THE BIG NATIONAL FICTION MAGAZINE

TWICE-A-MONTH

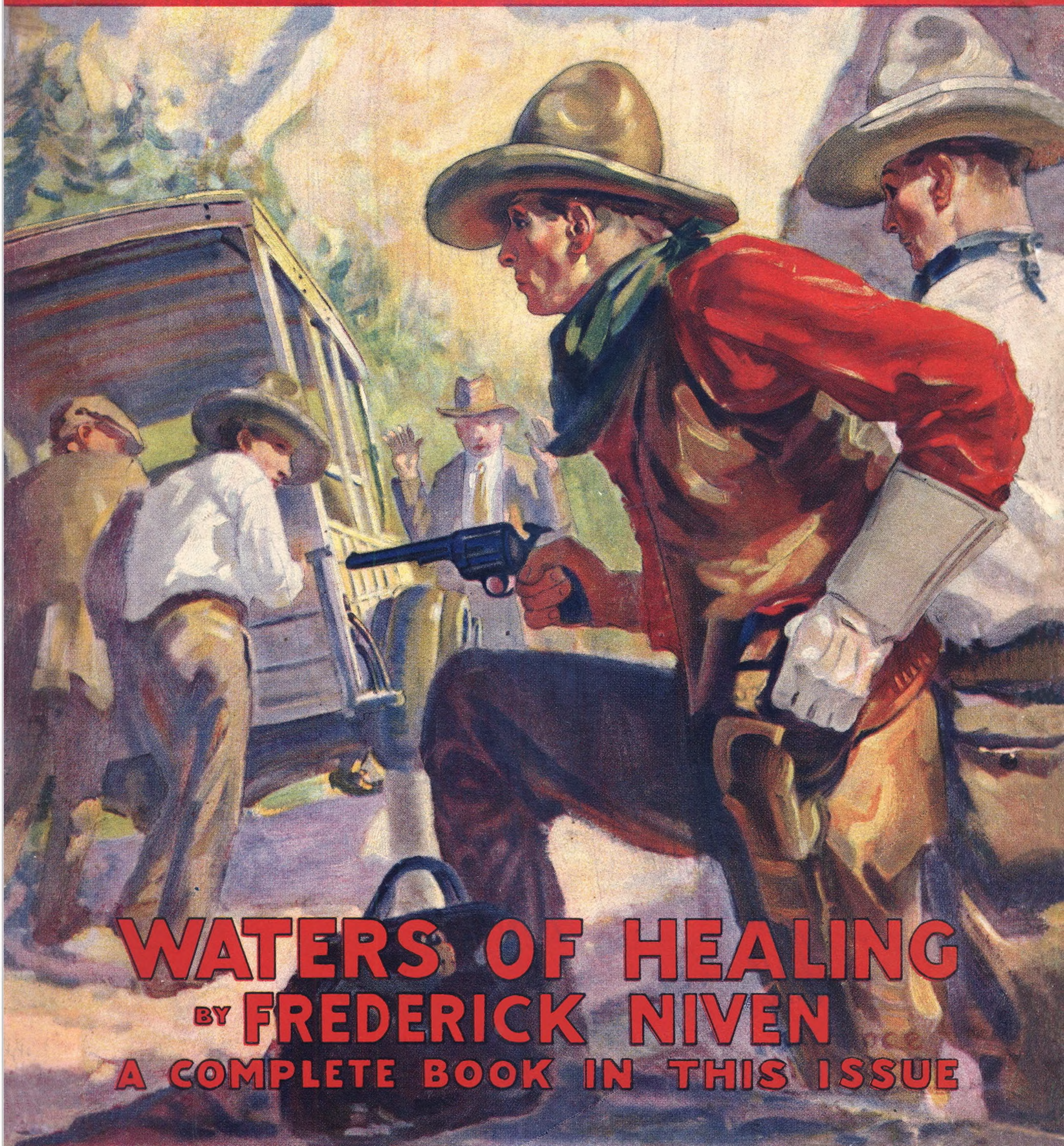
The Popular Magazine

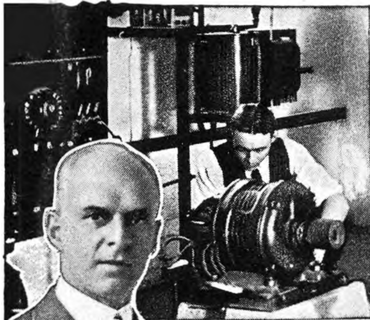
AUG. 7, 1926

25 cts.

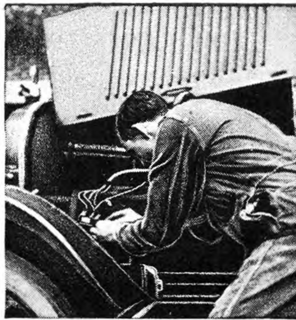
AUGUST 7, 1926
VOL. LXXXI No. 2

★ THE POPULAR MAGAZINE 25 Cents

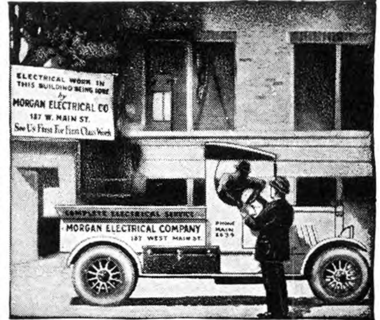




Herbert Dickerson, Warrenton, Va., makes $7,500 a year



Automotive Electricity pays W. E. Pence, Albany, Oregon, over $9,000 a year



J. R. Morgan, Columbus, Ohio, makes $30 to $50 a day in business for himself

Electrical Experts Are in Big Demand

I Will Train You at Home To Fill a Big Pay Job

It's a shame for you to earn $15 or $20 or $30 a week, when in the same six days as an Electrical Expert you could make $70 to $200—and do it easier—not work half so hard. Why then remain in the small pay game, in a line of work that offers no chance, no big promotion, no big income? Fit yourself for a real job in the big electrical industry.

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But I Learned to Dominate Others Almost Overnight

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And that was the way it always was—I was always being given opportunities to show my ability and always failing miserably. I was bashful, timid and nervous—I never knew how to express myself, how to put my ideas across. In fact, I was actually afraid of my own voice!

In social life, too, I was a total loss—I was always the "left-over"—the one who sat back and watched the others have a good time. I seemed doomed to be an all around failure unless I could conquer my timidity, my bashfulness, my lack of poise and inability to express myself.

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- How to write letters
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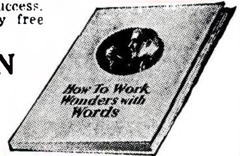

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The tang of the forest, the soul-stirring thunder of big timber whirling along a swiftly flowing stream, the frantic excitement when the logs jam, the devil-may-care lumber-jacks—these things and the clash of temperaments, distrust, misunderstandings, envy, cunning, trickery, make up the vivid, fascinating book-length story called "FLUID OF THE SUN," by Clay Perry, that will be published complete in the next issue of THE POPULAR. On the news stands August 20th, and your news dealer will reserve a copy for you—if you ask him to NOW!

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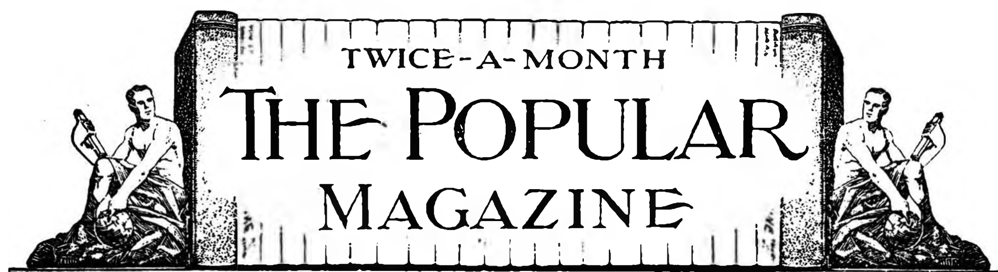

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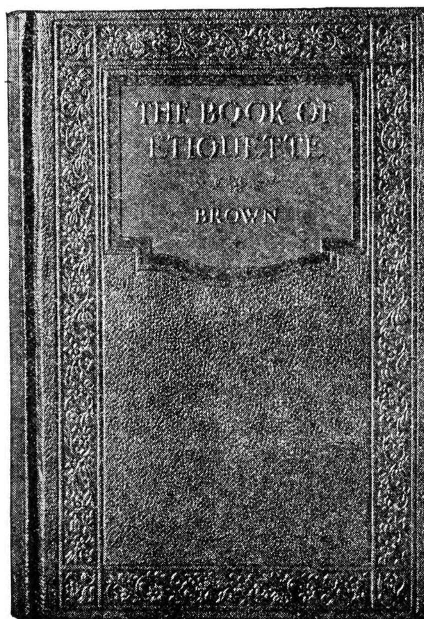

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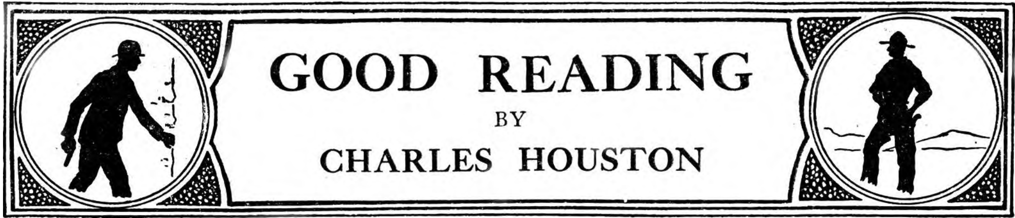

GOOD READING

BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

He's a Harvard University graduate with a long string of degrees after his name. A highbrow, if you like, who writes learned papers on industrial problems and is respected for his thorough knowledge of complex affairs.

I met him in the railroad station the other day on his way to his beautiful country home. He had two books under his arm, and as we stood waiting for the train, curiosity prompted me to ask him what he planned to read over the week-end. I was not surprised when he showed me the first book. It was a work on economics by a distinguished college professor; a specialized piece of writing that could only appeal to a limited few.

He grinned as he handed me the second volume.

"This is where I get my real fun," he said. "I have to plow through that first book because it's part of my job to find out what the professor thinks; but I can hardly wait until I'm done, to get at this second book. I'll probably finish it at a reading. But if it's like the rest of the titles on the list of Chelsea House novels, I won't skip a single page, which is more than I can promise for the professor's book."

And he showed me the Western story that he had picked out for "real fun."

It was one of the Chelsea House popular copyrights that I have reviewed in these columns. A rollicking, breezy story of men and women out under the great blue which canopies the Western plains of this country; a typical fast-moving story, packed with exciting incidents that made me recommend it to all who love well-told, exciting fiction.

Now this is not to say that none but learned college graduates read Chelsea House stories of mystery, romance, and the Great West. Of course the audience that these books reach is a great cross section of America. I've seen cow-punchers waiting their turn at a rodeo in Oklahoma absorbed in these books, and two-fisted coal diggers in Illinois mining camps buying them at the local drug store. I know many a hard-headed business man who loves to forget the cares of the office for a while in the absorption of a detective story that bears the Chelsea House brand, and it is impossible to go abroad in America without coming on men and women in all walks of life who find in fiction of this sort a sure release from the monotonies of everyday life.

There is evidently a great national need for good fiction. And, as is always the case, the demand is being adequately met by American enterprise and ingenuity. At Fifteenth Street and Seventh Avenue, New York City, is a huge building that shelters one of the oldest and best-established publishing businesses in this country. Here are being published and distributed from coast to coast the books of fiction that have the common mark of Chelsea House, the sign of good reading everywhere.

For your guidance as to the latest and best of the Chelsea House offerings, I have made thumb-note sketches of recent titles. All of these books may be obtained at your dealer, or you may write direct to Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, for a complete list.

Continued on 2nd page following

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THE BRUTE, a Western Story by David Manning. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

When soft-handed civilization takes hold of a primitive creature fresh from the wilderness, something fine in him is apt to disappear. That's what happened to Harry Camden who packed the kick of a mule in each of his big fists, and who could have won fame and fortune in the ring if he had not listened to the lure of easy living. How Camden won through at last after a series of hair-raising events, how he recaptured his better self and won real respect, makes a story of the great West told as only Mr. Manning, veteran fictionist, knows how to tell it.

THE WIZARD'S SPYGLASS, a Detective Story by Emart Kinsburn. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Mr. Kinsburn has written many a stirring detective story, but none more thrilling than this. From the very moment that an innocent man, accused of murder, decides to cover his tracks by taking on the identity of a dead man, the reader is kept guessing at lightning pace. Here are all the elements that make for rattling good fiction; action and more action—mystery, romance, and adventure, cleverly combined by the author. Take my advice and start this early in the evening if you don't want to sit up all night.

TRAIN'S TRUST, by George Owen Baxter. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price $2.00.

This is one of the famous Chelsea House Two-dollar novels by the author of "The Shadow of Silver Tip," "Wooden Guns," and other fascinating fictions. It tells the story of the perilous journey of Steve Train, gambler, adventurer, and rogue, only trusted by one man, who rode away to find the outlaw, Jim Nair. As you ride with him over mountains and through dangerous passes, as you camp under the stars with him and share his amazing adventures, the four walls of your room fade away and you fairly breathe the winds of the Great West that blows through this fascinating book. Written by a man who knows how to paint a scene and draw a character in a truly colorful fashion, "Train's Trust" is one of the outstanding Western books of the times. By all means have a copy on your library table.

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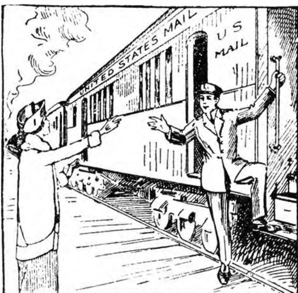

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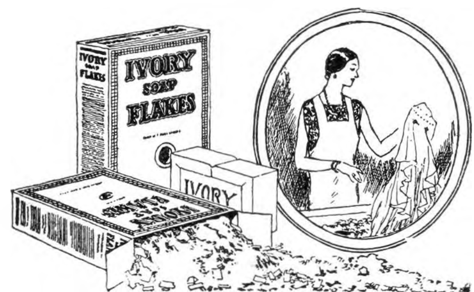

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Waters of Healing

By Frederick Niven

Author of "'I'm Going Now,'" "That Little Sawed-off Cuss," Etc.

The West is hard. For instance, it takes young men full of the hope of life and twists them into unrecognizable and knotty shapes, like dried-out apple trees. Larry Symons was one of these young men. He hoped to irrigate the dry desert land of the Upper Sanish Valley and settle there with a wife and a home. He forgot for a bit that the human heart can also dry up and very often needs irrigation, too. But the grimness born of six years of prison can come a cropper when a woman smiles with the hopefulness of life.

CHAPTER I.

THE ULTIMATUM.

LET us call the place the Upper Sanish Valley, for the very reason that that is not the name it bears on maps of the West. You may easily hazard a guess or two from the local color, as the story goes along, where it is; and that will be close enough. The sagebrush that grows there is not of the purple variety, but yellow.

The aromatic and pungent odor of it came gustily into a certain frame house in the scattering of homes called Elwinton—the one with the board over the door reading "Upper Sanish Valley Irrigated Land Company"—on a certain June day, came gustily in with the determined entrance of four rather grim-looking men.

They had come to see Bertrand Elwin, hearing that he had just arrived that day from Blaeberry, their railroad town.

Elwin was many things, and among them a company promoter. He was the kingbolt of that scheme called the Upper Sanish Valley Irrigated Land Company. He had, as they say, "all kinds of money," for he had many irons in the fire; and a canny man was he.

He looked up from his swivel chair before the gleaming desk as the clump of these four pairs of feet smote into the office. There was something in the sound they made that caused him to raise his eyes in a guarded, self-effacing manner. He had not made all the money he possessed without having heard heels hammer that specially definite kind of tattoo before, a tattoo of ultimatum. It put him on guard. He glanced up, glanced down, then looked up again with a suave smile at the advancing four.

"Hullo, Brown!" he said, in a cheery manner. "Hullo, Hayes! Hullo, Beymer!" all with a little inclination of his head. "How do you do, Symons?"

Larry Symons was one of the more recent arrivals in the valley or, if you like to put it that way, one of the last birds to be caught in the lime of the U. S. V. I. Land Company.

"Just see what these gentlemen want," said Elwin to Edward Motley, his secretary, and turned back to the papers on his desk again.

MOTLEY knew grimness when he saw it. He peeped at Elwin, and then stepped quickly to the counter and looked from one to another of the stern quartet. He did not know what to say. He was switching in his mind between a merely interrogatory "Yes?" and a "What can I do for you?" when John Brown explained what he wanted, not by speech, but by merely raising a hand and pointing the forefinger very definitely at the president of the company.

"Want to speak to him?" asked Motley.

It was the secretary's business to take care of the great man's schemes, both the just and the unjust, to take his wages, and to keep his own council upon the latter variety of schemes that his duties might give him insight into. Something in the eyes of these four men made him feel that he would like to be right out of this affair. The indications were clearly very cloudy, storm impending.

"Yep!" snapped Brown.

Another clerk, sitting at a farther table, glanced over his shoulder and back to his work again. Any one could tell that the barometer was falling, so to speak. Even to have looked in, in passing, one would have tapped that something sullen was afoot in there.

The secretary slithered to Elwin's side and mumbled something in a low tone.

"Oh! Want to see me, do they?" said Elwin, pleasantly—or at least near to pleasantly.

He dried his signature to a letter on a blotting pad, rose, looked round the room.

"Come in," he invited. "Get chairs, get chairs."

"We don't want chairs," said Brown. "We've just come in to ask you when you think the irrigation flumes will be completed on our end of the valley."

"Aren't they working down that way?" asked Elwin.

Brown stared. The stare meant: "Why, you know they aren't!" What he said at that stage of the grapple was:

"No. Never started yet. Work's hanging up even on the main flume all the time, right along."

"Well, I haven't been able to look into that yet, gentlemen. I only got back to-day. I've been outside."

"Yes, that's why we're here to see you now. We've been in once or twice and we're always told you'll be able to answer. We asked for the matter to be written about to you."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Elwin.

He turned and glared indignantly—or near indignantly—at his secretary, who was a very sly young man, a run-with-the-hare-and-hunt-with-the-hounds young man, a sit-on-the-fence young man, who tried to hold his job on the one hand and not be ostracized, or worse, by the community on the other. Many a man could not have played his rôle at all.

"Did you mention the matter to me, Motley?" asked Elwin.

"Yes. I told you about it in one of the recent letters I sent," and then he mumbled: "and once before, too."

"Oh! Quite. Well, it must have slipped me. Didn't I say in my reply that you'd better get the board to look after it?"

Motley looked at nothing in particular, evasive of eye.

"I could turn up the file of letters if you like," he suggested, "and verify exactly."

"Oh, you needn't bother about that," said Elwin. "It will be all right now that these gentlemen are here and the matter is brought to me personally! Yes, you certainly must get the water down there. That must be seen to."

Brown leaned against the counter. They were not entire fools, these men; they had known that they could get little out of the secretary in Elwin's long absence. That had been plain as a pikestaff. But they did not know how much they could get out of Elwin, president of the company, from whom they had bought their land, even now he was back in the valley.

Reading over their purchase forms in the light of subsequent events, they all had had a feeling that there were little holes in the company's typed promises. It was not absolutely clear, indeed, some of them were beginning to think, that the water need ever be put on at all. A pity there had not been an outside date fixed for that.

"I understand," said Elwin, "that work is going on with what celerity we can act, and the company is not a company of millionaires, you know."

"Well, you got our money!" said Brown and Hayes together.

"You've sure got all mine," remarked Symons, with a dry laugh.

They certainly had all his. He had fallen desperately in love down in the main Sanish Valley with Maisie Maurice, daughter of E. P. Maurice who was known over a thousand miles just as "E. P., old-timer." And here, in the upper valley, Larry had thought, when the land company began its boost, was opportunity for a young man to jump in and make good. He was going to make a home, and then—then ask Maisie to share it. That was his aim.

IT was a dry valley, like all these sage-brush lands, but the men who were in with water—with *water*, mark you—were already doing well. On coming in, he had carefully surveyed the country; he had seen what these men were doing, what they could raise, had ferreted out something about the markets. He had imagined, at first, that he was making a wise move.

"Well, as I say," repeated Elwin, "the company is not just rolling in funds, you know. You got the land fairly cheap. Everybody did."

"I guess so did the company when it bought it all up with a view to subdividing to us suckers," commented Beymer, in a low voice, a comment which was rather foolish perhaps, not exactly a soft answer turning away wrath.

Brown turned and frowned at him. He could have said all that, and more, but he did not think the time was ripe. Their manner was obviously of men

who were a touch crusty, but they had merely been making inquiries so far, not indulging in edged repartee.

Elwin was a hard nut to crack. He had heard all that Beymer said, and something like a shadow passed across his eyes.

"Take a memo, Motley," he said, "to bring this matter up at the board meeting. These gentlemen on the south end evidently are feeling a grievance. But ——" he thrust out his chin toward Beymer—"as you suggest, if there were more people come in, we would have more money to play with."

Beymer gazed in his eyes and could not find the man in them. Elwin had that trick of effacing himself.

Brown pursed his lips.

"There don't seem much good mentioning things casually to the board," he said firmly. "That's been done while you were away, too. And this that you say about getting in more people to help pay for the irrigation work—— Why, man!" he ejaculated, "that's like some of these schemes you hear of where a fellow goes and buys something, promising to pay in a couple of months, when he's already got in view a purchaser to whom he can sell at about a hundred per cent profit within one month!" There was a story current of Bertrand Elwin having done this kind of thing on a big scale at one time. "The company ought to have had capital at the start to put in all the flumes——"

"Oh, come now, it couldn't do that!" interrupted Elwin.

"Well, a reasonable amount," persisted Brown.

There, he was losing the day!

Elwin stepped back and smiled placidly at him, while he stood ponderously considering on the other side of the counter.

"I think," said Larry Symons, "that you might anyhow arrange for the people who have bought the land to work on the flumes for wages, instead of getting men in from outside who'll just pull out when it is through. That would help us a bit. And it would be for your good, too. It would keep the money in the valley."

"The flume gangs are full to capacity," replied Elwin, still with that urbane smile. "We have some of the settlers working on them, too. You must be just."

Must be just! That remark made Larry angry deep down. Here was he seeking justice and was told he must be just! And he was told so by a man who was quibbling. Very few of the people who had bought land from the company were employed at the work on the flumes.

"And anyway," went on Elwin, "I don't think we can be dictated to," and he tapped the counter lightly two or three times with his well-manicured hand.

It was at this that Brown, who had objected to Beymer's acerb accent, became acerb himself. It was that bland finality of the tapping of Elwin's fingers on the counter that, as he would have said, got his goat. He clenched his big fist, smacked it down and, head lowered, peered at the president of the company under his brows.

"You get busy!" he snapped. "Some of us fellows are growing desperate. Some of us sunk all we had in our land and our buildings, thinking we'd have the water on by the time we got through with that, and we're getting tired of being fobbed off and fobbed off."

Elwin half turned away, made two steps sidewise toward his desk.

"All—right," he drawled. "All right, gentlemen."

"And," said Brown, "just when can you promise to let us know when we can expect the flumes down there?"

"After the next board meeting——" began Elwin.

They thought that was the answer, he paused then so long, but he added:

"We should be in a better position to give you some idea of the date."

The four men turned toward the door, baffled. The sight of the sandy benches outside, tufted over with the yellow sage, a grasshopper or two clicking here and there, gave them pause before making exit. The same thought hit them all simultaneously: they were going back out again no farther forward than when they entered, despite all the determination of that entry.

They halted unanimously, as at a word of command, though no command was given. They looked at the planks at their feet; they looked at each other. Any one might have known they were, as John Brown had said, growing desperate.

Then Brown walked deliberately back, past the counter; and Symons followed him closely, the other two bringing up the rear. Elwin had sat down at his desk again, and he looked up then as if he was astonished to find them still there.

Brown put a hand on the curved side of the desk.

"If you don't give us a definite date this time," he said, bending over Elwin, "there'll be trouble."

"Oh? What kind of trouble?" asked Elwin, combative on the instant.

These men did not know all, though for a moment he wondered if they did. There was something behind Elwin also. The company was not assured by the water department regarding the deflection of more than a certain amount of water onto the land. That was a little private source of anxiety for the chairman and the directors. But his manner exasperated Larry.

"I tell you one thing," said he, stepping in front of Brown, "when you give us the date finally, if you don't get the water on by the time promised, there will be hell to pay!"

That seemed to do all four good. John Brown gave him no slightest frown of annoyance. He had been on the point of saying just that himself.

They swung round and marched out of the office, their heels slamming down a tattoo as definite, after all, as the tattoo of their entrance.

CHAPTER II.

OF PIONEER STOCK.

FOUR cayuses went sifting sand from their hoofs down the road from Elwinton, their riders—Brown, Symons, Hayes and Beymer—looking still rather grim, but feeling fairly well satisfied with themselves.

Nobody walks in the Upper Sanish Valley. Cayuses do not there signify wealth. Larry Symons had purchased his, as a matter of fact, the fall before for twenty-five dollars, from the Indians near his former headquarters in the main Sanish Valley, they having had a good year with foals and expecting a lot of snow on the ranges where their horses saw the winter through, and so selling off as many as they could, thus cheaply, in advance of the winter.

The settlers all had their horses. Those who had been in first, and had water, had motor cars. Elwin, of course, had his big seven-passenger sedan, one that cost quite a nest egg, as nest eggs are considered by some people. It was "looking on this picture and on this," as Shakespeare has it, that had helped to precipitate trouble: the U. S. V. I. Land Company president and board able to take vacations "out," trips to Florida even, trips to San Francisco; and people, on the land they had bought cheap, and sold not so very cheap, with promises of irrigation, still waiting for water.

"Well," said Brown, "I don't know whether we got any further forrad or not toward getting the water on, but if we haven't got that, we've got further forrad to——" He paused for a word.

"A show-down," said Symons and Clifford Hayes in duet.

"A show-down," Brown agreed.

"I hope it's done some good," observed Beymer, reining aside as they came to the road that led to his ranch. "So long!"

"So long! Good luck!"

"So long, Dick!"

"So long! I hope so"

THE three, leaving him, rode on, canted a bit forward in the saddles, gripping with their knees, side by side, each at the same angle. They did not speak. Their cayuses' dainty hoofs whispered the same rhythmic pit-a-pat in the sand.

Eventually there was something rather pleasant to all three in the unity of it, in the rhythm, neck and neck, *pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat.* At the same moment each emitted a little laugh of pleasure. They were men like that, men of the open. They felt pretty well "up against it," but still there were horses, and there was the open air. As some poor scholar, bankrupt, sits reading his classic volume, lost to the fact that the brokers are in the house, somewhat so were these three men suddenly happy in the swing of that ride, despite their almost hopelessness regarding their temporal affairs.

"To the devil with him!" broke out Larry abruptly. "I built my house here, and I got my fences up, and I'm just waiting for one thing—the water. I'm going back to the Sanish Valley."

He was riding in the center, and the other two men turned their heads and looked at him suddenly with an unbelieving light in their eyes.

"To quit?" asked Hayes, with an emphasis of astonishment on the last word, unable to believe his ears.

"Oh, no—quit nothing!" replied Larry, laughing at the suggestion. "I got a mineral claim back in the mountains up there, head of Sitcum Creek, and I might just as well go and put in my assessment work for the year and hold her. Perhaps when I return, Mr. Bertrand Elwin may have the board moving. Can't do much here this year now, anyway. By the time they get the flumes in, at the best reckoning, it will be too late to do much. In fact, if they hang it up a great deal longer, they are liable to say they might as well wait till next spring."

"No, sir!" exclaimed Brown. "If they say that after the meeting, it will be hell to pay."

"Well, that's what I'm going to do," said Larry. "It's only a middling good showing I have up there, considering the length it's away from the railroad, and of course the financiers will try to knock it by talking about difficulty of transport. I ain't counting the chickens before they are hatched, but seeing I have it I may as well hold it, things here being so dubious."

"Where will you get your grubstake for it?" asked Brown.

"I guess the storekeeper at Sanish will let me go the length of another sack of flour, or a bag of tea—maybe both!" Larry laughed again. "There's fish in Sitcum Creek, too, and I can sometimes knock over a fool hen up there. I don't want to lose tenure on my claim. I'll do it somehow if I have to live on berries! It's a small little iron in the fire, I know, but—— Aw, what's the good of waiting around till they have their board meeting and let us know? I'm too impatient. I'll fill in time that way."

"We'll see you when you come back, then?" said Brown.

"You sure will."

Larry reined in. The two other ponies tittupped on upon one side track and settled into a lope, Larry rode off upon the other, to his ranch. He turned his head and looked after them. There they went like two rocking-horses, loping, the riders leaning back now, legs

outthrust, behind them two ripples of dust in wavering spurts.

Larry rode on slowly, head turned, watching them, seeing the pale-yellow rolls of sand beyond them dotted with the bright-yellow bunches of the sage-brush, beyond again the sharp-cut benches, looking almost as if man-made, like embankments, and beyond again jagged peaks of mountains standing up, seeming, as the sun lit them, like colossal projections of pumice stone in some parts, and in others like spires of pink coral.

"Dang it," he said, "a pretty picture, a pretty picture! Great country if only it wasn't overcrowded and a man could live on his hunting and fishing. I don't think the Lord ever meant it for grangers. He sure didn't lay the water on it as if he did."

HOME again, in pursuance of the plan that he had come to when riding back from Elwinton, Larry rolled his blankets, got some provisions together, put the saddle on his pack pony, and soon, his door closed, was off upon his way.

He went down the Blaeberry Road, riding away, the pack horse ambling ahead, came to Walla at the time when the glory before dusk was over the land and the ridges fifty miles off were purple and looked as if one could almost touch them by stretching out a hand.

There was just Tom Gratton's way house at the junction of the roads there at Walla, standing on a bluff above Sanish River that burrows its way, deepening and deepening in years the gulch in which it runs; across the road from it the old pole corrals of the one-time almost monopolist J. P. Cattle Company, out of business these years because of the crowding of the range, the grass "eaten out."

A Chinaman in the hotel yard said "Hollo!" to him when he went by, and received a "Hullo, Wing!" in reply. That was all. Turning into the main Sanish Valley where the bull pines stand dotted by the side of a small tributary creek, like Sanish, burrowing deeper in the ages, he camped for the night; and by the evening of the next day he rode into the little town of Sanish.

Never would he forget the two conversations he had there with Maisie: The one that evening; the other, his assessment work done, before he rode back to the upper valley, to Elwinton, and what awaited him there. She was sitting on the porch as he rode into the diminutive street in that exquisite hour of the dry belts, twilight over all; and as she ran eagerly down the steps toward him, he dismounted.

"Hullo, Larry!" she cried out.

"Hullo, there! How are you, Maisie?"

"I'm very well," said she.

Question and answer were unnecessary, all mere formality, for Maisie had wonderful color in her cheeks for one of the dry lands. She could see, of course, in Larry's eyes, as he stood there, lines in hand, to talk, that she was admired. There were times when she thought there was more than admiration in his gaze; and as for herself, she entirely, frankly, liked this young man. He came from the same stock as she did, from generations of people who had sought spaces, elbow room, who required frontiers, who liked rolls upon rolls of sand tufted with bunch grass, and sagebrush, and tumbleweed, the kind of people who are rather humorously called settlers. They are really wanderers. When they can see another house from their door, they feel troubled; when they can see two, they fold their tents—or at least load their belongings into a tent-topped wagon—and silently steal away.

"I thought," said Larry, "that I might just as well come and put in my

assessment on that little mineral claim I got up in the hills. They're dilly-dallying and shillyshallying with us over there in Upper Sanish. I've got a house built, and stables; I've got my fences up; I've paid up to date for my land; but the company is awful slow about pushing the flumes along, and we can't do a thing without water. Some people think the work on the flumes has turned out more expensive than was expected and that they're trying to cut down now till they get more land sold.

"They ought really to have started with a bigger capital. They ought to have been the people to take a chance, not us settlers. Some think they have the cash to go ahead and are just acting mean about the flume work. Anyway, they certainly ought to have got all the main flumes in by now. the pipe ones. I think, considering it all in the light of what I know, that that ought to have been done before they started in peddling subdivisions."

She nodded her head thoughtfully. "I see," said she. "Oh, it will all come right yet, I expect! It's just patience you want; that's all."

His brow puckered. "That's the trouble," he said. "I don't know if it is only patience we need, Maisie. I sometimes think the way the agreement with them is worded that legally they might be able to go back on us."

She stared. "Surely not!" she exclaimed.

"Well, there's no final date for the water scheme to be completed. We never thought of that, it being so obvious that water was the one big essential. The thing was so obvious that we never noticed, till they began laying off on the work every now and then, that there was no final date for that."

"You wouldn't stand for them going back on you surely!" she said:

Here was one come of the stock that was wont to raise its own vigilantes, instead of going hundreds of miles to drag in the aid of a lawyer.

"No," he said, "I guess we wouldn't stand for that. According to law, though, I guess we were fools not to see the point earlier."

She probably did not mean her last remark with such a fighting edge as he took it, but what she said braced him in his determination that there would be trouble, or a fulfillment of promises understood, whatever loopholes of escape there might be in the actual wording of the U. S. V. I. Land Company's agreement.

"I'd better be getting on," he said. "I want to get a grubstake at the store before it shuts."

"Won't you look in again to-night?"

"I'd like to," he said, "but it will be too late by the time I get through, I'm afraid."

"Well, I'll see you before you go back to Elwinton?"

"Surely. Sure, Maisie."

He liked to speak her name. And when she called him Larry, something happened to him. He mounted, and when he turned in the saddle, she was back on the porch steps, walking slowly up. She raised a hand and waved it at him twice, then danced into the house.

Larry swept his hat off, and rode on to the store, a wonderful whirl of very tender emotions inside him. Difficult to locate the exact place. Under the fifth rib on the left side, it seemed to be chiefly.

The storekeeper was entirely willing to advance a stick or two of dynamite and a sack of flour. He suggested bacon also, unasked.

"I could do with it, but——"

"Sure, sure! I ain't worrying," said the storekeeper. "There ain't no need for you to worry, Larry. You'll be all right some of these days, and you can pay then. Leave it like that."

Pleasant-sounding words for a young

man somewhat harassed over the pelf side of life!

So in the morning, he was off up the Sitcum Creek Trail and within three weeks he was back again, and with a few more specimens of ore to leave with Frank Gorst, who was a sort of—one can hardly say jack-of-all-trades, but jack of all phases of mining industry in these parts.

Gorst's attitude was neither of one hopeful nor despondent. You would not come away from his office—all shelfed around with stones of various colors—and say definitely either, "Well, he's pretty sure that there's going to be a mining boom in the country!" or, "He hasn't much opinion of the mining chances here." A blank and noncommittal man was Frank Gorst, a cigarette everlastingly hanging from a corner of his mouth, and blinking his eyes from its ascending smoke as he vowed that he must give up smoking.

THE second talk with Maisie came. Her father, he who was known affectionately far and wide as "old E. P.," was sitting on the veranda when Larry projected himself slowly that way on the evening of his return.

"Hullo, boy! They tell me you've been up where you hear the angels' wings flapping. See anything in the way of game?"

E. P. was a great man for keeping track of the game. To be up in the mountains with a rifle and a camera was the pinnacle of life to him, its best offering to a man.

"Not an awful lot," replied Larry. "More wood ticks than game up in that big belt of timber! There was a cougar walked down—oh, a matter of a good five miles or so—after me."

"I know the place!" said E. P. "It was just where——" He began a long description.

"That's right," said Larry.

"Yep, I've seen that fellow two or three times when I've been up there," E. P. announced.

"You know," said Larry, "where there's a bend, beside a big rock and some mountain ash, and the trail kind of peters out, and down below there's a bit of a slough?"

E. P. nodded.

"There was a——"

"Moose!" broke out E. P.

"That's right. Have you seen him?"

"No, but I saw moose tracks around there once, beside that slough."

"I saw him," said Larry. "He was on the other side and just rose up sort of humping himself and walked into the forest."

Maisie came out of the house while this talk, so much in the vein her father liked, was in progress. Larry put a hand in his pocket and held forth for her inspection a little chunk of his glittering rock. She looked at it with interest, passed it to her father, who tossed it up and down in his palm, feeling its weight and considering it, before he gave it back to her.

"Well, sir," remarked the old man, "it's all a matter of transport. I don't expect to see any of my claims around here sold in my time. We're too far off."

"Oh, go on, father! You're always talking like that."

Larry held out his hand for the return of the ore, but Maisie flicked her head suddenly to one side in a way she had, elevating her eyebrows at the same time, and——

"Can't I keep this?" she asked.

"Sure, if you'd like to," said Larry. And again there was that tumultuous whirl under his fifth rib.

Old E. P. gave a chuckle and rose. "I've got to go to the store," he said, and left them.

"Take dad's chair," Maisie suggested; and after Larry was seated: "Well, you never can tell!" she said. "The railway might come in closer in

your time, and there might be a mining stir up here, and——"

She left the rest in the air.

"I'm neither hopeful nor downcast," said Larry, talking the way Frank Gorst looked. "I pretty nearly let it lapse, but seeing how we're held up and dillydallied and shillyshallied with in the Upper Sanish, I thought I might as well fill in the time by coming over. Things are awful slow, Maisie."

His head lowered slightly as he said this, looking very tenderly at her. And, to tell the truth, she wondered to herself: "Why doesn't he ask me to wait until he can come and ask me to be mistress of that ranch he's fixing up?"

He met that look in her eyes, then his own clouded. He turned away his head and stared into the distance.

The mosquitoes, the little mosquitoes of these parts that made such burning assaults despite their small size, drove the two inside within half an hour. They sat behind the screen door, chatting and looking out at the twilight, chatting chiefly about their respective families, what they had done, where they had been, how the great West had changed.

Maisie's grandfather had been on the frontier when the Mississippi bounded it, then had crossed the Mississippi and settled in Kansas. Here's why one feels there is something wrong in calling such men and women settlers. Kansas had become too settled for him, and off he set again with a couple of the farm wagons hooded over—prairie schooners—yes, and in those days E. P. had been old enough even to herd the little bunch of horses alongside. Then later Montana had become too settled for him, as Kansas for his father, and news of a place where one could get land cheap, and vary agricultural pursuits by going off in the summer to wash gold dust out of a creek, or in the winter trapping in the mountains, had lured him to the Sanish country, lost away in here among the sequestered dips and time-shattered peaks.

Twilight over, night come, Maisie lit the lamp, and then Larry had to talk of his folks, Minnesota people. His father, like hers, had been able to remember very clearly trekking to new land, into Dakota, and there Larry had been born to hear the old stories, to see still the two lives blending, grain elevators dotting the stretching railway lines and in the reserves, the Indians treasuring their old finery of furs and feathers to bring out on all possible occasions for a dance.

WHEN his father died, leaving his son little but the old unrest, off the lad had to come into the mountains. He had worked in lumber camps; he had worked on foothill ranches; he had acted as guide to tourists in one of the national parks. He had made friends with an old trapper and learned the trapper's calling—and quit it, as he said, because it was too darn cruel.

"It would be different if the darn things died right away," he said, "but you get along your trap line to find they've been suffering for hours maybe."

Then he had gone prospecting, first with an old prospector, then alone. Later he had thought he would settle, make a home. Hence the Upper Sanish, when land seemed within his purse there.

And then he looked thoughtfully at Maisie. It had been an intimate talk somehow, each on the theme of ancestors, and in that talk they had discovered that they had much in common in outlook, in tastes. Almost did he add: "And then, when I met you—when I met you—I thought I'd better try and get a place of my own and sort of settle," but he did not say it.

"When do you start out to-morrow?" she asked.

"In the morning, early. Make a

day's jump of it to Walla." His face looked grim. "You see, it's like this," he went on, "I sometimes wish I'd done the way some of the fellows did who went up there."

"What was that?" she inquired.

His head turned back to her.

"Beat it!" he said. "Gone on looking for another chance somewhere else. Why, there was one of them got up the whole framework of his house and then didn't like the look of things, gave them a present of it, and quit."

"Of course they do produce up there!" she said. "I think it is a case of patience, Larry."

"H'm!" he said, and nodded. Then he rose. "Well, I'd better be going."

"Won't you stay and have some supper when dad comes in?" she suggested.

"No, thanks. It's late now."

He was afraid that if he stayed on he might blurt out how greatly he adored her—and that, he felt, would be all wrong at the moment. His home in the Upper Sanish had nothing behind it. On his return the news might be merely of more airy promises and, if that awaited him, he would have to consider if the man he had just told of, who "quit," had not acted wisely and was to be imitated.

No, it wouldn't be fair to Maisie. And there were times—— A certain look of friendliness in her eyes, and that surge in his heart together, and he might, before he knew, have his arms round her and even be asking her—to wait for him to make a home, indefinitely, in the manner of the U. S. V. I. Land Company?

Maisie glanced at her wrist watch and saw, with amazement, that it was after ten o'clock.

Very abruptly, Larry held out his hand. "Well!" he said.

Maisie took that outstretched hand. "Good-by, Larry."

He turned, walked down the steps to the gravel path, in the light sprayed from the door, moved away with the carriage of one hesitant, troubled. He was not aware that she had come one or two steps down from the porch after him. But she had, and in a woman's way read the dejection of his back, understood the significance of his slow, departing walk.

"Larry!" she called.

He wheeled round.

"Good luck!" she said quietly.

Then she nodded, smiled, and ran up the steps and indoors again just as he, raising his hat, called back:

"Thank you, Maisie."

He went on then with an entirely different carriage and walk.

CHAPTER III.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

AT his little ranch, or one had better say, perhaps, for the sake of entire precision, ranch house, Larry Symons found all just as he had left it, when he threw the lines and dismounting again at his door in the late afternoon of the day of his return. The horses he gave each a scoopful of oats, leaving them contented, and went indoors to prepare his own supper.

Well, he was back! But what, he wondered, was he back to? Perhaps Maisie was right; he was, maybe, one of those who should be counseled patience.

The anxiety to know what had happened after his departure, if Elwin had given any satisfaction, sent him out again to ride across the benches to Brown's.

Dusk had fallen by the time he reached there. Brown's place was set back in the beginning of the scattered pines, and in the fading day would hardly have been visible from a hundred yards off, but a square of light flickered up, a window light, as Larry drew nearer.

At the same moment his horse gave a whinny, and "put in a step" unrequested by any indication from him. As he rode closer, he saw two cayuses hitched to a tree near the door.

"Got company," he thought, dismounting.

AN iron ring had been driven into the tree, and there Larry left his horse with the others. There was no curtain to the window, and as he stepped to the door, he saw the backs of two men, beyond them the lamplight on John Brown's face. He tapped at the door.

"Hullo! Come in!" shouted Brown.

Larry entered.

"Hullo, it's you, lad, back again! Just in time for the session," said Brown.

The two other men were Cliff Hayes and Dick Beymer.

"Take a chair, or I should say a stool," went on Brown, with a pucker to one side of his mouth that might have been taken for a smile, though he was not much in smiling mood. "How did you find everything in the big valley?" he asked, as Larry sat down, coming out temporarily from immersion in their local troubles.

"Pretty much as usual," replied Larry.

"And your prospect?"

"Well, I did the work on it, and that's all I can say. When things are as tough as they are here, a fellow might as well hang on to any chance he has, even a thin chance. But there is not much immediate hope of things moving up there in the mining line, Frank Gorst says, or at least I gathered that from him, and he should know. How do things move in Elwinton?"

"Move!" exclaimed Brown and Beymer together.

"How goes it?" asked Larry, and looked from one to the other.

"Punk!" exploded Brown.

"They don't go at all," said Cliff Hayes.

"What happened after I left?"

"Not a thing," replied Brown. "Elwin stayed a couple of nights at his home over there, and then went off again. He's taken a vacation, if you please—a vacation, not just out on business this time, but off to Honolulu on a junket."

"I guess he's got the money to do it," said Larry, "and I ain't jealous of him. I'd take a trip around the world if I had the funds, and forget all the bother here."

"It ain't jealousy," said Cliff Hayes slowly. "it's the contrast that gets my goat. Even admitting he made most of his money out of other schemes than the U. S. V. I. Land Company, he might realize that it ain't the side issue to us that it is to him. Why, he's pulling down wages on it, wages, as the chairman! All that our talk did, it seems, was to make him and the board say: 'All right, do your damnedest!' We can't get a thing out of them, not a word."

"Wages!" repeated Larry, pondering what he had heard. "It would serve them right if some holdup man was to intercept Motley some day on his way back from Blaeberry with the wages for the whole outfit."

Beymer looked up. "That would be rather hard on the shovel stiffs working on the flumes," he remarked. "They'd be out."

"Oh," said Brown, "the company would just have to send out and fetch the dough again. They've got the money all right."

He stretched out a hand and turned up the lamp, the chimney having been warmed by then. The light shone bright upon the faces of all. They looked one to another in that increased radiance, and then sat quiet, each after his own fashion, meditatively nursing and fingering a chin, or revolving one thumb round the other, or merely sitting staring.

"What's the matter with doing it?' Brown broke the silence.

"Doing what?" asked Hayes, to make certain.

"Holding 'em up!" growled Brown.

Larry and Cliff looked at him sharply, a gleam of interest in their eyes.

Beymer became agitated. "Gosh!" he said. "You're not serious, are you? A married man couldn't take a hand. A single man could do it and skip, but well——"

"Unless the men that did it were disguised," suggested Hayes.

"You can't disguise properly," said Brown. "If anybody in the valley did it, they'd have to skidoo afterward. Too few people around here. Every one knows every one else's gait and build and voice. Masks and pillow slips with holes for the eyes, and all that sort of truck, wouldn't disguise us any."

There, he had said it—"us." The motion had been practically put to them personally. His suggestion had not been merely a vague thing or, if it had, he had been caught by it himself.

"By gosh, gentlemen!" said Beymer again. "If this is the turn our talk about what to do is going to take, I think I'll beat it before I hear any more. Even if I do have to quit here, I can't quit that way. Here," and he rose, "I'm not going to know anything about this."

Then he paused.

"You're not serious, are you?" he inquired finally.

That settled it. Brown looked from Larry to Cliff Hayes, and then clenched a fist in that way of his and pounded it down on his broad knee with a soft thud.

"By gosh, we are!" he said.

"Then I'm off," said Beymer. "I'm a married man. I have not heard anything."

He nodded and departed, the "Well, good night, Dick," of all three following him, entirely friendly.

"Good night, good night! I don't know a thing about it," he repeated in the doorway. "I'm mum. But I can't join in."

They sat quiet till the sound of his horse's hoofs, faint as blown leaves, passed away outside in the dark.

"There you are!" said Cliff. "Dang it, it's almost our duty to the married men to put a scare into the company."

"They had a board meeting while I was away?" asked Larry.

"Yep. I've got a sort of a hunch that there is something behind it all that we don't know."

"They didn't tell us in so many words to do our damnedest, of course. What exactly did they say?"

"They would promise nothing. They simply stuck to it that they were doing all possible; and then they informed us that anyhow we had no fixed date for completion. We saw both that man Allandyce and Seymour. Seymour got nasty and told us we hadn't a leg to stand on, that we couldn't force them to fix a date. And when I asked again if they couldn't give us a definite promise to have the flumes ready on a certain date, he said, 'No!' just like that."

LARRY half closed his eyes and shook his head over that, thought it over for a moment or two and then——

"Look at the way we're almost all up against it," he said. "Some of us bought outright for a lump sum. How can we sell? Folks are getting chary of buying land like this until the water promises are fulfilled. Only if a man has a heap of money can he afford to put in his own irrigation, and if he had a heap of money, he'd go to some place where he'd have less donkey work in preparing things, buy a running concern, a ready-made farm. We could only sell to some other guy as believing as we were ourselves."

"Yes, and some of us folks are too honorable to do that," said Brown.

Larry looked sidelong at him with a faint twinkle, for he had a sense of humor, and mention of honor seemed slightly whimsical to him, seeing the turn their talk had taken; for after all, two blacks, he considered, don't make a white.

"I'm through with honor!" said Brown abruptly, after another pause in their talk. "If I got another sucker willing to buy, I'd sell to him."

"Those who have only made part payment," said Larry, continuing on his line of thought, "think of them! They can't get their money back if they quit. Their payments stand in lieu of rental for the time they've been on the land, unless they paid multiples of the minimum monthly payments, in which case they'd have whatever was additional to rent returned."

"There you are!" ejaculated Brown. "The darn thing's all coggled. It's all take and no give with the U. S. V. I. Land Company. We were a lot of mugs not to get legal advice, any of us, on that form of theirs. Of course we could not see ahead. There were things we took for granted——"

"You can take nothing for granted," said Larry; "that's a cinch."

"I don't know," said Brown. "I think I can take it for granted that you two fellows have got enough sand to hold up the mail car to-morrow and take the wages off Motley!"

A night wind ran in the tops of the scattered pines outside and then gave the door a gentle pat as they sat there mum for a spell, thinking it over, the speaker as well as the other two.

"Well," said Larry, "I'd rather play holdup man on the U. S. V. I. Land Company than realty agent for their land and their promises. By gosh, I would!" He waggled his head. "I know which I'd consider the more dishonorable game."

"You bet you!"—"You bet you!" his auditors duetted.

All this was very salving to the conscience. A little bit of sophistry blent with the casuistry went a long way.

"How could we make our get-away?" asked Hayes, raising his head. "The telephone is in this way from Blaeberry as far as Walla, you know. Even suppose we did it this side of Walla, they could get down that far to telephone out to Blaeberry before we were halfway there."

Brown leaned forward, crossing his fingers, and looked at Larry.

"Well," he said, "you know half the old Indian trails and trappers' trails, and the ways through on the east side of the main valley, don't you, with trapping and prospecting up there?"

"Sure," said Larry.

"And I," went on Brown, "know every trail on the west side up here. Yes, and ways through from valley to valley where there ain't a trail. I could hit back right on this side and then bend south, and there's nothing but the hawks would see me till I was a couple of hundred miles the other side of Blaeberry—yes, five hundred miles!" he said, tossing his head up.

"You got to cross the railroad," Larry reminded him.

"Sure, you got to cross the railroad, got to dip down and cross the track," Brown agreed, "but a person could stop, look, listen before doing that."

The three sat very quiet.

"Well, what about it?" said Brown.

Their hearts stopped a moment and then beat on normally. They nodded one to another. The thing was settled. They had had enough of unfulfilled promises, of "shillyshally, dillydally." The U. S. V. I. Land Company could keep their part payments and the houses they had built, such as they were. They were going to see to it that the U. S. V. I. Land Company provided them with funds for a fresh start. They

were going to make an appropriation along the sights of their six-shooters.

CHAPTER IV.

"HANDS UP!"

LARRY had to admit to himself that he was nervous. Here was a new game for him. He had ridden mean horses; he had borne the sense of unutterable loneliness that sometimes strikes prospectors in the mountains; he had been in trouble with log jams when he went lumberjacking; but a holdup was a new game for him.

There had been occasions for his heart to flutter before—but to-day! Yes, he was nervous. Not that his hand shook, or that he funked it; only that there was a queer seething in the pit of his stomach that made him almost physically sick as he closed his door for the last time and set off to his appointment with the others.

It was very early in the morning. The last of the night, as a matter of fact, still remained in black chunks along the edges of the belts of timber both to east and west above the dim-yellow benches. As he rode, high peaks to the west beyond the lower hogbacks were lit, and then the tips of the tallest trees began to be illumined, like the lighting of candles—flicker, flicker, flicker all down the mountainside. He did not write poems to it all, but he had the love of it in him, as have his kind. Just for one moment he had a horror of jail, of being prisoned far away from all this, but he put that thought swiftly to the back of his mind.

Down the road ahead of him, as he came over a rise, he saw a leisurely little haze of dust and, in the midst of it, horses walking slowly, and the back of a man atop one of them. Larry had only his saddle horse and pack pony; John Brown—the rider ahead, for Larry recognized those shoulders—had half a dozen cayuses and he was taking them all with him in case of any trouble on the way that might necessitate spare mounts.

Larry saw Brown swivel round in the saddle, hand on cantle, then saw that he had stopped, his spare horses spreading out, necks down, tearing odd tufts of grass.

"Well, how do you feel?" asked Brown, when Larry came up to him.

"Kind of punk," Larry admitted. "If a person had only the money, it's a darn fine place to live. Say, it's good to be alive in the air this morning! But I guess my first bid to be a settler hadn't any trumps to it, and we'll just have to let her go as she rides. That's all that's to it."

Brown laughed harshly. "Well, that's the mood to be in for the job we've got to do," he said, and clicked to his horses, then rode on. "Yep, that's a good mood to be in for the job ahead of us!"

And there was Cliff Hayes coming tangenting down a bench behind. They rode on slowly to make a meeting place at the apex of the triangle made by his long slant and the track they rode upon. He raised a hand and waggled it to them.

"How you feeling?" asked Brown, when they drew together.

"Fine and da-dandy," replied Cliff.

Brown smiled. "Feeling like hell, I expect," he said.

"Oh, well," said Cliff, "I'd decided to pull out anyhow, while the going's good, or not too bad. I hate feeling I've got to go, and I might just as well join you fellows in this little game for a se-send-off. Gee, I feel like a kid going in for the first dip too early in the season. I guess once I'm in, I won't want to chitter. I got a hunch it ain't quite as cold a morning as I seem to feel it!" He laughed at himself.

He could bring levity to his touch of funk.

"You're all right," said Brown. "Four fingers of the hard stuff would put an end to that little quiver. You fellows ain't like me. You ain't decided that the rules of the game are dishonorable and that dishonorable's the only way, I ain't got any conscience left after tackling the U. S. V. I. Land Company."

Larry stole a glance at Cliff Hayes, and it struck him that he knew very little about Cliff, that is, where he had come from, what he had been, what was his early training. Cliff had few belongings. He had brought only a Mackinaw coat and a blanket roll tied over his saddle cantle, a stuffed gunny sack hanging to one side of the horn. He had a sporting rifle. Larry noticed the butt of it projecting on the other side, where it was slung from the horn.

"Here," said Brown, "we may as well fix you easier. Put that truck of yours on one of my pack horses. We must look kind of warlike, you with that sporting rifle and me with my Winchester. Still close season for deer, so if we meet any one on the road and they happen to ask us where we're off to"—he dismounted to lighten Cliff's load onto one of the pack ponies—"why we won't be able to tell them we're off on a deer hunt," he went on. "I guess the best thing to say to them would be that we're just going down the road to hold up the mail coming in today. They'd never believe that; think we were great humorists! There, that's easier. That's fixed better. Where's your armament, Larry? Got it on?"

He turned his head to look at Larry's hip for a bulge.

"Right here in the saddle pocket," replied Larry.

"I got one there, too," said Brown, and swung again to his seat.

Lines over wrist he rode on, moodily filling his pipe, and none of them spoke for some time.

"Now, steady you, Jess!" said Brown. "I'm going to spark a match." Gripping tight with his knees, he did so, lit his pipe while the pony danced left and right a trifle and then settled.

THE place they had selected for the event was that bend of the road where the Little Sanish sweeps down to Sanish River, about two miles on the Elwinton side of Walla. In the days of the horse stage, passengers used to sleep the night at Tom Gratton's hotel, the whole run being made with one team, but the motor did not stop. She was due at this curve somewhere about five in the evening, but would probably not arrive till half past, or getting on for six. They would be on the spot, however, by five, as though she were sure, that day, to run to schedule without any delaying hitch on the way in.

At about four in the afternoon, they turned aside down in among the aspens, below the appointed place. The aspens were all tossing and showing the silver side of their leaves as if in trepidation. There the three men ate. As they did so, Brown remarked that it looked as if it were banking up for rain.

"When the aspens get rattled like that," he said, "it generally means a storm."

They had a final discussion, with perhaps more repetition than professional holdup men would have gone in for. They said the same thing over and over again in their anxiety for all to go with a click. They were going to roll a fallen tree across the road, just to their side of the bend. Brown and Larry would be working at it, levering, when the car came round; and Brown would turn from that task to hold up the flat of a palm to the driver.

Brown was very much of the build of the road boss, Nash, and they might easily mistake him for the other, which would be all to the good. Of course

if they had seen Nash farther down the road, there would not be that to aid them, though he might just as likely be up on the main Sanish Valley Road above Walla. And after all, if they had seen Nash, they would just think two pilgrims had come upon the fallen tree and were prizing it off to let some rig behind them have passageway along the road.

All right! So far, so good. The spot was well chosen. With a cut bank to one side, and the dip into the aspen grove at the other, the car could not get around. The tree half off the road, Larry Symons still levering, John Brown would stroll along to the automobile and then, "Hands up! Up with them, everybody!" gun in hand; and at these words, Larry would advance level with him.

Motley would be ordered to get out, bag and baggage; then the others, if any other passengers were aboard; and if they had any weapons with them, these would be confiscated. All right! So far, so good. Then they would start the car down, send it plowing into that sandy hollow just before the aspens, and with apologies leave the people afoot.

"It ain't as bad now as it used to be, to be afoot in this country," said Brown. "The only thing I've ever been scared of while there was still cattle here was being afoot far from a tree or a telegraph pole. You hear tall stories about cougar and lynx, but the only thing that ever worried me crossing a treeless stretch afoot was cattle dotted on it. They'll be all right. Probably," and he laughed dryly, "we'll even have their sympathy when they know what we're after."

Hayes was to be well along south in the aspens, the horses all bunched together in his care, ready for instant departure. He repeated his part two or three times with a sort of pathetic eagerness, like a schoolboy memorizing a lesson and slightly jumpy before an examination day.

"We don't want to be too far ahead of time in case of any one coming past," said Brown.

So they left it till five o'clock.

IMPATIENCE tugged at Larry Symons as they sat there among the aspens, waiting the moment of action. He thought a great deal about Maisie. It was her he was seeing as he sat there cross-legged, elbow on knees, chin on hand, gazing seemingly at nothing. Here, he thought, though too late, for he could not back out now, was a fiasco. Here was the end of the fiasco of his attempt to settle and "get a home together."

Why hadn't he met her earlier? There were men in that Upper Sanish Valley near to the water, not on the irrigated land company's property at all, who were doing well. There was old Langley, for instance, who made a fat thing every year out of his potatoes alone, shipping them by the carload to a big wholesaler. He had his own motor car; he went "out" with his wife every now and then for a holiday. What would Maisie think of it all, when every smallest Western paper would have a column about the affair?

Patience, patience! Yes, she had been right. He would have to change his name, would have to get away to the other end of the continent—and then up swung the other spirit. Well, it couldn't be helped. The U. S. V. I. Land Company had driven him to it!

It was probably a quarter after five that the storm that had been threatening all day broke upon the valley, just after they had gathered the horses and Cliff had them all together, and John Brown and Larry Symons were preparing to go over the top. It was not a rainstorm; it was a windstorm. The sand came before it into their eyes, their nostrils, filled their ears.

They had got up to the place on the road decided upon, the aspens all whipping like demented fishing rods and half smeared out by these ribbons of blown sand. They got the log across the road in readiness and waited. An hour passed, but still no car appeared. They became worried. Was the mail, by any chance, waiting at Walla till the storm would be blown over?

"Here, we better go to the bend and have a look," said Brown.

AS they reached the curve, they heard confused sounds of a car. There it was, a hundred yards round the corner, up to the axles in a new drift of sand, the engine buzzing, the wheels spinning. So their plan was upset.

"Come on!" said Brown. "They're going to back out. If they haven't shovels on board, they'll maybe back out till they can turn and then go to Walla for help."

They went plunging along through the sand, heads down against the cutting particles that came in their faces like small, dry hail. They were alongside the car. There sat Motley by the driver, and behind were two strangers.

"Sorry to trouble you," said Brown firmly. He pushed his left hand in front of Motley, and shut off the roar of the motor.

"Here, what you monkeying about?" blazed the driver. Then he looked at the big six-gun in John Brown's fist.

"I want this gentleman here beside you," said Brown. "Get out, Motley. The rest of you don't move."

Motley did as directed.

"Get your bag out, too," ordered Brown.

Trembling slightly, Motley leaned back into the car and produced his bag.

"See if the dough's there," said Brown to Larry.

"It's locked," Larry replied.

"The keys!" snapped Brown.

Motley produced a key and handed it to Larry, all with that typically furtive, noncommittal look on his face.

Larry opened the bag and there, sure enough, were paper bills and several packets of coins done up in the way of banks.

"Get over there a bit, back in the bush," said Brown, and Motley did as ordered.

"Well, Brown," said the driver evenly, "it is not only the secretary of your land company you've held up. You've held up the government mails, too."

"Oh, I have, have I?"

"You sure have. Don't forget!" He was very cool indeed.

There was a wild streak in John Brown. The corners of his mouth drew down; his eyes puckered.

"If that's so, I may as well do it properly, eh? I'll have the mail bag, too. I was about forgetting! Thank you for reminding me. There may be something in it." With an intimidating couple of jerks with his revolver at the driver, he hauled out the bag, and heaved it to one side. Then he stood on the running board.

"Now back up your car a bit," he said.

"I ain't go——"

"You sure are!" said Brown, "or I'll blow the top of your head off."

He switched on, and the driver backed the car as ordered.

"Now swing her to the side here," said Brown. "Swing her forward."

"What, to the edge?"

"Sure, to the edge."

"Here, let us get out!" said one of the men in the back.

"All right. Stop her," said Brown, and again shut off. "Come out this side." He stepped off and opened the door. "Take a feel at them, Larry, and see that they are not heeled."

They were not heeled, and went over and stood beside Motley, Larry keeping guard on them while Brown ex-

plained to the driver what he wanted done. The car swerved forward to the edge of the road; the brake was jammed on.

"Now you get out," said Brown to the man at the wheel, who immediately did as he was told. "You there, come up here. I want you all."

He let the brake off.

"Get a hold on them wheels and shove," he said. "Put your weight on it. I just want you to start her down in this dip here, where it will be a while before anybody can get her out."

"Well, by gosh!" exclaimed the driver. "You gentlemen are witness that I only did it because he had a gun."

The car oscillated back and forth on its springs as the men leaned to her, the wheels not moving.

"Give it to her!" growled Brown, adding the weight of his left shoulder. "Put some pep in it, as if you meant it."

Away she went, swaying lightly, down the bank and plunged, bonnet-deep, in sand at the bottom. Larry took up Motley's bag; Brown swung the mail sack over his shoulder and they walked backward, away from the men on the road.

"You strangers will hear all about why we did it," said Brown, as he moved off. "If you're going into the Upper Sanish in the hope of making good, you see the only way to do it up there. We've just shown you."

Then they turned and plunged into the bush, the sandstorm still scudding, pattering on the canvas mail bag on Brown's back with a sound like that of small shot, and went brushing through to where Cliff Hayes waited with the horses. There the beasts stood, their haunches all to the gale, their tails tucked down, Cliff peering, head on side against the driving grit, for evidence of success on the faces of his returning partners.

"I see you've ma-made it," said he.

"You be-bet your life!" snapped John Brown.

CHAPTER V.

LOOKING OVER THE BOOTY.

THEIR booty swiftly packed, the three mounted and went crashing through the aspen grove, tangented down the cut bank to Little Sanish—the horses getting their noses between their fore hoofs, haunches up, going cannily, splashed across the shallow stream and up the farther bank; the horses plugging down their hoofs, necks rising and falling.

When they came to the top of the rise there, Larry and Brown simultaneously threw back their heads and laughed low and exultant from the depths of their chests. This was the aftermath of the excitement. The thing was over. They were suddenly both possessed with a sort of intoxicated hilarity.

Cliff looked from one to the other, and then joined in, for he had his minor share of that unexpected emotion. The affair was over and they started off upon their flight.

Then they suddenly sobered their faces, realizing that the laughter was partly of tensity; yet now and again they chuckled as they went obliquely across the bench there, the narrow plateau. Thus they continued across the terraced benches—now on the flat, anon aslant up a bench front—their destination Mormon Creek which, after a tortuous lower course down in its gulch, flows into the Little Sanish just before that stream joins the main river at Walla.

The sand was blowing even up there, gritting between their teeth, drifting into their ears. Within a couple of hours they were threading along the high banks of Mormon Creek—all the creeks there digging deep into the land, the slope below them every here and

there decorated with queer "hoodoos," tall columns of sand held in place by boulders atop.

They did not ride down to the creek-side, but kept along on the bank top, ever and again riding back to evade deep, dry side gashes. Within another hour they were up in the beginning of the timber, where the creek, with a more rocky, less sandy bed, was closer to them. When they paused to breathe the horses, they could see the valley below them filled with the flying pennants of the sand, clumps of trees, whipping and tossing, standing up in the midst of that ribboning sand like swaying islands. A wild, hilarious day! Above them, ahead, was the tempestuous sound of the wind washing in the mountain pines.

THE old trail up Mormon Creek, first made, perhaps, by that wandering Mormon prospector who gave it its name—though maybe he used an old Indian trail—goes up on the south bank; so, before they mounted so high as to be in among the patches of second growth, they maneuvered down to the creek, coaxed the cayuses carefully through, letting them pick their way, for it was too early in the game for broken legs, clambered the farther bank, and found the old trail, such as it was.

They were going up into the country that Brown knew. In the beginning of the big cedars, beside a little lake of the most vivid blue, overhung by a bluff of the most vivid vermilion, they camped for the night. The horses must not stray back, so across the trail and on either side of it, between the cliff and the rocky edge of the creek, where they were hardly likely to attempt to clamber over, a rope was stretched. They had to dispense with a bell on any horse's neck in the circumstances—though perhaps that need hardly be mentioned, and is mentioned only because they felt the lack of it, felt it odd to be in a mountain camp with horses round them and never one *tinkle-tinkle* sounding.

To north of the bluff they made a cooking fire, but that only of dry, punk wood which they had to tend constantly—dry tinder that would give only flame and no smoke. Supper cooked, they let the fire out. It was typical of the way they had gone about the whole thing that there was no urgency with any of them to discover just exactly how much there was in that bag of Motley's, and one might surmise from that fact that they had been as much actuated by the grim determination to let the company know it had come to a show-down as by a desire, by fair means or crooked, to replenish their depleted exchequers.

"Well," said Brown at last, lighting his pipe, "let's see what's coming to us. What are you dreaming about, Larry?"

Larry was dreaming about a girl running up a flight of steps, her right hand raised, waving to him. And her voice had been in his ears—"Good luck!" But it was not on this escapade she had wished him good luck.

"Eh? Oh, nothing," said Larry. "Yes, let's have an examination of the haul."

Motley's bag was beside Cliff Hayes, and one of the blankets being spread out, he simply opened it, tipped it upside down and shot the contents onto the ground.

"Lord bless me!" Larry exclaimed. "You seem to be in the habit of handling money. See the way he tosses it out, as if it was a sack of spuds. That's the way the tellers in the banks shoot the stuff about."

"Let's count it," said Brown. "What are them little packets? Oh, they're fifty-cent pieces in stacks of ten. Yah, I see they're marked '50' on top."

"Here's a bunch of stacks of quarters," said Cliff. "What's that roll?"

"A roll of ones. And here's a roll of fives, and a roll of tens. Heh!" this

to a little flutter of wind that swirled down on them and passed. "What are you grabbing for?"

THERE was an amount of hilarity, or dubious exhilaration, still in them, from the escapade, tensely approached and successfully over, and from the hilarious day. Brown stretched out upon one side toward the blanket, and Larry stepped over and sat on his heels at the other. Together they counted that booty, a total of six thousand dollars. A trifle for which to risk jail, but there was more than the need of money in their impromptu lawlessness.

"Yes," said Brown, "that's quite a tidy pay roll for a little job like the U. S. V. I. land scheme. Secretary and clerk maybe a hundred and fifty a month; the three directors make a couple of hundred, or maybe they get theirs by check. The president will get his by check, I guess. I thought it would be about that, doing a bit of mental arithmetic as I rode along. About fifty men working on the flumes at three a day. Outsiders, almost all of them. I wonder why in hell they were outsiders!"

They were to find that out later.

"We all ought to have been on the flumes working for wages," said Cliff, returning to his old complaint.

"We might just as well divide this into three right now," said Brown. "Might as well be square among ourselves at the offset." He proceeded to split it. "And now we'll have a look at the mail bag."

They slit that open and toppled the contents out.

"Here, half a minute," said Cliff. "Just in case we're—er—we're—er perhaps——"

The other two waited.

"In case we are—what?" asked Brown.

"In case we are snitched, don't you think it would be better for us not to open the letters?"

Brown, flicking a hand among them, casually considered that suggestion.

"It's a cinch," said he, "we can't cash postal notes. Something in what you say, Cliff."

"I didn't know you were going to touch the mails," said Hayes.

"Neither did I," replied Brown. "The mailman suggested it to me! Hullo, here's a letter to Bertrand Elwin! I guess we'll abstract that."

He put it in his pocket and went on flicking the letters, like a post-office sorter, there in that secluded dip among the pines, the wind swishing in their tops.

"There's one to Motley in Elwin's writing," he went on. "We'll have that, too. It might be interesting. Oh, here's one to Beymer! Well, he didn't know a thing. Not a bad sort of a guy, Beymer. I don't blame him for withdrawing that night when we——"

"Darn!" said Larry, looking over his shoulder as he ran through the letters. "There's one to old Langley. I'm kind of sorry we took the mails."

Langley was a resident of the Upper Sanish whom all liked.

"That's right, too," agreed Brown. "Oh, we can leave 'em cached here and send 'em a note to tell 'em where they are. Langley will get his letter all right—just slightly delayed in transit. But I guess I'll take out everything for the land-company folks, now that I'm at it. They might be interesting. There! We'll put the others back in the sack and hang it up in this cedar here."

"Gosh, it looks like a man hanged himself!" said Cliff.

"Or been hanged," remarked Brown, in his grim voice.

"Well, we haven't plugged any one yet, so there's no ill omen about that," said Cliff. "Say, it was sure a very polite holdup!" he laughed.

Brown laughed, too. "There, that's

easy enough for any one to find if they get the directions," said he, looking up at the sack. "Gee, it's getting dark. I suppose neither of you fellows brought a flash light with you?"

They shook their heads.

"Nor me," said Brown. "We'll have to leave the reading of these letters till the morning."

BUT in the morning, each having sat up a two hours' spell of the night, ears alert for any sound from below apart from the rub-a-dub of Mormon Creek, eyes alert for so much as the flick of a flash light in the hands of possible urgent pursuers, the inspection of those letters was left in abeyance. They wanted to get on, away from the trail.

A few miles higher up, beyond the old Mormon's crumbling shack, the trail lost itself in upland meadow. There Brown led directly southward between the height of timber and the rock slides and ultimate cliffs that seemed to stare at them blankly under the toothed summits.

But before leaving the creek they watered the horses and filled their canteens, for there was a long jump to be taken, Brown said, without a single trickle. The snows had drained away. There were no glaciers in that stretch to send down their icy streams. It was a stretch such as may be found in many parts of the backbone of the continent: on one hand sometimes abrupt slopes into forest, sometimes sheer cliff; on the other, cliffs, rock slides, the ragged summits, and here this belt of heath and grass ribboning along, from a couple of hundred yards in breadth to maybe a quarter of a mile.

It was even as Brown had told them. For miles this almost flat strip between precipice and precipice was not riven across by any stream.

They went at a quick and steady walk, Brown in the lead, then the led horses, and to rear Larry and Cliff, jig-jogging rhythmic in the saddles. Well on in the day, Brown stopped and let the others make up on him. A little way ahead was water at last.

"Now," said he, "there's two ways. We can either keep on here, curve round the end of this range, then drop down through the timber and make a break across the railroad track about a dozen miles to the west of Blaeberry; or we can turn up by this creek and go through that small saddle there. I think that might be better. Then we'd come down to the railroad about Julesburg. That's if we're going south. But we don't even need to do that.

"After we get through the gap here, there's a way down into the Stronish Valley. Quite a bunch of settlers there. We'd be liable to be seen crossing, but we might make it; and once we get across there, I don't see what would be the matter with letting loose the horses. The Stronish people let their horses run back on the other side there. They could look after themselves. Then we could separate, and each get out to the coast on his own hook."

"Isn't that too near?" asked Cliff. "They'll have telephoned all over the country, don't forget. People in the Stronish Valley might be on the lookout for us."

"I think there's hardly any one knows about this way through to the Stronish Valley," replied Brown, "but maybe you're right. Perhaps we ought to hit south instead of thinking of west and the coast, and get over the railroad first before we separate, and then one of us could hit south, one east, and one west."

"That's better," said the two others together.

"Well, what about it, then?" asked Brown. "Straight on this way and across the track about twelve miles west of Blaeberry, or go through the gap here where this creek comes down, but instead of keeping on to the Stronish

Valley, take the next valley and drop down south near Julesburg?"

"Which," said Larry, "is quicker for getting us across the railroad?"

"It's about a toss-up, but we got to think of more than just speed in getting over the railroad; we've got to think of where they'll be looking for us," replied Brown. "They are liable to have speeders or velocipedes east and west of Blaeberry already, expecting us down out of the Sanish Valley, though not on the main road. But I don't think they'd patrol farther than the width of the valley on either side."

"That looks as if through the gap here west, and then south down near Julesburg would be better," said Larry.

"What I was thinking," agreed Brown.

"Let her go," said Larry.

"Let her go," remarked Cliff.

The led horses had moved on unchecked and were drinking at the stream. The riders followed them, turned them aside into that queer upper valley, a long oval, the peaks sweeping round it, beyond more stretches of heath, a rock slide or two, and a declivity or two of snow. The notch through which they were to travel was in the southwest corner of that craterlike dip among the summits.

IT was not good going for the horses beyond the grass. They picked their way gingerly. A queer place! Horses seemed all wrong there. Even humankind seemed not to fit in. It was as if they had come to a bit of this planet, barren, desolate, like the moon. Not a sign of life, save as they came up among the snow patches a sudden chirr of wings, and away sailed a string of ptarmigan.

The notch itself was the sort of place Doré would have adored, and at their first sight of it Larry and Cliff wondered how horses could ever pass through it.

"It is only a little bit, only a little bit," Brown assured them, "and we're on to shale again and then on to grass. There was a prospector put in a charge or two up on this range some years ago, and he used to pack his stuff up all the way on horseback, too. Came in north from Blaeberry. He made a kind of a causeway for the horse to walk on in the notch, filled in the chinks between the big boulders with little fellows. Wait till I see if we can strike it before we go farther."

He dismounted and moved along southward in that wild notch. Then he turned and waggled his hand to them, walked back parallel with them, and came on to the grass behind them.

"Up this way," he said. "We strike it here."

Larry had been in such places before, but it was all new to Cliff Hayes. His eyebrows were raised and remained raised. He had somewhat of an amazed look as Brown led them off the shale into a little strip, not more than a foot wide, a little strip of small stones twining among the boulders. It made him very quiet to think of some man all alone up here years ago, toiling away there on that finical job. In single file they passed through the gap and so down to grass again stretching away on the other side.

"That wasn't too bad!" called Brown over his shoulder, and then waited for them to come level. "Wonderful how a made track like that lasts, in spite of dozens of feet of winter snows melting into it every spring. That's where the fellow had his claim. Just this side. See?"

Cliff could not pick it out at first, and then saw against the ridge on that side, just north of the gap, what looked like a small replica of the bigger rock slides, but atop of it a little slit of black with one or two timbers protruding. He stared at it with his eyebrows still elevated.

"Where did he live, sleep?" he asked.

Brown peered away down the slope, then pointed.

"You can't see any trace now," he said. "He had a little bit of a shack down there, near the timber. Last time I was up here after goat I saw it had been knocked over in a snowslide. Funny thing! He had left a little stack of cordwood, near the shack. Shack was swept down, but the cordwood was there, most of it still stacked. I can't see even it now."

"Gosh!" sighed Cliff Hayes. It was all new to him, such lives, such scenes.

That strange light of evening was on the uplands. The woods in the wedge below them looked very dark. Halfway down, everything was in chiaroscuro.

"Well, we'll get into the timber and camp," said Brown.

THEY got down quicker than Cliff expected. There was much deceptive to unaccustomed eyes in that suffused glamour, that iridescent quality of the light up there. It lingered long. The stony slopes to the back of them, facing west as they were, seemed to be exuding a radiance, almost an unearthly radiance, to Cliff's eyes, long after the individual lower trees were lost to sight and all was just one wedge of reddy-brown, growing darker and darker, the red gone, the brown gone, black night in blocks, and the voice of a creek roaring up from it like troubled thunder.

Here it was that, while Larry cooked the supper, Brown produced the letters from his pocket. He slit them open, very slowly and matter of fact, with his penknife.

"Here's a nice how-do-you-do!" said he.

"What's that?" asked Larry.

"Now we know why they brought men in from outside to do work on these flumes, instead of giving the job to us to help us out," said Brown. "Here's a letter from our present honorable representative, promising Elwin that if he gets the gang up there to vote solid for him at the coming election, he'll guarantee that one of the first projects he'll bring up will be for an appropriation to assist the U. S. V. I. Land Company as an excellent development scheme! Ah-ha!" He read aloud: "'Will make representations that the work is undoubtedly of a kind deserving government assistance.' Now that letter!" He held it out, waggling his hand up and down. "The other party would give a hell of a lot to see it. Let's find out what old Elwin was writing to his secretary about. Let's take a look at that letter and see if it clears up the situation any."

He dipped into that, and by his expression did not at first come upon anything to the purpose. It seemed to be tame, not incriminating. Then suddenly he gave a dry laugh which sounded foreboding in those high places.

"Yes, here we are!" he said. "He says: 'I'm sending in four deserving men to work on the flumes. Two of them will go to-morrow, two can't make it till next mail day. I've given them chits, to present to you. You might prepare the way for them by saying you've got to lay off some men, and you can lay off Thompson, Davies, Campbell and Sanders. I am not absolutely sure what ticket Sanders favors, but I am certain about Thompson, Davies and Campbell.'"

"So that's that!" said Larry. "He's going to get the vote solid for his friend. Four of the gang that don't fancy his party are to be fired. The four he sends in go on the understanding that they know where to put their cross. Yes, sir, those letters would bust our worthy representative for the next election. They've got an awful pull, that crowd, though. I guess this is the way they get it. Say, it strikes

me that our little game is not one fraction dirtier than politics."

"Politics?" asked Cliff Hayes, but the two others did not dispute his doubt of the word's aptness.

With the consideration that their "little game" had been no dirtier, Larry salved himself from any lingering feeling that, despite the provocation, the holdup at the aspen grove was a proceeding that could not easily be defended.

"We can chance a fire at our feet tonight, I think," said Brown. "It is going to be cold. We can take spell and spell again, each for a couple of hours. Better keep the horses tied to the trees and give them the last of their oats to keep them going. They'll snatch grass to-morrow, as they walk."

The night was cold, and a weird dawn it was that Larry saw, for he took the last spell, after which he wakened the other two. A queer dawn! Not a cloud in the sky, and the height of it suddenly glittering, brilliant blue, every star put out; then the mountaintops across the valley flashing their fronts toward him like mirrors suspended from the sky.

And there was the oddest deceptive display on the edge of the woods close by. Every tree, a few moments after the sun struck there, seemed to have, instead of a black shadow, a white one, a frost being on the ground and the sun wiping it away, wherever it struck, almost immediately its rays topped the crest, so that the frost lay only on the farther side of the trees, where their shadows should have been. White shadows—that was what it looked like at first, a sort of ocular illusion. Then, next moment, Larry realized their significance.

"Gosh!" he said, looking at it all.

He knew the mountains as Cliff Hayes did not, but he had never before seen such a curious, delusive dawn. Then he shook his two partners awake.

CHAPTER VI.

JUST BY LUCK.

COMING out of the timber's edge where the three had camped, Brown led on again upon just such a strip of betwixt-and-between grass border, ribbon of comparatively level meadow between sheer rocks and a belt of forest. Upon this side of the range there was plenty of water. There was, indeed, more than they needed, from little glaciers, and glacial lakes in the cups of the summit above them; and the rocky beds of the creeks that foamed down out of these had to be carefully crossed with the horses.

Still they made quick progress on that elevated, grassy and heathy strip, and, coming to a belt of cedar forest, with no second growth beneath, they rode sharply into its green dusk and away aslant down the slopes. Before dusk fell, Brown had struck an Indian trail out of the valley, below the cedars, in the midst of a patch of berries.

There they camped that night, and as they sat over their supper fire, suddenly Larry and Cliff raised their heads in response to a sound.

Brown nodded. "Train whistling for the curves," he said.

"Then we've made good going," declared Larry. "Whereabouts just exactly does this valley come out, Jack?"

"About five miles east of Julesburg."

"Well, we've certainly made some jump from the Upper Sanish Valley in the time. It's a cinch they won't be expecting us down there, near Julesburg, that far west. Bet you they're still watching the valley's end on either side of Blaeberry, and east through the main Sanish Range. Lots of folks know I know the Sanish Range from trapping and prospecting up there. It was a heap more sensible coming over this side for the get-away. Never heard any one say you knew it."

"Oh, just after deer I got to know it

first," said Brown, "and then I came up after goat once or twice when I used to be in the Stronish country. Like pottering around in the mountains alone. Get away from the gol-darn people."

Larry's eyebrows lifted a moment. He had never thought of it that way before. He liked the mountains, but he was a gregarious young man.

Then the two who were to sleep first rolled up in their blankets. Before daybreak they were mounted and off; and the section men would hardly be started on their work on the railway when they came to where they could see the track below and, beyond again, westward, open country, another stretch of dotted greens and yellows after the manner of the valley from which they had come. The mountains dropped abruptly, and it was through a gap in them that the railroad ran.

Brown pointed toward where the hills swerved up again, to the sky.

"Once get up there beyond the settlements on the other side," said he, "and I can keep going for a week without a soul seeing us. Takes a man who knows the mountains to do it. If a man didn't know the mountains, he might just as well pike into Julesburg and give himself up. That's how they catch all these ordinary holdup men who can only make a get-away by trail or railroad."

Then he said no more, perhaps because of some thought in the manner of "pride goeth before a fall and a haughty spirit before destruction." This old Indian trail that had served them on the last stage out of that narrow little valley actually twisted down the gorgeside, went under a trestle bridge of the railway, and they could spy it again twisting on round a bend and down into the flats.

But that could not be their way. Suppose a section gang came along on a speeder or pump car while they were riding under? They would be seen. There would be the quick rattle of the wheels above them, and the gang would not stop at whatever was to be the place of its day's labors, but would go on to give the alarm of three men and a bunch of horses seen coming down out of the mountains.

THAT thought brought another to John Brown's mind after they had crossed the track. He was pondering it while they, after a look both ways, rode over, still pondering it as he and Larry, leaving Cliff with the horses in the scrub on the southern side, returned to the track, each with the branch of a tree to flick left and right over the evidence of their passing and so obliterate the hoof marks. Flicking thus, they backed away from the rails and into the bush again on the side where escape led them.

"I've just been thinking," said Brown. "One of us could make a get-away here, take his blanket roll, sling it on his back, hit the ties all same hobo. There's always some fellows going through that way—some professional hobos and some just looking for jobs in the extra gang in the railway camps. That would be one of us safely off, I think almost for a cinch. They'll never look for any of us hitting the ties alone with a blanket roll."

"So far as that goes," said Cliff, "I could play the game whole hog by looking out for some heavy grade and jumping a freight on the fly." He laughed. "It wouldn't be the first time. I did it once or twice when I was a bit younger and the fret took me from home. That's how I came West."

"Well!" ejaculated Brown, and nodded. "I believe the man who does that has the safest get-away of the whole three of us. If you want to do that, Cliff, I think Larry and I would get along the back of the settlements here and see if we could sell our horses to some of the old-timers. They might guess who we were, if the news has got

through to them, but I think we could take a chance, even if they did guess a little."

He glanced at Larry, who was looking at him rather doubtfully.

"Oh, we can take the whole bunch of horses with us," Brown added, "if you think better. I'm only making a suggestion. Or if you don't like running the chance of selling them anywhere, we could even just let them run at the end, when we split."

Larry Symons had his sentimental side as well as his tough side. He did not like this word "split" at all. They had not been long in the hills together, these three, but to be in the mountains with two other men for even a brief while, and get on with them, gives a pang when the parting comes.

Larry did not want to see Cliff Hayes go. He had taken a definite liking to that nervous and lean little colleague in this adventure. He thought then that he could part from Brown with less regret, but that of course might only have been because there was no suggestion from Brown that the parting with him was to be immediate. Larry might feel that as badly when the time came, though somehow he did not think so.

All thrown closely together up in the mountains there, however well they had pulled together in their escapade and their flight, he had had the impression that the highly strung, the almost jumpy Cliff, might be a more dependable partner in the last ditch, so to speak, than Jack Brown. It was not that he thought Brown would leave him in the lurch, if such a thing did befall as a sudden attack upon them by officers of the law who might force a fight. No, in a case such as that Brown would be all alert, Larry was convinced, from the first drop of a card, as he would have phrased it.

Cliff would get momentarily rattled in such an event, Larry thought, and then recover nobly. He might have worded his view of the difference between the two men by saying that he thought Cliff Hayes had a touch of physical timidity which he could conquer, and that Brown was no physical funk at any moment, or in any circumstances, but might be a spiritual turncoat, might go back on a man in a way that Cliff would never go back on any one.

HE had this mental summing up of them in a more brief space of time than it has taken you to read it.

"Well," said Cliff, in the scrub to the south, "I'll do that, I guess." And then: "Gee, I hate leaving you fellows! I may as well help you bunch the horses back a bit before I roll my bundle."

Larry gave a quick sidelong glance at him, at the lean, nervous face. Yes, Cliff did not want to go, not because he was scared of being left to his own resources, but just for the same reason that Larry disliked the thought of the coming parting.

So on they went; and then suddenly they were out upon a new wagon road running parallel with the track. Brown put a hand to his mouth and plucked it in a manner he had.

"Development, development!" he said. "I didn't know they had even started work on this road. Well, there's nobody on the blame road anyhow. It's a good thing you came this far with us, Cliff. You can give a hand to get the horses off it. We'll break through here till we strike a creek coming down. It ain't far. It runs into the one we've been following, just over on the flats there."

But there was somebody on the road.

Riding along from west came two Indians. They came round a little bend laughing and talking together, stopped laughing, stopped talking, reined their horses through the group.

"Clayhowya!" said Brown and Larry.

"Clayhowya! Clayhowya!" responded the Indians.

They rode on. Brown looked after them, then looked at Larry.

"Where's their reserve?" asked Larry.

"Oh, about halfway to Blaeberry. It lies back, south and east, up there. We'll be coasting the edge of it. They do their visiting at Julesburg. There's a store there where they trade sometimes."

He frowned, plucked at his lips again.

"All the same, I'm kind of worried," he acknowledged. "They always like to be in on anything like a man hunt, and they're always asked to come in, too. They may be riding a kind of patrol on the road for all we know. I guess, Cliff, you're going to have the best part, acting hobo and getting away on the track."

"I'll come with you now if there's any chance of a fi-fight," said Cliff, looking very strained and sternly determined.

"Fight nothing!" said Brown. "We don't want to be hanged or electrocuted. I wouldn't mind being shot in a fight, I'm that mad I could bite into a chisel, but I don't want to be stretched for shooting up anybody, so there's going to be no fight."

But Larry and Cliff both remembered his sudden blaze in the office of the U. S. V. I. Land Company, and thought it highly possible that, having got thus far, if they were headed off by a pursuing posse, and if there seemed a ghost of a chance to get through by aid of a bullet, Brown might let the bullet go.

"Well, I'll help you through this close bit anyhow," Cliff offered, "same as I helped through from the track, before I go back."

"All right, all right."

That was all Brown said in response. He never had any show of sentiment. He was a grim man, though doubtless like most people he had a corner for sentiment somewhere in him.

THE scrub seemed less dense farther down the road, so they herded the horses thither, and there broke in. Red willow and aspen, silver birch, then the brawl of a creek and its boulders shining in the sun beyond, a little spit of sand, and the framework of an old Indian sweat lodge there, an old cattle trail or two twisting about on the other side, on the hither side of the Indian trail—such was the scene.

"Well, here we are," said Brown. "We go up here. It does not matter much which side, but it is easier to cross higher up. Guess this is where you roll your blankets, Cliff."

Cliff got his roll off the pack horse that carried it.

"Here," said Brown, "if I was you, I would take that old condensed milk can as if you had it for a cup, instead of taking a real camp cup. It will look more like the part you're to play. And that little old black billy that we used for the tea looks better than that newer pot."

They were all dismounted then, standing by their horses.

"And if I was you, I wouldn't take the rifle with you," Brown went on. "That is out of keeping altogether."

Cliff laughed. "No, I can't take that," he said.

He kept biting and biting on his lip. One might have thought he was nervous. He was not, really, or not nervous in a way that would put him out of action if action were called for. He just hated going, leaving these men. They had been together in their final flaunt at the company that had not played the game with them, and here was the end of an episode in his life, an ill-starred episode so far as trying to settle and find a niche, even though he did have a mollifying belt full of dollars on his person.

Looking at him, Larry thought he understood.

"Well, so long," Larry said, "and the best of luck, Cliff."

They grasped hands warmly.

"We may bump into each other again somewhere," said Cliff.

"When we do, don't you call me Larry Symons and I won't call you Cliff Hayes, if there are folks around!"

"No, that's right," said Cliff. "Damn the U. S. V. I. Land Company making us lose our names!

Brown put his head on side at that and considered him, mouth grim, eyes twinkling.

"So long, Cliff," he said.

"So long, and good luck!" returned Cliff.

He turned away back toward the road and the railway, blankets on shoulder, the black billy can tied to them, and the milk tin that was to be his cup thrust under the rope. Away he started in a short-spaced tramp as of one stepping on the ties, then looked back over his shoulder and grinned.

"Do I look the part?" he asked.

"You've got it!" said Brown. "You're it!"

Larry merely nodded his head up and down slowly two or three times, gave a farewell flick of his hand at the side of his head, as though he were wiping away a fly.

BROWN swung to the saddle and led the way up the creek. The horses followed. Larry, mounting, brought up the rear. But they had not gone far when suddenly he looked over his shoulder, attracted by a swishing of bushes behind; and there was Cliff Hayes running after them, without his blanket roll.

Larry reined in abruptly.

"Look out, look out!" said Cliff. "There's a posse, or something, breaking right off the road along that way, and there's some other men gone along past, toward Julesburg. I don't know if they are going back in, too, farther along."

"Did they see you?"

"No, none of them."

"Good man, Cliff, good man!" And then Larry called in a low voice: "Jack! Jack!"

Brown did not hear. Larry then rode ahead and attempted to pass the intervening horses, but they did not go to one side, thought more speed was wanted of them and began to jog after their leader.

"Jack! Jack!" Larry hailed, low again.

Again Brown did not hear, but the sudden acceleration of pace of the horse immediately behind him, in response to the hurrying steps of those to rear, caused him to look over his shoulder.

Larry held his hand up rigid, in the sign for a halt, and Brown immediately reined in, puzzled, then saw Cliff to the rear. He opened his mouth to ask what the trouble was. But Larry put a warning finger to his lips.

At that Brown heeled his cayuse square across the trail, to prevent the led horses from passing. They mobbed close. Raising a hand, Larry pointed aslant down toward the road, then jerked a thumb toward Cliff behind him.

"What is it?" asked Brown, low and hoarse.

"Cliff got down to the road and saw a bunch of men going into the scrub there ahead, riding straight in. They did not see him. He dropped his blankets and beat it back after us to let us know."

"Hell!" said Brown. "Them two aborigines were riding patrol on the road, then. Guess the police have got camps along it."

"How about quitting the horses here?" suggested Larry. "Could we make it on foot? If we start down across the creek here, as we are, horses

and all, we are going to make some noise."

"On foot!" exclaimed Brown. "Well, yes, if we was sure of living on the land. But how can we carry the grub the horses are packing? Though I suppose needs must when the devil drives. Darn! I hate to walk. If we could make it along the way I intended, but on foot, we would just have to come down for grub sooner than I wanted. Darn that new wagon road! Yes, I guess we better do that. A blanket each would do. We could perhaps make it on the grub we have." He dismounted. "But this is going to be a close call, even getting away on foot. Well, we'll just have to hit up in places horses couldn't go."

Larry slipped from the saddle. Suddenly up went the horses' heads and two of them whinnied, high and clear; and immediately a whinny answered.

"That's done it," said Larry.

On the instant Brown yanked Cliff's rifle from the nearest pack pony and went leaping down to the creek.

"Come on, boys, this way!" he rumbled, low.

There was a crashing through the bush ahead.

"Halt there!" called a voice, and added: "Here they are!"

And another took up the cry: "Here they are!"

Larry stood still, looking at a revolver pointed at him by a man who came riding up. He thought to himself that the bullet might miss at that range. His lips moved, and perhaps the man thought he was swearing at this interception; but really, looking the newcomer in the eyes over these intervening yards, Larry was saying:

"Drop in the bush, Cliff, drop in the bush and lie there. They haven't seen you. We left you. We don't know where you are."

Suddenly *smack!* went the roar of a rifle as if from across the creek. Brown had cut loose, thought Larry; but it was not so. It was only one of the members of the posse firing a shot in the air as a warning.

"Stand pat, all of you!" came his voice; and then he, too, rode out of the scrub.

HERE they were, quite a lot of them, thought Larry, and his lips formed a wry smile as he looked at them. One rode close up beside him, dismounted, felt him for a lethal weapon, but his six-gun was still in the saddle pocket. Another urged his horse plunging through the bush toward Cliff, who was not trying to run. Another on the bank of the creek was shouting:

"You better come back here. We got your partners. No use starting to play with that rifle you got. I see you over there. You better come back."

Brown came slowly back, dropping his rifle as he climbed the creek bank again, his legs, from the knees down, soaked from the crossing and return through the water.

"All right," he growled.

"Well, it was no good, boys," said the leader of the posse. "You didn't reckon on the brass pounders. The old West is getting changed. You're reported over the wires for a thousand miles."

Brown glowered at him.

"We didn't reckon on that damn wagon road," he said. "You would never have got us if it hadn't been for that road. We reckoned on brass pounders, all right. You got your patrol installed pretty prompt. And luck was with you, those two Indians doing their patrol just at the wrong moment."

"We've only come along to-day for the first time to establish a patrol this far," was the reply. "We got later word that your tracks went up Mormon Creek, so we were going to extend the patrol in case you came down one of these side draws. Those Indians

only happened past—at the right moment! They were no patrol. In fact, we let them pass us without a word, and then called after them to ask if they'd seen three men and a bunch of horses."

"Aw—be—damned!" snarled Brown, and clenching his fists in chagrin raised them a moment, his teeth gritting at the same time. Then the spasm passed.

So there they were.

Larry seemed to forget them all for a minute or two. He heard the voices, but paid no heed to what they were saying. He was lost in thought. A fiasco! A fizzle! Damn that road! Confound those Indians! What did they want helping the very kind of white man that was the least kin to them? He was a darned sight nearer Indians than any of these fellows.

And all the news of it would go to Maisie. What would she think? All seemed to be obliterated before his eyes, the clustering horses, their guard, that broad, shallow, bouldered creek. Maisie was again looking into his eyes and counseling patience.

What a topsy-turvy turn it would be to things if Elwin, in return for his votes, did get an appropriation from the government sufficient to rush the irrigation project to completion in the valley, get the government to fork out the money that the company would not fork out!

"I can just see Elwin sit back in his chair and laugh when he hears about us being euchred!" Larry broke out bitterly. "Ah, well, that's that!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE IRON ENTERS.

PRISON and Larry Symons did not go well together. His "reactions," that we hear spoken of so much in these days, were many and painful. The impatience of his temperament made him suffer in one way more than might a man of the jack-easy order, the poco-tiempo sort of man.

He simply could not bear to think of seven years of this. That was what he had been sentenced to, as also had John Brown. At least there was no envy or jealousy in Larry. That Cliff Hayes, looked upon as an accessory, had got off with three years gave him no feeling except of congratulation toward his old partner.

What hurt most were his memories. This man of the open had had seeing eyes and, penned up there, he was assailed with the most vivid recollections of spacious regions. He had seen his world, and he remembered it. He was much haunted by memories of a spot where he sometimes camped a night when going to that prospect of faint chances of his in the main Sanish Valley, remembered the place well—a pocket of grass in a horseshoe sweep of the hills, a little creek, threading the center out of the forests, where he used to dip for water. He recalled that optical illusion it gave as of a stream of colored stones running uphill when one looked at it for long.

He tried to forget it, but back it would come into memory—his camp to one edge of the grass pocket; opposite, a belt of very dark trees; and he could almost hear again that plaintive single note of the orange-breasted robins that used to be always calling one to the other round there about July. He had to keep a hold on himself at times, lest he should beat his head against the wall. Had he not put a restraint on himself, he might have padded to and fro like a caged cougar.

But even in prison bits of news leaked out. One bit of news was dropped to him, one day, by a not-unfriendly warder, a piece of news that gave him lots to think over, very puzzling.

John Brown, he was told, was out of jail.

"What, escaped?"

"No. Pardoned, I believe."

This gave Larry a wild hope. He heard no more at the time; that was all he had to be going on with, so the hope persisted for some days that perhaps whatever wires had been mysteriously pulled to get Brown off might be given another twitch that would anon open the doors for him. What, he wondered, could have happened? Perhaps Elwin, feeling that the land company's affairs had been exposed by the holdup, was using his influence toward pardons for them all, so as to square himself in the esteem of those who sympathized with the robbers.

Perhaps in a day or two, Larry thought, he would be free! He would head back to the mountains; he would hear again that poignant single note of the orange-breasted robins. But the hope was deferred, making the heart sick.

AND then more of the news was given to him, explanatory. John Brown, he was told, had asked to see the governor. It appeared that he had some valuable papers, and he had had a hunch there might be a possibility of buying himself out with them.

"Valuable papers!" explained Larry. "But wasn't he searched, same as we other two?"

"Oh, he didn't have them on him, it seems," replied the friendly warder. "He'd cached them somewhere. The governor communicated with the parties concerned and they seemed to be pretty high up. They got him a pardon, all right."

"I wonder what the papers were?" mused Larry, for that was all the information forthcoming at the time.

The statement that Brown did not have the papers "on him" when captured cast out of his mind, for the moment, his surmise—correct though it had been, as he was to discover in later talks—that these "papers" were the correspondence regarding the vote buying, and the promise of appropriations for Elwin's Upper Sanish Valley scheme.

A dark horse, this John Brown, to have papers implicating people of position high enough to be able to give him a pardon after he had been sentenced to seven years' imprisonment!

Opportunity came later for the friendly warder to give Larry more details. It was some letters, he now more precisely divulged, affecting politics that Brown had had. He had been pretty clever about it, from all accounts. He had said, to begin with, that these letters were in the hands of somebody outside, but no—he wouldn't write to them and have them send them on to him, and then the pardon be given. The matter had hung fire a little while, and then So-and-So and So-and-So—the warder whispered two well-known names in the political world, and Larry then knew almost to a certainty what letters they were—had actually come to have a conference with Brown in jail.

"Oh, it's been done before," the warder said, "with even more important papers than John Brown had up his sleeve. That man Bill Miner worked it with some government bonds that he had secreted, worked it not only for himself but for his partners."

Larry's brow darkened. "Couldn't Brown have worked it also for his partners, then?" he inquired.

"They tell me he never tried to do that," the warder informed him. "No, not a word about that, I'm sorry to tell you. Well, he worked it all right for himself. He was shown the pardon, but it was not put into his hand; and then he went away with two officers. They played square with him all right. The joke of the whole thing is that there were no persons holding the incriminating letters at all for him. They might have lain where they were and never been found. It seems that he was pretty nearly getting away from

the arresting posse when you were caught, had got across a creek. He had these letters with him, in a pocket, and he had a brain wave then, shoved them into a hollow tree before he came back and gave himself up to the posse with you two fellows.

"Darn clever of him to stand the trial first, before making a bid to use them. Once he was sentenced and the buzz about that holdup was all past, then he could use them. He took the officers to that tree, put his hand in the hole, forked out the letters, then got the pardon and—— 'Well, so long!' It made them smile; but they'd done their job as ordered, and got from him letters addressed as stated in their instructions. Maybe they had a look at the letters, seeing they were open," and the warder winked. "It will never get into the papers, but it is one of these little things such as we fellows often get to know."

What these letters were, Larry had by then, of course, little doubt; but any faint possibility that they were letters other than those come by in the holdup, the gossiping warder then finally expelled from Larry's consideration.

"They were just letters," he went on, "about a scheme for buying votes with jobs on the one hand, and buying a government appropriation on the other. They were darned glad to get them, though, even though I guess the parties implicated, who could pull the wires, felt a bit mad when they heard from the two officers who went with Brown that the letters were not in the keeping of any one who could have read them and made them public. And yet you never can tell; they might have come to light. Queer how things happen that way! Guess they are burned now, but a few of us know the contents and think our own thinks about all the funny games."

"He might," said Larry slowly, "have made a try to get us all off."

There ended the conversation.

BUT Larry brooded upon it. Prison, and those facts, preyed upon him. The more he thought of it, the worse it seemed. He was always seeing some new facet of it. The first was that Brown had made no attempt to get them all off; the last one, that nearly maddened him as he considered it, was that Brown had got his pardon by playing into the hands of their enemies.

Seven years was a long time. To be sure the letters might have rotted by then, but they might not. What a showing up it would have been, on their release, to have recovered them and taken them to some editor of the other party view and have them published.

He pondered that. Perhaps the editor would have been responsible for receiving stolen goods! But Larry thought it could have been worked somehow, that publication; and yet seven years was a long time. They might all be dead by then, and nobody interested, nobody care.

He thought often of Maisie, but in a very hopeless way, glum, lugubrious. Never now would she be queen of any home he might on his release get together. A jailbird! He could never ask her to marry a jailbird.

And then came a letter from her full of sympathy, in an evasive way, because of the possible intermediary perusal by the prison authorities. It eased him, but he did not reply to it after all. Once or twice he tried to send some words of thanks; but he could not do it. It was very kind of her to have written in that tone, he felt, but he should leave it at that.

It was his duty to her to leave it at that. He must not take advantage of her sympathy. He was a jailbird, and a girl like Maisie would be better without him, either as sweetheart or friend.

But some time later there was another letter from her, giving him the news of Sanish, a letter not as greatly brimming with veiled sympathy as the

earlier one, but ever so friendly. It did him good in a way. That she did not sit in judgment on him was good to know, but who was *he* to reply in terms any warmer than those of a mere acquaintance?

And in the end he did not reply at all, much for the same reason as he had left her once, despite an invitation to stay on, left her lest he told her of his devotion, he a penniless good-for-nothing! Now he abstained from writing because of that very love for her, and because all he could think of to say were phrases of affection. He had nothing to offer her now, not even his name! The strains of sentimentalist and of one hard as nails, to the verge of what is called "tough," were twisted together oddly in Larry Symons.

She did not write a third time; and ever and again, as the years went by, he would brood upon John Brown away, free, his life his own by playing into the hands of Bertrand Elwin. It was past thinking of! It was intolerable!

The years drifted on, and there Larry was alone in prison, Brown shuffled out by a treacherous subterfuge, Cliff Hayes' time expired. Larry's reactions to prison in the circumstances were bad. Warders marked a glitter in his eyes, though to be sure they saw a similar glitter in many eyes. It might only be prison trying to break him and he trying not to be broken that caused it.

Certainly he was "well behaved." Well behaved! He was only that because of one hope, one fixed idea. All thoughts of Maisie he had renounced. He was, had they only known it, practically a monomaniac. The lonely brooding had expelled, at last, it seemed, all that was of the sentimentalist in him.

His fixed idea, that kept him well behaved instead of going berserk and unavailingly smashing down some warder, was to get out, find John Brown, have a little talk with him—and then blow the top of his head off!

Larry used to lie awake at night, staring, grim, looking forward to that day of what he called not revenge, but justice. What he had to say, by the time he got out at the end of six years—one year commuted from his sentence because of his good conduct—he had by then letter-perfect. So it was a monomaniac who came out into the world again, his "little piece" all ready to say, with nothing to do but procure a gun somehow, then find John Brown, say that "little piece" to him and—as he had muttered to himself, lying awake many a night—"blow the top of his head off."

CHAPTER VIII.

LARRY HAS HIS SAY.

IT depends upon how one sees things whether one looks upon Larry Symons as a broken or a demented man when he found himself free again. Out in the streets, he had a sudden exhilaration and exultation. The old impatience leaped on him; he wanted to get on with what he had to do. He wished, though, that before he found John Brown he could have just a glimpse, no more than a glimpse, of Maisie. He would not dare to speak to her, but the desire to see her was mingled with the impatience to have the matter out with Brown.

In the city of his detention a trolley car passes the jail, and the jail is some distance out of town. Larry looked down the road, and it seemed a long way to walk. He hadn't the face to get on the trolley at the prison corner, so he turned and strolled two blocks farther countryward to board one. His argument was that if he walked a block or two on to town until a car overtook him, the people inside would not know where he had come from. He was entirely unaware that this was precisely what many another man did on coming

out, walk a block or two out to board the car. It seemed to him novel, a brain wave.

In the center of that busy little Western metropolis, he alighted. Evidently destiny had no objections to his discovering very soon the whereabouts of John Brown. His first encounter with a known face, however, apprised him of the fact that not every one who had known him would wish to cut him. More than Maisie, his dear Maisie, his lost Maisie, sympathized at least, though extolling what he had done might be another matter.

JUST after he stepped off the car, he felt some one looking at him keenly, and what was said to him let him know how little stress that speaker put upon his incarceration, the fact that he had been in prison mattering less than what he had been in for.

It was none other than Tom Gratton, who used to run the hotel at Walla; and what he said was, "Well, well, Larry! I thought you were still——" and then he stopped.

Larry took the extended hand and shook it, though not overfeelingly. The sentimentalist in him was not to the fore. He was a man of one idea at that time, what idea we know; and that was certainly not a sentimental one.

"Yes, I got out to-day," he said. "A decreased sentence owing to good behavior." He spoke quietly, so that passers-by would not hear. "Are you living here now?"

"No, I'm only on a visit. I'm staying with the Walla hotel. I think things are going to move there. I don't know about the upper valley, but the engineers are running the railway track into Sanish, or at least she's as far as Walla. Small world, in a way. I met Cliff Hayes when I was down at the coast recently. He looked as if he didn't want to recognize me at first, but I soon put that straight."

"Well, you did! How is he making out?"

"Oh, pretty good. He has quite a swell job. Cities for him in future, I think. No more 'back to the land' for Hayes. I gathered he wanted to forget it. We had a little chat and everything seemed to be going well with him."

"You never bumped into Brown, I suppose?"

"No, man, I never bumped into him, but I heard about him, oddly enough, just the other day. Say, wasn't that queer about him getting out? Something at the back of that. Looked to me as if he had something or other over somebody to be able to do it. What was it, do you know? Can you tell?"

"I don't know that I can," replied Larry. "What did you hear about him?"

"I heard that he had something over somebody; that was all. No one seemed to know details."

"No, I mean more recent news?" And then Larry added, because of a quick, sharp look in Gratton's eyes: "I was wondering how he was making out, if he had gone bad, or started on the square, or what he had done."

"Oh, he's in the Salmon River country, and doing quite well, I believe. He's a contractor, or something, down there, I think. Managed to get a little money together."

"Salmon River country!" said Larry. "Well! That's a change from the Dry Belt."

"Sure. Somebody was down in Robson City, on business with the smelter people there, and came across him. He's kept his own name."

Robson City! Quite a way, Larry privately considered, but he could make it.

"How are you fixed for dough?" asked Gratton.

"I got what was coming to me this morning," replied Larry, "and there

was the sale of my horses, and one or two things. They let me arrange for that. I got the cash before I left."

"You don't want any more?"

Larry was wanting nothing from anybody. He was not ecstatic over this kindness; he was merely civil toward it.

"No, thank you," was all he said dryly, in an offhand manner.

Gratton was a fairly broad-minded man, and after leaving Larry all that he thought to himself was: "Poor fellow! He's sort of stunned. That's the way I size him up—kind of stupefied, just out again. When these open-air men get locked up, they get that way, I guess, kind of stunned."

No, Larry was not exactly stunned, unless being possessed of one wild, diabolical aim stuns a man.

IT was only about a week later that he gathered his few belongings in response to a conductor's "Next stop—Robson City!" He had had enough money to get there without stealing a ride on a freight. He would not have very much left when he was through, but he had a loaded automatic on his hip.

And here he was. He did not care what happened after he had said his "little piece" to John Brown. He understood now pretty well how the world had seemed to a certain desperate character who had once been hunted over hundreds of miles of the foothills while he had been working there, east of the mountains. Yes, Larry understood pretty well, he thought, how it had been with "Dutch Henry" who, hunted through the country on breaking jail after a holdup, used to write warnings at the bottom of the placards offering a reward for his arrest, warnings that he would shoot on sight any one who tried to arrest him. Eventually, of course, he was stalked and shot like a wild cat.

Well, Larry Symons simply did not care what happened so long as he said that "little piece" of his to John Brown and then put a period at the end of it with a bullet. The fellow had crawled out of jail by playing into the hands of the very man who had driven them to what they had done. Intolerable! Insufferable!

He alighted from the train and found a hotel. The most casual inquiries gave him the information he desired. As Tom Gratton had told him, John Brown had not changed his name. Well, it was a common enough name, of course. That might have prevented him from changing it, though it seemed more in the nature of him to have kept it out of sheer grimness and determination.

Brown, Larry learned, had a little ranch about seven miles out across the Salmon River, and two or three teams of horses. The ranch appeared to be pretty much just a home for him, and with his teams he took on contract work.

Larry inquired his way, and then set off. He had to cross the river by a cable ferry, and was the only passenger. It was early morning. Long scarves of white mist hung a little way above the water and were being slowly drawn up into the sky, twinkling with color as they rose higher. The scene was different altogether from the Dry Belt land, a more humid region this.

Off the ferry, he climbed the bank and began his trudge along the road, passing little stretches of the old original forest and then cleared land with hayfields and orchards. The scarfs of mist rose higher, twinkling high in the sun, red and gold, white no more; and there was a pleasant piny and fresh smell in the air.

But that did not move the monomaniac with thoughts of freedom. He thought only of doing what he had planned these long years in jail. When he was a mile or two upon his way, a

rig that had come over on the ferry on a later crossing overtook him. The driver slowed down on coming level.

"Going far?" he inquired.

Larry's inclination was to reply, "What the hell's your business?" and then he realized that here was the offer of a lift. One may hazard that he was pretty nearly a crazy person then, and not of the cunning order. It came over him suddenly that he did not care who knew where he was going and might describe him later.

"I'm only going as far as John Brown's place," he replied.

"Oh! Jump in, and have a lift. It's a little way on yet."

Some men, newly back into the free world from incarceration, have broken down, tears filling their eyes, before a smaller friendliness, as though it were some mighty thing. But Larry took this offer as glumly as he had accepted Gratton's friendliness.

"A dour sort of a guy," thought the teamster, when he dropped Larry at Brown's gate.

Even the "Well, thank you, I'm obliged to you!" that the "dour guy" flung over his shoulder after he had alighted seemed a long time in coming, and perfunctory.

John Brown's ranch house was on the uphill side of the road, beyond a narrow orchard of young trees. On the lower side was a field stretching all the way down to the river, fairly broad there. Across the river, at the base of a steep, uncleared mountain, ran the railway track. On the edge of the field, by the road, were stables, presumably where Brown kept these haulage teams of his.

LARRY opened the gate on the orchard side, walked smartly up the path to the house, and then saw a young woman at the gable tying up strings for some climbing flower. Hearing his quick step she turned her head, came erect, and advanced to meet him with an inquiring gaze.

He took off his hat as by use and wont. There was an expression on his face that troubled her.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said, "can you tell me if Mr. Brown is around?"

"He's up on Duhamel Creek to-day at the camp," she replied, speaking to him as though he were acquainted with local lore and knew Duhamel Creek and what the camp might be.

"When do you expect him back?" asked Larry.

"Expect him back to-day," she said. "It's just possible he might get in to dinner. Was it—er—— Were you wanting—er——"

She wondered if he was a teamster come seeking employment.

A little glitter flamed in the back of Larry's eyes. "He might be expecting me around some time about now, I guess," he said.

"Oh! My husband didn't leave word that he was expecting any one," said she. "If he's expecting you, you'd better come in and wait."

Come in and wait! Larry wasn't sure about that. He might be half crazy, but old instincts and usages die hard. He had not been prepared for John Brown's having a wife. Deeds such as he was there upon, he considered, could not be done before women.

"I guess he wasn't expecting me to-day," he amended, "but he would probably be looking for me about now, expecting me more or less. We used to be——" he was going to say "friends," but that also he amended and said: "We used to be around together quite a bit."

"You'd better come in and wait and see if he comes in to dinner," said she. "What is the name? He didn't say anything that I can remember about expecting you."

"Larry Symons," said he, in an oddly even voice.

The name apparently conveyed nothing to her.

"Well, come right up and in. Mr. Symons," was all she replied.

Larry did not know what to do. A woman put him out. He had not talked to one during years. And the last woman to whom he had spoken was Maisie Maurice.

Mrs Brown walked up on to the veranda, so there seemed nothing for it hut to follow and decide later what to do. And there, under a tented mosquito net, was a baby just awakening, kicking its feet, and rubbing its knuckles in its eyes. She tossed aside the covering mesh, caught up the child, opened the screen door and held it for Larry to follow. Within, in the cool living room, the table was set for a meal.

"Just take a seat," she said. "I'll get another plate and things."

"Can't I get them for you, ma'am, you with the baby——" He could not find words to go on.

"Oh, thank you, I'm accustomed to that," she told him, and departed into the kitchen, leaving him disturbed before a new emotion that came rushing in upon his fixed idea, an emotion due to that fact that not for years had he spoken to a woman, and also that the last one had been Maisie.

By the time she returned, child on one arm, plate, knife, and fork in the other hand, Larry was out of sympathy altogether with this way of going about his revenge.

"He'll be coming back with his teams, I suppose?" he inquired.

"Yes, he'll drive back with one of the teams. The other two will still be working up there."

"I could go down to the stable and wait there for him, then," said he evasively.

"Why, for pity's sake!" she exclaimed. "I couldn't let an old friend of my husband's wait down in the stables when the house is open, nor a total stranger even!"

SHE thought he was shy and might wish to be alone, so making the excuse of going to see if Jack was coming, she passed out onto the veranda. There she walked to and fro, past the window and back again, glancing now up the road, now down into the baby's face; and every time she passed, Larry's eyes were riveted on her. She had auburn hair with glints as of copper in it—and she was the first woman who had talked to him since his coming into the free world again. Queer how much that meant!

There was something in the way she smiled at the child that began to unsettle him. Then she came in again and went through the room, remarking: "I don't see or hear him coming yet. I must look at the dinner." She returned, the baby still in her arms, but once more asleep. Going on to the veranda again, she put it in the cradle and spread the mosquito net.

Larry could stand it no more. He rose and followed her. He must get into the air. He leaned against a pole of the veranda roof and stared along the dusty road.

"I could walk up and meet him," he said.

"You might just as well stay and have dinner now," she replied. "If he doesn't come soon, he won't be home till supper time, and you'd have to go all the way up to the camp before you'd get a meal. It's a long hike. You wouldn't get there till supper. Is it nothing I could do for you? Was it that you wanted anything in the way of business, or was it just a friendly call to see my husband again?"

A friendly call! He looked at her heavily. He looked away. The blood was singing in his head. He did not know what was happening to him, but something was taking place, as when the

angels disturbed the pool. He must get away and think it over again—think it over again. The time was not ripe.

"I just happened to be in Robson City and thought I would come across and see him," he told her.

"But you said he expected you," she said, puzzled, worried to think he was going, certain that he was simply actuated by shyness. "You told me——"

"Oh, I only meant that perhaps he thought we would meet some time."

What was happening within him went on happening, if one can be allowed to put it so.

"I tell you what," he continued, "you can just mention to him that I called, as I haven't seen him for six years, and wondered how he was making out, and that——"

His face was drawn. His eyes had lost that glitter. There was something in the way he stared, and fumbled for words, that made this woman feel sorry for him without knowing any cause for pity.

"Where did you know him before?" she said.

"Up in the Sanish country."

"Well, well!" she said. "He'll be awfully sorry to have missed you, but you'll come again, won't you? I wish you would wait now."

"Thank you, ma'am, I won't wait."

He began to go down the steps. She walked beside him, walked all the way to the gate, his hat in his hand to there. A queer, shy kind of a fellow, she thought him again, probably little accustomed to the society of women, living mostly in camps; but that sense of pity for him persisted so strongly that when they reached the gate, and he was just going to turn away abruptly, she held out her hand.

Larry looked at it for a moment, then looked in her eyes, then at her hand again, then slowly held out his own.

"I'm glad to see Jack's doing so well," he said, "and got su-su-such a nice place." Something made him stammer much as Cliff Hayes used to. "And—and I guess he's happy."

"Oh, we're surely happy!" she responded. "I'll remember the name and tell him you called, Mr. Symons. I'm very sorry you won't stop."

"Thank you, ma'am. Yes, you might just say I looked over to—to tell him"—there was a sound like a gulp in his throat, a catch, nothing in the way of a sob, just a catch—"everything is fine and dandy, and give him good luck from me."

He had said his "little piece," but not the little piece he had for so long planned.

Then he was off abruptly, and posting along the road back to the ferry, on past the bits of forest, past the intervening cleared lands with the aligned orchards and trellised houses; and all the way, sinking into his heart, he almost unaware, went on the liquid cries and the trills of birds. He had never been anywhere where there were so many orange-breasted robins flying and calling. Ever and again one gave just that brief note that he had remembered in prison. It went into him, with the kindness of Mrs. Brown, with thoughts of Maisie.

Hard he posted along, and as he went the whole scene—the fields, the patches of forest, the river twining below, the confronting bulk of mountain across it —he saw through a haze of tears. What had been happening in him had come to a head.

It was all over. He wanted no revenge. He felt suddenly extremely tired. He had been waiting for revenge, and he had renounced it. Very tired, very worn, feeling almost as one convalescing from an illness, he came back down the embankment to the ferry, in his heart only the desire to see Maisie —just to see her. That was all he wanted, a glimpse of her, and then to begin afresh.

CHAPTER IX.

A HOME-COMING.

IN the Dry Belts, for some reason, Larry felt more at home; and sitting in the train on the new line running from Blaeberry to Walla, unrecognized by any so far, some kind of healing began in his heart.

Almost all the windows of the coach were open. He could look out on the gleaming benches and the yellow sage-brush lands, where men ride and do not walk. What a little thing it was that brought the crux of that sense of home-coming—a little thing indeed; it was a very small mosquito! He had seen mosquitoes in some parts that looked like daddy longlegs, but here in "the Sanish" they were diminutive, and of a color best described as the blend or average hue of the scene. But though they are diminutive, they give one a twitch when they get to business, these little fellows of that Dry Belt, with more of a burn to it, it seemed, than the big fellows of some other parts.

The little pin point of fire of one on the back of his left hand made him whack the right down upon it just by second nature, and having done that he actually smiled. He was home again!

An automobile stage was awaiting the arrival of the train at Walla, so he went straight on. This was a land after his own heart. Perhaps heredity had something to do with it. Had not his father loved all that region of the sand hills of the Platte and the Bad Lands of Dakota when these were frontier?

Larry found himself bending frequently in the stage, wishing it did not have a hood, bending and craning to look up at the terraced benches, at the irregular belts of forest above, at the high, blank cliffs, at the crests notching the blue sky with hues as of pumice stone or coral. A great white cloud drifting overhead indicated, by its traveling shadow, all the dips and rises, the cracks and chasms, the innumerable creases of that mountainside, now stretching out slowly on a fairly even area of slope, next moment leaping where there was a gulch.

He would get out at the journey's end practically penniless, but he was there. He must see Maisie, and then forth again to a fresh beginning.

Who should be the first man to cast eyes on him when he alighted but Frank Gorst, looking much the same, the everlasting cigarette hanging from a corner of his mouth, and wearing that placid, noncommittal air? His face lit at sight of Larry, and he stepped up to him, extending his hand.

"Well, well!" he said. "I was wondering when you would blow in. I've been trying to get in touch with you."

He put a pudgy hand to Larry's shoulder a moment, to thrust him across the street before him to his office.

"I had a letter, in response to my inquiries, from—er——" he smiled faintly, "the manager of that hotel where you've been boarding recently, informing me that you had not stayed as long as you intended when you went there first."

Larry turned his head slowly and looked at Gorst, at last with an expression of gratitude for the milk of human kindness. Then, just as they crossed the little street, an old friend who had once worked in the camps with Larry leaped between them with an "Excuse me interrupting," grabbed Larry's hand, shook it warmly and then hurried on.

Gorst smiled, and thrust Symons before him into his office, the little roll-top desk still in the corner, the ore specimens all around on the shelves, glinting their variegated colors there.

"Now, my boy," he said, "do you want to go eat first or do you want to talk business first?"

"Talk business! Well, what business is there to talk?"

"Which will it be? We can go over to supper afterward, or we can go right now. The doors open now, just when the stage from Walla comes in."

It seemed that in coming home Larry had nearly all he wanted—nearly all. He wasn't impatient to hear any news. He was back there, and he was not looked at askance. That was enough for the moment. And curiosity was not one of his failings, many though he had.

Gorst settled it. "It won't take many minutes," he said, waving to a chair with his cigarette. "Sit down. You must know that the railway's coming into Walla, and to be in here before long, is having its effect on us; and I've got an offer, my boy, for an outright purchase of your claim up there. That's what I've been trying to get in touch with you over. Now it's not much, not much. People prefer to lease, as you know, in these days, but I purposely tried to work an outright sale, thinking it would be handy for you to have a wad to make," he drooped his eyelids, "a fresh start. I've got a definite promise of seventy-five thousand dollars. It's not much, you know——"

Larry stared at him. "But the claim must have lapsed!" he said. "Any one could jump it, and it would be quite legal doing that. It wouldn't be jumping at all, in a way."

"No, no," Gorst contradicted, the cigarette in the corner of his mouth again.

"No, no," Gorst said again. "It hasn't lapsed. That's been looked after for you."

"Who by? By you? Well, that was awful good——"

"Well, no, not exactly by me. I've been on the lookout for buyers. The grubstake for somebody to go out and do it for you each year has been handed to me by—shall we say another party?—whom I have promised not to name, somebody who felt a lot of sympathy with you."

"Whoever was he?" asked Larry. "Who in heck felt friendly enough to me to do that?"

"I've passed my word not to divulge," replied Gorst; "given her a promise to that effect." At the "her," he opened his eyes wide and peered into Larry's, then turned his head and blinked to the smoke ascending from that pendant cigarette.

She, not he! She! Larry thought of those two letters he had received and not answered because of the feeling that he had come shipwreck. There was only one "she" in Sanish who would do such a thing for him.

He stared away past Gorst and scarcely even saw the wall at which he was staring, that wall stratified with shelves on which lay the specimen rocks of many colors, saw only that "she" in his mind's eye.

"Was it——" he began, but somehow could not bring himself to name her.

"I'm pledged to secrecy," repeated Gorst. "What about this deal? Would you like me to close it on your behalf and get the papers and legal matters attended to?"

"I surely would."

Gorst jumped up. "All right," he said, "then we'll go eat," and was thrusting the bemused Larry out before him again next minute, coughing away and saying: "Darn! I must cut out this smoking!"

Halfway across the street, Larry stopped. "But is it all right?" he asked. "You don't mind being seen in the hotel——"

"Here, you'd better cut that out!" exclaimed Gorst. "You'll be making me annoyed with you. Do I need to say anything? Ain't actions louder than words?"

"I'm sorry," said Larry.

"Well, I'm glad you are. You ought to be! Why, man, everybody knows the kind of proposition you were up

against there. It might be different back East, but the West is still the West. We ain't quite hidebound here. It depends on what a fellow's been to jail for, man!"

Very amiable and broad-minded view! It made even Larry smile slightly, for after all a holdup is a holdup, even if there be extenuating circumstances to the minds of many.

It was good to be sitting at the table there with the assayer and mining agent.

But he was very impatient to see Maisie. Dinner over, Gorst asked to be excused for having, he said, an appointment. So had Larry, an appointment with his destiny.

SHE saw him coming, but this time did not run down to the gate. She simply stood up and waited, gazing at him. And there was no man, even a fool man, but might know by the look in her eyes as he drew near that she was a friend, a true friend.

She thrust open the screen door as he came onto the porch, and together they stepped inside.

"Maisie!" he said.

"Larry!"

They held hands like two children.

"Oh, Maisie," he said, "oh, Maisie, that was wonderful of you, all the time seeing about the assessment work on my claim!"

"How did you know?"

"Gorst."

"He promised me not to tell," said she.

"Well, neither he did," Larry cryptically replied.

"Then how——"

"Oh, he said 'her' instead of 'him' when telling me somebody had done it, and there was only one 'her' for me. There is only one 'her' in Sanish, or all the world, for that matter, who would have done it for me."

Her eyes were misted at that.

"Why ever did you tell him not to tell?" he demanded.

"Well, you see, a woman—helping a man—— Oh, can't you see, Larry?"

He did not, evidently, exactly see.

"Was it because I didn't answer those two letters you sent me?" he inquired; but did not wait for a reply. "I couldn't answer them, Maisie," he said. "I thought it was better to make an end of it, before it had begun, or before I was sure it had begun for you. I was glad I'd never asked you."

"Asked me—what?"

"Why, asked you to wait and marry me some day," he replied.

Her breast was rising and falling, as though a bird fluttered within.

"You've done this for me, Maisie," he said, "but—but after that trouble in the Upper Sanish, and the prison, can I ask you now?"

"The prison was an accident," said she, "and what makes you think I would turn you down for that? You maybe didn't act wisely, but the way I saw it, and the way my folks saw it, was that it was coming to them. The people we come of had a way, before lawyers were everywhere, of just putting things like that U. S. V. I. land-skin game straight for themselves. Irrigated land!" she scoffed. "Oh, Larry, do you know, I may be awful old-timer in the way I see it, but the thing that hurt me most, only I could not say that very well in the letters I wrote to the jail, was that you didn't get away with it!"

There were tears in her eyes and her face all smiling at that.

"You and me," she added ungrammatically, "come of the same kind of folks."

It was on talk of their ancestors—as you will remember—that they had come, one evening, very close, in that house there. They came closer then. He looked down at her; he held out his arms; he drew her to him; and she clung to him, her head on his shoulder.

Regenerated

By Captain Ralph R. Guthrie

Author of "The Colt," "Spreadeagle and the Black Art," Etc.

There had been sown a tiny seed of kindness in the crime-hardened breast of Martin Gruesbeck. In the far, wet jungles of the Philippine outposts, when the slashing of Moro bolos was filling the air with the sounds of death, that one, small seed blossomed into the finest courage that the heart of man can know.

THE most exciting and horrifying experience that could come to an American soldier in the Philippines, during that romantic period known in near-contemporary annals as the "Days of the Empire," was the bolo rush.

Such events usually happened along about daybreak when the red sun was beginning to gleam above the mountains, which range through and through the Moro country in Mindanao.

The rolling kitchens are steaming with breakfast, and the horses on the picket line are stamping and nickering for their oats. Suddenly there is a series of staccato "yips," followed by the Mohammedan war cry.

"Allah il Allah!"

The canebrakes become furious with the movement of hundreds of black bodies. They are on the camp of sleeping soldiers by the time the warning "pop" of the sentry's rifle—fired with the last breath in his body—reaches their ears. They are through and over, while men, whose eyes are still heavy with sleep, close them again to wake in glory. Pistols crack, fired in frantic haste beneath dew-soaked blankets. Troop commanders find themselves too busy defending their necks from the whirling knives to shout commands.

Then the dreadful age-long moment passes, like the first leveling gust of a typhoon. Men with crimson streaming from empty sleeves or ghastly cuts on the left sides—always the left sides—of

their faces or torsos are clamoring for the medicos. Officers who happen to be unwounded begin to yank and haul their scattered platoons into the handiest defense formations possible, swearing, shouting, frothing at the mouth, like madmen.

"Rack-rack-rack-rack!" crackled the Springfields.

"Here, doctor! See what's the matter with my arm. Why—why, it's gone!"

"Sergeant Bogan, take your squad and organize a covering fire from those banyans!"

"Where the hell is our jackass battery?"

"Doctor over here! Doctor over here!"

"Rack-rack-rack-rack!" and at last: "Boom! Boom!" from the light batteries, firing at nothing. The "rush" is over. It has lasted perhaps not longer than four minutes. But brief though it generally is, men have been known to go crazy while it is on. This is especially liable to happen if they are addicts of the native "beno," into which Chinese venders sometimes insert habit-forming drugs that go straight to the occidental brain.

I am thinking now of Lieutenant Calder P. Grinshaw, who was the son of old Judge Grinshaw of the Tilden County Criminal Court, and came from a family very well known in a certain city of the Middle West. Young Grinshaw very nearly brought discredit on the uniform through the dual agency of doctored beno and a bolo rush down at Pao-Pao—he and an enlisted man, named Stuyvesant. That wasn't the soldier's name either, come to think about it. His real name was Martin Gruesbeck. He had assumed the other upon entering the service.

As this yarn is mostly about Gruesbeck, we shall have to go back to where he enters it, about the year 1902. He was a nondescript civilian then, so it will be best to forget the army for a while—until we get back to it.

THE father of the lieutenant—Judge Grinshaw—was sitting on the bench, and Martin Gruesbeck came up for trial, charged with housebreaking. That's where we'll begin.

The judge was a man few people thoroughly understood. He was tall, strongly built, stern of feature and dignified of mien, with the knack of keeping his motives pretty well to himself. The newspaper men came as near reading his character as any one else, and they sometimes were of a divided opinion as to whether his unfailing leniency in cases where there was an obvious heart interest was based on kindness or the desire for publicity.

They were clearing out the witnesses of the preceding case. The judge's hard voice had rung in denunciation of the criminal and wound up with a sentence which seemed rather paltry, all things considered. However, the man's wife keeled over in a dead faint and sweat gleamed on the magisterial brow as he summoned the reporters to his desk.

"What are you going to print about that?" he demanded harshly, glaring first at one and then another. "I suppose it will be the same rotten dope about my working hand in hand with crooks. Encouraging crime by letting the criminals off easy."

"What's the matter, judge?" laughed one of the older news gatherers. "You look down in the dumps. Don't tell me this kindly criticism of ours has gone home after eighteen years. Some of us have cracked lips."

The judge did not join in the general titter. Usually he relished this jesting.

"Yes," he admitted grudgingly, "it has. Now, I'll have to confess to a weakness. It is this. I can't bear to hear a woman shriek or a child sob. It nearly breaks my heart.

"As far as the crooks are concerned, I have steeled myself until I don't mind giving them the limit. It is their women —their women and their children. They have made out of me what you have often said—a milksop. Now, you know that, for once, I'm not talking for publication. I'm in deadly earnest.

"For eighteen years," the judge went on, "I have meted out justice at this bar. Hundreds of criminals, old, young, married and single, have been arraigned before me. I have listened to their pleas, charged the juries, put them away for terms of various lengths and felt no qualms of conscience on account of them, personally. But the screams and sobs of their relatives and friends always remain in my ears for days after. Not a single man has ever been tried before me who hasn't had some one interceding for him, to make me feel that, for every lash of the law I give the culprit, an innocent, helpless woman or child gets a knife driven into its heart."

"Well!" said the reporter. "What's the answer? Crime is getting worse every day and our bosses say you let 'em off too easy."

"I can't help it, if they do say so," declared the judge angrily. "What do I care? I can be hard on a man crook. I could see him broken on the wheel, for that matter, and you know it."

"Pshaw! You've just got a tender heart."

The magistrate's eyes glittered with anger. "Go ahead and roast me!" he exclaimed. "I'll show you some day. If ever there comes before me a convicted criminal who hasn't a friend or relative in the world—not one!—I'll give him the limit. I've taken more years off sentences on account of sobbing relatives than it seems there are left in eternity. I'll give him all the statutes allow to square the bill. You bring me that kind of a crook and I'll show you how hard I can be."

The bailiff arose.

"The next case on the docket is the State against Martin Gruesbeck. Crime, housebreaking and larceny from person."

"Are you ready?" inquired the court of the State's attorney.

"The State is ready, your honor!"

"Is the defense counsel prepared?"

"The defendant is ready and enters a plea of 'guilty,'" returned the young lawyer who represented Gruesbeck.

The prisoner, a tall, sallow-faced young man, with very seedy clothes, nodded his head glumly.

The matter of extenuating circumstances came up.

"Has the prisoner at the bar any friends who can vouch for him?" inquired the judge.

"None, your honor!" replied the smart young lawyer.

"He has no relatives to whom we can write?"

"He has none."

"But some one, somewhere, must be concerned whether or not we send him to the penitentiary for a term of years," insisted the court listlessly.

The prisoner took the words out of his counsel's mouth.

"Not a relative and no friends," he declared stolidly. "No one gives a damn what becomes of me, and never did."

Judge Grinshaw sat up straight in his chair and the room became deathly quiet.

Here was drama! The reporters quickly, silently drew out their pads and, with poised pencils, fastened their eyes on the judge, scarcely breathing. They were thinking in a sort of panic:

"Poor devil! The judge has got to soak him now, to save his own face. He came in at the wrong time."

The judge was leaning forward with his elbows on the bench, his chin in his hands.

"So!" he exclaimed softly. "*You* are the man no one cares about?"

"I'm the man!"

Judge Grinshaw glanced down and began to shuffle the papers on his desk—probably turning over in his mind the ways and means at his disposal to make this an ideal punishment, an example to all the crooks in the land.

"I'd hate to be in that fellow's shoes," remarked one news gatherer to another. "He certainly is playing into hard luck."

The judge looked up. His face, instead of being set and stern, was soft, almost as that of a pitying woman's. The steel-blue eyes, which so often had glared at offending mankind, were suspiciously dewy and indirect of gaze.

"Martin Gruesbeck," he said solemnly, while the ticking of the courtroom clock clamored from the wall, "I am going to unusual lengths in your case. You have made a misstatement of fact and I've got to set you right. You have just stated that you haven't a friend in the world, and thus you intimate that no one here cares to intercede for you. That never happens in this courtroom. It can't happen, because I won't let it."

Then, turning to the clerk, he said rather huskily:

"We will sentence this man to a year in the penitentiary, but we will parole him on the cognizance of the court. I will see the prisoner right away in my chamber."

What the judge said to Gruesbeck will never be known, because the judge did not take the reporters into his confidence afterward. as was his custom. But the haggard youth went out of the criminal-court building an hour later a changed man. Self-respect had come to him at last, along with a little money, a promised job, and a powerful friend, the love of whom was destined to take a central position in his life.

All of his life, Gruesbeck had sought friendship and found it not. People he was likely to meet were apt to judge a man pretty much on his appearance. His was not the kind of a personality that provoked camaraderie of the right sort, for he was halting of speech, ingrowing, ugly of countenance.

To-day, a man who dwelt on forbidden heights and wielded an authority that made men cringe had condescended to be kind. He had said—— Well, no matter what he said. The effect was to put Gruesbeck on his feet again, free, hopeful at last, on the road to a paying and responsible position, under the wing of a judge of the criminal court.

He began to whistle, and at last to hum as he tried to express his relief because of the new lease on life. Meanwhile, he was thinking what he would do with this chance that had come to him out of the blue. He decided he would show the judge that he was not bad at heart, at all—only misunderstood. This gave him a peaceful, airy feeling in the region of his heart and made his feet dance over the hot pavement as he shuffled along.

"I'll make good to the old bloke if it takes me until doomsday," he mumbled out loud, as he ambled along looking for a street car, never dreaming that he was uttering a prophecy.

ON his way uptown, the man saw something suddenly, had a thought come to him which checked his bounding hopes and froze the blood in his veins. Two detectives he had known only too well in a distant city were standing on a corner, gazing at him with avid interest. He knew what they were after, these men. There had been a robbery and a murder. The murder was a mistake, and it was not he, but the reckless lad he had induced to go prowling with him, who had let a frightened finger slip off the trigger guard.

Gruesbeck turned and ran as if all the fiends were in hot pursuit.

His first impulse was to go at once to Judge Grinshaw, confess all and throw himself on his mercy. On second

thought, Gruesbeck decided it would only embarrass his new-found friend—would disillusion him. He didn't want to do that. He didn't want to go to prison. He wanted to expiate and make good—to win back. But since this was now out of the question and his capture almost certain, he took the course that led down to the levee and to a certain bridge that spanned the river.

When Gruesbeck arrived at the bridge, it was dusk, and he found another man lingering there looking down into the boiling flood fifty feet below. The presence of the watcher did not interest him much, only caused him to hesitate. He thought the man was leaning too far over the rail for safety and should be warned. Then he saw the stranger was holding on with tightly clenched hands.

"Probably some man who has come down here to escape the heat," he thought.

He slipped his own body over the opposite rail silently, in case the stranger might be listening, crawled like a cat down onto a projecting beam, hung by his gorillalike hands a few seconds, and let go.

At the same moment, the other man, with a terrible groan, swung himself free from the rail and dropped like a plummet into the rushing water.

The two would-be suicides went down to the bottom of the river simultaneously, came up twenty or thirty feet apart, each one drew a pitiful breath, decided to sink for the last time and then observed the other apparently floundering close by. They were both strong swimmers and set about the mutual rescue with considerable skill and cunning. By the time they were within closing-in distance, the current had carried them far below the bridge and near the bank.

Gruesbeck it was who took the initiative. Yelling to the other not to try to lay hold of him, he closed in and, with a lightninglike feint, seized him by the hair. The other, thinking it to be the desperate plunge of a drowning man, struck him in the mouth. They clinched, battled, sank, rose spluttering, swore horribly, just as the current swung them on to a gravelly shingle, and thus allowed them both to make a safe landing.

On the bank they argued the matter out, fell to laughing, came at length to explanations. The stranger said his name was Henry Stuyvesant.

Why had he attempted to do away with himself?

Simple!

His wife and babies were starving, and he had no job but a fair amount of life insurance. A day or two before, he had in desperation enlisted in the army, in order to get a paltry fifteen dollars a month, supposing it would be home service. To-day he had learned that he must go to the Philippines at once. So he had decided to cash in on his policy.

"I wouldn't mind going to the Philippines," quoth Gruesbeck. "I've got a job and some ready money. Suppose—say! You take my credentials and make good for me. I'll take yours. See?"

IT was an ideal arrangement. Gruesbeck, desiring above all things in this life not to undeceive his benefactor, and to remain out of jail long enough to prove his own gratitude by some sterling act of noblesse oblige, saw nothing else in prospect than a speedy flight. Once in the army, he believed he would be safe from arrest.

On the other hand, if Stuyvesant assumed his name and the credentials which were to land him a job, the probabilities were that he would be able to get away with the deception so long as Stuyvesant's behavior was exemplary. In the course of time, the man would be summoned before Judge Grinshaw, so that even the stigma of being a

paroled prisoner could be removed, and then, doubtless, the judge would attribute any change which he might notice in his protégé as due to the benefits of leading an upright life and partaking of three "squares" a day. The finger prints were different, but shucks! This man Stuyvesant was too much of a mollycoddle, from Gruesbeck's more worldly viewpoint, ever to become involved in anything which would call for Bertillon evidence.

It was Stuyvesant who inquired if there might not be some responsibilities attached to the name of Gruesbeck. The paroled prisoner laughed.

"None," he replied. "I read it off a show bill when I struck this town. My own mother, if she remembers me, would not recognize that moniker."

Stuyvesant thought Gruesbeck was the sourest man he had ever seen. He was, however, delighted; and so the trade was made, with each one possessing all of the requisite information necessary to carry them through in their assumed rôles. They stepped into each other's shoes. The criminal, with the proper military papers in his pocket, reported the next morning to the recruiting officer, and the following week found himself safely on the deck of a transport bound for Manila, P. I.

FATE had a funny habit of interfering with the life of Martin Gruesbeck. When he arrived at Manila, he was transshipped to Zamboanga, Island of Mindanao, and there he was assigned to the infantry platoon commanded by a dapper young man, who turned out to be the son of the judge who had given the criminal his first chance to redeem his life.

Only by a great stretch of the imagination could you see any likeness between Lieutenant Calder P. Grinshaw and his father. Even then, you would have to confine the comparison to their heights, builds and dignity of carriage.

The old man's life had been a very busy one, which might account for the difference. Then again, he had been born poor, and what he had accomplished had been done by himself. Calder was the only child, had been born with two high-priced doctors in attendance, and a trained nurse or two, and there had followed a sizable train of other functionaries to wait on him—nursemaids, private tutors, chauffeurs, valets. Life and all there was in it was his plaything. Consequently, he was inordinately centripetal by nature—a good-looking, vain, conceited puppy who got what he wanted pretty shortly after the desire came to him.

When a boy, he had liked to sit in the stuffy courtroom at times, and there had picked up a better knowledge of crooks and their characteristics than has the average boy. When Private Stuyvesant showed up in his outfit, therefore, Calder was not long in giving him the proper place in his mental catalogue.

"Some one has fooled the army again," was his mental comment, as he looked upon the crime-seared features of the recruit. "This man will need watching and a bit of disciplining. And the first opportunity that arrives, I am going to do what dad would do under the same circumstances—land him in the jug and forget about him."

Which shows that he did not know his dad.

He did not know Stuyvesant either.

The latter knew he had found the son of his benefactor, sought patiently for some trace of the old man's kindly nature, gave it up at last, and swore an oath to himself that he would repay his debt of gratitude to the father by good and loyal service to the son. Sooner or later, he believed the chance would come. Else why had Fate thrown them into juxtaposition?

So Stuyvesant began to see what he could do.

He kept his eyes on the lieutenant,

anticipating his every wish, volunteering for the hardest and most menial tasks. The desire to ingratiate himself with the son became almost an obsession with him. He used to sneak down to the picket line with an old silk handkerchief, and rub down the officer's mount until that animal's sorrel coat shone like patent leather. Sometimes he would beat the personal orderly to the lieutenant's boots, and shine them until they were almost like twin mirrors. The men began to gibe him for being a toady and his attentions became irksome to Grinshaw himself.

Gradually the lieutenant grew to dislike the soldier intensely. For a youth, still in his early twenties, Calder was unusually set in his mind. A first opinion was likely to be a final one with him. He had appraised Stuyvesant as a thinly disguised crook, when he first showed up for duty with his platoon, and this idea stuck like a cocklebur to a sheep.

In every way he could devise, he attempted to put Stuyvesant in his place. He tried out all the most grueling details on him, gave him every bit of extra fatigue that came his way, abused him by slurs to his face; disparaged his efforts to be an ideal soldier; snapped at him at drill and publicly bawled him out on parade. Still the soldier worshiped him with the blind, fatuous, unreasoning fidelity of a fox terrier for a boy who happens to be his master.

THE regiment of which Grinshaw was a part left Zamboanga shortly and moved to Malabang. There was a deadly period of peace on the island then, and they used to shift troops about to keep them interested and so as not to let them take root too deeply in any particular station. Malabang was a stagnant town on the upper island, possessed makeshift port facilities, a general store, a market, two or three fishmongery establishments and a saloon in every other building.

Since prehistoric days, the Chinese had been landing there in their junks and importing Malays, Hindus, nondescripts from all parts of the Orient, especially Chinese coolies. Gradually the foreign element replaced the Moros as masters of the village, and therefore vice, which is almost unknown inland, reared its forbidding structures on the main streets.

It was too hot during these days in Malabang to do much work, but the nights were alluring and delightful, and a homesick young man might well be tempted to search the town for such amusement as he might find. He was bound to be disappointed at first. Then he would naturally become acclimated to the peculiar environments therein existing. After a while, there would be a general letting down of barriers. When that began to occur, everybody knew the regiment would be moved again.

The lieutenant was not as long about letting down the barriers as was customary. The transition was almost instantaneous. He got to spending most of his evenings "out." Occasionally he was caught flirting with some dusky half-Chinese beauty by a stern post commander, and reprimanded with cutting emphasis by him in the privacy of headquarters.

At last came beno and drugs.

One night, Private Stuyvesant saw the lieutenant entering an evil place where Chinese hung out with renegade whites, and went in after him. If he expected to be thanked for his interference with a superior officer's private sorties, he was mistaken. Grinshaw, drunk and vicious, sprang upon him like a tiger and thrashed him within an inch of murder. The next morning, sullen from his excesses, he had Stuyvesant up before him as summary court officer, and sent him to the guardhouse for a brief stay.

One would have thought this would

have been enough, but it was only the beginning.

At the termination of his short sentence, Grinshaw had Stuyvesant up before him again on a trumped-up charge, intent on ridding the service of this pest who had turned himself into a private spy. He went back in the guardhouse again, this time for fifteen days.

Some one of the men must have had an awakening by then, for report of the hazing of the soldier came to the ears of the commandant, Colonel Greening, and he paid a visit to the sergeant of the guard, and put questions to him.

"I don't know what the matter can be," said the sergeant, "but I will say this: There is something wrong between the lieutenant and this man. I have heard things, but of course, they are only rumors. So far as I can see, Stuyvesant is doing everything in his power to please everybody, but—— Well, the lieutenant hates him, and has gone out of his way, ever since the two first saw each other at Zamboanga, to lay him out."

The prisoner was sent for.

"What is wrong, if anything, between you and Lieutenant Grinshaw?" demanded the colonel bluntly.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"He is my idea of a perfect officer," replied the prisoner. "I would do anything on earth for him."

"I understand that; but what makes him dislike you?"

"Nothing," was the sullen reply. And that is all they ever were able to get out of Stuyvesant. "Nothing."

It is problematical what would have happened next if there hadn't been a sudden uprising on the part of the natives in the interior.

However, the colonel had the lieutenant into his quarters that same afternoon, and gave him a heart-to-heart talk about the way he had been deporting himself.

"There is talk," said the colonel, "and talk leads to out-and-out scandal. Scandal leads to only one place, and that is disgrace. It is time you took yourself in hand. The army does not tolerate loose living."

"I know, colonel," returned Grinshaw. "Perhaps I have been careless. This place gets on my nerves. You see, I am used to having what I want and one of the things I like is a white man's drink—that and sociability. Where in Malabang can a young man go to have a decent good time?"

"You don't have good times in Malabang," retorted the colonel sternly. "This is a man's place. The only way you can find a substitute for amusement as you find it in the States is to frequent the chink dives, drink poisonous Chinese drinks and dance with half-caste and Chinese women. That is forbidden."

FOR a while everything was well with Calder Grinshaw. Then he began to slip again. It was evident he blamed Stuyvesant for information of his doings getting to the ear of the commandant. If Stuyvesant had possessed half a brain, perhaps he would have taken the tip, and let his superior go to the devil in any way he chose, but he was subnormal or he wouldn't have led the life which had been his since babyhood; and so he dogged the lieutenant's steps and watched over his actions like a father.

It got to such a pass that when Grinshaw went into a bar, Stuyvesant went with him and covertly conveyed a terrible threat to the bartender if he sold the officer anything with a wallop in it. If, in spite of his watchfulness, drink got the better of the lieutenant, it was Stuyvesant who took the officer home and put him to bed. The enlisted men began to laugh at this unusual guardianship and Grinshaw grew furious. He sent for the soldier and they

had a fine one-sided set-to in the orderly room.

"See here, Stuyvesant," he warned, "I'm not going to stand for much more of your surveillance and tattling to the colonel. I don't know what is behind your desire to ruin my career, but it has got to stop. See?"

"Yes, I see," responded Stuyvesant. "I am doing this for your own good."

He wanted to say more, but he knew no words for it. He wanted to say that the man whom he wanted to serve was not the son, but the father who gave him the only chance he had ever had in life. What he wouldn't do to repay that debt!

And yet, if he had had the words and could have gone into the matter of his obligation fully, there is not a shadow of a doubt but that any sane man would have laughed him out of the room. The idea! Why, all the old judge did was to give him a parole, a few dollars which meant little or nothing to him and the promise of a job. No ordinary person could understand what such consideration, coming from such an unexpected source, meant to an Ishmael and a pariah on the face of the footstool—a man who thought he had been forgotten even by his Maker. To understand a warped brain, you have to possess one, or else have the imaginative soul of a De Maupassant.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Grinshaw, in an ugly mood. "Want to go back to the guardhouse and stay there?"

"No," mumbled Stuyvesant. "But I wanted to keep you straight. Nothing else."

"Who put you up to spy on me?"

"No one."

"I think you are lying. You're one of those intelligence-department sleuths?"

"No, I'm not."

"What are you then?"

"I can't tell you, sir. It has something to do with your father. That's all. I want to be of some service to you."

"Oh, you do! I'll bet I know who you are. It's nine chances out of ten that you are some dirty crook my father punished some time, and you are trying to revenge yourself on me."

Stuyvesant winced and the judge's son saw it, and thought he read a confession that his random accusation had struck home.

"Oh-h-h!" he taunted. "So it's true, is it? Well, you dirty crook, I've got your army finger prints and I'm going to send them back to the States to-morrow—broadcast them through my father's office. Then, if you are really guilty of a crime, I'll get you and get you quick. I'll show you!"

Stuyvesant threw him an imploring look, but his lips remained sealed. What could he say? The lieutenant no longer possessed a normal mind. Having once followed the drug habit himself, he could read, in the sunken eyes and twitching lips of his tormentor, the infallible signs of the addict. Knowing him to be what he had become, Stuyvesant was sure that, in spite of any argument which he might make, the finger prints would go out in the morning mail. There are some drugs which bring to their victims a sort of melancholia, haunting them with the baseless fears and suspicions of the paranoiac. Grinshaw had poisoned his own mind against Stuyvesant, and it would stay poisoned.

THE next morning, Grinshaw had something else to think about. The call to arms was sounded at two a. m., and, at five, a punitive expedition was organized to institute reprisals on a pair of hill datos for murdering the entire family of a white trader. They were in movement at sunup. Only light field equipment was taken, but at the last moment Grinshaw threw away a pair of heavy shoes and, instead, slipped into

his bedding roll a couple of bottles of distilled poison from the chink grog shops.

Grinshaw marched at the head of his platoon and Stuyvesant at the rear, but the mind of each was on the other, and the thoughts thus interchanged were barbed with two-edged hate.

Grinshaw was thinking:

"If that man is near me when the action starts, I won't be responsible for what I do. I suppose he would kill me, too, if he had the chance. I must watch out for him, if he is behind. A crook—that's what he is, a dirty crook and a peacher at that."

Stuyvesant, not so capable at reasoning, was entertaining a rapidly growing grudge.

"So! My services are not wanted, huh! He is going to turn in my finger prints. That's what he intends to do. Turn 'em in, to show his father that I failed to make good after all he did for me. Rob me of my only hope of doing something for my friend. Well, he won't do it, I'll tell the world. I'll beat him. It's on the cards that I'll beat him; or else why did I happen to be over here in Mindanao, serving under the old man's son?"

They camped that night only fifteen miles from Malabang. The next night the distance was only thirty miles, and the night following only forty-five, slow traveling. No Moros were encountered—not a sign of them. The jungle grew dense as they skirted along the basin of the Lintagoup River. Heat, mosquitoes, worn-out shoes, curtailed rations, all were getting in their work on the command, adding to its fatigue and discontent.

Grinshaw, feeling himself directly under the eyes of his commanding officers, refrained from attacking the black bottles. He became the most surly and discontented of the lot, and his orders to the enlisted men were delivered in the form of insults.

They passed into the mountains, through them to the valleys of lower Misamis, down again into jungle land. The guides reported that the Moros were disbanding, or rather breaking up into insignificant detachments, and straggling south. The colonel verified this information to the best of his ability, from natives brought into camp, and came to the conclusion that there would be no very severe action during that expedition. There he was wrong. He was dealing with a crafty people.

ONE evening he pitched his tents on a bit of open ground, put out a heavy guard, as usual, and called a council of his higher ranking officers to explain the situation and discuss the feasibility of continuing the campaign. Such powwows always end up in an argument and not another thing. This was no exception.

At midnight the session broke up, and the officers returned to their tents feeling ten times more secure than if they were turning in at the leading hotel right on Main Street.

Grinshaw had been bandaging his feet with strips of canvas. He was sick from exposure and a specie of recurrent malaria he had brought from Zamboanga. His nerves were worn out and unstrung completely from total abstinence. That night he opened one of the bottles to take a sip. He drank it all, opened the other, and before morning it, too, was empty, and the lieutenant was on the verge of drunken hysterics. Then it came—the bolo rush.

Sentries on three sides of the camp were driven in at the first impact, firing as they ran. The bugler, sitting up in his tent amid a pile of warm, green cogan grass, which constituted his bedding, blew the "call to arms," meanwhile firing futilely with his disengaged right hand. Hideous yells rang out in the morning air. There were frantic calls for help, half drowned in the din of

clashing bolos and cracking small arms. The fanatic Moslem bands passed over the encampment, striking at every living thing in view like angry wasps.

They were driven off, and returned, only to be driven off again. The battle was without form from the first and raged across the little flat where the ragged pup tents had stood, but were now trampled underfoot. Savage and civilized, the combatants joined on sight like gamecocks and neither from the manner of their attack, nor from their power to withstand punishment, could you have told one from the other.

THE action was nearly over when Colonel Greening saw a soldier break camp, and, in an abandon of fright, dart away toward the forest.

"There's a coward over there," he yelled. "Somebody get him!" He could not determine in the dusky light who it was, nor which one of his men or officers, promptly started in pursuit, just as the Moros gave up and fled back into the canebrake.

About an hour later, the colonel sent out a party to search for the missing men and the party found them lying together on a little knoll. Lieutenant Grinshaw was unconscious and in a bad way from a blow on the skull. Beside him lay the instrument which had dealt the blow—and Private Stuyvesant with two bullets from a service revolver in his breast. The soldier was still breathing, hanging onto the ragged edge of life, and that was all. As the searching party approached, he raised himself on his elbow and smiled like a happy and carefree boy.

"How did this happen, Stuyvesant?" asked the sergeant, in charge.

"I'm the coward who ran away," admitted the soldier with a gasp. "The lieutenant—he—he followed. When I struck at him with a club, he had to shoot me; but I got him anyway. We're quits!"

Of course, there was no way for the sergeant to tell whether or not the officer would live, so he asked:

"Did the lieutenant say anything before he became unconscious, Stuyvesant?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'Tell dad I was game to the last.' That was all he said. Good-by."

Then Stuyvesant collapsed onto his side and, as they prepared to lift the two bodies onto an improvised stretcher, he gasped once more and let his muscles relax. Just that. He was dead when they got to the dressing station of the jungle camp.

The lieutenant?

He recovered completely in due time—his health, but not his bad habits, I mean. He became finally just like his dad, but very much more reserved and strait-laced. He was the officer who took a machine-gun nest from the Germans, with his bare hands, at Exermont. That's where he sleeps to-day—Exermont!

One of the bravest, most efficient and best-loved products of the old-time army. His regeneration was complete enough to suit anybody—poor chap. The rest of his life is now a closed incident of the service.

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Larry

By

A. M. CHISHOLM

Author of
"Little Sister of the Stars,"
"A Dozen Eggs," Etc.

CHAPTER I.

JUST A DOG.

ON all sides save bayward, the little glade on the top of the treed knoll was surrounded by dense brush; but on that side there was an opening which overlooked a small, marshy bay beyond which lay the broad waters of the Grand Bay itself, a great estuary of an inland sea, sparkling in the sun of a bright morning in early September.

To the left, a slow creek entered the small bay, to lose itself in faint channels among rushes and merge with the larger waters. Here and there, black dots in the silvered water openings, swam ducks with an occasional flash of white, as their tails tilted upward while they pursued their underwater quest for food. The creek bottom and the slopes rising from it were densely brushed, affording shelter and sustenance for small game, rabbits, woodcock, partridge, and hunting ground for fox, weasel and owl. But because of the thickness of the brush, human hunters seldom came there, or if they did, merely prowled along the outskirts.

Hence the little glade, thus protected, was secluded, hidden, and unlikely to be visited save by chance. But nevertheless it showed signs of occupancy in the form of a small shelter of brush and old canvas arranged in lean-to form, supported by a pole laid across forked stakes. In front of this structure was a shallow trench rimmed by fire-blackened stones, the quantity of ashes telling of many fires. Leaves, loosened by an early frost, were beginning to carpet the ground in patterns of yellow and red. Now and then one fluttered down gently.

Just at the edge of the bayward opening, a boy lay face downward, his head on his right arm. Beside him a section of earth had been freshly dug and replaced, so that it formed a little mound. Close by it lay a battered shovel.

Presently he raised his head, disclosing a freckled face and clear, blue eyes which, however, were reddened and swollen as from tears. For a few moments he stared unseeing across the blue, crisped bay, and then his gaze shifted to the freshly turned earth beside him. Throwing out one hand, he patted the soil with a gesture of gentle caress, and buried his face once more in his arm. He lay motionless, save

He was just a little Irish water spaniel. Not a great thing, perhaps, but as complex and sensitive as those vastly greater things which ordered, wisely or illy, the affairs of his life—those things called "men." For Larry had his good and bad fortunes, his ecstasies and his melancholies; and the story of his dog's vicissitudes, hunting and retrieving game in the marshes and ponds of the woods he so loved, needs translation into the language of man—a rendering to which Mr. Chisholm has brought the gifts of his sympathy and talent.

for an occasional contraction and swell of his torso in long, sighing breaths.

The lad's sorrow was very real. He had just buried his dog, his close companion and best friend. To him—as to many older persons in little less degree—it was tragedy.

At the farther end of the little glade, the brush parted quietly and a man appeared in the opening. He was a long, lean individual, apparently upward of fifty years of age, with a deeply tanned, leathery face, and grave, kindly gray eyes, crinkled at the corners as by sun and wind. He wore an old, stained hunting coat, and beneath his right arm was tucked a light, sixteen-gauge shotgun. His gaze took in the prostrate boy, the raw earth and the shovel beside it, and an expression of surprise quickly followed by sympathetic understanding crossed his leathery features. He shook his head and half turned to go as he had come, unnoticed; but apparently he changed his mind, for after a moment's hesitation he advanced a few paces.

At the sound of footsteps the boy sat up hastily, drawing his knuckles across his eyes. He turned to face the newcomer with an air at once sullen and defiant, which changed as he recognized him.

"What's the trouble, Anson?" the man queried.

"I didn't hear you coming, Mr. Wilson," the boy replied indirectly.

"Maybe I shouldn't have come at all, son," the man thus addressed returned. "I guess maybe you ain't anxious to see anybody right now."

The boy's lips quivered.

"J-Jock's dead!" He pointed to the little mound. "I—I've been buryin' him."

"That's too bad. I'm real sorry, Anson. He was a good little dog."

Tears welled in the boy's eyes. He dug at them impatiently with his knuckles.

"I—uh—I guess you think I'm a darn' cry baby, don't you?"

"Do you think I am?" Wilson asked in return gently.

The boy stared at him.

"You? Why, you—you're a man!"

"Yes. Well"—Wilson spoke slowly, his voice shaded by sadness—"well, son, man or not, it's always a tough job sayin' good-by to a dog you've thought a lot of—mighty tough. You don't need to be ashamed of showin' you're

sorry when you lose a good friend, dog or human. We've got to do it, though. Why, how many good dogs do you s'pose I've had to say good-by to and bury in my time?"

"Gosh! I don't know." The boy's interest temporarily effaced his sorrow. "Of course I know you've had lots of dogs, but I never thought about you havin' to—bury them."

"No, you wouldn't," Wilson nodded. "But that's what it comes to some day, son. A dog don't last so long, no matter how much you think of him. You've got just about time to get real fond of him and so you know each other real well, and then you've got to get another. A dog's life is supposed to be about fourteen years, but the average is shorter, and his active life is shorter still. 'Specially retrievers, like I've had. A duck dog as a rule ain't long-lived. When he's about eight or nine you begin to favor him, and a year or two after that he's through. Yes, that's the way it is. What happened to your Jock, Anson? He was a young dog."

"He was run over two days ago. He didn't seem to be hurt much, but this morning he was dead."

"Tough," Wilson sympathized. The dead dog had been a cross-bred cocker, from his standpoint not a practical dog, too small and too light for hard work, but good enough for the boy. "He was a good little dog, just about right for you. You and him were chums, the way I like to see a boy and a dog. I know just how you're feelin', son. You're about fourteen, ain't you? Well, I was about that age when I had to bury my first dog. That'd be—lemme see?—that'd be forty years ago."

TO the boy, this was an eternity, a space which his ideas of time were inadequate to measure.

"That's an awful long time ago," he commented.

"Why, yes, the way you look at it now and the way I looked at it then," Wilson nodded. "But after a while—when you get to be a man and think about things that happened when you were a boy—like what's happenin' right now, this mornin', you buryin' your Jock, and me comin' along buttin' in, and us sittin' here talkin' and lookin' out over the bay—it won't seem so long. Maybe you'll remember it clearer than you will a good many bigger things that will happen between now and then. Funny, how a man will remember some things clear, and others not at all or sort o' blurry. Don't seem no special rule for it.

"Well, anyway, I remember all about buryin' my old Beaver. That was his name. He was a good dog, too—or I thought he was then. Good enough for me, anyway. No special breed. Strong spaniel strain crossed with something else. Good water dog and good for partridge. Them days I shot a light, muzzle-loadin' cylinder bore, no choke at all; and I carried my powder in a horn and my shot in a bottle, p'cussion caps and old newspapers for waddin'. Course there was breechloaders made, but the shells cost money.

"The old folks said it stood to reason them guns wouldn't shoot as hard as muzzle-loaders, 'count of openin' at the breech and leakin' gas there. Makes you laugh to think of it now, don't it? Wonder what some of those old people would say if they could see a pump gun bored to eighty-per-cent pattern and nitro powder? Still, we got all the game we wanted. There was lots of birds then—hundreds to every one there is now—and not so many folks shootin'. I've seen this bay covered with rafts of ducks, and geese coverin' the sand bars, and the gabble of them when they got up you could hear for miles."

Tom Wilson was not ordinarily garrulously reminiscent. Usually he kept his thoughts to himself. He was talking in an endeavor to distract the mind

of the youngster from his real grief. He and the lad were friends. The boy was a trifle lonely. His mother was dead and his father had married again. The father, a hard-working man absorbed in his farm, a couple of miles inland, had little interest in his son's pursuits, and his stepmother, though a kindly woman, had her smaller brood, too young to be companions for the growing lad.

HE, however, did not much desire companionship beyond that of his dog. He loved hunting and fishing. He had a light, single-barreled gun with which, under Wilson's tuition, he had become a fair shot; and as the game he brought in helped out the family larder, he was allowed to follow his inclinations as long as he did not neglect his appointed tasks. With the capacity for hero worship which every normal boy possesses, he had adopted Wilson as his ideal.

Tom Wilson had been born on the shores of the Grand Bay. In his young manhood, in the palmy days of white pine, he had been a logger and river driver. Later he had made a little money from a small timber speculation. But he was essentially a hunter. At one time he shot for the market in the fall, working for a boat builder in the winter. He was a finished shot, and a keen observer of the ways of game birds and animals. Finally he decided to settle down.

He built a modest cottage on the shore of the bay, convenient to a deep cove where he kept a cabined gas boat which he used in his shooting excursions. He dwelt alone, for he was unmarried. In the winters he built boats and wooden decoys, which found a ready sale. In summer he fished or worked in his small garden. In the fall, he hunted.

He had a knack of training dogs, and loved them. But he never had more than one at a time. Invariably it was a duck dog, a retriever. He was quiet, steady, patient, and he was deceptively slow moving, slow of speech and slow to anger; for on occasion he could be quick enough in these respects. In spite of his patient good nature, in his younger days he had been known as a good man to let alone. That was Tom Wilson, the boy's mentor and friend.

"Well, now I guess the thing to do is to get you another dog," he suggested.

The boy shook his head sorrowfully and a trifle resentfully.

"I don't want another dog. He wouldn't be like Jock."

"Not just like him, of course," Wilson admitted. "It takes time to get used to anything. But you see, son, in this world nothing lasts nor stays the way it was. Everything changes and shifts around, and dogs and folks grow up, and get old, and die, and younger ones come on and take their places and nobody can help it. You see that, don't you?"

"Yes," the boy returned doubtfully.

"Not quite, I guess," Wilson perceived. "That'll come later. What I'm trying to show you is that nothing stands still, men nor dogs nor nothing at all. F'r instance, there's your pa's farm, and him and your ma and your little brothers and sister, and me and Shan and all the folks you know, livin' around here. You live at home and go to school and do your chores and hunt and fish in your spare time, and it looks all solid and permanent, and one year is like another. All looks like it couldn't change, don't it?"

"Yes," the boy replied, puzzled, but following the man's words.

"Looks that way," Wilson nodded. "Looked that way to me once. Looks that way still to all of us, sort o' peepin' out from ourselves at other folks and things we're used to. Only it ain't so. A few years will change the whole thing for anybody. Can't stop it, son. Thing to do is to make the best of everything the way it is. You were

fond of your Jock, and that's right and proper. But you're fond of shootin', too."

"It won't be the same without Jock," the boy stated. "He was fond of it. He'd jump and bark and run circles when he saw the gun. He—he——"

"Sure, he was a good little dog," Wilson nodded understandingly. *"I* know, son. I've been there. I know just how it feels to pick up a gun and not see the dog you're used to. It's tough. But, just the same, you always get you another dog, because you can't help it, even though you know—as you will after a while—that he won't last and you'll have to go through the whole thing again. Shootin' ain't shootin', without a dog. Now I wonder where we can get one. Know of any puppies hereabouts?"

"Not huntin' dogs." The boy shook his head. "I'd like to get a dog like your Shan." He looked around, perceiving for the first time that the big Chesapeake which ordinarily companioned Wilson was not with him. "Why, where's Shan now?"

"Shan cut his paw on some glass and I left him home to doctor it with his tongue. Thought I might get a woodcock or two, and that ain't his game. But you don't want a Chesapeake, son; not yet, anyway. You can't beat 'em for hard retrievin', but they ain't a gen'ral-purpose dog. What you want is a spaniel of some kind, a bit larger than Jock. Only I don't know where there is one. I'm afraid you'll be out of luck for a dog this fall."

"I guess so," the boy agreed dispiritedly. "But I don't feel much like huntin', anyway. It don't seem the same now. I used to come here with Jock, and—and—dunno," he stammered.

OBVIOUSLY he had not said all that he had intended to. But Wilson had a very fair idea of it. That brush-screened glade had been peculiarly the boy's own. He had adopted it with the primeval instinct of boyhood for a hidden place. In reality there was nothing secret about it, beyond the fact that there was no object in penetrating the brush that surrounded it. Through this the boy had worked out what was rather a line of least resistance than a trail, known to himself and to Wilson. He had built himself a brush shelter and a fireplace where he cooked fish, and roasted in the ashes birds rolled in wet grass and clay, and played various secret games of make-believe with his dog for company.

Tom Wilson, who had not forgotten his own long-ago boyhood, guessed at this; but he knew the shrinking shyness of any normal boy against baring any quality of tenderness or even imagination, and he had never hinted at his knowledge.

"It's a good thing for a fellow to have some place to come where he can do as he likes," he nodded. "When I was a boy, I used to pretend I was Dan'l Boone or Davy Crockett, or some of them old Injun fighters and scouts, and I had lots of fun out of it. I guess you've often sat here with Jock, lookin' out over the marsh and bay, wonderin' what it was like when the country was a wilderness, with no white men in it at all. You could see what birds were in the marsh, too, and figure out how you'd get a shot. Yes, it was natural and right for you to bury Jock where you have."

The boy looked at him uneasily. He and his beloved dog had done exactly as Wilson had said; and for that reason he had buried the animal there. But as that argued a certain amount of imagination or even sentimentality, he was ashamed to admit it.

"I had to bury him some place," he muttered, digging his toe into the ground. "This was easy diggin'."

"Yes," Wilson spoke directly. "But back of that hadn't you the idea that it

was sort of fittin' to bury him where you and him had good times together, where if he was alive he could see the things he was fond of? Ain't that about it?"

"I—uh—I dunno," the boy mumbled.

"You don't need to be ashamed of it, son," Wilson told him gently. "I've done the same thing myself. And it ain't only dogs, Anson. Once there was a man in Africa named Rhodes, a big man. That part of Africa you've read of in your g'ography Rhodesia, is named after him. And when he died and they came to bury him, they made his grave high up in a range of hills where if he'd been alive he could have looked all over the country he'd lived in, and loved, and worked for.

"Same thing, you see. So I guess if the biggest men in Africa weren't ashamed to do that for a man, little fellers like you and me needn't be ashamed of doin' it for our dogs. The best we can do for 'em is little enough compared with what they'd do for us. I read a piece of po'try once about an Injun hopin' his dog would be with him in the happy huntin' grounds. Well, I dunno about Injuns. No Injun that I ever knew made a friend of his dog. But I know some white men that would like to hope it—me bein' one of them."

The boy kicked the ground with his heel. "The minister says when dogs die, that's the last of them. He says they haven't got souls."

"Well, I ain't sure what a dog's got and what he ain't got," Wilson returned. "The minister ought to know more about what comes after than I do—but he don't know near as much about dogs. And I know that a dog knows a lot of things a man don't. I've had dogs that knew where I was goin' as well as I did myself, before I started out at all, and knew whether I was goin' to take them with me or not. Shan knows that—and a lot more. I've seen dogs that knew when their masters were sick, or had died away from home, before the home folks got a letter tellin' about it. Course I can't prove it, because a dog can't talk, but I'm sure in my own mind. I've often thought, watchin' dogs, that they heard things I didn't—I don't mean just sounds like somebody comin' or a rig on the road. Of course it's all guessin' and all tangled up with a dog's sense of smell. There's a lot of things we don't know yet, ourselves—a whole lot of things."

Much of this was beyond the boy's comprehension as it was beyond his experience. But Tom Wilson was talking to himself, rather than to his auditor. A keen observer as well as dog trainer and lover, with ample time to study the mentality of his favorites, his own observation had convinced him that dogs possess certain powers of reasoning beyond the blind instinct commonly attributed to them. He had seen them working out their own problems. He did not push his theories to any definite conclusion, nor attribute powers of occult perception to animals. But now and then he had seen odd things for which he had no ordinary explanation, nor, indeed, any at all. They must remain matters of speculation, as far as man was concerned.

He rose and picked up his gun.

"Time I was gettin' along. I'll keep my eye peeled for a likely lookin' pup for you. So long, son—and I'm mighty sorry about Jock."

After his departure, for some time the boy sat motionless. Then with a glance at the sun, he, too, rose and picked up the battered shovel. He stooped, and patted the freshly turned earth with the same gesture of gentle caress.

"Good-by, Jock, old boy," he said brokenly. "You—you were the best darn' friend I had!"

Eternal cry, old as life, from lonely life, be it of man, woman or child, calling in vain upon other life which has

been a part of it! A boy's tragedy! But tragedy none the less.

CHAPTER II

WITHOUT A FRIEND.

WHEN the last of the daylight failed so that the night flight, though advertised by whistling wings, was invisible, the man on the duck pass who had been straining his eyes to catch the outlines of overhead flocks, and occasionally wasting ammunition on blurred wisps of them, extracted the shell from the breech of his pump gun and closed the weapon on an empty chamber. He stowed the proceeds of the evening shooting, some half a dozen birds, in the game pockets of his coat and turned to go.

"Come on, you mutt!" he ordered harshly; and at the command, backed by an oath, a dog which had been sitting behind him in the long marsh grass rose and slunk after him.

The dog was an Irish water spaniel, apparently of good breeding, though smaller and lighter of build than most of his kind. He had been the runt of a large litter, and had never caught up to his fellows in the matter of physical growth. His coat, long and woolly, was wet and plastered with the mud of the sloughs in which he had been working, so that it clung to him and weighed heavily as wet garments. He limped slightly from a strained shoulder. Head and tail were down, drooping. Attitude and movement as he followed his master told of weariness and dejection.

Indeed, for Larry, the Irish water spaniel, the light of hope had all but faded from life. Time had been—he remembered wistfully and lived again now and then in doggish dreams—when he had known kindness. Then he had had a master who made of him a friend and companion, talking to him in words which, if he did not understand, he knew to be friendly and companionable. There had been a woman and children, also his friends. There had been grass and trees and a good bed of clean straw or sweet shavings, often renewed.

Then, when the days shortened and the air grew crisp with a tang to it, he and that dimly remembered but still-adored master had gone afield, and hunting had been a joy. When he retrieved a bird, he had been praised. At night the mud had been cleaned from his coat; he had been rubbed dry and given a warm place for his own. Then the world had been very good.

And then, without reason that a dog could comprehend, his good world had been shattered in ruin, catastrophe. His master came no more, and when he looked for him, wandering uneasily around the house and gazed questioningly at the woman, she had thrown her arms around his neck and her tears had been wet on his coat. He knew she was in trouble and licked her hands to express sympathy. There was a time of many strangers coming and going, a turning upside down of the order of things as he knew them. But those days were far-off, fading memories. Almost they seemed never to have been, figments of doggish fancy to be remembered vaguely in long, dreary days or lived in dreams.

He had come, by a transfer which he did not understand, into the hands of his present master, who was harsh of voice and, as he soon found out, heavy of hand. There had been a railway journey ending in a city, a congestion of beings new to him, and a little back yard, dusty, dirty, shut in by houses, vile in smells, stifling in summer, cold in winter. Instead of a comfortable kennel, weatherproof and snug, he now dwelt in a box, cold and drafty, lying on a bed that was seldom renewed. To this box he was chained. Now and then it was unsnapped so that he might have such exercise as the yard limits permitted. He got no other. His food

was table scraps, sometimes partly warm but more often cold, anything and everything jumbled on a plate, unbalanced in ration, which with lack of exercise gave him indigestion.

His coat became harsh, staring, matted with dirt; his eyes rheumy, lackluster. Sometimes in summer his drinking water was not renewed for days; and in winter it was frozen for days. In the winter, this mattered little; but in the summer, this was excruciating torture.

In his old home he had had the run of the house; but the house appertaining to the yard he never entered. Lying in his drafty box on cold nights in uneasy, shivering slumber, he could see the lights of it, even smell the heat and the scents of it as the back door opened briefly; but it was not for him.

He seldom saw his master. His food was brought by an ever-changing succession of beings, sometimes women, sometimes Chinamen, cooks. One of the latter he remembered as a friend. A yellow hand had caressed his head.

"Goo' wong gow, poo' wong gow!" the Chinese cook had said, the equivalent of "good brown dog, poor brown dog."

Larry did not understand, but he sensed the friendliness of tone and hand. When his master came, it was merely to look at him casually, never to fondle him, to make much of him, to dispense a few crumbs of the affection which the dog craved and longed to return, for which his inner nature was starving. For the Creator, when he fashioned the dog to be man's friend, endowed him with a heart, hungry to adore and worship.

But this man when he handled him at all did so roughly, felt of his nose, and thereafter his food and water would have strange and nauseous tastes—medicines instead of rational living, as is the custom of supposedly rational man in his own case. But the dog ate little because he was not hungry, having no exercise to stimulate his appetite.

WHEN the first fall in his new quarters came, as he knew by the growing chill and lack of sunlight in the shut-in yard, there was another railway journey, ending in a place with well-known marshy, woodsy smells. When he saw a gun in his master's hands, he knew he was to hunt again, and brightened at the prospect. But on the first day the retrieving which fell to his lot was from shallow sloughs, boggy, choked with rushes, through which he must wallow. The bottom was too boggy to wade and the water too shallow to swim. He wallowed.

The mud got into his coat and weighed him down, and from lack of exercise he was soft and short of wind, out of condition. In this going he could not overtake winged birds which flapped ahead of him. When he came back without them, he was thrashed, and thrashed severely.

His old master had possessed forethought and consideration for the limitations of a dog. He had selected his stands with a view to making the task of retrieving as easy as possible. But this new master had no such consideration. He shot at anything and everything, in and out of range, which resulted in an undue proportion of cripples when he hit at all, useless and senseless maiming, for most of them fell in inaccessible places. He was not a good shot; yet he was possessed of a desire to make big bags. Most wing shots dislike to lose a crippled bird, because it represents useless destruction; but this man disliked to lose one because, bagged, it would have fattened his score. And he had not the wisdom to shoot where a dog could find his birds. He expected impossibilities of the animal.

Commanded to hunt unretrievable birds when tired to the point of exhaus-

tion, and beaten again, the dog became sullen, taking refuge in rushes in boggy ground where his master could not get at him. Once the man raised his gun, but thought better of it and turned away, going to another place. After a time the dog followed. But the thrashings he had had before paled to insignificance before that which he received when his master got his hands on him again.

In desperation and fear of his life, he bit as a wild animal bites; and then he was beaten very nearly to death. That thrashing took most of the heart and all thought of resistance out of him, and implanted shrinking, unnerving fear. Thereafter he accepted what he got. On the other hand his master neither forgot nor forgave the teeth which had closed on his hand. He cherished it as a grudge, which developed into active dislike, hatred of the animal he owned.

What made matters worse for the dog and was productive of frequent punishment for apparent stupidity was that the man had no set formula of command—no unvarying one command for one demand—which a dog might come to understand by dint of repetition. His orders varied in phrase. When they were not understood, he yelled them in still other phrase, with oaths. It was confusing. And confusion, misinterpretation of uncomprehended and often impossible orders had but one result. No hunting day went by without beatings.

His master never praised, never rewarded success or obedience; but invariably he punished for failure. After a time the dog accepted punishment as a matter of course. Hunting was no longer a joyous game. He sought for wounded and dead birds and retrieved to avoid being beaten, rather than from the hunting instinct that formerly had animated him. At the end of the hunting he was taken back to the city, to the back yard.

This had been the dog's lot for two years. For two years he had inhabited that back yard. In all that time he had seldom heard a friendly voice or felt the contact of a friendly hand. From his surroundings he was dirty and unkempt. Because he had once used his teeth, he was said to be vicious. He now took no interest in human beings, remaining unresponsive to occasional advances of strangers because he had come to doubt their bona fides. He merely existed, a sad bit of life, without joy in living or hope of better things.

NOW, as he limped dejectedly after his master in the early dusk, the dog had little to look forward to in the immediate future. He was wet and cold and muddy and tired and sore; but he could not count with confidence even on a satisfying meal and a dry bed.

There were three men in the hunting party which included his master, and each owned a dog. Of the other dogs, one was a big, black curly retriever, his muzzle bearing the scars of old fights, oddly quarrelsome for his breed; the second was a sour-tempered, truculent crossbred with a dash of Labrador. Both were good retrievers, big, powerful dogs. They had hunted together before, and now tolerated each other from prudence; but they made common cause against the stranger, driving him from his food when it was set down, and even from the tent at night when the men were in their blankets.

Larry was no match for them individually, and together they could have killed him. Realizing this, he made no attempt to fight. Nor did his master, interfere to save his rights to food and bed. Such protection as he received came from the owners of the other dogs, who now and then saw that he had an opportunity to eat undisturbed, and a place to sleep.

Leaving the duck pass, Larry fol-

lowed his master on a beaten trail through high grass and presently came to timber. Within this it was darker, but soon a light appeared ahead. This became a tent, brilliantly illuminated by a gasoline lantern. A stream of sparks from a stovepipe projecting from a collar in the roof gave promise of warmth. At the sound of footsteps, the black retriever and the crossbred bounded from the tent, roaring challenge.

Larry closed tightly to his master's heels, seeking his protection which, though usually inadequate, was better than none. The flap of the tent was thrown back, framing a man who with a selection of curses commanded the dogs back. Recognizing the newcomers, they obeyed.

Larry's master entered the tent. One of his companions was cooking supper, the other was running a rag through his gun barrels. A bottle of whisky stood conveniently on a rude table, and from this the newcomer helped himself.

"How was the flight?" the gun cleaner asked.

Larry's master grunted.

"Good enough if I'd had a dog worth a curse," he growled. "I lost half of my birds because he wouldn't hunt. I took it out of his hide—for all the good it did me."

Neither of his companions offered comment. They were hard men with their own dogs, though at least they saw that the animals were fed and comfortably bedded; and as they looked at it, how another man treated his dog was none of their business. Besides, they had very good reason to refrain from criticism of Larry's master, whose name was Cleary.

CLEARY was a builder and contractor in a large way, and he was in a position to give a good deal of business to the two others, who were named respectively Wall and Donnelly. Wall was in the plumbing-supply business, while Donnelly dealt in brick and roofings. Therefore it stood them in hand to cultivate Cleary's good will; which, indeed, was why they had invited him to accompany them on the present shooting trip. Privately they disliked him and considered him a holy brute; but business was business. The shoot was nearly over, and they were glad of it; for, business or not, they were finding him increasingly hard to get along with. They were, in fact, fed up with Jim Cleary.

Cleary was rough and he was not a diamond. He was entirely self-made, though opinions might differ as to the quality of the job. But he secured building contracts and made money. He was a big man physically, and in his early days had been noted as a rough-and-tumble fighter. He was now nearing forty. But he was going the way of many men of exceptional physique and strength in that, confident in both, he set no limits to self-indulgence. It was beginning to tell on him. His temper, always sour and morose, was becoming worse. He was becoming irritable, hard to get along with, impatient of opposition, prone to fly into rages over trifles.

A hunting trip for Cleary was principally a booze-and-poker party. He thought he was fond of shooting, and he had a greedy desire for big bags; but he was a mediocre shot. He knew little or nothing about dogs. Larry was the first he had owned. He had bought him for fifty dollars from the widow of a deceased hunter, having heard that the animal was a trained duck dog. He kept the dog in the back yard of the house where he had bachelor apartments, exactly as he kept a car in the garage; and when he took it out, he expected it to perform as efficiently as a piece of machinery.

The idea that the dog was a living, sentient being did not occur to him. He neither recognized nor realized the ani-

mal's physical and mental limitations. He regarded a fallen bird as his, no matter where it fell, and if it was not retrieved, he considered himself cheated of his rightful trophy by the dog's stupidity or laziness. He was envious of his companions, who were better shots than he, and whose bags were larger. He blamed his dog.

WHILE Cleary and his companions ate supper, Larry dared to lie inside the tent entrance, near the stove which gave grateful heat. He took advantage of it while he might. He knew that the owners of the other dogs would not allow their animals to attack him just then. Indeed, these dogs, tired from their own exertions, lay on the other side of the stove asleep, their coats steaming in the heat. Larry was grateful for the brief comfort that was his.

Their own supper ended, the men prepared the dogs' food. Wall and Donnelly picked up a plate each, and called their animals. Larry scuttled out of the way. The retriever and the crossbred emerged from the tent, leaping in eagerness at the sight of food. When it was set down, they attacked it ravenously.

Larry, to one side, eyed the tent entrance longingly. Cleary, who had waited to fill a pipe, brought out his food, set it down with a curse directed at the waiting dog, and went back.

Larry was hungry. It was the first food he had had since the preceding night; and then half his meal had been stolen by the other dogs because, as was happening again, they had received theirs first. Now, with a wary eye on them, he proceeded to gulp it down. But he had not had a fair start. The black and the crossbred, having cleaned their plates, came for him together, when he had little more than begun. He knew he could not defend his food, and seizing a final mouthful he retreated in haste. Over his dish the pair snarled at each other as they emptied it, but forbore actual hostilities. However, their noise brought Wall to the tent door.

"Those mutts have robbed your Irish of his supper again, Cleary," he reported.

"Serves him right," said Larry's master.

"He's had a hard day," Wall pointed out, "and he ought to have a full meal. That dog of mine is a robber and Donnelly's no better. I'll fix yours up some more grub."

"Let him be," Cleary growled. "If he hasn't the sand to fight for his own, let him go without, and good enough for him."

Wall shrugged. "He's your dog."

"If you call him a dog," Cleary returned, with contempt. "He's a fool and a quitter. I got stung on him. The first good duck dog I see I'm going to buy, and I'll put a charge of shot into this one. I had a good notion to do it to-day, and to-morrow I will. I'm not going to take him home. Get out the cards."

Meanwhile Larry sat at a safe distance in the brush. The other dogs, after a vain search for scraps, reëntered the tent. He gave them time to settle down, and then cautiously approached the abandoned dishes, hoping against hope. They had been polished clean, but he licked them, tantalized by the faint flavor of food that still clung to them. In his turn he searched unsuccessfully for scraps. After some hesitation he approached the tent, halting before the dropped entrance flap. There he sniffed wistfully the scents of hot metal, warm, dry leaves and cut slough grass that floored the interior. Timidly he inserted his brown muzzle between the canvas flaps, shoving them aside to reconnoiter.

The men were playing cards. The black dog was not visible. But the crossbred lay directly before the entrance. He raised his head with a mina-

tory growl. Larry shrank back. Donnelly, who owned the crossbred, turned his head.

"You, Crab, shut up!"

"It's Cleary's dog," said Wall, who sat facing the entrance. "He's outside and he wants to come in."

"Well, he's got a right, too," said Donnelly, rising. "You, Crab, get out o' that where you belong over by Nig. Move!" He assisted motion by the toe of his boot and held the flap open. "Come on in, Irish. Call him, Cleary."

"Shut the tent and keep out that damned draft," Cleary returned. "If he hasn't the sense to come in, leave him out."

"Hell, no," Donnelly objected. "The other dogs have him buffaloed. It's a cold night, and he's wet. Come on in, little Irish. Here, boy!"

Larry, divining invitation, slunk in, and the flap dropped behind him.

Donnelly fastened it against a rising wind. He threw down a gunny sack by the camp stove. "There you are, Irish. Dry off."

In Larry's existence, stoves and artificial heat were rare things, belonging to the vanished long ago, as did kindness and consideration for his wants. He turned a liquid and thankful eye on his careless benefactor, and even ventured on a propitiatory wag of the tail; but Donnelly saw neither and went back to his game.

Larry sank down gratefully on the sack. The warmth of the camp stove striking through his wet and mud-plastered coat was comforting to his chilled body. It even soothed his hunger. Doggish habits of neatness asserting themselves, he began to clean himself, licking the mud from his belly and treating the scratches of saw grass with his tongue. When this was done, he stretched himself out, belly to the stove, sighed deeply in the unwonted comfort that was his, and passed into slumber.

As he slept, visions came to him, perhaps of other days, the long ago of a dog's brief life. He dreamed, with little twitchings of paws and limbs and body muscles beneath his muddy coat, and achieved forgetfulness. Infinite mercy, which presses the kindly blotter of sleep upon the blackness of discouragement of man or beast!

WHILE he slept, the men played cards. But no three-handed game is absorbing, seldom even interesting. Wall and Donnelly took an occasional drink. Cleary took more—much more. The cards ran against him, and though it was but a small game he became sullen, resentful even of his slight losses. Plainly he was accumulating a grouch on top of the one with which he had come to camp that night.

Wall and Donnelly exchanged glances. The latter yawned.

"We'd better hit the blankets if we want to get up in the morning," he suggested.

Wall backed him up. But Cleary objected. He was behind, and he wanted a chance to play even. To save argument, his companions agreed. But his luck did not change. It became worse, and so did his temper. Then Wall and Donnelly definitely quit. Cleary sullenly poured himself a stiff drink and wanted cold water with it. Wall told him there was fresh water in a pail outside the tent, but did not offer to bring it.

Cleary rose a little unsteadily. His eyes beneath the glare of the gasoline light were not adjusted to the shadows, nor, indeed, did he look down. Thus on his way out he tripped over his dog, which was sunk in deep slumber. He plunged forward, and involuntarily caught at the hot stovepipe, disconnecting it from the stove and almost capsizing the latter, a folding affair of sheet metal. The pipe burned his fingers.

With a snarling oath, he kicked the scrambling, sleep-stupefied dog against

the tent wall, and followed him, kicking again and again. If he had been wearing boots, he might have broken ribs or limbs; but as he had donned sneakers for camp comfort, the impacts were less damaging to the dog, and his own toes suffered, which increased his fury. Stooping, he endeavored to seize the animal's collar.

But Larry recovered his legs and, avoiding the clutching fingers, leaped in terror for the entrance, burst its fastenings, and fled into the outer darkness. There, trembling, he listened to the tumult in the haven of rest from which he had been suddenly and mysteriously ejected.

Cleary cursed furiously. For the moment the dog had escaped him; but he was ready to vent his anger on anything animate.

"Why in hell did you put that cur right in the gangway?" he demanded of Donnelly.

"You knew he was there," the latter returned. "The other dogs won't stand for him back of the stove."

"Then why didn't you leave him outside like I told you?" Cleary persisted.

Donnelly, though anxious to keep in Cleary's good books, had plenty of spirit.

"Because he was cold and wet," he answered bluntly. "He has a right to his grub and a share of the camp; and if he was mine, he'd get both."

Cleary glared at him.

"Maybe you have something to say about what I do with my own dog," he suggested dangerously. "If so, spit it out!"

Donnelly's lips opened to take full advantage of this offer; but he thought better of it. Cleary was half drunk, and a row with him might seriously affect his business. No dog was worth it. He swallowed his rising anger.

"Not one damn word!" he said. "He's your dog. And after this, I'll remember it."

LARRY, in the shelter of a bush at a safe distance, sat humped and cold in the darkness. To the dog it was all a blind alley. He had been sleeping soundly in the place that had been indicated as his; and suddenly he had been kicked and kicked again. What his offense had been, he did not know. For that matter he had given up trying to understand the reasons for the punishments he received. He took them now meekly, save when, as in the present instance, they appeared to be murderous, then he sought safety in flight. He saw shadows on the canvas as the men prepared for bed. Then the light was extinguished.

Well, there was no tent for him that night. He knew that the entrance was again fastened tightly; and had it not been, he would not have dared to enter. Limping more than ever, his limbs, ribs and muscles sore from the kicks he had received, he sought about in the dark, eventually finding a log behind which, in a hollow, fallen leaves had collected. There he scratched himself a bed, turned around several times, and presently passed into uneasy, shivering slumber.

Later in the night the wind rose, searching him out with a cold blast. There was little heat in his unfed body to combat it. He curled tighter, shaken with shiverings, snuggling deeper into the inadequate protection of the damp leaves.

With the dawn, when he heard movements in the tent, he was chilled through and through and his bruises had stiffened. He smelled the smoke of a fire and the scents of cooking food. The dogs emerged from the tent and cast about, investigating its vicinity for possible night marauders. They discovered him, but let him alone. After an interval, the men appeared with their guns, ready for the hunt. His master looked around for him, whistled, and began to call angrily.

Larry obeyed, limping stiffly. He was never fed in the morning. There would be another day of hard work, without food, in mud, water, or tangled rushes. He would be thrashed again for failure to achieve the impossible.

"So there you are, damn you!" Cleary snarled, as the discouraged, limping figure appeared. "Sitting out sulking, were you? I'll learn you to come when I call!"

Donnelly, lips compressed, exchanged glances with Wall as Cleary's fist thumped against the dog's body and head; but he carefully said nothing.

"Come on, now," Cleary commanded. "Heel, you sulky devil!" He strode away in the direction of the outer bay, the beaten dog behind him.

Donnelly and Wall exchanged glances.

"Well, by Heaven," said Donnelly, "there's times when it's hard to keep a shut mouth. I don't mind a man hammering a dog when he needs it. Some need it. But the way he treats that little Irish is a damned shame."

"So it is," Wall agreed. "But what good would it do to say anything? He'd take it out on the dog. We've got to keep on the right side of him if we want his business; and I need it."

"So do I," said Donnelly. "But I'm paying too damn high for it. This is the last time I'll camp with him, business or not. Do you think he'll shoot the dog, like he said?"

"I wouldn't put it past him," said Wall. "When he gets mad, he doesn't know what he's doing. Best thing for the poor little devil if he did."

CHAPTER III.

ON THE WING.

AS the first dim light of a fall morning thinned the darkness of the gas boat's cabin, Shan, the big Chesapeake, stirred on his comfortable bed of old blankets and canvas, lifted his smooth, broad-domed head, and gazed inquiringly at the starboard bunk which held the recumbent form of his master, Tom Wilson. Before that hour, if he had wished to make an early start for the duck blind, Wilson should have been astir; but his deep, regular breathing still indicated sound slumber.

The dog's head drooped slightly in disappointment. Perhaps he felt the impatience of the keen hunter forced to await the tardy one; but waiting, patiently or otherwise, is a dog's lot. Turning his attention from his master, he cocked his head to one side, his experienced ears identifying and possibly synthesizing the sounds that came to him from the dawn outside.

The gas boat, lying in the lee of the land in a big bay which ran into a rice marsh back of which again was a vast area of drowned lands, sloughs and old beaver dams, was swinging at her moorings with little slappings and chuckling mutterings against the skin of her hull, which told of a heavy sea running outside the bay. The backwash of it was creaming with a gentle hissing on a strip of sandy beach. A canoe, streamed out astern on a painter and deeply floored with slough grass to make for quietness—for a bare canoe echoes like a drum—as well as for kneeling comfort, soused down now and then as a running wave took up the slack of the line and let it go. Dominating and pervading these minor, near-at-hand sounds was the vast, straining rush of wind, rising occasionally to a higher note in the stiffer gusts. As the dog listened, a volley of rain drops, scattered but heavy, pattered like shot on the cabin's deck.

On the whole a rough morning, and so one to rejoice the heart of duck hunter and dog; but unfortunately the man slept. With a sigh, the dog dropped his head upon his outstretched paws.

But he did not sleep. His eyes, brown-amber, full, intelligent, were fixed expectantly upon the sleeper. His

tan countenance was slightly wrinkled in an expression which in a human being might have denoted worried thought. Within his broad-domed skull, he seemed to be debating some course of action.

Presently he rose and stretched himself, a soundless yawn revealing formidable fangs in a mouth which yet was so gentle that it ruffled no feather of a bird. In the back and forward stretches which a dog employs to limber himself, the great driving muscles of his powerful hind quarters stood out as the thews of a posed athlete. Dropping back to a normal position, he stood revealed in the growing light as an almost perfect specimen of his kind; a retriever to dream of, to glory in, and, at the last of his too-brief life, a companion to sorrow for.

On that fall morning Grand Bay Shannon—to give him his official, registered style—was at the peak of his physical power, his wisdom becoming matured. A giant of his breed, he weighed eighty-five pounds in hard condition. His outer coat of tan was short and straight, save down the back, where it waved with a pronounced curl across the rump; but beneath it was an inner coat, dense, otterlike, almost waterproof.

The dog's body was long, houndlike, with a swelling barrel. The legs were strong, big-boned, the paws well webbed as became an animal practically amphibious. A standardized composite of a breed whereof the beginnings have never been exactly determined, in power, in courage, in intelligence, and in fitness for the hard, rough work for which he and his ancestors had been bred, he left little to be desired. As he stood that morning, Shan was a dog to delight the eye of the devotee of the twelve gauge and the duck blind; or, indeed, of any man who knew and understood dogs. Money would not have bought him from Tom Wilson, who regarded him as his partner and friend.

SHAN, his morning stretch finished, regarded his sleeping master speculatively. He moved to the side of the bunk and for a moment stood listening to his breathing. Then he thrust his muzzle gently against the sleeper's shoulder, and as he did so, he uttered a low note, half whine and half growl, charged with impatience.

Tom Wilson came out of his profound slumber with a groan, which changed to an exclamation of disgust as his eyes opened to daylight. Reaching for an alarm clock above his head, he found that he had neglected to throw the switch from silent.

"Bright of me!" he grumbled. "And a good shootin' day, too, sounds like." Much as the waking dog had done, he listened to the sounds outside and drew his own conclusions. "Blowin' a good hick'ry out o' the sou'east," he decided. "Hallo, Shan, old pup! Think I was going to sleep all day? Want to get goin', don't you?"

Tom Wilson, who in his time had owned many dogs, talked to them as to human companions. Privately he was of the opinion that they understood a good deal of what he said. At the very least they knew that they were being addressed companionably, and liked it.

Shan's response was to rise upon his hind legs and place his forepaws on his recumbent master's chest. Wilson, reaching up with a leathery grin of affection, caught him by the loose skin of the neck and shook his head to and fro; to which the dog responded by a growl of mock ferocity, and caught the man's sinewy forearm in his mouth, squeezing it gently. For a moment dog and man tussled with the abandon of two pups in a basket; and each enjoyed it hugely.

ON this particular shooting trip, Wilson was alone, his old hunting companion, one Joe Claflin, having been unable to accompany him. He had got in late, and dropped his mudhook rather

than attempt to make the place where he ordinarily tied up, a cove across the bay, in the dark.

He lit his galley stove, set the coffee-pot aboard, drew on his garments and reached for his pipe, which lay on a shelf above his bunk. Investigating its bowl with a questing finger, and finding merely the top smoked off the load, he lit it, grunted with satisfaction, and emerged from the cabin to the deck, where he stood bareheaded, sizing up the day.

The wind was booming out of the southeast, driving banks of low, gray clouds. A distant rain squall, a drifting veil of gray, shut out part of the prospect to the eastward. Across the wide mouth of the bay, a heavy sea was running in the waters of the great estuary. Deeper in the bay in which the gas boat lay, the wind ran through the marshes, bending and winnowing their vegetation, thrashing out the heads of the rice for the sustenance of the wild fowl on their annual migration. A few lake gulls, gray in the prevailing note of the day, rode the wind. A plover or two, invisible, uttered melancholy cries. In all the bay there was no visible sign of human life.

Any one but a confirmed duck hunter would have found the prospect depressing; but Tom Wilson, standing on the deck of his stanch little craft, a stream of sparks from his pipe flung to leeward by the wind, found it exhilarating, stimulating. It was such a day as he loved; and he loved, too, the loneliness, the drab desolation of the marshy wastes. These things struck some responsive chord in his being.

But though signs of human life were lacking, the bay teemed with other life. Close down to the water, skimming the tops of the wave crests, sped a dark line of bluebills. Following the serrated shore line in wispy, erratic flight, swooping and swinging, in apparently irresponsible but bulletlike impulse, came a wisp of teal. Crossing in from the outer bay, quartering the wind, shooting through its strong draft with contemptuous speed, compact and powerful, came a flock of canvasbacks, speedsters and aristocrats of their kind, headed for the wild celery beds.

And up the center of the bay, just discernible, low to the water, beating up for the mud flats and sand bars with strong, unhurried, evenly spaced thrusts of great wings came seven gray honkers, liners of the air, Canada geese. On that rough day the great sheltered feeding ground, a noted way station in the long flight, attracted the hosts of feathered migrants.

There should be good shooting. Though Tom Wilson had overslept, it was still early; and he knew every foot of the shore, the marsh and the drowned lands back of it.

"Got the whole bay to myself, looks like," he reflected, as he scanned its expanse. "So I can take my pick of places. No hurry."

In fact, Wilson seldom hurried in matters connected with his chosen sport, being in perfect accord with the festina-lente maxim. In long hunting experience, he had found that haste got one nowhere. In duck shooting in particular, the man who got the birds was he who knew how to sit still and wait. The impatient hunter, continually on the move, merely beat up birds for his more patient fellow. And few men got more birds than Tom Wilson—or perhaps more accurately, few could have killed more had he wished to make big bags at present.

He had long abandoned market shooting, and now shot principally for his own amusement, finding as much pleasure in observation and in watching the work of his dog as in the shooting itself. A finished wing shot, the very certainty of his usual performance had deprived it of much of its thrill; for, though in any sport a man likes to do and will

continue to do that which he can do well, there is no special excitement in a foregone conclusion. Apart from that, he realized that the game supply of the continent is shrinking, and that big bags are no longer defensible as pure and clean sport.

Thus, some years before, he had discarded the murderous pump gun for the more conservative double barrel; and he had even considered changing that, which was a twelve gauge, for a gun of smaller bore; but had decided against the smaller guns as lacking in stopping power against the heavily feathered wild fowl. For field and upland shooting, however, he used a sixteen gauge.

So without undue hurry he cooked and ate a substantial breakfast and put himself up a lunch. Drawing the canoe alongside, he loaded in some fifty wooden decoys of his own manufacture, laid the long, heavy double twelve which was his pet duck gun carefully by the rear thwart, and spoke to the dog, which had been watching these familiar preparations with a running commentary of impatient whines.

"All right, Shan!"

At the well-known phrase, the big dog jumped from deck to canoe, landing lightly amidships, where without further command he lay down. Wilson followed, adjusted himself comfortably, picked up his paddle and shoved off. Clear of the gas boat he kept under the lee of the shore, the weight of the wind on his port bow equalizing the turning power of his paddle, so that little steering was necessary.

HIS objective was a point in the bay where wild celery grew. When he opened this, a varied aggregation of feeding ducks rose from the surface; but, as he knew they would come back in small flocks and in doubles and singles, he proceeded to set his decoys, avoiding bunching them, stringing them out in natural feeding formation, which also gave the effect of larger numbers to birds awing.

This done, he paddled around the point, beached his canoe, and, shouldering the light craft with a practiced twist and heave, carried it inland to concealment. Then he turned his attention to a hiding place for himself.

Tom Wilson never built an elaborate blind, which, while it may conceal the hunter, also advertises itself as the work of man, and therefore defeats its own end. In the camouflage of duck shooting, background is more important than frontal screen. If a man can get a bank or a bush at his back and remain motionless with his face hidden, it is not very material whether he has anything in front of him or not. He had shot from that point before from against a steep bank some six feet high, bushed on top, with merely one little bush in front of him.

But now to his disgust he saw that some greenhorn had built a blind close to the water's edge, a large, obvious structure of stakes and brush. This he proceeded to rip down and scatter.

"Might as well have built a house while he was at it," Wilson grumbled. "Must think birds have no sense in them at all."

When he had tidied up the foreground, he went back a few yards to where a few scrubby bushes grew at the foot of the bank, and sat down behind them. Immediately he became invisible, his worn and weathered clothing blending with the background. He opened a box of shells, placed a handful in his coat pocket, laid his gun across his knees, lit his pipe and settled down to enjoy a smoke. In half an hour or less the birds would begin to drift back. Meanwhile he was content to wait. He even enjoyed the waiting, savoring his surroundings with the keen zest of the sportsman who finds his real pleasure in the open, rather than in the killing.

AS always on such a day, under similar conditions, he felt a quiet content, a peace of mind seemingly begotten of lonely shore and empty waste of marsh and bay. His inner soul laved itself in these surroundings as a boy's bare body delights in the water of a swimming hole. In some vague way he felt that he had known his surroundings for ages, always. In them he experienced the sensations of one who has come home.

Nobody knows if the thing we call memory reaches back beyond the present body and mind to the dim past of another body animated by the same spirit. Most of us have experienced a sense of odd familiarity now and then in face of a happening, scene or situation which so far as we know is entirely new and strange. Tom Wilson had this feeling—that it had all occurred before, that somehow he belonged in this setting. Perhaps his spirit once dwelt in an earlier man who roamed the lone beaches of an unknown sea, a savage wolf dog at his heels; and perhaps the vital spark of that dog subsisted in Shan. Where all must remain guesswork, one guess is as good as another. At least, the two of them tuned with their surroundings perfectly.

Master and dog sat motionless; the man, at least, entirely contented. He did not consciously think, but gradually as he gazed bayward before his mental vision formed pictures of other hunting days; of other waters, other shores and companions, boys, dogs and men. They came in that silent procession of memory which is the attendant company of advancing years, when the mind, momentarily footloose, harks back to the past as a stray turns instinctively to its native range. In fact Tom Wilson's mind had gone woolgathering. His eyes no longer saw the surface of the bay, the decoys bobbing lifelike in the brisk ripple. His thoughts were away and away down the aisles of the years, and with them for the moment went recognition of that which his physical eye looked upon.

But the dog had no such memories to distract him. In the long winter evenings, lying at his master's feet, he might dream of hunting days, living them over with twitching limbs and thrashing tail and eager whine. But now his keen, hunter's brain was occupied with the business in hand. These were his glorious days; too few; not to be lightly wasted. His brown amber eyes, now hard and cold, with none of the dreamy lovelight they held for his adored master, scanned bay and sky. He was the hunter, the hunting animal keen for the kill for the sport of it, and not from hunger. He was impatient to play the game he knew so well, in which in his part he was as expert as his master.

Presently, though he remained motionless, his posture took on an added alertness. Two mallards, a duck and a green-headed drake, were approaching from the outer bay. Attracted by the bobbing decoys, they changed their line of flight and swung toward them. As they drew nearer, the tip of the dog's tail, barometer of canine emotion, began to quiver. He glanced at his master. The man seemed to be looking directly at the birds. The dog's eyes went back to them. The ducks came over the decoys with outstretched, craning necks and then, apparently discerning something not to their liking, sheered and climbed higher, coming directly over the blind.

THE sound of a wing cutting the air in mad acceleration brought Tom Wilson back to the present. His reaction to the sound was instant. He rose swiftly, looking up; but the birds crossing back were hidden by the peak of his cap. He swung about, turning to the left, whereas the birds were to the right. He turned again and saw them

getting away, climbing frantically, alarmed by the man beneath them.

The average old hand considers the climbing shot a cinch. When an overhead bird begins to climb, he is as good as bagged. Wilson swung on the drake with perfect confidence, held a little over him and pulled. The bird did not fall, and he held a little higher and unhooked his second barrel. The birds kept on. Wilson stared after them.

"Well, I'll be darned!" he muttered. "Missed clean and clever with both barrels! Never saw them come in, either. Must have been asleep, I guess."

The dog, which had been staring after the birds as had its master, turned a questioning eye upon him. To Wilson it seemed reproachful.

"Rotten shooting, sure enough, Shan," he admitted, as to a companion. "We'll have to wake up."

His next chance came five minutes later at half a dozen pintails which came in, long necks outstretched, set their wings after a preliminary swing, and slanted down for the decoys.

Ordinarily they would have furnished an easy double, and he had not the least doubt about it as he rose, selected his birds with instant certainty, and swung and pulled with the automatic precision of long practice; but somehow the twin, tearing shot clouds missed their marks. The birds went on unharmed, leaving him to guess why. He could not account for it. And when he missed a single mallard that came lobbing along, looking as big as a tractor and nearly as slow, he knew he had fallen into a shooting slump and was having what every hunter experiences now and then—an off day.

A sudden slump in the work of a good shot is due nine times out of ten to dwelling too long on the aim, or to slowness of the trigger finger, which is much the same thing. The execution is lagging, instead of crisp and snappy. Back of that again may be brain fag or body fag, affecting the instant of alert concentration absolutely essential to good wing shooting. The obvious remedy is to speed up the swing and the trigger finger. But when a man falls into a slump, he is apt to take additional pains, which itself makes for slowness and stiffness. Just as no man may accomplish a perfect golf swing while his mind is occupied with the details of it, so no wing shot can kill consistently while consciously aiming. But in spite of this, the average man will attempt to hold more carefully, which merely accentuates the fault.

All of which Tom Wilson knew, and had proved in his own experience and that of others. He knew that of late years he had been slowing a trifle, becoming a shade more deliberate, but remaining just as deadly. He swung a little slower and pulled a little later, thus equalizing matters. Now he endeavored to speed up, and got slightly better results; but as always conscious performance remained poor performance.

His usual certainty had vanished. Some birds he missed altogether, and others he merely winged, which meant that he was not centering them with his shot pattern. He was too old a hand and too honest with himself to blame gun or shells. He was doing ragged work, and because he was accustomed to kill cleanly, to see birds crumple with the crack of the nitro, he was disgusted.

The large percentage of cripples made hard work for Shan. The big Chesapeake, with seven years of hunting experience to the good, threw himself into it to meet his master's temporary weakness. Instead of waiting for the word of command, he broke shot unreproved when a winged bird slanted down, trying to reach it before the temporary dazing effect of the shot shock had passed. But with all his experience, swimming power and wisdom, birds got away, flapping out into the

bay faster than he could swim, or baffling him by cunning diving.

Not that a diving bird was safe. Shan, otterlike in the water, would dive for cripples and did so whenever they went down close to him. He knew how to wear down a wounded bird by forcing it to dive repeatedly. But he could not get them all. He worked untiringly, but it was a hard day for the big retriever.

To lose a wounded bird was against Tom Wilson's code. The thought of one broken-winged or badly wounded, dragging out existence for days only to perish miserably and uselessly and rot in the marsh or furnish food for fox, hawk or owl, invariably troubled him. Some lost birds there must be; but with his usual good shooting, backed by Shan's excellent retrieving, the proportion was small. To-day, however, it was large. It left an unpleasant taste. He would have quit shooting till his work improved, but he had promised a certain number of birds to friends.

Then, too, there was the factor of human obstinacy which forces a man to buck a losing game. At any moment he might get back his timing and come out of his slump. The good shot when he slumps feels indignant surprise and keeps on shooting. So did Wilson. Then, as Shan was chasing down a crippled redhead beyond the decoys, he saw a man with an Irish water spaniel at his heels approaching his blind.

CHAPTER IV.

A LIVING PROJECTILE.

THAT morning Cleary had elected to try the bay points for open-water shooting, while his partners went deeper into the marsh. He had a dozen patent collapsible decoys, and these he set out in the shoal off a point, wading out to do so. But though he got some shooting, the birds seemed to shy, either from his hide or from his decoys, and he picked up and went on. He was in a vile temper, due partly to too much liquor the night before and partly to his near-row with Donnelly, against whom he cherished a grudge. As occasion offered, he vented his temper on his dog.

He had been hearing Wilson's gun, and presently he opened the bay where the latter had his decoys, and saw Shan at work. The dog excited his interest and envy, and when it was chasing a bird beyond the decoys, he went forward to meet its master.

Wilson rose at his approach, greeting him civilly. Cleary's shooting togs were new and expensive, and his pump gun was an ornate affair, engraved and inlaid—such a tool as is built for men who do not boggle about price. Wilson had found that usually shooting experience is in inverse ratio to elaborate equipment. Still, clothes and gun must be new at some time. From the man, his gaze turned on the retriever. A good-looking dog, though small for its breed; but to Wilson's eye the animal seemed jaded and discouraged, down in flesh, not the hard, sinewy leanness resulting from work, but as if out of condition.

"Having good luck?" Cleary asked.

Wilson shook his head.

"Not much. I can't seem to get onto them to-day."

Cleary had heard that before. It was a stock excuse, as that of the dub golfer who lamely advertises that he is "off his game."

Shan, having caught his bird, came ashore and delivered it to hand, flirted the cold water from his coat in one contemptuous shake, honored stranger and strange dog with a brief, aloof inspection, and unbidden took up a position behind his master.

Cleary's eye lit covetously. He knew a Chesapeake when he saw one, and knew their reputation, but that was all. But evidently here was a dog that un-

derstood its business, a big, strong animal that could stand the gaff of icy water, mud and tangled rushes. A dog like that would get his birds. He made up his mind to buy him if he could; but he realized that it might be difficult to do so.

Having the price, one may buy trained setters, pointers, hounds, coon and bear dogs; but comparatively rarely a trained duck dog. For the man of marsh and blind as a rule trains his own dog from puppyhood, owns but one at a time, cleaves to him till death doth them part; and thereafter sets him in a niche of memory before which in quiet hours and very secretly he worships.

Knowing the difficulty of persuading a duck hunter to part with a really good retriever, Cleary scrutinized this owner, and was not impressed. A duck shooter engaged in his sport is rarely a sartorial triumph. Wilson's garments were old, sun-bleached, weather-and-game stained. The long, heavy double twelve that nestled in the crook of his arm was plain, handworn to brightness at the breech, its stock marred by the mishaps of long service. To Cleary, Wilson looked like an old beach comber and marsh walloper. To such a man, he decided, a hundred dollars would look like big money.

CLEARY did not know a great deal about dog prices. When he paid fifty dollars for Larry, he had thought he was paying a top price, and afterward decided that he had paid too much. He knew that some dogs commanded fancy prices; but he had an idea that these were confined to fancy dogs—show dogs, women's dogs of freak breeds, field-trial winners and the like. In the present case, if this old fellow would sell at all, he should do so for a hundred. Not that he intended to offer that much at first. Cleary had a rule for dickering; he endeavored to depreciate that which he intended to buy.

"A strain of Chesapeake in that dog of yours, isn't there?" he opened.

"Some," Wilson replied. "Say about one hundred per cent."

"You don't mean he's pure bred!" Cleary exclaimed in surprise not altogether affected, for he had thought Wilson's appearance against the ownership of a registered dog. "I wouldn't think it to look at him."

"Wouldn't you?" Wilson returned coldly.

Cleary, though he did not know it, had committed a grave tactical error. Shan was a perfect specimen of his breed, and Wilson was proud of his looks as indicating that breeding. Cleary might as tactfully have cast doubt on his—Wilson's—legitimacy.

Cleary was slightly disconcerted. His remark had been intended as slightly depreciatory, merely. But he could see that he had made a poor beginning. He tried a new and opposite tack.

"Anyway, he seems to be a pretty fair retriever."

"Pretty fair?" Shan! Shan, who was not only the best duck dog Wilson had owned in some forty years, but the best he had ever seen. Shan! With the gentle mouth, the strength, the power plant, the indomitable hunting spirit, and above all the almost human intelligence which made him an equal companion with men in men's sport. Shan—"pretty fair!"

Wilson decided that he did not like Cleary. But he said nothing.

"Do you want to sell him?" Cleary asked directly.

"No," Wilson returned shortly.

"I'll give you fifty dollars for him."

Wilson laughed. He had found Cleary's comments offensive; but this offer was so absurd that he now excused them as proceeding from sheer ignorance.

"I guess you don't know much about

Chesapeake prices, do you?" he suggested.

"Fifty dollars is a good price for any duck dog," Cleary asserted.

"Yes?" Wilson returned. "Well, I paid that much for this dog when he was three months old; and when he was two years old, I refused three hundred for him."

Cleary was taken aback. But he thought Wilson might be lying, a shrewd trader.

"If you were offered that, it was a fancy price, not a market one."

"You think so? Well, you try to buy a well-bred Chesapeake, with a couple of season's work on ducks and geese, and see."

"I can buy plenty of good duck dogs at from fifty to a hundred," Cleary asserted.

"I ain't arguin' about it, if you say you can do that," Wilson returned. "You ought to know. But you can't buy my dog at any price, and that's one thing *I* know."

Which seemed definite enough. But Cleary was tenacious. When he wanted a thing, usually he got it. He was frugal by instinct and from the necessities of his early environment, and he would haggle over ten cents; but nevertheless when it came to satisfying his own desires, he had a prodigal streak. And he possessed that practical wisdom which prefers satisfaction with the best at a high price to dissatisfaction with the second best at a lower price.

HE looked again at Shan, and visualizing him as his, desired him more than ever. He had neither affection for nor understanding of animals. He wanted this dog not as a hunting companion—a living being warm with intelligence, courage and loyalty, specially skilled in his part of sport—but as a retrieving machine to bring him fallen birds so that he might show them and boast of his bag. He snapped his fingers at the desired dog and took a step toward him.

But Shan turned aside from the outstretched hand, and as he did so uttered a warning note, low but unmistakable.

"Shan!" Wilson spoke in surprise, sharply.

The dog, though dignified and disliking to be mauled by strangers, was entirely friendly and not averse to a pat. But rarely, for reasons known only to himself, he had evinced dislike for individuals. In such cases Wilson had never forced his inclinations. Indeed, he had a high opinion of the dog's instinct—to call a mysterious quality of divination that. If Shan did not like a man, Wilson privately decided that there must be something wrong with him.

"Better not crowd him," he suggested to Cleary.

"Is he vicious?"

"Not a bit. Just now and then he takes a notion he don't want to be handled, and I don't make him."

"If he was mine," Cleary said imprudently, "I'd knock that foolishness out of him."

"Yes?" said Wilson. "Well, I guess we've got different ways of handling dogs."

At this moment the Irish retriever, which had been standing by dejectedly, began to investigate his surroundings. His master ordered him down harshly. The dog shrank visibly as he obeyed.

A hard man with a dog, Wilson decided, and liked Cleary no better for it. Likely he favored breaking dogs, as distinguished from training them. Wilson himself, save in exceptional cases of obstinacy, preferred the latter method. All his dogs had been his friends, companions in sport. Between him and them there had been confidence and understanding. He was not squeamish about administering punishment when deserved; but he punished fairly, adequately, without temper. He had found that dogs and horses react to

fairness, justice and the square deal as do human beings.

"That's a good-looking Irish," he remarked tentatively. "Smaller than most of them, but he looks intelligent."

"How will you trade?"

"No trade," Wilson negatived. "How does your dog work?"

Cleary cast a malevolent glance at the animal.

"He's no good. I paid fifty for him, but he's turned out to be lazy, stupid, and as obstinate as a mule. He's got my goat, and some day I'll put a charge of shot into him."

Wilson thought that he meant it. It was plain enough that the dog was afraid of him. The animal, he thought, was cowed; and a cowed dog is a quitter, lacking the dash and courage and persistence of the animal of unbroken spirit to which hard work in the field is not an enforced task, but a glorious game. A harsh temper, wrong methods and excessive punishment may ruin a naturally intelligent but high-strung animal. With such they may produce unnerving fear; and the fear itself may produce apparent obstinacy or even stupidity.

"Maybe all your dog needs is a little more work and to be shown what's wanted," he suggested. "Some dogs are slow on the pick-up; and some are nervous and need easy handling."

"A dog does what I tell him, or he gets his," Cleary stated grimly. "I know this dog, and you don't."

"Well, I don't claim to," Wilson denied mildly. "I was just speakin' gen-'rally."

THERE was no use arguing with *him* about proper handling. At the moment his eye caught a flock of birds in the distance, making in. He told Cleary. Together they crouched in the blind. Cleary got his dog in with a selection of curses. It came slinking, took a cuff on the ear, and lay head on paws. Shan laid his tawny length behind his master, blending with the background.

The ducks, a flock of mallards, were heading for the decoys. They swung outside them warily, turned, circled again nearer, and then came in confidently, wings set, planing, directly for the wooden lures.

Wilson disliked to shoot beside a man whose gun handling he did not know.

"You take them," he whispered. "I won't shoot. Now!"

Cleary rose, pitched the pump gun to his shoulder and began to shoot. The chance was easy. Wilson himself, shooting as he ordinarily shot, but with a pump instead of his double gun, would have accounted for one duck per cartridge.

But Cleary was not a good shot. He did not pick one bird and only one, and see no other as he drew trigger. More or less he shot into the flock. However, with this very bad method he managed to drop three. Two were dead, and another, winged, fell outside the decoys. He fired his last shot ineffectively, lowered the hot tube and turned to his dog.

"G'wan! Fetch 'em! Bring 'em in here! Get a move on you, damn you!" he rasped.

Wilson steadied Shan with a word; for the big fellow, though too well trained to break for birds which had fallen to a gun other than his master's, was quivering with eagerness. He noted that the Irish retriever limped, and took to the water slowly, without eagerness. The dog swam for the nearest dead bird.

"Not that one, you fool! Get the cripple!" Cleary bellowed.

At his voice, harsh, menacing, the dog turned his head, looking back with uncertainty mingled with fear.

"That one!" Cleary roared, waving an indicative arm.

But Larry failed to understand. Perhaps he did not see the wounded bird. He seized the nearest dead one and brought it to land. As he emerged from

the water, his master grasped him by the collar, cursed him and struck him on ribs and head with his fist.

"Get that winged bird, damn you!" he snarled, and swinging the dog clear of the ground by his grip on the collar, he threw him a dozen feet into the water. "Fetch it!" he roared. "Or——"

Tom Wilson stood by in pained impotence. He longed to interfere, to tell Cleary what he thought of his methods, or lack of them, but it was not his dog. Shan would have retrieved the wounded bird first, and so would most of the dogs he had owned in his time. They would have done so by instinct or reasoning, rather than by express training. But he had owned others which, like Cleary's, had failed to distinguish, and had been prone to retrieve the nearest bird first. Then he had made the best of it, exasperated at times, but never losing his temper. Now the Irish spaniel made for the second dead bird.

Vainly Cleary endeavored to indicate the escaping cripple. Confused, fearful, failing to understand the man's shouts and gestures which became more violent, not knowing what to do but knowing that somehow he was incurring anger, the animal turned for shore empty-mouthed.

TO Cleary, this was the climax, the limit. His rage at the dog's apparent stupidity and disobedience, feeding upon its own expression, had grown out of all proportion to the cause. He drew a long, shuddering breath, that of a man who at last lets go his self-control, and shoved a single shell into the chamber of his empty gun.

Tom Wilson, reading his purpose, attempted to interpose.

"If you like, I'll send my dog for that cripple."

"Damn the cripple!" Cleary grated through his teeth. "I'll show the brute this time. I'll blow his damn useless head off."

"No use in that," Wilson remonstrated. "Mighty provokin', of course, but you'd be sorry if you shot him."

"Sorry, nothing! I'll fix him this time."

Tom Wilson came to a sudden decision and voiced it promptly.

"Not from around my blind, you won't."

"What?" Cleary wheeled on him, his eyes blazing.

"You heard me," Wilson affirmed steadily. "I won't let you shoot that dog in front of my blind."

"The hell you won't!" Cleary returned furiously, and pitched the pump gun to his shoulder.

He who interferes between a thoroughly angry man and his dog or horse does so at his own very real peril. Men have lost their lives in such well-meant interference. But Tom Wilson had never been able to stand by and see an animal punished beyond its deserts.

He caught the gun with both hands, depressing the barrel. Cleary cursed him and wrenched against his grip, but could not break it. Strong as he was, there was a tensile quality in Wilson's long, lean sinews that defeated his furious efforts. For a moment they struggled for possession of the gun. But it needed very little to transform that struggle to personal combat; and it needed just as little to deflect Cleary's killing fury from his dog to Wilson. With startling suddenness, the essential elements of homicide had leaped into being. And Wilson knew it, if Cleary did not.

IN that moment, huge with possibilities, the men came to a pause, the gun, the object of contention, breast-high between them. Above it, they looked into each other's eyes. Cleary's were dilated, black with fury; Wilson's were cold, narrowed, entirely steady.

"Let go my gun!" Cleary commanded.

"Not till you cool down," Wilson re-

fused, retaining his grip. "You're so crazy mad you don't know what you're doing. Get over it, and get hold of yourself!" Out of the tail of his eye, he caught sight of Shan. "Shan! No! Down!" he commanded sharply, but with a certain warm sense of support.

He was just in time. Shan had disliked Cleary instinctively, intuitively. Perhaps the man's personality radiated something unfriendly, inimical to dogs. The ordinarily good-tempered Chesapeake crouched, hackles aloft, brown-amber eyes glaring, the great, driving muscles of his hind quarters quivering, a living projectile hung on a hair trigger; but just for an instant hesitant, not from fear, but because men in general being his friends and his master's friends, he found it hard to comprehend the nature of the struggle. At Wilson's command, he sank back; but he held his crouch. From his throat came a single deep, hoarse, minatory note, charged with unwonted ferocity.

Now Cleary was a holy brute, and a bully. He had a rotten temper, a thoroughly dirty disposition, and a well-defined streak of cruelty. But in spite of these things—and against all literary canons—he was not a coward. In practice, the theory that a bully is invariably a coward does not work out. He had plenty of courage, and he had been beside himself with anger. He might have turned his rage upon Wilson, though he had found a surprising quality in the latter's grip.

But—perhaps as an obscure survival from the days when man was the prey of beasts, rather than beasts the prey of man—a man who will barehanded face another armed with a knife may shrink from tooth and claw. Angry as he was, he realized that the dog would go for him, orders or no orders, if he struck Wilson. The animal was big enough and strong enough to pull down a man. So, prudently, though inwardly raging, he released his hold and stepped back.

"Take the gun yourself, then—if you're afraid of it!" he sneered.

Tom Wilson promptly ejected the shell.

"Maybe I had a right to be afraid," he said. "There was a minute when I guess you'd about as soon have shot me as the dog."

"You're crazy, you old fool!" Cleary scoffed. "What would I shoot you for?"

"That's what you'd have been wondering—after you'd done it," Wilson returned. "But that wouldn't help me any. I saw a man get his brains bashed out with a pinch bar, once buttin' in when a teamster was usin' it on a horse. Well, now I hope you've given up the notion of shooting the dog."

"You do, do you?" Cleary said grimly. "Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do." He took his gun from Wilson's unresisting hand. "I'm going to take the dog down the shore—seeing you think you have rights to it here—and when I get to that rock, there, I'm going to blow his head off. And you can see me do it."

"He's your dog," Wilson admitted. "You can shoot him if you like, of course."

"You're getting a little sense," Cleary returned. He rose, slipping shells into his weapon, filling the magazine. "When I get to that rock," he promised again. "Good day to you."

Tom Wilson looked at the doomed dog, which was sitting near at hand, eyes fixed upon the arbiter of his destinies. Somebody once said that the Irish water spaniel was the last dog to be made; and was made only by using the left-over remnants of other breeds and throwing them together in a hurry, by way of jest.

He might have added that, to complete the jest, the Creator placed within this grotesque body a spirit of affection, loyalty and intelligence unsurpassed by any breed. Most men of

marsh and blind have a warm spot in their hearts for the real old Irish breed which was known to their fathers and their fathers' fathers. And Tom Wilson was no exception. He had owned them, pure bred and crossbred.

NOW, as he looked at the dog, he saw in him—or even through and beyond him—other dogs dear to his heart in bygone days. Who was this man, that he should take the life of a hunting dog, born and bred to be man's companion? And yet he could do so lawfully. The dog was his. Persuasion had failed.

There was one other way. Tom Wilson did not want another dog. He was a one-dog man. Another would be a nuisance, interfering with his shooting and the strait companionship that was his and Shan's. He looked from the dog to Cleary, and of the two works of the Creator, the dog appeared the better. That look made up his mind. He detested Cleary, wished to tell him exactly what he thought of him.

"What will you take for your dog, instead of shooting him?" he asked.

The question surprised Cleary. This man had a far better dog of his own. He was incapable of understanding the sentiment, the fine feeling, the large sympathy for an animal which backed the question; but he realized dimly that the reason was sentimental, and so foolish. As such, he held it in contempt. But he might trade upon it. He hated the dog, but he was essentially greedy. He would have called it practical.

"Do you want to buy him?" he countered.

"Rather than see him shot," Wilson replied. "You say he's no good. How much do you want?"

"He cost me fifty. If you want to pay that for him—all right. If not, it's worth that to me to shoot him."

"I'll take him," said Wilson. He was glad that he had that sum with him. Usually he had much less when hunting, but on this trip he had intended to call at a bayside town on his way home and buy certain supplies. "Here's your money. And I want a receipt."

While Cleary was scrawling one with a stub of pencil on the back of an envelope, Wilson took a light cord from his pocket, attached it to the collar of his purchase, and made the other end fast to a bush. "What do you call the dog?" he inquired.

"'Larry.'" Cleary handed him the receipt. "There you are." He grinned. "You're getting a fine bargain in that dog," he added, with irony. "I wish you luck of him."

Tom Wilson inspected the receipt and put it in his pocket.

"You don't need to wish me anything," he said. "I can talk plain to you, now that you can't take it out on an animal, which I guess you would. You're that kind. I don't know anything about you, and I don't want to. But I know dogs, and I know you've made this dog's life hell for him. You've pretty nearly ruined him. You say he's stupid and a quitter; but if he is, it's because you're so stupid yourself and such a darned skunk that you've ill-treated him till he's so scared of you he can't use what brains he has. I bought him, if you want to know, not because I want him, but because I couldn't stand to see a well-bred hunting dog shot by a two-legged thing that ain't fit to eat out of the same dish with one, let alone own one. That's what I think of you, Cleary. And now you get out of here. Pull your freight. This is my blind, and you're interferin' with my shootin'."

Cleary was utterly amazed and thoroughly angry.

"For two pins," he cried furiously, "I'd ram your money down your dirty old throat and blow the dog's head off!"

"No, you won't," Wilson returned. "I can take care of my throat; and shootin' my dogs don't come under the

headin' of sport for anybody. He's mine, now, and you remember it. Be darned careful how you handle that pump gun around here."

Cleary glared at him. The long, heavy twelve lying in the crook of Wilson's arm seemed to discourage carelessness with his own weapon.

"If you were my own age——" he began.

But Wilson cut him short.

"If you think you want anything out of me, come and get it!" he challenged, in the formula of his shanty days.

He rarely let himself go. Like many quiet men, he was gentle, even meek, up to a certain point, beyond which he was exactly the reverse. Twenty years before he had been known as a good man to let alone. He knew his fighting days to be past, but his indignation at what he knew to have been Cleary's treatment of a hunting dog wiped out the prudence proper to his years.

Cleary knew fighting men of a certain type. He had come into contact and even occasionally into collision with them in his earlier days. But he had never come in contact with that of the clean-strain, North American pioneer, nor with the more modern offshoot of that type, now itself passing, the "hardy lads" of shanty and river in the palmy days of white-pine logging, a run of men hard physically and glorying in that hardness, fearless, self-reliant, insolent and formidable. Tom Wilson combined in himself both original type and offshoot.

If he had been a younger man, Cleary would have accepted his challenge gladly. As it was——

"I'm not beatin' up old men," he refused, with what scorn he could muster.

"Just little dogs, hey!" Wilson taunted him. "I thought that was about your size on a show-down."

Cleary flushed darkly.

"That'll be plenty—if you know when you're well off," he growled. "Whatever I am, I am no coward, and no man yet ever called me one—knowin' me. I have about twenty years and all of thirty pounds on you. Save the bitter old tongue of ye, and be damned!"

"I've said all I have to say," Tom Wilson returned. "I didn't mean to call you coward. I'll take that back, if you like. But not one word about the dog."

"Blast the dog!" said Cleary. "He's yours, and the devil do you good with him. You'll be wanting to shoot him yourself, inside a week." And, turning on his heel, he strode down the shore, and out of the lives of Tom Wilson and Larry.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW MASTER.

TOM WILSON filled his pipe and thoughtfully considered his newly acquired property. The dog, as his former master increased his distance, became uneasy and tugged at the cord that held him, so deeply is the sense of allegiance to one man, no matter what his treatment, implanted in the canine brain. When Cleary was out of sight, Larry turned his eyes apprehensively on his new owner. In them Wilson read fear and a dumb pleading. He shook his head in review of his own actions.

"I'm a darn old fool, I guess," he soliloquized. "I didn't need another dog, no more'n a cat needs fins, and I ain't got fifty dollars to throw away. But how could I let the poor little cuss stop a charge of sixes? I couldn't, that's all. And then of course I had to go and tell that feller what I thought of him. Twenty—thirty years ago, like enough I'd have done more. Never had no sense about dogs and horses, anyway. And now it looks like I've got a cowed dog, the one kind that's about hopeless—that tags along after you with his tail tucked, and wilts when you look at him, and slinks up to you when you call him as if he expected to be kicked

You can't give a dog like that away. Shan'll be jealous, and sore at me. Another dog will interfere with his work and my shootin', and be a darn nuisance all round. Well, it can't be helped. Come here, Shan, I want to talk to you."

And when the Chesapeake, which had been eying the smaller dog in plainly puzzled disapproval, came to him, Wilson patted the broad-domed head and proceeded to set forth the situation as to a human auditor. Whether or not the tawny hunter understood, he laid a confiding paw on his master's knee, and looked into his eyes, which actions Wilson chose to interpret as indicating full comprehension.

"All right, big boy," he said. "Now we'll sort of get acquainted with Larry."

At his name, the dog looked at him, his bright eyes darkening with fear. As Wilson extended his hand for the cord, he shrank flat, belly to ground.

"Now ain't that hell!" Wilson muttered. "He's tied up, and he expects a kick or a cuff to go with it. A darn shame!"

He sought among the remnants of his lunch, finding part of a sandwich. But the dog, though rib-lean, would not take it. Wilson patted his head and put the food beside him. Presently, with an incredulous eye on his benefactor, the dog swallowed it.

Now birds again began to swing to the decoys; and without apparent reason, Wilson came out of his slump, recovering his accustomed deadliness.

"Now why couldn't I do that this morning?" he muttered. "Funny, the way you can't hit sometimes. And other times, holding just the same, far's you know, you can't miss."

Shan's work was now comparatively easy. Presently Wilson dropped a duck close to shore. He steadied Shan and slipped the cord from the new dog's collar.

"See that fellow there, Larry? Go get him!"

The latter phrase was his own formula, which he taught all his dogs, instead of the customary "Fetch!" As such, he did not expect the new dog to understand it, save my association with the sight of a bird.

Larry was in doubt. There was a bird; but a bird to be retrieved was indicated in his recent experience by shoutings, gesticulations, loud bellowings of sorts. The command he heard was new to him, and moreover delivered quietly. This new master did not even raise his voice or wave a hand. The man in fact was stroking his head, which was amazing enough to take up a dog's entire attention. What did it mean?

Wilson repeated his command several times, and when he thought the phrase sufficiently impressed, though its meaning apparently was not understood, he said, "Go get him—Shan!"

At his name, the big Chesapeake sprang into action with a joyous bound, took the water with a flying leap and made for the dead bird with a driving stroke that threw his shoulders clear. When he came ashore, he brought the bird on the run.

Wilson grinned to himself. Shan, always a fast retriever, was actually showing off, pleased that his master had been forced to call on him after wasting time with that lesser canine. And so when he came with the bird, Wilson made much of him, praising and petting him as he had done in his puppy days. This served several ends. It pleased Shan; and it showed Larry the relations that subsisted between Shan and Wilson.

THE man had confidence in dogs' powers of observation. He used allow them to work out their own problems, reach their own conclusions unforced. He had found this method, which required infinite patience, well worth it in terms of success. He knew that dogs crave praise for work well

done, as do human beings. Larry would establish a connection for himself between what Shan had done and the praise he received.

On the showing, the dog has reason to regard man as a harsh taskmaster and tyrant. First of all, that outlook must be changed. Confidence must be established. To this end, Wilson brought the dog close to him as he sat in the blind.

Larry obeyed the pull of the cord with misgivings. He came hesitatingly and cringingly. He now comprehended that he had been bidden to retrieve. He had not done so. Disobedience in his experience inevitably resulted in a beating, and he was prepared for one. But this new master, into whose hands he had fallen by quirk of Fate beyond his understanding, did not seem angry. Instead of blows, an arm came over his shoulders and he was drawn close against the man's thigh; fingers rubbed his neck, scratched it behind the ears; a hand patted his chest hearteningly.

Larry did not know what to make of it, and waited for what might come, passive but tense. But no punishment came, and the hand continued to caress him. Faintly at first, as far-away music comes to the ear, but gradually growing stronger and stronger, he seemed to feel a current of friendliness, of sympathy, radiating from this being, reaching out toward him, warming his lonely, shivering dog's heart. His body, which had been taut and tense, relaxed a trifle. Wilson felt the easing of the tension.

"That's the boy!" he approved softly, and his voice took on the crooning note of a mother comforting a hurt child. "Poor old Larry, poor little Larry-dog. He's had a hard time, so he has. Nothing to be afraid of now, Larry. All right now. Good times a-coming, good times a-coming for a brown dog. Good times come for a poor, little Irish. Poor little Larry-dog! Well, well, well!"

As he crooned, gently caressing, the body relaxing still more touched his thigh, leaned against it. Little by little the brown head inclined sidewise till it touched his knee, started away from it, drooped again and lay quietly against him. Fear faded from the eyes. They closed. The dog sighed deeply.

Wilson let birds light among his decoys unheeded. Not for all the ducks in the bay would he have disturbed the physical contact between himself and the dog, and the confidence which he knew was being born of it. It would take time to eradicate the shrinking fear that had been so deeply implanted; but he had made a beginning.

But Shan was plainly disgusted. His master should be paying attention to the job in hand, which was to shoot ducks, in order that a real hunter—Shan, to wit—might fulfill his purpose in life. But instead he was petting a grotesque canine which had neither looks, courage nor hunting ability. Shan did not like it, and when he could stand it no longer, he voiced his grievance.

"Ar-r-rh!" said Shan.

Wilson caught the note of complaint that was protest rather than growl. It would never do to make Shan jealous. The big fellow was good natured, but no one-man dog will accept a rival in his master's affections with equanimity. So Wilson proceeded to put the big fellow in good humor by making a long-range double; which, as it involved two swims in delectably icy water, and a dive or two after one bird, restored Shan's belief in his master's dependence upon him and his own full partnership in the game.

BUT the best of the shooting was over for the day. The evening was drawing on. Wilson abandoned his blind, picked up his decoys, and got the dogs aboard the canoe, and headed back for the gas boat. When he reached it, he started his engine, got up his mudhook

and headed for his favorite spot, a cove on the farther side of the bay. There he tied up in good shelter to a ramshackle log landing, which he had built for his own use some years before.

Here there was shelter from any wind, dry wood, dry ground when he wished to camp ashore, as he did occasionally when his party numbered more than the boat would sleep comfortably, and a good, cold spring.

He let the dogs ashore to make each other's acquaintance as they saw fit while he prepared supper, but kept a casual eye on them, interested in their reactions, though he had little fear that Shan might shake up the lesser dog. But Larry was not so certain, and kept a wary eye on the Chesapeake, which, however, treated him with contemptuous indifference. Shan, after investigating the familiar camping ground, took a roll in fallen leaves, shook himself, and boarded the gas boat, where he lay down in his place, with one eye lifting as he watched preparations for supper.

Larry, left alone, sat in the growing dusk by the landing, lacking confidence to follow the other dog. He was puzzled. At once his pleasant world which he dimly remembered had been turned upside down, so now the unkindly one which had succeeded it, to which he had resigned himself hopelessly, had suffered an upheaval. The master whom he had feared had gone mysteriously, leaving him in the hands of a stranger.

For the first time in years he had felt the touch of a caressing hand, heard a human voice address him in tones of friendship. It was puzzling, almost beyond belief. He had given up hoping for such things. What would happen next? He sat by the landing, lonely, disconsolate, uneasy, sniffing the scents of food for which his stomach cried out, looking wistfully at the lighted cabin, but not daring closer approach.

Tom Wilson looked out, saw the dog, and made a very accurate deduction. "The poor little devil doesn't know where he's at," he muttered. "He wants to come aboard, but he's afraid he'll be chased out. I'll bet Cleary never looked after him, nor made him comfortable, nights. Here, Larry, come on, boy!"

Larry obeyed slowly, doubtfully. In the cabin, at the foot of the port bunk, Wilson arranged a bed of canvas and gunny sacks.

"There you are, Larry," he said. "That's yours. Pretty good bed for a brown dog. Down!"

This command Larry understood and obeyed, dropping on the sacks, where he remained till Wilson had finished his meal. The man filled two deep dishes with a mixture of porridge, meat scraps and vegetables, the whole delectably flavored with pork fat. As he took a dish in each hand, Shan sprang to his feet. The hard retrieving in the cold water had made him ravenous. He rose on his hind legs in eagerness, standing as high as his master's chest, his mouth literally watering.

"Hungry, ain't you, old pup?" His master nodded. "Hard day for you. Well, here's a pretty good supper. Here, Larry, this is yours. Go to it."

Larry attacked the amazingly bountiful and delicious meal thankfully, but from his experience with other dogs hurriedly, keeping a wary eye on Shan. But Shan was well mannered and good natured, and his own meal was satisfying. When he had finished it, he stretched his big frame and went ashore, where he cleaned his chops neatly by the simple method of polishing them on the leaves, to which end he folded his front paws, laid his face on the ground and propelled himself forward with his hind legs. He took a satisfying roll, and a drink, and came back to the boat, where after a friendly patting and a rub of the ears from his master, he lay down on his bed, stretched his powerful limbs, and at once slept the sleep of the just and weary dog.

Larry with misgivings settled down upon the bed that had been indicated as his. It was all amazing, too good to be true, a dream from which he must awake to find himself again a prisoner in a back yard. For the first time in many days, his hunger was satisfied. He was warm and dry and clean, though his body was still sore. The light, the warmth, the bed which seemed to be his own, and, more than these things, a new sense of security, companionship, and an atmosphere of friendliness were as a translation from torment to bliss. When his new master came to where he lay, patted his head, rubbed his ears, and spoke to him in a heartening, friendly voice, adoration filled his lonely heart. He tried to express it by a quiver of his tail, with his eyes, and by little, straining throat sounds almost too low for the perception of the human ear. But Tom Wilson, who had known dogs all his life, heard and interpreted.

Wilson, having done his best to make the stranger feel at home, dismissed him with a friendly pat, lit his pipe and stretched himself upon his bunk. He loved the long evenings in the snug cabin of his stanch little craft after a day on the bleak, wind-swept points. In its light and comfort he had the feeling of defeating the elements, of closing the door upon the dark and the things of the dark.

PERHAPS an earlier man felt much the same when he put a boulder against the mouth of a cave. For though saber-toothed tigers and cave bears are no more, man, who persists, is bone and flesh of the men who were their prey, and many of his more obscure sensations seem to be bred in his fiber, to arise not from reason but from racial instinct, which probably is the sum of racial experience of an earlier day. The voice of a wolf will prickle the back hair of a man who has never heard it before and does not even know what it is; whereas an imitation of it will not. At any rate, Tom Wilson was accustomed to luxuriate in these nightly surroundings, which represented the progressive triumph of his race over water and cold and darkness and storm.

The new dog presented a problem over which he puzzled. He did not want Larry, but he did not know what to do with him. The devil of it was that the animal had been badly abused and mishandled. It was unlikely that he could sell him. Few shooting men would take such a dog, even as a gift. The men he knew who might have use for a retriever wanted slashing, courageous animals, able to stand correction and profit by it. A dog that will take a licking cheerfully is comparatively easy to handle; but a timid one demands too much patience and forbearance for the average man. And a cowed dog is all but useless.

He was not sure that this dog was entirely cowed, but it was on the border line. It would need the most careful and considerate handling. At present, the dog was underfed, stiff and sore, a trifle lame. Good food and light exercise, sufficient to take out the stiffness, might make a difference in spirit in the course of a few days.

For the first time the thought of the boy, Anson, occurred to Wilson. He had promised to look out for a dog for the lad; but he had not intended to buy a dog for him, and certainly not one which cost fifty dollars. He could not afford such benevolence. But then he could not afford to buy the dog at all. He had done so on impulse, from his regard for hunting dogs, without considering whether he could sell Larry again or not. It was doubtful if he could sell him. Then why not give him to the boy?

It was typical of Wilson that he considered this idea from the standpoint of the dog's best interests. The boy was fond of dogs, would treat the ani-

mal well, make a chum of him in a way which a man could not, live with him, play with him. Yes, from the dog's standpoint it looked all right. And it would be all right from the boy's point of view, if the animal would work at all in light retrieving and had any nose for ground birds. In the next two or three days. he would find out about these things.

Tom Wilson dozed over his pipe. He was awakened by the gentle contact of something warm and wet with the fingers of his hand, which hung over the side of the bunk. Beside him, Larry sat humbly licking his fingers.

Shan slept in his accustomed comfort by the foot of the bunk, his great limbs now and then twitching in hunting dreams; but the waif had left the unaccustomed comfort of his bed to creep close to this man who had come into his life, to express, in the only way that was his, his humble gratitude, adoption, and the adoration of a dog. which passeth human understanding.

CHAPTER VI.

DOG SENSE.

DAY was breaking when Wilson left the gas boat and, with the dogs at heel, cut across a neck of timber, coming to an expanse of meadows interspersed with shallow ponds. Once this area had been a gigantic beaver pond or succession of them. The brown workers had gone, but remnants of their old dams remained, grown with grass and willows, affording causeways of firm footing as well as cover for the hunter.

Wilson went directly to the bushy end of one of these dams, between two ponds. Though there was high grass, the ground surrounding the water was reasonably firm, and the ponds themselves open, clear of weeds, with little mud and good bottom. It was the spot to which some six years before he had brought Shan, then a puppy, for his first practical work; and to which ten years before that he had brought Admiral, Shan's immediate predecessor, then a six-months' pup. There was no hard going to discourage a pup or timid dog, and the hunter himself might accompany him almost anywhere, to direct and encourage.

Shan viewed his early training ground with vast contempt. The big fellow preferred the point shooting over decoys in open water, where an amphibious hunter might display his talent, and where as he knew very well there were more birds. Though he tolerated the other dog, he did not approve him, and he was plainly puzzled as to why his master, essentially a one-dog man, bothered with him. He, Shan, was able to do all the retrieving that one gun could furnish, and ask for more. And here it was child's play, kindergarten stuff, puppies' work. Why, then, another dog? Shan sat down with dignity, his tan features slightly wrinkled as with thought, to await developments.

Wilson would have preferred to have had Larry by himself. Two dogs, unless accustomed to working together, are hard to handle. Shan was well trained, but as a rule he worked alone. Wilson put the other dog on a leash, noting as he did so that the animal shrank a little, as if he associated the action with something unpleasant. He corrected that by a friendly pat. Then he sat down in cover.

In a few minutes he got his first chance, at four pintails crossing between the ponds. Two dropped in the grass close together.

Wilson sent Shan. His intention was to send Larry for the second bird when the Chesapeake, as was his right, had retrieved the first. That would be holding the scales level, and moreover would show the new dog what was wanted.

But Shan disarranged this neat plan. The tawny hunter had marked both

birds with the eye of long experience. He went for the farther one first, and as he turned with it in his mouth he came upon the other. He put the first bird down beside the second, shoved them together with his nose, got one at the extreme back of his jaws and the other in the grip of canines and lips, and came to his master carrying both, with the proper pride of a hunter who has made a clean-up.

It was not a new performance for the big retriever. He had done it before, often from shallow water, more seldom from grass. It was made possible by the length of the Chesapeake jaw and the habit—mark of a gentle-mouthed retriever—of carrying a bird at the extreme back of it. Naturally it was possible only with smaller ducks of slender build.

"Well, you darned old collection plate!" Wilson said affectionately, as he took the birds from his coadjutor. "I suppose you're proud of yourself. Not going to give Larry a chance, hey? Well, next time you stay in."

THE next bird was a mallard, a high shot; but the bird crumpled cold, its momentum carrying it to one of the ponds, where it fell well out with a splash. Shan glared after it, his muscles quivering. But his master steadied him with a word and loosed the other dog.

"Go get him, Larry!"

The dog looked at him with bright, intelligent eyes, went forward a few yards and began to use his nose in the grass. It seemed that he had not seen the bird fall. There was no hurry about retrieving it, and Wilson lit his pipe and watched the animal, giving no further orders or indication of his wishes.

"Working all right," he soliloquized. "Hunting, though he don't know what for. Not bad in that grass, with no scent to start him going, Makings of a dog, with easy handling. Hallo! What's he got now? Must smell one of Shan's birds."

Larry had seemed to catch a scent. His nose went down eagerly and his tail began to oscillate. But he drew away to the right. Suddenly he dived into a patch of tangled grass and backed out with something in his mouth.

"Darned if he hasn't found a cripple," Wilson muttered, well pleased. "Not too bad, at all. Hey, Shan, look what Larry's got all by his lonely!"

The cripple was a young mallard, wounded by some other hunter days before, down to skin and bone. Wilson put it out of pain. He disliked such tasks. But he praised and petted the dog. Then he took him to the edge of the pond and pointed out the dead bird. When Larry saw it, he waded out and began to swim toward it.

But at this point Shan, the perfect retriever, the model dog, again deranged Wilson's plans. More, he became guilty of a serious misdemeanor.

All his life Shan had done all Wilson's retrieving, brought every bird that had fallen to his gun. As he looked at it, his master's birds were his, by right, to be mouthed by no other dog. The sight of this interloper doing the work that was his by right was too much. He came from behind his master with a rush, took the water in his customary flying leap, his limbs going in the swimming stroke even in the air, and, heedless of Wilson's sharp "Whoa!" he forged past the slower swimmer as a speed launch passes a family tub, reached the bird, got it with his usual grip at the back of his jaws, and with a scornful snort turned for land. Larry, meeting him and turning to swim alongside, eager for a share in the honor, received a ferocious warning to keep his distance.

Wilson for the first time in years was seriously displeased with his favorite. "Whoa" or "No," indistinguishable to a dog's ears, was in his very limited

training vocabulary an imperative command to halt, or to cease instantly whatever the dog was doing. It was the first command he taught a pup, the foundation on which he built. It was fundamental, a basic law for his dogs. Shan knew it well.

After that one sharp command which he knew the dog had heard, understood and yet disobeyed, Wilson kept silence. That was his way. He never repeated an order which he knew was understood; and, though infinitely patient in instruction, he never passed over unruly infractions of established discipline. He might have made allowance for and overlooked the "break;" but not the flagrant disobedience of his command. Shan, then, favorite and companion as he was, David to his Jonathan or Absalom to his David, was due for a licking and a good one.

"You would, would you?" he said, as the dog tendered him the bird by raising his head. "You'd go before I told you, keep going after I told you to whoa! You know better. Shame on you!"

Thus chidden, the big fellow dropped the bird, dropped his ears. He was perfectly aware that he had broken the law. Punishments were infrequent, but he knew he was in for one this time, after his double dereliction.

"Pick that bird up!" Wilson ordered. "Give it to me properly." He took the bird from the dog's mouth and tossed it out in the pond. "Go get him, Larry."

Larry swam the short distance eagerly, watched by the drooping Shan. Having given this object lesson, Wilson ordered the dogs to heel and returned to his stand, where he cut and trimmed a stout but pliant switch. When he punished, he did so, deliberately, without temper, usually with evenly spaced cuts of a switch which stung but did not injure, a method very different from the wild rain of blows of an angry man. Animals seem to understand this difference.

"Come here!" he ordered Shan.

The big dog came to his feet and lay down, reluctantly but obediently. He knew quite well that he had broken the law of dog and man, knew exactly what he was about to be punished for. After it was over, he would jump up and shake himself, and there would be a fresh deal all around, with no holdover.

But as Wilson raised the switch for the first cut, he chanced to glance at the other dog, and something in the animal attitude gave him pause. The dog was regarding him intently, and, it seemed, apprehensively. His bright eyes were slightly darkened as by fear. Wilson tried to read what was going on in the brain behind them, and what he thought he read there made him lower his hand.

"Scared," he said aloud, "scared at the sight of a switch. And if I trim Shan, it'll scare him worse. He won't know why I'm doing it, though Shan knows darn well. All he'll see is another dog getting a licking, just when he was beginning to think that I was a man who was kind to dogs. It'll upset the notion he has of me, and spoil everything. He'll think maybe it'll be his turn next. So I can't lick Shan—though I ought to." He threw the switch into the bushes. "Shan, you old rascal, you get off this time. But mind you behave yourself!"

But though he had quite determined on punishment, inwardly he was glad of the excuse for leniency. He and Shan were friends. The dog was more of a companion than a possession.

THAT morning he gave Larry the easy work, calling on Shan only for the harder. And he was surprised at the quickness with which the Irish water spaniel picked it up, and the eagerness he began to display.

"He's got the makings of a real good

dog," he decided. "But he's got to be handled awful easy, and no more than a little scolding till he has time to find himself.

"Him and the boy ought to get along well. That's what a dog like this wants—somebody young to run about with and play with and chum with. A man, somehow, don't seem to fit in right with a certain kind of dog. Now, Shan fits me, and I fit him. He's big and wise, and mostly steady; and even as a pup, he wasn't feather-headed. He always seemed to be thinking of his job—sort of a dignified, grown-up, man's dog.

"But this dog is diff'rent. I dunno's he ever had the chance to play with young folks, but I know he wants to. He puts me in mind of my old Beaver. He's nervous and high-strung and affectionate, and he's just starvin' for some one to show it to. He likes me, but he'll like the boy better. I'll stay here two or three days, to give him a chance to find himself, and then I'll go home."

He diversified the work for Larry by taking him into the brush for partridge. This was not Shan's game. The big fellow stalked sedately at heel while Larry ranged the thickets enthusiastically. In common with all the spaniel tribe, he loved to investigate odd corners. He had a good nose. Some birds treed when flushed, and he barked at them as they stood on limbs above him, statuelike save for craning movements of the head.

Wilson never shot a treed bird. It was too much like murder. He liked to watch them peering down at him with bright eyes from their fancied security, their attention mainly on the dog, which presumably they took for a species of fox. But now and then he got wing shots, sometimes in fairly open stuff, but more often getting but a glimpse of a hurtling body propelled by roaring wings, on which he swung in its line of flight, the bird itself invisible as he pulled trigger.

It was snap-shooting, totally different from the deliberate, calculated swing of the duck shot, more rapid, more concentrated, calling for more instant action, as well as for a lighter weapon of more open pattern than the heavy, full-choked duck gun, which was the only one he had with him. He got a fair number of birds, but he did not excel at this shooting. It showed him, to his regret, that he was slowing up.

At the end of three days, Larry was a different animal. His stiffness and soreness had worn off. Proper food and plenty of it had put heart in him; and most of all his confidence in Wilson was complete. Now he no longer shrank away from the hand, or jumped nervously at sudden movements.

BY this time Wilson no longer had the shooting to himself. A party had come in and established a camp farther down the bay. On what Wilson decided should be his last day, one of this party took up a position within sight of him. Apparently this hunter had no dog. He spent considerable time looking for birds that fell in the grass, and seemed to have trouble in finding them. Eventually he came to Wilson, to ask the assistance of his dogs, offering to pay for it.

"I'll give you a hand, of course," Wilson agreed readily. "I don't want any money for it. Glad to."

"Well, that's mighty decent of you," the other acknowledged.

His name, Wilson learned as they walked together, was Carson, and duck shooting was a new game to him over which he was now enthusiastic. But he knew little about dogs, and had never seen a retriever work. He seemed a little doubtful of the ability of Wilson's to find the birds he had dropped.

"I've got about a dozen down altogether, some in grass and some out in the water. If they can find three or four, they'll be doing well, I think."

"Ought to get 'em all," Wilson returned; "that is, if you know about where the grassed birds dropped, and if those in the slough haven't got away off in the middle. That slough has a bad bottom, too soft for a man to wade, and it's boggy in those cat-tails. But Shan can go through it all right. We'll get the birds that fell in the slough first."

"Wouldn't it be best to get the birds in the grass first? Easier."

"A bird in grass ain't easy if its been killed a while or lies close. Reason I want to hunt the slough first is on account of the dogs. A hunt in the grass afterward will dry them off and clean them up."

Carson was impressed. "I shouldn't have thought of that. You seem to look after your dogs pretty well."

"I try to. Retrievin's a hard job. A dog likes it, but it's hard, just the same. Cold water, wallowin' through mud, sittin' around wet all day in freezin' weather. It's part of a dog's job, of course, but I always give him the best deal I can. That's one of your birds out there, ain't it?"

"Yes. There's another just to the right."

"I see it now." Wilson pointed out the birds to the Chesapeake. "Steady, Larry! Go get him, Shan!"

Shan retrieved the birds.

Carson was enthusiastic.

"That's wonderful."

"That?" Wilson returned, in surprise. "That's nothing. Any dog with any trainin' at all would do that."

"Would this other one—Larry, you call him?"

"Oh, yes. But he's got a long coat, and it's muddy out there. Needs a strong dog. Now where are the other birds?"

"Two are somewhere in that tangle of rushes. One at this end, and the other halfway down. or out beyond. Perhaps we'd better not bother about them. It isn't likely a dog could find them."

"We'll see, anyway. See that mess of stuff out there, Shan?" Wilson addressed his favorite, at the same time indicating with his arm. "Two birds out there. Hunt 'em up. Go get him!"

"You'd think he understood what you said," Carson commented, as Shan crossed the intervening water, attained the rushes and disappeared.

"So he did," Wilson returned. "That is, he knew what I wanted. It's about the same thing."

They could hear Shan plunging through the bog and rushes, the waving of the tops of the vegetation indicating his course. He was hunting thoroughly. After some minutes he appeared at the edge of the tangle and looked toward his master. Wilson waved his hand, gesturing strongly to the right. The dog disappeared in the direction thus indicated.

"Well, I'll be darned!" Carson exclaimed. "He goes the way you tell him!"

"Sure," said Wilson. "Why not?"

"Well, I never saw anything like it before."

"No?" Wilson was mildly surprised. "For real arm control you ought to see a good collie or sheep dog workin'. Bred to it, I guess. But all my dogs will answer to my arm—some better than others, of course. That's what Shan came to the edge for—for me to tell him where to hunt next. Of course he didn't see the bird fall, but he knows there is one or I wouldn't have sent him in, and so he figures I must know about where it is—or anyway that I know more about it than he does. He's willin' to use his nose and to hunt till I tell him to stop; but he wants to know where."

"You think he thinks all that? That ideas like that actually pass through his mind?"

"Well, figure it out for yourself. You

saw what he did, and what I did, and you see what he's doin' now. Ain't it reasonable?"

"It's more than that—it's logical," Carson admitted. "I don't know much about dogs, and it's all new to me."

"Yes? Well, of course you have to be able to wave a dog right or left, or he isn't much good in stuff like this, or out in open water with a cripple divin' and a sea runnin'. When a dog is swimmin', he can't see a divin' bird like you can standin' up in your boat or in a blind. So you got to have some way of showin' him."

"But how do you train him?"

"Well, it takes time. All trainin' does, and this sort of works in with the rest. A lot of it a dog picks up himself, sort of natural, by usin' his head. If you're trainin' a pup to retrieve by throwin' out a glove for him, he sees your arm swingin', and after a while he knows the glove's goin' to go in the direction your arm swings. If you make false motions and cover up his eyes when you make the real throw, chances are he'll start off in the way your arm was swingin' when he saw it. Only that's sort of foolin' him, and it's best never to fool a dog.

"So what I mostly do, I hide a glove or whatever he's used to retrievin' and knows the scent of, out in the grass somewhere. Then I tell him 'Hunt 'em up!' and motion with my arm the way I'm goin' to go. A dog will go the gen'ral direction you do, just to keep with you, and I keep him in close. I wave my hand the way I'm goin' to turn. By and by he gets the idea. When he finds the glove a few times he hooks it up in his mind that I've been wavin' toward it. Then it's easy. Dogs have plenty of sense, and they think a man has more. So they'll look to a man for instructions, if they're at fault. Sendin' a dog to right or left is easy. What's harder is to get him to go straight out and keep on goin' as far as you want."

"Will your dogs do that?"

"Shan will, on land or in water, as far as he can see me, as long as I keep motionin'. Then, to make him come straight to me from wherever he is, I hold my arm straight up. Then he comes on a line."

"But you could whistle him in, or call him."

"When there's a wind, a dog can't always hear. And I hate to be callin' and whistlin'. The quieter you can handle a dog, the better. It's all right to talk to him—I talk to my dogs a lot in a friendly way—but for handling them, I've got only about half a dozen orders, like 'No,' or 'Whoa,' 'Steady,' 'Down,' 'Heel,' 'Hunt 'em up' and 'Go get him.' Always the same word for the same thing. And I say 'em as if I meant 'em. Which I do. Dogs mind your tone as much as the words. So do horses. Bein' able to make a dog come straight to you is mighty handy sometimes."

"To get him to come at once, do you mean?"

"Not that, exactly. It helps in retrievin'. For instance, a dog is huntin' a bird out in a slough, and he gets out beyond where you think the bird is lyin'. Wavin' him to right or left isn't any good. So what you do, you move along till you think the bird ought to be lyin' about on a line with you and the dog, and hold up your hand. If your guess is right, the dog will come close enough to the bird to wind him on his way in to you. There! Shan's got your bird now."

SHAN appeared with the bird, a fine-feathered mallard drake, and came ashore with it, delivering it to his master's hand.

"Never mind the other," said Carson. "I didn't expect this one."

"Oh, Shan may's well clean up for you," said Wilson. "One more, Shan. Get the other one."

"Now, that's different," said Carson, who was observant. "That's a different order. Before, you said 'Go get him!' Now you say 'Get the other one!' And you said you always had the one command for the one thing."

"It does look like I was mixed a little," Wilson admitted, "but I'll tell you about that. When Shan was a pup, he used to fetch my slippers for me from the bedroom. He knows the meanin' of words like 'slipper' and 'glove' and 'overshoe' and a few things like that. Lots of dogs do. Well, I'd tell him to go get me my slippers, and he'd come with one, and I'd say 'Get the other one' and he'd go and do it. So when I say that now, he knows there's a second one to get of whatever it is. I wouldn't tell him that for a first bird. So you see his pickin' up the meanin' of that order was sort of accident. I didn't train him to it with huntin' in view, but just for foolin' around the house. But just the same it comes in handy."

"I see. But you're letting him do it all. How about the other dog?"

"Well, that's pretty hard goin' out there," Wilson admitted. "No use gettin' two dogs all muddied up. Larry will hunt the grassed birds. This is just play for Shan, for two or three birds. He's big, and strong, and long in the legs and short of coat. He can slash right through what would be hard work for Larry."

Shan got the fourth bird, after a long hunt, delivered it, shook himself and looked expectant.

"No more out there, you old slough-hound," his master told him, with a friendly pat. "Now you can clean yourself off in the grass. And mind you don't tangle with Larry over any bird."

In the grass, Larry did well. He had an excellent nose. Carson was pleased and gratified.

"If it hadn't been for you and your dogs, I wouldn't have got one of these birds."

"Didn't it strike you that was how it would be when you took your stand here?" Wilson asked.

"Why, no, it didn't. I thought I could find anything that fell on the grass, and I didn't think birds would fall so far out in the slough."

"Lots of birds lost that way. It ain't right to kill what you can't get."

"No," Carson admitted frankly, "it isn't. I ought to have a dog—if I'm going to do much duck shooting."

"Yes, a man pretty near has to have one."

"Will you sell me one of yours? I don't suppose you'd part with the Chesapeake, but how about the other? He'd do me. I'll give you whatever you say he's worth."

Wilson considered and shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I guess not. I've sort of promised him to a friend of mine."

CHAPTER VII.

A BOY AND A DOG.

TOM WILSON went home with his game and his dogs, much to Shan's disgust, for the big fellow thoroughly disapproved these silly home-comings in the hunting season. From the time the leaves first yellowed until they carpeted the ground and the snow carpeted them; until the little bays froze tight and the ice struck out from the points and bound the marshes to iron hardness, and the great, gray honkers passed southward high up against the steel-blue sky, dim liners of the air against the bright-pointed stars that heralded the annual freeze-up—it was hunting time, not to be wasted at home, which was well enough in winter and summer, but not to be endured when the ducks were flying.

But Larry, less sophisticated, investigated the house and its surroundings and found them good. There were grass and water and trees, the bay in

the foreground, and, in the background behind the garden, woods full of scents delectable to the nostrils of a dog. He was rapidly losing his timidity, beginning to show the curiosity and investigating spirit that were his by right of his spaniel blood.

His head and tail were carried higher, tokens of better heart. He was now on excellent terms with Shan. The big fellow seemed no longer to regard him as an intruder; he accepted him if not as an equal at least as a possession of his master, and so a part of his own responsibilities. The smaller dog deferred to the Chesapeake as if recognizing the latter's priority.

But he was allowed little time to settle down in these surroundings, pleasant as they were. Wilson spent most of the shooting season on his gas boat; and he had arranged for a hunt with a crony of his, Joe Claflin, the possessor of a black, curly retriever which, though aging, its owner swore to be the equal if not the superior of Shan. Thus he was merely home between trips, and it seemed to him that the sooner Larry was in the hands of his young master, the better. And so, it being a Saturday morning, he took his gun and the dogs and tramped off up the shore.

As it was Saturday, a school holiday, he was pretty sure that he would find the boy in the neighborhood of the marshy bay near his father's farm, trying for ducks, or in the brush back of it, looking for partridge. The event proved the first guess correct. As he neared the bay, he heard a couple of shots, and presently discovered the boy near the end of a marshy point, in the rushes of which he had been concealed. As Wilson neared him, he saw that he had come at a most opportune time.

The boy had shot a mallard, but the bird had fallen in the water some yards from shore. He was now engaged in an attempt to retrieve it, for which purpose, being dogless, he had equipped himself with a fishing line with a lead sinker tied to one end. This he was endeavoring to cast across the floating body of the bird, so that he might draw it in; but so far his casts had been futile. Several times he had got the line across the duck, but each time it had slipped off. The wind was now setting the bird outward, almost beyond the limits of his casts. His last one, to the length of his line, fell short.

"Darn it!" he muttered, in disgust; and after a moment's hesitation sat down and began to pull off his boots as a preliminary to complete disrobement. The water was cold, but he was not going to lose a mallard. He was half stripped when Wilson pushed through the rushes.

"Goin' in swimmin', son?" the man asked. "Sort of late in the year, ain't it?"

The boy grinned.

"Hallo, Mr. Wilson! I wasn't going to lose that mallard." He stared as he caught sight of the two dogs. "Why, where'd you get that Irish?"

"I sort of picked him up. The fellow that had him didn't have much use for him. Put on your shirt, son, and we'll see if he'll get that bird for you." He waited till the boy had resumed his garments. "I want you to send him out for it yourself, son. Larry, his name is."

The boy snapped his fingers enticingly.

"Here, Larry! Good dog. Fetch it out, Larry. Bring him here!"

But Larry, though he wagged his tail, looked at Wilson.

"Now what have I always told you, son?" the man reproved the boy. "Haven't I always told you never to go jumpin' around and snappin' your fingers at a dog, but to keep quiet and steady, and talk to him like both of you had brains? And haven't I told you never to give him two or three orders to do one thing?"

"Yes," the boy admitted shamefacedly.

"Well, you want to remember it, if you want a dog to work for you real well. This dog understands 'Go get him!' same as I use for Shan. Try that."

The boy tried it, but the dog looked at Wilson.

"All right, Larry," the man nodded. "Steady, Shan. Try him again, son."

He accompanied the boy's next repeated command with a wave of his hand. Larry went for the bird, got it neatly, and came ashore to Wilson.

"I want you to take it from him," Wilson told the lad. "Do it easy, and pat him a little first. He likes it. That's it. I want him to get used to you."

"To me?" the boy wondered.

"Yes. I want you and him to be good friends. He's sort of nervous, but I think he's a good dog."

"He's a dandy!" the boy confirmed. "He's pure bred, isn't he?"

"Pretty close to it, I'd say. I don't know his breeding. Anyway, he's yours."

"Mine?" the boy exclaimed. "Gosh!" His eyes shone, expressing the thanks for which his young tongue found no words.

"Uh-huh," Wilson nodded. "Now I want to tell you something about him, so you'll know how to handle him. He's a good hunting dog naturally, but he's been abused. He's been starved and kicked and licked half to death. He ain't exactly cowed, but he's been so near it that it's just on the balance, even now. When I got him, he was scared of me and of everybody. He's just coming out of that—beginning to find out that there's such things as decent human beings in the world—but you've got to be mighty easy with him. You've got to speak to him gentle and quiet, and no matter what he does or don't do, you mustn't punish him. If you lose your temper with him just once, you'll undo what I've made a start at, and what I want you to keep up—teachin' him confidence in human bein's. Now, will you remember all that?"

"You bet I will!" the boy promised. "I'll treat him right. There won't be nobody but me feed him or lay a hand on him. A real Irish retriever! Gee! it's awful good of you, Mr. Wilson."

"That's all right, son," Wilson told him. "I want you to have a good dog, and I want this dog to have a good master and a good home. So it's about an even break. He'll make you a good chum. He's mighty affectionate, and you can pet him all you like. The more, the better. He's sort of taken a notion to me, in the short time I've had him, but he'll take to you as well or better, in a few days. Now, we'll just sit down and wait for ducks. You do the shootin' and handle the dog. After that I'll go home with you, so you won't have to lead him. That'd make him nervous and get him off to a bad start."

Toward evening, Larry had retrieved half a dozen ducks for his new master, to the high disgust of Shan, to whom the rôle of spectator was new and ungrateful. Wilson went home with the boy, and after supper took pains to explain to his father his ideas concerning the dog, finding him sympathetic, for he was a good man with animals. Then he went home. He knew that once more Larry's world had been shattered, but he had a certain warm consciousness that he had done his best for the canine waif that had crossed his path.

Shan, as he stalked beside his master on their homeward way down the brush-fringed road lit by a cold young moon, plainly approved the resumption of their strait companionship. At home, Wilson lit his pipe and settled down for an hour's reading. Presently the big Chesapeake rose and came to sit beside him, thrusting his muzzle beneath his master's arm. Wilson thought he understood.

"You're tellin' me it's good to be alone again, just the two of us, ain't you, old pup?" he said, as he caressed the smooth, broad head and rubbed the great, muscular neck. "So it is. But at that, Larry is a pretty good little dog. I could have got fond of him. I'll bet right now the poor little cuss is wonderin' what's goin' to happen to him next. I wonder if he ever had a decent home? I wonder who had him before that damn Cleary?"

As Larry obviously could never supply this information, Wilson remained in ignorance.

Tom Wilson went on his hunt with Claflin without seeing more of his canine protégé; and he and Claflin, once away by themselves, made a good hunt of it. They were old cronies and enjoyed each other's company. They did not return for a fortnight, and when they did, it was with plans for another and final shoot for that season already laid. Wilson was busy for several days. Then he decided to see how Larry had settled down. The dog had had time to adopt his young master and fit into his new surroundings.

AGAIN it was a Saturday morning, after a hard frost. Wilson took his light sixteen gauge and Shan, and instead of following the shore struck off through the woods. The ground was piled with a leafy carpet which rustled underfoot. The trees, save the coniferæ, were bare-armed. It was a morning when smokes go straight upward, when sounds carry far, when the air possesses a great clarity.

Such a morning Wilson loved. Though he might have had several shots at partridge, he did not lift the gun tucked under his arm. He walked slowly, sniffing the odors of fallen leaves, breathing the crisp air with keen enjoyment. On such a morning it was good to be alive, to be one's own master, to have the open to revel in. A faint savor of the keen zest of his boyhood in woods and waters and the outdoor world came back to him across the intervening years; a flash of memory of old, forgotten things, of sounds and scents calling up misty visions of long ago.

He struck into a long-disused tote road, now partly grown with saplings, its ancient corduroying rotten, green with moss, and followed it.

Ahead of him the report of a gun shattered the silence, startling him, dissipating his mood. An instant later a partridge sailed down the old road, and at sight of him swerved wildly to the left. Automatically, in pure reflex action, he pitched his gun to his shoulder, wheeled and swung. At the sharp rap of the nitro, the whirring wings folded, and the body of the bird, just topping the brush, seemed to sink into it.

As Shan came back with the bird, young Anson and Larry appeared. The boy was carrying a partridge. The dog trotted beside, sniffing at the bird. He carried head and tail high. There was companionship in his bearing.

"I got one," the boy announced proudly, "on the wing. If I'd had a double barrel, I'd have got both."

"Take the other, anyway," said Wilson, handing him the bird. "I didn't mean to shoot. How is Larry coming on?"

"Fine!" the boy replied. "He doesn't seem afraid of anything now, and he stays right with me. I guess he's going to be a one-man dog."

"That's the kind to have," Wilson agreed. "I'm mighty glad to hear it."

He bent to pat the grotesque, topknotted head, rubbed the neck and scratched the ears. Larry took these caresses in friendly manner, but almost as he would have taken them from a stranger. He remembered Wilson, but it was plain to the latter that the dog now knew to whom he belonged.

Which was as it should be, and as he had hoped. Larry exchanged greetings with Shan. Then he looked at his young master expectantly, impatiently. Apparently the mutual adoption of boy and dog was complete.

"Going down to the bay for a crack at the ducks?" Wilson asked.

"Yes, I guess so. Are you coming, too?"

"No, not to-day. I'm just fooling around. Good luck, son!"

"Thanks, Mr. Wilson. Same to you. Larry's sure going to be some dog! Good-by."

Wilson went on a few steps and then turned, looking after the pair as they went down the old tote road, the boy walking briskly, the dog nosing the brush. Just a boy and a dog, going hunting together on a bright fall morning! But into old Tom Wilson's eyes crept a certain wistfulness. And after they had passed from sight, his mental vision still beheld a boy and a dog—not young Anson and Larry—but another dog remembered as Beaver, now dust for forty years, and another boy—the boy he used to be.

So long he stood motionless that Shan became uneasy.

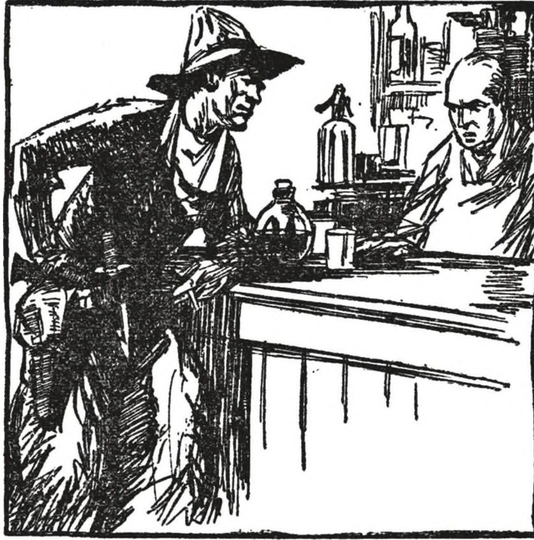
"Ar-r-rh!" said Shan.

Another story by Mr. A. M. Chisholm will appear in an early issue of THE POPULAR.

THE COWBOYS OF THE SPANISH MAIN

THE word "buccaneer" lives on in a romantic haze in the mind of almost every American. From childhood up he has met in book, in painting, in moving picture, and in fireside yarn that strange, thrilling word, trailing crimson and glorious adventure across the seas which encircle the West Indies. The origin of "buccaneer," however, is not quite so romantic. "Butcher" would be a free translation. In those exciting years after Columbus had discovered Hispaniola—now Haiti—for the honor and glory of Isabella and Ferdinand and the profit of old Spain, the Castilian governors of this island, which formed the hub of the dons' acquisitions in the New World, waged a private war with some French and English squatters whose headquarters was on the adjacent rocky islet of Tortuga. These hearties lived a robust and boisterous life, supporting themselves by hunting and killing the wild cattle which abounded on Hispaniola. They cured the meat by smoking over a slow fire, a method learned from the Carib Indians, erstwhile lords of the island, and preserved the skins and then sold both meat and hides to skippers of ships who put into Tortuga to stock up with water and incidentally with an excellent food commodity which was very cheap for the fact that the royal court of Spain collected no taxes on its production or sale. These wild hunters were called "boucaniers," a French term signifying persons engaged in smoke-curing meat.

The Spanish authorities mercilessly hounded these squatters and defeated them in many bloody engagements with pike and cutlass, until finally, in despair, they gave up the profession of purveyors of bootleg meat and took to the sea in long boats, swooping down upon the dignified but clumsy and poorly defended merchant galleons of the Main. This new venture proved so profitable that the entire polyglot population of Tortuga gave up the beef industry and flew the Jolly Roger on the prows of captured ships.



Brown's in Town

By John L. Considine and Patrick Casey

The chips were clacking on the gaming tables when Ned Ingram made his big play. Now even in the refurbished West of to-day, a grown man can't do what Ned did and still cherish safety and comfort. Perhaps the effectiveness of his act was due to its novelty, the implicit drama with which it was charged. But the fact is, Ned did get away with it, and you are at liberty to supply whatsoever reasons you will for his astounding success.

IF this story were written fifty or more years ago, it would properly begin with the two bearded strangers, an old and younger man, journey-weary and cold-benumbed, alighting from the Overland stage in front of the Nugget Hotel of La Java City on a raw and gusty night in mid-November.

Being up-to-date and craving action, we jump all such atmospheric preliminaries and launch forth with: The elderly man—ha! you've recognized him—returned to his son—for it was he—at the post office where he had asked for mail addressed to Edward Ingram.

"Ned," said "Old Man" Ingram, in a complaining tone, "the clerk told me they were full to the limit. The stage driver was right. I'm plumb tuckered out, but I've looked about and there's no other place but the Nugget House to put up at. The rest are all shacks of dance halls and gambling hells."

"We'll have to get a room for you somehow, dad," said the young fellow determinedly. They recrossed the unpaved street to the hotel. "You take a seat by the stove in the lobby here, dad," he suggested, "while I prospect around a bit."

He spoke in a slow deliberate drawl—because he was in the West where men always speak that a way. His actions were correspondingly lacking in impetuosity. Especially for so youthful a man, although to judge from his sandy beard and long, unkempt red hair curling about the brim of his cap, it would have been difficult to estimate his precise age.

He did not charge directly down upon the offending clerk. No, he sauntered about the lobby, bringing up slightly to the rear of the desk upon which leaned the clerk, a stoutish, loose-lipped man of about forty, also bearded and with a large, yellow diamond in his shirt front. The clerk was chatting with a departing guest who was just settling his account and leaving a room vacant.

"A burly ruffian," the client was saying. "A big, red-headed, sandy-whiskered lout with mean little bloodshot eyes. It was at breakfast and I ast him for a knife to cut the loaf of bread. You won't believe me, but I'm willing to take solemn oath that knife was this long!" And the man extended his hands to indicate a length of about eighteen inches.

"I've seed them most that long," assented the clerk matter-of-factly. "A good foot, anyway."

" 'You may not care to use this for carving that hunk of dummy,' says the lop-eared geezer, 'when I tell you I've killed sixteen men with it.' " The narrator paused, aghast again at the recollection.

"What did you do?" asked the clerk, with a smile.

"Do? What could I do? Couldn't very well refuse a feller like that, could I? So I took the knife and cut the bread with it. But I lost my appetite instanter."

"Don't wonder," sympathized the clerk perfunctorily.

The other wasn't finished, however. "Think of the comp'ny employing a murderer like that as station keeper!" he exploded.

"Uh-huh! They do lay themselves out to do some outlandish things," drawled the clerk, and stifled an incipient yawn. "I've heard tell of this Sam Brown afore. He carved up a promising young faro dealer over Marston way. Popular young sport, too. Whopping big funeral. Too bad."

"Yet it might have been worser," qualified the other. "Brown might have chanced to stop over here and taken a pussonal dislike to the cut of your jib and whiskers."

"True," agreed the clerk. "And same's by, I'm glad he's in Ruby and fixed permanent with a job. Hope he stays put there till the vigilantes git busy and make him a present of a Manila necktie."

"Waal, if he ever gits to be belle of the ball at a hanging bee," drawled the guest, with a touch of malice, "it won't be in Ruby, old socks, 'cause he's heading this way. He mentioned he'd be dropping into La Java in a day or two."

"The deuce he did! When did you say you passed through Ruby, mister?"

"Just four days gone."

"I believe," observed the clerk, standing erect now, "you said he wears sandy whiskers, a big fellow?"

"Sandy beard, reddish hair and big as all outdoors. You ain't going to spit in his eye or do anything rash of that sort?" the departing one inquired.

"You bet I ain't, pardner!" was his emphatic reply. "Sam Brown is my bosom chum from the second I clap eyes on that red head and sandy whiskers of hisn! The best in the house won't be good enough for Sam, you'll hear me tootin' from the momint he puts his John Hancock on the register—providing, a course, he knows how to write."

"Oh, he kin scribble after a fashion. Station keepers must be able to sign their names, leastways. But if the pen is mightier than the bowie knife, Sam Brown hasn't found it out yet!" And slipping his receipted bill into a wallet, the guest, in a certain spiteful elation, left the clerk to his now obviously serious reflections.

INSTEAD of asking for the vacated room, Edward Ingram left the Nugget Hotel as unobtrusively as he had entered it and, scanning the shop signs,

strolled down the main and only street. He came to where a monstrous wooden gun indicated a gunsmithery and, entering, inspected a counter show case wherein reposed an assortment of weapons. The proprietor stepped forth from the rear.

"Have you any secondhand bowies?" broached Ingram.

"Sure," affirmed the smith. "Here's one with three notches in the handle. You can have it cheap. The steel ain't warranted, though."

"That's all right. I don't expect to have much use for it, only show," Ingram smiled reflectively. "But what do the three notches indicate?" This question made it evident how new to the West this young man was.

The gunsmith smiled toothily.

"They mean that this here knife has killed three men!"

"Better still!" commented Ingram. "I'll take it." Having paid the demanded price, he thrust the knife through the front of his belt and strode back to the Nugget House and up to the desk.

The clerk was busy sorting the newly arrived mail, his flabby lips mumbling the names. Ingram picked up a pen and drew the register toward him.

"Ain't no use registering," announced the clerk, without looking up. He had detected the movement with the tail of his eyes, while his hands still automatically shuffled the envelopes.

"Why not, pard?" drawled Ingram, and scrawled a name in enormous script across the page.

"No rooms—watcher think!" snapped the clerk, irritated that his injunction had been ignored.

Ingram shifted the book to bring the signature under the other's gaze. The clerk's eyes widened as he read: "Sam Brown, Ruby Station."

"Wha—why——" he stammered, looking up for the first time at the liberal spread of sandy whiskers and fringe of red hair showing beneath the cap. "When did you get in, Mr. Brown, sir?"

"Evening stage. And I want a room. Want it quick!"

"Sartainly, sartainly, Mr. Brown." Nervously the clerk eyed the long bowie in the visitor's belt.

"I have a friend here, too. Want a room for him," growled Ingram.

"Sure, Mr. Brown, we'll fix him up! Any friend of yours, you know!" And he clasped his fingers together to still their trembling.

"It's that old man nodding by the stove, the one you told half an hour ago there were no rooms," Ingram reminded him mischievously.

Fifteen minutes later, Edward Ingram, Sr., was enjoying the best rest he had experienced since leaving his home in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, weeks before.

"Do you happen to know a young man named Ingram, George Ingram?" Edward queried of the clerk, after Old Man Ingram had gone upstairs.

"George Ingram? Yep, I know him, Mr. Brown. Is that old man his dad?" The clerk remembered the name last signed on the register.

"That's none of your business, pard!" snapped Edward, in his rôle of the uncouth Sam Brown. "Just answer me this: Where does George Ingram hang out?"

"Well, he's a sort of sport, Mr. Brown," explained the stoutish clerk. "Gambles considerably. Not a professional; he'd be better off if he was, wouldn't lose so reg'larlike. But lemme see. He puts in most of his time at Sawdust Corner. Or he might be found at one of the other joints—the Delta, Senate, Patterson's or Nate Newman's. You ain't got anything agin' him, Mr. Brown, has you?"

Edward ignored the question.

"Which is the nearest of those places?" he wanted to know.

"Sawdust Corner, Mr. Brown, directly across the street."

Contrary to its name, Sawdust Corner proved to be rather luxuriously furnished, with velvet carpets on the floor, paintings on the walls and a myriad of glass pendants reflecting the blaze of many lights. There were little wicker tables set about and upward of a hundred women and men lolling in the chairs, so it took Edward Ingram several minutes to ascertain that his brother was not among them. At the Delta and the Senate, his quest was no better rewarded.

HE was striking back to the hotel when the sound of music drew him into a resort called The Chrysopolis Dance Hall. It was a hurdy-gurdy house, but the mechano-musical device which gave such places that name had here been superseded by a fiddler and pianist. The rest of the staff consisted of a bartender and six "girls," most of whom were blond and stout. The male patrons paid half a dollar each for a dance and afterward were required to contribute a like sum at the bar for drinks for themselves and partners.

Ingram noticed that one of the girls, dark and slender, wore very long skirts, longer than those affected by the others. There seemed something hauntingly familiar about her demure little face and he frankly stared at her in perplexity. He couldn't help observing, when the dance was over and it came time to flock to the bar, that she quietly ordered mineral water instead of the more conventional beer or whisky.

As the music struck up for the next dance and she approached the fringe of spectators, unescorted and quite close to him, Ingram became sharply certain that she was the very same girl who had mysteriously left Lock Haven shortly after his brother George had fared West.

"Aren't you Sally Unsworth?" he asked, leaning toward her and removing his hat.

She shook her dark head quickly.

"No, Sally Ingram now," she answered, and then on second thought, quite surprised and upset by his question, looked at him with a puzzled frown.

"Then you married George!" he exclaimed. "But what are you doing here, Sally? Where's George? Don't you know me?"

"Why, Ned!" she ejaculated, the frown clearing and her cheeks blushing. "I'd never have known you with those whiskers!" She forgot in her astonishment to answer his queries.

"I intended to have the hirsute reduced as soon as I got to town," explained Ned, "but I found a use for the hairiness just after my arrival and now I don't know but I'll keep the whiskers a while longer. But come to one side with me, Sally, where you can tell me everything."

She was very nervous. "Don't misunderstand my being here in this dance hall, Ned," she began apologetically. "George and I have had a pretty hard struggle—he's been sick—and this was my one way of earning a living and helping out. You're new to the West and so this will strike you as odd, but you'll soon perceive that it is perfectly all right."

Ned held up his hand in remonstrance. "I can appreciate you have done this for George," he said sympathetically. "Tell me about him."

"Well, at first he made thousands of dollars turning over claims. That was when he wrote me to come on to marry him, inclosing the fare. But I must have been somewhat of a jinx," she smiled sadly, "because shortly after we married, the boom slackened here, things accordingly went against George and he took to gambling to recuperate. Instead he lost steadily and, through worrying about it, worked himself into a state of

nerves and sickness. Then was when I took this job here."

"Tell me, Sally," asked Ned kindly, "why you left Lock Haven so quietly, without a word of good-by?"

"George's instructions. He told me not to say anything, particularly to your father, who was set on George finishing in the school of mines, even though he had flunked out once."

"I understand now," Ned nodded. "George was always the favorite son," he went on, a bit wistfully. "That's why I'm out here with my dad. He couldn't rest easy till he had seen George again and pleaded with him to return home and to college."

"Your father here, too!" she exclaimed. Then, in a real glow: "You're both in the very nick of time. George has been in the worst of luck, as I said, but to-night he's having a wonderful run up at Nate Newman's. Yes, gambling. He has the check rack empty, I've heard, and could cash in for about four thousand dollars, if they'd let him."

"If they'd let him?" repeated Ned hollowly, not comprehending.

"That's the trouble," she went on. "It was all right so long as he was a consistent loser, and that mainly at this same Nate Newman's; but now that he's making a killing and they know he means to quit, it's a different story. I heard to-night—you hear everything in a little place like this—that Newman had hired a gunman named Hank Gosser, who just arrived from over the Sierras. They say Gosser broke jail in California where he was under sentence for murder. If George attempts to cash in to the good, this Gosser is under orders to pick a fight with him and kill him!"

Edward Ingram started in spite of himself. Sally clutched both his arms convulsively.

"Oh, I've been half crazed," she confessed, "wondering what to do! And here you appear, Ned, as though sent by an act of Providence! But," she added on reconsideration, her mouth drooping dolefully, "what can you do against a gunman like Hank Gosser?"

"Is he so bad then?" asked Ingram, trying to smile to hearten her.

"Bad?" she repeated seriously, her brow knuckling. "Why, he's killed four men, Ned, and they call him the quickest man with a gun on either side of the mountains!"

"Worse than Sam Brown then?"

The girl fairly glared at him. "Sam Brown? Why no, not quite. Sam Brown's a demon personified. He's killed over a dozen men."

"Sixteen, to be precise," corrected Ned, smiling wryly. "Did you ever see him, Sally?"

"No, though he was here once. But he left overnight, as it were. This is a shifting population, Ned," she went on to explain. "There were three times as many people here a year ago as there are now. The bad men Brown herded with struck out for the Idaho mines by way of Walla Walla, and I think he went with them. It was rumored he did."

Ned shook his red head.

"No, he's in this State, Sally, and up to recently was in charge of the station at Ruby. The stage driver told me a lot about Brown and his exploits on our way in. To all intents and purposes," he ended, with a peculiar smile, "Brown's in town to-night!"

"Brown's in town?" she echoed, staring at him, nonplused.

"Yes, Brown's in town," he repeated, the smile broadening. "Which brings me to what I want you to do. But first, tell me—you've been longer in the West than I have, Sally—— Is a man who is clever with the bowie, like this Sam Brown, supposed to be more dangerous at close quarters than a gun wielder like Hank Gosser?"

"Every time," she answered readily. Still she failed to perceive what he was

driving at. "I can't see any connection ——" she began, when he asked:

"How far is it from here to Nate Newman's?"

"Three or four doors."

"Could you slip on a cloak, Sally, and go to the side door—I suppose all these places have 'family entrances.'"

She nodded.

"Call for the barkeep," went on Ned, "and tell him that Brown's in town, that he's going to call there presently and that it pleases him to have his name remembered there, and always with the 'mister'——"

"I won't have to tell him all that," she broke in. "He'll turn over the house to Sam Brown the moment he sees him!"

"Then explain to him what Sam Brown looks like——"

"Describe the desperado," she fairly commanded, not without a humor of her own.

"He's about five foot eleven."

She repeated the measurement, sizing Ned up at the same time, with slowly dawning perception.

"Square-shouldered and weighs about a hundred and ninety."

"Yes, yes!"

"With long, sandy whiskers and red hair curling about his cap."

She couldn't help it; despite her deep anxiety, she bubbled with laughter, perhaps as much through nervousness as with mirth.

"Why, Ned," she quavered, "that's exactly a description of yourself!"

"Precisely!" he grinned. "Describe me to the bartender and that will fill the bill as a description of Sam Brown. Then ask the barkeep to have George step outside a moment, which will give you a chance to warn your husband of his danger from this Hank——"

"But I've already done that."

"You have? Good girl! Then you have merely to explain to George that I'm here with his dad, that I'm going to show at Nate Newman's and take a hand in the game and that, above all, he's not to know me, neither by word or look."

"I'll do it, Ned. How soon will you be at Newman's?"

"In about half an hour. I have a few other arrangements to make and I want to give the news time to sink in and cause effect."

RETURNING to the hotel, Ingram found the stoutish clerk lolling half asleep in an armchair.

"Come out of it, man!" growled the alias Sam Brown, shaking him. "I want you to do something."

The clerk heaved afoot.

"Why, good evening, Mr. Brown!" he greeted, with cloying cordiality. "I'll do anything for you, anything in my power."

"Go down to Nate Newman's and tell the barkeep I'm calling there to-night."

"But—oh, I'm sorry, sir—but I can't very well leave the office, Mr. Brown."

"If your boss kicks," insisted the inflexible Mr. Brown, "refer him to me."

The clerk glanced regretfully from the easy-chair to the barrel-shaped stove, glowing like a hot coal. "All right," he assented, with almost cheerful grace. "Is that all, sir?"

"That'll be plenty, I think," returned Ingram, with a cryptic smile. To himself, he elaborated the idea. The announcement of the hotel clerk, coming on the heels of Sally's warning, would serve to throw the white-aproned dignitary of Newman's into an opaque-blue funk. His state would naturally communicate itself to the others. Also, the clerk's appearance would help to absolve Sally from a too-close connection with the incident and aid, later, in covering up Ned's interest in George.

Ned, as he considered all this, was running up the uncarpeted stairs to his room. He listened for the regular respiration of his sleeping father and

then went on down the hallway to his own cubby. Here he lighted the kerosene lamp, produced a jackknife and added thirteen notches to the three already in the handle of the bowie. Sixteen in all now decorated it.

Disguising the freshness of the new baker's dozen with smears of oil from the untidy side of the lamp, he slipped the blade into his belt and, leaving the hotel, struck out briskly along the main and only street for Newman's.

A LONG, low-ceilinged adobe structure, without partitions, was Newman's. As Ned Ingram swaggered in, his eye fell upon a bar which extended from the doorway down the entire side of the building. He pushed his way bearishly through the groups of men gathered about the entry and paid not the slightest heed to the wrathy glances leveled at him from practically every quarter but one. The white-coated bartender greeted him obsequiously.

"Evening, Mr. Brown!" said the bartender, in uncertain but fervid accents. "What'll your pleasure be to-night, sir?"

"Whisky," grunted the notorious Mr. Brown.

"Here, barkeep," protested a deep voice, "I ordered my drink first."

"So did I," piped the shrill tones of a smaller man. "What kind of a joint are you runnin', anyway?"

Ignoring the complaints, the bartender set a bottle and glass before Ingram.

"Have one on the house, Mr. Brown," he offered.

Gliding a few paces down the bar then, he whispered a single brief sentence to the complainants:

"It's him hisself, Sam Brown!"

Ned overheard this whisper.

The mutterings ceased and, although the disgruntled ones continued to eye the intruder with covert malevolence, they looked quickly away when he happened to glance at them. The potent whisper, fraught with dread, was picked up and carried throughout the groups, which dissolved like magic and drifted apart.

High-handedly Ned made no offer to pay and, turning away from the bar, visited the keno, monte, blackjack and other games, casually scanning the faces of the players. Finally he came to anchor at the faro table.

Every seat was taken, but all save one player was engaged in a "piker's game." The exception was a scantling-thin young man with the inevitable hirsute in the form of a bushy mustache, but with clean-shaven cheeks which revealed an unusual and unhealthy degree of pallor. Even the excitement attendant upon high play failed to awaken a responsive gleam in his dull, heavy, sick-looking eyes.

Stacked before him in orderly array were piles of chips of all colors, from the despised whites to the costly chocolate-browns and yellows. He was betting heavily and, despite the fact that occasionally he lost, his columns of checks were constantly increasing numerically and in height. As Ned paused behind the case keeper, the young plunger chanced to glance up. A momentary flicker of recognition flitted like light across his heavy eyes. He was George Ingram.

He sat on the right of the case keeper, the man who, by a system of wooden balls strung on wires like an old Chinese or Grecian abacus, kept track of the cards that had been dealt. On George's right was a red-nosed, red-shirted miner, and to the dexter hand of the red shirt sat a narrow-chested youth, about five feet ten inches tall and weighing no more than one hundred and thirty pounds.

This last fellow was freshly shaven, slick of hair and garbed with that touch of foppishness peculiar to the professional gambler and most mining-camp

desperadoes. Notwithstanding the heat from the big stove only ten feet away, in which blocks of nut pine afforded a roaring blaze, he shivered almost continuously.

He was, because of this, the butt of many jokes from the dealer—a clerical-appearing person who wore an eye shade—and also the lookout, who sat on a low platform a little behind and to the left of the dealer. These twain seemed to find an inexhaustible trove of gayety in his shivering fits, rallying him forever on the thinness of his "California blood." From the geographical allusion and the further fact that they addressed the chilly one variously as "Hen" and "Hank," Ned Ingram was convinced that he was none other than the gunman, Hank Gosser.

NED had never before seen a faro game. It did not take him long, however, to perceive that the gunman was laying the foundation for a scrap with George. He would occasionally place a bet on the same card and, if it won, pick up not only his own stake and winnings, but George's as well. The victim affected, with diplomacy, to ignore the imposition; yet the sole apparent result of his forbearance seemed to be to embolden his oppressor, who repeated the thieving maneuver with increasing frequency.

Gosser made himself even more offensive to the red-shirted miner who sat between himself and George Ingram. Not alone did he appropriate the red shirt's bets now and then, but he trampled heavily on his toes whenever he reached over the layout to place a wager and also dug him occasionally in the ribs under pretext of extending his hand for a pile of chips. It became evident, to Ned, that the gunman's aim was to drive the red shirt from the table and thus remove the only buffer between himself and George. Ned decided it was high time for him to intervene.

Resting his elbow not at all lightly on a red-shirted shoulder, Ned leaned forward as if to observe the play more closely. Ignorant of gaming-house amenities, he did not sense the breach of proprieties of which he thus became guilty. Not merely was he inconveniencing the miner physically, as he intended, but also he was incurring the suspicion of being a willful hoodoo, should the red shirt lose.

As Ned's elbow dug into his shoulder, the miner placed a ten-dollar gold piece on the king. The king turned up, within half a minute, a loser. The exasperated red shirt, seething from the indignities already put upon him by Hank, whom he evidently feared, was more than ripe thereat to vent his wrath upon the bewhiskered young jinx.

"What do you think I am—a leanin' post!" he shouted, flinging off Ned's elbow with a shunt of the shoulder and swinging round to glare up at the hoodoo.

Ned felt the time had come for that act of wanton aggression which, he had been told, usually marked the advent of Sam Brown. Brown, of course, would have used his knife, but that was beyond Ned. He had undergone a season's experience in handling logs, once, and he possessed besides some knowledge of wrestling and boxing. Wherefore he seized the red-shirted shoulder that had just thrust him aside and whirled its owner up out of his seat and partly off his balance.

As the miner teetered on his high-heeled boots, wholly surprised and bewildered, Ned reversed the swing on his shoulder and sent him spinning headlong to the other side of the room, where he disrupted a group of monte players. These gamesters, not realizing that his momentum had been involuntarily acquired, believed him drunk and received him with kicks and violent imprecations.

The miner stood dazed for the nonce

by the suddenness of it all; then as his mind cleared and he pulled himself together, he faced about toward Ned with a return of warlike spirit. But a friend, rushing up, whispered the dread name of Sam Brown in his ear and he merely contented himself with glaring balefully at the back of his assailant's red head.

For Ned, without so much as a second glance, had slipped into the vacated chair and, amid a hush that was at once respectful and nervous, had placed a golden eagle on the layout and called for a stack of reds. He ordered, in the next breath, a cigar which necessitated the presence of the bartender.

As that white-aproned and white-jacketed functionary approached in obedience to a sign from the lookout, Ned half lifted from his chair and, leaning forward to place a bet, trod purposefully upon Hank's toes. The gunman immediately leaped afoot.

"Hell's fire, man!" he exploded. "Where are you walking with those gunboats? What do you think I am—a footstool!"

Ned made no pretense of apology. He ignored the fellow. His eyes remained glued to the layout. But his right hand rested significantly on the indented haft of the bowie in his belt, while his left fingered the stake which he seemed in doubt where to place.

The bartender came up at that critical and auspicious moment. Instantly he took in the situation and, leaning toward Hank, spoke convictwise out of the corner of his mouth. He whispered just two words, but they proved magic words. The contortion of rage vanished from the gunman's face and, deliberately shifting his chair, he sat himself down as far as possible from this unpleasant and notorious neighbor.

A SUCCESSION of resounding raps summoned the bartender peremptorily back to the bar. He resented the imperious interruption; he wanted to watch the play between the gunman and the bowie wielder; but he quickly swallowed his vexation when he caught sight of the cause of the din.

He was a redoubtable-looking individual, slouch-hatted, roughly garbed, easily over six feet tall and certainly all of two hundred and fifty pounds in weight. With the tone and mien of one accustomed to prompt service, he barked out a crisp order. The bartender, versed in the study of men and manners, thought it wise to be speedy in producing glass and bottle.

Then, while the ruffian was engaged in pouring and drinking, he indulged in further observation. He noted the untrimmed sandy whiskers overspreading the man's face, the unkempt shaggy locks of red hair straggling from beneath the wide brim of the slouch hat.

"That's durn bad redeye!" remarked the owner of these characteristics, and he made to turn away from the bar.

"It's stuff yet to be paid for," the barkeep reminded him.

The fellow veered about slowly, planted both feet upon the brass rail and, lifting himself above the bar and craning his neck, surveyed the bartender from the tail of his apron to the top of his bald head.

"My name is Brown!" he thereupon proclaimed. "I pay when I feel like it and I don't feel like it to-night, see?"

His bearded face was close, most of his enormous torso was above the horizon of the bar, and the white-jacketed functionary couldn't help but see the long bowie knife projecting from his belt. There were a plenitude of notches in the haft. Almost unconsciously the bartender began counting them. There were sixteen.

He was utterly confounded. He shot a glance toward that other Brown at the faro table, who seemed almost a gentleman in comparison with this uncouth, shaggy cinnamon bear. He managed to stammer:

"But—b-but which Mr. Brown?"

The stranger came down upon the flooring as though his insteps had slipped from the rail. He favored the bartender with one withering look. But there was in that look a certain degree of stupefaction, besides.

"Why—Sam Brown, you fool! There ain't no other Brown when I'm about, savvy!"

But the bartender didn't, quite. His face was a study. There was no further need to scrutinize the ruffian opposite. His gaze, instead, sought that more youthful desperado at the faro table. He came, on a hunch, to a sudden decision.

"Have another drink, Mr. Brown," he invited cordially, and he put a fresh glass upon the rosewood and produced from a concealed recess a new sealed bottle. "This is the boss' private stuff, plenty old. I'd have offered it to you in the fust place," he went on subtly, to explain, "on'y there's another gent here to-night a-passing himself off as Sam Brown and I natchally didn't tumble that you was the real, simon-pure, dyed-in-the-wool and blown-in-the-bottle article till I give you the second up and down. I'm apologizin' to you, sir, for being taken in by a four-flushing tinhorn. It's a sorter busy night, you see and——"

"Aw, stow the guff!" growled the newcomer. "You say there's a sidewinder here misusin' the name of Sam Brown? Whar is the lop-eared ky-ote? Show me the rooster!"

"That's him over there playing faro. The young feller with his back to us, though you can git a kinder side look at his whiskers." The bartender smiled with great inward joy as he indicated Ned Ingram.

"The redhead?" queried the real Sam Brown.

The bartender did not note it, but a new and surprising inflection had entered the other's voice. Between persons of the same sort of pigmentation, according to psychology, there exists a deep-rooted affinity, and perhaps the fact that Ned Ingram was also red haired aroused within the stranger an unconscious but ineluctable sentiment.

IN any case, to the utter confusion of the bartender, the real Sam Brown chuckled! Then he turned his attention to the bottle. But his thoughts were elsewhere, engrossed, and his hand trembled, as though with the excitation of a strong and novel idea. When he poured out a drink, the liquid overran the brim of the glass.

Had he been an ordinary customer, the bartender would have indicated his displeasure thereat by throwing a towel and a bar of soap upon the counter, and requesting the "whisky hog" to continue with his bath and not mind him! But he never even thought of offering such an affront to this two-legged package of dynamite. He ignored it utterly.

Sam Brown drained the glass and wiped his sandy whiskers with the sunburned back of his hand. But he offered no comment on the merits of the boss' stuff, although the bartender was hopefully waiting for just that. Instead and thoughtfully, he poured out another generous dram. Then, ere swallowing it, he said:

"I got an idee, barkeep. I wanta send a leetle billeedoo to that fire-eatin', red-headed rooster what's misappropriated my name!"

The bartender did not quite comprehend.

"I hope you settle his hash, good and proper!" he managed to respond, almost prayerfully.

"Oh, don't you worry none about that! And don't think for a momint I'm going to trust you with the message. All you'll have to do is pass the note to him and then lay off and watch the fireworks! No lip, mind you, and nary

a sign to them others to show that the real Sam Brown is here, comprendo?"

The bartender nodded.

"Whatever you say, Mr. Brown," he replied obsequiously.

"Waal, then, what're you stallin' about!" exploded Sam Brown. "Git me pen and paper!"

To the white-jacketed factotum of Newman's, the known world, wherein Sam Brown had always acted like a madman, had in verity come to an end.

MEANTIME, if it had been Hank Gosser's intention by removing his chair to afford himself greater freedom for the use of his revolver, the maneuver proved fruitless. He had no sooner switched his position than Ned Ingram followed suit, and the gunman found himself as closely crowded as ever.

Seething within, Gosser was too seasoned a veteran to allow his rage to show and so he preserved, outwardly, an aspect of calm. Besides, a certain amount of fear was leavening his rage. Had he planned to kill a man, he would have gone about it with the same nettling tactics as those pursued by the notorious knife wielder. He was a professional man slayer, but, like his ilk, he had no stomach for death himself. He was sure the fellow was there to get him and he resolved, if it could be avoided, to give no pretext for the use of that murderous-looking bowie.

Anyway, the supposed Sam Brown was not "his meat" that night. He was there to do for George Ingram and the sooner that business was over and done with, the sooner would he be relieved of the discomforts of this chilly and harassing night. So extending his bluish fingers, shivering as usual, he picked up a stack of blues which the dealer had just placed on the ace in payment of a bet won by George Ingram.

The stack represented twenty dollars, but George thought it politic to ignore the robbery. Hank immediately placed the pilfered chips upon the seven and, that card coming up a winner, the dealer laid another stack of blues, similar in height, beside it. Before the gunman could reclaim them, however, Ned seized and added them to the stacks before his brother, George.

"Them's mine," expostulated Gosser.

The militant Ingram merely smiled at him, a mocking smile that seemed to invite battle. The gunman bit his lip to keep control of himself.

"Yep," interposed a new voice, that of the lookout who had just come on duty at the close of the preceding deal. "Them's Mr. Gosser's. I see'd him place 'em."

Purposely or otherwise, the lookout had ignored the theft of the ace bet. Ned reached over the layout. Snatching up the case keeper, that heavy, wooden-framed and hinged contrivance like an abacus, he folded it like a book and hurled it. By the fraction of an inch, it missed the lookout's head, imbedded one corner in the wall and fell to the floor with a loud clatter.

The lookout surveyed with widening eyes that fresh hole in the adobe. Less than an inch closer and the case keeper would have crushed his temple. He did not know that Ned had intentionally missed him. His hands trembled and the face that he turned back to the game was a mottled gray.

He said nothing, though. He was too overcome. He had interfered to curry favor with his employer's minion and, strangely, Gosser had failed him. Hank Gosser, the gunman who was always "honing" for trouble, had not even reached for his revolver.

Gosser himself was nonplused. The flight of the case keeper was in harmony with the capricious disposition of Sam Brown, according to all he had heard, yet why had it been flung at the lookout instead of himself? Pondering the problem, gazing at Ned with puzzled

frown, Hank became convinced to a certitude that he was being reserved for the bowie.

A roustabout restored the case keeper to its accustomed place on the faro table and, at the same time, with a smirk on his face, the bartender came up and thrust a folded bit of paper into Ned's hand. Ned read:

If you live up to the name you've jumped, all well and good, I'll lay off. But if you fall down on the Brown fambly, you red-headed rooster, you'll have to answer to the reel——
SAM BROWN.

Ned swung quickly about in his chair and, gazing after the retreating back of the bartender, saw beyond him, leaning nonchalantly against the bar, a burly ruffian, sandy-whiskered and red-haired. He noted the wickedly gleaming bowie in the fellow's belt, and then he became the victim of an illusion. He thought it *must* be illusory: Sam Brown was winking at him!

With an unaccountable flair of bravado, Ned waved back to him. It was as if to acknowledge that the provisions of the note were a bargain.

The dealer had resumed his task of slipping the cards, one by one, from their metal box; but Ned felt that the time had come to try conclusions. He must show this Sam Brown, prove up, as the fellow almost put it, on the claim he had jumped. Leaning slightly toward George, as the turn was called, he whispered:

"Cash in!"

Without so much as a nod to indicate he had heard, George assembled his varicolored stacks and pushed them across the layout toward the dealer. That individual proceeded in leisurely fashion to shuffle the deck for the next deal. This was a custom which gave the potential winner a chance to reconsider before drawing down his money. It often resulted in his resuming play and losing all he had.

But George sat with folded arms, evidencing by look and manner he was through. And Ned Ingram, suddenly remembering the whetstone he had slipped into his pocket ere leaving the hotel, produced it, laid it upon the table and began to sharpen the blade of his bowie as indifferently as though he were putting an edge on a razor before shaving.

THERE is something appalling about steel, even to the gun-toting man-killer. Hank Gosser felt never more chilly than he did at that moment. The dealer gritted his teeth a time or two, brought his shuffling of the cards to an abrupt close, and began to count George's array of chips. There were many stacks of them and the business of returning them to their ordained place in the check rack proved a matter of minutes. All the while, the whetting of the bowie went on with a shivery, frictional sound.

"Five thousand, two hundred and fifty dollars, even!" announced the dealer with finality. Yet he looked to George for corroboration.

"Correct," said George, with a slight inclination of the head, and sat waiting for the money.

The dealer settled in twenty-dollar gold pieces, stacking them up in columns of twenty coins each. When he had measured out thirteen such golden columns, George began dropping the double eagles into the side pockets of his coat. As the dealer flipped the final two twenties and a ten onto the layout, Ned, testing the bowie on a hair curling out from the back of his hand, demonstrated beyond doubt that the blade would cut like a razor.

Gosser shot him a vicious sidelong glance, shivered again, and then, anticipating his show-down with George, turned in his checks. He was reaching for his money—a matter of thirty or forty dollars—when Ned gave a last touch to the blade, a flourishing rake

across the stone. It proved too much. The unwarranted steel of the bowie parted at the haft and went tinkling upon the floor.

Gosser's reaching hand relinquished the money and snatched for his revolver. But Ned closed in and, with the heavy knife handle still in his grasp, struck him across the pistol wrist. The man slayer grunted with pain, the revolver dropped from his hand and his hand hung flaccidly.

His wrist was broken.

Ned bent down for the gun. Across the table, the dealer yanked out his revolver from a drawer and, as Ned bobbed up, fired. But George's fist had simultaneously impinged upon his ear and the shot went wild. In another trice, George was scrambling over the table, and the dealer, thrown backward by the impact of his flying body, hit his head upon the floor and passed out.

Shirt-sleeved, suspenders dangling, a little fat man, who looked as though he had been aroused by the din from slumber, ran in through a side door, gun in hand. He had the protuberant stomach and beady black eyes of a guinea pig, and those quick eyes lost no time in taking in the scene. He saw Ned standing, gun in hand, master of the situation, with Gosser bent over the faro table, clutching his broken and painful wrist. Raising the revolver, the fat man took careful aim to avoid hitting the hired gunman.

"No, you don't, Newman!" came a voice from beside him, in an almost conversational tone. "Hands up, or I'll stick you to your own bar like a fly!"

The roly-poly little fellow quivered all over like so much jelly. His hands shot toward the ceiling and the revolver plumped upon the flooring. For a huge ruffian with sandy whiskers and red hair was pressing the point of a long bowie into his protruding stomach.

"Here you, you cock-of-the-walk!" called Sam Brown to Ned, across the building. "Pick up this gat. Your winnin' friend"—meaning George—"has the dealer's. You haven't anything more to worry about from Newman's hired gunman. But you, Nate, you little rat, you've got to buy a drink for us three!"

"I'm afraid I don't care to accept any favor of him," objected Ned, as he picked up Newman's gun.

"Waal, I admire your taste, but damn your judgment," observed Sam Brown dryly. "You ain't drinking with him, remember, you fire-eatin', red-headed rooster; he's serving it, that's all. I'm the only man what sets 'em up when the Browns are in town!" And with a chuckle, he grasped the two brothers by the shoulder as though he were one of them.

Other stories by Messrs. Considine and Casey will be published in forthcoming issues of THE POPULAR.

BEING FOREIGN AT HOME

THE love of things foreign pervades the fair land of America. So much so, in fact, that there are individuals whose profession and means of livelihood is to think up articles which can be given a strange foreign twist and then be dumped on a rising market. There is, for instance, chop suey, the great Chinese dish. Chop suey never got any farther east than San Francisco's Chinatown. Only scholars interested in the manners of occidentals know of it in the ancient land of China.

Pepper

By Robert T. Pound

It was a fair bet and any one's game. Smileow was a stranger to the Broadway stage, a happen-so picked up on a busy city street. Could he hold for a single minute the rapt attention of an amusement-jaded New York audience? Mr. Smileow answered that moot question with a personal appearance.

TWO well-dressed men stepped together from the entrance of a club long known for its connection with the stage. The short, rotund one turned to his companion.

"And I tell you, George, it is impossible! No untrained man can go on the stage and hold an audience for one second, let alone two minutes. Really grip his hearers, I mean."

"I rather agree with you," answered the taller, meticulously attired one addressed as George. "I don't see what Lanchester was getting at, anyway. Stirring an audience isn't a matter of native wit, or anything else but training, or perhaps heredity. The question is easily proved, though. Suppose we ask the first man we meet to try an impromptu act for five minutes between curtains at your show to-night?"

"Ye-es," hesitatingly agreed the little man, who was noted for the long string of successful plays he had produced. "Ye-es. But suppose the fellow we meet has acted, or his parents have? What then?"

"Oh, we'll question him of course, and eliminate any unfair entry; that is, if we can get any one to take us up. How about this lad approaching us now? That coat means he's from the Western sticks, or nowhere."

"We've a proposition to make, if you will listen a moment," said the short man.

"Swing your rope then," suggested the newcomer, as he halted. "I've bought the Woolworth Building twice to-day, and resold it both times."

There was a twinkle in the Westerner's eyes, and yet he kept his right hand

in a curious, fixed, forward position, as if it were paralyzed. He was on foreign range, and fair game. Why not be prepared?

The short man spoke again. "You needn't be afraid, Mr.——"

"Smileow's my name. From the short-grass country, Mr. Stryker."

"Ah, you know me then! From my pictures in the papers, perhaps. That simplifies matters. This is George Windom."

"Just a moment," interrupted Windom. "Mr. Smileow, have you by any chance acted on the stage? Or were your parents actors?"

"Well, I've heard tell my father was a bad actor in his younger days, but perhaps he was justified. He was in a new country and had to be hard or go under."

Windom smiled slightly, while Stryker continued puffingly:

"My friend and I have just disagreed with a man who claims that stage training is not essential in order to hold an audience; in fact, he said that a stranger from the streets, given sufficient provocation, could hold an audience for two minutes."

"And would not even be struck with stage fright," supplemented Windom.

"If I hobble your drift, you want me to be the horse to test your Ford for you?"

"Precisely, precisely. We shall present you to an audience this evening, between the first and second acts, before the curtain. Because of—er—competition from the regular play, we shall require you to hold the audience for one minute only."

"You mean that he must really hold their interest, not merely catch their attention," said Windom.

"Gripping, vital, compelling, stunning!" commented Smileow.

"Even, ah, more so!" said Stryker, blowing his cheeks out like little toy balloons, a sign of pleasure if Smileow had only known it. The roly-poly man had noticed at once the source of those words, which editors use forever to describe their wares. And of course a man familiar with such patter would inevitably resort to some outworn plot to stun his audience.

"We shall of course see that you are properly reimbursed for your trouble," stated Windom, wondering vaguely if his tie was properly knotted.

This stranger had almost a womanish trick of staring at one, slyly, from under his eyebrows, as if he saw a huge joke in the offing. It made a chap uncomfortable, the more so because there was no reason for such a feeling.

"Properly reimbursed," repeated the Westerner, in a deprecating drawl.

Even the hardened producer flushed slightly at the studied inflection of the two words. If this cheap hick thought he was going to put over a show of his own—Stryker mentally raised his bid to five hundred dollars. He would get that back in bets alone.

"Officer, just a moment!" said the Westerner, to a passing policeman.

Windom and Stryker smiled cheerfully as Officer Mansor stopped at Smileow's request and nodded to the producer and his friend. Then the blue-coated Mansor looked inquiringly at the stranger.

"What will it be, sir?"

"These gentlemen and myself have had a slight difference of opinion," replied Smileow. "I can throw a double diamond over my part of the argument so it will never slip on any trail. The trouble is my proof may be costly to these gentlemen, because I will have to try it out between acts of their play. For that reason, I want you to hold this money for me and pay it to Mr. Windom and Mr. Stryker if I do not break my bronc to-night."

Smileow held out three bills to the officer, then slightly withdrew them.

"You will be off duty to-night?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; in fact, I'm just going off now."

"All right then, here is the money."

The officer turned toward a recently lighted window and thumbed the three bills carefully, then whistled softly.

"You must be planning to dynamite the show, sir, if you expect to do three thousand dollars damage."

"It will have to be something like that if I hold the audience for a minute. That was the understanding, gentlemen?"

He turned to the watching pair with his question.

Stryker nodded swiftly. The play had been taken from his hands, but he was not one to refuse such a bid for that reason. He removed a roll of bills from his pocket and began counting.

"Want a thousand, 'Windy?'" he questioned.

"Oh, double the beggar," retorted Windom, with a gesture of annoyance.

STRYKER glanced about in dislike as curious passers-by stopped to see why the officer accosted the well-dressed gentlemen and the Westerner. Maybe here was a pinch.

"Let's step into the club," suggested Stryker.

Presently Officer Mansor wonderingly counted nine thousand dollars in large bills, some of it hastily borrowed from club friends of the two conspirators, and the club till.

"Then I take it, gentlemen, if Mr. Smileow stops the show for one minute to-night, he gets this for his trouble; and if he misses his turn, then you gentlemen retain it as damages? It's a contract to hire, with cash damages for failure, in other words."

Officer Mansor was slightly anxious to exactly define the status of his holdings. His superiors had recently begun a drive against betting of all kinds.

"Exactly, Mansor, exactly!" answered Stryker. This had almost been too much excitement for him. Not that the bet was so high, but that something had happened in a new way. He liked it and puffed his cheeks accordingly.

"All right then, sir. And you couldn't keep me away unless you got the reserves. If it's agreeable to you gentlemen, I'll put this money in the club safe here."

The three men thoughtfully watched the officer disappear through a near-by doorway.

Stryker turned to Smileow.

"Pretty dangerous to carry that much money about. It's easy to lose and easier to steal."

"It's safe now," offered Smileow.

"Er—may I ask how you intend to handle three thousand people without previous experience?" interjected Windom.

"You may. It is very easy. Just imagine you were called on to night herd three thousand cattle—you would pray that it didn't storm."

"But—but!" puffed Stryker. "But you must get these people's attention, hold 'em, grip their minds, pull 'em off their seats! Not like a bunch of cattle, not at all!"

"Well, what of it? Can't you have a noose on either end of a rope?"

"Of course, of course. But no one can throw both ends at once."

"It could be done, but I don't intend to. I don't mind telling you I'm going to tell those people a story, sing to 'em, maybe. That ought to get them."

"Sounds deucedly uninteresting," commented Windom.

Smileow thrust a hand into his pocket.

"I've got some more that says you will be as interested as any of the audience. Want to cover it?"

Windom gave a quick glance at the puffing Stryker, then shook his head. This man evidently was partly insane on the subject of betting. Perhaps the Westerner had some trick concealed, he

was so confident of his ability to hold three thousand people. Oh, tosh! It couldn't be done, that was all there was to it. Let the fool praise himself if he wished. Windom quietly turned to Stryker.

"Let's be getting along, old chap."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Smileow, you should be at the theater by nine o'clock, you know."

"I'll be saddled by then. You might give me a card to your chief electrician. I may need some special lights."

"Certainly, certainly, the hands will help you any way you wish. Here's a card. But you don't intend to ride a horse, do you?"

"Oh, no, figure of speech merely."

"Chap seems a bit queer to me," said Windom, as he and his friend walked off. "Notice his last sentence: 'Figure of speech merely?' "

"Yes, yes. What of it?"

"Oh, nothing; it was oddly worded, that's all. The chump, to think he can hold that crowd! Wonder what he is up to?"

SMILEOW hurried to the theater Stryker had indicated and hunted for the chief electrician. Finally the man was found worrying about the location of a new spotlight; he was inclined to be gruff for that reason. The Westerner backed the electrician over to a small located light and showed the card from Stryker.

The electrician growled: "More work, when we already got too much. Whadda you want?"

Smileow moved his thumb away from the corner of a bill he held in his hand. The fellow made a little sound with his lips.

"Whadda you——" he began.

"I want you and one of your men to obey my orders for just one minute between the first and second acts. I don't mean maybe, I mean just one minute, with no 'ifs' or 'buts' from anybody. Will your picket pin hold that, or shall I hobble it for you?"

"I get you."

The bill changed hands.

"This is what I want you to do," said Smileow. "When my hat falls off, you are to turn off the lights, all of them, count eight, and switch them on again. Can you flood that box over there so that it looks as if the light were reflected from the stage? Not a sharp spot, but diffused."

"Sure! Who're you going to rob?"

"Nobody, unless it's Stryker and Windom."

"Soak 'em one for me, buddy. Hey, Jimmy, come here! Mr. Smileow's made a proposition and covered it heavy. All you got to do is what he says."

Smileow made his way to the box office and presented his credentials to the inhabitant of that place before explaining his errand. The king of the cubby-hole shook his head.

"That box is already sold," he reported, after a glance at his records.

"Give me the name," requested his interrogator.

The fellow found an envelope marked "Miss Rantoul, phone 2242 Beacon Hill."

"Old maid?" asked Smileow, as he pulled the telephone toward him.

"Lord no!" exploded the box-office man.

"All the easier then," remarked Smileow. "Beacon Hill 2242, please. May I speak to Miss Rantoul? Miss Rantoul? Do you wish a thrill to-night? . . . But if I told you it would be a real thrill! Why not take me at face value? If you will stop at the box office, I can reassure you, and your presence will make the idea so much more effective. . . . Certainly. I'll bet you on it if you wish. . . . That's fair enough. . . . Good-by!"

"Keep 'em guessing," admired the ticket agent. "I've seen her cold shoulder more than one."

"They weren't thrilling," pointed out Smileow. "Now if you tell me where this agent is camped, I'll leave you to your nose bag."

COME on," puffed Stryker to Windom and Mansor, as an usher opened the theater-ticket office. "First act's nearly over, and we want to get down in front where we can watch this boy lose his three thousand. He said it would be over quick."

"Miss Rantoul is conspicuous to-night," commented Windom, as they settled in their seats. "Who is that with her?"

"Looks familiar. That old bat uncle of hers, I guess. Doesn't come out much. He must have grown his whiskers in the Ark. Ain't she a wonder, though?"

The curtain fell as the main lights flashed on. Suddenly they dimmed as a figure strolled on the stage in front of the curtain. His high-heeled boots clumped sharply on the boards, while people stared at the big-hatted man. This was certainly a new departure. Stryker nudged Windom.

"That's him," he observed unnecessarily.

"I'm going to tell you folks a story," said Smileow from the stage. "But first I got to get rid of my gum. Where'll I stick it?"

He took off his hat, inspected it as if hunting for a sticking place, but turned to the curtain and stuck his gum on that. Then he resumed his hat and strode to the edge of the stage.

"All right, boys, press your stop watches," he said to the mystified audience. This was horseplay to them.

"Folks," began Smileow, "I rolled into Chicago a week ago, sold my beef, got the money, and came on to this town to-day. I met two fellows who bet I couldn't hold your interest for one minute to-night. I'm going to tell you a story that's never been heard before.

"About ten years ago, I was running cattle over on the west fork of Sunsleep River. I had a wonderful range, and as I had nearly all the water cinched, the grass was all mine. Then a band of Mormon sheep came in. We ain't so crazy about fighting out there as the storybooks tell, but I knew if one band of Mormon sheep bedded there long, pretty quick there would be a ZCMI store somewhere around, and where'd I be? Up the skimmer handle proper! So I went over the mountains and bought all the pepper I could find at the store."

"Look at 'Whiskers,' in Rantoul's box," grunted Stryker.

"And then," went on Smileow, "I took that pepper back to my range and plumb sowed it where those sheep trailed down to water. Say, you should have seen those sheep run when they hit the pepper! Part of them piled up over a cut bank, and——"

The huge, whiskered figure beside Miss Rantoul heaved unexpectedly to his feet.

"Those were *my* sheep!" he roared. "Get your gun!"

The girl screamed shrilly as the man beside her whipped a dark automatic from a shoulder holster and fired at the tensed fellow on the stage. Smileow's hat jerked backward. At the same instant, his stiffened right hand flashed inward to his belt.

Crash! roared his answer.

As if the bullet had hit a switch, every light in the house jumped off. Women screamed; children yelled; men roared. Stryker pounded Windom, and Windom yelled "Lights" while the two guns crashed and reverberated deafeningly in the building. Flashes of light spat from the stage and the box, faintly illuminating the heaving, frightened mob below.

Suddenly the lights flashed on as mad a scene as ever appeared on the stage. Men and women glared wildly about,

unable to collect themselves, so quickly had the scene passed before them.

"Look!" shouted Stryker, pointing at the Rantoul box.

As he pointed, the heavily whiskered head of a man dragged slowly over the plush edge of the box. A thin red stream ran down the white carving that surrounded the box. Almost at the same instant, Windom caught a glimpse of riding boots disappearing behind an arch. Windom rose to his feet.

"Get the murderer!" he yelled, quite forgetful of the fact that he blocked Officer Mansor's impatient, frantic efforts at exit.

"Keep your shirts on," admonished Stryker disgustedly. "Here he comes back. Besides, I smell peppermint."

And back Smileow did come, dragging the limp figure of his victim. Coolly he laid the body on the stage before an awe-struck audience, straightened the arms, put two fingers under the head, and lifted.

"Lookit!" giggled a girl next to Mansor.

Slowly the stiff figure approached the vertical. It reached its feet, Smileow backed off, the whiskered man bowed, then wiped its chin!

Smileow pulled a watch from his pocket.

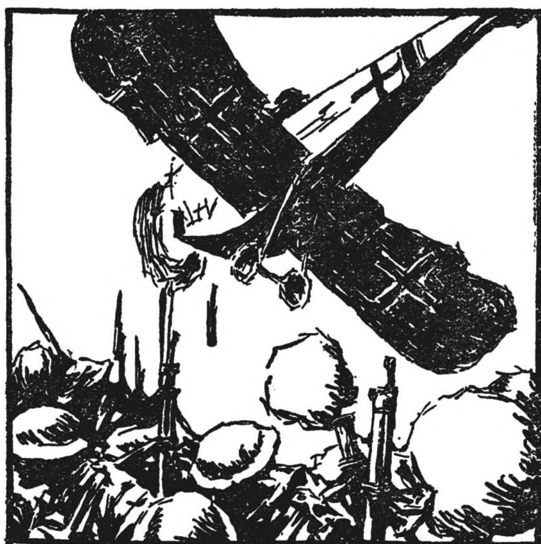
"Folks, my minute is up. If any of you feel that your attention hasn't been held for the last minute, I wish you would stand. By the way, my hat was pulled off with a string, while that peppermint odor comes from the red stuff you see on the carving of the box there. Did my pack slip on that grade?"

Windom glanced about before turning to Mansor with a wry grin.

"Officer, do your duty," he suggested.

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE IN FLORIDA

ONLY the more thoughtful of the hundreds of thousands of visitors who have turned the isolated fruit farms of Florida into vacation plants, only those who have recovered from the strong stimulant of sunshine mixed with gold bricks, have wondered about the coconut trees that lend such attractive shade to Palm Beach and Miami and so helpful a sales name to countless mushroom developments which dot the coast from Jacksonville to the Keys. The coconut is not native to Florida. The first of these tropical plants to spring up on the long, pear-shaped coast trace their origin to an accident. An eighteenth-century slaver was wrecked in a bad storm off the Florida coast and its cargo of coconuts which it had carried from Africa along with the blacks was washed ashore. The seeds took root, as they were undamaged by the heavy sea—the coconut spreads itself about the South Seas in such manner of floating. When Miami and West Palm Beach were being developed by Fisher and other large realtors they took a page from history and purchased five hundred thousand coconuts, paying five cents apiece for them and six cents each for shipment from Cuba. Then encountering heavy seas they dumped the cargo of nuts overboard to float them upon the shore and the seeds, as before, took root in the sandy loam. Expensive? Yes. But then Florida must have its face lifted for the delectation of visitors.



Tin Hats

By Fred MacIsaac

Author of "Ice," "Breakfast at the Plaza," Etc.

The last dreadful days of the greatest of all wars.

IN FOUR PARTS—PART IV.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BIG GUN'S ROAR.

THE wagon train, commanded by Lieutenant Chris Graham, could be seen as it roared and rumbled along the road, in desperate haste to reach the curve which would take them out of the sight of the enemy artillery. Shells were dropping around them. It was only a question of time before a hit would be made.

They were halfway to the curve in the road when the first hit was scored. A shell obliterated one wagon, killed the mules and the driver and wounded five men of Chris' military detail. The wagon ahead stopped long enough to load the wounded, then went madly onward after the others. The road now led downhill and, swaying wildly, the wagons drove the animals forward.

A second shell killed the mules of one of the wagons, and it rolled upon their bodies and stopped. Fortunately it had lumbered to the side of the road, and the others managed to pass it. As the disaster had occurred right at the elbow turn, Chris marshaled a dozen soldiers, went back and trundled the wagon around the turn by hand, while the enemy dropped half a dozen shells close by as a farewell salute.

From that time on, they moved in safety. Chris remembered how thrilled he had been many years before when he attended Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and had seen an Indian attack on a wagon train. What a stupid affair that was, when compared to this! He

laughed foolishly at the idea and his sergeant suddenly took him by the arm.

"You're wounded, lieutenant!" he said. "Your head!"

Somewhere along the line a tiny fragment of shrapnel had cut Chris' head. He had no recollection of it. He grew faint; things got black; he made the rest of the journey in a wagon, lying upon a pile of stores.

About ten miles farther along, they found fresh mules and a new detail to take charge of the wagon train. Chris was helped from his uncomfortable perch and carried into a house in a village. He was told to remain there until a physician could be secured to tend his wound. He was conscious, but very sleepy; nothing seemed to matter much. He knew that he was lying on a very soft feather bed, and then he knew nothing.

The medical major who visited him next morning made light of the injury. It was a scalp wound; the bone was uninjured. If Chris had worn his tin hat, the flying bit of metal would not have done any damage. Early in the wild night ride, however, Chris had lost his helmet. After a week or so of quiet, Chris was told, he could report for duty. The major would notify headquarters that he was staying in this village under orders. Probably his new assignment would be sent to him here.

TO Chris the next week was a marvelous vacation. Most of it was spent in sleep. For months he had been on short rations of sleep, rarely getting more than five or six hours a night, often kept awake for hours by the horrible crashing of air bombs in his vicinity or the furious *drum-drum* of artillery shells exploding not far away, with evil intentions toward him.

In two or three days he was able to move about. He took short walks in the village, a singularly clean village with well-dressed people whose manners were more citified than rural. He wrote several long letters to Marion. Something prevented him from writing to Lady Mary, probably his sense of loyalty to his first love. During his sojourn at the front, he had received three delightful letters from Marion. Mary, despite the string on her finger, did not write at all, or if she did, he had not received her letters.

It still thrilled him to think that Mary loved him, but Marion was now uppermost in his heart. He was sure that he loved Marion best and that Mary could be made to understand. Mary's attraction for him had always been fierce, but ephemeral. She needed to be in his presence for her overpowering charm to get in its full effect.

On the fifth day of his invalidism, he received his new assignment. He had been ordered, as a second lieutenant, to a regiment of regular-army men, a regiment that had distinguished itself in its first trench experience, and recently had covered itself with glory in the taking of Cantigny, one of the brilliant episodes of the war. The outfit had lost very heavily in officers and men, and replacements were necessary.

The regiment was in the line, far to the west. To reach it, a great detour would be necessary, around the huge salient which had been driven in as far south as the Marne, and there were no railroad lines to transport him during part of the way, most of the French railroad system being well outside their present front. In ordinary circumstances, Chris would have been able to reach his regiment without passing through Paris. As things were, a visit to Paris was necessary and he rejoiced because it gave him an opportunity to see Marion.

In ten days from the time of his arrival at Provent, Chris was ready to leave. His physician, however, who happened to pass through the town again, inspected his wound, looked him

over carefully and forbade him to attempt the journey for another week.

"You may have to walk long distances," he explained. "You are liable not to eat regularly. It isn't as though you could shoot over by rail all the way. You take your time. A sick officer is of no use to a combat division."

So Chris fretted for a week longer in the village, which had ceased to interest him for some days. No news filtered in. He was the only American in the town at the moment. The few French soldiers knew nothing, but all were despondent.

"You Americans, you have come too late!" a lieutenant informed Chris. "They will take Paris. The government will yield. And then they will drive you and the British into the sea."

One morning, Chris was delighted to see coming through the main street a company of colored soldiers detached for labor duty. The outfit was commanded by a white captain, who had two colored lieutenants. The captain was delighted to see him. Neither he nor his men had ever heard a shot fired or met any Americans who had seen service. Nothing would do but that Chris must address the company.

Chris protested, laughed, finally consented. The captain hastened to pass the word along, and that afternoon drew up his company in front of Chris' lodgings. As the wounded officer emerged, a bandage still about his head, the soldiers shouted and applauded.

"Attention!" commanded the big top sergeant. "Now you men, when I says 'Eyes right,' I wants to hear them click. Eyes right!"

Such was the power of suggestion that Chris thought he heard the gleaming eyeballs click into position.

Chris told them something about life in the trenches, to which they listened intently. After five minutes he nodded to the captain that he was through. The top sergeant called for three cheers for Lieutenant Graham, cheers which were so lusty that they drew out the entire population of the village.

"Now, you lazy loafers!" declaimed the sergeant. "Don't lemme never hear no more grumblin' about hard work. If I does, I swears to the Lawd I'll ask Lieutenant Graham to take you-all right into them trenches he done tol' us 'bout."

"You did them a lot of good," said the captain, with a smile. "None of them is yearning for a turn in the trenches now. They'll work like Trojans to keep out of them."

From the village to Paris as the crow flies was perhaps eighty miles. To reach it Chris had to cover about one hundred and fifty miles, only about half of which journey could be made by rail. The rest of the distance he walked, or secured rides on trucks or staff cars, both French and American, which happened to be going in his direction. He entered Paris via the Gare de Lyon on July 8th.

A terrific battle had been raging for days, as he could tell by the volume of distant artillery on the Marne, while he was making his circuitous journey. It seemed, however, that at present the drive was definitely at a standstill.

Chris knew nothing of the details of what had happened until he reached Paris. Then he picked up news here and there from officers who had heard something of the stirring events. Paris resounded with praise for the Americans, being quite convinced at the time that the troops flung into the line in desperation had saved the city.

As he passed along the street, Frenchmen grasped his hand and shook it. Frenchwomen rushed out of shops, flung their arms around his neck. Every officer who wore our uniform was having similar experiences—as for the privates, they moved up and down the boulevards with two or three girls on the arms of every man, grinning ma-

liciously at the M. P.'s on duty, who scowled at them as they passed.

Chris hastened to the Place de la Bourse. As he neared it, the urge to see Marion was more and more powerful. He climbed the stairs three steps at a time and burst into her office with a shout.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DISCARDED FOR GOOD.

MARION was not in the office. At the desk sat a young American in mufti.

"Where is Miss Stacy?" Chris demanded rudely.

"Who are you?" asked the youth coolly. "What do you want to know for?"

"Lieutenant Christopher Graham. She is my fiancée."

"Oh," said the young man in some distress. "I'm very sorry. The fact is she's in a hospital."

Chris crossed the room in a stride and grasped him by the arm. "Where? What has happened?"

"She is not badly hurt. Don't be alarmed."

"How did she get hurt?"

"Big Bertha," he replied reluctantly. "They are shelling the city with some long-range gun, a shell every fifteen minutes. One struck her hotel and made some of the walls fall."

"She isn't dead?" Chris asked piteously.

"No, no! She got her arm injured by a falling stone."

"Where is the hospital?"

The man wrote the address upon a slip of paper. Half mad, Chris rushed down the stairs and hailed a taxicab. The chauffeur shook his head in a surly fashion, whereupon Chris drew his gun and pointed it at the man. That was enough. The cab stopped and Chris jumped in, snarling the address. Soon the taxi was racing through the streets at terrific speed.

The hospital was a beautiful private house on the Avenue Bois de Boulogne, which had been leased by the New York society woman whom Marion had met at the memorable dinner party where she also encountered Lady Mary Yorkley. The nurses were Americans and so were the physicians.

Chris had to ring the doorbell to gain admittance. His uniform secured him a pleasant greeting from a businesslike American woman attendant who sat at a desk in the front hall.

"If you please, I must see Miss Marion Stacy!" Chris cried. "I have just learned that she was injured. I'm her fiancé. Is she badly hurt?"

"Miss Stacy is not severely injured. She must stay in bed for a week or ten days, and after that, her arm will be bandaged for a fortnight. I'll let her know that you are waiting. I'll tell her myself; we are very fond of her here. Your name?"

"Lieutenant Christopher Graham. Please hurry!"

Smiling the young woman rose and ran lightly up the stairs, while Chris walked up and down in a condition of extreme nervousness. It seemed ages before she returned—in fact it was six or seven minutes—then she descended slowly, with a very grave face.

"I'm sorry, but you can't see Miss Stacy," she said quietly.

"Why? Is she unconscious?"

"No-o. She is awake, but—I hate to tell you—she doesn't want to see you."

"Oh, see here! There must be some mistake. You didn't get the name right."

"I'm sorry. She sent you this note. Perhaps it will explain."

She had kept one of her hands in the pocket of her apron. Now she drew it forth and held out to Chris a letter which he stupidly accepted. Marion to refuse to see him when she was sick, in a hospital, in France! How could this be?

He tore open the letter with feverish fingers, then stared at the dozen lines in Marion's familiar scrawl:

> DEAR CHRIS: I can't see you. I don't want to see you ever again. As soon as I am better, I am going home. I can never forgive what you have done to me, how you have lied to me. You came to me directly from that Englishwoman. You told her you loved her, and you are engaged to her. You gave her a piece of string for an engagement ring, but that was more than you ever gave me. Don't try to see me; you will only distress me. I hope you will be happy with her and that you escape all calamity. Good-by forever. MARION STACY.

"Look here!" Chris exclaimed to the attendant. "I've *got* to see her. I can explain—maybe I can. Please let me see her."

"Impossible. You would distress her."

"Let me send her a letter. Will you give her a note from me and I'll wait for an answer?"

The girl's face softened. After all, he was an officer and wore a wound stripe, and he was good to look at.

"I shouldn't," she said, "but I will. Here is paper and an envelope."

Tears were blinding Chris so that he could hardly see to write. His heart was pounding and throbbing. He knew now that he loved Marion, loved her better than his life, had never really stopped loving her. It was terrible to know that she was injured and within a few yards of him and not to be able to rush to her side. His letter was incoherent, mad, and completely sincere.

> MARION DEAR: I was out of my mind, but I am sane now. I am wild with fear for you and love of you. I must see you. You must forgive me. Everything will be all right. I'll never speak to her again. Please let me see you.

He thrust it in the envelope and gave it to the nurse. Her eyes were filled with tears, as she saw his quivering lips and moist eyes. She fairly ran up the stairs with the missive. Chris tried to follow her but an orderly arose from somewhere and blocked the staircase. In a moment the girl came down again.

"What did she say?" Chris asked huskily.

The girl's face was averted. She thrust a hand into her apron pocket and brought forth his note, torn into four pieces.

"She wouldn't read it," she said sorrowfully. "I am sure she won't stay hard like this. Please don't take it too much to heart."

"I guess I deserve it," Chris struggled with a sob. "If you get a chance, please tell her I am going to the front and that I will come back as soon as I can."

Then he scribbled his address, turned and went forlornly down the steps of the hospital, the most miserable young man in all France at that minute.

WHY had he not told Marion before? She would have forgiven him then. Now his cowardice had ruined him! now she would never forgive him. Did he not know how strong a soul she had, what an iron will the girl possessed? In some way, somehow, she had learned that he had been insane enough to get engaged to Lady Mary; that he had come to her with Mary's kisses on his lips and had accepted hers.

Marion would consider that a terrible outrage; her Puritan mind could not imagine her fiancé wavering for a single minute in his loyalty. She was entirely capable of going back home, putting him completely out of her mind and never permitting him to see her again.

Chris laughed bitterly at his own folly. When he had been mad about Mary, he was actually fearful that Marion would tear him away from her willy-nilly. Instead, Marion loathed him, washed her hands of him. Now there was nothing to prevent his keep-

ing his faith with the English girl—nothing in the world, except that he did not want to.

Chris did not love Mary; he would not marry her; nothing would force him to do so; he had never loved Mary for a minute; he had just gone crazy, due to war excitement, nerves! Oh, what did it matter? All that he knew was that his heart was broken. He was crushed. He did not care whether he lived or died. If he couldn't have Marion he didn't want any woman.

Then he began to wonder how Marion had learned the truth. Being aware that he had not told a soul of his engagement, he was sure that the information had come from Mary. Marion must have met the girl again, or else Mary had mentioned the engagement to somebody who had repeated the story. But the piece of gold string—Mary would not be likely to tell about that to anybody but Marion; no girl tells other men of that sort of engagement token.

A SULLEN anger against Mary began to burn in Chris. She had not played fair. Knowing as she did that he was engaged to Marion, Mary had led him into an engagement with her. Then she had sought out his original fiancée and told Marion of his bad faith. Why had Mary done such a thing? If he had met Mary at that moment, he would have quarreled with her bitterly.

Returning to the officers' club, Chris wrote a long letter to Marion, making a clean breast of the entire affair, excusing himself where he dared, berating himself, assuring her of his repentance and his undying affection and swearing that if he could not marry her, he would marry no one. In all probability she would treat the letter as she had treated the note written at the hospital. Even if she read it, most likely she would maintain the same attitude, but he mailed it nevertheless. Then he went to R. T. O. headquarters, to ask the location of his regiment, determined to join it at the earliest possible moment.

He was informed that his regiment had come out of the line up north. It had not figured in the series of battles which had been going on for six weeks since the invaders had struck between Soissons and Rheims and had advanced thirty miles to the Marne, where they had been brought to a halt, which everybody believed was only temporary. The regiment was now lying at Meaux on the Marne, about halfway between Paris and Château Thierry. It was resting, refilling its depleted ranks and expecting very soon to relieve one of the divisions on the Marne.

We know now that the war, at that moment, was deadlocked. The enemy had hoped to break the French and American lines as they had broken the British line in front of Amiens, but though bent back to form a huge salient, the Allied line had not given way at any point. They had shot their bolt for the time being, and the Allies were recovering their breath.

However, nobody believed that the invaders did not know what to do. Another great smash was expected momentarily and in Paris the inhabitants had little hope that the next drive would not result in the capital falling into the hands of the enemy. Notwithstanding this, they set about arranging the biggest celebration of Bastille Day, the Fourteenth of July, since the war broke out.

A great review of Allied troops was scheduled and contingents of British, Americans, Italians, Canadians, Australians, Scotch, Algerians, Portuguese and representatives of other Allies were ordered to Paris to make the affair a success. The entire city would be decorated. All the inhabitants would turn out in holiday dress. All this was planned with the enemy on the Marne, fifty miles away, and the terrible long-range gun, "Big Bertha" dropping a

shell every fifteen minutes during the day.

Chris had no desire to wait for the celebration—he could not have done so if he wished—and the loss of his sweetheart had disheartened him. His load of despondency was heavier than his knapsack had ever been, when he was an enlisted man.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A MESSAGE TO DELIVER.

THE regiment to which Chris was assigned was billeted at a village on the outskirts of Meaux. Chris was ordered to report for duty with C Company of this regiment, and he found a train leaving for Meaux at three in the afternoon of July 9th.

He no longer wore his bandage, but his head ached and his heart ached. He started on the journey listlessly, without interest, and not the least idea in the world that he would be fortunate enough to play a part in a big battle.

Until July 18, 1918, the enemy was the assailant. From that day, the initiative passed forever from their hands. The defender became the aggressor and never stopped belaboring the foe until they cried for mercy and quit. On the eve of July 16th the invaders were triumphant; they were confident of victory; they expected to reach Paris in another month and win the war.

Since the retreat from the Marne in 1914, the Allies, save for a few sharp blows at long intervals, had huddled in their trenches and were satisfied to hold the enemy. They had neither man power nor strategy brilliant enough to endanger any of the invaders' plans.

In this latest drive the enemy had exhibited contempt for their opponents, because they had taken a big chance and driven through a salient thirty miles deep and only twenty-five miles wide. The foe had concentrated a million men in this long, narrow bag without fear, being confident that the Allies would be in no position to take advantage of the situation. And it was planned to hurl new, fresh masses of men against the western side of the salient and burst through to Paris.

Until the Allies struck at the hinge of the big salient at Soissons and came so near to closing the mouth of the bag that the entire invading army at the Marne had to turn tail and retreat to avoid capture, the enemy was winning the war. That stroke, however, turned the tide.

The risk of that stroke was terrific, for the enemy in the salient still outnumbered in men and artillery the worn defenders. Delay would be fatal; it would give the invaders time to bring down more troops and widen the sides of the bag. In one sense they were in a trap, but if they made the trap wide enough, they would have a tremendous advantage over the Allies, who would have to defend the outer rim of a great arc. The element of surprise was vital. If the invaders had the slightest inkling that the Allies had the impudence to strike back, they could mass troops at the mouth of the salient in such numbers that it could not be closed on them.

Chris found his regimental headquarters and was directed to the village where his company was billeted, a hamlet about a mile west of the town. He reached it by getting a ride in a flivver that was going that way.

The captain of C Company was a grim, hard-visaged, stocky, gray-haired veteran, who had been a sergeant in the old regular army and who looked upon training-camp lieutenants with disdain. He greeted Chris contemptuously. As he saw the stripes indicating wounds and long service in France, however, his manner changed. He became cordial, assigned Chris a room in the house which he occupied himself and brought out a bottle of brandy and two glasses. He

questioned Chris closely as to his experience and nodded with approval.

"I'm damn lucky to get you, young feller," he assured Chris. "You ought to see some of the la-de-da boys that come down here, who don't know a platoon from a spittoon. Guess we get a little action soon, probably go into the line at Château Thierry."

Chris made the acquaintance of his company. About half of the men were veterans and half were recruits from replacement divisions whose knowledge of soldiering was scanty. At the time he was the only lieutenant in the company, both others being on leave.

Chris found a lot of company work, clerical and military, piled up, and for several days was busy straightening these out. They were somewhat complicated, for the captain was more of a soldier than a business man.

ON July 12th all leaves were suddenly canceled, all going to and fro from Paris interdicted, and special orders issued prohibiting civilians or soldiers, except with special passes, from passing through the village toward Meaux. Rumors of all sorts arose. That the division was about to move into line seemed likely, but where it was going remained a secret.

Early in the evening of July 12th the sergeant of the guard came to Chris, who was officer of the day.

"Lieutenant," he said, "following out special orders, we stopped a woman on a motor cycle who had an ordinary French pass through the lines and who says she has got to get to Meaux. The special order supersedes ordinary passes, so we held her up. Hated to do it, 'cause she's the best-looking frog I ever seen."

"Bring her to the office and I'll find out what her business is," Chris instructed. Despite his low frame of mind, he was masculine enough to wish to glance at the best-looking frog the sergeant had ever seen. Something should have told him who answered this description, but it didn't. Therefore he was astounded to see Lady Mary walk jauntily into the room, clad in khaki, dust-covered, but lovely as ever.

"You may leave us, sergeant," Chris remarked. "I know this young woman."

"Chris, my darling!" the girl exclaimed. "Oh, what a surprise! I had lost track of you. It's the most wonderful thing to find you here. I don't know what I should have done, if it had been a stranger."

For once the battery of her charms had not their usual effect upon him. On the contrary, he was conscious of immunity. He looked at her sullenly. The girl was not to be compared with Marion. He must have been out of his head to let her beguile him to his ruin.

She sensed his attitude. "What's the matter, Chris, dear?" she asked, in her most plaintive manner.

"Please sit down, Mary," he returned gravely. "I am glad to see you, because I want to talk to you."

"And I want to talk to you, of course."

"I believe you have been making a fool of me."

"I'm the fool," she declared, with a languishing glance, "over you."

"Mary, when you let me become engaged to you, you knew already that I was engaged to Marion Stacy."

"I heard her say so," she retorted. "I never believe a woman."

"You could have believed that woman."

"If I had, do you suppose I would have permitted you to make love to me? See, I still wear our ring!"

She showed him the engagement finger with its bit of gold string still around it and his heart smote him.

"I suppose I was as much to blame as you. But then you sought out Marion and told her of our engagement."

"I didn't do any such thing," Mary

declared. "I have never set eyes on the girl since I met her at a party after the Amiens drive."

"Then how did she know that you were wearing that string as an engagement token?"

"Really," Mary returned, rather tartly, "I don't know."

"Did you tell any one else?"

"I might have. Why not? It was not a secret, at least on my side. I wasn't deceiving anybody, as you apparently were. Wait. Would Colonel Wolmouth of your army be likely to tell her?"

"He might. He did!" exclaimed Chris. "The fellow is in love with her."

"He saw my poor little ring and asked about it. Naturally I told him what I supposed were the facts. Don't you love me any more, Chris? Not even a little bit?"

Chris was red with shame. Poor Mary was evidently sincere. She had done nothing for which he had a right to reproach her. He had made love to her, had given her the token. She had every right in the world to tell whom she pleased about it. It was evident that the maliciousness with which he had been charging her was rank injustice. There was an untrustworthy scoundrel in the room, and it was himself. Mary was looking at him with eyes that showed hurt. After all, it was not her business, but his, to worry about any previous engagements he might have had.

"I beg your pardon, Mary," he said humbly. "I have no one to blame for this situation except myself."

"Please, what is the situation? Have you concluded that you prefer this girl to me, that all your protests were false, that you led me on, persuaded me to love you, and all the time you were playing with me?"

"No, no?" he assured her. "You carried me off my feet. I was crazy about you! It was all my fault. But I have found out that I don't love you the way I love Marion."

"She sits in Paris and plays the lady. I dash along the lines, mingling with the soldiers, trying to do my bit in winning the war. I am rough, coarse, unwomanly, not to be compared to your cool, blond American who has never heard a shot fired."

"On the contrary, she is wounded and in a Paris hospital, as a result of a shell from Big Bertha."

"Oh!" said the girl contritely. "I'm sorry. I didn't know. Will you forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive. You are as fine a woman as ever lived, and I don't think you meant any of the things you said. Only——"

"I know. You love her." Mary nodded.

"And she won't have anything to do with me. She refused to let me see her in the hospital."

"Then your engagement is broken?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Don't you realize, Mary? I love her! Nothing else matters."

"Yes, I see, finally," she said, with a sigh which touched him. "Pass me your candle, will you, Chris?"

"What for?"

"I am going to burn this string. I'll let you go."

"Mary!" he exclaimed, with the gladness in his tone so evident that she winced. "I suppose you are the finest girl that ever lived."

"With one exception," she demurred, as she set fire to the couple of inches of gold string.

"No exceptions! I just happen to love her. I can't help it."

"That's done!" said Mary. "Now will you do something for me?"

"Anything."

"I am carrying a message for the French intelligence. They don't know anything about your stupid American

order to permit no one to pass on to Meaux. I would have to make a wide detour to avoid your lines and I haven't time. You can pass unquestioned. Will you deliver my dispatch for me?"

"Why, yes! To whom?"

"It's now eight o'clock. At nine fifteen I am to meet a French officer at the Hotel Tavarne, in room No. 4. You will knock on the door. When he answers, you say: *'La Muette de Portici.'* He will reply: *'Ernani.'* Then he will open and you will deliver a note; that's all."

"I should not go to Meaux," he remarked thoughtfully.

"'Anything'—you said," she repeated scornfully. "You made mental reservations. Pass me through the line and I'll deliver my own message."

"No, I can't defy the special order. But I will take your note for you. It's the least I can do. Give it to me."

She laughed. "I don't carry it on my person. Ask your orderly to bring in my motor cycle."

He repeated her request to the orderly. In two or three minutes, the bulky motor cycle was trundled into the room. Mary went to the machine, fumbled under the gasoline tank, then revealed that it had a false bottom. From it she drew an envelope of very thin French paper, evidently filled with the tissuelike note paper so popular.

"Here it is," she said. "You will have to start very soon."

"I'll walk, and go as soon as I have seen you safely on your way back to Paris. Can you possibly forgive me, Mary?"

"I'll try," said the girl, with a rather pathetic smile. "Do you want to kiss me just once, Chris, now that you are temporarily unengaged?"

He put his arms about her and again she thrilled him.

"Probably you will never see me again," she told him. "I shall try to avoid you. And I am sure Miss Stacy will make up her cold, blond mind to forgive you in time. Good-by, my dear!"

He led her from the room, the orderly wheeling her machine close behind. They walked through the street of the village and into the outskirts, where Chris passed her by the most remote sentry. Then she got on the motor cycle. With a roar the machine started down the road. He was never to see her again.

Returning to his quarters, he picked up the envelope, which he had placed on his desk, and thrust it in the breast of his uniform jacket. Then he took his forage cap and started toward Meaux. He had no trouble passing his own sentry on that side of the village. As there was no prohibition against the officers of the division from going into the town, he reached it without incident.

The Hotel Tavarne was a miserable affair to be dignified by the name of "hotel," but, in France, the more insignificant the boarding house, the more it insists upon being called a hotel. It was a small house with a concierge, a fat old woman, sitting beside the stairs. Room No. 4 was on the second floor, she informed him, and continued with her knitting.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

CHRIS climbed creaking stairs, walked along a corridor, dimly lighted by a single oil lamp, and came to a room upon which the figure 4 had been drawn with a piece of charcoal. He struck the door a sharp rap and a pleasant male voice asked in French: "Who is there?"

"La Muette de Portici."

"Ernani," came the response, then the door opened and he saw the figure of a French officer bidding him enter.

It was a large, musty room with a

table in the center upon which were the remains of a dinner, and two lighted candles, the only illumination.

"I expected a woman," said the Frenchman. "But you have the password. How does it happen?"

"The lady was held up by our lines, special orders to-night. As I happened to be an old friend of hers, she asked me to do her this slight service."

"Ah, an American officer! Please be seated. It is very kind of you to aid our friend in this manner. You have a message for me?"

"Here it is," said Chris, as he drew forth the letter.

"Just a moment, excuse me," said the Frenchman, as he tore open the envelope and drew out a dozen, closely written sheets.

He leaned over the table to read and the candlelight fell full upon his face. Chris looked at him in perplexity, somewhere, somehow he had met this man, a long time ago it seemed, but where? Not in France.

THE man was smiling in satisfaction and the smile placed him. Eight years before at the scientific school in Benton, Chris had seen him. The man had been a student, but who the deuce was he? Chris didn't remember a Frenchman in the school. There was no Frenchman, no, but—Hans von Oster, the son of a nobleman in one of the Baltic provinces. That's who he was!

Then what was he doing in a French uniform? Of course he would not be fighting for France. He would be with the enemy. Why—this man must be a spy! And that made Lady Mary a spy!

Chris was being used as a cat's-paw by enemy spies! Oh, no, it was too horrible! He must be mistaken. This was merely a chance resemblance. Mary was never a spy. Still, it was very curious how she roamed about. She had never looked English with her huge, dark eyes and her brunet beauty. Why should the French intelligence have to take such precautions inside their own lines?

Chris slipped his hand up to his pistol holster, got his fingers upon the handle of his revolver, drew it half from the holster, then said softly:

"Cannibal, cannibal, rah, rah, rah!"

The man jumped as though he had been shot and looked into the muzzle of the American's gun. He had betrayed himself at hearing, for the first time in seven or eight years, the words which began the college yell of the Benton Scientific School.

"Hand over that letter!" commanded Chris hoarsely.

The man's answer was to tip over the table, precipitating the candles to the floor, where they were extinguished. Chris' gun spoke, but missed the man. It sounded like a cannon, in the small room. Suddenly he was struck by the table, which had been hurled in his direction, and he went over on the floor. A man's boot stepped on his stomach. He grasped it and twisted the foot so that the owner also fell to the floor.

Chris had dropped his gun, but he had the man. He pulled himself up on the fellow's body, caught the man's wrist, which happened to be his gun arm, and the gun was in Chris' hand. Now began a savage struggle, the spy to release his gun so that he could thrust it against the body of his opponent and fire, Chris to break the wrist and make him drop the weapon.

Suddenly the gun went off. The bullet missed the American by a hair. Then Chris forced the arm upward steadily. The spy brought his knee up suddenly and caught the American in the middle. A terrific pain shot through him, but he held on grimly.

The spy had Chris by the hair and seemed to be pulling handfuls out by the roots. Suddenly the door was flung open. Half a dozen American soldiers

piled into the room, drawn by the shots. The enemy spy redoubled his efforts to get away, but Chris clung desperately.

A flash light illuminated the two men on the floor.

"What's all this about?" demanded the sergeant, who held the light.

All he saw was a French and American officer at grips, both trying to overpower the other.

"A spy!" shouted Chris. "Grab him!"

That was enough. They fell upon the man in French uniform, dragged him from his opponent and held him safe.

Chris climbed groggily to his feet. "There's a letter here, the evidence. Get it," he ordered.

A search of the room revealed the letter on the floor, its sheets scattered by the struggle.

"I am a French officer of the intelligence," declared the captive. "I trap this American in this room. He is the enemy spy."

"Shut your face!" commanded one of the doughboys. "He's one of our fellers. We can tell them."

"I am Lieutenant Graham, C Company," declared Chris smartly, and mentioned his regiment and division. "Place this man under arrest and take me to the commanding officer of Meaux. I have important information for him."

As they passed into the hall and beneath the oil lamp, the prisoner looked into the face of the man who was responsible for his capture.

"Graham!" he exclaimed. "I remember you now at scientific school. What rotten luck I had to run into you, of all the Allied army!"

"I'm sorry, Von Oster," said Chris. "It's the way things have to happen."

"Can't you let this matter be confined to me?" pleaded the spy. "You understand what I mean."

"I don't know," Chris replied. "I've got to think the thing out."

Von Oster had been a decent fellow, companionable, hard-working, likable. While Chris had never known him very well, they had often sat side by side at lectures in the old days. Now he was sending this poor chap off to be executed as a spy. Without question Von Oster would be shot at sunrise on the strength of Graham's statement. Chris had to make the charge; it was his duty; there was no way out.

As Chris followed to brigade headquarters with the damning evidence, a more terrible problem was upon his mind. What was he going to do about Lady Mary Yorkley, if that was her name? The girl was unquestionably dealing with the enemy, whether she was English, as she claimed, or an enemy subject.

That Mary had ever loved him, Chris felt to be extremely doubtful. She was a consummate actress, probably had used her charms to wheedle information out of him, and other officers as well. He remembered now her insatiable curiosity, how she had questioned him about the training school at Langres, about the number of American troops in France. And how willing she had been to enter the enemy lines that time when he had disabled her motor cycle at the trench in front of Amiens. Why, she would have been among friends!

In Paris, she was accustomed to associate with officers of high rank. Chris remembered that Marion had told him that two generals, a colonel and a United States Senator had been at the party in Paris. Upon the occasion that Chris had encountered Mary in the French capital she had been with a major general. And that message she had given him to deliver to Madame Govert at Langres about Raoul being wounded and getting well—undoubtedly that was some sort of cipher to be passed on to the enemy. Mary had turned up at Govert's pastry shop as a French

waitress. She had been making bread in the kitchen when she persuaded him to become engaged to her. Most likely she had a dozen fiancés among officers and men of the Allied armies. She had tricked him!

And yet—how could he betray a girl whose arms were so soft, whose courage was so dauntless, a woman working for her country in the most perilous service possible, a patriot, even though her patriotism was for a nation that was his enemy? They would pounce upon her, imprison her, try her and execute her with the same dispatch as if she were a man.

Chris couldn't be responsible for that; the thought of lovely Lady Mary, dead upon the ground, while a firing squad shouldered its rifles and marched away was too terrible.

Wasn't it his duty to betray her? If she lived, she would continue to work against the allied cause, might cause untold damage. As a soldier he must present information against her; as a gentleman, he couldn't.

"Damn it, there's a limit to what is expected of a soldier!" he told himself. "I've caught the male spy and seized his dispatches. I've done my share. If they want Lady Mary, they'll have to capture her without any help from me."

And in this frame of mind he faced the brigadier general in person.

"What's the idea of insisting upon seeing me? I'm too damn busy to be bothering with lieutenants," said the general testily.

"I have apprehended a spy and taken his dispatches," returned Chris curtly. "I presumed it was my duty to bring them to you at once."

"The hell you have! That's different. Sit down, sir. How did it happen. Where are his dispatches?"

Chris passed over the letter given to him by Mary. The general inspected it with the solemnity of an owl.

"Damn things are in some kind of cipher," he said. "How do you know they are intended for the enemy?"

"I recognized a man, posing as a French officer, as a foreigner who went to college with me in America. He put up a fight and is now in the guardhouse. I assume that these papers are important to the enemy."

"Good work, young man! Let's call in the intelligence officer."

Captain Larkin entered in a few minutes.

"What do you make of this stuff, captain?" asked the general. "Is it a mare's nest, or have we got something?"

"It's the new spy cipher," replied the intelligence officer. "I can't read it, but it happens that Colonel Nefchateau of the French intelligence arrived an hour ago. He's up on all their cryptograms. Shall we show it to him?"

"By all means. It may be damn important. Now, Lieutenant Graham, how did you know this man had dispatches? Tell me all about it."

"Early this evening a woman on a motor cycle was stopped by a sentry of my company. She had a French pass which was superseded by the order you sent out to-night. The sergeant brought her to me and I questioned her. She said she had an important letter for a French captain at the Hotel Tavarne in this town and insisted on being allowed to pass. I did not wish to be rude to a French dispatch bearer, let alone a woman, but I could not pass her. I offered to deliver the letter for her and she consented."

"You had no business to undertake such a thing."

"Yes, sir. I thought it would be a good thing to have the letter in our hands and to have a look at the man who was to receive it."

"Perhaps you were right, though it was irregular. Go on."

"I walked into town with the letter, went to the Tavarne Hotel, found the

man in No. 4, as she had said he would be. I recognized him as an enemy subject. Hans von Oster is his name. He attended the scientific school in Benton about eight years ago. I accused him and he betrayed himself. Then I tried to arrest him. He resisted. We fought all over the place, and the guard came in and nabbed him."

"Did you get a good look at the woman?"

"She was covered with dust. I couldn't tell much about her."

"Was she young?"

"I guess so, sir. Somewhere around thirty. She was a brunette; I am sure of that."

"That's a hell of a description! Ninety per cent of the women of France are brunette. Where did she go?"

"Back to Paris."

"You should have detained her."

"I had no authority. Her pass was in order."

"Well," said the general, "I suppose you did the best you could. It was a darn good job to capture that spy. Maybe this French colonel will be able to tell us what is in the letter. You will have to make the charge against the spy. Drumhead court-martial in an hour. Stay within call. And thank you, lieutenant."

Chris breathed freely. He had feared the questioning regarding the girl. If an investigation were made, the sergeant of his company would say that his lieutenant had claimed acquaintance with the female spy. In that case, Chris would be in great trouble. His only chance would be that they would make no investigation.

As far as Von Oster was concerned. Chris was sorry that his evidence would cause the man's execution, but it was the fortune of war. His old schoolmate knew that he was risking a spy's death when he entered the enemy's lines.

Chris waited outside of brigade headquarters for more than an hour. Then an orderly summoned him into the presence of the general.

SEATED at table with the commanding officer was a French colonel, an alert man with a black beard. Captain Larkin of the American intelligence was also present.

"Lieutenant Graham," said the general, with an approving smile, "you have done the army a great service by your quick wit to-night. This gentleman has deciphered the dispatch which you captured from the spy and finds it to be of the most vital importance. If the enemy had ever received the information contained in that letter—— Well, it would have cost this division thousands of lives. That's all I can tell you now. I am recommending you for promotion."

Chris saluted and was silent.

"At the request of Colonel Nefchateau, I am turning the spy over to the French intelligence department. In Paris they may find a way to get more information out of him than they would secure if we shot him out of hand. You are excused and may return to your company."

Although the fate of poor Von Oster was undoubtedly sealed, Chris was greatly relieved that he would not be called upon to face him in a court and cause his immediate execution. That no more questions were asked regarding the woman on the motor cycle was a tremendous relief. As he was turning to go, the Frenchman spoke:

"With your permission, general. Lieutenant, would you know the woman who gave you this letter again if you saw her?"

"I don't know," faltered Chris. "It was pretty dark. I am not sure."

"You may be called upon to identify her."

"Yes, sir."

"That's all," said the general. "You may go."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A SURPRISE ATTACK.

ON the fifteenth, the division commander was astonished to receive an order to get into motor trucks and go to the front. His destination would be told him later. Many officers were on leave. The units were scattered. No one was prepared for immediate action. Chris found himself the only lieutenant in his company, and many of the companies were in temporary command of lieutenants.

Following fast upon the heels of the orders came long lines of motor trucks, in charge of French officers who only knew that they were to follow the Paris-Soissons Road northward to a certain point, where further orders would be given.

Each company made haste to load its kitchen and rations on trucks. The men were also loaded into trucks, twenty men in each. They rode all night. At dawn, they found French officers by the roadside, who instructed them to leave the trucks and hide in the forest before it grew light enough for the enemy to see them. This meant that they were already near the front. Evidently they were intended for some sort of surprise party. There was no bombardment going on. It seemed to be a quiet sector, and the troops had no special premonition of the terrific experience in store.

This was the morning of July 16, 1918. All day the division lurked in the woods, resting, skylarking, chatting, gambling and sleeping. In the afternoon word came that they were to relieve a French division, marching by night and hiding again at dawn. On the seventeenth, they loafed all day in the forest of Retz, ten miles behind the front.

Late in the afternoon the general in command was thunderstruck on receiving an attack order. They were to go into the line, under cover of darkness, and at dawn they were to jump off. Battalion and company commanders were quickly called together, the plan explained, their maps turned over to them and their instructions given.

The captain of Chris' company came back with a grim smile on his face. He jerked his thumb toward Chris, who joined him and they walked away from the nearest group of men until they could not be overheard.

"If you've got a mother or wife or sweetheart, young feller, slip her a line now, because she's never going to see you any more," the captain said gruffly.

Chris felt a sharp quiver of fright. "We're going to attack?" he ventured.

"Right! That's nothing. How are we going to attack? Why, we are just going to jump off without any heavy-artillery preparation because there ain't any heavy artillery. We get a barrage from our own divisional light guns, which is fine, if they don't hit us instead of the enemy, and we bite our way through their barbed wire, because there isn't any artillery preparation."

"How far do we go? What are our objectives?"

The captain grinned. "We go till we damn well drop dead. There are no objectives. We're supposed to cut our way through the whole darned army."

"What are we doing it for?" asked the perplexed lieutenant.

" 'Cause we were fools enough to butt in Over Here!"

"It sounds like suicide."

"You said it, kid. Suicide. This time to-morrow you and me will be playing little gold harps and telling pretty angels to stop tickling us with their wings. You can't break the enemy's line without preparation. We're a lot of gone gooses!"

Chris took the advice, wrote letters to his mother and to Marion. His nervousness grew as the day advanced. The men were taking things placidly. They

didn't know what was locked up in the bosoms of their officers.

As night fell, it began to rain. An accident protected the grand strategy. If the enemy had seen those three divisions moving up to the hinge of the big sector, they would have laid their plans. But it was pitch dark. The rain came down in torrents. Over the roads moved sixty-seven thousand men, five thousand animals and three thousand vehicles.

The confusion on those narrow roads was indescribable. The men marched in the muddy ditches because the center of the roads were clogged with guns and caissons. Creaking and groaning, crawled big French tanks, their motors roaring. Huge five-ton trucks carrying field hospitals, staff cars, motor cycles, side cars, every kind of motor vehicle, passing one another, jumbling up together, occasionally running over an unfortunate soldier.

Had the moon been out, the scouting enemy airplanes would have seen the white roads jammed with humanity and the death and destruction they would have wrought would have been appalling, besides destroying the element of surprise upon which the success of the movement depended.

Reel carts of the signal corps, one-mule carts for machine guns, every element of an army was scrambled in that mess, yet somehow or other, by dawn, the thing had been unscrambled and the battalions and regiments and brigades and divisions were passing through the French and taking the line.

From the opposing lines came no sound. Not a single shell was fired. So long had these invading soldiers been accustomed to doing all the attacking that they never dreamed that in this far-off, quiet sector the Allies were planning an audacious stroke. But the officers found the silence ominous. Always, until now, the enemy had learned our plans. Most likely they knew all about this, and had some dreadful reception arranged for it.

AT a few minutes after four in the morning, every gun on the Allied side from the Aisne to Château Thierry went into action, notifying the foe that an attack was coming somewhere along a forty-mile front, preventing them from moving a brigade anywhere along the line. Near a village called Dommiers, Chris' division went over in the wake of the rolling barrage laid down by the division artillery.

Chris waved to his men, and, spreading out in attack formation, they moved along, not running, because they must not run into the barrage. Ahead they could see the sky alight with rockets as the front lines of their opponents signaled for their own protective barrage to tear the attacking troops to bits. It came quickly, but the Americans were cheered to find it weak. The enemy did not expect them. They had not prepared for this attack. The advancing troops were going to get through.

The charge was on a five-mile front: They swept through the rifle pits of the front line without much difficulty, but at the second line they encountered the machine guns. That front line had not been well organized. There was no barbed wire.

Now the captain of the company broke into a run and the men followed. The quicker they moved, the more ground they would take and the less time they would give the defenders to massacre them. Already machine guns were spitting and men were dropping here and there, but thirty thousand rifles were coming on in waves over that five-mile front, the dare-devils of the French Foreign Legion in the center, the first division on one side, the second on the other, vying with each other as to which would gain the most ground.

The tanks rumbled along, headed for machine-gun nests, shattering them

with their shortened 75 millimeter guns and then rolling over them.

The advancing troops took the second line, and killed or sent back as prisoners the defenders, hopelessly outnumbered. Behind the Allied soldiers came their batteries, moving forward almost as fast as the infantry, perhaps the first charge of artillery in modern history.

Chris lost his sense of fear. It was glorious, this dash through the previously ever-victorious enemy. What if he did lose his life? It was worth living to be in a thing like this. On either side the soldiers were shouting excitedly, some of them daring to laugh.

THE sun was high in the heavens. It beat down hotly. They had been advancing for hours with no sense of fatigue. On and on and on, stopping to surround and creep up on a machine-gun nest and bayonet or capture the defenders, then on to the next obstacle and over it.

Always ahead burst the shells. Sometimes an enemy shell burst among them, bringing down half a dozen.

Chris looked at his watch, and saw that it was noon. They had been moving forward for nearly eight hours. They had advanced at least eight miles—half the distance to the great enemy supply station of Soissons.

And then from behind came the sound of bugles and galloping horses. In surprise, the Americans turned and saw, advancing, long lines of cavalry. Mangin, the French commander, had decided to send in two regiments of cuirassiers.

They came on at a trot, resplendent in their helmets and new bright-blue uniforms, until they had passed through the cheering infantry. Then the colonel, riding ahead, drew his sword and a thousand sabers gleamed in the air. The bugle sounded the charge, and across the plain galloped the horsemen. It was glorious, but it was not war.

Hardly had they faded from view of Chris and his company when there came the *rat-a-tat* of hundreds of machine guns, mowing down the magnificent targets. Hardly a trooper lived to reach the enemy lines. The glorious regiments were completely decimated, cut to pieces. This was certainly no place for cavalry.

The infantry waves continued after this interlude. In a few minutes several score of wounded men and horses came back, all that was left of a superb regiment. Farther on they had to climb over the fallen bodies of blue-clad men and horses while the machine guns poured bullets on them.

"On with the tanks!" cried the generals, and a line of tanks now moved through the infantry.

They tore over a trench with machine guns and moved up to the crest of a slight ridge, where the distant enemy artillery had the range.

And then Chris saw another appalling sight. As each tank was outlined against the sky, a high-explosive shell struck it and shattered it into a mass of junk.

On, infantry! If the salient was to be burst it would be done by the infantry, unarmored, unprotected human beings—the most potent weapon of war!

The sky overhead was full of airplanes, but they were mostly French: The foe were outnumbered. Burning planes, falling like plummets, were another menace.

And now the Americans were swarming among the machine guns in the third line. The fighting was hand to hand. It was cut and thrust. The ground was covered with men in khaki and men in gray. Chris was wounded in the left arm, and he was walking stiffly, at the steady pace of the doughboy lines, because a bullet had passed through the calf of his leg, but he was going forward. He could have turned and gone to the rear, but who would command

the company then? The old, grizzled captain was dead.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TURN OF THE TIDE.

DARKNESS found the American soldiers wearily plodding forward. The order came to dig in where they were for the night, in preparation for counterattacks.

Surely, they thought, they would be relieved during the night. They had done enough in one day. But Mangin had no troops to relieve them. The job was only half finished. Next day they must continue forward, against fresh troops brought up in the night.

A doctor stumbled into the line and bandaged up the two wounds of Chris.

"You had better go to the rear," he advised.

"I can't," groaned the fellow who had sought a safe job. "I am the only officer."

"There is a sergeant in command of a company I just left."

"I have no more sergeants," Chris returned, with a wry smile.

If the enemy had been taken by surprise by the big attack, they were now well over it. They had driven through a salient twenty-five miles wide and forty miles deep to the Marne, and now the Allies had driven a wedge into that salient, at its hinge. If the Allies made a farther advance, the vast army inside the salient would be cut off from its supplies and tied up in a bag.

All night they were bringing up fresh divisions, building up new lines of defense, and preparing to evacuate the whole Marne salient before they were caught in a trap. The Allied commander was sending for reserves. The great stroke had succeeded, but the reserves would not be in the line at once. The attacking divisions must continue the advance a day or two longer.

Back in corps headquarters, Mangin with his generals of divisions were studying maps and receiving reports. The first day had more than surpassed expectations. Hundreds of cannon were captured; the infantry had driven through so fast that they had passed the three lines of defense and descended upon the artillery before it was possible to move them away.

All night fresh artillery was brought up, vast supplies of ammunition placed in new dumps in what had been enemy territory, new sets of maps were forwarded to regimental and battalion commanders covering the ground that must be taken on the morrow. Through the night the retreating foe shelled the conquered area with every gun which could be brought up, making the task of getting up supplies and strengthening the lines more difficult.

Before dark a swarm of enemy planes came up from the Marne and drove all the Allied planes from the sky. After dark they flew low and introduced Chris to something he had never seen before—big lights suspended from parachutes which illuminated the plain and enabled the airmen to drop bombs upon groups of infantry in trenches and destroy supply wagons and ammunition carts on the way up to the lines. Oh, they would be ready on the morrow! What had happened that day was nothing to what was to come.

Up in the corner of the ground nearest Soissons the enemy had collected many hundreds of machine guns, and spread them to cover three miles of the advance, in such a way that the infantry could not attack one set of machine gunners without drawing the fire of two other machine-gun crews operating on the flanks.

Chris' company had lost a third of its strength in killed or wounded during the first day. He knew that the advance had won through by force of superior numbers. During the night, however, the superiority would be lost. Un-

doubtedly three or four fresh enemy divisions were in the line, with all the artillery that could be moved from fifty miles around.

Nevertheless, the first division, the Moroccans, and the second division jumped off at four in the morning under cover of the rolling barrage. They ran immediately into a hostile barrage much stiffer than their own. Chris limped along, though every step he took was agony. He told himself he was entitled to go to the rear. He ought to go. The doctor had ordered him back, yet something impelled him to keep moving forward. He didn't even have a sword to wave to make him feel he was an officer. He carried a rifle, like the rest of the men.

Looking neither to right nor left, eyes fixed grimly forward, they moved on. They did not want to look around; too many men were falling. This time there was no line of rifle pits to be carried. They ran directly into the field of machine guns hidden in the tall grass, the gunners lying flat, playing the guns as one plays a hose. How the bullets missed any of the advancing men was a mystery.

And now they were among the nests of machine guns, bayoneting the gunners, turning the guns on the enemy, but there were always more machine guns just behind and the farther in they got, the thicker the guns. Chris ordered his men to crawl up through the grass and this saved many lives from that withering fire.

Behind them, they heard their tanks; it was jump to your feet and get out of the way of the armored monsters, or they would run over you as quickly as they would an enemy. The tanks were the weapon in a field of machine guns. The opposing artillery, however, had the field all plotted out. They dropped big shells, which shattered the tanks as though they were made of paper or match board.

BY late afternoon the advancing soldiers had won over this three miles of machine-gun nests, captured or destroyed at least five hundred machine guns and killed or sent to the rear nearly all the operators. The resistance ahead was as stiff as ever, however. There were plenty of gunners still, and they were full of fight. All day our troops had gone without food or water. The canteens had soon been emptied. They could not stop to eat. When the order came in to dig in and hold what ground they had gained, they gave feeble cheers, then began to turn up the sod with their bayonets and the small trench tools they had carried on their backs.

A runner crawling along gave them some news that heartened them tremendously. The marines in the second division had succeeded in reaching the Château Thierry Road and had cut the enemy at the Marne off from their supply base at Soissons. Most of the bombing and shelling that night was in the vicinity of the road, which the enemy was striving desperately to take and to which the marines held on with bulldog determination.

Meanwhile a terrible job had been handed to the first division. It seemed that the Moroccans, wonderful as they were, had failed to take the village of Berzy-le-Sec, and so thinned were their ranks they did not have men enough to make another assault. Therefore General Summerall, commanding the first, was ordered to take the town in addition to having won his own objectives.

It is necessary now to explain the make-up of an American division, which at full strength has twenty-seven thousand men. It consists of four regiments of infantry, three regiments of artillery, three battalions of machine gunners, a regiment of engineers, four hospital companies, a signal battalion, a supply train and a headquarters train and military police.

The infantry of a division at full

strength is about twelve to fourteen thousand rifles.

During the night, up to the front line came about everybody in the division to fill the gaps in the infantry regiments —engineers, orderlies, cooks, kitchen police, military police, clerks from division and regimental headquarters—all who could be mustered and who could fire a rifle. And with this reënforcement the brigade assigned to the job took the town the French couldn't take, while the rest of the division pushed on, and on the fourth day came out on the hills commanding the city of Soissons, only three miles down the valley. The city was doomed and the enemy had suffered the greatest defeat since 1914, for the fall of Soissons meant that the splendid army that had slashed its way down to the Marne and come within an ace of taking Paris must now return faster than it had advanced, or be captured.

But imagine the condition of the three divisions which had accomplished this wonderful thing. Half of their men had been killed or wounded; those who lived were in a pitiable physical condition. These men had been fighting for four full days, targets for every known weapon of war as they advanced across open fields, on through forests. At night they had been unable to sleep, because shells and bombs were continuously bursting upon them; their nerves were frazzled; their health was wrecked; they were through.

Chris' two wounds were badly inflamed, and he suffered tortures. Strangely enough, he had not received a scratch after the first day. Many of the men under his command were more severely wounded than he, yet they had not gone to the rear. How many men he had killed, he did not know. He had fired at many, but he had done no bayoneting. Veteran though he was, he shrank from cold steel, even to save his own life. Fortunately for him, the regulars were not so squeamish; they had taken care of the machine gunners.

THERE was no advance on the fifth day and word had been sent up that relief was soon coming. Blessed news!

Fresh divisions had relieved the second and Moroccans, but the first were still in the line. Firing in front of them was perfunctory, because the enemy had given up hope of saving Soissons, had decided to withdraw and were fighting farther south to protect their retreat.

Early in the evening of July 22d, one of the men pricked up his ears.

"What's that sound?" he demanded. "Jumping Jehoshaphat, it's bagpipes!"

It was. With a full pipe band shrilling, and with the men in parade formation, a whole Scotch division was approaching to relieve the first. Never were kilties more warmly welcomed than the Fifteenth Scottish Division, hauled up from the British front because there were no reserves nearer at hand. And then the weary first division crawled back to the rest camps.

The four infantry regiments were reduced to skeletons; in many cases officers had been killed and wounded, and companies were commanded by noncoms or even privates. The Twenty-sixth Regiment had lost its colonel and all its majors and came out commanded by a captain. The total casualties of the division in five days were eight thousand three hundred and sixty-five, three quarters of this number being in the infantry regiments.

Sixty per cent of all the officers and fifty per cent of all the enlisted men were lost in this action. The division had taken more than three thousand five hundred prisoners, seventy-five cannon, fifty mortars and three hundred heavy machine guns. The second division had been fortunate in being taken out of the line at the end of the third day, with a loss of four thousand seven hundred

men. It had captured three thousand men and seventy-five machine guns.

Chris rode back to the forest of Retz in an ambulance, with heavy bandages on his leg and a ticket for a hospital. Of course neither he nor any junior officer had the slightest notion of the tremendous strategic importance of the victory they had won. He was aggrieved because the division had been asked to do too much. It should have been relieved at the end of the second day, he thought. He believed it had been sacrificed by the inhuman brutes of the general staff.

But while he was riding in that ambulance, the hordes of the invaders were pouring back out of the salient and the great retreat had begun, which did not stop until the armistice.

CHAPTER XL.

FRESH DOUGHNUTS.

THAT night Chris lay on a cot in a field hospital, and remained on his back for two days. Fresh and more serious casualties were coming in, however; he was able to move, so he had to give way to the more serious cases. He was ticketed to a base hospital fifteen miles farther south. On the third morning he was aided to climb into the back seat of a flivver with two other slightly wounded officers, while two more squeezed in beside the driver on the front seat.

They had been riding for several hours along a road choked with trucks and cars of every description, both going their way and coming toward them, when they entered the outskirts of a village where congestion seemed worse than usual. As they poked along they saw many cars which had been driven into the ditch or even forced over broken shrubbery into fields. A little distance ahead was a swirling crowd of men. At the same time there was wafted toward them on the breeze an aroma which made the men in the flivver sniff incredulously. It was the odor of frying lard. And then they saw men come out of the crowd who were eating something.

"Doughnuts!" exclaimed the driver of the flivver. "Excuse me!"

He stopped the car in the ditch, made a flying leap from his seat and dashed toward the throng, while the wounded shouted after him.

They wanted doughnuts, too.

Chris got the door open on his side, and lowered himself into the road. Then he grabbed a crutch belonging to one of the others and hobbled rapidly toward the center of activity.

Truck drivers and doughboys made way respectfully for the wounded officer, and he forged to the front to rest his eyes upon an astonishing sight.

In the garden of a cottage by the roadside a camp fire was burning. Over the fire hung a huge French soup kettle, which was filled with boiling fat. On a table near by, a girl was rolling out doughnuts, a second was dropping the dough into the kettle and a third was ladling out the browned and delicious New England product. The three girls were garbed in the familiar blue uniform and poke bonnets of the Salvation Army, and at that minute the celebrated organization won its way into a popularity with Americans that it has never lost.

The men were scrambling for the doughnuts as fast as the girl in charge of that part of the job could offer them. Chris forced his way to a strategic position where she could not fail to drop one or two into his outstretched hand. Seeing the sleeve of the uniform with its gold service stripes, she lifted her head. Underneath the disguising poke bonnet was the beautiful, flushed face of Marion Stacy.

"Marion!" Chris exclaimed, incredulous, yet joyous.

The girl dropped an armful of dough-

nuts and a dozen men dived for them. "Chris-s!" she faltered. "Oh, you are wounded! Come inside."

Abandoning her work, she grasped him by the arm. Her eyes filled with tears as she saw the crutch and the bandaged leg. Tenderly she led him to a bench, then sat down beside him.

"You wouldn't see me, Marion!" he declared reproachfully.

"How could I? Are you badly wounded? You won't lose your leg?"

"They say not. I'm all right. How about you? Your wound?"

"It was nothing much. The bandages were taken off a week ago."

"What are you doing here, in this uniform?"

"I couldn't go home. I thought I would, but it was like deserting. I wouldn't stay on that foolish job any longer, and I met a Salvation Army officer who allowed me to join. I wanted to be of some use. Oh, Chris, how they love the doughnuts! I was never so happy in my life!"

"Believe me, your Salvation Army knows the right thing to do. The boys would rather have doughnuts than anything in the world. Marion, did you read my second letter?"

"Yes," she answered, blushing.

"Do you forgive me? Will you take me back?"

"There is no question of that. You love Lady Mary Yorkley."

"I don't!" he said fiercely. "Listen! I met her. She gave me back my piece of string. And, Marion, she is a spy. If they find her, they will shoot her. I found out all about her. I think she cultivated me for information to send to the enemy. Like a fool, I talked too much."

"You loved her!" Marion insisted.

"I was fascinated. I was an idiot. I only love you! Don't you understand? I went through the last battle hoping to get killed, because I had nothing to live for. I wrote you before we went in. We were a forlorn hope and I expected to die. Did you get my letter of July 17th?"

"N-no," she faltered. "I must have left Paris before it arrived. But, Chris, you were disloyal, and that is something I can't forgive. I'm sorry."

"Marion!"

"My principles——" she began firmly.

"Oh, damn your principles!" he exclaimed. "Haven't you seen enough of real life to know that you can't expect too much of a man? I love you, do you hear? I'm going to marry you whether you like it or not!"

"How dare you——"

His right arm went around her waist. He grasped her roughly and pulled her to him. His left hand grasped her face and turned it upward. Then he leaned over and kissed her brutally once, twice, half a dozen times.

"Whether you like it or not! Do you hear?"

Marion shook herself free. "You brute!" she exclaimed. "Why, Chris, how can you treat me like this?"

There wasn't much anger in her voice, however, and he followed up his advantage.

"I'm your future husband, and don't you forget it! You are going to be my wife and you had better like it, because you haven't anything to say about it. Come here."

He seized her in his arms and kissed her savagely again.

"Chris!" she murmured, when she caught her breath. "I think I like it."

"For the love of Pete, Jack, look at Graham kissing the Sally," said a rough but familiar voice.

Chris and the girl swung apart. He scowled at the man who had called him by name. Then the scowl changed to a grin.

"Meet some old friends, Marion," he said.

A sergeant and a corporal with the

insignia of the second division stood before them, Messrs. Luke Manning and Jack Cunniff.

"I never saw them before in my life." declared Marion, her face pink with embarrassment.

"Sure you did, lady!" declared Luke. "We was the guys that got fresh long ago at Eppington, when the lieutenant, here—he was a sergeant then—came running down the road and tried to beat me up."

"What are you fellows doing in the second division?" demanded Chris delightedly.

"Well, leftenant, after that mess at Amiens, a general come down to see us. That was after you went away. He asked us if there was anything we wanted. We was the white-haired boys for what we done with Carey's outfit, see? So Jack, here, spoke up and said we was entitled to be regular soldiers and we was sick of chaperoning box cars.

"He switched us to the second division, and we got more fighting than we ever wanted. We're fed up, we are! And now when the gang is at a rest camp having a good time, we get set at driving trucks. Say, lady, them was certainly good doughnuts. You Sallies going to be here near the front lines right along?"

"How did you get chevrons, both of you?" Chris asked.

"Oh, we was in that little trouble at Belleau Woods."

"Were you in the Soissons affair?"

"We was there with bells on!"

"Then you're lucky to be alive," remarked Chris, with a grin.

"You got kind of bunged up, didn't yer? Well, sarge—'scuse me, leftenant—we won't butt in no more. Come on, Jack."

The pair lumbered off, but a few steps on, Luke looked back.

"Say, leftenant, you don't suppose yer girl would hand us a knock-down to the other two Sallies? They don't seem to have no special friends."

"On your way!" ordered Chris, and the pair returned to the doughnuts.

"So Lady Mary Yorkiey is a spy!" said Marion, thoughtfully. "You know, Chris, I disliked that girl the moment I met her. I felt there was something wrong about her, and when I heard that you had got engaged to her, I think I was hurt more because it was that particular woman than for any other reason. I hope they catch her."

"You don't hope anything of the kind. Don't you know they'll shoot her?"

"There is no more reason why they shouldn't shoot a woman spy than a man."

"Well, I don't want her shot."

"You still love her!" Marion's eyes filled with tears.

"Stop that!" he exclaimed, exasperated.

Marion stopped. "Yes, Chris," she said dutifully.

He grinned at her. "You know, I think you'll make me a nice, obedient wife!" he informed her.

"Of course I shall. You don't suppose any woman wants a man who isn't her master, do you? I didn't want to boss you the way I did in the old days; I had to!"

"Well, you won't have to any longer," he assured her. "I'm a tough customer."

"Yes, Chris."

"Now this Salvation Army business is finished, for you. You go back to Paris and take the first boat home."

Marion smiled at him curiously. "You don't understand, lord and master. The Salvation Army is a military organization, and I have enlisted for the war. I can't get out of it, and I must go where I am sent. So your orders are impossible. Besides, I am doing some good and I love it."

"But it's dangerous," he protested.

"So was Paris. So is the Atlantic

Ocean. So is America, where they are dying by thousands of the flu. No, Chris, you do your job and I'll do mine. Now I must go back and help fry doughnuts. Let me help you to your car. I suppose you didn't walk here."

He rose and hobbled along, one arm over her shoulder. "Where can my letters reach you?"

"Salvation Army headquarters in Paris. Do you know what hospital you are going to?"

"There is a base hospital about five miles south, for which I am headed."

"I'll try to come to you there."

"God bless you, Marion!"

She smiled at him, but there were tears in her eyes. "I'm so happy, Chris, that you are going to a hospital. You'll be out of danger for at least several weeks."

"Marion, please fry your doughnuts well back of the line."

"Our orders are to go as near the front as they will let us, and we shall obey orders."

She helped him into the flivver, whose driver had returned, gorged with the doughnuts. She kissed him frankly, before the grinning invalids, then waved good-by as the flivver rattled forward.

Chris explained the situation to the boys in the car and received envious sympathy. The sun was shining brightly for him again. Despite his aching wounds, all was right with the world. Marion had forgiven him. Things were as they had been—or were they?

In the old days he would have accepted her dictum as final. When Marion said something was against her principles, he had not dared to argue. But to-day he had silenced her rudely, and she had wilted. After she had finished her declaration, he had told her what was what and she had meekly surrendered. Darn it, she was only a woman after all and she knew her man when she met him!

FOR him, the next few weeks were hospital routine. His wounds slowly healed. His soul was at peace. He received letters from Marion nearly every day. When he missed a day or two, he received several at once. That she did not come to see him, he understood, for she was a member of a military organization, a private with women captains and majors. The independent Marion had yielded to army discipline.

During these weeks, wonderful things were happening along the whole front. Foch, in command from the Atlantic to Mesopotamia, issued his orders and they were obeyed all along the line. The British advanced on Jerusalem from Bagdad; the Italians struck in Italy; the great army of Haig with a number of American divisions in line crashed against the enemy who had weakened himself on the British front by sending reserves to the Marne. The great enemy army in the Marne salient retreated slowly, hotly pursued by French and Americans, until it got out of the trap and reached the comparative safety of the prepared positions along the Vesle.

Much more than a million Americans were now in France. Foch did not hesitate to continue his offensive and he had consented to the formation of a great American army, operating under its own commander in chief.

To Chris, in the hospital, came a major of the French intelligence and a captain of the American intelligence department, to find out what he knew of Lady Mary Yorkley. He sized them up as reasonable and understanding men, so he made a clean breast of the whole story so far as he knew it.

"Then you knew who she was the night you accepted her dispatch at Meaux? You recognized her?" asked the American.

"Naturally. I had been engaged to marry her."

"It's a lucky thing for you that you have a wonderful record, young fel-

low!" remarked the American officer. with a smile. "Do you know what was in the dispatch that you were to turn over to the enemy secret agent?"

"The general said it was important information. But he didn't specify what it was," answered Chris.

"That girl had wormed out the entire plan of our surprise attack at Soissons. If her letter had got through, the enemy would have concentrated a couple of hundred thousand men and a thousand guns at that point and blasted our three divisions off the face of the earth. They would not now be in full retreat; they might have broken through and taken Paris. That's how important the dispatch turned out to be."

"It was lucky I recognized that spy." Chris grinned. "I suppose you shot him. How did you get wise to Lady Mary?"

"It happened that a high officer in the French army, one of a dozen men who knew the plan of the attack, went out to dinner with her, had too many drinks and blabbed. By a process of elimination we decided that she was the only person who could have secured the information, and we put the British, French and American intelligence departments upon her record."

"Who was she?"

"Just what she claimed—Lady Mary Yorkley. It happened that her mother was an enemy alien; her fiancé was an enemy officer; she spent most of her life abroad, and she had no British sympathy whatever. However, she appeared in England shortly after the war began, was accepted in London society. because of her family, and the next year joined the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps. As she was a beauty it didn't take her long to make friends with generals who should have known better.

"She pulled wires to get herself detached from active service with the corps, and she went where she liked and did as she pleased. It never occurred to anybody to investigate her, and she roamed all over the front, on one excuse or another. She was so damn good looking that everybody fell for her. You are the eleventh officer to whom she was engaged at one time or another. However, you are the first under the rank of colonel."

"I suppose I may consider that a compliment," Chris remarked, with a wry smile.

"Evidently she loved you for yourself alone, because she wouldn't be apt to get much information out of a lieutenant."

"I'll have you know I was only a sergeant when she fell in love with me!" he returned, smiling.

"Don't flatter yourself too much! She knew that if you delivered that letter, you were being condemned to certain death—you and three full divisions—and she let you do it."

"Oh, I'm not kidding myself. I was a first-class boob."

"Correct."

"I suppose she is in prison?"

"She is not," the intelligence officer admitted ruefully. "Between you and her ten other fiancés, she managed to fly the coop. I imagine that the Soissons information was so obviously her work that she had laid her plans to get back inside the enemy lines immediately afterward. We can't find a trace of her."

"I'm glad of it!" exclaimed Chris. "No girl as heroic as she was ought to be shot."

"No beautiful girl ever ought to be shot," said the Frenchman. "There are too few as it is."

"What are you going to do to me—court-martial me?" asked Chris.

"It's this way." The American officer smiled. "If we court-martial you, there is a British lieutenant general, three British major generals, two American brigadier generals and half a dozen colonels in all three armies that

would have to stand trial with you. So the matter is going to be dropped."

"Good!"

"Of course if you had tried to lie out of it, you would have been in trouble, but anybody who went through that Soissons attack is entitled to the best of everything. Forget the whole affair. Only don't fall in love with any more beautiful strangers."

"I'm cured!" Chris laughed.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE EVIL FOREST.

IT was night in the forest, not a silent night, nor a night made hideous by the screams of wild beasts. In this forest there were no animals save human animals, but it was filled with menace and hate. Every few moments there would come a deafening crash, followed by the snapping of branches and the smashing downward of a great tree which had been struck by the explosion of a heavy shell.

Flashes of light, succeeded by the boom of a cannon, then the nasty crash of a rifle or the *pom-pom-pom* of a machine gun pumping out messages of death. There were groans and cries of wounded and dying men, but these were drowned by the man-made thunder. For this was the Forest of the Argonne, where a million of men fought like beasts for months on end and died in myriads.

The new American army was in the Argonne, more than six hundred thousand men commanded by General Pershing in person, and a tremendous opposing army was in the forest, placed there with orders not to retreat a step.

The Argonne forest was the biggest in France. It was about twenty miles in length, by five or six miles wide, and it was wild. Roman legions had passed through it on their way to the Rhine two thousand years before; hordes of barbarians had lurked in it during the Dark Ages. If it had been in America, it would long before have been dewooded, but the French preserved their forests. It did not differ much from its aspect to the generals of ancient Rome.

The forest was full of deep ravines and high hills. It was perhaps the most difficult spot to move troops over in France, and it was the last stand of what had been the greatest and best-trained army in the world.

While the northern army stretched from the Alps to the sea, it secured its supplies, its ammunition and its resources generally from its homelands, through the pass between the Ardennes Mountains and Sedan. From the River Meuse, where Pershing faced on a front of seventy miles, to Sedan, scene of the collapse of Napoleon the Third's army in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, was only twenty-five miles. If the Americans should take Sedan before the enemy had made good the retreat from France and Belgium, they would cut his communications and make the capture of the entire enemy army extremely likely.

Although the lines of battle stretched many miles on each side of the Forest of the Argonne, progress had to keep pace with advance in the forest and here occurred some of the most desperate fighting.

And this night in late September, Lieutenant Christopher Graham, pioneer officer, first division, was alone in the forest on listening post, several hundred yards in advance of his line. It had been raining heavily.

And as he lay there, Chris bemoaned his fate. Surely he had done enough; he had been wounded half a dozen times, had been in scores of battles. Did they intend to keep him here until he was killed? Millions of Americans were now in France. The first division had been fighting until there was hardly a man of its original personnel left. Why

not take it out and let the new divisions get a taste of war? Send it home, for if ever an outfit deserved to be sent home, it was this one.

Home, sweet thought! He would never see home again or Marion. He had not heard from her for a month. It was unfair, unjust.

"Bing!" A bullet whined by his head. Some sniper had seen him. He burrowed deeper in the mud. *"Bing!"* a second bullet whizzed by, but not so close. The sniper wasn't sure of his location. That was good. Silence again. Chris listened. What was that? Somebody was moving up on him from the rear. He drew his gun, turned and watched. Trying to get him from the rear! He would show them. Some dark object was slithering along in the mud like a snake, only twenty feet away. He pointed the pistol.

"Don't shoot, lieutenant," came a sharp whisper. "It's me, a runner."

Relieved, Chris waited for the message. The man crawled close and then the sniper opened fire again. His two bullets missed the target.

"You're ordered to the rear," whispered the runner, as he slid alongside of Chris. "Back to brigade headquarters. I think you're going home."

Chris laughed. Home! He would never go home! "What makes you think so?" he jeered.

"Heard them talking at headquarters. Sending wounded and long-service officers home to train troops."

Home! Was it possible? Home, safety, peace! He began to crawl back toward the line. And the sniper opened fire. Cautiously Chris wiggled himself along. He was sobbing with excitement and fear. Yes, he was afraid, and he had never been so afraid since the night long ago, when he had been alone in the French hut under bombardment. He was going home, yes, but—suppose they got him now! In a few hundred yards he would be safe; he would never be under fire again. But in the meantime that sniper might get him.

To die just as he was on his way home! It was too frightful. If he could only let the sniper know that he was going home, that he was no longer a menace. The man was human; undoubtedly he would like to go home, too; he wouldn't kill a man who was going home.

CHRIS crawled along. The sniper had stopped, but a machine-gun bullet might get him, or a piece of a shell.

"Who's there?" came a challenge.

Chris was hardly able to mouth the password. Then he toppled into the shallow trench which the company had dug that day. The captain was waiting for him to shake his hand; the other lieutenants and the sergeants crowded around him, patted him on the back.

"We'll hate to lose you, you lucky devil," said the captain.

Chris was off toward the rear, still a prey to that dread of a sudden taking off now, after a whole year of it and more. He reached regimental headquarters, where he came in for more congratulation and envy. And then he was off for brigade headquarters.

Perhaps it wasn't true; perhaps the runner had been mistaken. Possibly they were only going to change him to another brigade or division. No. The adjutant showed Chris the order. Officers with more than a year's service, who had been wounded and had graduated from the French training school and had been recommended to a promotion and who had won a decoration. Of course he qualified. That order was issued for him.

At that time no one on the Allied side was farsighted enough to divine that in six weeks the war would be over. The enemy was slowly retreating, true, but the invading army was intact. They were yielding conquered territory. To drive them across their own frontier

would end the first phase of the war, the second would be even more difficult, for they would fight on a shortened line. The enemy might hold out for years.

In America they had just registered eight million more eligibles and were about to call two million of them to the colors. Officers trained in the new warfare were urgently needed to prepare the most recent draft divisions, who would be over in six or eight months' time. So the American staff had planned to send home several thousand junior officers who had seen hard service in France and had earned the respite from war which they would get during the work in the American training camps.

Meanwhile the Allies would keep nibbling away at the Meuse-Argonne district, creeping closer and closer to Sedan and the vital railroad which was the breath of life to the millions of enemy soldiers in France and Belgium. The strategy of the movement was unimpeachable, however the unfortunate divisions which crashed against the opposing stone wall might feel individually. To capture several millions of the enemy was worth half a million lives if necessary; such was the cold reasoning of the powers that rule in war.

But Chris had escaped from the hellish forest; he had escaped snipers and machine gunners, field artillery and heavy artillery. Nowhere in northern France was he safe from air bombs, but that was a remote danger. He was free, to seek out Marion, persuade her to return home. They would have six months of happiness before it would be necessary for him to cross the sea.

CHAPTER XLII.

A JOYFUL DAY.

CHRIS entered a jubilant Paris, a Paris which no longer shuddered at the crashing of the shells from Big Bertha, a Paris with the enemy no longer at the gates—he had retreated sullenly until more than a hundred miles away. Paris did not anticipate the immediate end of the war, but she was sure that her own danger had passed.

Chris went at once to the headquarters of the Salvation Army and met a meek little man in the uniform of a general who could tell him about Marion.

"Miss Stacy?" the man said. "She is one of our best workers. Unfortunately, however, she is no longer in the field. She caught cold, that trench fever—I believe the doctors call it Spanish influenza—but she is well, only still quite weak. We shall not permit her to go out for a month."

"Listen, general," said Chris persuasively. "I've been in the army for fifteen months; I've been in a number of battles and have been wounded six times. Now I am being sent home. Miss Stacy is my fiancée and I want to marry her and take her with me. She wouldn't leave the Salvation Army of her own accord, but don't you think I am entitled to ask for her release under the circumstances?"

"Yes," said the soldier in the Army of the Lord. "You have a right to be happy. I'm sure you've earned it. I shall make out her honorable discharge from the Army and God bless you both."

Chris grasped his hand and shook it heartily. "I don't know how to thank you."

"It's an honor for me to do anything for a man like you. I'm doing the best I can on my job, but I wish I were young and able to fight for my country."

"You stick to doughnuts," advised Chris. "They're great stuff!"

After securing Marion's address, Chris hastened off to find her. She was sitting by the window of her room in the little hotel where she had lived during her first weeks from Paris. She

saw him descend from a taxi; her head fell back on the pillow and she fainted. Those were the early days of the influenza epidemic and its lasting influences were only beginning to be suspected. By the time Chris was announced, she had recovered consciousness, but he found her so weak and worn that she was hardly able to stand.

"Marion, I'm going home! I've been ordered back to train troops," he exclaimed joyfully.

"I'm so glad, Chris. If I could only go with you!"

"You are going, my dear."

She smiled faintly. "I am in an army, too."

"You're fired!" he laughed. "Behold your honorable discharge."

Marion looked at the paper, then began to sob weakly.

"My darling, you must have been very sick!" he exclaimed. "You must get better quick, because we are going to be married before we start."

"Oh, Chris, I couldn't!"

"Why not, I'd like to know?"

"I haven't anything to wear," she wailed.

"You wear your Salvation Army uniform. It will be a beautiful bridal dress. The groom will be arrayed in a suit of khaki, as usual."

Of course he won the argument. He had no difficulty in arranging to remain a week in Paris, considering the circumstances. They were married by an army chaplain, with a captain from Chris' regiment who happened to be on leave in Paris as best man. Marion's bridesmaid was one of the girls who had fried doughnuts with her on the Paris-Soissons Road in July.

AFTER the wedding they drove in taxis to the Bois de Boulogne and had a picnic party upon the grass. They were very happy, and Marion's normal pinkness was already returning to her cheeks.

"You're going home on the *Goliah,*" said Colonel Wolmouth, who was in the party. "I arranged that myself. Aren't you lucky?"

"What the deuce is the *Goliah?*" demanded Chris.

"The largest ship in the world. It was interned in New York when the war broke out and is now our biggest transport."

The *Goliah* sailed on the twenty-fifth of October. She was detained, waiting for a convoy, and it was not until the seventh of November that they landed in New York and went to a hotel to spend the night. The sea voyage had completely restored Marion's health and her good spirits. At times she gave evidence of returning to her old habit of dominating Chris Graham, but with a smile and a twinkle in his eye he always put an end to that.

And the next day New York City went insane. From the windows of the hotel the two saw the mobs tearing up and down Broadway, shouting and singing; they heard bands playing and saw flags appearing by magic from every window. A bell boy thrust a newspaper under the door. The honeymooners seized it. In huge red letters, which reminded Chris of those on the papers in Benton such a long time ago, were the words, "Victory. Armistice."

Incredulous, they gazed at each other. Outside, bells were ringing; whistles were blowing; the human contents of huge office buildings raced into the streets; the din was appalling.

"The war is over!" sang Marion. "Oh, my dear! You don't have to go back. You don't have to go back."

"Whee-oo!" screamed Chris. "Let's go down and see the fun."

AS they emerged from the hotel, an Italian brass band, hastily recruited, passed up the street, behind it a multitude of howling dervishes—bankers, lawyers, street laborers, sweatshop

workers—who held hands and snake danced like college students after a football game.

"Come on," shouted Marion. "Let's join!"

Chris' uniform brought him cheers and slaps on the back; then they were lost in the multitude upon whom, from high buildings, rained bits of torn paper like a snowstorm. At an intersecting street corner, they met another Italian band with another crazy following. The two parades joined forces and in time it was a great parade with a score of bands of music. Nobody ever hired the bands or paid for them; they just sprung out of the ground.

Such a glorious afternoon was never enjoyed in the history of the world. Yet it was the false armistice.

That night the tired couple were back in their hotel room.

"We had a good time, even if it isn't true," said Chris. "Now pack up for the training camp."

"It's true," said Marion, with shining eyes. "Even if they deny it, something assures me that it's true. The war is over, Chris."

"I hope so, but I can't believe it."

"Chris!"

"What?"

"What are you going to do if the war is over?"

"I haven't thought about it."

"Then think about it. Are you going back to the assessor's office?"

"Who? Me? That's an idea." He laughed loudly.

"But you must have a job."

"Listen, darling. There was a poor, weak fathead who used to draw down twenty-five dollars per week for adding up columns of figures. He's dead. The Somme and the Argonne killed him. The man you see before you can take this old world by the back of the neck and make it holler 'help.' The reason there are people like the old Chris Graham in cheap little jobs is that they are cheap little people who haven't got courage. Don't you worry about my making a living. I'll make a good one. I don't know what I'll do yet, but I am not afraid any more.

"I may have to be a locomotive engineer, or a rag man, or a street cleaner for a time, but I am intelligent, strong, willing to work hard, and you watch me get mine. This world is made for people who have nerve enough to know what they want and grab it. I grabbed you and I'll choke a fat living for the pair of us from the world. You watch my smoke!"

As it happened, Marion was right about the armistice. Three days later, on November 11, 1918, the actual armistice was requested. And as it happened, Chris was right. He got out of the army as quickly as his resignation could be accepted, and he was sitting at the desk of the assistant to the division superintendent of a big railroad inside of a month. He had been promised the superintendency as quickly as he mastered the details, and he mastered them very soon.

He is a big, alert, aggressive man today, first vice president of the railroad. He is two-fisted and quick-witted and he makes a very good salary. His wife is a sweet, charming, extremely feminine person. They have three children. She told a visitor the other day that in her opinion a woman's place is in the home, and she didn't believe in women's clubs or organizations of any sort, so far as wives and mothers are concerned. Chris often complains that he can't start an argument at home, because his wife always agrees with him. However, he is careful not to argue about the care and upbringing of children.

THE END.

It Helps

By Berton Braley

I ROSE up from my downy couch
With something very like a grouch,
My spirit sore, my features glum,
My optimism on the bum.
Depression held me in its clutch
I thought, "I don't amount to much,
And work or struggle as I may
It doesn't matter, anyway."

My pep was low, my jaw was slack
When some one slapped me on the back
And grinned at me and chuckled: "Kid,
I liked that little thing you did
The other day; not bad at all!
You stepped right up and hit the ball.
I'll let this fact be understood
Sometimes I think you're pretty good."

My egotism glowed anew.
I said, "That's dog-gone nice of you.
It sure does give a fellow joy
When some one tells him 'Attaboy!'
Too much of flattery like that
Might make me wear a larger hat;
But now and then, I'll tell you what,
Appreciation helps a lot."

I've put my grouch back on the shelf.
I think I'm pretty good, myself.
And with that feeling in my knob
I'll do much better on the job.

At the Sign of the Talkative Ghost

By Percival Wilde

Author of "The Clever Ones," "The Fifty-third Card," Etc.

It was the atmosphere of the room that would get you more than anything else. The unusual quiet, the confusing variety of illumination. When the medium's den could affect a man like Bill Parmelee, a man whose profession was the strange one of delivering the lambs from the maw of the wolf, of saving dupes from their own blindness, why then, no one could be immune to its soft enticements.

CHAPTER I.

OUT OF HIS ELEMENT.

IT was the hour when afternoon changes slowly into evening, and the three men were sitting on the steps of the west porch of the Parmelee homestead, watching the last rays of the sun paint the clouds every hue of the rainbow before disappearing gradually from sight beyond the mountains. Through the stillness came the mournful low of a cow; and a gentle breeze ruffled through the peaceful meadows; and from somewhere in the apple orchard came the singing of an early cricket.

William Parmelee, ex-gambler and unwilling corrector of destinies, threw back his head, breathed deep, glanced about him, and reveled in the perfection of the moment.

John Parmelee, his father, sucked at an unlighted pipe, and stared toward the hills behind which the sun was sinking. For more than sixty years, at sundown, he had lifted up his eyes to those hills, and had never found them twice the same. The play of colors beyond their tops, the amazing blending of yellows into reds, and reds into purples and greens and violets, the fantastic shapes which the familiar ridges and indentations assumed—these were all part of a picture that was different every time one chose to feast one's eyes upon it. At it John Parmelee gazed every evening, gazed as if he would never see it again.

Tony Claghorn, however, was as uneasy as a small boy in church. He found himself uncomfortable, shifted his position, and shifted it again. He knocked the ashes from his cigar, discovered that it had gone out, and relit it. He untied and retied his right shoelace, then he did the same for his left shoelace.

He removed a blue-silk handkerchief from his breast pocket, flicked an invisible grain of dust from an immaculate knee with it, and replaced the handkerchief with proper solicitude that just enough and not more than enough should expose itself to the view.

He glanced at the faces of his hosts. They were impassive, and Tony felt the silence becoming unbearable.

He twisted his mustache, slapped at the silk-clad ankle which a mosquito had just punctured, glanced sagely at the succulent grass under his feet, and remarked: "This land's worth a lot of money, I guess."

Only Tony could have delivered himself of a sentiment so utterly inappropriate to the moment.

John Parmelee started as if he, too, had been stung, yet he turned to his guest. "Did you say something?" he inquired courteously.

If he had hoped for a negative answer, he was disappointed.

"Yes," said Tony resolutely, "I said something. I said this land must be worth a lot of money."

"It is."

John Parmelee raised his eyes to the hills again.

"What's it worth?" persisted Tony, after a pause.

"What?"

"The land. This land."

John Parmelee sighed as he shifted his glance to the city man. "Want to buy some?" he inquired.

"No," said Tony.

"Because if you do, there's some you might pick up reasonably hereabouts."

"I'm not thinking of buying."

"It would be no trouble to me to help you—no, no trouble at all. There's none of mine for sale, of course, but I know a man who's anxious to sell. I'll run right in and call him up on the phone."

Tony shook his head. "I don't want to buy," he said firmly. "I wouldn't buy no matter how reasonable the price was. I'm a New Yorker, and I don't want to live outside of New York. I wouldn't take land here as a gift. I wouldn't know what to do with the land if I had it."

John Parmelee raised his eyebrows. "Then why were you asking how much it was worth?"

Tony smiled engagingly. "No particular reason," he admitted. "Nobody was saying anything, so I was just trying to make conversation. That's all."

John Parmelee glanced at his son, and William Parmelee glanced at his father.

"Tony," Bill inquired gently, "were you looking in the same direction that we were?"

"Toward the west?"

"Yes, toward the west."

"Yes I was," said Tony.

"Did you see anything there?"

"Why, of course——"

"What did you see?"

"Cows."

"Anything else?"

"Mosquitoes."

"No more than that?"

Tony scratched his head. "I might have seen more if the sunlight hadn't been shining right in my eyes," he admitted.

Bill broke into a roar of laughter. "I've heard of the man who couldn't see the forest for the trees, but I never expected to meet him!"

Tony gazed at him in utter bewilderment. "Forest? Forest?" he echoed, "I didn't see any forest, if that's what you mean."

No incident, perhaps, could have

typified Tony's reactions to the country more eloquently. The country—a collection of trees and earth and rivers and things which one saw from a Pullman window; the country—what one looked at when one played bridge at a summer hotel and was the dummy; the country—a large expanse devoid of taxicabs, apartment houses, paved streets, subways, and policemen; the country—where the charities which nicked one for contributions around about Christmas time sent sick children; the country—the mysterious no man's land where the milk came from; the country—the place from which one would depart in a hurry when the week-end was over.

Any of these definitions, had Tony looked candidly into his innermost thoughts, would have expressed his views on the subject, and he had acquired a large store of misinformation upon its details.

Trees were of two kinds—oaks and pines. In the first category Tony included every tree that shed its leaves in winter; in the second, every tree, whether it was a cedar or a spruce, a fir or a hemlock or an arbor vitæ, that did not. Growing vegetables were either corn or not-corn. Grass was grass—unless it grew more than six inches tall, when it was wheat. Beef cattle with horns were bulls; without them, cows. And towns were villages unless one could not speed through them without risking arrest. In that latter event they were suburbs.

It would doubtless be interesting to deal at length with Tony's numerous misconceptions. It is not necessary. They were merely those of the average city man, who is happiest when a crowd jostles him, and who is distinctly ill at ease when he can glance for miles in any direction and see only a network of plowed fields, unredeemed by a single hosiery advertisement.

But it follows, as night follows day, that if Tony, holding such opinions upon nature and upon her works, had deserted his beloved metropolis for the seclusion of West Woods, Connecticut, an excellent reason hovered not too far in the background.

CHAPTER II.

TRICKERY AFOOT.

TONY had gently steered the conversation in the desired direction during the afternoon. "I was wondering," he had inquired blandly, "if you ever knew a man named Ames?"

"Ames? Ames?" repeated Bill. "I've known a good many men of that name."

"The man I mean," Tony amplified, "came from this part of the country—from Wassaic, I think."

"Oh, Daniel Ames!"

"Daniel was the name."

"Of course I know Dan," said Bill. "Dan Ames and I were boys together. Dan played shortstop for Wassaic—they used to have an amateur baseball team—and I played first base for West Woods. A nice fellow, Dan."

"He was killed in the war."

"No?" ejaculated Bill.

John Parmelee corroborated Tony's statement.

"I remember hearing about it. It happened at Belleau Wood, I believe."

"Quite so," said Tony.

"Dan volunteered in 1917. He lied about his age, said he was nineteen when he was only eighteen. They sent him to Quantico with the marines; he went across with them, and was in the thick of all the fighting. Too bad Dan couldn't have come back, a great pity—he was just a boy."

"It's the first I've heard about it," Bill admitted. "I was somewhere out West when it happened."

Then the conversation, under Tony's skillful guidance, glided away from the subject of Daniel Ames as easily as it had approached it.

"That must have been in the days when you were learning what you know about cards," he said.

Bill smiled reminiscently. "It was in the days before I turned over a new leaf."

Tony returned his smile. Parmelee's uncanny knowledge of gambling games, his past-master's acquaintance with every cheating device used in them, had forced him into a profession so remarkable that no name existed for it, a profession in which he had, with singular success, exposed a large number of dishonest players for the benefit of their dupes.

It had been profitable for Parmelee. Tony was conservative when he estimated that the fees that had been forced on Bill during the last twelve months had totalled not less than a hundred thousand dollars; but he knew his friend well enough to realize that every case had been taken under compulsion of one kind or another. Upon more than one occasion the fees offered had been so large that Parmelee, who was by no means a rich man, had not, in justice to himself, been able to decline.

Upon at least as many occasions the circumstances had been so extraordinary that their interest had compelled his. Upon other occasions the opportunity to come to the relief of the under dog had been so obvious that no man with red blood in his veins could have drawn back. There was a crying need for a Robin Hood to come to the aid of the honest players who were being fleeced by others less scrupulous. Parmelee had filled it.

One adventure had led to others—to two others, for Tony, bubbling over with admiration for his friend, had been an advertiser par excellence. If Parmelee came to the rescue of Jones, Smith was pretty sure to hear about it—and Tony had made it his business to see that Robinson learned the facts as well. The result had been a steadily increasing demand for the services of the man who had no competitor in his field, and that demand had been accompanied by a willingness to disburse surprisingly large fees.

It stood to reason that a man who was being looted by a sharper would be inclined to pay well for help; and it stood to reason, too, that if he recovered the major part of his losings, as was not infrequently the case with Parmelee's clients, he would not grudge his rescuer a substantial fraction of them. Parmelee, the reverse of mercenary, had actually been embarrassed by the size of the checks that flowed in upon him.

Unthinkingly he had started upon a career. Like a snowball rolling downhill, it had acquired momentum, had grown so hugely that one might not foresee when it would stop.

KNOWING these things, Tony was curiously unquiet as he glanced at his friend's youthful countenance, and awaited the moment when he might best spring his news. Had he intended merely to interest Parmelee in still another card-cheating adventure, he would not have been so hesitant. But his plans were much different upon this occasion. Tony had reasoned that the talents which were so valuable in one field might be equally valuable in another; he had hopes, and he moved with extraordinary circumspection on the way to the realization of them.

He returned to the attack after supper. "Do you believe," he inquired, out of a clear sky, "that the dead ever come back?"

The Parmelees—father and son—stared at him.

Tony stood his ground. "Do they stay dead? Or do they return to communicate with the living?"

John Parmelee lowered his pipe from his lips. "It's usually a flapping shutter," he said.

"What?" gasped Tony.

"I've heard of lots of cases like that. Why, there was one not half a mile from here last summer. But when they came to investigate it, they found it was nothing but a shutter which made a lot of noise at night."

The light of discovery came into Tony's eyes. "Oh, you're talking about haunts!"

"Well, what are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about dead men who come back to give advice to their relatives."

John Parmelee grinned. "I guess I've had as many ancestors as the next man, but there's not one of them that's ever taken the trouble to come back and tell me how to run this farm; leastwise, not that I know of."

Tony saw the chance to drive home a telling thrust. He leveled a long forefinger at the older Parmelee.

"They haven't come back. Very well, then. But suppose, just suppose, one of them did come back."

"All right, I'm supposing."

"Suppose he started giving you no end of advice——"

"About the farm?"

"Exactly. Now if you wanted to investigate, whom would you go to? Would you go to a layman? or"—and Tony's mustache bristled with triumph as he flung his bomb—"or would you go to a man who is an expert on cheats and cheating, who knows how things may be made to appear very different from what they really are?"

In the language of the law, it was a leading question, and Tony's quivering finger was ready to point victoriously at the younger Parmelee.

But Parmelee, Sr., failed to rise to the bait. "If a spook started advising me how to run a farm, and if I wanted to investigate——"

"Yes?" prompted Tony.

"I'd go to a farmer."

"T-to a farmer?"

"To a farmer."

"But a farmer knows nothing about ghosts!"

"No, but he knows a lot about farming."

The point was so well taken that even Tony saw its force.

"Ah, yes!" he chuckled half-heartedly. "Ah, yes! Quite so, indeed! Very funny!" His laugh was anything but convincing, for the danger that the Parmelees might agree was too great.

As hastily as he dared, Tony turned to a safer angle of the subject. "Speaking of Daniel Ames," he began afresh, "I suppose you knew his father—Noah Ames?"

"For forty years, until he moved to the city," said John Parmelee.

"And you?" Tony turned invitingly to Bill.

"I met him only once—but you wouldn't call that a meeting. A crowd of boys was stealing watermelons out of his patch. It was a dark night—but it wasn't dark enough to stop the old man from scoring bull's-eyes when he loaded his shotgun with rock salt and turned it loose."

"I suppose you helped him run the ruffians off of the place?" said Tony.

Bill smiled reminiscently. "I helped! I helped all right! I had a watermelon in my arms, and I had a load of rock salt somewhere else—where Noah Ames had shot it—but I managed to set a pretty fast pace for the crowd anyhow!"

John Parmelee laughed. "Noah wasn't any too popular hereabouts," he commented. "He had plenty of money—he was a big landowner—but he was mean, and they used to say that not even his own son could get along with him. It wasn't Dan's fault, either. Dan was a nice boy. Noah was to blame."

Tony cleared his throat. "If Noah Ames couldn't get along with his son, that didn't prevent him from getting along with his nephew."

"His nephew? I didn't know he had a nephew."

"His name is Higgins," said Tony. "Robert Eugene Higgins, his sister's son. He couldn't be on better terms with anybody than he is with him."

It was then that a long, satisfied laugh came from the depths of the morris chair in which the younger Parmelee had ensconced himself.

"What's the joke, Bill?" inquired Tony.

"You—trying to be subtle," chuckled the ex-gambler. "In a minute you're going to come to the point. Let me see if I can beat you to it. Dan Ames was killed in the war, wasn't he? But his spirit has been appearing to his father—that right? And the nephew, Robert Eugene, wants the whole thing investigated."

Tony nodded. "I don't know how you guessed it."

"I've been trying to fit the land into the story; it's the one puzzling detail. I've been trying to reason out why you wanted to know what land hereabouts was worth."

"It's because——"

"Don't tell me," Bill interrupted. "I'm beginning to see it now. It's because Dan's ghost wants the old man to deed the land to somebody——"

"To the medium."

"Of course! To the medium! And the nephew can't see it. No, he wouldn't. He's Noah's heir——"

"His sole heir."

"Exactly, and he wants to stop the old man from making a fool of himself."

"Those were his very words," Tony admitted.

"It all fits together like a jig-saw puzzle, doesn't it? Well, I don't like Noah Ames. I never did like him. But if Dan's spirit has returned, I want to see what it looks like. I always did like Dan. You can tell the nephew that I'll take the case."

It was Tony's turn to smile. "It's not necessary," he pointed out. "Acting as your business manager, I did that little thing before I left the city."

CHAPTER III.

AN AIR OF MYSTERY.

THE room was unique—at any rate, Mersereau, the medium, its proprietor, had expended more than nine tenths of all that he had in the world in an effort to make it so. First impressions counted, counted heavily, counted in terms of reputation and in terms of money. Feeling thus, Mersereau had stopped at nothing that might make the room a background suitable to the unusual scenes that were to take place in it.

The walls were black—a deep, dead black that reflected no light, and gave the effect of great spaciousness. Indeed, a newcomer could not say where the walls began and ended unless he followed them with his hand—and that liberty Mersereau never permitted. Not the least virtue of the walls was that they concealed unsuspected doors. It would never do for unsympathetic souls to learn of their existence.

The floor was carpeted with a single large rug, as dark and as lusterless as the walls. Into its thick pile, footfalls sank as into a cushion. In walking over it, it was unnecessary to proceed on tiptoe. Any ordinary tread became noiseless; it was only when one stamped deliberately that there was any sound at all. It was an expensive rug, but Mersereau knew that it was worth what it had cost.

The windows, at one end of the room, were covered with a translucent material which Mersereau had dyed a deep purple. Sometimes a little light came through them. It was sucked up and smothered in the blackness of the room. And heavy shades were in place, quite impervious to the sun, ready to be drawn whenever Mersereau considered it desirable.

There were neither chandeliers nor wall brackets. Instead, a dozen or more bulbs of curious colors, sunk into the dead-black ceiling and into the walls in unexpected places, responded to the touch of hidden buttons. Some of the lights were faint and flickering. They served to distract attention from other parts of the room. Others of them, almost blinding in intensity, were located where their dazzling rays would shine full into the eyes of Mersereau's clients. An application of a few seconds was enough to narrow every iris to a pin point, and to render it incapable of dealing with the profound darkness that followed.

A study of the furniture, during times when guests were absent and when the windows were opened wide, would have shown that Mersereau pampered himself in a manner denied to his visitors. A large chair, well upholstered and almost ostentatiously comfortable, was provided for him; a row of four-legged camp chairs, frail and deliberately rendered insecure by an operation which had amputated an inch from one rear leg of each, was provided for his prospective callers.

Mersereau's reasoning was simple—perhaps too simple. A man placed on a camp chair which wabbled uncontrollably, in a room plunged into Stygian darkness, compelled to inhale the sweetish odor of burning incense while listening to old-fashioned hymns played over and over on a broken-winded phonograph in the next room, forced, moreover, to wait for long stretches of time during which nothing—nothing at all—happened, and blinded, whenever it pleased Mersereau, by shrewdly placed lamps, would be in no condition to observe what Mersereau did not want him to observe. This much was obvious; but to Mersereau it was not equally obvious that an intelligent man, given a single glance at his arrangements, would promptly brand him a charlatan.

To a colleague, Mersereau might have admitted that his methods were crude; but he might have added that, with the majority of his sitters, they produced the results he wanted.

The fact that a client parted with money for services of the nature that Mersereau rendered indicated a surrender of intellect to emotion. Knowing this, the medium pandered to feeling and not to intelligence, to sentimentality, and not to the cold-blooded thought that might reach too deeply into whys and wherefores. A clear-headed sensation seeker might come once and never again; but the rank and file of Mersereau's patrons, the men and women who devoutly credited him with supernatural powers, listened to the hymns, inhaled the incense, gaped at the lights, marveled at his shoddy tricks, and recommended him to their friends. From them he extracted a small, but steady income.

AS he sat at his desk, hands folded, awaiting the arrival of his clients, he was emphatically a striking figure. He had once been fat. He had lost weight—enough to make his flesh hang loosely upon him, and to furnish great, cavernous pouches under his china-blue eyes; but he had not lost strength, and could, when so inclined, shake hands with a grip that all but crushed the bones.

His hair was sparse, but long. It had once been red. It was now shot through with rusty gray. Below the ample expanse of his forehead, however, it beetled out in huge, bushy eyebrows of deepest black.

His mouth was unusually large and mobile. His chin and nose were prominent.

His height was a shade under six feet, and the Prince Albert coat in which he was attired made it look more. A visitor would have guessed his age at between forty-five and fifty-five, and

would have underestimated by at least ten years, for Mersereau's past reached farther back than any of his clients suspected.

The child of strolling players, he had been introduced to the stage in his infancy, having crossed the papier-mâché ice with *Eliza* when less than a month old in a long-forgotten performance of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." He had been a pretty baby; he grew up to be a handsome boy and a more than passably good-looking young man. But there had never been the slightest ability of any kind to back up his pleasing appearance, and it had served only to secure him a succession of badly paid positions, which he lost as rapidly as he found them.

He had toured the country with tenth-rate theatrical companies; he had been discharged or stranded oftener than he could remember, and he had walked his quota of railroad mileage many times. He had worked for every circus that would employ him. He had helped to stretch the canvas and to take it down; he had collected tickets at the door; he had been a side-show barker and a pitch man; he had paraded through towns, arrayed in a gorgeous red-and-gold uniform, eliciting ghastly sounds from a trombone; he had even acted as understudy for one of the animal men, and had nearly been killed by a leopard. Through it all, however, he had failed signally to develop a single quality that might make for success. Genial, easy-going, lazy, improvident, he had radiated sheer incompetence and unreliability so visibly that he had never been able up to that time to stay long in any one berth.

His prepossessing exterior, his gentle, lovable personality, had had one far-reaching consequence. At one of the times when he could afford it least, it had led him into marriage, and when his wife, whom he had cared for tenderly, died in childbirth, it had made him the sole support of an infant girl.

It would have been logical for Mersereau to have turned the child over to some more prosperous person for adoption—she was pretty, and offers were plentiful—but then Mersereau never did the logical thing. He loved the wee bit of humanity—it was all that remained to remind him of his wife—and he never hesitated at a personal sacrifice if it meant more comfort for his daughter.

In some mysterious manner he provided her with clothing, with shelter, with food, with medical care, with a vast quantity of toys, with an education. He suffered. He walked great distances to save a few pennies. His shoes were disreputable. His clothes were patched in weird and uncanny fashions. Many a night he went to bed cold and hungry. But the child never knew the meaning of want.

WHEN she grew up, she was sent to a good school. Its bills, by some unexplainable process, were met promptly, though it taxed Mersereau's resources to the breaking point. Yet he had never complained. Life, to him, had been the reverse of a bed of roses. Perhaps he understood that it was chiefly his own fault; perhaps his was a nature so stoical that it was prepared to endure much, for endure much he did.

If he could have settled down, he might conceivably have made a success of some kind of skilled manual labor, for he was strong, and his hands were clever with tools. But the roving spirit inherited from roving parents gave him no rest.

He had tried gambling, but lacked the card sense to make a go of it. He had attempted to sell goods of one kind or another, and had not been enough of a business man to succeed. He had celebrated his sixtieth birthday while traveling with a medicine show, disposing of quack remedies to a gullible public, and when his employer decamped the

same night, taking Mersereau's week's wages with him, he consoled himself with the reflection that his daughter, now twenty years of age, had secured an excellent clerical position, and was not in pressing need of money.

It was not until some years later, while he was making a precarious living as an assistant to a fashionable medium, that his great stroke of luck—the one and only in his career—came to him. A lottery ticket, bought in one of the discreetly hidden places where such things are sold, brought him an unexpected prize. It was more money than he had ever owned before. To him, it was a huge fortune, and for twenty-four hours he reveled in an unaccustomed feeling of independence.

At the expiration of that time he followed his daughter's advice, and bought out Devlin, the proprietor of the establishment in which he had been working. He substituted the name Mersereau for that painted on the gilded sign at his entrance, and he managed to expend by far the larger part of what he had left on a black rug, black paint, and new electrical installation. The principal articles which he had acquired from his predecessor were the phonograph, a supply of battered records, several pounds, assorted varieties, of incense, and the services of Omar, a little mulatto whom Devlin had trained to make himself useful; also what good will there was.

To his new venture Mersereau brought highly dubious assets. He had picked up the patter of the profession from his former employer; he had mastered a few of the tricks, automatic writing, table lifting, and the like, that were the stock in trade of the confraternity of mediums; he knew how to execute one or two simple sleights of hand, and had been known, under favorable circumstances, to escape detection while attempting them. But despite the fact that his daughter, who worshiped him, considered him a very wonderful person, the insight into human nature, the instinctive grasp of psychology, the understanding of mental processes which enabled other mediums to amass comfortable fortunes were qualities as far beyond him as if they had been nonexistent.

He had seen certain things done in certain ways. He did them in what he thought was the same way, with the improvements, in the way of lighting, that suggested themselves to his childlike mind; and he was mightily surprised when he noticed that the clientele of the place was changing, and that the prosperous individuals who had visited it regularly in the past failed to reappear, while their places were taken by men and women whose willingness to be impressed was as obvious as was their lack of well-lined pocketbooks. The revenues of the places, while steady, became smaller—until the lucky day that Noah Ames first ascended the creaky stairs—and there were many weeks during which Mersereau, for all of his alleged supernatural powers, did not clear as much as did his daughter.

As he sat at his desk, with hands folded, awaiting the arrival of his clients, a snap judgment might have condemned him as an impudent charlatan, a man who preyed upon the superstitions of his fellows, and who deserved nothing so much as a coat of hot tar and feathers. But a kindlier imagination, looking beneath the surface, seeing through his imposing exterior into the childlike, incompetent, unfortunate soul hidden under it, might with more justice have set him down as a very pitiable, very tragic, very pathetic little big man.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEANCE.

THE servant, factotum, and general assistant, who swept out in the mornings, and worked the offstage effects in the afternoons, a slim little mu-

latto dressed in a worn Tuxedo coat with red-silk facings, black-satin knee breeches, red-silk stockings, and outlandish shoes lavishly sewn with rhinestones, came to Mersereau's desk, and, without speaking, informed his master that callers were waiting.

That trick of silent conversation was something that Devlin, Mersereau's predecessor, had taught Omar. Devlin had listened just once to the mulatto's guttural voice, to his harsh accents, and to his ungrammatical English. Then he had had an inspiration—Devlin had many such—and had decided that the establishment would be more impressive if visitors to it were greeted by a deaf-mute.

He had shown the man how, without making a sound, he might form the words he wished to utter with his lips—for Devlin and Mersereau alone to read. Callers were welcomed by gesture, were assisted out of their coats and waved to chairs in the diminutive anteroom without speech. It was a novelty—and it was certainly more in keeping with the atmosphere of the place for Omar—what his name had originally been does not matter—to nod gravely and extend his hands, palms downward, in a more or less Oriental gesture, than to grin and croak hoarsely: "Yaas, sur!" It was a novelty which had been a success from the very beginning, for Omar, who was not lacking in intelligence, acted his part with unction.

Mersereau raised his head slowly in leonine fashion—it was a trick he had copied from Devlin—nodded solemnly, and the mulatto backed to the door as if leaving a royal presence. Even when the two were alone, their rôles were never dropped.

Omar opened the door wide, and bowed.

There entered two men contrasting strangely in appearance. Noah Ames, who was visiting the medium for perhaps the sixth time, was elderly, lean, short, carelessly dressed, with a badly knotted bow tie at his scrawny throat, and an old-fashioned gold watch chain, heavy enough to anchor a boat, festooned across an untidy vest. He was so nervous that his hands trembled. Indeed, he began speaking before he had actually crossed Mersereau's threshold.

Robert Eugene Higgins, his nephew, youthful, sleek, debonair, well groomed, faultlessly attired, might have posed for a fashion plate. Fate had tried to make him commonplace by naming him Higgins; he had done his best to parry the blow by spelling out the Robert Eugene in full.

He had progressed through life quietly and shrewdly, always the master of himself, always looking far ahead. His parents had not been affluent, but his uncle was more than well to do, and after the death of Daniel, Robert had become his sole heir.

Noah Ames had never been able to get along with his son. He had always been on the very best of terms with his nephew, who had given in to him, had flattered him, had wheedled and cajoled him, had, even from his boyhood days, humored and indulged the old man's whims.

Robert Eugene Higgins was no mental giant, but his mother, Noah's sister, had made him understand upon which side his bread was buttered. Always bearing that fact in mind, never losing sight of Noah's wealth, which he overestimated, but in which he knew he would share some day, he had cultivated tact in his relations with his uncle—and foresaw that it would ultimately be profitable.

For years everything had gone well. Most obligingly Daniel had enlisted in the marines, and had had his head shot off for his pains. Robert's rosy prospects had thereupon become still rosier, and then, one fatal day, Noah had climbed Mersereau's stairs, and the spirit of Daniel Ames, resurrected for

Noah's benefit, had commanded the old man to deed some hundreds of acres of valuable farm land to the medium.

At every other time Robert had humored Noah, but when he learned of developments, and reflected that one deed would probably be followed by another and another and another, until Noah was stripped clean, he decided that it was the moment to call a halt.

He had always considered his uncle shrewd and hard-headed. He was surprised when he discovered that he was seriously considering the spirit's command. He tried to reason with him. and could make no headway. Noah was quite convinced that the spirit was what it claimed to be; Robert's skepticism failed to impress him.

"It isn't hearsay, Robert," he pointed out; "he's talked to me himself—and he's told me things that only Dan'l would know."

"Why does he want you to deed land? What does a spirit want with a farm?"

"He doesn't want it himself. He wants it for the medium."

"Why?"

"The medium's his friend."

Robert sneered, but after attending a single séance, he sought out Tony Claghorn, and commissioned him to enlist the services of Parmelee at any cost. It was necessary to expose the medium at once, while Noah was still hesitating. Time was precious. A few drops of ink, and the fortune which Robert had eyed so covetously for so many years would begin to evaporate.

Yet he was outwardly calm as he entered Mersereau's sanctum with Noah. Indeed, he laid a soothing hand on the old man's arm.

"Don't, Robert!" piped Noah Ames. "Don't do that. I don't like it, so don't do it." He used precisely the language that one might have expected of a three-year-old child.

Querulously he brushed his nephew's hand away and turned to his host. "Good afternoon, Mr. Mersereau," he shrilled, "good afternoon. I'm here on time, you see. On time, right to the minute. Are you ready to start?"

The medium nodded gravely.

"Very well then," jabbered Noah Ames, "very good indeed! I have no time to lose. Our appointment was for three o'clock, and it's one minute after three already. We'll start at once."

THE value of time, clearly, was one of Noah's obsessions. Having retired from all active occupations, and having only to spend the income which came to him periodically, the worth to him of any one of his waking hours might have been calculated, with some exactness, as nil. But that fact did not prevent him from attaching exaggerated importance to every swiftly passing minute.

He seated himself on a camp chair, and his nephew followed his example, while Mersereau turned his own chair around to face them. A wave of the medium's hand, and the mulatto drew the shades and extinguished the lights.

Skinny fingers clawed at Mersereau's arm, and he recognized Noah's nervous clutch.

"Wait," said Mersereau.

"What for?"

"Wait until Omar has gone out of the room and locked the doors. I always begin my séances by locking the doors. I want my clients to know that if there are any supernatural manifestations they are genuine. I have no assistants."

"I'll take your word for it," shrilled Noah. "Go ahead! Don't waste time; I'm in a hurry."

But Mersereau could not be moved until he had heard both doors close, and until keys had turned gratingly in their locks. Then he stretched out his hands, and allowed each of his visitors to grasp one.

"Make a circle," he commanded, "an endless chain—a chain which neither be-

gins nor ends—a complete circle. Now concentrate. Concentrate hard. Concentrate. Concentrate on what you want to see most. Concentrate. Then, perhaps, my spirit control will come to me. Concentrate!"

Noah Ames had enjoined him to waste no time. Mersereau, apparently, did not take the injunction seriously, for in the darkness the minutes sped by, and the three men sat motionless in their chairs. Nothing, Mersereau knew, exercised so profound an effect as a long wait. He counted the ticks of the clock on his desk, and did not hurry.

From the next room came the strains of "Rock of Ages," repeated over and over again on the decrepit phonograph. The record had been cracked, and with every revolution the needle protested noisily. From censers placed in the corners of the room came the sickly sweetish odor of burning incense. And in the ceiling, over Mersereau's head, a tiny purple light flickered on and off feebly.

Ten minutes passed, a quarter of an hour.

"Well?" whispered Noah Ames excitedly.

"Shh!" Mersereau replied with gravity. "The spirits are near."

He began to groan, to move his limbs nervously, to twitch convulsively.

THEN a large dinner bell began to ring. Mersereau could feel Noah's hands trembling—and could sense the skepticism with which the elegant nephew observed the first of the "manifestations."

The bell, phosphorescing in the dark, rose into the air, ringing loudly, and circled the room at a height of seven or eight feet from the floor. It returned to its starting point, set itself down upon a table, rocked from side to side, and presently table and bell fell together with a jingling crash.

Mersereau felt Noah's grip tightening—and could picture the sneer on the nephew's lips.

"Old stuff," Robert Eugene Higgins would be reflecting, "a bell covered with luminous paint, and carried around the room by wires and pulleys."

Old stuff, Mersereau admitted, even though it was not done that way. But it was one of the most satisfactory tricks in his repertory, and even if it failed to convince Higgins, it had never failed to raise the goose flesh on Noah Ames.

Mersereau said: "The spirits are very near—very near indeed. If you wish to speak to them, ask. Ask!"

Noah lifted a quavering voice in the darkness. "Is anybody here?" he demanded.

From the center of the room came two loud knocks.

"The spirits have answered," said Mersereau. "They are here. Ask! Ask!"

"Whoever you are—whatever you are—will you speak to me?" entreated Noah.

The two knocks were repeated.

"You—you—— Who are you?"

Robert Eugene Higgins interjected his first comment. "That's not a question that can be answered with a knock." he pointed out irritatingly.

But the visitor from the other shore was fully equal to his task. From somewhere in the utter darkness came the sound of a deep, resonant voice, speaking in measured accents. "I am the spirit of Daniel Ames!"

The voice of the medium was heard. "The spirits are here."

Robert Eugene Higgins noted methodically that never at any time had he heard the two voices simultaneously. If the spirit spoke, the medium was silent. If the medium spoke, the spirit held his peace. Never did one interrupt the other. Robert Eugene Higgins drew logical conclusions.

Noah Ames, however, was visibly im-

pressed. "Dan'l!" he piped. "Is that you, Dan'l?"

"Daniel, your son, your only son, killed in the war," replied the sonorous voice.

In the dark, Mersereau could feel the old man's shoulders shaking.

"Are you happy, Dan'l?" Noah asked at length.

"No."

"You're not happy?"

"I'm not happy."

"Why aren't you happy?"

"Because you didn't do what I asked."

Robert Eugene Higgins felt his gorge rising. If the medium had demanded only a fee—even a large fee—it would not have been so bad. Noah could afford to pay fees. But to ask for land—which was capital, which created income, which would continue to pay the equivalent of many fees until the crack of doom—that was an outrage.

Noah was speaking again. "I've been thinking it over, Dan'l; I've been thinking it over. You wouldn't want me to do anything as important as that in a hurry, would you?"

"If it means happiness to me——"

Noah sobbed openly. "Dan'l! Dan'l!"

Robert Eugene Higgins cleared his throat. "How do we know that you are really what you pretend to be?"

"Bobby! Bobby!" protested the spirit.

At the previous séance, his first one, the nephew had been unwillingly surprised when the spirit had addressed him by name. He had recovered from his surprise.

"How do we know that you are the ghost of Daniel Ames?" Higgins asked querulously.

"Don't you recognize my voice?"

"I haven't heard it in eight years. How could I?"

"Doesn't *he* recognize my voice?"

"Yes, Dan'l, I do," said Noah. "That's your voice all right. I'd know it in a thousand."

"You wouldn't know any such thing," Higgins protested.

"Then if I don't know it, I think I know it," Noah quavered.

"You'll have to be surer than that before you sign away land worth thousands of dollars! Your best land, too, isn't it?" He addressed the unseen speaker. "Look here! I think you're a fake, a cheap fake, that's what!"

"Bobby! Bobby!"

"If you're not, prove you're not."

"Ask me any question you like."

"What was your mother's maiden name?"

"Sewall." The answer came without an instant's pause.

"And her mother's name?"

"Hendrickson."

"That's right! That's right!" interrupted Noah Ames.

"You had a cousin who died as a boy," barked Higgins.

"Your brother," said the voice instantly, "his name was Edward."

"What did he die of?"

"The doctors said pneumonia."

"Wasn't it that?"

"It was kidney disease."

Noah gasped his amazement, and Higgins came very near to losing his temper. It was only too obvious that the medium had unearthed every fact having to do with the Ames family. It was equally obvious that by answering questions having to do with those facts, he was making a gigantic impression on Noah Ames. And when Higgins gave him an opening, by asking a question as careless as his last one, it was easy for the medium to rise to the opportunity and make a startling statement which could not possibly be refuted.

To state that the doctors' diagnosis had been wrong in the case of Daniel's long-buried cousin—that was a brilliantly clever impromptu, and while cursing himself for having made it pos-

sible, Higgins searched his memory for another question which might not be so tellingly answered.

He thought he found it.

"Do you remember," he demanded, "about fifteen years ago when we were boys?"

"Years are as nothing where I am living now," said the resonant voice. "The past—the present—the future—all are one. Time is a dream—a delusion——"

Hastily Robert Eugene interrupted. This sort of nonsense, he was fully aware, impressed Noah too deeply. "Look back fifteen years. If a year is nothing, it ought to be easy for you to do it," he scoffed.

The deep voice declined to be irritated. "It is easy," it declared.

"Look back to a time when I spent two weeks with you in the country. Are you doing that?"

"I am."

"Your father had a watch—a gold watch—which was a family heirloom. One day, while I was visiting him, he lost it." The elegant nephew began to chuckle over his approaching triumph. "Now, if you're the real thing in spirits, if you know the past and the present and the future, maybe you'll tell us where we can find that watch!"

"It can't be found."

"Why not?" chortled Higgins.

At last the alleged spirit was in a tight place.

"It's at the bottom of the sea."

"How did it get there?"

"In a sailor's pocket. The sailor was drowned. His ship went down."

"How did the watch get into the sailor's pocket?" The elegant nephew's assurance was rapidly diminishing.

"The sailor bought it in a pawnshop."

"How did it get into the pawnshop?"

"It was pawned there."

"Who pawned it?"

"A thief—the man who stole it from my father."

"And who was that?" The nephew's confidence was returning again. "Tell us his name. Perhaps we can find him to-day."

"The thief?"

"Yes, the thief."

"It was you, Bobby!" boomed the deep voice. "You stole that watch yourself, and you know you did it!"

Robert Eugene Higgins leaped to his feet, breaking the circle. "You're a damned liar!" he howled, as his sense of injured innocence overcame him, "you're a liar!"

The room lit up suddenly as a dozen bulbs scattered in the ceiling responded to the touch of a switch under Mersereau's foot. The medium blinked, and opened his eyes.

"Was the séance a success?" he inquired blandly.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" shrilled Noah Ames. "Most wonderful!"

Robert Eugene Higgins glared. "Ugh!" he remarked eloquently.

Upon him the old man turned wounded eyes. "To think that you stole my watch! You, Robert! And I never even suspected you!"

The elegant nephew's reply was very profane.

CHAPTER V.

A GOOD GUESS.

THERE are many ways in which one can fight an adversary—but very few of them are of use when the adversary is a disembodied spirit. One cannot, for instance, pommel a spirit; one cannot blacken his eyes and smash his nose; one cannot trip him up, fling him to the ground, and sit on him; one cannot even call a policeman, and give him in charge.

All of these things Robert Eugene Higgins longed to do as he made his irate way toward his bachelor apartment. He was angry—he was very angry—and precisely as one may be so overjoyed that he treads on air, so Robert Eugene was so furiously wrathful

that, to continue the figure, he trod on nitric acid as he left his uncle and plunged into the streets.

In the turmoil of his thoughts certain facts stood out boldly. He had hoped to expose the medium as an arrant impostor. He had failed. He had hoped to convince Noah that the alleged spirit of Daniel Ames was a fraud. If anything, he had created the opposite impression. He had counted on his ability to rout any person, real or unreal, who claimed a supernatural knowledge of his family affairs, and in the battle of wits which had taken place, he had come off an extraordinarily bad second best.

Being a fashion plate, and being, moreover, a polished young man, Robert Eugene prided himself on his sense of humor; but whatever humor there was in the manner that the ghost had put him to flight was not, at the moment, apparent to him. To be accused of stealing a watch that he had not stolen—a third person might have considered it funny, but Robert Eugene's thoughts centered upon the fortune that was slipping from his grasp, and he failed to discern laughable elements in it. To him the encounter that had just taken place was fraught with serious consequences.

He was in an outrageously bad humor as he opened the door of his apartment, and he hardly acknowledged Tony Claghorn's introduction of Parmelee.

"If you'd only been here a few hours sooner, I might have taken you along this afternoon!" he fumed.

"You've just been to a séance?" inquired Bill.

"I've just been to a disaster." His tone made it unnecessary to ask who had been the victim.

"Indeed?" murmured the ex-gambler. "Suppose you tell us about it."

Robert Eugene Higgins wheeled upon him. "Look here," he prefaced, "I want to know if you believe in spooks."

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I don't, and because I want that clearly understood at the start. I'm hiring you to prove that there was nothing supernatural in what happened this afternoon—not the other way around, remember that!"

Parmelee chuckled. "I've met many mediums," he admitted, "but I have yet to be introduced to the real thing in ghosts."

The nephew nodded his approval. "Hold on to that thought—hold on to it tight! Now I'm going to tell you my story."

IT would have been a shorter story if Higgins had not begun to describe himself, and had not become so interested in his subject that he nearly lost himself in it. He was, according to his own uncontradicted testimony, a most exemplary man. His life was spotless; his ideals were pure; his character was lofty, honorable, not to say noble, and it was with an admirable absence of false modesty that he painted himself as a saint on earth. In one person he combined many virtues. He dwelt upon them lovingly, and as he warmed to his theme, tears almost—but not quite—stood in his eyes.

Parmelee listened with an expression that could not have been graver. His glance took in and appraised the nephew's fashionable exterior—his beautifully manicured nails—his rose-leaf-tipped cigarettes—a row of pulchritudinous photographs suspended from the wall—and he swallowed a smile. According to his code, a man's morals were his own excessively private business, concerning nobody else except when they conflicted with the law. Good or bad, they were not to be paraded in public; in either case, it was best for them to blush unseen.

Higgins shifted to another angle of the main topic. No human being on earth, he admitted, could have treated

Noah as he had treated him. He had watched over the old man with a love which no son could have given. He, an inhabitant of the city, hence a being vastly superior to a mere farmer, had nevertheless taken Noah under his protecting wing from the beginning. In kindly fashion he had tolerated his many whims—his vagaries—his eccentricities. Any other man might well have been irritated by them. He, Robert Eugene Higgins, had exercised patience that bordered upon the sublime.

Parmelee reflected that the speaker was Noah's heir—that his devotion would eventually be rewarded by a fortune—that he had probably drawn upon that fortune already—and he swallowed a second smile.

THEN Higgins paused. Parmelee took advantage of the opening to edge in a word.

"Both Mr. Claghorn and I are flattered to know a man of such character," he declared. His face could not have been more serious.

"Eh? I beg your pardon?" ejaculated the nephew.

"Go on."

Robert Eugene Higgins looked at him blankly. "Where was I?"

"You were going to tell us about the medium, weren't you?"

"Was I?"

"I may be wrong, but it's my impression that that's why I came to New York to-day."

The thinly veiled sarcasm made no impression upon Robert Eugene Higgins. He took himself so seriously that the thought that another man might not do so never struck him. "I'll tell you about him," he said. "I'll tell you about him, never fear!"

He did. In well-chosen language, none the less well chosen because of the anger that boiled within him at the mere recollection of what had taken place, he narrated the events with which the reader is already familiar. He described Mersereau's room, the man himself, the manner in which the spirit had outmaneuvered him.

"It's all a fake!" he concluded heatedly. "Perhaps Mersereau can pull the wool over another man's eyes. He can't do it with me. He thinks I don't know how he did his tricks. Well, I do. I've heard of ventriloquism. I know that a man can be in one place, and can make his voice come from another. I know that Mersereau can sit in his chair, and can throw out his voice in such a way that it appears to come from the other side of the room. It's easy enough for him to lower his pitch, to talk way, way up when he's speaking as Mersereau, and to drop to a deep bass when he's speaking as the spirit. Why, it's as simple as A B C!"

"Not quite."

"What do you mean?"

"It wasn't done that way."

Higgins glanced at Parmelee suspiciously. "You weren't there," he pointed out.

"What's the difference? You've described what happened."

"Well, I'm not through," said Robert Eugene. "The medium could answer my questions. That was easy; he had found out all about my family affairs in advance; he was prepared. But he overlooked one thing—that I never heard his voice and the spirit's voice at the same time. That was a dead give-away."

"Not quite," said Parmelee again.

"It didn't prove that the medium was playing two parts?"

"Not at all," said Parmelee, "if you're really keen about hearing the two voices at one time, I dare say you will have your wish gratified. It's just accident that it hasn't happened already. It's even money that it will happen at the next séance."

"Even money—for a hundred?"

"Gladly."

"You're on!" snapped Robert Eugene

Higgins. "The next séance takes place to-morrow. You can see for yourself."

Parmelee nodded gravely. "I expect to, not that it matters in the least. There's just one conclusion to be drawn from what you've told me—and that you haven't drawn."

"And that is?" rasped Higgins. Being Parmelee's temporary employer, he expected greater deference than this from him. It irritated him that the young countryman presumed to do his own thinking. "And that is?" he reiterated.

Parmelee smiled. "Isn't it perfectly clear? Isn't it more than evident? You've described Mersereau to me. He's a medium, a medium who doesn't know any better than to fit up his place in a way that drives away intelligent clients—if you can call any man who goes to a medium intelligent. He goes in for flashy electric lights, black walls, black ceilings, black rugs, and that sort of thing. Isn't it obvious that he isn't overburdened with brains?"

"What's the point?"

Parmelee rubbed his hands. "The ghost, on the other hand, is clever. He answered your questions, and he did so in such a way that you wished you hadn't asked them. He met you on your own ground, and he made a monkey out of you. Isn't the inference clear?"

Higgins flushed. "I don't admit that anybody made a monkey out of me."

But Tony, who had contributed nothing to the discussion, burst out with his first remark. "It's as clear as day!" he declared. "Why, I see it all!"

"What do you see?"

"He's shrewder than he wants us to know, that medium. When he plays the part of the spirit, he lets himself go; when he plays his own part, he makes believe he's stupid."

Parmelee laughed. "If that were true, Tony, we wouldn't be here today."

"Why not?"

"Noah Ames has been visiting him for a month, hasn't he? Well, a medium clever enough to sham stupidity would have cleaned him out long, long before this!" He smiled. "I'm afraid you haven't caught my point. The medium could change his voice easily enough. But could he change his mentality? He could talk high or low, as he pleased But could he be both a very average medium and a clever, a very clever spirit? No, I don't think so."

"You mean," gasped Higgins, "you mean——"

"I mean that a man you don't know anything about was in that room with the three of you! I mean that somehow—some way—a fourth man got into that room! I mean that he—not the medium—spoke for the spirit of Daniel Ames!"

"The doors were locked!"

"Not all of them."

"There are only two."

"There is at least one more you haven't seen."

Robert Eugene Higgins stared at him with eyes that popped out of his head. "You think another man came into the room—in the dark—through a secret door——"

"I don't think it," Parmelee interrupted, "I know it."

"By George!" ejaculated the nephew. "By George! If that's so—if that's true—if you can only prove it to my uncle!"

"I'm going to try to," Parmelee promised.

CHAPTER VI.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

LET us return, for a few minutes, to one of the most interesting persons in this tale—the man Mersereau. As Parmelee had pointed out, the medium's brain power might have been greater. But intelligence, by itself, is not so interesting as is sheer humanity, and above all else, Mersereau was human. An unfortunate, untalented man,

with nothing but his striking appearance and his great love for his daughter to set him apart from the average failure, he had blundered through life humanly—most humanly. His very failings were human. His ambitions were human. And if, in the pursuit of those ambitions, he stretched such modest qualifications as he had to the breaking point, that, too, was human.

Let us look in for a few moments as he sits in state in his cubby-hole of a dining room, waited on by Omar, the slim little mulatto, enjoying a hearty supper. The fact that Omar obsequiously hands him his dishes must not be interpreted at its face value. One must not forget that Devlin, Mersereau's predecessor, managed to earn perhaps twice as much as Mersereau, and that without working so hard. Devlin, being a luxurious creature, added the rôle of waiter to the many other rôles played by Omar—and Mersereau, since Omar's pay is so much a month whether he waits on table or not, has continued the comfort-giving practice.

It is extravagant, let us admit. Mersereau could get along without a servant. He could discharge the man, and reach for his dishes himself. He could don an apron, and sweep out in the mornings. He could sacrifice a little dignity, and admit clients himself. But that would be a confession of failure, and Mersereau is too much of a failure to confess it. The flattest failure of all is the man who never admits it.

Mersereau sits at his table, and he is happy, for he is surrounded by those who are near and dear to him. On his right is the daughter for whom he has sacrificed himself all his life. Even though she earns more than he does today, an absurd pride will not allow him to accept anything toward the expenses of his establishment from her. On his left is the young man whom his daughter is to marry. He is a good-looking young man, and Mersereau approves of him. The hearty meal is better than the medium has been accustomed to for many months past. The fees that Noah Ames has been yielding have not gone for luxuries. They have bought better cuts of meat—and more of it.

Let us forget, while we peer in and watch, that these persons are conspirators, the villains of this particular tale, if you will, and let us consider them solely as human beings. That much claim upon our sympathy they surely possess.

Mersereau finished his dish, wiped his mouth with his napkin, raised his striking head, and smiled. At his left, his assistant and accomplice, the good-looking young man who hoped to become his son-in-law, smiled back. And at his right, his daughter, pretty, for all of the serious look that had come into her gray eyes, managed a smile, too. From her mother, Dorothy Mersereau had inherited qualities which her father did not possess—stubbornness, determination, intelligence of a high order. Yet, perhaps mercifully, she had never learned that Mersereau was not quite so wonderful as she thought him.

"If you've eaten all you want," she said, "perhaps you'll answer my questions."

Mersereau grinned happily. "I thought we'd answered them all." He winked at his assistant.

"I thought we'd answered them, too," the good-looking young man chimed in.

Dorothy Mersereau was not to be put off. "You didn't tell me what happened after the spirit of Daniel Ames told Bobby that he was a thief."

Her fiancé, who had played the part of the ghost, grinned in his turn. "What happened after the spirit of Daniel Ames did that isn't fit to tell a lady. Bobby went up in the air—way, way up. He used strong language. He said things. He called me indelicate, unmentionable names."

"He didn't really steal the watch, did he?"

The ex-ghost broke into most unghostly laughter. "How should I know?" he disclaimed. "It's enough for me that Bobby can't prove he didn't."

Mersereau shook his head. "I think you made a mistake."

"How so?"

"By saying what you did, you made an enemy of Higgins."

The young man laughed. His assurance was contagious. "Do you know of anything I might have said that would have made a friend of him?"

Mersereau cocked his head to one side. "It wasn't necessary to make an enemy of him. Just watch—from now on he'll be fighting us every inch of the way."

"He's been doing that already."

"He'll fight harder."

"Let him. Let him! The harder he fights, the better I'll like it. The more he hates me, the more cheerfully I'll play my part."

Mersereau's mind did not work as quickly as that of his assistant. "Why so?" he inquired.

"Don't you see it? If we get that deed, it will be against Bobby's wishes. The sooner he and his uncle get on bad terms, the better it will be for us."

Mersereau frowned. "Perhaps—perhaps," he admitted. "You know, I've let you guide me in this from the very beginning."

"You haven't regretted it?"

"Not so far," the medium admitted cautiously.

"Well, you're not going to. To-morrow, when they come again, we're going to play our trumps. We'll materialize Daniel Ames. We'll answer their questions, and then, when they can't think of anything more to ask, we'll let them see a face with plenty of phosphorescent paint on it, and a bullet hole right through the forehead. That will bring action—take my word for it."

BEING engaged to Mersereau's daughter, the ex-ghost moved his chair to a spot where he might more easily hold her hand. "I know exactly what I'm doing. I can read Bobby like a book—and I can read the old man, too. Even in the dark, I can tell what's passing in their minds, and I can promise you that that deed will be signed within forty-eight hours!"

His voice became tenderer. "Just think where we'll be in a week—in a month, at the most! We'll be living in the country, the three of us." From the background came a hoarse croak. The ex-ghost smiled. "The four of us, I meant; we won't forget you, Omar, We'll chuck up this bum business. We'll be through with waiting for visitors, kidding them along, resurrecting the spirits of their relatives for them.

"I'll be running a farm. It's what I've wanted to do all my life, and I'll have the very best land the old man's got to experiment with. I've got ideas of my own about farming, and I'll have a chance to try them out.

"Dorothy'll be the lady of the house." He pressed her hand.

"Milking the cows and feeding the chickens?" laughed the girl.

The good-looking young man smiled. "There will be too many of them for that," he pointed out. "You can have a try at it if you want to, but we'll have half a dozen farm hands to do the chores.

"We'll live close to nature. We'll live as the Lord intended men to live—and we'll live longer—and happier! We'll see the sun rise. Do you know the people in this infernal city don't know there is a sun? They think all their light is supplied by Edison. Well, we know better."

"And dad?" murmured the girl. "What about dad?"

Mersereau raised a deprecatory hand. "Oh, don't bother about me!"

"But we will!" asserted the young

man. "You bet we will! There should be some use for a medium on a modern dairy farm."

"What use?"

"I'll be darned if I know," admitted his prospective son-in-law, "but I'll find it."

The girl rose, and slipped her arms about her father's neck. "You'll come, dad, won't you?"

Before Mersereau's eyes flickered pictures impressed by many, many years of hard, unprofitable toil; and they were wiped out by a picture of a peaceful old age, spent amid congenial surroundings, with the daughter and her husband at his side. He bowed his head. He said: "Yes."

It is time for us to go elsewhere. If we remained longer we should see Mersereau unlocking a very secret cupboard, and producing a dusty bottle of the very finest port from its depths. We should see him uncorking it, pouring it with due solemnity, and we should see the conspirators, Omar not excepted, drinking to the success of their nefarious schemes.

It is no place for us. We drop a curtain.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TALKATIVE GHOST.

IF the séance which Robert Eugene Higgins had described to Parmelee was a disaster, the one which followed might without exaggeration have been described as an utter rout. From beginning to end, the spirit showed that he was the master of the situation; from beginning to end, the allies met with crushing defeat.

After the lights had been extinguished, the unearthly visitor gave prompt evidence of his presence. He wasted little time with rappings. He merely upset a table or two and smashed a cheap vase that had been purchased for the occasion. Then Mersereau announced:

"The spirits are here."

It was Tony Claghorn's first séance, and he was thrilled. He had read of séances; he had heard of them from friends who had attended; but never before had he been in the presence of what claimed to be the supernatural, and the goose flesh rippled up and down his spine delightfully. The darkness, the music, the incense, the uncomfortable chair, the strange surroundings—all had had their effect upon him. He was terrified, yet he knew that he would not be hurt. The sensation was pleasantly uncomfortable. And he felt each individual hair on his scalp standing on end as a ghostly voice, booming out of the darkness, suddenly addressed him as "Mr. Claghorn."

"How did he do it?" Tony whispered to Parmelee, whose left hand he was holding.

"Shh!" whispered Bill.

But the ghost had overheard. "Yes, tell him how I did it," said the sonorous voice, "tell him that everything, no matter how secret, is an open book to a disembodied spirit. Tell him that, Mr. Hudson."

Mr. Hudson! Tony's mind reeled. It was not an hour ago that Parmelee, pointing out that his only meeting with Noah Ames had been a disagreeable one, had asked to be introduced to the old man under an assumed name. His choice had fallen upon the name of Hudson—and here was the spirit greeting him by that name, known only to the four who had been present at the introduction!

It was uncanny; it was more than uncanny; and Tony, who had entered Mersereau's rooms overflowing with skepticism, felt himself beginning to be an unwilling believer. It was one thing to be told about the spirits by some incredulous person who would never be convinced; it was quite another thing to see them at work at firsthand, to be an actual witness of a feat as remarkable

as that which had just taken place. For one of the many times in his life, Tony was overwhelmed; he retained enough self-possession, however, to make a mental note that Parmelee had won his bet, that the spirit had actually begun to speak before the medium had uttered his last word. He had heard the two voices simultaneously.

BUT Robert Eugene Higgins had come primed with questions; Tony listened while he propounded them.

"You say you're the spirit of Daniel Ames?" rasped the nephew.

"I do," replied the unseen speaker.

"How do I know you're telling the truth?"

"I have allowed you to question me."

"That proves nothing."

"I have answered your questions."

"That proves still less. Anybody could do as much by digging out the history of my family."

A pause—a long pause—as if the spirit disdained to reply.

"Are you still here?" demanded the nephew.

"Still here." The voice was unruffled.

"You want my uncle to make out a deed?"

"Yes."

"To Mersereau?"

"To Mr. Mersereau."

"For his best farm land?"

"Yes."

"What is Mersereau going to do with it?" challenged Higgins.

"Whatever he wants to. Mr. Mersereau is my friend. If it were not for him, I would be unable to speak to you now."

Noah's voice came through the darkness. "That's so," he assented; "that's so, Robert!"

The nephew's tones indicated his rising anger. "My uncle may believe that you're the spirit of his son, but I want to tell you that I don't believe it!"

"No, you wouldn't," asserted the ghost.

"What do you mean?"

"Believe something that would cost you money? Not Bobby Higgins! Believe something that would cut a slice from what your uncle is leaving you in his will? Never! Never!"

Hastily the nephew interrupted. "I'm not thinking of myself," he declared.

"Then it's for the first time in your life," boomed the spirit.

Came Noah's quavering voice: "Dan'l, you're not telling me anything new. I've known that right along, and he's got a surprise coming to him when they open my will!"

Parmelee, listening with amusement, regretted the darkness most of all because it concealed the expression on the nephew's face. He could feel his hand clenching; he could guess at the emotions that were surging within him; but he could only imagine the rage which was convulsing his features.

"Uncle!" protested a much-chastened voice. "Uncle Noah!"

"Why have you been fighting me if it wasn't that you wanted the land yourself? Answer me that!" piped the old man.

The medium interrupted the flood of Robert Eugene's explanations with a groan. "The spirit is sending me a message," he announced. "Quiet! Quiet!"

Through the darkened room came a strong current of cold air, while a tiny blue lamp over the medium's head glowed faintly.

"The message has come," said Mersereau. "Believe, says the spirit, believe, and he will show himself to you as he was when in the flesh."

Noah gasped audibly. "Dan'l!" he murmured. "Dan'l!"

The blue light vanished suddenly. The current of cold air became an icy blast. For an instant a blinding beam, issuing from an unsuspected recess in the ceiling, dazzled the visitors' eyes.

There came a half scream from Noah. "I felt Dan'l's hand!"

Tony shuddered. Then he cried out suddenly: "So did I!" Ice-cold fingers had rested for a second on his brow.

"So did I!" said Parmelee.

"Here, too," admitted the nephew.

The blast of cold air suddenly ceased.

The medium's voice cut through the darkness. "Believe! Believe!" said Mersereau.

In a corner of the room, high up, near the ceiling, a curious radiance began to glow. It spread over the black walls like a liquid. It changed color. It reached out luminous tentacles and withdrew them. It changed shape; it was oblong; it was round; it was oval; it was a pin point—it was nothing.

Then Tony's heart seemed to stop beating as in the space that the light had occupied a face slowly became visible. It was deathly pale. Its eyes were closed. In its forehead was a bullet hole. And from its cheeks radiated an unearthly glow.

"Dan'l!" screamed Noah Ames. "Dan'l! Dan'l!"

As if his voice had been a signal, the face disappeared. It did not disappear gradually; it disappeared suddenly, abruptly, decisively, like a flame that is blown out. Where it had been remained only blackness—smooth, velvety blackness, melting into the blackness of the room.

Presently the ordinary lighting returned. Shamefacedly Tony gazed to either side. Despite himself, he had been overwhelmingly impressed. He did not like to admit it.

He found Noah Ames with head bowed. His shoulders were shaking with emotion.

He glanced at Parmelee. His face was impassive.

He glanced at the nephew. A curious mixture of emotions, awe and anger, fear and fury, struggled for the mastery of his countenance.

He glanced at the corner of the room in which the ghastly face had appeared. It differed in no visible respect from the other corners. It seemed to be quite solid.

Mersereau rose. "Gentlemen," he said, "the séance is over."

CHAPTER VIII.

A WONDERFUL CLEW.

BEFOREHAND, Robert Eugene Higgins had arranged to have a long talk with Parmelee immediately upon the conclusion of the performance. There would be notes to be compared, impressions to be discussed, ways and means of action to be determined upon, and the nephew had intimated more than strongly that he wished to be consulted at every step. He would have valuable contributions to make to any discussion; he had said as much.

Yet all recollection of his plans seemed to have vanished from his mind as Omar opened the door and began to assist the visitors into their coats. Perhaps Robert Eugene had no priceless thoughts to offer; perhaps he had decided that the necessity of squaring himself with his uncle was too pressing. This last consideration must have been uppermost in his thoughts, for he took Noah's overcoat from the mulatto, and insisted upon helping the grumbling old man into it himself. With equally beautiful solicitude he saw that Noah's silk muffler was in place around his scrawny throat before they turned to go. Tenderly he took his uncle's arm—a picture of pious vigilance, if ever there was one—and helped him to descend the creaking stairs.

Parmelee, following at a discreet distance, could not repress a chuckle. "'Lean on me, grandpapa,' says *Little Lord Fauntleroy*," he whispered to Tony, "and all the time he's hoping the old codger will fall and break his neck!"

Tony grinned—but he was in too seri-

ous a mood to enjoy the nephew's embarrassment. He gazed at the familiar street—at the familiar brownstone-front houses—at the familiar corner, around which a taxicab was whirling Noah Ames and his solicitous relative, and he rubbed his eyes. Here was reality, matter-of-fact reality; but upstairs was magic, enchantment, mystery.

"Wasn't it wonderful?" he ejaculated. "Wasn't it wonderful? Why, I wouldn't have missed it for the world!"

"The first time you went to the theater, Tony, you thought it was wonderful, too."

"You can't compare them at all," declared Claghorn. "The theater—well, it's the theater, and the supernatural—well——"

"It's the supernatural."

"Exactly," said Claghorn.

Parmelee smiled. "The second time you went to the theater you still thought it was wonderful—but not quite so wonderful. And the third time you began to criticize the acting—the lighting—the scenery—the play."

Tony frowned. "You mean that after I've been to half a dozen séances, I won't be so much impressed by them?"

"Something like that, old fellow."

Tony glanced at his friend suspiciously. "Well, what was your reaction?" he demanded.

Parmelee half closed his eyes. "Well, first of all, and most of all, I'll say that the spirit of Daniel Ames is the chattiest ghost I ever met. No monosyllables, no 'yes' and 'no,' no 'ask me a question and I'll answer by rapping on the table' for Dan'l. He has a flow of language that's something exceptional for a spirit, and he doesn't hesitate to turn it on full cock. Why, he talked more than the medium did; he talked more than Noah did; he talked nearly as much as the nephew did!"

Tony knew something of the working of his friend's mind. "What's the conclusion?" he inquired.

"That the man who is playing the part of the ghost is clever—very clever—but he's an amateur," declared Bill. "He hasn't been long in the business, or he would know that you get results more quickly if you don't talk so very, very much."

Tony mulled it over. "If that's so, why didn't you interrupt?"

"What?"

"If you saw through the whole thing right off, why didn't you say a word? I expected you to."

Parmelee laughed. "To tell the truth, I was enjoying myself too much."

"Enjoying yourself—at a performance which you just told me was amateurish?"

Parmelee broke into a roar of laughter. "Oh, don't make any mistake, Tony," he begged. "The performance I was enjoying wasn't the performance put on by the medium and the spirit! I've seen better performances than that lots of times. What I was enjoying was what was taking place in the audience, the impromptu affair being staged by Noah and his loving nephew. Why, I would no sooner have interrupted that than have done the same thing in a first-class theater! Mersereau and the ghost of Daniel Ames were only play acting; Noah and Bobby were in dead earnest."

"Then you got nothing at all out of the séance," said Tony, with obvious disappointment. "You might as well have stayed home."

"Don't say that, Tony. Don't say that!" His friend's eyes twinkled. "I'll admit that I didn't get much—but I didn't come away empty-handed. I've got the ghost's visiting card."

"The—the what?"

"I'll show it to you." He opened his coat, and with the greatest care produced a sheet torn from a loose-leaf memorandum book. He handled it gingerly by the edges. "Look at it, Tony, but don't touch it."

Tony looked—and saw only a blank

piece of paper. Gravely his friend turned it over. Both sides were blank.

Tony blinked. "I don't see anything."

"Well, on a ghost's visiting card what would you expect to see?"

Tony glanced sharply at his friend. "Bill, you're joking!"

"Never more serious," Parmelee affirmed. "When the spirit started touching our faces with his fingers, I thought it wouldn't do any harm to have a permanent record. I tore this sheet of paper out of my diary, and I held it on my forehead in the dark."

"What's the big idea?"

"Not a big idea at all," Parmelee deprecated, "just a thought that may be useful to us later on. The spirit touched this sheet of paper with his fingers—don't you see?—and left his finger prints on it. They can be made visible in a dozen ways. That's all."

MANY times in the past Parmelee had surprised his friend with his astuteness, with his ability to make the simplest means serve his purpose. But never before had Tony veered from discouraged apathy to jubilant admiration so suddenly. As the possibilities flashed into his mind he halted in the middle of his stride, with eyes popping and mouth open, and literally shouted his approbation.

"By George!" he cried. "What a pippin of an idea! What a peacherino of an idea!"

"I thought you'd like it," said Parmelee diffidently. He folded the paper carefully, and restored it to his pocket.

"Like it?" chortled Tony. "Why, there's no word in the language strong enough to tell you what I think about it! How it simplifies everything!"

"Doesn't it?"

"Instead of just telling Noah that he's being imposed upon, you can prove it to the hilt! You can show him the medium's finger prints, and then you can show him these!"

Parmelee glanced at his friend quizzically. "Yes, that's one possibility," he admitted.

"Instead of saying that some unknown played the part of the ghost, you can identify the man who did it!"

"Yes, that's another possibility."

"You can take your finger prints to the police, and the chances are that you'll find out his complete record from them!"

"It's barely possible that he belongs to that class of the population whose finger prints are filed away by the Federal authorities."

"What's the difference?" exulted Tony. "What does it matter whether he's served time in State's prison or in a Federal jail? Either way, you've got him. He may be clever, but he's met his match." They had reached the entrance of the building which housed Tony's apartment. "Coming up?" he invited.

"Not now."

"The finger prints will keep you busy?"

"Exactly."

Tony nodded. What would follow now would be a matter of routine, and not particularly interesting. Yet the afternoon's events had brought up one question which he desired greatly to have answered.

"Before you go," he said, "explain to me how the spirit knew my name. When he called me 'Mr. Claghorn,' you could have knocked me down with a feather."

"You gave your overcoat to the servant."

"What about it?"

Without a word Parmelee plunged his hand into the inner breast pocket, and turned the lining inside out. "Do you see? Your name is written on the label."

Tony whistled.

"There are three or four letters in your pocket, too," Parmelee added.

"They're addressed to you. The address corroborates the label."

"I see! I see!" Then an idea struck him. "If the label in my coat identified me, why didn't the label in yours identify you?"

"You go to a fashionable tailor. He writes your name on his label. I buy my clothes ready-made. My name isn't in them at all."

"But he called you 'Mr. Hudson.'"

"I expected him to," Parmelee admitted. He handed Tony an addressed envelope. "Before we started for the medium's rooms, I sat down and wrote this letter to myself. You'll notice it's addressed to Hudson. I was careless enough to leave it in my pocket."

Tony smiled his appreciation. Then another thought assailed him. Carefully he removed his hat, and examined the initial punched through the lining. In a voice which sputtered his excitement, he announced his discovery. For once it appeared very much as if he were about to trip up Parmelee.

"The servant looked at my hat, didn't he?"

"Certainly."

"He saw the initial 'C' in it. That checked with the name and the letters I had left in my overcoat pocket. That right?"

"Quite right."

"Now," and Tony's voice rose triumphantly, "when he looked at your hat, why didn't he see the initial 'P' in it? I've seen it there myself a dozen times. Why didn't that conflict with the letter addressed to 'Mr. Hudson?' Why didn't that give it all away?"

Parmelee gazed at his friend with open admiration. "How you think of everything, Tony!" He removed his hat, and glanced at the lining. "As you say, the initial 'P' instead of 'H' would have given me away."

"And didn't?"

"And didn't. As you see, this hat isn't mine. Absent-mindedly I left my own hat at Bobby's apartment. This is one I borrowed."

"From whom?"

Parmelee smiled radiantly. "From Higgins," said he.

CHAPTER IX.

HANDCUFFED.

MERSEREAU gazed about the room. His face was as placid, as dignified, as striking as ever. His large, powerfully muscled hands were folded; his expressive lips were motionless; his china-blue eyes, under their bushy brows, were focused on the distance. He knew that the crisis was near. He knew that his plans would meet with decisive victory or with equally decisive defeat, and that soon. Yet the mask which for so many years had concealed his feelings from the world that had battered and tossed him about was impenetrable, inscrutable, unfathomable.

He glanced at his visitors. If their barely suppressed excitement communicated itself to him, not a muscle of his impassive countenance indicated it. He said: "I am ready to begin."

A thrill—a tingle—an indefinable something that stretched tautened nerves still tauter—quivered through the little group of men in the room. They joined hands in a circle. They swallowed nervously. They saw the lights go out. They sniffed the familiar incense. They heard the familiar phonograph grinding out the familiar hymn. They saw the dark close in upon them, and at least three hearts out of four began to beat high.

Higgins, perhaps, had the best reason to be agitated. He had waited for Parmelee at the street entrance. He had buttonholed him upon his arrival. He had drawn him to one side, and he had hissed in a tragic whisper:

"He's signed the deed!"

Parmelee smiled. "Yes, I expected that."

The nephew gazed at him incredulously. "Did you hear what I said? I said that he's signed the deed!"

"Well, what of it?"

"I argued with him all I dared. I argued with him on the way home in his taxi. I argued with him last night—until he told me he wanted to go to sleep. I had breakfast with him this morning, and I argued with him again, but that didn't stop him from going straight to his lawyers. His mind was made up, and I couldn't budge him. The deed's drawn up. He's signed it. He's got it in his pocket this minute, and he says he's going to put it into the spirit's hand himself."

IT is to be seen, from the above, that Robert Eugene Higgins was not without his worries. He detailed them to Parmelee, and when the latter failed to share his indignation, he began to grow angry.

"You don't seem to realize how serious this is!" he fumed. "Serious to me!"

"Oh, yes," said Parmelee.

"The deed is signed and sealed, I tell you! It has only to be delivered to make it a gift."

Parmelee smiled. "Will it comfort you if I say that in spite of that the land will never go to anybody who isn't entitled to it?"

"I want the land myself—all of it."

"Yes, I understood that from the beginning."

The nephew glanced at him with ill-concealed hostility. When arguing with Noah, he had been compelled to repress himself; but there was no reason why he should not say what he pleased now. Noah was his uncle, with valuable property to bestow; Parmelee was merely a temporary employee, who seemed, moreover, to grudge him the deference that was his due.

"You know," Higgins remarked politely, "you've been in town three or four days, and I can't see that you've accomplished a damn thing."

Parmelee's self-control was impregnable. If he disliked the man as heartily as one human being can dislike another, there was nothing in his perfectly level voice to indicate the fact. "What did you expect of me?" he inquired dispassionately.

Higgins pushed his face within an inch of the countryman's. "What did I expect?" he echoed venomously. "I'll tell you what I expected! With your reputation, with the lies that your friends have told me about you, with their record of the things you've done—which I don't believe—I expected nothing short of a miracle!"

"A miracle?" Parmelee smiled imperturbably. "If you wanted that, Mr. Higgins, you sent for the wrong man. You should have sent for a medium—a good one—and you should have asked him to resurrect a spirit."

With that parting thrust, he turned his back on the nephew—who debated, for an instant or two, whether or not to strike him, and decided not to—and turned toward the stairs.

It was then that a car pulled up at the curb, and Tony leaped out. "Bill!" he cried. "Oh, Bill!"

Parmelee turned to him with relief—but it was only momentary. Tony, waiting at home, while his friend ran down the trail, had all but died of curiosity. He had parted from him two days before, anticipating developments of no particular consequence. An hour later he had received a brief telephonic message that Parmelee had started for Washington.

Tony had marked time for the whole of the following day. He had tried to console himself by reflecting that he was probably not missing much. His imagination, however, was too active to let him have any solid comfort in that thought. Parmelee would not have embarked on such a trip without good rea-

son. It was obvious; it was transparent. The man he was hunting was big game—bigger game than he had at first suspected. No petty malefactor, this unknown who impersonated the spirit, but a supercriminal whose history was recorded in the capital of the nation, and whose misdeeds had probably included every crime forbidden in the Decalogue. Now Tony had never met a murderer, and like every respectable citizen, he yearned to be on the trail of one. Parmelee was having that pleasure; Tony was being cheated out of it. He writhed at the thought.

ON the morning of the next day, he opened his mail anxiously. Surely there would be word from his friend. There was none, and Tony's vexation increased. There was to be a séance that afternoon. He could not very well go alone, and he did not wish to miss it. Then, when he had almost given up hope, a telegram arrived, bidding him meet Parmelee at the medium's, and Tony wasted no time in complying with directions.

He knew enough to ask embarrassing questions—and not enough to make them unnecessary—and Parmelee had the very best of reasons for not wishing to answer.

He admitted that he had identified the finger prints.

"So the man has a record?" Tony gloated.

"He has a record."

"A long one?"

"Plenty long enough."

"Well, what do you think of that?" crowed Tony. A hundred questions leaped to his tongue, but Parmelee, foreseeing what would happen, was already halfway up the stairs. "Wait for me!" cried Tony, "wait for me!" He followed, trembling with excitement.

Noah Ames, too, was distinctly nervous. He arrived barely on time. He waved aside his nephew's proffered arm, and ascended the stairs unassisted. In his clawlike hand he clutched a large envelope, and he was careful to keep Higgins at a distance from it. When he seated himself in the circle, it was Tony whom he selected to sit nearest the precious document.

Noah Ames saw the darkness close in; he saw the faces which surrounded him melt gently into the blackness; he strained his feeble eyes in an endeavor to pierce it. In spite of the fact that his life had stretched over some sixty-odd years, the events of the past few weeks had drawn upon his emotions more heavily than had the many decades that had gone before.

The phonograph droned on; the sweetish smoke of the burning incense poured into the room. Mersereau sat in his chair counting the ticks of the clock.

He trod on a button. For an instant a light flashed upon the faces of his visitors. It showed him what he wanted to see, that they had not moved.

He groaned; he shifted his position. He said: "I think the spirits will be with us soon." Then, patiently, he counted ticks until five minutes had elapsed.

He sensed the impatience of his callers, but he was playing for Noah alone. What the others thought or felt did not matter greatly.

He flashed the light a second time. It showed him that the circle was still intact. He proceeded with his prearranged plan; he allowed a table, weirdly illuminated by an orange-colored light, to rise into the air, to execute a complete somersault, to descend noiselessly to the spot upon which it had stood. His assistant had begged him to devise new manifestations worthy of the occasion; with Omar's help, Mersereau had done his best.

He flashed the light a third time. Noah was impressed: there was no gainsaying that. Mersereau groaned and murmured:

"The spirits are here."

Noah did not waste an instant. "Are you there, Dan'l?" he quavered. "Are you there?"

Came two loud raps.

"Let me hear your voice, Dan'l," begged the old man.

A pause, then from the dark boomed the deep response: "Father!"

"That's your voice, Dan'l, I'd know it in a thousand! That's your voice! Come here, Dan'l, come here. Stretch out your hand. There's something I want to put in it."

Tony could feel the old man raise the hand which held the deed as the familiar blast of cold air hissed into the room. He heard the phonograph end "Rock of Ages" for the hundredth time—and promptly start it over again. He felt Noah's body relax as the deed was plucked out of his fingers, and then, in the dark, he heard a sharp, metallic snap, felt a body plunge across his, and found himself abruptly in the center of a grappling, battling, struggling mass.

The light flashed on and off, to show a tangle of writhing figures and flailing arms, and to reveal Noah, knocked out by an accidental blow, measuring his length on the floor.

A police whistle shrilled. A thunderous clamor broke out at the door. Axes and crowbars smashed its panels, letting light into the room. There was a rending of splintered wood, and two men crashed through what was left of the door, and into the mêlée.

A bony fist caromed on Tony's ribs. He struck back, and noted with pleasure that he had caught Higgins squarely in the mouth. Then he disentangled himself from the group—and nearly collapsed in astonishment when a glance showed him Parmelee, with handcuffs on his wrist, engaged in what appeared to be a battle royal with most of the other men in the room.

Tony's brain whirled. That Parmelee, whom he trusted, whose abilities he worshiped, whose integrity he would have vouched for, should be thus ignominiously captured was monstrous. Then his friend's voice came through the tumult.

"There's really no use fighting," it gasped, "I can't let you go without the key."

Tony gulped. There was something vastly relieving in those few words. Then the lights blazed on, pitiless, revealing, and he discovered that while one of the cuffs was indeed on his friend's wrist, the other cuff was securely clamped upon the wrist of a young man whom he had never seen before.

THE fight stopped suddenly. The combatants stumbled up from the floor. They counted noses.

Noah Ames, still senseless, lay where he had fallen. Mersereau, dignified, sphinxlike as ever, sat motionless in the chair which he had never left. Even though a trip in a patrol wagon might be in prospect, his mask of a face was inscrutable.

Parmelee, somewhat the worse for wear, was chained to a prepossessing young fellow, considerably the worse for wear, whose free arm was clutched by Higgins, very much indeed the worse for wear. Judging by the marks, at least every other blow delivered in the battle had landed somewhere upon the elegant nephew.

Besides these, there were the two men who had burst into the room, two men whose shoes, whose hats, whose general appearance proclaimed that they were detectives.

With a few choice words, Robert Eugene Higgins took command. He wiped his cut mouth, ejected two teeth which he needed no longer, and examined an ear which had been loosened in the struggle. Then he nodded condescendingly to his temporary employee. "Much obliged, Parmelee," he remarked,

"that was a good idea of yours, snapping handcuffs on him in the dark."

Parmelee grinned. "It was the only way I could make sure he'd stay here."

"He stayed all right!" exulted the nephew. "He's going to stay quite a while."

Parmelee extracted a key from his vest pocket and fitted it to the handcuffs. "We won't need these any more," he said.

"No." The nephew seemed to be in entire agreement. Then he beckoned masterfully to the detectives. "Here's your man. Take him."

Parmelee pricked up his ears. "What did you say?" he demanded.

"These men are officers of the law," Higgins explained, somewhat superfluously. "I had an idea we'd need them. I had them wait at the door until I whistled."

Parmelee gasped. "But you don't need them now, do you?"

"Why not?" Higgins turned to the detectives. "I want this man taken into custody."

The prepossessing young man uttered his first word. Tony recognized his deep, sonorous voice. "You want me arrested? On what charge?"

"On the charge of attempting to swindle my uncle. On the charge of impersonating the spirit of Daniel Ames. You did that, didn't you? You won't attempt to deny it."

The ex-ghost grinned. "Bobby, I cannot tell a lie."

Higgins disregarded the impertinence. "Take him away," he commanded magisterially.

The young man wheeled upon him. "Bobby," he said, and somehow Tony found his repetition of the name, in the same mocking tones as before, irresistibly ludicrous, "Bobby, don't you know me?"

"No," Higgins declared.

"You don't recognize me?"

"No."

"You've never seen me before?"

"No—and I don't want to see you again."

The young man turned to Parmelee. "How about it, Bill?" he inquired.

"Bill!" Tony could not conceal his surprise. But his friend did not appear to be startled.

Instead, Parmelee turned to the waiting detectives. "If you know what's best for you, you won't make any arrest. If you do, you'll have a suit for false arrest on your hands." He smiled happily and unfolded two sheets of paper. "Here is a set of finger prints this man made two days ago. Here is a photostat of another set on file in the records of the marine corps in Washington. Look at them. Compare them. Loop for loop, line for line, whorl for whorl, they're the same!"

He paused and deliberately grinned at Robert Eugene Higgins, who, with mouth open, was gazing at him with unutterable dismay. Parmelee turned back to the detectives. "Gentlemen, take my advice, and don't arrest this man for impersonating Daniel Ames. Somebody else might do that, but he—he can't! He *is* Daniel Ames!"

The young man stretched out his hand, and seized Parmelee's. "Thanks, Bill," he said.

Then, from the other side of the room, came a hoarse croak as Noah tottered to his feet. "Dan'l!" he cried. "Dan'l! Dan'l! Dan'l!"

Parmelee made a gesture which included Mersereau—Higgins—Tony—the detectives—every one except the father and the son. "Come," he said, "let's leave them together."

CHAPTER X.

A NEW START.

TWO cars of the three twenty train for Brewster, Pawling, Wassaic, West Woods, and points north, contained what might have been described

as a family party. In the club car, Parmelee, Claghorn and Mersereau, the last two smoking huge and prosperous-looking cigars, gazed at each other, gazed out of the windows, gazed at each other again, and smiled. In the Pullman adjoining, Daniel Ames and the future Mrs. Daniel Ames—Dorothy Mersereau, for the time being—held hands shamelessly and talked very little indeed. Across the aisle from them, Noah Ames, with lean legs crossed, and his chin sunk on his breast, twiddled his thumbs energetically in a clockwise direction, and having done that for a while, twiddled them quite as energetically in a counterclockwise direction.

From the family party only one person was missing—the devoted nephew. Strange to say, his absence was neither mentioned nor regretted. Robert Eugene Higgins had been invited not to come along, and he had accepted the invitation.

In the club car, Tony Claghorn, Tony the irrepressible, was engaged in his usual occupation of deciding which question, out of the thousand that sprang to his lips, he should propound first of all. And lest Tony, running true to form, should spring a dozen questions upon us at one and the same moment, we turn back the calendar ten years, and we ring up our curtain on the Ames homestead in Wassaic.

The Ames family consisted of two persons, a father and a son, and they were rarely on good terms with one another for more than ten consecutive minutes. Sometimes a family is so divided because of some great and vital difference of opinion; that, however, was not the case with Noah and Daniel Ames. On all questions of major import the two were in agreement; it was an unending warfare on the subject of trifles that made both unhappy.

Noah was opinionated, argumentative, quick-tempered, set on having his own way. Daniel, being his son, had inherited the stubbornness of his father. Second generations are sometimes improvements, and Daniel, a level-headed, straight-thinking young fellow, was usually right, and knew it; but the father, clinging to the belief that age and wisdom went hand in hand, could not bring himself to adm[illegible] boy who had learned his letters at his knee had become a man, with a man's judgment, a man's knowledge, and a man's pride.

Daniel had his ideas upon farming, modern ideas, acquired from textbooks and from government publications. Noah believed only what his forefathers had handed down to him by word of mouth, and was convinced that nothing had been added to the sum total of knowledge since 1880, or thereabouts. Daniel was an innovator, friendly to new theories, and ready to try them out. Noah was a conservative, and proud of it. What was—was right.

Now two men may differ upon the details of practical farming and still remain the best of friends. Noah, however, considered his son presumptuous for venturing to have an opinion of his own and, having control of the finances, retaliated by paying him smaller wages than he paid his common laborers. Thus his own father had treated him, feeling that Noah should be satisfied with anything. Thus, in turn, Noah treated his son, thereby both economizing and making him feel the weight of parental discipline. It did not make for a kindly feeling.

Patriotism covers a multitude of motives. Daniel, in all probability, loved his country as much as the next man, but he might not have volunteered so promptly when war was declared if he and his father had been on better terms. He found the inflexible discipline of the marines a relief after the tyranny to which he had been accustomed at home. It was severe, but it was just. It brooked no argument, but it was right. It was modern; it was up to date; it

was reasonable; it was scientific. For the first time in his life Daniel found himself treated as a man, and he enjoyed it. He rose rapidly to noncommissioned rank.

When he was sent across, he made new discoveries. He was in a position of some little authority His father might have looked upon him as a child; other men did not. His superiors trusted him; his inferiors looked up to him. They obeyed his orders. They respected him, because he had earned their respect. They were quick to recognize his mentality.

It was very pleasant for Daniel. His horizon had enlarged. He was standing on his own bottom, and making a success of it. The apron strings that had harassed him so long were severed. He awakened to a new sense of confidence in his own powers, of independence, of freedom. He saw action, and acquitted himself well. Overnight he had become a man.

He was a little dazed, at first, when, in an enemy prison, he read the news of his own demise. In the marines many surprising things had happened to him; this was the most surprising of all. He granted that whoever had been responsible for the report had had good reasons for his conclusions. When a shell explodes in the midst of a group of a dozen men, it is highly improbable that any one of them will escape. And when the sole survivor of the holocaust had been captured and removed by a raiding party, it is quite impossible for him to inform his friends that he is still in the land of the living.

BY joining the marines, Daniel had at a blow achieved a degree of freedom hitherto unknown to him; by adding his name to the list of those who had been killed in action, he had achieved a still greater degree of freedom. He was a living dead man, without obligations, without responsibilities, without masters and superiors, at liberty to do exactly as he pleased. He wondered what his former neighbors would be saying; he would have been surprised to learn how deeply his cantankerous father mourned him. But it came to him clearly that here was an unparalleled opportunity to break with his old life, and to live as he wished. It did not take him long to decide in favor of the experiment. Its flavor of novelty appealed to him.

Had he returned to his own country as Daniel Ames, son of Noah Ames, force of habit would have compelled him to take the first train to his home town, to rise at dawn the following morning, and to resume his place at the wheel of the tractor which he had purchased against his father's wishes. Returning as a veteran reported dead, he found neither friends nor relatives at the pier to welcome him. Other men in similar positions envied their more fortunate comrades. Daniel envied nobody in the world, for he was at length his own master.

Through an employment agency, he found clerical work in New York. He did not care for it particularly, but the abilities which had served in one direction were equally valuable in another, and he might have retained his position indefinitely had he wished to. He did not. Brought up in the open, happiest when the sun beamed down upon him, deeply interested in everything having to do with the miracle which transformed seeds into living, growing plants, he found the close confinement which his work imposed upon him most irritating. The long walks that he took morning and evening only emphasized the sedentary character of his labors during most of the day.

At the expiration of a year, he was summoned to the vice president's sanctum, and was informed that he was to be promoted. No longer would he work in the large outer office with the other

employees. He would have a cubby-hole of his own, and he would have push buttons to summon bookkeepers and stenographers to him. He would have a larger salary, and easier hours. Daniel, however, made a mental comparison between the large office which he had found so cramping, and the smaller quarters which were to be his reward, and he resigned on the spot.

The vice president had turned to him in amazement. "But look here," he had stammered, "look here——"

Daniel had interrupted. "I'm going to try farming," he said.

"But we're promoting you!" protested the vice president.

"I'm promoting myself," said Daniel.

He found work of the kind that he wished without difficulty. He discovered that Nature had not changed appreciably; that, despite the war, soil was still fertile, and grass still green. But the drive that had been in him in the old days when he had tilled the Ames farm was lacking when he worked for a random employer. It was one thing to labor in the fields from which his own ancestors had removed the stones, in the earth which successive generations of Ameses had broken and enriched, among the hills which had seen the lives and deaths of his forefathers, and it was a much different thing to perform the same work for some stranger, who, in the course of events, would pass his possessions on to another stranger. It was disheartening, for money alone could not reward him. It was not like the days of his boyhood, when, in the pride of his inheritance, he had longed for the ability to write at the end of each furrow: "Daniel Ames plowed it." Thus painter and sculptor signed their work; thus Daniel would have done, too.

HE wandered hither and thither. When, in the course of his peregrinations, he saw that the Ames farm was deserted, his heart ached. He would have given anything—had he possessed anything—for the right to work it. He feared, however, to disclose himself to his father. Noah might not receive him kindly. Even if he did, it would be but a matter of minutes before the two, as so often before, would be on bad terms. Daniel would detail his ideas; Noah would object to them from beginning to end, partly because they were novel, and partly because they were Daniel's; there would be war in an instant.

He resolved, if possible, to buy the land he coveted and, being young and hot-headed, saw no reason why he should not earn enough to do so. He returned to New York, and to the concern which had first employed him. After six months in the cubby-hole which he had once scorned, he had cooled off sufficiently to figure out that his maximum savings, even with interest compounded annually, would not reach the required total for some thirty years. It was a long time to wait—and when, one day, he saw Noah crossing the street on the arm of Robert Eugene Higgins, the cousin whom he had always detested, it promised to be longer than ever.

Long before the purchase price, which Daniel had ascertained, could be amassed, Noah would be gathered to his fathers. The farm would become Robert's property, and would pass into alien hands. The thought was revolting, but Daniel knew that if he revealed himself now he would have Robert's opposition, as well as his father's intractability, to contend with. Robert, looking out for himself, could be depended upon to poison Noah's mind against him.

If Daniel's make-up had held the slightest tinge of the mercenary, it would have struck him that his father was a rich man, that the farm was only one of his possessions, which included mortgages on most of the neighboring farms. It would have occurred to him

that Noah, even if he could not get along with his son, would never cast him off altogether, and would, at the very least, draw upon his ample resources to provide for him. In his boots, Robert would have calculated thus; Daniel did not.

Not knowing what to do, he did nothing. It was then that he became interested in one of his fellow employees, fell into the habit of spending his evenings with her and, before he knew it, became engaged to marry her. Through her, he met her father—a medium named Mersereau, who did not hesitate to show his future son-in-law the tricks of his trade. The compressed-air tank which provided a blast of cold air, the adroit lighting, the electrical contrivances by means of which raps might be made to come from any part of the room—all these Mersereau proudly displayed to Daniel Ames.

Daniel saw. Daniel meditated. Daniel evolved a most remarkable idea.

CHAPTER XI.

PAID IN FULL.

"TO put it in his own words," said Mersereau, who, assisted by Parmelee, had contributed the major part of the foregoing narrative, "the boy felt that his father would do for Daniel dead what he would never do for Daniel living. That's what he said to me."

"Dan knew the old man, didn't he?" Parmelee chuckled.

Mersereau nodded. " 'Father will do anything for the spirit of his son,' Daniel used to repeat. 'He won't do a thing for his son in the flesh.' "

"So you resurrected the spirit?" Tony said.

"The happiness of my daughter was at stake," said the medium, with the dignity that never deserted him. "I placed my professional services at Daniel's disposal."

Tony's eyes twinkled maliciously. "You didn't care how close you sailed to the law?"

Mersereau squared his shoulders. "I helped Daniel get what was rightfully his; that was no crime. For a son to inherit the lands of his ancestors—that is just; that is right; that is as it should be. I wish the deed could have been made out in Daniel's name. That was impossible. To ask such a thing of Noah Ames would have meant to give our hand away. We did what we could." He turned and faced his inquisitor. "We committed no crime, Mr. Claghorn; we violated no law. But if it had been a crime, I should not have hesitated. I should have gone through with it for the sake of my daughter."

"Bravo!" said Parmelee.

"When the young man came to me, and said, 'I am Daniel Ames—Daniel Ames who was reported killed in France,' I believed him."

"Did he have any proof?" Tony asked.

"The best proof in the world."

"And what was that?"

Again Mersereau's eyes blazed. "My daughter loved him! I asked nothing more than that. That proved anything he wanted to prove—with me. The man whom my daughter loved would not lie to her father. I allowed him to guide me. I did whatever he asked me to do. I followed him blindly because I had unlimited faith in him. I have had no reason to regret it."

Tony smiled. "Sometimes the heart is a better guide than the head, eh, Mr. Mersereau?"

"Not sometimes, Mr. Claghorn—always!—always!" Mersereau's voice was earnest, sincere, convincing. He was a believer reciting his creed. It had led him safely through tempestuous years. It had brought him finally to a haven. He was surer of its eternal truth now than ever. "Always, Mr. Claghorn," he repeated, "always!"

Parmelee broke in with a question.

"Having made your plans, how did you get Noah Ames to come to you?"

Mersereau smiled. "Daniel did that."

"How?"

"He dictated a note. I wrote it on a plain sheet of paper. It said: 'If you would like to learn something to your advantage, come to see me next Saturday afternoon.'"

"The word 'advantage' brought him."

The medium nodded. "It brought him as far as my entrance. The sign, 'Mersereau—Medium,' stumped him for a minute. He didn't know what to make of it. But he came upstairs anyhow."

"Trust the old man!" Parmelee chuckled.

"I sat him down in a chair; I turned out the lights; and then, before he could object, I told him that the spirits had a message for him. The rest you know."

Parmelee nodded. He gazed out of the window thoughtfully. "I've known Dan Ames ever since we were boys, but at the beginning I didn't guess who was playing the part of the ghost. You might think that I would have recognized his voice right off. I didn't. I hadn't heard it in years. More than that, I thought the poor fellow was dead. Why, if his voice had sounded familiar, it would have given me the creeps—and the face up near the ceiling didn't prove anything, because there was so much phosphorescent paint on it that it was unrecognizable. No, it was neither the voice nor the face that put me on the right trail."

"What did?" inquired Mersereau.

"The ghost's talkativeness!" Parmelee grinned. "There was never an Ames who wasn't a great talker. It's a legend up round where they come from. Noah Ames would talk by the hour, just to hear himself talk. He loved the sound of his voice. Every man of his generation in Wassaic will tell you that. Dan took after him. Even as a boy, Dan had a wonderful flow of language. Higgins has the family failing. He's an Ames on his mother's side. Listen to him two minutes, and you'll know it.

"To be frank, I wasn't thinking about the talkativeness of the Ames family when I walked into your parlor. I had expected to find——. Well, the usual thing. I've seen a good deal of mediums and their ways. I was comparing you with other mediums in the beginning; I was listening to Bobby and Noah, and I was enjoying myself. Then a thought came to me like a flash of lightning, and I found myself laughing in the dark. I was saying to myself: 'If that spirit isn't related to Noah Ames, then, by George, he ought to be!' He was doing what I would have expected of an Ames. He was a spirit, but that couldn't silence him. He was supposed to stick to spirit rappings——"

"I advised him to do that," Mersereau interrupted.

"Of course! Of course! But he didn't—not Daniel! He'd rap once in a while, just to show you that he hadn't forgotten, but most of the time he spoke right out in meeting!"

He paused. "At that very first séance—the first that I attended—I found myself doing some quick thinking. I'm not a skeptic. I'll believe if I'm shown, but I want to be shown that there's no natural explanation before I accept a supernatural one. Other things being equal, I'll believe what's easiest to believe. Well, I found it easier to believe that Dan wasn't dead than to believe that his ghost was talking to me."

"Why couldn't some other man have been playing the ghost?" Tony interjected.

"He would have been a professional, Tony, and a professional wouldn't have talked so much. It was an amateur that we were dealing with—an amateur with such highly special qualifications that Mr. Mersereau was willing to stake everything on him. And what amateur

could have been better qualified to act Dan's ghost than Dan himself?

"I secured his finger prints. The marine corps identified them for me. At their headquarters in Washington, they were surprised to hear that Dan was alive. They were interested. There's a decoration coming to him, by the way. But the thing that mattered most just then was that I knew who the ghost was, I could guess at his motives, and I could act as I wanted to."

Tony frowned. "Act as Higgins wanted you to," he corrected.

"What do you mean?"

"Knowing what you did, why did you interfere? Daniel Ames was your friend. Why did you handcuff him, and show him up?"

Parmelee smiled. "I didn't do that on account of Higgins."

"Higgins thanked you for it."

"He's withdrawn his thanks since then. No, Tony, I did what I did on account of Dan! I could have let him get what he wanted by trickery. I didn't. But I didn't prevent him from getting it fairly! He had the deed in his hand when the fight started, you remember. He held on to it through the scrimmage. But when we left him alone with his father, he offered it back to him!

"Now I didn't tell him to do that, mind you. I didn't say a word. It was just the boy's natural decency coming through, as I knew it would if I gave it a chance!"

"What happened?"

"The old man said, 'Dan'l—Dan'l—that's mighty square of you!'—and he handed it right back to him! Now the boy can walk onto that farm without being ashamed of himself—and he's going to thank me for it some day before he is much older."

"In the meantime, Mr. Parmelee," said Mersereau, "I do."

Parmelee inclined his head. Then he smiled reminiscently. "Noah gave him the deed—and five minutes later they were deep in a good, old-fashioned scrap. Dan has ideas of his own on how to run a farm. So has Noah. They agree that the Ames farm is a pretty fine farm, but they don't agree on another blamed thing! Before they opened that door and let us in, they'd had no less than two fights and three reconciliations. Lord knows how many they've had since! But in spite of that, something tells me that Noah is going to visit his son—and his daughter—frequently."

THE train lurched around a curve. Parmelee glanced at his watch. "We'll be there in an hour."

Mersereau raised his leonine head. "I feel tired, gentlemen," he said. "This has been a very hard week for me. If you don't mind, I think I shall go to sleep." He made sure that a large rectangular parcel at his side was safe before he closed his eyes. "It's my old sign," he explained. "I have sold out my business, but I want some memento of my former profession. 'Mersereau—Medium.' If it goes nowhere else, it goes on the door of my room. Who knows? I may have use for it again some day."

Parmelee grinned. "If Dan's going to help, you ought to change the lettering."

"Make it read, 'Mersereau & Ames.'"

"No. Make it read, 'At the Sign of the Talkative Ghost.'"

Mersereau laughed. "He did talk a lot, didn't he? But I think he'll have less to say after he's married." That conclusion seemed to please him. He nodded. Then he folded his hands and closed his eyes.

It was left for Tony to make the final comment. "On the whole," he summed up, lowering his voice so as not to disturb the medium, "I'd call it an unsatisfactory adventure."

"Why so?" inquired his friend.

"A trip to New York—a trip to Washington—nearly a week's time—and Higgins didn't pay you your fee."

Parmelee chuckled. "Didn't he, though?" he murmured.

"Did he?"

"*Little Lord Fauntleroy* got mixed up in that battle I had with Dan—and I'm very much afraid he got the worst of it. It was accidental, of course, but nearly every blow I struck landed on Bobby. By a remarkable coincidence, the same thing happened with Dan; he told me so. Higgins may not have paid, Tony, but that didn't stop me from writing my receipt on his face."

Tony nodded vigorously. "That's some satisfaction," he admitted.

"It's a great satisfaction," Parmelee corrected.

"And that's all?"

"Not quite." With due ceremony Parmelee opened a twist of paper, and exhibited what a dentist would have described as an upper incisor. "It used to belong to Higgins. I kept it for a souvenir."

Tony guffawed. Then he interrupted himself. "But look here," he cackled, "didn't Higgins lose two teeth?"

"He did."

"Well?"

Parmelee replaced the twist of paper in his pocket. "One was all I could get," he said. "Dan wouldn't give up the other."

Other stories by Mr. Wilde will be published in forthcoming issues of THE POPULAR.

IN KNOWLEDGE THERE IS FEAR

THE psychological department at Columbia University obtains permission each year to put tests to the candidates for admission to the university. Last fall an innovation was tried. The professors wanted to test these embryonic students for reactions to fear. They purchased a nice, fair-sized black snake, perfectly harmless in fact, but deadly to the imagination. Ten students were brought into the laboratory. The first one to step forward for the test was a cocky, not-to-be-fooled fellow from a small city in the Mid-West. The instructor hung the snake about his neck. The reptile, itself paralyzed with fear, rested there like an inert, black necklace, making not the slightest move, giving not the least evidence of life. The professors had not counted on this turn to their experiment. However, it proved of much scientific and human value. The youthful subject glinted scorn from his black eyes at his examiners, then pronounced with a great show of bravado:

"You can't fool me with your rubber hose. I know snakes."

Taking their note from this well-informed, wide-awake nature lover, the succeeding nine youths, wearing, each in his turn, the reptile about his neck, claimed they couldn't be fooled either by a piece of rubber garden hose. From this decade absolutely no reactions to the fear stimulus were recorded. Ergo, man fears only what he associates with danger. And though a garden hose can cause any amount of discomfort, it evidently does not inspire man with fear.

Advice from an Old-timer

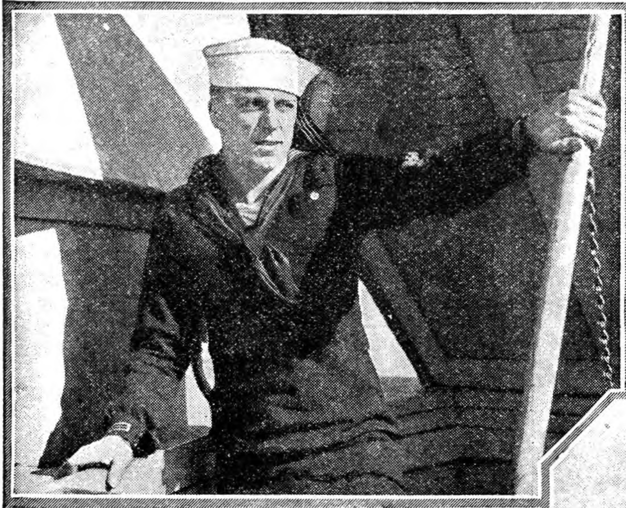
By Gregory Wattlington

THE West ain't what it one time wuz:
The "Wild an' Woolly's" 'most vamoosed;
They call the old trails "highways," cuz
The auto's put the bronch' to roost.
You see, folks thought it jes' a place
Fer Git-Rich-Quicks to grab the glitter—
But no one liked to show his face
As was a quitter.

Thar wa'n't no frills er make-believe:
The real men rode through life roughshod—
Thar wa'n't no suckers to deceive:
Jes' Natur', man, the Devil, God.
The Devil sometimes kicked up dust,
But not the way to git you bitter:
You hadn't time to gather rust
Er be a quitter.

The land was clean an' all first growth,
An' thar was space to turn around:
Your hoss an' you was sure you both
'O hev a few square mile' o' ground.
You'd pack a gun an' live your life
Upstandin'—no soft sofa sitter.
God's country was your child an' wife—
You wa'n't a quitter.

The old-time placer's gone his way:
The modern cowboy's 'most a gent;
An' hardly any soul kin say
Which road the faro dealer's went:
But git this straight: We still need men—
The blood that's red, the heavy hitter;
Thar's room—so come out West an' then
Don't be a quitter.



LEFT
"I AM A SAILOR in the United States Navy. All my life I have been bothered with a bad complexion and stomach trouble. I never found anything to clear my skin. While home on thirty days leave, I got in the habit of eating Fleischmann's Yeast. Now my skin is clear of pimples. I feel like a new man. I perform my duties with much more 'pep.' I owe it all to Fleischmann's Yeast." STANLEY H. STRAINGE, U.S.N., Hampton Roads, Va.

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Eat two or three cakes regularly every day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices, water or milk—or just plain, nibbled from the cake. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) before breakfast and at bedtime.* Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today!

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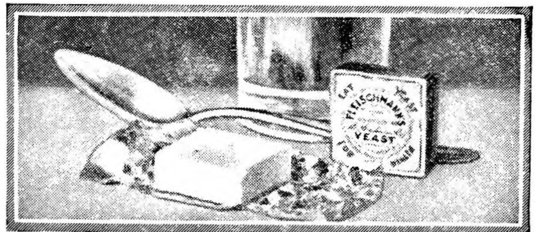
IDABELLE BARLOW, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.



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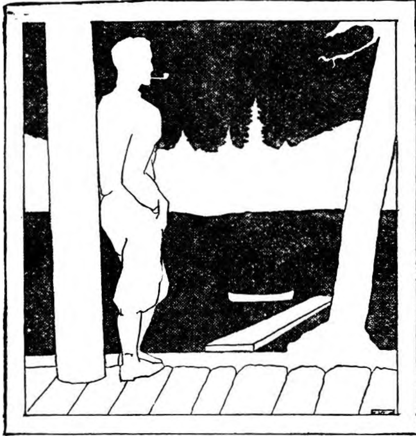

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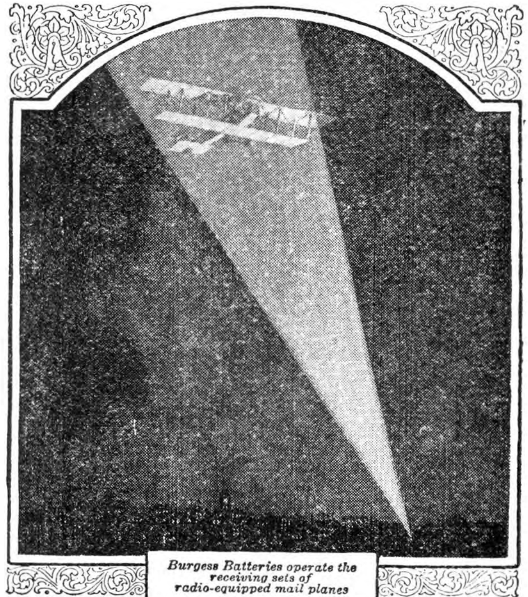

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An Extraordinary Story

In the September Number of

AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE

Ravaged Hands

By CLAUDE FARRERE

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It suggests a philosophy of love that challenges debate.
It flings a gauntlet in the face of convention.
It paints a romance of tender beauty.
It presents a drama of sharp intensity.
It draws a moral of inevitable logic.

Ravaged Hands

By CLAUDE FARRERE

September

AINSLEE'S

On the News Stands August Fifteenth

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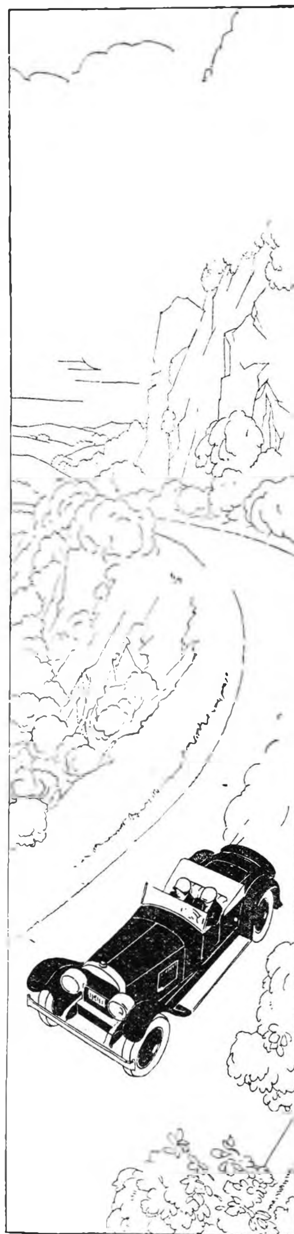

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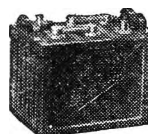

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31x4 ss.or cl.	4.25	2.00	34 x 4 1-2	5.75	3.00
32x4	4.50	2.25	33 x 5	5.95	3.25
33x4	4.95	2.50	35 x 5	5.95	3.25

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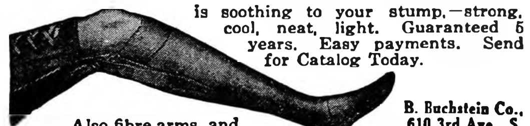

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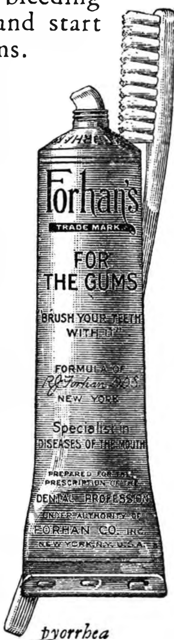

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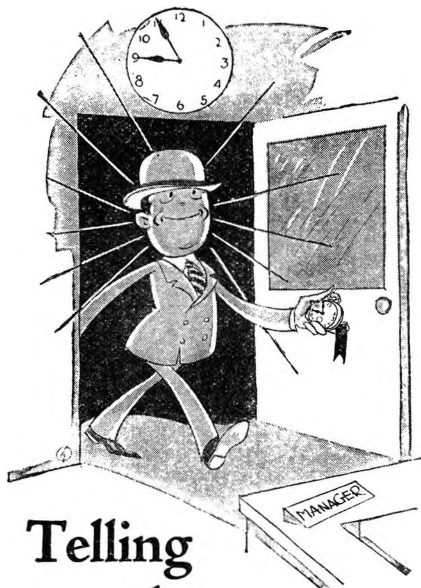

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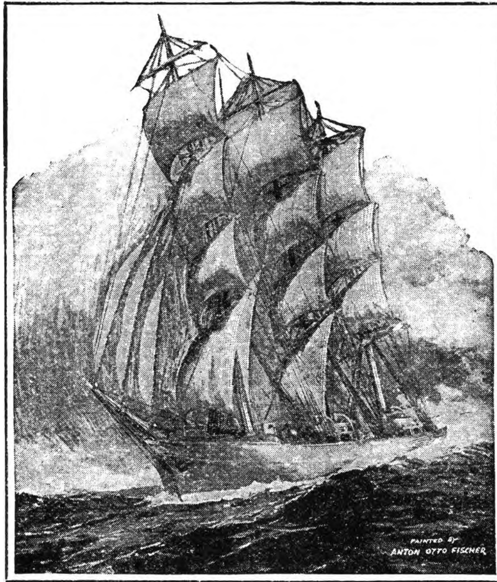

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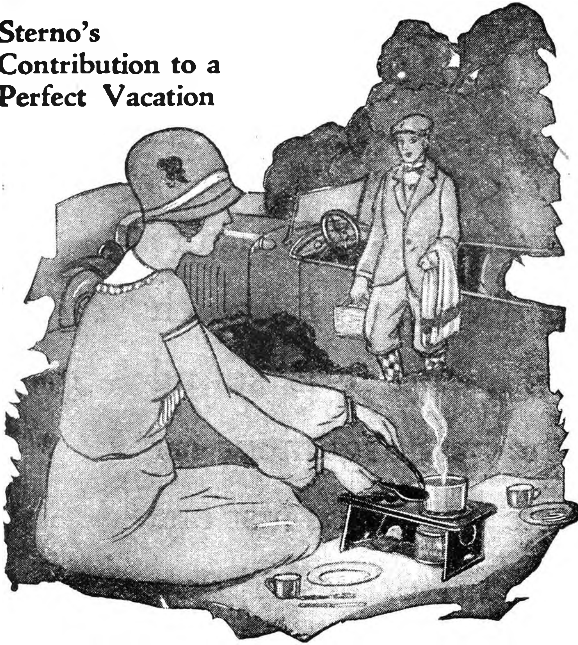

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