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Adventure

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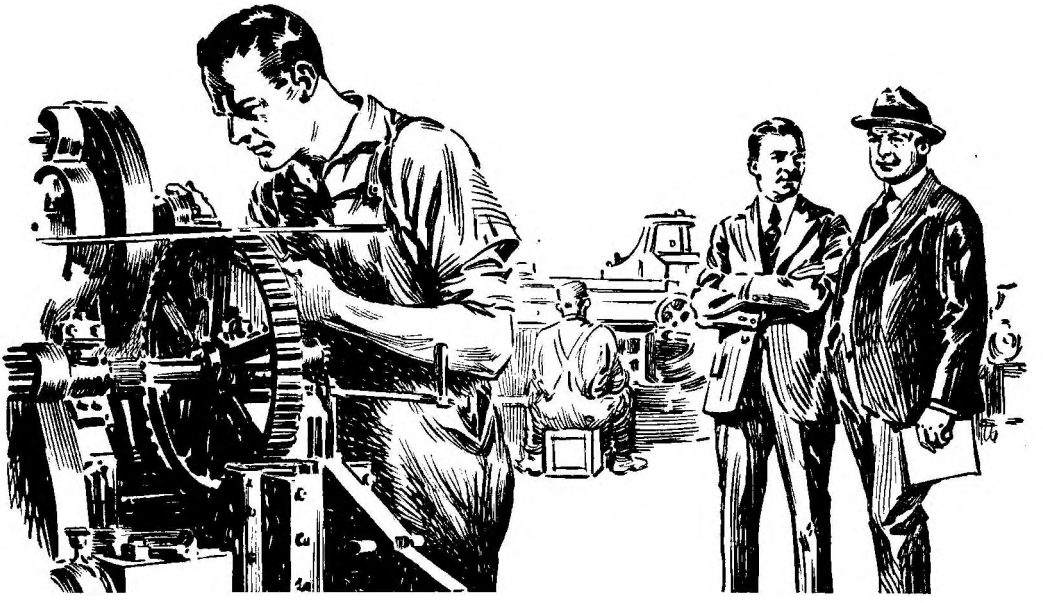

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ADVENTURE
Dec. 10th, 1922

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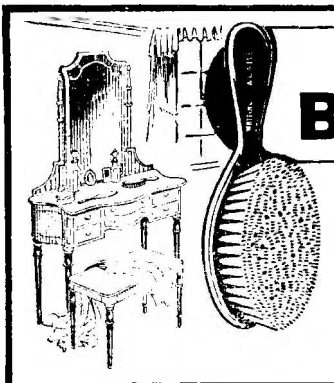

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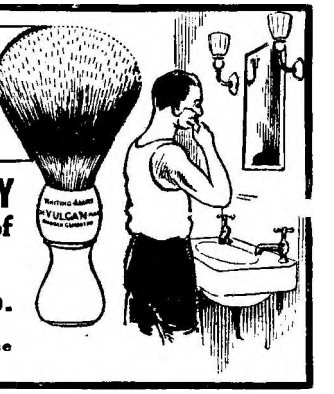

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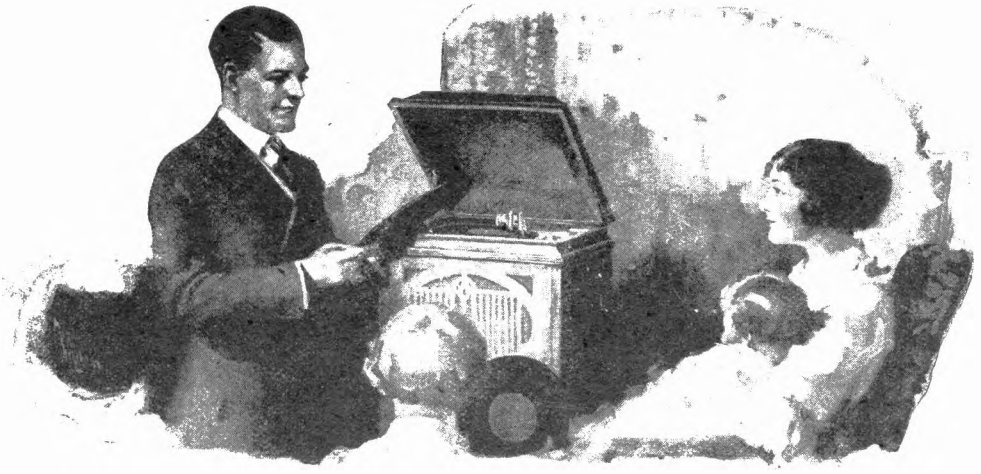

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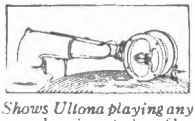
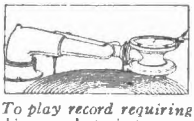


Shows Ultona playing any record, using steel or fibre needle.



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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Contents for December 10th, 1922, Issue

(Continued on next page)

(*Continued from preceding page*)

VILLAINY aboard the *King Sagamore.* "PIRATES' GOLD," a novelette of the high seas in sailing-vessel days, by H. Bedford-Jones, complete in the next issue.

ON HIS way to the flying-field, *Lieutenant Corrigan* of the U. S. Air Service has a chance to make a new friend by "crowning" a policeman. From then on, events crowd thick and fast by land, water and air. "CORRIGAN," a complete novelette of the Kentucky mountains, by Thomson Burtis, in the next issue.

ON THE stage route between California and Missouri the pony express is robbed and the driver brutally killed. *Rockwell,* old-timer, sets out to capture as clever and dangerous a bandit as he has ever encountered. "THRIBBLE H," a complete novelette by Glynn Bennion, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

Adventure
Dec. 10 · 1922
VOL. XXXVIII · NO. 1

Benefit of Doubt

A Complete Novel

by Talbot Mundy

Author of "Khufu's Real Tomb," "The Gray Mahatma," etc.

CHAPTER I

"All right. I'll remember."

SOME one began to pray in a nasal snarl, and a stallion squealed for breakfast, but the sun did not get up, and seven or eight thousand other horses that knew the time ignored the stallion's appeal as phlegmatically as several hundred men cold-shouldered the religious argument. It was better to sleep than pray. Better to sleep than squeal for breakfast. That was all about it.

Horse or human, at a horse-fair let him rest who can. There is little enough peace in the world, and none at Dera Ismail Khan when the snow has left the passes and the foot-hills. There is horse-fair and holiday and hocus-pocus—money maybe, and murder certainly; but no peace.

The stars had done a night's work and were fading away before the chill wind that blows the dawn along. To the northward the sky rested dimly on the dark mass of the Himalaya, and there was one warm light that marked the sentry-post by the bridge over the Jumna, but that was a long way off and made the darkness bigger and more bleak.

There was a smell magnificent, and one other light that moved. A man swinging a lantern walked among the rows of low tents, cautiously avoiding pegs and stooping at intervals to examine sleeping men, who had taken advantage of tent-flies or piled baggage. But they were smothered head

"Benefit of Doubt," copyright, 1922, by Talbot Mundy.

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and all under blankets, and though he prodded one or two of them occasionally with a long stick that he carried ostensibly against dogs he failed in his search.

Finally another dark form stepped from a shadow between two tents and cautioned him. This second man was obviously a Pathan policeman, and by the contrast between the two men you could tell, even in darkness, that the first was white. The white man swore, grumbled, and retreated to his own tent. The stars swung farther out of sight. Then suddenly the Lord of Light touched a mountain-top with an electric finger. Color was born and danced on the snow through a billion prisms. The wind increased quarrelsomely, and the camp awoke, each living being in it aware of emptiness and appetite.

Of such stuff music is made. Add the smoke of new dung fires to the stamping and snorting of horse-lines. Send the whine of morning prayer through that, and the shouts of the *saises* dragging sacks of *gram* —then presently the steady munching as the beasts get fed, and you have a tune, if you know what that is. It contains no jazz—nothing syncopated—but a leisurely suggestion of long trails and a hum to the effect that life means business. Now and then the staccato thump as a hoof lands home punctuates the rhythm. Mares, whinnying, provide high notes that are nearly as eloquent of distance as the mew of sea-gulls.

Music of the long leagues—immeasurable spaces—horse—and the smell magnificent of cooking and dung and unwashed men, tobacco, forage and dry grain in gunny-bags. That is Dera Ismail Khan when the passes open in the Spring.

The white man was there to buy army remounts. That was a quarter of a century ago, and his name does not matter, for he was no hero and never had been. Besides, he is dead and has probably learned his lesson. He belonged to that school of white man that asserts pride of race with boot and fist, demands obsequiousness, and is obsequious—the snob. Maybe the devil made them when the Creator's back was turned.

To him, as he sat in his canvas chair in the door of his tent, came ex-Rissaldar Mahommed Babar, leading a boy by the hand. It is not thought unmanly for a warrior of that land of battles to lavish affection on his male child, but the sight of it raised the white man's gorge and he omitted to return the stately greeting—although a viceroy had more than once gone out of his way to shake hands with Mahommed Babar.

"Curse you! Why didn't you come yesterday?"

"I came the day before yesterday at sunset."

The *rissaldar's* face did not betray that he had noticed insolence. It hardly mattered, for none could overhear. The camp was alive and ahum with too many noises for one mean man's ill-temper to attract attention, and the small boy knew no English. True pride is hardly ever self-assertive.

"You lie!" said the white man. "I hunted the whole camp over for you. All last night I poked among the shadows looking for your one-legged servant. Just for you and your dillydallying I got ordered out of the lines by a —— Pathan policeman! I won't listen to your lies!"

"Surely not, *sahib*, since I tell none. I arrived as I said. The boy fell ill. My man and I nursed him."

"And kept me waiting! That's another obvious lie. Look at the brat—there's nothing whatever the matter with him!"

"I have another son, who——"

"That'll do! You've kept me waiting while you've rigged the market against me. You promised to get the horses cheap! Kick that brat into the horse-lines and go to work now! I expect the best horses twenty per cent. cheaper than last year. Fail me if you dare, and take the consequences! Hurry! Don't stand there looking at me!"

Rissaldar Mahommed Babar continued to look for thirty seconds, saying nothing. His only reason for promising to help had been desire that the army of the Raj, whose salt he had eaten, and in whose ranks he had fought, should have the pick of the horses available. Year after year for ten years since he retired on pension he had performed the same friendly office of advising the remount buyers. But one white man is no more like another necessarily than horse resembles horse, and he stood considering the difference before he turned and led his son away.

That was altogether too much for the white man's patience. He had to be cringed to, and had not been. Instead, *saises*, horse-dealers of a dozen tribes, and even a camp

constable saluted the *rissaldar* as he began threading his way through the horse-lines. The white man picked up a tent-peg, which is an awkward missile, threw it at the *rissaldar*, missed him, but hit his son. The boy yelped—once—and bit the cry in halves—remembering what he owed his stock. The *rissaldar* turned to face the white man, and all that end of the camp grew curiously still. It is neither safe nor wise to strike back in a conquered land. It would be even less sensible than hitting a policeman in London or New York. Yet everybody knew the limit had been overpassed.

"Are you afraid to strike me, that you throw things at the child?" the *rissaldar* demanded.

He used a tongue that every hanger-on in that camp understood, and the white man got to his feet, picking up his riding-whip.

"Afraid of you?" He walked close with his lower jaw thrust out. "Take that!"

He struck with the heavy riding-whip, and the *rissaldar* made no attempt to parry the blow, which fell on his shoulder and brought blood welling up through the cotton shirt under a semi-military tunic. He had opened an old wound.

One, and only one consideration kept the *rissaldar* from defending himself—the same that prevented him from striking back or summoning assistance. There were twenty rival clans in camp, every man of whom would have instantly made common cause with him if the *rissaldar* had raised a finger. They would have beaten that white man to death, with consequences that any fool could foresee.

But the white man mistook the self-control for meekness, a quality that exasperates ill-temper. He struck again and again, until the boy let go his father's hand and shouted shame on the horse-traders who could look on and not retaliate.

That was all that was needed. There would have been murder, and inevitable hangings afterwards, but for another small boy. As he rode an Arab pony around the lines he saw the first blow struck, and being the only son of Cuthbert—"*Raj-bahadur*—" King, who was sixth of his line to serve in India, he knew how to choose the right course even at that age.

While the men of a dozen rival factions ran to avenge the *rissaldar* young Athelstan King spurred his pony in the opposite direction and reined in at his father's tent.

"What is it, boy?"

Those two had learned to understand each other in eight years. You must, if you ever mean to, in a land that the white man's son may not know between the years of eight and eighteen. It is as children that the English learn the art of governing, and grown men return to India to pick up reins that they dropped when they left for "home" and school. Nine or ten words were enough. "Raj-bahadur" Cuthbert King lifted his son from the saddle and galloped across camp as fast as the red pony could lay hoof to earth under him.

He was in time to burst through a yelling swarm armed with knives and sticks and take on his own body a last blow aimed at Mahommed Babar. The white man was afraid now, with the bully's fear that seeks to terrify the strong by hammering the weak. The blow would have killed if it had landed on the old man's head. Instead, it gave "Raj-bahadur" King excuse for the only means of saving the situation.

He struck back, dismounted, and waded in with his fists, treating the white man to a licking such as few white men have ever had in front of an Eastern crowd. Not a man from Delhi to Peshawar would have willingly laid a finger on "Raj-bahadur" King. Rather than harm him they forewent their rage and stood back in a circle, until it dawned that the thrashing he meted out was better, and more just than the murder they had intended. After that they ceased shouting and watched in silence, while all the theoretic principles of the army were broken and an officer thrashed a civilian with his fists.

Finally "Raj-bahadur" King threw the victim into his tent, resumed his jacket, and addressed himself to Rissaldar Mahommed Babar.

"I'm sorry, old friend, that this should have happened. Are you hurt?"

"Nothing that I can not endure for your sake, *sahib*."

"Is the boy hurt?"

"Not he. He has had a lesson."

King picked the youngster up and set him on the pony.

"Ride over to my tent," he ordered.

Then he took Mahommed Babar's arm and the two walked side-by-side across the camp, as equals, all the camp wondering.

Raj-bahadur Cuthbert King was considered the equal of viceroys in all except rank, and greater than any viceroy in his grip on the hearts of men.

When they reached the tent he with his own hands set a chair for Mahommed Babar, and made his own son bring the old man breakfast, even as the Black Prince waited on the French King after Agincourt. Then they sat and smoked together in view of all those northern traders, so that the news of the honor done to Mahommed Babar was certain to be spread from Delhi as far as Khabul before a month was out. Then—

"Is there anything I can do to make amends, Mahommed Babar?"

"By ——, *sahib*, may dogs eat me if I bear one grudge! I am old, and that fool struck me harder than he knew. Let him not know. He is not worthy to have killed a *rissaldar* of the 'Peishwaris.' Moreover, if it were said that I die because of him, better men than he would presently be hanged for taking law in their own hands."

There was fire smoldering behind King's eyes, but he nodded.

"Why didn't you tell me? Gallopers could have brought an army surgeon here by noon."

"My time has come. Why trouble the surgeons? This is thy son?"

King nodded again. The *rissaldar* knew well the youngster was his son, but there are proper ways of approaching subjects, and a man who fought on the right side in '57 is not to be denied his measure of stateliness.

"This is my son. Like thine, he shall carry on the purpose. He shall serve the Raj. They two may be the last for aught we know. None may know that, save Allah. My boy's name is the same as mine, Mahommed Babar. And thine?"

"Athelstan."

"A King's name! Good. Mahommed, lay thy hand on his. Be thou his man as long as Allah gives thee breath!"

"Shake hands with him, Athelstan!" said Cuthbert King, swallowing something and hiding emotion angrily after the manner of his kind.

The two boys shook hands, the Englishman frankly with a smile, and the other with some embarrassment.

"Say something!" commanded Raj-bahadur King.

"All right. I'll remember," said Athelstan. And that was surely as good as anything he could have said.

"Mahommed," said the gray ex-*rissaldar*, moving himself very gently in the chair for fear of hemorrhage, "do thou remember likewise. Other men's memories will fail them in the years that come. There will be talk of this and that. Let no talk seduce. Hot words are emptiness. Nothing is good in Allah's sight but deeds well done. I, thy father, who am Allah's slave, will stand at the gate of paradise and question thy deeds when thy time comes! Color, clan, creed, tribe, wealth, honor are all nothing in the scales against one deed. Remember!"

"Do you hear that, Athelstan? This is for you, too. Are you listening?" demanded King senior.

"Take no vengeance. That is Allah's. But requite in full. Repay. Owe no man. Thou hast seen how this *sahib* repaid, disgracing his own countryman and honoring me. Think well on that."

The old man laid his head back and moved his hand to signify the episode was over.

"And now, *sahib*, shake hands with me. Thine is a friendship bearing no regrets. If your honor's servants have nothing better to do it would be kind to have me laid on a litter now and carried home. Good-by, *sahib*. May Allah bless your son—and mine!"

CHAPTER II

"Twenty-five years later."

POONA, Bombay Presidency. Three words to a man who knows the western side of India like three sniffs in the dew to a hunting dog. They tell the whole story. Poona, summer government headquarters, depot for artillery, cavalry and favored infantry, sick-and-short-leave station—second-class Simla, as it were, where the pale-faced men and women who have bridled the rising Eastern peril meet once in a lustrum and exchange remarks, was the same after the war as before it. Only the people had changed a little. There were new faces, and the old ones were older. That was all.

Pig-sticking, polo and gymkana dovetailed into the day's work, and the nights were fabulous-Arabian. India lends herself to that. Hot skies and hard sport go together. The star-powdered Indian sky

is the background of them all for nodding paper lanterns. Turbaned servants, flitting on naked feet among shadows darker than themselves, suggest intrigue that never sleeps. A khaki uniform looks golden, a white one silver, and a woman's bare shoulders like a glimpse of heaven.

The fortnightly dance at the gymkana differed in no wise from a hundred that preceded it. A dozen scattered men in evening dress among two hundred only punctuated the color scheme and made the whirling pattern easier to read.

One of the men in black was Cotswold Ommony. He never wore uniform, being of the Woods and Forests. You could tell at a glance that he never walked abroad without a gun under his arm—a sturdy, stocky man with a queer old-fashioned look that made you take a second glance at him.

He was the only man in the room who wore a beard; one of the very few who danced in the new style. Most of them waltzed round and round in the Victorian way that Byron thought so scandalous and that looks so absurdly antique to Americans. But Ommony did the fox-trot and the one-step. He was no expert, but an enthusiast, and the high and mighty into whom he bumped did not approve. They said so at intervals, and Ommony smiled; whereat you knew immediately why he held his job.

Among the scandalized objectors was young Mrs. Wilmshurst, so-called because her husband was a middle-aged high court judge. She angrily chafed an elbow as she talked with Athelstan King against the veranda rail, with a blue Chinese lantern swaying gently overhead. They stood together exactly at the point where the yellow ballroom glare outpouring through wide doors and windows met dark night and defeat.

King was safe to dance with. He had not learned the new tricks. Moreover, he did not dance too much and get too hot, and had no beard; and women always liked to talk with him because he had never been known to make love to any one, and in a case like that there is always hope.

Although both men were in evening dress he looked as different from Ommony as a carriage from a cart-horse—taller, although the two were really the same height—lighter, although they weighed about the same—younger, although they were the same age—darker-complexioned, in spite of Ommony's dark gray-shot beard—more active, although Ommony was prancing like a satyr, and King stock-still.

Mrs. Wilmshurst was in her bitterly cynical mood, which she believed becoming to a high court judge's wife whose elbow has been hurt by a Woods and Forests man.

"Has India seeped into your blood and made you mad, that you should have left the army in your prime, Major King?"

"Perhaps," he answered. He was thoroughly bored with her, but quite able to be bored without letting her know it.

"I suppose there's more money in your present job."

"No. Less money."

"Gracious! Then you surely are mad! Do explain! I'm crazy about complexes. My husband has been reading Freud and talks about it at breakfast." She tapped his shoulder familiarly with her fan. "Come, let me analyze you!"

King turned to face the ballroom and leaned his back against the rail.

"There's a man enjoying himself! Look at Cot Ommony!" he laughed.

Mrs. Wilmshurst understood that she had failed to please, and her bitterness became as nearly genuine as anything she usually felt.

"Does he prance that way in the forest glades?" she wondered. "What a pity a man said to be so brilliant should waste his time among monkeys—and learn manners from them!"

"Ommony has learned more from the beasts than most of us learn anywhere," King answered.

"Oh, is he a friend of yours? I see you're huffed. So sorry. I thought you had no intimates—so everybody says."

"Ommony and I are friends."

"I suppose it would be rude to say I don't envy either of you! I like warmth about my friendships. How can you possibly be friends, when he lives in his great forest, and you disappear over the Himalayas for months on end? Do you write each other billets-doux?"

"Practically never write. I think your next partner is looking for you," King answered. "Here you are. Don't let me rob you, Campbell."

She left on Campbell's arm, but had the last word and took care that King heard it.

"So glad you came, Captain Campbell. I was frightfully bored."

King chuckled and lighted a cigar. A moment later Ommony joined him wiping the inside of his collar with a handkerchief.

"Hello," said Ommony.

"Hello, Cot."

"You're lean. What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Got a scratch up Khyber way. Brass bullet in the stomach. All right now."

"Where are you going next?"

"To stay with you."

"Excellent."

Ommony pulled out a gold watch that must have been an heirloom, because nobody nowadays would buy such a thing.

"Seventy-two minutes. One A. M. train."

"Ready when you are."

The fact that they had not met for nearly four years was as unimportant as the water that had tumbled during that time over Poona *bund*. They resumed where they had left off, those two, hardly troubling to exchange remarks over a whisky and soda at the bar, then striding side by side into the darkness to interrupt gambling by candle-light and send their "boys" in search of baggage.

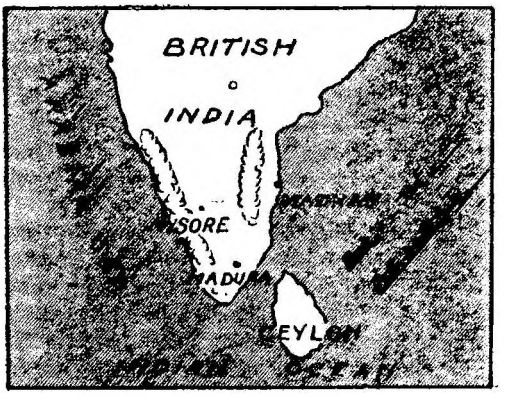
Servants and baggage went in a *tikka-gharri* to the station, but they walked, characteristically saying no good-byes. Ten words from each of them and their servants went about the business of going somewhere—anywhere—with that unsurprized contentment that is the homage of elementary intelligence to men who know their minds. There is more than art or violence in being well served; more also than money payment.

They had not more than enough time to catch the train, but you could have hurried an era just as easily as either of those men. Two things—knowledge of the exact number of minutes at their disposal, and an all-absorbing interest—took them out of their way through winding streets instead of straight down the high road to the station. Add to that the faith in their servants of two men who have kept faith, and you have their whole motive. But it was promptly misinterpreted.

INDIA never sleeps. And because the long night of her subjection to innumerable despotisms has probably begun to wane and life moves in her hidden roots, night is the time when secrets draw near the surface. Just as you can hear the jungle grow at night, so you can see India seeing visions, if you look. Not very many trouble to look.

There were voices on the roofs. Guttering candles made a beautiful golden glow among shadows where only hate lurked. Light emerged from the chinks of shutters, sound crowding through after it—mostly of men talking all at once, but now and then of one man's voice declaiming. The gloom of the narrow streets, with the occasional ineffectual-looking "constabeel" under a lamp at a corner, produced an unreal effect as if they were walking in a dream.

A door opened violently as they passed, and a copper-colored man with his long hair coiled in a chignon and sweat running in streams down his naked, hairy belly, stood boldly with a hand on each door-post and eyed them as agreeably as a caged beast eyes its captors. His eyeballs rolled, and he spat into the gutter. Then, turning with slobber on his jaws as if frenzy had



gone beyond control, he shouted in the Maharati tongue to the men in the room behind him:

"Come and look at them! O brothers, come and look at them! How long shall we endure? Those lords, eh! See them swagger down the streets! We labor to pay their salaries, but——"

Some one pulled him in by the waist-cloth and the door slammed shut. The constable at the next corner, who had heard every word of the tirade, saluted rigidly and stared after King and Ommony in a sort of dumb perplexity. He was not obliged to salute them, for they were not in uniform.

"I've been up and down India recently," said King. "It's like that everywhere. It

isn't honest discontent that common sense and guts could deal with. It's something else. The troops are beginning to get it. They're wondering. Did you notice that policeman? Nothing but his pay between him and anarchy. What's happening?"

"God knows," said Ommony.

"Of course, living in your forest——"

"You can learn a lot in a forest."

"Granted. But——"

"This, for instance—goats will keep a forest down. Control the goats, and they do it good; it grows. Turn them loose and they kill it. That's us. We controlled the goats for a hundred years, and India grew. We were so busy policing goats that we overlooked other things. The forest's getting out of hand."

"I often think we English are the blindest fools that breathe," said King.

"Queer, isn't it?" Ommony answered. "I've puzzled over it. Read a lot—'specially foreign criticism. But the critics don't help. They only sneer at our faults, as if we weren't aware of them. The nearest I've come to explaining it is that we're so busy policing goats—jailing robbers—passing cautious laws—cleaning unhealthy places—that we can't see beyond that. We're near-sighted."

"And where there is no vision—" King suggested.

"No foresight, yes."

"—the people perish. May I die with my boots on!"

"Amen!" said Ommony. "Some of us will, some won't. There'll be all kinds of us, in all sorts of predicaments when that hour comes. If that brass bullet didn't let all the steam out of you we'd better put on speed now. We've exactly seven minutes."

CHAPTER III

"I'll prove to you there's not much wrong with Mahommed Babar."

OMMONY being official overlord of half-a-million acres of forest and stream, he and King travelled in a compartment all to themselves. Characteristically Ommony asked no questions. Their car was cut off, bunted and shunted from one track to another. They smoked, said little and were fed from lukewarm tin cans at intervals by servants who climbed monkey-fashion along the foot-board for two long days and three longer nights. And at last they left the train at dawn at a station kept by one lone *babu*, who was station master, telegrapher, freight agent, porter and every other thing. He looked glad to see Ommony and told him the gossip of the line, which was mainly about sudden death, that being Moplah country.

A decrepit *tonga* waited, drawn by two nags not yet quite old enough for pension, and driven by a man, most of whose property was on his back (three yards of cotton cloth less wear and tear) and he contented. That *tonga* was the last link for a while with the life that is smothered under stiff shirts.

"Feels good here," said King, with his knees nearly up to his chin on the back seat, and the early morning flies making patterns on his sleeves and helmet.

"This is home," Ommony answered, lighting a cigar beside him, with his heels on piled-up luggage on a level with his head. "I hope to die here, if there's anything in death. Heaven 'll be a forest. Lots to do; lots of time to do it. By George, it's going to be hot among the trees!"

A rut-worn red earth track began to ribbon out behind them. The forest closed in on either hand, and with it the stifling breath of trees with interwoven smells that are an open book to all the animals and some men. Ommony brushed the flies away with a horsetail switch and wallowed in contentment, while the driver tossed back for his consumption snatches of fact—true journalism—a bulletin of forest happenings since Ommony went away.

"There was a little fire near the place where Govind's pony broke a leg two seasons back. Dhyan Singh took a gang from the village and put it out."

"That shall be remembered."

"Govind has offended all the gods. It is true that his pony's leg mended, which was wonderful. But the beast was lame, nevertheless, and three days back a panther sprang at twilight."

"Which panther?" demanded Ommony.

"The black one, *sahib*, who slew the old boar in the millet patch beyond the charcoal burner's. He slew the pony and ate the throat part——"

"That one always did begin at the throat."

"As the *sahib* says. Govind went to see what might yet be recovered. While he was gone Govind's wife ran away with Hir Lal, son of the blacksmith."

"I warned Govind he would beat that woman once too often."

"True. I heard the furious names the *sahib* called him. Mahommed Babar, seeing the *sahib* was absent, went after Hir Lal and made him give the woman back. Hir Lal recovers, but there is no skin or comfort on the backs of his thighs and loins."

"Did Mahommed Babar use my riding whip?"

"Surely, *sahib*. How else should he have authority? He took it from its nail in the *sahib's* bedroom, daring greatly lest a greater evil happen. And now Mahommed Babar knows not how to mend the broken whip. Nevertheless, Govind has his woman back."

"What else?"

"Govind beat her. She is as weary of blows as Hir Lal, who is a great rascal."

"There are others! What else has happened?"

"Shere Ali has changed his hunting ground. He hunts now near the village and the people fear he will kill cattle. So they send six men when the cows go grazing, and work which needs doing is not done, because, though they bring the cows home too early, the six men say they are weary, which is a lie, but who shall prove it?"

"I'll interview Shere Ali!"

"Soon, *sahib!* Soon! That tiger grows too bold. The wolves have been hunting over Guznee way of late."

So it went, detail by detail the account of all the little things that, multiplied ad infinitum by the little things of elsewhere, make a world of news.

King screwed himself back into his corner and reveled in the only genuine rest, which is anticipation of the good time coming. Every great natural gift includes the consciousness of spaces in between events. The music of the spheres is not all noise. There are interludes. Only the men who understand true time can leap into action at exactly the right moment.

THE forest closed in, and in, until they drove in a golden shaft between walls of darkness. The rank, lush after-monsoon smell had begun to yield to the hot-weather tang that gives birth to fire without rhyme or reason and keeps the naked gangs alert. Suddenly the drive curved and opened into a wide clearing with Ommony's house in the midst and all the evidences of a white man's twenty-year-long vigil in a dark man's country. An obvious bachelor's house. The flowers and vegetables stood in straight, alternate rows. Saddles and such things, polished to perfection, rested on brackets on the front veranda, where three dogs were chained. A boy loosed the dogs as soon as the *tonga* came in sight, and the next few minutes were a tumult punctuated by shouts of: "Down, sir! Down! Get off my chest!"

There was the first so-called police dog ever imported into India, an Irish wolfhound nearly as high at the shoulder as a native pony, and the inevitable, quite iniquitous wire-haired terrier.

Then came the servants, observing precedence — butler, hamal, dog-boy, dhobie, sweeper, three gardeners—all salaaming with both hands, and Mahommed Babar standing straight as a ramrod over to the right because he was of the north and a Moslem and would not submit to comparison with Hindus. He gave the military salute, although he was not in any kind of uniform; and in his left hand, that the world might see he was not afraid, he held the broken riding-whip. Having saluted his master he came to pay homage to King, who promptly shook hands with him.

"Are you satisfied?" King asked him.

"Surely. There is no such *sahib* as Ommony *bahadur*. But for these Hindus——"

"But for the night it would be all daytime, wouldn't it!" King answered laughing.

"*Sahib*, speak a word for me."

"Are you out of favor?" King answered. "What have you done?"

"*Sahib*, I am a Moslem of the North, and these——"

"You must face your own music," King answered. "I'm your friend to the gallows' side, if need be. I can't save you from yourself."

"The *sahib* is still my friend?"

King nodded.

"Enough. I am the *sahib's* friend."

King and Ommony went into the shuttered sitting-room, where several thousand faded books in glass cases provided most of the furniture. But there was a tiger-skin on one wall, three deep wicker armchairs, and a desk crowded with papers under lead weights. Through an open door was a view of Ommony's iron bed with its legs set in

jam-pots filled with insect-poison. The dogs came and flopped down on the floor with their legs out straight, panting. In his own house at last Ommony opened up.

"Here I am," he said. "Now. Tell me first why you left the army."

"Too many things a soldier can't do. Too many over you. They spoil every game by wanting to know at the wrong moment," King answered.

"How did you solve the money problem?"

"Found an American millionaire, whose passion is pulling plugs. To use his own term, he hired me. I've a free hand."

"You didn't come all this way just to tell me that," said Ommony. "Do you want some good advice? There isn't any! I can show you what I consider a good example, but you'll have to be the judge of it."

"I want information."

"Ask and it shall be lied unto you. I can give you my opinions about alleged facts. I believe 'em, but I may be as wide of the mark as the pigs that perish."

"Who's running the ructions here in Moplah country?" King asked. "Who is at the bottom of the chimney, making smoke?"

"Whoever it is has made fire," Ommony answered. "Moplahs are fanatics. Fire's under 'em. I turned in a report a year ago, and was told to mind my forest. I hate to be obedient as much as any man, but I like the forest and don't like politics. Besides, I had broken my own rule, which is never to offer advice. I lay down. If a man comes all this way and asks, he either wants to hear me talk or has something of his own to say; that's different. There's fire under the Moplahs. They'll cut loose soon."

"Did you go to Poonah to say that?"

"I went on leave because short leave was due. Chose Poonah, although I hate the place, because I knew Fludd would be there. He could do more than any one else to remedy this situation. Accepted dinner at the brute's house. Talked with his wife and daughter, who belong to all the societies for restricting other people. Hoping of course that he would ask for my opinion. He didn't. Here I am again, minus my leave and eight hundred rupees for expenses. All he said on the subject of the Moplahs was that they're sending Judge Wilmshurst to investigate the rumored persecution of Hindus. He thought I'd be pleased to hear it. I didn't try to look pleased, so he changed the subject."

"And Wilmshurst will bring his wife," King suggested.

"Undoubtedly. Daren't leave her!"

"D'you care if I use this as head-quarters?" King asked. "Wilmshurst will be intensely legal. He'll hang so many, and imprison so many, adjusting the proportions nicely——"

"And brother Moplah will do the rest!" Ommony agreed. "Headquarters what for? Reception committee? I forbid Mrs. Wilmshurst the house!"

"Plug-pulling campaign. I want to keep the peace in spite of Wilmshurst."

Ommony laughed, genuinely, making almost no noise but throwing his head back.

"All right. What else?"

"What is the matter with Mahommed Babar?"

"Nothing. He's a first-class man. Between the devil and the deep sea. As the son of his father he wants to stand with us. As a pious Moslem owing money to a Hindu *shroff* he naturally believes death is the dose for Hindus and now's the time. Why? Has he said anything?"

King repeated what the northerner had said when they arrived. Ommony nodded.

"He's all right. He's being tempted almost beyond endurance, but I'd rather trust him than Wilmshurst. Have you seen him out with tiger?"

The nearest to tiger-hunting that King had done for years was stalking greased Afridis in the northern mist.

"All right," said Ommony, "I'll prove to you there's not much wrong with Mahommed Babar. Do us all good. You and I need exercise. Mahommed's nerve may be going if he thinks he needs speaking for—moral nerve. Physically he's harder than either of us. Have to interview Shere Ali anyhow. Fancy any gun from that rack?"

That is as exciting as being invited to choose your own horse out of a bunch. There followed five minutes of absolute delight, Ommony remarking on the virtues of each weapon as King lifted them down in turn. He selected an express.

"Good," said Ommony with one of his curt nods. "I'd sooner you'd take that than any. Precaution—self-defense; that's all. Stop him if you have to. Shere Ali's in his prime. Preserves the jungle balance. Be a shame to kill him. Are you ready? No, no dogs this trip. No, no *shikarris*. No,

no bearers. Only Mahommed Babar and the *jungli*."

The *jungli* needed no summons. Naked except for a leather belt, he lived, moved and had his being within earshot in hope of a command from Ommony, and, like the dog, followed unless forbidden.

CHAPTER IV

"Fear and the heart of a fool are one!"

ROUGHLY speaking Ommony's forest is fan-shape, with his bungalow in a clearing near the handle of the fan. The jungle is hilly and in many places impenetrable, but fire-lanes have been cut through and through it, and the local villagers' main source of revenue is laboring to keep those clear. They are also the best feeding ground for the village goats, which is the reason why Ommony set forth to interview Shere Ali.

None of the lanes went straight, because of the conformation of the ground. They could seldom look back two hundred yards and see anything but solid jungle with heat shimmering up from it toward a brassy sky. Except the two white men, followed by Mahommed Babar and trailed by the naked *jungli*, the only moving objects were kites circling above the trees, who followed the view of two rifles on general principles. The *jungli* displayed scant interest, his bronze head was like a gladiator's, too familiar with fanged death to treat it seriously until face to face—unintelligent, perhaps, in some ways.

On the other hand, Mahommed Babar's manly northern features—rather hawk-eyed he was, rather hook-nosed, and the corners of his mouth, scarcely suggested under the dark beard, were rather cynical—appeared preoccupied. Not nervous. Not in the least nervous. Bent on something—perhaps arguing with himself.

"We may have to execute Shere Ali," said Ommony. "I hope not. He shall have fair trial. His dam came down from Khalsa ghaut and hunted the forest for nine years before she killed a woman at the water-hole, and I had to do my bit. That's her skin on the wall in my sitting-room. I had this fellow in my arms when he was about the size of a family cat. Huh! He'd purr when you stroked him and claw and bite you the moment you stopped. The *jungli* found him, and we fed him chickens and mice until he was old enough to take his own chance in the jungle."

"Pity to kill him," King agreed. "What does he get away with?"

"A full-grown buck or a doe about every other day. If it weren't for him they'd graze in one place until the ground was sick of them. But what with him and the wolves they keep moving and the young stuff has a chance. However, he's taking to goats, apparently, and that's the first step on the road to murder."

"What's the reason?" King wondered.

"Another tiger probably. Shere Ali may have a yellow streak. If another male tiger has elected to hunt this forest Shere Ali may be afraid to challenge him. No wild animal is dangerous to man until fear gets its work in. I hope he proves himself not guilty. Magnificent beast. Too good for a viceroy. I was hoping to keep him for the Prince."

They might have been strolling in the Botanical Gardens for all the apparent precaution they took. But Ommony knew his men, as well as his forest. At the end of a hour's steady tramping the *jungli* took the lead uninvited, armed with nothing but a small flat tom-tom and a stick. Ommony said something to him in a language that sounded hardly human, and he disappeared immediately like a shadow among the trees.

Two minutes after that they emerged into a clearing of several acres with an almost dry stream winding through it. There were occasional bushes, but the open space sloped southward and from where King and Ommony stood they had a clear view of the whole of it with the light on their left hand.

"He'll come that way," said Ommony, nodding toward the right front.

As if in answer to him there came a short, sharp rattling noise three or four times repeated. It was almost like a woodpecker's note.

"What the devil is that?" demanded King.

"The *jungli's* tom-tom. It's made of tortoiseshell and lizard-skin. He can drive anything with it—even pig."

Mahommed Babar announced his presence with a cough and came closer. Ommony looked at him and then up at the kites, and laughed.

"The Romans used to call the birds good prophets. What do you think of them?" he asked. "They expect you to die. Will you oblige them, Mahommed?"

"*Inshallah, sahib.*" (If God wills.)

The tom-tom rattled again two or three times, and Ommony seemed familiar with its code, for he motioned to King to take his stand on the far side of the lane by which they had entered the clearing. He took the near side and stood with legs apart and his rifle balanced loosely in the crook of his right arm.

"Shere Ali will be here in a minute," he said. "I want to try him out, Mahommed. Will you go and stand fifty yards away—not on rising ground—the lower you are the more helpless you'll look. See if he'll kill man without being attacked."

Mahommed Babar glanced at King, who detected the northerner's look of unfinished argument. It was not fear. It might be doubt.

"Take my rifle, if you like, and I'll go instead," King volunteered.

Mahommed Babar smiled. So did Ommony. The rattle of the tom-tom was repeated five or six times.

"Better be quick, whichever's going," said Ommony, and if there had been any doubt that ended it. Mahommed's face cleared. Those five words of Ommony's, added to King's offer had established him as an equal as far as essentials were concerned. He moved his hand cavalierly and strode forward to play in the presence of death, unarmed. The tom-tom rattled again, three times, more loudly. King opened his breech to make sure, being an army man. Ommony knew. His rifle lay along his forearm and he never once glanced at it.

MAHOMMED BABAR walked toward the apex of an isosceles triangle, of which Ommony and King were the base, and stopped at the end of fifty yards, looking up. There was a lump of ground in front of him, three or four yards high, with a tangle of dead bushes on top. Shere Ali had come silently from the direction Ommony predicted and stood looking down at all three men with his head thrust out through a clump of high grass. King's hands fidgeted with the Express. Ommony remained stock-still.

The more or less unexpected had happened, as always in tiger land. Shere Ali looked down on Mahommed Babar, measuring the distance, snarling, one ear forward and the other back, and looked altogether too long for his own reputation. A tiger whose hand was not against man would have taken the clear road to safety along the watercourse, after one swift survey.

Then Mahommed Babar did either a very bold and confident or a very afraid and foolish thing. He began retreating, backward. King swore between his teeth and raised his rifle mid-way. Ommony continued to stand still. Mahommed came very slowly, feeling his way behind him with each foot—trod in a hole, lost balance, staggered, and fell.

The rest was all instantaneous. Yellow as sunlight, in his prime, magnificent, Shere Ali launched himself like a flash to wreak murder. Both rifles spoke at once. An express bullet and a 404 went home and the tiger fell short, writhing with a smashed shoulder and paralyzed hind legs. Getting to his knees Mahommed Babar stared across a scant yard into the brute's eyes, and Shere Ali struck with the one uninjured forepaw, missing by inches and then trying to struggle nearer. Aiming very carefully King sent his second bullet exactly between the tiger's eyes.

Trial, sentence and execution were all over in less than sixty seconds, and the *jungli* appeared between two trees, looking about as enthusiastic as a stuffed museum specimen. His only comment was to rattle his strange little tom-tom; then he went to count the dead brute's claws and whiskers. Ommony must have moved, for it was his bullet that smashed Shere Ali's backbone and paralyzed the hind legs, but he was standing exactly as he stood at first, with the rifle lying on his forearm, legs apart.

He ejected the empty cartridge-case, reloaded and strode forward, for one thing to make sure that the *jungli* did not steal claws and whiskers; for the superstition is that those things are good against devils, which, as every *jungli* knows, are all too plentiful. King reloaded the express and followed Ommony, neither man having spoken a word since Shere Ali showed himself. It was Ommony who spoke at last. He came to a halt midway and felt for his cigar-case.

"That beats ——," he said wondering.

Mahommed had got to his feet and, glancing at the tiger once to make sure, had faced about. Presumably he was waiting for Ommony and King, but the old look of unfinished argument was on his face, with irresolution added. He glanced almost furtively from one man to the other—moved a pace or two—seemed to hesitate—and then started running. He made a circuit and disappeared at top speed down the lane they had come by.

"There's something I can't explain," said Ommony, as King caught up with him. "No smoking in the forest. Care to chew a cigar? You see that beast? He had no excuse for killing man. He wasn't hurt. He hadn't been driven far enough to make him nervous. I think he came by a yellow streak when we raised him by hand. But where and how did Mahommed Babar come by his? In a month Shere Ali would have been killing children at the water-holes. But who'd have thought Mahommed Babar would cut and run? Can you explain it?"

King shook his head.

"Somehow I don't believe it yet," he answered. "He and I were brats at Dera Ismail Khan. He had guts as a youngster. We gave that tiger benefit of doubt until he actually sprang. I vote the same for the *rissaldar's* son."

"Why did he leave the army?" countered Ommony.

"Resigned. Suspected of politics. Nothing was proved. I sent him to you to get him as far away as possible from Peshawar. There might have been trouble up there if any one had thrown the resignation in his teeth. He was champion of the native army with the saber—ambidextrous—capable of fighting three at once. I've seen him use two swords at once for practise. Marvelous—footwork. Shifts his ground so that one opponent is always stymied, and sometimes two. Hot man in a tight place."

Ommony checked the count of claws and whiskers, and sent the *jungli* for a gang to skin the tiger and bring in the hide. He and King kept guard until the gang came, talking intermittently, swiping at flies with their handkerchiefs.

"Mahommed Babar has a claim on me," said King. "I wish I had a notion what the real matter with him is."

"What *is* a man that thou are mindful of him?" quoted Ommony. "I know a little. He had been pestered out of his senses by the Moplah malcontents, who lack nothing but military training to make them almost invincible among these wooded hills. Mahommed Babar's a bit of a fanatic, and they've fed him the Koran until his blood boils. On top of that some of these gentry have been to Peshawar, and one of them heard a story of some insult offered to Mahommed's father by an Englishman. Not sure the Englishman isn't supposed to have killed his father. Anyhow, he spread the yarn hereabouts, of course, and they've been rubbing that into Mahommed Babar along with the Koran. I told 'em in Calcutta a year ago that the Moplahs would cut loose at the first opportunity. Maybe Mahommed Babar is opportunity. Was he a good soldier?"

"First rate," King answered. "Two campaigns. Promoted for gallantry. Nothing wrong with him except a cursed bent for politics. He never could understand that a soldier mustn't touch that stuff."

"Soldier or any other wise man!" Ommony answered. " 'Specially in India. Well, I'm afraid Mahommed Babar's lien on your friendship won't help him much. Did you see his eyes just now, before he took to his heels? We'd pulled a thorn out of him a minute or two before. He walked out like a man and a brother to meet Shere Ali. Then he and the tiger both had a yellow fit. Mahommed Babar knew we saw him flinch. Thought we'd be scornful."

Ommony got off the rock he was sitting on, saw the *jungli* gang coming in the distance, and turned to meet King's eyes.

"I'm afraid we've found him out," he said. "He's an enemy, or if not the next Moplah he meets will convert him."

He gave instructions about the skinning and he and King walked back, not saying much, nor exactly aware of the forest in the way they had been. The gold had gone out of the morning. Something drab had entered in—nothing a man could explain, even to himself. Very soon another tiger would find his way into that part of the forest and Ommony would have the delight of discovering his lair, and of knowing where he hunted day by day. North, south, east and west there were loads of men as fit to make friends of as Mahommed Babar,

and for that matter King had friends everywhere. Nevertheless, the day was changed. News did not improve it.

THEY were met about a half-mile from the house by two of Ommony's servants, who came running to report that Mahommed Babar had packed his bedding roll and ridden away at a gallop on his own gray pony. Furthermore, that certain chiefs of the Moplahs had come for a conference and were awaiting Ommony on his front veranda.

"Any men with them?" he asked.

"Nay, *sahib*. Three chiefs without followers. But they act boldly, as if their followers are not far off. Moreover, since when did a Moplah chief go unattended? Therefore, being afraid, we sent the *hamal* and two gardeners to discover where their followers are hiding. They have not come back, and we are more afraid."

"Fear and the heart of a fool are one," said Ommony, quickening his pace.

As they neared the house the third gardener met them with a message from the butler.

"The three men from Malapuram entered the house to help themselves to guns and ammunition, *sahib*. The butler forbade, but they threatened him. They were prevented by the dogs."

The dogs were still on duty when King and Ommony came in view of the veranda, the terrier standing gamely between the legs of the other two and making most of the noise. The Moplah chiefs, with the fanatical Moslem's loathing for dogs, showed their teeth almost as prominently as the beasts did and were standing herded together at one end of the veranda with hands on the hilts of most un-Indian looking swords. Their sword-belts, rather like Sam Browns, were surely never made in India.

Ommony called the dogs off, rewarded them with curt approval, and sat down on a sort of garden seat between the sitting-room window and the front door. King took a seat beside him, crossed his long legs, lighted a cigar and proceeded to look indifferent. The Moplahs approached, slowly recovering their poise.

They looked nearly as un-Indian as the swords they wore. They had the long, Semitic Arab nose and the ineradicable Arab stealthiness added to truculence, inherited from Aram ancestors. One of them had red dye in his beard, which increased the Semitic suggestion.

Nobody knows what Moplah really means, or exactly whence the turbulent fanatics came, but they invaded India three centuries after the prophet Mahommed's flight from Mecca and ever since have been Moslems in the middle of a Hindu land. Moreover in that impenetrable mountain jungle they have increased to a million strong—a million thorns in the side of Brahma and the Indian government—rebels to a man in every generation.

Their approach to Ommony was after the manner of their kind—not deferent. On the other hand, it was not insolent, although there are men in the East who call everything insolence that does not include obsequiousness. Theirs was rather the approach of peacemakers, who come to reason with a weaker adversary to save him from his own mistakes, and Ommony, who knows men as understandingly as he knows animals, chuckled as he signed to them to sit down.

They squatted before him with their backs against the veranda rail—proud, fierce-looking fellows. Change their Arab-looking garments, give them a hair-cut, and you could imagine them driving cattle in Mullingar (forgetting, of course, the tell-tale noses). They waited for Ommony to speak, for manners is the breath of all the East.

"Have you come to serve notice on me to quit?" he asked them in their own tongue.

The man in the midst with the red beard took up the tale at once.

"Father of Forests—that was what the one word meant—it is better that you go. Your house and your goods shall be spared. Go, and come back afterwards. Only leave the guns. We came for the guns and cartridges."

They knew their man—not quite so well as he knew them, but broadly nevertheless. Otherwise they would have beaten about the bush for an hour first. Ommony answered without a suggestion of superiority—which is the secret of real rule.

"The dogs would not let you take the guns."

"True. But now you are here and have understanding."

"Am I less than a dog?" wondered Ommony.

"Nay, *sahib*!"

"Then I, also, will not let you have the guns."

That was final. All three men recognized it. If he had lorded it over them, or argued, or threatened, there would have been a false note, which would have led to dispute, hot words and quite likely murder. But he stated facts simply, and they understood.

"Father of Forests, you can not fight against all of us. We are many. We rise in honor of the Khalifate, which is being sacrificed by the British for the sake of Hindus."

"As I've told you a score of times, you know nothing about international politics." Ommony answered. "You've been lied to by professional agitators, whose salaries are paid by the same foreigners who sent you those swords and sword-belts. Whoever enters politics is a fool. I have told you that often."

"You will be a fool if you fight against us, *sahib*."

"I don't intend to," said Ommony. "I shall stay here in my forest, on duty." He said "my forest" with the unconscious arrogance that came of having served the forest faithfully for twenty years. It was really the forest that owned him.

"But—but if harm comes?"

"Then my blood will be on your heads. I have been your friend. I never harmed one of you."

"That is true. Allah be witness, that is true. But if we take the guns and ammunition?"

"Allah will witness that also. It will be over my dead body."

"Ommon-ee *sahib*, that must not be."

"Don't try to take the guns then."

"But we need them."

"So do I."

"Oh. If you need them. Ah. That is straight talk." The three heads whispered together for a minute, looking devilish sly as they nodded, arriving at decision. "You will not give the guns to the Hindus?"

"No."

"Nor the Brahmans? They are worse than Hindus."

"No."

"Good. That is satisfactory. You have always been a friend to us, Ommon-ee. You know our Koran better than our own priests do. You have known many of our secrets and have not told."

"That isn't true," said Ommony. "I have told the Government in Calcutta, in Otticamund and in Simla all I knew of your secrets. I have warned them of your intentions. They told me to come back here and mind my forest. I did."

The Moplahs laughed. That was the type of joke that tickled them, for they did not doubt for a single second the deliberate truth of every word that Ommony uttered. (You can make your word worth more than Government paper at the end of twenty years if you try hard enough.) A government refusing to believe the reports of its own best forester—that was humor. They cackled. A forester knows everything, or should. If he doesn't, the trees will make him so lonely that he will go mad, and from madness to the devil is only one step.

"Will the government send troops to protect your house?" they asked.

"I hope not," said Ommony.

"Then, *sahib*, we must mount a guard to make sure the Hindus do not come and take the guns away."

"When do you begin?" asked Ommony.

They whispered again. This time they were longer reaching a decision, but they did not lower their voices much, and Ommony could easily have overheard if he had cared to. Obvious cutthroats though they were, they were rather like children playing at secrets in front of their nurse.

"Will you tell your Government?" the red-bearded one asked at last.

"Certainly," said Ommony.

"Ah! Then we will not answer."

"All right. My servants will give you food," said Ommony, by way of dismissing them. But they had not quite finished.

"Will you report on this interview?"

"Of course," said Ommony.

"We do not guarantee the messenger's life!"

"I will be the messenger. I myself will walk to the station and send a tar,"* answered Ommony.

Humor appealed to all three of them again simultaneously. They cackled.

"The *sahib* will weary himself in vain. The wire is cut!"

Ommony raised his eyebrows.

"The *babu* will send my message by the next train," he answered.

"The *babu*, who was a Hindu and would not recant, is dead of a cut throat," said

* *Telegram.*

red-beard pleasantly. "Moreover, the train will not go, because the rails are torn up."

"Oh, all right," answered Ommony. "No need then to tell the Government. They probably know already. Food is waiting for you. You have my leave to go."

CHAPTER V

"Loyalty to whom—to what?"

GOVERNMENTS are like earthquakes. They sleep for protracted periods and then wake suddenly. Waking, they blunder expensively and—*cui bono?*

The easiest way to wake a government is to cut the railway and the telegraph. The Moplahs did not mean that, naturally. Being simple sons of stream and forest their idea had been, as usual once in a generation, to convert a few hundred thousand Hindus by fear, to make a horrid example of as many conscientious objectors as could be caught, and to keep the detested British Government afar off by severing communications.

Whereas, of course, if they had let trains and messages go through they would have gained ten days or so for unhindered violence. Nobody would have believed the alarmist reports until long after scores of Hindu villages had ceased to exist. So the Moplahs threw away their best trump card when they tore up the railway line.

To the uninitiated in such matters a damaged track looks serious, especially when the rioters—as the Moplahs were described at first—have removed the spare rails to be made into bullets, swords and what not else. Actually it was less than nine hours before the first train got through and reached Ommony's wayside station. He was sitting at dinner alone, when a hot, red-headed military man rode up from the station followed by two mounted orderlies. Hair had been rubbed off their horses' rumps by contact with the inside of a cattle-truck, but otherwise—except for the redness of the officer's face—there was nothing about them that suggested emergency.

The officer shouted from the saddle. Ommony sent out the butler to invite him in to dinner.

"You're a cool one I must say," said the officer, striding in. "Or didn't you know?"

"Have a drink," said Ommony.

"The Moplahs are 'out.'"

"Sit down. Eat and drink. There are no Moplahs under the table," said Ommony.

The cavalryman ignored the invitation, but rather bridled at the jest.

"Haven't you a man named King here—Athelstan King?"

"No."

"He arrived by train with you this morning. Where is he now?"

"If I knew I wouldn't tell you. Martial law yet?"

"Not yet."

"Neither King nor I are military men. He resigned his commission, you know. Sorry," said Ommony.

"I'm Major Pierson."

"Sit down. Eat. Drink. You're wasting my merry mood."

The cavalryman took a chair and helped himself to whisky.

"Merry mood? Great Scott! Yes, thanks, I'll eat. Are you simply a satyr, well-fed and isolated? I'm in command of an armored train patrolling the relaid track between here and Malapuram. I want information."

"So do I. We all do," said Ommony. "King and I went to the station before noon and buried as much of the *babu's* corpse as we could find. The Moplah chiefs were here this morning and gave me leave to live. They agreed not to steal my guns. King painted his face and tired his hair until no wild Moplah in all the Nilghiris could outmopple him. He's gone—vamoosed—vanished—napoo."

"What about Mohammed Babar? He's on my list."

"Gone too."

"Where?"

"Ask Allah! King set out to find him. Now eat, drink and tell me news."

"There isn't any. This affair won't amount to much. Headquarters have wired for Judge Wilmshurst to come and hold an investigation, but the old boy had already started. My orders are to bring in any one I find along the line who feels frightened, with special reference to yourself, King, Mohammed Babar and one or two others up the line."

Ommony looked straight into the Major's eyes and deliberately blew up, crashing his open hand down on the table until the plates and bottles jumped.

"I shall stay here. I told those opinionative asses at headquarters—in Calcutta, Ooty, Poona—sent word to Simla. Now you. This is the biggest show the Moplahs ever staged. Not going to be. Is!"

"Who's running it?" asked the cavalryman, with frank incredulity. "Savages always fail for lack of leadership. Have they hired a new Napoleon from the Army and Navy Stores?"

"That's a question for Headquarters," Ommony answered. "Scores of Moplahs were in France—sapper and pioneer units. Learned trench digging and lots else. I warned the Government they've got bombs, modern rifles, ammunition and even uniforms."

"Got 'em where?"

"Abroad. France, Italy, Japan, the U. S. A."

"Who paid? Moplahs haven't any money."

"Whoever is running India's bid for independence paid. Best money's worth in Asia! Brother Moplah's going to keep a whole division busy. If he only had planes he'd raid Calicut. It's his turn. Hasn't staged a good show for thirty years. Do himself proud this time. Cares no more for brass hats and army corps than my terrier does for a steam-roller. He's been told that if he'll engage the British army for a month the whole of the North will rise at the British rear. They've promised brother Moplah half the loot and all the Hindu converts he can make. So he's out, and the British army's in for it!"

"You'd better come away then," said the cavalryman with the inevitable nurse-instinct that all soldiers feel toward civilians.

"Buncombe! I'm your only possible liaison with the Moplahs. You can't exterminate 'em. We've nobody to blame but ourselves."

"What for, pray?"

"Being English. Osseous formations on the occiput."

"Well, we can't help that."

"No. On the whole we're rather proud of it. Do you think you could so far penetrate the brass hats at headquarters as to make them see the wisdom of leaving me here?" said Ommony. "We're awfully proud of muddling through, you know. Tell them it would be Nelsonic rashness; that should turn the trick. I will act as liaison officer."

"If you like to call that a message, I'll deliver it," said the cavalryman. "Suppose you put it in writing. Eh? What?"

Ommony laughed. "I see myself! You might add, will you, unofficially, of course, that as things are likely to move swiftly my permission to remain here ought to be granted definitely within a few hours. How about tomorrow noon?"

"What d'you mean? Is that a threat?"

"From several points of view the Moplahs might do worse than kidnap me."

Major Pierson stared at Ommony, and Ommony smiled back with unquestionably genuine amusement.

"You see now why I won't put my demands in writing, don't you? They're demands. There's going to be wholesale murder, of course—bombs, machine-guns, bayonets—a beastly mess. Naturally we win. That's inevitable. I can prevent some of the fighting, and owe no obedience to the army. So either I get permission in writing before noon tomorrow to remain here—or the Moplahs kidnap me!"

Major Pierson's face became a mask—one of those obvious masks that announce to the wide world there is something to conceal.

"I'll deliver your message," he snorted, and Ommony chuckled.

"I shall be out when the answer comes," he said. "If it's 'Yes' I'll return to the bungalow. Otherwise I'll be kidnaped." He turned his head and whistled on a low note that carried amazingly. The dogs, sprawling on mats by the door, looked up but did not move; they knew that whistle.

THE *jungli*, naked except for a leather strap, appeared in the door and fidgeted. It was possible he might have come in if Ommony had ordered, but a room was too much like a trap for him to venture of his own free will. Ommony merely nodded in his direction.

"This is the man who will know where to find me. He'll wait at the station."

"Do'you think you're acting loyally?" asked the cavalryman, pushing aside a half-finished glass of whisky and soda and brushing away crumbs, as if Ommony's hospitality were now under suspicion.

"Loyally to whom—to what? I'm no soldier. The minute martial law's proclaimed I'm under the army's heel. They mean fight, and I know I can reduce the

fighting. Ergo, I make my bargain in advance. I'm sober and in earnest."

"Wouldn't you obey an order to come away?"

"I should never receive it!"

The *jungli* in the door still fidgeted. He had left his lizard-skin tom-tom and stick somewhere and was at a loss how to draw notice to himself. It was the dogs who first sensed the note of alarm; they growled and called Ommony's attention. He turned his chair about, and the *jungli* promptly squatted in the doorway with his eyes on Ommony's face but a sort of glance in reserve for the cavalryman. Ommony grunted a monosyllable and the *jungli* turned loose the floods of speech—little staccato freshets in his case that broke forth and were dry again. It was all about the cavalryman; that much was obvious even to the dogs, who watched him and were restless. The major, too, became impatient.

"Thus saith the Lord—but what?" he demanded.

Ommony grunted a dozen monosyllables and turned his chair again. The *jungli* disappeared. A big, winged insect dashed itself to death against the table lamp with an élan that almost broke the glass—first class cavalry tactics.

"Your two orderlies have disappeared," said Ommony.

Major Pierson overturned his chair in a hurry to get to the door.

"Nonsense!" he said. "They can't have gone far. Orderly! Oh, orderly!"

He ran down the veranda steps in the pitch darkness and stood still at the bottom, listening, but could hear nothing.

"Orderly! Oh, orderly! Where are you?"

There was no answer. His eyes were growing used to the dark so he strode forward, trying far-sightedly to penetrate the blackness where the line of trees began. Suddenly he stumbled, tried to recover, and fell headlong.

"My God! Ommony! You there, Ommony? Dead horses—two of 'em! Hot! Dead about a minute! Blood! By —— my hands are all sticky with it!"

"Better come back," advised Ommony from the veranda.

"Got to see where the men are. ——, if they're——"

"If you'll come back here I'll get your men for you."

Pierson wiped his hands on the dry grass and cocked his service revolver with an ostentatious click.

"What do you know about this?" he demanded, making his way back cautiously, peering sideways, trying to make out whether Ommony was armed. It was one of those panicky moments, euphemistically termed a crisis, when the army does things not easily explained in the hard light of tomorrow. Ommony recognized it.

"You'll be safe up here beside me," he said in deliberately commanding tones. (You can't safely plead with hysteria, especially in armed, grown men.) "Come on. I need your advice."

"I'll blow your head off if you try any tricks!" the major answered.

"Unfortunately I'm no use without my head! Come up," said Ommony. "Let's talk this over."

"Talk? You do as I say!" The major climbed the steps and tapped the muzzle of his revolver against the veranda railing. "Call your servants! Send two of them to the train to find out what's happening!"

"My servants have bolted," Ommony answered. He seemed not to see the revolver at all, although it was within a foot of him in the shaft of light that came by the window shade. "The butler brought coffee and followed the others for what they call tall timber in the West. The *jungli* has gone for your orderlies."

"You don't mean they ran too? For God's sake——"

"According to the *jungli* they were surprized, gagged, bound and carried off. He saw it."

"Good God! What's it all about?"

"The mystery is why the dogs didn't bark," said Ommony. "One of my servants must have attended to that. The dogs are above suspicion. So is the *jungli*."

The major sat down on the garden-seat between the door and window, pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his face. Then he shoved the revolver back into its holster.

"I say, was I beastly rude just now?" he asked.

"Not at all." Ommony produced his case, chose a cigar and offered him one.

"Thanks. I mean, wasn't I——"

"Men gone—horses dead—any man would flare up."

"Dashed decent of you to admit it. Some men would have— What's that noise?"

Out came the revolver and was cocked—quietly, meaning business.

"The *jungli's* drum. He's signaling. Listen."

There was no need to listen. You couldn't help hearing that peculiar, dry rattle. It penetrated like the note of the cicada.

"They'll be here in a minute," said Ommony. "D'you mind unloading that revolver?"

"What the devil! Do you think I'm——"

Ommony was much too wise to admit what he thought.

"I'm going to tell them we're unarmed."

"But suppose——"

"We'll know presently. Unload, please."

So the cavalryman unloaded, and that chance of accident was barred out. Ommony's hand closed in the dark on the empty revolver.

"Not in the holster. Always tell 'em the exact truth. Let me lay it down."

He laid it on the window-sill and strode forward to the head of the steps in the full yellow lamplight from the open door. All three dogs came and growled beside him with scruffs raised, and the terrier's sawed-off tail disappeared completely.

"The night's alive with 'em!" said Ommony. "Could your men scout as quietly? I tell you these Moplahs——"

A voice from the dark interrupted him.

"Oh, Ommon-ee!"

He leisurely lighted the cigar he had chosen two minutes before, and it occurred to the soldier for the first time that his host was in full evening dress—not dinner-jacket. Old-fashioned style. Stiff white shirt. It suited him so well that even out there in the jungle it looked perfectly in harmony.

"What do you want?" he said at last.

"Your tracker said you wish to speak with us. But you are not alone. We see a khaki-*sahib*. We see his pistol by the window."

"It is not loaded."

"That is a trick to tempt us."

"You have my leave to come up here and talk. You shall not be harmed."

"There are dead horses, Ommon-ee!"

"Very well," said Ommony. "I will go with this *sahib* and not come back."

There came the noise of hissed argument from the blackest shadow, and presently the speaker's voice was raised again.

"We want your promise there in no trick, Ommon-ee."

"There is none."

"No attack from the te-rain?"

"What orders did you give the train crew?" Ommony asked over his shoulder.

"Just to wait for me."

Ommony translated that news into the vernacular, but cautiously.

"The train-men have no orders to attack. But you must not attack the train."

That satisfied them. The three chiefs who had presented themselves that morning rose like goblins from the gloom and approached—grinning—undoubtedly pleased with themselves. They squatted uninvited in the pool of light before the door.

"Where are the Rajput orderlies?" demanded Ommony.

"They are not dead—yet, Ommon-ee."

They glanced at the major, but he missed the point, not knowing the dialect. Ommony came back promptly with a point that everybody understood.

"Produce those orderlies unharmed, or clear out!"

"But we make war, we Moplahs. They are prisoners—our first!"

"You make war in my clearing and call me friend?" he retorted.

"We have not touched you," red-beard answered lamely.

Ommony sat down beside the major and crossed his legs. He had won, and he knew it. All that remained was that they should know it too.

"The word of a Moplah is good or it is not good," he said abruptly.

"By Allah, it is very good!"

"This is sanctuary then. All who wish, of either side, have leave to come and go here unmolested."

"But Ommon-ee—they might come to make war here."

"Not while I live!" he answered. "Neither side shall make war here. Give back those prisoners."

"But Ommon-ee——"

"I have spoken."

They laid their heads together and whispered without much emphasis, there was so little to argue about.

"Very well, Ommon-ee."

The fellow with red in his beard raised his voice, and another man answered from the shadows. One of the three began to converse with Ommony, but he would not listen until the two prisoners were surrendered unhurt. So, as is said there was

once in heaven, there was silence for the space of half-an-hour—lighted by fire-flies and the glowing ends of two cigars. The dark was full of witnesses unquestionably, but even the usual jungle noises seemed to be suppressed for the occasion.

At last came the sound of footsteps and the voice of a native orderly reminding his captors that he had "told them so." He furthermore asserted they were pigs, and the night became instantly alive with recrimination. The shadows shrilled back with fifty voices that there would presently be no Hindu idolaters in Moplah country and the Rajput prisoners replied in kind. Ommony appealed to the major, who stood up and barked the order for attention. In perfect silence again the orderlies stood at the foot of the steps and saluted.

"Are both of you all right?" the major asked.

They were complete and unharmed, even to their small change, and admitted it reluctantly. They naturally thought that vengeance was in order, and it was pity to reduce the count in any way. Nevertheless, the fact was that although everything had been taken from them, all had been returned.

"Except the horses," remarked Ommony.

"They are dead," said the chief with the red beard.

"Have you horses that are fit for army remounts?" Ommony retorted.

"As Allah is our witness, we have no horses whatever, *sahib*."

"Then you must pay money. The horses were slain in this sanctuary after you had passed your word. You must pay. Everybody knows the price of an army remount."

"But we have no money with us, Ommon-ee."

"I don't care. Sign a promissory note, plus interest from date. Pay it here in my house whenever you like, or add it to the fines that the Government will levy after this foolishness is over. You must either pay now or sign."

"Very well, we will sign."

Ommony went into the house and wrote out a note for the proper amount.

"All three of you must sign," he said, handing them his fountain pen. Then, as he shook the paper to dry the signatures—

"One other thing."

"Nay, *sahib*, this is enough! We have done honorably."

"My servants have run away. One of them did as you told him and kept the dogs quiet while you seized those orderlies. Having obeyed you, he is yours. Keep him. Send the others back, and don't interfere with my servants again."

"Very well, Ommon-ee."

"And take away those horses. You have paid for them. We are not sweepers here to clean up after you! Leave the saddles and bridles."

The man with the red beard shouted and again the night became full of noise—grunting, many exclamations, much advice, and the sound of heavy bodies being dragged.

"You have my leave to go," said Ommony, and the three chiefs shook hands with him and went not quite so turbulent, but still looking fairly well pleased with themselves.

"By ——!" exclaimed the major. "May I be eternally —— if I ever saw anything like it! Mr. Ommony, if my report on this affair counts you'll be here whether you like it or not until the chiefs are all hanged and this extraordinary show is over!"

CHAPTER VI

"Engage the enemy more closely."

IN EVERY generation there are scores of men who can disguise themselves as natives of the East and get by undetected. The really rare men are those who can do it and regain their western heritage. It means something more than merely staining your whole skin black to act Othello. It is more like dying and being born again.

Athelstan King was dead to his own kind—to the past—to the world that knew him—possibly to the future. If he should die, they would say only this of him—that no man knew how he met his death, or why he courted it, and that few except Ommony had ever understood him. But that, too, is a most rare gift—the ability to go without praise and recognition. Ommony and King were both men who valued praise merely at its asset value. If it gave them command of more resources for the great game, good; if not, it bored them.

King limped a little, for the white man's feet grow soft in boots, however hard he uses them between-whiles. He looked so like Mohammed Babar from the rear that

even in broad daylight the Northerner's relatives might easily have jumped to the wrong conclusion. But it was dark in the jungle, although still fairly light overhead, and he held the end of a khaki turban between his teeth, as the men of that land all do when in haste; from in front, when he strode into the luminous gloom of a clearing, you could not have told whether or not he was bearded, and Mahommed Babar might have thought himself face to face with his own shadow.

A *jungli*, who had never seen King clothed and in his right mind, and was too incurious to be suspicious was leading jungle-fashion at a dog-trot, not boldly down the middle of the lanes, as King went, but flitting from shadow to shadow, afraid of the dark and of devils, but much more afraid to disobey Ommony—who owned both devils and forest, as every *jungli* knew.

King ran heavily. The *jungli* made no sound that any but an animal could hear. King breathed heavily. The *jungli*, like a phantom, seemed to do without breath. At intervals the woods resounded with the crash of falling branches, and at every one of those sounds the *jungli* would leap almost out of his skin, springing like Puck from side to side of the fire-lane. Now and then there would come the clear cry of a hunted animal, and at every one of those sounds King would stiffen tensely, but the *jungli* took no notice.

They did not speak, for they had no word in common, Ommony being one of half-a-dozen men who have ever learned the *jungli-bat*,* and very few *junglis* knowing anything except their own and the animals' language. Ommon-ee had spoken. The *jungli* showed the way, and thereafter would say nothing because he knew nothing and did not care to know.

Mahommed Babar doubtless believed himself beyond pursuit. Like all Northerners, and highlanders especially, he had an unconvincible contempt for Southern, and above all lowland ways. As Ommony's steward of supplies he had seen the *junglis* at their work reporting every incident in the forest including the tigers' and the leopards' meals, but that had not persuaded him that such folk could ever outwit a campaigner like himself.

Was he not born in the northern mists? Had he not scouted unseen on Allah's slag-heap by Quetta, where men are trained to outview the kites? Had he not been guide to the Guides* themselves? When such as he decide to vanish and leave no trace, there is less trace than a light wind leaves! Gone on a gray horse—that was the last the curious would know until it should suit him to enlighten them!

Nevertheless—four hours after he left it was told to Ommony that a panther had slain the gray horse while Mahommed Babar rested under a tree. Hairs from the mane and tail of the horse were brought in proof, together with a bit of fly-decked meat to show that the leopard had one eye-tooth missing.

An hour after that it was reported that Mahommed Babar stopped to pull a thorn out of his heel. It was even said from which heel and what kind of thorn it was. By that time King had used walnut stain so skilfully from head to foot that not even the mirror could expose his origin, and Ommony, Dutch-uncling, as he called it, from an armchair had done breaking up facts with a sledge-hammer.

Then King fared forth as the seventy did of old, with neither purse nor scrip, but—since the Good Book says nothing about pistols—with a perfect little Colt repeater nestling against his ribs and a great faith in his own high purpose. A *jungli* was whistled for and told to lead Sirdar Mahommed Akbar Khan on the trail of Mahommed Babar, and in the heat of the afternoon pursuit began.

NOW a man on foot can run down anything that lives. He can walk down anything that lives, and within a day or two. With a five-hour start on a well-fed horse, and given the information that he is followed, another man, of course, can hold his lead provided he has legs and knows enough to abandon the horse at the end of the first forced march. But a man who has counted on a horse and lost it in the first few hours, and who thinks he has baffled pursuit, so that he has ignorance as well as disappointment against him, is in no shape to leave a determined huntsman behind for long. The outcome is simply a question of mathematics and the huntsman's wind. King's wind was good.

* *The incomprehensible language spoken by the aborigines, who live in the jungle, and who are probably the last of a race that was conquered and proscribed when India was first invaded, thousands of years B. C.*

* *A famous Indian regiment.*

Moreover, although King had the white man's natural fear of the beasts who hunt jungle-lanes, Mahommed Babar was even more afraid of them, because unused. In his land men hunt men, which is another matter altogether. He was afraid to set his foot down where a snake might be hiding. He feared, as the evening closed on him, that the down-hanging tendrils were pythons in wait for the passer-by and a strangled meal. He had the North-born sense of direction, but no guide to show him practicable cuts. And although he had to perfection the swinging, almost tireless Hillman's stride, the end that he had in view was not so sure as the rock-strewn landscape he was used to marching down. There was a sort of jaw-set half-determination, at war with itself, that led to dalliance and reduced speed.

Whereas King's alert guide knew every short cut—every forest voice. He was afraid of devils, but believed that King could protect him from them, since Ommon-ee had said so, and whatever else Ommon-ee did he never lied. King was afraid of tigers, leopards, wolves, pythons, what not else, but knew that the *jungli* would give him ample warning, being always aware but never afraid of any of them. And the end King had in view was absolutely sure. He knew that because he was following first principles there was nothing whatever to argue about and the outcome was, as Moslems say, on Allah's knees.

When it grew dark and the fire-lane lay like the mould of loneliness in front of him Mahommed Babar felt inspired to climb out of harm's reach and wait for the dawn. He would not admit to himself that he was superstitious and that the indrawn sigh of the tree-tops put him in mind of all the spirit-tales that haunt the Northern villages. He was a man and unafraid, he told himself, but a soldier likewise, who would travel better by daylight and could sleep well in a tree.

"Moreover, a leopard slew my horse, and I am easier to slay. I have no fire-arms. Shall I fight *baghcela* in the dark with a knife and my bare hands? Let us hope there are no pythons in this tree."

He chose an enormous, wholesome one that spread impenetrable shade above ten thousand feet of ground, and clambering with the sureness of a mountaineer discovered a dry branch near the top that had not been long enough dead to be dangerous. Climbing that he found himself again in the short, clear Indian twilight and bracing himself like a man at the mast-head he surveyed the undulating sea of green that reached every way to the horizon—overlooking one fact. He was silhouetted against the crimson glare that the retreating sun had scorched on a tired sky.

King stopped by a stream, laughed curtly and sat down. Having satisfied himself that the *jungli* also had seen Mahommed Babar he got into the stream, cold water working on the Anglo-saxon like magic; when he emerged and ate sandwiches he was fit to march all night if need be.

The *jungli* grunted and King looked up. Darkness comes very swiftly in those latitudes and he was only just in time to see Mahommed Babar clamber down again and disappear into the opaque foliage. Another minute and the dead branch blended with the others in a blur against the night.

So King and the *jungli* went forward again, and were in time to hear Mahommed Babar drop from a low branch and resume his original direction. He had seen something; that much was obvious. Something friendly. Not too far away. King began to wish poignantly that he knew a language intelligible to the *jungli*—knew the general lay of the land—knew anything. The trouble was that the *jungli* had orders from Ommony to show the way taken by Mahommed Babar, and would therefore do that and do nothing else. Pantomime was no good; the *jungli* merely laughed at it.

The only possible remedy was to see what Mohammed Babar had seen—if there should still be light enough. King chose the same tree, since that was proven climbable, and bent all his faculties to the task of reaching the top before the last faint glimmer of light should die. He had signed to the *jungli* to stay below, but that had no effect; the *jungli* climbed too, and suddenly the merit of his stupidly literal obedience became apparent. He was showing the way still—step by step the only way that Mahommed Babar could have climbed the tree! Swinging overhead like an ape he pointed, first with one toe, then with the other, to the branches King should mount by, with the result that King reached the fork of the dead branch while

a baleful lemon-yellow glare still flickered low in the West. It was freakish, like summer-lightning.

He need not have hurried. What Mahommed Babar had seen became much more visible as darkness deepened. A series of fires placed roughly in the shape of the letter M flickered and gained brilliancy in the woods about five miles away, illuminating a wide clearing, and he could see dark shapes of men dancing around in circles and ducking. Pure Arab that. Nothing Indian about it. Brother Moplah was reverting true to type, as all men do when their primitive passions are aroused. You can recognize the pigeon-movement of Arabs dancing from as far away as you can detect any movement at all, but the man does not live who can explain the significance of just that bobbing of the heads toward the center all together.

There was rising ground capped by a high rock on King's left front, about two hundred yards away. Because of the trees you could not see it until up in the tree-tops; Mahommed Babar had seen it and evidently decided it was better than the tree, for he was up there now, where he in turn, had been seen by a Moplah scout. By a flash of sheet-lightning King saw Mahommed Babar step out and stand silhouetted on the summit of the rock. The next flash showed two men talking furiously.

King climbed down again followed by the *jungli*. There was nothing to be gained by guessing; much to be gained by the fact that Mahommed Babar did not suspect pursuit. For a man entitled to the benefit of the doubt and no more the Northerner was taking reckless chances, but not greater than King proceeded to take; for King, having no password or sign, risked being seen by Moplah scouts, who are as alert as they are bloodthirsty. For the life of him he could not make the *jungli* understand that he wanted to creep close and listen without being seen. The *jungli* understood that he should follow and overtake Mahommed Babar, and when you understand a thing you understand it, naked or otherwise. King tried to send him back to Ommony, but he would not go, not having accomplished his task yet, so finally King put a cord around his throat and held him in leash by that, as you would a too eager hunting dog. So they crept closer, each mistrustful of the other's smell, as the way is of humans as well as animals.

The arrangement did not last long. Restraint was intolerable and the *jungli* slipped out of the noose. Down there under the trees the range of vision ceased at about a hand's breadth from the eyes unless you had animal sight. The *jungli* vanished with the incredible speed of a shadow, and King thought he heard him break a twig about fifty paces ahead some seconds later, so he crept forward, groping with fingers on the ground. The great thing was to make no noise. Doubtless the *jungli* had made that little noise in order to guide him. Wonderful fellows *junglis*. Pity they could not talk intelligibly.

One thing was quite unnecessary—to be on guard against animals. The fires five miles away and the outthrown ring of scouts would have driven every jungle denizen bigger than a hare to other hunting grounds. Nothing to do but keep out of sight and go close—close—close—that is where secrets are learned and thoughtful little games prevented—close! Engage the enemy more closely—England's watch-word, or it ought to be. It went through King's head like a refrain, like those snatches you repeat in time to the thump of train wheels.

"Closer! Closer! Nothing to be gained by hanging back!"

Then some one struck a light—touched off a fire of leaves and twigs on top of the pinnacle rock—and he saw Mahommed Babar seated facing the other man, talking with him earnestly. There were four men now, not two, and he recognized Mahommed Babar by the shape of his turban, which was unmistakable. They heaped fuel on the fire as if they wanted to be seen by all the countryside. But of course the fire made it seem even darker down below, just as staring at it produced spots of light in front of the eyes that made the dark more difficult to penetrate than ever.

So King took his eyes off the fire and crawled forward again. He was sure he heard the *jungli*. Another twig broke, which is a way those people have of signaling. Ommony could have read the signal accurately, but all King could do was to follow the sound. Now he could hear the men talking on the high rock. He glanced up again and saw six, the last two standing. At any rate he hoped they were the last two.

He hardly felt the blow as two other men landed on his neck. Being perfectly unconscious instantly it did not trouble him that his face was pressed into the mould, or that his hands and feet were lashed with raw-hide until the blood in them ceased circulating. He had engaged the enemy more closely, and the incurious *jungli* trotted homeward to report the news to Ommony.

CHAPTER VII

"I am the high court judge."

THE British are always taken unawares. They get more notice than other people, and they don't ignore the notice. They wonder at it. Sometimes they admire it. They are almost always interested. But as for its meaning anything serious until afterwards, the forebodings of Noah, Cassandra and the Prophets meant more in their generation—much more; men pelted Noah, mocked Cassandra and stoned the prophets, whereas the British do none of those things. The British preserve a noncommittal attitude and wait and see.

They waited and saw at Ootacamund. Saw the flames of Hindu villages. For a generation it had been notorious that regular troops could campaign in Moplah country only with the utmost difficulty because of the hills and impenetrable jungle. So there were no troops to speak of. There was not even a garrison to defend Calicut, and one had to be improvised when the first horde of wounded and panic-stricken Hindus came stampeding for protection.

Even if there had been troops available they could not have been used to advantage at first, because the Moplahs were ready and the British were not. There was a prevalent superstition to the effect that the Moplahs knew nothing about tactics or strategy. Therefore there was no need to be ready. Moplahs always had been savages; ergo they always would be. Q. E. D.

Once a viceroy of genius had ordered Moplahs to be enlisted in the army, on the same principle on which Lord Canning enlisted Scottish Highlanders after the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. But brother Moplah did not take to discipline, albeit he liked fighting so much that he even fought with the other regiments and his own officers. It followed, of course, that he never could be disciplined.

Benevolent despotism therefore was the only dose for Moplahs, reinforced with aeroplanes, naturally. Aeroplanes had scattered the Somalis, who are a desert people, and had routed the Afghans, who live on treeless hills and plains. Therefore aeroplanes could easily police the Moplahs, who would fear them if nothing else.

But unfortunately aeroplanes can hardly accomplish much over hill and dale that is spread from end to end with a natural, impenetrable camouflage. And a bomb among trees, though it makes a lovely noise, does inconsiderable damage. Moreover, as Ommony had reminded King, scores of Moplahs went to France in the well-paid labor units, where they grew so familiar with bombing planes that anything short of being actually hit by a bomb left them entirely unconvinced. And that kind of insouciance is more contagious than the itch.

The Moplahs broke all standing rules from the start. They sprang a surprize that was perfect in all its ways. They were well-supplied with arms and ammunition, had a well-laid plan, displayed considerable strategy, used modern tactics, and obeyed somebody's orders—none of which things an honest Moplah ought to do.

In a pigeon-hole in Calcutta, with a duplicate in Simla and a triplicate in Delhi there is a report drawn up by a painstaking committee, which sets forth for the confusion of future historians just how the Moplah "show" began. Nobody knows how it began. It started everywhere at once, and every one concerned was much too busy taking his part on one side or the other to have any knowledge of what might be happening elsewhere.

Torn up tracks and cut wires were the first intimation the authorities received. The spares kept at wayside stations and beside the track were carried off as plunder, but with commendable speed and resource the emergency crews replaced everything, thus providing brother Moplah with a second instalment of welcome ironmongery. As the improvised armored trains patroled the relaid track, just around the next curve screened by trees before them and behind, the Moplah raiders helped themselves. Armored trains were isolated for lack of rails to run on. Crews were what is known as "scoughed" after the ammunition had given out.

Of course, not all the trains were caught in the open or wrecked in broken culverts

between depots. After the first damage had been repaired and between raids there were even passenger trains that got through. For instance, the train attached to which was a coach containing Judge Wilmshurst and his hot, although fashionable wife, who mourned like another Rachel and would not be comforted, arrived somewhere finally. As Ommony wisely said, the judge had not dared leave his wife behind.

The train winds through those hills like a patient worm possessed of brains. Ever it turns aside at each obstacle; always it appears again somewhere beyond, once more circling toward its ultimate objective, frequently passing a place on three sides within a mile or two before swerving in suddenly and dumping passengers or freight for a touch down. The train always wins, unless the Moplahs are "out" and in earnest, and sometimes even then. Such is the fortune of war and its freakiness that neither Judge Wilmshurst nor his wife as much as saw a Moplah; and when a subaltern commanding twenty men at a wayside station ordered them out of the train for safety's sake they not only disbelieved but were indignant.

However, you can't successfully oppose a British subaltern with anything less than steel or TNT when he has once assumed responsibility. The judge tried all the old methods of overawing a child and his wife tried several new ones, but none worked. Not even blandishments accomplished anything. The youth gave his name as Charles Sutherland, and Mrs. Wilmshurst remembered she knew the Sutherlands of Southrey, but he was not interested.

"I could pick your family profile out of a million," she assured him.

"Where's Southrey?" he answered. "I'm from Blackheath. My people never had a county seat. Dad was an architect. You're delaying us awfully."

She refused to leave the car she had been complaining of for two hot days and nights, and told her husband he was "spineless" to let a mere subaltern impose on a high court judge. So he from Blackheath ordered the car uncoupled and let the train go on without it—which it did for ten miles, at the end of which it fell into a broken culvert, where the Moplahs looted it.

As the solitary car in certain contingencies might make a superb addition to his scant means of defence Charley Sutherland of Blackheath made his men put their shoulders to it and shove until it stood exactly at the angle with the station building that his martial eye approved. There he left it, with two fifteen-year-old boys in uniform on guard (attested, of course, as twenty-one) and two more, who were honestly eighteen, carrying water in kerosene cans for drinking purposes in case of siege. They filled the copper tank, but as Mrs. Wilmshurst promptly took a bath and said nothing about it the total accomplishment did not amount to much.

The station buildings were sufficient for their purpose, whatever that may have been presumably. Undoubtedly they were no good for anything else. There was a ten by twelve concrete hut constituting ticket office and *babu's* quarters, and from that a roof reached either way for fifty feet above a masonry and gravel platform. That was all, except that a wooden hut had stood fifty yards back from the station by way of *zenana* for the *babu's* family.

There were nice black ashes where it had been. The *babu* and his family were Hindus, and the Moplahs had done the rest. Charley Sutherland, a sergeant, two corporals and seventeen men arriving later on the scene raked up the ashes of *babu* and family into sacks and buried them, which was respectful, even if blasphemously carried out and not at all the orthodox way of disposing of Hindu remains.

CHARLEY SUTHERLAND and his twenty were there by the whim of naked luck, not otherwise. They had been sent to lend distinction to the funeral procession of a Moplah chief, whose relatives and whose village the authorities chose to honor for reasons best known to themselves. Having marched for twenty miles along a jungle lane, slept in a flea-infested thatched hut, "proceeded according to orders" and having even fired a salvo of blank in the deceased's honor, they had marched twenty miles back again, only to discover a burned *babu*.

The station premises had been looted perfectly, but the arrival of Sutherland and twenty men had interrupted proceedings and the wire was not yet cut, Sutherland was a telegraphist of sorts and he managed to get headquarters before the raiding party thought of cutting the wire out of sight around the curve. Being only of sorts he

had difficulty. Scepticism, blank incredulity, panic and fuss were among the elements at war with him, added to all of which he could send, like most "of sorts" men, much better than he could take. However, he managed to read off that trains will proceed as usual before a clangor unmistakable announced that the wire was cut and being shaken.

Thereafter Charley Sutherland assumed responsibility, and being beyond reach of his superiors did fairly well. He kicked a private of the line, which is strictly against the regulations but, as man to man, conveys enlightenment; and he let the only train go through, as per orders. But orders had said nothing about passengers, and although Judge Wilmshurst and his wife said a very great deal they ceased from being passengers and became occupants of a fort on wheels—the right wing of Charley Sutherland's defences.

When he heard the wire go down he sent a sergeant and six men to bring in as much of it as could be "snaffled" without loss of life. The sergeant was a Lancashireman who had poached in Yorkshire and could fight either end up. The raiders abandoned their half-coiled wire and the sergeant's men dragged it in uncoiled—enough to make a breast-high fence of five strands between the station office and the Wilmshurst's car, with connecting strands so woven as to make a rather efficient net of it.

So far, good. There was more wire in the other direction and the sergeant's party sallied forth again. This time, having to do the tearing down themselves, they did not bring in so much of it; but it was enough for a three-strand entanglement on the other side, and meanwhile Sutherland had superintended the dismantling of the platform roof, and the ten-foot sheets of corrugated iron raised two-deep lengthwise with sand and gravel packed between them made a bullet-proof and fairly efficient means of communication between the right and left wing. More iron sheets and sand around the car wheels completed the arrangement, and Charley, scratching the back of his head like an architect considering new plans, sat down on the edge of the platform deliberating what to do next. It was then that Judge Wilmshurst so far thawed as to call to him. Not by name, of course. Nothing so human as that.

"Have you any food?" he asked.

"The men have scant rations for one meal in their haversacks."

"How long do you expect to hold this post against an enemy?"

"Hadn't thought of that, sir. Hold it as long as we can."

"Have you ammunition?"

"Some."

"How many rounds?"

"That's a military secret," answered Sutherland, drying up.

Wilmshurst smiled broadly.

"Would you mind listening to me a moment? I'm Grosset Wilmshurst—high court judge—perhaps you never heard of me? My business here is to hold an inquiry into complaints laid by the Moplah headmen against the local administration. They knew I was coming. Now, if you'll send word to the nearest headman that I'm here, I think you'll find there'll be no trouble."

Sutherland looked actually shocked, and it takes a very great deal to shock a youngster of his profession. He had known the Moplahs more or less for six months and the conceit of a man who supposed that his mere arrival from afar could cause trouble to cease in that neighborhood was breath-taking. Dead and burned *babus* he could face, but—

"Have you any idea what it means when the Moplahs are 'out?' " he demanded. "Perhaps you think——"

"Tut-tut, my dear boy, try it."

"You know they've killed the station master and his family, cut the wires, torn up the track behind you and fired on my men?"

"I should have been here sooner. The minute they know I am here to inquire into their grievances they will calm down. Send word to them!"

The judge's butler-like countenance was so self-assured that Sutherland was almost half-convinced. If he had been ten years older the judge's self-assertion might have appeared less absurd, but the judgment of youth is much more critical than Solomon's.

"If I had a man to spare, perhaps," he said dryly.

The judge's head retired through the window, but his defeat enraged Mrs. Wilmshurst to the blazing point. Fresh from her bath she confronted the limp, perspiring judge and demanded to know whether he supposed she had married him in order to be snubbed by a twopenny subaltern of infantry.

"Have you no manhood?" she demanded, and proceeded to display her own by stepping down on to the track to force the issue.

"What is this nonsense?" she demanded. "How dare you imprison a lady in this abominable way! You heard my husband. Send at once for the Moplah's headmen!"

"No need. Get back in!" commanded Sutherland, and shouted to his men to duck, pushing Mrs. Wilmshurst toward the door at the same time so violently that she collapsed on to the step, providing just sufficient clearance for a bullet, which clipped the brim of her panama hat.

Two more bullets plunked through Sutherland's helmet, half-a-dozen smashed the glass in the car windows, and one good answering volley under the sergeant's direction caused a temporary halt in the proceedings. Mrs. Wilmshurst climbed in and crouched on the floor.

"What does this mean?" asked her husband, head through the window again.

It was obvious what it meant. Sutherland read off the symptoms as one with vision reading to the blind.

"They've moppled your train, that's what! Scoughed everybody, or I'm a Hindu! Wonder we didn't hear the shooting—must have been *some*—no—train crew wasn't armed, that's right—they may have ditched the whole shebang and used knives! Anyhow, they've looted everything. I can see lamps, an oil-can, shovel, flags, some third-class carriage doors—give 'em another one, sergeant, they're gathering again!"

The volley tore across the barricade before the judge could get a word in, and the Moplahs, who had been swarming around the bend three hundred yards away scampered for cover.

"There! That will do! That's enough I tell you! Have you killed anybody? Let me manage this."

The judge was no longer ridiculous, if not sublime. Sublimity, warts and a butler's nose are not congruous; but he knew what he thought he could do, and proceeded to try it, tying his handkerchief to a walking stick and waving it from the carriage window.

"Good God! You mean surrender?" Sutherland made a jump at the stick but missed.

"Certainly not! You leave this to me. Let me talk to them!"

"Be careful! Oh be careful!" came the voice of Rachel Wilmshurst, but the judge ignored her absolutely.

THE MOPLAHS had swarmed through the fringe of trees bordering on the line and already had Sutherland's scratch defenses threatened on two sides. They established that fact beyond argument by means of a scattering crossfire, which ceased, however, when the judge had waved his white flag for about a minute. Ironically enough the Moplah leaders answered with the colored flags they had looted from the train, and presently, when it was clear that there would be no more shooting for the present, three white-turbaned, long-haired fellows in a kind of khaki uniform, armed with modern rifles and swords slung from the shoulder by a black belt, emerged from the trees and took their stand a little nervously by the ashes where the *babu's zenana* had been.

The judge with his flag in his hand walked forward to meet him, and Sutherland accompanied him after cautioning his men.

"Shoot at the first sign of treachery!" he ordered. "This is no surrender, I promise you that. Merely a palaver. If anything should happen to the judge and me, use your ammunition sparingly and fall back on the railway carriage. Protect the lady at all costs."

He had to run to catch the judge, who was marching like a man in a procession best foot foremost with the flag over his shoulder.

"Can you mopple their lingo?" asked Sutherland.

"No. No, my lad. I'll speak English to them. Key-language of the world—of the universe for aught we know to the contrary! Keep behind me, and don't try to interfere."

There is something in cock-sureness after all. It *was* the key-language. All three of the Moplahs knew English, he with the green flag in the middle almost perfectly.

"You surr-ender?" he asked, making a dactyl of the word.

"No," said the judge. "I have come to tell who I am."

The Moplahs bowed—a shade ironically. One can afford to be polite when the outcome is inevitable; and as the agony was to be all on one side there was no harm in prolonging it.

"I am Grosset Wilmshurst, *sahib*."

The statement was received with blank incomprehension. The Moplahs glanced at one another for a cue and some one shouted to them from the trees behind. The judge put on speed to explain.

"I am the high court judge who was sent for from Bombay Presidency to hold impartial inquiry into the Moplahs' grievances."

"Ah! Oh! Ah!"

That evidently did convey a meaning. The Moplah headmen looked in one another's eyes again and knew themselves unanimous.

"That is good. Then you are prisoner," said the tall man in the middle.

"Stuff and nonsense! I came to inquire into your grievances. Do you treat a guest that way? Have you no sense of honor?"

The man in the middle began to translate that to the other two, who had only half-understood it, and the judge took advantage of that to turn on Sutherland.

"Leave this to me, d'you hear me! This is a case for the Civil authorities. Go back there and tell my wife to keep out of sight. As long as they don't see her——"

But it was already too late. They both saw Rachel Wilmshurst stepping down from the car. The three headmen saw. Every Moplah in the fringe of trees had seen. There were shrill comments from the covert, not all of them unintelligible.

"I demand protection for my wife and myself," said the judge; and that, although he did not know it, was a thoroughly strategic attitude to take, for if Moslem law insists on one thing it is that the stranger demanding protection must receive it.

Needless to say, it does not always work, and the Moslem does not live who is not a quibbler over technicalities.

"That shall be seen," said the men in the midst. "You demand for yourself and your wife? You are high court judge? Judge what name? Willimsshirse. *Bohut atcha*. You know *bohut atcha?* Bombay language. Very well. We take you and your wife. As for these others, it is too late to make demands for them. Besides, they are military. They kill—we kill—blood-fare regular business. Of course you understand."

There followed one of those revolting arguments that leave all concerned dissatisfied. The judge and Sutherland asked time for consultation and were granted fifteen minutes by the headman's silver watch. They walked back toward the station arguing, the judge trying to overbear Sutherland and the subaltern falling back on sheer obstinacy.

"I tell you I will!"

"You shall not, sir!"

"You young ass!"

"Maybe. But you shall not while I have a man left to prevent you!"

The judge believed that he and his wife would be perfectly safe in the hands of Moplahs. Furthermore, that the Moplahs would let the soldiers alone if they could gain two important hostages, and the loot from the first-class railway carriage, without a fight.

Sutherland, with a youngster's views, might perhaps have been persuaded to let the judge go. The judge was his senior and of the male sex. But bluntly and truthfully he swore that he and his men would die before any Moplah came within bayonet length of Mrs. Wilmshurst. He disliked her already cordially, and for sufficient reason; hoped never to see her again, and told the judge so to his face:

"But I'd like to be able to look my own men and my mother in the eye. What's more, I will! By —— I will! She stays. That's all about it!"

The judge made the incredible mistake then of appealing to Sutherland's men over their officer's head. He stood with his back to the station building and spoke as if he were on the bench lecturing a row of lawyers.

"Now you men must know what the origin of this disturbance was. Your officer has told me how you came to be here. He has said nothing about your conduct in the village where you were supposed to attend a funeral, so I am left to draw my own conclusions. These Moplahs are a proud people, who bitterly resent such indignities as soldiers of an alien race can thoughtlessly subject them to, and they no more enjoy having their harems interfered with by aliens than you would enjoy having, let us say, your mothers carried off by Moplahs. However, the harm is done and must be remedied. I am the only person who can do that. I am here on an investigation of Moplah complaints. I intend to report that in my opinion at least

this one disturbance was due to our soldiers—to yourselves in particular—possibly others, too, but this disturbance certainly. Now I am going to order your officer to deliver my wife and me to these people as hostages in evidence of good faith——"

Sutherland saw fit to interrupt, and, since he did not care to dispute with the judge before his men, turned on the men and barked them back to their posts.

"The next man who leaves his post without my order will be 'for it,' " he announced.

They had no particular reason for fearing the judge. Besides, he had warts and a butler's face, and they had heard his wife scold him unrebuked. Sutherland they knew. The regulations they knew. The sergeant they knew particularly well, and the sergeant feared no fifty-year-old civilian, whatever he might think of foes in shining armor. Each man proceeded to the post assigned to him, and squinted along his rifle because that was the obvious thing to do.

BROTHER MOPLAH, peering from the fringe of the woods, could not see what took place under the shelter of the station building, but did see the men return and line the ridiculous defenses. He naturally misinterpreted. Wishing to believe that all British officials were rogues and liars, and with his hereditary instincts almost out of control in any case, he translated suspicion into certainty.

Probably no chief gave the order. It was spontaneous combustion, as it were, the spirit of pirate ancestors taking charge and unquestionably blaming the breach of faith on the British. From three directions at once the ragged, independent firing poured out from the trees, and Sutherland stopped one of the first bullets with his shoulder.

Thereafter, Judge Wilmshurst conceded there was no peace and stepped down in favor of the military, obeying without argument. Sutherland ordered him back into the railway carriage with his wife, where the two lay obediently on the floor, the judge on the side whence the bullets were coming and she pouring into his ear in fitful detail her opinion of him for having brought her among such savages, and for having failed on top of that so signally in trying to assert his authority.

There was no peace anywhere; nor much hope, with only twenty men, and the rails torn up to prevent relief from coming. There were a corporal and three men on their bellies under the carriage, peeping out between the iron sheets that surrounded their lair like a petticoat; but four men were not enough when the Moplahs crossed the line lower down and proceeded to surround the whole enclosure. As Sutherland, with an arm swinging limp, dragged more men from the barricade and drove them into the carriage to fire from the open windows some one on the Moplah side had enough military genius to take advantage of the momentary confusion. They rushed the station building, gained the cover of the wall, and thereafter had the outcome in their own hand. It was merely a question of how many casualties, and were they willing to pay the price?

The Moplah will pay any price when his blood is up. They surged around the station building from both sides and jumped at the telegraph-wire entanglements, encouraging Tommy Atkins, age sixteen, enormously by the sight of writhing arms and legs and bodies like bloody scarecrows hung face-forward grinning across the wire.

As long as the ammunition lasted, and with the harvest in full view fifty feet away there was no chance whatever of storming that nest of youngsters. Nobody misses much at fifty yards from behind a breastwork when life depends minute by minute on aiming straight.

BUT the ammunition did not last. At the end of fifteen minutes even the steadiest men had only two or three rounds left, and Sutherland knew that when it came to bayonets his boys would stand no chance against Moplah swordsmen. Stunned for the moment by the extent of their losses the Moplahs took cover, and Sutherland seized the chance to reduce his line of defense. There was nothing else for it. He had to abandon the station building, behind which the Moplahs were already gathering again for a final rush; abandon the sheer-iron barricades; abandon all except the railway carriage, underneath which he stowed his seven wounded, not reckoning himself. His kind never does reckon himself a casualty until unconsciousness supervenes and they carry him off on a stretcher.

Inside the carriage, kneeling on the seats that ran parallel with the windows, they waited and tried not to damage Mrs. Wilmshurst with the heels of ammunition boots. Sutherland ordered a count of cartridges, each man calling out the number still remaining; but before that was half-done the Moplahs resumed the attack, leaping the undefended barricades and charging at the carriage from all four sides simultaneously.

"Each man save one cartridge for close quarters!" ordered Sutherland.

He had eyes for nothing but his own men and the enemy, and did not see the handkerchief on a stick thrust through the window at his back and waved violently. All he knew for the moment, and wondered at, was that the Moplahs halted and ceased firing—halted with their prey by the throat, as it were—an unimaginable thing. But he was not dead or dreaming; he knew that because his shoulder hurt so. They did halt, and their chiefs came forward to parley again. He turned to look through the other window—and saw the white flag!

"Oh my God! You rotter!"

The judge has not forgotten, nor will forget that last comment of Sutherland's until his dying day. The next moment a bullet fired from the rear by a Moplah who knew nothing of white flags drilled Sutherland through the temples, and it was too late to say anything in his own defense. The judge lifted the boy's body off his complaining wife and gave her his handkerchief.

"I suppose I'm in command now?" he said to the sergeant, who could not answer easily because his lips and front teeth had been shot away.

The judge was acting in perfectly good faith. So was the sergeant, who aimed a blow at the judge's stomach with his rifle-butt—missing, because his bayonet caught another man's tunic and steered the blow awry.

"We've surrendered. Now no more fighting!" said the judge. "Put up your weapons, men. You've done your best. Now the right thing to do is surrender with a good grace."

He shoved his head through the open window and tried to make his meaning clear to the men underneath.

"Your officer's dead. We've all surrendered!"

Oaths answered him, and he was not sure whether he had been understood or not.

"The best thing we can all do now is to file out one by one," he said, with a feeling of inspiration. "Leave your rifles on the seats, and they'll not harm you."

The sergeant had collapsed. Disgust and loss of blood completed the Moplah bullet's work. One corporal was underneath and the other was dead. The remaining boys obeyed, laying their rifles on the seats dejectedly, with wicked barrack-room oaths, and filing down to the track one after the other.

The Moplahs let them come—took scant notice of them—only closed in and stood waiting; and the same headman with red in his beard who had palavered before came to the door with a hand stretched out to receive the surrender of Wilmshurst and his wife. Mrs. Wilmshurst, pale-faced and tousled, stepped down almost into his arms, and the judge followed. The Moplah chief, smiling but saying nothing, led them by the hand away behind the station building and then cried out an order in a language of which Wilmshurst knew not one solitary word. So his evidence is not trustworthy.

Months later, after the big surrender, the Moplah chiefs said that the men underneath the railway carriage had reopened fire, thus making unavoidable what followed. They said that four or five of their own men were shot down without warning, and went so far as to give names. However, unsupported by impartial witnesses that evidence has not much value either.

The fact is unpleasant. The moment the judge's back had disappeared behind the station building butchery began, and did not cease as long as a soldier remained alive. The judge and his wife heard it all, of course, but were not allowed to see, the excuse for that being that they might have exposed themselves to bullets fired by the British soldiers.

Finally, when the carriage had been stripped of doors, windows, upholstery and everything removable, the Wilmshursts' baggage, of course, included, the British dead were piled into the carriage. Branches of trees, loose lumber from the station yard and some telegraph posts were dragged up. The *babu's* looted kerosene was poured over the lot, and a badly made imported Japanese match did the rest.

Thereafter the judge and his wife were

made to walk interminable miles, until Mrs. Wilmshurst fainted.

CHAPTER VIII

"The benefit of the doubt?"

OMMONY made shift for twenty-four hours without servants—rather fecklessly, being used like most Anglo-Indians to being waited on hand and foot. A man can almost forget how to pull his own boots off after twenty years, just as an admiral of the fleet can forget how to tie a bowline. The cooking was the worst part. He opened cans, ate out of them, and let it go at that, incidentally making discoveries about a Hindu cook's kitchen-keeping methods that are not good for the white man's temper.

Like most men who deliberately sleep at noon, Ommony burned midnight oil, reading omnivorously. So he was not in bed when the *jungli* returned at three in the morning. A twig struck the wooden shutter, making a noise not much louder than that of a big insect alighting, only different. A man's ears draw distinctions instantly after twenty years of life like Ommony's. He stuck a marker in the book and walked to the door without any more doubt or hesitation than a city apartment dweller who expects a friend.

Afraid, unseen, indiscernible, the *jungli* gave his version of what had happened, sending forth his guttural monologue from behind a bougainvillea. It being his experience that man gets punished for all kinds of occurrences that are beyond his own control, he kept out of Ommony's aim and reach, albeit trusting Ommony more than any other man. Ommony found a small bag of rice for him, which was a prodigious treat, tossed it in the general direction of the bougainvillea, and returned indoors to meditate. The sound of the falling rice-bag convinced the *jungli*. He decamped, and the rice lay there until morning, where the squirrels found it.

The *jungli* had been sure of two things: that King was dead, and that Mahommed Babar had ordered the slaying from the summit of a high rock. The rock was described so accurately that Ommony identified it.

"Benefit of the doubt?" he muttered, putting his feet on a chair and beginning to read again.

But he could not read—not even Schopenhauer, whom he idolized. His thoughts reverted ever to that rock—the pinnacle wolf-rock. The first time he had ever seen it was by moonlight. A wolf had sat alone on the very apex of it, howling dismally, and he had shot the wolf because those were the days when he still thought he owned the forest, and was consequently lonely and irritable. Later, when he came to know that the forest owned him and made use of him, just as it made use of light, dew, warmth and all the creatures, he always remembered that rock as the wolf-rock, and regretted the lone wolf, whose cured pelt was on the floor beside his bed.

Strange that King should have met his death in that place. He wondered whether there was any possible connection. The more a man reads Shakespeare, Schopenhauer, Goethe and the prophets, the more convinced he is of subtle interwoven causes and effects, impalpable but governed by law—leisurely, unhurried, inescapable. Live twenty years in the jungle, and either you open your mind to the unity of all things and all actions, or else go mad. Ommony sat until dawn and remembered. He had slain that wolf wilfully, unjudged—he whose business in life it was to judge the jungle, always considering the greatest good of the greatest number. Had that slow, certain law impelled him wilfully to let King go to his death?

For he could have prevented. He could have dissuaded, diverted, forbidden. Had the same unreasoning impulse that blinded him to the lone wolf's right to sit on a rock and howl if so minded blinded him, too, to the obvious treason of Mahommed Babar? If so, why had he sent King to his death instead of destroying himself? He laughed. It was early yet to beg that question; the law was leisurely! He was no such fool as to think that killing the wolf brought consequences. It was willingness to kill the wolf without good cause that would cause him to stumble forever until he should wake up and understand. Strange, though. He thought he had learned that lesson long ago. But if he had learned it, why should the circumstances force themselves so insistently on his mind now?

So a man thinks, who has lived in the jungle for twenty years and loved the jungle most of the time. Ommony sat and puzzled over the impartial law that governs all

creatures without hurry or emotion, until he heard the horses in the stable neigh for breakfast and his dogs came and thrust damp, curious noses into his hand. Even then he had not puzzled it out. The horses needed *gram*, hay and water. More, they expected and would presently receive. The dogs wanted corn-meal and gravy in three plates set in a row on the veranda; and they, too, would get what they asked for, even if he had to cook the stuff. He himself wanted eggs, bread-and-butter and tea, and nobody would bring them.

Responsibility. That was the word that suggested itself as the answer to the problem. Sense of responsibility was better, perhaps. But to whom, and for what? All he could answer positively was that he would feed the animals before he fed himself, and that he was sorry he had let King go the day before.

He did not waste time being sorry for King. No man who understands life in its simplest aspect wastes a second being sorry for the fellow who dies in harness "proceeding as per plan." That is the way to die. Whatever lies beyond that is inevitably based on good faith, hope and manliness. But he was sorry to lose King, which is quite different, and he was extremely critical of himself for having let King go on such a hare-brained mission.

He broke about a dozen eggs but managed at last to poach two, and ate the mess out of the frying pan. Then he went to the veranda for his morning smoke, and wondered all over again from the beginning why Mahommed Babar, or a lone wolf on a rock in the moonlight, should have been allowed to make such a mess of things, and what the connection might be. In a universe composed of units, every one of which was equally important—granted—nevertheless, why should Mahommed Babar—of the North, an interloper after all—be allowed to betray the hands that had fed and protected him and to order the death of a man—a real man such as Athelstan King?

Benefit of the doubt? Of what doubt? Which benefit? *Cui bono?* Murder was murder since Cain killed Abel, and why should the best man be the victim nine times out of ten?

So Ommony was entertained for the whole of a lonely day, while he and his dogs alternately or together policed the grounds and he fed the horses and chickens at intervals. Not a soul came near him. He did not dare go to the station to discover, if possible, whether trains were moving and there was none to send. He almost forgot that he had ordered the Moplah chiefs to send his servants back; and he quite forgot his threat to Major Pierson to have himself kidnaped rather than desert his forest post.

Not that his threat made the slightest difference. Major Pierson lay face-upward beside a wrecked and burned train, while the crows picked the holes where his eyes had been. The Moplahs were on the job, and meant business, if no one else did.

TOWARD evening the servants came back, looking foolish and afraid. Two had been beaten. One looked near death from exhaustion, and collapsed while the dogs went and sniffed him to make sure he was really some one who belonged. They all lined up before the veranda, headed by the butler, who gathered dust in both fists and heaped it on his head in token of abject repentance.

"O you children of disillusionment!" said Ommony, smoking his cigar with that day's first touch of contentment. "Shall I dismiss you all or take you back again?"

"Father of forgiveness! We have nothing and nowhere to go. The Moplahs took all and drove us forth again. We will submit to fines and beatings without number. We are dirt. We abase ourselves. We have wept because the *sahib's* meals were not cooked and his bed not made. We are good Hindus. Pious people. We will not become Moslems! And we will serve the *sahib* faithfully forever—presenting ourselves for a beating forthwith!"

They all bowed repeatedly like a row of tall plants waving in the wind.

"Doubtless you have consulted on the way," said Ommony, stroking his beard between puffs of the cigar. "That is a clever proposal you decided to make. Whose idea was it? Yours? Exceedingly clever, since not one of you has ever known me to beat a servant or impose a fine! Did you ever see me beat even a dog?"

"*Sahib*, you have been our father and our mother. We are very much ashamed. All nine of us eat sorrow."

"Then why did you run away?"

"The Moplahs threatened us. We are Hindus and they vowed all Hindus will be slain or forcibly converted. They sent

word again and again. They said unless we went to them, to a village a day's march distant, and became converts of the Moslem priest, they would come here and murder us all, the *sahib* included. So we ran to the village, hoping to save the *sahib's* life."

"And you all became Moslems?"

"Nay, *sahib*. Therein our honor was at stake and we refused. Two of us were beaten. We were all robbed of our possessions. One of us was made ill with too much fear. But we refused to be converts, and at last the Moplahs took pity or else admired, we knew not which, and drove us forth again."

"A very pretty story!" answered Ommony. "So here you are—all honorable Hindus, eh?"

He chuckled. There is a certain way of knowing whether or not an individual has been admitted to the fold of Islam.

"Your clothes smell," he said to the butler. "They have contagion on them, but that is not your fault. The clothes must be burned. There are no women here. Strip, then and enter the house. Take new cotton sheeting from my store-chest and clothe yourself decently."

The butler hesitated. But what was the use? You could never deceive Ommony for more than five minutes. He stripped shamefacedly, and Ommony laughed outright.

"Nine new-made Moslems, eh? Well—you need comfort, not more punishment! Strip, all of you. Go and wash. Go to work. The butler shall give you each new cotton sheeting. Put that sick man to bed and I'll physic him presently."

The sick man was carried off moaning "Not episin sawts—oh, no, not episin!" and the butler came out on the veranda carrying a bolt of white sheeting, to make sure.

"There is none to overhear," said Ommony. "Tell me the truth now. Who ordered you to run away from me?"

The butler hesitated, showing the jaundiced whites of his eyes.

"*Sahib*, I am afraid. Is Mahommed Babar here?"

"No. He's gone."

"Run away?"

Ommony nodded.

"*Sahib*, it was Mahommed Babar who ordered us. He said we should go to that village and be made Moslems, after which he would see that we were not slain. It was truly Mahommed Babar, *sahib*. He ordered us."

CHAPTER IX

"I will lead!"

ATHELSTAN KING recovered consciousness, but did not advertise the fact, not believing in advertisement, and having seen too many men betray their plans and their weakness at the instance of that uptodate disease. He does not believe that it pays, and his dread of advertisement is of such long standing and so ingrained that it controls him even in the twilight between near-death and recovery.

So he lay still and discovered that he was lying on his stomach between a dozen men and a ridge of rock. He could touch the rock with his right hand. The men sat in a row between him and a bonfire, whose light danced and fell, alternating with shadow on the rock beside him. His head ached and there was a singing in his ears, but he could hear the men talking, and could hear others jesting across other fires not far away. He knew that his wrists and ankles had been tied, for they smarted where the thongs had cut, but some one had loosed them and the blood was circulating freely.

Moving inch by inch he managed to turn his head and look under his left arm, but it took him a long time to recognize what he saw as anything but phantasy, because the blood was still surging behind his eyes. He had evidently had a bad blow on the head, and a cautious survey with his fingers discovered a bruise the size of half a mango—whereat he was content. Bruises that break outward hurt but are hardly ever serious.

The scene, as viewed between the hips of two men who squatted chin on knee, resembled a glimpse of Robin Hood and his merry men carousing in the open. There were even bows and arrows in evidence, but most of the men had modern rifles and bandoliers. All had peculiar swords of foreign make; and every single man had loot of some kind—when nothing else, then brass railway carriage handles or the buttons from an official's uniform. Headmen were haranguing groups in front of the fires, for a Moslem loves to be told what he wants to think and will listen in raptures to almost any one who will reel off the right sort of platitudes.

Obviously these were men returning, not from one raid, but from a series of them. They had the loot of Hindu villages as well

as of railway trains. Over beyond the fires he could make out the shadowy shapes of cattle and sheep, and herded in a corner between two bonfires, with a guard beyond them, were unquestionable prisoners, mostly young Hindu women, like himself unbound, but unlike himself, watched closely.

Gradually King began to remember the incidents preceding the blow on the head that had stunned him. He judged that he must have been transported a considerable distance since then. He remembered the pinnacle rock and looked for it, but it was not there. Instead, his eye rested on another—a monolith twenty feet high from the ground, shaped like a huge recumbent tomb-stone, on which men were seated talking in the dark.

He could not hear words at first; could not recognize a single voice, for they were all pitched low; and he did not expect to be able to understand the language in any event; but he listened, trying by sheer force of will to overcome the singing in his ears.

Presently the men who squatted near him got up and crossed over to the far side, without even glancing at him. Taking advantage of the shadows King instantly started to crawl toward the monolith, and gained a point about twenty yards away from it, where a dozen dwarf trees cast impenetrable darkness. He lay there and listened again, beginning to imagine that a rather hard, not exactly nasal but roof-of-the-mouthy voice might be familiar. There were certain notes in it that struck chords of memory.

Then, to his surprize, he recognized words —Hindustanee, which meant that one race was talking to another, using the *lingua franca*. That drew attention to the predominant voice again, and he was more than ever sure he recognized it. Nevertheless, he could not catch more than a word or two here and there that were meaningless without the context. And he did not dare crawl nearer.

The men were not quarreling, but they were arguing. Some of them were shooting questions at the fellow with the Northern voice. That was it—Northerner! Mahommed Babar for a fortune! Knowing who the man was made it easier to hear what he said for some unfathomable reason.

"There are liars here as elsewhere evidently. You have listened to very many lies. You have only yourselves. No help from outside. Yes, it is true there is discontent. Yes, the North is full of violence. Yes, I have come from the North expressly to be with you. Very true, I would not do that unless I felt sure the cause I espouse would succeed. But I know more than you do. Listen! I tell you you will only make these English obstinate by raiding out of your own territory—I know them. They are like those trees; they can be made to bend before the blast, but if they are uprooted they grow again, and they hardly ever break. By Allah, I say you must act wisely, brothers! Slay no more prisoners lest the British send an army corps!"

The speaker got up to pace restlessly to and fro, and King could see him clearly at last outlined against the crimson overglow of a row of fires a hundred yards beyond. It was Mahommed Babar—both hands behind him—chin down—staring at the rock before his feet.

Aping Napoleon?

"Who is that fellow we seized by the lookout rock and brought along with us? He is a Hillman like yourself. Who is he?"

"How should I know?" Mahommed Babar answered. "Men from the Hills are sure to come in ones and twos. The news of your looting will bring them like kites. But do kites help?"

"Every Moslem's sword is welcome to strike a blow with us for the Khalifate!" some one shouted, and for a minute or two they all chorused "There is no God but Allah and Mahommed is his prophet." The whole bivouack voiced the sentiment.

"How many times must I tell you that between us and the Northern tribes lie not only leagues but armies!" said Mahommed Babar when the noise died down. "The men of the north have made you promises, but can not fulfil! Can each of you fight a hundred? No. Neither can they. You are as far apart as the mountain was from Mahommed, and neither can get to the other! You must manage this the way I tell you, or you will be overwhelmed."

Aping George Washington?

The others talked on. Mahommed Babar with hands knitted behind him continued to pace to and fro until the mauve of morning glimmered over the tree-tops and the glow of the bonfires paled. Then, of course, most of the raiding party proceeded to fall asleep. But some one blew a horn that sounded like a bagpipe, and a dozen others took it up, running officiously among the

dying fires to waken everybody. Probably they had been feasting through the night on the flesh of Hindu cows. None paused for breakfast. They were up and away, on foot all of them, before the first golden shaft of sunlight pierced between the trees; and nobody seemed to remember King. At all events nobody looked for him; and none took notice of him as he took to the trail with the rest.

It was difficult to think at all with his head almost splitting apart with pain, and he rewound his turban to make sure that the early sun did not creep under it and put the finishing touch. They were marching nearly due west, and a cursory study of one of Ommony's forest maps had not conveyed much information. He did not know where he was to begin with, so could hardly calculate what place they might be heading for.

He did not know whether to approach Mahommed Babar and tax him with disloyalty—perhaps dissuade him even yet—or to let him alone and wait on events. Chance and the law of averages always play into the hands of him who waits. He did not even know whether Mahommed Babar had seen him or not; nor if so, whether he had recognized him. That answer made on the monolith—"How should I know who he is?"—might have been honest in either of two ways—plain truth, or the effort of a careful man to save a friend's life.

He decided at last to look for Mahommed Babar and watch for an opportunity. But whether his head ached so badly that he could not watch as alertly as usual, or whether Mahommed Babar avoided him, he failed—even when they reached a Moplah village and filed up the one tree-shaded street.

IT WAS a prosperous enough village of about two hundred huts, some in considerable compounds, all enclosed behind a fence of sticks, and all shaded by enormous trees, underneath which the inevitable poultry put on muscle fighting and chasing insects. Peaceful enough at the first glance, except that the little boys who came running out were noisy and pelted the prisoners, and the women peering through the high stake-fences shrilled like furies.

There was a mosque built mainly of mud and thatch at the upper end of the steep street, and some one was thumping a tom-tom near the door. King made straight for that, confidently in spite of the sickening pain in his head and the increasing curiosity of a dozen small boys, who detected his foreign appearance and were inclined to be abusive on general principles. Just as the center of a cyclone is the safest place, so is a mosque in Moslem country, if you can pass for a Mahommedan. Every Moslem has right of refuge there—the right to pray and meditate and sleep.

Moreover, the mullah very often fancies himself as a physician, or at least as a vendor of cure-all charms, so King had a double claim on him, in addition to a knowledge of the Koran that would establish his credentials in any community where, as likely as not, the mullah himself knew no more than a hundred texts. Moreover, women having no soul worth mentioning in Moslem lands, the mosque, the coffee shop and the barber's are sure to be free from the sex, which gossips no more than men, and is no more curious, but is different. The gossip of men falls nine times out of ten on unbelieving ears. The curiosity of men is fairly easy to withstand. It was a woman, not a man, who saw through Peter by the courtyard fire, and though he had no objection to lying thirty times if need were, whether cock crew or otherwise, King was resolved to avoid the dangerous sex as much as possible.

Nevertheless, a priest is usually the next most dangerous.

The mullah greeted King with undisguised relief. He craved the night's news, was full of a private stock of rumors of his own, wanted to mix with the crowd and do what the Scots call "argle-bargle," yet dared not for fear of losing dignity. Evidently there was some local phase of politics that upset the usual procedure and, temporarily at any rate, robbed the priest of his privileges.

"Ah! An Afghan!" he exclaimed at sight of King. "No? An Afridi, are you. Well, the same thing. Both are true-believers, and Islam is all one, or ought to be. The blessing of the Most High rest on you, my son."

He was a learned-looking mullah, with the white turban supposed to imply that he was a doctor of Moslem law, but the crafty expression of his face added to a sort of vague indefiniteness provided excuse for reasonable doubt. If a small community lacks a really learned priest it must make the most of an ambitious one, and usually does.

He had a straggly beard through which he ran his fingers at frequent intervals, showing his fangs between rather simian lips, which could smile, nevertheless, extremely good naturedly. Clearly a man who could let well enough alone; who would rob Peter but would certainly pay Paul; who would fight underhandedly or any other way for his own interest, but would concede the other fellow's once his own was sure. In fact, not such a bad fellow, provided you did not poach in what he claimed were his preserves.

"It is good to meet a learned man among all these fools," said King. "I sat at the feet of the learned Sidiki ben Suliman of Delhi, of blessed memory, who filled me with a void of loneliness because so few can talk as he did."

The mullah's eyes changed swiftly as he went on guard. He was like a cat that wonders whether you mean to stroke or seize it. Plainly he was willing to admire King's learning, even if he should not comprehend much of it, for all India knows the name of the late Sidiki ben Suliman, and those who were taught by him are entitled to deep respect. But he was not going to be shown up before the villagers as an ignoramus, and if anything of that kind were on the cards he was going to denounce the new arrival out of hand.

"You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours," his brown eyes said, and King understood him perfectly.

Now King really had sat at the feet of Sidiki ben Suliman. That had been part of his secret service training, and the great Sidiki had accepted him quite frankly as an Englishman in quest of knowledge, who would inevitably do more good than harm in a world that is all too empty of what are called true seekers.

"Naturally I know much less than your eminence," said King, "and I have never had the inestimable privilege of being appointed mullah. But there are some things that the great Sidiki told me, which your honor might be pleased to hear; and I have been fortunate in acquiring some medical skill that might increase your honor's reputation."

The mullah almost purred. He crossed one fat leg over the other and leaned back against a wooden upright of the portico, brushing a place on the floor with his hand as a hint to King to sit beside him.

"I perceive your honor is a man of great distinction," he said warmly. "My servant shall bring a wet poultice for your head, which I regret to see is injured, and may Allah bless your honor with a swift recovery."

They exchanged names, and the mullah rolled King's over in his mouth half-a-dozen times, liking the sonorous high sound of it.

"Sirdar Mahommed Akbar Khan! Your honor favors us. To what circumstance do we owe the good fortune of this visit?"

"I heard of what you Moplahs intend, and as a good Moslem I came to see for myself and possibly to do some good here," King answered. "However, some of your outposts saw me first in the night-time and all but beat my brains out. Your men are alert and have keen eyes in the dark—good fighting men. There is no serious harm done. I shall recover. Many a harder blow than this has fallen to my lot in the Northern wars."

The mullah's servant came and bandaged King's head rather skilfully, clipping the hair around the bruise and laying on a kind of cool leaf that reduced inflammation.

"Tell me what chance you think we have! You are a soldier. Tell me, can we drive the British away from here, seize their ships, and send an army to restore the Kahlifate in Stamboul?"

"All that is on the knees of God," King answered piously, grateful for the Moslem habit that makes that kind of reply acceptable. "Let us talk first of the great Sidiki ben Suliman and the wise sayings that he taught."

The mullah sent for food. He was delighted. Here was a man, not only of good breeding but of learning, not only of learning but of valor, not only of valor but of discrimination—a stranger most unquestionably versed in the law, who set the law first and politics after it—who was pious, wise, indisputably well disposed toward himself—one from whom he could learn priceless scraps of knowledge, to be retailed thriftily to the villagers afterwards, and one whom he dared trust to give impartial, sound advice.

"Surely," he said. "If your honor pleases, tell me of the great Sidiki and his sayings, whose memory and whose wisdom may Allah forever bless. This is a stiff-necked people and I need such word as your honor brings for the better chastening of their

pride. They are willing to slay the infidel and to circumcise the idolater, but they are backward in prayer and fasting, and in alms-giving less eager than these stones."

So for an hour they talked, eating chupatties swallowed down with drafts of cows' milk (for the plundered Hindu cows were lowing for relief, and the villagers were not so unmindful of their mullah's needs as he chose to maintain.)

King's art—his whole art—consists in being all things to all men, as that arch-strategist the apostle Paul advised, so as he talked the mullah warmed to him, calling him "my son," drinking in the absolutely simple proverbs that had fallen from the lips of Sidiki ben Suliman, deceased, wondering at his broad humanity, chuckling at his shrewdness, more and more patronizing him and, as he patronized, delivering himself bound and helpless into King's net.

King asked no questions. Whoever has watched a lawyer examine even a willing witness must know that direct interrogation is the surest way to get the facts confused. He was simply sympathetic; not so flattering as friendly; willing to be waited on and accorded deference, but much more pleased to render service if that could be done with dignity. He owned the key that opens all doors in the world, and the oil that prevents the telltale squeak of hinges.

"Your honor is acquainted in the North. Do you know Mahommed Babar?" the mullah demanded at last. The really important subject *must* come to the surface, as a cat knows when she camps near a mouse-hole. King was at least as cautious as a cat.

"Who is he? What of him?" he countered.

"He came and worked for Ommon-ee, who is mad but has been blessed by Allah with compensating gifts. He ran away from Ommon-ee and came to us; and my servants brought me word last night that he sets himself up as a leader."

"What does he look like?" King asked, avoiding the direct question.

"I have not seen him. He advises one course, whereas I have all along insisted on the other. I say, raid and plunder. We have always done it—always. We have met defeat, because of dissention generally, but we have always kept the plunder, for our villages are inaccessible. Hindu women make good wives when their cursed superstitions have been whipped out of them. The Moplah nation has grown to be a million strong because Allah has blessed us with the daughters of our enemies. I say, Raid in the name of Allah! This Mahommed Babar from the North says otherwise. What does your honor think?"

"I think," King answered.

"In Allah's name think quickly, then, for I need advice! It is not good that a stranger should upset my authority. If he has valuable counsel for us, that is well, but he should address it to me first. Then with my approval it can be passed on by the elders."

"He lacks manners," King agreed. "Your wisest course is to arrange for me to have private word with him. Meanwhile, if you think his advice is bad——"

"It is the advice of an ape in the tree-tops!"

"—you may say there is another here from the North, whose advice may prove different."

"Excellent! Excellent! And you will say nothing without my sanction?"

"I will discuss each syllable with you in advance!"

KING entered the mosque and lay down in the cool, clean interior. The mullah departed, blessing him. He had let enough time go by to preserve his dignity and now, with a wonderful new ally in reserve, whom Allah must have sent for the express purpose of upholding traditional authority, he could afford to approach the raiders and highhandedly "demand to know." Incidentally, of course, he would make a few inquiries as to the share of the loot that was due him, and would look the prisoners over—males first, of course, in the name of Allah, for likely converts. Females second, not quite so perfunctorily, in the name of prudence, since he had but two wives.

And because some of them wished to avoid the mullah, whose prayers were doubtless excellent but whose appetite for percentages was insatiable; and because it was the custom; and because there was nowhere else where men could talk at that time of day without being overheard by women (which is always inconvenient) gossiping parties of two and three, with an eye for the mullah as they made a circuit of the house, began dropping in to the mosque and squatting face to face on *kaskas* mats.

It was reasonable that King should lie

there fast asleep against the wall. Even in the gloom every one could see that his head was bandaged. He might be dying. Who knew? In the name of the Prophet, Allah bless the man!

And having breathed the word of charity, they spoke of blood—of this and that raid on the railway line—of this and that woman dragged screaming from a Hindu home—of jewelry, cash, cattle—and the tale of butchered Hindu traders.

But lordly though the count was, and uninterrupted the series of detail victories, every little group opened presently on the subject of Mahommed Babar, until one group joined another and absorbed in a common subject they all formed one wide circle—outside which, in the shadow King lay presumably dead to the world. Not that he mattered. A Moslem—an obvious Northerner—a man with a broken head whom the mullah had been seen to feed on the portico—let him listen for all they cared.

Mahommed Babar had puzzled them. They recognized him for a good, grim fanatic, whose fiery impulse was to convert all India to Islam forcibly; but they did not understand his everlasting harping on the theme of caution—forbearance—discrimination.

What in the name of Allah had forbearance to do with rebellion? Why discriminate between troops and civilians? Troops could hit back. Civilians usually couldn't! Civilians had money. Troops had none. And by the time you had driven British troops to bay and butchered the last man there was usually not even any ammunition left. It was wiser, easier, more profitable and much less dangerous to kill civilians. Moreover, the soldiers never had women with them, and civilians always had.

The consensus of opinion was that Mahommed Babar was probably mad. Not that madness was necessarily against him. Most good leaders had a strain of divine frenzy that showed itself in unexpected ways. But it was a weird kind of madness that urged them to make common cause with Hindus! Mahommed Babar actually said, and swore to it in the name of the Most High, that in Delhi and such-like ancient places—even in Ahmedabad and Lucknow—Moslems and Hindus had fraternized and sunk old grievances in the hope of combining to clear India of foreigners from end to end. The man was obviously not a liar, but they did not believe a word of that. Some one had deceived him.

Why, the first thing they would do, if the British could be driven out of India, would be to—Allah! Think of it! How many Hindu virgins, and how many rupees in Hindu pockets would remain between the mountains and the sea? Oh Allah, Giver of all good, hasten that day!

Nevertheless, Mahommed Babar had impressed them. Their neck of the woods lacked leadership. Their own mullah was a greedy fellow, full of talk and plentifully bent on rapine, but not inclined to take the field himself—which, indeed, was no misfortune, since he would be quite sure to lead into disaster if obeyed, and if he were disobeyed there would be even less discipline than at present.

Mahommed Babar would make a splendid leader. Trained in war—widely traveled and full of experience—scornful of personal gain, and therefore unlikely to tithe them too heavily—brave, for had he not faced their headmen the previous night and stood up to them unarmed, insisting on his determination to be heard? Magnetic—for had he not appealed from the headmen to themselves, and successfully? They had actually threatened their headmen with violence unless they gave the Northerner a hearing, and one by one the headmen had seen the advantage of befriending him.

Followed much laughter. It was funny to remember with what haste the headmen had scrambled to make friends with Mahommed Babar after the first one had shown the way. Hah! With what jealousy they competed for recognition! How they had flattered, who but ten minutes before were mouthing hot threats! How they had striven and intrigued for the privilege of being host to him!

Even now all the headmen were crowded together uncomfortably into one small room rather than let one man have Mahommed Babar's private ear. Allah, what a stifling heat in there! What a mess of argument! If Mahommed Babar were indeed a leader he would drive those headmen forth and claim his privacy!

By Allah, that was a brilliant proposal! Who had thought of it?

They all had, since somebody said it was brilliant. Each nudged the other and insisted on having been the author of the praised remark.

Why—how was it brilliant? Hah! Any man with half an eye could understand that. Let there be a sign from heaven. Was not that the authorized, established, ancestral way of deciding knotty issues? If Mahommed Babar should up and drive those headmen forth, thus proving himself greater and braver and wiser than the headmen, then let him be accepted as their leader! If not, then no.

Let Allah, Lord of life, decide the issue. Then, if Mahommed Babar drove the headmen forth it would be the verdict of Allah and——

The speaker was interrupted by the arrival of the headmen in more or less of a cluster, each doing his best to seem the most important without offering the others too much inducement to challenge him. For a while they all whispered and talked at once, unable to elect a spokesman, until at last the youngest of them seized the advantage, speaking very rapidly and loud to avoid interruption.

"We advise that you engage this man Mahommed Babar to be leader for the present," he announced.

"We recommend it."

"We have considered the proposal in council and we strongly advise it!"

"We will continue to be a council. He may do nothing without our approval. Subject to that we advise you to appoint him leader for the present."

"We are unanimous."

"We urge you to agree to this at once."

The headmen were undoubtedly unanimous, but in nothing so much as preventing any one of their number from rising a little higher than the rest.

There came another man into the mosque. He was laughing and full of communicative malice.

"He drove them forth! I saw! I heard! From the street I saw and heard! He called them bellies full of wind and said he will appeal to less opinionative folk! He said he will offer himself as leader before us all, and we may leave or take him. If we take him he will lead. By Allah he will lead, said he. If we reject him he will go away and we may stew in our own juice! So he said, standing in the door with legs apart, and they went away and held a council afterwards."

"Good! Let him be leader!" said some one, and they shouted agreement.

"But he must change that part about doing no violence to civilians! We must be allowed to loot or kill unhindered!"

They agreed to that, too, unanimously.

"Let some one bring him and we will tell him so to his——"

The speaker's jaw dropped. There was silence. In the door Mahommed Babar stood, with head bent a little forward and hands behind him. He appeared to meet the eyes of every man in the mosque before he spoke. Then—

"I told these headmen that I will be your leader," he said quietly. "Does any one object?"

None did. At least none cared to voice his disapproval.

"Very well then," he said after a full minute. "I will lead. Henceforth there will be no killing of unarmed civilians. But there will be a plan and a purpose, and no back talk. I will give my orders to the headmen, who will enforce them. By Allah, since you have named me leader, I will lead!"

CHAPTER X

"Hostages."

PEOPLE live on the slopes of Vesuvius. They speak of the volcano's cruelty, its sudden anger, its destructive outbursts—of the names of its slain, of the square leagues of vanished orchards, and of the cities buried under lava. They continue to live on the slopes of Vesuvius. The profits while peace lasts are greater than on the crowded plains, and the human gambling instinct draws them to settle again among the smoking lava beds between eruptions.

Hindus live in Moplah country. They speak of the Moplahs' cruelty, their sudden anger, their destructive outbursts—of the names of the slain, of the square leagues of vanished cultivation, and of the cities buried in jungle that once hummed with Hindu life. Hindus continue, nevertheless, to live in Moplah country. The profits while peace lasts are greater than on the crowded plains, The gambling instinct draws them to resettle the smoking villages between outbursts of fanaticism.

The Hindus were there first, just as people were there before Vesuvius. Once in every fifty years or so since the Moplahs' first invasion, which is oftener than Vesuvius breaks loose, the Moplahs have readjusted

the balance in their own favor, adding to themselves new wives, new cattle, new money, and new blood in the shape of compulsory converts. Estimates of the number of Hindus killed on those occasions vary from a score to a million, according to whether Hindu or Moslem makes the estimate and whether the inquirer is merely curious or a British Government official.

Undoubtedly there is more looting than murder, just as Vesuvius impoverishes more people than it slays. The Hindu can run and, moreover, has a merry little way of accepting the creed of Islam temporarily, together with its permanent brand, and reverting to Hinduism when the storm is over.

For the profits are prodigious. The Moslem is literal minded. The Koran forbids charging interest, so he never charges it, but he will pay it willingly. And whereas under the ancient Moslem law no man's land or house could be attached for debt, the British have changed all that; a mortgage has become the moneylender's chief security. And a Hindu would rather lend money than till fields, especially with the legal maximum at twenty-four per cent.

So once in a generation or so the balance really calls for readjustment, and it is only the Moplah's method that is reprehensible. Like Artemus Ward's kangaroo, he is an "amoosin'cus." He redistributes the moneylender's surplus and converts the villager to Islam, but is careful to leave the moneylender unconverted, in order to have some one from whom to borrow by and by. And although he plunders the towns and villages and puts priests to the sword, he as often as not leaves the Hindu temples unharmed, in order to tempt the Hindu back again when recurrent peace sets in.

It was so at Podanaram, which the legends say was an enormous city before the Moplahs came. That may be true, for the Hindu temple that stands in the midst with little narrow streets crisscrossing around it in every direction is much too big and well-built for a town of the present size. Some of its stones are enormous. There are evidences of its being an ancient Buddhist temple made over by the Hindus, although the Hindu carving has suffered, too, where the iconoclastic Moslem has knocked off ears and noses.

The temple appears suddenly and sets you wondering, just as Podanaram appears unexpectedly amid the jungle at the end of a winding forest path. The jungle has invaded the ancient city in sections, gaining foothold where it may, and enormous trees make it impossible to gain any idea of the size of the present community, or even to see the temple from anywhere except in front. The temple's rear is plunged into impenetrable gloom, and from overhead the monkeys drop down on to its pagoda-like roof, which in places has been rubbed into grooves by the action of branches and wind.

Podanaram now was headquarters of the most radical Moplah puritan reformists. The Hindu temple was official G. H. Q. Just as Cromwell stabled horses in cathedrals the pupils of the Ali Brothers chose the most sacred Hindu shrine available for their designs against the Hindus, and the famous Alis being in jail elsewhere those who carried on the good work were much more thorough than their teachers might have been.

The Moplahs, being sons of their sires, were split into factions, of course, although not so badly as usual. The rabid, self-elected G. H. Q. at Podanaram was aiming at unity by force of a good example. So they seized a hundred Hindus, men and women, and made them clean that temple from cellar to roof, there being nothing under the blue sky filthier than a Hindu place of worship, nor anything cleaner than a Mohammedan mosque.

Having cleaned the temple thoroughly, the Hindus were marched in procession to distant villages, where a dozen or so in each place were publicly and painfully executed, to the greater glory of Allah, who is the Father of mercies and men, and never sleeps.

Very ingenious, that. There was not a village in a radius of twenty miles thereafter that could claim no Hindus had been butchered in its midst. All being equally guilty, all must unite in repudiating foreign rule, repelling British troops and raking the coals of Jehannum. Nothing like blood-guiltiness to stir fanaticism, which was stirred accordingly.

Meanwhile, in a clean-swept G. H. Q., the puritan reformers began their bid for power, as such gentry always did and do. Loot, rapine, reformation, destruction of idolatry—those were the wages of the blind-obedient. Power was the reward of brain-work, and the key of all contentment.

They chose, and would take nothing less. Control. The Key of Everything.

There were the individuals who had been taught by the cleverest agitators in the East. That their teachers were in jail only keened their appetite for vengeance and rebellion. Supplied with funds from the common Hindu-Moslem purse, they urged the butchery of Hindus, not because they cared but because that was sure to be obeyed and obedience is the very bones of power.

Schooled by shrewd demagogues, they knew that the outcome must be defeat. Therefore they planned for such disaster as should make the Moplahs turn toward themselves more desperately. For such outrage as should force the British hand and oblige retaliation. Then for such advertisement of British ruthlessness, as should set alight the whole fire of Moslem India. By that light they expected to see their way to power indeed.

But little by little! First Moplah-land. Power first over the factious villages, never forgetting for a moment the obligation to provide for their own individual safety in any event. Better jail than death, for a man may use his brains between four walls. Knowing defeat was inevitable they could plan for the days beyond defeat, and did.

And the first consideration of G. H. Q. must be intelligence. Village by village they arranged for spies, mullahs mostly, who kept them informed of every development. In the beginning, when a village sent its men-folk on a raid, G. H. Q. invariably sent a messenger in pursuit, who ordered just that raid in the name of G. H. Q. emphatically—only they called themselves the Khalifate Committee, which sounded more orthodox. So the suggestion of obedience was imposed and grew. None seemed to know exactly who the Khalifate Committee were, which helped immensely, and almost from the start men who would have defied their own headmen to their teeth obeyed the Khalifate Committee without murmur.

There are principles for winning the control of men, just as there are for training dogs. There are men who teach them; other men who study them as keenly as bankers investigate the laws of money. You take away a bone from a puppy, and presently give it back perhaps, to demonstrate your absolute authority and by and by the puppy lets you do it with an air of resignation, almost reverence. You must do the same thing to a crowd if you hope ever to exercise unquestioned sway.

THERE came along a fire lane through the forest a crowd of a hundred and fifty men carrying the plunder of a mixed train, dragging an elderly white man with them, who had warts and a butler's face, and carrying the prisoner's unconscious wife on an improvised litter. There were other prisoners, but those were the important ones. Incidentally they were also the greatest nuisance, since it took four men to bear the litter and four more to drag and shove the judge along.

He had said he was a judge, which was why they had spared his life from the start, and there was no precedent in living memory for killing or mishandling a white woman, so they had brought his wife along too.

The loot was very good indeed, including rifles. Most of the other prisoners were young women from a Hindu village down along the railway line—entirely satisfactory. The judge and his wife were a speculative quantity—perhaps profitable, perhaps not; certainly a cause for pride, but as inconvenient as a pair of European boots and quite likely dangerous, if one only knew.

They had sent word by runner concerning the judge and his wife, partly in spirit of boastfulness, but also to see what the reply would be—not to the Khalifate Committee in Podanaram, for that would have conceded too much, but to a village whose mullah they well knew would forward the news to the Khalifate Committee. Thus they could obtain a professional opinion without confessing themselves in need of it.

The professional opinion met them in the form of a stern command delivered to them in a forest clearing by a sub-committee headed by an ex-Brahman who had been forcibly converted twenty years before and wisely had made the best of the situation. A Brahman is constitutionally bent on self-assertion and inclined to reach the top, like scum on water. Nearly always an adept, too, at establishing his claim over ignorant men.

He told them to give up their white prisoners—to surrender them to the Khalifate Committee, who would take charge of them and be responsible. The men who

carried the litter, and who shoved and dragged the judge, complied without demur; so the headmen were presented with a *fait accompli*, which like possession is nine points of almost any argument. The ex-Brahman ordered his own party to take the prisoners away, and himself stood guarding the retreat exactly in the middle of a narrow jungle path, like a swag-bellied Cerberus.

"The Khalifate Committee takes charge of all white prisoners," he announced. "Whoever conceals or neglects to hand over a white prisoner will be punished. You are allowed to keep all other loot," he added, as if that were a concession granted by incontrovertible authority.

It was cleverly done. The moment was accurately chosen. The raiders wanted to go home and eat, brag, sleep. They decidedly did not want to go to Podanaram and argue with men who were almost certain to have the best of any argument except possibly force. The headmen could have accomplished nothing by going without their following, who would almost certainly have refused to go, and all who were in favor of not carrying litters or pully-hauling corpulent *kadis** said, "Aye." The "Ayes" had it. The raiders sought their own villages, one of which was that in which King lay nursing a bruised head and Mahommed Babar was establishing himself.

And so it happened that after many hot hours and much imprecation the judge and his wife were presented like captured animals before the door of a temple that would have stirred the judge's archeological lees on any other occasion.

Mrs. Wilmshurst had recovered consciousness. In fact she had done that some hours ago, but had played 'possum for fear of being made to walk again in high-heeled shoes. The litter lay on the stones of the temple forecourt and she sat on it, staring and being stared at by a row of Moslems, who varied all the way from cardinal-like sanctity to perfect ruffianism.

They broke no rules. As ever in such cases, they were nearly all foreigners—mostly from places as far removed as New York is from Mexico. The sprinkling of native-born Moplahs among them was enough, but no more than enough to lend a skimpy patriotic flavor to the whole, as if a Moplah or two had felt obliged to import advisers. Enough Moplahs, in fact, were there to take full blame for the whole committee's actions, and being ignorant savages they were swamped meanwhile—bewildered—almost ignored—but kept in a suitable state of amenity by dint of flattery and bribes.

Their day of disillusionment was coming, when the time should come to surrender and send in those responsible for outrages. For the present the Moplahs stood long-haired, open-mouthed, marvelling at fortune that had sent them British prisoners.

The men from Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Aden, Peshawar and the far North saw fit to be more polite to the judge and his wife than the Moplahs might have been if left to themsleves. More polite and less agreeable. The Moplahs would have grinned and gloated, but would have fed them and let them wash.

There was a table, looted from where only Allah knew, but a good, teak, Christian table, set under the temple portico on the thousand-year-old flagstones just within the limit of the shade so as to have the advantage of whatever breeze was moving. Around that were chairs—one each for the Committee, some of whom, Moplahs especially, had never sat on chairs until fate pitchforked them into such prominence. They took their places, with an oily-haired Moplah at the table head for sake of the advertisement, nearly all cross-legged but some enduring the European posture as, for instance, Mrs. Wilmshurst endured her shoes, and the judge and his wife were requested to stand at the end of the table opposite the chairman.

The language elected was English, probably because the choice implied a patronizing air toward the judge.

The chairman had nothing to say. He stuck his tongue in his cheek, displayed his magnificent teeth, and lolled with his elbows on the table, making an occasional scrawl on paper with a quill pen, perhaps to disguise the fact that he could neither read nor write. He was a very obvious figurehead and none too beautiful.

THE man who opened on the judge was an undersized dapper little Delhi Moslem, seated on the chairman's right, who looked and spoke as if he might have been a practising lawyer. His mild brown eyes were only mild at the first impression. They were unflinching really—

* *Judge.*

bold—calculating—afraid of nothing—and a lot too shrewd to take his share of the risks. That dark shade of brown that grows harder and darker as you look at it.

He recognized the judge instantly, but gave no sign. The judge was not sure. There was something about the man's deliberate impudence that seemed familiar, but of course he had seen hundreds of the same type from the bench and he did not care to run the risk of appearing to curry favor by recognizing some one whom he was not sure he knew. He stood with his hand on his wife's shoulder helping to support her and glanced from face to face, but always back again at the brown eyes of the undersized man from Delhi.

"You realize you are a prisoner?" asked the Delhi man. "You need not be afraid. We do not beat our prisoners."

"I am not the least afraid," the judge answered, "but I would appreciate your providing a chair for my wife."

One or two of the committee had the grace to look uncomfortable, but the man from Delhi grinned meanly. The judge began to be very nearly sure he recognized him, and was glad he had not made overtures.

"She shall have a chair, certainly. Many an Indian has been made to stand at her whim, but we are not vindictive!"

He clapped his hands and a boy brought a broken chair from inside the temple. The judge, who was weary almost to endurance, was left standing. Mrs. Wilmshurst sat down, speechless almost for the first time in her life.

"If you are not afraid, your case is different from that of the unfortunates who so frequently stand before you for sentence—unfortunates whom you punish drastically for breaking laws they had no voice in making," said the man from Delhi; and at last Wilmshurst did recognize him. But he contrived to keep the recognition from his eyes.

"What do you propose to do with us?" the judge asked.

"Why should we propose at all?" the other retorted. "You are a prisoner. You should ask mercy."

He evidently meant to inflict as much verbal torture as possible, for he was settling himself comfortably, cross-legged. Nevertheless, he did not enjoy the paramountcy that he hoped for. There was sturdy opposition from a gray-beard facing him, who wore the white headdress of an educated man and was big enough to have made about three of him from Delhi.

"They are hostages," he said in English. "Make no error about that. I will agree to nothing else. They are hostages."

The man from Delhi smiled with lean lips, accepting the suggestion, but obviously reserving venom for later on.

"Do you realize what it means to be a hostage?" he asked the judge. "For every outrage perpetrated by the British troops against us you are liable to be made to suffer in your own body!"

Wilmshurst smiled, rather wryly—because his feet were in agonies—but genuinely nonetheless. He was not such a fool as to suppose that men of the type before him would torture valuable prisoners. The suggestion was too absurd for him to answer with the obvious threat of what the British troops might accomplish in return. The point was not worth arguing.

Graybeard in opposition opened fire again, laying his fist on the table manfully and forestalling the Delhi man's next remark.

"You will write a letter," he said. "You will say in it that your wife and you are prisoners. You will say you have been well treated——"

"That will depend on the facts," Wilmshurst interrupted. "My wife has been disgracefully illtreated, and so have I. We have had no food—no rest. If I write a letter I shall say in it what I consider true."

"Say what you like!" the graybeard answered. "You will write the letter. Your friends will know you are a prisoner, and that is what we want."

"I shall read the letter, of course, before you seal it up," said the man from Delhi.

"I am willing to write," said the judge after a moment's reflection. His legal mind could see no possible objection to communicating with British Headquarters, wherever that might be. He rather suspected a trick, because the man from Delhi was connected with it, but for the life of him he could not see through the trick, so he supposed that none existed.

The man from Delhi, watching Wilmshurst with a quizzical expression that seemed to hint at ultimate consequences foreseen as yet only by himself, pushed paper, pen and ink toward the judge, who ignored them.

The Moplah at the head of the table said something in his own tongue and there was a moment's discussion in which the man from Delhi did not join.

"You are promised good treatment and anything you want in reason that is in our power to do until we shall have formulated our final demands. That is not yet. We will discuss them. When our final demands go to the British, your treatment after that will depend on the British reply. Now write," said the man who sat between the chairman and the graybeard.

He had obviously had legal training, and seemed more than usually proud of his command of English, for he smirked self-complacently when he had done his speech.

The judge wrote:

To whom it may concern: My wife and I are prisoners in the hands of Moplahs, who have notified us that we are hostages, but have promised us good treatment for the present. Hitherto the treatment has not been good.

"Cross that out!" commanded the Delhi man, coming round to look over the judge's elbow.

"Certainly not," Wilmshurst answered, and signed his name. "Send that or nothing!"

They were in a quandary whether or not to use that letter, and some of them did not care to argue the point in the prisoners' presence; so two of the Committee—Moplahs, who knew no English—were told off to take them to the quarters assigned to them inside the temple.

They were led through the gloomy interior past enormous stone images to a door at the rear that opened into a good-sized priests' room fairly well lighted by high barred windows that looked out among the trees. There were basins, great quantities of water, some soap, two towels, and two string-beds with cotton-stuffed mattresses and clean white sheets.

"Oh well, this might be worse!" said his wife, growing almost cheerful as the Moplahs locked them in.

"Might be worse? Yes. Might be better," said the judge. "That fellow from Delhi who did the talking is a man whom I once sentenced to twenty years for forgery and arson. He escaped from prison. His name was Aurung Ali in those days, but he has probably changed it.

CHAPTER XI

"Yours truly, John Linkinyear."

OMMONY returned to first principles—to his forest—cherished it. As a military man he was nothing. As a forester he had work, and knew that he could do it better than any one else, or otherwise he would have gone long ago to learn from the better man. War, and especially rebellion, means fire; fire in the forest means a generation's increase gone and possibly baked earth in which no tree will root again. He went to work.

Many of the Hindus in the scattered villages had been murdered. Others had run away toward the coast, where in due course a war-ship put in appearance and produced an impression of safety where there was none. But it is impressions that count. Even a pitched battle is for no other purpose than to convince the enemy.

Ommony convinced his friends, which is always equally important. The one lone cruiser that dropped anchor off Calicut accomplished no more in its way than Ommony in his. He was a refuge in a stricken land—one white man unafraid. You could go to him and have your panic laughed at—then listen to strong sympathy and reassuring wisdom.

It was Ommony, leisurely regarding life from a wicker chair on his veranda, who pointed out that, whereas a village could be burned and its women carried off, the *junglis* who had no villages were safe.

"You can rebuild your villages," he said, "but can you come to life again? Moreover, will the Moplahs burn an empty village?"

Thereafter, whoever had overheard him might have understood why the Christian missionaries have no kind word for Ommony; for he talked to those pagans in the terms of their own understanding, so that they knew him for an elder brother, not a representative of unintelligible wrath.

"The gods of the woods are afraid for their trees," he announced. "I, who have served their forest, am protected. You have seen how the Moplahs spare me and my house, although they murder the white men in the trains. The gods are grateful. But how about you? Is it better to serve the gods with little cakes and withered flowers, or to go and look after the trees that the gods

love? How do I know that the gods love the trees? People of no discernment! If the gods did not love the trees, why should they live among them?"

The logic of that was so much easier to grasp than the Moslem theory of one revengeful, flattery-loving Allah; and moreover it was so much more like what they were used to than the ordinary admonitions of the white man preaching allegiance to an incomprehensible Government, that they felt comforted and listened on, instead of shrugging their shoulders at the great gulf fixed between them and whatever gods there be.

"If you care for the trees, the trees will hide you," said Ommony. "That is the way of the gods, who reward for service rendered. If you let the trees burn the gods will forget you. Pray, and the gods will laugh like the money lender. Keep the fire-lanes clear; find the Moplahs' deserted watch-fires and slake the ashes; search for the heat where smoke is—and the gods will protect you, even as they do me. Moreover the Dee-part-tament, whose servant I am, will pay wages by the month."

So they left their miserable villages, cached their scant belongings, drove their cattle and goats into forest clearings under Ommony's direction, and submitted to be formed into gangs. The *junglis*, who are so wise that they have no homes and will not work unless the work amuses them, were set to guarding the cattle, driving them from clearing to clearing out of the way of the raiding Moplahs and not losing more than a fair percentage to the lords of the jungle. Leopards must eat, and the terrified buck were much harder to kill since the fighting started.

Other *junglis*, scouting to discover which way the Moplahs might come next—in order to give notice to the herdsmen—were told to keep a bright eye lifted for Mahommed Babar, and to discover what had been done with the body of Sirdar Mahommed Akbar Khan—for none of the *junglis* understood that King was an Englishman. Some of them had seen him in English clothes when he first came, and with a rifle when he helped to execute Shere Ali, but that only led to the logical inference that he was an Indian who could play a white man's part.

And meanwhile, the British authorities were not idle, although every precedent had been upset. Precedents are British gods, and it is distressing to see all your little deities broken on the earth, faces downward. Nevertheless, you can distress the British without immobilizing them, and they have this characteristic: That when the old gods are quite worn out and in disrepute they adopt nice new ones promptly.

The railways were out of commission, along with nearly all the bridges and a good proportion of the rolling stock. The roads, too, were blocked with felled trees and great rocks loosened from the hills, for brother Moplah who had seen the white man practising his creed in France had learned at last how to do a job thoroughly. Wherever a barricade of rocks and trees could be arranged to check the advance of troops, there it was. There, too, were trenches very skilfully designed and placed.

The torn-up railway track was about the only practicable line of advance; and as there were hardly any troops available, and such as there were were mostly needed to garrison fixed posts and protect defenseless small towns, the only possible course was to send junior officers in charge of small parties of men to patrol the line and keep the Moplahs worried.

LEFT to himself without a nurse in red tabs and brass hat a British subaltern can lead men. Whether wisely or not is not the question. He can be depended on to go three times as far as suggested and to have much less trouble with his men than if there were a canteen and a court martial within reach.

So Lieutenant John Linkinyear, marching jauntily at the head of eleven men—having lost three *en route* and buried them—arrived at Ommony's one early morning just as Ommony was coming down the steps with a gun under his arm.

"Bacon and eggs!" demanded Linkinyear, whose last meal was a supper of dry biscuit. "For twelve of us! Section—halt! Stand easy! Let your mouths run!"

Ommony shouted to his cook to continue bringing hot food until further notice, and demanded news.

"I'm three days out, thank God, and out of touch," said Linkinyear. "The last I heard was that Sutherland of the Rutlandshires and twenty men got theirs—and a rumor about old Kadi Wilmshurst and his missus. It's true about Charley and his Ruts. We found their bones in

the ashes of a first class railway carriage. Gave 'em full military honors—loaded salute. They'd earned it. Charley was a first class man. He'd actually thrown up earthworks with the railway carriage on one wing and the station building on the other—telegraph wire entanglement—iron off the station roof to keep the gravel and sand heaped up—no end good! Must have moppled 'em too—made 'em so sore they left the wire and stuff behind 'em—probably hadn't enough men left to drag it away."

"What was the rumor about Wilmshurst and his wife?" asked Ommony.

"They were in a train that didn't get through. I'm supposed to be sniffing for kubber* of them. Morning I left there was a note supposed to be from him saying he was a prisoner, missus along with him, and both safe. But nobody could swear to his signature and it was suspected to be a forgery."

"What good would the forgery do the Moplahs?" demanded Ommony.

"Dunno. Everybody's mad—Moplahs maddest of all, 'xcept of course the D. A. A. G. acting everything. He's no longer human. Theory was that Moplahs might be tempting us into a trap. Letter was dated from Podanaram or some such place. Never heard of it. Know where it is?"

Ommony nodded and led him in to breakfast, leaving the men to wolf food on the veranda.

"How did you come to be here?" Linkinyear demanded between mouthfuls. "Why aren't you killed or circumcised? Are you a Moplah chief—wizard—mad mullah—what's the secret? You'll come away with me, of course."

Ommony laughed and waved the suggestion aside.

"I've news of Wilmshurst and his wife. One of my *junglis* brought word last night of two white prisoners locked up in the temple at Podanaram."

"Man and wife?"

"Male and female made he them," said Ommony.

"Any description?" asked Linkinyear, pulling out his memorandum book. "Let's see—warts—age fifty-two——"

"No description, but who else could it be?"

"All right," said Linkinyear, "that's my next objective then. Which would you rather do, stay here or come with us? I'll have to borrow some sort of guide from you. Perhaps you know the way? You might be safer on the march with us."

For his own amusement Ommony mentioned the denseness of the jungle, describing it as pretty much one huge ambush. Then he described Podanaram and guessed at the number of troops that would be needed to assault the place. It all went by Linkinyear like so much weather.

"So you know the way. The luck holds! If Charley Sutherland had had my luck he'd have snaffled promotion out of this instead of making room. You know, these high court *Kadis* have influence—*Kadis'* missuses even more so—what? You get me? Rescue a *Kadi* and his beldame out of durance vile and the tide in the affairs of—what's your name again?—Ommony and Linkinyear starts rising forthwith. Princesses in enchanted castles are possibly all right, but for practise give John Linkinyear, yours truly, one fat *Kadi* and his wife in one tight fix. Return tickets, please, for Podanaram— But perhaps you can't march?"

Ommony thought he could march, but sensed a predicament unseen by the proponent of direct action.

"Some of the Moplah chiefs are my friends," he said. "Suppose I try to get word to them."

"Get word? Why? They'll know our game then. No. Let's steal a march on 'em. Nothing like unexpectedness—wins every time! We won't hurt your friends as long as they behave."

Ommony laughed again.

"They won't hurt *me* as long as *I* behave," he answered. "There's a truce that covers me, my house, property and servants. Any one may come or go unmolested from here to the station. I can go unarmed anywhere, but they would consider I had broken the truce if led a raid on Podanaram."

"I *thought* you were some kind of wizard when you turned on eggs and bacon. All right, you stay here and I'll take another guide. If Podanaram contains Wilmshurst and his wife I'm off there to acquire merit. I see an extra star for this on the shoulder of John Linkinyear."

"I see you and your men face upward looking at the crows!" answered Ommony.

* *News.*

"You've no chance, Linkinyear. I'll send word to the Moplah chiefs.

"Perhaps they'll come here to talk things over. Your wise course is to march back along the railway line and report. By the time you come this way again I'll have more news for you."

"Rats!" answered Linkinyear rudely. "Your eggs are good, Mr. Ommony. Your advice is rotten!"

OMMONY produced cigars and summoned his reserves of patience, which exceeded those of his visitor by the amount of twenty years' accretion at compound interest. His trump card was that Linkinyear would never be able to find Podanaram without a guide, and none could possibly be obtained unless he, Cottswold Ommony, consented. With that for final argument, and a fund of experienced geniality for the front line, he wore the younger man down, while eleven of the rank and file smoked pipes and listened through the open window.

The dispute lasted nearly all morning, with interruptions when Ommony went out to render off-hand justice between quarreling village folk, or to give orders for the guidance of the gangs. Whenever a native sent in word to Ommony, Linkinyear would follow out to the veranda and demand to know in his best attempt at the vernacular if he knew the way to Podanaram. He had no success. They all looked equally stupid. And he never once caught Ommony making signals with hand or eye, although he was smart enough to be suspicious and to watch for them. Ommony was not smart—merely wise.

Linkinyear would not return to G. H. Q. as long as it was humanly possible to remain away. His orders were to give the Moplahs something to think about, and if possible to make them believe that an attack in force was already under way against them. He would not sit down and be quiet in Ommony's bungalow while Ommony went to Podanaram to make inquiries, even if that should be permitted by Ommony's Moplah friends. Nor would he let Ommony go alone on any terms.

In fact, he vowed and declared that if Ommony's refusal to reproduce a guide should oblige him to return to G. H. Q. it would be his duty to take Ommony along with him. Whether or not it was his duty, he would do it. He convinced Ommony of that.

But the older man's moderation and good humor were having more effect that the youngster realized. Linkinyear yielded nothing of his demands, but gained nothing. He did not want to return along the line with Ommony in tow; yet Ommony, by everlasting obstinacy and exasperating good temper, obliged him to threaten that again and again as the only alternative to Podanaram. He threatened it almost pleadingly, reducing himself to a mental condition in which he would have cheerfully offered Ommony a year's pay to yield, if only that would not have made himself ridiculous.

At last, being full of youth and overrunning energy, he reached the stage where the judge and his wife in Podanaram seemed to be the only goal worth striving for, and Ommony, biding that time, recognized it.

"There's only one way we can agree," he said at last.

"Name it!" snapped the youngster. "No toss of a coin! I won't gamble on it! I go to Podanaram, or you come with me to G. H. Q!"

"An armed party leaving here for Podanaram would be attacked and butchered for a certainty," said Ommony. "But I might obtain permission for an unarmed party to go and speak with the prisoners."

"Fine!" agreed Linkinyear. "D'you think they'd swap the judge and his missus against the lot of us? That 'ud be good odds from their standpoint. Equally good from ours. If anything should happen to Mr. and Mrs. High Court *Kadi* our side would have to be enormously vindictive, whereas *we* wouldn't matter. Nobody would care if we got scoughed. The game is to get the judge and his wife away to safety."

"The Moplahs are not such fools," Ommony answered, looking Linkinyear candidly in the eye. "They know the value of a judge and an English lady. They'd set no more value on you and your men than G. H. Q. would! No. But you may be able to talk to the prisoners and come away."

"All right, I'll go you!"

"You would have to leave your weapons here."

Linkinyear demurred.

"It's against all the rules of war and the British service! I wouldn't mind promising not to use them. We could agree to

bury our cartridges somewhere, perhaps, but——"

"No butts or bayonets!"

"Man! We'd take their word not to attack us. They must take ours not to use our weapons."

"If I go," Ommony answered, "I go without even a hunting knife. If you go, you do the same. I know the Moplahs. You don't. I propose to return alive, which we never would if we carried rifles."

"Unloaded rifles? Just for appearance?"

"The appearance is what would start trouble inevitably. No. White flag party. Same way that a Moplah might be allowed to penetrate our lines."

"I'll find out if the men are game," said Linkinyear, and walked out on the veranda, arriving just too late to surprize them grouped with their ears to the open window.

Ommony went to the back door and whistled the same *jungli* who had attended Shere Ali's obsequies. They exchanged guttural coughs and grunts for about a minute, and the *jungli* departed at a dog-trot.

"The men are perfectly splendid. Game to go anywhere on any terms!" said Linkinyear. "Now for your Moplah chiefs! Mind—you must make this a regular white flag party—honors of war—good faith on both sides—all that kind of thing!"

"Yes, all that kind of thing," said Ommony. "I've sent for the chiefs."

BUT it was dark—nine o'clock—before the same three chiefs came who had made terms with Ommony in the first instance.

"What is it, Ommon-ee? Who are these soldiers? We promised. You need no guards in this place."

"Be seated. My servants shall bring food. You have prisoners at Podanaram—a judge and his wife."

"Not we, but the Khalifate Committee. What of that, Ommon-ee? Do the British not take prisoners?"

Ommony chose a cigar and drew on his air of deliberate leisureliness.

"Have you ever defeated the English?" he asked after a moment.

"Not seriously. No. However, this time——"

"If they should defeat you, would it not be best if there were certain claims on their generosity that might be brought forward on the day of settlement?"

"We have treated you well, Ommon-ee."

"But I am only a forester. The prisoners at Podanaram are very important ones. If they should be ill-treated——"

"As Allah hears us, they shall not be!"

"If I should send word into the British lines that of my own knowledge those two prisoners are well and are being treated kindly, there would be satisfaction," said Ommony. "Satisfaction begets good-will. And out of good-will no harm was ever born, even between enemies."

"That is true. We trust you, Omon-ee. We will take you to see those prisoners, but you must not spy on us; you must promise that."

"I shall return to this place," he answered, "and these soldiers will carry my report."

"Good. They may wait here. Only we will take their weapons as guarantee. When you return we will give them back their weapons. That is fair."

"But not wise!" Ommony answered. "It is better to leave their weapons here, subject to your promise not to interfere with them, and to take the officer and his men, unarmed, with me. In that way there will be no excuse for hostilities."

The headmen objected strenuously, but Ommony refused equally strenuously to leave any of the party in his bungalow, saying that if anything under heaven were certain it was that news of soldiers being quartered there would leak abroad and Moplahs from a distance, who knew nothing of the truce, would pay the place a business visit.

"These soldiers are too many," said the chief who had red in his beard. "Send all but two of them back to the British lines. Later when those two return with your message we will give them a safe conduct."

That was good common sense, but Linkinyear would not listen to it, for he himself would have had to return to G. H. Q. It would have been out of the question to send ten men back without as much as a noncommissioned man in charge. His adventurous heart was set on penetrating the jungle and the way to Podanaram and reporting the accomplished fact to his superiors. His men were no whit behind him in enthusiasm.

So Ommony held his ground, half-admiring Linkinyear's persistence, and wholly minded on his own account to look into the condition of the prisoners. There followed

an interminable argument as to disposition of rifles and ammunition, which it was finally agreed should be locked up in Ommony's store room.

Then the servants had to be sent for and carefully persuaded that the Moplah guard about to be set over them would guarantee their safety, and would not molest them, in Ommony's temporary absence.

Last, but not least, there were the white flag terms to be discussed, and the exact conditions of the safe conduct, which it was agreed in any event were contingent on the soldiers' good behavior.

One way and another, it was dawn before the white flag party left Ommony's bungalow and plunged into the gloom along a jungle fire-lane.

CHAPTER XII

"Mahommed Babar wants a cavalry saber."

THE mullah's servant came into the mosque and changed the bandage on King's head as an excuse for listening to deliberations from which he would normally have been excluded. In theory the mosque is absolutely democratic, but in practise there are tyrannies and sharp distinctions that a man must understand before he can cope with Moslem politics. If the mullah had been there in person his servant would undoubtedly have been excluded.

But the mullah, of necessity, was playing for his own hand. Having advised the village elders to oppose the claims and the temperate methods of Mahommed Babar, he could ill afford to continue to advise them in their hour of defeat. On his way down the village he had seen them driven forth by the Northerner, and had divined, with professional insight into local politics, that jealousy among themselves had practically made Mahommed Babar a gift of the leadership.

So he sent the servant to change the bandage on King's head, King being another Northerner and therefore very likely destined to be the first one's ally. And as for himself he took the obvious course—entered the house and the room assigned to Mahommed Babar's use, and waited.

His servant came first, reported that King's head was a great deal better, and gave an almost phonographic account of Mahommed Babar's final victory in the mosque; so that when the Northerner himself arrived, striding down-street with the peculiarly even motion of a man long used to spurs, and entered the house with his handsome head bowed gloomily, the mullah was well posted.

"Are you rested? Have you bathed? Permit my servant to trim your honor's beard and nails," the mullah suggested, rising and bowing.

Mahommed Babar stroked his beard and eyed the mullah for a moment in critical silence, well aware of the man's unstable friendship—equally aware of the mullah's possible importance as an ally, if wisely managed.

Nothing for nothing is the universal law of politics, with its practical opposite *quid pro quo*. In the East there are symbols, still continuing, that have their counterpart in Western decorations and honorary titles.

"Bring me a saber," said Mahommed Babar. "A cavalry saber, clean and sharp, the heavier the better."

The mullah understood. He was accepted. Subject to Mahommed Babar's overriding authority, his influence was likely to be greater than ever. An orthodox leader of rebellion—rare, but oh how wise! The mullah bowed, and almost visibly began to plan small indignities for his political rivals.

"What became of the Northerner whose head was injured when the scouts surprized him in the night?" demanded Mahommed Babar.

"Your honor refers to Sirdar Mahommed Akbar Khan?"

"If that is his name. What became of him?"

"He has been in the mosque all morning."

Mahommed Babar started almost imperceptibly.

"Unconscious?"

"No. I had his head dressed. He recovers. He is anxious to speak with your honor."

Mahommed Babar began to pace the room, chin forward and hands behind him, to and fro, to and fro, wrestling with indecision. There were moments when his fine teeth and hard eyes gleamed with an iron resolve, followed almost immediately by a different interpretation of the same impulse. Once or twice he stood, and held his dark beard in both hands as if about to tear it in the Eastern expression of distracted grief.

Mullahs, priests, ministers know all those signs. They can recognize pride, honesty, fine frenzy, patriotism, determination, compromise. The mullah watched stealthily, looking away each time Mahommed Babar faced about.

"What do you say his name is? Sirdar Mahommed Akbar Khan? Great names! A great man possibly."

He faced the mullah and stood with legs apart looking down at him, holding one elbow and stroking his beard again.

"See that he is respectfully treated. Let him have no weapons, but he may come and go unmolested. That is my order."

It was the very first detailed order given by Mahommed Babar since his grasp of the leadership, and the mullah's opportunity to attach his own imprint to authority.

"If he comes and goes but has no weapons harm may befall him, *sahib*. Better imprison him."

"I have spoken! If harm befalls him, let his blood be on your head! Let me have word of everything he says and does."

"Your honor will not speak with him?"

"No."

The mullah hesitated, devoured by curiosity, which eats the brains of some men as worms gnaw the belly of a dog.

"He has no beard, but—is he your honor's brother?"

Mahommed Babar glared. The word brother in the East has various significances. Moreover, a mullah's curiosity more often than not has teeth. Answer, and he perverts the answer. Refuse, and he draws his own conclusions. Appear to mistrust him, and he mistrusts you. Trust him, and take the consequences!

"You may get the answer to that question from Sirdar Mahommed Akbar Khan, and you have my leave to go!" replied Mahommed Babar, resuming his stride up and down the room with his hands behind him.

So the mullah returned to the mosque, where the elders had done arguing, and announced his restored importance in a short speech. He had prayed, he informed them; that being his business and he a faithful man. In answer the Lord of Mercies had inspired him to go and visit Mahommed Babar down the street. During the ensuing interview knowledge had been born in his mind in a flash that this Mahommed Babar was the Lord's appointed leader, and he had therefore blessed him in the name of the Most High, whose right arm would now surely uphold the Moplah cause.

Mahommed Babar, a very prince of men and a lover of God if there ever was one, had accepted the blessing and given thanks for it, requesting him, the mullah, to continue with spiritual mediations and wise advice. In view of the facts, and of his conviction that all this was Allah's will, it was his duty to urge them to obey Mahommed Babar implicitly in all things—for the present. He added the last words in more or less of an undertone, having not only a fine imagination but a well-developed bump of preparedness against contingencies.

The elders departed, discovering scant amusement in the mullah's sermon, but bent on making the most of the situation. They were so eager to keep an eye on one another that they flocked out, elbowing and shoving—hurrying down street to undo the advantage gained by those who had stood nearest to the mosque door.

The mullah approached King, who was still lying down with his bandaged head cushioned on the folds of his turban.

"Your honor's brother is disturbed for your honor's safety," said the mullah. "He orders a bodyguard appointed for your honor, lest harm befall. There is a little room behind this mosque—clean—comfortable—my son and my servant would bring food——"

King noted the tense and was careful to look pleased. The mullah's underhandedness was easy enough to see through, but the word brother was not so easy. He suspected guesswork, not believing that Mahommed Babar would have proclaimed relationship for any reason. He had probably given orders that made the mullah suspect blood-relationship as the only likely explanation. There might even be a slight facial resemblance. He was no such fool as to enlighten the mullah one way or the other.

"Has your honor a weapon?" the mullah asked, almost off-handedly, not looking directly at him, but sidewise. Conscious of the automatic still tucked snugly against his ribs, King shook his head.

"Get me one!" he urged. "Those rascals who struck me on the head took mine."

The mullah looked relieved, and beckoned King to follow. Almost laughing, King obeyed him and passed out through the rear door of the mosque into a tiny court, at the back of which was a one-story thatched

building. As a jail it was ridiculous. Nevertheless—

"This is where your honor must stay until further orders," said the mullah.

King noted the "must," and bowed acknowledgment. The mullah looked relieved again, as King observed. When men of the North, or Moplahs of the South, make prisoners they search them, usually strip them, and invariably lock them in a place whence escape is impossible.

The mullah showed the way into a reasonable room, carpeted with matting. It had two windows, barred with upright wooden rods. The ceiling was low and of calico. The door had obviously been stolen from some ready-made imported wooden building and could be kicked down easily. There was a folding canvas cot, a camp-chair, and a few odds and ends, including a bundle of old swords and bayonets in a corner, some of them dating from before the Mutiny. One of them was an enormous cavalry saber, much heavier than is used in any army nowadays.

The mullah made an armful of the weapons and pitched them all out in the yard, as if tidying the place. Reconsidering things, he brought the big saber in again. A very tactful man that mullah. Quite a strategist.

"There is a cot—a chair—your honor may rest here and get well. Would your honor do a favor for me? There is no hurry, but when the head feels better. This saber now—an old one—I place no faith in such things, but prefer this."

He pulled out a Mauser repeating pistol and patted it meaningly. King noticed rust on the sliding action and wondered whether the thing would go off.

"Your brother Mahommed Babar wants a cavalry saber. Would your honor care to clean and sharpen this for him? See, it was a good one once. Whoever owned it knew how to use it, too. Look at the notches he has nicked below the hilt—nine, ten, eleven men! A fighter! Your honor—a fighting man—sharpening a saber must be—see, I have a box of implements—files, a whetstone, sand, leather and some rags. There is water in that iron jar. Your honor is willing?"

Diplomacy! But two can play at that—none better than King, who can seem to play the other fellow's game more innocently than a sheep led by the bell-wether.

"If your honor's head were only——"

"Much better!" announced King. "Hardly aches now."

"I will be back in an hour. If that saber could be ready."

"Easily."

"I must find the right men for guards, who will treat your honor reasonably well."

It had been "bodyguards" the first time. "Reasonably well" seemed also a concession to unnamed contingencies. King bent his head to hide a smile and examined the blade of the saber.

"I would prefer this personally!" said the mullah, pulling out his Mauser pistol and patting it meaningly again. Very diplomatic!

"They are better than a sword," said King, reaching for the box of rusty files and things.

"So. I will be back in an hour," said the mullah, and went out, locking the door after him, incidentally forgetting in his haste the patriarchal blessing that he should have paused in the doorway to invoke.

Both men were beautifully satisfied. The mullah now had to ask no favors of the blacksmith, who was a person given to curiosity and almost as much independence as the men of his ancient guild who hammered armor for the knights of old. His guest was busy and undoubtedly believed himself a prisoner. He had time to hunt up discreet individuals, who would mount guard for a day or two and hold their tongues. There was no such simple way of reporting a man's sayings and doings as to keep the individual under lock and key. And, as he wanted very badly to be absent for the next few days, the arrangement was all the more convenient.

Last, but not least, the saber was likely to be cleaned and sharpened in such fashion as would delight even such a fierce soldier as Mahommed Babar. Excellent! There is no God but Allah, who is all-wise and who directs the thoughts of the faithful. Mahommed is the Prophet of Allah, on whom be peace! He emerged from the mosque and walked down-street with an air of contemplative statesmanship.

IN THE bedroom King worked at the saber contentedly. He might need it—if the mullah or his servants should return too soon. Meanwhile, it *might* be true that Mahommed Babar needed it, in which case——

King was this kind of man: He would either break the weapon or make it as near perfect as he could. He cleaned it—made it as sharp as a razor—within half-an-hour; tested it a time or two by hacking at the door until the cheap lock came in pieces; scratched on the blade with the sharpest file and the smallest letters he could compass, 'To Mahommed Babar from A. K. with compliments'; returned it to its scabbard, stood it in the corner, and walked out. It was no use closing the door; the frame and lock were smashed too noticeably.

An hour later the mullah, returning with four chosen sycophants, discovered the bird flown but the saber leaning upright in a corner, clean and sharp. He did not examine the blade beyond testing of its sharpness with his thumb. And he had this element of greatness—he could see the uselessness of crying over spilt milk.

"Go and look for him!" he ordered. "Find him, be polite to him, but bring him back and keep him in here!"

Then he went to deliver the saber to Mahommed Babar, for that was urgent. He delivered it in presence of all the elders, who were suitably and flatteringly jealous. Mahommed Babar did examine the blade—every inch of it—seemed able to read the inscription on it—possibly the maker's name. He looked pleased, and yet not pleased as he nodded and slung the saber at his waist. A strange, uncommunicative, puzzling sort of man, Mahommed Babar.

CHAPTER XIII

"Tonight I will write down how ye did."

IT WAS no mean accomplishment that Ommony had undertaken. Among those rival and fiercely jealous Moplah villages he himself could probably go unchallenged at any time. But it was "another thousand of bricks" to take with him an officer and eleven men—even an unarmed officer and men on good behavior, with full permission granted by three chiefs.

The trouble was that the chiefs' authority was largely local. Their influence, and Ommony's own, varied with the points of the compass. With distance from their village theirs diminished, although Ommony's actually increased in some respects as he went further from his home. Locally they knew him as a friend through thick and thin, fire, drought and famine—a mediator between them and the Government—a scoffer like themselves at lawyers' law, but a masterful upholder of first principles. At a distance he was less well known but more rumored about. Men came from a long way off to submit their quarrels to him rather than go to court and be ruined with fines and fees, and they, returning well content told stories about him, invented mainly on the way home, that made King Solomon of legend seem in comparison rather a cheap and silly potentate. In far outlying villages Ommony was almost a myth. They used his name to frighten children with and as a threat conclusive when the younger members of the village council would not see sense.

So, although the chiefs provided an escort of four men whose business was to emphasize the sacredness of the flag of truce under which the party marched, and although they all carried little white flags nailed to sticks, it was Ommony's person that was really sacred. The white flags did not mean much, and the chiefs' representatives meant less and less as they drew near rival villages.

Entered another distinction, with its fine edge widening progressively. Ommony had lived among them for more than twenty years, through internecine outrage and occasional rebellion, with never an armed man to protect him. There had never been a man in uniform attached to Ommony's scant staff. He had been policeman, lawyer, judge, adviser, forest king and friend so intimately and with so little friction that he was in a class by himself, apart from the military arm—which to the Moplah is incomprehensible if not a direct invitation to fight. Soldiers fight—fight soldiers—the words worked either way.

And the ways of a rumor are wonderful. It turns on itself like a whorl of smoke blown in the wind, until the outside becomes the inside and sense is nonsense. Moreover, it grows, even as smoke grows, covering more ground as the particles of fact grow thinner. And in a forest that is even more the case, because the range of view is limited and the eye can seldom check up what the ear exaggerates.

So word was sent echoing from tree to crag by the Moplahs' outposts, and it became known for a fact in the village where Mahommed Babar was busily evolving his plan of campaign that Ommon-ee was a prisoner of war, and was being marched through

the jungle by a British officer and ten men. Ommony was riding and the others were on foot, but it was described with how many knots Ommony's feet were tied beneath the horse's belly.

Naturally, the village wise-heads had to invent a reason for any such extraordinary turn of affairs, and having no facts to go on they depended wholly on imagination, which is the secret of most news anyhow. They decided that the British were bringing in Ommony with the purpose of exchanging him against the judge and his wife who were close prisoners at Podanaram.

Whereat was laughter. Who would hold Ommony prisoner for a day? Should they let the two prisoners go, whom they certainly could hold for ransom, and accept in exchange the one, whom they would have to release instantly because of friendship and past favors? Moreover, Ommony had dealings with the forest devils, and might inflict disasters on them. Who knew? Such things have happened. How much simpler in any event to release Ommony and obtain his everlasting good-will, incidentally increasing their own stock of British prisoners, who would no doubt be very useful when the time for talking peace should come.

That was the argument, and action follows very close on argument in Moplah-land. Every step was easy except one, which was impossible. There was no way of surrounding the party in the forest without Ommony's *junglis* becoming aware of it.

So a *jungli* came hurrying to Ommony's stirrup and made noises with his mouth. Ommony wheeled his pony and addressed Linkinyear, who had refused the offer of a mount because it would make the men feel better if he marched with them. They were all swinging along at a good three miles an hour, carrying their tunics and brushing off flies with bits of twig and stuff—not sorry to halt—rather expecting to laugh, because Ommony's jokes seemed inexhaustible.

"Whatever happens next, don't show resentment or offer to hit back!" said Ommony unexpectedly, however. He spoke to Linkinyear, but *at* his men. "Our escort are acting in good faith, but we're surrounded, and we might be attacked if there were any hastiness."

They surrounded Ommony to hear his explanation, not that he had much to say, although Linkinyear shot question after question at him.

"If you'll let me keep about fifty yards ahead," Ommony suggested, "that will look less as if I were relying on you for protection. The great thing is to show them from the first that we rely absolutely on their respecting a flag of truce."

He rode on. They allowed him nearly a hundred yards. So there was plenty of room, and the pony was hardly aware of disturbance behind him when fifty men rushed between Ommony and Linkinyear's party. It was over so swiftly that Ommony did not even see what took place. He wheeled his pony and spurred back; but when he got there and forced his way through the yelling crowd, beating them over the head right and left with his hunting crop, most of the men were already dead and Linkinyear was struggling under half-a-dozen Moplahs, who were trying to tie him and at the same time to murder a private whom he was protecting.

It was amazing what they took from Ommony without retaliation. He beat them off as a huntsman whips hounds off a kill, cracking open more than one skull with the butt of his loaded whip. But he was too late to save the lives of more than Linkinyear and three men. Two more were so badly wounded as to be obviously in their death throes, and the rest lay with their throats cut Moplah-fashion, which is right back to the spine.

Then the escort of four men, who had been leading considerably in advance for the express purpose of preventing a surprize, came running back and swore with good reason that their honor was involved. They were perfectly ready to fight about it, and would have been killed in turn if Ommony had not threatened to do murder and force them to do violence to himself. Whether Ommony guessed it or not, they had peremptory orders from their chiefs to do him no injury on any pretext, and he made the most of his immunity as it developed.

Linkinyear was nearly off his head—just not quite mad enough to fling himself on the Moplah knives.

"You swine!" he yelled at them in English. "You rotten, dirty blackguards! *You* know what a white flag means, —— you! Oh, you swabs! Look what you've done, you stinkers! Good, decent fellows marching under flag of truce and—just you wait, that's all! A hundred of you swine for every decent one of my men you've

murdered! Say, they don't understand that. You tell them, Ommony. One hundred of the swine for——"

"Better give those men decent burial," Ommony suggested. "Do you know the funeral service?"

"No. Good God! How does it begin? Any of you men know the funeral service?"

"I'm sorry to say I know it by heart," said Ommony. He turned on the Moplahs, resting the whip on his thigh and speaking as if disobedience were unimaginable.

"Dig graves for those gentlemen!" he ordered.

The Moplahs demurred. They are not proponents of hard labor at the best of times. This was war—their war. There had recently arrived hugely exaggerated stories of a British victory somewhere down between Ooticamund and the sea, in which a raiding party of Moplahs had left their own dead on the field. There were stories that Hindus were burning the bodies by British order, and burning is everlasting shame and desecration to the Moslem. To be made to bury fallen British soldiers in the circumstances was something of an imposition, as they viewed it.

But not for nothing had Ommony been unofficial judge of all that land for twenty years. In their own tongue he could rake their very consciences over the coals of Eblis better than their mullahs could. For every argument that they could hurl at him he knew ten texts—could cite ten instances where they had come to him for help and had received it. Besides, they were afraid of him, and he feared nothing but his own opinion of himself.

THEY dug the graves—not one trench, but a separate grave for each dead man in a row along the jungle lane; and Ommony recited the funeral service seated on his pony, who behaved as if he had attended that kind of ceremony scores of times—motionless until the end.

"—— them, they've got fire-arms! Let them salute my men!" exploded Linkinyear when Ommony had finished.

Ommony looked at him a moment and decided on heroic means to prevent worse trouble later.

"This was a horrible mistake," he said to the Moplahs, who had stood viewing the performance sulkily, waiting to push in the covering dirt with their hands when Ommony should give the word. "Honorable men who make mistakes make just acknowledgment. How many of you bear a grudge against the dead ye killed?"

That was the kind of Solomon-like question with which he always had his way with them. None answered.

"If these men had come to fight, ye had a right to kill. But they came peacefully, observing peace. If they had died in fair fight, there would have been others of their own race, with fire-arms, to pay them final honors. But they died by your mistake, unfairly. Will ye rob as well as kill?"

They, whose notion of life was organized robbery, denied that imputation hotly.

"But the dead are dead!" exclaimed one of them.

"Ye can honor the dead like honorable men, and so yourselves be honored!" answered Ommony.

"How then?"

He told them. So the unbelievable took place. Four and fifty Moplahs, some with the blood of murdered soldiers on their hands, fired a salute at the tree-tops, not knowing what it meant exactly but understanding that in some way they were wiping out a stain on their own honor and a score that would otherwise have increased against themselves with interest. They fired across the graves exactly as Ommony told them, and the scared crows winging from a tree near by looked like the souls of dead men.

Moslems—very ignorant Moslems—living among Hindus pick up by hearsay and observation innumerable Hindu superstitions, rail their mullahs how they may. The Moplahs glanced at the crows, met one another's eyes and stared at Ommony with new respect.

"By ——! You know—by ——! I say—you tell them, will you, in their own confounded *bat*—by ——! They've done the right thing, ——! Say that, will you, please," demanded Linkinhurst. "—— —— them! They've done the decent thing!"

But Ommony had not quite finished. He made the Moplahs fell two big trees straight across the path, so that all would go around in future, making a new track, and none would tread on the graves until the forest had blotted them out completely, along with the thousands of others that dot the earth unmarked. Then:

"Tonight I will write down how ye did,"

said Ommony. "It shall be set down that ye slew like dogs and fools, but that ye honored the dead like decent men."

"Let it be set down that we did not rob the dead, but buried them in their uniforms," called out one of them.

"That, too, shall be written down," said Ommony.

CHAPTER XIV

"But they stole no Hindu women!"

MAHOMMED BABAR had done with indecision, even if jealousy had not altogether done with him. There were those who mistrusted, without feeling strong enough to oppose him. News of the first British success to date made the moment ripe for action. Mahommed Babar was a man of action. He spoke like a man. He laid good plans. He gave orders without excuses, as a leader should. And as he led off through the forest he inspired confidence. Nevertheless, he also inspired resentment.

There were those beside the mullah who hurried to Podanaram to consult with the "Khalifate Committee." Some went merely as tell-tales. Others were marplots, who would have plotted the downfall of any one who seized the leadership. About a dozen men all told, including the mullah, took to the jungle path leading to Podanaram, and the mullah saw every one of them pass him, but could not help it, being loaded with a bigger belly and more years than they.

The mullah was, furthermore, suspicious that he was followed, and that delayed him. Not sure of it. Ten times at least in the course of a long day's march up hill and down dale he thought he saw somebody dodging out of sight behind him. As many times he stepped behind a tree and waited, and once he was almost sure his pursuer had crept up within twenty paces; but although he called — coaxed—challenged—cursed—and hunted among the tangled jungle growth as pluckily as if he had been a genuine fighting man instead of a rather spoiled, short-winded priest, he was still in doubt at the end of it.

The glimpses he thought he had had conveyed only one impression. Reason told him it must be false. It could not be possible, he argued, for Sirdar Mahommed Akbar Khan with that injury to his head to be following so persistently—unless—and there another thought entered in—perhaps that injury was not so serious, in which case——

He put on speed for a while. But endurance was more in his line. Speed distressed him. He sat down on a rock near a tree that shaded him from the afternoon sun, in a clearing from which he could see in several directions, and gave suspicion full rein, muttering the names of the Most High as a sort of touch-stone against which to test his thoughts.

If Mahommed Babar and Sirdar Mahommed Akbar Khan were brothers—and whence did that suspicion come if it were baseless?—one might be spying for the other. Notoriously, brothers were either the closest friends or the deadliest enemies, almost without exception. Mahommed Babar had refused to speak with the sirdar, yet had refused to have him imprisoned. Why? And he had ordered a report to be made of all of the sirdar's sayings and doings. Strange. Very.

It began to look possible that he, the mullah, was being used as a stool-pigeon. If he was to report the sirdar's sayings, what would be easier than for the sirdar to say things that should convey desired information? Obvious! And if he, the mullah, was to be the go-between—a go-between who was also to be spied upon—what was more probably than that the sirdar was close on his trail?

MEANWHILE, less than fifty paces from the mullah, King sat behind a tree from under whose lowest branch he could just see his quarry, and was very grateful for the short rest. The poultice of leaves had worked wonders, but the pain in his head still robbed him of fifty per cent. of efficiency. Nevertheless the pursuer has all the advantage. It is much easier to keep a fugitive in sight than to make the pace, especially if the fugitive is short and the pursuer long winded.

Officers of the Indian army are encouraged to hunt the most difficult big game in the world because of the experience it gives them, and the mullah would never have caught a glimpse of King unless he had so chosen. He had deliberately shown himself a dozen times for a fraction of a moment, because he wanted him rather rattled. Nervousness upsets even a mullah's judgment, and it is by the other man's mistakes that the pursuer profits.

Cagey old bird, the mullah! He settled himself apparently for a well-earned snooze in the shade—but with his head turned in the direction from which pursuit would come. King could just discern beyond the clearing the only possible path by which the mullah could eventually resume his journey; so he skirted the clearing, which was a very difficult thing to do without betraying himself, because of the denseness of the undergrowth and the necessity for crossing the open a score of times. Having reached the point where the track plunged again into the jungle he sat down exactly in the midst of it, and waited. Cagey old bird though the mullah might be, there was salt on his tail!

When King began to make his circuit of the clearing the mullah heard a few dry twigs break, as King intended that he should. Thereafter was silence, and the mullah lay shamming sleep, with one eye watching the direction whence the noise of breaking twigs had come. At the end of half-an-hour he could endure the suspense no longer. He got up suddenly, and ran for the point where he had heard the twigs break, found nothing, beat about the bush for fifteen minutes, and returned jumpily nervous to the rock, where he had left his bundle of traveling necessities. It was gone!

The ground was too dry to take footprints. There was nothing to show whether bird, beast or man had done the lifting, and the mullah in his heart suspected devils. Even his cotton umbrella was gone—that inseparable emblem of his dignity that, unlike all other dignities in this world, provided comfort too!

One point was settled, at all events. It was a common thief, and not the Sirdar Mahommed Akbar Khan. No sirdar would steal a mullah's cloth bundle containing snuff, soap, tobacco, socks and a change of shirts. Luckily he had tucked his small supply of money into the fold of his belly band. Luckily, too, he knew of a lodging for the night, where he would be treated with proper dignity, umbrella or no umbrella. He resumed his journey angrily, yet praising Allah in that he had not been killed.

He was telling his beads as he turned the corner into the jungle lane on the far side of the clearing; and it should not be written of a mullah that he screamed. It was not a scream. It was blended of oath, prayer, exclamation, agony of fear, astonishment, roar of rage, and recovering presence of mind. There is no one word in all the dictionaries that covers that ground completely, but there is one sound that expresses all of it, and the mullah used the sound, leaping backward at the same time like a colt that sees an adder in the path.

King rose easily from a sitting posture, holding the mullah's bundle and umbrella—very careful indeed not to startle his man any further, for that rusty Mauser pistol might go off after all, supposing the mullah could find it among the folds of his clothes.

"I saw that your eminence was tired, so I picked these up to carry them for a while!"

"How—why—what—Allah! Why are you not where I told you to stay?"

"The saber was clean and sharp. None came. I was curious to see the village. I emerged—looked about me—caught sight of your eminence—and naturally followed."

"Naturally!" the mullah snorted. "Did the door open naturally? The lock was smashed to atoms!"

"Yes. A poor lock and a good saber! Which way shall I carry your eminence's bundle—forward or toward home?"

The mullah eyed him, hesitating. He looked tired, and there was pain behind his eyes as if his head ached terribly, but nonetheless he was an antagonist too well set-up and limber looking to be tackled except as a last recourse. Besides——

"I have no means of protecting you. Can you protect me if we march together?" asked the mullah.

But no wise man shows his weapons until he means to use them.

"We came thus far," King answered, smiling. "If Allah pleases—is the road much longer?"

The mullah decided on direct tactics. This was a crafty fellow, who could outwit craft. It would be waste of words to try cozening him.

"Tell me truly how you stand toward Mahommed Babar!" he demanded. "Are you his friend or his enemy? I charge you, answer me the truth, or the curse of Allah and of all His angels shall pursue you forever!"

King answered without a moment's hesitation.

"Mahommed Babar is a friend of the Moplahs and of all who love liberty," he answered.

"And you?"

"I, too, am a friend of the Moplahs."

That was as direct an answer as a man may expect in a land that had studied evasiveness for seven thousand years.

"You spy on me in his behalf?" asked the mullah.

"I am his friend. And you?" King retorted.

The mullah made a virtue of necessity—an easy enough thing to do when you are a fatalist by profession. Believing in prayer and direct answer to prayer—failing of any means to rid himself of this man—and having prayed repeatedly for guidance in the present difficult turn of affairs, the mullah considered himself guided accordingly. This sirdar must be a guide sent purposely by Allah.

"I am his good friend!" he answered. "It was I who placed in his hands the saber that you sharpened, in token of Allah's blessing. He hitched the saber on and has gone foraying."

They swung into step together and walked in silence for a mile or two, until the sun got down so low that all was deep gloom under the trees, and the monkeys chattered overhead quarreling about perches for the night.

"Where are we going?" King asked at last.

"Podanaram. But not tonight. Tomorrow. I go to find out what the Khalifate Committee says about our friend Mahommed Babar. The news has gone ahead of me; no need for us to hurry. We are near a place where we can spend the night."

FROM under the trees you can see the stars before the sun goes down, but dimly. It was just as the stars shone forth with full brilliancy that the mullah pushed King up a side-path, whose existence was concealed by a tree-trunk lying parallel with the main track.

"Most men are afraid of this place," he said. "Are you timid about devils?"

Suddenly the mullah turned aside again, and a dim light showed itself a hundred yards away at the end of the gut of gloom. A man was holding a lamp—one of those earthenware things like a saucer, with a lip to take the wick. They followed the light, and the man led the way into an ancient temple that was part cave, part masonry—a Hindu temple—very likely once Buddhist—now indubitably Moslem superficially, for the noses had been knocked off the images that lined the walls, and some parts of their anatomy were missing altogether.

"This man *was* a Hindu priest," said the mullah with a self-satisfied smirk, taking the lamp and shifting it this and that way so that King could have a good view of their host. "I circumcised him. He is grateful. He and I have been good friends ever since."

Strange that a man should feel grateful for being circumcised against his will, and for having his temple walls shorn of beauty. King met the Hindu's eyes, and one of those intuitive flashes of intelligence passed between them, as incomprehensible as ether and electricity, no more, no less. The Hindu offered them water, washed the mullah's feet, then King's, with the forlorn air of a man who has lost his caste forever; and then brought food, which he served on the temple floor. King sat thinking, saying nothing. The mullah patronized the ex-Hindu, tossing him insignificant scraps of news and asking questions.

At last the mullah wiped his beard and announced his intention of sleeping until an hour before dawn, when he expected to resume his journey. With a dumb glance in King's direction that implored him to stay where he was, the Hindu led the mullah away to some chamber in the rear, and presently returned. He made a small fire of crossed sticks on the temple floor between himself and King, and sat before it saying nothing until the mullah's snores came thundering and rasping through an open door. Then—

"You are a Hindu at heart!" said King, looking straight at him.

"You are a white man—English!" the Hindu answered.

"If that were true, would it mean anything to you?" King asked.

"Hope!" he replied, speaking English. "I had almost given up hope. My spirit said you are English. You are a secret agent of the Government—an officer, I think. If you stay here I can be useful to you after that mullah has gone in the morning. Can you think of an excuse?"

"Easily. My head is injured. But how can you be useful?"

"Listen, *sahib*. You are here to work against these Moplahs—is it not so? I

would give my right hand, and my left hand—my feet, eyes, liver—and my life for one real chance to do the Moplah cause an injury! I am a renegade outcast, without honor in this world or the next. Nothing is left for me but vengeance, and I crave that as a hungry man craves food. I could have slain this cursed mullah, but I yearn to do the whole Moplah brood an injury! That mullah thinks he is the only guest who uses this place, and his talk is forever of devils, to keep others away from here. Stay here, *sahib*, and you shall know all the reports that reach the Khalifate Committee. Only promise me—on your sacred honor, *sahib*—that you will use the information against the Moplahs!"

"They *must* be defeated," King answered.

He showed King a place to sleep, in a niche behind a great stone image, and lent him a pair of most unpriestly blankets. But King was not allowed to sleep much, either during that night or those that followed. What the snoring mullah fondly dreamed was his own private preserve, turned out to be a secret meeting-place. Ex-Hindus who had been converted forcibly to Islam, losing caste so that return to their own religion was hopeless, as every suppressed people in the world has always done had formed themselves into a secret society with passwords, signs and counter-signs. But they were much more deadly dangerous than most in that they eschewed murder and confined their activities to spying, hoping to know so much about the Moplah cause that they could some day ruin it with information laid in the proper quarter.

King was awakened about midnight to sit up behind the stone image and listen to a man whose brother was secretary to the self-appointed Khalifate Committee. They had had to make use of ex-Hindus because the number of Moplahs who can read and write is approximately zero. A few mullahs. A few headmen. A few of the sons of the wealthier land-owners. No Moplah wanted any such menial task, and the virtue of the ex-Hindu consisted in his being so utterly forlorn and spiritless as not to be dangerous to any one—presumably.

He described the Committee's reception of the news of Mahommed Babar's *coup d'état*. They had approved the idea of a leader who led; who rallied a village around him and started on a foray almost before his leadership had been confirmed; a soldier, who had training and experience. But they objected emphatically to a leader who preached observance of the rules of war. In perfect pantomime, and even mimicking the voices, the man described each member of the committee's reaction to the news.

"And they will do something terrible to offset the preaching of Mahommed Babar," he prophesied before he left.

There was no danger of the mullah overhearing, even if his own snores had not rendered the feat impossible. There were some small boys, who appeared from nowhere in particular, and sat on guard in the doorway of the mullah's chamber. If he had wakened the alarm would have been given.

Never more than one visitor entered the temple at a time. There was some means of signaling with the lamp that kept new arrivals at a distance until whoever was talking to the ex-priest took his leave. In that way none but the ex-priest received the news, and none could swear who his informant had been. There was almost no chance for treachery.

It was like being in the center of a well-laid system of wires. Not an hour of the night went by but some one brought news. Of a Moplah raid. Of a Hindu village burned. Of a British force entangled in the trees and badly cut up. Of a counter-attack and a Moplah retreat. The dates of events were confusing, but the particulars were clearly given, as if the informants had trained themselves determinedly.

News came about fifteen minutes before the mullah snored his final blast and came out to pray noisily on the temple portico of Mahommed Babar's night's adventure. He had burned the railway bridges over the most difficult section of the line, and had chased away a contingent of sappers, who had been trying to make the track practicable for an armored train.

"But they stole no Hindu women, and burned no villages!" said the informant, as if that were much the most important part of his story.

The ex-priest told the mullah that King was delirious with fever, and the mullah was so little disturbed by the news that he did not even trouble to confirm it, mumbling only something about the devils of the place.

"I will call for him on my return," he said blandly, and accepting a handful of *chupatties* to break his fast with on the way stepped out into the cool, rustling darkness that precedes dawn.

Thereafter King slept in snatches, and was entertained in snatches. His host never once let him be seen by the men who brought information. That seemed to be the first and most strictly observed rule of all, that each was entitled to full secrecy and only the ex-priest should meet any informant face to face.

The Khalifate Committee aired their views rashly, considering that their servants were all forcible converts. Not even the General Staffs in France ever talked more incredibly loosely. Almost every argument and change of opinion reached King's ears within six hours of its expression by an irritated member of the Committee.

More and more their discussion raged around the subject of Mahommed Babar. Reports were so constantly and cleverly turned in that King even got to know what policy was favored by which committeeman, and who were the most consistent zealots of the nine.

By midnight of the second night the news had become fixed in an alarming groove, as disturbing to the ex-Hindus as to King himself.

"Many villages, some a long way off, are offering allegiance to Mahommed Babar, and to all he makes the stipulation that the rules of war shall be observed. The Committee desire outrages. They wish to force the British to make stern reprisals. They have sent their messengers in every direction, urging the contrary of what Mahommed Babar teaches, and now they have a worse plan. They desire to antagonize the British against Hindus and Moslems equally. Therefore they propose to torture and kill the two English prisoners—the *Kadi* and his *memsahib*—and to lay the blame to Hindu converts; the argument being that British soldiery will draw no distinction between Hindu or convert but will retaliate on all and sundry. Well handled, that would make a good story with which to goad the rest of India to rebellion."

"If that is their plan, why do they delay?" asked the ex-priest, shrewdly cross-examining.

"Because they hope for more prisoners. They wish to perpetrate a thoroughgoing outrage that will madden the English to a pitch of frenzy."

King waited the whole of another day listening to the development of that plan, and then there came news that put an end to mere eavesdropping. It was time to move swiftly. The mullah had not returned, and there was no news of him; so King accepted the *chupatties* that were ever a symbol of action in the Hindu world, and set forth with a lean, half-naked boy, who knew the distant village where Mohammed Babar was.

CHAPTER XV

"That kind of talk is always true."

THE mullah, returning from Podanaram, avoided the temple where he had left King, reasoning that if, as was likely enough, the *sirdar* should escape, the ex-priest would be blamed for it. For himself, he had troubles enough without any added difficulty of making explanations to Mahommed Babar.

He returned to his own village in doubt about Mahommed Babar. The Khalifate Committee had decided to throw their whole influence against him. Choosing the weaker of two sides was not the mullah's guiding principle, and he would cheerfully have given the amount of a year's stipend for sure, prophetic knowledge as to which of the rival influences would prevail.

As a Moslem and a mullah, he could hardly disapprove a plan to murder a couple of foreign infidels, if the cause of Islam was to be the gainer by it. What did prisoners expect? They would be lucky not to be tortured as well as murdered. Nevertheless, the project scared him. In the long run the British always had been victorious hitherto. It would be unpleasant to be hanged. Vastly safer to have an alibi. If Mahommed Babar were really strong enough to prevail against the Khalifate Committee, undoubtedly the best plan would be to notify Mahommed Babar of the project. He could manage that without the Khalifate Committee learning of his "discretion," as he described it to himself, because he had promised them to return to his village and spy on Mahommed Babar. But he must have a witness, otherwise the double-play would be no use. He must be able to prove, in the contingency of British victory, that

he used his influence against the murder of European prisoners.

It was in that frame of mind that he approached his village near nightfall. The village was almost empty of inhabitants, excepting women and children, who, however, were creating a prodigious disturbance at the foot of the hill, where the one street entered the jungle. He hurried down-hill to investigate, and was met by Ommony on pony-back, who knew him slightly, and whom he knew very well indeed by reputation.

"You step down opportunely out of Allah's lap," said Ommony by way of greeting. "Save these men's lives, will you! This is a British officer. These are three of his men. The remainder were killed in the jungle, while marching behind me under flag of truce—a bad mistake! Now these idiots of women want to kill the rest of them."

"Where were you all going?" asked the mullah.

"To Podanaram."

The mullah thumbed his beads in secret recognition of the wondrous ways of Allah, and launched forth a string of abuse that sent the women homeward. That left some half-dozen old men and cripples, and four or five armed youths who for one reason or another had not accompanied the raiders. The mullah gave Linkinyear and the three men into their charge. Ommony protested. The mullah excused himself, but was as adamant. He said it would cause a bad impression in the village if he acted otherwise, but invited Ommony, as a favored individual, to come to the mosque with him and talk the situation over.

Ommony yielded the point temporarily, knowing from experience how vastly easier it is to conduct an argument without an audience. Linkinyear did his best to look cheerful, and encouraged his three remaining men by sitting down beside them, ignoring rank over their protests. The mullah took Ommony's stirrup uphill, and the four Moplahs who had been lent by the chiefs for an escort took to their heels incontinently. Ommony tied the pony to a tree outside the mosque, and a *jungli* whom no one had noticed hitherto, came and sat in the dust beside the animal. The mullah led the way around the mosque and through a gap in the fence into the room whence King had cut his way out with a saber. The door had not been repaired.

"If your honor will be seated, I will find my servant."

Ommony raised no objection. Unless your host, in those parts, commits himself to some extent by supplying food and drink you have small chance of gaining your point. He sat down on the bed and pulled out a cigar—paused—lighted it—smoked—smoked the whole of it. His host was gone more than half-an-hour, yet it was not politic to arouse suspicion by betraying it.

Meanwhile the mullah went into the mosque and sat there. He wanted time to think. He took off his turban and pressed his temples between both hands. Put on the turban again, and knelt in prayer. Laid his forehead on the mosque floor—then rose and beat his forehead with his fists. Went out and found his servant, but suddenly changed his mind about what he had meant to say. Abused him roundly for looking like a fool, to the shame of his Creator, and then coaxed him, begging him to be discreet. Ordered him into the mosque. Ordered him out again angrily. Called him back. Made him squat down before him. Warned him how Allah is omnipresent—omniscient—knows, hears, sees all things and reads men's hearts. Bound the servant to secrecy by half a score inviolable oaths—and then sent him downhill to tell the whole party who were standing guard over the prisoners to march all four of them away at once to Podanaram, and to bring him an answer.

The answer came back in the shape of a protesting Moplah, who accompanied the servant and demanded to know whether they were to march through the jungle by night. Was the whole world crazy all at once? The mullah told the servant to say yes. The other refused indignantly, because of the danger. The mullah cursed him; then cursed and coaxed alternately; then coaxed —through the mosque door. They compromised. The prisoners were to be taken out of the village immediately, sleep wherever there was shelter. Hurry on to Podanaram at dawn. Praise Allah! The mullah had not compromised himself. He could claim afterwards that he had sent the prisoners along, or that he had not. None had seen him talking through the mosque door, except the servant; he could beat him.

He returned to Ommony, who was pacing the room restlessly—had to go out again, however, because he had forgotten in the excitement to tell his servant to bring food.

Came back again and sat down rather humbly on the floor in front of Ommony.

"And now, O Father of the Forest, let us seek to oblige each other," he suggested.

"Have you ordered food for that officer and his men?" Ommony demanded.

"That is what took this long while. It was necessary to see the food was suitable. It has been done."

He described in considerable detail the ingredients and condiments that had gone into the imaginary stew, whereat Ommony professed himself satisfied. Ommony began to explain the situation in detail, dwelling on the baseness of murdering unarmed men who came carrying white flags. He told why they were coming. He, Ommony, had consented to the expedition for no reason whatever except to save the Moplahs from consequences that inevitably must ensue if they should murder those two prisoners at Podanaram.

The mullah grew nervous again. He suggested that the consequences might not be so serious. Ommony disabused his mind. After the British victory, which must come sooner or later, the defeated Moplahs would be falling over one another to denounce the authors of every outrage, and nothing would be easier than for the British to identify culprits, who would be hanged after trial and conviction.

The mullah became very nervous indeed. Ommony pointed out that foreigners from other parts of India, who might look just at present like responsible people, would undoubtedly try to run away before the end came, leaving the Moplahs to shoulder the consequences.

The mullah, more nervous than ever, excused himself to go and see why the food was so long coming—actually to find his servant and countermand the order about taking those prisoners to Podanaram. But he could not find the servant. He had to get another man to make tea for his guest, and by the time that came at last it was after sunset.

"Where are my friends going to sleep?" demanded Ommony.

The mullah professed not to know. By that time he was too jumpy to invent a workable lie on the spur of a moment. Ommony insisted on finding out where they were to sleep; invited the mullah to accompany him, but threatened to go alone and investigate otherwise. Not knowing exactly what excuse to make, but hoping for something to turn up, the mullah took a lantern and followed him out, taking the lead as they passed through the gap in the fence and drew abreast of the mosque portico.

THERE a man ran into them—cannoned off the mullah in the dark and nearly upset Ommony. He was heaving—sweating—did not smell like a native of Madras—and Ommony's nose was jungle keen. The man had collapsed on the portico, gasping for breath. Ommony took the lantern from the mullah and, stooping to see who had come in all that haste, looked into the face of Athelstan King!

"Oh, hello!" he said.

" 'Lo, Cot!"

Ommony and the mullah picked him up between them, and supported him into the mosque, where Ommony kicked his boots off as a concession to the mullah's prejudices.

"Thought you were dead," he said, smiling at King in the dancing, dim lantern light.

"That was guesswork, Cot, not thinking! Is it true——" He lay down a minute, still panting for breath, then sat up again. "Sorry. Ran uphill. Is it true you had an officer and three men with you? Women said so. Why d'you let 'em take 'em to P'danaram?"

Ommony's lower jaw dropped a trifle as he turned on the mullah, that was all. The mullah recognized a crisis and proceeded to use his natural weapon.

"This person is an English spy, for he speaks English!" he announced. "You—you had our confidence! I will denounce you both!"

"Man without brains or hope of life eternal!" exclaimed King in the vernacular. "I come from Mahommed Babar, who now has four hundred followers. He cares nothing for mullahs—all for his friends! He is within a march of here."

The mullah chewed the cud on that a minute, then nodded and got up to leave the mosque.

"Sit down there!" commanded Ommony, who, however, had no weapon.

The mullah reached into the folds of his clothes for his own rusty Mauser, but heard a low whistle and turned his head—to find himself looking straight down the barrel of King's little automatic. King said nothing.

"Give me your weapon, and sit down!" ordered Ommony.

The mullah obeyed in both particulars.

"I was scratching myself," he explained. "I wasn't going to use that."

"Allah's own truth!" agreed Ommony. "It wouldn't have gone off. Here, take it."

The mullah stored the Mauser away again with an air of drawing comfort from it nevertheless.

"We've got to do something quick!" said King. He tapped the mullah's knee with an arresting finger. "It is not too late for you to put yourself right! We are men worth making friends of, Ommony and I. Can you bring that officer and his men back here at once?"

"I don't know where they are," said the mullah impotently.

Ommony gave King a brief account of how they had come, King interjecting short, quick questions, which Ommony answered in the same laconic code. Then:

"Every prisoner in Podanaram, including Judge Wilmshurst and his wife, is going to be tortured and murdered!" King announced. "Some talk of making it a public exhibition. The majority favors doing it in secret and showing the bodies afterward from village to village—commit 'em as accessories—encourage further outrage—offset the influence of Mahommed Babar, who preaches decency and enforces it."

"Better get word to him," Ommony suggested.

"I've just come from him. Strange fellow. Had a long talk. Seems it was we who drove him to rebellion. Yes, you and I, Cot! 'Member when we shot Shere Ali? 'Member how he flinched, or seemed to? Swears he didn't. Swears he stepped back to tempt the brute, and had perfect confidence in us. When he saw the look on our faces he knew he wasn't one of us and never would be! That's his version of it. Says we thought him a coward, and he didn't care to argue."

"That kind of talk is always true," said Ommony. "A liar would have invented something plausible."

"I tried to get him interested in Mr. and Mrs. Wilmshurst—heard all about them in a temple where this mullah left me. Mahommed Babar said he was sorry for Mrs. Wilmshurst, hardly interested in the judge, and busy in any event. True, too. Really is busy. They're flocking to his standard in scores every hour. Then there came a rumor about you and a party of British soldiers surrounded and cut up in the jungle. Mahommed Babar didn't believe a word of it—gave me leave to live—said he will always consider himself my friend—and hinted that the interview was over. I came hurrying here to investigate the rumor about you and soldiers. It's bad, Cot. Rotten. What are we going to do?"

"I can go to Podanaram," suggested Ommony.

"Worse and worse! They'd kill you out of hand, and impale your head to prove all ——'s loose! No. Think of something else. This mullah. What about him? He cooked the goose. Can he uncook it?"

Ommony considered the mullah for a moment.

"He has points. He has points," he answered. "I wouldn't trust him out of my sight."

"D'you know where Mahommed Babar is?" asked King, and the mullah nodded.

Both King and Ommony considered in silence for several minutes. Each kept looking at the other. The same idea was dawning in both minds and the mullah recognized the birth of a force that would sweep him he knew not whither.

"I have been a friend to both of you—to both of you!" he muttered.

"Do you understand that the murder of those prisoners must be stopped?" King demanded at last.

The mullah nodded. He would have agreed to almost anything, but he seemed convinced of that.

"If we promise to report to the authorities that you did so, are you willing to use your influence to prevent those people from being tortured and killed?"

"In the name of the Lord of Mercies, yes."

"You realize that Mahommed Babar has forbidden outrage from the first? Good. As a mullah you have influence with his men? Good. If you go and argue with his men that this outrage at Podanaram must be prevented, he can not accuse you of being in opposition to him, can he? Better and better. Go and do that. Go with Ommony *sahib*. If you do your work cleverly, when Mahommed Babar tells his men that this crime at Podanaram must be prevented, they will have been convinced already. They will obey with alacrity. Small time will be wasted. Will you do that?"

"Better let me go alone," the mullah answered, ever on the alert for a chance to switch plans undetected. Then suddenly he recalled an earlier thought that he must have a witness if his alibi was to be the least use. "No. No. It is good. I will go with Ommon-ee."

King shut both fists in a characteristic gesture.

"As you suggested, keep him in sight, Cot. I'm off to Podanaram—now—tonight—no argument. Arrive as soon after dawn as I can make it. Will you lend me your pony? Have to take a chance on leopards."

"Take the pony certainly. But what when you get there?" asked Ommony.

"Surrender, of course—tell 'em I'm an Englishman. They'll add me to the list for the *auto da fe*. You tell Mahommed Babar where I am. Say I sent you. Don't say anything about his father and mine, but say that as regards that tiger incident I'm giving him the benefit of the doubt."

"You think——"

"I know! Has the pony been fed?"

"He has. And there's a *jungli*, who can get you by the leopards," answered Ommony.

CHAPTER XVI

"Tomorrow a big victory!"

ALTHOUGH it only lacked two hours of dawn, the roar amid the trees was like the din of a city. In a clearing, partly natural and partly new-hewn, the watch-fires threw sparks that would have set Ommony's heart on fire, but more by luck than arrangement the dry trees had not caught. There was a glow over the tree-tops, and a great din where the blacksmiths labored, so that from half-a-mile away it might have looked like a titans' forge. Only, it would have been very risky for strangers to come within a mile, because of the pickets who guarded every negotiable track.

Mahommed Babar had done with indecision. He walked resolutely from one fire to the next addressing scant words to the men who cleaned their weapons by the blaze or merely awoke from slumber to greet him as he went by. No need to listen to what he said. His attitude, with a great old-fashioned saber slung from his shoulder by a modern Sam Brown belt; the reception he received; the air of alert expectancy he left behind him—all were perfectly eloquent.

Nevertheless, the words, being the expression of the spirit in him, were important.

"Tomorrow a big victory! Obedience, remember—wait for the word—leave loot to the jackals—be tigers! Be proud! Seek nothing but to conquer in fair fight—and the rest is sure! You shall have a victory tomorrow, and then forward to another one!"

As savages will, they turned his words over and over by one fire, while he strode to the next, where some one would stir the sleepers and they would all sit up and grunt at him.

"They conquered India by discipline—by obedience to orders—by fighting fair and *not* establishing resentment. When they take prisoners they treat them well, caring for the wounded. Do ye so likewise. In no other way can ye win freedom."

He had the fiery eye and carriage of a man of action—looked like a fighting man—promised victory—and yet refrained from foaming at the mouth and calling on God to curse whoever disagreed with him. Which, if they did not analyze, they at least appreciated.

He told them at another fire how he had thrown his all, including life, into the scale. They might trust him to do his best for them.

"There are others who urge you to outrage now, who will run from the first sign of disaster. You will find me with you to the end, whatever that may be!"

By one fire a fellow sneered openly, demanding what hope of profit had brought him from the North to claim leadership.

"I fight for all India," he answered. "I forbid rape and murder, and you hate me. But I tell you, it is only by such fighting as I permit that you can win freedom and set India free!"

The idea of setting India free was a brand new one to most of them. If he left an excellent impression, it was much like a ship's wake that prevails, but seldom long. There were men who followed him surreptitiously from fire to fire, undoing his words, reversing them, pouring scorn on them, quoting the Koran in evidence that it is right to murder infidels of all sorts.

"He says he will be with us to the end, but that is talk. Watch him! He will leave us in the lurch. Even tomorrow, possibly. The Khalifate Committee speak ill

of him. They say he is paid by Hindus to protect their property and lives. It is hinted that he serves the British. If that were so, that might explain why he insists on treating prisoners so tenderly! Turn that thought over in your minds, my brothers! Victory tomorrow? For whom? For himself doubtless!"

He had no other means of thwarting the discontented element than that he took, constantly moving about and appealing to the spirit of the others. He had hardly had time to surround himself with a group of loyalists, hand picked, really to be depended on, although he had done his best along that line. Over by his tent, which was a tarpaulin spread over branches, his more or less inner guard waited for him. When he approached they showed him a good deal of deference; but that was not necessarily in every instance more than their way of excusing themselves for accepting his leadership. To obey him and not appear to respect him would have been to make themselves ridiculous.

That bonfire in front of a tarpaulin was his G. H. Q. Thither the runners came, bringing messages from the out-thrown intelligence units—spies, the enemy called them—scouts, they called themselves—experts unquestionably. Mahommed Babar sat down on a log with his saber across his knees, and two runners who had been waiting for him stood up to tell their story.

"The British work their way along the railway line. They toil by night, with great oil-burning lamps that roar exceedingly. Where the bridges are broken they use timber very cunningly. Soldiers guard the workers with machine-guns, and a tee-rain follows fifty paces at a time as fast as the rails are laid."

Another took up the tale from another angle.

"They push supplies along the mended line—heavily guarded—food and ammunition for a thousand men perhaps——"

"Perhaps!" agreed Mahommed Babar with a dry nod. "They have no thousand men. Two hundred men in five days eat as much as a thousand men in one."

"They come fast, *sahib!* It is better we oppose them now."

"Let them come!" he answered.

Some of the men around the fire caught one another's eyes at that. One of them tendered advice:

"But, *sahib;* if we let them come too far there are others who will pounce on them and get the loot. We are not the only armed men in the woods."

"We are the wise men of the woods!" he answered. "Let others fight them. We will cut their line of communications when the time comes. They will be obliged to surrender. The more well-treated prisoners we have, the easier it will be to make satisfactory terms. What we must do is to defeat, not aggravate."

"*Sahib*, they say you have a purpose in holding us back."

"I have a purpose."

"They say, a private purpose."

"None who believes that needs follow me."

There began to be a fairly obvious division of his adherents into two. Perhaps a third of them believed their own advantage lay in supporting him as long, at least, as success might seem to attend his methods. Two thirds proposed to use him for their own ends and, if he would not be used, either to force his hand or else cast him off.

"We fighting men came to find a leader. You show us words and dalliance," one man grumbled.

"The woods are already full of loot, but the others have it all! Where is ours?" said another.

"Listen!" said a third. "There is a Hindu *shroff* who has fled to Calicut, but his house lies yonder, half a day's march. Once he lent me a little money. Three times with the aid of the notes I signed he took away all I had, and he claims that I still owe him more than he originally lent me. Lead to that man's village! Let me see the burning of his whole property! Thereafter you may lead me where you will!"

Mahommed Babar got to his feet, rested his hands on the saber in front of him, and met the gaze of every man in turn. The firelight shone in his eyes, and the most inexpert guesser might have known that even his oriental patience was near exhaustion.

"How many times shall I tell you that I am no man's agent?" he demanded. He spoke through his teeth, spitting the words at them. "I lead, or I do not lead."

"Very well, lead on!" retorted some one from just beyond the zone of light. "Thus far you have only led on little forays. We will give you until an hour after dawn to lead us against this big force that comes

along the railway. Defeat that for us—lead us to all that loot—and we will follow you from here to the sea and plunder Calicut and give you all the richest gems in the city!"

That was short notice. The stars were already paling. A considerable murmur of applause greeted the last speaker, and before Mahommed Babar could reply another runner came, announcing that Moplahs to the north and westward wanted to know at what hour the attack on the railway repairing party should begin. He was answered in chorus.

"An hour after dawn! Mahommed Babar will lead us then or sooner!"

Somebody hustled the messenger out of the light-zone and sent him away on the run to deliver his answer. Other men by the bivouack fires began passing the word along, and the enthusiasm leaped from fire to fire until the whole clearing roared the news, and the men in the outer ring of Mahommed Babar's circle smiled.

Another word began passing from lip to lip among the shadows:

"Now we shall see! *He* says he will be with us to the end. *They* say he will run from real danger. We shall know within an hour or two."

That was such obviously good leverage that the inner circle caught it up and used it.

"Now deeds may answer words and all will know that you are not paid by the enemy to save their lives and property!"

There was nothing indecisive in his answer. He drew his saber, with a jerk of the wrist that made the fine steel thrum.

"It is good!" he answered. "Ye shall have your way! An hour after dawn I will lead against this British force—and by the holy blood of martyrs ye shall rub your noses into the worst of it! I will pistol the man who flinches! Headmen!—*jemadars!*—join your parties—inspect weapons—see the men are fed—be ready!"

In a moment he was almost alone by the fire, standing, staring rather gloomily in front of him, angry because he knew he was being forced into a mistake, yet seeing no way out of it. True, he might snatch a victory, but it would be costly and worth nothing. If he could only hold them back he knew he could accomplish something worth while, at almost no cost in life at all. Well, there was nothing else for it; he must establish his reputation, on which authority must rest. He was turning to eat the food that a servant brought when another messenger arrived.

"A *sahib* comes!"

"A *sahib?* What *sahib?* You are crazy!"

But the *sahib*, walking swiftly and followed by a weary mullah, arrived almost as soon as the messenger.

"Don't shoot, Mahommed Babar!" said the *sahib's* good-humored voice. "I'm Ommony."

CHAPTER XVII

"I am a rebel."

THE door of the priests' chamber in the temple of Podanaram opened suddenly and they thrust a man in so violently that he stumbled and fell over the recumbent body of a soldier, who lay asleep on the stone floor. There were only two cots. One was occupied by Mrs. Wilmshurst.

"Is this to be another Black Hole of Calcutta?" she complained.

The suggestion was absurd. It was a good, large, airy room for one thing. The sun was already above the trees outside and flooded the room through a large window set high in the wall, through which escape might almost have been possible, for there was no glass—no bars. Only, one did not know what was outside, and the judge was neither active nor adventurous. The soldiers acquiesced, dog-weary, and knowing what they knew.

The judge had lent his cot for a few hours to Linkinyear, who sat up and stared.

"Oh, are we to have natives in here?" asked Mrs. Wilmshurst in the identical tone of voice that has made most of the trouble between East and West.

The man recovered himself, apologized to the soldier, and faced Mrs. Wilmshurst's cot, on which she lay clothed, languidly fanning herself.

"Pardon the interruption, but they threw me in here," he explained.

"Oh well—if you couldn't help it, I suppose——"

"I could have helped it all right," he answered.

By that time they were all staring at him—judge, Linkinyear, three privates of the line and Mrs. Wilmshurst—puzzled principally by the excellence of his English.

"Oh—beg pardon! I forgot. My name's King. Traveling incog., that's all."

"Not Major King—whom I met at Poona?" Mrs. Wilmshurst would have used her lorgnon if she had had one. "Mr. Ommony's friend? Well, I never! You look as if you need a bath. Sorry we can't oblige you."

"Well, well!" her husband exclaimed, stepping forward to shake hands. "At least we're safe then! The famous Athelstan King——"

"Not in the least safe," King interrupted. "Has anybody tried that window? Backs, please."

Two of Linkinyear's men stood face to the wall, and King climbed on to their shoulders. One glance through the window was sufficient.

"Not at all safe. Small yard—high wall—jungle. Two men with rifles on the wall, and probably others on the temple roof. Impracticable."

"What then?" the judge asked. "Why are you here? You say you could have helped it?"

"Heard you were all here, so came and surrendered to the Khalifate Committee. They were delighted, of course."

"Goodness gracious! Why didn't you run the other way and bring some help?" Mrs. Wilmshurst asked indignantly. "If the authorities knew we were here they'd——"

"No time," King assured her. She was right in her diagnosis. He was not a lady's man. "We're to be murdered. High noon today. Bodies disgustingly mutilated, before death or afterward—then placed on view—excite the Moplahs. Murder will be secret. Afterward they'll advertise it. Scheme is to persuade Moplahs to go in for frightfulness wholesale."

"Oh my God!" said Mrs. Wilmshurst. "What do they kill you with? Knives?"

"Pardon me, old top, but have you a weapon of any kind?" asked Linkinyear.

"Sorry. No. Had a pistol, but they searched me rather thoroughly just now," King answered.

"How do you know that is their intention?" asked the judge. "Perhaps they were only threatening you on purpose to terrify——"

"Oh no. You see, I didn't tell them who I was at first. They mistook me for a friend. Told everything. It was after that that I mentioned my real name and nationality, and of course then there was nothing to do but kill me or throw me in here. Mean minutes while they decided that point!"

"But, my dear man—that was quixotic, wasn't it? Outside, and incognito, there was surely always a chance in a thousand to help save us, whereas——"

"Whereas inside I've an even chance," King interrupted. "Cot Ommony has gone for help to a friend of mine, who has influence and some backing. He can't refuse to rescue me—at least I hope not. He won't, if I know him. The risk is, he may be overruled by the men about him. And of course, he may arrive too late. I'd say the chance was fifty-fifty."

Mrs. Wilmshurst got up and paced the floor, trying to master herself. Her husband began to offer sympathy, a little clumsily but kindly. She shook him off.

"I tell you what!" she said suddenly. "We ought to pray. Let's all pray. Do you hear me?"

They heard, but none responded. She returned to her cot to lie down and pray by herself.

"What do you say they kill you with? Knives?" she asked. "Oh my God!"

King entered into details, in particular about the Khalifate Committee, whose prisoners they were.

"Moplahs are decent savages. That Committee are devils," he insisted. "All they're playing for is ructions north, south, east and west. Bag them, and this Moplah business might be over in a month or two."

"Why discuss that? They've bagged us!" said the judge with a wry smile.

"Oh my God! I can't remember any prayers!" said Mrs. Wilmshurst. "Which of you knows a prayer?"

One of the privates did, and volunteered to prove it. Mrs. Wilmshurst welcomed him and they knelt against the cot, one on either side.

"Can't we stage a show of some kind?" wondered Linkinyear. "We might stand by the door and swat them as they come through—swat or scrag them. Kill a few before they snaffle us. The —— of it is they'll get the beldame anyhow. If I'd a gun——"

"Come and listen, Lu!" Mrs. Wilmshurst called to her husband. "This man prays *beau*tifully! He has made me cry already! Come here at once!"

The judge went and sat on the end of the cot, listening with a rather puzzled look.

He might have been hearing a witness in rare language.

"If Mahommed Babar comes too late," said King, "there's this — perhaps we couldn't have used our lives to better advantage."

"How so?" demanded Linkinyear. "I'd rather take mine with the damage I'd done all in full view around me!"

"It might be the last of this Committee," King answered. "The sight of us all dead may arouse Mahommed Babar to the——"

There came a kick against the door. It opened slightly. There was a noise of scuffling, and it closed again.

"There! Some one's coming to the rescue! There! That comes of praying!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilmshurst, getting off her knees.

The door opened wide. A man in a khaki shirt and pants, without much else on, was hurled in backward and the door slammed shut.

"There! Is that your Mahommed Babar?"

It was Cotswold Ommony, flat on his back. King helped him to his feet.

" 'Lo, Cot!"

" 'Lo, Athelstan!"

"Any prospect?"

"None whatever!"

"How did you come so quickly?"

"Borrowed his horse. When I gave him your message he was eating *chupatties*, standing in front of his tent. He went on eating.

" 'My friend King *sahib* asks more than he knows,' he answered. 'You speak of the benefit of doubt. Whose doubt?'

" 'Your own,' I said. 'He has no doubt of you.'

"He looked me in the face for about a minute after that. You know the way he strokes his beard, standing with his legs apart? He looked pretty much like a man, with an old-fashioned saber he's dug up from somewhere. I liked him. I hope he realized it.

" 'No time to waste!' I said. 'This is post haste or nothing!'

" 'You shall see what you shall see,' he answered, and began shouting for some of the headmen. They came running.

" 'These are some of my most loyal,' he told me, and then began explaining to them what was wanted.

"You never saw such a riot! They turned on him like wild dogs. Accused him of treason. Said he had promised to lead 'em against troops on the railway line, and led they would be or else teach him what became of traitors! The mullah was down among the men already, playing his part, but some of the headmen ran and gave their version, and if it hadn't been for a half-dozen stalwarts they'd have scoughed Mahommed Babar there and then. Several men took shots at him. He strode in among them like a man and a brother. Good to watch.

"It turned their hearts like eggs on a skillet. They shifted the blame on me—said I'd come there to corrupt him. I became the target. Nine or ten of them missed me beautifully. He managed to control them for a moment somehow, and gave me his pony to escape on. Told me to cut and run back to my bungalow, where I'd be safe. I came here of course, hoping my influence might have weight, but I'm worse than useless. The Committee told me point-blank they would rather cut my throat than any one's, because of the effect on the countryside! They stripped me of nearly everything and pitched me in here, but I kicked two of them in the belly—hard!—before they got my boots!"

"What time is it?" King asked.

"Oh, about half-past ten—quarter to eleven—somewhere there. They took my watch. Not an earthly chance of Mahommed Babar's making it, even if he decides to, and they let him come."

"Any one know any hymns?" asked Mrs. Wilmshurst. "I can hum tunes, but who knows the words of a hymn?"

Ommony did. They say in the woods that Ommony knows everything. He not only could sing hymns, but he could put that peculiar verve into them that distinguishes faith from mere habit of say-so. When Ommony hymned you knew somehow that God, Allah, Jehovah, Elohim, Maheshwara—it, he, they are all one!—was in heaven, and all was well with the world, at least in principle! You could believe it as long as he kept on singing, beating time with hand, foot, shoulders, head—sometimes with all his body. Captain of unexpectedness, he knew psalms—could sing them, too!

It takes time to roll out those stately meters. It may have been nearly noon when the door opened and a voice called:

"Come out, one at a time! Mr. Ommon-ee first!"

They half-closed the door again from outside. It was impossible to see who waited. They intended to kill quickly, one by one, or else they were few out there and did not feel confident.

"We'll soon see," said Ommony, and walked out before the others could raise a hand to prevent him.

"Follow up!" whispered Linkinyear. One of those stage whispers that can penetrate stone walls and be heard through the talki-talk of siege-guns. He led; King was next; the others herded Mrs. Wilmshurst in between them; and they all surged for the door—which, however, was slammed in their faces.

"When they open again let me go first," said Mrs. Wilmshurst. "They won't dare offer violence to a woman."

"Ladies last!" King answered over his shoulder.

"Pig! Ill-mannered boor!" she retorted, and they all laughed.

When the door opened again—just a little—very cautiously—they rushed it in a scrum all together, but failed of their purpose. Some one on the far side had forestalled them by placing a beam so that the door could only open wide enough to pass one person at a time. Linkinyear disappeared through the opening as if sucked through by a vacuum. The door shut suddenly—opened again—and King felt his neck in a noose. He could not step back to avoid it because of Mrs. Wilmshurst, who pressed forward from behind. He was hauled through choking, and the door was once more slammed.

Young Linkinyear was already stripped to the waist and tied with his hands behind one of the fluted temple pillars. Three men were holding and tying Ommony when King was dragged in, and they tied him next. There were only nine of the enemy.

"The whole of the Khalifate Committee," said Ommony, "and only nine to our eight! If only we had known!"

One of the three who were tying him struck him on the mouth. The Committee's smallest, meanest, most self-assertive member nodded pleasantly at that, examined King's thin rope and struck it a few times with the edge of his hand to make sure that it bit into the flesh, and then took charge of proceedings, giving orders without any suggestion of sharing authority with others. He was the whole noise—the works—the brains—the uptodate Napoleon.

"Now there are only four and a woman in there. Draw your pistols. Stand by the door. Open it wide. Let them come through. If the soldiers make any resistance, shoot them, for they don't matter much."

The first man through was one of the three privates. He charged in with his fists clenched, ready to do battle with the universe. But a Hindu tripped him as he went by. Another noosed him as he lay prone, and dragged him, strangling, to one of the pillars, where he had no difficulty in tying him single-handed—passing the rope around the pillar and kicking his victim until he stood upright—then choking him helpless with one hand while he roped the man's arms with the other.

The second soldier through was knocked more or less unconscious by a pistol-butt, so that he, too, was easily tied in place by one man. The third pulled Judge Wilmshurst and his wife back into the room.

"Come on in, ye devils, and fight like men if ye can!" he challenged, striking the Lancashire fighting attitude, which holds feet as well as hands ready.

Instead of going in they sent a bullet. He fell forward, and his brains spread in a way that made Mrs. Wilmshurst scream. But that was the last exhibition she made of any kind of weakness.

THE judge took his wife by the hand, kissed her, and they walked through together. Once through the door they were seized, dragged apart, and tied like the others, the judge at one end and his wife at the other next to Linkinyear. Linkinyear, with a rope cutting into his wrists, called on all that was left of his lone command to act like men, and they responded by telling Mrs. Wilmshurst to "cheer up, ma'am! and not be down 'earted!" Whereat she laughed and called them darlings. Her own wrists were in agony, but she said nothing about that.

There were twenty pillars supporting a dome. Six more were missing—had been knocked out and carried off by Moslems—and it was a marvel that the dome had not collapsed. The gap thus caused faced the temple door, which, nevertheless, was only dimly discernible in the gloom. The prisoners had been tied to the pillars directly facing the gap, so that when the door opened the light shone directly on their faces. On

the right also, only dimly discernible beyond the pillars, was a blank wall with a huge image at either end and a long stone bench between the two. Eight of the Committee went and sat on that bench, while a ninth opened the door to look out on the temple portico.

A vicious-looking rascal stood out there with his back to the door, but turned and saluted.

"Remember," warned the committeeman, "if anybody comes, rap loudly and give us ample warning!"

He spoke Hindustanee, the *lingua franca.* They all did. Among nine committeemen there were five races and three creeds, and they could not have understood each other or their servants in any other tongue.

"All is well," said the ninth, joining the others on the stone bench.

The Moplah chairman no longer sat in the midst but at the far end. The place of importance was occupied by Aurung Ali, the little, self-important man. He was the only one who looked quite comfortable, lolling back against the wall with his hands folded on his lap contentedly.

"Well, your honor Judge Wilmshurst," he began sarcastically, "I believe the pleasure of recognition is mutual, eh? I recall you were in no hurry when you sentenced me to twenty years' imprisonment. I will be equally patient and provoking! We are all going to enjoy ourselves thoroughly in secret session. Isn't it nice!"

He said that in English; then to the Committee in Hindustanee:

"Now you understand. The evidence of torture can not be applied to a body successfully after death. It must be done painstakingly while they are living. I will not have them killed too soon. There must be proof, positive and convincing, that they were done to death miserably. This is an opportunity of a life-time to inaugurate a reign of reprisal and counter-reprisal that will last until India is aflame from end to end! Now, who has a pistol?"

They all had. They produced them, thinking he wished that. He cackled meaningly.

"There you are! You produce them much too readily! You will use them too readily!"

"I say, shoot them first!" said a rather fat man, shifting his legs nervously. "Only Moplahs will see the bodies afterwards. They have no professional coroners. We can say they were tortured, and they will believe it. I am against this business of torturing."

"You mean, I suppose, that your brain has become as fat and flabby as your stomach! Idiot! We must take great care that the bodies fall into British hands! What would be the use of inflaming the passions of one side, without a corresponding hatred on the other?"

"We can easily make marks on them with a hot iron directly after death—almost the same second. None would ever know the difference," the other objected.

"No! Look here, you're going to spoil everything! Lay down your pistols, all of you! Lay them on the bench! Look—see—there is mine. To hear you talk you might be a lot of *ghandis* preaching non-violence! Now, no backing out of this! We were all agreed. You must all commit yourselves. Each of you must lend a hand and torture somebody. Take your knives, and somebody bring the hot coal. Leave Mrs. Wilmshurst to me—I am sure the judge would rather have it that way!"

They obeyed him, laying their pistols on the bench, and in proof that it was fear and not compunction that had made him flinch it was the fat man who went at once to drag a glowing charcoal brazier out from behind one of the stone images. The remainder chose their victims with a business-like air. Aurung Ali bowing sarcastically to Mrs. Wilmshurst.

"I want you to watch this, judge!" he said pleasantly, moving toward the brazier to choose an iron.

Not one of the prisoners said a word. Each stared at the devil in front of him. Each devil fingered a long knife, hesitating even yet to begin the abominable business.

"Now watch!" said Aurung Ali, whirling a hot iron.

But his movement was arrested by a quiet tap on the temple door, from outside. Every member of the Committee turned and faced the door as if Nemesis had already entered.

"Go on, go on!" exclaimed Aurung Ali. "That is nothing. I ordered him to knock loud for danger. This is some minor matter. I will go and see."

He walked to the door, after thrusting the iron back into the fire to keep it hot, and drew the bolt back gingerly. The instant the edge of the bolt was clear the

door was burst in violently, and the dead body of the man who had been left on guard was flung in like a sack, knocking Aurung Ali backward half-way across the temple floor. The blazing light of full noon shone in like a sunburst, and in the midst of that stood Mahommed Babar, with the mullah, haggard and red-eyed, behind him. Mahommed Babar held a pistol in each hand. There was nothing to be gained by moving. He stood there, summing up the situation, for about thirty seconds—then spoke to the mullah without turning his head. The mullah went to the stone bench and gathered all the pistols off it into his lap.

"This comes of hymns and praying!" announced Mrs. Wilmshurst. The soldier who had prayed with her was dead, but that thought did not occur until afterwards.

"If you would kindly cut our thongs, Mahommed Babar," said King, "we could——"

But he left the mullah to do that. Without answering King, he spoke again, over his shoulder, and some one closed the temple door behind him. In the sudden change from light to gloom it was difficult to see, but none could mistake the sound of the saber licking from its scabbard, or the thrum as he wristed it to the attack.

IT WAS then that Aurung Ali went mad and charged Mahommed Babar with a hot iron, upsetting all the charcoal on his way and screaming in the last frenzy of fear. There was a sudden swish and thud, and Aurung Ali's head rolled to Ommony's feet, where it lay mouthing at him.

Then panic seized the rest, and they pursued the mullah from shadow to shadow, from pillar to pillar, from corner to door. The door would not yield to them. The mullah shook the pistol-chambers empty as he ran and then threw away the weapon. They fought for the empty weapons, and screamed as they found them useless—rushing, swearing, imprecating, screaming—like rats in a pit with a terrier after them. And in among them—swift—unhurrying—certain as the act of destiny—Mahommed Babar's saber licked—and hacked—and thrust — until the last Committeeman backed away screaming in front of him and clung to Mrs. Wilmshurst for protection.

"You needn't kill him to oblige me," she said. "Is he worth killing?"

Mahommed Babar hesitated—stepped a pace back—and seemed to go off guard. The frenzy of cowardice gripped the other, and he lunged with his long knife, missing Mahommed Babar by an inch. A thwack—a thud—and *his* head rolled to lie gaping near Aurung Ali's.

The mullah was struggling to cut thongs, making poor progress. Mahommed Babar shouted and the temple door was swung wide open. Twenty or thirty men peered in, crowding to see but not crossing the threshold. Mahommed Babar walked behind the prisoners and severed all thongs with his saber. King held his hand out. Mahommed Babar shook it, very stately and gently, perhaps because of the injured wrist.

"We're all awfully obliged," said King.

"I say—we're simply frightfully grateful!" said Mrs. Wilmshurst.

"You're a man and a brother, Mahommed Babar," put in Ommony.

"Won't some one introduce us?" asked the judge.

"Of course you'll come with us, old man?" King asked, taking Mahommed Babar's arm.

Linkinyear led his two privates to bring their dead comrade's body from the inner room.

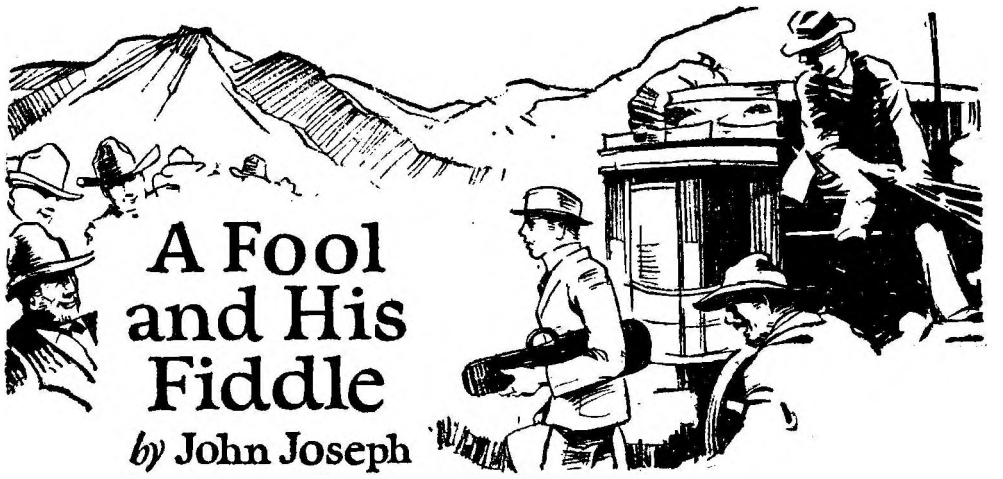
"No, *sahib*. I have my work to do. I am a rebel. Here are fifty men who have put the Committee's men to flight. They will escort you to the British lines. Please give them safe conduct back again."

"Ommony and I—this that you have done here—we can save you from a rebel's fate—" King began.

"*Sahib*, you and I are friends," he interrupted. "Forgive me, then, for my father's sake and yours. I am a rebel. I will be a rebel, until the end."

He bowed to Mrs. Wilmshurst, then toward the open door, then to the judge, and kicked two gaping heads out of the way.

"You have my leave to go," he said, and stood waiting, only shaking hands with King and Ommony as they went by.



A Fool and His Fiddle

by John Joseph

Author of "The Smilin' Kid."

SURE, there was an afterclap to the takin'-off of "Arizona" Peets. Bound to be. Just suppose, for instance, that you happened to be bad-man with a "rep," and somebody bumped off your twin brother in a gun-fight.

And suppose you happened to be 'way off down Placerville-way at the time; and suppose you had the whole camp buffaloed, and nobody give you any excuse for startin' anything; and suppose you felt all stuffed up, and craved action for your trigger finger; and suppose that along about this time—just when it seemed as if there never would be any more excitement in the world—suppose that somebody from Porcupine Camp dropped into Placerville and let it be know that your twin brother had been sent over the long trail by a Porcupine citizen. Would it make any difference to you that the fight had been strictly on the square? Would it make any difference if you knew well enough that the said brother was a gun-fighter himself—that he was in the habit of ribbing up trouble and blowing men's lives away with a six-gun—and grinnin' while he done it? Not if you belonged to the Peets tribe, it wouldn't.

Well, "'Nig" Peets got the story all straight enough and knew well enough that Arizona had deliberately picked a row—without even the shadow of an excuse—and tried to kill the Smilin' Kid. But of course all that sort of thing made no difference to Nig. It was a good plenty that the Kid had killed his brother, and the whys and hows of it didn't matter in the least.

So Nig lashed himself into a howlin' rage and made the rounds of Placerville camp blowin' about what he was goin' to do about it, and wound up by writin' the Kid a letter.

That was sure some letter. It ran like this:

> Mestr Smiler porcupine Oregon dear Sir. News of coward murder my brother at hand. i will be in Porcupine rite soon and thare will be smoke. yours respl simen Peets the same bein nig Peets.

The Kid showed the letter around, and after we all had our laugh out he tacked it up behind his poker table, in plain sight of everybody. Now be it understood we are laughin' at brother Nig's nifty way of expressin' himself, and not at the meaning of it. For Nig Peets was a mighty long ways from bein' a joke himself, and the letter was just as serious a proposition as the guy that wrote it.

Such letters was often sent on ahead in them days, and they meant business too. So everybody knew well enough that Peets would be along in a day or two, and it looked like a plumb safe bet that he'd come with blood in his eye.

Peets was a two-gun fighter, and by most people he was counted the fastest man in the Northwest. Up to that time no man had ever beat him to the draw, and there was no manner of doubt as to what that letter meant. It meant that the Kid would

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have to defend himself against a man that was fast as lightnin' and as dangerous as a coiled-up rattlesnake!

The Kid was a prime favorite around Porcupine, and counted every man in camp his friend—particularly after he outwitted and put the fixin's to Arizona Peets. In the first place he was strictly on the square—first, last and all the time. With him a thing was either right or it was wrong, and that's all there was to it. If it was wrong he didn't want and wouldn't have any truck with it. If it was right it was worth fightin' for—right *now*.

And after all is said and done, if a fellow lives up to that idea, through thick and thin, there ain't really much he can add to it. That's the way I look at it.

And the Kid had sand. The kind that can look into the muzzle of a crazy-mad gun-fighter's six-shooter and never bat an eye. And he had a way about him, and a smile that would charm bloody meat away from a mean dog. So everybody swore by the Kid, and the prospect of a gun-fight between the lad and a man like Peets lacked a lot of bein' a thing to joke about.

The Kid favors a thirty-eight with a short barrel, claimin' they're a lot lighter and therefore quicker on the draw. Some of the old-timers shake their head a lot over this fool idea, but after the Kid's run-in with Arizona they don't have much to say. They ain't convinced, of course, but the facts are against them, so they don't have much to say.

Then one evenin' a day or two after Nig's letter come, the Kid introduces a plumb new idea about a handy place to pack a gun, and the crowd in the old Log Palace sure stared, wild-eyed, when he strolled in. He had laid his belt aside and sewed the holsters fast to his pants legs, square in front and level with where his hands would be when he stood at ease, or where they'd swing when he walked. They sure looked plumb handy, if you want to believe me.

There was something about the Kid—his easy smile, the serene expression about the eyes, the cool, steady glance of him, coupled with the handy look of them two guns—that somehow looks plumb dangerous. There's something about that sort of thing that I never seemed to get the nub to. One man just simply *looks* like the real thing, another one don't, and a fellow is hard put to lay his finger on the why of it. And the fellow that looks right is generally there with the goods, and the other chap ain't, and that's all to it. There's some sort of—oh, well, atmosphere, or something. You know what I mean.

THREE days later Peets shows up and drops into the Silver Bell. Peets has a reputation for doin' things plumb sudden, so we look for a show-down right off the reel. But for some reason or other he don't seem to be in any hurry about meetin' up with the Kid. He sticks close to the Bell, day after day—drinkin' a little and gamblin' a little, and strokin' his big mustache and scowlin' at the crowd. But he keeps pretty well off the street, and he sure gives the Log Palace a wide berth. We watch him out of the corner of our eyes, and we don't know what to make of it.

Peets stands six feet in his socks, and has the longest arms and legs ever seen in the camp. He's as black as a Mex sheep-herder, and that of course is where he gets his nickname. His greasy hair is a dirty mouse color; his eyes, deep-set, coal-black and glistenin', shift continually, like the eyes of a wolf in a cage. He wears a big, blue-black mustache, which he strokes from mornin' till night. Take him all around, with his high cheek-bones and sloping forehead and great beak of a whisky-streaked nose, he looks exactly what he is—a mighty hard citizen.

He wears a broad-brimmed black hat, blue flannel shirt, and gray jeans trousers stuffed into the tops of high-heeled cowboy boots. Winter is coming on and the air is sharp, but he wears no coat, and it is rumored around camp that he has swore never to put one on while the Smilin' Kid is alive. Silver-mounted spurs and two ivory-stocked six-shooters, swingin' low at his hips, completes his rig.

He don't mix good with the natives, and apparently he has no business except gamblin' and drinkin' whisky; but he always has money and delights in showin' off by dumpin' a handful of gold on the bar and leavin' it there, apparently unguarded and forgotten for hours at a time.

Now Peets knows where to find the Kid; knows that he runs a poker game at the Log Palace from eight in the evenin' till four in the mornin', and there ain't a thing to stop him from droppin' into the Palace any evenin' and pullin' off any little

gun-play he wants to start. Nobody has ever accused Nig of being a coward, but when two weeks has slipped by and nothing happens, it begins to look suspicious, and the talk around camp is gettin' pretty strong. If he had strolled around town we'd have thought he was just layin' for the Kid, aimin' to meet up with him on neutral ground. But he sticks close to the Bell, and keeps off the street at times when he'd be likely to meet the Kid, and he shuns the Palace like it was a pest-house.

At the end of a month Peets is still plumb peaceable, and most of us make up our minds that he's sized the situation up careful and don't want none of the Kid's game, which we think is maybe sensible enough, at that. Still, after the letter he wrote, it's plain enough that he can't drop the matter without bein' branded a coward from one end of the West to another, so we don't know what to make of it.

Lookin' back, with all the facts in sight, it looks as if Peets is dead leery of the Kid, and can't work his courage up to the stickin'-point. At the same time he can't leave camp without gettin' the yellow brand, so he just sticks around hopin' that something will turn up—and it sure does, and some surprizin', at that. Funny thing anyhow—the way things goes, and turns up, and comes to pass in this funny old world. Who, for instance, could by any chance have dreamed that a freckled New Jersey kid fiddler would butt into the game and spill the beans all over the camp?

OF ALL the tenderfoot pilgrims that ever dropped out of a clear sky and lit in a minin'-camp, Zeb Hollis easy carries off the prize as the champion greenhorn of the lot. Zeb's uncle Jake was an old-timer in camp, but he never mentioned Zeb, so the boy takes the camp completely by surprize—in more ways than one, before he finished. There was quite a passel of folks waitin' when the stage rolled up that evenin' and dumped Zeb and his freckles on the Pioneer Hotel piazzy, and Zeb met up with a million dollars' worth of smiles when he stepped out and faced the crowd.

Zeb is tall and slim, a bit stooped, and looks to be about twenty years old, in his body, and somewhere around eleven in experience. His hair is straw-colored, his eyes a light blue, and he seemed a bit nearsighted. He's half-dazed and has the scared look of the lad that's never before been out of sight of the hitchin'-post and horseblock that stands in front of the old family homestead back in New Jersey.

At first sight he sure looks like a weak member, but he has a good nose, with a bit of a hump to it, and the more you look the less you're inclined to think of him as a weakling. Green past the telling, he was, but there was something else there, too.

He wears a dinky little narrow-brimmed brown hat, with a flat crown, and a pepper-and-salt hand-me-down that is two inches too short in the matter of coat sleeves, and three in the pants legs. And as if that wasn't plenty for one tenderfoot to live down, he wears that abomination of the West in the old days—a high, starched white collar, and a cravat of the kind we used to call a "dirty shirt alibi."

Zeb carries a violin case as he swings to the ground and turns to grab the battered old valise which the driver digs out of the rear boot. Then he turns to face the grinnin' crowd again. He hesitates for a breath or two, lookin' the bunch over. He don't say a word, but the look he gives 'em says as plain as sun-up, "I know well enough what you're all laughin' at, and you can all go to —— and be —— to you!"

Then he pulls his hat down over his eyes, bows his neck and hot-foots it into the hotel. He registers and turns his valise and fiddle over to the clerk. The clerk points out the washroom and dining-room, and two minutes later Zeb's feet are under a table.

Supper over, Zeb braces up to the clerk again and inquires about Uncle Jake Hollis.

"Jake Hollis?" says the clerk, scratchin' his head. "That would be 'Bud' Hollis, I reckon. Yes, his name was Jake, come to think of it. You're a little late to catch Bud—he sold out a spell back—went to Portland, I heard."

Zeb comes near to faintin' at this stroke of lightnin' out of a plumb clear sky, and his hand flies to his pocket to feel his flat purse. He's been countin' strong on Uncle Jake, and his face goes white when he thinks about the eighty odd cents he'll have left when his supper is paid for. Then the full force of the thing strikes him full in the face, and he stares at the clerk in a way that makes the fellow glance under the counter to see whether his gun is where it ought to be.

"Relative of yours, I reckon?" says the clerk, finally. "You might find out something about him over at the Log Palace dance hall. That's where Bud used to hang out when he was around town. Just ask for the Smilin' Kid—he can put you wise if anybody can."

Zeb gets directions from the clerk, and five minutes later he's standin' in front of the Log Palace. There's no screens or shades, and Zeb stares through the window and gets his first eye-full of minin' town high-life. It all looks fearfully wicked and it takes him some time to get his courage worked up, but finally he glances around to make sure that nobody is watching, then he tip-toes through the swingin' doors and slips back to the picket fence that divides the gambling end from the dance floor.

There's an eight-inch fir log along the top of this fence, and Zeb seats himself to watch the dancers as they swing past. There's two bars; one in front, facin' the gamblin' tables, and one along the side wall of the dance floor. There's a small stage at the rear, and here a pudgy little man is sawing frantically at a screechy fiddle, while another picks at a banjo, and a comely young woman hammers away at an old piano.

There's maybe twenty couples dancing; the girls all wear knee-length skirts, and the men dance with their hats on. Five or six husky miners are strung along Zeb's log, chaffin' the dancers as they pass, and Zeb marvels at the cheery, hail-fellow atmosphere of the place.

Accordin' to all the dope Zeb has on the subject, these people ought to be swearin', fightin', staggerin' around drunk. But there's nobody drunk, smiles and free and easy banter seems to be the order of the evenin', and Zeb don't know just what to make of it. The girls are a bit shy in the length of their skirts, but there's nothing else to shock him, and it fascinates the boy beyond anything he's ever seen in all his narrow life.

Zeb looks on with shinin' eyes, and by and by the little gate clicks at his elbow, and a tall young chap steps through and strolls among the dancers. He seems scarcely older than Zeb himself, but he carries himself so cool and sure and easy-like, that Zeb would pawn his soul for the nerve to carry it off just half as well. He has big, smilin' brown eyes, shaded by heavy, black brows that meet above the bridge of his nose. His hat, a wide-rimmed Stetson, is set well back on his head; he wears a deep red wine-colored silk shirt, and a plain white bow tie.

Zeb admires the way his coat fits around the shoulders, and the white velvet vest just about puts his eye out. Zeb takes note of the tight-fitting, sailor style trousers, and the polished, high-heeled boots, then his glance switches to the heavy gold watch chain that hangs around the young chap's neck. Altogether he is by far the handsomest man Zeb has ever laid eyes on, and he forgets everything else and stares like a man gone daft.

This was the Smilin' Kid, as Zeb had guessed from the clerk's description. The Kid seemed to know everybody, and the dancers shouted a welcome from all parts of the floor. A girl knocked his hat down over his eyes, the men cleaned the cigars from his pockets in a free and easy way that left Zeb starin' in amazement. Everybody had something to say about the Kid's fancy clothes, they wanted to know about his 'bawth," there was no end to the chaff.

By and by the music stops, and the dancers surge up to the bar. The Kid is called up to the front, and he slips Zeb a sharp glance as he goes by. He's merely sizin' Zeb up, of course, but Zeb is a mighty long ways from home, and half-scared anyhow, so he reads somethin' hostile in the Kid's eye, and he thinks he's maybe aimin' to come back and slug him in the neck, or something like that.

Zeb has been tryin' for quite a spell to work his courage up to the point where he can brace up to the Kid and tell him howdy, but what little sand he had oozed away, right now, and he beats it for the front door. The Kid is behind the front bar, and he smiles when he sees Zeb sneakin' away.

"Have a drink, young fellow," the Kid calls, with a wide grin.

There's something about the Kid's smile that someway sort of gets a fellow, and Zeb can't resist the pull. He steps up to the bar, kind of hesitatin'-like. The Kid sets out a bottle and a glass, Zeb stammers and says he don't drink.

"All right," says the Kid, cheerful-like, "if you don't drink—that's your business. I seldom touch it, myself. Want a job?"

"Why—yes—if I could find anything," says Zeb, and he digs up a grin from someplace.

"Broke?" says the Kid.

"Broke?" That's a new one on Zeb.

"Yes. Out of money, I mean."

"Pretty near it," the boy admits.

"How much have you got?" says the Kid, with a twinkle in his eye. Zeb digs up his purse, and without havin' the least idea why he does it he passes it over to the Kid. Zeb grins some more when the Kid spills the pitiful little bunch of chicken-feed out on the bar. There's one lonesome two-bit piece, four dimes, three nickels and seven pennies. The Kid smiles when he sees the pennies, then he sobers, sudden-like, and puts the money back in the purse. Then he digs up a twenty-buck gold piece from his vest pocket and slips it into the purse.

"Put that in your jeans and you'll feel better," says the Kid as he shoves the purse back to Zeb. "Pay it back sometime if it comes handy and you think you have to—otherwise forget it."

Zeb don't understand this sort of thing. He stares uncertain-like, first at the Kid and then at the purse, and finally he slips the purse into his pocket. The Kid is puzzled; Zeb is a new one and he can't place him, so he puts the direct question again.

"What is your line?" he asks.

"My line?" Zeb is stumped again.

"Yes. What do you follow for a living?"

"Oh, I see. Well, when it comes right down to facts, I guess I can't do anything much—except play the violin."

"Can you play as well as that fellow back there?" the Kid inquires, with a jerk of his thumb toward the stage in the rear.

Zeb grins, queer-like, then he says. "I guess I can. Maybe better."

"Maybe you're just the man we're lookin' for," says the Kid. "Our regular man is off on a little toot. This fellow is just fillin' in till the other chap sobers up. Come on back and let's see what you can do."

"I'd rather play my own fiddle, if you don't mind," says the boy.

"All right," says the Kid, "go get her. I'll wait for you back on the stage."

YOU must think a whole lot of that old gourd," the Kid suggests, when Zeb gets back and drags a rusty-lookin' old fiddle out of a mess of cotton batting and green velvet cloth. "She's sure a sorry-looking piece of property, and we don't think much of her. But there's a right smart lot we don't know about fiddles, and a couple of minutes later we're all willin' to admit it without stutterin' any to speak of.

"It's a genuine Cremona," the boy replies. "It has been in our family for over two hundred years. My great-grandfather brought it over from France at the time of the Great Revolution, and it was well known to French musicians long before that."

This is mostly all Dutch to the bunch, and the Kid lets loose a string of questions. Zeb explains a lot about old fiddles and says this one is worth maybe four-five thousand dollars. The crowd grins and don't believe a word of it, of course, but before mornin' Zeb could set the figure at a million and we'd believe it and swear we like it.

Then Zeb goes on to tell about his folks over in France, and how his great-grandfather come to bring the old fiddle to America. It seems that his people are way-up folks over there, then—time of the big ruction—the grandfather gets in bad with the new gover'ment and comes mighty near to loosin' his head. He hits the high places and is glad to get across the Spanish border, in a load of straw, and the only thing he saves out of the wreck is the old fiddle. He has a tough time of it, but finally he gets to America, and the fiddle is handed down from father to son till at last Zeb gets it and fetches her along to Porcupine camp.

"You must have played a lot," the Kid suggests, when Zeb cleans up on his story.

"I've been practising from six to ten hours a day for fourteen years," Zeb replies. "You see, my father planned a career for me, but I got the Western fever—caught it from my Uncle Jake when I was only ten years old—and I never got over it. He came back on a visit, you know, and the tales he told about the wild and woolly West just about fixed the career business, so I came the minute I was twenty-one and my own boss. I think I'm going to like it—when I get adjusted."

Then Zeb begins fussin' with the fiddle again, his eye takes on a new sparkle, and he looks alive—at last. The dancers crowd around, and everybody understands that something is about to happen. The old fiddle has been idle so long that it takes a lot of tinkerin', and there's something about the way Zeb handles her that sets the crowd on edge. The sound post don't seem to suit, so Zeb fishes a queer-lookin' pair of pinchers out of the fiddle box and prospects

the fiddle's in'ards for a while, then he slips the pinchers into his upper left-hand vest pocket—which is some lucky move, the way it turns out.

When Zeb gets the fiddle groomed up to suit him, he snuggles it up under his chin sort of caressin'-like, then he draws the bow across the strings. She's a rusty-lookin' old trap, like I said, but man, oh man! The sound that comes out of that smoky old shell just naturally digs into a fellow and stirs up something that simply can't be put into words—something that it seems like it might have happened maybe a million years back, in another world.

Well, the Kid calls for a waltz, and the dancers swing out on the floor. The banjo picker played for a breath or two, then laid the banjo across his knees and set like a frozen man, starin' open-mouthed at Zeb. The girl at the piano looks up now and again, with a look of wonder in her big, brown eyes.

The Kid stands like a hick at a sideshow, starin' in blank amazement at Zeb and the flashin' bow.

The dancers stopped, and two by two they come and crowded close around the stage. Zeb played on. Deaf and dumb and blind he was, and dead to all the world except the old fiddle and the music he was tearin' from it. The girl's playin' was strangely different, too. Before, she had been just poundin', poundin', hammerin' away and keepin' time, but now her slim fingers just touched the keys, here and there, caressin'-like—and now and then she glanced at Zeb.

Zeb changed to another tune and different time. The girl just smiled a little and changed without a break, and never seemed to mind at all. At last Zeb drifted into an old-time cradle song—a hauntin' minor tune that I reckon mothers must have been singin' to their little ones a thousand years ago. Every note of the age-blackened old fiddle was clear and sweet as a flute; the bow flashed; you could see the little clouds of white resin dust a-spinnin' from the strings; the crowd seemed to hold its breath as Zeb teased and wheedled the old fiddle into givin' up the harmonies that was hidin' there, waitin' for the hand of a master.

Rough people these; many with the marks of dissipation and hard livin' stamped plain in their faces. But here was something that held them, that compelled their respect, that probed around under the crust and touched that little spark that is hidin' away somewhere in the meanest man that ever tramped the earth.

The games are all deserted and hats are all off now, and outsiders tip-toe easy-like as they join the silent crowd around the stage. The girl strikes a false note, catches herself, then suddenly she stops playing. Her arms crash down on the keys and she hides her face upon them and sobs as if her heart would break. Zeb stops playin' and stares at the girl, as if he was just comin' out of a dream.

The Kid hesitates for a breath or two, then steps up on the stage and takes the girl by the shoulders and tries to straighten her up, but she shakes him off and for once in his life he don't know just what to do. Then old Pop Baldwin, the pock-marked, hard-eyed owner steps up and straightens everything out in short order.

Pop sure knows how to handle things, so he calls everybody up for a drink on the house—and the spell was broke. The crowd surges up to the bar—all but Zeb and the girl—and after a bit the girl straightens up and looks around at Zeb.

"It was just a little too much for me," she says. "I suppose I ought to feel ashamed, but somehow I don't seem to." She gets to her feet and then puts out her hand. "It was simply wonderful—it took me back—I couldn't help it."

Her eyes are still bright with tears, her chin quivers. Zeb don't know what to say, as he takes her hand.

"It's no matter," he says, and he thinks she has the prettiest eyes in the world.

She attracts him strange-like. She don't look like a bad girl, but here she is in a dance-hall, and he wonders how she comes to be here. There's no time for talk, though, for the crowd comes stringin' back and the Kid steps up for a little talk with Zeb.

"Can you play 'Old Zip Coon,' and 'The Liverpool,' and the like of that?" the Kid inquires.

"Oh, yes," the boy replies, "anything you want."

"All right," says the Kid, "get your partners for a quadrille, boys; let's turn her loose and roll 'em high!"

The Kid straightens 'em out in four sets, Zeb strikes into the old "Liverpool," and the dance is on. Zeb's playin' had the wine of Bacchus in it, as the poet says, and the

dance was fast and furious. For it was one of them times when Old Man Trouble is plumb forgot and everybody turns their selves loose for a glorious time—right now.

Everything swings along sweet and joyful, and along about twelve a big miner shouts and swings his hat.

"Just a minute, fellers!" he yells. "We've all been overlookin' a little bet." And he flips a silver dollar on the stage.

A shower of silver follows, clatterin' on the stage from all sides. Zeb don't understand it, and looks sort of dazed-like at the girl. She smiles at Zeb and shows him a mighty pretty set of teeth, then she jumps up and gathers up the coin and piles it neat and nice on the corner of the piano.

"What does all this mean?" Zeb demands, at last.

"It's for you," the girl replies, with another fetchin' smile.

"For me?" says Zeb. "But there must be forty or fifty dollars there!"

"Yes, and no telling how much it will be before morning."

"But it's too much! I couldn't——"

"It belongs to you," the girl interrupts. "They're having the time of their lives, and they're willing to pay for it. They want to pay—wouldn't have it any other way."

"And just think," says Zeb, sort of musin'-like. "Only a few hours ago I was scared blue because I only had eighty cents left, and didn't know a soul in town!"

The girl laughs right out, then she sobered pretty sudden.

"Excuse me, Mr.— Oh, I beg your pardon!" she stammers.

"Hollis, Zeb Hollis is my name," says Zeb.

"Mine is Madge Thomas. I beg your pardon. It wasn't very polite for me laugh at you, was it? And I wasn't angling for your name, though it must have looked as if I was. It was amusing at that—your being frightened just because you were broke. Really, I doubt if there's another place in the world where you'd be as safe, broke, as right here in Porcupine.

"The men are a rough lot, all right enough, but it's all on the surface, and they'll divide their last dollar with anybody but a snob. And the girls—there isn't a girl here that wouldn't dig up her last four-bit piece for a friend in distress, or an enemy either, for that matter. And these people will never pry into your past—to find out whether you are worthy of help. You've got to eat; you need something, need it now, not next week, and what you did with your Summer's wages hasn't a thing to do with it. Get the point? Oh, I've learned a lot, since I came here!"

They called for another waltz, and when it was over and the crowd slipped to the bar for their drinks, Zeb turned to the girl again. He was interested and wanted to know more about her, so in his odd-like way he puts the direct question.

"How do you come to be here?" he asks serious-like. "You don't look—you don't seem to belong here."

Perhaps I don't," replies Madge. "But it was the best I could do, and it isn't so bad when you come to know these people. They're just folks, like you and me. A bit reckless, perhaps, or out of luck in choosing their parents, or something, but they have courage, and are democratic and free-hearted—really generous. Their talk is rough and free and easy—careless. But after all, when you come to think it over, the language taught in colleges is not really the American language at all. These people speak the real American language—the language of ninety-five of every hundred everywhere. And I rather like it, now that I'm getting used to it."

"But you haven't told me how you came to be here," Zeb reminds her.

"That's so," the girl admits. "But there isn't much to tell. My father was killed last Spring, over in Sunnyside. Murdered, you know, and——"

"Murdered?" Zeb whispers the word.

"Yes, murdered. You couldn't call it anything else."

"Who did it?"

"Nig Peets—that is the name he goes by. He's a notorious gun-man, a killer, you know. You'll see him soon enough, for he's stopping here in Porcupine, just now. Came here to kill the Smilin' Kid, they say."

"He might come in here!" the boy exclaims, with a scared-like glance toward the front door.

"No fear!" exclaims the girl. "The Smilin' Kid is one man that Peets don't want to mix it with. He came here over a month ago to kill the Kid; but when it comes to a show-down he simply hasn't got the sand to face the music. The Kid killed his brother, in a fair fight, and he'll kill Nig too, if they ever meet, and Peets knows it.

I know there's a lot of people that thinks different; but the Kid has one thing that Peets lacks, and that's brains! He beat Arizona Peets twice, by using his head, and he'll beat Nig, too. I'm sure of it!"

"But how does Peets come to be at large, if he murdered your father?" Zeb inquires.

"You don't understand," the girl replies. "It was done according to the rules, or appeared to be—at least there was no one to say that it wasn't. So nothing was done about it."

"My father was a musician," the girl goes on. "We lived in Cincinnati. He planned a musical career for me, and I was just beginning to attract a little attention, when his health failed and the doctors advised him to go West. My mother was dead, so I came along to look after him. We went to Sunnyside, and father tried placer mining. He was new to the West, of course, and foolishly thought he must carry a gun, because the other men did. Well, you know, any man that carries a gun is fair game for these killers; so Peets managed to pick a row with father, and killed him.

"It was cold-blooded murder and nothing less, for Peets is one of the fastest men in the world, with a gun, and father was a mere tenderfoot with no experience or skill whatever. It was all very simple. Peets picked a row and made a quick motion toward his gun, and father, not realizing what he did, drew his gun. Peets was really in the lead, all the way, and father hadn't a chance in the world to beat him. Peets fired, of course, the instant father's gun cleared the holster. So he died with his gun in his hand, and by all the rules of the game that lets Peets out."

"It was an outrage!" Zeb declares, hotly. "I don't understand. Why don't decent men put a stop to such things?"

"Well," replies the girl, "people everywhere live pretty much by rule. The rule may be a very bad one, but once fully established it's a difficult matter to change it. And the rule here is if a man draws, it's his own fault if he gets killed, and the fact that he is a peaceable citizen and was surprized into it, has no weight whatever."

"What is this Peets like?" Zeb inquires.

Madge describes him, brief-like. The dancers clapped and asked for another waltz, and the dance went on. Twice more durin' the night the big miner stops the game to flip another dollar on the stage, and all in all she totals up to over a hundred.

At four in the mornin' the dance breaks up, and Zeb dallies for a little chat with Madge. The boy is mightily pleased with the girl's bright mind and cheerful smile, and he catches his breath a bit when she leans quite close to have a peek at the rare old violin. They talk about music for a while, then Zeb reminds her again that she still owes him the story about how she comes to be here in a dance hall.

"It rather looks as if I tried to dodge that, doesn't it?" the girl smiles. "It was all very simple, Mr. Hollis. I had no money, I had to live. I was offered this place at a good salary, and protected by the whitest man I ever met."

"And that man was?"

"Jack Bascom—the Smilin' Kid."

"And you like it here?"

"Yes it fascinates me. Under the rough surface there is so much that is really wholesome and good. I like the spirit of fair-play and real democracy. I like the absence of hypocrisy and pretense and silly conventions of too polite society. I was raised in a large city, and perhaps I ought to go back, but when I think of all that it means, I sometimes doubt whether I ever shall. There's something about the West that grips you, and it seems to be a fact that very few ever go back East, and stay there."

"Maybe the Smilin' Kid has something to do with it?" Zeb suggests, with a queer smile.

"Perhaps," the girl admits. "But I'm not in love with him, if that is what you mean. He's just a friend, a jolly good pal, and it's a notion of mine that he's one of the kind that never marries."

Zeb picks up his fiddle, like he's aimin' to go, right now, but his glance lingers on the girl's pleasant face. He offers his hand, and the girl smiles as she clasps it.

"You're forgetting the money," she calls as Zeb starts out.

"No," Zeb replies, "I don't want it—it's yours."

Madge tumbles the silver into her handkerchief and slips up behind Zeb. Then, quick as a flash, she spills it in his side coat pocket and disappears through a side door. Zeb stares at the door, sort of puzzled-like, then turns and mopes along to the front bar. The Kid is there, countin' the night's receipts. Zeb lays his fiddle box on the bar and spills the dance money out beside it.

"Do you think you could get Miss Thomas to take this?" he asks the Kid.

The Kid glances up and smiles.

"No-o-o," he says, "not all of it. Half, maybe. Yes, I think I can persuade her that she's entitled to half of it, anyhow."

"All right," says Zeb. "I'll leave it here. See what you can do."

"How about tomorrow night—or tonight, I mean? Can you play for us?"

"Yes," replies Zeb, "if you want me."

"Sure thing!" says the Kid. "We want you right along. Dollar an hour from the house, and all the crowd chips in is yours."

"That's too much," Zeb protests.

"Never mind about that," says the Kid. "I know who's getting the best of the deal, and it isn't Zeb Hollis. And listen, I'm your friend, understand, and if anything goes wrong—anything, mind you, I'll see you through. Some of the toughs around here may try to hand you something. If they do, you'll let me know, won't you?"

Zeb promises, but when the time comes he takes another course.

IN THE early evenin' of his third day in camp Zeb takes a notion to have a little look around among the other resorts. He has played at the Palace on the odd nights, and talked a lot with Madge, and the more he talks with the bright, wholesome girl, the better he likes her. She seems like an old friend now, and when he strolls into the Silver Bell and comes suddenly face to face with Nig Peets, his mind turns plumb sudden to the girl. Somewhere in his mind there's a picture takin' shape, a picture of this greasy beast killin' the girl's father, every part of it as plain as if he'd been right there and seen it all himself.

Peets stands with his back to the bar, one heel hooked over the foot-rail, both elbows on the bar, hands hangin' loose and handy by his gun-butts. The girl's description is still fresh in Zeb's mind, there's no chance for a doubt, the man is Nig Peets. Zeb stands and stares—too green to sense the fact that he's courtin' Old Man Trouble, right in his den. Peets grins and sizes Zeb up, for a minute, then he steps out and looks Zeb over like he's maybe a horse and Peets is aimin' to buy him. He lets on like he's holdin' a glass to his eye, and walks around Zeb like an old hen sizin' up some strange sort of a worm.

"Well, well!" says Peets, at last. "If it ain't my old friend Bill! Just like news from home. When did you leave dear ol' Missouri? Shake!" And Peets puts out a dirty paw.

Zeb is too dazed to do anything else, so he takes Peets greasy hand, and Peets drags him up to the bar.

"Come on and have a drink," Peets growls, then he half-turns and shouts to the crowd in the rear. "Come on, fellers, and have a drink on ol' Nig Peets! Regular family reunion. Let's celebrate!"

Zeb's feelin's is mixed up till he nearly chokes on the words, but he manages to stammer that he don't drink.

"Oh yes, you do!" says Peets. "Everybody drinks on ol' Nig—when he asks 'em."

The bartender strings out the bottles and glasses along the bar, Peets pours out a big drink for himself and one for Zeb. He still has a good grip on Zeb's coat collar, and when Zeb pulls back he jerks him, gaspin' like a fish, against the bar.

"Lap her up, young feller!" Peets barks. "And no back talk! I've had a lot of patience with you, already, and I'm a-gettin' peevish. Lap her up!"

"I can't do it!" Zeb screams, tryin' desperate-like to break away.

Peets is a powerful cuss, and he slams Zeb against the bar in no time. Then he grabs a glass of liquor and pours it inside of Zeb's New Jersey standin' collar. Zeb is plumb desperate by this time, and he pounds away at Peets with both fists. Peets laughs like a pack-jack, then he grabs another glass of booze and dashes it into the boy's eyes.

Plumb blinded by the fiery stuff, and half cryin' with rage and pain, Zeb can't do a thing but dig, helpless-like, at his burnin' eyes. Peets glares around at the crowd, then he trips Zeb to the floor. He grabs a bottle from the bar and empties it into Zeb's hair and eyes, then he rubs it in, savage-like, with a ham-sized hand.

It's a brutal stunt, and no mistake, and there's more than one scowlin' face in the crowd a-lookin' on. But baitin' a tenderfoot is a time-honored sport, and how far you go with it is admitted to be pretty much a matter of your own notion about it. Furthermore and also, tryin' to stop a man like Nig Peets means a bad mixup, and everybody knows it.

Still further, they know that Peets ain't

aimin' to do the boy no serious hurt. He's in for a rough time for a minute or two, but it's better to let him take his medicine than to start a gun-fight and maybe get the boy killed—which would just about be his luck if the shootin' ever starts. So nothing is done about it, and by and by Peets yanks Zeb up a-standin once more.

"There!" Peets roars. "That ought to make a man out of you! It'll make you smell like a sure-enough man, anyhow, and that's a lot better'n nothin'!"

Zeb stands shiverin' and rubbin' his eyes, and he don't know what's comin' next. Peets grins and bites off a big chew of tobacco.

"Now young feller," says Peets, slippin' the plug back into his pocket, "grab your hat and I'll start you for home."

Somebody hands Zeb his hat, he puts it on and staggers toward the door, Peets nails him by the collar again.

"Now, you white livered Sunday-school sissy!" Peets hisses in Zeb's face. "The next time a gen'l'man asks you to ake a drink, maybe you'll have enough sense not to insult him. Git out—and keep a-goin'!"

Then Peets kicks him through the door and turns to the bar for his neglected drink.

Zeb limps around to the Pioneer Hotel and goes straight to his room. He drags the old valise out from under the bed and opens her up, movin' slow and sure, like a man with a fixed purpose in his mind, and plenty of time to carry it out. He drags out a short-barreled thirty-two pocket pistol, tests the action careful-like, then opens a box of shells and loads her all around.

He shuts the valise, shoves it under the bed again, picks up his fiddle box from the top of the dresser and snuggles it under his left arm. Then he puts his right hand, with the pistol in it, into his trousers pocket, and slips around to the Palace bar. The Kid hasn't come on shift yet, so he turns the fiddle over to the bartender and strolls back to the stage. He sets on the corner of the stage, for a minute or two, then Madge comes in through the side door, and Zeb runs to meet her.

"I think I'm going to quit, Madge," the boy blurts out.

"Quit!" the girl exclaims. "I thought you liked it here. What is the matter?"

"Nothing much, and I do like the place, when you are here, anyhow. But—I can't tell you—maybe it will be all right, and well, if I don't see you again, good-by."

Zeb takes his hand out of his pocket long enough to shake hands with Madge, then he shoves it back again and lays hold of the pistol. The girl stares, too puzzled to say anything, and Zeb walks out. He goes along, slow and easy-like, till he comes to the Silver Bell, hesitates for a minute, with one foot on the step, then he shoves the swingin' door aside and steps inside.

Peets is still at the bar, standin' exactly like he was when Zeb first seen him. Peets glares at the boy, but he don't say a word, and Zeb walks slow and easy back to the gamblin' tables at the rear. He looks on at the games for a while, then he strolls back toward the front, with his right hand still in his pocket.

AND NOW I'd like to know the whys and hows of it— What it is that sometimes drives a man into doin' a —— fool stunt, regardless of results. No doubt Zeb's recent maulin' by Peets weighed heavy on his mind; no doubt his horror over the killin' of Madge's father had something to do with it; no doubt he felt that his honor demanded some sort of action; no doubt he feels, keen and sharp, that he's nothin' but a joke—a mere laughin'-stock for these fightin' miners. But he must know that nothin' but death, sure and swift, could come from meetin' up with Nig Peets in any sort of gun-play. But, whatever might be runnin' in his mind, there's one thing sure: he's made up his mind to kill or be killed, and that's all to it.

Well, when Zeb is fair in front of Peets, he stops and faces the gun-man, and partly draws the little pistol from his pocket. White to the lips, he is, and his face looks drawn and thin, but there's not a tremor in body or voice as he faces the fastest gun-man in the West.

"I came here to kill you, Nig Peets," the boy says, steady and even, with a slight movement of the hand that holds the little joke of a pistol.

Peets laughs outright—a hoarse "Haw-haw" that carries to all parts of the room.

"Hot over that little shampoo?" Peets grins. "Took you a —— of a long time to get your dander up."

The crowd gathers fast, front and rear, but they keep well out of the line of fire. Men call, hoarsely, urgin' Zeb to drop his gun, not to be a —— fool, to put up his hands; but the boy never hears a word of it.

"Defend yourself, Peets," he says, short and sharp. "I'm going to kill you where you stand!"

"What with?" Peets demands, with a grin. "That funny little trinket? You're a comical cuss, anyhow! I hate to do it."

Peets knows that Zeb is aimin' to play by the rules, otherwise the boy would have drawed and fired at the start. The itch to kill is tearin' at the gun-man. He begins to fear that Zeb will weaken and quit, an' his plan now is to force the play.

His right hand flashes to his gun, but he only taps it with his fingers and draws his hand away—empty. The move is almost too speedy for your eye to follow, but it serves its purpose. Zeb draws the little gun from his pocket, Peet's gun roars, and Zeb crashes to the floor. Peets grins as he slips the gun back in the leather; he eyes the crowd, close, watchin' sharp for a hostile move.

The men are froze in their tracks, starin' at Zeb a-lyin' there so still and limp, face-down on the floor, with the little gun still gripped tight and fast in his clenched right hand. Then, sudden-like and all unexpected, the crowd in front splits and makes a wide lane leadin' to the door.

The high-brows tell us that when the human animal learned how to talk and think, he lost his instinct slick and clean. Well, maybe they're partly right, maybe the chap that lives in a swivel chair and only has to push a button to get anything he wants—maybe he's a little shy.

But the man that sleeps and works and plays, with danger at his elbow, or lurkin' just around the next turn in the trail, or over the next hill; the man that's been compelled to look out for himself, all the time, just naturally picks up something you can't call anything else but instinct.

If this ain't so, then tell me how it happens that when every man in the house is starin' sharp at Zeb and Peets, this lane to the door should open up just like it did? Nobody has said a word, yet the crowd splits wide, and plumb sudden, at that. Like a flash it happens, and there, just inside the door, we see the Smilin' Kid.

He stands there, with his arms folded across his chest, starin' straight at Peets, and the distance between 'em is maybe ten feet. The Kid is hatless and barefoot, wears nothing in fact but pants and coat. His hair is wet and all mussed up, the bare flesh shows through the opening in his coat—shows that he wears not even an undershirt. The ivory stocks of his two guns glisten in the lamplight, in the holsters at his thighs. The crowd fairly holds its breath, there ain't a sound, you might have heard your watch a-tickin'. At last Nig Peets and the Kid are face to face!

"I'm a second too late, it seems," says the Kid, with a queer smile.

Peets is taken completely by surprize, his eyes waver, it is plain that for once in his life a deadly fear has gripped him tight. His jaw sags down, he swallows hard, two little rivulets of tobacco juice ooze from the corners of his mouth and dribble down his chin. From force of habit he falls into the gun-man's crouch, with his fingers twitchin' near his gun-butts, but the fear of death is heavy upon him, and he does not draw. His face twists in a horrible grin, showin' the long yellow fangs that shear together like the teeth of a wolf.

"You don't *have* to draw, Mr. Peets," says the Kid, soft and easy, with a smile that carries a rank insult. "You know the rules—you can sneak out, you know!"

Peets shuffles his feet, but he does not draw, and the Kid stands sneerin' at him.

"You came here to kill me, Mr. Peets," the Kid goes on. "I have your letter, it is tacked on the wall for all men to read. You came to kill me—by your own account. You wound up by murdering a child! Look him over, gentlemen, give it a name!"

Peets glares at the Kid, his chest heaves sort of jerky-like, his leather face twitches, but still he does not draw. Then, slow and easy-like, watchin' Peets like a hawk, the Kid starts toward the gun-man, with his arms still folded across his chest. Peets wavers, for a breath, then, with the speed of a strikin' rattlesnake, he draws both guns. There's a flash and a sharp report. Peets crashes to the floor, just like he might have dropped if both legs had been carried away by a cannon shot.

The crowd is amazed, for the Kid's two thirty-eights are still in the holsters. He holds a smokin' gun in his right hand, but so swift has he drawed it, from under his left arm, that almost it seems as if he has made no move at all. He watches Peets close, for a moment, to make sure that he ain't shamming, then he turns to look at Zeb. The boy begins to moan and flounder around, and finally, with a little help from

the Kid, he struggles to his feet. He is dazed and badly shook up and fightin' for his breath, but very much alive for all that.

They open Zeb's shirt and find that Peet's bullet struck fair over his heart, but the little pair of pinchers that Zeb slipped into his pocket so careless-like, that first night, has turned the slug aside without serious damage. The heavy forty-four simply knocks the boy out, and aside from a bruised chest and a badly burned rib, there's nothing the matter.

Satisfied that Zeb's injuries ain't no ways dangerous, the men turn to have a look at Peets. The man is dead, with a bullet in his brain. Both guns are still clutched tight in his hands. A trickle of blood from the wound in his forehead, drips down and mingles with the tobacco juice that drools from his mouth, his hard face is set in a last look of dread and ghastly fear!

"Dead as a mackerel!" some one says, and the spell is broke.

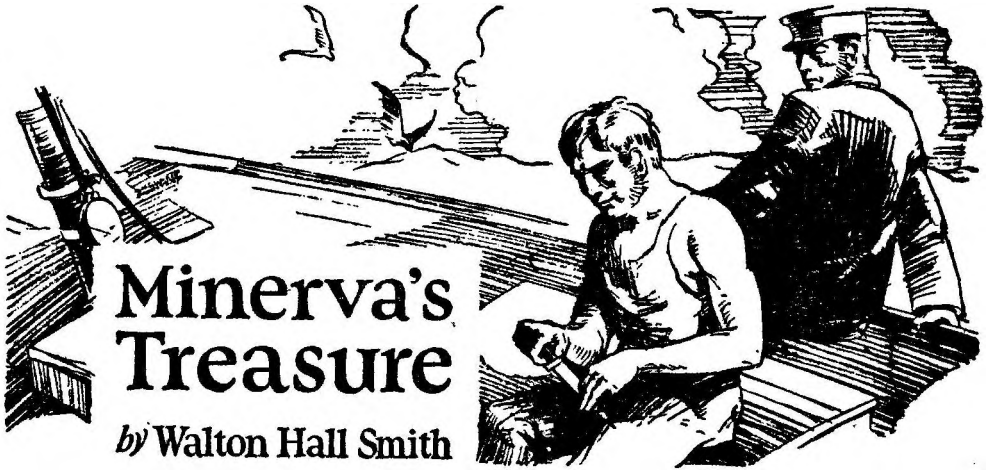
They mill around the Kid to shake his hand and howl and pound him on the back, and everybody talks at once. They drink, and cheer the Kid, and wind it all up with three and a tiger for Zeb. From now on Zeb is one of them, for he has faced what seemed like certain death—faced it bravely, without a tremor, and so has proved himself worthy of the camaraderie of the West.

Some one chaffs the Kid about his clothes, of course.

"I was in the tub," the Kid explains. "Madge watched this infant, and when he turned in here she made a —— good guess about what was in the wind, so she routed me out. You fellows have been claimin' that it takes me three hours to dress, but you're all way off your base. I can beat it by two hours and fifty-nine minutes and fifty seconds—and prove it by Madge!

"And now, boy," the Kid goes on, slippin' his arm around Zeb's shoulder, "you sure done a fool tenderfoot stunt, but take it all around it's a —— good job, after all, and the town's yours from now on. And the girl, too, if you want her, and I reckon you do. She's waitin', and she'll be worryin', and I'm liable to catch cold in this rig. Come on, let's go."

And the men turn loose another yell as the two pass out, arm-in-arm.



Minerva's Treasure

by Walton Hall Smith

DOCKERY, laughing, stood at bay. Here was excitement at last, after a day's search. He placed his back six inches from the wall and watched the avalanche of indignation gain speed, and watched also the first storm of glassware and table fixtures. These were badly aimed—as Dockery saw somewhat more quickly than the average—so he remained unmoved and let them splatter around him. Like Benny Leonard when he sees, somewhat more quickly than his audience, that a blow is going to fall short.

Dockery knew better than to start a brawl in the Elite, which, though odorously near the La Paz docks, "strives to keep out the

"Minerva's Treasure," copyright, 1922, Walton Hall Smith.

rough element and live up to its name." La Paz, situated as it is on the Gulf of California, collects a goodly portion of riff-raff from all points, and Dockery knew the town well enough to beware trouble in the levy cafés.

That is to say, he would have known it, had he been acquainted with the word "beware" in any sense. Having the minimum of imagination, he wasn't. But, like most animals, Nature made it as right as possible by giving him a glorious body, a good eye, that gift of God called muscular coordination, and a charmed life. And, temporarily, youth.

So, with the above-mentioned, plus a track shirt, rolled-up sailor's trousers and some coins earned from travelers by a diving and swimming exhibition earlier in the day, Dockery regarded the Elite as his own for the evening.

In the beginning the management and guests weren't complimented by his outward appearance; but there was one at least, up on the balcony, who appreciated what was underneath it. Indeed, this languid Frenchman had been watching and admiring Dockery all afternoon, and, therefore, when the manager stopped at his table—as he had at others—to apologize for receiving so untidy a customer, this individual looked up from his back number of *La Vie Parisienne* and told him to go to ——. And it's quite likely matters would have rested thus, but for Dockery's sudden impulse to dance with the Elite's pet entertainer.

Dockery's broad, bare feet seemed out of place on the dancing floor, and the girl's vehement protests raised shouts of anger from the tables. But Dockery didn't mind this. He held her close, with his magnificent, tanned right arm around her straining body, and whirled her round and round, mostly off the floor. There is a remote possibility that even this might have passed off, considering Dockery's build and size, but he, in ending the dance, pulled the final boot, so to speak.

For as he released her, he gave her a little push, just with the back of his hand moved from the wrist. He hadn't intended harm, but maybe he did push a little harder than was playful. Anyway the girl was sent spinning across the floor and brought up with a scream and a curse against a pillar of the balcony.

With one accord the male representation of the crowd arose, each not wishing to lose such a chance to appear as a protector. One madman lunged out, swinging a chair. He was larger than Dockery, but was awkward and all angles, as most oversized men are. Dockery took the chair away, giving him something in the teeth by way of return.

The rest understood at once, when they saw the neat aerial parabola described by this vanguard, why the entertainer had struck the pillar so hard. They, therefore, remained in a body and started the attack from long range.

The second volley of bottles and such did better. Dockery upended a table as a shield and returned the fire with pieces of débris that lay within reach. Once he stood bolt upright amid the flying glass and flung a chair with terrific force directly into the center of the mob, inflicting several casualties at one stroke. After that things grew hotter, and fury took the place of caution in the attackers. Dockery maneuvered to get another table, so as to put one on each side and avoid flanking.

A constant fusillade was flying now, and once a sheath-knife whistled by and sank into the wall with a thud, quivering curiously; but Dockery crouched to cover only at intervals. Evidently he didn't consider the situation dangerous yet—and his judgment seemed correct, for he hadn't a scratch. He was still laughing, too, especially when one of his missiles found a soft mark.

The Frenchman on the balcony watched with increasing interest, his right hand clasping an automatic. He had taken a fancy to Dockery and didn't mean to see him seriously harmed if a slug or two of lead would prevent it. As a matter of fact such probably couldn't have prevented it, had it come to that, but Dockery could, and did, for that matter. Just now, as it happened, his ammunition was about used up and the crowd was closing in, cautiously again. So Dockery charged into the open.

A roar and a shower of bottles came from the crowd as he leaped for a table just under the edge of the balcony. Dockery's feet struck the center simultaneously and the table cracked and fell on its side, but Dockery had shot upward and, catching the railing of the balcony in both hands, vaulted lightly over.

A heavy tumbler stood on the Frenchman's table, conveniently near, and, snatching this, Dockery struck it sharply against the railing, chipping it neatly off about half-way down and leaving a jagged edge. The remainder he sent hurling at the mob below, where its course stopped suddenly and audibly on the bridge of a certain nose in the front rank. The owner of this partially severed member slipped to the floor and remained there. Dockery laughed and, turning to the Frenchman, said—

"How's that?"

"Not bad at all. Say listen, you, meet me in back of the Plaisance in an hour. I've something important to tell you." Dockery frowned quickly in surprize. "It's all right; I watched you this afternoon, and I think I can put you in the way to make some money. Better beat it now, but be sure, in one hour."

Dockery nodded and darted through a door. It chanced to be a room for ladies exclusively, but that was a detail. Dockery broke open a small window and dropped two stories to the ground. There chanced to be a picket fence directly below, but that was a detail too, since Dockery didn't hit it.

IN THE best room of the best hotel in La Paz the Frenchman produced a bottle of Johnny Dewar and plenty to smoke.

"I have a forty-five-footer tied up down at the docks near the Elite. She has a standard engine. She's small and slow, but she's sea-going."

"What about it?" asked Dockery.

"I'll tell you in a minute First, my name's Minot, just at present. M-i-n-o-t. But pronounce it 'Mee-no,' because I'm French, also just at present. What's yours? *Comment vous appelez-vous?*"

"Dockery. And not 'just for the present.' I haven't got anything to hide."

"Well, don't brag about it; you may have. Do you know any French?"

"I picked up a little in the Marquesas."

"Oh, you know the Islands, do you?"

"Some."

"That's good. I saw you diving this afternoon. You handle yourself rather well in the water. Did you ever dive for shell?"

"That's what I've been doing here in the Gulf. I just finished the season off Tortuga."

"Then why are you broke?"

"The lottery."

"Fair enough. Now listen, Dockery. I'm going to ask you a few more questions, if you don't mind, just to get a line on you. Then I'm going to tell you a story. It is long, but it's interesting. If you stack up the way I've got you figured, you won't regret the time spent; and you'll be glad you met me, what's more." Minot paused impressively. "To begin with, what's your first name?"

"John," answered Dockery.

"Oh, of course."

"Well, it *is*."

"All right, I said it was, didn't I? Are you an American?"

"Yes; born in Chicago."

"That so? I didn't think any of the natives of that place ever knew there was an outside world. When did you rub the cinders out of your eyes and leave there?"

"I ran away from home when I was fourteen. You go ahead and ask questions if you want to, but don't get so —— snarky."

Minot laughed and took a drink.

"All right, John my boy. You'll get used to my ways, so don't be touchy. What did you do after you left? Tell me about it. Go ahead; you said you didn't have anything to hide."

"I hit the grit for two years," Dockery smiled. "I saw most of the country free."

"Have any trouble?" broke in Minot.

"Not that's any of your business."

"Oh, go on and tell about it; I won't hurt you."

"I know —— well you won't." Dockery scowled and hesitated.

"If you're so anxious to know, I had a run in with a brakeman once that played me dirt. He found out what car I was under and got between that one and the one ahead with a chain. The chain had a hook on the end of it. The devil let it drag along the road-bed and throw up the gravel —we was hitting a good clip, too. That flying gravel just about tore me to pieces. So when we pulled down, I got him by his skinny neck and knocked —— out of him. That's all."

"Kill him?"

Dockery sprang to his feet.

"No I didn't kill him; what the —— do you mean?"

"I didn't say you killed him. I just asked you. Furthermore, I don't care whether you killed him or not. I'm not my

brother's keeper. What are you so excited about; sit down."

Dockery sat back, watching Minot closely.

"Don't insinuate," he said.

"What did you do after your two years of hoboing?" Minot went on.

"I had a cruise with the whalers; three years it was, and harder than anything I'm ever figuring on doing again. After that I had a hitch in the Navy. Atlantic Fleet. I was on the '*Pennsy*.' She was flagship part of the time. I paid out bosn's mate, first class. Then I played around the Canal Zone for a while, swimming and having a good time, until a fellow told me about the good money diving for shell. He and I went to Tahiti together and we dived with the fleets for a while. Then one day he never came up. I drifted back here to the gulf and here I been ever since. Now you got it, ain't you?"

"That's very interesting. Let's see; there's just one point. You say you joined the whalers just after that row with the brakeman? I mean that was the end of your days on the road?"

"Did I say that?"

"Yes, I think you did; isn't it right?"

"It's right enough."

"I see."

Dockery glowered again.

"What do you mean, you see?"

"I just wanted to get it straight. Thanks for your story. Now if you'll pour yourself another drink and get comfortable I'll tell mine. I won't bore you with the details except where it's necessary. In the first place, I was born in Borneo, from parents nobody would brag about. But I got an education because I wanted it and because a silly old maid wanted to give it to me. I've lived all over; the longest time in any one place was Paris.

"I'm a pearl-diver; I've never done anything else. I saved up for twelve years for my two years in Paris. Now, I'm getting along. It's doubtful if I could go back to regular diving. But I'll never have to, although I haven't anything laid away for old age either. What I'm about to outline will explain why."

Minot passed his fingers through his hair.

"*Regardez, je commence à grisonner.*"

"Better talk English to me; I don't know much of that Frog," said Dockery.

"I use it now and then just to remember I'm French—I said I was beginning to get gray, to impress you with my dignity. As I was saying, my business is diving for shell. I know the game from start to finish, and I came to my knowledge honestly. When I was seventeen I was diving in the Sulu Sea, along that archipelago northeast of Borneo. We were after shell only, of course, because the pearls from that vicinity are yellow around the edges and don't bring much.

"For that reason there wasn't much in it for me, so I went to Australia and worked the west coast for a Chinese company. Man, that was diving! For a full six weeks we worked Useless Harbor, a little inlet in a place called Shark's Bay. It's different from the South Pacific. The shell there live in strong currents in narrow channels between islands, and they lie on a hard bottom. What's more, Shark's Bay wasn't named that for nothing. Our fleet left eight men there just during six weeks. We snagged 'em and butchered 'em, but they came back just the same.*

"But the company didn't mind losing eight men, or even twenty men, for the haul they got in that place. It was a darb. You know the average run is one marketable pearl to every thousand oysters. Well, they claimed this percentage was cut nearly in half on those we brought up in Useless Harbor. That place was a misnomer all right.

"After that I wandered around with several companies across the South Pacific. I worked most every known spot, I guess—the Navigator's, Societies, Paumotas, Gambier, every place and with all kinds of people. And, by keeping my eyes open, I made a sizeable wad. After a while they began to sing the blues about the South Pacific. Said it was all fished out and a lot more such rot.

"I was fool enough to fall for it, though, and now I'm —— glad I did. I went to the Persian Gulf, and I worked there for two years with the dirtiest bunch of nondescripts you ever saw. But it paid. They were so dumb they had lackeys carrying

* The pearl fishermen, especially in the South Seas, go out several days before the beginning of the season and catch as many sharks as they can right around the bank they are going to work. They don't kill these sharks, but wound them with knife slashes until they are practically helpless and then set them free. The supposition is that this scares away other marauding sharks. Superstition or not, few divers will work until this has been done.

them out of their boats, so as not to get their feet damp. Imagine—after being in the water all day. In the end I cleaned up and got away to Paris with a belt full of beauties, as well as my pay.

"You see now, Dockery, that you needn't hold anything back from me. But now we're getting to the point. I finally worked back into the game in the South Pacific while I still had a little capital left. I was pretty blue; it was hard luck to be broke, or nearly broke, after so much work. I'd tried to get smart in a city that's wise to all the tricks, and they simply laughed up their sleeves and took it away from me.

"Don't you whine about the Lottery, John, because you don't know the first principles of losing money. Sometimes when I was four or five fathoms under I used to wish a big gray fellow would mosey along and settle me, but none did. Probably because I wanted them to.

"Anyway, I worked at it for a while and managed to add a little to my capital for two miserable years—and then I ran across Cleaver, Captain Cassius Cleaver. He's dead now; he died an unnatural death; which is one very good reason why I'm French and named Minot. The captain was a great old fellow, and he had the most beautiful scheme ever thought of or discovered in this world, but he tried to double-cross me, and when you hear about it you'll say I was justified.

"It was one evening in Apia Harbor in the off season that I heard the captain's story. We were sitting in the cabin of his packet with a bottle of forty-rod between us. *En passant*, let me mention that the same packet is now tied up down by the Elite. You might say he left it to me. Anyway, the captain had had a son, not so long before our conversation. He also had this extraordinarily valuable information, which he could not cash in on without a son, or without a perfectly trustworthy helper. The captain was too old to dive.

"Now, you see, we're getting to it. The son died. It seems he had wandered off with some *vahine* who belonged by law to another white man, and the other white man hadn't liked it. So the son died. At any rate, that was the captain's story, and it was the one he always told. Well, as I said, he wanted another son, or *a* son, and he wanted to adopt me. Dockery, did you ever hear of the Minerva Reefs?"

Dockery, lolling back in his chair, shook his head.

"Few have, so you needn't be ashamed of it. The Minerva Reefs are some five thousand miles from where you sit and are shown on a chart as completely submerged, though some parts of them jut out a little. They lie southwest of the Friendly Islands, and the nearest island is Pylstaart, and the nearest big one is Tongatabu. Even Pylstaart is over a hundred miles away. In other words, the Minerva Reefs are the jumping-off place. Go there to die.

"*But*, Captain Cleaver was the only white man living who knew that a certain part of the Minerva Reefs is the wonder spot of the world for pearl fishing. These banks haven't been touched within the memory of any one alive today. Long ago the natives of the Tongans used to go out in nothing but their outriggers and fish this bank for their chiefs—and they brought back some of the finest pearl specimens the South Pacific has ever yielded."

Dockery was sitting on the edge of his chair.

"How the captain learned this I will never know, but, Dockery, it's true, because I went there with him and for two months we worked it with astonishing success, and without even beginning to deplete it. When we finally got back to Apia to provision, the crash came. I was slugged one night and robbed of all I had with me, which was nearly all my share. Lucky I had a few. But I got a glimpse of my attacker.

"I later saw him talking to the captain, and inquiry brought out the surprizing knowledge that he was the captain's son, and that he couldn't dive for the life of him. That was nice and thoughtful of the captain wasn't it, to fix it all up for his boy like that?

"But we won't get into gruesome details. They aren't here any more, either father or son, but the Minerva Reefs are. And so is a vast fortune in pearls of the first water. Remember, I said Useless Inlet showed sometimes one good one in five hundred? At Minerva we often opened a day's work to find one in one hundred. That's right, go ahead and look surprized. They are beauties too."

Minot opened a leather wallet and poured out three large gems into the palm of his hand.

"Here's about the run. They are picked at random."

He handed them over to Dockery.

"Aboard the packet is a kanaka. I call him 'Skull,' short for scullion. He's a good all-around man and does all the cooking and most of the other work. He doesn't require much sleep; he'd been sleeping all his life before he met me. So he does most of the night steering, too. He and another like him and myself brought the boat here from Apia. The other was no good, so he's paid off. John, my boy, it's only about one-fifth of the way around the world from here to the Minerva Reefs. The boat is small, and has a short cruising-radius on gasoline, but she can be fixed with a jury rig and a jib, and she will get there, in time. We'll have to be savages for a couple of years, living mostly on breadfruit and such from Pylstaart, but after that we can come back and live like most anything we want to. What I want to know now is, are you, or are you not, on?"

Dockery was standing now, the muscles in his bare arms and shoulders pressing out like cords. Dockery had no imagination, but Minot had made things so clear that he didn't need one at this moment. For the first time that he could remember he was a little nervous. That is, he called it nervousness, but it was really only excitement and an irrepressible enthusiasm.

Minot smiled and offered his hand, and the two stood looking at each other for a moment.

"The split is fifty-fifty, John, taking out of your share half the initial expense,which I'm putting up now. We start in two days, so don't get killed in the mean time. But I guess you couldn't if you wanted to."

Minot fished in his pockets for some currency.

"Get yourself an outfit."

Easily, then, the matter was settled, as one of the city might buy a bond or casually plan how to sell more shoes or tooth-paste.

"Inevitable white man!"

THREE men in a boat occasionally cast a glance backward at the fading shore-line of Santa Rosa Island. The fact that Nuka Hiva, in the upper Marquesas, would offer their next sight of land and that it was some twenty-three hundred miles away, seemed not to perturb any of them. This was natural, however, for had they been of the variety to give it a thought, they wouldn't be making the trip at all.

Skull was preparing chow, and Minot had the helm. Dockery sat on a stool in the tiny after cockpit, spitting over the rail and passing a new Marble blade over a scrap of carborundum. He was particularly proud and careful about this new purchase, which was the most expensive item he had bought in preparation for his two-years' jaunt.

Dockery believed thoroughly in the gospel of the knife for one who makes his living at the bottom of the sea. The blade must be of a certain length and balanced just so. It must be sharpened daily, whether used or not, thus insuring a constant razor-edge and needle-point.

The scabbard, which Dockery took all apart and made over, he used after a method all his own. It was fastened under the bulge of the thigh muscle, almost at the back of his leg, and strapped down at both ends. From this position Dockery could whip it out with surprizing swiftness—whether he was swimming along the bottom or standing on deck.

He had discarded shirt and trousers for short woolen trunks, so the blade was always handy. Not, however, that he expected to use it on his partners, for he had developed a strong respect and almost a liking for Minot, and Skull was just a harmless lackey, but it was part of the job and therefore part of him when on the job.

Minot was more careful as to appearance and wore dungarees; also, at much derision from Dockery, he affected a yachting-cap, which Dockery saluted gravely time after time, much to his own amusement.

All of which has little to do with the fact that the packet sailed casually on day after day, across the wastes of the misnamed Pacific. Misnamed, speaking generally, but perhaps it is an injustice in this case. Had any one else tried it out, it would have undoubtedly lashed itself into a fury at such effrontery.

But not for Dockery, Minot and Skull. Maybe it felt they belonged there, or else it realized the task would take too much effort. Whatever the reason was, the Pacific lived nobly up to its name, and for four delightful weeks mirrored the equatorial sun and sponsored a fair east breeze that kept things cooled and saved gasoline.

One fine day Dockery stood on the bow

with a corned beef sandwich in one hand and the crown of a patent anchor in the other. His hair was long and bleached nearly white, and his body was tanned a beautiful golden brown, such as only blonds get who do tan at all. He lifted the anchor easily and tossed it over the side, where it presently buried itself in the fine sand of a Nuka Hiva harbor.

He turned and surveyed the little bridge, where stood Minot, lighting a cheroot, and Skull, looking shoreward, apparently somewhat pleased. Dockery laughed. He was young and needed lots of room to spread out. The broad beach and the little settlement seemed strangely attractive. The high palms appeared to beckon.

"Fresh coconut milk," he exclaimed, and a minute later his tow head cut into the clear water.

They did not delay long. West and south, ever west and south—they left the Marquesas behind, after two days on the beach. Carefully avoiding Tahiti, they cut west to Scilly and south again to Hervey, making but short stops. Raratonga came next, and then the twelve-day jump to Pylstaart.

Pylstaart! A low reef tinted pink by the afternoon sun. Inside, a calm cove. A dazzling beach. Heavy green, palms and Paradise. Pylstaart—one hundred miles from the Minerva Reefs. Dockery threw over the hook, whistling off the key the while. Minot tapped the ashes out of his favorite pipe and seriously placed them in his pocket, tossing the pipe over the side. Skull gazed shoreward contentedly. Electricity and excitement and an odd quiet filled their little world. Pylstaart!

SUPPOSE we skip a week? It isn't an interesting week anyway, because it's uneventful, but Dockery and Minot worked harder than they had for a good while before, in the very necessary duty of locating the exact spot where Captain Cassius Cleaver had brought Minot when the captain was spending, mentally, the rich proceeds from Minerva.

Now, on one bright, calm noon, after six nervous days, they had found it, and Minot and Dockery were manning the rail and minutely studying the dark spots down beside the edge of the coral where the anchor had caught hold. There were the banks, all right, just below them, and filled in thick as far as one could see. Here a diver could work an hour or more in a single spot.

The reef itself came up straight and sheer from the packed sand, almost within a fathom of the surface. Minot pointed here and there excitedly.

Dockery said, "God," and then a little later, "God," again.

"Here! What'd we come for? Let's rig the lines and go down and look her over. Come on; shed those lousy dungarees; come on!"

In a minute all was action, and in a few more they were ready.

"You, Skull! You know your job, don't you? Come here and tend these lines; we're going under. Meet me on the edge of the reef, Minot—we'll go down together the first time. Now watch this," he gripped the rail with both hands.

Slowly, the heavy muscles in his shoulders and back dancing, his body lifted, and slowly, his feet pointed upward, his back arching gradually. For several seconds he remained, holding a handstand, then slipped, with hardly a sound, into the translucent water. Minot watched him a bit, while his body slowly spiraled toward the bottom, and then sprang over the rail feet first and followed after.

Along the edge of the reef they swam, taking care not to come close enough to be scratched. Here was a garden spot for fair. Long streamers strained upward out of the coral, gleaming green where they passed through a path of sunlight; and in the distance the depths appeared pale heliotrope. Though dark gray when viewed from the boat, the oyster beds now were colored a deep blue, with tiny flashes here and there of pure crimson, where parts of colored shell lay at certain angles to the changing light.

An occasional little silvery fish nosed up, keeping at a safe distance, and departed again, evidently satisfied. Dockery and Minot looked at each other and shook hands; then, ignoring the lines, shoved off toward the surface and a few seconds later climbed aboard, up an improvised rope-ladder.

"What do you say?" asked Minot.

"I say I never saw so much shell in one place in my life," said Dockery, "and also, we've got a pretty place to work, as well as an easy place. Did you see that cave?"

"What cave?"

"Didn't you see that hole in the reef, along there just before we came up? Looked like a dark shadow."

"I guess I missed it. I was too busy looking over the beds. Anyway, there's no reason not to get started. Let's bend the baskets on to those lines and try it out. We won't get a day like this every day. It's liable to blow like —— down here, and we're a long way from Pylstaart and protection."

"We can always lay to or cruise around," said Dockery. "I think we ought to buoy this spot so we won't lose it in case we have to up anchor. We can put out an empty gas can."

In a half-hour the diving had started in earnest, and by late afternoon the corners of the cockpit were piled high with shell. Reluctantly they called it a day, and after dinner turned in almost at once, in order to start again with the first sunlight. It was decided that Dockery should start the diving, with Skull tending the lines, while Minot opened shell.

By noon the next day all three men were working feverishly. Minot's advice had been right—they had already struck it rich. The average was hardly ever under one marketable pearl in a hundred oysters, and some of the gems were exceptionally large and beautiful. At dusk, as before, they stopped work, and the day's haul was divided up. Needless to say, dinner was a talkative affair, and enthusiasm ran high. If the luck kept up at this rate, it wouldn't be two years after all until they could call themselves rich and independent.

Affairs moved rapidly, while days upon days chased themselves by in quick succession. Having no calendar, all track of day, month or season was lost seriatim. Minot allowed his watch to run down. For all they cared it might have been a thousand years ago. Garments wore out, and pans and tableware became dented and useless. The elements of civilization were quickly wearing off.

After a considerable time, had you asked Minot or Dockery how long they had been there, they would probably have said four or five months; but it was, in fact, nearly ten months since they had first explored Minerva Reefs. In that time they had made nine trips to Pylstaart, had weathered four bad storms and had accumulated a store of riches and health that would defy many years of soft civilized life to wear away.

Now the work was nearly done, and they were planning to leave the Minerva Reefs for the rest of their lives and for eternity.

Minot thought it best to sail straight to Suva, in the Fijis, and there dispose of the boat. Then they could take transportation to New Guinea and thence to China and the World. If possible, this thought quickened their activities, and for the next two weeks they labored from first sunrise until dark.

THEN one afternoon, when Minot and Dockery were under together, something happened which made it plausible to stop operations at once.

They had just gone under and started filling their baskets when Skull hauled their lines sharply upward. The first thought of course was sharks, but unfortunately it was worse. When the divers stood in the cockpit they saw a flotilla of oyster fishermen sailing down toward them from the North. There were three boats and less than a half-mile away.

As quickly as humans could do it, they hauled up the anchor, and for the first time in a fortnight, started the motor. When the boats were about a hundred yards away, Minot and Dockery stood on the bridge ready to ward off unpleasantness with two Springfields, for the legitimate shell fishermen don't like poachers; but these boats used a wiser method of procedure and put about, heading from where they had come.

"Now," said Minot, "we've got to beat it in a hurry; and —— it all, there's no sign of a breeze. John, you go ahead and dive for a while until I get things shipshape for sailing. I think we ought to start as soon as it's dark. Those birds will have a cutter down here a darn sight sooner than you'd think, and it won't come here alone; it'll hunt for us. We can't afford to have anything go wrong this late in the game."

They brought the boat to anchor again, and Dockery went over the side.

Now it just happened that Dockery, who usually stayed under a little over a minute on an average dive, was this time somewhat short of breath. There had been quite a parcel of excitement, and furthermore he had cast the anchor over and had not entirely come to normal after the exertion. So instead of staying down he gave the signal tug at the rope. But the rope didn't

pull. He tugged again with the same result. —— Skull anyway; did he think this matter of tending lines was a joke? Dockery stroked upward.

A voice was coming from the little cabin—and saying words that caused Dockery to stop suddenly, with his hand on the bottom rope of the ladder. It was Minot's voice.

"—— never know the difference. I tell you, you black devil, I know he'll never know the difference. Just keep it up; take one each day from his sack. Then if I'm not able to get him; we'll have something anyway. Quick, now; back to your line!"

But Skull didn't quite get there. Something flashed from Dockery's hand and sank into Skull's neck, about an inch and a half under his right ear. He tumbled forward into the cockpit with a frightful gagging sound, and a claret stream started at once from his nose and mouth. Minot swaggered out of the cabin and looked about with a surprized expression.

"What's the idea of bumping off the dinge?" he inquired.

Minot's hands were in the coat pockets of his dungarees.

Dockery hesitated, and then a golden idea dawned upon him.

"Why don't he tend lines when he's supposed to tend lines, if he wants to stay healthy?"

Minot kept his distance, and his hands in his pockets.

"Too late to ask him now, John."

His eyes narrowed and his body became rigid. "That makes two for you—*includin' the brakeman.*"

Dockery shrugged and slowly seated himself on the rail, bracing his feet under him. If Minot would only take out his hands!

"Maybe I shouldn't 'a' got so mad," he said, and shook his head.

Minot relaxed, and took his left hand from his pocket.

"Better toss him over, I guess," he said. "Where is your shell for your last dive?"

"It's under him," lied Dockery.

Then, quite unexpectedly, Minot removed his right hand, and at the same instant Dockery sprang. The tussle lasted longer than you would expect. The year in the open had been good for Minot; but then, it had been good for Dockery too. After a little Dockery arose and pulled the automatic out of Minot's right pocket. Minot's eyes were protruding strangely, and there were blue and yellow marks on his open throat. He wasn't breathing any more.

Dockery withdrew his knife from the kanaka's neck and, after carefully choosing a spot on the bottom, dropped it hilt first over the rail. Then he secured the bodies of his late partners together with a length of rope and lifted them over also. They twisted about awkwardly as they floated downward; the two heads, one black and one white, bobbed oddly together, and four arms trailed out behind, the hands moving ever so slightly, as if waving a farewell.

Dockery waited until the bodies rested, somewhat buoyantly, upon the sand and then slipped into the water himself. Arrived at the bottom, he caught a handful of the kanaka's hair and dragged the two along the edge of the reef until a dark shadow loomed up in the coral. Toward this he swam and, pushing the bodies ahead of him, forced them out of sight into the mouth of the cave.

Then he turned back along the edge of the reef and, recovering his knife, now bright and shiny again, shoved off for the surface. He had plenty of wind this time—there's more exertion in lifting a heavy anchor than in a quick killing or two.

An hour later Dockery went over the side again. He carried a fat and strongly tied leather pouch, in which was contained the equivalent of a sizeable fortune, even in 1922. He swam quickly to the cave again and, sliding past the two bodies, deposited the pouch on a convenient ledge.

As he turned, something brushed against his face as if in puny protest. It was a hand. He knocked it aside, and a large bubble of air escaped from his mouth in an inadvertent chuckle. Indeed, here was real humor.

Back aboard, Dockery consulted the chart. Minot had suggested Suva, but Minot wasn't navigating any more, so Dockery laid off a course in the opposite direction, in favor of Sunday Island, four hundred and two miles to the southward.

At a little better average than five knots, he figured to sight it in three days and a half. He could lash the helm and sleep in fair weather. The gasoline supply measured about enough to make the distance, and since his plans did not anticipate its further need, he scorned sail and started out under power.

When night started, it came on to rain

heavily, and the little craft was plowing her way, without running lights, through inky blackness and rising seas. Dockery braced his feet on the deck of the shower-whipped bridge and leaned hard against the wheel. The feeble light from the binnacle gleamed faintly on his broad, wet chest.

Indications called for a dirty night, and that meant a constant vigil for Dockery, but he was giving it little thought; nor was he thinking of the two back there on the Reefs, four fathoms under. For in the little cabin below, tucked away in his pouch, were six pearls, which one could sell and live on the proceeds for a considerable time, until those interested had forgotten or had grown weary of hunting for poachers. Then one could come back, discreetly—as a traveler, perhaps—and the Minerva Reefs would still be waiting.

Dockery strummed the rings in the king-spoke and whistled a tune. He had plenty of food for thought without concerning himself with the past, or the present either.

WITH the first dawn Dockery dodged below for a minute and slipped into some clothes. The rain had stopped, but the breeze was more lively and carried a bit of chill with it. By the middle of the morning the sun blazed out, and he stretched himself out on the bridge deck for a nap, having lashed the wheel as nearly as possible to the course.

There was a sextant aboard, but he didn't know how to use it, which was bad business, considering that the practise of leaving the helm at intervals would throw him far off the plotted course. Furthermore, Sunday Island is not so confoundedly large that one can set out blindly and run into it willynilly.

These things occurred to Dockery as he dozed off, and he reflected drowsily that he would fetch up somewhere anyway, so it would be foolish to miss his sleep. And of course, in the afternoon of the third day of an impossible voyage, he awoke refreshed from a couple of hours' nap and sighted land five miles or so off the port bow.

Dockery caught hold of the wheel and hauled himself lazily to his feet.

"There she is," he said aloud, without the least surprize, and with all the assurance in the world.

And sure enough it was—Sunday Island. It is highly probable that a large percentage of the deceased master mariners turned over in their graves at this moment and cursed the sea they had once loved.

Dockery put over the helm and pointed the bow toward the beach, then went below to warm the last can of soup and make ready for landing. A pair of sailor's white bell-bottoms received attention first. He turned each trouser-leg back until it would hit just above the knee, and sewed it there—not, however, until he had wrapped the six pearls and put three in each leg.

This done, he put on a blue flannel C. P. O. shirt, and, slipping into the carefully arranged trousers, buckled his knife around the outside. The matter of clothes was now solved. Dockery sat down to drink his soup. He would have liked a smoke, but the shore-line was becoming more distinct, and he had decided not to be spotted from a distance if possible.

He stooped into the diminutive engine-compartment and selected a tool. The sturdy old motor was chugging away faithfully. He crawled forward in front of the fly-wheel and quickly removed the bilge-boards. The bilge was practically dry. Squatting down, he set to work. The tool was a brace and bit.

A little later Dockery lay down for a sun bath on the bow and watched the craft lose speed and the water mount higher and higher on her sides. Now he had just about enough time for a smoke. The engine was giving a surprizing performance, but it couldn't last forever. The water climbed higher.

Presently the motor took a paroxysm of coughing and choking, but hung on to its job for a while, nevertheless. However, the sea was nearly flush with the deck, and after a spasmodic struggle the motor gave it up.

Dockery waited until all headway had stopped and then took a dive, shoreward. He turned on his back at a reasonable distance and watched Captain Cassius Cleaver's boat settle and sink, a tattered burgee flapping dejectedly from the peak. A noble craft—but it had served its purpose and must of necessity go, after the manner of all things on earth—with the exception, apparently, of John Dockery.

You know, one doesn't eat soup, or anything else, just before jumping off for a swim of several miles; and, which is more, one doesn't ordinarily care to swim several miles through shark-infested waters. But

Dockery had never heard of the former objection, and he didn't think of the latter. The immediate object at hand was to get to shore at the earliest moment, and he did it.

ONE night in Boston, after a rather inebriate year, John Dockery took unto himself a wife. *Malheureusement* and *Miserere!*

Oh, it's all right to get married, perhaps, if one is well-supplied with funds and bored with everything; *or* if one is completely and actually in love—but Charlotte!

Charlotte was one of these "helpless" women. She whined all the time. If she could only have *done* something—if she'd been on the stage, or been a stenographer, or played the piano a little, or something; but all she could do or cared about was going somewhere to dance and be entertained, high-toning the waiters, and being admired and longed for.

And in the end she whined herself into Dockery's tremendous arms. However, as a certain shrewd lady used to say chidingly, "Well, if he likes her, why do you butt in?" Which is very reasonable, for Dockery was irrevocably gone.

Dockery had had rather soft going of it in the last year. He had been living at the Thorndyke, chumming around with some ex-Navy friends and, in a matter-of-fact sort of way, doing the town. Then, the day after cashing in the last pearl, some one introduced him to Charlotte, after a great amount of press-agenting on both sides.

Charlotte had heard nothing for a week but stories of the rich, blond giant, and Dockery was overwhelmed with tales of the dazzling belle of Back Bay. So they were all prepared for each other and simply had to fall in love. Then, when Charlotte was backward and failed to smile broadly enough on his suit, Dockery, over a dinner table *à deux*, unfolded his story.

He didn't tell it very well, or at least he didn't tell it very graphically, for about all one learned was of a charming voyage with untold wealth at the other end. And which, under the circumstances, was sufficient, for Charlotte had plenty of imagination, especially along the lines of motors, country houses and silver foxes.

After that, matters began to look up for Dockery. There even appeared to be a chance of winning this delightful creature for his bride. Later, after many cabareting evenings, and many poorly veiled aspersions about badly fitting evening clothes, which did not register on Dockery, he presented the momentous question.

Would she? Huh!

So the little coterie of well-wishers saw them out of the South Station with much merry-making and admonitions to hurry back. And it's dead certain no one knew where this one particular bride and groom were going to honeymoon. For Charlotte had forgotten the name of the place when she whispered the plans to jealous ears, and it wouldn't have made any difference anyway, because none of them had ever heard of the Minerva Reefs.

The couple pulled into Chicago in a storm of tears. They pulled in and out of Kansas City in a storm of tears. Likewise across Kansas and in and out of Denver, and likewise into San Francisco. Dockery was having misgivings. He was up to most things and was always willing to take a chance, but this continual crying and stamping of feet—this was bad for the morale.

"Jawwn," Charlotte would say, "why can't I buy my boating-outfit here instead of waiting till we are 'way out there where I know they haven't anything."

Or—

"You might at least ask the conductor if he can wait while I run in the station and send a wire. We're rich, aren't we?"

Charlotte had been to Nantasket many times, and to Marblehead a half a dozen times, to Nahant twice, and even to New York, once.

"I don't want to have lunch sent in to the drawing room," she would say; or, "I want to eat in here; there's nobody attractive looking out in that dining-car."

And so on and on.

Right outside the Golden Gate the steamer Tahiti, bound for Tahiti, turned her nose south into a bad chop. At the end of four days this had reduced Charlotte to a moan from the bunk and had given Dockery a chance to sit in the smoking-room and think it all over at his leisure. Unfortunately, though, the weather got better, and Charlotte swept amain.

"Oh, I wish I hadn't done it," she raved. "You lied to me. You told me about the beautiful trip we would have, and all it's done is nearly kill me. Why didn't I stay

in Boston? *Why* didn't I stay in Boston? If you loved me you would never have brought me on such a terrible trip."

"The weather's all right now—dear." He said the "dear" awkwardly; it just wouldn't seem to flow the way he wanted it. "Come on out on deck, and we'll take a couple of chairs."

"I certainly will not come out looking like this. It will take me a week to look normal again. Don't you realize that I nearly died? How heartless you are! Do you want me to think you are a brute?"

At length Dockery gave it up and adopted the policy of letting her have her way in everything, and for a while this worked beautifully, but naturally it only made it worse in the end. It got so, finally, that he must always be at her side—get her this and get her that. Couldn't go to the bar; couldn't play cards; couldn't play any deck games; because, of course, Charlotte couldn't play them.

When they reached Papeete another crash came. Charlotte stayed aboard and watched from her deck-chair while Dockery walked up to the Annex to engage lodging during the time they waited for the boat to Tongatabu. It wasn't Dockery's fault that blondes are a rarity in the South Pacific, or that the natives have a habit of following them on the street.

"Such an insult I've never known! The idea, you picking up girls on the street. You, just married and in plain sight of your wife! You aren't single any more, don't you know that?"

Dockery knew it, all right. However——

Mr. and Mrs. John Dockery continued their journey. On the whole, there have been pleasanter trips made through the South Seas. Some tourists have even discovered a little color there, in the scenery and in the lives of the happiest and friendliest people on earth. But one must open one's eyes to see and one's ears to hear, and not have one's entire mental organization wrapped up in the aforementioned country houses and silver foxes.

In the mean time, Charlotte cried for "civilization" and the wonderful mushrooms *sous cloche* at Heywood's, and Dockery became glum and vexed by spells, though finally decided on glumness as more diplomatic, and remained that way. They did, at last, reach Tongatabu. Tongatabu, you remember, is one hundred and fifty-odd miles north and east of Pylstaart, and Pylstaart——

Dockery rented a yawl, a fifty-footer, with his last money and away they started. It was because it was his last money that Charlotte consented to go at all. And of course it had to blow. It did blow, too, there's no doubt of that; and Charlotte was really sick. She didn't even whine, because, perhaps, she had to have that breath to live.

It takes a man to handle a fifty-foot yawl by himself, in just a fairly stiff breeze, and to handle one in a bad blow takes more than that. But Dockery got her through and made the blue lagoon.

Charlotte said nothing, but as soon as the yawl's forefoot scraped sand, she ordered herself carried ashore and refused to budge. The fact that this delightful cove is far from habitation on a large island made no difference. So Dockery did the best he could.

He threw together a dwelling of some sort and assured her that there were no snakes or animals or cannibals and that the worst thing that she could suffer was loneliness. She took nearly all the food there was aboard and his rifle and revolver, though she couldn't use either.

Then she asked for his knife. Dockery balked, and Charlotte raved and said many things. Still Dockery balked. He tried to explain, but it was no go. Knife or nothing. So he gave her the knife. A moment later she slashed her hand on its razor edge and flung it down in the sand, but she wouldn't relinquish it.

Dockery sailed away, after the storm, with little more than the bare yawl and his clothes. He promised to be back in a week at the longest, and probably much sooner, but he wanted to allow time to find his bearings on the reefs. Charlotte whined and said please to hurry.

THERE was a light, steady breeze, and Dockery was Dockery again. Things were in tune. Two gulls, scudding along, matched the whiteness of the flying sail. The blue water, seething alongside, looked a thousand miles deep, and the bluer, cloudless sky, seemed only a foot above the main peak. The world was wide and open and clean and beautiful.

And Dockery was Dockery again when the yawl found the hidden reefs, for he located the object of his journey in twenty-four hours. There was the little coral

precipice, and there were the markings where they had worked the oyster beds.

Dockery tossed over the anchor and looked at the bottom. After all, there was no great rush. He had said a week; why not take a week? It looked pretty certain he would never see much of the water after this trip. Undoubtedly this would be his last dive, and for what a treasure! Why hurry it?

Dockery threw off his clothes and climbed out aft to lie in the sun. This was living! Dockery dozed a while, then went below and prepared himself a meal, then dozed again. The next day the fine weather continued, and he napped and smoked and ate. Same the next, and the day following.

The morning of the fifth day Dockery studied the bottom. It was beautifully clear. He could see the little silvery fish. Dockery laughed aloud. They ought to recognize him, he thought. He breathed in the clean, fresh air in great lungfuls. He was going to prepare for this dive. He had kept out of the water for four days just to save up the fun, and he couldn't have awaited a better day. There was hardly a ripple.

Dockery's two strong, brown hands gripped the rail, and his feet very slowly left the deck. Easily he raised them up and held a handstand for a moment, as he had on his first dive, long ago, then slowly shifted his weight farther and farther forward and finally slid into the depths—like water poured into water. Down he slipped, spiraling and turning over and over, for the sheer joy of feeling the water around him. It was glorious.

At length he reached bottom, and there was his anchor, caught hold right at the mouth of the cave. The cave! A fleeting though of Minot and Skull came to him, but left no ill effects. They had tried to throw the hooks into him and they got no more than they deserved.

With a quick scissors kick he surged forward into the dark opening and, placing his hand carefully on the coral, felt along the ledge. There it was, just where he had left it, the leather soft and slippery from its long stay in the water. But no bodies. Well, something had come along and taken them, perhaps.

He turned and started out. He would go up and count these beauties again. He spread his feet for the kick that would send him out into the sunlit waters—and suddenly something struck his right ankle a sluggish blow.

It felt numb and cold; he must have hit it violently against the coral. He started to move, but the right foot wouldn't come. Then again, quite as suddenly, something else struck him in back of his right knee.

He whirled—and saw two long black arms, thin and cold, but powerfully strong. Like a flash he realized, and like a flash his right hand flew to his hip. His lip even curled a little as he did so.

But the hand came back empty.

Just then, for the first time in his life, Dockery experienced a peculiar weakening sensation, a little empty feeling in his stomach and a quick, convulsive throb on the left side of his body. And just then, also, he felt that blow again, this time on his left wrist.

Dockery turned animal. He grabbed that terrible thing that held his wrist and twisted with all his strength, but it stayed there. Quickly he brought his teeth together upon it, but it was like biting heavy rubber.

Then another blow struck him, on the left calf. He reached backward with his right arm, his only free member, and caught a grip on the edge of the coral outside the cave. He pulled with all his powerful strength, and slowly, terribly slowly, dragged himself out, dragged himself and the long arms that held him. Retaining his grasp with his right hand, he exerted all his energy and brought the left hand to the anchor line and gripped.

Then John Dockery started the battle for his life. His charmed life. Hand over hand he worked, the muscles in his arms and his neck tendons strained to bursting. Another black arm whipped out of the cave and stopped on his throat. He was half-way to the surface. Suddenly and instinctively, his lungs crying for air, he gasped. A fierce stinging started in his chest. Calling his last strength, he moved up one more notch. He felt very, very weak.

Again he tried to move his arms upward, but this time they wouldn't go. He was just holding his own. The black arms seemed to be hauling harder and harder. He couldn't hold on— it was so heavy, and he was so weak. He gasped again, and this time drew in a volume of water. His head swam. His left hand let go, and after a little, his right.

Grasping feebly at the water, he was dragged back into the cave. Again his free right hand hunted in vain for the knife. And again. And again. Then it occurred to him dimly that Charlotte had needed the knife.

His right fist struck puny blows into the water in front of him. He was dying, and he was fighting. A wonderful thought came to him. Maybe this was a dream. Of course it was! Idiot—wake up! Came unconsciousness for a minute, then terrible pain. He uttered a half-groan, half-scream and opened his eyes. Better had he kept them closed, for they were within twelve inches of the eyes of the octopus. . Expressionless, they were that, but cold—and white—and staring—*cruel*. Dockery wasn't frightened any more, nor was he fighting. He was dead.

It is odd, sometimes, how the Fates nurse along their *paté de fois gras*.

Yes, they found Charlotte; some English sportsmen on a fishing trip. They carried her aboard their craft in a state of whining collapse. She told them her husband had brutally deserted her, so they gave her the money to go home to Boston. No doubt she will dine at the Heywood tonight, and enjoy her mushrooms *sous cloche*.

By the way, the Minerva Reefs are still where they always were, and I suppose that sack of pearls is lying somewhere around the mouth of the cave.

The Last Run

by Will MacMahon

Author of "The Outlaw."

A CERTAIN winding river-country in northern Ontario is a natural preserve for moose—which argues the presence of wolf as surely as night follows day.

In green Summer the banks of the river and the shores of the contiguous lakes are marked by the splay-hoof as if herds of cattle were pasturing there. The long-legged cows and bulls, seeking the splatter-dock lily, wallow and nuzzle in the shallows like great, indolent pigs.

Tormented in the open forest by a plague of voracious flies, they are reluctant to quit their oozy retreats, and at such times the fire rangers of the Canadian Government must buffet them with a paddle to obtain gangway for the canoe.

At this season the wolves are in pairs attendant on their whelps and content with hares and other small game. Were this not so there would be no ox-like trails in that winding river-country.

In white Winter the moose becomes the wariest animal in the northern wilds, fleeing swiftly and afar from any suspicious sight, sound or scent. Death is abroad then in two pitiless forms—the modern high-powered rifle and the age-old menace of the wolf pack.

The human hunters travel in pairs on snow-shoes, usually a sportsman and his native guide, and their objective is a head with a wide spread of broad, palmated antlers. If successful, they abandon the bull's huge carcass to the crows.

The four-footed pursuers, in mobs of thirty to forty, seek for their prey a stray yearling or a cow, and occasionally even the formidable sire. If triumphant, they do not leave anything for the carrion birds—and in the last-named instance the antlers will be unfit for mounting, gnashed and gnawed throughout the spread as if the brutes had wantonly tested their powerful jaws.

When the snowfall has been excessive the moose take refuge deep in the forest where they tramp out a "yard" among the sheltering trees. Here they browse on low-hanging branches, and in the narrow runways can defy with deadly strokes of their front hoofs the attack of any marauding beast.

Now, fanged furies drift along the frozen reaches of the winding river. If the men with the repeating rifles are not alert, fire rangers in the following Spring will find only torn bits of clothing to mark the tragic spot. Even the leather thongs of the snowshoes will be gone and the wood ovals split and frayed as if the ravenous wolves had tried their teeth, dog-like, on a bone.

A WARM wave wandered up from the South and made fictitious May over New York City on a February morning, sunshine and zephyr temporarily supplanting gray sky and chill atmosphere.

Andrew West, star sending-operator for The Dominion Press Association, lined up the wire to Canada with an appropriate remark.

"This warm weather here makes me hate to work," he rattled off on the vibrating key. "How do you get me: '1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 a b c d e f g——' "

"Break!" interrupted Johnny McKee, the Toronto receiver. "That sounded O. K. Snowing hard here. Better come up and run a trap-line with me next week on my vacation. Fortune in furs this season."

"You're on!" the American impulsively agreed, his discontent apparently being more wanderlust than Spring fever; and he rapidly began the day's grind of news for the Canadian papers.

McKee had everything ready when his guest arrived on the promised visit—snowshoes, skis and skates; blankets and food; fire-arms and traps. It was dusk when the two young men alighted from the Northern Ontario lumber-road train at their rail-head destination—"Long Portage." Dark, forbidding forest was all about them, but the American whistled cheerily as the train rumbled back southward on its tri-weekly trip.

"Minus the railroad, this reminds me of my signal corps days in Alaska," West announced; "and it brings back my appetite for bully beef, sow-belly and beans!"

He had been a sergeant in the Great War and described his far north service as that of "bomb-proof observer in the Battle of the Aurora Borealis." The Canadian was a survivor of trench warfare in Flanders.

"Light marching order before we eat," Johnny explained. "We'll store our duffel in the section shack here so the porcupines can't get at it."

At the end of a mile's trudging through the snow, they reached a lumber-camp where, after introducing themselves merely as far-strayed city folk, they were made heartily welcome by the English clerk, a huge, middle-aged man as blond as a viking.

"You would better know I am glad to meet you!" he declared. "We shall eat together in my office where we can talk during the meal—" and he turned to West to enlighten the Yankee ignorance of lumbering customs. "We have sixty-five jacks to feed, and they obey the rule of silence at the table—otherwise they would waste time and neglect the hand signals to pass the bread and butter and so forth."

The meal was the usual heaped-up fare of the lumber-camp, with much fat and sweets, and after it the Englishman drank in every word of New York City that Andrew could tell of theaters and cabarets and restaurants, and particularly was he entertained by a description of the nickel-in-the-slot eating-place.

"And the coffee spurts right down into one's cup!" he mused, amazed. "I shall see that miracle this Summer if it costs me my Winter's wage. I have been buried alive ten years up here, first getting out ship timber to beat the U-boats and then to restore our merchant marine."

At bedtime he opened an extra room with a double bunk, odorous of balsam boughs.

"You would better believe there is not a 'cuckoo' in it!" he asserted, proudly.

"No cooties!" McKee feelingly explained to West.

"And will I hear the wolves howling tonight?" Andrew inquired, prepared to be chaffed.

"No; the wind is blowing north," the

clerk answered, casually; "but you shall be among them tomorrow night. The boys at the outer camp report the beasts as rather bold."

"Have they bothered any one?" McKee asked, soberly.

"No; we permit rifles this season, one to each gang. We learned a sharp lesson when two first-class axmen disappeared January, a year ago. A fire ranger discovered the reason last May. There was a bundle of torn clothing in a cleared spot near Opal Lake—that is where you are going—and on a near-by tree a bare skeleton with the shoes intact."

"How come?" West demanded.

"The wolves had overtaken one man on the ground, perhaps in a silent rush," the clerk replied. "The other escaped to the tree. He chopped off several limbs and threw them down in the hope of frightening away his besiegers. Then he built a platform of boughs so that he should not fall off during the night, but he froze to death before morning—and the crows did in a month what the wolves would have done in a few minutes."

"Torn clothing on the ground and none in the tree—that spoils the story to my mind," Andrew later observed to his companion.

"Well, no," Johnny pointed out; "deep snow would soon cover the tragedy in the open spot, and the crows carried away the clothing of the skeleton in the tree to line their nests."

"You're a cheerful camp-fire companion!" West retorted, scathingly. "Good *night!*

AT DAYBREAK the clerk called them for a bountiful breakfast and provided a two-horse sleigh and a driver to take them and their duffel over the fourteen-mile road to a lake whose frozen expanse was the beginning of their journey afoot into the wilderness. The sleighman refused any reward for his services, but finally agreed to take a Canadian quarter to tip the camp cook.

"By gar!" he declared, seriously. "You give dat chef one swelled haid and there be no leeving with heem! Me, I hope you trap plenty little silver fox, but watch out big wolfs no catch you!"

"I'm a curly wolf, myself!" Andrew West boasted. "If I catch a smooth-coated one I'll eat him!"

The French-Canadian uttered a realistic, blood-curdling howl as a derisive good-by and drove away, and after his team's jingling departure a menacing silence settled down over the snow-laden forest and the ice-bound lake.

"We'll travel slowly so you won't go lame on the snow-shoes," the Canadian suggested.

"Not for my benefit," West objected. "I was a bear on 'em up in Alaska. I'm an expert skater, too. Hike out, buddy!"

McKee fashioned sledges of the two pairs of skis and loaded on the duffel, and then the partners struck off on their snowshoes toward the north. All morning they traveled at a lively pace across wind-swept lakes and over the soft snow of the portages, and paused at noon only long enough to brew tea on a birch-bark fire and eat a quarter-pound of chocolate each.

Their progress during the afternoon was not so great because the American by now was becoming snow-shoe sore, and the Canadian expert was careful not to break trail fast enough to cripple his friend. Just at nightfall they reached their temporary halting-place, a deserted hut at a lake outlet, which was the beginning of the winding river-country where they were to trap.

And not yet had they seen any sign or heard any sound of wolf. Once they found the dainty trail of a doe, and again several rough oblongs in the frozen slush of a "snigh," or swampy indentation of a lake, that McKee said were the week-old footprints of a bull moose.

"You act like Little Red Riding-Hood after she learned the bad news!" Andrew remarked when the Canadian prepared to bar the door of the windowless hut.

"If we're besieged by a pack here," Johnny countered, "I'll let you fight your way through their lines tomorrow and bring us a pail of water—or do you prefer to go out now and fetch it in the dark?"

"Dig up the bucket and I'll fill it at the creek," West replied, sturdily.

While McKee unstrapped the duffel, his partner uncased a rifle and filled the magazine with cartridges.

" 'Oh, grandma! What makes your teeth so large?' " Johnny quoted. "You don't intend to shoot the old lady, do you, Andrew?"

"Aw, this is for a silver fox!" the waterboy asserted, brazenly, as he went out into

the black night with the pail in one hand and the rifle in the other.

He leisurely strode down the trail to where the water gurgled at the outlet, dipped out a bucketful and then stood for a half-minute listening to the muffled noises of the wilderness.

A wind in the tops of the near-by jack pines whispered scandalously; far out on the lake there were little crackling sounds almost too regular for the chance effect of frost.

The thought of that ill-fated axman who had been overwhelmed in a silent rush struck Andrew West like a blow. He whirled and stumbled hurriedly back to the hut, chills making a parade-ground of his spine.

"You spilled most of it!" Johnny observed, critically.

"Oh, well, I'm not thirsty!" Andrew replied, generously.

Both slept the drugged sleep of snow-shoe travelers, and it was broad daylight when the American again took the pail in hand. As he stepped outside he called, excitedly—

"Look here, Johnny; there's been a big dog all around the place!"

McKee rushed out to look at the tracks.

"Can't be! Yes! You're right!" he exclaimed. "But there shouldn't be a dog within fifty miles. See! Here's where he trotted away in steps about fourteen inches apart; a wolf would do eighteen. No! I'm wrong; he wasn't trotting there; he was only walking! Here's his trot—all of twenty-two inches. Must be a whopper of a dog. Notice how far apart the two middle toe-nails are—a wolf's would be close together."

Johnny followed the trail a hundred feet farther and sprung another surprize.

"The pack was here last night, buddy!" he called out, without any enthusiasm whatever.

Not only were there numerous tracks of the compact-footed wolves, but in a wide half-circle about the hut were the scooped-out forms where the beasts had lain in the snow. The indications were that the pack numbered an even forty.

"I don't like the presence of wolves in our neighborhood," McKee confessed, frankly, "and a dog running with them doesn't improve the situation. His tracks show that he isn't afraid of human beings—and he might be the leader of the pack!"

"Aw, cut out the Jack London stuff!" West objected. "We need water; let's go! I'll fix those Forty Thieves; I'm Ali Baba himself!"

It was the Canadian this time who carried a loaded rifle, and Austin was enabled to fetch a pail brimful for breakfast.

All day they again traveled north and at dusk reached their trapping headquarters—a fire ranger's log-cabin on the southern shore of Opal Lake. It was large and strongly built, with a small window high up from the ground.

"Unless the pack carries an ax," the American said, "we'll be so safe here that you can continue to snore your head off at night."

"Righto!" McKee agreed, but added, discouragingly, "and we'll carry our house with us, like a snail, when we run the trap lines!"

"You nervous old maid!" Andrew said, scornfully. "I'll go along with a gun to protect you!"

"Which means," Johnny insinuated, "that you think it better to go about in twos!"

And in that two-rifle formation they put out one line of traps along the five-mile eastern shore of the lake and another of ten miles across the western swamp-land and down the bank of the winding river. They also visited the two islands far out in the frozen lake—the larger one called "The Bottle" and the smaller "The Cork"—but on neither was there any sign of fur.

THE ensuing week was so busy and profitable that they gradually dismissed from their minds the thought of the pack. They took muskrat and mink and beaver until McKee predicted that another week would give them a considerable stake. But next morning there was a sign on the fur-bank that its doors had been closed until further notice.

Along both lines were the tracks of a large dog and in no sprung trap was anything left but the foot of the fur-bearing quarry. All the other traps had been robbed of the bait.

"I don't understand this," the Canadian declared. "That big thief couldn't eat all the catch himself."

West solved the puzzle when he scouted a hundred feet into the deep forest. Here were the parallel trails of the wolves.

" 'Rover' robs the traps and carries the loot to his gang!" he announced. "See here

where he skipped aside with a rabbit that blundered into this mink trap. Notice how the snow is scratched up, but there are no blood-stains!"

"Here are tooth-marks on the frozen crust," McKee pointed out. "The Forty Thieves ate even the stained snow. They must be ravenous, Andrew. What say? Shall we call it a week's work and toddle off south?"

"Run away from a cur dog?" the American demanded. "No! We'll stick it out and trap him."

"Only poison would get him," Johnny said ruefully; "and we haven't any."

"Slip him a couple of your half-cooked flapjacks," his partner suggested, unfeelingly. "Wait! I've an idea: We'll pound a piece of glass into slivers and make him a dog-biscuit that'll be even worse than your cooking!"

Before crawling in for the night they set out an attractive mouthful for the renegade dog, and went to sleep with clear consciences. And before midnight a snowstorm silently came down from the north and buried the trap-lines a foot deep and still was not satisfied.

"We'll wait until this white swirl is over before we go out to look for the big mutt," Johnny McKee decided at dawn, and Andrew West did not dispute the wisdom of the delay.

Outside one could not see more than a rod and the soft hissing of the falling snow would muffle the approach of an enemy.

For three ensuing days the white snow fell uninterruptedly, and when it ceased there were six feet of it so powdery that snow-shoes were little aid.

Each night, also, they had heard a chorus of howling deep in the forest where the pack could travel under the arched trees that held up some of the snow. A louder, rounder, more sustained note in the wild music suggested that the singer was the huge dog that had robbed the traps.

"The wolves must be living on hares," the Canadian said. "Moose are in their 'yards,' and the deer were killed off by the pack during the Winter because we saw only the track of one doe, you remember. Don't you wish we'd pulled up stakes last week, Andrew?"

"No; it feels like rain—and then we'll get that thieving cur," West declared, stubbornly.

Spring came overhead within an hour it seemed, the wind veering squarely around until it was out of the south. Then a deluge of rain overwhelmed the land for a day and a night. The snow on the trap-lines was beaten down into a white mush and the surface of the lake appeared as if it was Summer water.

"And now for my little freeze," the American announced, hopefully.

He had his wish, and when the next morning broke clear and cold Opal Lake was glassy and there was a crust on the land-trails exactly suited for skis.

"Here's our chance; we'll dig up the traps and say, 'Wolves, good-by!'" McKee announced with an air of finality—and West nodded consent.

Andrew had been lying awake unnecessarily late at night listening to the unsympathetic serenade of the pack.

They put on skis and swung skates over their shoulders, intending to run the lake trap-line and return aross the ice to the cabin and then to clean up the winding river water-sets. Each carried a rifle as usual, and the extra weapon still in the duffel bag was there strictly because it would be awkward, morally and physically, for either the Canadian or the American to add it to his armament.

A mile out on the short line they found the trail of a bull moose, the great stride showing that he had traveled at high speed. Fifty feet to windward were the tracks of the dog and a like distance away the rest of the pack had run.

Sharp details of hoof and paw had been preserved in the frozen slush. Among the low-hanging trees the antlers of the bull had torn off twigs and the branches were twisted as evidence of his headlong flight.

"The mutt ran closer to the bull's trail," McKee explained, "because his scenting power isn't quite as keen as that of his wild brothers. Now, that moose would go fifty miles straight away, so we are rid of the pack for some time even if they don't pull him down. You pick up this line of traps to the end of the lake, make a sled with your skis and skate back with 'em while I do the same down the river—and tomorrow we'll jump out of here."

"I'll say you said something commendable!" West agreed. "I've lost considerable sleep at night lying awake thinking about—about new-laid eggs and fresh bread! It

isn't the pack that's driving me out, Johnny; it's your pancakes!"

McKee swiftly glided away and when he disappeared at a turn in the trail Andrew began to take up the soggy traps as if a world's championship were involved. But the skis were treacherous and the farther north he went the heavier grew his load, of course. It was late afternoon before he approached the upper end of the lake.

Thereafter, his task would have been easy with the load on a ski-sledge and his sharp skates to carry him quickly over the glassy lake. And all that time he had been listening and peering about in what he believed to be the approved woodsman's style.

He was within a hundred yards of the ice and beginning to breathe with relief from the strain of constant watchfulness when a thumping, clacking sound on his back trail startled him. He turned in alarm—and the next instant scrambled wildly into the underbrush. He was just in time to escape the slashing hoofs of a bull moose fleeing for the open lake.

The fugitive showed every sign of terror. His mouth was agape and his eyeballs were glaring, and he held his head with nostrils so high that the heavy antlers rested back against his humped shoulders. He apparently had traveled far and was tiring, but still the swing of his rear hoofs carried them beyond the marks made by the front ones.

However, that peculiar stride was a woodcraft detail that Andrew West missed entirely. For the moment he nearly was as panic-stricken as the bull. The incident spelled "Wolf!" and if he had yielded to impulse he would have climbed a tree, skis and all.

With eyes veering sharply to the back trail he groped for the rifle in the snow—and at touch of the deadly weapon confidence surged back to him.

"I can stop a half-dozen of 'em and still have time to shin up a tree!" he told himself, swallowing his heart down into its proper place. "Anyhow, they're after the bull moose and not me. And they'll be howling on his track."

He stood listening rigidly for a few moments, and no hostile sound came down the wind to him. Gathering up the heavy traps, he began to ski at his best speed along the trail toward the lake.

He did not suspect that the bull had blundered on to the trap-line four miles back and that all the members of the pack began to run "hush-mouth" when they scented man. The older wolves, disturbed by the double trail, were drifting along to right and left among the trees, but the younger ones followed the leader, a huge, long-legged brute with a pelt quite black. He ran silently, but straight and true, in the ski tracks.

West had by now reached the edge of the ice from where he saw, far out and headed for Bottle Island, the ungraceful moose slipping and sliding on the glazed surface. The bull fell as he watched its progress, scrambled erect and fell again, and this time could achieve only a sitting posture.

"He has broken a leg, poor brute!" Andrew thought, and glanced to the rear.

He saw there a hostile crew that made his blood run cold.

On the trail, within a stone's throw of him, was a black beast, crouched and creeping steadily forward in the manner in which a strange dog approaches an enemy. Back of this savage brute were a dozen small, light-colored wolves standing in a group with ears pricked and tongues lolling, as if awaiting a signal to dash on.

West nervously let fall the traps and at the clanging sound the pack leader dropped flat. His gray followers sank back on their haunches.

Everything that the American had read or heard about wolves flashed through his mind, from the Old World story of despairing parents vainly throwing their children from the speeding sleigh, one by one, to appease the ravenous pursurers, to the tale of the American Northwest where two youths on skates had fled on a frozen river from the pack, and of the less speedy one only the steels and the soles of his shoes had been found later.

The problem for him now was whether to shoot first or to don skates before firing. He believed that his racing stride would outdistance any wolf, black or gray, on that glistening surface.

He raised the rifle, experimentally, and the pack leader flattened himself closer to the snow. The young gray wolves, however, swiftly slunk aside out of range.

Slowly, carefully, edging out on the lake, West retreated—and just as evenly the great, dark beast crept after him. It did not snarl, and even tried to control its heavy

breathing, only occasionally panting with protruding tongue.

When the man stooped to unfasten his skis, the pursuer again dropped flat, but with hind legs gathered tensely for a forward leap.

Rifle at elbow, Andrew quickly strapped on his skates. Then he took aim from a kneeling posture.

"I execute you," he mused, bitterly, centering the sights on the grisly head, "for leading that silent rush at the axmen!"

He pressed the trigger, exultingly.

The rifle roared like a shotgun and kicked with unexpected vigor against his shoulder. Powder particles stung his face.

When he blinked his eyes clear he saw in sickening dismay that a half-foot of the muzzle was split and bent.

The black brute had lightly leaped aside on the flash, but again was creeping forward.

"Choked with snow when I dropped it!" West said aloud, in self-accusation.

At the sound of his voice the beast boldly stood erect and growled ferociously.

Andrew took a great breath of preparation, grasped the now useless rifle with both hands as if it were a hockey stick, whirled and fled.

Behind him came the leader of the pack, baying loudly with the hunting-call, and out of the forest streamed the young wolves to a devil's chorus of screams and howls.

Wild ululations echoing and re-echoing from the forest made the number of pursuers seem quadruple, and in a few moments the skater understood why. Nearly thirty larger wolves were loping out from the shore of the lake to join the chase.

Within a quarter-mile the black leader was at West's heels, and he turned sharply aside barely in time to avoid the clashing jaws at his shoulder. Almost immediately a large gray wolf also leaped and snapped futilely at the same side.

Dashing away at a tangent, Andrew saw that many of the wolves slipped and rolled over and over in their efforts to turn after him. On his next sidewise spurt a young pursuer on the edge of the pack slid helplessly in front of him.

Before it could regain footing he checked with the skill of a hockey expert and swung the stock of his rifle on to the snarling, snapping head. The stunning impact numbed his fingers and the weapon bounced off onto the ice.

He swung away on another tack to avoid the leader's determined rush and the similar attempt of the great, gray one. Back of them the pack piled up in a screaming, struggling, tearing mob over the doomed young wolf.

His hunter's hatchet now in hand, Andrew began to plan for the undoing of any other unguarded pursuer. He knew that he could not escape the length of the lake, but his chances were good if he could work a zigzag course close to the shore and gain the haven of a tree.

Twice again he avoided the lunges of the leader and its lieutenant, and then he discovered that the other wolves had struck the moose's trail on the ice and were drifting toward the other side of Bottle Island. The bull, made desperate by sight and sound of the pack, evidently had struggled ashore there on three legs.

West whirled into the back stroke and then stopped himself on tiptoe in a spray of powdered ice.

"I'll fight you now, you devils!" he said, grimly, making ready with the hatchet.

It was not bravado, but a sharp need of a breathing space that influenced him to take this risk with his two pursurers.

The black one was raging but cautious. He had seen the man in action with the clubbed rifle, and the shining hatchet also was formidable.

The great, gray wolf stopped short fifty feet away and looked on as if only mildly interested. As the scene shifted, he quietly moved forward, but kept his distance.

Growling now, the black brute circled about for an opening and made little feints at rushing. The least stumble or indecision on the skater's part would have brought a headlong attack.

Continually facing the menace of the fangs, West managed to glide backward until quite close to Cork Island. He selected a certain outstanding tree for his haven, but had no clear idea of how it could be climbed with this deadly antagonist only a leap or two away.

And now a wild baying from the off-side of Bottle Island told that the rest of the pack had surrounded the disabled moose. They seemed to be calling for their leader to leap in with the death-stroke.

The black beast turned and, with the gray one at his shoulder, sped away to make the kill. Before they had gone a hundred

yards, however, another and fiercer outburst from the pack proclaimed that a volunteer for the throat-hold had been found among them and that the bull was down.

Instantly, the two brutes on the ice stopped and raced back again to harry their human quarry. But in that lucky interval Andrew West had dug his skates into the bark of the tree and climbed to a limb ten feet above the ground.

He laughed loudly with the relief of overstrained nerves, and at that provocation the black besieger slashed at the butt of the tree as if it were a sentient thing to be destroyed. The gray one stood impassively close by, listening with cocked ears to the insane roaring of the leader.

Suddenly, Andrew's merriment died. He had become aware that the north wind was sweeping stingingly through the tree and there came vividly to his mind the axman who evaded the wolves only to become food for the crows.

Already the sun had sunk close to the forest horizon, and not much more than an hour of daylight remained. With no means of sounding a signal for help, he would be lost in the freezing darkness where Johnny McKee could not find him. His one hope now was to disable the persistent brute below him and then escape from the tree.

He laboriously chopped off and trimmed a section of limb and threw it down with great force. His jailer easily leaped aside, as if previously experienced in dodging missiles thrown by man.

And once more the American laughed, and this time his mirth was genuine. An inspiration, born of emergency, had come to him.

"You treed me on the wrong kind of a vegetable, you black devil!" he informed the pack leader, conversationally. "This is a fir. I'll build a little house of limbs high up where they're thickest; I'll line the walls with boughs to keep out the wind, and I'll put on a roof, too, if I have time. But, best of all, I'll make a thick bed of fragrant balsam—and sleep like a bug in a rug. And you! I hope you choke! Go on, growl your fool head off!"

The brute did his best to climb the tree, snarling murderously in his hatred of the human voice. Austin removed his skates and took deliberate shots at him, but missed both times.

The gray wolf, uneasy at the repeated fall of missiles, glided ashore and hid in the underbrush.

No howl or snarl came down the wind now from Bottle Island where the pack was feeding voraciously on the slain bull.

West climbed twenty feet higher and was disturbed to find there a tall dead jack pine leaning at a sharp angle against the fir. A determined enemy might mount it at the ground and attempt to creep up to him.

He struck the dry surface of the pine an experimental blow with his hatchet, and the hollow trunk gave off a booming sound like a gigantic drum.

"Well, you ham!" he shouted down, insultingly, as might one contentious telegrapher to another. "Thought you had me grounded, eh?"

"*Bang! Bang! Bang!*" rapidly went the hatchet blows; "*Bang!*" a brief interval, "*Bang!*", and then three more swift "*Bangs.*" Out on the north wind went this roughly made "S O S" in the Morse code. It echoed plainly from the wall of tall trees across the lake.

"S O S" again boomed forth, and almost at once there came upwind a soft triple whistling—the whip-like reports of a rifle that were mellowed by distance.

"Oh, don't go, gentle stranger!" West mockingly called down.

The black brute, seeming to sense the situation, abruptly became silent. Then he trotted out on the ice to gaze southward whence had come the answering signal.

Standing thus, with ears pricked forward and head high, he stirred Andrew's memory.

"I've seen a picture like that," he mused. "But where? Must have been in 'Little Red Riding-Hood'!"

Then he hammered "S O S," enthusiastically, and now he could see from his high perch a small, swaying figure that he knew to be Johnny McKee skating at racing stride.

The leader of the pack also recognized the nature of this reinforcement, but was not willing to yield the field entirely. He returned to the fir and again vented his rage on its bark, and then he slunk away to an open spot among the trees near by and stood like a thing of stone.

When McKee was within a half-mile, West permitted himself an extravagance.

"Have a nice little shiny hatchet on me!" he said, and cast it high over the tree in the general direction of that wild statue.

The next moment the beast flattened out as if a magician had turned him into a rug. The hatchet, blunt side down, bounced from his unprepared head into the snowy underbrush.

He was on his feet almost immediately, however, shaking his ears in a dazed manner and uttering most unwolf-like yelps of pain.

"You cur!" Andrew shouted, preparing to descend. "I'm going to throw the boots into you and your yellow-livered friend!"

The brute looked up in surprize at the man and began energetically to wag a bushy tail. Then he fairly shook himself from side to side in contrition and, whining placatingly, crouched in expectation of further punishment.

McKee, guided by shouts, now was close at hand and when West saw that his friend carried two rifles he boldly slid to the ground. Here he seized the piece of limb that he had chopped off and also a skate, but there was no need of their protection. The erstwhile savage leader of the pack was thoroughly cowed and suing for peace at any price.

"Come here, Johnny, but don't shoot!" the American called out. "I hit a big black wolf with my hatchet and he's turned right into a tame dog! Just look at him begging not to be beaten up!"

The Canadian cautiously approached and handed over one of the rifles.

"I brought the spare one because I hoped you were mixed up with something worth while," he explained. "If this thieving cur starts to run in either direction—at us or away from us—we'll get him or I'll say it's bum shooting. What breed is he—German police-dog, eh?"

"Aw, the war's over!" Andrew objected. "He looks like a Belgian sheep-dog to me. Come here, Sport? Prince?"

"Fido?" Johnny inquired. "Towser?"

"No! No!" West exclaimed, excitedly. "Now, I remember! This is the malemiut that ran away from my doughboy assistant up in Alaska and joined the wolves!"

"Bosh!" objected McKee. "That's twenty-five hundred miles from here."

"His name was—his name was—" Andrew groped. "Come here, Pincher!"

The black dog wormed his way, lying down, to him and slavered gratefully on his shoes in return for a gingerly petting on the shoulder.

"Yes, this is Pinch!" the ex-sergeant declared. "Long after he disappeared we heard that he had attacked a sledge-team and the owner slammed him for a goal with a club. The doughboy had trained him to fight in the pit, and his theory was that a blow on the head drove him crazy enough to join the wolves."

"Look at the bump I put on his bean!" he continued, admiring his own handiwork. "It's as big as a baseball. That wallop was enough to knock him out of all his wolfish habits. I'll bet he's a reformed character from now on."

"And you sent out that 'S O S' just to show me a stray mutt?" Johnny inquired, disappointedly.

"No!" Andrew replied, cheerfully, as he again donned his skates. "Over on Bottle Island are the Forty Thieves, chuck full of bull moose and anxious to have us put 'em out of their dyspepsia!"

"Up and over!" McKee exclaimed.

"Let's go!" West agreed.

AWAY the two sped over the ice, and the dog galloped contentedly beside his new master. Nearing the head of Bottle Island the skaters slowed down and made their plans in guarded tones.

"I'll cover the west side and you take the east," Johnny directed. "Turn 'em back if they break on your side and I'll do the same on mine. If we work fast it'll be a clean-up before darkness shuts down. Shoot for the head so as not to spoil the pelts."

"Don't count your wolves until they're skinned," Andrew advised. "They may have beaten it!"

But just then the dog winded his wild relatives. He stalked ahead of his new protector, with hackles up and tail cocked. West took station fifty yards out on the ice.

McKee, darting around the head of the island, at once began to shoot.

Then the American's territory became alive with slow-moving gray forms, the beasts being so gorged that they could barely walk. He fired quickly until all the targets went down kicking or crawled back into the underbrush.

Again the Canadian's rifle spoke rapidly and now only a half-dozen wolves struggled over to the east side of the island. Andrew disposed of four as calmly as if he were breaking clay pipes in a shooting gallery.

Only one report came then from McKee's

weapon, and he megaphoned with his hands—

"How many?"

"A dozen!"

"Twenty here!"

"Butcher! Give 'em a chance!"

"No; we want 'em all!"

Andrew skated closer to the island, and the dog ran ahead of him, growling threateningly.

Just inside the shore line a young gray marauder sprawled in the snow, sorely wounded but with head up.

The black dog dashed in, evaded a rapier-like thrust of the fangs and seized the wolf by the top of the neck. He shook the life out of it as a terrier would a rat.

"Hey, Johnny!" West shouted. "Go to the head of the island and shoot 'em on the ice while Pinch and I drive 'em out."

He began to yell and to thump on the tree-trunks with a stick, in the approved manner of beaters after the royal Bengal tiger, but soon desisted when he saw that the malemiut had radically different ideas of driving wolves. The dog went forward circumspectly, step by step, testing the air all about him.

One young wolf was located in the middle of a thick-growing bush and died there with a bullet through the head. A large, dark-gray one was buried to the ears in a snow-bank. He never moved after the rifle spoke.

McKee also did some shooting down both sides of the island, and shouted encouragingly:

"Good work! Show some speed; it's getting dark."

On the opposite side of the island, braced against the butt of a tree, was a large wolf. Shot through both hips he waited with open jaws, but West finished him before the dog could close.

"Don't want to lose you the first day of your return, Pinch!" he explained, and the discomfited malemiut abruptly changed from a roaring fury to a silent stalker as they passed the dying beast.

Then they found the shambles and what remained of the bull moose. It hardly seemed possible that two score wolves, even when famished, could devour so much of the huge animal in so brief a time. Even his antlers were split and frayed where some of the pack had taken hold in the general rush to bring him down.

McKee joined West now and they made a joint search of the island, kicking up a lurking young wolf and downing him and putting out of misery two wounded ones.

"I call it a clean-up!" Johnny announced. "Where's our mutt?"

"*My* dog was just ahead of us a minute ago," Andrew answered. "Here, Pinch! Here, Pinch!"

But the malemiut was not there, and when the two riflemen broke through the underbrush to the ice they understood why. A half-mile out toward the eastern shore of the lake the dog was galloping away into the dusk alongside a wolf nearly as tall as himself.

McKee raised his rifle.

"Aw, don't!" West objected. "You called it 'good work,' didn't you? That's the big gray side-partner of the black fellow. Let 'em go!"

"All right," Johnny agreed. "But your 'reformed character' has gone bad again. Back to the rest camp for us. Tomorrow is skinning day and the next morning we travel."

Andrew gazed after the malemiut that by now was disappearing with the wolf into the evening haze.

"I'd have bought him a dandy collar with brass tacks on it!" he said. "I wouldn't have taken a hundred dollars for him just as he stood, bump on the head and all!"

"You can't trust a German police-dog!" Johnny reminded him.

They slowly skated the three miles to their cabin and, after eating the eternal flapjacks until they nearly were as torpid as the wolves had been, idly discussed the finish of the Forty Thieves.

"If I hadn't sent out the 'S O S' what'd you have done when night came on?" Andrew inquired.

"Well, I'd have taken my rifle and the electric torch and followed your ski trail until the tracks of the bull moose and the wolves showed on it," Johnny replied. "Then, I'd have picked up your skate marks and made the rescue."

"And I imagine my black wolf-dog would have struck you down about a mile out on the ice," Irby suggested. "At dawn the gray wolves on Bottle Island would relish a change in their diet—and leave nothing of your handsome corpse but the skis and the spotlight. Then they'd wait under the fir until I went insane and jumped down

among 'em or died up where only the crows could reach the *table d'hôte!*"

"I wouldn't put it past that four-legged Fritz," McKee agreed. "He yelled, '*Kamerad!*' when we had the drop on him, and I'll wager he's out right now gathering a new gang of cutthroats to do us in!"

At this moment there came a sturdy scratching at the door accompanied by an eager whining. McKee remained silent, but West called out—

"That you, Pinch?"

A bark was the answer, and Andrew hurried to open the door.

"Steady!" McKee shouted. "Wait till I support you with the rifle. He may have another pack with him."

But the black dog was alone. He would not enter the cabin, and almost spoke in coaxing his master to follow him out into the night.

"Oho!" exclaimed the skeptical Johnny. "He wants to lure you to where his crowd can make a silent rush! Get the other rifle; we'll see it through."

They kept the excited dog in the glare of a spot-light down to the edge of the lake, and there they found the carcass of a huge gray wolf. Scratches on the ice, leading in from the north, showed that Pinch had dragged his prey here for a purpose.

"I'll say he's some malemiut!" Andrew announced, proudly.

"Maybe this is one of the wolves we shot," McKee suggested, as he examined the inert beast. "No; there's no bullet wound, and his throat is torn. I suspect that Fritz—I mean, Pinch, really did him in."

"Why, it was a fight to the death!" the American announced. "See! Pinch is cut on both shoulders and across the chest. I'll bet he ran along with this wolf until they found a good ring for the battle and then went at it tooth and toe-nail. It occurred to me when I was up the tree that the two of them were waging a sort of silent duel for the leadership of the pack—that is, the malemiut took all the chances and this big gray hung back just far enough to take advantage of any mistake he might make and—and——"

"Cut out the Jack London stuff!" Johnny interrupted, meanly.

"Come on, Pinch, old scout," Andrew commanded. "I'll doctor you up, and then you can sleep at the foot of my bunk."

"Nothing doing on that 'Welcome To Our Fair City!' stuff," the Canadian objected. "A dog turns into a wolf and then the wolf becomes a dog again—and he may be due for another flip-flop. He might slash both our throats in the night."

Pincher settled the question himself, after his wounds had been dressed, by going outdoors straightway to a snow-bank alongside the cabin and digging himself in until he was hidden to the snout.

"He must have learned the trick Over There," Johnny observed. "We had to bomb out some of his two-legged brothers!"

"Aw, this is an Allied dog!" Andrew insisted.

"You mean an associate canine!" McKee amended, maliciously. "And how was it that you didn't recognize him until I helped you down out of the tree?"

"I had my mind on something else!" West replied, truthfully.

Next day a tally of the slain proved that all the wolves had been done for. A half-dozen of the younger ones had saddle markings that embarrassingly coincided with the color of Pincher's back, and Austin pointed to this fact as proof that the malemiut was not a new addition to the pack.

"I'm not interested in that," Johnny declared. "What I want to know is whether we can sell the six pelts as 'cross fox' !"

It was late afternoon when the skins were stacked outside the cabin, and then the chums skated to the end of the lake to pick up the traps and skis dropped by West before he fled from the pack. They carried no rifles now.

Pincher ran beside them and, in a friendly race, demonstrated that his four paws easily could out-pace an expert skater on a straight-away dash.

Johnny McKee was losing his prejudice against the dog, but his friend agreed that a probation period was needed before the black fellow could be accepted as a pet. The grotesque bump made by the hatchet on his head had subsided, but the bunches of muscle on either jaw were as large as a man's fist and his fangs remained as terrible as ever.

But after breakfast next morning, when the ski sledges were piled high with duffel and pelts, the Canadian suddenly achieved admiration for the malemiut. The dog's actions at first were puzzling as he trotted

from one load to the other, looking them over judicially and finally standing patiently in front of McKee's sledge.

"Doggoned if he doesn't want to pull it!" Johnny declared. "He may be an Alaskan dog, after all!"

He quickly rigged up a harness and then spoke as the master.

"Get up, Pinch!" And the malemiut lay down.

"Go ahead, Pinch!" And the dog gravely arose and faced around toward the sledge.

West straightened out the traces, and remembering Alaska, said—

"Mush on!"

Pinch promptly started away with the sledge and almost as easily made progress when the other one was hitched on to it.

"Gee!" Andrew shouted, and again "Haw!" and to each signal obtained a gratifying obedience.

"I recognize this dog now!" the Canadian announced, brazenly. "I lost him myself when he was a pup!"

"Haw!" West laughed, mirthlessly—and the malemiut took that for a signal to turn alertly to the left.

"Your dog? Gee, what a nerve!"

And at the sound of "Gee!" Pinch swung back toward the right.

Then they halted their black pet, left some stores in a secure place with a note of thanks for the fire ranger's hospitality, strapped on their snowshoes and said farewell to Opal Lake. With McKee breaking trail and West following the sledges with a ski rod for a gee-pole, they reached the lumber-camp in half the time consumed on their outward journey.

The English clerk was keen to own a full-blood Alaskan malemiut.

"I shall give up my sight-seeing trip to New York City," he said, earnestly; "if the money interests you, Mr. West."

"No chance!" Johnny McKee interposed, slyly. "He intends to give him back if he can locate the doughboy!"

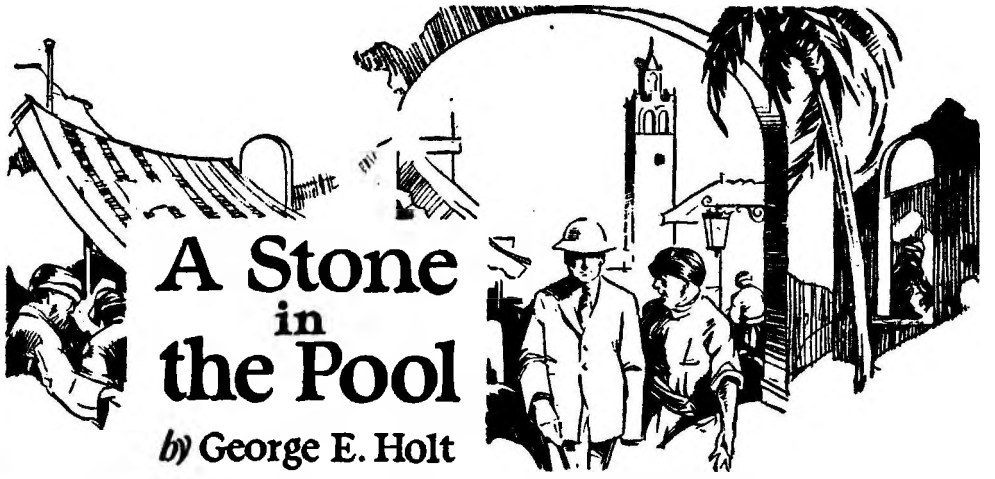
"'Losers weepers— Finders keepers!'" the American quoted, virtuously. "This dog is going to have a collar and a muzzle and go walking on Fifth Avenue. He'll make the German police-dogs look like mutts!"

BUT in Toronto a Canadian girl, Johnny McKee's sweetheart, argued in behalf of a happier fate for Pincher.

"This Northland dog would be out of place in a crowded city, and he might go mad in the stifling Summer," she explained, turning Andrew to wax with her shining, gray gaze. "Leave him here with Johnny and me, and we shall give him enough of the forest to keep him fit. Then, when you come up on vacations——"

"Aw, all right; I meant to, anyhow!" Andrew agreed, weakly, and went on with the drivel peculiar to young bachelors. "But I'm mighty glad you haven't a sister!"

"I'll say this Yank is a woman-hater!" Johnny McKee broke in, coming to the rescue as truly as he did on Opal Lake. "If I were a dog I wouldn't let an old crab like him own me!"



A Stone in the Pool

by George E. Holt

Author of "Absent Without Leave," "By Imperial Post," etc.

ONE of the chief differences between the East and the West is this: In the East, when a man dies they hold a funeral; in the West, they hold a post-mortem.

It will be seen that this is a very great difference. In one case the dead is dead and the matter is finished, while in the other the matter is just begun, and there must be endless futile inquiries into the reasons actuating Allah in sending for such and such a one. This is not only unseemly, but profitless; it annoys the living and benefits the dead in no way. Besides which, it is irritating to Allah.

This is shown clearly by the affair of Fat'mah, the dancing girl, and the Basha of Arzila and some other persons, as the story was told to me by Utair, my gardener, apropos of the recent murder of a Frenchman at his home in the Suani. And it is also shown that rise is thus given to perplexities and questions which are not healthy in any manner.

Now, Morocco, where Kaid Bushta Bargas ruled as basha, or governor, in the walled city of Arzila, is a very, very old country, and has therefore forgotten many things of which Europe and America are just beginning to learn. Such, for example, as the more practical forms of psychic phenomena, and soviet government. It is built upon Hebrew and Arabian history and superstition, with the customs and beliefs of bronze and black thrown in for good measure, and is frosted like a cake with a mixture of all the modern civilizations of the world. Which, of course, results in a confusion fully as Oriental, and a hundred times more unreasonable, than the Bagdad of Haroun-al-Raschid.

The beginning of the matter was simplicity itself. Kaid Bargas had paid five hundred dollars, native currency, to a man who called himself Herr Langmann, and Herr Langmann had delivered to the eunuch who presided over the destinies of Kaid Bargas' harem, a young girl, one of whose names was Fat'mah; the other had been forgotten when she was stolen from her tribe by the native agents of Herr Langmann. Fat'mah had not only refused to dance for Kaid Bargas, but called him a fat *halloof*, or swine, and had tried to murder him while he was drunk. This, of course, was quite irregular. Native girls as a rule are very well pleased to become inmates of the harems of bashas—even if they be fat. The immediate result was that the basha choked her until she died, and his eunuch supervised her burial behind the palace. There were ten purple marks on her neck, which was very white, now that she was dead.

Thus, in normal course of events, should the matter have ended. Fat'mah was not the first girl to be choked to death by a Moorish basha by any manner of means; not even the first to be buried hastily behind the gubernatorial palace at Arzila. But it was ordained that the unwise custom of the West should here interfere to muddy the waters. Fat'mah, just before she died, had

"A Stone In The Pool," copyright, 1922, by George E. Holt.

promised briefly to come back in the spirit and kill the basha in the same way she had met Kismet. She had meant it, which may explain the fact that she appeared to her brother, who was groom to the British vice consul at Arzila, and urged that he exact vengeance upon the basha for her death. Among various things she told him just where she was buried—which was not knowledge of the market-places.

But, although Rushti, the brother, had no doubt of the truth of the revelation, grooms attached to British vice consuls do not go precipitately about the business of killing native bashas. It is not approved of—and groomships to consuls are desirable posts, bestowing substantial pay and very great honor. Wherefore Rushti, after pondering the matter, reached the conclusion that his sister's death had been, after all, the obvious will of Allah, and let the matter drop. Until, one day, in telling his *sidi* consul of an entirely different business, he casually referred to the fact that the Kaid Bargas had choked his sister to death and had her body buried back of the palace.

Thus was the West brought into the matter to cause confusion. Arzila was not an important town and the British vice consul, as is so often the case, was very young. Thus he was considerably shocked at the story—Rushti did *not* tell him that his own knowledge had been gained in a decidedly immaterialistic fashion—and pained with Rushti for his seeming disinterestedness. Rushti passed the matter on to the lap of Allah, but the Englishman, not being a Believer, felt that inquiries should be set afoot. Being young he sympathized with native girls who get themselves choked to death—and he felt that such things were not proper in a town where His Britannic Majesty had a representative.

But just as Rushti, because of his groomship, could not invade the palace of the basha and exact vengeance, so the vice consul could not take open steps in the affair. However, he made inquiries of certain people, who made still further inquiries with the result that there was little doubt left as to the truth of Rushti's story, or the truth of Rushti's sister's ghost's story, if you will. The vice consul became very greatly interested in a particular corner of the yard of the basha's palace—but, here again, a foreign vice consul can not go digging up the back yards of bashas like a native planting wheat.

Being young, as I have said, the matter grew upon him—there is not much to occupy one's thoughts in Arzila—and at last he managed to work out a plan which enabled him to get two of his servants into the palace-yard at night, and enabled them—the eunuch had been in a hurry—in the few minutes at their disposition, to uncover what was left of Fat'mah. Being satisfied, they took a silk handkerchief from about her head for purposes of identification and, thoroughly convinced that the vice consul was not a little insane, and most surprizingly unwise, returned to report.

Wind of the matter very naturally reached the ears of the basha, with the result that three things happened almost simultaneously. The two servants of the vice consul, who had viewed the remains, drank tea in a certain native café one evening and the next morning were very, very dead. The basha's eunuch removed a certain Thing from a spot in the palace-yard and put another Thing, but of a different sex, in its place. And the basha demanded loudly of the British minister at Tangier by what right the servants of the vice consul performed diggings about the premises and charged him with some sin or other involving a girl of his harem.

Once a stone is dropped into the pool the riffles must continue to beat against the banks until Allah sees fit to stop them. The vice consul lost something of his head and told the consul general bluntly that the basha had choked Fat'mah to death, and buried her in the palace-yard; that his servants had seen, and had brought a handkerchief to prove what they had seen, and now were quite dead. The consul general summoned Rushti, who then remembered to tell that his own information had come from his sister's ghost. The vice consul gasped, but was still convinced, and the consul general, who was a gray-haired old unbeliever, went to call on the basha, who insisted that he witness the uncovering of a certain spot in the palace-yard, and the brief viewing of the remains of what had once been, judging from his clothing, one of the basha's soldiery.

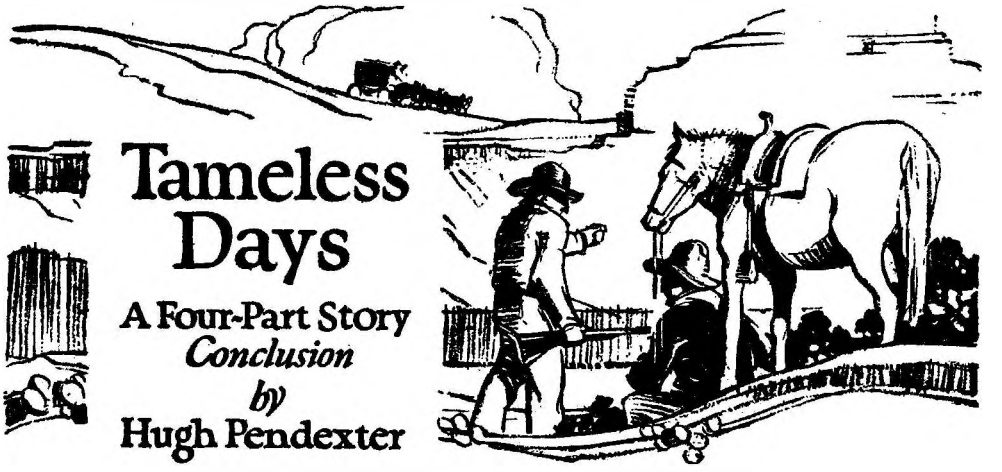
Which did not in the least change any opinion the consul general may have had, but which—I have said he was a gray-haired old unbeliever—enabled him to speak sternly to the vice consul, and even more sternly to Rushti. The vice consul eventually came

to believe that he had acted hastily in the matter; Rushti, with tears, loudly protested that the affair should all along have been left in the hands of Allah—which naturally lost him his place with the vice consul.

And that was the end of the matter, except—

Rushti, being no longer under the protection of the British Government, very shortly was found dead near the Fassi gate; and the British consul, having become *persona non grata* with the basha, was transferred to a much less desirable spot down near Aden, on the Red Sea. And the basha, very strangely, was choked to death by a woman of his harem while he was drunk.

But that may have been a coincidence.



Tameless Days

A Four-Part Story

Conclusion

by

Hugh Pendexter

Author of "War Wampum," "Over the Rim of the Ridge," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

THE Contents, that is, Milot Content, his fifteen-year-old daughter, Josette, and his son, Beach—were preparing to leave their farm in Madison Valley. The father's rheumatism made it necessary for him to reach Salt Lake City before the Winter set in. This was in 1863, and their route would take them through the gold town of Virginia City.

With the arrival of Ned Williamson, an old mountain-man, the party set out with a large freight-wagon load of vegetables. Josette and her father planned to go on to Salt Lake City, leaving Beach to find work near Virginia City. Williamson and the boy rode ahead, discussing the opportunities there.

Plummer, the sheriff, according to Williamson, was in league with the "road-agents," whose crimes were increasing in boldness and frequency. In an encounter with two horsemen Beach made an enemy of the "Wild Cat" in drawing his gun on him.

At Virginia City the vegetables and outfit were sold for sixteen hundred dollars in paper money to Carlton, the hotelkeeper. Two hundred dollars was left with him for Beach, Williamson taking the rest of the money and arranging to meet Content senior and his daughter at Snake Ferry, *en route* to Salt Lake City, to avoid the loss of the money in the hold-up of the stage-coach, which was almost certain to take place.

On the night that Williamson left, "Gold Dick," a miner, was robbed and killed. Plummer, the sheriff, charged Williamson with the murder and a posse was sent after him.

Beach was engaged to work for a lumber-mill owner named Holter and was sent by him to Bannack to purchase a belt for the mill machinery. On the way he met George Ives, whom he had been told was implicated in many crimes with which Plummer's name was also linked. Ives professed friendship for Beach.

CHAPTER IV

NOT FOR SALE

BEACH rose before the others and hid his gold in his blankets. Hilderman was the next to turn out. He joined Beach by the fireplace while breakfast was being prepared and was talking garrulously when Whisky Bill, smelling evilly of his favorite tonic, came forward and with a shower of curses drove the old man away.

Ives, fresh and debonair, next appeared and expressed the wish that he might ride with Beach to Bannack, but on being urged to do so regretfully replied that he was waiting to meet a man from Virginia City and finish plans for developing a quartz mine.

"Tameless Days," copyright 1922, by Hugh Pendexter.

The two ate breakfast together and parted with the most amiable expressions of goodwill.

As soon as he was out of sight of the ranch Beach dismounted and, while pretending to examine his horse's hoofs, made a careful examination of the animal and the saddle gear in a search for chalk-marks. He could find none, and, believing that he was enjoying immunity from the road-agents, he galloped along, high of heart.

He was beginning to find a strange relish in the uncertainties of the trip. It was both curious and tantalizing that he had escaped despoilment because of his acquaintance with Plummer and Ives, two men whom Beidler held to be villains. He nursed no illusions about the disappearance of his horse from the ranch corral. The animal had been stolen, and only the influence of Ives had restored it.

That the road was systematically watched was proven when within three miles of Bannack he was halted by two men on foot. They were roughly dressed and heavily armed. One of them bluntly informed him:

"We're looking for a horse-thief, stranger. You just sit quiet while I take a squint at your critter. And don't forgit to keep your hand away from that gun, because my pardner might git nervous."

"Look if you must, but be sharp about it," said Beach.

One of the men stood at one side, his sawed-off shotgun discouraging any thought of sudden flight. The other walked behind the horse and spent a minute or two in careful study of the animal. When he reappeared within Beach's range of vision his face wore a heavy scowl. He walked behind the man with the gun, so as not to come between him and Beach, and whispered in his ear. The other seemed to dissent, but at last lowered his gun and demanded—

"Where was you last night?"

"At the Rattlesnake Ranch. George Ives, Whisky Bill, Long John and a man called Hilderman were there."

'If you was there you couldn't 'a' took the hoss we're looking for. But your hoss answers the 'scription in a general way."

"I rode this horse from the Madison Valley to Virginia City. Henry Plummer and the hotelkeeper will vouch for that. I rode him to the Rattlesnake Ranch yesterday. Ives and I talked all the evening. The horse strayed from the corral, and the ranchkeeper said he had been stolen. But Ives doubted it, and after he had talked to the men they made a search and brought him back."

Without removing their gaze from Beach the two conferred once more. At last the spokesman of the two said:

"We'll take a chance you're telling the truth. But if you've lied to us we'll git you yet."

"I shall be in Bannack City for a day or two, and then shall ride back to Virginia. You can find me easily in one of the two towns. Or if you wish you can go along with me and keep an eye on me until you have sent a man to talk with Ives."

"What's your business in Bannack?"

"Business of getting some work. I've been on a vegetable farm all Summer, and I'm broke."

The two stepped back, obviously reluctant to allow him to proceed. Then to his great relief they told him to ride on.

"If they'd found a chalk-mark I'd be without a horse, blankets and gold, all right," mused Beach as he slowly rode away.

Following the stage road up and over the two-thousand foot divide, Beach descended into Bannack City. The town was located north of Grasshopper Creek and at the west end of the narrow cañon cut through the volcanic rock by the creek.

His impression of the town was unfavorable. As he expressed it, it was "hard-looking." But a more extensive examination of its cabins and shanties made him think of Virginia City, except that it lacked the atmosphere of tense excitement which characterized the Alder Gulch town. Because of the six-stamp mill busily working on quartz and because all the talk in Alder Gulch was about placer-mining, the town impressed Beach as being much older than Virginia City, although its seniority was measured by the space of a year. The rapid growth of Virginia had been made partly at the expense of the first town. Bannack streets were cluttered with wagon trains and mounted men bound for Alder Gulch and the country beyond.

Discovering the sign of Peabody & Caldwell's express office on Main Street, Beach tied his horse and entered. The agent was a young man, inclined to be suspicious until Beach had told his name and had described his father and sister.

"Glad to meet you, Content," warmly declared the agent, giving his hand. "My name's Griscom. Mighty handsome little sister you have. We see mighty few likely girls up here. I'd be awful proud to have a sister like her. I can see you two look alike. I acted offish at first because it doesn't do to talk much with strangers. Your folks are all right. The stage was held up, as usual. Your young sister was smiling when they got here. I went with them to Oliver's Express office and saw them settled in the Salt Lake coach. Peabody's stage was mighty late in getting in, so I knew what had happened."

"They held it after robbing it?"

"No. But to keep it from reaching town before night they stole the horses at Dempsey's ranch; also at the Rattlesnake Ranch. They lost time at the Rattlesnake getting fresh stock. That's one of the gang's games."

He suddenly ceased talking, gave Beach a wink and turned to wait on a man with huge black mustaches who had quietly entered.

"Any news about them derned robbers?" drawled the man.

"Not a word. Don't expect to hear anything, either."

"But some one oughter know who they are if they was old hands," persisted the man.

"No one recognized them. It's my idea that they were new hands. Just came over the mountains, made a haul and skipped back."

"Sorry. Hoping something could be done about it. Me and some other fellows are 'lowing this kind of work has gone far enough."

After the man had walked out Griscom grinned broadly and explained:

"One of their lookouts. It's his job to learn if either of the two robbers were recognized. It's only with the stage-coaches that they take the trouble to cover their faces.

"The game is plain enough to the stage company. The driver knew what was coming when he found the first relay of fresh animals missing. At Dempsey's Cottonwood Ranch 'Bummer Dan' got on as a passenger. At the Rattlesnake Ranch Bill Button got on as a passenger.

"When the two masked men stepped into the road Bill and Dan pretended to be scared to death and began to shell out their dust, begging and pleading for the robbers to spare their lives. The other passengers began to get afraid, thinking they'd be killed. Every one shells out and no one thinks of making a fight."

"Does the company know who the two men were?" asked Beach.

In a whisper Griscom replied:

"The driver swears they were George Ives and Frank Parish, but his life wouldn't be worth a paper dollar if you told any one that I told you."

"But if you know and tell the company—" began Beach.

"We can't do a thing till the twelve thousand people here and at Virginia City and between get behind us. We know there is a round hundred members in the gang and that one man is directing them. Same stage isn't held up twice on the same trip, as would happen if several gangs were working the roads.

"But we can't go out and run them down. All we can do is to put the passengers and express through on schedule. If we did catch any of them the jury would be packed and they'd be let go. When decent folks get good and sick of it you'll hear a loud bang."

"That's what John Beidler up in Virginia says."

"X? A good man. He's shrewd, too. Some folks pick him up as a joke when he comes along in the big white hat; but never after they've seen him go for a gun."

Beach then explained his business in Bannack. Griscom looked dubious and said:

"Bob Jesson is a queer fish. Never can tell what he'll do. A square man, but has a grudge against Virginia City. His claim down here petered out and somehow he has the notion that if color hadn't been struck in Alder Gulch his diggings would have held up. Idiotic, of course, but it gives an idea of the way he puts things together in his mind. His is the last cabin on the east side of the town and near the mouth of the cañon. You'll probably find him there. And say, is that pretty sister of yours coming back?"

"Next Spring, I expect."

"I forgot to say how she faced the two road-agents and threatened to set Sheriff Plummer on their track if they bothered her. They let her alone when she said she had no gold except a small chain Plummer

gave her. But they searched your father pretty close. Funny about that. You can look at it two ways; they was either afraid of Plummer's enforcing the law against them—and the Lord knows he hasn't been very successful in that line yet—or else— There! I've talked enough. You'll find Jesson at his cabin."

Beach left the office only to find a group of men around his horse. As he was working his way to the animal a strong hand caught him by the collar and pulled him back. He twisted about and faced a man whose hat failed to conceal the fact he was bald-headed. The fellow's eyes were the smallest Beach had ever seen in a human countenance, and they were glittering evilly.

"What'n —— be you doing with my hoss?" bellowed the stranger before Beach could resent the detaining grip on his shoulder.

Beach gaped in amazement; then recovered his senses and glanced at the other men. All were eying him gravely. Again he felt his heart pounding rapidly.

"I'm not doing anything with your horse. I'm about to mount my horse," he answered; and he felt deep shame that his voice should sound shaky despite his efforts to control it.

"Your hoss? That's good! That's —— smart! Now, you young thief, you turn and git! I oughter have your neck stretched, but a thief that don't know any more'n to fetch stolen property right back to the owner is too much of a fool to swing off. Dust out and take your chances with the boys."

THE fellow did not offer to touch his gun. Beach wondered why he had not drawn his own gun and gone down fighting. He believed he could draw and fire before the bully could, and yet something held him back. He had never gone that far. He had aimed a gun at the Wild Cat, but that was when something broke inside of him and filled him with rage. Perhaps on that occasion it was the presence of his little sister that had emboldened him. Now that he had every reason to be enraged, even to fear for his life should he confess guilt by attempting to run away, he was badly frightened.

He knew it was all wrong. He knew his manhood called for a radical defense of his property. And yet it was not fear of what might happen to himself if he stood his ground, but a fear of what might happen to the rascal so brazenly claiming the horse, which left him undecided. If he drew he must shoot, and he had never killed a man. He was cursed with imagination. Even while condemning himself he endeavored to find excuses in arguing that there must be honest men among the spectators and that he could prove ownership easily if given a chance.

He compromised between obeying the man's command and drawing a gun by saying:

"I'll not run away. This is my horse and I can prove it. Surely you men will see fair play?"

The last to the onlookers.

There was a shuffling of feet and tendency on the part of several to withdraw. Only one man spoke, and he revealed an allegiance to the claimant by saying:

"Baldy knows his own hoss, young feller. You'll be lucky to git out of Bannack alive."

Beach glanced toward the express office. Griscom stood at the window, a shotgun in hand. This suggested reenforcements. Beach's mood began to change. If the agent could risk helping him, practically a stranger, why should he not help himself?

"Know my own hoss," growled Baldy, pushing back his hat and disclosing more of his polished skull. "I 'low I paid high enough for him in the Bitterroot Valley to know him."

"What's his name?" asked Beach.

Baldy stared blankly, then in a fresh rage yelled:

"Think I'm here to answer questions fired at me by a cub hoss-thief? Git away afore I pull you to pieces."

"You must have called him by some name," persisted Beach, his nerves quieting as he noticed the grin on Griscom's face and the business-like manner in which the shotgun was held ready for instant service. "Call him by name."

Baldy was slow of thought. He primed himself for a fresh outburst, but some of the men in the group were watching him curiously.

"His name is Jim," he growled. "That was his name when I bought him in the Bitterroot last Spring."

"When was he stolen? I've only arrived in town today."

"You know when he was stole! Now you git funny with any more talk and you won't have a chance to dust out."

"No harm in answering that question. Rest of us would like to know," called out Griscom from the open window.

Baldy shot him a murderous glance, took note of the short gun-barrel, and replied sullenly:

"He was took about two miles up the crick where I'd left him while I went prospecting. That was two hours ago. Yes, siree! Now you have it all lawfully and in order. His name is Jim, and this pup stole him."

"You don't know his name. He doesn't recognize the name of Jim. If I've had him two hours and had to ride in a hustle two miles down the creek I wouldn't have had time to teach him a new name, would I? Of course not. But I've owned him for a year and his name is Squirrel——"

The horse turned his head and pricked up his ears.

"And he knows me. Hello, Squirrel; shake."

The horse promptly lifted a hoof for his master to shake.

THE honest men in the circle lowered at Baldy, fully convinced that the man was openly trying to steal the animal. Yet there were none who cared to meddle in the business. When one of the gang started after property he was sure to be backed by several who posed as spectators. Human life was more valuable than a horse. One man, a late addition to the group, did press forward; but his grim, undershot jaw and truculent eyes afforded Beach no encouragement.

Baldy believed it time to conclude the affair. He suddenly pushed Beach to one side and seized the bridle. Beach bumped into the ugly-faced man and instinctively reached for his gun, shame forcing him into action.

But Baldy's weapon was out and cocked before his victim could more than clasp his hand about the butt of the forty-four. Baldy felt much relieved. The young fellow had foolishly forced the affair to take a turn all to the other's liking. Then Beach felt himself flung to one side, and the man with the undershot jaw was loudly declaring:

"You shall do no murder. Put up that gun!"

"See here, mister, don't you try to mix preaching with helping hoss-thieves," warned Baldy.

"Put up that gun!" growled the newcomer.

And with a sudden motion he seized the man's wrist and gave it a wrench that brought a howl of pain. The revolver dropped in the dust. The man placed his foot on it and composedly told the spectators:

"This scamp is lying. I saw the young man ride into town, coming from over the divide, not more than an hour ago. He couldn't have been two miles up the creek two hours ago and coming down the divide when he did. He has had his horse a long time. He's taught him to shake hands. I came here to talk to sinners, but surely there must be some men in Bannack clean enough to stop a robbery as outrageous as this would be."

A man pressed forward and stood beside Beach's champion and quietly said:

"It's gone far enough. I'll pard along with the dominie. I may get murdered for it, but life ain't worth living on this crick if we have to stand such rottenness."

Four other men quickly advanced, their hands on their guns. The man Baldy and three others began to retreat. The preacher kicked the revolver forward, saying—

"Take your weapon, but I fear you will die a bloody death."

Baldy scooped up the gun and cried—

"It's my hoss, Mr. Gospel-Slinger, and I'll have him yet!"

With that he walked rapidly away, accompanied by his friends.

"You've done me a good turn," said Beach. "From what that fellow says I take it you're a preacher."

"I am, and a mighty poor one, I fear," sighed the preacher. "My name is Sessions. I'm preaching in the old blockhouse that was built against the Indians last year. But if I'm a poor preacher still I'm man enough not to stand by and see dirty work like that."

"The dominie is all right," spoke up the first man to take sides with law and order after Sessions had faced the bully. "None of us care to get killed on account of a horse. Besides, we believe a man ought to defend his own property out here."

And he shot a not very complimentary glance at the red-faced Beach.

"I'll defend my property next time," muttered Beach. "I may be killed, but no one will be asked to help me. This is the first time I ever was in such a business, and it flustered me. Mr. Sessions, I'm much obliged to you, and I'd like to hear you preach."

"There's something else to be said," spoke up another citizen. "When a game like this is tried no one knows just how many of the lawless cusses are in the crowd. Always several. I didn't know a soul when I stopped to look on. If I'd made a move to help the young man I should have expected a bullet or a knife in the back. Trouble is them cusses are organized and we ain't."

"Hooray! You've said a very true word," softly cried Griscom from the window.

"Are you in town for long, young man?" asked Sessions.

"Only long enough to do an errand for Holter, the lumber man at Virginia."

"Then finish your business and get back to your friends as soon as you can. And never try to draw again till you've practised a trifle. I do not carry, nor use, lethal weapons, but a man can be a Christian and still defend his life. I'll walk along with you for a bit if you don't mind, young man."

"I'd be pleased," promptly said Beach. "But you mustn't go along for the sake of looking after me. Just as company."

The group melted away. Griscom vanished from the window. Leading his horse, Beach made for the creek, the preacher striding along beside him.

"You must have rich ground to work here," remarked Beach.

"A mining-camp isn't a good place to hold revival meetings. Not because it is tough and rough and filled with bad-men, for those are the conditions I like to tackle. But because there is so much excitement over fights and robberies and gold discoveries, so much suffering and misery among those who strike out alone to locate pay-gravel, that man's capacity for being surprized, deeply touched or repentant is largely used up before the Word is brought to them.

"Talk to them about hell, and they have been through it. It's like making an appeal to a man suffering from hysteria. But I'm sticking it out so long as they'll come to the meetings. There are children here, and perhaps I can do good through them. Now tell me about yourself."

Beach explained his errand and related his experiences in reaching the town. At the mention of Ives' name the preacher sighed and said:

"He's a man of fine parts if he would use them. He's educated. He was meant for good things. But the rough-and-tumble style of living and the sight of much gold being paraded through the streets have spoiled him. He'll come to a bad end, I fear.

"I talked with him once. He was very polite, but I couldn't get any response. He wouldn't admit, or deny, that he was leading a wicked life. He simply said he had 'gone too far' to change. The saddest confession a man can make.

"I think the cabin right ahead belongs to Jesson. I'll stay outside and watch your horse for you."

The cabin door was open, and on hearing his name called Jesson appeared and asked Beach in. Jesson was small of stature and carried his head cocked on one side. He eyed Beach suspiciously and curtly asked—

"What do you want?"

"To buy eighty feet or more of six-inch, two-ply belting that I understand you have."

"Huh! Appears like you was quite familiar with my affairs. Who told you I had it?"

"A man in Virginia City."

"What you so sly about? What's his name?"

Beach was remembering Holter's injunction on names, but it was obvious he would be ordered from the cabin unless he answered, and he designated Holter.

Jesson laughed in a shrill cackle and cried:

"So Virginia City, after bragging and boasting about wiping Bannack City off the map, has to come to Bannack when it wants things! Young man, Virginia is too highcockalorium to suit me. She's stolen most of our citizens and captured most of the freight trains.

"My diggings paid high till Fairweather struck it rich in Alder Gulch. Then my claim petered out. When Fairweather found color up there and sent a feller down here for supplies the feller was told to whisper the news to some of the best citizens. Two hundred was favored, but

nary a word was said to me. I don't go where I ain't wanted. I've stuck here with my poor little claim paying grub-wages. But Virginia City can't have that belting. I'll rot first."

"That's for you to say, Mr. Jesson," agreed Beach, marveling at the strange feud the little man was carrying on in his heart against Alder Gulch. "I'm only a hired hand. I'm sent to make an offer for it. If you're going to use it——"

"I ain't going to use it. Haven't any use for it," tartly broke in Jesson.

"Then why not sell?" wheedled Beach. "I'll give two hundred dollars gold for it. They can buy them for twenty-four dollars, or thirty cents a foot."

"But they need mine most desperate to offer two hundred, eh? Ha, ha!"

Beach gently urged the bargain and increased his offer to two hundred and fifty dollars gold. Jesson retorted:

"I've let you have your say because you're a hired hand. But the belting is not for sale, and I'm busy."

"Four hundred dollars gold," offered Beach in desperation.

Jesson grinned maliciously; then gravely asked—

"You can pay on the nail?"

"It's on my horse outside."

"How much gold did you fetch with you?"

"Six hundred dollars. It's in two bags, rolled up in my blankets."

"Then why fiddle around the bush? Offer all of it."

"I'll give six hundred dollars gold for the belting. The belting must measure at least eighty feet."

"The offer is refused. Now clear out! Tell Virginia City that she can't pass me by when she's parceling out rich diggings and then send down here and buy what she wants to help her spread out and grow bigger. If the Fairweather party had used me right it would be different; good day."

It was useless to attempt overcoming such a monomania. Beach mournfully shook his head on rejoining the preacher.

"I heard all that was said," sympathized Sessions. "Too bad he should sour his life by thinking such thoughts. He's probably brooded so long over being left out of the first two hundred to rush to Alder Gulch that he can't help himself.

"But I've been thinking while you two were talking. At the start I feared you could do nothing with him. So I cast about in my mind to find something to take the place of his belting. I believe that if you can get hold of some canvas and have it sewed double thick it will answer until your employer can have a belt sent in from Salt Lake. Wet weather won't affect it, and I believe it will be strong enough if it's well sewed."

This suggestion gave Beach a fresh hope, and he declared his intention of canvassing the Bannack stores immediately. Sessions went with him, but all the material they could locate was from discarded tents, old and rotten.

"You'll have to try in Virginia City. I'm sure you'll find it there," said Sessions. "Now I must get back to my shack and plan another line of attack for my next meeting. That octagon-shaped building over there is the blockhouse. Just a word of warning: Keep your mouth shut about the gold and get away before it's known that you have it with you."

"I'll leave early in the morning. It won't be known until then. You've been very good to me. I'll go back and visit Griscom."

"I was going to ask you come to my place, but the express office is safe. Even road-agents won't disturb that. They know if they raid it Peabody, Caldwell and Oliver will pull off their stage-coaches, and then there would be no collecting-agency for the dust of the district. Miners would take to caching their gold. The outlaws want it all turned into the express offices and then transferred to the coaches. You won't have any trouble so long as you're inside the office.

Beach returned to the express office, and this time took his blanket-roll inside. Griscom elevated his brows, and Beach shook his head.

"Put your roll behind the counter. Take your horse into the corral back of the office. He'll be safe in there. They don't trouble our stock except out on the ranch stations.

"I saw what Baldy was up to, but couldn't chip in until the last moment. Company's orders are to keep clear of all trouble that doesn't interfere with our business.

"That Sessions is a fine man. One tough got up at his first meeting and said he'd absorb religion when the preacher

changed over long enough to show he was a fighting man. Sessions went at him like a cat and hammered —— out of him. The tough thinks he's the only man east of the Rockies now, and they're bully friends. Wait till I finish these figures and we'll talk."

Beach removed his saddle and turned his horse into the stage corral where the Company's horses were waiting to haul the north-bound coach over the divide. Returning to the office and depositing his saddle in one corner, he sat down on a box and waited till the agent was at liberty.

Griscom threw down his pencil with the invitation:

"Now tell me all about it. Jesson wouldn't sell, of course."

Beach gave the details of his interview and told of Sessions' suggestion about using canvas. Griscom snapped his fingers and cried:

"New canvas went through here for Virginia last week. Two men were to use it for a dining-tent. One of them was killed by the gulch wall caving in on him the very day it went through. The other man decided to stick to panning gravel. I'll bet it's up there waiting to be bought at a decent figure."

"That's fine. I'll run it down. Here's something else. I have six hundred dollars gold inside my blankets."

Griscom smiled.

"I thought they was very precious blankets when you fetched them in here before taking care of your horse."

Then he became thoughtful and mused:

"If our line wasn't being held up so regular I'd say for you to send the gold along by the next stage. Jesson is sure to brag about refusing your offer. Six hundred isn't much, but the gang works so clean it doesn't neglect even the small pickings. It's for you to say whether you'll carry it back or risk it by stage."

"If you were me and keen to save it, what would you do?"

"I'd ride for it. Pack it along with me," was the prompt answer.

"That's what I'll do. I'll start early in the morning."

Beach spent much of the day in the office, leaving only to make a trip to the stamp-mill, which he was very curious to see in operation. On returning to the office he found the door unlocked, but the agent gone. He thrust his foot under the end of the counter and examined his blankets. No hard lumps rewarded his investigation as both bags of gold were missing. He started for the door, his eyes blazing with rage, and his courage up to the point where he would face any odds to get the gold back; for this theft hurt his pride and might reduce him in Holter's estimation.

He met Griscom on the threshold, and after one glance the agent grinned and asked—

"Why on the war-path?"

"Some one came in while you were out and took my dust," snarled Beach. "I'm going to hunt up that man Baldy."

"Close the door and cool off. The gold is all right. I had to leave the office, so I put it into our strong-box. Some one might have seen you bringing the blankets inside. They'd naturally wonder why you were so careful."

Beach slumped on a box and fanned his hot face with his hat. But Griscom aroused him by saying:

"It's just as I said, only it came quicker'n I expected. Jesson felt so proud over turning down your offer and slapping Virginia in the face that he had to hustle to Keen's saloon and tell how he refused a money-on-the-nail offer for his belting. So the whole gang of thieves know by this time that you packed it in and will be packing it back if you don't send it by stage."

"I don't give a ——!" passionately cried Beach. "I'm tired of being held up at every turn, of being questioned and accused. I may not take the gold back; but if I don't it'll be because they kill me first."

"We'll talk it all over after we've eaten supper. You'll be my guest. I'll charge it up to the company and make a note that you're an honest man. It'll make the company feel mighty proud."

"It'll be better if you don't mix up in this. You're hired to run this office and not to take care of greenhorns."

"After I turn the key and start for supper I'm my own man. So keep your hair on."

Griscom had his way, and they ate their supper at Keen's place. One side of the room was filled with long tables, and the other was occupied by a bar. Beach kept his eyes open for Baldy, but saw nothing of him.

He was startled a bit, however, to behold George Ives pass through the doorway.

Ives was neatly attired as a gambler and seemed to have many acquaintances among those at the bar. Refusing numerous invitations to drink, he came to the table and greeted Griscom and Beach cordially. Griscom invited him to be seated and have something to eat.

"I've eaten. Came in to learn the latest news. Spotted you two the minute I entered."

"No news yet. Stage hasn't come in. Probably held up."

"That wouldn't be news," said Ives with a laugh. "If it gets through without being held up that would be real news."

Then to Beach.

"When you going back?"

Beach could think of nothing better than the truth to tell and answered—

"Tomorrow morning."

As he spoke he felt Griscom's foot press in warning against his.

"We can make it together," said Ives. "I'm going back in the morning myself. I've got to look after several matters now, but later this evening we three might get together and make a night of it."

"I'm dead tired and must get in shape for tomorrow's ride," said Beach.

"I'm never tired, and after ten o'clock I'll be here in front of the bar and ready for a gay night," cried Griscom.

Ives swung back along the bar, still refusing to drink, and made his exit.

Griscom demanded:

"Why did you tell him about leaving tomorrow morning? He's one of the gang. He knows you have the gold. He's gone to arrange to hold up the stage on the chance you'll send the dust by express. He'll also plan to have you held up on the chance you'll be taking it with you."

"But why lie and be caught in a lie? If they know, they'll be watching. I can't quit in the morning without their knowing it."

"That's right," moodily agreed Griscom. "I'm sorry to see Ives here. He's different from Baldy and his kind. He's a fine example of a fellow getting a wrong start very early in life."

"Seems hard to think of him as being low-down," mused Beach. "Of course he shot 'Cathar——"

"One of the best things he ever did, no matter what his motive was. It would do any man proud to shoot Carthart. But don't hold any lingering doubts in your mind because George Ives can play the part of a good fellow. He can be a tiger when it suits him. That's what makes him so dangerous. It isn't men like Baldy, 'Club-Foot' George, old Hilderman and scores of others that worries the stage-company. It's the men with brains who stand behind them.

"Folks don't dare talk about men like Plummer, Ives, Haze Lyon and a few more of the leaders," Griscom went on. "To try any of those chaps by a jury is a farce. This town as well as Virginia City is under the thumb of the gang, and we don't dare yip. They've got so they don't even bother to cover up."

"It's damnable!" heatedly exclaimed Beach. "That old Hilderman seemed to know all about the hold-up of the coach my people were on."

"He naturally would as Ives was one of the two," chuckled Griscom, inclined to be amused by Beach's indignation. "Maybe after all you'd better leave the dust with me. When you're held up you can honestly say the stuff has gone by stage. I can hold it over and send it up later, after they think it's been run through."

"No; I'll take it back with me," doggedly replied Beach. "I tell you I'm getting so mad that pretty soon I'll forget to be scared."

"Well, you're game. One good thing, it isn't any life or death matter. You can't be blamed if you're robbed. Every other honest man in the country is robbed one time or another. Man would be a fool to make a fight for six hundred dollars."

"Way I feel now I'd fight for six dollars," growled Beach.

Griscom threw back his head and laughed heartily. Robbery was an old experience for him. He had watched the workings of the gang almost from its inception as an organized band. He was calloused.

And there was something highly amusing in this transformation in his new friend. A few hours back Beach was nonplused when blatantly told by a third-rate villain that he was a horse-thief. Now he was hot to fight for another man's gold. Suddenly Griscom's laughter ceased, and he touched Beach's arm.

"If you run into any trouble there's the jackass you can blame," he whispered.

Beach saw Jesson just inside the door.

The man appeared to be looking for some one and did not venture near the bar. As Griscom and Beach rose to leave the table the owner of the belting met Beach's scowling gaze and at once ducked outside as if to avoid meeting him. But when the two left the room they found him leaning against the building—waiting. Beach would have passed him without a word, but Jesson stepped to his side and in a frightened whisper said:

"I spoke of your offer without thinking it might make things bad for you. Thought I ought to tell you."

"Rather late to do me a good turn," replied Beach."

"You've done him a mighty bad turn," said Griscom. "The only way you can fix it is to give him the belting and take the gold."

"Oh, I dasn't do that," refused Jesson, now deeply agitated. "I've blabbed about it being a cash offer. They'd know the minute he got the belting. Then they'd know I had the gold. I'd be found with my throat cut. I spoke before I thought. I'd had a few drinks. I'm risking my life in speaking to you two now. But I had to come and tell you. George Ives is talking to Baldy down at the High Pass saloon."

Beach began to understand that the little man had displayed real courage in coming to him with the warning.

"I take back what I said," he told him. "You've done me a good turn. Maybe I can make it after all."

Jesson scurried back into the saloon, anxious to end the interview. Griscom said nothing until they were back in the office and alone. Then he suddenly announced—

"I know what you're going to do."

Beach waited.

"You're going to start back tonight instead of tomorrow morning. The road's easy to follow even when it's dark. The horse will find the way. If you quit town unnoticed you ought to be able to make it."

"If I can get out of town without being spotted, yes."

"I bet you can. I'll sneak out the back door to the corral and take your horse up the road half a mile. I can get through the back end of the corral and keep clear of the street. You'll stay out in front of the office for twenty minutes, then set off afoot. Follow the road till I whistle to you to stop.

"If any one calls while I'm gone you'll say I had an appointment with Ives and went up to Keene's and that you're expecting the two of us back. If any one speaks to you when you're on the way to meet me, you'll say you're hunting for me and Ives. To make allowances for your being held up I'll wait an hour. Then if you don't come I'll hustle back and learn why."

Beach agreed to the plan. Griscom secured the gold from the strong-box and rolled it in the blankets. From a cupboard he procured some cooked meat and half a loaf of bread and added the package to the blankets.

Then he extinguished the light and the two went outside and sat down by the door and watched the passers-by, and waited for the night to thicken. For half an hour they sat there talking idly; then Griscom placed a hand on Beach's knee and murmured:

"The man opposite us now. He has passed twice before this. He's one of Baldy's friends. Just keeping cases on us, but not expecting you to bolt or he would stick close by."

Beach observed the fellow and after fifteen minutes saw him returning. He went only a short distance below the office and then walked back toward Keene's eating-house and bar.

"It's dark enough," whispered Griscom. "I'll drop the blankets, food and saddle through the back window and follow by the same route."

In a short time he reappeared through the door with the information:

"Nag's saddled. I'll walk around the building and sneak away. In about twenty minutes start strolling up the stage road. You won't be noticed afoot as you would be if mounted. We'll have to wait a bit."

It was the spy again. This time he met a man below the office and paused to converse with him. Griscom was positive the second man was another of the gang. After a few minutes the two swung back toward Keene's place.

"Now I'm off," murmured Griscom.

LEFT alone, Beach tried to estimate the time, slowly counting sixty to the minute. The street was growing more lively and more noisy as the miners from outlying placers flocked in to find excitement. Beach was preparing to start when a figure swung out of the straggling

line and came up to the office. Beach believed him to be the spy, although the darkness prohibited positive indentification.

"That you, Griscom?" he asked.

"Griscom went up the street somewhere. Eating-house, I think, said he wouldn't be gone more than half an hour," replied Beach.

With a surly grunt the fellow joined the throng and made for the saloon. Once the spy was lost among the other vague forms Beach started in the opposite direction and soon was clear of the town and hurrying toward the divide. He was halted by a low whistle before he had covered half a mile.

"Content," he softly called.

Griscom emerged from behind a heap of boulders, leading the horse.

"Good-by and the best of luck," he whispered, shaking hands.

"I'll always remember the bother you've taken to help me," Beach assured him as he swung into the saddle.

"Any time I can fool those rascals I feel overpaid. Expect your little sister to come back and grow up with the country?"

"I suppose we all will grow up with the country if the outlaws don't steal it all. I'm owing you for what you've done for me. I'm a good rememberer. Good-by."

And with another handshake he was sending his horse up the road.

CHAPTER V

INTO EXILE

THE stars burned with the sparkle of new fires, and the dark mountain masses, patched with spruce, drew the horizons closer together as Beach rode down the north slope of the divide. As he gazed on the silhouette of the mighty panorama, punctuated by isolated peaks, he named it the home of giants, and his fancy endeavored to people it with a race compatible with its majesty.

"Just insects, that's what we are," he told his horse as he halted in a well of blackness at the foot of the divide.

The *click, click* of hoofs cautiously placed brought him out of his reverie and warned him that other "insects" were abroad, and reminded him that while the ancient gods might have no concern with the tiny struggles of atoms down among the roots of mountains it was of imminent importance to at least one atom to return to his own plane and be wary. The horsemen—for he decided that there were at least two of them—were up the slope.

He dismounted and led his horse under some spruce at one side of the road and stood by his head to prevent a telltale whinny.

Now the hoofs drummed rapidly as they struck the level stretch at the end of the slope. The riders came close to the spruce. One said—

"I reckon you're mistook."

"What you reckon hasn't any market value," retorted the other; and they were beyond the hiding-place and were spurring deeper into the blackness.

Beach waited some minutes, then mounted, and with drawn gun walked his horse after the riders. The first speaker he believed to be Baldy. He knew the other was George Ives.

Ives had planned to ride back to the Rattlesnake Ranch in the morning; now he was pounding through in company with Baldy. The two had talked together in Bannack; they were on a man-hunt. The fragments of talk suggested a shrewd guess on Ives' part once the spy reported that Content was missing. Beach reconstructed the slight flurry of chagrin in Bannack when it became definitely known that he was gone.

As he advanced and failed to pick up the sound of galloping horses he began to fear lest the men had heard his animal clumping along the road and were lying in wait for him. It was an extremely disagreeable experience, the more so because Ives was, he believed, one of the men.

He began to lose faith in Griscom's assurance that at the worst he would lose only the gold. If Ives planned to rob Beach then he also planned murder, for he was not one to go half-lengths. His intellect had equipped him with an ability to scan the future. He would run no risk of having a victim rise up to swear his life away if Fate ever should present him and his crimes to an honest jury.

Baldy was a brute, but far less deadly than Ives. Beach concluded that it was rash to ride farther, and he withdrew from the road to camp for the night.

He was nervous and could not sleep for a long time. He did not believe that the men would suspect they had passed him on

the road, nor that they would attempt to find him even should they arrive at that conclusion. He would be in no danger until the first morning light. And yet to his distorted imagination every sound of falling rock or rattling gravel became another evidence of a stealthy assassin.

Toward morning he did fall asleep, and when he should have been resuming his journey he still slumbered. It was his horse whinnying that awakened him. He exclaimed in dismay on beholding the sun riding high in the east. He ran to his horse, unfastened the long rope and decided to mount and eat his bread and meat as he rode. He received the surprize of his life when he beheld Baldy seated by his blankets, the two bags of gold between his crossed legs, and a long Navy revolver held carelessly in his right hand. His hat rested on the ground at one side, and the morning sun made the hairless head take on a bright luster.

"I come to git my hoss," Baldy announced, his tiny eyes leering in enjoyment as he read dismay in the young man's face. "Seems you're not only a hoss-thief but a robber, too. Shame on you for taking a poor man's dust!"

Beach stood motionless, his left hand holding the halter close to the horse's neck, his right hand before him with the rope playing through it. He could only gape in consternation at the ruffian.

"Cat got your tongue?" jeered Baldy, beginning to play with the revolver.

All Beach could say was—

"You followed me to kill me."

Baldy's birdlike eyes glittered with ferocity. He had enjoyed his own talk. He had been complimenting himself on his wit and humor, and he had wished some of his pals might be present to appreciate him. But Beach's blunt accusation hurried him on to the climax. Yet he could not forbear playing with his victim for a little; or possibly he was working himself up to the point of committing murder.

As if defending his purpose he said—

"If I let you go you'd tell all about this, wouldn't you?"

"Not if I said I'd keep my mouth shut. I'd rather lose six hundred dollars than be killed."

"So would any of us," agreed Baldy. Then cunningly:

"But this ain't your dust to lose. You'd have to tell the owner that you was robbed."

"I could say I was robbed, and only that."

"You young hound! You mean to tell me you wouldn't shout my name from Bannack to Virginia?" derisively cried Baldy.

Beach knew a denial wouldn't save him. He took another tack and warned:

"Plummer will have it in for you. Plummer is a friend of mine."

This seemed to amuse Baldy greatly. With a chuckle he said:

"Let it go at that. Only Hen Plummer ain't here. There's other men as good as he is. And there's one I'd a —— sight rather ride behind."

"George Ives!"

The two words popped out before Beach realized what he was saying. The little eyes dilated, and Baldy hoarsely said—

"What makes you think that?"

Beach's right hand was nervously sliding up and down the halter rope.

"You were riding with him last night?"

Baldy slowly drew his heels beneath him and tipped forward until he rested on his knees, the gun held steadily, but pointing to the ground, his body inclined forward and being supported by the left hand resting on the ground. Beach had once seen an ape in a menagerie in a similar posture.

"How do you know Ives was riding with me last night?" demanded Baldy in a whisper.

"I know it, just as I knew the spy you had watching me in Bannack," replied Beach, the right hand sliding up and down faster and faster.

"Others know it. Kill me and you'll be nailed as the murderer inside of twenty-four hours. Leave the gold alone and ride off and I'll promise not to mention this meeting."

"How'll I be nabbed for murder?" gritted Baldy. "They'll have to find your carcass first. Think you can scare me, huh?"

"They know when I left Bannack. I have friends there," shrilly cried Beach, his right hand moving along the rope and now swinging toward his right side. They'll know when I don't arrive in Virginia that I've been murdered."

Baldy's eyes began narrowing until they looked like pin-holes. He was about to shoot. In desperation Beach ceased moving his right hand and with it clutching the rope

against his right side he glared over Baldy's head and shrieked:

"Ives! Ives! Don't let him!"

The frantic glance, the sincere terror in the young man's voice, made the old ruse convincing for a second, and for a second the fierce eyes were off guard and rolling to discover Ives. With a hysterical scream Beach struck the horse with his left hand, at the same time yanking out his revolver with his right. The horse gave a jump just as Beach fell prostrate.

The scream, rather than the plunge of the horse, caused Baldy's trigger-finger to twitch spasmodically, and the bullet went wild.

Like an echo Beach's heavy gun went off, the ball smashing the polished top of the man's skull and causing him to pitch forward with his face on the ground.

BEACH remained lying on his side, stupidly staring across the blankets at the grotesque posture of the dead man. It was all so unreal. He had stood at the edge of death, and in an instant the danger had been eliminated. Baldy would never kill again.

It was incredible that the toppled-over figure was entirely finished with earth. The convulsive tug of a finger had robbed the hardened rascal of all his fell power. He was as harmless now as the charred trunk of a spruce behind him. It was stupendous.

Beach slowly shifted his gaze to stare at the Colt painfully gripped in his right hand. In correcting such an abuse as the dead man exemplified Nature might take a lifetime; this piece of mechanism, with a revolving magazine, had worked the cure in the infinitesimal part of a second.

As his dazed wits cleared, his imagination began working, and he found himself slyly crawling back from the dead man, his gaze never quitting the bowed figure, the revolver held tensely for another shot. The man was not dead. He could not be eliminated thus easily, imagination told him.

For years Baldy had lived evilly, with no corrective strong enough to halt his career. He had had all the advantage. His victim had been powerless. Then how could he be dead in an instant?

Beach had never seen a man die by violence. He could not conceive of the brain ceasing to function between the ticks of a watch, nor of the hands refusing to carry out the last command. But as he stared at the shattered head his reason elbowed imagination aside. Obviously a man could not live when broken as Baldy was.

Beach continued to take note of the havoc worked by the heavy ball and reacted physically much as he had when gazing on Gold Dick, murdered. Be it miracle or just luck, no man could live with the top of his head blown off.

Nauseated and shivering, Beach managed to get on his feet, stagger to his horse and climb on his back. Then he remembered leaving saddle, blankets and gold.

Slipping to the ground, with his legs going weak beneath him, he secured the saddle, and, taking care to keep his gaze from resting on the dead man, made it fast to the horse. He reached out a hand sidewise, caught the blankets by a corner and snatched them to him. But to recover the gold it was necessary to move the dead man.

He gritted his teeth, breathed hard, and began the repelling task. He was thrown into a spasm of fear when the bowed form suddenly toppled over sidewise, disturbed from its poise by a groping hand. He hurriedly rolled the gold in the blankets, tied them on the horse, mounted and dashed away from the scene at a mad gallop.

After he had covered a mile at a frenzied pace he found himself still glaring back as if expecting to behold Baldy with his bloody head racing from the spruce.

Then he knew his flight was a species of insanity. He allowed his horse to walk and fought to recover his self-control. In an awed voice he confessed to the towering ridges—

"I killed him!"

The horse continued picking his own gait while his rider indulged in saner contemplation of the tragedy. The whole affair was so profound with mysteries. He had been dogged by a murderer and all but slain, and he had protected himself and his employer's gold and had killed the assassin. It was as simple as that.

The new keynote to his thoughts was the realization he had protected Holter's gold. The country was cringing in terror because of evil men, and all that was necessary was to point a Colt revolver and pull the trigger, and the menace would prove to be as unsubstantial as the long shadow cast by the eastern ridge.

Gradually Beach's head came up. He

drew a deep breath and went all over it again. He wondered if the law-abiding men in the diggings understood that murderers could be killed just as easily as they had killed their victims. And once the process of elimination began working wouldn't murderers be afraid of death as much as their victims had been?

NOW he had arrived at his second great conclusion, and he told it to the mountains, saying—

"We don't have to stand it any longer than it takes to pull a gun and shoot."

His shoulders squared. He began to sense the thrill of victory. An inexorable nemesis had dogged him, and now the road behind him was safe.

It had not entered his feverish thoughts that although Baldy was dead there were others to carry on the horrible work and strip him of his gold; strip him of his life. He knew only that unaided he had come out of a great peril and had solved his own problem.

Then a shadow fell swiftly upon him, and his eyes widened as he watched an approaching horseman. The man rode with gallant ease. As the two drew nearer together the one from the north stared steadily at the one from the south and reined in, still staring.

Beach's heart began its old trick of pumping spasmodically. George Ives could not be fooled by simple ruses. And Ives was surprized to see him. More than that; he was amazed.

"Why, Content, I scarcely knew you," he slowly greeted him. "You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"I've been held up!" cried Beach. "Held up a few miles back in a clump of spruce where I had camped."

"Well, well! Robbed, eh? Too bad. How much did you lose?"

"Six hundred dollars. But it wasn't mine. Belonged to the man who hired me to go to Bannack."

"I thought you were going to Bannack to get work," mused Ives reminiscently.

"I was to say that to any one who asked my business. True in a way, too. I believe my job depends on my doing my errand. Now I've failed!"

"I see. I know how you feel, but your boss can't blame you. Don't take it seriously. Could you identify the man if you saw him again?"

"I don't think so," muttered Beach, shaking his head despondently. "I was so stirred up. It was new experience for me. Took the gimp out of me."

Ives was studying him reflectively, still trying to puzzle out why the victim was here alive on the stage road.

"Was the man alone?" he asked.

"Alone. Just one man."

"Suppose you turn back with me. We might pick him up on the road or in Bannack."

"No! I never want to see him again. My nerves are all shot to pieces."

"Any one feels queer the first time he's robbed," said Ives. "My knees knocked together the first time I was held up. Now if you could describe the fellow——"

"I can't. It would be useless for me to try. Much obliged to you. I must be getting on."

Ives was debating something in his mind. He was still puzzled and undecided. Beach sensed his indecision and was compelled to use all his will-power so as not to betray himself as the two rode by each other. Then the struggle to keep from turning his head. Ives had stopped, for there was no sound of the horse in motion. Beach knew the blue eyes were watching him, with the man still undecided, and he expected to feel a bullet in his back. He kept his eyes to the front, however, and managed to check his wild desire to send his horse into a mad gallop. It was not until a mile had been covered that he remembered the democratizing effect of a Colt forty-four handled expeditiously.

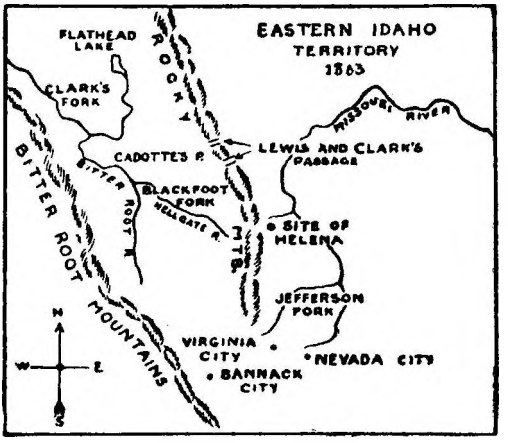
Ives in turn was bewildered. He knew that Baldy was entirely lacking in finesse and had a fine capacity for bungling, but he was never one to overlook an opportunity to kill. It had been necessary on more than one occasion to restrain this lust in the fellow; always, of course, for politic rather than humane reasons.

Ives rode leisurely, trying to piece the puzzle together. Frequently he stared back after Content and wondered if he himself had not erred in allowing the young man to escape. Had Beach lifted his horse out of its jogging gait and revealed the panic filling his heart he doubtless would have been pursued.

While Ives weighed the few facts as he understood them Beach topped a ridge and vanished. There was the chance that Baldy

had been recognized, for Baldy had foolishly tried to steal the horse in Bannack City. In that event it was obvious that Baldy did not suspect his victim knew him, as he was a stanch advocate for disposing of all possible witnesses.

As he reviewed Content's attitude during the brief meeting Ives began to stress points he had overlooked until now. Content had been much agitated. As he logically analyzed the young man's deportment



the more convinced he became that the loss of the gold was not sufficient to supply the reason.

"At least I ought to have made him come back with me," he finally decided. "I begin to feel I've seen Baldy's mistake and gone it several better."

The sight of a horse feeding on the scanty grass to the left of the road interrupted his speculations. With a keen eye for horseflesh Ives bent his gaze on the animal and swore softly.

"The fool hasn't gone yet!" he exclaimed in disgust; for he recognized the horse as belonging to Baldy.

Quickening his pace in a desire to find Baldy and give him some forceful instructions with the least possible delay, he was soon at the grove of spruce. He called Baldy by name and then sounded a shrill whistle. The signal remained unanswered. The horse trotted along after him.

Ives scowled at the shadows cast by the spruce and hesitated. He was without fear in the ordinary sense, but there was an atmosphere about the spruce and the scattered fragments of charred trunks that repelled him.

He gave the signal again, then spoke sharply to his horse and advanced to where Beach had camped. His first thought on beholding the silent figure was that Baldy had smuggled a bottle along and was drunk.

Leaping from the saddle, he walked to the dead man and drew back his foot to deliver a lusty kick and then discerned the mortal wound.

With a hissing intake of breath he crouched low, whipped out his revolver and glared suspiciously around the cover. The act was instinctive, for in the next moment he was erect and remembering that Baldy's slayer was miles away.

He knelt beside the figure and found the revolver still clutched in the right hand. He tried to disengage it, but Baldy's last thought had been to grip the weapon and fire it, and the will to kill had instantly been translated into a muscular contraction that Ives could not break. He did manage to examine the gun, and his bewilderment was doubled when he found that one chamber was empty.

Knowing Baldy's method of seeking every advantage, Ives could reconstruct the tragedy only to a certain point. The desertion of his horse showed that he had surprized Content. He had crept forward and had taken the young man unaware and had fired at him. Surely he had never fired after receiving the terrible wound. But it remained inexplicable how he had been killed while having the advantage of a surprize attack and the first shot.

There grew up in Ives's mind a new respect for Content. He grew very savage in concluding that he had entirely misjudged the fellow. Content was no tenderfoot. He must be very cunning to play the part so artfully.

The next thought was even more disturbing. Why had Content lied to him?

"That makes it bad. Very bad," he softly muttered. "It shows he mistrusted me. I was afraid of it when I found he had changed his plans and was gone. What made him mistrust me? Or did he know the truth even while stopping at the Rattlesnake? I could swear he felt friendly at the ranch and in Bannack. By ——, he was fooling me all the time!"

And the blue eyes grew murderous.

"I thought a sudden fright had driven him out of town. Bluffed me all the way through! Wonder if Plummer put him

forward to bluff me? And now this—killing old Baldy, and then telling me he had been robbed! He played it mighty well. That's very bad!

"Baldy shot first. I'd give fifty ounces to know how much time passed between the two shots. Or did Baldy do any talking before shooting? He may have told things about me and the others in his —— boasting way. It would be like him when he believed he had his man cold.

"That must have been how it happened. Baldy had him covered, helpless. Then the fool began to blab and brag; then Content caught him off his guard. Taken by surprize, Baldy got in one shot. *Zing!* Mr. Baldy's head is spoiled beyond all repair! I must find one of the boys and get word to Virginia City."

He dragged some brush and heaped it over the body; and he was not fond of labor. Abandoning his plan of riding to Bannack City, he caught Baldy's horse and started back toward the Rattlesnake.

ON ARRIVING in Virginia City at midday Beach found the street congested, with several men indulging in impromptu oratory at different points. Riding slowly toward Beidler's cabin, he caught enough from the various harangues to learn that the people were fearing an Indian attack.

A man in front of Kessler's was shouting for his audience to remember the men killed on the Salmon River the year before, to remember those killed during the present season on the Yellowstone and other tributaries of the Missouri. He was asking for volunteers to take arms and go out and slaughter the red men. He was listened to in silence, and when he paused to renew his breath his listeners deserted him to crowd around another speaker.

"What's the trouble?" asked Beach of the winded orator.

Thankful for even one pair of ears, the man explained:

"I've been trying to get some enthusiasm into these men. The Crows have appeared in the Gallatin Valley, and small bands have crossed the Madison to the Jefferson. They'll cut off any small parties going out of town. They've made peace with the Blackfeet, and they're planning to kill all the whites east of the Rockies. The Sioux tribes to the east will join them. I tell you, young man, that the Indians are about to wage a war of extermination!"

Beach rode on, not profoundly disturbed. He could not picture Virginia City being attacked. The Blackfeet were much to be feared; but the Crows, although great thieves, were not so quick to kill white men. If they came upon a miner or two in some isolated gulch they would make short work of him, but they lacked the malignant audacity of their ancient enemies, the Blackfeet.

However, as he passed other groups and heard the same warning repeated he began to fear that there was truth behind it, and that the Indians at last were ceasing their intertribal wars and were uniting to resent the presence of the gold-hunters.

Reaching the cabin, he found Beidler cooking beans and bacon. Beidler was glad to see him, grinned extensively and made much ado in finding another plate. After Beach had tethered his horse back of the cabin and had washed up for dinner Beidler's genial visage grew sober.

"So you didn't get it," he said.

"Get it? Oh, the belting? No. Jesson wouldn't sell at any price."

His abstraction told Beidler there was something the matter besides the failure of Holter's errand; and the little man prompted:

"Then what is it? Out with it. You look and act queer."

"I feel queer," mumbled Beach.

He stepped to the open door and glanced up and down the street, then took a seat at the table and whispered—

"I've killed a man!"

Beidler's fork paused in its journey and returned to the plate.

"Uh-huh? Then I'd copper it that he needed killing mighty bad, pardner. Any time you feel like telling me about it I'll listen. Reckon we'd better eat before we have any talk, though."

Beach's appetite was small, and soon he pushed back from the table and gloomily waited for his friend to finish. At last Beidler said:

"All right. Go ahead if you want to."

Beach sketched his adventures at Rattlesnake Ranch and in Bannack. When he came to the homicide he winced and apologetically said—

"It seems so awful."

When he was through Beidler heartily declared:

"Bully for you! Awful? It would have been awful if you'd been killed. But of course you bolted, leaving the body and the skunk's horse."

"Why, of course. I wanted to get away. I couldn't quit the place too quick."

"There are different ways of getting away," slowly said Beidler. "And there are some things you can't get away from by riding a horse. Perhaps it would have been better if you'd turned back to Bannack and publicly told the camp you had killed the fellow in self-defense. And perhaps it's wiser to say it here in Virginia City where you know more people.

"And I don't know but what you did the best thing by quitting on the run. If you'd covered the body some might think you was sly and trying to cover up.

"So far as killing Baldy goes you've done more good for the two towns than any one man has done since poor Dillingham was wiped out. Are you down in the mouth because you killed him, or because you're afraid his friends will try to get even?"

Beach frowned as he tried to make it clear.

"No man wants to be potted by a murderer. Nor am I worrying about what may happen to me. I passed all that when Baldy held a gun on me and was so sure of killing me that he hinted at facts about Ives and the others.

"It's my killing him that's jolted me. I'm not sorry, mind you; for I'm not a fool. Still it's so different from growing potatoes and pulling turnips that it's upset me. Shall I go out and tell folks about it now?"

Beidler played with his knife and fork for a few moments, and then shook his head.

"First you will take the dust back to Holter and tell him about the canvas. Then you and I will hunt it up. I know a man who was a saddler back in the States. He can sew it for you. Now let me think."

He was silent for several minutes; then he resumed:

"Yes, that's best. We must tell Holter about Baldy. If it hadn't been for Holter's six hundred dollars in gold he might not have tackled you. Telling Holter will be sort of an alibi if any talk is made by any of the gang.

"It'll be a good play to tell Carlton of the Virginia Hotel, also. That'll make three men you told as soon as you reached town; that'll show all right-minded men that you weren't trying to hide anything. Now we'll find Holter."

Several thousand people were parading up and down the long street that stretched from Virginia to Nevada City. The two friends met no citizens who were not bearing arms, except it be the gamblers, and these were sure to have forty-one caliber derringers in their vest pockets or hidden in their sleeves.

Besides the Colt revolvers—and nearly every man had one in his belt—there were many shotguns, Sharps breech-loading rifles shooting linen cartridges, and a sprinkling of Spencer and Henry rifles shooting rim-fire ammunition. They saw one man down on his knees frantically loading a fifty-six Spencer, but no sooner had he replaced the tube magazine in the butt than the spring spilled the cartridges out on the ground.

Several mountain-men in fringed buckskin strolled along unconcernedly, their eyes twinkling through a tangle of hair and whiskers, their cap-and-ball rifles held carelessly in the hollow of the left arm. The shotgun, descendant of the murderous blunderbuss, seemed to be a favorite weapon.

The talk flew fast and furious and had to do entirely with the latest Indian news. The stage from Bannack arrived and reported a hold-up ten miles north of Bannack City, but the news created hardly a ripple of interest. But when a man rode a limping horse into town and fell from his saddle and feebly cried out that the Indians were coming the gulch seethed with excitement and terror.

"BLACKFEET! Blackfeet! Every one to cover!" a man screamed.

"Meet 'em outside! Drive 'em to ——!" was a bolder slogan.

"Kettle's b'ilin' over without any fire," snorted a mountain-man.

Beidler and Beach worked into the group about the newcomer and learned that he had come from Crow Creek, just south of Prickly Pear Creek. He said that he had returned to camp to find his partner killed and horribly mangled; that he had not had time to dismount before the Indians poured from cover and fired a volley of bullets and arrows at him. He was shot in the side with an arrow, and it had broken off at the shaft. A man professing surgical ability promptly rolled up his sleeves, called for a

sharp knife, kneeled beside the wounded man and soon had the arrow-head out.

"The Indians won't attack this town," Beidler said assuringly, his even voice taking advantage of the lull caused by the appearance of the arrow-head. "I suggest that twenty or thirty well-armed men, used to Indians, ride north as far as Crow Gulch and bring down the dead man's remains. If that isn't practical they can bury the body on the spot and mark the grave so we can find it later. The men should be paid an ounce a day so they won't lose much from being away from their work."

Men began clamoring their willingness to make the trip, many offering to serve without wages and supply their own horses. Fear was succeeded by a desire for vengeance. A stoop-shouldered patriarch of the mountains, armed with a Kentucky rifle such as the Government manufactured in Pennsylvania for the Indians, hoarsely cried out that the job was one for men who knew "the red critters." He began bawling different names, and other men in buckskin sidled through the crowd to stand behind him. The old man glanced over them, ten in all besides himself, and declared:

"We've got 'nough. Ye needn't weigh out any dust for us. Just have a bottle handy when we come back. Rest of you folks go back to work."

Beidler and Content passed on and crossed over to the Virginia Hotel and found Holter an interested spectator of the street scene. They got him aside in a corner of the office and told him all.

"I'll keep shut if you say so," he agreed. "But it's such a good piece of work the whole gulch ought to know about it. Let it happen half a dozen times and you couldn't find a bad-man with a riddance-comb. You're just the man I need, Content, and that canvas idea is fine."

"That was Sessions', the preacher's, idea, not mine."

"You're the one who brought it to me. You fellows needn't bother to look it up. I'll find it. The express agent can tell me who received it. Later I'll hunt up your saddler, X, and explain just what I want."

Taking back the six hundred dollars, Holter bustled away. Beidler and Beach remained at the hotel to witness the start of the mountain-men for Crow Creek.

After the cavalcade had departed, amid a salvo of belt guns, Beidler advised Beach to get the landlord's ear and tell him of Baldy's death. Beidler returned to his cabin.

Carlton was very busy, and before he could catch him alone Beach observed Sheriff Plummer in the doorway. Plummer's greeting was warm and cordial, but Beach perceived, or fancied that he did, a strange glitter in the official's eyes.

"Haven't seen you for the last day or so," commented the sheriff.

"Been down to Bannack City trying to find some belting for Holter, the sawmill man. Couldn't do any business."

"Bannack's quiet?"

"Seemed to be. Stage held up just before I got there. The one my folks were on."

"So I heard," grieved Plummer. "My deputies, Stinson and Ray, are working to get some clew to the rascals. Hope your father didn't lose much."

"I hope not. He didn't have much to lose."

Then Beach told of Baldy's attempt to steal his horse.

Plummer swore roundly.

"I'll hang that low-down dog," he promised.

Beach felt uncomfortable. He wondered if Plummer had heard of the man's death. Plummer continued:

"That preacher has the right metal. If he'd quit preaching and serve as my deputy he'd be a big help to me. Stinson and Ray try hard enough, but they lack brains. So much territory to cover and so few good men willing to do the work. Why, a dozen men of the right caliber could clean up that gang inside of three days. Given any thought to my offer to take you on as a deputy?"

"I think I'd like it if I was sure of myself," was the frank reply. "And once I get so I can draw a gun I probably will have more confidence. I tried to draw on Baldy, but he had his gun out and cocked before I could get started."

Plummer stared out of the window for a few moments and then conceded:

"A man must be quick on the draw. And that only comes by practise. Let me see you draw."

Beach complied, sending several citizens scrambling for cover. The sheriff shook his head dubiously, and his gaze grew

puzzled. Coloring at his awkwardness, Beach gave a little laugh and requested:

"Give me a lesson. Show me how it should be done."

Plummer folded his arms and informed the gaping spectators:

"This young man may be my deputy when he has learned some gun tricks. You all understand I'm just giving him some pointers."

Then to Beach—

"Why, something like this, although I'm not as quick as I used to be.

And as he finished the big Navy leaped from the holster, and the black muzzle was resting against Beach's stomach, and the sheriff was gritting—

"Put your hands up!"

Up flew Beach's hands. The sheriff laughed silently and replaced his gun.

"Gr-great Scott!" gasped Beach. "I never could do that! I thought you meant it when you said, 'put them up.' "

The spectators laughed loudly. Plummer smiled in a peculiar fashion and said:

"All a matter of practise. Once you get the hang of it you'll improve fast. When you think you've grown to be nifty look me up. I need good men. As to telling you to put them up, that's what you will have to say if you become a deputy and corner a robber."

"They say the last stage in was held up," said Beach.

"Almost every stage is held up," Plummer gravely reminded him. "I can't be forever riding back and forth on stages. What the company ought to do is to put on some guards. I have advised that and offered to dig up some good men for the job, but the company would rather have the passengers robbed and the express stolen. Where are you staying?"

'With John Beidler."

Again the cold, calculating gleam shone in the sheriff's eyes, but his voice was suave as he said:

"Couldn't be in with a better man. Honest, and minds his own business. Well, look me up when you think you can draw a gun."

Waiting until Plummer had left the hotel, Beach turned to find Carlton; but the proprietor was not in the office nor in the bar. Returning to his seat by the window to await Carlton's return, Beach was slightly surprized to behold Beidler and Carlton coming out of the dining-room. Beidler at once joined Beach and abruptly announced—

"We'll walk back to the cabin now."

"I wanted to tell Carlton first," said Beach.

"I've told him already. We'll talk after we get to the cabin." His voice and bearing strongly intimated that he had something of importance to say. On leaving the hotel he walked ahead, instead of beside Beach; this to discourage any attempt at conversation on the street.

Now that the mountain-men had gone to investigate the Indian menace the long street was returning to normal, which meant a spasmodic consideration of the latest war-news from the East, the rising price of flour, the last rich strike or the most recent killing. For the time, Indians and stage robberies were under a taboo. The only display of excitement they observed was in front of the gambling wickiup, where a long-haired prospector was bawling for volunteers to aid in expelling from the gulch a score of Chinamen who were charged with making good wages by washing the tailings.

Beach followed his friend into the cabin. Beidler left the door open and sat on the threshold and motioned for Beach to be seated behind him. With his gaze on the street he talked over his shoulder to Beach, first saying:

"You were talking with Plummer at the hotel. I earnestly hope you didn't tell him anything."

"Only that Baldy tried to steal my horse in Bannack. He said he would hang Baldy."

"A safe threat. He knows that Baldy is dead and that you killed him."

Beach felt a strange sinking sensation in his stomach.

"I had a notion he knew all about it when he came up to me. But he didn't let on anything in his talk and said he was willing to take me on as a deputy any time."

"The first place he'd send you to would be the Rattlesnake Ranch," chuckled Beidler. "The news of Baldy's death came to town through two channels. The stage driver told Carlton before an office full of people. He said they had found the body. And there's one point I don't like. It was covered with brush, just as if you had hidden it."

"But you know I didn't! Why, I was so upset——

"I know. Some member of the gang hunted for Baldy and found him and covered him with brush. George Ives probably; shortly after meeting you. Lucky he didn't know the truth when he met you. He'd have killed you and left people to think you and Baldy did for each other in an open fight. The quarrel over the horse in Bannack would be accepted as the cause.

"The stage-driver hadn't heard anything except that Baldy was dead and buried. That's all Carlton knew until I got him into the dining-room and explained the whole affair. But an hour after you blew in the Wild Cat arrived. He brought the news to Plummer. No doubt about it. And Plummer is the one man in the gulch beside Holter, Carlton, you and me who knows the truth—that you killed Baldy.

'George Ives can be trusted to get important news through to the chief. It is only a question of time before the whole gulch knows that you did the killing, and, they'll naturally believe that you hid the body. That was a regular Ives trick. Making it appear you were afraid for the truth to be known."

"But how can they say I did it when Baldy and I were alone?" demanded Beach.

Beidler laughed at this display of unsophistication.

'They can say anything. They'll say whatever Ives tells them to say. And he's smart. The story gets to Bannack City. Who started it? The man who found Baldy, the man who was looking for him, having ridden from Bannack with him the night before. Ives. The gang could if it wished, produce a hundred men to swear in a miners' court that they saw you murder Baldy."

"Good Lord! Make me out a cold-blooded murderer!" gasped Beach. "And every one knows Baldy was a scoundrel!"

"A man has been killed. Plummer has been talked about because he never makes a killing-charge stick. Ives was tried and acquitted for killing Carthart; Reeves for killing friendly Indians, and so on. And out of more than a hundred murders only a few men have been called on to answer. Plummer packs a jury when a trial must follow a killing. The accused is acquitted.

"Now he has a chance to make a play without hurting any of his friends. People are complaining because the gallows built by Plummer hasn't been used.

"Of course if you could have a fair hearing folks would cheer you so loud that the noise could be heard over in the Madison Valley. You'd be called a hero.

"But the gang won't give you a chance. Your hearing would be rushed through before honest people could get at the truth of it. An arrest without warning, an immediate trial, a packed jury, and its verdict; and enough of the roughs present with drawn guns to see the sentence is carried out.

"Hold up your head! You look sick around the gills. You haven't been hung yet!"

"Beidler, I feel sick. Every one knows what kind of a man Baldy was. Every one in Bannack knows he was a thief and worse. The preacher there can tell how he tried to steal my horse."

"And the people there didn't dare make a yip till the preacher took the lead, for fear that every other man was ready with gun or knife to discourage any meddling."

"That's true," sighed Beach. "So it's likely, you say, that I'll find myself in danger of being hung. Lord, but it's sickening! And I'm scared—scared blue."

"That's just your frame of mind," soothed Beidler. "I've painted the worst side of it. Here is the other side. Things must take a new turn soon; they always do. The gang can't always sit in the driver's seat. Once the pendulum starts swinging back it'll swing the limit and carry the whole rotten outfit to ——.

"And they won't rush you to a noose unless they put up an awful fight. You've got several good friends here. Those friends have more friends.

"I can't say that I feel bad the way this thing is working out. It may be the very punch we need to set us going. And once we start, Alder Gulch will see more than one hanging. It would be peculiar if, after stealing wholesale, the attempt to steal six hundred measly dollars should wind them up."

"That's all right from your point of view," muttered Beach. "But I don't hanker to be hung, to even run the risk of being hung, in order to stir the people up so they'll put an end to the bloody business.

I'd be easier in my mind if some one else stood in my shoes."

"You won't be hung. Before Plummer can get into action we'll have you safe and snug till the people can understand the game."

"Maybe, but he's mighty quick on the draw," faltered Beach.

"Henry is quick," admitted Beidler, rising and stepping behind the door. "But honestly is he any quicker than this?"

His right hand flashed out a gun and restored it, and a gun appeared in his left hand, only to disappear; then the two guns appeared simultaneously, vanished and came again.

Beach, goggle-eyed, shook his head.

"I don't believe any man on earth is as fast as that," he muttered.

Beidler laughed gleefully.

"Oh, there are men very likely who can pull and shoot before I can get started—but I haven't met them. I know Henry can't, nor Ives, nor Parish. As for Haze Lyon and that cannibal, Boone Helm, they're ox-wagons beside me."

"I won't try to learn the trick. It's hopeless. Either a man can do it or he can't," said Beach.

"You'll begin today, doing it over and over. When you get so your average is good with the right hand you'll start with your left. Now take this empty gun so there won't be any accidents, step back here and begin!"

Beach shifted guns and tried it. Beidler corrected him.

"You mustn't glance down to your holster. You know it's there. Your hand must find it the first move while you keep your eyes on my eyes. Go ahead."

Time after time Beach tried it, and at last insisted:

"It's no use. I can't ever get the hang of it."

"Enough for this time. You're doing fine. Got so you can find the handle without glancing down at it. You've put eyes in your hand. That's the first step."

BY THE time night had darkened the gulch, the town's mercurial interest had reverted again to war news. Additional newspapers convinced even those from the left wing of Price's army that Lee had received a set-back at Gettysburg and that there was no immediate danger of an invasion of the North.

Union men were boisterously celebrating. Southern men were stubbornly denying the press reports. Blows were struck and pistols were used. Those men who were elected to read aloud from the newspapers were careful to preface their reading by stating an entire lack of bias and disclaiming any responsibility for what the papers had to say. And the moment the reading was finished the herald jumped down from box, table or barrel to escape any missile.

Thus at the feet of the Rockies did men argue and fight over issues which had been decided a month or two months back. But whether the absorbing topic was war news, Indians or the latest gold discovery, there was always an undercurrent of grumbling and cursing over the latest crime of the road-agent band. Lee might capture Pennsylvania or lose Virginia, and the immediate consequence was of less importance to some who failed to receive letters from home, or who learned their shipments of dust had been stolen.

But while men were courageous enough publicly to proclaim the news from the front, ride forth to fight the Indians or risk life in reaching new diggings, there were very few who would turn street orators and dare to harangue against the organized lawbreakers. The reason for this was as simple as it was old; none cared to dare a danger which could not be perceived and which in the shape of bullet and knife might strike from behind. It was the fear of the unknown that made men mumble under their breath and look the thoughts they dared not express in words.

It was commonly believed that the road-agents were many and their nefarious work well planned; but just who was on the roster was the query every honest man put to himself when tempted to talk in public. The number of deaths attributed to the band was not exaggerated much, if any; for it was possible to check off more than a hundred between Alder Gulch and Salt Lake City.

How many were done to death with only their assassins knowing their fate could never be known. Men departed on prospecting trips and never returned. Many newcomers to the diggings dropped from sight before they had had a chance even to establish their identity. Bones of white men were found in lonely gulches, and the

verdict, "Killed by some one unknown," was pronounced before many a nameless grave. Therefore the wise man, let him be ever so stout of heart, walked warily in the shadowed land, suspicious of the men he drank with or met on the trail, and waited for a time when he could know what he was fighting.

That many were convinced of Plummer's complicity helped the cause of justice but little. Who, and how many, were behind Plummer? Ives had a bad name, as had Whisky Bill, Long John, Texas Bob, old Hilderman, Bill Hunter, Alexander Carter, Boone Helm and Club-Foot George. But these were only a few men. Others, with much more power, might be behind the organization.

Beach reacted over night and by morning was filled with a fine enthusiasm to stand his ground. Nor did he realize how much of this spirited self-dependence he had borrowed from his companion.

Beidler was more quiet and given to cogitation. He allowed Beach to cook the breakfast while he stepped out on the street. When he returned he brought Holter with him. Beach knew the two had been talking about him when Holter said:

"You can do me the most good out in Ramshorn Gulch, looking after the mill. Later on when I get to sawing a lot of stuff you can handle the lumber-yard I'm planning to put in here."

Beach apprehended that he would find Ramshorn Gulch far more lonely than the vegetable farm, and his face fell. His duties would be those of a caretaker, as the mill must remain idle until Holter brought the new belt. Beidler read the disappointment in his face and said:

"It's a good place to practise the draw and quick shooting. After you've had time to practise I'll ride over and see how quick you are."

"You can take a pan, pick and shovel along and kill some time prospecting," added Holter. "I was so busy building the road over the divide between Ramshorn and Biven's Gulch that I never could look for color. But there's gold everywhere in this country."

"I'm going into exile, and you fellows are trying to make it soft for me," said Beach. "Last night I thought it was just a question of my keeping my nerve and facing things."

"That's the —— of it, old man," said Beidler. "The game takes a new slant. The Wild Cat is in town, and Kessler's bartender tipped me off that the gang now plans to let the Wild Cat even things up instead of making it a public trial. The Wild Cat's defense will be that you killed his friend in cold blood and that it became a feud fight between him and you. This will allow Plummer to keep out of it and yet teach the citizens a lesson on the danger of harming any of the toughs. The Wild Cat let something drop to some of his cronies when half-drunk, and the barkeep overheard it."

"Then my exile means I must stay exiled until I can draw a gun faster than the Wild Cat can," mused Beach.

"About that. You can't go out and shoot him down in his tracks. Not that Plummer would care much if you did. It would give him a chance to brand you as a killer."

"If you two say it's for the best then I'll go," sighed Beach. "But life in a mining-camp isn't anything like what I had expected it to be. I'm no more than here before I'm shooed out of town."

"Things have happened fast," sympathized Beidler. "But let's hope for better times. I can outfit you for prospecting, and there's plenty of powder and balls and a good Henry rifle under one of the bunks in the mill-house, Holter says. So you can shoot and wash gold to your heart's content and know you are earning your wages by guarding the property."

"And after I get the man started on sewing the belt I'll come out and you can help me make some repairs," said Holter.

"And we'll eat breakfast and start right away," appended Beidler.

"Whew! That's rushing me off in earnest!" exclaimed Beach. "All right. You two are real friends and know best."

By the time they had finished their breakfast Holter was back with a horse to serve as pack-animal. Beidler added a pan, pick, and shovel to the supplies already strapped on the horse and began donning his big coat. Putting on his huge white hat, he announced to Beach:

"Nothing to do just now, and I'll ride a bit with you. It's only eighteen miles out, you know, and you'll have no trouble following the ox-road after I turn back."

"It'll be good to have your company,"

said Beach. "I'll get my horse, and we'll start."

As they rode from the gulch more than one man turned and stared after them with strange earnestness. Beidler found his belt guns uncomfortable and shifted them to the tops of his flaring boots. As they passed a shack accommodating a small bar some one cried—

"Reckon he thinks it's high time to dust out!"

Beach turned his head and glared wrathfully at the open door and would have halted to challenge the statement of the unseen had not Beidler caught his bridle and insisted:

"Come along. We've no time for street fighting."

"I'll make him eat his words——"

"Don't act silly. I'll talk as we ride along. It's generally known that you killed Baldy. It's also known that the Wild Cat plans to even it up. Only the citizens believe there's bad blood between you and the Wild Cat, and they are not inclined to interfere. The fact that many believe you covered Baldy with brush after shooting him gives color to the notion you wanted it to be kept dark, and that the Wild Cat is playing the part of an avenger.

"That chap, who hollered after you back there, hasn't guts enough to hold up a stage; but he's a sneak and a spy and serves the gang. I have his name and camp record. He never works, yet always has plenty of dust for rum and playing the games. Chances are it was arranged for him to yap out at you and to have the Wild Cat jump into the game if you went in there to call him to account."

"I need a guardian, I reckon."

"No. You need to practise on the draw and to learn never to go into a fight in a strange crowd unless you can have them all in front of you."

"You're riding along to look after me. You shifted your guns to your boots so you could get at them in a hurry. You expected the Wild Cat to tackle me," declared Beach.

"I'm here to see you get a fair shake if any trouble is fetched to you. Now what will you do if George Ives, or any of his crowd you know, should ride down into Ramshorn Gulch?"

"Run them out," was the prompt reply.

"Fine spirit, but hardly correct. Run 'em into the ground. Begin shooting from cover the minute you sight 'em."

"But what if Plummer comes alone, or with others?"

Beidler screwed up his eyes for a moment; then said:

"After all, Plummer is the sheriff. Just stand him off. If he says he has come to arrest you tell him you'll come like a lamb if he'll send for Carlton, Holter or me. Otherwise stick to cover."

"I'll practise going after my gun. They sha'n't make me eat dirt."

"Guns," corrected Beidler. "I've brought an extra one for you. Wear both of them. Practise shooting on the draw. Draw before you begin to talk."

CHAPTER VI

BEACH HAS VISITORS

THE mill, a blacksmith's shop, a snug log cabin, a horse-hovel and corral, constituted the works of man in Ramshorn Gulch. A few miles over the divide the miners in Biven's Gulch were feverishly active in making the most of the closing season.

It was deathly quiet in Ramshorn Gulch. The several structures added to, or accentuated, the loneliness rather than lessened it. They suggested an abortive attempt at humanizing the rugged place and stood much as memorials to that which had been given up unfinished.

After Beach turned his animals loose and paused to survey his surroundings he could not rid himself of the idea that he was staring at a picture, so still were the mountain slopes, so lacking in all animate life was the rough course of the creek. The stream was very low, due to the diverting of water by the miners in Biven's. It seeped silently among the rocks and boulders, consisting largely of a string of quiet pools, threaded together by a tenuous rivulet.

"It's more lonesome than the farm," whispered Beach, his heart sinking as he gazed at the grim boundaries of the glacial furrow; and instead of being attracted to the cabin, shop and mill he felt a hesitance to approach them.

They would be reminiscent of their human occupants and intensify the solitude.

But the supplies must be taken care of, so he proceeded to the cabin.

He pulled the latch-string, and as the door swung open he leaped back and awkwardly fumbled for his revolver. He laughed aloud in great relief as he discovered that the explanation of the stealthy pattering sound he had heard was only a fat squirrel. He regretted the little animal's departure, which it took through a hole under the bottom log.

He soon had the supplies housed and had removed the wooden shutters from the one window-pane. The latter was a miracle in itself because it had withstood more than five hundred miles of rough travel before covering the gulch road around the foot of a mountain. There was fuel in the cabin; and, thinking to make it more homelike, he started a fire on the hearth before going outside to investigate the other buildings.

Near the foot of the slope behind the cabin the raw stumps told of the coming of the circular saw, but as yet the mill had not eaten deeply enough into the melancholy growth of spruce to be noticeable. It was the blacksmith's shop that gave him his first intimation of his employer's difficulties and the resourcefulness which had overcome them. The bellows were made out of rubber coats and whipsawed lumber. There was a pit of charcoal by the door, and for an anvil there was a broad-ax driven deep into a convenient stump.

Leaving the shop, he proceeded to the mill. The sixteen-foot overshot wheel impressed him as being a supreme triumph of engineering, for it had been fashioned on the spot, as necessarily was the long flume also. Wagon-axles had been made into shafting. The log-carriage, lacking track irons, worked by a "rope feed," was originated by Holter in his dilemma to supply what his outfit was supposed to have included, but much of which it had lacked.

"Lord! Think of getting all this stuff down here and then making enough more to go with it so he could put up a mill," muttered Beach as he stole back to the cabin.

It was not until he noticed the blue smoke rising in a straight line from the chimney that he realized there was no point to his practising stealth. Already his smoke had announced his presence to any one in the gulch or on the surrounding ridges.

To prove to himself that he was not suffering from "nerves" he raised a loud yell. It was thrown back at him from the rough walls of the gulch manifold. The echoes startled him, as he had not expected them. There had been no echoes on the vegetable farm.

He wandered to the corral and closed the entrance, although he had no fear that the animals would forsake the gulch and the large pile of cured grass that supplemented the long strip of grazing. But unconsciously he was viewing his surroundings from the farm viewpoint, where lowered bars invited the stock to wander.

Then he fell to wondering if he would be less lonely if isolated in the midst of a large plains area. Would he be surreptitiously searching the distant horizons and expecting to behold a moving dot of something? Or was the atmosphere of waiting for the unknown to happen down in this little wrinkle of the hills, where there would be no preliminary warning of danger's approach, more disquieting? Still arguing the question, he entered the cabin, overhauled the supplies and proceeded to prepare a supper of bacon, beans and coffee, to which he added bread bought by Beidler at Kessler's.

He was chagrined with himself to find he could not endure to have the cabin door closed while he was preparing the meal. Already it was twilight in the gulch, and when he paused to listen he could hear the wind whispering ancient secrets to the evergreens. He wanted the door open. He knew it was whimsical and foolish, and yet he could not fight against the desire.

At first he tried keeping it closed and instantly discovered that he had peopled the gulch with nameless trespassers. They pressed close to the door and the four walls and murmured confidences to each other. By opening the door and occasionally glancing out he found that his visual sense removed these ghostly intruders beyond the first skyline; which was much better than having them loitering just outside the building.

While the bacon and beans were simmering and the coffee was boiling he dug out the Henry rifle and a box of forty-four rimfire cartridges. It was a weak, short-range cartridge, carrying twenty-eight grains of powder; yet the weapon was accurate and fast to shoot. He familiarized himself with the mechanism and practised stuffing the cartridge through the trap of the magazine tube, which, unlike the Sharps, extended

parallel with the barrel. This work took his mind off the shadowy outside world and did much to restore him to a normal state. By the time his supper was ready he found he could close the door and sit with his back to it without experiencing any uneasiness.

Having eaten, he came to a void. On the farm his evenings had been made bright by the companionship of his father and sister. In Virginia City there was a swirl of life in the raw to keep his objective faculties alert. Now that he was alone with himself the solitude pressed against the walls of the cabin like a physical force. To occupy his thoughts he rummaged through a closet at the head of his bunk and found "Dombey and Son," by one Dickens.

Much rough travel and much rough work had separated him from books, and this was his introduction to the magician. The light through the eight-by-twelve pane of glass soon failed, and he shifted to the floor with his back to the fireplace. His growing absorption allowed the fire to die down, and it was a wrench to cast off the spell long enough to throw on more fuel.

At last in desperation he searched the cabin and unearthed a battered tin lamp, minus a chimney, and a can of oil. The resulting light was weird and flickering as the breeze found chinks through which to steal and twist it from side to side.

With the book close to the erratic, smoking flame he read until his gaze became blurred. When forced to lay aside the story there was old England and the Atlantic Ocean between him and Ramshorn Gulch.

Feeling guilty that he should have exhausted so much of his treasure in one night, he spread his blankets on the bunk and turned in, his thoughts straying after *Mr. Dombey*, little *Paul*, *Florence*, *Wally* and *Solomon Gills* long after the divide and ridges had been leveled by the dream forces.

Florence and her brother were in his thoughts when he awoke. He put the book in the cupboard to escape temptation, and after eating his breakfast and visiting the horses he placed the two guns in his belt and practised the draw.

Over and over he sought proficiency in this frontier accomplishment. When he was wearied by his prolonged efforts he felt greatly discouraged. As a matter of fact his progress would have pleased his friend Beidler; but in his own estimation he was a bungler.

Loading the Henry, he started for the head of the gulch and did not stop until halted by the limestone ledges. Although ignorant of geology he recognized the barrier as being similar to the wall at the head of Alder Gulch, and he laid aside the rifle to dig his hands into the soil along the trickling stream.

As Dickens had ousted loneliness from his soul so now did a sudden hunger to try his luck at placer-mining cause him to forget *Dombey* and his pathetic son. He hurried back to the cabin with scarcely a glance at the ridges and got out his pick, shovel and pan. As the sun was overhead he tarried at the cabin long enough to cook and eat some food, and then started back.

He could not wait until reaching the foot of the ledges, but halted frequently to try his luck. He had watched men pan out gravel, but had never tried it before. At first he made sorry work of it, but after much experimenting improved in his technique until he was rewarded by a dozen colors. The residue in the pan was worth perhaps five cents; in Beach's eyes it was a full rainbow of promise; and he enjoyed his first thrill as a prospector, and was at the threshold of understanding how the game tempted men to face starvation and savage Indians for the sake of whirling the heavy pan on the chance of finding a few yellow specks after the loose dirt had been washed out.

He worked up the gulch until the sun was touching the edge of the western ridge, when he was compelled to think of turning back. There was a fine feeling in anticipating the welcome awaiting him in the snug company of *Sol Gills* and his friends. The cabin no longer repelled him. He added the few grains of gold obtained from the last pan to the mixture of sand and dust in the bottle he had brought along, and, leaving his tools by the creek, hurried down to the cabin, eager to join his new friends.

This night closed in without causing any jangle of nerves. He cooked his supper with the door closed and rather enjoyed the sighing sound of the wind sucking through the gulch. But despite his resolutions to dip sparingly into the book he finished it before seeking his blankets.

The next day was patterned after the first. He forced himself to practise for an hour with his belt guns before going up the gulch, and on this trip he left his rifle

behind. But to his surprize what had been most exhilarating now became prosaic. The first day's labors had found weak spots in his anatomy, unused muscles that protested against a continuation of the unaccustomed labor. He persevered, however, and near the noon hour was rewarded by a score of flat, coarse scales, which made a pronounced addition to the contents of the bottle.

And now he was acquiring the knack of cleaning the specks and scales before bottling them. With no means of weighing the gold, he still was confident that he was liberally adding to his daily wage, and felt a new sense of independence. As he had not thought to bring any food with him, and as he wished to save time, he worked until late afternoon before calling it a day.

That night he practised with his guns, and although he was stiff and sore from the day's labor he believed he was making improvement. He noted that it was very seldom that a hand failed to drop with precision on the butt of a forty-four. This discovery surprized him, as his last efforts in the morning had been filled with faults. It was much as if a second self had remained at the cabin to keep up the practise while his physical body was up the gulch twirling the heavy pan of pay-gravel. With the gun-play finished he began re-reading the novel and found much that his first eager perusal had missed.

After a week of this isolation he developed a liking for his rugged environment and felt a kinship with it. The furrowed ridges emanated friendliness. The stiff spruces were excellent companions and much more congenial than their martinet appearance had indicated. Work and reflection had permitted him to humanize the wild spot, and the outside world seemed to be immeasurably removed.

It did not seem possible that a brisk ride along the divide would take him into the turmoil and shifting excitement of Virginia City. That was all behind him and in another existence. Only a short ride over the divide were human beings, but he had no desire to seek them. Biven's Gulch, like Alder Creek, was very far away. In fact, he now considered both bustling places to be a state of mind. He had cured his mind; therefore neither existed for him.

Each day he went through the formality of looking over the mill and the smithy. This was about all he could do in return for the wages his employer was to pay him. He read his story-book until he knew much of it by heart. He practised shooting with the Henry rifle and was much pleased with the speed he acquired in releasing a string of shots. He was not satisfied, however, except in spots, with his progress in drawing and firing his hand guns. And each day he panned out more gravel and added to his little stock of gold.

At the beginning he had had dreams of uncovering a rich pocket and scooping up several quarts of fat nuggets; but as the back-breaking work failed to reveal any such accumulation of treasure he stuck to it in the same spirit a man whipsaws lumber or works in a ditch.

He had not hitherto taken time to cross the creek and mount the well-wooded ridge. But now one day he took his rifle and jumped from rock to rock over the creek and climbed the slope to prowl about. He had not expected to find anything of interest; and when he blundered into what he took to be an old Indian path and observed that it ran parallel to the creek, he followed it more for the sake of filling in the time than because of any interest. Near the head of the gulch it turned abruptly to disappear over the top of the limestone formation.

As he had no desire to follow it over the wall he turned back toward the cabin. He moved leisurely, pausing at every opening to stare across at the ridge behind the mill and cabin. He remembered that it was the first day he had missed washing gravel, and he took credit to himself for abandoning private gain that he might familiarize himself with both sides of the creek.

On reaching a point where through a break in the growth he could look down on the mill, almost beneath him, he was astonished to glimpse a figure stealing along the foot of the opposite ridge. Had the newcomer been mounted and moving up the gulch instead of down Beach would have assumed that he was Holter or Beidler. But Holter would be bringing men with him, and Beidler would have approached from the ox-road below the corral.

"Must be a miner from Biven's gulch," Beach told himself, feeling no pleasure in the thought.

He did not fear that the man would be tempted by his diggings even if the other

found them. He simply did not care for a stranger's company. He left the trail and descended the slope stealthily, keeping under cover.

His first assumption was shattered when he beheld other figures, six in all and all afoot. They were now near the mill and cabin, and there was a strong hint of secrecy in their movements. Instead of following down the bank of the creek where the traveling was more open they clung to the edge of the growth, reminding Beach of Indian tales by their way of flitting from tree to tree.

On reaching a point opposite the corral he worked down to the foot of the ridge and found concealment in a clump of spruce. His isolation vanished, and Virginia City was brought very close as he found himself staring at a bearded face showing for a few seconds from around the end of the horse-hovel. The man ducked back, but not with the manner of one believing that he had been discovered.

Beach shifted his gaze to the cabin and found more sinister evidence. Two men were lying behind stumps, aiming their revolvers at the closed door. Jumping his vision to the smithy, Beach decided that the intruders had planned their movements well, for one man was stalking the shop with the sunlight glistening on his two drawn belt guns. The picture was completed by the two men stealing toward the mill.

Beach shivered as he realized how only an impulse had placed him across the creek and out of the visitors' murderous reach. It was purely by chance that the impulse seized upon him, this day of all days.

His first reaction was to remember that he was safe, for they could never find him on the spruce-covered slope. His second thought was more disturbing; even though they went away he never again could feel secure in the little cabin. Day and night he would feel their presence and imagine them to be creeping upon him.

Then he remembered the small bottle of dust in the cabin cupboard and felt outraged that his gold should be endangered. Never before had he so strongly condemned crimes against property.

He might have stolen away without making a fight so long as only his life was in danger. But the few dollars' worth of gold which he had dug held him in his hiding-place, his mouth drawing down in a snarl.

The man at the corral was intent on stealing the horses, or to prevent any escape by means of them. As yet none of the six had eyes for his side of the creek. He crawled closer to the stream, taking advantage of the scattered trees and the frequent boulders.

The man nearest him, the one behind the horse-hovel, was a stranger. Those at the smithy and mill now were keeping to cover, and he had occasional glimpses of them only. He recognized none of them. But one of the two men before the cabin impressed him as being some one he had met, although the reclining posture made a positive identification impossible.

Then action succeeded stealthy deliberation. As if by some signal the mill, the smithy and the cabin were rushed. The only man to remain inactive was the one behind the hovel. Beach centered his attention on the two before the cabin, as it was there his gold was stored. The two, after springing to their feet, had raced to the blind end of the cabin. They seemed to be listening; then one of them pushed open the door. A moment of hesitation; then he sprang inside. He was gone from view less than a minute and emerged to shout something to his mates and to wave something in his hand.

Beach felt his temples pounding as he made two discoveries—the fellow was the Wild Cat, and he was brandishing the Dickens story, which he had found open on the table. The four men up the gulch quickly satisfied themselves that there was no one in or about the mill or smithy, and ran toward the cabin.

The Wild Cat ceased waving the book and proceeded to commit the crime of derisively tearing out a handful of pages and throwing them into the wind. Without a thought for the consequences Beach threw up his rifle and fired.

The bullet must have clipped close, for the Wild Cat gave a screech, dropped to the ground and wriggled behind a stump. Even then they would not have known where to look for Beach, for the echoes made the shot ring from every quarter, had not the man by the corral observed the small patch of smoke. This fellow emptied his revolver across the creek and shouted to his companions. Very quickly the five men vanished, working their way behind the cabin and smithy.

Beach knew he had no time to waste if he was to secure a lead up the wooded slope. He worked back a few rods and paused to spy on the hovel. The men were gathering at that point, for he caught glimpses of several heads. He withheld his fire and waited for his heart to behave and for his breath to return to something like normal. A man fired six shots in his direction, shooting at guess.

By degrees he gained control of his racing heart and remained motionless. After a minute or two what he took to be a shaggy head appeared at one end of the open shed and remained stationary. The Henry was discharged for the second time, and the ragged hat jumped off the stick. The success of the trick was greeted with derisive laughter and loud-voiced threats prefaced with blasphemy.

The laughter and oaths stopped, and a voice bellowed:

"Might as well come over here. The ridge behind you is filled with men."

"You're a liar!" yelled Beach. "If there's any men behind me let them come and get me."

Yet the statement, obviously false, made him feel uneasy. He knew there were no men up the ridge, else they would have put in an appearance by this time. And yet he was afraid some one might be stealing down the rough slope to surprize him. He had considered the deep growth a refuge, *knew* it was a refuge, but could not make his imagination cease pronouncing it to be a trap.

When a boy and sent down-cellar for apples he had experienced the same sensation on turning his back to the darkness and making for the lighted stairs; a rushing-up behind him of a nameless menace.

To promote action he fired a ball through the back of the shed and was pleased to hear the volley of oaths. More than once he had conquered the cellar by turning and walking back to its darkest corner, and he believed he would feel more composed if he could take the fighting to the hovel. He even began casting his gaze about for some cover under which he could get in line with the end of the hovel and rake the enemy. As far as he had observed none of the men carried rifles or shotguns.

"Come over here and give yourself up!" came the command.

"Why? What for?" demanded Beach, slipping two cartridges through the trap to keep the magazine full.

"For the murder of Baldy. Surrender, and you'll get a fair trial."

"Go and bring Beidler, Holter or Carlton, and I'll surrender."

"To —— with them! You come across that crick, or we'll dig you out. And if we have to do that we won't bother to take no prisoner back to Virginia City."

He made no reply to this ultimatum. They were trying to locate him by his voice, or else they wished to keep his attention diverted from their next ruse. He wormed his way backward twenty feet. Then came a violent hail of bullets into the spot he had quit. He shifted his position to a boulder. There followed a brief period of silence, broken by the question:

"What you think about it now? Ready to give up?"

He was hoping that they would assume the volley had found him. Once let them advance to investigate, and he was confident he could hold the creek against them. But none of them showed himself.

Beach kept a sharp watch on both ends of the hovel to guard against one of their number stealing away to cross the stream and attack him from behind. They commenced calling to him, one man after another, and each speaking in a peremptory voice and demanding that he listen carefully and give the closest attention. And he did give heed, but as they thus took turns in addressing him and failed to reach their final admonition, he began to wonder why there was so much talk and why so little was being said.

They abruptly ceased their shouting, and like a blow came the realization that the trick had been played. Too late had he attended to watching for withdrawals from the shed.

His head was already turning as a careless step sounded behind him. He was horribly frightened, but not surprized to behold the Wild Cat standing by a spruce, an amused smile twisting his lips up on one side of the brown face. For a moment the two gazed into each other's eyes, the hell in the killer's stare exulting over the fear distorting the young man's visage. Beach dropped the rifle and rose to his knees.

"That's a heap better," murmured the Wild Cat, stepping clear of the tree that had masked his approach.

Beach slowly gained his feet, indifferent to a possible bullet from the hovel. One or two shots were fired as he began straightening up, but the Wild Cat's stentorian voice angrily yelled:

"Quit that —— fool work. I've got him."

Cheers greeted the announcement, and the five men began leaving the hovel to cross the creek.

"You're going to take me back to Virginia City?" asked Beach.

"I'm going to send you on a longer trip than to Alder Gulch," growled the Wild Cat. "Can't bother with no short trips. You didn't bother to take Baldy to town, huh?"

And his hand dropped to his holster.

Then they were at it, the two guns firing almost together with the deciding fraction of a second being in Beach's favor. The Wild Cat died, shot through the heart, between his pressure on the trigger and the fall of the hammer, his own lead grazing Beach's left side.

Staggering back and wondering how the gun came to be in his hand, Beach snatched up the Henry.

The men were at the creek, and on hearing the discharge of the hand guns, the two reports almost sounding as one, their leader yelled:

"Why couldn't ye wait till we got there? I want to asks him some ques——"

The first bullet from the Henry caught the disgruntled one through the leg just below the knee. Beach was now in the opening, his eyes dilated with the excitement of battle. With wild howls the gang made grotesque haste in diving to cover. Had he wished Beach could have shot at least another, but his victory was so unexpected that he was fully content.

The wounded man cursed and begged and shrieked in agony as he attempted to drag himself behind a rock. He pleaded for his companions to save him and swore terrible oaths as none was willing to risk rescuing him. Then the fellow prayed to Beach to spare his life.

Beach, still standing in full view, did not realize his danger until a hand thrust a revolver around the side of a rock. The Henry sent a bullet smashing close to the exposed hand, and Beach dropped to a sitting posture.

"Any more shooting and I'll pot the wounded man," he warned.

Then to the latter:

"Keep where you are. Another wriggle and I'll bore you. Now we can talk."

"Where's the Wild Cat?" called a muffled voice.

"He took the long trip over the divide that he had planned for me to take."

The question had had no point as it was obvious to every one of the five that the Wild Cat must be dead, or else the young man would not be sitting there with his rifle covering the wounded man. The latter now had a sudden fear lest his miserable existence should be terminated by some overt act on the part of his hidden mates. He began screaming for his companions not to sacrifice him, and in the next breath he cursed Beach for not taking to cover. Beach suddenly rolled behind a prostrate tree-trunk and worked along to one end of his shelter. Then, covering the wounded man again, he called out—

"Where did you leave your horses?"

"They're back on the ridge," groaned the wounded man.

"You fellows behind those rocks come out and take your friend away. You must also take the Wild Cat away. I haven't time to bury him. I'll move back and when I give the word step sharp. Keep together, for if any man strays to one side I'll shoot him."

One man stood erect. The other three followed his example. Beach crawled to the other end of the tree trunk and slipped under some spruce. Then his retreat became rapid.

"We'll come and git the Wild Cat first," the leader announced.

The four began advancing toward the fallen tree, moving abreast and quite close together until near the tree, when they leaped apart and began firing their revolvers at the spot where Beach had been hiding. The wounded man screamed:

"He ducked back into the woods! Spread out and git him, —— him!"

A shot from the spruce up the slope kicked the dirt into the wounded man's face and elicited a howl of terror.

"Take your dead man and clear out," warned Beach's voice.

The four men thrust their revolvers into their belts and halted to stare in astonishment at the quiet Wild Cat. They knew they would find him dead, but they could not get over their surprize. It had all ended so

differently from what had been planned behind the horse-hovel. Most amazing was the fact that the ruse had worked up to the crucial moment. The Wild Cat had had it all his own way down to the last decisive second.

They picked up the limp body, and two of them carried it down to the creek. The other two lugged the wounded man to the creek and were roundly cursed for their clumsiness. Then they sat down and smoked and waited while one of their number climbed up the ridge to bring the horses down by the roundabout ox-road.

Beach from his hiding-place watched and understood. The shadows were lengthening when the man finally appeared down the gulch with the six horses. The dead man was tied to his horse, and the wounded man was hoisted into the saddle. One of the men started toward the cabin, perhaps to loot it, perhaps to set it on fire; but the whine of a rifle-bullet sent him scampering back to his friends.

Still expecting some treachery, Beach trailed the little cavalcade down the gulch and into the ox-road. He followed them, the living, wounded and dead, nearly to the top of the divide and waited until they had passed from view. Even then he was not satisfied, but waited for nearly an hour, expecting that some of them would steal back.

Finally he returned to the cabin, his brain whirling with a chaos of thoughts. He wondered if it had just happened, or if he actually had beaten the Wild Cat on the draw. He tested his expertness in drawing a gun, and his trembling fingers made clumsy work of it. But he knew he must have shown proficiency when facing death. The Wild Cat had dropped his hand to his holster; then it had happened. But from the time the desperado started to pull a weapon until he lay in a heap, dead, Beach had no recollection of how it had happened. He could not even recall reaching for his own gun.

He stopped and picked up the scattered pages of the book. He observed how many were missing and worked with feverish haste to recover them all before the darkness came.

It was not until this task was completed and the sun was gone from the western wall that he took time to examine his state of mind concerning the coming night. Would the four men come back for him in the darkness, or would they first report to Virginia City so the wounded man might receive treatment?

At least two men would be necessary for conveying the dead and wounded to Alder Gulch. The other two would hesitate to attack him unless they had every advantage.

"Of course they'll take every advantage," he muttered. "Their breed never hankers for a fair fight."

He examined the cabin. It was stoutly built, and the door could be securely barred. It would be difficult for an assassin to work mischief through the small window. They would have sense enough to know that the cabin was a very hard nut to crack. They would wait to pick him off in the day-time. And yet he feared that they would return in the night, two turning back while two rode on to Virginia City to secure reenforcements.

"Two to come back and keep watch while the others fetch a crowd," he muttered. "That'll be the next caper they try."

HE MADE haste to cook his supper, and after he had eaten he took his blankets and made his bed under some spruce a short distance from the cabin. But this arrangement did not satisfy him. If they entered the gulch and lay low they would discover him and shoot him with the coming of the first light.

He returned to the cabin and hunted about until he found a bell which Holter had used on a pack-animal, and a coil of rope. Taking this to the corral, he fastened one end to a post about a foot from the ground, carried the other end across the rough road and secured it to a stump, first stringing it through the ring at the top of the bell. He walked against it gently, and the clamor of the bell satisfied him that no one could steal up the road in the night without sounding the alarm. Now he felt more at ease. If they came in the night it would be by the way of the road.

Returning to his blankets, he remained awake for several hours, his nerves still tingling and compelling him to live over the tragedy of the afternoon. Finally he fell asleep. The first morning light was showing along the top of the eastern ridge when he was aroused by the clanging of the bell. Leaping to his feet and snatching up his

hand guns, he raced behind the cabin and to the horse-hovel.

He heard some one exclaiming in a low voice as he reached the hovel. Thrusting his head around the end of the shelter, he aimed a gun and in a jerky voice commanded—

"Put up your hands!"

"They're up. What of it?" demanded a querulous voice.

Beach winked his eyes to make sure he was not being deceived, but there was one man only in the road. He was considerably above average height. He was staring around to locate the owner of the voice, his long arms held straight above his head.

"Well, they're still up. What next?"

And now the voice was even and drawling.

"Come up here to the shed where I can look you over."

The man promptly obeyed, remarking:

"Ringing bells and holding folks up! All dod-rotted foolishness."

"Halt!" snapped Beach.

The man's voice and bearing puzzled him. He quit the shelter of the shed and stood before his prisoner. The newcomer was clad in buckskin and had a long yellowish, white beard. On his shock of white hair were the tattered fragments of a hat.

"Who are you?" asked Beach.

"I'm 'Old Mis'ry.' Who'n —— be you, so pert with your bell-fixings and your gun ways?"

"You're a mountain-man?"

"I reckon. My arms are gitting tired. My rifle's where I dropped it when I hit the bell. And I've got only a knife in my belt. If I turn my back to you can't I drop my arms? What's your notion anyway?"

"Put them down. You're not the fellow I was looking for," said Beach as he lowered his own weapon. "I took you for a road-agent. Six of them paid me a visit yesterday. I killed one and wounded another. Been expecting them back. My name's Beach Content. Caretaker for this mill property. If you're a mountain-man you ought to know Ned Williamson. He's a friend of mine."

"—— and eggs! Ned Williamson? Course I know him. S'pose you squat and powwow to me about this fuss you had. I ain't been held up before since I was in St. Looey. I'm just meandering back from a ride up Crow Creek way. Started with a bunch of old-timers and struck a side-trail that led me back down this way. T'others went on north. Felt empty under my belt and reckoned to scare up some grub in your cabin. Didn't know any one was at home.

"Then that danged bell begun! Hope it ain't scared —— outer my hoss. Left him down the road a bit. He don't mind shooting and war-hooting, but bells might strike him as being different."

He whistled sharply, and out of the shadows came a rawboned horse.

"There's the old cuss now. He's pretty well tuckered out. I'll strip him, and then we'll powwow."

The saddle was soon off the tired animal, and the mountain-man was ready for a talk.

"You come into the cabin and we'll talk while I cook something to eat. I slept out under the trees last night," said Beach.

"Mighty good place when you don't want to git cornered," endorsed the mountain man. "Always want enough room to swing my rifle as a club."

He picked up his rifle, an old Hawkins, descendant of the older Kentucky gun, and trailed along at Beach's heels.

Beach felt a mighty uplift of spirit. He believed that he had found a friend where he had expected to face an assassin. He built a fire and began preparing the breakfast, and as he worked he told Old Misery all his troubles. The mountain-man made no comments while the eager speech was pouring forth, but his long beard trembled and jerked as he heard how Baldy had died. He rose from the three-cornered stool and at once resumed his seat when the narrative reached the killing of the Wild Cat.

When Beach finished and filled a plate with beans and bacon the old man smote his skinny hands together and exclaimed:

"By gorry! I reckoned you'd had a war-dream and was yarning. I'm beginning to think you did go through with everything you've said."

With that he fell to eating, and Beach said nothing more until the keen appetite was satisfied.

Old Misery, leaning back in huge content and filling a black pipe, nursed his rifle between his knees and with a wide grin remarked: "Younker, you're all ——. Just about that. I know the breed of that Wild Cat. I seen him in Virginny City. Didn't know the one called Baldy, but I 'low he needed to be wiped out. The Injun trail I

was following and lost along of darkness was made by a small scouting party, so there ain't no rush to chase after it. Me 'n' 'Solid Comfort'—" and he patted his rifle to indicate he was referring to it—"are going to make camp right here. Reckon the vermin will be s'prized if they come back to try some new rinktum and find they've stubbed their toes ag'in' Old Mis'ry. There'd be a bounty on their hair if it wa'n't so mangy."

"I'll be glad of your company, but you mustn't get into any trouble on my account," said Beach earnestly.

Old Misery's mouth became cavernous as he gaped over this speech. Then he made queer noises in his throat as he managed to say:

"I see you mean well by the old man. If any trouble drifts down in here I prob'ly'll have time to duck and run. No trouble. No, no."

"With that understanding I'll be glad to have you stay," stiffly said Beach. "You see this is my pack of trouble, and I must carry it without any help. But I'm free to say it's been sort of lonely at times and grows sort of ticklish now the gang knows where I am."

"You can bank on having my comp'ny so long as the beans and bacon hold out and times don't git too ticklish. Good Lordy! Every crick in the Rockies knows I've had my share of trouble already."

"Of course you have. More than your share," agreed Beach. "But you shan't run into any trouble on account of me. I'll see you have a chance to clear out before it begins."

"Thanky, younker; thanky kindly."

"And it would help me just as much as anything you can do if you'd ride on to Virginia City and tell John Beidler all I've told you," suggested Beach, thinking to open a graceful avenue of escape for the old man.

"No, no. If I done that I'd prob'ly run into some of the lawless critters, and they'd take my pipe and terbaccer away from me. I'll feel safer down in this hole then up on the divide."

TO BE CONTINUED.

The Wreck of the Brig Commerce

by R. N. Wall

Author of "The Seven Diamond Rings," "The Passing of Gorilla George," etc.

ON THE sixth day of May, in the year 1815, the brig *Commerce*, with a small cargo and brick in ballast, cleared from Saybrook, Connecticut, for New Orleans. The voyage was from the beginning unfortunate. East of the Florida coast the ship struck upon Carysfort Reef and was floated off only by desperate efforts.

At New Orleans her cargo of New England wares was discharged and the brig loaded anew with flour and tobacco. Thence she sailed for Gibraltar which was reached after a long and stormy passage. In that

harbor another untoward event occurred—the captain, on a visit to another ship, was upset at night in his boat. Captain and crew, however, after some floundering in the water, all succeeded in clambering upon the upturned craft, and, after a long vigil, were rescued.

The *Commerce* exchanged her flour and tobacco at Gibraltar for brandy and wine and on August 23rd sailed for the Cape Verde Islands where she was to complete her cargo with salt.

The ship was in charge of Captain James Riley, a commander of experience and ability, with George Williams as first and Aaron Savage as second mate. American ships, in those days, were manned by American sailors, generally of British extraction, as the roster of able seamen indicates—William Porter, Thomas Burns, John Hogan, James Clarke, James Barrett and Archibald Robbins. The *Commerce* carried also a cabin-boy, Horace Savage; Richard Delisle, a negro cook; and at Gibraltar they took on an elderly Italian, Antonio Michel, who was to work his passage to the United States.

From Gibraltar to Cape Verde the usual course was to stand out to the Madeiras and then run south, but Captain Riley decided to shorten the voyage by sailing directly south between the Canary Islands and the African coast. The nautical instruments of the times were few and crude; mariners depended chiefly upon dead reckoning; and, the weather becoming thick and foggy, without seeing them, or knowing that they had done so, they passed the Canaries.

Three days out the mates noted that the color of the water seemed to indicate the nearness of land, but Captain Riley decided that this appearance was due to the murky weather. They bore on before a brisk wind, all sails set, making some ten knots an hour, until, at ten o'clock at night, on the 28th of August, they were wrecked on the African coast near Cape Bajador.

A landsman, Robbins says in his narrative, can form no adequate conception of the appalling horrors of sudden shipwreck. When it is foreseen, yet can not be avoided, the mind is in some degree steeled to encounter disaster; but when catastrophe comes abruptly to those in apparent security, it is doubly terrible.

The *Commerce*, without the slightest warning, struck with such violence as to throw prostrate those who were on deck and to tumble the others from their bunks. Captain Riley, six feet and two hundred pounds of Yankee muscle and manhood, rushed to the deck; the roar of his voice rose above the thunder of the surf. The mates seconded him ably; all hands sprang to the ropes; they let go the sheet anchor, clewed down the sails and did everything that experience and ingenuity could suggest to get the brig off the rocks. It was useless. The sea broke tremendously over the starboard quarter and it seemed every moment that the ship must go to pieces.

The horror was heightened by the utter darkness, little lessened by the flare of a few old-fashioned lanterns in the rigging, but the crew were American seamen, inured to danger and untouched by panic. When they found they could not move the ship, boats were prepared, small casks filled with water from the tanks and stores broken out. By midnight the vessel was filling fast, but the clouds had lifted somewhat, and the faint line of the beach could be discerned.

Captain Riley decided to try to get a line to the shore. He had the seamen cut away a portion of the larboard bulwark so that they could more easily launch a boat. With William Porter, he himself entered the smaller of the two that the *Commerce* carried and was lowered to the sea. The breakers spun the boat about like a chip and promptly swamped it, but the beach was so close that both men were cast upon the shore, battered and breathless, but alive, and with the bight of the rope that he had carried from the ship still around Riley's waist. This they fastened to a rock.

The sailors on board then lowered the long-boat, which was hauled under the port bow and filled with provisions and water-casks. Robbins and Barrett descended into it and endeavored, by means of the line running from the ship to the beach, to pull the boat ashore. But the long-boat, too, was overset and men and stores thrown into the sea. Through the smother of surf the two seamen reached the shore, and with the help of Captain Riley and Porter salvaged some of the provisions.

The ship's company was now divided. Though both boats had come ashore they dared not again trust them to the waves; the oars, besides, were lost, and the long-boat much shattered. The sailors who

remained on the ship now heaved over chests, planks, and such articles as would float, while those ashore, wading out into the breakers, secured what they could.

So passed the hours until daylight broke, when the brig was seen to be filled with water and in immiment danger of breaking up. It was high tide; the ship lay some thirty yards from the shore; a single rope ran from her to the beach through surf which crashed and roared in a manner to dismay the stoutest heart, yet this rope offered the only avenue of escape.

Captain Riley, by signals, for even his stentorian voice would not carry to the ship, motioned the men to leave the wreck and come in along the hawser. The four men who had already landed waded out as far along the rope as they could stand and keep their feet.

Hogan was the first to attempt the perilous passage. His limbs and body in the sea, the waves breaking over his head, he tried to propel himself hand over hand along the hawser. Before he could get far his strength failed, he lost his hold and was tumbled headlong by the waves. Fortunately they bore him within reach of Riley, who, by virtue of his height, strength and position, had taken the weather place on the rope. Savage, the second mate, followed Hogan, and then the others, one by one, including Delisle, the negro cook, who, out of all apparent accordance with nautical traditions, seems to have been the last man to leave the ship.

At last the crew found themselves united in temporary safety, for which they knelt and gave thanks, not yet realizing that the next danger to confront them would be as merciless as the ocean from which they had escaped.

They rose and looked about them. For nearly a mile the beach was littered with fragments of cargo and broken spars. Part of the men went to work to repair the long-boat; others gathered up planks that had drifted in and with the boat-sails, began the erection of a shelter; the remainder collected the provisions and water-casks that had come through the surf.

THE sun had now risen over the sand-dunes behind them, and they suddenly discovered, blackly silhouetted against the morning light, the figure of an Arab. The sailors made signs of encouragement, but he would neither draw nearer nor let them approach, for as they went toward him, he disappeared behind the dunes.

In a little time he returned with two old women and some children. The man himself was of an aspect at once mean and fearful, but as for his female companions, Robbins says, more horrible visages never were presented to astonished and agitated men. With red and flashing eyes, with wide and slavering mouths filled with projecting tushes, their appearance was ferocious and terrible. The party now displayed an insolent boldness; they fell upon the wreckage which the sailors allowed them to plunder without interference until they attempted to seize the food and water which had been collected. This the seamen resisted, and the party retreated to the sand-hills.

The leader soon emerged armed and at the head of a considerable band of Arabs. Spear in hand, he approached angrily, mouthing an ugly jargon, his tribesmen at his back, and, behind them, appeared still further reinforcements of natives, who, mounted upon camels, threaded their way between the dunes to the beach.

Before this overwhelming force the sailors retreated to the long-boat. Riley brought up the rear, defending himself with a bit of spar against the Arab spears. Though the surf still ran high and the boat was not yet fully repaired, they tumbled aboard, and, using bits of plank for oars, regained the wreck.

On the deck of the broken ship they held a melancholy consultation. Should they go ashore and by surrender to the Arabs accept the chances of slavery or should they, in their ill-equipped and shattered boat entrust their lives to the sea?

A decade earlier Decatur had severely punished the Algerine pirates, and Preble had brought the defenses of Tripoli crashing about the astounded ears of the bey, but even if the rulers of the Barbary States had been taught to let American ships alone, the wild tribes of the interior knew little of treaties and cared less. The luckless captive who fell into their hands was sure of enslavement at the hands of merciless task-masters, or, at the best, to be held for ransom, as has happened to travelers in Morocco even in our day. No fate was more dreaded by the mariners of that time than

shipwreck upon the desert coast of North Africa.

The seamen pondered. They were familiar with the tales of captivity that acquaintances and friends had suffered; and they knew the perils of a voyage in an open boat. Before them the Arabs waited hungrily; about them raged the inhospitable sea. They did not, however, require long to decide—it was in their blood, a part of their heritage, to take the desperate chance rather than to submit tamely.

They hauled the long-boat as close aboard as possible, set to repair it, and waited for the sea to go down, which the falling of the wind indicated it would do.

The breakers subsided into long swells and nearly at sunset they started, after having again united in prayer. Most of their provisions had been thrown overboard and lost or captured, but they found a live pig, some pieces of pork, a few pounds of figs, about four gallons of water and a dozen bottles of wine. To these they added the foretopmast staysail, some articles of clothing, and the colors of the brig.

Darkness approached, Cape Bajador was under their lee, and with nightfall, the wind, which was partly ahead, freshened. With difficulty they kept off the rocks, and it was not until the night of rowing and bailing had passed that they found themselves to the leeward of the fatal cape. Then another problem confronted them: Should they follow the coast and make for the mouth of the Senegal, where there was a European settlement, or stand out for the Canaries? They had neither compass, chart, nor quadrant, these having been lost from the wreck. They feared that if they ran down the coast they might pass the Senegal without seeing it, in which case they would have no hopes; on the other hand, should they stand out and fail to make the Canary Islands they would still be in the track of commerce. This decided them to take the latter course.

For three days they stood outward by means of oar and sail. They put themselves upon a daily allowance per man of a bottle of water, a half-bottle of wine, two figs and a small piece of pork. The pig which began to get thin was killed and divided to the last scrap. By day they sweltered beneath a vertical sun; at night the wind and sea would rise so that the boat was almost swamped. The rocking of the waves drew the nails of the unseaworthy craft and it took desperate work with hats and buckets to keep it afloat.

"Riley and Savage alternately led us in prayer," Robbins states, "which had considerable effect in allaying our fears and encouraging our dying hopes, but, as the days passed and no land appeared, despair settled upon us and fortitude deserted our hearts."

On the 2nd of September they decided that it was hopeless to try to find the Canaries. The food was low, the water almost gone, while their thirst increased intolerably under the scorching sun. The wind favored a change of course, so they turned back toward the continent, and on the morning of the fifth, they discovered on their lee the mainland of Africa, barren, forbidding and bounded by perpendicular rocks. They coasted along until they found a small sandy beach, and with almost the last remains of their strength they laid to their oars and steered for it, and a mountainous comber carried them in. This, they afterward learned, was between Cape Barbas and the River St. Cyprian, some two hundred miles south of the point at which the *Commerce* had gone ashore.

The waves had spewed them forth; there was nothing for it but to trust to land. Riley and Savage went to seek a path up the cliffs, but they found none; meanwhile the others dug uselessly for water in the sand. They divided the last bottle of wine, ate a little pork, curled themselves up and sought the surcease of sleep.

In the morning, having decided to abandon their boat, they discarded everything except the clothes in which they stood and the little pork and water that remained. Standing in a circle, their heads bared, they took an oath to stay together as long as possible and to assist each other in every way. Then they started out along the coast, hoping to find food and water, hoping to discover a path up the cliffs, hoping to espy a sail, but having little expectation of the fulfillment of any of these hopes.

Sometimes they found a stretch of beach on which they could walk easily, often they had to clamber over projecting rocks, occasionally they were forced out into the surf. A few mussels afforded them some nourishment, but these were salty and increased their thirst.

Not until they had traveled for two days

did they discover a cleft which permitted them to make their way up the rocks. They ascended upon hands and knees, wearily dragging their stiff, bruised bodies to find, when they reached the top of the precipice, a boundless plain of sterile sand and flinty stones, destitute alike of vegetation or water.

They felt they could bear no more. Vaguely they gazed out upon the desert; rough and hardened men, they were dismayed and weakened to the verge of tears, and they cast themselves upon the ground in despair.

Then Hogan rose painfully to his feet and said—

"What's the use of lying down to die while we can stand and walk?"

They picked themselves up and moved on along the coast. The surf thundered upon the iron rocks a dizzying distance below; above burned the pitiless sun; before them stretched a lifeless and desolate waste. Now and then they found a wild dry plant like a parsnip that they dug from the baked earth and ate, but these gave little nourishment and less satisfaction, for their mouths were so dry that the roots tasted like cotton and their tongues were so swollen they could hardly swallow.

At dusk they discovered the glow of a fire ahead. They halted, to peer at it with mingled joy and apprehension, for while it indicated the presence of human beings from whom food and water might be procured, it might also mean that they would be forced to barter their freedom for these necessities of life. They decided to sleep and await the morning.

AT SUNRISE on September 8th they awoke, and, as they knelt upon the sand on which they had slept, Mr. Savage led them in prayer. Their water was entirely gone; of their pork but a few slices remained. Needs must that they go forward, and they made their way toward the thin smoke of the desert encampment.

They walked on until they could see tents; then a herd of camels; and at last a group of natives whom they took to be seventy or eighty in number. As soon as the Arabs perceived the limping seamen, seven or eight of them came upon a run, with simitars drawn, rags flapping, their faces contorted with horrid joy. Resistance or even parley was useless; the feeble and unarmed sailors could only hold out their hands in token of submission and wait.

The Arabs sheathed their simitars, but they let loose upon the unlucky sailors the women, ten times more ferocious than the men, who had streamed out from the caravan. These harpies rushed upon the seamen, stripped them of their clothes and then all began to quarrel over the possession of their persons. In the struggle that followed the sailors were almost dismembered; each Arab, grasping arm or shoulder, contended that the prize was his. Meanwhile the milling mass whirled and eddied along to the well at which the caravan had halted. The sight of water maddened the sailors and, breaking from their captors they plunged their heads into the green, brackish, but life-giving water.

After the excitement had somewhat subsided, the quarrels composed, and the question of ownership settled, the famished seamen were given a very little food and preparations were made to leave the oasis. It was the last time that all of the sailors were to be together, for the Arabs broke up into little parties and with each went the captives they had made.

Robbins, whose experiences are typical of what his fellows suffered, was led off by a gaunt and rawboned native named Ganus, and placed astride a particularly sharp-backed and lumpy camel, upon which he found it almost impossible to keep his seat. The animal was driven ahead at full trot; the sun beat down upon Robbins' naked blistering back; the dust arose to choke and blind him, and the poor fellow wondered why he had not let himself drown. Williams and Barrett remained with him until afternoon, when their masters carried them off in another direction.

After some hours of this torture he reached the tents of Ganus, which were pitched in a small valley of which the sandy soil was baked to a crust and studded like a pudding with sharp stones. His master's wife and children appeared much pleased with what papa had brought home and jabbered together merrily; evidently it was a mark of wealth and distinction to keep a Christian slave. Robbins was given for clothing a strip of old blanket which he fastened with thorns around his middle, and sent out to gather bushes for firewood. For food he was allowed a little milk mixed with water, which he had to drink from his

hat that the Arab vessels might not be contaminated by the lips of an infidel dog.

The next day Ganus took Robbins about five miles on foot to a considerable encampment where he found Captain Riley, Clarke, Burns and the boy Horace. While they sadly exchanged experiences, the Arabs held a council. Captain Riley tried to show the tribesman, by counting stones, how many dollars of ransom they could secure by taking his crew to Morocco, but nothing was settled, and in a little while Robbin's master carried him back to his tents.

Robbins feared that he had seen his shipmates for the last time, and, in his own words, "He converted his eyes into pumps and in this way was partially relieved of the bilge-water of sorrow that was about to sink his shattered vessel forever."

THIS was on the 9th of September, 1815, and, for nearly two years, Robbins wandered over the desert of Sahara the slave and sport of the nomad tribes. Their wanderings seemed more or less aimless. At first, in seaman-like fashion, Robbins managed to deduce the latitude from the length, angle and direction of the shadows, and he kept a calendar by means of knots in a piece of string. As the weary days succeeded, one like unto another, it seemed useless to keep track of them; and, as they shifted back and forth across the same sterile desert, he lost interest in his exact whereabouts.

The country consisted either of sand, which, disturbed by the wind, filled eyes, ears and nostrils so that one could neither see, smell nor taste; or barren earth, baked like cement, upon which neither man nor beast nor insect could long exist. The journeys were from well to well at which they found water—green from stagnation, reddish with camel's dung, rotten and stinking—but it was drink this or die.

By day Robbins scorched and blistered beneath a blazing sun; at night, after he had procured bushes and camel-dung for the camp-fire, he would be driven off to sleep shivering upon the dew-dampened sand, from which he would awake stiff with cold.

Robbins was constantly famished with hunger and parched by thirst. The comforts of his captors were scanty enough and to him they vouchsafed barely the necessities of existence. He dug up and swallowed every edible root he could find. He searched through thorn-bushes for snails, tearing the flesh from his naked arms to capture them; he gnawed old camel-bones which had first been scraped by the Arabs and then by their dogs. The Biblical locusts, but without any honey; rawhide rope; the uncleaned entrails of camels, for water was too precious to use for washing; and other matters best left unspecified all helped to keep a spark of life within him.

The Arabs were callous enough toward his suffering, but they themselves fared little better. They lived chiefly on camel's milk and meat, and, when they slaughtered an animal, retired to some private place that their neighbors might not force themselves upon the feast.

One of Robbin's masters, the most affluent, had one wife, one son, one daughter, sixty-eight camels and several relatives, including a teacher. This wise man strove mightily to convert Robbins, offering him wealth, wives and power upon earth and eternal felicity in paradise, but Robbins felt that if Mahomedanism could offer no more in this world than the richest of his masters enjoyed, and if paradise was in proportion, he had no reason to be tempted.

His privations reduced him almost to a skeleton. The irritation of his blanket-strip and his nights upon the hard ground wore the skin from his hips so that his very bones protruded. His Arab master became alarmed and, fearful that he might lose him, made him slightly more comfortable and tried to fatten him with milk. For a cloak he was given a square piece of the colors of the brig.

"The first time, doubtless," Robbins says, "that the American flag was raised on the desert of Sahara. Alas! It was more a corporeal than a spiritual protector!"

From time to time Robbins met some of his shipmates as well as seamen from other wrecked vessels. Not less than six American ships were lost upon the coast between 1800 and 1815, to say nothing of the vessels of other nations.

Robbins passed from one master to another until he finally fell into the hands of a trader who made it his business to ransom slaves. He was taken to Mogadore and released in April, 1817, arriving there in an old shirt for all apparel, with his hair and beard grown in every direction. For nearly two years he had heard nothing but Arabic spoken and at first he found it hard to frame

the sentences of English speech. Mr. Willshire, the British consul, furnished him with proper clothing; the services of a barber were secured; and from Mogadore Robbins was sent home by way of Tangier and Gibraltar, arriving in the United States a little more than three years after the beginning of the ill-fated voyage.

Porter was ransomed in October, 1816; Captain Riley recovered his liberty about the same time. When he was released at Tangier his giant frame had shrunken so that he weighed but ninety pounds. Savage, the brave and reverent mate, and the seaman James Clarke also gained their freedom; but Williams, the first mate; Burns, Barrett; Dick, the negro cook; the boy Horace; Antonio, the elderly Italian, and the dauntless Hogan, who would not lie down to die while he could stand and walk, were never heard from again. They either succumbed to indescribable privations, or were murdered by cruel masters, and the dust of their bones is mingled with the desert sands.

An Unpleasant Episode

by

Clements Ripley

THE third day of the fifth month, being sacred to the goddess Tu Hen, is auspicious for the worship of the dead. Therefore Ah Kow, waking at dawn, snapped his fingers to keep off such evil spirits as may lay hold on a man when the soul is but half-returned to the body and busied himself with his preparations. These were of some length, including the packing of a basket with roast pork, a dried duck and the inevitable gilt paper money.

When all was at last in readiness he took the basket over his arm and shuffled out into the sun-washed California morning in the valley of the Sacramento, pausing to inspect his rows of crisp lettuce and occasionally stopping with a guttural cluck to pick off a cutworm or give one of the larger heads a contented pat.

Ah Kow felt that he had reason to be contented. He was at peace with the world; his health was far better than his sixty-five years had reason to expect, and his little farm was blessed by the spirit of his father, who had been a market-gardener before him and knew what was needed. He reflected that it was well to pay the proper observances at the tombs of one's ancestors. They were inclined to reciprocate.

Accompanied by such pious thoughts, backed and interspersed with quotations from the venerable Lao Tze, he hurried along, his felt shoes padding swiftly over the fragrant pine needles. As he neared his destination he stopped to lift the cover of his basket to make sure that nothing had been forgotten, gave vent to a little chuckle of pure kindliness at the thought of the treat in store for the venerable dead and trotted forward.

Suddenly the chuckle died in his throat. He stopped short, eyes wide with horror.

Like a blow in the pit of the stomach came the realization that the grave, his father's grave, which his hands had shaped

with such loving care and where for thirty years he had never failed to place the prescribed offerings, was gone.

In its place stood a slab shanty, its raw, new planks glaring in the sun. Ah Kow stared uncomprehending, until it dawned on his horrified mind that the venerable bones must lie directly under its floor.

However, the dead do not like to be kept waiting, and even in the face of this desecration Ah Kow approached. At the doorstep he stooped with quick patting hands to accomplish the proper Taoist invocation. Then, taking the roast pork from his basket, he laid it on the ground, followed by the dried duck. In front of these, with careful pats and shapings, he built up a little mound of colored rice. Next came a tiny fire of chips of aromatic sandalwood, and as the wisp of smoke arose he laid on the gilt paper money.

The little smoke rose straight through the morning air, showing that beyond a doubt his humble gifts were acceptable to the dead. Ah Kow tipped back on his heels and was about to congratulate himself on the prospect of a paternal blessing when a sudden swirl and eddy in the little smoke plume gave him pause.

To Ah Kow it could mean only one thing. The venerable bones were not resting in peace.

One less firmly grounded in the lore of signs and portents would doubtless have ascribed the disturbance to the sudden opening of the door of the shanty, directly in front of which Ah Kow had made his fire.

It was a greasy, draggled individual who stood swaying unsteadily on the threshold, his face covered with a week's growth of beard, out of which his narrow bloodshot eyes stared uncomprehending. Ah Kow, scrambling hastily to his feet, recognized him as "Bud," the hard-faced, thin-lipped eldest brother of the Lukens trio.

They were a disreputable crew, the Lukens boys, a scourge to the community, living by petty thefts and occasional small blackmail. No one cared to molest them, for they had the reputation of being hard customers to handle. On the few occasions when their depredations had been too serious to be overlooked and legal measures had been taken against them, the instigator had found that mysterious maladies had developed among his stock or that his barn had burned to the ground while he was away from home. Rather than risk such calamities the farmers of the neighborhood paid a petty but annoying tribute in stolen poultry and raided clothes-lines and held their peace.

No one knew this better than Ah Kow, who now, perforce, twisted his wrinkled face into an ingratiating smile and with placating hands palms upward began an explanation.

Lukens cut him short with a growl.

"Get to —— off this place," he ordered.

"This b'long my place," ventured Ah Kow timidly. "B'long my place long time. Pay fifty dolleh."

"Belong ——. Your title's no good. Title no got; *sabe?*"

"Got papeh say b'long my place," persisted Ah Kow doubtfully. "You got papeh? Papeh say b'long my place."

"Oh, it does, does it?" said Lukens, his thin lips lifting in a sneer. "Well, listen here, chink. I got a wallop in the jaw for you that says it belongs my place.

"What the ——'s that stuff?" he broke off, pointing to the little offerings in front of the door.

Ah Kow hastened to explain.

"My fatheh he die," he began. "He b'long bottomside this place. Makee loast po'k, makee duck, makee lice topside this place. By 'n' by my fatheh catchee all thing. What you think that?" he concluded with a placating smile.

Lukens scowled.

"This here's no Chinee bone-yard," he asserted.

In the face of Ah Kow's horrified protest he thrust forward a hob-nailed boot, scattered the pitiful offerings and stamped out the tiny fire.

There are some things which are not to be borne even by as patient a nature as that of old Ah Kow. The Chinaman is thoroughly accustomed to foreign intrusion and interference in his affairs and treats them alike with indifferent resignation, but the desecration of a grave is a different matter. China is strewn with the bones of strangers who did not realize this.

Trembling with horror, the old man stepped forward to protest, but before he could utter a word there was a crash and a yell of rage from inside the shanty. A blue-overalled figure hurtled through the door and landed in a grotesque sprawl at Ah Kow's feet. Almost simultaneously the

window framed the red, beefy face of Joe, the second of the Lukens brothers, who instantly addressed himself to the man on the ground in a stream of crackling profanity.

The latter sat up and stared dazedly. Ah Kow, chattering with amazed terror, recognized him as Lafe, the youngest of the trio.

Meanwhile Bud Lukens' small eyes gazed on this domestic drama with a mild interest. He spat leisurely and listened with critical approval while Joe divested himself of some particularly virulent obscenity.

"What'd he do?" he drawled as his brother came to a breathless period.

The face in the window seemed to swell visibly and became even redder than before.

"Do?" shrieked Joe. "Why, the cock-eyed hop-head stole our likker; that's what he done. For two cents I'd rip the guts out of him, the dirty, lousy, thieving bum."

Bud Lukens's face underwent a swift change. One corner of his thin, hard mouth lifted in a snarl.

"I'll learn him," he remarked briefly.

Stepping over to the boy on the ground, he dealt him a terrific kick in the stomach.

Lafe's young face knotted with a spasm of pain. He made a futile effort to get to his feet. His brother watched him coolly for perhaps five seconds and then delivered another kick. The boy sank back white and limp.

"That's the stuff," shrieked Joe from the window. "Hand him another."

"Don't need no more," asserted Bud, watching the white face critically. "That'll learn him."

For the moment he had forgotten Ah Kow. By the time he remembered and turned to deal with him there was no trace of the old Chinaman. The second kick had broken the spell of terror which seemed to root him to the spot, and the old man ran as he had not run in years.

JUDGE BALLARD was a kindly and a patient soul. For more than an hour he listened to Ah Kow's recital, couched in the most incomprehensible pidgin and endlessly repeated in its more striking details. At the end he would accept no fee.

"What I'm telling you is fact, not law," he explained. "You've got a case in law. You've got a clear enough title and over thirty years undisturbed possession.

"What I'm getting at is this. The Lukens boys are bad medicine, the worst kind. There's hardly a man around here would want to sit on a jury and decide against them. Besides, you know it's pretty hard to get a jury in this part of the country to decide a land case in favor of a Chinaman.

"I'm sorry," he added kindly, touched by the dumb misery in the old man's eyes. "I'd help you if I could. But if I was you I'd just forget it. The land don't really amount to much anyway."

Ah Kow rose impassively, paid the judge a courteous compliment in droned Chinese, made his ceremonial bow and was gone.

The white man's way, the law, had failed. There seemed to be nothing for Ah Kow but to fall back on the age-old methods of the Orient.

A white man in like case would probably have at least considered a plan to dispossess the intruder at the point of a pistol. Ah Kow, the product of a long line of non-resistant philosophers, never thought of such a thing for an instant. A city Chinaman, a merchant, might well have entertained the idea of employing hatchet-men. This again never crossed the mind of the old market-gardener.

Neither, on the other hand, did he give way to despair. As a last resource there are always the gods, many and malignant and extremely useful to those who know how to invoke their aid. Where they fail nothing is left but the calm of resignation. But they seldom fail.

To the temple, then, Ah Kow betook himself, duly rehearsing in his mind the four and twenty examples of filial piety. To select the proper joss for his purpose was the work of an instant to so devout a worshiper.

Having performed the prescribed reverences and droned the necessary invocation, he proceeded to lay upon the Lukens family the curse of the Thousand and One Malignant Devils. This is an excellent curse and will do wonders if properly applied. Squatting on his heels before the shrine of the smoke-blackened joss, Ah Kow laid it on to the last letter. Huan Kik, the fat priest, could not have bettered it himself.

The gods, however, help those who help themselves, and Ah Kow, being of a practical nature, realized that a curse, while an excellent thing in itself, is infinitely more

potent if given material assistance. Ah Kow, casting about him for inspiration, let his eyes wander over the painted screen behind the joss.

It was an old screen, blackened with the smoke of incense, but the pictures, carefully drawn by some long-dead artist in the age-old conventions, were still clear. Ah Kow knew the story it depicted, a story with which he had been familiar since he could talk, as an American child is familiar with a story from "Mother Goose."

Idly now he traced it out; how the Bodhisavatta was once incarnated in the form of a mouse, and how three wicked cats hunted the mouse and finally drove it into a corner. There, after the manner of cats, being totally unable to agree on a division of the spoils, they fell to quarreling over the mouse and fought tooth and nail until all were killed. Thereupon the virtuous mouse, rendering due observances to the gods, took the skins to line its nest.

Almost unconsciously Ah Kow's mind worked out the story until it came to the scene where the quarrel started. Then, with a quick indrawing of breath, he sat bolt upright and stared, for out of the painted silk snarled the face of Bud Lukens as he had seen him that morning.

It was not a likeness that would, perhaps, have struck the casual observer, but to Ah Kow, who had seen the man that morning as he stood over his helpless brother waiting to deliver the final kick, the narrowed eyes, hard, thin mouth and bared teeth of the largest of the cats were unmistakable.

Slowly the old man's own eyes grew rounder and then almost disappeared as his wrinkled face creased into a grin. It was not a pleasant grin, that facial contortion, but it seemed to afford him an outlet for much inward satisfaction.

The grin was still on his face when, an hour later, he knocked with a peculiar emphasis at a certain door in the Chinese quarter and was admitted to the inner room of the gambling-house of Sun Chang, who, besides being a man of substance, was in some obscure Oriental fashion a relative of Ah Kow.

What was even more to the point, Sun Chang was the owner and sole proprietor of the Bird On The Nest Lotteries, an institution which kept most of the Chinese of the neighborhood and not a few of the whites in a constant state of expectant poverty.

Such a power as Sun Chang was not to be approached without due ceremony. After innumerable bows and compliments tea was set out, as yet untasted. In due time, however, Ah Kow told his tale, from the desecration of the grave to the miraculous recognition of Bud Lukens in the face of the wicked cat. With due emphasis on the part already played by the gods, Ah Kow at length preferred his request.

Sun Chang listened gravely and remained an instant in thought.

"It is well to honor the tombs of the venerable ancestors," he announced at length. "What you ask me to do concerns my face, my honor as a merchant. So far as my poor power can aid your exalted purpose it is freely given you. Please to remember that my miserable face is in your honorable hands."

With these words he raised his cup of tea ceremonially. It was the signal that the interview was at an end. Ah Kow expressed his thanks, bowed low and was gone, leaving Sun Chang to sip his tea and occasionally shake his massive shoulders in a silent chuckle. As he had said, his business reputation was in Ah Kow's wrinkled hands, but he felt it to be as safe there as in his own.

SIX days passed, and on the seventh word went forth, no one knew how, that Ah Kow had won the grand prize in the Bird On The Nest Lotteries. The grand prize carried seven thousand dollars, and Chinatown thrilled accordingly. True, no one knew just where the rumor had started, as the drawings would not be announced officially for two days more. Perhaps there was a leak in Sun Chang's organization. The great man himself was noncommittal. At any rate Chinatown devoutly believed that Ah Kow held the lucky ticket.

No less than eight speculators strained every nerve to reach the old man and buy his ticket before he himself should hear the news. They found him seated cross-legged on the floor of his little house, his one-stringed Chinese fiddle in his lap, playing the "Song of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Brook." He smiled a polite if somewhat ironical smile and refused to sell.

The same smile adorned his face the night

before the drawings as he wrapped his tattered quilt about him and lay down to sleep.

But sleep would not come. The smile faded as he lay staring into the dark, and in its place there gradually came a strained expression, a tense, listening look. He raised himself on his elbow and peered toward the window, where faint streaks of gray heralded the dawn.

At length he sank back, and almost as he did so the gravel beneath the window cried out and there was a heavy knock at the door.

"Who come?" gasped Ah Kow.

"Never you mind, chink. You open that door."

The voice was that of Bud Lukens, and Ah Kow would have known it among a thousand.

"What you want?" quavered the old Chinaman.

"I want you to open that door and show some speed about it."

Ah Kow scrambled to his feet.

"All lite, all lite," he chattered. "I come."

Trembling, he pattered over to the door and threw it open. The three Lukens brothers swaggered in, Lafe, the youngest, slamming it behind him.

"Strike a light," ordered Bud, and when this was done, "Where's that lottery ticket?"

"No got," stammered Ah Kow, retreating to the farther wall.

"The —— you ain't got it. No argument, chink. Come across with it."

"No got," repeated the old man stubbornly.

Lukens made one spring across the room, gripped Ah Kow by the throat and shook him like a rag.

"Come across," he reiterated as he flung the frail old body to the floor.

Ah Kow lay in a heap where he had fallen.

"Get up," boomed Joe, advancing threateningly across the room. "Get up and get that ticket."

Slowly Ah Kow rose to his feet, bruised, shaken and cowed. Painfully he made his way to a corner shelf, where stood a tobacco jar. Sorrowfully he drew forth a piece of pink paper, covered with Chinese script.

"That's the stuff," exulted Bud. "Now, look here, chink. We ain't stealin' this from you; get that? We're goin' to buy it fair and square. Here's five dollars, just what you paid for it."

Digging into his pocket, he produced a greasy five dollar bill, which he laid on the table.

"What the ——'s the idea," cut in the youngest Lukens, "wastin' good money that way? Give him a clout in the jaw for it and let's go."

Joe turned on him savagely.

"Shut your fool face, Lafe," he bellowed. "Who's runnin' this? For two cents I'd slap you through the wall."

Lafe subsided sullenly, and Bud drew from his pocket a stub of indelible pencil and a scrap of paper.

"This here's a receipt," he explained, his thin lips twisted in an ironical grin. "All you got to do now is to sign it, Chink. Hurry up," he added, thrusting it at Ah Kow.

His hands trembling so that he could hardly write, the old man made haste to obey.

"There," remarked Bud when he had finished. "That's done and if this ain't the right ticket, then God help you, chink, that's all I've got to say."

The Lukens trio swaggered out, slamming the door behind them. They were in high feather, owners of a lottery ticket valued at seven thousand dollars, and—a new experience for the Lukens family—so come by as to make it highly improbable that they were in any danger from the law. Ah Kow's receipt, backed by their triple testimony, would stand in any court against the evidence of one lone Chinaman.

"That makes us about twenty-three hundred apiece, don't it?" announced Lafe at last, after a hand to hand struggle with a mental calculation which had lasted him all the way to the slab shanty.

"It don't make you no twenty-three hundred," responded the elder Lukens briefly.

"Whaddya mean, it don't?" the boy demanded, a growing suspicion in his eyes. "If you split seven thousand three ways——"

Bud's mouth hardened to a misshapen slit, and his small eyes narrowed.

"There ain't gonna be no three ways," he announced. "If you shut your face and do like I tell you maybe I'll give you fifty dollars. Make trouble and you don't get nothin'."

"That's right," seconded Joe approvingly. "That's the stuff."

"What?" the boy's voice rose to a hoarse scream. "You dirty crooks. Gonna put me off with fifty dollars, are you?"

His voice cracked as he poured out a stream of filthy abuse, heaping indecency on indecency, quivering and white with rage.

The brothers listened in indifferent silence for a moment. Then Bud cut it short with a swift back-hand smash in the mouth.

"Learn ye," he said as Lafe dizzily spat out a mouthful of blood. "Keep your face shut. I don't want to hear another yip out of you."

"Now you listen to me," he continued. "We're out of likker, and you're goin' to town for a gallon. You can get it from Bob Hames. Here's the money, and if you're gone more than two hours, or if they's a drop of it drunk before you get back, I'll work on you right. Un'stand?"

Cowed and sullen, the boy took the money and stumbled out of the door.

Once free of his brothers he broke down completely and leaned against a tree, his frame racked and shaken with dry, convulsive sobs of pure rage.

"The dirty dogs," he gasped at length. "Always beatin' on me and—and——"

Another paroxysm shook him as he stumbled off down the path, sobbing out incoherent blasphemies, weak and sick from the deadly hate which consumed him.

"I'd like to kill 'em," he screamed. "I'd like to see 'em dyin' and tromp their faces in. I'd like—I'd like— And by ——, I will."

He stopped short, curiously calm in the grip of a sudden resolution.

"I'll do it, too," he muttered. "Get them two skunks dead to rights, I will. And get the whole seven thousand for myself," he added, almost as an afterthought.

It was well within the two hours when he reached the shanty above the grave of Ah Kow's father. Bud met him at the door, his thin lips twisted in a sneer, and dispossessed him of the jug.

"Got back quick enough this time, didn't you," was his greeting. "Guess maybe that jolt in the jaw learned you somethin'."

He lifted the jug and smelled the contents suspiciously.

"Hames must be gettin' careless," he remarked. "That don't smell like as good likker as he generally makes. Well, here goes, anyhow."

"Kinda raw," he commented after a long pull, "but it's got the old kick just the same. Hey, Joe, see how it hits you."

"Are you gonna give me my split of that seven thousand?" asked the boy desperately as Joe took the jug. "Are you, I say?"

Bud grinned evilly.

"Forget it, kid," he answered, a cheerful glow at the pit of his stomach. "What'd you do with that much money?"

Lafe made no answer. He sat sullenly in the corner as the other two drew up chairs to the table. Only he watched them, steadily—curiously.

For two hours the jug passed back and forth between them. In quick succession they became flushed and talkative, maudlin and finally sodden drunk, while the boy watched them, fascinated.

Then all at once Joe rose to his feet with a strangled cry, his face purple, his hands clawing at his throat.

"Whazz' matter," questioned Bud dully. "Somethin' gotcha?"

But Joe was beyond speech. Still clawing at his shirt collar, he toppled writhing to the floor.

"See whazz'matter Joe, Lafe," Bud ordered. "Can' see ver' good m'self."

Then Lafe rose to his feet, appalled, yet savage in his triumph.

"You bet you can't see," he raved. "And that stuff you been drinkin's pretty near straight wood alcohol. Wood alcohol, do you get me? And I put it in myself. You ain't never gonna see again. You're gonna die right here, you and him both. And when you're layin' on the floor I'm gonna kick your faces in," he ended with a scream of hysterical laughter.

Struggling against the stupor and blindness that were overcoming him, Bud felt the words beat into his numbed mind. For an instant their import recalled his fast disappearing faculties. Groping blindly, he lurched toward the bed, and his fingers closed around the butt of the automatic pistol which lay there.

"C'n see some yet," he grunted as he pulled the trigger for the sixth time and watched Lafe slide to the floor in a grotesque sprawl of arms and legs.

Three days later Ah Kow, rising at dawn, packed his basket with the roast pork, the dried duck and the gilt paper money his wrinkled old face bathed in a smile of contentment. Unpleasant episodes, he reflected, come and go. There remain always the observances due the undying dead.

Rough Justice

by

F. St. Mars

Author of "A Beast of No Account," "Mighty Motherhood," etc.

THE boughs of the camel thorn crackled, and there was a smell of cattle, as a ponderous and dripping black buffalo bull thrust his way up from the river. A brilliant flash of lightning revealed his angry red eyes and the enormous ribbed bosses of his wide-sweeping horns.

There was a sound in his path as of another beast moving a little to one side. A green parrot screamed and fluttered his wings in a marula-cherry tree hard by, and the bull, pausing, lowered his wet nostrils to the warm earth, snorting.

Then it was that the bull saw in his path, head to the ground, green eyes smoldering under scowling brows, a female caracal, pencil-eared, tufted and lean—the tawny red lynx of Africa.

Other shadowy shapes came and went behind her in the semi-dark, and the great bull in his isolated strength saw that they were her three fat kittens at play.

A dun cloud with a dust-storm beneath it roared away to the northward, and vivid lightnings splashed the copper sky.

The bull pawed before the couched caracal, not wishful to hurt her young, and from the semi-darkness among the foliage of a giant fig-tree two hundred yards away there leaped a monstrous martial hawk-eagle, full five feet ten inches in wing-span, his buffish-white breast under his brown mantle shining in the restless, flickering flashes of light.

A hoarse snort broke from the buffalo bull as, swift as an arrow, the mighty bird, the most dreaded winged shape in all Africa, landed with a rush just behind the caracal and in an instant, with a couple of sidelong hops, was upon one of the fat, jolly little caracal kittens.

A thin cry pierced the roaring and clatter of the wind among the trees, and the feline mother beast recoiled upon herself with the disconcerting quickness of a snake. There was a tawny-red streak drawn through the air very quickly as she leaped to the rescue.

A colossal flapping of wings followed, beating up a little cloud of dust, and the big bird, dancing like a great bubble, had somehow transferred himself from the kitten—now kicking on its side—to the mother's back.

For an instant only the hawk-eagle stayed there, gripping with knife-like talons, threshing his vast pinions in her eyes, beating with his hooked beak at her skull. Then, as she cast herself upon her back and became a clawing terror the eagle had shifted himself in a flash again to the kitten.

The caracal was up and at him before one could wink, with the courage of motherhood and the instantaneousness of a cat; but the bird had thrown himself sidewise on the ground even as she landed, and, striking at her with his dagger-talons cat fashion, too, laid her foreleg bare to the bone.

The caracal spun and spun with the pain and the shock in a perfect explosion of snarls, and in a breath the martial hawk-eagle was gradually rising, the squirming caracal kitten clutched tight in his claws.

behind him and below raced the maddened red apparition of the mother caracal.

The martial hawk-eagle had to swerve slightly to avoid the old bull buffalo, now thoroughly roused by the scent of blood, his eyes rolling, and his forehoofs pounding in the gloom; and even as the bird swerved a low cough broke out from the ground almost in his path.

In the same instant some beast, which had been crouched there invisible till then, shot clean upward in one convulsive spring. There was a glimpse of a pale, frilled belly; of long, lean hind limbs, and of wide, bared claws slashing furiously upward.

The martial hawk-eagle screamed as he literally bounded in mid-air. There followed a burst of white and pale buff feathers, a momentary wild confusion, and the caracal kitten fell dying in a heap at its mother's feet as she stopped short.

The martial hawk-eagle flapped on, two long strings of scarlet beads sparkling diagonally across the pure sheen of his breast, and vanished into the gloom of the foliage high aloft in the giant fig-trees. The buffalo thundered, snorting, away into the thorn "bush."

THE wounded mother caracal spirited her remaining two kittens and herself into cover. The dun cloud and the sand-storm and the lightning careered and whirled into the far distance. The sun shone out, binding, dazzling, stifling, and the old male caracal, grinning the evil, enigmatical set grin of all the lynxes, stood alone in the clearing.

Half a dozen nearly white, downy, martial hawk-eagle's breast feathers were under his heavy right forepaw, and the flame of battle was dying slowly out of his inscrutable eyes. He was alone. There was nobody to applaud him, yet some applause he deserved.

Slightly under three and a half feet long himself, standing upon his leggy-looking paws some nineteen inches, he had sprung full six feet clean into the air, such a spring as even a leopard might be proud of, and had all but cut down with one paw-sweep the most dreaded bird that flies. And all without thanks, without applause; and for what?

To save his son, a wriggling bunch of fur and fat, which probably till that moment he had never seen.

For as long as a man takes to inhale a cigaret puff slowly that caracal stood there in the full sun-glare, staring up with inscrutable green orbs at the towering fig-tree. He seemed to be thinking.

Then, light as an India-rubber ball, he bounced back upon his long, thick legs into the sinister thorn scrub out of sight, as suddenly and as mysteriously as he had come, and in the opposite direction to that taken by his demon wife.

That night, when the cynical moon had climbed above the tops of the tallest forest-trees, the old male caracal suddenly reappeared. That is the cat of the wilds all over—a spook, a wraith, that, if it did not leave footprints, might have been the fancy of a fevered brain only, and nothing more.

As a matter of fact the beast had come and stared at the black pool that marked the mouth of a disused ant-bear burrow, wherein his wife nursed her family and her wounds and her hope of revenge together. Nearer he seemed to have the best possible of reasons for not caring to go.

Then he vanished.

When next he appeared it was two hundred yards away, at the knotted foot of the giant fig-tree. He crouched there for a long half an hour, staring upward, always with that fixed intensity peculiar to his tribe. Only the eyes of him were visible—low, burning, green lamps that never flickered; all the rest was hidden in dense shade.

Once he looked round swiftly when a lioness, farther away no doubt than she sounded, began to roar with that peculiar intonation in her voice which told all who had ears to hear that the queen had cubs to worry about. Once also he shifted his steady gaze from aloft—and this time he swore softly under his bristling whiskers—as a hoarse bellow broke out from near the ground somewhere in the gloom under the trees toward the river.

That was a crocodile, coming up from the flood; but goodness knows why. The caracal did not wait to know. He showed momentarily, five seconds later, focused in a slant of moonlight, fifteen feet up the fig-tree, and climbing steadily.

Of all the cats smaller than a leopard this lynx-like beast, though not the tallest, was the most powerful and showed the strongest character. The fig-tree—a parasite, by the way, which had strangled its tree-victim and grown finally alone—was a tall one, and

the regular roost of the eagle, but it made no difference.

A momba snake, whose bite is death within ten minutes, got in the way, and feline hiss answered reptile hiss till the legless, lidless horror quitted station.

An owl snapped his fish-hook beak in the climber's face, and was all but pulled off his perch with hooked claws before he could finish. A tree iguana lizard fell to the ground with a flop, and offered no obstruction. And all the while, except for the faint scratching of talons upon rough bark, the old male caracal climbed, grimly and in dead silence. Nothing, it seemed, made any difference.

AT LAST, just in that thickest part of the foliage slightly below the summit, he stopped suddenly and turned to stone.

He did not move after that for seven minutes, and in the silence one could distinctly hear from the pitch-black depths of the foliage confronting him the sound of some creature snoring steadily. It was decidedly uncanny, especially at that height in the tropic night.

Then the caracal rushed, and—half hell seemed to have broken loose in the well-like blackness under the foliage on the treetop.

A scream echoed through the night. Wings, tremendous and devastating, beat and beat, sending leaves and twigs flying in all directions. Claws scraped and scraped with the sound of knives hacking up wood.

Then out of the foliage fell a shadow, enormous and flapping. It hit a branch with a muffled *thopl* turned over bodily, and continued its way, striking bough after bough, till at last it slid clear and fell to earth with a final *thupl*

It was nothing much. Only the martial hawk-eagle, dead as dead love, his spine bitten through at the back and base of the skull by the male caracal's murderous fangs.

The caracal himself only barely avoided following the dead bird down by releasing the latter—who weighed over ten pounds—and half-leaping, half-falling, under the dead weight, to a branch far below.

Half an hour later the female caracal, happening to glance out quickly from her den at some commotion of the night, was somewhat startled momentarily to behold her bitterest of all bitter enemies, the martial hawk-eagle, lying all stark and motionless in the pale moonlight upon the bare, trodden earth. And sometime during the night, it is to be presumed, she crawled forth and dragged the corpse in.

There could be no doubt that her mate had left the carcass there, for in spite of what has been thought by some there exists a strange, mysterious sympathy between many individual feline fathers and their mates, which is, however, so secret and stealthy that it has apparently been quite overlooked.

The point is that but for that timely feast it is doubtful if the wounded caracal mother would have lived, and without her her kittens must have perished also. Anyway she was in no state to hunt for some days after her battle, and must have starved but for the swift, vengeful claws of her mate.

Seven Fools

A Complete Novelette

by **Barry Scobee**

Author of "The Drouth," "Even Up," etc.

THE Summer was hot. For the first time in the knowledge of white men the snow cap was melted from Kulshan, the great northern master peak of the Cascade range. And the sky, clear and blue even in the end of August, made no sign or threat.

The wild was peopled. Residents of the coast country, tortured by the unheard-of heat of one hundred ten degrees—as they would have been frozen by zero weather in this northwest land of mild extremes—had fled to the mountains for coolness, had crowded even to the very receding edges of the glaciers.

The glaciers, on the westerly side, began at Heliotrope Ridge. This ridge of earth and rock, thrust into the ice like a gigantic wedge, was reached after one had traveled a single-file trail from the village of Ice, which snuggled at the edge of a great national forest reserve.

Ice was the jump-off for the thronging men and women and entire families going back and forth between the hot lowlands and the half-cool camping grounds.

These people, with tents and blankets, pots and pans, were requested to register in a book conveniently maintained if they planned to enter the forest, and thus it came about that many came into contact with a "native" of the village—a strapping, swaggering man of thirty or so commonly known as the Smart Aleck.

Smart Aleck could wag his ears, was good at rough-and-tumble wrestling, and possessed a notable range of tones for mimicking people. The presence of the many visitors gave him an opportunity to show off, and also, though he was unaware of it, to launch uncalculated tragedy.

Smart Aleck lived alone in a two-room unpainted shack that had been a harness shop. It was on the nameless main street, without near neighbors on either side, but diagonally across the street was the two-story, slate-colored, green-trimmed frame hotel, which sat in a wide yard of its own.

Close around these two structures, as well as on a hundred creeks and trails, were the white and khaki-colored tents of the summer campers. And as is customary with people unused to living in tents, the campers were always up and talking at the break of day.

The Smart Aleck habitually clung heavily to his cot as long as he could against the droning hubbub, but usually he was up before six. On a morning after late arrivals on the stages had been forced by lack of beds to sleep in the office chairs at the hotel, he was up earlier than usual. Strangers around the hotel porch were a magnet that he could not resist.

A hasty breakfast finished, he loitered to his porch, yawned magnificently as an introduction to the new day and to the people on the veranda across the street.

A man under thirty sat on the edge of the veranda of the Mountain Inn swinging russet oxfords and clocked socks, all topped off by a candy stripe silk shirt and smooth hands.

"Hello," said Smart Aleck briskly, striding up.

"Hello," the other responded dourly.

"Register over there by my shack," Smart Aleck said, "if you're goin' into the forest."

The others on the porch—a half-dozen khakied and booted men and women, and a little old man in a skull cap reading over his spectacles in a paper-bound book entitled "How to Camp Out," paused to listen. The man on the porch kept on swinging his feet and smirked insolently at Smart Aleck, who was instantly miffed at such lese majesty.

"If you go in you want to put out your camp fires!"

"That's logical," agreed the stranger.

"I'm the fire guard," informed Smart Aleck mightily. "I'm layin' down the law to you, mister."

The man slid to his feet and spoke sarcastically—

"Pleased to know you, Mister Fire Guard."

"Don't get funny. Who are you?"

"Name's Jones."

"Jones?" The forest man looked his vis-à-vis up and down curiously. "Not Logical Jones, bootlegger?"

"They call me Logical Jones," the other admitted insinuatingly.

"You ain't got a quart of tobaccer juice, have you?" the fire guard asked, and haw-haw-hawed loudly in changed humor.

Then into the cast of the forming play sprang another character, a large man fashionably dressed, but with the soft gray suit now wrinkled and awry from sleeping in a chair, shoes unlaced, hat dipped over heavy eyes, and a stick in hand in a kind of ridiculous pomp.

"Say," he demanded hotly, "ain't you people ever going to bed?"

Everybody stared. The man stepped out and allowed the screen door to close with a bang, and informed them incredulously—

"There's a woman still up doing her week's washing under the office window!"

There was silence marked by equal incredulity by the others, then the fire guard guffawed and roared out that the stranger didn't know it was morning yet. The stranger looked back at the dozing figures in the dimly lighted office, at the coming full day outside.

"Aw, scratch yourself on a glacier and get waked up," admonished Smart Aleck. "It's 'good morning' I tell you."

"You must get up in the night here on the farm," sneered the man, looking at his watch with blinking eyes.

"Kindy dusky," agreed the fire guard, "down here behind the hills. But you can see old Kulshan up there, with the light behind the dome."

"I don't give a hang!"

Smart Aleck cocked his head, shut one eye, and regarded the big man speculatively.

"I'll bet you, stranger," he said, "that I can go to the top of that peak and back again in nine hours. Bet a hund'rd dollars."

The man answered with a look of contempt at this rural fellow and his backwoods scheme, then leaped to startled interest.

"Nine hours!" he repeated. "I understand it's a three, four day trip up there and back?"

"I got a hundr'd bucks that says nine hours," declared the guard.

"What's this?" spoke up he who had given his name as Logical Jones. "They told me it couldn't be made in less than three days. To the top of Kulshan, you mean?"

"That's what I'm saying—with a hundred dollars."

The big man and Jones regarded each other.

"Shall we take him up?" asked Jones.

"Wait a minute, let me see," replied the other. "How about this? What's your proposition?"

"Go from here to the top of Kulshan and back inside o' nine hours. Not in no airplane but on my own feet."

"How far is it?"

"They call it fifteen miles to the summit. Besides that it is two miles up—ten thousand feet. Ask Dad Sinehour."

They all turned to the old man in the skull cap, who at once became slightly flustered.

"I have been here barely two weeks," said he. "I am practically unacquainted. I have a little bookstore up-Sound. Carry a few etchings——"

"Yes, but how long does it take parties to go up and back?"

"I've seen several. Three days, always three days, when they hurry."

"Then if you should start at seven o'clock," said the big stranger looking at his watch, "you would have to be back here by four o'clock this afternoon? Is that the proposition?"

"Perzackly." And the guard lifted a billfold from a hip pocket.

"I'll take half o' your hundred," said Logical Jones.

"And I'll eat the other half," said the other bettor. "My name is Morton-Dyer."

They couldn't get their money out quickly enough. They shoved it into old Sinehour's hands, talking down his startled objections in a dozen rushing words. He got their names, and pocketed the money with tremulous fingers.

"Oh me, oh my," he chirruped. "Gamblers pausing at nothing."

The fire guard hurried across the street to change clothes, he told them. As soon as he was out of sight a buzz of talk set up. The others on hand sort of envied the two who had bet, as if they had got hold of sure-thing tickets in a lottery.

"Three days," they declared. "Or anyhow, two days. Even a man used to it like the fire guard is couldn't go up there in nine hours."

"Like taking candy from a kid," chuckled the big fellow.

"Wonder what's the matter with the bird?"

"He might have a trick of his own," said Logical Jones. "Worth fifty bucks to see it if he has."

"Eh?" Morton-Dyer was startled. "You don't suppose he has?"

"If I had I wouldn't have bet. I'm not called Logical Jones for nothing."

Smart Aleck was back just before seven o'clock. Quite a little crowd had gathered by now. Smart Aleck was in running togs with spiked shoes especially made, it was plain to be seen. The proprietor of the hotel came out. He and the guard grinned at each other. Then the hiker was off, hitting for the trail in long strides.

"That Smart Aleck fire guard," said the landlord, "is fixing to get himself fired from the forest service."

"Why?" asked Jones and Morton-Dyer together.

"For making this bet so much."

"Yeah?" said Jones, his eyes turning cold.

The crowd began to grin. The stakeholder clutched at his coat pocket.

"This is the fourth time this Summer he has made the bet," said the landlord.

"What's his record?" asked Jones.

"I don't know—less than eight hours. That ain't nothing though. At the marathon of 1913 Westerlund made it up and back in six hours and two minutes."

BY SIX o'clock in the evening the people began to avoid Smart Aleck and his big I.

"I'm the man that made it up to the top and back in eight hours and thirty-two minutes today. I'm likely the only man in the Northwest could of done it."

At ten o'clock the vast majority whom he had afflicted, at the soda fountain, at the hotel porch, had snubbed him. And by midnight even the interested and the patient had abandoned him, until only the drug-store clerk remained.

At a half-hour past midnight the clerk shut up shop and turned the Iagoo out into the night. Smart Aleck strolled toward the hotel, where he saw lights. He liked to go down alleys when he could have traversed streets, or in by backdoors when the front was invitingly open. So now he went to the side of the hotel with an ear cocked for anything.

He paused by a window at the side. It was open, but the shade was drawn. Voices inside told him that a poker game was on. He made haste to enter by the nearest route—through a side door near the window. This opened into a little hallway, and from the hall he went into the office, where the game was in progress.

"Hello!" he called out in loud good humor. "Guess the man that went to the top and back today can look on, hey?"

"Takes money to stick around here!" retorted one of the players.

This was Morton-Dyer. Throughout the day he had resembled, to some visions, a moving picture actor of great elegance; and to others, a race-track gambler. Now, with a cigar tilted high in his mouth to keep the smoke out of his eyes, and with a blue-bordered handkerchief around his neck, he looked like a one-time shell-game operator at a county fair.

"Wantin' to win some of your money back?" asked Smart Aleck, and roared out. "Haw-haw-haw!"

"*Zsssst!*" hissed the little night clerk, called Fags. "People trying to sleep upstairs."

"Here's your hat, what's your hurry?" murmured another player, Logical Jones.

The two other players at the table

chuckled heavily, but did not even turn their heads. One was a big sailor with the smack of the seas in his talk and looks. He was Jack, and everybody was Jack to him. He had said earlier that he had come for a day or two from his ship to see the crowds.

The fourth player was an excessively fat man who called himself Casey Jones, and frequently referred to himself in a facetious way as the brave engineer—on some Oregon jerkwater line. His talk was of flying switches, hittin' the frogs at sixty per, and the like. A mumbling, rumbling going-on meant to be good humor but that was in fact a kind of madness, a fearfulness. He had a pack, which he kept under the table between his feet. The seafaring man kept bumping his feet against it and grumbling at the annoyance.

One of the three spectators was the little bookstore man, with his finger still in the volume, "How To Camp Out." Another was a man of about thirty-five or forty, who wore a sort of unchangable smile, and who was registered as J. W. Cotton.

"I certainly don't care for this type of men," he whispered once or twice to old Sinehour, nodding to the players.

The third onlooker was Fags, who smoked, lighting one cigaret from another. He was just barely old enough to have served with the Canadian forces at Vimy ridge, though American born.

Before the Smart Aleck had been present five minutes the sailor's patience with the pack beneath the table gave out.

"Hey, Jack," he rumbled impatiently, "why don't you stow that ditty bag below decks som'ers?"

And to emphasize his impatience he swiped out with a leg and scooted the kit to one side. Casey Jones literally tumbled down upon it, as a football player springs down upon the oval leather. He got up panting, his face sweaty and white. He dandled the pack on his knees.

"You—you!" he snarled raggedly at the sailor. "You ought to be blackballed!"

The others watched him with a touch of contempt at such an exhibition. Morton-Dyer spoke out curtly:

"What you afraid of? You must 'a' tapped the paymaster on the coco—after you was blackballed."

"Sandwiches in that pack," feebly countered Casey Jones.

To turn the subject the kindly little night clerk stuck out his cigarets to the players. Jack took a chew of plug, but others accepted. Casey Jones lighted on a match, then Morton-Dyer, and Fags was about to be the third when the sailor interfered.

"What the dancin' ho-rizon!" He struck out the match. "Third a-lightin' off the same match! Not when I'm around."

"Superstition," sneered Logical Jones. "Illogical."

"Come on, come on, brothers, let's gambolier," sang out Morton-Dyer impatiently.

"Superstition nothing," began Jack defensively.

"Sift out the pasteboards," cried the fat engineer in his high restlessness. "Gimme a chance to even up."

The dealer seemed to do just that thing then, for Casey Jones took the lead in the playing, and when it came to the betting he shoved in all his chips and said, "Tap you!" to Morton-Dyer.

Smart Aleck chose this moment to play his part, as if the tense silence were his cue. He went thumping around the table and sat down between old Sinehour and Cotton.

"I'm the man," he said to Cotton, "that climbed the peak today and won a hundred dollars."

Cotton gave a quick look around and made a movement of withdrawal.

"You're a nut," he said.

Sinehour smiled faintly at the fire guard, out of the kindness of his heart not wishing to be short.

"Beat it!" snarled Morton-Dyer.

Smart Aleck rose up on his dignity.

"To —— with you!" he flung at them, and tramped out.

He strode obliquely across the street toward his shack.

"Fools! City fools!" he damned. "Don't know nothing and don't want to learn!"

The thought came that, gosh, he'd like to show 'em up. Such men ought to be learned respect. That dude bootlegger, and that society-looking bird. A shot through the window, or an avalanche turned loose, or——

He sat on his porch to smoke, and as the cigaret ashed and glowed, and ashed and glowed, he pondered them with an eye to even things. Then abruptly he sat up.

"By gosh, I'll do it! I'll make 'em feel like two cents. Show 'em up! If it works."

He strode across the street and across the yard, to the side door, a few feet from the

drawn shade. The idea was growing on him. He checked a chuckle.

"I'll make 'em look like seven fools all right!"

The man possessed one amazing talent, or trick, or mayhap sin, so nearly did he make it sinful at times. It was the ability to mimic. By the door he paused, and went back to the street, and gathered up a handful of pebbles. Then he went back and stood between the door and window.

THE seven men inside were whisked from the drama of gambling by the voice of an elderly man calling in a subdued tone outside the lightly flapping and sucking window-shade:

"Nellie! Nellie!"

Now there was a scrawny, pathetic-looking, sweet sort of girl of seventeen years or so, timid as a wild doe, who waited table at the hotel. A stranger need but sit through one or two meals to learn her name, and "Nellie" was all that these men knew about her, except Fags, who since coming from the city to escape the heat and taking the job of night clerk at the hotel, had spoken perhaps a dozen words to her.

"A little night intrigue," whispered Morton-Dyer with a sly expression.

"Her father," allowed Logical Jones.

"The call boy," murmured Casey Jones.

"Nellie! Oh, Nellie! You up there?" came the voice again, cautiously.

There was a whine in the tone, as might be expected from some shiftless ne'er-do-well of the type to go calling under a hotel window at such an hour. The call was repeated. Almost at once the screen door opened.

"Nellie?" queried the man's voice quickly.

"Dad! Yes. What's wrong?" The screen door closed, as if she had stepped out.

"Nothin' wrong. Is everybody in bed?"

"Must be, it's nearly two."

"Listen."

To the seven men within, an old man and a girl stood just outside listening breathlessly to hear whether there might be any stirring in the lighted office.

"All quiet along the Potomic," said the old man's voice in a moment. "But the lights burn."

"They burn all night. What is it, dad? Speak out."

"Listen to what I say, gal. Harken sober to what I say. I've struck it rich. Gold!"

"Go-o-o-ld?"

"Zssst! Keyholes has got ears. I found it on top o' Kulshan, nuggets, where the heat's melted the snow all off. Big as dove eggs; bigger, by ——! And thick as hail on the ground!"

"Dad!"

"The top o' that mount is a volcaner, like I always says. The snow is melted off the sides o' the bowl, inside. There's a big red-burned boulder layin' there, and for a hundred feet around it the ground is yellow. Hold out your hands."

To the seven pairs of ears in the silent room there came the faint tinkle as of pebbles being poured from hands to hands.

"Nuggets!" whispered Morton-Dyer. "The gods of hades!"

He licked his lips.

And outside—

"Daddy! They're heavy. They nigh break my fingers."

"Yaller gold fer paintin' dreams!"

"Oh, daddy," the girlish voice went on, "mother can have her black silk now, for church! And I can go to the Normal. And you can get you an accordion and go fishing twice a week. Daddy, tell me you ain't a mockin' me."

"Gal, Nellie, honest Injun, as I hope for my reward on high. Why, you feel the heft o' the stuff yourself, and you can bite it."

"It's—it's soft, like lead."

"Pure stuff. An' you keep mum, you understand. Not a breathin' word to a livin' soul. I'm a-tellin' you because I got to have some money off o' you. For boots. I got to have 'em before I go back up tomorrow. I come to you now, just when I get in, because I didn't want your maw a-questin' and a-gabbling. She'd have to know."

Inside Fags whispered, all tense and trying to keep down a compelling cough. "Nellie! I know her and her dad!"

Outside there was a chink of silver dollars.

"Seven and a half," said the girl's voice.

"Nine-fifty, Nel. They're nine-fifty, that best pair in Slade's window."

More money jingled. The pebbles rattled again. A sob.

"I'll beat it out back here, Nellie. You get some sleep."

There was a whispered word or two, the screen opened and closed, footsteps sounded on the cinder path.

In the hotel office men were tense. They searched one another's faces.

"I know Nellie. It's her dad," declared Fags.

Curiously, it was as if he assured them on his absolute knowledge that the gold was really there on the bared crest of the master peak. No doubt existed with them. They had not doubted an instant.

"I'll have a handbag of that stuff!" swore Morton-Dyer, his eyes greedy.

"A handbag?" sneered Logical Jones. "I'll have a staked claim o' the stuff. First there, first served!"

Every man but old Sinehour was on his feet instantly. Fags was endeavoring to hold down his coughing. Morton-Dyer was a scowling hawk watching them all.

"Not a sound!" he warned. "I'll choke the man——"

"Don't move!" barked Logical Jones under his breath. "This crowd can't split up for a second!"

The men were tense, poised, waiting. Confronted with a chance to get gold out of the ground for nothing, these men of ordinary caution and gambling instincts became super-gamblers in a flash, as men have done from Australia to Klondyke, wagering time, hardships, danger, against a chance for the yellow grains. Yet they did not think of it thusly. They thought only of a chance to get gold and that the other fellow was planning to get there first.

Gold! Their eyes glinted with the madness. They were a mob ready to plunge.

"Listen, men," and Logical Jones appealed to them now, instead of commanding. "Let's stick together and not take a chance of anybody spilling this to their best friend. What say?"

"Gold news spreads!" Morton-Dyer warned them, seeing Jones' idea. "It goes by telepathy. One tick o' this news and there'd be a million on the trail by sunup."

They agreed by nods and quick words to stick together so that the news would not leak. All but Sinehour, who said nothing.

"Let's go!" whispered Jones.

They were on their toes with eagerness. But old Sinehour delayed.

"If you please, young gentlemen, your—er, gay gaming with the cards tonight has entertained me, but it is now well after one o'clock, and I shall, with your kindly permission, seek the side of my dear wife up——"

They jerked out an incredulous note of mirth. It startled Sinehour.

"Martha, my wife," he started to explain, "will be uneasy should she awaken."

"Shut up!" harshly ordered Morton-Dyer. "You're going! By ——, I'm not going to be interfered with! All of you, get that! This is the one chance that comes in a lifetime. I'm going to override all obstacles, understand?

"I'll be steppin' on your shirt tail!" asserted Jones.

They stood tense, uncertain for the moment, except Fags, who slid to a showcase and poked a carton of cigarets into a coat pocket. When he came from behind the counter they began simultaneously to tiptoe toward the front door. Casey Jones shouldered his pack. Outside in the street, a little distance off, they knotted together under the stars and in the gleam of a distant corner incandescent.

"Nobody stays back!" reiterated Morton-Dyer curtly.

"But, gentlemen," and Sinehour's wail rose up persistently. "I can not go. 'Twill be a merry adventure, I reck, but not for a man of my station and habits, who must have toast and milk at seven a. m., and a warm bath."

They snarled at him in divers words and keys. The old man was obviously nonplused. Then he burst out:

"I don't need the gold. I'm well heeled. I'm not greedy."

The sailor seized the little man by an arm.

"Go for'rd, you," he growled. "I'll bloody your back with a length o' cable!"

"How about supplies?" asked Morton-Dyer. "Boots, food, sacks for the nuggets?"

"I've got to get my overcoat," said Cotton abruptly, breaking away from them.

"Wait! Come back here!" They seized him. "What you want—tell your best friend, so he can tell his best friend?"

"Let loose! I'll get my overcoat or I'll scream!"

"I'll choke you," flared Logical Jones, all but seizing Cotton by the throat.

"My coat is in the office, you can see me get it," said Cotton.

They let him go, but Logical Jones followed, watching and warning outside the door. Cotton took his coat from a hook and rejoined them.

"Supplies?" repeated Morton-Dyer.

"I think we can get what we want at

Heliotrope Ridge, from what I hear," said Logical Jones.

"Sure. Let's go."

"Everybody forward! Step easy!"

"But my dear sirs, I have a plenty, I am not greedy. I——"

"Seven ——!" blurted Jack.

He seized the old man around the neck in the crook of his mighty arm, gagging him with the flat of his hand, and strode off.

They turned down the railway track and presently right-angled on to the narrow forest trail that would lead them to the foot of the glaciers, a mile in elevation. And almost at once they found themselves groping in the darkness, for the night under the thick trees and close foliage was black.

"A flashlight!"

There was none. It was proposed to go back and equip with lights, but Morton-Dyer checked this, declaring they had better wait until the crack of day.

"Naw," said Cotton. "I never got anything out of waiting on the other fellow. You gambler sharks will beat us honest men if you can. I'm going on."

He shouldered past Jack and Morton-Dyer and got ahead. At once he began to strike matches and make his way forward. The others tried to follow, but the rear ones could get no benefit from the little flickers, and the line began to stretch out.

Casey Jones by chance stepped out of the narrow trail on to the slope below and went down like a fat cushion. They derricked him up. Then Cotton sprawled. When they caught up he was sitting down.

"I'm here till daylight," said he. "You don't dare to leave me."

They cursed him for a stubborn fool and pointed out that it was he and not they who had kept on in the treacherous darkness.

"Lordy, lordy," muttered and panted Casey Jones. "I wish it was over."

"We can't be seen, but we can be heard likely," said Morton-Dyer, making himself as comfortable as the trail allowed. "Easy on the gab."

"Wish it was over—over."

"Cut out the croakin' chant!" exclaimed Fags. "It makes me cold."

"We won't all get to the gold," said the fat engineer with significant emphasis. "Not all of this seven. And some of us won't ever see that town there again either."

THE trail to Heliotrope is a single-file trail through the virgin forest, on the slopes and precipitous bluffs above the roaring ice-fed stream called Glacier creek. The trail was made by the township in the days when men ran marathons from the salt water to the summit of the great snow peak. But forest rangers had taken over its maintenance.

A better trail could scarcely be found. It climbs upward but a mile or so in ten and a half miles to the ridge. It twists and turns, drops and rises, and ever and ever climbs, over the ribs of the mountains. Sometimes it goes around the head of a gulch, or often it crosses noisy torrents of icy water on teetering logs.

So closely does the forest encroach and so littered is the forest floor with the fallen trunks of a thousand years ago, so jungle-like is the growth of vining maple and devil's club, that in but few places can one leave the trail to camp or rest.

The trail is an aisle through the forest, a steep wall or slope above, and a pitching slope below. Each year when the snow goes, in June or thereabouts, a year-long forestry man takes some of the Summer hands like Smart Aleck, and clears the trail anew for the Summer season, for each Winter the deep snows have broken off a few old pioneer firs and hemlocks and cedars and strewn them across the narrow road like matches across an ant's path. These workmen saw out a section of the trunks, roll them aside, and the trail is open, the white ends of the logs smelling like new-sawn lumber.

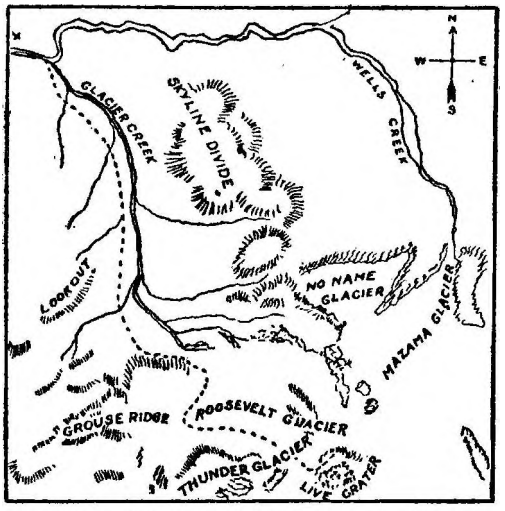
The climb to Heliotrope is not dangerous, only tiresome. The danger begins when one leaves the ridge and strikes the vast field of the Roosevelt glacier above.

In the ice, or hard-packed snow, are bottomless crevasses on every side. Parties travel hitched together with a stout line, and have spiked boots and alpenstocks, and dark goggles for the sun glare on the snow, and thick grease paint to smear on the face and neck to prevent sunburn, which comes easy in the rarefied atmosphere.

But these things were far from the minds of the gold stampede of seven men waiting on the trail for daylight.

They gabbled about the law for staking gold claims, and wondered whether Nellie and her dad might talk and get others started. It was Jack, who had been in

foreign lands as much as his own, that possessed the information that the maximum size of a gold claim in the States is fifteen hundred by six hundred feet. And after



MOUNT KULSHAN. THE DOTTED LINE SHOWS THE COURSE TAKEN BY THE SEVEN UP THE MOUNTAINSIDE.

a while they were romancing—whispering and chuckling and bragging like a gang of school boys as they juggled with their dreams of yellow gold as thick as hail on the ground.

"No more chautauqua managing, no more peddling insurance to poor people and rough mill men for you, J. Weever Cotton! A quiet club among gentlemen. Checkers and pinochle. Two cigars for a quarter. A gentleman!" So Cotton soliloquized.

"Won't all get there," came the dismal wail from the drooping fat man.

"Clothes!" dreamed Fags aloud. "Gold-tipped Turkish fags, and three squares a day reg'lar, and girls!"

"Money, by ——!" clipped Morton-Dyer. "Bachelor's quarters, the live set."

"Hooo! You sissies!" scorned Jack. "Buy a battleship and go to piratin' on the high seas!"

"Polo pony ranch in Oregon," was Logical Jones' contribution. "Equipped, running water, electric lights."

"I'm not greedy," sighed old Sinehour.

And time went on, talk and silences, laughter and cursing.

"Let's get some sleep," Casey Jones finally said. "I got a hunch it will be the last sleep some of us get this side o' hell."

A hush. The great trees swayed, and creaked like saddle leather, and soughed sadly in the breeze. The sough of the conifers may be cradle music to the forest man, but to the prairie born, and whelps of the sea, it is an unseen menace, a vague, nameless fear whispered in their ears—nothing trying to appear as something for the retardation of men.

"Don't *look* at that," said Logical Jones.

"I ain't afraid to," retorted Casey.

"But you don't need to foreweaken yourself by setting your mind in that direction. Whet up, use your head! Exercise will power!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Sinehour. "Such intellectual philosophy! You must visit the books in my little store sometime."

"Hunches is hunches," observed Jack profoundly. "If Casey's got a hunch we ought to pipe all hands and listen to it."

"Why?" snapped Logical Jones.

"To reef in and be ready for the squall."

"You bet, you bet," supported Casey.

Fags scraped a match for a smoke. In the flare Jack saw the carton of cigarets on the ground with the cover off.

"Great dancin' ho-rizon!" he burst out. "You got that lid there upside down!"

"Well, what of it?"

"What of it? Bad luck, you landlubber!"

"Foreweakening yourself," warned Jones.

"What!"

The sailor was up in arms.

"You take the hatch cover off a hatch, you don't lay it down ever' which way, do you? You lay it down like it come off the combing, don't you? Any deck hand knows that. Wouldn't it stand to reason then that the lid of a ceegareet box layed off wrong would make bad luck just the same?"

Such dumbness, Logical Jones grunted in disgust, couldn't be countered. In the midst of the chatter Logical became aware that somebody was trying to edge past along the rim of the trail in the utter darkness. There was a touch on his pant leg, a tiny slip of the foot on the moss. From where he sat he reached out quickly, unseeing, and by chance grasped a human leg at the shoe top.

The grunt of surprize that came was from old Sinehour, and the smothered scream of "Snakes! Snakes!" was from his screechy throat. Fingers began to fumble at Jones' wrist.

"Let loose! Take it off!" he cried out. "Martha!"

There was an uproar. Morton-Dyer, at the head of the line, plunged back regardless of legs and bodies on the ground.

"Tryin' to slip away, hey?" he charged. "You traitor!"

"Let me go, let me go!" Sinehour stormed. "I can't march."

Logical Jones seized him by the stiff collar about his neck and sat him down.

"Stay there!" he barked. "And use some sense."

"I'll prosecute!" the gamy old man swore. "I'll jail the last hound of you! You outlaws! Your gold will never save you!"

The sky silvered, and the light trickled down through the delicate tracery of the tree tops stirred gently by a breeze on the surface of the forest. It was like being in the sea with the wavelets above. Before they knew it the trail was visible, and they got up and started on.

"Won't all get to the top," Casey Jones fussed.

They took it easy for a few minutes, until the veil of dawn fell away from their feet and they could see the trail in all its angles and nooks. Then they began to step out. At the first little downward slope they began to trot, and they trotted up the other side. But the bulk of the fat engineer slowed up and blocked the way at once.

"Come on there!" stormed Logical Jones. Lift your feet!"

"I can't run over Sinehour," defended Casey Jones.

And there it was. Sinehour did not wish to make speed. So they were forced to slow down. They soon saw that Casey Jones and the old man were equally slow. This chafed them. Casey kept shifting his pack, which was awry on his shoulders most of the time, and the burden made him puff and lag.

"We'll take turns carrying it," said Morton-Dyer. "Can't be held back like this."

"No!" squealed Jones affrightedly.

"We'll peel if off o' you!" declared Logical Jones.

"You wouldn't do that, would you, gents? Me, Casey, that all the boys on the line like?"

"Why wouldn't we?"

"Why, because — because — Lordy, Lordy, but the wages of sin——"

Casey stepped out faster, and he whipped himself to maintain the pace of the others. And Sinehour played up his end gamely, too, for a while, then all at once he went staggering.

"I can't go on, I can't go on," he pleaded. "This is so unusual."

"Change your thought and you can go on," said Logical Jones curtly. "Want to go on and you can do better. Look at Fags."

"Tell you what would fill the bill for him," Morton-Dyer said over a shoulder to them. "Gag him and tie him till we come back."

Shortly after this the leader warned them, and they saw on ahead three or four tents beside the trail. Nobody was astir. Jack whispered that he saw a clothes line. He stepped from the file and deftly unknotted the line from the trees and coiled it over his forearm.

In a few minutes Morton-Dyer turned sharply off the trail, directing them to follow. They slid and stumbled and fell down the steep slope, cursing and lamenting the loss of time. When they found a level spot some distance below the trail they stopped, and Jack and Morton-Dyer seized Sinehour. He was alarmed.

"You wouldn't hang me!" he cried out.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Casey Jones curiously. "Why—why not?"

"But Martha, my wife——"

"Take it easy, old brittle. We're just going to tie you up so you can't get loose and tell the world we're after gold. That fool fire guard or other good mountain climbers might beat us to it."

"Or anything might happen with you loose."

"But, men, my oatmeal, my toast, my bath."

"Your wife can have 'em."

Fags and Cotton and Logical gathered moss and had a pallet ready when the others laid him down.

"I'll freeze here in the shade," shuddered Sinehour. "You will rue this day."

"I'll put this over him," offered Fags, spreading his coat over the prostrate form. "Mr. Sinehour is a hotel guest. I got to look out for his comfort a little."

"I'll halloo," threatened Sinehour. "I'll shout to the trail."

"Will, will ye?" Jack pulled out a big red kerchief. "Not if you're gagged good and tight."

"I'll prosecute!" screeched the old man. "I'll inform!"

"Inform and be ——!" retorted Logical Jones.

"They'll find the broken twigs, you three ruffians! They'll hang you! You better let me go!"

But they stopped his raving with the gag. And leaving him bound and on his back glaring threats at them, they struck back to the trail and would have hurried on, but Logical Jones checked them.

"This smashed path down the hill," said he. "Any greeniper can see it and will wonder what's at the other end."

So they took time to get hold of a sapling and bend it down until it broke, so that the top screened the point where they had turned off.

"Broken tree looks natural enough," decided Logical.

Then they went on, trotting down the little slopes and striding up the longer ones, led by the greed for gold—gold nuggets on the ground thick as hail and as big as dove eggs.

CASEY JONES was the slow one. His two hundred fifty pounds held back his spirit. If he said little about the gold, yet he was eager to go on. But in no time, so the other Jones and Morton-Dyer allowed profanely, he was holding them back.

After a time Casey became aware of a galvanized wire strung along the trail. It started him to uneasy muttering. He kept it up, mumbling and prospecting, until they made out that it was an old down wire, buried in places by the débris of years.

"I know about it," said Cotton. "I could have told you at first, but I have been saving my breath."

"Well, you ought to have saved Casey's breath."

Cotton shrugged.

"The wire," he went on, "was put up when they used to run the marathons to the top of the peak. It goes to Heliotrope Ridge."

It developed that he had gone almost to the ridge the week before with a party of girls, and had found out a number of things of interest that the others did not know.

"The phone," he explained, "is that copper wire up high there, strung to the trees with insulators hung in a loop of wire."

"And that's the phone," observed Casey. "Looks like a man can't get away from them threads o' fate. Strung in loops o' wire steepled to the trees, so's to allow for the sway in the wind. Lots o' slack, hey?"

"Looks like there's so much slack," allowed Logical Jones, "that a man ought to pull it down with a hooked stick."

"That's what I had in mind," replied Casey significantly.

Logical watched the trail side until he saw a suitable stick, and with this he drew down Casey's thread o' fate.

"Cut it!" croaked Casey. "Snip the telltale! Here's a knife."

"If Sinehour should get loose," Logical observed, "he couldn't have the officers phone ahead and stop us if this line were cut, could he? Illegal but logical."

"Cut 'er good!"

Logical took Casey's big jackknife and severed the wire. Then the silent file trailed on, Casey panting and blowing and shifting his pack. A while after this the galvanized wire began to interest the fat engineer.

"About a number nine," he speculated. "Good and stout."

A little later they saw that he had a coil of it over one arm.

"Aching legs!" exploded Fags. "Ain't hikin' enough without packin' old hardware?"

"Wire'd be good for hangin' a feller," panted Casey without much interest.

Sometimes the trail swung into the mountain side to get around the heads of ravines, at other times it crept out upon cliffs so that the travelers were almost immediately above Glacier creek, it seemed. At these near approaches they could scarcely hear one another shout because of the roar of the ice-fed stream. It was like many trains roaring over a long trestle. They caught another sound than that of the water—a muffled grinding, smashing, thundering.

"That's lava boulders," said Cotton. "The stuff is porous and light in weight and can be tumbled along by the swift water. It has been broken off the mountain crags and carried down by the slow glaciers."

"Where'd you get all that stuff?" asked the interested sailor.

"Why," said Cotton, "a man like me has sources for such information that are not open to the ordinary sailor before the mast, or gamblers and bootleggers."

"My stars!" derided Logical Jones. "Don't get wet er you'll melt!"

"Another thing," said Cotton, "you won't notice songbirds. They don't find their natural home much on the west side of the Cascades. Too damp."

As a matter of fact they heard one bird before reaching the ridge, and that was a squawking bluejay flitting in the sun.

As a whole they were not talkative but subdued. Casey Jones' waxy, strained face and his mumbling, that had almost become sobbing; and little Fags' persistent cigaret smoking and coughing, gave them a feeling of uneasiness.

When the sun came, and set the tree boles clear against the light, Logical Jones called attention to them—graceful, mighty, three feet through at the base and reaching skyward a hundred and fifty or two hundred feet.

"Perfect cones," said he. "From base to apex the lines run true. From base to apex a conical symphony. Do you know why man isn't that harmonious?"

"Why?"

Logical laughed.

"Hanged if I know! Maybe it is because man thinks."

"Thinks evil," chimed in Casey, "and does evil."

They passed a camp now and then, and occasionally met a small party on the way down.

Then Casey began to whimper. More than that, he began to give in. He lagged. He could not whip himself on any farther. To the threat that they would take the pack he only grunted. Finally they saw he could go no farther without rest. All were tired enough to rest for that matter, and when they reached the next torrent, where they could get water to drink, they refreshed themselves and lay down in the trail. All but Casey Jones. He crawled out on a jumble of fallen tree trunks where the mist drifted up from the rushing water below.

"Lordy," he muttered, "I'd like to stay down there forever."

Minutes went by with the men blinking at the sky or lying with closed eyes, resting deeply. The roar of Glacier creek, the grind of the lava boulders, the more staccato voice of the falls and creek at hand—all were a lullaby that helped them toward peace for the moment.

They were jerked to attention by an odd noise different from all the others. They turned their heads. They sat up.

Casey Jones was gone, and a twisted cable of galvanized wire around a log over the drifting spume hinted at the way of his going.

They crawled out and peered down into the twilight below the logs. The fat engineer hung there with the pack still awry on his shoulders, six feet below, in the cool mist, the wire looped around his neck.

"Second baby down," murmured Fags inanely, like the twittering of a bird.

"——!" rasped the sailor, drawing back, "Casey's gone and started it!"

They got away from the logs, silent, shocked, as men unused to that sort of thing are apt to be.

"The pack?" questioned Morton-Dyer. "Money?"

Logical Jones gave it a second's thought. He shook his head.

They struck out at once, walking rapidly.

"Casey's started it," repeated Jack dolefully. "The —— fool!"

"What? What are you talkin' about?"

"Violent ends. They goes in triplets. Two more of us five has got to go by violence. I never knowed it to fail."

NOT one of the five had been above the timber line and to the glaciers. But Cotton had been several miles over the trail, and he began to tell them as they sped along that he could take them by a short cut to Heliotrope Ridge. The dope was to cross no glacier water, he said, but to keep on upward to the right. One of the girls had told him. The others kicked against leaving the trail and taking chances. They quarreled irritably, irritated as they were anyhow by the hurry and the sticky heat.

When they reached what appeared from the heavy silt and discoloration to be an immediate glacier-fed creek Cotton turned off the beaten path. They protested loudly.

"I'm going this way," he asserted. "When I know a thing I know it."

Now, as when he had gone back into the hotel for his overcoat, there was a stubborn whang in his voice and his face was a stubborn moon. It set the others to snapping.

"You've got just what nature gave a billy goat," charged Jones in disgust. "A hard head!"

"You're the mind of this party!" Cotton sneered.

"Oh, a little shrewder than the average," conceded Jones loftily. "It's my name, Logical."

"Fine, fine!" put in Morton-Dyer. "I need a bright boy to keep me company."

Cotton abruptly headed up-stream.

"Will we go too?" asked Morton-Dyer, uncertain for once.

"We've got to," declared Jones. "He might be turning off to tell friends in the camp about it."

So they set in on the rocky way, and they went a half-mile or so before brush and rock and an uncertain way forced them to give up. There was no route that they could find. As they retraced their steps they cursed at Cotton and growled and grumbled.

"But there is a way," reiterated Cotton. "Can't fool me."

They resumed the trail. It was wide morning now. They met people making down trail to Ice and civilization. Sometimes these were inclined to talk and question, but the five said little, letting it be understood they were hiking on a bet.

"You picked winners all right," a man replied once, nodding to Fags, who coughed miserably as he pulled at a cigaret.

Jones and Morton-Dyer sized Fags up and whispered together, foreseeing that the white-faced, tremulous youth might attract undesirable notice among the people at the Ridge. They resolved to get him on past other people no difference what might occur so that he could not give news of the gold strike. And they warned him to be alert.

"I'll do my duty by you all," Fags promised wearily.

The last lap of the climb of ten and one-half miles was stiff. Up all night, unused to such travel, having pushed themselves hard, the five were weary and soaked with perspiration. Finishing the climb, and stepping abruptly to Heliotrope Ridge, that was thrust into the ribs of Roosevelt Glacier like a blunt thumb, they felt the chill of the ice field against them. It reminded of opening the kitchen refrigerator.

The Ridge was crowded with tents and people, like an old tree loaded down with chirping sparrows. The travelers paused a moment to catch their breath and to become familiar with the location.

The ice field, green in places, dirty white in others, stretched up and up to the very base of the rugged crown of the master peak. Right at hand water poured with a giant gurgling into a stream—the fountainhead of Glacier Creek.

Along the border of the Ridge was one of the lateral moraines—hillocks and drifts and furrows of boulders and wet gravel and mud thrown up by the mighty plowing of the ice drift.

At the outer edge the moraine had dried, and tents were pitched in smoothed places a few yards from the ice. It was the fad this year to go "glacier outing." Men and women in stylishly made-up khaki and boots or leather puttees, sat now before many of the tents at breakfast, either around makeshift tables or on the green grass. Over them stood the last gnarled, sturdy trees of the forest, for this was at the timber line. These people paid little heed to the five as they made their way toward the center of the mushroom canvas town.

Near the rangers' old wooden shack they found the "business district." Commercial minded men had put in two or three big tents for stores and a restaurant, and here the gold seekers breakfasted on hamburger sandwiches and coffee and stocked themselves with spiked boots, alpenstocks, goggles, grease paint, mackinaws, rope—necessary adjuncts to mountain-climbing and glacier-traversing that the merchants had on hand to rent or sell. And each, by unspoken agreement, bought a small canvas packsack for the gold nuggets. At the last they had an old man prepare lunches for them. He talked genially.

"You seem to be in a rush," he observed.

"Going up on a bet," said Jones, and added in vibrant boast. "Bet that we can't lose."

"No parties up for a day or two now," went on the old man. "Storm expected any time."

"Oh, we'll rush up and back. Fellow up yesterday, wasn't there?"

"Fire guard. On a bet too, he was. Hear he stripped a couple o' suckers down below for a thousand bucks."

"How do you know he got to the top?" asked Morton-Dyer.

"Smoke signal—one o' these here little hand bums the sassiety folks is fiddlin' with this Summer so the parties can let their friends down here know when they get to the top."

"Old fellow came down from the mountain, too, didn't he?" asked Jones, and they all focused tensely on the caterer.

"Everything that goes up comes down."

"Yeah, but an old fellow, prospector like?"

"With saggin' pockets," ventured Fags, "and needin' some new boots."

The merchant was willing to please the Summer folks in their vagaries.

"Um," he pondered aloud. "It do seem

I hear something like that. Was there something else I can sell you, gents?"

There was not, and they could not be on their way quickly enough to satisfy the propulsion burning within them.

They were warned that because of the "bad lands" of the lower part of Roosevelt glacier—one of the biggest ice packs of the American continent—they should not strike out straight toward the peak. So, following the advice of two or three persons who volunteered it at the last, they struck off about south, toward the upper end of Grouse Ridge, with a view to swinging to the left on to the glacier when past the lower treacherous edge.

When they had climbed up the bare, sharp rocks until they were out of hearing of the camp, and were beyond the farthest loafers and lovers of the camp sunning on the hillside, Fags set in to violent coughing. He began to lag, and they waited impatiently for him.

"I got to cough some," protested the thin youth. "I held up down there in camp till I liked to bust."

"We ain't going to be held back," warned Morton-Dyer. "Anyhow speaking for myself, I'm not."

"You won't get lonesome," said Jones acridly. "I'll be on your shirt tail."

"Split up!" wailed Fags. "We started out to stick together."

"But some don't stick," allowed Logical Jones. "They didn't have the will power."

"Sinehour and Casey Jones, for example," said Morton-Dyer brutally.

"Traitors!" shrilled Fags, panic stricken. "You leave me, and I'll set the whole pack down there on the Ridge after you."

There was a moment of silence as they adjusted this to their logic. Jones was the first to speak, and he sized the situation up speculatively.

"Imagine the stampede, if he'd tell 'em! If he'd say, 'People, up on top there's gold nuggets the size of pigeon eggs and thick as hail!'"

"He won't tell!" grated Morton-Dyer. "This is my chance to fill my pockets against beggary and want, and borrowing from my friends, and shell-gamin' the public, and dodging the ladies because I'm cleaned, and working. Hell nor heaven, love nor hate, nor a blasted one o' you ginks can stop me, savvy?"

"I'll be on your shirt tail," repeated Jones grimly. "—— can't stop me neither."

"You wouldn't rob me," pleaded Fags.

"I won't be hindered," went on Morton-Dyer, his superb selfishness cropping out. "I'm going to the top, and I'm going to get there first and pick my claim! I'm going on fast pretty soon and leave you."

Under this announcement of mutiny they sat quiet. Jones had the cotton safety line. Idly he loosed it, and toyed with it.

"The gold up there," observed Jack, "being on the ground is placer."

"Sure," agreed the mutineer. "Think of a claim fifteen hundred——"

"You're wrong. Feller down there that tried my boots for me and said the rent was two dollars. He said that fifteen by six hundred feet is a quartz claim. Placer claims, he says, can be decided on, for size, by the discoverers, if they want."

"We don't want!" snorted Morton-Dyer. "First come first served. I'll take what I want. I'll pile up nuggets wherever I find them. A stack o' nuggets breast high! A million dollars. Los Angeles, women, wine, fast cars! Gents, I'll have it or kill! And I'm going on fast."

He looked around at them, his face knotted until it was rock hard and ugly and savage.

Jones got up casually, a loop in the rope end. He took a step or two toward Morton-Dyer, so that with a twist of the arm he could throw the loop with certainty. And he did throw it, quick as light, and jerked it taut around Morton-Dyer's neck. Morton-Dyer leaped up. The sailor, Cotton, were on their feet instantly, understanding.

"Tie him!" shouted Jones. "We'll leave him here!"

Morton-Dyer was in a vise with three strong men around him. He was close to the end of the trip for him, and he knew it, and gave in.

"——!" he protested, trying to laugh, but making only a hoarse noise. "Can't you birds take a joke?"

"Tie him, men," urged Jones. "It's the safest."

He himself began to walk up on the rope. Quick as a fighting wolf Morton-Dyer sprang away from them, and past Jones. When he was brought up on the rope he was holding it with his left hand to keep from choking, and he had his alpenstock—a common hickory rake handle shod with a ferrule and steel spike—to the fore. And he tried to ram Jones with it.

"I'll fight the whole gang!" he bellowed. "Somebody will get hurt!"

He tried to get the loop off. Jones kept the line taut. But there was merit in what the man said. Somebody was pretty sure to get hurt. Then the argument was settled by Jack, with his own alpenstock, suddenly knocking Morton-Dyer's weapon some distance, and Morton-Dyer seeing himself again close to the end of the trip, gave in again.

"I'll surrender," he said. "Let up on this —— rope! It's galling my neck."

They discussed briefly what should be done, and on Jones' urgence to be fair, and Morton-Dyer's pleas, it was decided to tie the line securely around Morton-Dyer's neck and let him take the lead. This was done, the sailor knotting the rope cleverly, and presently they were filing on, Morton-Dyer in the lead and Fags at the rear, coughing.

The going was decidedly up-hill. Every step was up and up. They panted, their legs ached. Cotton observed that he would give freely a handful of nuggets for a place to take three level steps. After a time of great effort they rested. Fags was behind and he labored up to them before he would rest.

The lad was very weary and for the first time he did not light a cigaret. He put two packages from the carton, that he had kept watchfully by him, into his canvas pack sack and wrapped the carton and some of his sandwiches in his mackinaw. The bundle he laid aside.

"Get 'em later," he said hackingly. "No use to carry extra stuff."

It was a man's hike, the way they went after it, no doubt of that. The rocks were loose and sharp, the mountainside steep, and it was up, up, up until thigh muscles seemed dulled.

Even without his mackinaw Fags failed to keep up with them, and each time he caught up they were almost ready to go on.

"You'll just about stop here," said Morton-Dyer. "Can't lose a second on your account."

"Stop!" screamed Fags over, or out of, his coughing. "Lose my share o' that gold? You go to ——, you skunk!"

"You can't go much farther."

"I'll be there with the head man!" snarled Fags feebly. "My share of them nuggets—soft beds and reg'lar meals, and no more tearing around like this. I'm fond of an easy berth, I am."

They laughed at him as they rose to go on.

"Stay with it, kid," said Logical Jones, "and when your money's gone I'll give you a job on a polo pony ranch I'm seeing."

When they got out of hearing of Fags this time they agreed that they would go on and not wait for him more, as they were far enough now from the Summer camp so that if he went back and told, the four could not be beaten to the top, even by the best mountaineer.

At the next rest they rose to go as soon as he staggered up. He begged them to wait, to give him a minute, but they started selfishly on. Morton-Dyer called that they could not fool with him any longer.

Fags renewed his efforts. He threw all that was left of himself into the attempt to keep up with them. He began to unburden, strewing along their trail cigarets, matches, raisins, chocolate bars, everything but his packsack that was to carry gold nuggets in. But try his best he could not keep up with the strong men. Once Logical Jones paused as if to wait, but went on in a moment.

When again the four rested, with Fags far back, Jack speculated that very likely Fags would be one of the other two victims. He was a bit eager for the others to side with him. The circumstances gave him three chances out of four rather than out of five.

"With him out," said he, "only one of us is left for violence."

"I wouldn't want to make all this climb and then suffer violence," said Cotton.

"Hate to have the luck of a lousy cat," filled out Jack. "Live all Winter and kick the bucket in the Spring. But one of us has got to go."

"You nut!" jeered Jones.

"Nut! They's laws, I tell you, laws invisible. Listen here, I'll show you. Here, I gather up five little stones, and here's a big flat rock with a basin and stale water in the middle. I'll name these pebbles after us. I'll mark 'em."

The seafaring man, with fingers that trembled a little, found a nail in his capacious pockets and scratched initials on the pebbles—F for Fags, and J for Jones, and Ja for Jack, and letters for the other two.

"Now," said he, standing over the pool which was no broader than his two hands, "I'll throw these stones up and those that go in the water will be the ones that don't go back down this mountain, and the ones that stay out of the pool, they are the lucky men."

"Sure sign?" mocked Jones.

"It's worth trying."

"I wouldn't foreweaken myself with such superstition," said Jones. "Suppose your stone goes in, you'd give up easier in a pinch."

"Fate's fate."

Jack seemed sort of helpless, mentally. Jones advised him to whet up his will power. The sailor rattled the stones like dice.

"Wait," admonished Jones good humoredly. "All the pebbles that go in the water are men that won't go back down this mountain. Is that it?"

Jack nodded and rattled the stones, and turned them loose.

"Come seven, come 'leven!" he begged.

The pebbles struck around the pool, and bounced, and rolled, and went into the water—all of them!

FAGS arrived at this resting place, but he did not rise and go on with the others. Jones noticed this after they had started.

"Say, men," said he, "we oughtn't to go on and leave the kid in this cold-blooded fashion."

"To —— with that stuff," growled Morton-Dyer.

"Why don't you go back, intellectual?" sneered Cotton.

"By Heavens, I will!" flashed Jones. "You —— Pharisees!"

And he strode back. Fags was in a bad way. His eyes pleaded for help.

"If I was up and started," he suggested feebly, spirit willing but flesh weak.

"Kid," said Logical, "I'm afraid this is too tough for you. Maybe you had better turn back."

"No, sir! No! —— you, don't you turn against me!"

"But, Fags, it's a long hike yet."

"Turning against a pal! You—you chunk o' iron will power!"

"I'll swear," said Jones, "I admire your courage!"

"Admire. A man never done a kind thing for me. Why don't you say, 'Fags, I'll help you over this rough stretch to the snow, where going will be easy'? Hey, why don't you? If I could only get to that smooth snow."

"Come on, Fags," decided Jones abruptly. "By Heavens, I'll help you. You're game!"

He gave Fags his arm, and with renewed courage the smoked-out youth stepped along with credible speed—for a little way.

"By golly," he observed once, "this is white of you, Jonesy."

"We'll make it, too, kid," Jones allowed. "You're entitled to it."

Fags did not answer for some time, then it was to say he guessed he was entitled to it all right.

"Them fellows are gaining on you, Jonesy, like everything. I guess maybe——"

"Aw, stick with it. We're doing fine."

"You can't kid me, Jonesy. I'm—I'm failing." He stopped. "Go on. Catch up."

"Listen, kid."

"Go on, Jonesy. You've been white to me. You're a man. I'm going to be white to you, by stoppin' right here."

Fags dropped down. Jones saw there was no use to argue, nor to lose time.

"If there are claims staked," he said, "I'll get one staked for you, Fags, or know the reason why."

He hurried on, trotting, but he had not gone a stone's throw when he remembered that Fags was coatless and lying on the sharp stones. He went back, torn between wrath at the delay and the desire to do right. He carried the slight form to the sunny side of a huge boulder, smoothed a place, took off his own mackinaw and wrapped the lad in it.

"I hope you get rich," said Fags feebly.

And all that Jones could think of to say, absurdly enough, was a verse from the Book that popped into his mind:

" 'He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver. . . . This is also vanity.' "

"I give you my luck for up there, Jonesy," murmured Fags sleepily.

Somehow it all made Jones feel different. But he in no sense was weakened.

THE trio was far ahead of Jones now, and it was plain, by the spaces between them, that the rope was no longer looped about Morton-Dyer's neck. Jones ran, he made a desperate fight to overtake them, and he reached them where they were paused at the edge of the glacier knotting loops in the light cotton line to run their arms through—some assurance should one slide into a crevasse while the others remained out.

While they paused, the sailor, with weather-wise eye, called attention to the black nose of a cloud edging up behind the

skyline of the mountain. At the same time a sharper breeze ruffled Logical Jones' candy striped silk shirt.

"Going to have some weather," said Morton-Dyer. "If Nellie's dad doesn't get up pretty soon we'll have to take his gold down to him."

He chuckled and chuckled.

They went up on the ice-pack. The heat of the remarkable Summer had melted it to a porous state. It cracked and thundered with their weight, so that at first they were half-afraid and went cautiously. But soon they were going at their old rushing pace, each fearful that the other would get ahead. Water ran in little brooklets on the ice and down into it. They were in constant danger of going through the honeycomb and into a bottomless crevasse.

The four were but moving specks on a vast cold field of ice, with the harsh Black Buttes towering above them on the right and the dome of Kulshan on ahead. There was neither tree nor shrub, nor remote landmark, for their world was curtained in by the blue-brown smoke haze that, some said, originated partly in far-away Oregon forest fires. Only desolation was around them. The wind became sharply cold.

"Storm coming on," said Jack uneasily. "Look up yonder!"

The cloud over Kulshan had become a black bulk. They stopped, startled at the forbidding sight. The world seemed suddenly quiet. The cracking of the ice field was suspended. For the moment they were bound by fear. Jack threw out a pointing finger.

Four birds, looking like graceful swallows, were flying along, close to the surface of the glacier—a strange, weird sight.

"Four," cried Jack. "Four, like us. Behold what happens to them!" He was like a prophet warning Babylon. "Behold, it will happen to us!"

At once the birds flew down into a crevasse and disappeared, and though the four men searched all the ice field with darting eyes they did not see the birds again.

When they started on they saw the black cloud spreading, dropping down, hiding the crest of old Kulshan with swirling rain or snow—a wreath of violence. Then a terrible thing began. The ice field set into cracking and shuddering, and off here and there, to heaving. It was as if an earthquake were shaking the world. The men fell to their knees or sitting postures, white, scared. Ice and snow jambs, formed against the mountain sides and in its clefts for ages, began to slide and tumble in thundering avalanches. The glacier split anew in a hundred places, great yawning gashes.

"It's the wind, the wind doing it!" shouted the sailor.

A hurrying, frigid blizzard smote them, cutting to the bone at the first blast, freezing their wet clothing, roaring and shrieking in its mighty power, tumbling and jumbling the ice pack—cold Winter fallen of a sudden. Cotton started back. They shouted at him.

"We can't go on!" he shouted in return.

His moon face went grim and stubborn, but the sailor threatened him with the spike of his alpenstock, and forced him on with little ceremony.

"Go on," bellowed Jones. "We can follow the shelter of the buttes when we go back. Not much ice there."

"Come on!" roared Morton-Dyer, pulling at the line which connected them. "It'll be easy going down with a sack o' gold on your back! Ease the rest of our days. Whoopee!"

They were like drunken men. And the going was not so impossible—proved by the fact that they did it.

The wind half-froze them. Their clothing became stiff with ice. Segments of the glacier frequently changed position, throwing them about. They narrowly missed crevasses.

Above them, against the great ragged buttes, banked on the northward side, lay a vast mountain of snow packed for perhaps scores of Winters. Earlier and farther back they had counted the stratas that marked the years. The pack was two or three hundred feet thick. And abruptly, amid a world-shaking crashing and cracking and rumble this mountain tottered, gave way, and came tumbling down toward them.

"We're doomed!" cried Jack, and he threw himself down on his face.

"You —— coward!" thundered Morton-Dyer.

Jones jerked the sailor to his knees. Morton-Dyer yelled for them to run off to the left to dodge the coming avalanche. They literally dragged Jack to his feet. They fled like refugees from a battle. The great snow cliff was a mile away, but even now the thundering avalanche was half-way down to them. They could see chunks of

snow and ice as huge as box cars and tugboats hurtling through the air.

Jack fell. The loop was jerked from his arm. He strove to get it back. In his terror, and blinded by the driving rain, he lost his footing and stumbled over the edge of a sloping crevasse. He started down with a scream, but almost at once caught a projection with his hands.

"Hold on! Hold on!" they shouted at him.

Jones and Cotton drew together, dropped down on their fronts and tried to shake the loop of rope down to him.

"I'm doomed! I'm doomed!" the sailor moaned.

"You —— fool, take this rope!"

The ice hold began to crumble under the sailor's fingers. He scratched and scrambled. His toes would not take hold. He would not reach out and try to seize the cotton line. Jones tried to shove it down to him on the end of the alpenstock, but the wind kept twisting it back.

The sailor could have caught the rope had he tried. But he did not try. He only scrambled and scratched and howled with a superstitious glaze in his eyes. And all at once he let go and slid downward out of sight.

"Foreweakened!" shouted Jones above the storm.

The mighty avalanche was now all but upon them. Morton-Dyer had been tugging at the rope and hurrying them, regardless of Jack's position. Now they got to their feet and fled along the ridgepole-like ice wall between great crevasses.

They had got to a slightly wider place in the crevasse field when the first leaping masses of the avalanche reached them. Because there was nothing else to do they dropped down on their faces. A block as large as a cottage roared overhead, leaving a snowy tail like a comet.

Others thundered all around. One mass struck the side of the crevasse in front of them. It was burst, and it burst the solid wall of ice, hurling the men backward into the crevasse on their other side, gouging them out again, rolling and flinging them on, tangled in the cotton line.

The avalanche no longer came in detached masses, but a solid flowing, undulating field. They did only one thing consciously; scrambled to stay on top so that they might breathe.

THREE men, dripping wet, bare of head, crouched miserably out of the storm behind a low wall of rock and rusty mud. No shelter was overhead, and the mushy, snowy, sleet settled on them.

"Fifteen hundred feet further," said Morton-Dyer for the dozenth time, "and hell nor heaven can stop me! Fifteen hundred feet between me and gold. Then this struggle for existence I've endured forty years will be over."

Despite the dull misery of them their eyes lighted. They were indomitable, or at least two were. Cotton had nothing optimistic to say. He shook from the cold—the greatest demoralizer for some men.

"Gold," he snarled. "Wish I'd never heard of it!"

"You fool!" And Morton-Dyer repeated ecstatically, "Gold! Gold!"

Jones cleared his throat and repeated the verse from the Book, paraphrasing one word:

" 'He that loveth "gold" shall not be satisfied with "gold." That is also vanity.' "

"If it comes to that stuff I can say it too," declared Cotton. 'Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.' I've heard my old dad say it a hundred times."

"What's this?" protested Morton-Dyer. "Camp-meeting? Come on, let's go get the gold. Ease and good times, and women and fast cars!"

They got up. Jones ran his hand under a mass of soggy snow on the back of his neck and threw it off.

Their heads above the bank, the storm slapped them. The wind took their breath. They scrambled up to the hogback that led straight to the top at a terrific slant. They could face the awful wind and wet that combed this ridge just here but a few seconds at a time, when they would have to fling their backs to the pressure and gasp for breath.

Jones realized unexpectedly that Cotton was no longer ahold of the rope. He jerked Morton-Dyer and they stopped to look back. Cotton had turned himself loose and was scrambling back down the slope. He was then actually on the narrow divide between the side of the mountain they had come up and the other side that seemed to be a vast drop-away of the world.

"Hey!" shouted Jones. "What's the matter?"

Cotton stopped and shouted up to them: "I'm going back. Can't live in this." The rest that he said was flung away by the wind.

He started on. But instead of turning to the right to go the way they had come, he turned to the left, where the mountain pitched away.

"Cotton! Cotton!" yelled Jones.

He started impulsively down, but at the end of his space of rope Morton-Dyer jerked him to a standstill. Cotton stopped again, and gestured and shouted, and it seemed to them dimly through the storm that his face became a stubborn moon.

Then he stumbled determinedly off to the left, the wrong way. Almost at once he disappeared.

Jones slipped his arm out of the loop and ran down, while Morton-Dyer shouted profane protest. But when Jones got to the lowest dip of the saddle Cotton could not be seen. He might be close by under a bank, or have got far down. Jones shouted at the top of his voice, shouted again and again, but there was no answer.

He gave up. There was nothing else to do. He saw that Morton-Dyer was going on. He scrambled and hurried to catch up. The mixture of rain and snow and sleet made the sulfury clay and rocks slick and insecure. He slid and mired and fell, and it was some little time before he caught up with Morton-Dyer.

"You're a —— fool," said Morton-Dyer, "for losing strength and time to look after that mule. Tell you, it's the man that looks out for number one first that gets by. I'll be at the top when you're lagging."

But despite this boast, or threat, they hooked up with the rope again. Sometimes one was ahead and sometimes the other, and the line frequently helped to steady them, but it was noticeable that Morton-Dyer would exert little strength to help Jones.

The slope, they figured, was at an angle of forty-five degrees in places, and steeper at others. Up and up they went, cursing, grunting, putting up a fight that in the morning they would have regarded as superhuman. Morton-Dyer got out his watch and said it was two o'clock. Considering their rate of travel they had a long way yet to go. Morton-Dyer began to have the best of it. He would not hesitate to drag himself forward on the line when Jones was higher up, but when Jones pulled Morton-Dyer gave slack.

"You better keep alive!" he warned Logical. "I'm not going to waste an ounce of strength."

"You'll get no more help from me then!"

"I don't need it!"

Once they rested behind a boulder, water-soaked, dilapidated beings, blue and shaking, Morton-Dyer with a mackinaw, Jones in shirt sleeves. As they sat or half-lay in the mud and running icy water their real inner human bitter selves crept out.

"Man's a fool," snarled Logical Jones. "Going through this for gold!"

"But if we get it!" Morton-Dyer chattered. "No more borrowing money and being dunned by cinchy acquaintances. No more dodging from one boarding-house to another, and from city to city, and afraid you'll meet the tailor you got a suit from on time. No more of that sort of suffering. Bachelor apartments, and a valet, and a car instead of bluff and trickery that hardly gives a man spending money."

"I've been wanting to start a polo pony farm in Oregon for five years," Jones went on. "I've been gambling and peddling booze to get the money and I'm poorer than the day I started in at it. If I had taken a government claim and worked I'd be on my feet now, and not up here in the sky on the brink o' hades."

"Bah, work! Ease, man. Los Angeles! Wine, women and money that will last. Mister Algernon Morton-Dyer, who owns a gold mine! That's him by the fountain with the silk hat! See? Oh, boy, hear 'em talk about me. Gold does it."

Morton-Dyer sprang up.

"Let's go!" he shouted. "Get the stuff! Stake a claim!"

They climbed on, and struggled—the insistence of life. They slipped and slid and fell and cut hands too cold to bleed and fought on and on.

"—— can't stop me!" Jones muttered once.

Morton-Dyer answered that they would go back by the buttes, where they could travel on the rock most of the way and miss the ice.

After a time the blowing, howling storm slacked up sharply. That is, it lifted away from the mountain, so that the sloping sides to the eastward, the south, and the westward were revealed to them. Desolation, precipitous slopes, were all around.

"Ugh!" Jones recoiled. "Look where Cotton went."

Down at the foot of the spine, where Cotton had stepped away, was a terrific slope down to a glacier so split by crevasses that it had the appearance of corrugated iron. Cotton was nowhere visible.

The let-up of the storm was brief. In a moment or two snow began to fly—dry snow on the wings of a freezing wind. Wet ice had clung to their garments. This stiffened rapidly so that their clothing cracked as they crawled. It was bitter Winter cold, as miserable as on the prairies of the Dakotas in January, Jones declared.

Then these two last men of the seven came to the parting of their ways.

It was at what any amateur geologist soon learns to call a fault in the rock or earth. They arrived at a sheer rock wall about eight feet high. Water poured over this in a thin sheet. Morton-Dyer, ahead, stepped upon a mound of soft earth to climb to the shelf, and as he poised there the soft earth crumbled under him. He had just time to throw himself forward, catching on the edge with elbows and stomach. His alpenstock dangled on its string.

Jones was swept off his feet by the avalanche of mountain débris. His footing slid away, dragging him down. Instinctively clinging to the rope he tried to get his feet under him, but it was like trying to stand on water.

Jones' tugging on the rope was dragging Morton-Dyer from the shelf. Morton-Dyer got one leg up. This let him release his right arm somewhat so that he could shake spasmodically to get the loop off.

"Pull me up!" shouted Jones. "Hold that rope tight!"

"Use your intellect!" flung Morton-Dyer derisively, trying to free his arm.

"Intellect!" sputtered Jones bitterly. Then he saw what Morton-Dyer was trying to do. "Don't, don't let go!" he begged.

Morton-Dyer shook the loop off at last.

"I won't be beat!" screamed Jones, wallowing in the muck as he started sliding down the steeple-like slope.

Morton-Dyer turned his head so as not to see, and got to his feet and kept on at the climb.

UP OVER the curve of the dome crawled the lone man, and over the rim, so that at last he was taking level steps again. How good it felt! Down into what the old voice had described to Nellie as the inner slope of the volcanic crater went the man, searching with darting glance for the red-burned boulder within the bowl that marked the center point of the bed of gold nuggets the size of doves' eggs and as thick as hail.

Morton-Dyer began to stoop and dig here and there with his numb hands, picking up pebbles and inspecting them. They did not gleam with yellow; they did not have the heft of gold.

In a moment he was jumping about, taking up handfuls here and there, flinging the stuff down, only to seize frantically for more.

All the while he searched for the red boulder, and when finally he made out one, a thing as huge as a freight car, he raced for it. At its base, mumbling and gurgling his pleasure and excitement, he fell to his knees and seized up more of the pebbles from the thin blanket of cold, cold snow.

"Gold! Gold!" he kept saying.

Crawling and muttering like a beast he presently brought in a change on this. He began to repeat in a dreadful monotony:

"Sold! Sold!"

Crawling on his hands and knees, scratching in the snowy mud and pebbles, muttering his "Sold!" he collided with another man who sat chattering.

"For the love o' Mike," said Morton-Dyer, dumfounded. "How'd you get here, Logical?"

"Not by your help!" snarled Jones. "There's no gold!"

"We're sold, we're sold!"

"A bunch of fools. ——, let's get back before we freeze."

But Morton-Dyer began to scrape in the muck for nuggets again, and Jones got himself to the shelter of the red boulder to look. But in a moment he gave up, and together they shouldered into the thick blizzard, blowing so fiercely they could scarcely keep their feet, and headed back toward the rim where they had come over.

They got back to where the dome fell away sharply to the glacier and yawning crevasses far below—where it seemed Cotton must have gone. They found themselves without their alpenstocks. The way was treacherous. The flowing water and the wet snow had frozen. The dome was slick. It was a glazed pathway to the crevasses.

All at once Morton-Dyer began to weep.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Jones in a sort of new horror. "What's the matter?"

Morton-Dyer got to his feet, a precarious position.

"Life isn't worth living," he said, "after this."

He put his hands over his face, swayed, and pitched forward, and glided down, down, down, until Jones, fascinated, saw him disappear in the thick and shrieking snow storm.

OLD Sinehour lurked just within the edge of the forest where the trail to Heliotrope Ridge entered. Under the trees and brush the gusty wind and rain did not smite him so violently.

He had risen early at the hotel and come shivering here. It was only eight o'clock now, and this was the third trip. He had had to go back and warm.

Old Sinehour was here with kindly intent. He meant to tell the men, his erstwhile friends and enemies, that they need not fear to go boldly into town—he would not keep his threat to prosecute them. He had acted rashly, pettishly, not in the good sportsman-like way that was their nature. Yes, he did not wish to appear small and 'shop worn' before these bold fellows. And he did not wish to cause them uneasiness, since he knew they would come back as poor as they went. He was decidedly sorrowful for them.

There was Morton-Dyer, he of the clipped voice and the high gambling spirit; Jones, the young man of the brilliant-sharp philosophy; Cotton, the positive and friendly; and the superstitious sailor who roared like a pirate. They should be getting in—if they were ever coming—ever coming.

Old Sinehour shuddered from the cold and his fears.

The fat engineer and Fags the little night clerk—he knew they would not be back—rather, that they were already back, in a way of speaking.

Then a man appeared on the trail out of the mist, quite close. Sinehour, already made tremulous by his fears and the wild creaking of the forest, started back and stared. The man stopped also, leaning on an alpenstock in his right hand.

"Are you there?" the stranger asked doubtfully.

"I beg pardon," began Sinehour, advancing as if greeting a customer in his store. "Good morning, sir. Is there something you wish?"

The man only stared. He was bare-headed, his face was bruised and cut and swollen, and his left hand was raw. It held tight together before his breast a kind of shawl that looked like a piece of brown canvas tent. This shawl had holes for arms that were only half hidden by rags and ribbons of a once brilliant silk shirt. There were torn trousers and boots.

Then the old man saw that this stranger was Logical Jones.

"Mercy me!" he exclaimed.

Jones groaningly sat down on the bank and let his staff fall. Sinehour, with his hands crossed lightly on his breast like a shrinking maiden, went and stood before Rags-and-Tags and made three false starts before he finally managed to ask—

"Where are the other gentlemen?"

Jones made a weary gesture back up the trail.

"Coming, you mean—er, Logical?"

"Logical!" Jones flared out. "Don't call me that! I'm fed up on that forever. Silly braggadocio. Henceforth I am Sumner Jones, Oregon homesteader and polo pony farmer."

"But——"

"No 'but' about it. Logical! All the real logic I had you could stuff in your eye. I'll tell you, mister, when a man's flesh becomes nothing and his spirit everything, like up there in the rocks and raging Winter most of last night—when there's little hope of the flesh left to veil the truth from a man's eyes, he sees clear. He sees through sham.

"Yesterday I was proud of my cute logic and intellect and will power. I thanked my stars I was not as other men. Down in my heart I did. But it wasn't those things that took me to the top."

"The top! You got to the top in that storm?"

"Listen, old man. You are here because you were not greedy. Because you were not greedy, understand? I've studied it all out. Do you know why I am here? Why I got to the top?"

"Why, son?"

"It's none of your —— business! My private secret."

This was like a slap in the face to the sensitive old man. His lips quivered.

"Something I never mention to anybody," Jones declared.

"Where are the others?" asked Sinehour,

changing the subject. "Did they get to the top?"

Jones made his weary gesture up the trail.

"Perished," said he. "Crevasses—the storm—superstition and stubbornness and greed. All but one, Fags."

"They brought him in, stiff as a board."

"Fags? Poor kid."

"And Casey Jones too. They'll bury them."

"You!" Jones remembered Sinehour and his threats. "Why, we left you hog-tied. How did you—. You'll have me arrested, won't you?"

"The fire guard," hastened the old man in his explanation. "Yesterday about noon he was going up the trail and saw the broken tree and the smashed twigs down the slope, and he followed and found me. My wife was much disturbed."

"There were no gold nuggets," broke in Jones.

"It was the fire guard. Fooled you. He told me. His ability to mimic."

Jones got to his feet, a fighting man.

"The fire guard? Another trick? Why, it's murder!"

"No jury would, could convict. He's paying in hard coin. Come and see. You will understand."

"But the girl, Nellie?"

"That was the Smart Aleck too. He said to me this morning, 'men or women, I can mock 'em all. It's a curse.' He's pathetic, Mr. Jones."

"The gold-nuggets!" These things had been very real to Jones.

"Pebbles he'd picked up in the road. He confessed everything to me."

"Great guns!"

"When the fire guard found me," old Sinehour resumed, "and saw I was bound, and understood how serious it all was he started up the trail in a hurry. But the storm was starting even then. He said if you men went past the Ridge there would be the dickens to pay.

"A long time before he got back the campers from the Ridge were stringing into town cold and wet, some being carried. Like refugees I've read about, they were. Crying, hysterical, offering fifty dollars for a seat in automobiles to get them to the main railroad. Special train came in at midnight, to get them. They're flocking into Ice yet this morning, half-drowned and frozen. Oh, mercy me, it is awful.

"About dark some men came in with the engineer. They found him where he had hung himself to a tree. They had him on a horse. And just a little time after that the fire guard came in with the night clerk. He had gone on from the ridge after you others, but when he found Fags he came back, but Fags was gone."

The old man stopped. His lips were trembling. He was just weary and sad.

In the pause Jones said:

"The camp on the Ridge—it was whipped to ribbons. They cracked all night in the wind like rotten ice. I slept in the rangers' shack under wet canvas, when I finally got there."

"Let's get out of this storm," said the old man. "I'm nearly frozen. I'll show you the fire guard."

"And I'll tell him about the others."

"No! Not a man of your intellect."

"Intellect be ——!"

"Er, your big heart, then."

They left the shelter of the forest and went into the gusty rain, Jones limping along on his staff in his grotesque garments. They turned presently into the wide main street. It was dotted with rain-drabbled figures. The same sort of nondescripts sat in the shelter of the buildings.

When they drew near the fire guard's shack they saw him sitting at the sheltered end of the porch. They stopped in front of him. He did not look up. His hands, down between his knees, held a stick, and with the stick he dug absently in the ground.

He was a figure of lugubrious remorse, a beaten jokester. Jones shook his head and they moved away.

"He couldn't be hurt any worse," he said in the middle of the street. "I'd be less than a man. You going to have me arrested? You ought to."

"No," said Sinehour. "I've decided not to. I didn't get lumbago out of lying on the ground. I guess—I'll be a sport."

The kindliness that was so evident—the love of an old man for youth and adventure, the good sportsmanship, touched Jones. He was sorry for his gruffness on the trail back there.

"Mr. Sinehour," said he, "I don't mind telling you why I got to the top, and why I got back down here. It wasn't logic nor will power. It was because I have a little girl eight years old. I did it for her."

THE CAMPFIRE

A Meeting Place for Readers - Writers *and* Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

MORE data on Henry Starr who has at various times been up for Camp-Fire discussions:

In Oct. 30, 1921, issue, Comrade G. L. Harper wants some information concerning a Henry Starr. I hope this is what he's after.

STARR was the leader of a band of outlaws who terrorized Oklahoma. He was born at Fort Gibson in 1873, the son of a Cherokee Indian and a woman who was part Indian. Others of the family were also bandits.

In 1902 Starr was pardoned after serving some time for the murder of Deputy Marshal Wilson, whom he had murdered in some train robbery at Pryor Creek. Nothing was ever heard of him till 1908 when he looted a bank at Amity, Colorado. He was sentenced to from 7 to 25 years in State prison, but later was paroled on account of his good conduct.

In 1915 Starr and his followers held up two banks in Stroud, Oklahoma. They had about $5,000 and were escaping, when a boy shot Starr in the leg, capturing him. The kid's name was Paul Curry.

NOT many months ago I heard that Starr was shot to death while attempting to hold up the People's Bank in Harrison, Arkansas. The story goes that Starr and two confederates rode up about noon and herded all the officers and employees in a big vault in the back of the room. At the same time one of the stockholders walks in (W. Y. Meyers). He was ordered in back with the rest. Meyers had been prepared, it seemed, and in the vault he had a rifle concealed. He opened fire and hit Starr under the heart. The confederates fled into nearby hills and escaped. Starr died a few days later.—COMRADE JOHN MASTERS.

IN JOHN JOSEPH'S story in this issue came up a point that has often worried us. Frequently in Western stories—and dialect stories of some other regions—a character who has been using the rough and ready dialect suddenly begins talking book-English. Well, if we leave it that way a good many readers—most of those who have no first-hand knowledge of the story's material—will promptly brand the change as a careless slip by the author and as a careless slip by the editors in letting it go by. They'll think the author forgot to keep his character speaking in character. Sometimes that is the case, but, as Mr. Joseph says in the following letter, that change from

careless to perfectly good English is itself characteristic of many who use dialect most of the time.

But that doesn't solve the problem for us here in the office. Wish it were feasible to keep the change in the text and run with it each time a printed note saying:

"This change from dialect is O. K. The author knows what he's doing. The men he described did this very thing on occasion. Don't get excited. All is well."

Weiser, Idaho.

In my stories I have been trying to present more or less intimate pictures of mining-camp life in the old days, and all are based to a greater or less extent upon things that actually happened.

FOR instance, referring to the matter of a hundred or more supposedly hard citizens being swept off their feet by music—as related in this story—I have seen it happen a number of times, and the account I have given here is a very conservative one. As a matter of fact I have seen such men—scores of them—driven to tears by the playing of a wandering violinist. I have always contended that man was ninety per cent. environment and only ten per cent. "human nature"; and that the man who has always lived the sheltered life had no particular call to swell up with self-righteousness and moral superiority. It is a fact that when chance dropped him in an old-time "camp," the man who sang in choir and taught Sunday-school back East was quite as likely as any one else to "go the route." I have seen it happen so often that I make the statement without any hesitation whatever. All of which simply means, of course, that a bunch of these case-hardened old-timers were, under the crust, just folks, fundamentally differing not at all from the rest of humanity.

Now the first draft of this story carried a strong scene covering this point; but after careful thought I toned it down fearing that the truth would not be credited (it often really *is* stranger than fiction) and would spoil the story.

I'VE almost lived my life among these people, and I know how they talk. I have made a careful study of dialects and the peculiarities of expression of all sorts of Westerners—and particularly the old-timers. Many of these old-timers are well educated men, put on the bum by whisky or women—or both—and crude speech is a mere habit. In telling a tale they will use the lingo of the camps for the most part; but quite often—and particularly if they happen to touch upon something sentimental, or something that happened years ago *back East*—they will forget themselves and spill a bunch of three and four syllable stuff.—JOHN JOSEPH.

SOMETHING more about ancient prophecies and their fulfilment:

Omaha, Nebraska.

As I understand the Scriptures, Tiglath Pileser carried away the tribe of Reuben, the Gaddites, and the half tribe of Manasseh (living east of the Jordan), a part of Galilee about 740 B. C. and the remainder were under Hoshea's surrender to Shalmanezer (II Kings, xvii, 34, 36) in 721, B. C.

I am not an Adventist, not a believer in anything but the good old-fashioned Christianity as taught by the Saviour, and I can answer Paul in the affirmative when he asked King Agrippa—"Believest thou the prophets?" My study of the prophets has forced me to the conclusion that the prophecies are stern realities, we can't ignore or pass over lightly—as so many are doing. Many of them bear down upon the fact that we are near the "regeneration" when wars shall cease and peace shall reign upon the earth, under the divine rule of the Saviour of men—during the thousand years of peace. The troubles we are undergoing are the *cleaning out* of the remnants of the great war, following the downfall of the Cabalistic beast 666, whose other name is Kaiser—(6 being the integer), and the false prophet (Caliph) of Islam, the Sultan of Turkey. The way to figure the problem "Kaiser" is this. Take the alphabetic rank of the letters and prefix the numbers to 6 in this way:

K	11-6—116
A	1-6— 16
I	9-6— 96
S	19-6—196
E	5-6— 56
R	18-6—186
Kaiser	666

This was handed to me by a young officer of the regular army at Camp Otis, Canal Zone.

At Garden City, Long Island, another regular army officer when speaking of this prophecy said to me, "The Kaiser was 666 months old when he declared war." These were stern, practical men, one of whom was distinguished for his gallantry in France.

As I believe, the Sultan has been relieved as "Caliph," and it is now conferred upon the king of Hedjaz, one of the Mahometic families. The Turk secured it through the surrender of the Bagdad Caliphs. So you can see clearly the Sultan is the false prophet referred to in Rev. xiii; 18: xx; 20, 21.

But I must forbear to catch the mail, with the remark that the number of prophecies recently fulfilled and being fulfilled make their study one of the profoundest in which the human mind can be engaged.—E. F. TEST.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Walton Hall Smith rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Chicago.

I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, and lived there until I was sixteen, when I went to preparatory school at Andover. After Andover came a year in a tutoring school, where I learned a lot of things not to do. Then Yale, for a little while—and the end of schooling; or I might say the beginning of education.

THE war brought to an early end my start at learning the ins and outs of the mercantile business, and two years active service in the Navy ruined it forever—and saved that industry one hanger-on who could never have done any good in it or it any good.

I saw a good deal while in the service, of things, places, and of people. It was, I suppose, more than

the average, since I was moving around from station to station and going back and forth across the water. But it was nevertheless only a sample, for it served the one main purpose of permanently strengthening my determination to see more—and to remember it all by setting it at once upon paper, in the form of fiction.

Since 1919 I have been in the advertising business, and that is the one real business, in a strict sense of the word, where one can breathe a bit of fresh air now and then, and preserve an individuality, if one has such a thing.

I LIKE writings, any kind and anybody's, so long as they're *human*, and secondarily, so long as they have action. Style can go hang; it can best dovetail with the personality of the story's main character, and thus help the reader to understand that personality, without bothering him too much describing it.

I'm tickled to death to join the gang around the "Fire." If there were more such groups, there'd be less sighing and moaning, and more appreciation of the particular blue of certain skies, the morning sun and the calmness of the moonlight on the hills, woods and the sea. Also, more realizations that after all, the eternal dicker and barter and "night-knifing" of commerce is not the *only* thing.

Thanks; I'll listen a while.—WALTON HALL SMITH.

F. R. BUCKLEY of our writers' brigade asks me to state to Camp-Fire that Mr. and Mrs. Ray Buckley mentioned (*re* canoe trip) at our October 10 Camp-Fire are no connections of his. "Of course, nobody said they were, but my initials are F. *R.* and—"

AS I'VE said at Camp-Fire, I'm strong for William Allen White, particularly because of his splendid stand in defense of free speech in these times when that absolute essential of real democracy is being curtailed and suppressed by those who place their own personal interests above any regard for democracy and by those, far greater in number, who are too ignorant of their boasted democracy even to know when one of its essentials is being strangled to death. But I'm mighty strongly against him on his defense of anti-weapon legislation. I not only agree with the following open letter to Mr. White from one of you, but I ask him how, with his sincere belief in the necessity of safeguarding the essentials of democracy, he can advocate disarming the general public of our democracy, leaving them helpless under the rule of this, that or the other minority, autocratic, criminal or openly and directly hostile to our democracy? How does he reconcile any anti-weapon law with the Constitutional Amendment that reads:

"*A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a Free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed*"? What does "infringed" mean, Mr. White?

The comrade's letter follows. His reason for not giving his name is not one he need be ashamed of.

DEAR SIR:

On page 18 of the July 22nd issue of *Judge* appears the following editorial:

"The Gunman's Millinery

"The other day the New York police force caught a specimen of the gunman Americanus, and in dissecting his cuticle they found the following defensive antennæ:

One .45-caliber Colt Revolver,
One .38-caliber Lueger revolver,
Two .25-caliber automatics,
One 7-inch unused dirk,
One blackjack,
One pair of new handcuffs,
One vial of chlorine (or, with whisky, 'knockout drops').

"If the gunman continues to develop along these lines, he will find himself displaced by some other species. For, unless his motive power increases, he can not carry his armament. In the meantime it will pay to consider how we are developing these mankillers by permitting the unrestricted sales of firearms. What excuse is there for gun-toting in this modern world! Why is not society's right to peace and order a paramount right to any man's privilege to carry a gun on the public streets? Why should the gunman's love for his peculiar millinery load up the tax-rolls with court costs in putting the gunman in jail? Why should the common man be taxed to death that the crook may disport himself like a battle-ship?"

IN ORDER that both sides of the case may be fairly defined, I beg to present the following statements for your consideration.

Your editorial does not show that the weapons listed were for the individual use of the captured crook.

Having had some experience with gunmen of various types, I assure you that any one of the smoke-wagons specified would be quite sufficient, provided it could be gotten at speedily enough.

A man should logically carry those things which are most likely to be useful to him in the work he is to do.

We come now to the discussion of the work of the gun-man and the undesirability of gunmen as a class.

That they are undesirable is admitted by all exponents of organized society. But bewailing the fact that they exist, and whining about the cost of imprisoning gun-men, will not remove the menace.

Man-killing is a distinct and difficult performance, not to be lightly confused with the mere carrying of firearms. It is necessary to be in a certain frame of mind, and to have a sufficiently powerful incentive, before you can kill your man.

I grant you that, among degenerates, the mood in which one person will kill another is almost constantly present, but that condition is due to definite causes, entirely apart from the possession of firearms.

Please bear in mind that the gunman is a criminal who would rap you over the head with a gas-pipe just as quickly as he would shoot you—from behind. It is the personality, not the weapon, that counts.

YOU state that the unrestricted sale of firearms is responsible for the development of gun-men. My dear sir, there are at least a dozen ways of clandestinely securing firearms. These ways are well known to the underworld, and legislation can not altogether stop them. The criminal class will *always* possess and use firearms.

IF YOU will pardon the assertion, I think you are looking at the problem from the wrong angle.

When you destroy a servant of man, you reduce him that much nearer to the beast from which he has risen during the long, bitter, hard-fought centuries.

Fire is a servant of man, yet when uncontrolled is a terrible agent of death. Would you therefore prohibit the use of matches?

Water is vitally important to the life of man, yet the raging torrent is as an insatiable monster, greedy for the lives of men. Would you therefore remove all inhabitants of the country to the mountain-tops?

Firearms are servants of man, like the others, and when their force is misdirected, can also become terribly destructive. Yet it is just as logical to try to control fire and water by legislation, as it is to do so with regard to firearms. All three are too necessary to man's welfare to be handled in such a way. The use of all three has been developed through centuries of need and service.

NO ONE will argue that firearms should not be manufactured. No one will argue that responsible persons should not be permitted to own and properly use firearms. There can be no debate on the subject of the right of free men to defend their homes and property.

The firearm in the possession of the citizen trained to use it, and with a grim determination to defend himself, is the most important single element in the solution of the problem of eliminating gunmen.

Do you know why criminal gun-toters are so free with their weapons? Because they understand that the officers of the law are too few adequately to cover the country. Since the economy of operating city and State governments has become such an issue, the police and protective forces have necessarily been held at the minimum.

With the responsible citizen going armed, the increase in the police force of the nation would be appreciable and well distributed.

The shooting down of a few desperados by righteously indignant citizens would have a wholesome effect on the conduct of affairs.

Please do not misunderstand me. I do not favor the promiscuous shooting of any one by any one. But reason asserts that gun-mob activities can be curbed more quickly by this method than by lamentation over the taxes.

REGARDING your statement as to the right of society to have peace and order, I can but state that peace and order inevitably and solely accompany that conduct of society which clearly demonstrates society's ability to take care of itself.

By all means strive to control the use of firearms and limit their use to proper purposes. This is a vastly different thing from legislating away the right of Americans to have and become proficient in the use of various lethal weapons.

YOU state that the court costs of incarcerating the gun-men load up the tax-roll. Are you, who clamor for protection, unwilling to pay for it? The common man is not taxed to death for any purpose. Governments which tried that system litter the plains of history with their wreckage.

These United States are a going concern, and will continue to levy taxes as required. Courts must exist. They administer justice and insure that the convicted criminal is punished and immured where he can't get at *you* and *your* property.

It would appear that a man who has reached your eminent position in public life could manage to make his criticism constructive. The country has helped you get where you now are, and, as a loyal American, you owe the country a debt of honor which could be most fittingly paid in this hour of need.

You point out sore spots without indicating the remedy. Come across, Mr. White! What's your answer?— —— ——

I said I agreed with the above letter, but it must be with a restriction on two. The writer says "No one will argue that firearms should not be manufactured." Comrade, you overestimate the intelligence of some of your fellow citizens. Recently the New York Bar Association met and solemnly passed a resolution in favor of prohibiting the manufacture of firearms in this country. A lawyer's one remedy for any evil is usually to pass a law against it and go home proud and happy. That's why the statute books in this country are loaded with thousands and thousands of laws, some effective and enforced, many disregard with impunity or enforced only by fits and starts, many utterly and completely forgotten. And *that*, in turn, is a chief reason why Americans are notorious among the nations for disregard of law as well as laws. Nor did these legal wiseacres who resolved and dissolved deign to consider that, with thousands of miles of coast-line and border, there would if arms were no longer manufactured in the U. S., be always a very ample supply of firearms for criminals and other undesirable minorities to be as well armed as ever, but

not enough to arm and protect the respectable majority.

Also, comrade, there *are* plenty to argue that responsible persons should not be permitted to own and properly use firearms. And, again, there *is* debate on the right of free men to defend their homes and property. The anti-weapon movement is even more of a danger than you think. There is even that little joke in the words "that *can* be concealed on the person" which would put rifles and shotguns, as well as pistols and revolvers, under the ban.

Yes, you make one big mistake, comrade. You underestimate the fanaticism of fanatics.

IF CHIGGERS bother you, here's a remedy. Also something as to their northward range.

Chicago.

The writer noticed in the Camp-Fire that D. W. C. of Arkansas in writing of "chiggers" says that he does not know how far north this pest ranges, and can vouch for having gathered a beautiful mess of them on a hike I took up your Olentangy River one beautiful Summer Sunday.

Can also vouch for gathering another mess of the same kind one other Summer when I was hiking through Connecticut along the river of that name.

AS A knockout for these "pests," if the sufferer is where he can get a piece of butter or bit of lard about the size of an egg and a big handful of salt, and mixes thoroughly the salt with either the butter or the lard, and will smear this upon the spots formed by the blarsted things, he will find that the following morning the annoyance caused by them has ceased to exist. A "bawth" the following night, and he will be ready for another encounter.

The last named place is the farthest north I have ever had the pleasure of meeting them, but I have "cropped" them many times in all parts of the State of Florida, and the remedy was given me by a dyed-in-the-wool Southerner on the occasion of my first "meeting up" with them down in the "you all" country.—C. N. H.

SOMETHING from Barry Scobee in connection with his story in this issue:

Bellingham, Washington.

In the story "Seven Fools" birds are mentioned as flying into a crevasse on the glacier and not reappearing. I have actually seen just that. I ascended Mount Kulshan, as I call it in the story, this being the ancient Indian name and common even now, on the 11th day of August, 1921, and our party, while crossing Roosevelt Glacier, saw a flock of, I think, seven swallow-like birds fly gracefully into a vast cold crevasse and, though we looked for a long time, we did not see them again. It was as if they had flown into that yawn of the ice and gone to roost.

The common name of Kulshan is Mount Baker, and it is ordinarily so called. C. F. Easton, a scientist of this town and known as the historian of Mount Baker, has told me that much exploration has half-way convinced him that the top of the mountain is snow filling a vast volcanic crater. This is neither proven nor disproven. The height of the mountain is given as 10,827.

Storms come suddenly on the mountain. A week after the party of which I was a member made the climb the same guide led another party, and as it approached the higher reaches a terrific blizzard suddenly blew over the skyline and drove them back. This was August 17.

Seven and eight thousand feet up we saw lifeless bugs. I heard of ants being that high. We saw flies buzzing about. Why they go there I don't know, for there was nothing but ice. The ice, which is more like crystal snow on the surface, is somewhat dirty even at the highest altitudes—that is, dusty, or soiled, sufficiently for us to scrape away the top when we filled our little pocket waterbottles with crystals to melt for water.—BARRY SCOBEE.

SAND CREEK MASSACRE, Elizabethtown, N. M., Wild Bill, Jim Baker, William N. Byers. How about David Huston, Uncle Frank?

Bayfield, Colorado.

Was particularly interested in Uncle Frank Huston *re* the Sand Creek Massacre. It would not be proper to say I was acquainted with Col. Chivington; acquaintanceship between a grown man and a schoolboy is not easy. But I knew the Colonel, and remember the controversy that raged for years and centered about him. I wondered then, and wonder now, whether his stern, unsmiling face, and what I thought then a questioning look in his eyes, were the result of an unjustified attack on an upright man, or whether they were caused by the memory of what his men had done by his command. You can still get ardent supporters for both sides of that matter here in Colorado.

MET an old two-gun man named David Huston, in Red River, N. M., a few years ago. Uncle Davy to all of us. Wonder if he is any relation to Uncle Frank? He was one of the old-timers in Red River and was said to be a holy terror with a gun in either or both hands when he was younger.

Pass this tip on to Hugh Pendexter if you get a chance: Elizabethtown, N. M., might be nicely used as the scene of an historical story. At one time it had a population of 20,000 and there was considerable talk of moving the capital there from Santa Fé. That was about fifty years ago. Red River followered after an interval of about twenty-five years, with nothing to justify the camp, as had Etown. You could get the populations of both towns into a passenger car now.

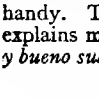
ALL the Wild Bill stuff interests me, because a cousin of his was a mining partner of mine in 1903. He told me a great deal about Bill, but nothing to his discredit and nothing new. This cousin, Hillis Parrott, was some man, too. Out in the John Day River country, in Oregon, he rode into the willows after a well-known bad man who had caught

Hillis by surprize and stolen a fresh horse. Hillis and the horse came back, but nothing was ever seen afterward of the thief, and Hillis never would say a word about what had happened. He only laughed when I asked him.

Jim Baker is another of the old-timers I knew when I was a kid, and he is well worth the attention of some writer.

One or another of my pioneer relatives were acquainted with all the old-time characters, and I had a keen appreciation of what they were and what they had done. Richardson's "Beyond the Mississippi" was intensely interesting to me for that reason, and because he tells of an uncle, William N. Byers, getting out the *Rocky Mountain News* with a rifle leaning against the desk where it would be handy. That uncle was my boyhood hero, which explains my early love for newspaper work. *Adios y bueno suerte.*—S. S. S.

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map. Help make them grow.



A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

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WHEN Arthur O. Friel set out on his last trip he asked me to say nothing about it, on the general idea that after doing a thing is a better time to talk about it than before doing it. He was going somewhere up the Orinoco, by himself as is his custom. Not on business or to accomplish anything in particular, but just because he wanted to.

I heard from him at Port of Spain, Trinidad, where he fell in with a good Camp-Fire comrade, Captain Alfredo L. Demorest. Then the jungle, where there are no mail boxes. Considerably later he emerged after an exceedingly interesting trip up the Ventuari, a tributary of the Orinoco. I'll not spoil the story by giving any details. He's going to tell you himself at a later Camp Fire. Also, he's written a novelette for us that pictures the country through which he passed.

BEFORE getting heated up about the San Saba or any other lost mine or mission treasure, remember E. E. Harriman's warning at a past Camp-Fire. This particular comrade may have a real clue to a real treasure, but the game in general seems to involve a very long chance.

Austin, Texas.

Friends of The Camp-Fire: Have any of you ever heard of the San Saba Mission and the San Saba Mine? I have gathered all the data possible in this part of the country, but I am sure that there are some among you who can give me further data and possibly advice. This old mission and mine has been lost for over one hundred years and I think that the chances of ever finding them are very slim. However, with the aid of you who can give me data we may be able to make a good guess. The old Spanish records show that there was over fifty million dollars worth of gold taken from this mine and from all I can gather there is still that much there. It stands to reason that the mine was close to the old Mission.

Now, don't think that I am trying to enlist the aid of any of you in trying to capitalize this idea of hunting lost treasure, but I will gladly exchange ideas and data with any one who is interested, and anything I can tell you I will gladly do so. I have been studying this thing for ten years and more and, while I would not gamble on any one ever finding it, I think my chances are somewhat better than any one's that I know of.—GEORGE HARWOOD Jr., 405 West 21st St., Austin, Texas.

BE MARKING down your favorites for our annual vote by readers on the best stories published in the magazine during 1922. Send in your list at the end of the year. Let us know the kind of fiction you like.—A. S. H.

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A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts 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 assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts 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 given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

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2. **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.**
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H. C. WIRE, Chino, Calif. If all conditions are complied with, a *general estimate* as to composition and commercial value will be given from ore specimens submitted. Specimens half the size of a man's fist, in canvas bag, cigar-box or other strong wrapping; preferably by parcel post; *always marked with sender's name and address.* Separate letter telling general nature of locality, mass of rocks where found and of neighboring rocks; what local mining activities; *what particular mineral is sought in sample;* nothing that gives away exact location. Samples (usually destroyed in analysis) will not be returned. Charge: $1 per sample.

Oil. A rough general opinion given on oil indications. Give general description of lay of land as to hills, exposed rock-beds, kind of rock. (Can help also by referring inquirer to U. S. Geol. Survey bulletins that may bear on locality.) No questions as to stocks, companies or investments answered. Charge: 50 cents per locality.

No responsibility assumed by either the magazine or me beyond honesty and sincere endeavor. Name and address of sender will not even be passed on to the magazine in case inquiry and answer are sent it for publication.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. ARTHUR BENT, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

United States Revolver Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

All inquiries for information regarding the national parks, how to get there and what to do when you get there, should be addressed to the National Park Service, Washington. D. C.

More Pirate Literature

THIS information supplements that given by Mr. Barker in the issue of Feb. 20, 1922:

Question:—"Will you kindly tell me where I can get the following books and if possible the approximate cost of same?

"Buccaneers of America," John Esquemeling; "The Voyages of Capt. Barth and Others," Philip Ayers; "Buccaneers and Pirates of Our Coast," F. R. Stockton; "History of Buccanneers of America," James Burney; "Genealogical History of the Family of Morgan."—C. J. GRANT, Pittsburg, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Barker:—Esquemeling went through four or five editions in French, Dutch, Spanish and English between 1690 and 1750. Since then the only reprint that I know of is a complete one in one large volume, published in 1853 at Boston by Benjamin B. Mussey & Co., 29 Cornhill.

The editions were published thus. Esquemeling's narrative, which recounts the operations of Pierre LeGrand, Roc the Brazilian, Bat the Portuguese, Montbars, etc., and more particularly those of Llolonois and Sir Henry Morgan (with the latter two of whom Esquemeling served) occupies 259 pages in the edition of 1741 (English) and 179 pages in the edition of 1853 (English).

The edition of 1741, which is the fourth, and printed in London, also contains the operations of Captains Sharp, Sawkins, Coxon, Harris, Bournano, Cook, Alleston, Row, and Macket (which followed those of Morgan and were in the South Seas or on the Pacific coast) in 212 pages by Basil Ringrose, who was a quartermaster among them.

This is succeeded by a Journal of 250 pages, of a voyage made into the South Seas by the American freebooters under DeGraff and Van Horn, commencing in the year 1684 (about which time the Sharp and Coxon voyage terminated) and ending in 1689, by the Sieur Ravenau de Lussan, an ensign among them.

In conclusion there is the relation of 26 pages of a voyage made by the Sieur de Montauban, Captain of the Freebooters on the coast of Guinea, in the year 1695. (Whole in two volumes.)

All the above is printed in English and is copied verbatim (but without the index, and the four books not divided, although by the chapters you can readily tell where one leaves off and another begins) in the edition of 1853 (one volume).

In the French editions probably the voyages of Sharp, Coxon, etc., would be omitted, and more stress laid on French exploits. The same—stressing the operations of their own nationality—in the German and Spanish editions.

As they are all out of print the only way to obtain them is of a private individual, at auction, or through some bookseller who specializes in such things. In ten years I have seen only one odd volume (Vol. II) of the English edition on sale, and that at auction.

The French editions are more often met with, and can be purchased more cheaply.

As I have said, I have not seen the English edition on sale since I bought the one I have described heretofore some fifteen years ago for $100.

I know an individual who has—or had some months ago—both that edition and the one of 1853. At that time he was willing to sell the 1741 edition (2 vols. very quaintly illustrated with woodcuts of Morgan, Llolonnois, Roc the Brazilian, Bat the Portuguese, battles and maps, and beautifully rebound in full morocco) for $75, and the edition of 1853 (1 vol. with frontispiece and illustrations of Morgan, Llolonnois, etc., copied from old edition) for $20. I do not know if he still has them or if they are still for sale. I will inquire for you if you wish me to. I should doubt your being able to get the English editions for less unless by chance.

"The Voyages of Capt. Barth and Others" I am unfamiliar with.

"Buccaneers and Pirates of Our Coast," by Frank Russel Stockton, is not contained in the best edition of his (so-called) complete works, which I have. It was published (by Harper, I think) about 1890, and is probably out of print. It is only a collection of a dozen or so lives, apparently picked at random from Johnson. I saw it sell at auction a year or so since for two or three dollars.

James Burney's "History of the Buccaneers of America" was published in 1816 in London. Printed by Luke Hansard & Sons, near Lincoln's-Inn Fields; for Payne and Foss, Pall-Mall, it forms one of the five quarto volumes of his masterly work, issued between the years 1803-1817, under the general title, "A Chronological History of the Voyages and Discoveries in the South Sea or Pacific Ocean."

I have a very beautiful reprint in one vol. half morocco, published by Swan, Sonnenschein & Co., London, Paternoster Square, 1891, which I think cost about $5 fifteen years ago.

I have also an edition in one small voulme, but complete, published by the Unit Library, Limited, Leicester Square, London and New York, 1902, which I picked up in a department store for about twenty-five cents. It makes a handy pocket edition.

For general purposes this is all that is necessary, and covers all the others, for information on the early or buccaneers proper, down to the days of such pirates as Kidd, Blackbeard, etc., for which purpose you would want Capt. Charles Johnson's "Lives of the Pirates," London, 1726, or one of the several copies of his lives (which the Stockton book is to a limited extent).

I would refer you to a long letter of mine in the "A. A." section of the Feb. 20, 1922, issue, Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, in which I give a long list of pirate publications.

As to a genealogical history of the family of Morgan in America, I can not advise you. Libbie has none in a recent catalog, composed entirely of genealogies. If you were thinking of the buccaneer, Sir Henry Morgan, he was of obscure Welsh parentage and left no descendants.

Trust that this may be of service to you, and regret that I can give you no more definite information.

The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

'Gator-Hunting in Florida

SEEMS to be more sport than profit in it:

Question:—"Would like to ask you a few questions regarding alligator-hunting in Florida. Are they plentiful there? Could you inform me where I could go to hunt same? Also what sort of equipment would we need as there are two of us? Is there any market for 'gator hides? And where? We thought perhaps we could make a business as well as a pleasure trip there.

What sort of a boat would you recommend to us? Also could you give us an estimate upon the cost of an outfit minus the grub part? At present our outfit consists of a .401 auto Win., .45 Colt automatic, an eight-m.m. Mauser carbine and a .45 Govt. S. & W. revolver. Would these arms be suitable for our purpose?"—W. DALTON, New Orleans, La.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—Alligators are by no means so plentiful as they once were in Florida. Those that are left are to be found in the wild places, anywhere in the State. There is a market for 'gator hides, yes, but not a good one; I'm told that it's worth as much as the hide brings to skin them now. There is a firm or two in Jacksonville that buys them, but I don't recall the names just now.

Nearly any kind of boat will do, and nearly any kind of gun, though a high-power rifle is best, and especially an explosive bullet is best. The best way to hunt them is to go at night with a strong light, "shine their eyes," shoot them, mark the spot with a weight and a float with a cord between, and go back next day to grapple for them. (At that you won't find half of them!)

Any of the weapons you name will be all right. There's a lot of poppycock about this notion that 'gators are so hard to kill. A .22 bullet will kill one if you hit him in a vital spot—backbone, brain or heart.

Cost of an outfit? It would depend on whether it was new or second-hand, of what it consisted, and where you got it. Not much is needed. A tent, Army-type beds, blankets, cooking-utensils, ax, lantern, carbid light, emergency remedies (and don't

forget a possible, though maybe not probable, snake-bite).

Frankly, I don't believe that hunting 'gator hides is a very good business any more. You have to pay enough for anything made of 'gator hide, goodness knows, but the hunter is certainly not the man that gets the big money. Commercial salt-water fishing, in my opinion, would pay much better, and perhaps give you a good time too.

Boomerang Throwing

AUSTRALIA'S indigenous sport:

Question:—"Please send me a complete list of the chief sports of Australia in which the natives indulge.

As this letter is the result of a friendly argument I trust you will not disappoint me."—GEO. W. CORNISH, Bronx, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Goldie:—I am rather puzzled as to what information you desire, whether it is in respect to the sports indulged in by the Australian people generally, or whether you are referring to the pastimes of the "natives," otherwise the aborigines.

Over here, when we refer to natives we mean the remnants of the black race, which is now rapidly dying out. Americans frequently make the mistake of thinking that Australia is chiefly populated by blacks, and I am therefore wondering if you are under the same impression. However here goes.

As Australians are ninety per cent. purely British, the sports indulged in are naturally chiefly those brought over from England; namely, cricket, football, golf, tennis, bowls, horse-racing, polo, hockey, etc. Of late years we have been becoming to some extent Americanized, and therefore such games as baseball and soccer football have become more or less popular.

Australians, however, are great lovers of water pastimes; and surf-bathing, boating and fishing are indulged in here more than in any country in the world. As nearly all our big centers of population are on the seaboard, and as we possess a coast-line rich in sandy beaches, opening out into magnificent harbors, rivers and lakes, and as the weather is warm for the greater part of the year, it is only natural that we should be attracted by aquatic pastimes.

For instance, in Sydney surf-bathing is quite a different thing to what it is in most of the American seaside resorts, and on a hot day in Sydney you can see a sight that you won't see in any other part of the world. Take an automobile and follow the coast-line south from Manly to Bondi, Coogee, Maroubra, and La Perouse, which are the near-by and popular seaside resorts, and you will see hundreds of thousands of people in the water. Nearly everybody goes down to surf or swim.

There is no such thing as the "dress parade" along our beach esplanades, which is usually to be seen at American or European resorts. People take their surfing earnestly, and make of it a real sport.

If you are referring to the sports of the Australian aborigines, who are now very rarely seen in our cities, I am afraid that there is not much to be said, as the race is in decay, and their ancient pastimes are indulged in only in those few places in the far out-back, where the blacks retain some semblance of their former selves.

The *corroboree* is the best known pastime of the Australian aboriginal. It is much the same as most of the feasts held by Pacific island races, consisting of a performance of war-dances, spear-throwing, boomerang-throwing, etc.

The last-named sport is peculiar to the Australian aboriginal, the boomerang being a thing of their own invention, and being in a way the most remarkable weapon in the world. I have seen an Australian aboriginal stand in the street of a city, throw his boomerang right around a substantial modern building, and have it returned to his hand without moving from the spot. Needless to say, boomerang-throwing is seldom seen in the large centers of population; but in the country districts it is indulged in not only by blacks, but by white people, who find it a most fascinating game of skill.

If you care to submit any further qustions, I will be most pleased to answer them.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

Trapping the English River District

IT'S not so good from the money point of view these days:

Question:—"Am writing you for information regarding trapping for profit in the Hunter's Island and English River districts.

What would it cost for an outfit; and would we have to have a trapper's license? And the cost of that?

Also rules, laws, regulations and habitation of the countries; and what time of the year is best to start on a venture of this kind?"—W. E. BELL, Escalon, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Phillips:—Hunter's Island is included in the Quitico Provincial Park and no trapping is allowed excepting that permitted by the Canadian Game Rangers. The above park lies north of Minnesota and south of the Canadian Pacific R. R. You can obtain a map of this district by applying to the Minister of Forests and Mines, Ottawa, Canada. Ask for the Hunter's Island sheet.

The English River district lies directly north of the Quitico country—that is, north of the Canadian Pacific railroad. Trapping is allowed here. Americans must secure a Canadian license and pay a royalty per skin. You can obtain a copy of the English River district, also a copy of the trapping laws, by application to the above minister.

You should have a good general knowledge of trapping to go into these districts as it's no place for a tenderfoot. The Winters are very severe and the hardships of packing in your supplies many. You should go into this country early in the Summer so as to build adequate houses along your line of traps. The trappers who are now in this district have them a day's journey apart.

In Summer you will have to travel by canoe, starting from Winton, Minn., or from 'most any railroad point on the Canadian Pacific between Ft. Français, Ont., and Port Arthur, Ont. A good canoe will cost you $100; your blankets and camp

equipment $200. In your groceries you can go as far as you like.

In Winter you should have a team of dogs, not less than three nor more than seven. Dogs cost anywhere from $25 to $100.

The "T. T. T.'S" Big Swing

"T. T. T." stands for "Typical Tropical Tramp," as those of us may recall who have been following the discussions of this most interesting human phenomenon. And for the benefit of those who chanced not to see the discussions, I rise to remark that the T. T. T. is not a bum or a beachcomber, but is most emphatically a man of his hands:

Question:—"Would like to ask you for information along the following lines. Am anxious to get around in foreign countries and in particular that part of South America that comes under your list in "Ask Adventure." I am spending my sophomore year here at the U. of M. in an engineering course with which I am not very enthusiastic. Thought that I would like to travel round a bit before I decide on another course. I am now interested in foreign trade and would like to have you give me a few pointers on the possibilities of trade in Latin America.

As to traveling in that country:

1. Are there any means by which a fellow could work his way from one place to another—that is, paying all expenses—once he has left New York? What kind of work could one get on a ship?

2. Have had about one semester of college Spanish. Would that be the same language as spoken by the South Americans or do they speak dialects?

3. Which would be the best country to settle in permanently as far as trade is concerned?

Wish to thank you in advance for the information, and am sorry that these questions are not more to the point. Have a list of various companies operating in South America, but do not know what kind of a job to apply for."—WALTON J. GUTTING, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—1. Write U. S. Merchant Marine, Park Row Bldg., New York City, New York, for details about obtaining employment on ships running from here to South America.

The T. T. T. (typical tropical tramp) jumps through Central and South America are as follows—also including one jump from Mexico. Tampico oil-fields (some fifty companies and a couple of pipe-lines) to camps of United Fruit Co. and two railroads owned by same running all the way across Guatemala (shops at Zacapa and general offices at Guat. City) hike from point 17 miles inland from Puerto Barrios to railroad of Cuyamel Fruit Co., thence to other fruit companies in Honduras, including Vacarro Bros. and Tela Fruit Co.; over and across to San Juancito mine near Tegucigalpa, to Corinto, Nicaragua, and hit the American-operated railroad running to Managua and Granada; to the United Fruit Railroad in C. S. and their camps near Port Limon; to Bocas del Toro, Panama, and up-country to Changuenola, where the general offices are located; to the Zone of Panama and hit for three months' job on the canal (temporary, sometimes open); to the G. & Q. R. R. of Ecuador at Duran, across from Guayaquil; to Callao, Peru, and up to Cerro de Pasco across the Andes by rail to the big American-operated copper-mine; to Chucacamata, Chile, where Guggenheim runs a big mine; to Bolivia and hit railroad and several mines; to Valparaiso and up to Rancagua and hit other Guggenheim mine; across to Buenos Aires and hit such people as Agar, Cross and Co. (28 Defensa St.) for job as engineer in the harvest on thresher up in Chaco, if it happens to be their season (our Spring is their Fall); several other construction outfits in B. A.; up overland to Tres Barros, Brazil, where there is a big American-operated sawmill (one of the largest in the world).

Eleven hundred miles of railroad from Uruguay border through to São Paulo, Brazil, is American-operated also. Headquarters of Mr. Pollard are at Santa Maria. He is the Harriman of South America.

On through to Rio de Janeiro and hit Light and Power Co. Also same sort of outfit at São Paulo. Several local branches of American coffee houses down at Santos also. Also several large branch commission houses in Rio de J. From there it's a long jump to Para and a bare chance of catching on with some commission house in the rubber game. Same thing up the Amazon. Then she's a jump clear to Colon again.

2. Please see attached list. Everything in my territory is Spanish. Mr. Goldsmith has Brazil (Portuguese) and Dutch and French Guiana in his territory. Temporarily I've taken over his "A. A." section while he's away.

3. Depends. Buenos Aires is as up to date as almost any large city of Europe; yes, more so; and almost up to us in pep; ahead of us in many things. All the big capitals are O. K. Hard to say. See my marks regarding booklets. A slant at one of the P. A. booklets will give you a good idea of the countries.

Whaling Today

THE romance goes out as the profits go up:

Question:—"Would appreciate any info *re* whaling. Realize that it's an industry of the past, but am under the impression that there are a few surviving whaling-ships still being operated.

Believe that there are several companies engaged in whaling located at New Bedford, Mass., and there are, or were, some whalers out of Long Island, N. Y.

Can you tell me anything about any of them?

Am more interested in sailing-ships than steamers, but would like to get dope on both.

How long are whalers usually out?

Are the crews paid shares or a regular wage, and if shares about what amount?

What particular season do whalers go out, or doesn't it make any difference?

Would like to know something about the whales, their habits, size, different species, method of catching, etc.

Might mention that I've worked about considerably and am used to roughing it. Was river-driving in Maine last Spring, which is as rough as anything.

Now I am a Yankee, 25, soldiered under two flags; but sea experience is limited to one year and that wholly in steamers—tramps mostly.

Thanks for dope.

Stamped, addressed envelop enclosed.

Please do not publish my name.

Answer, by Mr. B. Brown:—To the best of my belief the old-fashioned whaling industry is extinct. The Eastern whaling-fleet, or what was left of it, was transferred to the Pacific coast many years ago, and the fleet had San Francisco as its home port, departing from there to the Arctic, returning if possible the same year, although often spending a Winter in the ice; but if there are any survivors of that fleet they never get mentioned in the papers.

The whaling industry survives, but on an entirely different and much more profitable plan, for the present at least; although the way it is working, whales in the North Pacific will go to join the dodo before many years. As whaling is now done, stations are established on shore in Alaska, and from these stations small, fast steam vessels go out after whale.

They are killed with bomb lances from the deck of these steam craft and towed in to the whaling-station, where they are tried out and the oil and bone shipped down by the supply steamers or by the regular commercial vessels plying to Alaska. They kill hundreds of whale each year, and the industry had been enormously profitable, but they are likely either to kill all that are left of the whale or drive them permanently out of these waters.

If you want an answer, read the rules.

Sawmilling in China

THERE are some things that even a Chinese coolie will rebel at; and innovation is one of them, as the incident recounted in the subjoined Q and A shows:

Question:—"I am very much interested in China and would like to find some way to get there. I am an accountant and have had five years' experience in Chihuahua, Mexico, in the lumber business. Had charge of a sawmill and the timber end. I came up here after Madero was killed and the natives wrecked our mill, and went into the trucking business and went broke.

If you could put me in touch with some one who might want to send a man to China I would appreciate it very much.

I notice that *Adventure* says that you are not running an employment office, but thought that you might know of some one to whom I might write."—D. J. Woodruff, Casper, Wyo.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—It will interest you to know that when some enterprising capitalists tried to establish a sawmill in Hongkong the natives promptly wrecked it, and the ruins are pointed out today as a moral not to try to change the old customs of China.

Lumber is sawn entirely by hand, except such as is imported from Oregon and Washington. A trestle six or seven feet high is placed under one end of the log and the old two-handled cross-cut saw is used, one man standing on the log and one underneath.

All of which leads me to remark that there are practically no opportunities in your line of business in China, and I am sorry if I appear discouraging.

If you have other qualifications you might write to the Standard Oil Co., 26 Broadway, New York, as it is the largest American firm doing business in China.

The Inestimable "Tote-Cart"

TOUCHING on and appertaining to the subjoined letter and other matters, Raymond Spears writes:

Little Falls, N. Y.

I enclose an interesting "hiker's" letter. It shows how they do the tripping when they get to going.

My wife went over to some religious conference of the powers of light, and on Monday my two boys and I went after her. Back with her and two other delegates yesterday. We camped—the boys and I—three nights in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and saw, too, Connecticut, adding a State to the boys' record. A sand-pit, whence road-repair material, is best all-around place if one has a can of water on running-board.

Lordy—the mobs of tourists! Men, women, children, dogs, cats and birds—caged—and parrots, gipsies, darkies, all varieties of white folks, hotelers and campers, salesmen, itinerants and us—and I've a dozen letters to answer.

Some do bother me! What shall I say to a seventeen-year-old boy wanting to jump school for the free and wide? Or girls of the same age? Or even older. They *ought* to go, but *must* be forearmed and forewarned—which is my plan, for these youngsters may be at the parting of the ways.

My paws are stiff now, because I held the wheel for about two hundred and fifty miles yesterday—lost two hours in Massachusetts hills! A detour!—Raymond Spears.

And now for the letter that prompted Raymond to take to the typewriter. It reads:

Port Arthur, Tex.

Dear Mr. Spears:

Notice your reply to Miss Dorothy Buckmaster, Brooklyn, N. Y., in the July 30th issue of *Adventure*, in *re* transcontinental hike.

I have made this hike twice. The first time *via* route you spoke of (Northern Yellowstone Trail) carrying packs. The last time—two years ago—we made from Jersey City to Phillipsburg, N. J., New Castle Pa., Cleveland, Toledo and Montpelier, Ohio, Chicago, Ill.; through Savanna to Des Moines and Omaha, straight through Grand Island, Nebr.; North Platte to Ogalalla, where we branched off to Denver, north to Cheyenne in order to do Colorado and Rocky Mountain National Park. From Cheyenne through Granger to Border, Idaho; north along the general route of the Oregon Short Line to St. Anthony, thence to Yellowstone, retracing from Yellowstone to Pocatello to Nampo, entering Oregon at Ontario northwest to Umatilla to Portland.

There were three couples on this hike. We discarded our packs, using a two-wheel rubber-tire (pneumatic) "tote-cart." This permitted taking 12x14 wall tent; and oh, brother! You don't know

what a difference a tote-cart makes where there are four or more in the party. It means four times carrying-capacity with half the fatigue. The sides of our tote-cart brought us $240 for hotel advertising.

We averaged a fraction better than twenty-one miles per day. On hot days (which was 'most every day) we hiked from 5:30 to 9:30 or 10 A.M., rested till 3 and hiked from 3 to 6:30 P.M. This gave us about 8 hours at an average of about 2½ miles per hour. Rested one day a week.—Dr. HUGO PAXTON.

Thank you, Dr Paxton!

Big-Game Rifles

HOW to turn a military model into a sporter:

Question:—"I have an old 7.62 m. m. Russian Army rifle with an extra long barrel, which I should like to cut down to about 20 inches, and I can not afford to send it to a gunsmith. Do you think I could do it myself?

If so please tell me how. Would it shoot as well cut down? Could I put on a Marbles globe sight?

I also have a .38 Colt Army special with a six-inch barrel; but I would like a seven and one-half inch. Does the Colt company make a seven-and-one-half-inch barrel for this arm?

Can you give me the velocity and energy of the .30-40 Krag, also of the 7.62 m. m.?

Where can I procure a telescopic sight for the Krag?

Is either the Krag or the 7.62 big enough for bear or moose?

Now I think I've bothered you enough, so I'll ring off and let some one else have the line."—ROY SPEAR, North Clarendon, Vt.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—You can remodel your 7.62 m. m. Russian rifle to a nice sporter; but I would advise altering the Krag, for the ammunition is much more easily secured, and I believe is more desirable anyhow. I did that, but have never tried the Russian arms. Cut the barrel to twenty-five inches, place a front sight—I use a regular Springfield front band, I may say here—and then fit a Lyman receiver sight, and you have a sporting rifle second to none, in my opinion. Write me if you want more details on this; they shoot very well.

Yes, you can secure a special Marbles sight, front or rear, that will fit these rifles. A peep sight would have to be fitted to the grip with wood screws.

The Colt firm makes a seven-and-one-half-inch barrel or the .38 officer's model, and I believe it would interchange on your special, although this is not made with the seven-and-one-half-inch length.

I have no figures on the ballistics of the 7.62 m. m. rifle, but understand it had about 2,800 feet per second velocity. Should develop about 2,500 foot-pounds energy at the muzzle, I think. I send enclosed a ballistic table showing the Krag's ballistics.

You can secure a telescope sight for any rifle from Stevens Arms Co., Chicopee Falls, Mass. Yes, either Krag or Russian rifle is powerful enough for any animal in North America. And less powerful ones are used by some for the largest African game, such as elephant.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

SHAHANE, T. O. Please write to your old partner of the Training Station. Have something of interest to tell you.—Address PERCY RUSSELL, 4102 Thompson Ave., Tacoma, Wash.

REIMER, HAROLD. Last heard of in 1920. Please write to your mother as she is not very well.—Address MRS. REIMER, 16 West 35th St., New York.

McDEVITT, HUGH. Will anyone knowing his whereabouts kindly communicate with his sister.—Address MARGARET McDEVITT, 1837 N. 12th St., Phila., Pa.

KAHL, HARRY. Age eighteen. Please write to mother. Everything is all right now.—Address MRS. H. F. KAHL, 2418 Grand Ave., Dallas, Texas.

WALL, FRANK. Was member of 22nd Co., Coast Artillery U. S. A. Stationed in Havana, Cuba, discharged about 1901. Or any other member of 22nd Co. from 1898 to 1903. Their old comrade would like to hear from them. Please write.—Address J. B. BRAGASSA, P. O. Box 477, Hornell, N. Y.

WILLIAMS, RUFUS. Last heard of in Clifton, Arizona leaving for over seas. Please write.—Address E. C. LAYMAN, 426 W. Delevan Ave., Buffalo, N. Y.

VIVIAN, HOWARD. Last heard of in 1917. Any information will be appreciated.—Address FRANCIS G. ELMS, 236, Boston, Mass.

DAILEY, JACK W. Lived in San Jose, Calif., until 1917 or 1918. Punched cattle in California, Nevada and most all the rest of the cattle raising states. Was in Africa, Europe, China and Australia. Any information will be appreciated.—Address CHESTER G. MOORE, Plainfield, Ill.

FOSTER, H. B. (HAL). Served on U. S. S. *Washington* 1907-1911. Last seen, summer of 1911, in New York planning to go to Peru. Any information will be appreciated.—Address WILLIAM T. HART, 1017a Capitol St., Vallejo, Calif.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February 10th issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

JOHNSON, NELLIE. Was in Summit, Ohio, in 1892. Married a man named Coons in 1902. Please write.—Address L. T., 447, care of *Adventure*.

BRADLEY, GEORGE SHIFLER or JOSEPH LAKE. Residents of Pittsburg, Pa. Kindly write to your only sister.—Address MRS. A. L. PRUDEN, 1922 Sherman St., Denver, Colorado.

DAVIS, ARON and family. Last heard of were in Indiana. Any information will be appreciated.—Address WILLIAM H. DAVIS, 829 Colorado St., Butte, Montana.

HOWARD, GEORGE. Last heard of in Arkansas. Any information will be appreciated.—Address WILLIAM H. DAVIS, 829 Colorado St., Butte, Montana.

FRANKLIN, B. G. (or GUY). Missing since Sept. 1, 1916. If living probably working in oil fields. Any information will be appreciated by his family—Address MRS. B. G. FRANKLIN, 729 W. Mississippi St. Durant Okla.

JACK. Write. I know all. I understand and love you. JOHN.

U. S. S. *TRUXTUN'S* CREW. James Kirby; W. T.; Eugene Frye; Pete Crawford; or any one who knew "Daddy" Lantz in 1911-12. ("You haven't seen anything yet.") Please write.—Address SAMUEL J. LANTZ, Veterans' Home, Napa Co., Calif.

STOTTS, CECIL, CLARENCE and CHARLEY. Their old schoolmate would like to hear from them. Any information will be appreciated.—Address PVT. CLYDE MARKS, Headquarters Co. 30 Inf., Camp Lewis, Washington.

SERIL, FRANK. Formerly of Troy, New York. Last heard of on Army Transport *Buford*. And also Morgan of the same ship in the steward's department, formerly from Pittston, Pa. Any information as to their whereabouts will be appreciated by their old friend.—Address RALPH CAHN, 405 North High St., Chillicothe, Ohio.

PAYNE, ALFRED C. Age about thirty-seven, tall, dark complexion and blue eyes. Father died July 21, mother and all very anxious to find him. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. F. E. BURCH, 307 7th St., Chickasaw, Ala.

WILLIAMS, EARL. Last heard of in Oklahoma. Has property in Omaha, Nebraska. Traveled with Donald McGregor shows for three years. Height five feet four inches, 160 lbs., blue eyes and auburn hair. Parents and sister dead. Served in Foreign Wars. Was gassed, and crippled in left ankle. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address CLARENCE DAY, Wellington, Kansas.

SARGENT, JOHN W. Last heard of was in South America latter part of 1917. Any information will be appreciated.—Address FRANK KING, Gen. Del., Tracy, Calif.

PILSBURY, MARY. Last heard of four years ago at Atlantic Highlands and Seabright, New Jersey. Age eight years. Father, Jim Pilsbury, butcher, worked at Atlantic Highlands and Seabright, New Jersey and New York City. Any information will be appreciated by her cousin.—Address MRS. MADGE SORENSEN, cor. North Water and Mill Streets, East Port Chester, Conn.

BOSSMAN, ARTHUR; Burg, Louis A.; Bushard, Wilfred; Cannon, Lewis Marion; Conlton, Mrs. Conrad; Ira L. Cook, "Mano," or R. M. Cook; De Con, John H.; Farss, Ellis G.; Gregoire Frank; Hartman, G.; Hankins, Drew; Huffman, Carl; Jensen, Victor; Kennedy, Norman; Lee; Malcom, Peter; Malone, Clifford; McGee, John; Middaugh, Robert Lee; Muller, Robert F.; Noll, Adam; Mrs. (maiden name Mollie Thompson); Peebles, Jack; Philpott, Jack; Reed, Mrs. M. A.; Romans, Donald L.; Seagraves, John; Shaklee, George H.; Smyth, Pete; Snyder, "Dutch"; Styles, Virgil; Thomas, Luther; West, Max; Wilson, Samuel William; Willet, Jas. S.; Wray, Albert L. (sometimes called Gray).

MISCELLANEOUS—N. S. L. Please write to your old pal Dutch; Bob and Ruby, write to your friends; would like to hear from the Sergeant of Co. K. of the infantry who was in France with me after the Armistice was signed.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

DECEMBER 20TH ISSUE

Besides the three complete novelettes mentioned on the second contents page, the next issue of *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE UNFORESEEN — ***Albert Richard Wetjen***
The brigantine's mate attempts a double murder in Samoan waters.

A LOST MASTERPIECE — ***Roy Snider***
A painting for which rival gangs risk their lives.

LOVER'S GOLD FROM TURON — ***Joel Townsley Rogers***
Madmen's metal.

GHOST LANTERNS — ***Alan B. LeMay***
Why there were strange lights at sea.

TAMELESS DAYS A Four-Part Story Part III — ***Hugh Pendexter***
Beach Content finds gold—and Indians.

"HANDSOME IS" — ***F. St. Mars***
Wart-hog meets leopard in the African jungle.

AN AGENT OF PROVIDENCE — ***E. S. Pladwell***
He was a bad half-breed, but even so he had his uses.

Keep Christmas with a Kodak

While far too excited to dress, little Jane has popped into bed again to pose for a picture with mother's new Kodak.

And that only starts the fun. Even now father and Uncle Stan are renewing their youth in a snowball fight—and there's another picture.

Kodak is a gift that slips out of the holiday box into the spirit of Christmas.

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Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N.Y., *The Kodak City*

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?

IF YOU want to find another like it, get *Everybody's Magazine.* The aim of this magazine is to publish the most readable, the most stimulating stories that can be had. It was an *Everybody's* story that won the O. Henry Memorial prize for the best short story published in 1921.

Known and Unknown Authors Share Alike

THAT'S *Everybody's* policy in choosing fiction. And is it justified? Take, for example, "If Winter Comes"—the year's best seller. It ran as a serial in *Everybody's* before it came out in book form. The author, A. S. M. Hutchinson, was comparatively unknown then. But *Everybody's* appreciated his work and gave its readers the first chance to really know this now-famous author.

Everybody's Magazine

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