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ADVENTURE

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Adventure

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W. C. TUTTLE · ARED WHITE · HUGH PENDEXTER
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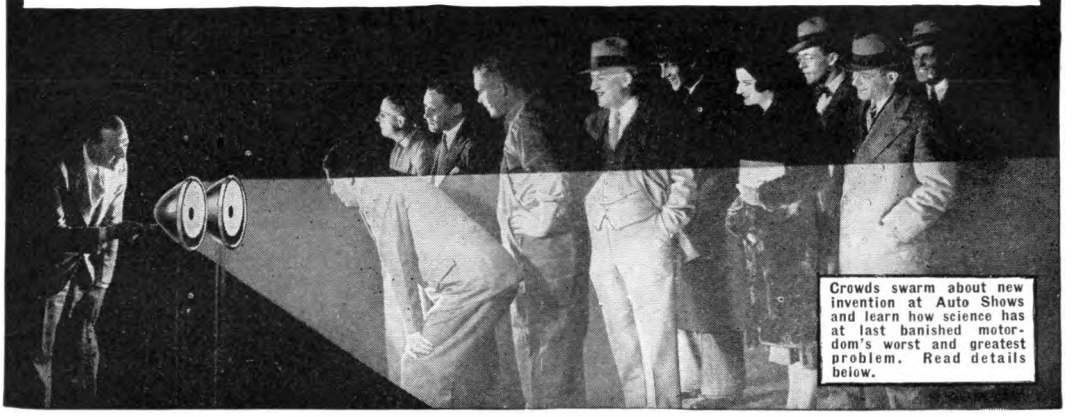
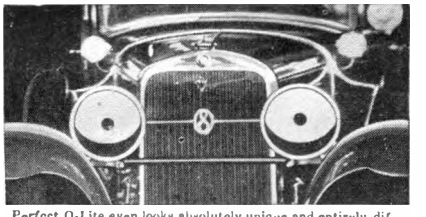
DANGEROUS DIMMING ENDED..
Road Light Doubled!



Crowds swarm about new invention at Auto Shows and learn how science has at last banished motordom's worst and greatest problem. Read details below.

AMAZING INVENTION FITS ANY HEADLIGHT...
Revolutionizes Night Driving!

At last! Night driving suddenly becomes actually SAFER than day! At one sweep, a tiny, inexpensive invention banishes glare yet doubles road illumination! Cuts through every light on the road! Fits any car. Use coupon QUICK for liberal FREE TEST OFFER!



Perfect O-Lite even looks absolutely unique and entirely different. Every sale brings dozens more. It's the greatest "self-advertiser" ever known.

IT is a well-known fact that motor car manufacturers have solved every big problem except one. As soon as the sun goes down at night, the highways of America break forth into a constant, rushing stream of "dimming and damning." Speed is cut down one-third to one-half. Every Monday morning finds the highways littered with broken glass, wrecks, cars in the ditch, overturned, shattered against telephone posts. Every man who ever groped dizzily down the highway in traffic at night knows the horrible sensation of being half blinded by cars on his left, unable to see the ditch on his right, his own lights seeming dim and shadowy and practically worthless. Now, in a twinkling, this curse of night driving is lifted completely and **inexpensively** from the shoulders of the entire motoring world!

FITS ANY HEADLIGHT

This new lighting discovery is called Perfect-O-Lite. It is a little invention that replaces the "bulbs" in your automobile headlights. No extra wiring or installation. Yet actually DOES double road illumination. Banishes need for Glare Shields. Cuts through the other fellow's light, yet absolutely cannot glare in his eyes. Makes ruts, animals, children, detour signs, etc., visible at least three times as far. Makes night driving at 40 to 50 miles an hour safe and easy.

The secret of this new light is in the kind of "beam" or "ray" that it throws. Instead of ordinary light this new invention throws a solid beam of double-reflected or "infused" light down the entire roadway. Shows up ditches at the side, as well as distant objects, absolutely clear, without the usual flickering "shadows." Space here limits further discussion of the facts.

MAKE YOUR OWN TEST FREE

Under an introductory offer you are now invited to be the judge and jury without risking one penny. The coupon brings full details of the invention, offer of a set on FREE TEST and facts about agent's money-making opportunities. Mail the coupon, without obligation, TODAY!

AGENTS! Davis Made $1400 in 1 Week

This new invention unquestionably opens up one of the most amazing money-making opportunities ever presented. Here actually IS that chance for $8 to $14 in your FIRST hour, $6,000 to $10,000 THIS year, with no limit WHATEVER for Distributors! Fleet owners buy quantities. Wallace & Tiernan, N. J. trucks just equipped. Other big orders flooding in. A real self-advertiser; each car equipped is seen by thousands. Davis, Pa., made $1,400 in one week. Start full-time or spare-time. Use coupon for FREE TEST OFFER and details of Exclusive Territory, etc.

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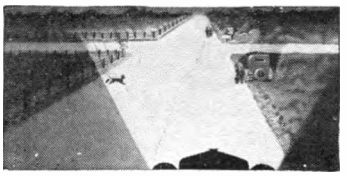
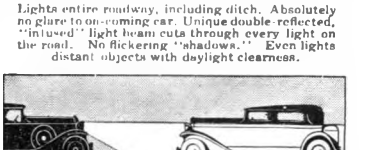


Lights entire roadway, including ditch. Absolutely no glare to on-coming car. Unique double-reflected, "infused" light beam cuts through every light on the road. No flickering "shadows." Even lights distant objects with daylight clearness.



Throws all light on roadway. Shoots through fog, mist, rain and snow like magic!

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Adventure
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Beginning a Two-Part Story

The MAKE-BELIEVE Man

By W. C. TUTTLE

DARK, murky clouds hung low along the base of the brushy hills that evening, and wraith-like fog flung its streamers across the dripping mesquite, where a bawling herd of range cattle—stubborn in the cold and rain—resisted the efforts of the slicker clad, hoarse voiced cowboys to shove them through the gateway of the fifteen-acre holding corral.

It was a big shipment—fifteen hundred head—from the Swinging J outfit, thirty miles away, consigned to a Chicago packing house. Ever since daybreak the dozen cowpunchers had worked hard to keep them strung out and moving in the storm, and time after time the cattle had threatened a stampede.

But now the last of them, a blurred mass in the drifting rain, went through the open place in the fence, and several cowpunchers dismounted to straighten posts and hammer the barbed wire back into place. There was the usual amount of cut fingers, torn clothing and curses before they rode wearily away, dripping wet, heading for the tiny cluster of yellow lights which was the town of Medina—a depot, one saloon and a general store.

The depot agent at Medina was a tall, gangling, sour faced sort of person; a confirmed pessimist, who hated Medina, hated everything connected with the cattle industry. Every payday he swore that this one would be the last—but he was always there on the next one. His was a flag station for anything except a

of Hashknife and Sleepy

local passenger, which he said merely stopped there from force of habit. He was usually found crouched down in an old arm chair, feet on top of the desk, a corncob pipe between his teeth, while he perused a paper-back novel.

He especially hated these cold, wet nights. Wet tracks and washouts might cause a train to sidetrack at Medina, which would cause him to lose sleep. No one came to Medina. It was twenty-five miles across the hills to Concha City, and he often wondered why the devil the railroad company ever maintained a station at Medina. Many cattle were shipped from the place, that was true; but why not let them herd their cows over to Concha City and load there.

He was deep in some such reverie when the door of the little waiting room banged heavily, and he turned his head toward the ticket window to behold a long, lean faced cowboy, his sombrero dripping water all over the ledge of the window. Behind him was another cowboy, who grinned past the elbow of the tall one. Their worn slickers glistened with rain.

"Hyah, pardner." The tall one grinned. "We was wonderin' if you'd mind if we come in here out of the rain to eat a snack. There not bein' any cafés

in Medina, we buys ourselves some canned salmon, some peaches an' crackers, on which we aims to feast plentiful. An' as a added thought, we don't think a hell of a lot of Medina."

The added thought settled the question. The agent swung around in his chair, jerked out his pipe and pointed toward the rear with it.

"Door back there," he said. "C'mon in beside the stove. I've got a pot of coffee on the stove, an' she's stronger than hell; it's a lot better 'n drinkin' water on a night like this."

The two cowboys filed in, doubly grateful for a chance to sit beside a stove. They dumped their bundles on the floor and warmed their hands.

The agent went into the freight room and dug out a couple of old chairs.

"Better 'n settin' on the floor an' lettin' your feet hang over," he explained. "You fellers come over with them Swingin' J cattle?"

"An' a sweet time we've had," said the short one.

"My name's Evanston," said the agent. "Not that it makes any difference."

"Mine's Hartley," offered the tall cowboy. "This is Stevens."

"If it makes any difference," added Sleepy Stevens.

"Not a damn bit," said the agent, digging under the counter. "I've got some cups around here—oh, here you are. Where's the rest of the bunch—at the saloon?"

"Yeah. Thanks for the cup. That coffee shore smells good. Help yourself to the salmon, Evanston. Sleepy, this shore is luck."

"I'd tell a man," replied Sleepy heartily, spearing a chunk of salmon on the point of his pocketknife. "Dig in, Evanston."

"I'll have a cup of this here mud," said the agent. "Dyspepsy has almost laid me low, an' I've gotta be careful what I eat. About all I do is take bakin' sody an' water. Nossir! None of them peaches. I love 'em like a brother; but if I et a couple of 'em, I'd be all tied up in a knot inside five minutes. You fellers been with the Swingin' J very long? I jist asked, 'cause I never seen you over here before."

"We've been with 'em three months," replied Hashknife Hartley. "Our job is over right now—when we git paid off."

"Uh-huh. I seen your boss git on a train here 'bout noon. He always goes over to Concha City to git cash for the payoff."

"I reckon that's the idea." Hashknife nodded. "Most of the boys will owe their wages to the saloon by the time he gits back."

"They shore will. Sometimes I wonder if Jim Tynan don't own a interest in that saloon."

"Prob'ly does." Hashknife grinned.

A far away whistle gave warning of an approaching locomotive, and in a few moments a long passenger train roared past in the night. The agent glanced sharply at the clock, opened his telegraph key and reported the passing of No. 17. Then he came back and sat down. In a surprisingly short time the salmon, peaches and crackers were all cleaned up, and with a deep sigh of complete comfort, the two cowboys leaned back in their chairs, their wet heels sizzling against the stove rail, and began rolling cigarets.

The agent filled his corncob as he gravely considered these two cowboys. Hartley was at least six feet four inches tall. His face was long and lean; he had rather high cheek bones, a prominent nose and a big mouth. His eyes were a peculiar steely gray, and the agent had the feeling that they looked straight through him.

Sleepy Stevens was a different type: broad and powerful, with a square jaw, deep grin wrinkles and a pair of inquiring blue eyes, which seemed to be smiling all the time.

Beneath their slickers both wore the usual cowboy garb, plus cartridge belts and holstered guns. The agent noted that the belts and holsters were hand made, not in the least ornamental, and

had been worn a long time.

"I don't reckon you find it very excitin' around here," said Hashknife.

"Excitin'!" snorted the agent. "I've been here eleven months, an' nothin' has happened yet. I'm sick of the damn place. Jist why the company ever—"

THE waiting room door slammed again, and they turned to see a man at the ticket window. The light was rather bad, but they could see he did not have any hat, and his hair was soaking with rain. He needed a shave, and there seemed to be a red weal across one cheek. And when he spoke, it was with the panting inflection of one who was nearly exhausted.

"Give me a telegraph blank, will you—quick!"

"Telegraph blank?" said the agent. "Shore. There's some at your elbow. Got a pencil?"

The man grabbed at the blanks, glanced behind him as he leaned heavily on the ledge. Hashknife could see the pencil wobbling nervously as he poised it over the blank. Some water dripped off his hair on to the paper and he brushed it aside with the heel of his right hand.

The pencil had barely touched the paper when there came the crash of splintering glass. The man at the window gave a sharp cry and flung up his hands. At the same moment the little depot jarred from the concussion of a heavy shot, and the man slumped for a moment against the ledge; then he slid weakly out of sight.

Hashknife sprang to his feet, vaulted the little counter and the rear of the office, swung the door open and ran across the waiting room to the door, which opened out to the platform. But there was no one in sight. The darkness and drifting rain would conceal any one fifty feet away.

He came back, where Sleepy and Evanston were examining the man. He had been shot in the back with a heavy load of buckshot at a distance of fifteen feet. Some one had poked the barrel of a shotgun in through a window, and nearly every shot had hit its mark. The man was dead, an expression of horror on his face.

Hashknife picked up the telegraph blank, but there was only a scrawled line where the pencil had touched. Hashknife knelt down and looked closely at the features of the dead man. He was wearing several weeks' growth of whiskers. The red weal proved to be a half healed cut, and looked as though it might have been caused by horse kick.

Hashknife felt of his wrist, and was surprised to find them both sore and scabby. He got to his feet, his face serious.

"Recognize him, Sleepy?" he asked.

"No, I don't reckon I do. Them whiskers kinda—"

"Claud Raney."

"No! Well, I—I—yeah, that's right. Claud Raney! What do you suppose this means?"

"No idea."

Hashknife turned to the agent.

"Sheriff's at Concha City, ain't he? Wire him right now and tell him to bring the coroner."

"Shore, that's the thing to do."

And while the excited agent sent a wire to the sheriff, Hashknife composed a wire to the secretary of the Cattlemen's Association.

IS CLAUD RANEY STILL WORKING FOR YOU STOP WOULD LIKE TO LOCATE HIM BEST REGARDS

—HASHKNIFE HARTLEY

The agent sent Hashknife's wire, and leaned back in his old chair, his long nose beaded with perspiration. Finally he reached for his pipe, scratched a match along the desk top and looked at Hashknife.

"Nothin' ever happens here," he said dryly, as he lighted his old pipe and puffed nervously. "An' jist then somebody murders a man."

"That's right," agreed Hashknife thoughtfully. "We better leave him right where he is until the sheriff an' coroner git here; an' it won't do any good to tell the boys down at the saloon. How long do you reckon it'll take the sheriff to git here."

"Who can tell?" replied the agent. "He might be away. If he was in town an' the telegram reached him right away, he might catch No. 18. If he don't, an' decides to ride horseback, gosh only knows when he'll git here. Where you fellers bunkin' tonight? Git your blankets an' stretch out here. I ain't jumpy, but I don't crave to be alone with a dead man."

"Suits us," replied Hashknife quickly. "I kinda crave a warm, dry place to roll up my sleep, an' this shore is all that. We'll be back right away."

They put on their slickers and went over to the saloon to get their blankets.

"What do you think of that killin'?" asked Sleepy, as they splashed through the water.

"Kinda cold blooded," said Hashknife. "Didja see his wrists? He's been roped for a long time; wrists in bad shape. I wish he'd had a chance to write that telegram, so we could have seen what he wrote. But they cut him off short. Don't say anythin' to the gang."

"I'm not sayin' anythin' to anybody," declared Sleepy. "When you're a stranger in a strange place, and you know somebody's got a shotgun loaded with buckshot—don't say anythin' except good mornin', an' be sure to smile when you say that much."

"Safety first, that's my motto," said Hashknife.

"Yea-a-ah! You hadn't ort to lie on a rainy night, Hashknife."

IT WAS daylight the following morning when the sheriff came, and with him was Doctor Estabrook, the coroner, Rusty Roberts, the deputy, and Jim Tynan, owner of the Swinging J outfit. The sheriff, Cochise Conlon, was a tall, gaunt man, wearing a flowing mustache which was but little larger than his beetling eyebrows. He spoke in a drawling monotone, and it seemed to Hashknife that he wanted to impress everybody with the importance of his office.

Rusty Roberts was a little, red headed, grinning fellow, who looked upon his boss with evident amusement. The doctor was the usual type of range town doctor, a little impressed with his position. He wore a white collar and barrel shaped white cuffs, which put him in a class by himself. His upper and lower plates, having been made by the hand of man, clicked when he talked fast. This latter seemed a source of amusement to Rusty, whose sense of humor was apparently developed to a keen point.

They examined the dead man, the doctor on his hands and knees, the sheriff at a distance, tugging at his mustache. Hashknife expected at any time to see him draw out a magnifying glass and start examining the woodwork of the depot.

"Buckshot, eh, Doc?" he said finally.

The coroner nodded. The depot agent had already told them what had happened. Now the sheriff eyed Hashknife closely.

"Have you told everythin' you know about this?" he asked.

"You ain't heard me tellin' anythin', have you?" asked Hashknife, and Rusty laughed softly.

"Hartley helped bring in my cattle, Cochise," said Tynan.

"He was here when the man was shot."

"He don't know any more about it than I do," said the agent. "I've told you the whole thing, Sheriff."

"Have you?"

"Yeah, he told you," interposed Rusty. "Don'tcha remember?"

"Oh, shut your trap," said the sheriff testily. "I'm jist askin' questions."

"That's right." Rusty nodded. "A sheriff is supposed to ask a lot of questions. That's how they learn so many things. It shore is a education—bein' a sheriff."

"Do you know who this man is?" asked Hashknife.

"This dead man?" queried Rusty. "Shore do. Name's Ed Harris. Punched cows for the Nine Drag outfit a few months, but quit a couple months ago."

"Three months ago," corrected the sheriff. "Where's his hat?"

"He didn't have none on," said the agent.

"Where's his horse an' saddle?"

"He didn't bring them in with him either."

"You think you're smart, don'tcha?" asked the sheriff coldly.

"Personally, I think it was a good answer," chuckled Rusty, as the coroner stood up.

"Have you found out everything, Sheriff?" asked the coroner.

"I guess I have," replied the sheriff gruffly. "I'm jist wonderin' how the hell I'm goin' to git these three men over to Concha City to testify at a inquest."

"You can't git me," said the agent. "I'm tied up here, unless you want to ask the company to send on a relief man."

"You might take their depositions," suggested the coroner.

"What's that?"

"Have 'em write out what they know about it, swear to it under oath and sign it."

"Well, yeah, I might do that."

"I reckon we'll go over to Concha City." Hashknife smiled. "Our job is over, an' we're footloose."

"Shore—c'mon over," said Rusty. "Got your horses?"

"I reckon the county might pay your railroad fare," said the sheriff a little doubtfully.

"We've got our own horses." Hashknife smiled.

"That's fine. Agent, will you flag the next train for us?"

"Freight due in fifteen minutes—if you don't mind a caboose."

Tynan paid Hashknife and Sleepy with gold coin, and they drifted over to the saloon, where they bought Tynan a drink, and then went to the store to purchase oats for their horses. The depot agent had made some coffee that morning, and they rode past to get another cup, before heading over the hills to Concha City. He had a reply to Hashknife's telegram. It read:

CLAUD RANEY WROTE IN HIS RESIGNATION THREE MONTHS AGO STOP SAID HE WAS TIRED OF BUSINESS AND WAS GOING EAST STOP HOW ARE YOU TWO HILL CLIMBERS STOP LET ME HEAR FROM YOU AGAIN

—WILLIAMS

"An' that's somethin' else again," said Hashknife. "Let's go to Concha City an' look the place over."

"I knowed we was due to look somethin' over," replied Sleepy, but his tall partner merely smiled at him.

Sleepy knew that Hashknife would never quit until he found out who had killed Claud Raney, and why. Not that Hashknife was interested in Claud Raney, or greatly interested in sending his murderer to the gallows; but he did delight in working out a solution of any mystery, regardless of the labor involved or the danger which it might incur.

And Hashknife felt sure that this was no ordinary murder. It was his opinion that Raney had been held a prisoner a long time, escaped in some way, and was shot down before he could wire certain information. Hashknife was no super-sleuth of the range country, but he did have a keen mind and a keen eye for small details, together with a bulldog tenacity.

He was a product of the cattle range on the Milk River, Montana; the son of an itinerant minister, who had almost too many sons and daughters to share his pittance. So little Henry Hartley, with only a smattering of education, went into the world to win a living.

He grew up quickly, both physically and mentally, a student of human nature, a crude analyst of things. Drifting down through the cattle country, he stopped

for awhile at the famous old ranch which gave him his nickname; and there he met Dave—Sleepy—Stevens, another cowboy with an itching foot.

The other side of the hills called both of them, and they rode away together, just a pair of vagabond cowboys.

And many a rangeland had passed under their horses' feet since that day, and many a hill had seen them go up one side and down the other. It had not been a profitable partnership. Right now they had less money than they had the day they rode away together; but behind them were deeds well done, and memories that money could not buy . . .

CHAPTER II

BAD MONEY

IT REQUIRED nearly all that day for the twenty-five mile trip over a twisting mountain road. Concha City was not much to look upon. Except for the silver mines at Summit, twenty miles north, Concha City had little to live for. It was not a big cattle range, the Nine Drag being the biggest outfit. Concha City, being centrally located, was the county seat; but the county was so sparsely settled that this meant little.

The main street, and that was about three blocks long, was composed of several saloons, general outfitting stores, postoffice, stage station, blacksmith shop, feed stores and livery stable. The little courthouse, boasting a small tower, was located on what might have been a cross street had the town grown that much. The sheriff's office was a sort of cubbyhole in front of a small jail, fronting on the main street.

It seemed to Hashknife and Sleepy that the point of interest in the town was the Silver Concha Saloon & Gambling House, owned by Handsome Doc Pollard. Here it was that the miners and cowboys lost their wages with great regularity, thereby enriching Doc Pollard, who Hashknife decided was a big town gambler.

Pollard was undeniably handsome, polished, suave. Less than forty, tall, slender, his wavy, dark hair showed a tinge of gray at the temples. His features were clean cut, well balanced; his dark eyes always seemed a trifle bored, except when the play ran high. He dressed well, but not extravagantly except in his display of diamonds.

Pollard had owned the Silver Concha less than a year. Rusty Roberts told this to Hashknife as they stood at the bar that evening.

"Doc is a fine feller," explained Rusty. "Got plenty *dinero*. Why, old lady Austin wanted to sell out her place, and Doc offered her fifteen thousand spot cash. Never seen the place but onct—at that time."

"Did he buy it?" asked Hashknife.

"Shore, he bought it. Gave her the cash, an' on her way home she was robbed—by her own son."

"Her own son?"

"Yeah. Hell of a thing to do, wasn't it? She recognized him by his clothes. Fred Austin was a high-rollin' devil, an' he owed Doc somethin' like twelve hundred dollars gamblin' bill. An' the damn fool paid Doc his twelve hundred. That is, he gave the money to Jack Elk, the foreman of the Nine Drag, to give to Doc. An' then he rattled his hocks out of the country. We've got a reward of five hundred offered for him, but we'll never git him, I don't reckon.

"I dunno." Rusty shook his head thoughtfully. "If I had a wife as pretty as Nell Austin, all hell couldn't drive me away."

"Was he crazy?" asked Hashknife.

"Sometimes I think he was. You wait'll you see Nell Austin. She shore took it hard. They're still livin' down on the old ranch—her an' Ma Austin."

"Pollard never made 'em move off, eh?"

"Nope; that's what I like about Doc. He said they could stay. He hired a puncher to take care of the stock, an' I hear he pays the old lady a little each month, besides furnish-

in' them with grub. Course Fred's wife lives there."

"Kinda funny that he'd steal fifteen thousand an' then turn around an' pay a gamblin' debt," said Hashknife. "Mebbe he thought more of gamblin' honor than he did of his mother."

"It shore looks thataway," admitted Rusty. "I've knowed Fred a long time, an' I didn't think he'd do a thing like that. He's a fine lookin' feller, Fred is. You gotta be fine lookin' to win a woman like he got.'

"What do you figure on this deal at Medina?" asked Hashknife.

"Oh, I dunno. Ed Harris worked for the Nine Drag. He was around here quite a lot; sort of a wild jigger. Him an' Fred Austin was friends. One day Harris drawed his pay an' pulled out, an' it wasn't more'n a couple days before Fred Austin pulled his raw deal an' faded out. Kinda funny about Harris showin' up thataway."

"Yeah, it was," agreed Hashknife thoughtfully. "You don't know where Harris left for, do you?"

"I never seen him leave; the boys from the Nine Drag said he did. I heard Dan Parrish—he's the owner—sayin' that Harris quit his job."

"Was you ever bothered with rustlers around here?"

"None to speak about."

"Any to speak about?" asked Hashknife.

Rusty laughed and shoved his glass aside.

"Several months ago Ma Austin talked with me an' Cochise about her losin' some calves. It seems that Fred Austin found a yearlin's hide on a fence in Summit, an' it had her brand on it. She thought mebbe somebody was killin' her stock for beef to sell at the mines. We couldn't find out anythin,' an' she said she was goin' to take it up with the Association; but I dunno if she ever did. We've kinda kept our eyes open. You see, we have to check over all the hides."

That night Hashknife wrote a letter to Bill Williams, secretary of the Cattle Association, asking for details on Raney's last assignment, and telling him how Raney was killed. Hashknife had known Raney long enough to doubt that he had resigned his job and gone crooked. He realized that a range detective lived precariously, especially if recognized. Even the law abiding cowboys did not have much use for a cattle detective, and there was little mourning when one happened to be missing.

THE next morning Hashknife was with Rusty, when Mrs. Austin and her daughter-in-law came to town. Mrs. Austin was a little old white haired lady, dressed in neat black, with white collar and cuffs, while the young woman was tall, slender, well poised—and Hashknife decided she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

Rusty introduced him to the two women. Ma Austin shook hands warmly with him, but Nell Austin merely nodded, murmured something and looked at him with her wide gray eyes.

"You remember Ed Harris, don'tcha, Ma?" asked Rusty.

"Why, yes, I remember Ed—of course, I do."

"Somebody killed him in Medina night before last."

"My goodness!" she exclaimed. "You don't mean it, Rusty!"

"Yes'm, it's true. We're holdin' a inquest here this mornin'."

"Isn't that terrible! Nell, did you hear that?"

"I'm sorry," Nell said simply.

"He was such a nice boy," sighed Mrs. Austin. "Fred liked him."

"Yeah, they was good friends," said Rusty.

The women entered the store, and the two cowboys sauntered down the street.

"Yeah, she's pretty," agreed Hashknife. "Kinda cool, too."

"Oh, she wasn't that way before Fred

pulled out. Allus laughin'. Man, I dunno how anybody could git crazy enough to leave *her*."

"No, it don't seem reasonable." Hashknife smiled.

A little later he saw Doc Pollard talking with the two women in front of the postoffice.

"Her an' Doc shore makes a handsome pair, don't they?" queried Rusty.

"Uh-huh," replied Hashknife thoughtfully.

Sleepy found them at the sheriff's office. He flung his hat aside and squatted on his heels.

"I've done found the most beautiful woman in the world," he told them seriously. "I runs face to face with her in a store entrance, starts to tip my hat an' stuck my thumb in my eye. I dunno what she thought of me—gougin' my eye thataway."

"That's Mrs. Fred Austin." Rusty laughed. "She's married."

"Oh, hell, I know that!" snorted Sleepy. "All the pretty ones are either engaged or married. All the maverick females are freckled—"

"Are you one of them lovin' cowpunchers?" Rusty interrupted.

"If I could find somethin' worth lovin'," replied Sleepy, rubbing his eye. "I'm allus from a couple days to a couple of years late."

"That's me," sighed Rusty. "Brimmin' with love an' no place to pour it."

"Probably a mighty good thing for the girls that you're both late," chuckled Hashknife.

"I dunno," said Rusty. "I read a cowboy story onct, where the hee-ro married the beautiful schoolma'am. I've been a-layin' for a schoolma'am for six years, an' all we ever git is men teachers. I'll hang around a couple more terms, an' if it don't take I'm sunk."

"I've been disappointed in love so many times," sighed Sleepy. "If I was as handsome as you, Rusty—"

"That's right," agreed Rusty seriously. "I've allus been a handsome devil—but unlucky. But I reckon I'm still good for a few more terms of school."

"I ain't never seen a pretty teacher," said Sleepy. "An' if you did find one, she'd be too smart to marry a cowpuncher."

"Apply that to you, pardner; I'm a deppity sheriff."

"You prob'ly won't be in a few more terms of school, unless they hire a deputy for life out here; an' then what'll you do?"

"Gawd, I dunno," sighed Rusty. "You shore paint in dark colors."

"Can you play pool?" asked Sleepy suddenly.

"Pool? C'mon, an' I'll show you."

But the coroner was ready to hold the inquest, so the boys postponed their game. The surrounding country was fairly well represented at the inquest. Rusty introduced Hashknife to Dan Parrish, owner of the Nine Drag, and also to Jack Elk, the foreman. The inquest was devoid of any real interest. Hashknife and Sleepy told what they knew about the killing, and the coroner and sheriff supplied the rest. They spoke of him as Ed Harris, and Hashknife did not correct them.

After the inquest Hashknife talked with the sheriff about it. He wanted to discover what the officer thought of the murder.

"Jist another killin'," said the sheriff indifferently. "Them things happen onct in awhile, you know."

"Kinda cold blooded murder, don't you think?" queried Hashknife.

"All murder is," replied the sheriff.

"Didn't you think this one was kinda out the ordinary?" persisted Hashknife. "Feller shot down while writin' a telegram. He was all excited an' exhausted; didn't have no hat. Don't it strike you that there might be somethin' behind it, Conlon?"

"No-o-o, I don't reckon so; no more 'n if he was shot down while saddlin' his horse."

"All right." Hashknife smiled. "Would it interest you to know that his name wasn't Ed Harris, because it happened

to be Claud Raney, an' he was in the employ of the Cattle Association?"

The sheriff tugged at his mustache, closed his left eye tightly and stared at Hashknife with the other.

"The hell you say! Cow detective, eh?"

"Was," corrected Hashknife. "I wired the Association, an' they wired back that Raney wrote in his resignation some time ago. It might be well for you to wire them an' find out what to do with the body. He must have some relatives."

"Yeah? Well, that's a good idea. Sa-a-ay!" Conlon cocked one eye at Hashknife. "Who are you, anyway, pardner?"

"You know my name—it's my right one, Conlon."

"Excuse me all to hell. I'll go up an' send a wire to the Association about this dead feller. Thanks for the information."

"You're welcome." Hashknife smiled.

WHILE Sleepy and Rusty played pool most of the afternoon, Hashknife circulated around, picking up bits of local information and gossip. But there was nothing that would connect Raney with any trouble. He had merely been a cowboy on the Nine Drag, minding his own business. He had apparently been friendly with Fred Austin, who gambled rather heavily. Common gossip said that Austin owed Pollard twelve hundred dolars, and Hashknife wondered that Pollard had ever allowed Austin to get in debt that deeply. It seemed that Austin owned nothing. He worked cattle for his mother. Folks said he probably got desperate over his debts, and when his mother sold out to Pollard, he robbed her.

"It don't work out," Hashknife told himself. "Austin wore a mask when he robbed his mother, 'cause he didn't want her to recognize him—but he wore familiar clothes. Then he turns around, pays back a twelve hundred dollar gamblin' debt. He knew he couldn't account for havin' that much money. Anyway, he faded out of the country—an' if he was intendin' to fade out, why did he pay the gamblin' debt?"

He talked it over with Sleepy that night, and the stocky cowboy was amused at Hashknife's seriousness.

"For once you're stuck." Sleepy laughed. "You're tryin' to build up crime where none exists. Call it a day, an' we drift tomorrow. There's some tall hills west of here, pardner."

"I've seen 'em," replied Hashknife. "If I only knew why Raney was murdered. Dang it, there's somethin' behind it."

"Aw, some sorehead jist caressed him with a bundle of buckshot. Forgit it. Doggone, that Rusty feller shore shoots a game of pool."

"Pretty good, eh?"

"Better than that—a reg'lar shark. Go to bed an' quit wearin' out your brains."

Hashknife sighed and pulled off his boots. He was half inclined to believe Sleepy was right. As he pulled off his overalls, some money fell from a pocket. Sleepy made a playful grab for it, and in the scuffle a ten-dollar bill was torn in two.

"Now look what you done," wailed Hashknife. "Ruined good money."

"Aw, you can git a little stickalage an' fix it back together," said Sleepy. "The bank will take it."

It was a fairly new bill, and Hashknife fitted the torn edges together.

"They shore must use awful good paper," he said musingly. "Didja ever think how long one of these things last, Sleepy? Ordinary paper wouldn't last no time. These wear like a rag."

"It shore is tough stuff," agreed Sleepy, undressing.

Hashknife picked up his overalls, took his pocketknife from a pocket, and began picking at one of the colored threads in the paper. Sleepy watched him indifferently. Finally he laid the two halves on a chair, weighted them down

with his knife, and leaned back to roll a smoke.

"Didja say a bank would take this torn bill?" he asked.

"They shore will," said Sleepy quickly.

Hashknife grunted shortly.

"They'd be foolish if they did, Sleepy."

Sleepy looked sharply at Hashknife.

"Why?" he asked.

Hashknife shaped his cigaret, lighted it and inhaled deeply, before he replied—

"It's a counterfeit."

Sleepy looked at him sharply.

"Counterfeit? How do you know it is?"

Hashknife grinned.

"Them silk threads are nothin' but colored ink, drawn on with a fine pen. Boy, the man who made 'em is shore a expert!"

Sleepy did not examine them; he was willing to take Hashknife's word for any question that arose.

"You got any paper money?" asked Hashknife.

Sleepy shrugged.

"Not a bit. Where'd you git that bill?"

"At the saloon in Medina."

"But that don't mean anythin'. It might have been in circulation a long time."

"Shore."

"It looks awful good," remarked Sleepy.

"It *is* good—long as it keeps movin'." Hashknife grinned. "I'll paste her together an' see if the banker here spots it. If he don't I'll show him where he's careless."

Sleepy chuckled.

"You can't expect him to go pickin' at it with a knife, can you?"

"I did."

"You would!" Sleepy laughed. "If you was a banker, you'd bite every piece of money that came into your place. Let's git a good sleep, so we'll feel like travelin' tomorrow."

CHAPTER III

HASHKNIFE MAKES AN ENEMY

HORACE BOND, cashier of the Concha City Bank, was a man of about fifty years of age, slightly stooped, but nervously active in his duties. There was none of the "good fellow" in Bond; he was all business. His thin features were harsh in outline, dark eyes keen and calculating. Always immaculate in dress, his work exact, even his writing looked like copper-plate engraving.

John A. Cooper, president of the bank, was not at all like Bond. Cooper was a big man, who had run the gamut of cowpunching, owning a herd, owning a general store, and finally getting control of a bank. Cooper slapped his friends on the back, boomed a greeting in a voice which fairly shook the money in the safe, lent money on shaky security and bought the borrower a drink. He was the despair of Bond, but even Bond was forced to admit that the bank made money.

It was to Bond that Hashknife took the patched ten-dollar bill that morning, and without question Bond gave him two five dollar notes in exchange. Knowing that there was no further business to transact, Bond turned back to his work.

"I wish you'd take a look at that ten dollars," said Hashknife.

Bond turned his head quickly.

"Look at it?" he repeated.

Cooper came in behind Bond, carrying some papers, and nodded pleasantly to Hashknife and Sleepy. Bond picked up the bill and looked at it.

"I see nothing wrong with it," he said coldly. Cooper glanced curiously at Bond, who was looking at the bill.

"Test them silk threads an' you'll find they're paint or ink." Hashknife smiled. Bond looked sharply at Hashknife; a look of suspicion, as though the tall cowboy was trying to beat the bank out of some money.

"You mean the threads in the paper?"

he asked, and Hashknife nodded. Cooper came in close and watched Bond pick at a thread with the point of a pen.

"Well, I'll be damned!" snorted Cooper. "A counterfeit, eh?"

"I'm afraid it is," replied Bond.

Cooper took the bill and examined it with a reading glass.

"Good job, eh?" asked Hashknife.

"Barrin' the phony silk, it shore is." replied Cooper. "Where didja get it?"

"I don't remember," evaded Hashknife.

"If you'll give me back those two fives—" suggested Bond.

"Wait a minute," said Cooper. "I'd like to keep this bill. Sort of a curiosity. Frame it under a glass. You keep the two fives and I'll keep the ten, eh?"

"Well, all right." Hashknife laughed. "We all know it's a counterfeit."

"I'll trade," said Cooper. "It's the first of its kind I ever seen. I reckon there's plenty in circulation, at that."

"I've seen them before," said Bond. "Not here, of course. But I suppose there are many of them in circulation. Men will take a chance on making that sort of stuff, in spite of any penalty the law can inflict. With a bill as well done as that one, the only way it can be detected by the layman is by the threads. Counterfeiters can't procure that paper, so they take a chance on inking in the colored threads."

"The rest of it is a good job," said Hashknife.

"Well, I accepted it," replied Bond.

Some one came in to transact business, and the two cowboys wandered outside. They went up to their room to get their warbags and pay their hotel bill, but while Sleepy packed his bag, Hashknife sat down and tried his knife blade on the two five-dollar bills.

"You was shore lucky to git ten bucks for that bad bill," said Sleepy, as he tied the neck of the bag.

"Was I?" queried Hashknife.

"You got somethin' for nothin', didn't you?" Sleepy asked curiously.

"Nope."

"What do you mean?"

"Sleepy—" Hashknife lowered his voice—"both of these bills are as bad as the ten."

"Counterfeit?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, what the devil's wrong?" demanded Sleepy. "We ain't been in this country twenty-four hours before we git twenty dollars in bad money. Is it jist one of them quaint old customs of handin' a stranger a flock of bum cash, or is somebody runnin' a private mint hereabouts?"

"I wish I knew," said Hashknife thoughtfully.

Sleepy looked at him for several moments; then flung his hat into a corner and began unpacking his bag. He knew they were not leaving Concha City—for awhile.

"I reckon I'll go an' find Rusty," he said. "If he'll spot me two balls, mebbe I can beat him—I dunno."

But Hashknife was paying no attention as he compared the two bills. Finally he folded them up carefully and looked at Sleepy.

"Them two bills was printed off the same plate, an' they never changed the serial numbers."

"Goin' to sell 'em to Cooper?" asked Sleepy.

Hashknife smiled grimly as he shook his head.

"An' don't mention it to anybody," he said warningly.

The next few days were unproductive, as far as Hashknife was concerned. A wire to the sheriff from the Cattle Association instructed him to ship Raney's body to Phoenix, where he had relatives. Later Hashknife received a letter from Bill Williams, which read:

Dear Hashknife:

It was rather a shock to learn of Raney's death. He was a good man, always reliable and as square as a dollar. I have wired the sheriff to ship his body to Phoenix. A Mrs. Austin, at Concha City, complained that some one was butchering her cattle at Sum-

mit; so I sent Raney to investigate. His reports indicated that the woman was mistaken, but I told him to stick around there. Then I got a letter from him, in which he resigned. Said he was tired of the work and wanted to take a trip east.

The only thing I could do was accept it. As far as his murder was concerned, I have no ideas on the subject. As you know, a man working in his capacity might be discovered by a former enemy; and some one might resort to murder as a revenge.

Anyway, I was glad to hear from you boys, and if you ever get short of work, let me know. There's always a job for both of you. And as sort of a postscript, knowing you as well as I do, if you find out who murdered Raney, send in a bill for the length of time you worked on the case, and a check will be forwarded. Drop me a line.

I am always the same,
—BILL WILLIAMS.

HASHKNIFE had not seen Mrs. Austin or her daughter-in-law since the day he came to Concha City; so he decided to ride out to their ranch and have a talk. Hashknife was merely working on a hunch. As far as the counterfeit money was concerned, there was no proof that it had been put into circulation around there.

There was nothing to prove that Raney hadn't been killed by some outlaw, who recognized him as a detective; and there was no proof that Fred Austin did not rob his mother—except Hashknife's psychological angle of the thing: If he robbed his mother, why did he pay that twelve hundred dollar gambling debt?

The Austin ranch, now owned by Doc Pollard, was three miles almost due north of Concha City; a little old huddle of ranch buildings, tucked away in a wonderful grove of oaks. It was just the sort of ranch Hashknife would have liked to own, and he studied it from the point of a hill. It appealed to him greatly, except that the Nine Drag, off to the west, controlled most of the range.

He rode in slowly past the old stable and corrals and dismounted near the kitchen door, which was open. There was washing dangling from the clothes line, chickens scratching around the yard, an odor of wood smoke from the kitchen stovepipe. Hashknife stepped up on the little back porch and was about to knock when the sound of conversation reached his ear. A man's voice said:

"I realize that you are married. But I'm not setting any precedent by coming out to see you. I admit I came out to see you because your mother-in-law has gone to town. I knew you were alone. Don't be a prude. As far as your husband is concerned, it seems to me that he has forfeited all rights to you. He can't come back, Nell.

"No, I'm sorry I said that. I didn't aim to hurt you. Don't you know the court would grant you a divorce at once? Use a little common sense in this matter. You can't go through life moping after a man who would do what Fred Austin did."

Hashknife did not want to listen in on this conversation. He did not hear what the woman said in reply, but it plainly annoyed the man, who said:

"Well, and what if I did? I admit I wanted you to stay around here. Neither you nor the old lady have any money—no place to go. I'm no philanthropist, Nell; I didn't want you to move away. But I'm not trying to force you to get a divorce; I'm merely pointing out the fact that you can and should."

The woman's reply was pitched too low for Hashknife to hear it.

"Where would you go?" demanded the man's voice. "Don't talk foolish, Nell. Fred Austin didn't care much for you, or he'd never have done what he did."

The woman made some reply, and the man laughed. Then came the sound of something like a blow, the tinkle of broken glass, a sharp cry from the woman. Hashknife walked quickly through the kitchen.

Nell Austin was backed against the wall, and a few feet away from her was Doc Pollard, the handsome gambler from the Silver Concha, his back to Hashknife. Between them was a small table, which had been upset, and parts of a broken flower vase were strewed on the floor.

"I'm sorry about that vase," said Pollard; but he added quickly, "Except that I was afraid you might throw it at me."

Nell Austin was staring at Hashknife, who was framed in the doorway, and Pollard slowly turned his head to follow her gaze.

"I'm sorry to bust in on you thisaway," drawled Hashknife, "but I thought I heard the lady scream."

"Is this any of your damn business?" demanded Pollard, lips white with anger. "Who asked your opinion, I'd like to know?"

"Keep your hand away from the lapel of your coat, Pollard, or you might not hear an answer to some of your questions," drawled Hashknife.

Pollard's hand halted.

"Mind steppin' away, Mrs. Austin?" asked Hashknife. "You're right in line, in case this feller might forget."

"Gunman, eh?" sneered the gambler. "What the hell are you buttin' in here for? Who asked you to come here? What's your business?"

Hashknife smiled with his lips, but his gray eyes were hard as he stepped over nearer the gambler.

"Nobody asked me to come here, an' my business is my own," he said. "If the lady asks me to go away an' leave her alone with you, I'll do it—but not otherwise, Pollard."

Doc Pollard turned quickly and looked at Nell Austin.

"Tell him to get out of here," he said sharply.

"I will not," she replied defiantly.

"You won't, eh?" Pollard turned and looked at Hashknife. "All right, I'll go. Maybe she'd rather be alone with a damn cowpuncher she probably never seen before."

Pollard picked up his hat and started to go past Hashknife, but the tall cowboy blocked him.

"Not yet, Doc," said Hashknife evenly. "You're goin' to turn around an' apologize to the lady for that remark."

"Like hell I am!"

Pollard glared his defiance at Hashknife for a moment, but there was something in those gray eyes that caused him to hesitate. They seemed to burn away all his nerve.

"You're goin' to apologize," said Hashknife, "or you're goin' to a hospital, Pollard. Take your choice—it don't matter to me, except I'd like to see you in a hospital."

Pollard hesitated. It seared his soul to have to do a thing like that. But down in his heart was the knowledge that this tall, grim faced cowboy meant every word he uttered. Pollard was no fool. Even if it did hurt his vanity to apologize, he would escape injury; and there would be another time to even the score. He turned to Nell.

"I was pretty much of a fool," he said. "I apologize and ask you to forgive me, Nell."

THE woman did not reply, and Pollard walked past Hashknife, who watched him go around the house and mount his horse at the opposite side from the kitchen entrance. Then Hashknife came back to the living room.

"I'm mighty sorry, ma'am," he told her. "I didn't mean to bust in thataway. It was kinda crude on my part, an' I'd like to say I'm sorry it happened—but I'd hate to lie to you."

His smile was infectious, and for the first time he saw her smile. She had gained her composure quickly.

"You have made an enemy," she said quietly.

"Yes'm, that's a habit I've got. But don'tcha see, I wouldn't want him for a friend. You remember me, don'tcha?"

"Yes; I met you that morning in Concha City. Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you, ma'am. Is Mrs. Austin in town?"

"She should be back by this time. Did you come from town?"

"Yes'm, but I rode through the hills, an' that's why I missed her. I never like to ride on roads. I always kinda feel that I'm lookin' at somethin' that every-

body else looks at. I like to see things that mebbe somebody else never did see."

"I think I understand what you mean, Mr. Hartley."

"You even remember my name." Hashknife smiled.

"We meet so few strangers it isn't hard to remember names. And I would remember your eyes."

"My eyes?" queried Hashknife quickly.

Nell Austin laughed throatily.

"You look right through people, you know."

"I didn't know it, Mrs. Austin."

"Well, you do. Ma Austin noticed it, too. And when you were looking at Doc Pollard—"

"Was I lookin' through *him?*" asked Hashknife, laughing.

"He apologized," she said. "I don't believe he is the sort of man who makes it a point to apologize to people."

"I'm glad he did," said Hashknife. "Saved me from bein' foolish, an' he might have whipped me. I shore worked a bluff on that feller."

"You didn't seem afraid of it at that moment, Mr. Hartley. But how did you happen to be out here at the right time?"

"Luck, I reckon. No, I did have a reason, Mrs. Austin. You knew Ed Harris, the cowboy who was killed in Medina. Well, he was a feller I knew pretty good, an' his name wasn't Harris; it was Claud Raney. He was a cattle detective, workin' for the Cattle Association."

"Why, we knew him very well," said Mrs. Austin. "But we didn't know he was a detective."

"That ain't so strange as it might seem," said Hashknife. "Detectives don't usually tell folks who they are—not when they're workin' under cover. They tell me he was quite a friend of your husband."

Nell Austin look away, her lips shut tightly for several moments. She nodded, but did not reply.

"I know how you feel," said Hashknife gently. "Folks have told me the story, an' it shore must hurt you an' his mother. I'm mighty sorry for both of you."

"Couldn't we talk of something else?" she asked earnestly.

"We ought to, but I'd like to ask you a question. Do you an' his mother believe him guilty?"

She got to her feet and walked over to a window, where she stood for several moments, looking outside.

"It wasn't a fair question," said Hashknife. "Suppose we drop it."

She turned and came back to him, her big eyes filled with sadness.

"Everything is against Fred," she said wearily. "His own mother recognized him. What is there for us to believe? He owed a gambling debt to Doc Pollard, and he paid it that day. Fred had no way of getting that much money —honestly. Oh, I want to believe him innocent, Mr. Hartley. We—Ma Austin and I—try to make each other believe; but with that evidence, what can we think?"

"Shore tough. Now, suppose Doc Pollard gets sore an' makes you move off this ranch: what'll you do?"

"I don't know what we could do. We haven't a cent in the world. I guess I was born to be poor, but I wouldn't care if Fred—"

"You still love him, eh?"

"I married him, knowing that my own folks would disown me for doing it."

"That's a good an' sufficient answer, Mrs. Austin."

Hashknife got to his feet and picked up his hat.

"I'm mighty glad for this little talk," he said simply.

"And I'm mighty glad you came out to see me," she replied. "Won't you come again?"

"Yes'm, I'd like to." He looked down at the floor for several moments, and when he looked up at her he was smiling. "I wouldn't be comin' out to see you jist because you're the most beautiful woman I ever seen. I wouldn't want you to feel that way about it. You've got all the markin's of a thoroughbred—an' I

shore admire good blood, Mrs. Austin."

Nell Austin held out her hand, and he grasped it in a handshake of friendship.

"I'd like you for a friend," she said, her eyes moist with tears.

"That's straight talk," he said soberly. "My friends call me Hashknife, an' I—I don't like to be called mister."

"All right, Hashknife; my friends call me Nell."

"That's great. Well, I hope to be seein' you again. You an' Ma Austin jist keep on tryin' to make each other believe things. I'm kinda strong for folks makin' believe."

"Do you make-believe?"

"All my life," seriously. "You'd be surprised at the things that have really happened from my make-believe. I pick out a man and I make-believe he's a horsethief; an' then I pick out a man that's in jail, an' I make-believe he's innocent. It's a lot of fun, an' you'd shore be surprised how often it works out thataway."

"Just by thinking a thing strong enough?" she asked.

"Well, no-o-o, not always," drawled Hashknife." You see, sometimes it takes a lot of hard work. But the thinkin'—make-believe—starts things."

"You haven't always been a cowboy, Hashknife," she said.

"I should say not. For the first ten years of my life I wasn't big enough."

They looked at each other and laughed, and he turned to his horse.

"You keep smilin'," he told her over his shoulder. "Folks up at Concha City say you never laugh any more. There's only the thickness of a cigaret paper between laughter an' tears, Nell an' you stay on the smilin' side."

"Thank you, Hashknife Hartley."

"You're welcome, Nell Austin." He laughed and rode away.

Hashknife knew he had made a bitter enemy of Doc Pollard. The handsome owner of the Silver Concha was not the type of man to overlook interference with his plans. Hashknife did not want any trouble with Pollard. He had no intention of telling anybody what happened at the Austin ranch, and if it ever became known it would be through the gambler himself.

He was afraid Pollard might evict the two women. Still, it was evident that the fellow was in love with Nell Austin, and that fact might prevent Pollard from making any move to put them off the ranch.

"He wears a shoulder holster," mused Hashknife as he rode back. "He knows that I know it, and he'll probably wear it differently. Look out for a derringer in a vest pocket. Shucks, I'm yellin' 'wolf' to myself, an' there ain't a track in the valley."

AFTER supper that night Hashknife went to the Silver Concha. Doc Pollard was there, but Hashknife knew he was too hardened a gambler to show any emotion. He merely looked indifferently at Hashknife. Sleepy and Rusty were still at the pool table, running along on even terms. Buzz West, one of Pollard's gamblers, was conducting a draw poker game, in which were Dan Parrish, Conlon, the sheriff, and Jack Elk. Hashknife watched the play for a few minutes before taking a vacant seat.

It was not a big money game. If it had been, Hashknife would have kept out, because of his limited capital.

"Fresh blood is lucky," declared Jack Elk, a lean faced, swarthy cowboy, nearly as tall as Hashknife. Jack had prominent front teeth which seemed to force his lips back all the time.

"I ain't won a pot since I set down, but my luck's turnin'," he declared.

"Game's too damn small," yawned Parrish. "Let's make it five-dollar jackpots."

"It's all right with the house," said West indifferently.

"Suits me," grunted Elk. Hashknife smiled slowly.

"Well, I'll play a couple," he said.

"Five dollars to open," said Parrish.

"That's poker that's worth while."

The raise in price caused the play to be cautious for awhile, but Hashknife managed to pick up a few pots which protected his original capital, and he grew bolder. Jack Elk scowled continually. Finally Sleepy and Rusty quit their game and came over to the poker table. Sleepy managed to seat himself on the edge of a table, nearly behind Parrish and Elk, making himself an unofficial lookout.

Hashknife won steadily, and even Parrish became annoyed. West was, in poker parlance, playing them close to his vest, which was the thing for him to do. Conlon was a cautious player; too cautious, Hashknife decided. Several times Elk borrowed money from Parrish, but he was unable to win a pot. In fact, Hashknife was winning nearly every pot, and he realized that the rest of the players were watching him very closely. But Hashknife had no tricks. The gods of luck were perched on his shoulder and refused to be knocked off.

Hashknife beat three aces for Elk, and the Nine Drag cowpuncher proceeded to tear up the cards.

He borrowed another hundred from Parrish, and West broke out a new deck. But the cards made no difference. Hashknife, paying twenty-five dollars to draw cards, drew to a pair of jacks and got the other two. Elk's hundred lasted one deal.

"Lemme have another hundred," said Elk.

"I've only got a few dollars left," growled Parrish. He turned and called over his shoulder to Pollard, who came over to the table.

"We need a little credit, Doc," said Parrish.

"Sure. Give him what he needs, Buzz," said Pollard. He glanced at the pile of blue chips in front of Hashknife, and turned away.

"Five hundred dollars' worth," growled Parrish. "No use playin' with chicken feed."

It was Elk's deal, and he was shuffling the cards while West doled out five hundred dollars' worth of blue chips. Parrish shoved half of them to Elk, who dealt the hand. Again Hashknife won a pot worth fifty dollars. Elk raked up the cards and flung them across to West.

"Damn Jonah cards!" he snorted. "New deck, Buzz. Make it a hundred dollars to play, a hundred to open. That kinda damn luck can't last always. Whatcha say, Hartley? Are you game to play a man sized pot?"

"I'm playin' a lotta Nine Drag money." Hashknife smiled. "Suits me."

"Don't suit me," said Conlon, shoving back from the table. "I'm not able to stand a game like that."

"Is it all right with you, Buzz?" asked Elk.

"Perfectly," replied the gambler.

Hashknife glanced at Sleepy, who swung out his left leg, scratched behind his knee, leaned forward, chin on his left hand, three fingers extended up along his left cheek. Then he shifted his hand, showing only one finger. After that he reached for his tobacco, and began rolling a cigaret.

Hashknife read the signal as plain as though it had been spoken. Sleepy was a firstclass lookout, and his sharp eyes had detected a crooked move, which Hashknife had been expecting. Sleepy had told him that Jack Elk had stolen three aces from the deck, and was holding them behind the left knee. Parrish was on that side, which would screen Elk from the other players.

West shuffled the new deck, the backs of which were the same as those of the two previous decks. Parrish passed, and Elk opened for a hundred dollars. Without more than a glance at his cards, Hashknife called the opener, and West passed it. It left only the two of them to fight it out. Hashknife saw West, holding his cards in his right hand, reach down, take hold of his chair with his left and hitch it closer to the table. It was a perfectly natural movement, but he knew Elk had taken those three cards from under his knee.

With a flirt of his wrist he discarded

so cleverly that no one, not watching closely, could have detected that he threw away more than two cards. But Hashknife knew what he had done. Hashknife drew one card, Elk drew two, and after a moment of indecision Elk shoved nearly all of his blue chips to the center of the table, only holding out possibly a half dozen.

"Keep on playin' your luck, cowboy," he sneered. "There's a man sized bet to be covered."

HASHKNIFE gravely considered the card he had drawn, and with a steady hand he measured chip for chip with Elk's bet, glanced at the six chips in front of Elk, and flung in a six-chip raise. He knew it was exactly what Elk wanted; he wanted to call Hashknife, which would force the tall cowboy to declare his hand.

"Three little aces an' a pair of kings," said Hashknife.

Elk stared at him for several moments. His lips twitched nervously, and he seemed to have a little difficulty in swallowing. Finally, after a supreme effort, he said:—

"That's good," and flung his hand into the discard.

Hashknife, without exposing his hand, also flung it into the discard, and raked in the pile of blue chips. Elk looked at the chips, took a deep breath and started to shove back his chair; then he stopped and, reaching out, picked up the cards Hashknife had flung down.

There was not a pair in the hand. He jerked his head around toward Hashknife as he flung the cards down, face up.

"Ace full—you damn liar!" he gritted. "You never had a pair!"

The other players were on their feet. West flung out a hand to stop Elk, fearing a gunplay. Hashknife laughed at him.

"I didn't have to show them to *you*, Elk," he said. "You didn't dare show your hand, after I called mine."

"Why didn't I dare?"

Hashknife shifted his eyes toward West.

"Count the cards in that deck an' you'll find fifty-five," he said. "There's three maverick aces among 'em."

Elk jerked back, his right hand streaking for his gun, but Sleepy launched himself off the table, wrapped both arms around Elk, and sent him crashing across a chair, whence they rolled to the floor. Like the rebound of a rubber ball, Sleepy was on his feet, holding Elk's gun in his hand. Cards were scattered over the floor, as were quite a number of chips.

Jack Elk got to his feet, blood running into his eyes from a cut at the base of his nose. He thought he had lost his gun on the floor, and kept moving his feet, trying to locate it.

"I've got your gun," said Sleepy. "You don't need one. All the shootin' in the world wouldn't ever make any of us think you was honest."

Parrish reached out his hand to Sleepy.

"I'll take care of his gun," he said evenly. "There won't be any shootin'."

Sleepy gave him the gun. The fall had apparently taken all the fight out of Elk, and he allowed Parrish to lead him from the saloon. West cashed in Hashknife's chips—nearly eleven hundred dollars worth. It was a fortune to Hashknife and Sleepy. Pollard watched the payoff, a glint of amusement in his hard eyes.

"Look out for Elk," warned the sheriff softly, as they walked outside. "He's a gunman, Hartley."

"Well, I'm sorry it broke thataway," replied Hashknife.

"He really stole them three aces?"

"He couldn't deny it. I played the best just the way he wanted it to come. If I had anythin' but aces in my hand, he'd have won. But when I declared three aces, he didn't dare peep. He knew he had been foxed, either accidentally or intentionally."

"Well, I'll be damned!" And the sheriff gave his long mustache an extra hard tug. "He held back jist enough to force you to raise, so he could call you. I'll be damned! Well, I don't reckon you ever

git too old to learn somethin'. I wonder if Parrish will fire him. I would, if it was me; fire him awful hard. Good foreman, too, I reckon. Hm-m-m-m."

Hashknife examined all the currency he got from the Silver Concha, but it was good money.

"I dunno what we're hangin' around here for," complained Sleepy that night, as they went to bed. "Forget Claud Raney. Hell, he ain't the first cow sleuth to git rubbed out—an' he won't be the last. We're in bad with the Nine Drag; an' they're the biggest spread in the country. If we stick around here much longer, they'll write our epitaph."

"At that, it ain't unremunerative." Hashknife smiled. "We've got enough to winter us in a good pasture, feller."

"Shrouds ain't got no pockets, you remember. Where was you this afternoon, anyway?"

Hashknife smiled broadly.

"I was visitin' Mrs. Austin."

"You was? The young Mrs. Austin?"

"Shore was. We had a nice visit—jist the two of us."

"That's a dirty deal," said Sleepy, examining a hole in his sock.

"Nothin' dirty about it. You was busy playin' pool."

"To talk with a pretty woman, I'd quit anythin', an' you know it. An' that game cost me three dollars an' two-bits. Rusty's pool game shows a wasted youth. Listen to me, pardner; don't overlook the fact that you proved Jack Elk was cheatin' at poker. Rusty says Elk is a gunman; an' he's got all the earmarks. Dan Parrish is well liked around here, an' he's on the square; but he ain't Elk's master —jist his boss."

Hashknife looked up, a quizzical expression on his face.

"Think I ought to run?" he asked.

"No, you danged fool; but don't let a pretty woman blind you to the fact that your skin ain't bullet proof."

Hashknife leaned back on the bed and laughed heartily.

"I wasn't courtin' her, Sleepy."

"You wasn't?"

"Certainly not."

"Oh, yea-a-ah. Well—" Sleepy ran his fingers through his unruly hair—"how about introducin' her to me?"

"She's got a husband."

"She *had* one, you mean. That jigger ain't comin' back."

"Mebbe not."

"No mebbe about it." Sleepy sighed and flung the sock aside. "This shore is a great town to vegetate in. Only wakes up once a month."

"Once a month?"

"When it's payday at Summit. Must be close to four hundred miners workin' up there, an' they come down here to spend their money. Rusty says things hum for a couple days. Doc Pollard shore cleans up. Rusty says he puts on a bunch of gamblers that could steal the pearls off the front gate to heaven an' sell 'em back to Saint Peter."

Hashknife nodded thoughtfully.

"That would make a payroll worth more than sixty thousand dollars. No wonder Doc Pollard sticks around here."

"Crazy like a fox. Well, I feel like rollin' up a little shuteye tonight. I've walked forty miles around that pool table today."

"When is their next payday at Summit, Sleepy?"

"Next Saturday, I think. Rusty would know, 'cause they shore make work for the sheriff's office. I'll ask him tomorrow."

CHAPTER IV

THE KILLER RIDES AGAIN

IT WAS just after noontime the following day when Dan Parrish rode in at the Austin ranch. He came alone, and was very courteous to Nell and the old lady.

"I'm buyin' this place from Doc Pollard," he told them. "The Nine Drag has needed the water that's here a long time, an' Pollard is givin' me a good deal on the purchase. He don't need any ranch."

"I see," said the old lady vaguely.

"An' bein' so close to my ranch," continued Parrish, "I'll have to close this place up. No use of me runnin' two ranch-houses, you know."

"You—you'll close up this house?" asked the old lady weakly.

"Yeah, I'll have to do that."

The two women were silent. Nell wondered if this was a punishment for what had happened to Doc Pollard. It would leave them with no place to go; no means of support.

"I thought I'd better tell you," said Parrish.

"Have you already bought this place?" asked Nell.

"Not yet, but I'll prob'ly settle the thing today."

"We were running the place for Mr. Pollard," said the old lady. "We haven't any place to go, you see, Mr. Parrish."

"That's what Doc said. I mean, about you runnin' the place. But you can see it wouldn't be good policy for me to keep this place goin'."

"Would you mind answering a personal question?" asked Nell.

Parrish looked at her quickly.

"No, I wouldn't mind, Mrs. Austin."

"Is this Doc Pollard's way of punishing me?" she asked.

Parrish's ears reddened, and he laughed shortly.

"I reckon Doc Pollard had reasons for sellin' out."

"You know what happened here yesterday, Mr. Parrish?"

Parrish smiled at her.

"I don't reckon that makes much difference, Mrs. Austin. Doc wants to sell out at a price that suits me."

"He didn't want to sell out until yesterday," said Nell bravely. "I haven't any idea what we will do—but that is all right. I wish you would tell Doc Pollard that I said he didn't have nerve enough to come out and tell us this himself. And, in case your deal with him does not go through, you may tell him we do not care to live here any longer."

"Well, all right," Parrish laughed. "Of course, I'm not interested in Doc Pollard's likes an' dislikes. I've wanted this place a long time. If I had known it was for sale for fifteen thousand, I'd have bought it right then. But I'm getting it for the same price; so it doesn't matter."

"You won't need a cook, will you, Mr. Parrish?" asked the old lady.

"No, I don't reckon I do," he replied.

"How soon do we have to move?" asked Nell.

Parrish had come out there to tell them to get off right away, but the injustice of the thing caused him to hesitate.

"Oh, I won't close it up for a week or two," he said. "You can have time to kinda look around for something else."

"That is very kind of you," said Nell. "It is more than we expected."

"That's all right," said Parrish gruffly, and rode away.

HASHKNIFE banked his money that day in a joint account for himself and Sleepy. Bond was busy, and Cooper handled the account. Hashknife liked the big voiced banker, and they talked of local things. Cooper spoke of old Mrs. Austin's troubles. He had handled the deal for both Mrs. Austin and Pollard.

"I advised her to leave the money with me," he said. "But she wanted it all."

"Was the place for sale a long time?" asked Hashknife.

"Two or three days is all."

"How many people knew the deal took place?" asked Hashknife.

"I don't know. She was in town the day before, and Pollard told her he'd buy it. He told her to come to town the next afternoon, and he'd pay her in cash. She came in alone, made the deal and went home. She had an old horse and buggy. And on the way home a masked man stopped her and took the money."

"Her own son, eh?"

The banker nodded, frowning.

"The sheriff had quite a hard time makin' her tell who it was. She was so busted up over losin' everythin' she owned, that she finally told. No, she

didn't want him to be put in jail."

"What sort of a feller is Fred Austin, Mr. Cooper?"

"Reckless as the devil, Hartley. But I swear I'd never have believed him capable of doin' this. And then the blasted fool paid the twelve hundred dollars he owed to Doc Pollard. He wrapped it up in a paper and asked Jack Elk to deliver it to Pollard. Elk didn't know what it was, he said."

"Mebbe it's a good thing he didn't." Hashknife smiled. "Pollard might still be shy that twelve hundred."

Cooper laughed grimly.

"I heard about your run-in with Elk last night. Serves him damn well right. I've got no use for a crooked gambler. But—" Cooper lowered his voice—"look out for Elk. I've been in the range country all my life, and if Elk ain't a gunman, I've never seen one. No, he ain't never pulled no gunplay here, but he's got all the earmarks."

Cooper turned to answer a question from Bond, who came in behind them.

"I'm kinda sorry it happened," said Hashknife, when Cooper turned back. "It makes things bad for Parrish. Elk is prob'ly a good man, an' it's up to Parrish to either fire him or back his play."

"That's true. Parrish has always played square. He bought out the Nine Drag a little over a year ago, and he's made good with everybody around here."

"Speak of the devil—" Hashknife smiled, as Parrish came up the street and dismounted in front of the bank. He came in, nodded to Cooper and Hashknife.

"Cooper, I'm buyin' the Austin ranch today from Pollard," he said briskly. "Will you handle the deal?"

"Why, shore, Parrish."

"How long will it take?"

"If you want the title searched and all that—"

"You don't need to. The title suits me as it is right now."

"Well, it won't take long then. Bring Pollard over here, will you?"

"If he ain't too busy," replied Parrish, and went out again, walking briskly.

Cooper scratched his head thoughtfully for several moments.

"Huh!" he grunted. "I wonder what this new deal will do for the two Austin women?"

"I dunno," replied Hashknife grimly, "but I've got a damn good idea."

HASHKNIFE went down to the sheriff's office, where he told Conlon about the sale of the Austin ranch. Hashknife felt that he was partly to blame for Doc Pollard's selling the place, in order to get a petty revenge. But Hashknife did not tell the sheriff what had happened at the Austin place.

"It would be tough on them two women, if they have to git off," remarked the sheriff. "They ain't got nothin', Hartley."

"I know it, Sheriff, an' I shore feel sorry for 'em."

Cochise Conlon looked keenly at Hashknife.

"Shore it's only sorrow, Hartley?" he asked.

"That's a perfectly natural question." Hashknife smiled. "Mrs. Fred Austin is the finest lookin' woman I've ever met—but I'm still sorry for 'em, Conlon."

"Well, so am I. You ain't seen Jack Elk since last night, have you?"

"Nope."

"I'm wonderin' what Parrish will do about it."

"I'll make you a little bet that he backs Elk's play, Conlon."

"You mean he'll keep him on at the Nine Drag?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe he will, Hartley. A man can't afford to back a cheat."

"We'll wait an' see."

Ed Torrance and Abe Frazee, two of the Nine Drag cowboys, came to town with Dan Parrish that evening, but Elk did not put in an appearance. Hashknife did not like the style of either of the two cowboys. Torrance was a square headed, stub nosed blond, with little round eyes

and a narrow mouth. Frazee was as dark as a Mexican, with sharp, narrow features. He wore his hair long, and was badly in need of a shave and bath.

Torrance and Frazee paid no attention to the games, but drank quite a lot of liquor. Parrish lost a few dollars at roulette, and finally settled in a stud poker game.

Sleepy, Rusty and Conlon were playing a hundred-or-bust game of pool, and Hashknife merely loafed around. Pollard was tending the draw poker game. After awhile Torrance and Frazee left the saloon and went down the street. The sheriff, finding to his sorrow that he was no match for either Sleepy or Rusty, paid his score and quit the pool game.

"I'm goin' to hit the hay," he told Hashknife, yawning.

"A couple yards of sleep wouldn't hurt me none," said Hashknife. "Sleepy an' Rusty won't be through for an hour, so I reckon I'll go to bed."

He walked out with the sheriff, who went across to the front of the hotel with him. They talked for several minutes before the sheriff went on down to his office, where he and and Rusty slept. Hashknife entered the hotel and walked back to the little desk. He wanted to get a pitcher of water from the hotel keeper, who was not in evidence. He was lounging at the desk, waiting, when the crash of a shot caused him to jerk upright.

The gun had been fired either at the front or rear of the hotel, he was unable to determine which. Walking swiftly to the doorway, he looked up and down the street, but could see no one. Several men came to the doorway of the Silver Concha Saloon, crowding out on the sidewalk. The sheriff had heard the shot, and came hurrying up the sidewalk.

It was not unusual for a drunken cowboy to fire a few shots, but it was unusual for that cowboy not to be in evidence. The sheriff came up to the doorway and asked Hashknife where the shot was fired.

"Well, it sounded close around here," replied Hashknife. "I was back at the desk."

Rusty and Sleepy came across the street, and the four of them made a circle of the hotel. But there was no sign of anybody. The hotel proprietor met them at the front door. He said he was in the kitchen when the shot was fired, and he thought it was out on the street.

There did not seem to be any way of accounting for it, so they decided it did not amount to much. It had ended the pool game for Sleepy and Rusty, and Sleepy decided to go to bed.

Hashknife got his pitcher of water, and they climbed the rickety stairs to the second floor.

"Funny about that shot," said Sleepy, as they went down the hallway in the dark. "Mebbe somebody accidentally fired a gun, an' they was ashamed to acknowledge it."

"Yeah," said Hashknife, and opened the door of their room. "Light the lamp, will you?"

Sleepy started for the little table in the dark—and came down in a sprawling fall, which shook the place.

"You don't have to dive at these lamps around here," said Hashknife, laughing.

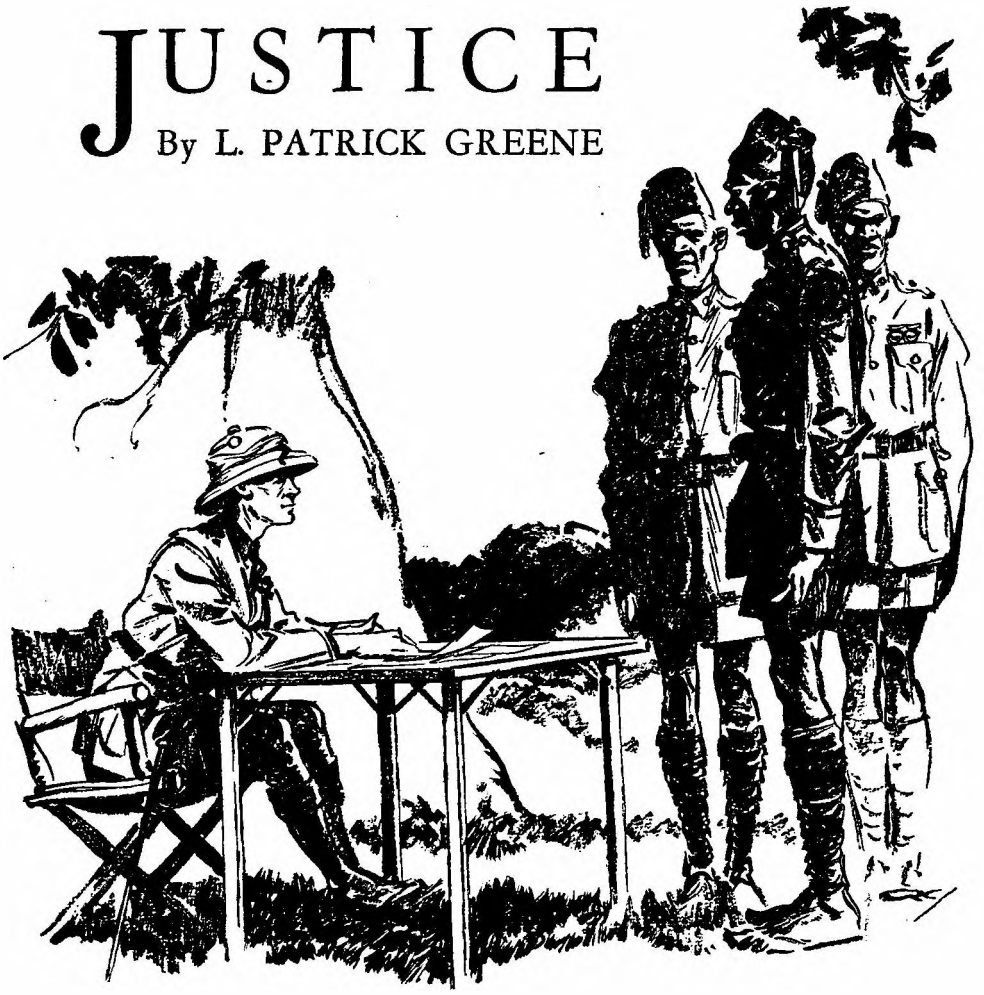
"What the hell did I fall over?" grunted Sleepy, fumbling in his pocket for a match. But Hashknife scratched one on his boot and held it up.

Between him and Sleepy, sprawled on his face on the floor, was a man, his arms flung out. A few feet from his right hand lay a big Colt. Hashknife placed the pitcher on the table and lighted the lamp, while Sleepy got to his feet, rubbing a bruised knee, and looked down at the man.

TO BE CONCLUDED

JUSTICE

By L. PATRICK GREENE



Said England unto Pharaoh, "Though at present singing small,
You shall sing a proper tune before it ends."
And she introduced old Pharaoh to the Sergeant once for all,
And left 'em in the desert making friends.
It was not a Crystal Palace nor Cathedral;
It was a not a public-house of common fame;
But a piece of red-hot sand, with a palm on either hand,
And a little hut for Sergeant Whatisname.

(*From "Pharaoh and the Sergeant", by Rudyard Kipling*)

"FINED one day's pay," the sergeant snapped in English; then leaning back in his hard seated, stiff backed chair, he listened intently while Private Guffa, his official interpreter, passed on the judgment to the delinquent who stood at attention before him.

The day was very hot; the white-washed stones which outlined the parade ground of the Black Watch shimmered in the glare of the sun; not a breath of wind stirred and the flag at the top of the tall pole hung down in limp folds as if it —symbol of white man's rule—had capitulated to the sun and to the inertia which makes Africa a potential curse to all white men.

The sergeant was lean, his muscles supple, his gray eyes clear and keen. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on him. He wore a thin white drill uniform, and his face was shaded by a light helmet; but he sweated profusely. That was the saving grace. Not that he gave any outward sign of the feeling, which obsessed him, that his spine was slowly melting. He knew too well the value of outward appearance in dealing with these men over whom he had been placed in full authority.

When he had first come out to the country, transferred from a crack regiment, to teach the rudiments of drill to the natives who had enlisted in the forces of their white overlords, he had looked upon his charges as creatures of an inferior order.

"Grinning Barbary apes," he had called them.

And they, six-foot warriors of a warrior tribe, glorying in their physical strength, had had only contempt for the little man who had been appointed to teach them the warfare of civilized tribes.

Time and occasion had proved them to each other—the natives acknowledging the truth of their proverb which sounds like a parody of our own relating to good things and little parcels, while the sergeant was content in the knowledge that the men he commanded were *men*.

And men, especially warriors, delight in pomp and ceremony; they like the day's routine to be governed by a series of functions.

Hence this daily court which the sergeant held—trying offenders against military discipline, hearing complaints made by wives, and against wives—was something more than a military tribunal. The sergeant was a chief conferring with his people.

It was a difficult rôle to fill; it marked the sergeant's ability that he filled it.

The O. C. of the regiment, seeing the sergeant seated behind the cheap deal table, hearing cases and passing judgment, his right hand clasped about his gold knobbed swagger cane, had exclaimed indignantly—

"The man acts as if he were the Almighty!"

"He is that—to his men," the adjutant had replied. "We'd best leave him to it, sir. He seems to be getting along well."

And so the sergeant had been left alone, until he had so entrenched himself in the minds of his men that they became very definitely his men and would have resented any statement that they were really in the service of the sergeant's superiors. When the sergeant was in hospital with his first attack of fever, the Black Watch refused to turn out for drill until Corporal Kawiti had been granted an interview with him.

The sergeant had said then:

"Tell the men they must drill and obey the orders of the man sent to drill them. Even if the man sent to them is a fool, they must obey. Because of the uniform he wears, he ceases to be a fool as long as he carries out the orders given to him."

Quite a lot more in this vein the sergeant said, endeavoring to preach the military gospel of obedience to an ideal, to a flag, to something even less concrete than that.

"Our man says," Kawiti had told the Black Watch, "that, during the time the sickness is upon him, and at all other times when he is not with us, he has ordered other white men to drill us. So there is no shame in obeying the orders of that one who shouts angrily on the parade ground. He only obeys the orders of our man."

After that, Lieutenant Godfrey, who had been put in charge of the Black Watch during the sergeant's absence from duty, had no complaints to make.

"They came to heel," he reported, "just as soon as they saw I meant business. *Ach sis*, yes—" Lieutenant Godfrey was a Colonial—"they knew I was too *slim* for them. Just the same," he added, "I'll be glad when old Sergeant What-do-you-call-him gets back to duty. Those niggers of his look at me at times as if I wasn't there. And the beggars refer to

me as 'The Voice of Our Man!' What do you know about that?"

THE sergeant stifled a sigh that rose to his lips. There was an unusual number of complaints this morning. The heat increased; the lazy drone of flies filled his ears; the scent of unwashed Africa stung his nostrils. He wanted to jump up and put an end to all this childish mumming. This new case, now, which was being brought to his notice: Thuso was a good soldier, but he would get drunk and, when drunk, beat his wife.

"If he'd only beat her when he's sober," the sergeant commented mentally, "he'd do a better job and she, most like, would take it more to heart. She's a trouble maker if there ever was one. An' I've got to sit here an' listen to it all—oh, hell!

"Tell Thuso," he said to Guffa, when that man had finished translating the complaint and statements of witnesses, "that he is excused from duty for a week. He is to go to his *kraal* and he is to take Mabele his wife with him.

"An' blimme!" he muttered happily to himself as he noted Mabele's look of dismay and the broad grins on the faces of the other women. "I've been slow not to think of that before. He'll teach her something before he brings her back. At any rate, we'll all have a bit of peace for a week at least."

The next case made him forget the heat and his thirst. Private Bombva was brought before him under armed guard commanded by Corporal Kawiti. Bombva was a powerfully built native, dwarfing even his escort, and the sergeant had "pricked" him for promotion. Hitherto his conduct had been exemplary; he was a clean, intelligent and keen soldier.

The case against him was briefly stated.

He had been drunk last night at sununder and had attacked the corporal with a knobkerry. Four men had been required to put him under restraint. In the mêlée he had torn their uniforms—and his own. There was evident proof of that, the sergeant noted grimly.

To all of which Bombva morosely pleaded guilty, and stubbornly refused to say anything in his own defense.

"He went on a drunk jag, I suppose," the sergeant mused, "an' now's damned ashamed of himself. That's why he won't talk. Damned nuisance. I've got to 'crime' him. Can't let him off with a caution."

Aloud he said—

"Fined one week's pay an' confined to barracks for a month. Next case!"

A native orderly, on duty as the O. C's messenger, came at the double to where the sergeant was sitting, saluted, handed him a letter, saluted again and departed at the double.

The sergeant read the message, a trace of irritation in his manner. It instructed him to report at the O. C's office at once.

The sergeant looked up suddenly at the people before him—men of the Black Watch, their wives, children and a number of boys, servants of the white troopers.

Their expressions were tense. Their eyes were fixed on him as if they were trying to read his thoughts. A strange silence seemed to have enveloped them.

He looked at them steadily. Then he rapped on the table with his cane.

Corporal Kawiti shouted a succession of orders; little clouds of dust, stirred up by naked, scuffling feet weighted the air. When the dust clouds settled the parade ground was deserted. The Black Watch, with their women and the other natives, had gone to their quarters. The sergeant could hear the hum of their voices and wondered at the note of excitement which sounded in them.

"There's something they're hiding from me," he muttered. "Wonder if I'll ever really learn to know 'em?"

He rose to his feet, tucked his swagger cane under his left arm and made his way across the larger parade ground—where awkward squads of white recruits were being put through the paces by loud voiced corporals.

His own men were drill perfect. That was all that was expected of them. The formation of the regiment had been a concession to some big bug at home. They looked picturesque in their red fezzes, their blue jumpers and khaki shorts; their bayonet drill was a marvel of clock-like precision. But—and the knowledge of it was like bitter alum in the sergeant's mouth—they were only regarded as toy soldiers. They looked pretty standing guard; it gave a white officer an air of dignity to have a smartly uniformed native—who in other days had probably led an *impi* of warriors—to run errands for him.

Yes, the Black Watch was tolerated—but not trusted. Only a few years ago they had fought magnificently against the same men who now contemptuously affirmed that you could never make a soldier out of a negro because he had a yellow streak. They had faced unflinchingly a hail of steel coated death released by white men who now sneered that they'd never stand firm under fire.

At first the sergeant had spoken heatedly in defense of his men. At first—his hair was red, his temper hot—he had backed up his opinions with his fist. But common sense—plus a warning from the O. C—forced the realization that he could not be in constant warfare with his fellow N. C. O's and from that time onward he avoided the sergeants' mess, save at such times as he could count on its being empty.

The R. S. M. was waiting impatiently for him on the *stoep* outside the O. C's office.

"You take your time obeying an order," the R. S. M. accused wrathfully.

"I came as soon as I could, sir," the sergeant replied, giving the R. S. M. exactly the proper deference a warrant officer's rank commanded.

The R. S. M. frowned and looked the sergeant over from head to foot, hoping to find some fault—a dull button; shoes that were non-military. But he was doomed to disappointment.

THE O. C—who was in heated conference with the captain of headquarters troop and his adjutant—frowned at the sergeant.

"I sent for you to come at once," he said tersely. "That was fifteen minutes ago, Sergeant. Well?"

"I was hearing complaints, sir. I had to dismiss the men."

"I hope they obey an order more promptly than you do, Sergeant," the O. C. said coldly.

He exchanged a few whispered comments with his adjutant. Then, abruptly—

"How well do you know your men, Sergeant?"

"Very well, sir," the sergeant replied confidently, wondering what was in the wind and hoping that it was a prelude to sending him with them on a long patrol. They needed more action than barrack life could give them.

"Then you won't be surprised," the O. C. continued, "to learn you've got a damned murderer amongst them."

"I don't understand, sir," he stammered.

The O. C. turned to his adjutant.

"Tell him, Cartwright," he said.

The adjutant smiled encouragingly at the sergeant.

"A native named Marka, Sergeant," he said gravely, "the servant of Trooper Grendon, was found dead on the veld just outside the camp, at eight o'clock this morning. He had been stabbed in the back. A uniformed native was seen running from the place where Marka's body was found."

"Who was he, sir?"

The adjutant shook his head.

"The witness who reported it was one of the new batch of white recruits. All natives look alike to him at present. He says he couldn't identify the man. But he was a big man, he says. Not that that helps much."

"Just the same, sir," the sergeant said doggedly, "it might not have been one of my men. It might have been one of the other private boys. They're always fighting amongst themselves. Some of them

wear old fezzes an' tunic coats my men have discarded."

The adjutant nodded.

"Quite so, Sergeant. But, unfortunately for your theory, the weapon by which the murder was committed was sticking in the murdered man. There it is."

He jerked his thumb to a little table at the side of the room. On it was one of the long bayonets issued to the Black Watch. A rusty stain dulled the brightness of the steel.

The sergeant examined it intently, his face disturbed.

"Know whose it is, Sergeant?" the O. C. asked sharply.

"No, sir," the sergeant replied. "But it shouldn't be difficult to find out, sir. Fingerprints—"

"It's been examined for that, Sergeant. There aren't any. At least there are too many. God knows how many fools touched the weapon before it was handed in."

The sergeant could not entirely mask his feeling of relief.

The O. C's sharp eyes detected it.

"Understand, Sergeant," he said sternly. "I'm not greatly concerned about this affair as a murder. A killing or two doesn't mean a thing to a native and, as long as he kills his own color, we're ready to regard it as a minor offense. It's not a hanging business, anyway. No, I'm not worried about this nigger being killed—he probably deserved it. But, damn it, consider the impertinence of the fellow! He wears his uniform and kills with government property. We've got to do something about it, for discipline's sake.

"So—" the O. C. leaned forward and pointed an accusing forefinger at the sergeant— "I'm expecting you to discover the murderer and bring him before me for trial. I'll accept no excuse for failure. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," the sergeant replied slowly.

"Well?" The O. C's sharp query challenged the hesitation in the sergeant's voice.

"It won't be easy, sir—"

The adjutant interposed swiftly, anticipating the O. C's choleric ire:

"It should be easy, Sergeant. Hold a kit inspection. The man who's minus a bayonet is the guilty party. Simple enough, surely."

"Too simple, sir," the sergeant replied uneasily.

"Well, then," the O. C. snapped. "Better get busy, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir." But the sergeant still hesitated.

"What is it, Sergeant?"

"It would be easier, sir," the sergeant said, "if I could be allowed to question—officially, sir—Trooper Grendon."

"Damn it, why?" the O. C. asked.

"Sir," the sergeant said stolidly, "I have already had occasion to report an' complain of white troopers sending their native servants with proposals to the wives of the Black Watch. I have tried, sir, to obtain authority to put a stop to it. But my request has been refused—"

"We are not running a school for morals, Sergeant," the O. C. snorted. "Of course, we don't officially approve of such behavior. And I am convinced that very few of my men are guilty of such—er—bad taste. But men are men—"

"Exactly, sir," the sergeant dared to interrupt. "An' it's only natural—begging your pardon, sir—that my men should resent interference with their wives."

"Your men!" The O. C. choked back his wrath. "Damn it, Sergeant, you take too much to yourself. But, go on; you were asked to explain why I should give you permission to question Trooper Grendon."

"I only thought, sir, that he may have sent his servant for one of the women. An' if we knew which one, that might give us a clue to the murderer, sir."

The O. C. considered this thoughtfully.

"No," he said at last. "Keep the white troopers out of this mess. Get them mixed up in it and we'll have letters in the home papers and all that sort of thing. No, the bayonet should give you all you need in the way of clues. And I expect the

murderer under arrest within the hour."

"Very good, sir," the sergeant said quietly. "I'll hold a kit inspection at once, sir."

He saluted, made a smart right about turn and was halfway to the door when the O. C's voice recalled him. He turned and stood to attention once again.

"I'm coming to this inspection, Sergeant," the O. C. said meaningly. "I think you're a bit too anxious to protect your men."

"Very good, sir," the sergeant said stolidly. "An' have I your authority, sir, to prohibit the native servants of troopers entering the lines of the Black Watch?"

The O. C. replied testily, as one who concedes a point against his will:

"What do you want, Sergeant? White troopers set on guard over your precious men? Damn it, man, protect your own lines and don't bother me with trivialities."

"Very good, sir; thank you, sir," the sergeant replied with an inward glow of satisfaction. "Shall I go now, sir, an' give the order for kit inspection?"

"We'll all go together."

The O. C. rose from his chair and led the way out of the office to the parade ground of the Black Watch.

"Now, Sergeant," he said. "Let's see how quick you can turn your men out."

IN LESS than five minutes the men of the Black Watch—called by the clarion notes of the bugle from manifold duties: fatigues and such like—assembled on the parade ground in full parade kit.

The O. C's eyes traveled down the lines of men.

"Smart turnout, Sergeant," he said approvingly.

The sergeant's gray eyes glowed with pride as he took his stand in front of his men. His practised eye quickly took in the details of dress and equipment of every man present.

Private Bombva's bayonet sheath was empty! A grim smile for a moment curved the sergeant's compressed lips.

He drew in a deep breath and then the commands came with the explosive force of shots from a gun:

"Fix bayonets! Slope arms!"

As if controlled by a single brain, the men executed the orders.

Again the sergeant failed to control, entirely, his facial expression. Private Bombva had gone through the motions of fixing his bayonet and his pantomime had been so good, so perfectly coordinated with that of the others, that a casual observer would have been convinced he did, in fact, fix a bayonet.

The sergeant turned to the O. C, saluted and asked—

"Will you inspect, sir?" he asked.

"No need to, Sergeant," the O. C. replied dryly; his eyes were not a whit less keen than the sergeant's. "No. 7 from the end, in the rear of rank, has no bayonet. What is his name?"

"Private Bombva, sir. No. 468, Private Bombva. A very good man, sir. I intended to recommend him for promotion."

"He'll get his promotion all right," the O. C. said grimly. "Not as high, perhaps, as he merits. However, dismiss the parade and have Private Bombva arrested and brought before me under guard."

"To your office, sir?" the sergeant asked.

The O. C. shook his head.

"No, Sergeant. We'll hold the inquiry inside your hut unless—" he added—"you object."

"Very good, sir," the sergeant said. "No objections, of course."

He gave Corporal Kawiti the necessary instructions, and then dismissed the parade. Rejoining his superior officers, he ushered them into his hut. The O. C. looked curiously around as he seated himself in the wicker chair the sergeant held out for him.

It was a large hut, sparsely furnished, immaculately clean. The floor, lately re-*dhaga'd*, was smooth and as hard as concrete. Along one wall was a narrow army cot; the blankets were folded round the "biscuits" as laid down in the regulations. There was a plain deal table in

the center of the room and behind it a straight backed chair.

On a long shelf hanging from the wall was a row of books on native customs and languages, and two oil lamps. And that, excepting, of course, the sergeant's regimental equipment, was all the hut contained. It was a place of Spartan simplicity, typical of the man who lived there.

A shuffle of bare feet sounded outside the hut. Corporal Kawiti's high pitched voice sounded, giving orders in a queerly pronounced English—

"Prisoner and escort," he said, "halt!"

The sergeant looked to the O. C. for instructions.

"Have the prisoner brought in, Sergeant," that man replied.

"Very good, sir. Will you question him, sir, or shall I?"

"I'll leave the questioning in your hands, Sergeant."

"Then may I sit down, sir?" the sergeant requested. "It is my custom—"

"Sit down by all means, Sergeant," the O. C. interrupted.

The sergeant saluted, then sat down in the straight backed chair behind the table. He struck the table with his cane.

Almost immediately Bombva, escorted by two armed natives, entered the hut; behind them came Corporal Kawiti and Guffa the interpreter.

"It is my custom, sir," the sergeant explained to the O. C, "to conduct inquiries, hear complaints an' so forth, through the medium of an interpreter. But if you desire, sir, having regard to the gravity of the crime, I will conduct this inquiry in the native language."

"Stick to your own methods," the O. C. grunted.

"Tell the prisoner," the sergeant said to Guffa, "that he is arrested because he appeared on parade improperly dressed."

He waited until that had been translated. Then he continued—

"Ask him why he appeared on the parade without his bayonet."

The answer came quickly enough.

"Bombva says that when the bugle sounded for parade he was at the canteen. He ran to his hut and put on his tunic, his shorts and his fez. He buckled his belt about him. He took up his gun and ran to parade. He did not know until the order came to fix bayonets that the bayonet was not in its sheath."

"Then," the sergeant countered, "his bayonet is in his hut. Is that what he would say?"

"That is what he says," the interpreter replied.

"Well, now tell him," the sergeant said slowly, "that I know it is not in his hut."

"If the *inkosi* says that is so, that is so," Bombva replied through the interpreter. "Yet I think it is in my hut."

"It is not," the sergeant said sharply. "Further, Bombva knew the bayonet was not in his belt when he fastened the belt about him. Bombva is too good a soldier not to notice that.

"Bombva's bayonet has been found," the sergeant continued, speaking very slowly, listening intently as the interpreter gave his words to Bombva, watching the expression on Bombva's face, and on the faces of the other men. "Bombva's bayonet was found," he repeated, "on the veld. It was sticking in the back of the man he killed."

NOT by the quiver of an eyelash did Bombva or the other natives show surprise at the sergeant's words. There was no emotion in Bombva's voice as he spoke to the interpreter.

"Bombva wishes to know, *inkosi*, when and where the man he killed was found."

"On the veld outside the camp. At the hour when the bugler sounds the call for skoff. A white policeman saw a man in the uniform of the Black Watch run away from the dead body. He found a bayonet sticking in the body. And of all the Black Watch on parade just a little while ago, only Bombva had no bayonet. I say that the bayonet was Bombva's—the murderer, Bombva."

When that had been translated the sergeant added—

"Ask him if he has anything to say?"

The question seemed to unlock a flood gate of oratory.

"Last night at sundown," Bombva said, "I played the part of a man who is a great fool. I drank much beer. The strength of it went to my head. I ran up and down and about the huts, striking all who tried to stop me. Corporal Kawiti arrested me, though he himself could not have done it. He called others to his assistance. They overpowered me and threw me into the *trunk* hut and set a guard over me. All night they kept guard. Not once—though I tried many times—would they let me go from the hut. In the morning, the madness of the beer having gone from me, I no longer tried to get away but sat mourning my folly, knowing now that a long time must pass again before I could regain the *inkosi's* esteem.

"*Au-a!*" he concluded. "I said that I had acted like a fool. But if I had not been a fool, I should now be standing before you, accused of having killed a man, with no evidence at hand to gainsay it. That is all, *inkosi.*"

The sergeant turned to the O. C.

"It is true, sir. Private Bombva was brought before me this morning, accused of drunkenness an' mutilation of government property. He was under close arrest from sundown last night until this morning when he was brought before me. So it would seem, sir, that we're as far off from discovering the identity of the murderer as before we had the inspection parade."

"Nonsense, Sergeant," the O. C. exclaimed irritably. "The man's lying."

The sergeant questioned Corporal Kawiti, who stoutly corroborated Bombva's statement. He sent for the men who had helped the corporal arrest Bombva. He sent for those who had stood on guard over him during the night. Their statements amounted to this: Bombva had indeed acted as one gone mad. He had been put under arrest and closely guarded all through the night. Not for one brief moment had the guard relaxed their watch.

They laughed at the idea of the possibility of Bombva's emerging unknown to them and returning unobserved. They were indignant at the suggestion that they had guiltily allowed him his freedom.

Only two conclusions therefore were possible: Bombva was guiltless of the murder; or the corporal and all the other witnesses were guilty of perjury.

The sergeant acted on the first conclusion.

"There remains," he said, "this crime against Bombva. He is guilty of losing government property and of appearing improperly dressed on parade. For that I fine him two weeks' pay. That is all! Dismiss!"

He waited until the natives had marched out of the hut, then he sprang to his feet and stood at attention, waiting the O. C's comments.

They were not slow in coming. Their quality was vitriolic.

With sweeping profanity the O. C. condemned the Black Watch. They were all grinning liars. They had conspired together against discipline; they had conspired to make him and his command the laughing stock of the world. He accused the sergeant of aiding and abetting them in their nefarious behavior. He concluded with:

"There's not a doubt in my mind, Sergeant, that Bombva is the guilty man. What are you going to do about it?"

"I could deal with him," the sergeant said, tentatively, as if the case against him were proved.

The O. C. snorted.

"You know damn well we can't do that, Sergeant," he said. "A man's innocent until he's proved guilty."

He rose to his feet and, accompanied by the adjutant, left the hut with this parting shot—

"And I look to you to *prove* it—without any waste of time, either."

The sergeant sat down in his chair and morosely considered the problem confronting him. He knew that there were

ways at hand whereby he could extract the truth of the affair. By making a personal appeal to the men; by—

The sergeant frowned. He knew that he could follow none of the methods which suggested themselves to him; although they might succeed in getting the evidence against Bombva which the O. C. insisted upon, such methods would result in lowering his—the sergeant's—prestige in the eyes of his men. And he could not afford that, not if he wished to continue his work with the Black Watch. In some part they regarded him as a God. It would hurt him, and them, if they discovered he had feet of clay.

Absently he took his watch from his tunic pocket and toyed with the silver chain. At the end of the chain was a tiny compass.

As he watched the needle oscillating back and forth a plan came to him. He detached the compass from the chain and placed it in the center of the table. The north pole of the needle pointed to the center of his shelf of books.

With a pencil he made a faint mark on the table, locating the position of the compass. Then, returning the compass to his pocket, nodding his head in satisfaction of the plan he had evolved, he blew a shrill blast on his whistle. To Corporal Kawiti who came in answer to the call he said:

"I want Bombva, the men who arrested him, the men who kept guard over him, and yourself here in my hut, at once."

WHEN the men presented themselves he bade them stand apart from one another, distributing them about the hut so that he could, he said, see into each one's eyes and read the truth, or lies, that lived there.

When they were placed as he wanted them—yet apparently there was no preconceived arrangement, certainly they were conscious of none—he said:

"A man has been killed an' a shame has been put upon me. Not because of the killing—that is nothing—but lies have been spoken; lies have been acted. Before the colonel *inkosi* you shamed me. Now we are men dealing with men; there is still time to wipe out the lies an' the shame."

The men fidgeted uneasily. Kawiti said:

"What is it you would have us say, *inkosi?*"

"I ask you only to speak with a straight tongue."

There was a slight hesitation before Kawiti replied—

"But how could that Bombva have killed a man when he was in the *trunk* hut?"

"You answer my question," the sergeant said with a sigh, "by asking me another. I am as a child in this matter. I know nothing. I say nothing. I do not call you liars. I only make a charm."

He took the compass from his pocket.

"Here," he continued, "is a great magic. It hates evil. It can only point a true way. A murder has been done. It will point to the man who killed. If the man is not here it will find him out. But that is the end of its power. It can not punish. Now watch, all of you. But do not move from the place now where you are standing, for the spirits which move the finger that is within this magic box are now in the hut. It is the blackened end which points out the guilty one."

He put the compass on the table on the spot which he had marked. The men watched, goggle eyed, the quivering needle; the only sound was that of their breathing.

At length the needle came to a halt, pointing to the book case. And there stood Private Bombva.

The silence was broken by gasps of wonder and relief, followed by Bombva's—

"*Au-a, inkosi!*" The exclamation was a confession of guilt and a supplication for mercy.

The sergeant looked at Bombva inquiringly. But before that man could speak, Kawiti said boldly:

"*Inkosi*, what is this thing you do here now? Is it a matter between us only, or

is it a matter of white man's justice?"

The sergeant hesitated a moment.

"It is a matter between ourselves," he said. "But it is also justice."

Kawiti considered this, then he nodded.

"Were it otherwise we would keep silent, even though we fear the power of the spirit which is in that pointing finger of yours. White man's justice and our justice do not always trek together. Speak, Bombva."

"*Inkosi*," said Bombva, "I killed to protect the honor of my hut. That was my right. But before I killed, fearing the white man's justice, I took counsel with others who saw eye to eye with me. They made it possible for me to kill, to execute justice and be protected from justice! That is all, *inkosi*."

The sergeant nodded understandingly. He did not try to find out from Bombva how the matter had been arranged. The method was obvious. The story of Bombva's drunkenness and running amok, of his being placed under close guard all night was only a story fabricated to provide him with an alibi.

The sergeant said casually:

"A wrong has been done. A punishment must follow."

"A wrong *was* done," Bombva said grimly. "A punishment followed. There the matter should end. The man I killed sought to take my wife from me. What more is there to say?"

"An' yet," the sergeant insisted, "there is more. It is not permitted for a man of the Black Watch to take the law into his own hands."

"There must be no punishment, *inkosi*," Kawiti affirmed stoutly. "Having spoken once, our mouths are again closed. Bombva denies that he killed a man. We would affirm that he could not have killed him because he was in the *trunk* at the time he was supposed to have killed him. How, then, can the white men punish him?"

"You forget," the sergeant said slowly, "that you have told me, that I know about it."

"Truly," Kawiti agreed. "But you said, *inkosi*, that it was a matter between ourselves."

"I also said," the sergeant said dryly, "that it was a matter of justice."

"And is not justice satisfied, *inkosi*?" Kawiti asked. "You would have made Bombva a corporal. Now that honor is held from him. He is not permitted to go from the camp for the space of a month, his pay is held back from him so that he can buy no beer. Punishment enough. Justice enough."

The sergeant shook his head sadly.

"It is not enough. Until justice is meted out to Bombva by the colonel *inkosi* we shall be under a cloud."

"At least," one of the men replied, "a cloud protects us from the burning of the sun."

"If the sun is always hidden," the sergeant countered, "crops never ripen."

"What would you have then, *inkosi*?" Kawiti asked.

"The matter rests with you," the sergeant replied. "I have no more to say. Go now and talk this over between yourselves. When you have come to a decision return to me."

They filed silently out of the hut.

FOR a long time the sergeant sat motionless in his chair, unconscious of the passing of time. He looked around his hut. He was walled in, he felt, by Africa. The hut was Africa; its rounded walls symbolized the tortuous mental processes of Africa's black children. The Turkish bath atmosphere was indubitably Africa. And yet, paradoxically, the hut was not at all Africa. It was the sergeant and the cold race which sired him.

He looked up as Kawiti entered. The corporal had taken off his regimentals. He was naked save for a narrow loin cloth. He squatted on his haunches just inside the doorway.

"You have made your decision?" the sergeant asked.

"Are we," Kawiti questioned, "two men talking together?"

The sergeant nodded gravely.

"Then," Kawiti continued, "I come to bargain."

"I do not bargain," the sergeant said coldly.

"You will, *inkosi*. You must. There are some who say you are not strong enough to protect us. We who ask for justice!"

The sergeant frowned.

"Go on," he said curtly.

"We ask," Kawiti said, "that Bombva's punishment for the killing—having in mind that we consider he had a right to kill—be light."

"It will be," the sergeant replied.

"We ask that no fault be charged to us others who tried to keep the matter from your knowledge."

"For discipline's sake there must be some punishment," the sergeant commented.

"From your hands we will accept it."

"My hands shall give it," the sergeant promised. "What more?"

"*Inkosi*," Kawiti said gravely, "if we may not protect the honor of our huts in our own way, if we may not kill, then our honor is in your hands. We look to you for protection. Can you give it?"

"Put a closer watch on your women," the sergeant countered. "The fault is also theirs."

Kawiti spat his contempt of the suggestion.

"We are men," he said, "not watchers of women. Even if it were possible for us to always have them under our eyes, we would not do it: there is no honor in living that way. And as the *inkosi* knows, it is not possible for us to order our lives so that our women are always under our protection. When we are on parade, when we are at drill, when we are sent on patrols, our women are free."

"No freer than they would be," the sergeant interrupted, "if you were living with them at the *kraals*."

"Much freer," Kawiti contradicted. "Here they have little work to do. They have no ground to till. If water is required they do no more than turn a tap. Full freedom is theirs, and from that freedom springs evil.

"*Wo-wel*" Kawiti laughed ruefully. "We may not even beat them for their folly. If we do, and they report the beating to you, *inkosi*, our punishment follows."

"At least," the sergeant said lightly, "they are also forbidden to beat you."

Kawiti made the gesture of one who concedes a point that is not worth debating.

"The truth still remains, *inkosi*," he said. "If we may not kill, our honor is without protection, unless you can give it to us. Assure us of that, and this affair of Bombva is ended."

The sergeant nodded.

"That protection I will give you, Kawiti," he said.

"It is one thing," Kawiti muttered, "to say you will kill a lion; and another to come back from the hunt carrying the lion's skin."

"I promised protection," the sergeant said quietly, "an' that protection I will give. Guards shall be set about your quarters day an' night."

Kawiti shook his head.

"It is not enough, *inkosi*. Those black dogs who slave for the white men act as if they themselves were white men. They would laugh at the sentries; they would say to them they were doing the bidding of their white man and go their way."

"I had not finished, Kawiti," the sergeant said sternly. "The sentries shall bring those men before me and I will deal with them."

"It is enough, *inkosi*," Kawiti answered after a pause of consideration. "And so Bombva shall confess to the killing. But," he added gravely, "if your protection prove worthless, *inkosi*, we must, for our honor's sake, take the protection into our own hands again. Even if it mean sorrow to you, and an end to all the things you have tried to teach us."

As he spoke Kawiti rose to his feet and stood stiffly at attention, signifying that the matter which they had been discuss-

ing was concluded. Once again he was a corporal of the Black Watch in the presence of a superior officer.

"You have my leave to go, Corporal Kawiti," the sergeant said absently.

IT WAS night time, a week later. The sergeant was seated at his deal table going wearily through the official forms arranged before him; making out pay and ration vouchers.

That task finally completed, he leaned back in his chair and mopped his sweating forehead.

With a gesture of disgust the sergeant pushed the lamp farther away from him. His head ached; the throbbing of his temples was identical in rhythm with that of the beat of the tom-toms which sounded somewhere out on the veld.

The sergeant once again turned to the papers on the table before him. This time he read through a series of reports which, during the past week, he had sent to the O. C. They dealt with the beatings he had administered to the native servants of certain white troopers who had ignored the ruling which forbade their trespassing in the quarters of the Black Watch.

With each report the sergeant had appended the request that the quarters of the Black Watch be officially placed out of bounds to white troopers and the servants of the white troopers.

"I'm taking no notice of these complaints, Sergeant," the O. C. had told him. "It's a matter you must handle entirely on your own."

The sergeant had countered boldly:

"It's a matter which goes deeper than you think. It affects the prestige of all white men in this country."

"I know, Sergeant," the O. C. hastily agreed. "But I think you're exaggerating the trouble. In any case, I don't see what proof you have to offer. No proof, I mean, that these native servants are sent at the direct instigation of white troopers. The black race is not exactly a moral race. I think you'll admit that—and it may be they have their own ends in view. No, it is definitely your affair. Because of your importunities I imposed a ridiculously light sentence on the man Bombva. I ignored the behavior of the men who conspired with him to throw dust in the eyes of justice. More than that I will not do. If you can not handle the situation I must find some one who can."

And there the sergeant had been forced to let the matter rest, knowing that sooner or later things would be brought to a head. And on his handling of the situation which would then arise depended many things.

At that moment he heard the sharp challenging voice of one of the sentries. The challenge was repeated. Then there was the sound of a scuffle and angry shouts, suddenly silenced. He sighed wearily, rose and took down from the wall where it hung by a loop to a nail, a stout *sjambok*. This he placed on the table before him and sat down again in his chair.

The next moment four of his men stood in the doorway, and standing sullenly between them, a gag thrust in his mouth, his hands held tightly behind his back, was a white trooper.

He was a big man, yet not so big as the men who stood on either side of him. They held him easily despite the wrath which gave added power to his strongly muscled body. He blinked for a moment as he came into the lighted hut.

"What is the meaning of this?" the sergeant asked sharply.

"This one," one of the natives replied, "came into our lines, seeking, he said, a certain woman. So we have brought him before you for judgment. That is all, *inkosi*. The rest is in your hands."

The sergeant said quietly:

"This is now a white man's *indaba*. Take the gag from his mouth, release his hands, then stand on guard outside the door."

The men obeyed swiftly, leaving the two white men alone together.

The trooper was the first to speak.

"What the hell?" he shouted. "What do you mean by letting them lousy niggers

of yours treat a white man like this? I'll report you to the O. C. and get my rights. I'll—" His eyes glittered as they fell on the *sjambok*. "Damn it, I'll *sjambok* the hides off 'em. I'll show 'em the way to deal with a white man."

He made a grab for the *sjambok*. But the sergeant whipped it away from him.

The trooper raised his hand threateningly.

"I shouldn't if I were you," the sergeant said, quietly. "It isn't wise to strike your superior officer."

"You ain't my superior officer," the trooper sneered. "You got nothing to do with us. I know that. You're only in charge of a lot of niggers. You ain't got any authority over white men like me."

"So you're a white man, are you?" the sergeant questioned. "I shouldn't have known it if you hadn't told me. What's your name an' regimental number?"

"608, Trooper Blackie. Why—what's it matter to you who I am?"

The sergeant made no reply. He was writing a report which, when he had finished, he gave to one of the Black Watch and bade him take it to the O. C.

"Now I can answer you, Trooper Blackie," he said, looking up at the trooper. "I've just notified the O. C. that my men have arrested you within the lines an' that I am going to deal with you myself."

"What the hell do you mean?" the trooper asked harshly.

"I'm going to try you in my own peculiar way," the sergeant said coldly. "If I find you guilty, I'm going to punish you that way, too."

"Like hell you will!" Trooper Blackie replied with a laugh. He added, with a suspicion of fear in his voice, "You ain't going to bring them niggers of yours into this matter, are you?"

"I'll deal with you myself," the sergeant promised. He looked at the reports he had sent in to the O. C. "I see I've already *sjamboked* your native," he said, "for coming into the native lines, so you can hardly plead ignorance. You knew, didn't you, that it's a case of hands off the women of the Black Watch?"

The trooper grinned.

"Is that all that's biting you? Don't be greedy, Sergeant. You don't want to keep them all to yourself, do you?"

The sergeant ignored the question and the leer which accompanied it.

"It's no good appealing to your better nature," he said, "because you haven't got any. An' I'm not preaching morals, either. All right, then. I find you guilty. Have you got anything to say?"

"Not a thing," the trooper replied with a laugh.

"The sentence of the court is," the sergeant said coldly, "that you be given five strokes with the *sjambok* across your naked shoulders. Now take off your tunic an' peel to the waist. Look sharp about it!"

The trooper glared at him.

"You're crazy, man," he said. "Crazy with the heat! What do you think I am —a nigger, or a dog, that I should stand up to let you *sjambok* me?"

"You can always lodge a complaint afterwards," the sergeant suggested mildly.

"I ain't going to lodge no complaint," Blackie said, "because I ain't going to have any complaint. You're doing no *sjamboking* of me. So get that into your head."

He turned to leave the hut, but at a sharp command from the sergeant he found his way barred by two of the natives who menaced him with fixed bayonets.

He turned back to face the sergeant.

"What sort of game are you playing?" he demanded. "And all because I tried to visit a nigger wench. You ought to know that they think it an honor to have a white man make up to them."

"If you don't strip of your own accord," the sergeant said tersely, "I'm going to make you."

"You and who else?"

"Me, all by myself," the sergeant said. He took off his tunic and hung it up. "There's not much room here," he con-

tinued conversationally, "but there's enough."

He put the lamp up on the book shelf at the side of the hut, the table and chairs on the top of his bed.

The trooper glared at him incredulously.

"What are you getting at?" he asked.

"I've taken off the protection of my rank," the sergeant replied. "An' I'm going to *sjambok* you."

The trooper laughed.

"You crow loud for a little 'un, Sergeant," he said. "But you ain't going to get me that way. The moment I set hands on you them niggers of yours 'll be rushing to your rescue."

"They won't," the sergeant promised. "It's a matter between you an' me."

He went to the door of the hut. The light from the lamp, streaming out through the opening, projected his shadow before him. To the natives who waited there it looked as if his shadow hovered protectingly over the huts of the Black Watch. He said to them:

"What happens now in this hut is a white man's *indaba*. Is it understood?"

"Aye, *inkosi*, it is understood."

He turned back into the hut and faced the trooper once again.

"Are you satisfied?"

The trooper removed his tunic and slowly rolled up his sleeves over his hairy forearms.

"Not," he observed, "that there's any need for me to take off my tunic to a little shrimp like you."

"Better take off your shirt too," the sergeant countered. "It'll save me the trouble later on."

THE trooper's reply to that was to rush madly at the sergeant, putting all his force into one tremendous blow, with which he hoped to end the fight there and then. But the sergeant, keenly alert, had no difficulty in sidestepping the rush, and scored with a straight left, which landed on Blackie's jaw just below the ear.

The big man staggered across the hut, his arms flailing in an attempt to regain his balance. Colliding with the wall of the hut, he slumped to the ground.

Though he arose immediately, he was evidently much shaken.

The sergeant sprang in quickly, realizing that his best hope was to allow the man no respite. Again and again he got past Blackie's feeble guard and battered him about the ribs with his iron hard fists.

It looked, for a moment, as if the sergeant would gain a victory without receiving a blow. Then he ran unguardedly into one of Blackie's wild swings, and he reeled back. Had Blackie rushed him then all would have been over. But the big man was still somewhat dazed, and before he could follow up his chance-given vantage,the sergeant had recovered sufficiently to dance out of harm's way.

For a little while they sparred warily, until, stung by an obscene taunt which oozed from Blackie's lips, the sergeant attacked with a red headed fury.

He darted in under the big man's guard and, with head down, taking no thought of guard, he stood flat footed and directed a barrage of short arm punches at Blackie's middle.

When he broke away Blackie was breathing through wide open mouth and hiccoughing painfully. The sergeant was far from unscathed. His nose was bleeding, his lip cut, his right eye was beginning to close.

Again, for a little while, they sparred, each seeking to recuperate from punishment. Once again they closed, fell into a clinch and wrestled violently.

Here Blackie had the advantage. Presently he succeeded in pinning the sergeant's arms to his sides; his grip tightened, and he tried to knee the sergeant in the groin.

The sergeant, sensing his intention, kicked him on the shin. Cursing with pain, Blackie loosened his grip for a moment. Before he could tighten it again, the sergeant broke free. For a little while they stared appraisingly at each other.

"You've broken my shin, damn you," Blackie muttered.

"You asked for it," the sergeant panted.

"Are you ready to call quits then?"

"If you're ready for the *sjamboking*, I am," the sergeant replied. His face was very white: he found it almost impossible to stand erect. He knew that if Blackie rushed him now he could not stand against him.

"You ain't going to *sjambok* me," Blackie said.

The sergeant was suddenly conscious of a new-born strength which seemed to surge through him. He felt that he was being supported by the strength of numberless unseen witnesses.

"Then put up your hands," he said. "We'll fight on."

He was confident now of victory, More than that, he no longer was worried by doubts as to the wisdom of the course he was pursuing. And, armored with that knowledge, the sergeant attacked again. Back and forth and around the hut they fought. Again and again the sergeant was sent reeling back. Several times he was floored. Once he staggered backward out through the open doorway. Invisible hands that time saved him from falling. Their touch gave him strength to return to the attack.

For the most part the men fought in silence, a silence which was broken only by the thud of their blows and the sound of their labored breathing. They heard nothing; they saw nothing but their own blood-stained faces and bodies . . .

OUTSIDE the hut were grouped the men of the Black Watch. Unseen in the darkness, they were endeavoring to follow the progress of the fight. Their thoughts were elevating the sergeant to victory. They knew he was fighting their cause. They marveled at the strength and the iron fortitude of his body.

Kawiti was posted at the point of vantage. His whispered comments were full of the drama and suspense of the fight which was being waged inside the hut.

"*Au-a!*" he exclaimed. "Our *inkosi* fights shrewdly! It is our fight he wages. Now the big one has him in his arms—our *inkosi* breaks away—he has buried his fist in the big man's belly. The big man doubles up and our *inkosi's* fist crashes into his face. *Wo-wel* That was a blow! The big man is down. Our *inkosi* stands back that he may get up again! What folly!"

"It is the way white men fight," another commented. "I have seen them."

"Silence, fool," another voice said. "Kawiti speaks again."

"The big man is up. He stands weakly, like one who is just weaned from his mother's milk, but—*au-a!*—there is still strength in him. More strength than in our *inkosi*, I think. But our *inkosi* is wise; he knows best his own weakness and his own strength. Now he is keeping away from the big man, yet tempting that one to come to him. He stumbles. He is down. The *inkosi* is up again—the big man rushes him, but our *inkosi* steps aside and hits the big man as he passes. *Wo-wel* I can see no more!"

There had been a crash of broken glass in the hut. Blackie had lurched into the book shelf, and the lamp, crashing to the ground, had gone out.

"But they still fight," Kawiti said. "I can hear them."

The tramp of booted feet and the jingle of spurs sounded above the noise of the men fighting in the darkness of the hut.

Some one whispered:

"It is the colonel *inkosi* and the captain *inkosi*. They come to interfere in the justice which our man metes out."

Quickly Kawiti gave whispered orders to those nearest him. To the objectors he said:

"Fools! If there be any blame, that blame is mine. I am a corporal: you, only privates. Act quickly before they come too close and make known their presence to our *inkosi* and the man with whom he fights."

A few moments later the men he had instructed barred the way of the O. C. and his adjutant with their bayonets.

"What is it?" the O. C. asked sharply, acutely aware of the proximity of cold steel to his comfortably rounded paunch. Visions of a mutiny flashed through his mind.

"We mean no harm, *inkosi,*" a native replied. "But our man is dealing out justice. It is our part to see to it that he is not disturbed. That is all."

"I myself," the O. C. said grimly, suppressing his feeling of relief, "have come to witness this justice dealing."

"But you will not interfere?"

The O. C. hesitated.

"We seem to be in their hands, sir," the adjutant commented. "And I think we ought to trust the sergeant, sir. At least, you have always said he was to handle this business in his own way."

The O. C. snorted.

"You always stand up for the man, Cartwright. Between the two of you, I can't call my command my own."

But when the native repeated his question he answered gruffly—

"I will not interfere."

"Then come, *inkosi.*"

The natives led the two white men to the right of the doorway of the hut where Kawiti whispered a respectful greeting.

They sensed the presence of suspense filled men who crowded about them. The sounds which came from the hut told them of the desperate fight which was being waged there. And Kawiti, aided by Guffa—who gave the words which had passed between the two white men—gave them the story of the affair from the beginning.

When the O. C, remembering the size and strength of Blackie, expressed a fear for the sergeant's victory, Kawiti answered:

"How can he fail, *inkosi?* He is our man. He fights that we may receive justice. All our strength supports him.

"*Au-a!* Listen! It is the end."

A great silence, following a dull thud and a hollow groan, had descended upon the hut.

One of the Black Watch whispered—

"Shall we go in to them?"

Kawiti's answer was decisive.

"No!" he said. "It is our man's *indaba.* Not yet has he meted out justice as he promised. Wait! Listen! Watch!"

There was a sound in the hut like that of a man crawling on hands and knees. They could hear his labored breathing. There was a scratching noise. Then a tiny match flame dimly lighted the hut. . .

THE sergeant was the first to recover from the grueling, no-quarter fight which had been waged in the darkness; a fight which had been brought to an abrupt conclusion when both men had crashed head-on against a corner of the iron bedstead.

He lighted a match and with it located the other lamp. Having lighted that, he leaned against the wall and stared dazedly about the hut. When his eyes fell on Trooper Blackie he smiled grimly.

Blackie was sitting with his back against the wall. His mouth sagged open; there was a vacant expression in his wide staring eyes. The sergeant stooped over him.

"Had enough?" he asked thickly, his articulation indistinct by reason of his cut lips. "Had enough?" he repeated, putting his hands on Blackie's shoulders. Without that support he would have fallen, he was so weak.

The look of bewilderment gradually left Blackie's eyes. He tried to rise to his feet and failed.

"I've had enough," he said. "An', damn it—so have you."

"I'm on my feet," the sergeant countered. "An' what I said at the beginning of this scrap still goes."

He staggered back, assuming a fighting pose, expecting Blackie to start fighting once again. But that man had passed quickly from the semi-consciousness of physical exhaustion to a deep, sodden sleep.

With grunts of pain the sergeant struggled into his tunic. Then he looked absently about the disordered hut. The sight of his *sjambok* prompted his memory. He picked the whip up and crossed to Blackie, who had slipped full length to the ground. He was lying on his belly, his head pillowed on his folded arms. His shirt was in tatters. The sergeant completed its ruin, tearing it down so that Blackie's naked back was exposed.

"Five strokes with a *sjambok!*" the sergeant said, unconscious of the fact that he was speaking in the vernacular to a man too deep in sleep to hear him. "Justice must be done. So!"

The lash whistled through the air. But the sergeant checked its force so that it no more than flicked lightly across the sleeping man's back.

"One," the sergeant counted.

Four strokes thus the sergeant gave and Blackie's back remained unmarked. But there was no fake about the fifth. It stung Blackie to wakefulness. It brought him scrambling to his feet with a yell of pain.

"You can go now, Trooper Blackie," the sergeant said. "You won't come visiting in my lines again, will you? You know what to expect if you do. Out you go!"

Blackie shambled out of the hut. The sergeant wearily set about restoring order to his hut.

"He put up a good scrap," he muttered, "an' I'm damned if I know how I managed to lick him."

And then he remembered the feeling he had had that others were fighting for him. With a start of dismay he remembered the natives he'd put on guard outside the hut. Had they been spectators of the fight?

He went to the door of his hut. As he did so the O. C. and the adjutant stepped forward. The sergeant stood rigidly at attention, wondering what their visit meant, but even more concerned with the impression that out there in the darkness all his men were drawn up in parade order.

And the evenly spaced noises which followed. As if those unseen men were presenting arms. The idea was ridiculous. He was punch drunk. That's what the trouble with him was. Yet his keen ears had detected one man who had concluded the salute a little behind the others. That would be Marfwe. Marfwe was always a little sluggish with the present arms.

He frowned and was about to shout a condemnation when the O. C. obtruded into his vision and consciousness once again. He had nearly made a fool of himself—shouting orders to a parade which was not! Conscious of his fight scarred face, he wished that he dared hide in the darkness bordering the beam of light which shone through the doorway.

But he could not move with the O. C's eyes fixed on him, And the O. C. was speaking to him . . .

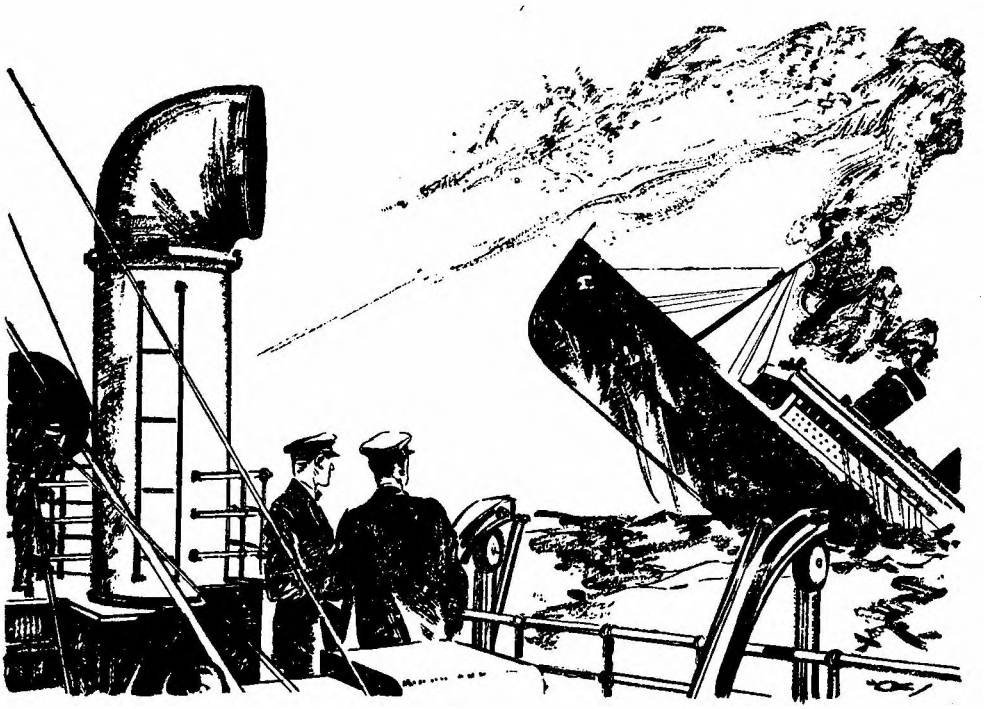
Something about congratulations and admiration for a man who was not afraid to fight for justice for his men . . . Something about the honor the Black Watch had just paid him was well deserved . . . Something about—the sergeant was sure that he had got this straight—that the Black Watch quarters would be officially placed out of bounds for all white troopers and their servants. Something about a promise that any interference with the wives of the Black Watch would be severely dealt with. Then the O. C. and the adjutant had shaken his hand and the sergeant was alone once again.

For a long time he stood at the door of his hut, staring out into the darkness, a darkness which was somehow illuminated by the happiness of his thoughts.

Suddenly the beat of tom-toms vibrated through the air and the voices of the Black Watch raised in song. They were singing the praises of a man whose word was his bond; who faced odds and fought to obtain justice for his men.

He felt, at that moment, that he would not exchange this hut of his for the noblest palace in the world.

And he slept, that night, with the song of the Black Watch still ringing in his ears. It was a soothing lullaby; it cradled him in the security of their esteem.



A Story of the Sea

FIRST COMMAND

By JACLAND MARMUR

MATTHEW HURLEY and Michael MacPhale bumped into each other for the first time in six months on the Kowloon jetty after stepping off that miniature ferry from Hongkong. That they hadn't seen each other while coming across the bizarre and bustling waterway was not surprising. They were too deeply engrossed in triumphant thoughts. It wasn't until Matt Hurley had started for the rickshaw stand with his unmistakable deep water roll that they caught sight of each other almost at the same moment.

Matt was just under six feet tall, and at sight of the short, burly Scotsman, he stopped on the jetty with his feet braced wide as though he had been suddenly fetched up sharply by an unexpectedly vicious lurch of a ship's deck. Michael, who had been dreaming a wonderful dream of authority over a number of men and an engine room full of beloved rods, levers, pumps and whirling cranks, stopped short also. He lifted his immense right paw and mopped his brow deliberately, before recovering the shock of his vivid red hair with his soft straw hat, which seemed a little small.

"What the hell are you doin' here,

Mike?" Matt Hurley asked. "Where's the *Lopaka?*"

Michael grinned broadly, a frankly pleasant grin.

"Official business. Where's the *Tahonda?*"

"Fifth berth. We sail tomorrow. I'm in a hurry."

"I'll walk yer way, if ye do no' mind!"

Matt nodded curtly and the pair set off at a leisurely walk down Kowloon Dock Road as though they were the best of friends. The lengthening shadows of the moored shipping, of all descriptions and from all the ports of the world, fell across their path in black, wavering shapes as the dusk deepened. Abreast a huge mound of that "domned rotten Japanee coal" that MacPhale, in a purely professional way, hated with all his heart, they stopped as though by signal. From the shed wall behind them a single light, swaying slightly in the gentle breeze, ranged a baleful glow upon them. In the distance the coolie street hawkers of cloying, unsavory sweets set up their shrill singsong. The nauseous odor of the East swept upon them with the land breeze, which sighed mournfully in the rigging of an invisible vessel.

"Matt, we ha' got to stop this domned nonsense," Michael growled at the night. "We are no' kids no more."

Matt Hurley looked down at the engineer from his superior height, and in the twinkling snap of his eyes there might have been read a strange explanation of a bitter, long standing feud, for there was little of hatred revealed. It is quite likely that their queer animosity had its very foundation in respectful admiration that had learned no other manner of expression —in that and the subtle fact of established precedent.

"If you hadn't shouted so loud and called down the constabulary, we might've had it settled for good six months ago in Manila, Mike. But—"

MacPhale's head snapped up suddenly and his blue eyes narrowed. The Scot's hatred of Matt, too, was little more than professional—similar to his hatred of "that domned rotten Japanee coal".

"Are ye tryin' to say that I hollered quits, ye long legged graduate deck swab?"

"No! But I'm sick an' tired of havin' every drunken sailor that joins the *Tahonda*, who's sailed on the same ship as you at some time or another, grinnin' at me as much as to say, 'There's the mate o' the Union Line Scotty MacPhale beats up every time they meet!' Mike," he ended sharply, "you talk too much!"

"I—" The Scot broke off abruptly. "I am tired o' this nonsense, Matt. Every time I ha' a stroke o' luck I run into ye an'—"

"Well?"

"Well, mon, let's get it over wi'."

And strange and ridiculous as it may seem, these two sturdily built men who should have been the very best of friends peeled off shore jackets, tossed them on the coal mound, and squared off in the feeble light of a Kowloon waterfront shed as though death alone could wipe out their personal animosity.

For whenever Matt Hurley and Scotty MacPhale were in the same port at the same time, sooner or later, depending on just how quickly they discovered their proximity, there was bound to be a bang up fight. It was like a law of fate—inexorable. As a matter of fact, it had reached the point where a whole ship's company, seeing either one or the other coming up the gangway after a night ashore with the unmistakable evidence of a serious fist fight on his person, would without a word turn for the opposite rail and search the docks and the roadstead for a sight of another ship of the Union Line, knowing well enough that somewhere in the harbor the ship of the other principal of that long standing feud must be berthed.

Every one in the company knew about it except the executives ashore, and they remained in ignorance of a personal quarrel that had lasted with growing intensity for the better part of fourteen years, because by some tacit agreement between the two young hot headed fools, the home

port of the Union Line was neutral territory. There wasn't a master or a chief engineer in the fleet who would have thought of reporting the affair. It wouldn't have been decent; it was an affair of honor.

How it all started, no one in the East or at home professed to know. It is even quite likely that Matt Hurley, now chief officer of the *Tahonda*, and Michael MacPhale, first assistant engineer of the *Lopaka*, had themselves forgotten the cause of their innumerable fistic battles.

THEY had started their sea careers at the same time, two husky youngsters of fifteen, staunch friends, Matt as ordinary seaman and red headed Michael as wiper. And on that first memorable voyage when the lusty sea first welcomed its two new untried apprentices, young Matt awoke early one morning for washdown to find his dungarees tied up in a number of wicked square knots which had some time before been dipped liberally in sea water.

Scotty, being in the black gang, lived on the other side of the forecastle bulkhead, and why Matt should have suspected him, no one knew. Probably because he laughed the loudest and the longest, for which you couldn't blame him. But when the ship docked in Nagasaki, they had had it out hot and heavy behind the godowns. They each carried away with them bruised arms, cut lips, and a pair of perfect shiners, because even then they were pretty evenly matched.

That should have been the end of it, but Michael was possessed of a devilish sense of humor, and his laughter still persisted. So the performance was repeated on the docks of Shanghai, Singapore, and on a ramshackle jetty in Balipapan that voyage—and as many times thereafter as their respective ships met in the ports of the world. Years later a girl in one of the Shanghai cabarets—one of the innumerable Russian princesses for whom neither of them, if the truthwere known, cared a tinker's dam—got tangled vaguely in the feud, and now, fourteen years later, with one of them chief mate of the *Tahonda* and the other first assistant engineer of the *Lopaka*, they weren't an inch nearer a decision or a reconciliation. In a way it was funny.

But there wasn't anything comical or trifling in the dull thudding blows they rained upon each other there in the semi-darkness. Whatever latent savagery there was in the two simple hearted seamen found its relief in these periodic encounters.

They fought on in silence, panting with the violence of their exertions, not even noticing three homeward bound coolies with rags tied about their grimy foreheads who had collected at the seaward edge of the wharf to watch the grim battle in mute surprise and with wide, staring eyes. A vicious blow brought blood from MacPhale's lip. Matt grinned triumphantly and stepped closer.

The Scot, fully aroused and quick to see his own advantage, let loose with both fists. His left caught Matt a staggering blow on the side of the chin that sent him reeling backward, off balance. Michael sprang forward, a low growl in his throat. Matt staggered backward, arms waving ludicrously for balance. Then he stepped on a lump of coal, spun dizzily in a complete circle and fell backward, his head striking the mound with a dull thud.

The Scot, panting heavily, waited with fists upraised, muttering between bloody lips—

"That'll hold ye a spell, ye—"

But Matt lay quite still and MacPhale's arms fell slowly to his side. He stepped forward and stared down at his opponent. The mate of the *Tahonda* never stirred. With a grunt of surprise the engineer dropped to one knee and lifted the other's head. On the very edge of the circle of feeble light the mute coolies looked at one another, dumbfounded. A moment before these two insane white men had seemed bent on murdering each other, and now the one was ministering to the other with the greatest tenderness and concern. It was beyond their comprehen-

sion and, with a mutter of unintelligible gibberish, they turned away in disgust and shuffled off into the night.

Matt came to slowly, his hand reaching instinctively for the throbbing lump at the back of his head.

"Here, here, ye're all right, mon," Michael soothed. "Fallin' down that way like a ten year ol' kid! Get up. Can ye manage?"

Hurley found his feet unsteadily and glowered at MacPhale.

"Manage! Sure I can manage, you greasy—"

"Never mind that, Matt. Be comin' along wi' yer new chief to the *Tahonda*."

Matt's head cleared in a flash and his hand shot out to clutch Mike's forearm.

"What'd you say?"

"I said yer new chief. The *Lopaka's* still up in Shanghai. I came down by P. & O. steamer to go chief of the *Tahonda* an'—"

Matt's arm fell heavily to his side.

"Well, I'm damned!" he barked weakly.

"What's eatin' ye now?"

"A hell of a mess! I just came from the agent's over in Victoria. Captain Pauls an' the chief're goin' north to take over the new flagship job. I—I—the *Tahonda's* mine, Mike. I—I'm your skipper!"

Michael stared at him in disbelief.

"An' we—" he stuttered finally. "You skipper; me chief. Well, mon, I *am* domned!"

In silence the two slipped shore jackets over bruised arms, mopped at bloody lips with handkerchiefs, and started once again along the dock road toward where the *Tahonda* lay peacefully in her berth awaiting her sailing on the morrow. At the foot of the shore plank Matt turned.

"Listen, Mike," he whispered savagely. "Everything's changed now. You understand that. I'm in command. We can't go tearin' each other to pieces every time we hit a dock. We'll arrange somethin' back home—a long ways from the ship." He started to ascend the ladder, hesitated, and turned suddenly on the burly form of his new chief engineer. His hand shot out perfunctorily. "Congratulations, Mr. MacPhale. I'm glad to have you with me—professionally."

MacPhale looked up as he took the other's hand, and in the soft light of the gangway lamp his square, earnest face wore a puzzled, half humorous expression. At the head of the gangway the quartermaster stared.

"The same to ye, Captain Hurley," the Scot growled gruffly.

In the alleyway Michael passed the second assistant, an old shipmate, without so much as a hello. The fellow caught a glimpse of a bruised and swollen lip, and then nothing more than the broad, swaying back of the new chief. He whistled softly to himself, turned on his heel, and darted down the passage for the engine room door where the Third was on watch below. He had great news. Matt Hurley and Scotty MacPhale were skipper and chief of the same ship and they'd met already on the dock. Down before the log desk the two whistled over it again, winking slyly at each other under the shaded lamp before the main engine. This trip was going to be a hell bender if ever there was one!

And in his own room, Scotty, staring sourly at his face in the mirror over the washstand, growled incoherently.

"Them bruised knuckles of his won't look so pretty when he sits down tomorrow for dinner at the head of a half dozen of them cabin passengers!" He dabbed a wet washrag at his lip. Then suddenly he flung it to the deck and barked at no one in particular—"A fine domned kettle of fish!"

THE following day the *Tahonda* nosed her way carefully past the brilliant green islands and the lacy reefs of the Lyemun Pass. Captain Hurley sensed her lift beneath his feet to the first long swell as she felt the sea in her teeth once again. The ship gave the first gentle roll. Then she settled into her pace, chopping the water at her eyes to foam as she made for the empty wastes of the open sea.

He stared aft from his position in the

weather bridge wing, watching the blue peter come swiftly down the halyard, the blue bunting with its white patch stiff in the breeze, and at the taffrail the quartermaster drawing the ensign aboard. Pillars of white trade clouds billowed up over the horizon, and the sun made a blinding dazzle of the China Sea. A vague sense of power and the sobering influence of responsibility swept over Matt Hurley, there upon the bridge of his first command —the youngest master in the Eastern fleet. For he wasn't Mr. Mate any longer, that abject slave of the ship he serves who may leave the weight of the greater struggle for the shoulders of a solitary, close lipped man. He had been transformed in an instant, in the swift and sudden magic of the sea. In a way, he no longer served the ship; he served the sea; and his fortitude, his ingenuity, and his sea skill alone stood between a flimsy structure of steel and timber, and its ancient enemy.

He took a turn of the bridge, no longer in the careless manner of a watch officer, but with the heavy tread of the master. Coming up through the fire room ventilator, the familiar, metallic clatter of ash buckets drifted to his ears, and Captain Hurley smiled a strange, whimsical smile.

In the engine room, deep in the bowels of the ship, Michael MacPhale stood before the throttle, his hairy arms folded soberly across his broad chest, surveying his new empire, an empire toward the conquest of which fourteen years of toil and back breaking labor had gone. In the strange light of engine rooms, the huge main crank passed regularly in its pulsating revolutions before his eyes. Polished steel flashed eerily up and down.

Under his wide braced feet the floor plates throbbed and, behind him, from over the log desk, the ranging light threw his flame-red hair in alternate sharp relief and dark shadow. The auxiliaries droned on; the bilges were dry; the water in the boiler gages just showing and not too high . . . All was well on sea and deck.

Michael caught himself suddenly with a grin. Properly speaking, such things were his affair only indirectly now. He wasn't standing an engine watch. And at the face of the telegraph pointing mutely to full ahead he, too, smiled an enigmatic smile.

And if an expectant crew—officers, too, for that matter—expected to witness anything unusual between the perennial enemies, they were disappointed. For above all else Matt Hurley and Michael MacPhale were seamen with all that word implies of traditions and training. There was present always the knowledge of an eternally watchful, an ageless enemy, the sea. Between the two there was always the strictest professional courtesy. It was Captain Hurley and Mr. MacPhale.

The *Tahonda* piled up her easting steadily. She passed far south of Taiwan and headed north and east on the great circle route for the coast of home. For seven days and nights the watches changed, on the bridge to the tinkle of a little bell, below to the reverberating clang on the long bar. In these things, of course, the passengers were interested only in moments of casual curiosity. The sea for them was a playground, disconcerting them at times in their dancing to the ship's orchestra, and at times upsetting their stomachs.

On the eighth morning Scotty MacPhale awoke for some unknown reason just in time to hear eight bells made for the morning watch. It was pitch dark in his room, and he lay for a time without moving, staring wide eyed up into the blackness. He heard the shuffle of the First's carpet slippers along the passageway as Mr. Harding made his way to the engine room door on his way below to relieve the Second.

He heard the doleful whine of the wind overhead and the sullen slap of seas against the *Tahonda's* throbbing sides. Somehow he couldn't sleep, and he listened for a time to the monotonous beating of the instrument on his bulkhead that registered the revolutions of his engine. Then he flashed on the light, clambered out of the bunk and lighted his pipe.

Later he went out on deck, slippered, and with his trousers drawn over the lower part of his pajamas.

The wind was fresh out of the east, with a rising sea thumping the *Tahonda's* hull and sending an occasional shower of spray hissing to her decks. There was no moon. The vast dome of the star studded heaven seemed infinitely remote and disdainful, with a squadron of flying clouds coming up over the eastern board. It was very dark on the water.

The *Tahonda* throbbed onward in the center of an empty universe of sea and sky.

Michael MacPhale felt acutely, oppressively conscious of that whirling, pulsating mass of machinery under his feet for which he held complete responsibility. It was not that this was his first chief's berth. Once before, on the *Lopaka* as first assistant, that seaman's sixth sense of impending disaster had routed him out of a sleepless bunk fifteen minutes before the oiler of the mid-watch allowed a main bearing to sizzle its metal away. And he wanted desperately now to go below and have a look around.

He puckered his lips about his pipestem and growled softly in his throat. What sort of reputation would that get him with his officers—snooping about the engine room at four-thirty in the morning watch? A chief's assistants are supposed to know their jobs. If they don't, they aren't any use whatever to you as watch engineers. No trustworthy engineer wants his chief fussing eternally over his shoulder any more than a mate wants the master hounding him about the bridge. And you have to be particularly careful about such subtleties on your first command when the foundation of a lifetime's reputation is molded. Michael cocked his head sidewise and strained his large ears intently. Above the metallic clatter of ash buckets coming up the hoist, he heard the rhythmic beat of his main engine and the monotonous drone of the draught fan. Perfect. Even that leaky packing he had made such a fuss over had sealed itself and no longer hissed escaping steam.

He turned with an incoherent mutter into the alleyway. But before he pushed open the door of his own room, he stopped for a moment before the topmost engine room grate to peer wistfully down through the webwork of iron ladders. It takes awhile for a new chief to accustom himself to the fact that he is no longer required to associate intimately with the sweat and grime of hot steel, nor to stand his regularly appointed watch. He turned away with a sigh . . .

SUDDENLY the *Tahonda* seemed to lift her stern violently out of the water. The sudden and unexpected lurch hurled MacPhale against the bulkhead. He whirled about sharply. The ship regained her poise the next moment, but under his feet her whole frame shuddered and trembled furiously. From below came a pandemonium of noise. The piston rods of the main engine pounded up and down at terrific speed as though they meant at any moment to rend steel, iron and thundering rods into mangled bits. Michael sprang for the engine room ladders.

Below, after taking over the watch, Mr. Harding, standing before the log desk over his first cup of coffee leaped instantly to alertness. In that half second after the first terrific clamor of the racing engine that rocked the boilers in their cradles—in that half second when his head snapped up and his eyes widened—hung the fate of the ship *Tahonda* and the professional integrity and future of Mr. Harding. The thought flashed instantly through his brain that she had dropped her wheel, and the next instant, out of nothing more than sheer instinct, he leaped for the throttle.

Michael, already down to the first landing, heard the jangle of the telegraph as his first assistant jerked it to stop. Then, the main engine stilled, he had a fleeting glimpse of the tall angular form of Mr. Harding racing across the floor plates toward the shaft alley tunnel door.

Michael and the oiler of the watch reached the floor plates at the same time.

The oiler, his eyes popping from his head and grotesquely rimed with grease, spied the open tunnel door and started toward it.

"Leave it be!" MacPhale shouted, and that instinctive order was the saving of Mr. Harding's life.

Behind them the speaking tube from the bridge whistled shrilly. Astonished at the sudden clamor of the engine room telegraph on the bridge, a reversal of the usual procedure, that can mean only disaster of some sort, the mate up there wanted to know what was going on. The iron fire-room door opened, a blackened, anxious face thrust itself sharply into an overhead light, withdrew suddenly, and the door clanged closed again loudly. To all this the chief paid no heed. Before the shaft tunnel door he met Mr. Harding, flying backward with astonishing speed out through the alley.

"Water!" he gasped in a weird, unbelieving voice, with no time to wonder at MacPhale's miraculous presence. His face was white—ash-white—and he heaved the door closed with his weight thrown full against it. "Joe!" he shouted at the oiler. "Joe! A hammer, quick! Batten this thing down!"

The three men struggled in silence with the massive bolts. MacPhale had no need for useless questions in the face of the urgency of his first command. Behind the bulkhead a fearful hissing sounded, growing rapidly louder, like boiling water in a caldron. Mr. Harding whirled about suddenly and bent down toward his chief.

"Happened like that—"

"Yes; I know, mon!" Michael growled. "I was standin' on the top grate. She's dropped her wheel—"

Mr. Harding shook his head savagely.

"Dunno. Cracked her tail shaft likely. A wall of water comin' at me, Chief," he whispered with suppressed horror and with an air of great secretiveness. "*A wall of water!* She—"

"That—what is it swishin' in there, mon?" MacPhale barked. "Tail shafts have snapped before an'—"

He stopped abruptly. The oiler darted away. Mr. Harding straightened up. The two stared as though turned to stone at the seams in the bulkhead where the tunnel door meshed. Slimy beads of water appeared, hung there glistening before their astonished gaze, and then slowly and methodically started dripping to the floor plates at their feet. For several seconds they stood there frozen into immobility.

The unaccustomed stillness of the engine room was appalling. The auxiliaries shuttled on steadily. Behind their backs the bridge tube whistled again, shrill, imperative, insistent. The *Tahonda*, her way lost, wallowed heavily in the deep swells. And suddenly the unnatural quiet was shattered by the booming noise of steam blowing off through the safety valve far over their heads, for with the engines stopped, the pressure rose with amazing rapidity. It startled MacPhale to his senses, recalled him violently to his responsibilities.

"The fires, Mr. Harding," he said soberly, "and answer that domned whistle. Tell 'em to keep quiet a spell. I'm goin' up to see the Ol'—to see Captain Hurley."

He turned and started quickly climbing the ladders to the deck. In the alleyway he saw the master charging toward him, drawn faced and anxious, only half clothed. From the passengers' quarters banging doors sounded and the rising buzz of excited talk. Captain Hurley, violently awakened by the noises from below and the jarring jangle of the engine room telegraph—sounds that are enough to hurl the most dignified and experienced master of the seven seas from his bed—had raced for the bridge expecting to see his ship in the act of grinding out her life against the looming cliffs of an unexpected shore or the towering hulk of an oncoming craft. But the night was serene and the sea empty. Barefooted, he ran to meet Michael.

"What the devil?" he shouted. "What are you doing to my ship?"

MacPhale looked up at him with jaw thrust forward and lips tightly com-

pressed, his huge hairy hands clenched angrily at his sides.

"This happens o' my first trip as chief," Scotty growled, "an' ye have the gall, Matt, to— Ye think I'd deliberately—"

Captain Hurley's hand shot out and he clutched the chief by the shoulder, his face gone suddenly white.

"That was a dirty thing to say, Mike," he interrupted swiftly. "I'm sorry. What's—"

"I'll tell ye better after ye have the after holds sounded. Them passengers—"

"The steward's up quieting 'em down. Where will you be?"

"Where the hell do ye think I'll be?"

The two whirled about. Michael darted back below. Hurley raced out on deck. Several moments later he climbed down to the floor plates of the engine room. He found MacPhale and his three engineers—for the Second and Third had come below after that rending clamor and the succeeding silence of the *Tahonda's* main engine—standing before the after bulkhead like a group of half clothed somnambulists awakened brutally before a blind wall after having lost themselves in a forest of steel and iron. MacPhale turned his head as the master approached.

"Well?"

"No. 3 hold, Mike. It's flooding. What—"

"I'll tell ye what!" the chief shouted with startling savagery. "She's killin' herself! Committed suicide! Snapped her tail shaft," he went on more calmly, but with awful bitterness, "an' not satisfied wi' that she gored her flank wi' the jagged end o' whirlin' steel. She does no' like her new master an' chief, seems like."

For the fraction of a moment the group stood motionless and silent about the short, red haired, half clothed chief of the *Tahonda.* No one of them realized that these two had called each other Matt and Mike under the stress of their common trial. Behind them the sea oozed through the seams and about the rivet heads of the bulkhead. Captain Hurley was the first to break the spell.

"You can keep the generator running?" he asked softly.

"As long as she floats."

"I'll be down again in a few minutes, Mike."

The master turned for the ladder, but MacPhale's barked call stopped him. He hesitated, one foot on the lower rung, one hand on the iron rail.

"I want the carpenter, Matt," the chief said very softly, "an' beams an' joists an' screw jacks. Get him down here quick!" Captain Hurley nodded. MacPhale turned on his engineers, barking his orders without stirring. "Get the bilge pumps working. You, Jorgen, rout the whole gang down here from the focsle. Get moving! This domned hooker has got to stay afloat!"

TWELVE hours later the *Tahonda* was still afloat.

She had ceased to be a living ship with the breath of life beating in her iron heart. She wallowed soddenly, dead, as the chief had put it, by her own hand. And as though, by her ignoble act, she had not earned the right to pass peacefully into the oblivion of the profound depths of the sea, they refused to let her sink. As the after hold filled, she settled slowly by the stern and the awful weight of the water buckled the bulkhead inward upon them.

It pressed upon them in a menacing curve, seeping water with terrific rapidity. Svensen, the ship's carpenter, under MacPhale's directions, sawed joists and beams and platforms, and they shored up the bulkhead, reenforcing it with buttresses of timber against the inexorable weight of the sea as though they meant audaciously to defy the whole wide expanse of the Pacific. That clean, efficient engine room became a cluttered mass of scaffolding, of heavy beams and timbers braced against the bulging bulkhead as though they had all gone mad down there in the knee deep water of some subterranean tunnel, floundering about in bitter silence.

But the auxiliaries still shuttled stead-

ily on, the pumps were drawing, the water in the boiler gages just showing and not too high. And Svensen, with MacPhale at his side, a huge maul in his hand, let out a sudden peal of wild laughter as he drove home a great wedge.

"It's a damn joke!" he bellowed into the dimly lighted engine room in the center of which rose the strangely still and silent hulk of the main engine like the crouching form of some monstrous, three legged sea beast. "The Old Man's got the mate on deck there with the hatches off No. 3 and the winches going like mad. Bailing out the hold with ash cans!" He laughed again at the grimness of the jest and MacPhale looked up at his wrinkled old face without a word. "Bailing out the whole damned ocean!"

There was something heroic in his defiant laughter as he straightened up and looked at the bulkhead. They all looked at it, fourteen grimy, sweating men, knee deep in oily sea water, eyes hollow with an unspoken dread. That thin fabric of straining, leaky steel was all that separated them from a gruesome death. Upon its buttressed strength hung the fate of eighty-odd passengers, and upon the men who stared at it with speechless horror rested the weight of generations of sea traditions.

They had lost all track of time. The half hours were no longer marked by the echoing clamor on the long bar. There was no watch below. They were all on watch —on watch with death. They asked for lunch and were amazed to learn that it was already six in the evening when hot coffee came down to them from the galley.

Matt Hurley and MacPhale stood on the top gratings, with sandwiches of some kind or another. Below them the water swirled about with an appalling sound. The wind whined dolefully above.

"The *Vendome* answered our SOS early this morning, Mike," the master muttered. "Coming south on the Yokohama to Honolulu track she can't get to us before daybreak tomorrow."

"The passengers?" MacPhale growled questioningly.

"Had 'em all in the social hall this morning. No use lying about this. Decent as you can expect, Mike. All huddled on deck, waiting—waiting—"

The ship lurched on her side. All eyes flew swiftly to the bulkhead, expecting at any moment to hear the first rending sound of steel cracking under the terrific strain.

"I've got a sea anchor out, Mike," the master went on. "Unlashed for'ard booms. Lashed 'em together. Got 'em dragging on a hawser. Keep her head to the wind in this damned swell. Keep what strain we can off—off that."

MacPhale nodded. Words were useless things in this battle against the sea—and time. They had forgotten their enmity, these two, in the sudden enormous disaster that had overwhelmed them. They had forgotten everything but the common responsibility of their struggle. Only the grim lines that ribbed their faces betrayed the mad thoughts that raced senselessly through their brains. A first command for the both of them, in a way, and first commands are precious things.

"How long, Mike," the master asked suddenly. "How long can you keep her afloat?"

MacPhale's grimy face snapped up swiftly. His mouth opened, but at the look he saw in Matt's eyes, his outburst subsided, and instead he growled quietly—

"Fourteen hours at the longest, Matt—if we're lucky."

Captain Hurley turned away without a word.

Why Michael had said fourteen hours instead of four he did not know. It was the expression of a hope, or the expression rather of a dogged, indomitable will, as if by it alone, expressed in his intent and fierce stare at the buckling steel, he meant to keep that flimsy bulkhead from bursting in upon them. At midnight he called again for volunteers, and he led them down into the shoulder high water, the Swede carpenter, Svensen, at his side, his pock marked face split in a jovial grin as he bellowed again that it was a "damn

joke!" Well, it was in a way, only Svensen didn't mean it in just that light.

The water was over the crank pit by now and there was no sensible reason for them to go down there courting death in a mad effort to keep the hulk afloat for a few hours longer. It wasn't in the articles they'd signed for the voyage. If it were put up to them, they would have taken to the small boats hours ago. But they had passengers aboard, and human lives were a greater responsibility than a cargo of baled silk and frozen eggs. The underwriters didn't guarantee the safety of passengers. That was the affair of the master and the chief . . .

ON DECK the boats were swung out and ready, the passengers huddled in the lee of the housing, the shadowy figures of the officers pacing steadily back and forth in the dark night. A great silence had fallen upon the ship and the sea. The whine of the wind, the desolate slap of water against the ship's heeling sides, the sibilant hiss of escaping steam from her stack, became a part of that grim, interminable stillness. A man groaned; a woman sobbed. The mate stepped over to comfort and reassure them, but he was in his element and they were not.

Captain Hurley stared bitterly at the dark mass of his crippled ship. He alone stood between those huddled shadows and the sea. Alone? No. There was one other who shared with him that awful burden. And far aft on the boat deck there were two others, two youngsters in the wireless cabin who bent over glistening instruments, white faced and with trembling fingers urging the *Vendome* on. They, too, had their share in this unapplauded drama.

The black hours of the night were endless. Out of its darkness the sea reached eagerly at them. Overhead a trackless glitter of stars peered down without compassion upon an empty universe of sea and sky in the center of which the *Tahonda* drifted lifelessly, a black mass. Below decks, all through the bitter hours they kept their watch with death, toiling endlessly at their impossible task of damming the entire waste of the Pacific in the shadow of that bulging, straining bulkhead.

At four in the morning Captain Hurley sent up his first rocket, and regularly thereafter the lights shot into the immensity of the night to glow in the heavens for a brief instant before being suddenly obliterated. Faint streaks of pale gray flushed the eastern board, and in the weird and unnatural light before the dawn the ship's plight became poignantly revealed. She was far down by the stern, her bows pointing to the paling heavens. But the light brought also a black smudge of smoke on the horizon, and a half hearted cheer died in a hundred throats.

The *Vendome* bore down swiftly on the settling ship. Out of the *Tahonda's* engine room doors poured a dozen men, dripping with grimy, oily water that oozed out of their boots at each step. They were hollow eyed and haggard, with arms bruised and faces covered with soot and sweat and sea water like apparitions rising miraculously out of the hull of a ship already at the bottom of the sea.

At five-thirty in the morning Captain Hurley sent his first small boat over the side, and he stood watching it take the water and pull away. Then he waved his hand to his mate, who nodded in silence, and turned to go below again.

He found MacPhale seated on the iron ladders leading down into the flooded engine room, his feet just above the line of water that was already halfway up the cylinder walls, lapping triumphantly about the steel shells. The master stood there for a moment, and the strange thought came to him that the chief had fought out this entire battle with the sea in a pair of battered carpet slippers.

The Scot did not lift his head. He sat there, utterly exhausted, above that desolate scene, his eyes still riveted on the bulkhead, as though he meant to keep it intact until the very end by the sheer power of his stare alone.

"She's here, Mike," Matt breathed down at the disheveled head below him. "Boats going away now."

MacPhale nodded without looking up. You would have thought that that mournful announcement of his victory would be greeted with some display of triumphant exultation, but he only dragged himself wearily upright, clutching at the hand rail for support. They stood there together and stared down in silence at the soiled sea water rising inexorably to take eternal possession of their first command.

They paid no heed to the noises on deck as boat after boat was launched under the care of the chief officer. They heard only faintly the splashes and the shouts of command and the whine and creak of blocks as the falls were slackened. They were thinking, no doubt, of that time when two eager youngsters first heard together the loud and lusty bellow of welcome to the sea. And strangely enough, it seemed all very clear and close to them, as though fourteen years were not such a long time. At length Michael turned, his shoulders stooped, his entire body bent in great weariness.

"She murdered herself, Matt," he muttered dully. "Why did she do that, Matt?" He looked up at the set face of the master, and his own eyes bore a quizzical expression of disbelief, a simple stare like that of a child puzzled at some incomprehensible mystery. And he repeated mechanically again, "Why did she do that, Matt?" And Matt knew, of course, that he spoke of the ship.

"COME along, Mike," he breathed. "The boilers'll be fallin' off their cradles in half an hour the way she's stern down."

He led the way and Michael followed him out on deck. They met the mate running toward them. The last boat hung swaying gently in the falls. The chief clambered in without a word. Captain Hurley hesitated for a moment, and turned to view for the last time the deserted deck of his first command. He stared straight down at the taffrail, level with the sea by now, saw the ghostly weave of empty, dangling boat falls, the wisp of smoke still curling from her funnel. Then he turned.

"Every one away, Mr. Starling?" he asked his chief officer mechanically.

"All gone, sir. I have the logs. We had better get along ourselves if—"

The master nodded and climbed aboard. Mr. Starling waved his hands and the men fore and aft slackened at the falls. And as the fragile boat pulled away from the stricken ship's side, Matt Hurley and Michael MacPhale watched her, standing side by side in the sternsheets as though they meant to impress the last sight of her on their brains forever.

They were the last two out of the boat, and they climbed the *Vendome's* swaying ladder slowly, as though loath to board the strange craft. Her master stood on deck at the head of the companion, and he helped Captain Hurley aboard in silence. Matt looked at him in a sort of daze and mumbled—

"Thank you, Captain."

Then he turned aside quickly. Making his way through the crowd on deck, his own passengers and those of the *Vendome* all strangely silent in the face of a catastrophe whose outer aspect alone they were capable of understanding, he climbed down to the midship well deck and took up his position alone by the iron rail.

Captain Hurd, on the *Vendome's* bridge, looked down and saw him, and he saw also the burly form of Michael MacPhale descending to his master's side. He was a seaman, Captain Hurd, and he understood. And he made no move and gave no order for procedure. The *Vendome* drifted slowly, her engines barely turning. All eyes were riveted across a narrow space of darkling water where the *Tahonda* was settling in her last agonies.

The sun crept stealthily up over the horizon behind a wall of haze, lighting up the sea in a dull crimson glow. Side by side Captain Hurley and MacPhale watched all that was visible of the

Tahonda. And suddenly as they watched she seemed to shudder violently, as though repenting in her last moment her atrocious deed. The black wreath of smoke from her stack suddenly stopped, and Michael let out an involuntary gasp, as though some one he loved had suddenly stopped breathing under his intent stare.

The next moment a huge plume of steam and smoke darted angrily up from the ship's bowels. A series of sharp explosions sounded and she settled swiftly then, sliding with appalling speed stern first into the water. For a moment her bows alone topped the boiling sea, and the sun, clearing the horizon haze, darted a blinding flash of light at all that was left of her. The next instant that too disappeared and nothing remained for the sight of man upon the face of the sea.

In silence her master and her chief watched, for with her she had carried a part of their hearts. Of a sudden Michael's hand gripped Matt's forearm.

"We will no' be fightin' any more, Matt, mon," he said deliberately.

"No, Mike. That—that's finished." He hesitated, and then mumbled, "We didn't lose a life, Mike. We lost only the—the ship."

Michael said nothing. The sun made a dazzling blindness of the water. And when Matt said that it was finished, perhaps he meant that with her sinking, their youth, careless and totally irresponsible, was also finished, for she had taken that, too, with her to the bottom of the sea, the *Tahonda*, their first command.

THE MYTH *of the* AMERICAN PANTHER

By WILLIAM WELLS

THERE has probably been more bunk written, from the time of Fenimore Cooper downward, about the panther, cougar or mountain lion—they are all the same bird, given by the naturalist sharps the Latin name of *Felis concolor*—than any other animal.

It is said of them that they lie in wait on the limbs of trees overhanging trails to drop on unsuspecting people or animals passing underneath; that they utter the most terrible and blood curdling screams, resembling those of a woman in awful agony; and one noted writer of Western tales says that they have so keen a sense of scent that a bloodhound has nothing on them when it comes to tracking man or beast—which is to laugh! A mountain lion can't smell a man, or anything else, two hundred feet away.

For something over twenty years I lived in the mountain and bad land countries of Colorado, Utah, Wyoming and Montana, when lions were about as plentiful as rabbits, and just about as dangerous. I suppose that during the greater part of that time there were always from one to a dozen lions within a

mile, often within a few yards, and I never heard one scream, or met any one among the trappers and hunters who had.

It is true that there are many sounds—the roaring challenge of a big he-wolf, the screeching bark of a fox or coyote, even the buglelike call of a bull elk—which, distorted by echoes, might lead a tenderfoot to believe that a ferocious lion was lurking about ready to attack him.

I have hunted lions on foot and on horseback, shot several hundred of them, chased them with dogs, crawled into caves after them, poked them out of trees with poles, dragged them out with ropes, killed them with clubs, rocks, knives and guns, followed them on foot in a fresh tracking snow on which every move of a lion during a night's hunt was as plain as if on a printed page.

Like all cats, a lion has a very poor sense of scent. Take a house cat and a dog, toss a piece of meat into high grass—and see which finds it first. Watch a house cat hunting mice or birds in the open and you will have a very good idea of a lion doing the same thing. Though a lion can't smell, its sight and hearing are very acute, and it finds game with these.

The speed of lions for short distances is unbelievable, though they are very short winded and can't keep it up. They are unable to run far ahead of dogs. When jumped they must tree or come to bay in short order. Watch a house cat, after having crept as close as possible to a bird, make its dash, and note how like a flash it moves.

At the time of which I speak deer were very plentiful and lions lived mainly on them; though, after cattle and horses were brought in, the lion developed a taste for horseflesh and it was soon impossible to raise horses on the range in some localities, the lions killing most of the colts and many of the older animals, especially the mares when they attempted to fight a lion away from their colts.

When a lion started out on a hunt, it would wander about aimlessly, paying no attention to deer directly upwind unless it could see or hear them, which is contrary to the way a wolf, for instance, hunts. A wolf will scent game a long distance upwind, and on doing so will turn at once in that direction.

Once a lion saw or heard deer, it began a careful stalk, taking advantage of every bit of cover, until it got within charging distance, say about fifty yards. Then it rushed, a few tremendous leaps, twenty feet or more each, and was generally on top of the deer before the frightened animal got fairly started to escape. After the lion had made its kill it usually dragged or carried the carcass to the nearest patch of brush, or under a tree, ate what it wanted, then covered the remainder by scratching up a mound of leaves, grass, rubbish or snow, after which it would make a bed alongside, sleep and hang around until the deer was gone.

Several times when tracking lions on foot in the snow I have seen one of these mounds at a distance and, creeping up carefully, have put a bullet through the lion's head as it was cautiously raised to take a look at me.

I never saw any evidence of a lion lurking on the branches of trees waiting for game to pass underneath, or of lynx doing so, either.

As to size, a full grown male lion averages about seven feet six inches from end of nose to tip of tail, weighing some hundred and fifty pounds, the females being slimmer and lighter. The largest lion that I ever killed I shot on the White River in Colorado some thirty-five years ago. It was eight feet four inches, and weighed nearly two hundred pounds.

Theodore Roosevelt, hunting in the same territory a few years later, killed one eight feet two, weight one hundred and eighty-five, as I remember the details; and that is about as big as lions grow, all the talk about nine, ten and eleven feet to the contrary. These sizes, if true, would make them equal to the tigers of India, which is nonsense.

Of course, the fresh skin from a seven and a half foot lion will stretch to nearly nine feet, but that doesn't make the animal any larger in life.

A Story of India

MONSOON

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

"CHECK!" said Purdy, moving his bishop to bear on the district officer's king.

The district officer bent over the chessboard. He studied the pieces in the gloom of the veranda protected against the afternoon heat by fiber mats which coolies were at this moment wetting down. The splash and drip of water blended with the creak of the lazy *punkah* overhead. The district officer reached for a perspiring pitcher at Purdy's elbow and poured himself a glass of shandygaff. He appeared to be still studying the chessmen as he drank, but actually he was asking himself for the tenth time that day whether he should not order Purdy arrested after all.

The whites of Zargpur had been clamoring for Purdy's arrest—all but the civil surgeon, who insisted that the man had dementia præcox and should be committed to an asylum. The district officer was not sure Purdy was crazy; he rather thought the man was suffering from a pathological lack of humor; but he was sure that Purdy was potentially dangerous, not only to Zargpur, but to all of

India. Yet would not Purdy in jail be even more dangerous? On Purdy's arrest, his Rajput lieutenant, Nervadi, would take over. After Nervadi, there would be other leaders. Jail all the leaders, and the mob the two had collected would turn into a wild, rioting horde.

And, since you can not put two thousand men peacefully in jail at once, there would be troops, disorder, bloodshed, death—all contagious, in view of India's actual nervous state. No, the district officer wanted to avoid all that. He would not arrest Purdy. He would continue with his original plan of action, incomprehensible as it might seem to the whites of Zargpur, or to his bureaucratic superiors elsewhere if they became aware of the situation. He would try to keep Purdy and his "army" in Zargpur awhile longer.

"It's your game," he announced, putting down his glass. "That makes three each. Shall we play a deciding game now? I take it you choose the black, as usual?"

"Mr. Worth, I must go," said Purdy.

He stood up. He was a tall, serious eyed man of perhaps thirty-five, with a broad scar bisecting one pale cheek. A bright red turban was piled high on his head, despite the unmistakable Nordic origins signaled by his grave features and yellow hair. His mouth twitched nervously at irregular intervals, particularly when he was about to speak. His voice was deep, earnest, and rang with a vibrant vitality.

"Still decided to move on tomorrow?" asked Roger Worth, the district officer. It was the first time that afternoon that either man had mentioned the subject closest to both of them.

"We march two hours before dawn," said Purdy.

"You're in too great a hurry," said Worth. "You ought to stay on another twenty-four hours at least. Not only would that give us another go at chess, but you're not sufficiently prepared—"

"Not prepared?" Purdy was indignant. "Have you seen my men? Even the new ones, with me less than a week—have you seen them march?"

Worth nodded.

"Not bad, for Indians," he said. "But because they're Indians they ought to have a full day devoted entirely to working up their religious fervor. Their morale will be much improved."

Purdy's mouth twitched.

"Strange, your giving me advice like that," he said. "Nervadi has been urging the same thing on me, so it is probably sound. Yet since my whole mission is directed against you—not you personally, understand, but the *raj* you represent—I should be suspicious of some kind of a trap."

Worth laughed reassuringly.

"I've had all week to trap you if I wished," he said. "I'm merely giving you the benefit of my fifteen years in India, so that when your bubble bursts—as it will burst—you won't be able to say that it didn't have every chance—"

"Bubble!" Purdy's eyes flashed. "I've an army out there—an army with a cause. And inside of a week it will have grown to ten times its size now, fifty times in a fortnight."

"An army," said Worth, with a smile, "of peasants. An army of splay footed Indian farmers."

"An army of liberty!" announced Purdy solemnly. There was a note of exultation in his voice, an inspired light in his eyes, that reminded Worth at once of a child and a madman. There was no mistaking the naive faith of Purdy in his own mission.

"Anyhow, you'll keep the army here for another day," said the district officer. "I'd like to play that deciding game of chess."

"So would I," Purdy agreed, "and yet —I will see tomorrow."

He pushed aside the mat and went down the veranda steps. A blast of withering air swirled in as he let the flap drop into place.

Worth filled a pipe and lighted it. His tanned face, deep lined but kindly, was one an artist would probably picture with some crooked briar with a careless curve, yet all Worth's pipes in the brass

bowl on the table were straight and precise. He was not a large man, yet he was broad and well muscled. His light, slightly wavy hair was turning gray at the temples, and his blue eyes were at once mild and intelligent. They clouded somewhat with worry as he entered the bungalow to strip for his midafternoon cold bath. He was still thinking about Purdy.

Purdy was a shell shocked Canadian veteran of whom Worth had never even heard ten days before. His past was a vague jumble of war, sanitariums, ships, and then this Messianic urge to lead India out of bondage. He had marched into Zargpur with his army of a thousand Indian *rayots* all armed with wooden staves like boy scouts. He had recruited his army from the farming villages of neighboring *t'aluks* in some ridiculously short time. The novelty of the yellow haired giant in a red turban, the contagious vitality of his personality and the exciting resonance of his voice had caught the Indian villagers at their psychological freest and swept them in line.

By luck, rather than by design, he had hit upon the proper season for fomenting an uprising in India. In the hot weather the ground is baked so hard that the *rayot* can't work his fields. Losing contact with the soil and his true life, he lives for three months or so on ideas. He sits in the shade and listens to men like Purdy—through the translation, in this case, of a self-seeking, *pan*-chewing agitator named Nervadi. Thus it was that Purdy's army marched from nowhere into Zargpur, and picked up some five hundred new recruits while preparing to march on the railroad. His "soldiers" had nothing else to think about during the hot weather . . .

It was the hot weather, too, that could explain in part the snarling, nerve jangled attitude of the whites of Zargpur, Worth reflected as he dried himself and took the clean clothing his bearer handed him. The hot weather had been unusually trying in Zargpur this year. For months the thermometer had scarcely dipped below 100° Fahrenheit, and still the parched days dragged on, weeks beyond the usual season of the monsoon. So Zargpur's white men cursed, and Zargpur's white women loitered on in the cool hill stations while the monsoon, with its blessed rains, loitered somewhere on the Arabian Sea. And the curses were now descending about the ears of Roger Worth who, instead of arresting Purdy and asking troops to disperse the crazy army, was actually fraternizing with the mad Canadian.

Worth knew the opinion that was gaining force against him, yet as long as he had confidence in his own plan for solving the problem, he merely smiled at his critics. He finished dressing and donned his topee to walk to the club for his daily hour of veiled jibes and polite sarcasm that had been his portion since Purdy's army had come to Zargpur.

AS THE district officer stepped off his veranda a uniformed *chaprassi* ambled up with speed appropriate to the season and handed him a telegram. Worth tore it open, read it, smiled, glanced at the sky, and stuffed the message into his pocket. He hesitated a moment, then walked off at a brisk gait. He was not heading for the European club, however. He walked down the hill toward the *maidan*, the open public square, into the streets and bazaars of the swarming Indian part of Zargpur.

As he walked he was constantly reminded of the tardiness of the monsoon. The spreading mango trees in his compound were powdered gray. An ash flanked water buffalo panted in agony as it dragged a two-wheeled cart through swirls of thick dust in a blinding white street. The flaming blossoms of the gold mohur trees curled and withered about the edges of the *maidan*. The green scummed surface of a village tank had dropped a foot since Worth last saw it.

Worth passed the tall red minarets of the mosque, quivering in the heated air. He crossed the bazaar and walked behind the pyramidal domes of the Hindu temple to Shiva. Behind the temple he

greeted a wrinkled old Brahman who squatted in the dust beneath a *bô* tree, reading Sanskrit scriptures aloud to himself. The old man looked up and replied with a toothless smile.

"*Salaam, Hakim!*" he said.

"*Salaam, Pundit Deshwar!*" said the district officer.

The pundit was naked except for a *dhoti* and the double sacred thread of the twice-born castes around his brown torso and over one shoulder. Lesser Hindus greeted him respectfully as they passed.

The district officer dropped to a squatting posture beside the pundit. The two men seemed on excellent terms. They talked informally, laughed together, then engaged in serious conversation for ten minutes. Worth did most of the talking, and the pundit nodded gravely. Finally Worth arose.

"Tomorrow, then," he said in conclusion.

"Without fail," said the pundit.

Then Worth continued with his original intention of visiting the gathering place of his own people.

As he entered the clubhouse there was a sudden lull in the conversation. He looked about, calmly, benignly. Immediately in front of him was a table of four men, playing bridge. They had been in heated discussion when he came in. Now they sat in embarrassed silence while a large florid man shuffled the cards. Worth let his cool blue eyes rest in turn on each of the four faces.

The large florid man, whose baldish head was perspiring profusely, was Fenton Marville, manager of the Zargpur branch of the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China. His partner was Dr. J. K. Timmons, the civil surgeon, a small, sharp featured man who peered darkly through a pince-nez, and who somehow gave the impression that he enjoyed nothing more than a good, gory operation. At his left was Paul Braddert, a pompous young person squinting through his own cigaret smoke. He was addicted to bright blue socks and had something to do with oil. The fourth man was tight lipped, thin necked Henry Hughes, the sub-collector.

Worth knew that the four men had been talking about him. He knew that each of the four considered his present utility and his future career in the I. C. S. to be distinctly limited. He realized that he was not their ideal of a district officer. Here he was at six in the evening, clad in khaki shorts, while each of the four had on crisp, fresh whites. He knew they considered him too insouciant and too informal for a successful bureaucrat. And he rather enjoyed playing the bad boy in their midst.

"Mind if I watch the game?" he inquired, drawing up a chair.

"Take my hand, if you like," said the sub-collector.

"I'll watch," said Worth.

"He'd rather play chess," said Braddert, "with crazy Canadians."

The civil surgeon dealt the cards.

"By the way, Worth," he said, before any one had bid, "I understand you've asked for troops after all. When are they coming?"

"Where did you get that idea, Doctor?"

"That's the rumor," said Braddert. "Since no one takes us into official confidence, we have to depend on rumors. We hear you sent a telegram yesterday and got a reply half an hour ago."

Worth laughed.

"You have good ears in the outer darkness," he said.

"When will the troops be along?" inquired Fenton Marville in a high tenor.

Worth shook his head.

"I didn't ask for troops," he said. "I telegraphed for weather reports."

Worth watched the four men look at one another, exchanging glances of fellowship in their common resentment of being made sport of. Fenton Marville put down his cards. His florid face turned a trifle more florid.

"See here, Worth," he piped. "You're pulling our legs."

"Not at all."

Worth wondered if he should tell these

men what he had in mind. He did not think they would understand his point of view.

"Do you realize your mad Canadian friend is going to march his insane army out of here to battle, tomorrow morning?"

"Day after tomorrow," Worth corrected. "I've persuaded Purdy to stop over until his men are properly prepared religiously."

"You're out of your mind, Mr. Worth," said the sub-collector. "You've actually been encouraging sedition and revolt. These beggars will be worked up to such a pitch that they'll start in on us right here in Zargpur before they march."

"They're not armed," said Worth.

"That simplifies matters," said the civil surgeon. "Six machine guns mounted on your veranda would be just the dose. Mow down the front ranks and the show would be over."

"Just like Amritsar," said Worth. "Another Amritsar massacre and we'd have to keep on killing Indians until we ran out of ammunition. We can't rule India by machine guns."

"Some of us can't rule it by any means," said Braddert. "Some of us allow revolt to organize before our very eyes. Isn't the district officer going to do anything about it?"

Other men had come up behind the bridge table. Worth suddenly found himself defending his policies before a dozen hostile eyed compatriots and club members.

"The district officer doesn't need either the advice or the physical aid of Mr. Braddert," said Worth with a smile.

"See here, Worth," came the fussy voice of Fenton Marville. "This concerns us all, Braddert as well as the rest of us. You owe it to all of us to get troops here. If you'd acted in time, the guns of your police force, small as it is, would have been sufficient to put down this business. But you've let it get out of hand. You must get troops here, sir!"

"There will be no troops," said Worth, "and no shooting by the police. There's to be no bloodshed of any kind."

"But if this crazy army marches on the railway and the arsenal—you suppose there won't be bloodshed?"

"There might be," said Worth, "and it would be equally bad for India and Britain. Any massed slaughter of unarmed Indians at this time will mean a general holocaust. The timid *rayot* is a fatalist during the hot weather."

"So you let a fatalistic army form in our very midst," said the civil surgeon. "I suppose you've watched them drill. The Canadian deserves that much credit. They drill like soldiers."

"They're *rayots*," said Worth. "They're farmers at heart, and they can't get away from it."

The civil surgeon was arranging his cards as though the conversation had become too silly for his attention. The other three bridge players were doing likewise.

"You might be interested in the weather in Bombay," said Worth, putting his hand in his pocket for the telegram.

The civil surgeon ignored him.

"I bid two no trump," said the civil surgeon.

"By me," said Paul Braddert.

The district officer shrugged, smiled, arose and sauntered out into the stifling evening. Below, on the *maidan*, Purdy's army was drilling. Worth went down to watch.

THE army did not leave next day. Purdy had accepted his friendly enemy's suggestion of delay for religious preparation. The simmering air was alive with sounds of bustle and expectancy. A suffocating gray mantle of cloud veiled the sun and beat back the heat of the parched earth.

Purdy stood all day under a banyan tree with Nervadi and his brown staff. There was always a platoon drilling before him on the *maidan* between devotions; a never ceasing flow of half naked men wound from the *maidan* to the multiple temples of Zargpur. Recruits of

high caste squatted in front of bustling Brahmans to have caste marks painted on their foreheads. Others passed beneath the golden spire of the temple of Shiva to spatter handfuls of crushed jasmine blossoms against the four-handed statue of Shiva the Destroyer. Crowds prayed to lucky, elephant headed Ganesh, god of wisdom. Priests at the Kali temple beheaded goats for red tongued Durga the Terrible, while pariahs hovered at a respectful distance to dip their fingers in the blood of sacrifice, and make bloody marks on their foreheads. Monkeys screeched in the vermilion eaves of the temple of Hanuman, ape-like patron of loyalty and devotion. Even Moslems, temporarily at peace with the Hindus under the spell of Purdy's personality, droned prayers in their mosque.

Roger Worth returned to his bungalow after a trying, wilting day in the bazaars, at the police station, in the excited streets. He had talked to Pundit Deshwar behind the temple of Shiva. He had talked to Purdy and Nervadi. He did not talk to any Europeans.

He paused at the foot of his stairs and and looked up at the oppressive sky. It seemed a little blacker. He climbed the stairs, dropped his steaming topee in the hands of a waiting bearer, and walked to his aneroid barometer hanging on the wall. He tapped the dial. The hand seemed to have moved slightly to the left. He set the brass indicator. The metal was hot.

Before he could sit down, the perspiring, florid face of Fenton Marville appeared from behind the fiber mats.

"Come in," said Worth. "I was on the point of sending for you. It's about that telegram."

"What telegram?" piped Marville, mopping his head.

"The telegram you sent this morning, describing the situation in Zargpur as serious, demanding military protection. The telegram to which you forged my name."

Worth had turned his back on Marville and appeared to be busy lighting his pipe. However, he was watching the bank manager's reflection in a glass decanter that stood on a table. He saw him leaning forward, his mouth open, apparently unable to speak.

Worth flicked out his match and whirled abruptly.

"Forgery's pretty serious business, Marville," he said.

"I'm surprised you can distinguish the seriousness of matters," replied Marville, at last finding his voice. "You don't realize—"

"I quite realize everything," Worth interrupted. "That's why I'm quite willing to overlook the matter of the telegram, particularly as it was not sent. Dareis, the telegrapher, recognized the *chaprassi* you sent with the forged message, and sent to me for confirmation. You may rest at ease. I tore up the evidence."

"I'm not looking for favors at your hands."

"No favors, I assure you. I merely wanted you to know that I appreciate and make allowance for your nervousness. You really should have gone to the hills with the ladies, Marville."

The banker stood up.

"I didn't come here to be insulted," he said. "I came to find out what you intended to do about the European being attacked in the bazaar this morning."

Worth smoked for a moment before replying.

"Despite the fact that the attack would have been avoided if the victim had followed my advice to stay out of the bazaar for a few days, I have arrested six men. They are in jail now, and will be tried for assault in due order."

"You must make a public example of natives who dare attack an European," said Marville indignantly. "Otherwise none of us will be safe. And your jail isn't large enough to hold the thousands of Purdy's army—"

"I said these men would be tried in due order," said Worth. "Witnesses will be subpoenaed tomorrow. The men will be punished if found guilty—but not publicly."

Marville approached the table and

pounded on it frantically. His florid face turned purplish.

"Coward!" he cried shrilly. "A fine, stout hearted civil servant who's afraid to take a firm British stand against a lot of savages? A jellyfish, sir, that's what! Thank God we can still protect ourselves! Thank God we still have our own private arms, and know how to use them. Last night we organized our own vigilance committee, Mr. Worth, and from now on you and your spineless policies be damned!"

Worth put his hand on Marville's arm to quiet him.

"Let's not get hysterical, Marville," he said calmly.

Marville shook off Worth's hand with a gesture of irritation.

"The British residents of Zargpur are still men!" he shrilled. "We are armed, and we will protect ourselves."

"If you'll listen to me, Marville—"

"We've listened long enough, sir. From now on we act. Goodby."

His eyes bulging, his face a bright crimson, Fenton Marville stormed off the district officer's veranda.

Worth watched him go. His forehead wrinkled into a frown. He let his pipe go out. He stood a moment, confronted with the probability of bloodshed, despite all his elaborate precautions against it. Marville's hysterical vigilance committee, taking upon itself the armed defense of the persons of its members and the prestige of the British Empire, was certain to strike a spark into the tinder Worth had been guarding so carefully. Unless—

WORTH turned and went quickly into the bungalow. He sat at a desk, considered a pen at length, then wrote something hurriedly, folded the paper and called a *chaprassi*. He started to hand the paper to the *chaprassi*, reconsidered, unfolded it and reread it. He had hoped he would not be forced to measures of this sort in support of his policy. If his theory were wrong, he would have much to answer for. There might be blood on his hands. Yet, if he did not take this action, there was almost sure to be blood on his hands. He would be consistent. He handed the paper to the *chaprassi*.

"Take this to the police station," he ordered. "*Ek dum*. Quick."

The messenger took the paper.

It was an order for the confiscation of all firearms held by Europeans in Zargpur.

The hot cloud dome of the sky darkened to a blue-black pall, snuffing out the last ray of daylight two hours before nightfall. The cooked out air lay motionless. There was not even enough breeze to stir the delicately poised leaves of the row of dusty peepul trees leading down the hill from Worth's bungalow to the *maidan*. In this stifling stillness, sounds came unnaturally clear, magnified, unreal. The call of the muezzin from the minaret of the mosque, the drone of prayers, shouts of a bullock driver, cries from the bazaar, an excited murmur from the *maidan*.

The district officer sat alone in the dark of his veranda, smoking. He declined to eat the dinner which his *khansama* announced, but drank two glasses of sherry. He had not gone to the club that afternoon, but he expected to receive a deputation of his countrymen at any minute. He had half expected Purdy that afternoon for the deciding chess game, but Purdy had not come. Worth was speculating on the possible significance of this fact, watching a bonfire kindled on the *maidan*, when he noted the approach of Pundit Deshwar, the toothless sage of the *bô* tree behind the temple of Shiva.

The pundit talked with the district officer for several minutes, then went away. Twenty minutes later he returned, followed by two score Brahmans. They had evidently come directly from either religious devotions or their evening meal, for they were bare to the waist. No turbans hid their shaven heads, from the back of which trailed the sacred lock. The pundit and his Brahmans squatted in groups to the left of Worth's bungalow

on the parched remains of a lawn.

A little before nine o'clock the European deputation Worth expected arrived. He was somewhat surprised by its size. There were at least twenty persons in it. Worth recognized the civil surgeon, Marville and Paul Braddert, the oil representative, in the van. He did not get up. Then he saw two women, the wives of American missionaries. He arose. He called for lamps.

"Won't you come in?" he said.

"This is not a social visit," said the civil surgeon. "I fancy you know what we've come for."

"Let's all go inside," said the district officer. "We can talk it over much more agreeably that way."

Lights appeared. The deputation silently filed into Worth's bungalow. Bearers brought chairs. Every one found a seat except Marville, Braddert and the civil surgeon. Worth appeared quite at ease. He waited for some one else to begin the conversation. There was an uneasy silence. The civil surgeon spoke first.

"What do you propose to do for us," he said, "now that you've left us as defenseless as children?"

Worth pretended not to understand.

"I can offer you all a drink," he said.

"Drinks be damned!" snapped Braddert. "Where are our firearms?"

"Oh, those," said Worth, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb. "They're all in my room there. Quite safe, I assure you."

"We demand them back!" came Fenton Marville's tenor announcement.

"Not now," said the district officer. "Sorry."

"You'll give them up now!" insisted Braddert. He advanced menacingly.

The district officer stood up to face him. He shook his head.

"No," he said.

"You will, damn it!" Braddert's fingers curled at his sides. He towered a full head above the district officer.

Worth did not reply at once. He seemed to be studying the bright blue socks which showed between the cuffs of Braddert's tussah silk trousers and his white shoes. A murmur of half spoken conversation died away.

Worth's arms were crossed loosely on his chest. Again he shook his head in silent negation.

"You will." Braddert lunged toward the district officer. His hands moved for Worth's throat.

Worth uncrossed his arms with the speed of a striking cobra. His right hand dropped down, swung back. His fist flashed upward, met Braddert's chin with a dead, non-resonant smack.

Braddert fell forward, stumbled against a chair. Worth bent over him, picked the big man up bodily and carried him across the room to stretch him in a chaise-longue. He gave crisp, quiet orders to his bearer, and was soon sponging Braddert's face with a damp cloth and pressing a glass of brandy to his lips. In less than two minutes Braddert opened his eyes.

"That was foolish, Braddert," said Worth. "I have an armed guard posted over those guns. And I merely want to remind you that I'm still district officer of this *zil'a*."

There had been a respectful silence during this incident. Worth had emerged master. His authority, newly asserted, seemed to permeate the room until even the tiny *punkah* boy, squatting barefoot in the corner, began pulling more energetically on the *punkah* rope. Only the civil surgeon, carefully paring the tip of a slender cigar with a gold pen-knife, seemed immune.

"You may be district officer today, Worth," said the civil surgeon, "but at the club this afternoon we were giving odds against your being district officer next week."

"You might have let me take up some of that money," said Worth.

"In fact," the civil surgeon went on, lighting his cigar, and punctuating his words with great, contented clouds of smoke, "there is every likelihood that as early as tomorrow your status will be changed. We stood your stupidity as

long as we could, Worth. Today the sub-collector volunteered to act in our behalf. He's traveling overland to lay our case before the commissioner. With luck, he ought to reach his destination tonight—at about this time. I think we can expect the commissioner to send us adequate protection and put down all this silly nonsense that you've allowed to grow into a menace. Likewise, the commissioner is likely to want some explanations from you—"

The civil surgeon laughed sarcastically.

Braddert, sitting up, guffawed.

A titter ran through the room.

The *punkah* boy relaxed his efforts, and the strips of matting barely swished across the ceiling. The spell was broken.

Roger Worth made no reply. He calmly selected a pipe from the brass bowl, filled and lighted it, and walked to the veranda. He looked at the sky. There was not a star visible. He saw figures moving about the bonfire on the *maidan*, and listened to the confused sounds that came from that direction. He reentered the bungalow, seated himself at his desk and wrote a message. He wanted the commissioner to hear a sane word from the man still responsible for this *zil'a*. He called a *chaprassi*.

"Send this telegram," he said.

"*Offis bund kara hai*," said the messenger.

"I know it's closed," said the district officer, "but you will go to the bungalow of Mr. Dareis and have him open it again. This telegram must go off immediately."

A tense silence followed the dispatch of the *chaprassi*. The *punkah* creaked faintly, ineffectual against the humid, crawling heat. Perspiration stood on every face, forming first beads, then rivulets. In the distance a jackal howled. From the foot of the hill came the confused voice of a thousand tongues.

The district officer walked slowly back and forth across his veranda, smoking. He saw a figure running awkwardly toward the bungalow. He thought at first it was his *chaprassi* returning from the telegraph office. When the man came nearer, Worth saw he was evidently a coolie. The man stopped running when he saw Worth, advancing timidly until he stood before the steps. He had something in his hand.

Worth snatched the paper from the coolie's hand, opened it and, still standing on the steps, read a penciled scrawl by the dim light filtering from within the bungalow. The note said:

> Dear Mr. Worth: I am sorry I can't keep my word about not touching you or Zargpur. Nervadi and my other lieutenants heard that you have collected all the arms of the place in your bungalow. They think we ought to have arms before we move on, and I guess they are right. You had better send me what you have before I muster my men at eleven-thirty. Otherwise at midnight we will be forced to strike, as Nervadi has convinced my men that we need the arms and they will do anything to get them. You had better avoid pillage and fire by sending me those arms. I hope you understand there is nothing personal in this, and that it is only a blow against the system you represent and which stands in the way of liberty. —PURDY

Worth read the note twice. He glanced over his shoulder to see if any one had come up behind him. He looked at his watch. Ten minutes to eleven. He tore the note into small bits which he tossed into the brown face of the messenger.

"*Chel aol*" he ordered. "Get out! There's no answer."

Worth walked up the steps and reentered his bungalow. All eyes were on him, but he saw no one. He was staring at the door behind which lay the firearms he had taken from his compatriots. Should he give them back? It would be an admission of defeat, a sacrifice of principle. He still believed he was right in his theory that Purdy's army was a hypnotized band of peasants. With a little luck, or even normal conditions, they would have come to their senses before this. Yet since this crisis had arisen, he would sacrifice his principle, risk all that he had tried to avoid, rather than sacrifice his countrymen.

Of course, there was no question of acceding to Purdy's request. On the

contrary, Worth would probably have to mobilize his police, which he had kept to a minimum number, armed only with clubs. He might even resort to the telegraph, and ask for a military airplane . . .

A BOLT of thunder cracked and rumbled around the horizon, splitting into a thousand muttering explosions.

Worth was standing in the center of the room, puffing at his dead pipe.

"Mr. Worth! Mr. Worth!"

A dark faced Eurasian with glossy black hair and sweat soaked khaki clothes came running up the stairs and stood panting a moment on the veranda.

"What's the trouble, Dareis?" demanded the district officer.

"I can't send that telegram, Mr. Worth," panted the winded Eurasian. "I can't raise a soul anywhere along the line. The wires have been cut somewhere near here."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive, Mr. Worth."

Worth clamped his teeth tighter on the stem of his pipe.

Marville laughed hysterically.

The civil surgeon sneered through his spectacles.

"Splendid, Mr. Worth," he said with mock politeness. "You've succeeded in getting us into a beautifully hopeless situation, even far beyond our expectations. You must be proud of our splendid isolation."

"I hope you're satisfied," snapped Braddert.

"What shall I do, Mr. Worth?" pleaded the Eurasian telegrapher.

Worth stared at him for a moment in silence. He removed his pipe from his mouth and moistened his lips. Then he said—

"Give me back the telegram."

He took the blank and stuffed it into his pocket absent mindedly. He walked a few steps toward the room in which the firearms were locked. He stopped, turned half about. He moved across the room to the telephone instrument connected by a private line to the police station. Raising the receiver, he pushed a button. There was not even an answering click. The instrument was dead. There had been wire cutting here, too. Slowly replacing the receiver, Worth walked toward the veranda. He watched the torches and flares flickering above the turbaned heads of the crowd gathering on the *maidan*. He could see figures moving about the bonfire, shadows of men streaming from the mosque, more men pouring from streets leading to the Hindu temples. The hot night was a-tremble with subdued, distant sound.

Worth's teeth were clamped upon the stem of his pipe with nervous determination. His fingers pinched the bowl. Suddenly he turned his head. The pipe-stem snapped in his mouth. He flung the pieces from him. He was listening.

He had heard a noise on the roof like the snapping of a dry twig. Similar sounds followed, sharp, distinct, like the click of rails as a locomotive gains speed, merging into a rhythmic roar.

Anxiety in his eyes, but a smile on his face, Worth started down the veranda steps. Near the bottom he almost collided with Pundit Deshwar, yellow caste-mark shining on his wrinkled forehead, rain drops pearling his mustache, white against his dark skin.

"The monsoon, Hakim!" exclaimed the pundit in toothless glee.

"Go quickly, Pundit Deshwar," ordered Worth. "Hurry with your strong voiced companions. You have little time."

The pundit turned and called into the night. The Brahmans who had been squatting at the side of the bungalow arose and came forward. Their white *dhotis* shone in the darkness, as they went down the hill behind Pundit Deshwar like ghosts in single file. The old man in the lead was running with stiff, jerky steps. They lost their identity in the blurr of rain and the confusion of Purdy's mustering men. It was nearly half past eleven.

Worth walked a few steps after them,

then stood still. The drops rattled in the dusty foliage of the mango trees. The air was filled with a singing, sighing sound that seemed to come at once from a great distance and close at hand. Worth derived a pleasant cooling sensation from letting the rain fall on his face, although the drops were actually warm. He inhaled the warm damp odor of the earth drinking in the downpour, the strange dusty fragrance that arose like steam from the parched ground. When he went back into the bungalow he was refreshed, almost jaunty. His self-invited guests were puzzled, but still defiant.

"Pundit Deshwar seems to enjoy your confidence," said the civil surgeon, adjusting his pince-nez, "more than we do. I trust he's helping you frame some plausible explanation to present to the man the commissioner sends down tomorrow."

Worth was no longer annoyed by the civil surgeon's sarcasm. He had reached the crucial moment of his policy. He would know in a little while whether he would stand or fall.

"Gentlemen," he said, consulting his watch, "at five minutes of twelve I am returning your firearms. I hope you will take them and return home. In any case, I am giving them back."

"You'd better give them back at once," came the tenor complaint of Fenton Marville, who had gone out on the veranda. "There's something going on down there. They're getting ready to attack us at last."

"There's a crowd of the beggars coming up the hill," exclaimed Braddert.

The district officers' guests pushed nervously to the door. Worth elbowed his way through them until he stood on the stairs. He saw a group of Hindus, led by a torch bearer, come trotting toward the bungalow. Their turbans bobbed excitedly in the orange flicker of the torch, sputtering in the rain. Shouts punctated a general hubbub of voices. Worth put his hands in his pocket to touch the key to the room in which the firearms were locked.

The Hindus crowded forward toward the veranda, then stopped. There was a moment of silence. Then some one sang out—

"Will it be tomorrow, sahib?"

Worth took a deep breath.

"Yes," he called back.

The group moved on over the hill, talking in spirited tones.

Another platoon marched up the hill in straggling and undisciplined manner. Snatches of song and laughter arose from its dripping members. They, too, stopped in front of the district officer's veranda.

"Is it true, Hakim, what they say you have promised?" called one.

"Quite true," Worth answered.

The platoon moved on. More men came past. Torches could be seen streaking away in all directions, making flickering halos in the rain. The bonfire burned low. In half an hour the seething mass of men that had been Purdy's army mustering on the *maidan* was reduced to a little knot of perhaps fifty, outlined against the last glow of the fire.

Then Purdy himself came stalking up the hill to the bungalow. He was soaked to the skin, and the end of his brilliant red turban hung damp and bedraggled down his back. His shoulders were slightly slumped. His eyes burned with indignation. His voice was uneven with emotion.

"Well, you've done it!" he said, more in disappointment than in bitterness, as he stood facing the district officer. "You've bought them away from me. They've all gone—men I've been recruiting over a fifty-mile radius—deserted—"

There was a child-like wistfulness in Purdy's face as he stopped and swallowed.

"I told you they would," said Worth quietly.

"Brainy, aren't you?" cried Purdy in sudden indignation. "Very clever, sending doddering old Brahmans to impress my men with the truth of your message—as though it came direct from heaven: 'The Hakim promises seed for monsoon

planting to all men of this *t'alku* and the three neighboring *t'aluks*. For three days *dahl*, millet, cardamum and seed rice will be given to men who are in their own homes to receive it. Gift distribution begins tomorrow.' So they run home. Patronage! Paternalism! Bribery!"

Purdy spat out his words. Worth appeared not to be listening. He was choosing a pipe from his brass bowl.

"Is all this the truth, Worth?" asked Fenton Marville.

Worth nodded.

"Where are you going to get the seed?" demanded the civil surgeon.

"I've been collecting it the last four or five days," said Worth. "The sacks are stored in the police station."

"Why didn't you give it out before?" Marville demanded. "Why didn't you spare us this awful anxiety?"

"They wouldn't have listened yesterday," Worth explained. "Seed would have meant nothing while the ground was too hard to plow. It took the monsoon to remind them they were farmers."

"They're soldiers," shouted Purdy, suddenly defiant again.

"Turned to farmers by the first drop of the monsoon rains," Worth replied.

"Soldiers!" Purdy insisted. "Nervadi still has a nucleus of men. He knows how to handle them. They are afraid of him. By dawn he will have five hundred back in the ranks. Our march will begin on schedule after all. Nervadi will do it!"

"Nervadi," said Worth, "will be in jail within an hour. I'm sending him back to Bombay in the morning to face an old police charge."

"You're—!" Purdy stared at the district officer. Something he saw in the clear blue eyes must have convinced him that argument was futile. He raised his hand limply in a gesture of defeat. "And me?" he asked. "Are you having me shot?"

"I don't know yet," said Worth. "It seems a shame to waste your uncanny ability to influence the Indian *rayot*. If you ever got it through your head that the *rayot* is a farmer, not a soldier, I'd like to use you around here. For instance, your persuasive gifts might be able to teach him to use a metal plow, instead of the wooden implement which is useless in baked soil. But I'll decide all that in the morning. Right now we have a chess match to decide. It stands three games to three, if I'm not mistaken."

Worth clapped his hands. Bearers appeared with a chessboard, bottles and glasses. There was a sudden, almost jocund relief from the tension that had prevailed all evening. The district officer's hitherto indignant guests drank *chota* pegs—except the American missionaries, who asked for lemon squash—and were in a most talkative mood. Even the civil surgeon smiled, as he stood, glass in hand, watching the rain streak the night. The firearms had been brought out for redistribution, but lay on a table, unclaimed.

Purdy, sitting at a table opposite the district officer, tore his red turban from his head and ran his fingers through his damp blond hair. Worth was sorting the chess men.

"You'll take the black, as usual?" asked Worth.

Purdy let the pile of red cloth drop to the floor.

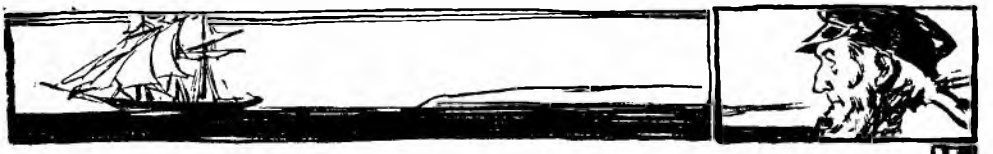
"No," he said. "I'll take the white."

He seemed to be listening to the rain on the roof as he set up his pawns.

A Long Time Ago

By BILL ADAMS

She towed from out the Mersey with a Joliffe tug before.
(It's snowing over Mersey. D'ye hear the liners roar?)
She towed from out the Mersey with a feckless shouting crew
Come out of Paddy West's place, their lips and fingers blue.
She towed from out the Mersey with a lean jawed Blue Nose skipper—
(Hard up your helm, you liner man! Give way there for a clipper!)
She towed from out the Mersey with a redhead Cornish mate—
(Aye, but the wind piped coldly as she passed the last dock gate!)
The pierhead loafers cheered her as she slipped away to sea
With a freezing little 'prentice chap—God help the likes o' he!



She rolled away for Tuskar in spray and mist and rain.
(Aye, you'll have learned the sting of salt ere you come home again!)
With the gray road wide before her, with the roofs of home behind,
She towed away for Tuskar to meet the ocean wind.
At dusk she signaled Tuskar. The tugboat turned her heel.
The wild Atlantic rollers, they surged beneath her keel.
The daylight died o'er Tuskar. She lost the Tuskar light.
'Twas snow and blow and blackness that mad Atlantic night!
She rolled her railings under. Her topsails strained o'erhead;
Her little seasick 'prentice boy, he wished that he were dead!

* * *

'Tis forty year and over. His hair is thin and gray.
He sits and dreams of tropic seas and flying fish at play.
He hears the liners hooting; he feels a clipper roll—
Aye, well he learned the sting of salt. There's glory in his soul!

Decorations by
L. F. WILFORD

A Novelette of Quantrell's Raiders

By HUGH PENDEXTER

A YEAR prior to the opening of the Civil War the discovery of gold in the Northwest led to a migration from the Pacific Coast to the East. Idaho contributed the rich diggings on the Salmon and Clearwater Rivers. The heads of the Missouri surrendered extensive placer deposits within the limits of what was to be the State of Montana. The stampede to these new diggings drew many seekers not only from the West Coast but also from the East, by Salt Lake and the Missouri River.

Gold seemed to be everywhere for the taking. The discovery of the Comstock silver lode in Nevada was largely responsible for the nation's ability to resume specie payments. Now the Northwest was to give gold in an abundance never dreamed of before. When it seemed that the hidden storehouses must all have been revealed and exhausted, there blazed across the continent the news of one of the richest discoveries ever made; that in Alder Gulch, Montana.

This plethora of the yellow metal produced an hyperbole of living. Dissipation, brigandage and gaming were so many vicious adjuncts to the building of permanent structures. The placer mines gave great strength to the North, although Federal greenbacks for a time were accepted in mining camps at fifty cents on the dollar. The age old habits of the Indians were sadly dislocated by

NO MAN'S LAND

the sudden influx of the gold hungry. New wage scales were abnormal, compared with the former cost of hire. Never had the criminals such rare stakes for which to play. The Missouri River suddenly became one of the most important waterways in the world. Towns sprang up like vegetables.

No development was more radical than was the sudden importance and consequent growth of old Fort Benton. Where the annual arrival of steamboats had been limited to six during the season, scores were now arriving. The unbroken wilderness along the river between Benton and the mouth of the Yellowstone was disturbed by the passing of as stately craft as could be found on the ocean. Where men had dressed in jeans and furs were crowds of well tailored adventurers. Thousands of tons of merchandise were being rushed to Benton, to be freighted overland to the mines. Quartz mills were sailing on steam craft where only fur traders' keelboats had penetrated.

Profits to steamboat owners were enormous. Freight rates jumped to twelve cents a pound, and a million and a quarter of dollars in gold dust was brought back to the States in one steamer. The hysteria of the long fought war in the States was echoed in the North by man's hysteria over unlimited gold.

No settlement in the West could sur-

pass the multicolored history of Fort Benton. It was the oldest white settlement in the North American mountains, with the exception of some Spanish villages in the far Southwest. Within forty years it experienced more contrasts of living than the oldest of the Eastern cities had seen. The Fort became a town, with scores of boats waiting to discharge cargo, or carry back the lucky and unfortunate to the States. The stream of wagon trains arriving from and departing for the mines seemed to be endless. Every one appeared to have gold, and many were intent on spending and wasting it.

Among those who swaggered and found the world a joyous place to live in was Dandy Jim Jacques, crack pilot for Joseph La Barge, the veteran river man. His appearance was immaculate from the crown of his soft gray hat to the tips of his polished boots of French calf. He wore a modest fortune in his silk necktie, in the form of a diamond cluster. He was debonair, impulsive and, when not in the pilot house, reckless. His meeting with a boyhood acquaintance, Elijah Brant, was no accident. He had sent word to Brant in Alder Gulch in the preceding Fall that he would be on the river all the succeeding season. It was late Spring, and optimism and gaiety had succeeded the gloom of Winter, when the two met. Brant, having resigned from his supreme realm, the pilot house, was pulling on his kid gloves as he walked down the gangplank, when a nondescript figure suddenly rushed up, threw his arms about him and roughly started dancing him from side to side.

"What the devil? Hi, stop jiggling me! Who the devil—dawggone! Lige! Old Lige Brant! You ornery looking hound! For heaven's sake, why don't you shave? You look more ferocious than any of Quantrell's guerrillas back home. Judas up a tree, but I'm glad to see you! A long drink and a long talk . . . Have you made your everlasting fortune? Are you going down with me, Lige? I'm the lightning pilot, you know. Three hundred dollars every week, whether afloat or speared by a snag."

Brant's bearded face was divided by a grin of sheer joy as he seized his friend by the arm and hurried him by the line of moored steamboats to a vacant spot on the river bank. There he halted and pulled his friend down beside him and eagerly began asking questions. Both talked at the same time. Jacques was the first to get out of breath, and Brant anxiously inquired for the latest news of the war.

"Cotton, if it can get to England, is as valuable as gold is up here. England's simply got to jump in and help the South. Oh, don't draw any long faces. I know you're a sneaking old Yankee at heart even if you did come from my neck of the woods. Seems as if the fighting had been going on for a million years. But I've stuck to the river. Crazy game, this one of Americans killing off Americans."

Brant's face lengthened as he said:

"I'll be late in getting in, but I'm going. But you keep out. Stick to the river. God forbid we both went in to battle and by accident shot each other. It would have to be by accident, Jim. I won't kill a friend even to prove I'm a patriot."

"You old murderer! Ever I git you at the end of a rifle I'll slap your ugly face. England's got to kick in."

"If she does she'll buck into a rare bunch of trouble. Gold from up here is helping the North a heap."

"And I'm big fool enough to carefully pilot it down for the North to use."

"If the Union's busted into two pieces both chunks will be gobbled up by nations across the water . . . Ever see the Weldons?"

"Yes. They're just the same. The old man is suspected of running niggers North, and some of the border ruffians have threatened to get him. He's gone into hiding in southern Missouri, or northern Arkansas; depends on what sheriff is chasing you. No one knows just where the State boundary line is. A godforsaken place."

"You've visited them?"

"Meaning the Weldons, not the State boundary lines? Yes. After every trip. Have just time for a short fling in St. Louis and pay them a brief visit. Then it's back to this damn river again and my blessed three hundred a week."

"And Mary?"

"Master handsome girl. You still set a heap by her?"

"Always did from the first time I saw her. I've made my pile, some twenty thousand. Got a mighty big surprise for you. I'm going back with you."

"Hurrah!" And in his exuberance Jacques snatched off Brant's ragged fur hat and flung it into the river. Then he added his own expensive head covering, and cried, "Let's have them think both of us are walking on the bottom of the river. Your hat sank right over a twenty-foot bar. Mine will clear the point by just twenty feet, if the current hasn't shifted."

Brant stared out over the turbid current, rolling by with the impetus of the Yellowstone's vast contributions. His voice was low, and he was embarrassed as he finally asked—

"She isn't bespoke, is she?"

JACQUES' merry mood vanished. His gaze shifted to watch the fleet of fleecy clouds blowing down from the North and the Blackfoot country. His voice was low and hesitant, as he slowly answered:

"That's a mighty hard question, old-timer. I can say no as far as any promise goes. But I wouldn't be your friend if I didn't 'low that I've grown to feel about Mary just as you do. At first I felt guilty, then just sort of meeching. Well, you know a man can't always pilot his own mind."

Brant nodded, his face sobering. He was quick to admit:

"Of course, she would see a mighty big difference atween Dandy Jacques and just me. Any girl would. But I'm much obliged for your telling me so frank and honest."

"Hard-a-port! Don't let any wild horses run away with you, son. Nothing is settled. I've never asked her point-blank. But her old man must feel I love that scenery down there if I'm not after Mary, the times I go there. When we finish the sail down the river, if we do finish it, I'll take my fling in St. Louis, and in the meanwhile you'll have had a chance to learn who's what."

"That's mighty handsome of you, Jim. But no woman ever can come between us and our old friendship."

"No, sirree! Never! Let's go and eat."

Brant seized his arm, as if guiding a child, and led or shoved a way through the milling mass of men bound for the States and those eager to get to the mines. Returning exiles and adventuring pilgrims were afoot, ahorse and jammed into old overland coaches, which bore wounds left by road agents' lead and red arrows. Long lines of wagon trains were impatiently waiting to be loaded with freight for the gold country.

"I'd rather fight Missouri River snags and cross-currents and shifting bars than to work my passage through such confusion," puffed Jacques, as his friend led him into an eating place and secured two seats at a table by the rear windows, which opened on the majestic river.

Two bearded mountain men, dressed in tanned skins and wearing fur hats and moccasins, were their immediate table companions. Jacques disliked the environment and suggested:

"I know a better place than this. You come along with me. No matter how big the crush I'm served at once. French Pete's place. Told him I'd jettison all his supplies on the first bar if he ever kept me waiting two minutes after I'd given my name. That's the fun of being a lightning pilot."

He spoke without restraint, and the trappers stared at him truculently. One remarked:

"Ye seem to be some sort of a simon-pure hellion. Yer ma know ye're out?"

The man's nose was that of a hawk, and his eyes bored like gimlets.

Dandy Jacques stiffened, and a hand dropped carelessly to a waistcoat pocket where he carried a derringer of murderous caliber. Brant snapped his fingers under the mountain man's nose and was quick to say:

"No acting up, old friend. This man's my friend, as you are. He's La Barge's lightningest lightning pilot. He comes from where I used to live, southern Missouri. Jim, meet Long Thomas and his partner, Runty Bill. Boys, this is Dandy Jacques, who has a heap big river medicine."

The mountain men grunted and the tall one said—

"If he's friend of yers, Lige, he's welcome to this Elk lodge of Hy-yah-ah braves." With that he threw back his head and loudly sang in the tongue of the Teton Sioux a song of the Elk Society.

The short man remarked:

"Joe La Barge is a stout feller. Ye must 'mount to somethin' if ye suit Joe. But all them do-da fixin's! Ye look more gallus then a Dakota squaw after she's got her Winter stock of beads from the Government. What ye goin' to eat? Me'n' this cripple alongside once et half a buf'ler inside of twelve hours out in the Big Horn country. Derned old fool says he won't ever eat ag'in till he can have 'nother side of buf'ler. He's drunk."

"Ain't 'nough whisky in the world to make me drunk . . . *He taku wakan*—"

The song was violently interrupted by a hand clapped over the singer's mouth, and the short man was admonishing:

"Crazy drunk, ye ol' fool! Singin' a sacred song outside the lodge!" Then he amiably asked Jacques, "Yer puff-puff boat can go anywhere, I reckon."

"I am careful to give snags a wide berth," replied Jacques. "Boats trying to race me down the river also are a great danger. Gros Ventres fired on us at the Tobacco Garden, coming up this trip. If the annuities haven't been received by the river tribes before I start back they'll shoot at us considerable. Coming up I saw six dead miners, scalped and mangled, thirty miles below Fort Berthold. They'd gone down in a keel, and how they managed to get that far is beyond my figgering. And once I enter the State of Missouri there's always a fine chance of being shot up by guerrillas at the high wooded bank near Sibley, or at any other likely place. They're after the gold we're always taking down to the States, of course."

This bit of information, carelessly given, impressed the mountain men. The tall one sententiously remarked:

"Young feller, ye seem to have a hell of a job. Reckon ye earn yer salt. Have to keep on steerin', no matter what happens."

"Of course. That's my job. But the pilot house is sheathed with boiler plate and has iron plates to cover half the windows."

With a snort of disgust the mountain man remarked:

"An' I was s'posin' ye give the reds a square shake, shot for shot. Why, for what ye git in wages I'd float downstream, way to St. Louis, on a poplar log."

"When there's a fire, no boiler plate will protect me. But I have to keep her against the bank till the last man's ashore," added Jacques.

"Huh? An' if my poplar log caught fire I could quit it, but he can't quit the boat. Pick up the beaver pelts. You win."

Then Long Thomas intruded. He startled Jacques by throwing back his head and bellowing—

"*Sunka micila yukan hinchan!*" Runty Bill followed, and roared in English—

"A wolf I consider myself, but the owls are hootin'!"

To Jacques he explained:

"Wolf song. Teton Sioux man used to sing it. Dead, or that danged old fool would never dare to sing it. Never see licker git him so quick. He's failin'. Ain't had more'n a measly quart since we drunk the first quart apiece this mornin'."

THE singer nodded toward the door and said:

"My song's a wolf medicine song. See what it's fetched in."

Jacques and Brant turned their heads and beheld what the mountain men had been quick to notice. A tall man, dressed in wolf skins, had entered the place. He carried a big leather bag slung over his shoulder. His gaze was wild, and he jerked his head from side to side in a peculiar manner. Thomas explained to Jacques:

"It's Tall Amos, the wolf hunter. Has a line of pizened meat miles back. Wolves gobble the bait an' die. He gits good money for the pelts."

"There's something alive in that bag," softly exclaimed Brant.

"Prob'ly a wolf cub."

Jacques eyed the peculiar specimen curiously. A bartender leaned forward and motioned for the man to leave.

The wolfer bared his yellow teeth, snarled like a wolf and snapped at the bartender's hand. Jacques laughed at the bartender's sudden fear. But Brant and the mountain men smiled none. The wolfer swung himself upon the bar and fumbled with the thong which secured the mouth of the bag.

"What's the matter with those two men?" cried Jacques, as Long Thomas and Runty Bill as one leaped to the open windows and dived through headfirst to light on their hands and knees as easily as cats. Runty Bill yelled the warning:

"Tall one's *heyoka!* Come out of thar! He's crazy!"

The patrons of the place, more or less tightly hemmed in by the tables, were concentrating their attention on the intruder, whose eyes rolled and glared as if he were bereft of his senses. As he fumbled with the fastening of the big bag he exclaimed in a high pitched voice:

"Old Amos never had no luck. Ye purty folks live warm 'n' dry. Ye don't have to run no wolf line an' skin the critters afore they can freeze. Ye can eat an' guzzle hot whisky. So I've fetched something some of ye never saw. What ye reckon it is?"

He paused and grinned insanely at the gaping diners. Then he lowered his voice, as if being confidential, and in his wailing voice announced—

"Old Amos fetched ye a wolf."

Some were afraid, but ashamed to confess it. Some were merely impatient. And some were angry. The latter began calling out for the proprietor to oust the nuisance. But there was that in the wolfer's bearing that caused the drink servers hastily to quit the bar. The wolfer chuckled softly. With an abrupt transition he was snarling and showing his yellow teeth. In a ferocious climax he yelled:

"Damn your hides! Ye live soft! Ye live warm! Old Amos lives hard an' sleeps cold. Ye know what's in this mess of rawhide? It's a wolf!" He paused for the effect to register.

"Kick it outdoors for the dawgs to chaw an' have a drink," advised a burly freighter.

"Kick it outdoors! Ha!" Then his voice deepened and he shouted, "Why, you poor damn coots, my wolf's mad! Gone mad! He bit me! Here! Some of you smarties kick him out doors!"

And with a flirt of his hands he upended the bag and dumped a gray wolf on the floor.

For a count of five the patrons of the place stared and made no move to escape. For that space of time the wolf dragged himself heavily, as if nailed to the floor, and his eyes were blazing green emeralds. The muzzle writhed and exposed the long fangs, a scratch from which would sentence a man to die from hydrophobia. With a shriek of mad merriment the wolfer kicked the beast with his moccasined foot and shouted:

"He bit me, damn him! I'm follerin' his trail! I'll take some comp'ny along with me!"

Jacques' eyes dilated. He was paralyzed with terror. The wolf slowly approached him. Brant, with business-like precision, drew a gun and fired. The

terrible beast whirled and snarled at the air, snapped at its own feet, and dropped dead on the rough floor. Jacques, with the awful terror upon him, plunged from what was a sure position and rushed for the door. The wolfer howled like the game he had poisoned, and with mouth open and teeth as deadly as those of the dead beast, crouched to pounce upon the horrified pilot. Brant leaped on to a table to avoid hitting his friend, and fired again. And Amos, the wolfer, was spared a terrible death by dying instantly. Then bounding after his half crazed friend, Brant caught him under the arms just as he was succumbing to the shock, and half carried, half dragged him to the river bank. Leaving him there, he ran back to the doorway of the eating house and called out:

"Some of you know me. I'm Lige Brant, fresh from the diggin's. To those who don't know me—you all bear witness I had to shoot that poor man to save my friend."

"It was God's mercy to him and all of us that you potted him," said the freighter in a weak voice. "I've seen men die of mad wolf bites. It ain't a pretty sight."

Hurrying back to where Jacques was sitting, his eyes still filled with terror, Brant sharply commanded:

"Kick out of that! There's no danger now. Get up on your feet."

"My God! If he'd had the run of the place!" faintly exclaimed Jacques.

"Then every man he bit or scratched, no matter how slight the wound, if it broke the skin, would have died as a mad dog. That poor man! Yet it was the greatest mercy one could show him."

"My legs are strings," weakly complained Jacques. "Help me back to the pilot house. I won't step ashore again. Mad wolves and mad men can scare me half to death any time. Ask anything you will for this bit of work you've done for me, Lige, and I'll grant it. You own all my money, my life. Both are yours for the asking."

"You're not yourself. You owe me nothing, old man. If ever I want a favor I'll ask it simply because I've always known I could ask it. This business has nothing to do with it."

"Ask anything under God's blue heavens and I'll gladly grant it if it's anything a human being can grant," vowed the lightning pilot.

ONCE the initial efforts of the Federal Government had eliminated all doubt as to where stood the States bordering the banks of the Ohio, the line of cleavage between the Federal and seceding States was clearly marked from the Atlantic to the Mississippi River. Beyond the latter, especially in southern Missouri and northern Arkansas, there was much confusion. This debatable terrain held a hybrid growth of sentiment, for and against the Union.

Before hostilities began, a great many "Castles" of the Knights of the Golden Circle were being erected in Texas, and this, and similar forms of secret organizations, spread rapidly. The avowed purpose of these various bodies was the destruction of the Republic's nationality. An empire based upon slavery was to be set up, with its center in Havana, and including Cuba and the richest provinces of Mexico. Its south to north diameter was to extend from the Isthmus of Darien to the southern border of Pennsylvania.

Missouri presented a double problem, consisting of the inevitable invasion from the South, and the hidden menace of the secret societies throughout the State. Whether these be Knights of the Golden Circle, Sons of Liberty, or American Knights, their purpose was identical.

At the opening of 1864 in Missouri no man was sure of the political complexion of his neighbor unless the two happened to be affiliated with the same secret society. Marauding bands of border ruffians rode and killed for booty. Fear constantly stalked the citizens of the river counties. Bands of irregulars from Kansas, claiming burning devotion to the cause of liberty, raided into Missouri and

added to the lawlessness. Loyal to neither North nor South, and unwilling to take a chance with death in fighting for or against the Union, scoundrels left burning buildings and a litter of dead in many of the outlying districts. Of all these bloody nightriders the name of Quantrell easily stood foremost.

In this disputed area, claimed by both Arkansas and Missouri, no taxes were paid, no sheriff's writs were recognized; nor could there be any compulsory participation in the death struggle.

Some of these conditions were new to Lige Brant, long absent from the country. His gold was safely housed, or he hoped it was, in a St. Louis bank. After parting from Dandy Jacques in St. Louis he had traveled southwest and, in a roundabout way, came to the upper waters of Strawberry Creek, an affluent of the Black. Now that he had arrived he found his burning eagerness changing to a strange hesitation. It was based on fear and was fed with doubt. He was recalling the gallant figure of Jacques, lounging about the office of the Palmer House, and on intimate terms with men high in the councils of the Northern leaders; and yet a friend of those who were for the South.

He had spent but one hectic night with his friend, following him from hotel to barroom to gambling hall and marveling at his apparent indifference in winning or losing. He saw his friend wager a month's salary on the turn of a card, and he heard him laugh when he lost. An elderly gambler, once a figure in respectable circles, dubbed the pilot Young Midas. The name followed him from waterfront to outlying mansions, with Jacques endeavoring to live up to it. Brant had endeavored to reason with his feverishly active friend, but the latter merely laughed and ordered more wine. In the stark gray of the morning he told Brant:

"This is my holiday. That damn river is lonely when you can't have an eye for anything except cross-currents, new bars, hidden snags, with Injuns ready to shower you with lead and arrows from every bluff. If Venus should walk along a sand point to go in swimming, I'd have to be watching in another direction to discover what new mischief the old river was developing. Now you heed my advice. I shall be here about ten days longer. What hay you have to make down on Strawberry Crick must be made in that time, Lige."

"Lawd, Jim! Who could stand a show against you? Your boots alone would catch almost any girl. But I'll be off Strawberry Crick before you show up."

"Polished boots never won a girl yet," Jacques had replied sleepily.

Now the journey was all but ended. A fourth of a mile away was the girl who had been in Brant's mind and heart throughout his long absence. He had traveled in an erratic course to escape bands of irregulars who were active between the Black and the Mississippi. A short distance west of the creek he had left his horse to graze in a grassy opening, and hungrily had forded the waist deep waters. Then indecision and timidity assailed him. He dropped on the bank and dabbled his feet in the water. Suddenly he was seeing the unreasonableness of his expectations. The pleasing structure he had built up during his exile in the rugged gold country tumbled to nothingness. He could see the trim and gallant figure of his friend. He could not believe that any maiden would hesitate a moment in choosing between himself and Dandy Jacques.

Despite his trepidation, the instinct of self-preservation kept half his mind on the alert. He knew that death struck unexpectedly in that disputed region. As indecision held him back he instinctively kept tabs on his surroundings. A squirrel came hurrying through the tops of the stunted post oaks. Mechanically his hand went to his belt. Then he glimpsed something moving in the growth. He watched keenly until he beheld a funnel shaped sunbonnet. His face burned red hot. He had helped to round up the desperate Plummer gang in Montana, but never in all his experiences had

his heart raced so madly. He concentrated his gaze on the shallow stream. Apparently he did not hear the soft steps behind him until a drawling voice inquired:

"Howdy, stranger. Lost your way?"

He came to his feet, both hands outstretched, and stared hungrily at the comely and slightly freckled face under the bonnet.

Her voice was scarcely audible as she exclaimed:

"Lige Brant! Back from the mines!"

"Mary, you walk as sly as a Cherokee scout . . . Yes, I'm back. Came down with Jim Jacques, La Barge's crack pilot. Lawd, but it's good to see you. Home folks, you know."

"I'm mortal glad to see you, Lige. You seemed awful young to go way up there to Montana. Where's Jim, just now?"

"Business keeps him in St. Louis for a bit. Mighty popular with the big bugs. A heap of them have traveled up and down the river with him. Banked on his nerve and skill for their very lives. Don't know anybody more important than a lightning pilot. Git twelve hundred dollars a month! He's the handsomest man I ever saw. He's coming down here pretty soon."

MARY seated herself on the bank and motioned for him to do likewise. She frowned slightly, and tilted her head as if listening. He asked—

"Anything the matter, Mary?"

"Two men stopping at our place. I came here to be shut of them."

Brant hurriedly drew on his boots, his dark eyes asking questions. She took account of his two revolvers; and in her slow, drawling, yet serious voice said:

"Don't you go to be too wild, Lige. Pap's always able to carry himself like a double hitch and a fighting dawg under the wagon. It ain't time for you to come tearing out of the wilderness. The strangers are Quantrell's men. Camping on the north side of the fence. And such a clutter of hand guns! Four to six in each belt."

"Come to trouble your pap?" Lige asked.

"Would I be here if the Weldons were in for a wring? They ain't wearing any war paint yet. Quantrell may come any time with the rest of his outfit. Whole band is working north to Clay County. Pap, being a Jeff Davis man, stands all right with them so far. But being for Abe Lincoln, myself, I dusted out before my tongue talked me into any trouble."

"Good land, Mary! I hope your pap won't have any truck with that trash. They talk about Quantrell way up above Fort Benton. He and his men ain't either for North or South. Just plumb hellfire—when the odds are on their side. How they treated you?"

"Very polite."

"Mary, I don't believe it. You look and act scared."

"I came here to get clear of them," she whispered. "I'm mighty glad to find you— Listen!" Her eyes widened with fear as she turned her head. Then she drew a deep breath of relief as she recognized the sound to be that of men singing "Feared for a second they'd jumped him," she murmured. "Just singing, or think they be. They're at the rum. I wish they'd go."

"Your pap ought to be safe even with that breed, being for the South," Lige encouraged.

"Oh, pap's sound on the goose to their way of thinking. But it happens I ain't."

"You talk mysteries," impatiently accused Brant. "If I'm your friend and can be trusted, why don't you tell things?"

"I'd trust you anywhere, any time. But I don't want to mix you up in my troubles. But if that scum should go prowling around, and should find out a certain secret, they'd never believe pap is a Jeff Davis man. Lige, I haven't asked how you fit in with all this terrible war. But no matter where you stand I know I can trust you."

"To the hilt of the knife! I'm North.

But if you was the rankest rebel that ever lived you could trust me with your every thought. What is it?"

Glancing warily about, and then talking in a low whisper, Mary told him:

"I have three runaway negroes near here. They managed to git this far from way down in lower Arkansas. If the bushwhackers happen upon 'em, they'll kill 'em. If they opine pap knows anything about it, they'll kill him. They'd believe our place is an underground station for getting blacks inside the Union lines."

Lige was vexed and worried.

"How could you dare do that, with your pap being South?"

"All our family has strong wills. Pap and me get along by agreeing not to try to change each other's notions. If ma had lived she'd been for the North. But I'm worried. If the bushwhackers go to mooning around much they may find the blacks. If that happens—" She left the sentence uncompleted.

"Stop fretting. Ain't I here? I've fought it out with Injuns and outlaws. If they find the blacks I'll say they're mine."

"They'd never believe it. They'd have to know you've been out the country for a long time. It would be your death sentence."

Brant scowled heavily and his voice was very serious as he said:

"Our tribe never was much for bragging. But I'm not wearing these guns just to balance myself."

"But you'd have no chance!" she insisted. "They never give a man a chance. That's why they're what they are. And each man is a dead shot. I want you to pull out—now."

"My going won't unscramble any trouble that's threatening your cabin," Brant replied. "Scarcely can expect me to pull out and leave you here to suffer if they happen upon the niggers and learn you was hiding them. And why are you playing old Beecher's game, anyway? The Government has freed the slaves. Let the Government finish the job."

"But the bulk of them are not free. And they're worse off than ever before. So I hoed in, in my small way. Please go now, Lige."

He smiled grimly and said:

"Of course. And leave you alone to face these devils. Where's the hideout?"

Mary hesitated, tilted her pretty head and listened, and then leaned close to him and whispered:

"In the old ha'nted fish camp on Tuggle Crick, straight west a quarter of a mile. Only the poor creatures don't know it's ha'nted."

"Why, I crossed it! Passed within a rod of the camp."

Brant was more concerned than he cared to admit. Even if the strip of country where they were sitting were free soil the plight of a colored man would be pitiable if found by any Southern band of irregulars. Especially was the hatred of Quantrell and his men most venomous, now that the hopes of the seceding States were on the wane. Brant thoroughly understood the knack of the prowling desperado type for ferreting out what was concealed. As he listened to the bandits singing an old song he recalled the merciless raiders' proclivity for drinking with a cabin dweller, and singing lustily, and then concluding by cutting their host's throat.

"Each of them has four or more revolvers and a rifle," whispered the girl.

"And neither of them can shoot only about so many guns at one time." Brant came to his feet and added, "I reckoned when I come here that I had something to say to you, Mary. Something important —to me. But it must wait till your company's gone. I'll pick up the blacks and work them north until I can strike free soil. That means wherever Federal troops have control. I ought to get them to the head of the Tuggle before dark. I'll be at your cabin tomorrow morning."

A shrill whistle pierced the quiet of the growth. The girl's eyes filled with fear. There followed the baying of dogs.

"What's ailing you?" quickly asked

Brant. "Only your pap's bear dawgs, letting out a few hoots."

"Can't you tell the voice of our dawgs?" she whispered. Then she added, "I was forgetting. We didn't have this pack when you went to the mountains. Hark! These are not our dawgs that you hear. Must be a parcel of man trackers that the guerrillas fetched along and left tied in the bush. Hear them! They seem to be following my trail!"

"The crick's only waist deep. Wade upstream, keeping under this bank. You can be home and in a dry gown before the two men get back. Off with your shoes."

"But you, Lige?" Mary anxiously asked as she pulled off her rough footgear.

He picked her up, gently lowered her into the placid stream and assured her:

"I'll stick along here till you round the first bend. Then I'll be off for the fish camp. They won't bother me along of any niggers even if they run into me."

"They'd kill you for being a stranger even if there wasn't a black man in the State."

"Bet four bits against a million dollars in reb paper money that they can't make me turn a hair. Had several run-ins with the Plummer gang along Alder Crick. Get along, so's I can be off."

THE girl breasted the sluggish current rapidly, keeping close to the bank. At the bend she looked back. Lige had crossed to the west bank and was signaling for her to go on. She was soon out of sight, but Brant did not elect to withdraw farther from the stream. He did step into the growth to conceal himself, but when he beheld dogs, instead of men, he emerged again. Three of the animals were huge and looked to be ferocious. These were the killers. The fourth was a hound, the pilot. He came to a halt where the girl had taken to the water and then began nosing up and down the bank. Then he jumped into the stream to try the other bank. The big dogs followed.

"The miserable brutes, to set those devils on a trail," thought Brant. "Or to leave them unleashed, to go where they will."

He was further infuriated by hearing rough voices profanely calling out encouragement to the dogs. Drawing a revolver, he fired three shots very rapidly, and each bullet ended the career of a big beast. A chorus of terrible oaths greeted this outburst of fire, and two men came pounding along the creek path. Retiring to cover Brant reloaded his weapon and waited to treat the guerrillas as he had the four-footed brutes. On second thought he changed his mind: for did he open fire, and did one escape, it would mean a night raid and death to the Weldons. Crouching low, Brant watched the two men as they emerged from the growth, a short distance above where the dogs had attempted to cross.

"But where be the pups? Why be they so mighty quiet? That pistol shootin' couldn't been agin them."

"It was close enough to be meant for us," said one. "Mebbe that handsome gal did the poppin'. Took my eye the minute I see her. Mighty likely lookin' piece of calico."

"T'other folks may be thinkin' the same way," gruffly reminded the other.

"Then forgit it, till the chief comes up. I'm cap'n of this outfit till then. You feel uppity?" The fellow glared savagely at his follower, who made no reply.

Brant realized the situation was vastly more serious than any attempt of conducting fugitives to the Union line could be. He called out:

"Walk along the bank. Your dogs are in the crick."

"Where be you? Who be you? Wherever you are, you're a liar."

The last was prompted by the hound crawling on his belly to his master. The other man advanced to the edge of the bank, glanced up and downstream, then cried:

"The dawgs be dead! I can see them in the ripples downstream!"

"Don't you folks like to have your man-eaters killed?" jeered Brant.

"Step out an' show yerself, ye low-down yaller houn'," roared the infuriated owner of the pack.

"Come over and get me," challenged Brant.

"We'll do that little trick."

His companion quickly vanished. They fired blindly into the bush. Brant remained behind a sheltering oak until they had emptied their guns. Then he retreated. It was not his plan to leave any dead men on the bank of the creek to excite the wrath of Quantrell, did he come. In falling back he did not attempt much stealth. He invited pursuit because he remembered the "likely lookin' piece of calico." For some minutes he listened without hearing anything from the bushwhackers. Then sounded the voice of a man. He was cursing the horses as he hurried them downstream. Once the two men were in the saddle they splashed across the creek to comb the country.

Brant bowed his head and ran swiftly for a quarter of a mile to the opening where he had left his horse. This was close to Tuggle Creek and the fish camp where he had passed a few hours back. He made direct for the camp, a dilapidated shanty which was almost entirely concealed by vines and bushes, and speedily found his advance disputed by a huge negro who was armed with an upraised cudgel.

Reining in, Brant hurriedly explained:

"I'm for the North. Abe Lincoln. Men are hunting you. I killed their dogs. Young missy sent me. Push on up the crick."

The hunted ones had heard the gunfire, and now they were hearing the burst of profanity on the stranger's back trail. The huge negro was convinced that the white man was friendly. He called softly. Two negroes timidly thrust their heads from cover, their eyes round with terror. Their leader spoke to them in a patois that Brant did not understand. The two leaped into the shallow stream and scrambled up the west bank. The giant followed, clinging to Brant's stirrup. When the growth along the west bank prevented this proximity he walked behind the horse. Brant motioned him to come alongside, and said:

"The men behind are on horses. They soon will be up with us. I'll lead them farther west if I can. Take your friends and hurry upstream, keeping to this crick. I've shot their big dogs. Only a hound left. They're after me. They don't know you're here."

The negro bowed his head and sped forward after his companions. Brant turned at right angles, taking pains to leave a broad trail. Spurring across an opening, he halted in the shelter of some scrub pine and watched to make sure he still was being pursued. He glimpsed the hound running up the creek path, and then saw the horsemen taking the same course. This was not as he had planned. He had given the Weldon maid a promise. Almost before they had finished exchanging greetings he had assured her he would save her black protégés, and it was maddening to think of the poor creatures being run down and massacred.

He galloped furiously back to the Tuggle, intent on making good his word to the girl. Reaching the creek trail, he wheeled his mount and raced north. A tangle of logs at a wide bend caused him to slow down, and while thus cautiously maneuvering he glimpsed the two horsemen in single file ahead. Brant raised his gun and swung it down to knock the rearmost man from the saddle when his gesture was halted by an unexpected dénouement.

Three pair of dusky arms shot from the thick cherry bushes to draw the two man-hunters from their saddles and into the growth. It was done so quickly that neither man could make any outcry. Brant lifted his horse into a gallop and raced along the path. He pulled up suddenly, dismounted and drove his horse ahead of him, with both knife and gun ready. The bushes just ahead of him violently parted and the head and shoulders of the black Hercules appeared. He was bleeding from a scalp wound, but his big white teeth were exposed in a wide grin.

"White man boss, yassir. Yo' look-um—daid." And he held up two fingers to indicate that the bushwhackers had been exterminated.

DAZED by the unexpected conclusion of the affair, Brant cautiously entered the growth. He had advanced by a few yards, when he came to a small area where the bushes had been trampled. One sweeping glance at the small arena was sufficient. With a shudder Brant turned back and beckoned the fugitives to follow him. He ordered the leader to secure the dead men's weapons, and to use the knives in digging shallow graves for the slain. He threw the guns into the creek and rode downstream a short distance while this gruesome work was being completed. Finally the tall black joined him, and with much bobbing of the head announced that the interment was finished. Brant went back and scattered dry leaves and twigs over the two mounds.

Then, gathering the blacks around him, Brant, indicating with his finger in the dust of the path, pointed out the route north they should travel. When he told them he would travel with them until dark their joy could not be restrained. Afraid to shout and sing, they expressed their emotion by dancing.

They walked on each side of and behind his horse as he rode up the creek path. At sunset he halted and directed them to press on during the night, but to remain in hiding during the daytime. After they had departed he picketed his horse, laid down on his blanket and slept until an hour before sunrise. The return journey was made in record time. He was well satisfied with what he had accomplished. Quantrell had lost two men, and the blacks were no longer a menace to the Weldons. There was nothing between him and a serious talk with the Weldon maid. He galloped up the east bank of the creek and reined in before the large log house. This was flanked on the south side by a vegetable garden. A few head of cattle grazed close by, mute testimony to Weldon's fear of raiders, who claimed both Federal and Confederate sanction for their stealings.

Mary Weldon fairly flew from the doorway; and Brant rejoiced over her eagerness to greet him. But she touched a finger to her lips and lifted her brows and, in a voice that carried, she announced:

"We always are glad to meet any one who's heart is for the right. Doubly so when he's an old friend."

"It's fine to be seeing you, Miss Weldon," Brant replied awkwardly. And he glanced furtively about, wondering at the change in her manner.

An almost imperceptible movement of her head warned him against what he would find inside. For a moment she allowed her gaze to stray to a splendid black horse, grazing a few rods east of the cabin. Brant viewed the animal and envied the owner.

But the girl now was making for the doorway and beckoning him to follow. He strolled a few feet behind her, his thumbs hooked in his belt. He came to a halt in the doorway and stood motionless until his eyes were relieved of the sun glare. He found himself confronting a slim, dark faced man whose deepset eyes were boring in their intensity. Brant advanced bruskly and shook hands with Weldon, who he believed was striving to conceal some strong emotion. Weldon, whose back was to the stranger, winked as he said:

"I'm always keen to see any one who's sound. I was telling my friend, Cap'n Black, that you are a friend of ours and a great friend of Dandy Jacques. Meet Cap'n Black. Cap'n, this is young Brant —Lige Brant. He's the young man I was speaking of. Missouri born and bred. Been up north digging gold for some time. Great friend of Dandy Jacques, smartest pilot on the Missouri."

Black shook hands quickly, eyed Brant sharply, and said:

"We know Jacques is all right. How do you do, sir? You're doing your part for the cause, I hope."

The atmosphere was heavy with danger.

Brant was quick to sense that much, but he could not understand why he should feel that way. Over the guest's shoulder he beheld Mary Weldon's eyes dilating with a terrible fear. Hedging for time, and wishing for more insight as to the character and timber of the man, Brant fenced.

"I'm just back from hunting gold in the Rocky Mountains. Up in Montana. Came down on one of Captain La Barge's steamboats. Jim Jacques is an old friend. I'm trying to find myself after a long absence."

"The work at hand should be plain," said Black. "A young man like you can go far, if he walks in the right direction. I am here, expecting to meet your friend, Jacques."

"I recently left him in St. Louis. He takes a week or two of city life so he may have something to remember when he's on the lonely reaches of the Upper Missouri."

"The young fool! The harvest is ripe, and he stays in town to play. See here—" now his tone was mandatory—"you came down with Jacques. You know what was the most important item in that boat's cargo?"

"Certainly. Two hundred thousand dollars worth of gold dust in one shipment. No knowing how much the miners brought down in their packs. Probably several hundred thousand. We were loaded to the guards, and nearly every man had made it rich."

With a deep intake of breath Captain Black slowly said—

"Hundreds of thousands in clean dust and nuggets!"

"Last season the *Luella* brought down a million and a quarter on one trip."

"God! We were asleep! How could you know that? You were in the mines?"

"Jacques told me. But it was commonly known at Fort Benton."

"It's past. Like something dead," mused Black. "Many holdups, up there?"

"Until the Plummer gang was run down and many were lynched, yes. Men had harder work getting their gold out of the country than they had in finding it."

"He was a fool!" muttered Black.

"Too sure of himself. He was sheriff of two counties, while by law he could be sheriff of only one. His road agents were appointed deputy sheriffs, to protect what they planned to steal."

"Ah, that's much better. Shows more common sense."

"They were all hanged," cheerfully added Brant. "Plummer offered several hundred thousand in dust if they'd let him go."

"And they refused?"

"Plummer's dead. Lynched. But there's been a rare scramble for his wealth since he was hanged."

"Damnation! Don't keep yapping that word. Jacques will surely come down here?"

With a side glance at the girl Brant replied:

"I'm positive of it. He may arrive at any moment."

Weldon glanced at Black, and asked Brant, "By any chance did you see two horsemen near here when you came along? Some of the men here quit in a hurry."

"No. I saw several travelers on the way down. I recall no two men in particular. I saw none near this place."

"Each of them would have a belt full of weapons," supplemented Black.

"I think every man I saw was armed, but none so heavily as that. Friends of yours, Cap'n?"

With a quick flash of his teeth, Black replied:

"That depends on how well they have done their duty . . . I own a plantation in southern Arkansas. They were chasing some runaway slaves of mine."

"I did not see them," repeated Brant. "But I heard gunfire in the west when nearing this place."

"The men the captain mentions were here three days. Had some dogs with them," Weldon explained.

"I saw no men with dogs. Nor dogs running free. Nor any horsemen. . ."

Black stepped to the doorway and

whistled shrilly. From the surrounding cover more than a score of men stepped into view. Each man was heavily armed, ridiculously so, Brant thought. The captain waved his hand and the men vanished. Wheeling about, he said—

"For the good of the cause I must ask you to remain here until Jacques arrives."

"When and where did you meet my friend?" Brant asked curiously.

"In St. Louis. I was off duty, playing a bit. Drank too much. He saved me from being robbed, and worse. If he vouches for you, it's all right. The same goes for Weldon."

"The Weldons are old friends of mine. I used to live here. Now I come to pay them a short visit. But who are you, a stranger to this neighborhood, to tell me how long I shall stay? Or give orders to the Weldons?"

Thrusting his face close to Brant's, the man replied—

"If you must know, I am Quantrell."

Although his face remained calm, Brant felt ice in his heart. Yet he managed to keep his voice even as he replied—

"I certainly shall remain here as long as it pleases you, sir."

NEXT morning the guerrilla leader and Brant ate breakfast with the Weldons. Quantrell's men bivouacked in the open beyond the stump fence, but were little in evidence so far as one could observe from the house. If not for the smoke of the small cooking fires, none in the vicinity of the clearing would have suspected their presence. Brant was intensely interested in the uninvited desperado, who was now wearing the uniform of a colonel which he promptly had procured after being commissioned a captain by General Price. This assumption of rank which had not been bestowed was an illuminating index to the man's predatory nature and overweening egotism.

News of his activities had traveled up the river to the gold camps, and Southern men who had known him well had revealed much about him. From this gossip Brant knew Quantrell was a cattle thief, blackmailer, slave driver, kidnapper, and many times a murderer. He was the embodiment of all evil, and would be loyal to no friend, to no cause, except as it served his own convenience. He possessed all the undesirable qualities of mankind and not one redeeming virtue. He killed for the love of killing. Yet, in that little clearing, he was an autocrat. What also added to Brant's smoldering rage was the monster's steady gaze directed at Mary Weldon. The icy sparkle of his eyes was reptilian.

After the meal was finished Brant was more closely cross-examined as to the gold output of Montana. He got the impression that Quantrell was looking ahead to migrating far north. The amount of gold brought down on the steamers was gone into for a second time. In this connection he sought minute information as to wooded banks along the lower part of the river. He also was deeply interested in the various overland routes.

"Jacques can tell you about the river traffic a million times better than I can. I went up overland and have made the trip down but once," said Brant.

Quantrell nodded, staring steadily at the speaker. Brant doubted if his words had been heard. He believed that Quantrell's objective senses were submerged beneath rapidly forming plans for taking a rich toll from the mines, or the river craft. Brant ventured upon a recital of Henry Plummer's activities, but Quantrell cut him short by tersely saying:

"That man was a fool. Had his lap full of gold, and got himself hanged." With that he came to his feet as if moved by steel springs and, with a parting, staring glance at the girl, swaggered outdoors.

Red of face, Mary whispered—

"The blacks?"

Brant briefly related what had happened, speaking under his breath. Instantly Mary was alert against a new danger. She glanced from the window and beheld Quantrell crossing through the line of stumps to join his men. Turn-

ing back, she surprised Brant by demanding—

"Give me your guns!"

"If it comes to that, I can handle them better than you can, Mary."

"No, no! Hand them over. Quick! They must be cleaned. He's gone to send men in search of the missing men. You mentioned hearing gunfire in the west. I'm afraid. No, you must not come with me. Sit in the doorway, where he can see you. Take the two guns behind the door for your belt. I must work fast."

Brant caught something of her fear. He handed over his weapons and secured Weldon's two guns and took his place in the doorway. The place had become a trap. One might enter, but none could depart without Quantrell's permission. The man's bloody whimsies almost induced Brant to believe he was insane. No one knew, not even the members of the band, what terrible deed the erratic, but always deadly, mind would next urge. For the first time in his life Brant sensed the deadening feeling of utter helplessness. He heard the guerrillas laughing and talking as they made their breakfast of Weldon's turkeys.

Suddenly he felt a pair of hands fumbling with his belt. He breathed in tremendous relief as he found them small and slim. Nor did he look over his shoulder as he felt the borrowed guns being removed and his own weapons being replaced. He heard the little sigh of relief as the exchange was finished. Without turning his head, and scarcely moving his lips, he murmured:

"The bravest girl in the whole United States—and the wisest."

He was sitting there, indolently resting his elbows on his knees, when a sudden commotion broke out in the guerrilla camp. At first he believed the ruffians were about to be attacked, and his heart beat high. Then one of the men hoarsely shouted:

"Ben's found somethin'! It's somethin' mighty 'portant!"

Quantrell ordered his followers to be silent. The clearing became a stage set for rare drama. All in the cabin now heard it, a repetition of a shrill, ululating cry. It was a discovery cry. Very soon the staccato hoofbeats of a galloping horse fell on the ear. Then a rider tore by the door of the cabin and raced straight for the camp. The bringer of news began to talk loud and excitedly, but was quickly checked by his commander; and the young man and woman in the cabin did not learn what it all was about.

The recital ended; there was a deep silence, until broken by Quantrell's trembling voice. Almost overcome by rage, his voice became falsetto in timbre when he commanded his men to keep in camp. Then he stalked back to the cabin, Weldon walking before him, and a big, ragged haired fellow at his heels. Weldon's face was ghastly with fear. He called out to his daughter and Brant—

"A terrible crime has been done within a short distance of this cabin!"

"Close that yawp!" snarled Quantrell. "I'll do the talking. I may have to do some killing here." His eyes were feral as he glared over Weldon's shoulder at Brant, still sitting in the doorway.

Coming to a halt, his hands resting on two of the four guns in his belt, he demanded of Brant—

"Have any notion what one of my scouts has found?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. How could I know?"

"Don't you question me, damn you! My scout found two of my men, *dead.* Half buried. Been killed within twenty-four hours."

"But I have killed no one. I had nothing to do with their death," protested Brant.

"But you said you heard gunfire in the west."

"I repeat it. I heard guns fired. But if I'd been up to any killing I wouldn't likely have mentioned it."

Quantrell reached forward his left hand, his right gripping a gun, and yanked Brant's weapons from the belt. Without turning his head he called out—

"Here, Hockensmith."

THE big man took the guns as they were passed over his leader's shoulder. Quantrell ordered—

"See if those guns have been fired recently."

Then did Brant appreciate the foresight of the girl. He awaited the man's verdict without betraying any concern. After a brief, yet thorough examination, Hockensmith gruffly reported—

"Mighty clean, Chief."

Without relaxing his watchfulness, Quantrell took the guns. He raised the hammers a notch, twirled the cylinders, and inserted a twisted piece of paper in the muzzles; but he was forced to confirm his subordinate's verdict.

Yet he was lusting to wreak vengeance on some mortal for the loss of his men. He was staring like a basilisk at Brant, undecided whether to hand back the guns, or use them on the owner, when the bearer of the news came running up the path, calling out:

"I forgot to say, Cap'n, that the boys wasn't shot. Just sorter pulled to pieces. They had their heads bashed in."

"Why didn't you report that in the first place?" demanded Quantrell. But his gaze wavered as he glanced around the clearing. "What mortal thing could manhandle such stout men to death?" he cried, without addressing any individual in particular.

Wheeling on the quaking Weldon, he fiercely demanded:

"What do you know about such devil's work? Ever hear of a man being killed in these parts as those men were killed?"

"No, sirree! Nor anywhere else. Never in all my born days!"

Quantrell surveyed him with contempt, and admitted—

"It's plain you never could do it."

He switched his gaze to Brant, who appeared to be deeply interested, but in no degree perturbed. Quantrell handed back the guns, and savagely said:

"I'd give a thousand dollars to know how those men died. I know you couldn't have done it, Brant. You'd used your guns . . . Hockensmith, did you fetch back the boys' weapons?"

"Not a gun or a knife to be fetched."

Quantrell was enraged because he felt nonplused. Anything he did not understand was a potential peril. He swept his gaze along the edge of the clearing, and announced:

"Blood calls for blood. This neck of the woods needs a lesson. Hockensmith, take any four men you choose and ride out there and look for a trail. If you find one, follow it."

"The boys said they looked that ground over foot by foot, Cap'n. There was bushes beat down, like several men had had a rare fuss. But they couldn't find no boot tracks. There wan't no trail, except of two hossmen ridin' north. Looked like devil-ghost work."

"Would a ghost carry off all their guns and knives?" Yet the bandit leader was impressed by the mystery, and his gaze became furtive as he continued examining his surroundings. Then he suddenly asked Brant, "But you heard guns west of here?"

Brant nodded, and repeated:

"I heard guns. But I have no idea who fired them, or for what reason. It's as big a mystery to me as it is to you."

"Hockensmith, pick some of the boys and go out there and cast about very carefully. It's too damnable queer to leave behind us. After Ben made the find, he couldn't have searched very far, or very thorough."

Hockensmith ran to the camp and soon was riding away with three men trailing behind him. Quantrell continued nursing his aversion to what was inexplicable. He was afraid of mysteries. Todd had ousted him from leadership once, and he feared Todd. He believed Anderson was hostile to him, and he was afraid of that stormy guerrilla. If not for Brant's testimony he might have credited the deaths to invisible powers. Had the dead men been killed by knife or gun he would have suspected treachery on the part of those in his band who were planning to oust him from command. But the gunfire, testified

to by Brant, and the seemingly impossible feat of an agency destroying two of his followers, all loyal to him, without using knife or bullet, left the worried leader in a rare mental fuddle. He told Brant:

"You're free to walk about. Don't stick here. You're safe with my men if you don't try to bolt."

"I don't want to bolt. I want to wait here until my friend, Dandy Jacques, comes. That's why I'm here—to meet him."

"Jacques is smart," said Quantrell. "But go over and neighbor with the boys."

Brant wandered to the outlaws' camp and was treated civilly. Some of the men, having learned he was fresh from a long stay in the gold country, were avid for information. Many in the band realized that bushwhacking could not continue. Those who had planned to escape retribution for their many crimes by flight to Texas or Old Mexico were recasting their plans and were wishing themselves in the gold camps. Brant quickly perceived their trend of thought, and his description of the rich diggings caused more than one man to smack his bearded lips and avow his desire to be where fighting and killing was more richly rewarded.

Dissension had been smoldering in the band for some time. Anderson and Todd already were planning to oust Quantrell from command. The file of the organization feared the net was about to be drawn tightly about all free riders and wished to leave the border before they were caught in the inexorable roundup of all their kind. Quantrell was unique among all ruthless men along the border. He hated the North, but was not deeply concerned over the welfare of the South. Above all else he hated Kansas. He hated the Confederate General Price. He despised Shelby. He had grown to hate the Confederacy, believing he had been denied official advancement at Richmond because of Price's opposition.

His men knew much of all these hates. They also knew there was rivalry between Todd and Anderson, both seeking to supplant Quantrell. Such politics were deadly. The men knew Todd would side with Quantrell in order to oust Anderson from the band, and then would be the actual leader, governing through Quantrell. It was all too involved and vexatious to simple minds concentrated on the simple problems of killing and looting.

Because of this general unrest and fear for the immediate future, Brant found ready listeners to his stories. He described so vividly the richness of Last Chance and Alder gulches that his hearers licked their lips. Had either Quantrell, Anderson, or Todd at that time suggested a migration to the northern mines the exodus would have included practically every man.

One crimson dyed murderer expressed it for all when he summed up their situation by saying—

"This damn stretch of border is gittin' too damn fussy."

NOR were the men slow to discuss the mysterious extermination of their two comrades. Some were superstitious, grossly so; and, like their leader, they feared what they could not comprehend. Had the bodies been found shot through and slashed with bowie knives, there would have been no mystery. Brant, finding he was listened to respectfully and accepted as an authority on gold mining, would have preferred the camp to the cabin, if not for the presence of the girl. When he had ceased talking and the men congregated in little groups to discuss the gold country, he sauntered along the stump fence to the point nearest the cabin.

His steps were quickened by what seemed to be a shrill protest. He ran through a narrow opening of the rude barrier and came upon Mary Weldon, who was flushed of face and was staring wrathfully at Quantrell. The latter spun about on his heel and savagely commanded:

"Get back to the camp! This cabin's headquarters. Your place isn't here."

"But I heard the young lady cry out in fear—as if she had been scared by a snake."

"Never mind what you reckoned. Get back where you belong!"

Brant remained, his thumbs hooked in his belt, his gaze fixed on the guerrilla's long, slim hands.

"Get back across that fence!" again ordered Quantrell, his eyes widening in the killer's fixed stare.

"I'm Southern born," quietly replied Brant. "I don't belong to your outfit. And if the young lady is alarmed I am not taking any orders from you. Your men can easily kill me, although they'd rather I would guide them north to Montana. But before any one can kill me I'll get you first. I know you're quick with a gun, but I'm quicker. I can beat you on the draw."

For a bit Brant believed it was to be a test between the guerrilla and himself. But Quantrell had problems sufficient to require the most subtle planning without being needlessly involved with an outsider. And he noted that the men in the camp were slowly drifting up to the fence. He harshly said:

"You make a boy's talk when you brag about gunplay. I'll overlook it this time. This young woman misunderstood me. And a Southern gentleman should always be ready to protect Southern women. You've made a mistake, but I believe you were honest in doing so. My protection is enough for any of this household. This young woman can be in no danger. Isn't that true, miss?"

"Oh, yes! Yes!" Mary was now afraid for Brant, whereas she had been afraid for herself.

"Having heard her say that, will you go back where you belong?" The snarl had returned to Quantrell's voice.

But Brant realized that he had advanced too far into the animosity of the killer to withdraw without catching a bullet in the back. His decision was quickly taken. Even if his presence spelled the ruthless killing of daughter and father, and himself, he knew he must not again leave the girl unprotected.

He quietly insisted—

"I am sticking here."

Quantrell inhaled deeply, crazy lights dancing in his eyes. Brant was alert, his hands nervous, eager to draw his guns and have it over with. He slowly closed his fingers more tightly about the two Navy Colts, the famous .44 being the favorite arm of the day.

When it seemed as if the impending tragedy must explode, there came an interruption: a shout from the creek path south of the cabin. Quantrell's nervous muscles relaxed, only to tighten instantly as he wondered what fortune, good or bad, was coming up behind him.

A horseman was approaching at a gallop, waving his hat and calling out greetings. Quantrell asked the girl—

"Miss Weldon, who comes?" He still faced Brant.

"A friend," she exclaimed, her eyes lighting. "James Jacques, our friend!"

Not until then did Brant dare shift his gaze from the bushwacker's guns. He lifted his head as the handsome, reckless rider came racing to the front of the cabin.

With one glance Dandy Jacques sensed the tensity of the two men's truculent bearing even before he was clear of the saddle. He stepped between the two and extended a hand to each, and genially greeted—

"I trust that I find no misunderstanding here."

"Not on my part, Dandy. Your friend was unnecessarily alarmed."

"If he really was alarmed, Captain, then I am alarmed. He's too cool a hand to be alarmed needlessly. He and I were boys together. I know him and vouch for him. But surely it's only a misunderstanding. Just that, and nothing more."

"I want him to stay in the camp with my men."

With a reckless laugh Jacques countered—

"And I want him to stay here, with me."

"Jacques," somberly began Quantrell, "you can do almost anything with me. But even you can go only so far." His eyes frowned as he beheld his curious followers pressing closer.

"I live so much in a pilot house, Capt'n, and have my way when I give orders—give orders even to the captain of the boat—that I've got used to having my way." Then he turned to his friend, and asked, "What's your objection to staying in the camp, Lige?"

"I heard a woman call out, as if frightened," said Brant.

JACQUES' dark face was filled with sudden passion. His voice was a bit unsteady, as he told Quantrell:

"I vouch for Brant. He's my friend. I saved your life when a gun was at your head in a St. Louis barroom. You pretended to appreciate my intrusion then. But you don't like my intrusion now. Now I'm interfering with your business. I want my friend here where I can talk with him."

"I told him to stay in the camp, and there he stays," said Quantrell.

"And I know him too well to expect him to change his mind, once it's made up. But maybe I can change it for him, now that I am here. Maybe I can't. But whether you insist on his living on the other side of that stump fence, or try to kill him in his tracks, that decision will cost you and your outfit just a cool million dollars, Quantrell. Seems to be a question how high you value the having of your own way."

The men of the band were now separated from the three men and the maid only by the stump fence. They exchanged startled glances. Quantrell knew that gold had spoken to his followers more loudly, more compellingly, than ever he could speak. He licked his dry lips, and conceded:

"It's something to be talked over—this million dollars. If you vouch for Brant, he can stay where he pleases. We'll go inside and talk about that million."

From across the fence George Todd spoke up, saying—

"We're all master keen to hear about that very same million, Cap'n." As he said this he swaggered through the opening, with the others quickly crowding behind him.

Quantrell swallowed his wrath and readily acquiesced:

"Very well. I intended to report fully to you if Jacques' talk amounted to anything. We'll all cross to t'other side of the stump line and hold a council. More room there."

"I'll be with you in just a few minutes, gentlemen," said Jacques. "I have a few messages for Brant from some of his old St. Louis friends. I must repeat them before I forget them."

With that he turned and led the way into the cabin, stepping aside at the door for the girl to precede him. Those outside saw him clap his hands on Brant's shoulders and shake him playfully and pretend to struggle with him. The men grinned at the foolishness of it as Brant stood motionless, while the lightning pilot in pantomime pretended to be exerting himself to his utmost.

Then the two men dropped on to a couch of bearskins and the girl walked to the window across the room to give them privacy. Jacques' laughing lips quickly warned:

"This is a hell trap for you and Mary. I'm crossing over the stumps to keep them interested with fairy stories while you two light out. Yankee cavalry is within two miles of here, perhaps much closer. Scouting for Quantrell. Let Mary vamoose out the back window and have half a mile start of you down the crick. While waiting for her to get that lead, show yourself at the window and door, and look back over your shoulder as if talking to her. Then you follow her."

"And you?"

"Oh, I stand ace high here. I'll come along. Before you pull out start a blaze in the fireplace. Empty a feather bed on it to make a smoke; empty anything. Then hustle out the back way and down

the creek. The smoke should call the cavalry here. Once you catch up with Mary go into snug hiding till the cavalry comes in and makes all safe for you two."

"But what of you, Dandy?" insisted Brant.

"Why, nothing. They'll believe my fairy story. I'll be all right. Now we mustn't talk any longer . . . Remember when our hats started sailing down the Missouri? Till we meet again, you old whelp."

The girl called out softly—

"Something is happening."

Jacques stepped to her side and raised her hand to his lips, and assured:

"Nothing can happen to hurt us. Come Federal cavalry, come devil, we're all hunkydory." As he spoke he backed through the doorway, extravagantly flourishing his soft white hat and laughing as if much amused.

From the window, after gazing at the hand he had kissed, the girl softly said—

"You've acted as if you were saying goodby."

"Till we meet again!" With another wide gesture of his hands, in which Brant read an urging to immediate flight, Jacques briskly joined the silent, ominous group.

The girl had warned that something was happening. Despite his jaunty bearing Jacques was wondering what new dilemma was forward. Once he was with the bandits he took his cue from their focused eyes and beheld the men whom Quantrell had sent out on a second reconnaissance, returning. Todd hurriedly told him about the mysterious death of the two men. This party of investigators came up at a round gallop. Quantrell was very expectant on beholding their illy repressed excitement. He barked—

"Well, what killed them?"

Hockensmith leaped to the ground and cried:

"Found nothin' new where our boys was kilt. But we found their dawgs, each one shot to death. By a revolver."

Quantrell's eyes glistened. He eagerly asked—

"You fetched back one of the bullets, of course?"

"Naw. Dawgs was kilt. Can't ye take my word for it? Why fetch back a bullet, or tote back a dead dawg?"

With a sigh of disgust, Quantrell said:

"That's why I am your leader. You have heads, but you don't think. The bullet would at least tell the caliber of the gun used." To his men he announced, "We can't feel safe for a minute until we know how our friends died."

"We can look into that later," spoke up George Todd. "Why bother about dead dawgs when a story about a million dollars is waiting to be told?"

Quantrell shifted his gaze to the cabin, and his eyes glittered as he beheld Brant standing in the doorway, his head turned as he talked over his shoulder. To Jacques he explained:

"Your friend Brant said he heard gunfire in the west while on his way here. I was at the cabin at the time. I heard none. What he heard must have been the shots that killed the dogs."

THE discovery of the slain dogs disturbed Quantrell more than he cared to have his followers realize. When he had the odds on his side, and the advantage of a surprise attack, he was a most effective killing machine. He was an excellent marksman, and the revolvers in his belt meant as many victims as their chambers held bullets.

The strength of his band varied from one to two score hard riders who were thoroughly familiar with the technique of border banditry. This maximum of strength increased and diminished, according to whether the band be riding to victory, or galloping from defeat. In the back of his mind ever was the worry of being deposed. He slept apart from his followers, and the slightest sound would cause him to awaken and be on his guard.

He was a haunted man, and the dread of treachery, as well as the insane hatred of all things pertaining to the North, had created in his mind a demoniac lust for

slaying. Now his suspicious mind was wondering if some of the Todd following had killed the dogs for some subtle reason, or whether some Northern sympathizer had exterminated the pack.

He could not rid his mind of the mystery: for a puzzle it was when the death of the two brigands, and the manner of their dying, was recalled. His first words, as the band squatted in a big circle, or reclined prostrate on the ground, harked back to what was troubling him. He said:

"Brant told me that he heard firing in the west." He turned to stare suspiciously at the lounging figure in the doorway. "I reckon I'll have him over here to see if he don't know how the dogs were killed."

"If he knew anything about the dead dogs he never would have let on that he had heard any firing," spoke up Jacques. "He don't know who killed the dogs any more than I do."

"Jacques, when business is brought up here, you keep that trap closed, or somebody will close it for you. Quantrell's eyes showed overmuch of the white as he shifted his gaze to stare steadily at La Barge's best pilot.

But the young man was not visibly impressed. He laughed good naturedly, and challenged:

"Here I am, surrounded by an ocean of Navy .44's. The guest of a certain Captain Black, whose life I saved in St. Louis. It needs but one pill from the doctor's medicine bag to snuff out my candle. The man who acts the doctor will always be remembered as firing the shot which cost him and his friends a cold million."

"No one here wants to kill a million dollars," harshly spoke up Todd. As he spoke he exchanged glances with his partner in plotting, yet not his friend, Anderson.

Quantrell, through half closed lids, noticed this exchange of glances. He had known of their hostility to him for some time. He also had realized they were rivals for the leadership of the band. Thus far he had succeeded in playing one against the other. He was not yet ready for an open break with them. The odds were not in his favor. He faced Jacques and ordered:

"Let's hear your plan. I hope for your sake it is a good one. Hockensmith, post a man south and west, so there can be no surprise attack."

Hockensmith hurriedly named two men. But these remained sprawling on the ground, with no relish for missing the pilot's plan for making what would be the record breaking coup of all border thieving. Hockensmith grinned widely and tossed up his hands in a gesture of helplessness. Todd was quick to grasp an opportunity. He ordered—

"Mattox, you take the southern post. Menk, you take the west."

The band understood. Todd had been quick to accomplish what Quantrell had failed in. It gave him the edge on Anderson, his rival. The men named were Todd's friends and followers. They knew their interests were safe so long as he sat in the council circle. His order had been obeyed, whereas Quantrell's, indirectly given, had been ignored. Two other men volunteered under the simple impetus of Todd's questioning gaze. This incident angered both Quantrell and Anderson.

Quantrell bottled up his seething rage, occasioned by this minor insubordination. Anderson lowered heavily at his competitor. Quantrell's eyes were lurid as he turned to Jacques, and curtly said—

"We're listening and waiting."

Jacques swept his gaze over the reckless, eager faces, hugged his knees, and began—

"I know where a million dollars in clean gold nuggets and dust is being held, awaiting shipment to Washington."

"Where?" fiercely demanded Todd.

For once Quantrell relished the young man's independence, who was now drawling:

"Suppose you let me go about it in my own way. When folks fire questions I get confused and am liable to say anything. There's no chance to bag it offhand."

And, apparently not noticing Todd's malignant gaze, he plucked short tufts of grass and idly tossed them for the soft breeze to sport with and, incidentally, inform himself that a heavy smoke from the cabin chimney would be blown to the west and not over the wolfish men, and thereby call attention to the smudge Brant was to make. He leisurely continued:

"Most of you know I am a Missouri river pilot. I've fetched many fortunes from the mines through all the different kind of river dangers and the many Injun attacks. I did my own work well for La Barge. He paid well for my services. I'd never scheme with any men to get that gold while it was on a La Barge boat. I'd fight to the death to protect it. But, after it's taken from the boat, it's a hoss of a different color. I've seen so much of gold that it's gotten to be common with me. I never think any more about it than I do about mining machinery, or any other freight."

"Yes, yes," impatiently prompted Quantrell. "Where is the gold?"

"I've got to tell this my own way, Cap'n, else I'll be forgetting things. It's all pictured in my mind. The sudden dash, the haul, and the escape with it."

"I'll attend to the last," curtly assured Quantrell. Anderson smiled grimly. Todd's brows went up in a query.

"Men will chase longer, fight harder, take more of a licking, for a million in gold than they will for a thousand," reminded Jacques. "The man hunt for that gold will be the greatest the West ever has seen. Big rewards will be offered. Every man having a hand in the game must be known to be true blue."

"I'll see to that," declared Quantrell.

"To get clear of the border will be the hardest part of the job," Jacques continued. "Just as careful planning is necessary for holding on to the loot as in getting it out of the place where it is housed. As I size it up, it can be done without the loss of a life, and no hard riding except at the start."

HE PAUSED, and idly tossed up more grass, and again noted that the breeze from the east was blowing a considerable volume of smoke from the cabin into the western woods. Clapping his hands sharply, and thereby focussing all the predatory eyes upon him, he leaned forward, and unconsciously added drama to the situation by lowering his voice as if fearful of being overheard. Fixing his gaze on Quantrell, he continued:

"The job must be done at night. There must be no confusion. No gunplay. No alarm will be given if we succeed. The actual capture of the gold can be made by four men. Two strong carts will be waiting in the alley beneath the window. The four men will lower the bags. Four men in the alley will place them in the carts and cover them with garden dressing. The drivers of the carts should be out of the town before the loss is known. They will travel south. The horsemen will gallop west. The entire plan must be understood by all before we stir a peg. I've figured the plan all out, in every detail, while coming down the river.

"One, or several, prairie schooners must be camped at a certain point. The carts will be taken there and left. The drivers, taking the horses, will ride for cover. The carts will be burned, the iron work thrown into the crick. The schooners should go into camp there several days before the raid, perhaps two weeks. The women should do much washing. Their men will walk to town and buy supplies and ask questions as to the safest roads into southern Kansas. It would be a fine touch if we could have some little children in that train. The younger the better.

"The women should be made up to look like clay eating, snuff dipping types. It's just an ornery outfit. Horses must be bony and meeching. Lean cows will be part of the outfit. Just lowdown white trash going to squat in a new place. No one ever would suspect such types as having ambition enough to steal more than a side of pork, or a jug of poor whisky. I'm paying quite a lot of atten-

tion to details, as the success of the whole plan is the poverty struck wagon train.

"Remember, after the surprise attack, with not a gun fired and not a man killed, the gold will be slowly taken to the camp and thrown out. The immigrants will be waiting to scoop it up and hide it in the wagonbeds. The horsemen will not pause for a moment. No more jogging along. They'll ride furiously south. After ten or a dozen miles, with the chase hot or cold, the band will split, no two men keeping together. Each horseman will know ahead just the place he is to go to and hide. After the excitement has died down a bit, and the chase has led to nowhere, the horsemen will make for the Injun Territory line, traveling at a moderate rate of speed, but no two can travel together. The chase will be centered on the horsemen. They will meet at a rendezvous, the name being given each man on the night of the raid. After reaching the rendezvous the hiding place of the gold will be revealed, and the ride to it will be in a body.

"Now to return to the wagon train: the poor whites will not break camp until the chase is far ahead of them. Then it will proceed, traveling only in the daytime, and making poor headway. Everything about the train will suggest ill luck: no hard money, shiftlessness, chronic movers. The people of the train will wear homespun, and the men will carry long Kentucky rifles, and every man will have fair to middling whiskers. There will be no six-shooters in the train. If a posse comes up and asks questions, they're just movers, and very timid. They've seen one band of horsemen riding off in the west. They'll beg the posse to keep along with them to protect them from Injuns and border ruffians. The posse never will quit the search for the lost million to defend any poor white trash. In this way the gold can be taken into Injun Territory."

Jacques paused for breath, and noted that the smoke from the cabin chimney was heavier and darker, and was crawling higher into the heavens. But the structure did not appear to be on fire.

Every pair of eyes was fixed on Jacques. George Todd was the first to speak. He said:

"That outfit you describe never would be taken for movers unless the women were real women. Mighty few of us could wear petticoats and fool anybody."

Jacques promptly replied:

"That's where Cap'n Quantrell comes in strong. From the dance halls of St. Louis he can get a dozen women to dress and act the part of immigrant women. They won't be let into the secret, and they can't blab what they don't know. They'll be given to think the packages of gold are so many packs of ammunition for the Confederacy. The cap'n will pick only women who are loyal to the South."

"I can get a hundred inside of twenty-four hours and go bail for the loyalty of every one," boasted Quantrell.

As the leader spoke he did not lift his brooding eyes from the ground. He believed the plan was not only workable, but he was forced to feel admiration, or envy, for the young mind that had evolved it. He was used to doing the planning, and it nettled him for a cub to come out and calmly propose a plan for stealing a million dollars. He was now firmly convinced the youth decidedly was not of the right timber for his organization. By the time Jacques had finished Quantrell had formed a plan of his own for carrying off the booty, once it was secured. He lifted his head and announced:

"It's a good workable scheme, with two *ifs* against it: *if* it is not so strongly kept as to require a fight, and *if* we can get it out of Missouri. We'll arrange for the wagons and women at once. There should be several wagons. The train should start from Indiana and be some time getting to where it will go into camp and wait for the stuff to be delivered. There must be some poor horses and scrawny cows. Certainly some very young children. Now, where is the stuff stored, or hidden?"

"Pacific. Edge of Jefferson County,"

promptly answered Jacques. "Makes it only a short dash to where it can be passed over to the Indiana wagon train, in camp on some small crick."

"That chimbly's burnin' out!" cried a man.

"To hell with it!" growled Anderson. "The whole nest should be burned out. Anything else to tell?" The last was addressed to Jacques.

"Nothing that you don't know. Shelby and his cavalry has crossed this State, if we be in Arkansas, and has been turned back near St. Charles by the Federal General Carr. By this time he should be reenforced by Marmaduke. Missouri surely will be invaded. That'll take attention off from us. If our wagon train should be caught between old Rosecrans' men and our soldiers, our luck will be out."

"Why didn't you tell about Shelby in the first place?" fiercely demanded Quantrell. "If he's been licked, then we may be bagged."

"I supposed you knew what was commonly known from St. Louis to Springfield—from St. Charles to Injun Territory."

"Judas! The old man's cabin *is* afire!" cried one of the lookouts.

Quantrell shifted his gaze long enough to observe red tongues of flame licking the roof boards where the chimney stack passed through. He said—

"Let it burn."

"Burn!" cried Jacques, leaping to his feet and registering alarm. "But not if Miss Weldon and my friend are in there. Something's wrong there!"

His play acting was so genuine that none, for the time being, suspected him of anticipating the destruction of the cabin. Quantrell, however, was quickly suspicious. He also came to his feet and cried—

"But why didn't your friend, or the girl, or the old man, sing out for us to help fight the fire?"

Before Jacques could improvise an answer, the man on watch to the west called out:

"Tall feller ain't showed hisself at the door for some time. Must be lovin' the gal."

"I believe that something is wrong in there!" cried Jacques, and he made for the roaring cabin.

"Hold back there!" yelled Quantrell. "If your friend's been up to any game, you pay for both."

Jacques ceased running and allowed Quantrell to range along beside him. Todd also held back, his eyes as hard as flints. The cabin now was hopelessly engulfed by the flames. The men ceased running, and several dropped on the ground to enjoy the spectacle. One old man, long versed in border fighting, with Indians as well as whites, reclined on his back and watched the black smoke seek to claw and besmirch the fleecy rafts of white clouds. Suddenly he scrambled to his feet and hoarsely yelled:

"Hosses comin'! Heaps of 'em! Licky-terlarrup!"

All the guerrillas ran to their mounts and opened fire, even as they retreated, at the head of a column of Union cavalry, now suddenly bursting through the growth which bordered the creek path. With yells which equalled the warcry of the irregulars, the cavalry came on, firing their carbines. Jacques felt a terrible blow on his shoulder, and spun halfway around. He was hit again, and fell to the ground. The shots came from the retreating guerrillas.

Laboriously drawing a long gun, he summoned all his will power, and fired three shots rapidly before collapsing. Two guerrillas bowed to one side, and then pitched headlong from their saddles.

The guerrillas were in frantic flight, breaking up into twos and threes, and scurrying to cover. Jacques believed himself to be mortally wounded, although he felt no pain. His dull eyes lighted as he beheld Brant, bareback, racing toward him. Without waiting for his mount to come to a halt Brant leaped to the ground and kneeled beside his friend.

"Badly hurt, Dandy?" he hoarsely cried.

"Reckon I nosed on to a bar I can't work off of. Game worked fine. Told my million dollar fairy story."

"It's killed you!" sobbed Brant as he tore open the flannel shirt and beheld the wound.

"It don't matter, Lige. I knew Mary had picked you. I talked a bit with her. But I kept my word."

"Dandy! Dandy! If it wasn't for her I'd wish to God it was me in your place!"

"Hard a-port! Shut up! You don't owe me anything. I'm just paying back for that mad wolf—just as I promised. Anything in heaven—or earth . . ."

Haroun Al Raschid— CHINESE MODEL

By JAMES W. BENNETT

THE Ming Emperor, Chang Tê, who reigned over China during the early years of the Sixteenth Century, has been stamped by Oriental historians as a thriftless and pleasure loving monarch. The historians, after their kind the world over, are lacking in a sense of humor. The records of his period show Chang Tê to be not only warm hearted, but a shrewd judge of men.

This sovereign of the Mings had the habit of wandering incognito through the lanes and *hutungs* of his capital, Peking, and of making excursions in disguise to the far corners of his realm. He studied his people at first hand, and decreed rewards and punishments—much in the manner of Haroun Al Raschid, that official of Bagdad, immortalized in the "Arabian Nights".

On one occasion, after a tour of several provinces, he called before him his grand secretaries. He advised them bluntly that he had found agricultural conditions in China to be in a bad way. He invited suggestions for improvement.

Nearly all of the grand secretaries were men sprung from the soil, and the advice they offered was shrewd and pertinent.

Only one of that august number failed to be of aid. He was a man born in the City of Peking, and sublimely ignorant of affairs agricultural. In his em-

barrassment he blurted out the first thought that bubbled to the top of his mind:

"Exalted Majesty, I have been so busy with appointments I have not had opportunity to look into this grave condition. Only today I have been occupied with the problem of appointing a deputy assistant district magistrate (the lowest office holding official rank), in Kiangsu Province."

The king smiled broadly as he commanded:

"Give no more heed to that problem. You will resign your grand secretaryship and, yourself, take over the post of this district magistracy. Kiangsu—as I learned on my recent tour—is one of our most backward regions agriculturally."

And disregarding the unhappy man's babbled protests, Chang Tê shook his sleeve to dismiss the conclave of ministers.

A year passed.

The Emperor Chang Tê, becoming curious to see how fared that luckless urbanite, his former grand secretary, donned his customary disguise and took a junk south to Kiangsu Province. Changing from the junk to a barge at that poverty stricken fishing village where Shanghai now stands, the Son of Heaven entered the district of the new deputy assistant magistrate.

As his barge moved along the network of streams and canals with which Kiangsu is criss-crossed, Chang Tê noted that nowhere in China had he found such prosperity as here. Following his custom of learning from the common people, the Son of Heaven questioned the boatman.

"Yes," said the man, "we are prosperous. We have a very fine magistrate now, the greatest we have ever known. At first he knew nothing of our problems. His mistakes were very laughable. But he sought our village elders and humbly he heeded their advice. Today we are praying ceaselessly that this good man be not taken from us for many years to come."

The sovereign shook his head a trifle sadly.

"I fear that your prayers will not be granted."

The next year there was a new Premier in Peking. The urbanite, the former grand secretary, had returned to his own.

ON ANOTHER occasion, traversing the city of Peking in his usual disguise, the emperor saw a crowd collected before the portable desk of an itinerant letter writer.

Peking in those days was filled with members of that fraternity, impoverished scholars who gained a precarious livelihood by writing or reading the missives of an illiterate people. Chang Tê joined the throng and discovered that this particular letter writer was producing Chinese ideographs of a beauty which was breathtaking. More than that, he was composing his letters with the swift diction that betrayed a keen, well stored mind.

"Why are you engaged in this catchpenny trade?" the sovereign demanded of him. "You should be competing in the civil service examinations for a governmental post. They are open to every man in the empire."

The letter writer did not recognize the Son of Heaven, so well disguised was Chang Tê. But he perceived that the questioner was a being of superior intelligence.

"Sir, I did compete," he answered. "I passed each examination until I came to take the test of the Hanlin, before the emperor himself. The Son of Heaven saw fit to disagree with the formation of certain of my phrases and he refused to grant me my doctor's degree. I was too poor to return home. And so—" he shrugged—"rather than starve—"

Chang Tê now recognized the letter writer as having been one of the hundreds of scholars he had examined that year, before awarding the empire's high-

est honor, membership in the "Forest of Pencils", the Hanlin. The man had had the temerity to argue with him over points of scholarship, and had been dismissed. Chang Tê had discovered that the scholar was in the right. He had ordered a search made for the man, but the candidate had disappeared.

The emperor now said sharply, in that tone of command he could well assume:

"You will come to this spot, tomorrow. A man will meet you and give you a letter to the acting governor of Shantung. You will take the letter and deliver it to the acting governor in person. You will be given funds to make the trip."

The scholar agreed to accept the commission. And the following day a letter, sealed in a yellow envelop, was handed to him. Accompanying it was a large sum of money.

The letter writer's first act was to pay a number of debts that he had contracted while waiting for his previous Hanlin examinations. He retained only enough to enable him to reach Chi-nan-fu, the capital of Shantung Province. Not enough remained, even, to permit himself decent raiment.

In Chi-nan-fu, the scholar hastened to the governor's *yamen*. At the gate he was refused entrance, the porter casting a supercilious eye at the messenger's patched and shabby robe. The scholar's instructions had been to deliver the missive in person, and for three days he faithfully presented himself at the official's door.

By now his money was running dangerously low. The proprietor of the inn where he was stopping truculently demanded a reckoning. He limited himself to a shallow bowl of cabbage soup a day.

At last he was forced to relinquish the hope of personally presenting the yellow envelop. Humbly he asked the gateman to deliver it. Impudently the porter thrust out a hand, not for the letter, but for the money to grease his palm.

The scholar slowly drew forth his few remaining coppers. If he gave them to the gateman, there would not be enough left now even to buy himself an inkstone brush and the flowered paper with which to ply his trade of letter writer in this provincial capital. Yet—had he not pledged himself to deliver the yellow envelop to the acting governor.

AN avid hand reached out and snatched the money from him. With a sigh, he turned and trudged back to his room at the inn, odorous of garlic and the smell of the kitchens nearby.

An hour passed.

Patiently the poor, discouraged scholar waited for the acting governor to reply. Perhaps to send him a little money, so that he could make the return journey to Peking with an answer, although this last he hardly expected . . .

A knock sounded at his door. The innkeeper burst in. He was sobbing, wringing his hands with fear. He dropped to his knees and performed the kowtow.

"Prior born! Favored of heaven! Your Excellency!" he babbled. "Forgive your stupid servant! This miserable one did not know!"

His patience strained by waiting and the threat of starvation, the scholar answered tartly:

"Do not make sport of me! You well know that I am a poor writer of letters, not an Excellency!"

But the innkeeper, bowing, backed away. The scholar saw in the courtyard an official red sedan chair and eight coolies. With gentle force, the publican pushed the bewildered letter writer into this conveyance. The bearers lifted the sedan to their shoulders. As they trotted away, the head coolie called loudly to the crowd which had collected just outside the inn:

"Make way! Make way, ye rabble, for his Excellency, the new governor of Shantung!"

By the author of "Four Years beneath the Crescent"

GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

GLOBETROTTING IT

I WAS sitting on the terrace of the Sheperd Hotel in Cairo watching a pretty morning slip by, and I had no more company than a forlorn highball, when a smartly dressed gentleman (cork-helmet, monocle, etc.) stopped short before me with a hearty—

"Jolly glad to see you again, old chap!"

It was Captain Burke, whom I had met a few months before in Morocco during the pig sticking season. Together, we had managed to save a friend from the tusks of an infuriated boar. Burke was a former British army officer and a typical soldier of fortune. As soon as he had settled down opposite me and finished his eye-opener, he caressed his monocle with a silk handkerchief and, looking sharply at me, said point blank—

"How about giving a fellow a hand?"

"Sure!"

"I have a dangerous piece of work ahead of me."

"Fine."

"Come along?"

"Why not?"

"Mighty generous of you. We'll talk it over when we get to India. Can you leave on the tenth?"

"Yes."

We shook hands and proceeded to drink another half-dozen whisky-and-sodas without mentioning the matter again. Why ask questions?

During my remaining two weeks in Egypt I devoted my time to leisurely rubber-necking, sailed the Nile up and down, investigating every hole from which the body of a Pharaoh or a holy cat was supposed to have been taken. In the evenings I studied less scientific subjects, for Cairo is a happy old town.

On the tenth Burke and I boarded our steamer, which was to make its first stop at Djiddah, the port of La-Mecca. Five or six hundred steerage passengers, mostly True Believers on their pilgrimage to the Holy City, crowded the ship to suffocation. I noticed that several of them were crouching in a circle about an elderly, white turbaned *mollah effendi* who shielded his eyes with colored spectacles. Out of the dark disks he seemed to be looking at me with some insistence.

That evening, while I was leaning over the railing looking at the lights of Port Said, the shadowy figure of the *mollah effendi* approached, and he greeted me ceremoniously, saying in German.—

"My name is Dr. Scheermann."

Then I understood, for I remembered having read quite a good deal about that famous German scientist who had fallen into the hands of the True Believers during the Mahdi revolt and had thought it best to become a Mohammedan in order to save his life. He did not seem to be *persona grata* with the British. They suspected him of having given the Mahdis some useful information on the manufacture of gunpowder. Dr. Scheermann was, therefore, a very interesting man to meet, but one who had to be handled with some care.

He was apparently well posted about my recent doings in Morocco and Tripoli. The latest news travels with surprising speed in the desert—every bazaar and caravanserai is a miniature news agency in itself. The fact that I had been brought up in Germany, and that I was an army officer by profession, and something of a scholar, induced Dr. Scheermann to place a trust in me that was rather painful for, according to what he told me, quite confidentially of course, there had been moments in his life when he had been compelled to act in a manner that did not quite agree with my military ethics.

Nevertheless he was a very interesting and likable person, full of wit and quite fearless, and he regaled me among other things with the inside story of Slatino Pasha, a story, by the way, which was very much at variance with what the pasha told in his book about his experiences as a prisoner of the Mahdis.

I met Dr. Scheermann again during the World War, in Jerusalem. He was traveling then to La-Mecca on his last "special mission" for, according to what I heard afterward, he died with his boots on while trying to be of assistance to his country as a confidential agent.

The next morning I spent in admiration of the sandy wastelands that stretched out endlessly toward the east of the Suez Canal, cut now and then, near the horizon, by the blue silhouettes of the low rocky hill ranges of the Sinai peninsula across which Moses conducted the chosen people to Palestine.

Little did I think, at that time that I, an alien and a Christian, would have the honor, seventeen years later, during the World War, of being the last Turkish *montaca-comandane*, or military governor, of that land—and the last standard bearer of his Majesty the Sultan and Khaliph of the Mohammedan World!

As soon as we left Suez behind we had to start drinking in earnest to defend ourselves from the heat. The Red Sea was red hot, and only innumerable highballs full of cracked ice could keep a man from going up in smoke.

Our cabins were as intolerable as furnaces, and the stewards had hit upon the idea of making a camp on deck. Beds were improvised on the starboard side for ladies, and on the port side for the gentlemen. And one night Burke and I were so happily unconscious of our surroundings when we went to bed about 3 A.M. that we curled up into two unoccupied couches on the starboard side. No sooner had we begun to snore—evidently a masculine characteristic—than the lady next to me started howling bloody murder. Burke and I were made the objects of a barrage of pillows, wigs of all standard colors, umbrellas, lipsticks, slippers, whatnot, until half a dozen stewards picked up sufficient courage to break through the enemy lines and stem the fury of the Amazons, giving Burke and myself an

opportunity to make a somewhat shaky bee line for the saloon bar, where a few additional highballs helped us to recover our nerve to the point where we could start out again in search of our own rightful beds.

At Djiddah, having the blues, I regretfully declined Dr. Scheermann's invitation to go with him to La-Mecca dressed as an Arab. Years later I realized the danger I had avoided then, for La-Mecca is the Holy of Holies, the Forbidden City, and for a heretic to be found there parading as a True Believer was a heinous offense punished instantly by the knife. Although I was too depressed then by the numerous highballs to risk such a fate, years later, during the World War, I did walk—on stockinged feet, of course—into the holy jaws of that sacred tradition. It happened thus:

I was coming down from Jerusalem on my way to Bir-es-Sabah (Beersheba) accompanied by my A.D.C. and a squadron of lancers, when I entered the city of Hebron before dark. It was raining and Seki Effendi—my A.D.C. —and I sat down in a café to enjoy our *mesa*, which means an endless series of tiny drinks of *raki*, a native grape liqueur, accompanied by assorted tidbits. Seki Effendi, his Mohammendan creed notwithstanding, was of the opinion that *raki* was not mentioned in the Koran among the drinks branded by Mohammed as unclean. So he reached out heartily for the thimblefuls until his physical and mental balances became slightly precarious. In this hazy state, it occurred to him to dare me to visit the Ulu-Djamisi, the Mohammedan cathedral of Hebron. It was a crazy thing to do, for discovery would have meant certain death to both of us, Seki being guilty of taking me there, and I being guilty of unbelief.

However, Seki had not been drinking *raki* by himself, so I accepted the invitation, and twisted through several narrow streets with him until we reached a side entrance of the mezquita through which we slipped in unobserved. With my tanned features and my military *kalpak* pulled down over my eyes only an expert could have spotted me as a *giaour*. Seki, who had commenced sobering by this time, walked ceremoniously in front of me, in his stocking feet, and I imitated his movements, bowing here and there, Moslem fashion, in different directions and at significant places, keeping an eye all the time on the entrance in order to to make a dash for it, revolver in hand, if anything should appear to be going wrong.

We walked all over the enormous temple in the twilight, threading among the motley crowd of devout Mohammedans who would have torn us to pieces if they had discovered our irreverent purpose there. Until Seki gave me the signal that enough was enough and we took French leave from Allah and his Prophet on the double quick, never stopping until we found ourselves once more in the midst of our lancers.

But to return to our passage to India—

AT DJIDDAH, where Dr. Scheermann left the ship, all the pilgrims landed. At Djiboutti, the malodorous French colony at the entrance of the Red Sea, their place was taken by a peculiar set of passengers, prominent among which were a number of kinky haired Nubian ladies, very scantily dressed, and very fond of applying anything from butter to carrion grease to their bodies to make them lustrous. They shone like polished ebony. That cosmetic custom I also noticed at Eritrea, an Italian colony near Djiboutti, and there also some of the Abyssinian old-timers, when inclined to eat steak, carve it out of the living cow, and plaster up the wound so that another steak may grow for future consumption.

After we left Aden it seemed to me that we were moving in a different world, in the mysterious realm of the Thousand and One Nights. Those deep blue waters that surrounded us were the same ancient waters traversed by Sinbad the Sailor in quest of the lands of Ophir. The reddish streamline faintly visible

toward the north, where heaven and earth seemed to melt into one, was the old rocky wasteland of El-Djemen—the Arabia Felix of the ancient Romans—the land of the giant birds and the djinns and the mysterious caves that hid glittering treasures from the world—the treasures that in my boyhood I thought I would find some day.

A lateen sail loomed now and then in the distance only to fade silently out of sight. Or a school of dolphins would swim rhythmically alongside the ship, seeming to hurdle the cobalt blue waves.

After two hot and tiresome weeks, we sighted Bombay, and a few hours later we were seated near the governor's palace, watching a happy family of vultures feasting on the corpse of a Parsee gentleman which some native undertakers had deposited on the inclined circular roof of the Tower of Silence. Burke took that cheerful opportunity to tell me the purpose of our trip:

There was a godforsaken village, on the Gulf of Oman, south of the straits of Ormuz. There was a native schooner anchored offshore. There was an emir who had rebelled against his powerful master in Kabul, and lost. There was a wife and some children who were waiting for him. There was Burke, who was a friend of the emir and who had promised to return him to his family. And there was I, who had never rescued an emir before and would like to try.

The emir was somewhere in Afghanistan; the schooner was painted in gaudy colors; its captain's name was Hadchi-Mustapha-Chelebi, who was accompanied by his son Ali-Merdan. Those were the bare facts of our adventure.

Burke and I, accompanied by Ali, who had once been a servant of the emir's family and said he knew the emir's hiding place, plodded up the dusty shores of the Amun, along the upper reaches of which, where the marshy lake of Seistan spreads across the Afghan border, we expected to come upon the emir. Near Husseinabad, Ali said, we would find him.

The trip was colorful, but also very dirty. At night we had to put up in filthy caravanserais frequented by vermin and patronized by a nondescript collection of travelers—princes and beggars, thieves, and wandering story tellers. The story tellers interested me most of all. The Oriental imagination feeds avidly on tales of the strange and has a tremendous appetite for the half lights of mystery. The centuries gather and roll by like clouds, and the Orient remains as always, strong, filthy, colorful, and threatening, a strange, monotonous counterpoint murmuring and thundering on the background of the milder and more corruscating Western melody.

The Amun bends into Persia, into the dismal plains of the south where the sand, of a reddish color, whirls up in columns that do gigantic dances across the whole range of your vision, and the Fata Morgana plays with the trembling haze and shapes it into dissolving landscapes of fantastic design.

After many weeks of traveling in a world of waste and visions, where the air, like a magnifying glass, brought the spires of minarets a hundred miles distant before your eyes, after sampling many caravanserais, hearing many minstrels tell their colorful tales, and preventing many thieves from looting our meager equipage, we reached the outskirts of the town of Husseinabad. A friend of Ali-Merdan's allowed us to hide our horses in his yard and furnished us with stinking costumes obtained by him from beggars in exchange for more decent clothing.

At the gate of the town a dozen ragged soldiers were cooking mutton chops over an open fire, indifferent to the corpse of a man who, with his entrails dangling out of his ripped belly, was hanging by the feet from a crossbeam.

Led by Ali, we traversed the narrow streets formed by the bare outer mud walls of the dwellings, as silent and forbidding as tombstones. We reached an empty space between blank walls, in the middle of which was an abandoned well. Burke tied a rope to the rusty

grillework, and we let ourselves down the cool musty shaft until we came to a landing. With the aid of innumerable matches, Ali at last located a removable rock which, after much effort, we succeeded in pushing slightly to one side. Into the dark passageway that opened before us we crawled on our hands and knees. It seemed an interminable journey, although I imagine the passageway was not more than fifty feet in length.

Suddenly my head ran into something soft and caressing. A match showed that it was a silken curtain. Ali then began to cry in the dark—

"It is I, Ali-Merdan, my master!"

When he threw aside the curtain, six men were standing before the entrance of the passageway with leveled guns. One of them recognized Ali, and the guns were lowered. A small ladder was propped against the wall for us to descend.

The passageway opened into a round enclosure, windowless of course, and made entirely of large gray slabs of granite. An old table and a few benches were the sole furnishings of the room, and there were guns and swords hanging from a rack on the wall. It was a sort of guardroom of what proved to be a veritable underground palace for, as we were ushered through a door and a corridor, the smell of incense became perceptible and a number of polite voices reached our ears.

Beyond another door we came into a brilliantly lighted room, carpeted with beautiful rugs and hung in silks of many colors. In one corner of it, quite at home on a mountain of pillows, sat an elderly gentleman dressed in the attire of his class. He greeted Ali familiarly and was at pains to show us all the shades of Oriental hospitality. Rugs were placed for us beside him, narghiles were lighted, and dressing gowns were provided so that we could take off our malodorous costumes.

He explained to us that he was quite comfortable in his underground castle, but that of course he would be glad to leave it for the open air and that he was thankful to us for the risk we had taken for him.

That night we managed to smuggle the emir out of Husseinabad, and after an uneventful return trip across the dusty wastelands of southern Persia, we boarded at Gueter Hadchi-Mustapha-Chelebi's gaudily painted schooner which, after another uneventful trip of eight or ten days, deposited us safely near Karachi.

Following our little excursion to Husseinabad I spent several months in a haphazard junket which took me from India to Sumatra, and through Ceylon to the East Coast of Africa, which I followed southward, to the Cape Colony, and up to the Congo.

I LEFT Lahore, India, where I was staying as the guest of a delightful philosophic gentleman I had met during our passage to Bombay, because the accidental killing of a holy cow by a Mohammedan citizen had precipitated a series of religious riots in which I feared I would find myself involved if my philosophic friend happened to request my aid. I had made up my mind to behave. I had by that time begun to realize that if I risked my life needlessly very often I wouldn't be present to risk it usefully later on. What I wanted now was to see some part of the world alone and peacefully, without knives, guns, or disguises, but simply with my eyes open.

In pursuit of that plan, I packed my luggage and left quietly for Calcutta, where the racing season was already under way. I only made stopovers at Agra, to take a look at the Taj-Mahal, and at Benares, where the rushing polychromatic mass of humanity that teems along its narrow streets is a sight never to be forgotten. The sheer vision of the crowds on horseback, on foot, mounted on miniature donkeys or on gigantic elephants—a moving, pulsating rainbow of life—packs more beauty and significance than the pen of a writer can describe. In Benares I saw my first and only white ele-

phant—which was pinkish. Real white elephants I have only seen in Wall Street, but they were two legged.

In Calcutta, the New York of India, the atmosphere was more familiar. And my appreciation of the city was not diminished by the fact that I doubled my money at the races. From the racetrack I went directly to the nearest steamship agency and purchased my passage for Java, D.E.I.

After one day at the Straits Settlements —rightly called the Gibraltar of the East— I headed for Batavia, where I had cabled to an old school friend. He took me later to Sumatra, where he owned a plantation, and there we spent some time hunting everything but tigers, and keeping a sharp eye for certain tribes that still enjoyed—so at least I was told—the kingly sport of head hunting.

At the Sunda Islands I found the Dutch colonists already grumbling at the social and political innovations which had slipped into Asia since the acquisition of the Philippines by the United States. The Dutch were incensed by the fact that the natives no longer saluted them by throwing themselves flat on their faces, but by a simple polite nod instead.

From Batavia I went to Natal by way of Colombo, Ceylon, where I was amused by the little whiskered Singhalese dressed in women's attire, with their hair tied up in a knot at the top of their heads, rings in their noses and rings on their toes.

At Lourenço Marques, on the East Coast of Africa, we were forced to remain a few days on account of engine trouble, and I had the opportunity of doing some good hunting with Senhor Oliveiros, a Portuguese gentleman who was organizing an expedition up the Zambesi River, past the Victoria Falls. He wanted to take me along, but fell ill at the last moment, and I continued my trip by boat to Natal, and from there, overland, to Johannesburg and Cape Town.

A few weeks later a rickety tramp steamer landed me at the mouth of the Congo River, in a place called Boma. I was on my way to Matadi, which is situated at the foot of the cataracts. I had secured by courtesy of the late King Leopold a letter of introduction to the Belgian authorities of the Congo State, where I intended to make myself at home for a time, and hunt some big game. But during a day that I spent hunting wild fowl near Kabinda—another miserable little settlement at the mouth of the Congo—I contracted a heavy spell of swamp fever, or pernicious malaria, which forced me to go to São Paolo de Loanda, the capital of Portuguese West Africa.

There I quickly recovered in spite of the efforts of a Portuguese physician who experimented on me with some new prescription of his about which he was always talking, never explaining its precise nature.

While wandering in the neighborhood of São Paolo and hunting big game in the central plateau, west of the Kwango River, I ran across several of the ancient trails leading from the interior to the coast, along which ever since the discovery of Angola countless caravans of black ivory—slaves—had passed on their way to the flesh markets of the world. I was shown some places where, according to the guides, hundreds of miserable wretches had been killed to keep up the price of black ivory. It seemed inconceivable to me that Christian peoples should have allowed those conditions to prevail, and even encouraged the traffickers in their gruesome efforts to keep the slave market rising.

Hyenas were abundant in Angola at that time. Their laughter kept me awake for hours many times while camping in the native villages of the interior. Peering out of my tent, I could see the iridescence of their shifting eyes in the darkness, like fireflies. At first I went after them with my shotgun. Soon, however, I became accustomed to their music and, in fact, missed it; for when it ceased it meant that a leopard or some other big cat was prowling in the vicinity.

I did not get a chance to kill a lion, but I bagged besides numerous smaller game an elephant bull, several fair sized leop-

ards, a wild buffalo and a young hippopotamus.

Satisfied with my modest achievements in Angola, I decided to take advantage of the kindness of the Portuguese authorities and visit also the province of Benguela, to the south, separated from German West Africa (in those days) by the Kunene River, where hunting was reported to be excellent.

The city of Mossamedes, capital of Benguela, was at that time composed of one or two thousand native huts with an occasional stone building that looked like a palace in comparison. The cleaning of the streets was performed at night by the hyenas and the jackals, and one morning I saw a stray leopard chase an antelope down the main street to the beach, and into the sea, where some fishermen, after amusing themselves awhile with the spectacle, put out in their boats and killed both animals with the butt ends of their oars. Some days later the roar of a lion in the distance put the town in a state of siege. Those conditions reigned in Benguela for centuries after its discovery by the Portuguese.

SHORTLY after my arrival at Mossamedes word reached the town that several native tribes had risen around the headwaters of the Chatinda River. A company of native troops was mobilized at once and put under the command of three Portuguese reserve officers, who asked me to accompany them as a sort of acting chief of staff.

The column left town followed by a string of women and children—the families of the enlisted men—carrying sleeping mats, cooking utensils and other household effects on their backs, or on despondent donkeys. By day the caravan was followed by swarms of vultures, and at night it was surrounded by bands of hyenas.

Treading along the old caravan route of Lubango, we crossed the Kunene near Dangala and headed for the district of Kasinga, where the uprising was supposed to have taken place. We had to keep constant watch on the native soldiers, who would sell their equipment or exchange their guns for new wives.

The tall dry veld grass and thorny vegetation continually hampered our advance, and the tsetse flies killed the few donkeys that had not yet been traded for women—a frequent bargain and one in which I believe our soldiers got the worst of it. The leopards multiplied and in consequence grew bolder. Their snarls were a nightly feature of our bivouac. The beasts seemed to be losing their usual respect for fire. One night alarm spread among the camp followers. A giant cat had dropped through the thatched roof of a native hut and carried off a child.

The next morning Lieutenant Machado and I followed its tracks, which led us several miles across country to a thicket of mimosa trees, where we found the remains of the child strewn over the ground. The cat would surely return that night to finish its meal, so we lay down to sleep until sunset. Then we crouched behind some bushes to wait for the beast.

The hours dragged on until midnight. Machado, getting nervous, decided to climb a tree. Our native scouts had already made themselves comfortable at a safe distance from the ground, and after awhile I began to feel lonesome. Every little sound—even the rustling of a leaf—made me start sharply. Suddenly I felt a chill creeping up my spine and instinctively grabbed the nearest branch and, with a desperate effort, swung myself up . . . With my legs still dangling in the air I saw two glowing lights less than three yards away from me. The shotgun flew to my shoulder. There was a sharp report, a snarl . . .

When Machado came down from his tree he found both of us on the ground. The leopard was dead. I had merely been stunned by the fall.

The killing of that cat was the whole result of the expedition. We found no rebellion on the upper waters of the river and returned to Mossamedes with no other trophy than a leopard's skin.

The GUNNER'S SEAT

By GORDON CARROLL

COCHRANE, G. F., lieutenant, X Tank Brigade, was a very tired man. He had picked up a nasty cough on the Arras road the night before—the twenty miles of pock marked road where the wind screamed through the tender's shield and clawed at bodies already weakened by the damp. He raised his blue eyes from the packing case that served as a table and vaguely contemplated the man before him. His memory stirred. Oh, yes, the new gunner. The lieutenant picked up a pencil.

"Number, name and rank, please."

"197457, Corporal Brown, G. T."

"Age?"

"Forty-five, sir."

The lieutenant sighed. It was a funny world, this; a world being drained by war. Men on the narrow edge of the age limit were being engulfed, accepting it complacently. A warning, heaven knew, but no one seemed to pay any attention . . .

"Next of kin?"

"None, sir."

The lieutenant folded the piece of paper and placed it in his leather case. The corporal prepared to turn. Cochrane's arm halted the movement.

"You've come at a tight time, Corporal. 'S no secret. We go up tomorrow. Brigade at stake—must show our worth."

"Yes, sir."

"Training sit well?"

"Yes, sir. Four months at Wool, two at Bermicourt."

"Ah! Ordinarily, y'know, you'd be slipped in slowly. But orders are orders. Tomorrow's the big test. We expect a lot from the men. Y'understand?"

"Yes, sir." Brown's cheeks were taut.

"Righto. Take your kit over to 14. You'll see the number. Place there for you."

"Thank you, sir."

Brown halted just beyond the doorway, where the cobbles encroached on the crumbling steps, and stared at the late afternoon sky, dank and gray as last year's dreams. He straightened his shoulders with a little swagger. Forty-five, he had told the lieutenant. Old, was it? Good Lord, no. He was forty-five and to spare, but he didn't feel it. Boys were playing the game; why shouldn't he?

The days of youth suddenly streamed past his rapt vision like a panel of rich, crimson cloth, rousing old memories he had thought were slumbering forever. He had lived, by gad, and there were no regrets. He could do the same again—and would—if chance offered. That was the decision he had made almost a year before. He was abiding by it.

Then a swift twinge in one knee pulled him up short on the cobbles. He straightened the leg, deliberately; toed the heavy boot. Was this a warning of age? He shrugged—and smiled at the gray sky. Nonsense! It was only a thing called time—an inanimate, stupid thing that slunk close to the ground behind and mocked him, when he was not looking. Well, starting now, this moment, he was through with it. He was beginning his youth all over. Just beginning.

He drew in his lean stomach; felt, from habit, his upper lip where, for years, there had been a mustache. Now it was shaven and cool to the touch. The black hair beneath the cap was only flecked with silver. His cheeks were smooth as tanned leather, and the dark eyes were clear. Even his shoulders were square as sinew could make them. Age? Rubbish!

Brown picked up his kit and walked toward Hut 14 with springy steps.

Across the road and beyond the piles of shell torn masonry the row of Mark V tanks rested heavily on the earth, like sleeping saurians. They were resting silently for the morrow, when fifteen of them would go forward with Ulstermen and Southern Irish to wrest Wytschaete from the Germans. Under the dome of the dying sky, the rest of the village scene was empty, save for piles of petrol tins and S. A. ammunition boxes, and the collapsible tin hutments.

On the crown of the low ridge to the west were stumped trees, broken off like snapped matches. The hillside was covered with conglomerate litter that had been left in the wake of one retreat and two advances, though only rusting helmets remained of the men who had made the maneuvers possible. The ground in the valley was corduroyed with the caterpillar spoor of the tanks.

Brown stared at the line of silent monsters, snouted close into the hillside. What queer tricks progress played! Five years ago, the staff had said— Oh, well, time had had its innings. And the war had come along, changing everything.

He opened the door of the hut and threw his kit to one damp corner. Five minutes later he was asleep.

Back in the cellar of the broken house the blond lieutenant studied the map spread on the packing case top—a map criss-crossed with blue and red lines. He fingered the slide rule, squinted again at his calculations:

"Hill 73. Compass bearings. N.W. by W. Zero at 4:12 A.M." Right! They dovetailed with orders.

He idly rapped his knuckles against his teeth. Funny, these bearings! Something new. Something headquarters had evolved to pick up direction. Well, any scheme was welcome, after the confusion at Beaumont-Hamel.

COCHRANE replaced the rule and map in a case, stretched his long legs, blew out the guttering lamp. In other houses along the shattered row, other long legged, bronzed lieutenants also slept. The attack was eleven hours away.

Before midnight Brown awoke and lay for a moment, eyes wide, on the damp cot. Out in the street the air began to rumble with the noise of motors warming. The saurians were awakening too. He groped for the sheepskin jerkin and stuck his arms through the holes; he gave the cap a touch, and pulled his mask on. Then he stepped out into the gloom, where the raw fumes of petrol raked his throat.

Men were debouching from every sort of shelter, stumbling, sleepy eyed, to the ground. Officers were moving along the road, collecting their crews with hoarse calls. Flashlights snapped on and off, on and off, like swarms of fireflies on a Summer's night. Each ray caught a face and held it momentarily, revealing a nose, a pair of eyes, a tight mouth. Then the thin lips moved, and identification was completed. Slowly the moving men began to cluster into knots, each groping toward the particular tank that was theirs for the night—and maybe forever.

A flashlight brushed Brown's face.

"That you, Brown?" Cochrane called.

"Yes, sir."

"Come along, then." Brown fell in with his lieutenant.

Close to the hillside the tanks grunted and growled as petrol was fed to their cold cylinders. The haze from the exhausts hung close to the ground, following the contour of the land like a gas cloud. Cochrane counted six machines from the end and halted. The left sponson door was swung open and the crew poured in, groping and cursing in the darkness. Then followed tins of petrol, of water, of oil; a ten-pound can of grease; two hundred rounds of six-pounder ammunition, six thousand rounds of S. A. for the Lewis guns. Cochrane's flash played over the tank's black interior.

It was a cold, damp iron box, from the inside. In the center forward the Daimler motor reared its vibrating sides. Beyond, to the right, was the driver's platform; to the left, a gunner's seat. There was a tangle of levers and pedals—the control handle, the clutch and brake, the change of speed control, the forward and reverse lever, an officer's locker, water tanks, revolver cases. Staring through a forward port was the blue-black snout of one of the Lewis guns.

In the right and left sponsons—great bulges that extended beyond the tank's outer sides—were the six-pounders. To the rear, jammed together in a welter of metallic surfaces, was the massive gear box, the epicyclic gears, the oil and petrol tanks, the fan and radiator. And the whole interior, which measured less than fifteen by five feet, reeked with the fumes of burned fuel, of hot oil, of paint, of gun grease—and of stale sweat.

Cochrane checked the crew off one by one. Three gunners, two spares, a driver. Brown grasped moist paws in the darkness. There was little time for introductions. Men merely nodded their heads, muttered some meaningless words, and the job was done. Cochrane shouted over the cough of the Daimler.

"Every man his mask?"

Assent came in grunts.

"Close up, then!"

The sponson door clanged shut, the locks were thrown. The vizors in the forward hood were pushed open, allowing a faint breath of air. The motor growled contentedly on idle throttle.

Far off to the left at one end of the snouting line the commander turned his machine slowly and headed down the road. Officers' whistles blew. Movement, waddling and heavy, spread

through the metal ranks. Hear ye, O infantry—the motors roared—the tanks are coming up!

Brown sat on the hard bench of the forward gunner's seat. At his right a dour fellow by the name of Davis grasped the multiple levers with hairy paws. Cochrane was stooped over in the center of the tank, supervising operations. The other men were indistinct in the gloom. With a deep chested grunt of approval the Daimler increased speed and the blunt nose of the tank swung in behind its leader, until all along the road the saurians puffed, the crescendo of their clanking chorus rolling out and over the land, like the approach of a storm.

Brown was glad it was dark, save for the dim battery lamp swinging from the iron roof. He desired to experience this ride to the Front in dark silence. Tonight he sought the conviction of his ideas, vague and shadowy. His mind suddenly wandered back to the first ride at training camp.

The crawl into the steel sides of a belching monster, the swift discovery that even a man of medium stature could not stand erect without crashing his head. The sudden roar of the starting engine, the deepened chant when the throttle opened, the jolt forward, and the first slide through the mud that followed. Then the sickening downward motion as the tank reached the practise "jump", the motion that threw every one off his feet and caused clutching hands to streak toward the nearest fixed object—usually a hot pipe through which water flowed from the cylinders to the radiator.

So, down and down and down, the throttle almost closed, the panting engine barely turning over, until the bottom was reached with a jolt. Then as the power was slowly turned full on, the metal monster raised herself to the incline, like a battered ship raising on a mountainous wave, and every one was hurled the other way, only to clutch again at things that were hot, and burned the flesh, until at last, with a rending, whining swing over the top, the tank was level again.

It had been a great experience—but hard and brutal, too. Brown had wondered for a moment if he could carry on, if the blood in his veins was thick enough. Better to quit now than fail later, he had warned himself. Then an overpowering sense of adventure had stirred him. He had come through this first test, he muttered, even though his hands smarted from the touch of hot metal. He had mapped this, his course; too late to turn back now . . .

Age? It was no barrier! Family? No, he had none. Name? The name could best be kept secret. He was supposed to be somewhere else—somewhere that was quiet and safe, far from the lines. Let his name rest there, please, while his body went forward.

Another vivid incident crept into his memory. More than a year ago it had happened. A dull, drab day at Wormwood Scrubs, where the War Office and the Admiralty joined hands to witness the trial of what some preferred to call a "land cruise". Kitchener was there, and Balfour, and others, and what they saw was a foreshadowing of the infernal machines to come. Brown's heart had leaped within him that day—but was soon destined to bear the burden of bitter disappointment. For the later report had come like a spray of cold water:

"Caterpillars could only go at the rate of one and one half miles an hour on roads, were very slow in turning, and nearly every bridge in the country would require strengthening to carry them . . . It is necessary to descend from the realm of imagination to solid fact."

He had looked up from the crisp, white paper, and as he did so, two tears rolled down his cheeks and fell to the desk top. They lay there, tiny splotches on the cool green of the blotter. He sat brooding for an hour, in the silent, paneled library. Then he had shrugged, in anger and pity mixed, and torn the paper into small shreds. They fluttered from his hand to the heavy carpet.

Late that night he had shaved his mustache, plucked a score of gray hairs

from his temples—and packed a large, well worn kitbag. The years fell from his shoulders. And six weeks later he had discovered solace in the war, a solace that soothed his anger while his body found a forgotten youth.

NOW, in the gunner's seat of this snorting, clanking monster, his eyes were no longer wet. He felt the arm muscles swell beneath his fingertips; felt the steady beat of his heart. Going up with the tanks he was. The tanks! By the Lord Harry, it was amazin'!

Beyond the metal flaps, the night was dark, with heavy thunder clouds veiling the moon. Dust hung over the roads and seeped through the cracks in the tank's armor, mixing with the petrol fumes. Cochrane and the gunners began to cough. The caterpillar treads on either side bit into the crust of the earth with the sound of snapping giant's teeth. Ever so slowly, like a metal snake in creaking sections, the line crawled forward, while the men in its hollow guts cursed beneath the armor and sweated.

Messines was to be a prelude to a far flung attack in the Ypres Salient. The village of Messines itself and Wytschaete Ridge were to be taken, securing the British right for the Ypres attack, and routing the Hun from the high ground. The tanks were acting with the artillery, the infantry and the sappers, particularly the sappers.

For under the land ahead, stretching out like the gnarled fingers of a giant, were five miles of tunneled galleries. And at their ends, sensitive as a mercurial cap, were a million pounds of ammonal. The explosion of the land mines was to be the signal for hell on earth. And the tanks knew it. Slowly, slowly, they crawled to keep their rendezvous.

Brown peered through the flap. They were passing the ruins of a village just shelled by the Boche. Two sides of the square were blasted away, and the débris still smoked and glowed. Shadowy working parties shoveled rubbish into shell craters to make them passable for the gray, riveted saurians.

Smashed limbers, strings of dead horses, burned and buckled motor lorries, transport wagons, lay huddled in the red glare from innumerable small fires. Occasional shells dropped into the litter, stirring it like a spoon. Men in the working parties still hung their mouths open—habit formed during the bombardment when lips were parted to equalize pressure on the eardrums. Brown clenched his fists. Sir, this was war!

The tanks moved through the village and left it behind. Cochrane slipped a greasy handkerchief over his mouth; the driver tugged and fought with the metal bars that ruled the pulse of the feverish Daimler. Brown now coughed, too, and spat to the gratings beneath his feet. It was growing hotter, all the time, and the fumes were awful. The only ventilation was through the narrow flaps, barely large enough for the nose of a Lewis gun. And the night had just begun.

The tank in front slowed to a halt, and a blinking flashlight showed off to one side. An officer leaped from the sponson door and stared ahead into the murk. He cursed, and came back to Cochrane's panting charge.

"Ditched, up forward!" he cried through a slit in the wall. Suddenly Brown noticed that the night was pulsating with the murmur of motors idling on the throttle. The neck of the snake was bogged; the body and tail held tight by the narrowness of the road. Hot, sticky minutes passed. Hooded lights flickered off to the right side, three score yards ahead. Cochrane raised one hand.

"Open up!" he cried.

The right door swung wide, creakily, and the lieutenant jumped to the roadway. Some one opened the lid of the conning tower overhead and a breath of cool air swept down. Brown stretched his cramped legs and stuck his head from the side door. The hooded lanterns lighted the scene in kaleidoscopic glimpses.

A tank was wallowing in a bog of mud at the foot of the embankment. Grunt-

ing and thrashing like a drowning man, it was turning this way and that in a terrible struggle to churn its way out of the morass. About her tractors were great weals and hummocks of mud, and ragged holes brimming with black slime. The crew, sweating and filthy, were staggering about, trying to help their gasping machine by thrusting planks and brushwood under the trucks.

Now and again the engine would roar into life and heave the bulk of the tank up in unsteady, floundering fashion, little by little, in wrenching jerks, as the motor was raced and the clutch released. Then the tracks would suddenly stop biting at the slime and would rattle around like huge bones; the ground would give way afresh on one side, and the tank would slowly heave over and settle again with a ghastly list, the black water awash with the lower sponson. Only the lights blinked on and off, half concealed for fear of bombardment.

Brown withdrew his head. Precious time was passing.

Cochrane suddenly came running down the road and leaped through the door.

"Close up!" he shouted.

The door clanged shut. The lid of the conning tower dropped. Heat—enveloping, sweltering heat—filled the metal box once more. And from far up the road a whistle shrilled. It was taken up along the line.

The officer in front jumped into his machine, whistle between his lips. With a lumbering surge his tank moved forward. The rest of the snake resumed the rolling, ambling gait. But down in the mud, at the foot of the embankment, the bogged saurian and its crew were left to sweating labor. The other tanks must go forward!

Somewhere north of Wytschaete a German dump had caught fire and the red fingers of flame licked up the side of the Summer sky. Brown saw the east faintly graying, and saw the shadowy shapes of British planes and balloons, dark against the dawn. The air suddenly became heavy with the fading fumes of lachrymatory shells, but the gloom was so thick that gas masks were impossible. With streaming eyes the driver plugged at his levers and handles. Brown wiped the tears from his own cheeks. Behind him Cochrane and the crew pawed with their handkerchiefs. The Daimler roared; the metal walls creaked and groaned; the smell of burned petrol increased.

Like great, gray rollers on the seacoast, the tanks plowed ahead over an area of back trenches, stinking rubbish, barbed wire, and old shellholes.

It was queer and ghostly, like the march of automatons, and Brown found himself squeezing his flesh. By the Lord, it was amazin'. His mind fled back again to that drab day at Wormwood Scrubs, when the mighty had stared with unbelieving eyes. Stared thunderstruck, and then gone home, to write a report that savored of witchcraft and the Middle Ages. Brown rapped his knuckles into the palm of one hand until pain came. Those solid men of fact should be here now!

HULKING, roaring, bulking, spitting ironclads, snouting over the carpet of war like steam rollers on parade. Gray to the outside, black on the inside, filled with enough ammunition to rip a battalion to pieces. Brown crouched in his corner of the tank and stared through a slit in the armor. Good Lord, those solid men should see it.

It was war, cleared of all its cluttering fallacies, shorn of tactics, of strategy, of costly heroics. War—clean and metallic—like the edge of a razor blade. War, fought with petrol instead of blood. And those men had laughed, written reports, when every hour spelled a thousand lives. They had—

But the tank suddenly halted and Brown knew it had reached the lying up rendezvous . . .

"Compass bearings, N. W. by W. Zero at 4:12 A.M. . ."

Cochrane's voice was strident.

"Ammunition and masks?"

Six hoarse voices answered confidently.

"Twenty minutes more," Cochrane added with dry lips; and he moved forward to confer with Davis, the driver.

Arras and Bullecourt had taught brigade commanders that the tanks must have definite objectives; otherwise they were lost in wallows of their own making. Cochrane's objective was a crumpled hill below the hogback of Wytschaete Ridge. And the village, too, if he could make it.

Davis nodded his head vigorously at the lieutenant and clutched the speed control in hairy paws.

"Yes, sir. I understand."

Cochrane faded away into the rear section where the water tins were stacked. Brown fingered the trigger of the Lewis gun.

At four o'clock the Germans eyed the increased air activity with suspicion. Planes were snooping in the sky like hawks. Boche rockets went up, calling for barrage fire. And soon the growling guns responded with emphasis, answering the spasmodic British artillery. A curtain of lachrymatory gas, H. E. and shrapnel fell across the countryside, like rain lashed before a storm. The tanks drew their share, and had to take it, immovable on the mud.

At the left end of the iron line an H. E. shell scored a direct hit. It pierced the tank's armor with a crackling noise; silence came down—a queer, impressive silence. Two seconds passed and then the sides of the tank bulged outward, splashed into a welter of smoke and flame, soared skyward in pieces that screamed as they tore through the air. The burst petrol tins caught fire, adding to the glare; machine gun ammunition began to explode in rippling scales. But the other tanks stood stolid. The silent voice of warning sped up and down the line, repeating what the crews already knew—a direct hit meant disaster.

At ten minutes past four the British artillery stopped, and in the comparative silence the machine gun chorus increased to crescendo. There was a pause, broken only by the yapping Vickers. A low rumbling was heard. Then the earth rocked and quivered until, with a prolonged and rending crash, a screen of orange fire rose where the German front lines had been. Masses of earth were hurled skyward and, as they rose, gleamed purple and gold in the first rays of the sun. They writhed and shifted, fantastically swaying, and were shot through with tongues of fire. Balls of burning débris were hurled in every direction, and the air trembled and vibrated with the shock.

The mines had done their work. And before the tortured soil could fall again, down came the stunning bellow and crash of the British barrage; and tanks and infantry were over the parapet.

Brown saw the wild flame lap along the horizon, and sat spellbound, frightened for the first time by the brutal immensity of modern war. Good Lord, he muttered, could the earth itself stand such a shock, without crumbling into nothingness? Could any living thing be left in the wake of that fan of fire? Had the sappers, even, imagined that their tunnels could create such frightful havoc? He doubted. Man's brain could not conceive such things in advance; it was only his own eyes that were capable of grasping the story and believing it. It was immense, gigantic.

He didn't feel the tank get under way, didn't notice the rumbling, rending motion until he saw Davis manipulating the levers. Then his brain cleared with a rush. Gad, they were off. And behind, strung across the pocked earth like corks on a sweep net, were the infantry—ruddy men of the Ulster regiments, and the South Irish.

The tank lifted itself over the sandbags and pushed through the British wire, smashing the taut strands as a spider breaks its gossamer web. Two hundred feet to either side, and so spaced down the line at similar intervals, were other snorting monsters, their tractors clashing with the churned soil and taking hold. There was no glimpse of the men

inside; only the gray, riveted walls and the cloud of smoke astern, betraying the hot exhaust.

Cochrane suddenly screamed—

"Give it to 'em!"

Brown pressed the trigger. The Lewis flickered into life and, behind it, one of the six-pounders boomed.

Through the firing slit was a glimpse ahead of huddled humanity in gray-green, crawling along the top of a shattered trench. With a start, Brown saw British uniforms on either side of the tank, and realized the infantry had passed them.

The six-pounder suddenly coughed and died, and the tank pushed forward. It was too close for enfilading; the Ulstermen were in the way. With a sickening crunch the tank slipped across the sandbags and straddled the German trench. Davis pushed the clutch and the engine raced, then idled. The stench of gunpowder filtered through the openings in the armor. Cochrane stumbled forward over the greasy plates and clapped Davis on the shoulder.

"Good 'un, good 'un!" he cried.

Brown stared stupidly at the lieutenant. What was all the excitement about? What had happened? The guns had hardly warmed. He glanced through the slit.

Down in the hollow of the trench, one hundred Boches in coal scuttle helmets stood with white faces, hands high over their heads. Men in khaki weaved through the surrendering men, stub nosed rifles held close to their sides. They were rounding up the prisoners, telling off a guard to each twenty. The first of the bewildered Germans climbed the firestep, hands held high, and stumbled toward the British lines. A dozen of his companions followed, prodded by a bayonet.

Brown's heart gave a tremendous leap. Gad, the tanks had done it!

Here was the answer to that cold, crisp report that he had torn between his shaking fingers. This would show 'em a thing or two, if their minds still wavered. This was the dream he'd had at Wormwood Scrubs, when his eyes had glistened as they watched the land turtle lumber over man made obstacles.

But Cochrane was moving back to the rear again, where the periscopic eyepiece was, and a burst of machine gun fire rattled across the tank's side like the first hail of Winter.

THE motor roared once more, the snout turned and the tank waddled forward, along the line of advance. Over in a patch of woods, three hundred yards away, a hidden Maxim spat at the invader. Imperturbable as a landslide, the tank moved toward the Maxim, while the bullets splashed and chipped the gray paint, whined away in ricochet.

"Now, Brown!" Cochrane shouted.

The Lewis trembled, jerked, coughed streams of lead at the Maxim, concealed behind a felled tree. The bullets splintered the log and sent sheaves of wood flying into the air. Then the bullets bit deeper and, with a sour gasp of despair, the Maxim stopped. The tank moved ahead and crushed the gun emplacement, flattening out the bodies which, a moment before, had been so full of determination. There was a queer slip under the tank's belly, and the job was done.

Brown exulted, in spite of himself. It was what the tanks promised. It was a new type of war, economic of human life. It was what he had dreamed.

No one moved inside the monster. Cochrane knelt by the engine; two men huddled in the sponsons, behind the six-pounders. Two other gunners squatted close by, passing up ammunition. In the growing light outside, the exhaust spired upward like the smoke from a brush fire. And the infantry, spread like a fan, plodded doggedly behind, firing at dim objects which Brown could not see in the limited vision of his eyes.

The tank lifted its nose on to the low embankment of a narrow gage track—artillery supply rails. Davis turned the machine down the metals and the tank

cruised along, firing now from both sides at anything that moved. The infantry was dropping behind. The ground gradually sloped away and the height of the embankment grew. Two score Germans debouched from a redoubt and made for a concrete arch beneath the track. Ten of them withered beneath gunfire, but the remainder made their goal.

Davis cut the throttle and the tank halted, straddling the rails one hundred feet from the arch. Brown held the Lewis gun on the edge of the bridge, waiting for the sight of a gray uniform, but nothing moved.

One of the gunners slipped from the left sponson and stood beside Cochrane, while the lieutenant held to the man's shoulder and fumbled with the catches of the conning tower. The metal flap opened, a gust of smoky air swirled down. The lieutenant climbed upward, pulling a greasy handkerchief from his pocket. Half protruding from the hatch, he waved to the infantry behind, and a score of Ulstermen trotted forward on the double.

Cochrane pointed to the arch. Then he clambered down, just as a shrapnel burst bloomed overhead, and the roof resounded to the pattering. One of the lead balls splattered to the grating inside. Then the flap shut with a clank, the gunner crawled back into the sponson. Cochrane wiped his forehead.

Brown stared through the firing slit—and waited.

Within two minutes the last of the Germans marched out from beneath the arch, hands pointing to the sky. Scuttling like rabbits, they made away from the barrage of their own guns, while the Ulstermen, the task completed, spread out by the embankment and plodded forward. Shells whined and droned overhead, and would now and again pitch along the slope, throwing up a rusty cascade of earth that daubed the tank's sides. Davis reached for the throttle and the monster moved again, crawling along the tracks. It passed over the arch and headed for Wytschaete.

Brown licked his dry lips. He was getting what he had asked for—a taste of war—though he was, too, suddenly feeling his age. There was a crick in his back and a quiver to his hands. But the remembrance of that curt report now failed to rankle his mind. And what was the price? A dry mouth and a muscle twinge. It was worth it. This was machine war. Gad, what a revelation!

Along the bank of a hillside to the west—Hill 73—were excavated and concreted pits, where the Boche guns had hidden for more than two years. From some the pieces had been withdrawn; in others the British fire had caught the gunners and their teams in the act, and the ground was strewn with tragic heaps. Guns, limbers, men and horses huddled together in shapeless tangles of russet and gray, or tossed apart to lie seared and torn among the short grass and the shell holes. But the tank passed by and moved on—on and on.

By 7 A.M., the Anzacs were in Messines, and the Southern Irish hammered at the fringe of Wytschaete. Within the outskirts of the crumbling village, the tank, its ammunition spent, halted to let the engine cool.

Cochrane croaked the order to lie up. The Daimler heaved a sigh and stopped. Beyond the tank's steel sides the infantry consolidated their positions. But inside, at Cochrane's order, down dropped each man of the crew where he sat or stooped, fagged by the heat and the cumulative effects of three hours of exhaust fumes. They all slept instantly, except Brown, who merely slumped on the gunner's seat. He fought his drooping eyelids.

After today, by gad, there would be no more acrid reports; instead, there would be unbounded praise. The tanks were vindicated, and the debacle of Vimy Ridge atoned. A new type of warfare was here to stay. Were those tears of pride, dripping down his cheeks? Yes. Conceited old ass, he muttered. Then his head dropped forward on his chest, and the moisture, unseen, cut channels down the grimy face.

THREE times Brown went out with the tanks and crouched in the stench and heat of the gunner's seat. Three times he felt the surge of excitement kindle his veins, felt the lust of battle scorch his face. But he gradually came to feel, too, a gnawing sense of disappointment that crept upon him after the day was done. For it was automaton's work, this game, he came to realize. He never saw the enemy except through the slit before his eyes; they never saw him—until it was too late. At these times, strangle his thoughts as he would, a slow flush of shame spread over his bitten features. It verged on murder, it did! The other fellow had no chance. Not sporting, it wasn't. And to a man who had fought at— Then he blinked his eyes rapidly. He was a fool. Damned sentimental streak.

What else could he honestly have expected from the very start? A waving flag, a rumble of drums, the flash of sabers? No—they were gone, along with the honor of regiments. The personal touch in war had been displaced. All that was left was a snorting, efficient tank of steel and petrol, born of blueprints, saving of human life. The tanks were here to stay; his dreams were vindicated. Good Lord, that was sufficient. He was content.

He stuck to his job and became an integral part of the tank's crew. It was a task of his own asking, and he made no protest. He had hunted for this chance, eagerly accepted it, merely to justify the corroding pride of his soul, the soul that had poured itself out into a jumble of queer lines on a blueprint. Perhaps, if he had waited? . . . Well, what then? Recognition was slow and grudging. Sometimes, it never came. Bitter and proud, he would never have known, first hand, how the War Office changed its mind—and built the tanks. The word would not have reached him—in seclusion.

The way he had chosen was hard, but it was the best way. Otherwise? "It is necessary to descend from the realm of imagination to solid fact . . ."

Six weeks later the gods scanned their crystals, seeking the odds on the third battle of Ypres. All during a sultry July the reconnaissance officers had been preparing. The Salient, in miniature, had been laid out in sand and concrete in Oosthoek Wood. Every hillock or depression, every road, every railway, trench, stream, ruin, was faithfully reproduced to scale. The miniature trenches were formed by cast lengths of cement.

Little evergreens served for trees, and real water lay in the tiny pools. From a high wooden platform, reached by a ladder, the Ypres Salient, to scale, could be scanned and memorized as from a sluggish kite balloon. In short, the coming battle was to be fought by machines, from machines.

Cochrane stood on the platform and overlooked the concrete park, as a man studies the palm of his hand. Brown, too, went and stared, and Davis, and the others. Like a sensitive camera plate, their minds held the image, even in sleep.

Tank commanders met infantry officers in company with whom they were to fight, and they looked the ground over together. Rôles, routes, objectives and time tables were discussed, and settled. Never was liaison so strong, or so friendly.

But Brown, when he lay on his cot in the dark hutment, felt a new born lump grown in his throat. It beat and pulsated like the rumble of a tank's engine, hammered the sides of his skull. Machines, machines, machines. Would the war never come out again into the open? Like those mad, slap dash, wasted days on the Marne? Then Brown swallowed. No, it would not. Absolutely no. For blueprints, petrol and tractor belts had changed everything, forever. And two tears, on a green blotter, had changed *him*, forever.

Toward early morning a fine drizzling rain commenced, blurring the outlines of the star shells that lighted up the Front. Along fifteen miles of trenches the English

and German guns bickered at each other. The waiting infantry shivered in the dripping, slippery assembly trenches. At three o'clock a lull came in the firing, for a low hanging blanket of mist had crept up and lay enfolding both armies. Men began to feel for the firesteps.

At 3:50 the streaming darkness was split asunder along seven miles of attack. Thermite and blazing oil flared out, and a barrage, such as had not yet been seen, crashed upon the German lines. Whistles shrilled and tanks and infantry lurched in the gloom, moved over torn and slimy ground.

The flame of the barrage stabbed through the firing slit and flicked Brown's face. They had been six hours getting up to the jump-off and the heat inside the tank was terrific. Sweat poured down over his forehead, dimming his eyes, and the handle of the Lewis gun was slippery. Far to the front, tape lines had been laid out for the tanks, but the shells had done for most of them. It was touch and go in the murk, and the driver cursed beneath his breath. Cochrane was at his elbow, seeking the path ahead and helping with the ponderous brakes.

They kept stride with the barrage and felt the muck rumple below the tank's belly; then flatten, like dough. Shrapnel hammered on the roof and conning tower, machine gun bursts nicked at the sides, but the Daimler roared and the tractors bit deep. Dipping and pawing, the tank went ahead, while the infantry, like the wash astern of a ship, streamed back into the distance.

On Cochrane's map was a penciled line which was the Steenbeek, a tiny, sluggish creek that coiled behind the German lines. There was but one bridge across the marshy stream, and it was marked "Red X" on the map. "Tanks are to cross the Steenbeek and dislodge the enemy from the farther bank." So read the orders. If, in the half light of sunrise, the tanks missed the crossing, success was gone—at the cost of a thousand men. And, perhaps, a half score tanks. It would be crossed, then!

Dawn and the shell bursts fought for the right to be first to light the scarred terrain. The flaming oil had burned out, the last of its scarlet breath barely flickering along the horizon. Brown fired a warming burst from the Lewis. As he did so the tank snouted into fragments of the German wire.

One of the six-pounders flamed. Brown jerked the machine gun on to a fleeing cluster of figures, shadowy in the half light. The two muzzles chattered in unison and the figures fell. The tank moved ahead another two hundred yards. The exhaust smoke grew thick as fog. The crew began to pant, and spit. Along the line the other tanks kept pace.

A half hour passed. Cochrane scrambled forward and grabbed the driver's sweaty shoulder. The clutch was suddenly freed and the motor idled, loud as a broken piston in the bowels of a ship. Beyond the hot walls, in the dim light, five other tanks waddled about in the dark, searching for the spot that was Red X on the maps.

Cochrane's flashlight illuminated the crinkled surface of the chart, and his eyes squinted at the paper.

"Northwest by west, bearing twenty degrees," he muttered.

The light now lay nose to the map. Cochrane's eyebrows beetled in the yellow glow. Sweat trickled down his cheeks, and he cursed.

BEYOND the face of the tank, all Brown could distinguish was a welter of torn land, the gaping maws of craters. There was no Steenbeek, no marshy ribbon across the earth. Perhaps it was there, but the eyes could not see. From the gloom forward, long fingers of orange reached out and hurled lead—desperate, frightened Maxims, coughing at a menace they could not see, yet feared. Over the whole scene hung the rumble of the puzzled tanks, like thunder held in the Summer clouds. They groped with their blunted noses, finding nothing. And the infantry took to every depression, hiding from the storm of steel.

Cochrane let the map fall to the greasy floor plates, where it vibrated to the pulse of the Daimler. The aura of the flashlight found the blue of his eyes pale and flecked with scarlet. He swept the interior of the tank with his lamp, catching the haze, the glistening faces, the dull gray armor, the ammunition cases. Then he moved silently toward the right door. But Brown was quicker.

"Hold up!" he cried, and crawled down from the gunner's seat.

The flashlight streaked across his face, then returned to hold it in a circle. It was a face of tiny lines, suddenly grown deep; of taut cheeks; of thin, compressed lips; of ingrained authority. Cochrane caught his breath.

"I'll do it," the gunner said softly.

And they stared at each other, corporal and officer, until Cochrane's eyes fell in mixed wonder and surprise. Somehow, it was the Army that had spoken to him!

"Stay with the tank, Lieutenant," Brown snapped, and moved toward the bulging sponson.

In the faint illumination of the lamp the crew looked upon this strange drama with stolid eyes. They knew something out of the ordinary was taking place, but the fumes of the motor dulled their curiosity. Brown flung open the armored door and dropped to the mucky ground. One hand remained on the flap of metal.

"The light, Lieutenant," he said evenly, stretching out his fingers.

Cochrane silently handed over the lamp, like a man in a daze.

The flap clanged back into place, cutting off the noise of the motor. Outside, everything was gray and murky; the visibility was down to one hundred feet. Five other tanks lay on their stomachs, peering sightlessly ahead like bedridden old men. The exhausts smoked away in sodden clouds. The Maxims, far in front, stuttered like pneumatic hammers. The infantry waited patiently to the rear—waited for their guardians to move.

Brown plodded past the high walls of the tank, left the tractor belts behind, stepped ankle deep into the mush ahead. Every tree, every hillock, even the support trenches, had been wiped out by the metal blast. Nothing was left except mud and stench.

Holding the flashlight behind him, using his body as a shield, he moved forward, peering into the gray for a landmark, or the glint of the Steenbeek. Dot, dot, dot, dot, the flash blinked. Dot, dash, dot, dash! Come along, it said to the tanks; we're moving up! The motors roared in answer. Faint cheers came from the lumbering hippopotami, as the crews within saw the yellow eye ahead.

One tanned fist clenched at Brown's side in sudden retrospect, and he saw again the awful hill that was Spion Kop. A sunburned African knoll with a cluster of khaki shirts along the ridge, Martinis and Hotchkiss guns flaring into the shimmering haze. A bugle blew and the men were on their feet, stumbling down the hill to meet the black dots that moved up its side. A flurry of bodies and the bitter smoke; the dull impact of bullets and the clatter of steel. Another shrill burst of the bugle, a scattered cheer. The black dots fleeing . . . Gad, sir, that was war. Without machines . . . But Brown's thumb monotonously pressed the flashlight button. Come on, come on!

Wormwood Scrubs and a cold report . . . Two tears splotched on a green blotter . . . The strange feel of a razor on his upper lip. Six months at training camp, midst the reek of petrol. The hot, stuffy boxes that crawled over the ground. Wytschaete and Oosttaverne . . . A new type of war has come, belching monsters spitting lead. Machines, machines, machines! Clank, clank, clank!

The flashlight winked in the growing dawn. Six tanks and five hundred men followed. Come on, come on!

Brown was threading through the débris of a swamp now, débris that smelled heavy and moldy. On he plodded. Maxims swept the plain with a queer, swishing noise; rifle fire increased. An anti-tank gun clattered into action. The air was full of stinging, singing bees.

But the flashlight still blinked; the tanks rumbled.

The ground underfoot became suddenly marshy, and strands of rough grass clawed at Brown's boots. For a moment the light failed. Ahead was a bridge, the maps said; a concrete bridge. Red X! Brown's eyes narrowed and slowly roamed, until a vague, gray shape took form off to the right. The flashlight resumed. Dot, dash, dot, dash!

Brown all but stumbled across the ramp of the bridge. He glanced down and saw the concrete, kicked at it with one heel to make sure. A shell landed in the creek and exploded, showering the arch with mud and slime. Brown, carefully and patiently, turned about and stood at the end of the bridge. Dot, dot, dot, dot! Here it is! Come on!

THE first of the tanks reared high in the scene before him and felt for the concrete. The tractors hit the hard surface with a clattering crash, raced madly for a foothold, caught at the crumbling ramp and nosed forward. As the tank passed over the arch its six-pounders streamed fire in two directions, silencing some of the Maxims, putting cold fright into the others. The anti-tank gun, hidden behind sandbags, fired one last sullen shot, and died, with its gunners. More shells dropped into the Steenbeek, flowered into mud. Five tanks to come. Dot, dash, dot, dash!

One by one on the monsters snorted over the bridge and took to the marshy ground on the far side. Two German snipers broke from the cover of an abandoned gunpit and fled toward the creek. At the edge of the green water a Lewis burst caught them and they fell face downward into the slime, arms thrashing. The water closed over them.

The last tank crossed over the arch and strung out in line with its mates on the farther bank. There they paused, and lashed with fiery fangs at the diminishing enemy. The first of a tattered file of prisoners came vomiting from a concrete dugout, hands high overhead.

Khaki clad soldiers of the Guards regiment plodded across the bridge, plodded while their eyes strayed momentarily to the tall tank corporal who stood by the bridge head, a pocket lamp in one hand. The eyes flashed and chins came up beneath the spattered helmets.

Then Brown sagged wearily against the concrete stump. His hands and feet suddenly felt heavy. Forty-five and to spare, he muttered. The springs of youth were dry; the blood in his veins thin. He'd been wrong! This war was just like all the rest. Man made his infernal machines, but in the pinch, man had to lead 'em. He should have known it, right along. But it needed today to convince him. Everything was just like the old days, except that the Vickers had replaced the Martini, and the enemy was blond and ruddy, instead of black and bearded.

All through the ages it had been the same. So, too, would it be in the years to come. War was a part of man, grafted on to his soul. There was no escaping the personal touch. Machines only proved it.

Brown weaved on his feet and groped behind for cement support. The infantry was pouring past, now, in the wake of the iron saurians. Brown stared at the oncoming men. One was an officer, lean jawed and helmeted. Perhaps, Brown muttered, he should—

But before the thought could take shape, a snickering Maxim spoke across the Steenbeek, far up one bank. A metal hail laced the bridge, splashed the water below, and six infantrymen sighed and collapsed. One of the bullets caught Brown in the shoulder and spun him about. He crashed to the concrete.

The lean jawed officer saw him fall. He reached Brown's side with a leap and lifted the pocket flash from the quivering fingers. The yellow arc struck the face on the ground.

"Good Lord!" the captain cried.

But there was no mistake. The mustache was gone, the tanned cheeks thin, but the face was the same—the

same as he used to see, every day, at the window of the Guards Club.

Brown looked up wearily from the mud. Then suddenly his eyes gleamed in recognition.

"Oh, it's you, eh, Rycroft?"

"Yes, sir," the captain replied. Then he was on his feet, screaming at a surprised soldier. "You man there, double for an M. O—quickly!"

A subaltern reached the bridge just as his captain stripped off his coat and made a bundled pillow for the wounded man. The subaltern stared, amazed.

"It's the flashlight chap, what?" he cried.

"Chap? Oh, hell, no. No! It's General Brecourt!"

"Brecourt?" The querulous word was all but lost in the hacking bedlam of the guns.

"Yes, youngster—designer of the first tank!"

The panting M. O. stooped over the wounded man and cut away the right sleeve. The plunger of the shining needle pressed home. Then the M. O. stood up.

"He's all right. Just pinked."

The captain sighed gently and swallowed the throb in his throat. They placed a blanket under the man on the mud. Brown stirred softly and opened his eyes, while one tanned hand gestured across the Steenbeek to the tanks.

"Tell 'em for me, will you, Rycroft?"

The captain leaned over.

"What, sir?"

"Pshaw! Forgot. Nat'rally, y'couldn't know." The narcotic was dimming the fire in his black eyes. "Why, tell 'em it's nec'ssary to descend from the realm of imagination to solid fact. They'll understand—"

Disks of Doom

By FRANCIS BEVERLY KELLEY

A SHRILL, vibrating cry shattered the stillness of the relaxation period between shows. Then the low, staccato throb of jungle tom-toms came from the private dressing tent of the monster lipped savages from the deep Congo.

Inside the animal-tent elephants turned majestic heads in the direction of the strange sound. Leonine occupants of the menagerie crouched, alert, on the floors of their cages. But members of the circus personnel, loitering on the half deserted midway or dozing beneath the rest tops, paid no attention. It had happened practically every night since the season began. Some one said it was a daily tribal custom; another defined it as "just plain cussedness", but a third said it was a ritual of doom. And thereby hangs a tale—a tale of black magic from Africa's darkest depths directed against one white man. And the white man died . . .

When Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey circus negotiated for the transplanting of a dozen savages from French Equatorial Africa to the world of red wagons and white canvas, nobody suspected that the duck-billed belles and their stalwart mates hated their French manager with enthusiastic passion and were pleading with their weird devil-gods to wipe him off the face of the earth.

Eugene Bergonier, French doctor and explorer, who attempted to guide the destinies of the big-lipped Africans and their mates, experienced plenty of trouble from the moment of embarkation. His methods of discipline, which apparently had proved effective in the Congo, were surprisingly ineffective once the tribe reached civilization. And while the prayers of the devil worshipers may not have brought about the death of the Frenchman, it is quite possible that the constant worry and fatigue he experienced in trying to handle them so weakened his physical resistance that he fell an easy victim when pneumonia overtook him.

The chief difference between ordinary blacks and the peculiar tribe from the seldom visited country of the Ubangi-Shari-Chad lies in the huge, saucer-like lips that adorn the women.

The custom began centuries ago as a protective measure. Hostile tribesmen had a quaint little habit of stealing the Ubangi fair ones for slaves. Some of the wise old men of the tribe scratched their woolly heads and decided that, if they made their women grotesque in appearance, the enemies would not be so eager to own them. So one of the strangest practises that ever blazed its way across the pages of African history was inaugurated.

When the little Ubangi girls reached the age of five years, their lips were pierced with ivory needles and twigs were inserted. Soon, very small metal disks replaced the twigs and, later, wooden disks took the place of the metal. As the girls grew older, the size of the wooden disks was increased, the lips growing out around them, until at twenty-five years of age these hoop-like

lips extended six to twelve inches from the face. The upper lip was never made as large as the lower.

Probably the process was too gradual to be exceedingly painful and the effect upon amorous enemy tribesmen was all that could be desired. They soon exhibited the same amount of cordiality toward the monster-mouthed Ubangi women that the average person does toward a case of smallpox. And so the fairest among the female contingent were permitted to enlarge their lips and thus insure their protection from marauders.

Centuries passed. Hostile blacks no longer molested the Ubangis and the practise of developing tremendous lips among the women no longer was necessary. But habit is strong and the huge lips had become so closely associated with tribal aristocracy that an element of beauty had crept in. The woman whose lips were largest was the belle of the tribe. So the Ubangis continued to produce the "loveliest" women in the whole Congo until halted quite recently by the French government. Among the Ubangis who comprised the circus troupe during the 1930 season each warrior had two wives, but Chief Nabia's favorite wife, Gettika, was queen. With lips as large as an ordinary phonograph record, she swept aside all other contenders for tribal beauty.

While showgoers got a major thrill out of the duck-billed blacks, the show itself had difficulties trying to keep peace between the savages and their manager. On one occasion, they went on a clothes strike and rode stark naked in one of the circus passenger busses from their railroad cars to the show grounds in the heart of downtown Chicago. That was fifteen minutes before their scheduled appearance in the matinée performance and the show took matters into its own hands. They calmed the angry blacks by giving them a new wardrobe that included bright tan shoes, and the chief shined his until he was dizzy. The day after the Ubangi revolt, Bergonier was sent back to the circus Winter quarters in Sarasota, Florida, to await the return of the savages at the conclusion of the season.

This move altered the entire complexion of things. Not only were the savages given more new clothes; they received a weekly consignment of tobacco and were permitted to pocket the money they received from the sale of postcards and trinkets. There was, however, very little for which they could spend money. Because they were semi-savage they were not permitted to roam at will. An African warrior could cause a lot of excitement if he became frightened in city traffic or terrified in an elevator.

The effect of treating the blacks with the consideration accorded a regular trouper was electric. Overnight a sullen, brooding tribe of African savages became a grinning, happy group of colored folks anxious to cooperate with their new friends, the show managers. But they didn't forget the Frenchman and his Congo tactics for discipline. The thought of returning to Africa under his iron supervision frightened them. Every day between shows they adjourned to their private tent where they called upon their gods to grant them swift revenge and safety in the future.

While the circus was making its homerun from the last stand of the season to Winter quarters, Dr. Bergonier died at Sarasota.

Scarcely a day had passed during his stay with the show when he was not met with grim opposition from his African charges. One afternoon in Madison Square Garden, they stopped the show by halting in their march around the hippodrome track to shout and gesture wildly in front of a box which they believed to be occupied by a person of high authority. Investigation proved that the chief had been told to strut his stuff for "the biggest man in America", who would watch the performance from that particular box. Instead, the savages embraced the opportunity to air their grievances.

The religion of the duck-billed savages is built upon a strong belief in reincarnation. They believe that after death man returns to earth in the form of an animal. If he has lived a good life, according to their primitive standards, he blossoms forth in the person of some highly respected and dignified creature. But if the tribal gods find him wanting, he will be reincarnated in the form of a hyena or some other despised animal. From this, it is natural to assume that they worship animals. True, they won't kill certain beasts because they are thought to contain the spirits of departed friends and relatives. The rhinoceros and the white monkey are two animals which they hold sacred. The Ubangis worship totem poles and are staunch in the belief that their devil-gods can perform any miracle if their prayers are frequent and sufficiently fervent. Many years ago, the tribe included the playful habit of head hunting in its strange program of religious activity, but this practise has ceased.

Civilization had little effect on the Ubangis. They simply turned up their dusky noses at everything that would be expected to give a stranger a double-barreled thrill. Perhaps it was almost too overwhelming to be yanked out of a jungle village where they had spent their entire lives and to be set down suddenly in two different worlds at one time—America and the land of tanbark and spangles, a separate and distinct country within a country. Certain features of the circus interested them. They were fascinated by the hundreds of beautiful horses and by the Wild West department of the big show. But firearms terrified them. The Ubangi weapon is a heavy, slightly curved blade.

Nothing captured the interest of the savages quite so much as the circus band. Rhythm is the very heartbeat of Africa and the breathtaking tempo of the circus musicians found high favor with the blacks. Their own instruments consisted of long, cylindrical tom-toms with heads made from the skin of elephant ears; also a crude instrument fashioned from teakwood and calabash and resembling a modern xylophone. Their music is essentially ryhthm without melody, but they do have an ear for tunes. They learned to play in rhythm many of the numbers that the circus band played on the big show program. If you explained to the savages that you wanted to hear the number that accompanied the high-wire act, they obligingly would pound out "Monterey"—in rhythm, of course. You could easily recognize it in the beat of their tom-toms.

The savages apparently felt very much at home in the menagerie tent where they were on exhibition. There, chattering monkeys, roaring lions, trumpeting elephants and hissing leopards provided a jungle symphony that may have satisfied their homesickness.

Practically every one who beheld the savages wondered how they ate and of what their diet consisted. Fish, ground meat, fresh fruit, okra and lots of red pepper were favorite items on the Ubangi menu. The dental equipment of the women was negligible, most of their teeth having dropped out at an early age as a result of the friction of disks against the gums.

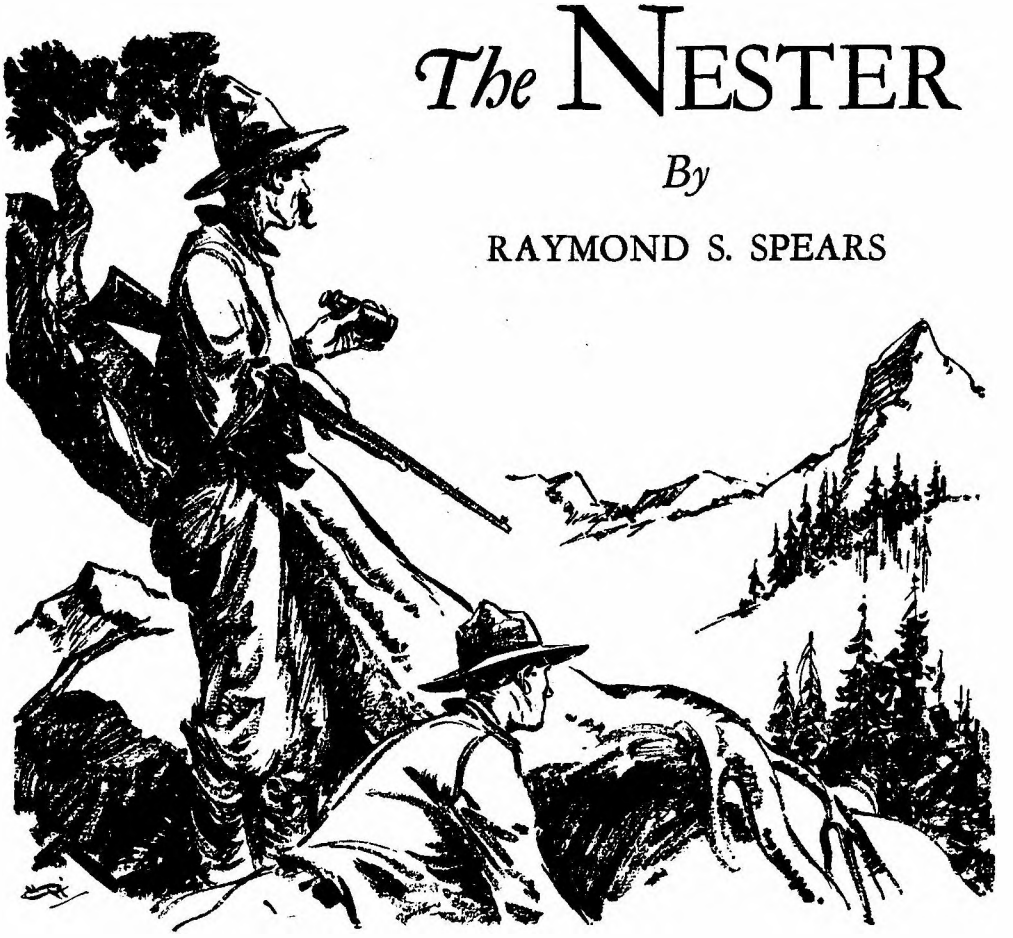
That the Ubangis were good natured is borne out by the fact that they had only two enemies in the circus. Jocko and Minnie, chimpanzees, had a hearty dislike for all colored folk in general and the Ubangi savages in particular. If one of the blacks ventured near the chimpanzee den in the monkey section of the menagerie, he was greeted with the "French razz", executed by blowing with the tongue between the teeth.

Considering everything, the genial blacks from the Congo got along surprisingly well, making friends; despising only one man. They have returned to Africa where undoubtedly there is a general high hatting of the less traveled members of the clan. Probably they whisper of the power of their ancient religion and boast of a terrible prayer answered in the strange land they visited.

The NESTER

By

RAYMOND S. SPEARS



THE *Weekly Mirage* carried an item that three antelopes had been seen in the Valley of Dreams. Many years had elapsed since such news had come from the wide basin. Hunters had killed off the band which at one time covered the desert and old-timers had not expected ever to hear of the return of the red beauties. Some of the readers thought it was just some local correspondent's fancy, but Jem Harter, a few days later, crossed the valley on the North Star Road to see with his own hungry eyes, and when he came opposite the Wild Goose Pools, he stopped his automobile and walked around the water holes.

Sure enough, three antelopes, a buck, a doe and a yearling, had come in there to drink for the past two or three weeks, as their old and fresh tracks plainly showed. Jem carried a rifle, an old-time .50-110-550 single shot—the big .50 of buffalo days. His gaze turned sharply over the landscape, searching for the spectacle which in other days had flashed in that country, the glisten of crystalline sunshine on the shining red or white of antelope hair.

Jem was tall, lank, gristly, a desert man. His black hair was tousled and streaked with gray, too long under a soft, broad brimmed hat, and he was clad in a limp, dusty, cream colored shirt which showed patches at elbows and reworked seams, with a neckerchief knotted under his right ear, two corners flapping silky red

over his right shoulder. A wide, holstered cartridge belt, kept slick with oil, girt his waist, and star stripe jeans were tucked into high laced hunting moccasins.

"They come back." Jem shook his head. "I never thought to see it."

His deep sunken eyes glowed as he looked at the range of hills, spotted with junipers over on the west side of the valley, a stand of cover which was not too dense for the open-loving antelopes. Eastward he looked at a rugged, shattered ridge of mountains with scatters of timber belt, and along the back evergreens standing "like the hair on a wolf's neck." From the Wild Goose Pools, Jem Harter could scan, between him and the far, high horizons, nearly eight thousand square miles. The distant range was twinkling in pearly luster where light played on the uttermost edges. The inner desert, this land that dreamed fantastic scenes for men to look at, contained perhaps a thousand square miles.

Having stood among his memories and hopes, he slithered back to his machine, started the motor and circled around to his home, the Nest, beyond the Red Rocks, as the rugged uplift on the east side of the Valley of Dreams was called. How Jem managed to live there puzzled ranchers, homesteaders and prospectors who knew that spacious and barren waste.

"What in the world do you eat?" the storekeeper at Wet Pass Springs asked him.

"Plenty to eat," Jem replied. "Rabbits, skunks, rattlesnakes, birds and one thing and another—juniper berries, too."

The storekeeper added to this of his own knowledge, cornmeal, Arkansas turkey—side salt pork—an occasional sack of flour and some dried apples, peaches, an annual half barrel of brown sugar, a hogshead of molasses every so often, paid for with wolf and coyote skins, a bounty order and an occasional mysterious spoonful or two of gold dust after a cloudburst or rare rain had given the old desert rat water with which to work.

Jem's traps, a .22 special rifle, a long single shotgun and his old .50 rifle scoured the land of its sparse supply of living creatures. He had horses; of late years he had his automobile; always in the cañons and draws he had some beef—a few tall, narrow creatures who held their heads like mountain sheep and watched things move a mile or two away, and disliked even old Jem himself, if he came scrambling on foot in their locality.

When Jem arrived in the country he had killed the last antelope in that land, a big, shy buck. He had dropped it at just short of half a mile with his old slug throwing barrel. That was a good twenty years, now, and he remembered the thrill of his young manhood, having such a whack to remember!

Now the antelopes had returned. He still thrilled to the kills. A natural born hunter, a natural born shot, and he loved the outdoors. He understood there were places where game was plentiful and where he could do better, speaking of water, soil, crops and all the other conditions. But he had come to the moist place on the east side of the Red Rocks and, digging, he had found more than enough water. He built a stone cabin, a juniper branch and aspen corral, establishing his outfit. From the Red Rock wall he could look into the dreams of the valley at the west and into the delusions of the east. Trapping, prospecting, raising cattle, developing the adventures of that country, waiting for fortune to strike him, what more did he want?

Three antelopes! He needed another antelope skin shirt like the one he had had made, brain and smoke-tanned, Indian fashion, out of that other buck. He had worn that jacket nearly twenty years, washing it every so often, and it dried soft. Wind proof, water shedding, warm in a blizzard, nothing was like that tough hide fabric of nature for him. He had filled out some; the old shirt needed too much mending now. Time for a new one.

Sitting at his fireplace, Jem Harter smoked on his project. Those antelopes would surely be sly, hard to kill, and a man'd need all his skill to get them in-

stead of driving them away. Yes, indeed. Already he was thinking of the taste of venison, his feast to be. One funny thing, the State had had a law forbidding the killing of antelopes for ten years. Seven years, now, and there hadn't been any antelopes. Probably these three had escaped from some circus or private preserve.

It had been three weeks now since he read in the paper about those antelopes being seen again by some one following the sea-to-sea trail. He just hadn't believed it. How was any one going to believe anything but the society items in the *Weekly Mirage?* But now, for once, it had told an outdoor fact that a man could prove by hoofprints in the soft edge of a water hole; the nester had so proved it.

He walked to his door to look around. Long since he had ceased to look for people. Now he saw a car come bouncing over his road, the alkali dust spurting out on either side and sucking up behind in a tawny roll.

"Wonder who it is?" Jem pondered to himself. A jay along the side hill on a corral post heard him speak aloud, and jeered.

Jem used to shoot mountain jays for rifle practise, till he saw how smart they were, and then he began to study their tones and their calls. Now he knew what was on their minds, whether they were looking for something to eat or teasing a wild cat by keeping him company, warning all the game out of his reach. Jem had had his jays do that for him, too. Plague take them; at the same time he'd shoot anything else, but not a jay; nor any of those fantastic birds related to jays, like crows, magpies, ravens and so on. Thieves, scoundrels, jokers, tricky but bright, too, wisest of all the birds, and if they stayed away a man missed them.

That was a funny thing about the wilderness: a man just naturally took to some of the wildfolk while he disliked others. Like people in a way, Jem figured. Some you like to have around . . .

SURE enough, a car coming. Jem brought out his glasses to look over the outfit—one man apparently. He might be just one of those tourists. Perhaps he was a trapper looking for new country. Mighty slim pickings, for Jem trapped close. More likely, however, he was a bad actor, scouting, waiting for the hue and cry of posse and reward hunters to die down.

Jem knew outlaws. In twenty years quite a few had gone prowling down the line, hiding out. Of course, Jem minded his own business, and they had better mind theirs—as one learned who had stolen a horse from him one time. Jem had had his private reasons for leaving Pennsylvania; a man would; at the same time it was a matter of honesty and desire, and not anything serious.

The machine turned up from the North Star Road and stopped by Jem's automobile shed. The driver swung to the ground; a stranger, sure enough. He looked something like an Army man, but it wasn't old uniform goods he wore. He was trim, neat, natty, and active too. When he approached, the nester saw on his wide hat a kind of insignia which read, Game Protection Service.

And also, he had a little metal button, silver on black, in plain sight, which read, Game Warden No. 11.

Jem Harter couldn't help but smile. So this was a game warden, eh? What did he think he was doing here, anyhow? People said around that hunters from outside had to take a license to hunt game, whether they could kill any or not. Also, citizens of the State intending to hunt, trap or fish, were supposed to pay a dollar or two, something; but of course, that meant town people, sports. It couldn't mean anybody living in the game country where, if a man happened to be hungry, it stood to reason he had a right to shoot any wild meat which was grown for whoever could get a straight whack at it.

"Howdy," the visitor greeted.

"Howdy," Jem answered. "Come in an' set?"

"If it's all the same, I'll help myself to this bench," the man remarked, indicating the wash stand beside the door. Jem sat in a comfortable juniper root chair he had found growing natural over a boulder.

"Right pretty to look at." Jem divined his visitor's thought, for the newcomer was sweeping the scene with his glances.

"Sure is . . . Reckon you're Jem Harter?" the man remarked. "My name is Det Burney. I work for the State, under the chief game warden."

"A long way from headquarters, seems like."

"Yes, that's so." The man in uniform chuckled. "I live up north at Quartz Creek. I'm supposed to cover all this part of the State, everything west of the Fadeaway road south to the line, and clear from the Sea to Sea Trail into the Three State Corners."

"Twenty thousand square miles, or better!" Jem jeered ever so little. "So you live in Quartz Creek, eh? A city man."

"Yes, city, college, all those things. One of the Rabbit Ear brand Burneys, though."

"That so? That's a good outfit—big." Harter nodded thoughtfully. "First Summer I come West I dug post holes for a fence around the Wet Flats—"

"My uncle Steppin' Pete's place."

"Comin' night. Reckon you're hungry? I know I am. I'll just set up a snack."

"I've some stuff in a box," the game warden remarked, and brought a big hamper and stacked on the table oranges, roots, a lot of tasty things which would go well in the meager fare of the nester's lonely cabin.

At that the cornmeal johnnycake Harter baked was the most delicious the visitor had ever eaten, he said, and Jem ate with gusto the things from the hamper, especially fresh fruit and fresh vegetables.

After they had eaten, cleared the table and washed the dishes, they sat before the fire place. Despite the barren appearance of the land there was a great pile of cedar snags, sticks and stumps for fuel and this wood on the hearth flamed bright, the smoke puffs fragrant, comforting in the chill of the high plateau desert night.

"Paper says there are three antelopes over in the Valley of Dreams?" the game protector suggested as a question. "Reckon it's true?"

"Tracks are around," Harter answered shortly. He knew now what was on the visitor's mind, and he didn't like it so well.

"Fine!" the man exclaimed. "Which way'd they come in?"

"I don't know."

"Any idea?"

"First around here in twenty years, far as I know," Harter answered slowly. "I killed the last one, a buck, along in 1908 or '10, along there. That's his hide, the old shirt on the peg."

"The last one," Burney repeated and, looking closely at the shirt, he noted the sinew sewing, the dogskin patches, the places where the wear had come, elbows, collar, lacing holes.

"An old brain tan hide, that," Burney said, and by the remark Harter knew this young fellow was good, knew his stuff. Then, after a minute of reflection, the game warden went on, "Those three antelopes came out of the northeast, from over in our country. Across the Golden Bow, down the Fiddle Strings and into the Drifting Clouds Valley, antelopes have been coming back."

"Yeh?"

"Yes. The ranchers in the strong curly grass laid off killing them awhile back; they had more'n two thousand saved up when the big May blizzard hit them. A lot were lost. Sent out riders to feed the hungry at baled stacks, along with the cattle. I was in above Quartz Creek where I heard some of the boys were killing blacktail deer, thin Winter hides. I saw three antelopes there, one just a baby. I couldn't believe my eyes. That was in middle April. Antelopes! Even those skin butchers let them go. Wondering what became of them when I read in the

paper about the three in the Valley of Dreams. So they're here?"

"Yeh, they're here," Harter admitted.

"Dandy .22 trombone you have there. Special?"

"Yes, .22 special."

"Plenty good for small game. A man has a hundred times as many shots with a .22 special as with one of those old big game thunderers, like that .50 caliber of yours on the hooks."

"Been a long time since I shot it for business," Harter nodded, staring at this heavy weapon, "but when you hear the black powder roar, an' the echoes! An', course, big meat has lots of chaw, instead of nibble."

"You've once in awhile a deer to shoot over yon side of the Delusion Valley?"

"About every year, come late Autumn," Jem admitted. "I hunt down the south end there. Green timber, good cover, and so far back hardly any one else ever gets down there. I lay up what jerky I need."

"With the old single shot?"

"One whack's enough, aimed right," Jem said grimly, and he took from the mantel four or five huge brass tubes with dark slugs in the ends.

"Patched—factory loaded," the game warden remarked. "But you've loading tools?"

"Oh, yes. These shells are for business. But even if you're a natural born shot, good like I be, you want to keep in practise." Jem smoked a cloud or two. "I use a round ball and sixty grains of black, here. Up to two hundred yards, one of those half-inch balls goes fast and accurate. Coyotes, mountain woodchucks, jackrabbits—all those things. I 'low to shoot once every day. I almost never miss. Just popping around with the .22 special, course I'd keep in practise."

"But you love that old roaring slug thrower?"

"I'd go a long ways to get a shot at real meat with it."

"Even if it was the last time you'd ever see big game?" the game warden asked.

"I reckon," Jem admitted after a moment of hesitation, "I done it before, killing the last buck antelope in the Valley of Dreams, at the Wild Goose Pools. Course, I never knew, them days, that was the last one."

"And it wouldn't have made any difference?"

"Well, I needed a shirt," Jem declared dryly.

"That one's pretty well wore out now, after twenty years?"

"Yes, sir, darned near tuckered."

"Then those three antelopes over't the Wild Goose Pools came along—just to give you a new shirt—that all?"

"FUNNY the way things break sometimes, ain't it?" Jem Harter chuckled. "Just when you need it, lots of times, along comes the supply. Seven years ago I was sure hard pressed. I hadn't any beef to sell. A wild stallion away down in the south there't the Big Lonesome 'd coaxed away practically all my mares. I hadn't any money, no corn, no grease meat—bacon or lard—and seemed like I was sure 'nough starved out at last. I'd been dreading it. Then along come five gray wolves, big Canadian lobos, howling by in the night—um-m! Hides worth fifteen apiece, leastwise. An' bounties running one hundred and fifty dollars each. They woke me up racing down the wind, and when I heard them 'way off I thought it was a gang of big geese, raining music out of the sky. And, course, the next minute I knowed the dif'rence. I was hungry, breakin', starvin' out—and there was better than seven hundred dollars! Man alive! I caught my breath till my ears rang. And so I had about my best Winter."

"They still tell over't the county court how you rode in with five gray wolf hides on your packhorse."

"They were big scoundrels, travelers, and smart." Jem's pipe went out and his shoulders squared. "They sure extended me. They laid about ten miles below here, sleepin' the first day. They crossed over into the Delusions. They

killed a maverick heifer just below Broken Alley—what I call the knob—the next night. Gorged, they scattered, and at dawn the next morning luck was with me. I killed the leader with my .22 special—seventy yards, hit him just behind the left ear as he stretched. A good hundred and seventy dollars! I damned near cried!"

The nester's voice quavered a moment.

"Course, with their leader missing, the others didn't know which way to go, what to do." The hunter nodded with satisfaction. "They'd been used to obeying orders, lazy minded, depending on old Black Back to do their thinking. Humans are a lot like that. Sitting around out here, I've kinda got the lowdown on towns and cities and politics. A good leader's a big detriment to a community. So these wolves were just running around in circles, lost. About four miles south of where I knocked down the big one, there's a park pass over the divide. I watched there the next day but one. Only water for about thirty miles, and they'd been to it. Two yearlings came prowling in, worried, anxious and mighty suspicious. Side by side, huddled up close, I had to laugh! One trigger pull and I had three hundred and thirty dollars net cash with a round .50 caliber ball, a bushwhack shot. I wanted to yell, but there were two lobos left. If I could get them I'd be fixed practically for life."

"And luck broke right? Shoot them?"

"No, sir, I didn't." Jem shook his head. "I miscued. I hadn't but just a little table salt, so I rode over to my place, caring for the three skins. So far, I'd killed only the dogs. The two females were a different proposition. They howled around in the night, sure grieved. 'Twant long before they had local habits. They'd follow trails, and I found where they'd been by three, four times. One had a little twist in her right foot tracks—trap, I reckon. I laid down some small bear traps I had, but they knew them forty, fifty yards away. I had some hay wire, and so I noosed snares where they came downgrade to water, runnin'. About quarter of a mile from the spring they'd slow to a fast walk, then to regular creeping, mighty careful. The runway came through a patch of prickly pear, couple acres, and right in the middle of it where she'd have to hold her breath so's not to hook her sides on the spines, I set the wire hole—and, sure 'nough, she hung herself! I saw the other one circling around, so I plastered the pass south of here with nooses and chased her on horseback. She was watching me, and so tangled herself in the wire. Seemed to me, that Winter, food tasted better'n any I'd ever had before or since."

"Better than that antelope venison?"

"At the time, yes." Jem nodded. "Of course, there's meals a man remembers more and better as time goes on. I've had meals I wish I could forget, too—course. The first time I got down to skunk, say, and then when old Nugget Piquett, the prospector, came through; I ate with him, sociable, rich, tasty meat which he said was salt sink fish—ugh! Rattlesnake, by the hide! I never did get used to it but, of course, it don't do any good, being prejudiced. Livin' out here, I've learned not to be too particular. At the same time, if a man don't keep up he finds ants cleaning the dishes he didn't wash, troubles with mice and such, and like enough scorpions in his bed. It don't do for a man to let down none. If he don't improve, he wastes away. You can't stand still."

"You do lots of thinking."

"When a blizzard drives down the line I sit right here, three days, just thinkin'," Jem explained. "You have strange ideas, runnin' like words set to the storm music. That's a funny notion, ain't it?"

"They told me over at the county court one time that on your trip in with the wolves you hired a girl—at the Wagon Lunch—to listen to and talk to you all one Sunday. Paid her a five spot and meals."

"Doggone! They told that on me!" Jem exploded, his ears turning a bright red. "I know she didn't let on. Some jigger heard me bargainin' with her.

Ain't nothin' confidential around a law town, is there?"

"She said she'd been glad to listen for nothing," the game warden added.

"She di-id?" Jem caught his breath. "I'd never hoped that. Why, you know, I was just filled up. Seemed like I'd bust. She was awful patient. She listened thirteen hours straight. Nice big girl—I didn't have no mercy on her."

"She's been telling things you've said—about the jays, the coyotes, the way the rocks roll down, the tracks in the alkali—"

"Laughin', I reckon."

"No, Jem." Burney shook his head. "No one laughs about any of your sayings. Who laughs at Mirage Valley? At the Delusion Range? At the Red Rocks? You don't; I don't; no one does. Why, when I heard over't the county court about the antelope and you I made up my mind to come and have a chin-chin myself. Been waiting for an excuse a long time. I naturally wouldn't want to come along and just waste your time—"

"Waste my time!" Jem Harter exploded. "'Tain't worth anything! I'm the most shiftless, no 'count man in all this country."

"Don't fool yourself, Jem." the game warden said. "Why, ever since that item about the three antelopes was printed in the *Weekly Mirage* I've had telephone messages and letters telling about you. Probably more people are thinking about you, right this minute, from the State game warden's office right through my game law beat to me sitting here, than about any one else in the world."

"Well, what are they thinking about me for?"

"Why—" Game Warden Burney twisted uneasily—"you understand lots of people don't mind their own business. They are always interfering, in their thoughts, with what doesn't concern them. They just don't respect any one, not personal matters, not privacies—they just gossip, worry, mess into everybody else's affairs."

"Well, they better not interfere with me none."

"I know." Burney sighed. "You're free and independent out here. Nobody else ever could have seen the past twenty years through, the way you have stuck it out in this place. Now folks have just begun to realize how important you are, what an example you are to the country. Just the other day, in the Quartz Springs High School, a man made a speech to eight hundred youngsters. It was about you."

"A speech about me—about Jem Harter the nester?"

"An hour talk about Jem Harter the nester!" the game warden exclaimed. "Living out here between Dream and Delusion valleys."

"But what could any one tell about me?"

"You talked thirteen hours to Flapjack Sue—"

"About myself, yes."

"Nobody could have been more interesting, you know."

"I don't understand it, nohow," Jem said tartly. "I come out here to get away from folks! They better leave me alone. I don't have to stand everything. I *might* get peevish!"

"That's what a lot said," the game warden assented.

IN THE morning, when the two men had slept deeply in the bunks, whose springs were wild horse hides and whose coverings were soft cowskins, they ate breakfast together. Then they saddled two horses to ride around a bit. Jem guided the game warden to the promontories and showed his visitor the lay of the land, indicating its innumerable advantages.

"A hard country," Jem said, "but if a man can—"

"Can be a man and stand it," the visitor said, as Jem hesitated.

"Yes, sir, that's it," Jem said. "Tain't in me to brag none, you understand. I've stood it for twenty years; the Winter of the wolves, course, it was just a narrow squeak. Luck favored me—or I'd starved."

"The wolves came—and now three antelopes have come," Burney mused aloud, yet absently looking down from the crest of the Red Rocks into the Valley of the Mirage, "just when you need a new shirt."

"We'll run over't the Wild Goose Pools tomorrow," Jem said. "Them antelope come in about every three days to drink, I figure it, readin' the sign—just about every three days."

"I'd sure like to go," Burney answered, shaking his head, "but I'd hate to disturb them. You see, if they should see us, probably they'd quit that valley. They're shy. I heard some fellow emptied his .30-30 magazine at them above the Sea to Sea. They'd stopped there in the irrigation district, drinking in the ditches. Then they came down here."

"Somebody shot at them up there!" Jem gasped. "And he didn't hit them? If he had—"

"They'd never come back to Mirage Valley, Jem."

"That's so!" The nester's voice was hollow, and he added, "Dang those .30-30's! I never thought much of them, anyhow. I noticed the doe dragged her right hind leg. I reckon she was creased—"

"Probably," the game warden said. "I heard the fellow claimed he had hit the doe—found blood. Of course, he denied it to me. I couldn't prove anything on him. Nice fellow—thoughtless, though. After I talked with him he realized if people kill off those antelopes they are probably gone—forever."

"They belong to who can get them," Jem said.

"Of course, lots of people feel that way," the game warden admitted. "Some old-timers are so shy and know the country so well, they live so far back, they just laugh at us game wardens. At the same time, when the antelopes were gone, they were the ones who didn't have them."

"If they didn't shoot 'm somebody else would."

"Who would have killed that last antelope buck if you hadn't?"

Jem Harter opened his mouth to answer, only to find he had no words to speak, no thought, even, to put into words. Talking to Flapjack Sue, he had run tongue free for thirteen hours, straight and steady. He had to laugh, and he spoke out loud, presently, but he didn't tell why he chuckled.

After dinner that noon Game Warden Burney sighed.

"Well, I'll have to go rolling," he said.

"Hate to have you go so soon, young man," Jem remarked. "Like to have you stay a month."

"I'll come drop in once in awhile, now," Burney said, going toward his car. "I'll kinda want to report to the chief—to the newspapers around—how the three antelopes are getting along. Away over in the northeast part of the State they're doing well. Probably a thousand came through the blizzard. Every one up there is honing for them, you know. You'll kinda keep an eye on the Mirage antelopes, Jem?"

"You bet," the nester declared with emphasis. "I sure will. I need a—"

"That makes me think, Jem." The game warden reached into the back of his car, where he had stowed away some camping outfit. "Some of the boys sent this down to you. The blizzard, like I told you, Winter-killed a lot of antelopes, and we all went out gathering up the weaklies and those that had frozen we skinned out, same as cattle. You know the thin Winter skins are lots better than the thick Summer ones, which are spongy. This is one of them. Well, so long."

He rolled away, leaving a bundle, wrapped in a daily newspaper, and Jem watched the game warden going for a long time. Some people had sent him a present? Everybody was talking about him lately? The game warden had minded his own business, not hardly mentioning the State game laws, and only just hinting about trying to find out who had shot at that doe—with a .30-30, dad blasted, newfangled rifle! Just supposing the scoundrel had killed her and knocked down the buck?

Sure was luck—but it was true about Summer skins being full of blood and spongy. Those three antelopes would hang around till next Winter if they weren't disturbed. Come late October or November, the old .50-110-550 could roar again. One shot would be enough; Jem was a natural born outdoor man and a sure shot.

"Then I'll brain tan the prime hide and make me a new shirt." The nester chuckled, untying the leather string with which the bundle was lashed.

He paused to read a headline over which some one had drawn a coarse lead pencil.

ANTELOPE BACK IN VALLEY OF MIRAGES

Good News for Nature Students and Wild Life Lovers Reported; Last Week a Herd Seen

"A herd? Three!" Jem snorted. "Why, I've seen and counted more 'n a hundred in a band."

"Long ago," his memory, like a conscience, echoed.

That was so. He unfolded the paper and with curiosity examined the contents.

A pale and tawny, compactly folded something was within. His fingers drew across the hair side of skin. He shook it out and beheld the present from somebody —antelope skin! Sinew sewed, too! And a shirt! A new antelope skin shirt, beautifully patterned—the right size, too, seventeen and a half. A bit oversize, but allowing for a regular hickory wool shirt underneath. Doggone—worth fifty dollars if it was worth a cent. Brain tanned and smoke proofed too.

Jem Harter drew the gift in a hug with both arms to his ribby chest, looking at the alkali dust of the departing game warden's jouncing and bounding automobile.

An awful nice feller, that Burney! Them Burneys, up there in the northwestern part of the State, had always had a good name.

Jem tried the shirt on. It fitted. Times a plenty, Jem had bought shirts at the county court town, been particular about them, too. Take a shirt without a long tail and it always crawls up, exasperatingly. This one fitted like a glove. Every stitch was lapped over, and it just couldn't leak a drop; sure funny, bringing a new shirt to an old nester, away out there to Hades and gone!

"I just can't figure it out nohow." Jem shook his head.

He slept on it; he day dreamed about it; he read the newspapers too. Sure enough, they told all about the new antelope skin shirt which local sportsmen had chipped in together to buy for the nester, Jem Harter. Jem's ears warmed up.

The doggone sports had made it illegal to kill antelope, deer, or even game for meat. Now they sent him a brand new antelope hide shirt, the skin of a Winter kill over where they had hundreds in herds, because ranchers, Burneys, Hickoks, and whole cow outfits of rich fellows, dude ranchers, and even sheepfolds had "no tresspassing" signs for shooting sports.

And a game warden had brought this present!

They were all talking over at the county court about Jem Harter, thinking about him, regarding him as very important. Course, he was now an old settler. His eyes were as good as ever, and he could shoot straighter, farther, faster if anything. He had killed the last buck antelope at the Wild Goose Pools at close to half a mile range. He could do it again, and he was plumb sure that when the time came, and any time he wanted to, he could drop this new buck. Probably with a bit of patience he could take two of them in a line and get both at one shot with his old .50-110-550—half inch, powder and lead slug grains.

Of course he wanted to. He longed to renew the thrill of twenty years before, when he was just a boy, practically, but good, and he let down the last antelope buck in Valley of Dreams. The shirt, lasting twenty years, was the best he had ever known. Worn thin now, patched right much, a new one was needed, and another big buck had come along. And, laws, antelope venison, roastings with

sage flavor, broiling steaks, trammeled ribs dripping at the fireplace, and soups—that'd sure be good! But the Summer hide would be thick and spongy; take a Winter hide to make the best leather!

Autumn came and Jem went to town for supplies. About every one asked for news of the three antelopes. He could tell they were growing fat, the yearling filled out visibly, the doe stepping high, the buck sure noble. On the way home he was figuring close.

Within a week four old-timers, a banker, a merchant, a rancher and a stranger came to Jem's cabin. Before dawn the five were stretched in the low sage on a knoll overlooking the water-holes. After nine hours the three antelopes came to drink, and dim eyes took turns at the binoculars and field glasses, just looking.

"I never expected to see that again," one whispered. "Doggone, they're cute—living memories!"

A tiny black line against the crystalline blue north sky drew their gaze; a flock of Canadians, traveling down the line, coasted on spread wings to splash in the largest Wild Goose Pool, and at their appearance the antelopes pranced about, nervous at the noisy confusion.

"Who'd believe we could see that now?" one exclaimed huskily. "Worth a thousand dollars a head—S h-h! Coyote!"

A little desert wolf rose from a bed, and the geese stretched their necks, hissed, flapped their wings and lined out, ready to fight. Coyote that he was, the beast slunk away and the geese settled down.

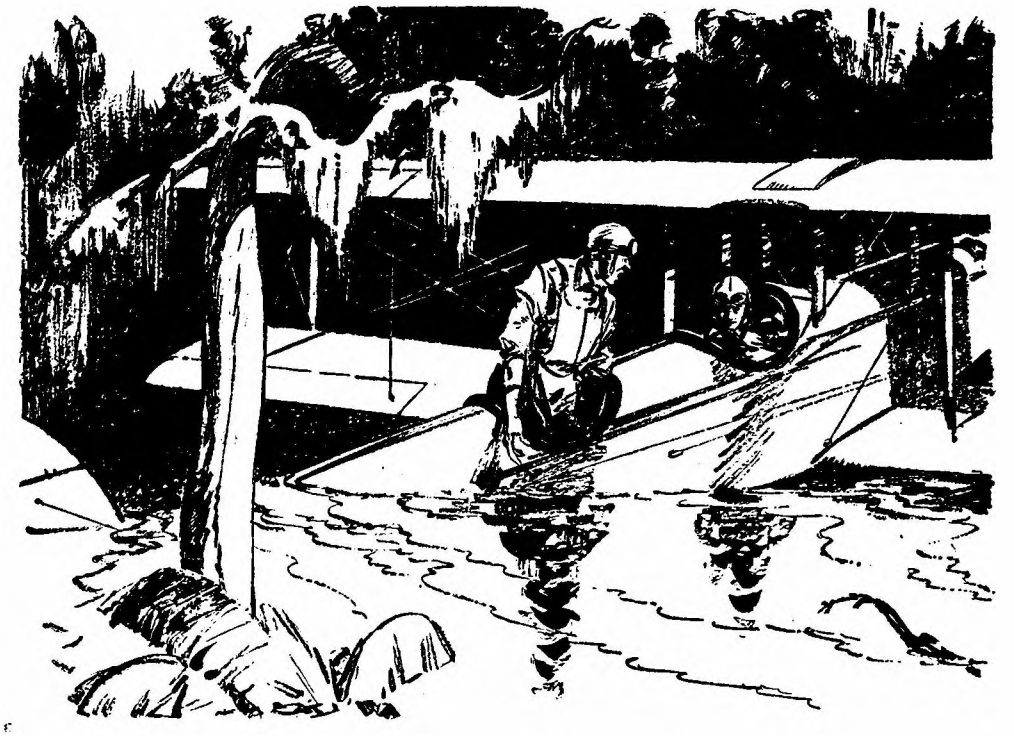
"Anybody shot them, I'd sure tote 'em to the judge, wouldn't you, Jem?"

"Why—" Jem hesitated—"that's right, I would! Huh, boys, that new shirt sure taught me a lesson, yes, indeed! Lucky it come!"

"Wasn't it—" a visitor chuckled—"a sure bright idea?"

The FISHING WAS GOOD

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY



FLYING CADET Booth Delano was on the ground again. Yes, sir, on behest of Web Field's commanding officer, Major Dodo Dodson, the wild cadet had drawn another setdown; and this time the major had told his adjutant, Captain High Pockets Merritt, to make sure that Delano drew the limit.

"D'ye get that, Merritt?" the major had yelled at his adjutant. "The limit! Not two or three days, or a week—or a month. You tell—d'ye hear me, Merritt?—you tell flying office to post Delano as being on the ground indefinitely. I'll clip that heller's wings, Merritt. He'll break no more flying rules for a spell. Dive lagoons, will he? The devil he will, Merritt!"

It seems that Major Dodo Dodson was taking a pay hop in company with Captain High Pockets, with the latter doing the piloting. Now these two spent enough time in the air each month to qualify for their flying pay. That meant that they must be on the wing for just ten hours. And, take it from the rest of the boys at Web Field, those two headquarters gents never put in more than the ten hours required. For a fact, 'twas said that they didn't even put in the ten. Some even hinted that, being so close to the book, maybe the C. O. and the adjutant cheated a bit. Maybe, and no doubt.

Well, at any rate, on the day of this pay hop High Pockets must have been feeling extra brave. That is, he got away from the home field. Yes, sir, believe it or not, the adjutant and his fat superior had winged their way all of ten or fifteen miles south, and east, of Web. That brought then down over the lagoon country, just north of the very wet Everglades.

While down there, where a good cadet would never expect to meet them, the C. O. and adjutant had come upon another Web Field ship doing its stuff. This other ship, with gay abandon, was diving and zooming, just missing the wet surface of a small lagoon, *veraging*, and doing it all over again. Right away, without being called upon to do any very heavy thinking, the two men in the headquarters ship knew what was coming off. That diving, zooming, *veraging* ship was putting on a combat. It was combating a whoopin' crane, which was a favorite sport of the Web Field flying cult. A whoopin' crane, you see, makes a good combat adversary. A diving, zooming ship can drive the crane out of the lagoon and make that fine flying bird do his air stuff. But the diving ship can't convince the whoopin' crane that said whoopin' crane hasn't first rights to that particular wet spot on the Florida finger. So, without leaving his chosen lagoon, the whoopin' crane will just flush, zoom, turn and dive back into his own fish pond.

And that's where the good combat fun comes in, for a pilot can wheel and turn too. And the pilot can dive the crane time and again. The combat that follows is no mean bit of aerial maneuvering, and seldom or almost never did a Web Field man actually run the whoopin' crane to earth. But, (and this is the tough part) more than a few Web Field pilots had made a wrong guess, hit the water and washed out ships that had cost Uncle Sam plenty of jack.

Hence, and to be expected, there was a flying order against all such combats. Anyway, Merritt and the C. O. came in close enough to grab the ship's number. Then they returned to Web Field, feeling that a manly day's work had been done in behalf of the liberal old uncle up in Washington, D. C. Shortly after landing they had the combating ship's number checked—and maybe double checked—at the flying office.

The resulting report was that Cadet Delano, he of the dashing Denver Delanos, was in sole charge of that rule busting plane. And did old Dodo Dodson hit the ceiling? And was High Pockets mad and glad? You bet. Any time these two could tack anything on to Delano, they tacked. And they liked it, and made Delano like it too.

So the wild cadet seemed doomed to remain on the ground till his feet would take root. It was tough on him. Still and all, the wild one from Denver was more or less used to being set down. But as for the major and his adjutant, well, they figured that, for the time being, all troubles had departed Web Field. With Delano on ice, things should flow along smoothly and peacefully. Then, without warning, something else again happened. Headquarters received a very official communication from Washington.

Again old Dodo Dodson hit the well known ceiling; and again High Pockets Merritt found himself the butt of his superior's very loud yelling.

"Merritt—d'y' hear me?—we're due for a visit from a general inspection officer. Merritt, it's just one danged, such-and-such thing after another. Old Ball, old Fish-eater Ball, that's who's coming down. Ball, Merritt, d'y' understand? The toughest old line lieutenant-colonel in the inspector general's office. Old Fish-eater! I was in the Islands with Ball, Merritt. I know him. Y'know, Merritt, he'll turn this so-and-so reservation inside out. You'll have to start scratching, get this post in order. D'y' hear, Merritt? Get things shipshape. And especially our transportation equipment, Merritt.

"Our trucks, tractors and other rolling stock, Merritt. Old Fish-eater, the crusty ex-artillery devil, is a stickler for mobile

equipment. Y'know, Merritt, I've seen him inspect a motor park. The old betty —would y'believe it, Merritt?—would throw back a motor's hood, wipe his white glove across the cylinders and yell blue murder if any dirt showed up. Same on the brake bands, springs, shaft and rear end. No danged reason to old Fish-eater, Merritt! Thinks he's still with Horse or Infantry. White gloving motors! Nevertheless, Merritt, we've got to get things up to snuff. It'll be up to you. D'ye understand, Merritt? Up to you."

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir," High Pockets yes-yessed.

"And," Major Dodo Dodson yelled, as a sudden afterthought, "be sure that Delano is kept out of the picture. No more pink planes, Merritt! D'ye hear? And no more pink goats tangling in the general inspecting officer's legs. Oh, hang that Delano! I could put the man in irons, Merritt. Irons!"

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir, Major."

Major Dodson, in mentioning pink planes and pink goats, was recalling what had happened at Web Field during the visit of the last Washington-sent inspection. On that occasion, just as the general inspector, along with other high ranking men of Army and state, were unloading from the big transport plane, a brace of two foolish looking goats, each painted pink, walked into the picture. They also walked here and there, and between the fat legs of the inspector, generally upsetting that gent of high rank. And even the biggest ship on the field, turned out for inspection, was painted pale pink. Anyway, to say the least, that dignified inspection turned into a bust. Worst of all, the pink goats were Major Dodson's own private goats—in more ways than one. To sum it all up, Cadet Delano had spread all that pale pink paint. And now, naturally, the major feared inspections.

"See that the trucks and tractors are shining like new dollars, Merritt," the major carried on. "And the light cars and motorcycles. Also the flying equipment, Merritt. Have 'em all at their best. Put every enlisted man on the post to work. Wash out all flying if necessary. Curtail the Liberty trucks to town. Cut down on all usage of equipment, once it's policed up, till this inspection is off our hands. Get going, Merritt. Dammit, man, don't sit there like a Navy bump."

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir," Adjutant Merritt again yes-yessed, and backed through the door, still bowing, on his way to outer offices where he would meet other lesser officers and put the whip on them.

An inspection in the Army can be an awful thing. Fact is, Sherman was thinking of inspections when he said that war was hell.

Now, at the time, just after the war, Web Field was not very strong on equipment. It had the usual heritage of '17 and '18, that is, it had trucks, tractors, cars and motorbikes that had been handed down from wartime surplusses. There were two tractors—a large one and a pony tractor. There were three Liberty trucks, and one four-wheel drive Quad. All Army posts had to have a Quad just to make life hard for the garage gang. There were half a dozen motorcycles and half a dozen transport Steve Brodys to ride them.

There was the C. O's staff Cadillac, two Dodges and a pair of hard looking ambulances. As for ships, Web had a few dozen Jennies and four DeHavilands. And, of course, the three-motored transport that was no longer painted a pale pink. All these trucks, tractors, ships, and so forth, must be washed and polished, petted and pampered and made ready to stand at attention out on the deadline when the day of inspection should arrive.

MERRITT went here and there. He told the officer in charge of transportation just what was to be done. He told the officer in charge of flying to tell the officer in charge of engineering to tell all the noncoms to tell all their greaseballs to hit the ball. In the end, you'll notice, the greaseball carried the load. That's life.

Then Captain High Pockets Merritt, meeting the officer in charge of cadets, knew that there was something he should tell this particular gent. So, thinking fast, he told the officer in charge of cadets to confine Cadet Delano to the post till after inspection day.

"But why?" the cadet officer wanted to know for, in putting a man under actual or technical arrest, one should have at least one little reason.

"Why enough!" Merritt barked. "Commanding officer's orders."

And, believe it or not even if it is hard to believe, the wild cadet, Delano, was told to remain east of the west fence, west of the east fence, south of the north fence and north of the south fence till further and future orders. And, for Delano, that was hard to take.

"I'm sorry, Delano," the officer in charge of the wild ones explained. "If anything can be done I'll do it. I'll talk to the commanding officer. But, Delano, don't do anything that I wouldn't do between now and the next time I see you."

"Well, listen, Lieutenant," Cadet Delano said to his immediate superior. "I don't want you to get yourself in dutch talking for me. Let it slide. I'll either see Dumb Dodo myself, or I'll let the thing stand for the time being. You see, sir, it's all of two weeks till next pay day; and they didn't roll just right for me this month so I'm broke flatter than a hat. No good reason why I should leave the post anyway. So, as a favor, sir, don't do me any favors at this time. She'll all come out in the wash. She always has, you know."

"Have it your own way," the lieutenant agreed. "I'll lay off."

Preparations for inspection turned Web Field inside out, and the equipment sure began to look like a million dollars. The C. O. and High Pockets circulated among the workers and appeared very well satisfied with the results of all that labor. Yes, sir, this coming inspection should redeem that last awful pale pink bust.

"This inspection will tickle old Fish-eater," Major Dodson said to High Pockets. "And, Merritt, did I ever tell you why we call him Fish-eater? No? Well, just for that reason: because he is a great fish-eater. In the Islands old Ball would send a squad of men fully fifty miles to get good fish. Daffy old devil."

They returned to the office. There was a telegram. The major read it, saying:

"Hell's bells, Merritt! Fish-eater arrives Jacksonville tonight. Requests I meet him there with transport plane in the morning. Merritt, guess I'll have to take the big ship up. Guess you'd best come along. That's settled. You get a good transport pilot for us. Tell flying office to have the transport ready to fly."

This was Friday. Tomorrow would be a free day for the men. There would be no trucks or cars to take the men out of camp, but the gang would go. Till taps Sunday night Web would be deserted.

Saturday morning found Major Dodo Dodson and his adjutant in the mess early. The mess officer, Lieutenant Page, was there too.

"Page," the major chirped, "come here. Captain Merritt and I are flying to Jacksonville. Bringing back Lieutenant-Colonel Ball. He's from the inspector general's office, you know. Now look here, Page, why can't you have a catch of good fresh fish for this evening's mess? The colonel is very fond of fish, Page."

Lieutenant Page said that he could and would get the fish.

"Good," the major enthused. "And make sure it's fresh fish, Page. Send a plane south this afternoon. That should get the fish here in time for evening mess. Don't forget, Page. It's important."

Major Dodson and High Pockets quit the mess hall and went out to the waiting ship. Lieutenant Page, with his week end all planned, was out in the kitchen talking things over with the cook on shift.

"Brown," he said to the cook, "the Old Man just told me to get fish for tonight's dinner. Now I'm on my way to Fort Myers, so the fishing detail will be up to you. About noon you dig up a ship and pilot, and see that they fly south and get some good, solid mullet. And maybe a

few turtles. Perhaps you can take a hop down yourself, Brown. You like to fly, eh?"

Cook Brown said he'd take care of the fishing cruise; for the cook sure did like to ride in planes—and what enlisted man doesn't?

Well, with the major and his adjutant gone, the ten o'clock inspection wasn't much of an event. Major Feest, the medical officer, was supposed to put on said inspection; and if there was anything old Feest didn't like, that thing was to walk through many long barracks, for no good reason at all. To state it just as it happened, the major carried on that inspection right from his own quarters, without leaving his bed, merely by sending one of his medical noncoms to visit each waiting unit and say that the inspection was a success—and over.

By ten-thirty Web Field was very quiet; and the heat of the Florida day was heavy upon the place. There were a few enlisted men sleeping in quarters, a few cooks and kitchen police on duty, a few guards on post, and a few good soldiers in the guardhouse. All in all, there were very few men left at Web.

At noon meal the cook at officers' mess fed just one man, the officer of the day. Then, with that big piece of work out of the way, the cook remembered that he must secure the fish, as promised. But a thorough search of the field produced not a single pilot to fly a plane; and the best fish known to Web Field had to be reached by air; for there were no roads going into the lagoon country where those white bellied fish were wont to sport and break water. Well, at the end of his search, the cook arrived at the cadet barracks. And there he found Delano. Jerking the blanket from Cadet Delano's sleeping face, the cook yelled:

"Snap out of it, kaydet! You've got to rise and fly."

"Not me, cook," Cadet Delano answered, and began to pull the friendly hot blanket back into sleeping position. "Now get out and let a man sleep!"

The cook, being an old line, rough and loud soldier, then removed the cot from under Delano. That removal was by the good old lift and tip method. A method that is not always painless. Cadet Booth Delano, picking himself up from the floor, argued thus:

"Now listen here, you grub destroyer. I'm on the ground. And—"

"You were on the ground," Cook Brown corrected. "And I don't want to hear any part of your family brawls, kaydet. See? I want a pilot to fly a ship south for some fish. You know where the fish hang out, don't you, eh?"

"Guy, I know where everything and everybody hangs out in Florida," Cadet Delano stated, and that there was actual fact too. "But I'm on the ground. Old Dodo's orders; and those orders stand. Go get yourself a commissioned man, cook."

"There's only one such bird left on this reservation," the cook told Delano. "That's Lieutenant Sale, and he's acting officer of the day. He can't leave the post. You know that, as little as you seem to know. Come on now. Get into some clothes, kaydet. This is the Old Man's orders. He said, 'Cook Brown, you have some eating fish here for supper.' That's what the major said before he took off for Jax this A. M. And he told me to take a ship, any ship and any pilot, and hop south for said fish. So you see, kaydet, it will be jake for you to do the piloting. No piloting, no fish. No fish, much hell. Much hell, you'll be the goat. What say now?"

Delano, of course, wanted to fly. Delano always wanted to fly. Nevertheless, he must not take a ship without authority. So he suggested:

"Tell you what, cook. You dig up the officer of the day: and if he'll write out an order giving me permission to take a ship, then I'll go, because the O.D. is the big brass hat whenever everybody else is out on the make."

"No sooner said than done," Cook Brown agreed. "I'll be right back, so you get ready. Make it fast, and we'll have a few hours down there in the lagoon."

AT TWO o'clock sharp Delano zoomed his Curtiss JN6H out of Web Field, and cut for the southeast, with fishing poles strapped to the leading edge of the left lower wing. The cadet and the cook were wearing hip boots. There was going to be some fishing done, no fooling.

On his way south Cadet Delano happened upon that lagoon, about fifteen miles from Web, where he had been discovered diving and combating the whoopin' crane. Of course, he had no intention ever of returning to that banned sport but, upon nearing the place, he found that a group of the Web Field enlisted men were camped and fishing at the end of a trail which crossed the palmetto, then stopped almost within a mile of the water. So Cadet Delano jazzed down to see who was who among those present.

These enlisted men, four of them, had a stripped down flivver puddle jumper for transportation; and they gave the passing jazzing, zooming ship a wave. Cadet Delano carried on. Then, right ahead, was the fatal lagoon. And in the middle of the big lagoon was none other than old man whoopin' crane, standing there on a bit of high hummock and waiting for somebody to come along in a plane and give him a run for his money. The life of a whoopin' crane, between waits, can sure be lonesome. However, the wait had ended.

Cadet Delano, leveling off and idling his motor, turned to Cook Brown and yelled:

"Make sure your safety belt is tight! And get set. We're going round and round."

Having said that, Delano slapped full gun to his motor, dropped the ship's nose and began to bring that lagoon up and up. And the diving, roaring, whistling nose was within a hundred feet of the lagoon's surface before the crane decided that the time to pull out had arrived. And as the crane pulled up his long stilts and made his flush, Delano zoomed. On the top of the full zoom, Delano flew a flat, fluttering, mushing turn. In that almost control-less turn, the ship's motor conked and quit. It was a full size quit too. A breath taking, dead stick stop; and one wild cadet knew that luck had moved out on him. But a good cadet goes right along without luck; so Delano shoved his stick ahead to the instrument board, fought for all the control that he could yank out of his surfaces, and held tenaciously to his straight-ahead landing.

The landing, in spite of all Delano might hope to do, was going to be right smack in the lagoon. Not so bad, from the point of view of two necks saved, if the thing could be pulled off without washing out the plane when it hit the water. Well, luck was with them; and Cadet Delano, getting a bit of control on his surfaces in the last few yards of glide, set her down for a nice three-point splash. Having splashed, the ship quit right there, about one hundred feet from the nearest dry land. That nearest dry land was the shore toward Web Field. As for depth of water, the lower wings and the floor boards of each cockpit were under. The two men, unstrapping with great speed, pulled up out of the water and took side by side seats on the upper wing. So far so good.

"This," Cadet Delano said, "wasn't the lagoon I had in mind, but it will do. Lucky we thought to bring along the rubber boots, eh?"

"Yeh," Cook Brown agreed. "We can fly them home."

For a few minutes the two Web Field men sat there and stared at the water, sky and each other. Noticing that this didn't do a single thing toward getting them out of the difficulty, Cook Brown next suggested:

"Why not get down there, kaydet, and see if you can shove this crock toward land? Go ahead, I'll tell you if she moves."

"Can't be done," Cadet Delano decided. "Why, if you were to take a cook, shove some brains into his head, and make a mule out of what you had left, said cook-mule couldn't budge this ship. The bottom's just soft enough in these lagoons to make the work too heavy. Tell you what, Brown. You take a running jump off the end of this wing and wade to shore.

Then go back, locate those birds who are fishing about a mile the other side of that palmetto barren, and take their flivver back to camp. You'll have to get the garage to send down a three-quarter-ton truck with ropes. Hop to it, and I'll have a fine mess of dead fish on a stick by the time you get back."

Cook Brown didn't relish the wade ashore, or the trip through a mile of palmetto barren, with, perhaps, a hidden rattlesnake or two along the mile of march. But Cook Brown knew that this cadet would stay here forever before he'd start back on foot. What was more, it was up to Brown to make speed and have the fish on the table by the time the C. O. and his party arrived home. Anyway, wading waist deep, the cook started for the north bank of the lagoon; then, with a few parting words, he carried on through the palmetto, slowly.

The four fishing enlisted men, after a little argument, said that Cook Brown might take the flivver—if he'd manage to fill the tank with gas from the Web Field supply. Brown promised; and started alone.

The sergeant in charge of the garage kicked like a steer, and refused to send a clean truck down into the muck of the well known lagoon country. But, again, the officer of the day gave the order; and Brown, leading the way, started south again with Web's nice clean light truck following. Coming to the end of the trail, Brown returned the flivver—with full tank, as promised—to its owners.

The light truck, bumping and making a rough sea of the travel through the sandy palmetto barren, carried on with Brown pointing out the way. At last, to Brown's great joy, they were back at the lagoon.

As they pulled up at the edge of the lagoon Cadet Delano was found fishing diligently. He was still sitting upon the top wing. In view of the fact that those lagoons just simply teem with fish, asking to be taken, Delano already had a good catch.

"Turn that truck around," Delano yelled, "and back up to the water's edge. Then tie your rope on the propeller shaft. We'll be getting out of here right away. This will be plenty of dead fish."

The truck driver made his turnabout, coming back with the tailgate of the truck overhanging the water. Then, after knotting one end of the rope to the truck, Cook Brown again waded toward the ship, intending to tie on to the propeller shaft as suggested. But the rope fell short of reaching. It was all of twenty feet short.

"Well," Cook Brown yelled, "what now?"

"Back the truck into the water," Cadet Delano suggested.

"Not me," yelled the truck driver.

"Why not?" Delano demanded. "The last time I put a ship in one of these lagoons the truck—that very same truck that you've got there—came right in to where my crock was piled up. And it got out again without any trouble. The bottom of this lagoon is just like that barren you just crossed. That soft stuff, the dark muck, is only a few inches deep. Come on, be game. Ease her in. We want to get this ship back on dry land. The cook and myself have to hop back and have these dead fishes on the table for dinner. The Old Man will call a court for you if you gum the works, feller."

The driver hesitated. Then he asked: "How about it, Brown? Does it feel hard under where you're standing?"

Cook Brown shuffled his booted feet and dug them into the lagoon's bottom.

"Yeh," he said. "She seems tough as gravel. Back in and give it a try. You've got everything to lose and nothing to win."

So, with everything to lose and nothing to gain, the truck driver decided to do the right thing. Slowly, with Brown taking up the slack on the long rope, the truck slid back through the last clumps of palmetto and oozed down the slight lagoon bank and into the water. It took a bit more power to send it back and back. But the wheels were still finding traction on the lagoon's bottom. So, to make the job good, and just because the man does

not live who doesn't take great joy in driving through deep water, the driver went even farther than was necessary. He stopped when his hot muffler hissed.

"That will be jake," Cook Brown yelled.

The driver killed his motor, pulled the tops of his boots to the hips, and stepped out to join Brown. He circled his truck, noticed how deep she was and remarked.

"Guy, what I mean, I put this baby into the water, eh? Land snakes alive! If the garage macs could only see their nice, clean truck now. Make it fast, Brown. She's still oozing down a bit. Going deeper. I don't want that muffler to get under water. Are you set?"

"Whoopee!" Cadet Delano yelled from his fishing position atop the wing. "Gang, I've tied on to a 'gator. Give us a hand. Give us a hand."

Now there was nothing that caught the fancy of a gang of Web Field men more than an alligator. The ambition of every man in camp was to become proud daddy of a young 'gator. And here was a three-foot specimen that had taken Delano's hook, and was now putting up as game a fight as ever you've seen. And Delano was playing it, giving it lots of line, just to avoid breaking his tackle. So, by the time Cook Brown and his mate came a-running, the young 'gator was some thirty yards beyond the tail of the plane, to the south. Right after it, wading deep, the two booted men went. Up over the boots came the water; and onward the braves pushed. Fifteen yards beyond the tail of the ship the water was to their middles; and they went slower. Five yards more, and they stopped; for the water was up under their arms. For a few seconds they seemed stopped.

"Take hold on the line," Cadet Delano yelled. "I'll show you city folks how we-uns down a-here twist them there 'gator's tails. Gangway for a fish!"

Delano, kicking out of his boots and the very few bits of clothing he'd been wearing, came off the top of that wing in a swan dive, swam under water for more than twenty yards, and popped up again between the 'gator and the men who were holding the line.

THERE was a long fight after Delano got his hands on the three-foot 'gator. The lagoon was loud with frantic splashings and ride-'em cowboy yells. And that went on for several minutes. In the end, though, Cadet Delano made his way into the shallower water where Brown and the driver watched and waited. With Delano was the captive, a snapping, angry little devil. All jaws and baby teeth.

"Is your tailgate up?" Delano asked the truck driver. "We'll dump this baby right in the wagon box. Give me a hand; he's slick."

The three soldiers, with six hands on the 'gator, began to walk round the plane and to the truck. Then, with his eyes popping, the driver dropped his hold, stood and stared. There was no truck! But a small brown turtle, all eyes, sat upon the upper tip of the steering wheel. That upper tip, about four inches of the wheel, was all that remained above water. The rest of the truck had oozed into the gooey bottom of the lagoon.

"Oh-o!" Cadet Delano cheered. "Hang a flag on it, to show where she went down. Come on, Brown. Never mind the truck. let's get a rope on this 'gator. The Army's full of trucks; but a good, three-foot 'gator comes just once in a lifetime."

With the towrope they secured the 'gator and deposited the hog tied, wild eyed little fellow high and dry on the palmetto barren. So that was that, but something had to be done.

"Well," Cadet Delano told them, "there's nothing for us to do but go back to that flivver gang, get said flivver, and make for home. Did you bring the fish I caught, Brown?" Delano knew that the cook had been too busy to bring the fish, which were still atop the wing. "Fish! I'll—" Brown cussed. "It's 'most dinner hour now. We'll never get back in time. I grab myself some particular grief for this when the Old Man walks into my

mess, with his guests, and finds me missing."

Cook Brown waded out again and pulled the string of fish from the wing. There was a good forty or fifty pounds of fish, for the things come out of the water fast and furious in that place.

The four flivver troopers were all set to camp for the night.

"Fill the junk's tank on U. S. gas, and you can take her," was all they said; but added, seeing the young 'gator which Delano carried over his shoulder, "You can leave that baby with us, kaydet. No use crowding him aboard the skeeter."

"Yeh," Cadet Delano answered. "Leave him here, and I'll come back to find him made into four cigaret cases, eh?"

Northward, with the sun sinking fast, the three men drove the borrowed flivver. They were pretty well satisfied that the plane and truck would remain where left, unwatched, till they got back. It had been a large day; the cook had his fish; Delano had his 'gator; and the truck driver knew that he was going to get *his* as soon as he returned to Web—his slice of official bawling-out.

As they swung in through Web Field's main gate they met the officer of the day strolling down the camp's wide central drive. The officer's eyes bulged a bit.

"Where's the plane?" he asked.

"Still in the lagoon, sir," Cadet Delano answered.

"And the truck?" asked the O. D.

"It's in the same lagoon, sir," the truck's driver told the anxious acting brass hat. "It's in deep, too. She's a tow job."

"But," Cook Brown told the O. D, "we got the fish, sir."

"T'hell with the fish!" said the officer and gentleman. He added, "The commanding officer and party won't be here to eat those fish. Toss the stinky things into the garbage, cook. An hour ago we had a telephone call from Captain Merritt. They won't be back this evening. The transport burned out a generator, center motor. They're still at Jax. First thing in the morning we'll send a ship and motor mechanic up there with a new generator. Chances are, the party won't get back before tomorrow evening, or Monday morning. Now what are we going to do about this plane and truck? Any ideas, Delano?"

"Full of 'em, Lieutenant. Always full of 'em," the wild cadet exclaimed—almost cheered. "We sure made a smear of the detail."

"Granted!" the O. D. snapped. "Now how are you going to go about unsmearing said detail?"

"Aw, shucks," Cadet Delano belittled, "it will be easy with one of the heavy trucks. We'll jerk them out of that lagoon, high and dry, before a man will have time to say Suetonius Tranquillus or even Aleksyey Nikolaevich."

"The Quad truck, sir," the truck driver volunteered, "could walk right out of that puddle with my bus. The Quad, you know, has a four-wheel drive. The cadet and myself could take blankets and go down there with the Quad right now. Have it back here by daylight."

"That's a pregnant idea," Delano agreed.

"Yeh," the O. D. half agreed, "if it works. Let's drive round to the garage and talk to the sergeant. We've got to get that equipment out of the hole. I'll get burnt surer'n shootin' if the Old Man comes back and finds the whole command mislaid."

"What!" the noncom in charge of the garage yelled. "Send you thugs down there with another truck! Not by a damn sight! Them there 'gators got all the equipment they're going to play with till after this inspection. One truck in that hole is plenty. And you, Beefy—" this to the truck driver—"you've worked yourself out of a soft job. It's back to the garbage detail and kitchen police for you, Y'big sea going tramp! Sink a good truck, will ya? Now get y'self outa my shop. Scram!"

The truck driver made tracks. But the O. D. was still the brass hat. He argued:

"Now listen, Sergeant. We've got to get that ship and truck out of the water.

The major and his inspecting party won't be in before tomorrow afternoon at the earliest. We'll have plenty of time to get that equipment back here, wash it up and forget the whole cheesy mess long before inspection hour arrives. It's the only thing to do, Sergeant. Send a heavy truck down. That's a good soldier. Make it snappy. Then forget."

"Well," the garage noncom decided, backing down, "I'll go down there myself. And you, cadet. You'd best come along and show me where this mess is. We'll go right now. Wait till I dig up a few more goldbricks. We'll need half a dozen hands."

Somewhere in that camp the sergeant located six other enlisted men. With these men aboard, and driving the heavy Quad, the noncom departed Web Field and headed south. His headlights bobbed out over the palmetto barren; and you just knew that one hog wild garage sergeant was going places, through the balmy Florida night, in a great, cussing hurry. Out front, driving the borrowed flivver, Cadet Delano showed the way. Then Web Field waited for a few hours.

A few minutes before midnight the flivver, with the noncom and Delano aboard, whirled through Web Field's main gate once more.

The O. D. and sergeant of the guard, just prior to the former's after-midnight-and-before-dawn inspection tour, were standing in the doorway of the guardhouse. The O. D's jaw fell when the flivver stopped, and the garage sergeant saluted. Delano said—

"All present."

"What now?" the officer of the day asked with emphasis.

"That clumsy Quad, sir, mired down on us," said the noncom.

"Do tell!" said the O. D. "Of all strange things! And you, Sergeant, backed into the lagoon too, eh?"

"No, sir," alibied the sergeant. "You see, it was dark, sir. All I did was back her up to the edge of the water. We had a fifty-foot chain from there to the truck's front spring. Cadet Delano, here, was out on the truck. He gave me the go ahead. I put power to my bus and it began to spin its wheels, all four of 'em. Well, you see, I supposed that she'd spin in a bit, then bite into solid gravel, or something like that. Hell, sir, it's hard to make a Quad four-wheel-drive lay down and say uncle. Well, I spun there for a minute or so, but she wasn't getting traction. Then I got down, and took a look. She'd spun all four wheels through the white sand, and reached water all around, sir. You see, sir, I didn't guess that the lagoon water came back under the shore like that. Anyway, she went right on with the sinking even after the power was off her drive. She's in a little above the axles. Or, that's how she was when we left her. The gang we took along are still down there, digging."

The officer of the day chewed his fingernails for awhile. Then he lighted a smoke, scratched his nose and said:

"Well, it's up to you, Sergeant. It's your equipment. What are you going to do about it?"

"We're going right back," the noncom answered. "I'll drive the small tractor, the whippet. She'll butt the Quad head an' heels outa that hole. Then I'll yank the light truck and plane high and dry. And I'll have the whole cockeyed, dripping mess back here by reveille, or I'll eat my shirt. I'm fed up with this monkey-foolin'."

"Hop to it," the O. D. agreed; and suggested, "I'm fed up too."

Down the main company street and out the east gate went the flivver, with the whippet tank following as close as possible.

At two-thirty in the morning, same morning, back came the flivver. As per usual, the garage sergeant and Cadet Delano were with it. The sergeant was mad. Cadet Delano gave a cheer for the sentry on the main gate, yelling:

"Two high powered gentlemen of the post. Never mind the guard!"

The O. D. was sleeping; but his sergeant of the guard came to the door of the guardhouse to learn who on earth was

making all that noise right in the middle of the night, or small of the morning.

"What!" the sergeant of the guard exclaimed. "You birds again! Come on, don't be bashful. Tell poppa all about it."

"Aw, go an' die, Kinney!" the sergeant of the garage told the sergeant of the guard. "Who the—"

"What's wrong now?" the O. D's voice asked, from where he was climbing out of his bunk just inside the guardhouse. He came to the door and stood there beside his right hand man.

"That sample tractor," the garage sergeant told the O. D, "isn't worth a good, bad or indifferent damn, sir."

"'S funny," the O. D. mused. "I thought you were going to sneak up behind that Quad and butt it right outa that muck."

"I did that thing," the sergeant testified. "But the fifty-foot chain we had between the Quad and the light truck—well, Delano, here, forgot to turn that chain loose from the Quad. Anyhow, the chain got tangled in the tracks. She's a mess. It's a daylight job to untangle it."

The O. D. looked at Delano.

"Mighty careless, cadet," he said.

"If true," admitted Delano. "The chain, though, is tangled."

"Well, what's the plot now, Sergeant?" the O. D. asked.

"There's nothing left now but to crank up the big tractor," the garage sergeant decided. "I'd like some more men if I could have them. Maybe I'd best take along a couple trucks of bridge planks. As it is, we'll have all we can do to get the equipment back here before noon."

"Go get your tractor," the O. D. ordered. "We'll comb the barracks while you're getting it, and see how many men we can dig up. But if anything else goes haywire, we'll march the command down to that so and so lagoon and hold the inspection there.

"Cadet Delano, you trot down to the cadet barracks and see how many men you can turn out there. And turn 'em out. Sergeant Kinney, turn out your off guard men. Send them through every barracks. Get your corporal, and go along yourself. I'll run down to officers' quarters and see if I can dig up a few commissioned men to handle the detail. We've got to quit this submarine work and get back into Air Service. Man, won't there be some hell a-poppin' if the Old Man and party arrive to find this post busted forty different ways from the center! Let's go."

HALF an hour later three officers, twenty-six enlisted men and seven flying cadets stood in front of the guardhouse, rubbed their tired eyes, cussed more than a bit and wished that they hadn't come back to camp for the night. Where did the O. D. get this stuff, rolling a bunch of men out of the hay at three of the A. M? Why, the Army can't make a man do this! Gosh, no, but, of course, the Army can make a man mighty sorry that he didn't do it.

The O. D. turned the assembled detail over to Lieutenant Ted Cushman, and told him to march the sleepy eyed soldiers down to the garage where there were two Liberty trucks waiting to be loaded with heavy bridge planks. At three-thirty of that balmy Florida morning the two Liberty trucks, loaded heavy with planks and swarming with all that reluctant slave labor, went out through the main gate and rolled into the south. Clanking, crackling like a machine gun, and spitting fire, the big bull tractor followed. And after taking on some mooched grub at Cook Brown's kitchen, Cadet Delano was all set to flivver down the line once more.

"Well, kaydet," Cook Brown was saying, there in the early morning, "you'll get to know the way after a few more trips, eh?"

"You bet," Delano agreed, over his fourth or fifth cup of hot java. "Man, didn't we cut this outfit in on some fun, eh? Never had so much fun, cook, since the silly soldiers painted the silly major's silly goats a silly pale pink. Well, so long. See you later. But say, how about tossing our 'gator a few pounds of the best meat?"

Cook Brown said he would, for Army cooks are always that way—except when it comes to feeding the enlisted men.

It was daylight before the garage sergeant reached the battle front with the big tractor. The shock troops were camped around a roaring fire and waiting for the zero hour.

When the tractor showed up Lieutenant Cushman put the whip on his charges and told 'em to go over the top and get those trucks and tractor out of the quagmire.

The garage sergeant knew his big tractor like a book. Yes, sir. He went right into action.

"Unhook that chain from the Quad," he yelled; and willing hands did that thing. It will be recalled that the Quad was out front, with the pony tractor between the Quad and the edge of the lagoon. "That's jake!" the sergeant yelled. "Now pull my tow cable back there and couple me up with this four-wheel-drive mud hen. That's the stuff. Stand clear."

The big tractor walked off with the Quad, and the sergeant dragged the mud caked thing far out into the palmetto. Then, hell bent and full of business, he came chug-chug-chugging back.

"All right, Delano," he bawled, "throw that chain on to this tractor's hook. I'll be right in there and snake the heller out. And you, Murphy," he called to one of his garage mechanics, "wind up its engine and get set to ease power to it. With your tracks moving we'll untangle that chain quicker'n scat."

"Come back," Cadet Delano yelled. "This chain won't make your hook. Back up. Come on, back, back, back more."

"Stand out the way!" the tractor driving sergeant yelled.

Then knowing his tractor so well, the sergeant put the power to her and came back. Right down through the deep troughs made by the Quad she came. She splashed water and showed a powerful contempt for the sink holes that had stopped a mere Quad.

"How's that?" the sergeant asked, when his rear hook was almost against the pony tractor's front hook.

"Not so danged good!" yelled Lieutenant Ted Cushman. "You're sinking, man! Get outa that hole!"

"Aw, easy, Lieutenant." The garage sergeant laughed. "This is one baby that can beat Florida. Hooked up, Delano? Stand clear then! Come on, you loud ex-artillery iron mule—let's go!"

The great big bull tractor roared, sounding like something gone mad. And her caterpillar tracks took that power, and spun. But the great puller didn't pull worth a cent. And was she sinking!

"Kill your power!" Lieutenant Cushman yelled. "Kill it before you bore through to China. Shovels and bridge planks, front and center. Come on, men, push those shovels and start laying plank. Up till now nothing has happened in this lagoon but, take it from me, work begins here and now. You bend your back too, Cadet Delano. Come to think of it, seems to me you started this, eh? Say, man, in the good old days they'd take a guy apart, bone from bone, for causing all this grief. But a cadet, I suppose, has to run true to form and be just a cadet. Lord love 'em."

The work was well under way when noon arrived. Grub was sent down from Web Field. Then more work was put out. By then there was an excavation circling the big tractor that would have done credit to a steam shovel. But the more they dug the deeper the heavy chunk of machinery sank. The troops had all their duds off and were working waist deep in the surrounding water, trying to induce heavy planks to sneak under the sinking tracks. Out front, away from the lagoon, more men were bending their backs, digging a long runway and planking the bottom. It looked very, very much like Times Square torn up again for for another subway; and the New York men in the group were getting homesick.

In the middle of the afternoon, using the Web Field ambulance and bringing a few more men who had strayed back to camp, the old officer of the day, off duty at noon, arrived at the scene.

"You're in luck," he told all hands. "Just got word from Jax that they washed the landing gear off the transport trying to get out of that rough field. That means that the major and party will come down by train. They won't be in before tomorrow morning. By then we'll have this job cleaned up."

"*We*," one of the mud caked enlisted stiffs was heard to remark, "meaning *me*."

The old officer of the day laughed and let that pass.

"I'm going to run back to Web now," he said, "and get some blankets and more grub for you men."

Sunday wore on. More men came down from Web. Officers flew down, upon returning from week end. Night fell. More men came. And the exhaust stack of the bull tractor was barely above ground; with that patient sinking fastly. By lantern light and headlights the job went into extra innings. Delano was still the life of the party. He told all hands that it was like General Goethals digging the Panama Canal.

SUNRISE, however, found the Army at rest. And the same dawn found a train from the north coming closer and closer to Web. On the train were Major Dodson, old Fish-eater Ball and High Pockets. And old Fish-eater was plenty sore. The transport's failure had peeved him.

The train arrived in Arcadia, eight miles north of Web, at eight-twenty. There was no Army car there to meet them. High Pockets called Web. Web told the adjutant about all the grief down at the lagoon. High Pockets, trying to keep that bad news from Fish-eater, said he'd call a taxi. It was shortly after noon when they reached camp.

Lieutenant Pratt, officer of the day, was the only officer on the post. No enlisted men. It was a deserted post.

"Lieutenant Pratt!" Major Dodson yelled. "What's it mean?"

Pratt slipped his C. O. the high sign; and the taxi went on. After paying off the taxi High Pockets went back to Pratt. The major and Fish-eater went to the former's quarters.

Alone, Major Dodson joined High Pockets at headquarters. The major was wild. High Pockets told him enough to make him wilder.

"Plane in a lagoon?" the major yelled. "Who put it there?"

"Delano," whispered High Pockets. "The O. D. sent him after the fish, sir. The whole command is down there—in the mud, sir."

Major Dodson said awful things. And the major could say 'em.

"Get a car, Merritt! Get a car," the major yelled. "We'll go down there. Don't stand there! Call the garage, man."

The garage said there was no car, or truck, or bike.

"Get a ship, Merritt! Get a ship," yelled the major.

High Pockets gave the guardhouse a ring. He told the officer of the day to turn out the guard and put a ship on the line.

From where the major was pacing and raging in that office, he could see the members of the guard trundle a big DeHaviland to the deadline. Then they started the motor. The ship was set.

"Now look here, Merritt," the major was explaining, as they began to quit the office for the ship, "I left old Fish-eater in the bath, at my quarters. Maybe he'll take a nap. We've got to get there, straighten things out, and fly back in time to keep the old devil pacified. D'y'understand, Merritt? Hang it, man, d'y' un—"

Major Dodson cut his talk short, for there was the mad old Fish-eater, feeling neglected, and appearing full of fight.

"Will you excuse the captain and myself, sir?" the major asked, by way of a feeble opener.

"Where you men going?" old Fish-eater demanded, with all the outward indications of much fight.

Major Dodson's first impulse was to stall and lie a bit. However, on second thought, he decided not to obey that im-

pulse. So, instead, he reached for the truth and told it.

"We intend flying south to where some of our troops are having trouble with a truck in a lagoon, sir," he related. "It is highly necessary that we get that piece of equipment back in time for the inspection, sir."

"I'll ride along with you," old Fish-eater snapped. "Never in my life saw such a confounded command. Dodson! Wrecks! Lagoon!"

"Have 'em roll out another ship, Merritt! Come, man, get busy! Call the guardhouse again, and order out another ship!" Major Dodson barked at his ever present adjutant.

High Pockets gave the guardhouse a ring from where they were, still in the major's quarter's. Then, after a long talk with the officer of the day, High Pockets cupped a hand over the instrument's transmitter and turned to talk with the C. O.

"Sir," he reported, "the officer of the day wishes to remind you that there is not a single flyer on the post."

"It's you he tells!" Major Dodo barked. "Let me talk to that smart guy. Hello! Hello, Pratt! This is the commanding officer speaking! D'ye understand? Get that second plane out, Pratt; and you be ready to fly it south . . . I don't care! I don't care! . . . Don't give a dang if you're officer of the day or officer of the night. You have that ship on the line and all ready to fly in five minutes!"

Lieutenant-Colonel Ball was all set to shove off now. He was still madder than than the well known congress of wet hens; but ready and even willing to try something else, at least once. But as they walked up the long row of barracks and hangars, old Fish-eater kept muttering such snappy sayings as:—

"Ships! Took m'ride! Hell of a command! Back talk right in the commandant's own quarters! Damned shanty town stuff! Joke of a post. Nothing to inspect. Make a black report, sure. Wrecks. I never saw such a layout in all my life! Taking a bath, and out goes my host. Sneaks away. Ship in lagoon. No equipment in sight."

Lieutenant Pratt, all set to fly, was waiting where two ships were warming out on the deadline. The ship handling guards were doing their best to avoid laughing; for they knew that the C. O. was up in the air, higher'n a kite, even before the planes took off.

The trip from Web to the lagoon, by air, was no trip at all. Soon both ships were circling above the wet spot where all the work was being done. And much queer labor had been accomplished since last we made note of activities on that front. Even from the air, the four men in the ships could see that the upper crust of Florida had at least been scratched. But with two ships jazzing around the scene, all that wet labor now came to a halt.

The troops, leaning on muck stick and pick, dropping timber and plank, waved and wondered who was coming by plane to look the job over, or help. Needless to say, Major Dodo Dodson and High Pockets had no desire to see all those men quit work and become clubby. Waving! Having fun! The major and his adjutant would take care of that just as soon as they could set the ships down.

Back over the mile of palmetto barren the two big ships flew. There were plenty more ships on that emergency field, twenty to be exact, so they had no trouble finding it. What was more, and what was very military, those ships were all drawn up in two orderly lines. Even the major noticed that; and he hoped that old Fish-eater might know enough to know that this was as it should be. Good order. Good soldiering, in any man's branch of the Army.

Lieutenant Pratt, knowing all those palmetto barren landing spots, went right down for his grounding. His wheels rolled to a stop at the far west end of the first line of ten. Then he kicked in a bit of left rudder, ground looped the bus, and there were eleven ships on that line. Major Dodo Dodson, pulling off helmet and goggles, stood on the cushion of his seat to watch High Pockets and old Fish-

eater make their setdown. In they came. And for some reason High Pockets decided to make his landing along the south side of the open space. That is, he was landing, nose into the west, and behind the lineup of ships; which was all right, for there was plenty of room.

Ah, but there wasn't plenty of room—not for High Pockets. It was this way: The adjutant was a Jenny pilot, so the big DeHaviland was a bird of another color. Not so easy. Anyway, with the old Fish-eater in that rear cockpit, the adjutant was coming down.

"Jump, sir!" Pratt yelled. Major Dodson, with Pratt, jumped.

The whole world had gone wrong. High Pockets' ship, bouncing along with power, was out of control. It was horsing, bucking along the line of ships. As it traveled the line the wild ship wrecked every tail that came in its way; which were eleven tails to be exact. Then, to make things worse, the adjutant pushed full gun to his motor and tried to recover command. He almost took off again. But his right lower wing was wrecked, from battering all those tails. He jerked the great ship off in a bounce. Then he killed his power. The heavy ship slammed down on to the sharp palmetto hummocks, upside down. And as Major Dodson and Pratt ran toward the wreck old Fish-eater fell out of that rear pit. The old boy fell on to the spears of the palmettoes.

And did old Fish-eater orate? He did. And he had a right to. He was pretty dirty, even before he opened his mouth. He was also scratched and bleeding. However, he picked himself up and forthwith began to lead the charge through the mile of barren.

"Get going!" he bellowed. "I'll burn you for this, Dodson! And you, Adjutant! Tried to break my neck! Crashed in Jacksonville; and crashed me here. I'll black mark you both. Army equipment gone, destroyed. Army equipment scattered all over the State—piled up in palmetto and sunk in lagoons. Nothing to inspect. Get going!"

All the way, old Fish-eater carried on like that, telling what was going to happen. The poor major, bless his big heart, didn't get an opening. High Pockets trailed his master's heels. Lieutenant Pratt, trying not to laugh out loud, brought up the rear. After all, he who laughs first and last laughs like that. Pratt was the laugher. Pratt realized that if he could remember all this he'd be the life of the officers' mess for a long time.

But all of a sudden Lieutenant Pratt found himself walking up High Pockets' back. The adjutant, in turn, was tramping and booting his master's heels; while the latter pushed and shoved, and yelled:

"Merritt, y'dumb ass! Look where you're going! D'y'hear?"

To make a long story short, old Fish-eater had stopped all of a sudden; causing this piling up of following traffic. And the sight that stopped the lieutenant-colonel was enough to stop a clock. They had arrived in the shoreside clearing, with the lagoon's action spread out before them. Ye gods, what a spread was there!

HALF a dozen officers, cadets and enlisted men were sitting out in mid-lagoon, atop the plane, fishing. It wasn't the usual silent fishing however, but noisy water whipping. What fun!

There was a ten or fifteen-foot crap game under way off to the right. Such a crap game is a large gathering.

Near the fire, stretched out and swapping stories, were ten or twenty more officers, cadets and enlisted stiffs. More fun, and lots of it. Loud, genuine, carefree relaxation. Forget all that unlucky regulation U. S. equipment. Let it sink. We don't own it.

"Attention!" somebody yelled, seeing what had arrived at the edge of their playground.

"Aw, where t'hell do y'get that old stuff!" somebody, many, yelled back, having failed to see what had come down upon them.

It was Captain High Pockets Merritt

who stepped out and brought them all to attention. And did they come to attention? They did. Trouble was here.

Lieutenant Cushman was still in charge of all that work; so he stepped out to talk with his C. O. and explain that he had just now knocked off all the help, seeing as how the boys had put in a long day's work. One look at those boys would tell you how tired they were.

"Get every man back on the job!" Major Dumb Dodo Dodson barked. "D'ye hear me, Lieutenant Cushman? Every man-jack of them back on the job. There's no quitting till every piece of this equipment is back on Web Field—cleaned up and ready for inspection! D'ye hear me, Cushman? And all you other officers? And you noncoms? Dammit! D'ye hear what I'm saying? Get to work!"

Captain High Pockets, pouncing to the kill, began to rush here and there, putting the well known verbal whip on officers and men alike—with an extra heavy hand for the bucks and cadets. He was in his glory, trying to live down what he had done to old Fish-eater. Just as if the old boy was likely to forget all the delay, grief, more delay and final crash.

Old Fish-eater, he who took so much pride in the inspection and condition of mobile equipment, stood there, for a lost few minutes, in dumb contemplation of all that was spread around them. He'd point at this truck, and mumble. Then he'd point at that truck, and mumble. Or he'd point at the plane deep in the lagoon—and cuss. Then all of a sudden he noticed the long ditch to which the hurrying workmen were now returning, under the double urge of Cushman and High Pockets. The mere sight of that ditch stopped the old boy. Yes, sir, he couldn't get it at all.

"Dodson," he said, "what the devil do you suppose they're burying over there?" He pointed, a thing which should not be done in company. "Over there," he repeated. "D'ye hear me, Dodson, over there!"

Without waiting for an answer, old Fish-eater started over toward the workings. Major Dodson, wishing that he could cover this matter, fell in and went along. High Pockets came to heel and trailed.

The extensive workings were in the form of a long dugway. It was fully one hundred yards long now, with its far end at the edge of the lagoon. To be exact, that end was where the small tractor had first gone down. The northern end of the dugway was out on the barren. This dugway had a varying depth, from very deep at the south to the no depth of the usual ramp out at the barren end. In the dugway there was a bridgeplank bottom. On that bottom, chained up to pull, were the Quad and the three big Liberty trucks. In front of these, also on the tow line, were the two Dodges and the two hard looking ambulances.

At a glance, you could tell that no pains had been spared toward putting everything possible on the pull. Off to one side of the big working was the major's Cadillac.

Out in the lagoon the light truck was still in place, with just a piece of its steering wheel showing above water. As for the plane, it too was in place, with Cadet Delano still fishing from the upper wing. Now, though, he was on duty—fishing for the troops' supper. Good and faithful servant, eh?

Old Fish-eater and party booted their way from one end of the dugway to the other, then back again. It still had the old boy stopped; and the major and adjutant were hardly any wiser.

However, judging by the number of sunken upended planks near the Quad, one could tell that here was where most of the action was acting. And behind the Quad, say ten feet behind, there was a regular mess of sunken and splintered bridgeplanks; and it takes lots of rough doings to make such a mess of such heavy planking. But, as the newcomers noticed, all those messed up planks were pretty deep in water; for, at this lagoon end of the dugway, water was the one thing of which there was a great plenty. And into that water, from the rear of the Quad,

there ran a heavy, tight chain. That's how it looked—just a tight chain going straight into the water for no apparent reason at all. And old Fish-eater, plus Major Dodo Dosdon and High Pockets, stopped near that point and contemplated the queer sight of a heavy, tight chain going right down, as it were, into the very bowels of Florida.

"What are you tied up to, Lieutenant?" old Fish-eater asked, speaking to Lieutenant Ted Cushman and pointing to where the chain disappeared from view into the water.

"The big tractor, sir," Cushman answered. "It's right down there, sir. We can still touch it with a sounding pole. And the small tractor, sir," Cushman added, just for conversation's sweet sake, "is in there, where that rag flag is up as a marker." The lieutenant pointed just aft of where the big tractor was said to be. "Both tractors are tied together, sir," he concluded.

THE officer sent down from Washington to hold an official inspection of Web Field's equipment stood there for fully two or three minutes, minutes which seemed like ages to Major Dodson. Again, and no question about it, old Fish-eater was about to put thoughts to words, words for Major Dodson's benefit, words that would be big and brave, words loud and lasting, words that would be all Army, Navy and Marine Corps too. The old boy was red in the face. His neck was red too. And while it might be elaboration or exaggeration to say that he was foaming at the mouth, you can, without a word of a lie, say that old Fish-eater was dribbling a bit.

Just at that point, and as a godsend to Major Dodson, one Cadet Delano, string of fish in hand, came wading in from the plane. Cadet Delano, full of happy business, was still wearing the helmet that had been with him when the ship went down last Saturday. You see, he was still captain of that ship, even though the thing was wing deep in water.

"Delano!" Major Dodson bellowed; and High Pockets added his loud "Delano!" too. Talk about your official hog callers, those two were happiest when calling Delano.

"Delano!"

The cadet looked up from his hip deep wading as though he was totally and completely surprised. Land snakes alive! Do you suppose that Cadet Delano had failed to notice the arrival of the major and party? Yes, there's just a chance. Perhaps one bare chance in a million. Or two million. What's a million more or less to such a bird as Cadet Booth Delano?

Anyway, registering all that surprise, Cadet Delano froze in his tracks, came to sudden attention and saluted with a handful of fish. And that, to say the least, was mighty poor militarism. Why, that would be poor soldiering in any man's army. Even in a Latin-American army. And it made the whole affair look foolish; for a few hundred officers, cadets and enlisted men, seeing, broke right down and laughed. They laughed uproariously. Great, genuine belly laughs. And it was no time and place for merriment.

"Fish!" somebody bellowed, and it was none other than Lieutenant-Colonel Ball, better known as Fish-eater. But, with a sinking heart, the commandant of Web Field noticed that the yell of "Fish!" was no cheer. It wasn't a joyous yell like "Team!" or "Touchdown!" And there was no joy-of-fish in that voice. "Fish! A salute! Fish!"

Cadet Delano, still holding his fish, came closer. Chances are, the wild cadet guessed that maybe this swell string of fish might buy off the major. Who knows? After all, fish was the issue in the first place and fish might yet be the winning bet in the final analysis. At any rate, Delano wished to impress Major Dumb Dodo Dodson with the fact that he had gone out to get fish, and fish he had. That's all you can ask of any soldier—the end. For, to men-at-arms, the end always must justify the means. Even if the means prove to be the means of strewing half of Web Field all the

way from right here down to China.

"Delano!" the major barked. "You were on the ground, and you flew that ship into the lagoon, eh? Speak up!"

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" cut in the testy old bloke from inspector general's office. "How's that, Dodson, y'dumb ape! Can a man be on the ground and flying an airplane at one and the same time? Talk sense, man! S'help me, talk sense— Mister," old Fish-eater now said to Delano, "are you the man who flew that airplane into the water?"

"I am, sir," Cadet Delano answered.

"Well what the devil were you doing, mister?" old Fish-eater wanted to know.

"I was after fish, sir. Fishing for the officers' mess, sir. Under Major Dodson's orders, sir," the good cadet related, and even elaborated a bit, as is the way of a cadet.

"Fishing!" old Fish-eater bellowed. "Fishing with an Army airplane! Fishing under Major— Say, Dodson," the old boy now yelled, swinging back to the major, "is this true? Dammit! Is the man telling me straight? And if so, why? Why in the name of Bill H. Hell would you send a man out with an Army airplane fishing? Speak up! Let's hear it!"

"Well, sir," Major Dodson explained, "I did order a plane out to catch some fish. You see, sir, I had your wire saying that you were coming down to inspect the post. So I decided to get a nice mess of fish for your first meal at Web Field. And, sir—"

"And sir be hanged!" old Fish-eater cut in. "Why, Dodson, should you get fish for me?"

"Why, sir. Why, sir," the major stammered. "I always knew that you were a great lover of fish, and—"

"Lover of fish your—say, I'll be. Where do you get that queer soldier talk—lover of fish?" the old boy wanted to know. "Fish! Dodson, I haven't eaten a piece of fish in the last ten years. Not since I left the Islands. I got ptomaine from the stinky things, Dodson! Almost died. I hate the sight of fish. Why, dammit man, I wouldn't even feed fish to the enlisted men's mess. Fish! Mister—" old ex-Fish-eater said, again turning to Delano—"come with me. I want you to fly one of these airplanes for me."

Again Lieutenant-Colonel Ball turned to Major Dodson and High Pockets, saying, yelling, bellowing:

"Your command has been inspected! I'm having this man fly me over to Palm Beach. See that my bags are sent there. I'll black mark your post for this mess, Dodson. Send all of my bags to Palm Beach.

"Motor trouble . . . Wreck . . . Tried to kill me in a crash! And fish . . ." And the voice of Lieutenant-Colonel Ball grew fainter and fainter as he and Delano booted their way northward through the palmetto toward the ships.

But if anybody's interested, there are still two pretty fair tractors waiting for a good digger to come along, down there in Florida. Or perhaps, down there near China.

Concluding a Novel of the

WITH the Austrian eagles continually falling before the onslaughts of Napoleon's armies, hatred and fear of the French became the order of the day in Vienna. Premier Thugutt's dread Black Cabinet, the core of Austrian espionage, stopped at no villainy calculated to enrich the pockets of its members at the expense of the French.

So it was that young Count Otho of Donau-Walden, half French on his mother's side, became a victim of the Black Cabinet. He was sent to Paris under the pseudonym of Monsieur Le Falcon, believing himself to be a trusted agent of the emperor. After his departure his rich estates in Lombardy were turned over to his rascally cousin Ferdinand; and in Paris, Major Moskolz, an Austrian spy to whom he was ordered to report, tried to trick the unwitting Otho into the hands of the French police. By chance Otho managed to escape with his life. Then, deserted by Moskolz, and penniless, he took a position in a company of French players, where he quickly became famous for impersonations of Napoleon.

One night Bonaparte sent for Otho who, ignorant of the Black Cabinet's

Monsieur le Falcon

By ARED WHITE

treachery, was still zealously loyal to the Austrian cause. Napoleon complimented the young Austrian upon his talent for acting, and commissioned him a lieutenant of Hussars. Otho, delighted at the stroke of fortune that afforded him familiarity with Bonaparte's heavily guarded quarters, offered his services to royalists plotting the death of Napoleon.

Deep in intrigue, Otho was startled one day to receive a note from one Lieutenant Le Carbenne, a favorite of the Corsican, requesting that he call upon a matter of gravest importance. Prepared for anything, Otho complied—and was amazed to discover that Le Carbenne was a woman, known to him in Vienna as Fräulein Teschen, and a member of the Black Cabinet!

Fräulein Teschen told him of the plot against him and, his eyes opened at last, Otho forswore allegiance to Austria for that of Napoleon's rising star. The woman then apprised him further that Plobo, who in Vienna had been Count Otho's most trusted servant, was now Corporal Hom of Bonaparte's Consular Guards.

With the Corsican preparing to quit Paris, to swoop down upon the unsuspecting Austrians in Italy, Otho was suddenly arrested for treason. In vain he protested his innocence—but the plotters against his life had some twelve witnesses to swear that Lieutenant Le Falcon had tried to bribe them with royalist gold. With his execution at sunrise a few short hours away, Otho

played his last card. He sent for the friendly Lieutenant Fullois of the Hussars.

"Fullois," he said, "you must not fail me. You must get Napoleon's ear!"

Fullois gripped Otho's shoulder.

"I shall go, my friend," he cried. "The Little Corporal can do no more than hang me—but I shall not fail!"

FULLOIS hurried down the dank corridor as the sentries called the hour of three. Otho made a quick calculation. The lieutenant would be able to reach the Tuileries in a quarter of an hour. That would allow him ample time in which to secure a written stay of execution and return well ahead of the death hour.

Four o'clock came without Fullois' return. Five o'clock ticked slowly up. Otho ceased his restless pacing of his cell as the official hour of sunrise approached. Had Fullois failed? Had the First Consul turned a deaf ear to the entreaty? He smiled a grim surrender as the sentries called in a hollow, dolorous voice, the hour of five. The official hour of sunrise was at hand. The ring of heavy heels sounded an echo to the cry of the sentinels. A platoon of Grenadiers grounded their arms in front of his cell. The captain of the guard unlocked the iron door and motioned Otho out with a jerk of his hand.

"Ah, monsieur, an abominable hostelry you conduct," Otho bantered the officer. "Am I to be robbed of my breakfast this morning?"

"I have waited until the last moment for the return of your friend, Citizen," muttered the captain. "There is no time left, though you shall not suffer long of an empty stomach."

"At least the muskets shall not want for breakfast, eh, Citizen Captain?" Otho smiled. "Ah, I note that your hand has an ague, my friend. I am most sorry that I am not equipped to offer you a potion for the benefit of your courage."

"I am unused to this duty, Citizen Lieutenant," the captain replied nervously. "I find that I have little taste for such work."

"Then we have much in common, my friend." Otho smiled again. "This is, in fact, my very first experience of the kind."

The captain set the guard in motion. Otho marched with a firm, easy step. His face was untormented by fear. He no longer dared to hope. All his forces now must go into the vanity of a gallant death. It was not the fashion of the hour to wince at guillotine or firing squad. Outside the first pennants of red were thrust across the sky of a mottled May morning. Otho breathed deeply of the cool morning air and scanned the sky with a brave show at unconcern. He heard the clatter of hoofs, the hum of wheels, but risked no look at the road, lest he break the thread of his self-possession. Even when a sharp command halted the guard, and the face of Fullois hove before him, he did not abandon his grim humor until he had read unmistakably the message of the Frenchman's radiant face.

"Did I not say it was impossible I should fail you, Le Falcon?" cried Fullois. He seized Otho and kissed him on either cheek. "See, I have brought the order—and just in time. My general, he will see you, so all shall end as we wish it. Come, I have my carriage, and the First Consul shall have had his omelette and coffee by the time we reach the palace of the government!"

Fullois delivered the order of reprieve to the captain of the guard, seized Otho by the arm and hurried him into the vehicle.

"Ho, but such eloquence I did not know I possessed, Le Falcon," he said. "The First Consul but shook his head and said he must believe the evidence of his courts and not the vaporings of young ninnies. But in the end he gave way, as I knew he would. The general, he has a tender heart, my friend, for those of small rank, though with the generals he is not so gentle. But I warn you, Le Falcon. He says you must

leave him without doubts or he will not interfere."

"Then, wait," said Otho. "You rushed me off my feet, monsieur. First we must visit the troops before they break rank. There is a soldier I must find, to go with us to the Tuileries."

"We will give the order to the captain, Le Falcon. He will bring your witness."

"But I have no witness. I must seek out with my own eyes the man I wish to take. It is for you to order that the man I select shall accompany us."

Otho led the way among company after company, appraising the faces and figures of scores of soldiers, before he came upon the man he wanted. The soldier was a sergeant of the Grenadiers, a trim, alert youngster whom Otho hurried to the carriage without questions.

"You have but the one witness, Le Falcon?" Fullois asked anxiously. "The First Consul himself made a point of it that twelve Guardsmen had sworn your guilt."

"As I said, my Lieutanant, I have no witness," said Otho. "But this man, whom I have never seen before, will do very well for my purpose. Now when we reach the Tuileries, please to fetch my portmanteau from the map room and I shall be free in no time, my friend!"

The First Consul's eyes knitted as Le Falcon, presenting himself, said he had nothing to say in his own behalf. Bonaparte granted, with a nod of his head, Le Falcon's request that he be allowed to counsel alone for a brief minute in the ante-chamber with the sergeant of Grenadiers. Bonaparte resumed his papers as the two left. Fullois, having delivered Otho's portmanteau, stood nervously by. A moment later Bonaparte looked up in sharp annoyance at Le Falcon's impudent entrance.

With his hand at salute, his eyes glued straight ahead like a wax mannikin, Le Falcon scurried across the room with a muttered apology and disappeared into the corridor leading to an exit of the Tuileries.

"Halt the numbskull!" commanded the Corsican, rising angrily to his feet. "This is an outrage for which some one shall pay a penalty!"

An aide-de-camp rushed precipitately after the retreating figure. As he did so, a second figure entered from the ante-chamber, in the uniform of the sergeant of Hussars. Bonaparte started at the face before him.

"It is I, Le Falcon," the intruder said softly. "If the sergeant, whom I masqueraded and dabbed most hastily with pigments, deceived the eyes of my General, perhaps it is excusable that a dozen Grenadiers were tricked by the masquerade of a conniving rascal who has good cause to wish me dead."

The First Consul sat down. His eyes searched Otho's face for the better part of a minute.

"The charges struck me as preposterous, Le Falcon," he said quietly. "But I could not afford to disregard such testimony when you offered nothing to the court. You have yet to tell me who could have a motive for such an intrigue against you, Le Falcon."

"A cousin, my General. One goaded by a strange greed."

"A jackal in the family, so? A resourceful rascal, withal, and with the tricks of courtiers of the black régime, Le Falcon. Come, tell me his name and his reasons."

"A great favor, my General, that you do not press the point. I have my own excellent reason."

"Do not be a sentimental ninny, Le Falcon!" blazed the Corsican. "A rascal of that stripe is not entitled to mercy. It is in my mind that he shall take your place before the rifles, this very day. Fouche's men will unearth him quickly enough if he is in Paris."

"A great favor I ask, my General," Otho pleaded. He met the Corsican's flashing eyes steadily. "Please to believe me when I say it would be only a mercy to turn him to the firing squad. I implore my General to permit me to deal with the fellow in my own way."

CHAPTER XXV

AT SIX PACES

FULLOIS, bubbling over with joy, capered boyishly about the room, pausing every few moments to embrace Otho when he reported back for duty, fully restored to rank and confidence. Some minutes passed before this demonstration spent itself. Otho stood, thoughtfully passive, without speaking.

"But your face, it must not be so long, my friend," cried Fullois. He snapped his fingers. "Poof, it was nothing to fret you now. The bullets for you have not yet been molded. And did I not say I would save you, Le Falcon? Did I not tell you my general has the soft heart of a woman for those who serve him?"

"I will never be able to show my gratitude, Fullois," said Otho with a warm smile. "My humor is not that I am glum, but because I have a serious matter on my mind that can not delay. I must report immediately back to the captain of the guard for his firing squad —and you must help me."

"Diable!" swore Fullois. "You rave like a madman. Come, Le Falcon, what preys on you now?"

"A little prank of my own, Fullois. Let me explain myself. I must go through the pantomime of a firing squad. The Charlevilles must be loaded only with powder. Then I will fall and be carried away. A pretty spectacle for the ears of my charming cousin, Ferdinand."

"*Mon dieu*, my friend, but you should call forthwith upon your devilish cousin with a broadsword. If he were my cousin, I would cut out his rascally heart without compunction!"

"It suits my purpose better, Fullois, to let him arrange his own demise. But, in any event, please take my word for it that there is much to this affair you do not understand, my friend. Will you help me at the prison?"

Fullois considered, pinching his eyebrows together as if to induce deep thought.

"Ho, but if that is your game, Le Falcon, I have a much better plan. Why not let the captain of the guard put on his show with that little sergeant you brought here and painted to resemble you? They can waste as much time as they please on the show at the prison—while we will be free for other matters. Think of it, Le Falcon. We leave tonight, and must make our plans accordingly."

"Splendid, my Lieutenant," Otho approved. "Your plan is an improvement upon my own—but it will be for you to arrange the details with great care. My cousin, he must not be disappointed in his wish to see me dead."

Fullois started at once for the prison, leaving Otho to the work of removing the colored pins and folding the maps for shipment. The Frenchman was back within an hour to report that the captain of the guard would spare no pains in carrying out his orders.

"Ah, but my general will fly into a terrible rage one day—" Fullois laughed—"should he get wind of the silly orders I bandy about in his name. *Diable!* But what other joy in this insufferable duty of the staff, than to strut about putting into the mouth of your general commands of which he has never thought."

"But your order at the prison, my Lieutenant," Otho said gravely, "was not so silly as you may think. One day I will be able to explain to you and you will see it was not of myself alone I have been thinking."

They turned to a checking of their preparations for the night. Fullois excused himself shortly with a sly wink. He had many discreet adieux to extend, he explained. Otho had no wish to trust himself to the streets of Paris, even in disguise. He remained in the map room, busy with his own thoughts, shaping his own course. As the day wore on his pulse rose to the adventure ahead. He no longer tried to gage the Corsican's enterprise across the Alps. From the map, from his own knowledge of the set of things in Italy, he had been able to

shape nothing better than a mad gamble in the First Consul's maneuver. The Austrians held the superiority of number, the advantage of position. Their legions were seasoned veterans, gorged with success. But Otho was gripped by something of Fullois' ardor. He was sharing the lieutenant's blind faith in the Corsican's miraculous leadership. He no longer challenged the hold that Bonaparte had laid upon his loyalty. Those blind plots of months ago, they were the misguided work of that intrigue ridden simpleton, Count Otho. Count Otho was effaced from the earth. No such person now existed. He had left behind only a memory of wrongs to be avenged by Monsieur Le Falcon, a loyal son of France.

Fullois did not reappear until after midnight. He came in, his face flushed by wine and excitement, his accoutrement in place, a brace of fine horse pistols in holsters across his arm.

"Come, my friend, we move toward the Alps," he cried. "The postilion waits for us at the terrace. At last!"

As Otho, gaily saluting his readiness, turned to portmanteaux and saddlebags, Fullois caught his arm.

"One moment, my friend," he exclaimed. He brought from the folds of his cape a bottle of rare Burgundy and filled two silver goblets. Then he flashed out his sword dramatically.

"Drink to the life of glory," he proposed. "To life where the blood of men runs red and there is the mighty music of the guns to stir the soft breezes of the vineyards. Here's victory for France, my friend, and glory for her valiant sons. *Vive la république! Vive Bonaparte!*"

"*Vive la France!*" chorused Otho fervently. "*Vive Bonaparte!*"

They went stealthily from the Tuileries to their waiting vehicle. Fullois complained at Otho's two large portmanteaux, in addition to saddlebags, sword, pistol and field equipment. The load required them to make a second trip.

"*Nom de dieu!*" fretted Fullois. "But you take the equipage of a man on his honeymoon. You should have the caissons of a regiment to carry your effects. There will not be room left in the carriage to carry our legs."

"I but obey orders," said Otho. "The second of these portmanteaux, that immense one, was brought to me tonight by Monsieur Bourienne, with sealed instructions that I am to open it at Martigny. I do not even guess its contents."

FULLOIS' tongue wagged incessantly through the night as the conveyance jolted along at a lively clip on the route to Lyons. His mind was filled with the mighty adventure ahead. He pictured himself riding the rolling plains of Lombardy routing bands of timid Austrians, drinking his fill at transient vineyards, claiming a rich share of loot and tribute from reconquered villages that had befriended the enemy; returning at last to Paris to dazzle the eyes of greedy shopmen with his wealth. France was sure to win a great and sweeping victory. How? He shrugged the answer to his question: That did not matter. Had not the First Consul said, within their hearing, that he must have a great victory? That settled it all. The Little Corporal knew what he was about.

They halted at a village in late afternoon to rest while their Dragoon cared for the horses. Fullois, disdaining sleep, strode about the cafés with clanking accoutrement, talking freely and drinking much wine. But he spoke with discretion. To the frontiers they were headed, he proclaimed to the awed villagers. The French were moving to reenforce Moreau. They would quickly show Kray's Austrian louts the way to Ulm and Vienna.

Three days of travel brought them to Lyons. The garrisons there were denuded, the last of the troops gone in the direction of Geneva. Fullois pressed on to Geneva. It was there, he announced, that he would pay his last farewell to civilization before plunging into the snows of the Alpine peaks. There was the city in which to wash the dust of

travel from one's throat. It was only a deep pity, he grumbled, that they had no longer than one night to give over to the gay city on the great blue lake.

Geneva bristled with the soldiers of the French. Officers and men from the army of Moreau were in for supplies or rest. The last of the Army of the Reserve had not yet cleared. They flooded the streets, the cafés and gaming places. Grenadiers, Dragoons, Hussars, lumpy Fusiliers of the foot, elbowed their way along the streets, shouting rough badinage at those of other arms, breaking now and then into brawling groups as some soldier found quick offense in the boasts of another. There were grizzled veterans, lithe, lean and threadbare, whose rawhide skin and ferocious beards contrasted strangely against fuzzy youngsters in unblemished uniform, lads who were lately from village or farm for service in the new army of the Corsican.

Into the giddy maelstrom of Geneva's night Fullois plunged as soon as they had found lodgings. Otho had business of his own in the seclusion of the tavern. He wrote, with a painstaking care in the choice of his words, a message to Vekuss at Vienna. When the wily colonel had reduced it from cipher there would lie, under his eyes, a warning.

> Do not be misled by silly rumors of this French Army of Reserve.

A dangerous warning if the blind Vekuss could only penetrate the truth. But Otho could picture him fuming, as he verified the seal of Moskolz on the missive, frothing because the Hungarian had not reported more. He reckoned the turn of Vekuss' mind. Vekuss would promptly interpret it to his own liking, and send it on to the Aulic Council as another evidence of Austrian secret service efficiency in proving that Austria had no fears in Italy. And the Aulic Council would send a fast courier on to Melas that he need not bother himself over wild rumors wafted down through the Alps.

Otho, by virtue of his rank, was able to commit the message to a courier who was leaving next morning with reports for the Tuileries. The courier, for a bounty of ten francs, pledged himself to deliver the letter to the French mail the instant he reached Paris. Thence it would be delivered at once to Monsieur Le Montier and on to Vienna.

He turned in early for a night's sleep. At daybreak their postilion would be ready for the trip on to Martigny, under the beetling brow of the Alps. Fullois, he estimated, would not show up until the last minute. Neither would Fullois be late, no matter how wild the night, nor how unsteady his legs. But Otho was little more than asleep before the Frenchman came in noisily and lighted the lights with a taper.

"Rouse yourself, Le Falcon," Fullois commanded. "Get into your pantaloons and coat. There is business at hand."

With Fullois was a second officer, a captain of Grenadiers of the Army of the Rhine. The Grenadier stood drawn up, arms folded, his face a stern mask. Otho tumbled out of bed and into his uniform, the two waiting in silence until he was dressed.

"The Captain Quel is the representative of his Lieutenant d'Orde," Fullois explained thickly when Otho rose. "I will leave you alone, messieurs, to your own devices, while you arrange the details. But a word of caution, Lieutenant Le Falcon: I will accept no compromise, nor will I delay beyond the break of day."

Captain Quel bowed stiffly as Fullois left.

"My Lieutenant d'Orde, as the one challenged, claims the choice of weapons," the Grenadier abruptly introduced his purpose in the chamber. "He selects the pistols of the army, of the manufacture of Charleville, model of 1792."

"The reason for a duel, monsieur?" Otho demanded, suddenly wide awake. "I have heard nothing of this unhappy affair."

"A quarrel at the Café d'Ouvre, Citizen Lieutenant. A matter of loyalty to their generals. Your acceptance, Citizen Lieutenant, of my principal's proposal."

"But let us discuss their difference, my Captain. Come, these are not days when one loyal Frenchman should be seeking the life of another in senseless brawl."

"Choose your words with caution, Citizen Lieutenant!" said the captain. "The challenge has been passed and accepted. It is a point of honor, and our part is to arrange the details."

Otho bowed an apology and took hurried stock of the situation.

"Then if it must be with pistols, my Captain," he proposed with a suave smile, "at least let us arrange the distance on some thoughtful basis—say thirty paces, which will cover some margin of safety."

"At six paces!" snapped the captain. "My lieutenant claims his right and I have no wish to interfere."

"Six paces, monsieur!" protested Otho. "But that is murder, nothing less, for both of them if they should fire at the same moment."

The captain yielded a cold smile.

"You forget the code, Citizen Lieutenant. At six paces, but one pistol is loaded. Which one? Ah, that is for fate to decide. The Lieutenant Fullois has accepted. You will present yourselves, then, at the point where the Arve joins with the Rhone at the break of day. Have I your word?"

"Since I appear to have no word of my own in the matter, I will be guided by the wishes of my lieutenant," said Otho reluctantly.

THE two exchanged stiff bows. Captain Quel marched out. Fullois returned to the room in a moment, a scowl across his face, his eyes snapping fire. He consulted his watch with an impatient oath.

"Five hours to wait for my satisfaction, Le Falcon!" he fumed. "Ho, but if I had been able to claim my way, we would have fought on the instant, with steel!"

Otho caught him by both shoulders and searched his eyes in reproof.

"This brawl must go no further, Fullois," he said. "You forget that you move by the orders of the First Consul. What would he say to such conduct?"

"But my honor, Le Falcon," cried Fullois. "My general would not require of me that I sacrifice my honor. This low knave of the Army of Moreau berated the honest name and reputation of my General Murat. Ho, he dared to say that the general crawled in Egypt and pretended a wound rather than charge the infidels in battle. No man can make such a charge within my hearing, Le Falcon."

"Fullois, you have had too much wine. I have heard you use the very words against General Murat."

"Ho, but I spoke only as a friend, Le Falcon," blurted Fullois. "I did not mean it in offense. Besides, my friend, you have not heard the worst of it all. The throaty rascal then boasted that his General Moreau is a greater general than the Little Corporal. He even dared to say that it was Moreau who must save France, while my General Bonaparte plays at politics in Paris. *Diable*, Le Falcon! At that I brought my fingers across his eyes, which means there can be no turning back!"

"Then I will protest to General Berthier and have you both brought to discipline," Otho announced decisively.

"What, you my friend, bring me to ridicule in such a fashion!" Fullois was livid. "Would they not charge that you, whom I named as my second, had gone at my behest to pull me out of the trouble? I forbid you leave this room, Le Falcon. A lucky thing that the General Berthier has gone on himself to Martigny."

Otho sat down and pondered. He quickly saw there was no alternative. The hothead was adamant, there was no turning away. He thought of a ruse. When it came to loading the pistols, he would be present. If the leaden slugs could be left from both weapons, a bloodless duel would serve the purpose well enough. But he sensed that the fiery Quel would never accede to that subterfuge. Fullois went shortly to bed. They arose at four o'clock and went on foot

down the banks of the Rhone to where the gray Arve poured in to pollute its blue waters. The two Grenadiers from the Army of the Rhine appeared promptly. Otho went apart with Quel to prepare the pistols. He saw, from Quel's grim manner, the uselessness of further proposals. Quel loaded the weapons, one with ball, the other only with powder, placed them in a bag and shook them.

"You will choose, Citizen Lieutenant!" he commanded.

Otho took one of the pistols. Quel promptly drew the other. There could be no chance, in this arrangement, of a trick. Fate would decide who was to die.

Fullois was cool and fully the master of himself as he took the pistol from Otho, examined the flint and balanced it appraisingly in his hand. There was a gleam in his eye, a masterly display of easy possession as he took his place and faced his adversary. D'Orde was visibly uncomfortable, though striving hard to brave the ordeal through. There was a pallor in his face, even through the heavy windburn, and his light blue eyes were drawn and lusterless.

"Ho, but as you feel my bullet burning in your heart, monsieur, pause an instant in dying to reflect upon your foul mistake!" cried Fullois as they were brought to the mark.

D'Orde swallowed hard but made no reply.

At the count of one they raised their pistols. At the count of two they took aim. D'Orde, squinting one eye heroically, aimed at Fullois' heart with a muzzle that rotated fitfully. Fullois stood with his weapon loosely aimed.

"Fire!" cried Quel.

D'Orde's pistol belched, the explosion drowning the vibrations of Quel's command, so quickly had the young Grenadier pressed his trigger. Fullois stood a moment with drawn face, then preened himself.

"Ho, now stand a moment, my brave Grenadier, and face your sweet music!" said Fullois. "You can see that I held my fire since haste could serve no one. It allows you time to muse upon your vile calumny while I perfect my aim."

His hand was steady as Fullois took aim. The Grenadier was shaken by a sudden ague as he saw the loaded pistol had fallen to his opponent's choice. But he held his place at the line, without drawing back. Fullois presently lowered his pistol.

"Perhaps, since monsieur has had time to reflect, he would desire to withdraw with due apology, his words of last night?" he proposed haughtily.

The Grenadier stared in indecision, then shook his head.

"No? Then I shall kill you without further ado!" snapped Fullois.

Fullois whipped his weapon into line and squinted determinedly down the barrel. But he did not fire. Presently he lowered the weapon a second time.

"Ho, but it is difficult to shoot you, monsieur, as I would a rat," he cried. "Perhaps you would like to admit you may have been hasty in your words, Lieutenant d'Orde?"

The officer choked, swallowed hard and nodded.

"Perhaps I was hasty, monsieur," he gulped.

"Ho, you admit it, then?" Fullois stepped close. "Perhaps you will agree with me now that the First Consul is a great soldier and the General Murat a brave man?"

"Do you agree, monsieur," the Grenadier countered in a quavering voice, "that my General Moreau also is the great soldier?"

"Ho, my friend, if I ever thought otherwise, I know my mistake. A great general indeed, to command such loyalty as you have shown in his behalf!"

"I, too, realize now how deeply I was mistaken, my Lieutenant," said d'Orde, a sudden fervor in his voice.

They stood looking at each other briefly. Fullois tossed his pistol to the ground.

"You are a brave man, d'Orde," he said. "I am glad that I did not shoot you."

"If I had monsieur's fine courage, I would be most happy," said the Grenadier.

They paused another brief moment and embraced each other warmly. Then Fullois, with a cold bow to Captain Quel, strode back up the Rhone, snatched a hurried breakfast and climbed into their vehicle with Otho.

CHAPTER XXVI

ACROSS THE ALPS

FROM Geneva to Martigny was a long day's contract, even for fresh coach horses that had been hardened for forced travel. Fullois sat for a time glowering morosely ahead, then sank back in the cushions as Geneva sank behind, exhausted at last from his maudlin journey across France. The road was clear during the morning, but by early afternoon they were upon the heels of plodding columns of the Army of Reserve. Foot, horse, artillery and wagon trains yielded a reluctant passage for their raving driver. Troopers breathed thick curses after them as their conveyance stirred fresh dust into inflamed eyes.

As they rose into the uplands the route seemed closely linked to the distant Alps by one solid stream of men, their new uniforms grimy with dust and sweat. Foot columns marched doggedly, goaded by their officers to a forced pace, at least a dozen paces per minute swifter than the normal route step. Cavalrymen rode asleep in their saddles, gunners dozed on horses or caissons. Drummers, trumpeters and fifers trudged with silent instruments. There was neither spirit nor morale in that whole struggling column as they plodded their way uphill and down across weary kilometers, a city afoot at the will of the Little Corporal, but for the moment dead to enthusiasm.

Fullois awoke with a start during an exchange between Otho and a stubborn column commander who was holding them behind. He leaped from the vehicle in a savage humor and ran up beside the officer.

"Parbleu, but do you wish to cause disaster!" he bellowed. "Do you not recognize the postilion of the First Consul's own staff? Move your troops to the side of the road and give us passage, or I shall report this insolence."

The column commander was bluffed into a sullen acceptance. He had his men yield half the road without halting, while he muttered imprecations upon the pestilential staff that annoyed the fighting ranks to no good purpose. Fullois was for leaping from the carriage to take up the affront, but Otho caught him firmly by the arm.

"You have lost your sense of humor, my Lieutenant," he scolded. "Come, be peaceable, or we shall never reach Martigny by midnight. Have we not lost time enough today to no purpose?"

Fullois turned his scowl upon Otho.

"But did I complain," he demanded, "when you claimed good time for your own quarrel in Paris? A quarrel in which you did not even demand satisfaction, under the foulest provocation, Le Falcon."

"You will understand all that clearly, one day, Fullois, when I am free to explain. You will not complain that I did not exact satisfaction."

"Ho, so you taunt me with my conduct at Geneva?" Fullois flushed angrily. "But even if I did not see fit to kill D'Orde like a rabbit please to remember I left behind a friend of the man, and not a dangerous enemy."

"I will not quarrel with you, my friend. You misunderstood me. Your conduct toward D'Orde only increased my affection for you, my Lieutenant. But if I left a dangerous enemy behind in Paris, it is not my purpose to let him stay there in peace. My dear cousin Ferdinand will come running to me when I give the word."

Fullois was momentarily mollified, then he leveled a fresh scowl at Otho.

"He will come running? Monsieur, but you speak in parables. Did we not arrange a spectacle to have your cousin believe you dead?"

"His own blindness is what I count upon, my Lieutenant. His belief that I have fallen into his trap will blind him to the one into which he leads himself. Please to have faith in my word and all shall end to your entire satisfaction."

With a perplexed shake of his head, Fullois muttered an end to the exchange and lapsed back into his cushions. He slept until night, waking up only long enough for his portion of the bread and wine they carried for the evening ration. With evening the troops fell away from the road for bivouac. The postilion was able to hold the lusty Belgians to a steady trot until slowed down by the heavy rise as they approached Martigny.

At midnight they came into the deep valley close under the Alps, crossed on a winding road to the village and found Berthier's headquarters in a convent of the Bernardins. The general-in-chief of the Army of Reserve was asleep with his staff. They roused a hollow eyed monk who gave them goat meat, bread and wine and showed them a place to sleep.

Otho woke to the shrill of bugles and the roll of drums. It was not yet light in the little stone walled room as he sprang from his blanket and hurried into uniform. Fullois was already out, unpacking his maps and grumbling for breakfast. As the gray shadows thinned in the deep valley, Otho saw the bivouac of many regiments of all arms, a thousand breakfast fires already blazing, groups of shivering soldiers close about them to escape the icy Alpine breath of daybreak. He gulped his portion of goat meat and coffee and hurried impatiently to find Dupont, the chief-of-staff to General Berthier, to whom his sealed orders must be presented.

The chief-of-staff tore open the orders with an indifferent hand, read them with a sudden bulging of his eyes, gulped several times before recovering himself, then handed them back to Otho.

"Very well, Le Falcon," he said. "You may set out as soon as you are ready. But you must be very discreet—and an officer will accompany you to see that you are not questioned. It will be necessary for you to go no farther than St. Pierre today. An orderly will have your horses ready at the door."

AS HE took the orders expectantly and scanned them, Otho's face fell. It was the one answer he had been praying against—another masquerade. He was to fare forth as the Corsican, in Bonaparte's long gray overcoat and cocked hat, to ride over such routes as General Berthier might indicate. The purpose of this adventure nettled Otho as he went obediently about his preparation. He was to ride only to St. Pierre, at the base of the great St. Bernard, a mere fraction of the ninety mile course through the Alps, and then turn back. What possible advantage could accrue from that gesture? What game did the Little Corporal play now?

The troops were on the march again as Otho rode out from the convent, Fullois trailing him at a respectful distance, two mounted orderlies behind Fullois. As far as the toiling road reached before him the way was choked by men, moving briskly in the sharp morning air, but with heads low, and without spirit. As he came beside them, at a slow trot, a company of Grenadiers looked up, recognized the figure of the Little Corporal, and snapped erect. In some mysterious way, a vital spark seemed to leap forward along the whole line, traveling with the speed of fire along a trail of gunpowder.

"*Vive le Premier Consul!*" cried a captain of the Foot, flashing forth his sword and thrusting it high in salute. "*Vive Bonaparte!*"

A hundred voices rang instant response, then a thousand. The cry was taken up along the line. Shoulders were erect, legs snapped out in new life, there was fire in eyes that an instant before had been dead and lusterless. They knew now who was to command them. Rumor was set at rest, the terrible rumor that a lesser general such as Berthier would lead them, that the Little Corporal might not come

from Paris. To St. Pierre was twenty miles, twenty miles of men, caissons, guns and horses. This new vitality raced on ahead of Otho.

Mingled with the cheers of the men as he passed them came the ringing march songs of the battalions behind. By midday, when he reached St. Pierre, the steep slopes of the Great St. Bernard were dotted with men in masses of a hundred.

They toiled with ropes at the great sledges of pine trees that had been hollowed out to transport the trunnioned guns of the artillery over the ice crested heights. Everything of weight was being reduced here to bits for portage. Gun carriages, caissons, wagons, heavy guns, all had to be carried across on the backs of man or animal, or dragged in the improvised sledges. Horses had to be led, while high officers of command and staff sent their chargers by orderlies and entrusted their own necks only to the backs of sure footed Spanish mules, led by peasants who knew every danger of the tortuous trails. Otho saw the impulse of his presence hurled up the mountain slopes.

Men twisted their backs to the roped trunnions with a new zest. Their cheers came ringing down across the snow. Trumpeters sounded flourishes, fifers stirred shrill echoes, drummers beat ruffles. The conquest of the Alps had become a lively adventure now that the First Consul had appeared to share it.

The endless column was still feeding itself through Martigny and on into the foothills when Otho got back to the village. The spectacle of a great army spread out in column was not new to his eyes. He had seen the armies of the Archduke Charles on the ill-starred route from the Danube to the Po. But the magical effect of an individual upon that struggling serpentine was a new miracle. There was no mystery now in this masquerade. The Corsican had sent him to quicken the march through the Alps while Bonaparte tended his infant republic at Paris. He knew now what Bonaparte meant when he said he would waste little time upon the Austrians.

But once the Alps were behind, and Bonaparte himself with his legions on the plains of Ivrea, what then? Otho found the question back in his mind. Already there were wild reports and rumors in the air, even at Geneva. Massena had surrendered at Genoa. The Austrians were marching into Provence to unite with French royalists. There were twenty thousand Austrians at Bard, the fortress past which the Army of Reserve must debouch from the Alps. Melas had reenforced Milan. These might be merely the lively rumors that brew in the restless ranks. But that Melas held Italy with ninety thousand men, that Massena, outnumbered, was forced back to Genoa, even the Corsican accepted all that as fact. Therefore what possible miracle of strategy did he count upon with his Army of Reserve?

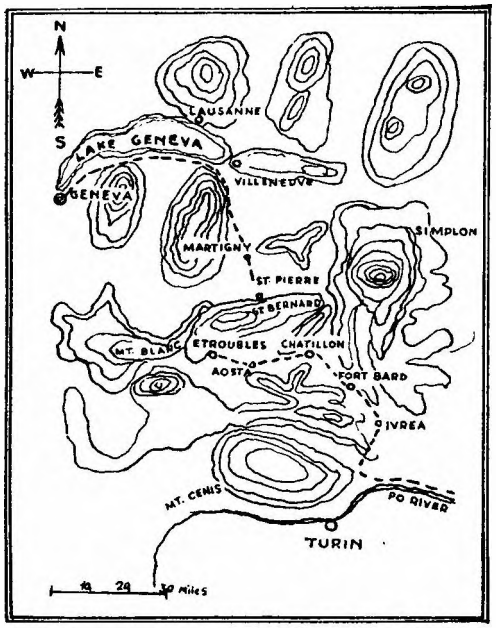
On returning to headquarters, Otho was relieved of his masquerade duty by Dupont.

"What geese there are in the world!" laughed the chief-of-staff with a cynical smile. "Your ride, it has performed wonders, monsieur. Our troops they would march now until they drop in their tracks, since with their own eyes they have seen that their Little Corporal will lead them. Ho, the wonder is wrought!"

Otho reverted the next morning to the maps. There was no saying when the First Consul would arrive, Fullois announced in high spirit. A full thousand of the Consular Guard already were bivouacked at Martigny. So the Little Corporal might come pouncing in upon them at any time, demanding to know by the map where his regiments were. During the next five days the wax headed pins executed a daily maneuver.

The whole Army of the Reserve was in the mountains now. The main body went by St. Pierre over the Great St. Bernard with Lannes in the van. Another column under Chambran was scaling the Little St. Bernard. Three more columns came to their map for the first time; a force under Moncey, fifteen thousand from the Army of the Rhine, was crossing at the

St. Gothard; a smaller column under Bethencourt moved through the Simplon; far to the west, five thousand men under Thoreau threaded the Mont Cenis.



THE ROUTE THROUGH THE ALPS

Rumors continued to multiply. The Austrians were reported in the passes. Scouts had clashed with a detachment on the Italian slopes beyond Etroubles. The Fort at Bard was reenforced with regiments of heavy mortars to challenge French passage. A wounded infantryman was brought in to lend substance to these tales. He had exchanged shots with an Austrian patrol, which had beat a hasty retreat into a ravine. Tension at headquarters grew under these reports. The stolid face of Berthier showed lines of anxiety. His more emotional chief-of-staff was visably alarmed. The general-in-chief hurried out for personal reconnaisance, remaining out three days in order to scale the Great St. Bernard into Aosta, and returned more fretted than ever. An Austrian outpost had been encountered by Lannes and driven off after a sharp exchange of musketry. The passage of the Alps had been betrayed. The Austrians must have their passage blocked.

Into the thick of these reports the Corsican arrived. He came in unannounced late in the night in a dusty carriage from Lausanne. Aides-de-camp, personal servants and a small body guard accompanied him. As his carriage drew up at the convent he leaped out, greeted Berthier abruptly and demanded the maps. For several minutes he stood in an impenetrable silence, his eyes fixed upon the colored pins, then sat down and went over them in detail while bolting cold meats and bread which a Mameluke brought in. Berthier began a narration of essential reports of the situation. His voice was heavy as he told of the Austrian scouts, of his fear that the fort at Bard was heavily garrisoned.

Bonaparte rose from half an hour of deep silence. He paused to wash down the last of his cold supper with a glass of wine. Then his eyes sparkled, a lively smile crossed his face.

"Excellent, my General!" he exclaimed. "The situation is excellent, even better than I had expected. The army is making swift progress. In a fortnight we shall be moving into battle. As for the fort of Bard—send the command instantly to Lannes that he must present himself there with all his forces and crush it, whence he will hurry on into Ivrea to cover the debouchment of the main column."

"Such an order has been given already, Citizen First Consul," said Berthier. "But if the place is held in force, we have small space for maneuver in the narrow gorge of Bard."

The Corsican's laugh was cold and taunting.

"You flinch at shadows, my General," he replied. "Have I had Duroc in the Alps since Winter for no purpose? He has verified a goat trail leading over the Alberado to the left of Bard. Since the goatherds use it, the trail will serve the purpose of Lannes' infantry."

"Yet we do not know that the Austrians are not holding that trail also, Citizen Consul."

"Austrians!" Napoleon's contempt quickened. "They lack the imagination to guess what is coming. It is beyond Melas to accept this as anything more than a demonstration to distract their attention from Genoa. Do I not know their processes of reasoning? Melas' dull brain will not realize his danger until too late for him to help himself. Come, let us not waste time in talk. There is much work to be done."

The Corsican had timed his arrival well. Events moved swiftly thereafter. The next day brought word that Lannes was pressing the fort at Bard. Berthier moved on to Aosta with his staff. Bonaparte ascended to Etroubles for a survey of the situation. After three days, when Lannes, attacking with foot and cannon, had been unable to force the neck of the bottle, Bonaparte moved on to Aosta, threading the dangerous peaks on a mule, led by a peasant. There he flew into a passion at learning the path was blocked by a mere handful—a Hungarian captain with a few hundred Croats. He ordered Lannes over the goat trail with his eight thousand men to seize the vital strongpoint of Ivrea, past which his army must debouch on to the plains of the Po.

The Alps echoed to the roar of cannon as Marmont pecked away at the little stone fort. Bonaparte panted up the goat trail, gave personal directions for the placing of cannon against Bard, and returned to Aosta. Engineers, working day and night, improved the trail of the Alberado, bridging ravines and building protecting walls along the breasts of dangerous chasms. The leak at the bottle's neck grew. But no miracle of the engineers could make the goat trail passable to Marmont's artillery. Short range two-pounders were going over on the straining backs of sturdy gunners but these guns were unequal to the storming of Ivrea. Word came back that three thousand Austrians held the forts at the Italian village. Mormont, youthful chief-of-artillery of the Army of Reserve, met this crisis in his own deft way. He muffled the wheels of guns and caissons in straw and slipped them audaciously past the fort of Bard in the dead of night, artillery enough for the reduction of Ivrea.

Lannes closed on the Austrians at Ivrea with a furious attack of foot and guns. By night of the first day of battle he dispatched a courier to Aosta with news of victory. There would be no delay for siege. Lannes reported his outposts thrust on out into the valley of the Po. The way was clear for the great debouchment of Bonaparte's thirty-three thousand men. The Austrian garrison was crushed, its remnant prisoner.

THE Corsican wasted brief time in jubilation. With Lannes' report came enemy dispatches. A venturesome patrol of his attached horse had ridden down the Austrian couriers, who had slipped through the Simplon on their way from Vienna to Melas. Bonaparte's face fell as he scanned the dispatches. They were of small importance, chiefly reports of ammunition and men reserves for the future operations of the Austrian army in Italy. For a long time he puzzled over one of them before he tossed it aside dolefully.

"A great pity," he said. "I had counted upon their courier route for important news—and now it is before me, I can make nothing of it."

His aides-de camp took the paper, eyed it with blank faces, and returned it to the table. Otho, at the map table with Fullois, engaged in charting the day's developments, rose quietly and moved to Bonaparte's desk. Although his eyes verified what he expected to find, he started at sight of the familiar cipher of Colonel Vekuss.

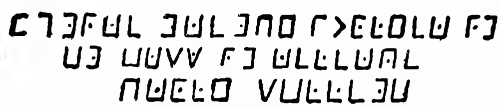
"May I have this, Citizen First Consul?" he inquired, adding hastily, "It has been a great pastime of mine, amusing myself with cipher."

"You will find nothing in this one to amuse you, ninny," muttered Bonaparte. "One day I will be in position to demand of Austria the key in order to compensate me for past headaches."

"Nevertheless, if I may try, my General."

"If you have nothing better to occupy you," said the Corsican indifferently, and returned to his reports.

Though, with the key at his beck, Otho knew he could reduce the cipher promptly, he decided upon a night's delay, lest he incite suspicion. When he was alone in his quarters at midnight, he turned eagerly to the task. The message read:



He reduced it, a word at a time. His eyes danced as it lay before him in clear text. His message from Geneva had borne rich fruit. The mind of Vekuss had followed the charted course, and the senile Aulic Council had accepted it as another of Austria's proud secret service achievements at Paris. It was addressed by a senior general of the Aulic Council to Melas, under a date that was less than a fortnight old.

Ignore French bluster of an Army of Reserve. Crush Massena.

It meant that Ferdinand, Vekuss, the Black Cabinet groped blindly. And Otho knew that the message must be in the hands of Melas by now, since Austrian orders went by several routes to insure their delivery. He seized a sheet of paper and wrote another message, in the same cipher. A message again through Le Montier. Whether Ferdinand was in Paris or Vienna, it would be delivered into his hands so long as the nest at Le Montier's remained undisturbed. And, under the seal of Moskolz, it bade Ferdinand hurry in French uniform to Milan, there to report at an appointed rendezvous. Otho was ready now to spring his own trap.

He wrote a second communication, one to be opened only in event he did not himself survive the Corsican's adventure in Italy. Since Ferdinand might not be able to reach Milan before Otho had moved on into action with the Army of the Reserve, he would have the rendezvous kept, in that event, by an agent of the Consular Guard. Ferdinand, thereupon, would be held in the prison of the Guard which would be established at the great headquarters city of Milan. Lieutenant Lemoire, of the Consular Guard, would attend to that for him. Lemoire, a taciturn but obliging Grenadier, could be trusted to hold his letter with the seal unbroken against the day of Otho's return to Milan from the battle front. Thus Ferdinand would be brought to his deserts regardless of eventuality. The letter, which Otho sealed and placed carefully in his dispatch case, omitted no salient detail of Ferdinand's bald career in France.

Bonaparte, when he grudgingly yielded an audience to Otho at daybreak in the morning, scowled his skepticism of the young officer's blunt claim of having broken the Austrian cipher. But as his eyes scanned the array of symbols and letters and he read Otho's translation of the message into French, his features quickened into sharp interest. Impatiently he seized the proffered key and patiently worked the cipher out for himself, word by word. As he finished the last letter, he leaped to his feet.

"You have found it, Le Falcon!" he exulted. "It is everything I prayed for. The numbskulls at Vienna could not play better into my hands if I issued their orders!"

His jaw snapped shut in one of his lightning changes of humor. He searched Otho's face with quizzical sparks of fire.

"In many ways, Le Falcon," he drawled insinuatingly, "you are a most remarkable fellow; more remarkable, I often think, than if you had been always a mere actor. Eh, *voilà!* but maybe one day I will have you let me into your confidence, monsieur."

His mood changed again, as suddenly. He did not wait for Otho's reply. He thrust his arm impulsively to its full

length and slowly closed his fingers until the nails bit into the palm.

"Nothing can save Melas now," he vowed. "Italy lies in the hollow of my hand. The victory I came for—it can not escape me!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SCROLL OF THE BOAR'S HEAD

IN THE score of days that followed, events multiplied swiftly. The Corsican established himself at Ivrea. There he sent columns in divergent directions. Murat galloped toward Milan, Lannes disappeared on the road toward Turin. The Alps continued to disgorge the French divisions while Bonaparte, once they were in hand, moved them here and there on the great checkerboard of his map. He moved his own pins now, with his own hand. Day and night he sat glowering over reports and wax headed pins. He spoke only to issue sharp orders. The move of a pin, and Lannes veered off the road to Turin, his direction to the left into Chivasso. Moncey, through the St. Gothard at last, was started by forced marches to Bellinzona. Other columns were given their directions of march. Reports of fighting came back incessantly. In the midst of it all came crushing news. Massena had capitulated at Genoa. The Corsican did not wince at the disaster, barely pausing to hear the news and passing it with a shrug.

Otho, seeming to have been forgotten in this fever of movement, stood by with the inconsolable Fullois, the whole maneuver a senseless jumble. Succeeding reports plunged him into black despair. Disaster seemed written clearly across the map. Melas had crushed Massena and doubled back to Turin. The Austrians were massing there for battle. Bonaparte, with a mere feint in that direction, was moving off toward Milan, dispersing his columns into a tangled skein.

But Otho was alone in his misgivings. The Corsican remained impenetrable, the staff, the generals of the line, the couriers who came to headquarters, reflected their leader's cool assurance. Fullois' one complaint was of fighting in which he found no part. Had the Little Corporal forgotten his pledge? Was Fullois to be kept cooling his heels, forgotten in the background, until the victory perched on French eagles? There was no baiting the general now, no pleading for duty. They must simply wait until the First Consul remembered their existence, if he ever did. Fullois alternated between curses and tears.

They moved to Milan in the wake of Murat, a triumphal entry by the little Corporal to impress the populace. Again couriers were sent in every direction with orders redistributing the French checkers. Melas was reported concentrating in Alessandra. Bonaparte took to his horse in a few days, mercilessly pounding the saddle as he trotted and galloped under the hot June sun. Small battles raged in many places. The dull echoes of distant cannon came from varying directions. But of a great battle there was no indication. The Corsican dismounted finally at Stradella when Murat had sabered the Austrian garrison into flight. Here he set up his maps again, ordered headquarters established, and plunged into a study of the pawns.

A sergeant courier of the Consular Guard here overtook them from Milan with dispatches for the commander-in-chief. Delivering them to an aide-de-camp, he brought from his coat a letter, stalked to Otho and delivered it.

"I am commanded by my lieutenant to wait upon your reply," said the sergeant

There was a quick gleam of triumph in Otho's eyes as they passed across the terse message from Milan. It was from Lemoir, commandant of the prison at Milan of the Army of Reserve.

> I hold for your disposal the person from Paris whose detention you requested.

Ferdinand had reported. A trusted sergeant of the Consular Guards had kept the rendezvous with him at Milan.

From his dispatch case Otho took the sealed letter addressed to the prison commandant and handed it to the awaiting sergeant. On the face of the letter was written the legend "To be opened only in event M. Le Falcon should not return." As the sergeant galloped off, Otho smiled a grim satisfaction. No whim of fortune or prank of battle could now save Ferdinand from meshes of his own designing.

BONAPARTE emerged suddenly from the stolid humor of the past fortnight. His eyes fell upon Otho and Fullois.

"Well, here we are, my ninnies!" he exclaimed. "Here we are at last at our destination, sitting hard upon the Austrian tail. *Mon dieu*, do you not see their desperate position?"

Fullois ventured a plaint.

"The maps, my General, they have become to me a tangle that causes an ache in my brain. Ah, that there is a battle and I—"

"Ah, but see," the Corsican broke in. He ran his finger across his map as he stripped bare, at last, the intrepid plan that had brought him to Italy. "See the beautiful way our design has turned into reality. See, we are sitting here across the Austrian communications, completely in his rear. Melas wakes up to find our army between him and Vienna. How, my ninnies, is he to receive munitions? How will he replete the store of shells he hurls at us? What must be his emotions now as he sees himself between the Army of the Reserve and the deep blue sea! A panic for the Austrians, messieurs. No army has the morale to stand up when it is cut off. Another day and I will have his escape checkmated. His scouts are flitting about now like snipes, seeking some way out of the trap."

His flash of enthusiasm spent itself. He dropped back into his close lipped silence. But only momentarily. There entered the room of headquarters a small, bristling man, who summarily waved aside the Consular Guardsman who stood sentry at the door. Though he wore the insignia of general of division, his face was new to Otho. He was an undersized man, no larger than the Corsican, and no older. His mouth was an abrupt line, his eyes black and commanding, his gait an easy swagger. His color was that of an African, but Otho saw that his blackness came from sun and wind, his features were those of a Frenchman.

"Desaix! *Le bon dieu*, but what a beautiful sight for my eyes!" The Corsican was on his feet at first sight of the officer. He rushed from behind his desk and embraced the little general. "Ah, but I knew they could never hold you back in Egypt. And you are just in time, my friend, for the *coup de grâce!*"

"I am just arrived, my General," said Desaix quietly. "General Desaix begs to report himself for duty to his commander-in-chief."

"A command is ready for you, little cheese. You shall have the divisions of Monnier and Boudet. Here, see the situation on my map. I have Melas cut off completely and floundering about trying to pull himself together for escape either north or south of the Po. We held the Stradella defile before Melas was able to reach Alessandria, and Lannes already has beaten the vanguard of Melas' main army at Montebello."

General Desaix studied the positions, rubbing his chin soberly as he reflected.

"But, my General, do you not divide your forces too greatly for caution?" he inquired. "I gather that while you sit astride the Austrian communications, they have yet to be whipped."

"But from what information I get, Desaix, Melas' one thought is of escape." Napoleon added with an incisive emphasis that left no further room for question, "I will have you proceed with Boudet's division around their left, to prevent an escape toward Genoa."

Desaix bowed a silent acceptance, and sat down to study his mission. Bonaparte turned to Fullois.

"Here, you young numbskulls, I have seen you eating your hearts out. Now a mission for you. I will have Melas' inten-

tions in his own report. Take a dozen of my mounted grenadiers and patrol toward Rivalto and Novi. If you intercept Austrian couriers trying to slip through with messages for Vienna, you will hold my gratitude for a useful service. Now be off, and see to it that you waste no time in returning!"

The afternoon was before them, two superb mounts under them, the detachment of mounted Grenadiers at their heels as Otho and Fullois galloped to the south. The canker of discontent that had gnawed at Fullois since the first wary skirmishing began was displaced by a radiant enthusiasm. Otho's face was flushed, his eyes flashed stern purpose as they hurried on their quest. The way lay along dusty farm roads until they emerged from friendly territory; then, as they slackened their pace, they trotted with eyes alert across waving fields of new grain, through broad vineyards, keeping to the narrow swales and going cautiously to each hillock for observation.

Late afternoon brought them the sight of an Austrian column. Fullois measured it with a trained eye. Cavalry, by the height of its dust cloud, a full squadron by the length of the floating trail. They hung in an alder thicket until the Austrians had disappeared, then swung to the south, watching the obscure routes that led through the hills to the Trebia and the village of Bobbio.

Without appearing to do so Otho had shaped their direction to the edge of the high hills. He reined his horse and raised his hand for a halt as they came to a meandering road that came from the vineyards and wound its way into the highlands. In the distance to the west, in the direction of Alessandria, was a pretentious farmhouse, its tiled gables blood red in the setting sun.

"An excellent place to lie in wait, my Lieutenant," Otho proposed to Fullois. "There is grass and water for our horses, as well as cover."

"But we might only wait until doomsday," Fullois objected. "No, we must ride on, and patrol for contact. It is the hour now when their couriers will be setting out, if ever."

OTHO was adamant. He spoke not from theory. This, to his eyes, was familiar terrain, every foot of it. They were in the area now of those first smashing maneuvers of the Corsican's two years before. The Austrians had yielded every kilometer of this ground sullenly. Over this very route the Austrian couriers had gone with the word of Bonaparte's drive toward Novi. The farmhouse in front of them had sheltered Austrian couriers in those days, caring for their horses and hiding them until the curtain of night gave them access to the hills. But of his knowledge of these things, Otho was able to say nothing.

"Floundering about in the darkness will net us no gain, Lieutenant Fullois," he argued. "Come, let us be reasonable rather than impetuous. Our horses must be fresh for the ride back to Stradella."

"To horse!" cried Fullois, as the senior making his decision by command. "We will scour the country."

"Keep to cover," Otho called out. The Grenadiers paused, with feet at stirrups ready to swing into the saddle. Fullois shot an amazed scowl at Otho's insubordination. Otho stood with his hand pointed to the front, tensely. "The Austrians themselves decide for us, monsieur!" he cried.

From the vineyard, at a distance of a thousand meters, a cavalcade of horsemen was emerging. Their white coats proclaimed their allegiance. Fullois gasped sharply, and motioned the Grenadiers to hold to cover. As the Austrians approached to three hundred meters Otho saw there were twenty-four of them, armed with sabers and booted muskets. At their head rode a young officer. Across his breast was strapped the leather dispatch case that betrayed him an officer-courier, therefore the bearer of important dispatches. The fact that he was heavily escorted through the first leg of his journey, as well as the direction

of his journey, told Otho the officer was off to Vienna.

He whispered his deduction coolly into Fullois' ear. Fullois himself was now thoroughly collected, appraising the situation with coldly calculating eyes. He waited until the Austrians, on the road a hundred meters distant, sensed the presence of danger. Two horsemen were detached by the officer to ride ahead and reconnoiter. Fullois galvanized into action. His decision was made. Twelve of the Consular Guard must be equal to many times their number. He sent his Grenadiers to their horses with a jerk of his wrist, vaulted into his saddle, and leaped forward to the charge.

Otho, galloping beside him with naked sword, shouted fierce demands for surrender. But the Austrian officer, quickly estimating the situation, bellowed to his men to stand and fight. He whipped out his horse pistols and fired point blank, first at Fullois, then at Otho. But his plunging horse ruined his aim and he was forced to maneuver for time to get his saber into play.

The Austrian Grenadiers did not bolt. But their action was disconcerted. Some brought out their muskets, others their sabers. The guns merely added to the noise, and before sabers could be whipped from scabbards, the French whirlwind of flashing steel was upon them. Half a dozen of the white-coats fell at the first impact. The others turned tail but only long enough to arm themselves with their blades. The fray became a swirling maelstrom of shrieking, cursing men.

Fullois, in his lust to get at the courier, was forced to hack his way through a determined Austrian trio who held in front of their officer. Their clumsy swords were no match for Fullois' plunging blade and deft horsemanship. A quick clash and he was through them and slashing at the officer. The Austrian parried successfully as Fullois drove at his heart, and countered with a quick thrust, which missed. Fullois tightened his rein and headed a second time straight at his antagonist. The courier precipitately changed his mind at this instant, whirled his mount on its haunches and bolted. He pressed his heels home and rode for the hills, Fullois left ten yards behind by the maneuver.

The Guardsmen had been fighting with a furious zest to reduce the odds, Otho among them, riding first to the relief of one Grenadier, then another, as the Austrians in groups of two and three attacked lone swordsmen. But at sight of two Austrian Hussars detaching themselves to gallop after Fullois, Otho turned from the fray and followed. The courier had not exhausted his pistols. He turned twice to fire with his belt weapons, which only brought defiant yells from Fullois' throat. It was a race into the foothills, with the courier slowly gaining. Fullois' horse was broad across the breast and with sturdy legs for endurance rather than great speed. The courier was leading him by forty meters, the two Hussars were pressing close to his rear with ready sabers, when they came to the first sharp rise of the foothills. Otho spurred desperately to prevent Fullois from being caught in rear.

BUT the Austrian officer had reasoned poorly in choosing his direction of flight. His mount, speedy on the plains, slowed under the terrific exertion of the ascent. Fullois slowly reduced the distance. Then as he came to the fugitive's heels, the courier pulled his mount, leaped to the ground and stood defiantly ready for dismounted battle. Fullois leaped from his own horse and accepted the challenge.

The two Grenadiers flung themselves from the horses ready to overwhelm Fullois, but only in time to face Otho, who was on the ground at their heels. The courier was something of a match for Fullois. But the slow wrists of the Hussars were no match for Otho's seasoned skill. A swift sortie did for one of them. The other, after a few uncertain passes, turned to scramble back down the hill, throwing his sword aside in his flight.

Fullois waved Otho aside as he stepped

forward to transfer the courier's blade to his own. Dusk was thickening, the Austrian held tenaciously to the upper slope of the road and Fullois was panting. But he was unwilling to share any part of the struggle. He cut, slashed and thrust with a venomous persistence, holding the attack in his own hands. From his defensive tactics, the Austrian was hanging on for darkness. Fullois guessed this and, as the last light was fading, leaped close with all his strength drawn together, forcing himself on the high ground, and beating down the Austrian's blade with a succession of cuts. A sharp thrust brought the struggle to its end.

Fullois cut the straps of the dispatch case from the dead man's breast, secured it to his belt and set out for their horses. They found their mounts grazing below, mounted quickly and rode back to the place of battle. Seven of the Consular Guardsmen were standing beside their horses, the ground strewn with vanquished Austrian Hussars. Twelve they had killed, the others driven off. Of the seven Guardsmen three suffered from saber cuts, at which they did not complain, swearing they were equal to the ride back to their Little Corporal's headquarters. Three were dead. Fullois rode off at once, walking the horses because of his wounded Grenadiers until they were back on the roads, when he left the Grenadiers to come on at their leisure and set out at a gallop for Stradella.

"An afternoon's work, my friend," Fullois cried. "What sparkling wine after the stale beer of the past! Ah, but it is a stroke of fortune that we return with full hands. What greater fortune, if these dispatches should be important?"

"Of course we may very easily inform ourselves, my Lieutenant," proposed Otho. "A fire, when it is discreet to strike one, will tell us what we have."

"*Bon dieu*, Le Falcon, but it is the excellent proposal! When we approach Stradella, we shall rest our horses and have a small fire to read by."

Until after midnight, Fullois forced the gait in his impatience. When Stradella was in the foreground, they dismounted behind a hedge and struck sparks into tinder until they fanned a small fire. Fullois searched the dead courier's dispatch case. It contained a single sealed letter, which he cut open at the bottom.

"*Diable!*" he muttered as he saw the hieroglyphics of Austrian cipher. His face brightened as he handed it eagerly to Otho. "But you, my friend, can reduce the thing to reason. Quickly, what sense does it make?"

Otho sat staring at the message for many minutes. Fullois spoke to him in rising impatience before he heard the other's voice. He worked it out, word by word for Fullois, speaking in an abstracted voice, as if the message itself was without interest.

> I am arrived and beg to confirm that the situation is such our armies must force their escape as soon as it is possible.

"*Voilà!*" shouted Fullois. "That will be glorious news for our Little Corporal. Is it not exactly as he expected? Ah, but we have had a great stroke, my friend!"

He clapped the silent Otho roundly on the shoulder. But Otho did not respond. His eyes were burning, his hands clenched, he was gripped by some deep emotion as he sat over the message. It was not the message that moved him, but a tiny splotch at the signature, an oval scroll of tiny lines in the shape of a boar's head—an imprint from the ring of Vekuss. It told him that Vekuss himself was at Alessandria with the headquarters of Melas.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

THE Corsican was in a quandary. Those intercepted dispatches, which his two intrepid lieutenants had brought in overnight, confirmed the Austrian purpose of escape. But where and how? On the plains behind San Giuliano he had confidently expected to find Melas assembled in force. A logical place for

the Austrian to make his last fling, in front of his citadels at Alessandria, a broad river to girder his strength. But his generals reported that there was nothing on those plains but an Austrian detachment. Gardanne's men had driven the handful of Austrians out of Marengo halfway across the open fields toward Alessandria. Cavalry scouts reported no bridges from the Austrian stronghold across the Bormido in their immediate front.

Bonaparte turned to his maps, setting up headquarters at Torre di Garofoli, and reached his own conclusions. He would close the three lines of Austrian escape. He put Desaix in motion for Rivalto. That would head off an escape toward Genoa. Victor could hold on at Marengo, attacking any forces that might appear. Murat would remain at Sale, covering the right of the position. His forces in hand were now reduced to a minimum—a dangerous minumum if Melas should turn in force to fight. But the Corsican sniffed his contempt of such a thought. Tonight Melas would set himself in motion, but to escape by some back door. So Bonaparte decided to close the gaps, even at the risk of scattered forces.

When his plans were made, he took to his horse again, restless at the secrecy that now enveloped Melas. He rode to San Giuliano and scanned the rolling plains. Artillery growled from the banks of the Bormido, warning the French to stay at Marengo, out of range of the Austrian cannister. He studied the situation through his field glass. The walls and turrets of Alessandria rose in the distance, tiled roofs glistening in the slanting sun. But the heavy brush and littered trees of the Bormido River were an effective veil. Movement on the ground was not visible.

Otho, riding beside Fullois with the Corsican's staff, had not spoken since the night before. His face was a grim mask, which Fullois' most buoyant raillery failed to break as the forenoon slipped by. At San Giuliano, where Bonaparte stood on a hillock, surveying his front in nettled irritation, Otho edged close. His eyes were fixed upon the First Consul rather than upon the plains below or Alessandria beyond.

"What would I not give for eyes to see beyond those walls!" the Corsican snapped, lowering his glass. "But no matter, my net is wide enough that Melas shall find no gap in its meshes."

Otho stepped forward, hand at his hat in salute. It was the opportunity for which he had been waiting.

"Your pardon, my General," he said, "but I solicit authority to visit the city of Alessandria. Perhaps—"

Bonaparte turned, his eyes snapping impatience. There was something in the determined face before him that arrested his unspoken rebuke at an impertinence.

"I have sent trusted men to try that, Le Falcon," he said sharply, "men who had some good reason to think they might succeed. So far, they have learned nothing. You would be promptly taken prisoner and shot."

"I have confidence, my General—" Otho stood his ground. "My General's permission, and I will succeed."

"It is not worth it, Le Falcon. I have better uses for you in the future. Besides, I can not feel you would have the slightest chance in such a reckless adventure as you propose."

There was a weakened decision in the Corsican's abrupt voice. Otho pressed his advantage resolutely.

"I have my own excellent reasons for the venture," he persisted. "I have waited long for just this chance, my General. I will not fail."

Bonaparte raised his glass again and studied the distant turrets. When he finally decided, it was with a toss of his right shoulder, a drawing of the corners of his mouth.

"I do not require such audacity, when there is so slender a chance," he replied sternly. "But if you are so determined I will not stand in your way. I would warn you, in any event, to return by morning if you are still alive, as Melas

will show his hand plainly enough before many hours."

Otho paused to salute, swung on his heel and hurried from the group. Fullois edged away and hurried after him as Otho swung into his saddle. But Otho merely shook his head in negation and galloped away for his billet at Torre di Garofoli, two miles north on the Rivalto Sale road. There he spent scant time in preparation. A few personal effects in his pocket, a long blue cape across his pommel and he rode south past San Giuliano, plunged into the checkerboard of open wheat fields and vineyards, skirted Marengo to the south and secured his horse in a willow thicket.

Cautiously he worked his way forward, taking cover in the wheat and among the hedges until he found a small rise from which he had a view of the river. From where he lay, through sunset into the dusk, he saw the Austrian pickets, woven in a loose but alert line across the front of the Bormido. By watching the galloping patrols and couriers he verified the presence of not one but two bridges across the Bormido in front of Alessandria. Cannon were mounted at the bridges, and they were manned by heavy detachments. He made his final preparation, a few deft touches of his pigments at the lines of his mouth and eyes, a wisp of hair at his lips. He viewed his handiwork. Except for the square lines at the forehead and neck, his field mirror reflected back a passing likeness of Ferdinand.

HE WAITED long hours after darkness had fallen, until the cooling breezes from the highlands had drifted down the Bormido to cool the hot plains. By midnight, there was a chill in the air, and he worked his way carefully ahead to the Austrian line of pickets. A challenge rang out in the darkness, in Hungarian.

"*Megalj!*" and quickly thereafter, "*Kiaz?*"

"An officer," Otho barked in Austrian. "Have a care with your lungs, unless you wish to attract the French!"

"Approach, and give the countersign, Herr Officer," mouthed the sentry in thick German, an apology in his voice.

"*Kuz!*" snapped Otho as he came up to the sentry. "But I will find if you are properly instructed. The countersign, whisper it in my ear. Again. *Serbus?* Correct, but have a care that you do not forget it—and keep sharp eyes to the front!"

He marched on, with the authority in his carriage of a man who goes about his business. A stiff march brought him to the bridge across the Bormido. There was another challenge, in Austrian this time. The tone was that of an officer. The officer scanned the long blue cape that flowed to Otho's boot tops. It was not familiar in color or cut. But Otho breathed the magic word of passage and was shunted across the bridge.

Once across the Bormido he quickly sensed an immense massing of men. There was the tramping of marching columns, muttered orders and imprecations, black shadows under the fitful starlight. As he moved ahead he was compelled to thread his way among companies of the foot, sitting in huddled squads with their bayoneted rifles aslant, or asleep in sprawling platoons. The ground was covered with men to a depth of a hundred meters. Columns were coming endlessly out of the city to join them. He hurried on, passing unchallenged through gates that were emitting an unending stream of infantry. An apprehension gripped him. This was not the maneuver of flight. Those thousands were massing under the Corsican's scattered bivouacs. He hurried on.

The streets, inside the walled city, were well lighted, and jammed with men, horses, moving cannon, all surging toward the gates at the Bormido. Otho held to the air of an officer who is certain of himself, alert for couriers arriving from the front. He had passed halfway across Alessandria when a suspicion that he was being followed became a certainty. He turned about to glimpse the white coat tails of a Grenadier, dodging into a door-

way. The incident puzzled him. In the commotion he had felt secure against suspicion at this hour, even in his unaccustomed garb. On a reckless impulse he swung on his heel and walked back. The shadow was gone. He turned to follow a courier to the great headquarters.

Lamps burned on the lower floor of Melas' rendezvous. On the upper floor the shutters were drawn, with no flicker of light showing through. The general and his staff were catching a nap for the morrow, Otho guessed. A sentry challenged him at the door, but stood aside at the password. He stalked through several rooms until he came to the general's official quarters, an elegant reception room, in the center of which was a broad table over which a sentry stood guard with drawn saber. Seated nearby was a lieutenant, half asleep. The officer sprang to his feet at Otho's entrance.

"You will leave at once!" he commanded. "This room is to be entered only by the generals and the officers of the great staff."

"You speak nonsense, my fellow," scoffed Otho with an arrogant leer. "Does it happen that you do not know the Captain Count Ferdinand? Place yourself at ease; I wish to glance over the maps."

"Impossible, Herr Captain," wailed the officer, throwing out his arm in protest. "No one must approach the maps, unless by order."

"You presume to address me with a tone of insubordination! Do as I command or you will suffer for it."

The guardian of the Austrian battle maps made a hasty estimate of the disagreeable possibilities. His orders were definite. But the arrogant assurance of the man before him hinted at reprisals from high authority.

"I shall be compelled to summon the captain of the headquarters guard," he equivocated. "It will be for him to say."

"Go wake him at once, then, and tell him whom you have offended," Otho said with a snap of his fingers. "He will not thank you for your stupidity. The Colonel Vekuss himself will point out to you tomorrow your silly error." He halted the officer at the door. "You must not forget tomorrow to report to your superiors all the details of this visit. Now hurry."

The officer out of sight, Otho pointed a tense finger at the door.

"You will go, too," he commanded the sentry. "Go with your lieutenant this minute, and see that he finds his captain!"

OTHO stepped coolly to the pin littered battle map. He made a swift calculation. It would be ten ninutes before the captain of the guard could get out of his bed and to the map room. He ran his eyes across the map. Melas had his dispositions staked out for battle. As Otho read them, his blood turned cold. Melas was going to cut his way straight through the French front. A crushing force was to dash across the Bormido at daybreak and crash the French left at Marengo while a second mass under Ott struck the right at Castel Ceriolo. Twenty-eight thousand men were massed under Melas' hand; of this all but twenty-two hundred, Nimpich's heavy cavalry, stood ready to crash the thin French resistance. Nimpich had been detached, with order to march at dawn to fend off Souchet, reported operating on the Austrian rear.

A voice at his ear brought him from the map with a start. As he swung about, the man he confronted broke into a friendly greeting.

"My dear Ferdinand!"

Colonel Vekuss bit his sentence. With quick presence of mind he brushed aside Otho's long cloak. At sight of the French uniform underneath, he whipped a pistol from under his dressing gown. Vekuss thrust his long face close to Otho. A look of disbelief slowly merged into a taunting smile.

"So it is really you, my dear Otho—or rather, Le Falcon?" he leered. "Otho, erstwhile Count of Donau-Walden! An unbelievable phantom—Banquo's ghost

at our table. A traitor in enemy uniform."

"On the contrary," Otho coolly rejoined, "I am Le Falcon, in the full uniform of my service."

"A pitiful pretext, my friend." Vekuss' smile spread. The situation was bringing him an immense enjoyment. "But I must admit that you have the lives of a cat. Though even a cat comes to its end —and here you are, my silly mouser, at the end of yours!"

Otho was drawing himself together while Vekuss purred. He sought his one chance, a quick leap at his captor's throat, a desperate play against the spurt of the Austrian's lead. Vekuss was sluggish physically, his mind was filled with gloating. By dint of swift, unsuspected violence, there was a bare chance of closing with Vekuss. But though confidence did not fail Otho, his desperate plan was dashed from his mind in the next instant. He dropped his gaze from the colonel's mocking glare, lest the other read the danger behind. A figure had passed in at the door, moving with the stealth of a shadow. Though the man wore the uniform of an Austrian dragoon sergeant, recognition swept instantly into Otho's mind. Corporal Hom of the Consular Guards, his own Plobo.

Vekuss misread surrender in Otho's gesture.

"So-o-o?" he taunted. "You see now how hopeless is the mess you are caught in, my poor pumpkin. Well, an Austrian firing squad—"

Vekuss' taunt ended in a choking for breath as Plobo's steel fingers gripped his throat. There was the glint of lamplight on steel as Plobo thrust home his dirk. The Austrian sagged to the floor, an impotent hulk. Otho helped break the fall of the body, then seized Plobo's arm and hurried toward the door as he caught the clank of marching heels on the flagging outside.

The captain of the Austrian headquarters guard, a detachment of Dragoons in formation behind him, loomed into the chamber. Otho started resolutely past them, motioning the captain aside with a haughty toss of his hand. But the Austrian glimpsed the body of Vekuss on the floor and thrust his sword excitedly forward. His alert, determined bearing indicated to Otho that the man would not hesitate to run him through if he made a break for liberty.

"You will wait, Herr Grofur Ferdinnand!" the captain blurted. He stood his ground and ordered his men to stand at thrust bayonets as Otho attempted to force his way past. "Your pardon, but I must investigate this strange scene in the general's map room!"

The captain of the guard strode to the figure on the floor, scrutinized the ashen features and recoiled at seeing the dead man was Colonel Vekuss of the high command. He turned back to Otho, his eyes wide with amazement at this incomprehensible thing. He sputtered his orders in high excitement.

"But now I must detain you in arrest, Herr Grofur Ferdinand!" he cried. "No, but I can not release you—no, not on your honor. Please but I can not even listen to what you have to say. It is a thing to explain to the herr general himself, and not for a poor captain to decide. But save your voice, since I can not listen."

He broke off with a guttural order to his Dragoons. They massed in a square around Otho and Plobo and marched the prisoners to the military prison of the garrison at Alessandria. The captain of the guard did not relax his vigil until he saw them into a stone cell on the upper floor of the stone prison. He turned a deaf ear to Otho's final demand for a hearing.

"It is for the ears of the herr general," he rejoined, unshaken. "Pardon, Herr Grofur Ferdinand, but here you must remain until the herr general is free to listen with his own ears. I dare not risk my commission under circumstances where a colonel of Vienna is dead in the headquarters of the general, as you must see, Herr Count."

Otho nodded once, shortly . . .

CHAPTER XXIX

THE GUNS OF MARENGO

THROUGH the one narrow window of their cell, there was wafted to Otho and Plobo the endless grinding of iron and oaken rims on cobblestone, the lively clang of shod hoofs, the clatter of countless infantry. The din echoed through Otho's brain like a knell. The army of Melas was marching upon the unsuspecting Corsican to slash its way through his feebly marshaled legions. The Austrian eagles were perching themselves for easy prey. A brief inspection of the cell convinced Otho there was no hope of escape. The walls were immense blocks of granite, stoutly cemented together. The narrow window was barred by squares of iron the thickness of a man's wrist. He turned from this inspection with a sigh of despair and laid a gentle hand on Plobo's shoulder.

"Chance has played us an ill prank, my faithful friend," he consoled. He added with a shrug, "But no matter—we must not quarrel with Fate, Plobo; and I am as grateful to you as if we were flying at this moment safely back across the Bormido. I only regret that you must share my ill fortune, the more so since it may imperil your mission into the Austrian ranks."

"I came to learn what I could of the Austrians' plans, Highness—pardon, my Lieutenant. For three days I have been hiding in Alessandria in this uniform of the Austrian Dragoons, but nothing have I been able to learn from the chatter of the soldiers, who did not know. I have been safe enough, since for months I have been playing hide and seek with the Austrians, though with the help of Monsieur Le Carbenne, who is the master at trifling with their orders."

"Le Carbenne!" Otho broke in. He caught Plobo's sleeve and asked breathlessly, "Le Carbenne came with you to Alessandria? Le Carbenne knows of the Austrian massing behind the Bormido?"

"But no, my Lieutenant," said Plobo heavily. "It was to the army of General Ott that our headquarters sent Monsieur Le Carbenne. Ah, if only Le Carbenne had been dispatched to Alessandria with me, my Lieutenant! We would not now be caged in this sad hole. Le Carbenne, in the uniform of an aide-de-camp of the crown, gives orders even to the colonels when the shoe pinches too tight."

"You gave me a moment's hope," sighed Otho. "A hope that our Little Corporal might receive warning. But fortune seems to have turned against the French eagles tonight. Of my presence in Alessandria—your own appearance at headquarters, Corporal Hom? You came at a critical moment, though I felt sure even then that I could upset the rascal Vekuss before he could shoot me."

"A stroke of fortune, my Lieutenant. Tonight I saw the Austrains massing toward the Bormido and was leaving the city when I saw a sight that filled my eyes with blood. On the street near the gates I saw in the long cape the wretch I thought to be the Captain Ferdinand. Little did I guess, my Lieutenant, that it was you come in the disguise of your cousin. So it was that I crept along behind, even into the headquarters, and wormed my way through the courtyard and over a balustrade of stone to the doors at the piazza. Ah, my Lieutenant, I thought when I saw the Colonel Vekuss enter, that my moment of vengeance had been delivered to me. Colonel Vekuss and the Captain Ferdinand, those two monsters at my mercy—two thrusts of one knife before I went back across the Bormido.

"It was not until I was outside the door, my Lieutenant, that I knew you were other than Ferdinand. Then I heard Vekuss call you by the name Le Falcon and threaten you with his pistol. Oh, but for his words—his calling out Le Falcon—I might not have guessed the truth in that poor light!" Plobo shuddered. "But the Lord favored us, my Lieutenant, and though I have settled my account with that black monster, it will be hard to die before the Captain Ferdinand has paid me his account—

and harder still to know that I can perform no service for you, my Lieutenant!"

"No matter about me, Plobo," said Otho gently. "I accomplished my own purpose, with your good help. If I could only find some way to send the warning to our Little Corporal, before it is too late, I would cheerfully face a dozen firing squards. As for Ferdinand, I can console you with news of him. I have taken good care of him, no matter what happens. He is now held by an officer of the Consular Guards at Milan, in close confinement at my request. He came hurrying from Paris through the Alps into my trap—although I am sorry it is not the Austrains who are to deal with him, as I had planned."

Plobo quickened, a malignant fire kindled in his eyes at the words.

"Be assured, my Plobo, that he will not escape," Otho added hastily. "I left behind with the Consular prison at Milan a sealed letter to be opened if I should not return. It gives a sufficient account of my little cousin—and the Little Corporal himself his knowledge that will help him to judge the truth."

Plobo rubbed his hands in satisfaction and lapsed into silence. They sat through the long hours of darkness without further words. The dull echoes of artillery wafted in occasionally over that grinding bedlam from the cobbles. As morning approached, Otho's tension grew. He listened with heavy apprehension for the din that must come with the dawn. It broke, with the first ribbons of light at their window, grim confirmation of his fears. The bellowing artillery rose to thunder on the plains across the Bormido. The clatter on the street below was now that of galloping horses. Melas had moved into his attack.

THROUGH the endless hours of the morning, Plobo sat on his cot, his eyes fixed in dejection upon the walls in front of him. Otho pushed his cot to the window and stood straining into the street below. He appraised with eager eyes every moment, every face that passed. It had come to him that there was now but one forlorn hope of escape. If the Corsican's magic should turn the day to victory, it might mean the French legions would drive their way into Alessandria. But this hope was slowly effaced. By ten o'clock there were jubilant cries from the throats of passing couriers. The French were beaten. Austria was sweeping the plains of San Giuliano. Marengo had fallen. The Austrians had forced their way across the Fontannana.

Midday came. The jailer remembered to bring them food. He shouted the gladsome news as he thrust bread and wine through the bars. The news was confirmed. The French were running away like sheep, the Austrian sabers cutting them down in hundreds as they scampered. Italy was recovered, a glorious day for the Austrian eagles. He blurted the message, in short guttural bursts, and hurried on, talking to himself in jubilation.

A flourish of bugles and a moment later Otho saw before his eyes the final confirmation of it all. In haughty procession rode a general and his numerous retinue. He recognized the fat jowls of the ancient Melas, his features illumined by a serene smile. A captain of the staff shouted to an officer in the street:

"Prepare for the great celebration, Herr Captain. The Corsican donkey is tied in the Austrian halter. The battle is ended, except for the pursuit of sprinting Frenchmen!"

Otho left the window and sat on his cot to stare with graven eyes at the stone floor of his cell. The general would find time now shortly for an inquisition into last night's affair. Otho knew that the hearing would be a brief affair. Once his nondescript cape was stripped from his shoulders, his French uniform would seal his fate. His masquerade as Ferdinand was too perfunctory to fool the prying eyes of General Melas or those of his staff. There would be only a quick formality of trial, then an Austrian firing squad. As he measured this certain

course, Otho shrugged a Spartan indifference. But what did it matter now?

A rattling of the chains at his cell caught his ears but did not take his eyes from the floor. He had abandoned himself to the inevitable. When the bolts were slid and the jailer ordered him to his feet and out of the place, Otho rose nonchalantly, stretched himself and yawned insolently at the fellow.

A half smothered exclamation from Plobo, tense with excitement, quickened his eyes. Otho had been conscious of an officer of the Guards awaiting them outside. He had accepted him as a matter of course, the agent of headquarters come to escort them before the general of the Austrians. The officer was standing idly at one side, indolently taking a pinch of snuff from a tortoise shell box; a dapper, undersized lieutenant, of waxen features and a dandified wisp of hair over his lips. Recognition came slowly, unbelieveably, into Otho's brain. It was Le Carbenne, in the immaculate white uniform of the Dragoons, a gold aiguillette of the staff of the commander-in-chief looped across his right shoulder.

Le Carbenne eyed the two prisoners with an officious stare, signed for them and ordered the jailer to march them to the street. The jailer's offer of an armed escort was met with a curt reminder that aides-de-camp of the Dragoons needed no bodyguard. With many nervous apologies, the jailer led the way to the street where three horses were held by a wooden faced Grenadier. There Le Carbenne dismissed jailer and Grenadier with an arrogant toss of a riding whip, motioned Otho and Plobo into the saddle, mounted in rear of them and started them directly west on the street toward the Austrian general headquarters at a lively trot.

On reaching the first cross street, Le Carbenne cantered past them and led the way at a faster trot sharply to the north. By a sinuous route the three trotted through Alessandria and emerged through the gate on the route to Acqui, whence had gone Nimpich's heavy cavalry in quest of Suchet. In the excitement of the hour the three escaped attention. Even the inconsistency of Otho's long cape under a burning June sun attracted no one. Le Carbenne rode south to the first road bend, then swung south and east at a full gallop toward the Bormido. They came to the river far below the Austrian pontoons, plunged through, skirted the village of La Bolla and set their course along the south flank of the battlefield toward San Giuliano.

The voice of battle was dwindling. Artillery whanged in fitful bursts of passion. The chatter of musketry was sporadic. Cavalry patrols wheeled and circled in scattered local clashes far to the front beyond Marengo. Otho's eyes saw, across the plains of Marengo, a dismal panorama of Austrian victory. On the old road in front of Marengo the Austrian masses were forming back into columns. Other columns, already formed, were jogging behind, or standing on their arms waiting orders. Only far to the front was there action and that the stubborn remnants of the Corsican's broken army, pausing now and then for a volley as they retreated.

The afternoon sun was past the zenith when they galloped on to the Rivalto road. The Austrians were behind them now. Le Carbenne and Plobo stripped off their Austrian trappings and stuffed them into saddlebags as they rode. They came upon scattered Grenadiers, scurrying across the road. Otho called after them for news, but they shouted back the frenzied alarm that all was lost, and ran on. A battery held its position behind the road. They drew rein while Otho questioned the commander. His face was drawn, his eyes hollow. All was lost. He waited here under orders to cover the withdrawal of the infantry remnants. The First Consul? The captain shrugged. What did that matter? At Milan, perhaps, sunning himself on the piazza of his palace.

They galloped north on San Giuliano. Otho rode beside Le Carbenne. The diminutive Hussar shouted across to him

tersely the events at Alessandria. She had reported to the Corsican late the night before from a mission through the lines at Sale to learn the plans of the Austrian, Ott, whom Bonaparte had mistakenly feared more than Melas. From the Corsican's aide-de-camp at Stradella, Le Carbenne had learned of Le Falcon's brash invasion of Alessandria, of Corporal Hom's failure to return. She had galloped on into Alessandria in the teeth of daybreak, knowing that Vekuss had come from Vienna, of which danger Otho might not have been warned. With her uniform of a crown aide-de-camp and her audacious knowledge of Austrian military custom, she had gone easily into the heart of the Austrian lair. There she learned of the death of Colonel Vekuss, of the arrest, and had bided her time at attempting a rescue. Since the battle broke in all its fury at daylight, she made no attempt to return to French headquarters, remaining undercover in Alessandria and planning out each detail of the bold coup that was to release Otho and Plobo. The return of Melas brought her the coveted chance. Hard on the heels of his triumphant return through the city, and a few minutes after he had passed the prison, she rode to the place and demanded, in the general's name, that the two men be delivered instantly to the aide-de-camp of the herr general. The jailer had complied with dumb alacrity.

RIDERLESS horses now galloped madly across their route. Wounded men dragged themselves away from the field. Stampeded French infantry scurried back, their legs goaded by fear, though the firing was now a thousand meters or more behind them. As they approached San Giuliano, staff officers were riding the roads with drawn sabers, staunching the flight of stragglers, forcing fragments into hastily assembled platoons. Otho's eyes caught a detachment of the Consular Guard. In a moment he sighted the First Consul himself, on a little rise near the village. Leaving Le Carbenne and Plobo to report to their immediate staff chief, Otho forged his way forward.

The Corsican stood glowering upon the disaster in his front. He raised his glass from time to time or turned to issue a sharp order. Standing beside him was Desaix, returned from his march on Rivalto at sound of the cannon. Desaix appeared as imperturbable as the Corsican, until at sight of a company of fusileers in flight, he erupted in sudden passion and rushed after them shouting furious imprecations.

Bonaparte, at sight of Otho at his elbow, turned upon him in sharp inquisition, without greeting.

"Well, what is it you have to report, Le Falcon?"

"I regret having been detained, my General, by the prison at Alessandria."

"*Mon dieu*, but waste no words! What of the Austrians?"

"They celebrate their victory at Alessandria, my General. General Melas has returned to—"

"Melas is back at his headquarters? Now make certain, Le Falcon, that you tell me only what you know."

"I saw his return, myself, a full two hours ago, my General."

"Ah, so that means the wooden headed Zaim has been entrusted with the pursuit. What else?"

"They have their army in hand, my General. From near Marengo their columns stretch back to the Bormido on the road."

"Columns! You are saying that they form in columns?"

"In a long column, my General. But they are moving ahead, slowly, past Marengo."

"Their cavalry, what have you seen of that?"

"I saw only a few regiments of their horse, though there are many small detachments riding about the plains."

"The cavalry of Nimpich—it has puzzled me by its inaction up to this hour. It is vital to know if they hold it in hand for their pursuit. Did you see

anything of cavalry massed under screen of the river?"

"The cavalry of Nimpich, my General, was detached to ride after Suchet who was reported at Acqui."

The Corsican gripped Otho's arm, his eyes aflame.

"You must be certain of what you say, Le Falcon!" he snapped. "What reason have you for saying this?"

"The Austrian order of battle, my General. I saw it on the map of General Melas before my arrest. Nimpich's cavalry, his whole command, was ordered to fend General Suchet at their rear."

"The fools!" cried Bonaparte. He turned with a curious grimace of exultation upon his thin face as Desaix came up. "It is precisely as you said, my General. We have lost the battle today—but there is ample time to win another and greater one before the night!"

The Corsican bent over his map, marking swiftly with a stubby pencil, the wax headed pins too slow for his purpose. He checked over his handiwork in deep thought for many minutes, then turned to a decisive crackling of verbal orders. Staff couriers vaulted into saddles and raced away to move the pawns. The military chess board was being laid for a second test of wits with the Austrian generals.

As the afternoon sun slanted toward the Bormido, a semblance of order was brought out of the French chaos. A foot weary column came plodding up the road from Rivalto, Boudet's detached division of fifty-three hundred men, sickened of marching but ready for fight. Marmont got a battery of a dozen guns in hand and placed them in the path of the approaching Austrian pursuit. Desaix and Lannes, with a furious energy, established a Grenadier line and strengthened it with improvised battalions of stragglers. Officers of all rank swore, toiled, taunted and goaded as they molded new commands from broken fragments.

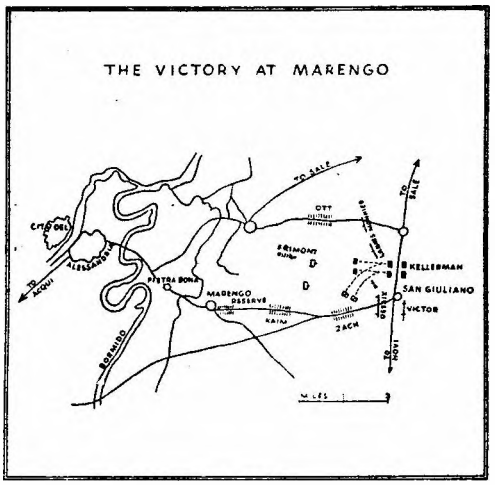
Six o'clock was approaching when the Austrians came plodding at their leisure upon San Giuliano. Skirmishers preceded them, meeting little resistance. Bonaparte stood, a statue of granite, his glass fixed upon them. Otho, standing nearby, saw the long column of Grenadiers and Dragoons behind the patrols. He saw, from their very bearing, that they held no suspicion of the trap that lay close before them.

Marmont's guns blazed forth with a sudden vengeful defiance. Cannister, at close range, mowed red swaths through the Austrian ranks. The guns released the French whirlwind. Lannes and Desaix leaped from behind a roll of the plain and dashed forward at the head of their improvised divisions. There was a fierce yell of the French attack in a thousand throats as the first lines advanced to the grapple.

"*Vive la France! Vive Bonaparte!*"

French blood ran hot again. The frenzy was now of the assault. Men who a few hours ago had run panic stricken before the Austrians now stormed down upon them with bullet and bayonet. The first Grenadiers of the attack did not wait to bite fresh cartridges into their muzzles. They pressed on with the threat of cold steel. From San Giuliano Otho stood breathlessly watching while the Corsican's fierce design unfolded itself. He saw Zach's men caught in column. He knew the helplessness of men surprised when they are spread out only to march. Battle requires the forming into lines, with a broad front of steel presented at the enemy's throat. This unfolding into fighting lines from marching columns exacts time. There was little time for the Austrians to deploy before the Army of Reserve was upon them.

The Corsican gave a sharp command to an aide. The officer dashed off madly to the north. He went to release a thunderbolt. Kellerman's cavalry sprang from their leash under cover of vineyards and dashed across the plains. The Austrians were floundering about trying to establish a front. In plunging masses the fiercely yelling cavalry bore down upon them, sabering right and left, riding through and back again.



The Austrian column broke. Kellerman dashed into the midst of a second column. He hacked his way right and left. His cavalry tore the Austrian ranks to ribbons and followed them, as they turned in panic, chopping relentlessly. As far to the north as the eye could reach, and beyond, the French were attacking. But a brief half hour sufficed to bring the verdict of the gods of battle. The Austrian chief of staff himself was overwhelmed, made prisoner with two thousand of his men. Everywhere the attacks succeeded. Austrian officers made a last desperate effort to rally their men, but the Austrian army was in flight toward the Bormido.

CHAPTER XXX

LE FALCON

OTHO touched spurs lightly to his horse's flank as the red tiles of Milan rose shimmering under the hot mid-afternoon sun of three days later. The spirited mount sprang forward into a full gallop. Fullois, goading his own mount ahead to keep pace, voiced a fretful protest.

"Is that sun not insufferably hot, Le Falcon, without such violent riding?" he demanded.

"But it is not half so hot as my impatience, Lieutenant Fullois," cried Otho. "Sight of Milan has set up a fever in my blood. Ride up, I have important business waiting at the city."

"And I a señorita, but that is no reason for such violence. What better reason can you have?"

"A cousin, my Lieutenant. You will recall the fellow we left behind us at Paris? Well, he is in Milan in the custody of Lieutenant Lemoire of the Consular Guard."

"Ho, cheering news!" Fullois ejaculated, then blurted an insolent afterthought, "But I presume your soft heart will smother your reason and cause you to plead for the rascal's release."

"You have guessed my very purpose, Fullois," Otho replied with a cryptic laugh. "I shall want him set at liberty promptly and escorted to Alessandria to join his Austrians."

Fullois merely swore. The two rode on into Milan without further exchange, their minds flooded with their own immediate plans. The whole future was cast in a rosy hue. There was no saying what bounty might lie in store out of the Little Corporal's great victory. Marengo was history. Melas, the cup of victory dashed from his very lips by the audacious Corsican, marked time at Alessandria, waiting the conqueror's pleasure. Bonaparte, the ardor of success dampened by the death of his gallant Desaix in that last glorious assault, had driven on to Milan the night before with his aides-de-camp and Consular Guard. A pause there to check his victory, issue his final orders, and he would head his restless postilions back toward Paris with the trophy of success for which he had penetrated the Alps.

At entering Milan, the two officers reported their presence to the First Consul's headquarters. Since there were no orders for them other than an assignment of billet, Otho excused himself and rode impatiently to the prison at Milan of the Army of Reserve. As far as Ferdinand was concerned, that rascal could well enough wait upon his inevitable day of retribution. But the sealed

letter of charges that Otho had left behind with Lieutenant Lemoire, for use in emergency, caused him a sharp uneasiness. That letter, necessarily, told much, far too much, now that Otho had survived the campaign in Italy. And though Lemoire was pledged to return it to him unopened in event of his return, his fingers itched to destroy the document.

As for the conniving Count of Donau-Walden, Otho had no desire for a meeting with his rascally cousin. He would permit Ferdinand to hurry, of his own volition, straight into the unsuspected arms of an Austrian court. Otho need only give Ferdinand his liberty, an escort to Alessandria, and there he would find himself in meshes of the kind he had been so deft in weaving this past year for Otho. His most eloquent pleas of ignorance and innocence of Vekuss' death, of the escape from Alessandria, of treason to the Austrian crown, would fall on deaf ears this time, with Vekuss no longer there to pull him out of the fire.

Lemoire was a beefy giant with an inscrutable red face, fringed in even redder whiskers. He greeted Otho with a cold stare, and replied with an evasive grunt to Otho's request for Ferdinand's release.

"But I have no charges to press against the prisoner," Otho averred stoutly. "Whatever I have against the fellow, I wish to handle in my own way. Come, that was my agreement with you, Lemoire, when we arranged the arrest."

"*Ventrebleu*, but small good charges would be now, Citizen Le Falcon!" sneered Lemoire. "The rascal we held for you, he has given us the slip."

Otho blanched and searched Lemoire's face.

"Escaped?" he exclaimed. "But when did you allow this to happen, monsieur!"

"When, but on the night we were upset by the first terrible news from Marengo. The wretch sawed his way through an iron bar the thickness of an axle, and stole a blooded horse belonging to a captain of the Consular Guards. *Voilà!* But never again shall I make such a silly bargain as I made with you, Le Falcon."

"You have been able to find no trace of him, monsieur?" Otho demanded breathlessly. "In what direction did he run?"

"Ah, but in a direction that will do us no good, Le Falcon. In little time, my mounted men were hot on his heels. He would never have escaped except for the lines of the Austrians, into which my men raced him late that night."

"You are certain he went into the Austrian lines, Lemoire?"

"Most certain, Citizen Lieutenant. The Austrian outpost in front of Sale fired upon my men as they pressed hot on the fellow's trail."

Otho's face brightened as Lemoire affirmed this. He suddenly laughed aloud and clapped Lemoire's fat shoulder.

"Then it is fortunate he got away, my friend!" exclaimed Otho. "It couldn't have been better if we had planned it that way, as events have turned out. The fellow has only raced himself to his own execution. And now if I may trouble you for that letter, monsieur."

Lemoire's glum face froze behind his red whiskers. He stood bristling before Otho, the light of suspicion now definitely glinting in his little eyes.

"The letter, ho!" he blurted. "Your own words, Citizen Le Falcon, they give point to strange things. *Viola!* But I wash my hands of you and your affairs. Adieu, Citizen!"

THE jailer pivoted on his beefy legs and lumbered away, slamming a door of the prison behind him. Otho looked after him, sharply puzzled by the officer's words and manner. Hurriedly he searched his memory for the words of the letter he had written for use against Ferdinand in emergency. Had Lemoire broken the seal of that letter and read its contents? Involuntarily Otho took a step after the fellow, intent on demanding the truth. Then he accepted the uselessness of such

a course, and with a shrug decided to leave the matter to a more favorable moment.

But when he joined Fullois at their billet, the exchange with Lemoire was brought sharply back before him, a sudden ominous threat of instant disaster. At sight of the order which an aide-de-camp had left with Fullois, the blood left his face. It commanded that Otho report immediately to the commander-in-chief at his palace headquarters. Had Lemoire sent that letter on through official channels to the Corsican? In the midst of his fears, Fullois smote him heartily on the back.

"Ho, but you are the lucky dog, Le Falcon," exclaimed Fullois in noisy felicitation. "But for what else would our Little Corporal send for you now except to reward you for your little junket into Alessandria! Ah, but you travel under a lucky star, Le Falcon; and when you are back here we shall celebrate your promotion in good champagne which you shall buy."

"Perhaps, though," said Otho with an uncomfortable smile, "it is nothing so fortunate as all that. It is only bad news that travels so swiftly as this, my friend, is that not so?"

"*Bon dieu*, Le Falcon, but what would I not give to be in your shoes at this instant! Our general knows how to reward those who have served him well, and without waiting. Ah, but I have seen him ride a dozen kilometers to reward some gallant regiment, at a time when he was tired and hungry."

Under Fullois' reassurances, Otho went to headquarters with mingled fears and hopes. For the better part of an hour he waited in an ante-chamber of the palace while officers of high rank, Italians of estate, and important staff officers came and went. The ante-chamber was clear of all other official visitors before Bourienne's long, plain face appeared with the words that the First Consul would now receive Lieutenant Le Falcon.

Bonaparte sat under a wide window behind a broad heavy desk of carved walnut. His arms were folded, his head thrust forward, his penetrating eyes searching his visitor as Otho, pulling himself together for the ordeal, crossed the broad, richly carpeted command chamber and presented himself with his hand at his temple in salute.

"You may sit down, monsieur," said Bonaparte, his voice a soft purr that gave no inkling of the humor behind it. "I have several matters to discuss with you."

"I am grateful for my General's indulgence," said Otho quietly, seating himself in a small carved chair on the general's left.

"Ah, that perfect ease of the courtier, my friend," said Bonaparte. The veriest smile shone in the depths of his eyes. "But for that matter, why should not the Count Otho of Donau-Walden be always at ease in any presence, since he was to the manner born?"

There was the veriest taunt in the Corsican's voice. Otho gave no outward evidence of the chill that raced his spine at these words that told him why he had been summoned before the commander-in-chief. He waited in respectful silence. Bonaparte spoke more sharply.

"Why, monsieur, did you not tell me at once you were Count Otho of Donau-Walden?"

"Because, my General," Otho replied steadfastly, "I am what I pretend to be, and no other—Lieutenant Le Falcon of your Hussars."

"Do not dissemble with me, monsieur!" snapped Bonaparte. "I deal in facts. The letter you left with Lemoire, opened by my staff when your cousin escaped the prison, it told enough, when coupled with deductions of which I am certain. First, explain to me why you risked that rascal's escape as you did, Count Otho?"

"Le Falcon, my General," Otho corrected.

"Answer my questions with something better than impudence!"

"If the General Bonaparte will but accept my word for it, a richer reception awaits the fellow at Alessandria than any

he could have received here. He will find himself in precisely the same trap he set for me, my General, at Paris; a circumstance for which I have waited long and patiently. Also, my General, his life was useful to us after we left Paris as a means of communication, which is the sole reason I have not acted earlier."

"Be that as it may, I should have consented to no such delay and indirection, Count Otho!"

"Le Falcon, my General!"

"*Sacrebleu*, but you try my patience with such insolence, monsieur! Do you think I am to be deceived by such pretense? Come now, I will tolerate no further indirection. Tell me, without reservation, what is your purpose in my Hussars? I demand the whole truth!"

"Your pardon, my General." Otho rose and brought himself to attention. "But the quality of my service to you in these past months must speak for my future purpose."

Bonaparte sat, a graven image except for the piercing eyes that searched Otho's face. He made up his mind abruptly.

"Ah, but you make a convincing argument now," Bonaparte rejoined heartily. His voice mellowed. "*Eh bien*, but you wholly miss my purpose in sending for you, monsieur. I want you to take me into your confidence, fully and without reservation. Have not others from Vienna done this—Corporal Hom of my Guards, and late of his Majesty's Hussars; Le Carbenne, once a figure at the Austrian capital? Speak without reservation, though your letter to Lemoire and my own guesses have left little to my imagination, Count Otho."

"Count Otho is dead, my General, no matter what facts you may have to the contrary, or what you may have concluded. It is Ferdinand who has been given the hereditary title and estates of Donau-Walden. I have been plucked clean—though I offer no complaint on that account."

"As I thought! An intrigue of his Majesty's Black Cabinet, monsieur."

Fire crackled in the Corsican's eyes. He rose and strode back and forth across the room, his hands tightly gripped behind his back. When he returned to his desk he spoke with temper.

"But this is an intrigue that shall fail, Count Otho!" he announced. "The Austrians dance to my music now. They must sneeze when I choose to open my snuff box. Ah, my friend, and it will please me vastly, as well as reward a valuable service, my young ninny, to compel them to reopen your account, to restore you instantly to your estates and title. But are not the richest of your holdings in Lombardy, which is now in the hollow of my hand? They will not dare to say no."

Otho's face was deeply flushed but his manner contained as he met the Corsican's blazing eyes. He spoke without pause.

"I shall never forget my gratitude to you, my General," he said, "for your generous thoughts of me. I gladly accept back from you my estates in Lombardy, though it is not alone for myself, but also in the thought of rewarding Corporal Hom and Monsieur Le Carbenne, to whom I owe an everlasting debt upon my own account. But since it pleases my General's great generosity to reward me for what you term my services, may I present a further request of my own?"

"What now, monsieur?" Bonaparte's face was an astonished grimace. "Have I not made myself clear—what greater reward could I possibly hold out than those estates of Donau-Walden in Lombardy and the return of your ancient title?"

"That you also accept, my General, the Austrian record of Count Otho's death," Otho replied earnestly, "and believe that I am forever after the man I claim to be—Monsieur Le Falcon, a loyal son of France."

THE END.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

HUGH PENDEXTER sends on an interesting letter from a reader, commenting on the author's recent note in Camp-fire on General Andrew Jackson and the execution of Alexander Arbuthnot and Robert C. Ambrister, for inciting the Seminoles to war. Mr. Pendexter's accompanying word:

I am enclosing a letter from Col. Graham, Judge Advocate General of the War Department, in which he sets me and various historical data right in re Gen. Jackson's claim in defense of the execution of Arbuthnot and Ambrister ("Devil's Brew"). He puts it so concisely and succinctly that I wish the letter back for my files. I am pleased to be set right on a contentious point, and I have thought you might wish to run the letter in full, or in part, in Camp-fire, so that my readers may get the truth of what was a very famous case.

—HUGH PENDEXTER

With Colonel Graham's permission, here is his letter in full:

Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Pendexter:

I have just finished your interesting novel on the Seminole War, concluded in the current number of *Adventure*. Having been a reader of *Adventure* ever since Volume 1, Number 1, I have read and enjoyed all your historical novels, and found them of the greatest assistance in bringing vividly to the mind's eye the atmosphere and color of times gone by. I tried it myself in an effort to put history straight on the battle of the Little Big Horn—"Custer's Last Fight"—and thus know from my own experience how difficult it is to make history speak the truth. Somebody

(was it Wendell Phillips?) said in one of his great orations that we read history not with our minds, but with our prejudices; a statement I used to doubt until I found it all too true.

I have before me as I write the record of the military court in the cases of Arbuthnot and Ambrister. I say "court" without using any designation of its character, because your Camp-fire letter indicates that you have accepted as correct Jackson's contention, advanced after criticisms of his conduct had been made, that it was a court of inquiry, and not a court-martial, which tried these men.

In this view you are mistaken, for the record does not bear out Jackson's claim; the court was undoubtedly a court-martial, and Jackson's own order which published the cases so designated it.

IN THE earlier years of our military jurisprudence, a form of court-martial called a "special court," took the place now occupied by the military commission, which, in plain terms, is nothing but a court-martial empowered, under certain conditions, to try civilians in a theater of operations during war. It was such a tribunal that tried the Lincoln conspirators in 1865, though by that time it was called a military commission and not a court-martial. If you are at all interested, you will find complete information as to the proper use of the military commission in the celebrated case of Milligan vs. United States, as decided by the Supreme Court of the United States.

Jackson's own order, publishing the findings and sentences of the court in the Arbuthnot and Ambrister cases, begins as follows:

Adjutant General's Office,
Camp 4 miles North of St. Marks
April 29th, 1818

Headquarters.
Division of the South
(GENERAL ORDER)

At a *Special Court-Martial* commenced on the 26th instant at St. Marks and continued until the night of the 28th, of which Brevet Major General E. P. Gaines is President, was tried A. Arbuthnot on the following charges and specifications, viz:

Was also tried Robert C. Ambrister on the following charges, viz:

So you see that even Old Hickory himself, *ante litern motam*, recognized his tribunal for what it was, and it was only after he had been attacked, and was believed to be in danger of a charge of murder for his illegal and unwarranted execution of Ambrister, after the court had modified its original sentence, that claim was made that he had convened a court of inquiry rather than a court-martial in these cases.

It was a court of inquiry, in effect, though in form a "Board of General Officers," that was convened by Washington in André's case; and its finding that André was "a spy from the enemy," and that "he ought to suffer death," came as an expression of opinion and not as a sentence. But in the Arbuthnot and Ambrister cases, the record leaves no doubt that the court did not express opinions but imposed sentences.

The difference is a very great one, though not for the reason you set out in your Camp-fire letter. A court of inquiry makes findings of fact, and usually states its *opinion* as to whether further proceedings (i. e. court-martial) are necessary; a court-martial tries the issue of guilt or innocence under specific charges, and pronounces sentence upon a finding of guilt; a sentence which it is beyond the legal power of the reviewing officer to exceed. But neither the opinions of a court of inquiry or the findings and sentence of a court-martial are of any validity until they are approved by the officer who reviews the record of their proceedings. He may approve, disapprove or modify, within limits—but may never *increase* the punishment awarded by a court-martial; and it is the consensus of opinion of authorities on military law that Jackson's execution of Ambrister was beyond and outside the very law he had invoked by bringing him to trial.

—W. A. GRAHAM,
Colonel, Judge Advocate

TWO letters on diamonds. Opinion as to the structure of the crystal seems to differ.

Ridlonville, Maine

As an old-timer at the Camp-fire and also a fairly good field man at mineralogy, I would like to add a word about Mr. Friel's mention of diamond crystals in "Bush Devils" of May 1st issue. "Octagonal faces" were the words he used in describing them—whereas the faces on a diamond crystal of typical shape are triangular, and the crystal shape octahedral.

I assumed at the time that it might be a typographical error, but Mr. J. M. Blair, in the Aug. 1st Camp-fire, says octagonal is quite correct. I would rise therefore to say the correct name for a diamond crystal is *octahedron* when referring to the shape (or habit, as the hooks have it). This is an eight-sided solid but surely not an octagon.

—CHARLES F. MARBLE

New Kensington, Pennsylvania

I started with the No. 1, Vol. 1 *Adventure*, and Aug. 1, 1931 is on the table by me and I have nearly all of them, keeping them for the great-grandchildren to read.

One of the writers, Mr. Arthur O. Friel is my prime favorite. He has written several stories, in the scenes of which he or I must have followed in each other's footsteps.

In the Aug. 1st issue Mr. Blair comments on the diamonds in his "Bush Devils." I dislike to take issue with a college prof. but I am after all the information I can get, so here goes:

In his letter he says, "Diamonds in the rough look like oiled glass. To sparkle they must be worked by a lapidary." I can not agree with him, and he will have to give me more definite information than this to convince me. For the last 50 years I have been handling thousands of rough diamonds—all colors, white, green, yellow, all from ¾ carat down to 1-30; a very few that have gone as high as 8 and 9 carats. I have seen among these some of the prettiest sparkles and brilliant fire any one could ask for.

MR. BLAIR speaks of the diamond as octagonal in shape as correct. I can not agree on this either, for of the thousands I have handled there have been a thousand and one shapes.

If I could buy diamonds in the rough, and I must buy them that way, that were all octagonal in shape, in 10 years I could make a million dollars.

I do not know what education teaches about these diamonds, but I do know what 50 years' experience teaches. I would be very much pleased if he would suggest one or more of the latest books on diamonds.

—CLAUDE JOHNSTON

The New International Encyclopedia says: "It [the diamond] crystallizes in the isometric system, usually in octahedrons, or in combination of several forms, including the octahedron, cube, rhombic dodecahedron, trisoctahedron, and hexoctahedron; the faces and edges of the crystals frequently are curved. It has a very perfect cleavage by which the primary form of the octahedron may be derived.

RECENTLY we reported in our pages, in an article by John S. Stuart, the meeting in New York City of men who had seen service with the Foreign Legion. An organization of Legion veterans was the result of this meeting, which, from the following letter, seems to have made a great deal of progress. The letter comes from the president, and our thanks are hereby extended to him for his kind offer of service to the readers of *Adventure*.

371 Riverside Drive, New York City

Your article, "Legionnaires in America", in your May 15th issue, interested us greatly. The writer would like to correct a few impressions that your readers might gather from that article, however:

To the best of my knowledge none of our members are deserters from the Legion. We are proud of the Legion and all it stands for, and a deserter certainly shows none of the ésprit de corps that our Legion is famous for.

It would seem from your article that members of the Lafayette Escadrille are not eligible for membership in our organization, but this is emphatically not the case. The Escadrille Lafayette was considered as the flying corps of the Foreign Legion during the Great War, and many of the pilots of that famous unit are in our association.

WE NOW have over four hundred members, ranging all the way from a young man who returned from Africa two months ago to a grizzled veteran of the Madagascar campaign of 1879. In the memories of our comrades we have a veritable history of the Legion—deeds of courage and valor performed in Algeria, Morocco, the Sahara, Dahomey, Tonkin, Indo-China, France 1914-1918, Syria, Madagascar and the Dardanelles. If you or your readers have any questions about the Legion you want answered—books, history, uniforms, equipment, songs, traditions, pay, enlistment, life, service—please do not hesitate to write to us. We have dedicated ourselves to uniting "wearers of the blue band" in America and to giving the American people a true picture of the Legion and its purposes. The services of our organization—men of sixteen nationalities and veterans all of France's Foreign Legion—are yours for the asking.

—MAURICE A. HAMONNEAU,
President, Anciens de la Légion Etrangère

PAUL L. ANDERSON, of Ask Adventure, gives us his views on poison ivy cures and preventives:

Huntington, Massachusetts

May I be permitted a word of caution regarding the method of immunizing against ivy poison by eating a leaf of the plant, as suggested by Mr. Van Ness in the August 1st *Adventure?*

If you happen to be one of the 60% who are naturally immune, or the 20% who are only slightly sensitive, you can undoubtedly eat a leaf of poison ivy with no serious results—possibly with advantage. But if you are one of the sensitive 20% such a proceeding may be very serious indeed. A friend of mine, when a boy, was advised to use this scheme, and did so. He promptly turned up with a bad case of ivy poisoning in his alimentary canal, suffered greatly

for more than a week, and almost died. Whether or not he was immunized, I can not say (for the past forty years he has sedulously avoided finding out!) but in any case he feels that he paid altogether too heavy a price for immunity from something which, after all, is rarely serious, and can be avoided with moderate care.

AS FOR Mrs. Hoernlein's laundry soap treatment, it is unquestionably effective, if applied in the early stages, before the essential oil which causes the trouble has taken a good hold. In fact, washing with anything is a preventive, if used at once after contact with the leaves. I have seen soap used thus, to good effect, also alcohol, and even a photographer's hypo solution. After the stuff gets a good hold, I don't believe anything does much good except local applications to relieve the itching, plus prayer, and a large dose of grin-and-bear-it. And prayer is remarkably ineffective so far as ivy poisoning is concerned!

—PAUL L. ANDERSON

A LETTER on pythons, from a comrade in Australia:

Perth, W. Australia

For a long time I've been getting a lot of pleasure and information listening to the debates and yarns that circulate round the Camp-fire. Now I must rise and talk back to T. Samson Miller.

In the April issue of *Adventure* Mr. Miller told Camp-fire: "There are seven kinds of pythons, four known to Africa, three to Asia." Well, for the better information of the gang, there are eight kinds of pythons in Australia, some of which are over twenty feet in length. The genus *Liasis* contains three kinds, all of which may reach twenty feet in length. The genus *Python* contains three, the genus *Aspidites* contains two. I have come across an olive-green rock-python measuring twenty-four feet in length. These snakes mostly live in rocks and caves.

I AGREE with Mr. Dempsey when he says pythons hunt by night, but I think scent and their very wonderful tongue have more to do with finding their prey than sight. Pythons and venomous snakes swallow their prey by practically the same method (engulfing). But their jaws are certainly not flexible; they are separate bones and fastened by elastic ligaments. I've seen a rock-python swallow a full sized kangaroo. And I've shot one seventeen feet in length that had just swallowed a black child of eighteen months.

I've never seen a python jump, not in the sense that its whole body is off the ground at the same time. But if you see a twenty-foot snake striking at a distant object with lighting-like rapidity, yet using its tail as a stationary base, it sure enough gives you the impression that the snake has leaped or jumped.

A WORD for a very venomous snake that we have in this country, one that I never hear brought into Camp-fire discussion: the death-adder. There are two species found in Australia, both of which are as deadly as the cobra or mamba. They are short snakes (about two feet in length) and very legarthic. You can approach within a hair's breadth of them and nothing happens; but if once touched, they strike like lightning. Death usually occurs within three minutes. They are mostly found in sandy places and are the exact color of their surroundings and very hard to see. In northern Queensland, where those snakes are numerous, people have to carry lanterns at night in order to lessen the danger of treading on a death-adder. It is an oviparous snake and produces eight to fifteen young ones, which hatch out of eggs in from one to six hours. I have personally watched the whole of this process.

—DAVID J. P. BREEN

A READER'S note pointing out an error in the relative weight and size of the man-eater in Reginald Campbell's recent serial, "Death in Tiger Valley."

New York, N. Y.

On page 128 of your issue of May 15th Mr. Reginald Campbell describes a tiger that has been killed as "six feet seven inches from nose to tip of tail" and as weighing "close on seven hundred pounds." I should be interested in seeing, or traveling to see, a full grown tiger as short or as heavy as is this beast.

—JNO. B. KIRKMAN

According to custom, I sent the note on to the author, and here's his reply. His set of proofs *did* arrive too late; and the slip, which Comrade Kirkman and two others were keen enough to detect, escaped the editors. For which they are sorry.

Folkestone, Kent, England

As regards that statement of mine in "Death in Tiger Valley," in which I gave the size of the tiger shot as measuring "six feet seven inches from nose to tip of tail," and estimated as weighing "close on seven hundred pounds", let me hasten to say that the word "six" was a pure typewriting error which I spotted at once on the proof-sheets you sent me and altered to "ten"; for ten foot seven inches was the size of the tiger I had in mind. Unfortunately, although I returned the

proofs to you the day after receiving them, the time taken in the post each way from America to England must have prevented the mistake being rectified before the issue went to press.

Actually, as I well know, the size of a full-grown male tiger is about nine feet and a half, though they do go up to eleven feet or over (hence the ten foot seven tiger that I intended).

AS regards weight—I am referring, of course, to a ten foot seven tiger—I heard recently that a sportsman had killed one in India weighing over 600 lbs., and in this connection I also quote Lyddeker's "Royal Natural History," a standard work over here:

". . . one shot by Mr. F. Shillingford, of which the length was nine feet, ten inches, weighed a little over 520 lbs., and if a specimen under ten feet in length will turn the scale at over 500 lbs., it may be taken as certain that . . . considerably heavier weights must be reached."

What with the fact that very few sportsmen have the means of weighing their kills, and that there are more tigers in the jungle than ever came out of it, I am quite convinced that tigers close on seven hundred pounds must exist, and that therefore my hero's estimate—he had no scales—was pardonable.

While on the subject of tigers, there is an interesting theory that these animals are not indigenous to India or to any tropical country. They are supposed to have migrated from Siberia (where the biggest tigers in the world still exist), and the fact that they can not stand much heat, and that their ruffs seem out of place in the tropics, lends strength to the theory.

I SEE that in Camp-fire there's still a lot of correspondence about snakes. Perhaps this will add a little fuel: Pythons and hamadryads *curl round* their eggs before they are hatched; not to hatch them, of course—the heat of the sun does that—but to protect them from interference. I've seen a photograph of a python curled right round its batch of eggs; and as regards hamadryads, natives have told me that this is also the case.

A hamadryad, by the way, is very rarely seen near the haunts of man; mostly it lives in wild forest, with the result that very few whites have ever seen it in its natural surroundings. I have, once, and that was quite enough, for I saw it stretched out in the undergrowth by a path exactly three feet from where I was standing. It wouldn't quit, as any other snake would have done, but luckily it wouldn't charge, and its head was blown off by buckshot. It measured, without the head, just over thirteen feet.

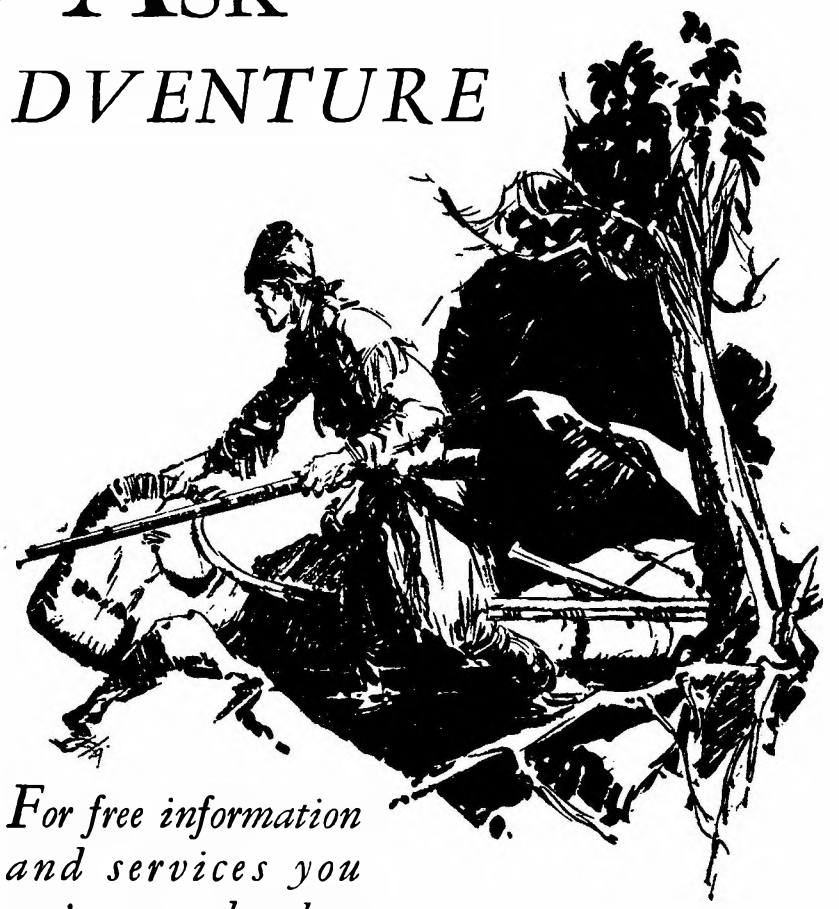
—REGINALD CAMPBELL

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. 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. 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 are 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.

ASK ADVENTURE



For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Alaska

AROUND trip ticket and a good grubstake are advised this year. The fishing industry has slowed down, and sidelines for the prospector are few.

Request:—"I would appreciate some information as to the opportunities in the interior of Alaska at this time.

Particularly, employment, chances for trapping this coming winter, and prospecting. Prefer the Kantishna or Kuskoowim district.

I put in three and a half years in Alaska at Nenana and Ft. Gibbon during the war, but have an idea that conditions are somewhat changed there now, compared to what they were when I was up there."—C. C. TAYLOR, Seattle, Washington.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—The chances for employment this year for men coming from the States are not at all favorable. While it is true that Alaska has not suffered so much as has the rest of the country from the depression, it is nevertheless rather tough sledding this summer. We have barely enough work for our residents, because of reductions on account of lack of demand for products such as salmon, lumber, fur, etc. Our many gold mines are helping us, also certain projects for harbor improvement, etc., undertaken by the Government, despite which we do have men out of work here and there. This is being broadcasted, also stated in the press, but none the less about every

steamer from the south has its quota of men hunting work. This means: Unless you have cash enough to keep you awhile and to enable you to beat it south when you wish, *better not come* this year.

Trapping: For several years there has been a queer invasion of coyotes from the east across the B.C. border. They have entered much of the former fine trapping districts in area between Valdez and Fairbanks and even farther west. They have been stripping out fur feed to the extent that the fur bearers have been apparently driven west. At least, for two years the bulk of our fur shipments have been composed of pelts taken almost entirely from the westerly. That means even west of the Kuskoowim River basin. If you savvy the country, you may pick certain good fur pockets here and there and make a fair stake. Mining activities lately in the country north of Mt. McKinley have naturally followed with the trapping more intensively of the Kantishna district and country surrounding. The Broad Pass country, and that lying around the headwaters of the Kuskoowim River has always been good. It may be O.K. for a trapper who knows his stuff well, right now, but is rather tough to enter from either the overland route from the east, or upriver from the west. Probably that would be your best bet—there, or areas like the head of the Nashagak River, say, up its Mulchatna branch. There is placer gold reported up the Mulchatna. My advice is to purchase all supplies and outfit (outside guns, bedding and personal stuff) up here. It will cost a bit more, but will be *what you need.*

THERE have been several recent gold strikes north of the Yukon, especially on the upper Koyokuk; but that region is tough to get into and expensive, besides having a mighty short working season—90 to 100 days. An easy place to reach, comparatively, is the Goodnews Bay Country, just south of the mouth of the Kuskoowim. Take coastwise steamer *Star* (or any other chance boat) from Seward or Anchorage. There is fair fur in there, and they have been getting not only placer gold, but also the rare mineral osmiridium, which sells for $120 an ounce.

Canneries of salmon plan to put up as short a pack as possible this year, and many are shut down entirely. This is to benefit market situation. Also, the bottom has fallen out of the halibut fishing industry and no one knows just how or when it will be adjusted. Besides this, though the run of king salmon is excellent, prices to trollers have just been reduced by local buyers to a point where returns don't meet the costs, so a strike has been called by the Alaska Trollers' Association. This last, we feel certain, has nothing to do with demand or prices in the States. Most thinking Alaskans are not worried, but are optimistic and look forward to a condition more like normal in 1932.

If you have a road stake, then, come along and you'll probably be able to select a good trapping location with possible mineral on the side; otherwise, don't.

Horse

WHEN to whip a kicker.

Request:—"1. How can one break a horse of kicking? I have heard people say that whipping a horse will break it of various things. Personally I do not approve of that method. What is your opinion?

2. When breeding, should the stud and mare be the same kind, size and color?"

—HERBERT STEVENSON, Champaign, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. Thomas H. Dameron:—1. The whip will break a horse from kicking more quickly than anything I know of. However, it must be carefully used. He should be struck only when in the act of kicking, or raising his foot as if to kick. A horse can not reason as we can; hence you must always connect the chastisement with the act simultaneously.

2. It depends entirely on the results sought what kind of stallion one uses. A great many horses are cross bred for various purposes. Some are breeding draft mares to thoroughbred studs to produce heavy hunters. Some breed common mares to Shetland studs to produce ponies for small children. Size makes little difference. Some small mares produce large mules. Color generally comes from past generations, and often a colt is colored differently from either mare or stud.

Rattlers

CATCHING them alive. Snake-hunter's tools. The forked stick.

Request:—"Can you tell me some methods of catching rattlesnakes alive?"

—GEORGE A. SHERMAN, Trinidad, Colorado

Reply, by Mr. Karl P. Schmidt:—They can be caught alive with a long handled dip-net; or with a noose on the end of a stick which can be operated from the handle end; or with a forked stick, with a short fork. I can not recommend this latter method.

South America

YOU can't roll down to Rio in the family flivver, for there aren't any roads for miles and miles.

Request:—"About how much would it cost if I drove my car down to South America?"

—RAYMOND POELK, Lancaster, New York

Reply, by Mr. Paul Vanorden Shaw:—If you could drive a car to South America it wouldn't cost you a cent, You would probably be very well paid for it by maker of the car you drove. There are few roads, and you would have to drive

over thousands of miles of mountains up to twenty thousand feet high, through dense jungle where you would have to hew your way with an ax, and cross rivers without bridges or drive across deserts. Gas stations would be a thousand miles apart in places. It would be an excellent trick if you could do it. Roads are being built and protected, and some day it will be possible.

Zog

ELECTED king before he was thirty-five, this blond young mountaineer rules Moslems who have broken with Istanbul and Greek Orthodox Albanians who do not recognize the Patriarch.

Request:—"1. What is the background of King Zogu of Albania?

2. Is the country making economic progress?"

—JOHN WILKERSON, Canton, Ohio

Reply, by Mr. Robert Swan Townsend:—

1. After the Armistice in 1918, Albania was placed under Allied armies of occupation. The French had troops in the districts of Korcha and Scutari, while the Italians had a much larger force in control of a much greater area, especially the seacoast along the Adriatic.

Then began long and heated discussions at the Peace Conference in Paris as to what should be done with Albania. These were naturally very much involved and led nowhere, as in 1920 the Albanians took matters into their own hands and set up a *de facto* government. This government was later admitted to the League of Nations and the armies of occupation left Albanian territory. Albania was reborn!

The Government at this time was a form of republic. Needless to say, it was not greatly successful nor was it welcomed with open arms by many other countries. Nevertheless, it somehow *did* manage to exist and with each year became more stable and was finally recognized by all other governments. Then a year or so ago a young man by the name of Zog was elected president. He came from a long line of hereditary governors of the Mati province, stretching back to the 16th century. The Mati country is a vast region of beautiful mountains and breeds the finest type of men. This young president, now only 34, was immediately popular and instilled new inspiration into the country. He was so competent and so thoroughly Albanian that in August, 1928, the legislature convened in a special session and elected him king. Thus, contrary to most of the newly formed, or one might say reborn states, since the war, Albania has elected to become a monarchy.

Just here it might be of interest to say that the King's name is Zog, and not Zogu. In Albanian, the article is always attached to and placed at the end of the noun. Thus it is correct to say, "King Zog I, of Albania," and if one is desirous of saying "the Zog" one uses the form Zogu, the "u" being the article.

King Zog is, contrary to popular conception, a decided blond, having blue eyes and light hair. He is young and full of ambition and a very arduous worker, arriving early at his desk and remaining late. Although unmarried, he is very fortunate in that he has six sisters. These ladies were also raised to the rank of royalty and given the title of princess, at the time he was elected king. They too are hard at work in various lines of endeavor trying to make their country what they know it can be.

2. Albania ranks third of all the countries of Europe in the amount of natural water power. But until now, all the electricity generated is by gasoline motor driven dynamos.

The population of Albania is about one million, two hundred thousand. Of this total population, about two-thirds are Mohammedans, due to the long Turkish influence; the majority of the other third are Greek Orthodox, while there are Catholics in Scutari and surrounding districts whose religion has survived since the Middle Ages. It is now a matter of interest to learn that the Mohammedans in Albania have broken with Constantinople and that the Greeks no longer recognize the Patriarch.

With the coming of capital and quieter governmental conditions, industry is beginning to spring up. In 1926, Albania exported products to the amount of some two million dollars, which included cheese of all kinds, grains, eggs, skins, lambs' and kids' wool, asphalt, charcoal, cattle, fish, fresh and dried, fish roe, citrus fruits, firewood and beeswax. And, in passing, I would mention that Albania grows some of the finest tobacco and olives I have ever smoked or tasted. As to manufactured goods, Albania has little or nothing, buying them where markets are most advantageous.

Caulking

NOT only stops leaks, but braces the hull.

Request:—"In caulking the seams of a newly built motor boat (twenty-three feet by eight feet, of white pine), should one include seams through which light can barely be seen? What should be done to seams through which light can not penetrate? Six inch by ⅞ inch planks were used and nothing placed between their edges."

—M. GIOVANETON, Richmond Hill, New York

Reply, by Mr. Gerald T. White:—Your question about caulking can hardly be answered without a good deal of knowledge of how dry the lumber was when it went into place. If it was very dry, you can be sure that it will swell considerably when the boat is launched. On the other hand, if the lum-

ber was not well dried out when it was cut and placed upon the boat the chances of its swelling are reduced.

Another point to consider is that caulking, properly done, accomplishes more than simply keeping out water. By spreading the planks apart, it firmly braces the hull. Often a boat that seems very easily twisted out of shape will become stiff when caulked.

It would be my advice to caulk every seam. It may be necessary, on the tight seams, to open the outside of the seam a bit by driving the caulking iron in until the wood is opened sufficiently to take the cotton.

Air Mail

FIRST flight, May 15th and 16th, 1918, and the engine trouble recorded by stamp collectors.

Request:—"I have a 24-cent stamp with a red border; airplane in center, dated May 21, 10 A. M., 1918; mailed at Washington, D. C. What is its value?"

—JOHN F. CLARKE, Highland Park, Michigan

Reply, by Mr. H. A. Davis:—The stamp you describe is one of the first set issued by the U. S. for air mail use. It is listed as worth 35c in used condition. Its being on cover would increase its value somewhat. Covers bearing this stamp dated May 15th and 16th, 1918, are worth from $20.00 to $30.00 according to the postal markings on the cover. Covers bearing the date of May 15th, 1918, were sent on the first flight from Washington, New York and Philadelphia. The plane from Washington developed engine trouble and did not get through, the mail was returned to Washington and sent the next day, May 16th, covers of which also bore the cachet of "first flight".

Your stamp therefore, dated May 21st, has no special significance and would be worth only a small sum over the value of the stamps on account of its being on a cover.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 303 Laurel Ave., Libertyville, Illinois.

Motor Boating GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, New Jersey.

Motor Camping MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., care American Tourist Camp Assn., 152 West 65th St., New York City.

Yachting A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Place, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, legislative restrictions and traffic.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

Automotive and Aircraft Engines *Design, operation and maintenance.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 939 Timberman Road, Grandview, Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 322, Westfield, New Jersey.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 322, Westfield, New Jersey.

Camping and Woodcraft PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tennessee.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere in North America. Questions on mines, mining, mining law, methods and practise; where and how to prospect; outfitting: development of prospect after discovery; general geology and mineralogy necessary for prospector or miner in any portion of territory named. Any question on any mineral, metallic or nonmetallic.* —VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Precious and Semi-precious Stones *Cutting and polishing of gem materials; principal sources of supply; technical information regarding physical characteristics, crystallography, color and chemical composition.*—F. J. ESTERLIN, 210 Post St., San Francisco, Cal.

Forestry in the United States *Big-Game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and products; economic possibilities; distribution; exploration, etc. No questions on employment.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care of Insular Forester, Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk, General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Ripon, Wisconsin.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS V. GREENE, U. S. N. R., 442 Forty-ninth St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps CAPT. P. W. HOPKINS, 541 No. Harper Ave., Hollywood, Cal.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. Parachutes and gliders. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, 3432 83rd Street, Jackson Heights, New York City.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.* —THOMAS H. DAMERON, 1006 E. 10th St., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects, etc.*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

Herpetology *General information on reptiles and amphibians; their habits and distribution.*—KARL P. SCHMIDT, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois.

Ichthyology *Fishes and lower aquatic vertebrates.*—GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Calif.

Ornithology *General information on birds; their habits and distribution.*—DAVIS QUINN, 3548 Tryon Ave., Bronx, New York, N. Y.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology (*a*) *Racial and tribal tradition; folklore and mythology.* (*b*) *Languages and the problems of race migration.* (*c*) *Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Old Songs that Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON. *Archive of American Folk-Song; Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

Football JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose Street, New York City.

Baseball FREDERICK LIEB, *The New York Evening Post*, 75 West St., New York City.

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, P. O. Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune*, New York City.

Basketball I. S. ROSE, 321 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Bicycling ARTHUR J. LEAMOND, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "Daniel," *The World-Telegram*, 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Boxing CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH.

Fencing CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 455 West 23rd St., New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, wages, duties, addresses of all ocean lines and liners; shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America.—LIEUT. HARRY E. RIESENBERG, 118 Uhler St., Mt. Ida, Alexandria, Va.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping; names, tonnages, dimensions, service, crews, owners of all American documental steam, motor, sail, yacht and unrigged merchant vessels. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all Government owned vessels.*—LIEUT. HARRY E. RIESENBERG, 118 Uhler St., Mt. Ida, Alexandria, Va.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.* —CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean.* (*Siberian Waters*).—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, Universal City, California.

★ **New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★ **New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa** TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★ **Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States; and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies in general, India, Kashmir.*—CAPT. R. W. VAN RAVEN DE STURLER, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 3 *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 4 *Southern and Eastern China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

★ **Asia Part 6** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., U. S. Veterans' Hospital, Fort Snelling, Minn. and DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 7 *Japan.*—OSCAR E. RILEY, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

Asia Part 8 *Persia, Arabia.* — CAPTAIN BEVERLEY-GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Asia Minor DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 1 *Egypt.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT.

Africa Part 2 *Abyssinia, French Somaliland, Belgian Congo.*—CAPT. R. W. VAN RAVEN DE STURLER, care of *Adventure.*

Africa Part 3 (British) *Sudan, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya.*—CAPT. R. W. VAN RAVEN DE STURLER, care of *Adventure.*

Africa Part 4 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs, caravan trade and caravan routes.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY-GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 5 *Tunis and Algeria.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 6 *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 7 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria.*—W. C. COLLINS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 8 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal and Rhodesia.*—CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp, Box 107, Santa Susana, Cal.

✠**Africa Part 9** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada.

Madagascar RALPH LINTON, 324 Sterling Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

Europe Part 1 *Jugo-Slavia and Greece.*—CAPT. WM. W. JENNA, West Point, New York.

Europe Part 2 *Albania.*—ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving Street, Washington, D. C.

Europe Part 4 *Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Poland.*—G. I. COLBRON, East Avenue, New Canaan, Conn.

Europe Part 5 *Scandinavia.*—ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving Street, Washington, D. C.

Europe Part 6 *Great Britain.*—THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Avenue, London, W. C. 2, England.

Europe Part 7 *Denmark.*—G. I. COLBRON, East Avenue, New Canaan, Conn.

Europe Part 8 *Holland.*—J. J. LEBLEU, 51 Benson Drive, Glen Ridge, New Jersey.

Europe Part 9 *Belgium.*—J. D. NEWSOM, care *Adventure.*

Europe Part 10 *Switzerland.*—DR. ALBERT LEEMAN, Kramgasse, 82, Bern, Switzerland.

Europe Part 12 *Spain.*—J. D. NEWSOM, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and Brasil.*—PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 457 W. 123rd St., New York, N. Y.

✠**West Indies** *Cuba, Isle of Pines, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups.*—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala.*—E. BRUGUIERE, 10 Gay St., New York City.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern Border States of old Mexico, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Mexico Part 2 *Southern Lower California.*—C. R. MAHAFFEY, care of S. P. Company, Arlight, Cal.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche.* Also archeology.—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Poplar Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

Mexico Part 4 *Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—JOHN NEWMAN PAGE, Fernandez Fiallo 42, Xochimilco, Oaxaca, Mexico.

Newfoundland.—C. T. JAMES, Box 1331, St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Greenland Also dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Canada Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.* Also homesteading in Canada Part 1, and fur farming.—FRED L. BOWDEN, 5 Howard Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

✠**Canada Part 2** *Southeastern Quebec.*—JAS. F. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 3** *Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.* Trips for sport and Adventure—big game, fishing, canoeing, Northland travel, also H. B. Company Posts, Indian tribes and present conditions.—S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), 45 Vernon St., Toronto, Can.

✠**Canada Part 4** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, Desoronto, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 5** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario.* Also national parks.—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 6 *Hunters Island and English River District.*—T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn.

✠**Canada Part 7** *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

Canada Part 8 *The Northw. Ter. and the Arctic, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere.*—PATRICK LEE, 3432 83rd Street, Jackson Heights, New York City.

✠**Canada Part 9** *Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin and Hudson Bay mineral belt.*—LIONEL H. G. MOORE, Flin Flon, Manitoba, Canada.

Alaska Also mountain climbing.—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 1015 W. 56th St., Los Angeles, Cal.

Western U. S. Part 1 *California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Utah and Arizona.*—E. E. HARRIMAN, 1832 Arlington Ave., Los Angeles, Cal.

Western U. S. Part 2 *New Mexico.* Also Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance.—H. F. ROBINSON, 1211 West Roma Ave., Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Western U. S. Part 3 *Colorado and Wyoming.* Homesteading. Sheep and Cattle Raising.—WILLIAM WELLS, Sisters, Oregon.

Western U. S. Part 4 *Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.*—FRED W. EGELSTON, 357 Chestnut Street, Reno, Nevada.

Western U. S. Part 5 *Idaho and Surrounding Country.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 6 *Tex. and Okla.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S. Part 1 *The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.* Especially early history of Missouri Valley.—JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure.*

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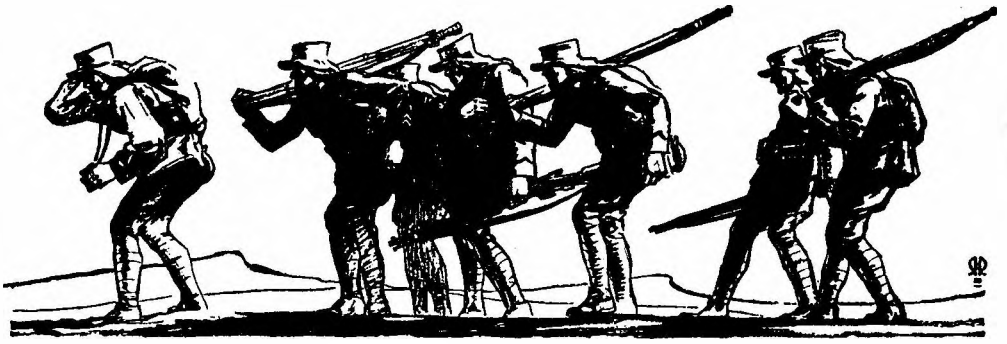

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