the Mauser were sufficient. Stark silence reigned momentarily. Then the Japanese sailors, crowded about the ladder, heard an officer's voice repeat Ordway's order —repeat it in words they could understand. It was a command that brooked no hesitation, no pause; cold and concise, it said—

"Disarm!"

AS EACH sailor moved closer to the swaying ladder, he divested himself of weapons. Some abandoned pistols, some rifles; even bayonets clattered to the deck. There was scant delay, for each passing moment increased the threat of death, now waiting in the oily sea, creeping swiftly up the sides of the stricken craft.

Of those aboard her, none knew the nature of the sudden accident, nor did a single figure pause to ponder. It was enough to know that disaster had come, and that the freighter's deck offered refuge, provided the terms of this cold command, roared down from her bulwark, were met. Time was too fleet for idle reflection.

But once at the top of the beckoning ship's ladder, each Japanese had his bewildered thoughts swiftly arranged for him—arranged at the point of two pistol muzzles, and knife edged words from the lips of the *Canton Prince's* mate. While Ordway's Mauser covered each succeeding arrival, the Chinese boatswain stood by the bulwark lashings, his weapon serving notice of sudden death for any who sought to crowd and jostle to safety.

And so the Japanese, monkey-like, crawled slowly over the barrier, one by one; felt their hands lashed tightly by sinewy Chinese fingers, and then were led away across the deck, where their ankles met a similar fate, wrapped round with half-inch rope.

All this time, Neelson, shrouded in the gloom which encompassed the *Canton Prince's* bridge, had uttered no word or command. Within easy reach of the telegraph control, he was content to lean upon the rail, harken to the muffled

sounds below him and smile grimly as he envisioned the action taking place so close, yet barely visible in the dim light. He could hear the panting breath of his hard worked crew, the scuffle of boots and sandals on the deck, the grunts of surprise, the stifled ejaculations, as the boarders were dragged away. Once he heard a Chinese deckhand's voice raised shrilly as the yellow man arrived from out of the gloom, bearing fresh strands of rope.

So another ten minutes passed, and with them the last of the Japanese visitors. Nearly two score men had clambered up the swaying ladder, fleeing the sinking craft below them, only to find a new danger, and a new fate, at the freighter's bulwark. The combination of two blunt pistol muzzles and a dozen Chinese deckhands, all strengthened and made more menacing by the cloak of darkness, had done the job neatly and with a minimum of effort. On the *Canton Prince's* forward deck now lay rows of huddled figures, each bound hand and foot, each helpless and ineffectual.

Ordway, satisfied that the task was completed, grasped an ax close at hand, ran toward the bridge and with one blow parted the line that had been flung upward from the Japanese craft alongside. The ax bit deeply; the rope jerked and quivered, and then fell into the water, its splash barely audible.

As if the mate's act was a preconceived order, Neelson, on the bridge, moved swiftly. His hairy hand closed on the hood of the telegraph control. Far down in the freighter's hull, McLorr, grimy and expectant, read the message. The engines began to pulse and throb again. The *Canton Prince,* like a human being breaking free from distasteful hands, drew clear of the battered torpedo boat and surged ahead.

It was just in time, for as the steady flow of water poured into the Japanese hull, the boilers finally caught the wash, and they burst with a deep throated, muffled detonation, like the blast of a submarine mine. A few flames licked upward into the fog, the surface of the water boiled momentarily; then the pallid, enveloping curtain of the night closed over the scene once more. The churn from the *Canton Prince's* receding propeller stirred the oily splotch on the sea in stark farewell.

Ordway rejoined his skipper on the bridge, and his wiry arms, though he fought to control them, trembled at the bidding of overwrought nerves. Behind the two men the Malay helmsman again blinked impassively at the compass card; not a muscle of his brown face had changed. To outward appearances he had seen nothing, heard nothing. Neelson broke the strained silence by clearing his throat.

"A good job, Mister," he said gruffly to Ordway.

Then a short pause as the skipper stared downward from the bridge to the forward deck, where a group of graven Chinese seamen, dimly silhouetted, stood guard over the trussed Japanese. Neelson's leathery face was set in straight lines, although his mind, with pleasure, was contemplating the value of his new found captives. The besieged Russians, he divined, would be ready, willing, to discuss a bonus, an extra payment, for this strange cargo. Then he raised his eyes and spoke slowly—

"We're even with 'em now, the Japs—ship for ship!"

Ordway swallowed audibly.

"Yeh," came his husky reply. "Risky business, mebbe, but it worked fine. I figger we've reimbursed ourselves, and more. But say, what's that ahead?"

He pointed above the rail, into the night, where the dome of the sky, however slightly, seemed more pallid than the surrounding void.

"That?" Neelson responded briskly. "Why, Mister, it's the Port Arthur searchlights. If we don't crack a mine, we're through!"

Notes on William Walker

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

WILLIAM WALKER, the noted filibuster, was undoubtedly one of the most picturesque characters the United States ever produced. Though volumes have been written about him, there seems to be no one who knows how the man really looked and the way he used to command his men.

According to a description of him which appeared in the *Times* of May 31st, 1856, he was only five feet high, of insignificant appearance, red haired and with a grim expression in his somber blue eyes. He used to wear a dark paletot, black trousers, a big felt hat. A sword dangled from his belt. But for that sword, so the writer claims, any one could have mistaken him for an itinerant merchant.

Nevertheless, in spite of his insignificant appearance and his somber smile, there was a volcano of dynamic force constantly boiling in Walker's brain, a force completely active until a firing squad put an end to his life. And he did achieve his life's aim—he ruled Nicaragua, if only for a few hours.

Some of Walker's chief characteristics were his total abstinence (he is supposed never to have indulged in liquor, smoked or caroused) and certain traits of gallantry, as for instance when, during the battle of Masaya, he rescued at the risk of his own life a wounded young Nicaraguan sergeant.

Some of Walker's officers, among whom he counted numerous ex-Army men, were tough lads, and mighty quick on the trigger, as was exemplified by Lieutenants Woolf and Kruger who, after some disagreement, decided to fight it out. Whereupon Kruger drew his sword and ordered Woolf to defend himself, an invitation which Woolf immediately accepted by shooting Kruger dead.

As another example, take the case of Colonels Piper and Sanders who after an altercation had also decided to fight a duel. Since it was up to Sanders to choose the weapons, he demanded that their duel be fought with Army rifles, which were to be fired simultaneously at a distance of five yards. Next morning Colonel Piper failed to make his appearance at the appointed hour; he claimed that he was not in the habit of fighting duels roughneck style but according to rules and regulations. As Piper was known to be a fearless soldier, his decision helped Walker to put an end to dueling among his officers.

This he managed to do shortly afterward, during a prospective duel between Captain Henry Clark and Lieutenant Fred King, which never materialized because Walker informed them, at the last moment, that he had no objections to their duel taking place; but that after it was over, whoever survived would be shot and the seconds of both parties degraded and expelled from his army.

On a certain occasion, while he was facing with a flying column a numerous host of *patriotas* near La Virgen and San Juan del Sur, the detonators of his rifles and cannon were spoiled by a thunder storm. Whereupon he offered his best horse, a promotion and a considerable sum of money to whoever fetched him a box of fresh detonators from their nearest supply depot; but he added that if the bearer failed to bring the detonators in an hour and a half, he would receive as a reward a bullet through his brains.

Instantly one of his trusted officers galloped off and, after riding two horses to death, brought the required detonators within record time.

Continuing

RED SKULL

By ARTHUR O. FRIEL

The Story Thus Far:

McGREGOR stood over the body of his partner, Terrill, treacherously murdered by river boatmen, and swore an oath to push on alone through the Amazonian jungle to the mysterious Red Skull, whence for years vague stories had drifted to the settlements of the rich treasure stored there by a half mythical tribe of white savages called the Blancos Perdidos. Scattered as they had fallen in the jungle trail were the mutinous boatmen, victims of McGregor's Army .45. Years in the old Marine Corps had made the American adventurer a difficult man to take by surprise.

After heartbreaking days in the pathless wilderness, McGregor came at last to a point where the jungle ended; and across a broad savanna, he could discern against the horizon the hulking, macabre looking rock he sought—the Red Skull.

When McGregor finally came up to his objective, he could see in the shadows beyond the great red stone head that the rude dwellings of its guardians were dark. The American, at his leisure, inspected the natural treasure vault: Two hideously monstrous holes loomed in the harshly hewn stone whose lines startlingly resembled the face of some malignant giant. McGregor decided those empty, gloomy sockets were passageways to the storeroom of the treasure.

With daybreak coming on, the American dropped back to the savanna's edge and made camp. Confident that his nocturnal reconnaissance had not been discovered, he turned in for a long sleep against his projected raid on the Skull—only to be awakened abruptly some hours later by a horde of natives swarming over him. The odds were too great; he was disarmed and taken to a strong house for confinement.

Hours passed and McGregor was seemingly forgotten. But in those hours the adventurer saw and heard much that occupied his mind with fantastic conjectures. These men he saw were unlike any South American Indians he had ever seen. In fact, they were not Indians but white men. And the language they spoke was no primitive jargon. It was a French patois!

At last a warrior presented himself and indicated that McGregor was to follow him. The American was led before a group of elders. Having a working knowledge of French, McGregor was able to understand much that was said. Addressing the chief—whom he mentally labeled the general—he imperiously demanded his release, saying he was journeying to the Amazon.

"You say wrong. You are not going there," came the answer.

"Why not?"

"No man who comes here goes farther."

A PIERCING look accompanied that assertion. Meeting it inflexibly, McGregor thrust back—

"Why not?"

Into the general's gaze came a fleeting glimmer. He relished that swift riposte. But, methodically, he pursued:

"So you remain here. Forever!"

Poker faced, the captive drawled:

"All right. I'm beginning to like it here."

Again the commander's eyes twinkled. The gaze of his sub-chiefs remained cold as the stare of frozen fish.

"That is good," came the slightly sarcastic rejoiner. "To prove your liking you will—"

The sentence halted. The interpreter mechanically repeated the fragment, though his head turned to one side. All others faced in the same direction—toward the path from the savanna. On that path had sounded fast running feet, almost inaudible, yet discerned by quick ears. Now from the woods emerged a man who sped straight to the general.

He was clothed but hatless. His face glistened with sweat. His eyes and teeth gleamed. Panting out a few words, he grinned widely. That grin was wolfishly cruel.

The general's face tightened into a stony mask. Without a word he arose, turned, stalked into the house which had been at his back. The sub-chiefs scattered toward other houses. The lounging men flocked into doorways. Among them went the interpreter and the messenger whose arrival had so abruptly terminated the session. All moved with purposeful alacrity, yet without the haste of men summoned to battle.

For a brief interval McGregor was left alone and apparently forgotten. Eyeing the path, wondering what the runner had spied out on the plain, he suddenly remembered something seen through his field glasses—the early march of a few men to the Red Skull, and their later leisurely return. That, he guessed, was a daily trip of inspection; and this morning the inspectors had found something. The guess soon proved accurate.

The yawning doorways which had drawn in the men now poured them forth again. At sight of them the Northerner stared.

The chiefs, who had gone away in floppy cotton clothes, emerged as erect pumas. Big brown hides covered heads, bodies, upper arms and legs; long brown tails dragged behind. Their faces, framed in triangular cuts of the fur, were ruthless as those of cats sighting prey. Their brown hands hung with fingers curved like claws. Their brown feet moved with feline tread. Their expressions, positions, movements were not assumed. The donning of the animal skins had worked a corresponding effect on their subconscious minds.

Their men, some of whom also had been completely or partly clothed, now also were divested of all semblance of semi-civilization. Pale bodies wore only clouts. Brown fists gripped primitive weapons. This McGregor had seen before. But now hairy heads hitherto uncovered had sprouted Indian ornaments. From circlets of palm fiber rose feathers of variant color, size, and design. Many men wore only a few short ones, arranged in somewhat different order. Others sported wavy fronds which were taller and thicker. A very few wore a complete circlet of magnificent plumes, which shone bright in the sunlight. But no two of these were quite alike in hue or arrangement. Every headdress, humble or haughty, had its individual significance of social or military rank, incomprehensible to the foreign beholder.

Without a word of command the whole array fell into formation—a long single file headed by the chiefs. It advanced with quick tread, yet with restraint. McGregor, watching, told himself, "Dress parade." Then a hand touched his right elbow. The interpreter had returned, wearing a feather

crown of noticeable importance. Without speaking, he drew the Northerner into the line, then fell behind. Almost before he realized it the prisoner found himself on the march.

Through the timber the silent parade trod the narrow footway. As they went, a quick thought made McGregor almost miss his step.

"The brown cat!" he muttered. "That's why—"

Then, steadying, he marched on. Not long ago a brown cat had sprung from the timber to annihilate an annoying dog. Later the general had taken pains to ascertain whether that cat had been all brown. Now all the commanders of these Blancos Perdidos wore hides of the brown cat. In this sequence was an obvious connection. Just what it all meant was still to be learned. But that, McGregor told himself, was why he still lived.

Therein he was partially right. But only partially. Other reasons for his continued existence still were locked in the mind of the pantherish chief now leading the savage procession; a mind which could change with feline suddenness and be utterly merciless. And if the Northerner had thus far failed to realize how inexorable that changeable commander could be he was now to get convincing proof.

CHAPTER IX

THE PANTHER MEN

OUTSIDE the woods the long single file changed formation. Without spoken orders it became a double line, advancing in platoon column. McGregor's eyes glinted with appreciation of the soldierly shift and the steady advance. No longer did these swinging marchers seem loutish bumpkins, or even the disorderly horde which yesterday had fought him like a dog pack. Instead it looked a disciplined force which, given guns and modern training, could readily become a crack battalion. For a moment he half wished for opportunity to drill them into real military cohesion. In the past he had made good outfits from poorer stuff.

Without a word or sound other than the concerted swish of bare feet in low grass, the column strode straight toward the stony skull. In the bright daylight the great rock looked even more grisly than when veiled by the dimness of night; for on it were visible cracks, dents, projections, as if this head, once living, had been battered to death by stupendous weapons whose marks still remained. Across the forehead was a particularly deep depression, sharply cut in, like the ancient scar of some edged implement swung sidewise. With these, and with the reddish coloration resembling watery blood, the thing suggested not only death but murder.

Larger it grew, until it towered over the arriving force. Its distorted eyes stared blankly over the array, soullessly unseeing. But the lower of those two cavities was not completely vacant. At its inner edge was a small, close group of clothed men.

A terse command ran down the column. It halted. Then its precise alignment broke into disordered groups stringing out at haphazard behind the chiefs, who stood facing the rock. McGregor unconsciously frowned. A simple command of "left face" would have turned the halted men smartly and held them in straight double rank. But if the general knew any such elementary evolution he had never taught it. Despite their military parade, these Blancos Perdidos apparently knew only how to go and stop.

Movement ended; the irregular array stood quiet. McGregor, ignored, stood just behind the puma skinned elders. At his right, unobtrusively watchful, was the recent interpreter, now a feathered sub-commander, loosely holding a double edged wooden war ax. For a moment there was utter silence. Then the general raised a long, furred arm.

At once the group in the big black eye began to approach. Close drawn, as before, the inspectors of the Skull marched to their commander. Among them, carried rather than led, walked a yellowish creature which attempted to balk, to struggle, to fall down—anything rather than come to the savages grimly waiting—but, remorselessly borne along, came rapidly nearer. Soon the captive arrived. Ghastly with fear, he stared at the flinty faces framed in the brown cat hides.

Swarthy, black haired, bristle bearded, raggedly clothed, barefoot, the captive was a *mestizo,* of mixed ancestry manifestly vicious. Eyes, nose, lips betrayed innate criminality; greed, lust, treachery, cowardice, all were readable in his visage. Scanning him, every hard eye in the silent line grew harder. McGregor's blue gaze was no exception. The fellow reminded him of the better looking but nonetheless treacherous boatmen who had tried to disembowel him and had cut Terrill's throat.

Despite his disheveled appearance he seemed to be unhurt—except his hands. These, held forward by the captors who still gripped his arms, were swollen and bloody. All the fingers were puffed and their tips were raw, looking as if he had striven to break bars and claw aside stones in a desperate effort to escape from some prison cell.

One of his guards spoke briefly to the commander. The general gave no reply. Ominously silent, he surveyed the interloper from greasy hair to dirty feet, missing no tiny detail; then again fixed his chill gaze on the blanched face. For long, dragging seconds he made no move. Under his inflexible gaze the quaking wretch lost the last traces of manhood.

Unable to endure that piercing eye, the halfbreed shifted his eyes to the massed savages behind the chiefs. His gaze fixed on McGregor, blond, clothed, booted, obviously alien, yet apparently on good terms with the dread Blancos Perdidos. Suddenly he wrenched loose from the somewhat relaxed clutch of his holders and flung himself at the white man's feet.

"*Camarada!*" he whined. "*Compaixão!* Comrade, have pity! Help—"

He babbled on in frenzied Portuguese, clutching the white man's legs with his bloodied hands. Disgusted, McGregor drew back, shoving the despicable creature away.

"Go to hell!" he growled.

Then the guards pounced on their prey. Dragged back feet first, the mongrel squirmed, screeched, grabbed vainly at the grass. When he was once more before the commander he refused to stand or even to look up. Groveling, he whimpered.

The general spat one contemptuous syllable. At once the guards turned and strode toward the Skull, hauling the victim callously along the ground. After them, with cat-like smoothness, walked two of the cat-skinned sub-chiefs. They vanished into the cavern whence the group had so recently emerged.

A TENSE silence followed. Nobody moved. Glancing aside, McGregor found all faces lifted, all eyes fixed on some spot near the top of the Skull. His own gaze, following, rested on the sharp cut across the stone forehead. Presently that empty depression showed life.

From no visible exit magically appeared men—the same who had faded into the low cave, yet not quite the same in appearance. The captors had paused somewhere to doff their clothes, and now stood savagely bare. The captured man, now held drooping among them, also was naked. Only the two old men in puma hides were unchanged. These separated, to stand at opposite ends of the short line, looking fearlessly down the deadly drop just beyond their toes. In obedience to some instruction unheard below, the other men moved a little to their left. Then all stood momentarily quiet.

Down below, the general raised an

arm. Up above, the victim sank almost out of sight. The guards swayed in rhythmic swings forward and back. At the third forward heave their burden shot headlong out into the air.

A long, ghastly scream broke from the falling body. It kicked, writhed, jerked—

The body struck one of the misshapen rock fangs jutting from the soil; hung a second, slid down, lay still.

At sound of the impact two more of the sub-chiefs started forward. Unhurried, they advanced to the shattered corpse; stooped, made brief inspection and, from somewhere inside their panther hides, drew knives. With alternate strokes they hacked off the head. Straightening, each fastened a hand in the hair. They walked into the dark hollow with their burden and disappeared.

Then the third and last pair of elders advanced. With wiry strength they lifted the broken body by the legs. They held it there until blood from the severed neck ceased. Dropping it, they rested a moment; then, grasping the feet, pulled it into the cave and were gone.

Up above, the executioners had faded from their high shelf. Down below, the general stood alone before his troop. Now he looked back at McGregor and the man beside him, and spoke one word. The interpreter, with a nudge, walked forward. McGregor went with him. The oldster spoke again.

"This is the punishment," translated the interpreter, "of a thief."

"A good one," coolly replied McGregor. "He steals no more."

In the piercing old eyes came another of those flitting lights. Then they calmly turned and scanned the silent line of his own people. Again he voiced one word.

A man came forward, steps quick but face rather tight. One side of his face was swollen and bruised. Halting, he waited. Eyeing the bruise, McGregor recognized him—the man he had knocked senseless yesterday for trying to seize a can of food.

Tranquilly the commander said something more. The sun browned face paled; the bearded lips became gray; the eyes darted aloft to the incised platform on the Skull. From the broad shouldered interpreter came a short, strangled sound like a gulp. Frowning with concern, he stood wordless but obviously much upset. Lazily observing both, the general grunted again. Slowly the bruised man obeyed the order.

His muscular chest rose in a long, deep breath. His eyes, now dull, roved along the faces of his fellow tribesmen; then, sharpening, turned on McGregor a glare of intense hatred. Moving mechanically, he laid at his chief's feet the weapons he had borne—a strong bow and a quiver of long arrows; drew from his head his circlet with a few short feathers; then walked away, gait springless but regular, toward the place of death.

He had taken ten steps when McGregor fully woke up. Then he stopped, smitten by a roaring voice.

"Hey!" blared the ex-Marine. "Halt!"

With that he wheeled to the general.

"What the hell?" he bellowed. "You going to kill that lad just because he picked up a can? You old fool, he didn't swipe it! Even if he tried, he got all that was coming to him. And he—uh—he wasn't trying, see? He only wanted to look at it, and 'twas my mistake. And even if he'd got away with the whole kit, what of it? That's a good *soldado* you've got there, and—Oh, hell, wait a minute!"

Controlling himself, he tried, by actions and vernacular French, to translate the idea. In this the interpreter eagerly assisted. Every watching eye, every listening ear comprehended fully. The lone man waiting between life and death stood rigid, following every move and sound. To all outward appearance the argument for clemency had no effect on the chief.

When all was said he looked coldly

along the line of his subjects, then faced again toward the Skull and snapped one more command. The condemned man hesitated a moment, slowly swung away, walked again toward his doom.

FIGHTING mad, McGregor took a step after him. The execution of the groveling coward had made his stomach squirm a little, in spite of all the hard sights he had witnessed in bygone years; but he had viewed it with comparative equanimity, feeling that he saw the end of a snake. The destruction of a good soldier who had merely grabbed a bit of food revolted him. There could be no question that the brawny fellow, going unguarded to death, was brave. And for his death there was no reason but the ferocious whim of his ruler. Damn it all—he would put a stop to that—

Suddenly he was seized from behind. The general had made a sign, and a dozen men were on McGregor's back. Before he could set himself he was down. And, down, he was overpowered before he could turn over to fight upward. With swift efficiency far different from the first confused attack on him, they pinioned arms, locked legs, held him helpless. Face in the dirt, he heaved, wrenched, cursed, but stayed where he was.

When his breath was gone they released him as suddenly as they had thrown him. Sitting up, glaring around, he found them walking back into line. Over at the Skull the man he had tried to stop was just fading from sight in the hollow eye. With two more steps he was gone.

Mouth grim, McGregor stood quiet. The general stared bleakly past him. All others looked fixedly aloft.

Presently figures again emerged on the high shelf. The elders took their former positions. The executioners ranged between them. A step ahead of them, in the middle, the tall warrior stood untouched. Nobody needed to hold him. Mentally braced, he needed only a shove from behind to send him diving on to the jagged fangs.

Statue-like, all awaited the signal. Long, breathless seconds snailed away, drawing every taut nerve to the snapping point. Then the general gave his command—but not as before.

His arms remained down. His voice rose, drawling, yet far reaching. For a moment the tense group above was rigid. Then the condemned man swayed, seemed about to fall. The others seized him—and, instead of heaving him out, pulled him back. Their bodies shortened, sank, were gone from sight.

Minutes later, the warrior reappeared in the cave mouth. Alone, he walked stiffly back across the open; reached the general, stopped. His face looked dazed; his eyes, fixed, were full of slowly subsiding horror. After one straight look into those staring pupils the chief wheeled and gave one more brief command.. It seemed to be, and was—

"Dismissed!"

Without another glance at any one he walked straight away toward the Skull. Into the eye he went, to join his sub-chiefs somewhere inside.

McGregor stared after him. Then, again regarding the man who had been sent to the brink of death and spared at the last moment, he nodded with understanding. This fellow had needed a lesson; and the general had taken this opportune time to give him one he would never forget. In so doing he had tested the obedience of all the rest of his force, finding it satisfactory. Moreover—though McGregor did not think of this at the moment—he had given the still insubordinate Northerner a further demonstration of his despotic power.

Now the dismissed parade swarmed for a moment around the reprieved victim, faces excited, voices blending into a rumble of congratulations, sarcastic

levity, rough taunts, all meant to buck him up. Lips quirking into a feigned smile, he stooped, picked up his bow, arrows, headdress. Thereupon the mob left him, running in disorderly haste for the cool shade of the houses. The show was over, and they had already exposed their bare bodies overlong to the broiling sun.

McGregor, apparently forgotten by the rushing horde, found himself almost alone. Almost, but not quite. Two men remained. One was the bruised fellow whom he had once knocked cold and later defended. The other was the likable interpreter who had almost protested against that fellow's destruction.

As he turned from the repulsive Skull and strode toward the settlement these two walked with him, one at either side. Neither spoke. Neither seemed to look at him. But, as they swung along, he felt that neither was a guard, nor even an enemy. On the contrary, he began to realize that by his impulsive effort to save an essentially good soldier he had thawed unanimous cold enmity against himself into a faint warmth of friendliness.

CHAPTER X

SIESTA

AGAIN McGregor sat in his doorway, thinking. Again the settlement was silent, wrapped in slumber. But now the quietude was that of afternoon siesta, not dim night. Into the clearing poured the full flood of sunlight, blindingly bright, hellishly hot, killing all energy.

To that bludgeon of heavy heat and the grip of lifelong habit every animate creature had succumbed—except McGregor. He, too, protected his body by the shade of the eaves; but his brain was restless. Reviewing recent developments, he sought to estimate his present position and formulate his future policy.

"You," he scowlingly accused himself, "have been too damn Irish lately; grabbing yourself a scrap or doing this or that because you felt like it. And by dumb luck that rough stuff has worked O. K. so far. But now you'd better use your head, Scotty. If you don't it'll go where that yellow guy's went, and the rest of you won't be under it."

His mind reverted to the interrupted session of the elders that morning. The general was through with fooling around; he now meant business. He had been just about to tell McGregor what he could do in order to keep on living. Perhaps it was as well that his sentence had been so suddenly broken off; the defiant prisoner might have made the wrong retort this time. Now that the Northerner had journeyed to the Skull and witnessed the cold ruthlessness of the elders, his answers would be more considered.

His nose wrinkled slightly as he recalled the complete destruction of the fellow caught in the Skull. Hurling him from on high had not been enough. Beheading his corpse had not been enough. To make the job complete, his shattered, decapitated body must give all its blood to the parched earth whence protruded those stony teeth, while the cavernous eyes watched. And even that was not the end of it. Somewhere inside the caverns something else had been done with both head and body; something in which only the headmen participated. Just what it was, McGregor did not greatly yearn to know.

Neither did he care to speculate long on the formal procedure of those elders —the facts that two had directed the execution, two had taken the head, two had bled the corpse, and that all had moved as precisely as officers at drill—or priests at service. Obviously the entire thing was an orthodox ceremony, so punctiliously formulated that even the decapitation was performed by alternating strokes of two knives, and the severed head must then be carried by the right hand of one chopper and by

the left of the other.

It was an old rite, practised often enough to be fulfilled without hesitance; often enough to explain why McGregor, scouting around the Skull, had detected the odor of death. That earth around the jagged teeth had drunk so much blood that even the lightest dew made it exhale corruption.

How it had come about that such savage rites were conducted by Frenchmen—if they were Frenchmen—he did not care much either. There was some obscure religion behind the sacrifices, some obscure origin of these people, which mattered little to him. What did matter was that he had come to get gold and now would be lucky to keep his life. Wherefore he had better obey the general's next orders, if they were not too humiliating. If they were (his mouth tightened) there would be one final scrap that would go to a finish. They would never heave him alive off that rock, anyway.

Just where the general was now he did not know. If the chiefs had returned he had not seen them. On reaching the settlement he had found the other paraders cooling their sun reddened skins by short swims. The silent pair who had escorted him promptly joined the bathers, leaving him without a word. He watched all a moment, then ambled on to his own quarters. And there he remained unapproached.

Not even at noon did any one come near him. Too stubborn to ask for food, he dined off remnants of his breakfast. So doing, he realized that not once since breakfast time had he seen a woman. Ordered to remain inside that morning by the chiefs, all women and children still obeyed. This and the continued aloofness of all the men indicated that the prisoner's trial was considered not postponed but merely suspended, to be resumed at any moment and then pushed to conclusion. And now, lounging on his sill and waiting, he wished the judges would reconvene and reach a verdict.

TIME dragged along. The sun drew farther west. At length, with a long yawn, he arose and idled around into the lengthening shade of the eastern side of his cabin, perfunctorily eyeing the near woods, half minded to take a short walk among the trees. Then, yawning again, he decided instead to sprawl out on the ground. As he looked downward, however, he glanced quickly up again. Something had moved.

The movement had been slight and soundless, barely caught by his swerving eyes. Now everything was still. But, peering keenly, he made out something yellowish, somewhat rounded, just beyond a thick gray tree trunk, and about six feet from the ground. Another sharp squint at it told him it was the head of a man; a head half hidden, watching him with one eye. The body below it was completely concealed.

He smiled. So they had guards out, did they, to make sure he would not sneak away? With a derisive gesture he sat comfortably down, back resting against the wall, and grinned at the furtive watchman.

Long moments passed. The head came farther out. It was black haired, black mustached, black bearded— No, it wasn't bearded. It had black stubble along its jaw, but no real beard.

Then appeared a hand, beckoning. After a swift look to left and right the Northerner got up and strode forward.

The face drew back. Rounding the tree, McGregor confronted a man similar to some of the Blancos Perdidos. He was hatless, barefoot, yellow-brown, clothed in drab shirt and trousers. But his features were different; his clothes were washed-out blue, not naturally gray; and he was belted with cartridges, wore a machete down his left leg, and held an old but efficient .44 rifle. The muzzle of the gun, held at his hip, yawned at the blond man's abdomen. The hammer was cocked and a finger was on the trigger. But he obviously was not eager to fire.

"*Quem é?*" he demanded, voice low.

Although McGregor knew no Portuguese, the question was plain. He retorted by repeating the query in Spanish:

"*Quién es?* Who are you?"

The Brazilian smiled faintly and adopted the required language, spoken by every South American nation except his own.

"Nobody you would know," he countered. "What are you here?"

"A prisoner," admitted the Northerner. "And you'll be the same if you don't get out. What d'you want?"

The Southerner studied him, glanced around, locked eyes again with the blond man.

"Have you seen another stranger today?" he asked.

"Yes. He's dead."

The yellowish face drew tighter.

"How?" he probed.

"Why do you want to know?" countered McGregor.

A slight pause. Then—

"He was my comrade."

"Well, you pick rotten comrades."

"I begin to think so," came the ready admission. "He deserted me last night. But how did he die?"

McGregor surveyed him anew. His straightforward frankness was rather pleasing. So was his anxiety to learn the fate of a partner, even though that partner had proved treacherous. And he was much more decent looking than that other intruder.

"They caught him in a trap," rapidly enlightened McGregor. "Threw him off a high rock. Cut off his head. Bled him white. Took the pieces into a hole. That's all I know. Now beat it, fellow! Get out and stay out!"

He looked toward the houses, listening. The Brazilian drew back; stooped, picked from the ground a dingy sombrero, put it on, straightened up.

"Perhaps I had better do that," he acknowledged. "Thanks, *amigo*. Do you care to come with me?"

The Northerner stared. The proffer of liberation was as casual as the passing of a cigaret.

"Where to?" he queried.

"We can decide that later."

For a second the captive hesitated. Then he asked—

"You've got other partners?"

"No. I wish I had. I am alone now."

"Then get going and keep going. I'd only bring you bad luck. They can trail me with dogs—then they'd have us both. So go on, fellow. *Vaya, muy pronto!* And don't come back!"

He looked again toward the houses. The Brazilian eyed him once more, then sidled farther off.

"Very well, *amigo*. Thank you again. Is there any message you wish to send out?"

"No. *Adios!*"

McGregor waved the other away, then halted him.

"Oh, there's one thing: My name's McGregor. If anybody ever wants to know, this is where I stopped."

"McGregor," carefully said the other. "I have it. I am Manuel Ribeiro—which nobody cares about. Good luck to you!"

"Same to you."

Forthwith Ribeiro faded into the woods and was gone. For a minute or two McGregor stood listening, hearing only a few faint footsteps, a tiny rustle of leaves, then nothing more. As he sauntered back to the shady house wall he smiled crookedly.

A fast worker, that lad. No lost motions; no useless words; right on his toes every minute. Not once had he relaxed his vigilance; even while getting his hat he had watched lest McGregor grab his rifle. A quick shooter, but—apparently—a square one. He had offered escape, and if the offer had been accepted he probably would have played fair. But in return he would naturally have expected full partnership on reaching the treasure of the Red Skull. That, of course, was what he had come for. And that was what McGregor meant to have all to himself,

if it could be had by any man. No others need apply.

So he sat down again and awaited the next event in his quite uncertain life. And hardly ten minutes later, while Ribeiro made good his unsuspected retreat southward, the somnolent settlement bestirred itself. Doors opened, men appeared, and soon the softly striding interpreter stood again before the lounging captive.

"*Fan,*" he bade, as before.

"*Bien,*" replied the other, lazily arising.

And, with neither anxious haste nor irritating slowness, he again approached the waiting chiefs.

CHAPTER XI

THE JUDGMENT

"AS I was saying," stated the general, "no man who comes here goes farther."

Seated again with his satellites, he spoke as if no noteworthy interruption had occurred. His puma skin had disappeared, as had those of the other elders, and the usual rude clothing had been resumed. Lounging in the background, the lesser men watched as before. Except that the sun had moved from east to west, the scene was as it had been hours ago.

"I heard you the first time," dryly remarked McGregor.

When the interpreter had repeated, the chief pursued:

"And you say you like it here. That is fortunate."

The white man nodded casually, repressing other reply.

"Since you like us, you will become one of us."

The American's lids flickered slightly. Otherwise he betrayed no feeling.

"To what extent?" he probed.

"To the full extent!"

The commander's tone and gaze were icy. Evidently he expected more swaggering belligerence and was resolved to crush it. Instead, the outlander merely looked thoughtful. His eyes roved along the watching groups of men, then came back. Calmly he asserted:

"I'm nobody's slave, General. And I'm not going to carry a wooden ax, or stick feathers in my hair, or go naked in the sun, for anybody. I'm a white man, and I'm going to stay so."

An odd look crossed the faces of all the elders; a look faintly surprised and slightly offended, both at once.

"Such things are not required," shortly declared the general.

"*Bien.* What is required?"

"Obedience. Loyalty. Unhesitating attack on all our enemies. And blood brotherhood in our nation."

McGregor almost nodded. Those requirements were essentially similar to those of the oath perfunctorily taken by every soldier enlisting in civilized armies. After a fellow got in and gathered experience he used his own judgment as to how literally he need keep his promises. Particularly if he was drafted, yanked into service against his will, to fight for the interests of plush bottomed politicians and other old stuffed shirts. Inside himself he derisively laughed. But, on guard, he halted easy consent.

"Blood brotherhood?" he demurred. "What's that?"

The general eyed him, manifestly surprised by his apparent ignorance. Then he explained:

"You blend your blood with that of another warrior. Thus you become his brother. And since he is of us, you are brother to all. Brother to all through life—and death."

Again the Northerner ran his eyes along the lounging groups, and again he faced the chiefs. Pointedly he repeated—

"I'm a white man."

Again the elders looked offended. In fact, this time their expressions were decidedly angry.

"And what," snapped the general, "are we?"

"That's what I want to know," thrust McGregor. "You haven't told me. And I'm fussy about what I do with my blood."

A long pause. The oldsters glared at him, glanced at one another, sat tight mouthed. The general's face was first to relax. Into it came a deepening light of approval. Quietly he said to the sub-chiefs something which the interpreter was not supposed to repeat. But the latter, before he could be stopped, mechanically translated:

"The man is right. I will tell him—"

There the promise halted, as the chief scowled fiercely at the interpreter. After a brief silence the general asserted, hard voiced:

"We too are white men. When you are one of us you shall know all. Meanwhile you must take my word for it. Now do you join us, or do you not?"

"Perhaps," temporized McGregor. "If I do so what is my position?"

The answer was immediate, short, but hard to translate. The interpreter fumbled for a word, failed to find it. Then he acted it out. Touching his own chest, he imitated donning his feather headdress, grasping his war ax, marching away, glancing at men behind him; then, laying down the imaginary wooden weapon, extending an equally imaginary rifle, made an explosive noise; lowered the invisible firearm; touched the Northerner's chest and swung a hand toward the men at the houses.

McGregor nodded, holding back another grin. This fellow was a platoon leader. McGregor was to hold the same rank. He was also to train these men in the use of rifles. Thus he was to be a drill sergeant. And the men whom he was to drill had no guns. They would have to carry sticks, like many a raw rookie early in the World War. Meanwhile he might get his own guns back. Soft? It was hard to maintain his poker face as he looked again at the general.

"Bien," he assented. "I take your word. I take the job. I take the brotherhood. But I want full brotherhood from every man, and full obedience from every man I train."

"You'll get it!"

The commander's worn teeth showed in a grin. He arose, shooting a glance along his intent subjects. They had heard nearly everything said, for in the quiet air words had traveled far. Now he added—

"Pick your brother!"

McGregor, rising from his own stool, looked around. He was not ready for this quick order. As his gaze swung along the arc of houses, loafers straightened up. Several took a half step forward, then stopped, waiting. Through him shot a flash of warmth toward all. These foes who had fought him yesterday wanted his fellowship today; wanted it, he felt, because he had sprung to the defense of one of them this morning. Or was that it? Swift suspicion whispered that each might want to be on the right side of the new drillmaster. His warmth cooled, and his eyes became bleak. Then they came to rest on the man nearest to him—the interpreter.

FOR one second longer McGregor was silent, swiftly contemplating the solid, stolid man who stood quietly meeting his gaze. Then he smote a hand down on the muscular shoulder.

"You're a man!" he declared. "What d'you say? Want to team up with me?"

The dark eyes under the reddish brows glowed. And, although the question had been voiced in English, the response came immediately.

"Kah pah?"

"Attaboy! *Pourquoi pas?* Why not?" McGregor grinned widely. "All right, brother. What do we do next?"

From the general came a chuckle. On the faces of the dour sub-chiefs came an expression almost genial. The Northerner's choice was evidently pleasing to all commanders.

Rising, the supreme chief quickly revealed what was to be done next. From his waistband he pulled a short knife. The interpreter, unbidden, pulled off his blouse. McGregor, following the example, doffed his shirt. Thereupon the general cut a short gash in each man's left breast, above the heart. Blood welled forth. At once the native closed with the outlander, pressing his small wound against the other; then stood quiet, eyes fixed on those of his new brother. And for a long moment thereafter everything was utterly still.

Over McGregor came a strange feeling, entirely contrary to the hidden levity with which he had accepted fraternity in this clan. Blood to blood, heart to heart, eye to eye, he was giving something of himself to this steady man he had chosen—and was receiving something in return.

To this adopted comrade the barbaric ceremony was no mere matter of empty show, and in his honest mind was no reservation. Henceforth, come hell or high water, he would willingly give the last drop of his blood for the man to whom he had willingly given his first. When the momentary embrace ended, the treasure hunter felt very sober.

As the native stepped back he smiled. McGregor's mouth widened in response. Then his gaze centered thoughtfully on the reddish beard, which now gleamed in a slanting shaft of sunlight. Abruptly he asked:

"*Comment vous appelez-vous?* What's your name?"

The other frowned inquiringly. More slowly, McGregor repeated the inquiry. The puzzled face cleared.

"Tem Thay," he responded.

"Tem Thay?" The questioner wrestled with throaty pronunciation and growing conviction. "Tem— Huh! Timothée! Timothy! Man, you're Irish! Sure, I see it now! It's all over your map! How in hell did *you* get here?"

He stared into the deep eyes, which were darkly gray. Tem Thay stared back, now completely bewildered. Even when McGregor translated in careful French he still continued to look blank. He now grasped the words, but not all their meaning. His gaze turned to the sharply watching general. Once more he mechanically interpreted. And, for the first time, the omnipotent chief himself seemed momentarily at a loss.

The bright old pupils clouded, veered, gazed at nothing, as if the mind behind them groped for something long obscured by the mists of time. When they came back to contemplate the two men anew they still were not clear. But, with the ingrained aversion of all commanders toward visible uncertainty before subordinates, he briskly parried:

"We shall talk elsewhere. Come with me, you two!"

With which he jerked one hand outward, tacitly dismissing the whole vigilant assemblage; he turned his back on his sub-chiefs and strode toward the most ignominious but most private place in the whole settlement—the jail.

The wrinkled countenances of the elders contracted with anger at this unceremonious abandonment; but, arising, they stalked away with stiff dignity. Their subjects, slowly moving, pretended dissolution into their houses, but still watched. McGregor, swinging toward his pen, gave Timothy a jovial shove in the same direction.

"Come on, buddy!" he bade. "Let's go!"

They grinned at each other and went. And, as they went, the men round about glanced at one another and grinned in their turn.

CHAPTER XII

THE LOST WHITES

ONCE more McGregor sat alone, thinking. Once more the settlement was completely quiet. And, unless some predatory prowler should upset its peace, it would remain quiet for long hours. The sun was gone,

the stars marched again across the rainless sky, the dim somnolence of night wrapped all the world of the Blancos Perdidos in its dark blanket. But through that dimness the new lost white man saw more than any of the older ones knew.

He had heard a tale told by the general. True to his word, the chief had explained how he and his people happened to be white—or almost white. He had told all he knew; all he remembered from old tradition. To this, when left alone, McGregor added various things mentioned by Terrill, who, before starting, had read everything available concerning the whole mysterious region north of the Amazon.

The vast extent of this reading—covering the three Guianas, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, northern Peru and northern Brazil—had been too great for any mind to retain in full; and, later, Terrill had recalled only scattered bits. But some of those bits fitted into what his surviving partner had just now learned. So now McGregor had the answer to the question he had asked of the dark silence last night—what this crazy stuff was all about.

Three centuries ago, or thereabouts, a large force of French colonists had crossed the Atlantic to settle a pestilential area supposedly rich—the place now called French Guiana. Their leader, one Bretigny, was insane when he landed, if not before he sailed. Instead of conciliating the native Indians and pushing inland by peaceful penetration, he antagonized them.

Then, infuriated by their fierce retaliation, he vented his rage on his own people. On Frenchman and Frenchwoman he wreaked the most hideous tortures. Desperate, most of the survivors fled to the only possible refuge—the jungle and its implacable Carib warriors. These wild aborigines, ferocious though they were, proved more kindly than the mad Bretigny. They not only spared the refugees but also sheltered and protected them; killed their pursuers, including Bretigny himself; and drove his few remaining henchmen into the sea.*

For a time thereafter the white fugitives dwelt among the brown foresters. But they did not like the dank, feverish jungle; it sickened them physically and mentally. So, hearing of a higher, drier, sunnier land at the south, they journeyed thither. Guided and aided by their aggressive Carib friends, who at that time dominated all lesser Indian tribes, they reached the land of sun and wandered about in it, drifting gradually westward.

Thus they came to the region where stood the Red Skull.

This wide expanse was sparsely populated by light skinned Indians of a tribe allied to the Caribs; not so nomadic or restlessly war-like, but vindictive fighters against hostile invaders of their homeland. Their principal settlement was this one, near the strange stone. Their chiefs received the wanderers amiably enough and, for a few days, entertained all with barbaric hospitality. But then between them and the Carib escort arose a sudden quarrel which speedily became merciless battle. The Caribs, much outnumbered, all died fighting. Meanwhile the white men seized a house, rushed their women inside and stood on guard. When the maddened natives attacked them in turn they opened fire.

The thunderous reports of the muzzle loaders and the instantaneous fall of assailants sobered the warriors. A parley followed, resulting in compromise. The whites were to stay here, well treated. If other Caribs should come and demand explanation of the disappearance of their fellow tribesmen, the whites were to say they had died from some sudden disease contracted on the journey. As it happened, a long time passed before any such inquirers did arrive; war had broken out elsewhere between the Caribs and powerful enemies, and the little detachment with

* True.—A. O. F.

the wandering whites was forgotten. Meanwhile many things changed.

Wearied by their long pilgrimage, shrunken in numbers by natural deaths on their way, the adventurers willingly accepted this arrangement, which, expected to be temporary, became permanent. Soon they learned that in this region could be found yellow stuff little valued by these aborigines but exceedingly useful to any white men—gold. Wherefore they settled themselves for a long stay and skilfully persuaded the Indians to begin gathering that gold.

The work proceeded fitfully, but the shrewd Frenchmen were patient. Well fed, well housed, with no other good destination in mind and raw wealth gradually accumulating, they had every reason to wait, and meanwhile to ally themselves more closely with the tribe. And, as they waited, nature took its inevitable course. The French women who had survived the grueling trek were necessarily strong; and now, with nothing else to do, they bore amazing numbers of children. The Frenchmen who had no wives married the lightest and prettiest Indian maidens, who faithfully did their part. As time drifted past the juvenile population of this unknown village increased notably, the whites preponderating. At length the fathers belatedly awoke to the inexorable fact that they were there for life.

THEY now had gold, but could go nowhere with it. Years had slipped away unmeasured; and they themselves had slipped into physical and mental old age. Some had died. The others were fat bodied, slow of movement, slower of thought. Moreover, their old guns now were useless; all powder had been shot away long ago. Their swords and shorter knives had worn out, rusted out, or broken. They had neither the weapons nor the stamina to force their way out of this country wherein they had deteriorated. And their Indian companions would not help them depart if they could, and could not if they would; for just now those Indians died.

From some unknown source suddenly swept one of those mysterious pestilences which swiftly exterminate primitive tribes, yet, strangely, leave white men almost unscathed. Within a week it had virtually obliterated the original population of this secluded prairie. For good measure it killed also a few French, including their commander. The instinct of civilization failed to survive this blow. Mentally the transplanted French now went almost entirely native.

They had long spoken the native tongue, used native weapons, participated in native ceremonies, adopted all native ways—with some reservations. Among themselves they still spoke French; they took part in various savage rites only by watching or by making appropriate motions; they still wore clothes and hats, which they made from wild cotton or palm fiber. And upon their children they still enforced the practise of wearing breeches or dresses. Otherwise they now let everything slide. Since they were not to go out with their gold, since their children could never see France—what did it all matter?

Yet they still cared for the gold. They stored it in the most grisly, most holy place of all, the Red Skull. They contrived safeguards for it. They impressed ineradicably on the minds of their children the necessity of guarding against all comers. In so doing, they made use of obscure but ferociously effective traditions of the dead Indians. With these thoroughly inculcated, they sat down and waited to die. And soon they died, and the young white savages left behind them carried on, guided by what they knew.

For untold centuries the Red Skull had been a place of human sacrifice. To the priests of the unknown light tribe who had wandered here, the sinister shape of the thing had naturally

suggested bloody rites. So all enemies captured alive in war had been hurled from the high gash to the jagged teeth. At one time these captives had been many, for the invading light tribe had been numerous and formidable toward all foes. Just who these pale invaders were, and whence they had come, they themselves had forgotten.

There was a fragmentary tradition, however, that they had been led to this spot by two brown cats; pumas, male and female, which had appeared from nowhere to walk fearlessly before the human horde, guide them here, then vanish. So the puma was forever afterward the guiding spirit of this clan; and whatever the puma indicated, or whatever the rightful wearer of the puma hide ordered—namely, the chiefs and priests—must be followed out without question and obeyed on pain of death.

These two heritages from the dim past had been religiously handed down, unquestioned, through the succeeding generations of French-Indians; generations quite rapid and prolific, since tropical climate matured boys and girls at about twelve years of age and forced them then to mate and create new children. As such generations succeeded one another the mingled teachings of Indian and French forebears became automatic ritual. All strangers entering here must necessarily be enemies seeking the sacred treasure and must therefore be killed in defensive fight or, if captured, thrown from the Skull—unless, of course, the chiefs should decree otherwise. And these commanders very seldom granted mercy.

A few prisoners had, at times within the last hundred years, been favored with clemency—only to forfeit it by their own unworthiness. These men, like the first white settlers, had come by devious routes from the far east; and, like them, they spoke French. So, although the legend of that old hegira had grown dim and the French language here had degenerated into fragmentary patois, the rulers conceded them life and liberty.

They did not know that French Guiana now was a penal colony, inhabited only by the worst criminals of France. But they quickly learned that none of these occasional desperate wanderers was like the sturdy old forefathers, essentially decent; that each was treacherous and soon tried to perpetrate some despicable crime. Wherefore these ingrates soon paid their penalties; penalties not so rapid as a high dive from the big rock, but fully as effective. Among other things known to the Blancos Perdidos were the uses of sun and active ant hills.

ALL other captives, white or brown, had gone overboard without hesitance by the commanders. These had always come from north or south, from Spanish Venezuela or Portuguese Brazil, with the obvious intention of merciless conquest. In retaliation the defenders not only destroyed all such invaders but marched far afield in counter raids. Thus they obtained two new forms of wealth—cattle and white women.

The cattle were captured from Brazilians at the south, who, seeking to expand their *fazendas* in this natural grazing ground, had pushed gradually farther north from the Amazon. Craftily besieging isolated headquarters, the marauders starved out and slew the cattlemen, then drove their herds north. Yet, oddly, they did not bring along also the horses of those cattlemen. Instead they killed and ate them. Relying as always on their own legs, they brought home the beef and thereafter let it roam and multiply. And the cattle, contented on this new range, did so, thereby assuring to their masters an unfailing supply of meat.

The white women, even more highly prized, were caught unexpectedly at some unnamed place which these raiding Blancos Perdidos had chanced to discover. Some Northern company of

promoters, as crazily foolish or as criminally unfeeling as those who repeatedly tried to settle French Guiana, had sent into these wilds one more band of hopeful but ignorant colonists. When the white savages found them they were so worn out by hardships that the men were easy prey; and the women, reduced to apathy by their sufferings and the final ruthless slaughter of all their mates, trudged along willingly enough with their new masters. Well treated, they soon responded by bearing many more children. Thus, like the cattle, they enriched the race by new blood. The old French blood, as the chiefs realized, had been worn thin. This providential accession from outside reenforced mental vigor. Moreover, it weakened still more the Indian heritage, for all these women were entirely white.

Thus these lost white men now were more truly white than they had been in their first generation here. Just how it happened that some of them had brownish or reddish hair, bluish or grayish eyes, unusually powerful builds, neither the general nor Timothy knew. But Scotty McGregor, far more widely traveled and partly Irish, understood.

The red headed Irish were the world's most adventurous race. They themselves did not know how they got their red hair or their inborn restlessness. But for at least a thousand years red Irishmen had hunted every fight they could find, and red Irishwomen had sought adventure in their own way, and what had happened to any would-be conqueror had been somewhat too bad for the latter. Consequently it was not entirely inexplicable that even among these Blancos Perdidos there might be a red hair here and there.

This, then, was the history of these people, as outlined by the general and filled in by the new sergeant. Concerning these events the oldster had been entirely frank. Concerning various pertinent details, however, he had been uncommunicative. He had not revealed how much gold there was; he had not mentioned any gems; he had not told how the treasure was guarded, or disclosed anything about the interior of the Skull. Still less had he explained the workings of the queer religion of which he was evidently the high priest. And on these points McGregor asked no questions. Much more important at present was the matter of his own status in the tribe, with the corollary reasons therefor.

These reasons were several. First, as he had guessed, was the lucky chance that a puma had grabbed a meal of dog meat while he was snooping around. To the chiefs this had been a possible omen. More important, however, was the prowess of the lone intruder caught asleep and forced to battle barehanded. Any fighter so indomitable was worth saving for future use; so the canny commander had saved him. The fact that he was blond, different from all other interlopers hitherto seen, also helped him in more ways than one: It bore out his assertion that he came from some world far away from this one, and it suggested some affinity to the yellow-brown puma.

Most influential, however, was his equipment of guns. Guns of such swift accuracy and terrific power had never been imagined here. Now the general wanted many more such guns. He also wanted his men trained to handle them with the same deadly efficiency exhibited by the Northerner. So that was the principal reason why McGregor now was what he was—a nominal sergeant, a drillmaster, an instructor in rifle fire to the whole little army.

Of guns there were more than McGregor had suspected. He had not seen them yet, but he now knew of them from the oldster's talk. They ranged from the clumsy muzzle loaders brought by the first settlers to rapid repeaters captured from more modern invaders. But, with three exceptions, none of these would shoot, because there was no ammunition. One of these ex-

ceptions was a rifle just taken from the *mestizo* who had been thrown from the rock. The other two were McGregor's rifle and pistol. All other captives had seemingly fired their last shots before being overwhelmed. The most recent victim had possessed only a few cartridges. And McGregor's bullets were even more useless to the captors, because, as the chief candidly confessed, nobody could make the new guns work.

McGregor, suppressing a grin, volunteered no information concerning the simple secret of making those weapons workable. He judged that the old men were too fearful of them to do much experimenting with the puzzling breech machinery and would, therefore, continue to overlook the safety locks. Therein he guessed correctly. And at no time thereafter did he ever reveal the trick which made the pieces potent in his own hands but useless in all others. At present the general asked no questions. Instead he explained just why he wanted his men equipped with the most powerful rifles.

Unlike his stubborn sub-chiefs, he realized that even in this isolated land the world moved. Down south the Brazilian cattlemen, although repeatedly repulsed, were slowly pushing in toward the mountains. In time they would arrive in invincible force, shooting down male Blancos Perdidos, outraging females, looting the Red Skull, then settling down to ranching. But that time might be long delayed if the defenders could shift now from wooden weapons to guns even more powerful than those used by the invaders. And, with simplicity at once appealing and menacing, he now put it up to the man he had saved to perform his duty.

How such a staggering command was to be obeyed he neither asked nor explained. It was an order. The powerful white man was to obtain the weapons, train the troop, defend his new homeland. That was that. And with that he stalked away. And that was why McGregor now sat in the silent night and thought.

To tell the imperious general that such guns could not be obtained here, that even a supply of junk Krags and nickel-plated revolvers could be had only by lengthy maneuvering and staggering expenditure, would be explanation wasted, or worse. The old fellow would refuse to understand that. And, disregarding personal safety, McGregor did not wish to tell him that anyway; at least, not yet. Only that morning he had involuntarily longed for a chance to drill these warriors. Now he had his wish.

He even had guns for drill; useless guns, but good enough for rookies. By the time this green outfit was fit for actual shooting he might be able to figure how to make shooting possible. Meanwhile he would be not only keeping himself alive, but learning things and enjoying his job. The best job in the world—training soldiers!

With a grin at the dark houses McGregor turned to his hammock. And for weeks thereafter he gave no deep thought to the other job which had lured him here—the solving of the secret of the treasure-guarding Red Skull.

CHAPTER XIII

BROTHERS

"TEM THAY, I want a word with you."

Timothy, healthily tired after a hard drill, glanced sidewise at his blond brother, smiled and ambled with him toward the small cabin wherein the drillmaster still lived. Inside, the two sat in the single hammock. Outside, sweaty warriors noisily splashed a little while in the cold pool. Then, within and without, all grew quiet.

Blood brothers though they might be, McGregor was field instructor of the whole troop, Timothy a mere platoon leader, learning rifle work like all others. So the latter never visited his superior's headquarters without invita-

tion. Such invitations had been rather few, and the ensuing conversations had been confined almost entirely to military instructions by the Northerner and lessons in the local dialect by the Southerner. Now, as usual, the native waited for his cue. But this time the outlander was long silent, frowning at a blank wall.

For unnumbered days McGregor had carried on the job he had so readily accepted, drilling the Blancos Perdidos in the handling of guns. But now at length that job was worn out. And, hard and stark as the grim Red Skull itself, there confronted him once more the unanswered question which he had continually relegated to tomorrow—where to get good rifles and cartridges?

The men were ready to begin shooting. The general and his sub-chiefs, whom he had succeeded in stalling off from day to day, were unitedly, stonily demanding that the men should shoot. But with what?

As the general had admitted, only three firearms in the place would shoot —McGregor's two weapons and the loaded rifle of the sacrificed *mestizo*. These the ancient commander had never once given up. Hoarding them, he had made the drillmaster do his work with empty rifles. And even these must be turned in at the end of every drill. In a central room in his own tribe house, where he daily conferred with his sub-chiefs, the general had a crude but serviceable gun rack wherein every piece was stored. It held a queer collection.

There were cumbersome flintlock muskets, a couple of ancient fowling pieces, and even a short blunderbuss. There were cap-and-ball guns; single shot breech loaders made for rim-fire cartridges; awkward repeaters constructed for early center-fire shells, and later, lighter models. The latest, however, was decidedly antiquated to McGregor's military eyes. Among them all there was not one with bolt action. Most of those still usable were of the usual bush type—.44 caliber, lever action hunting arms of low velocity. These he selected for training purposes; and, when the men had scraped away rust and oiled the working parts, he put them to use.

The first use was that of sighting, with the complementary instructions in holding the piece with the right balance, squeezing the trigger, reloading without lowering the gun or losing the target, and taking the right positions in standing or kneeling. The sitting and prone positions he omitted, since they were virtually useless. These men were essentially upstanding battlers, and the idea of sitting or lying down to fight was too hard to grasp.

Also he omitted most of the manual of arms and nearly all parade drill. Right shoulder and order he taught; left shoulder, port, present, all silly salutes, all unnecessary moves, he passed over. Such stuff would be not only valueless but confusing. In marching maneuvers he likewise confined his instructions to essentials, with one exception. He developed the single and double files, already known; taught anew the column of squads, evidently forgotten; and, as the squads learned to march, trained them first to deploy as skirmishers, then to execute front into line.

This last was his sole concession to parades; and it had its use. The only formal procession hereabouts was the march to the Skull, which, as he had seen, was quite sloppily executed at the end. When he had shown the little army how to do it with military snap and straight alignment he held a dress parade for the chiefs; and, for once, their stony old visages glowed with appreciation.

The men ate up all this work without slacking. The monotonous sighting and trigger pulling did not become an empty performance; every eye still assiduously centered on a target, every hand tightened with careful steadiness, every face brightened or darkened as the front sight remained frozen or

moved slightly off. And when the guns were taken from them for use by other students (for, since rifles were much fewer than the men, drilling must be done by relays) every man surrendered his piece with visible reluctance.

In more active work they followed him even more eagerly. The butt strike, the clubbed swing, and the parries were instinctively understood and joyously practised. So was deployment, with its advances as skirmishers, its rushes by squads, its crawls and flat creeps. Private or noncom, every man worked with unflagging zest at the war game which soon, he hoped, would become a real killing of living enemies.

TRAINING such men as these, McGregor enjoyed the game even more than they. Never before had he handled such an earnest outfit. Not one was a goldbrick. And, contrary to his first saturnine intention, he never once bawled them out.

His orders were snappy, forceful, but good humored; and whenever he introduced something new to all he explained it with infinite patience. Consequently the slow ones kept up with the quicker ones, and nobody hated him because of ridicule. Which, he knew, would do him no harm in the long run. Some time, soon or late, he might need their liking and unthinking obedience in defending what he and they both valued —the treasure which was theirs now, but which some day, with luck, would be his own. If that day never came, what of it? He did not need it now, and he was having the time of his life.

But now he and that gang could no longer play along with old, worthless guns. From somewhere or nowhere he must produce the powerful, plentiful armament expected by the obdurate general. No excuses, no arguments, no subterfuges, no further delays would be accepted. That had just been made plain in the despotic old man's council room, after McGregor made the daily surrender of the rifles. The sub-chiefs all had been there, sitting rigidly alongside a heavy table, watching the drillmaster as he heard the ultimatum. After one look along those fixed visages he had walked out without reply. And now here he was, eyes and brain contemplating a thick, dark wall.

Abruptly he glanced at Timothy. And bluntly he asked—

"Brother, how can good guns be got here?"

The dark gray eyes regarded him sidewise. The redly bearded lips slowly smiled.

"That, brother, is what we all wonder," replied the native.

"Me too," confessed McGregor. "The general expects me to do some magic and pull rifles out of my hat, or something. So do all you fellows. I can't do it, and that's that."

Timothy's face grew solemn. After a moment of deliberation he said:

"The general is old. Old and—" he lowered his voice "—not always reasonable. But we supposed you and he had made plans to get the guns."

"No such luck. I've been trying to think of a way. I see only two possible ways, and both look impossible."

"And they are?"

"To buy guns or steal them. We can't possibly get the kind of guns I brought with me, but we might possibly get the sort we've been using for drill. They'd be guns, anyway. But where could they be got?"

Slowly the reddish head shook.

"No man would sell us guns," said Timothy. "Even if any would, with what could they be bought?"

"Only with gold. Much gold."

Timothy's mouth tightened, and again he eyed his hammock mate.

"No, that can not be done, brother."

"Uh-huh. There's no gold but the—"

McGregor halted, struck by a sudden thought.

"Or is there?" he went on. "Why, sure! Fellow, there must be some more gold in the ground here. And gold in

the dirt isn't sacred. Just dig it out and—"

He stopped again, scowling. Just dig it out, and then what? The hazy idea was killed the next instant by Timothy's phlegmatic announcement:

"There is no more. All that ever was found was stored in the great rock."

McGregor's scowl deepened. Then he went on:

"I see. Well, if guns could be bought or stolen or captured, where would be the best chance? When I say guns I mean bullets too, you savvy. Guns without bullets are no good. Plenty bullets. And plenty guns. Good guns. Those old things we've got aren't much good. Where are good rifles?"

Timothy looked meditatively through the open doorway, as if gazing afar. After a time he said:

"Away at the south are men who watch many cattle. They ride around on another kind of animal that has no horns and a large hairy tail and can run very fast."

"Horse," explained McGregor. "*Cheval.*"

"Those men," continued the other, ignoring the interruption, "have good guns that shoot fast and straight. And there is a town of them at a place where two rivers meet. What name it has we do not know. But to that place sometimes come boats from farther away, probably the great River Amazon, bringing many things. That is the nearest place where plenty of guns and bullets are. But—"

He smiled. McGregor nodded.

"But try and get them, eh? How far is it?"

"Ten days' march. Ten days if there is no opposition. Longer if there is trouble. We have not gone so far south for years now, because there was too much trouble. The men with guns and cattle grow stronger in that land, and they were too much for us. So the chiefs ordered us to make no more raids there, but to stay here and defend our own place."

McGregor nodded again, recalling the general's fear of those cattlemen.

"See here, brother, there's just one way for you all to keep on living!" he asserted. "That's to use some of the gold in the Skull to buy guns. And trust me to buy them. You can't buy them, but I can. With enough gold I can do business with those boatmen you spoke of. It'll have to be sly, but I can work it. They don't know I'm connected with you people. They'll fetch guns to that town for me. I'll pick up a gang of peons to bring the stuff father in a canoe or something. Then you fellows capture us at some ambush we'll arrange beforehand. Let the peons run for their lives, and we disappear. After that we can lick the whole lousy world, fellow!"

He slapped Timothy's knee. For a second the other's face brightened. Then it clouded, and again his head shook.

"No, that can not be done," he repeated.

"It's got to be done!" argued McGregor. "What good is that gold doing over there in the hole, anyway? Is it worth more than your life? If so, why?"

NO ANSWER came at once. The native's sober expression persisted, and again he stared thoughtfully doorward. At length he arose, stepped to the opening, glanced at each side, reassuring himself that no listener loitered near. Returning, he spoke with surprising candor.

"Brother, what you say about the gold is truth. I myself have often thought that it is useless, or worse. It has caused much trouble, cost much blood, done nobody any good. And my grandfather, who sometimes saw strange things in dreams, said before he died that it was a curse to us, and before many years it would destroy us."

"He did, hey?"

"He did. And for saying that he would have been severely punished if

he had not been already in his last sickness. As it was, the chiefs said he was mad. But some of us have thought often of what he said."

"Uh-huh." McGregor eyed him shrewdly. "How many of you?"

"Not many." The other, meeting his gaze, smiled faintly. "So few that none dares to speak such thoughts openly. As for talking of spending that gold for guns — such talk means quick death."

"Uh-huh. The chiefs couldn't stand that."

"No. Their heads are hard as stone. And the general—"

He paused, again glancing outward. In a still lower tone he added—

"He is crazed."

"Hey?"

McGregor stared. Timothy slowly nodded.

"Yes. I feel that he is, brother. For some time we have noticed that he did queer things. His actions since you came have been all the more strange at times. But old men may act oddly with a wise purpose; and it is not for us to question the mind of our ruler. But now, if he expects you to pick many guns and bullets from nowhere, his brain must be decayed. Yes, I see now."

Soberly he gazed at the bulky back of the nearest tribe house. McGregor, silent, looked in the same direction, seeing the structure only vaguely. The general had indeed been queer in many ways. But to the newcomer these oddities had been only devious workings of an uncommon mentality. Even in the unreasonable expectation of rifles from nowhere he had seemed to be actuated only by ignorance and habitual belief that whatsoever he might command would be done. The thought of insanity somehow had never entered McGregor's head. Nor, apparently, had it occurred until now to any man of this clan, hereditarily obedient to all commands of priestly chiefs in whose hands rested life or death. But now—

McGregor looked again at Timothy, the quiet, loyal, but just noncom who had almost openly balked at the sacrifice of a fellow tribesman for grasping a can of fish; the slow but sure seer whose grandfather had possessed the "second sight" sometimes granted to the mystical Irish, and who himself now apparently visioned tribal calamity under the continued rule of a decaying brain. Fast thoughts streaked through the Northerner's own mind.

"Who would be the next chief?" he asked.

"None knows," came the slow reply. "The great chief had several sons, but they all died young. So the rule goes to whichever sub-chief is most powerful when the general dies."

"Humph! They're all dirty old snakes with no brains! Look here!" McGregor swung the other abruptly to face him. Swiftly he went on, "Do you believe in guns?"

"Yes. I have seen what your gun can do."

"And do you believe in me?"

"Yes. I have worked behind you many days. I know you."

"Do the men believe in me?"

Timothy hesitated. Carefully he then answered:

"Yes. But not in you alone. In you and guns and the chiefs all together, yes."

"Uh-huh. Well, then it's up to me and you. What would you do to save all hands?"

Eyes bored into eyes. Then Timothy answered—

"Almost anything."

"Uh-huh. Well, listen again. These chiefs of yours are no good to the tribe. They're all cracked by that rotten gold. The general's got the best head here, but that's slipping. Everybody else—but me and you—is blind. Between us two we can get the guns. To get them we've got to take some of that gold and sneak out. When we get back with plenty rifles we'll be the big bosses here, whether the chiefs like it or not. Guns

talk, boy! And if these old bosses with heads like rocks can't get the idea, it's time a younger man took command. You, for instance."

The suggestion of supreme power brought into Timothy's strong face an involuntary glow. But the inevitable corollary of insurgency and violent deposal of all established rulers, with probable fratricidal strife within the clan, brought another headshake, short but decisive. McGregor, however, pressed on—

"Can you get at that gold?"

For a long minute the other made no answer. Then he said—

"Yes."

"Will you take some of it to save your people?"

This time the reply was much longer in coming. Timothy stood outwardly immobile, only his eyes moving. They looked deep into the inflexible blue ones meeting his; turned, and dwelt long on the outer houses; and at length came back. Despite his external calm, a hard fight had gone on within him. Now he steadily declared:

"I will do that. I will do it tonight. You will come with me. We shall take enough gold to buy guns and hide it outside. Tomorrow you must manage somehow to get your own rifle and bullets. We shall need them on our way south. Tomorrow night we shall start with our gold. I trust you, brother."

Thus concisely and conclusively he accepted the Northerner's plan; the only feasible plan for the preservation of his people. What it had cost him to uproot inborn loyalty to an outworn system of government, to face the certainty of being considered traitor and thief—and of suffering horrible tortures if caught—he alone knew. But McGregor guessed much. His hands closed hard on the muscular shoulders.

"You're a man, buddy!" he said. "And don't forget I'm trusting you, too."

A slight smile, a short nod, answered. Timothy understood that quite well. By merely reporting to the chief of his own house that the adopted drillmaster had suggested robbing the Skull, he could immediately destroy the tempter and add to his own record a mark of merit. But now, turning away, he only said:

"I forget nothing. Leave your door open tonight."

And with that, as McGregor's grip loosened, he walked out. As he sauntered easily across the clearing, giving no observer the impression that anything more important than military matters had been discussed, the man behind him drew a long breath.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TREASURE

DARKNESS on earth. Stars on high. No moon. Dull clouds, scattered, slow moving, portentous of rain, yet dropping no water on this parched land south of the mountains on which they had poured in passing. In the obscurity below them, two men strode through silence toward a bulging rock.

Both were armed, but not with guns. The native, stripped to a loincloth, carried his wooden war ax; the khaki-clad Northerner bore a six-foot wooden spear lent by his companion. From a hip pocket of the khaki breeches protruded a round black cylinder suggesting a huge pistol barrel. This, however, was an electric torch, now to be used seriously for the first time in many days. It had been recovered from the curious general by showing him what it was, but by conducting the demonstration in sunlight, when the little inner lamp seemed so weak that the oldster regarded it with contempt.

As the clandestine pair swung onward they exchanged no words. Once or twice Timothy glanced with a slight frown at McGregor's boots, which, crunching gravel, sounded loud in the stillness. But he said nothing. Those

hard heels had left no telltale marks on the woods path this time, for their owner had walked barefoot until out on the hard barren ground; and now they could do no harm. Stride for stride the comrades marched to the looming Skull and, without pause, to the edge of the lower eye.

There Timothy stopped a moment, hesitantly regarding the ominous blackness within. In silence, McGregor drew his torch and pressed its button. As the white ray shot into the cavern the native voiced an amazed grunt. For seconds thereafter he stared at the magical cylinder and at the far reaching shaft of radiance. Then he joyously chuckled and touched his partner's arm, prompting advance.

They moved inward, side by side. Timothy, at the left, carefully refrained from stepping ahead and repeatedly eyed the boring torch askance. He seemed a bit afraid that its powerful ray might, if it struck him, burn a hole through his vitals. As he proceeded farther into the enormous head, however, he soon concentrated all his attention on what waited beyond.

For several rods McGregor saw only bare earth, smooth stone walls, and a curved roof equally smooth. Any geologist, examing this shaft, would have decided that it had been smoothed by water in long distant ages when the hard old Skull had been overlaid by thick beds of softer rock now gnawed away by inconceivably slow erosion. To the present invaders the waterworn evenness meant only that no immediate danger threatened. Deeper and deeper they penetrated, following random slants, seeing nothing strange. Then Timothy's guiding hand closed hard and bore back. Both men halted.

Beyond them the tunnel divided. At the right a wide passage swung gently away into darkness. At the left a narrow, low corridor angled off into apparent nothingness. At their feet the earth looked smoothly solid. But Timothy eyed that earth long and earnestly. At length he glanced down again at the Northerner's clumsy looking boots. Abruptly he ordered—

"Take them off!"

He spoke in a hushed tone, yet not in a whisper; the tone of a man awed by his surroundings, yet not on guard against listening ears. Without question McGregor obeyed. Laying down his torch, he involuntarily snapped off the switch. At once the blackness became a menacing void, in which the sliding of his loosened laces sounded like the dry creep of snakes.

Boots off, he hastily grabbed the flash and slid its button into the locking position. When steady light again shone, Timothy drew a quick breath of relief. So did McGregor. During the dark pause he had again smelled death. Old death, dry death, but unmistakable death. The smell now seemed to come not from the entrance but from somewhere in the cavities of the old stone Skull.

"Follow me," prompted Timothy.

With that he tossed his ax a couple of yards onward; stepped to the extreme left wall, pressed himself against it and moved sidewise, watching his footing, as if traversing a narrow ledge on the brink of a chasm. In a moment he again stepped outward and stood at ease, though anxiously watching his follower. McGregor copied his movements precisely, throwing his spear, hugging the wall, moving freely again when he reached his waiting comrade. Again that comrade breathed deeply. Then, picking up his ax, he started onward. He turned to the narrow hole at the left.

"Wait," said McGregor. "What's here?"

He moved his spear butt toward the ground so carefully avoided.

"Do not touch it! It is a pit. Overhead is a gate. Both work together. Come away!"

Turning his light upward, McGregor discerned a lurking menace indistinguishable to any intruder equipped with

a weaker light. The stone roof, high at the entrance, had grown lower during their advance. Now, just over the spot where lay his boots, that solid ceiling showed a straight crack, about a foot wide; and in that fissure, dully visible, were blunt brown teeth. They were the ends of vertical logs. Crossing these, a couple of feet higher, was a horizontal bar of the same heavy timber. Still higher up, hidden in the crevice, must be other such bars, forming a grate as heavy and firm as steel bars. It was a primitive portcullis, ingeniously constructed by the ancient Frenchmen and still efficient.

BY WHAT mechanism it could be automatically operated McGregor could not guess and did not ask. No ropes or other means of suspension were visible. Timothy's terse explanation proved, however, that portcullis and pit were somehow connected. And, remembering the Brazilian caught here, his raw fingers and swollen hands, the Northerner understood well enough what the trap did when sprung.

That fellow, like others before him, had sneaked in stealthily, carrying a dim lantern or candle, or lighting only an occasional match. Suddenly the ground had fallen, dropping him into a hole. The gate had crashed down at the edge of that hole. By frantic efforts he had managed somehow to claw his way up to the lip, there to meet only the immovable bars; bars so tough that even a knife, if he had one, could not cut an exit before morning. With virtually nothing to stand on while working, he had soon given up any such effort, even if he had tried it; and, beside himself with fear, had spent all strength in useless wrenching at the unyielding barrier. Such would be the fate of any other man thus caught—including the two now here.

McGregor backed away. Timothy turned again to the narrow passageway. But again his partner delayed him. Shooting his light along the broader tunnel, he queried—

"What's here?"

Timothy's face tightened with impatience. But then, wordless, he gestured along the wide way and stepped forward. Side by side, they again walked ahead.

The shaft now grew narrower and steeper, twisting upward. At every step the smell of death grew stronger. All at once opened a large cavern, irregular, yet smooth, resembling a crude dome. As the light streaked around it McGregor stopped short.

The room was walled with human skulls. Hundreds of them, skilfully piled, leered at him from empty sockets and grinned at him with unfleshed teeth. Savage men, half savage men, probably some civilized men, all mocked the two new men who had penetrated to their catacomb. All had been daring men who entered this forbidden land full of life, courage, determination, only to become mere shells kept in eternal dark. Indian warriors, *mestizo* fortune hunters, white adventurers of unknown nationalities, were tiered in this dry vault in a fellowship of failure. No defenders of this place were among them; the homelanders would never place their own dead among enemies. All these were aliens who had come to conquer pale Indians or paler French successors, only to meet death.

Piercing their ghastly array, several black holes of varying size and height receded into ungaged depths of the weird rock. In the middle of the grim chamber stood a low stone table, some seven feet long, dyed dull red. It was completely bare. But its shape, its color and its smell suggested gruesome dissections. For what purpose such cuttings of corpses could have been conducted McGregor did not ask, but could imagine.

Hearts, brains, other vital organs were, among some tribes he had known, put to purposes having to do with the longevity of old priests. At the thought

he choked down a sudden desire to gag. Then he switched his light and his attention to the irregular openings.

"What's there?" he huskily demanded.

"Nothing," grated Timothy, through his teeth. "Nothing you want to see—or smell. Neither do I!"

Wheeling, he strode down the black tunnel by which they had come. Swallowing again, his blond comrade followed fast.

Soon they reached again the inconspicuous orifice into which the guide had twice tried to go, and which he now resolutely entered. Close behind, the Northerner trod without further question, swinging his light up and down and sidewise, watching the quickly changing quirks of the constricted passage. Timothy, walking surely and speedily, gave no more attention to the darting ray which repeatedly crossed his back. He had lost all fear of that harmless beam.

Up and up they worked their way on a steep footing of bare stone. Several times the tortuous corridor divided into random holes looking alike. But Timothy went on without pause, choosing his path with unerring knowledge. Sweating along behind, McGregor noticed that, although the air was warm and close, it was clean; the faint stench below was gone.

Then the pilot stopped, drawing a long breath, gesturing with his ax. McGregor echoed the breath, mopped his face on a sleeve, darted his light about, then leaned heavily on his spear. They had reached the gold.

A small cavity, hardly high enough to give them headroom, held the treasure. Against irregular walls, rather rough, squatted ancient hide bags, many of which had split with age. From the open rents had spilled stuff which now lay in dark yellow cones against the burst containers. Yellow—and, at one spot, other colors. White, red, blue, mingled in chance confusion. These hues, too, were dull; for even in this high, tight vault, exposed to no breeze, there had been a gradual accumulation of dust. But the dingy things which gave forth those variant colorings must be the precious stones of the old tale—diamonds, rubies, sapphires, worth far more than the gold, if they were real gems.

At that thought McGregor's gaze sharpened. The legend had been that here were caverns filled with treasure. This was only one cavern, a small one, and by no means filled.

"Is this all?" he asked.

Timothy stared at him. All? What did the outlander expect? A veritable mountain of gold? But he answered simply—

"This is all."

The questioner tossed his spear aside and squatted beside the heap of colored stones. From it he picked a large white one which, if a genuine gem, could buy more guns than could a heavy backload of gold. He rubbed it clean on his breeches; then carefully turned it about, examining it in the piercing brilliancy of his torch. From it glinted superficial gleams. But all such reflections were flat, shallow, rather dull. From its core came no glow, no live light. At length he laid it down, drew forth another stone, subjected it to the same penetrating test. Like the first, it responded only by such reflections as might return from a bit of broken bottle.

WORKING more rapidly now, he gave other such specimens a searching scrutiny. Of rough diamonds he knew not much; of rubies and sapphires even less. But soon he became convinced that all these translucent stones were worthless; mere crystals gleaned by the ancient French adventurers and fondly hoarded in the belief that they were raw jewels. More than one man before them had made the same error. Back into memory floated one of the random talks of Terrill:

"There's a place away up the Orinoco

called Esmeraldas, where the Spaniards discovered green crystals which they thought were emeralds. The Jesuits flocked in there and missionized the Indians to gather those beautiful jewels, and for awhile it was a tidy little town. But the stones were only colored volcanic glass, not worth a dollar a hundred. So the place went flop, and now it's only a fleabitten cattle ranch. And over where we're going the gems may be just as false as those emeralds, and probably they are. Rubies and sapphires have never been found in South America, as far as I've learned.

"There are diamonds, but probably there are plenty of other volcanic fusions that look like diamonds but aren't. I'm not dreaming much about those things, or even the gold, for that matter. I just want to learn what the old yarn's all about."

Terrill had guessed right. These things were no good, McGregor felt. But there was the gold, anyway. Rising, the inspector stretched cramped muscles and eyed the other bags. Yes, that dusty yellow stuff was gold. He had seen such stuff often enough in various places to have no doubt now. And, although it looked despicable by comparison with the legendary store of treasure, it was more than enough to buy guns and ammunition for his men. More than enough, in fact, to keep a not too frugal Scotch-Irishman wealthy for life. He grinned tightly at it. Then, moved by a random impulse, he turned his back on it and looked outward.

"What's in the rest of this place?" he queried. "There are other holes."

"Nothing," said Timothy. "There are holes, but they hold nothing."

"What about that big opening that makes the other eye of this thing?"

"That goes nowhere. It is just a hole that does not come through to the inside. In it is nothing but the droppings of birds and bats."

"Uh-huh. Well, show me the way to the top. I want to look out."

He stepped out. Timothy, frowning with puzzlement, followed slowly. Now that the gold was revealed, the obvious thing to do was to take out what was needed, not waste time wandering about worthless passages. McGregor knew that also; but, for no reason except habitual watchfulness, he felt like surveying the outer ground before starting movement of the treasure. In the corridor he paused, waiting. Timothy, without argument, took the indicated lead. Turning into the narrow path previously trodden, he rapidly swung downward. McGregor trod close to his heels.

Down they went, and down. In at a side opening Timothy abruptly turned. Up a new crooked shaft he clambered, ascending so fast that his follower's feet slipped and his lungs labored. Up, up, up—then came sudden fresh air and vast space.

The two stopped on the high platform of sacrifice—the gash across the forehead of the Skull, highest attainable foothold on the rounded rock. Deeper than it had looked from below, it slanted slightly upward for perhaps thirty feet to the extreme edge. To this edge McGregor walked cautiously. There he snapped off his light and stood gazing down and out.

For a time he saw only dark land, stars, sky, all stretching away into obscurity. Neither down below nor far away was any visible or audible movement. Everything slept.

Breathing deep, relaxing, he stood more leisurely scanning all his dusky world. Slowly his vision narrowed and fixed. Away to the south was a faint hint of light amid the starry dark; a phantasmal sheen so vague as to be barely perceptible, yet persistent and motionless. As he watched it, beside him sounded a sharply drawn breath.

"Fire!" muttered Timothy.

The two faces turned toward each other, and in the starshine the blue and the gray eyes talked. That far glow was firelight. The fire itself was hidden by intervening trees. But beside it must

be men. Men camping, carefully controlling their night blaze, unaware of its spectral radiance on the invisible horizon. Neither fire nor men should be within eyeshot of this eternally watching Skull—no, nor within several days' march of it. Those covert campers were enemies.

McGregor's jaw hardened. Again he looked abroad, now fixing in mind the location of the ghostly light, which, when the pair descended to the ground, would be impossible to see. Then he turned and strode into the black opening at the rear. Mute, Timothy followed close. Without spoken words, each understood the purpose in the mind of his blood brother. The sacred gold which both had come to steal could lie here awhile longer unmolested. Guns were near. And the price of those guns was not gold but blood.

CHAPTER XV

GUNS

MERE shadows, McGregor and Timothy stole into thick timber surrounding a waterhole. Through the many small interstices among low leaves glowed soft firelight and flowed thin, acrid woodsmoke. The pair wrinkled their noses and narrowed their eyes against the pungent fumes, but worked on into them. A faint breeze was blowing, and they were approaching from downwind.

For nearly two hours they had been advancing from the north, striding across the barrens, swimming small streams, forging ahead with purposeful speed; then, nearing their goal, slowing to a wary creep, looking, listening, sniffing. Through that hard march McGregor had worn his boots; but now, like his comrade, he walked barefoot, his heavy footgear left beside a tall stone. As the two adventurers made their way through the tangle the Northerner stepped as soundlessly as the Southerner.

Their long, resolute advance against unknown and unnumbered foes had been, both knew, their only practicable plan of conquest. To return from the Skull to the houses, arouse the chiefs, tell of their discovery, would inevitably evoke questions as to how they had made that discovery. To such interrogation there could be no satisfactory answer. Wherefore, while all other warriors still slept, these two now were here to win or lose their daring game.

With infinite caution they worked forward to a clear view of the camp. For long minutes thereafter they stood motionless behind adjacent trees, scanning everything visible. At length they silently drew back, took cover behind another tree and, in the lightest of whispers, talked. Then once more they moved to their former posts of observation.

Beside the broad black pool burned the fire. Against a tree sat a sentinel, body at rest, rifle across relaxed thighs, eyes dreamily regarding the water, ears alert to any suspicious sound. In hammocks just beyond him slept seven other men, their beds plainly visible in the firelight which would hold off marauding jaguars or bloodthirsty vampires. None of these eight invaders, who so carefully protected themselves against attack by men or beasts, had realized one fatal fact—that the smooth water would reflect the light of their hidden fire upward, to be discerned by human eyes from afar.

Beside each sleeper stood a rifle, held erect by a leaning crotched stick, ready for swift seizure. And on the ground under the hammocks lay long bandoleers stuffed with cartridges. Of other equipment there was little. This gang had come to conquer or die; to shoot its food as it came, to shoot its savage foe when it arrived, to shoot its way out again with its treasure if necessary. Therefore it had dispensed with virtually everything except vitally necessary beds, guns, and bullets.

In McGregor's eyes glinted apprecia-

tion. Experienced men, these were. But battles were won by outguessing rather than by outshooting. With a hard grin he turned his face again to Timothy and gave an almost inaudible sniff.

Timothy sank. Face at ground level, he gave a snaky hiss.

The lounging sentinel straightened. Scowling, he peered narrowly at the tree roots whence issued the ominous sound. After a few seconds the lurking native hissed again. With a muttered oath the listener arose; then stood hesitant, uneasy, undecided. Presently he stepped closer to the fire and stood there, fixedly regarding the black bush. Long moments passed, during which the sinister silence wore on his nerves and the standing position grew tiresome. Then, at the right moment, the unseen "reptile" once more hissed.

With another growl, the sentry drew his machete and warily advanced, rifle in left hand, long knife in right. To shoot blindly at the hidden menace and thereby startle his tired companions—as he might justifiably do if the noise were that of a jaguar—would earn him only angry curses. But the venomous thing must be slain; otherwise it might creep around and strike somebody before dawn. So, step by step, he worked up toward the tree.

Timothy emitted one more threat; then he lay soundless, motionless, almost breathless, in the dark.

That last hiss had given the stalker the exact spot he sought—the base of the left hand tree. Easing his rifle to the ground, he abandoned it and crept forward with machete raised, eyes set on the ground. Between the two trees he inched his way. Suddenly he recoiled, mouth opening for a yell. Instead sounded only a gasping gurgle.

From the right hand tree had darted a six-foot spear stabbing with deadly certainty. Through his throat it had plunged, severing vocal cords and jugular vein, tearing his neck wide open. Now, before he could fall, forth leaped the wielder of that spear; a yellow haired, blue eyed, burly man who clapped a hard hand over his mouth and held it there. Squirming, kicking, clawing, the sentinel died.

Meanwhile Timothy started up and bounded noiselessly at the seven sleepers. His task was first to snatch up the ready rifles, then rush back into the bush with the captured arms. But the ensuing events did not work out as planned. He bungled his job.

Four rifles he grasped and threw into the crook of his left arm. But, in his haste, he neglected silence. The metallic thwacks of barrel on barrel aroused three sleepers. Two snatched for guns already gone. The third grasped his piece and swiftly fired.

The bullet missed. The shooter had fired from his swaying hammock. And now, as he tried to jump erect, he lost his balance and fell. He was up again in a second; and in that same second all his companions sprang into action. So did McGregor and Timothy.

With one heave Timothy flung his captured rifles into the pool. Wheeling back, he swung up his war ax, which he had carried in his left fist while gun-gathering. As the fallen enemy arose the ax crunched down on his skull. He collapsed. Swiftly sidestepping, Timothy seized the gun from his nerveless hand.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Old Goldie

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

OLD GOLDIE was working along an oak mast point, snuffling up acorns, grunting contentedly, or turning with sudden rushes to chase away shoats and young sows that encroached on his feeding places. The sun was shining through the treetops, where patches of leaves still clung to the branches and rustled in the crisp wind that blew across the back of Hoop Snake Ridge and carried with it white clouds in the cerulean sky. Even in the newly fallen leaves the razorback was so bright and shiny that he was like a statue of gold plowing through loose flakes of dull brass.

Presently, where Old Goldie reached a broadback, he stopped and began to sniff, then followed his nose into the wind over the edge and down a steep slope, along the sidehill and around a point into a gully which was thickly grown with shrubs and laurels. Here he snuffled more eagerly and plunged his snout up to his ears into a well rounded heap of greenish yellow discard that smelled sour and which assuaged a desire which was neither thirst nor hunger, but had been acquired through the chance satiation of both.

Old Goldie had eaten plenty, but this sour mash had been brought to the ravine and dumped; and the razorback's nose, sensitive from longing, had detected the odor. He now hogged the mess. His flanks swelled visibly, and his snorts bubbled and blew into the stuff, throwing it in little explosions. Apparently he intended to eat it all, but there were bushels of it and, despite his utmost efforts, he could not contain it. Presently he yielded to the sensation which experience had made him know was sure to follow such provender.

Old Goldie backed out of the trench his eating had dug into the heap and shambled down the ravine on to a bench jutting from the mountain side.

He staggered to the right, where his shoulder brought up against a tall beech tree that stopped him with a jar and a grunt. Leaning against the obstruction, he twisted his head around till his ear was against the smooth gray bark. Then he went around the trunk two or three times, leaning against its support.

Presently he stumbled from it sidewise, hastily lifting his legs and getting his hoofs down by the attraction of gravitation. His mouth was open with excited bewilderment. Even when he observed a steep brink imminent, his disunited efforts failed to prevent his approach to it, nor saved him from going down, drawn by his huge head, his flopping afterparts following.

Sliding and rolling, forefooting it straight ahead, or slipping in the blue clay of a slide bank, he arrived at the West Fork road. This was a woods wagon trail along the sidehill a hundred or so feet up from the branch. Three sheets in the wind, Old Goldie started down the highway grade.

He overtook two men who were carrying a jug between them on a broomstick thrust through the handle. They were oblivious of all but the fact that despite their best intentions equally to divide the burden of weight, it slid first to one end and then to the other. At each halt made necessary for readjustment, they tipped up the jug and drank, replaced the corncob stopper and gravely measured the stick with palms and thumbs, dividing by two and adjusting the handle just so on the stick, around which at last one had the happy thought to cut a notch to insure an even distribution of the rapidly diminishing weight of the jug.

They were just ready to go on again when Old Goldie came up behind them, keeping between the wagon ruts, but weaving from one to the other. He was perhaps three feet high, more than four feet long and narrow out of all proportion, except for his jowls and the spread of his ears. When he gave a sudden "Woof!" upon finding himself right at two humans, the men jumped ahead with such violent energy that the stick broke at the notch and they landed like frightened rabbits, facing back.

One of them was Mull Wilding, Jud Morrel's hired man. The other was Scape Vasser, ostensibly a ginseng digger and turtler, whose cabin was up the valley, off the road down beside the creek and above most of the high water marks.

"Pigwidgan!" Scape cried, turning to run.

Wilding followed in a panic.

"He'll be witchin' us!" Vasser choked, turning to make off down the road. But Wilding wasn't going to be left behind.

Old Goldie stopped where the jug had broken on a nubbin in the limestone rock. He snuffled into the liquor, which was caught in little hollows. When the men looked back over their shoulders the huge beast had his mouth wide open, his nose pointed up, puffing and gasping for breath. Then he nuzzled down and drank some more. The two had seen enough. They raced away, neck and neck, down the trail.

Before they reached the first turn they met Mutt Foseen. He stepped to one side, first grinning and then yelping with laughter. At Mutt's shouts Old Goldie threw up his head in excitement and came toward him, left and right hoofing, swaying from side to side, summoned by that loud and jubilant whooping. To the further astonishment of the two, Mutt, instead of running from the wild apparition, waited for it to come up.

Sure enough, they were seeing things. Ordinarily that old yellow razorback wouldn't have come within two hundred yards of a man. So many shots had been taken at him in the past that mighty few humans ever saw him any more.

Wilding and Vasser had seen enough. Huddling where they were, all worn out and pretty sick themselves, they

went to sleep. They weren't what either one would call really drunk, but at the same time they knew when it was time to quit. They woke up once or twice that night, but the sun was shining when they finally sat up and combed the twigs and leaves out of their hair while making up their minds about how they arrived at just that particular place. Both felt pretty empty, but not hungry. Neither did they want to move, but they felt obliged to get out of the road, so they went down to Morrel's place, commissary and grist mill, at the foot of Hoop Snake Ridge in the forks of Plenty Waters Creek.

Patrons were gathered around a big cardboard with printing matter on it, like a reward notice for a killer, but this one read:

NOTICE OF BOUNTY!
$100 Cash Has
been deposited in the
First National Bank of
Blue Smoke
PAYABLE FOR A PERFECT
ADULT RAZORBACK HOG
of Large Size, Good Color
and NATIVE ORIGIN
For Mounting in the Wild
Life Museum of Bivouac
University
(Sgnd.) The Naturalist
—WICKRIGHT ARBERRY

"Ho-law!" some one shouted. "A hundred dollars for a razorback hawg!"

"Yeh!" Jud Morrel snarled wrathfully. "Spendin' a hundred dollars of taxpayers' money on a damned hawg!"

Wilding and Vasser drew near and spelled out the reward notice to the last word.

THERE it was, posted on trees and fences, pasted on rocks and even printed in the *Welkin Ringer,* the newspaper edited and published at Branch City Court. Any one could read that the Bivouac University naturalist had actually deposited $100 in cold cash in the First National Bank as evidence of good faith that it was to be paid for a perfect specimen of razorback hog. A sheriff who wanted a fair to middling bad man couldn't have done any more than that.

As Mull Wilding and Scape Vasser stood there reading the notice an idea came to them both at once.

"Just the same as if we had said it out loud," they declared when they were talking it over afterward.

In spite of doubts they might have had regarding Old Goldie, Mull Wilding and Scape Vasser decided that a hundred dollars in cash wasn't to be idly passed up if reaching hands could seize it. If there was a razorback fit to perch himself in the University along with the quality, intellect and high spirits there—and one that needed killing—it was this Hoop Snake Ridge boar. Of "large size, good color and native origin," he was eligible. And he had damaged their liquor and made them comical in the eyes of such careless, no 'count white trash as Mutt Foseen.

Naturally there was discussion all along Plenty Waters about who was most likely to collect that one hundred dollars. Besides the *Welkin Ringer's* long editorial piece proving the money had actually been deposited, including a letter from the president of the First National, there was an interview with Assemblyman Anson McCoy Hatfield, confirming the fact that the money was actually up.

When they were sober Wilding and Vasser argued that their excitement and alarm when they thought they saw a pigwidgan in broad daylight was plumb ridiculous. All they had seen was a big, perfect razorback hog which would be one hundred dollars to their good the day they delivered him to the First National, dead or alive.

So the two hunters headed back into the Hoop Snake country without telling any one their intentions.

Mutt Foseen owned, but did not plant, a clearing at the head springs of the two creek branches on this ridge-

back land. He lived on the country, but did not work it, and if he felt like it he basked for hours in the sun, or hunted raccoons and 'possums on dark-of-the-moon nights; he fished for big-mouth bass in the emerald Plenty Waters branches; he trapped for mink, muskrats and other furs. No one could pick a gray squirrel's eye farther or a pheasant's neck quicker with a bullet. Hoop Snake Ridge was his stamping ground from end to end and down both flanks.

People knew Mutt Foseen's eloquence and ideas, more or less, and nobody wanted Mutt to be stirred up. How he would take it, having Mull Wilding and Scape Vasser hunting for Old Goldie and one hundred dollars right in his bailiwick might well give these two pause. Many less valuable hogs—in fact sometimes the merest shoats—had been trouble breeders.

Wilding and Vasser spent that first night at Step Light Bingall's clearing on Hoop Snake Ridge.

In the morning the hunters cut down off the mountain to the road, where they struck the tracks about a hundred yards south of where the pieces of the broken jug still lay scattered on the ground. They took the trail up the mountain, and undertook to walk the old hog down, as if he were a big buck deer.

They found where their quarry had slept, first in one place, then in another. Indications of his uneasiness were plainly visible. When a hog is feeling all right he just lies down, and probably grunts in his dreams. He doesn't lie down just anywhere. He finds a nice sousy mud puddle on a day when flies bother him. If it is fresh, chilly weather, he hunts sunshine. When an Autumn wind blows, an old boar or sow huddles in behind a windbreak. But Old Goldie just lay down anywhere, without any system and without any care.

Instead of picking a nice, easy nest of Autumnal leaves, he just fell in the laurels, with all their roots and branches and roughness. After having a spell of that, he went a jump or two on to a sidehill, slipping and rolling down, taking leaves and twigs with him, likely muddying his glorious golden bristles in the clay slick.

When he moved on he had come to a branch. He had splashed and sprawled in the icy flow. He must have been feeling pretty awful when he did that, and both men could and did sympathize with the thirst and feverishness he indicated.

Then they found where the hog had begun to ramble again. He had come to acres of acorn mast, mixed with chestnuts. Though Old Goldie had nuzzled the deep fall of leaves from the ground, he had chewed but not swallowed the provender. In fact, he had spat the stuff out as if he were disappointed in the flavor.

These tracks and signs were about thirty-six hours old when the hunters came to them. Wilding and Vasser recalled their own feelings and general physical condition at about that time. They had to laugh.

About two miles farther on, night coming on, they found where Old Goldie had joined a drove of razorbacks and the herd had strung off along the mountain. The big boar's hoofprints were trampled by the others, and in some places he was hard to follow; but being good woodsmen, the two hunters kept the trail till it was too dark to see it. This was only a little way from where Vasser had his confidential enterprise, but now that they were in a manner of speaking partners, he didn't mind taking Wilding to it. Leaving the ridgeback, they carefully hid their tracks into the ravine and on to the shack and cave.

A trough led spring water out of the branch over to a shed, the roof of which was carefully hidden by living green spruce branches. A copper tube was coiled in an old kerosene barrel into which the trough emptied. The tube

came out of the bottom in a spout that dripped into a jug on a block, a demijohn on a lower block and into a keg's top bung. A pipe attachment would enable the distilled fluid to flow into a forty-two-gallon barrel from the keg or jug bases.

Just inside the cave in the sidehill was a stillhouse where a furnace and boiler arrangement evaporated the juice from sprouted corn, fermented wild grapes, honey sorghum, or whatever line Vasser was producing.

BOTH men were tired. They had cold snacks, although Vasser always had the makings of a hot meal in his cave. At the same time, the way things were, they decided not to bother much that night. The morning would be soon enough to prepare whatever they desired, according to their appetites. It wouldn't have been natural for Vasser not to be hospitable. He served a taste, a bracer and then some. After a time it occurred to them that they had better mark the exact place where they had left the tracks of Old Goldie, to be sure to find them in the morning.

Accordingly, they went up the mountain. In the dark, circling around looking for the exact place on the ridgeback, they went either a half circle too much or too little, so they couldn't tell which was north—or any other direction for certain. Arm in arm they wandered for awhile, till the going was too steep up or down. Then they circulated in another direction, one that seemed tolerably reasonable.

After considerable wandering they heard hogs. Some were grunting, some were rooting in the hardwood, rustling the leaves. Shoats were crashing around in play. Dark as it was, the men were not able to see plainly, if at all. Among the other sounds they heard a grunt deeper and more distinguished than any of the others. The drove was just on beyond, so they eased themselves in that direction—not that they expected to be able to do much of anything, having neglected to bring headlamps to shine the eyes of Old Goldie. That is, if a hog's eyes shone; they weren't sure of that.

Probably the deep grunter wasn't the hog they were looking for; there were lots of big razorbacks on the mountain. They wet their fingers and tried the wind. They took a drink, each having a quart bottle convenient. Then they averaged their ideas as to which side of their fingers was cold, to indicate the upwind. Thus, presently, they approached the hogs from the lee side and looked over the top of a fallen tree trunk for luck.

Both had hunted deer at night. They knew that deer in the Summer red are white in the dark. They could see the dark shapes of the razorbacks, large, medium and shoat. They were rooting the oak, beech and chinkapin mast in the hardwood, nosing in complete content. Among them loomed, twice as large as any of the others, a pale hog—white in the moonglow as a deer in its Summer coat. His were the heavy grunts; his the noisy manner of content.

"Shu-u-u!" the two observers breathed, and Vasser reached for the rifle Wilding had brought.

"Lemme!" Vasser whispered.

"I kin shoot!" Wilding declared under his breath. "I kin sho-o's good's anybody!"

"Ye're drunk!" Vasser objected. "I ain' drunk. I'm shober!"

With firm grips on the barrel, each telling the other to keep still and let go, they urged and tugged. Thus they were making sure of neither making a mistake when suddenly they saw a black shape coming along the ridge crest on the highest divide. The shadow was tall and thin, and walked exactly like a man.

"Howdy, Goldie! How's the old hawg tonight!" they heard plainly.

The great pale hog threw up its enormous head, gave a grunt and came

bounding right to this black passerby. The tugging at the rifle instantly ceased. The whisperings became faint, sibilant exhalations. The two hunters shrank till just their brows and eyes were above the log behind which they had arrived with such elaborate caution.

With their own eyes they saw that double-sized pale razorback go to that upright figure. They heard with their own ears; while one grunted, the other talked—pig and human language swapped with obvious understanding! The observers heard the crisp sound of fingers rasping through the bristles of the hog's back. Never in their born days had Mull Wilding and Scape Vasser heard a conversation like that.

"My lan'!" breathed Mull, watching the black shape stride on its way, the pale razorback shape bounding and stirring along at its feet.

The other hogs scattered, and the strange man and the big boar went on till they were out of sight.

THE two bushwhackers crawfished back from that fallen tree. They had seen something. They could bear witness that they had. They kept moving faster and more noisily till they were literally on the jump.

"Lucky we didn't git to shoot!" Wilding gasped, his breath still short.

"Sho' is!" Scape answered.

They crept down the mountain side, headed into a ravine and struck a spring branch. The first thing they knew they were transported into Vasser's establishment. Never in the world could they have found it, but there they were.

"Say, Scape," Wilding asked, when Vasser was about to drink out of his own quart bottle, which was only a bit more than two-thirds empty, "about that there liquor: Be yo' sure a green snake didn't git into the mash?"

"What!" Scape held his bottle at arm's length, alarmed. "Yo' don't s'pose that's it, Mull! Yo' don't b'lieve that—my lawse!"

"Yo' know jes' well's I do, 'f a green snake eveh in Gawd's world gits into the corn sproutin's or wild grape sour mash, if anybody gits to drink hit, what happens!" Mull whispered. "Yo' know hit!"

"'F anybody drinks hit, he gits second sight!" Vasser whimpered. "My lan', Wilding, this yeah's that same batch off'n the jugful that day—"

"What?" Wilding gasped. "Not that gallon we had the day we seen that—that pigwidgan cross-footin'! Not really, Scape? We been drinkin' second sight! Oh, my lawse!"

"I neveh meant hit, hones', Mull," Vasser said. "'Course, I didn't watch ev'y minute, clost, dreenin' that batch," he whimpered. "I don't want no second sight! I drank same's yo' did, Mull. I seen the same things—yo' know that. I filled both bottles; we drank out'n the same jug; me same's yo'. I didn't trick yo'. I neveh treat no friend thataway."

"I neveh wanted no second sight!" Wilding moaned. "We seen hit in the daytime. Now we seen hit in the night!"

"That jes' proves it must 'a' had a green snake into hit!" Vasser groaned. "We better pour this all back—"

"I wouldn't drink out'n either of them bottles, not if I was sick as a dog," Wilding gasped. "Ugh—my lawse—second sight—"

"I gotta have somethin'. Back in there they's a dif'rent run-off, Mull, hones', 'tis! Leave them bottles right there on that kaig. I kin ship hit down't the fox hunters. They won't know what ails 'em. Anyhow, some of them'd likely give four times as much a quart for second sighter—they don't cyar what they git. I wouldn't touch the stuff, if I knowed hit. I been noticin' right smart of green snakes around yeah, but I neveh thought nothin'. We betteh take some of this. Hit's wild honey dew; I c'n guarantee they wa'n't no green snake into hit, on account of I'd noticed in the clear juice of the

fermentin's. 'Course, in sour mash yo' cain't see nothin'."

"I sho' need hit, Scape," Wilding choked. "Afteh what we been through.

MUTT FOSEEN came down to Branch City and found that not only had Bivouac University offered a hundred-dollar bounty on a perfect razorback hog specimen, but that everybody took it seriously. The information was absolutely reliable. More than that, the Honorable J. Sevier Jaumette, who was probably as reliable as most lawyers in nonpartisan affairs, told Mutt that he stood prepared to collect the one hundred dollars in case there should be any hitch about the payment.

"I reckon you'll be claiming it, won't you, Mutt?" the attorney inquired with a shrewd, sidelong inspection of the tall hillbilly.

Mutt didn't answer. He was looking at Mull Wilding and Scape Vasser, who were just along the square a short distance away.

"Personally," Vasser was saying, "I ain't neveh 'sperimented with second sighter. I ain't no ambitions thataway. A man don't neveh know where he's goin' to land once he heads in that line. Shu-u! I neveh was so s'prised in my life's when me 'n' Mull developed second sight. Neither one of us suspected anything the first time. 'Course, if any one wants that kind of stuff, that's all right with me. I don't recommend hit; I don't cry hit down."

Mutt Foseen moved over to where he could listen more closely. His head was small and round; his ears stuck straight out, scooping forward like clamshells. His pale blue eyes were far apart under bright red eyebrows, and his forehead was partly covered by his faded, black, wide brimmed hat. His shoulders were narrow, his body lean and long. His back was straight and his legs spindling; his coat sleeves had been pieced down, but not far enough to cover his wrists.

"'Course, Scape, 'tain't none of my business—" Mutt took advantage of an interval when Scape paused and Wilding had just pulled his breath to start with more details—"but when I came down off the ridge I noticed where somebody 'd dumped some mash. The heap 'd been plowed, rooted through right smart. The hog tracks were sure big—big's Old Goldie's, sure 'nough. I was wonderin' if that old razorback 'd found something special extry in the wastin's. Reckon he'd git second sight, too?"

"Shucks!"

A dozen listeners chuckled, and some smart alec declared flatly that second sight was just a hillbilly superstition.

"'Course—" Vasser joined the grinners—"if a man drinks one kind he floats up to it. Then if he drinks some other kind, that handles him dif'rent. You know yo'se'f if a green snake runs through a batch of mash it ain't goin' to be the same kick to it as if there hadn't been no snake. I'll leave it to anybody if it don't stand to reason."

"Well, anyhow, what the newspapers have been sayin' about this rewardin' a razorback's had its effect," Editor Scupp of the *Welkin Ringer* declared. "I just had word from Bivouac University that the museum and zoo naturalist is leadin' an expedition here to Plenty Waters Basin to catch a perfect big razorback hog, dead for stuffin' or alive for the menagerie. My editorial last week on the subject was copied all over the State. I tell you, gentlemen, if we can get what they want stuffed and mounted in the corridor of the State's museum it's goin' to create a great deal of curiosity and attention as regards Plenty Waters Basin."

"The surprisin' thing would be if it didn't," Sheriff Pucklin declared with emphasis.

"Excuse me, Mutt, I'd like to speak with you."

The editor led the tall mountaineer down the street out of earshot.

"Now, Mutt, Dr. Wickright Arberry,

the Bivouac Naturalist, is a very particular friend of mine. Knowin' me, knowin' I was right here, he wanted to know 'f my editorial about our razorbacks was just poetry fervor or if it was reasonably true. If it was so—and of course it was facts—he just absolutely had to come here to Branch City himself, personally, to round up a specimen. What he wants is somebody who knows Hoop Snake Ridge and the adjacent territory to help get a mountain hog that would satisfy Old Doc Taylor, who funded the hundred dollars, if the old curmudgeon looked into the museum when his ghost was on the prowl. You must know right smart about mountain razorbacks, don't you, Mutt?"

"I'm up and down along the back," Mutt admitted.

"Now I ain't nothin' against Mull Wilding and Scape Vasser," the editor explained. "Not a thing in the world. But the way they talk I wondered if, probably, I hadn't better ask you'f you wouldn't scout these scientists up over Hoop Snake Mountain. They ought to see that country. I don't believe science knows the half of it yet."

"Me he'p those scienters get a hog?" Mutt asked, looking at the editor.

"Yes, suh, you, Mutt. I'll say the good word for you," Mr. Scupp declared. "The chances are that they'll not only pay you wages, but they'll write your name right down into the records, how you he'ped explore, find and capture that perfect specimen. They'll likely photograph you with your foot on him, just like they have in the Sunday papers when somebody kills an elephant or dwarf bear or things like that. You cain't tell what it might lead to. They might paint you into a picture down't the museum with their razorback. Just think of it!"

"Yeh!" Mutt grimaced. "They mought think of stuffin' me, too—be just like 'em!"

The editor burst into a laugh, the way Mutt said it—as if one was just as good an idea as the other. Of course, Mutt wouldn't say right offhand that he would do it, even to accommodate the editor of the *Welkin Ringer;* but after he had slept on the proposition, Foseen came down to Branch City again the next day and said he would guide the razorback expedition if it was the last thing he ever did, than which no promise could be more satisfactory.

NO TRIAL for murder, no hanging or election had ever brought out a bigger crowd than came to the court seat to welcome the expedition from Bivouac University.

When the scientists came down from their automobiles and trucks, they glanced over the sheriff, the county clerk and all the others and, nodding their recognition to Editor Scupp, they looked at Mutt Foseen, who towered above the others in pride and embarrassment, his slimness emphasized by the heavier townspeople. The newsreel and newspaper photographers took one look and brought their cameras to bear—and fairly yelped for joy as they learned that not only was Mutt there to welcome them, but to guide them too.

The barbecue was in Court Square under the trees, a free-for-all—and enough for everybody—celebration. Dr. Arberry, dapper, bright, blue eyed with a reddish Van Dyke beard and a brow like a pale limestone knob, explained in the simple but explicit language of science the intentions, purposes and aspirations of the expedition. Even the local attorneys gazed at him, rapt and envious. By a rising vote it was declared that the sentiment of the gathering was unanimously in favor of publishing the naturalist's speech in the *Welkin Ringer* in full. No one ever realized before that such magnificent words could be applied to razorback hogs.

Mutt Foseen ate with methodical gusto, paying strict attention to whatever was on his own mind. He listened to the eloquence, local and foreign. He

gave one spasmodic jerk of alarm when the toastmaster, Attorney Jaumette, turned to him, spoke of him as the tall hickory of the silent Hoop Snake Range, and suggested that he speak a few appropriate words.

Mutt's eyes popped and rolled in their sockets. After that first moment of utter panic he stood up, cleared his throat and opened his mouth, practically from ear to ear, beginning to grunt and squeal. Finally he shrieked as only a razorback hog can in the full of perfection, running the gamut from a shoat nursing in new contentment to the hog yell of an angry boar.

Every one just stood up and let go. The scientists, the attorneys and the officeholders applauded and gazed at Mutt. Until that moment those who had seen him oftenest and known him longest were most dazed.

No prize hog could have done better.

THE razorback expedition arrived at Flat Gap, about two-thirds of the way from the creek forks to Mutt Foseen's place at the north end of the range. Close to the stamping grounds of the razorbacks, with a glorious view east or west to other mountain ridges and down the slopes to the two branches of Plenty Waters, the place was ideal. When the tents were pitched, the National, State and University flags raised and the two cooks had prepared the evening meal, they called it a day.

Breaking pieces of hot bread and spreading pot roast beef with lots of gravy created a party atmosphere just in the natural course of events. Afterward Step Light Bingall played mountain music as he had never played before. . Then, inspired by "The Hunting Moon", Mutt Foseen reared his six-feet-six, single footed in his No. 11's—and it was the consensus of opinion that none had ever seen or heard the equal.

Julian Merriwether Chamberlain, the reporter, and Damale Chapling, the official motion camera man, wrote a description and ran off three hundred feet of film, destined to make Step Light and Mutt famous.

"We're going to catch a perfect specimen!" Dr. Arberry was then inspired to declare exultantly. "The more I hear of the razorbacks the more absolutely necessary one becomes for our corridor centerpiece!"

"Yas, suh, I expaict!" Mutt sighed, for science is impressive at first hand.

The expedition had upward of a mile of hog tight and deer high patent fencing donated to the University so they could build a long funnel—and once they got a hog headed into the wings he could be chuted right into a kind of cross between a hog pen and a circus wagon. This was in case they should find it convenient to catch the razorback alive for the Wild Life Division of the Bivouac establishment.

Then they had rifles for long range and sidearms for self-defense, every one knowing how savage boars can be if they take the notion.

"All you have to do is show us where," Dr. Arberry declared with enthusiasm. "We'll attend to the how."

"I expaict, yas, suh," Mutt acknowledged, nodding his pippin of a head.

The guide took the matter with much more solemnity than the others. He, if any one, knew what they were up against and, personally, he wasn't a man to brag of what he was or what he wasn't going to do with a razorback hog.

In the morning every one rode northward on the ridgeback trail. Mutt and Dr. Arberry were in the lead, followed by the others, on horses and mules. Chamberlain, the reporter and historian of the expedition, had a low, broad backed man-mule, with a platform instead of a horn on the saddle, so he could have his portable typewriter at his fingertips and write as he rode, losing no precious data and missing no chance to make an impression permanent. He wrote constantly, unquestionably the completest record in the

minutest detail of any scientific expedition ever covered in extenso, his fingers waltzing over the keyboard. Damale Chapling aimed his lens at Chamberlain and made permanent the idea for every reporter with a riding assignment at hand. Together, the notes and pictures delighted every one but Mutt. They made him nervous.

"Lots of times—" he sighed—"if there ain't no photograph pictures of a feller, he c'n take chances doin' things that he c'n git away with. But if a sher'f or anybody can pick up pictures anywhere, you c'n see how that is."

THE bare places in the emergency high water trail on top of the mountain were tracked, especially where shallow pools had gathered and dried out. The expedition found bird, rabbit, wildcat and 'coon tracks firmly imprinted. They could distinguish between hog and deer hoof impressions—the one blunt and irregular, the other sharp, trim and cleanly stamped.

"You c'n see—" Mutt indicated the spread of trails—"the way they prod around, a deer's kinda stuck on hisse'f, but a razorback's just as common as folks, not sniffy, not snooty nor spiteful."

"Did you get that?" Dr. Arberry asked Chamberlain.

"I did, indeed!" The reporter sighed, content.

The experts surprised Mutt. They not only recognized the 'possum, pheasant and wild turkey tracks; they knew the shrews, weasel and squirrel tracks. These wildlifers talked of dewclaws, caudal extremities and gait accelerations like attorneys establishing new precedents.

And then as they came to the Clay Lickings, Dr. Arberry looked ahead, gave a yell, flopped himself off his horse and pointed, practically breathless, but managing to gasp:

"Look! Will you look? Did you ever see *such* tracks?"

Mutt Foseen swallowed. Sure enough, they were the biggest hog tracks on the mountain. Nobody approached them, however. All stood back and gazed. Dr. Arberry reached with a pair of pincers and lifted something out of the blue muck. They gathered around him, staring. It was a hog bristle, and it was, when wiped off, one of the longest and thickest hog bristles any of the scientists had ever seen. Also, it was the color of gold—fresh minted gold!

Every one looked at Mutt. He stood wiping the back of his neck with his red bandanna, his lips working.

"That's Old Goldie." He nodded, weakly.

"Old Goldie?" Dr. Arberry exclaimed intently. "They name razorbacks in this country? You got that, Chamberlain?"

Considering how excited they were over the hoofprints, Mutt wondered how they would act when they saw Old Goldie himself. Chamberlain was pecking his typewriter like a flock of birds.

They photographed the mud, the licks, the whole business over and over again, then they prepared plaster casts so that when they mounted Old Goldie he would look natural amid natural surroundings. They meant business, these fellows who hunted facts or razorbacks with equal enthusiasm.

Shaking his head dubiously, Mutt Foseen at last realized as never before that it takes all kinds of humans to make hillbillies and down-the-liners. Dr. Arberry shook hands with Mutt, he was so delighted, and declared he should seek only the golden bristled hog from now on.

Barring a few bluejays, two gray squirrels, and buzzards circling far below above the valleys, the scientists hadn't begun to see anything yet, and they were acting as if they had actually gotten somewhere, just finding where Old Goldie nuzzled the clay for salt. The big hoofprints fairly awed them.

"Well—" Mutt squinted thoughtfully —"the biggest part of Old Goldie ain't

his tracks, it ain't his hams er shoulders; 'tain't even his haid, though that's sure sizable."

"No? What's the idea, Mutt?" the leader demanded.

"It's what's in Old Goldie's haid that counts," Mutt remarked in an offhand way.

"Eh?" Dr. Arberry perked up sharply.

" 'Course, he's sure big to see, bright's a gold double eagle," Mutt went on, choosing his words carefully. "But, shucks! His sausage er hams Virginied wouldn't be a circumstance, if yo' actually knowed that old scoundrel, no, suh!"

Dr. Arberry laid the bristle, which was big enough to be put into a whitewash brush, on his gold ring; color for color, sheen for sheen, they were exactly alike. His gem-blue eyes met the gaze of Mutt's pale cerulean orbs. Mutt believed what he was saying, anyhow. In that instant the scientist realized that in the zest of obtaining a mounted specimen that would make Bivouac University and even the State capital famous, something had been overlooked. He instantly summoned the members of the expedition and all hands went into a huddle.

"Boys," Dr. Arberry declared solemnly, "we'll have to observe Old Goldie before we collect him. So far we've been neglecting psychology and biography for biology. The way he steps is more buck-like than porcine; he's proud and uppety; he isn't just a mere superior specimen, boys; Old Goldie's a personality!"

Mutt Foseen wiped the cold sweat that had gathered in the horizontal crinkles of his brow, flowing thence down into the creases of his frown. But Mutt still maintained that cool, quiet poise that distinguishes the great and the self-controlled.

"Until further orders, Old Goldie is not to be killed under any circumstances," Dr. Arberry declared. "We'll seal all our firearms."

"Old Goldie's idees is as scienterific as his meat," Mutt declared, adding for fear some one might think something, "If he was stuffed there wouldn't be nothing left, hardly, of that ol' razorback."

THE scientists gazed at the native of the hills. Chamberlain caught and recorded each precious syllable. Science was in the making, and they were sitting in on it. What had seemed to be just another adventure—collecting hide and bones—might now perhaps bring upon all the participants fame for perpetuating the character and individuality of a famous razorback.

"Put down all our names right here!" Dr. Arberry turned to Chamberlain in an aside, gazing at Mutt Foseen with an awe unique in the bestowals of science on, so-to-speak, an aboriginal.

Mutt didn't even know he had said something unique; he was agitated and nervous.

"You're right, Mutt!" Arberry said magnanimously. "Old Goldie stuffed without his personal biography, how he lived, what he did, the way he acted, wouldn't be half there. Why, just looking at this bristle indicates the magnificence of his living appearance."

"Come Spring, when he's sheddin'," Mutt remarked, "you could find enough to make a broom."

"Now we'll have to re-plan our campaign," Dr. Arberry announced with emphasis. "We'll send messengers to warn everybody not to kill Old Goldie, first thing; then we'll interview the natives who can tell us about him."

"Why, Mutt, here, knew that hog when he was jes' a little yeller shoat!" Step Light Bingall declared. "They ain' nobody in the country knows that razorback like he does. Shu-u-u!"

"And you haven't talked a bit, Mutt!" Dr. Arberry declared reproachfully.

"I hadn't noticed none that you wanted anything much but the bristles," Mutt flared back with a jerk of his

head and a twist of his lips.

The listeners all colored more or less. That was so.

It was one thing to keep track of the expedition and its great project of collecting the most perfect specimen of razorback hog extant in the State, or for that matter in the whole Appalachian System, across the Mississippi Bottoms into East Texas and the Missouri Ozarks . . . To gather the facts about the razorbacks as a species was one thing; it was something else again to find out what made them so interesting and important, and then to concentrate on the prime, ideal, characteristic living personality as embodied in Old Goldie of the Hoop Snake Range, than which no type superior in quality had been evoked by the far flung news of the University's challenge for the perfect specimen of razorback.

Step Light Bingall absently began to play a piece that popped right into his head, picking and sawing along, hardly noticed by the others in their abstractions, but getting under their hides, nevertheless, and carrying along their ideas and joining with their feelings. Suddenly Dr. Arberry perked up into attention and listened with acutely directed ear.

"Why, Step Light, I never heard that tune before!" Arberry exclaimed. "What is it?"

"Why—uh-h, hit's jes'—jes'—" Bingall blinked and swallowed, confused at awakening from his inspiration. "All I c'n think of hit is 'Root, Hawg, or Die!' "

"It's an old piece, I suppose?" the leader suggested.

"Why, hell!" Mutt Foseen interrupted. "Half the pieces that fiddler plays ain't nobody eveh heard before or sinct! They never was a piece called 'Root, Hawg, er Die!' That's jes' politics, kind of a sayin' around—politics an' gittin' busy on yo' job!"

"Play it again!" Dr. Arberry demanded, and in rapt attention all listened, carrying the tune, whistling or humming.

"All we need now is some verses to go with the tune!" Dr. Arberry said. "Gracious! Could you beat it? We'll print the music in the monograph and everything! Old Goldie—"

"Say, Chamberlain," Chapling called the reporter, "come and turn this crank a bit—I want to be in the picture too."

Dr. Arberry and several others gave little starts, realizing now the priceless film that the screen news experience of the official photographer of the expedition had insured. Chamberlain and Chapling had gone ahead, on portable looseleaf and ribbon of film, recording the scene and the exact words. If only men like these had been present at the Declaration of Independence— Well, anyhow, they had *this* occasion covered right, and for the second rendition, a dictagraph of "Root, Hawg or Die", just the way Step Light sawed it off.

They were going to patent the music for Step Light, so he could show his wife that music wasn't all a profitless pleasure.

WHILE the great razorback expedition was reorganizing for the collection of Old Goldie as a specimen of natural history rather than as a piece of junk, Mutt Foseen slipped away. When he was out of hearing and sight, he took his hat in one hand and a convenient stick for balance in the other, and lighted out for Branch City. Having gone as far as he had, postponing the lethal intentions of the scientists in favor of getting a line on Old Goldie's history and intelligence, Mutt had to have some legal advice. Lawyers, as a matter of court record, had just about as long a list of getting people out of fixes as doctors, and probably as preachers—though of course proof regarding the parsons appeared to be lacking.

Mutt arrived in the court seat after dark. Luck was with him. He found Attorney J. Sevier Jaumette in his office alone, busily engaged in smoking

some sidehill cut-twist, which his wife didn't allow him at home. From Mutt's expression, Jaumette's first thought was that such anxiety could only come of homicide, or some such illegality.

"You see, Mr. Jaumette," Mutt exclaimed, "I jes' gotta know if and when a razorback hawg's got rights, if he's protected perm'nent like beaver, or ain't game at all, an' is he personal prop'ty by account of nobody else ownin' him. Ain't they some way of headin' off these yeah dad-blasted scienterifics an' them eddicated State collegers?"

"Eh-h?" Jaumette sat up and spat. "When a hawg has personal rights—or if adverse possession applies?"

"Yas, suh! An' cain't a big he-hawg have his own pers'nal business to tend to, jes' bein' hisse'f? A dawg's got the priv'lege of one bite of a leg, or a mule one kick in any d'rection, so why ain't a tol'able big razorback got some rights in his own se'f?"

"A razorback have private business, *per se?*" Jaumette reflected, his eyes widening with comprehension and delight. "Shu-u-u! Did you eveh study law, Mutt?"

"Who, me? Law!" Mutt laughed at such a comical suggestion. "Only that time yo' 'quitted me!"

"I tell you, Mutt, you've sure raised something!" Jaumette shook his head. "I don't know 'f the State Supreme Court's touched on a hawg's own privileges. Owners have sure ruckused from oralities on to killings and from justices proceedings to the seats of final decision. Um-m—'course, theh's ownership; theh's metes and bounds; theh's natural water rights and open range; theh's marked sows and litters— Dog-gone, Mutt, just what's aching you, anyhow?"

"Now I'll tell yo', by attorney's privilege an' confidentially, hit's that damned razorback hawg expedition," Mutt said. "They engaged me fer guide. Editor Scupp of the *Welkin Ringer* recommended me. I hated to take that job, Mr. Jaumette, but I'll do anything fer a friend. If he's in a mess, I'll he'p him out. If he's hongry, I'll feed him. If he needs a drink, I'll git hit fer him. If he's hittin' 'shine too much, I'll boot the 'legger right clean out of the country, puttin' prohibition on to him. If he's scoutin' out, I'll he'p hide him. But theh's that dad-blasted razorback, Old Goldie. Me'n' him's growed up together. We always got along all right. Here I am, hired out to he'p git a perfect hog, an' the woods is full of 'em, an' they've lit on to that old scoundrel. An' heah I am, the on'y human he's got confidence in a-tall. Yo' c'n see what I'm up against."

"Shu-u. Like a judge that's friendly to both attorneys—and he has to establish a precedent," Jaumette mused aloud.

"'Course, naturally," Mutt admitted, "Old Goldie's a razorback. But they're scienterific! To tell the truth, Jaumette, I've been gittin' them together spite of me. I got 'em comin'. Old Goldie's sure a prime razorback as is, an' they're jes' about as smart humans as he is a hawg. Trouble is, I ain't nothin' but kind of an ornery, no 'count human. If I could jes' kinda get the law edge on 'em, comes a clost proposition, hit mought throw the balance. Them things is awful ticklish; now 'f I could get kind of a line of legal rights for Old Goldie, along of his natural ability, hit mought mean right smart."

"Now, frankly, Mutt, I'm sorta stumped." Jaumette squinted with one eye in his shrewd and wrinkly countenance, gray points of his silvery whiskers beginning to shine again after his morning shave. "I better get counsel on this proposition. Theh's a poker game over't the circuit judge's office. I'd better go over there'n' discuss this matter with them. It just might be, Mutt, that the statute as regards cruelty to domestic animals could, on a pinch, be spread to cover Old Goldie, situated as he is. Close decisions have been made regarding what constitutes annoyance

and malice as regards rocking mules in a pasture and dogging hawgs in the corn. But theh's unfenced grazing grounds—and then mast in the hardwood, oak, beech, chestnuts. Frankly, Mutt, I b'lieve you've started something!"

"Well, if I ain't," Mutt declared with firmness and asperity, "I c'n tell yo' now, I'm heah to tell yo', I don't cyar how much information them dad-blasted scienterifics c'lect about Old Goldie, they ain't goin' to have his hide 'r bones for no State museum. No, indeedy!"

"Oh, come now—just about a razorback?" the attorney said.

" 'Tain't the fustest time a razorback's been doggoned important. Yo' said so youse'f!" Mutt reminded him.

"I'll take counsel on it, Mutt," the attorney promised.

Accordingly, the Honorable J. Sevier Jaumette had the honor of bringing to the attention of the leading members of the Branch City bar the question as to just what were a razorback hog's rights, personally and *per se*—as for example, Old Goldie on Hoop Snake Ridge, with particular reference to putting into jeopardy the life of the animal in question by an offer of one hundred dollars bounty for "a perfect adult specimen of razorback hog."

THE attorneys in the poker game had a jack pot. They told Jaumette he was a disturbance and a distractor, but when Judge Clauster opened and won they all turned to an informal discussion. They sent out for coffee and sandwiches some time after midnight, and from time to time participants went after books from their office libraries. What had been a poker table was now covered with authorities and references, precedents, and even a number of printed cases which had been filed on appeals.

"The question is," former Circuit Judge Clauster declared, "whether Mutt Foseen, through habit, adverse possession, long acquaintance and continuing association, even though without expressly stating the same, can declare himself owner of Old Goldie for the purposes of protecting the same in the pursuit of life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness and enough to eat."

"Now, Judge, don't that hinge on how long it takes for adverse possession to become sufficiently established?" Jaumette asked.

"As regards lands, it can be twenty years," the judge reflected. "But lands are permanent. It might depend on how long an average razorback hog lives. You can see that, gentlemen."

"Mutt's had Old Goldie under his wing since he was a shoat, he tells me," Jaumette declared. "Suppose he comes right down to it and kills off a couple of those scientists to protect Old Goldie. He'll be tried here in Branch City, unless we get a change of venue. What'll we do with him? He's going to throw himself on the sympathy and understanding of the jury."

"It'll give this country a black eye 'f we don't placate Mutt and those strangers both!" Judge Clauster shook his head. "This is a mighty delicate question, considering its social and legal aspects. Of course, gentlemen, we don't want any unfortunate accidents. We better have Editor Scupp mosey up there and take Dr. Arberry kinda off to one side and warn him."

"Now, I don't know about that," Jaumette spoke up. "Mutt came to me confidentially, speaking particularly to that effect, so this is a privileged communication."

"Well, of course, that's different." The judge nodded.

"I'm inclined to think Mutt's handling the situation himself," Jaumette reassured the counsel. "He's carried himself very conservatively indeed. We all knew something was up when the offer was changed to read *alive*. Mutt's diplomatic. It's really remarkable the way he's managed, feeling the way he does. Of course, that contingency is

rather beside the question at issue, anyhow. Suppose Old Goldie's a free agent, at large, title wholly in question, and his own rights the matter to be determined. Just how far could Mutt interpose as next of kin, say, or rather paralleling a guardianship over a minor—"

"Wouldn't it resemble, more, interposition on account of mental debility?" some one inquired. "Or, say, incompetence?"

"Or even for an alien, Indian, convict, or a female person unable to appear in her own behalf?" another suggested.

Thus, here a phrase, there a bearing, yonder a slant, and some of the choicest precedents ever accumulated were in the showdown in the judge's office of the Branch City court. English common law, cases in the Ozarks and Everglades, hogs at large in navigable waters and hogs on owners' terrain, or at large, or in the confines on various pretexts and for various motives, were cited and expounded, elucidated, accepted as having a bearing—if one got right down to it—on the matter at hand. If something happened and Mutt Foseen, for example, became entangled, the Branch City bar and bench were prepared, even though the attorney general of the State himself, backed by Legislature, superior courts and the militia, should come questing in the matter of the public's or razorback's rights. No case involving a hog would ever again be a routine matter in Branch City court or legal affairs.

"You know, gentlemen," Judge Clauster said, "I sat on the bench fourteen years, and I've practised law twenty-two years, and I'll tell you now, I never before had a genuine, broadminded, thorough apprehension or appreciation of our hog laws before. We've covered the ground thoroughly and I believe we ought to cook up some kind of case, just so we can get what we've found out into the records—"

"We may not have to cook it up," Jaumette reminded them. "I'm not so sure we haven't the case already in the making."

"You know, Jaumette, I'm sure obliged to you," Clauster exclaimed. "I apologize for the slight feeling of irritation I displayed when you came busting in, seeming about to spoil what appeared to be one of the most promising and unusually interesting sessions at the cyards I recollect, suh."

Jaumette returned to his office.

"The consensus of opinion, Mutt, is just this," the attorney said. "After all is said, the best thing for you to do about Old Goldie is use your own judgment. Some mighty fine points of law are involved. You can never tell what a jury, an appellate division, or a State Supreme Court'll do. But from the way things look, we'll have the edge, no matter what happens, on the prosecution as regards criminal procedure, and on the defense, if it's a civil suit. We'll see you through to the court of last resort. So my advice, after due counsel, is to go to it, Mutt."

When a lawyer tells a client to go to it, that means business. Mutt Foseen realized in some measure the extent of his predicament the moment Attorney J. Sevier Jaumette went seeking counsel. As when doctors consult and ambassadors go into conference, the situation was serious. Finally, when the lawyer cited juries, appellate judges and the Supreme Court, it meant the statutes had their limitations and the attorneys were willing to risk their reputations if the clients were.

"They got me crowded and cornered." Mutt shook his head.

When he was back on Hoop Snake Ridge he circled the dark and silent camp of his employers. He came down to the clay licks and sat waiting for Old Goldie, who was due to come for salt. The only way to save that old razorback from being gobbled and stuffed for a museum specimen out among the quality folks and with the way-up intellectuals was to get going and get him out of the way somewhere, some-

how, without delay.

"I neveh went back on nothin' or nobody yet!" Mutt sighed. "I ain't g'wine to begin now, no, suh!"

MUTT FOSEEN whistled, calling Old Goldie, but Old Goldie did not answer. Instead, Mutt heard a distant throb like a chunk falling off a dead snag. After that, very faintly, came the voices of humans. What would anybody be prowling around there for in the false dawn? Cocking his ears, Mutt recognized the voices of Mull Wilding and Scape Vasser. Suppose they'd been figuring around to get the one hundred dollars for a perfect razorback? A cold shiver traversed Mutt's lengthy spine and goose pimpled his legs and shoulders. Maybe all this time they'd been scheming, contriving, getting set! Maybe they'd got Old Goldie already?

Mutt, in a half panic, crept and bushwhacked, listening as he went toward Scape's still. There was a trail of mash leading almost to his shack, and then it turned off into a regular trap in the laurels. Mutt might have known they'd work in that underhanded way! When he came to the scene, the smell of the sour mash showed how Vasser had tricked Old Goldie. Wilding must have aided and abetted.

No wonder the razorback hadn't answered. He had stuffed himself with sour mash. In a bear box-trap, set specially for him, with the drop gate shut behind him, he had gone right on eating; and now he was laid right out, kind of tipped over on one side, his big head lopped down. Vasser, not satisfied with making moonshine for himself and for other humans, had corrupted Old Goldie. In due course the old boar would be stuffed and mounted in the corridor of Bivouac University, nothing left of him but his shape and hide—and glass eyes, probably with little electric lights in them to make them shine in imitation of life. Ugh!

But not yet, no, indeedy! Mutt Foseen wasn't going back on Old Goldie. When Mull Wilding and Scape Vasser had stumbled on until they were out of hearing in the direction of Vasser's still, Mutt pushed aside the slab of rock that was on top of the box trap gate. The dropgate weighed better than a hundred pounds, but Mutt hoisted it and propped it open. He looked in on Old Goldie, who was sure soused. He might have known better, but he didn't. One thing about a razorback, he never knows when to quit. Mutt was a strong man, but it took all his heaving and hauling to get Old Goldie out of the cage.

Time was precious. Dawn was at hand. Mutt was ready for any contingency, but he was going to be peaceable as long as possible. Meanness never did any one any good.

At last Old Goldie came out of his stupor enough to respond to Mutt's prodding. Mutt thanked his stars as Old Goldie recognized him. They started off together, Mutt covering their trails the best he could in the faint light of dawn.

When they reached the drove with which Old Goldie most often rooted and moved, Mutt stopped prodding, and the hog lay gratefully down, his grunt of relief drifting into a snore. Now that the razorback was safe for the moment, Mutt sought out the largest and yellowest boar of Old Goldie's progeny, and, with a big chunk of salt and lumps of sugar, he lured him to the stone bolt box-trap lately vacated by Old Goldie.

With the substitution safely made, and weary to exhaustion, Mutt dragged his tired frame to Old Goldie, but there was no time to rest. The prodding man and the razorback started through the mountains.

When the sun came up and the cold frost of early morning had moderated somewhat in the Flat Gap camp, the scientists began to stir; the cooks prepared breakfast. Each one gathered his tools—camera, notebook, portable typewriter, magnifying glass.

All was in readiness to take off for

the great day of the hunt for the boar of the golden bristles. All except the guide! They called for Mutt. Then they searched the camp. They circled around, looking beside logs and under brush, but no sign of the guide rewarded their efforts.

Then some one spied two men approaching. They were Mull Wilding and Scape Vasser, and the expedition fell upon them with anxious questioning.

"Yas, suh," Scape answered when the scientists had had their several says, "I 'low we c'n tell you'ns the right of what you want. Mutt's had to git back into the mountangs fer a spell. Natu'ly *why* wa'n't none of our business, but he said tell you'ns that theh boar razorback's jes' down the yon side the clay licks, all boxed up convenient for totin'. We'ns 'll cyar for the money."

So the scientists rushed to the box trap and, having seen with their own eyes a most wonderful yellow razorback, and having heard with their own ears grunts and squeals beyond their fondest anticipations, they loaded the animal and took him to the camp, safe on the truck. When they had handed over the reward to the two men, they broke camp and headed for Branch City, proud, happy and grateful.

That night they held a meeting of the whole community. There were speeches. Step Light Bingall played his new piece. There was almost too much to eat and hardly time enough for the news account. Because no one felt like sleeping, they just piled into their trucks, with the yellow razorback protesting even louder than ever as they pulled forth down the pike on their way to Bivouac University.

Mull Wilding and Scape Vasser had promised to come to the doings, but they hadn't come; they hadn't any special reason to suppose that Mutt Foseen would be there, since they knew he had hotfooted to hunt for Old Goldie and they had reason to believe he hadn't found him yet. There was more than just a chance, however, that he might come back without finding him. They couldn't help laughing when they thought of him hunting around for that old yellow boar. Still, they stayed away and played safe.

Of course, with all that money they just had to be uneasy, so they started the next day but one down the West Branch roadway on their way to town —or anyhow as far as Morrel's place at the forks where Wilding sometimes worked when he needed money badly enough.

They had a jug on a stick between them, but the jug slipped first to one end and then to the other. Each time the jug slipped the men would stop, remove the corncob and, after taking a drink, measure with thumbs and palms to find the center of the stick until one of them had the happy thought to cut a notch in the stick halfway. Then they marched on in contented dignity.

The sun was shining brightly. A light zephyr blew up the creek. Laughing bluejays flocked in the beech trees, accompanied by a mocking bird learning to chuckle and jeer.

At the same instant a gleam of sunshine flashed into the eyes of both men. The stick cracked between them, but they kept right on running, faster than they had ever raced before.

"Pigwidgan!" they yelped in their grief. "Hit's Old Goldie, an' he ain't heah no more! Hit's a pigwidgan!"

They didn't have to see, for their feet knew the road. Down the trail they met Mutt Foseen, and he stopped to laugh. They saw him doubling down like a closing jacknife. Just once they looked back after they passed him. His yelping laughter still echoed down the valley, and they shook with terror as they saw Mutt all tangled up with the grunting, squealing pigwidgan that might have been Old Goldie if it hadn't been for that green snake and the second sight.

Report from Kwei Hua Cheng

By WM. ASHLEY ANDERSON

WE WERE a little dubious about prospects for Fall business in northern Shansi and Mongolia; so I wrote Doc Shroder for information on developments since I left him. I got this in return:

"Now, son, here goes [the letter ran]. In the first place you left too soon to see the real fun but as you are doing so nicely I am not going to kick. Well, the story of my doings is too long for a scribe like me to put on paper, but I sure will give you the complete dope when I see you.

"I had a fierce time. The damned automobile Thomas gave me so I could make better time than ponies, I put on the bum after the second trip; but I took it through the chinks' line without getting caught. I had the sad pleasure of gathering G—'s bones into a cigaret case and shipping them to Peking. Also Mamen and I took one caravan of five hundred and fifty camels out without getting caught, although the robbers tried to hold out the last one hundred while we were in front; but we got the word and put back and of course they ran. We had plenty of little scraps with the soldiers to pass the time. Was only twenty *lis* from seeing Mulung killed; the same day my *mafoo* and myself saw his dead body; so you see G— was avenged, his death brought about by the Urga god.

"Well, I got over here to Kwei Hua Cheng and thought I would get a few callouses off the seat of my pants, but as the old saying has it, 'man proposes and woman disposes.' In this case she was the Company. While I was over with Father Huston helping to get up a big deer drive, as these animals were eating up all the Father's crops, I got word to meet the Lanchow caravan five hundred *lis* north of here in the desert; so there was nothing to it. We killed plenty of deer; I would hate to say just how many. Then I ducked fast. Was held up and arrested by one thousand five hundred soldiers at Ou Lin Ho—too many to fight.

"I fell back on the good old American bluff and pulled off the stunt by allowing them to bring me back to Kieg Ie Irigen. There they turned me loose. The *mafoo* and I ducked back through the mountains and made it O. K. Of course they are sore as a boil at me all along the line for going and coming when I damn well like. I put my Lanchow outfit across the desert and then started back. Had to run head on into trouble at Pao Tou Chen on the Yellow River. The soldiers mutinied and looted the place and seemed to think I made a good target; and then our troubles only began.

"There were six thousand soldiers on the road down from here to recapture the mutineers. They tried to drop everything they saw moving until it got monotonous. So I took to the mountains and came in that way.

"I am sending you a picture of Hunghutzes and the old *mafoo*. Have bought a fine, long distance pony, named Andy. He is a pippin. Old Thoymar is turned out to pasture. Got two fine bighorn—*Ovis argali!*—one with eighteen and a half inch horns, the other sixteen, and located some new wapiti country. Will get after them this Fall. I forgot to mention the hound pups have caught over one hundred hares this Spring and Summer. Old Fourth is in fine shape. No fur skins of any kind have been coming in here or Kalgan for over a year and a half, but I will get you a snow leopard if I have to send to Mukden."

And that's how we did business in China!

The FIELD *of* HONOR

By
DONALD
BARR
CHIDSEY

THE walls of Jean Brisac's *salle d'armes* were covered with photographs of past exponents of the foil, the épée and the saber—photographs so old that many of them looked as if they had been taken on a day of rain and fog. Mostly they showed Brisac *père,* that celebrated blade of the Nineties, now settled on a little farm where he raised chickens and told neighbors about the good old days. They were funny pictures, showing men who puffed out their chests, displaying many medals; who held their fencing masks firmly, with an air, almost defiantly, as if these were steel casques topped with plumes; and who glared—glared like men trying to outstare enemies in the field.

Funny old pictures. Jean Brisac used to gaze at them when business was poor—as business too often was these days—and grin quietly at the memory of the old master. What a swordsman he had been! Six duels he had fought, and only a single scar to show for them. Old Brisac's blade had been a sweet piece of steel, smooth, alert, exact; and his tough old body was unmarked to this day, except for that one small scar on the right forearm.

He had made his name in the palmy days of fencing, when wealthy men considered it an honor to be numbered among his pupils. And he never could be made to understand that those days were gone. Brisac *fils* enjoyed a reasonably good patronage; he made some money—not much, but some; but the old master indignantly demanded more. The old master forgot his own foolishness, forgot the time when he had stepped out of the *salle d'armes,* where he was unbeatable, into the world of financial speculation, where he had been beaten very badly indeed. They had taken every sou from him, those sharp men. And now, on the farm, he was practically penniless, and ill too, dependent upon Jean, his only child.

But then, hadn't the old master taught Jean every trick he knew? Was there a better fencer in all the world, excepting the old master himself? Yes,

Jean should keep the *salle* in operation, and support both of them. Brisac *père* took this for granted. For clearly it was Jean's duty as a son, was it not?

And Jean was doing his best; but times were hard. He thought his father should not be obliged to resort to local physicians, whom Jean didn't trust. He should have a specialist from Paris, making regular visits. But that would cost a lot of money, and Jean scarcely had the price of a good dinner.

He frowned this afternoon, as, unoccupied for the hour, he stared again at the brownish photographs on the walls.

But presently he began to smile; for he was an impulsive lad, and it was not his habit to permit things to trouble him for long. Oh, he'd find the money somehow. And once the old master was properly taken care of, perhaps Jean could spend something on himself.

It was at this moment that Paul Doucet came knocking. Doucet, until now a stranger to the young fencing master, was a thin little man, prematurely middle aged. He spoke like the sound that your heel makes when you draw it out of the mud. Ordinarily he was brisk and bumptious, even supercilious. He was a dealer in silks or something of that sort. But when he came knocking at the Brisac *salle* he was nervous, twitchy, almost in a panic. He twisted an umbrella in his hands; he shifted from foot to foot, as if not certain that either leg would support him; he rolled his eyes in an agony of fear and apprehension.

"*Entrez, monsieur!* You wish some lessons perhaps?"

"No, no. It is something else. I—I have a peculiar request to make of you, Monsieur Brisac."

"Yes?"

Jean did not smile with his mouth. But his eyes were laughing; for somehow the sight of this frightened little man amused him.

"You—you are reputed to be an excellent swordsman."

Jean bowed.

"It is my profession, monsieur."

"Some of us, you understand, are not so expert."

"That is regrettable, for every man should be able to conduct himself well on the strip. It is the finest form of exercise. Possibly if monsieur were to have a few lessons it would—"

"No, no! It is too late now."

Doucet twisted his head as if he found his collar too tight. He shifted from foot to foot.

"Pardon, monsieur, but that scarcely seems likely. Surely monsieur is not more than—" Jean guessed discreetly—"let us say thirty-two or three."

Doucet said stiffly—

"I am twenty-six."

"Ah, of course! You are a man of affairs, a man of business, and that lends you a distinguished air which makes you seem somewhat older. Twenty-six. Yes, that is just my own age. A coincidence, is it not?"

"No, it is not."

Jean only raised his eyebrows. The visitor continued hurriedly—

"I mean that it is just because we are of an age, and because we look so much alike, that I have come to you."

Jean, not at all flattered, but a naturally polite young man, was silent.

"I must ask you first, Monsieur Brisac, to regard as strictly confidential anything I shall tell you today."

"But of course."

DOUCET, increasingly nervous, wiped his face with a large silk handkerchief. He dropped his umbrella and picked it up hastily, as if he felt a need for its support.

"I have a rival in business, Monsieur Brisac. He is a low, vile thing from Orleans, and his name is Henri Fabre. We have been enemies for years, business enemies. I have met him but once, and that was several years ago. But it is frequently necessary that we correspond."

"I see."

"Recently his letters have been of a sort no gentleman could endure. I became very angry. It—it may be that I answered him rather sharply, Monsieur Brisac, but I assure you that his own letters were unbearable. Unbearable! Three days ago I became enraged, and in an answer to one of his so insulting letters I called him a dog and the son of a dog, and a pig, and—"

"Yes, yes, monsieur. And you challenged?"

"I did indeed. The swine!"

"He apologized, I trust?"

The visitor was almost in tears now.

"No, he accepted. His friends called upon me the very next day and said that we must fight with swords!"

Jean Brisac nodded gravely.

"But you should apologize, or else arrange the matter in some other way. Dueling is a very dangerous business, monsieur. Sensible men don't settle their quarrels that way any longer."

"I know that! I know it! But what can I do? It is known among our associates—the important ones—that we are to fight. I don't dare refuse, or try to bring about a reconciliation. If I don't go through with the business it will ruin my career."

Jean Brisac stroked his tiny brown mustache with his left thumbnail, nodding thoughtfully. He offered:

"So you have come to me to brush up on your half forgotten épée lessons? Well, that's my profession, monsieur. But I must warn you that I'll have nothing to do with the meeting itself—if ever it occurs. I am not prepared to break the law for the quarrels of other men."

"But I am no swordsman! I never have been. Not even in school did I practise with the épée and the foil. And yet the affair is to take place tomorrow morning."

"Well, then, call it off. It's no loss of honor to refuse to fight with weapons to which you are not accustomed."

"But do you not see? I can't do that. I have boasted, monsieur. Oh, I was too full of wine then no doubt—yes! But I have boasted, before men who know of this affair, that I was an expert swordsman."

And now Jean Brisac shrugged and spread his palms. He was becoming bored.

"Ah, monsieur, that was very unfortunate for you. But I do not see what it is I have to do with all this, eh?"

The visitor rose and began pacing the dim *salle*. His thin, shambling, crooked figure looked thinner, more shambling, more crooked than ever, against the background of beautiful straight foils, all smooth and shiny, racked along the walls in precise rows mathematically spaced.

"I have already noted that there is a resemblance between us. I have noted it often as I've seen you enter and leave this establishment. For my own place of business, monsieur, my office, it is nearby." He paused, wiping his face again. Then he blurted, "So I wished to propose that you take my place on the field."

Jean, in spite of himself, laughed. But he straightened his face promptly.

"I am so sorry, monsieur," he said. "But surely you did not mean that seriously? Surely you were joking?"

The visitor turned.

"Do I look like a man who is making jokes? Shave that mustache, and I assure you there will be a very great similarity between our appearances. Fabre has seen me but once, and that was some years ago. You are thinking of my representatives? Well, I have discussed it with them, and they are willing to carry out their parts. As for Fabre's friends, they are strangers to me and I to them.

"I can not meet this man on the field, yet I can not refuse to meet him. But you—you are a great fencer, and it would be a small matter for you to touch him on the forearm. Just a scratch, nothing deep."

Doucet was eager now, and faced the teacher with eyes distended, mouth open, a trifle breathless.

"A bit of blood is drawn, and honor is satisfied. There is no harm done to anybody. My position is saved, and you—" here the business man showed in his voice—"you will of course be rewarded. I will pay you five thousand francs."

Jean rose suddenly; his voice was low and dangerous; his eyes were terrible.

"Get out of here," he whispered.

"But monsieur, if you—"

"*Get out!*"

"Monsieur, I will make it twice that. I will offer you ten thousand francs!"

The two men were of about the same height and build, but the fencing teacher was hard, firm, with whipcord muscles. He grabbed the visitor by the coat lapels and shook him.

"Listen! I have no respect for the custom of dueling. Men should not fight. Not like that. But still it is a gentleman's custom. And you ask me to dishonor it, defile it, so that afterward you can strut about and say that you are a so great swordsman—you who should never be permitted to touch a clean, fine thing like a sword? Bah!" He shook Doucet again, shook him so vigorously that the visitor dropped his umbrella. "You ask that of me—me, the son of Regis Brisac!"

Doucet's teeth were chattering, and his face glittered with perspiration; his eyes were sticking half out of his head. But he managed to stammer—

"I will make it fifteen thousand francs."

Jean Brisac never could be angry for long. Abruptly this whole business struck him as funny. He laughed again; he released the preposterous little Doucet and strode across the room roaring with laughter.

Doucet picked up his umbrella. Also he plucked up some further courage—the blind courage of a cornered rat, no doubt.

"You'll do it for me then? Fifteen thousand francs, and nobody ever will know."

Jean was gazing up at one of the pictures. It was a picture of his father alone, taken just before he had called out a famous fencing master from Orleans. Bearded and bellicose, Brisac *père* gripped his saber like a warrior of old astride the corpse of an enemy. Jean smiled affectionately. He knew how much it had hurt the old man to be pinked in that affair, for it was the Orleans swordsman, De Grasse, who had given Brisac *père* his one wound. The wound itself was trifling, a scratch. Nevertheless, it was a wound; and Jean knew how the old master brooded over it, especially now that he was old, and had nothing else to do but sit in the sun, waiting for death, and fondle memories of the days when he had been young and hard and fast like Jean.

Doucet was whimpering.

"Fifteen thousand francs, monsieur. Think of it! And nobody ever will know. I give you my word of honor for that, my word as a gentleman."

Jean wheeled upon him.

"Suppose this Fabre is an expert, eh? Suppose my foot slips? What then? You ask me to risk my life for a miserable fifteen thousand francs?"

"But, monsieur, I am assured that Fabre is a very poor swordsman. And with such skill as yours—"

"I'll do it for twenty-five thousand."

Doucet was aghast.

"But, monsieur, if—"

"Be quiet! If you'll pay what I ask, write a check and leave it here. Then write on that paper the names of your seconds, and where I should meet them and when. Leave that with the check here. I'm going into my bedroom now. I'll return in five minutes, and if you haven't gone by then, I'll throw you out myself. Good day!"

ARCHAMBAULT, the army doctor, stopped his automobile at the farm for a chat.

"How is it, my friend? Do you feel strong enough to get up to Paris tomorrow?"

Regis Brisac grunted.

"I had thought to visit my son there soon. Why?"

"An affair, my friend. Swords. I'm attending one of the principals, and perhaps we could arrange for you to be nearby."

Regis Brisac grunted again.

"I've watched enough poor fencing in my life, Doctor. These youngsters—"

"Ah, but this should be interesting. That's why I tell you of it. You know De Grasse's son, from Orleans?"

The old master nodded, frowning.

"He is said to be as great a swordsman as his father was. Greater, some men think. Well, my principal is frightened. He handles an épée as if it were a broom, and he hears that the man he is to fight is an expert. But he does not dare to avoid the meeting. So he has hired young De Grasse to do his fighting for him."

"But this is nonsense!"

"But no, my friend! It is the truth. You see, the two have met face to face only once, and that was some years ago. So my principal thinks his champion will pass off as himself. They look somewhat alike. De Grasse's son is merely to prick the other man in the arm, of course, and then it will be finished. A low trick, yes."

"De Grasse always was a trickster," growled Brisac *père*, "and I don't suppose this son of his is any better."

"Perhaps. But he is a great blade. I myself have watched him, in his academy. So it may be that the fight will be worth watching. As for me—" Archambault lifted his shoulders—"I do not care. I get my fee, no matter who touches whom. But I thought perhaps my old friend might like to watch some pretty fighting."

"There isn't any pretty fighting today."

Archambault smiled, and placed a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Maybe you're too harsh on these youngsters. Some of them have the old spirit still. But, of course, if you don't feel strong enough to make the trip—"

"I'm strong enough, Doctor. Don't fear. I'm no invalid."

"There are supposed to be no witnesses of any sort. But it's not an affair of honor—not with a professional fencing master matched with another man—and I don't see why we can't hide you somewhere about. What do you think, old comrade?"

Regis Brisac knocked the ashes out of his pipe and bellowed for his housekeeper. Surely there was plenty of strength left in his lungs, anyway. He ordered the woman to bring a bottle of Cos d'Estournel. To Archambault he said:

"You will join me, yes? This is one of my best clarets. Very well, I'll go with you and watch this silly affair. I'll go in the hope of seeing young De Grasse punctured. His father always was an old rascal, and I suppose the son's no better."

IT WAS a lovely spot, quiet, deserted, seemingly very remote, but in fact scarcely more than twenty-five minutes from the Place de l'Opéra.

The morning too was perfect. There was no haze, no ground mist. The sun was rising full and firm, without hesitation. The grass was wet, but very short.

"You might suggest that we take off our shoes," Jean said. "It will not be slippery in our socks."

"Very good, monsieur."

"And remember, if there is any crowd at all—if there is a single spectator—I will not fight."

"There will be no one."

Four men had appeared at the other end of the clearing, and Jean was wondering idly which of them he was to meet. One carried a long brown sword case: He would not be Fabre. Another had a small black bag: He would be the physician. One of the two remaining was short and bearded and rather stout, a fussy little man; the other was very tall, lanky, young, grim visaged. It would be one of these. The little man

seemed fidgety. Probably it was he. Not that it mattered.

"The agreement, of course, is that the first blood stops the fight?" Jean asked, as he began taking off his coat.

"No, monsieur. Monsieur Fabre insisted that he would not be obliged to stop until he considered his own honor satisfied."

"But he's the challenged party."

"Yes, monsieur, but he insisted that we have it so."

"But suppose I touch him again and again, and he keeps coming in for more? Damn it, gentlemen, I don't wish to fight all morning. I have better things to do."

"Oh, of course, the physicians can stop the combat whenever they decide that one man is too badly wounded to continue."

"Umph!"

This was an unlooked-for development. Jean had supposed that one touch would end the silly business and permit him to return to the Rue Caumartin to breakfast. He had no stomach for pinking a stranger's arm repeatedly just because that stranger happened to be seething with false pride.

Still, he had accepted the check for twenty-five thousand francs. He must go through with the business now. It was only fair.

He took off his coat, his waistcoat, his collar and tie. He took off his shoes. He tightened his braces and turned up the bottoms of his trousers. One of his seconds handed him a sword, and he made some counters with this, swishing the air, and half lunged a few times to limber his legs.

"You are satisfied with it, monsieur?"

"Oh, it's all right."

"You wish to examine the other blade?"

"No, no. Don't bother." He shivered. "I'm chilly," he complained. "Isn't that fool ready yet?"

"In just a minute. Ah, he is ready now."

Jean turned, and saw instantly that his antagonist was not the short, bearded man, as he had guessed, but the grim, very tall fellow. He was summoned to the center of the clearing, where the two physicians and one of Fabre's seconds and one of his own men, were in conference. The other second accompanied him. Fabre too, attended by his remaining representative, approached the group.

"Gentlemen, we have decided to ask you again, for the last time, if either of you thinks it is possible to settle this quarrel without resort to arms. There is no honor lost if you agree to apologize. We appeal to you both to do this."

This was sheer ceremony, and neither principal paid it the slightest attention. Jean was humming a popular fox-trot, and looking at nothing in particular. Fabre, who had stripped to the waist and looked grimmer and more determined than ever, whispered something to one of his seconds, who whispered to one of Jean's seconds, who approached Jean.

"Monsieur Fabre makes the demand that you either take off your shirt or roll up your sleeves, in order that a wound on your arm could be seen instantly."

Jean laughed.

"Well, that's fair enough." He rolled up his sleeves. "But it's damn chilly," he added.

The announcing second called:

"These gentlemen refuse to settle their differences by peaceful means, so they must resort to arms. I will recite the rules of combat we have agreed upon."

He cleared his throat. Somewhere near at hand a bird began cheeping shrilly, persistently, as though like Jean it was complaining of the cold. The whistle of a railway engine tooted, far away.

"Neither principal will retreat beyond the spot where his coat lies on the ground, nor move nearer than four feet to the spot where Dr. Archambault is standing on one side and where Dr.

Halte is standing on the other. The officiating representative of Monsieur Doucet—" he bowed to that worthy, who solemnly bowed in return—"and myself, will hold buttoned swords with which we will engage and disengage the principals at will. Either one of us can do this at any time he sees fit, merely by touching the blade of either principal. Whenever this happens, each principal must immediately lower his point and step back two full paces and remain there until both the officiating representatives have simultaneously engaged the principals again. You understand these rules, gentlemen?"

He glanced from Jean to Fabre; they both nodded—Jean cheerfully, with a smile, but Fabre sternly.

"For the rest, the rules of combat customary in affairs of this sort will be observed. I am sure that both principals are familiar with these, but if either so wishes I will recite them in full, to prevent any possible misunderstanding."

"Please don't," Jean begged. "I'm freezing!"

Fabre only shook his head. He had never moved his fierce gaze from Jean Brisac.

"Very well, then. Prepare to engage, gentlemen."

The physicians swabbed the fighting blades with pungent disinfectant. These weapons were handed to the principals, who were brought together, in the center of the clearing, so that the tips of the swords just touched. Then simultaneously, at a signal, the seconds withdrew their own blades, jumping back. The fight was on.

A MAN like Jean Brisac, a swordsman virtually since birth, feels many things about an opponent he never could explain. It is not simply a matter of form, or of strength, or of skill or courage or manner, though all these things are important. But there is something else, something compounded of exquisitely controlled nerves, the calculation of perfectly coordinated muscles, and a true, cool fighting spirit, that communicates itself to another swordsman, warning him to be at his very best.

Until they actually faced each other with bared weapons Jean Brisac had scarcely glanced at this lanky man. To be sure, he had noted that the fellow had an excellent build for a fencer—small, firm muscles, long straight legs and arms, an erect and thin body. But this much he would notice of any man similarly equipped anywhere; he had observed it instinctively.

Jean had expected a man who had fenced as a youth and perhaps continued the sport one or two evenings a week subsequently, and who had practised rigorously for this duel. Such a one would be overeager, would become too excited and leave many openings, would be easily winded.

But this Fabre was of a different sort. Jean knew instantly before either of them had made the slightest move, before either had so much as caused the point of his blade to tremble, that here facing him was a master swordsman. Not merely a good swordsman. Not merely an expert. But a master.

For a long, long time, perhaps two full minutes, they stood statue-like, tense in guard position, studying each other. The only sound in that remote place was the persistent, shrill cheeping of a bird.

Then Jean began to move his point in tiny circles. He tapped Fabre's blade three times, with increasing harshness. Suddenly, hoping to learn this man's favorite parry, he half lunged, feinting. Fabre did not respond in any way to these tactics.

Jean advanced with tight, cat-like steps. He moved his blade to a low position, swinging the point in minute half circles. He feinted again. But again Fabre refused to reply.

Then Fabre began to beat with his sword, began to put pressure now on one side, now on the other. He stepped

forward warily. Jean stepped back.

Fabre disengaged and lunged. His lunge was swift as thought: His whole body swept forward, his left leg and right arm straightened with the speed and precision of a well oiled machine. Jean countered twice without retreating, caught the blade, slithered in with his own for a riposte, was parried neatly, and stepped back.

Again, for a long time, the fighters did not stir. The bird in the tree cheeped persistently, but the human watchers were silent.

Back of some shrubbery, at the east end of the clearing, an old man smoked his pipe thoughtfully, watching. He was erect and slim, and his clear gray eyes were lively with interest. No, not merely interest, but excitement. It had been many years since he had been stirred like this. But he was glad he had come. For here was some pretty fighting, after all. Very pretty.

There was more than that behind his excitement. The old master had his nerves under perfect control, as always. He was cold and hard as tempered steel. But even he had been shocked to see his own son, impersonating another man, face De Grasse's brat on the field of honor. The old master had never forgotten that scar on his right forearm. De Grasse had given him that, his only wound, his only mark of defeat, twenty-odd years ago.

It would be horrible if Jean were touched by this youngster. Jean was a good blade. The old master himself had taught him to fence, taught him carefully, for many years. But clearly De Grasse was himself no mean swordsman.

The old master's eyes were almost shut, and his mouth was drawn very tight as he puffed his pipe and watched from behind the shrubbery. He did not stir an inch.

The tall fighter edged closer, making tiny circles with his point. Jean Brisac did not retreat.

The tall man feinted for the right shoulder, dropped his guard and lunged very low for the right hip. Jean parried down. He had no chance to try a riposte. Their blades pressing together, the bell guards almost touching, they waited. Their faces were only a few inches apart. Neither dared to move until the seconds had intervened; then they fell back into guard position at a respectful distance.

Fabre came in suddenly, disengaging and double countering, a full lunge. Jean caught the blade barely in time.

"Stop!"

The seconds pushed them back and examined Jean. The slack of his shirt had been pierced; it was stained with disinfectant.

He scowled, shaking his head impatiently. He had come to hate this tall man now. A black, primitive desire to kill possessed him.

Fabre whispered with his seconds, and soon Jean was asked to remove his shirt. A few minutes earlier he would have laughed at such a request. Now he took off the shirt without a protest and threw it away from him, never moving his gaze from the face of his antagonist. There was gooseflesh on his bare arms and shoulders from the morning air; but inside he was a mass of fire.

One of Fabre's seconds objected that the white shirt might distract his principal. Fabre could see it, while Jean could not. This caused further delay, until the shirt was carefully removed. Jean, with his left thumbnail, brushed at his upper lip—and remembered, with a frown of annoyance, that he no longer had a mustache. The gesture was trivial, but it worried him. It showed him he was nervous, and he didn't like that.

WAS he afraid? No! Furious, desiring only to kill this tall man, no longer concerned merely with pinking an arm, he forced the fight now, advancing, beating, stamping with his right foot, thrusting, half-lunging. The two blades

moved at a mad pace, slithering together sweet and deadly.

Back in the bushes the old master watched in silence. He stood statuelike, and never a nerve of his body twitched. But his eyes were bright with excitement. Ah, here was beautiful fighting. Here was true swordsmanship! His pipe had gone out, but he did not notice this.

Jean Brisac pulled himself up sharply. Fabre had made no attempt to thrust, but had contented himself with a perfect, inexpressibly fast defense, giving ground slowly, but always watchful. Jean couldn't have explained it, but somehow he felt what it was Fabre was awaiting. He himself was pressing the fight too hard: He was becoming wild. Canny Fabre, retreating with a purpose, was waiting for a certain opening. Jean Brisac knew what that opening was. He guessed it, or sensed it.

Only for an instant he paused, for the flick of an eyelash. Then he stepped in again. He half lunged, seemingly a little wilder than before, and his sword arm straightened with a jerk. Fabre, who knew by this time that subtle tricks would not work with such an antagonist, tried a bold but starkly simple parry and riposte—a slash designed to throw Jean's point high out of line and leave a fatal opening. It was precisely what Jean had anticipated. His blade avoided Fabre's; his right elbow bent, then straightened again. He went into a full lunge.

Fabre was quick—oh, so very quick! Sensing the ruse almost before it was started, he recovered with lightning speed, and countered up desperately. He was quick enough to save his own life. Any other swordsman would have been run through the heart. But Jean's blade only pierced the fleshy part of Fabre's left shoulder.

"Stop!"

The seconds were in again. Jean Brisac stepped back, lowering his point. There was blood four inches up his blade. But he was angry. He had wished to kill, not merely to wound.

Blood was coming from both front and back of Fabre's shoulder. Fabre's physician examined the wounds, patted them with antiseptic, fussed about them. Fabre stood motionless, silent, glaring at Jean while Jean glared back at him. He shook his head when his own physician told him that the fight should stop.

"No!" said Fabre. He rapped it out, a metallic monosyllable.

The physician called over Jean's medico, and they conversed in whispers, gesticulating much. The seconds stood silently by, looking worried. Fabre swung his left shoulder, raised his left arm and lowered it, all to demonstrate that he was not seriously hurt. The physicians conferred with greater animation, and soon the seconds joined them; they all talked at once, motioning with their hands. Only Fabre and Jean Brisac were still. And presently Jean began to laugh. His rage was gone, and now he found this whole business very funny. It was against all the rules, against all etiquette, but he raised his voice and entered the discussion.

"Perhaps if you were to permit me to speak to Monsieur Fabre for a moment, gentlemen, we might decide this matter."

They looked at him, startled, shocked. Jean laughed.

"Just one minute, gentlemen. Be sure that there will be no difficulties. You may take our swords from us, if you wish."

"But, monsieur, this is highly irregular."

"The whole affair's irregular. After all, Monsieur Fabre and I are the principals, and it is your sworn duty to encourage reconciliation between us at every opportunity. Please step back for a moment and permit me to speak to Monsieur Fabre."

Dumbfounded, they retreated. Jean, smiling, dropped his sword and walked close to the glowering Fabre.

"It is very foolish, monsieur—two

such fencing masters to become angry in the quarrel of other men."

The tall man's eyes opened very wide; his mouth, too, was open. He dropped his blade as Jean had done.

Jean continued, in a low voice.

"You are not Henri Fabre. I know that. Only a master of the sword could be so swift and true. Well, shall we fight just because two spineless idiots have hired us to do something they're afraid to do? I will be honest, concealing nothing. I am Jean Brisac of Paris, son of Regis Brisac, and Paul Doucet gave me twenty-five thousand francs to prick Henri Fabre in the arm."

"Twenty-five thousand! That son of a pig, Fabre, only gave me twenty thousand to prick Paul Doucet." The tall man smiled suddenly, extending his hand. He had a smile as swift as his thrust, but much pleasanter to meet. "I am Antoin de Grasse, of Orleans. Our fathers fought once, I believe?"

"So they did," said Jean. "I have often heard my father say it was the greatest bout he ever had."

"And wouldn't they be ashamed of us, our fathers, if they knew what we were doing here today?"

Jean laughed.

"They must never learn. We'll swear secrecy, eh? And now shall we return to the city, monsieur?"

Arm in arm, to the astonishment of the seconds and physicians, they quit the field. They returned to Paris in De Grasse's automobile, and had a lively professional talk on the way. Jean knew two men in Orleans who might become pupils of De Grasse: He would write to them. And several former De Grasse pupils had moved to Paris: Would Monsieur Brisac care to continue their instruction? In front of Jean's *salle,* the best of friends, they parted, laughing and shaking hands.

The first thing Jean saw when he entered the *salle* was his own father, quietly smoking a pipe at the window.

"*Mon père!*" They embraced. "But I had thought you were ill in bed."

"Umph! You're up early, Jean."

"I—I had a little business to conduct this morning. I was raising some money, so that I could send you that specialist."

"Umph! Save your money. I don't need any specialists fussing around me. I'm all right."

"But I have already arranged to have the money. It should be ready—"

There was a knock at the street door, and Jean excused himself. The caller was an assistant cashier from Jean's bank, bearing Paul Doucet's check for twenty-five thousand francs. The assistant cashier was voluble with regrets. Doucet had removed all his funds from that bank the previous day. But here was the check itself as evidence, in case Monsieur Brisac desired to sue.

Jean was stunned for a moment. Then he roared with laughter. He slapped the cashier on the shoulder, and the check he tore into quarters, which he thrust into a coat pocket.

"Forget it, my friend. No, I'll not sue. And thank you."

He turned back to the *salle,* still laughing.

"It's well you're well, *mon père,* for I haven't been able to raise that money after all. Oh, well—" he shrugged, smiling—"shall we open a bottle of Château Margaux in honor of your visit, eh? I'd been saving it to take to you on my next visit. Nineteen-eleven."

The old master nodded. Just above his head was a picture taken about the time he had fought De Grasse of Orleans—stuck-out chest, medals, mask and foil, bristling beard, heavy black eyebrows, a face unwrinkled and stern.

"Nineteen-eleven," he repeated. "It was a good year for Medoc clarets."

Jean Brisac was gay as he bustled about, seeking glasses and a corkscrew.

"Any year is a good year when the right men get together, *mon père.*"

"Perhaps you're right," said the old master. "I used to think that only the old years were good. But perhaps you're right after all, Jean."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A NOTE from William MacLeod Raine in connection with his serial, "The Broad Arrow," beginning in this issue:

Denver, Colorado

Of all the far lands Australia has always seized on my imagination the most. In my early youth various branches of my family were migrating to America, to Australia, to India, and other corners of the world distant from England. My father headed for the cattle country of the Southwest and brought a family of young sons with him. But I shall never forget the day when I opened a Melbourne paper, sent us by my cousin Forrester Muir, filled with the amazing story of the last stand of the Kelly gang of bushrangers.

In a neighboring State of our own country the James gang was still night-riding, and in another Billy the Kid was skulking through the chaparral. There was plenty of lurid drama in my own State. Men whom I met every day—quiet softspoken lawyers and schoolteachers and business men—had had "trouble" and been forced to kill their man. Others whom I knew well (one an employee who lived on my father's place) were destined to be victims of feuds and pass out to the roar of guns. But Australia held the charm of the unknown. It was a topsy-turvy land, where Christmas was in the heat of summer and the flora and fauna were entirely different. The bush stood for mysterious and dangerous silences. Even the cattle business, in many respects so markedly similar in history and in method to our own, had a different terminology, fascinating to my ears. A mob of scrubbers at a muster seemed more interesting than a herd of longhorns at a roundup.

WHEN last year I stood on a wharf in New York and looked at the old convict hulk *Success*, a hundred memories swept over me. This quaint old ship of Indian teakwood had witnessed a thousand tragedies. Men had stood on its deck lashed to the flogging triangle while the cat-o-nine-tails ripped blood from their quivering backs. Scores had died below decks from lack of proper food and air. It had seen the rush of mutineers as the convicts fought to capture the ship. Upon it young boys and girls, snatched from home and transported for trivial

crimes such as poaching or stealing a ribbon, had learned evil from old hands and members of the crew.

In my mind there began to fashion a story of Sydney harbor and the bush. That story I have told in "The Broad Arrow."

—WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE

IT'S pretty certain that James Stevens, any more than any of the rest of us, never heard of this episode in the strenuous life of Paul Bunyan—and the author is, as you all know, his official biographer. Though since it is so copiously corroborated with facts and figures, it would seem hardly open to doubt:

Inglewood, California

It certainly has caused me great sorrow to see that famous and original oilman, Paul Bunyan, maligned by being classed as a lumberjack.

True, Paul did cut a lot of timber—present-day physical geography gives us adequate proof of this. Next summer if you have to see this proof, just take a ship at Seattle and go to Nome. Travel along the Behring Sea coast, the Straits and the Arctic Ocean. You will notice that this great region is absolutely treeless. The explanation is very simple, and it explains how Paul's actions might have given the erroneous impression that Paul was a lumberman instead of the greatest oilman the industry has ever heard of, John D. included.

PAUL had been taking it very easy. His great wells in Mexico had been supplying enough oil to keep his several hundred refineries going full blast when they suddenly turned to salt water. This meant the immediate closing of his refineries and even caused such a shortage of oil that horses began to replace autos and what ships were not fitted for coal had to be turned from oil-burners to coal or rerigged as sailing ships.

About this time the Navy Department became very worried because the Navy had only a few days' fuel for the fleet, so the Secretary of the Navy called up Paul on the phone and asked him to come to Washington.

Well, no matter whether they claimed he was a lumberjack or what have you, no one ever said Paul wasn't patriotic, and he immediately got out his seven thousand league boots and walked over to Washington. In fact, when the Secretary swung around after putting down the phone, there sat Paul! Whoever heard of a lumberjack with that much speed?

WHEN the Secretary had told Paul of the great danger threatening the country's first line of defense, Paul immediately got busy. On his phone orders, backed by the Navy Department, the great foundries and mills in Pittsburgh hummed with activity making up special equipment for Paul's greatest well. Just to give you an idea of the size of this equipment, I want to tell you that Paul ordered 10 10,000-lb., 500,000 H.P. boilers; the drilling engine weighed seven hundred tons. He had a 40-speed draw works, the drum shaft of which measured 400 ft. in diameter. His mud pumps had a 2-mile stroke. He also ordered a special string of drill pipe 50 ft. in diameter, 1000 ft. to the single, and the finished bits weighed well over a million pounds each.

It was when Paul came to get the lumber for his derrick that he ran into difficulty. It seems that all the lumber manufacturers in the country couldn't deliver enough lumber for this derrick. This didn't worry Paul one bit. He just picked up an ax (and such an ax!), put on his seven thousand league boots and started out to find a good stand of timber. He found it in the northern part of Alaska, so with a few swings of that mighty ax he felled every tree in that area.

He picked up these trees, put them under his arm and walked down to California to the site of his new well, took out his jackknife, shaved the trees down to the right sized timbers and put up his derrick. That's the only time Paul ever wasted any time monkeying with timber. And to give you an idea of this derrick: It was so tall that the derrickman had to use an airplane to get up to the double-board and wear a special oxygen tank in order to breathe.

WELL, Paul finally got spudded in, and after 5 hours of steady drilling he encountered the oil sands underlying Mesopotamia. He said afterwards that he would have made better time but when the drill passed through the center of the earth the heat was so terrific that it turned the mud into steam. Paul soon remedied this by putting on his boots and stepping up to the North Pole, where he picked up a handful of icebergs, which he forced down the hole.

It took all the available trains in the United States to haul the pipe and cement for Paul's well, and when he finally drilled out the plug the well came in without swabbing with a roar that made Paris think they were in the midst of another war.

Paul tried to pump mud into it to get it under control but the mud flew out faster than the 2-mile stroke pumps could pump it. This kind of perplexed Paul, so he took his fingers and pinched the Kelly hose, disconnected it from the standpipe and proceeded to blow in it. For a few minutes it was touch and go, but Paul swelled out his chest, gave a great puff and presto! the flow ceased long enough for them to get a control head on and turn the oil into the pipe lines, two of

which later blew up under the strain.

—JACK LANG

SOME time ago one of you inquired about the Magyar cowboys of the Hungarian plains. Here is a letter about them from Grace Isobel Colbron of the Ask Adventure Department:

New Canaan, Connecticut

The Csikós, the Magyar cowboy of the great Puszta (Hungarian plains) is his country's pride. He and his kind represent about the purest Magyar line that any class of Hungarians can show. He works for the great landowners or for himself, but he is as proud as any noble, and they treat him almost as an equal.

The cowboys proper, the horsemen, look down on cattlemen and shepherds, just as our own Western cowboys used to, as far as sheepmen were concerned. The Csikós is so entirely part of his horse that he himself can not imagine life without the horse. The boys grow up with them. The Hungarian Csikós is as fine a rider as can be found; he yields to none. Although to any horseman who has seen all kinds of riders the Don Cossacks are the riders supreme of all the world. But the Hungarian cowboy is very much the same sort and is a wonderful rider.

NOW as to saddles: The true Csikós uses no saddle, in our sense. He has merely a square of felt strapped on his horse's back by a girth from which the stirrups hang. His lasso—yes, he uses one—is coiled around the horse's neck. The fancy saddles are used in the army or by the nobles for pleasure riding.

As the climate is mild, except for a short winter, the men sleep out of doors. In winter the Csikós sleeps in his village or in one of the inns on the rim of the Puszta—taverns that cater to the cowboys, have rooms especially for them. Great drinking bouts and merrymakings go on in these inns. The Csikós is a fine dancer.

THE cattle are a long-horned breed. The Hungarian plains horse is not large, but is noted for speed and endurance. His ancestor was the wiry Asiatic pony ridden by the Tartar hordes. But for centuries the Hungarian government has tried to improve the breed by crossing the plains horse with Arab and English thoroughbreds. The government selects the stallions that are turned loose among the herds.

The Csikós wears a picturesque costume: a big saucer-shaped black hat tilted over his eyes, a long white felt coat hanging from his shoulders. The sleeves of this garment are wide and long and hang loose. They are usually sewn up to serve as pockets. Loose trousers bulge over knee-height military boots. The long whip used by the Csikós when riding herd is anchored in one of these pockets, or else its handle is caught in his belt, and the lash, when not in use, is looped around his neck.

—GRACE ISOBEL COLBRON

WITH the current issue the price of *Adventure* goes to ten cents. While the magazine will be smaller in size, I want to impress on all of you that no other change *whatsoever* will be made in the contents.

Almost a quarter of a century ago the magazine was dedicated to the policy of printing the finest adventure stories available. We are going to continue to print the finest. All your favorite authors, who built *Adventure's* enviable reputation for high grade fiction, will appear regularly—and with their best work.

While there has of necessity been an adjustment in the quantity of fiction in each issue, there will be no compromise with *quality.* We shall unswervingly maintain *Adventure's* own level.

A word or two about the contents of prospective issues: In the past, at the twenty-five cent rate, each issue contained from eight to ten fiction stories, besides the usual short articles. In our new format, each issue will contain at least seven stories, besides the miscellaneous non-fiction. It will be obvious that from the point of view of the number of items, the difference will not be great. While, surely, with the generous reduction in price of the magazine, it will be possible for a great many more readers who appreciate superior fiction, yet who in these times found the twenty-five cent rate prohibitive, to become regular buyers of *Adventure.*

Though some of you may regret that there must be some reduction in size, all of you will feel, I'm sure, that the new price more than compensates. We plan to make *Adventure,* at ten cents, absolutely the best fiction magazine at its price. And to keep it, as far as quality goes, the best at any price.

—A. A. P.

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Safari

DON'T forget soap! Better take an overcoat along.

Request:—"What would we need besides guns and medicines in the way of safari equipment in the Belgian Congo?"

—FRANK C. HANNUM, Los Angeles, California

Reply, by Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler:—Clothing: 2 or 3 flannel shirts; moleskin jacket and breeches; 2 or 3 khaki shooting suits, having plenty deep pockets; thick stockings and socks; leather knee-length gaiters; soft felt hat or topi (cork or pith helmet of khaki color); a greatcoat for sleeping or very bad rains; a poncho on your saddle (if any); 2 pairs of easy, comfortable, well-nailed shooting boots, a woolen sweater or two. A rubber ground sheet is a *sine qua non,* also 4 good heavy woolen blankets, mosquito nets around hats and mosquito boots. When stalking game a pair of leather, soft-lined knee protectors are most welcome.

General requirements: Tents, best ordered in New York (to eliminate waiting in Africa). 1 tent for each 2 whites with mosquito netting door, flaps, and space for bathing, sewed-in ground cloth, keeping insects out, having windows and porch (shaded).

Bedding: 4 blankets, as above, pillows made from Kapok, mattress, sleeping bag (hard to keep free from insects); rubber ground sheet—no bed sheets. Army cots, with mosquito netting appliances. 1 chair per person. Folding tables, according to number of hunters. Nested outfit, containing plates, cups, cutlery, etc. Kitchen outfit: Pots, pans, knives, forks, spoons, etc, canvas water pails—some sort of camp stove, large enough to prepare complete meal for whites at same time. Foldable camp and tent lanterns; foldable bath tubs and wash stands. Horses, mules or donkeys where obtainable and practical in use. (They can not stand bite of tse-tse fly). Other items you will see yourself and know to be useful, and do not forget soap, both for washing your clothes and yourself—I once did and will never forget the horror I went through.

If you do arrive before August wait till the rains stop. One can not travel comfortably in rain.

Pistol

LUGERS, their good and bad points.

Request:—"What is the reason for the Luger pistol's unusual shape?"

—HENRY W. VOLZ, Phoenix, Arizona

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—I judge the peculiar shape of the Luger to have been designed to give a good model for rapid instinctive firing, and I find my own Luger is more adapted to "throw down" on a mark than is my .45 Service Automatic Colt. I also seem to shoot just a wee bit better with it; but it is more apt to jam than is the Colt.

However, the Luger is the best automatic pistol made in Europe that I know of, although I regard its caliber as being too small to rely upon for self-defense. A close friend of mine was shot through the hand with one in the Argonne Forest, and believed it a wire scratch until next day; had it been a .45 he would likely have lost his hand, the bullet going in between two fingers and coming out at the base of the palm.

Whip

CRACKING a Florida skinner is a fine art, like casting for trout.

Request:—"1. Where can I get a Florida stock whip and instructions?"

—WALTER FRIED, Elizabeth, New Jersey

Reply, by Mr. Hapsburg Liebe:—Get in touch with the firm of Knight & Wall, Tampa, Fla, hard-

ware men. It is possible that they don't carry these whips in stock; there are not so many cattle ranches in Florida anymore, and the whips last indefinitely; enclose stamped envelop to insure an answer, and request Knight & Wall to tell you where you can get a whip in the event they haven't one. The cost runs anywhere from 25 cents up to a dollar a foot, depending upon make and quality of materials, etc. I've never seen any printed instructions as to the use of these whips. It is a matter of practise, and knack, a lot like casting, in fishing—the wrist does it, more than the arm. Don't try to force the whip, if you get what I mean. The whip itself will do three-fourths of the work, if you but do your fourth correctly. Experts with them can cut a cigaret from your lips without harm to you, or snip a snake's head off—not too large a snake, of course. Their crack is like a pistol, and a big pistol at that. They are used to scare cattle far more than to hurt them.

The handles of these whips are something like 14 inches in length (very short, you see); lashes run anywhere from 10 to 23 feet, and the longer ones are called "skinners." I'd begin with the length I meant to use, and my own preference would be 20 feet.

State Trooper

IN NEW YORK he must live in barracks.

Request:—"1. What is the salary of a New York trooper?

2. Is a married man eligible?"

—WILLIAM A. GIBSON, New York City

Reply, by Mr. Francis H. Bent:—1. $900 a year with $100 a year extra for each year served up to four. After that pay remains at $1300. This is base pay of trooper. Uniforms, arms, equipment, board and lodging are furnished by the State.

2. A married man is eligible. Size of pay and fact that men must live in barracks is often a deterrent, as it is hard to support a wife in town on this salary.

Fencing

ARM, leg and head touches do not count in the Italian school.

Request:—"1. Are touches anywhere on the body counted in the Italian school of foil-fencing?

2. I am in the habit of using a stop-thrust, performed by dropping suddenly from the position of on guard to my left knee, my left arm thrown out to preserve my balance and my blade and right arm, of course, fully extended before me. I have been informed that this is illegal as it constitutes avoiding my adversary's blade, in spite of the fact that I have not moved from my tracks. Is this true?"

—WILLIAM G. SEARS, Houston, Texas

Reply, by Capt. Jean V. Grombach:—1. In the Italian school of foil-fencing the body only is counted. Arms, legs and head do not count.

2. A stop-thrust is perfectly legal in épée fencing. If you arrive before the attack of your adversary does, it is your touch. However, in foil you are technically supposed to parry the attack and the riposte. Stop-thrusts are allowed in foil fencing only when they are so far ahead that there is no question about time. If the stop-thrust is slightly ahead, if you have not parried the attack, the attack has the right of way and the attacker scores the touch.

Marine

NOTES on the dress and service uniform.

Request:—"What is the service uniform of the Marines?"

—FRED J. FRAZER, Bellefontaine, Ohio

Reply, by Capt. F. W. Hopkins:—Winter service uniform is wool, dark "forest" green color, with trousers and khaki leggins. Shirt is khaki, with necktie. Summer service uniform is khaki, with trousers and leggins. Dress uniform is blue, piped with red. NCO service chevrons are green, trimmed in red. Overcoat is forest green. Marines wear roll collar blouses in both service uniforms; high collar with dress.

Central America

BUCKING the back country in an automobile.

Request:—"We are contemplating an automobile trip through Central America. We will appreciate any information you can give us concerning special equipment."

—H. J. OVERMYER, Toledo, Ohio

Reply, by Mr. E. Bruguiere:—You will find a small block and tackle (with plenty of light rope that will stand your car's weight) a great advantage. There will be bulls to pull you out of ruts and mud and brush, but sometimes not enough bull power without the tackle. And occasionally no bulls. A watertight carburetor hood can be rigged up that will help in crossing small flooded streams. While in Mexico machetes for cutting brush may be bought reasonably. I suggest you get two good axes here before leaving. A couple of emergency tanks for gas and oil will not only prevent being stranded but will prevent outright robbery at isolated gas stations. Nails, hammer, hatchet, light wire will help toward raft building in places they are necessary. Chains will not be needed until after April. Mosquito nets, hammocks of the long, wide sort. Medical supplies.

Indian

CANNIBALISM among the old Menomini.

Request:—"Were the Indians of North America cannibals, and, if they were, to what extent?"

—REVEREND THOMAS DEMPSEY, Dunkirk, New York

Reply, by Mr. Arthur Woodward:—Cannibalism in two forms occurred in various parts of North America in primitive times. There are instances among certain tribes where it came about during famine periods; these, however, are rare, even as we have such examples among our own people, to wit. the Donner Party in northern California, 1848. Among some of the tribes which were forced to cannibalism by hunger are recorded the Huron, Micmac, Chippewa (Ojibwa), and others.

However, in most cases, anthropophagy as practised by the American tribesmen was ceremonial. It was deemed valorous for warriors and youths about to become warriors to eat a portion of a captive enemy, especially if the captive was a man of note, a man who died well, who instructed his captors how to achieve the best effects in torturing him, who died singing and taunting his enemies. Among the Menomini at one time, youths to prove their manhood were supposed to eat the heart of an enemy raw, and old warriors in after years confessed it was the hardest deed they ever did. When the custom changed, the heart of a snapping turtle, which quivered and beat even after being removed from the body, was substituted, and even that was a decided test. I know of a white man, a friend of mine, who was challenged by an adopted Menomini uncle to prove himself a man and eat a turtle's heart. My friend compromised and ate one quarter and afterward said that palpitating bit of raw meat was the worst dose he ever took.

In Old Mexico the bodies of victims sacrificed in the temples on the *teocallis*, those truncated pyramids, were thrown down the steps and divided among the populace for consumption, but again this was ceremonial, and not because the people had developed a taste for human flesh. As a rule, only prisoners were treated in this manner.

Sea Captain

BEYOND the three-mile limit the Old Man is supreme.

Request:—"Could the underwriters have a passenger appointed a special U. S. Marshal (or any other official position) and provided with any warrant or document that would give him legal authority to put a sea captain under arrest while a ship is at sea?"

—G. J. NEWTON, Youngstown, Ohio

Reply, by Lieut. Harry E. Rieseberg:—There is no law which would prevent the underwriters' having a passenger serve a warrant on a captain of a vessel while at sea, but said captain would be within his rights in ignoring such a warrant after, or in other words when, his vessel is beyond the three- or twelve-mile limit; unless the warrant were served within the three- or twelve-mile limit, and then only for prohibition purposes in the twelve-mile limit. The three-mile limit is the limitation usually upheld by all maritime courts in the majority of offenses.

As you are aware, I presume, the Navigation Laws give the master of a vessel sole authority at sea beyond the legal limit, and he owes no obligation to any person other than the owners by whom he is employed.

Write to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., enclose one dollar and request a copy of the new 1931 Navigation Laws which gives you all data on this matter in detail. I have only given you a brief outline of the matter.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

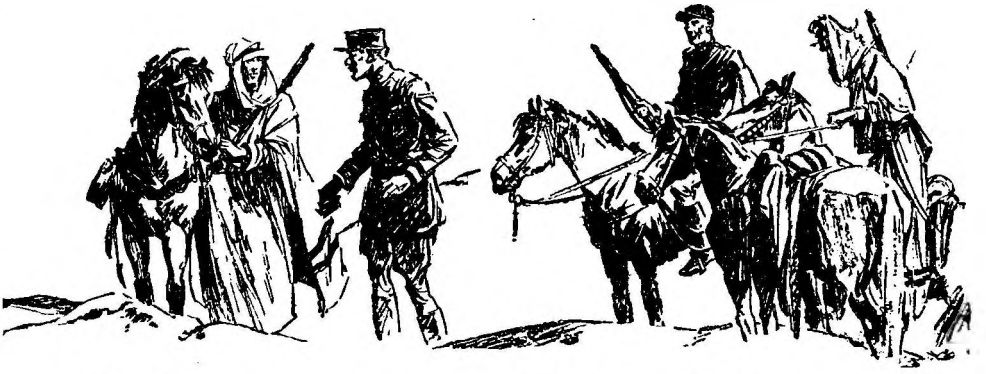
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD—THE NEXT ISSUE OF *ADVENTURE,* SEPT. 15th



Once An Officer

ELEVEN citations for valor in action, and a hornet's nest of trouble for his superior officers—his escapades would have made even a lesser figure than the giant Russian a legend in the Legion. Son of a Siberian prince, he had once been an officer in the Imperial army. But more is required of a Legionnaire than towering pride and a reckless courage.

"Bravery is within the gift of any man," said his commander. "You are brave, but you don't know what discipline is. You're not officer material."

The Russian smiled and bided his time. For in the desert were burnoused raiders, thirsting for the joy of daring assaults, waiting for the leadership of one who was more than brave . . .

By GEORGES SURDEZ

And These Other Fine Stories

THE DARK WIND, a story of shipwreck in perilous seas, by S. B. H. HURST; WHERE THE WATER RUNS, a story of the Western cattle trails, by S. OMAR BARKER; RED SKULL, conclusion of a three-part story of the Amazon jungles, by ARTHUR O. FRIEL; TARANTULAS, a story of Africa and black insurrection, by FERDINAND BERTHOUD; DANGER ZONE, a story of the U. S. Army in the Philippines, by CHARLES L. CLIFFORD; and THE BROAD ARROW, part II of a novel of the bushranger days in early Australia, by WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE.

"Chic" Sale says Bein' Tight Don't Pay!

GENTLEMEN, if there ever was a stingy feller it was Ira Jenkins. Six-foot-two in his stockin' feet, he would come down to the depot at train time and read the passengers' newspapers through the train windows. Well sir, one day a smilin' drummer gave Ira a little tin box of chocolate tablets. They tasted good to Ira, but he bein' so stingy he jest ate one now and then.

Well sir, I never see such a change come over a fellow. He's spendin' more money in one day than he used to spend in a week, but bein' of an agreeable nature now and havin' lots of friends he's makin' more in one day than he used to make in two weeks. I thank you.

"Chic" Sale

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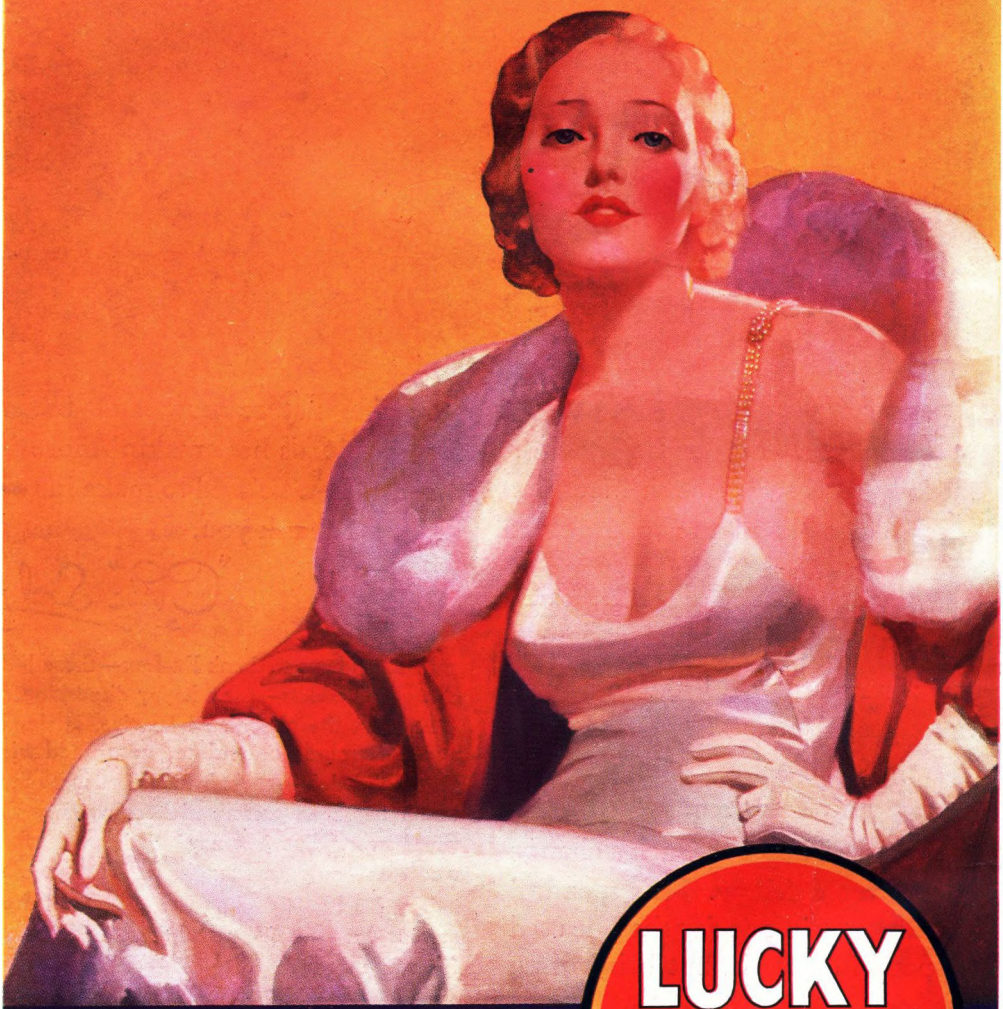

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