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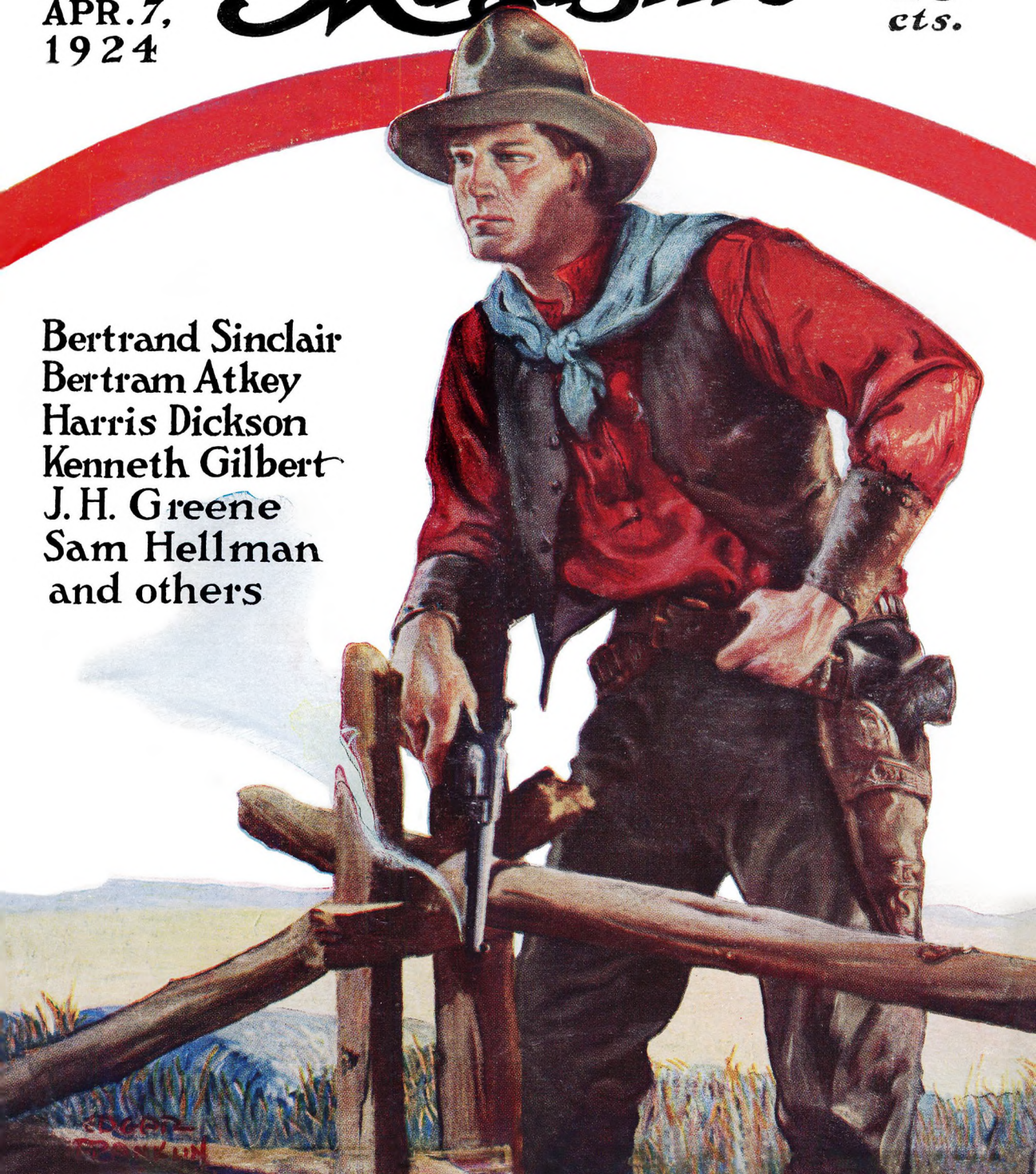

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Earn $3500 to $10,000 a Year

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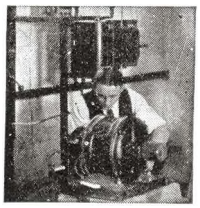
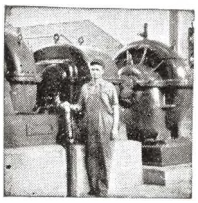


Dickerson Gets $7,500 a Year

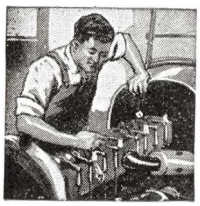
"I earned $30 a week when I started with you—$50 a week when half through your course. Now I clean up at the rate of $7,500 a year. Thank you a thousand times for what you did for me. Electricity pays big on the farm." Herbert M. Dickerson, Warrentown, Virginia.



$20.00 a Day for Schreck

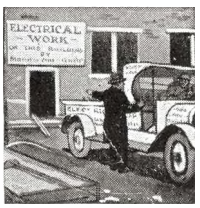
"Use my name as a reference and depend on me as a booster. The biggest thing I ever did was answer your advertisement. I am averaging better than $600 a month from my own business now. I used to make $18.00 a week."

A. Schreck,
Phoenix, Ariz.



Pence Earns $9,000 a Year

W. E. Pence, Chehalis, Wash., says: "Your course put me where I am today, Mr. Cooke—making $750 a month doing automobile electrical work—think of it—$9,000 a year. Besides that I am my own boss. My wife joins me in thanking you for what you did for us."



$30 to $50 a Day for J. R. Morgan

"When I started on your course I was a carpenter's helper, earning around $5.00 a day. Now I make from $30 to $50 a day and am busy all the time. Use this letter if you want to—I stand behind it."

J. R. Morgan,
Delaware, Ohio.

It's your own fault if you don't earn more. Blame yourself if you stick to your small pay job when I have made it so easy for you to earn $3500 to $10,000 a year as an electrical expert. **Electrical Experts** are badly needed. Thousands of men must be trained at once. One billion dollars a year is being spent for electrical expansion and everything is ready but the men. Will you answer the call of this big pay field? Will you get ready now for the big job I will help you get? The biggest money of your life is waiting for you.

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I will train you just like I trained the five men whose pictures you see here. Just like I have trained thousands of other men—ordinary, everyday sort of fellows—pulling them out out of the depths of starvation wages into jobs that pay $12.00 to $30.00 a day. Electricity offers you more opportunities—bigger opportunities—than any other line and with my easily learned, spare time course, I can fit you for one of the biggest jobs in a few short months' time.

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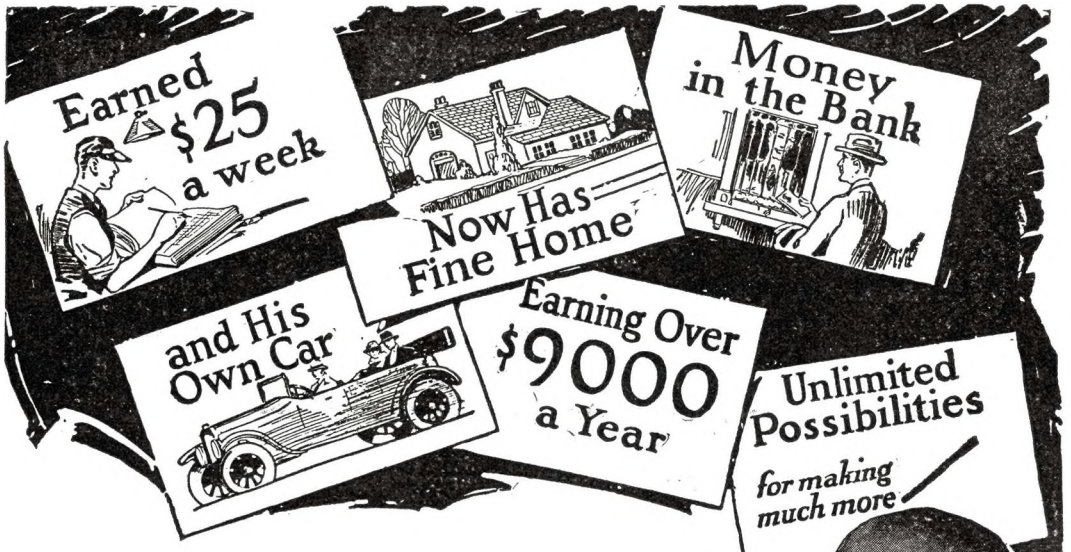

Can Success Like This Be An Accident?

"THE fellows who used to work with me while I was plugging along at $25 a week are convinced that I either had a pull or just fell into a good thing—that my $9,000 a year position is a sheer accident.

"When I told them I had found an easy way to earn big money as a salesman, they laughed at me and called it a harebrained idea. They told me 'salesmen are born, not made.' But I decided to see my harebrained idea through. I was sick of slaving for a pittance.

"I started studying the secrets of master salesmanship as taught by the National Salesmen's Training Association—and almost before I knew it I had confidence to tackle my first selling position. And why not? I had mastered the very secrets of selling used by the most successful salesmen.

"My earnings during the past month were $750. I now have better than a $9,000 a year position—with lots more room to grow. I can state positively that my sudden success was not an accident. It came because I knew how to sell scientifically. And how simple it is to sell when you know how. My regret is that I did not know these secrets ten years ago."—Ellis Sumner Cook, Manufacturers' Agent, 20 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

Why Not Make More Money?

If you want to get out of the wage-earning class, if you want to make good money without loss of time—then do as Mr. Cook and thousands of others have done.

The secrets of salesmanship which Mr. Cook learned are available to you. There are certain ways to approach prospects, to stimulate interest, to overcome objections, and to close sales. Every move in selling is governed by certain rules. Once you know these, success is yours.

Success Like This Yours

Adam Horneber, Bay City, Mich., writes: "I have increased my earning power 500% since I secured your training in the Science of Selling."

Lewis A. Tinnes, Minneapolis, Minn., writes: "When I finished your training I left my job at $160 a month and took a job as salesman. The first month I made over $600 and I expect to go higher yet."

N. D. Miller, 1705 S. Clark Street, Chicago, says: "I place the credit for my success where it rightfully belongs. I owe my present position wholly to the N. S. T. A. In July, 1919, I studied your selling secrets and in September you secured me the position which I now hold. I am earning in excess of $100 a week."

Bear in mind that these stories of real success—the kind that is awaiting you in this field of unlimited money-making opportunities—are but a few of thousands on file. You will find scores of them in our literature.

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are invited to write to the Employment Dept. of the N. S. T. A. We can put you in touch with just the men you need. No charge for this service to you or our members. Employers are also cordially invited to request details about the N. S. T. A. Group Plan of instruction for entire sales forces. Synopsis and charts sent without obligation.

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No matter what you may now think, it is only a thought. Get the facts! See for yourself how you can easily duplicate any of these stories of success. NOW and no other time is the minute to mail the coupon below. Our big free book, "Modern Salesmanship," will be mailed promptly. And there's no obligation.

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Vol. LXXI APRIL 7, 1924 No. 6

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary.

Entered as Second-class Matter, September 20, 1909, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.72. Foreign, $5.44.

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Quick Quaker is flaked from the same queen oats as regular Quakers Oats. The only difference is that the grains are cut before flaking, rolled very thin and partly cooked. And these small flakes cook faster.

That rich Quaker flavor is there. All the good of hot breakfasts ***quick.***

OATMEAL COOKIES

¾ cup shortening, 1 cup sugar, 2 eggs, ¾ cup chopped nuts, 3 cups rolled oats, 1 cup flour, 1 teaspoon salt, ¾ teaspoon mace, ¼ teaspoon cloves, ¾ teaspoon cinnamon, ¾ cup raisins, 3 teaspoons baking powder, 4 tablespoons candied citron, 4 tablespoons candied orange, 4 tablespoons candied lemon, ¼ cup milk. Cream shortening: add sugar and cream again. Add one egg at a time and cream thoroughly after each addition. Add fruits, nuts and raisins, then milk, and stir well. Sift flour, salt, spices and baking powder and mix well with rolled oats; fold into first mixture. Drop from spoon on cookie sheet. Bake in hot oven (400 degrees) for 15 minutes.

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Now two styles of Quaker Oats at your grocer's: Quick Quaker and Regular Quaker Oats

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Cooks in 3 to 5 minutes

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The kind you have always known

THE QUAKER OATS CO.

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"Tom's manager of the department now and earning twice as much as I am. It isn't because he has more natural ability than I have, but because he's trained! That's it—*he's trained!*

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Waist and Hips Reduced
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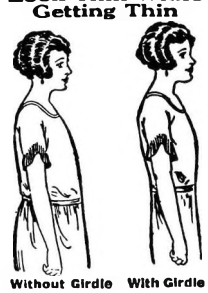
New Kind of Girdle

The moment you put on this new kind of Girdle your Waist and Hips look inches thinner—and you *Get* Thin while looking Thin. For this new invention produces the same results as an Expert Masseur. Makes Fat Vanish with surprising rapidity while you walk, play, work or sleep, yet does it so gently that you hardly know it is there. No More Heartstraining Exercises—No More Disagreeable Starving Diets—No More Harmful Medicines—No More Bitter Self-Denials.

The Madame X Reducing Girdle takes the place of stiff corsets and gives you with comfort Fashion's straight boyish lines. Makes you look and feel years younger.

At last! A wonderful new scientific girdle that improves your appearance immediately and reduces your waist and hips almost "while you wait!" The instant you put on the new girdle the bulky fat on the waist and hips seems to vanish, the waistline lengthens, and your body becomes erect, graceful, youthfully slender! And then—with every step you make, with every breath you take, with every little motion, this new kind of girdle gently massages away the disfiguring, useless fat—and you look and feel many years younger!

Look Thin While Getting Thin



Without Girdle With Girdle

Improves your appearance instantly—works for you every second of day to reduce the excess fat.

Look More Slender At Once!

Think of it—no more protruding abdomen—no more heavy bulging hips. By means of this new invention, known as the Madame X Reducing Girdle, you can look more slender immediately! You don't have to wait until the fat is gone in order to appear slim and youthful! You actually look thin while getting thin! It ends forever the need for stiff corsets and gives you with comfort Fashion's straight boyish lines!

Actually Reduces Fat

The Madame X Reducing Girdle is different from anything else you've seen or tried—far different from ordinary special corsets or other reducing methods. It does not merely draw in your waist and make you appear more slim; it actually takes off the fat, gently but surely!

The Madame X Reducing Girdle is built upon scientific massage principles which have caused reductions of 5, 10, 20, even 40 pounds. It is made of the most resilient rubber—especially designed for reducing purposes—and is worn over the undergarment. Gives you the same slim appearance as a regular corset without the stiff appearance and without any discomfort. Fits as snugly as a kid glove—has garters attached—and so constructed that it touches and gently massages every portion of the surface continually! The constant massage causes a more vigorous circulation of the blood, not only through these parts, but throughout the entire body! Particularly around the abdomen and hips, this gentle massage is so effective that it often brings about a remarkable reduction in weight in the first few days.

Those who have worn it say you feel like a new person when you put on the Madame X Reducing Girdle. You'll look better and feel better. You'll be surprised how quickly you'll be able to walk, dance, climb, indulge in outdoor sports.

Many say it is fine for constipation which is often present in people inclined to be stout.

For besides driving away excess flesh the Madame X Reducing Girdle supports the muscles of the back and sides, thus preventing fatigue, helps hold in their proper place the internal organs which are often misplaced in stout people—and this brings renewed vitality and aids the vital organs to function normally again.

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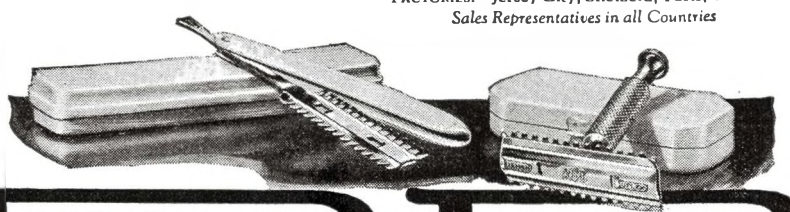

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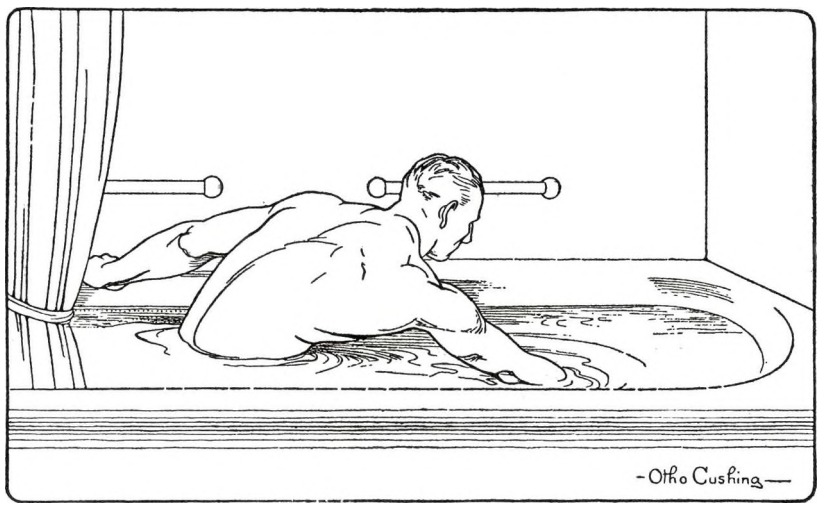

We sometimes still hear of a man who tries to bathe with a soap that has all the diving properties of a ship's anchor.

The fact is, sinker soaps went out of fashion for the bath with tin tubs and the one-horse shay.

The Ivory non-sink principle is simple and incontestible. Therefore it is both modern and permanent. Is it desirable that your bath soap should conceal itself, like a furtive trout, in some dark corner of the tub-bottom? No. Very well, that is why Ivory Soap floats.

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

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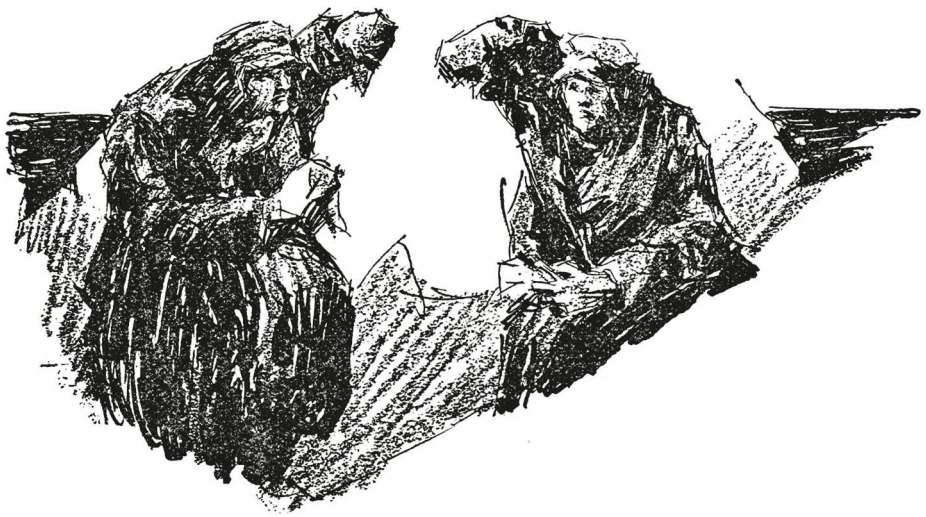


The Berg Battlers

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "Clinging," "The Haunted Gun," Etc.

A notable and unusual story of the North by a writer who not only knows his field but can tell of it with the sure touch and arresting effect of the finished craftsman in words. "The Berg Battlers" is not only the recital of events in a thrilling adventure, it is, besides, the story of a mystery, original in conception and fresh in setting.—THE EDITOR.

(A Complete Novel.)

CHAPTER I.

SURPRISE.

"HERE'S to the clean-up that's almost done!" cried Cartwright jovially, touching his granite-ware cup to Brant's. "Gulp her down, boys."

In the days before the advent of quietude and perambulators in the small towns of Alaska even the best of men were not averse to celebrating good fortune in the good old-fashioned way. The cups were deceptive. Had they been sentient they must have wanted to be of glass with thin stems and broad, shallow bowls; for they held champagne brought from Candle that very day—the eleventh of May. Not one of the nine men who drank to that toast in the sod-built cabin on Discovery claim of Tilliwik Creek ever forgot the date. But not because of the champagne, though it was new to the lips of many. Nor because of anything that went *before!*

"You're spillin' it, Gene," exclaimed Mead Skillilee, his eyes crinkling. "There's wine in your gold, now!"

Cartwright's hand, usually a deliberate and steady one, had shaken with his emo-

tion. He drained the cup. "Golden wine it is, boys. Why shouldn't a little of it mix with the best output of gold I've seen from any ground north of Nome."

He waved his hand over the mess table whereon, in friendly nearness to the emptied wine bottles, were gold pans of raw gold, blown and dried, rusted pans with the black-sand blowings, and a hundred-ounce gold scales, the only large one on Tilliwik Creek. "What's your total to date, Mead?"

Skillilee, working Number Two below Discovery, jerked out a worn memorandum book and turned to certain notations. "Fifteen thousand, eight hundred and seventy-two to-day; ten thousand eight hundred and eleven yesterday, and Saturday and the first two small clean-ups about fifteen thousand altogether. Not so bad for the lowest claim of the string."

"Exceedingly good, I would say," agreed Brant judicially. He was a large man, clean shaven, of much dignity. He was in working clothes, but they were neater than those of his companions—a concession to the professionalism which he had only temporarily abandoned in personally looking after his interests on Tilliwik Creek. He was a lawyer. "I congratulate you all—all of us," he amended, remembering his own large share in the group of the Big Four claims, as they were known to local celebrity. He glanced at his heavy gold watch. "It's nearly eleven o'clock, boys. I'm tired. Let's call it a day—and a good one." He rose, stretching his weighty frame, and reached for his parka.

"Yes, let's go," agreed Skillilee. "To-morrow ought to finish up the dumps, hey, Gene?"

"I guess so," answered Cartwright absently. His head was partly averted—listening. "Somebody in the tent?" He frowned, his eyes narrowing in suspicion.

There came two knocks at the door. Peculiar. Slow.

Brant, his head emerging from the neck of his parka, moved to open the door.

"Wait!" warned Cartwright. "It's pretty late for any of the boys to be——"

As he rose, uncertain, his foreman, Ben Gallagher, who was sitting nearest the door, sprang up. "I'll open it!"

"*Wait,* I said!" growled Cartwright. "Hell's the matter with you——"

But Gallagher, taking the distance at a single stride, already was turning the key in the lock. He flung open the rude door and stood quickly aside, at the same time whipping a revolver from his hip pocket. But he did not use it upon the two men who, masked, entered the room. Instead, he wheeled and, with them, covered the eight men in the cabin.

Cartwright and the big lawyer stood frozen. Skillilee leaned low at the table. The other five miners, workmen all, held their several attitudes. The eight stared, astounded, into the barrels of the three pistols that were leveled at them. In this place, at this time of year, a holdup was an astonishing thing. In far Kotzebue Sound on the Arctic Ocean, marooned by the winter just ended, a stranger was all but unknown, an open criminal an all but impossible thing. But here, seemingly, were two. Or three, rather, counting Ben Gallagher, who obviously was their accomplice.

"What does this mean?" asked Cartwright in a strained voice. His black, melancholy eyes seemed to have shrunk into his head.

But the two masked men made no answer. Instead, Gallagher spoke.

"You eight men will kindly raise yo' hands, gentlemen. And back up to the rear wall, there. And keep yo' hands raised, please." Gallagher, noted always for his politeness, one of his qualities as a foreman, was no less polite than usual; yet his manner was exceedingly crisp and businesslike.

"Look here, Ben Gallagher——" began Cartwright with rising passion. But his foreman interrupted him with a kind of nodding toward him of the revolver.

"And be good enough to hold your tongue—all of you. Whatever you've got to say, just postpone it till later. You'll have plenty of time to talk it over."

Cartwright, flinging him a malevolent look, was the last to line up against the rear wall of the cabin, where they were held by Gallagher, who moved forward to a bunk, sat comfortably upon it and continued to cover the eight with his .44 while the two strangers in the neat black masks pocketed their automatics and proceeded to the business for which they evidently had come.

Scooping up the dust and nuggets in the copper blowers with which it had lately been weighed, they filled the big moose-hide pokes that lay on the table. These proving inadequate, instead of looking about the cabin for more they drew empty pokes from

their pockets. They tied the pokes securely and flung them into two flour sacks which, folded, had been carried in the wide breast pockets of their drill parkas. Before dropping in the last and largest poke, one of the masked men turned toward Gallagher and uttered an interrogative "Huh?"

Without taking his gaze away from the eight he watched, Gallagher said: "The men have all been paid up to date, including yours truly."

"You cur!" muttered Cartwright, whose long, lean hands were working—in the air!

The masked man dropped the remaining poke into the flour sack and with a slight effort threw the sack over his shoulder. The other masked man already had shouldered his. Then both, leaning against the door, drew their guns again, with their unused hands, and covered the eight, thus relieving Gallagher, who instantly flung back the bedding in his bunk, tossed up the dried grass beneath it and drew out small, light handcuffs. In about three minutes the eight men were manacled. Whereat he threw them a kiss and departed with the two masked men, reversing the key in the cabin door and locking it as he left.

With the snapping of the tumbler in the lock discord awoke in the cabin. The men gathered about the empty table, stared blankly at each other a moment, jerked at their hands in seeming disbelief that they could really be secured, and talked volubly. Presently, with an authoritative gesture of his manacled arms, Brant brought a return to silence.

"Here, Gene—Mead, what are we going to do about this? Shut up! Sit down a minute. Keep cool. I'll say—to begin with—this is what's called an inside job, evidently."

"What do you mean?" asked Skillilee petulantly.

"Police term, you understand, Mead. Framed right here on the creek. Our own men. At least Gallagher and——"

"Damn him!" gritted Cartwright.

"Possibly more."

"Those two with the masks, you mean?" asked Skillilee.

"Either from one or another of our four claims or from one of the others up or down the creek. Mebbe from Tilliwik City. Anyhow, they're getting the clean-up above and below, you can bet on that."

"We're wasting time, Walter," exclaimed the snapping-eyed Cartwright. "Let's get these things off and——"

"How you gonna do it?"

"Cut 'em with a cold chisel, of course."

"With all of us handcuffed? Hullo!"

There was a peculiar rattlelike pounding on the door.

"Here's some one may do it," continued the lawyer hopefully. "Who is it?"

"Me—Duane," came the reply through the door.

"My windlassman," recognized Skillilee. "Turn the key; she's locked."

"I'm handcuffed," came the bewildered response.

"I told you," said Brant. "Above and below, as sure as the world."

"Turn the key, I tell you," yelled Skillilee in exasperation. "Fingers ain't paralyzed, be they?"

"Ain't no key, I tell you." Duane replied testily.

"You poor rube, Mead; of course he took the key with him—that cur!" put in Cartwright. "Come on! Let's all heave against it. Common lock and short screws."

Headed by Brant, whose colossal bulk alone was nearly sufficient, those nearest the door put their shoulders to it and the lock gave quietly, the door opening against the paunch of the windlassman. "Give you a call, too, did they?" He managed a sour grin.

"They did," Brant informed him—rather unnecessarily. "You see, coming *up* the creek," he said to the others. He turned to Duane again. "Did you stop at One Below?"

"No, I beat it up here when the boys got me through the winder. I knew Mr. Skillilee was here on Discovery."

"Here, Walter, let me experiment on you with this," demanded Cartwright impatiently. He was standing at an anvil which was mounted on a stump at the corner of the tent entryway of the cabin. He had a cold chisel in one of his manacled hands.

Brant stepped forward and stretched the chain connecting his handcuffs across the face of the anvil. Cartwright held the chisel on the chain and Skillilee, seizing a hammer in both hands, brought it down carefully on the chisel. With Brant's two hands now free, though the cuffs with their dangling chain ends still bothered him, it was only the work of moments similarly to free the others. The braceleted gang, scurrying

for weapons in the cabin—of which there proved to be nearly one to every two men—held a hasty council of war and decided on following the bandits up the creek.

Exactly thirteen hundred and twenty feet along the hillside, denuded, now, of its last traces of brush, stood Brant's cabin, on the last of the Big Four claims. Its windows, divided by stout timbers, were too small to permit the egress of a man; and his workers, four in number, had not thought to bring their weight against the door. Hence they remained imprisoned. But they were quickly freed because the robbers had not taken the trouble to withdraw the turned key. Brant admitted himself ahead of the others and surveyed his men, sitting constrainedly about the long room—handcuffed.

"Wonder where those devils got all the bracelets," murmured the lawyer irrelevantly as he looked at the chaos of gold pans, blowers and baking-powder tins emptied of their nuggets. "Hullo, where's little Tommy Trimble?" he asked with sudden suspicion.

"*Him!*" answered Josh Albertson, cook and handy man. "That dirty little whelp opened the door for 'em!"

"Inside job, I told you!" exclaimed Brant to the others. "Must have been framed for weeks—months. Tommy Trimble! What do you know about that?"

"Where'd they go from here is what *I* want to know. To hell with Trimble!"

"No use looking for tracks on the wet, mushed-up tundra of this hillside, Gene," reminded Brant.

Cartwright waved his hands, the handcuff chain ends lashing his wrists at the sudden movements of exasperation. "We got to *do* something!" he roared. "What are we standin' here for like dummies and letting those fellows get away with a fortune!"

Brant raised his big hand soothingly. "Now don't be excited, Gene. Use sense. These thugs are not acting on impulse—or hooch. You saw them. You heard them. Or rather you didn't hear them. Outside of the men they had on the inside—their accomplices—we have no clew to their identity. Not even their voices. Their get-away was, naturally, the main thing they'd prepare. Ask yourself whether a mad rush up the creek by us fellows, with nothing but a few rusty pistols——"

"Rusty nothing!" contradicted Cartwright savagely.

"Without even a decent long-range rifle—what chance have we got to find them or capture them?"

"They can't get away," asserted Cartwright doggedly. "Shut in by the snow divide on one side and the Arctic Ocean on the other."

"No, they can't get away," agreed the lawyer, his heavy jaw almost protruding from his large, pale face. "Come in. Sit down. Let's decide on a course of action."

CHAPTER II.

ORGANIZING.

WHEN Eugene Cartwright, main mine owner of Tilliwik Creek, had said, "They can't get away!" he had merely echoed a belief so prevalent in the arctic mining camps that, whether true or not, it had been accepted as a truism by the mining and business communities.

These camps, four or five in number, bordering the Kotzebue Sound, were small, isolated clusters of placer miners with the mechanics and tradespeople on whom they depended for living and working necessities. They faced, northward, the uncharted arctic seas. Southward the rough, uninhabited Seward Peninsula stretched between them and Nome and St. Michael where amply long and virile limbs of the law waited to clutch that daring malefactor who might successfully have struggled across the peninsula. On the east was a mere wilderness of barren Alaskan mountains whose high passes led nowhere save into greater wildernesses of perplexingly sinuous creeks and rivers of the vast Koyukuk watershed of the Yukon.

The phrase "They can't get away" was, however, more especially applied to any criminals who might foolishly select spring, summer or autumn for their depredations. In winter snow and ice made a broad highway anywhere for the skillful "musher" equipped with a good team and snowshoes of a webbing suited to the character of the snow to be encountered; and it became merely a question of superiority in travel as to whether pursued or pursuer were successful. But when the northern tundras and sparce forests were bare the natural difficulties of land travel, tremendous, unheard of anywhere else on earth, save, perhaps, in the tropical jungles, made the lot of the fleeing malefactor a harder one, more precarious, more dangerous far, than the facing of

a jury. The result was that of those few criminals, or men of criminal mind, who strayed into the settlements of northern Alaska few indeed summoned the hardihood to commit crime except of the sort that breaks from sudden passion. The holdup man was a rare bird, a fitting candidate for the asylum for feeble-minded or the glass case of a museum. The locks on the doors of the cabins on the Big Four claims had not been put there as a protection against bandits, but against the chance sneak thief, or, worse still, the busybody intent on prying into the business affairs of his neighbors for purposes of tattle and general tongue wagging. No wonder the owners and workers of the Big Four claims were dazed by their unprecedented adventure.

"Duane," said Brant before he entered the cabin with the others, "you go on back to One Below and see what's happened to Joe Dyer and his gang. Let 'em out if they are not out already. And if they are, find 'em and bring them here." When the windlassman had gone he suddenly went to the telephone, jerked down the receiver and called "Hullo, hullo!" a number of times. Then he hung it up.

"Cut, of course! Cut to Candle and the marshal's office, too, without doubt." He wiped his forehead. "What do you suppose they got, Gene?"

"Somewhere around two hundred thousand, between the four claims. I don't suppose they bothered the scattering camps above and below. We'll soon know."

"Oh, no, they're not fools enough for that. They wouldn't monkey around with little clean-ups and take chances of alarming us before they got to us. How are they going to get that amount of dust out of here? They can't lug it on their backs, or on the backs of horses—not far. They might hide it somewhere and try to make an overland get-away."

"With three feet of snow on the divides—hard as nails in places and soft as mush in others? You can't hoof it, you can't make a horse wallow through it; and you can't get dogs enough in the whole country to drag weighted sleds across the bare tundra of the valleys. I say we'll get 'em. They're just lunatics."

But Brant shook his head warily. "They're not that. They've got some scheme all carefully laid out. Here comes Dyer now!" He was looking out of the narrow north-side window. "Hullo, Joe. You, too?"

"Me too is right!" said the owner of One Below. He was followed by three of his men. There should have been four.

"Where's Ed Morrison?" asked Brant and Cartwright simultaneously. Morrison was Dyer's best man.

Dyer, still handcuffed, sat down heavily on a mess bench. "He's been out during the evening—fussin' around somewheres. And he comes in with two masked men—leadin' 'em. Can you beat it!"

"That's three," said Brant. "Skillilee's men had nothing to do with it on his claim—apparently, that is. The masked men entered the door like any one else, except they didn't knock. They'd cleaned up earlier and the gold was put away. One held the others covered with a big gat and the other ransacked the place. Three men on the inside of the job," he repeated ruminatively.

"Let's get communication with Candle, gentlemen," suggested Dyer. He was a quiet, orderly sort of man.

"Can't handle it alone, you think?" asked Cartwright frowningly. As the virtual discoverer and developer of Tilliwik camp, rival of older and more populous Candle, he struggled with local pride.

"Dyer's right," asserted Brant. "We've got to get all the help that's available, believe me!"

Forthwith he organized their activities. With a score of men from the four claims, all eager as hounds, no job need wait. The first thing was the patching of the single wire connecting the string of claims of Tilliwik Creek with the small settlement at its mouth, called, after the hopeful fashion of Alaska, Tilliwik City. Mrs. Munro, the "central" of the little system, reporting the line to Candle down, two men were sent out to find the break. Brant dispatched ten men in as many directions to search the hills for tracks—which meant that they must gain the summits on either side and at the head of the creek where snow still lay, and follow its margins for footprints of men or animals. Brant himself, with his three co-owners and associates, began on the cabins. They first went carefully through the effects of the three traitorous "inside" men, Gallagher, Trimble and Morrison—if the few relics which these worthies had left could be called effects. Old overalls and shirts, discarded mittens and outworn socks innumer-

able formed the bulk of these mementoes. One memorandum book was discovered. It was that of Tommy Trimble and contained nothing more illuminating than lists of mining claims—wildcats all—which Tommy had staked or bought or traded throughout his career in Alaska. This had covered, seemingly, a period of several years. He was a sour dough, despite his youth and apparent frivolity. Who would have suspected genial, debonair, generous Tommy Trimble?

When the local phone line was patched up, Tilliwik Creek to a man was deeply sympathetic. Which spoke well for its general personnel, for the Big Four, having the lion's share of the main pay streak, was naturally envied, openly or in secret, by the smaller men working the outskirts of the pay gravel. To all inquiries Brant, generalissimo of the looted group, answered only "Thank you. *Wait!*"

At two in the morning, the twilight of midnight giving place to the long Alaskan spring day, Mrs. Munro reported Candle answering; and Brant got the marshal's office. Marshal Dwyer had peace jurisdiction of the entire north-of-Nome section of Alaska, but outside of serving papers in petty civil squabbles his office was mainly a sinecure. However, he was provided with one deputy —a good one by popular esteem and former reputation—"Dash" Bascom.

Dwyer's drowsy, testy manner changed rapidly to keen interest as Brant, choosing his words carefully, told him the story of the burglaries.

"Sure!" he rasped into the telephone. "A job for Bascom. He'll eat it up. Arrestin' squaw men for sellin' booze to Eskimos is tame work for him. I'll send him right over with anybuddy he wants to tote with him. How's the ice along the coast? Can he make it with dogs? He can go quicker that way than mushin' over the tundra." It was thirty-one miles overland from Candle to Tilliwik Creek.

"Yes, he can make it along the shore ice," replied Brant. "Send him right away, will you?"

"In an hour," was the reply.

"Well, that's that, boys," reported Brant to the others. They were in Cartwright's cabin, now, awaiting return of the men scouting for tracks on the hills. Two other men, sent to Tilliwik City for rifles, had returned with several splendid weapons and ammunition enough for a siege. Breakfast was under way when Skillilee bethought him of a pair of powerful binoculars he possessed. He ran down to his claim and got them, suggesting a lookout on Spine Hill, topping a gulch that divided upper and lower Tilliwik Creek.

"A good idea," commended Brant. "Get a bite and take 'em yourself, hey, Mead?"

They arranged signals indicating the several points of the compass. Skillilee departed with the understanding that if he could locate the bandits or anything suggesting them he would give the appropriate signal and a pursuing party would start out without waiting for Bascom, if only to keep the bandits in sight in their presumed retreat. Another man was dispatched with instructions to canvass Tilliwik and its environs and see if there were any horses missing. The one regular teamster operating from Tilliwik City had already reported that none of his animals had been molested, but there were a number of miners and prospectors here and there who possessed something in the way of pack animals.

Thus the morning wore on, occasionally one of the ten searchers for tracks returning from his beat and reporting nothing. But the farther-out men, those sent to the head of the creek, were yet to be heard from when into Tilliwik City came Deputy United States Marshal Bascom, whose first name was plain William but who had been known for a number of years in the north as "Dash."

He had made a swirling trip on the glare ice of the coast, and now, at eight o'clock, telephoned to the Cartwright claim that he was coming up the creek as fast as one of the freighter's "skates" could pack him. He had another man with him, he said, who would follow as best he could—an utterance as perplexing as it was irritating to the impatient Big Four until they understood it, later on.

When the deputy arrived—on the borrowed horse, which was reeking—he entered and glanced about Cartwright's roomy cabin. There were too many men in it, he decided; and he asked that only the mine owners who had been robbed remain. At this robust hint the rest of the men withdrew—with rather a chip on their shoulders. Somehow, they felt placed in the suspicious class; for the poison of the "inside" three was breeding suspicion as to all the employees on the Big Four claims.

Brant apologized for the absence of Skillilee. He explained, however, that the latter knew nothing that the other three did not know.

"All right, then. Needn't send for him. He might do more good with that pair of binoculars than he could do here." Bascom paused and considered the three men before him. He knew them by reputation; slightly by former personal contact. And furtively, veiling their sharp curiosity, the three looked at Dash Bascom with a wholly new interest. Save that he was very thin, perhaps thirty-five and possessed of very light-blue eyes, there was nothing to remark about the physical personality of the peace officer.

"I got the main facts in Tilliwik, gentlemen," he said when they were comfortably seated. "It's certainly a very remarkable sort of thing. Deep laid, all right. No question of that, with three men planted on the rich claims they intended to rob. Now turn loose and tell me all about it, going back to the beginning of the connection of these three men—all you know about them. In fact, all you know or suspect of anything that might have a bearing."

Cartwright and Dyer looked at Brant who, after his way, spoke for all of them.

"Well, Mr. Bascom, I don't know just where to begin with what could be called the pertinent facts. It was three years ago that Cartwright located pay on this creek and staked the main claims. We've all four been associated together more or less from the beginning. Before that, Cartwright and I—— I've done a good deal of legal work for him and we've been associated in mining, too. You know in a general way, I suppose, the difficulties we had in draining the pay streak. We took out a little money the first year, hardly enough to pay for the developments up to that time. The second year we did fairly well and paid for the improvements—the costly draining system—and all expenses. This year, as everybody knows, we've had a dry bed rock to work, and we've certainly worked it. The pay streak is narrow and concentrated. We've worked out at least two thirds of it—of the rich dirt, that is—this winter. And the last of the dumps are all but shoveled in now. It was the strategic moment to make a haul for those fellows—whoever they are. There is no doubt but what they had cold-bloodedly waited till the right hour to strike."

"These three inside men. Tell me about them."

"Say, when we think about them we see red!" replied Brant impressively. "Tommy Trimble, the one from my camp, was almost a confidential man of mine. He'd been with us over two years and knew all about everything. Gay, light-hearted, droll fellow, you'd say. Nasty little devil! Who'd take him for a gangster? Bet that's what he was. Some big city. Sure as the world."

"How about the other two."

"Same thing, only they were men of different character, entirely. More serious. Hard-working men, and apparently very reliable. Ben Gallagher had been nearly two years with Cartwright, here. He was foreman. Ed Morrison was Dyer's man. A good engineer. Ran the steam thawer both winters. They were in cahoots, of course. With each other and with this mysterious pair that wore the masks."

Bascom ruminated, drumming with his fingers on the oilcloth of the table. "Good men, you say. Like them?"

"Liked them, certainly. Trusted them. Quiet men—except Trimble. Yes, I'd say ——" Brant studied the ceiling judicially. "I'd say—I would have said, any time—that they were men of excellent character!"

"What would you say about them now?"

Brant stared at the deputy—nonplused. "Why—why, naturally, I consider them damn' scoundrels."

But all Bascom returned was a reflective "They certainly acted the part of men of good character a long, long time!" Then, alertly, he asked: "Know where they came from?"

"No, we don't. Just like all the men you hire, if they don't happen to be old-timers around here. They drop in from here or there, Nome, or the boats in summer, or come dragging in from long, cross-Alaska prospecting trips. Morrison worked a while on Candle, I believe, before he came up here and got taken on by Dyer."

"Have you any enemies, gentlemen?"

The question seemed peculiarly to irritate Cartwright. "What would that have to do with it—business quarrels or anything like that? When you fire a man he may be sore at you a while. What's that got to do with a piece of business like this? Enemies? No, none that any of us would call that. Occasional squabbles, that's all."

"Oh, certainly, certainly," Bascom made

haste to say. He got up and looked out the door. "Here's Abenrunyak mushing along. I couldn't get him to ride horseback up the creek with me—not for love nor money."

"Who's he?"

"An Eskimo. Good man at tracking. Sometimes I've thought I could track, but pshaw!" Bascom snapped his fingers at himself in humorous depreciation. He continued standing, the arrival of the native seeming to be the deputy's signal for action. "I'll say this, for whatever it's worth: This isn't any ordinary case of criminals. There's something mighty funny about it."

"Funny!" almost screamed Cartwright. "All our toil——"

"Queer, I mean," amended Bascom smoothly. "Here's a case of months, years, maybe, of preparation. You can see that. Well, we'll get busy. Who's this coming in now?"

"Here's McCartney and Rhoades coming back down the creek," called Dyer. They were two of the several men who had taken the long trip to the head of Tilliwik Creek.

"We got 'em!" said Rhoades breathlessly. "Found their tracks, or tracks of two or three of them, heading over the divide to the main Buckland River. Snow got deep and we didn't care to come too close to 'em. So back we come."

"Any pack-horse tracks?" asked Cartwright anxiously.

"Nope."

"Nor sleds?"

"Nope."

"Now where do you suppose those lunatics think they can get to afoot, packing a hundred or so pounds of gold dust instead of grub?" It was a rhetorical question put with dry sardonism by the attorney. Evidently he felt elated at the news.

"Search me," was all Bascom would say. He spoke to the native, a man as thin as himself, and very slow, almost feeble in his manner. Then to the others:

"Well, nothing for it but to strike out after them. Let's have snowshoes and a few dogs to pack. No use monkeying with a sled. It'll be tundra—bare tundra—anywhere off the hills. While we're going"—this to the claim owners—"give me the best description of these men you can. The two masked ones and the three traitors. Heft, build, style of walking. I'll tell it all to Abenrunyak. We'll get his judgment on whether the tracks are theirs. I suppose they are, but still, it seems so silly——"

"You think it's more likely they're hiding?" asked Brant.

"I certainly do. Those tracks will probably end over the other side of the hill, if they are their tracks at all. And then it will be a case of searching for their hiding place. And as they've apparently had two years or so to prepare it, that's going to be some job!"

CHAPTER III.

AN ESKIMO BLOODHOUND.

WITH the arrival of Bascom the Big Four tacitly conceded to him full charge of the man hunt that now began. The transport problem bothered him, for he had to prepare, once a chase started, to continue it for days without a return to Tilliwik. This difficulty was settled for the time by the providential arrival of Sven Erickson, teamster, with a light spring wagon and two mules. He good-naturedly consented—fearing commandeering if he did not—to throw off his load and accept grub, bedding and general equipment for the pursuing party. Bascom foresaw a camp at the snow line, some fifteen miles south; yet a way might be found for the wagon to pierce farther. With a few dogs, two saddle horses, including the one Bascom rode, and a dozen picked men in the wagon and on foot, the motley cortège started away on its puzzling quest.

Puzzlement, indeed, was the keynote of the mood of all; certainly of the more intelligent. They could not, for the life of them, reconcile the glaring contradictions presented by the known facts. A deliberate, carefully planned holdup had been committed, arguing coolness, knowledge, reason. Yet there was no reason, no intelligence, in striking out boldly on a cross-country getaway, especially southward, unless they reckoned on the safety of a hiding place more secure, more inaccessible, or more unfindable than any that the bland, open nature of the country offered to the imagination of their pursuers.

"I wonder if they reckon on nobody helping us," speculated Brant to the deputy suddenly. The two men were together, alternately walking and riding Bascom's horse. "Maybe they're fanatics of some sort—socialists, perhaps—and think because they spared the men's wages that the men won't

help us. You know some people imagine that just because men work for wages they naturally hate their employers."

"How do you mean—spared the men's wages?"

"That's right," remembered Brant. "We forgot to tell you of that curious feature. Where the men were paid already they took it all. But on Skillilee's claim and Dyer's they left money enough—dust enough—to cover the pay roll. There was no accomplice on Skillilee's claim—that's Two Below. But they must have had information from one of the inside men on the other claims as to what was due. The book had been looked at and the accounts for labor summed up that day or the day before. In the case of Dyer's claim, Ed Morrison told them what was owing and they weighed it out and left it. Dyer has it, but I suppose he'll give it to the men. Socialists, do you suppose?"

Bascom considered, then opined:

"Oh, well, I don't know about that. Just not bad fellows, in that way, perhaps. Didn't want to see the workingmen lose their wages. They could afford to leave a few thousand out of that haul."

"Fat chance they've got to get away with it! They could throw it away—lose it or hide it where we'll never recover it, though." Beads of perspiration gathered on Brant's forehead at the thought.

Before the snow was reached the gaunt native had been told all that could be remembered of the physical qualities of the outlaws. He was given a very complete description of the three inside men. It was Bascom who, in a mixture of English and Eskimo, communicated these facts to Abenrunyak. He was very serious about it. But the Big Four smiled.

Halfway over the hill from the height of the farthest tributary gulch of Tilliwik Creek, where the land sloped more steeply, the pursuers were halted by soft drift snow, and a kind of camp was made. Without waiting for the unloading of the outfit, however, Bascom, Abenrunyak, the Big Four owners and McCartney and Rhoades walked over to the place where the latter two men had found the tracks. Warned by Bascom to keep away from them, the eight men struck into the snow parallel to the footprints until they reached a point beyond that to which McCartney and Rhoades had gone. Here Abenrunyak went alone, studying the series of holes in the snow where several men had lately walked.

Often he went to his knees and scraped away the snow from the leg marks, studying the impacted snow left by the feet of the walkers. When he returned—it was fully half an hour that he had worked alone—he nodded his head to Bascom.

"Three men, that's all."

"What I judged," grunted Bascom. "What men look like?"

The native described them—their weight, size, the footwear that had made the tracks. "Those men you speak," he concluded with assurance.

"Carry big packs?" asked Cartwright, eagerly.

"No carry," replied the native shaking his head with positiveness.

"Well, we go," directed Bascom. "You first, Abenrunyak. We follow you. You keep on trail of three men?"

"I try," responded the native modestly.

But, to the astonishment of all, the fellow walked back to the edge of the snow, the others wordlessly following him. They thought he wanted something from the camp before starting out, all except Bascom. But he, knowing the native's readiness, uttered an exclamation of perplexity.

"Where you go, Abenrunyak?" he called to him as the Eskimo, leaving the entrance point of the snow trail, bent his eyes on the wet tundra and followed the prints until none but his eyes could discern them in the dryer and dryer sods.

"You speak follow," replied the native placidly.

"Yes, but why do you go backwards?"

"No go backward. Zhis three men go backward."

He fell into his native tongue and the blue eyes of the man hunter widened.

"What's this?" demanded Cartwright coming close.

"He says they walked out of the snow—backward," replied Bascom. "I'll be damned!"

"How can he tell that? It's impossible. Absurd," broke in Brant irascibly.

"Say, friend, I brought this man because he's a sure shot on tracks," said Bascom quietly. "If there's one thing on earth he knows it's the reading of any and every sort of footprint. They're all good at it, but this man's a wiz. Second sight, you might call it, only it isn't that. Just senses sharpened

a little finer than the other natives. And a cunning brain."

"What did they do that for?" asked Cartwright weakly.

"Search me!" It was Bascom's favorite expression when puzzled. It was accompanied by a light shrug. "You heard him say they carried no loads. Well, it looks as if they walked out of the snow line here and came down the creek before they pulled the job. Where they went after that is what we've got to find out now."

He went to Abenrunyak, who was conscientiously following, with great difficulty, the footprints in the tundra. It obviously was only a matter of minutes before these would cease utterly, for the bone-dry "niggerhead" of Alaska, which is the pincushionlike aggregate of hardy small shrubs and grasses, holds no more traces of passing feet than a rug. Probably less. None but a bloodhound might follow the human or animal trail upon dry tundra; the scent even of the native dogs is unreliable.

"You can send one of the men to follow the snow tracks for a while if you like, gentlemen," Bascom suggested. "You'll probably find that they entered the snow from some side point of bare tundra—entered it for a blind. To gain time, maybe. Let's go back to the claims and try to get a trail —some clews—from there."

And back they went, the Big Four cursing volubly.

Though Abenrunyak, sometimes at one side of the line of march, sometimes the other, found an occasional trace of the footprints he now knew well, the sum of the up-creek trip was the certainty that the robbers had approached the four claims they looted from the head of Tilliwik Creek, walking backward in the snow but walking naturally thence down the creek to the lowermost of the four claims. Here their work had begun. Abenrunyak traced them from Skillilee's cabin on Two Below up the line to Brant's cabin on One Above. In the tramped, moist ground their prints, though mingled with many others, were still distinguishable to the Eskimo's eyes.

"Now follow 'em out, Abenrunyak," directed Bascom. And the native, circling the cabin carefully, went off sidewise up the gently sloping hill. Sometimes he walked, stooped over; sometimes he crawled on hands and knees. But he soon reached the zone of undisturbed tundra and here his craft was baffled and he shook his head. The white men heading the hunt drew around him.

"This is more like it," declared Bascom. "I was sure worried about that south trail. It was *too* silly for those men, as I said. Now what they did was to make that line of snow tracks out south—though they were really coming north—for the express purpose of throwing us off for a while and gaining time. After the job they moved west from the last cabin looted, up the hill here; and they either continued west toward Candle—which is mighty unlikely—or they turned north toward the coast."

"Where will *that* lead them?" inquired Cartwright sneeringly.

"There's a lot of things they may do north. They can work along the coast east or west on bare ground and tundra all the way. They're loaded and they can't chance snow. There are cliffs, caves, shore ice—lots of places of concealment. The thing to do is to go down to the coast and search either side for a trail. There's patches of creek and watercourses, sand, gravel and the like, down there where they've simply *got* to leave footprints—unless—well, even on the coast ice I think Abenrunyak could follow them—finally."

The party now divided into squads of three. Four of these squads were made up, two to travel to the coast on either side of Tilliwik Creek, along the undulating ridges dividing it from its neighbors, a third to go farther east, to the Buckland River above the mouth of Tilliwik and follow down to the coast; and the fourth to go well to the west and reach the coast far below the mouth of the Buckland. All these squads were to then converge down on each other and meet at the Buckland at the mouth of Tilliwik Creek, which was very close to the mouth of the river itself. In case either party found the tracks—and before they started the native showed all the searchers clear footprints of the robbers in the muck surrounding the looted cabins—that party would, of course, immediately seek out the nearest other party and the entire body of searchers would thus quickly reform.

But the day was far spent, the men weary, and permission was given them by Bascom, the Big Four reluctantly consenting, to turn in wherever they might be when they hit the coast, and take a few hours' rest. It was not a necessity dictated by failing light, for

even at midnight at a time so close to the summer solstice any sort of track was clearly discernible. But Bascom did not propose to lose the chance of picking up the trail because of sleepy men. Erickson was directed to drive down the Tilliwik Creek road—it was the usual miry wagon track of the northern placer mines—and when he made the river mouth to put up a camp.

Dash Bascom, more stimulated than discouraged by the up-creek fiasco, walking by the side of the mounted Brant down the long westerly ridge of Tilliwik Creek, confided to him a circumstance which he had refrained from telling the others. This was obviously in deference to the greater experience and intelligence of the lawyer as compared with his copartners. He realized that in Brant he had an able coworker. Walter Brant had a reputation for sagacity and shrewdness throughout the whole Seward Peninsula. The fact that he had gone mining during the winters of two years was no reflection upon the lucrativeness of his practice, but rather argued the extreme richness of his interests on Tilliwik Creek—interests too valuable to trust to other hands, notwithstanding the closeness of his relations with his fellow workers.

"These robbers," said Bascom, "are cool devils. I don't know of a case that I've ever had anything to do with—and I've followed the same calling for the better part of my life—in which more deliberate, leisurely preparation was made for the commission of a crime. As a matter of fact, I was coming to Tilliwik last night. I would have been here at or before the time these fellows got to work. Dwyer had some papers he wanted me to serve. But about two in the afternoon the phone rings, and a man's voice asks for me. I was in the office talking to Dwyer. I answered, not recognizing the voice, however. The man gave the name of Richardson. He said he was up in the timber trapping. He'd been bothered by some thief or thieves. That was the way he put it. And now he had got him—or one of them. He had caught—Richardson had, or one of his traps, rather—a fox. He knew by the tracks. And some one had come and taken off fox, trap and all. But the man had hurt himself, lamed himself, he said, and he, Richardson had tracked and captured him. And he found a lot of other skins that had been stolen from him, one a very valuable black-fox skin. He wanted me to come up right away and get the thief. He would be glad to prosecute him. He told me where he was cabining. It was up the Keewalik River about thirteen miles from Candle. He was telephoning from one of the open, public-trail phones on the Nome line. He was having a hard time holding the man. Would I come up right away? It was an urgent matter, you see, and of course I went.

"When I got there—that is, to the phone box at the mouth of Coffee Creek—and started to follow Richardson's directions to his place I soon saw that I'd been flim-flammed. There was no trail leading away from the box in the direction he indicated. No one had been through there—eastward it was—since the thaw, at least. I found no trace of Richardson.. When I returned, disgusted, to Candle and interviewed our central operator she got busy with her slips and decided that that call, as near as she could identify it, had come from over this way somewhere—the Tilliwik City line. Our friends, the robbers, evidently didn't want me to be over here yesterday afternoon and evening. Whether they knew of my intention to come or just wanted me out of Candle on a wild-goose chase to be sure that I would *not* go to Tilliwik you can guess as well as I. It just shows the pains they have taken to get a good head start of any expert pursuit. They handcuffed and locked up you fellows, figuring that by the time you got out and freed your hands and got together and talked it over they'd have all the first start they wanted. They might have tied you fellows in your cabins, and gagged you. But they didn't consider that necessary. But they didn't want *me* on this creek. Not till to-day. They knew you'd think of their getting out over the country and searching up creek. That's what you did. I don't know that I would have. But when you announced a positive trail over the divide, naturally I had to follow that lead. Now they've got some twenty-four hours the start, wherever they are, and that's evidently much more than they have figured to be necessary. I'm going to sit mighty tight on this job from now on. By the way, is there a phone box at the mouth of Tilliwik? I've forgotten."

"Yes, the 'Ptarmigan Kid's' been running a kind of road house down there at the coast. And he has a connection. Why?"

"Simply because, if those fellows should

have taken the coast trail, or the coast ice, at least, northward toward the Kobuc, I want to phone Candle to radio Cape Blossom and get word to men along the Kobuc to look out for them. Northward, along the coast, is their likeliest get-away."

"For a while!" agreed Brant trenchantly.

"Yes. In the end they can't hold out in that direction."

At the coast the four men divided their zone into four parts, Bascom taking the more difficult fourth. They separated and went to work, beating back and forth across the sandy beach and the dunes and marshes, stopping always at the thick shore ice which still lay upon the still bosom of the sound as far as the eye could reach. Midnight came, with Bascom still ferreting. But the other three had rolled themselves in their parkas, each with a beach fire close. Abenrunyak had been attached to no party; he was a sleuth at large, left to his own peculiar devices.

About four in the morning Bascom took a cat nap on a high, dry dune commanding the sweep of coast to and around the broad mouth of the Buckland. Already some of the searchers were visible to him after their rest from midnight on. These—three in number—were widely separated. One was out on the ice. He was too far away for Bascom to identify him, yet he was sure it was Abenrunyak. Something about the figure held his eye. It had become stationary and seemed elevated. Squinting against the well-risen sun, which lay almost directly back of this figure, Bascom soon saw that the man had climbed an erect flinder of ice and was standing with his hands raised aloft. He decided immediately that it *was* Abenrunyak and that he was counting on being seen by some one—Bascom particularly—who would interpret his posture for what it probably was, a signal that he had found something.

The deputy marshal picked up his three companions along the beach, and by four-thirty they were on the move, Brant and himself going eastward to Tilliwik Creek and the other two, both being Brant's men, going west to pick up the extreme westward party. At five-thirty Bascom and Brant had found two of the Tilliwik-mouth squad and with them walked out on the ice toward Abenrunyak—it was the native, indubitably, now—after leaving directions with Erickson to call in the eastward searchers.

When the native saw the party coming out toward him he left his perch and walked shoreward to meet them. In a quick confab Bascom and Brant learned from him that he had found tracks of the same men whose prints he had studied in the snow and around the cabins. He had found them twice—in what were, probably, the only two places in a mile or more in width in which shod feet would leave a trace; for the ice was bare and glare, with perhaps a fourth or fifth of its surface covered with water varying in depth from a quarter of an inch to a foot or more. Abenrunyak had bothered to look at the ice only along the margins of certain pools where feathery edges of melting ice lay, like snow crystals, upon the slightly undermining surface of water. Here, twice he had found what he insisted were the footprints, though only Bascom was prepared to fully believe him.

"You come more," said the native; but he was rather addressing the others—Brant in particular. He seemed to know that the doubts of his skill lay all with the stranger white men.

"Yes, let's come on, boys," urged Bascom, and Brant consenting, they followed the native for an hour. It was a maddeningly slow process, for Abenrunyak doubled and doubled and doubled. Twice he pointed to what he again claimed were traces of feet—the feet he knew. And twice Brant shook his head skeptically. Then, from the top of one of the numerous rambling winrows of crushed-up ice—relics of the tidal compressions during the formative days of the freeze up of the previous fall—Abenrunyak laughed and said, "Some snow!"

When they reached the place he had indicated they found a lone narrow swale of snow lying on the protected, northward side of a seemingly endless wall of ice, marking the tremendous impact of a floe. A strong inshore wind must have done that before the ice had set.

"You go this way; me go this way," Abenrunyak said, his death's head of a face all agrin.

It was the rest of the party, however—those that went the first "this way" who found the tracks—clear ones, like the imprint of type in papier-mâché. There were six pairs of them, the three that Abenrunyak knew—which he quickly distinguished—and three others. The latter Brant and Bascom were quick to ascribe to the three "inside

men," the traitors! Who the sixth man was, of course they did not know. Bascom shrewdly suspected him to have been an outside sentinel.

"Heavy!" said Abenrunyak.

"I'll say they're heavy," agreed Bascom. "Every one of those men weighed pretty close to twice his normal weight. Feel the compactness of the snow under the ball of the feet!"

"We've got 'em!" cried Brant, his great countenance illuminated.

"To get!" was Bascom's quiet corrective. "Now for shore again and a little new organization."

CHAPTER IV.

TRAPPED.

THEY slopped back to shore at a rapid pace, and glad they were to make its friendly brown, for the glint of the sun on the gray-green ice had steadily risen in intensity, dazzling their eyes maddeningly. Only the native was immune. He had taken out of his pocket his pair of clumsy but very effective wooden goggles, solid except for a single horizontal slit in each.

The first thing Bascom did when he reached Tilliwik City, near the mouth of the river, was to buy snow goggles for ten men. There was no telling how long or far the robbers would travel northward along the shore ice. The pursuers might be days on that coast under the raw glare of the sun, and ice-blind eyes do not function well along the barrel of a rifle.

He got his team, which on coming from Candle he had left in a road house; bought grub and supplies, which Brant instructed the storekeeper to charge to the Big Four Claims; and got together two more teams of dogs with which to take bedding, a tent and two sheet-iron stoves.

"Rather elaborate, don't you think?" asked Joe Dyer, who, with his squad, had come in to town in the wake of Bascom.

"Better safe than sorry. What have those fellows got?"

"Didn't you say the tracks showed they was afoot, lugging the gold? Can't have much of an outfit."

Bascom was irritated. He stood loss of sleep well in a physical sense, but it reacted on his nerves. Like most natural man hunters he was high tensioned. "Look here, Dyer—and Brant, too, if you'll excuse my bluntness. We'd better have an understanding right now. Just use your beans. Think. Do you suppose for one holy minute that those men—three or six, or whatever their number is, that have framed this thing for God knows how long—are actually walking out northward over that ice, bound for God knows where, with nothing but gold for an outfit! Even if they figure confidently on getting off without being tracked and pursued, still they've got to have an outfit, haven't they? Calculate the weight of the dust they're lugging. That would peter them out alone in a few more miles. We'll take the littlest we can get along with for a few days, and trust to getting more at Cape Blossom if they keep us dogging them that long—and I've a hunch they will. If it wasn't for giving them more of a start than they have already I'd sure lug along more plunder than we've got here."

"Dead right, Bascom," agreed Brant. "Make allowances for our anxiety to get after those miscreants."

They did not wait for Skillilee and Cartwright, relying on catching them at the river's mouth or near it, and annexing them to the party without further delay. They reached the ice again without seeing them, however, but Bascom sent Duane and another man up the beach after them with instructions to cut over to the main party and join them. They would have no difficulty in locating the long dark string on the flat coast ice. Then the pursuers, reduced now for economy of supplies and transport to ten men, including the native but excluding Skillilee and Cartwright, struck out from shore, most of them sitting or hanging on to the sleds, an addition to the loads which, on the wet, "slick" surface of the bare ice, was scarcely felt by the dogs. They made directly for a rough bit of ice topography which Bascom had noted as a "landmark" for his return to the place where the robbers' tracks had crossed the snow-filled slot.

"One thing that worries me," he confided to Dyer and Brant, sitting on his sled, "is the direction those fellows took from shore. You'll notice it's directly seaward. Of course they can swerve northerly and keep closer to the coast, but in doing that they will have made a detour and lost ground."

"This part of their get-away was made before it was very light, wasn't it?" asked Brant.

"Not a bit of it. Figure the time they left the last cabin which was yours, and al-

low them only a three-mile-an-hour gait down to the coast—kind of swift that would be for men lugging a hundred pounds or so of gold dust—and it would be light enough to see the coast hills even if the night was hazy. Gee, this thing worries me!"

"When we've found 'em?" put in Dyer incredulously. He was a keen, dapper, clever-looking fellow, the junior by some years of his three partners.

Bascom regarded him thoughtfully. "No use asking you fellows to *think*. It isn't placer mining or you could."

The long snow tongue, which was about three miles out from shore, was reached inside of half an hour, from which point on progress was slower, for Abenrunyak was placed ahead and his pace was no match for that of the dogs. The invariable deliberateness of the native traveler marked him; and this was much exaggerated by the necessity he was under to find traces of the robbers every few hundred yards, or of going sidewise until he did. It was a tedious business, yet it was not tedium that drew at length a profane exclamation from Dash Bascom.

"What's the matter now, friend?" drawled the attorney from his comfortable nook on the sled.

"Oh, nothing," replied the sleuth, sighing. "When are those fellows going to catch up with us? Cartwright and Skillilee, I mean."

"We had a big start of them, you know."

"Yes, but I counted confidently on the trail veering toward shore—easterly, which would have given your two partners a very short cut over to us. Damn it, are those fellows crazy?"

"Who, Cartwright and——"

"*No*," cried Bascom in exasperation. "The bandits. What do they mean by it?"

"Keeping out this way?"

"If there was any chance of an accomplice bringing a boat to them, I'd——"

"Man, that's just their game," suddenly divined Brant. "Either that—a boat later, that is—or just staying out here to hide a while. They assume that no one would dream of looking for them straight out on the ice toward the deep water of the sound."

"There's something in that last idea, perhaps," conceded Bascom less testily. "For of course they don't figure on the skill of Abenrunyak, without which we'd no more have found their tracks out here on this glare ice than we would have on dry tundra. But the boat idea—forget it! Before a boat could come and take them off, the ice in the sound will have rotted into ten million pieces and been swept out and away by the winds. Think of a breeze like this, for instance. What wouldn't it do—or won't it do, rather—when this ice breaks up in a week or two from now! These pools are getting deeper all the time. These cracks we cross will get wider, and then watch the rotted masses drift back and forth, and out!"

"Here come the other boys," announced Dyer.

The recent long pauses of the natives had given Skillilee and Cartwright time to gain on them; and at the next stopping they came up, puffing, satisfaction in their faces.

Just then the Eskimo approached Bascom and stood with impassive face until the white man noticed him.

"No see feet," he declared.

"It has been mighty wet and slick for tracking. All the frost crystals that he's been relying on are gone long ago." He turned to the native. "What we do, Abenrunyak?"

"Catch 'em," said the native as if the question were a foolish one. He waved his hand far out.

"Where? How?"

"You no see men?" he asked naïvely. Though the traces of their "feet" were no more, the fellow had sighted the robbers themselves, and he seemed to think that the white men's eyes were equally keen.

"Now what do you know about that?" laughed Skillilee. "We brought you luck, fellers." He put his field glasses into use and passed them on to Bascom. "Behind rough ice now, but you'll see them again soon."

It was so. The robbers—presumably it was they—were wending a leisurely course in the identical direction which they had taken from the mouth of the Buckland River. And that direction was as directly away from all land as a surveyor could have laid it out.

They crowded close about Skillilee and his binoculars, peeping at them, talking excitedly. No one but Bascom seemed impressed with the fact of their direction. The deputy told the Eskimo to "Hop on a sled," and, taking the lead with his team, urged the dogs forward at a rapid pace. The four claim owners, eager to get close to their gold as soon as they could, rode with Bascom.

They were soon debating hotly the best method of approach and capture.

"I'd cross that bridge when we get to it, gentlemen," advised Bascom meaningly. "It looks too easy to suit me."

"Like 'em hard, hey?" interpreted Brant admiringly.

"No!" replied Bascom shortly. "I don't mean that." And he shut up and drove his team.

The robbers were at least four miles ahead of them. After many minutes of rapid going, the teams veering only to avoid the deeper, indigo-colored pools, Bascom halted the line abruptly, with raised hand, and, leaving his team, ran over to a lofty boss of hummock ice—one of those strays from the southward-moving arctic pack that often become incorporated in the new floe ice of the coasts in the fall. He climbed this and stood, like a statue, shading his hand.

When he returned he remarked only, "Sea not so very far. No boat, of course."

"What's their idea, do you think?" asked Cartwright, his black eyes puzzled. Now they were beginning to understand what the man hunter had meant by not liking so easy a job. It was suspiciously easy!

"Maybe it's right that they didn't think it possible we could come on their tracks. Of course in that case the open-water coast of the ice would be a mighty good place to hide—for a while. Perhaps they figured on laying out here till the excitement blew over and then sneaking shoreward up or down the coast somewheres and making a get-away. But I'm from Missouri on that. Mush on!"

In ten minutes they were within all but shooting distance of six men, each lugging something on his back. From the low level of their travel the zone of glinting blue which was the open sea made only a wide band before the eyes of the pursuers, a band nicked on its lower side by the irregularities of the "ice coast." Toward one of the farthest projections of this serrated line, a kind of cape, as it were, with high berg ice at its farthest end, the robbers were walking in single file. At a quarter of a mile, or thereabouts, the pursuers jerked to a halt when they saw the end robber drop his burden, turn, and fire his rifle at the advancing line. Perhaps it was intended merely as a sign that they were aware of pursuit. It had the effect of sensibly slowing the approach of Bascom and his aids. They maintained the quarter-mile space until, the robbers having disappeared behind one of the numerous low ice walls which was well out upon the cape, Bascom called a halt and a council of war.

"It *looks*," he said—and his emphasis on the word was very deliberate—"as if, when they saw us, maybe half an hour ago, they just kept on walking out on the ice as far as they could—to this projection. But it's funny that they didn't have to change their direction—not a point—to do that. And what was the use of walking that much more, with those heavy shoulder packs?"

"Why, they've got good shelter there. Maybe they saw that," suggested Dyer.

"Good shelter anywhere, if an ice wall is good shelter."

"Maybe bigger, maybe better there near that high berg ice?"

"They're not back of *that*. Nothing but the deep sea back of that, apparently. Well, boys, nothing for it but to get 'em if we can and when we can. They may surrender. They've got no chance there. They're trapped, now, even if they throw away their gold. Even if they had a team, for we'll naturally divide and hold them from both sides out on that point."

"That's right," said Cartwright. "A point's a damn poor place to start a retreat. They're yaller, I'll bet."

"And I'll bet they're not!" said Bascom, his blue eyes unsmiling. "They *worry* me!" Which was a queer thing for Dash Bascom to say, the others thought.

At once, now, there was methodic action. Three parties were formed of four men each. Cartwright and three men went to the right; Dyer and Skillilee with two henchmen to the left; and Bascom, the native, Brant and Duane, to whom Bascom had taken a fancy, stayed where they were in the center. The side parties had their instructions. All three, after the spread out, advanced cautiously toward the apex of the ice cape, driving the three teams of dogs from the rear, crouching under the protection of the bulking sleds. At the first shot from the bandits they were to scurry for shelter behind the nearest windrow. Fortunately, these were numerous, now that the margin of the coastal zone had been reached. Marking the last crushings of the tides during the formation of the ice, they were well formed; in places breast high.

The robbers did not shoot!

"Yellow, I guess," observed Brant to Bascom in a low voice. The two were riding the rear runners of the sled, crouched down. "Cartwright called it. They'll give up." His voice was jubilant, for in truth he did not relish a battle. He was an attorney, not a gunman.

"Easy there, boys!" Bascom's only reply was this soothing word to his dogs. He reduced their pace to a slow walk. His eyes never left the rough rampart of ice behind which the six gold luggers had disappeared. Stealthily the other parties drew in, radially, with that rampart the common center of approach. They, too, crawled, their heads concealed by the sled.

There seemed to be a point of distance from their objective at which, by common, tacit consent, it was wise to stop. The three sleds had reached it. From back of the sleds, after a few moments, the heads of the leaders, poking out sidewise, observed each other. They were perhaps a hundred yards apart and not more than twice that distance from the wall of the robbers. Here was a kind of impasse. It was awkward, irritating. Moreover, it must have been so to the bandits, for suddenly six men mounted the low ice wall back of which they recently had disappeared. They balanced themselves on the irregular edge of the wall and held up empty hands, simultaneously. Bascom saw it first among the three white men of the central party. He stood up and cupped his hands to Dyer and Skillilee.

"Advance on them, men. Be careful. Keep cover." He turned and shouted the same words to Cartwright and his squad.

"Why 'careful,' Bascom?" asked Brant laughingly. "'Yaller,' as Gene called 'em, is right."

"Keep down, Brant," was all Bascom said by way of reply. He called "mush" softly to his dogs, who rose and slowly straightened their traces once more. A glance showed the deputy the other parties likewise had begun to move.

About halfway to the wall of the robbers the sleds encountered an ice crack. It was not wider than many that had been spanned —only a few feet. The sleds took it as usual. And about halfway between that crack and the robbers lay another, and the last, windrows or low rampart of tide-crushed ice flinders. This was perhaps a hundred and fifty or possibly nearly two hundred feet from the rampart-girded ice wall of the robbers. It was close, but it was shelter; and Bascom, to whom the other parties looked for initiative, had no hesitation—the bandits standing motionlessly on their wall —in crawling up to it. But he did not pass the windrow. He had not intended to, in point of fact. But what would have stopped him in any case was the fact that as his sled drew within a few feet of it, the other sleds similarly close to the wall, three of the six robbers—the pursuers were close enough to see that two of them were Galiagher and Morrison—flung down a hand each, drew up rifles and quickly aimed them each at a sled.

"Halt!" came a peremptory voice. It was from the center of the line of six. Strangely, this man still wore a mask.

The three sleds halted.

"Here's where my leader get's his, I suppose," Bascom whispered gloomily to Brant, upon whose broad placid face astonishment sat. "I can't make it out." He looked first one side, then the other to his supporting parties, whose members were now close enough together for converse. But, at this distance, everything they said could likewise be heard by the robbers.

"Get close to the hedge, boys, and stay there," he called. He meant the windrow or wall of ice. "Careful. Crawl!"

The instruction was unnecessary. Like himself, the others momentarily expected shots—dangerous indeed at so short a range. But no shots came, though, until the pursuers had nestled themselves close against the sheltering barrier, the three riflemen remained with the weapons to their shoulders.

Bascom ranged his dogs and sled parallel with the windrow, and tying the leader, a big, vicious Mackenzie River husky to a splinter of ice, crawled on his belly, followed by Brant and Duane, toward the sled on his right—Cartwright's But the latter and his men were approaching them, so they returned, motioning Skillilee and Dyer to come to them from the left. The whole party, except one man who guarded each of the side sleds, thus gathered in the center and sat for a confab alongside of Bascom's sled. With Duane, on his knees, facing the bandits, watching them, the others felt safe enough to put their backs to the sled and relax.

Laughter—a few uneasy guffaws—was the prelude to the conference.

"Fooled!" acknowledged Cartwright bitterly then.

"Now, why," asked Dyer curiously, "did they seem to surrender till they got us close? One would think the farther away they could keep us the better." He looked at Bascom.

"My friend, don't ask me that, or anything else about those fellows. I pass!"

"We're a little closer to murder, I suppose," suggested Brant uncomfortably.

"They won't murder *us*," snapped out Bascom sinisterly. After a thoughtful pause he added more cheerfully. "Well, there's no harm in being close, when it comes to that. We've got grub and bedding. We'll tire 'em out, I suppose. Starve 'em out. They're either deep ones or the most absolutely blithering imbeciles I ever heard of, much less followed. I give up interpreting their moves. One minute they seem wise, the next foolish. One thing they do is criminal, heartless. The next is humane. Hell, men, they could have shot one of us then, or a dog or two at least. Let's call 'em fools and say they're trapped. But for goodness' sakes be careful!"

CHAPTER V.

SIEGE.

SAFE from assault with three pairs of eyes watching the robbers, the other nine of the pursuers laid their careful plan for the siege.

They decided that the grouping of the three sleds was spread enough to guard the exit from the cape against any attempted breaking out; but they separated the sleds a little farther so that the space from water to water across the neck of the cape might be a little more accurately divided. There being no darkness to be feared, it became merely a question of a continuous lookout, watch and watch, to keep the bandits where they were, unless the latter should court an attack or a running fight. This, Bascom felt, was a certain eventuality; but who could say how long it would be deferred. He believed they would have plenty of time to prepare for this, and he proved right.

In each of the camps—for camps they now were—routine soon ruled. The sleds were never emptied, the dogs never unhitched. Yet a fair degree of comfort was attained, bedding being placed on the ice, which was carefully drained from the vicinity of the sleds into the nearest pools, and turn about taken in resting. One thing alone bothered them—they had stoves but no fuel! It was evening by the time the pursuers had settled down to their siege, the chill of the late spring was in the air, with the low circling of the sun toward the north. They missed their tea. Later they would miss cooked food, for outside of some bread and canned meats the provisions carried were the usual uncooked "grub" of the miner—cereals, beans, bacon, flour, dried fruit.

Little clew to the effect the settling down of their pursuers had produced on the minds of the robbers could be gleaned from their conduct, which was rather negative than positive. They maintained a single lookout, who was changed frequently. He carried a rifle negligently under his arm. Usually he sat on his wall, ready, however—it was apparent from his posture—to swing about and disappear in case a rifle were to be leveled at him from either of the three guardsmen in the camp of his enemies. The second day this one lookout man was withdrawn. For an hour, in the afternoon, the wall of the bandits was blank! Bascom called the Big Four in conference upon this.

"What do you think of it?" asked Brant at once.

Bascom frowned. "I've given up thinking, or, at least, trying to reason about anything they do. Except defensively, or offensively, rather. We simply must meet them on a basis of what we see and hear and quit theorizing about them at all. Naturally, we've got to make some move, to see what they mean by it. As it *looks* we could swoop over to 'em, mount the wall and shove a gat into the faces of every one of 'em. I certainly won't order it!"

"Why can't we advance in a body with guns pointed?" asked Dyer in his cool, dapper way.

Bascom looked at him with an admiring but cynical smile. "You'll probably see why in a few minutes." He called in all the men except the lookouts.

"Who of you fellows wants to take a chance on walking over to that hedge of theirs and seeing what happens?" he asked with a light laugh.

"I'll go," offered Dyer.

"No, you don't," denied Bascom. "They don't like any of the Big Four!"

"I'd say they don't like any of the twelve of us," was Dyer's reply.

"I said I wouldn't theorize a minute ago," Bascom explained. "But you have to use what knowledge you have, sometimes, in a kind of speculative way. Those men wouldn't take the pay-roll money. And yesterday they wouldn't try to nick one or more of us or the dogs when they lured us close in—lured is what it amounted to. I judge from all that that it would be safer for one of the men—any man who isn't a Big Four, or, to be still safer, any man who isn't a mine owner at all—to try it. There's Duane, here. He's just a hired man. Gallagher and Trimble and Morrison know that. Will you go, Duane?"

"Oh, yes, I guess so," replied the windlassman after a short pause. "Want me to pop one if I can?"

Bascom laughed aloud. "No, you nut! How long do you think you'd last if you did that? Just reach over the wall and crack one, hey? I admire your nerve!"

"What am I to do, then?" asked the man, flushing.

"Why, carry a white handkerchief, if there is such a thing with us. Or a dishcloth. What we want to do is stir 'em up and see what they mean by withdrawing their guard. I'd suspect they've crawled away if there was any place to crawl to. I don't suppose they've got diving suits."

Duly coached, Duane, carrying a gray-white dishcloth which he held out somewhat disdainfully, deliberately walked over the barrier and started across the wet, flat ice. He had got to the middle of it, being about equidistant from his friends and his enemies, when a peculiar thing happened.

Out of the center of the protective rampart of the robbers, the center not only horizontally but vertically, issued a slight puff of smoke and a report. Duane felt a slight jerking of the hand that held the dishcloth, and, drawing it in, saw the cloth had been pierced. He turned round, uncertain what to do, and encountered the eyes of Bascom, whose head was thrust up far enough to see what was happening.

"Come back, Duane," called the deputy to him, and the courageous windlassman obeyed with some alacrity.

"That settles it, men," said Bascom to the crouching group. "It's what I wanted to find out—several things. They're not bloodthirsty—not for the blood of the men helping us, at least. And they're not asleep! They haven't sneaked off in some mysterious way, and they don't want any powwowing. What in hell they *do* want is something I can't even guess at. What they'll get, though—for the present—is a continuation of the siege. We'll see how much grub they've got."

"They had nothing with 'em but those bags of gold—big canvass sacks containing smaller pokes, evidently. Where could they have grub, barring maybe a little in their pockets?" This was Skillilee's poser.

Brant's shrewd eyes—shrewd always when craft within his province was under consideration—turned on Bascom, to whom the inquiry was obviously addressed.

The deputy, as usual, was patient. "It's plain enough now, if it wasn't inferable before, that it was no mere chance that led them here. They, or some of them, were here before. They have grub, without doubt, and bedding. Not only that, but they prepared that wall for defense. They've used a pick on the inside of it and drifted it thin in places and knocked small holes in it. They knew that if it came to rushing them they couldn't hold out against a number who might be bold enough to risk their fire from over the wall, for they couldn't shoot without exposing their shoulders and heads, and an attacking party would sure get some of them. So they've got these loopholes. They're strong. They're surrounded on three sides by the water and have the fourth side—the wall—impregnable. I'll say that's rather neat. My opinion is that they have no cave or hiding place on shore, and relied from the beginning on this place."

Cartwright snorted impatiently. "How they going to get away? Tell me that!"

"They can't, that I can see," answered Bascom quietly. "But it wasn't as foolish as it looks, Cartwright. Don't you see that there wasn't one chance in fifty of their being trailed out here? They didn't know anything about Abenrunyak's trailing ability, probably."

"Shall we rush 'em?" Cartwright's eye glared balefully. He was no coward, no more than was Dyer. But men are raised to heights of physical courage to retrieve hard-won gains. The avails of three years of effort were somewhere behind the bandits' wall!

"Don't be a fool, Gene," said Brant angrily.

"They daren't shoot us. They'd swing for

it," persisted Cartwright. "We got to get 'em, haven't we?"

"We can take our time to it, gentlemen," reminded Bascom. "Let's wait another day or two. I know it's mighty uncomfortable, this continuous crouching, and eating cold grub——"

"The cooked stuff is pretty nigh gone," put in Zeb Graney, who was a cook for the Big Four.

"Well, we can send ashore for driftwood. Or, better still, for reinforcements. Let's stick it out a while and see what happens."

His advice prevailed, though he was there to command. It was the only thing that could be done with any safety, except to retreat. Once more, then, the gathered men returned to their stations and resumed their long vigil, and the only thing that occurred —if it could be called an occurrence—for nearly forty-eight hours was the rising of a thin column of blue smoke from behind the rampart of the desperadoes. It had a comfortable savor—for the robbers. But it was anything but comfortable for their besiegers to contemplate. It proved one thing besides the obvious fact that the fugitives had fuel. They were prepared for siege, as Bascom had surmised. Late in the evening the peace officer called them together, scenting impatience in them.

"Very likely they have as much grub as we have, maybe more. But they can cook theirs, and we can't. The thing to do—I hate to do it—is to get help. A good big body of men, and particularly a bullet-proof cover that can be pushed out at them—are what we want. If with that they won't surrender, why we'll simply make a bomb and threaten them with it. Who goes ashore? I've got to stay here, of course."

"We stay, too, Bascom," asserted Cartwright positively, at which the deputy slyly smiled. He was rather fed up on Cartwright's emotion over his stolen gold, though in his heart he sympathized with him. He could fancy how these four men felt! It was a bitter pill to swallow!

"Yes, you fellows had better stay, of course. In a pinch you'll be worth more than any one else—not knocking your zeal and courage, men," he added for the benefit of the noninterested siegemen. "As a matter of fact, though, it's not going to be any baby play to make this move for help. Those fellows don't want us to bring a mob out here. They're waiting for a boat, without doubt, and hoping to hold us at bay until it comes. I don't like this offshore wind any too well. The shore ice is melting fast. That crack there, back of us, was filled with open water, narrow though it was. Way over to the west I've thought some today I could see ice moving. An accomplice could get a boat in here any time in the next week or so if he knows where to work to, and you can bet he does!"

"What's your scheme?" asked Brant.

"I've been figuring it out. If I'm right that they won't stand for any of us going for help, half of us have got to cover the retreat of the other half, and at that they'd better walk backwards and keep their guns out. Let them take two of the teams, leaving the outfit here, of course, and I'll keep my team for emergencies. Duane, you better handle the retreat. I'll write a note to any one you fellows say at Tilliwik. He can get the supplies and fuel together and the timber for a movable cover; and I've also got to write to Marshal Dwyer telling him what's what and asking him if he wants to swear in any men. We ought to have some more, for safety's sake."

"If I may make a suggestion," said Brant modestly, "it would be that you ask Dwyer to get some one to patrol the coast at once and if any boat is seen out in the ice working eastward that it be pursued and overhauled—in some way."

" 'In some way' is right," replied Bascom with his light laugh. "How would you proceed to get a boat out from shore? It would take a week to work it around the pieces of rotting ice field—or two, maybe. And by that time the ice itself would be weaving and interweaving around, boat and all, with the fellow they were trying to overhaul going his way in the open water beyond. However, there's no harm in trying. I'll make that suggestion. We don't want those fellows snatched away under our noses from back of that ice-hill stronghold of theirs."

The get-away of the shore party was prepared for for midnight, the dusk of that hour being favorable. The two sleds were unloaded, and the dogs lined out slantingly, remaining, however, within the visual cover of the windrow. At a signal from Bascom the leaders were swerved to the direction of shore, the three men of each sled, kneeling backward, held their rifles on the wall of the robbers, and simultaneously with the word "mush on" to the dogs, the six remain-

ing men threw their rifles over their ice wall and held them on the unseen robbers.

The robbers remained unseen! Nor was there seen smoke from their portholes. Nothing, indeed, happened. And the getaway was a fiasco, so far as the expected resistance was concerned. Bascom, when this was evident, drew in his rifle and wiped his forehead.

"There you are again!" he exclaimed to Brant and Dyer, who were on either side of him.

"The unexpected, you mean." Brant smiled benevolently.

"Yes," said the deputy gloomily, "I simply can't make 'em!"

He "made" them still less an hour later when his perplexity, a state of mind that had been constant to him from the beginning of this man hunt, grew suddenly to utter dumfoundment.

CHAPTER VI.

A DOG, A NOTE AND A WOMAN.

UNDER a rain of imaginary bullets, Duane and his five comrades got away in their two sleds with a few bumps but without overturning—something of a feat for the unguided dogs. Seeing no hostile movement on the robbers' wall, the men turned around and drove their teams landward, chuckling at the ridiculousness of the preparations they had made for trouble. The dogs, weary of the long vigil in their cramped quarters at the base of the windrow, broke into a gallop which notwithstanding the strong offshore wind they maintained for many miles.

At three in the morning Tilliwik City's thirty inhabitants were waked by a pounding on the store door and a knocking on the window of Mrs. Munro, the "central" phone operator. She was a good-natured woman, admitted Duane, shushed him into a whisper for fear he would wake Munro, a hard-working crank, and forthwith got Candle, which got Dwyer—who got mad!

In the first place he couldn't understand Duane, who was breathless and less efficient in words than in action. In the next place, where in heck was the hurry! As nearly as Dwyer could make it out from his informant's story, Bascom had the miscreants corralled with men and weapons enough to capture an army. However, as the marshal wakened he became more reasonable and said he'd get ready and come in person. He wanted to know if there weren't more Tilliwik men who would go out. The thing was costing Candle enough as it was—meaning the valuable services of Dash Bascom, probably. Duane assured him that he could get any number of men from Tilliwik—when they woke up or were rudely waked.

"Get 'em," said Dwyer curtly. "Perhaps I won't have to come."

"I got a note for you," informed Duane.

"Then why in hell don't you read it to me?" asked the marshal with mild sarcasm.

"It's marked 'private,'" objected Duane.

"I'll come, then. Be over maybe by eight or nine o'clock."

He would have been, but he was delayed by a circumstance that might or might not have had importance but which so perturbed him that he lost an hour wondering what to do—and Duane couldn't help him there!

At about six o'clock a woman sat on a porch overlooking the Keewalik River, on the bank of which the town of Candle was built. She was beating hot-cake batter for herself and several children who were dressing. But she was also looking down the rotting ice of the river and her eye was caught by a dog which was carefully, gingerly, picking his way across it from the eastern bank. He was a splendid husky. The woman shaded her eyes against the glare of the sun which was bright on the collar of the dog with its brass plate. The dog was in harness, his traces tied up. This circumstance may have accounted for the interest of the woman, or it may have been the white spot on his collar.

She dropped the pan, ran through the cabin and out upon the river street, looked quickly about her to see that no one observed her, and darted down the bank of the river just as the dog, very weary, evidently, dragged himself off the ice.

"Why, hullo, Tuturek," she said to him in ingratiating tones. "Well, good boy! Where have you come from?" Carefully she approached him, patted his head, and with a quick movement unwound and withdrew the piece of white paper which was bound to his collar by a bit of shoe lacing. She quickly concealed it in her bosom, patted the dog again, and went back into the house.

Tuturek, happy to be in Candle again and to have received a petting immediately upon his arrival, climbed the bank and turned into the yard of a house not far from that

of the woman who had interrupted her breakfast making. He investigated several empty kennels for scraps, found none and forthwith lay down at the back door of the house.

A few moments later a comely woman of perhaps thirty opened the door and stumbled over the dog, who got up and whined to her in delight.

"Why, Tuturek!" she exclaimed. "Whatever does *this* mean!" At once she fell to examining his harness. She found it exceedingly wet. An expression of alarm overspread her features. She stepped back into the doorway a moment and said to some one: "Mother's going away for a few minutes." Then she went out, took hold of one of the traces of the dog and led him—somewhat unwilling—toward the small building—though a jail was immediately back of it—which bore the sign: "United States Marshal." There was much bustle there. A dog team, harnessed to a loaded sled, stood, impatient, at the door.

Marshal Dwyer, a small, lithe, long-mustached man in a very fancy drill parka, for the morning was sharp, almost ran against her as she started to enter. "Why, Mrs. Bascom, what are you doing up so early?"

"Look, Mr. Dwyer, here's Will's leader, Tuturek."

"Why, so it is. That's funny. We've heard from him. They're out on the ice, holding those claim robbers till we can get help to them. Sent a man in to phone to me. Funny! Harness on. Wet, too. Dog's come alone across the ice, evidently."

"Yes, isn't it queer? None of the rest of the team. I found him on the doorstep a few minutes ago. I haven't any idea how long he'd been there."

"Couldn't be very long. The man told me he left Dash and his deppities—men sworn in, helping him—left there after midnight. Must be forty miles out there even by a short cut. Dog cut straight over for the mouth of the Keewalik I suppose."

The marshal was visibly disturbed—more, probably, than he cared to show to his chief deputy's wife. "I'll try to get that feller Duane again and see what I can make of this. I'll let you know what I find out. I was just starting over to Tilliwik."

Three men were waiting for him, open-mouthed, unable to comprehend this by-play. But Dwyer closed the door and went into executive session with the long-distance phone. It was half an hour before Duane could be found at Tilliwik City. He was up the creek, scurrying about the Big Four, getting recruits. When connection was established with him he professed absolute ignorance of the meaning of the appearance of any one of Dash Bascom's dogs in Candle, or anywhere else except where he had last seen them, safe under their master's nose in the lee of the ice rampart sheltering the robbed miners and the limb of the law. Asked what he thought, he said he couldn't think, except—was he, the marshal, *sure* it was Bascom's dog? Dwyer replied with a disgusted "Yeah," promised to get over to Tilliwik, dog and all, pronto, and hung up.

He reported the little he had learned to Mrs. Bascom, assured her it was probably just a case of a dog breaking loose—though he knew that Mrs. Bascom knew that Tuturek wouldn't have done any such thing—and told her not to worry. Then he started for Candle.

The woman who had first interviewed Tuturek in Candle that morning spent her leisure on the back porch where her view commanded the river. When she saw the marshal and his three new-made deputies take the wet trail down the river, she put on her worn parka and slipped through the river street of Candle to a small cabin at its lower end. She entered without knocking and greeted a tall, gaunt woman whom she called Ada.

"Just look at this!" she cried to her in triumph. And handed her the strip of paper—torn off, it seemed, from a memorandum book. The elder woman read it with difficulty. But she read it.

"Why, Mollie, they've put it over, as sure as the world. Too bad, though, that poor Mr. Bascom had to be taken, too."

"Yes." The younger woman's eyes were far away. Evidently she was not thinking of Dash Bascom. "It's all according to Hoyle, isn't it? Wouldn't you judge so?"

"Oh, I'm *so* glad!" And the two women fell on each other's necks and wept.

It was a rather formidable array of new talent, plus considerable impedimenta in the way of movable bullet screens, fuel, tents, et cetera, all the latter being on a bob sled drawn, or ready to be drawn by Sven Erickson's mules, that impatiently greeted Marshal Dwyer and his men about ten o'clock that morning at the mouth of the Buckland

And the first thing the marshal did was to invite Tuturek, who had been a passenger, to jump out of the dog sled and exhibit himself to Duane and his original fellow gunmen. Not that anything much was to be gained by it. Dwyer wanted to impress them with the obvious fact that *something* had occurred at the robber's cape after Duane had left there.

The theory, weakly advanced by the windlassman, that the dog might have broken away, was at once repudiated by every one present who knew Bascom and his team—and his leader in particular.

"Well, there's nothing to do about it except to get out there and find out. Erickson, you follow us as fast as those long-eared hosses of yours can hoof it—put 'em right through the water. It's safe enough for a while yet, and the wind's with us. Come on, boys."

The wind certainly was with them! The offshore breeze that had been blowing for days—that invariable spring helper of the break-up of the coastal ice sheet—had freshened all morning, and the reënforcements, some thirty strong, not counting Erickson's outfit, fairly flew over the ice. Duane promised to spot the cape, as they called it, four miles before they reached it, by the knob of berg ice at its apex, and he made off in the general direction through all but the deepest pools. Dwyer sat on his sled, smoking, indifferent, until he fell to studying the face of Duane which was growing more and more anxious. Finally he asked him what was the matter.

"We ought to see it, marshal, and long before now. Gosh, let's stop and find the sled tracks."

He found them quite readily. They were not two hundred yards to the right.

"Let's follow them to make sure. Maybe we ain't traveled like it seems we have. We come back in less time, seems to me."

He said nothing more, content to keep scrupulously in the path of the former sled journeys until suddenly the sea burst upon them not two miles away. Doggedly the man kept ahead, scanning the ice to left and right for his knob of iceberg until he was forced to halt the line or pitch into the blackish waters of the Arctic Ocean. Then he confronted Dwyer, amazed, blank-faced, white.

"The cape's gone, marshal. Berg and all, she's drifted out to sea!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE UNHEEDED WARNING.

SO much for that," muttered Bascom with satisfaction as he heard the slithering retreat of the sleds back of him, and no sights or sounds from the ice dike behind which the looters were ensconced. "As usual, they fool us, pulling the utterly unexpected. What's next?"

He was answered shortly. The shore-bound sleds were scarcely out of sight before Abenrunyak, who stayed with him in the new line-up of watchers made necessary by the division of the party, called his attention to a whirling thing above the robbers' stronghold.

"All same bird, mullakelluk," the Eskimo characterized it.

"A bird gone plumb loco," interpreted the deputy. "That's sure pat," he averred, watching the whitish, whirling thing. Its circle widening, he perceived, in the dim light, a line or cord holding the revolving thing. In a moment it darted up and out and proved to be a small heavy object tied to a string. Its trajectory took it just over the windrow of the pursuers, not far from where he and Abenrunyak watched. Without being told, the native crawled over to it and brought it to his employer.

It proved to be a bit of ice of the weight of perhaps a pound, flindered by its fall. But to it had been attached a paper—a note. Bascom read it; for it was addressed to him:

> You and the native and the dog-team go landward a couple of hundred yards. We give you half an hour. Better heed this warning.
>
> A FRIEND.

Bascom cursed feelingly from sheer exasperation. The devils were true to type—puzzlers. Was it bluff, bunk—what? He took out his watch. It was close to twelve thirty, the weather clear, the offshore breeze cool. Silence reigned. The slender column of smoke that had died down earlier in the night had risen again, sole reminder, since the whirling out of the message, of the existence of the bandits. On either side of him he could see the Big Four, one lying in his sleeping bag, one smoking, seated on his blankets, the other two, well separated, watching, their rifles rested upon the ice wall. Long he debated whether to call them. Why worry them with anything so sinister? If the message was ridiculous only, it wasn't worth a conference. If it

meant anything—well, he didn't intend to obey the warning in any case. So—why worry them?

"Abenrunyak, you sneak over and tell Brant and Cartwright to come," he decided finally. It was Dyer and Skillilee who were on shift.

When the lawyer and the main owner of the Big Four came to him, without a word he passed them the note. Evidently the "crazy bird" incident had not been observed by these two, though Skillilee and Dyer probably had seen the missile and were expecting a report concerning it.

He searched the face of the attorney, who was the first to read it. Only perplexity seemed evoked by the scrutiny of the note as Brant passed the paper to Cartwright. Cartwright, Bascom thought, gave a slight start as he glanced at the writing. But Cartwright was on edge over the whole affair. His start, if, indeed, not merely imagined by the deputy, might mean nothing. But Bascom had grown tense—not nervous, exactly, but stubbornly alert, suspicious of everything, charged with a sense of mystery, of something subsurface in the little drama of crime and pursuit into which he had been drawn. His perceptions were sharpened to the verge of self-deception.

He expected smiles, though they might be sardonic. But no smiles greeted him when the reading was done. Brant was mystified, and only that, seemingly. Cartwright was mystified, but enormously angry as well; and plainly fearful.

"Not going to desert us, are you, Bascom?" he asked nervously, his black eyes twitching.

Bascom snorted.

"Certainly not," was his reply. "What do you make of it?"

Cartwright cleared his throat. "Simple enough," he returned. Yet Bascom was oppressed with the uncomfortable feeling that the warning was less simple to Cartwright than to himself or Brant. "These fellers want to get rid of two of us so's they can rush us four remaining or—or something like that. Why, what else?"

"Nothing, I suppose," agreed Bascom reluctantly. "Yet how foolish. Your four rifles are just about as deadly as six, ain't they? Don't tell me that those cowardly thugs are men enough to rush on four rifles just because you can't plug all six of them at once. For that matter you could kill a dozen of them while they'd be closing the distance between you."

He looked at his watch again. "Fifteen minutes yet before the attack. Attack? I guess—*not!* Well, go back then. Wait a bit. Cartwright—Brant? Is there anything I don't know about this business?"

"Why, nothing in the world. You have all the facts," replied the lawyer, speaking, as was his habit, for his partners.

"All right, gentlemen," concluded Bascom. "Better take up new stations. Let's the six of us be on guard for a while. For an hour or so. Finish your rest later. We ought to have plenty of help and end this thing by the middle of the morning, if nothing happens."

When the claim owners had gone he knitted his brows. Calling the native, who was kneeling apart, he told him to post himself halfway to Cartwright, who was the nearest watcher, now, and keep his rifle trained on the robbers. "They jump up, you shoot. They six, we six. You third man here. All right, you shoot third robber. I shoot fourth." He showed him on his fingers, and Abenrunyak nodded his sober understanding.

To allay his nervousness he took out his watch and laid it on the glittering surface of the ice cake upon which his rifle rested. And on it he glued his eyes until the twenty-ninth minute, glancing up only momentarily, now and again to throw a quick glance toward the robbers. The thirtieth minute passed, and he held his eyes steadily now on the challenging rampart under the thin blue smoke. Perhaps half a minute elapsed, and then:

Bong! Bong! Bong!

They were three dull, mighty stirrings of sound separated by but the slightest interval of time. But they were back of him, not in front. In a moment, even as he turned, a shower of ice fragments fell upon him—fell for many yards around. One struck him rather forcibly on his right shoulder. The dogs, sleeping near him, started up in alarm, and almost mechanically he seized his leader to quiet him.

"What is it?" Brant shouted to him. And he heard cries of surprise and rage from the others.

"Explosions back there," he called to them. Somehow it was a relief. It was, seemingly, a silly thing. Silly things had seemingly been interwoven from the begin-

ning with the shrewd, efficient maneuverings of the robber gang.

Throwing a backward glance at the smoke to be assured that the besieged men were not taking advantage of the excitement caused by the explosions, he turned shoreward and looked at the ice. He could see nothing but fragments—large ones near to the places of the detonations—it was lucky that none of these had been lifted farther through the air—and thousands of smaller ones littering the wet ice. Otherwise there was nothing!

"Damn fools!" cried Cartwright aloud. He intended the robbers to hear. Then he laughed raucously. "Imagine! Men like them getting away with our clean-up!"

There was a large fragment at some distance, Bascom had noted. It was his preternaturally sharpened sensibilities that were responsible for this close observation. That thought within him—of the inconsistency of silliness with the keen, efficient, deliberateness of the crime in its general aspects—harried him with an insistence upon alertness, kept his eyes drilling, his ears straining.

Suddenly he thrust his head forward, boring the distant fragment with his blue eyes, their pupils pin points now.

"Smaller—going!" he gasped.

He acted now mechanically, automatically. He must see—know! He jerked his leader, Tuturek, to his feet and cried to him to mush. The dog, glad of release, wheeled and started and Bascom threw himself in the sled for protection from rifle fire.

In a moment—"Whoa!" he called to the dogs, his voice snapping like a whip, for he saw a wide crack—water filling it. The dogs saw it too, or they never would have obeyed quickly enough. The sled piled on them and they stopped its onset.

The crack stretched across the cape. The cape had begun to be an island. Instantly Bascom jerked his memorandum book from his pocket, pulled loose the pencil from its sheath at the margin and scrawled the words: "Send a boat to find us on a drifting berg," and tearing the leaf loose wound it round the collar of his leader, snapped a shoe string from his rubber shoe packs and tied the paper to the collar. Then, unhitching the dog from his companions and tying up his traces, he lifted him in his arms, sprang to the edge of the ice and flung him into the water.

"Go home, Tuturek! Go home!"

The husky glanced indignantly at his master and made as if to swim back. But Bascom seized a fragment of ice and threatened the dog with it, repeating again the command to go home.

Tuturek turned and swam across the widening crack, and, much to Bascom's relief, found a sloping point—the place, no doubt of one of the explosions, as he afterward learned—clambered up it and went galloping off in the direction of the distant shore.

Bascom faced the dogs about and drove them back to the wall, himself crouching at the rear of the sled. His companions, except the native whom nothing could swerve from the fulfillment of a command given, had edged toward each other and were waiting for the deputy's return.

"What is it?" demanded Brant. "What you been doing? Look at your dog!" From their crouching position at the low wall they had been unable to see what had occurred.

"I got a note off to Dwyer," said Bascom. "Oh, at least it will get into his hands. The dog will go home and my wife will hand it over pronto. I told the marshal to send a boat after us. We're drifting! These fiends have shot away the solid parts in the crack that held this piece to the rest of the ice, and the offshore wind has done the rest. We're six to six!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ADRIFT!

A SHARP consternation seized the Big Four at this astounding news, and to a man they turned and partly rose. Brant, quicker witted and more fearful than the rest, impulsively strode off toward the parted ice.

"Let's jump for it, boys—swim——"

"Not for me," Cartwright yelled back at him.

And Bascom cried, "Look out!" some instinct telling him that the bandits wanted no quitting.

With his warning exclamation a rifle cracked, and a bullet whizzed close to Brant's head. He heard it, seemingly, or felt its whir, for he turned and dodged back, a little shaken.

"We gonna stay—get carried out to sea?" he asked, puffing.

"Stay till hell freezes over," answered Dyer doggedly. He smiled uncomfortably.

"They can't get away with our gold this way!"

"How'd they do it? What's happened? I can't understand," complained Skillilee. Bascom, knowing little more than the rest, was, however, a better reasoner from the carefully accumulated array of facts which he had kept in the forefront of his highly trained mind.

"Keep down, boys. Don't get excited. They want you here—not trying to swim, or commit suicide. That rifle shot shows it. What they'll do to pedestrians after we've drifted out of swimming range of the shore ice I haven't much idea. But just now they want no leaving this cover. What's happened is something like this, evidently. They've touched off three charges of giant or blasting powder. Giant powder I should judge."

"Giant it was," said Cartwright. "Forty per cent, I should judge by the slow sound of it."

"No one went out to touch it off, so it must have been a battery shot, with wires carefully laid in trenches cut in the ice from that fort of theirs—which it properly is, I'll bet my head. The practically instantaneous character of the three explosions shows an electrical detonator. Now, consider some more facts. There's been an offshore wind for several days that has grown stronger and stronger. It is to be expected in May. You fellows know that. *They* expected it. Maybe they knew the weather signs of its approach and pulled off their little touch at the Big Four claims accordingly."

"Waited till the clean-up was just over, or nearly over, you mean?" reminded Skillilee.

"Yes, true enough. Well, anyhow, they had prepared to help this little piece of cape ice that projected out from the general ice coast to get away when the wind began to press at it. The imbedded berg at the end must have served to increase the outward pressure of the wind, and what held us was places where the crack was not continuous. Just why that was so I don't know. It's a contraction crack and should have extended across without a break. You remember when we crossed it coming here? And speaking of that—do you remember that we stopped a hundred yards or so on the other side of it, first? We only came this far in because they stood on their wall and held their hands up as if in surrender, and we, like fools, came rushing in and crossed the crack and were on the islet—what they planned to make an islet and capture us on when the wind was strong enough to blow them out. All they did was blast out the three points that still fastened us to the rest of the shore ice. You can see it all, now!"

"What do they want us for—six men with rifles—after them like the hounds of hell?" expostulated Dyer. "I should think they'd been glad to have us the other side of the crack so's they could blast themselves loose and float away to safety, or, at least, to a chance of getting away—touch solid ice somewhere and getting to shore or being sighted by a boat and rescued. What's the idea of luggin' *us* along?"

It was a point that had shaped itself into an immense interrogation point in Bascom's brain. He answered cautiously.

"I'll say what I think is the obvious answer. The obvious one, mind you—and it isn't the obvious thing that is the true thing always, especially when you're dealing with very clever criminals; and you can stake your life on it that's what we've been up against here. They decided on the ice as far from either shore of the sound as they could get for a safe retreat. But in case they were balked in that—and we did balk them, thanks to this native with his sixth sense—they planned to get away—float off. But they knew that unless they were able to dispose of their pursuers in some way, shoot or capture them or something, it would be a mighty dangerous thing to leave them on the ice. For naturally they'd scoot back to Tilliwik as fast as dogs could carry them, and out would come boats; the wires would hum to Nome; every gasoline tub in the north would be out looking for them on their iceberg island. So they planned to take us with them. To get us here they went through the farce of seeming to surrender. We skipped over the crack and they had us. But there were too many of us, so they encouraged us to send back for reënforcements. They didn't object, though it was obviously better to keep news of where they were from being brought ashore. However, they seem to have decided that that was preferable to having to deal with twelve men—desperate men, intrenched like themselves. They preferred six. So they let the other six return ashore—never fired a protesting shot. You'll admit that they

didn't lose any time in getting away after our men left us!"

There was silence—conviction. Yet Bascom, remembering the note to him, was not fully satisfied with his own explanation. True, the note, if its advice had been heeded, would have reduced the force against them on the islet from six to four. They would have gotten rid of the more dangerous elements of their pursuers—a trained man hunter and a wily, incredibly clever ice hunter, the native Abenrunyak. But, unless the two thus eliminated had decided to go on to the shore, they would have remained witnesses of the explosions and of the drifting away of the berg, and that knowledge would have been as menaceful to the robbers as if it were shared by six others, or twelve others. Pursuit by sea would have been quite as certain. Why, then, had they advised him to betake himself and the native merely a short distance away—across the crack, as their intention evidently was? Why not have advised him—warned him—to go away completely, go ashore? It was a nut he could not crack. Moreover, remembering many details, trifles, in the behavior of the Big Four, conscious of many circumstances which had struck him as odd, he did not propose to fully share his thoughts with his companions. The adventure had become perilous in another sense than as a hunt for desperate criminals—to which he was inured. With the sparsely inhabited shores of arctic Alaska still choked with ice that prohibited the play of craft, large or small, yet with the season advanced enough for endless northward drifting, the conditions were ripe for the greatest conceivable hazard that ice and sea afforded. His wife, his child——

The deputy marshal determined to protect himself as best he could. He resolved to be wary, alert. He became an observer, a listener. He had little more to say for many hours.

Moodily, the Big Four claim owners, adrift with their gold and its filchers, watched the glittering gray line of the Kotzebue Sound ice narrow its zone to the vision, watched the dark water, illumined now by a well-risen sun, grow wide. Occasionally they looked about them, studying the islet, steadily floating northwestward under the urge of the still strong wind, glancing across it to the distant shore of Cape Blossom, nearer, now, than the Keewalik and Buckland shores, but with less ice extending from it. One could readily fancy their thoughts, their hopes. Would they drift into the open sea, or toward and against the ice of either shore, and come to rest again, or, touching it at favorable points, be able to jump to it and make their way to land?

Bascom believed that only Brant would take that chance, unless help were near—settlements in sight. He was sure the temper of the other three was such that rather than abandon their stolen gold to the certainty of loss, they would unhesitatingly involved the loss of it to *all* men, they would stay with the berg and the bandits, hoping for rescue by a vessel—revenue cutter or whaler or trader. It was doubtless the way they felt now. They had indicated as much. But it was early in the game of drifting. How would they feel later?

Bascom brought himself together with a jerk. This wouldn't do. He was still leader. Or, at least, his leadership was not yet disputed. There were things to be done—an attitude to be taken, some plan to be carried out. Yet he held himself in leash. He would let the others approach him; for they, too, were active men. When their daze should subside they would naturally confer with him.

He suddenly discovered that he was very tired. His vigil had been almost a continuous one from the time—it seemed very remote—when he had been wakened by his chief at two in the morning and put on the case. The others, also, were tired out. Only the excitement of this latest and ugliest of developments kept them from drowsing. The sun was high, by now; the berg islet slowly spinning, the glance of it came first from one side, then from another. The whole vista of the horizon in the course of five or ten minutes was visible to the castaways in this rotation of the islet. It was interesting, it might be valuable, thus to scan the sea in all directions without having to withdraw one's gun eye from the place where the dust thieves watched.

"How many of us do you want on guard, Bascom?" called Brant to the deputy.

"Oh, well, as long as we all keep our guns handy one or two should be plenty. They can holler if our friends over there start anything."

Brant, Dyer and Cartwright approached him, still in the crouching position which

had now grown exceedingly awkward and painful.

"Nothing to do but stand it, I suppose, Dash?" suggested Brant. "Most damnable situation I ever was in. What's to do?"

"Well, in a sense, I don't feel like dictating. This thing has rather got beyond the limits of the marshal's office. I suppose I'm on duty still, in one way—till I can't do anything further toward an arrest. But in another way it's a case of every man for himself, or, certainly, a private matter of six men scheming for their safety—from the sea as well as from these desperate devils. What do you suggest? You fellows have been talking it over."

"We're going to be in a bad way, soon, Bascom. Cooked grub gone long ago—eating raw bacon and dried fruit. I think there's one can of cooked corned beef left. Not sure. We're fagged out. Got to sleep." He looked jealously at the base of the berg. "Those fellows are comfortable enough, I'll wager my life!"

"No doubt," agreed Bascom absently. "We might raise some kind of signal. A blanket on the upended sled. Anything dark."

"The top of the berg would be the place for that," asserted Dyer. "Of course they'll shoot us if we try to get round 'em and scale it. Need ice creepers, anyhow."

"The thing to do," said Bascom, deliberately—he wanted to feel them out on the idea—"is to find out what those fellows think of the whole proposition. What are they willing to do? What do they *want* to do?"

"Mighty necessary thing, I should say—the way we feel—plight we're in. We've *got* to have eatable grub. Raw stuff will sicken us in a day. Maybe we can get some of their wood. They must have a lot of it if they prepared for this. There's a big space there, back of their wall. Probably it's a deep pit. What say you, Gene?"

Cartwright looked uneasy. "Try it, if you like," he muttered. Then he looked at Bascom. "Not *me!* I'll see 'em in hell before I'll speak to 'em!"

"I think," said Brant smoothly, "that you are the logical one, Bascom. You are official, in a sense. They haven't robbed you. Please try it."

"Very well." He raised his voice. "Hullo, over there!"

In response to the call, after a few aggravating moments, the head of Ben Gallagher poked itself over the rampart. "What do you want?" it asked urbanely.

"A talk," replied Bascom concisely.

"All right, marshal. Just drop your rifle, jump over, raise your parkey and pat your pockets. I'll do the same. And then I'll meet you in the middle."

"They know what to do. Well drilled, that 'inside man,'" muttered Bascom angrily. "We're just puppets."

He followed Gallagher's demands. As nearly as each could observe, neither had a pocketed revolver. Bascom had little fear of foul play. He strolled over and met the former foreman of Gene Cartwright's Discovery claim in the center of their no man's land. The two men surveyed each other stoically.

"Spit it out," said Gallagher.

"Can I see your boss?—Gallagher. That's your name, isn't it?"

"But I haven't got any boss, my dear friend."

"One of the masked men, I'm referring to."

"I'm representing the others. Spit it out, I say."

"We're hungry for cooked food; and mighty uncomfortable otherwise. I have no doubt you fellows are well fixed. Don't you think, as a mere matter of fair play—humanity—you might help us a bit until—until whatever happens happens?"

"All's fair in love and war," said Gallagher, who evidently was more familiar with standard quotations than the average mucker. "You personally were fairly warned."

"A warning I couldn't take, under the circumstances. But let that pass. What's the scheme—as far as our living or starving to death is concerned, I mean? Your ultimate plans, of course—I hope I've got sense enough not to ask you."

"Well, you can if you want. But you wouldn't believe me. We've got no schemes, as a matter of fact. Now you can all take pot luck with us."

"Which means sharing——"

Gallagher laughed. "Oh, you can have a little wood. But you've got to go light with it. Got an ax?"

"Yes."

"We'll chuck you out a stick or two. It don't take many chips of it to cook up a bit of grub."

"Well, that's decent of you. Got more grub than you need?"

"How much will we need?" asked Gallagher with a dry laugh. "What *you* got?"

"Mighty little."

"Well, use it. When that's gone—we'll see what we'll do."

"Have we got to keep watching you fellows all the time—with guns?"

"No, you don't," stated Gallagher with emphasis. "But *we* got to watch *you* fellers. Anyhow that precious bunch of Tilliwikites!"

"I imagine they'll be glad to declare a truce while we're out here drifting."

"We wouldn't trust their truce. And you couldn't control 'em. There's too many of them."

"Rather poor opinion you've got of them, I see," observed Bascom sarcastically. "Men like you usually distrust those they've wronged. You know better .than anybody else how little mercy you're entitled to at their hands."

"Yes, we know them!" exclaimed Gallagher. "If that's all you've got to say, let's get back."

"All right. First, though, let me thank you for the wood. You're wise, though. Desperate men are hard to handle—even with rifles poked through portholes!"

"They're the best repeating rifles that money can buy," stated Gallagher. "I think one of them, or two anyhow, could stop you all—for keeps—before you ever reached our stockade. Do you know how many of us there are?"

"No; how many?"

"You can while away the time guessing," he replied insolently. And turned on his heel.

CHAPTER IX.

DESPERATE MEN.

THE chunks of driftwood were tossed over the rampart of the robbers some minutes later, and Abenrunyak, whose fears were not white men's fears, volunteered to bring them in. He was not molested.

The wood was selected driftwood, all but bone dry. Dyer, a skillful axman, undertook to reduce one of the pieces to stove wood. He carefully collected the chips. There had been no promise of immunity from attack while any of the Tilliwik men might show their heads and shoulders above the wall. Dyer, swinging his ax ten feet from its base was at least half exposed, the others protecting him by a concerted watchfulness, their fingers on the triggers of their extended guns. None expected to see powder smoke from the enemy wall, and none appeared. The "pursuers" cooked the first hot meal they had had since they left their cabins, and it heartened them somewhat in a situation which was as nerve racking from the mystery of it as it was perilous from the hazards of the open sea.

Before the meal ended Abenrunyak drew their attention to the fact that they were drifting westward, no longer toward the north. "Wind change," he said.

"If this keeps up," prophesied Cartwright, his eyes snapping, "we'll float over to Good Hope Bay. I've heard a lot of loose ice fills in there in the spring."

As Good Hope Bay was the westernmost part of Kotzebue Sound, the outlook, in that case, would be bright for rescue or getting ashore.

In two hours—it was afternoon, now—a southwestward tendency was observed in their drifting. The hills of the south shore of the sound were closer. Abenrunyak could see the zone of shore ice. At five a boat could be seen, a small one, evidently; some sort of sloop. It seemed motionless. It might be frozen in the ice.

"It may be a lookout Dwyer has hired," Bascom inferred. "I haven't heard of any boats in the ice down there. That's beyond Cape Deceit, halfway to Espenberg, at the entrance to the sound, I should judge. Now for a signal."

He looked about him. For some hours the sea had been sparsely filled with floating fragments, low, most of them, detached bits of the coastal ice which would soon come together in the narrower currents and become floes against which incoming whalers and trading craft, bent on getting early into the arctic, would send their blunt bows in the maneuver known as bucking through.

"We're a little higher than those other chunks," he added. "But if Dwyer didn't get the message I sent him by the dog, all he knows is what I said in the note Duane carried him. I merely suggested that he obtain some kind of a lookout for a boat of an accomplice of these fellows, sent to take them off the ice—or off the floes!"

"In that case," objected Brant, "if we signal them it will only result in their getting help and our getting hindrances!"

"I don't believe it's their boat," replied Bascom. "It would be making out here. It wouldn't be so close to the ice. And our dear friends would be hoisting something. Let's try it. Up with the sled. Blanket on first—a dark one."

Draping the bow of the long basket sled with a deep-brown sleeping-bag cover, they raised the sled on end and secured it with chunks of ice cut from the wider bases of their windrow.

At once a fusillade of rifle shots rang out, and the upright raves of the sled began splintering.

Quickly Bascom ducked and, Dyer aiding him, jerked out the supporting chunks of ice. Down fell the sled.

The marooned man hunters stared at each other open-mouthed.

"They don't want to be rescued, evidently. We might have known it," Brant observed bitterly. "Well, it's not *their* rescue boat, evidently. And if it's one that Dwyer sent out to look for their pirate craft it won't be interested in anything like an iceberg."

"And what's more to the point," added Bascom, "if it's a boat sent out to rescue us from a berg—if Tuturek made through—it won't know one from another of hundreds floating in these seas. I doubt if Dwyer has had time yet to get a boat out. It's a big job, as you all know."

"Wind change," Abenrunyak mildly observed.

"Northward again?" asked Bascom. And the Eskimo nodded.

The deputy shrugged his shoulders. "There goes that chance, anyhow."

But another and better chance, should they be able to avail of it, loomed for them in the darkest part of that night—at one o'clock next morning, to be exact. They passed close to Espenberg, in the strong current of the ebb from the sound, and as they gradually neared the shore ice, some heavy pieces of which girded the cape, the captured men prepared for a desperate attempt.

Cartwright was the last to be persuaded to give up the foolhardy resolution to stay with the berg—and his gold. Not less anxious, perhaps, to retrieve their stolen fortune than he, the other three members of the partnership, thoroughly alarmed at the prospect of drifting into the uncharted wastes of the arctic, preferred safety to riches. Even though the main pay streak of Tilliwik Creek was now largely worked out, life remained sweet. The lunatic men who had robbed them might have the gold—until the berg on which they crouched melted, and they took it with them to a Northern Davy Jones' Locker.

"We're surely going to grind that shore ice, boys," said Brant, eying the nearing shore greedily. "And there's one thing that tickles me. They'll be glad to get rid of us here, for they must know it will be a day or two before we can get to Tilliwik or Candle and get help, and by that time they'll be on their way—either to be rescued by their accomplice, if there is such a person, or to hell! For that matter, we can't carry any news that isn't known already. Duane must have got the help he was sent for; and when the whole bunch got out to where we were they must have seen what has happened. They ought to be glad to get rid of us. They won't have to starve us or kill us, now—if they can. Not a bad sort of thugs—giving us wood."

His mood was a high one, for he was a man optimistic to the last degree when things seemed coming his way.

"Better be ready for a good ducking," warned Dyer.

"I am," replied Brant. Cartwright and Skillilee were silent, eying the shore hungrily, though Cartwright every once in a while turned his eyes to the robber-held berg as if loath to leave them to their doubtful victory.

"Take nothing, men," advised Bascom. "Warm enough weather, and Eskimo igloos around in the bay, not ten miles off. And don't jump till you see a sure place to make up on the shore ice. The current's deadly. Just take your rifles, and chuck those before you jump."

Ever closer to the shore ice the islet berg moved, majestically, silently, in the sweep of the current, until the distance, scarcely twenty feet, promised in a few rods to be even less, if indeed, the berg did not actually rub the shore ice.

"Come on!" Bascom gave the word, and walking almost erect, chancing the attack which reason told them was wholly unlikely, they sprang toward the edge of the ice.

They were halted, with beating hearts, by a fusillade! They expected to feel the ping of an entering bullet. Flat on the ice they fell.

"Lucky!" Dyer muttered. "Nobody hit."

"Try it again!" cried Skillilee doggedly.

"*Fool!*" growled the enraged Bascom. "Crawl back, men." He turned, Brant following him with alacrity.

"Fool, hey?" echoed Skillilee. "Damned coward—you, I'll say." But he crawled back with the rest.

"Excuse me, Skillilee," apologized the deputy marshal contritely. "I was disappointed. Disappointed in all of us as well as in being balked. We should have known they won't let you fellows go!"

"We *might* have got away. They missed us!"

Bascom laughed derisively. Even Cartwright smiled saturninely.

"*Missed us!* Why they fired those shots in the air to warn us. If we'd gone a step farther we'd have sunk to the ice with a bullet in the backs of each of us," declared Bascom. "How could they miss us at sixty yards, with a gun rest—every one of them —in those portholes."

"You say they won't let *us* go," blurted Cartwright. "Ain't you and the native as dangerous to them ashore as we could be?"

If it was a challenge to speak his mind. Bascom evaded it—partly. "You remember the note they took the trouble to send me, Cartwright," he replied evenly. "I based my remark on that." To which Cartwright made no rejoinder.

In deep dejection they watched the shore ice glide by until the low dunes and marshes of Espenberg faded from sight and the open Arctic Ocean yawned to them.

Now here was the rub: Every few years some vessel, forcing the rotted ice fields in the Bering Sea, intent on getting into Nome with fresh supplies ahead of competition, was carried, in leads that closed, through Bering Strait and into the Arctic, there to drift north with the set of the currents until liberated by the scattering and melting of the Bering ice. Thus it was well established that in the spring the drift in these waters was northward; and this was within the knowledge of these men. To have floated southward would have meant rescue in Bering Sea, unless their berg succumbed to the warmer waters before the castaways were sighted. But northward! The prospect was a bleak one.

Conferring listlessly, only the native on guard, they fell into dispute over a course of action. Gallagher's talk, faithfully reported by Bascom, so plainly showed a belligerent rancor back of the mere surface humanity that granted a stick or two of wood—perhaps with a purpose that was not, ultimately, unselfish—that none of the conferees were hopeful of good from further treating with their enemies. But three of them were for guile, and two for a waiting game, of which one was Bascom. Cartwright openly counseled a kind of treachery, gaining their confidence slowly and then abusing it. His argument, not without its merits, was, in a word, that all was fair in war—to clip the saying of Gallagher himself. Skillilee was for some trick, feigning illness, or crawling up on them under the outer edge of the ice, if that point could be gained—which was entirely probable. Dyer was for open friendship—kidding them, offering to divide, offering immunity.

But Brant and Bascom, an eye to the ultimate, laughed aside these enterprising suggestions. Where, they asked, would guile, even if successful, get them? The arctic still lay about them and the sun would continue to melt the ice under their feet. The windrow had shrunk perceptibly during the few days they had crouched behind it. The pools were deeper, and the solid ice itself, formed from sea under the scum that first restrained its heave during the fall before, was solid no longer. Prism lines, vertical, crisscrossed, were becoming visible. Soon these vertical prisms would sink under the feet—the first stages of a decomposition of structure which would end in the ice on which they stood becoming mere mush. Whether the outlaws became friend or remained foe, they were doomed by the stern edict of nature. Starvation or the sea would get them!

"We've got the berg to fall back on—for standing room," Skillilee pointed out. It was one of his arguments for a feigned friendship with the robbers. "That won't melt, not for weeks, if at all."

"No," admitted Brant, "but it'll topple. They're never in stable equilibrium, if you know what I mean. All this flat ice here which holds it erect, when this melts the whole berg is liable to lay over, even reverse itself. God, gentlemen, I don't want to be clinging to the slippery thing! A man can't live on a melting iceberg, not with all the provisions and bedding in Christendom!"

"Let's go to sleep. I'm tired out," proposed Bascom shortly. And with Dyer on

watch the five unfortunate men sought the surcease of sleep's oblivion.

CHAPTER X.

TRUCE.

THERE was no land; there was little ice. Many hours had passed, and the current, veering northward after its scouring of Kotzebue Sound, seemed to have joined a yet stronger current—that of the strait, probably—to have swept the islet so far that only the haze of the Alaskan coast was visible.

It was as much in the listlessness of incipient despair as because of accumulated fatigue that the Tilliwik party remained inert so long. Yet doubtless the minds of the six men were busy, even in their disordered dreams. The native only, for some obscure reason—his lifelong familiarity with ice and sea, perhaps—remained changeless, unless his stoic features were a mask.

When even the haze grew dim—that last reminder of the earth they had quitted—something bold, reckless, seemed to inspire the castaways. They were ripe for enterprise. Possibly it was but the invigoration of their long rest. Bascom and Dyer, particularly, itched for action of some sort, and the former proposed it.

"I'm going to take a chance," he told them. "If they won't talk to me—I want no more of Gallagher; he was too plainly acting under instructions—I'll jump over their damned wall, guns or no guns. Maybe that sounds more swaggering than it is, really. I'm convinced they won't harm me. I've got a 'friend' among 'em." He laughed discordantly.

"What you going to say?" asked Cartwright. A sullen anger had been consuming the man since Cape Espenberg sank below the horizon.

"I don't know," replied Bascom truthfully enough. "Good-by!" He put his rifle aside and stepped over the rotting windrow.

Nothing happened until he had nearly reached the rampart of the enemy. Then Tommy Trimble, recognized by Bascom only from the description he had had of him, jumped up and accosted him.

"Mr. Dash Bascom, I believe," he said in an inimitable fashion. Tommy had been the life of the Big Four claims.

"Mr. Trimble, I think," the deputy came back at him. "Any objection to admitting me. Hospitality of the high seas, you know."

"Oh, you're as welcome as the flowers in May—this bein' May, they say. The old man wants to be fair with you, though. He desired me to express the hope that you will be prepared to keep your bazoo closed about what you see and hear in this neck of the woods when you return to your friends. He's liable to put you under that promise or not let you go back at all. And as that will be an extorted promise, as you might say, make up your mind now, before you come. How do you like that for 'honor among thieves?' "

"Sounds all right, Trimble," returned Bascom. "I'm perfectly willing to agree to it."

"Go right around by the side door, then—that way." He jerked his thumb to the right, the way of the lowest side of the berg. "An' hang your hat and coat on the mahogany hatrack."

"Cheerful young scoundrel!" thought Bascom. He hastened to the end of the rough wall, and found, where it turned, that it had been artificially extended to the steep side of the berg. A tunnellike hole evidently was the "side door" to which Trimble referred. Crouching, Bascom boldly entered.

Rising and glancing along the space, never seen before, back of the rampart, he had the sense of surprise at its roominess which is gained in stepping back of a counter in a well-appointed store. A camp was here. Himself and his associates slept, cooked, ate, lived, in a sloppy trench. But these men had brought much dry grass and were comfortable in their sleeping and eating quarters. They had used ax and saw on the ice for level spaces at the sloping foot of the berg and for drainage. And, as he had surmised, they had hollowed out the inside surface of the wall so that they could look through it in many places and poke their guns into apertures no larger, scarcely, than the barrels.

These details the trained eye of the man hunter took in at a first glance. At the next he had traversed the faces and figures of the criminals. They were six in number, despite Gallagher's insinuation that there might be many more. The faces of the three "inside men" were known to him. Then he looked at the others. One he did not know. The next, stooping over the fire, paying him no heed, he recognized as one

Forster, a Candle miner with whom he had been casually acquainted. Last—when he turned and faced Bascom—was his intimate friend, Al Montrose!

Bascom's mouth flew open. The figure of the man was precisely that of one of the black-mask men—the one who had stood revealed when the pursuers first came upon them. There was no doubt of it—Al Montrose, occasionally in Candle, his family there for two winters—Al Montrose, his coworker of Klondike days for a long, hard season, was the main holdup man of the precious six, leader in the most daring, desperate claim robbery ever staged in the North Country!

"You?" asked Bascom curiously. His astonishment was too deep for immediate expression. He could not quite grasp it.

"Yes, I, Will." Montrose raised his hand in protest of an anticipated reproach. "I did my best to keep you out of this. The man Richardson—that was the name he gave over the telephone, wasn't it? He bungled it. He was to have taken you much farther up the Keewalik, so you could not have returned for at least twenty-four or thirty-six hours. I'm sorry."

Gallagher had pushed up a sled for the guest, who mechanically sat on its handlebar studying the face of Al Montrose.

"You know these men who have been working on—Tilliwik Creek." He pronounced the name painfully. "Forster of course you know. He was the man who entered the cabins with me. This other, who was lookout, you haven't seen. He is Ford Gough—no, needn't shake hands!"

The man Gough, a heavy-set, hard-jawed fellow had stepped forward quickly. But at this reminder of his status as bandit he lowered the hand he had impulsively extended to the friend of his leader.

"Al, in the name of God, what does this mean?" Bascom breathed out, a kind of nausea assailing him

"It means a good deal, Bascom," returned Montrose, reverting to the less intimate address. He was a man of perhaps forty-five, serious, almost melancholy, with a steely gray eye, kindly looking, but with a suggestion, patent to the least perceptive observer, of an indomitable strength of purpose, a fanatical tenacity. It lined his face, which in repose seemed of polished granite—like a statue of a Dante. In the rough North he had stood to Bascom, himself not an ill-educated man, as the most cultivated person he had met. He had referred to himself as an ex-school-teacher, but Bascom always had believed him to have been a college professor bitten by wanderlust. The intimacy of the two had been close only during that season, years before, in "the upper country" as the Klondike region was called by Alaskans. Here, in northwest, coastal Alaska, they had met rarely, but always with cordiality. Bascom had seen him last only a week or two before. He was an inveterate prospector, working for wages only when necessary to keep his wife and small family of half-grown children comfortable.

"Why did you send out two of the others to talk to me, Al?" asked Bascom when he had recovered sufficient tranquillity to speak again. Curiously, it was this comparatively unimportant point that rose uppermost in his mind.

"I had excellent reasons. Principally, I did not wish to disclose my identity to the others." It was a reply plausible enough, yet Bascom was aware that it contained more than appeared. He did not press the inquiry.

"Let me say at once, my dear fellow," the bandit leader continued, "that in the situation in which you find me, or rather in which we both find ourselves, I cannot be frank with you, as I would wish. I must pursue my policy in the interest of myself and these friends of mine no matter how it may clash with your—interests. I think you know me well enough to believe—even if I had not already shown you by several incidents—that whatever I can do for you without hurting ourselves I will certainly do. I would have permitted you to escape at Cape Espenberg. But there was no time to warn you there. All of you started to make the jump, or the swim."

"I don't know that I could have deserted the others, Al," said Bascom a little constrainedly. "You realize what my position was—and is!"

Montrose raised his hand again. It was a favorite gesture, seemingly. It meant "Say nothing more"—one of many attitudes of finality of a man irrevocably final in his decisions. "I understand," was all he said.

All of a sudden, without self-warning, indignation surged within the breast of the man who, except for a miracle, felt doomed to death in the arctic sea.

"You! Why have you done this thing,

Alfred Montrose? *You!* It is unbelievable!"

Again the raised hand. But a wan smile accompanied the raising. It merely said "Be calm!"

"Of all men, Al—but what's the use?—now! We're goners, I suppose, except in the unlikely event of an early vessel. Probably you have grub. But the iceberg—this berg with the bit of floe welded onto it—it can't last long. Wouldn't it have been better to have surrendered than to have taken this forlorn chance of escape?"

He glanced from Montrose to his five comrades. Their faces, watching him intently, were singularly impassive. Here, thought Bascom, were very stoics of crime—men who should have been Orientals, fatalists. They placed the issue of their deeds upon the laps of the gods and were content.

"You can look through the air as far as I," replied Montrose. "As for food, we have not a great deal here. See for yourself." He waved his hand to sundry small sacks, none of them intact. "We have quite a bit of wood still. As for the fragment of ice on which we float, it is, I admit, a precarious hold upon life. The sun is strong in the arctic these twenty-four-hour days. We must be north of the circle by now, and Old Sol will be glaring at us, round-eyed, continuously in a few days." He glanced up at the towering berg. It was some forty feet to its fantastically sculptured summit. "The melting of it makes a thin sheet of water over the whole surface. A straight-edged receptacle placed against it fills in a few minutes!"

There was something sinister, saturnine in these admissions, though the man spoke them nonchalantly—as trifles corroborating the fears voiced by his visitor—his enemy. Bascom shuddered. A suspicion of the sanity of the old friend, gone grievously wrong, flashed upon him.

He brought his mind to its immediate business with an effort. That business was the amelioration of the hard lot of himself and his captured associates. They were wet. Starvation threatened. They hated the guns. They wished to make a signal. Bascom spoke of these things. What were they to expect? Was there to be enmity when all faced a grave at sea?

Montrose replied to him very deliberately. "Yes," he said, "there is to be enmity on our side. And, if I mistake not, enmity on theirs. Nevertheless we will share. Naturally, we must first provide for peace, mutually. You will agree with me, no doubt, that the matter has gone beyond any utility in gun play—capture, or killing for revenge."

"It certainly has. Your attitude is more than fair, under the circumstances. They'll accept, of course. Their private feelings can——"

"Or ours!" interjected Montrose, his voice rising.

"That is another matter, of course. Well, then, shall I bring them in, or will you——"

Montrose raised his hand, with more than his previous finality.

"Do *not* bring them in. And I shall *not* come out."

Bascom flamed. But it was for the old friend—his memory of him. "Not afraid to show your face, Al Montrose, are you? Even if you have done this unbelievable. desperate thing?"

Montrose paled. But it was rising anger, for he controlled himself with difficulty. "You knew me once, quite well. Forget the present, if you can—which you do not understand. In my own time I shall make many things plain."

"Before the berg melts?" reminded Bascom.

"Yes. For the present, you are to refer to me, to Forster, and to Gough as "the other three men." You were warned by Trimble there were exactions before he admitted you."

"Yes, I was. And it shall be as you say, Al," replied Bascom simply.

"As if we were strangers to you. They will still wonder why I warned you. Let them wonder—or, if they prefer, ascribe it to whatever motive they constructed at the time. The rest of our conversation, what I agree to, you may tell them, of course. The first thing will be to disarm your men. We will disarm ourselves at the same time. You may attend to the details—carry the guns and pistols to a point equally distant and equally difficult of access to both parties. And one thing more. In doing this I am trusting you to act not as an official, a peace officer, but, for the time, as a private person, a kind of intermediary."

"That's satisfactory, Al. Remember. though, that whenever a chance to take you crops up, if it ever should, I've got to get back into the harness of a deputy marshal

and do what I can and must in the interest of the law."

"And that is satisfactory to me. If I did not stand before you seemingly a common criminal I would say, let us shake hands on that!"

Impulsively Bascom put out his hand. "Damn it, Al, we're on the brink of eternity, as I see it. Let's shake on it. I ought to curse you, I suppose. There's a little woman ashore who will—if she ever knows. But you have a woman too, and three children to my one. Let it go at that. I understand the terms and I promise. Shake!"

Solemnly, their feeling great, if hid, they shook hands. It was a truce concluded. The details of the relief—a generous thing for these bandits to concede who had all the pitiful best of it—were quickly arranged.

CHAPTER XI.

STALKING TERRORS.

"HE'S in there a mighty long time," complained Cartwright suspiciously. "It wouldn't surprise me any if he's joined them."

Brant laughed uneasily. "You could hardly blame him—any man—for looking out for himself. It's not his funeral——"

"It's the funeral of all of us, if I'm not badly mistaken," corrected Skillilee. "Damn the gold!"

"At the same time," continued Brant in his learned way, "there is nothing he could gain, that I can see, by any such—eh, treachery. A little more comfort, possibly, but——"

"Here he comes," interrupted Dyer dryly. "And, by the holy piper, luggin' an armful of rifles."

The rifles Bascom laid upon the ice, a little distance from the exit of the stronghold. Then he walked back to his friends, and told them what had occurred, censored to fit his promise.

"Fair enough—the damned scoundrels!" exclaimed Skillilee sententiously. "Take the guns!"

They were collected by Bascom, the last to give his up being Cartwright. Bascom studied the man thoughtfully. "Didn't you have an automatic or something?"

Cartwright hesitated, but he saw in the faces of the others that which would have made a lie useless. "I have—you bet!" he replied boldly.

"I'll trouble you for it, then," Bascom told him coldly.

"It's very small—in a loose part of my shirt. They'll never suspect it," Cartwright explained in a low voice, casting a glance of enmity toward the stronghold.

Bascom uttered an oath under his breath. "Give it to me or I throw up the job."

Cartwright's black eyes twitched. "You're easy, Bascom," he said. "Here, take it."

The weapons—all that existed on the floating islet, so far as Bascom knew—were placed in a trench which the deputy marshal, assisted by Gallagher, chipped out of the ice on its farthest margin, and covered with the pieces that had been removed. It looked like the grave of hatred, but remembering the marble face of Montrose and the snapping eyes of Cartwright, Bascom doubted it.

A pick, a shovel, some wild hay, still fairly dry, more wood and some odds and ends of provisions came in turn from the encampment of the robbers; and before many hours the Tilliwik party was dryer, warmer and generally more comfortable. They paced the ice, erect, safe; their blood, denied a normal circulation for days, surged again. They felt heartened, hopeful.

Gallagher, Trimble, Morrison, the man Gough, who was unknown, it seemed to any of the Tilliwik party, and later, Forster and Montrose, still in their black masks, availed themselves of the truce in similar fashion. They took the other side of the island, like the men in the Gilbert ballad who "Hadn't been introduced." But there were covert eyings, strange, varied glances interchanged. The scene was bizarre, fantastic. And in its midst Skillilee, carelessly tramping too near the rotting edge of the flat ice, fell through, the edge caving with him, and sank into the sea.

Morrison, who saw him go, darted to the wall, leaped over and reappeared with a rope just as Dyer's own party cautiously reached the broken edge. He threw the end to the man, when he rose sputtering; and it took the combined efforts of half a dozen, enemies and friends commingling, to get him safely out without scraping the skin from his body on the naked, flindered crystals. He got into his blankets and lay there shivering.

There was some fraternizing, next day, between the "inside" men and their former employers—guarded, constrained, noncom-

mittal to the last degree on the part of the "traitors." But Cartwright refused to so much as recognize Gallagher, his ex-foreman, and that man, a robust, hearty fellow, resented this, Bascom observed, and the deputy marshal scented future trouble.

There passed thus two days of a fair tranquility, the menace fended by a brave show of indifference on the part of the Tilliwik six. The others—who could read them? Not Brant. Not Bascom. The native? Perhaps. But the native was no talker—certainly not in the language of the whites.

Besides the general grievance they bore, the captured six found a new one on the first of these two days. And it worried them vastly.

They had proposed, through Bascom, the erection of a signal of distress from the peak of the berg. It was refused!

Nor would Montrose explain his refusal. His answer denying permission was prompt, curt, final. Bascom brought the reply to his party and wrath broke forth.

"That's the cur!" Brant declaimed. "It's of a piece with the whole infernal business. They steal the clean-up at a time of year when every one knows a get-away can't be made. They ..y the coast ice—ingenious enough, if it had succeeded. But when it doesn't succeed they commit suicide and drag us with them! They prefer death to capture, though only a term in the pen awaits them."

An idea popped into his head. "We've got to have a signal. It's common sense. Smoke or a sail is likely to show up any time, but who's going to come chasing this bit of ice, with larger blobs of it in sight constantly. Let's promise them immunity. It's true their crime is against the commonwealth, but they don't know that, and anyhow, if we don't prosecute who else will take the trouble to?"

"I'll try them," agreed Bascom. He looked at Cartwright. "Will they do it?"

The owner of Discovery claim, Tilliwik Creek, grew red. He disliked Bascom's eyes, which, of late, had met his constantly. "How in hell do *I* know? I refuse to answer for anything those vultures do."

Montrose, walking the ice in his eternal mask, approached by Bascom, shook his head. At which the deputy uttered an angry exclamation. "Are you crazy, Al? What's the sense? You have a family. Is it the gold? Are you obsessed with it? Oh, you can have it—a share at least. I'll ask them. I'm lawyer enough—familiar enough, at least with legal forms, bonds, undertakings—to put it through, even if you don't trust Brant. The thing can be done."

"Stop!" said Montrose imperiously. "It is idle."

"I'll appeal to your men. Surely they can't *all* be insane!"

"Dash!" Montrose drew very close to him. His voice was low, kind. "The men are with me. They have been for many—let us say months. You do not understand. We are not insane, not obsessed—not as you mean it. Wait a day or two more"—he looked carefully at the rotting ice about him, rounding, smoothing, shrinking—"a day or two more, not longer, I think. In the meantime—nothing!" Again the lifted hand.

Smothering an exclamation, Bascom returned to his side of the islet; for, by tacit consent, motived in the prudent avoidance of personal contacts all too apt to strike fire, the bandits had kept to one side of the level space of the islet the miners to the other.

His fellow castaways had watched the colloquy keenly. "What does the man of mystery say?" eagerly asked Brant, whose relish for their situation had grown alarmingly less in the last twenty-four hours. The attorney had fallen to studying the slow honeycombing of the ice during his hours of listless leisure. He brooded over his plight.

"We've got to fight for the right to save ourselves, I guess," reported Bascom morosely. "I told him he was a lunatic—all of them. I can't make them out. But then, I never could—not from the beginning," he flared. "I told you so. They seem to have one object—to take *us,* or you Tilliwik men, at least—you and the gold and themselves to the bottom of the Arctic Ocean. Evidently they have no trust in anything we may do in the way of giving them assurances—immunity. When they blew themselves loose from the coast they must have determined to float off and die—and to keep you fellows with them."

"There's another way of looking at 'em, though," said Cartwright craftily. "I've been doing a little thinking, too. They prepared those mines to get away if they got chased out to their cape. Well, wouldn't they prepare to get taken off the ice after

they drifted out? There's some friends of theirs in a boat following us up!"

"They're a mighty long time doing it, I'd say," objected Dyer.

Skillilee, who had nodded a kind of acceptance of Cartwright's theory, sneered good-naturedly. "Mutt! What would be the sense in showing up while we were in the sound, or anywheres in the vessel lanes? Wouldn't they know that when Dwyer and the rest found we'd broke off they'd commandeer some craft to chase after us? The boat these thugs have got to take us off that ice is standing away durn far. They'll get us, mebbe, off the coast of Siberia!"

"How can they see us if we can't see them?" asked Bascom skeptically.

"Glasses, of course," Skillilee replied. He was wedded to his binoculars.

"Not when they're hull down! They can't see through solid water with them!"

"Somehow, I think Cartwright and Skillilee are right," said Brant hopefully. "Men value liberty, but they value life still more. These men haven't murdered any one. It's the pen, I insist, that's the only thing they have to fear. Isn't it reasonable, then, to suppose they expect a boat?"

"Why not make sure their boat can find us by lifting a signal, then?" argued Dyer. Whereat the others laughed.

"Same reason that keeps the rescue boat away from us till it's good and ready—fear of attracting the attention of Dwyer's boat, of course," Bascom continued, after Dyer saw the point. "There's plausibility in either theory—suicide rather than the pen, or a plan to be rescued by friends. But the last is as wild as the first. We simply can't be seen by a rescue boat, for there hasn't been anything on the horizon in the line of a craft. Personally I intend to accept the theory that they are crazy—though they are *not!*" he added with consummate inconsistency. "I *know* that taller man with the mask that I was talking to!"

He made this disclosure impulsively; yet subconsciously the seed of the revelation had been germinating.

"Who is he?" asked Brant and Cartwright together.

"I won't tell you," snapped Bascom. "I wish to say only that, knowing him, knowing him well, I'm surer than ever that there's more back of this holdup than anybody has supposed—unless *you* fellows know what it is. I asked you to tell me everything you knew or suspected when I first answered the summons. And several times later. It's no good now—whatever your knowledge or suspicions are. I'm just telling you how I feel about it."

"If you know him so well," sneered Cartwright, "why didn't he tell you all about it? Or did he?"

"You make me sick, Cartwright," replied Bascom, angrily flushing. "You're mighty damned suspicious."

"And you're mighty damned mysterious. And suspicious, too."

"You're right," Bascom confessed more mildly. He changed the subject. "I've got to kill the three dogs. It makes me hot. Last of the feed gone. I've had to halve their rations the last three days and they're starving, almost. Poor devils."

"You got no right to throw them overboard, though, Bascom," Dyer observed prudently. "You'll have to bury them in the ice. We're liable to need 'em ourselves before long."

"Eat them!" Bascom shuddered. "I suppose so. Will you do the job, Joe?"

Dyer winced. He loved a dog as well as the next man. "I'll—see that it's done, Dash."

His eye had wandered to the rear of the islet, where the dogs had been sunning themselves, near the brink, as usual. It was a singular coincidence—their talking about them at the moment. The imminence of what was to happen may have communicated the thought of his dogs to Bascom. A segment of the islet—a huge bite of it, reaching almost up to the all-but-melted windrow—broke away and sank dully into the blackish water, the dogs upon it.

Bascom, turning at the exclamation of Dyer, gave a leap. But the dapper miner caught the tail of his drill parka, clenching it with both hands, and held him by all the weight of his own body.

"Hold on!" Dyer panted. "There's no chance. Want to go in yourself?"

Bascom relaxed and Dyer let go of him. "Better than killing them, maybe—for me, anyhow," the deputy muttered.

"It's grub gone, though," reminded Skillilee unemotionally.

Cartwright was staring at the huge indenture of the islet, his dark eyes holding horror. "I'll say that's the beginning of the end—if that rescue boat don't show up. All this rotting flat ice is going to go that way!"

"It's dangerous!" agreed Brant. His face was white. "We've got to move everything closer to high ground—the high ice. Now!"

Without a dissentient word from the other four, they went to work. All their scant belongings—wood, hay, bedding, sled, and the ever-diminishing food, augmented though it had been from the slender stores of the robbers—they moved up close to the stronghold of the enemy that had consented to a merciful truce. Listlessly, moodily, they set about draining this new area, drying the hay, fixing their camp. In front of their eyes—between them and the things they handled—there danced the shadowy specters, starvation, drowning. These seemed like rivals quarreling over which should seize them first!

CHAPTER XII.

MONTROSE REVEALS HIMSELF.

BASCOM and Brant had both wondered at the scarcity of floating ice. Their conclusion had been that they were in advance of the northward march of the floes scattered by spring from the cold, shallow coasts. This fragment on which they were perched had been detached by artificial means prematurely—like an apple that falls at the touch of a pole, unripe from the tree. Also the berg, a chance inclusion in the area that had been blasted away, presenting its bulk to the wind, had drifted faster than the pieces of floe which they had seen in Kotzebue Sound.

But long since the wind had died, and the current which held them in its grip had joined other currents. This was manifest, for gradually ice appeared in several directions, distant, low, for the most part, with here and there higher masses. These were the most distant, and they presaged the nearness of the arctic ice pack, Bascom judged. The air was colder, chance breezes sharper. A pallor lay upon the sea. The unwilling voyagers did not know where they were, for the days of drifting out of sight of land had afforded no mark, no sign by which direction or speed could be judged. But even if by chance they still remained in the courses of those few ships which enter the arctic in its all-too-short summer, they knew that it was too early to expect them. Even the forlorn hope of a chance craft was denied them by the stern edict against a signal, and without a signal it were vain to dream of being sighted. In their new place of encampment, crouched at the wall of their indifferent enemies, the Tilliwik miners and man hunters sank into a listless repose, their thoughts dark, despair stealthily infolding them.

At evening, after a frugal, cautious supper, they saw the robbers issue from their entrance, thirty feet away. These men had supped, too, apparently, for nothing had been seen of them for perhaps an hour. They walked, but they walked far from the steadily contracting edge of what was left of the level ice. Where now, thought Bascom, must he and his party walk? On the other side! But the other side was unsafe —near the edge. And away from it they should be walking close to the robber party. Clearly, friends and enemies were drawing together in a narrowing circle of death!

Seeming to read these thoughts, the taller of the two men in masks suddenly approached. His five companions followed.

"I think we haven't long," said the tall man. "Let us throw off *all* masks!" With that he tore from his face its black screen and stared into the eyes of Eugene Cartwright.

Bascom, alert, his blue eyes pin points, watched them narrowly. The pounding of his heart told him its premonitions were about to be fulfilled.

Cartwright blinked, fascinated. He made several efforts to speak before he was successful. The tone of his voice was one of repression, a disguise of feeling.

"I thought it might be you. I suspected I'd seen that handwriting before!"

"You know each other!" said Bascom. He glanced at the attorney.

Walter Brant, it seemed, knew him too. His features were working. Clearly he was dumfounded. Cartwright, it would seem, had not voiced his suspicions to his partners.

Montrose, the marble of his face immobile, composed, folded his arms. "Do you wish to fight, Eugene Cartwright? To revenge yourself for the loss of your gold and your life before you forfeit them both?"

"You want to kill me?" asked Cartwright, his face as white as the other's.

Montrose slowly, sadly, shook his head. "I want to kill no man," he answered.

"I'd kill you in a minute," shrieked Brant, losing his hold upon himself. It was a kind of climax of long-repressed fears. The ice

and the sea had been gnawing at the bowels of the man. He started to rise.

"Sit down, Brant," said Bascom in a low, ugly voice, "or, *I'll* kill you. And hold your tongue!"

Cartwright was wagging his head, his lips trembling. "You devil, you! You devil, you!" he kept repeating.

The other masked man, Forster, between whom and Cartwright and Brant some signs of recognition passed, here drew up the sled. "Sit down, Al," he suggested to his fellow bandit.

"Gentlemen," said Montrose in an even voice, "let us while away the time—what time is left to us, be it a day or two or three—pleasantly. My friend, William Bascom, I am sure, will be interested in many things we might tell him. It is a time for reminiscence, for a backward glance at one's life. In fact I promised him disclosures. I must not delay the fulfillment of that promise too long—it may be too late."

He paused, glancing, as for permission, to the faces of Cartwright's partners.

"By all means," said Dyer, with the smoothness which never deserted him.

"I'm curious to know——" began Skillilee. But he was too disturbed to continue. His wondering glance had been fixed upon Cartwright and Brant.

"If, after I have entertained these gentlemen," resumed Montrose, looking at Cartwright, "either you or Brant wish to try to kill me—with your hands—I am at your service. I shall not ask your pardon if I am lengthy. We have nothing to do, and the night is long in these latitudes. Besides, I want you all—particularly you, Bascom—to get the entire background of this affair.

"It is ten years since five men, of which I was one—the leader, in a sense—entered Alaska. We came into the Yukon, like nearly all the rest of the old-timers. I had left a wife and two young children in the States. So did Forster. Gallagher was married, also. But even men unmarried have their hopes, their ambitions. They want to get ahead in the world. They have their rights, too. I should like to tell you the detailed history of the first seven of those years. You, Bascom, know—if you happen to remember—some of that past, but nothing of the last part of it. The rest of you have heard similar stories. You have similar stories of your own. You know what prospecting is in this Far North; pioneering, struggling in trackless wildernesses, wintering on far rivers, battling with the blizzard, the ice, the overflows—cold, starvation, black despair! There are always prospects. And they come to nothing. And you strike out again. Then more prospects—and nothing again. The years go by. It is too late to quit. You have only one resource—to go on, endlessly, until you succeed or die. Pride holds you if nothing else. If you have a family, some part of each year must go to the slavery of wage earning—mucking in a dark, wet drift or cutting wood for the river steamers at sixty below, fourteen hours a day.

"In one thing only does this story, the early part of which I have merely sketched, differ from that of many others: Our party stuck together. We had picked each other carefully before we struck out. We had quarrels, temporary partings. This merry fellow, Trimble, was like a son to me. He was only eighteen when we went into the Klondike. Sometimes one of us worked a whole year for money for the others to go on testing some far creek. We stuck together, I say, through thick and thin—and it was mostly thin. We have stuck together until now!

"Four years ago we were in the Koyukuk, nearest tributary of the Yukon to this Kotzebue Sound region, as you know. It is a devil's own country—colder than all Alaska, and a teasing, heart-sickening country with its Tramway Bar and its Bettles region, thrusting up enough rich pockets, here and there, to raise hopes, keep obstinate men prisoners, only, in the end, to force them to give up, disgusted, broken in health. A treacherous country, it has proved. We are among its victims.

"After a year of it, in the spring, we moved to its western headwaters, over the Kobuc and Selawik divide. We had a camp there. From it we split up into two parties of two each and left the fifth man at camp, to look about in the vicinity. Forster and I, with a very light outfit, went over the divide, along between the Selawik and the Buckland, country unknown to us, but we were used to that. All we knew was that somewhere off in that direction the water ran into the Arctic Ocean. The ground was nearly bare when we made the mouth of the Buckland. We saw no signs of white men.

"We camped at the mouth of a small creek, where the bank had thawed and sloughed down into the channel. I found coarse colors there. Forster had a prospect on the river itself, but it amounted to nothing, he found, later. I went up this creek, two days in succession. The second day I went up several miles, found coarse gold in the creek alongside a gulch, went up the gulch and found more of it. The ground was still frozen, but I managed to thaw enough to know that I had struck it! It might not be extensive, but it was rich. And I knew it to be bench-channel gold, which, in my experience is rarely pockety. I traced the bench over something like a mile. This was seemingly the best ground, and I staked the four claims in my own name and that of three others of our party, whose powers of attorney of course I held.

"Now observe, please, how I staked them. It was a bare country, like the rest of the coast region hereabouts. There were only a few willows farther down the creek. I cut some four-foot stakes from this clump, returned to my bench and set them. I called the creek Forster Creek. I staked the claims well and carefully, complying with the law. As I have said, however, we knew nothing of the country; saw no whites, nor sign of whites. I had no means of knowing that recently Candle, a new creek, had been staked by men from Nome. Already there were small settlements there, the nearest thirty miles away. There was a recorder's office, too, and the district had been organized so that this Buckland River region was in it. But the nearest recorder's office I knew of in Alaska was on the Koyukuk, two hundred miles away. I made copies of the location notices I had stuck into the cleft end of my center stakes; and finding Forster, we broke camp—for our grub was low—and started overland again the way we had come. You may imagine the time we had in half-thawed ground, with the rivers running on the ice, and our dogs sore footed and useless. We were half dead when we made back to the main camp on the headwaters of the Koyukuk and gave the glad tidings to our partners. Luck had come in the nick of time. Two of the three were rotting with scurvy.

We held a council. Had I known of the Kotzebue Sound settlements we would have gone west to our new holdings and gotten help at Candle or at the missionary station at Cape Blossom. But the nearest medical aid we knew of—it was rather a matter of getting fresh food—was the camps on the Koyukuk. One man couldn't get two sick men down there, so we decided to leave Forster with them and that I should return alone to Kotzebue Sound.

Little Tommy Trimble and Zeb Forster almost carried Gallagher and Morrison into Koyukuk. A part of the way they were able to raft them. It was months before I knew of the fate of my four partners. For I started back, next day, for salt water, living on ptarmigan and blueberries and a kind of native salad. I had a pound of flour. When I reached the Buckland, and the mouth of Forster Creek, I saw tracks, cut willows. White men had been there. I forged up the creek, glad of help near—if the newcomers were still there. They were not. The rest of the creek had been staked, but the stakes had gone. I found the six claims I had located. I thought I recognized the stakes. They had not been tampered with. But something unfamiliar in the paper location notice stuck in a center stake attracted my attention, and withdrawing it I found it was not my notice at all. It was in a strange hand. It was my Discovery claim, but instead of it's being called Discovery on Forster Creek it read "Discovery claim on Tilliwik Creek!" I was aghast.

"It seemed incredible to me that any other party had come over from the Koyukuk. So I started looking for tracks. I found marks here and there at the adjacent coast, but I would have been a long time in tracing the newcomers to Candle if I had not met natives who understood English enough to tell me of the new camps farther around the sound. I reached Candle next day and inquired for the recorder's office. I found that the latest recordings were a brand-new bunch on a new creek—Tilliwik Creek—and other creeks and gulches in the vicinity. The first recorded of the many claims were the four I had staked. The staker was Eugene Cartwright!"

Montrose fixed him with his eye. "I saw that man—after waiting a week for him. I saw him first, hoping it was a mistake, not wishing to make trouble for him until I had seen him. I told him my story. At which he laughed—and said that I had had a disordered dream. I told him my friends had scurvy. He replied that he believed I had it also—in the brain! He stated to me

that he had been alone when he found gold on that creek and had staked it. The dates of his notices, if correct, showed that he had done this a week before, or thirty-two days after I staked the six claims. He insisted that he had found no stakes anywhere, nor a sign of any sort to show that a white man had ever set foot on the creek. He looked me brazenly in the face and told me that!

"I went away and thought it over. There was a chance—a remote one—that some native, with a motive none could fathom, had passed up the little creek and removed my stakes. For, of course, I could not swear that it was actually my stakes that were still set in the ground on the creek.

"I saw Cartwright again and asked to see his attorney, of whom he had spoken before. He took me to him. The attorney was Walter Brant. 'Prove it!' was what he said to me. He was very busy. I saw from the records that Brant was one of the men for whom Cartwright had staked.

"I was out of money, so I worked for several days for wages, bought a little food, and returned to Tilliwik Creek. I despaired of proof. I had been alone when the discovery and staking were made. Even if Forster had been with me, his word, corroborating mine, would have added little weight, for he was an interested party. I camped on Discovery claim and sat, with my head in my hands, for a solid day, going over each act of my discovering, of my staking. In the evening something impelled me to withdraw one of the stakes from the ground and examine it. The proof I sought was found! Next day I hurried to Candle and preesnted myself at the office of that busy attorney, Mr. Walter Brant. I found him deep in preparations for sending out a gang of men to begin development work on the claims of Cartwright and himself on Tilliwik Creek. Well they knew that the ground was rich!

"I called him aside and told him I had found the proof.

"'Indeed?' he said with a supercilious raising of his eyebrows. 'And what may that proof be?'

"I took from my pocket a piece of wood. It was the lower six inches of the stake I had examined the night before. 'This,' said I, 'is the end of the center stake on Discovery claim. I cut it off, replacing the stake. This stake is the same stake I planted on that ground a month before Cartwright was there. The upper end, whittled by me and marked, has been rewhittled to obliterate my pencil markings, and remarked. Having been whittled off, the marks of my knife have been lost. But this lower end of the stake has not been touched. The stake was not withdrawn from the ground, and the sharpening of it, which was done with my knife, remains as it was. Here are the knife marks—six surfaces or facets, each one smooth except for a little raised line or ridge. See it?'

"'I see it, certainly,' replied Brant coolly.

"I drew out my jackknife, then, and showed him that the large blade had a deep nick in it. I fitted the nick to the ridge on one of the facets. 'You see,' I said, 'it was this nick that made this ridge. There are half a dozen or more such ridges on every stake on those six claims I located that day. What better proof can you want? It is circumstantial evidence—the best in the world when it is plain and simple; for a knife and wood do not lie.'

"He studied the stake end, weighing it in his hand. 'No,' he replied slowly, 'a knife and wood do not lie. But you do. The next thing you better try to prove is that you haven't just filed that little nick in your knife to fit the ridges which you have found in Cartwright's stakes!'

"With that I struck him, and he drew a revolver.

"'I've a good mind to kill you here and now,' he said, his hand shaking. 'What I suggest is that you get out of this town and stay out. I have considerable influence here!'

"I took his advice, for the time being. I knew I had better put distance between myself and Walter Brant and Eugene Cartwright. I went to Nome and consulted a lawyer—after working for the price to pay one. He told me that he believed my story, but that if it were to constitute proof of my ownership of Tilliwik Creek a hundred men could prove that they owned the richest claim in the Nome district. He was sorry. He accepted no money from me. It was my strangest experience in Alaska!

"It took me nearly a year to find my four partners. They were alive and well, but scattered. They thought me dead. Forster was about to start to find, if not me, at least the creek where I had made the discovery. We moved down here—one

at a time. We have never seemed to be acquainted with each other. We played lone hands, yet in secret, at distant rendezvous we met at intervals. Three of us obtained work on Tilliwik Creek. I need not tell you who those three are.

"It was our purpose to know all about Tilliwik Creek, its output, its prospects, and the nature and habits of its 'owners.' I have never believed that you, Skillilee, or you, Dyer, knew the infamous facts of Cartwright's title."

Montrose paused and surveyed, in turn, the members of the partnership known as the Big Four.

Dyer and Skillilee were looking furtively at the other two. They had nothing to say, a loyalty too old to sunder at the touch of instant revelation paralyzing their tongues.

"Montrose——" Cartwright, looking at the wet ice at his feet began. But the bandit stopped him.

"Wait! There are only two things you can say. The consequences of either are serious. If I am to be a liar you must take me out there, as near the edge as you please, and kill me with your hands, or throw me into the sea. If you are to be the liar, the cruel thief—the consequences are still serious. Wait!"

"Will you let me say a word, Mr. Montrose?" asked Brant with what calmness he could summon. There was silence. "I just want to say, in behalf of both of us—Cartwright and myself—you are, if you will pardon me for saying so, a victim of circumstances. You were alone, as you say. You can hardly blame me for deciding, as between you, a stranger, and Mr. Cartwright, my intimate friend and mining associate—for deciding in Cartwright's favor. As for Cartwright, remember, please, that all over Alaska, on every creek and gulch and draw, even out on the naked tundras in the vicinity of known placer ground like Candle Creek, claims are staked wildly. Many of these are never recorded, and by far the greater number of those recorded are never worked, never prospected even, in fact never seen again. Even if your stakes were there, the ground not being recorded, Cartwright would have felt justified in regarding the ground as abandoned. Mind, I do not say your stakes were there!"

"Yet in your heart you know they were," said Montrose sternly, pointing an accusing finger at the pale attorney. "You were ruthless, both of you—thieves not only of the gold, of far more of it than we, its rightful owners, have taken, but of our lives, our faith, our hope—families, women praying for their men, their children. Well do you know what this struggle in the North means to the humankind that wage it."

"You are right, Al," said Bascom, deeply moved. "Let me have the rest of the story, unless you still value secrecy."

"No, we are too near the brink for further secrecy! The rest is quickly told, though the steps were many. Long before I returned to Candle, after my interview with the Nome lawyer, and other lawyers later, I had taken an oath to resort to no violence against these men. I believed they deserved killing. I still believe it. But my sober judgment told me that nothing but a passing satisfaction of the passion that gnawed me was to be gained by violence. Instead, I made a resolution that, come what might, I would regain my rights if it lay within my power and that of my partners. A suit being out of the question, and no other lawful means available, we purposed taking the gold. This was our object, then, in concentrating at Candle and Tilliwik. We had to play a waiting game. The first year the ground was opened up, the second year it was better exploited, the pay-streak limits found, the work blocked out. What gold was extracted went largely for this past expense, for wages and equipment. We knew that the next year would witness the thorough working of the claims. They were good miners, these thieves. We give them full credit for that. This, the third year, was the appropriate time, practically and psychologically, to strike.

"In winter, we might readily have got off overland, or in summer either, for we would have been prepared in every conceivable way for a quicker retreat than any pursuit that could have been organized. At this time of year, however, the chances were too slim. Hiding on the trackless ice of the coast was the only logical means. We prepared a camp in the place you know. We decoyed you up to the head of Tilliwik Creek by leaving a backward track. Even without it we should probably have gained our hiding place in time, unobserved; but we threw you off as an additional precaution. You did well to find us at all. It was the native, of course."

"Why did you try to keep me away,

Montrose, if you believed that no one could track you out on the ice?"

"Because, in case we *were* tracked, I did not want to drag you, along with our enemies, to probable death!"

"But the others?"

"We prepared to drag them with us if we were caught and forced to take to the sea. The end of the point of ice we had selected was carefully prepared, as you know. But *how* carefully you can hardly guess! The point was selected last fall. We stayed out on the ice, with sled and canoe for days, taking our lives in our hands. Again and again, as the ice was forming we selected points that we thought would surely be the last of the ice—the outer edge. Then new bits of ice, small fields, stray bergs would come and our work was for nothing. The method was to place bumpers of drift logs at three points on the edge so that when the new area drifted in—one small enough for our purpose—it might be stopped by these impediments and leave a crack all round. These logs were low—at the water's surface. They froze over and were unobservable. But in the spring the crack would be the first to melt, leaving the piece free except for the three barriers. Late in the spring two of us went out there and laid charges at these three points, leading the concealed wires to our little stronghold at the base of the berg. We hid supplies here—what you have seen.

"We were resolved that, rather than be taken, we would drift out. The time would be too early for any boats to pursue us. It was impossible, short of days, to get a safe craft into the open water of the sound. The sequel has proved this. Moreover, we threw up the low wall of ice back of which we lured you. You had stopped the other side of the crack. We pretended to surrender and brought you across it to the protection of the closer wall. We knew that these four men would be in the vanguard of our pursuers, if we were tracked to the ice. Then we should take them with us to our doom! We waited for you to send back some of the men for help. I tried to get you and this innocent Eskimo away—safely on the other side of the crack; though we took chances in doing it, for you would make a rapid run for help for the captured men. But I felt quite certain that when you saw that we had spared you a sense of gratitude would moderate your zeal. I think you would have developed a sprained ankle, Will Bascom!"

A silence, deathlike, in which no man stirred, followed the ending of this strange narrative. Bascom's mind was far away—on his little home in Candle. But abruptly it leaped away, along the slow course of the drifting of the little islet with its tragic group of desperate men and their now equally desperate victims. And the question, long debated between himself and his companions, framed itself into words for the answering of the man who had told all.

"Al, I want to know one thing. Will you tell it to me?"

"Ask it and see."

"If you answer you will answer truthfully, will you?"

"Have you ever known me to lie?"

"No, Al. The question is this: Have you arranged for, or do you expect a boat of any sort, to look for us—rescue us?"

Five men hung breathless upon the answer, their heads craned, their eyes round, their lips apart.

"*No!*" replied Montrose.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CANDLE BURNS LOW.

FIVE men sat on their damp blankets, on wet straw, staring at each other. With scarcely an added word the men called robbers had filed off and into their own camp, the remains of their rampart between.

"Cartwright," said Bascom earnestly, "you felt this thing in your bones the night you were robbed. And you knew it when you saw the handwriting on that note. Why didn't you put me wise?"

"What good would it have done," replied Cartwright dully. His voice had the sodden quality of weak despair.

"I begged you to tell me all—both of you. If you had explained about the quarrel over the title, even——"

Brant interrupted—but dully, like his client and partner. "It was hardly a quarrel, Bascom. Two short interviews. We practically forgot about it."

"Brant," said Bascom, leaning toward him, "you lie! No men, doing what you two did, ever forget. You might forget the man Montrose—his look, his figure. You might forget the month, the place, the details. But you could never forget the thing that happened, the thing you did."

"You believe I'm guilty—*I?*" Brant's voice shrilled thinly.

"Guilty, yes, as guilty as Cartwright, even if you didn't know for certain that he had jumped those claims. If you did not question him it was because you did not want to. But you knew enough not to look further if it was not in your heart to beat and cheat a gallant man out of his life's one chance. You dog!"

"We gave up our guns—and pistols, Bascom—to you." Brant smiled miserably. "I'd kill you for that—before the water gets us!"

"Brant!" Dyer, sitting not three feet from him yelled it at his head. Suddenly he rose and drove his naked fist into the lawyer's eye. The thud against the soft flesh was sickening. Instantly the man turned and seized Cartwright by the hair, pulling him to the ice. "Kill you with his hands," he screeched. "That's what he said. I'll do it for him. You'll sell me a half interest in a claim you stole, will you, you rat!" He beat him with his fists.

Bascom and Skillilee sprang toward them, dragging Dyer away. The coolest of the lot he had been, but there was madness in his blood distilled by days of a secret brooding upon his fate.

Montrose, Forster and Tommy Trimble came running out.

"Tie him up," ordered Montrose. "We want none of that."

Dyer was sobbing. He seemed dazed, unconscious of what he had done. Bascom cut a lashing from the sled and made a hobble for his feet. "That'll do, for him, Al. He's liable to throw himself into the water. We'll watch him. It's all right, Joe." The man hunter's heart went out to him. For somehow he felt that the outburst, maniacal though it had seemed, was the precipitate of a moral revulsion. The man had been sound, honest, a hater of the like of Cartwright and Brant.

"Excuse me, Skillilee," he said when he had Dyer on his blankets. "I'm going off a while." The fourth of the shamed, cowed men sat frowning, his head in his hands, paying little heed to the quarreling about him.

Behind the wall, Bascom sat on the one remaining log and lit his pipe. He was silent for a long time. Then he looked from face to face. The six men responsible for his plight were smoking quietly. There was efficacy in the long preparation these men must have made for their doom. They were like brave men in a death cell when their time draws near. What shrinkings, what shudderings the spirit suffers in its approach to liberation these men had suffered long ago. They were composed. Bascom envied them.

"How long will this ice last, boys?" he questioned.

"Ask Gough," replied Montrose, pointing to the silent, thickset man. "He's a whaler. Knows ice like an Eskimo."

Gough shrugged his great shoulders. "This lump, a long time. To-morrow or next day the rest of it is liable to mush up and float off. We'll be cuttin' holts for feet and hands up there before long." He waved a careless hand back of him at the steep shining slope of the berg. "Maybe we can stick on here for days, yet—'less we get sick of it and take a header. The divin's good. No danger of hitting bottom, I guess."

"Isn't there anything we can do, boys?" questioned Bascom. "Every day betters the chance of a steam whaler heading north through the straits and getting within vision of us. And you know they keep a sharp lookout, day and night, for whales. A man with a glass. Why not get a blanket on top of the peak? The immunity offer can be made tight enough; and, backed by your story, no jury in Alaska would convict you fellows of anything more than a misdemeanor! Don't you love life?"

He thought those five men, partners for ten years, had grown into an inner semblance of each other, so startlingly alike was the facial response he observed to the plea and the question. Common aims, common sufferings, common sorrows had cemented them, seemingly; and they presented a front of stone. The only response was a shake of the head from Montrose. Whereat Bascom nearly lost control of himself.

"Montrose, if it wasn't for the way we're disorganized out there"—the deputy flung out an arm toward the Tilliwik men—"I'll be damned if I wouldn't lead 'em against you and *make* you listen to reason! The thing's gone too far. If you'd murdered any one or faced certain disgrace and punishment I could see where you'd have a right to commit suicide rather than be taken. But the way things are—why, you're crazy! You've brooded over this wrong of

yours so long you're simply not responsible. Trust to me. I——"

Montrose rose suddenly and beckoned Bascom away. They went to the farthest safe point of the islet.

"Listen, Will. I'm only interested in one thing—a point of psychology, if you like. I'm curious as to the working of the mind and heart of that *thing* that is called Eugene Cartwright. Why does he hold to his miserable mask of innocence?"

"You challenged him to deny or confess. But you counseled him to wait!"

"I did. I wanted to give him time to think. He has thought. How can he do anything else than think—of that and of approaching death? Find out if he has dropped the mask. I am curious."

Bascom looked at the man in amazement. Teacher ten years before? College professor, rather. He must have been. It was only the academic passion that could account for the supremacy of such an interest in the mind of Montrose at a time like this. Or was it pride in a righteousness to be proved, vindicated, before his partners who might, conceivably, have doubted him from the beginning in his tale of having uncovered riches—riches for them all? Bascom had no will to thwart him in this. It was rather an admirable thing. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll sound him out—the cur!"

He made his way, his steps slow, to the four men crouched in their blankets, staring at the low sun. It was near to midnight. Every few minutes little masses of icy crystals at the edge succumbed to the mild lap of the sea and slid away with a thin, crinkling sound. In a few hours, when the sun rose higher, Bascom, in his mind's eye, could see this process going on very rapidly.

"Cartwright!"

"What do you want?"

"Tell me the truth?"

Cartwright's eyes were like slits. "I've been thinking—hard. I've whirled the thing over in my mind—over and over. Ever stop to think why folks say 'over and over?' Because you whirl it, like—like that feller, whoever he was, that whirled the piece of ice with the note tied to it before he threw it out to you. That was before we cut loose."

"Tell me the truth, I say. About the staking of the claims!"

"I've been whirling everything over, I tell you. This man—and his bunch—they love life like you and me. It stands to reason, doesn't it? Well, there's a boat crawling up somewhere. Maybe it keeps hidden by the berg, and whirls as we whirl. If we could climb it now——"

"You've got whirling on the brain, Cartwright," exclaimed Bascom disgustedly. He looked at Brant, his broad, flabby face aged years in a week; at Skillilee, still sunk in his quiet dejection; at Dyer, dazed, calm. "You owe it to these men, if not to yourself, to make a clean breast of it—before the end."

"They love life as well as you or me, I tell you," the man repeated cunningly. "It stands to reason."

Yet Bascom felt that it was only terror that made him cling, against the fear itself, to the pitiful belief. The man's real mind knew better. He left him, reported the result of the interview to Montrose, and sought his blankets. These he carried to the place, a little apart, where Abenrunyak, in his caribou-skin bag, was peacefully sleeping.

He awoke to the strange sensation of rocking and sprang to a sitting posture. It was true, the berg islet rocked—or undulated, gently, rather. But his sensibilities were strung so tautly the movement had magnified itself to his sleeping consciousness and roused him just in time to see full two thirds of the remaining flat part of the islet rise up out of the water into which it had fallen. One might jump across to what had broken away. Bascom understood that the heavy end of the isle, the berg itself, must have been exerting an upward strain on the flat portion, and the honeycombing of the latter had reached the final stage of weakness.

A quick side glance showed him his companions, staring in horror. The break had come within five feet of Dyer's outspread blankets. Rising, Bascom went over to Dyer, helped him to his feet, and led him farther back. The other men were rising stealthily, as though fearing that any sudden movement would cause another and a fatal breaking away. The sun was high and strong.

Their six enemies, if enemies they still were, had stepped upon the wall which now was little more than a long mound.

Montrose spoke. "You men had better move your belongings close up here. Come

back of the wall with us. There'll be nothing but the berg left before long!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRUTH.

AT its longest part the islet had been about a hundred and fifty yards from the crack to the peak. The latter, the berg, was scarcely broader at its base than it was high. Fifty feet would easily cover its span from edge to edge—sloping, slippery. The flattish, slightly circular camp of the fugitives still protruded from its base, irregularly fringed by the space outside the mound wall.

Retreating from this narrow, perilous margin, the six menaced men entered the camp of the robbers. The plain of the islet was gone. The berg that had been merely a rugged monument at its end was now all that remained of it—a small iceberg with a flattish collar half encircling its base, to which twelve men clung.

For days they clung!

Strange days, strangely filled, they were —with tragedy implicit in a train of happenings trivial for the most part, a never-ending succession of details, natural, unnatural, but details all, seldom lifting their heads above the level of the sordid or commonplace—of the routine of life enacting itself stubbornly on a stage of death.

It seemed to Bascom that it was this very quality of the commonplace—of cooking, eating, sleeping, of banal, yawning converse —that gave to the scene its unearthly hue of strangeness and of tragedy. But another thought occurred to him in those long hours when his mind, resolutely shutting out the picture of his home in Candle, fell into reflection upon the things within his eyes and ears. Here were men, two groups of them, who, under the logic of cause and effect, must be filled with the bitterest rancor. And upon his own side, at least, this group was— or should have been—broken individually into enmity—Dyer and Skillilee toward Brant and Cartwright, Brant and Cartwright toward each other and Bascom himself against them all.

They flared, it was true. At trifles murderous hate leaped up, and several times in that long interlude of waiting in the drip of the melting berg Bascom or Montrose or Forster had to lay rough hands on their companions in misery. But for the most part listlessness marked the truce and the waiting, and politeness sometimes gruff, sometimes elaborate, but more often natural and kind.

After the surprise—to those who knew ice the least—of the deferring, day after day of the final catastrophe, it became known to them that there was vast difference between the behavior of the floe and that of the berg. The flat ice had been shallow, its rotting away rapid. But the berg lay deep in the sea; its volume was immense under water, and as the sun melted the part exposed, the lessened gravity of the whole thrust it gradually up. The collar remaining of the floe, which was their cramped, narrow camp, was higher—a shelf now, out of reach of the lapping sea. But it was melting under them and for two days the Montrose men, determined, it appeared, to play out the game of life to the end, had been busy cutting ledges into the solid wall of the towering berg at their backs. Here they might stand or cling, but cooking or sleeping would be out of the question.

Cartwright joined in this work—feverishly. He had made a truce indeed with his enemies. He spoke to Montrose, who spoke to him, directed him. Indeed the tall miner of the discarded black mask was almost gentle with this, his chief enemy, and saw to it that the covert hate of his own party, all of whom had evidently come to a belief in Cartwright's responsibility for their plight, did not rob the man of food or warmth or such safety as the berg afforded. There was no ostentation in this attitude of Montrose or his men; it was quiet, unobtrusive, as if with the baring through their leader of that common wound which they had sought to heal through a remedy denied them by the law, they had purged themselves of all venom and were satisfied with a revenge which the blind forces of the arctic were wreaking upon themselves as well as upon their enemies.

There was a one or two, a white or black, a yes or no in the minds of the castaways during this hideously long interlude. It was put before them frequently by one or another, tired of turning it over silently—in his mind: Will it be starvation or drowning? It was a theme of debate at first. Toward the end the point became taboo. One of the several quarrels had arisen from it; a knife had been drawn—by Skillilee against Morrison. But no interdiction of

Bascom or Montrose could taboo it from the brain!

The food was nearly gone, the last of it was cooked as a precaution against their being compelled to take to the wall of the berg at any hour. Bedding would have to be abandoned—everything but that which might lie upon the narrow ledges they chipped out above their heads.

The hour came unexpectedly—and took them almost unawares, notwithstanding a close watch was kept. At twelve noon, a week from the day of the mingling of the two parties, as if it had required the strongest rays of the sun to effect the parting, the collar began to give way, and at a cry from Gough, the man who knew ice as the landsman knows earth, the twelve men scrambled to their perches upon the wall, lifting the pots of food and the bag of skillet-made bread to the prepared ledges. Montrose had taken his place by the side of his enemy, Cartwright, and he had motioned the man who had been deputy marshal of Candle to stand upon the other side. The shelf was narrow; only Tommy Trimble, slender, catlike, could pass.

In the way the berg lay in the sea, the sun beat upon them. They were hot—except their backs. But in the berg's gradual rotation, they lost the sun and toward late afternoon a chill seized them. But they moved sidewise in unison—backward, forward, beating their arms and were comfortable again until—blessed relief—they turned into the sun once more and were warm, just right, until late in the evening. The water they had collected from their pool and carried up in a granite pail was gone by that time; but they managed without water, shivering, until the sun beat upon them again early next morning, when Gough, jamming the water bucket and an empty pot until their edges were straight, fastened them above his head against the side of the berg where they caught the continuous thin stream of melting ice. In this way the wall clingers assuaged their keener thirst. But Cartwright took none!

A new terror came later that day. It was not the terror of hunger, for, with the consuming of the last of the food, hunger they faced as a thing expected, a torture that would grow acute only slowly. But the shelf!

By some insidious effect of foot pressure, or reflection, the foot space became slowly rounding. This downward-curving slant had only to grow to reach an angle of slippage. Then——

Cartwright, strangely enough, was the first to discover it. He cried out as though he had seen a ship.

"It's getting slippery. Look at it—the edge is melting!"

"Those moccasins are wet. Poor stuff for gripping," said Montrose. "Want my shoe packs? I have very strong toes. I think I can keep steady for a while with your moccasins. But there's no danger yet. You fancy it. Not for an hour or two, anyhow!"

"Only an hour or two, you say?" repeated Cartwright, his large black eyes, shrunken latterly into the arches of his forehead, strangely lit. "In an hour or two we slip—slip—and *in!* There's nothing out there in the water back of this berg—no rescue boat that's been turning when the berg turned?"

"None," answered Montrose.

"None," said Forster, who stood, elbow to elbow with him.

"I would have sworn you loved life too much to——"

He stared—glared—upon Montrose and Forster. He turned and glared at Bascom, who almost ate him with his riveted blue eyes.

"No!" he cried. "Keep your shoes. Keep your water. Keep—I *know,* now. It's true. You *don't* love life too much to—— Throw me in—don't wait. No, wait! Wait! *I did it!* I just whittled off your stakes and put my markings on. I thought you was just another of thousands, who stake and go away. And when you came to me at Candle—it was too late. I had gold in my head—more of it than ever I had a chance at before. Throw me in, Montrose. I'm getting what's coming to me. I've murdered myself and all you men. Push me, or by God I'll jump!"

"No!" Montrose gripped his arm. "One thing you can do—for the honor of my wife and children, and Forster's, and all of us. Write it, and I'll put it in a bottle. I have one here, somewhere."

"I'll do it. I'll sign it—quick!" Sweat dropped from Cartwright's face.

"I thought you might—finally," said Montrose quietly. He drew out a folded sheet from his pocket, and a fountain pen. "Read it!"

"You, Bascom," said the penitent man, shaking his head shudderingly.

Bascom took the paper, and read it aloud:

"ARCTIC OCEAN.

"KNOW ALL MEN by these presents, that I, Eugene Cartwright, of my own free will and not acting under duress, menace, or undue influence of any sort, do now declare, in the presence of the undersigned witnesses, that I did, three years ago, in staking on Tilliwik Creek Discovery claim and One and Two Below and One Above, find and use the stakes already there, marked and purporting to be there placed by Albert Montrose thirty-two days before. I whittled out his marks, destroyed his notices, and substituted my own. He and those for whom he staked were and are the rightful owners of those claims and the gold then and now therein."

"Quick!" whined Cartwright. "Lemme sign!" And sign he did with shaking hand.

Solemnly, without a word, the paper was passed from one to the other and witnessed. Only Dyer, left purposely to one of the end places, was not handed the paper, Montrose fearing a flare-up of his madness.

"The bottle—quick!" Cartwright was wringing his hands. Bascom imprisoned one of them in his own.

"Cool, there!" he said soothingly.

"The bottle!"

"Wait!" replied Montrose, carefully pocketing the paper. *"At it, Ford!"*

The thickset sailor, at the other end of the line on the ice wall, alert, waiting, turned at the bidding. Carefully edging along the shelf, he drew from his trousers leg a long slender bar of steel, which he stuck into a hole in a slightly protruding block of ice invisible to the other men because of the wall's curvature. Putting his weight upon the bar he pried out the block of ice, which fell with a splash into the water.

Then he crawled within the berg!

CHAPTER XV.

TRIUMPH.

BRANT, leaning across his neighbor—his old and trusted employee, Tommy Trimble—witnessed the disappearance of the odd man of the Montrose gang with a countenance in which interest, alertness, long dead to it, had suddenly returned.

"A big hole to cache a bottle in!" he exclaimed.

"A bottle!" Skillilee echoed feebly. "It's the gold cache. You all been so busy with your troubles—me, too—you forgot it. Not ten minutes past it struck me all of a sudden—it must have gone down when the camp caved away. But they didn't have it buried there but higher up, around the corner of the berg. Bottle hell!"

"What chance, Al, is there in a bottle?" asked Bascom curiously. "The set of the current is said to be north all summer, with maybe a dozen or two vessels in the whole ocean. Of course, after years, it may get into the Pacific. Have you got an address on the back of that paper? I didn't turn it over to look."

"No, there is no address upon it, William Bascom," was the measured reply. An inscrutable look lay in the man's face, from which the marble seemed gone. It was flesh and blood. "Time!" he said in a louder tone. The eager eyes of Trimble and Gallagher were upon him.

At this word those two men turned instantly and followed the course of the sailor. They disappeared, one after the other, into the berg.

"Strange!" exclaimed Brant in a strident voice. He seemed suddenly to have regained a professional manner—as though he pierced the duplicity of a witness. Quickly he turned and began following Trimble, the last to disappear.

Forster whipped out an automatic. "Here, my man, stop that!"

The lawyer, partly turning at the words and catching the glint of the weapon, came to a sudden halt. "What's the idea?" Suddenly he went, his nerves giving.

"That's no cache, is it, Al?" asked Bascom tremulously. "Why so large a chamber for a few sacks of gold?"

"To hell with the gold!" broke in Cartwright. "I'm slipping. Come with me, boys. Don't let me go alone!"

With a quick movement Montrose seized him by the shoulders.

"Don't force me in, you fiend!" shrieked Cartwright. "Let me jump—like a man."

"Be still, fool!" commanded Montrose. "I'm merely sitting you down. You'll hold all right—long enough—that way." He eased the distraught miner to a sitting position, his legs dangling over the abyss.

Cartwright looked up puzzled. "Ain't you fellers slipping?"

Montrose laughed. For a man so implacable, of so saturnine a mood as his, it was almost a hearty laugh.

"No. The rest of the ledge wasn't made so slippery as where you stood—not so sloping."

Bascom, whose quietude masked a humming brain, heard it in a dawn of understanding. He stood riveted, a spectator of the action of the men—of Montrose, Forster and Morrison, particularly. His own men he knew to be, like himself, struggling with a rising emotion inchoate, nameless, choking utterance, hammering upon their hearts. But the bandits—the remainder of them! Their eyes were upon the water, close to the berg, the side of the berg into the wall of which three of their party had crawled. Suddenly a voice from the water—from the place of their focused gaze: "All right!"

In a moment, the bow of a gasoline launch nosed into sight, close under. Had he not needed instantly to busy himself in restraining the precariously balanced Cartwright he might himself have fallen into the water from the sheer surprise of it. Holding an arm of the man who had confessed, Montrose clutching his other shoulder, Bascom stared hard into the glinting eyes of his old friend of Klondike days.

"Al—you damned old fraud, you!"

Montrose, unsmiling, slowly, drolly winked. "There's our bottle," he said, pointing at the launch.

"I told you! I told you!" shouted Cartwright, essaying to wave the arms that were held. "I told you they loved life like we do. It stands to reason!"

Forster, having something to do and the footing treacherous, was bothered. "Shut up, you swine," he admonished him brutally. "Chuck it, Ford!"

He caught a rope from the launch, which was now nearly beneath them, and passed it to Morrison who, thrusting his head and shoulders into the aperture—which, obviously, had led to the water on the hidden side of the berg—made it fast to some solid projection within. When his head emerged he tested the rope and found it tight.

Below, Gough took in the slack of the line and secured it. "All ready," he called up in the cheerful tone of a man back to his accustomed work.

Cartwright scrambled to his feet, aiding his rise by the body of Montrose. "I'm coming. Fine work!"

"Leper!" Montrose flung at him. But he laughed. "Wait till you're invited. Stand still or I'll make you. Slide down, men."

Morrison, Forster, descended the rope. The others looked at Montrose, who nodded to Bascom. "You next, Will."

Bascom, then the native, then Dyer—turned suddenly right again—finally Skillilee, slid successfully into the launch, which was of some little tonnage, a stout, ice-resisting craft, decked over. Montrose, who had held to the rope to steady it for the others, suddenly seized hold of it and in a moment had descended to the launch.

Brant looked down on them pitifully. New fears assailed him. "Surely, friends, we are not to be left to—left to——"

Montrose replied: "We've gone aboard in the order to which we're entitled. You should have seen that. You two may come —last!"

Gough, standing by at the bow, raised his head. He thrust out his tremendous jaw. "This is my boat, Al. It's clean, damn it. You got your paper. Leave 'em where they be, the gutter snipes!"

It was probably unpremeditated. Montrose, afterward, said it was. But he had smiled when he said it—which may have meant nothing. But an astounding thing happened.

"Take him, boys; take him, men," cried Cartwright, shoving Brant against the rope. "I lied to him, too. I swore there were no stakes. Take him, and lemme stay. I ain't no good." His teeth chattered in the abjectness of his terror of a cruel death, yet he pushed his friend forward and himself shrank back against the wet and glistening berg.

"Oh, I guess we'd better take them, Ford," said Montrose to the sailor. "You can scrub out your launch after we land them in Kotzebue Sound."

Brant threw his leg over the rope; but Montrose, his eyes twinkling, shouted to him to stop.

"One moment, before we let you come down, Brant. Give me your professional opinion about that paper you signed as a witness. Is it sound and tight in law?"

The leading attorney of Candle Creek peered down. He cleared his throat. "In my opinion as a lawyer the confession is absolutely binding. I will undertake to uphold it in any court in the land!"

"Come on down, then," said Montrose. Aside he whispered to Bascom. "I should say it *is* binding. The best lawyer in Seattle drew it up!"

Cartwright, alone on the ledge, was looking straight up in the air, his features convulsed with his struggle. Montrose called

him by name. "You want me hanged for your murder?" he asked him. "I came mighty close to it three years ago. Slide down!" Cartwright slid.

Gough and Trimble, having disappeared astern with several of the others, a chugging was heard—intermittent, irregular at first, as of a cold and rusty engine. When it rose to speed, the rope was cut by Morrison, and the launch, turning southward through a glassy sea, left the rotting berg behind. Montrose, gravely saluting it, met the lighted eye of Dash Bascom.

"So!" said the man hunter. "You had cut a cave in the berg last fall and hid this boat in it! It was all carefully framed for the one purpose of——"

"Confession, yes," admitted Montrose smilingly. "A voluntary one, wrung from the man not by threats, which would have made it invalid, but by his own conscience —his fear of meeting his Maker with a soul unpurged. He was obdurate, forcing us to go to extremes—to stage the last spectacular act before he gave way. Now you know that we did not try, did not want, to escape unobserved, but only to appear to! We took the gold only to lure the Cartwright men away—to kidnap them. What we wanted was justice, vindication—the right to the gold as well as the gold itself!"

"Ah, the gold itself!"

It was Brant, who had approached and overheard. His manner was polite, ingratiating.

"I observe—looking over the outfit in the boat—in fact we all observe, that the gold is not here. Evidently it was buried under the ice of the camp and dropped into the sea when we were obliged to take to the wall of the iceberg. I am sorry, truly sorry. While we—myself and my partners—have virtually renounced our right to it, it is exceedingly regrettable that you men, its rightful owners, should have lost it after your heroic struggle to possess it. However, there is still some gold in the claims, a little nest egg for each of you. I will do all in my power to smooth your path toward getting and keepng it."

"I've no doubt you will," replied Montrose dryly. "However, your sympathy, so feelingly expressed, is entirely misplaced. The gold is not lost. It never left the land. What you saw us carrying over the ice when you first discovered us in our retreat was bags filled with sand. We were not so foolish as to risk on ice and water so precious a thing to our families as that gold. Every ounce of it is buried in a place long ago prepared for it—a place known to only two human beings besides ourselves. One of them is Ada Forster. The other is Mollie Montrose!"

In the next number—"The Crusader's Casket," a complete book-length novel by Roy Norton.

THOSE UNHUMOROUS BRITISHERS

BRITISHERS take their politics as they take their sport—seriously. And, as every American who ever has attended a vaudeville show knows, an Englishman can never see the point of a joke. However:

A young woman candidate for a seat in the House of Commons was interrupted by a gentleman who shouted: "What do you know?"

"A good deal," said the lady.

"Well," came back the heckler, "how many ribs has a pig got?"

"I don't know, but if you'll come up here I'll count them," said the lady.

A candidate was speaking in London. Apparently what he said didn't appeal especially to a woman in the crowd. "If you were my husband I'd give you poison!" she shouted.

The speaker regarded her seriously. "If I were your husband, madam, I'd take it," he replied.

Another candidate was being sarcastic at the expense of his opponent, a lawyer. "I have made inquiries at the bar about him," he sneered, "and he seems to be totally unknown."

"Mister, maybe you inquired at the wrong bar," said one of the unhumorous Britishers in the back of the hall.

Loot

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "The Heavy Hand," "Sorrowful Island," Etc.

The underworld sends an embassy to tempt the wilderness.

IT is a very far cry indeed from the semi-underworld of Cordova and Lower Main to the upper reach of Jervis Inlet. An undertaking that promised easy money, when considered and talked over with acquisitive eagerness there, seemed less alluring, far less certain now, to Kitty Ross as she looked up at gloomy, forested escarpments frowning over her in the starlit night. It was a new and depressing vista for Kitty to face, this silence, this solitude, these melancholy cliffs and slopes lining a dark shore, enormous mountains towering starkly in an immensity of space. The hard sophistication of the half world that lives by its nimble wits, preying on what the tides of commerce bring floating to a seaport town didn't seem quite sufficient for this venture that "Monk" and Kitty Ross had planned as a coup which should fatten their bank roll against a hard winter.

Baldly stated, Monk and Kitty were there in a sixteen-foot Linton rowboat a hundred miles from their accustomed haunts for the purpose of robbery by aid of a graceless fraud. Like other predatory animals the denizens of the underworld often find it convenient to hunt in pairs, and their hunting sometimes takes strange turns.

Monk lay on his oars now, squinting his foxy eyes alongshore at a yellow square glowing in the darkness which lay thick between the sea and the sharp uplift of a mountain range. Monk felt the need of rehearsing their program or of encouraging his companion—perhaps both. Even a casehardened crook finds a disturbing difference between the gloom and silence of a dark alley and the gloom and silence of a lonely coast at midnight. Monk was aware that Kitty lacked his hardness. He sometimes cursed her for being soft. Yet now and then he found her softness useful. In their various—occasionally nefarious—enterprises Kitty was very dependable within certain limits. She had a curious unreasoning loyalty which Monk had come to rely on—a loyalty which he knew was not common among women of her type. In fact, classifying Kitty, Monk never allowed for environment; he didn't make any distinction between a natural instinct to prey on

one's fellows—which summed him up—and a tendency to move along lines of least resistance which had carried Kitty so far along the dubious road she traveled. Monk knew nothing of Kitty's antecedents and cared less. She was young, good looking in a deceptively wistful fashion that powerfully appealed to men. She had made that sort of appeal to Monk and under its influence he had married her quite as casually as he would have bought a new hat. After three years of life together Monk finally accepted the fact that Kitty had a deep, ingrained respect for the initial ceremony—which meant nothing whatever to Monk. Nor could Monk understand why once in a blue moon Kitty had qualms about plucking some well-feathered bird. But he could understand how she felt at this moment because he knew how he felt himself—a little nervous, as if exposed to some unfamiliar danger, some vague, impersonal menace. Monk did not know that the simple act of facing a naked wilderness shrinks a man to his true proportion; or expands him to the occasion—if he is that sort of man.

All his life Monk had been a creature of streets and crowds, of dance halls and saloons, of race tracks and hotels. The smell of gasoline was incense to his nostrils. The clang of a street-car gong was to him like unto the bells of a temple. Monk was of the crowd, unused to venturing beyond the limits of crowd psychology, uncomfortable in the face of solitude. Only a pressing need and the conviction of a good haul had brought him so far afield.

Under his flinty hardness Monk was now uneasy, without quite knowing why. He assumed that Kitty must be so. Hence the reassurance of a voiced plan—the spur to action:

"That's his light, see," Monk whispered. "Now the play is: I set you ashore; if he don't spot me you spiel him a line about your man gettin' sore on you an' maroonin' you. See? You've seen his light an' hike to it. If he comes down I peddle the bull about us lookin' for a preëmption. See? Then to-morrow, or when the sign's right, we pull a fake row. I go up in the air and row off cussin' you, after he butts in—which he naturally will. You stick around till you get a chance at his stake. These guys are always easy for a woman. I'll be handy every night after dark. Once you get the stuff an' get away from the float with his rowboat he's stranded, see? You strike two matches ten seconds apart once you're clear—or if you want me. Got it straight in the old bean, Kit?"

"I got it," Kitty answered. "Only somehow it don't look such a cinch as it did. Suppose he ain't got the stuff? Suppose he gets gay and festive with me—an' me all alone with him?"

"He's got it all right," Monk whispered with a trace of impatience. "Everybody knows he has. And," he added cynically, "you know how to take care of yourself. If you don't you'll never learn younger. You got to take chances if you want to wear diamonds. A good-lookin' jane can make these hicks eat out of her hand. You know that."

"All right," Kitty answered. "For God's sake let's quit chewin' the rag and land. This sittin' out in a boat in the dark gives me the creeps. I'm freezin' to death besides."

"Don't you make a sound till you're at the door," Monk warned. "It's a stronger play if he don't see me at all—if you just walk in on him with your tale of woe in the middle of the night."

Having once engaged in petty waterfront piracy Monk knew all the methods of rowing noiselessly. Without a sound he shoved the boat alongshore in the dense shadow cast by the hills and brought up beside a small landing float where Dave Lusk's rowboat was tied.

Two hundred feet beyond and a little above a single uncurtained window shone like a beacon. The gloom on the water was as nothing to the sooty black that enveloped the house and its surroundings. There stood revealed no outline, no item or object detached from that impenetrable shade. They sat a moment listening; nothing reached their ears but the faint slapping of wavelets on a rocky beach and the far murmur of water pouring over a stony bed in some distant gorge hidden in the night. Monk's boat rubbed against the float.

"Fly at it," he counseled. "Good luck. Work fast. If anything goes wrong it's a case of each fellow for himself until we get back to the old hang-out in town."

Kitty stepped out on the float. Monk backed clear, merged into the shadow and was gone. Not even a drip from oar blades broke the silence that lay heavy as a funeral shroud.

The girl stood a few seconds gazing at the light. Her solitary bridge was burned. The man occupying that cabin, the possibility of separating him from something of value, was her immediate problem. To herself she owned that it was not one she liked solving. To meet the casual male—usually already well "lit up"—against her own background of lights, jazz, fictitious excitement and surreptitious drinks, to cajole him into free spending and ultimately plunder him by any means that served, was an entirely different matter from the working out of this brilliant scheme of Monk's.

Nevertheless, it was too late to do anything save proceed boldly. If it had not been so dark, so profoundly still, so unutterably lonely! In the ten seconds she stood there uncertain that single bright window began to loom as a refuge from those vague dreads. Kitty moved toward it with a sense of relief. At least it was a human dwelling place. It promised temporary warmth and light in the chilly void of night and silence.

She felt her way to the door, listened, heard nothing, rapped at last.

"Come in," a voice invited.

For a moment the light blinded Kitty. When that passed she saw the interior as a whole: a room sixteen feet square, one end given over to a kitchen stove, a table, sundry shelves burdened with canned foods and dishes. The other end had a bed in each corner, a broad shelf that ran across the wall on a level with her eyes, a table on which the lamp burned amid a litter of books, magazines, tobacco tins and such.

On one bed a man lay stretched on his back, his right foot elevated on a small box. His leg was bare to the knee, and between knee and ankle wound a bloodstained bandage. He lay staring silently at her with eyes burning bright in a flushed face. And Kitty stared as silently for a matter of seconds.

"Say something," the man muttered at last, "so I can tell if you're real or a spook. You look natural, but my head ain't exactly right just now."

"I'm no spook," Kitty replied and stepped over beside the bed. "What's the matter? Have you hurt yourself bad?"

"Split the old prop wide open with a double-bitted ax yesterday morning." Lusk gritted his teeth. "It's just about got my goat. I can't do much for myself."

"You all alone?" Kitty asked.

"Just what you could notice. Alone by about sixteen miles in every direction."

It flashed across Kitty's mind that if the situation had been made to order it couldn't have favored Monk's plan more. But at the moment she only felt thankful that he was not present. Monk in search of loot would have about as much sympathy for a helpless man as he would have for a crippled rat. And in spite of rather loose and questionable practices in the way of supplying her material wants Kitty did have a ready fund of sympathy for any one in pain or distress.

"Maybe there's something I could do," she offered impulsively.

"There's several, if you would." He mustered a smile. "But where's the rest of your crowd?"

"There ain't any," Kitty answered.

"Eh?" he stared unbelievingly. "Where'd you spring from then? How'd you get here?"

"What's the difference?" she countered "I'm here. There's nobody with me. Not a soul. Maybe," an impish humor flashed sardonically, "the Lord sent me, seeing you're crippled. What can I do first?"

Lusk rolled his head wearily on the pillow.

"Far be it from me to ask damfool questions," he muttered. "If you want to be a sister of mercy light the fire and get some water hot. I guess if you blew in all by your lonesome at this time of night you could stand something to eat. And maybe hot fomentations on this cut would ease the pain and draw the inflammation so I can rest. I've been getting wabbly in the head by spells the last two or three hours."

Kitty found kindling and firewood and started a fire in the cookstove. The grateful warmth filled the room. When the teakettle began to spout steam she got cloths and a basin and began the interminable task of applying hot fomentations. There was a deep gash under the bandage. Lusk explained that he had done a rough job of stitching the lips of the cut together with silk thread. Supported by a bandage these stitches held the wound in a position to heal. But he had been compelled to move more or less in accordance with his needs. He had opened the cut, strained the joining tissue until the whole calf of his leg was inflamed and full of a burning pain and badly swollen.

Kitty kept putting on one hot cloth after another. Between whiles Lusk told her where to find tea and bread and butter and urged her to eat. She fed him a cup of tea and a slice of toast, stayed her own hunger with rashers of bacon and resumed her march between the steaming kettle and the bed.

In about two hours Lusk looked up at her with a drowsy smile, sighed deeply, contentedly, closed his eyes and slept—the profound slumber of an exhausted man relieved from pain.

"Now's a chance," flashed across Kitty's mind.

She looked about her. The end of a steamer trunk thrust from beneath Lusk's bed. Tin boxes, cigar boxes, canisters of various shapes and sizes stood upon the shelves. What Kitty and Monk desired in the way of plunder might be in any one of those receptacles. Thus called to mind Kitty wondered what Monk was doing, what sort of shelter he had devised himself on that dark, inhospitable shore. She knew how very prompt and thorough Monk's search of that cabin would be if he were here now. Kitty looked closely at the sleeping man. He was a boyish-looking person, despite the bigness of his frame and the third day's growth of beard. He had suffered agony without losing heart. Kitty knew that. The mark of it was in his eyes, on his face when she came in. He would suffer again soon, Kitty suspected—having some knowledge of deep cuts and bad wounds. And if that stuff *was* somewhere about—well, it wouldn't get away. Let Monk wait. He'd put the worst end of the job up to her. Let him wait a while for the swag.

Kitty surrendered to physical weariness. She lay down on the empty bed, blew out the lamp, and in a few minutes slept as soundly as the injured man in the opposite corner.

Daybreak wakened her to find Lusk looking wide-eyed at the rude ceiling. She went outside in search of firewood and stood to stare curiously across the sea-floored inlet at far high peaks tipped gold with the first sun rays, deep chasms that opened between these pinnacles, great reaches of forest breaking at the sea's edge in unscalable cliffs ribboned with silver cascades. It had a different aspect than when seen dimly through enveloping night.

For a moment the space, the color, the ineffable serenity of the everlasting hills baring themselves to the sunrise held her vagrant attention. Then she came back to earth. She wondered afresh how her consort fared in a region devoid of restaurants and rooming houses. What a crazy stunt it was to come here. And still—suppose he did have the stuff? For a moment Kitty had overpowering, ecstatic visions of the ponies thundering down the dusty course at Tia Juana. She saw herself with a pair of diamond ear drops, a Hudson-seal coat—cutting a dash, playing 'em on the nose. Monk was right. She *was* soft. She should have gone through everything in the house last night Still, the poor devil was in a bad way. Suppose blood poison got started in that leg? Kitty's feelings and desires suffered a strange pulling and hauling: the prospect of easy money, of loot, in conflict with a rooted instinct to succor a physical distress she could so clearly comprehend.

She went back with her armful of kindling. The swelling and pain had revived. Again for an indefinite time she kept hot stoups on the wound until the moist heat brought relief. Then she cooked breakfast for both.

By midafternoon the constant applications had a positive effect. The leg became normal in size. The fiery pain vanished. Lusk, in spite of remonstrance, took his leg down off the box on which he had hoisted it to relieve the blood pressure and hobbled outside to a seat in the sun.

"You know," he told Kitty, "when I'm laid up in a room I feel like a bird in a cage. Lord, how I hate a hospital. Give me the open air. Ain't this a peach of a place to sit and look around? How'd you like to live in a place like this?"

"How'd you know I don't?" Kitty countered.

"Uh-uh." Lusk shook his head slowly. "You got the wrong earmarks. Fancy pleated skirt; classy buck shoes; the kind of sweater Drysdale sells; the way you talk. Town's written all over you. How'd you get here, anyway?"

For answer Kitty incontinently burst into tears, in spite of the fact that she didn't want to. There was some curious confidence-compelling quality about this man that nearly dragged the squalid truth out of Kitty. It struck her all in a heap that she did want to sit here in the autumn sun, on the edge of a forest, under the shadow

of great mountains, listening to the hum of insects in the bleached grass; here she could dimly sense a strange peace, an indefinable security immeasurably above the sordid shifts of her immediate past. Such a prospect was impossible. Partly because of Monk Ross, partly because of—well, a variety of reasons Kitty could think of. So she cried, just as any woman does when a wave of unaccountable depression sweeps over her. All the cheap gods at whose shrine Kitty had worshiped seemed to mock her now. Also it frightened her to think how near she had been to blurting out the motive and purpose of her presence there. This sort of man wasn't likely to overlook a contemplated crime against himself—or crookedness in the abstract.

"What's the mystery?" he inquired gently. "And why the weeps?"

"Oh," she sighed, "I can't tell you. I just felt bad for a minute. It don't really make no difference to you who I am nor how I got here, does it?"

"Maybe not," he admitted. "Depends. It's been a long time since a woman did anything for me. Most of the girls want a fellow to do something, or blow them to something. You don't seem to have anything like that on your mind. You step in out of nowhere. You'll probably go the same way. And you'll stick in my mind."

"Will I?" she commented. "Why?"

"Don't know." He smiled. "Have a hunch you will."

"Well, maybe I will," Kitty said morosely. "But probably not the way you think."

She thought with a faint touch of shame that he wouldn't nurse a pleasing recollection of her if she succeeded in her purpose. And she had to make a try. Monk would half kill her if she didn't. Excuses didn't go with Monk.

"What do you do for a living here?" she asked, to shift the flow of talk into a safer channel.

"Mine a little and hand log a little," Lusk told her.

"What sort of mining?"

"I've got a claim up the cañon with a few traces of gold and platinum," he replied. "I take a little stuff out of that now and then. When timber's high I get out logs."

"Platinum!" She pitched on the word with simulated surprise. "That's valuable as gold, isn't it?"

"More so. Platinum's worth nearly a hundred dollars an ounce. Gold about twenty."

Lusk relapsed into a brown study.

"I wonder what it would be like to have a lot of money," he remarked at last.

"Didn't you ever have?" Kitty gave over thinking how much or how little his reference to platinum was worth.

"Uh-uh. Couple of thousand dollars at once, maybe."

"That's quite a lot," she sighed. Two thousand right then would have been a small fortune to her.

"Depends on how you get it," he observed. "If you lay it up dollar by dollar sweating on the end of an ax or a seven-foot saw it seems a lot and it seems to come mighty slow. But it don't go far. I never found it hard to make a few hundred. Likewise I never found it last long. I've picked up a thousand dollars in two months—and spent it in less than a week. No. I meant a hundred thousand or so. That would be enough to do something."

"If I had that much I'd never do anything," she confessed.

"Only doll up and have a good time, eh?"

"Well, I could do that for a change."

"Most of us could—for a while," he commented shrewdly. "But that would get old, too. Anyway, I guess most of us will have to stagger along on a lot less. I got no kick coming. I'll make a stake here by and by. I have the stuff in sight. I was getting out some pretty good stuff when I gashed my leg."

Kitty sat thinking. Money—the mere mention, consideration, of money never failed to excite her. It was the only thing that brought a touch of color, of gratification, joy of living, into an otherwise drab and uncertain existence. When she and Monk were in funds they flew high, according to their lights. Lately the picking had been poor. Now, out of the man's own mouth Kitty thought she had confirmation of Monk's story, of the idea on which their tactics were based.

Lusk was supposed to have a platinum claim here, out of which at intervals he gathered from one to two thousand dollars' worth of the "white gold" of the early placer miners and thereafter descended upon Vancouver to paint the town red. On one of these wild sprees two months earlier Lusk had fallen in with a cabaret crowd that in-

cluded Monk. He had in the large confiding manner of the jag told Monk all about his mining operation. He had seemed very well supplied with money which he spent freely without once permitting any of that crowd to work their "stuff" on him. He got away from them without contributing more than several rounds of drinks—and a daring idea to Monk.

Monk pondered over this free-spending person who mined platinum. He went to some trouble to verify Lusk's confidences. Lusk did have a platinum claim, he found. Nobody knew much about it. But a variety of persons did know that Dave Lusk frequently turned up with a good deal of money on him. A man with money was Monk Ross' meat. He argued that Lusk must keep the stuff about his place until he got ready to come into town. He further convinced himself and Kitty that it would be a good stroke to get that stuff before Lusk had a chance to spend it in riotous living. It seemed sure and fairly safe. Even if the haul were not great Monk accepted small contributions thankfully. And Lusk's stake *might* be as much as a couple of thousand.

Kitty sat now reflecting upon this. Somehow she didn't seem to like the idea. And since it was easiest, as well as being her nature, to follow the line of least resistance she decided to let it slide that day. Perhaps that night would serve. Kitty didn't try to analyze whether she disliked plundering this particular victim, or if she were getting sick of plundering in general. She merely felt that it was pleasant to sit in the sun looking out across the rippling green floor of the inlet while she listened to Lusk. Kitty had never met a man like Dave Lusk on his own ground—always on hers. She had seen the Lusk type only when bent on excitement.

"To-morrow," Lusk said suddenly, "if this leg keeps on the mend we'll get in the rowboat and go down to Egmont. It's steamer day."

"You should get out to a doctor, I suppose," she reflected.

"I wasn't thinking of that," he answered. "It'll heal here as well as under a doctor's eye. But you can't stay here."

"Why not?" Kitty hazarded.

"Can't you see any reasons why?" he inquired.

"None I care a hoot about."

"Well, there are," he drawled. "Good reasons."

She shook her head.

Lusk eyed her inscrutably for half a minute. "Look here, Kitty Pearson," he began finally, "what's the idea? Spit it out? I don't like mysteries. Open up."

Kitty gasped. She sat up straight on the block of wood. No one in this country had ever called her by her maiden name. It was a shock and it loosed besides on Kitty a devastating flood of recollection that made her breast heave.

"What are you talking about?" she faltered.

"About you," Lusk said quietly. "Don't you know me, Kitty?"

She shook her head.

"Honest?"

"Honest to God," she protested in genuine distress. "Who are you, anyway? How do you know my name? I never knew anybody called Lusk."

"Six years seems to make a lot of difference to some people," he answered slowly. "Maybe you never knew any one named Lusk. But you did know old man Tait who lived on the Apple Road just outside Portland. He had a stepson. You ought to remember *him*."

"For God's sake, are you Davy Tait?" Kitty breathed.

"Sure. I was always known by the family name, but I took my own when I left there—which was blamed shortly after you left. Why, I knew you the minute you stepped inside the door, Kitty. You look just the same. I thought for a minute I was seeing things. Hang it," his voice shook a little, "why did you let 'em bluff you out? Why did you fade away without a word to me? Didn't you know I was—well, what you'd call interested?"

"They didn't bluff me," Kitty said stupidly. "I just got sick of eternal nagging. Nobody cared a continental. They made my life so miserable I just skipped. I thought I might as well go first as last. Since then it's been—well—hell!"

"Not so bad as that, I guess," Lusk comforted.

"Just about," Kitty said grimly. "Home was bad enough. But what I got up against was worse—and I couldn't go back. I worked in restaurants. I tried all kinds of jobs. The farther I went the tougher it got. Then I married a man who turned out to be

a crook and a grafter and I turned crooked myself."

"And you're sick of it."

"Sick of it! Say, there's blamed few girls jazzing around that aren't sick of it," she cried. "But if you're no good for anything but a second-rate entertainer in a third-rate cabaret what are you goin' to do? You got to live. And it don't matter much now, far as I'm concerned—only—oh, God, it's an awful world!"

She put her face down in her hands, sobbing in a choked, shaking spasm, racked to her little depths by a facile emotion. Lusk reached over and patted her shoulder.

"Stop it," he begged. "I don't like to see you cry. Darn it, the world's all right. There's always a chance. If you've got in so wrong you feel that way about it, why don't you pull up and make a fresh start?"

"Oh, it isn't that," she wailed. "It just struck me how different things might have been. And it kind of got my goat, when you told me who you really are, to think what I come here for."

"Whatever it was—if it bothers you, forget it."

"No," she said resolutely, "I want to tell you. It sits too heavy on my stomach now. I've done all sorts of cheap tricks, but I guess I wasn't cut out for the real rough stuff. I can't go this."

And without any excuses or palliatives she told him just what lay behind her mysterious descent on him in the middle of the night. Lusk listened gravely. Once or twice a faint derisive grin flitted across his face. But he heard her out in silence.

"What's the difference?" he said. "Between you and me it doesn't matter. You're in with the wrong crowd, that's all. I don't blame you. I'm no tin god myself, to sit in judgment on you. I *would* like to break your man's neck."

Kitty dried her eyes. She felt comforted. The mere act of recital seemed to shift a responsibility, to lift an intolerable weight off her breast.

"My leg's beginning to pain a little," Lusk said presently. "I'd better get back and lie down so the blood pressure won't be so strong in that cut."

Kitty helped him in. When he was bestowed comfortably on his bunk he said abruptly:

"If you want to cut loose from this no-good stiff you've married I'll stake you to divorce expenses and a chance to try your hand at something else. I've got a few hundred dollars to spare."

Kitty smiled wanly.

"You don't know Monk Ross. He'd chase me all over the country. Probably he'd beat me to death. He figures he's got my number, and I guess maybe he has. Besides, what could I do?"

"You've got brains. Use 'em. You can work."

"No," she shook her head hopelessly over the last. "I won't work. Never again for me. I put in years in hash houses and kitchens and stores. It isn't worth it. You can't get anywhere. You're always somebody's dog. Grafting is easy living. It don't hurt my conscience—much. And I kind of like Monk, too. He's no good much—but it seems like I got to stick. Only I couldn't put *this* deal over—not on you."

She made a gesture of finality.

"I guess I'll take that steamer to town tomorrow," she said, "if you're able to go down to that place—what is it?"

"Egmont Landing—down by the Skookumchuck Rapids," Lusk answered absently.

Kitty sat slumped in a chair nursing her chin in her hands—thinking. If he hadn't offered her money! If he had offered her—well—himself, for instance. She didn't want to be financially, charitably, assisted to reform. It was all very well for a man to change his gait. But a girl—bucking up against the world alone. It wasn't worth even a try—not single-handed. Thus Kitty brooded.

Lusk lay silent on his bed staring up at the low ceiling. The sun dipped behind the westward mountains. The pearl dusk began to draw in. Kitty went out to get some wood. She stood to gaze at a rosy glow that lifted and spread across the sky and tipped the snowy summits with touches of fire. The far hills stood in blurred masses, veiled and transfigured in that translucent, shifting color. Kitty watched till the rose and emerald blended and faded into purple shadows and dark began to spread its sable cloak over that lonely land.

Then she went in and lit the lamp and the fire. It had been a long time since Kitty stood to watch a sunset. It used to disturb her, fill her with strange, muddled longings. It did so now. The man stretched on the bed watched her face as she tended frying bacon in the pan, looked at her with

a puzzled, pitying expression. But he did not disturb her with speech until Kitty had fed him, eaten her own supper, washed the dishes and put everything away. She sat down then with her hands in her lap, apathetic, brooding. The night and the silence pressed in on her through the cabin walls. Those vast empty spaces troubled her, gave her a shrinking. She wondered about Monk.

Lusk stirred uneasily, beckoned her. She went over to him. He motioned to a chair beside his bed. Kitty sat down. Lusk put out his hand, rested it gently on one of hers. He was frowning a little, looking at her directly, intently, with a little pity and a touch of tenderness. Kitty got that impression. But her thoughts were vagrant. They flew to Monk Ross, wondered if he were waiting, watching, what he would think and say if he knew this man he had set her to rob was a childhood sweetheart who didn't like her way of life and wanted her to abandon it.

And just as Lusk opened his mouth to speak, as if Kitty's thought had found material embodiment, Monk opened the door. He stood framed in the lamplight, the darkness at his back like a curtain, an ugly twist to his merciless mouth and a revolver in his hand.

"You!" he spat at Kitty. "I've been keepin' cases on you. You'd double cross me, would you? For two pins I'd crown you right now."

Kitty shrank. She knew Monk in that mood. Lusk raised his head.

"If you're as nervous as you look," he addressed Monk, "you're liable to shoot yourself in the foot. Better put that gun in your pocket."

Monk transferred his glare to Lusk. His hand came up with the six-shooter leveled. His face grew hard, watchful, stonily intent.

"Where's your stuff?" he demanded harshly. "You go over to that table an' sit down," he ordered Kitty. "Cough up. Where d'ye keep that stuff?"

"What stuff?" Lusk asked coolly. "What you think this is? A bank?"

"You know what I mean," Monk gritted. "This here platinum you get off your claim. Come through! I want it."

"I happen to want it myself," Lusk answered contemptuously. "I don't fancy being stuck up."

"I'll croak you and get it anyhow," Monk threatened. "Come on. I won't fool with you long. You cough up, or here's where you get yours. See?"

"Oh, well," Lusk said resignedly, "if that's the kind of guy you are—on that shelf, in the red-tin tobacco box."

He indicated the particular tin. Monk stepped forward warily. He had to come within arm's length of Lusk, to reach the shelf. The hammer of his gun clicked back under his thumb. He leaned forward, tense, watchful and lifted down the box. It seemed heavy for its size. With one eye sidelong on Lusk he set it on the table and turned back the lid. Kitty rose to look, her lips parted, a strange glistening eagerness in her eyes. The lamplight fell on a thick layer of loose metal in fine grains, the dull silver-looking stuff that was not silver but the "white gold" that is far more precious than the yellow. Monk weighted the box in one hand. His face wrinkled in a vulpine grin. He fairly gloated.

And in that moment Lusk, who lay watching, narrow-eyed, alert, pointed past Monk to the door and uttered a single sharp exclamation:

"Look!"

Monk looked. So did Kitty. Involuntarily. As if the essence of command had been distilled in that well-simulated tone of fear. And when Kitty's eyes twitched back after seeing nothing Lusk had Monk Ross by the neck, his gun had clattered to the floor, and the muscular hands of the crippled man were holding Monk bent backward across the bed, relentlessly choking him. Monk, slight of stature and soft-fibered, was helpless in Lusk's powerful grip. Already his lips were purple, his eyes bulged in their sockets.

"Let go," Kitty screamed. "You're killing him!"

"I mean to," Lusk muttered.

For a moment Kitty stood wringing her hands. Then a strange, wounded-animal cry burst from her lips. She leaped at Dave Lusk with a billet of firewood in her hands and struck him twice across the face.

Momentarily blinded, dazed by this unexpected attack, Lusk let go and Monk, half strangled, but still conscious, scrambled free, bent to the floor and hastily retrieved his weapon.

"I'll croak him," he snarled to Kitty.

"Croak nothing," she cried. "Do you want us to swing? Grab the stuff and let's get out of here."

"I'll grab all that's in sight while the grabbin's good," Monk said defiantly, from a safe distance beyond Lusk's reach. "You go through his clothes and his trunk, Kit. I'll spike him if he lifts a finger."

But Lusk lay still; only his blue eyes followed somberly each furtive movement of that precious pair. From his good suit on the wall Kitty extracted a few dollars in currency. Other search revealed no plunder of value.

"This is good enough," Monk said, picking up the tin box. "There's a stake here."

"Must be a pound and a half. And platinum's worth a hundred an ounce," Lusk croaked unexpectedly. "But you can't get away with it. Your work's too raw."

"A smart guy can get away with anything," Monk sneered.

"Shut up and come on, Monk," Kitty implored. "We're in it up to our necks now. All I want is a get-away."

They backed out the door, slammed it behind them. Silence fell. Lusk lay perfectly still. For a long time he stared at the ceiling. Then he felt tentatively the slight bruise on his cheek and forehead where Kitty had struck him with the stick. His mouth twisted wryly once or twice.

Then all at once he began to chuckle. The chuckle grew to a roar. He held his hands to his sides and laughed until tears stood in his eyes, the loud side-splitting laughter of a man moved by some stupendous joke.

"Oh, Lord, oh, Lord!" he gasped finally. "It's as good as any crime comedy that ever was staged."

Late the following afternoon the fiery pain and excessive swelling had left the gash in Dave Lusk's leg. He hobbled out on an improvised crutch at the *chug-chug* of a gas boat's approach. The boat sidled in to his float. A husky middle-aged man in the clothing of a logger came striding up.

"Hello," said he. "What you done to your leg?"

"Nicked it with the ax."

"Bad?"

"Bad enough to lay me up for a couple of weeks, I guess."

The man sat down on a convenient block.

"Might be worse," he declared cheerfully. "Well, I sold that boom for eighteen hundred and got the mazuma. Not too bad, eh?"

He drew out a roll of currency and counted off nine hundred dollars.

"There's your whack," he said. "Now, if we fly at that cedar we'll make some money the next six months."

Lusk stuffed the money in his pocket. He chuckled. The chuckle, continued, expanded.

"What's eatin' you now?" his partner demanded mildly.

"I had a holdup while you were gone," Lusk told him. "Kind of tickles me."

"Holdup?"

"Yes. Real stick-up artist from town. Had a female partner. Pulled down on me with a six-shooter and made me come across."

"You don't say!" Steve looked both incredulous and expectant. "Well, what happened? What in blazes did they expect to get?"

"Recollect the last time I went to town I got all lit up," Lusk continued. "Remember I went around springin' that yarn about my platinum claim and showin' them samples? Some cabaret hound got hold of it and swallowed it whole. So he comes up here to hold me up for whatever platinum I got washed."

"Yeah, I recollect that platinum dream," Steve growled amiably. "You peddled it all along the coast—until you sobered up. Go ahead."

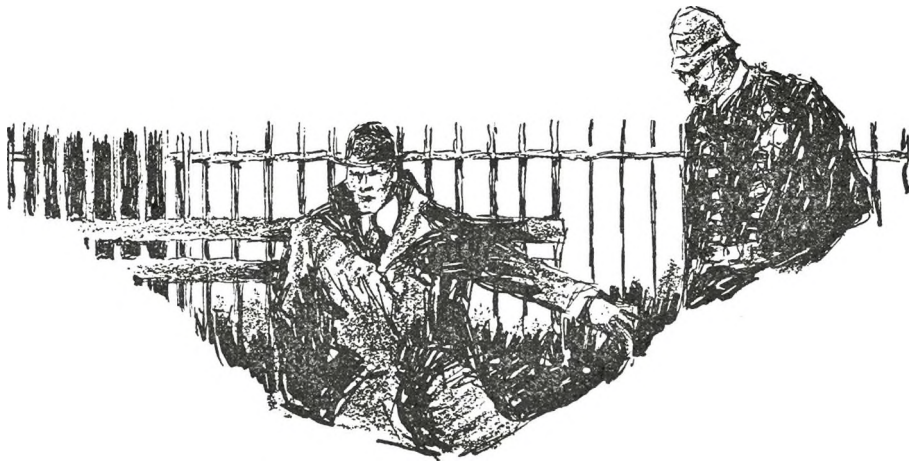
"Well, this bird stuck me up and says, 'Come through,' and I come through. I points out that red-tin tobacco box on the shelf and says, 'Spare my life and take my platinum!' or words to that effect. So he took the platinum."

"Red-tin box—platinum——" Steve looked bewildered. He regarded Lusk as if he thought the wound in his leg had touched his sanity. Then his face cleared.

"Oh," he grinned widely, "that red-tin box with the iron filings. You humbugged 'em with that?"

"No," Lusk chortled anew as his imagination pictured the dismal finale of the expert test when that precious pair tried to convert their plunder into cash, "they humbugged themselves."

More stories by Bertrand W. Sinclair in early issues.



Dragour, the Drugmaster

By Bertram Atkey

Author of "The Man with the Yellow Eyes," "The Taming of Malang Shah," Etc.

I.—THE ENTRY OF DRAGOUR

This is the first of a notable series of stories which will appear in successive issues of THE POPULAR. Bertram Atkey is an acknowledged master of the mystery romance, and in "Dragour, the Drugmaster" he has contributed a capital addition to the total of his reputation. Brooding over the lives of the great in England's great metropolis, picking at will, here a dupe, there a victim, Dragour, sinister virtuoso of crime on the grand scale, terrorizes, ruins, and destroys. No more mystifying, implacable, horrific villain ever adorned the pages of fiction.—THE EDITOR.

THE big police officer who was slowly making his sunny, afternoon perambulation of Green Square halted for a moment outside the small, retired house in the southwest corner of that quietest of central London squares, glanced up at the open window of the second floor and listened intently.

But it was not in his professional capacity that he listened, though it was an uncommon sound which had brought him to a leisurely standstill—the clear, wild note of a piping bullfinch which was issuing from that upper window like a moving thread of silver wire.

The policeman knitted his brow as he listened, for there was something vaguely familiar about the song of the bird. He was recruited from the countryside and knew the note of a bullfinch—but he had never known a bullfinch sing that air or any air resembling it before.

He waited a few seconds. Then suddenly his square, heavy face cleared and he smiled.

"It's a song—can't remember the name, but I can remember the tune. Mr. Chayne's done well with that bird since I was on this beat last."

He nodded, smiled and moved on, absently whistling, very softly, the first few bars of a song that once was tremendously popular—"Oh, Promise Me!"

That was what the bullfinch had been piping—perhaps the first ten bars—as truly as and more sweetly than any instrument.

The exquisite notes followed the big po-

liceman as, reaching the corner he hesitated a moment, then left the curb and moved to make his way diagonally across the small, tree-planted, railed space in the middle of the square.

This "garden" was empty save for one person, an enormous man, very largely built as well as very fat, who was sitting on a lonely seat set by some discouraged-looking shrubs.

The policeman paused by this man who, sitting perfectly still, was staring straight ahead of him with dull eyes, very black and seeming very small, set in that vast expanse of smooth-shaven face. His complexion was so extremely dark that although one would have hesitated to call him a man of color, few would have confidently described him as a white man.

The policeman moved his hand in a nicely discriminated semisalute.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Dass," he said affably. "Mr. Chayne seems to be doing well with the bullfinch."

The dark, elephantine man turned his lack-luster eyes on the constable. For a moment they were totally devoid of expression—remaining blank with the utter blankness of those of one long habituated to the study of abstruse, remote and intricately complicated problems.

The policeman's smile widened, for the deep trances of Mr. Kotman Dass were no novelty to him. He spoke a little more loudly.

"I say that Mr. Chayne's bullfinch is improving, sir!"

The dark man started violently, staring dully about him like one just reviving from the effects of an anæsthetic.

"Eh! Yess—yess! Thee bird, you say. Oh, certainlee, officer—veree perettee!"

He steadied himself, controlled the small fluster into which the sudden appearance and speech of the policeman and his own abrupt return to consciousness of his immediate surroundings had thrown him, and spoke again. This time his English was devoid of that curious, sharply clipped accent with which he had first spoken.

"Ah! Good afternoon, officer. It is some weeks since you patrolled this beat. I was meditating and your sudden appearance startled me. How do you do! It is singularly perfect weather. Yes, Mr. Chayne has worked wonders with the bullfinch. Its note is very sweet."

He raised a huge, shapeless hand.

Across the square, soaring above the hoarse, rough chirpings of the London sparrows gossiping all about them, came the thin, silver note of the bird singing in that top-floor room of No. 10.

"Very pretty, Mr. Dass," said the policeman. "It wants a lot of patience to do that."

Kotman Dass nodded a ponderous head.

"With some of the little wild ones, yes. With others, no. Mr. Salaman Chayne is a man of infinite patience—with bullfinches!"

"I'll be bound he is," said the policeman, and nodded, moving on in the leisurely, measured, irresistible-seeming walk of the police officer the world over.

For a few seconds the dark eyes of the fat man followed the blue-clad figure. If they held any expression at all it was of apprehension.

Mr. Dass took out a blinding orange-and-emerald silk handkerchief and wiped his immense forehead.

"Jollee good fellows, these London police, yess," he muttered uneasily, "but veree devoid of tact. To approach a gentleman obviouslee lost in thought—engaged in profound reflection—and to address him soa veree abruptlee is not the act off a tactful policeman."

He sighed cavernously, rose and, still holding his brilliant handkerchief, went toward the house of the bullfinch—the house which was the home of Mr. Kotman Dass and his friend and informal partner, Mr. Salaman Slaymore Chayne. He went with slow ponderously dragging steps that grew slower and slower yet, until halfway across the road they ceased, and Mr. Dass stood still, staring blankly ahead—an enormous and unshapely figure, black-clad, with an alpaca coat and a worn black-and-white straw hat, vaguely clerical looking, the blinding handkerchief still dangling from his hand.

Standing in the exact center of the road, he was quite obviously lost in thought.

But this time he muttered to himself, as one recapitulating a matter in his mind might do. He spoke in the odd, clipped, *chi-chi* which he invariably used when not speaking with a conscious guard on his tongue.

"It iss undoubtedlee logical conclusion thatt there is master mind att work—in

supreme control off thee vast bulk off illicit drug traffic. Where there are little veins, there are arteries, where there are arteries there iss a heart. Oah, yess. Twenty-six perfectlee sound deductions prove thatt, I think. I shall convince Mister Chayne——"

A taxicab bustled into the small square —a rare visitor at that hour of the day— and bore down upon the gigantic dreamer.

He did not appear to notice it—staring straight ahead, his lips moving.

The taxi horn hooted like an angry duck.

Mr. Kotman Dass, utterly oblivious, continued to dream.

It is a tacitly accepted rule of the road that both parties to a passing do their share of any swerving necessary. Only thus are accidents avoided. The huge Mr. Dass, fathoms deep in thought, left it to the taxi driver to do both his own and Mr. Dass' share of the swerving. Which that motor bandit did with a violent and raucous spate of very evil talk—just as Mr. Salaman Chayne chanced to put his neat head out of the window, his hot, gray-green eyes instantly photographing the situation.

He leaned out almost dangerously.

"Damn you, Dass, you are obstructing the traffic. Get out of the light, can't you!"

The voice of Mr. Salaman Chayne was acrid, distinct and penetrating. It cleaved through the reveries of Kotman Dass like an arrowhead dipped in acid—and the ponderous one woke up. He moved weightily to the pavement with something in his motion akin to that of a large bullock endeavoring to rise hastily from a recumbent position.

The taxi driver laughed sourly and rattled round the bend.

Mr. Dass glanced up apologetically, made several deprecatory gestures and let himself into the house.

"Oah, yess—a man of infinite patience—with bullfinches only. With me, Mister Chayne is soa hasty always," he muttered. "But he will be veree highlee delighted with thee twenty-six deductions!"

And so laboriously he began to climb the stairs.

II.

The room to which Kotman Dass successfully transported his astonishing weight was, like many other things in No. 10 Green Square, unexpected.

It was tenanted by birds—uncaged. There were perhaps as many as fifty, of various species, about the room, which was lined with neat little nesting boxes. There was not a cage in the room. Every bird was free—really free for the big window was widely open. The place was busy with the pretty traffic of the little winged folk, going out or coming in—finches, linnets, sparrows. Robins flickered there and some brilliant blue-tits—busy, peering, inquisitive mites. There were a number of foreign small birds, very ornate, and a pair of wrens had a "desirable detached residence" in a tiny box in a high corner. A number were playing about in a big basin of water sunk in the floor.

For some years Salaman Chayne and Kotman Dass had lived together—upon their wits, or, rather, upon the wits of Mr. Dass and the physical activities of Mr. Chayne—indissolubly partners, in spite of the fact that they were diametrically opposed in almost every conceivable way that matters. But upon one point they were wholly at unity—they loved birds and birds loved them. At least, no bird ever feared either. They were bird men—bird masters, bird slaves.

It was the one gift the two men possessed in common and in like proportion—this wonderful, enviable charm over the little feathered folk, and the passion to exert it.

Out of their general, catholic love for birds developed more particular passions—resolving themselves in the case of Salaman into an intense interest in, and an uncanny mastery of, the art of training the wild bullfinch to pipe man-made airs; and in the case of Kotman Dass into an illimitably patient and eerily successful effort to teach that incorrigible ventriloquist, the starling, something of the English vocabulary. There was rivalry, if not jealousy.

Kotman Dass had a friend—an elderly starling long a permanent boarder of his own free will, who could say "Good morning, Dass," as clearly as any parrot.

But against this Salaman Chayne could now set another practically permanent guest —a bullfinch with a twisted claw whose achievements had so interested the police officer.

To the sanctuary of the upper floor of No. 10 birds came and went or stayed as they listed.

It was to this room that the mountainous Kotman Dass ascended.

Salaman Chayne had just finished the bullfinch's lesson for that day and met his partner on the landing outside the door.

He was lighting a very large and very good cigar, and paused in this operation to state a simple home truth to Dass.

"Some day they will bring your remains home on several lorries, Dass," he said. "What were you dreaming about out in the square? But we will have it downstairs, I think."

"Oah, yess—downstairs assuredlee!" agreed Mr. Dass, turning unwieldily and retreating down the creaking stairs, followed by his partner—and that was as if a squirrel followed a bear.

For Salaman was little and slim and darting like an arrow or a wasp or a lance. Five feet three and steely as a sword blade.

He was probably the neatest, jauntiest, cleanest, most fastidious little man in London and if he had been several sizes larger he might have claimed to be in his clean-cut way one of the best looking, for he was completely and perfectly symmetrical and his thin, hawkish, brown face was well, if boldly, modeled, and illumined by a pair of queer, hot, compelling gray-green eyes with a hint of yellow in them. They were never free from a curious smoldering ferocity. All his movements were neat, quick—except when with the birds—dainty and cat silent. His hair was corn colored, and he wore a thin. narrow, dagger-shaped beard of the same yellow hue. He carried himself with the fierce easy cockiness of a man conscious of his diminutive size and even more so of the fact that in spite of his size he was far more than averagely competent to take care of himself.

Salaman, among his fellow men, was rather like one of those trim, businesslike, game bantam cocks, in a barnyard full of fat and flustering hens. His cockiness was in his air and carriage more than in his manner which, save when irritated by adverse circumstances or his partner, was that of a near-enough gentleman. It had on occasion come as a surprise to certain of the misguided to learn that the little man carried in each hand a punch which could fan into fairyland most men half as big again as Mr. Chayne; and though his brains were on about the same scale as his body, nevertheless there was room in them for a formidable knowledge of Japanese wrestling. He could cling to a fighting horse as that agile monkey known as the gibbon can cling with one finger to the topmost bough of the old home tree—and, he was a dead shot with most weapons, including his mouth and the dainty sword cane he invariably carried.

He was devoid of illusions concerning his partner whom he treated much as the small precocious son of a mahout may treat a gigantic but humble-minded elephant—or a little quick wife a large slow husband.

To Salaman, Mr. Dass was ever ready to admit that, though English, he indubitably numbered among his ancestors certain "highlee" placed inhabitants of far-off India.

Salaman would agree.

"Yes, Dass. I guessed that on the first occasion I heard you suddenly slip from decent English into a sort of *chi-chi*. Anybody who ever heard you speak in a moment of haste or excitement would know that. Even your starling says 'Yess' instead of 'Yes.'"

Meekly the colossal Dass would agree.

"I know. I know that it is so, Mister Chayne."

"Personally I have no objection to your admittedly mysterious and complicated parentage and ancestry, Dass," the hot-eyed Salaman would continue. "Your amazing brains annul and cancel all that. It's not your ancestry that irks me—it's your——"

Kotman would nod his vast head, heavily and slowly.

"Yess, yess, it is my appalling lack off physical courage that discommodes you, Mister Chayne. *I* know. Thee heart of a fat sheep upon the hillsides—yess. A highlee disgusting coward. Yess, I see thatt, certainlee"—sighing gustily.

It was true. While Kotman Dass possessed a brain which Salaman Chayne sincerely believed practically unparalleled, his personal courage was precisely nil, his habits were untidy and his customs slovenly.

The partnership flourished only because the cold-blooded courage of Salaman was added to the astonishing brain of Kotman Dass. They were to each other what the lock is to the key, the hammer to the anvil, the knife to the fork. There certainly was in Kotman Dass much that Salaman Chayne despised—and said so; and there may have been in Salaman Chayne much that Kotman Dass despised—and carefully did not say so; but both believed that united they might stand and, divided, fall.

Kotman Dass began speaking hastily and

propitiatingly before they had reached their favorite sitting room.

"It was veree foolish to linger in thee path of taxicabs, Mister Chayne, I confess thatt. But my mind was busilee occupied with small problem off thee Lady Argrath which you brought to my notice thiss morning."

His tone was changing curiously. He had begun on a nervous apologetic note, but as he proceeded he appeared to gain confidence.

"I have considered thee matters of Lady Argrath; her attitude to her husband, your cousin; and Sir James Argrath's peculiar fluctuations between extremely high spirits and bouts of profound gloom."

Kotman Dass leaned back in his chair and raised a huge hand as though to tick off certain points on his fingers.

"The material which you gave me to consider was as follows," he said. "You advised me that, firstly——"

Salaman Chayne stirred restlessly.

"All right, all right—I know what I told you, Dass. Don't waste time repeating all that over again. What I want from you is not a long account of the way you've churned your brains over the information I gave you. I want your conclusions briefly —not a lecture on the art of arriving at conclusions."

Kotman Dass looked reproachfully at his acrid little partner.

"It was veree interesting speculation," he said.

"No doubt—to you. But I am only interested in results."

Kotman Dass nodded resignedly.

"Very well, Mister Chayne. I have arrived by infallible chain of reasoning at thee following conclusions. Lady Argrath is a drug addict, a traitress to her husband, and I think thatt she is trying to lure you into a condition which will render you useful to her for some purpose at present obscure to me—for lack of data."

He was staring absently before him—like a man whose eyes are really looking inward to read his own brain, as clear as a printed sheet inside his skull.

"It is theoretically incontrovertible that she is false as she is beautiful; that she is utterly heartless, completely selfish, unquestionably dangerous. A fierce, cold, and formidable vampire. I shall demonstrate irrefutably to you—from the material you gave me—that she is a liar, that she betrays her husband in many ways, that she will inevitably ruin him and probably you; that she is possessed of a mentality compared with which yours and that of your cousin are the mentalities of two wax dolls; and that logically she must be in league with an evil Force of which I have repeatedly suspected the existence. Of this mysterious and deadly Force I will speak presently, but first I will finish acquainting you with the true nature—as made perfectly apparent by the evidence—of this beautiful vampire in whom you are interesting yourself——"

Mr. Dass broke off suddenly as Salaman leaped to his feet, glaring.

"I have a good mind to give you the damnedest hiding you've ever had in your life, you libelous scoundrel!" he snarled. "You dare to sit there like a—a—an overfed whale and roll out a string of low slanderous untruths like that! Why, I simply can't keep my hands off you!"

Mr. Dass collapsed like a child's air ball touched—in a spirit of curiosity—by her big brother's cigarette end.

He moved his hands hastily, aimlessly; he began to show the yellowish whites of his eyes; his face took on a greenish pallor; he trembled very much and he began to gabble almost meaningless apologies. He was a very frightened man. His English was shattered to fragments.

"Oah, my dear Mister Chayne, but please noticing thatt I speak purelee abstract fashion. That was impersonal intended certainlee—same fashion as professor speaks off microbes."

"Microbes!" roared Salaman Chayne, glaring. "Lady Argrath——"

"Iff you please, noa, noa. She iss not microbes, assuredlee not—it was onlee hurree to explain manner off reference to her I used thatt expression. I—meditated upon lady and reported on same lady in spirit of professor meditating and reporting on veree difficult problem. Personallee she is undoubted veree charming ladee, oah, yess, I readilee agree and apologize thousands times."

He brightened up a little as the glare died out of Salaman's fierce eyes.

"Ten thousand apologies, my dear fellow, Mister Chayne," he gabbled, propitiatingly.

Salaman ignored this offer of apology in bulk, and stared at Mr. Dass over his cigar with something very like uneasiness replacing the fading anger in his eyes.

He had had too many proofs of Kotman

Dass' mental abilities to be able to shake off lightly any unpleasing deductions made by that large person from data relating to any one.

Though by no means in love with the beautiful wife of his cousin Sir James Argrath, a well-known company promoter and financier, the wasplike Mr. Chayne undoubtedly was interested in her—so interested indeed that he had seen enough of her and her household to have been puzzled by a number of small matters he had noticed there. These he had carried to the scalpel-minded Mr. Dass—and now Mr. Dass had reported upon them—in the annoying fashion related.

"Of course, you're as wrong about Lady Argrath as it's possible for a man to be. But just what did you mean by an evil Force? Did you mean a man, a ghost, or a devil?" said Salaman, with acid irony after a few moments reflection.

"Oah, a man—but a man with much devil in him also," replied Dass, still eying his partner apprehensively.

"You see, Mister Chayne, I have formed thee conclusion from various facts—they have nothing whatever to do with Lady Argrath, certainlee not—that somewhere concealed behind all thee traffic off the illicit drug trade, secret like cobra in his hole, iss an Intelligence. A man, I have decided. It iss veree plainlee manifested to me in number off recent drug affairs thatt there iss a master mind—off its class—moving behind—secretlee—in thee dark—like spider sitting in center off her web—onlee much more active than spider!"

His eyes were growing veiled and absent again.

"Much more active, yess. I trace his hand—thee same hand—in many affairs."

"What affairs? Get to facts, will you, Dass?"

"Oah, readilee, my dear fellow. Such affairs as thee collapse off Harlow's Bank and arrest off directors; thee scandal off Countess off Barford's Jockey and thee Barford heirlooms; thee recent matter off thee defalcations off four cashiers at the London & Southern Bank; the accidental death off Clyde Hamer off thee Airplane Postal Service; thee fifty-per-cent drop in value off thee shares off Burma Ruby Company; thee murder of Colonel Carrel on Salisbury Plain; and many other recent affairs!"

Salaman stared.

"You mean to tell me that you can trace the hand of this mysterious Master Mind in all those affairs, Dass?"

"Oah, yess, by all means," said Kotman Dass, with an ingratiating smile.

"How?" said Salaman, stiffening.

"Oah, veree simple matter. My reflections have brought me to conclusion thatt this Master Mind whom I call in *my* mind by thee letter X is in control off great bulk off smuggled drugs and also director off distribution off same to drug addicts."

"Hum! He'd make a big profit—if there were such a man," said Salaman.

Kotman Dass shook his head gently.

"Itt does not seem to me—if you are agreeable, Mister Chayne—that X cares veree much about thee profits off drugs. He would do better than thatt!"

"How d'ye mean, Dass?"

"It iss complicated matter. I have formed conclusion that thee man X—that is to say the Drugmaster—first ensnares with drug habit people—women—highlee placed ladies——"

Salaman scowled.

"Be careful, damn you, Dass!"

"Oah yess, assuredlee," said the fat man, hurriedly, and continued: "X ensnares people who know valuable secrets, who have valuable information confided in them—such as financier may confide in his wife—and presentlee, depriving victim off drug, he reduces victim to condition in which poor soul will exchange important secrets for fresh supply off drug. Then X uses secrets for his own benefit."

Salaman stared.

"You believe that, Dass?"

"Oah, I can mathematically demonstrate that itt iss true," said the fat man.

"And you say Lady Argrath is one of his victims, do you?" persisted little Mr. Chayne.

Kotman Dass glanced swiftly at the menacing green eyes, and hastily looked away again.

"Oah, noa, decidedlee I do not say thatt!" he answered. "But itt iss very conceivable thatt she may be!"

"Bah! Heart of a white mouse!" sneered Salaman, turned on his heel and left the room.

Kotman Dass listened for a moment, grinned nervously, then leaned heavily back and submerged himself in that deep sea of thought in which he spent half his life.

III.

Salaman Chayne was far more disturbed by the "conclusions" of Mr. Dass than he had allowed that curiously gifted individual to see.

He had many times disputed the correctness of his partner's views on matters which he had considered—but he had never yet found the fat man wrong in the long run.

And the "cowardly" denial that Lady Argrath had anything to do with the mysterious X was too belated and too obviously inspired by the physical terrors of Mr. Dass to be taken seriously.

Salaman, out of his experience, knew that a woman was almost certain to be what Kotman Dass said she was. For the fat man was uncannily gifted, and had long ago proved it.

Still, even the cleverest man makes a mistake sooner or later, and Salaman Chayne presently left the house in Green Square with the hope though not the conviction that possibly the time had come when Kotman Dass was making his first error.

"I think the cowardly hound is wrong—I'm sure he's wrong," mused Salaman as he stepped briskly along. "But, in any case, I shall form my own judgment. If there is anything in her manner this afternoon to suggest that he is right I shall not fail to observe it."

He was going to call on Lady Argrath, and he intended to study her more closely, and from a different angle, than he had ever done before.

But she was "not at home," and he sought his club where, for tea, he took two whiskies and sodas—absorbing these with an air of ferocious gloom which very effectively procured for him the solitude he desired. But even the stimulants were contrary. They seemed to depress him rather than raise his spirits.

Small, bristling and sulky he sat long over his second drink, pondering the statements—as many of them as he could remember—of Kotman Dass. His confidence that the fat man was wrong had long dwindled.

He endeavored to recollect some of the affairs which Dass said had resulted from the infamous activities of X, the drugmaster, but except for the mysterious murder of Colonel Carrel, a quite recent sensation, and the drop in Burma Ruby shares, they had slipped his mind.

"How the half-bred rascal contrives to put two and two together in the way he does puzzles me—would puzzle any normal-minded man," muttered Salaman to himself, "and I don't see that he had the slightest ground for connecting Lady Argrath with this—this drugmaster," he added, comfortably ignoring or forgetting that he had refused to listen to an account of the obscure and intricate mental processes which had brought Kotman Dass to his "conclusions."

"I don't see it—I don't see it at all. Damn it, I decline to see it," snarled Salaman at half past seven, finished his whisky, was conscious of hunger, and went sullenly forth to dine at Gaspard's, a small, quiet but well-managed and rather expensive restaurant in a side street off the Haymarket.

Still pondering his problem he secured his favorite corner, rather brusquely desired the head waiter to help choose him his dinner, and continued to ponder.

"She's altogether too fine and sweet and beautiful to have to do with this X man. What signs has she ever shown that she uses drugs? Occasionally she's depressed, yes—and occasionally she brightens up rather quickly—but so do many people."

Dimly it came to him that whenever that sudden change had happened while he was with her she had left him for a few moments. That is—she had left the room languid and melancholy, and a little later she had returned a different woman. A little thing, of course—but did it mean anything?

"But drugs eat away a woman's beauty—and a blind man could see that Creuse Argrath is one of the most beautiful women in London! And she has told me herself that she does not get on with James Argrath. Certainly that's not hard to believe. James is a money maniac—always abstracted, always brooding, his mind obviously always hovering over the gold tide in the City—like a fish hawk or a gull over the water. No, Dass is wrong; he——"

Salaman's train of thought was suddenly dislocated, for a woman sitting several tables away with her back to a pillar which had helped conceal her from his quiet corner, moved her chair slightly and so became more plainly visible to him.

The eyes of the little man suddenly glowed.

It was Lady Argrath dining with a man whom Salaman had never seen before.

He had been right when he spoke of her as a beautiful woman. It was impossible that she could be under forty years old but she looked nearer twenty—even to-night when, as Mr. Chayne instantly decided, she was not at her best. He frowned a little as he noted several points which to-night she had needlessly stressed. Her mouth, a trifle wide but exquisitely shaped, was redder than usual, and her wonderful skin was whiter—almost dead white. Her eyes shone feverishly out of shadows which owed something to the art of a capable maid, and her wonderful mass of coppery hair was dressed in a style wholly new to Salaman Chayne, and quite unlike her usual style. And it seemed darker to-night. Her evening frock was much more daring than those in which she usually appeared—and these were never illiberal—and she wore big pearl earrings, a form of jewelry she usually claimed to dislike.

The meticulous Mr. Chayne frowned as he watched her.

"She's changed herself to-night," he told himself. "One would say that she desired to look less like Lady Argrath, more like some star of the half-world. And she's succeeded."

He ran a cold eye, jealously disapproving, over her companion, but found in him nothing to hold his attention long. He was a thinnish, fair youth, probably under twenty-five, with a high, rather bulbous forehead, dim-looking bluish eyes, a little fair mustache, and a receding chin. There was something vaguely foreign in his appearance.

Salaman decided that he looked like a young German lieutenant in unfamiliar mufti, and turned again to Lady Argrath.

She was talking a good deal, very low and rather hurriedly, and her manner was touched with a certain vague and uneasy urgency—quite unlike her normal easy self-possessed poise. She never looked away from their table.

"She's—altogether different to-night," said Salaman. "Why?"

He did not know and hardly attempted to guess.

"If that boneless scoundrel Dass were here no doubt he could explain it—to his own satisfaction if not to mine," said Salaman. "But I'm glad he's not here."

Mr. Chayne nodded a little to emphasize that.

He turned away, looking up as a man paused by his table. He had come so silently that Mr. Chayne was a little startled, though he gave no sign of that.

"Can you put up with me at your table, Mr. Chayne?" asked the newcomer. "Gaspard must be making a fortune—the place is crowded."

"Very glad to see you, Kiss. You happen to be the one man I'd have chosen to share a table with to-night."

"Ah, is that so?"

The colorless, blank, lidless-looking eyes of Mr. Gregory Kiss lingered on those of Salaman Chayne for a few seconds. Except for a certain melancholy they were totally expressionless. The eyes of Mr. Kiss always were those of a sleepwalker—in appearance only.

"*Is* that so?" he repeated and began to stare blankly, listlessly about the restaurant.

Mr. Kiss and Salaman were old acquaintances, although Kiss was about the best private detective in town whereas Mr. Chayne's occupation, normally, was perilously akin to that of the company of free lances upon whose existence and varied activity the detective's livelihood largely depended.

In appearance Mr. Kiss was precisely and exactly like a lean, weather-worn head coachman temporarily and rather unexpectedly in evening dress. The only thing lacking in the dark, middle-aged, rather deeply lined face was a straw between the tight, thin lips.

"Why?" asked Mr. Kiss.

Salaman had seemed to hesitate. But now, his eyes on Lady Argrath, he spoke.

"I've been listening to the crazy theory of a friend of mine," he said.

Mr. Kiss nodded, his eyes on the menu.

"Crazy theory—there's a lot of those about, Mr. Chayne. How crazy was this one?"

"Oh, hopeless, hopeless," snapped Salaman. "My friend was saying that he believed the illicit drug traffic in this country was controlled by a mysterious master mind who did not look for his profits to the sale of the drug so much as to using the confidential information which his drug-taking customers gave him. It was wild, of course. All right for a novel—or a cinema film. But not in real life, eh, Kiss?"

Mr. Kiss appeared to reflect.

"Hum!" he said. "A master mind, you

say, Mr. Chayne? What put that idea into your friend's head?"

But Salaman had no time for details—and less inclination. Kiss was all right—a very quiet, decent chap in his way—but he was a detective and the way of the detective was not the way of Mr. Salaman Chayne.

"Oh, Lord knows, Kiss. This chap—a man I met in the club—don't know his name—had a string of reasons, I gather. But I've forgotten 'em."

"That's a pity, Mr. Chayne," said Kiss. "For I should say that your friend is right."

"Right!"

Mr. Kiss nodded.

"Oh, yes. It's pretty well known—guessed at, anyway."

"Known? D'you mean to say that it's true—and that the man is known? Why don't they arrest him?"

"For two reasons. One is that they don't know him. They know of him. And another reason is that even if he were known he is unarrestable. They say that no ten men could arrest him. They could stop his traffic, but they could not arrest him."

Mr. Chayne bristled pugnaciously.

"Couldn't arrest him! Why the devil couldn't they arrest him?"

Mr. Kiss sighed.

"They would be dead before they could get within a yard of him. He would be dead himself, of course. He is said—rumored—to carry always a couple of bombs—flat, specially constructed bombs—and they are set with hair triggers."

"You mean he'd blow himself up and everybody near him before he would allow himself to be arrested?"

Mr. Kiss nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, that is what I mean," he said in a voice of settled melancholy.

"But sooner or later—when they know who he is—they will get him?" asked Salaman.

Mr. Kiss shrugged and began to eat his soup.

Salaman looked at him curiously. He wondered if Mr. Kiss were after the drugmaster himself. Kiss was just the sort of queer, quiet customer to pin him, he thought—in spite of his bombs.

But he had no more time for speculation on that matter just then, for Lady Argrath had again caught his keen attention. She was leaning toward her companion, speaking very earnestly. She seemed to be making some request to which the fair-haired youth, frowning, would only respond with little shakes of the head and tiny shruggings of the shoulder.

Mr. Chayne watched intently. And the melancholy Mr. Kiss watched him, as well as Lady Argrath.

Presently Kiss spoke again.

"A sad thing about Sir James Argrath."

"Sad? What do you mean?"

"Argrath failed for a quarter of a million this afternoon. It's in the last editions of the papers."

Salaman's eyes narrowed.

"Argrath failed!" He scowled ferociously. "Why, they said he was a millionaire—and a pretty careful one at that."

"H'm! Well, it hasn't helped him much. He failed—awkwardly, too. There are suggestions of—um—mistakes. Shouldn't be surprised to hear that he's been arrested!" Mr. Chayne's scowl deepened as he watched Argrath's wife.

What was she doing out—almost in gala attire—to-night? The evening of a day on which one's husband fails "awkwardly" for a quarter of a million is not usually selected by a normal wife as an evening for being out.

But even as the well-marked brows of the little man knitted over the problem, Lady Argrath and her companion rose to leave.

Salaman Chayne made up his mind quickly. He would follow them. It might be quite simple. If the fair youth put her in a taxi and ordered the driver to her home he, Salaman, would join her and look in for a few moments to commiserate with his cousin. If she did not go home it might be as well to know where she was going and why.

Without flurry he paid his bill, said "Au revoir" to the melancholy Mr. Kiss, and leaving that gentleman rapt in intent study of the menu, he went, with his peculiar, jaunty, cocky walk, out of Gaspard's.

Lady Argrath and her escort had not taken a taxi. It was a glorious summer evening, just cool enough to be refreshing, and wherever the couple were bound they clearly intended walking. It was at once evident that Lady Argrath was not yet returning to her home.

Salaman followed them—behind one of his biggest cigars. Behind the unconscious Salaman followed a lean, tall, soft-footed man exactly like a slightly dyspeptic head

coachman lacking a straw for his mouth—the melancholy Mr. Kiss.

Ten minutes later Salaman was bending over the lock of a door in a small, rather secluded block of flats somewhere between the south end of Charing Cross Road and St. Martin's Lane.

Lady Argrath and her escort had disappeared into the flat guarded by the lock of that door.

There was a queer, secret, rather ugly atmosphere about that house and Salaman had been quick to feel it. A place dimly lit, secretive, and though well-fitted and clean, boding and suggestive of dark and ill-omened things. It was oddly silent there, also, and the roll of traffic west and south reached him only as a far-off murmur. It was well chosen for one needing a secret rendezvous, thought Salaman Chayne, and with the thought he was instantly aware that this was the note of the place.

A place of rendezvous—mysterious, furtive, a dark corner—needing no hall porter because none ever came here who was not perfectly well acquainted with it. The sweet scent used by Creuse Argrath still lingered on the warm close air.

A man's voice was suddenly raised inside the flat.

Salaman listened for a second.

"Why—it's James Argrath! What are they doing here?"

His face was set in a look of sheer amazement.

Argrath was almost shouting—it sounded as if he, this quiet, reserved, excessively controlled man, was indulging in a furious burst of reproach, of upbraiding.

Salaman's slender, steely fingers hovered about the lock with gentle, delicate, groping, tentative movements and a small, shining instrument of metal showed for an instant. Then the door opened a little, absolutely without sound. Mr. Chayne understood locks of all descriptions, though few guessed it.

He stepped inside, soundless as a cat.

In a room on his right two people were quarreling furiously—Sir James Argrath and his wife. Salaman Chayne listened, craning close to the door.

Argrath was shouting, but, from where he now stood, the listener could glean that the predominant note in his cousin's voice was less of anger than despair.

"If you had been my worst enemy instead of my wife you could not have done me a greater injury or contrived a more infamous treachery!" he was saying in a high, shrill voice that was not free from a vibration of anguish. "Why did you do it?"

The voice of Lady Argrath cut in chill, composed, very clear.

"I don't understand. Put that pistol away. I will not listen or talk to you an instant longer if you threaten violence. Put it away—point it away——"

Mr. Chayne judged it time to interfere. He turned the handle of the door and entered swiftly, neatly.

It was a well-furnished apartment of considerable size and the Argraths were standing in the middle of it, facing each other. The man had an automatic pistol in his hand—drawn back as though he had snatched it back from an attempt to knock it from his hand.

"Good God! What are you two trying to do?" snapped Salaman.

They turned swiftly—the woman was the quickest—looking down at him, startled.

Argrath spoke first, letting his pistol hand fall to his side.

"Ah, you, is it, Chayne?"

"You—what are *you* doing here? How did you get in *here?*" broke in Lady Argrath eying him keenly, her beautiful face suddenly sharp and, for a moment, cruel with suspicion.

Salaman shrugged, but before he could speak Argrath went on heavily. His normally pleasant face was intensely pale save for two feverishly flaring red patches high up above his cheek bones; he was unshaven, still in his City clothes, and his eyes were shockingly bloodshot. His mouth seemed oddly twisted.

"Listen to me, Salaman, and I'll tell you what I'm trying to tell this woman—this wife of mine—this drug slave and traitress—the result of the crime—the crimes—she has committed against me. It seems that she hates me—has hated me for a long time—because she believes I have been ungenerous to her in money matters. She says that—but it is not true. She hates me, yes, but she hates every one else who does not administer to her insane craving for the drugs that have destroyed her—the drugs she came here to-night to get!"

He laughed, hysterically.

"God, what I have been through—what I have suffered—how I have worked and

overworked—wrung my brains for twenty hours of the day for months. A circus horse, Salaman, that's what I've been—going round and round in a circle—never getting anywhere. Oh, I'll explain. Keep quiet, Creuse, damn you!" He menaced the woman with the pistol.

"No—stand back, will you, Chayne? It's not for her, this little toy—it's for me presently. Look at her, Salaman—she doesn't believe it. We'll see about that. She's cool enough about it—eh? Keyed up with her infernal drugs. That's it, keyed up——"

Salaman Chayne stepped nearer, intending to try to quiet him, but he saw that. Argrath was quick now and perceptive with the darting uncanny perception of the fey.

"Listen, I say—be still, you leopardess, your turn will come! I'm speaking now. Listen—listen and leave me alone or I'll go down to Trafalgar Square and yell the truth to the crowd there. I'm ruined, Salaman—I've failed to-day for a quarter of a million cold—eh, a quarter of a million! I! James Argrath who used to keep big companies spinning in the air like a juggler—only easier. A year ago I was caught in a bit of a squeeze—nothing but a squeeze—a temporary thing. Every business man gets that. It's nothing—if one is not surrounded by traitors—hasn't a traitress on his own hearth, in his own home. It was necessary to economize for a little—only for a little while. *She* wouldn't help. You see, she'd only married me for the money I had and when that was gone there was nothing to keep her loyal. And she was already a drug slave—even then. I begged her to be patient, but these drug eaters don't understand what patience is. She continued to waste money like water—what she did with it God knows—it went. She kept coming for more and I had to refuse. I hadn't the money and I needed all my credit in the City—every ounce of it. I begged her to wait patiently and I confided in her my great coup; there was a big concession going on the west coast of Africa—no, not oil, but gold country—gold and a great chance of radium. It was a fortune—and it was mine—should have been mine. At the eleventh hour I was forestalled, Salaman. Why? Because that woman had sold me out to—some one. Probably some sly, stealthy, unseen brute that supplied her with drugs—eh? Something special in the way of drugs. She had told him—or somebody. They stepped in and forestalled me on that concession. Eh? What do you think of that—a man's own wife—the very woman he was toiling for? Of course I never guessed. I hung on—working like an insane thing—and made, forced, another chance—a patent, this time; a big wireless improvement—a fortune. You'll hear of it yet. I told her of it one night—to help out, to help her to wait—as men do tell their wives things. I was forestalled again. My inventor man was bought away from me. *She* had betrayed me again. Why? What for? Good God, it was mainly for her I was struggling! Three times that happened. It was like pouring water—no, blood—my own blood—into a bottomless vessel. I fought for chances, half killed myself for chances, won them, shared my relief with my own wife—and lost my chance. Sold out! And I took risks, bad risks, and the police are—will soon be—after me. Oh, I understand things now. I know now. It came to me one night like an inspiration. I had her watched—my man tracked her here to this flat. It's here—but there's one—the big one—that my man hasn't been able to get sight of—as silent, and swift and cunning as a snake. Dragour! That's his name. I've learned that, Chayne. Dragour—eh, what a name for the reptile such a man must be! I've come here to kill him—but he's slipped me. Dragour——"

"Kill him! *You* kill him! You would find it easier and more profitable to kill yourself!" said the beautiful drug slave, facing him, her brilliant eyes as cold as her voice was cruel.

It was clear that she hated him—as clear as it was that she had injured him irreparably.

Argrath stared stupidly, pierced by something in her tone.

"Creuse, you meant that—you would like that?" he said in a strange, almost wailing voice.

She stared at him levelly, her eyes merciless.

"Very few ruined gamblers have the courage to do that, and you are not one of them. It would chime admirably with my mood if you were!" she said—and even as she spoke Salaman Chayne was conscious of the set deliberation of her tone. She, too, was possessed—she *knew* that Argrath would take up her icy challenge. And, magically, eerily, Chayne knew it also. Ar-

grath had loved her—and he had reached or been driven to a point, where it needed only this from her. He was at the very brink of the abyss—she could have pulled him back with a word, a gesture. But she had thrust him down.

"Ah—you say that, do you?" shouted Argrath in a terrible voice, hoarse and broken—swung the pistol to his head and fired.

A sudden red stain, a splash, a flower of blood, appeared like magic on the shimmering silk of her dress, just above her heart.

Sir James Argrath collapsed in a queer, limp crumbling heap—a dreadful sight.

Salaman Chayne, glaring, sick, stabbed a lean finger at the soulless creature facing him.

"You—you knew he would do that! You *knew! You* have murdered him. But for you—for what you said he would not have done that."

Her eyes, blazing with an infamous excitement, looked suddenly beyond him, dilating widely, and she stepped back.

"I will bear witness to the truth of that," said a voice gravely over Salaman's shoulder. The little man glanced round.

It was Mr. Gregory Kiss who spoke, mysteriously, soundlessly appearing from nowhere.

The woman moved back toward a curtain at the other side of the room.

"That man killed himself," she said. "Don't dare to accuse me."

Mr. Chayne stepped toward her.

"You goaded him to the deed, and it can be proved."

She laughed wickedly, as cold-blooded as she was fair.

"Proof! Proof! Do you imagine I am without a witness of this mad suicide?" she said.

"You will be detained——" began Kiss quietly.

She tore aside the curtain, laughing acidly.

"Hold these men, Dragour," she said, swaying back.

The black muzzle of a big pistol seemed to shoot over her bare shoulder like the head of some huge viper, and behind the weapon was the face of Dragour, the Drugmaster—a dark and bitter face, stamped with the unholy hall mark of a thousand evil deeds and appalling thoughts—a face malign and cold and frightful, like a dark mask, set with two black eyes that stared with a fixed, bitter and unchanging stare at the two startled men by the body of Sir James Argrath.

For a full second all three stood perfectly still, like wax figures—almost as though they would never move.

Then the full, rich voice of the woman broke on the silence—slow, musical, but intolerably insolent.

"You see, do you not? The devil takes care of his own!"

She laughed.

A black void seemed to yawn behind Dragour and the woman, they moved swiftly and even as Salaman Chayne leaped toward them the secret door crashed to.

Mr. Chayne tore down the curtain, but there was neither key nor handle visible on that door. If it opened from the inside at all it was evidently by the manipulation of some concealed device.

Pallid with fury Salaman turned on Mr. Kiss.

But that one, already at the telephone, shook his head.

"It was a bolt hole," he said quietly. "They are away. Dragour has a thousand exits. Nobody can expect to catch him in a cul-de-sac at the first attempt. All in good time, Chayne—all in good time."

He began to call up the police.

Mr. Chayne dropped on his knees to examine the dead man.

But that was quite useless. Sir James Argrath had made no mistake in the carrying out of his final coup.

Salaman rose, staring about the room. As yet he was conscious of no sense of loss or pity, only of a cold and inexorable anger. He scowled in his effort to memorize everything in that room perfectly. He needed to remember as much as he could—for he had long since learned that everything, every little microscopic detail seemed ever to serve as valuable data to the prehensile brain of his remarkable partner Kotman Dass.

He wished he could telephone to that mountainous man to come and see the place for himself—but there was no hope of that.

Nothing on earth would induce Kotman Dass to enter that room until every sign of the tragedy was removed.

All that Mr. Salaman Chayne could do was to incise his memory with details for

Dass, and painfully retail these to his partner when presently the police should have finished questioning him and Mr. Kiss.

And so, swearing to himself that he would never rest, never cease his search for, nor abandon the trail of the drugmaster until that living pest was taken—alive or dead—Salaman settled down to await the arrival of the police.

"They'll be here any minute," said Mr. Kiss quietly, and began softly to prowl about the apartment, peering, it seemed to Salaman, at everything, but touching nothing.

Mr. Chayne watched him in silence.

"He may be—I think he is—a good man, but Dass and I will prove the better bloodhounds," said Salaman, and shrugged, eying the still figure on the floor. "We shall see."

Another Dragour story by Bertram Atkey in the next issue.

SELF-DESTRUCTION ON THE INCREASE

ACCORDING to an English investigator, whose observations recently appeared in a London periodical, the tendency of advancing civilization, already proven to be a powerful deterrent of the human birth rate, is to increase the suicide rate in proportion as the degree of civilization in any given country is intensified.

Among savage races in general, the investigator affirms, suicide is of extremely rare occurrence, whereas among peoples of advanced intellect, voluntary death becomes increasingly frequent as the mental average rises. The Germans, who are notable thinkers, are more given to suicide than any other Western nation. After them, in order of descending suicide frequency, come the French, the English, the Italians and the Hungarians. In Spain, Ireland, and Portugal the suicide rate is almost negligible.

Among other curious observations made by the English investigator, in the course of his inquiry into the causes and frequency of self-destruction, is the discovery that certain seasons of the year and certain days of the month and the week have a direct relation to suicide occurrence. He notes that from January to June the suicide rate increases. From June to December it decreases, fewer suicides being reported in December than in any other month of the year. The first ten days of each month are reported as those of greatest suicide frequency. And more suicides are reported on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays than on other week days.

Among the Oriental peoples the ratio of suicides among the various tribes and nations follows essentially the same rules of frequency as in the Western Hemisphere, with the Chinese in the lead. The suicide rate in China is enormous, attaining the proportion of one death by suicide in every two thousand.

THE BOOK HE CHOSE

AT Oteen, near Asheville, North Carolina, is the government's crack hospital for ex-service men suffering with tuberculosis. The days drag most heavily for the men who have to stay in bed all the time, and it is to their wards that the Asheville women, young and old, so most frequently to see what cheer they can give the hero sufferers.

One afternoon a girl took out an armful of books to a ward which she had "adopted," and went from bed to bed offering the volumes after describing the different kinds of stories they told. The adventure, mystery and business novels went like hot cakes, although there was one man who refused all of them. He did not care for reading, he said.

Passing on to the next patient, the girl explained:

"Here's one I believe you'll like. It tells about a girl marrying a man without his having anything to say about it."

"Hold on!" shouted the man who had said he didn't want to read anything. "I do want to look that book over. It's my autobiography!"

Glorified Golf

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "So this is Paris," "A Switch in Time," Etc.

Ottie Scandrel poses as an egg and gets scrambled.

BACK an odd century or two some noted wit or half-wit in the ordinary course of the afternoon's conversation happened to drop the astounding information that there is a reason for *everything*, and immediately the remark was ushered into the textbooks to become as permanent as relatives or a broken nose. There's a reason generally for this, a reason for that and a reason for the popular Master Ottie Scandrel, an egg for the centuries, going into golf which, once you taste it, is the real reason for this snappy narrative.

To begin at the beginning—which is a good place to start.

One afternoon no longer than three years or less than three months ago, Scandrel and myself lunched six dollars' worth in the main dining room of a Longacre chop house. We had just cleaned the menu and were listening to the music of a radio, the table tools and the Crockery Chorus from the kitchen when Ottie, glancing at the front doorway, threw away his toothpick and smirked.

"Look what an ill breeze blew in, Joe, will you? That Pitz parsley, or misery hates company. Honest, everywhere I'm at so is he. I suppose the only place you ***won't*** run into him will be heaven. And even at that he might horn in!"

Pitz, one of Scandrel's elderly and friendly enemies and a box-fighting manager who had more ups and downs than an elevator operator, tottered over to give us the cream of the afternoon. Pitz, who had known a few better days, was shabby as the bread line. Not being able to squander the pennies, Looie could only afford to have his shoes shined one at a time.

He handed us both what passed for a smile.

"So it's you," Ottie said. "Really, Looie, you look so low that you'd have to reach up to touch bottom."

"We've just finished eating," I put in.

Pitz glanced at our empty plates and licked his lips.

"Everything comes to them what's got. Listen. I'm hot on the trail of a promising welter who looks as big to me as the Woolworth Building does to a midget. Stick an ear over and I'll tell you about him. His name is Fish and——"

"I don't care if his name is Bismarck and he's a herring," Ottie interrupted coldly. "Speaking of tailors—time is pressing. Me and Joe here are slipping out to do a little car shopping. The last hack I had got chewed up in a fight with a twelve-ton truck up the Hudson. Never again on them seven-thousand-dollar carts for me."

The statement, for some reason, put a sparkle in each of Looie Pitz's eyes.

"So you're looking for another car? This is certainly luck all around and no error there. I suppose the two of you know who 'Centipede' Balzoff, the rassler who invented the toe hold, is. Well, Balzoff is going back to Belfast to see the old folks and his car goes under the hammer an hour from now in Harry Perley's Auction Parlor. I wouldn't be surprised if a thousand even took it. Secondhand cars and opium are the same things nowadays—drugs on the market."

Scandrel turned to me.

"Listen to Zero, Joe. I should buy a car that's going under the hammer? Get back in line, Stupid!" he hissed at Pitz. "I'm running up to Canada Thursday and I'm looking for a car—not a ruin."

Pitz took a watch chain out of his pocket with nothing on it and looked at a clock across the room.

"It ain't nothing to me *what* you buy. I'm only telling you you can pick up a twenty-grand job for next door to nothing if you've got the cash with you and let the credit go. They only make six of these cars I'm speaking of a year and if you offered the manufacturers all of Brooklyn and half of Coney Island they couldn't give you a spark off the plugs. An opportunity like this comes once in a lifetime. Pass it up. I'll enjoy seeing you stepping past a bona-fide bargain. You always knew twice as much as anybody else, anyway!"

Ottie rubbed his twisted beak, a thoughtful expression creeping across a pan that would have given any beauty doctor life work.

"If you feel that way about it I'll buy this boiler and fool you. Put on your hat, hide them cuffs and we'll look in on this gyp joint. Come on, Joe. He's got me red headed."

Harry Perley's Auction Parlor, once we reached it, proved to be located on the banks of the East River. The waterway end of it might have been explained by the number of wrecks we saw once we got inside. Honest and truly, Athens had nothing on the floor space for ruins and there were as many antiques present as absinth bottles in Paris. If the first car ever made wasn't there, the second was. Ottie took one look around the paradise of junk and began to laugh. Then he scowled.

"So this is where you can get a twenty-thousand-dollar runabout for a song and dance? Honest, by every right I ought to give you a punch in the ear, Looie. This is the same kind of an insult as if you had picked my pocket. Hello and good-by!"

"One minute, you big stiff!" Pitz yelped seizing both his arms. "You can't judge the bargains by looking at this place no more than you can tell what's going on in Russia by a slant at a geography. These here breakdowns ain't sold."

"You don't have to tell me that!" the rajah of court jesters sneered. "Leave go of my sleeves or I'll twist you so far around that you'd bring fifty cents as a corkscrew. If there's a twenty-thousand-smacker gas eater concealed around here it's in a photograph. You must be running to the dust!"

"Here, here!" I put in. "Stop this brawling. You're worse than a couple of rival laundries arguing about a pillowcase. Why don't you stick around?" I said to my boy friend. "It isn't costing you anything just to see what's what."

Before Scandrel could answer the auctioneer pulled himself up into the stand and picked up a gavel. He was short and round and wore a silk shirt whose pattern was a disgrace to the industry. One peek at him was enough to make anybody put their loose change in an inside pocket.

"Come to order!" he bawled at the six or eight clients of the shop who looked like ex-convicts. "Now, feliers, we'll start off to-day's raffle by offering some genuwine bargains—each guaranteed to be as is. The first is an 1893 Road Hawk, one of the finest vehicles ever put on the street. Wheel her out, Gus!"

A mechanic with a fortune in grease on his hands and face threw open a door in the rear of the inclosure. There was a short runway there and down this runway he rolled an example of the automotive art that passed as a motor car through its absence of shafts.

While Scandrel tried to get his eyes back in place, the buggy became an object of brisk bidding and was finally knocked down to a boy in a black coat for seventeen dollars even.

"What do you call that—if it ain't a bargain?" Looie Pitz chuckled.

"A shame!" Scandrel growled. "I hope they send that car we come for out soon. I'll be in tears in another twenty minutes."

The auctioneer looked at his catalogue and used the hammer again.

"Send in that foreign car, Gus."

"Now you'll see something!" Pitz promised in a whisper.

"If I don't, you'll feel something!" Ottie shot back.

The machine that Gus drove in under its own power a few minutes later stood out from the other trash like a flagpole at a mass meeting of snails. It was a block long; a low, rakish touring car, painted a rich maroon, with disk wheels, axles, and a radiator as bright as a chorus girl's eyes.

A single glance was enough for the buffoon of the universe. Scandrel loved it!

"One of the rarest machines that ever come out of Europe!" the auctioneer hollered. "Gents, this is a Rumanian Hesperus that's only gone nine hundred miles by the clock. This here car has fourteen cylinders and guaranteed upholstery. It formerly belonged to a rassler who only put it on the market on account of family troubles. It's better to-day than it was when it was new. Who'll start at a thousand dollars?"

"Five hundred!" Scandrel yelled.

The auctioneer brought the hammer down with a crash.

"Sold to the gentleman on my right! Roll in the next, Gus!"

Twenty minutes later Ottie put his autograph on a check, papers were signed and we found that Looie Pitz was no longer with us.

"Where did he go?" Scandrel mumbled. "I was just ready to buy Looie a suit of clothes for putting me next to this."

Gus, the mechanic, laughed.

"Pitz aired fast. He always blows once he cops a come-on and puts over his sale. He's working here on a ninety-per-cent commission and the sucker money ought to run high from now on. Take this car you two boys just bought. Honest, we made a wonderful job out of it. When they pulled it out of the river two years ago last May there weren't nobody who ever thought we could get a thin dime for it!"

O sole mio!

A week later, after Ottie had a couple of experts tune the Hesperus so it would turn corners, found us en route toward Canada. We made Boston in nine days even with only the loss of the magneto, the crank case and my companion's temper. Eighty dollars' worth of repairs put us on the road again and in another week we were giving Vermont a tumble. By this time the fixing bills had run well into three figures and Ottie had been toasted to a cinder.

Twice he offered to sell the Hesperus for what the repairs cost and twice each prospective victim threatened to sue him for libel. Oh, it was all very ludicrous for every one except Scandrel.

Then, when it seemed a fair bet that we were destined to positively reach Quebec before the following summer, the big bus developed engine trouble again and we coasted down three hills and up to the front door of a hotel that was more Ritz than the Ritz-Carlton itself.

"It couldn't have done that better if it had been trained!" Ottie barked, throwing away a piece of the steering wheel before giving the lay a look. "The class and no mistake, Joe. I wonder if we can get a wreath here."

"What for?"

"The car, Sap. It's absolutely dead now!"

As he finished speaking a quartet of bell hops in uniforms tore down the front stairs, snatched our baggage out of the back seat and sprang away with it before Scandrel could make the broken lock on the front door work.

They had hardly disappeared before the doorman of the establishment approached and looked the motor over with a sniff and a shrug.

"Where are we, admiral?" Ottie asked.

"This is the Hotel Cosmo Arms and this is Greenwald, Vermont, sir. The mecca of the true golfer, sir. If you'll pardon my boldness may I praise your automobile, sir? It is most remarkable."

"You must have known somebody who had one," Scandrel grinned. "Listen, I like your looks, bo. And when I like anybody's looks I try and be nice to them. You admire the car. I don't want it—*you* take it!"

The doorman smiled.

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. Shall I have your motor housed in the garage?"

"What are you talking to me for?" Scandrel roared. "I said the car's yours and when I say it's yours I mean it's *yours!* And this might help you to get over the idea I'm fooling!"

With that he stuck over a right hook that

dropped the doorman, uniform and all, under the front wheels.

The minute we got inside it became evident that it was fashion's hour at the Hotel Cosmo Arms. The lobby of the hostelry, an outright steal from a Fraudway musical comedy, contained an assortment of boys and girls wearing golf clubs and sports clothes, elderly ladies dolled to the brow, whose chins were going into third editions. Tired Business Men and a smartly groomed crowd hung around tables where bridge, Mah-Jongg and Mah Jong were in progress.

One look and Scandrel was coughing like a cold in the chest.

"This is surprising, to say the least. I hear music but I don't see the chorus. I guess the curtain is up!"

"What now?" I inquired.

"The clerk and a time-table to see how soon we can get out of here."

This good intention was, however, nipped in the bud.

Ottie had taken only a step in the direction of the desk when something thrown out in a cutaway coat, gray trousers and patent-leather shoes and hair romped over and got in the way.

"I must beg your pardon," he began in a voice that matched his faultless complexion, "but allow me to introduce myself. I am L. Rodman Phelps, you know."

"I didn't and I don't want to!" Ottie snapped. "Hey, listen. What's the big idea of pulling this nutty on me—an innocent stranger?"

The other glanced at me, colored daintily and fingered a cravat that could have taught cream puffs a thing or two.

"My word! I fear I have made a grave mistake. Are you or are you not Walton Waterbury, the amateur golf champion of Los Angeles?"

This was coffee and cakes to Ottie's conceit.

"So I've been mistook for a champ, have I? That's not bad for a start. The name is Waterbury, you say? What is he—a clock-golf player?"

L. Rodman Phelps got back his breath and his balance at the same time.

"An unpardonable error on my part," he continued. "You see, we've been expecting Waterbury all week. As every one here is a rabid golf enthusiast they've been keyed up to a fever of anticipation. And because my fiancée-to-be is as bad as the rest, I thought to win her approval by getting friendly with Waterbury on sight and possibly arranging matters so he can teach her a thing or two about the bally game."

He appeared on the point of adding more particulars when a stout lady with a rope of pearls around her neck large enough to tow a scow loomed up and touched his elbow.

"We're waiting for you to finish the rubber, Rodman," this number purred like a Pekingese. "Don't tell me that you've deserted us."

"Oh, decidedly not!" Phelps made haste to reply. "May I escort you back to our table?"

They ducked, leaving Ottie to get his mouth shut.

"'May I escort you back to our table?' I'd like to hit him in the neck with one. The idiotic cake eater. If I stayed here over two days they'd be a murder in this joint. Let's get the dope on the steam locomotives with the utmost rapidity."

We did.

A charming clerk with more waves in his hair than a flag let us in on the secret that the next train out of Greenwald was the first train the following morning.

"Fortunately," he stated, "I have just two rooms left unreserved. The rates are twenty dollars apiece. Will you be kind enough to affix your signatures to the register?"

"I'll be unkind enough to affix my fist to the end of your smeller!" Scandrel hollered indignantly. "Who are you—a jockey to ride me? The only difference between you and Captain Kidd is that the Kidd had a sailboat!"

"But this is the only hotel in the vicinity, isn't it?" I asked.

"Try and find another one," the clerk smiled, as unperturbed by Scandrel's rave as a fireman at the sight of a burning match.

Ottie finally came out of it and we were escorted to the twenty-dollar chambers under the eaves, where our baggage was already stored.

There it took him fifteen minutes to decide on the scenery he'd wear down for dinner. He tossed up a nickel to decide between full dress and a frock coat and decided eventually on a dinner jacket, ruby studs, a chamois waistcoat and his cloth-topped kicks.

"How do I look, O'Grady?" he asked, taking the chance of seven years' worth of

tough luck by slanting at himself in the mirror.

"You'd never be mistaken for a waiter, that's a cinch."

Undecided as to whether he had been flattered or insulted, he put on his wrist watch and we took an elevator to the dining room of the Cosmo Arms.

My dear!

If the lobby looked like musical comedy the chew chamber was the Ziegfeld "Follies" for the scenery and characters. The room was filled with mirrors, music, soft lights and hard waiters. Each table had its own crowd and each crowd was dressed to assassinate. The boys bulged where gentlemen should, the girls divided their time between three-foot-long cigarette holders and the dance floor, and the others sat, looked and listened.

The instant we tied napkins on Ottie gave me the point of his elbow and a look. Both were more significant than the loaded revolver of a gangster. Just across the aisle from where we sat we recognized L. Rodman Phelps, the stout lady with the pearl hawser, what was evidently her husband, and a beauty who was one of Venus' few rivals. A waiter took Ottie for a dollar and broke the news that besides Phelps the party consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus van Alden and Miss Patricia van Alden from New York.

"The big Wall Street broker, sir, and his family," the tray tipper explained.

"Sweet music!" Ottie mumbled. "That little gal don't attract no more attention with me than a bottle of rum at a prayer meeting. Eh—maybe we're a little hasty about checking out of here so soon, Joe. The doctor I went to last year about my fallen arches said I ought to fall for this golf thing."

While he talked I looked at Patricia van Alden. She was worth looking at. A fairly tall, healthy-looking girl, she had hair the same color as a two-dollar-and-a-half gold piece, thrilling eyes, a demure mouth and a nose that wouldn't have been shorter if it had been chopped off with a knife. She had on more bracelets than a felon, earrings as long as the Erie Canal and the same sport haberdashery that seemed to be the rule rather than the exception.

The meal over, we made the lobby where the first thing Ottie discovered was a florist's stand manipulated by a brunette as striking in a dark way as Miss van Alden was in a light. One stare and Ottie had exchanged a Dublin cart wheel for a rose that went to his buttonhole.

"Sweetie," he began, resting a familiar elbow on the counter, "you and the Times Building are two things I'd recognize *anywhere*. If you ain't Wanda Gay who used to handle the coatroom at that kafe on Forty-ninth Street I'll give two bones to charity—both my ankles!"

"Recognized!" the brunette cooed, getting rid of a demure little smile. "And you're Ottie Scandrel or I'm unable to distinguish a pansy from a chrysanthemum. Oh, dear! You must be the millionaire from New York who arrived this afternoon in an intoxicated condition—the one they're all talking about."

"What do you mean—not sober? For all I know a Bronx cocktail is a glass of water with garlic in it."

"Then you *mustn't* be the one," Wanda Gay giggled. "Horatio, the doorman here, was telling us at dinner how some souse drove up and wanted to give him his automobile. We all had a good laugh."

Scandrel swallowed nothing twice, looked at me, and coughed.

"Er—never mind the tanks. Hand us the low-down on this place and every morning you can send me violets, Cunning. Eh—how about this here party who staggers around under the name of L. Rodman Phelps? Give us him first."

Miss Gay did, with the result that we learned young Phelps was a confirmed chicken chaser, he-flirt and masculine vamp—also that Madame van Alden was trying her best to arrange a match between the fair Patricia and the youth himself. From that point the conversation turned to the Van Alden family and Wanda Gay had to laugh.

"Say, did you pipe the old gent at dinner? He's quite a sketch, being up here on account of his health and not his wealth. He has water on the knee, gas in his stomach and electricity in the hair. What would you say that made him—an invalid?"

"No—a power house!" was Scandrel's answer. "But never mind him. Tell me everything you know about Phelps and the gal. You're in the florist business. Does it look like orange blossoms to you?"

Wanda Gay poured a glass of water over some nasturtiums that were gasping for breath.

"As far as I know they haven't signed yet for the altar walk. Ain't Phelps a cry for help though? Old man Van Alden likes him the same as a thumb in his soup plate. Personally, I don't believe Phelps has a chance. The reason is that he don't play golf any more than I do this Chinese bricklaying game. The boy that wins Goldilocks is the boy who plays golf, because Miss van Alden does everything on a course but sleep there. How are you with the links?"

"Which kind—sausages or the ones that keep your cuffs together? If you mean golf I've played it once or twice and I certainly drive 'em nasty. Why?"

The brunette arranged some carnations in a vase.

"When you play be sure and engage Maxie Shine as your caddie. He's as clever as Edison and the only thing he don't know about golf is why it's so popular. Max will help you brush up your game."

"I've got a broom of my own," Ottie retorted. "What comes under the head of pleasure now?"

"Dawncing on the west veranda," Wanda Gay said.

When we reached it we found and heard a Rialto orchestra throttling a piece of jazz while the blue-hosiery guests of the tavern either danced or glanced. Near the railing, Phelps and the blond Patricia van Alden lurked together in the shade of a honeysuckle bush.

The fact was sufficient for the clown king.

"I thought that was you, Phelps," Ottie said, joining them on the spot. "And Miss van Alden too. I'm certainly infatuated to meet you. Probably you've heard of me. If you haven't—guess?"

I expected the young lady to either faint or call for the manager but she did nothing of the kind. Allowing a laugh to escape her that was as silvery as the moonlight she gave Ottie a run for his comedy.

"I suppose you're Harold Lloyd, aren't you?"

The big buffoon snickered.

"No, and I'm not his brother Celluloid neither. If you look at the ticket close you'll find the title is Scandrel. Do I have the next shuffle?"

"Thank you, I believe I'd like to dance it with you, Mr. Scandrel."

The answer brought L. Rodman Phelps out of his coma.

"Oh, I say!" he gasped indignantly. "This is most unusual, you know! It strikes me that you're a bit of a bounder, old top! I really must demand an apology and——"

"Drop everything!" Ottie snarled. "And be careful how you 'bounder' and 'old top' me or for the next twelve years of your life you'll be picking your front teeth out of your back throat. They're turning on the music, Miss van Alden—if you've no objection I'll call you Pat and save time. Shall we do the tripping?"

That was exactly what he did.

Scandrel was light on both his feet and her feet. Using the charming heiress as a battering-ram he nonchalantly hurled aside a few couples who were in his way, gave the rubber heel to some one in a pink evening gown and was out of sight before she had picked herself up.

When the number ended he returned, perspiring and perplexed.

"Why won't you give me the next one, Patricia? I thought you told me you could die dancing."

"I did," the girl admitted, "but I didn't say anything about being trampled to death. Rodman, dear," she went on to Phelps, "you needn't wait for me. Mr. Scandrel is walking over to the Arbor with me. So you run along and call on some of your girl friends."

The last sentence was delivered in a significant voice before she took the lucky Ottie's arm and went down the front steps, leaving L. Rodman Phelps to tear a perfumed silk handkerchief to pieces and hurl it away.

It was all in fun.

The following morning the awaited Walton Waterbury arrived with golf clubs sufficient to give him more strokes than apoplexy. Waterbury was small and dark with a hatchet face and gimlet eyes. He made a speech in the lobby, went directly to his suite and then followed by every one except "Baby Bunting" set off immediately for the golf greens.

"Look at him," Ottie sneered when the parade was out of sight. "The Barrymore boys and Congress wouldn't get half this attention. And all because he can sock a pill with a cane. And that reminds me. I shared a little chatter this morning with the professional here—a Jock MacNibb who looks like Harry Lauder talks. He's one of them Scotchmen who are always looking for a reasonable post office and he's going to fix me up sweet on this golf stuff. I'm

going to get private lessons off him in the mornings before anybody gets up at twenty bills a hole and until I'm as good as I ought to be I'm going to pass the news that I've got a couple of damaged fingers. Foxy, eh? If Patricia likes golf she'll get it in quantities. I'll tell her how good I am and keep stalling until I *have* to play!"

A day later Ottie broke out with two fingers in splints, his plus-five knickers and a fancy sweater the Prince of Wales would have claimed had he ever seen it. The damaged fingers were a good enough excuse for Miss van Alden, who allowed him to walk around with her, and, from what I gathered, he got rid of a line of guff Jones and Sarazen together couldn't have equaled.

It made scant difference to Ottie that he thought a tee was something you went to at four o'clock or that for all he knew a stance was used for the removal of ink stains. By picking up a lot of MacNibb's chatter, which he had jotted down on his cuff, and looking twice as wise as Moses he managed to give the blond Miss van Alden the impression he could do a battle of bunker and hill as cleverly as the best of them.

"Already," he admitted the same night at dinner, "I've got this little queen eating out of my hand. She says my advice has helped her game a lot. I'll show these pastry pirates here a thing or two yet, I positively will."

In another two days the wealthy Patricia appeared to have completely forgotten there was such a person as L. Rodman Phelps in the vicinity of Greenwald. The daughter of the house of Van Alden gave her mornings to Scandrel and her afternoons to Walton Waterbury who hung around like a panhandler looking for a cup of coffee. It was a cinch to see that Phelps welcomed the two rivals the same as a broken arm. More than once, especially when Cyrus van Alden and Ottie smoked cigars together on the veranda, the well-bred young man did a little teeth gnashing readily observed by any bystander who was in the know. The only thing the affair hadn't corrected was his philandering among the wear sex.

From dawn to yawn with Phelps it was a case of one gal after another.

"Ain't we got comicals?" Ottie guffawed once I brought up the fact of his growing friendship. "I've put that Phelps gimick in the ice box and now I'm going to hang crape on this Waterbury stiff. He's as annoying as a rash but I'll toss him overboard yet. It's the golf stuff that puts him over and it's the golf stuff that's going to put him under. Paste *that* in your derby!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Waterbury might be the Statue of Liberty when it comes to running around and clouting the pill—but remember this: A rolling ball gathers no hole. I'll sink him like a putt and slice him into the rough if he tops any of *my* drives. Come on, let's look up this Max Shine baby that cute Wanda Gay was telling us about the first night we fell in here. I hear he's as crooked as a rainbow and I'm going to have use for him soon."

We left the veranda and started for the locker house.

"You talk a lot but you don't say much. What's on your mind besides that comic-opera cap of yours?"

Ottie looked at the wrappings around his fingers and sighed.

"To stunt a long story I understand Waterbury is making cracks about my fingers behind my back. Honest, you'd have to have them amputated before you could satisfy some people. Not only this, but that goofy Phelps flirt is making a few wise remarks and, to throw in some dramatic interest, Patricia asked me this morning when the two of us can go around together. It's all leading to one thing—I've got to say my hand is better and do a twosome with her."

"Good night!" I murmured.

Scandrel curled a lip.

"Yeah? Well, you're going to get fooled, Joe. If I do say so I've learned to play a pretty round of golf. Jock MacNibb said he'd take off his hat to me if he wasn't afraid of getting a cold in the head and yesterday morning by the dawn's early light I did the sixth and fourteenth holes in par. Equal that if you're able. Still, why shouldn't I? Any one who's an athlete like me ain't going to run to a nervous breakdown on account of a little white ball I could knock from here to Cuba!"

We reached the locker house and found a group of African-ivory experts hard at work. Ottie pushed aside a few of them before we got attention.

"One side, fellers! I'm looking for some bootblack named Shine. Is he present?"

At the question, a small, dark youth well supplied with nose and hair and who looked something like a jockey, picked up the pot,

slipped the dice in his pocket and shuffled forward.

"I'm Max, mister. You want, mebbe, you should book a game? First, I'm telling you now, I usually charge four dollars an hour but you can have me at three-fifty."

"Get in order before I slap a piece off that ridiculous nose of yours!" Ottie bawled. "Wanda Gay up at the lily counter in the hotel told me not to pay you more than two fish and a sardine an hour if you promised to go out and steal for me. You're hired. Be on hand at half past ten to-morrow morning and clean the mud off my sticks. That's all. So long."

He was turning away when Max Shine took his arm.

"You should wait! Miss Gay has got it wrong. Last week I charged two-fifty but this week I pushed it more up. A feller has got to live, ain't he?"

"Gyp me and then try to?" Scandrel snarled. "Two-fifty is two-fifty and that's what I pay."

"Not me!" Shine wailed. "Two seventy-five an hour and I'll throw in five extra minutes if you don't swear at me!"

So that was all arranged.

Back in the gilded lobby of the Cosmo Arms, Walton Waterbury and Patricia van Alden were camped in an alcove, having tea all by themselves. Ottie promptly made the company of two three and a crowd.

"Well, well!" he yelped, shaking hands with the girl and slapping Waterbury on the back. "This is certainly cozy. If you've got a chair for Joe O'Grady we'll make it a foursome. I can stand the lemons in my Ceylon but no clovers. How is the world treating you, kid?" he added to the golf champion.

"Rough!" Waterbury coughed, getting rid of a look that made a dagger as dull as a sponge.

"Walton," Patricia van Alden murmured, "has been telling me about some of the match tournaments he has played. You have no idea how many cups he has won. You should play against him, Mr. Scandrel. I'm sure it would be a thrilling contest."

"I'd love it!" Ottie nodded. "But them fingers of mine. If I had a package under my left arm and seen half a dollar in the gutter I'd leave it lay, I would for a fact. Like restaurant steak, it's tough!"

From Waterbury's expression I gathered some faint idea of what was destined to follow. Looking Scandrel directly in the eye, the Californian drew his lips back over his teeth.

"You're a faker!" he said deliberately. "My caddie has seen you playing—or trying to play—at six o'clock on two separate mornings. You're a four-flusher, a mountebank and a hypocrite. Here and now I challenge you to an eighteen-hole match at any time, any place you select. And to show you up further I'll bet you a thousand dollars cash I beat you."

Woof!

"You talk like an imbecile!" Ottie yelled, red about the ears and scalp. "I'll play you golf, I'll play you piano, I'll dance against you, I'll crawl against you and I'll swim against you and not for no one grand but for *two* grand! A four-flusher, am I? A mountain bank, you say? If there wasn't a lady present I'd knock you for a twist. You're wood alcohol—that's the worst name I can call you just now!"

"Bah!" Waterbury grated, snapping his fingers.

"Blah!" Ottie hissed, doing the same thing. "I'll play you Monday morning. Be a worm and crawl out of it at your peril!"

That was fixed up and by dusk the hotel was gossiping about it.

Worry over the impending conflict to Ottie was like rainfall on the back of a waterfowl. Throwing away the bandage that had helped him over a lot of blunders and with quite a gallery on hand to witness his turf digging he stalled, clowned and kidded away nine holes of golf the following afternoon. Half the customers didn't know whether he was good enough to burlesque his playing or so rotten that he *had* to. I could see that both Miss van Alden and Walton Waterbury wore puzzled expressions. In fact, L. Rodman Phelps with something on his arm that might have worked for the Shubert brothers appeared to be the only one who was skeptical.

"The uncouth ruffian deceives me not at all," he said to the girl. "This jesting is only to throw the unsuspicious off the track. A low exhibition!"

Miss Good Looking watched Ottie ruin two clubs before he got on the green.

"He's fascinating. I never saw any one with a face like his outside of a museum," she purred.

On the green Scandrel got a lucky break and put the ball where it belonged.

"How many strokes did I do that in, Maxie?" he barked at the caddie.

Shine flung a midiron back in the bag and grinned.

"You should ask me. I'm a caddie—not an adding machine. Phooie! Leave us get back to the clubhouse quick so I can come out and hunt them balls you lost in the rough!"

"Not so good," I said the minute we were alone. "It looks like you've let yourself in for the laugh and not the lady. You'll make a spectacle out of yourself!"

He made a careless gesture and sneered.

"Yeah? You're on a busy wire, Joe. You don't notice any tears streaming down my face, do you? Rumania wasn't built in a day. I'll come in like a breeze!"

Apparently with not a worry in the world he could call his own, Ottie took whatever time Patricia van Alden allowed him, wore white duck to please the chicken and discontinued morning classes with "Hoot Mon" Jock MacNibb. While Father Time got in *his* fine work, the gilded Phelps began to make a handbook on the impending match, suddenly ceased playing Romeo to the hotel Juliets and kept pretty much to himself. Waterbury buzzed around the heiress but had little to say concerning the Monday affair and Scandrel, when time hung heavy on his hands, gave Wanda Gay a whirl around the neighborhood in a hired hack.

He was so carefree and untroubled that I finally called him aside and, like a fisherman or a correspondent, dropped him a line.

"Listen. You're either a Napoleon for strategy or cement for the thickness. What have you got up your sleeve beside the freckle on your arm? Come clean and come clean quick. Are you thinking of blowing the joint before your bluff is called?"

His answer was to stick out his jaw and growl.

"By rights I ought to slap you one for that, Joe. What do you mean—bluff? You talk as if I was the Palisades. I'll win and I'll laugh Waterbury out of the hotel and here's the way I'll do it. Maxie Shine put me next the other day. All is fair in love and golf—eat onions and don't breathe a word of this to a soul. Shine has got a dozen brand-new loaded golf balls. I'm paying him important money for the use of them Monday. Get it now? I cinch it from here to Madrid with hardly a struggle. Ain't life lovely?"

"*Loaded* balls? I never heard of such a thing!"

Ottie grinned.

"Yeah—and you never heard of Columbus until you went to school, either. Well, loaded golf balls and loaded dice are closely related and as modern as four-wheel brakes and baboon tires. Maxie is attending to all the rough work and he'll do the switching at the proper minutes. What could be nicer? So Waterbury has won thousands of cups, has he? Well, it's nickels to nothing that all the cups together won't be able to hold his tears—once he takes *my* punishment!"

If possible, approach that one!

With every one present except the bell hops at the Cosmo Arms, the much-discussed grudge-match tournament got under way the following Monday at eleven o'clock to the instant with Ottie pulling a lucky drive from the first tee that put him within striking distance of the green.

"Tie that one, feller!" he sneered at Waterbury with a side look in the direction of the blond Patricia parked in the gallery.

With Shine well in advance of the procession Ottie dubbed about a bit, finally playing a crisp iron to within ten feet of the pin. The champ from the land of the movie studios brassied up and gave the green a hasty look.

"That my ball over there?" he snapped at his own caddie.

"Positively—ain't you got eyesight?" Shine cut in quickly.

"Speak when you're spoken to!" Waterbury said angrily as Ottie dropped his putt and marked a fair seven.

"My mistake," Shine apologized. "Such a hasty temper I got—you can't imagine. That's the way I am—they say this and they say that, I'm always getting hollered at and it don't pay to have manners——"

"I'll report you to the committee if you don't cease that confounded chatter!" Waterbury raved, calming a little when he caught the Van Alden girl's eye. "Eh—Patricia, observe the method with which I play this down. Just a slight wrist tap and then——"

He delivered the slight wrist tap and the ball shot off at an angle of eighty degrees and rolled around in a circle! The spin to it created a wave of merriment.

"Ha-ha!" Ottie roared. "A wrist tap! This is certainly comical!"

Waterbury grimly went after it and with the slight expenditure of nine unnecessary strokes finally put it in the can.

"This is a new one on me. I can't understand it," he moaned. "If I didn't know the popular brand of ball I play with I'd think it was bewitched!"

Going out the game was a travesty but coming in it was a tragedy.

With the perspiring Scandrel topping his drives and landing in every trap along the way, splintering his clubs and cutting up the course, he blundered and blahed up to the greens where the fine hand of Shine did its duty and Walton Waterbury more than equaled Ottie's strokes when it came to putting. The seventeenth hole was played and the drive from the last tee made—the railbirds wise to the conclusion.

For all of his dubbing and his antics it looked like Ottie's match by a possible trio of gift strokes. He made the eighteenth green in twelve, allowing Waterbury to reach it in three, threw a look at Max Shine who had gone on in advance, snickered at the audience and rubbed his hands.

"I hear them tell how I'm five strikes to the good. I'll play this one wicked just for fun. Hand me the regular club and we'll end it in a hurry."

Shine handed over the iron, Ottie threw out his chest, squinted at the pin and tapped.

Immediately the ball zigzagged off in an angle of eighty degrees!

"Ha-ha!" Walton Waterbury laughed. "So your ball has got it too! Now we'll see who wins!"

A look at the face of Signor Shine was sufficient to explain that Scandrel, disregarding a tip off, had selected the planted ball. Mumbling under his breath and dashing a pint of perspiration from his brow he went after it with the iron but with no more chance of winning the game than a pig has of being turned loose in a parlor.

He eventually made the hole, the exile from Los Angeles demonstrated the slight wrist tap and it was all over for keeps.

The next thing on the bill of fare was L. Rodman Phelps' merry peal of laughter.

"Exactly what I imagined would happen! You cannot make a gentleman out of an ordinary roughneck or a golfer from a goof. This is worth all that I won and——"

Breaking his putter in half, Scandrel stopped only to drop the amazed Maxie Shine with a hook to the jaw and then walked over and caught Phelps before *he* could escape.

"Here's where I make a cold sketch out of a hot one!" he hissed venomously, swinging a fast one to the precise point of the wealthy youth's jaw. "Laugh *that* off!"

Phelps took the turf and Ottie swung around and picked out Miss Patricia van Alden. But before he could speak a word she had confronted him, her face flaming and her hands made over into little fists.

"Oh, how could you!" she cried. "How could you do such an unspeakably beastly trick! And how dare you strike my husband?"

Cyrus van Alden pushed a way out of the ranks of the startled spectators.

"What's that, Pat?" he thundered.

With Scandrel's mouth open wide enough to accommodate a moving van and some one passing the sniff salts to Mrs. van Alden, the beautiful blondie, on her knees beside Phelps and taking as much notice of Waterbury as if he had been on the outskirts of Turkey, lifted her head and looked at her father.

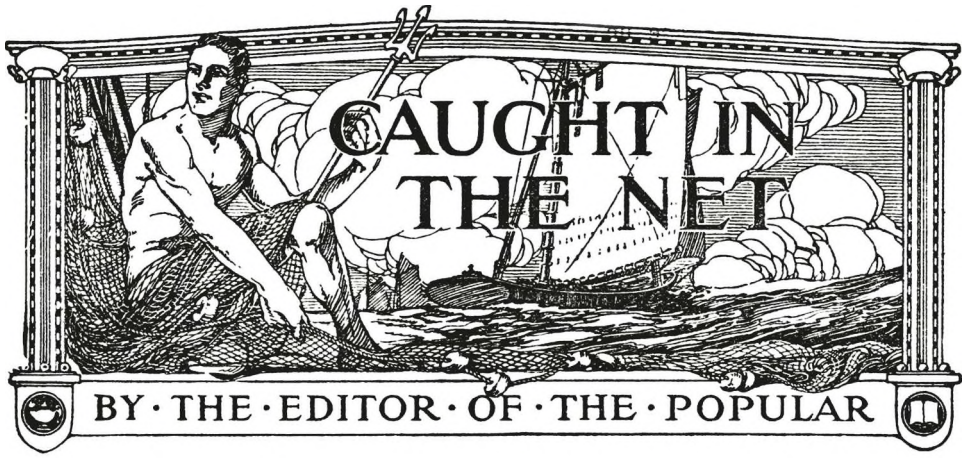
"Yes, my husband! We were married three months ago—secretly. Roddie was angry because I wanted to win *you* over, dad, before I made it public, and he thought to retaliate by flirting outrageously. I endeavored to do a little of the same thing on my own hook and the day before yesterday we came to an agreement. We had decided to break the news at dinner to-night."

Twenty minutes later Ottie, packing hastily in his room at the Cosmo Arms, was interrupted by a knock on the door. Two seconds after that Max Shine walked in, grinning sheepishly.

"Listen, Mr. Scandrel. A punch in the eye is one thing and a bargain is another. Could I help it you should make a mistake of picking out the wrong ball? And does that make it a difference? Eh—now—you owe me two hundred and fifty dollars like you promised. If you ain't got change I'll go and get it for you."

Fore!

Another Montanye story in the next number.



EATING OUR CAKE

CONSIDER the following facts.

The United States numbers approximately six per cent of the world's population.

The United States produces:

Forty-three per cent of the world's coal and uses forty-two per cent.
Fifty-four per cent of the iron and uses fifty-three per cent.
Sixty-four per cent of the steel and uses fifty-seven per cent.
Forty-nine per cent of the copper and uses forty-four per cent.
Sixty-four per cent of the petroleum and uses seventy-two per cent.
Sixty-nine per cent of the cotton and uses thirty-seven per cent.
Fifty-two per cent of the timber and uses fifty-one per cent.
Forty-one per cent of the shoes and uses thirty-nine per cent.
Forty-three per cent of the print paper and uses fifty per cent.

Our authority for these figures is good. They come from Chairman Howard Elliot of the Northern Pacific Railway. Mr. Elliot advanced them, in the course of a recent address, to demonstrate the economic strength of the nation.

There can be no denying the force of such a demonstration. In the industries covered they reveal America as supreme among the nations of the earth as regards production. There is matter here for gratification. We may safely congratulate ourselves upon the fact that we, with only a shade over one twentieth of the world's population at work, command half of the world's output in nine basic industries.

But that is only a moiety of the story as told by Chairman Elliot's extraordinary array of statistics. Looking at the other half—the figures on consumption—it seems that we no sooner get our cake than we eat it. That one twentieth of the world should consume one half of all the world produces is startling. The question immediately arises: What does the other eighty per cent live on?

Most of the other eighty per cent, of course, lives on what scraps and leavings it can scramble together, and, according to our American standards, lives pretty miserably. At first glance this appears unfair. But is it? It might be but for one thing. America is not grabbing anything that other nations have worked for. She doesn't buy her cake at the world baker's. She bakes it herself. By baking harder—or at least to better purpose—than her neighbors, she provides herself with more and better cake. And she has a right to eat it.

However, whatever her ethical prerogatives in the case, the fact remains that she is eating all the cake instead of putting some of it by for a time of need. Chairman Elliot's figures prove us the most efficient and productive nation; but they suggest also that we may not be the thriftiest.

A REQUISITE OF PEACE

LISTENING to the men who ought to know the worst about war, we sometimes doubt whether there is any hope that human beings will ever learn to keep peace. It seems to us that any practical peace plan must include a chapter on the cultivation of the veteran memory. The men who have written books, and stories, and treatises, and news reports about war have unanimously assured us that it is a grisly, dismal, terrifying, and wholly tragic business. These men are presumably experts on the subject, even if they did get their facts at secondhand and study the evidence at leisure. The real experts on war ought to be the men who did the firsthand fighting. And if war is as horrible as the men who write about it declare, it would seem that the men who actually participated in the horrors would concur in the verdict.

The remarkable fact is, however, that they don't. At least, they don't appear to. Listen to the veterans talking it over. Do they speak of blood, and slaughter, destitution and suffering? Rarely. Usually they talk of good times and good friends. Their faces glow. Their eyes grow misty with enthusiasm. They might be university graduates reliving the "good old days at Siwash." You hear snatches like this: "And 'member the li'l' game down in that dugout at Seichprey the night the Jerrys——" Or: "That certainly was a nice little town. The folks there treated us like——" Or again: "Those were the days! Nothing to worry about. No responsibility. Just take orders and do as you were told. Lots of mud, but——"

Thus runs the talk of most men we know who have really tasted the undoubted horrors of war. If you force them to it they will admit that it was pretty bad. But you have to force them. Leave them to themselves and they will paint a picture of war that sounds like the program of a chamber-of-commerce clambake.

And it doesn't mean a thing. Not really. War is without question considerably worse than anybody can paint it. But the human memory is a vastly complacent piece of mechanism. It retains those things its owner enjoys and rejects those that annoy him. The man who ought to be teaching the rising generation to abhor war, the veteran, is painting it in glowing colors instead, telling of its dignity, glory, and romance, glossing over its sordid gloom, its terror, its suffering.

This is nothing new. The veterans of every war in history have done the same. And unless something is done to rob the human memory of its complacency, the veterans of every future war will carry on the tradition. It is going to be a difficult thing to devise a peace program that will stop war until its victims cease to sing its praises.

DON'T BE ASHAMED

THERE is a weakness from which few of us do not suffer. It is the vain ambition to be something, or do something, for which we are hopelessly unfitted. For instance, most small men, though they may not admit it, would rather give the heavyweight champion of the world the licking of his life than make a million dollars. And the awkward rough diamonds who stand six feet two in their bath slippers and spend their lives trying to find inconspicuous parking places for their hands and feet would sacrifice all the physical advantage they hold over their fellow men to acquire half the grace of a Rudolph Valentino. As to just what it is that Rudolph the Incomparable would rather be than Rudolph, we have never heard. But it is fairly certain that even a Valentino can think of some rôle in life more desirable than his own.

This yearning to be something or somebody else, which preys upon the contentment of most of us, is all very well if we recognize it as an absurdity and keep it well out of the way, in the realm of daydreams. But it is dangerous if we give it too much space in our minds. Many a man who was born to physical mediocrity allows his life to be embittered by an acute, almost morbid, consciousness of his bodily handicaps. And there is a dash of gall in the cups of thousands who are blessed with strength and bulk but who cannot match the social grace and mental facility of their less robust associates in life.

The exercise of a little common sense teaches the futility of wanting to be a heavyweight if you are built to be a jockey. The fact is that Jack Dempsey trying to win the Kentucky Derby would be no less ludicrous than Tod Sloan challenging Bob Fitzsimmons to a finish fight. Too many of us try to run in the wrong class And when we take the booby prize we are ashamed and hang our heads. The thing to be ashamed of is not that we failed to breast the tape with the winners but that we were ever fool enough to enter such a race.

The man who was born to drive a plow—and who drives a plow—has nothing to be ashamed of. It is the man who ought to be back on the farm and who makes an idiot of himself at Hollywood instead, who has reason to reproach himself.

Find out what your own last is, and stick to it. Rather pride yourself on the thing you can do well than reproach yourself over the things you cannot do at all. If you find, through bitter experience, that poker is not your game, then try chess.

A WELCOME RETURN

WHEN the alarm clocks of the nation break out in their sleep-wrecking chatter on the morning of the fifteenth day of this month a very considerable portion of the great American public will hop out of bed with the firm conviction that life has become really worth living again. For April 15th is the day on which baseball comes into its own again; the day when the sixteen teams of the two big leagues start on their long pennant chases; the day for which real baseball fans have been longing ever since the umpire bawled "Out!" for the last player in the World's Series last October.

Baseball as a game to play is just one of a number of good games, and for most of us not the best one. But as a game to watch it has changed from a national sport to a national habit. It has had its critics, some just critics and some unjust, but on the whole it is a good and healthful habit. Of course, watching highly paid professional athletes do your playing for you isn't as good as playing yourself, but it is a much better way of spending an afternoon than many we can think of. Certainly as an exhibition of high manual skill and of mental alertness it is impossible to beat. And to most men—and more women each year—it is full of thrills. Of course there are men to whom two out, the bases full and "Babe" Ruth striding to the plate brings no mental tingle—but we don't envy them!

It looks as if baseball is going to enjoy one of the best years of its history. Whether brought about by the decadence of the fine art of pitching or the increase of skill in the more rugged business of slugging or the added liveliness of the modern baseball, the freer hitting of the last few seasons has added many thousands to the army of fans. There are some enthusiasts who still prefer the rapier play of a pitchers' battle and a 1-0 score to the more robust delights of a slugging match, but to most fans the thrill of baseball thrills comes with the crack of the bat that sends the ball whizzing over the heads of the fielders

POPULAR TOPICS

GOLFERS in the Fiji Islands have little trouble finding lost balls. There grows on the Fijian links a sensitive plant that shrivels at the lightest touch. When a player pulls or slices his drive and the ball departs for the great open spaces off the fairway, all he has to do is to follow the line of shriveled plants to the elusive pill's resting place.

It's different in America. Here it is the language of the players that shrivels the shrubbery. Our golf courses are no fit places for sensitive plants—vegetable or human.

WE don't doubt for a second that Hugh Gibson, our minister to Poland, can be the most diplomatic of diplomats—when he wants to be. But when he wants not to be, he can wag a wicked tongue. While telling the foreign-affairs committee of

the House of Representatives what our diplomatic and consular services can get along without, Mr. Gibson suggested that "white spats, tea drinkers and cookie pushers" should be eliminated.

"Cookie pusher" deserves a permanent place in the great American language.

HERE is an addition to THE POPULAR'S list of regular fellows—Doctor R. Adlington Newman, a sixty-four-year-old resident of Detroit, Michigan, who last winter risked his life on treacherous ice on the Detroit River to save the life of an Airedale puppy.

IT seems to us that half the population of the world is busily engaged in destroying the fond illusions of the other half of the population.

Take the weather, for instance. For as long as we can remember we have looked forward to an "equinoctial storm" in March and to another in September. When they didn't make their scheduled appearances we were disappointed. Now along comes the weather bureau at Washington with a denial that there is any such thing as an equinoctial storm. The big, satisfactory blows that come up the Atlantic coast so often in March and September are just West Indian hurricanes that have been lost, strayed or stolen from their usual stamping—or blowing—grounds.

The weather bureau also rules the moon out of the weather-forecasting business. Wet moons and dry moons, it says, are nothing but superstitions.

Which won't keep many a wise old farmer from taking a look at the moon and then predicting the weather with at least as much success as the most "scientific" observer.

ANOTHER illusion that we have been compelled to scrap is that Hawaii is the land of the grass skirt and the untrammeled hula dance. Of course the grass skirt still survives, but it is worn over a cloth skirt, and the hula dance has been made so tame that Hawaiians have to come to Broadway to see the latest real peppy steps.

LADIES who refer to their sisters under the skin as "cats" have the scientific opinion of Professor Lepinay of the Paris College of Psychology back of them. Cats, says the professor, "are very curious enigmas to which we very rightly compare the fair sex." He follows this damaging blow with the statement that cats are capricious and independent, like flattery, and are anarchists among animals.

Men do not get by without a salute from the professor. Dogs, he says, through associating with them have contracted some of men's faults, among them a lack of sincerity.

We wonder if the professor ever has seen a dog tearing into a piece of steak.

STAY with Uncle Sam and you will wear diamonds. Our consul at Capetown, South Africa, says that between eighty and ninety per cent of the world's diamond output is being sold in the land of the free and prosperous.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY professors have been amusing themselves—if amusing be the right word—by taking a referendum on the six most important words in the English language. President Hibben picked Duty, Loyalty, Honor, Self-control, Service, and Sacrifice. Professor Van Dyke chose The, Is, Yes, No, A, and Do.

If these gentlemen had our job we know what six words they would pick as the most important:

Only
Six
More
Lines
To
Fill.

NOT the least optimistic of the immigrants who entered the United States last year were twenty brewers. Another straw that may predict damper weather is that although over a hundred tailors went back to their old homes, not a single brewer left us.

Bat, Brown Brother

By Sam Hellman

Author of "Low Bridge," and other stories.

Baseball in the South Seas produces a weird box score.

I'M in Manila, wondering what the chances is of swimming to Frisco on a empty stomach when "Toots" Kinnealy, whose gin joint I been working for flops and chops, spills a idea that learns me in a coupla weeks that I ain't seen nothing yet in the grief line.

"Know anything about baseball?" he asks.

"Go on," I comes back, "what do I say?"

"You better say yes," yelps Toots, "because the free lunch ain't gonna be free no more, beginning last night, and unless you is figuring on doing a Dutch——"

"Yes," I cuts in quick, "but I ain't played none since I was a kid."

"That makes no never mind it," says Kinnealy. "You don't have to know much, seeing as you ain't gonna play the game; only teach it."

"Who to?" I asks.

"Here's the lay," he explains. "Some cuckoo in Washington is got the notion that if these tan babies here can be talked into falling for baseball it'll help make Yanks outta them and take their minds offa revolutions, head hunting and them other innocent pastimes that is all the rages in these parts. One of the government bozos that slips in here for a shot in the arm tells me they is gonna slap schools and ball grounds on all of the islands and he asks me if I knows anybody that can teach the game."

"And right away," I interrupts, "you thinks of me."

"Yep," says Toots, "I had to get rid of you before you eats me outta house and lot and this looked like a swell chance to bounce you out graceful."

"What," I asks, "gives you the hunch that I knows anything about baseball?"

"The progress of elimination," comes back Kinnealy, "They ain't nothing else you is good at, so I gives my doubts a benefit——"

"Well," I cuts in, starting to beat it out, "they is some other rum roosts in this burg, where, maybe, I can't get no handouts but they is got just as good insults."

"Clam yourself, kid, clam yourself," says Toots, soothing. "What difference does it make whether you know anything about baseball or not? How is these lads gonna know if you is learning them right or wrong? They is a hundred and fifty fish per and chow in this act and in three or four months you can get yourself enough of a stake to beat it back to the States."

That listens reasonable and I lets Kinnealy tell me the how, when, what and where of the job. He don't know so much but he gives me the name of the gink that is the loud noise in the layout—McCollum,

it is—and I drifts over to see him. My tough luck's still sticking and I find the bird in his office.

"What is your experience?" he wants to know.

I gives him a Doctor Cook about the different teams I has played with and the swell offers I got from McGraw and Connie Mack for private lessons in the arts of baseball. When I finishes McCollum grins and hands me a cigar.

"Smoke some more," says he. "I was a sport editor in St. Louis for about fifteen years. What's happened to the fight game?"

"Gone blah," I answered, "and I guess this job's gone the same place, huh?"

"To the contraries," comes back McCollum, "you're sitting on it prettier than ever. A guy with a wallop like you used to have oughta fit in sweet down at Tomango where the lads is a little wild."

"How wild," I butts in, "is a little?"

"Well," says he, "Tomango is one of them islands at the other end of the bunch Dewey hung on to us which even the Spaniards didn't pay no attention to. so they ain't used to none of the refineries of civilization."

"And they is wild to get 'em, eh?" I asks.

"If you comes back alive, they is," answers McCollum. "If you don't, they ain't."

"Now that Tomango's off the list," says I. "What tame island is they around here that's honing to learn baseball?"

"I was only kidding," laughs the boss. "Nobody ain't gonna hurt you down there. They just ain't used to white meat—white men, I mean—and you maybe'll have a lotta trouble getting your stuff over. They is a coupla Americans down there now, a dame from Kansas that's teaching the kids, a guy that's kinda in charge of the whole dump, and besides, they is a company of constables. Your job is to get the young bucks interested in baseball. The boat leaves tomorrow. Does it go with or without?"

"With," says I. "If it ain't too wild for that prairie hen from Kansas, it ain't too wild for me."

II.

The ocean-going tub on which I muffs my meals takes three days to do the crawl to Tomango. It ain't such a much of a joint to look at, but any place where you can keep your head up is a pair of dice to me and I'm just about ready to kiss the brown babies that comes from the shore after me.

Besides me they is a coupla natives that gets off and a few boxes which is full of bats and balls and the other truck that goes with the great American wow. I looks around for a taxi or something and pretty soon the something shows up. It's the gal from Kansas. She's a slim frail, about twenty or so-so, and while she ain't no "Folly" entry on looks, she's got a nice, friendly smile that cashes with me. She tells me her name is Miss Allison and I knocks myself down and explains what brung me to Tomango.

"I'm glad you come," says she. "The children is easy to handle but the older boys is getting kinda restless because the constables won't let them play the games they used to and——"

"What games is them?" I cuts in.

"Head hunting mostly," she comes back calm, like she was talking about crickets or leap frogs. "Maybe you can make 'em trade in their bolos for bats."

"Maybe yes," I says dubious, "if you and the other feller lends a hand. They is another paleface here, ain't they?"

"Yes," she answers, slowlike, "but I'm afraid he won't be much help."

"How come?" I wants to know.

"You'll see," says the gal and starts up the beach. I follows with a flock of the boys lugging my freight and pretty soon we comes to the swell residence section which is a bunch of grass houses set up on stilts in the mud. Off by theirselves is a coupla shacks that don't look so bad from the outside, anyways.

"That one," points the kid from Kansas, "is my place. I guess you'll put up with Mr. Grainger over there in the other hut—if you can."

"What is he?" I asks. "A missionary?"

"No," she says with a smile, "he's the government agent and you'd better report to him."

Which I does. After almost busting the door down they is a growl for me to come in. A big fat bird is squatting in a rocking chair with a fan in one mitt and a glass of hooch in the other. The day ain't got a good start yet, but this bozo has.

"Who in hell is you?" he yelps.

"In hell is right," I comes back. "Me?

I'm Young Bright-eyes, baseball teacher to the little brown brother."

That don't register, so I tells him what I comes to Tomango for. Grainger sneers me through.

"Think you can learn this gang to play?" he asks.

"An honest lad can but try," I answers modest. "Any rule in this swamp against offering a guy a drink?"

"What do you want," growls the agent, "a perfumed invitation? If you wait for offers around this dump you won't get nothing but nothing. The system in these parts is to grab what you wants and then let out a roar because it ain't enough."

"I'm a roarer from Aurora," says I, helping myself to a hooker of gin, "and I'm gonna start roaring for some info. Is they any dry places on this island, or is it all slush?"

"It gets slushier as you go back," answers Grainger. "Go on and take a look for yourself. It's nearly noon and I ain't half bunned yet."

"Don't let me stop you," I tells him. "But before you passes out, where do I flop?"

He motions toward the back of the shanty and the cuckoo being about dead to the world I don't waste no more time asking no questions but beats it out to see what Tomango has worth wasting my eyes on. About a half a mile away I comes to a flat spot that's a little higher than the rest of the island which I figures I can use for a diamond if they ain't no better place—which they ain't. I runs across a flock of the natives, little, dark-brown babies that don't wear no more clothes than them athaletic dancers which just skins through their acts.

By the time I gets back downtown school's out and I get a chance for some more talk with the gal from Kansas. It's a cinch I ain't gonna get nothing from that gin fizzle that's supposed to be the ace spot on Tomango, so I takes my troubles to the frail.

"How'm I gonna start the baseball racket here?" I asks.

She tells me I better have a gab fest first with the head native, a goof that can't talk United States and don't know whether baseball is a game or my favorite aunt's middle name. Howsomever, the gal says she will put me up against a lad that can sling both lingoes and after that it's up to me and my gift of bull.

I don't do nothing the rest of the day but the next morning I meets up with the lad Miss Allison was telling me about and I springs the works on him. The boy's been to Manila, has seen a coupla ball games, and talks pretty good English. He ain't so sure that the Tomangoes will fall for my stuff but he's willing to tote along and do his bit.

We finds the big cheese without no troubles. He turns out to be a young feller that don't look no different from the rest of the natives I've piped excepting that somebody's slipped him a silk hat and a pair of cloth-topped kicks which makes him look like a cross between a Broadway cakehound and the chief of the Cannon Ball Islands. Manny—that's the short cut I hung on the interpreter—gives the boy the grand salami and then motions me to do my stuff.

"Tell this fathead," says I, "that the President of the United States is crazy about Tomango and has sent me over to this deadfall to teach his favorite outdoor sport to the young bucks; tell him the head-hunting stuff is ruled off the turf and if these gay young razor blades wants to keep up with the parade they got to learn baseball."

Them ain't exactly the words I pull but that's the idea and Manny breaks his teeth putting it over. They ain't no way to say "baseball" in Tomangoese and the motions this lad of mine goes through trying to get the idea across is a big-time laugh. After the boy gets through the main works turns loose a few splutters.

"Him say," explains Manny, "what for him do?"

"In other words," says I, "what's in it for Sweeney?"

I figured on something like this and I'm all set. I pulls outta my pocket a bottle of gin which Grainger gives me while he is asleep and holds it up.

In this neck of the woods the Constitution follows the flagon. The high muck give the grape the thirsty eye and the smacky lip and seeing that I is getting myself in good I makes hay while the iron's hot and has my boy tell the chief what I wants he should do for me. Before I leaves Banyo—that's the head guy's name—I got his promises to have thirty or forty young bloods out on the flat in the morning for spring training.

After which I beats it back to the dump me and Grainger is splitting, to get out some bats and balls and suchlike so as to be all set for get-away day.

"Well," says I to the agent, "what's my chances of cutting you loose from the hooch long enough to pitch the first ball to-morrow?"

"You'd be surprised how little they is," comes back this lad.

"It ain't none of my business," I goes on, "so I'm going to ask you what in heck you is supposed to do here?"

"I don't know," admits Grainger and then the cuckoo starts to blubbering. "It's a sad story."

"Go on," I urges, "spill it. I ain't got no friends."

"It was this way," says he, dropping a tear in the gin. "When I leaves Manila the governor gives me a closed envelope which he tells has all my instructions about what I'm supposed to do here. While we is on the ocean I takes my coat off and hangs it on the rail and along comes a wind and parks it in the drink. So when I gets to Tomango I ain't got no orders on what to do."

"Can't you write," I asks, "and find out?"

"I thought of that," mumbled Grainger, "but my pencil was in the coat, too."

"That sure is the eel's ears for tough luck," says I, "but did it ever strike you, when you was sober, if ever, that you might maybe cadge the loan of one from the schoolmarm."

"I don't take no presents from no ladies," comes back Grainger, dignified, and then he starts to blubbering again.

"Dry your lamps," says I, cheerful. "Your troubles is over. I got a pencil which I will slip you scot-free and for nothing."

"No," answers he. "You maybe will need it yourself and I ain't got the heart to take it." Then he pours himse' a big shot of gin and goes to moaning about what his poor mother will think when she finds out that he is five thousand miles from home without even no lead pencil.

Crying jags ain't nothing new in my young life. I've seen husky boilermakers load up on barrel-house varnish and then sit down in the sawdust and cry their eyes out for the sufferings of an angleworm that they stepped on by mistake twenty or thirty years before. I remember one bozo out in Frisco that finished up a bout with a keg of steam beer with a two-hour sobbing spell about a dog that a friend of his cousin used to have.

"Is it dead?" I asked to be sociable.

"It must be," he come back. "I ain't seen Bones for twenty-five years and he was slipping fast then. The poor pup."

But none of the jags I has seen is so funny as the one Grainger is toying with. The cuckoo has been pickled for two months according to what I hears around Tomango, but is got some kinda drag that keeps him on the job and in gin without no kicks.

In the evening I sees the Kansas frail and tells her about the lead-pencil gag. She just smiles.

"When he first come here," says the gal, "it was paper that he didn't have. I sent him some over but he refused to take it because he said it wouldn't be right for him to use no paper without no picture of George Washington on it."

Then she asks me how the baseball idea is sprouting and I tells her about my visit to Banyo.

"Step out to-morrow," says I, "and see the bushers perform."

"All right," she comes back. "I'll dismiss school and bring the kids out. I just love baseball. Don't you?"

"The remains is to be seen," I answers, evasive.

III.

Sure enough they is about fifty of the bucks out on the flat next morning when I shows with Manny and a coupla bat boys lugging my stuff. I never seen such a flock of grouchy maps in my life. these babies acting like they expected me to bounce the clubs off their beans instead of showing 'em a good time.

"Tell these cuckoos," says I to the educated lad, "that this ain't no funeral and that I is here to teach them a pastimes outta which maybe they should get a lotta enjoyments if anything."

Manny gathers the boys around him and says his piece. I can tell by the way they looks that he ain't going over big but the mob don't seem so scared like it did at first and I figures its about time for me to show them something. So I pulls out a ball and playfullike tosses it to one of the lads about ten feet away, just to see what he'll do with it. He gives a yell and flops on the ground and the pill bounces off a bozo in back of him. Then the whole mob starts

milling and whooping and I'm just about ready to call it a day on the run when Banyo comes along and quiets the crowd. The chief's got some real brains and gets jerry pretty quick when Manny and me starts explaining the ideas of the game to him. I shows him how to hold his mitts and in a few minutes me and him is playing catch. The rest of the gang, seeing that nobody is being murdered with cold blood, and Banyo with a grin on his mush, begins getting interested so I tosses out half a dozen balls and invites 'em to sit in, which they does.

After the boys get used to the feel of the pill I bats out a few and has a bunch of the lads chasing around the field and throwing 'em in. By this time the Tomangoes is beginning to get some fun outta the pastimes and before I knocks off for the day I've drug out the masks and the gloves and explained what they is for. These brown babies ain't the stupids I took 'em for at first and they really surprises me by their speed in getting hep.

The gal from Kansas keeps her promise and shows up with her kids and she likes my work so good she wants that I should also learn the youngsters how to play, all of which gives me an inside laugh, me not really knowing enough about baseball to be third assistant bat boy for an eighth-place team in the Three-Eyes Leagues. But the frail is in good with me and I'm willing to learn the kids anything from faro bank to bookmaking if she asks me to. Understand, I ain't kicked in on the jane but she's the only person on the island I can trade gab with, this guy Grainger not having nothing to offer in the ways of polite conversations excepting crying spells and gin cracks.

In a week or so I got my stuff across so good with the boys that I splits 'em up in two teams and announces that we will have a regular game the next Sunday. I'm feeling kinda good about the way things has been going with my act and I lets go a few brags.

"This is a cinch," I tells Miss Allison. "Where do they get that hop about it being hard to put the civilized stuff on here?"

"You is likely to run into troubles when you leastest expect it," she comes back. "These folks ain't Christians and they has some funny costumes about castes and religions and suchlike."

"Leave it to me," I says. "I don't care what kinda rags they wears and what kinda shows they has so long as they don't begin heaving bats around and starting a head hunt with my conk for first prize."

I don't think no more of what the gal says until Sunday, when it all comes back to me with a wallop. When I gets to the flat the place is packed. I guess everybody in Tomango is there, excepting Grainger. I invited that cuckoo to come but he says he don't believe in no Sunday baseball and besides he didn't have no pencil to keep the score with, which he says I knows and just brung up to make him sad.

The boys, of course, ain't got no uniforms, but I snags a bunch of blue-and-red cloth which I gets the different teams to wear around them so the gang can tell who's who. These babies look so much alike to me that it would be a cinch if they was a man on first for the baseman to start running around the bags without me knowing they was anything wrong.

Well, we starts the game. The Blues is at bat first and the first geezer up strikes out on three pitches that is so wide that he couldn't 'a' hit 'em with a club eighteen feet long and a long reach. The next bozo hits one right at the pitcher and makes a home run with hours to spare, every one of the basemen trying to show how far he can miss the pill. All of which don't worry me any. They ain't none of 'em that can play for a whoop but they is getting the idea of the game.

Banyo's the next baby up. The Red pitcher is going pretty good by this time and gets three of 'em near enough to the plate for me to call 'em strikes. Nothing ain't no ball with me that a guy could take a run and jump and maybe hit. I waves the chief out but he don't budge. Then he begins jabbering at me and I calls for Manny. The two h a long powwow.

"What's eating him?" I asks.

"Him say," says Manny, "him headman and no can do him like you do him and him," pointing to the lads ahead of him in the waiting list."

"No sabby," I comes back.

"Him headman," explains the lad. "Him like king. Him have four wives. Him and him only one. Headman get more everything than other mans."

"I got you," says I. "If them other bozos only get three strikes he figures he oughta get six. That so?"

Manny grins all over.

"You near to right," he tells me. "Only six not right. Twelve he say. Four wives for——"

"I see," I cuts in. "Three strikes for each wife."

That's the idea and I lets it go at that. I figure they ain't no use starting no argument with a bozo I need in my business so I motions to him to go on swinging. He hits a slow roller on the eighth one that the second baseman juggles around like a hot spud and finally gloms onto but too late for a play at first. I wave to Banyo to stick to the bag—me being umpire and coach all in one—but the gink pays no attentions. The bird at second's holding the ball but the chief jogs right on like they ain't nothing to stop him and they ain't. The baby with the ball moves off the bag and don't even try to tag the runner.

"Slap him, you flathead," I yelps, but the bozo looks kinda scared and shakes his head. Manny comes running out to the box.

"Him no can do," explains this lad.

"Why not?" I wants to know.

"Him low-caste mans," he answers. "No can put hand on Banyo."

"Oh, hell," says I. "Is this the kinda game I'm up against? Say, how many wifes is that bird up at the plate now got?"

"Him," comes back Manny, "brother headman."

"How many strikes does that give him in this league?" I wants to know.

"Nine him get," the boy tells me and don't even crack no smiles.

This bird don't need no more'n one. He wallops the first ball pitched down the shortstop's alley which is, of course, good for a coupla home runs. He's faster on the hoof than his brother and beats Banyo across the plate. I starts to pull the rule book on the lads but changes my mind quick, figuring they ain't no use starting something more until I gets wise to all the trick costumes they has on Tomango. For all I knows they may be something in their religion that says the chief can't get home before his brother's in bed.

Well, we finally gets three outs on the side with five runs chalked up for the Blues. Manny tells the headman the score but for some reasons it don't suit him. He lets loose a bunch of chatter.

"What's wrong now?" I asks.

"Score," he says. "Twenty-four should be."

"How come?" I inquires.

"Headman," explains Manny, "him make twelve. Him brother him make nine."

By this time I'm getting kinda riled.

"Say, cuckoo," I yelps, "if I should give that little short gink over there a wallop in the jaw, would I have to slip Banyo a dozen?"

"Must do," comes back Manny, serious.

"All right," says I, "wait till I start chalking up the errors on the bozo."

The game drags along with nothing much happening outta the extraordinary until we gets to the sixth. Counting the runs Banyo and his brother gets on their shape the score is about fifty-six to three and a half with the Reds on the short end. They ain't got nobody in the line-up that's good for any royal graft except one baby that's a fourth cousin of the chief and is got two wives, but he don't get on base. The half run is one scored by the low-caste lad on second base and they is nearly a riot when I tries to treat him in the score like the rest of the players, outside of the specials.

In this sixth inning I'm telling you about the bird that's playing in right field for the Blues and who's run himself outta wind and legs backing up the first baseman, goes out on the job with his wife. He squats down and she stands up in back of him. I send Manny out to find out what's going on.

He's back in a few minutes and explains. The fielder is just got tired of chasing balls and has brung the hen to do the footwork. By now I don't give a hoot I'm so disgusted so I lets it go the way they lay. The bird up for the Reds hits one straight at the first baseman, an easy try which any guy in the States without no arms coulda got with his false teeth, but it's different on Tomango. The right fielder's wife starts after the pill on a duck waddle, while he don't even move. In about ten minutes she comes back with the pill and hands it to her favorite husband like a spaniel fetching a stick. He looks it over careful, hands it back to her and she brings it in to the pitcher's box. Whatta game! Whatta life!

I sees the Kansas frail giving me the merry snicker and I snick right back. The humors of the layout is got me by this time and anything the lads pull is K. O. with me. In the eighth inning I switches the line-up around and right here is where I steps in

the egg box. This low-caste baby at second is got the best arm on the lot so I slaps him in to pitch, the other cuckoo having gone three innings without getting no nearer the plate than I is to Rockefeller's dough.

The first bird he pitches to is Banyo and the last one. I never seen a wilder heave. The ball catches the headman in the ribs and right there the game is called. The low-caste boy starts running and in no times a-tall the whole gang is after him, including even the kids Miss Allison brung to the game. Only me and the jane is left, and she comes dashing over with a scared look.

"Hurry," she gasps. "We gotta get the constables. They'll kill him if they get him."

"For a wild pitch?" I asks.

"He hit Banyo," explains the frail.

"But it was an accident," I comes back.

"Accidents don't go on Tomango," says she.

"I know one that does," I yelps as we starts on a run to the town, "and that's me."

IV.

On account of not wanting to leave the Kansas gal alone and also because they ain't no boat for a coupla weeks, I decides not to beat it back to Manila right away. We don't have no luck rousing out the constables, the copper-colored coppers being away at the other end of the dump, but they ain't needed—right then. By nighttime Banyo and his gang is back and I gets it that the low-caste boy outhoofed 'em, with the chances that he grabbed off a canoe and beat it for another one of them islands which is like warts on the ocean around here.

When I starts for the hay I pipes Grainger looking kinda funny and not more than three quarters spiffed.

"What's the matter?" I asks. "Find your lead pencil?"

"No," says he with a silly grin. "Remember me telling you about the coat that blew overboard?"

I says yeh.

"Well, it didn't," goes on Grainger. "I just found it."

"Where was it?" I asks.

"It's been hanging on back of this chair all the time," says he. "Ain't it funny I ain't noticed it?"

"Seeing it's you," I comes back, "it ain't. Then you got your instructions, huh?"

The bozo busts out laughing and keeps it up until I think he's got highsterics.

"That's the joke of it," he says finally. "I'm on the wrong island."

"So am I," says I. "Where is you supposed to be?"

"Sotango," answers Grainger. "That's a much bigger place about thirty miles that way. I thought it was sorta strange sending an agent to this joint."

"Sotango, eh," I repeats. "The cuckoo that talked to you first musta lisped."

I hears a noise like drums beating and some yelling that sounds far away.

"Must be celebrating the opening of the baseball season," grins Grainger. "Let's you and I do it, too," and he passes the gin over. But I don't get no chances to drink any.

They is a slamming on the door and in busts Manny and the Kansas gal. They is both looking scared to death.

"What's up?" I asks.

"The natives is up in arms," gasps the schoolmarm, "and they is coming here. Listen."

The drum racket is coming nearer. I turns to Manny.

"Banyo," says he without waiting for no questions. "Him say you try kill him. Tell low-caste boy to hit with ball."

"Well," says I, "what does he want?"

"Heads only," comes back Manny.

"Only, huh. Is we got any guns here?" I asks.

"Hurry," yells Miss Allison. "We must get away from here before they comes. They'll kill us all."

"All right," says Grainger. "Nobody can't run me away from no place but I was going anyways, wasn't I?"

Bam, bam, bam. The drums sounds like they is on the front porch.

We don't do no more arguing but ducks outta the shack. A few hundred yards away we sees a flock of torches and what looks like a lotta bozos on the run.

Manny takes the lead and we hotfoots it toward the beach. I got a bat in my hand and Grainger's got a bottle of gin in each of his. We is in luck. There is all ready and sitting pretty for us one of them wide kinda canoes these natives use which is got a coupla long arms sticking out over the water to make 'em steady.

We helps the gal in and then we hops in for ourselves. Just as we pushes off Banyo

and his gang pipes the layout and comes on a rush yelling bloody murder. But we is away and off. Manny knows how to handle the boat and gets away quick.

"What's the matter with these constables they is supposed to be here?" I asks after a while.

"They no can help," answers the interpreter.

"Why not?" I asks. "Don't they work at night."

"No can help," explains Manny, "because they is helping Banyo catch you."

"Know where Sotango is?" inquires Grainger.

"Me know," admits the boy. "Also know Tosango. Both near. Wish go?"

"Yeh," says the agent, "Tosango."

"I thought you said it was Sotango you was supposed to be at?" I remarks. "Got the papers with you?"

"No," comes back Grainger. "I wonder which it is now."

"Better try Sotango," I suggests. "I remembers they was a dance in the dump you talked about."

Which we does and after nearly getting baked and with nothing to drink but gin for a coupla days we gets to the joint.

Grainger starts right off on another bender. Me and the Kansas frail sticks around until the boat comes and then hops it for Manila. I hunts up McCollum.

"I'm out," says I.

"Out," he repeats.

"Yeh," I tells him, "on a wild pitch."

A KNOCK-OUT PHRASE

FRED LANDIS, a brother of the baseball mogul, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, is one of the finest after-dinner speakers in the Middle West. He got his start in oratory by running for Congress, to which he was elected several times from an Indiana district. In those days he affected the spread-eagle, go-get-'em, wave-the-flag style of eloquence. He was master of the upflung arm, the writhing finger and the desk-splitting fist. He excelled them all in clinching the teeth of emphasis and wrinkling the scowl of denunciation. Popularity seeds flew forth on the winds of his discourse to blossom into political victory for him within thirty days. He was the original hurry-up boy with the vote crop.

It was always a field day for him when he got off what he called his Lincoln speech. That was the highly polished gem of all his oratorical treasures. It never failed to throw the hats to the stars of heaven and the men to the knees of admiration. Fred always ended it with both arms spread wide, his face turned upward, his trembling eyelids closed, his voice husky with emotion, while he exclaimed in an intoning, chantlike way: "Abraham Lincoln—that mystic mingling of star and clod!"

One day after he had delivered this speech with the usual triumphant effect, a friend who had heard it several times took him aside and said: "Fred, that 'mystic mingling of star and clod.' Just exactly what does it mean?"

"Blest if I know," Landis laughed. "It doesn't seem to be anything that a star can do or a clod either, for that matter. But it gets 'em every time!"

A PARROT SCHOOL

ON the outskirts of Brownsville, Texas, there is what is said to be the largest parrot school in the world. Mr. W. A. King, owner of a fancy bird and rattlesnake farm there, has over a thousand parrots under instruction. They are being taught to say anywhere from ten to twenty commonplace phrases. The student birds are all between six and eight weeks old. The work is tedious, but not monotonous, Mr. King says. The teacher stands in front of the parrots' cages and keeps repeating the trite sentences. Some birds learn more easily than others, and then they are promoted to a higher grade. The course of instruction lasts about two months, but even the "graduated" birds are kept in good speaking practice until they are sold and shipped. Mr. King gets his supply of birds from Mexico, where he has many men capturing the young birds in the tropical jungles. He expects to have more than ten thousand parrots in his classes very shortly.

Gold and the Girl

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "Ocean Tramps," "The Garden of God," Etc.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

With one exception, all the stories we have ever read about treasure-trove are concerned with the adventures that lead up to the discovery of the treasure. The exception is this story. In "Gold and the Girl" the author starts with the discovery of the treasure. It lies in the hold of the mystery ketch, the *Baltrum,* where she swings to her anchor in the Pool at Hildersditch. How the *Baltrum* came to anchor at Hildersditch nobody knew. She sailed in one day, shortly after the war, manned by two foreigners. And inasmuch as these two proceeded mutually to murder each other—for reasons never disclosed—the secret remained a secret. And the admiralty, unable to penetrate the veil that dimmed her past, took possession. Captain Salt, the port authority at Hildersditch, loaned her, pending sale by auction, to Captain Dennis. And so she became the home of that broken old seaman, his daughter, and his man Friday, whose name was Larry. She was the last home Dennis ever knew, for he died in her cabin. Thus Dicky Sebright found her with only Sheila and Larry aboard. Dicky had a few hundred pounds between himself and destitution. These he dedicated to the purchase of the *Baltrum.* He couldn't buy her until she came up for auction. But in the meantime he prevailed on her crew of two to take him in as a paying guest. They were glad to have him, for Sheila's slender patrimony was barely enough to feed and clothe herself and the faithful Larry. When the *Baltrum* was sold they would lose the only home they knew. And Dicky agreed that if he bought her they should sail with him. So he came aboard with his duffel. And that was the beginning of the strange adventure. How he learned the secret of the *Baltrum's* golden ballast is a matter of detail. He learned it. Her hold was filled with painted pigs of gold! A fortune for all of them! And only Dicky and Sheila in the know. Fortunate for them that Wilfred William Corder was friend of Dicky's. It was Corder who saved the *Baltrum* and her treasure when the auction came. Dicky bid his last farthing to get her. But there was a higher bid. "Four hundred and thirty pounds," said Murdle, the auctioneer, raising his hammer. That was five pounds too much for Dicky. "Going——" cried the autioneer. "Four forty," came a voice from the door of the barn where the fate of the *Baltrum* hung in the balance. The voice was the voice of Corder, Dicky's plutocratic crony of other days.

(A Four-Part Story—Part II.)

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HIGHEST BIDDER.

NOW the night before the auction, Mr. Corder, otherwise known as James, had dined at the Ritz and danced at the "Midnight Follies."

He had clean forgotten Dicky Sebright, the story of the Dennises, Houston, and his own half promise to turn up at the sale on Tuesday, May 6th. He was awakened at seven o'clock by his valet Strutt who was holding a tea tray in one hand and turning on the electric light with the other.

James' head was aching and his tongue was heavy in his mouth. You cannot expend energy in talking, laughing, eating, dancing and drinking from seven in the

afternoon till three a. m. and wake up at seven charged.

For a moment and while he drank his tea the world seemed a very black place to James, but five minutes later under a cold shower it began to clear.

Then came recollection.

Wilfrid—to give him his other name—was the son of his father in some particulars. He had a kind of broken-down business sense—or, to put it more exactly, he had mixed with his joyous and generous qualities something of the low cunning that makes a business man's "sense." He had also a memory faultless when it was in working order.

The calendar on the wall of the bathroom, which Strutt attended to, pointed to the day being Tuesday, May 6th. It was also a calendar edited apparently by a madman, for each day had its text or quotation, and to-day's was "Go thou and do likewise."

James' eye fell on the calendar as he was drying himself and the date set his memory going. To-day was the day of the auction at Hildersditch, at eleven.

The last of his depression vanished. Here was something to do, something to do in the open air, away from London, and in the way of yachts.

Getting into his dressing gown, he touched the electric.

Strutt appeared.

"Strutt," said James, "breakfast at eight sharp, kidneys and bacon, a sausage and coffee."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell the car to come round at nine sharp, have a luncheon basket packed for two—one never knows whom one may pick up and I'm going into the wilderness. Also pack in three pints of Mumm." In the act of shaving now, he was speaking through lather. "Also some cherry brandy—they like it better than liqueurs. Got that down in the tabloids of your memory?"

"Yes, sir," said Strutt.

"A siphon of soda and a bottle of John Roe. I like to take my opening hours with me. Have you put out my clothes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then that will do."

"At what time may I expect you back, sir?"

"Heaven only knows—but probably before midnight. You have the day to yourself; you had better go to the Tower or somewhere quiet. Beware of gambling, wine and women, and shut the door after you."

"Yes, sir," said Strutt.

At nine to the tick of the clock the car, a Rolls-Royce, drew in to Savoy Court and at two minutes past nine Mr. Corder appeared, stepped in and drove off.

The luncheon basket and wine had been put in at the garage. He never asked about them; so certain was he of being well served that an order once given was forgotten.

The chauffeur, Handley, drove. James did the navigating, and the route was Regent's Park, Seven Sisters' Road, Epping, Dunmow, Colchester, Hildersditch.

At Dunmow the continuous sight of shut houses of refreshment, the keen air and the vision of the bacon factory suggested in the mind of James a large whisky and soda and the John Roe was got from its hiding place.

It was got out again at a crossroads four miles beyond Colchester, where they stopped to ask the way of a country policeman who turned out to be quite a delightful person with an inside knowledge of poaching, ferrets, and the ways of wild ducks.

James would have taken this blue-bound edition of Gilbert White on board to continue the conversation only he had a bicycle with him. As it was, nearly half an hour was lost, so that when they arrived at the barn, a boy on the footboard piloting them, the auction had begun.

The bidding was at the two-hundred-and-fifty-pound mark when, standing at the doorway, he took the whole position in.

The proceedings interested him vastly, and the crowd. In that grubby and rather sordid crowd the figures of Dicky and Sheila attracted his attention; also Sheila's beautiful profile as she turned to her companion. Houston, also, stood out from that crowd.

This was the girl whose story had been told to him, and Houston was evidently the "beastly chap" who was trying to buy her boat.

The bidding went on, the knock-out blow came.

"Four hundred and thirty pounds," cried Murdle, "any advance on four hundred and thirty pounds? Going at four hundred and thirty pounds—going——" The hammer swung up.

Then, as Dempsey might wade into a street fight, Mr. Wilfred William Corder came into the business.

"Four hundred and forty."

Houston looked round. He had already gone a bit beyond his mark. He saw the newcomer and threw up the game.

"Four hundred and forty—any advance on four hundred and forty—going at four hundred and forty—going——"

The hammer fell and the *Baltrum,* ballast and all, was the property of James.

The crowd turned and pushed out of the place for drinks, and James, Dicky, Sheila, and the auctioneer suddenly found themselves alone.

James shook hands with Dicky, was introduced to Sheila and handed his card to the auctioneer.

WILFRED WILLIAM CORDER,
Royal Thames Yacht Club.

Murdle knew the name quite well, but he made trouble about taking a check. He wanted local references.

"And where the devil do you think I can find references in this benighted place?" said James, already writing the check from a book he had taken from his pocket. "I can refer you to Mr. Molyneux of Hatch, but that's fifteen miles from here. Don't be a fool; the Bank of England is good enough for you, ain't it?"

The sight of a check on the Bank of England—the Bank of England requires a permanent current account of two thousand pounds from its customers—was enough for Murdle. But still he grumbled.

"I take it you won't move the boat till this is cleared," said he, putting the check in his bag.

"I'll jolly well sink her if I want to," said James. "And now come out and have a drink." He put the receipt in his pocket and led the way out. Sheila and Dicky followed.

The girl was almost in tears. Boat, money, all were gone. She was not thinking of herself, but of Dicky—also of Larry.

What would Larry do now for a job? With enough money to keep them both on the *Baltrum* she had not enough to keep them both ashore, where rents were so dreadful and where one could not do one's own washing. It was only now, really, that the blessing the *Baltrum* had been to them appeared before the girl like the vision of a retreating angel. The old boat had saved them from want, given her a home, and the strange fact remained that in the mind of Sheila at this moment the gold was almost forgotten in her grief for the lost home.

Meanwhile James, the home destroyer, not looking the part in the least, was directing Handley, who was preparing and distributing drinks.

Handley was a strict teetotaler and he made the income of a puisne judge owing to this fact and strict attention to business. He was never at fault and never wanting in an emergency. In this instance he was not driven to crave glasses from Bone; tucked away in a cubby-hole of the car were five or six cut-glass Savoy Hotel tumblers, also the pints of champagne were quarts.

James, if you will remember, had ordered pints. When the man had turned up at the garage with the luncheon basket and the wine, Handley, surveying the straw-covered bottles, had asked: "What are them things? Get back with them," said Handley, "and get quarts. There's never no knowing what we want if we meet company and it's me that gets it in the neck if we run dry."

So quarts it was and fortunately, for Murdle having been satisfied and Dicky and Sheila having reluctantly enough drunk a small libation to the God of Luck, the expanding soul of James began to take in the natives in the form of two longshoremen, a crab catcher, and an old shepherd who had strayed over from Berwick Flats.

The wants of these people having been attended to, the three got into the dinghy, a tight fit, and rowed by Larry pushed off to inspect the new purchase.

"It was jolly lucky I came just in time," said James as they left the shore. "I'd have been too late in another five minutes. I saw you were stuck; then I struck in, and now you've got her."

"*You've* got her, you mean," said Dicky.

"Me—which—oh, the boat," said James, rather confusedly. "*Me!* Why, my dear chap, you don't imagine I bought that old dredger for myself."

"Then who on earth did you buy it for?" asked Sheila.

"You," said James quite naturally, and as though he were talking of buying an orange.

"Me," said Sheila.

She had met a good many different sorts of people in her life but she had never met any one quite like this.

"Yes, you. I know all about the old hooker and this fellow, what's his name, who wanted to buy her; well, she's yours. Here's

the receipt from that auctioneer chap, and any other papers will be made out in your name."

He took the receipt from his pocket, but Sheila would not accept it. The whole thing was like a nightmare, a pleasant nightmare; being rowed off to the *Baltrum* by a jovial and pleasant-faced stranger whom she had never seen before, a stranger moreover who had bought for her a present costing over four hundred pounds—this was a situation outside the normal, to say the least of it.

But the situation that arose on her prompt rejection of the offer and the receipt was even more curious, for James was James to begin with, secondly he was James plus far too much alcohol for that hour in the day, thirdly the philanthropist in him that had risen and had humped its back had received a snub on the nose. He had been moved by Dicky's story and in buying the boat and saving the home of the Dennises he had felt what the knight-errants used to feel when, lowering their vizors and leveling their lances, they charged.

"You won't take it?" said he.

"No indeed, I won't—thank you more than ever so much, all the same. No, I can't."

"All right," said James grimly. They were just alongside the *Baltrum* and as Larry hooked on James ungallantly and without a word sprang on board, and as the others followed stood looking around him.

A crab boat was passing. James hailed it.

"What are you doing that for?" said Dicky.

"You'll want it to fetch your things ashore," said James. "I'm going to put a light to her."

"A light to what?"

"This hooker. She's mine, ain't she?"

"Good God!" cried Dicky. "Don't be a fool, man."

"Will you kindly get your things off," said James, "unless they're insured."

He went toward the galley, saw a can of paraffin and fetched it out. "Now we'll have some fun," said James, the snubbed philanthropist in him subsiding partly to give place to the gleeful incendiary. "I've never burned a ship before—hic; never thought of it." He turned toward the fo'c's'le hatch, having glanced at his match box to make sure it was full, and Sheila and the others saw at once that he meant work.

"Don't," said Sheila, laying her hand on his arm. "If you want me to I'll take the boat, but not before you hear what I have to tell you. Come down below. Larry, tell that crab man we don't want him and give him a shilling." She produced a starved-looking purse, handed him the coin and led the way down below.

James, who had reluctantly given up the paraffin can, followed with Mr. Sebright.

CHAPTER XIV.

MAC ADAM.

THE day had clouded over a bit as they rowed across the Pool, but now, just as they entered the cabin, the sun lit the place with beams through the skylight and water shimmers through the starboard port-holes.

The place looked cozy and comfortable, and James, who had never seen a sea interior like this, stood for a moment at the doorway looking about him.

You could have got the whole of the *Baltrum* into the saloon of his yacht, the *Dulcinea,* furnished by Hollyer & Stevenson regardless of cost. But good taste backed by money has, to the appreciative eye, no chance against good taste fighting against odds, and many a humble home is to the appreciative mind a better habitation than the palace of many a millionaire who buys his taste with his tapestries, regardless of expense.

There was nothing in the cabin of the *Baltrum* to offend the eye because everything was in keeping with the sea surroundings, everything was spotlessly clean and there was only one color to contrast with the dark oak of bulkhead and beam—blue.

James having taken the seat pointed out to him, Sheila, perching herself on the side of the table, started business right away and without preliminaries.

"I couldn't say it on deck," said she, "because Larry is there and he doesn't know yet, but you can't donate this boat. If I were to do what you ask me and accept it from you, I would be the wickedest person in the world. This isn't a boat, really, it's a gold mine."

"I beg your pardon!" said James. He had recovered almost entirely from any slight aberration due to alcohol and the auction and for a moment he thought that Sheila was joking with him, but he saw at

once that she was in earnest. What on earth did she mean?"

"I know, it sounds mad," said she, "but I am telling you the truth. This is not an ordinary boat; she has thousands and thousands of pounds' worth of gold on board her. Oh, tell him," said she, turning to Dicky. "I can't."

Dicky got up from the seat he had taken and leaning against a bulkhead with his hands in his pockets began right at the beginning of things and went on to the end, the millionaire listening, nursing his knee, scarcely speaking a word.

He could scarcely believe, yet he believed, and the whole thing filled his mind with extraordinary sensations never experienced before. He possessed all the money he could possibly use, but the near presence of this new gold affected him almost as much as though he had been a beggar. Cupidity in a golden mantle rose gigantic in the mind of James, fronting the Spirit of Adventure and Captain Teach in all his pirate rig. Meanness, that horrid giant who is always somehow a dwarf, came from under the table and told him what a fool he had been to insist on Sheila taking the boat as a present; through the open porthole, mixed with the sea air and the clanking of the bell buoy, wafts from all the treasure stories he had ever read came spiced with the perfume of Treasure Island and the smell of rum.

"So you see," said Sheila as Dicky finished, "why I can't take the boat. It's all yours."

The words acted like the drop of cold water that precipitates a chemical mixture and in the soul of James, grandeur, always lurking, rose like a giant reaching almost the roof.

"Nonsense," he cried. "I never go back on my word. She's yours."

Yet in the sixtieth part of a second, old Corder, who had given a hundred thousand pounds in charity yet had murdered all sorts of men financially in strictly business deals, spoke.

"The boat's yours; as to the stuff, we'll go into that later. Dicky here will want a pull out of it—by Jove, this is the biggest surprise that has ever struck me. Why, there must be near a ton of the stuff, by what you tell me. I say, those fellows must have had their heads screwed on tight to think of getting it away as ballast."

So he babbled, while all the time a voice was crying to him, the compound voice of father Corder and meanness and cupidity and Captain Teach: "Stick to it, James, stick to it, James, don't let foolish generosity get the better of you. Gold, gold, gold, tons of gold, stick to it, James."

And then, so strange a stuff is soul, the voices were shut off, and James vaguely, against his will at first and then entirely with his will, turned to the others and spoke clearly and from his heart.

"Look here, you two," said he, "we're *all* in this. It's a huge big piece of good luck and it was meant for the lot of us. The boat's not worth twopence, but she's yours, Miss Dennis; as for the stuff, we'll divide it between us."

The shade of his father, throwing up its hands at this stupidity, which seemed to read that each would take a third share, maybe chipped in, for James went on:

"I'll take half and you'll take half—how's that for fair?"

"Oh, no!" cried Sheila. "It's all yours."

"Well, see here," cut in Dicky, "I don't know that it's not fair to divide the stuff and I'll tell you why. You wouldn't have come to the auction only for me, and then again it's not only buying the stuff, but getting rid of it. It will take us all three to help in that. Sheila, I think that proposition is fair—it's more than that, it's jolly generous, but still, as I said, we have to get rid of it, turn it into money and it's a job Corder couldn't do alone."

"Well, that's fixed," said James, virtue now pouring balm on his head and saying to him, "You've done the right thing, James, you've done the right thing—you've been a damned generous fool—but all the same you've done the right thing."

"That's fixed—and now let's see the stuff. I'm aching to set eyes on it."

They led him to the ballast. He sniffed at it, touched it, tested it, gloated over it. Then they led him back to the cabin. Dicky offered drinks, but James was beyond drinks; he smoked while Sheila took up some needlework and Dicky talked, explaining the task before them. James seemed to have it in his head that the caching of the stuff was quite an easy matter.

"You see," said Dicky, "we've talked all that over for days and I don't see yet how it's to be done. If the stuff was actually our own it would be easy enough. We

could take it right off to the Bank of England, but as a matter of fact, *is* it ours? We've bought the boat from the government, but taking her history into consideration, wouldn't the government barge in and claim the gold? It's treasure-trove. I believe they could and it won't do to risk it. But I tell you what we might do. There's nothing about the law my lawyer man doesn't know; we could ask him."

"Wouldn't he peach?" said James.

"Not he. I'd put it to him as a—what do you call it?—hypothetical case. If he gives it as his opinion that the government would bone the stuff, well, we must think out some other way. We've lots of time."

"Listen!" said Sheila.

A boat was coming alongside, and through the skylight came Larry's voice.

"What are you wantin'? Wantin' to see the owner—and what are you wantin' that for? Keep off till I tell the mistress." Then through the skylight, "Miss Shaila, there's a chap wantin' to come on board."

Dicky left the cabin and ran up on deck. They heard his voice and the sound of some one coming on deck. In a minute or so he reappeared at the door of the cabin, followed by a stranger.

A big glossy man attired in a frock coat and carrying a top hat in his hand.

"This gentleman was too late for the auction," said Dicky, "and he's come off to see if there's any chance to do a deal over the boat." He winked at James as he spoke, and stood aside while Mr. MacAdam—this was the name of the newcomer—advanced, placed his hat on the table and his card beside the hat.

"Haf I the pleasure of speaking to the owner of the *Baltrum?*" asked Mr. MacAdam, addressing himself to James.

"No," said James, indicating Sheila, "this lady is the owner."

"Ah, well," said the other, "it is all the same—may I take a seat?" Then turning to Sheila, "I wish to buy her. It was distinctly told me that the auction hour was two o'clock and I come too late. My partner Mr. Shelegmann and I have need of such a boat for the trade we are engaged in and as the matter is urgent to us, I haf come to make an offer. Four hundred and dirty pounds was the price named to me by the men ashore there as the price the boat changed hands at. Well, I mean good business. I would pay four sixty."

"We don't want to sell her," said Sheila.

"So. Well, maybe not, but it is urgent to us. Five hundred—what now do you say to five hundred? Seventy pounds profit to you right away."

"No, thanks," said Sheila. "We don't want to sell her."

"Well, that is right if you do not want to sell her. I am not a man to beat pigs about the bush and seeing you are all gentle people and to be trusted, I will tell you a little trade secret. My partner and I haf some little Continental dealings and it is necessary to us to bring a cargo of what I will not say from Boulogne to the English coast. Nothing wrong, only the English government don't look with eyes of approval on such a cargo. Now I am in your hands—but it means a large fortune to me and Mr. Shelegmann and we are cornered for a boat. Saturday I went to Deal—no boat to be got such as we want; Sunday to Dover and all them ports. Yesterday came news of this boat's sale—and here I am too late. I jump the price at once in my necessity—one thousand pounds. One thousand pounds paid on this table."

"No, thanks," said Sheila. "We do not want to sell."

"Then what will you take?" said Mr. MacAdam.

"Nothing," cut in James.

"I don't say our cargo is what you call 'dope,'" said Mr. MacAdam. "I don't say it isn't, but that we should get it over by Friday night means to us a hundred thousand pounds—there, you haf me now in a bag. My name ain't MacAdam, that is my trade name. Moses Levenstein is my name, it is indeed, and the Levensteins know how to spend money to make money. One hundred thousand pounds is losing me. I could cry. Come now, good people, and if you ain't made of stone, be moved to me in my emergence—ask what you want for her. Two thousand—would that fill your pockets? Two thousand beautiful Bradburys with the King of England's head on them. Ain't that coming it? I'm bleedin' at the pores when I think of our profits being cut by two thou. Think of it! Two thou—going at two thou. Ain't you softening to it? I tell you now it's cocaine—there you've got me in a jug, that's why we want a boat like the *Baltrum*. A hundred thousand pounds' profit worth of cocaine going to leave me. Think of us sitting here and me

bidding two thou. I'll go one better, three, that's my last. Three—three." He rose to his feet.

"No, nor thirty," said James.

"Then why aren't you selling her?" suddenly fired MacAdam.

"If you want to know," replied James, "it's because my name is Wilfred Corder and because I have made a present of the boat to this young lady. If you want to know who Wilfred Corder is, ask at the Savoy Hotel—or the Bank of England. And now get out and thank your stars that I don't tell the police about you."

"Oh, that's all right," said MacAdam, quite recovering himself. "We are all gentlemen here and you ain't likely to do a dirty trick on a man who has made you a good offer. Well, if you ain't selling, you ain't, and good day to you." He took up his hat and followed by Dicky strode out of the cabin.

Dicky was back in a moment.

"Well," said he, "what do you think of that?"

"If you ask me," said James, "I'd say he was one of the old firm; failing that, a gentleman in the know. We're blown on, Dicky, and it's my humble opinion we'll have every yeggman in yeggtown on top of us before the week's out."

"You think he was one of the men who got hold of the gold originally and stowed it on board here?" asked Sheila.

James was sitting with his face between his hands and his elbows on his knees; he seemed plunged miles deep in thought. Then at last he answered.

"No, I don't," said James. "I may be wrong, but it seems to me that this is some outsider who has got late news of the whole business and maybe found out by accident where the *Baltrum* is anchored and all about the sale.

"Seems to me the origin of this business was something like this: Some government doing shady work shipped the gold on the *Baltrum* to get it away to some foreign port. The two men in charge of the business did in the crew and made off with the hooker, ran her into this place, fought, and killed each other.

"Well, seems to me, we can reckon that the fellows who ran away with the stuff are all dead and accounted for, and what's after us now is the government that started the show, or some hanger-on of it who has been nosing about on his own after the *Baltrum* and only found her just now."

"You think his yarn about the cocaine was bunkum?" asked Dicky.

"Absolute," said James.

James hadn't a bad headpiece on him—it was revealed in his flashes of sanity, as now, when, seated with the tips of his fingers together, he seemed measuring the whole of this business, by and large.

"There's one thing I wish you hadn't done," said Dicky. "You gave him your address."

"I?" said James. "Never—that chap my address?—never."

"Why, you told him you were Wilfred Corder of the Savoy Hotel and the Bank of England."

"Oh, *that*," said James. "Well, it doesn't matter; what can he do?"

"I don't know," said Dicky, "but it would have been just as well to keep it dark."

Sheila laid down her needlework.

"There you are," said Sheila. "It's beginning its work already. Before we had it we were free and happy, and now we have to keep things dark; we've got that horrid man after us and what's to be the end of it all I don't know." She spoke addressing the others, yet seeming to talk to herself, with her eyes fixed a thousand miles beyond the bulkhead at which she was gazing.

James, watching her in her dark beauty gazing like that as if into the world of the Celtic twilight, suddenly received a terrible wound.

A bowman had been stalking him ever since the auction and now had fired an arrow, barbed and poisoned, at short range from the doorway against which Sheila's profile was outlined. A foul attack.

"Sure what's the good of money when it only brings trouble," finished Sheila, turning to Dicky and then sweeping her eyes round to James.

CHAPTER XV.

LONDON.

JAMES did not reply. Dicky saved him the effort.

"Well, it's a lot more trouble if one's without it," said he, "and anyhow we are up to our necks in this business and can't pull out. Look into your own mind, Sheila, and you'll see that. We can't let go of the stuff."

He was right, the gold had them by a

clutch tighter than any physical grip. It was physically possible to dump the stuff in the Pool, and send Larry running after MacAdam with word that they would take his offer of two thousand and so cut free of the business. It was psychically impossible —even if they had wanted to do so.

This great mass of gold clung to them like an octopus, clung to their instincts and desires by a hundred tentacles armed with ten thousand suckers, tinged their surroundings as the octopus tinges the water around it by squirting out ink—only the ink used by the golden monster was golden ink, lending a lovely laburnum tinge not only to the material world and the present, but to the future.

"No," said Sheila, with a sigh, "I suppose we can't."

"Of course we can't," said Dicky, "and we don't want to if we could. Now what I propose to do is go right up to town and see old Forsythe, my lawyer man, and put the case before him. If he thinks we're safe to trust the government, *absolutely* safe, then we'll cart the stuff right up to the Bank of England. If he doesn't, we'll have to do something else."

"That's obviously the first move," said James, who had recovered sufficiently from his wound to feel the delicious effect of the poison of the arrow. "You can come up with me in the car and see him first thing in the morning. You can both come up—I'll get you rooms at the Savoy and we'll have a jolly dinner to celebrate the event. You'll come, won't you?" said James, turning to Sheila. "*Do* come."

"I can't," said Sheila. "I can't leave Larry and the boat. You two go and, oh, *do* be careful and say nothing to any one, because I feel," said Sheila, "I feel somehow that now we are surrounded with enemies—no, not enemies exactly, but people who would do anything to us for the sake of this money. You'll promise me, won't you, not to do anything—anything foolish?" She had gauged James' possibilities in this direction with the terrible penetrating eye of a woman, she had experience through old Captain Dennis and Larry of what men can do when in a joyful mood and she felt instinctively that the pass they were in required for safe conduct directing brains, cool, crafty, businesslike and keen in strategy.

A combination of Sherlock Holmes, Von Moltke, Rothschild and the governor of the Bank of England would have met the situation. James and Dicky, pleasant as they were, scarcely filled the bill. She felt this vaguely, but the qualities that were absent from this pair disturbed her less than the qualities they might gain through exaltation. She had seen James dispensing hospitality on the Hard.

"We have just time to catch the five ten," said Dicky, who was consulting a time-table. "I'll fling some things in a bag and tell Larry to get the boat ready; I won't be two ticks."

Off he went, leaving them alone, and while he was gone Sheila, face to face with the stricken one, fell to wondering what had happened to him. James had never been in love before. He had danced, flirted, carried on with girls, but this was the first time the shot had gone through his heart. The very first sight of her profile had attracted him; he who had seen so many and such lovely profiles without turning a hair! And now alone with her he felt dumb, unable to think of things to say, awkward and wishing Dicky back.

He had not to wish long. Dicky, who had packed an attaché case, appeared with it in his hand, good-bys were said on deck and Sheila, shading her eyes against the sun, watched the little boat as it put off across the Pool.

On the way up to town James was silent, plunged in what seemed to be thought and answering only in monosyllables when spoken to.

But the atmosphere of London had a clearing effect on the mind of James, and in the Seven Sisters' Road of all places in the world he began to brighten. Regent's Park found him brighter still and by the time they reached the Savoy the full sun of his soul had unveiled itself from fog.

The joy of life had also seized Dicky, and do you wonder?

The four hundred pounds in his pocket, the precious four hundred that this morning had been his entire fortune was his to spend or do what he liked with; he need not bother about saving or scraping now, a fourth share of the *Baltrum's* golden cargo would be enough to carry him through life and into this golden dream that had begun long before reaching the Seven Sisters' Road; Sheila had come timidly, her hands also filled with gold.

It is strange that while James had been harpooned at first sight, Dicky, who had been in contact with Miss Dennis for so long, was still scarcely scratched.

He was fonder of Sheila than of any one else in the world, but fondness is not love, though an excellent foundation for it.

"Have Mr. Sebright's luggage taken up and a room got ready for him," said James to Handley when they drew up at Savoy Court. "I won't want the car any more today—now come on."

"What are you doing first?" asked Dicky.

"Cocktails," said James. He led the way to the American bar.

That was the beginning of things. Dicky was no believer in prohibition, but he had a very cool head and alcohol beyond a certain point had little effect on him. James was different.

He *would* dine at Romano's; a quiet dinner in his suite at Savoy Court did not seem at all the right thing on a night like this, and he *would* talk in a loud voice of the *Baltrum* and the "stuff" on board of her. It did not matter, really; there was no one in the restaurant that mattered in this respect and anyhow he soon changed the subject to Sheila.

He talked of her with tears in his eyes as one of the brightest and loveliest and best of womanhood, proposed her health, drank it in Château Larose and smashed his glass by throwing it on the floor, so that no other lips might ever drink from it.

Dicky got him back to Savoy Court quite early—about ten o'clock—and then having presented him to Strutt, the valet, went off to his own room in the hotel.

At nine o'clock next morning, Dicky, calling at the suite, found James at breakfast.

"I say," said James, "when I left you last night was there any one else with us?"

"No," said Dicky.

"Well," said James, "it's the funniest thing—when I got up here I sat down to have a smoke and a whisky and soda for a nightcap and then I remember talking to a chap. Strutt had gone off and whether some hotel waiter brought the chap up or whether he came and knocked and I let him in myself, I don't know; to tell the truth I am rather confused about the whole thing. But I can distinctly remember hobnobbing with a fellow—he was sitting in that armchair and he wouldn't have drinks, only a cigar."

"Some friend of yours?" said Dicky.

"No, he was a stranger. Red-headed chap. Came to tell me of a big yacht he had for sale; at least that's what I think he came about."

"What did you say to him?" asked Dicky, suddenly and vaguely perturbed.

"The bother is," said James, "I can't quite remember."

"Did he say anything about the *Baltrum?*"

"I remember saying something about having bought a yacht," said James, "at least a boat—and I remember telling him about my yacht, the *Dulcinea,* you know, and where she was lying, but I tell you quite straight I wasn't in a clear state of mind."

"I wish this hadn't happened," said Dicky. "I can't help thinking this fellow, whoever he was, must have had some connection with the MacAdam man. You see, that chap had your address."

"Oh, nonsense," said James. "Where's the connection?"

"Only suspicion. There may be nothing in it, still there may. MacAdam had time to get up to town. Perhaps there's a big gang of these chaps after us now they've spotted where the gold is."

"Nonsense," said James. "Look here, my dear chap, the *Baltrum* has been lying there all winter; why didn't they turn up before? You told me Salt had told you that the government had reported her there to all the foreign port authorities."

"Yes," said Dicky, "but it seems to me that the people who are after us—if they are after us—aren't foreign port authorities, but crooks who have got in the know, yet who couldn't locate where the hooker was till that infernal government advertisement was circulated of the sale—see?"

James considered for a moment.

"Then why didn't they come and bid?"

"I don't know," said Dicky. "Perhaps they don't like publicity and public auctions, perhaps they thought it safer to wait till she was bought and then to come privately to the buyers and make a bid, perhaps MacAdam was right when he said he came too late for the sale—though I doubt it. Anyhow, James, I don't feel comfortable. I don't indeed. We've got to get a move on."

James left the table and lit a cigarette. He wasn't feeling comfortable himself. It came to him and only just now that if some gang of crooks had entered this game they must be fought without any aid from the

law. He and Dicky were not exactly inside the law—unless this lawyer man whom Dicky had spoken of said otherwise. What a relief that would be; they could take the stuff openly to the bank and deposit it, and then all the crooks in London might go hang.

"How about your lawyer?" said James.

"That's where we've got to go first," said Dicky. "He won't be there till ten—he lives in Old Serjeants Inn, and we have time to walk. It will clear your head."

It was five minutes past ten when they arrived at Isaac Forsythe's office, and when they were shown in the lawyer was in place before his desk and his morning correspondence, looking just as dry, antique and remote from human sympathy as on the day Dicky had seen him first—not a gray hair or grain of dust out of place and his glasses in just the same position on his nose.

Dicky introduced the other.

"We have come upon some awfully important business," said Dicky.

"Take a seat," said the lawyer.

Dicky took a seat, James did likewise and the conference began. Dicky had intended putting the matter as a hypothetical case, but he was no fool and when it came to the point he saw in a flash of genius that making a clean breast of the business was the only way to get any good from Forsythe. So he set to and told his story right from the beginning, the lawyer listening to the amazing tale as unconcernedly as though it were a matter of a deal in potatoes.

"I take it you have left out nothing," said Forsythe when the recital was ended, "and that what you say is, in fact, a plain statement of the affair without varnish or gilding."

"Yes," said Dicky.

"Then what do you want me to do?" asked the other.

"I want to know if the stuff is ours."

"Certainly it is not," said the lawyer, leaning back in his chair and putting his hands in his pockets. "Oh, dear, no. To begin with, if you bought this vessel without knowledge or suspicion of the nature of the cargo——"

"Ballast," cut in James.

"Exactly—treasure concealed as ballast—a host of questions would arise. There is the question of treasure-trove which we will put aside—though leaving it viable—in favor of the more immediately suggested question of contraband. There is no duty on gold, but the law of contraband is elastic. Here is a cargo of great value brought secretly to an English port, possibly from one of the late enemy countries; it is a cargo that has never been declared, mark that, and it is in the province of the customs to seize this cargo for full examination and inquiry. Then the law officers of the crown would take the matter up. This concealed cargo would be held pending full examination and inquiry by the government. The stuff is evidently, or probably, stolen. You say you have bought it, but the purchase of stolen or possibly stolen goods does not make the purchaser a possessor. Oh, no. The law is quite clear on that point.

"Well, should no claimant be found for this gold, after the lapse of years, would come the question of its disposal and I may as well frankly tell you that here grows up a hedgerow of difficulties should you put in a claim. The grand old laws of England are our greatest heritage and defense against tyranny, but one has to confess that they were not framed with an eye to benefit the finders of hidden treasure; after unlimited trouble and expense you would fail, I believe, to justify your claim to any of this money. Frankly, it is in the interests of the crown to keep it and the interests of the crown are ably defended by the law officers of the crown. And so," finished Isaac Forsythe, stretching his legs out farther and rattling the coins in his pocket, "after years of waiting and ruinous law expenses you would find yourselves no longer young, worn out with litigation, depleted of money and lost to hope."

"Dicky, we're done," said James, appalled by this lugubrious picture, but Isaac Forsythe had not done, and he continued:

"That is the most favorable side of your case, and it presupposes that when you bought this vessel named the *Baltrum* you were ignorant of the treasure secreted on board of her.

"But that is not so. If I take you rightly, well knowing of this treasure secreted in the ballast chamber of this ketch, you bid for her in market overt against the government in whose possession she was, you being subjects of that government.

"That fact raises most complex questions of criminal law."

"Oh, good God!" said James.

"Questions," went on Isaac, "upon which

in an ordinary case one would require council's opinion. Let us take just one example. You might say you 'found' this gold, but the criminal law——"

"For Heaven's sake, stop," said Dicky. "The very name of the Law gives me shivers. I only just wanted to know what the beastly thing would do to us if we stick to the stuff and it seems from what you say that if we act straight and own up the law will rob us of it, and if we don't, it will put us in prison."

"You have put the thing in a nutshell," said Forsythe.

"Well, can't you give us any idea of some way out?" said Dicky. "Just a hint would do—anything."

"You forget," said Forsythe, "that I am a lawyer. The only thing I can do for you is to say nothing. My advice would be to drop this thing here and now, hand over the gold to the government and await their decision."

"Would you do that if you were us?" said James.

Forsythe laughed.

"Man never knows what he will do till he is tempted," said he. He fell into reverie for a moment, then turning to Dicky: "If you had found this gold on some desert island the whole case would be different."

"Yes?" said Dicky.

"That's all I have to say. I am going to say it again. If you had found this gold on some desert island—some island, let us say, belonging to Spain—and if you had a permit to search for it, the whole case would be different."

"I suppose it would," said Dicky, wondering what the other was driving at.

"Absolutely," said Forsythe, rising from his chair, "and now that is all I have to say. Your confidence placed in me shall be respected. I shall charge you no fee for this interview, and my advice has been to drop the business. If you had found this gold on some desert island the case would be quite different."

He opened the door and the pair went out. Halfway down the stairs they looked up. The lawyer was speaking to them over the banister rail.

"Remember what I said."

"Thanks," said Dicky, wondering what on earth he meant. But James knew. James had seized the meaning of the dusty one, this man of law who had the sharpest brain in London and yet a little bit of the boy left in his heart.

"Can't you see?" cried James, when they were in Fleet Street; "haven't you tumbled to it? He couldn't tell us to do it, but all the same he's told us what to do."

"And what's that?"

"Oh, good Lord! Can't you see? Why, take the stuff to some place and bury it same as the old pirates used to do, then discover it and claim it."

"By Jove," said Dicky, "there's something in that."

"Something! It's everything. How on earth else can we get rid of it? It's a peach of a plan. People are always going off to hunt for hidden treasure and they've never found any yet. Why, at Havana they're always selling locations of old treasure ships to any fools that will buy. You buy a location and a permit and there you are. If you dig up the stuff it's yours. You can take it to a bank and turn it into dollars. I know the whole of the Caribbean, cruised there two winters running, and there's no end of cays and places we can dump the stuff and then run to Havana and get a permit to dig. See?"

"Yes, I see," said Dicky. "But how are we to get to the Caribbean?"

"I'll get you there and never you fear that," said James. "Can't we get the stuff on board my yacht? Why, it was built for the work. I know just the place to go to, south of Rum Cay, nothing but sea gulls and flying fish. Any more objections to make?"

"I'm not objecting," said Dicky, "it's a stunning idea, but wants getting used to—and there's Miss Dennis."

"We'll take her along," said James.

He fell into thought for a moment as if contemplating this new proposition of Sheila. Then linking arms with the other, he wheeled him into a café.

CHAPTER XVI.

PLANS.

LEAVING the café and entering the Strand, they turned into Denny's bookshop.

You can get any book you want almost at Denny's. James wanted books about buried treasure, and told his wants quite openly, and was surprised at the number and variety of the works that had been printed on this subject.

Life is a big university and every day brings some sort of examination for the scholars. Dicky and James, suddenly forced to compete for this hidden-treasure prize, had determined to mug the subject up.

"You see," said James as they came along toward the bookshop, "there's been no end of chaps working their brains over this business and we may get tips. I'm not great on the reading business myself, but you and Miss Dennis may pick up something useful."

"Treasure Island," Knight's "Cruise of the *Alerte*" and half a dozen others having been bought and paid for, they took their way back to the Savoy, James stopping at a post office on the way to send a telegram.

"Who are you wiring to?" asked Dicky.

"My skipper. The yacht's at Tilbury and I'm telling him to bring her right round to-day to Hildersditch. You don't know my skipper. Shortt's his name and long's his nature. He takes ten minutes to do a repair another man would do in five, and it wants a derrick to get him out of a port once he's taken up moorings. If I told him to come round to Hildersditch to-day and said nothing more he'd be there about this day fortnight, so I'm addressing him like this," said James, as he stood, his stick under his arm and his bowler hat on the back of his head, covering telegraph form after telegraph form with a message running like this:

SHORTT. Yacht *Dulcinea*. Tilbury.
Bring *Dulcinea* round to-day to Hildersditch Pool, berth her at buoy two cable lengths from ketch *Baltrum*. I know *Dulcinea's* mainmast is sprung, she has opened a seam and can't possibly be moved until spars have thorough overhaul. Disregard all that, this is urgent, have her there to-day or you're fired.

CORDER.

"But is her mainmast sprung?" asked Dicky, as he read the message.

"That's sarcasm, or supposed to be. No, my dear chap, but Shortt's sprung. He's paralyzed in the hind legs of his initiative and wants hot irons to make him move."

"Fifty-eight words—four and tenpence," said the girl behind the counter, and out they went.

James' mind was now in full running order; he had taken command of things and had developed, as men develop in an emergency. Carrying the parcel under his arm, he paused after leaving the telegraph office and made his way across the Strand to a big stationer's. Here he bought an atlas, had it parceled with the books, and calling a taxi, bundled Dicky in, got in himself and told the driver to take them to the Savoy.

It was only a few hundred yards. They got out and going up to the suite, Mr. Corder untying the parcel and casting the books on a sofa, placed the atlas on a table.

"Now I'll show you," said James, opening the atlas at the section showing the Bahamas, Florida to Tallahassee, and Cuba.

"Here's the place for us. I know every reef and shoal of it almost. I've fished it, you see; there's Great Abaco, I was nearly wrecked on it once, and there's Cat Island where they hanged Harvey—a pirate chap—and, south of Cat Island, that's Rum Cay—look, that little spot.

"South of Rum Cay there's nothing here but blue water, but the map's a fool. Give's a pen—it's all reefs along here and that keeps ships away, and here, almost in the same latitude as Acklin Island, there's a cay no bigger than your hand. That's the place for us; there's only two palm trees on it and the crabs come up there by the thousand, but they don't worry you if you have something to bat them with.

"Now you see what I mean. If we bury the stuff here it's as safe as churches. Dash it, what was I thinking of? The name of the place has come to me, Crab Cay—that's the name. It's known for the crabs that come up on it; they aren't always there. I landed and there was nothing but just the sand sizzling in the sun and the palm trees waving in the wind, but I hadn't more than walked half the length of it when I heard a rustling and behind me crabs were coming up over the coral, hoisting themselves out of the sea, hundreds of them, and hundreds of them behind me and to right and left. It was me they were after, I felt that and it wasn't a nice feeling, I can tell you."

"I should think not," said Dicky. "But why on earth bury the stuff in this beastly place? Why not hit on some spot where there are no crabs?"

"Well, you don't know the Bahamas and all round there," said James. "The place is full of small traders and fishing boats and contraband chaps always messing about. Acklin, Mariguana, Caicos; it's all the same, there's always chaps messing about that might spot what we are doing. Crab Cay is safe, no one goes there."

Dicky pondered over the map.

"There's another thing," said he. "Won't the crew see us burying the stuff? And there's another thing—we've got to transship the stuff from the *Baltrum* on to your boat; won't they smell a rat? It's not your scheme to take the *Baltrum* along, is it? Well, there you are. We have two things to do that ought to be done in secret; the transshipping of it to the *Dulcinea* and the burying it when we get there, and your crew aren't blind men, are they?"

"I'll have to have a glass of sherry and bitters to help me think over that," said James, ringing for Strutt. "As you say, those are two very important points and they haven't cropped up in my mind till now. Strutt, two sherries and Angosturas and get luncheon up at once and tell Handley to have the car here at one thirty sharp. Yes, there's no doubt about it, that the whole of this thing is not as easy a proposition as falling off a log, and there's another thing we've clean forgot—MacAdam and the possible crowd of yeggmen behind him, and the British government behind them, and the law-officers-of-the-crown chaps who may stick us in prison if one wheel goes wrong. Good gosh, Dicky, I wish we'd never gone to that lawyer chap of yours."

"Well, there's no use in meeting trouble halfway," said Dicky.

"Halfway? Why, we're in it unless we dump the stuff in the Pool and let MacAdam fish for it."

"You're not getting cold feet, are you?" asked the other, alarmed by the sudden change in James' manner.

Strutt and the sherries and bitters saved James from replying for the moment. Then when they were alone again, James, getting up, began to pace the floor.

"It's not a question of cold feet. I reckon I'm no quitter, and as for MacAdam and that lot, I don't care a shilling. But I've got a horrible and unholy fear of the government. I have indeed. I was in a criminal court once, and I saw an old guy in a red dressing gown with a sword hanging over his head sentencing a chap to a hundred and ten years' penal servitude for sneezing in the British Museum, I think it was—anyhow the whole business gave me the quakes."

"Luncheon is served, sir," said Strutt, opening the door.

Ten minutes later James, under the restoring influence of food and cheer-inspiring liquids, had quite recovered his balance and tone of mind. The gold had him again in its clutch, the gold and the sense of adventure and the knowledge that Sheila was in this thing with them. After all, without danger the thing would have had no spice; as it was, what could a man want better, a huge treasure, a pretty girl, danger and the land of the old buccaneers all rolled in one? What could the heart desire more?

It was five o'clock when they reached Hildersditch and by good luck they found Larry on the Hard. He had come over to fetch some parcels and he rowed them off. Sheila was waiting for them. She had spotted them through the glass and had put the kettle on to boil and when they got down to the cabin tea was made and waiting.

"I felt somehow or another you'd be back in time for tea," said Sheila. "What's in that parcel?"

"Books," said Dicky, throwing the parcel into a bunk. "We've seen Forsythe and he's not a ha'p'orth of use, only he gave us an idea. Corder will tell you."

James, who was not much of a tea drinker, took the cup presented to him, and, while he let it grow cold, plunged into the middle of affairs. His nervousness before the girl had vanished. The arrow was still there but he no longer felt it; the poisoning had entered upon its second stage and the presence of Sheila instead of sending all his wits astray pulled them together in one leash and whipped them into activity.

He explained the whole position with clearness, and not without humor, gave her a sketch of Forsythe and a brief of the plan he had formed for taking the *Dulcinea* to the Bahamas. "But it all depends on you," said James. "You are one of the partners in this business and nothing goes without your word. Will you come?"

"Of course I'll come," said she. "But there's only one question I want to ask. Won't the crew know all about it?"

"You've put your finger on the spot," said James. "You've gone right to the center of this business. That's what we're up against. Unless we can ship a crew of blind men, they will. First of all they'll see us transshipping the stuff here, secondly they'll see us burying it."

He had placed the atlas open on the tea table while explaining matters and Sheila, with her eyes fixed on the map of the Bahamas, seemed lost in reverie.

"I'm beginning to understand," said Dicky, "why the old pirate johnnies murdered people to keep things dark. They *had* to."

"Seems to me," said James, "if their position was anything like ours, they had."

Sheila raised her eyes from the map.

"I think your plan's wrong," said she quite simply. "If we do the thing at all we must take the *Baltrum*. Your yacht can come along too, and cruise in company with us. First of all, if we do that, there will be no transshipping here. Think of it, how could we? Your captain and crew would say to themselves, 'What are they bringing this ballast stuff on board for?' They might suspect nothing, but still they would think it queer. Then, when it was taken on shore to be buried, they'd be sure to suspect the whole business.

"I've just thought out the whole thing, and my suggestion is to take the *Baltrum* as she is. Us three and Larry can work her. The *Dulcinea* can keep us company. At Crab Cay you can send her to Great Bahama or somewhere to wait for us. You can say we want to do some fishing. Then the three of us with Larry can easily get the stuff ashore. It will take us a few days, but that is nothing. When it is buried we can rejoin the *Dulcinea,* send the *Baltrum* home or leave her in harbor wherever it is, and sail in the *Dulcinea* for Havana, where you can get your permit to dig for buried treasure. What do you think of that?"

"Topping," said Dicky, but James for a moment said nothing.

James was fond of comfort.

"Isn't the *Baltrum* a bit small for a long cruise?" said he at length.

"Good gracious, no," said Sheila. "Father and I used to take one like her every winter to the Canaries. We took her to the Cape Verdes, once. Why one could go round the world in her, easily."

"Maybe," said James.

"You aren't afraid of roughing it?" said Dicky.

"Me! Lord, no. I like it. Give me a simple life and I'm happy—I was only thinking of the size of her. Well, I'm not saying it's not a peach of a plan. It is, but I'll tell you what, folks, this gold is going to make us work to get it. I remember my father saying the only royal road to fortune was work. He was right, seems to me."

"What time did you say your yacht would be here?" asked Sheila.

"It's sixty miles from here to Tilbury, about," said James. "Shortt would have started about one o'clock. The wind's with him and with the auxiliary he'd do about twelve knots; that's five hours. He ought to be here at six."

Then they fell to discussing ways and means, and James, forgetting for the moment the month of hard labor and rough life before him, became as engrossed as the others in the question of stores and the time of starting.

This was no pleasure trip and there was no time for delay. Speed was a matter of urgency. While the *Baltrum* remained in harbor or within the three-mile limit many things might occur. If MacAdam and the possible men behind him were a real menace, as was highly probable, they might be boarded by night, attacked and the *Baltrum* run out to sea. It was the huge amount of gold that brought this seemingly absurd idea within the bounds of possibility, for the gold was like a magician, a spirit capable of either boundless evil or boundless good, a chemical compound that might lie forever quiescent, or handled might resolve itself into all sorts of benefits to the handlers—or explode, shattering everything around it.

That is what gold is, gold in bulk like that on board of the *Baltrum,* gold unclaimed and seizable by the first comer. And they knew it.

It was theirs for the moment, but only while they could hold it. Time was of the essence of this contract; and to get to sea, clear England and give the good-by to possible enemies, it was necessary to act with lightning swiftness. It was Sheila who took the lead. Fortunately for them she had the power to think all round a subject and an experience in ship matters and stores denied to either of them.

"We can get everything we want at MacQuoid's," said she, "and I am going to make the list. I'm provisioning her for three months; no use in getting in too much. You had better take your car and go up to town to-night with the list. Be at MacQuoid's first thing in the morning, have the things brought down by lorry. See? Then you had better arrange at your hotel, for you won't be going back there."

"Yes," said James. It was strange to

hear his future being arranged for him like this by a girl, by the girl who had hypnotized him yesterday, but whose power had somehow now become merged into the power of the gold and the power of events.

She was no longer a detached being, but part of the impetus that was carrying him he knew not whither. Love under these circumstances had to wait, finger on lip and watching.

The *Baltrum* could carry to sea with her five hundred gallons of water in two water tanks; these had to be filled, and Sheila made a note of that for a start. Used to getting in stores for their winter cruises, she could tell almost exactly how much they would require per man per month. She sat adding up things on a spare bit of paper and putting down the totals on the sheet before her. No "cabin biscuits" for Sheila, except a box or two; she had seen them turn into worms too often in the heat of the subtropics. Hard-tack was what she ordered, hard-tack and ship's beef to supplement the tinned food, for a man sick of canned stuff will turn to junk with a relish.

While she worked, the others, having nothing to do for the moment, smoked. She made a pretty picture and as they watched, their admiration would have been increased if possible had they known what was really going on inside her head and what she was doing for them and their comfort, for it is on the little things that comfort and often safety depend.

Sheila knew, for instance, that their water supply could not be drawn upon for washing purposes, therefore they would have to wash in salt water, which is impossible without salt-water washing soap. She knew what sort of chocolate kept and what didn't, what sorts of dried fruit went mushy, the best brand of coffee and the fact that they would require four can openers.

"What tobacco do you smoke?" she asked James.

"Oh, I'll get my tobacco myself," said James. "You needn't worry to put that down."

"Well," said Sheila, "coarse navy or ship tobacco is all right, but if you smoke any fancy brands they've got to be hermetically sealed. You'd better let me put it down; MacQuoid can supply you with anything —you'd better take some extra pipes with you too. I've seen father near crazy trying to smoke a pipe he bought at Teneriffe —the Spaniards never smoke pipes and don't know how to make them. I'm ordering matches; you needn't worry about them. Wines and spirits—we don't want any wines, do we?—haven't got room for them and a dozen bottles of whisky will do, don't you think? If you want soda water we'll have to take sparklets—I'm putting them down. I suppose your clothes are all right, you'll want light things." She surveyed the list, up and down, and then went over it carefully item by item. Then she handed it to James, who put it in his pocketbook.

"How about the water tank?" asked Dicky. "It will take some filling."

"Your men can do that," said Sheila, turning to James. "If the yacht gets here to-night, they can start on it first thing in the morning, and then later in the day when the provisions come down they can help to get them on board. Has your yacht a motor boat?"

"She has," said James.

"Good! That's the provisions and water settled, and now let me see what else there is to think of. Fortunately we don't want an overhaul; everything is right, we have no sprung spars or rotten ratlines, thank goodness, and the copper is clear. Now about the navigation and instruments. The compass is all right. We can have the boat swung to-morrow to adjust it, and we have a sextant, everything we want, but no charts. You will have to get the charts to-morrow. Are you any good at navigating?" She was addressing James, for she knew Dicky's failings in this respect.

"Not a ha'p'orth," said James.

"And yet you own a yacht! Well, no matter, fortunately I'm used to it and I'll teach you as we go. And now it has come into my head that it's stupid to work her with only the four of us; we can do it but it's dreadfully hard work. We'll take two of the men from your yacht if they can be spared—can they?"

"Lord, yes," said James. "She's overmanned, she's more like a floating sailors' home than a yacht."

"Good," said Sheila. "We'll take two of your best men, and I'll choose them if I may. They can go back to the yacht when we get to the Bahamas. Well, that's all, I think, anyhow for the present."

The two men went on deck to smoke, leaving her to clear up.

"Damn!" said James. "How was I to

know I'd ever want to be able to do navigating? I've always paid a man to do it just as I've paid a man to do cooking. She'll be wanting us to do the cooking next."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," replied the other. "I don't feel more than about one inch high. She's everything on this boat and we're nothing—not till we learn to do things."

CHAPTER XVII.

MORGAN.

THE sun had set beyond Hildersditch church when through the rose-tinted gloaming a white ghost showed up treading its way smoothly through the passage to the Pool.

It was the *Dulcinea*.

She came along in as though she knew the place by heart, past the sand spit she came, steering as though to cut into the *Baltrum*, then, the light wind shivering out of her sails, she turned, gliding, to pick up her moorings.

"Oh, what a beauty!" cried Sheila as she watched this ghost from the sea, "and she's yours."

"Yes," said James, "and she's late. Come along."

Larry was in the dinghy, alongside, waiting, and he rowed them off. The ladder was down at the port side and as Sheila came on board it seemed to her that the heart could desire nothing better than this. There was light enough to show the sweep of the deck, the grace of the spars, the exquisiteness of the canvas, the perfection of the standing and running rigging. The *Dulcinea* wore her canvas as a duchess wears her robes. Lapthorne had dressed her, and for the first time to Sheila as she stood and looked around her the gold in the poor old *Baltrum* spoke clearly and definitely, saying: *"Now* you can see what I can do. I and I alone can create a boat like this, find her and man her and keep her, aye, and give her to you to be your own, your very own."

"Shortt," said James, addressing the four-square person in a peaked cap and with a show of brass buttons who had received them on board, "you're late."

"Aye, I'm late, sir," said Shortt, "but it wasn't my fault. Morgan was late in coming off—overstayed his leave. But we're here now, anyhow, and there aren't no spars sprung, same as in your telegram."

James laughed, then he led the way below, Sheila following and Dicky and the captain coming after.

The electrics were on in the saloon. Cream and old gold formed the color scheme. There were no pictured panels or fallals or plate, beyond a few trophies and a tarpon cup on the sideboard, but there was comfort everywhere, great cushions, ash trays where they ought to be and chairs solid and comfortable.

"Well, I won't have that," said James, who had gone down the stairs laughing and was now standing by the table with his fingers on it as he turned to the skipper.

That was a characteristic of James, which came out chiefly when brought in contact with the employees; he would suddenly strip laughter and a pleasant exterior away to show anger that he had maybe been corking up for a long time over some fault.

"I won't have that. I won't have chaps overstaying their leave, and Morgan's fired." He turned and touched an electric bell.

"Are you intending cruising right away, sir?" asked Shortt.

"Yes, right away and right down to the Bahamas."

"Then you can't fire him," said Shortt, "unless we sail without a mate. You can't get a mate in two minutes and he's my right hand."

The steward entered.

"Tell Mr. Morgan I want to see him," said James.

In less than a minute Morgan was standing in the saloon doorway; a youngish man with jet-black hair—Welsh black.

"Come in," said James

Morgan came slowly forward. He was holding his cap in both hands and fiddling with it. He did not seem to want to come forward in the least, but he came right up to them and right into the full glare of light.

"I hear you overstayed your leave at Tilbury, Mr. Morgan," said the owner of the *Dulcinea*. "What made you do that?"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Morgan, "but I met some relatives at the last moment."

Dicky, watching Morgan, said to himself: "That chap is in the deuce of a funk about something. Either that or he's no more nerves than a kitten."

"Well, don't do it again," said James, "and hold yourself in readiness to start at once for abroad. You'll have no more shore leave."

"No, sir," said Morgan, acquiescing.

"That'll do," said James. Then he turned to Shortt.

"How much provisions and truck have you got on board?"

"There's a month's victuals for us and the crew, sir," said Shortt, "but I had to put out of Tilbury without the cabin stuff. I hadn't time to order it—your telegram was so sharp on my getting away."

"We won't want it," said James. "I'm not coming on board; I'm going to sail in that ketch over there. By the way, I haven't introduced you—this is Captain Shortt, Miss Dennis. Captain Shortt, Mr. Sebright. Yes, Shortt, I'm going to be very seasick for once in my life, I believe; sit down and have a cigar. Miss Dennis, is that chair comfortable? Yes, the three of us are going to sample the weather in that dough dish and I'm going to learn navigating from Miss Dennis, who's a better sailor even than you, Shortt. We've got to cruise in company and you've got to keep your eye on us. Have you your water on board?"

"Both tanks full," said the captain. "And when do you propose to put out?"

"Day after to-morrow early," said James.

"That's quick work," said Shortt, rolling the cigar between finger and thumb.

"Yes, it's quick work, as you say," replied James, "but you know me when I take a thing into my head, Shortt."

"Bahamas," said the captain meditatively as he stared across the cigar smoke at the old-gold plush carpet. "I was thinking it was maybe the Norway fjords you were going to make a summer trip of. Summer in the Bahamas—well, you'll find it hot, sir."

"You can't give me too much heat," said James.

"Nor me," said Dicky.

"Nor me," said Sheila.

"And it will be the hurricane season," said the captain.

"Well, we'll have to risk that," said James, "and you know a lot of that hurricane talk is bunkum. It's like the bay—give a place a bad reputation and it holds. I've been to Key West in the hurricane season and got no harm there."

"Well, sir, it's for you to choose," said Shortt. "You to order and me to obey, as the saying is. And how about your compass, may I ask?"

"We'll swing the *Baltrum* to-morrow," said Sheila.

"And your charts," said Shortt.

"Mr. Corder will get the charts to-morrow," said the girl, "also the chronometer. We have all the other navigating instruments we want."

"May I ask are you used to handling boats, miss?"

"Ever since I was a child," said Sheila.

As they were being rowed back to the *Baltrum* by Larry, Sheila, apropos of nothing and after a fashion she had, suddenly spoke up:

"I don't like that man Morgan," said Sheila.

"Why, what's wrong with him?" asked Dicky.

"I don't know," she said. "Nothing—maybe it's only a fancy."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MAINSAIL HAUL!

NEXT day at dawn the business began. They had decided last night to give themselves only one day; that is, twenty-four hours from daybreak.

Surrounded by a host of real or imaginary opponents, their nerves were on edge and the craving to get out into the wide sea beyond the three-mile limit was like the craving of the thirsty for water.

James had gone to town in the car, and he would not arrive back till afternoon. Besides the stores he had to get a log book and a chronometer, and to see to the ship's papers in conjunction with Captain Salt, on his return.

Meanwhile Sheila and Dicky had to complete their preparations on board, get ready to receive the stores, see the water brought on board and swing the compass.

The compass is the sensitive plant of the mechanical world. The chronometer comes next to it, but the compass is easily first. A compass resents the near presence of iron and goes off its balance, so to speak; or in other words suffers deviation.

To ascertain the amount af deviation due to the presence of iron on board, the ship must be swung; that is, turned right round, the pointing of the compass being noted with reference to the position of some fixed spot ashore.

Hildersditch church spire was the point fixed on by Sheila, and as soon as the light was strong enough she was at work, arrayed against the morning chill in a sou'wester

and an overcoat of old Captain Dennis' that reached to her feet.

You can swing a ship by just letting her swing herself to the tide, but that takes time. The quickest way is to turn her by towing her head slowly round with a boat. This was the method adopted by Sheila and as Larry pulled the head of the ketch round with the dinghy she took careful bearings of the spire as the *Baltrum's* head came on to the different points of the compass.

She found that all the bearings did not agree as they ought, so she had to make out a table showing the deviation from each point.

This table when she had made it out could be carried with them to show the amount of error in the compass and to allow them to account for it when determining their course at sea.

At eight bells—twelve, noon—the motor pinnace of the *Dulcinea* came alongside with water breakers to fill their tanks. Morgan, the mate, was in charge of the pinnace and he came on board to direct the men.

Sheila and Dicky were away in the dinghy. They had finished their work on board, and leaving Larry in charge had gone to the Hard to see if there were any letters. When they came back they found Larry in a temper.

The tanks had been filled by the men from the *Dulcinea* and Larry had not been called upon to do a hand's turn. All the same he was in a temper and the cause was Morgan.

"Cut and carried on as if the boat was his own, and him not an honest sailorman but a damn brass-bound monkey on a shtick, bad cess to him. And then when I lift me eye off him, down he was below. 'What are you doin' below there?' says I.

" 'Inspictin' the water tanks,' says he, and down I goes and there he was and him inspictin' the ballast."

"*What!*" cried Sheila.

"As sure as I'm tellin' you; him with his nose on the ballast."

" 'Oh, get out,' I says to him, 'don't you know which end of a ship's which?' and he tried to soft sawther me, but I was in a timper and told him to get on deck. I'm never houldin' with them big yachts like the *Dulcinea* over there. The afther guard's fixed up in gould lace and the crew's all white ducks and spit and polish, but I'd sooner sail in a herrin' boat full of tinkers than with a cargo of them chaps and in a scow like that beyond. Them and their exiliary ingins and 'lectric light!"

Sheila hurried down below, followed by Dicky. There was no sign of any meddling with the ballast, but Larry's word was enough.

What had Morgan been doing?

Sheila asked this question of Dicky and the only answer to it was, as Larry had put it, "inspictin' the ballast."

"It mayn't mean anything," said Dicky. "He'd be interested in a boat like this and would be poking his nose everywhere once he got below."

"Maybe," said Sheila, "but why should he go to the ballast like an arrow to a mark? He couldn't have been down here three minutes and—there he was."

"It's rum, certainly," said Dicky.

"I didn't like the look of him a bit when I first saw him last night," said she. "I took a dislike to him right off, the way he stood and fiddled with his cap and seemed as if he was cringing before Mr. Corder—but he wasn't. He'd have given impudence in a minute if he'd got the chance. Then why did he overstay his leave? What was he doing? I believe these men have got hold of him."

"You mean MacAdam and any possible men who may be working with him?"

"I do—and they are more than possible men, highly probable men, I'd call them. Mr. Corder gave his address away and you told me the night before last when he had taken too much wine he remembered talking to a stranger who called at the hotel to see him. It would be quite easy for them, once they knew his address and how rich he is to find out about his yacht, go to Tilbury and get in touch with the crew."

"Would they have had time?"

"Of course they would. It doesn't want much time to bribe people."

"Well," said Dicky, "even if it is so we've checkmated them."

"How?"

"By taking the *Baltrum*. If we had the stuff on board the *Dulcinea,* Morgan, if he *is* a scoundrel, might be able to do something. But sailing apart from them as we are, what can he do? He won't see us burying it. If it was in the old days, of course he might work the *Dlucinea* chaps up and take the ship and then go for us, but that sort of thing is not done nowadays."

"I suppose you are right," said the girl. "All the same we've got to be on the lookout. Shall you tell Mr. Corder?"

"What's the good? James is just the chap to go and make a row with Captain Shortt and give the show away, for all he'd have to say was that Morgan was looking at the ballast—which isn't a crime. Shortt would smell a rat and maybe talk some time or another. Besides, we can't fire Morgan—haven't time to get a new mate."

"All right," said Sheila.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon before James arrived and he didn't come in his car. He came in MacQuoid's lorry with the stores. He had forgotten nothing, neither the chronometer nor the charts, and ten minutes after his arrival the stores were coming off in the *Dulcinea's* boats.

The question of ship's papers was a bothersome one. James, as owner and nominal captain of the boats, had to attend to this business with Captain Salt, and it was ten o'clock and a rising moon before everything was fixed and done with.

They were short of all sorts of things but of nothing absolutely necessary except tropical clothing. They could get this at Teneriffe, where they proposed to put in before the long run across the Atlantic. Two of the *Dulcinea's* men, Hearn and Longley by name, were aboard, and Captain Shortt, having received his last orders, had gone back to his ship.

The *Dulcinea* was not to bother about keeping in sight. She was to make under all plain sail for Santa Cruz harbor, Teneriffe, touching at Plymouth on the way for oil for the auxiliary. Shortt had discovered at the last moment that the oil drums had not come aboard at Tilbury. He had only enough to run the auxiliary for five hours or so, and Mersea could not supply him, so a wire had been sent to Struthers of Plymouth to have the stuff ready.

As they watched him row off across the moonlit Pool, Sheila felt a sudden depression of spirits for which she could not account.

Every one knows that feeling of a hidden worry working beneath the mind like a mole; when hunted for it generally comes to light.

Hunting for it now, she found the cause at once. The call of the *Dulcinea* at Plymouth.

Instead of cutting their connection clean off with England on the morrow the *Dulcinea* was going to call at Plymouth.

Well, there was nothing in that. She would put in, get the stores she wanted and put out again. The whole business would take only a few hours. Still Sheila felt worried. Felt as an operating surgeon feels who finds that the tiniest loophole has not been guarded against sepsis.

Morgan would be in touch with England and he would know their destination and if he was what she vaguely suspected, well then——

What? She could formulate no definite idea of what he might do.

Being sensible, having found the worry, she put it away from her. It was not a bit of good nursing it, and there was a lot still to be done down below before turning in.

Any one who has had to get a small boat ready for sea in a hurry for a long cruise will know what I mean.

Nearly all the stores had been disposed of but there were some things that refused. A small barrel of oatmeal had taken up its place in the main cabin. Hearn and Longley, who had done most of the stowing, helped by Larry, said there was no place for it to go. Sheila found one. A bag of dried figs that had "bust itself" had to be sutured, and a drum of lamp oil deposited in a bunk—of all places—because there was nowhere it would go, had to be removed and stowed.

She knew every inch of cargo space and some of the clumsy work of these yacht sailors had to be undone before everything was shipshape. By then the west wind was bringing midnight from Hildersditch church clock across the Pool.

Then returning into the after cabin which was hers, while the two men took the bunks in the main cabin and the sailors the fo'c's'le, the crew of the *Baltrum* found oblivion, while under the moon the ketch turned slowly with the tide, as though the Fates were swinging her compass for a voyage of which no man could tell the upshot or the landfall.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GIRL TAKES CHARGE.

JAMES, when he engaged in this business so blithely, had entirely left out of count the fact that he was no sailorman.

Though he could handle a sailing boat and had covered thousands of miles of sea,

he had never taken charge. He paid his skipper to do that.

"Never do anything bothersome you can get another to do for you," was a motto of James', and he wasn't far wrong as long as he remained within the golden circle that Fortune had drawn round him. Yacht handling for any one who has not an inborn passion for the business is wearisome work requiring strict attention to business, knowledge born of ignominious failures, and a clear head.

In no other trade or avocation are there so many things easy to do that surely lead to disaster or confusion, so many things that if left undone produce the same results. He had found out this fact long ago and forgotten it under the hypnotism of gold and adventure—forgotten his ignorance of the whole practice of seamanship.

The fact came to him this morning as he stood on the deck of the *Baltrum,* an inexpressibly mournful-looking dawn breaking over the sand spits, and the voice of the bell buoy coming against the wind, blowing from the west.

On board that ship there were only two people deeply learned in sea craft and capable of handling for all she was worth a craft like the *Baltrum,* and those two people were Sheila and Larry. The *Dulcinea* pair were good, capable white-painted yacht sailors but with no more initiative than a doughnut. Dicky was an amateur with all the will in the world, and you know what that means. James was hopeless till licked into shape. The only good thing about him was that he knew it and treated the fact as a joke.

"You and Larry will have to get us out and show us how to do things," said James, lighting a cigarette in the face of the dismal dawn. "It will be all right when we are once out, you know."

"Yes," said Sheila.

She was standing, in an old pea jacket with a muffler round her throat, watching while Larry and the hands came on deck. Then turning to the two others: "I'm going to pick watches with Larry," said she. "Larry, come here—I'm going to pick watches." She ran her eye over the small crowd meditatively. "I'll take Hearn," said she.

"Longley, stip over to the other side," said Larry.

"I'll take Mr. Sebright," said she.

"And I'll take the gintleman," said Larry, rather grumblingly indicating James.

Sheila's was the port watch, Larry's the starboard. Sheila was the virtual captain of the *Baltrum* as she always had been, Larry mate, and the hands the rest of the crew.

James, lighting another cigarette, took in the position fully, and the comic-opera side of it. Quite naturally under the all-compelling influence of the gold, things had fallen into this shape. He, James, was serving as an A. B., of all things in the world, on an old ketch and under command of a girl, a girl, moreover, who had made him feel queer about the heart, who made him still feel rather queer about the heart when he had time to register the ordinary feelings of humanity. But that was not all; he was serving and would have to pull ropes and things with two of his own sailors. Furthermore he was sailing on a treasure expedition, not to seek for treasure but to bury it.

Mad! The thing would have been mad only for the iron chain of logical events that led up to it. Taking all the facts into consideration, nothing else could have happened; even though he and Dicky and Sheila possessed free will it had been and was of no use to them. They could not let go of the gold any more than a man can let go the poles of a powerful electric battery once they are in his hands.

It would have been an interesting question in psychology whether they were clinging to the gold or the gold to them. The result in either case would have been the same.

As he filled his lungs with cigarette smoke he recognized all this, and just like a man on a started toboggan, he recognized that he could not get out.

The sun that had been fighting the low-lying sea mists was making way, the dismal gray of the dawn had vanished and the seaward sky had taken a blue, faint, new-born and lovely, the blue of ice holding the sparkle of fire.

The captain of the *Baltrum* was looking toward it, but with no poetry in her heart. The *Dulcinea* lay in the fairway, the wind was fresh, the tide ebbing—why didn't she get out. She could see the fellows on her deck.

"What are they waiting for, Larry?" asked Sheila.

"Faith, I don't know, miss," said Larry, his contempt for fine yachts and their ways palpable to the ear. "Except maybe their exiliary ingin won't work."

"It's Shortt, damn him," said James, utterly forgetting Sheila for a moment. "Shall I row off and stir him up?"

"No," said Sheila. "There goes the winch."

The sound of the anchor chain being hove short came to them and now the sails of the *Dulcinea* began to go aloft.

"Now the winch, Larry," cried Sheila.

The winch was manned and the anchor chain hove short.

"She's a-thrip, miss," said Larry.

"Set your mainsail."

The mainsail rose slatting to the breeze, then came the orders like snow. "Your throat halyards. Gaskets off the jib. Your jib halyards—haul!"

The *Dulcinea* already was away as the orders came. "Man the windlass."

She gave it as she took the wheel.

Then as the anchor came out of the mud and up to the cathead, the *Baltrum* took a new feel and found a voice, a watery gurgling voice; the main boom lifting to the breeze strained at the sheet. They were away.

The south-center spit drew toward them as though the land were moving, the fairway broadened, and the cold North Sea, sparkling in the May morning, showed its foam gouts and its gulls and a big tanker pounding north for Hull, maybe, or the Tyne.

The sand spits passed to a shouting of gulls and the wind freshened as though the sea had given it new life, and now the bell buoy of the east-center shoal spoke loud and clear and close to starboard and then began to fail in voice as the runways and traps of this infernal passage were left definitely behind.

"Tank-tonk—tonk-tank-tonk," said the buoy. "The *Hilda Claydon* lies here—fishing boat—lost—all hands—winter—storms—wreck—Essex boat, too—tonk."

"Lee-o!"

The wheel went over, the sails shook, the main boom listed out to port and the *Baltrum,* with the wind on her starboard beam, leaned to it, pointing due south with the sunlit coast of Essex away across the water.

Away ahead the *Dulcinea,* on the same course, showed beautiful against the blue.

Sheila handed the wheel over to Larry and dropped below to see after breakfast.

A line from the haze to the south foreland forms the arc of a great bay, a wedge-shaped bay whose conelike top diminishes till it becomes the Thames and touches London.

Larry was holding the *Baltrum* close to this line and the *Baltrum,* as though incited by the *Dulcinea,* was proving her qualities as a sea boat and for speed. Noon found them with the north foreland away on the starboard beam and the Goodwins directly ahead.

CHAPTER XX.

SOUTHWARD BOUND.

I HAVE read many books on the subject, but I have never yet met an author who with his hand on his heart had told the truth, the whole truth, about the North Sea and English Channel, those sea approaches devised by the devil for the confusion of his friends the enemies of England.

Wind, currents, sand spits, fog and ships are chief among the dangers peculiar to these places and among them the most trying to the nerves of the tyro are ships.

Crossing the entrance to the port of London you meet ships. Vast ships in a hurry, high in ballast or low with freight; little ships from the Tyne, from the Humber or Channel ports, and, worst of all, Thames barges that get in the way of the traffic like dust carts in Piccadilly.

James' heart was in his throat several times that morning. Larry, on instructions from his superior officer, who was down below engaged in household duties, was l'arnin' the new hand how to steer. James had the wheel and after the first five minutes or so nothing was easier. "Keep her as she goes," said Larry, and James kept her while Larry stood off and filled a pipe.

Nothing was easier; it was even pleasant. It gave him a sense of power and of being in control and she was an easy boat to steer. Sheila came on deck, glanced at the weather and the coast and fell into talk with Larry about some trifle or another, and James, proud of his job and the way he was doing it, straightened his back and whistled. He didn't whistle long.

A ship, outward bound and high in the water, drew his attention, a great brute of a Shireman liner with a stovepipe funnel and

propellers kicking up behind like the Buffalo girls.

She was making to cut the course of the *Baltrum*. He calculated the distance and speed of the two ships and saw that if he held on collision was inevitable. But he said nothing. Sheila had glanced at the freighter, so had Larry, then they had resumed their talk as if nothing was the matter. James' lips were dry, but the palms of his hands were moist. He would have given worlds to express his feelings, yet pride held him. These two people who knew all about everything were content. They must have something up their sleeves to prevent collision at the last moment, and it was for them to show concern, not him.

He held on.

Sweat drops were trickling down his nose, then suddenly he recognized that collision though probable was not inevitable. They might just shave it.

A minute later he saw that he had been fooled by sea distance and want of knowledge of speeds, and that he would pass the freighter cable lengths astern.

He saw this just as Sheila turning from Larry went below.

Larry, while seeming to see nothing, had seen everything. He had been rattled the same way himself when he was a young steersman.

"Did you think she was goin' to cut into us?" asked Larry.

"I did," said James.

"Well, you'll soon know better when you've l'arned your distances. But sure, you ought to have known it was for her to do the botherin', seein' it was her place to give us the way."

"I'd forgot," said James.

"Well, then, the next time you'll remimber," said Larry.

That was James' first lesson in seamanship which is, at base, the art of self-reliance. He had to learn a lot of other lessons before he sighted Teneriffe—how to heave the log, the delights of keeping watch of a moonlit May night with lighthouses winking at you and the water populous with shipping—red and green stars to port and starboard, lights of steamers that with a shift of helm might ram you and damn you and pass on.

Down this populous street the *Baltrum* passed like a cockroach down a passage filled with tramping men, protected by the god of little ships and the sea sense of her officers and the officers of the ships around her. For a day and half a night she lay smothered in fog billows in Lyme Bay, blowing a foghorn worked by foot in the midst of a fleet all foghorns and Devonshire voices. Then the bay took her, calm as a mill pond, till in the dark of a night powdered with stars a great revolving light far to port shouted to her: "I am here—I am here—Finistere—Finistere." Far to starboard a Union Castle liner crawling home showed like a flittering insect with one bright green spot in its middle. Then came the blue sea, boundless and desolate, till one day far to the southward the sky showed a stain diaphanous yet sharp cut, cone-shaped —the Peak.

CHAPTER XXI.

SANTA CRUZ.

THEY found the *Dulcinea* at anchor in Santa Cruz harbor, also an American training brig and two fruit schooners.

Dicky, standing by to help with the anchor, thought he had never seen a pleasanter place than that, so foreign to the eye, so friendly after the great sea spaces, so filled with the breath of the subtropics.

Sheila, who knew the place well, stood by Larry at the wheel; it was she who gave the word to let go and it was she who received the port officer and doctor as they came alongside, not as officials but as friends.

They knew her well, and when she gave them news of old Captain Dennis' death they flung up their hands. Then they came below, were formally introduced to James and the other, smoked cigarettes, never bothered to look at the *Baltrum's* papers, and departed leaving the cabin perfumed with Spanish tobacco.

The last time the girl had been in this place her mind had been free from care. Poor as church mice, she and her father had known nothing about care or worry and a lot about the joy of life, a life where the wind and the sea and the ever-changing sky had ringed them and roofed them, a life in which they were always altering their major environment without altering their home.

That is the charm of a seafarer's life if his boat is his own and he is free to work her as he wills. Without leaving his house he can alter his surroundings, transporting himself at will on the magic carpet of the sea. Sheila had been happy because she was

free, and it was only now in Santa Cruz harbor that the fact of her lost freedom came to her fully. She had been so busy on the voyage that she had no time to think of things, but here in this place so filled with old associations she felt as a bird might feel who suddenly finds a weight attached to one wing.

It was the gold.

Of all substances in the world, gold is the most active. It cannot throw off particles like radium, but it can build cities and destroy them, build ships and sink them, cut throats, ruin men, raise them to the heights; there is nothing that it cannot do, and it is always doing. Always at work. And its work is done entirely in the world of mind, even stirring to life in that strange world forces benign or destructive, far reaching, incalculable.

Sheila, without thinking this out, felt it. The idea that the terrible cargo of the *Baltrum* had been scented by others and that men of power in the kingdom of crookery which reaches from China to Peru were out against herself and her companions, had taken hold on her mind. But it was only here, at rest in the harbor of Santa Cruz, that she felt the full weight of it as it clung.

She was no longer free, and her horizon that had always been clear and bright was hung with vague clouds.

Beside this a load of responsibility had been cast on her. On her depended the working of the ship and the safety of the crew. She was an efficient navigator, and she had seen enough of James and Dicky on the voyage to know that months of steady application would be required to make either of them efficient, and they had not months to spare—no, nor days. Then the two clockwork sailors of the *Dulcinea* were exercising her mind. They were good fellows, but obviously not satisfied with their present job and quarters. Used to big yachts and Southampton water, the *Baltrum* did not appeal to them. They were only required to stick it till Great Bahama was reached. Would they? But what troubled her most was the attitude of James and Dicky.

These gentlemen at the sight of land seemed to have cast all care to the wind, forgotten the gold, forgotten everything. They wanted to get ashore and stretch their legs.

Captain Shortt, who had come on board after the port officers, received instructions to send the pinnace along. James wanted to go ashore in style. Sheila was to go with them.

"But we can't all leave the ship," said she.

"Goodness," said James, "she's as safe as houses. She won't run away and Larry and the others will be on board."

Sheila debated with herself.

She knew that it was safe enough to leave the *Baltrum;* she would have left it joyously for a cruise ashore in the old days. But now she felt as a woman might feel who is asked to leave her jewel case in a railway cloak room—it would be perfectly safe—yet still, she would be worrying all the time about it. On the other hand, she dreaded James and Dicky going ashore alone. What might they not get up to, specially James!

James had been perfectly all right on the voyage—but ashore!

"All right," said she, "I'll come."

She went down to change and before stepping into the pinnace she gave strict injunctions to Larry to let no one on board till they came back. She took him aside to give him this order.

"No one, Larry, not even any one off the *Dulcinea,* except Captain Shortt."

Then as she sat with her hands folded in the stern sheets of the pinnace she reviewed the whole position as only a woman could review it. Her own desperate need of money; not wealth, but just a competence; James' character—what she knew of it—and Dicky's; the gold, like a monster hidden in the *Baltrum,* the enemies or antagonists she imagined lurking out of view, ready to pounce, ready to follow them, able to trick them—she had read Gaboriau—wherever they went, ready to strike, pitiless; a dishcloth she had omitted putting to dry, and the fact that she had to tell Larry to get some potatoes from one of the fruit boats that are always dodging about the shipping.

No sooner had she put foot ashore however, than being a sensible person she dismissed all this from her mind and determined to enjoy herself.

Santa Cruz was hot, it was also empty of visitors, but that did not prevent them from enjoying themselves. They sat on the Plaza under an awning in front of the Hotel Continental and had vermouths, then they found their way through the narrow calles,

so-called streets, where no windows are and where the shop doors are just slits in the wall; shops like shops in the Rue de la Paix, only smaller; gorgeous shops you never would have imagined lurking in those cutthroat calles. Here they bought tooth powder and Pond's extract and other things they were short of and here they ordered tropical clothing, to be ready and delivered in two days.

Then it was lunch time and they went back to the Continental, where the waiter placed them at a table next to one occupied by the only other visitor, a French gentleman, stout, with a black beard, and a napkin tucked under his chin.

This gentleman, who was jesting with the waiter when they came in, seemed drunk but wasn't. He was Southern.

He surveyed the newcomers with a bold black stare that would have been impertinent in an English room, sang scraps of song as he broke his bread, and while waiting for his fish, and then struck up acquaintance with his neighbors.

He had arrived at Las Palmas by boat from England last night and had come over to Teneriffe that morning on business—nothing but business would take a man to a hole of a place like this out of season. Bompard was his name, born at Arles. Did they know Arles? Well, it was all the same——

By the time dessert was reached and coffee, they knew Bompard, knew all about him. He was less a man than an infection, a wonderful personality, radiating itself, and irresistible. He was in the cigar business and was going from Teneriffe to Vigo, and from Vigo to Havana; did they know Havana, *hein?* Ah, well, they had to see something yet if they never had seen Havana harbor.

Then he produced a big cigar case and gave them cigars unbuyable in the English market.

Sheila almost fell in love with him. He was different from any man she had ever met or heard of; he was the joy of life condensed and radiating itself, now quietly, now unquietly, but never offensively. Sometimes when not talking he would break into little scraps of song, songs about Provence and the sun.

He walked with them down to the landing stage and bade them a fond farewell after having accepted an invitation from James to lunch next day on board the *Dulcinea.*

Then, waving his hat to them, he turned and went off on his cigar business, and as they rowed off to the *Baltrum* he seemed to have taken some of the brightness of the day with him.

He was one of those rare persons one meets with in life who seem too good to be true.

CHAPTER XXII.

BOMPARD.

SHIP'S coal from lighters in Teneriffe harbor and bits of coal falling overboard form the basis of a microscopic industry. Men come out in boats and dredge for them and half a hundredweight of coal salved by a couple of boats working half a day is considered good business.

The captain of the *Baltrum,* seated under the awning knitting a jumper, watched this work with one eye and wove it into the texture of her knitting—it and all sorts of thoughts connected with it.

She knew nothing of the economic theories of the great minds whose thoughts find expression in the British quarterlies, monthlies, and weeklies, but she knew for a fact that the world is terribly poor and that man is ready to do anything for money. The gold under her feet was talking to her as well as the picture of the poor devils scraping for a peseta's worth of coal.

This was the fourth day of their stay at Teneriffe. All their purchases had been sent on board, the water tanks were filled and they were due out to-morrow morning. The gold had been talking to her all that time, hinting, suggesting, filling her with the vague uneasiness of its presence and affecting her even against Bompard.

Bompard, James and Dicky had grown frightfully thick during the last few days, dining ashore, going excursions, consuming more cocktails than were good for them and carrying on generally like schoolboys.

This radium man had infected the two others with his own joy of life—not that James wanted much infecting, but even James had become more carefree and irresponsible under his influence, and Sheila, watching him, brooded.

She had taken James aside that morning and warned him.

"Take care of that man," said Sheila. "He seems very jolly and all that, but you

can't be too cautious. You haven't told him anything about—you know what, have you?"

"Me?" said James; "not a word. But what's wrong with him?"

"Nothing, perhaps—everything, perhaps. I'm uneasy."

She told him of her suspicions about Morgan, and how Morgan had been in touch with Plymouth.

"I'm only suspecting," said Sheila. "If he is in league with any people who are after us and if he gave them word at Plymouth they would have had time to send a man by mail boat. That man might be this Monsieur Bompard. Remember, he arrived at Las Palmas the night before we arrived here."

James, whose nervousness about the whole business had been forgotten or suppressed by adventure and travel, had to take all this in.

"Confound Morgan!" cried James. "What was he doing sniffing around the ballast? I'll fire him—fire him right now."

"No," said Sheila, "we have him safe so long as he is on board the *Dulcinea* and we are on guard. If he was loose he might talk or give information or do goodness knows what—then of course we may be suspecting him wrongly. No, I'd keep him."

James brooded.

Once suspicion was roused in this ordinarily unsuspecting mind it was apt to ramp and do things.

It was roused now against Bompard. Not under the immediate spell of that fascinating presence, he began to remember things.

The way Bompard had chummed up with them at first sight, the way he had told all about himself and his affairs, the frank questions he had put as to why the party had two yachts—and such a queer-looking yacht as the *Baltrum*—Bompard was very frank; the way he had laid himself out to please—oh, lots of things rose up in the mind of James asking questions and receiving no answer.

"Look here," said he, "we promised to go with him to-day up to a *fonda* he knows of, and have lunch. What do you think—had we better call it off?"

"I don't know," said Sheila. "No, maybe it would be better to go—I don't believe in evading things; grasp your nettle. Besides, if he is what I almost suspect him to be you might do some good if you are clever."

"How?" asked James.

"Give him wrong information. Say we are going from here to the Cape Verde Islands."

"But he knows we are going to call at Havana."

"How does he know that?"

"I told him," said James. "How was I to suspect anything?"

"Well, tell him we have changed our plans."

"I might do that," said James.

"I *told* you," said Sheila, "to say nothing to anybody about anything—well, you have done it, but remember we may have terrible people working against us. Never forget that—people who would stick at nothing, not even killing us."

She felt easy in her mind for she felt that she had made an impression on James. She had.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon and Sheila had come on deck where Larry had put the tea things out. She had turned from speaking to him when her eye caught a boat coming toward her. It was a Spanish boat, one of the ordinary scows that ply for hire, and in the stern sheets she recognized James and Dicky.

"They are coming off," said she to Larry. "You can get the tea now." She went to the side to receive them.

They looked queer.

James flung five pesetas to the boatmen. Then he came on deck, Dicky following.

"What's wrong?" asked Sheila.

Dicky laughed a queer little hysterical laugh. James looked over the side to see that the boatmen were gone.

"Down below," said James. He went, the others following, Sheila with her hand on her heart, Dicky dumb.

James was hunting in a locker for whisky.

"We've got to get out," said James. "Right out—quick."

"He's dead," said Dicky, with a cluck in his throat.

"*Who's* dead?"

"Bompard," said Dicky.

"He's what you thought," said James, speaking between gulps of neat John Begg. "He tried to poison us and took the stuff by mistake in wine. Luncheon—in an orange grove—miles from anywhere—we left him and ran—took wrong road. Got here at last. Get the anchor up!"

The sense of blank calamity paralyzed

Sheila for a moment, then she was herself again.

"Don't drink any more whisky," cried she. "How can we get out? The wind's against us! The ship's papers are all right —the water is on board—let me think—let me think."

She stood with her hand pressed on her head. Yes, they must get out. It was not a question of escaping from the law; she knew that James and Dicky were innocent; but she knew Spanish ports, and if Bompard had any friends or accomplices here, what might not happen?

Then she formed her plan.

"Leave everything to me," said she, "and don't touch any more whisky."

She put the bottle back in the locker, came on deck and ordered the dinghy over. When she was getting into it with Larry to row her, she gave orders to Longley and the other man to get the awning down. Then she told Larry to row to the *Dulcinea.*

Captain Shortt was in his cabin at tea. She shut the door.

"Mr. Corder has sent me with orders that the *Dulcinea* is to get a tow rope over to our boat and take us out," said Sheila abruptly.

"Why, God bless my soul, we weren't due out till to-morrow," said Shortt.

"I don't know anything about that," said Sheila. "I only know those are his orders and he's in a terrible temper about something. Also he says you are to keep in sight and touch with us, steering sou'-sou'-west on a course that will give a wide berth to the Selvages. Will you kindly take all this down?"

"I've got it in my mind," said Shortt, evidently put out. "Anything more?"

"He wants to know if all the crew were on board, especially Mr. Morgan."

"The starboard watch had shore leave this morning and they're back. Yes. Morgan is on board."

"By the way, Captain Shortt, did Mr. Morgan go ashore at Plymouth?" Sheila thought that while at work she might scrape this bit of information up as well.

"Yes, he went ashore for some truck he wanted. What makes you particular to ask?"

"What I meant to ask, only I'm so stupid, is did he get all the paraffin you wanted? Mr. Corder wanted to know."

"Yes," replied Shortt, struck even in his upset about starting by the idiocy of this question, yet putting the matter aside. "We got the paraffin. God bless my soul, tow you out! Does he take the *Dulcinea* for a tug? It will strain her, it'll spoil my paint and I'm doubting if I have hawser sufficient. Well, it's his boat and if you ram blam into my stern it's his lookout. I'd better run over and see him."

"You'd better not," said Sheila. "He said specially that the thing had to be done at once and that I was to tell you not to come off but get to work—those were his words."

"All right," said Shortt.

He left his tea unfinished and Sheila, getting into her boat, came back to the *Baltrum.*

James was still below, but Dicky was on deck.

"Is the whisky all right?" whispered she.

"Oh, that's all right," said Dicky, "but he's a bit upset. It's given him a nasty turn for he's awfully sensitive. He's lying down there in his bunk now, smoking cigarettes."

The awning had been stripped and now from the *Dulcinea* came signs and sounds of activity. The anchor was weighed, the auxiliary put in motion and the *Dulcinea* backed to within near distance of the ketch. Then the anchor was dropped again. Then came the boat with the line that was to lead the hawser and the hawser itself slobbering wet as it came—a messy business.

Every one was out of temper, as every one is, as a rule, on a towing job—every one but Sheila, who saw in imagination police boats setting out from the landing stage, James and Dicky hauled ashore, examinations, delays—disaster.

But nothing came off, nothing but a fruit boat for the American training ship, the sight of which pierced everything to find the housekeeper within her.

"Larry," said she, "did you get those potatoes I told you?"

"Yes, miss," said Larry, rising from the fixing of the rope and going aft to the wheel. "Now then, stand by the winch till I give the word. Hiven mend them, what a time they are gettin' that boat aboard! Now then, stand by the winch—now then, up wid her."

The anchor was hove short, then it came out of the mud, leaving the water as the

anchor of the *Dulcinea* was coming to the cathead. The *Dulcinea* was moving. Sheila gave a glance astern. No, there was no sight of police or boats or any disturbance whatever, nothing to see but the evening light on Santa Cruz town and nothing to hear but the far sound of the evening band playing in the Plaza.

Then the harbor mouth was passed, the *Dulcinea* tugging bravely and the *Baltrum* following like a mongrel dog towed by a fine lady.

The island lay astern, and then the Peak came into view. You cannot see the Peak from Santa Cruz.

The wind from the northeast breezed across the sunset-lit sea and as the tow-rope was cast off the sails of the *Baltrum* rose, fought the breeze, and filled.

"Thank God!" said Sheila.

Then suddenly, sprung from the depths of her mind, came the words: "James is a fool!" She was not thinking of the whisky but of Bompard. "James is a fool!" she thought.

Maybe she was right.

To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *April 20th.*

CHANGED TIMES

IF the shades of those old bucks and dandies—Fox and Sheridan and Brummel and the prince who became George IV. of England, among them—who used to travel the road that runs from London to Brighton happened to be hovering over that famous highway on April 7th of last year they saw a sight that probably made them glad that their day on this earth was over before the nineteenth century was out of its teens. For the old road that was the scene of many a pulse-quickening contest in the days when King Horse still ruled became on that day the course for a baby-carriage race. Mrs. Lilly Groom, of Eastbourne, England, won it, her time for the fifty-one and one-half miles being twelve hours and twenty minutes. Two others of the five starters finished within a half hour of Mrs. Groom. The other two ambitious perambulator pushers were left at the roadside. The three children who were passengers in the carriages that finished the race seemed in perfect condition, although the oldest of them was only two years of age.

Mrs. Groom's name goes on the Brighton Road's roll of fame under those of other record makers and record breakers who were famous in their day. That Prince of Wales who became King George IV.—and who proved his tutor a true prophet by fulfilling in every detail his prediction that the prince would become "either the most polished gentleman or the most accomplished blackguard in Europe—perhaps both"—was one of the record makers. In 1784 he rode horseback from Brighton to London in four hours and thirty minutes, and at once made the return trip in five hours and thirty minutes. A month later he drove three horses, hitched tandemwise to a phaëton, from London to Brighton in four and one half hours. In 1809 a Mr. Webster rode horseback from Brighton to London in three hours and twenty minutes. Another record breaker was the London-Brighton trip made by the "Criterion" coach in three hours and forty minutes, in 1834.

BUTTERFLIES

NEW YORK skyscrapers saw an unusual spectacle at the close of last August when myriads of milkweed butterflies fluttered past them on the last journey of their lives. "The butterflies are on their last long flight to death," said William Beebe, honorary curator of ornithology at the New York Zoölogical Gardens. "They are hatched all over Canada and northern United States, and when they have finished their lifework by laying their eggs they start on a tremendous migration, drifting southeasterly along the seacoast, and finally out to sea, where they drop exhausted into the water and die by millions.

"Science," Mr. Beebe says, "has failed to explain what instinct prompts them to choose death thousands of miles from their breeding grounds. I have seen them as far south as the Galapagos Islands, off Ecuador."

The Hideaway

By Harris Dickson

Author of "Amiable War Horses," "The Treasure of Abou Farag," Etc.

A distinguished story by a distinguished writer. The author knows his South because the South is his home. Primarily, "The Hideaway" is a tale of adventure in the Louisiana swamps, that mysterious country where dwells a race of outlanders as primitive and romantic as the feudal folk of the Cumberland ranges. But for its charm the story relies less on exciting events than on the drawing of quaint and unfamiliar characters, the little-known types of the remote bayou country. As a study of strange humanity in a strange setting this latest contribution from Mr. Dickson's skillful pen is a memorable bit of artistry.

THE EDITOR.

LOOK, steward! That big man! With the scar! Who's he?"

"Dunno. International crook, mebbe."

"Crook! Gee!" The outbound liner was less than twenty-five miles from New York, yet this tourist boy had already asked twenty-five thousand questions of the deck steward. "What's he fixin' to do?"

"Dunno," the steward answered at random. "Police are always takin' crooks from these boats."

Off Sandy Hook their steamer had slowed down nearly to a stop, and in darkness, far below, the tiny speck of a mail tug bobbled about on the waves. This was the routine of every voyage; but a second craft that came alongside was not routine, and to her deck the sailors were lowering a second ladder, under personal supervision of the captain himself, which invested their function with an air of mysterious importance. Evidently the man with a scar across his temple was preparing to go over the side.

"But the *lady,* steward! Watch her! She's goin' too."

"Mebbe she's the crook." Steward leaned against the port rail and volunteered, "Women is gettin' worse than men. When a man turns a big trick the passenger makes his holler; but if a woman skins him the sucker is ashamed of himself and keeps his mouth shut."

Two inquisitive ladies now observed that something unusual was about to occur and hung over the rail beside the boy, as pas-

sengers do when watching swimmers dive for piasters at Port Said.

"Why is that couple getting off?" the younger woman inquired.

"Ain't sure," the boy whispered his reply; "but I suspect that they are international crooks."

Whoever they were the anonymous pair accomplished their departure in silence. One of the sailors held up a lantern as the scar-faced man went first, backing down the ladder. The veiled woman followed, and he carefully settled each little foot before permitting her to risk another step. At the bottom they saw him lift her into a small craft and cast off, a riddle of the sea whose answer stifled itself in the fog.

He'd seen a man and woman sent ashore without baggage, a thrilling adventure which the boy expanded in the saloon; and every passenger made a different guess at their identity until one dear old lady pointed to the headlines of her afternoon paper and started a free-for-all discussion.

"It would not surprise *me* if she's the missing witness, Francine."

"Francine? Oh! The girl in the Eltringham case?" and the group drew their chairs closer together.

No spectacle in ancient or modern times surpassed this sumptuous Eltringham divorce for lavish expenditure, or for entertainment afforded. The burden of proof and disapproval had shifted back and forth from husband to wife, from wife to husband, in a plot that bristled with novelties. Even while the affairs of old Jabe Eltringham were being made public as the liasons of Jupiter, Mrs. Eltringham's maid created a brand-new diversion by disappearing; Francine the pretty creole girl was gone, eloped, vanished, and a breathless population waited to hear what tale Francine might tell when the husband caught her. Eltringham's detectives were everywhere, men detectives, and newspapers also hinted at clever women who were searching Florida, San Francisco, Havana, France. What if a shrewd woman should trap the elusive Francine! A world dangled in suspense, watching their game of hide and seek.

"It is highly probable," insisted the nice old lady, "that our late passenger was Francine."

Nobody considered Lije Brown a scary white man, his nerve being attested by a record in the unmentioned county that he'd left, and likewise by four squirrels that now dangled from his belt, each one accurately "barked" along the nose, and its skull split by the sideswipe of Lije's rifle ball. Not every marksman, even in these Louisiana swamps, possessed this pretty knack; but Lije dreaded to offer Jinny Mix a squirrel that he'd mutilated by promiscuous shooting. Jinny would jeer at him for being full of white lightning, and could shoot nearly as well herself.

Though Lije promptly resented the slightest imputation that he was skittish, yet he never drifted near Abadie House without shuffling his brogans a little faster and feeling a prickly sensation among the hair that grew thick on the back of his neck. Negroes insisted that the place was haunted and while he couldn't afford to indorse negro news, Lije felt no craving to meet the grisly Thing that dwelt in Abadie House. Only last week two white trappers had come paddling along Darkwater River in front of the deserted mansion, and afterward told Lije that both of them saw, in broad daylight, a yellow girl wearing a head handkerchief, who leaned over the upper balustrade and shook out a red-and-white-checkered tablecloth.

"Say, Pete," Phil Gruner suggested to his partner, "somebody's moved in thar, an' they's jes' got through dinner. S'posin' we strike 'em for a snack." The trappers had tied their skiff and climbed the brick steps, now covered with mud from many overflows, which ran up from the river.

"Them folks ain't been here long," Pete observed. " 'Tain't no tracks on these steps."

As they crossed both men saw that the jungle growth of Abadie's front yard was all trampled. They found no sign of human presence in the vast wide-open house, nor any mark in the dust that lay unstirred upon its upper floors. Nobody was in the house, nobody had been in the house for years; yet they both had seen the girl, and swore to Lije that their tale was true.

Even if Lije Brown derided all such superstitious gabble, he felt it safer to halt at the edge of what had once been a clearing, and gaze respectfully upon the grim gray gable that half revealed itself among the magnolias. Death and murder brooded within those abandoned walls. During the Civil War a company of negro soldiers had been

quartered here, and here the blacks were slain, dying to the last man, by the sword of Quantrell's guerrillas. Folks could yet remember when these hallways were heaped with skeletons, when bones rattled along the banisters and one fleshless hand still hung from a window as if beckoning the wayfarer to come in.

Curiosity concerning the octoroon girl now held Lije Brown watching and listening, but the Abadie House seemed only filled by a prodigious emptiness and silence.

"Huh! Them fellers never saw no gal," he scoffed, and turned to go, when the low laugh of a woman came from the house, or somewhere near it. A shiver trickled through him, and Lije's feet got fidgety, but he was ashamed to run and let any yellow girl laugh at a white man for being scared. So he moved about cautiously, seeking to catch the laughter at a vacant window. His clumsy shoes had eyes of their own, and knew instinctively where to plant themselves to avoid the snapping of a rotten twig. Having keen eyesight he could detect no woman, and with the sharpest ears could hear no sound.

"Shucks! 'Twa'n't nothin'."

Then he did hear something, and whirled. From immediately behind him a laugh rippled out again, not in the house but from toward the river, and undeniably distinct.

A brilliant sun still shone into the black, crooked cañon through which Darkwater twists between the solemn trees. So Lije actually saw what he saw, and could swear to its being a woman; not the octoroon girl in her tignon, but a white girl in a brown skirt. He couldn't see below the waist, for she sat on the landing stair about two steps from its top, and Lije caught his breath with a gasp at the unknown creature's loveliness. At first he imagined that she must be talking to herself, after the fashion of these uncanny things. Yet he didn't feel one bit afraid; her voice was not the kind that men ran away from, and Lije wriggled through the brush to get a nearer view.

"Huh! She's a human 'ooman," he decided. But what was a human woman doing here, alone in front of Abadie's, nodding and talking down at the river?

The conundrum puzzled Lije until a man's voice came up the landing stair. Presently his head appeared, his shoulders, stooping as if beneath a burden which he apparently dropped on the steps. Only the upper part of the stranger's body became visible, with a jaw like a bear trap and a scar on his temple—a fighting man's scar.

"Officer!" Lije thought. Who was he after? John Betterson? Or Al Findoff? Or possibly he was seeking to capture Lije himself? Anyway, Lije felt compelled to know about this stranger. From his clump of myrtles Lije passed like a shadow behind the Spanish daggers, squirmed through swamp vines to the river's bank, and parted their curtain of greenery before him. Now he could see, everything.

From a skiff load of equipment at the landing place below, the stranger had brought up his tent. The intruder looked even taller than Lije, far more powerful, and burned to a deeper tan. Yet in spite of his corduroy breeches, flannel shirt and rough hat, Lije couldn't figure him for a countryman. With all ease the stranger now lifted a heavier tent roll than Lije himself could have handled, and tossed it to the top of the steps.

"Hard looker," he considered; then his own tight lips relaxed and Lije viewed the scar face from a softer angle; for when the stranger stooped to take up his tent roll the girl plumped herself on the middle of it, kicking up her feet and laughing at him.

"Don't, Innis; don't," he begged. "Let me get our nest ready by night."

"Plenty time." She drew him down beside her and cuddled happily as she said, "Oh, Barry! Isn't it *wonderful?* Just you and I—out here—alone?"

For a swamper of stolid temperament, Lije Brown had experienced three startling changes of sensation—from superstitious dread to intensely human hostility, then to a tingling restlessness as he eyed the honeymooning couple. Almost he felt the pressure of a woman's arms, and her long sweet kisses sent frisky notions skylarking through Lije's head.

"Gee!" he muttered. "If Jinny would only love like *her*. Reckon I'll go now; that feller ain't studyin' 'bout no man."

Neither was Lije Brown studying about a man as he crawled away from his hiding place, then rose and limbered his eager legs.

It is perpetual twilight in those leafy, level solitudes through which the swift-moving swamper veered right and left unerringly to avoid the stagnant windings of a bayou, or to skirt the edge of a lily-grown lake. His steps quickened and lengthened with scorch-

ing impetuosity until six miles away he crossed Corkscrew Bayou and came in sight of Jinny's shack. There the hotfoot cooled and Lije hung back, glancing furtively around to get a line on what Jinny might be doing.

Nothing had changed in the isolated glade since the days when Jinny's father lived in a shanty from which the family disappeared at certain seasons, and returned like migratory birds to their old roost. Neighbors supposed that Sid Mix always went up to White River in Arkansas, where he got pearls out of mussel shells. And they used to laugh at how the simple Sid had slept for years inside the trunk of the same burned-out cypress tree, until he fetched home an uppity creole girl from somewhere in south Louisiana. After Corinne appeared she made Sid walk the chalk, for Corinne was entirely too stylish to live in the hollow of anybody's tree. Like a slave driver, Sid's bossy wife stood over him, forcing old Sid to split boards and build a new shack against the cypress. That's how Jinny happened to be born under a roof instead of in a hollow tree, and to grow up jabbering with her mother in a lingo that United States people couldn't understand. And little Jinny had a mighty fixy way of dressing herself, besides putting on an awful bunch of airs.

Lije Brown hadn't known much about the black-eyed creole spitfire until after she and the entire Mix tribe had been missing for nearly four years; then all of a sudden Jinny showed up again, by her lone self, and nobody knew it except Lije.

Of course no enterprising ladies' man could neglect such a chance, and Lije began fetching squirrels, but that's all the good they did him. After seeing what he had seen at Abadie's, Lije marched to this shack determined that he'd stand for no more shilly-shallying; and changed his mind when he saw the touch-me-not Jinny chunking her fire into a blaze.

"Hello, Jinny," he called; once he'd sneaked up like a fool to surprise her and stared into a rifle barrel, which took the pranks out of Lije. "Hello, Jinny."

"Come in, Lije."

Breaking through a screen of vines Lije held out the squirrels as an excuse, and Jinny examined their heads with approval.

"Thanky, Lije. Don't ye ever miss 'em?"

"Yep," he grinned. "One Friday evenin' 'bout ha' pas' four, I hit a fox squirrel jes' a *leetle* bit to the lef'. But that was endurin' o' th' time when I had shakin' fever. Lemme skin 'em, an' we'll brile a couple for supper."

The suggestion was a feeler—would Jinny let him stay?—and his face brightened when she didn't say no. He was getting along, not so rapid as that chap at Abadie's; still Lije was coming on.

"Yep, Lije;" the girl smiled; "you kin have supper. Then you got to git."

"But Jinny, don't I git nothin' else? Jes' a kiss—for——"

"Lije Brown," she glowered, "ef you sets in to talkin' that a way, you better git fust, 'thout no supper, an' save yo' measly hide."

All the tingly feeling oozed out of Lije, who made himself humbly useful by toting water from the bayou, yet reaped a partial reward by following the contour of Jinny's round bare arms as she flopped the squirrels in their skillet.

"Here's yourn." She passed it to him sizzling on a tin plate, with a chunk of corn bread. "No. Set over yonder."

He'd nerved himself to take a seat upon the log beside her, but Jinny showed him his place on another log, at an itching distance; which likewise kept Lije in an itching silence until the girl's white teeth stopped picking her squirrel bones, and she paused with pan in her lap to inquire:

"Any news, Lije?"

"Nope; 'cept a couple o' strangers what's campin' up to Abadie's."

"What are they doin'?"

"Ain't payin' 'tention to nobody; they's a man an' a 'ooman, an' 'pears mighty confectionery in their lovin'."

"Tell me 'bout 'em." Jinny laid aside her pan.

On his conceded inch Lije spread himself to take an ell, and played up the lady's snuggly affection in the hope that Jinny might be tempted. But she never caught on to his idea, and remarked:

"Yep. I seen 'em."

"You seen 'em too?"

"Sholy. They passed the mouth o' Corkscrew this mornin' 'bout sunup, while I was runnin' my trot line. Bein's I had a hunch where they was headin', I went to Abadie's an' took a nigh squint."

"How'd you know they was headin' for Abadie's?"

"Ain't I got eyes? Didn't I see a man

from Providence come down here night before last with two negroes pullin' him in one skiff, an' towin' another. Didn't he fetch that tent, an' hide the skiff in them willers? Co'se somebody was comin'. They 'lows to camp there, an' ole Tucker's goin' to wait on 'em."

"Look here, Jinny." Lije rose indignantly and kicked the fire together. "Tucker's got his nerve, fetchin' folks in here that we don't know nothin' 'bout."

"That's so. Some more of 'em's got a camp at the far end o' Turtle Turn. 'Hap' Hawkins an' Sam Gaston is sneakin' round with two city fellers. It's got to be stopped."

"Shore is." Lije punctually agreed to bust any proposition that displeased her, specially when Jinny showed symptoms of warming up, and the tingly feeling all came back.

"Listen!" She gripped his arm, almost but not quite like that other woman, and pulled him to a seat beside her. "Lije, are you game?"

"Game to the gizzard!" Gameness was itching him all over, like pins. "I'll do anything you say."

"Want to get some money?"

Money wasn't the main ambition that now fermented in the heart of Lije Brown, but he couldn't fall out with Jinny. "Co'se I craves some money—to buy you a breastpin."

"Fergit th' breastpin. Git up an' hit the trail for Sam's camp. Don't fool with Sam or Hap. Talk to the big feller with the black eyes an' mustache. He's Collini, the boss. Take Collini off to one side an'—now listen—put a bug in his ear that you'll lead him to the party he's after!"

"No, I won't." Even under the hypnotism of Jinny's eyes he wouldn't consider turning up a fellow refugee. But the girl seductively resisted.

"I know what I'm doin', an' 'twon't no harm come of it. Tell Collini you'll lead him to the party for five hundred dollars. We split fifty-fifty."

"Five hundred!" Lije's mouth flew open and his eyes bulged.

"No sense in bein' cheap. He'll pay five hundred jes' as quick as five cents. Tell him if he don't, you'll tip off the other party; then he'll come across."

"Look here, Jinny. Is it that kissin' feller up to Abadie's?"

"No. The woman."

"The woman? What's she 'cused of?"

"Nothin'. They can't hurt her." Jinny laughed at some joke that she knew, and her black eyes sparkled with devilment.

Only half won, dull-witted Lije stood staring, but when Jinny's lips drew near to his he weakened and promised:

"All right. I'll git his money an' fetch yo' half."

"Good boy!" she applauded. "Now travel."

"But I ain't ready to travel—not for a while."

"You must go *now*, an' strike Sam's camp before midnight."

In all these eighty years of excommunication, the long-shunned gable of Abadie House had never once looked down upon human creatures who came unafraid to sleep within the circle of its dread. Not since that fearsome night of slaughter in '63 had this accursed mansion heard the laughter of a woman. Through eighty morbid years never had the single window in its gable watched a couple sitting on its landing stair with their arms around each other. In happier times the old house had smiled upon such matters; and last night it had almost smiled again.

And so there was something new under the sun that rose next morning behind Abadie House to cast a shadow of gable and treetops across the tent. Except for its gloom of evil memories, no more charming camp site could have been chosen, on the level crest of a bluff overlooking Darkwater, that wound lazily through a forest unmarred by any ax. At the foot of the landing stair lay a half-unloaded skiff and dugout, and beside them an airy cedar canoe floating like a bubble on the river of ink.

Suddenly as a woodland sprite might appear, from her tent into the sunshine stepped a slim young woman, with bare white arms and bare white legs in a scarlet bathing suit.

"Hurry up, Barry," she called back. "I must take my plunge before Tucker comes."

The sunlight centered on her scarlet brilliancy as she waited at the top step while the staid old mansion blinked. In its astonished gable there was a single window, one solitary eye, half closed by a broken shutter that dangled crazily across it. Beneath this shutter the eyes of a man widened while he too gazed upon the apparition of a red-

bodied woman with white arms and legs, such as Sam Gaston had never beheld in all his born days.

"Look a' yonder!" he muttered. "That must be her." His freckled hand stroked a stubbly chin, and Sam hated to tear his eyes away from the pretty red woman to a man in skimpy gray swimming clothes who followed her.

"Huh!" Sam considered, "this feller's got her, an' t'other feller wants her. No wonder he's spendin' sech a bunch o' money to git that gal." Which explained the situation in Sam's crude mind, and accounted for two strangers who came to his shack claiming to be hunters. But Sam figured that they weren't hunting for deer when they asked so many questions about a woman. Of course Sam and Hap Hawkins were keen on raking in their crisp new five-spots, yet found no trace of the woman they sought until Lije Brown had appeared last night and led them to Abadie's.

" 'Tain't no kind o' doubt 'bout that bein' her." But the big chap had never mentioned the fact of a man being with her, a man who didn't look like he was used to having folks run over him.

"Now ef 'twas *me*," Sam chuckled, "an' some feller says, 'Sam, gimme that 'ooman,' I'd sholy put up one hell of a scrap."

Though Sam was scrawny and lean and sallow jawed, with a nose so big that it made him walk bowlegged to tote it around, yet he perked up mightily and imagined himself all sorts of a devil as he hurried down the back stairway and reported to Collini in the cellar.

"That's her. I seen her real good."

"She fits our description?" Collini asked.

"Like the skin on a snake. You'll see 'em when they come out o' the water."

The New York detective kept himself hid in the Abadie cellar, which was no cellar at all, but a basement of brick piers to raise the house above high water. Through a lattice between these piers he was trying to see what he could among a tangle of underbrush. Back of him stood Lije Brown, now detached, as if the affair concerned him no further.

"All right, mister." Lije touched Collini's arm. "Thar she is. Gimme my money."

"But I haven't got her yet."

"Gittin' her is yo' lookout," Lije answered steadily. "I fotch you to her, an' that's what I 'greed to do for five hundred dollars."

"You are not going to leave me?"

"Sholy. I'm through."

Collini had left Boyce, his professional colleague, with Hap Hawkins on the other side of Darkwater to cut off a possible escape; and after sizing up the big man with the scar when he emerged from his bath, Collini deemed it prudent to retain the strong-armed Lije; but Lije shook his head and insisted:

"Gimme my money."

"I'll pay you when we get back to camp."

"That wa'n't our trade. Pay now."

In his precarious situation Collini had to think quickly. He must keep on friendly terms with these natives or he couldn't get his prisoner out of the swamp; and his plans were too carefully matured for him now to risk an upsetting. Thirty miles away, on the Mississippi River, Eltringham's yacht lay waiting, and it would require three days or more to reach it with a struggling woman. Although he'd come fortified by a warrant for Francine Ladrone, on a charge of grand larceny, his enterprise was kidnaping, no more no less; and Collini dared not rouse the antagonism of Lije Brown.

"Very well," he assented; "here's your money."

Hitherto the squinty blue eyes of Sam Gaston had never been dazzled by anything bigger than a five-spot, and he mentally resolved to raise his own rates when Collini began skinning off tens, twenties, fifties, just the same as shucking corn. From the best that Lije could make of following a confusing count, Collini actually paid him five hundred crinkly dollars.

"Thanky, mister. Good-by."

"Hold on, Brown," the detective tried to stop him. "What'll you charge to help take my prisoner to the Mississippi River?"

"Not a dern cent. I got all the money in the world." Lije shook himself free and vanished into the swamp where he belonged.

The detective dared not try to catch Lije, for a man's voice now began speaking near the tent, and Collini crept round the house to have a better look at him.

A more critical inspection of Barry confirmed Sam Gaston's unfavorable estimate —the big man would not be easy to handle. Who was he? Collini knew every face in the rogues' galleries of two continents, but failed to recall these lean, high-bred fea-

tures, those cool gray eyes, and above all the scar across his left temple. That scar alone, broad and unusual, should have been sufficient to identify the most skillfully disguised criminal, yet Collini's memory remained a blank. Where had Francine taken up with such a lover? Of course, as Collini reasoned, her three years' service as maid to the fashionable Mrs. Eltringham, on both sides of the Atlantic, gave a pretty girl no end of opportunities. Speaking of disguises, the girl herself now made a second appearance from her tent, and Sam Gaston gave a snort of disgust. "Oh, hell!" She's gone an' put on clo'es."

Sam would have resented any kind of clothes, especially of such length and thickness, when he more than half expected to enjoy tights and spangles. But his red-bodied white-legged vision had changed into a faded calico and sunbonnet, such as any old slouch might wear on a shanty boat. That's why Sam remarked, "Oh, hell!"

The girl made no remark at all; she only proceeded to the landing stair and began to sweep away its mud while her lover looked on in amazement.

"Barry," she asked demurely; "don't you like me in this dress?"

Then he broke into a laugh and said, "Can't you *ever* stop acting?"

"I'm doing my very best to please you," she pushed back her sunbonnet and pouted. "You said I was to be a hunter's wife. Isn't this right?"

"Right?" he exclaimed. "That make-up's worth a million on any stage." After which Barry dutifully encored the performance as she went about her housework.

Possibly the little actress was clever enough to apply the psychology of La Pompadour, who every night appeared before her lover in some new and stimulating character, now a bacchante, now an austere nun, or a wild creature of the woods clad in scraps of bearskin; all of which sustained the illusion and staved off boredom. The stranger girl made a pretty play of it until she dropped her broom and ran to nestle in his lap.

"Oh, Barry, Barry," she said; "how did you happen to think of such a delightful place? Nobody can find me here."

"Don't fool yourself, my lady," Collini thought, and repeated, "Barry? Barry? Barry?" hoping that the name might catch up some broken thread in his memory. Yet he missed nothing of what Barry was saying:

"Yes, Innis, I noticed this house two years ago while I was down here on a hunting trip, and when you needed to hide away from everybody, I thought of it."

So far as Collini had heard, this was the first mention of "Innis" as an alias for Francine; but a girl in her line of business might assume any name she chose. For near two thousand miles he had followed Francine by description. Now Collini eyed this girl intently, fastening every feature in his mind, every trick of gait or speech or gesture. He'd seen her somewhere and it bothered him.

Long experience had taught the detective never to be surprised at any eccentricity of hunted folk. Many of them were intensely temporamental, moody and freakish. There was no accounting for what they'd do; so Collini accepted it as a matter of course that Mrs. Eltringham's pretty maid should be disguised as a shanty-boat woman.

From both sides of narrow Darkwater and from Abadie's cellar four pairs of vigilant eyes watched every move in camp. Barry made their morning coffee like a veteran, and while they lingered over it a negro pulled toward them in his skiff, singing as he came.

"Listen, Barry!" Innis set down her cup and turned with a smile toward the river. "He's singing my dear little 'Heartbreak Song.' "

"It's caught you, Innis; it's caught you. You can't run away from 'Heartbreak.' "

To the rhythmic accompaniment of oars the words trembled along the water, a song that was famous in New York, Petrograd, Capetown, translated now into the pathos of a negro's tongue as black old Tucker sang:

"Ef you's sorrerful wid sighin',
Ef you's weary wid yo' cryin',
Ef you breaks yo' heart a-tryin'
For sump'n—what you—jes'—can't—git."

Innis moved her dainty head in unison with its melody, until a voice behind her called out from the canebrake:

"Hello, stranger!" and a tall, shaggy white man, with a rifle, stepped into the clearing.

"Come in, sir," Barry invited him, and courteously rose to welcome his guest.

As bellwether and he-coon of this community, old "Pap" Nabus had a sacred duty to discharge. So the loose-faced swamper, with hair like a tangle of dry grass, strode

around and took position in front of their tent.

"Howdy, stranger." Pap never let go his rifle and ignored the girl. "Stranger, kin ye loan me a chaw o' tobaccy?"

"Sorry, sir," Barry apologized; "but I don't use it."

"Don't chaw? What does you do to pass th' time?"

"Hunt a little, fish a little, read, and be quiet."

"Fine place fer quiet; but 'tain't so overly good fer startin' no foolishness."

Reaching into the tent Barry set out a stool which his visitor declined, preferring to squat down on his own heels. From which perch of dignity old Nabus began asking questions.

"Stranger, what be yo' name?"

"Ross."

Though Collini ransacked his catalogue for a Ross whose description tallied with this scar-faced man, he found none.

"Ross? Ross?" Pap repeated as he combed out his whiskers. "I knows a feller named Ross what runs a sawmill nigh Tendall. Be you any kin to him?"

"Not that I ever heard of. I live in New York."

"Uhuh. Right smart town, ain't it? What's yo' business?"

"Innis," Barry turned to his companion; "what would you give as my occupation?"

"Traveler, at present."

"Traveler?" Nabus nodded. "Uhuh. Much money in yo' job?"

"Very little," Barry smiled, and Innis felt herself choking with glee at his grilling.

"What be you-all a-doin' down here?"

"Camping out. Tired of city life."

"Yep. I can't abide Talluly. It's too thick."

For several minutes Pap sat cogitating on his heels, then looked up and spoke a parable:

"Stranger, one time a feller named Chancy blew 'long an' tied up his boat in Darkwater. Never said nothin' to nobody fer three years. After while another fisherman come, called hisself Dick, an' tied 'longside o' Chancy. Them two never had no dealin's ontil one time in a high wind Chancy jumped ashore to fasten his lines—'thout no gun. So Dick leveled on him, an' Chancy got his neck stretched in Ioway. Ev'y sence Chancy made his bad mislick, we folks is been kinder skittish o' strangers."

"But I'm not dangerous," Barry laughed. "You may look around my camp if you like. And my wife, she won't hurt anybody."

"That's so. She do make things 'pear sorter peaceable. I never heered o' no deputy fetchin' his gal. How'd you git hurt?"

Pap's skinny finger pointed at Barry's scar, another detail that the listening Collini was curious to hear.

"Oh! This old wound?" the suspect answered candidly. "I got that years ago, in Africa, from the savages."

"Uhuh. Been to Afriky? Fine country, they tell me."

Innis couldn't hold in; she laughed outright, such an infectious tinkle that a flicker of it crossed Pap's face as he rose to go, and Barry held out his hand. "I'm very glad you came, Mister—Mister——"

"Call me Nabus. Pap fer short."

"Come again, Mr. Nabus. Won't you have a drink? And get better acquainted?"

"Reckin I don't figger on gittin' better 'quainted; but I'll take yo' drink jes' to prove 'tain't no hard feelin'."

When Barry brought out the bottle and a small glass his guest glanced around and asked, "Whar's yo' drinkin' cup?"

He spied Tucker's tin cup hanging on a limb above the water bucket, filled it brimming full and drained it raw. Then Pap strode away as he came and left Innis convulsed.

"My!" she gasped, "aren't there a lot of funny people in this world?"

"All kinds," Barry nodded as he watched the old man go. "But he takes an interest in his fellow man, which is more than we can say for our friends in New York."

To Collini's intense disgust the couple dawdled around camp all morning, without separating by so much as an inch; and when dinner was served al fresco on a collapsible table it appeared to Sam Gaston that he mighty nigh wore himself out waiting for them to eat. They gabbled forever and ever amen, turning poor old Tucker into a plumb fool by hawhawing at the way he answered. The stranger wanted to know every darned little thing about everybody: How did swamp folks make a living? Did they have good schools? Would corn grow well on these lands?

"Yas, suh. Sho do." Tucker bragged powerful strong on their corn. "Jes' hoe it out one time, an' dat corn makes a hundred gallons to de acre."

One was just as bad as the other; no sooner would Tucker answer the man than the girl popped up with her question:

"Uncle Tucker, do they hang many colored people down here?"

"Hang dese swamp niggers? No, ma'am. Sheriff don't need to hang 'em, dey's so wild. He jes' lassoos de nigger an' fastens a pair o' shoes on his feet, den lets dat wild nigger buck hisself to death."

These old gags made Sam Gaston tired, yet Tucker proved himself a garrulous delight to Innis. Through the early afternoon she kept him talking while he cleared a space between two magnolias, and the men swung her hammock.

"Now, Innis, you can take your nap," Barry suggested. "Tucker, get our net and we'll catch some minnows."

Those were surely joyful words to Sam, and he nudged Collini:

"Takes two men to drag a minner seine. He's fixin' to leave the gal."

"Good!" After weeks of patience the detective grew impatient at the end and eyed every movement as Francine—or Innis—settled herself cozily in the hammock not thirty feet away while the negro rolled up a small seine and carried it to his skiff. Barry came out of the tent with a minnow socket and stooped to kiss her as he followed Tucker.

Dreamily Innis lay watching her lover disappear down the steps; then she listened to the sounds of his debarkation, the minnow socket being dropped into the skiff, the rattle of rowlocks, and the measured sweep of oars as they pulled away.

"Hold still!" Collini gripped Sam Gaston's arm. "Wait until they can't hear her when she hollers."

II.

Midafternoon sunshine stewed the sweat from old black Tucker, who toiled at pulling Barry in the skiff. They were just leaving camp to catch some minnows. Half a mile northward the river made an abrupt turn, and beyond the second bend they'd drag their seine in the shallows. On shore a dazzle of light struck the sullen gable of Abadie House, softening as it filtered through the magnolias to where Innis lay in her hammock, listening to the sound of Tucker's departing oars. Faint and fainter still the rasp of rowlocks died along the water, until even their slightly jarring note merged into the silence infinite which surrounded her.

She settled back, with eyes half closed. It was so peaceful here, so unfretted by city clamors, that Innis could think, think of her marvelous companionship with Barry, only the two of them in these deep woods together, camping beside an old deserted mansion, a haunted house.

"Haunted? How silly!" Yet Innis turned and looked upon its forbidding visage with a distinct feeling that somebody was also looking at her. This queer uneasiness betrayed itself so plainly that the spying men behind their lattice slunk deeper into the cellar. From New York to Montreal, Chicago, Memphis and southward through lower Arkansas into Louisiana—Collini had followed this trail too far for him to take chances now on a premature alarming of his quarry. Another fifteen minutes and the scar-faced Barry would pass beyond the possibility of helping her. Then Collini would act.

But the shrewdest sleuth never can gamble on a woman. Innis didn't wait fifteen minutes, or fifteen seconds; she rose at once and went slowly into the tent. Nothing in her apparently careless movement aroused suspicion; Collini thought it no more than a whim of idleness, until he saw her come out with a book in her hand, and a paddle.

"Look! She's goin' too!" Sam Gaston squirmed at his elbow. "Lemme ketch her."

"No. Wait."

Outside her tent Innis paused uncertainly beside the hammock, glanced again at Abadie House, then ran swiftly down the landing stair.

Even now Collini might have overtaken and seized her before she could cast off in the canoe; but Barry's skiff was still in sight and a scream would summon him. No, the detective's safe play was to wait. Out through the vines he crept to the river bank, where he saw Innis balancing her unstable craft by instinct, and wielding a skillful paddle. With a few quick strokes she sent her canoe into midstream as if to chase the skiff; then she changed her mind and drifted.

"Ain't that hell ag'in?" Sam Gaston expressed their sentiments.

Presently she took another notion; like a yellow bird her canoe skimmed the black water while three men ran crouching through the underbrush.

At the first bend Innis dropped her paddle to flutter a handkerchief as Barry's skiff disappeared around the second bend. She was alone. It suited her mood to be alone, drifting in soul and body, just as she had so irresponsibly drifted into this wonderful adventure. On the black, still river, narrow as it was, she could see no banks, for masses of matted vegetation hung low and draped its shelving shores. The world seemed utterly shut out and she seemed utterly shut in. She loved it. Of late Innis never knew what it meant to be free of the jangling telephone, of inquisitive reporters and sensation mongers. Now she drew the bonnet about her face to soften the glare, and held her book, but not to read. In a most delicious languor she observed the lazy garfish as they rose and rippled, the turtles big and tiny tumbling off their logs, the schools of shiners that flurried a moment, glittered in the sunlight, and vanished. Satisfying as this seemed to Innis, it was more than maddening to Collini and his men, who at times could almost catch the stern of her canoe. The canoe floated where it chose. A little farther and she must drift into the top of a fallen cottonwood which lay prone upon the water. Sam's quick eye noted this and he wriggled out along its trunk to lie hid among the leafy branches. The canoe eddied slowly toward the cottonwood. Innis felt a sudden jostle and saw a skinny arm reach out when Sam Gaston shoved her straight into the bank.

Along these smooth clear waters a sound may carry far and be heard by ears attuned to catch it. Barry was wading thigh-deep in the shallows, dragging his end of the seine, when her cry came to him:

"Barry! Barry! Quick!"

"Coming, Innis!" he shouted back his reassurance, tumbled into the skiff and snatched the oars from Tucker. With mighty strokes Barry seemed to pick up the boat and lift it over the waters until they rounded the bend. There he saw nothing; the river lay empty.

"But she was right here, Tucker?"

"Sho was, boss; nigh dem willer snags. She couldn't ha' turnt over cause we'd see her boat."

"Look good! Look everywhere!"

For fear of missing Innis he pulled a little slower and scanned the banks on either side, when Tucker pointed:

"She mus' be over yonder. Done landed."

Beside the cottonwood Barry found her canoe, drawn up on the bank with Innis' book lying in its bottom.

"Innis! Innis! Where are you?" He sprang out of the skiff and called into the silence. "Tucker, why do you suppose Miss Innis came here? Look! Tracks!"

"I sees 'em." The negro already had stooped to examine them. "Two big men an' a little un. Dey ain't been lef' here no time, 'cause de water's still tricklin' in deir tracks."

That Innis had not voluntarily gone ashore was demonstrated by marks of a struggle in the soft earth. Three men evidently had carried her up the bank, and upward Barry bounded in pursuit.

"Run, Tucker!" he turned and shouted. "Bring my rifle from camp, and my automatic. Run." Then he dived into the canebrake, following a plain new trail.

Tucker would never have ventured nigh that haunted house, even in broad daylight, except for the blazing eyes and deadly set of Barry's jaw that sent him flying, dodging and zigzagging like a bat. If a bony-handed ghost caught Tucker, he'd have to catch him on the fly. On the fly he darted into Barry's tent, grabbed the rifle and automatic, and made a whizzing detour as he circled the corner of Abadie House with white eyes staring behind. And Tucker didn't care how much racket he made in the dry cane, scrambling over logs, ducking under grapevines and tearing through briers until he found the boss again. Like a crazy man Barry was raging at the edge of a totally unexpected river.

"See here, Tucker!" He clutched the negro's arm and pointed. "Here's where they took to a boat."

"Shore did. An' tuk her wid 'em."

The mud showed signs of beaching a skiff, and tracks of three men, with a smaller footprint—Innis'.

"What stream is this?" Barry questioned briefly.

"Same river what us lives on; twists roun' by de lef' han', fo'teen miles to yo' camp."

"And that direction?" Barry indicated the right.

"Dat a way, Darkwater kinder rambles through de swamp, mos' ev'rywhere."

Water leaves no trail and the half-demented Barry read no sign upon its inscrutable surface. He felt sure that the bandits,

or whoever they might be, must have gone to the right, for by going to the left they would necessarily pass his camp; but Tucker told him of two cut-offs in between, either of which would have offered an escape. So Innis might have been carried to right or left, and Barry couldn't stand there guessing.

"Boss," the negro suggested; "mebbe you better ax Pap Nabus what come to yo' camp dis mornin'. Him an' his boys mought ha' seen 'em go by."

"Where does he live?"

"Foller me."

Here the snaky river made another winding curve and Tucker cut straight across its neck to the water again, then paused and panted:

"Yon's Pap's shack! Holler. Holler loud. Dese folks don't love for nobody to run up on 'em unbeknownst."

But for Barry's shout it might have startled Pap when a flannel-shirted stranger burst out of the woods, rifle in one hand and automatic in the other. Being warned, Pap never stirred from the bench in front of his cabin where he continued to smoke and superintend the river as Barry rushed up.

"Did you see some men? In a boat? With my wife?"

"Nope." Pap smoked on placidly.

A gangling boy appeared from inside the shack and began scratching his shoulder blades by rubbing up and down against the doorpost while he listened.

"Mr. Nabus! Did you hear? Three men —carried off my wife?"

"I ain't deef."

"But you are not going to sit there and do nothing?"

"Yep. Keep on a-doin' nothin'. When two fellers gits to squabblin' over a gal the rest of us kinder figgers it's their business, an' let's 'em fight it out."

"Can't fight. I don't know where they went."

"Go look. Plenty good places to look."

Desperately Barry turned to the boy. "You'll go and help me?"

"Nope."

"I'll give a hundred dollars—a thousand if you find her!"

The boy shuffled restlessly from one foot to the other and glanced down at Pap, who removed his pipe and asked:

"Mister, you say a thousan' dollars? 'Pears like you's hell bent on makin' this some of my business. When does you pay?"

"At once. I'll pay each of you a thousand when we find her. Get up! Get up!"

"Don't stampede me." Old Nabus jerked loose his arm. "How does I know we'll git that two thousan'?"

"I haven't that much in my pocket; but here's my watch and my rifle, take them now."

Without speaking the boy took Barry's rifle and examined its lock, then made one step from the doorpost and fired. In midstream a tiny snag flew upward into splinters.

"Right smart of a gun, Pap," he commented, and returned it.

"Stranger, lemme understan' you." Pap began to take notice and rose from the bench. "I ain't no han' at hoss tradin', but you 'grees to pay both of us a thousan' dollars—cash?"

"Yes. When you find my wife. Come on"

"Does that likewise go for Abner?"

"Certainly. Who's Abner?"

"My other boy. Bigger'n this'n."

"Goes for all of you. Hurry."

"Stranger, don't work yo'self in sech a sweat. That'll 'mount up to three hundred, sartain; an' three thousan' mo', on top o' them three hundred, providin' we gits her safe back to you."

"Yes. But you must start at once."

"Jabe," old Pap released a cloud of smoke and motioned to his son. "Jabe, run fetch yo' buddie."

Slouchily Jabe moved down the sloping bank while his father said:

"Don't tear yo' shirt, Mister Ross. We'll git yo' gal. Them fellers can't scrape out o' here with no 'ooman, 'cept by three ways."

The patriarch also was a general. He squatted with a stick and drew a diagram on the bare earth—a series of sprawling horseshoes.

"Darkwater runs like this. Here's yo' camp, right here. An' roun' here is whar I lives, nigh fifteen miles by water. Bobcat turns off in here, twixt you an' me. An' a little slough cuts in right here."

It astonished Barry to find how clearly, by a few marks in the dirt, this ignorant trapper made him visualize a bewildering locality. He grasped at once the strategy of their position.

The men who had abducted Innis could best leave the swamp by one of three routes. They traveled in a boat while Pap would

march on foot; and by reason of a winding river the distances were far shorter overland. Those three points of exit might be guarded long before a skiff could reach any one of them.

"But, stranger," Pap considered; "it'll take six men to watch them places, an' we ain't got 'cept four. Negroes don't count." He glanced dismissingly at old Tucker, who didn't need a second hint, but faded promptly into the bushes.

'Can you get two other men?" Barry urged.

"Yep. At a hundred per."

"Get them. Quick."

"Plenty time, stranger. Plenty time."

Pap's two sons now came climbing up from the river, long-legged, lantern-jawed, sallow-faced men of twenty-four and six. They walked slowly, and Jabe must have posted his older brother, for Abner asked no questions, only measured the stranger for himself and took Pap's order.

"Git yo' guns, boys. Pick up Joe Scudder an' 'Stumpy' on yo' way. Hundred dollars apiece for 'em in this job. Don't mention no more. Abner, you take Joe an' cut across to Pecan P'int, whar you'll head off them fellers ef they comes out o' Bobcat. Jabe, you an' Stumpy kinder skirmish along Corkscrew Bayou, then watch the Narrers. Me an' Mister Ross will stan' at the ole white sycamore. Twixt us all we oughter overhaul them fellers afore night."

"Shoot?" queried Abner as he started.

"Reckon not. Jes' make 'em set the gal ashore. One man kin hol' 'em in their boat while t'other fetches her to Abadie's."

His arrangements being definitely settled, Pap reached inside the door for his own rifle and set off through the forest at a most astounding clip. Gaunt and shaggy and silent, he marched ahead of Barry for two good hours before breaking through the brush at a tall white tree beside Darkwater.

"Stranger, here's our stan'. Set still an' keep yo' eye peeled while I goes over yonderway an' axes Ed Hopper ef he don't know sump'n. I'll git back in 'bout a hour."

After old Nabus had moved away at his tireless gait, Barry sat on a drift log overlooking the river. By water he was now more than twenty miles from the point where Innis had been forced into a boat; by land it must have been less than seven. Even if her abductors chose this route some hours must elapse before they'd pass. So he tried to compose himself for a long and anxious vigil.

It was no new experience for Barry to be alone; he'd been cast upon his own resources for weeks and months at a time, in Congo jungles, in Tibet, among the buried cities of Yucatan. But never had he felt so helpless, so utterly at fault. The only possible explanation that suggested itself was that bandits had carried off Innis for ransom, which Barry would have paid, though stubbornly opposed to financial arrangements of this kind. Twice before he'd refused to pay, once in Morocco, once in Mexico, and fought himself free. But flight or mistreatment to Innis overruled his prejudices against a holdup.

Barry Ross—or John Barrington Ross, as his name appeared on the fellowship rolls of many a learned society—was a man who deserved great credit; and he actually got the credit; not because he possessed unlimited cash, but because he'd done big things without being spurred on by necessity. Most darlings of fortune, born like Barry Ross with a golden spoon in their mouths, would have luxuriously continued to eat from it, rather than eat from a calabash, from an earthen bowl, or from the mess kit of a soldier. Sheer love of adventure sent Barry questing among the unknown regions of the earth, and some of his discoveries proved so valuable that governments and scientific bodies had covered him with decorations.

Returning lately to New York from his antarctic expedition, Barry fell in love with Nora Innisfail, promptly and headlong as he did everything. Which was no marvel. The magnetic young actress drew all mankind to her; the balance of the world loved Innis, and Barry dropped in line just to make it unanimous. The marvel was that Nora Innisfail married him at once, and lion hunters made such a fuss over them both that they were forced into a brilliant wedding. Every newspaper printed acres about the star and the explorer. Reporters kept tapping at their doors, for the general public clamored that this couple belonged to the public. Innis and Barry planned to go abroad and get out of it when cablegrams announced preparations in London, Paris, Denmark, to further lionize the groom, while Miss Innisfail was scheduled to address various clubs on "Present Tendencies of Our Stage." So they sidestepped all these functions by dropping off their steamer at

Sandy Hook. Four days later Barry and Innis pitched their tent in front of Abadie's, where they belonged to each other.

Then this incomprehensible thing occurred. Barry had plenty of time to sit and think it out. To sit and think was all that he could do. Restlessly he glanced at his watch. Nearly six. Innis had been missing since three. The shadows deepened, owls began to hoot, and silence brooded through the swamp when Barry heard a trample of feet in the canebrake. Somebody was coming, several persons, judging from the noise. Could it be possible that the kidnapers had abandoned their boat and were taking Innis by a short cut overland? He shifted his rifle into position and prayed for no kinder providence. The crackle of dry cane came nearer, directly toward him. He knew it wasn't Pap, for Pap never made a sound.

Noiselessly Barry crept up the sloping bank, chose the edge of an open space for his ambuscade, and crouched with rifle pointed. Tense and expectant he waited. Now a bush shook. Now he saw the men themselves. No, he saw only one man, a single runner making noise enough for a dozen, galloping for speed and not for secrecy. As this man dashed out from the canebrake, Barry recognized Jabe, the younger Nabus boy, with shirt torn in tatters from his breast, his face and hands and neck all bleeding.

"Here, Jabe! This way!" he called, and ran to question the lad. "You caught them? You had a fight?"

"Awful scrap, mister; but we got the gal." Jabe wiped off the sweat and left a red smudge across his forehead; Barry saw the bloody marks of teeth on his arm, and Jabe's wounds made him dread to ask.

"Is Innis hurt? Is she hurt?"

"The gal?" Jabe stared at him. "Hell, no. But look at me."

"Where did you leave her?"

"She's lickin' the tar out o' Stumpy at yo' camp. Whar's Pap?"

"He's gone. Coming back."

"Hurry, mister!" With one quick movement Jabe hung his hat on a bush in plain view, as a signal to Pap, then swung round for another race. "For God's sake, mister, run! Run help Stumpy."

All that Barry knew, all that Barry cared to know, was that Innis had been found, unharmed. Innis being safe, he thought of nothing else. The nimble Jabe darted on ahead, like a jack rabbit; but Jabe was leading him to her and Barry felt no scratch of briers as he went crashing through miles of brake and jungle. He lost all sense of distance or direction, following Jabe with eyes upon the ground, until the boy slowed down and slunk behind him, saying:

"Thar's yo' camp, mister. Now you go fust."

Here was his camp; he hadn't expected it so soon—the old mansion, brick steps, hammock, tent. Barry got himself oriented and pushed forward. He looked only for Innis, but saw a low-built chunky man washing off blood in a tin basin. Like Jabe, Stumpy's face and hands were scarred with fresh red gashes.

"Where's my wife?"

"She's tied." Stumpy snarled and sucked his bitten thumb.

"Who tied her?"

"We couldn't ha' did that ef Joe an' Abner hadn't come."

"Where is she?"

Stumpy nodded toward the tent where Abner Nabus stood guard in front while a second sentry watched its rear. Both men seemed glad to resign their jobs when Barry drew aside the flap and reassured the frightened girl:

"Innis! Innis! It's Barry!"

No answer came from within and he questioned Abner:

"Has she fallen asleep?"

"No. She's jes' lyin' quiet, fixin' to raise more hell."

Innis must have become hysterical, he thought—queer for Innis; perhaps she'd fainted. Barry rushed in. No, the girl hadn't fainted; she wasn't even lying down, but sat bolt upright on her cot with elbows tied behind, and feet bound underneath. Why should they use her so roughly?

"Innis. Innis, it's all right." He touched her shoulder. She turned and bit him. Had she gone mad? Astounded he sprang back. He had not seen her face, which the woman kept averted. Now, in semidarkness he bent down and peered into her unfamiliar features. It was not Innis, but another woman, an utter stranger.

"Who—who—are you?" he tried to ask, tried to think, but could only stagger from his tent and cry out:

"Men, you've brought the wrong woman!"

"What's that?" Abner was strolling toward the steps, and turned; Stumpy, Jabe

and Joe Scudder all came running. "What you say, mister? What you say?"

"She's not my wife!"

"Huh?"

"No. You've made a mistake. Get your guns. Go back to your posts. Quick! Quick!"

Not a man stirred, only glanced at each other and remained ominously still, while the unbelieving Stumpy spoke for all:

"Nothin' doin', stranger. You can't git out o' payin' us by no sech line o' talk."

"Damn it, men!" Barry almost screamed. "I don't mind the money, but you must find Mrs. Ross. Then I'll go myself."

Their stubbornness had made Barry lose his head and start on the run, to go somewhere, anywhere at random, looking for Innis, when Abner halted him and said:

"Mister, we ain't aimin' to let you git away. Set down an' wait till Pap comes."

"I won't wait. I——"

"We figgers that you's moughty apt to wait," and the four grappled him together.

In rough-and-tumble mêlée Barry might have scattered a heavier team, as he'd done before on slighter provocation. But at the first exertion his faculties seemed to clear and Barry wasn't fool enough to antagonize the people upon whom the safety of Innis must depend. So he relaxed his powerful arms and spoke more calmly:

"Abner, I never saw that woman before. If you don't believe me, ask her!"

"Mister," the stolid Abner answered him; "don't try to play us fer a pack o' dern simples. Co'se that gal denied bein' yo' wife, an' fit like hell. She don't want to come back to you, an' now you don't aim to pay." Which seemed plain enough to the others.

Every muscle clamored for action as Barry glanced at their impassive faces, yet he forced himself to sit down with fingers clenching in his palms and madness thumping at his throat. It could not now be long until Pap must return. Joe Scudder set a lighted lantern in front of the tent. By unspoken arrangement Joe guarded the woman while the other three hung around to overpower Barry in case he started trouble. But he meant to start no trouble. At the top of the brick steps he sat down, holding himself under rigid control. Behind him Abner leaned negligently against a tree and began to whistle the "Heartbreak Song," the song that she loved and that was so identified with Innis. It made such taunting mockery that Barry sprang up and shouted:

"Men, you must listen to me."

"Pap'll listen to you." Abner smiled as at a female tantrum. "Thar's Pap a-comin'."

The son had already heard his father; Barry now caught the crunching of dry leaves and ran to meet the rugged patriarch who emerged from blackness into lantern light.

"Howdy, boys," Pap accosted them. "I figgers you's done foun' her."

"She's in thar." Abner jerked his thumb toward the tent.

"That's not my wife!" Barry burst out passionately.

"Mebbe she moughtn't be yo' wife," the old fellow snickered; "but she's the gal what you fotch here."

"No; I never laid eyes on that woman."

"Pap, he wants to git out o' payin'," Abner put his father wise.

"Oughtn't to be no kinder 'spute 'bout his gal," Pap observed as he picked up the lantern. "I seen her myself this mornin' an' I kin see her ag'in."

"Yes. You did see Mrs. Ross. I forgot." Barry jerked aside the tent flap and pushed Pap inside with the light.

The girl still sat as Barry had left her, defiantly erect on the cot, but had turned away her face.

"Move roun', gal," Pap ordered. "Lemme take a look."

She made no answer and Pap was about to catch hold of her when his son cried:

"Watch out, Pap, she'll bite. Bit me turrible."

"Bites, do she?" Old Nabus knew how to handle critters that bit and stung. He passed the lantern to Barry, who held it above their heads while Pap gripped the woman's neck, as he might have seized a snapping turtle, and twisted her face into the light. After looking closely he glanced behind him like a hound at fault, and confessed: " 'Tain't the same one he had here this mornin'. Gal, who are you?"

"None o' yo' business!" Her white teeth gleamed.

"Boys," the old man queried, "whar'd you ketch this'n?"

"Over nigh Corkscrew," Jabe answered sullenly.

"Tuk her away from them other fellers?"

"No, Pap. We 'lowed she'd 'scaped. Me

an' Stumpy was follerin' a new-broke trail that showed a gal's foot, an' this'n come runnin' todes us, lookin' back'ards, same as ef somebody was chasin'. So we hid in the bushes an' grabbed her. She's a hell-cat. Stumpy's clawed up wuss'n me."

For one gloating instant the girl glanced up with a glitter in her eyes at sight of what she'd done; and while the perplexed Nabus stood stroking his chin and considering, Barry urged him:

"Can't we hurry now and find Mrs. Ross?"

"Hol' yo' hosses, stranger. We got to talk this thing over."

Pap was moving out from the tent when Stumpy sidled past him and came in, stripping the twigs from a hickory pole with such deliberate purpose that Pap inquired: "Stumpy, what you aim to do?"

"Frazzle the hell out of her. No dern woman kin claw me an' chaw me an' git away with it."

"Wait a minute." Pap held his arm and turned to Barrington. "Stranger, you say this gal ain't got no claim on you?"

"None whatever," Barry answered, wondering at his question until Pap had inspected Stumpy's scars and then let loose the executioner and passed sentence:

" 'Tain't no more'n fair to give the gal a dose of her own medicine. Clear out, ev'rybody 'cept Jabe an' Stumpy."

It was a square tent. At the far end stood a small table with the lantern on it. Beside the table Barry held his position while the three unclawed swampers filed outside to enjoy the proceedings and allow plenty of elbow room. Though Barry couldn't believe that Stumpy was in earnest, the woman had no such doubts and struggled at her ropes; which tickled Jabe mightily as his fellow sufferer began rolling up both sleeves. Seeing that Barry made no move to go, Stumpy grinned and inquired:

"Mister, does you aim to stay an' watch th' fun?"

"What fun? Surely you can't intend to whip this girl?"

"Whup her? I figgers on mighty nigh killin' her."

Stumpy figured wrong. A powerful hand shot out and snatched his cudgel; another hand caught up the lantern, and the catapult of Barry's resistless body hurled both men from the tent. Then he flung the lantern after them.

An audience of three had been looking in, utterly unbraced to withstand the impact when Jabe and Stumpy were ejected. Two went down. Pap wabbled and kept his feet. All five scrambled around in dazed and grotesque attitudes to wonder at the stranger who now held possession of his doorway.

"No, you are not going to whip this woman," they heard him say; and Stumpy had reached for Jabe's rifle when the sharp voice spoke again: "Drop that!"

Not until that attentive crisis had Stumpy observed the muzzle of an automatic, one of those newfangled contraptions that spit out a bushel of bullets. Behind the gun, against a black interior he could only see a hand; which was Barry's reason for pitching out the lantern that Abner now took up to throw a clearer light upon the stranger.

"Set that down! Right there!" The automatic pointed to an exact spot, and Abner placed the lantern where it would illuminate his own crowd but leave Barry sheltered by the darkness. Within a narrow radius the automatic moved slowly back and forth, covering them all, when young Jabe blurted out:

"Pap, she *is* his woman. He's scrappin' fer her!"

"No," Barry denied, "I have never seen this girl before."

Old Pap gazed upon him with puzzled scrutiny, then inquired from the viewpoint of curiosity.

"Ef she ain't yo' gal, how come you gits so peevish?"

"Because I've never seen a woman whipped, and won't stand for it."

A peculiar mixture of expressions straggled across Pap's face as he meditatively combed out his whiskers and remarked:

"Don't that beat hell? Some folks shore is got quare prejudy."

The man with the prejudice seemed ready to maintain it, giving orders in a silken voice which was Barry's way when perilously cool and under pressure:

"You gentlemen will oblige me by standing very still."

Never shifting an eye or the automatic, he now spoke to the woman; at the same time his left hand drew out a shiny knife.

"Miss," he apologized; "I'm sorry not to know your name. But could you manage to drag yourself nearer so that I may cut those ropes?"

"You bet I can." At his front five men

respected the scatter gun, and huddled together, while at his back he heard a rocking and scraping until the cot bumped against his leg.

"Now, mister," the girl said; "hold yo' knife steady. There! Cut!"

With eyes still fixed upon the swampers Barry stooped and slashed the rope. Then he felt the girl's hand touch his own and she said, "All right, mister. Gimme the knife."

Quickly she freed herself and stood beside him to ask, "Ain't you got another gun?"

"Look under my pillow."

His predicament seemed not so hopeless when the little tiger cat swung into position on Barry's left flank, with a second automatic and a willing heart.

"Les' begin on Stumpy," she suggested.

"No. Hol' on, gal; hol' on," Stumpy begged. "Turn that gun t'other way. It mought go off."

" 'Twouldn't miss you ef it did," the girl laughed; then Pap's eye lighted with recognition as he pointed his long finger.

"I knows you now. You's Jinny Mix."

"What ef I am?"

"Nothin' much, 'cept me an' yo' pa was good friends. You done filled out a heap an' got purty like yo' ma. Put up that gun. Nobody's aimin' to bother you."

Searchingly Jinny Mix looked straight at old Nabus and the automatic's unwavering muzzle followed her eye. Then she spoke frankly.

"Pap, sometimes you acks powerful bad; but I ain't never knowed you to lie."

"That's right, Jinny. S'posin' we calls ev'ybody even, all th' way roun', an' starts fresh?"

"Suits me."

The assurance with which Jinny accepted Pap's proposition led Barry to followed her judgment and toss both pistols on the cot. What's settled is settled; and though the boys sulked no shade of resentment lingered on the old man's face when Barry appealed to him, "Mr. Nabus, can't we go now and find Mrs. Ross?"

"That's a-pesterin' me a heap," Pap answered slowly. "I done give my word, an' —I believes you's square, and aims to stick by you."

Just before, in the tent, Jinny had heard the name of "Ross," but then it hadn't registered. Now she glanced up as though some hidden spring in memory were released, a spring already touched by the vaguely familiar sound of Barry's voice. His features she might not have identified by this tricky lantern light; but there was the scar, and she would never forget the man himself, two years ago at a dinner given by Mrs. Eltringham in his honor. The clever little maid then called herself "Francine Ladrone," and the explorer had spoken to Francine in the dressing room, like one human being to another, instead of ignoring her as though she'd been an article of furniture. Since then she unconsciously had idealized Barrington Ross, and it was hard luck that she'd instigated the kidnaping of his wife for the joy of bringing Collini into disrepute. And harder luck that the husband got even by saving Jinny from the stick. She couldn't let things go at that. Jinny tried to be honest, but was guilty according to her own code. No matter if she did betray herself, Jinny must tote fair with the man who'd been her friend. Now she heard him begging old Nabus:

"For God's sake do something! We've lost three good hours."

"Too late, mister." Pap shook his head. "Whar we laid off to ketch 'em, 'twouldn't be no sense lookin' now. They done already got past one o' them places."

"No they ain't!" Jimmy contradicted so positively that Pap turned and demanded:

"What do you know 'bout it?"

"Never mind what I know; you do what I say." Regardless of what might happen to herself Jinny sprang up and spoke in a rush.

"Mister Ross you did me a kind favor, and—— Pap, them fellers is making for Gaston's shack over nigh Turtle Turn."

"Did you see 'em?"

"Maybe I did an' maybe I didn't. Anyhow they's been hangin' roun' Sam's camp plannin' devilment, an' got a fancy little steamboat in the Mississippi River jes' below Willer P'int."

"Thar!" Pap slapped his thigh. "I been studyin' considerable 'bout that boat."

"It belongs to them, an' been waitin' to take a gal. I figgers they'll go fust to Sam's an' pack their things; then beat it for the steamboat."

"An' never git thar." Pap chuckled grimly as he took his gun and started. "Come along stranger. Here's whar you gits action for yo' money."

Many times before Barrington Ross had stalked hostile bivouacs in Afghanistan, in the Soudan, in France. Six unspeaking shadows followed Pap Nabus in and out through the marshes, finding a skiff precisely where it was needed to cross the river, and winding along the contortions of a little bayou until Barry now saw the dull reflection of a fire in the treetops.

"That's Sam's camp." Jinny nudged him.

The file pressed on more cautiously, parting right and left as they passed their leader, who instructed each man.

"Mister," Pap whispered, "you an' Jinny go that a way. Git nigh as you kin 'thout 'em seein' you, while we cuts 'em off from the bayou. Lemme do the talkin'."

Barry didn't want to talk, but he wanted to fight when after crawling for two hundred yards he lifted his head from behind a log and saw Innis sitting on a blanket roll —Innis a prisoner, bound and gagged. Yet wrathful as he was, Barry couldn't help smiling; always the actress, Innis eyed her captors like some scornful lady playing her part in a melodrama.

"Those wretches haven't frightened her," Jinny whispered. "I'm so grateful that we've found her."

"Thanks to you," Barry nodded without observing that the girl's language was so nearly that of his own world.

Four men moved busily around the fire, strapping their equipment into packages for a hurried march. At this isolated spot beside the bayou they felt so secure that Collini and his colleagues showed no sign of suspicion until a peremptory voice commanded them: "Stan' whar you are! No use tryin' to run. Sam Gaston, you an' Hap Hawkins come to me."

Such an order from the dark always means a gun behind it, and local talent knew better than to resist. Holding up both hands Sam and Hap deserted their late confederates and went straight to Pap. The New York importations stood staring, amazed by a coup that left them helpless. Yet they saw nobody until six silent men uprose at well-spaced intervals and closed in.

"Git nigh the fire whar we kin see you!" The gaunt old leader poked Collini and Boyce with his rifle barrel, then gave directions to one of his younger men:

"Abner, start these fellers to that fancy boat o' theirn. Here Sam, you an' Hap tote some o' these things."

Having no eyes for anybody else, Barry rushed straight to Innis and tore the gag from her lips. "Did those fellows harm you?"

"No."

"Frightened?"

"Not a bit. I knew you'd come."

"Thank God you're safe now, safe!" Cool as she was, when this excitement had passed she must break down, and Barry soothed her as he would a terrified child. "Don't worry, dearest, don't worry. I'll take you away from here to-morrow."

"Take me away? Indeed you will not." She stood up laughing. "I'm having a lovely time. And we are going to stay in our camp."

"Co'se you is, lady." Old Nabus patted Innis on the back. "I done took a likin' to yo' man, an' aims to show him whar the deers is at. But what th' hell is Jinny doin' to that city feller?"

"They're going to fight!" Innis exclaimed as she turned to see a woman confronting the oily and burly leader of the gang.

At first Collini hadn't noticed Jinny; he was bending over a bundle when she spoke for benefit of the audience, "Collini, you're a pretty fool!"

The dramatic sense of Nora Innisfail saw a most effective picture, a stage setting of black woods, a smoldering fire and shapes of shadowy men as a background for the native woman who posed like Carmen, hands upon her hips, taunting the baffled villain.

"Mr. Nabus," she begged. "Please don't let that man strike her."

"Shucks, miss, Jinny kin take keer of herself."

When Collini glanced upward at the menace he lifted his arm, not to strike but to defend himself, while Jinny laughed like a jeering devil and pointed to Innis:

"The great Collini! Doesn't recognize his prisoner! Look at the lady. Look at her, good."

Whether Collini would or no he gazed unwillingly upon his rescued prisoner and flinched at Jinny's sneers.

"Palming her off for Francine! When her face is plastered on every billboard and ash barrel in New York—Miss Nora Innisfail!"

"Innisfail!" Collini surveyed the star in calico. "The Innisfail? I don't believe it."

Then a singular thing happened in Louisiana. The famous Nora Innisfail advanced toward a fire whose ruddy glow beat upon her like footlights, holding her skirts in the dainty manner so familiar to all the world. Everybody knew the pose, the face, the smile with which she always sang the haunting melody that thousands were singing. Impish and radiant at such a delicious novelty, Innis sang two lines, much as she'd heard old Tucker sing them:

"Ef you breaks yo' heart a tryin'
For something—that you—just—can't—get."

No other human being could have done it, and Collini seemed to shrivel as he apologized: "I'm sorry, Miss Innisfail. I——"

"Shut up!" Jinny cut him short. "Hush, and look at me. I'm Francine. No—keep your hands off. If you move one step a feller in those bushes will bore you through. Don't shoot him, Lije; don't!" she called over her shoulder. "Now, Collini, go back to New York and tell that old dog of an Eltringham that you paid five hundred dollars of his good money to Lije Brown for showing you the wrong woman; and that Lije divided with Francine for telling him how to get it. Here's my half." She flashed the bills and snapped her fingers in his face. "Now, Collini, you can read your warrant to the jaybirds. Keep still! Keep still! Lije might get nervous in his fingers. Good night."

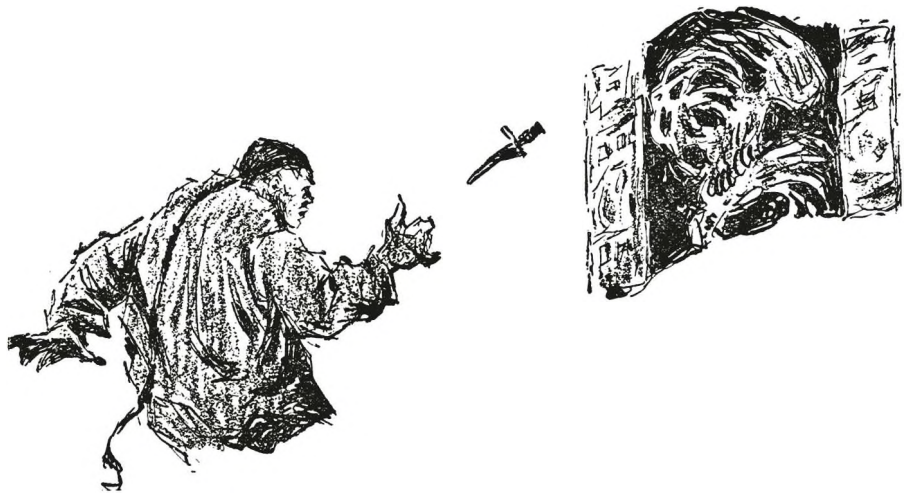
Being none of their business Pap Nabus motioned for his boys not to meddle when Jinny began backing away toward the bayou. Backward through the bushes she disappeared. They could hear her stepping into Sam Gaston's skiff and heard the dip of oars. Then from beyond the bayou Jinny shouted back:

"Don't be scared Collini. Lije Brown is gone to get drunk on your money. He ain't in twenty miles of here!"

"Oh, Barry!" Innis squeezed his hand and whispered. "Don't you just *love* it. I want to stay here all summer."

A WELCOME GUEST

THE recent celebration of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel's thirtieth anniversary brings to mind the many well-known New Yorkers who were familiar figures in the spacious reception lobby during the Boldt régime. There was Marshall P. Wilder, for instance. The famous little humorist and George C. Boldt were warm friends, and almost any evening one might see the tall, imposing manager of the hotel looking down, seemingly at the floor, and laughing uproariously at some sally of the diminutive Wilder. Incidentally it may be mentioned that whenever Wilder was in a group of men, unrestrained guffawing was the rule. He was a member of the Lambs' Club, and it was a favorite diversion of DeWolf Hopper to lift him to a table, so that his gravely comical face would be on a level with those standing around him, and enjoy his latest story. For he always had one—and it was always clean, as well as irresistibly droll. Wilder's popularity at the Waldorf and Mr. Boldt's regard for him were the cause of some embarrassment to Marshall P. He remarked one evening, with a sadness that brought a fresh outburst of laughter from Boldt and the others with him, that he was a permanent guest of the hotel and yet "I never spend anything here except my time." This was merely a gesture, for he lunched every day in the men's restaurant and had the waiters all agrin as they served him. His humor bubbled out spontaneously and it was as free to a waiter as to any one else. Boldt looked thoughtfully at him for a moment, then remarked quietly: "And that's all you are going to spend in this hotel so long as I'm manager." Talking about it afterward Wilder said somewhat ruefully: "Would you believe it? The next day, when I asked for my check at lunch, the waiter said there wasn't any. It was Mr. Boldt's orders. He actually was trying to make me a star boarder at his big boarding house. Just pure friendship! I had to threaten to lick him right there in the lobby before I could convince him that if he were to cut off all that revenue it would perhaps bring him to bankruptcy. But," added Marshall, really serious, "that was George C. Boldt all over—one of the kindest-hearted men I ever knew. Big business men are often that way." Marsh Wilder, besides being a humorist, was also a keen observer, and there was always truth in his philosophy.



The Great Wong Loo

By Roy Norton

Author of "Spanish Joe," "Taking a Chance," Etc.

David and Goliath see the vindication of courage and rectitude.

AS the stage for Wallulla crawled slowly up the steep mountain road high above the bed of the Middle Fork River, and the four sweating horses that dragged it settled into their collars until the hames creaked and whined, David, the stocky red-headed little man on the back seat, lowered his voice so that none but his partner and seat companion, Goliath as he was commonly and appropriately called, could hear it. He seemed annoyed, yet philosophical, and soliloquizing, yet intent on addressing his homily to the man at his side.

"It's the hardest thing in the world to get anybody to let you pay back favors. It's difficult to accept them in the first place, ordinarily, but where your life depends on it you grab and are thankful. Now take us, for instance. We're in the middle of Mexico which just now is about the same as being in the middle of hell, and Mariano Castro saves our lives by knifing a cold-blooded murderer called Don Andreas, and for good measure knifes a couple of his gang. When we get our lives saved we send this Mariano with his daughter and her husband to our mine up here where it's quiet and clean. Then we get into another scrap and we'd have been as full of bullet holes as a colander if it hadn't been for this same Mariano, who has written to his friend, Don Marti Carandez, to step in and save us if it comes to a show-down. Once more we're under obligations to this Mariano. And who is he? Nothing but a one-armed, half-broken old revolutionist! A chump who has given all his property, and most of his life for his unappreciative country, and lost. A man who has been a general in a rag-tag army, and when we first saw him was bumming his ride in a freight car. And we give him a chance to spend the last days of his life in peace and comfort and what does he do? Runs away for fear we'll pay him back for all he's done for us!"

"Davy, how do you know he ran away for that reason?" demanded Goliath, turning to face his partner, with his big dark eyes puzzled by his own thoughts.

"Anybody with any sense can see that. But that's got nothing to do with what I was talking about. I was talking about the difficulties of paying back favors. We butted in and tried to save him a mining property in Arizona. Did we do it? We did not. We——"

"But maybe we saved him from being

grabbed by the present gang that runs Mexico on a charge of three murders!"

"No, we didn't. Bill Darrow, the United States marshal, did that for us by taking another man, called 'Spanish Joe.'"

"But he'd not have grabbed the wrong man if it hadn't been for friendship for Mariano that was made through us, would he?" the big man insisted with slow but relentless reasoning.

"I tell you that a man who is marked with one arm and has been a general, and who——"

The big man thrust out an elbow that found a bed in the smaller man's ribs and brought him to an abrupt and angry stop.

"S-s-s-h! Not so loud, Davy. We don't know these ginks in front of us and—humph!—what's the use in thrashin' over a lot of things that's already done? Besides, we're most at the place where we pile off. We'll find out more about it when we get back home, and then you can jaw all you want to."

The little man held his tongue until the partners climbed out of the stage in front of the ramshackle post office in Wallulla where they were greeted joyously by Hank Mills, young, stalwart and third partner in the Good Hope mine.

"Came down with the mules and the buckboard," he said, "and we'll dump your suit case in now—that is, unless you want to take a look at all the gay lights of Wallulla which you ain't seen for——"

"Wallulla nothin'!" Goliath exclaimed. "I want to go home. How's Rosita, and Ling Tan Foo, and Manuel and his wife, and——"

"All hunky-dorum. And that Manuel is sure some worker. He's a prize pup in a mine, all right. They told us all about the nice time you had down in Mexico. But it was funny about old Mariano, Missus Manuel's daddy, wa'n't it?"

"Yes, tell us about him," David said as they climbed into the buckboard and turned the mules' heads for the seventeen-mile trip into the higher hills of the Big Divide.

"Queer old gink!" Hank said. "He showed up with his daughter and her husband Manuel, and looked things over as if to make sure that everything was all right. Sort of like—like an old lion guardin' its young, I reckon. Then I got a couple of men to help and we knocked a good cabin together for 'em, and—I knowed you'd want me to do things right, so I come down to camp and bought an outfit of furniture, and that was all right. Then the very next mornin' after they was all fixed up so nice and comfortablelike, over to our house comes Mariano's daughter. Sort of weepy. When she got up to get breakfast the old codger's vamosed the works and leaves her a note, telling her not to bother about him, but that he's going to see some friends he's heard about and that she'll hear from him again sooner or later. But she brought a letter that was addressed to you two marked 'pussonal and private,' which likewise he'd left. Well, when I got your wire from Arizony, I starts out to find him and—that's about all! Couldn't find hide nor hair of him, nor nobody that's ever seen him and—there you are!"

David and Goliath interchanged a string of comments before David asked, "Got Mariano's letter with you?"

"No, it's in the clock up at the cabin," Hank said, and David passed a few irascible remarks at such thoughtlessness which merely caused the lank Mr. Mills to grin good-naturedly as if he enjoyed being growled at again after so long a lapse.

In time they reached the big cabin, greeted every one, felt themselves at home once more after perilous wanderings, and took the letter from the clock. David read it aloud, translating its precise Spanish as he did so that Rosita and her husband could understand:

"I do not wish you to think that I am ungrateful for a kindness and consideration which I neither earned nor merit; but I have thought it over and recognize how useless a one-armed man would prove to be around your place. I cannot bring myself to the acceptance of what, regardless how kindly intended, must be merely charity. I will not hamper my son-in-law and his wife in this great opportunity you have so kindly given them to get ahead. Their struggle will be difficult without providing for a wreck such as I am. I implore you not to seek me, or to worry over my welfare, for I am not yet too resourceless to discover some means of making an honest livelihood. I have taken my departure thus surreptitiously to avoid the pitiful protest of my daughter and the well-meant but useless insistence of your younger partner, Señor Mills, who has more than maintained your high standards of generosity. I hope to find a way, in due time, to repay the sum of money which you advanced me, amounting to $184.50 American. Until then, go you, gentlemen, with God."

For a moment after David had finished

reading the somewhat pathetic letter there was silence in the cabin that was broken by Goliath's, "Well, I'll be hanged! Independent old cuss, anyhow. Well, what are we goin' to do now?"

"Do everything we can to find him, of course," David snapped impatiently. "We've got to let him know about that mining property of his in Arizona, and put him wise to it that there are extradition papers out wanting him for murder. He mustn't ever go back there, and he must lay low. He's got to come back here, which is the safest place and the only safe place in the world for him that I can think of."

And with this in view the partners sat down and wrote a lengthy letter to their friend Heald, the capitalist, in San Francisco, whom they had visited en route from Mexico, asking him to use his great resources and wisdom to aid them in their search. In due time they received a reply from Heald which gave them hope. He wrote:

DEAR D. & G.: I think you are right in the effort to find Mariano Castro and induce him to return to you and remain there quietly until his affair is straightened out, if ever it is. I say the latter because all advices from Mexico indicate the same unsettled conditions. It is almost certain if Castro returns there he will be speedily recognized and summarily executed. He is a thorn in the ribs of the present government, which for so long he consistently fought, and I have no doubt they would sleep easier of nights if he were underground. However, it should be easy to find him sooner or later. You told me to go the limit, so I have put the search in the hands of the most competent private detective agencies in America, offering a reward of twenty-five hundred for accurate news of his location. I gave each the description of his appearance with which you supplied me when you told me of your Mexican experiences, and wish you would check this up to see if it is accurate.

Then followed a description of Mariano's personal appearance that, with the exception of a few additional details, seemed to David and Goliath to be ample.

"He's not more'n five foot seven," Goliath remarked, "and this thing makes him about five foot eleven."

"Go on! He's no taller than I am, and I'm only five foot five," David objected.

"Psho! If he stood up straight alongside you, you'd look like a dwarf!"

"Stood up straight? What do you mean? Think he's going around on tiptoes to try to look big? Humph! You think because you drew an odd size when you were born that everybody wants to look like a freak in a side show in a circus!"

"I didn't mean to say that I think bein' big is——"

"Damn it! You did!"

After which David fumed out of sight and hearing, and Goliath grinned.

The finding of the missing Mariano did not prove as easy as Heald and the partners had hoped. One month went by with no trace at all, and the second month brought nothing save that a man answering the description had worked in a small town in Oregon until a certain day when, under some other name than Castro, he had received a letter and subsequently cashed a bank draft for two hundred and fifty dollars. When the draft was traced back to its source it was found to have been sent by Don Marti Carandez, of Dolores, Mexico. David and Goliath wrote Don Marti who promptly replied that after that one interchange of communications he too had lost all trace of his friend. He besought the partners, in case they found Mariano, to inform him where the latter could be reached.

"We got to keep our eye on Colorado," David insisted at intervals. "He's a wise old bird and there's a heap of places up in the hills there where a man can lose himself. Besides, there's many a Mexican in Colorado and some of 'em are most likely friends of his. Yes, he's in Colorado."

And then as if to disprove the little man's theory the partners received from Philadelphia a letter from Mariano inclosing money orders for exactly $184.50 and this communication:

RESPECTED SENORES: I herewith inclose the sum I owe you and at the same time am thanking the bountiful kindness of the Virgin that has enabled me to find means for livelihood and repayment. I have found an avenue where my physical misfortunes do not militate against me and am well. The payment of the money, I may add, does not lessen my great sense of gratitude, which I hope to express more adequately in person whenever an opportunity presents itself.

As if to add to the mystery his daughter also received a letter which contained nothing as to Mariano's work, his resources, or plans, and concluded with the statement that inasmuch as his movements were uncertain it was impossible for him to give an address to which she could reply.

"It's gettin' worser and worser all the time," Goliath growled. "And like as not

at any time he'll be nabbed, extradited to Mexico and—fare you well, Mariano!"

To increase their anxieties the partners received a letter from their friend the United States marshal which read:

I expect you two will like to know what became of Spanish Joe. Well, we handed him over as Mariano Castro, and, of course, when he was taken to Dolores the cat was out of the bag that he wasn't the real Mariano. But the government had been wanting him for some time, so he was tried under his real name for the real tricks he had turned, and got ten years in the hoosegow, which ought to just about settle him for good. And, by the way, the Mexicans are still out for your friend Mariano, and offer a tidy reward. Of course if I clap eyes on him, I'll have to take him in and turn him over. That's my sworn duty. But it doesn't prevent me from telling you chaps, if you happen to see him, to advise him to lay low until the whole thing blows over and is forgotten.

"Reward! Reward!" bawled David in exasperation. "What good does that do? We've offered a reward too, and it's got us nowhere."

"But just the same," Goliath gravely reasoned, "the more officers and detectives there are lookin' for him, the sooner he'll be rounded up. And we've got to be the ones to do it first."

"That's right, too," David agreed, and Hank Mills, who had by now become as eager in the pursuit as any of the others, said that if he were handling it he would write to Heald and get him to "double the ante."

Since it had by now become something of a sporting proposition, David and Goliath thought this was wisdom, and did so. But Heald wrote back:

For Heaven's sake! If you men keep on at this rate it will all tend to make the search more public, and therefore more difficult to conceal this man Mariano after he is located.

"There's a lot in that," David conceded when they held a conference over Heald's advice, "and I reckon it's wisest for us to just let things simmer along as they are."

And simmer they did until one day in March when a man drove up to the partners' cabin in a livery team from Wallulla, and dismounted. He was quietly dressed and, but for the swarthiness of his face, and the blackness of his mustache, might have passed anywhere without attracting attention. The partners were just leaving the cabin after their noonday meal when he came and they met him on the porch in front of the big rambling cabin that was all wings and additions.

"I have the honor," said the man with overpoliteness, "to be speaking to Mr. O'Leath and Mr. Field?"

"That's us," said David, eying him. "What can we do for you?"

"Some six or seven months ago you were in Mexico looking after the interests of Mr. Heald of San Francisco, were you not?"

"Yes," David admitted, "we were."

"Then," said the man, smiling and instantly reverting to the Spanish tongue, "you both speak my language, which makes it easier for me to talk. There is now a reward offered for the finding of a certain Mariano Castro, formerly a general of revolutionaries, and——"

"So that's what you're here for, is it?" David demanded in a voice that might have warned the inquirer had he been more familiar with the red-headed man's temper.

"And," continued the swarthy man, unperturbed, "I represent the government now in being which is even more eager than its predecessor to get in contact with General Castro. As you observe, I chose to seek him through you as a channel of information, knowing that you had been friends."

"Well, you've come to the wrong shop! See here! We don't know where Mariano Castro is, but I'll tell you this: If we did we'd see you in hell before we'd give you a single line on him."

"But, señores," objected the Mexican, deprecatingly and with his hands thrown outward, palms upward, "it is necessary for me to find General Castro for his own good and——"

"That's all bunk!" Goliath roared. "You think we're kids enough to swallow that kind of medicine? Humph! Better make some more!"

"Steady. Partner! Steady," David warned the giant. "Let me talk to him. Maybe he's one of Heald's men and——" He turned to the stranger and, addressing him, asked, "Who do you represent? Who are you, anyhow?"

"I am the head of the new secret service of Mexico," the swarthy man announced pompously, as if this reply settled all questions in advance.

An arctic chill followed his words. The partners frowned and drew themselves back as if from contamination.

"That being so," said David icily, "we'll

give you just one minute to walk back out, climb into the buggy, and beat it back to wherever you came from. And we give you just two minutes additional to be out of sight around the bend before"—he stopped, bolted into the cabin and reappeared with a rifle in his hands—"before I open fire and pot you!" he finished.

The man from Mexico read the murderous light in his eyes. Unmistakably this fiery, red-headed little man would shoot, and shoot to kill. The big man by his side pulled out a huge silver watch and fixing his eyes on it remarked, "I'll be timekeeper. Now his first minute begins!"

"For the Lord's sake, mister," shouted the driver of the livery rig, "come a-jumpin'. When these men say a thing they mean it, and they'll make cold meat out of you just as sure as you're a Mexican. Anyhow, I'm off!"

The head of the Mexican secret service took the warning and bolted for the side of the buggy after it was already starting, fully convinced by the driver's words and attitude that this was a perilous minute of time. He scrambled in as the driver laid the whip to the horses and the buggy rocked and careened in haste to be beyond sight within the narrow limit of time allowed. David stood with the rifle in his hands, inexorable, and Goliath kept his eyes fixed on the watch. The buggy just succeeded in turning the bend within the time allotted. David walked back inside the cabin without a word and hung the rifle on the antlers from which he had taken it. Goliath snapped his watch shut and put it back in his pocket. Hank Mills grinned and rolled a cigarette and said, "Well, that guy had some sense, after all. And he just scraped under the wire, at that."

"He did," Goliath gravely assented. "But somehow I wish Davy had potted him one for luck."

Three days later another Mexican arrived who came hesitantly as if anticipating trouble, and got so far as to announce that he was a friend of the missing Mariano and had good news for him, before the partners unanimously ran him off the claim and threatened to kill him or any of his pals who ever set foot thereon again; but this time their apprehensions for Mariano had reached a climax of distraction.

"I'm going to San Francisco and have a talk with Heald," David declared. "Surely he can't be doing his best or we'd get some action. I thought a man with a million could do most anything he wanted to, but —well, we don't seem to get anywhere."

"All right," said Goliath, "we'll go," and David looked relieved in this assurance that he would have his usual company.

And yet when they boarded the ferry that took them across the bay from Oakland and saw that panorama which never failed to impress them rising up as they advanced, they felt that they had nothing constructive to offer in the quest which had by now become an obsession. They boarded the Market Street car and went thundering their noisy way up into the town until they got off in front of the skyscraper that was their destination and felt the swift upward rush of the elevator that bore them as on a giant's wings to the top of the building. They were still at a loss what they were to say when they entered Heald's outer office. Heald, with whom their friendship was of long standing and close intimacy, never kept them waiting, hence they were almost immediately ushered into the close-guarded sanctuary of his private office.

"David and Goliath! Together, as usual. Inseparables, like a sort of new Siamese twins. Well, what's up now?" the capitalist asked as he shook hands and gestured them to seats, after which he bent over and produced the inevitable box of cigars.

"Nothing except that it's come to a showdown. We've just got to do something to find Mariano," David declared. "There's about a thousand men and two governments hunting him, and if they get him, it's Katy bar the door for him! It's getting hotter and hotter."

And then he told in detail how the chase had finally reached the doors of their own cabin, isolated as it was in the heart of the Sierras. Heald listened with interest, staring at the partners curiously with his keen, friendly eye as if half amused. And when David ended with, "We've just got to save him. He saved our lives twice," Heald's eyes held admiration; but he shook a doubtful head and stared out of the high window over the tops of the nearest buildings and at the glittering bay beyond.

"I don't honestly see what more can be done than has been done," he asserted. "Knowing how intent you were on finding Mariano, I did my very best. And if all the men we've got looking for him have

failed to find him, what chance have the Mexicans?"

But both Goliath and David insisted that even more strenuous efforts must be made, until the financier said, "Well, we'll think it over. I'll sleep on it and see if I can't think of some other methods that we haven't tried. Now the thing for all of us to do is to forget it for the night and tackle it afresh to-morrow. Let me see. What can I do to entertain you this evening? How about vaudeville? That's it. We'll have a good dinner and then go to a show. I haven't been to one myself for weeks and it will do me good. I'm getting stale. Been thinking about coming up into the hills and loafing with you fellows for a month or so. Yes, we'll see a show. I'll send one of the boys over for tickets."

He got up and strolled into the outer office and returned after a few minutes saying, "They tell me the best one is at the Trohambra. Now let's forget our troubles and talk about things up there in the hills. How's Wallulla, and Sky Gap, and the Shaughnessy gang, and——"

Thus he got them going on a fresh track and it was time for them to leave his office before any of them realized it.

The Trohambra was brilliantly lighted when, after a modest dinner, they reached its wide, arched entrance and saw that one of the headline attractions was "The Great Wong Loo." Another was "Lady Bertram in humorous recitations," and still another "The Swiss Bell Ringers," all of which met the partners' approval; but they felt conspicuous and embarrassed when they were ushered to a stage box which the capitalist had engaged in its entirety for their private use. Goliath, always rendered conspicuous by his size, and, although he seemed never aware of it, his handsomeness, became a shrinking violet and thrust himself as far back into the obscure corner as was possible so that the large audience might not see him and he would have to run no gantlet of eyes save those of the few performers on the stage, which seemed inordinately near. David, on the other hand, leaned his elbows on the rail of the box and calmly stared at the audience as if it were composed of nothing better than a colony of ants. Heald, habituated to a theater box, seemed oblivious to everything and everybody. As was the custom of the time the headliners were interspersed at equal points throughout the program, the divorced wife of an English peer having the first place of honor, "The Great Wong Loo," the exact middle, which would be the closing preceding the intermission, and the "Swiss Bell Ringers" the finale.

David laughed himself into aching sides over the humors of the English Lady, but Goliath sat somberly regarding her, his sense of humor being admittedly slow. Two knock-about comedians pleased him much more, and a clown act delighted him immensely.

"The next number is the chink act," Heald said, "and usually these jugglers bore me until I lose pounds of weight, and years off my life. Shall we slip out and miss it?"

And then, discovering Goliath's rapt attention, he grinned at David, who had half arisen as if to comply and David drawled, "No, let's not. Juggling is Goliath's pet amusement. His mouth'll hang open, and his eyes'll stick out, and he'll hold his breath or let it out like an explosion and—why, it's worth sticking it out just to watch this partner of mine!"

Goliath grunted and would at once have departed but for the fact that it was too late, the curtain having shot upward exposing "The Great Wong Loo," who, half blinded by the footlights, was bowing stiffly to the audience, both arms dangling awkwardly at his sides and his shaven head, save for the queue, reflecting the lights. He appeared to be almost oblivious of his audience, his black eyes scarcely deigning to rake it over once, and his lips unsmiling as if he disdained courting its good will. He had no assistant and turned at once to his paraphernalia, which was of the usual type.

"All that stuff seems common enough," Heald commented as the juggler did nothing but the customary simple tricks in the first part of his act. "Can't see what he does that's so hair thrilling, as it says on the program. Any mutt could do that stuff." But the audience waited expectantly and whispered, and then the cause of their interest was manifest.

Wong Loo threw a gayly embroidered cover from off one of the numerous tables on the stage and exposed a glittering array of knives. He took the tray over his arm and nonchalantly stepped to one side of the stage. The stage hands trundled in a target of scarcely more than ordinary rifle-range size, on which a row of numerals from "one"

on the outer ring down to "thirteen" in the bull's-eye were blackly marked. Without the slightest hesitation or a glance at his audience the Chinese threw the first knife across the stage and it clung and quivered in the numeral one. And then so rapidly that the eye could scarcely follow his movements, and the air across the stage seemed alive with one constant arc of flaming reflections, the audience heard the sharp, unbroken staccato of thudding sounds and, as the juggler paused, suddenly burst into applause. For there, all quivering, in an absolutely perfect line, were thirteen knives, each of which had stabbed the numerals in succession from the outer ring to the bull's-eye. Wong Loo granted one of his stiff, awkward bows, the stage hand trundled the target and its shining array of steel from sight, and the Chinese walked back to his little table and with his back to the audience wiped his hands.

David and Goliath looked at each other with peculiar eyes and shook their heads meaningly. They had seen a knife thrown across a room into the heart of Don Andreas and the show was suggestive. Too suggestive. But there was still more to come.

Wong Loo now advanced closer to the footlights with but a single heavy knife in his hand. He threw it upward and stood motionless. It passed up almost from sight and then fell, blade downward. The juggler did not look up. The knife passed within a few inches of his face and imbedded itself in the floor. The audience gasped at the man's coolness and whispered, wondering at a daring so obvious; for that blade, did it swerve but a few inches, would plant itself in the juggler's brain. Again he threw it upward, extending one of his feet and the knife missed his bare foot by an inch. He repeated the stunt using the other foot, and then prepared for a still more dangerous one. He held a cigar in his mouth, lighted it, and this time seemed to more carefully balance the heavy blade.

"Good Lord!" growled Goliath, speaking loudly in his excitement. "Surely he's not going to take a chance on clipping that off from overhead!"

The black eyes of Wong Loo flashed toward the box and he hesitated. Some of the audience that had been sitting breathlessly still glared at the box as if resenting audible comments, and again Wong Loo balanced his knife and then, holding the cigar in his teeth and puffing so that its glow might be visible, threw the knife upward. Those of the audience who had seen the act before bent forward expecting to see the cigar cut off within an inch of the juggler's face and then there was a murmur of alarm and pity; for despite his great skill the juggler had faltered at last, swerved slightly and the great, keen knife, flung but a trifle untrue, imbedded itself in the juggler's arm after slashing open half the length of his sleeve. Wong Loo whirled, clutched his arm, and hastily left the stage just as the curtain came down with a sharp rush. The audience seemed for a moment to forget that the intermission was due and sat excitedly discussing the accident until the orchestra suddenly awoke to its duty and began to play a loud and brilliant melody.

"Hang it! That was my fault," Goliath exclaimed. "I threw the poor cuss off by speaking just when he was about to chuck the blade."

"I'm afraid that's true," Heald said, plainly distressed. "I think I'll go back to his dressing room and see how badly he's hurt. They'll let me through because I'm pretty well known here as being one of the principal owners of this property. Poor chap! It may mean a long lay-off for him."

He got up to go and both David and Goliath insisted on accompanying him.

"If it's my fault, I ought to pay the damage," Goliath remarked, with his usual sense of fairness. "Hope he's not badly hurt, but —don't see how it could be otherwise. Those were real knives all right!"

Headed by Heald they went out of the box to a door behind it which led to the stage, and were admitted by the watchman who spoke to Heald by name, deferentially.

"I'll show you his dressing room," he said; "but I doubt if he'll let any one inside. He never does. Surly brute, he is. Just comes in and out without ever speaking to anybody."

He led the way across what to the partners was an unreal maze of painted canvas and ropes in which a little army of men moved in a frenzy, and back to a corridor.

"He has one of the star dressing rooms," the guide said. "Number 2. This is it."

A call boy in uniform lounged outside it as if to be within hailing distance, and volunteered, "He'll not let you in, and when the manager asked him if he wanted a doctor he said 'No,' and there you are. The

boss told me to stick around out here so if his nobs changed his mind I could go and get one."

Their guide rapped smartly on the door and elicited nothing but a guttural "Hello. What you want?"

"Open the door a crack so I can tell you," demanded the guide, and after a slight delay it did open—merely a crack, through which a part of a face was visible.

"These gentlemen——" began the guide, and as if to belie the reputation of aloofness he had given the Chinese the door was suddenly thrown open with the remark:

"They can come in. I'll see them."

The guide turned and hastened away with a "There you are, gentlemen," and the partners and Heald stepped inside. Somewhat to their astonishment Wong Loo peered out into the corridor, told the waiting boy he would not be wanted, and then, before facing his visitors, locked and bolted the door. His face suddenly broke into a wide and friendly grin, he reached up and with a single twist removed his queue and scalp and then thrust out a hand in greeting.

"Good Lord! Mariano!" Goliath exclaimed just as David remarked, "Well, I'll be hanged! So it's you, is it?"

Mariano motioned them to find seats and as he replied, "Yes, it is I—Mariano," calmly threw off his embroidered blouse, exposing his mechanical arm and a great gash in its covering.

"I was so startled when I saw you three men to-night," he said in Spanish, "that I nearly ruined a very clever false arm. As they say in English, you nearly 'crabbed my act.'" And then he sat down on the edge of his dressing table and laughed as if the joke were on him.

"Do you know," David demanded, "that we have been scouring the country for you to warn you that the Mexican government is hot after you for murder?"

"Oh, señores! I am sorry. I might have spared you that trouble, for I knew it. I was warned by my friend Don Marti Carandez whom you met. Indeed, that was one reason why I did not write you, much as I wished to, lest you become involved; and also the sole reason why I became Wong Loo—a mountebank. It was safer to do the very thing that would be unexpected; choose the most public occupation I could conceive. And besides, I could think of no other means of making a livelihood. I could always throw a knife," he said, with dry emphasis. "And when I was a boy I used to amuse my companions by simple juggling tricks. I, who have once been a cabinet minister, once a college professor, and once a general in a revolutionary army, have been grateful to have done so well in this new occupation of mine. Perhaps—after all!—I merely found my level. And this disguise was admirably adapted to conceal my physical discrepancies. But it has been annoying to keep thus disguised, even in hotels and railway trains, for I live as—Wong Loo!"

There was a gentle melancholy in his speech as if even his bravery and fortitude could not entirely conceal all the trials he had been compelled to uncomfortably endure. He stared absently at the bedaubed and defaced wall of the dressing room, where stars who had preceded him had indulged in their embryonic artistic tendencies with crude drawings done in pencil or grease paint, as if seeing a far Southern land in which he had been distinguished. Faintly from outside came the brisk military strains of a march indicating that the intermission was at an end, and then as if timed with it, a sharp rapping on the door.

Mariano jumped from the table corner and began hurriedly reaching for the wig with the queue that lay on the floor where in his excitement he had thrown it, muttering, "One of you keep whoever it is occupied until I can again become Wong Loo."

David, ever the quickest to act, stepped to the door, unbolted it and opened it a few inches and said, "What is it you want? Wong Loo is engaged."

Then Goliath and Heald, both of whom had arisen and moved toward him heard him draw his breath sharply, and saw him jerk the door wider and lunge forward. From outside came a startled exclamation of appeal and David's voice: "So it's you, is it? And I told you that if ever I saw you again it would be your finish. Well, you've butted in just once too often and this time you're up against it!"

He suddenly came lunging backward into the room dragging a man who struggled and violently resisted with both anger and terror.

"Shut the door, Goliath, quick! And bolt it! I've got the head of the Mexican secret service who we chased off the mine. He's run Mariano down but it's up to us to see that it does him no good!"

And then, just as Goliath shot the bolts, and David's sinewy hands were clutching for a throttling hold on the Mexican's throat, Mariano whirled, took a quick look and sprang forward; but his hand, instead of seeking the enemy clutched David's, and he called: Señor! Señor Field! Let go of him! Don't choke him to death. He is my friend!"

In utter astonishment David slowly loosened his hands and fell back, looking from Mariano to the intruder with bewildered eyes, and his attitude was duplicated by Heald and Goliath. Their astonishment was further increased by a view of the warmth of greeting between Mariano and the man they had believed to be an enemy; for the intruder caught Mariano's hand in both his own and exclaimed, "General—I have found you. But to-day I received a letter from our friend Don Marti telling me that you were living as Wong Loo, a vaudeville performer, and——"

"But—señor! What does it mean? Why did Don Marti write—what is it now? Tell us what it means?"

"It means," said the secret-service man, "that the government you and all of us fought, crooks, thieves, and assassins that they were, has been put out, and some are dead, and the others in flight; that your old friends composing the new government are in power and have quashed all charges against you, and solicit you to return to take your own proper place in the rehabilitation of our country; that you are to come back honored as a hero who gave all he had to give for Mexico and never surrendered a single ideal. That, Friend Mariano, is what my visit means, and that is the news I bring."

And then "The Great Wong Loo," who had never been known to show fear, who recognized no odds, and who the partners knew hesitated not to slay, seemed to lose control of his knees, collapsed onto the rickety chair in front of his littered dressing table and reckless of soiling his silken embroidered blouse threw his bent arm out on the pots of grease paint and powders, and rested his head upon it as if to steady himself.

"That ends his music-hall career," David exulted quietly, and his prophecy was fulfilled because from that night "The Great Wong Loo" ceased to exist, and to the surprise of the guardian of the stage door a swarthy little man, instead of a morose Chinese juggler, made his exit never to return.

Mr. Norton will have a complete novel in the next issue, "The Crusader's Casket."

A NEW KIND OF TRAP

AMERICAN humane societies are trying to devise some method of trapping fur-bearing animals that will not cause the torture to the fur bearers that now is inflicted by steel traps. It is a worth-while effort, for twenty million animals are caught in traps in America each year, and the demand for fur is increasing. It is realized that trapping is a business that is carried on under difficult conditions and that the trapper is not able to care for complicated mechanisms. To be of any practical use the painless trap devised must not be much more expensive than the steel traps now in use and must be simple enough to be operated in the wilderness by men who are wearing heavy gloves. Various plans for quick-killing traps have been suggested, but what seems to us the most practical scheme has been outlined by Thomas A. Edison, who suggests that the war department's chemists be asked to experiment with the use of poison gas for this purpose. Unfortunately the war department has no appropriation for this purpose, but officials say that Mr. Edison's suggestion is practical and that a receptacle —which would be broken by the operation of the trap—filled with a small quantity of gas would solve the problem.

As whatever trap is adopted probably will be slightly more expensive than the traps now in use it is likely that legislation by both the United States and Canada will be needed to bring about the reform. This legislation may be opposed by the fur trade—in which case it will be in the power of humane women to bring pressure on the fur trade by refusing to buy more furs until humane trapping methods are adopted.

Something New

By J. H. Greene

Author of "A Queened Pawn," "Indian Nerve," Etc.

Australia—the lure of gold—a mystery and a revelation.

DICK thrilled all the way up to his backbone as his fingers ran over the gravel caught by the cross sticks of his shaker, but he did not shout, or cheer, or lift the bend of his back. Voices came out of the dim dust of the field, disgusted and weary voices. Men were not working their claims, men were abandoning their claims, men were tramping off bending under their swags. Dick did not wish to revive their faith.

He was dry blowing an eastern patch of the Dundas. All around him were half-scratched alluvial claims, heaps of worthless tailings, sieved and wind-blown sand that had not even brought tucker, and the black cinders and gray ashes of cold camp fires. That was all the field had meant to these departing, disgusted prospectors—cinders, ashes and sand. Dick soon would be the last man on this field that had held back its gold for him. The news of that slug under his fingers would turn them; would bring more, for the rumor carried along the track and over the wires to the east would provoke a new rush. He alone knew that the field was not a duffer, and the big and little brothers of that slug, that must be in the sands about him, were to be his.

Knee-deep in the tailings of his fifteen feet of claim, all that could be his at once by the regulations governing the gold fields of West Australia, the dry blower lifted the clean, shining slug. His touch, trained from handling the pennyweights and flyspecks of mere tucker grounds, estimated it at thirty ounces—not a fortune, but there was a promise of more, and found gold outvalues gold that is earned, inherited, or gained by any of the respectable methods of high finance.

"Can I locate next to you?"

The voice made Dick shove his precious slug back under the gravel. Absorbed in avaricious reverie, he had not seen a man approach, a man he did not recall among the few on the field, a newcomer leading a pack horse.

The fellow was small, lean, with a foxy face under a thin new beard. His horse carried the usual blankets, tucker bags, water bags, and a small condenser. But the tan on his face and hands was new; obviously he was a new chum—his question proved that. Seasoned dry blowers do not ask questions like that. The adjoining claims were not being worked, and the absence of shovel, pick or rocker gave any one a right to occupancy. Besides this, the man's tongue was strange.

"Course you can," answered Dick shortly.

"Party left that claim a week ago. It's worked out; it's a duffer."

It might be a duffer, but that was to be proved, for the ground had been worked for only a few yards.

"Calc'late I'll play it for a few days' tucker."

The newcomer began inserting sticks in the corners, pegs of his own to replace those of the previous owners. He knew enough for that, Dick noticed, and Dick had found his slug close to the boundary. The rich patch he expected might easily lap over onto this newly pegged claim; the stranger might with his first shovel dig up a relative of his big slug. Dick did not get a chance to lift his slug, for the man kept talking in a gossipy fashion as he pegged; about himself and his trip down from Kurnalpie. When the pegging was done he stepped over into Dick's claim. Dick casually threw more gravel over the hiding place of the slug.

"Kinder cute, that contraption of yours. I get along with a sieve and the dishes. But the gauge of your wire is too big. You lose your fine gold."

Dick was angry at the chap's intrusion and his loquacity. He did not want him on his ground or near his shaker. A touch, and the gravel might flow over the wire, disclosing his slug, and advertising a new gold field to the world.

"D'ye mind if I boil my coffee on your fire?"

Dick grunted an assent, glad to get him away from his gold. The man took his billy from the pack horse and set it on the one camp fire on the field that was smoking. As he bent to blow up the new sticks he had thrown on it, Dick slipped the slug out of the gravel and put it into his trousers pocket. He did not have time to stow it in the tubular leather gold belt round his waist inside his shirt, for the stranger kept chattering.

Dick came over to him, taciturn though he was himself. The man was so full of news, and cheery news at that, of fresh finds, of bright prospects, that the dry blower was glad of a change from the grumblers and despairers he had been camping with.

"You're a Yank, ain't ye?" Dick asked.

"Yep. How did you guess?"

"Your lingo, your coffee—and you're so blasted cheerful."

"Yep. I'm Rhode Island Yankee. A Democrat, a First Baptist, and sampled every trade in the directory. Cy Demming. Shake."

Dick had to take his hand, but only passed a surname in return. Cy evidently knew enough of the ways of the fields to take that as sufficient, for he turned to the fire and succeeded in opening a can of meat by melting the solder in the flames.

"I could have lent you a tin opener," said Dick.

"Don't need one, and I hate to borrow a man's tools."

Despite the Yank's intrusion Dick was becoming interested in the fellow.

"You're a long way from home," he said, watching the clever way in which the man manipulated the hot tin, how he extracted the meat without spilling the juice.

"You've said it. Three weeks walking to reach this alkali dump. The time I've wasted looking for dried-up soaks, pickle-juice lakes, wells that gushed a spoonful a minute."

In half an hour he told Dick his whole history, the number of businesses he had tried and mostly succeeded in, from selling papers in Boston to mining in Idaho. He apparently had learned to make his living before he had learned to walk.

Dick gave little confidence in return; the slug, weighing, burning in his pocket bade him beware of the bonds of mateship. He dropped corrosive curses on the field, the lack of gold, of water, and perhaps very soon of tucker, for the storekeepers of Dundas were clearing out too.

Dick returned to his work and soon was lost in the red cloud of dust arising from his shaker, though he found no more slugs, not even pennyweights.

"How's this, Dick?" called the Yank later.

Dick looked up from pawing his ripples and saw that the fellow had fixed up something new in dry blowing. He had fastened one side of the sieve Dick had considered so ineffective to an elastic stick stuck in the ground. The spring of the stick drew back the sieve quicker than Dick could oscillate his shaker, and the Yank already had a big tailing heap. He was eating up his ground to the low bed rock, and soon would be worked out ahead of Dick. Already he was talking of using the waste energy of the pack horse that had been browsing under

his hobbles up the ridge, some distance away from the claims. The lean animal, divested of its pack, was forlornly nibbling the salt bush.

"We ought to be able to rig up some gear to make him do the work. We ought to treat this stuff by the ton. We're too slow."

Yank was already treating Dick as a partner, but Dick was smoldering with an irritation he did not know how to relieve. Yank was so friendly, so accommodating that there was no point on which to take offense. Dick was annoyed with his perpetual talk, his "too much plurry yabber-yabber," as a blackfellow would phrase it. Dick could tell him to shut up, but then Yank would yabber-yabber to his horse, to his shaker, to anything. He was the kind of man who did his thinking aloud, and that thinking was geared high.

Dick turned into his blankets as worn out as if he had come off a thirty-mile stage from the mental effort of trying to keep up with Mr. Cy Demming of the U. S. A. It had been a hot and exciting day. Yank's twang buzzed in his ears. He was restless and sleepless, and besides worried about his slug. It interfered with his comfort. He found he was lying on it. Then he began worrying lest Yank should see it bulging in his pocket if he chanced to oversleep in the morning. He tried to put it inside his gold belt but it would not fit. After an unusual amount of thinking, for him—for in some way he felt he was matching his wits against Yank, against a whole United States of yabber-yabbering Yanks—he rose stealthily from his bunk, slipped out of his tent and slid the slug back in the gravel it had come from, the pile of his tailings under his shake. No one would look for gold in old tailings. He could leave it there for days. The tailing heap was the best bank on the fields, and Dick knew something about banks.

He crept back to his bunk. The night was black, starless, stifling. The fire was out save when a stray breath of the hot night wind woke the cinders. Yank was asleep, pillowed on the fly of his tent, which he had not set. Dick looked at him coldly, cursing him, venting his annoyance at the man's presence in lurid litanies that would lift a team of bogged bullocks out of a Riverina Creek, though the words were not spoken, not even whispered. Dick did not have to think aloud.

He was awakened by a big wind filling his tent with choking sand and the ashes from his fireplace, a month's accumulation. His blankets were afire with the sparks. The flapping tent drew in the wind, the sparks, the sand, like a bellows.

"Strike your tent, mate, it's a dust storm," he heard Yank call. "My tucker bags are blowing away. I'll give you a hand when I anchor them."

Dick was more concerned over his slug. This wind, the wild sweeping willy-willy of the south, would blow those tailings he had been so sure of. At daylight his slug might be glittering in the sun. Stamping out the sparks with his stockinged feet, choking with the dust that blew up in his face, he fought his way out in the dark to his tailing heap. Closing his eyes, for the pebbles stung his face like shot, he fumbled till he found the slug, and slid it again into his pocket. Yank was calling to him; he could hear the tent flapping. He was still half asleep; the voice of the man that had been drumming in his ears all day sounded like the roar of a crowd; the canvas snapped like pistol shots.

He snatched the slug from his pocket to hide it, to find another bank for it. He fumbled in his tucker box, securely nailed to tree stumps, and dropped the slug in his flour bag. That would be as safe, as private as his tailing heap. Then, still dazed, and annoyed by the man shouting his name out of the dark, he turned. Then the ridge pole, lifted by the wind, struck him on the head and he fell senseless in the sand. His face was half buried before Yank found him.

"Drink this, matey. Guess you're on the up grade."

Dick felt the boiling-hot tea poured down his parched throat. He tried to rise, but Yank pushed him back in the bunk.

"Lay still a bit. Don't know what hit you—the ridge pole, sunstroke or typhoid. Kinder cramped me in my treatment. You see, I only carry cholera drops, and the pill business is one I have never tackled. So I pumped tea into you. Seems to be Australia's peruna."

"How long have I been here?"

" 'Bout ten hours."

"Did I talk much?"

"Did you? Wish I could cash in all the slugs you were figuring on. John D. has nothing on you when you're asleep. Better

lay back a bit. I'm going to get some water. Tea takes water, you know."

Dick lay back, relieved to find that what he had babbled about his slug had been taken for the ravings of delirium. His head still ached, there was a big bump on the back; he had narrowly escaped a cracked skull. He lay in the open, for his tent had gone off in the wind. The sky above him was clear, but the air was cool from the south.

He could see his little kitchen, his table, his one seat, hewn of logs, his tucker box —these had stayed, though all were coated with the red dust of the willy-willy. Quite satisfied that his slug was safe, he dozed a little till he was awakened by hearing gravel falling in a dish. Raising his head he saw over the rise Yank trying out some new ground, pouring the dirt from one dish to another, the little wind that was left sifting out the sand, leaving the gold—if any —to remain in the bottom dish.

Yank evidently was an energetic prospector. Dick began to consider the possibility of joining up with him. He would not have to share any gold found before the mateship started. The big slug would still be all his, and if there were no more Dick would share Yank's pack horse and his swag would be carried. Yank carried a condenser—the two would be independent of the rapacious water sellers. With that outfit they could scorn distance and defy the desert. Dick began to see that the coming of Yank was as much a slice of luck as the finding of the slug.

He determined to show Yank the slug, to keep him with him, to trade his luck, his skill in finding gold where so many had failed, against a share in that pack horse.

But he could not find the slug. It was not in the flour bag which he lifted, shook and felt. The heavy lump of gold should have been at the bottom of his few pounds of flour. Frantically he was pouring his tea and his sugar from their tins, hoping that in his dazed and stunned confusion of last night he had dropped it in them, when Yank came up with his dishes under his arm.

"I've lost my gold," cried Dick. "I planted it with my tucker when the willy-willy struck us."

Dick related the story of finding the slug, while his agitated fingers foolishly ran through the heap of sugar and tea on his table, trying to find it again.

"Course I didn't let on at once. But we're mates now! Help me to find it and we'll divvy. It must have blown away."

Yank shook his head.

"Slugs don't blow away. You, a dry blower, ought to know that. Better go back and bunk a bit. You got an awful whack on your head. And I think you were a bit nutty when I met you. Too much sun on the back of your head."

" 'Tain't!" shouted Dick at this pitying incredulity. "I was all right."

"When I came up to you, you didn't see me. You didn't hear me nor my horse. When you did you reached inside your shirt and looked wild. Another crazy hatter, I figured. I thought you were reaching for a gun."

As well as he could remember in his distracted condition Dick recalled that he had been fumbling for his gold belt when Yank had first appeared. The evidence was overwhelming that his slug was the figment of a sun-smitten brain.

"But I saw it, I felt it. Thirty ounces, to a pennyweight."

"Better cool off and forget it, Dick. Come and have a look at some real gold."

Dick's knees were sagging, the wide, red plain was fading to a dim blur when he felt Yank grab his triceps. The grip aroused him, brought back all his vigor, and he threw off Yank with an oath. His new mate was not offended, but only laughed.

"Excuse me, buddy, I thought your pins were going," said Yank. "I never like a man to get that grip on me, myself. Where I come from it means the pen, and the club if you kick. But if you have all that pep, pack your swag and start with me for the new field."

"What field? Where?"

"Don't know, exactly. Out there somewhere," said Yank, waving his hand to the south. "See here. That's gold, ain't it? Real gold and we're both wide awake, sober and sane, ain't we?"

He held out a dish to Yank. In the bottom was some red sand. He shook the grains together in regular prospecting fashion—lifted the dish to his mouth and blew them with all the skill of the poorest of prospectors, the dry blowers by mouth. Out of the sand as his breath blew away the lighter dirt flashed a rich "color," a glittering heap of yellow grains.

"Where did you get it?" asked Dick excitedly.

"Didn't get it. It was handed to me. The willy-willy brought it. The good Lord did a little dry blowing Himself last night, and brought it into camp."

Yank again led Dick, this time by a friendly touch on the shoulder, to where his pack was spread. By the fire was stretched a piece of oilcloth, the cover of his pack by day, a waterproof sheet by night in case the rare dews should dampen the ground. In the center of the black, creased stuff was a pile of sand.

"I didn't sleep under that last night. Found it covered with sand this morning, and some hunch made me try out the sand. Dick, that gold was blown here by the willy-willy. One half shovel panned out this prospect. Out of the sky, Dick. Blown off some rich, some big—some heap-big rich alluvial off south where the wind blew from."

"But gold won't blow. You just said so."

"Slugs won't, nuggets won't. But grains will. The willy-willy that took your tent and lifted your ridge pole could shift these flyspecks. The storekeeper has lost his roof—that was a big wind. This gold is a gift, sheer luck. We've got to follow it up. Where it came from there will be slugs, perhaps reefs, mother lodes. Up stakes, buddy—we start at sunup on the trail of that willy-willy."

Dick had to yield, for Yank never let up on his enthusiasm. At tea, during the after-tea smoke, he emitted a perfect willy-willy of ideas, and leap-to-the-moon suggestions. He had figured out the direction of the wind and taken a bearing on a blue blur of a hill to the southwest. They would pan every likely looking patch, every hill bared by the big wind, every uncovered rock, for streaks of quartz, for reefs. They would trail the golden footprints of the storm.

If Dick remembered his slug at all, if he still believed in its existence—that perhaps in his half-awakened stupor he had mislaid it, and forgotten through his accident—he knew it still would be there when they returned. No one would be trying out his nearly worked-out claim on that poor field; there were few men round to make the attempt.

Next morning breakfast was over before the sun was up. Yank tracked the horse by his bell the mile the hungry beast had traveled in its prospecting, fed him from his bag, loaded him with the additional weight of Dick's swag and shaker, and then taking the leading rope strode off on the track of his new field. Piles of drifted sand, wave molded by the wind, streaked with stream lines where rock, scrub, withered tree trunks gave a shelter, were clear signposts to where the gold had been dry blown by the storm.

Dick kept by Yank instead of trailing behind in the way of mates who merely tolerate each other, for Yank talked almost a sentence to every yard, and Dick liked to listen now. The Yank and his ideas had relieved him from carrying his heavy load; the Yank carried good grub and shared it generously; the Yank—he almost believed—could invent gold.

Dick wanted to stop and drive his pick into a line of quartz, but it looked barren; there was not a speck of promise in its pale face, and they had no dynamite to blast a deeper trail.

"We'll come back and put a shot in it later," said Yank. "We must keep to our trail. We're on to something new in prospecting. Let's keep after the big thing."

Dick would have pottered for a week over that quartz, but Yank kept him moving with his fervor, his ideas, his tireless loquacity.

"Something new, Dick, that's us, that's U. S. You fellows are too stuck in the old ways. 'Cos you can't get water to wash your fields you quit and say alluvial is bust. I know—I've seen Flyspeck and Pig Dirt in Coolgardie, the Six Mile at Hannans, all with gold still in them but given up 'cos you lack ideas to handle them wholesale."

"Can't without water."

"You got wind, haven't you? That's the big idea that's going bumpety-bump in the back of my head. When we hit this field and cash in I'm going to dope out and build something new. Something that will make little willy-willys of our own, something that will dry blow by the ton instead of by the shovelful. California placer sluicing won't be one, two, three."

Cy Demming was the Yank that Dick had read of, the Yank whose notions, whose goods from dollar watches to reaping machines filled the papers, covered the hoardings back East, and were gradually converting the cockie farmers and bush folk to—ideas. Yank was tireless of tongue, of feet; he did not complain of walking now. With swift, nervous step he kept the pack horse almost at an amble, and Dick at a speed unusual for a swaggie. Dick did not

complain—his mate's energy was contagious, the whir and stir of the great republic across the Pacific was dragging him to a windfall of a gold field. Dick was strong enough for the strain; in muscle, bone and physical grit he outclassed the Yank. What he lacked in vision Yank supplied.

Up to late in the afternoon the results had been visionary. The willy-willy had not sprinkled any more gold dust to encourage them. Patches near hills with the possibility of shed gold from hidden reefs, gullies that might have been pockets of old watercourses, were equally barren. Dick grew glum, but he was not discouraged; he was simply waiting on Yank, to whom he referred now as to a leader.

"Must have come from farther off still. Guess that gold was lifted right over here and then dumped on us. Hello, I've got a color."

It was more than a color in Yank's dish; it was a small slug, about a pennyweight, big enough to be called a slug by men not too lucky.

Dick was tremendously encouraged by the speck. He took his shaker off the pack horse, rigged it and began shoveling. He did make another grain that afternoon, but he was certain the place looked likely and next morning refused to budge when Yank wanted to push on farther. He said he wanted to give that hollow a thumping good try.

Yank left him to do a little prospecting on his own account farther along the trail of the willy-willy. He returned at noon. Dick had accumulated a very respectable tailing heap. He had been working harder than any pack horse; he had not worked out his hope and he wanted to stay longer, but Yank showed him more gold he had found, about two ounces of fine flyspecks.

"I found a pocket of dust in a hole on top of a hill. This is all there was. It proves my idea is right. It was blown there, 'cos there was dead grass under it. Let's keep on till we hit the mother field, Dick, and don't stop to piffle over little patches like this."

Dick did not want to move.

"That's what's the matter with you Yanks—always on the trot. You start in a bull rush and end in a fizzle."

"And you slow mutton eaters stick where you're planted."

The partners were beginning to criticize each other, which is the beginning of the end of all mateship.

Next morning Dick yielded and left his claim. Yank's talk and the knowledge that Yank owned the pack horse made him do it. But their tramping was now spoiled with arguments, differences as to direction. There were fewer traces of the willy-willy, the character of the country was changing, limestone outcrops were appearing, the coast ranges were coming nearer, the blue of their distant sides began to look green, Mount Toolbranup began to look like a mountain. They crossed winding hollows that might in rare seasons of rain be creeks. But Dick kept edging away east; he almost made a complete left turn when Yank pointed to the smoke of a settlement.

"You're a hatter, Dick. Plumb scared to be with folks. A lonely, grub-by-yourself hatter."

"Where farms begin, gold ends. Slugs don't grow with turnips."

"But we're after something new, Dick. Farming and gold digging go together in the Sacramento Valley—why not here? Why, you've seen back in Vic——"

They had been climbing a bluff; the air had been cooler and fresher and now at the summit before them was the wide blue of the Bight, the vast vista of the Southern Ocean. Dick threw himself on the ground—he was satisfied that Yank's aërial gold field was a duffer. He was savage and sarcastic.

"Maybe your 'Something New Reward Claim' is anchored out there. Maybe your gold blew all the way from the icebergs at the south pole, for there ain't no land between it and us. All I can say is that as a prospector you're a wooden-nutmeg, tin-razor, overadvertising Yankee liar, and I'm fed up chockablock with you! On me own from now on!"

Dick rose as he leisurely finished this harangue. He was six feet of mutton-bred bone and muscle. Yank was no match for him in strength or weight, but Yank did not even show resentment. The man of ideas had sunk to his knees and was staring blankly at the sea. The pack horse edged up to him, lifting his thirsty nose at that novel and immense water hole.

"The sea," murmured Yank. "I didn't think——"

"No, you didn't think. Just did a bull rush and trusted to luck, to your blooming optimism. That's Yank all over. Smart,

you are, clever, democratic, good enough to run a country with Mississippis and Niagaras in every block. But trusting to luck and Oh-let-us-be-joyful don't work in a dry hell like this."

Yank took Dick's sermon without rising. That sudden burst of blue water seemed to have demoralized him.

"Ain't you going to git up? Ain't you going to fight? I called you a liar. Why don't you draw a revolver on me?"

"Why should I? Besides, I don't carry one. Why should we fight? We've had a difference of opinion—you're right, I am wrong."

"Then we split. I'm going back to look for my slug. You were wrong there, too. I was not off my head. I did find one."

"You can't. You haven't water enough to cross that dry stretch. You have no condenser, no horse."

Yank's argument was interrupted by a smear of smoke and the black hull of a steamer rising above the horizon to the west.

"Wonder where she is going," said Yank. "Rather close in, isn't she?"

"Just out of Albany, most likely."

"Where is Albany from here?" asked Yank.

"That way, I should say," said Dick, giving the direction blackfellow fashion with a vertical palm.

"Then me for Albany," said Yank decisively. "If you won't keep with me, Dick, get your traps off the horse."

Dick's bluff that he could go back across the desert alone was called. He saw himself humping his swag over that driest of countries, carrying one small water bag, a supply barely sufficient for one day. He had been trapped in this predicament by Yank, by his foolish credulity in Yank's ideas.

Yank carried no revolver, but just now he was filling his pipe by slicing plug tobacco with a long-bladed knife. Despite Yank's failure to find the gold, Dick still had considerable respect for his late mate. That knife was a weapon. All the Yanks Dick had heard of—and he had heard of more than he had met—were as quick with knives as they were with revolvers. Yank had stood being called a liar, he probably would not stand being relieved of his horse, and highway robbery with this clever man of ideas who carried a knife, who was trained to knife fights, probably would mean homicide, with some uncertainty as to the victim. Dick stood, still weighing his chances, Yank kept cutting the tobacco, the steamer came closer. Dick considered that if it came to a cutthroat battle they probably would not be sighted from the steamer.

"Dick," said Yank slowly, "I kinder figure I led you into this, and I am willing to do the fair thing. Leave your traps on the horse and I'll take you wherever you want to go."

Dick agreed. He was relieved at not having to fight with this quick, strange-thinking foreigner. He still was in awe of Yank's ideas.

Dick, who now took command of the expedition, suggested they make for Esperance Bay, the port on the Bight that supplied the Dundas. It lay to the east and they made for the shore. Dick pointed out that the walking would be easier, and water no more brackish than the well they had been drinking from could be dug in the sea sand above high water. Dick's ideas now led, and they soon reached the long, low beach. Dick scored further when he found turtles in the shallows, and baked a banquet of them. The slow steamer had passed them, edging in to the coast that curved east and north. The two tired, gorged men sprawled on the sand. Though it was early in the afternoon they decided to camp and rest. They had dug good water, there were more turtles, and they would sleep to the lapping of waves.

"Wonder where she is going," said Yank lazily.

"Probably Esperance Bay."

Yank sat up suddenly, as if he were shot. Dick knew that he was—by an idea.

"How far is this Esperance Bay?"

"About a hundred miles."

"That means three hundred along the shore line. I am going to flag that steamer for a passage. I've walked enough."

Dick threw himself back and laughed.

"How? Going to hoist a signal of distress from two starving prospectors? They won't see your signal, and if they do they will say, 'Walk, you cows, walk—what's a hundred miles?' "

"I'll light a bonfire."

"What's fire to a coast skipper? He'd think it was blacks. Blackfellows can telegraph by smoke, quicker than wire, but you can't."

Yank had not answered; he had grabbed

a prospecting dish and ran down to the edge of the incoming surf. Dick followed him lazily and laughed again to see the man of ideas swirling his dish in the sea. The inside was full of sand; Yank was scouring the dish.

"Trying to prospect the Southern Ocean, Yank?"

"Shining the dish, Dick. I'm going to flag that steamer. Ever see a heliograph?"

Yank had cleaned the traces of the desert sand from the inside of the dish. The tin shone like a mirror. He began flashing the low sun, clear of all clouds, at the steamer. The spot of light danced over the dark water.

"How do you know them fellows will understand?" asked Dick, incredulous but with admiration.

"Don't. Taking a chance. Some of the officers ought to be able to read it."

The spot of light was lost in the distance; Dick thought he could see a faint illumination on the side of the steamer.

"What are you giving them? 'For Gawd's sake help two perishing prospectors?' "

"That and a bit more. Don't interrupt, Dick. I haven't slung Morse since I was a train dispatcher on the Sante Fe."

Steady as a rock, keen-eyed as his country's eagle, Yank worked his dish and that flying spot of light.

" 'Tain't enough to tell 'em we're starving," he said slowly. "That's your sundowner's way, the way of the hobo. 'Tain't U. S. Never crack on you're broke if you want anything. I'm flashing we have found a new gold field. That we need tucker at any price. They will fall for it. She seems packed with passengers—prospectors for Esperance. My yarn of big slugs and bonanza reefs will start a rush on board. Bet the very stokers will mutiny if the old man don't relieve us. She's going about."

Sure enough, the broadside of the steamer shrunk as she turned.

"And an American ship!" shouted Yank as Old Glory fluttered from the ball that had been sent to her masthead. Yank danced on the sand with glee.

"But what'll they do when they find we ain't on gold?" said Dick.

"Get sore and then admit the joke was on them. We like to be fooled, if there's ideas in the fooling. Once on board we can pull the hard luck. Maybe they will take up a collection for us."

A boat was seen approaching, the oars flashing helios of wet blades that help was coming. Dick was convinced. Yank was irresistible. Scores of black heads could be seen over the taffrail. Miners coming to these fields had money; they had to have; it was no field for a poor man. Dick could see the hat passed round for the perishers nearly left to rot, struggling out of the interior, desperately scratching for shellfish and digging for half-filtered salt water. Properly worked the tale might bring a fresh outfit, perhaps a pack horse of his own. He had no more objections, he was one with Yank.

"But we don't look perishing. Our tucker bags are still half full," he urged, not critically but helpfully, to avert the criticism of their rescuers.

"Spill them. Can't help our looks. But we've got to be out of tucker and water."

Behind the bushes, out of sight of the nearing boat, tucker and water were buried and spilled in the sand. The pack horse was given a kick that sent him flying back into the hills. Men could not be perishing with a pack horse and only a hundred miles from a town.

"Throw your boots away, Dick, and tear your clothes. By rights we ought to be naked. Now let's act weak."

When the boat touched the beach the two starving men that had been holding themselves erect collapsed from joy over their deliverance. They were too weak to answer any questions.

Dick lay on the bottom of the boat. Brandy was poured down his throat. He kept his eyes closed till he felt the boat bump the steamer. Between his lashes he saw scores of faces gazing down on him.

"Will he need a cradle?" he heard a voice ask.

"Better lash him. Poor chap is all gone," Yank answered in a voice all shaken.

Dick felt himself lifted in air and gently lowered to the deck. He tried to rise, he dared to open his eyes, a dozen men leaped upon him, not to loosen his lashings but to tighten them, to tie fresh ones.

"What the blazes—what's the game?" he roared.

He saw Yank surrounded by the ship's company. All were grinning; Yank was shaking the hand of the skipper.

"I can get up."

"But won't," said Yank. "Dick Morgan,

alias 'Black Dick,' you're nabbed for the Wagga-Wagga bank robbery, the Long Tunnel amalgam boxes, the attempt on the assay office in Bendigo and other charges."

"Yank!"

Astonishment left Dick really weak.

"I can drop my alias now. I'm a gum sucker. Detective Shaw of the Victorian Police. You led me a long chase, Dick. Had to salt the trail for him every mile, gentlemen, to nose him home with the gold he is so greedy for. I wasn't big enough to tackle him alone. Now he has prospected himself to a life sentence."

The trapped bank robber struggled to his roped feet, to fight his way overboard by sheer weight, to try and swim back to those deserts that had hidden him. When he was restrained he tried to bribe.

"I know where there is gold—big gold. Lemme go. I'll take you to a thirty-ounce slug back in Dundas."

"Wrong again," said the detective producing a lump of gold Dick recognized. "You hid it in my flour bag. It has cost the government most of that thirty ounces. But it was your helping me out and hoisting that flag did the trick, captain."

Look for more stories by Mr. Greene in early issues.

A PLEA FOR JUSTICE

CHARLES D. WETHERING of Washington is a big-game hunter and a lover of the West. He was a close friend of the late Wilbur Sanders, once United States senator from Montana, and the two used to ride and hunt together over various parts of that State.

Late one afternoon they struck a mining town which was in the throes of mob action. The infuriated populace was about to lynch a man for stealing ore. Sanders thrust into the midst of the crowd and began to argue.

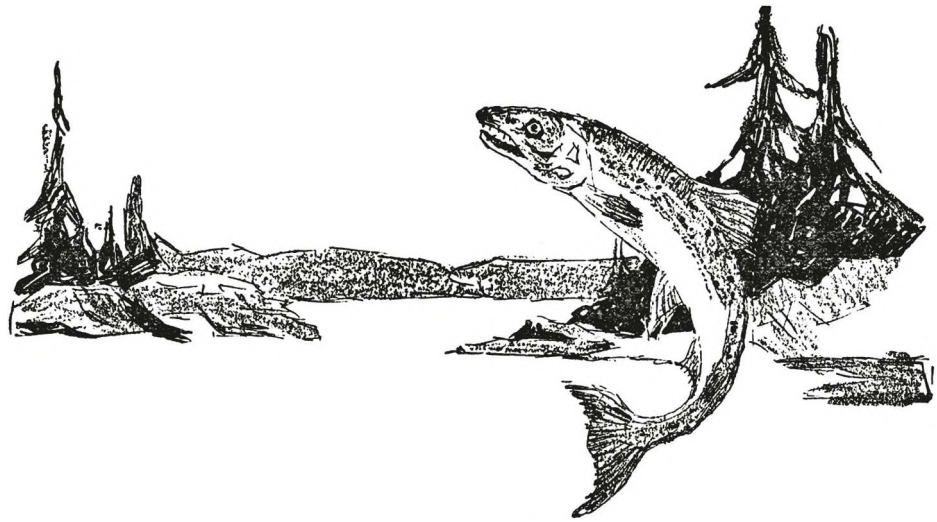
"Wait a minute!" he roared. "Stop this! Montana has been having too much of this lawlessness. We've got to get away from this abominable act of hanging men without trying them according to law. Now here! Let's give this man a fair and impartial trial by law and then hang him!"

READING BY THE EAR

BRITISH medical circles are buzzing with gratification over the invention of the "optophone," an ingenious device designed to make the blind "see with their ears." If the optophone, as is confidently predicted, proves its practical value in general service it will do away entirely with the necessity of printing books especially for the blind with the Braille system of raised letters. Instead of reading with their finger tips, as they do now, the blind will read with their ears, and the whole field of printed literature will be opened to them.

With the aid of the optophone the reader has only to apply the page of a book to the transmitting mechanism, snap a pair of receivers over his ears, turn on the current, and the machine does the rest.

The secret of the optophone lies in the use of selenium as an essential principle, selenium being a metalloid with the property of varying its resistance to the passage of an electric current according as the intensity of the light to which it is exposed varies. The vibrations of a minute particle of selenium applied to a perforated disk that revolves above the printed page produce notes of varying length and intensity. These notes are transmitted through the optophone to the ears of the listening reader as a ray of light passes across the page. Each letter of the alphabet produces in the optophone a distinct corresponding musical note. It is only necessary for the operator to learn the gradation of notes corresponding to the letters of the alphabet as a telegraph operator learns the dots and dashes of the Morse code.



The Saga of Silver King

By Kenneth Gilbert

Author of "The King of the Cañon," "The Greenhead Judas," Etc.

The king salmon outlives his kind.

JUST below the point where the river slipped off a forty-foot shelf and landed thunderously, was a deep pool. This drained in a wide riffle which lasted for more than a hundred yards, when it narrowed, stormed along in a series of rapids, then became a riffle once more; and so on until it joined with the mighty Columbia. There its identity was lost, swallowed up, and it became part of a majestic body that moved deeply and quietly, shaken out of a serene placidity but once before wedding with the sea hundreds of miles distant.

The riffles, delicately musical against the heavy diapason of the falls, shimmered in their depths with marvelous blue-and-gold effects as the early-morning sunlight, filtering through the thickly growing conifers, grew stronger. This was headwater, and when the sun blazed down at noon the glaciers which fed the stream would bleed limestone silt and ice water, and the current would run white with the consistency of skimmed milk; but now there was a certain clarity to it. The yellowish sand in its bed—vitreous-hard glacial dust—seemed packed smoothly beneath the hurrying water, yet erosion was going on. Every moment a fine layer of sand was removed and another laid in its place, but never the same; and all the while tiny pebbles were rolling with the current, so that the bed of the stream was constantly changing.

As though the summer sun, whose coming had stirred the feathered kindred to song or activity, wrought magic on the river, the bed of the stream suddenly seemed to explode!

One moment the riffles hid smooth sand and the next this sand was broken in countless spots. Tiny stones were pushed aside here and there, and a horde of minute, gnomelike creatures peopled the water.

Perhaps half an inch long, they resembled nothing else on earth. Pinkish-hued, transparent, they were all eyes, and these stared unblinkingly and round at the new world opened before them. Their bodies narrowed to a long tail, while suspended beneath was a reddish sac, the size of a june berry.

Instantly they discovered that by wriggling they propelled themselves through the water, and this they did, although apparently without thought or purpose. Food—such as they could extract from the water—would not be theirs immediately; meanwhile the sustenance in the egg sac would keep them alive. For four long months they had been buried in the sand, where Mother Sal-

mon—a fifty-pound royal chinook—had scuffed them with a flip of her broad tail, and later covered them that a rapacious trout might not dine on the coming generation, and all the time they were kept alive by the nutrition in the egg sac.

More than two thousand in number, instinct already moved them to keep close together, shoal fashion. To the unaided human eye they seemed exactly alike, yet they were not. The marvelous thing about it was that they seemed at once to recognize this disparity in size, for as they moved off they unconsciously fell in behind the biggest one of them all.

Nature had been kinder to him. Maybe he had been imparted more strength by his mother, or, perhaps, the conditions wherein he existed until his début in the world of light were more nearly ideal; at any rate, a micrometer gauge would have showed him to be the tiniest fraction of an inch longer, thicker than the others. All his life he was to maintain an advantage in size, but there was to be a further means of identification.

At this moment he was merely an alevin, and his fins and gills were undeveloped. Yet Nature was hurrying about her work of making him a king, and when he was six days old he had his first great adventure.

The swift current had carried him and his brothers and sisters far downstream, flung them, not without casualities, against rocks, until the surcease of a small backwater appeared, a marshy spot with soft, muddy bottom, and inhabited by strange races of insect larvacea. Here the harassed shoal remained, feeding upon minute forms of life as the reserve of food in their individual egg sacs became smaller.

One day the biggest alevin chose to investigate the dark depths of a water cress at the precise moment that a "devil's darning needle," or mosquito hawk, was in pursuit of an immature water beetle, scarce out of the pupæ stage. Now, the "darning needle" himself was still a thing of the water, although it would not be many days before he would crawl up on a dry stone, split off his outer shell and take to the air; but he was a fearsome object despite his size. A veritable hobgoblin of baleful eyes, his appearance was made more terrifying by a prognathous under jaw which he carried close to his stomach when not in use; when in pursuit he possessed the faculty of shooting out this jaw, and woe be to the hapless swimmer it touched!

It chanced that the royal alevin passed directly across the path of the fleeing beetle. The insect "sounded" desperately, and before the alevin could wiggle a fin, the fearful "darning needle" was upon him.

Yet the destroyer cared nothing for alevins; it wanted the beetle, and it shot out its under jaw just as the frightened bug doubled downward. The sharp-edged, bony weapon raked the alevin through the center of the dorsal fin, splitting it and scarring him. Terrified, he fled—marked for life—for although the split fin would reunite, he would always carry a white cicatrice across his back.

When he halted, he was alone.

This was no cause for alarm, however. Days went on, wonderful days wherein he shed his egg sac, and relied entirely upon his ability to forage. Food was abundant for such a minute organism as he, and he thrived and grew prodigiously.

Soon he had attained an inch and a half in length, thereby graduating from the alevin class, and becoming a fry. Still his growth went on rapidly. By late autumn he was nearly three inches in length. He had become a parr.

Never did he rejoin his brothers and sisters. The swift rush of the river kept them apart when it might have thrown them together. To be sure, he saw numerous parrs, and shoaled with them, yet eventually he put off on his own account, thus showing a kingly independence of spirit.

At last the coldness of winter shut down, although the temperature of his native waters, glacier fed for three fourths of the year, scarcely changed. Yet he became depressed and sluggish, and all the while the shell ice along the banks grew thicker and thicker.

Finally, he took to lying for long periods in the gravel, scarcely eating. As he became underconditional, his color changed—he turned almost black. Gone was the old snap and playfulness; he was in torpor. Yet it was Nature's way of fitting him for great things, and she would not allow him to die by fasting.

But there is an end to all trials. The sun touched the limit of its southern arc, and started north again, bringing in its wake the

birds and that invisible presence which heralds the reawakening of life. Sap started in the smooth-barked birches and aspens, while the evergreens began to sprout new needles of a fresh, lighter color. The air was spiced with the tang of spring—the smell of newly turned earth, thrust upward by millions of tiny shoots.

On his listless bed in the gravel the royal parr sensed the change, and life quickened within him. For the first time in many weeks he knew hunger, and with appetite came returning interest in existence. He began to regain his old liveliness.

With the season he grew, making up for the setback of the winter. Likewise his markings underwent a curious change. Nine black perpendicular bars appeared on each of his sides. He was a full-fledged parr at last.

By autumn he was more than twice the size he had been at that time the previous year. Yet he was still far from being more than a mere minnow.

Another winter and spring. Now he had become a smolt, of silvery sides, and he was acquiring other distinguishing marks of the salmon. His tail lengthened and became forked. Again he acquired a taste for companionship, and shoaled with thousands of his kind.

Minute organisms in the water interested him more than ever, and he struck at them with lightning swiftness, turning on his side in a graceful curve, prey between jaws that were daily growing stronger. The battle of life was on in earnest.

And, too, he quickly learned that his six inches of length whetted the appetites of bigger fish. New enemies he discovered, foes that had held him beneath contempt while he was a parr. He learned to avoid the bottom of deep pools, habitat of big bull trout, for whom he would make but a mouthful. Only his remarkable swiftness and agility saved him from these ferocious gluttons; and time after time he saw his fellows overtaken, crushed into helplessness, and then whirled headfirst into the maw of a killer. But he was larger and more active than his clansmen, and his destiny still lay ahead.

As the season advanced he began to know a new sensation, the migrating instinct. Apparently his kind were likewise affected, for in their uneasiness they began working downstream. The sea called them, and they followed the current, coming at last to the tremendous sweep of the Columbia which, moving slowly, carried them toward the ocean without their knowledge.

Then one day they tasted for the first time the tang of brine. They went on.

Where they went man may but guess. Perhaps they lingered about the mouth of the stream, as many will say; perhaps they did, indeed, voyage to Japan, as many more will say. In any event the sea, with its deeps, its mountains, its valleys, took them for its own.

All but the royal smolt. For some unaccountable reason he seemed loath to wander far from the fresh-water currents. He cruised offshore, plumbing pits of blackest midnight, meeting stranger and more terrifying enemies than in his wildest dreams. Great-mouthed cod, gluttonish dogfish, and now and then a slimy-tentacled squid. Sometimes, too, and he sensed that never was he in greater danger, he was pursued by a seal; but always he managed to twist and turn faster than the fishlike animal which kept at his tail.

Enemies above and enemies below. He was a grilse now, perhaps two pounds in weight, and he was fond of rising at the turn of the tide and feeding on fingerlings at the surface. He would cruise slowly a few feet deep; then, as a shoal of small fish crossed above, he would flash upward like a silvered spearhead, in a beautiful parabola. Sometimes his rush carried him completely out of water; sometimes he leaped thus in the sheer joy of living. Yet once as he sought to do this the lesson of caution was more firmly implanted in him.

He was lurking at the usual depth when a shoal passed overhead, and instantly he struck. But as he did so an ominous shadow swept above, and just at the surface he curved, bowlike, and "sounded," with a powerful churn of his tail.

None too soon. At that instant there was a resounding splash; then, with a finely drawn yelp of rage and disappointment, a great osprey, or fish hawk, winnowed off to quarter new waters, having missed by less than two inches of seizing the princeling salmon in bony talons.

Mad with fright, the grilse continued to "sound," until the water changed from light green to deep blue, and then inky blackness;

a murk unrelieved except for the oddly staring, phosphorescent eyes of deep-sea people to whom the world of light is abhorrent. He was fathoming a deep crevice with narrow shelves, and along these benches the halibut were feeding.

Suddenly, twin globules of fire close at hand attracted him, and he paused. Then the glowing orbs were quenched in blinding indigo, and instantaneously his length curved and straightened with a strong impulse, as loops of adhesive gristle, flung at him, slipped harmlessly off his scales. Behind, the baffled cuttlefish gaped its beak in soundless anger.

Straight upward the grilse went, until the hue of the water changed. Thereafter he set off on a voyage. Where he was going he did not know; doubtless instinct told him the direction where lies that mysterious gathering place of the salmon clan, if such exists. With swift, flirting strokes he shot through the water, pausing only to feed.

His progress was curiously like that of a bird, upward and downward. That is, he would "sound" on a long gradient for a depth of forty feet; then climb to the surface on an equal upward slant. On and on, tirelessly, until the Pacific swallowed him. The grilse never came back.

Yet there was a returning. On a glittering day in early summer, when the penetrating rays of the sun warmed the upper stratas of water, the mouth of the great river was the scene of activity. Along the shore on either side were sprawled skeleton-like fish traps—an arrangement of stakes and wire mesh forming a labyrinth. Into this the fish swam, but once there intelligence failed them, and they could not find the way out. From the "spiller," or innermost chamber of the trap, the finny captives were netted by the tens of thousands, loaded on a scow, and towed to a cannery.

The salmon run was on. They came from seaward like an endless flock of wild pigeons, straight to shore until they attained a forty-foot depth; then followed the contour of the coast until the river was reached. Up this they moved, to the spot of their birth, to carry on as Nature had intended; and, having fulfilled their lives, to perish mercifully.

They had been well fitted for this, their last journey. As soon as they passed from salt water to fresh they would stop eating; their digestive organs would atrophy. Therefore, they required a reserve of energy on which to travel, and so Nature had fattened them to the degree necessary for the trip. Thus, salmon destined to reach the headwaters of the Columbia, more than a thousand miles distant, were much fatter than their brethren who would work up rivers but half that length, and those which sought the upper reaches of the Yukon were fattest of all, for they must go without food while swimming two thousand two hundred miles! By what mysterious method could Nature know which was which?

In count of time, it was twelve years since a royal alevin, bigger than his fellows, had narrowly escaped death at the hands of a "devil's darning-needle" larva on the upper reaches of a mountain stream draining into the Columbia. Four years after that incident, his brothers and sisters had returned with mates to the place of their birth, spawned, and perished. Four years later their progeny had done likewise. Yet the grilse who bore a white scar on his back, and had gone to sea following an encounter with an osprey and a cuttlefish, had not returned. Wherein he was favored by Nature, for by the cycles of salmon destiny his bones eight years ago should have whitened the shore of his birthplace.

Beyond the mouth of the river, and alongshore, the trollers were taking toll. Power boats, each with two strong lines astern, were working up and down the course taken by the incoming salmon. Each line had at its end a heavy sinker and two four-inch "flashers," or metal spoons, which revolved when drawn through the water. Stout hooks, secured to a "leader" of piano wire, completed the apparatus.

These were market fishermen, but likewise there were men who took fish only for sport's sake. Only in salt water would these salmon strike a lure. One such lone angler, dressed in unsoiled khaki which proclaimed the "city fisherman," was destined that day to have the most thrilling fish story to tell.

He rowed a skiff, a trolling line secured to his wrist. Suddenly, it seemed that his arm would be jerked from its socket. A big fish had struck the hook!

Excitedly he stood up and began to fight. Now, the jerk of a fifteen-pound salmon hooking itself is enough to win respect, but this fish seemed to combine the strength of

a horse with the agility of an antelope. Too lively for a shark; and tuna or swordfish were rarities up here. The line, which he had loosed from its wooden reel, burned like a red-hot wire as it ran between his palms.

Suddenly the line sagged and astern the water broke with a churn of foam.

"Got the granddaddy of all *tyees!*" yelled the man to a near-by boat. "He'll weigh a hundred pounds!"

There was no gainsaying it. *Tyee* means chief in the Chinook jargon, and this is the name the Indians have given to the greatest and gamest of all salmon. "King," is the white man's name for the same fish. This was in truth a king of his kind, which produces each year fish weighing fifty to seventy-five pounds.

Frantically the man reeled in the line, hand over hand, for it slacked as the fish charged at the boat. There was every likelihood that the big salmon would shake the hook from its mouth, unless the line was kept taut.

Abeam, less than thirty feet distant, the water erupted again, violently, as the great captive sought to free himself. Like a torpedo he shot clear, then smashed flat on the surface in a smother of foam. Five feet long he seemed, and deep and thick of body; bright as new silver, and with a dark-green back and hollow beaklike jaw. The glimpse of him was but momentary, yet the man saw that across the fish's back was a white scar.

The one-time alevin had returned, as the kingliest salmon these waters had seen in years. By some twist of fate his homecoming had been postponed until he had attained giant proportions. Where he had been, why he was detained, these were secrets of the sea.

Failing in his struggle, he "sounded" seaward; then, having attained the greatest depth possible, swung sharply to the right. The man with the line found there was no stopping the fish.

Now it chanced that between the boat and where the king veered was a needlelike pinnacle of rock, and presently the *tyee* found himself jerked up short when the line caught in a crevice. The pain maddened him, and he surged forward. A shock, and then he swam unhampered, save for the hook with six feet of wire leader dangling from his jaw.

The man sorrowfully reeled in the parted line, and cursed feelingly. For it was but little comfort to know that he had for the telling the story of the greatest salmon he had ever seen—and which got away.

Before nightfall, however, the king found himself swimming around and around, puzzled, in a strange maze of wire netting. He had gone upriver, despite his tussle with the fisherman, for the paternal instinct would not be denied, and, like thousands of his fellows, he had fallen victim to a skillfully contrived fish trap. With him swam his mate, also royal in size, yet smaller than her lord. How she had found him again, after his escape from the fisherman, there was no explaining.

The size of the king attracted the attention of the two trap watchmen.

"Biggest *tyee* I ever saw," commented one. "We'll lift the trap to-morrow. Bet you ten dollars that he weighs a hundred and twenty-five."

The other shook his head.

"Nearer a hundred," he guessed. "I'll take that bet."

Yet the wager never was to be paid. Not long after midnight two wide-beamed boats noiselessly approached the trap. The watchman on duty heard a sound and turned just in time to "go out" in a blaze of shooting stars as a marlinspike descended on his head. In the shack his mate awoke when a hairy hand closed on his throat, and presently he was helplessly bound and gagged. Thereafter the fish pirates went leisurely about their task.

Through the "spiller" of the trap, with its thousands of milling captives, they drew a purse seine, so called because it is made exactly like an old-fashioned purse, "puckering string" and all. When the mouth of the seine was closed, one side of the trap was cut away, so that the catch could be pulled through. It was the intention of the pirates to drift off with the current, and load their boats in the lee of an island.

When they had gone, and the great gaping hole in the web remained, the king salmon and his mate, with others—for the haul was not a clean one—swam through it to liberty. They had been sulking near the bottom, and the edge of the purse seine had scraped over them.

Fortune was even kinder. As the king passed through, the wire leader hanging from

his jaw snagged in the broken mesh, and a second later he was freed of the encumbrance, although his lip was torn. He moved upstream with the finny hordes, all bent on the same errand, urged by the same mysterious impulse—to seek the waters of their birth.

On a flat rock at the edge of the stream, where the current swirled inward, crouched a bulky figure, peering intently into the water. A huge black bear, with a taste for salmon, had discovered that the run was on, and he was gorging himself.

He stiffened, for the greatest salmon he had ever seen was approaching, unaware of danger. A fish that would need a tremendous lifting stroke to be taken from the water. The bear struck, putting all his strength into the blow.

The giant *tyee*, startled, and goaded by the pain of the claw hooked into his skin, gave a mighty lunge. By all rules of bear fishing he should have been snatched from the water, yet one hundred pounds of muscular activity is not to be juggled so easily. A precarious position the black-furred fisherman was in at best, and, at the broncho-like leap of the *tyee*, bruin found himself jerked off his balance. Into the ice-cold river he went with a splash, and almost instantly emerged, but without his trophy.

Thereafter he moved away, shaking himself in high ill humor, his fishing ardor cooled. The *tyee* frenziedly continued his upriver journey, trailed by his mate.

A week later the riffles below the falls which marked headwater, and up which even a salmon could not go, were alive with big fish.

The eggs of the king's mate were left in a hollow which she gouged out with her hooked jaw and forked tail. Thereafter the king covered them with milt; and sand and fine gravel were scraped over them.

Nothing remained, then, but to mount guard—and await starvation's end, for they had tasted no food after leaving tidewater. The days passed and slow death came to the female. Bruised by rocks during the upriver passage, and attacked by fresh-water parasites, she was content at last to lie restfully on a sand bar, where scavenger birds found her, with cries of excitement. But the king lived on and savagely wreaked vengeance on venturesome trout which approached the royal incubator.

Of tremendous vitality, he stayed on and on until the others had gone; and maybe out of sheer admiration the gods relented and spared him the commonplace fate of his kind. His hour struck as though with the crash of giant cymbals.

It was a hot, still afternoon, with heat devils dancing on the hills beneath a fleckless sky. A wrinkled Indian, leading a horse, came by the riffles, and his eyes widened as he caught sight of the bulky king.

He knew that no bait would tempt the big *tyee*, and he had no spear. But from the handle of his hunting knife he unwound several feet of stout copper wire, which he made into a snare. Then, cautiously wading into the riffles, he approached the big fish.

Yet the king was wary. Time after time he flashed away, but always duty drew him back to his post of guard when the Indian paused. The man knew that with patience the biggest salmon he had ever seen would be his.

As he worked there was in his ears the thunder of the falls, and for that reason the growing rumble of a deeper thunder went unnoticed. He did not observe that over the lip of the canon's upper end there loomed a black cloud which seemed to hang almost to earth, and that immediately below it there raced at locomotive speed a wall of water twenty feet tall, bearing on its crest broken trees and logs that were tumbled and lashed as though they were toothpicks.

For a space of ten minutes the sun was obscured, and rain poured as if from barrels; then all was bright and wet and calm once more, with the flood rumbling away in the distance down the valley like a Titan chariot.

The falls still poured water, but the scene below was changed as though by magic. Gone were Indian and horse, and gone were the ancient salmon beds, gouged clean to bed rock by the mighty scraper that had passed; nor until the hurrying river had covered the naked stone with fine sand and gravel would they be fit to breed the finny hordes which Nature destined to seek the sea.

Gone, too, was the king who, having forestalled Nature's ways for the span of two generations of his kind, had at last come home.

Talks With Men

By Martin Davison

VII.—ON HAVING GOOD MANNERS.

THERE are three current misconceptions as to good manners. One is that "they don't cost you anything."

The second is, "that they don't get you anywhere." The third is that that they can be learned from books of etiquette.

The second is, "that they don't get you anywhere." The third is that they can be learned from books of etiquette.

Good manners cost a good deal. They cannot be laid on and off like an overcoat. They must be worn at all times and in all places to have real value. They cost a lot. They cost self-control, they cost the effort to keep in good temper, they cost still more in an imaginative effort to put oneself in the other fellow's place and sympathize with him. To have good manners the vigilance must be unremitting. The cost is high.

The dividends they pay are enormous. Popularity is the reward of good manners. Popularity makes a man's good points shine out and casts his weak points into shadow. Popularity can put a man anywhere. It can take a man out of a teller's cage and make him president of a bank. It can lift him out of the poor quarter of a city and make him governor of the State. This is the real, genuine popularity. Not the kind that money or gifts can buy.

AS for learning the art of courtesy—it is a lifework. Some are more gifted than others, but all who achieve real politeness have striven consciously for it and sacrificed something for it.

The books of etiquette are merely sets of rules. Some of the best of them give the underlying reasons for the rules, but that is all. Can you learn to play golf from a book? Can you learn the violin that way? Good manners may only be learned by practice. To be really courteous a man must put a lot of his real self in an effort to make those about him at their ease and comfortable. It is a matter which requires creative, intelligent thought as well as keen observation and discrimination. I can't tell you how to be courteous. Every situation and every person asks for a different sort of tact. I can, however, give you a few instances of really good manners.

WHEN I was a good deal younger than I am now I was at dinner in the most magnificent and exclusively fashionable club I had ever seen. It is one of the famous ones of the world. The men I dined with were richer, older and wiser than I, and I was so absorbed in an effort to keep up my end of the conversation I paid no attention to what I was doing with my elaborate array of forks, so that when the fish was carried off and the roast put on, I had no fork to eat it with. I was too bashful to interrupt the conversation and so I sat there trying to appear at ease while the good Southdown mutton cooled before me. The gentleman at my right was a very prominent and very popular man. Every one who knew him swore by him, as the saying is, and up to that time I had never quite been able to understand why, for his style was cool, distant, and anything but effusive. I was now to discover both the secret of much of his popularity and of what constitutes courtesy as well. I saw his hand appear from beneath the damask cloth and lay the proper fork before me, then withdraw itself silently; all the while its owner leaned attentively toward the other diner and maintained an uninterrupted flow of conversation. To say that I was grateful is putting it mildly.

Here is another illustration of the meaning of good manners. I was in the waiting room of a hospital talking to an idle ambulance surgeon when a lady was brought in suffering from an embarrassing calamity. She was dressed for the opera and very good looking. But clothes and looks were little to her then for she had choked on a bone and was threatened with suffocation. She was about forty-five and was attended by a younger man—a nephew. While the surgeon grappled with the bone, a clerk got her pedigree from the young man. As the question of her age was advanced I saw her eyes roll anxiously toward the young man who was answering the inquiries—the lady, of course being unable to speak for herself.

"Thirty years old," said the young man with anxious sincerity. He did not make the mistake of glancing even for a second at the lady whose eyes now shone with gratitude. Whatever other qualities that young man may have had, he had one that would make his path through the world an easy one—he had good manners.

Another instance. The Western sheriff was a man of rough appearance who drank his coffee out of his saucer. When he brought the handcuffed murderer out of the Panamint Desert to the railroad station, he not only gave him a tin dipper full of water before he moistened his own alkali-cracked lips, but he placed a cigarette in the murderer's mouth and lit it for him.

I COULD multiply instances of good manners, but these are enough to give the general idea. The etiquette books will give the technique of the thing, but the technique is no use unless the heart is in it. Dandified airs and overlabor of style are bad manners. To quietly give a lady a seat in the subway is much better manners than an athletic dash to pick up a flapper's fallen handkerchief. To boast of one's physical superiority is bad, to boast of superior cleverness, worse, to adopt a holier than thou attitude, worst of all.

A man whose spirit is religious in the broadest sense is almost sure to have good manners. I do not mean that he is to be a Methodist, a Baptist, or indeed, attend any church at all. The fine essence of religion, the thing that is the vital spark in all the creeds, is respect and veneration for the intangible things of the spirit and for that spark of the divinity that burns somewhere in every living creature. Without this, the poetry and beauty fades out of life and courtesy becomes a hollow sham. With this quality, Emerson, living all his days in a little New England village, was the finest gentleman on two continents and perhaps the best-loved personality of his generation.

To practice good manners just for the sake of material advancement, if that were all that came of it, would not be so important. It is fortunately true that "manners make the man" and a steady practice of the art of courtesy is sure to make a finer man and a better-ordered, more beautiful world.

The Unusual Adventures of the Texan Wasp

By James Francis Dwyer

Author of "The Black Hounds of Correze," "The Iron Chest of Giovanni the Grand," Etc.

XIII.—THE LAST GAMBLE OF ROBERT HENRY BLANE

Home calls insistently. And the Texan Wasp resolves to heed the call. He hurries to the throne of Lady Luck, perched above the blue of the Mediterranean, with a farewell petition. She smiles. She grants his suit, and more. For to the fortune she flings at his feet she adds such happiness as he had never thought to win.

TO Robert Henry Blane, alias The Texan Wasp, had come the home hunger. A tremendous home hunger. It rose up within him and beat down the wanderlust. It whispered of Texas. It brought to his nose the odor of the South that he loved. It brought visions of cotton fields! Of wheat stretches! Of great plains that rolled away to the horizon.

It was a terrible thing. It woke him in the night, filling his mind with strange beliefs. He thought he could hear the whimperings of the Rio Grande. He heard the whistling winds on the Staked Plains, the songs of the negroes in the cotton fields.

It stayed with him through the waking hours. It jeered at foreign customs and manners. It ridiculed foreign food. It broke through all the cosmopolitanism bred of years in strange cities and screamed its wish without pause. It sang continuously a darky melody of the long ago:

"Sing a song o' the city;
Roll dat cotton bale!
Niggah ain't half so happy
As when he's out of jail.
Norfolk foh its oystah shells,
Boston foh its beans;
Texas foh its rice an' cawn,
But foh niggahs New Aw-leans!"

The Wasp swooped down on Marseilles and the chant came with him. It rose above the cries of street hawkers on the Cannebière. It became an obsession. It garroted all other noises and made his ears oblivious to them. He found himself repeating the chant as he walked along the street, whispering it with all the fervor of a prayer:

"Doan' yuh hyah de niggahs singin'?
Dinah, blow yo' hawn!
Back to Texas I'll be wingin'
In de golden mawn!"

He went down and stared at the ships. Big ships tied up in the Bassin d'Arenc and Bassin National. Great ships! Ships that went out to all the ports of the world! Ships that had rolled in across the Gulf of Mexico with their snouts thrust straight at Galveston. To the Galveston The Wasp knew well. Old sea battlers hunting for cotton and hides, rice and corn.

"When I go back," he growled, staring at a bull-snouted old tramp that had hooted for cargo off all the ports in the world, "I'll go on an old sea cow like her! I'll go to Galveston! Zowie! How she'll buck if she gets a norther in the Gulf! I'll——"

He broke off abruptly and stared out across the breakwater. He was a trifle startled as he reviewed his little soliloquy. What was wrong?

"Why, Robert Henry Blane," he cried, "you're just aching to go home! Get away from the water, man, or you'll start to swim across!"

He walked back to the Vieux Port, coldly reviewing his position as he traversed the Quai de la Joliette. He showed no mercy to himself. Primarily he had shouldered the guilt of another and had been made an outcast. He told himself that he did not regret the action. The guilty one was a mean, small person who took advantage of the chivalry of Blane and remained as quiet as a mouse at a cat concert. Thoughts of the fellow made The Wasp grin.

He reviewed the half hundred or more affairs in which love of adventure and hatred of the commonplace had involved him. The review stirred no sense of shame. He had taken money from an Indian maharajah to square the debts of a man who was a brother to a girl for whom Robert Henry Blane would have given his life. Was it a crime? No, answered the inner self that was marshal of the review. Eccentric and decidedly unwise, but—well, you could live it down.

Up came other escapades. Half forgotten till this moment. Remembered now because The Texan Wasp was shriving himself. Escapades in a score of capitals. An affair at Venice, another at Brussels, others at Madrid, Paris, and Amsterdam. Each slunk by, fearful of the marshal that was conducting the review. For each there was an excuse. A friend in trouble, a girl in distress, the challenge of a spring day; something, however small. And there were matters that offset other matters. For instance: The Texan Wasp had collected nothing from Colonel Ralph Coltman for the rescue of his niece from the Château of Correze. There were other unpaid debts too; many of them.

At the corner of the Rue de la République the inner self of Robert Henry Blane delivered judgment. "I don't see that there is anything to stop you from going back," it said. "Nothing really vital. Yes, yes, you have been in a few scrapes of one kind and another, but then you've helped society here and there. Don't kick yourself too hard. What about the help you gave in the affair at Carcassonne? And the difficulty with the Man from Prague at Lake Como? Don't be too sensitive. I'd go back if I really had the longing to go back, and I were you."

The Wasp took a sealskin wallet from his hip pocket and counted the contents. Houston was a long way away and ocean fares are high nowadays.

Hurriedly Robert Henry Blane fingered the contents of the wallet. There were nine bills of one thousand francs, six of five hundred, and eleven of one hundred. A total of thirteen thousand one hundred francs. A ridiculous sum. Something that one might throw into the cap of a beggar on Christmas Eve.

Again, from some melody-making plant in the back of Mr. Blane's head, came the tune! Texas was calling! Big stretches rose up before him and made him dizzy with their grandeur! Wheat fields over which the fat winds rolled like collie dogs at play! Cattle herds, moving majestically across the plains! Big men with honest hearts; women who were as true as steel. He gasped in a queer way, pulled himself together and hailed a horse carriage.

"Gare St.-Charles!" he ordered. "On your way!"

Robert Henry Blane paid off the carriage at the railway station on the rise above the city and thrust himself through the crowd before the ticket window.

"One first-class ticket to Monte Carlo," he said. "One way only."

As the train swept southward The Texan Wasp dissected the sudden inspiration that had come to him to visit the Temple of Chance. He wanted money, of course, and the tables of Monte Carlo suggested the possibility of getting coin. But, behind the desire for immediate funds, was a queer, sentimental longing to see the place where he had spoken to Betty Allerton on the day before he had taken the money from the Maharajah of Behan Gudsa to pay the gambling debts of her brother.

He recalled the words of the girl he loved. He had denied his name to her. Denied

that he was Robert Henry Blane, and she, on leaving him, had spoken words that he could never forget.

"I was wrong to speak to you," she had murmured, "but I thought that you were the man I knew. He was blamed for something that some one else did, and he went away. But—but I always believed in him."

The Texan Wasp whispered the words as the train roared toward Toulon. "'But I always believed in him,'" he said over and over again. "'I always believed in him.'"

The home hunger fed on every little scrap that came its way. It called attention to an American flag flying in a little cemetery. A boy, or perhaps a dozen boys from the U. S., sent south to recuperate, rested there in the good soil of France, the whisper of the olive groves soothing them in their long sleep.

The Wasp was alone in the carriage. He sprang to attention and saluted.

On and on roared the express. On past Toulon to Fréjus, where the Emperor Augustus sent the galleys that he took from Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium! For just a moment The Wasp had a vision of them with their sails of Tyrian blue and purple, their carved figureheads and the rows of chained oarsmen. But the longing for America, for Texas, for home chased the vision from his mind.

"Old stuff!" cried the home hunger. "Dead stuff, boy! A cotton field in August is a greater sight than any that could happen here. A Texan cotton field, boy! Wait till you go back! Wait!"

By St. Raphael and Cannes! By Antibes and Nice. Swinging past The Wasp's train, northward bound, went trains de luxe. The season was dying on the Riviera. The people who do not toil or spin, but, like the lilies of the field, sit in the sunshine, arrayed in garments that rival those of Solomon, were going up to Paris and London. The home hunger used them to its own purpose. It drew the attention of Mr. Blane to their fat paunches, to their pet dogs, to their arrogance and conceit. He stared at them, a little amazed that he had not noted their appearance before. Fat dowagers with lorgnettes, spatted old turkey cocks with monocles driven into their eye sockets. Ridiculous folk. Hanging on to their words in a queer way. All un-American. "What would they say to these in Texas?" asked the home hunger. "Look at this bird with the windowpane in his eye! Think of him ambling into the Bristol at Houston! Why, some one would throw an old shoe at him!"

On to Villefranche! And at Villefranche there occurred a miracle, as far as the home hunger was concerned.

In the anchorage, sitting in all her glory was the United States cruiser *Pittsburgh*, flying the flag of Rear Admiral Andrews!

The railway station of Villefranche is beside the water, and from the shore to the station were bunches of gobs. Scores of them! Hundreds of them! Sturdy, rolling, easy-going, merry, white-capped gobs! They were going backward and forward like ants. The cruiser had rocked in from Ajaccio and Tunis and it was the sailors' first day ashore.

Gobs! Gobs! Scores and scores o' 'em!
Gobs! Gobs! Half a hundred more o' 'em!
Gobs! Gobs! White caps on all o' 'em!
Mobs of gobs from the U. S. A.!

For just a moment Monte Carlo and the great project of raising immediate funds were forgotten. Robert Henry Blane gripped his suit case, unbolted the door and leaped out. He had a great desire to talk to folk from home.

Blane had a way with men. At the little café at the top of the hill up and down which milled the white-capped gobs he spoke to them. They were delighted to know him. Did he parley-voo? Well, he was just the guy they wanted to help 'em out. A fellow had short-changed them, a fellow right across the street and they wanted some one to help them who could slam him with his own yap.

The Wasp slammed him. Slammed him good and plenty. The fellow gave back nine francs and was told by the indignant gob to whom the refund was made that he was lucky that he didn't have his face turned into something that his mother would mistake for a boiled cauliflower.

"Say, mister," said the aggrieved seaman, addressing The Wasp, "a lot of these Frenchies think we have a printin' press on board the old lugger an' that we run greenbacks off by the thousand when the weather isn't too rough."

"Where do you hail from?" asked the amused Wasp.

"Texas."

"What part?"

"Dallas. Ann Avenue, Dallas."

"I've been in Dallas. Stopped for a week at the Park Hotel."

"Gee," gasped the gob. "You know Texas?"

"Born there," said Robert Henry Blane.

"G'wan!"

"Sure. Born in Houston."

"Say, there's a feller on the lugger from Houston. He's always talkin' of it. Hey, where's 'Skinny?' Tell him to come here. This gem'man's from his home port."

Skinny came. A long, freckled Texan, with blue eyes. Not really the cut of a sailor. The boys pushed him forward.

He stared at Robert Henry Blane for a minute without speaking, then he made a queer sort of noise by puckering his lips, a sound that expressed his amazement. "Why, you're Kenney Blane of Happy Valley!" he cried. "My brother rides range for you!"

The Wasp laughed. "Kenney Blane is my uncle," he said. "People tell me that I am like him."

"Like him?" cried Skinny. "Why, you're more like him than a one-dollar bill is to another. You've only got to go to Happy Valley some day when he's in Houston an' the punchers'll give you the outfit to carry away. But I want to shake your wing. I'm real pleased to see some one from Houston. I've been tellin' these blighters what a burg it is, but they know nothin'."

"Houston Uber Alles!" shouted a humorist from the outside of the group. "Lissen to Skinny!"

Skinny turned in the direction of the voice, wrath upon his features. "If there's any one wants to set on to Houston he can step out," he growled. "It's my town an' it's the best town I know!"

Robert Henry Blane stepped forward and took the outstretched hand of the gob. "You're my friend," he said. "What's your name?"

"Jack Graye. They call me Skinny on the craft."

"Jack," said The Wasp. "when do you have to go aboard?"

"I'm free till to-morrow mornin'," answered Mr. Graye. "I've got the evening an' the night ashore."

"Would you like to go along with me to Monte Carlo?"

"Sure."

An empty taxi came swinging along the road from the direction of Nice. The Wasp hailed it. He invited Mr. Jack Graye to climb aboard the machine, and he followed on the heels of the sailor.

The mob of jackies had increased. Fourscore of them milled around in the Petite-Corniche. They cheered Robert Henry Blane and they cheered Skinny. The Wasp was delighted. The machine sprang forward to yells of Houston Uber Alles which again stirred the ire of Mr. Jack Graye.

"Those boobs are quieter 'n stowaways when they're by theirselves," he growled. "When they get in clumps they howl like ki-yotes."

The Wasp laughed. "They have got to get fun out of something," he said. "It's a tough life."

"You've guessed it," said the sailor. "I've got another three months of it—then I'm loose."

"What are you going to do?" asked The Wasp.

"Go back to Houston!" snapped Mr. Graye. "I've got a girl there. If we can scrape the coin together we'll open a restaurant. Jest a small restaurant. I'm shy on the coin but I guess we can begin feedin' small lots of folk for a start. Our admiral started with a canoe and now he bosses a battleship."

The Wasp was amused. "I'll come in and get a plate of beans off you when you start," he said.

"Are you goin' back?" asked the sailor.

"I am if I have luck, John," said Robert Henry Blane. "And I have a hunch that I will have luck. I'll tell you. I've got the home longing bad, but Houston is a long way from here so I want money. Good old Uncle Sam will carry you there, but I've got to buy a pill box on a transatlantic boat, and the rates are high."

"They're fierce," agreed the gob.

"I took stock of my funds," went on The Wasp, "and I found I had something over thirteen thousand francs. It seems a lot of francs, but it won't make many dollars. That's why I took a train from Marseilles headed for Monte Carlo. I had a hunch that I wouldn't have contracted the homesickness if I didn't have the means of curing it. So I'm going to match the thirteen thousand against the ivory ball."

"Gee!" The eyes of Mr. Jack Graye grew large as he regarded Robert Henry Blane.

"And," continued The Wasp. "I'm becoming more certain every minute that I'll beat the ivory ball. I've got a hunch that you're a mascot. I hopped off the train

because I saw a bunch of you boys, then you strolled along and thought I was Kenney Blane. You're my mascot, John. Stick by me for a few hours, and if I beat the black-coated brigands in the joint we're going to I'll tear off a bit to help the restaurant along. That's what I wanted, a mascot. I feel it in every bone of my body."

The Wasp leaned forward and spoke to the chauffeur. "Let her out!" he ordered. "I'm in a hurry to make some money. Feed her, boy, feed her!"

Now they are very exact at the Shrine of the Goddess of Chance, very particular about the worshipers who come to woo the lady's favors. The smooth and soulless folk who run the joint are particular about the folk whom they fleece.

They refused admittance to Mr. John Graye because he was wearing the finest uniform in the world. He could enter the vestibule, but could go no farther.

The Texan Wasp was annoyed. "But I want him in!" he cried indignantly. "I must have him in!"

The suave underpirate who controlled the bureau where passports are examined and admission tickets issued, regretted that this was impossible. "It is not allowed," he murmured, bowing low before The Wasp. "For monsieur, yes. Monsieur, to the eyes of a child, is a distinguished American. For the sailor it is different. No person in uniform is allowed in the gambling rooms."

"So," growled The Wasp.

Robert Henry Blane retired for a moment and talked the matter over with the man from his home town. Mr. Graye showed no hatred toward the controlling forces of the Société Anonyme des Bains de Mer, who operate the gambling joint. The sailor was a philosopher.

"Well, I've had the ride out here an' I'm thankful for that," he said cheerfully. "It's pretty country, too."

"But I want you as a mascot!" cried The Wasp. "I've got a hunch that you'll bring me luck. You're from Houston and you mistook me for Kenney Blane."

The sailor looked at the seats on the Place du Casino, then he addressed Robert Henry Blane. "At times I'm a religious man," he said quietly, "and if any one wants to make war against the heathen and the sinful I'm with 'em. Brother, if you want to go into that place and smite 'em hip an' thigh I'm goin' to camp on one o' those seats an' pray that you'll chase 'em into their holes. Go to it! If you can send me word how the battle goes, do so. But don't worry. I'm prayin' for you, an' I'll be here when the fight is over. Go at 'em, brother, I'm goin' to sit down here an' pray!"

He took the hand of The Wasp, shook it fiercely and turned to the seat. Robert Henry Blane ran swiftly up the steps and entered the Casino. The hunch had grown stronger. Some one from Houston was praying for him, some one who, like himself, wished to go back to the city on Buffalo Bayou that they both loved.

The Wasp checked his hat and cane and made for the holy of holies where the ivory ball sings its song of defiance as it rolls around the torture wheel. The Wasp was eager for battle. He hummed a line or two from the old-time chantey as he passed through the door. "Texas foh its rice an' cawn, Dinah blow yo' hawn!"

He bought chips. Five thousand francs' worth of chips. It was to be a big attack. A fight for America, for Houston, for his own home!

The Wasp waited. He closed his eyes for a second and tried to visualize a number to which he could pin his luck. There was to be no combination betting; none of the methods of play that the timid and cautious gambler follows to delay the inevitable end. The Wasp wanted the long odds against the long chances.

And, as the big Texan sat with closed eyes the number that he sought came to him! Came to him in an amazing way! Startling, unreal, a little terrifying! There flashed up before his eyes the picture of the Hudson River on a day in spring. He and Betty Allerton had journeyed up to Nyack, and at Nyack they had hired a boat, bought oranges and soft drinks and had pulled away into the soft, blue mist that covered the stream. They had picnicked beneath a big tree on the opposite bank, and on the tree he, Blane, had cut their initials and the date.

It was the carving of the date that came up before him. It was August 8, 1908, and he had carved it on the tree as 8|8|8.

He tossed one hundred and fifty francs in red-and-white chips on number 8.

The spinner cried out, *"Rien ne va plus!"* and the ivory ball started in the opposite direction to the wheel in which it spun. The

devotees sat with shoulders crouched and waited.

The wheel slowed. The ivory ball wabbled drunkenly, twisting the nerves of the wide-eyed gamblers who waited. There was a queer maliciousness about the thing; a spiteful malignity, a vicious desire to further stretch and strain the tautened nerves of the haggard bettors.

It dropped. Dropped into the little compartment that bore the number 8! Robert Henry Blane thought of the sailor on the seat in the Place du Casino.

The wolf-faced croupier tossed showers of chips across the table. At thirty-five to one it was a tidy killing. Five thousand two hundred and fifty francs were due to Robert Blane.

The big American stacked his chips up and let the original stake lie. Roughly he calculated the distance between Monte Carlo and Houston, Texas. The first lap to Bordeaux was five hundred and eighty miles. From Bordeaux to New York—the idea of going up the Gulf on a tramp being impractical—was three thousand two hundred; and from New York to Houston was another two thousand and odd. Roughly speaking he was six thousand miles from home!

The Wasp made a quick calculation. Reckoning current train and boat rates he was somewhere off New York as the result of the first wager.

That is, the spiritual Mr. Blane was. The real Blane, face drawn, so that the little scar on the right jaw showed white as he leaned forward, waited for the ball to settle.

It settled into number 29. The rake of the croupier fell upon the American's pile of chips.

Blane staked again. Again the nerves of the gamblers were drawn out as the wheel revolved.

And once again the spirit ship that was carrying the soul of Robert Henry Blane was halted. The ball dropped into 19.

The Wasp clung to his fancy. Again he bet the limit on 8. Around went the wheel and the chattering ball, and this time the goddess smiled. Chips by the score came flying toward him as the croupier paid. Blane calculated quickly. The spiritual Blane was somewhere close to the city he loved! He had won more than his fare to Houston!

Hurriedly he scribbled a note and called a messenger. The note read:

> Good for you. Keep it up! I am over ten thousand francs to the good. Mascots help.
> BLANE.

"Give this note to an American sailor sitting on a bench in the Place du Casino," he ordered.

The messenger was back as the ball recorded a loss to the big Texan. Breathlessly he handed a reply to The Wasp. "The sailor was walking about, sir," he whispered. "I gave it to him and he gave me this to give to you."

The Wasp opened the note and stared at it in astonishment. The sang-froid that characterized his every action was swept away. He stared at the scrap of paper, a little bewildered. Something that savored of necromancy had happened. The note that the messenger had brought to him ran:

> Puzzled. Didn't know you were here. Would be thankful for your help. All hell loose! Your assistance worth anything to me. 37.

The Wasp beckoned to the messenger. "Who did you give my note to?" he breathed. "To a sailor in American naval uniform?"

"Yes, sir. He wasn't sitting on the bench. He was walking around in front of the casino door."

The Wasp sprang to his feet. Something had gone wrong. It was impossible to think that Mr. Jack Graye of Houston had become metamorphosed into the greatest man hunter of Europe during the short absence, yet the note came from the extraordinary sleuth. Furthermore as proof that it was not written by Graye, the writer was at sea as to the meaning of Blane's reference to winnings and mascots.

With long strides The Wasp reached the door of the Salle de Jeu, dashed bareheaded through the vestibule and out onto the Place. Standing in the hot sunlight, head to one side, regarding the carvings above the entrance was an obvious American jacky. A sturdy, muscular jacky whose white cap was cocked jauntily on a bullet-shaped head.

The appearance of The Wasp brought the sailor's gaze from the carvings to the door. Cold, merciless eyes that looked like brown-tinted and hard-frozen hailstones fell upon Robert Henry Blane, then the jacky, evidently possessed of a sudden resolve, stepped forward and saluted.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, speaking in a loud voice. "I'm new to this joint. Could

you tell me if I could give 'em a chance to rob me of a dollar or two?"

Blane was alert. He was facing the great detective. No. 37, with the shrewdness that made him the cleverest hunter that Dame Justice had in her employ, had seized upon the presence of the U. S. S. *Pittsburgh* at Villefranche to deck himself out in a splendid disguise. There were American sailors everywhere, so the man hunter had begged or borrowed a uniform and, as a harmless-looking gob, was out hunting for prey.

"You are not allowed into the gambling rooms," answered The Wasp, taking the cue from the sleuth. "You can enter the vestibule, but you cannot play with the wheel."

Blane smiled, and the imitation sailor smiled back at him. "I am in room No. 61 at the Hotel Hermitage," whispered the sleuth. "Come there, quick!"

"I cannot," murmured The Wasp. "I am backing my luck. It's in to-day." Lifting his voice he said: "I'm sorry that they will not allow sailors into the gambling rooms. Very sorry. Sometimes it is easy money for rovers who wish to get home. To-day it is my day. I am trying to get my fare to Texas and it looks as if I would get it and a bit over."

The low voice of the great detective protested against the decision. "Come to the hotel," he whispered. "It will be worth more than you can win from the wheel."

"I cannot! I've got a hunch!" breathed The Wasp.

"Come for ten minutes till I explain!" cried the man hunter, trying hard to keep his voice to the level of a whisper. "Blane, I want you! I want you!"

Robert Henry Blane looked at the eyes of the man whose capacity for hunting down evildoers was known from Tangier to Kara Bay and from Cap Matapan to Malin Head. Into the cold, merciless eyes had crept a feeling of wrath that was new and strange to them. The lipless line that represented the mouth was softened slightly. No. 37 was, for a moment, strangely human. He was asking help.

"What's wrong?" questioned The Wasp.

"Everything!" gasped the sleuth. "Come and help, Blane! Come and help! Follow me to my room. Forget your luck. I'll promise you four times more than you can win. Come!"

The sleuth turned away. Robert Henry Blane, strangely impressed by the pleading of the man who, up to that moment, had never shown the slightest emotion, stepped back into the vestibule. He recovered his hat and cane from the cloakroom and walked out through the big doors that gape wide for the foolish worshipers of Lady Luck.

Mr. Jack Graye of Houston was sitting on a seat, "actively mascoting" as the sailor expressed it.

"How did you do?" asked the gob.

"I'm over ten thousand to the good," answered The Wasp. "Your cut is a thousand francs."

The sailor whistled to express his astonishment. He started to speak, but Blane interrupted him.

"I knocked off for the present," explained The Wasp, "because I got a call to help a man. He—well, he's the greatest detective in the world. He wants a little assistance from me, and as I owe him a lot, I'm inclined to give it. But I'm going to give you your share of my winnings. Hold out your hand. There's your thousand for acting as a mascot."

The sailor stood with the money in his hand and looked at Robert Henry Blane. "Was the 'tec the feller you were speaking to at the door a few minutes ago?" he asked.

"Yes, why?"

"Nothing. I knew he wasn't from our craft although he carried the rig. It's his disguise, eh?"

"That's so," said Blane.

Again the sailor looked at the money in his calloused palm. "What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"I don't know," said The Wasp. "I'd hate to drag you into any trouble, so I suppose we had better part for the moment. I'm sorry I couldn't keep on when you were doing such good work as a mascot. If——"

The sailor thrust the handful of hundred-franc bills back upon The Wasp. His jaw tightened and a fighting glow appeared in his blue eyes. "Look," he said, "I don't want any money. That wouldn't be right. I just thought to have a ramble round with you 'cause you were from my home town, but if you want to beach me now it's not goin' to cost you anything. Not much. Here's the coin. I had a nice ride here an' I'm pleased to know you. Every Blane I ever heard of in Texas was a gentleman, an' I think you're one."

The Texan Wasp looked for a moment at the honest face of the sailor, then he laughed boyishly. "Keep the money," he said. "We're going to stay together. I guess there will be something for you to do before the night is out. Shake. Jack. I didn't want to pull you into trouble."

"I was born in trouble," said the sailor quietly. "Father was a ranger, an' a Mexican crook put a bullet into him the morning I was born. He missed seeing me by about two hours."

Mr. Jack Graye, of the U. S. S. *Pittsburgh*, was introduced to No. 37 in the latter's room at the Hotel Hermitage. The cold eyes of the great sleuth looked hard at the sailor as The Wasp told of their meeting. The man hunter smiled.

"I'm pleased to know you, Mr. Graye," he said. "I think I saw you on the Place du Casino. You were looking me over. What was wrong?"

"Your shoes," said the sailor promptly.

"What is wrong with them?"

"Nothin' is wrong with 'em except that they're not American shoes. That's sayin' a lot, as far as I'm concerned, but it mightn't mean much to you. It'd give you away, though."

The sleuth laughed good-naturedly. "You're right," he said. "They're not American shoes. I bought them in Stockholm. Next time I masquerade as an American sailor I'll see to it."

He turned to Robert Henry Blane and the smile slipped from his face. He was the cold, merciless hunter of men. The nose, bred of battles, the lipless line that denoted the tight-drawn mouth, the chin that had thrust peace to the winds, showed to the gray eyes of The Wasp as they had appeared on the day he had first met the sleuth in that same abode of gilded sin in which, strangely enough, they had again come together after years of wandering.

"Blane," said the sleuth, "you have helped me now and then. Helped me in a way that I can never repay. Starting as an enemy you have become a friend, a friend I admire and respect. I've chalked a lot up to your credit. I don't forget Seville and Carcassonne. I don't forget Como, and a few other places. If——"

"I'll wager," said The Wasp, smiling uneasily under the praise of the detective, "that you're going to decorate me with some foreign order. Make me a Boob of the Balkans or a Check of Czecho-Slovakia. Please don't."

"I want your help," said the detective. "Listen—your friend can hold his tongue, I suppose?"

"I think so," answered The Wasp.

"Well, I'll tell the matter in a few words. There has been on the Riviera for a few days a person who was known as Monsieur Berton. He was traveling incognito. French papers made no allusion as to who he was; the mayors and other officials were instructed to take no notice of his presence in an official way. He was resting. As a matter of fact he walked along the Croisette at Cannes where scores of folk passed who knew his features but, as they were polite folk, they made no gesture to signify that they knew him. That is the wonder of the Continent.

"He came on to Mentone to see an elderly relative who has a villa there, and, this morning, he motored to Monte Carlo. Let me tell you what happened. The person I am speaking of arrived with an aid-de-camp on the Place du Casino about eleven forty-five. The aid-de-camp went into the Casino to fix up the little trivialities concerning admission so that Monsieur Berton would not be annoyed, and, while he was away, something happened."

The detective paused and looked at The Wasp.

"Something happened," he repeated. "A man came from the entrance to the executive offices of the Casino and bowing before Monsieur Berton asked him to kindly follow him. The—I mean Monsieur Berton, thought that the aid-de-camp had arranged it so that he was to enter by the administration building so he left the car without giving the matter a second's thought. That was the last seen of him."

There was a little silence, then Robert Henry Blane spoke. "Pardon me," he said. "I came down from Marseilles to-day, so I am not altogether conversant with the élite of the Riviera. Possibly I would be more interested in Monsieur Berton if I knew who the gentleman was when he was at home."

For a moment the man hunter debated with himself, his keen, cold eyes upon The Wasp.

"Blane," he began, speaking very slowly, "you are useful to me in this because you are, outside myself, the only person that

has met face to face the man who is at the bottom of this kidnaping. You spoke to him at Lake Como and I was with you when we captured him at Florence. I wired you that he had escaped."

The Wasp whistled softly. "The Man from Prague?" he said.

"The same. He is here in Monte Carlo at this minute. I know. He cannot escape. We have not made the kidnaping of Monsieur Berton public for the simple reason that it would shake the political foundations of Europe, but we have every road out of this town guarded. If nothing happens this evening we will have to make the matter known broadcast, but I hope something will happen."

"But you haven't answered my question?" protested Robert Henry Blane. "You have told me the assumed name of this person, but——"

"He is the most popular young prince in Europe," interrupted No. 37.

"You mean," began The Wasp, "that the prince——"

"Yes, I mean just what you think," again interrupted the sleuth.

"Suffering bobcats!" cried Robert Henry Blane. Then, after a pause, he said: "And you think that The Man from Prague has got him?"

"I'm certain of it! I intercepted papers that told me The Man from Prague was here. That's what brought me hotfoot. The kidnaping took place ten minutes or so before I arrived. The aid-de-camp had sufficient sense to keep his head, otherwise all Europe would be in an uproar. He couldn't believe it at first, then he told the authorities, pledging them to secrecy. Now we're trusting to some extraordinary happening to pull us through. If the miracle doesn't take place the fat is in the fire. There will be scare headlines in to-morrow's papers that will astonish the world."

The great detective rose. The fierce and rather terrifying look of battle was upon his face. He tramped up and down the room, looked at his watch, wheeled and confronted Robert Henry Blane.

"Listen, Blane," he said hurriedly. "I said a few minutes ago that you and I are the only two persons who have seen the face of this mysterious devil. I was really wrong in saying that. I slipped into a swoon the moment I had handcuffed him, and before I got out of the hospital the authorities had shipped him away. Now you spoke to him face to face, didn't you?"

"I did," answered The Wasp. "I not only spoke to him but I managed to put over a jolt that sent him to the mat."

"You'd know him?" questioned the sleuth.

"Anywhere!"

"Then for the sake of everything that you hold sacred go out and hunt for him. Take your friend and go at once. You are lucky, Blane. At the present moment I'm altogether at sea. I'm dog-goned tired and disgusted. Go to it. Phone here if anything happens. Some one will take your message and find me."

An extraordinary town is Monte Carlo. The ordinary population of the little gambling hell is under ten thousand, but it has twoscore hotels, many of which are palaces of the premier order. It is a city de luxe, where the only spinning is done by the wheel in the casino. The visitors eat; they drink; they gamble. They swagger in fancy raiment on the magnificent terrace with its incomparable view of the coast line running toward the Italian frontier, while to the right is the baby port of Monaco with the palace of the prince on the great rock.

Robert Henry Blane and Mr. John Graye ate an early dinner, then, in the soft evening light, they mingled with the élite. A dozen times The Wasp had suggested to his companion that the evening might bring trouble, but the sailor shook his head each time that Robert Henry Blane hinted at a parting.

"This geek you're huntin' for is a rough-house guy, isn't he?" he asked.

"He's inclined that way," answered the amused Blane.

"Well, I'd like to stay around. I've got the night off an' I like you."

They talked of Texas as they wandered round, the cool, gray eyes of The Wasp searching the faces of passers-by. And the home hunger grew greater as the conversation swept from El Paso to Galveston, and from Brownsville to Chillicothe.

They climbed the hill toward Beausoleil, and from the heights looked down upon the Mad City of Chance. Below them was a sea of lights that attracted the butterflies who buzzed around the wheel. An illuminated Place of Sin.

The sailor was ruminative. He looked at the glittering lights that ran like scattered

diamonds on a pall of velvet down toward La Condamine and up over the hill on which stands the palace of the son of that dead prince who, curiously enough, studied the family life of fishes while the croupiers were studying the human fishes that drifted into their net.

"There was a place just across the Rio Grande from Laredo that was something like this," said Mr. Graye. "A lot o' lights an' tinsel an' music. Women with big combs stuck in their hair an' their eyes heliographin' for all they was worth. Wheels spinnin' so fast that the croupiers had to be changed every ten minutes 'cause they were tired out rakin' in the spoil."

"Yes," murmured The Wasp as the sailor paused.

"They cleaned out a feller from Laredo," said the gob. "Cleaned him out so that he couldn't get his shoes shined without pawnin' his socks. He was a babe to those birds. He was what they call a 'minor' 'cause his old man an' old lady still had possession of him 'cordin' to the law. Well, his old man gathered a bunch of the boys together an' they went over there one night. Called themselves the 'Wrath o' God Brigade.' They fell on the wheels an' the chaps that spin the wheels an' the fellers that raked in the spoil, an' when they got through with the joint you couldn't have sold it to a Chinaman. The señoras with the heliographin' eyes took the first train for Mexico City an' never came back."

The two Texans drifted down to the Avenue de la Costa and then through the gardens that are maintained by the society that runs the Casino. Exquisitely kept gardens with strange, exotic trees and shrubs gathered from all the corners of the earth. Lady Luck, as we see her at Monte Carlo, must be approached with politeness. The Casino folk have guarded against any rough stuff. They have built a bower for the dame that takes away the breath of the gambler, and if he as much as raises his voice a uniformed attendant will touch his arm and softly whisper "Hush!"

The Wasp and the sailor circled the Casino and reached the Terrace overlooking the sea. It was crowded. Men and women in evening dress walked slowly to and fro while a band played softly an air from "La Belle Hélène." The sea of illuminated jade breathed softly; lost winds from far-off places—winds with the hot smell of the desert—came sniffling landward like little dogs that had lost their masters.

Chatter! Chatter! Chatter! A score of tongues. High-pitched French, snappy Italian, drawling English, throaty tongues from the North—Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch—tongues that told of fogs that thicken throats; musical Spanish, Americanese—"the electrified English" as some one described it; swift-flung Russian. A tremendous gabble. No one listened to the music. They were all busy talking of the great game of profit and loss as played at the Casino—profit for the Casino and loss for the players.

"I was a thousand ahead," came a whining protest, "and when——"

"But listen to me!" cried an interrupter. "Listen to me. I play a system and I——" He passed out of hearing, but the jabber of the resort rose to the little stars.

"Some one from Naples made a killing! A duke, I think. How did you do? No good? There's a fat man playing at table seven. He——"

In all tongues rose brag and plaint, gossip, lies, and wheedling chatter. Robert Henry Blane and Jack Graye seemed to be the only tongue-tied persons on the pebbled stretch where fatigued gamblers take the air. The ears of the Texan Wasp were gathering in the empty chatter, analyzing, experimenting, rejecting. The hearing organs of Monsieur Blane were extraordinarily acute; his knowledge of tongues was unparalleled.

He gathered up the scraps of talk like a hungry coyote. He had a belief, a strange, unaccountable belief that something would come to him. He thought that some whiplash of sound would rise out of the never-ending jabber and give him a clew to the trail he sought.

Up and down went the two men from Houston. The sailor divined that his companion was listening, and he remained silent. Mr. Graye was not a talkative person at any time.

Backward and forward with the throng. Turn and turn again. The tongues of all the earth chattering on one theme. Of gold!

> Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold!
> Bright and yellow, hard and cold!

And that for which Robert Henry Blane waited suddenly came to him. Came to him out of the sea of chatter. It shot out of the

babel and struck his ears, stinging him as if it were a hot wire!

It was the whiplash of sound for which he had curiously waited!

Six words of protest in the slithering Magyar dialect that for all time in the mind of The Texan Wasp would be associated with The Mystery Man from Prague! Up out of the chatter they came, arresting, thrilling, stinging! A little lariat of sound that set the heart of Robert Henry Blane pounding madly!

He didn't pause. He kept right ahead, but his cool gray eyes located the source. On the seaward side of the band stand two men had halted, two tall men in evening dress, and it was from one of these that the exclamation in slithering Magyar had come.

The Wasp and the sailor walked to the end of the Terrace, and Blane spoke to his companion in a whisper. "We have struck a trail," he said. "We passed our man near the band stand."

"Is that so?" asked the sailor. "Well, let's get him."

Blane, taller than any person on the Terrace, was looking over the heads of the promenaders. Dimly he could see the two men who had attracted his attention. They started to move westward along the Terrace, their backs toward him and the sailor.

With a gesture to his friend The Wasp moved after them. The trail was hot. He was not certain which of the two men had uttered the exclamation that had startled him, but on one point he had no doubt whatsoever. The speaker was the mysterious apostle of destruction whose extraordinary capacity for underground engineering was keeping Europe in a ferment. The words had been uttered by The Mystery Man from Prague!

The two walked up the steps leading to the higher level. They paused by the monument to Berlioz, talked excitedly for a few moments, then abruptly parted. One swung on his heel and came back along the Terrace, the other strode forward toward the Avenue de Monte Carlo, leading down to Monaco.

The Wasp whispered a word to Jack Graye. "One of these two is the man we are hunting for," he breathed. "Just for the moment I don't know which. Trail the fellow making for the avenue! Stick to him like grim death. If you hole him get a message to the man at the Hotel Hermitage. Go to it!"

A sleek person was the man whom Robert Henry Blane attempted to shadow. An old hand at doubling on his trail and throwing impediments in the path of a pursuer.

He reached the end of the Terrace where the big, outdoor elevator drops the tired gamblers down to the platform of the station. Blane was some twenty paces to the rear. The pursued reached the elevator as the attendant was on the point of closing the door. He entered quickly, the car dropped slowly downward, leaving The Wasp upon the Terrace.

Blane held college records. He called upon the speed that had made him famous. He raced to the stairs, took the two flights in half a dozen reckless strides, landed on the open space beside the station and ran full speed to the entrance. A hurrying fat man met him in the doorway, the two clutched, swayed and stumbled. The fat man cursed; The Wasp tried to disengage himself. At the moment of collision some one had slipped through the outer door, some one whose movements were snakelike and sinister, and, for the first time Blane was confident that the person he was trailing was none other than The Man from Prague!

Blane threw off the fat man. The strange apostle of destruction had slipped into a magnificent car that had swung toward the entrance as he came through. There was a short order, and the auto roared its contempt for the incline.

The Wasp rushed across the open space to a parked car. He woke the snoring driver with a rough push. "Up the hill!" he cried. "Quick! Follow the car ahead!"

"Engaged, monsieur!" yelped the startled chauffeur.

"A thousand francs!" snapped The Wasp. "After him!"

The chauffeur was mercenary. He forgot the expected client and steamed up the rise after the big car. Madmen, and oftentimes very rich madmen, came to Monte Carlo, and if the Almighty brought one of them in his direction it proved that the Almighty knew of the troubles of a chauffeur who had a wife and four children to support, with food and clothing leaping skyward. He leaned over his wheel and laid a heavy foot on the gas.

Luck favored The Wasp. On the steep Avenue de la Madone he sighted the big car ahead of him. It had been blocked by a sight-seeing charabanc immediately before Ciro's. Blane pointed to it.

"Keep it in sight!" he cried.

"If the good Lord wills," said the chauffeur quietly.

The big car swung to the left, hooting madly as it crossed the Boulevard des Moulins. It took the hill without an effort, swung its tail around the bend of the Boulevard du Nord and disappeared. Robert Henry Blane cursed softly as the machine he occupied coughed asthmatically. For the moment the cotton fields of Texas were forgotten. There welled up in him a hate of the destroyer who had, months before, impudently offered to The Wasp the position of high plenipotentiary to the United States with capital unlimited to spread the doctrine of destruction, the doctrine that had already dragged part of Europe back to semibarbarism.

"If I get my hands on him I'll teach him to fiddle with the affairs of the United States!" he growled. "I'd like to hand him over to a bunch of the *Pittsburgh's* boys after telling them what the assassin wishes to do."

Blane's car struck the straight boulevard. It roared along it. A red light danced far ahead. Blane watched it. The red eye swayed from the center of the road, paused for the fraction of a minute, then sailed away into the darkness. The headlight of a Casino-bound auto illuminated for a second the place where the big machine had paused. The keen eyes of The Wasp made a discovery. Slipping across the circle of light thrown by the oncoming machine was a tall, snaky silhouette! For the moment it looked like a figure cut from black cardboard, the legs jerked by threads held by unseen hands.

Blane took a thousand-franc bill from his pocket. The descending car swept by. He opened the door and climbed onto the running board. He thrust the bill into the hand of the chauffeur and yelled an order. "Keep her going! I'm going to drop off, but you keep right on! Understand? Drive her! Don't bother about me! Good night!"

The Wasp dropped to the ground some twenty yards beyond the spot where he was now certain The Man from Prague had left the big car.

Blane ran for the shadows of the tall houses. He was a wolf now, on the trail of a mean, sneaking cur. There flashed into his mind the sneering words of the apostle of destruction when he, Blane, had spoken of the little heroine of Calico Springs, Arkansas.

A stone stairway ran from the boulevard to the lower level. Blane took it. To him there came the scent of flowering shrubs. He was in the quarter of wealth. Quiet, discreet avenues ran to the right and left; villas sat demurely in the midst of plots where palms, wet nursed from infancy, spread their splendid fronds. Wistaria and bougainvillea crept over the dividing walls and plucked at passers-by.

Blane, hugging the shadows, peered down the avenues. He was certain that The Man from Prague had left the car at the head of the stairs; certain that he had rushed down into the secluded lower levels. He, Blane, slipped into an alcove in a stone wall and waited.

Two minutes passed, five minutes, ten. The Wasp had a belief that he had lost the trail. It chilled him. The long, snaky person from Prague had outwitted him.

He crept from the alcove and moved quickly along an avenue running southward toward the sea. He sought an inspiration, a hunch like that which had come to him in the Casino. At the gambling tables the number 8, connected with the outing of himself and Betty Allerton in the years gone by, had flashed up before him. He had played it and won. He glanced at the names of the villas he passed. Flowery, exotic names: "Villa des Fleurs," "Villa Sans-Souci," "Villa of Dreams," et cetera, et cetera.

He noted a number. It was two. His mind whisked him back to the roulette table. He saw the middle column of the three rows of figures upon which the gamblers stake. That middle row runs two, five, eight, eleven, fourteen, et cetera. *Two, five, eight!*

Blane watched the doors of the villas. There was no three, no four, but there was a *five!* Six and seven were missing from the entrances. He held his breath and crept along the wall. A large, newly painted 8 was above the iron gate that led into the inclosed garden!

The Wasp thrust himself against the wall. He pondered over the coincidence. He thought there might be something in it. The

Man from Prague had disappeared down one of the avenues and possibly had taken shelter in a villa. Perhaps in the villa marked with the newly painted figure!

Robert Henry Blane glanced upward at the wall that separated the garden from the street. Something white showed in the shadows of the tree. Something stirred, then a voice that The Wasp knew whispered softly: "Come aboard, sir."

Robert Henry Blane uttered a little exclamation of surprise, then the sailor of the *Pittsburgh* explained his position. "Got here about ten minutes ago," he breathed. "The geek I steamed after ran in here, and two minutes after he berthed another chap followed. Tall, rangy chap plunging along like a destroyer."

On the top of the wall, hidden by the shadows of the trees, Robert Henry Blane and Jack Graye held a consultation. Four windows of the villa were illuminated, one on the upper floor and three on the lower; the shadows of moving figures showed from time to time on the linen blinds drawn tightly over the latter. The garden was dim and shadowy. A quiet that was extraordinary was upon the place.

The sailor breathed his conclusions softly into the night. "I'm not the boss of the party," he murmured, "but I never saw much in sendin' for help."

Blane grinned. He thrust his two legs over the wall into the garden. The sailor followed his example.

Together they dropped into the garden. They circled a huge palm and, keeping well to the shadows, approached the door of the villa. The Wasp was in the lead, and, according to his time-honored custom, he kept his mind in a fluid state, refusing to let his thoughts harden into any plan of campaign till he had looked over the situation.

The two men from Houston reached the side of the villa immediately beneath the illuminated window of the upper floor. The window attracted The Wasp. It brought to him a strange curiosity. The blinds of the three lower windows showed moving occupants; the upstairs blind was shadowless.

Blane gripped a drain pipe and pointed upward. The sailor nodded. The method of getting into an engagement was nothing to Mr. Graye. In his mind the nephew of Kenney Blane was the leader of the expedition.

The Wasp swarmed up the pipe and found a resting place on a cornice to the left of the lighted window. The sailor followed. Their position was midway between two windows, and Blane chose the darkened one as a means of entering the villa. With great caution he leaned over and dexterously opened the lower sash.

The Wasp crawled through the window; the sailor followed. They moved like two great cats, feeling softly for resting places for feet and hands. Both possessed in a curious degree that quality of vision and deftness that enabled them to move without noise.

Blane reasoned that the passage into which the door of the room opened would lead them to the lighted chamber. He moved to the door, found it open and stepped into the corridor. A few paces beyond there showed the reflection from the fanlight of the occupied room. He tiptoed to it. He dropped upon one knee and peered through the keyhole of the door.

For a long minute the big Texan surveyed the chamber, then he rose and motioned the sailor to take a look. Graye's scrutiny was even more lengthy. It required a tap on the shoulder to drag him away from the spy hole. The faint reflection from the fanlight showed his face indistinctly as he got to his feet. Blane had a belief that the sailor was desirous of whistling to express his astonishment.

Softly Robert Henry Blane tried the handle of the door. It was, as he expected, locked. And the key had been taken away.

The sailor hurriedly brought the key from the door of the room which they had entered first. The Wasp tried it. It gave no results. The door was of oak, the noise made by breaking into the room would bring the persons from the lower floor. Absolute quiet was necessary. The glimpse of the interior that Robert Henry Blane had seen through the keyhole had startled him immensely, but it had made him more cautious. A thousand times more cautious. He realized that he was dealing with a person whose nerve and impudence knew no bounds. A man who understood, more than any one else, that poor old Europe had drifted back into a medieval state and that acts that would have been unthinkable before the war could be carried out with impunity in the new era of crookedness and deception.

He stood to consider the situation, and as he waited there came an interruption. From below a harsh voice called a name, evidently the name of a menial. There came a quick answer. The first speaker shouted instructions in the Magyar dialect, the other repeated the order, then to the ears of The Wasp and the sailor came the sound of heavy feet upon the stairs leading up from below.

The servant, or at least the person who had received the instructions, was ascending.

Blane pushed the sailor into the darkened room through the window of which they had entered the villa. They pushed the door to and waited breathlessly.

The man from below came hurrying along the corridor. There came to the listening ears of the two Texans the jangle of keys, the click of a lock, the whine of the heavy door on its hinges.

The Wasp stepped quickly from his hiding place. Swift and pantherlike were his movements. The fellow who had opened the door was standing just inside the room. An arm like steel went round his neck from the rear, there was the crushing upward turn that the wrestler Isuchi taught to the Emperor Hideyoshi when that strong groom fought his way to the throne, then a limp form hu g motionless in the arms of the big Texan.

A little chuckle of pleasure came from the bed. Blane held up a warning finger, dropped the servant upon the floor and whispered an order to Jack Graye.

"Undo his feet," he breathed. "Quick! I'll manage his arms!"

The young man, spread-eagled on the bed and tied thoroughly hand and foot, smiled pleasantly as the two Americans fell upon his bonds. He didn't wince as The Wasp cut away the cords that had bitten into his wrists. Blane half lifted him to the floor and tried to set him upon his feet.

The freed young man couldn't stand. The hours that he had spent strung up on the bed had numbed his limbs. He clung to The Wasp as he sagged.

"I'll be O. K. in a minute," he whispered. "Just wait till the blood gets moving. I'll give the blighters something for this. Where are they?"

"Downstairs," answered Blane.

"Have you a gun or anything?" inquired the young man. "A gun for preference, old chappie. Wait a second till I rub my jolly ankles."

The sailor had fallen upon the man on the floor, trussed him with a deftness that was remarkable, and tossed him onto the bed.

Blane stepped to the door. No sounds came from below. He moved swiftly back and took the arm of the young man he had liberated. "Can you walk?" he asked. "Good. We've got to move. Lean on me and——"

"But I'm not going till I settle with these beggars!" growled the liberated one. "They've handled me in a beastly fashion and I'm——"

"Hold your tongue," breathed Robert Henry Blane. "Do you hear me? I know the person who roped you in. He's a tough baby. Let's get out. Afterward we'll settle with him."

"Oh, all right, if you say so," said the young man. "You seem to be a bossy chap."

The Texan Wasp grinned. "Pardon me," he said gently. "I know who you are and all that, but I came from a country where every one is equal and where princes and kings don't cut much of a figure. A friend of mine told me to bring you to his hotel and I'm going to do it. Come on."

The sailor went first. He crawled out of the window and clung to the drain pipe like a leech. Supporting the half-numbed figure of the prince, Blane followed. Noiselessly the three reached the garden, climbed over the wall and hurried down the deserted avenue.

At the corner of the Boulevard Pereira they found a taxi. "Hermitage Hotel!" roared The Wasp. "And burn your tires, boy!"

Five minutes after the rescue, No. 37 had heard the story and was ready to start for the villa. Robert Henry Blane wished to come along, but the great sleuth thrust the big Texan aside. "I'll take the sailor," he said. "You've done enough for one evening. Besides, there's another task for you. There's an envelope on my table addressed to you. Read it and forget about me for the evening. I'll rope in this fellow and all his brood. Good night."

An automobile had whisked the prince away to the home of his elderly relative. The Wasp watched the tail lights of the machines that carried No. 37 and a little army of police up the slope toward the villa

that sheltered The Mystery Man from Prague. Then he thought of the letter.

He found it on the dressing table of the sleuth. It was addressed to "Robert Henry Blane," and, wondering a little, he opened it. The single sheet of paper carried the following words:

DEAR BLANE: I made a careful overhaul of every foreigner at Monte Carlo this evening. You might be interested to know that the register of the Hotel Metropole shows an entry reading: "Miss Betty Allerton, Boston, U. S. A." Also, I have spoken to Colonel Ralph Coltman, of Paris, over the long distance. He has empowered me to pay you one hundred thousand dollars as a reward for the rescue of his niece, Dora. You're a lucky fellow, Blane. Sincerely,

No. 37.

Robert Henry Blane found Miss Betty Allerton in the sitting room of the hotel. She was dressed in a soft creamy-colored gown, and the big Texan told himself that no woman in all the world was as wonderful as this girl of his college days. He came toward her haltingly, and the girl rose as if doubting the wonderful eyes that told her of the approach of the only man she ever loved.

"Bob!" she murmured.

"Betty!" he whispered. "I—I just heard that you were here. I—I——"

He paused, holding her little hands in his. For a long, long minute they looked into each other's eyes, then the girl spoke. "We are going home," she said softly. "Home to America. Auntie came here to say good-by to some friends. And you?"

"To-morrow morning I start for Texas," answered The Wasp. "For Houston, Texas. Oh! Betty! A home hunger came upon me at Perpignan. A terrible home hunger. I thought I would have to swim across if I couldn't find the money. Then—then I came down here because I wanted money and—and because it was the spot where I found you again and where you said you still believed in me. And—and money came to me."

He seemed a little less the adventurer and more the college boy as he stood beside her. She smiled up at him as he chattered of the inspiration at the Casino and how he had chosen the figure eight because it was connected with the excursion that they had made from Nyack in the long ago. Her eyes were large and luminous and full of a great love as she looked up at him, hanging intently on his words.

They moved out on the terrace, a joy that was splendid and indescribable upon them both. The Texan Wasp knew that he had come to the end of his wanderings. All the world was his. He felt kin to the little stars that sat high up above the Sea of Romance; the sweet winds that came from the far-away desert way down beyond El Hoggar soothed the fever in his blood.

Hours later the Comtesse de Chambon, the aunt of Miss Betty Allerton, came searching for her niece. The comtesse stepped softly out on the hotel terrace that was in semidarkness, then she paused and clutched her bosom. The voice of Miss Betty came to her ears, and the words appalled her.

"Yes, yes," came the soft whisper of the girl, "I agree. But Bob, dear, are there any people that you—that you would like to ask?"

"A few," came the voice of Robert Henry Blane. "There's old 37, who's not a bad scout. He told me you were here, you know. And there's a sailor on the *Pittsburgh* who came from Houston. I bet he'd be glad to see a Houston man pulling off a prize like you. And the prince might like to come. He's not a bad chap in his way."

"I don't want the prince," interrupted Miss Betty Allerton. "There's only one prince in all the world, and his name is Robert Henry Blane. Bob, dear, I love you so much!"

The Comtesse de Chambon slipped gently into a chair and felt feebly for her smelling salts.

LIMITED IN EXPRESSION

GEORGE M. COHAN, actor and producer of plays, was manfully sitting through the opening performance of a piece staged by another man.

"This is rotten!" said the friend who sat beside Cohan. "If a play as bad as this had been produced on the other side, it would have been hissed."

"Yes," agreed Cohan drearily. "I'd like to do it myself, but, you see, you can't gape and hiss at the same time."

The Quest

By Harry Kemp

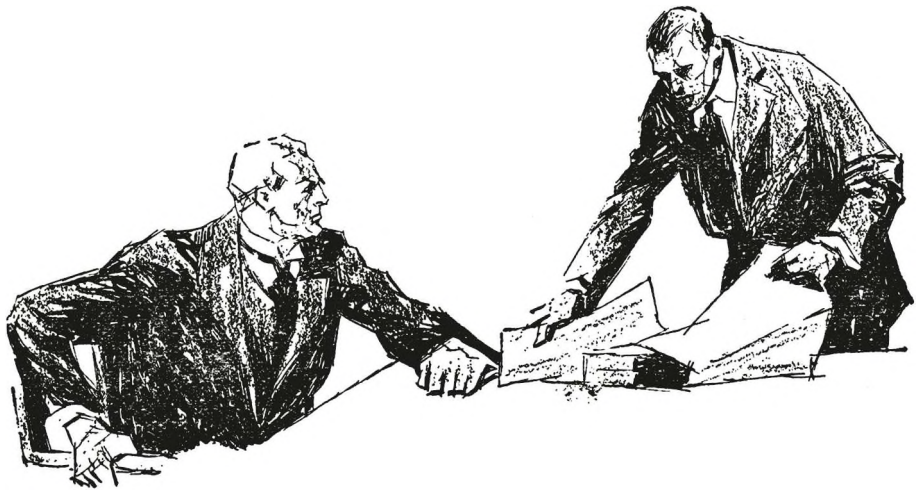
THE months he got for vagrancy,
The bars that shut him in for days,
Chain gang and rock pile, county farm—
They failed to cure his roaming ways;

For he'd be up and off again
Hitting the trail from State to State,
Riding the roaring, dangerous blinds
Or hidden in the swaying freight;

Yes, he'd be up and off again
The minute he was out of jail,
Tramping his way from State to State,
Ulysses of the midnight mail.

Why did he tramp? If you had asked
He couldn't for his life have told
Of the far quest that led him on
Like any Argonaut of old:

In fact he hardly guessed himself
(If one the question should propound)
It was America he sought,
It was America he found!



Convertible Fives

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "The Yellow Devil," "The Borrowed Bridegroom." Etc.

The Great Macumber does a bit of neat financial legerdemain.

THE Great Macumber's hand had been empty. He closed it—on nothing; breathed upon it, spoke words for which one might search the dictionaries of all surviving language in vain. The wonder-working hand opened. In it, fresh, uncrushed and fragrant, lay a rose.

"This," said Macumber, abandoning the lingo of magic and addressing himself more comprehensibly to the girl at the switchboard, "would be better in your hair than the pencil you've poked into it. So! You've no idea what a difference it makes, Millie. There's a magic in the flower greater than any of mine."

Miss Millie Doyle had seen a hundred such casual miracles performed in her behalf—which in part may explain the excellent telephone service we enjoy at the Rawley. She flashed the Great One an applauding smile.

"You're a dear, professor!" she exclaimed, and then as her capable little hands went darting among the cords and plugs and cams of the busy hotel switchboard she called: "Oh, please don't go. I've got something to talk to you about. It's important, really. Darn! There it starts again. Just a minute, please!"

A half dozen of the small lights along the rise of the board had begun to wink. Swiftly and deftly, without flurry, the girl applied herself to the ripping down of old connections and the establishing of a new series.

"That's the way they come," said she presently. "It must be telepathy or something. Everybody seems to think of calling some one up at exactly the same second. Now there won't be anything doing for maybe ten or fifteen minutes. Funny, isn't it?" She tucked the flower farther into her dark hair, and looked up at Macumber. "But of all the queer things under the sun—well, listen! Just between us, what'd you say about a man being kidnaped in broad daylight, not a half mile away from where you're standing?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Millie. But I'd probably suggest that the direction would make a difference. A half mile is a considerable distance in New York City. Go west that far from the Rawley, for instance, and you'll be in a lawless river-front district in which no crime of violence would be surprising. So you see——"

"I don't mean west, but almost due north."

The Great One blinked at her.

"That would bring us to the middle Fifties, and the vicinity of Broadway, wouldn't it? What sort of nonsense are you talking? Is this a hypothetical question of yours? That is, do you ask my opinion on something that has happened, or that might happen?"

"It did happen. That's what I——"

"When?"

"This morning. Not more than a couple of hours ago. I wouldn't believe it myself if my sister hadn't seen it with her own eyes. I had her on the wire just after you went out and she was all worked up over it You see, she knows the man who was kidnaped—that's how real it is. He's a Mr. Budd, a broker down in Wall Street. Lottie's phoned to the police, but they didn't give her any satisfaction. How could they? It's just like I said to Lottie: the cops are all right, I told her, if you can get word to 'em quick enough so they get around before the burglars are out of the house. But in a case like this one of Mr. Budd's, I said *brains* are what counts. There's Professor Macumber living right here in the hotel, I said. He isn't exactly a detective, but I've known the police glad enough to get ideas from him when they've found themselves up against a brick wall. If you're so worried about Mr. Budd, I told her, why don't you just—— One minute, please!"

In a twinkling the swift fingers broke two connections and made another; and Millie Doyle, after an absent-minded pluck at her rose, found the displaced pencil and jotted a memorandum on her call sheet.

"You've whetted my curiosity, Millie," said the Great One, "though I'd not promise I could be of assistance. Why, in the first place, is your sister so largely interested in this Mr. Budd? And where and how was he kid——"

The girl was staring beyond him at something or somebody.

"You won't have to take secondhand information, professor. I was going to say that I'd invited Lottie to come down and tell her troubles to you. And here she is. 'Lo, Lottie. You're just in time. Meet the gentleman I was speaking about over the phone—Professor Macumber. This is my sister, Mrs. Drummond, professor."

She was a stout and breathless woman, this Mrs. Lottie Drummond; much older than her sister of the Rawley switchboard and much plainer, and just now obviously much exercised.

"Did you ever hear the like of it?" she wanted to know immediately. "Would you think such a thing could happen in a crowded street in a respectable neighborhood, with a dozen people looking on and a policeman no more than after turning the corner?"

Macumber smiled.

"At the moment I'm afraid I can't reply, Mrs. Drummond. I haven't had the details yet. All I've heard from Miss Doyle is that a Mr. Budd has fallen in with a rather extraordinary misadventure. And I gather he is a friend of yours."

"He has been a friend to me—a good friend."

"A neighbor?"

"In a way of speaking. Since my poor husband died, God rest him, I've supported myself by taking roomers. Mr. Schuyler Budd has had my parlor floor these three months past. As fine and kind a man as you'd ever wish to meet, and the last man you'd think to be having enemies."

Macumber had ushered the woman into the snug little reception room beyond the switchboard.

"Enemies?" said he. "That's interesting. I'd like to hear what you know about them —and about Mr. Budd himself, please. 'Twould perhaps give me a better perspective on occurrences of to-day."

The widow shook her head.

"I'm sure I don't know what the trouble is, except that it has something to do with a company that Mr. Budd is interested in, and that certain people are after papers he has. Wasn't one of them snooping through his rooms only yesterday, and didn't I catch him at it?"

"Indeed?"

"That's the truth of it, Professor Macumber. I would know the man if I saw him again, but who he is or what he isn't I couldn't say. The name he gave me for himself was Mr. Kruger, and he came to the house pretending he was looking for rooms. Most particularly he was curious about the parlor floor. Even when I told him the suite was rented he *would* have a look at it. Of course, Mr. Budd is with me only from week to week, and there's no telling when any part of the house is going to be vacant. I didn't see there would be any harm in showing the rooms. We sat there a while

talking about rates and the chances of the parlors being for rent soon. By and by this Mr. Kruger asked me if I wouldn't please call a party on the phone for him, explaining he didn't want his voice to be recognized by the one who would be first to answer the call."

"A ruse as old as the telephone, Mrs. Drummond," remarked Macumber. "And there was no phone in the rooms, was there?"

"No; I had to go down into the basement hall. It seemed to be a wrong number I'd called. I was to ask for a Mr. Barkley, and no one of that name was known. I began to get suspicious then. As quietly as I could I put up the receiver and tiptoed upstairs. The Kruger person didn't hear me coming, and I surprised him while he was poking around in Mr. Budd's desk. He didn't seem to have had time to disturb anything, so I just gave him a piece of my mind. 'If you're not out of this house in three shakes, mister,' I told him, 'I'm going to have the police into it. Never mind the argument. I saw what you were doing. I can tell a sneak thief by his actions even if I can't by looking at him. Now you just up and get and thank your lucky stars that you'll not be sleeping in a cell this night!' "

"He 'got,' I fancy?"

"He surely did move. He gave up and went without saying another word. I was glad enough to be rid of him, but later on I was sorry I hadn't tried to hold him."

"Something had been stolen, then?"

"Yes. A paper. And Mr. Budd took on pretty bad about it when he knew. I'd never seen him before when he wasn't calm and cheerful. You'd never have thought he had a temper."

"Did he miss this paper just by chance, Mrs. Drummond, or had you told him——"

"No; I'd let him know about the sneak thief, as I then thought the man who called himself Kruger. I'd made up my mind to tell him just as soon as he got home, but it must have been pretty well after midnight when he came in. Unusual? Oh, no. Mr. Schuyler Budd is a bachelor, and is seldom home early. What a single man does with his evenings is nobody's business but his own, *I* say. Mr. Drummond, rest him, used to be——"

"So," interrupted the Great One, "you didn't see Mr. Budd until morning. What then?"

"That," said the woman, "is what I was going on to say. I've been serving Mr. Budd his breakfasts ever since he came to the house, and when I carried in his tray I told him how close he'd come to being robbed. First thing he did was to rush to the desk. 'Everything's all right, isn't it?' I asked him.

" 'All right—hell!' said Mr. Budd, and that was the first time I ever heard him swear. He was terribly worked up and stormed around the room for a time. But soon enough he cooled off. 'This is a bad business, Mrs. Drummond,' he said. 'The man carried off a very important paper that really should have been in my safe downtown instead of lying around here. *This* means I'll have to take a quick trip out of the city, and just when business is booming, too.' Then he began to throw things into a traveling bag, not even stopping to eat his eggs. I stood there while he packed, not knowing what to do or say. Finally I asked him what the paper was. 'Oh,' said he, 'it's something very valuable in a business way. It's an agreement belonging to a company of mine which would be worth a lot to some other people. And now they've got it.' I asked him where he was going and when I could expect him back, and to that he said: 'If any one asks for me, Mrs. Drummond, tell them I've had to go to Mexico to protect my interests in the Vera Cruz Oil Company matter. That will be understood.' Well, Mr. Macumber, when he spoke the name of the company my heart jumped right up in my throat. Every dollar I've got in the world is sunk into it, and if anything went wrong——"

A shadow came onto the Great One's face. Perceiving it, the widow hastened to assure him:

"But luckily I don't have to worry, professor. Mr. Schuyler Budd told me that what had happened wouldn't affect the value of my stock one particle. 'There are only two or three of us who are embarrassed by the theft of the agreement,' he said. 'For the stockholders things remain exactly as they were. Vera Cruz Oil is just as sound an investment as ever.' "

"That's fortunate, at any rate. May I ask, Mrs. Drummond, how much money you have in the company?"

"Properly speaking," said the widow, "it wasn't money that I invested. Mr. Drummond left me only a few hundred dollars

in cash—just about enough to make the first payment on my house when I bought out the business. But in addition there were ten thousand-dollar bonds of the Illinois Midland Railroad that Mr. Budd discovered to be 'convertible fives.' It was a lucky thing, he said, that the bonds were the convertible kind. That gave me a chance to turn them into stock paying ten times five per cent."

Macumber seemed startled.

"You reinvested under the direction of Mr. Budd?"

"I followed his advice. He'd been very kind to me, and I knew I could trust him. Fifty per cent did sound like an awfully big return, but Mr. Budd said that even bigger dividends were common in the oil business. He was frank to say that only too many oil companies were no more than swindling schemes, making all sorts of extravagant promises to persuade people to invest in them."

"Some people would call a promise of fifty per cent extravagant, Mrs. Drummond," murmured the Great One.

"Oh, but the Vera Cruz Oil Company is earning enough to pay even more than that. I know it to be a fact."

"You've really received such a dividend?"

"I have, professor. First off, you see, I decided to go cautiously; and I converted only one of my Illinois Midland bonds into the Vera Cruz stock. Mr. Budd himself advised me not to be too hasty. Less than a month after I made the exchange my thousand dollars' worth of stock had made five hundred dollars for me—as much as all my bonds of the railroad would bring me in a year. I had proof enough then, and I got Mr. Budd to convert the rest of the bonds for me. When I get the next dividend I'm planning to sell out the rooming house and take my two boys to live in the country, for now my income will keep us all in luxury and see the little fellows through college later on. There's a big difference between five hundred a year and five thousand, Professor Macumber. You can see now, I guess, why I look on Mr. Schuyler Budd as a very good friend and why I couldn't stand by idle and see him come to harm."

"Your interest in the gentleman," said the Great One, "is fully explained. Now, if you please, I'll hear how——"

"About the actual spiriting away of Mr. Budd I haven't much to tell, professor. It all happened in a flash. I don't think it was more than five minutes after he'd discovered the theft of the paper when he was leaving the house."

"Which would indicate," remarked Macumber, "that the man's an experienced traveler."

"Mr. Budd has been about the world a great deal. He told me he'd started on even longer journeys with no more than a suit case, and in just as much of a hurry. 'I'd not be where I am to-day, Mrs. Drummond,' he said, 'if I were slower to arrive at and act on decisions. In this present case, for instance, I tie the hands of the enemy by bobbing up serenely in Mexico. To Mexico I go, and his schemings are frustrated. The strategical advantage he has won by gaining possession of the paper counts for nothing.' Then, after telling me to hold his rooms for him, Mr. Schuyler Budd went out of the house, whistling and smiling. I watched after him from the front-parlor window.

"First off, I took notice of a taxicab that came scooting through the block while Mr. Budd was walking down the front steps. It slowed down and crawled along behind him. That seemed kind of queer; and then, while I was wondering about the taxi, a man stepped from a doorway and sort of stumbled against Mr. Budd. At the same instant the cab rolled in to the curb. The door opened and a big hand reached out and fastened onto Mr. Budd's arm. Into the taxi he went, pulled by the man inside and pushed by the other on the sidewalk. This second man jumped into the machine after him. The door slammed and the taxi leaped ahead. Before I could get the window up to shout for help it had gone flying around the corner—and that was the last I saw of Mr. Schuyler Budd."

Macumber betrayed not the slightest symptom of surprise when the widow had finished. He looked at me quizzically.

"Well, lad," said he, "you've heard all I have, and I pass Mrs. Drummond's question along to you. What do *you* make of the abduction of Schuyler Budd?"

I didn't, for once, have to grope for a reply.

"Some one," I said, "didn't intend that he should get to Mexico."

"Well and succinctly put, youngster," applauded the Great One. "That is precisely

my view of the matter. Have you communicated with Mr. Budd's office, Mrs. Drummond?"

"Oh, yes. I called up at once and told his partner—a Mr. Fleming—what I had seen. He was very much alarmed, as I could tell from his voice.

"'The trip to Mexico was a brilliant thought,' he said. 'Our firm certainly should be represented there as quickly as possible. I'll start this minute, myself.' And I guess, professor, that Mr. Fleming is a great deal like Mr. Budd when it comes to fast traveling. At any rate, when I called up the office again an hour later to ask if there'd been any news nobody answered the telephone."

"The partner didn't suggest who Budd's enemies were?" queried Macumber.

"No, sir. He just asked one question after another. When he'd found out all I knew he didn't seem to have time for any more talk. He just thanked me and hung up the receiver. As to what's happened to Mr. Schuyler Budd, my opinion is the same as yours, professor. That's the natural way to explain the kidnaping. But the question is, what can we do to help him? The police aren't——"

"I'd look for no assistance from them," said the Great One. "And whether I can be of service to you I have my doubts. However, you may depend on me to do all that lies within my power. Perhaps it is fortunate that at the moment I am free. A full week remains before we start our Western tour, and that time is yours."

"But what——"

"Tush," said Macumber, "is there not an obvious starting point, madam? Would it not serve us well at the outset to look into the affairs and connections of the Vera Cruz Oil Company?"

II.

It was not to be my fortune to share Macumber's adventures in searching into the "affairs and connections" of the Vera Cruz Oil Company. Scarcely had we seen Mrs. Drummond out of the Rawley and begun to discuss ways and means of procedure over our luncheon—a discussion in which, as I later recalled, the Great One saw that I took the lead while he contented himself with the making of sundry ironic interpellations—when a telegram arrived calling me to Ohio. The wire advised me of the serious illness of a favorite sister, and suggested that I come home at once; so when Macumber was beginning his investigation in the case of Schuyler Budd I was already on my way westward.

It was not until the sixth day afterward that, having stood by at home until the doctors pronounced their patient out of danger, I climbed out of a taxi in front of the Rawley and found myself face to face with Macumber. He had been leaving the hotel as I arrived, apparently in a deal of a rush.

The matter of the kidnaped broker had been often in my mind during my absence and my first question concerned the man.

"Oh, the devil with Budd!" cried the Great One impatiently. "My mind is now on quite another thing."

"Were you able to get any trace of the man?" I insisted, and when Macumber glowered I remarked that in many ways this daylight abduction seemed to me one of the most remarkable cases in which he had ever been interested.

"I've been away, you know," I reminded him, "and it will perhaps occur to you on reflection that you haven't found time to advise me of your activities. What's on your mind now, if Budd is off it?"

"A problem," said Macumber, "in low finance." A smile broke through his frown. "And of course you'll be in the dark, lad. Yes, I got on the track of Schuyler Budd without a great deal of difficulty."

"You know where he is?"

Macumber nodded.

"I do. And I'm satisfied to let him stay there."

"Well, then, where is he? Why——"

"You'll know in good season. Just now I'm scheming and contriving in another direction. Do you think you could stand a jaunt in the subway and then two hours more on a train?"

"I dare say. What's the idea?"

"I've a deal on in a securities market that's neither the big exchange nor the Consolidated, nor yet the Curb—the 'underground market,' some call it."

The Great One, seizing my elbow, had started for the subway; and when we were whirling downtown through the tube he took from his pocket a frayed newspaper bearing the date, I noticed, of the day following my departure for Ohio.

"Things have been happening since you left town, lad," said he. "I've found inspiration in the news."

He ran a finger along a scare head which proclaimed:

BOY VANISHES WITH $90,000 IN BONDS.

"I don't see anything particularly exciting in this," I confessed after I had read through the article. "It's the old story of the untrustworthy messenger and the careless employer. The thing's happened a dozen times before, I'm sure."

"Of course it has, lad," beamed Macumber. "That's the beauty of it. And the bonds are as good as so much money. The courts have ruled that a man who buys stolen bonds in good faith becomes their rightful owner. If he is to be deprived of them it must first be proved that he had guilty knowledge of their theft. Just so a merchant who innocently takes stolen money in exchange for his wares is entitled to keep the cash. Bonds like these class under the law as currency. They can be bartered back and forth as freely as dollars."

"That's news to me," said I.

"I don't doubt it," smiled the Great One. "Did you take note, by the way, of the issue of the bulk of the bonds in this latest theft?"

I glanced at the newspaper again.

"They appear to have been convertible fives of the Columbian Steel Corporation."

"Quite so. It might be well to keep that in mind. Here we are at Wall Street, lad. Come along!"

The Great One glanced at his watch as we were climbing out of the tube.

"A close connection," he said. "It lacks only five minutes of the time of my appointment—which is for eleven thirty, precisely. You'd not have found me lingering about the Rawley had you arrived a bit later than you did. I've a notion of being aboard the noon train, you see."

I didn't see; but Macumber was striding away at a clip not conducive to conversation. Just one remark he flung to me as we swung from Wall Street into Broad:

"I'm afraid our man might change his mind about meeting me if I weren't on the dot, lad. His misgivings were hard enough to overcome in the first place. He trusts me, of course, but in the circumstances one could scarcely blame him for being a little nervous. I'm sure he's spent the night wishing himself out of the deal."

And there was a drawn and haunted look, for a fact, about the individual whom the Great One accosted a moment later in the entrance to one of the Broad Street skyscrapers. He was hatless, and wore a light jacket of the sleazy material affected chiefly by office workers and Chinese.

From under this thin jacket the man brought an oblong package. I thought his hand trembled a bit as he handed it over to Macumber.

"There you are," he whispered. "For God's sake, be careful!" And then he darted into an elevator and was born swiftly aloft.

The Great One tucked the package carefully away in an inside pocket.

"Seemed shaky, didn't he?" he grinned. "What did I tell you? I don't think his resolution to go through with our arrangement would have outlasted a five-minute wait. Hi, there! Taxi!"

When we had piled into the cab Macumber tapped his breast.

"For the moment," said he, "we're custodians of a fortune. Although there'd be plenty of time to walk to the Hudson Terminal, the extravagance of the ride is well justified, I think. No use taking chances in crowds. Aye, the truth of it is, lad, I detect a trace of nervousness in myself. Would you have a look at our cargo?"

He brought out the package, opened it and spread out fanwise an array of engraved sheets, closely folded.

"Bonds!" I gasped.

"Correct," cried the Great One. "Twenty of them, quoted in the market at par and worth exactly one thousand dollars apiece. They're as good as twenty thousand dollars in gold, if a man dared sell them openly."

"Sell them?"

"Aye, lad. These bonds are for sale. Now take a closer look, if you will. What kind of bonds have we?"

On the bond he handed me I read with a thrill the name of the issuing company.

"They're a lien," said I, "on the plants and properties of the Columbian Steel Corporation."

"So they are. And more than that, lad. See! Are they not the convertible fives?"

III.

Our objective was Philadelphia. That much information, and no more, I got from Macumber after we had made the change from tube to railroad. He would talk only

of a spectacular cabinet illusion on which he had been working at odd times for a half dozen seasons, and when we climbed out of the club car at our journey's end I knew precisely as much of the purpose of our journey as I had known when we left New York.

"I've an appointment here, too, lad," said the Great One as we walked down the platform. "Keep your eye open for a tall, thin man who'll be carrying a tan brief case and will be having his eyes on the alert. He—— But never mind. There's the man himself making for us!"

Such a man as Macumber had described had wriggled through the throng at the gate and was walking rapidly in our direction. He addressed the Great One in an undertone.

"Good!" exclaimed Macumber after listening for a moment to the sotto-voce report. "Let it be at three o'clock, but not a minute before. And Jarrow is prepared for my call, is he? He's ready to do business? Well, so am I! Call him up as soon as you can get to a telephone, and tell him I've brought a friend with me—one who comes in for a share of the money, and who's in the thing as deeply as I am. You understand?"

As the thin man hurried off, the Great One flickered an eyelid at me.

"You're in the thick of a shady business, lad," said he, "that it's my pleasure to let you know nothing about for the time being. I'm trusting you to follow my lead."

"You can do that. But I would like to have some idea of what's doing. Who is that fellow?"

"An excellent man at his trade, although the trade might not seem altogether admirable to one of nice scruples."

"I'm obliged for the enlightenment. And what's his trade?"

"Pretending to be what he isn't."

I abandoned the mystery of the thin man at that, and asked:

"Who's this Jarrow, then, that we appear to be about to visit?"

"A man who takes long profits and no chances. A solvent citizen, and at the minute one of Philadelphia's solidest. A highly respected personage in this town is Homer Jarrow, lad. I've no doubt he could sign his name for a million. But he's not the one to be satisfied. He's always the man to turn a dollar."

We had walked through the station, and now were confronted by a line of importuning hackmen. Macumber waved them away.

"We'll walk," said he. "It's only a square or two we have to travel."

They were long blocks we traversed before the Great One turned into a shabby office building. There was no elevator and we climbed the stairs to the third story. Macumber pointed to a door which bore the legend: "Tri-State Finance Co., H. Jarrow."

"Beyond, lad," he whispered, "is where buyer and seller meet. Mr. Homer Jarrow will buy anything negotiable—at a price."

Then he pushed open the door, and we were in a space closed in by a partition topped by panels of opaque glass. A grizzled head appeared at an aperture in the glass, and a crackling voice demanded:

"Well?"

"I want to see Mr. Jarrow," said Macumber. "Tell him it's Mr. Hawkins' friend calling. I think he'll be expecting me."

The gray head vanished and presently a door in the partition opened.

"He'll see you," said the old clerk. "Go in."

Still another door leading to a private office stood open, and through it I could see a heavy-set man with a tousled head of reddish hair seated at a desk. He kept us waiting for a space before he looked up from the writing on which he was engaged.

"You're Hawkins' friend, eh? I've heard about you. Hawkins says you've got something to sell."

"I have," replied the Great One. "You know what it is, don't you?"

"I don't know anything."

"But——"

"Well, what have you got? Speak out! It's not my business to guess."

Macumber reached into his inner pocket and placed the package of bonds on the desk.

"I don't think I need to tell you what these are," he said. "They speak for themselves."

One after another, subjecting each to a meticulous inspection and finally making a careful count of the pile, Homer Jarrow looked over the bonds.

"Seem to be all right," he conceded grudgingly.

"You *know* they are."

"Maybe I do, maybe I don't. What do you expect to get?"

The Great One pondered over the question.

"I'd thought of asking you," he said at length, "for eighteen thousand dollars. What would you say to that?"

The big man at the desk burst into a rasping laugh.

"You're crazy!"

"How so?" demanded Macumber. "I can ask you for what I please, can't I?"

"Of course. You can *ask*. But when it comes to doing business it's something else. You're a stranger to me, after all. How do I know——"

"You know your business, Mr. Jarrow."

"I do. And eighteen thousand's out of the question. If that's your figure, I'll say 'Good afternoon!' "

"You don't have to say it yet," interposed the Great One calmly. "You have cash, and I want to get some of it. What's your own figure?"

"Considering everything, I'd be doing you a favor to give you half what you asked for. But I might take a chance. Yes; I'll give you nine thousand."

Macumber began to gather up the bonds.

"Then I've wasted my time," said he. "From what Hawkins told me I expected to find you more reasonable. I guess we can't do business."

Jarrow turned a thin smile on him.

"If you don't feel you're in a position to get more than you ask," he remarked, "then my offer's a good one. Would you care to explain how the bonds came into your possession?"

The Great One completed the wrapping of his package before he replied:

"I don't see that it makes any difference how I got them."

"Ah, my friend, but it does. Why should you have come to me in Philadelphia when there are a thousand bankers and brokers in New York who——"

"For coming to you, Jarrow," said Macumber, "I had personal reasons that I'll not bother to discuss. You seem inclined to take and hold the upper hand, though. I'll talk on another basis. Can I get fifteen thousand from you?"

"No, sir. I've stated what I'm willing to give."

"Say, then, fourteen thousand?"

"Nine thousand's my price!"

The Great One hesitated and then appeared to have arrived at a decision.

"I can be stubborn, too, Jarrow," he announced. "I won't take nine thousand. Before I'd do that I'd burn this package and be done with it, upon my word. Say ten thousand, and I accept your money!"

Their eyes met, and in silence they fought out their battle. Homer Jarrow was the first to speak.

"Let it be ten thousand, then," said he, moistening his lips. "I'll meet you there, and draw you a check on the spot. Let's see. I believe Hawkins said your name was Thomas?"

"Thomas suits me for a name just now," replied the Great One. "But so far as the check is concerned, the first name is 'Doubting!' I'd much prefer the cash, Jarrow, if it's agreeable to you."

"It's too late."

Macumber brought out his watch.

"Oh, but it's not. There's twenty minutes left before three o'clock. Write your check to your own order and let me have your money in my hand."

Jarrow stared at the Great One and then at the package which he had flung back on the desk.

"As you please," he said, sweeping the package into a drawer of his desk and opening a check book. He raised his voice when the scratching of the pen had ceased: "Griffith, get on your hat and coat. I want you to go to the bank."

IV.

When we left the office of Homer Jarrow, sped by the curtest of farewells, Macumber carried with him ten one-thousand-dollar bills. It then lacked only a couple of minutes of three; and as we were on our way downstairs we met four men coming up. In one of them, with whom the Great One halted to hold a brief whispered conversation, I recognized the thin man who had met us at the railroad terminal on our arrival in Philadelphia. He still had with him his brief case of tan leather.

"More callers for Mr. Jarrow," said Macumber after the others had gone on. "The tall chap is the fellow you heard referred to a while since as Hawkins. His name, more properly, is William Saunders. He's a department-of-justice man and is considered one of the most accomplished 'ropers' in the Federal service. His specialty, that is to

say, is to gain the confidence of crooks for whom the department is gunning by representing himself as a fellow criminal. It's not a nice sort of job, as I believe I've remarked earlier; yet there must be some one, lad, to do such work. I'll tell you more about him and about other matters later, but now we'll do well to leg it. We've just time to catch a train for New York."

A little later, settled comfortably in a Pullman smoking compartment with his pipe aglow, the Great One asked me a familiar question:

"Well, lad, what do you make of it?"

"Less than nothing," said I.

He grinned.

"Could you not build a theoretical connection between the mysterious abduction of Schuyler Budd and our visit to Homer Jarrow?"

"I couldn't. Nor do I see rhyme or reason either in the presentation to you of twenty thousand dollars' worth of Columbian Steel bonds or in your sale of them at cut rates. You say you know where Budd is?"

Macumber nodded.

"I do," he said. "In fact I never had much doubt concerning what had happened to him. Your suggestion that his captors were anxious to prevent him from going to Mexico was absolutely right. You hit the nail on the head *there*, lad."

"But why didn't they want him to go?"

The Great One gazed at me mournfully.

"Don't you understand yet?"

"I do not. Why did they keep him from going?"

"Because that was a great deal easier to do than to get him back into the United States once he'd be over the border. Schuyler Budd's captors were department-of-justice operatives—just as was the man who went through his desk at Mrs. Drummond's. I knew all that before you were a hundred miles on your way toward Ohio, lad, for in seeking information in regard to the Vera Cruz Oil Company I'd gone directly to the Federal district attorney in New York. It was one of the most venerable tricks of the crooked promoter that Budd played on his landlady, paying her a handsome dividend out of her own money in order to unload more of his worthless stock on her.

"From the district attorney I learned that Schuyler Budd was looked upon as only small fry. For months the government had been gathering evidence against fake promoters who received their inspiration and financing from one central source. Jarrow was the higher-up the department of justice was after. Saunders, posing as a stock swindler, already had built up a fairly solid case against him; and the memorandum taken from Budd's desk, definitely connecting him with the Vera Cruz Oil Company, completed the chain. One reason for the methods employed in Budd's arrest lay there. The man was held incommunicado following his capture so that he could not put Jarrow on his guard and thus upset Saunders' scheme to trap him."

"But why," I asked, "wasn't Jarrow taken into custody days ago?"

"That was due partly to the slow-and-sure policy of Saunders; and partly also, perhaps, to my own intercession. So long as Jarrow remained at liberty I saw a possibility of recovering Mrs. Drummond's money. From Saunders I learned that quite a number of stolen bonds were believed to have found their way into Jarrow's possession at one time and another, and the recent bond theft gave me my cue for action. Through Saunders I had a direct line of approach to Jarrow, and I appointed myself fiscal agent for Mrs. Drummond—with the result that I've her ten thousand dollars here in my pocket to be returned to her as soon as may be after we arrive in New York."

Macumber paused to refill his pipe. For a moment he looked out complacently upon the flitting landscape.

"The bonds I took to Philadelphia with me," he resumed, forestalling my question, "were borrowed from the customer's securities clerk in a brokerage house through which I've done a considerable amount of trading. He was the man whom we met in Broad Street. I'd done him a trifling favor or two, and with a deal of argument and prayer I persuaded him to lend me the bonds overnight. That arrangement was made yesterday, when I didn't know I should have the pleasure of your company this afternoon."

"Yes," said I. "That's all very well. But suppose your friend in Broad Street should be called upon to produce the bonds tomorrow morning? What then? No doubt you've a plan for recovering them, yet——"

"He'll have them the moment he reaches

the office," replied the Great One. Again his hand went to the inner pocket, and once more I looked upon the borrowed bonds of the Columbian Steel Corporation.

"Great Cæsar!" I cried. "How——"

"You and Jarrow," smiled Macumber, "might have watched my hands and sleeves a little more closely while I was doing up the prize package on his desk. Can you imagine what it held when I'd sealed it?"

"Blank paper!"

"Not a bit of it," said the Great One solemnly. "That would have been cheating. What Homer Jarrow got for his ten thousand dollars was ten thousand shares of sublimated Vera Cruz Oil!"

Another story of the Great Macumber's exploits in an early issue.

FRIENDS IN NEED

THE movement started recently by Polish-American societies for the erection in Warsaw of a scientific institute as a memorial to General Tadeusz Kosciusko, Polish patriot and gallant soldier in the American Revolution, serves as a reminder of the valuable services rendered the American cause by a group of foreign officers—real "friends in need." At a time when numbers of what Washington called "hungry adventurers" were flocking to America to offer their doubtful talents to the new republic in return for high rank and hoped-for profit, men like Lafayette, Kosciusko, De Kalb, Pulaski and Steuben won the gratitude of the American people by proofs of loyal and unselfish service.

Kosciusko offered himself as a volunteer early in the war. He was a highly trained military engineer, having been educated to that profession in several European countries, and had fought against Russia as an artillery captain in the Polish army. Before long he was made a colonel of artillery in the American army and for a time acted as Washington's adjutant. He fought all through the war and his skill in military engineering was of great value to the Americans, especially in the campaigns in the south toward the end of the struggle. He is said to have had a part in the selection of West Point as the site of the Military Academy and in the founding of that institution. After peace was made he returned to Poland and led the Poles against the Russians in 1794, for a time being military dictator of his country. In the end his army was defeated and he was captured. After his release he visited America and lived for a time in Philadelphia. Then he went to France, where he died in 1817.

Another Pole who rendered good service was Count Casimir Pulaski, who joined Washington in 1777 after being exiled from Poland because of his patriotic activities. He distinguished himself at the battle of Brandywine and was made a brigadier general. In 1778 he organized "Pulaski's Legion," a small force which he commanded until he was killed while leading an unsuccessful assault at the siege of Savannah in 1779. Baron de Kalb, who came from France with Lafayette, was another foreigner who gave his life for the American cause. He was an experienced and competent soldier who after two years of valuable service was killed at the battle of Camden, in North Carolina, in 1780.

When Washington took his army into winter quarters at Valley Forge in 1777 it lacked clothing, provisions, discipline and ability to drill and maneuver in the field. When it left Valley Forge the next spring, after a winter of terrible suffering, it was a better fighting machine than ever before. Washington's noble spirit had kept the army together during the dark days, and he had not been neglectful of practical matters of supply and training, but credit for much of the technical improvement is due to Baron von Steuben, a Prussian officer who had served on the personal staff of Frederick the Great in the Seven Years' War and who had been sent to America by the French government. He joined Washington as a volunteer in February, 1778, and after proving his ability was made inspector general of the army. He was a competent professional soldier who taught the Americans something of the science of war, introduced a plan of organization for the various branches of the army, saved the country much money by a system of accountability for public property and was the author of our army's first drill and field service regulations. After the war he was given a vote of thanks and a gold-hilted sword by Congress, and later granted a pension. He did not return to Europe, and died in New York State in 1794.

A Chat With You

SOME one asked us who was the happiest person we knew. A hard question to answer. What is it that makes for a happy life anyway? It is not wealth, for many rich men are profoundly gloomy and many a day laborer is happy. Health has not so much to do with it either, for we have known strong men who nursed a perpetual mental anguish and consumptives who were transfigured with cheerfulness. Neither is it fame nor achievement. Mark Twain, the author achieved enough in his lifetime to suit most, yet he was a pessimist, and, in spite of his humor, a sad man at heart. Napoleon himself, the perfect example of the man who achieves, spent his life in a continual fret.

* * * *

OPTIMISM does not make a man happy, especially if it is of the exaggerated self-conscious type. The most optimistic man we ever knew, a man who appeared to sincerely believe that "everything was for the best in this best of all possible worlds" killed himself in middle life. Self-sacrifice and service to others do not always bring the reward we hope for. We have known men and women who gave everything for others and won nothing in return but bitterness and disillusionment. Selfishness will never bring happiness, for selfishness is the root from which grows despair. The man who laughs may be eating his soul out and the quiet man who seldom smiles may carry within him the secret of a deep and abiding peace.

AND yet it seems to us that the path to happiness is plain enough and within the reach of all of us if we only have the good luck and good guidance to climb up to it and set our feet upon it. Let it not be understood that when we speak of happiness we mean the absence of suffering. Pain or suffering—pain, mental or physical—this is one of the eternal realities of life. It comes and goes with all of us. It has little to do with our permanent, continuous happiness. It is the foam-flecked flurry raised by a passing squall. When it leaves us we are generally the better and wiser for it. Whether we are happy or not depends on something deeper, the rhythm, the slow, swinging ground swell of our natures.

* * * *

THE ancient Greeks had a word which we call ecstasy. The modern idea carried by the word has in it something of frenzy or excitement. The Greek idea was not this. It simply meant the ability that a man might achieve to get out of himself, to forget himself entirely in his interest in something else. Literally, the word means "to stand outside of yourself."

People wonder why Mr. Edison can work fourteen or eighteen hours a day without weariness while his young secretaries and laboratory assistants are tired out at the end of nine or ten. The reason is that Edison is happy. He has achieved the Greek ecstasy when he works. It is much the same way with Mr. Ford. These men care little about how they are fed and clothed. They

are happy because they have found something that carries them quite outside of themselves. No spendthrift who consciously devotes his life to pleasure will ever get a tenth part of the thrill they experience from life.

* * * *

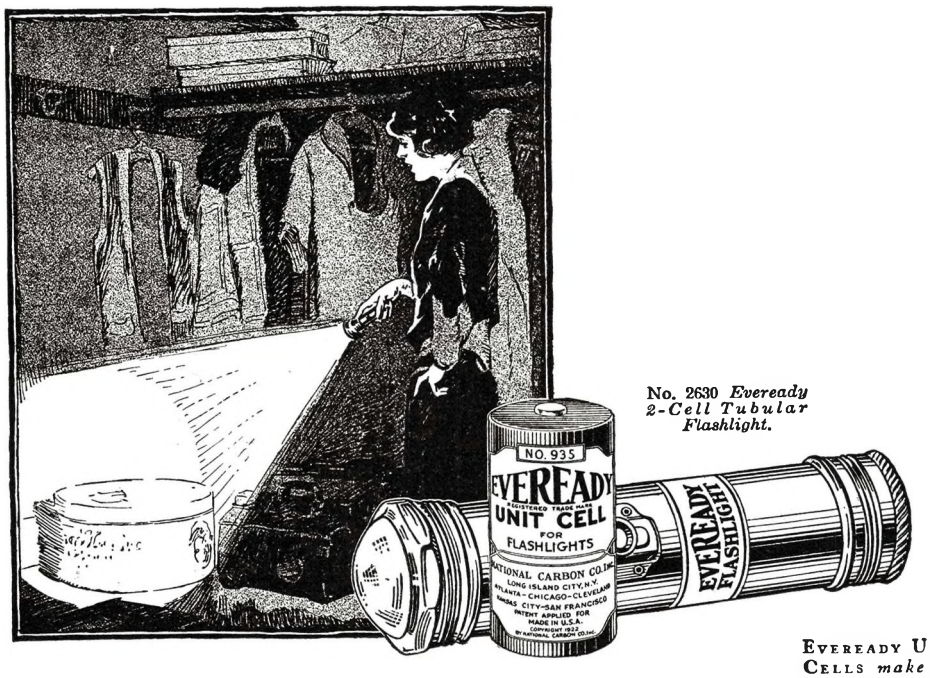
EDISON and Ford are men of genius. There are many others like them. But for the most of us, for the terribly great majority, their example means nothing. We, the most of us, cannot find work that regularly carries us out of ourselves. We are tired at the end of the day, a good deal of the task has been routine and humdrum. A good part of it has been done, not from spontaneous interest, but under the lash of the will, and that is tiresome. And so, when we want to get out of ourselves, we play tennis, go to a ball game, sit in the theater, or read a magazine. Music, pictures, sculpture, architecture, pretty girls in pretty gowns, purple and fine linen—all these are to help people to forget themselves for a little while.

* * * *

EVERY one ought to try to lose himself or herself as much as possible in the day's work. But that cannot always be done, nor to an equal degree by all people. And it is fortunate that it is so, for the by-products of human life—the art, the plays, the music, the stories are the most beautiful and least destructible treasures we have. Mr. Edison's work would not have suffered, either, if he had worked fewer hours some of his days and lost himself for a time in books and pictures. Charles Darwin toward the close of his life was wise enough to regret that he had not devoted some of his time to books outside of his chosen scientific field. He realized that he had lost something valuable and beautiful in losing his appreciation of music and poetry.

* * * *

SO, if any of the stories in this magazine can lift you for a little while out of yourself, can make you forget yourself entirely in your interest in other beings and scenes, you have the key to happiness in your grasp. The greatest of all indoor sports is reading, and if you happen to smoke at the same time you are none the worse for that. In two weeks from to-day, Roy Norton, with a complete book-length novel, Stacpoole, with another big installment of the serial, "Gold and the Girl," Bertram Atkey, with the second of a wonderful new series of short stories, Marsh, Josselyn, Montanye, Jackson, Wilde, Harris Dickson and Solomons, with a collection of the finest short stories being written to-day, will all be waiting for you, ready to help you climb out of yourself, to help you to feel as Edison or Ford feels. So it might be as well to order your copy of the magazine in advance.



No. 2630 *Eveready 2-Cell Tubular Flashlight.*

For that dark closet - *use your flashlight!*

MORE light for all the dark places of your house. Instant light. Safe light. Keep a flashlight in each of those much-used closets. Tie tapes around them. Hang them where they will be instantly convenient. Don't stumble! Have another at the top of those dark cellar stairs. Don't fumble! Have another at your bedside for sudden needs at night.

Keep them loaded with Eveready Unit Cells and you will have plenty of bright, white light where and when you need it.

If you have a flashlight not in use, get it out and reload it with Eveready Unit Cells; long-lived cartridges of brilliant light. Buy them from any electrical or hardware dealer, drug, sporting goods or general store, garage or auto accessory shop.

When you buy new flashlights, be sure they have EVEREADY stamped on the end. EVEREADY means the highest standard of flashlight quality, and Eveready Unit Cells give more light longer. Prices from 65c to $4.50 complete with battery—anywhere in the U. S. A.

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EVEREADY FLASHLIGHTS & BATTERIES
—they last longer

EVEREADY UNIT CELLS *make all flashlights better.*

Eveready Unit Cells fit and improve all makes of flashlights. Eveready Unit Cells come in two sizes to fit every tubular case flashlight.

Know the Eveready size that fits your case. Then you can buy new Eveready Unit Cells without bothering to take your flashlight along.

Eveready Unit Cells mean brighter flashlights and longer battery life.

The Simple Art of *Getting* Well and *Keeping* Well

THESE remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to Fleischmann's Yeast.

There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation—or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach, and general health are affected—this simple, natural food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work—invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. *Health is yours once more.*

"I am office manager for a large mercantile corporation. Two years ago I began to develop 'nerves,' stomach trouble, insomnia, and worst of all to me, an irritable disposition towards those under me. Chatting with a friend I spoke of always feeling so rotten that life was hardly worth living. My friend urged me to try Fleischmann's Yeast, attributing his own excellent health to its daily use. At the end of a week I was eating it with a relish, and feeling a great deal improved. Now a day never passes that I don't eat at least three cakes—using them as a between-meal snack—with the result that I am in the best of health with an eager zest for my work."

(Extract from letter of Mr. G. A. Dempsey of Winnipeg, Canada)

"I watched her crumble the crisp cake into the milk. We drifted into conversation. She sang of the magic of Fleischmann's Yeast. Many months before, her doctor had recommended it and she confessed she owed the clearness of her complexion to its use.

"I was persuaded to try the yeast in milk, and prepared to swallow an obnoxious dose. I was pleasantly surprised. It proved a delightfully palatable drink.

"Fleischmann's Yeast waged a successful battle against the canker sores, dried up the existing ones and cured the stomach condition which was causing them. I faced my winter's work with enthusiasm, and came through triumphant."

(Extract from a letter of Miss Grace S. Baumann of Philadelphia)

"I knew my headaches and unwholesome complexion were caused by constipation. To take frequent cathartics was my regular program and even by doing this I was tired and dopey. 'I like what yeast does for me' said one of my customers and asked if I had ever tried it. I acted on this suggestion and began to drink yeast in milk regularly. Soon people began to comment on how well I was looking—my husband said I grew younger—the mirror told me my complexion and eyes were clear and bright. Cathartics are now a thing of the past."

(A letter from Mrs. Mabelle Conomikes of Marathon, N. Y.

Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain. Fleischmann's Yeast comes only in the tin foil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form. *All grocers have it.* Start eating it today! A few days' supply will keep fresh in *your* ice box as well as in the grocer's. Write for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-3, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York City.

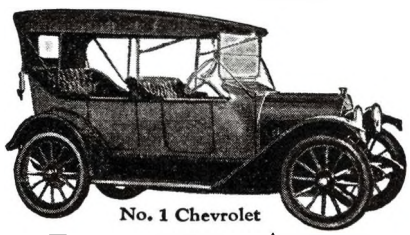
TEN YEARS' PROGRESS

for Economical Transportation

CHEVROLET

1914 SPECIFICATIONS

Horsepower, S. A. E.	21.7
Weight	2500 lbs.
Tires, 32 x 3½, fabric (about 4000 miles)	
Top	Two-man, with side supports
Gas feed	Air pressure
Windshield	Folding
Rims	Detachable
Cooling	Thermo system
Rear axle gears	Straight teeth
Oiling system	Splash
Chassis lubrication	Grease cups
Back curtain light	Celluloid
Side curtains	Stationary
Finish	Paint, air dried
Gasoline mileage	About 18
Service brake	Clutch combination
Wiring harness	Open
Insurance rating	B
Terms	Cash
Service stations	About 1000

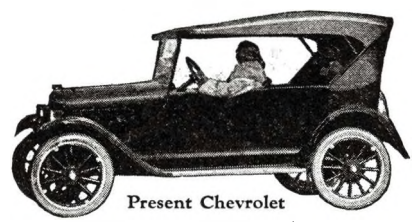


No. 1 Chevrolet

Price, 1914, $1000

1924 SPECIFICATIONS

Horsepower, S. A. E.	21.7
Weight	1880 lbs.
Tires, 30 x 3½, fabric (about 8000 miles)	
(Cord Tires on all closed models)	
Top	One man
Gas feed	Suction
Windshield	Double ventilating
Rims	Demountable
Cooling	Pump circulation
Rear axle gears	Spiral bevel
Oiling system	Pump, forced feed
Chassis lubrication	Alemite
Back curtain light	Glass
Side curtains	Open with doors
Finish	Baked enamel
Gasoline mileage	About 24
Service brake	Separate brake pedal
Wiring harness	In conduits
Insurance rating	A
Terms	As desired
Service stations	About 20,000



Present Chevrolet

Price, 1924, $495

THE pronounced leadership of the automobile business in restoring the old-time purchasing power of the dollar is best illustrated in the increased quality and decreased price of a Chevrolet.

The reductions in prices have more than doubled the purchasing power of the consumer's dollar, although the specifications and design show marked increase in quality.

Big volume production made these economies possible. Note the ten years' record of Chevrolet sales:

Ten Years' Record of Chevrolet Sales

1914— 5,005	1919—151,019
1915— 13,500	1920—155,647
1916— 69,682	1921— 77,627
1917—125,399	1922—242,373
1918— 93,814	1923—483,310

We are the world's largest manufacturers of quality cars, having attained this leadership through offering the utmost possible per dollar value in modern quality automobiles.

Before buying any car at any price *See Chevrolet First.*

Chevrolet Motor Company, Detroit, Michigan

Division of General Motors Corporation

Five United States manufacturing plants, seven assembly plants and two Canadian plants give us the largest production capacity in the world for high-grade cars and make possible our low prices. Chevrolet Dealers and Service Stations everywhere. Applications will be considered from high grade dealers only, for territory not adequately covered.

Prices f. o. b. Flint, Mich.

Superior Roadster	$490	Superior Commercial Chassis	$395
Superior Touring	495	Superior Light Delivery	495
Superior Utility Coupe	640	Utility Express Truck Chassis	550
Superior 4-Pass. Coupe	725		
Superior Sedan	795		

Fisher Bodies on Closed Models

The Delightful Practice of Burning Incense—

A HERITAGE from the Orient—is fast becoming universal, through the many new uses developed by modern civilization.

Today, with ***James' Temple of Allah Incense,*** you can remove all traces of stale tobacco smoke, mustiness or cooking odors; freshen the atmosphere of the nursery, bath and sick-room; and keep mosquitoes and other insects away.

To guard against substitution, be sure you ask for it by its full name—***James' Temple of Allah Incense.*** *Remember, only* ***James' Temple of Allah Incense*** *guarantees you fullest satisfaction for all uses, so insist on getting the original.*

Your evenings at home, too, will be more pleasant when you burn ***James' Temple of Allah Incense.*** It leaves a haunting, enduring sweetness; charming after the cares of day are laid aside.

James' Temple of Allah Incense **is made of the highest quality East Indian Sandalwood, Rose Petals and Florentine Orris-Root, in both powder and cones, in five enchanting fragrances: Sandalwood, Rose, Wistaria, Pine-Needle and Lavender.**

Leading drug and department stores carry ***James' Temple of Allah Incense,*** *but if unobtainable from your dealer, order direct. 1¾ ounce box of powder, 35 cents. Special De Luxe Incense Set—all-metal Oriental burner and package of incense, attractively boxed—$1.00. Sent postpaid anywhere in the U. S. A.*

172 Fifth Avenue — **JAMES DRUG COMPANY** — *Chemists and Perfumers Since 1882* — New York, N. Y.

Popular Announces the Winners of the January 7th

Advertising Prize Contest

First Prize:	$15.00.	J. T. DELROY, Port Orange, Florida *For letter submitted on Ivory Soap.*
Second Prize:	5.00.	C. L. JAMES, 1210 Summit Ave., Springfield, Mo. *For letter submitted on Hupmobile.*
Third Prize:	3.00.	I. GOTTFRIED, Box 41, Alajuela, Costa Rica. *For letter submitted on L. S. Starrett Co.*
Fourth Prize:	2.00.	MISS L. A. KELLER, 19 South High St., New Britain, Conn. *For letter submitted on Shipman-Ward Mfg. Co.*

We want to thank our readers for the many letters we have received. Our readers were quick to respond to our invitation to write us and help us prove to the advertiser that readers of fiction magazines read the advertising pages. The many letters received prove that our contention has been correct—that readers of fiction magazines *do* read the advertisements and the advertising department is glad to say that more advertisers are being convinced of this each month. Renewed thanks to our kind readers who have helped and are helping us.

Winners for the February 7th issue will be announced in the May 7th issue

See regular contest page for April contest

Choose the keyboard yourself

Something new in typewriters ~~~~ an "individualized" keyboard to fit your work exactly. Mail the coupon! Get all the facts about this remarkable machine. Learn how easy it is to own one

Corona is just as good as it looks! It has every convenience, including the wide carriage, the two-color, automatically-reversing ribbon, back spacer, margin release, self-spacing carriage return, etc.

The new "XC" MODEL CORONA

TELL us the kind of work you do, and we will show you your own keyboard—fitted with the very characters you need!

Think of the joy of being able to write just what you want to write instead of turning out makeshift work with a typewriter that lacks the keys you need most.

Why this machine fits your work so well

First of all, it has ninety characters, six more than the ordinary office typewriter. That is the secret of its wonderful convenience—its adaptability to *your work*.

It is not a freak machine—nor is it complicated. It is simply a regular Corona, with every modern improvement—*with 6 extra characters added to the keyboard.*

Choose your own keyboard

Do you want a full range of fractions? You can have them. Or we can give you chemical or medical symbols, mathematical signs and exponents, or a full set of accents for foreign languages.

With a machine like this, typewriting becomes a real pleasure. You'll do better, neater work with far less effort.

Corona has an eighteen-year record of Proved Durability. It is the best typewriter investment you can make.

And the price is low

Only $55 for this 90-character model, including the neat carrying case—and with a keyboard of your own selection. (The price of the 84-character Corona is still $50.)

Don't delay. Mail the coupon and let us tell you the address of a Corona store where you can see this new machine. There's no reason why you should deny yourself the pleasure and the profit of owning a typewriter that is really adapted to your work.

MAIL THIS COUPON

CORONA TYPEWRITER COMPANY, INC.
142 MAIN ST., GROTON, N.Y.

Without any obligation, send me complete Corona literature and the address of the nearest Corona dealer.

NAME .....

OCCUPATION .....

ADDRESS .....

Freshen up the Fairy way!

DIP into the foamy lather that Fairy Soap makes! See how easily and quickly you can rinse it off. Then get the clean refreshing feeling that only a perfectly pure white soap can give.

It's the feeling of true skin health. For Fairy Soap clears the pores—expels impurities—and gives the healthy glow of new skin vigor.

Fairy Soap is purity personified. It's white through and through—and fragrant with a delicately elusive perfume.

The oval cake is soap in its handiest form. Most convenient for toilet or bath. And economical because it wears to a thin wafer without break or waste.

It's white! It's pure! It floats!

FAIRY SOAP

She Found A Pleasant Way To Reduce Her Fat

She did not have to go to the trouble of diet or exercise. She found a better way; which aids the digestive organs to turn food into muscle, bone and sinew instead of fat.

She used *Marmola Prescription Tablets* which are made from the famous Marmola prescription. They aid the digestive system to obtain the full nutriment of food. They will allow you to eat many kinds of food without the necessity of dieting or exercising.

Thousands have found that the *Marmola Prescription Tablets* give complete relief from obesity. And when the accumulation of fat is checked, reduction to normal, healthy weight soon follows.

All good drug stores the world over sell *Marmola Prescription Tablets* at one dollar a box. Ask your druggist for them, or order direct and they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid.

MARMOLA COMPANY

283 Garfield Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

YOU TOO CAN PLAY THE HAWAIIAN GUITAR

JUST AS THE HAWAIIANS DO!

PLAY ALL THE LATEST HITS

After Your FIRST LESSON You Will Play a Complete Selection. We Guarantee That--

Our method is so simple, interesting and appealing that you begin in your first lesson to learn the famous Hawaiian Folk Song "ALOHA". Think how happy you will be when you surprise your friends by playing the fascinating Hawaiian Guitar.

Only Four Motions--
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In a few minutes you acquire the four motions necessary to play any piece--after that a short period of practice and you will have mastered this weirdly sweet music. Complete course of 52 lessons includes FREE beautiful Hawaiian Guitar, necessary picks, steel bar, etc. No extras.

No Previous Musical Knowledge Necessary

If you *never read a musical note in your life*--if you haven't even the slightest knowledge of music, we can quickly and positively teach you to play this wonderfully popular instrument. Don't be just a "listener" when you can *easily be the center of interest* among your friends. Over 40,000 successful students.

Just Mail a Post Card for Details

of our remarkable FREE Hawaiian Guitar Offer--simply write: "I am interested"--*but do it today.*

First Hawaiian Conservatory of Music, Inc.

Special courses on Violin, Tenor-Banjo, Banjo--Ukulele and Ukulele.

Desk 83 --233B'dway (Woolworth Bldg.) New York City

FREE A Beautiful Hawaiian Guitar

DIAMONDS

MILLION DOLLAR BARGAIN BOOK

FOR A FEW CENTS A DAY

Don't send a single penny. Ten days *Free Trial.* When the ring comes examine it—if you are not convinced it is the *Greatest Bargain in America,* send it back at our expense. Only if pleased, send $1.50 weekly--at the rate of a few cents a day. This Bargain Cluster Ring with 7 Blue-White Perfect Cut Diamonds can be yours. No Red Tape. No Risk.

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Send for it today. It pictures thousands of Bargains. Address Dept. 1924.

Million Dollar Bargain Book FREE

J.M.LYON & CO.
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Relief for coughs

Use PISO'S—this prescription quickly relieves children and adults. A pleasant syrup. No opiates. 35¢ and 60¢ sizes sold everywhere

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"DON'T SHOUT"

"I can hear you with the MORLEY PHONE." It is invisible, weightless, comfortable, inexpensive. No metal, wires nor rubber. Can be used by anyone, young or old.

The Morley Phone for the

DEAF

is to the ears what glasses are to the eyes. Write for Free Booklet containing testimonials of users all over the country. It describes causes of deafness; tells how and why the MORLEY PHONE affords relief. Over one hundred thousand sold.

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FORDS 34 Miles

on Gallon of Gasoline

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We guarantee all other cars nearly double present mileage, power and flexibility, make hills on high formerly difficult on low. Models for any car, truck, tractor, marine or stationary engine. Makes old cars better than new. See wonderful mileage guarantees for other cars.

Ford.....34 mi.	Reo.....24 mi.	Chevrolet.....32 mi.
Buick 4.....30 mi.	Chalmers.....23 mi.	Maxwell (25)..30 mi.
Buick 6.....24 mi.	Olds. 6.....23 mi.	Nash 6.....23 mi.
Hudson.....20 mi.	Paige 6.....20 mi.	Lincoln 8.....17 mi.
Hupp.....25 mi.	Oakland 6.....24 mi.	Stdbkr Lt. 6....23 mi.
Dodge.....28 mi.	Overland 4....32 mi.	Cole 8.....17 mi.

If your car is not mentioned here send name and model for particulars and our guarantee on it. AGENTS WANTED.

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You can drive any car in heaviest traffic without shifting gears. Starts off on high in any weather without priming or heating—no jerking or choking. No more foul spark plugs or carbon in cylinders. No leaking of gas into crank case. Try it 30 days on our guarantee of money back if not entirely satisfied. No strings to our guarantee. YOU ARE THE JUDGE. Anyone who can handle a wrench can attach it. No boring of new holes or changing of operating mechanism. Write today.

AIR-FRICTION CARBURETOR CO.

174 Raymond Bldg. Dayton, Ohio, U. S. A

Aspirin

Beware of Imitations!

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Unless you see the "Bayer Cross" on package or on tablets you are not getting the genuine Bayer Aspirin proved safe by millions and prescribed by physicians over twenty-three years for

Colds	Headache
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Neuralgia	Pain, Pain

Accept "Bayer Tablets of Aspirin" only. Each unbroken package contains proven directions. Handy boxes of twelve tablets cost few cents. Druggists also sell bottles of 24 and 100. Aspirin is the trade mark of Bayer Manufacture of Monoaceticacidester of Salicylicacid.

It's delicious and good—you'll find the regular use of that flavory Beeman's *"a sensible habit"*

BEEMAN'S

Pepsin Gum

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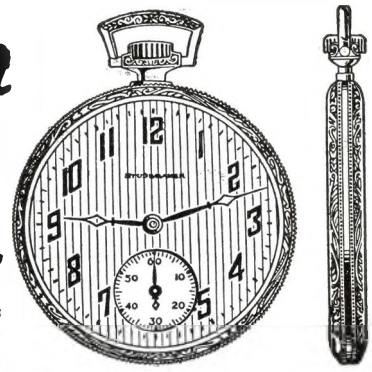

Choice of 54 newest Art Beauty Cases; 8 handsome dial designs. 8 adjustments, including heat, cold, isochronism and 5 positions; Insured for a lifetime. Direct from the maker at lowest prices ever named on equal quality. Send for the Book!

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Fine Chain FREE!

A limited offer! Free with the Studebaker Insured Watch a beautiful Watch Chain. Write while offer lasts.

Ladies Bracelet Watches

Handsome new designs and shapes in 14 K white gold—excellent timekeepers. Write for special folder No. W 304.

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"Don't you know—*really?*"

THE thing was troubling her—something she had overheard several men say about her when they thought she was the last person in the world within hearing distance.

So she had asked two of her friends. They were amazed that she had never thought of this sort of thing before. But they were frank enough to explain it to her in a delicate way. And she never ceased being grateful to them.

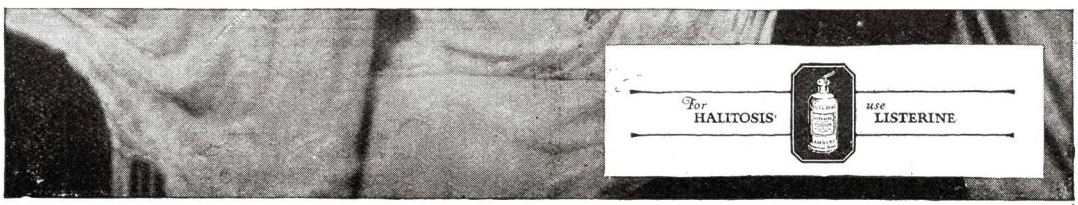
* * * *

That's the insidious thing about halitosis (unpleasant breath). You, yourself, rarely know when you have it. And even your closest friends won't tell you.

Sometimes, of course, halitosis comes from some deep-seated organic disorder that requires professional advice. But usually—and fortunately—halitosis is only a local condition that yields to the regular use of Listerine as a mouth wash and gargle. It is an interesting thing that this well-known antiseptic that has been in use for years for surgical dressings, possesses these unusual properties as a breath deodorant.

It halts food fermentation in the mouth and leaves the breath sweet, fresh and clean. *Not* by substituting some other odor but by really removing the old one. The Listerine odor itself quickly disappears. So the systematic use of Listerine puts you on the safe and polite side.

Your druggist will supply you with Listerine. He sells lots of it. It has dozens of different uses as a safe antiseptic and has been trusted as such for a half a century. Read the interesting little booklet that comes with every bottle.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*

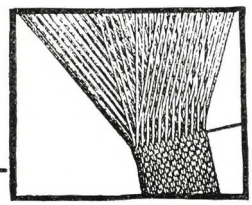


Are Your Brakes Obedient?

THE problems of driving today call for brakes that almost think for themselves. At least, brakes that obey your call instantly.

Multibestos, the Brake Lining with the Interlocking Weave, is always ready for the hidden emergency and is famous for the long time it *retains* its ability to take hold.

MULTIBESTOS
THE BRAKE LINING
with the Interlocking Weave



Auto Maps — Up-to-date — 10c

SEND 10c and address of concern that usually relines your brakes, and we'll send you an absolutely up-to-date Rand McNally Touring Map showing any state you wish. Size 28½ x 34 in. Be sure to state points you wish to visit. Order now.

MULTIBESTOS COMPANY
Dept. A. F. 4, Walpole, Mass., U. S. A.

Limbers up lame muscles

Muscles are likely to be stiff and sore after unaccustomed exercise. Limber them up quickly with Sloan's. Stroke it on gently. You don't have to rub it in. Fresh blood is sent straight to the exhausted tissues. "Fatigue poisons" are swept away, the aching stops, the muscles regain their elasticity. Get a bottle from your druggist today—35 cents.

Sloan's Liniment *-kills pain!*

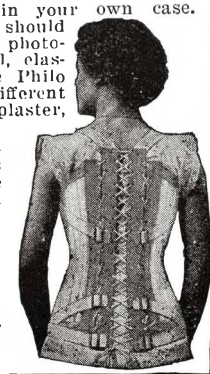
Deformities of the Back

Thousands of Remarkable Cases

An old lady, 72 years of age, who suffered for many years and was absolutely helpless, found relief. A man who was helpless, unable to rise from his chair, was riding horseback and playing tennis within a year. A little child, paralyzed, was playing about the house after wearing a Philo Burt Appliance three weeks. We have successfully treated more than 50,000 cases the past 20 years.

30 Days' Trial Free

We will prove its value in your own case. There is no reason why you should not accept our offer. The photographs show how light, cool, elastic and easily adjusted the Philo Burt Appliance is—how different from the old torturous plaster, leather or steel jackets.



Every sufferer with a weakened or deformed spine owes it to himself to investigate thoroughly. Price within reach of all.

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If you will describe the case it will aid us in giving you definite information at once.

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Can You Afford to Buy An Unknown Battery For Your Car?

The Sign of "Friendly Service"

Service Stations Everywhere

For your whole electrical system, the maker of your car insists on a name which means an earned reputation for perfection of manufacture and constant, faithful operation.

Is it sensible then for you to take chances on an unknown battery which is the very heart of the electrical system?

Is it reasonable to suppose that the unknown is as good a battery as an institution like Prest-O-Lite produces?

Behind that name lie the experience and reputation for character and integrity of manufacture built up through 20 years of service to the motoring public. Behind the Prest-O-Lite Battery stand the resources of Prest-O-Lite and—most valuable to you—the national spread of Prest-O-Lite service known everywhere as the "Friendly Service."

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For your Radio get assured performance in The Prest-O-Lite Radio Battery.

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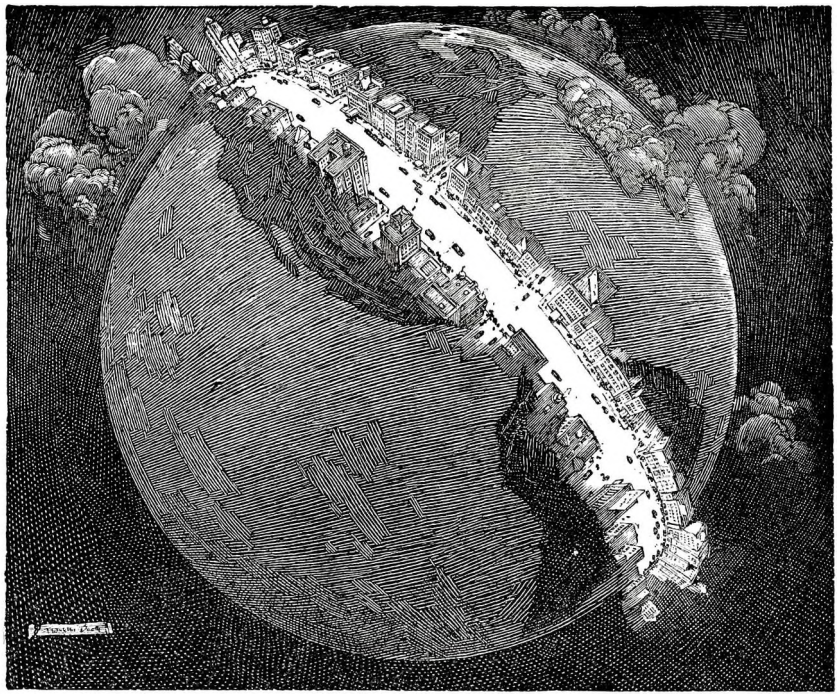
THE OLDEST SERVICE TO MOTORISTS



Broadway around the world

Compare these huge turbines with the tiny lamp used by surgeons to examine the inside of an ear, and you will realize the variety of G-E products. Between these extremes are lamps, motors, generators, switch-boards and other equipment—all tools by which electricity works for you.

The biggest machines built by the General Electric Company are steam turbine generators of 80,000 horse power, used in great power houses.

One of these giants could generate enough current to run all the street cars in twelve cities as large as Wilmington or Spokane. Ten could light a street as bright as Broadway running around the world.

GENERAL ELECTRIC

TO PLEASE all manner of people the way the new Overland does, a car has to be just about right in every detail.

Mechanics find Overland to be right mechanically. Professional men like Overland because it is faithful and dependable. Farmers appreciate the greater Overland value. Women enjoy the ease of handling. Salesmen know it can stand hard driving.

There is extra satisfaction in the bigger power of the bigger new Overland engine. And in such exclusive advantages as the Overland all-steel body, with baked-enamel finish—Triplex Springs (*Patented*), which *pull* instead of *push* the wheels over bumps—and bigger, stronger axles.

The new Overland is the greatest Overland ever built—everywhere called the most automobile in the world for the money!

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APRIL 7, 1924
VOL. LXXI No. 6
THE POPULAR MAGAZINE
25 Cents

Being a closer student of beauty than most women—isn't it natural to consider an actress as a connoisseur of beauty accessories—of powder puffs?

Where Faces are Fortunes!

The searching glare of the spotlight demands a skin of naturally flawless texture.

The actress who would keep hers thus, despite late, weary hours and the daily irritation of make-up, must have faith in her array of powder puffs.

That is why in green room and boudoir; for professional as well as for daintier, more personal use—hundreds of stars prefer Gainsborough Powder Puffs.

These puffs spread powder evenly and naturally. They are softer than the most sensitive skin. From the moment you begin to use one you will understand why—"*Each Soft Caress adds Loveliness.*"

A Daintier Puff—

Packed attractively in its sanitary, dust-proof container—it comes to you untouched by human hands.

Made of rich velvety velour—or soft lamb's wool—in all sizes to suit your needs. Prices 10 to 75c. At the Better Stores.

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