Published SEPT. 7, 1914

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

Volume XXXIII Number 6

COMPLETE NOVEL IN EACH ISSUE

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

PUBLISHED SEPT. 7TH, 1914 PRICE 15 CTS.

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BY W. B. M. FERGUSON

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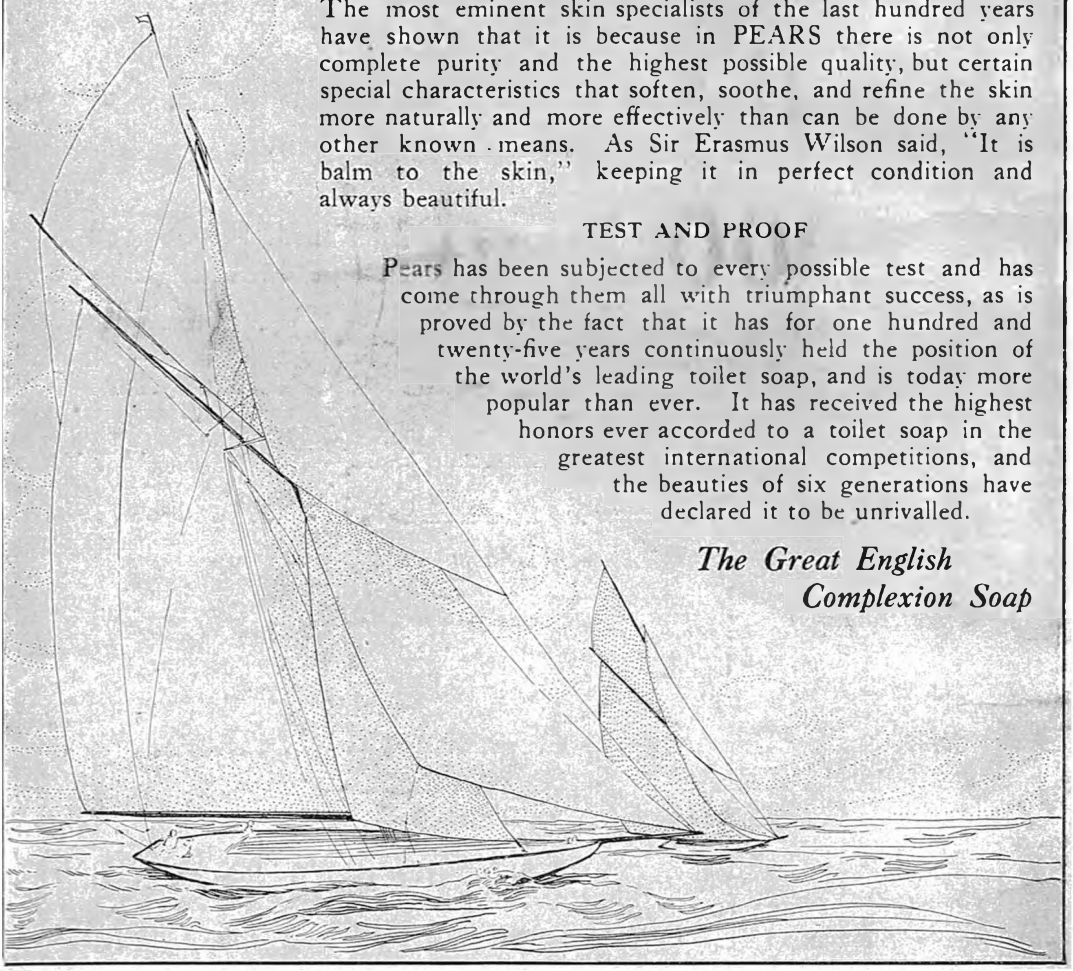

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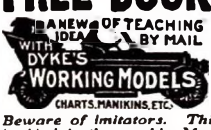

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Pop. Mag 10-1-14

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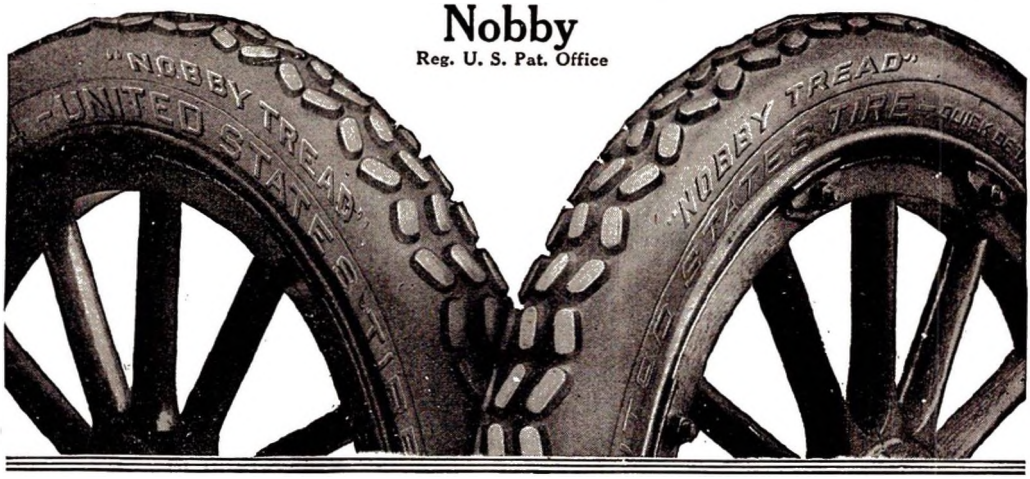

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COMPLETE NOVEL BY HENRY C. ROWLAND IN THE NEXT ISSUE

VOLUME XXXIII — NUMBER 6

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS

PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 7, 1914

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NEXT NUMBER OF POPULAR ON SALE SEPTEMBER 23rd

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Pop. Mag 10-1-14

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXIII. OCTOBER 1, 1914. No. 6.

A Man's Code

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "The Son," "Garrison's Finish," Etc.

You may consider this man's code Quixotic, but you can't help giving him credit for being true to it. The man is a ball player who is forced out of the Big League for "throwing" a game. Innocent or guilty he was the man responsible for the loss of the pennant, and only a psychologist can figure out how against his own will he came to make a play that he had been afraid all day of making; trying for nine innings *not* to make. Under a new name he begins a new life that he avers will have nothing to do with baseball, and here he has his chance to play the man and live up to his code. Ferguson's great story of the race track, "Garrison's Finish," sticks in our memory. We believe it is still the best racing novel extant. And we believe you will say of "A Man's Code" that it is the best baseball novel you have read. We believe, too, you will concede that it deserves to rank, both as to length and merit, with the best dollar-and-a-half novels on the news stands.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

THE thin young man, plainly dressed and unobtrusive, had found an obscure corner directly under a wall light which, the slouch hat he wore being pulled down until it almost swept his nose, threw the face into profound shadow; a thin, keen face by no means handsome, yet good to look upon.

From force of habit Steele had ordered a soft drink, corrected himself, and called for straight whisky; he felt it to be an occasion for that commodity, and the straighter the better, there being small consolation or support in ginger ale or lemon soda.

Emptying the small glass at a gulp, and pouring another before the vigilant, if plethoric, waiter could whisk away the bottle, he opened the evening paper, and spread it on the table. The paper was the *Eagle*, and had been bought deliberately that he might learn the worst, for he was in the frame of mind which prefers to know the worst, and from "Honest Bob" Somerville fandom could always depend upon hearing nothing but the truth, however unpleasant.

As a matter of course, the entire first

page was filled with double-leaded type, announcing the sensational defeat that afternoon of the Boston Badgers, and Steele's eyes fell upon such scareheads as:

MANHATTANS WIN.

World's Championship Goes to Pennant Holders of Continental League.

BADGERS DOWNED IN THE NINTH 5—4. GAME WON BY GLARING ERROR OF STAR SHORTSTOP.

Wild Scene at Grounds When Boston Rooters Try to Mob "Scrappy" Steele.

RESERVES CALLED OUT.

On the same page was a picture of Steele himself in uniform, and below it the ironic caption: "The man to whom every New York fan tenders a sincere vote of thanks."

Steele passed over the scareheads with hardly a glance, but he flushed dully at the words under his picture; that was a gratuitous jab that cut to the bone; a jab that might be expected from the most rabid Boston sheet, but not from a New York paper of the *Eagle's* standing. Surely it should not be from the press of the city to which he had presented a world's championship that he should look for a panning.

Yet almost from the day of his entering professional ball the *Eagle* had panned him more than once; when it must praise that praise was lukewarm or with a derogatory string attached, and virtually every paper but the New York *Eagle* had recognized "Big Ed" Connolly and himself to be the greatest team in the country, the backbone of the champion Badgers' offense and defense. To Connolly the *Eagle* tendered all the bay leaves, and honest Bob Somerville was considered one of the most expert ball critics in the country. According to him it was Connolly, the star second baseman, who started everything, about whom every play revolved, and that Steele, minus his big running mate, would never have shone. In this opinion Somerville stood almost alone, and perhaps for this reason—in order to justify his contention—he always had a veiled knock ready for the youngster who was considered the best shortstop in any league, barring none.

Steele now turned to Somerville's comment on the game, skipping the graphic word painting pertaining to the contest itself, until he came to the account of his own particular and inglorious part in the fray. Wrote Somerville:

Steele's wild throw in the ninth was a flagrant present of the game, and even the most rabid Manhattan rooter cannot but wish that the world's series had been won otherwise, won on its merits rather than by the questionable action of an opponent. I use "questionable" advisedly, and with full responsibility; the playing of the Badgers' shortstop throughout the series has been open to criticism, while this last episode must receive from officialdom the searching investigation it merits.

With shaking hands Steele turned over the page, his eyes and cheeks on fire. He forced himself to read farther. The article continued:

Every one knows that the game, the series, and the world's championship should have been the Badgers'. The game was as good as won; they were two runs plus, the last half of the ninth, one man down, two on the sacks, Collins, a pinch hitter, up, and the stage all set for a double play.

The rawest bonehead that ever stepped out of the bush would have doubled the men that Steele, by his wild throw, allowed to romp over the plate. There can be no excuse, for Collins' liner was the easiest of chances; Steele wasn't hurried, and didn't have to throw off his balance. He simply shoved out his glove, and the ball stuck there; he had all the time in the world, and he took it. But instead of passing to Connolly, waiting to double his man, who had started back and would have been caught by a mile, Steele held the ball like a dead one for at least three seconds, and then calmly heaved it over Connolly's head. It seemed as if he wanted to put the ball where it couldn't be fielded till the winning run was over the plate.

No such flagrant exhibition has been seen in big-league history, and I repeat there can be no excuse, and that the Badgers are perfectly justified in feeling robbed. They can't consider themselves victims of the fortunes of war, for no one who saw the play can call it an error to which the best of players are at times liable.

Steele is no busher; as every one knows, he has starred major-league ball for two years, and has been picked by many for the season's All-American choice. He can't claim he got rattled, and he's never been accused of boneheadedness.

The whole thing is grossly unpleasant, and necessarily gives rise to suspicion, especially —as it's been my duty to point out—as Steele played below form throughout the series. Certainly it has appeared at times as if he were not trying his hardest. This cannot be attributed to overwork, for Con Riley isn't the kind of manager to play a man who's out of condition or down too fine; he knows when a man's fit.

Steele by to-day's exhibition has given the national game the worst jolt it's received in history. In these days, when the game represents so much money, it becomes harder than ever to keep the sport clean; there are gentlemen to whom the winning or losing of such a game may mean a fortune, and they are not averse to using any method in order to turn a dishonest penny. These men aren't connected with the game itself, but they can kill it just as surely as they killed the race track and prize ring if once they tamper with players. It has always been our proud boast that the national game was absolutely clean and on the level, and, thanks to that belief, it has flourished enormously until the capital invested totals millions. But once the public begins to suspect any crookedness, we may as well turn back to ping-pong and croquet, for the great asset of professional ball is public confidence in its absolute squareness; shake that, and the game goes the way of the ponies and four-ounce gloves.

For this reason, to-day's action of the Badgers' shortstop must be fully investigated without fear or favor. Unfortunately there are always some people who prefer to believe the worst of any sport; there are those who believe the world's series to be fixed affairs, frame-ups for making extra money, and Steele's action will not help to dispel this belief.

The public wants to know, has the right to know, and *will* know, what explanation Scrappy Steele has to offer. Who are the men who have profited by his studied, deliberate error? This question doesn't concern the Badgers alone, but all fandom, and it must be answered if baseball isn't to become extinct; Morganthal and Hardman, as business men, will recognize this truth.

THE GAME CAN AFFORD NO PLAYER, HOWEVER BRILLIANT, WHO ISN'T ABSOLUTELY ON THE LEVEL!

Steele sat up, feeling dazed and almost physically ill; he had expected the warmest kind of panning, but this—this was infamous! Somerville was virtually accusing him of throwing the game and series for a consideration, and the accusation was but thinly veiled.

He closed his eyes as if to shut out the scene which had been enacted but a few short hours before at the Athletic Grounds; sweating from every pore, he felt again the awful paralyzing, ghastly silence following his wild throw to Connolly. He saw again the ball going on and on, heading for the bleachers as if it would never stop, as if it were a sensate demon created for his destruction. He saw again, amid the same grim, unearthly silence, the two white-uniformed Manhattans scampering home with the winning run, while he stood mute and powerless as if turned to stone; while the genial October sun set over the bluff, turning the west to a pyre of peerless gold, as if God were in His heaven, and all was right with the world.

And then the scene had changed. With a roar like hurricane surf on a rockbound coast the thirty thousand fans had come to their feet as one man, and the heavens seemed to open and pour down hats, sticks, chairs; bottles, cushions, oaths—and all the latter were for him alone. The Boston rooters, five thousand strong, had come for him in a solid, yelping phalanx, he the prime favorite who had been carried shoulder-high from many a hard-won field! He had become the storm center of a human cyclone; every one was on the diamond, and every one was yelling and waving

his arms like a drunken Indian on the warpath.

Then followed the run to the clubhouse while the police tried to clear the field. An empty beer bottle clipped him on the head, but it had not stung like the words he heard screamed into his buzzing ears; not hurt like the silence of his teammates nor Big Ed Connolly's awkward attempt to treat the matter as a piece of everyday luck. Not hurt like the expression in the blue eyes of "One-two-three" Driscoll, the veteran slab artist, who had pitched perhaps the headiest game of his life only to be robbed of it. For Driscoll had given the pinch hitter a ball which he knew, if connected with at all, must be lined straight into Steele's unerring glove; he had forced the inevitable double play only to have it butchered shamelessly by the very man who was famed for getting away with more impossible chances than any one who wore the spikes. Nor had it hurt like the stony silence of Con Riley, the manager. Riley, for once in his life, had absolutely nothing to say; and when Riley could not talk it presaged the end of the world, a cataclysm of some sort.

That brief period in the clubhouse, while he changed his clothes, and the howling homicidal maniacs waiting for him outside were driven back by the reserves, was another part of the bad dream.

Then had followed the hasty exit from a rear entrance where two motors were waiting; the successful dodging of his teammates, his slipping by a side street into Eighth Avenue, merging with the crowd, and boarding an L train to Forty-second Street. He had wished to escape from his teammates, had dreaded the motor ride in their company; he wanted to be alone, absolutely alone.

For the same reason he had turned into the New Metropole instead of going to his rooms at the Murray Hill, where the Badgers were staying; time enough to see Riley and them all when he must.

On the congested L train, and in the comparatively deserted bar of the New Metropole, none recognized in the inconspicuous young man with the slouch hat pulled over his eyes the person about whom the whole town was talking; in a few hours it would be the entire country. Small wonder, perhaps, he considered it an occasion for straight whisky, and broke the habit and training of a lifetime; that afternoon he had been through more, both mentally and physically, than men double his years are called upon to face, and, after all, he was but a boy.

Not the least among the troubles attendant upon his action that day was the knowledge that through him alone his teammates had been deprived of a substantial sum by losing the world's series. His own financial loss Steele did not count, though the money would have meant much; that, however, was part of his punishment.

And so Richard Steele, one-time favorite of the fans, sat in an obscure corner of the Metropole bar, glowering at the evening paper, drinking whisky and thinking of the future. He was young in years, yet knew something of the world and its people; knew that the higher a man climbs the farther and harder he may fall, and that public favor is fickle as fortune, something difficult to win, yet more difficult to keep; something treacherous and unstable like the shifting sands. The *Eagle* had screamed, sounded that note which of all others he had dreaded to hear. The *Eagle* had screamed, and its echo would be heard throughout the land.

CHAPTER II.

Unnoticed by Steele, the room had been filling gradually until now every table was taken and the thirsty stood three deep before the bar. It was a

tribute to Steele's comparative ignorance of the city that, of all places, he should have selected this hotel as a sanctuary where he might be alone, little recognizing it as the rendezvous of every sporting man of any pretension. He had entered at a slack moment preceding the evening rush, and now found himself literally hemmed in by the very classes he sought to avoid; fans who had attended the game, men who knew baseball inside out; actors, journalists, artists, and the sporting fraternity at large.

The room hummed like a beehive, and, as a matter of course, the sole topic of conversation was the Manhattans' unexpected victory and the flagrant, unaccountable error which gave it to them. Also everybody had a copy of the *Eagle*, or had seen it, and Somerville's article was freely discussed.

Steele slunk back in his corner, now no longer obscure, but shared by half a dozen well-dressed strangers. He kept his face lowered, the slouch hat pulled down, his face in shadow, hoping to find a favorable opportunity of escape. Also, a strange, grim desire possessed him to hear what this roomful of men had to say concerning him, the plain, unvarnished truth as seen by them. They represented public opinion, the great public by whose favor he earned his living.

He had not long to wait, for his name was being bandied about on all sides; his ears began to burn, his nerves to tingle, but he listened in dogged silence, feigning absorption in the evening paper which he had picked up the better to hide his face.

Soon it became evident to him that the majority believed Somerville had written nothing but the truth—perhaps less than the truth. He need seek no farther than here at his elbow where a discussion was in progress between what might be termed the radical and conservative wing of public opinion; here all possible was being said both for the prosecution and defense.

"Somerville knows what he's talking about," said the Radical. "He isn't the kind to make reckless statements; he knows probably more than he's said here. You can't tell me that play of Steele's wasn't the rawest kind of deal you ever saw pulled off anywhere. I only wonder he'd the nerve to do it, and it's a sure thing he wouldn't if he'd been playing on his home grounds. It was cold-blooded highway robbery, and you bet he didn't do it for nothing; a man's got to be paid and paid good for that sort of thing."

"Well," said the Conservative, "it seems to me if a player wanted to throw a game he could get away with it easier than that. I don't see why he should wait until the last half of the ninth, and then make a play a blind man could see."

"There wasn't any occasion for trying to throw the game until the last session," argued the other. "It was anybody's up to then. And throwing a game without arousing suspicion isn't so easy as you seem to think. Steele had to take the last chance offered. If you can give me any logical explanation for a star like him making such a rancid play, I'll be glad to hear it. Understand, I'm not a sorehead, for I cleaned up five hundred. But I look on it as dirty money; we don't want to win a championship that way, and I hope Con Riley will protest the game. That's as much as I care for my stake."

"Well," replied the Conservative, "there's never been a word of that sort against Steele, and I certainly hate to think of him or any player guilty of such a thing. Yet I can't find a word to say, for that play certainly smelled rotten, and it'll take a whole lot of explaining."

"Now you're shouting!" said the first. "A whole lot, and then some. When some players get to the top of the heap

they think they can get away with anything. They can't make money fast enough, and you can bet Steele's share of the winners' end wasn't a marker to what he's pulled down for throwing this game. He thought he could get away with it, that the fans would stand for anything from him. That's the whole thing in a nutshell. Somerville has sized him up right, and has had the courage to howl."

So much for public opinion.

Steele crouched farther back in his corner, checking a homicidal impulse to fly at the Radical's throat, and over the other's prostrate form scream his defiance and innocence to the whole room.

At this moment Honest Bob Somerville himself entered, and Steele's eyes, glancing over the paper, became hard and bright as polished stone. Somerville, known virtually to all present, was accompanied by several friends, and his entrance produced a stir, a place being made for him at the bar amid a whirlwind of greetings and questions pertaining to the game and his article on the Badgers' star shortstop.

Somerville was a college man as, indeed, was Steele himself. In fact, they had attended the same university, Steele being a raw young freshie when Somerville, half a dozen years his senior, was the salutatorian of the class and an honor man in classics; member of the most exclusive frat, ex-captain of the varsity ball teams, ex-stroke of the crew, and one of the most popular men who ever wore the C.

Somehow, back even in those college days, Somerville had achieved a reputation for clean sport and fair dealing, a reputation enhanced undoubtedly by his physical attributes, for he stood well over six feet, broad-shouldered and lean-hipped; he owned a fearless, lambent blue eye, and yellow hair that curled tightly to his skull like a Greek god. In fact, there was a whole lot of the Greek-god stuff about Somerville, and the sobriquet "Honest Bob," donated on the campus, clung to him in his subsequent career.

As a star athlete and capable "pen pusher"—no ordinary combination—it was inevitable, perhaps, that he should seek his living in the world of sporting journalism, and from general writer he became at an early age the baseball expert of the best sporting page in the country. Such was the *Eagle's* reputation.

As member of a crack metropolitan club, he had held the amateur heavyweight championship, and, in the hammer throw and discus events, competed in the stadium at Athens where, if he won no triumphs, his heroic figure and physical resemblance to the old Greek gods provoked enthusiasm and left its impression on many a susceptible feminine heart. In fact, as concerns the latter, "Begorry" Mulvaney, the loose-mouthed sporting writer of a rival sheet, put it: "Somerville thinks he's th' quare hairy ould boy wid th' wimmin, an' that he's only to give wan slant from thim boudoir eyes of his to have thim fallin' all over his chist." As usual with Mulvaney, the statement was grossly exaggerated, yet there could be no denying Somerville's ability as a squire of dames. Every one, however, has his detractors, and thus there were others than Mulvaney who, in the slang of the day, claimed Somerville to be a good bit of a "limelighter."

Somerville's popularity in the sporting world, however, was undisputed; as a brilliant writer and recognized authority on the national game he had an enormous following among the reading public, and his influence could be hardly estimated. He owned a reputation for fair, fearless criticism, and was always clamoring for the square deal, ridding sport of the betting incubus, and, especially, keeping all taint of it away from professional ball. Thus the

nickname "Honest Bob" had come to stand in the greater world of affairs for what it had stood in the smaller one of college life.

All this Steele knew; knew that, for one in his position, Somerville of all people was the very worst to have as an opponent. Somerville could mold and fashion public opinion, and if he started any talk about bribery, there was no knowing where it might end. And he *had* started it, by the deadly method of innuendo, if not direct attack. Well, the thing should be settled here and now before it went farther; no better time or place than in the presence of this representative gathering discussing himself and his actions.

Gripping the evening paper, Steele arose and walked toward the bar with its three-deep fringe of humans; his face was white and haggard as if he had not slept for weeks, the blood was throbbing madly in his temples, and he fought for outward composure.

Somerville was talking easily and well, surrounded by friends and topping the tallest by a head. Steele found an opening in the human fringe and tapped Somerville on the shoulder, at the same time pushing back the slouch hat so that his own face was no longer in shadow.

Somerville turned, and the talk died away slowly as the room recognized the man whom it had been discussing with such liberty. It was the first time in years Somerville and Steele had come absolutely face to face, and, though knowing each other, the former looked down from his vastly superior height with a blank stare of unrecognition, waiting for Steele to speak. An utter silence had fallen upon the room, and men stood with glasses, cigarettes, and cigars upraised and with necks craned, waiting mechanically for the scene which the younger man's expression and manner presaged.

Steele, his eyes flaming, held out the evening paper, and pointed with trembling finger to Somerville's article. "You've been panning me for some time," he said thickly and without preamble. "I've had more than enough! What do you mean by this article?"

Somerville looked at him much as a St. Bernard might look at a troublesome fox terrier. "I mean exactly what I say," he replied evenly. "What's written there. Make out of it what you like."

"You say I threw the game, and was paid for it? Is that what you mean? Is that what you mean, though you haven't said it in so many words?"

"Now look here," replied Somerville calmly, "don't try to start any mucker play, for it won't go. I tell you it won't go. I'm entirely willing to answer you at another time and place. If you think yourself slandered enter suit against the paper; we'll pay if I'm wrong."

"It isn't the paper, it's you!" shrilled Steele. "It's you, and you'll answer me here and now!" He broke the grip of restraining hands and faced the other. "I demand a public apology for this!" he cried, tapping the paper. "I demand an apology, that you take back every word you've written!"

"I'll take back nothing, and you'll get no apology from me," said Somerville quietly, leaning against the bar and eying the other at leisure. "This grandstand play of yours won't go, Steele; it's nothing but bluff, and you know it. You needn't try to muzzle the press or make my duty to the public a personal issue with yourself. You needn't try to arouse public sympathy this way or fog the real issue. I write the truth as I find it, and no matter whom it may hit. And I refuse to be bluffed or intimidated by any man living."

"You'll take back what you've said, or I'll—I'll make you!" exclaimed Steele, through his teeth.

"Now get out of here before you're

hurt," warned Somerville tolerantly. "I say you'll get no apology from me. I know more than you think. If you want to know the truth, you threw that game, and you were paid for throwing it; ten thousand was the price. I know it, and you know it, and all the world will know it before you're a day older! Now take your bluff somewhere else."

Steele had been through much that day, and his nerves, on tension for weeks, suddenly snapped. His open hand lashed out, and before Somerville could slip or block the blow its smack could be heard throughout the silence of the place like the flat of a paddle meeting still water. The room stood aghast, and in another moment, before any one could interfere, a lively fight was in progress.

It was a massacre rather than a contest, however, for though Steele was composed of India rubber and whalebone and no mean antagonist at his weight, he had about as much chance of success as an Orangeman singing "Derry Walls" at a Fenian wake. He was pitting himself against a former master of the art, a man who could pick him up with one hand.

Yet all this he ignored and tore into his big opponent with both arms swinging like a gate. Somerville had an ugly temper when aroused, but at first contented himself with cuffing Steele with open hands and round-arm blows as a bear cuffs an unruly cub; a stinging facer, however, aroused his fury, and he came in with clenched fists, a savage glare in his blue eyes. The room was in an uproar, and no one seemed able to put an end to the disagreeable scene.

Steele was assimilating tremendous punishment and undoubtedly would have been injured badly had not a hand the size and color of a smoked ham suddenly shot over the impotent crowd, fastened on the back of Somerville's collar, broke his grip with a single wrench, and sent him sprawling into a convenient chair. Steele, breathing in great sobs, feeling as if his face were a huge gumboil, his ribs a red-hot gridiron, leaned weakly against a table as the owner of the hamlike hand heaved into view. It was Big Ed Connolly, star second baseman of the Badgers.

Connolly had graduated from a Pennsylvania coal mine, and was built way up in the air just as Steele was built close to the ground—physical characteristics suited to their respective positions on the diamond. No backstop need be afraid of throwing high to Connolly, for he looked tall enough to pluck a star from the heavens, and, thanks to his stepladder build and gorillalike reach, many a smoking liner bound out for deep center had found an unexpected harbor over second. If the physical make-up of the Badgers' shortstop represented five feet four of India rubber and whalebone, Connolly's represented six feet three of tempered steel and whipcord. His hard youth in the mines had taught him to use his hands in more ways than one, and though proverbially easy-going, he was known as bad medicine in a mix-up.

Outwardly composed, his lean, ugly jaws chewing gum mechanically, his flinty gray eyes turned from Steele to Somerville while, unseen, the red hair bristled under his hat.

"Nex' time you want a trial horse, Somerville," he said deliberately, "don't pick on a kid. Get a man who can try you out."

"You, maybe?" said Somerville, instantly on his feet.

"Yes, me, mebbe," replied Connolly, sticking out his ugly jaw.

A clash of eyes followed, and peacemakers came between. Somerville, surrounded by friends and still excited, talked over their heads at the big second baseman.

"You've got a nerve to come in here

and try to bawl me out!" he exclaimed. "It's none of your business, in the first place, and, in the second, you don't know what you're talking about. Steele started this, and he got no more than was coming to him. I take a slap in the face from nobody, least of all, a thief like him! He's a disgrace to your team, and it doesn't speak much for you, sticking up for a man who's sold you out cold!"

"Whatever he did or didn't do, that's no skin off yours," retorted Connolly. Like a parent with a furious, refractory child, he restrained a fresh outburst from Steele and bundled him from the room, turning at the door for a parting shot, Steele's battered condition having aroused an anger that would not down.

"I'll tell you one thing," he said, looking at Somerville, "if I'd been th' kid, I'd have opened that head of yours with th' first thing that come handy. A man your size don't have to beat up a kid like that, no matter what he done. Nex' time you feel like doin' murder come around an' see me; that goes as she lays."

CHAPTER III.

Big Ed Connolly, who had happened into the Metropole quite by accident, accompanied Steele to the Murray Hill, where, once in his room, the other explained the origin of the row with Somerville.

"But, of course, you've seen it in the *Eagle*," he finished excitedly. "The whole town's talking of it. Look here, Connolly, does Riley or any of the boys think for a moment I made that rotten play on purpose? Sold them out cold?"

Connolly shifted his big feet, and looked away. "Aw, forget it, kid. Don't you mind what Somerville says, he ain't your boss. Of course, Riley an' th' boys are sore; it was an awful boneheaded play, kid, but we all make 'em at times. Forget it." And with this perfunctory "cheer-up Charley," Connolly beat a precipitate retreat to his own quarters.

Steele, in silence, let him go; it was painfully apparent that Connolly felt troubled; perhaps even at heart he believed Somerville's charges. And why not? As public opinion had said, that play would take some explaining.

With a sudden thrill of emotion, painfully akin to fear, Steele's mind grappled with Somerville's words: "If you want to know the truth, you threw that game, and you were paid for throwing it; ten thousand was the price." Why ten thousand? What did Bob Somerville know about any ten thousand? His thoughts turned instantly to his boarding house in Boston, and a visit from a certain acquaintance by the name of Harry Deeping; then they strayed to an Albany hospital, and there remained.

Steele flung himself on the bed, and, worn out by fatigue and excitement, slid into a troubled, heavy sleep while still pondering over the situation.

Several hours later he was awakened by the insistent ringing of the telephone, and the cool, curt voice of Con Riley, at the other end of the wire, effectually knocked out of his system all traces of sleep.

"Hello," said the manager, giving the number on Broadway from where he was phoning. "Come down here at once."

And Steele, without a word, hung up the receiver, his mouth tightening queerly. The number given was known only too well as the headquarters of the United States League.

He knew, also, that Morganthal, owner of the Badgers, was in town; also Brown, of the Cincinnati Pilseners; Schlechter, of the Washington Red-tapes; Thompson, of the Philadelphia Sleepers, and Fielding, of the Brooklyn Tombstones. The five had attended the game that afternoon, sitting with "Silent" Hardman, president of the league,

in his box. There could be no doubt that an impromptu official inquiry, hastened evidently by the *Eagle's* article, was on foot, Hardman acting with all his well-known energy and promptitude. No doubt, also, that Connolly had known or sensed what was in the wind and therefore beaten a hurried retreat. It accounted, likewise, for Con Riley's absence and the other players keeping out of the way. Evidently much had been going on while Steele slept. Well, the inevitable had merely happened sooner than he had expected, and he must see it through, hoping for the best.

It was after eight when Steele reached the headquarters of the United States League, to find the stage all set for his coming. At one end of the big directors" table sat the president, named Silent because of his paucity of speech. Hardman never spoke unless he had something to say. He was a massive individual in every way, with a face hard and impregnable as the Rock of Gibraltar.

At his elbow sat the secretary, and, facing one another across the mahogany, the owners of the five biggest clubs in the league. Steele glanced mechanically from the impassive Semitic features of Morganthal, his owner, to those of the other four; one and all they were the faces of shrewd, successful business men; men who had fought and overcome obstacles, who had managed to get hold of a paying proposition which they did not intend should be wrested from them. Their respective clubs represented a huge fortune; they were business men, who made baseball pay handsome profits, and it wasn't necessary for Somerville or any one to tell them that their greatest asset was public confidence. Quite aside from all ethical considerations they dare not, for the sake of their own pockets, condone anything which would tend to undermine that confidence. Also, it may be said in passing that the United States and Continental Leagues constituted virtually a baseball monopoly, and their influence was national, reaching, if need be, the smallest professional club in the country. When they banned a player he stayed banned.

Steele experienced no surprise when he saw that Honest Bob Somerville and half a dozen newspaper men were present; also Con Riley, of the Badgers, and Owny Seford and Dan Geoghan, of the Washingtons and Phillies. It was an impromptu array calculated to daunt the heart of any player up for a panning, and Steele's jaw set a little harder as, greeting all but Somerville, he took the place assigned him amid a silence big with coming trouble.

Hardman lost no time in getting down to business; he mentioned briefly that all present had been eyewitnesses of Steele's play that afternoon, and, therefore, it wasn't necessary to sift such evidence; every man present had seen it for himself, and all considered it entirely incomprehensible, to say the least, and that some satisfactory explanation must be forthcoming. He then mentioned the *Eagle's* article and Steele's public attack on the writer thereof, a deplorable incident in itself, which had not helped matters; of the league's desire to have the speediest and most public investigation, hence the impromptu meeting and presence of the half dozen newspaper men who represented the city's big dailies.

"Mr. Somerville," he concluded, in the same impersonal tone, "accuses you specifically of making a deliberate wild throw in order to lose the game, and that you were paid a consideration by certain parties for so doing. What is your answer to this?"

"That he's a liar!" shouted Steele.

The president's face hardened. "Remember where you are, sir! There's no occasion for such extreme language. It won't be tolerated. This is an official board of inquiry, your interests are

fully protected, and you'll get nothing but a square deal. You deny the charge?"

"Yes," said Steele sullenly, his voice trembling while he fought for composure.

"Very well. Now"—the president glanced over some papers at his elbow—"let me ask you some questions relative to the matter in hand. Do you know any one by the name of Harry Deeping?"

Steele started visibly, and changed color. He felt Hardman's metallic eyes, every eye in the room, in fact, boring through him. Somerville was leaning back in his chair, pulling at a cigar and looking indifferent; indeed, rather wearied, as if dragged, against his desire, into an unpleasant scene in which he participated solely through a sense of duty.

"Yes," replied Steele, "I know a Harry Deeping."

"Very good," said Hardman, glancing again at the papers before him. "Will you relate what took place at your boarding house in Boston the night before last?—the third instant, to be precise. The night Mr. Deeping called."

Steele cleared his throat. He still owned much of the unsophistication and simple honesty which he had brought with him from the little mountain town of his birth, and it never occurred to him to evade the question, distort the answer, or place the burden of proof on the prosecution, as it were. Conscious of all eyes, he began falteringly:

"Mr. Deeping came to my rooms in Boston that night. I'd known him for about a month—a chance acquaintance—and we'd become very friendly. I didn't know what business he was in. This night, however, he told me he was identified with certain big gambling interests in New York—that's all he would say—and mentioned that if the Badgers, with the odds of five to four on them, lost the deciding game, it would be worth ten thousand to his employers; that that's what they'd be willing to pay. I needn't go into the adroit way he brought the matter up without giving offense; at first he stated it merely as a hypothetical case, saying any infielder had a hundred chances of throwing a game and getting away with it. Anyway, Deeping at last pulled out a wad and peeled off ten one-thousand-dollar bills, laid them on the table, and looked at me. I threw the money in his face."

"Well?" said Hardman curtly. "What then?"

Steele changed color again, and his voice became more hesitant.

"Deeping laughed, and replaced the money on the table. 'Think it over,' he said. 'You know my Boston address—the Emerson House. If there's nothing doing put the bills in an envelope, seal it, write my name on it, leave it at the desk of the Emerson House, and tell the cashier to put it in the safe until called for. I'll ask for it to-morrow night; if it isn't there I'll know you're a wise boy and that I can pass the word to get down hook, line, and sinker on the Manhats.' Then Deeping left."

"Leaving the money with you?"

"Leaving the money on the table."

"It's all the same; we won't split hairs," said Hardman harshly. "Why did you allow him to leave that bribe money in your possession if you'd no intention of accepting it?"

Steele moistened his dry lips. "I—I don't know. The sight of those ten one-thousand-dollar bills sort of fascinated me—as I guess he knew they would. Deeping knew I was hard up, for I'd told him a good deal about my affairs——"

"Answer the question!" thundered Hardman. "Why did you let him leave that money there?"

Steele raised haunted, miserable eyes. "B-because I'd made up my mind to ac-

cept it. Yes, I meant to keep it, and sell out my team."

CHAPTER IV.

A profound silence greeted this totally unexpected confession.

"Oh," said Hardman at length grimly; "then we needn't go any farther. You admit that the charge is true?"

"I do not!" replied Steele, his voice trembling. "I admit that for one night I was a blackguard; for that I'm ready to stand punishment. I admit that the temptation was too much for me, that I meant to keep the money, and—and earn it by throwing the game. I admit all that. But the next morning, after a night of hell, I found I simply couldn't do it, no, not for a million! No matter what the money might mean to me! And so I followed Deeping's instructions, and waited until I saw the cashier at the Emerson House put the envelope in the safe. I also inclosed a note to Deeping, saying I couldn't consider him a friend any longer."

This explanation was likewise received in silence, and Steele flushed hotly as he noticed the skeptical glances exchanged among some of his judges.

"And so yesterday morning you returned this money to the Emerson House, in Boston?" pursued Hardman remorselessly. "Why did you say nothing to any one about the attempted bribery?"

"I—I didn't want to get Deeping into trouble; we'd been friendly, and I liked him. You have to like some people no matter what they do. Then, I wasn't blameless myself; I couldn't forget that at first I'd meant to accept the bribe and sell out my team. I couldn't forget I'd kept the money overnight with that intention. So in a sense I was no better than Deeping—perhaps a good deal worse." Steele's voice was trembling again.

"It wasn't a thing I cared to make public," he added desperately. "I wanted to forget if I could. I didn't like to think about the blackguard I'd been—I mean in at first agreeing to take the money."

Hardman eyed him curiously a moment, as if trying to read his inmost thoughts. "Have you any explanation to offer for your unaccountable play that lost the game and series?" he asked at length.

"No," replied Steele wearily. "I—I guess nobody but a professor of psychology could understand that."

"What, exactly, do you mean to convey by that?"

Steele hesitated, then the words came with a rush, and he spoke hurriedly and with a certain passion:

"I don't mean to take up your time with my private affairs, but I'd like you to understand how I was fixed. To begin with, I signed up for three years at a salary lower than the poorest outfielder. I'm saying nothing, you understand, against Mr. Morganthal or Riley, for I was only a busher, and glad to put my name to any sort of contract that would give me a chance in the big league——"

"I hardly dink all diss iss reladive to the madder in hand," put in Morganthal composedly.

"I'm only trying to show one reason why I needed money," said Steele desperately. "I never had an awful lot, and I'm the only support of an invalid brother, who's in an Albany sanitarium with cancer. The treatment costs money, and that ten thousand Deeping offered me——"

"The question isn't *why* you wanted money," interrupted Hardman. "We want to know about to-day's play."

Steele made a helpless gesture. "I can't explain it except that since the series opened I haven't been myself. I'd been thinking a lot about my brother and I couldn't sleep nights——" He

stopped, suddenly and painfully conscious of the absurdity of a big-leaguer laying the blame of a boneheaded play on an invalid brother!

"Mighty funny," broke in Riley, an angry light in his eyes, "you never peeped a word to me or any of the boys about this brother of yours. I wouldn't play the best man living if he was under any sort of pull, and you know it. If you were worriting, why didn't you say so? You looked fit as a fiddle, and why didn't you say if you weren't?"

"I didn't say anything because I knew you wouldn't play me, and I needed the money," said Steele. "I wanted to play; I thought I was fit. But my nerves must have been shot to pieces, for I didn't play up to form, and in today's game I kept thinking all the time about Deeping and his money, instead of playing the game. I kept thinking: 'Supposing I hadn't returned the bribe, and was pledged to throw the game?' Every chance that came my way I kept thinking: 'Here's one I'd have to fumble or pass up on purpose. Supposing now I *do* make a mess of it without meaning to?'

"The thing got on my nerves until along in the ninth when Collins hit into me and everything was set for a double, I felt like a horse with the blind staggers. I was so anxious to make the play, so afraid I'd mess it up without meaning to, that I didn't know what I was doing until I found myself looking at the ball in my glove as if it was framed. Then, like a busher, I went all to pieces, and in trying to nail the man at second, slammed the ball over Connolly's head into the bleachers. It was a rotten play, and I don't know how it happened. I've tried to figure it out, but I guess only a professor of psychology could understand; understand how, *against my own will, I came to make a play I'd been afraid all day of making; trying for nine innings not to make.* That's all I have to say, except that I didn't do it purposely."

Steele sat down, wiping the perspiration from his pallid face. There was silence a moment, then Hardman said:

"I think perhaps that, as you claim, it would require some one versed in psychology to grasp your explanation. As a matter of fact, the charge is made that you *didn't* return the bribe offered by Deeping. You kept it."

"W-what!" cried Steele, instantly on his feet. "Who makes that charge? I can prove by the cashier of the Emerson House it was returned! I've told you I waited until I saw him put the envelope in the safe."

Hardman turned to Somerville, and the latter arose with evident reluctance.

"It's true that the sealed envelope was returned," he said quietly, "but I understand it contained nothing but blank paper. The envelope hadn't been tampered with, I understand, and it's unnecessary to say the cashier of the Emerson House is absolutely above suspicion."

Everybody nodded agreement, for Joe Smiley, of the Emerson House, was known perhaps the country over.

Steele was staggered, realizing the seriousness of his position, and for a moment he could make no reply. "It's not true!" he exclaimed at length. "There must be some mistake! Deeping *knows* the money was there, and he can't say it wasn't!"

There was silence again, and then Hardman turned to Somerville. "Mr. Somerville, will you kindly tell all you know about this?"

The other arose, with the same display of unwillingness. He was good at public speaking, and made a dignified, imposing figure as he talked, with evident sincerity, force, and composure.

"In the first place," he began, "I needn't say how distasteful all this is to me, and that I'd much rather pass it up, if it wasn't part of the day's work, and

my duty to the public and my paper. Mr. Steele, too, by his action in the Metropole, has brought the matter to a head, but I hope it's unnecessary for me to state that no matter what happened there, I'm not influenced by any personal animosity or rancor——"

"I think it's unnecessary to say that," interrupted Hardman.

"Well, to begin with," continued Somerville, "I understand that this man to whom Mr. Steele refers is connected with well-known gambling interests in Philadelphia, *not* New York, and that his real name is not Deeping. What his real name is I don't know, for the person who gave me the information refused to divulge it. Before I go further, I may say that before to-day's game it was rumored in certain quarters that it was all fixed for the Manhattans to win. I think some of the newspaper men present can bear me out in that statement, for no doubt they heard what I did."

Hardman turned a questioning eye on the group, and several nodded, one of the most prominent saying: "I heard it on Broadway last night. Of course, nobody believed it, for there's always more or less irresponsible talk of that kind before every big sporting event, and you never can trace it to its source. I don't know where it started."

"It probably started," explained Somerville, "with the briber, Deeping, himself; he'd been drinking, and boasted that he'd fixed one of the Badgers, a man who could be depended upon to throw the game, if he got half a chance. Understand that I don't know this Deeping, that I don't know his real name, or who he is; I'm merely repeating what an acquaintance told me—an acquaintance I'll call Brown, because I promised, in payment for the information, not to drag him into it.

"Deeping, while drunk, told Brown all about the deal which Mr. Steele has related, with the important exception that the bribe was accepted, the envelope left with Joe Smiley being full of blank paper; this Deeping considered a clever dodge of Mr. Steele's to throw off any investigation that might crop up. Anyway, Deeping believed his bribe accepted, notified his employers to that effect, and told Brown, in another burst of alcoholic confidence, to get down heavy on the Manhattans.

"Brown is an acquaintance who considers himself in my debt because I've been able to do him several little favors; he's absolutely on the level, and, though Deeping was a friend he didn't want to get into trouble, Brown came to me with the story. I repeat that he refused to give away Deeping's right name or identity, and asked that his own name be kept out of it.

"At first, I was inclined to pay no attention to the story, but a few investigations proved that the essential facts were true; a man by the name of Deeping *had* called the night before last at Mr. Steele's boarding house in Boston, and was registered under that name at the Emerson House. Also, Mr. Steele *had* left with Joe Smiley a sealed envelope for Deeping. I knew, too, that Brown wasn't the sort or would have no motive for coming to me with a story he hadn't every reason to believe was true. An additional significant fact was that Deeping, when he sobered up, denied emphatically to Brown that he ever made such a statement, that he didn't know Mr. Steele personally, and had never exchanged a word with him. All this in spite of the proof I had—and now Mr. Steele's own acknowledgment—of their intimacy.

"Following Mr. Steele's inexplicable play in to-day's game, I couldn't help but believe all I'd learned, and I considered it nothing but my plain duty to act as I've done. If Mr. Steele is innocent no one will be more gratified than myself, and I will, of course, apol-

ogize publicly and make every restitution possible.

"I admit—in fact, I wish to point out—that the evidence is entirely circumstantial; if I could produce Brown, which I cannot, he could only repeat what Deeping told him. And if Deeping's identity were known and he could be induced to speak the truth, it would be merely his word against Mr. Steele's. Mr. Steele admits accepting the bribe, keeping the money overnight, and returning it next morning; Deeping says he did not. It's merely one man's word against another's, and if Mr. Steele can produce his friend, Deeping—or whatever his right name may be—and have him admit the money was returned, that would settle the question. So far as I see, it's the only way it can be settled."

Somerville resumed his seat, and all eyes turned to the Badgers' shortstop.

"I don't know Deeping's right name or where he lives!" exclaimed Steele. "He said his name was Deeping, and that's all I know. I can't make him tell the truth if he chooses to deny it! I've nothing to *prove* the money was in that envelope. This is nothing but a rotten frame-up! I returned every cent of that money, and I didn't throw the game; that's all I can say, and if you don't want to believe it you don't have to——"

"Come!" interrupted Hardman sharply; "that spirit won't get you anything but trouble." He turned to the other directors about the table and conversed in low tones, while Steele tried to master his impotent rage and emotion.

The nicknames, "Scrappy," and the "Fighting Runt," had not been conferred on Steele for nothing, for he was full of what is known to fandom as the "good old pep," that electric, combative ingredient necessary in the make-up of every star ball player. It was Steele's pep that had helped to make the Badgers the team they were, and which had pulled many a losing contest out of the fire. He never hunted trouble, but if it came he met it halfway, and fought a losing game until the last play had been made. Neither Morganthal nor Riley could afford to lose him; yet, if necessary, they must yield to the greater need.

At length Hardman spoke, looking fixedly at Steele:

"You are suspended until you can produce your friend, Deeping, and have him admit the bribe money was returned. The time for doing so must be placed within a reasonable limit, say two weeks. If you cannot produce your friend and have him corroborate your statement, you will be expelled. Taking all the circumstances into consideration—your play to-day, your admission of initially accepting the bribe—I think, personally, that this verdict is lenient. However, we wish to give you an absolutely fair deal and every chance of proving your case."

Then the varied and intense emotions under which Steele had been laboring so long broke all bonds, and, conscious only that he was the victim of injustice, perhaps conspiracy, he spoke without reckoning the cost or caring whom he addressed. Also, his late alcoholic indulgence was now rising up to demand its toll.

"There's nothing square about this deal!" he cried, flinging off Riley's restraining hands. "I tell you I don't know Deeping's identity, and, if I found him, I couldn't make him tell the truth! If you don't believe what I've told you, if you think I kept the money and threw the game, go ahead, then, and expel me, and the sooner the better——"

"Careful, there!" warned Hardman, every word off the ice. "You may be taken at your word, young man."

"I don't care!" shouted Steele recklessly. "This is a rotten frame-up, and

I won't stand for it! Go as far as you like!"

Ignoring all commands, he turned his back on the president and committee, and walked from the room.

CHAPTER V.

Steele had several more drinks before returning to the Murray Hill, patronizing lowly and obscure bars, where he might pass unrecognized.

A sharp, unseasonable frost had attended the last momentous battle of the post-season at the Athletic Grounds, and now a warm wave was following on its heels, a fog creeping over the sleeping city as Steele, long after midnight, fumbled his way home with the unerring instinct of the drunk. For he was drunk; yes, very drunk, for the first time in his life, and he knew it. Unversed in the potency of alcohol, hostage to a bitter recklessness and craving for oblivion, he had absorbed enough cheap "redeye" to poison him.

He was unaware of the coming fog, considering it and the far-off hooting of the horns on the river as phenomena produced by his condition. Being drunk was a novel and diverting experience, and he attempted to tabulate the various new sensations; that was more amusing than brooding over what had passed. For instance, it was very amusing to find himself removing his hat and apologizing to an ash barrel into which he had blundered; he had seen such incidents in comic supplements and burlesque shows, rather scouting their probabilty.

Steele has a recollection of standing in the hotel exchange, leaning over the desk, and asking the sleepy night clerk, in a brotherly, confidential aside, for his key, which the other insisted had been given to him some time ago; of his genuine astonishment at suddenly discovering said key in his hand, and of a futile argument with the clerk and a bell boy concerning how it had got there; of a strange and startling discovery he had then made, that the man behind the desk was none other than a boyhood friend who had died of measles; of his just resentment when the clerk refused to explain why the measles had not killed him or offer a logical reason for deceiving the public and securing a funeral under false pretenses. This point being amicably, if not intelligently, settled, a wave of tenderness and generosity engulfed him; he suggested buying the hotel for his newly resurrected friend, and experienced a strong desire to weep on the other's bosom and unfold all his troubles.

The next Steele knew, he was standing in the middle of his own room, looking at a telegram he held, and wondering how it got there. By this time the amusing potentialities of alcoholic excess were beginning to pall a little, for it was rather disconcerting to have objects appear and disappear from and to nowhere; he had felt this most strongly when an unseen hand removed a chair upon which he had made elaborate preparations to sit. He suspected the night clerk and bell boy had entered into a deep conspiracy against him; but, for that matter, the whole world had leagued itself against him. Of this he was quite sure.

After a vain attempt to fathom how the telegram came to be in his hand, it occurred to him that he should open it. He switched on another wall light, and with obscured vision scanned the typed words that seemed to pursue one another across the yellow paper. Gradually the meaning of the message seeped into his cloudy intelligence; it was brief and to the point:

> Your brother died Albany hospital this evening. Funeral from Hamills. Have made all arrangements. PARKER.

Judge Parker was a small country lawyer, and there was a legend to the

effect that once in the long ago he had loved the defunct Mrs. Steele. At all events he had proved a consistent friend, and Steele, on leaving his little home for college, had gone the easier, knowing Parker would be left to look after the crippled brother. Almost as far back as he could remember there had only been the two of them, his younger brother and himself, and they had been much to each other. He had worked summer and winter, early and late, with body and with brain, to provide for himself and this brother. It had been his ambition to go through college and be a lawyer, like Judge Parker.

In all this, the idea of baseball as a profession had had no part; he loved the game for itself, and, a natural-born player, headed the amateur team which is found in every village from coast to coast. At the university he had come for the first time under the notice of a skilled coach, made the varsity in his second year—he would have made it as a freshie but for the one-year-attendance rule—and had been the sensation of the season. From that it was but a question of time until one of the big-league scouts picked him up, and, before commencement day, he was pledged to Con Riley, of the Badgers, being offered a salary which seemed tremendous. Why, it was equal to what old Judge Parker was earning after a twenty-five years' tussle with the law! The money, too, was needed, for his brother had developed cancer, the last hope being vested in an Albany specialist, whose fees were by no means nominal.

So he had jumped at Riley's offer, realizing when too late the astuteness of the other, and that he could have signed for almost double the salary, had he known his own value, or listened to the advice of well-wishers. Riley had got him cheap for three years, and had been offered ten thousand for his release; that was his, Steele's, market value, for he had made good without even a season on the bench.

The telegram fell from Steele's nerveless hand, and he dropped heavily into a chair; his brother was dead, dying while he, Steele, had been getting drunk. A great loneliness and desolation rushed upon him like a giant wave swinging in from a midnight sea, and he threw himself on the bed, giving way to a passion of weak, maudlin tears.

When he awoke, his watch pointed to seven o'clock; he had been asleep four hours. He had a bad "hang over," his head was bursting, and he possessed all the symptoms of the previous evening's debauch without the attendant levitation of spirits.

Now he could see nothing humorous in the fact that the room was spinning round like a top, or of his trying to put both feet into the one shoe. Nor that somehow he had undressed himself during the night and climbed into his ball togs instead of pajamas.

The lights were still burning as he had left them, and, on pulling up the shades, he saw that it almost resembled night outdoors. An impenetrable fog hung over the city, thick and yellow, like the most approved London variety, but as on the previous evening, he was inclined to consider it a phenomenon attendant upon his condition. He understood that victims of his complaint could see *anything*, and were never surprised at the most startling sights. Certainly he found himself incapable of coherent thought or observation.

A glance at the crumpled telegram on the floor brought him up all standing. Yes, his brother was dead; he'd forgotten that, and the truth struck home more keen and terrible than before. He must leave for Hamills at once, for it was useless going to Albany. Judge Parker had attended to the funeral arrangements.

He called the office on the phone, and

a bell boy brought up an Ulster Railroad time-table, a hasty search of which disclosed the fact that there was a through train to Hamills at eight. By cutting breakfast—no great sacrifice, for his tortured interior revolted at the thought of food—he could make it by taking a crosstown car to the ferry.

He threw things pell-mell into his suit case and scribbled a line to Riley: "Leaving for home. Back in a few days," and this, on paying his bill, he left at the desk. It occurred to him vaguely that for seven-thirty in the morning the exchange presented an unusually animated appearance, the electrics burning, owing to the heavy fog, and a number of people passing in and out. In the distance he saw, and dodged, several teammates, and he wondered what made them rise so early, after the previous day's exertions.

Outdoors, it still resembled a murky evening, and he blundered along, heading for the westbound surface cars. He bought a paper mechanically, and from the first page his own name stared at him side by side with the account of a sensational murder. With difficulty he read the following headlines:

"SCRAPPY" STEELE SUSPENDED.
BRIBERY CHARGED.

Badgers' Star Shortstop Up Before President and Committee of United States League.

Steele tried to read farther, but the light was bad, his eyesight worse, and, with a weary shrug, he pocketed the paper for future reference.

He scrambled aboard the car like the drowning man seizing the proverbial straw; he was very dizzy, and experienced a novel but decidedly unpleasant "gone feeling" in the pit of his flaming stomach. Most emphatically getting drunk wasn't so funny as he had thought. Would the effects never wear off? He felt almost as helpless as on the preceding night, for, after all, but a few hours had passed since assimilating the last dose of poison, and it was working on an empty stomach. He would guarantee, if ever he regained sovereignty over brain and muscle, there would never be such another experience. How could he face Judge Parker in this condition? His presence at the funeral would be a desecration.

Of that morning's subsequent events Richard Steele never could offer any explanation other than the candid truth, that he had been in no condition to navigate without a pilot; no doubt, also, the heavy fog and his comparative ignorance of the city played their respective parts.

As on the previous evening, he owned no realizing sense of his surroundings; he had no clear perception or recollection of what happened after leaving the street car. Everything was unreal, nebulous, figures appearing and reappearing out of the fog—both the real and that in his own brain—like those in a fairy play. He remembered at one point seeing a great, hazy golden clock, suspended midway in the heavens, its hands pointing to ten. He consulted his own timepiece and found it still faithfully registering seven. Vainly he attempted to reconcile the glaring discrepancy, and decided finally that the clock had stopped the previous evening.

He remembered a clanging bell and a wheezy engine drawing a string of "flats" appearing out of the fog, creeping down the avenue at a snail's pace and barring his progress for years.

He remembered an interesting conversation with a clerical-looking gentleman with lamb's wool whiskers, and his grief and indignation when said gentleman advised him to go home and sober up. He remembered being escorted to the ferryhouse by an imp of a newsboy with red hair and freckles, to whom he gave half a dollar, and an earnest assurance he would bring him up right, and make a man of him. He felt very

kindly toward the imp, especially when the latter confided that he had been reared on a farm up New York State, and was the sole support of his poor old mother. On hearing this piece of biography, Steele parted cheerfully with another half, and renewed his promise to do right by the imp, extorting a solemn vow that under no circumstances would he ever desert his poor old mother.

Immediately subsequent to the imp's disappearance there followed the discovery that all his small change had disappeared synchronously; and then, in the midst of attempting to connect the incidents, another blank intervened.

Steele knew at length he was walking down the ferry slip; he could see the boat and hear the monotonous lapping of water. The fog was still supreme, and more than once he stumbled over unseen objects that had a malicious faculty of being where they shouldn't. He remembered nothing about purchasing his ticket, but there followed a hazy recollection of some sort of altercation with a cherubic-looking individual who had an extravagant quantity of brass buttons; he remembered admiring these buttons greatly, and making a handsome offer in cash for them. In the midst of a lengthy argument with the owner of the brass buttons, another blank overtook him.

The boat was moving when next he began to take a vague interest in the life about him. The fog had lifted a little, now lying in great straggling wisps over the dull-gray river and the ragged outline of the distant Jersey shore. He was sitting somewhere on the lower deck, and the throbbing of the engines found a fervent echo in his aching head. Instinct, it seemed, had guided him to an obscure corner of the boat, for there was no one about, and for this he was thankful. The fresh sea air was exhilarating yet soporific, and presently he fell asleep.

When next he awoke, cramped and aching in every muscle, the fog seemed to have thinned further. He looked at his faithful timepiece, and found it still pointing to seven. This was strange, and, for the first time, he began to entertain serious doubts concerning the veracity of that faithful watch.

"Hey!" he called to a man in blue, who, some little distance off, was industriously polishing some brasswork. "What time is it?"

"About two o'clock."

"What!" yelled Steele, staggering to his feet. "Say, when do we get into Weehawken, anyway? Seems to me I've been riding back and forward all morning."

After a prolonged stare, the deck hand turned to another who had appeared. "Hey, Bill, here's a rummy sleepin' it off behind th' deadlight who wants to know when we get into Weehawken! Thinks he's on th' ferry."

"Har, har!" said Bill, echoing the other's roar. "He must have a beaut! I'd give a week's pay for half of it. Say, kid," laying a hairy and understanding hand on Steele's swaying shoulder, "come alive! Where d'ye think you are, anyway? Don't you know we're off th' Hook, an' th' first stop's Norfolk? Sure thing! This ain't no ferryboat. You're on th' Southern liner *Thomas Jefferson*."

"Holy mackerel!" gasped Steele.

CHAPTER VI.

Purser Jones, of the *Thomas Jefferson*, turned out to be the cherubic individual for whose brass buttons Steele vaguely remembered making a handsome offer in cash.

Jones had merry blue eyes, a kindly nature, and obliging disposition, and to the many patrons of the Southern line had become the favorite purser of the fleet. Jones was the particular stand-by of unchaperoned ladies, young

or old, and with him it had become second nature in his official capacity to look after everybody who seemed in need of help or advice. A pet dog or boarding-school miss who must make the coast trip alone was always dedicated by the knowing to the never-failing Jones, and travelers who before embarking had indulged too freely in the flowing bowl were regarded as his particular specialty.

Something of this he now tried to explain to Steele, for whom he had found a very comfortable room. Steele lay in his bunk, and groaned freely, premonitory symptoms of seasickness adding to other physical discomforts.

"Of course," confessed Kirk Jones cheerfully, "it was irregular to allow you aboard without showing your ticket. I admit that; but I simply couldn't refuse when you put up such a strong argument."

"What did I say?" asked Steele guiltily.

"You said your brother had died suddenly, and if you didn't catch this boat you couldn't attend the funeral."

Steele groaned again. "That part was quite true, my friend, but the funeral's to be from Hamills—up in the Catskills. I thought this was the Weehawken ferry. My watch had stopped, and at ten o'clock I was trying to make the eight o'clock on the Ulster Railroad. I must have been drinking dynamite."

"You certainly had a pippin," said Purser Jones, in the tones of a connoisseur, "and I've seen about all varieties. But I really thought you knew what you were talking about, that at all costs you must catch this boat, and hadn't had even time to buy your ticket. We aren't crowded this time of the year, and I thought I'd be doing you a kindness in waving a technicality, and letting you get your ticket after coming aboard. Again, I thought it likely you had your ticket somewhere about your person but had forgotten about it; there are often such cases of the kind. Then the fog held us up two hours, and everything was hurried at the last. I'm sorry, but I certainly thought I was doing you a service."

"Don't say a word; it was all my fault," replied Steele, with characteristic candor. "I believed implicitly this was the ferry, and probably I'd have tried murder if you'd refused to let me aboard. I suppose there's no way out of this mess? You couldn't put me ashore somewhere? I wouldn't say a word if it was even Ocean Grove."

Kirk Jones shook his head. "Norfolk's the first stop, and the old man wouldn't pull up for anything short of a rock. We're behind schedule as it is, and will have to make it up."

Steele groaned again. It was a nice situation, due entirely to himself. "Well," he said, trying to put the best face on it, "it seems I'm booked for a trip I don't want to take, and must pay for, to boot. What's the damage to Norfolk?"

"Single or return?"

"Single. I'll come back by rail, for I'm in a hurry. There's no money waiting for me in Norfolk that I know of, and," a wave of nausea overcoming him, "this sea business doesn't seem particularly in my line."

"You've been half poisoned with rotgut," said the purser sympathetically, "and this trip is just what you need. You'll get to the bottom of your system."

"Leave it to me; I'm getting there, all right," agreed Steele grimly.

Jones named the amount of the fare, and Steele reached for his suit case, which, after an arduous search, had been discovered in one of the lifeboats. Of course, he had no recollection of placing it there or of his climbing, subsequently, into the bow and falling asleep behind one of the deadlights. The impenetrable fog had aided these maneuvers and obviated detection. The

wonder was he hadn't fallen overboard, a wonder the suit case which contained all the money he owned was not lost or stolen. But in these instances his "drunkard's luck" had held. Had he lost the suit case it would have meant working his passage to Norfolk, and finding himself stranded there. He had never possessed a bank account, for somehow his salary went faster than it came in, and, like most of the sporting world, whatever surplus he happened to have was carried in cash.

"This is the dearest jag I've had," he exclaimed, peeling off the bills from his roll and handing them to the purser. "I suppose you wouldn't believe it if I added it's also the first I've ever had?"

"Well," said Jones cautiously, eying the lean, brown face and sinewy figure, "if it isn't, you certainly stand it well; I'll say that much. What name?" he finished, preparing to make out the receipt.

Steele hesitated; he had no wish to be known as the man about whom the whole country was now talking. He had no desire to be pointed out on the boat, stared at, and discussed all the way to Norfolk. Discovery of his name and identity would only arouse further talk and publicity.

While still hesitating, his eyes chanced to fall on the end of the suit case with its black initial "R. S."

"Smith," he said, thinking of the first name that began with the letter "S." "Richard Smith."

"New York?"

"Oh, yes, New York."

"Well, Mr. Smith," said the genial purser, preparing to leave, "this trip will do you a world of good, even though you don't want to take it; you see if it doesn't. Shall I send in the doctor to look you over?"

Steele declined, with thanks. "I'm not proud of this exploit," he said. "On my word of honor, it's the first time I've ever been this way, and I don't want to be pointed out all over the ship as the rummy who had to have the doctor. I'm modest about such things."

Jones nodded understandingly. "You needn't worry. Perhaps some of the passengers may know—may have seen you come aboard—but, then, there was the fog, and you kept out of the way. I guess they won't recognize you, and, of course, they'll learn nothing from me."

"Thanks, old man; I'll do as much for you some day," replied Steele. "I must have made an awful fool of myself, and I simply couldn't go on deck or into the saloon if everybody knew about it. I'm thoroughly ashamed of this thing."

The purser left, and Steele lay back in his bunk thinking over matters. It was evident that, hitherto unsuspected by him, the *Jefferson's* dock was in the vicinity of the Weehawken ferry, and that the ingenuous imp of a newsboy had either made a mistake or deliberately led him astray; no doubt the latter. How long a period had elapsed since his leaving the crosstown car until he found himself on the boat could only be conjectured.

The situation was far from inspiring; he had been given two weeks in which to locate his "friend," Deeping, and here at the very outset he was wasting almost half the time in a nonsensical trip South, from which there was no escape. There was irony in the situation which forced a grim smile to his lips. Harry Deeping, if found at all, would be located in Philadelphia, or its vicinity, for Somerville had said that city, and not New York, was his home. But if located, how could he be compelled to tell the truth? What was his right name? What was "Brown's" right name? The man who had given Somerville the story.

He arose dizzily, and from his overcoat brought out the paper bought that morning; perched on the edge of the

bunk, he set himself doggedly to read, unmindful of congested eyes and splitting head.

It did not prove pleasant reading; the paper was not the *Eagle*, yet its report was far from favorable. According to it, the bribery charge looked very black; very black indeed. Steele admitted accepting the money, and could not prove it had been subsequently returned. He could not explain his weird play that cost the game. He claimed to be ignorant of the briber's true name and identity. He had tried to muzzle the press by assaulting Honest Bob Somerville, a newspaper man of the highest reputation. He had been insulting and grossly impertinent to the president and committee of the United States League. He had defied them openly, and walked out heedless of their commands.

With an oath, Steele crumpled up the paper and flung it out of the port. The gist of the whole matter was that press and public believed him guilty, that the two weeks' grace allowed him would produce no results, and that his expulsion was inevitable and righteous. That was the gist of it.

He paced the small stateroom, trying to think with clarity and logic. It was painfully apparent that the one and only hope of proving his innocence lay in finding Harry Deeping, and making him confess the truth. But how? Every revolution of the *Jefferson's* screws was carrying him farther away from the battleground, the one place where he should be.

His thoughts centered on Honest Bob Somerville. Could it be possible the whole thing was a frame-up, planned by the ingenious brain of that golden-haired Narcissus? Could it be possible Somerville had never forgotten a certain incident of the past, and hated him to such a degree that he would plumb the lowest depths in accomplishing his revenge? Supposing Deeping were a tool of Somerville's and there had been a cold-blooded, deliberate attempt at bribery, not for the sake of financial gain, but for the accomplishment of his, Steele's, downfall?

It seemed incredible, and Steele was loath to believe, though knowing by personal experience, that Somerville, in one circumstance at least, was greatly unworthy the sobriquet "Honest Bob." There was one very black mark in Somerville's life of which the general public stood in ignorance, but which Steele knew, and Somerville was quite aware he knew. Steele had never mentioned it to any one; he was not that kind that loves to wield the hammer, and if he could find nothing good to say about a man, he kept silent. What had happened in the long ago was between Somerville, himself, and one other—and that other was now dead. A man's past should not be held up against him, and Steele was the last person in the world to tell what he knew, seek to destroy the reputation Somerville had acquired. Aside from this, he could not speak without smirching the dead, that "other" who had shared the secret.

It had not occurred to him previously that Somerville might cherish an implacable hatred toward him, never forgiven him for sharing that degrading secret; the implacable hatred of a man who, universally lauded for his honor and rectitude, knows there is one person who is not deceived, and whose silent contempt cannot be forgotten. Steele could well imagine himself the unremovable fly in Somerville's ointment of self-esteem. While he, Steele, remained in obscurity, the matter might be overlooked, if not forgotten, but when he appeared in the public eye, becoming famous, as Somerville himself, intruding in the other's world and meeting him at every turn, then slumbering hatred might become active and deadly animosity.

And yet Steele was loath to credit

Somerville with such malice, cunning, and dishonesty. The story he had told so frankly seemed entirely logical, and backed by his personality and reputation it had certainly convinced Hardman and the others. If he had lied, then that lie was a masterpiece. At all events, somebody had lied, and there was a mystery that must be solved.

Steele skipped the dinner hour, and toward eight o'clock put on overcoat and cap and started for the deck. Four hours of sleep and plenty of fresh air from the open port made him feel somewhat better, though he still experienced an unwonted distrust of his legs, a splitting headache, and recurrent spasms of nausea, which might be attributed mainly to the motion of the vessel, for the sea was choppy, and the occasional booming of the *Jefferson's* horn told that the fog was hanging on tenaciously despite the wind that had arisen.

In the corridor he met several passengers, and nerved himself to pass with head up and an entirely fictitious air of confidence; he was afraid of being recognized as the drunken buffoon who, for all he knew and despite the purser's assurances, might have been the morning's laughingstock. Not the least distressing features of the whole deplorable affair were those awful blanks in memory, blanks which might be filled in with anything. The previous night and again that morning he might have committed the most heinous crime, and have absolutely no recollection of it.

To his relief, no whisper or titter followed in his wake, and he made his way upstairs past the saloon to the companionway; the weather door was closed, and, ignorant of the reason, he opened it, being caught in a vortex of air that whipped the cap from his head and almost hurled him back against the stairs.

He became conscious that a girl had entered the companionway through the other door, and was staring at him; and Steele, mechanically dusting off his cap, stood bareheaded under the electrics, and frankly returned the stare.

There was a seductive air of luxury about her defying analysis. She wore a tight, slashed skirt, disclosing a figure at once pliant and audacious, a white sweater, and a scarlet scarf tied about her head and under the cleft chin. There was vivid color in her cheeks, whipped by the wind, and her tawny wealth of wanton hair reminded him of dead beech leaves touched by the sun. Her eyes were neither blue nor brown, nor yet green nor gray, yet something of each and all with little, warm golden flecks that seemed to come and go like fugitive moats dancing in the sun. Large, expressive, and very direct eyes they were, direct as those of a child, and owning, also, all a child's elusive appeal.

Of all this Steele was aware, just as he was aware that her lips were beautifully cut as a Cellini cameo, and quite out of harmony with the flagrantly snub nose; yet he was unconscious of making such a sweeping inventory or that his eyes had never left her own. And so, during what seemed an eternity, they looked at each other, pictures of arrested motion.

Then the vivid color in the girl's cheeks deepened slightly, and Steele felt as if the glow were reflected in his own; with a little start, she looked past him hastily and indifferently, and he stepped aside, automatically and in silence, as she descended the stairs.

Where had he seen that face before? Had he ever seen it previously or did she merely remind him of some one? Was it a face he had seen in a painting, the passing crowd, the theater?

CHAPTER VII.

The following morning, on entering the saloon for breakfast, Steele was rather disconcerted when almost the

first pair of eyes he encountered were those into which he had stared so long and thoroughly the previous evening; this disconcertment verged on confusion when a steward showed him to a seat directly opposite the owner of said eyes. It was a small table, and at its head sat the cheerful and cherubic Mr. Jones.

"Good morning, Mr. Smith," he greeted. "I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind being seated at my table. I can vouch for the companionable and entertaining qualities of those present," with a gallant bow all round, "and good company is half the battle in a sea voyage."

Steele murmured an appropriate but wholly unintelligible reply, and sat down after bestowing a wholesale and mechanical bow on his fellow guests. There were half a dozen of them, males and females, of various ages, but he was conscious solely of the girl sitting opposite.

He attacked his grapefruit in gloomy silence, quite aware that the owner of the expressive eyes was indulging in an occasional fleeting glance in his direction, which he resented. Perhaps, after his behavior the previous evening, she imagined he had asked to be placed at her table in the hope of scraping an acquaintance.

He was totally unappreciative of the purser's courtesy in placing him at this table, for he didn't want to know any of his fellow passengers; this wasn't a pleasure trip he was taking, nor was he in a holiday humor. Also, being greeted publicly as "Mr. Smith" was annoying, that being a contingency he hadn't contemplated when assuming the incognito. His idea and desire was to keep in obscurity as much as possible, and leave the boat at Norfolk without having attracted the slightest attention. Thanks to the jovial Mr. Jones, however, this plan seemed in a fair way of being defeated, for those at the table were like a family party, and, as no introductions seemed necessary aboard ship, the talk was lively and general.

Steele, however, preserved an indefatigable silence, quite discouraging an amiable and garrulous old lady on his right, who had tried him on various topics from the weather to reincarnation and the transmigration of souls. Farther up the table, a lively post-mortem was being held on the now historic world's series, and he heard his own name mentioned in no complimentary terms; more talk followed concerning the bribery charge and his disgrace. He writhed mentally; there was no getting away from the thing even on the high seas.

"Heard anything more by wireless about Steele's case?" asked some one of the purser.

"No," replied Jones. "I guess there's nothing more to be said until the two weeks are up."

"Oh," said another confidently, "his expulsion's a sure thing. That story about returning the money was awfully thin!"

"Yes," put in another, "and then his claim about not being able to find this fellow Deeping or knowing his right name looks mighty funny. Why, he admitted they were good friends."

"Very deplorable case all round," pronounced a third. "Given the game a black eye from which it will be a long time recovering. That fellow Somerville is to be commended for speaking out; also Hardman for acting so promptly."

Steele wondered grimly what these amiable neighbors would say if they knew his identity; it would prove quite a sensation, and he saw his wisdom in assuming an incognito. More than one at the table no doubt professed to be an expert on the national game, yet none recognized him. Perhaps they might, were he a member of the Manhattans, and not the Badgers; his features

weren't familiar to the general New York public, though, if the papers didn't stop printing his picture, they would become known the world over. However, press photos are anything but admirable, and identification by such a method is not easy.

He wondered, quite idly, which of these half dozen occupants of the table —or how many, for that matter—were related to the girl with the expressive eyes; for it did not occur to him that she might be traveling alone. He imagined she must have been reared south of the Mason-Dixon line, for her accent was similar to none he had ever heard; some words she pronounced almost like a negro, especially the personal pronouns and words ending in "r." He had never met a cultured Southerner, and this throaty voice held, like her eyes, a strange, elusive charm. He liked to listen to it; it seemed as if fashioned for caresses and endearments; essentially a feminine voice.

This was as far as his interest went, and he arose from the table, donating another wholesale automatic bow, without having bestowed a word or glance in the direction of his opposite neighbor.

The steward had left a passenger list in the stateroom, and Steele scanned it idly a moment before going on deck; down near the end of the alphabetical column was the name "Mr. R. Smith, New York."

"That's funny," thought Steele. "How did that get there? I know they print these things before the boat sails."

There could be only one explanation —that he had chosen for an incognito the name of a person who was actually a passenger! It was a strange coincidence yet quiet understandable; in seeking an incognito beginning with the letter "S," the name "Smith" had occurred to him because of its very commonness, and it was not surprising to find there actually was such a passenger by that name; in the latter's case, the "R" might stand for Robert, Roy, Reginald. Steele dismissed the matter, never for a moment suspecting that it might have any serious or far-reaching consequences.

On deck, he caught a glimpse of Jones hovering about the steamer chair occupied by the girl with the expressive eyes; the elderly purser was acting toward her like an indulgent parent, tucking the rug about her diminutive feet, restoring a book she had dropped, and performing various little services for her comfort before resuming his daily routine.

Pursuant to his desire for obscurity, Steele kept religiously to the deserted weather side, and, after a monotonous, solitary promenade indulged in for mere health's sake, he sought a corner of the smoking room and buried himself in a book. He was bored to death, and the hours, dragging like an eternity, were a constant source of irritation to his smoldering impatience. He should be speeding north instead of crawling south.

He groaned, thinking of the interminable hours that must be lived through somehow. Several lively games of poker and auction bridge were in progress, but even this successful way of killing time was denied him; the price of this nonsensical trip had made a hole in his bank roll, he would need all the money he owned, and could not afford to hazard any part of it even if inclination strayed in that direction.

He delayed going to lunch, postponing the inevitable until he thought his fellow passengers at the table had vanished; this laudable plan, however, was defeated, for on entering the saloon he instantly spied several, among them Jones and the girl with the golden eyes.

He made the best of the matter, and sat down with as good grace as possible, taking no part in the conversation which seemed concerned with a harrowing New York murder of some descrip-

tion. From this enlivening subject, the talk turned again to the defunct world's series and his, Steele's, disgraceful part in the Manhattans' victory; for it was a topic of which the male passengers at the table never seemed to weary. On the former occasion the girl opposite had evinced a certain interest in the matter, though keeping silent, and now, to Steele's surprise, she suddenly interrupted the wholesale denunciation of himself.

"Don't you think, Mr. Greenlees," she said, addressing a pompous little gentleman who had led the diatribes, "that it would be just as well to withhold a public verdict until the two weeks are up? Isn't there just a possibility that this man Deeping may come forward and corroborate Steele's story?"

Mr. Greenlees and his male companions received this suggestion with that good-natured and lofty toleration with which superior man receives inferior woman's opinion on a subject peculiarly his own, and of which she is supposed to be in a state of abysmal darkness.

"Why, my dear Miss Overton," he said indulgently, looking at her over his glasses, "I didn't know you were interested in the great national game. However, the world moves, and if nowadays woman shows an interest in the ballot, why not baseball?"

"Why not?" replied Miss Overton demurely. "And, as with the ballot, perhaps she may show a more intelligent interest than man," her eyes dancing. "Or, if not more intelligent, more charitable. For that matter, can you say baseball is confined to your sex? At every game isn't there a good percentage of feminine 'rooters' and 'fans'? Aren't there baseball teams at women's colleges? Aren't there some professional women's teams? And aren't even some of the big-league clubs owned and operated by women alone? What about Mrs. Heinemann, of the Clevelands, and Mrs. Stewart, of the Baltimores, not to mention half a dozen others in the minor leagues? Don't they run them quite as well as—well, say, for instance, as you yourself could?"

A smile went round the table, for it had become evident that Mr. Greenlees considered himself, as regards knowledge of the national game, something unique and apart from the common herd of fandom.

"Certainly I won't dispute all you claim for your sex," he replied dryly, with a bow. "I see you've studied the subject—even if superficially. Perhaps you even played on some of the teams you mention?"

The irony was wasted. "No," said the girl calmly, "but I might own one of them."

This suggestion appeared to momentarily disconcert Mr. Greenlees, and he eyed her sharply, as if to see whether or not she were in earnest.

"I admit I don't know very much of the subject except what I've heard and read," pursued Miss Overton, in the same demure voice, "but I certainly think there's a possibility of this man Deeping turning up and corroborating Steele's statement."

Mr. Greenlees smiled his superiority. "I'm afraid that's a very remote possibility, Miss Overton. In the first place, Deeping daren't show himself because he'd be jailed for bribery; in the second instance, I hardly think he could corroborate the strange story—not if he had any regard for the truth."

The girl shrugged. "That's a matter of opinion, Mr. Greenlees. I admit the case looks black against Steele, but, after all, the evidence is greatly circumstantial. You mustn't forget that. At any rate, I think the public should withhold judgment until the two weeks are up; otherwise it would be rather awkward if Steele should happen to prove his innocence within that time."

The subject was dropped, Mr. Greenlees exchanging a glance with his male

companions which said eloquently: "What's the use of trying to argue with a woman?"

Steele, however, was properly appreciative of the girl's quick defense, and his heart warmed toward her; it was a novelty to find one who admitted the possibility of his innocence. She might be a mere woman who knew nothing of logic, the law of evidence, and the subject under discussion, but she had displayed a spirit of fairness and charity which superior man, as represented by Mr. Greenlees, could well afford to emulate.

Miss Overton and the purser, it seemed, had come to the table but shortly before Steele himself, and not many minutes passed before he was alone with them; under these circumstances, it was impossible to preserve the silence to which he had dedicated himself, especially as Jones insisted upon drawing him into the conversation. Thus Steele soon found himself exchanging commonplaces with the girl who sat opposite, and, to finish the matter, the purser, as they arose from the table, took it upon himself to effect a formal introduction.

"Miss Overton, Mr. Smith," he said simply and without preamble.

The girl held out a frank hand, and Steele had another look into those great, warm eyes with the little, dancing, golden flecks, eyes which met his own unwaveringly.

They left the saloon together, Steele carrying her litter of books and magazines, and Purser Jones beamed on their departing backs that were straight and supple as young saplings, as if he had accomplished a particularly able piece of routine work. It was his self-imposed duty to make everybody happy, especially the girl intrusted to his care, and surely these two young people should find enjoyment in each other's society!

Presently Steele found himself occupying a deck chair in immediate juxtaposition to the one he had so carefully avoided that same morning; also, he had performed the various rites which, hitherto, had been Purser Jones' special prerogative; he nad tucked in the steamer rug about Peggy Overton's diminutive feet and patiently restored her heterogeneous collection of reading matter which had a discouraging habit of dropping, singly and in sections, wherever she went. In fact, Peggy Overton confessed unblushingly that one could always trace her by the trail of personal possessions left in her wake, precision and orderliness being, apparently, virtues confined solely to the care of her exceedingly well-kept little person.

Steele never quite understood how he came to be sitting where he was, chatting with the girl as if they had known each other for some time. It just happened, that was all, and he yielded with characteristic philosophy and cheerfulness to what seemed the inevitable. Certainly, Miss Overton was not hostile; in fact, strange to relate, she even seemed to find some enjoyment in his society, and, so long as he was not forcing himself on her, why, chatting in this manner was infinitely preferable to flocking by himself and thinking of the past.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I'm afraid," said Steele, restoring Miss Overton's neglected book for about the fifth time, "you must have thought me awfully rude the other night when I stared at you. I know it's a venerable excuse, but the fact is, your face seemed familiar; for a moment I thought I must know you. I suppose we couldn't have met somewhere before?"

"You aren't very flattering," she laughed. "To think it possible you should be in any doubt if we had met

before! All the same, I forgive you for staring, the more so as I started the proceedings. Oh, yes, I did! For the strangest part about it all is that I thought I knew *you*."

"Who, me?" asked Steele, in astonishment.

"Yes, you. Your face seemed familiar, and ever since I've been trying to think of whom you reminded me."

"Very strange," pronounced Steele, rubbing his chin. "According to the lady who sits on my right at table, reincarnation is an undoubted fact; in that case, you and I may have known each other in a previous existence. Perhaps I was Solomon——"

"And who was I?" she asked, as he paused.

"I was going to say the Queen of Sheba, but that presupposes rather much of an intimacy," he laughed.

"Besides," she added demurely, "you can hardly have been Solomon, for I'm sure he gained a knowledge of women he couldn't possibly have forgotten even in another incarnation."

"Why, have I displayed an alarming knowledge of the subject?"

"Not alarming, Mr. Smith; perhaps amusing."

Steele rubbed his chin again, a characteristic maneuver when perplexed. He never could tell when this girl was laughing at him, when serious, and in comparison with hers his intelligence seemed of the groping variety. It was the first time he had been brought in intimate contact with the "unfair" sex, and its complexities and subtleties amazed him.

"Do you really know so much about baseball as you would have Mr. Greenlees believe?" he asked at length, changing to a subject on which she would have him at no disadvantage. "Do you really own a club?"

"Oh, dear, no!" she laughed. "I've only repeated things I heard my uncle say at times, and I wanted to puncture Mr. Greenlees for his own good; there was danger of him bursting with self-importance. But I read all about Mr. Steele's case, and I believe all I said. I suppose you saw the game at the Athletic Grounds?"

"Yes, I was there," replied Steele.

"So was I. Wasn't it dreadful?"

"Dreadful!' he agreed fervently, and, to change the subject, proposed a promenade before turning in.

He offered her an arm, and they walked briskly and in silence, a silence punctured at regular intervals by the booming of the *Jefferson's* horn; for the fog, haunting them persistently throughout the trip, had closed down thick and impenetrable.

"At this rate, I suppose we won't dock till all hours," said the girl.

They were due in Norfolk the following day, which place, it seemed, was also Miss Overton's destination. Steele understood she lived in or near the city and was returning from a trip to New York, where she had stopped with friends; other than this he knew nothing about her, and had volunteered no information concerning himself.

"By the way," added Miss Overton, "I wonder how that poor man is getting on?"

"What particular poor man?"

She began to laugh immoderately. "Haven't you heard? It's—it's so funny! The stewardess told me; she got it from one of the sailors, I believe. Why, it seems one of the passengers came aboard so intoxicated he thought he was on the ferry!" She stopped her promenade to double over in another burst of merriment. "*Wasn't* it funny?"

"U-m-m," said Steele gloomily. "Awfully!"

She straightened up and looked at him. "U-m-m!" she mimicked. "Why don't you laugh, then? Don't you understand? The unhappy victim of demon rum had no intention of taking

this trip; he thought it was the Weehawken ferry——"

"I understand," said Steele dejectedly. "It's very, very funny."

Peggy eyed him reproachfully. "I did think you had a sense of humor, Mr. Smith," she sighed. "Somehow, it seems out of joint to-night."

"Well, why shouldn't it?" he replied, with labored gallantry. "Isn't this our last night together?"

She gave him a fleeting glance, and the color surged into her cheek; then she turned to the rail and stared down at the murky green glow from the port light cutting through the fog. "Why did you say that?" she asked at length, in a low voice.

"I don't know," replied Steele promptly and quite truthfully.

She was silent a moment, then: "I hope you aren't going to be sentimental, Mr. Smith, and spoil everything at this late stage," giving him another fleeting, enigmatic glance. "It was rather refreshing to find you didn't consider it your duty to indulge in extravagant compliments and mawkish sentiment. Many young men are so soft nowadays."

Steele laughed unaffectedly. "I promise not to be soft. I didn't mean to be. I said what I did because it just popped into my head, and I didn't mean anything by it. Honest Injun. Have I cleared myself of the charge, and is the explanation satisfactory?"

"Oh, perfectly," said Peggy, biting her lips.

"Besides," he added, "I don't think I could pay a compliment if I tried."

"I'm quite sure of that," she said heartily.

There was silence again, broken by Steele leaning over the rail and pointing out into the darkness. "Listen!" he said. "Do you hear that?"

Somewhere out in the dense fog there sounded a faint booming, seeming like the echo of the *Jefferson's* automatic, one-minute horn.

"Another boat?" asked the girl quickly. "I suppose there's no danger?"

"Oh, none in the world," he replied confidently.

The booming sounded nearer.

"I don't know," said Miss Overton nervously, after a moment's silence. "I don't like this fog one bit. And it seems to me we're going entirely too fast for this sort of weather."

"There's absolutely no danger," reassured Steele, his thoughts far away. "Not one chance in a million."

"I don't know," repeated the girl, staring out into the darkness. "I used to think so, but the *Titanic* disaster changed all that for me. In that case there wasn't one chance in a million, yet it happened, just the same. I *know* we're going too fast."

Steele laughed. "Well, if it comes to swimming, the water looks very calm, and I dare say it's warm enough. Personally, I wouldn't mind a dip, for it's some time since I've had one."

"I wish you wouldn't joke," said Peggy, repressing a shiver. "Ordinarily, I'm not given to a display of nerves, but I don't like this fog, nor that horrid booming. It certainly sounds nearer."

"Have you ever gone swimming at night? It's great fun," remarked Steele, thinking of his boyhood and the "swimmin' hole" up in the mountains.

"No, I haven't, and I don't want to!" retorted Peggy. "I asked you not to talk about it. I can't swim enough to keep warm. I do wish the fog would lift, or we'd slow down."

"Absolutely no danger," repeated Steele serenely. "Not one chance in a million." And precisely at that moment a hoarse cry resounded from the bows of the *Jefferson*, was echoed from the crow's nest and amidst a deafening booming was taken up throughout the vessel until it became a babel of sound.

To Steele and Miss Overton, standing under the bridge and gazing spellbound, it seemed almost at the same moment as if a great gray segment of the fog suddenly became detached from the superior surrounding darkness, and was about to hurl itself upon them; the next instant, before they could speak or brace themselves instinctively to meet the coming impact, there was a terrific ripping, tearing crash, and the *Jefferson* quivered from stem to stern, and then recoiled as if she had rammed her nose into solid rock.

Then followed pandemonium.

The sinking of the *Thomas Jefferson* near Hog Island by the superdreadnaught *Tennessee*, on her way from the southern drill grounds, has passed into maritime history, and needs no illumination other than that shed on it by the Federal investigation which proved beyond doubt that the *Jefferson's* captain was solely to blame for the catastrophe which cost his vessel and cargo—representing one million dollars—and the loss of thirty-four passengers and nineteen of the crew. It was proved that the *Tennessee* had stopped her engines on first hearing the *Jefferson's* horn, and that the latter, ignoring the signals, and with speed little diminished, crashed into the waiting mountain of steel, opening a gash in her own bows which, as she backed away, sunk her within ten minutes. But for the promptitude and discipline displayed aboard the mammoth battleship, the loss of life would have been more appalling, for a panic ensued on the *Jefferson*, and but two lifeboats got away safely before the vessel went down by the head.

There were heroes aboard the *Jefferson* that awful night, but they were mighty few; the chief wireless operator was one—he generally is—also Purser Jones and several of the officers, crew, and passengers who strove vainly to exert discipline and hold the boats, true to the maritime law of "Women and children first." They were in a hopeless minority, however, for all seemed to realize their fate was but a question of minutes, and after the first two boats left—the gallant captain himself being in one—it degenerated into a horrible scramble of every man for himself.

All this Steele and Peggy Overton learned long afterward, for at the time they knew little, and cared less, how the catastrophe happened; they knew solely that the vessel was sinking under them with alarming rapidity, that it was impossible to get near the lifeboats with their hordes of fighting, panic-stricken humans, and that if anything was to be done it must be done at once.

"There's only one thing to do," said Steele, kicking off his shoes mechanically and removing his coat, "and that's to swim for it. We've got to get out of here before she goes down and sucks us with her."

He spoke with a collectedness that was not assumed, being trained to emergencies, sudden crises in which his mind acted with singular clarity, and in perfect coördination with muscles. Had he been alone, instinct and desire would have urged him to take his stand with the little band who were trying to hold the boats; he felt, however, that his first duty was toward the girl who stood beside him, who was absolutely alone now that Purser Jones had more than enough to engage him elsewhere.

Peggy Overton was very pale, and, though steady of eye, her voice trembled slightly. "It's no use, Mr. Smith; I couldn't keep afloat five minutes. I'll have to take my chance here. Y-you go on. Please do!"

But already Steele had knelt and was taking off her shoes. "Get rid of that heavy skirt and that sweater," he said, quite cheerfully.

She obeyed automatically, standing shoeless in her sheer silk underskirt, and with effortless ease he lifted her bodily over the rail to the space occupied

lately by one of the lifeboats. Somewhere out in the darkness the *Tennessee's* horn was booming hoarsely, and her searchlights, unable to penetrate the fog, resembled vague, blurred moons which gave no light.

From her dizzy height the girl looked down, and shivered at the black abyss from which came the monotonous lapping of hungry water; Steele had joined her, having made no attempt to find a life preserver, for he knew that in inexperienced hands the cork buoys have drowned almost as many as they have saved. He had implicit confidence in himself, and, slipping an arm about the girl's waist, he held her to him in a grip firm as his name. Facing them was the black unknown; behind, chaos and pandemonium. The *Jefferson* was lurching dangerously, her bows under water.

Steele spoke in the same light-hearted, cheerful manner. "Keep your hands close by your sides, feet together, and jump for all you're worth. Don't be afraid, I won't lose you. If you keep your nerve and obey your Uncle Dudley this thing will be a cinch. Now then—jump!"

They struck the water as one person, Steele retaining his grip. Peggy bobbed to the surface, gasping and spouting like a whale, and instinctively tried to throw both arms about his neck, but he dodged, and, shifting hands, came up deftly on the other side.

"Rest your weight on my shoulder," he ordered. "That's it. Now kick out."

After the first shock Peggy had regained her nerve, and Steele's nonchalance gave added confidence. He was absolutely at home in the water, his long apprenticeship at the old "swimmin' hole" now serving him well. Not for nothing had he been dubbed "eel" and "water rat" by boyhood friends, nor, among them, held the record for "fetchin'."

The water was quite calm and warm, and, but for the fear of losing in the darkness the one person who stood between her and the traditional watery grave, Peggy could have almost regarded it as a picnic; in fact, she forgot this fear presently, native courage and youthful high spirits rising to take command of the situation. It would be an experience to talk about. She felt that, aided in this manner, and with such a companion as Steele, she could keep afloat indefinitely. It was wonderful the absolute confidence with which he inspired her.

A great, roaring noise sounded from somewhere back of them, and the water dimpled and rippled like the eddies of a whirlpool.

"I guess that's the last of the poor old *Jefferson*," said Steele, over his shoulder. "We weren't a moment too soon. There's nothing for it but to keep afloat until we're picked up."

The fog was so impenetrable that the *Tennessee's* whereabouts could merely be guessed at, and, in trying to reach her in the dark, they might only widen the distance between them. Though ignorant of the class of vessel with which they had collided, Steele had seen enough in that brief glimpse at the moment of impact to convince him that it was of vastly greater displacement than the *Jefferson*, and in all likelihood had suffered little; therefore she must be standing by somewhere in the vicinity, and lowering boats to help in the work of rescue. In fact, all about them the fog began presently to emit sound; the throb of a small gas engine, the rhythmic beat of oars, the indistinct murmur of voices punctuated at intervals by an occasional staccato command.

Steele, treading water—he had shown the girl how to float, and was supporting her head—began to shout lustily, his strong young voice carrying far into the night; and, at length, from out of the fog there came an answer, while

the far-away drumming of the gas engine drew nearer.

Steele redoubled his cries, and suddenly from out the dense curtain of fog there shot a cutter with a searchlight in her bows; she seemed to be coming at terrific speed, to be appallingly near, and he sensed the peril in a glance. There was no time, however, to do more than give a single yell of warning and throw up a protecting arm between the girl and the coming danger before the cutter struck them bows on.

The last thing Steele remembered was being rolled over and over, and down and down as if to the very bed of the sea; he had no recollection of fighting for breath, suffering in any manner, for darkness closed in upon him sudden and complete.

CHAPTER IX.

Over a fortnight had passed, and Richard Steele, sometime star shortstop of the Badgers, was holding down a cot in the Norfolk hospital, his head swathed in bandages and his right arm in a plaster cast. It was a question whether that redoubtable "wing" which had been able to project a ball across the diamond with the accuracy and velocity of a rifle bullet would ever be the same. At all events, it had undoubtedly saved a human life, and that—though some fans might think otherwise—is better than saving the greatest ball game ever played. So thought Steele.

That shattered wing had robbed Miss Peggy Overton of a fractured skull. For that matter, despite the intervening arm, the cutter had clipped them both smartly on the head, enough to knock the girl unconscious and lay his own scalp open for a good four inches. They had been fished aboard with a boat hook, and,—with the other survivors of the ill-fated *Jefferson,* landed in the sick bay of the *Tennessee,* where neither had been able to take a coherent interest in matters during the run back to Norfolk; there the girl had been pounced upon by desperate relatives, while Steele, in the natural course of events, went to the hospital. There was no one to bother about him, and a public ward in the hospital was his logical place.

All this Steele had learned subsequently; he had seen the local papers in which the name Miss Peggy Overton had been mentioned as among those saved, and that was all that concerned him. Too bad if at the last moment she had been drowned by would-be rescuers; she was a mighty nice little girl, and, under other circumstances, he might have been glad to improve the acquaintance if permitted; as it was, he would never see her again, and no doubt she would live to tell her children and grandchildren all about the historic wreck of the *Thomas Jefferson.*

To the hospital authorities Steele was known by his true name; it had been some time before he was in any condition to utter it, but when at length he had been able to speak, the name Richard Steele rose unbidden in answer to their questions; true to his intention he abandoned the sobriquet "R. Smith," now there no longer existed what he had considered a necessity. Norfolk was not a small, self-centered world like the *Thomas Jefferson,* and the postseason series had slipped away back into the past tense.

Thus about a week after the wreck the local papers chronicled the fact that among the survivors at the Norfolk hospital was one Richard Steele. Previous to this they had also chronicled the fact that among those missing was a passenger by the name of "R. Smith." Undoubtedly, thought Steele, this unfortunate was the *real* Smith, the passenger whose name he had assumed unwittingly. To him it was a matter of keen regret that Purser Kirk Jones was also one of those who had lost their lives, for, unlike the gallant captain,

Jones had stuck to his ship until she went down, taking him and others with her. During their short acquaintance, Steele had formed an attachment for the sentimental and big-hearted purser.

Lying in his cot, the daily paper before him, Steele now considered the future. That paper had told him only too plainly how his affairs had been going in New York; the two weeks were past, and he had made no attempt to find Deeping; moreover, he, Steele, had disappeared from the city. No one knew anything about him. He had left a note for Manager Riley, saying he was going to Hamills, his home town, but inquiry there proved the immediate falsity of this, for none had seen or heard of him. Obviously a blind to keep his real whereabouts secret. All this pointed to the obvious conclusion that his story about returning the bribe to Deeping was essentially false, and, that knowing it to be so, he had disappeared into obscurity, taking his disgrace with him. Under the circumstances there was but one thing for President Hardman and the committee to do, and they had done it promptly; Richard Steele was adjudged guilty, and thereby expelled.

Steele smiled grimly as he put aside the paper; so he was expelled, permanently under the ban! Already, like the world's series, he had slipped into the past tense. Swiftly moving events had left him behind, broken and disgraced; already Connolly and the rest would be preparing to invade Havana on their post-season tour, while he—— He smiled again wearily. Should he wire Hardman and Riley, telling them what had happened, and where he was? What was the use? He had been judged and sentenced. He couldn't find Deeping and make him tell the truth if given two years instead of two weeks. He no longer possessed funds for the hiring of a lawyer and detective; his bank roll was in his suit case, and that was at the bottom of the deep blue sea. There would be long, long months, perhaps years, of official unwinding of red tape before the Southern line would recoup him and the rest for their loss; meanwhile there was about fifty dollars —cash carried in the clothes he had worn—between him and the poorhouse. He was a charity patient of the hospital. No, what was the use? Nobody cared, and press and public had more than half believed him guilty, anyway. He had a broken arm to boot, and even if the ban were lifted might never be the same.

"To the devil with the game and with them all!" his bitter thoughts shouted. "I'm through. I'll never touch a ball as long as I live! I've had one raw deal, and I'm *through*. Let them believe what they like and do what they like. Here's the passing of Scrappy Steele; he's dead and buried. He's *through*."

Thus Steele decided definitely and doggedly to make no further attempt at self-vindication; he was through with the game, and that settled it. There were other ways of earning a living. An entirely foreign and rather pleasant spirit of inconsequence, even devil-may-care recklessness possessed him; the present could go hang, and the future was at liberty to look after itself.

For the first time in memory responsibility had vanished from his life; his brother was dead, and there was no one, absolutely none other than himself, for whom he must think and provide. And Steele was the kind who does his best while working for a loved one, not himself. It seemed now as if meaning and motive had gone out of his life, and he was content to let events shape their course without any assistance from him, to drift with the tide, permitting it to carry him where it pleased.

Two things he alone knew: that he would never touch a baseball again, and that he would not return North

until he got good and ready. With the exception of old Judge Parker—Big Ed Connolly, too, perhaps—there was not one person north of the Mason-Dixon line whom he cared about, or, for that matter, who cared for him. He felt resentment and antagonism toward the land of his birth and everybody in it; inner consciousness, however, proclaimed the fact that President Hardman, the committee, press, and public had, under the circumstances, taken the only logical view of the matter. Inner consciousness also had not forgotten the initial acceptance of Deeping's bribe, and thus much of Steele's resentment and antagonism partook of the quality of lost self-esteem, the virus of self-hatred.

Surely it was a mark of native honesty, intrinsic worth, that Steele could not forgive himself for that single false step, corrected before it became irrevocable; that he brooded over it, and thought not of the courage and honor in ultimately defeating temptation and publicly confessing what otherwise might never have been known, but of the dishonor of ever contemplating the rôle of bribe taker and traitor.

CHAPTER X.

It was on a sunny afternoon toward the end of November that Richard Steele, looking rather seedy for all a brave attempt at his wonted spruceness, found himself in Claypole, a small town situate some fifteen miles from Norfolk, where he had been told he might find work.

It seemed the town lived, moved, and had its being around the big manufacturing plant of Josiah Claypole, who had the honor and profit of turning out the renowned "Claypole Simplex"—not an automobile, but a sewing machine appreciated by the nation's housewives, a fact testified by the firm's advertising contracts and balance sheets.

What Steele did not know about sewing machines would have filled a library, but, true to his determination of drifting with the tide, he found himself washed up on the rocks, the rocks representing one suit of clothes rather damaged, and an empty stomach. Finding work in Norfolk had not proved the light and cheerful task it had seemed, and he had worn out his shoes and patience looking for that suitable berth in which he proposed to demonstrate, to the ungrateful and despised public, the truth that he could earn a living without its support. Succeeding this it had become a question of locating even the common garden variety of job, hence his presence in Claypole.

They employed many hands in the big sewing-machine factory, and not all skilled labor, either; besides, the owner appeared to have a local reputation for generosity, a vital interest for the welfare of his employees and the town to which he had given his name, and which owed its very existence to his enterprise.

In Norfolk it was spoken of as the Model Town, and now as he looked about him Steele found on every hand ample justification for this name; it *was* a model town if well-laid out streets and well-built houses went for anything; it seemed to have been planned with a definite eye for harmony and beauty hand in hand with utility, and there was none of that intermittent wooden dilapidation and dog-eared soddenness which he had come to associate with many towns both Northern and Southern he had seen. This place seemed a fitting example of the reconstructed, wide-awake, manufacturing portions of the South, and it breathed an atmosphere of cleanliness and hustle in marked contrast to Steele's hitherto placid acceptance of the traditional indolence and squalor of Dixie.

The home of Claypole Simplex furnished another surprise, occupying as

it did two blocks or squares, and being built entirely of steel, poured cement, and glass; a mammoth building of the most approved design and construction.

And his respect for the enterprising Josiah Claypole went up still farther when he saw adjacent to the factory the ample and well-kept recreation grounds provided for employees; here was a regulation diamond, with grand stand and bleachers, that would have done credit to many a professional club, and his heart warmed at the familiar sight. The five-o'clock whistle had blown, and a crowd of be-sweatered youths, availing themselves of the last minutes of daylight, were knocking out fungoes.

Steele stopped mechanically and watched them with an expert's eye; he had sworn never to touch another ball, assured himself that he hated and despised the game, yet he was finding the ruling passion hard to down. For the mere curiosity of the thing he would like to see if that mended wing was as good as ever.

A very small person, hands in trousers pockets and a whistle on his puckered lips, shared Steele's interest in the fungoes, watching the antics of the players with an admiring and appreciative eye.

"Do they belong to a team?" asked Steele conversationally.

"*Do* they?" echoed the very small person, staring at the author of such benighted ignorance. "Say, them's th' Claypole Simplexes."

"The what? Solar Plexuses?"

"Naw. Claypole Simplexes."

"Oh!" said Steele, forbearing to smile at the name. "And who are the Claypole Simplexes?"

"Champeens of th' county," replied the boy shortly, with a proprietary swagger. "Me big brudder's their bat boy, an' I know every feller to speak to on th' team. Say, youse don't live around here, or you'd know th' Simplexes."

Steele confessed to being a stranger, and the very small person, forgiving the excusable ignorance, proceeded to throw some light on the famous local nine.

It seemed they were a semiprofessional team organized by Josiah Claypole—whom the boy characterized as a "real sport"—and the majority of members were employed in the sewing-machine factory. The enterprising Claypole was a dyed-in-the-wool ball fan, and thanks to his efforts had assembled and developed a team which, the preceding season, had succeeded in bringing home to the town of Claypole the county championship.

Aside from the healthful recreation furnished his employees by this side line and the interest he took in the game itself, Josiah Claypole, in developing such a team and annexing the championship, accomplished a shrewd stroke of gratuitous advertising for the renowned Claypole Simplex, and the town he had put upon the map. "Claypole Simplex," emblazoned in scarlet letters that seared the eye, was carried throughout the country on the white uniform of every player; "Claypole Simplex" figured prominently in the sporting pages of the papers throughout the State; "Claypole Simplex" was discussed on corners, in barber shops, cigar stores, saloons, and, above all, the home where the nation's housewives knew something of the name and might be induced to know it better.

It is an age of advertising, and Josiah Claypole, being a man of the age, believed that the nation's housewives, for all their sex, can reason quite as logically as the nation's voters—perhaps more so when it comes to the concrete matter of buying a sewing machine. A firm that can afford a champion ball team must be wealthy; wealth means success, and success means that the article one sells must be the best of its kind and price. That was logic, and

Josiah Claypole believed that the nation's housewives were logical.

Steele saw two men talking outside the factory, and, crossing the railroad spur that paralleled the shipping entrance, went over and asked about securing work.

"Nothin' doin', Jack, that I know of," said one of the gentlemen, who carried a bill hook and had tobacco running down his square chin. "What's your line?"

"Anything," replied Steele briefly.

"Better go round to the office," advised the second gentleman, pointing the direction with an invoice sheet. "I guess we're full up this time of the year, but there's nothin' like tryin'."

Both seemed friendly, and Steele, thanking them, started for the office.

"Try an' get past to th' boss himself," shouted the gentleman with the tobacco chin. "I reckon you'll stand more of a chance with him. Don't let that young ferret in th' office bluff you out." The man with the invoice book said something by way of caution or reproof, but Tobacco Chin only laughed.

The spacious offices were situated on the second floor of the building, and Steele had not progressed far before being challenged by an individual who emerged from a door marked "Private." He was a lithe, well-set-up young man, with a pair of remarkably piercing dark eyes, and Steele felt instinctively he had met the "Ferret" against whom Tobacco Chin's friendly warning had been directed.

"Well?" said this gentleman curtly, surveying Steele in a single glance.

"I wish to see Mr. Claypole."

"Name and business?"

"I hardly think it matters. I'll tell that to Mr. Claypole."

"You'll tell it to me," said the Ferret promptly, "or you won't see Mr. Claypole. I'm his secretary."

The secretary's name was Howard Murtha, and he had estimated the visitor's inconsequence by the shabbiness of his clothes; therefore he wasn't afraid to be insolent. Murtha was proud of himself, his ancestors, and the fact that his father had been a captain of Price's unsurrendered Left Wing. Although but little older than Steele himself, he might have been living in the past of fifty years ago, so far as his feelings toward the North were concerned. He belonged essentially to that portion of the unreconstructed South which had never surrendered and never would. He hated and despised the North and all that came out of it, whether Swede, Italian, Irish, or "Yankee," and Steele's accent alone was enough to arouse his slumbering antagonism. Moreover, he was extremely jealous of his authority and position, and often overstepped them whenever possible. Related distantly to Josiah Claypole, and regarded indulgently by that gentleman, there were times when he acted as if the establishment were his own or would become so at some future day.

Outside this Howard Murtha was an excellent employee, well educated, devoted to his employer's interests, keen as a wolf trap, and without a lazy, time-serving bone in his body. His faults were rather those of commission produced by overzeal, a hasty temper, prejudice, and vanity. A recent interview with his uncle—Josiah Claypole married a second cousin of the boy's mother, and Murtha, lacking a proper understanding of the relation, called the other "uncle"—had not sweetened his temper, and Steele could hardly have found a more inopportune moment for his visit or a person less responsive.

"What's your business?" repeated Murtha, in the same offensive manner. "What do you want?"

"Work," replied Steele cheerfully.

"I thought so," exclaimed the other, his dark eyes supercilious. "You've got

a nerve! Do you think Mr. Claypole has nothing else to do but interview every one looking for a job?"

"I understood I could find work of some kind here."

"Then you understood wrong," replied Murtha. "We're full up, and there's absolutely nothing doing."

By this time Steele's "pep" had begun to ferment badly, and he was deliberating whether it was worth while to tell this young Chesterfield what he thought of him, when Mr. Claypole himself appeared on the scene. He had overheard a greater part of the dialogue, and, from the look he bestowed on Howard Murtha, it was evident he did not approve of that gentleman's method of conducting an interview. Dismissing Murtha with a peremptory word, he invited Steele into his private office.

Josiah Claypole's appearance shattered another of Steele's traditional beliefs concerning the South and its people. Without doubt here was a Southerner, but emphatically he was not tall and thin, had no white mustache and goatee, did not wear a frock coat, elastic-side boots and string tie, did not chew eternally on a cigar, and did not smell reminiscently of mint. As a picture of the traditional Southern gentleman, Josiah Claypole was a pronounced disappointment.

Josiah Claypole was a bald-headed, clean-shaven, pink-cheeked, rotund little gentleman, quick and energetic in his movements which, for all his excess baggage, were remarkably youthful. His eyes were very large, very brown, very bright, and he put Steele in mind of a fat but alert and enterprising sparrow. His speech was quick and energetic like his movements, and adorned with a rather remarkable collection of expletives which seemed to be inserted from sheer force of habit rather than with the intention of emphasizing emotion, and, somehow, as uttered by him they did not sound in the least offensive. In the main, these expletives were what might be termed nautical, and to him one would imagine the pink-cheeked little gentleman to be treading the quarter-deck of an old-time line of battleship.

It was clear Mr. Claypole had granted the interview mainly as a rebuke to his overzealous relative, and as an apology for that gentleman's gratuitous rudeness, one of the Claypole maxims being that politeness costs nothing, and that one has always time to be courteous. It was apparent, also, that whatever local reputation for kindliness and generosity Mr. Claypole possessed, it did not interfere with the function of interviewing a prospective employee, his exceedingly pertinent questions proving this.

"Are you a trained man?" he asked abruptly, the shrewd brown eyes boring into Steele. "If so, what is your line?"

Steele confessed that so far as the manufacture of sewing machines was concerned the subject was, to him, a profound mystery. "I'm not a mechanic, skilled or otherwise," he admitted, "but I hoped I could make myself useful in the office or shipping department. I'm a college graduate," mentioning the university, "and have studied for the bar. I'm also familiar with office work. I applied here because I heard you had a big pay roll, and thought there might be an opening of some kind."

"There generally is—for the trained man," replied Mr. Claypole dryly. "It's an age of specialties, young man. What brought you South, in the first place?"

Steele hesitated, a hesitation not lost upon Josiah Claypole. He had no desire to speak of the past, or go into explanations with a stranger. His strange story would not be believed, and a bribe taker is hardly a desirable employee. So much he knew of the world.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Claypole," he said.

"I happened to be a passenger on the *Thomas Jefferson,* and she took with her every cent I had; that's why I'm looking for work."

Mr. Claypole's expression instantly changed—but not for the better. As with every great catastrophe, the *Jefferson* affair had been taken advantage of promptly by an army of mendicants and panhandlers; they posed as survivors of the wreck, fattening on trusting charity until unmasked; even the professional knights of the road had changed their threadbare, hard-luck stories until they embraced, wholly or in part, the sinking of the Southern liner. According to the statistics of Virginia housewives the *Jefferson's* passenger list must have been fully a yard long.

Josiah Claypole numbered himself among the victims of these impostors; initially he had responded whole-heartedly and without due consideration to the numerous appeals for help, and in consequence had been bitten so badly as to develop a form of hydrophobia, as it were, toward the subject. Under the circumstances, in fact, Steele could not have offered a worse explanation of his need.

"Oh," said the owner of the sewing-machine factory, a grim light in his brown eyes, "another survivor, eh? They're certainly holding out devilish long."

"Sir?" said Steele, sensing the sudden antagonism and quite at loss to account for it.

"I say they're holding out devilish long! Dev-il-ish long, sir!" repeated Mr. Claypole, raising his voice almost to a shout. "Sink me! about the only survivor I haven't met is the ship's cat, and I dare say that'll turn up yet if it wasn't drowned."

Steele grew very red. "Do you mean you don't believe me, sir?"

"Oh, no," replied the other, waving a polite, sarcastic hand. "Devil take me, if I'd say that! But haven't you any friends or relatives in the North to whom you could write? I've plenty of stamps here."

"I've neither friends nor relatives up North or anywhere else," replied Steele, ignoring the remark concerning the stamps.

"How strange!" murmured Mr. Claypole pleasantly. "Don't tell me you were traveling on the *Jefferson* for pleasure?"

"I certainly wasn't traveling in the interest of any employer."

"No?" said Mr. Claypole. "But if one travels for pleasure that presupposes a certain degree of wealth, doesn't it? Surely you had the forethought to leave some of it at home or invested in the bank, eh?"

Steele's cerise hue deepened. "Mr. Claypole, I came here to ask for a position, not to be cross-examined——"

"And it seems to me, sir, one is inseparable from the other," interrupted the other dryly. "I'm sorry, but my secretary was quite right; there isn't a vacancy in any department, nor is there an immediate possibility of any. Good afternoon, sir, and kindly close the door when you go out!"

Steele turned away, hiding the bitter disappointment written on his face. He saw all argument was useless.

Then he opened the door and came face to face with Miss Peggy Overton.

CHAPTER XI.

The girl started back from the doorway as if she had seen an apparition, her face white as the lace about her throat, and the warm golden eyes wide and terrified; then with a little cry she sprang forward and seized Steele's hands. The action was frank, impulsive as that of a child, and she made no attempt to conceal her obvious astonishment and delight.

"Mr. Smith!" she cried, swinging his hands, looking up into his face with

crimson cheeks and brilliant eyes while she laughed tremulously. "Mr. Smith, is it really you? Why—why, we thought you were—*dead!*"

Steele forgot to be embarrassed; he forgot Mr. Claypole and his surroundings, and was sensible solely of his own unbounded pleasure at the totally unexpected meeting; in all his life he never remembered being so glad to renew an acquaintance.

"Peggy!" exclaimed Mr. Claypole. He had risen and was regarding the proceedings with profound astonishment and disapproval. "Blue blazes! my dear."

In the same exuberant spirit, Peggy seized Steele's hand, and literally rushed him across the room to Mr. Claypole, almost knocking that gentleman off his feet. "Mr. Smith, my uncle!" she exclaimed all in the one breath. "Don't you understand?" she added hurriedly, seizing the lapels of her uncle's coat as if to shake comprehension into him. "This is the gentleman who saved my life! The Mr. Smith who was on the *Jefferson*. Oh, I'm so excited!" she finished, plumping into a chair and fanning her crimson cheeks. "It doesn't seem as if it could be true at all. You must pardon me, Mr. Smith, but one doesn't meet a ghost every day in life, and I'm not a bit used to it."

"My dear!" expostulated Mr. Claypole, frowning formidably while his lips twitched. It was apparent he was far from approving of his niece's impulsiveness, yet equally evident he was accustomed to it and feared only the possible construction placed upon it by a stranger. It was apparent, also, that redoubtable as the owner of the Simplex might be, Peggy Overton could rule him with her little finger.

"My niece," said he apologetically, turning to Steele, "is inclined to be devilish outspoken and impulsive——"

"Because she is your niece," put in Peggy imperturbably. "Please don't swear so terribly, uncle."

Mr. Claypole scratched his bald head, and then offered a frank hand to Steele. "Blue blazes, sir! it's a great pleasure and honor to meet the savior of my niece's life! Devil take me if it isn't! It was a devilish fine exploit, sir—I beg your pardon, Peggy. A damnably—a remarkably fine exploit, sir, and no words can praise it too highly or convey my thanks and appreciation——"

"It was absolutely nothing!" expostulated Steele, now thoroughly embarrassed. "A ten-year-old child could have done it—more, too—when Miss Overton behaved so admirably. She saved herself——"

"Fiddlesticks, Mr. Smith!" said Peggy indignantly. "I did nothing of the kind! I swim like a stone, and my uncle knows I do. There's no way out of it, Mr. Smith; you're a hero, and now that you're resurrected and discovered, you must suffer the consequences. Mustn't he, uncle?"

"Devil take me! yes," replied Mr. Claypole promptly. "Sir, will you dine with us to-night? Of course you will, for we'll take no refusal. Quite informal, of course."

"I'll be very glad to," said Steele frankly, quite forgetful of his shabby clothes.

In the outer office they met the secretary, Howard Murtha, whose dark eyes gleamed as they rested on Miss Overton. "I say, Peggy," he exclaimed familiarly, and in an injured tone, quite ignoring Steele, "why didn't you keep that engagement yesterday?"

"Why, I wrote you I couldn't, Howard. It was impossible."

"Well, I didn't get your note until after the tickets were bought," he said, in the same injured tone. "How about to-night?"

"I'm sorry, but that's impossible, too. Mr. Smith is dining with us."

"Mr. who?"

Josiah Claypole, some little distance off, was talking with a foreman of the designing room, and the girl now turned to Steele. "Mr. Smith, my—my cousin, Mr. Murtha. Howard, this is the gentleman who rescued me from the *Jefferson*."

Steele offered his hand, but it was only after an obvious effort that the other accepted, hardly touching it, in fact; then, with a muttered word of apology, Murtha turned and hurried back into the office. An awkward silence followed, broken by Steele.

"Of course, Miss Overton, you won't allow Mr. Claypole's kind invitation to interfere in any way with your arrangements?"

Peggy was biting her lips. "It is interfering in no way, Mr. Smith. Please believe that. I have no previous engagement, and if I had," with a lifting of the little, cleft chin, "I think it would be my privilege to break it."

Shortly afterward, in the Claypole touring car, they were whirling through the model streets and avenues of the model town, Mr. Claypole seated beside the colored chauffeur and man of all work. The former had intended sharing the roomy tonneau with his niece and guest, but, owing to some inexplicable maneuver executed while the party was boarding the car, he found himself seated instead at the side of "Uncle Mose."

This disturbed Josiah Claypole vaguely; in the light of his guest's identity his feelings toward the latter had undergone a change, but at the same time he owed a plain duty to himself and the niece whom he worshiped. Peggy was deplorably outspoken and impulsive and given to likes and dislikes on the spur of the moment; no matter if her instinct so far had been seldom at fault. It was evident she had taken a liking to this Mr. Smith, and, after all, despite the latter's heroic action, he might be nothing but a dangerous adventurer. It was even possible he had come to Claypole in the hope of a reward or with the intention of making capital out of the rescue by playing on a young girl's romantic feelings. Well, it would not take him, Josiah Claypole, long to find out, for he knew men and the world. Hospitality and gratitude demanded that he invite this stranger to share his roof for the night, but the acquaintance should go no farther were he not entirely satisfied concerning Mr. Smith's character. One thing, he had been egregiously wrong in considering the other an impostor, as regards being a survivor of the wrecked Southern liner, and for that he owed him an apology. Moreover, there was something about this young man's clean-cut build and direct eye which had appealed to him from the first, despite the suspicion and prejudice leveled at all professed survivors of the *Jefferson* disaster. If his niece had not happened in—she called for him every evening—he might have given this young Mr. Smith a situation, after all.

Meanwhile Peggy was asking Steele more questions than one. Where had he been? What had happened to him after the cutter struck them? What brought him to Claypole, and especially to the home of the Simplex? Why had the papers said he was among the missing?

"It's the strangest thing," she concluded. "You must have thought it very queer we made no inquiries about you at the Norfolk hospital; but we did, and they said no person by your name was there. Then we saw your name in the papers among the missing, and inquiry seemed to prove beyond doubt that you were dead. I don't see why they said you weren't at the Norfolk hospital."

"Because, like yourself," replied Steele, "it was some time before I was able to talk. That R. Smith you saw mentioned as among the missing wasn't

intended for me. You see, there were —er—two R. Smiths on the *Jefferson*, and this fellow reported as missing is the other one."

Peggy eyed him blankly. "*Two* R. Smiths? How strange! But there was only one mentioned in the passenger list—wasn't that you?"

"No. I—er—hum—ah—— That is, I bought my ticket too late to have my name put down. You see, I—hum—ah —I—er—decided on the trip at the last moment. Yes, I decided on the trip at the last moment."

Steele had been floundering badly, but he brightened up as this explanation occurred to him; it was a very fine explanation, and no fault could be found with it. It was strictly truthful —truth was growing to be a luxury— for certainly he *had* decided on the trip at the last moment, the very last possible, in fact, when he had found there was no alternative but to stay on the *Jefferson*.

Peggy, busy with her thoughts, seemed unconscious of the shoals which he had floundered through successfully. "But you haven't explained," she said, "what brought you to Claypole. Of course, you didn't know this was my home town and Mr. Claypole my uncle?"

"No, that was delightful coincidence, Miss Overton. You see, I had just finished asking your uncle for a position, and he had just finished refusing me, when you happened in. I'd heard in Norfolk of the Claypole Simplex factory, and thought I'd stand a chance there. You see, I never was what you might call a plutocrat, and the *Jefferson* took my dime-savings bank with her."

"I don't see why my uncle refused you," exclaimed Peggy, instantly indignant and sympathetic. "He's given a fortune to the *Jefferson's* survivors— ninety-nine per cent impostors at that."

"That's just it; he thought I was one and spoke vaguely about the ship's cat as being the only survivor that hadn't turned up yet."

Peggy laughed, the mellow laugh that sounded like a deep-toned bell. "My uncle positively foams at the mouth if any one as much as mentions 'survivor.' Don't you, uncle, dear?" leaning over and tickling the multiple folds of the Claypole neck.

"Eh?—devil take me! my dear," said that gentleman, the wind of the car's speed preventing him from overhearing the dialogue.

"He will some day if you don't stop asking him," reproved Peggy, making a megaphone of her hands, and inserting it in the Claypole ear. "I was just apologizing to Mr. Smith for your repudiation of his credentials and explaining that, of course, if you'd only known his identity your reception would have been quite different."

"My credentials!" thought Steele. "Quite a fine bunch they are! A name I've no right to and a real name that the press, with its well-known sense of humor, now spells 'Steal.' I see where I'll have to beat it out of this town before they discover the full beauty of those credentials. . . . Mighty nice people, too. . . . Mighty fine little girl. . . . Oh, the devil!"

"This other Mr. Smith—he wasn't a relative?" asked Peggy sympathetically.

"No—ah—hum, fact is, I never saw him in my life. One of the passengers, of course; but I don't know what he looked like. Mighty funny coincidence, wasn't it?"

"Very," said Peggy. "Especially the first initial being the same."

"Yes, that's about the funniest part of it," exclaimed Steele cheerfully. "For, of course, there are millions of Smiths; millions of 'em. You fall over them everywhere. I guess Adam's last name must have been Smith."

"Redroofs" drew in sight, a spacious house and outbuildings, set in spacious

grounds, and with the red roofs from which the place derived its name.

Steele had gathered that Mr. Claypole was a widower, and Miss Overton an orphan. Mr. Claypole's elder sister, Phœbe, lived with them, and she proved to be a simple, amiable spinster, motherly to a degree, and, like her brother, entirely devoted to the interests of a certain Miss Peggy.

The dinner was simple and informal, the protean Uncle Mose officiating as butler, and in the guest's opinion but one thing marred the proceedings—mention of a sometime Badger by the name of Scrappy Steele. Mr. Claypole, being a dyed-in-the-wool fan, had taken a great interest in the case, nor was he one to hesitate about speaking out his mind.

"You saw the game?" he asked, addressing his guest.

"Oh, yes."

"Disgraceful!" exclaimed Mr. Claypole. "Devil take me if it wasn't! The worst case I ever heard of! I told you so from the first, my dear," turning to his niece.

Peggy sighed plaintively. "I should think you'd get tired, uncle, saying 'I told you so.' I do, indeed. Haven't I admitted I was wrong?"

"Of course you were wrong," replied her uncle cheerfully, "and, of course, at the time, no one could tell you so. Devil take me if they could!"

"Josiah!" reproved Phœbe, motioning frantically with her eyebrows. "Your language, Josiah!"

"Your pardon, Phœbe. Everybody's pardon," said Mr. Claypole humbly. "My father, sir," addressing himself to Steele, "a fine sailor and gentleman, sir, who captained a Confederate blockade runner, was rather given to strong, if dignified, language; devil take me if he—that is, may the Old Boy fly away with me—if he wasn't. Therefore, it has become habit with me."

"And a very bad habit, too, Josiah," said Phœbe placidly.

"My niece," continued Mr. Claypole, pretending not to hear his sister's observation, "is given to what the sporting world calls hunches, sir—that intuition which women especially are supposed to possess. For my part, I think they're greatly overrated in this respect, and that feminine intuition is mostly humbug." He looked quizzically at his niece, but she refused to be "drawn."

"I think you're quite wrong, Josiah," put in Miss Phœbe spiritedly. "You know yourself Peggy is far oftener right than wrong. Woman is less material than man, and therefore possesses a finer, truer instinct——"

"Blue blazes and grasshoppers!" confided Mr. Claypole to his napkin.

"A finer, truer instinct," repeated Miss Phœbe firmly. "History is replete with woman's intuition, and, personally, I know hundreds of instances. There's Mrs. Daintree, for instance; why, I remember her telling me that time something was going to happen, and it *did*—the very next day to her nephew."

"There you are, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Claypole, turning to Steele. "A devilish fine concrete example of woman's intuition. Mrs. Daintree feels something is going to happen—mark the wide latitude of the prognostication, sir—and, sink and burn me, if the very next day hundreds of miles away her nephew doesn't triumphantly thrash a fellow half his size! Devil take me, if that isn't intuition, what is it? *What* is it, may I ask?"

Thus appealed to, Steele very appropriately murmured that he didn't know.

"Then I'll tell you, sir—rank idiocy!" exclaimed Mr. Claypole, thumping the table. "Bosh! Piffle! Moonshine! and likewise fool nonsense, sir. If this fellow Steele's mother—if he has one—had experienced a feeling that her son was going to have his head punched,

then that might be more to the point, eh? You might call *that* intuition, eh? As it is——"

"Josiah!" warned Miss Phœbe, her eyebrows frantically working again.

With admirable fortitude, her brother stopped short of the excellent peroration toward which he was working, and with a resigned smile reached for the sherry.

"Mr. Steele?" queried the guest calmly, his eyes on the baked fish.

"Yes," said Mr. Claypole. "Of course you saw it in the papers—this fellow Steele being thrashed in a New York hotel by Mr. Somerville. Of course he deserved it, but at the same time, sink and scuttle me, if it mustn't have been a one-sided exhibition."

"You know Mr. Somerville?" queried the guest, still quite calm and engrossed with the baked fish.

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Claypole. "I should think I did; knew him since he was knee-high to a grasshopper. He's the nephew of a neighbor of ours—the Mrs. Daintree, who possesses the devilish fine intuition. Do you happen to know him?"

"Well, not intimately," replied Steele, "though we've—er—come in contact. We were at college together—he was a third-year man when I entered."

"What a coincidence!" exclaimed Peggy. "Why, it was Mr. Somerville who took me to see the game in New York. I was stopping with mutual friends—the Archers. Don't tell me you also know Marion Archer!"

"No, I won't, Miss Overton, for that would be a palpable falsehood—and I'm awfully keen on the truth."

"I suppose that's meant for me—sink and scuttle me if it isn't!" laughed Mr. Claypole. "My dear sir, you have my humble apologies for relegating you to the status occupied by the poor old *Jefferson's* cat. At the same time, I've always heard that truth was the last resort of the incompetent."

"If you intend staying in the neighborhood any length of time, Mr. Smith," remarked Miss Phœbe, "you really must call on Mrs. Daintree. She will be delighted to meet any one who knows her nephew."

"I—er—certainly must avail myself of the opportunity," murmured Steele, still finding the baked fish very absorbing. "Was Mr. Somerville born in Claypole?"

"No, but he spent his boyhood here with his aunt."

"He went to school with my brother and me," added Peggy.

"Your half brother, my dear," corrected Mr. Claypole.

"It's all the same," replied Peggy airily. "I suppose, Mr. Smith, you don't happen to have met a James McAllister in New York? Yes, he's my brother," looking demurely at her uncle. "But I suppose you haven't; New York is such a big place. But after living in a small town like Claypole one gets into the way of thinking that everybody should know everybody else if they happen to live in the same city. And then, you see, you *do* know Mr. Somerville."

"Yes, there's no denying that," smiled Steele. "I certainly do."

CHAPTER XII.

The ladies retired to the drawing-room where, through the partly opened doors, Steele caught a glimpse of Miss Overton at the piano; the soft light of a great old-fashioned banquet lamp threw a halo about the glory of her hair, bringing out in gentle relief the flagrantly retroussé nose and the wonderfully beautiful, tender mouth; it gleamed on the satin shoulders and firm young arms, and, as he looked, an admiration stirred within the soul of Richard Steele, an admiration which could not be called distinctly impersonal nor akin to the variety bestowed on a beautiful horse or a certain famous pitcher's

spitball. Of a sudden Miss Peggy Overton had been lifted into a region immeasurably beyond quadrupeds and baseballs, a promotion and transition of which she was quite unconscious and for which, no doubt, she would be properly grateful.

Peggy began to play softly, absently—it was Schubert's "Serenade"—and the music held the soothing, bell-like quality Steele had come to associate with her voice. Miss Phœbe sat at a little, Spanish mahogany card table, her placid, kindly features perplexed over a simple game of solitaire; an imposing collection of chestnut logs roared in the great, deep fireplace, and a huge boarhound lay sprawled on the bearskin rug, basking in the glow and energetically thumping his tail like a flail whenever Miss Phœbe addressed a word to him. It was a simple, homelike picture—of a type in which he had had no part for years—and it stirred Steele strangely; for all their obvious wealth these were simple, homelike people, and their ungrudging, spontaneous hospitality, the unquestioning acceptance of himself, their gratitude for the very little he had done, touched him deeply.

Meanwhile Uncle Mose, moving with the deftness and silence of the trained servant, had set out the sherry and walnuts, a sheaf of old-fashioned churchwardens, cigars, cigarettes, and tobacco.

"What's your particular poison, Mr. Smith?" asked Mr. Claypole, waving a hand at the collection. "As for me," filling one of the long-stemmed pipes, "I consider clay the coolest and best. I noticed you took no wine at dinner, sir; now, I can recommend this sherry, but perhaps——"

"Thank you, but I neither drink nor smoke, Mr. Claypole."

"Blister me, how extraordinary! Now—meaning no offense—I've always been a bit suspicious of the man who neither smokes nor drinks. We must have vices of some sort, not that they're necessary, but because we're only human."

"Oh, I've plenty of vices," laughed Steele. "With me, total abstinence isn't virtue, but habit and necessity. I broke the habit once—not so very long ago, and the result was—ah—hum—rather discouraging. It seems to me there's no particular virtue in abstaining from a thing you don't like, and, what's more, that doesn't like you."

"Now that's handsomely said!" exclaimed Mr. Claypole. "It's more than a good many of your total abstainers will admit; with them it's shining virtue, not that it makes 'em sick at the stomach. Total abstinence's a great thing, sir, a very great thing—though, for the life of me, I can't embrace it myself—and I should be the last person to turn any one from it. I'm always preaching it to my employees, for, aside from all else, you can't make a champion ball team out of alcohol and nicotine. No, sir, you can't; blister me, if you can! No doubt, Mr. Smith, you've heard of the Simplexes?"

Steele replied in the affirmative, refraining from adding how recent was his knowledge.

The Claypole eye lighted up with proprietary pride and satisfaction. "Ah, I knew it would be only a question of time until they'd be heard of, even in the North!" he exclaimed. "A wonderful team, sir! Every man jack of them recruited and developed by myself! I've never seen any of your big leaguers, but I'd be willing to bet they haven't so much on the Simplexes at that. No, sir, not so much."

Steele did not smile, absurd though the statement was. He wondered what Con Riley, for instance, would say if he heard the Badgers mentioned in the same breath with a semiprofessional county team recruited mainly from a factory; a team which of necessity could only devote a small part of its time to the practice and study of the

game. He would like to see Riley's face and hear his verbiage. It was rather evident proprietary enthusiasm, and perhaps downright ignorance had blunted the customary Claypole intelligence; his knowledge of the big league was greatly theoretical, not so much what he had seen, but read. Probably his idea of the acme of baseball efficiency was the "Macons" and others of the Southern League, who were about the only fairly high-class teams he had seen in action.

Launched on his favorite subject, Mr. Claypole now regaled his guest with a minute and detailed account of the renowned Simplexes, and the historic games which had won them the county championship. Howard Murtha, it developed, was the captain, and had been in no small degree responsible for that momentous victory.

"There's a pitcher for you!" exclaimed Mr. Claypole, vomiting smoke like an engine. "Wonderful, sir, wonderful! Fine judgment and a remarkable change of pace; his slow ball's a teaser, and his fast one a terror. A terror, sir. Why, in three consecutive innings he fanned nine men. *Nine* men; think of it! Can any of your *big* leaguers beat such a record?"

Steele was again eloquently silent. For two seasons he had batted around three hundred against the best slab artists in the world, and he was thinking quite idly how distressing to the Claypole enthusiasm it would be had he happened to be one of the nine unfortunates whom the invincible Murtha had induced to swing holes in the air. He could see himself picking one of the "terrors" off his ear and putting it away out somewhere around the Mississippi or Sierra Nevadas.

Mr. Claypole observed and misinterpreted the silence. "Perhaps I'm boring you, Mr. Smith? I'm a fan, sir, and I forget sometimes there are one or two people in these United States who are not. Perhaps you're one of them? Do you know the game?"

"A—a little," confessed Steele. "I can't say that I care for it particularly."

"You'd like it if you only knew it," assured Mr. Claypole confidently. "The more you know it, the better you'll like it; I promise you that, sir. It's the one game on earth and typical of the nation. A nation is judged by its pastimes, sir, and when they degenerate and become effeminate—then look out for the fall of Rome, sir!"

"My knowledge of the game isn't profound," said Steele. "It seems to me that, like the violin, it's something you can play for years, and still have lots to learn."

"All depends on teacher and pupil," declared Mr. Claypole, swelling visibly. "I captained my class team," mentioning an obscure fresh-water college, "and with all due modesty I venture to say there's precious little about the game I don't know or can't teach. Witness the Simplexes, sir. I know a ball player the minute I clap eyes on him; sink me, if I don't! They're born, not made—that is, the best of 'em."

"I wonder, Mr. Claypole, what you would think of me as a ball player."

"You, sir? Preposterous!"

"I'm not the class that's born, eh?"

"Never! Never in the world, Mr. Smith. With all due apologies, you're —you're too—too——"

"Sketchy?" suggested Steele obligingly.

"Well, yes, but not so much that; physique hasn't so much to do with it as you'd think. It's temperament, make-up—in a word, equipment, sir. Your place is in an office, Mr. Smith. No offense, but when a man asks my opinion I always give it."

"I dare say you're right, sir," observed Steele gravely.

"Of course I'm right," nodded Mr. Claypole complacently. "Never made a mistake on the subject yet. I may

know nothing about sewing machines, but I *do* know ball players."

Steele thought if the statement were reversed it might be nearer the truth.

Mr. Claypole reverted again to the defunct world's series, and again spoke in no unmeasured terms of the Badgers' erstwhile shortstop; it was evident he felt as strongly on this subject as he did on that of the *Jefferson's* survivors; and as he listened to the scathing indictment of himself, Steele's half-formed intention of admitting his identity flickered and died out.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Claypole, at length talking himself out on the subject after exhausting all his expletives, "now we'll come to more personal matters. What are your plans?"

"Why, I don't know that I've made any, Mr. Claypole."

"Then how about accepting a position with me, sir?"

"Most emphatically not, Mr. Claypole!" said Steele, flushing.

"Why, may I ask?"

Steele looked at him. "Because you've told me already there was no position vacant, and, with all due thanks, I don't intend you should make one simply because you may consider yourself under an obligation to me. Is that plain, sir?"

"Devilish, Mr. Smith. Devilish, sir," replied the other, scratching his bald head, a pleased expression in his bright brown eyes. "Handsomely said, Mr. Smith. But supposing we don't put it that way, eh? Say there's a position vacant, and that I think you may fill it capably? Say I turned you down in the first place because the very word 'survivor' gets me riled, sir—and that's the truth. Strike me blind, sir, if it isn't!"

"Impossible, Mr. Claypole."

"Now don't be ornery, Mr. Smith—if I may use such a word," retorted the other. "Sink and burn me, don't be ornery. Isn't it a fact you need and want a position?"

"Yes, that's quite true. But I should feel you were making one solely——"

"Tush!" exclaimed Mr. Claypole. "Pish and tush!" Which, for him, was a remarkable exhibition of self-control in the way of expletives. "I say pish and tush, sir! Why shouldn't I feel under an obligation and wish to show it in the only manner at my disposal? Why shouldn't I, eh? Isn't it my right? Isn't it my prerogative?—the prerogative of every free-born American citizen? Come, sir, don't be ornery. Sink and scuttle me, don't be ornery!"

"But you really don't know anything about me, Mr. Claypole. I may be an —an impostor, sir. Smith may not even be my right name."

"What have names got to do with it? Am I proposing marriage, sir?" demanded Mr. Claypole. "Did I know your family history when you walked into the office and asked for a job? For that matter, don't I know more about you now than I did then? Weren't you at college with Bob Somerville, and aren't you the man who saved my niece's life? Come, sir, for the third time I ask you not to be ornery."

And so because beggars can't be choosers, but doubtless due mainly to the existence of a young girl who was playing the piano in the next room, the light making an aureole of her hair, Richard Steele suddenly made up his mind, deciding to partake of the good things of the palpable present, and bidding the future and what it might hold go look after itself. It was a decision perhaps eminently characteristic of youth; certainly of that new spirit of inconsequence which had been his since responsibility knew him no more.

"You are quite sure, Mr. Claypole, you aren't making this offer just because you feel you have to?"

"Quite, sir."

"Then I accept—and thank you very much. I'll try, sir, to prove worthy of your generosity."

"Of that, sir," replied Mr. Claypole, the look of approval deepening in his bright brown eyes, "I'm entirely satisfied, though 'generosity' isn't the word. I hope to profit as much as you. In short, Mr. Smith, I wish you to fill the position of secretary."

"Secretary? But I thought—I understood Mr. Murtha holds that position, sir."

"So he does—and devilish badly, too, I must admit. Mr. Murtha's talents don't seem to lie in that direction, and, between you and me, sir, I've been thinking for some time of displacing him. As secretary Mr. Murtha is a square peg in a round hole—a devilish square peg, sir—and in the office his mechanical gifts are quite at a discount. No, for his benefit—and mine, I may add—Mr. Murtha should be learning by practical experience to superintend the workshops, and that's where I intend he shall go. I wish you to feel in no sense, Mr. Smith, that you're displacing him; if it wasn't you it would be some one else, for I'd made up my mind to it before this; it was merely a question of finding a suitable man to fill his place, and it seems to me you may fill the bill. I'm willing to try you, anyway.

"You can work under Mr. Murtha for, say, two weeks; by that time you'll have picked up the duties of the position which, I think, you will find neither so difficult nor complicated for a man who hasn't an exaggerated opinion of himself and can use some judgment."

CHAPTER XIII.

A month had passed, the holidays were over, and "Mr. Richard Smith, of New York," had become secretary to the president and owner of the Claypole Manufacturing Company, the "Company" representing Miss Peggy Overton, who had been left a very comfortable fortune by her father, and had invested it in her uncle's business until she now owned a good third of the stock; as a result she was independently fixed, while her half brother, left an equal amount, had on his father's death straightway set out to prove for himself the truth of the old adage concerning a fool and his money being soon parted.

Mr. Overton had made the mistake of not trusteeing his stepson's inheritance, and James McAllister, promptly finding the little town of Claypole a mean and obscure place, quite unsuitable for one of his fortune and talents, departed for that brilliant flame, that Great White Way, which has burned so many moths. Of his subsequent career in New York his relatives knew little; enough that the inevitable had happened sooner than even they expected, and that Bob Somerville proved the friend in need and put his old schoolmate and neighbor in the way of earning a living. Peggy was greatly attached to this scapegrace half brother, and therefore, Somerville, by his action—quite aside from the fact of his being a lifelong friend—had won an assured place in her esteem and that of her uncle and aunt.

Some of all this Steele had learned from Peggy herself, from Mr. Claypole and Miss Phœbe; both from what was said from time to time, and from what was left unsaid. For silence can be more eloquent than speech. He understood, also, that Peggy's recent visit to New York had been undertaken mainly for the purpose of learning for herself how her half brother was conducting himself, and that she was now satisfied of his entire reclamation, thanks principally to the exertions of Somerville.

Steele had found lodgings in Claypole, and there being no local paper, Mrs. Boggs, his landlady, had long since constituted herself one; her memory was profound, her tongue remarkable, and

her gift for picking up the latest bit of local gossip nothing short of marvelous. She was generous, too, never waiting to be asked concerning this fund of local information, but parting with it on the slightest provocation, and thus Steele's knowledge of his employer and family became augmented quite without his seeking or desire. Thus, for instance, it was from Mrs. Horatio Boggs that he learned of James McAllister's graceless local career, and the fact that Somerville and Peggy Overton had been youthful sweethearts.

"Devoted they was," pronounced Mrs. Boggs, folding her scraggy arms under the blue-checked apron. "A couple as it did your heart good to see, sir. A sight for sore eyes, I might say. I'm sure it near broke the heart of her when he went North to college, but she bore it like the little major she is; never a whimper and always a smile. Ah, they'll make a match of it yet, just as soon as she'll consent to leave her uncle. You see if they don't. They say he's doing finely, too; writing a newspaper all by himself, and getting famouser every day. Don't my Jimmie say there ain't any one in the country as can write baseball better than him? And I guess my Jimmie should know."

"Yes, he should," admitted Steele, politely making a desperate effort to concentrate on the work he had brought home. For "My Jimmie" was Jimmie Boggs, only and revered son of the venerable Widow Boggs; also coach of the renowned Simplexes, and night watchman at the factory, a term that was a slight misnomer, for Boggs slept very comfortably the greater part of the night and watched little but the hours for his meals. However, he was a good coach, and the berth of night watchman solved the problem of keeping him permanently on the Claypole pay roll while employing his spare time. He was an old Southern Leaguer, long past his prime, and with an arm crippled in a railroad accident, but in comparison with the rank and file of the "Simplexes," his knewledge of the game shone out like a bright and luminous star.

"Ah, they'll make a match of it yet," continued Mrs. Horatio Boggs, genially oblivious to the fact that her audience was beginning to squirm like the proverbial worm. "And why not, says you? And why not, indeed? says I, seeing they was boy-and-girl sweethearts. Ah, they can't fool Mrs. Boggs, and she knows Miss Peggy was up to New York to see Mr. Somerville, though they do pretend it was to see her brother. They can't fool Mrs. Boggs; she knows."

"But there seems to be one thing Mrs. Boggs doesn't know," remarked Steele desperately, turning to her with a smile that took the sting from his words, "and that is it's quite impossible for me to work and listen to you at the same time. And as this work must be done, I think the inference is obvious."

"Going, sir, going," murmured Mrs. Boggs. "It's just that I like to drop in friendly and sociable, and cheer your loneliness, sir——"

"And I appreciate it, Mrs. Boggs; indeed I do—when I'm not busy."

"Going, sir, going. And don't you be working too hard, Mr. Smith, if I may be so bold as to remark. Mighty young you was, I should say, to be secretarying for a big company like the Claypole. And how does that Mr. Murtha like it having his nose put out of joint? Didn't fancy it a bit if you should ask me."

"On the contrary," replied Steele, "Mr. Murtha was very well pleased. In this case it was promotion, you understand; it had always been intended he should ultimately superintend the workshops, and he only agreed to fill the position of secretary until Mr. Claypole was suited with another man. If you happen to hear anything to the con-

trary, Mrs. Boggs, you may deny it emphatically." And he looked very hard and straight at the venerable widow.

Mrs. Boggs sniffed and assumed a very shrewd air. "But, you see, sir, my Jimmie works over to the factory. And my Jimmie knows a thing or two."

"I don't doubt it, Mrs. Boggs. Your son is a very capable man, and for that reason he would be the last person to believe and repeat irresponsible gossip which Mr. Claypole doesn't like."

"I understand, sir," replied the venerable widow, with another shrewd nod. "Mrs. Boggs don't need to have a house fall on her before she takes a hint; my lips is sealed, and so is my Jimmie's. But between you and me, Mr. Smith—being friendly, you might say, and sociable—truth is truth, and I ain't a bit sorry to see that stuck-up, high-and-mighty Mr. Murtha took down a peg. Swells around, he does, as if he owned the town and every blessed soul in it, and all because Mr. Claypole—who really ain't no more related to him that I am to a bull—brought him here a couple of years back, his blessed mother living in Nashville, and not knowing what to do with him. And right off, if you please, your brave Mr. Murtha took it all as if it was no more than his blessed right, and they say he didn't like it a bit because Mr. Claypole had him board in the town instead of having him live at Redroofs. For, you see, he started making love to Miss Peggy right off the reel, though knowing she's as good as pledged to Mr. Somerville. Oh, a very fine thing for your brave Mr. Murtha if he could marry a good third of the Claypole Company's stock and be left the rest, most like, by a generous father-in-law——"

"I believe I've remarked, Mrs. Boggs, that I'm busy."

"Going, sir, going. I was just telling you about Mr. Murtha and Miss Peggy——"

"And I don't wish to hear, thank you."

Mrs. Horatio Boggs sighed resignedly, and retreated slowly but in good order toward the door, firing a parting salute as she went. "Well, Mr. Smith, my lips is sealed, and so is my Jimmie's, but just because we're friendly and sociable and truth is truth, I'd warn you to keep an eye out for Mr. Murtha, even if he is so proud and happy at being promoted. I've my opinion of that young gentleman, and Mrs. Boggs is never far wrong——"

"Mrs. Boggs——"

"Going, sir, going. And mind, you take care and not work too hard, sir. Work is all very well, but youth needs plenty of sleep and food—and that reminds me I'll be bringing some coffee and an egg or two up around ten o'clock, so you needn't be locking the door the minute my back's turned. I know I'm a dreadful old nuisance, Mr. Smith, but it's that lonely sometimes when my Jimmie's gone to his work, and it's real good of you to let me drop in friendly and sociable. There ain't many I'd bother with, either, but from the first I took to you as if you was my Jimmie himself; and, indeed, you might be the living spit of him when he was your age.

"Well, good night, sir, and mind what I told you about keeping an eye out for Mr. Murtha, proud and happy at being promoted though he may be. I've my opinion of that young gentleman, and Mrs. Boggs is never far wrong."

Alone, at last, Steele hardly knew whether to laugh or swear; his landlady was an exasperating nuisance at times, but this was more than offset by her great kindness toward himself. Certainly she had "taken" to him from the first, though this could hardly be attributed to any physical resemblance on his part to "My Jimmie"—no matter at what remote age—for Mr.

Boggs had scarlet hair, a broken nose, and an epidemic of freckles.

CHAPTER XIV.

Though he had pleaded the excuse of being busy, though clerical work confronted him which he felt must be accomplished that night, Steele now pushed back his chair and sat staring into space, thinking of what Mrs. Boggs had said; for with all her garrulousness he owned a certain respect for her opinion, nor could her liking for himself be doubted.

He felt that in mentioning Peggy Overton and Somerville she had wished to convey a timely hint, to save him from making a fool of himself. For no local event or circumstance could lie long concealed from the eagle eye of the Widow Boggs, and indeed his friendship with his employer's niece, conducted in the open and with the full sanction of Mr. Claypole, was no secret from the town. Likewise he felt that the Boggs' warning concerning Murtha was well intentioned, though, no doubt, prejudice lent an exaggerated conception of the lengths to which that gentleman's resentment might go.

Murtha had taken his "promotion" in anything but a happy vein, and to Mrs. Boggs Steele denied the truth simply through a desire to let the other down easy and put an end to the gloatings of local gossip. Howard Murtha, despite his captaincy of the Simplexes, was a thoroughly disliked individual in the little factory town, for many had suffered through his hot temper, domineering ways, and the outrageous advantage which he took at every opportunity of being related to Josiah Claypole.

Steele felt sorry for Murtha, recognizing the fact that the latter was his own worst enemy. He had no desire or liking to oust him from his position; he could understand how Murtha must feel being supplanted by a stranger, especially one before whom he had acted with such arrogance. He felt all this, yet knew, also, that Murtha had no one to blame but himself for his removal; that, as Mr. Claypole said, he was a square peg in a round hole; that his future lay in learning to superintend the workshops, and that if Steele had not displaced him it would have been some one else.

Accordingly in no sense had Steele stepped into his new position with a spirit of triumph, but rather in every way striven to make the new régime easy for the man he was supplanting; he had tried to make a friend of Murtha —probably the first time in his life he had made overtures to any one. He might as well, however, have endeavored to become neighborly with a wild cat, for from the first Murtha displayed an active venom, and during the two weeks in which he was supposed to instruct his successor, Steele found every opportunity of exerting his growing self-control. Had he been the Scrappy Steele of old—youth triumphant and pugnacious because unconquered—these two opposing forces would have clashed in deadly conflict the moment they were alone. Adversity, however, was giving Steele a toleration, a self-command he had but too little known, and the days of the quick word and quicker blow were passing. The boy was slowly, yet surely, becoming a man.

So he paid no attention to the sneers, and the two weeks passed without an open break, Murtha was "promoted" to the workshops, and Steele remained in the office with Miss Armitage, the capable, little, sloe-eyed, vivid-lipped stenographer. In fact, it was from Milly Armitage, friendly as Murtha was hostile, that Steele learned much of the office routine. His education, which he had begun to think a waste of time and money, now blossomed

forth and served him well; he applied himself unsparingly to his duties, and now at the end of a month's trial he had the pleasure of knowing that Mr. Claypole did not regret the step he had taken. Indeed, in this new field Steele was developing an aptitude for business that quite startled himself.

From the first he had sensed that much of Murtha's animosity was due to jealousy; Murtha resented his friendship with Miss Overton. Mrs. Boggs' words now confirmed that suspicion. Well, it seemed Murtha had been troubling himself quite unnecessarily, and he, Steele, had been doing precisely the same; for it now seemed Miss Overton was for neither of them, being as "good as pledged" elsewhere. Pledged—and to Bob Somerville!

With an exclamation, Steele kicked over his chair, and, going to the window, pulled up the shade and stood staring out into the night. Pledged to Bob Somerville! What a fool he had been! What a fool not to have seen it from the first! What a fool to have taken hope from the friendship Miss Overton had shown him, to have mistaken gratitude for something infinitely stronger! What a fool to have aspired to—to what? He hardly knew. He had existed solely in and for the moment, in this new, wonderful life that had opened up for him; in the friendship and confidence of his generous employer, the almost motherly regard of Miss Phœbe, the friendship of such a girl as Peggy. He had been accepted and trusted as one of the family—and, like a fool, he had blinded himself to realities, and lived in a beautiful, golden dream which, after all, was nothing but a dream. Now the inevitable waking was at hand; he could thank the garrulous Mrs. Boggs for that waking and he did thank her. Better to wake up before it was too late.

He was existing on the crater of a volcano which might erupt at any moment and hoist him to ignoble oblivion.

At any moment, Somerville might appear in Claypole; at any moment, through some odd chance, his, Steele's, imposture might be discovered. For this reason, perhaps, the golden dream was all the sweeter, his wonderful new life all the dearer because of its very precariousness.

Yes, the thing must stop, though it meant the loss of his situation—to descend to that strictly material plane; that would follow automatically on confession. He knew only too well his employer's opinion of Scrappy Steele, and what he would say and do when he discovered that his particular pet aversion, his "Judas" and "Benedict Arnold"—favorite terms applied vigorously by Josiah Claypole to the outcast Badger—was his trusted employee. Yes, there must be confession; after this brief glimpse of paradise he must cast himself again into outer darkness, become a pariah, and seek anew a way of earning his bread.

On the whole, it may seem a rather despondent view of the situation, but no more, in Steele's opinion, than the facts themselves warranted. It was not the first time he had decided on confession, but he had found it infinitely more difficult in practice than theory, and it was a question if now he could bring himself to the sticking point. It is not easy to take the harder way; he was no Sir Galahad, and he knew it.

One thing, however: he must keep away from Peggy Overton; that at least he must do. No more of those delightful, intimate chats while Miss Phœbe played solitaire, Blunder, the great boarhound, snored before the flaming chestnut logs, and Josiah Claypole, at his sister's elbow, dozed over his sherry, walnuts, and tobacco. Dear, happy hours, how hard to give up! How hard!

Steele sighed, and turned resolutely

to the neglected work before him; yet something persisted in coming between his mind's eye and the imposing columns of figures, and, after several futile attempts, he capped his fountain pen and pushed back his chair; it was no use, he couldn't work. For the "something" was a pair of eyes neither blue nor brown, nor yet green nor gray, yet something of each and all, with little, warm, golden flecks that seemed to come and go like fugitive moats dancing in the sun. "Listening" eyes he called them, for the steady, reflective expression that always was theirs, as though they listened for things ears could not hear.

And so she was as good as pledged to Bob Somerville! And why not, indeed? as Mrs. Boggs would say. Why not, indeed? What more natural than that boy-and-girl sweethearts should become man and wife—though, as a matter of plain truth, it seldom happens except in books. But what more natural than she should love that heroic figure with the yellow locks—one so many women had loved—in comparison to which he, Steele, must appear a black smudge of insignificance. Why not, indeed? What more natural than that she should love the companion of her youth, the friend, neighbor, and schoolmate, the man who had stepped in and saved an adored brother from perdition? A man brilliant and successful in his chosen profession, honored and admired by all. Why not, indeed? What more natural or logical?

Steele found a fierce oath on his lips; if it had been any one but Somerville! He was not thinking of himself and his dislike for the man; all that was obliterated in memory of a certain incident of the past, the bar sinister which, though unseen by the world, fouled the supposedly spotless escutcheon of the golden-haired Narcissus. Yes, if it had been any one but Somerville! As it was—— Well, what could he do? What could he say? Nothing, absolutely nothing. That bar sinister represented the sort of thing that is regarded all too leniently by a good part of the world; it was not a tale to be told to a young girl, nor was he, Steele, a talebearer; surely he, Steele, should be the last to set himself up as judge over his fellow man. Besides, it had happened in the long ago, and, so far as he knew—that is, putting aside all suspicion and surmise which might be born of his own personal dislike for Somerville—it was the only blot on the other's record; a foul, black blot, but the only one.

And yet, despite his honest attempt to think that Somerville had changed for the better, despite the article in his code that forbade talebearing and his belief that even one foul, bad deed should not damn a man for good and all; despite his acknowledgment of the name Somerville had made for himself, his record of honor and achievement—despite all this, Steele wished in his heart that Peggy Overton's choice had been any one but Honest Bob Somerville. For, after all, Steele was but human, and, as he himself frequently admitted, no Sir Galahad. Instinct was hard to down.

CHAPTER XV.

"I'm afraid," said Mr. Claypole, locking his desk and eying his secretary meditatively, "you've been overdoing things a bit, Mr. Smith. You've been working too hard, sir. You're looking white and peaky about the jib—devilish peaky, sir. Blister me, if you don't look as if something was gnawing at your vitals like the worm that never dieth." Mr. Claypole laughed loudly, but Steele turned from his desk with a sober face.

Almost another month had passed, and as yet he had not trod the harder

way except as regards absenting himself from Redroofs and foregoing the society of Miss Overton as much as possible. Confession knew him not; it had still proved elusive, and each passing day made it the harder. Whenever he had found a favorable opening and nerved himself to the sticking point, something always intervened, and the words remained unvoiced.

The present instance was no exception, for now, as he was about to seize this golden opportunity, admit the existence of said "worm," and proclaim its identity, the door opened, and Miss Armitage entered, crossing to her desk in a corner of the big room. And so all Steele said was: "Oh, I'm all right, Mr. Claypole, thank you. Hard work never killed anybody yet."

The other shook his bald head. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, sir. You haven't been up to the house in a dog's age, and my sister asked me this morning if I wouldn't remember to bring you home to dinner to-night."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Claypole; it's awfully kind, but you know the pay roll isn't made out."

"Yes, Friday's a bad day," sighed the other. "I'd stay myself, for that matter, if I didn't have to run over to Norfolk." He said good night, then turned at the door. "By the way, wish you'd report to-morrow afternoon to Boggs."

"Who—me?" asked Steele, in astonishment.

"Yes, you, sir. Just a couple of hours—from two to four. Why, you haven't an engagement?"

"No, sir. But—hum—ah—that is to say——"

"What, sir? Don't think I've any idea of you making the team. But I see you're devilish white and peaky about the jib, and that what you need is exercise. Exercise, sir. I don't intend to have a first-class office man die on my hands for the want of sunlight, fresh air, and a good, healthy sweat. And there's nothing like baseball for that—blister me, if there is! Now, you get out there to-morrow and run the kinks out of your system, and get a chestful of good ozone; you'll feel the better for it Monday, see if you don't. I'm the doctor, and that diamond out there wasn't made to look at. It's my duty to see my employees kept in good physical trim—that's business, sir, for you can't get snappy work out of a soggy carcass—and every man jack in this establishment has got to be a Simplex, and make the team if he can; yes, sir, he's got to, even if he goes on crutches. That's part of the contract when I take 'em on. So I expect you to report to Boggs to-morrow."

Steele laughed, but detected, nevertheless, a certain seriousness under the other's levity.

"He's certainly a character!" said Milly Armitage indulgently, when her employer had left. "The nice old hypocrite! Puts everything on the head of business—even all his charity and thoughtfulness for others. He seems afraid of being detected in a gratuitous bit of kindness—devilish mawkish sentiment, he'd call it. As a matter of fact, he's one of the most generous and considerate of men when you get to know him. His bark's far worse than his bite, and he can get up on his hind legs and roar fearfully if you happen to step on his corns. Like every one else, I suppose, there are certain subjects on which he has hard and fixed ideas, and, if you don't agree, the only way to keep the peace is to keep mum."

Steele nodded; he knew only too well one of the subjects upon which Mr. Claypole had hard-and-fixed ideas. Small wonder he still found it hard to deliberately tread on one of the Claypole "corns," kept postponing the moment that would see the other "get up

on his hind legs and roar fearfully." He was quite satisfied, also, that in this instance the Claypole bite would equal or surpass the Claypole bark.

"So you're about to become a Simplex, Mr. Smith?" laughed Miss Armitage. "I knew it was only a question of time until, on Saturdays and half holidays, you'd be out running around the field with the rest of the lunatics. But I suppose Mr. Claypole's right, as usual, and it's just what you need."

"Perhaps," smiled Steele; "though I don't feel a bit as if I were dodging the undertaker. Anyway, to please Mr. Claypole—and I suppose there's really no way out—I'll report to Boggs to-morrow. But there's no fear of me becoming a Climax or Duplex or whatever you call 'em; none in the world. I think after my exhibition to-morrow even Mr. Claypole will be forced to admit I should get the kinks out of my system in some more graceful and less grotesque fashion."

"I don't know," mused the little stenographer. "I should do my level best, if I were you, Mr. Smith. It would be a great thing if you could possibly make the team—though, of course, you can't. But I mean it would please Mr. Claypole and help you along; he's extra considerate with members of the team; all their expenses are paid, too, and they make a good bit of money out of their games; he doesn't touch a cent of it. I'm sure, relative or no relative, Mr. Murtha wouldn't have lasted so long here if he hadn't happened to be a star pitcher."

"Well," said Steele, with finality, "there's absolutely no danger of me turning out a star pitcher or star anything else. I hate the game."

They settled to work, making out the big weekly pay roll for the morrow; Steele had been intrusted with this duty, and, Saturday morning, drew the money from the bank before coming to the office. So far had he risen in the trust and confidence of his employer. Also, he had become very good friends with little Milly Armitage; a frank friendship hinting in no sense of romance but based upon mutual liking and respect. Miss Armitage hailed from Tennessee, and though not one to air her family troubles, it was apparent she had been used to better things than pounding a typewriter. On the nights they worked late—principally the Friday of every week—Steele escorted her home, her boarding house being in the same neighborhood as his own.

"H. Murtha," read off Steele from the long list of names on the time sheets. "Fifteen, ten, twenty-five, forty-five——"

"My!" exclaimed Miss Armitage, her white fingers flying over the keys; "he's going some!"

"Yes," nodded Steele gloomily. "Four hours for the week. He's never on time, and it's getting worse. I certainly hate to turn this in to Mr. Claypole; it means another panning for Murtha."

"And, of course, he'll blame you for simply doing what you're paid to do," remarked Miss Armitage, speaking from experience. Also, Murtha's rabid dislike for the man who had supplanted him was no secret to her. "I understand he isn't getting on any too well in the workshops, either; with the men, I mean," she added. "It's too bad."

"It is," said Steele, "for he's got a lot of ability, if he'd only give it half a chance. If he'd only take a tumble to himself and lose that insufferable manner and rotten temper. He's coming mighty near the firing line with Mr. Claypole, if he only knew it. But I can't say anything; if I tried to drop a hint he'd tell me to go to blazes."

"It's been that way as far back as I can remember," said Miss Armitage soberly. "He's never been able to hold a position because of his temper and

arrogance. And he's got one of the sweetest little mothers a man ever had."

Steele looked a question, and the little stenographer added: "Oh, yes, I know the family quite well; they live in Nashville, and I was born and raised there. Mr. Murtha inherits his nasty temper and domineering ways from his father, and he's been a sore trial to his mother. He was expelled from Vanderbilt—nearly killed a classmate with a pair of compasses for some grievance, fancied or real. When his temper once gets going he hardly cares what he does; he'll pick up the first thing handy and let fly. You may think I'm exaggerating, but let me tell you something I saw with my own eyes.

"We used to have a kitten here, a furry little thing, with great, pleading blue eyes, that Mr. Claypole found one morning stuck in a tree and afraid to come down. It was just like him that he should pay a small boy to bring it down, that he should bring it himself to the office, and make a pet of it. Mr. Boggs looked after it, and it became great friends with the entire factory.

"Well, Mr. Murtha took a dislike to it, said it was always under his feet, and that none but a pack of lunatics would have a cat around a business office. I think the real reason was that the kitten refused absolutely to have anything to do with him. It's a funny thing that no animal will go near Howard Murtha.

"Well, one morning before Mr. Claypole had arrived, Murtha got into an unusually nasty temper over something; I forget just what, for usually it's some trifle. Anyway, entirely through his own fault he fell over the kitten and barked his shins; the next moment he had the poor little thing by the neck, and, before I could stop him, he flung it headfirst out of the open window." Miss Armitage paused, her face white, her lips trembling, her blue eyes hot, misty, and angry.

Steele's glance turned mechanically to the window; there was no use asking what had been poor pussy's fate. He remembered Mrs. Boggs' words concerning "that fine young gentleman," and his respect for her opinion increased.

"A man who can do a thing like that can do about anything," added Miss Armitage. "I was so mad I could have scratched his eyes out! I called him all the names I could think of, but he only laughed."

"And what did Mr. Claypole do?"

"Nothing. You see, Mr. Murtha told him right up and down the kitten was asleep on the window, and fell off; that it was an accident, and all her own fault. And—the more fool I!—I was afraid to tell Mr. Claypole the truth, for I knew Murtha would be fired so quick it would make his head swim. I wasn't thinking of him, but of his mother. You see, Mr. Murtha came here practically as a last resort; he'd lost position after position in Nashville, the town had got to know his record, and no employer wanted him. It was not through incompetency, gambling, dishonesty, or anything like that, you understand, but simply on account of his nasty temper, and because he was sure to make trouble wherever he went. His father is dead, you know, and his mother didn't know what to do with him; she thought if he went some place where he wasn't known it might be the saving of him—in fact, it was the only thing to do. So she wrote to Mr. Claypole, and I don't think she concealed anything; she isn't that kind. I feel sorry for Howard Murtha, too, though I can't ever forgive him for the death of that kitten. You can understand why he is so well hated in the factory; though I didn't say anything, the manner of the kitten's death got about—I think some one saw it fall—and they've had it in for Mr. Murtha ever since, especially Mr. Boggs."

"Yes," said Steele slowly, "I'd be sorry for any man who had a temper like that and which he couldn't control. I used to have a bit of a one myself that ran away with me at times."

"Besides," added the girl, "there has been so much sorrow in Mrs. Murtha's life. It does seem sometimes as if those who deserve it least get the most. Some mothers who never lift a hand have their families turn out howling successes, while others who slave and sacrifice and plan from morning to night are never rewarded with anything but flat failure. Mrs. Murtha is an example; her husband was a failure, and her eldest boy ran away from home and got into trouble in Philadelphia; they say he is mixed up with gamblers and blacklegs, and she doesn't know where he is now."

"Mixed up with gamblers and blacklegs in Philadelphia?" echoed Steele, mention of that city in conjunction with the word "gamblers" inevitably calling up memory of "Harry Deeping."

Miss Armitage nodded. "So they say. And then there was her only daughter, Alice. That was the worst of all; enough to break any mother's heart. Howard Murtha was devoted to his sister, too, and I've often wondered if her fate hadn't a direct bearing on his subsequent conduct. He was the younger, and she always had a great influence over him.

Steele looked up suddenly. "What happened to her? Did she die?"

"She killed herself," replied Miss Armitage, in a low voice. "A—a love affair that went wrong." She stopped abruptly.

There was silence a moment, then Steele said slowly: "I'll tell you why I asked. I knew once of a girl in Ithaca by the name of Alice Murtha who killed herself because—because a love affair went wrong. She was a Southerner, and, if I remember rightly, her home was in Tennessee."

CHAPTER XVI.

Miss Armitage looked at Steele for a long moment. "In Ithaca? Why, that's where it happened! Miss Murtha was attending school there."

"The Pratt Commercial College?"

"Yes."

"About four years ago?"

"Yes."

"How did she commit suicide?"

"She—she drowned herself," replied Miss Armitage. "Drowned herself in a lake—I forget the name of it."

"Lake Cayuga," said Steele.

"Yes, that's the name. It must be the same."

"There's no doubt about it," replied Steele soberly.

There came a long silence. "It's a very small world, after all," pronounced the little stenographer, at length.

"Very," agreed Steele. "And the more you see of it, the smaller it seems."

"To think that you knew Alice Murtha," added Miss Armitage. "I—I knew her quite well; we were classmates in a preparatory school in Nashville. I was very fond of her. She was a lovely girl, lovely in every way; quite different from her brothers."

"She was all that," said Steele.

Miss Armitage looked at him almost gratefully; her blue eyes were misty. "Did you know her—well?"

"Fairly well."

Miss Armitage leaned forward, with pleading eyes. "Then, if you knew her, Mr. Smith, you must also know she wasn't all to blame for what happened. No one who really knew Alice Murtha could believe otherwise. She loved the —the blackguard, not wisely, but too well."

"Yes, I also know that," said Steele

heavily. "I know it was the old story of a broken promise."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Miss Armitage. "I knew it must be so, though there are many—even among Alice's old schoolmates and neighbors—who chose to believe otherwise. In such cases, we women seem to be the unkindest critics of our sex. But I knew and loved Alice Murtha, and I've always felt, if the truth were known, she was far more sinned against than sinning. Your words have meant a lot to me, Mr. Smith, and you can understand how infinitely more they would mean to Mrs. Murtha—though she has never doubted. You know the name and identity of the man in the case were never known, though, of course, it was conjectured he must live in or around Ithaca. Alice Murtha never betrayed him; she just went away quietly and drowned herself, and though the inquest revealed the motive, she never mentioned anything about it even in the farewell letter to her mother. The papers, of course, took it up, and that's how it became known in Nashville."

Steele was now walking the floor, with bent head and clasped hands.

"Is it possible, Mr. Smith," added the girl, "you knew the man in the case?"

Steele hesitated, then he stopped opposite Miss Armitage, and looked her in the eyes. "Yes, it's quite possible."

"You knew! And yet you said nothing!"

"I said nothing," nodded Steele. "The man was a college mate." He raised a hand as Miss Armitage, white-lipped and stormy-eyed, was about to speak.

"One moment," he added. "You needn't say anything about man's peculiar code, and how we all seem to pull together to shield a blackguard because of a distorted sense of honor. I admit I may not have done right in keeping quiet—I've often wondered if I did—but I just want you to try and put yourself in my place for a moment and see what you'd have done. And I want you to try and look at it from a man's point of view, the point of view of an insignificant undergraduate, which I then was.

"To begin with, the man in the case was one of the most popular fellows in college, and I was nothing but an obscure freshie. He was no friend of mine, you understand, being too far above me in every way to as much as notice me. I was too poor to live at the university, and boarded at a small private house in the suburbs; in this place Miss Murtha was also a boarder, and that's how I came to know her. She did not board at the commercial college."

"No," nodded Miss Armitage. "She couldn't afford it. Her father was a spendthrift, and left little. Alice was fitting herself for an office position."

"You understand," continued Steele, "I didn't know Miss Murtha intimately, but I couldn't help seeing what was going on. More than once I saw her with the man in the case—we'll call him Robinson, because that wasn't his name. I recognized him, of course, as a senior, but, if he noticed me at all, he very likely didn't know I attended the university. Sometimes, but not often, he came to the house; you understand it was in the suburbs, and the old German couple that kept it didn't know Robinson's identity or bother about it; I doubt if they even knew his name. At any rate, either through ignorance or the fear of getting mixed up in the case, they didn't give any helpful information at the inquest. And Miss Murtha and I were the only boarders.

"Obviously, the affair between Miss Murtha and Robinson was none of my business, and I'd no reason to think he meant anything dishonorable. It was not long, however, before I noticed the girl seemed greatly worried and un-

happy, but though I asked her more than once if I could help her in any way, she pretended nothing was the matter, and I couldn't prove my growing suspicion.

"Then one night I came home late and heard Miss Murtha's and Robinson's voices in the little front parlor; the door was closed, and they evidently thought every one was in bed. The girl's voice was raised in an agony of supplication, and I couldn't help hearing what she said. She was imploring Robinson to keep his promises to her; what he said I didn't catch, but it seemed evasive enough." Steele paused, clenching his capable hands.

"Although," he continued, "I knew I'd be told to mind my own business, I was so mad at what I'd heard that I went outside and waited on the corner for Robinson. I needn't go into the subsequent interview; he was furious, of course; called me a filthy little eavesdropper, said how dare I meddle in his affairs, and what business it was of mine. He finished by threatening to punch my head. I admitted it was no business of mine, but, as evidently Miss Murtha had no friends up North, and she seemed in great trouble, I told him I was going to kick in and make it my business. I told him she was a decent girl, and that if he didn't treat her right I'd make it my business to communicate with her relatives in the South, brand him all over town as a blackguard, and have him kicked out of the university.

"He checked an impulse to knock my head off—something I quite expected, and which he could have done, by the way, very easily, for he was a big fellow—and changed his tune. He laughed at me, called me a fool, said I'd entirely misunderstood what I'd overheard, and that his intentions toward Miss Murtha had never been anything but honorable. He also pointed out that he'd like to see anybody believing my word against his own; that I was an insignificant nobody, that Miss Murtha was of age, and her own mistress, and that if I dared to interfere again or repeat what I'd imputed to him he'd throw me in the lake.

"I returned home, trying to think I *had* misunderstood the whole business, or, at any rate, that I'd thrown a scare into Robinson, and that he'd play fair. For I meant every word I'd said to him. The next morning, however, I found I'd tried to interfere too late, for Miss Murtha's body was found in Cayuga. She had left the house after I returned and drowned herself that night. Poor little girl! Poor little thing!" Steele paused again, his face old and careworn.

"And you said nothing?" asked Miss Armitage, in a strangled voice.

"No, I said nothing. What good would it have done? Would it have brought her back? The law doesn't punish things like that—more shame to it. As Robinson had said, Miss Murtha was of age, and her own mistress, and knew what she was doing. He would only have fouled her name, put all the blame on her; blackguards like that generally do. I didn't know the inquest would disclose the truth, and I thought only of her memory and her people, whoever they were. Afterward, when the truth came out—well, I still kept silent, but don't think it was through any consideration for *him;* it was simply because I knew he wouldn't hesitate to deny the whole business, or, if cornered, foul her name worse than it was. I could prove absolutely nothing; he had a fine reputation, and his standing in the town and college was practically unassailable. I doubt if any one would have believed me; in fact, I'm quite sure they wouldn't. Again, I repeat, it isn't the sort of thing for which the law punishes a man; I guess no law can touch it but the unwritten one. Then, you see—well, you see, the little girl loved him until the last; loved

him so much that she did away with herself rather than get him into trouble; loved him so much she wouldn't betray him, even in death. And it seemed to me——" Steele hesitated, as if searching for the fitting phrase. "Well, it seemed to me if she gave her life to keep the secret, to save him from trouble, it—it sort of wasn't my place to kick in and make it all in vain. I can't explain it exactly, but that's sort of how I felt."

"I understand," said Miss Armitage softly. "I understand. I'm sure you acted for the best. And yet, it's hard to think of a man like that getting off scot-free when that poor girl paid with everything—even her life."

"It is hard," nodded Steele. "It seems to me, though, every wrong brings its own punishment in this life, if you only wait long enough. I don't mean to moralize, for I don't know anything about such things; but that little girl certainly paid mighty heavy, and Robinson's debt may be waiting for him round the corner. Of course, I told him what I thought of him; he knows my opinion of him, but I guess that doesn't keep him awake nights."

"Well," said the little stenographer, with a sigh, "as a friend of Alice Murtha, I'm glad to learn all this; it corroborates what I've always thought. And as her friend, Mr. Smith, I thank you for all you did or tried to do in her behalf. Indeed I do!"

"Ahem—pardon me!" said another voice. And, turning, Steele and Miss Armitage saw Peggy Overton standing in the room.

Steele thought he had never seen Miss Overton look so arrestingly beautiful, for there was a patch of vivid color in her cheek, and her eyes were snappingly brilliant. She bowed to both of them with exceeding dignity and graciousness. "Good evening, Miss Armitage. Good evening, Mr. Smith. I'm sure I didn't mean to startle you. I thought my uncle was here."

Miss Armitage had turned to her desk, and seemed, of a sudden, vitally interested in the neglected time sheets, while Steele stood looking rather red and awkward, conscious of a vague confusion he could hardly define. He pulled himself together with an effort. "Mr. Claypole left for Norfolk—er—some time ago, Miss Overton. He had a business call, and was going straight home from there."

"Dear me!" said Peggy. "He never told us anything about it. Just like him, I declare! I wouldn't have called if I'd known that. At times he's the most forgetful person alive. I suppose, Mr. Smith, he forgot to tell you that my aunt wished you for dinner tonight?"

"No, he did tell me, Miss Overton. It's very, very kind of your aunt, but Mr. Claypole agreed with me that it would be impossible. You see—er—it's Friday, and we have to make up the pay roll. You see—hum—ah—we are very busy."

"Yes, so I see," replied Peggy sweetly, eying the pile of neglected papers on his desk. "Then I won't detain you." And, with another very gracious but dignified bow, which included Miss Armitage, she left the room.

Steele sat down at his desk feeling, for some unaccountable reason, strangely depressed.

"I wonder," said Miss Armitage, over her shoulder, "just how long Miss Overton was standing there before we happened to notice her."

"I'm sure I don't know," confessed Steele absently.

"She didn't seem very—pleased," said Miss Armitage to her typewriter.

"On the contrary," replied Steele, "I thought she was graciousness itself."

Miss Armitage typed for a full minute with commendable industry and silence, then: "I don't think, Mr. Smith,"

judicially, "any one will ever pin medals on you for your knowledge of women."

"Nor for anything else," admitted Steele. "But you're the second person who's accused me of knowing nothing about your sex. I'd like to know wherein I've been so awfully stupid. I can't see it."

"No, that's just it, Mr. Smith. For one thing, let me tell you that when a woman is 'graciousness itself,' it's ten to one she feels like cutting your throat. I repeat that Miss Overton was anything but pleased."

"Well," said Steele, "I suppose she had every reason not to be; we were talking when we should have been working, and that sort of thing, as a rule, doesn't appeal to stockholders."

"Yes, no doubt that's the explanation," nodded Miss Armitage to her typewriter. "How clever you are, Mr. Smith!" There was a twinkle in her sloe eyes and a dimple at the corner of her vivid mouth. "Miss Overton is such a terrible one for business; a regular slave driver and miser. And, of course, she'll go home and tell her uncle we were wasting his good electric light and gossiping instead of earning our salaries."

Steele looked suspiciously at the back of the Armitage neck—just where two dark curls disported themselves in a manner that would have proved very distracting to eyes unfilled by another image. But Steele said nothing; he might be—and no doubt was—quite stupid regarding women, but he knew at least when he was being laughed at.

"Well, all this has nothing to do with the price of putty," he observed, settling to work. "Queer, though, that the Miss Murtha I knew should turn out to be this fellow's sister. It must have been mighty tough on him. I wish you'd speak to him, Miss Armitage; you know him, and he may take from you what he certainly wouldn't from me. Drop a gentle hint that he's got to take a brace, and that his being late every day won't do. I know for a fact that Mr. Claypole has about reached the limit, and is tired warning him; the next time there's any trouble he may fire him without argument."

"Yes, I'll speak to him," promised Miss Armitage. She turned and looked curiously at Steele for a moment. "I don't think many men in your position, Mr. Smith, would trouble themselves with such a warning. Howard Murtha hates you—oh, yes, he does!—and he's tried to make things as nasty as he could for you. I'm sure he wouldn't lift a finger to save you from death itself."

"Nonsense!"

"It's not nonsense," replied the girl earnestly. "I know Howard Murtha and his blind, unreasoning hatreds, if you don't."

Steele laughed. "Well, I hope he'll get over his dislike for me. Anyway, I certainly don't wish him any hard luck."

They settled to work in earnest, making up for lost time. Steele's subconscious mind, however, still grappled with two subjects: the strange fact that he should have heard again of Alice Murtha, that her brother should be met with in this out-of-the-way little town. Also, that Howard Murtha had an elder brother who was "mixed up with gamblers and blacklegs in Philadelphia." The association of this phrase with the Harry Deeping he had known still persisted. Could it be possible Deeping's right name was Murtha? There was absolutely no reason for this wild supposition other than the fact that the elder brother lived in Philadelphia, and was a professional gambler. It seemed absurd, far-fetched; reason repudiated it, and yet he could not rid himself of the idea. He owned a dawning conviction, in fact, almost amounting to prescience, that a higher power had directed his steps in the direction of the obscure

little town of Claypole; that while he thought he was wasting time, fate had been pointing him toward the place where he would learn of the one man who could vindicate him. In short, call it what you will, Steele was becoming possessed of a conviction that sooner or later, in or about Claypole, he would get on the track of Harry Deeping or meet with him face to face. There are certain inspired moments when the least gifted among us can dimly penetrate the veil and forecast in a measure coming events; such was the case with Richard Steele.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was with the settled intention of making an exhibition of himself that Steele, the following afternoon, sought the diamond, obedient to Mr. Claypole's mandate to run the kinks out of his system. He had no desire to shine as a Simplex, and assured himself he still hated the game, and would have nothing more to do with it. Aside from all else, any public display of his old-time magic would only bring down suspicion on himself, and the sole way to stop any future invitations of the kind was to convince Mr. Claypole he couldn't tell a baseball from a cocoanut.

With this purpose firmly in mind, he had made no secret of his putative ignorance regarding the great national game, and, in consequence, his début that afternoon was regarded as something in the light of a local event. To find a young man in this time and age who didn't know anything about baseball was, to the factory hands, something unheard of, and they anticipated a lively time at Steele's expense. He came in for a lot of good-natured "joshing," and much preposterous advice, all of which he assimilated with guileless innocence; for "Smit'y," as he was called, was well liked in the big factory, and there was no malice in the fun poked at him.

Murtha, however, was an exception; his contempt was manifest, and he appeared to find a malicious pleasure in jeering at the other. "So they're going to make a ball player out of you, eh, Smith?" he sneered, joining Steele and Boggs as they made their way to the diamond.

"So it seems," sighed Steele resignedly.

"Cheer up!" said Murtha, with a sardonic grin. "We can't do any more than kill you; eh, Jimmie?"

Boggs' freckles leaped out on his face like the measles; he had not forgotten the death of the kitten, and he liked Steele. "Oh, I don't know," he said gruffly. "If I know anythin' about ball players, I guess th' kid won't make such a rotten one, at that."

From this it may be seen that though Mr. Boggs, unlike Josiah Claypole, never boasted, his knowledge as to the game and those who played it was genuine. As a matter of fact, Steele had learned long since that to Jimmie Boggs alone was due the credit of making the Simplexes the team they were, though he seemingly concurred in Mr. Claypole's opinion of himself as critic and judge. "What's th' use?" he once confided to Steele. "Th' old man's a good sport, an' he pays th' freight. If he thinks there's no ball shark in th' country like himself, why, let him! It don't hurt me none. Th' boys are all on, of course, but they wouldn't let him down for th' world. It'd be like tellin' a kid there ain't no such thing as Santa Claus. But between you an' me, Mr. Claypole can't tell a ball player from th' side of a ham."

Murtha now laughed at Boggs' reply. "So you think he won't make such a rotten one, eh? How long do you calculate it'll take him to learn? Ever have a bat in your hand, Smith?"

"Well, once or twice," confessed Steele.

"Oh, once or twice!" jeered Murtha. "Hear that, Jimmie? That's a lot of encouragement, isn't it? He knows, anyway, there's such an article. What have you been doing all your life, Smith—playing marbles and ring-around-a-rosy?"

"I've played both," replied Steele, with the utmost good humor. But now there was hint of a latent fire in his eye.

"Well," said Murtha, with studied contempt, looking Steele over from head to heel, "take my advice and stick to them, Smith, and when you grow up you may be a great help to your mother. Don't put your skin in danger for the sake of trying to make solid with Mr. Claypole. Stick to marbles and ring-around-a-rosy, for baseball's a *man's* game, Smith, and when you play it you're liable to get hurt." With another sneering laugh, Murtha moved off and began warming up behind the backstop.

"Har, har! Mirthful laughter!" growled Boggs, sotto voce, looking after Murtha with an eye full of bile. "He's as funny as a crutch! Th' big stiff! I'd like to pay his funeral expenses. Take it from me, kid, this coachin' a private team ain't no bed of roses; not when your crack pitcher's one of these stuck-up wise guys, an' happens to be related to th' boss.

"Don't you worry none about what he said; just run around a bit, get up a good sweat, and then beat it home. I wouldn't go makin' a fool of myself for his benefit; some other day mebbe when he ain't around. I wouldn't put it past him tryin' to cripple you; he ain't no friend of yourn, an' I ain't forgettin' what he done to that cat. Take it from me, he's a nasty child of misery."

But already Steele was forgetting the elaborate plan he had made; the whole familiar scene had stirred his blood; the warm spring sun and bracing air raced through his veins like liquid fire; the crack of willow meeting horsehide, the familiar shouts and cries, the whole stirring symphony of the game filled his ears to the exclusion of all else, and he seemed to be back again in the past. Mr. Claypole was right: he had been cooped up for months, and now he was like a young colt dying for exercise, aching for some outlet for the pent-up energy within him.

A couple of hefty young fellows were wielding the willow, knocking out to the infield and outfield, and, throwing off his coat, Steele borrowed a finger glove from Boggs. "I guess I'll take my chance out there," he said, with a grin. "As Murtha said, they can't do any more than kill me."

"Well, you're game, all right!" nodded Boggs approvingly. "But take it easy; take it easy, kid. Remember if your hands get knocked out it's good-by to your job. Don't get in th' way of any hot ones; pass 'em up."

Steele grinned again, spat mechanically into the palm of his glove, rubbed it round, gave his cap a hitch, his trousers another, and trotted out on the diamond, like the veteran he was. Boggs grinned as he watched him. "Crumbs!" he said. "You'd think he was a professional. He's got that stuff to th' life. Y-e-s, I guess I wasn't far off when I said I could see he wouldn't be so rotten. I can make a ball player out of that kid; yes, you bet I can!"

Steele's appearance was greeted with a round of good-natured, derisive applause, which, suddenly, turned to a roar of warning. One of the hefty gentlemen, perhaps as a sample of his humor, had uncorked a screaming liner that was making a bee line for the back of Steele's head as he trotted over second into the outfield. Steele turned, not a moment too soon nor too late, negligently speared the ball with one hand, and almost in the same instant

flung so hard and true to first that the guardian of that sack, quite overwhelmed, spilled the beans and scrambled the eggs in the most approved bush-league fashion.

"Ho-ly cat!" gasped Boggs, trying to jump out of his boots.

An amazed howl went up from the diamond: "Oh, you Smit'y! Good boy, Smit'y! How'd you do it? Let's see you put over another accident like that!"

An outraged wail came from the collapsed first sacker: "Say, Smit'y, what do you take me for, anyway? I ain't no Hal Chase!"

"No, an' never will be, you funeral!" roared Boggs. "Mebbe now you'll speed up a bit! Go to him, kid!"

"Say, what are they yelling about?" sneered Murtha, who had seen the phenomenal catch and lightning play. "What are they hollerin' for? It was nothing but an accident, and he couldn't do it again if he tried all year! A fellow can do anything if he's going to be killed, and that ball would have taken off the back of his bean if he hadn't stopped it somehow. Nothing but an accident."

"Was it?" said Boggs, his eyes still on Steele, now playing in the outfield.

"Yes, it was!"

"Mebbe that's an accident, too, eh?" asked Boggs, as the little ex-shortstop, making a great running catch, slammed the ball over the home plate. "Mebbe it's an accident to have a pair of legs an' a wing like that, eh? Accident?" he repeated excitedly. "Say, gimme a couple more accidents like that kid out there an' I'll clean up for your State champeenship! *Accident?* Say, whether you know it or not, you're lookin' at a *real* ball player; that kid can run rings round this circus without half tryin'——"

Murtha made a sneering comment.

"All right," said Boggs. "You're an awful wise guy, ain't you? I tell you that kid's a ball player! Take it from me, he was playin' ball when you was on th' business end of a feedin' bottle. Look at him! Got anythin' to say about *that?* Mebbe he ain't a speed merchant, eh? I tell you he's a *ball player!*"

Murtha said nothing, for there was absolutely nothing to say; the "accident" theory had exploded long since. For Steele had come in, filling his old berth at short, and a deadly duel was in progress between him and two hefty young pinch hitters. Turn about, they were trying to find the outfield through the ex-Badger, trying their level best, with sizzling grounders and crashing line drives, to make him back up. But not an inch did Steele give, and they might as well have tried to puncture a stone wall. He accepted everything within his legitimate territory, often going outside to execute a hair-raising one-hand stop; not a man present had ever seen such an exhibition, and they stood around, open-mouthed, pop-eyed, and silent, too impressed even to cheer.

Steele was playing like a demon, like one inspired; he had forgotten everything but his old love for the game and the fact that his "soup bone" was as good as ever. All the old fear and doubt had vanished, and he felt as if he could have stood off the "Dutchman" and "Ty" at their best. These two bushers were not even extending him, and, presently, they acknowledged defeat with a grin, and threw aside their bats.

Amid the same impressive silence, Steele pulled off his glove and walked in like one in a trance.

"Pretty good, Smith!" said Murtha, with a white sneer. "Pretty good. You've certainly pulled the joke on us. But it takes something more than that to make a ball player. Let's see your stickwork; I'll try you out."

Boggs said nothing, but there was a grim light in his flinty eyes as Steele, mechanically trying over a bunch of

bats, picked out one, balanced it a moment, rubbed his hands in the dirt, gave the characteristic hitch to trousers and cap, and stepped to the plate, while Murtha began to wind up on the mound.

The first one over was what Josiah Claypole had enthusiastically characterized as a "teaser," a ball that floated up as if in a groove, then dropped suddenly. Steele stepped out, swung savagely, missed cleanly, and spun round. He gave his cap another hitch, pawed the dirt with restless feet, and waited. The white sneer had widened on Murtha's lips.

"Take your time, kid, an' wait him out," said Boggs, in a husky aside. "An' watch out he don't try to bean you!"

The big pitcher unwound again, and this time it was a straight ball, that burned the air and thudded into the backstop's mitt, Steele having again missed cleanly. He grinned. "Got nothing but some smoke," he said to himself.

The third was another "teaser," and Steele fouled it off. His eye, long out of practice, was coming into its own; his old-time judgment of pace and distance was returning. He waited confidently for the next, blithely picked it off his ear, and slammed it into the left-field bleachers. The next he sent crashing through the box into deep center, and the third went the same way, never to return—the longest hit ever seen on the field.

"Come on, now!" encouraged the ex-Badger, with a grin. "Loosen up, and let's see what you've got. Turn out your whole bag of tricks."

The sneer had vanished from Murtha's face, and he settled down to pitch as, perhaps, he had never pitched in his life. As with the two pinch hitters, however, he might as well have tried to get past a stone wall. He was trying to outguess a man who had hit around three hundred in the major leagues, and to whom this was nothing but the simplest of batting practice; he had sized up all Murtha's "stuff," and now proceeded to pound it all over the lot with a deliberation and accuracy that smacked of first-degree murder. Finally, he began to bunt, and, try as Murtha would, he could not put the third strike over. Then the big pitcher began to tire, and grow wild.

"Say, is this a game of bally cricket?" shouted Boggs to Murtha. "Tryin' to throw your wing out? You couldn't fan him if you tried all year. You're up against a big leaguer, or I'm a liar!"

Steele turned, at the words, while Murtha, taking careful aim, his face convulsed with passion, made a deliberate attempt to "bean" him. Steele turned at the warning shout, instinctively trying to throw up a protecting arm; but he was too late, and the ball catching him fairly under the jaw, he dropped in his tracks as though shot.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Steele awoke with his throat on fire from the whisky Boggs had poured down him; to offset this, he had been given a "chaser" of water—the entire contents of a bucket with which the coach, ever lavish of hand, had drenched him from head to foot.

"I knew he'd try to bean you!" exclaimed Boggs. "It was stickin' out all over him. Thanks be to glory!" he added fervently, as Steele struggled to his feet. "Wan inch more to th' right an' you'd have been deader'n Solomon himself. How are you feelin', kid?"

"Pretty rocky," confessed Steele. He felt sick, and under his ear there was a lump that seemed the size of an ostrich egg. "That was some wallop! What hit me, anyway?"

"That nasty child of misery," said Boggs, with an oath, employing his favorite term for Murtha. "He done it on purpose, too; I seen him hop th' pill

deliberate th' minute you turned. I told you I wouldn't put it past him tryin' to cripple you, but I didn't think he'd try murder. Of course, he sprung th' accident wheeze; says he threw just as you turned, an' couldn't help it. But it's a black lie, an' none knows it better'n him. If he hadn't beat it home I guess th' boys would have lynched him."

"Well, it might have been an accident," said Steele. "It's more than possible, so let it go at that. Give him the benefit of the doubt."

Boggs snorted. "Doubt? There ain't no doubt to it! I seen him with my two eyes an' so did half a dozen of th' boys. He made a good try for cold-blooded, first-degree murder; that's what he done."

Steele made no reply. He understood now that he was in the little dressing room under the grand stand, carried thither by Boggs. Outside, he could hear a confused murmur of many voices.

"Well, what are you goin' to do about it?" asked Boggs.

"About Murtha? Nothing."

"Nothing!" snorted the red-haired coach. "Say, look here; that guy needs a good beatin' up, an' if you can't do it yourself, say th' word, an' I know a whole bunch that'll do it for you; yes, proud an' happy, too. You've made yourself solid with th' boys, an' Murtha's queered himself for good; he never was liked, an' this mucker play's finished him. Relative or no relative of th' boss, he'd better get off this team before he's kicked off, for there ain't a man who'll stick with him. Hear that?"

The confused murmur from outside grew louder.

"That's them," nodded Boggs, "an' they're waitin' for you to show yourself. They're goin' to make you captain of th' team or know th' reason why."

"Me?"

"Yes, you! Look here, Smith," added Boggs, "it ain't none of my business, of course—I mean why you pulled this awful bull about not knowin' th' game. But between you an' me if you ain't played up there," meaning the major leagues, "my name ain't Boggs! I ain't askin' no questions, understand, but you know as well as me that for you to be wastin' your time with these bushers is nothin' but a crime. Why you ain't playin' up there where you belong an' wearin' di'monds is more'n I can tell, and it's your business, not mine. But if you want th' captaincy of this team, why, it's yours for th' askin'. These boys knows you're good, but they don't know just how good you are. But I know you belong up there, an' that if you wasn't a star, then you ought to be."

Steele looked Boggs in the eyes. "You're right, Jimmie. I belong up there—or, rather, I did. My name isn't Smith." Strange that it should be to freckle-faced, broken-nosed Jimmie Boggs he should first make confession; strange that the harder way should be gained at last by no secret, private path, but the most open and public. For Steele, opening the dressing-room door, turned to the old coach and added: "What I've got to say to you, Jimmie, I must say to all."

A great crowd had congregated before the grand stand, and it was composed not only of players and substitutes, but the many who had heard of Steele's phenomenal playing and Murtha's dastardly action. A spontaneous cheer went up as the former appeared with Boggs, and there followed an incessant cry of "Smit'y! Smit'y! Oh, you Smit'y!" Mingled with this were threats against Murtha; jeers, imprecations, catcalls, and much hearty advice how best to pay him out. Then an individual with a stentorian voice—Steele recognized him as his friend, Tobacco Chin—roared out: "We want Smit'y

for captain! We want Smit'y for captain! We want Smit'y, Smit'y, Smit'y! Who's all right? Smit'y! Smit'y! Oh, you Smit'y! Speech! Speech! Speech!" And the cry was taken up to the accompaniment of waving arms and stamping feet, until it swelled into a mighty chant, above which it was utterly impossible for anything else to be heard.

Steele found himself on the topmost step of the flight leading to the grand stand, looking down on the sea of faces, the forest of waving arms; he was very pale, bareheaded, and bedraggled, and his lips trembled with emotion as he gazed on this strange demonstration, this great and spontaneous tribute to the popularity and esteem he had earned among his fellow workers and townsmen; a popularity he had little suspected until that moment, and which he now considered won under false colors.

"Oh, you Smit'y! Speech! Speech!" roared the crowd.

Steele nerved himself for the task before him; his voice trembled at first, but soon steadied and strengthened as he threw back his shoulders and looked the crowd in the eye.

"Boys," he began, "I needn't start with the usual apologies about not being prepared to make a public speech; you'll soon find out for yourselves just how rotten I am at it, and that it's the first one I ever made in public—the last, too, I guess. But I'm here to say something, something I've been trying to find the nerve to say for a long time. You ask me to be your captain——"

Cheers, and cries of "Yes! Yes! You bet we do! You're th' boy for us, Smit'y! There ain't a player like you in Claypole, an' never will be!"

"You ask me to be your captain," continued Steele, raising his voice, "and I refuse! One moment, please; hear me out. I refuse because it's impossible. You offer me an honor which I appreciate more than I can say, but which I can't accept. You're offering it to not the man you know, but the man you think you know. You wouldn't offer it to a man who's been kicked out of baseball for taking bribe money. You don't want that sort of man to lead you, no matter what star article of ball he puts up.

"Boys, you've all heard of Scrappy Steele, of the Badgers, the man who was accused of taking ten thousand to throw the world's series to the Manhattans; the man who was expelled from the United States League. You remember him, and the rotten play he made, a play that, I dare say, cost many of you a lot of hard-earned money. Yes, you remember him; all the world does, and so do I. That's the sort of man the world can't forget any more than it can forget Judas Iscariot or Benedict Arnold. And, boys, that man's speaking to you now; I'm Scrappy Steele, the outcast Badger."

A profound and paralyzed silence greeted these words; men eyed one another, lips moved, but no sound was uttered; the audience, taken wholly by surprise, seemed unable to grasp the situation.

"So, you see," continued Steele, rather unsteadily for a moment, "how impossible the whole thing is; you now see the honor was offered to a man you didn't know, who gained your good will under false colors, and whom, now that you know his record, you will very properly consider beneath contempt. You also see there was nothing phenomenal in my play to-day, that I was paid for playing big-league ball when you fellows were earning your living at the bench. It's no credit to me that I could hold your best pinch hitters and knock your best pitcher out of the box. And, while I'm on the subject, let me say that in my opinion he's a mighty good pitcher for a semiprofessional team, and that I'd be sorry if through

any act of mine he shouldn't get anything but a fair deal. I don't want him to get in wrong; being hit with a pitched ball is all in the game, something that's liable to happen to any one and at any time. Murtha says it was an accident, and his word should go. It does go, as far as I'm concerned.

"I don't want you fellows to think that I came out here to-day with any idea of showing off; I didn't want to play, for I thought I was through with the game, and told myself I'd never touch another ball as long as I lived. But I found the game stronger than I, and once I got going I forgot everything but my old love for it. The game doesn't want me, it seems, but I still want it; I found that out to-day. You all are ball players, so you may understand.

"In conclusion let me say that Mr. Claypole, my employer, doesn't know my true name, and who I am, any more than you fellows did; I imposed on him as I imposed on you. If he'd known I was Steele, of the Badgers, he wouldn't have given me a job, for no employer wants a man with my record. But I wanted a job, and that's the reason I didn't tell him who I was.

"I—I guess that's about all I've got to say, and I thank you for hearing me out. I want you to understand I'm making no grand-stand play for sympathy; I don't want any sympathy, even if it was coming to me—which it's not. And, as a last word, because you've been my friends, I want to say I didn't throw that last game of the world's series nor the first, nor any of them; I'm innocent of that and the bribery charge. I've said all this before, but they didn't believe me up there, and now I'm not asking you to believe me, either, for I haven't any proof. A day may come, however, when I will have proof; if it doesn't, well, no matter. But I want you to know that no matter what the world says about me, none of you fellows need be ashamed of having known and played with Scrappy Steele, of the Badgers—though he can only give his mere word that he never threw a game nor took a cent of bribe money in his life."

Amid the same utter silence, Steele, white-faced and erect, descended the steps and walked swiftly through the crowd, which parted at his approach, until he came to the highroad skirting the field. The crowd looked after him, watching mechanically until he had vanished round a bend in the highway, and still not a word was spoken. Once or twice Boggs opened his lips as if to speak, but no words issued forth.

Steele walked swiftly, automatically, his brain in a whirl, his eyes unseeing; he hardly remembered what he had said in that impromptu speech, for it seemed as if another, not himself, had acted and spoken. He knew, however, that somehow the long silence of months had been shattered at last, and that he was now launched on the harder way, where there was no turning back; the only thing now to be done was resign his position with the Claypole Company and write its owner a letter of apology and farewell. The going would be easier if he saw none of them again. He would go home to his boarding house and write that letter now; he would leave Claypole that night. The end of the impossible golden dream had come.

The singing in Steele's ears now resolved itself into a rhythmic beat which presently became a roar punctuated by several ear-splitting blasts; a series of horrible grinding noises ensued, a blinding cloud of pungent dust, and Steele came out of his trance, to find Peggy Overton staring down at him over the windshield of the Claypole *Bobcat*.

"Well, you're a nice one, Mr. Smith, I must say!" she exclaimed. "You've almost made me strip my gears, to say nothing of the scare I got. Where are your eyes and ears, sir? You take up

the whole road like a circus parade, and you'd have walked headfirst into the radiator if I hadn't braked my head off. It isn't your fault, I'm sure, if one more murder hasn't been added to the record of us 'careless' motorists."

"I beg your pardon," said Steele humbly. "I'm sure I hadn't any criminal designs on your gears or radiator; the fact is, I didn't see you at all. I was —er—thinking."

"Does it come as hard as all that?" asked Peggy sympathetically. "Then take my advice, Mr. Smith, and don't do any more thinking on the public highway. But, there! I fully and freely forgive you, and won't scold any more. Somehow, I find it quite impossible to be nasty on such a glorious evening. Look at the trees! Aren't they beautiful? And just hear the little birds!"

"Yes, the trees and the little birds are very nice," said Steele. "I was just noticing them."

Peggy looked at him. "Your enthusiasm is so contagious, Mr. Smith! You don't seem very bobbish."

"No? Well, I can't say I feel precisely bobbish—whatever that is."

"What have you been doing, playing ball? You must have been taking it very seriously, for you seem to have perspired—well, rather freely."

Steele fingered his wilted collar, and eyed his wrinkled clothes—the result of the Boggs' "chaser."

"You look," added Peggy critically, "as if you'd walked into a horse trough. Was it the result of thinking?"

"Yes, but not on my part. And it was a bucket of water, not a trough."

"And what's that behind your ear?" exclaimed Peggy, as Steele turned his head. "I declare—— Why, Mr. Smith, you've got the mumps!"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Overton, but I have not got the mumps," replied Steele, with dignity. "I never had them in my life."

"All the more reason, then, why you should have them now," replied Peggy promptly. "They are the mumps, sir! Oh, yes, they are; don't contradict me, for I know all about them. I tell you they are! Let me see. . . . There, I told you so——"

"Ouch!" exclaimed Steele, as a small, investigating finger touched the ostrich egg. "It's not mumps, I tell you! I got hit with a ball."

"Are you sure?" asked Peggy doubtfully. "Quite, quite sure?"

"Quite. If you'd been on the receiving end you wouldn't have any doubt about it. You can't be mistaken when you get hit with a baseball—at least, I never was yet."

"Then I'm very, very sorry, and humbly apologize," said Peggy contritely, the devil of mischief hidden by the long, thick lashes of her demure golden eyes. "Forgive me for poking it with my finger; I always like to poke things like that. Did it hurt very much? And so *that* explains the bucket of water! Were you trying to knock out a home run with your head, Mr. Smith? Forgive me again; I don't mean to laugh; really and truly I don't. See, I'm quite solemn, for I know it must have hurt dreadfully. But, really, it's your own fault, Mr. Smith, for allowing my uncle to make you play a game you don't know anything about; you shouldn't encourage him in his foolishness. I declare if he had his way Aunt Phœbe and Uncle Mose and myself would be playing one-old-cat in the dining room evenings for his amusement. But I'm delaying you, Mr. Smith. Where are you going?"

"Going? Er—nowhere in particular."

"Well, I've never been there," said Peggy, "so let's go and see what it's like. Turn over the engine and jump in."

"Jump in?"

"Yes. Here," said Peggy, patting the crimson-upholstered seat at her side.

Steele hesitated. "I—er—that is, you see—hum—ah——"

"Now, Mr. Smith!" warned Peggy, holding up an admonitory finger. "I've noticed that when you say 'Hum! Ah!' and so forth you're always putting yourself to the unnecessary trouble of thinking up something that isn't so. Oh, yes, I've noticed that! Now, we're going for a ride to the place called 'nowhere in particular,' and that settles it; so please crank the engine without any more humming and ahing!"

"With all the pleasure in the world, O Princess," replied Steele, with a bow. "You command; I obey." And, cranking the engine, he jumped into the seat at the girl's side.

"That's ever so much better," nodded Peggy approvingly. "And—and it's very nice of you to call me princess. Now, hey, for Nowhere in Particular!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"Miss Armitage is a lovely girl—don't you think so?" asked Peggy suddenly.

"I—I beg your pardon?"

"I say Miss Armitage is a lovely girl," repeated Peggy loudly and almost aggressively.

"Oh, yes! Yes, indeed!" agreed Steele.

Peggy relapsed into silence again. After an exhilarating burst of speed, the *Bobcat* had left the highroad, and now, at an aimless, inconsequential pace, was threading a byway flanked by tall hedges and nodding trees, looking bravely in their new spring dress, all green and gold in the evening sun. Peggy handled the high-powered car like a veteran, and Steele, whose knowledge of motors was anything but profound, admired the graceful, effortless ease with which she manipulated wheel and levers.

"Did you work very late last night?" pursued Peggy at length, apparently entirely interested in the scenery. "Do you work as late as that every night, Mr. Smith?"

"No, just on Fridays."

"With—Miss Armitage?"

"Yes. She helps me."

"Does she, really? With what?"

"Why, the pay roll, of course!"

"Oh, yes, of course," agreed Peggy. "How stupid of me! I suppose you couldn't do it alone, could you?"

"Well, I suppose I could; but it's easier with her, you know."

"Yes, I know. And nicer, too, I suppose?" said Peggy.

"Nicer?"

"Yes, of course. I'm sure I wouldn't like to work alone in that big office after everybody had left. It must be ever so much nicer to have company—some one to talk to."

Steele was about to reply that Miss Armitage and himself hadn't any time to talk, when making up the big pay roll; remembering, however, the previous evening and its interruption, he remained silent.

"I should think," added Peggy at length, "Miss Armitage would be afraid to go home alone so late as that—for it must be very late when you get through."

"Sometimes it is," said Steele. "But then I always go home with her."

For some unaccountable reason the *Bobcat* swerved suddenly and viciously. "Oh," said Peggy, "so you always go home with her? How very obliging you are, Mr. Smith—at times!"

"Why," said Steele, "really, there's nothing very obliging about it, for we live in the same neighborhood."

"Oh, you live in the same neighborhood? What a charming coincidence! Then, of course, you must see a good deal of Miss Armitage. And now, Mr. Smith, by the way, will you tell me what you were confiding to Miss Armitage the other night when I entered the office? I mean about Alice Murtha. You and Miss Armitage were so very busy

over the pay roll that I'm sure I was there a good five minutes before you had time to notice me, and I couldn't help overhearing something; in fact, if you want to know the truth, I listened deliberately. For if Miss Armitage knew Alice Murtha, why, so did I, and, moreover, being distantly related to her, I'm sure I've at least an equal right to know about her."

Steele looked uncomfortable. "It's —it's not a very nice story to repeat, Miss Overton. I'm sure you gathered the gist of it."

"I'm sure I did not," said Peggy promptly. "Anyway, that's got nothing to do with it; you told it to Miss Armitage, and I'm sure I've got as much right to hear it as she. If you can tell it to her, you can tell it to me; I'm no more a child than she is."

"I didn't deliberately set out to tell it to Miss Armitage," expostulated Steele. "It followed naturally when it turned out she had known Miss Murtha; otherwise I wouldn't have thought of mentioning it. It sort of followed naturally."

"Well, then, let it sort of follow naturally with me," retorted Peggy, "for it turns out I also knew Alice Murtha, and that she was a cousin of mine; I don't know how far removed, but still a cousin. Of course, Mr. Smith," she added loftily, as he was silent, "if you don't wish to, that's quite another matter. I'm sure I can't claim the same degree of friendship with you as Miss Armitage evidently enjoys."

"You are quite wrong there," said Steele warmly. "That has nothing to do with it."

"It has everything to do with it!" retorted Peggy, with superior warmth. "I've more right to know than Miss Armitage, and if you won't tell me it's simply because you—you don't trust me; because you don't consider me enough of a friend. Oh, yes, it is! That's the true reason, and I refuse to believe otherwise. I'm not precisely a fool, Mr. Smith! You haven't been near the house any more than you could help, during the past month; you're always making the excuse about being busy—though it seems you waste half the night talking to Miss Armitage, when you should be working——"

"That only happened the one night. We got talking about Howard Murtha and——"

"Oh, of course!" interrupted Peggy, tugging viciously at the unfortunate wheel. "You've every right to talk in the office and out, and so has Miss Armitage, for that matter—I'd like to see any one try to stop her talking. And you've every right to be alone with her, walk home with her, and—and see her as much as ever you please; you've every right, and—and no one's disputing it, I least of all! Why, it's absolutely nothing to me, only——"

"Of course it isn't," agreed Steele humbly.

"Only," continued Peggy, her golden eyes flashing, "you needn't be odiously hypocritical about it, and—and pretend you're worked so hard that you've no longer a moment to yourself!"

Steele rubbed his chin in silence, quite at loss to account for this sudden and inexplicable storm.

"I—I detest hypocrites!" added Peggy violently. "I can stand anything but hypocrisy! And—and so if you don't want to be friendly any more, why, just say so, and be done with it; I'm sure nobody wants to compel you! But either we're friends or we're not, and if we are, why, then, you won't pretend to be busy when you're not, and you'll agree that I've quite as much right as Miss Armitage to hear about my own cousin. I'll pass over the obvious truth that if you were going to tell any one about it, the first person certainly should have been me, and emphatically *not* Miss Armitage."

"Well," replied Steele humbly, "I

really don't understand what we're quarreling about——"

"Who is quarreling, Mr. Smith?" inquired Peggy loftily. "I ask you to remember that it takes two to quarrel—and certainly I'm not one of them. I never quarrel. Quarreling presupposes an interest in the subject or person which, in this instance, I emphatically lack. I'm merely endeavoring to point out quite calmly and dispassionately the obvious truth that if we are to be friends I am entitled to be told something that concerns me far more than it does Miss Armitage."

"Well," said Steele patiently, "as I was about to add, so long as you insist upon looking at it that way, I'll repeat the conversation I had with Miss Armitage."

"I don't wish to hear what Miss Armitage said," replied Peggy, with dignity. "I simply wish to hear about my own cousin—something I've a perfect right to know."

Thereupon Steele, without further words, related briefly the story he told to the little stenographer. And, as she listened, all the mischief and petulance died out of Peggy's golden eyes, and they became very sober and reflective. And when Steele had finished she said nothing for some time; and now the golden eyes were very hard and bright, the cleft chin determined. And when at length she spoke, her voice was low but full of an inflexible purpose.

"Thank you, Mr. Smith. Of course, I suspected the hidden tragedy of my cousin's life—I mean the love affair that went wrong. Her suicide and its motive were no secret, but until now I didn't know the details. You have omitted one thing, however; one very important fact."

"And what is that?"

"The name of the person responsible for her death," replied Peggy slowly. "You call him Robinson—but that wasn't his name?"

"No, that wasn't his name."

"What was it, then?"

"That I can't tell you."

Peggy's eyes flashed. "You told Miss Armitage, yet you can't tell me?"

"Pardon me; I did not tell Miss Armitage."

Peggy eyed him steadily a long moment. "Well, then, I insist upon knowing, anyway. It is my right to know. You may have done right in concealing it at the time—I'm not saying you didn't—but that time is long past, and——"

"And what?" asked Steele. "Why do you wish to know his name? What good can it do? If the law couldn't punish the man then, it certainly can't punish him now. What's past is past—it seems so to me. That was the only black mark in Robinson's life, and, to the best of my knowledge, he's gone straight ever since. He's built up a fine name and career for himself, and I haven't the right to knock the props from under them. It doesn't seem so to me. It isn't for me to do it, and I won't do it."

"Oh, very well," said Peggy stiffly. "You needn't get so angry about it!"

"I'm not in the least angry."

"You are!" contradicted Peggy flatly. "You know you are! And there's certainly something very queer in all this, to say the least; you admit the man was no friend of yours, yet you persist in shielding him. Is it because you're afraid of him?"

Steele laughed shortly. "I see you don't understand, Miss Overton; perhaps I don't understand myself, for that matter. I admit I may be wrong now in concealing Robinson's true name, just as I may have been wrong from the start. Anyway, I can't give him away; that's how I feel, and so there's no use talking about it."

"I insist upon knowing!" said Peggy determinedly. "You must tell me! I say you shall! You shall! I warn you I've never been defeated yet in any-

thing I've set my heart on—and I'm determined to find out that man's true name!"

"Then I'm afraid you're doomed to disappointment so far as I'm concerned."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, quite."

Peggy bestowed a sidelong glance on his square jaw and firm, clean-cut lips; then for the next few minutes she endeavored by all the arts of which her sex is mistress to wring or cajole the information from him. And finally, rather flushed of face and brilliant of eye, she unwillingly admitted herself defeated—for the time being, of course. Only for the time being.

"You are absolutely the rudest, most disobliging, stubborn creature I ever met!" she declared warmly. "I hadn't the faintest idea any one could be so—so nasty! I've a good mind to put you down here and let you walk all the way back to Claypole; it would just serve you right! I *hate* you, Mr. Smith!" Succeeding this there was silence for quite five minutes while the unfortunate wheel came in for some more vicious handling that was entirely unmerited.

Resumed Peggy at length with a very superior air: "But don't flatter yourself, Mr. Smith, that I'm so easily beaten as that, for if you won't tell me I know one who will. Mr. Somerville, you say, was at college the same time as yourself, and so he must know all about the case, though he never mentioned it—— Now—now, I wonder why he didn't?" she finished suddenly, half to herself.

Steele's face was calm and unruffled. "No doubt because he didn't know Miss Murtha was related to you. She never visited you at Claypole?"

"No. The only times I saw her I went to Nashville. I admit we were anything but intimate. You are quite right; Mr. Somerville would have no reason for knowing she was distantly related to me, for I never had occasion to mention the fact. And, of course, he didn't know her in Ithaca."

"No, of course not," said Steele calmly. "So you see, evidently that is why he never mentioned the case to you. I doubt if you'll learn anything from him, either, for I'm sure I was the only one who knew Robinson's true name."

"Well, you may be sure I'll ask Mr. Somerville, anyway," retorted Peggy. "He may know quite as much as you. If not, he'll do his best to find out when he learns Alice Murtha was distantly related to me. He'll recognize the justice of my desire. Mr. Somerville is never nasty or disobliging, and I'm sure there isn't anything he wouldn't do if I asked him. Quite different, you see, from some other people I could mention."

"Oh, quite," agreed Steele.

"And I won't have to wait very long, either, to find out," added Peggy triumphantly, "for Mr. Somerville, by the way, is coming on a visit to his aunt."

"His aunt?"

"Yes, his aunt," said Peggy calmly. "Mrs. Daintree, whom, by the way, you've never yet visited, being, of course, 'too busy.'"

Steele was thinking, hard and swift; reviewing the strange situation and all its possibilities; for the coming of Bob Somerville to Claypole might spell tragedy. It was not impossible; all the ingredients would be present, and thoughtless handling might bring them in contact, producing an explosion.

"Look here, Miss Overton," he said suddenly, "it seems to me there's a serious contingency in this case of Alice Murtha, which I think you've overlooked; I mean—her brother."

"Explain yourself, Mr. Smith."

"I mean that from what I know of Howard Murtha—and I do know something—it seems to me the life of the

person responsible for Alice Murtha's death wouldn't be worth much if her brother happened to meet him."

Peggy was silent. "That's quite true," she said soberly, at length. "Howard always had a violent temper, to say the least, and I understand his conduct became worse after his sister's death. He was extremely fond of her. For that reason we've borne with his execrable temper more than we would, perhaps. I know that of late he has brooded a good deal over the tragedy, for he was young enough at the time it happened, and could hardly realize it as he must do now." She eyed him intently. "Are you inferring, Mr. Smith, that—that it's possible Howard Murtha will meet with the man you call Robinson? Do you mean——"

"I mean," said Steele, "if you should happen to find out from Mr. Somerville the true name of the man Robinson—which I very much doubt—you must be careful to keep it from Murtha, for otherwise you don't know what might happen. It seems to me that Murtha, when he gets a fixed idea in his head, is capable of about anything, for he doesn't stop to think; in fact, seems incapable of thinking. It's quite possible that if he happened to learn the man's true name, he would drop everything and set about hunting him down; the clew would give him a stimulant that has been lacking so far."

"It is possible," admitted Peggy, without conviction. "It might and it might not. At any rate, if I learn anything from Mr. Somerville, I'll do as you say, and keep it from Howard Murtha. I suppose," she finished shortly, "that's why you're afraid to trust me with it?"

Steele offered no reply, and presently, the sun having almost set, Peggy turned the car and headed back the way they had come. "I'm sure you'll be glad to meet Mr. Somerville," she remarked. "You can talk over old times. He'll be glad to meet a college mate, even if you weren't in the same class."

"He may and he may not," said Steele. "At any rate, I won't be here when he comes."

She turned and looked at him. "Won't be here? Why? What do you mean?"

Steele braced himself. "That I'm leaving Claypole to-night."

"F-for good?"

"Or evil," said Steele. "At all events, forever!"

Peggy suddenly turned her head away, and gave her whole attention to the wheel; she seemed to have some difficulty in breathing, and the vivid bloom had left her cheek. She was silent a long time; at length she laughed, a laugh that was quite hard and artificial. "Of course, this little place must bore you dreadfully, Mr. Smith, after New York. I only wonder you remained so long; why, in fact, you stayed at all. Of course, you must have other and greater interests up North, though you have never spoken of them."

It was Steele's turn to laugh, a laugh that sounded equally hard and artificial. "Interests? I think you know very well that, as I told your uncle, I haven't friends or relatives up North or anywhere else. I think you know why I stayed here—or one reason why; because I was dead broke, and only too glad to accept your uncle's generous offer." His voice deepened. "No, Claypole hasn't bored me, Miss Overton; far from it. In fact, I think the past few months are just the happiest I've ever known, and I'll never forget Claypole and its people—especially the Claypole family. I'm not much good at words, Miss Overton, and so I can't say what your uncle's kindness, your friendship, and—and everything has meant to me. I'm going away not because I wish to, but because I must."

"Because you—must?"

"Yes." He looked her in the eyes. "You see, I'm nothing but a rank impostor, and I've deceived you all shamefully from the very start. My name isn't Smith, but Richard Steele, and I'm the person whom your uncle brackets with Judas Iscariot and Benedict Arnold. I'm Scrappy Steele, the outcast Badger. There, now you know!"

"Dear me!" sighed Peggy, "it's taken you a fearfully long time to tell me something I knew long, long ago."

CHAPTER XX.

Peggy had deliberately stopped the car in the byway they were threading, and now she settled back in the seat, folded her hands, and looked demurely at Steele's utterly blank face.

"Yes," she added, "it's certainly taken you a fearfully long time to tell me something I already knew, Mr. Steele. Really, I was beginning to despair about you ever confiding in me. No doubt, however, you told it to Miss Armitage long ago. No? Well, then, I'm ahead of her in that, at least. I think it's high time we had a little talk on the subject of your identity, and if you really wish to know the truth, I came out this afternoon for that very purpose; our meeting was not accident, but design, you see. I wished to tell you of Mr. Somerville's expected arrival, believing that would prompt confession; in fact, you would have no choice. My little plan, you must admit, has succeeded admirably. I believe I remarked once before that your knowledge of my sex was—well, absolutely nil. We are very deep, Mr. Steele; very deep, indeed."

Steele found words at last. "Do you think I was going away, and admitted my identity at last simply because I heard Somerville was coming, and preferred confession to exposure?"

"It looks that way, Mr. Steele, doesn't it?"

"It may look that way, Miss Overton, but it isn't so. You'll find out that all Claypole now knows who I am, for I practically told the whole town this afternoon at the ball field. No, it wasn't fear of Mr. Somerville or any one else. I've been trying for a long time to tell, had made up my mind to it, but couldn't bring myself to the sticking point until to-day at the ball field; they asked me to be their captain, and—and then I told them the truth."

"I think you might have told it to me—long ago," said Peggy. "Why didn't you?"

"Isn't the answer obvious? If I had —— Well, if I had you wouldn't have spoken to me. You wouldn't have wanted anything to do with me," said Steele harshly. "If Mr. Claypole, for instance, had known I was Steele, of the Badgers, he would have kicked me down the stairs—or tried to. You know what he thinks of me—the real me; I'm sure he's said it often enough."

"I'm sure he has," agreed Peggy. "And you needed the position?"

"Yes, I needed the position."

"And for that reason you said nothing? It was for your bread and butter? That was—all?"

"No, it wasn't all!" said Steele harshly. "That was the least part of it. I——" He looked away.

"Yes?" said Peggy.

"Well, it wasn't the loss of the position at all, for I could have got another somehow. But it meant losing something I couldn't replace; it meant the loss of your friendship, Miss Overton; your kindness, and Miss Phœbe's and Mr. Claypole's—everything that somehow made living worth while. I was brought in, and—and treated like one of the family by you and your people, and—and it meant a lot to me. I never had much of that sort of thing,

and—and after the game with the Manhattans, people haven't been overanxious to take my hand; I guess you know how I stand with the public. I know it was mean and cowardly to accept your friendship under false colors, and I've no excuse to offer, except to say that I didn't plan the deception." He then told why he had assumed the name of Smith on the *Thomas Jefferson*, and how he had resumed his own name in the Norfolk hospital.

"So, you see, one lie led to another," he finished quietly, "as they say it always does. I didn't want you to know I was the person who boarded the *Jefferson*, thinking it the Weehawken ferry; and I didn't want to admit I took the trip because I was too drunk to know what I was doing. The fact that it was the first time in my life I was in such a condition would have nothing to do with it; quite naturally you wouldn't wish to continue the acquaintance. So, you see, I deceived you all along the line."

"Yes, so I see," said Peggy. "You deceived me quite successfully about being the person who thought he was on the Weehawken ferry," her lips twitching slightly, "but you didn't deceive me at all as regards your name and identity. I suspected it on board the *Jefferson;* I sat opposite you, remember, and had a good opportunity of watching your face; when Mr. Greenlees and the rest of them were giving it to Richard Steele, of the Badgers, your expression—was, well, illuminative. You see, unlike the others, I had been present the previous day at the Athletic Grounds; I saw the game, and—you. And though at first I couldn't remember where I'd seen you before—I told you your face seemed familiar—it wasn't very long before it came back to me.

"Yes, even before the wreck of the *Jefferson* I was quite sure you were Steele, of the Badgers, and had taken the name of Smith to avoid notoriety. But I didn't know you assumed your real name again, nor that there were two Smiths on board, and so when the papers reported 'R. Smith' as among the missing, I thought it certainly must be you. It never occurred to me to inquire at the hospitals for Richard Steele. So, you see," concluded Peggy, quite simply, "your deception was entirely unnecessary where I was concerned, and if I said nothing it was because I preferred you should tell me yourself—as I knew you would some day. You being Richard Steele, of the Badgers, had no terrors for me, and so you are quite wrong in saying that if I'd known who you were I wouldn't have wished to continue the acquaintance; for I *did* know, and I *have* desired to continue it, haven't I?"

"Yes, and—and that's what I can't understand!" blurted out Steele, passing a hand before his eyes. "This has sort of knocked me out, Miss Overton. I can't get it through my head that you knew all the time, yet didn't show me up. What can I say? You've been mighty generous, and—and merciful and——"

"It—it was neither generosity nor—nor mercy," whispered Peggy, suddenly all shyness and fear, and with the vivid bloom dyeing her cheek. And now her eyes had dropped to the hands working nervously in her lap, the slim white fingers twining and intertwining as though with an unceasing flux of thought.

But Steele saw nothing of all this, barely heard, in fact, for he was staring out stonily into the gathering twilight whose coming shadows were but as a reflection of those closing in on his own heart. Here and there amid the drowsy, nodding trees a bird was starting a fitful lullaby as the night scents stole out from thicket and hedge, while down the long vista of the byway the west stood out an arch of

gold and coral, a tympanum cut from the evening sky. But to the girl sitting so passionately yet with furtive, working hands, that sun which had marked the day's transfigured and immortal passing, seemed a burning, pulsing heart, fitting replica of her own, and something for all the world to see. For it was not given her Southern blood to comprehend the being one thing inside and another outside. Who, however, can give vision to the blind?

"It was neither generosity nor mercy," repeated the girl, and now her voice had steadied and the hands lay quiet. "I—value your friendship, Mr. Steele; and, valuing it, is it necessary for me to say I don't believe you capable in the smallest degree of dishonesty or treachery toward any one?"

Steele's eyes leaped back from the shadows, and for the moment held her own; what they found there, or thought they found, made him go white and very silent. He groped painfully for words. "It is—nice of you to say that. I thank you," he said, at last. "It is nice of you to say it, though all the world has said otherwise."

"And it is absolutely nothing to me what the world says," replied the girl.

"Nor what—Mr. Somerville says?"

"Nor what Mr. Somerville says.'

"Then that is faith, indeed!" exclaimed Steele grimly. "That is faith, indeed!"

Peggy's hands began to move restlessly again. "I—I wish you wouldn't talk like that, if you don't mind. You seem to be attributing such—such high and lofty motives to me. I'm not—not an angel, you know, nor are you the malefactor you seem to think yourself. I'm human, and it's only human to believe in those we—we like, isn't it? And—and still like them, no matter what they do or have done."

She had turned suddenly; her face was very white, very near his own; the vivid lips were trembling, the golden eyes dark, direct, and daring. Steele was looking down, down into their smoldering, velvety depths, and what he found there he hardly knew; nor did he know what passed during that tense, electric moment when all nature seemed to stand still, and everything was but the frame for those glowing, golden eyes drawing the soul out through his own.

Of all this he was but dimly conscious, and how it came to pass he did not know nor care, but, suddenly, he found Peggy's head on his shoulder, her lips against his own, his arms about her as if to hold her against the world; found himself kissing, over and over again, the hair that was as dead beech leaves touched by the sun, the eyes that were neither gray nor green nor yet brown, yet something of each and all, the vivid lips and cleft chin. In short, found himself fulfilling the most wildly impossible part of the wildly impossible Golden Dream which he had so often dreamed. And it all seemed so wonderful, so wonderful and impossible as to defy credulity, whereas, Wise and Experienced Age knows it was but one of the inevitable and countless repetitions of the most venerable, hoary, and mildewed story under the sun. O Spirit of Youth, glorious and triumphant because all things are new and real, what are the staid joys of Wise and Experienced Age compared with Thine! "Peggy!" said the boy. "Dick!" said the girl. And these two words tell the oldest, newest story in all the world.

Then Peggy, taking Steele's face in her own two hands, looked down long into his eyes. "Dear, tell me that you love me!"

"I do! You know I do!"

"But you haven't said so. Say it now!"

"I love you, sweetheart!"

"With all your heart and soul?"

"With all my heart and soul, O Prin-

cess! From the first day I saw you and——"

"It was night, Dicky; in the companionway. And your cap was off ——"

"Yes, I remember perfectly. And you wore a white sweater and a red thing round your head, and I loved you from that moment——"

"I don't think you did, Dicky; at least you'd a very funny way of showing it. But so long as you love me now and always, I don't care."

"But—Mr. Somerville? I thought he——"

"You thought what, Dicky?"

"That you were engaged to him."

Peggy stared. "Did I ever say so?"

"No, but—but Mrs. Boggs did."

"Dear heart!" said Peggy, partly an exclamation and wholly a caress, "do you believe all you hear? And so I'm to thank Mrs. Boggs for my not seeing you for the better part of a month? Well, I'm thankful it was *that,* and not Miss Armitage as I feared. I was horribly jealous of Miss Armitage, Dicky—and I think I'm a wee bit yet. Oh, yes, I am. It's hard to forgive her for seeing so much of you, when I would have given the world to be in her place. Do you think it very bold and forward of me, Dicky, to speak like this? Does it make you think any the less of me——" Here the answer precluded further questioning for a while.

"Well," resumed Peggy, at length, making futile dabs at her rumpled hair, "you know Aunt Phœbe's always scolding me for saying what I think and feel. She says speech was given us to conceal our thoughts—especially those of young girls who should be modest and shy and never say what they mean; not bold and forward like I am. But then, you see, I was born that way, and can't help it, and so long as you don't mind, and it doesn't make you think the less of me—and you're quite, *quite* sure it doesn't——"

Peggy emerged from the answer more rumpled and flushed than ever. "Well, then, so long as it doesn't, I'm going to show you just how bold and forward I can be; for I'm going to tell you that that night in the companionway finished me where you were concerned. Oh, yes, it did; finished me completely—and you, too, though you didn't know it. You hadn't a chance, Dicky; not the ghost of a chance, for I've told you I always get what I set my heart on. I said to myself: 'I'm going to marry that young man if he isn't married already!' I did; I did, indeed, Dicky; that's just what I said. But you were horribly standoffish, and acted as if I had the plague; you never once looked at me nor seemed aware there was such a delightful person as myself on board. And so I just had to be bold and forward and quiet in a roundabout way—oh, I can be very roundabout, too, when I want to be—I put the idea into Mr. Jones' head that he would like to have you at his table. Poor, dear Mr. Jones! how much I have to thank him for. How much!

"So, you see, Dicky, I'm flagrantly betraying my sex, giving away one of its most cherished secrets which is, that ninety-nine times out of a hundred the woman pursues the man, though she pretends otherwise and would be horrified at the accusation. But it's the truth, all the same——"

"Hush!" said Steele. "You'd make me the very vainest person in all the world if I hadn't a sense of humor and looked in the mirror occasionally. What you saw or see in a little scrubby, insignificant nobody like myself only the Almighty knows, for emphatically I don't and never will. It's one of His great mysteries——"

"It's no mystery at all!" said Peggy indignantly, "and I'm not going to listen to such outrageous libels——"

"I could understand," continued Steele, "if I were somebody like Bob Somerville; there's something worth looking at——"

"Pooh!" said Peggy, "I've been looking at Bob Somerville most of my life, and I've never experienced the smallest inclination to become Mrs. Bob Somerville. We were never more than good friends, even as children, no matter what your omniscient Mrs. Boggs may say. I never could stand kissing games—until the present moment, Dicky—and I remember distinctly slapping Bob Somerville's face when he insisted on indulging in that barbaric pastime of childhood called Post Office. I was ten years old at the time, and that was what you might call the only tender passage that ever occurred between us. He left me alone after that until—well, we grew up. Then he considered it his duty, I suppose, to start making love to me all over again; he's kept it up, too, though I've refused him half a dozen times. You see, I haven't known Bob Somerville half my life for nothing, and, to put it mildly, he's a flirt; women in general have so much attraction for him that I think he's incapable of being loyal to any one in particular."

Steele knew that, however Somerville might have changed for the better, this criticism was at one time justly deserved.

"Not that I would want him loyal to me," continued Peggy, "for I don't want him under any circumstances, and never did. I like Mr. Somerville, and that is all. He was very good to my brother, you know, and that alone would be enough to make me feel very kindly toward him. As for his believing you guilty of bribery, that didn't weigh a particle with me, for, as I told Mr. Greenlees, the evidence was all circumstantial, and Mr. Somerville can be mistaken just as well as anybody else. And that he was mistaken, I *know*.

"And now," concluded Peggy, looking suddenly at the star-studded sky, "I think it's high time we returned from Nowhere in Particular, which has proved just the very nicest place I've ever known, one I shall never, never forget. Yes, we must be going, or my dear, violent uncle will be having a hemorrhage over my absence. I'll have to tell him there was a blow-out, or that I ran short of gas. And on the way home, Dicky, you're going to tell me all the ins and outs of that bribery charge—every little thing connected with it; for there must be some good reason why you lay down under it instead of fighting it to a finish. For if I know anything at all, you're the fighting kind; that's one thing I like about you. There are two others, also——"

"And what are they, O Princess?"

"Why," said Peggy frankly, "my arms, sir."

"And so," concluded Steele, having related the whole story of his expulsion from the United States League, "that's why I've lain down under the charge. Partly because the evidence was so damning, because I hadn't the money to fight it, and because when I awoke in the Norfolk hospital it was all over and I was expelled. Then, after my brother's death, I somehow didn't care what happened. And then—I met you again and lived in and for the moment. Added to all this was the feeling that my expulsion was in a way deserved, for I *had* taken the bribe—at the start. That—that was the worst part of it, Peggy; that's what I couldn't forget, and can't forget. You've said I couldn't be guilty in the smallest degree of dishonesty or treachery toward any one, but, you see, I—I can, and—and *was!*" He bowed his head.

The girl took a hand from the wheel, and snuggled it into his own. "Dear heart!" and again it was partly an exclamation, wholly a caress, "but you're

so simple and honest! And that's one of the countless reasons why I love you. Why, Dicky, dear, if I had done all the ugly things I felt at times like doing, I'm sure I'd be the wickedest girl alive! If everybody did all the bad things they thought themselves capable of, this world would be impossible. And if nobody ever felt like doing wicked things it would be equally impossible. Don't you see that goodness and badness lie in the *doing*, not the thinking?

"There! I'm no good at preaching, but, Dicky, dear, I think you acted—nobly! Yes, I do. It was a great big temptation—and for your brother's sake, not your own pocket. I think it was splendid of you to get up before that roomful of men, and admit what otherwise they would never have known; that was just like you. I'm sure a great many would have said nothing at all about it.

"And I quite understand what you call the psychological part of your misplay that awful day; I don't think it impossible to grasp at all if only one wants to be fair. I know how one can do a thing through very fear of doing it and by trying awfully hard not to do it. You've been brooding on this thing, Dicky, until you've worked yourself into thinking yourself a depraved malefactor, when, as a matter of fact—— Well, I won't say all I think you, for fear, as you claim, your vanity may become exaggerated. Your vanity! Dear heart, a little vanity is just what you need; belief in yourself and your own worth. There, you needn't protest; I won't say anything more. But, Dicky, dear, you're going to start and fight now, aren't you? You're going to fight for justice and a fair deal! You're going to find out that man Deeping, even if he's at the end of the earth, and you are going to make him tell the truth if you have to—to *choke* it out of him! That's what you're going to do!"

"Yes," said Steele, quite simply, "that's what I'm going to do." For somehow his vindication no longer appeared impossible; for that matter, nothing seemed impossible. What could he not accomplish for the sake of this girl whose hand lay with such abiding love and faith between his own? Once again life had assumed meaning and purpose, infinitely greater, grander than he had ever known.

"And you're not going to send any good-by letters to my uncle, and leave the town by the back door?" added Peggy. "You had the courage to get up before all Claypole and acknowledge the truth, and don't you think my uncle deserves at least to be treated the same as the town?"

"Emphatically, Peggy. I hadn't looked at it that way before. It wasn't that I was afraid; I simply thought it best."

She nodded. "But now, to-night, you're going to tell him the truth face to face—tell him all you've told me?"

"If he'll listen," said Steele grimly. "I think I won't be able to get very far before he orders me from the house. You know, Peggy, if Mr. Claypole happened to be a monomaniac I'd say his monomania was Robert Steele; he's all but daffy on that unfortunate subject. I needn't try to explain the bribery charge to him or offer excuses, for the mere mention of my identity will be quite enough."

Peggy sighed.

"Added to this," continued Steele, "is his firm and enthusiastic belief in his knowledge of baseball; he told me once I'd never make a ball player in the wide world, and when he finds out who I am——" He sighed and Peggy echoed it.

"All the same, Dick, it's got to be done. You must tell him yourself. He's been at home since noon, and won't have heard what happened at the ball field. He'd never forgive you if you

didn't tell him yourself and he learned it from some one else."

"He won't forgive me, anyway; you may be quite sure of that," retorted Steele. "But it must be done. And, Peggy, no coaching or rooting from the side lines, remember; I'm to go this alone, absolutely alone. You are to be an entirely disinterested spectator, and neither your uncle nor any one else must know you care for me, until I can come and take you before all the world, clean and unashamed——"

"But, sweetheart, what do I care for——"

"Peggy, it can't be argued. Don't you see my side of it? Do you think I could ask you to share a dishonored name? I don't want any help, even from you, dear; I won't have sacrifices of any sort. All I ask is that you still believe in me and wait for me. I've got a bit of money saved up, and when I've had it out with your uncle, I'll leave Claypole and go after Deeping. And I *know*, Peggy, I'm going to find him, and that I'll get at the truth! Somehow I feel it. The feeling's been growing on me, and I know that nothing now can stand in my way, for you've given me everything to fight for; you've put the spirit of fight into me. And so you won't tell your uncle——"

"That I love you?"

"Yes. Promise me solemnly."

"Very well," sighed Peggy. "I promise solemnly. You see, I can refuse you nothing." But there was a dancing light in the golden eyes and a demure smile on the vivid lips—all of which the friendly darkness concealed.

Redroofs drew in sight, and Steele braced himself for the coming interview with Josiah Claypole. In silence he assisted Peggy from the car, Uncle Mose driving it round to the garage. The hall door had opened and closed, a man was descending the steps, and as Steele and the girl turned, they almost collided with Mr. Robert Somerville.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was quite light in the little plaza leading to the wide steps, the glow from the house being ably abetted by the moon which, fitful until that moment, seemed to have been lying in wait for this meeting of the eternal triangle's three sides; for now it beamed down steadily, brilliantly, so brilliant, in fact, that Steele saw the instant flash of recognition that leaped to Somerville's eyes and with it a look of utter surprise and something difficult to define; something that seemed a blending of fear and hatred. It was gone in a moment, but the memory remained acutely with Steele as something to puzzle and ponder over; it seemed as if in that instant his eye had taken a snapshot X-ray photo of the man's naked soul. That Somerville should hate him was some illumination in itself, but why should he fear him? Was it fear and hatred he had glimpsed, or was it all a trick of the moon?

Half unconsciously he found himself listening to Somerville's tuneful tenor, as, hat in hand, he bent deferentially and familiarly toward Peggy, talking with her under the stars; half unconsciously found himself admiring, as he had always admired, the sheen of the close-cropped, golden hair, the sweep of the powerful shoulders, the imposing height, the whole turnout of the man in the shadow of whose bulk he felt a smudge of insignificance. Was it possible any one could prefer him, Steele, to this Greek god?

Somerville, looking as if the other side of the triangle did not exist, was saying to Peggy: "Yes, we got in about an hour ago—for I prevailed on your brother to come along. Yes, I meant it as a surprise. He's under the weather a bit, working too hard, I fancy; a vacation was coming to him, so the firm saw things my way, and let him run down——"

"Thank you!" interrupted Peggy. "That was kind and thoughtful of you, Bob. Thank you, indeed, for seeing that he came; also for making his coming possible——"

"Oh, it was nothing," dismissed Somerville. "Of course, I know the firm, and I knew you'd want to see Jim. He's doing fine, getting on like a house afire."

Peggy flushed with pleasure; then her hand tightened a moment on Steele's arm, and her chin came up as she looked at the tall, golden-haired man. "Bob, this is Mr. Steele, an old college mate of yours, I understand, though you haven't recognized him."

Somerville stared, hesitated a moment, then nodded stiffly; Steele returned it, and a tense, highly uncomfortable silence followed, broken at length by Peggy quite naturally, addressing both: "Won't you come in? I suppose, Bob, you've seen my uncle?"

"Why, no, he's in Norfolk, isn't he?"

"Is he?" exclaimed Peggy.

"Yes, so your aunt said. Some business engagement or other. Just before I left he phoned over, and said it was doubtful if he'd be back to-night at all; at least, you're not to wait up. That's why I didn't wait—seeing you weren't home, either." He laughed. "I'd keep an eye on your uncle, Peggy; these overnight business engagements are a bit suspicious."

"Speak for yourself," countered Peggy, with an absent smile. She exchanged a meaning glance with Steele, for it was quite evident confession, in all probability, must be postponed until the morning. She craved a last moment alone with him, but Somerville refused to be dismissed, and, short of downright rudeness, she saw no way of fulfilling her desire. Somerville was standing doggedly, serenely oblivious to all hints, and as if with the inflexible purpose of outstaying Steele. And, seeing this, the latter put an end to the trying situation by offering the girl his hand and saying good night.

She retained his hand a perceptible moment—an action not lost on Somerville—and said, with a meaning glance: "Good night, Mr. Steele. If my uncle happens to come home at a respectable hour I'll tell him you want to see him about that matter, and I'll send word over to you. If he doesn't return, then I suppose you'll see him first thing in the morning at the office?"

Then, to Somerville's evident discomfiture, she dismissed him promptly with a brief word and briefer smile; for she was angry at being denied a last moment alone with Steele, and determined that Somerville should not profit by his maneuver.

Thus Somerville found himself following hard on the heels of Steele; he lengthened his stride, Steele shortened his, and they walked side by side through the quiet street in silence. Steele knew what was coming and he did not try to shirk it; rather, in fact, he courted the interview.

In the same silence they reached the little triangular public park, and here amid the trees and shrubbery they stopped suddenly as if by mutual consent, and eyed each other like two dogs about to fight. Although in the town's center it was a quiet spot, used little but by wayfarers as a short cut.

"Well," said Somerville, with an unpleasant laugh, looking Steele over at leisure from head to heel, "I've only been in town an hour, but I've learned a good deal. I've learned, for instance, that a fellow calling himself Smith has been trying to make himself solid with Josiah Claypole and family; that because he happened to be on the poor old *Jefferson* with Miss Overton, and was lucky enough to do her a slight service—greatly exaggerated, of course—he hasn't hesitated to work himself into the position of secretary to the Claypole Company." He threw back

his head and laughed. "I even hear he's got gall enough to think of marrying into the family. Pretty soft picking, eh? Easy enough—isn't it—to squat down in a tub of butter for the rest of your worthless life if only you're unprincipled enough. Easy enough if you've only a foolish old man and a couple of sentimental women to deal with? A fine scheme, Steele; fine as silk. The only mistake you made was in not knowing this happened to be also *my* home town."

Steele rubbed his chin. "You seem to have learned a lot," he said reflectively.

"Oh, yes, a whole lot, Steele. You see, I happen to have an aunt here; didn't know that, did you? It's wonderful, Steele, when you come to think of it how things turn out to confound the villain at the psychological moment; clever as he generally is, he's always overtopped just when he believes he's going to scoop the pot. After all, there's a lot of truth in the good old blood-and-thunder fiction, for in real life the villain generally gets his if you only wait long enough. Take, for instance, the present case; you might have imposed successfully—yes, even to the extent of marrying into the family, for there's no knowing what an impressionable, unsophisticated, generous young girl will do if she's made to believe she owes her life to a gay, handsome cavalier like yourself. Yes, it might even have gone as far as marriage but for the very small fact of my having an aunt here. She's a sensible woman, Steele, and—— Well, she wrote me she believed there was an unscrupulous adventurer trying to get to windward of Mr. Claypole and family; at all events, as an old friend and neighbor, it was my duty to come down and take a look into things. And so, you see, here I am and the villain stands confounded."

"Very obliging of your aunt," nodded Steele. "I'm sure Mr. Claypole will be grateful to her—and you—for undertaking to manage his affairs. Extremely neighborly of you both."

Somerville laughed. "You take it well, Steele; I'll say that for you. I didn't think you had the nerve." He eyed the other meditatively, then pointed to the fountain. "Steele," he said softly, "I've a good mind to take you by the slack of the pants and heave you in there, souse you until you're half dead; that's what filthy little impostors like you deserve. As it is——" He paused, then added: "I wished to avoid a scene before Miss Overton, and I still wish to save her the notoriety and tongue scraping that will go round when this town finds out the sort of beggar you are. For that reason, I'm going to let you off; but mind," he finished, stepping up and scowling down blackly, "if you know what's good for you, you'll put many a mile between your skin and Claypole before daylight! If I catch you around here to-morrow you'll get a coat of tar and feathers, a ride on a rail, and a hiding you won't forget all your days! Now get!"

Afar off a twig snapped suddenly, and Steele turned instinctively to the undergrowth on his right; but no one appeared, no sound followed, and he turned again to Somerville.

"Move!" repeated the latter menacingly, clenching his hand, "or I'll move you!"

For answer Steele stooped and picked up a stout branch which, in a twinkling, he snapped across his knee, retaining a section which made an excellent cudgel. "You're a good size bigger than I, Somerville," he said, almost apologetically, "as you proved in the Metropole. I haven't a look-in with you. But this is public property, and I don't intend to move until I get good and ready; nobody's going to move me, either, understand? You try it and I'll knock you cold!"

Instinctively the other stepped back.

"You hit me with that," he said, fire in his eyes, "and I'll pick you up and break you in half!"

"I'll hit you with it, all right," assured Steele. "You lay a hand on me and find out; that's all. I'm not taking water from you or any one like you, and if I was anywhere near your size you wouldn't be so awfully strong on this war talk. You can bull little men around something great, but I never noticed you keen on mixing it up with fellows like Big Ed Connolly or Joe Driscoll."

There was silence a moment; then Somerville took out a cigarette. "You talk like a child and always did," he sneered, flipping the burning match contemptuously toward Steele. "You and your bit of wood! Why don't you run for a cop? Put your stick away, sonny; nobody's going to slap you—though I could make you walk Spanish, even if you had a whole tree in your hand. But what I said goes," he finished, with a formidable scowl. "You let me catch you in town to-morrow, that's all!"

"I'll be in town to-morrow, and as long after that as it suits me," replied Steele. "Go ahead with your showing up; start right in. I think you'll find yourself a bit late. But you've been good enough to give me a warning, and so now I'll give you one; here's something Mrs. Daintree may not have told you: Howard Murtha's now living in this town; he comes from Nashville, and he's the brother of the girl who ended her life in Cayuga. And, what's more, he's a distant cousin of Miss Overton."

Somerville's face flushed and then became a pallid mask; he stared at the other. Steele looked at him with an almost objective interest.

"That's a warning in good faith, Somerville, but make out of it what you like. I warn you, however, that Murtha is about capable of anything when his temper's up. I've said nothing to any one, and I'll say nothing—I mean of your intimacy with Miss Murtha——"

"What do I care what you say?" cried Somerville, with an oath, finding his voice at last. "You little blackmailer! I warned you before about your filthy insinuations——"

"Quit your lying, Somerville!" Steele stood up to him, looking with fearless, blazing eyes of contempt. "I told you once before you acted the blackguard with Alice Murtha, and I tell you so again! You killed that girl as surely as if you'd thrown her in the lake! You know that, and I know it!"

The two pairs of eyes stared into each other for a long moment as if they were sensate things at death grips; then Somerville's wavered, returned to the attack, wavered again, and finally fell. And Steele, his eyes still on the other, flung away his impromptu weapon as if with the action he signified that he no longer considered Somerville's physical bulk; the action was symbolic of the triumph of the spirit; his manhood had conquered Somerville's, and physical strength no longer counted.

Somerville moistened his dry lips; he forced a laugh and made a desperate effort to recover his old bravado. "You lie, Steele," he said thickly but mechanically. "I knew Alice Murtha no better than you yourself. I warn you again about——"

But Steele had turned on his heel, as if the other no longer existed, and was threading his way through the park.

Somerville stared after him with convulsed face and twitching hands; all the old hatred which he had thought assuaged by Steele's humiliation and disgrace had leaped to life, stronger than it had ever been. The man whom he had thought obliterated, wiped out, submerged, removed from his path forever, had appeared again. To Somerville, Steele was symbolic of an accusing conscience, the one man in all the world who knew him, Honest Bob

Somerville, for what he was. This was the second time Steele had looked him in the eyes and called him blackguard; the second time he had read in those eyes the measure of his own meanness, the littleness of his own soul. Added to this was the memory of a foul wrong done the man who knew him for what he was; add to this the fact that Steele's presence in Claypole spelled danger, vital danger; and to this add the crowning truth that Peggy Overton evidently cared something for him. For Somerville had seen that parting handclasp, and he cared for Peggy Overton as much as it is given one of his nature to care. Indeed, for that matter, it was the one clean and abiding love of his life.

With clenched hands he paced toward the fountain, flashing like molten silver in the moonlight, and stared down with burning, unseeing eyes into the dimpling water. Strange irony of fate that the man he had sought to destroy should now turn out to be his rival! Hatred and fear flamed up within him, intense and abiding; so intense that the moonlit water reflected a face stamped with the stamp of Cain.

Then, where Steele had stood, the shrubbery parted slowly, slowly, and another face peered forth, a face very white and with burning eyes like Somerville's own; and on this face, too, was stamped the look of Cain. And so, for a space before stepping forth, Howard Murtha looked at the tall, golden-haired man standing before the plashing fountain, the man who was staring into the water like the Narcissus of old.

CHAPTER XXII.

A knock sounded at the door and Boggs entered the room. He glanced at Steele sitting motionless by the table, then took a chair and stared methodically at the floor. "Feelin' pretty good, kid?" he asked, at length.

"Pretty good, thanks," said Steele, emerging from his absorption.

Boggs eyed the floor, the ceiling, the walls. "I dunno," he said, making another effort. "Th' mother was sayin' you wasn't home for th' big eats, an' I was thinkin' that wallop might have laid you out somewheres along th' road; you never can tell much about them things till afterward. You're sure you're feelin' pretty good?"

Steele reassured him again on this point, and Boggs had another minute look at the furniture. Then he cleared his throat. "Say, that was some surprise you handed out at th' ball field—I mean about you bein' Steele, of th' Badgers; I knew, of course, you was class, but—well, say, it sort of knocked th' boys cold; it sure did."

"I don't doubt it," said Steele.

There was silence, and then Boggs, his freckled face red and embarrassed, got up slowly. "Say, I ain't no hand at this chewin' th' sock, an' when I find words in me mouth I dunno what to do with 'em; this ain't a job I care for particular, see; but it's been wished on me by th' boys——"

"Shoot it!" said Steele grimly.

Thus abjured, Boggs had a final look at the furniture as if in a last desperate effort to gather inspiration. "Well, say, it's this way, see? You bein' Steele, of the Badgers, knocked us so cold we hadn't time to peep a word before you made your get-away from th' field. But th' boys have been mullin' it over, an', say—well, they think that spiel of yours was somethin' great—you gettin' up like that by your lonely, an' talkin' straight off your chest. It made a hit with 'em. An', say, they want you to know they don't care a cuss who you are, or what you done or didn't do; they're awfully strong for you, an' when you says you didn't throw that game or cop a cent of dirty money, why, it goes, see? It goes, kid, no matter if Silent Hardman an' th' whole push up there—yes, an'

even Bob Somerville, who was raised in this burg—says different! It goes, kid, for th' boys knows you, see; an' your word is good enough for them. Good as wheat, kid. An' count me in with th' boys, see? An', say, they want you to know that so far as they're concerned, an' any time you feel like takin' it, why, they'd be proud an' happy to have you for captain. That goes, see?"

"Jimmie!" said Steele, with unsteady voice.

The red-haired coach shoved out a hairy paw, saying: "Slip it there, kid. Slip it there!"

Steele struck his hand into that of Boggs, and with that and the meeting of their eyes was cemented a friendship which, begun at their first meeting, was destined to endure while these two lived. Then Steele, his voice still rather unsteady, endeavored to say something of all he felt, to explain just what this friendship of Boggs and the "boys" meant to him, and succeeding that, he sat down and told the other the full story of his expulsion from the United States League.

"Gee!" pronounced the coach, when the other had finished, "it sounds like one of them things you read about. There's three answers to it; either this guy, Deeping—or whatever you call him—copped th' money out of that envelope, or this fellow Brown, who gave th' story to Somerville, was lying wholesale for some reason or other; or else th' whole thing was a frame-up—an' only for it bein' Bob Somerville, I'd say it was a frame-up, kid. Say, you was all kinds of a fool to return that money th' way you done; you should have plunked it into Deeping's mitt with your own hand' an' seen that there was a couple of your own witnesses, too, layin' on th' side lines. You can't be too careful about them things. Gee! you certainly was easy."

"I know it," said Steele. "I've learned a whole lot, Jimmie, since that day. It never entered my head to return it in any way but the one Deeping had explained; I never once thought of it being a frame-up, or that Deeping might say the money wasn't in the envelope. I wasn't used to crooks, and I trusted him; he was an awfully likable sort, and I couldn't think—even after trying to bribe me—that he'd want to put me in wrong."

Boggs shook his head and blew smoke. "You was dead easy, an' he knew it; you bet he did. It was like takin' candy from a child. Only for it bein' Bob Somerville I'd say it was a frame-up; I sure would, for it has all th' smell of it."

Steele was silent; he had not voiced his suspicions concerning Somerville's connection with the matter, nor spoken of the other's hatred, and he meant to keep a shut mouth until suspicion became certainty or was wiped from the slate. Nor had he mentioned anything concerning the strange conviction possessing him gradually that Harry Deeping was none other than Howard Murtha's brother; how could he explain a belief founded on the slenderest, the most shadowy clew imaginable? It was not a thing one could substantiate by reason or logic; yet he believed he had struck the right track and had decided, on leaving Claypole, to make straight for Philadelphia.

"Th' boss—Mr. Claypole—doesn't know yet?" asked Boggs.

"Not to my knowledge. I intend telling him to-night, if he returns from Norfolk in time."

"How will you know?"

"From Miss Overton."

"But we ain't got no phone here."

"She'll send some one over," explained Steele.

Boggs nodded and rolled a cigarette while the other's thoughts centered on Peggy; how fine was her action in hunting him out that afternoon for the purpose of acquainting him with Somer-

ville's expected arrival so that he would not be taken unawares; giving him an opportunity of confessing and explaining, discounting his unmasking by Somerville.

Here Mrs. Horatio Boggs knocked and put her head into the room, beaming fondly at "my Jimmie" and Steele. "Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Steele, I'm sure, but there's a gentleman downstairs as would like to see you."

"What's his name?"

"Mr. McAllister, Miss Overton's half brother, you know."

"Oh, yes, I understand."

"He wants to see you," added Mrs. Boggs, evincing symptoms of an overwhelming curiosity.

"Show him up, please," said Steele.

Boggs arose and accompanied his mother from the room.

In all probability, thought Steele, this unexpected visit meant trouble; no doubt Somerville had informed his friend that the person who was so intimate with his, McAllister's, sister was none other than an impostor, a disgraced ex-ball player. No doubt Somerville was using McAllister as an instrument of revenge.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs, a knock came at the half-open door, Steele said "Come in!" and the man known as Harry Deeping walked into the room.

They looked at each other for quite half a minute without speaking, one face as white and tense as the other; then Steele went over and closed the door mechanically. The strange conviction that he would soon meet with Deeping had been justified to the fullest, but to find him the half brother of Peggy Overton, and not the brother of Howard Murtha, was something which, to him, passed credulity. This jest of fate he had not remotely anticipated; and yet as he looked at that handsome but weak face, it suddenly became clear of whom Peggy had reminded him when he first saw her that night in the companionway of the *Jefferson*. McAllister had much of his sister's beauty, but lacked all her strength.

Harry Deeping—or, to give him his right name, James McAllister—was leaning against the table, still too white and shaken to do more than stare as if Steele were a specter; he had received a tremendous shock, and his nerves were all in a flutter. Dissipation and vice had also left their mark on his face.

"Sit down," said Steele calmly, and the other obeyed, his eyes hunting the floor. "Well," added Steele, "I think this is a mutual surprise. You didn't know who I was?"

"N-no."

"Why did you come?"

McAllister made an effort at composure. "My sister asked me. I was going an errand, anyway, and she—she asked me if I wouldn't stop in here and tell you Mr. Claypole had returned."

"You didn't connect the Mr. Steele, secretary of your uncle's company, whom your sister asked you to see, with the man who, thanks to you, was convicted of bribery?"

"W-what do you mean?" exclaimed the other, with an assumption of anger.

"What you know only too well, McAllister! The money was in that envelope I returned to you in Boston——"

"You lie! It wasn't——"

Steele had him by the throat, and for a moment it seemed as if he were about to interpret literally Peggy's words about choking the truth, if necessary, from "Deeping." Then his grip relaxed, his hands fell to his side, but he remained standing over the other, dominating him with his eyes.

"Look here, McAllister, you're going to tell me the whole truth, or I'm going to make you! You're going to tell the truth before you leave this room, and the sooner you understand that the bet ter! Now take your choice. I know a

whole lot more than you think; I know it was a frame-up, and that you were merely the tool of one more unscrupulous than yourself."

McAllister put a hand to his throat, to the marks left by Steele's inexorable fingers; his eyes hunted about the room, looking anywhere but into those flaming above him. The sweat pearled his brow; he seemed to be deliberating between two great fears.

"Was it—Somerville?" said Steele. "Don't lie, McAllister, for I *know* it was!"

"Yes, it—it was," said the other hoarsely. He started up. "He—he made me, Steele; I swear he did! I hadn't a choice. I liked you; I didn't want to do it, God knows I didn't! But it was either that or——"

"Or what?"

"Jail!" McAllister dropped back in his chair and flung wide his arms.

"I see," said Steele, with set lips. "I was suspecting something like this. You haven't been doing so well as you and Somerville led your folks to believe?"

The other shook his head, his eyes hunted and miserable. "I'll tell you the whole thing," he said feverishly. "I'll be glad to tell some one, even you, for my life's been a hell since that day. I owe it to you, too.

"To begin with, I made a hash of things in New York when I left here with the money I came into at my stepfather's death——"

"I know that part, so you can skip it. You were down and out when Somerville happened on you and played the benefactor—according to his story accepted here?"

"I was worse than down and out," replied McAllister, with compressed lips. "I was absolutely desperate, and one night, while half drunk, I committed theft—I swear I hardly knew what I was doing!—and the man I robbed turned out to be Bob Somerville, whom I hadn't seen since I left Claypole. He had me dead to rights, and I could have been railroaded up the river——"

"It was burglary, then, with assault?"

The other nodded. "Somerville and I had always been good enough friends in the old days, and it seemed only natural when he offered to say nothing about it and give me a lift. That part about him getting me a position was quite true, for he did get me one. I knew he'd always been soft on my sister, and I was only too glad to write home great stories about him, for at that time I thought there was no one like him, and I'd have done anything to show my gratitude. The folks at home knew I'd made more or less of a fool of myself in New York, but they hadn't a ghost of an idea I'd fallen so low; I knew if it ever leaked out that I'd even tried burglary it would pretty near kill them, especially my sister, who's always cared for me far more than I deserve——"

"Go on," said Steele, in a hard voice. "Somerville let you know one day that his silence and benefactions had a price, and that the time had come for you to pay?"

McAllister nodded. "I hadn't been doing very well with my new job, for I was still traveling with a hard set, and often I had to come to Somerville for money which he always let me have.

"Well, one day he told me about you; said you'd once done him an injury he'd never forgotten, and that now he saw a way of paying you out in a way you'd remember all your days. Then he outlined the frame-up, said you were dead easy, and would never suspect, that there was absolutely no danger, and that, under an assumed name, I was to go to Boston and make your acquaintance. I was to get five hundred cash for the job, or the alternative of going up the river, and the folks at home being told all about it."

McAllister paused and wiped the

sweat from his brow. "Well, you know what happened," he continued dully. "Of course I refused at first and then caved in; what principle I owned had been about killed by the life I'd been leading, I needed money badly, and had no wish to do a jail term or disgrace my folks—though, I guess, I thought of them last. I was afraid of Somerville, too, and I knew he had me dead to rights.

"Yes," he finished, "the whole thing was dead easy, and it would have been all the same whether you took the money or not; you'd have been shown up, anyway. Your error in the game helped the thing along; but Somerville had counted on you making a misplay of some kind, for he said you'd been playing below form and might go to pieces in the last big game.

"Of course there was never any person called Brown, and I was never connected with any big gambling interests; the stake I flashed on you was Somerville's own money and half of it was phony—as you'd have found out if you tried to pass it. But it would have taken a wiser man than you to detect that it was counterfeit; in fact, the whole game mightn't have gone down with any one but yourself, for you were so green about some things that I found it all the harder to put it over on you. I'd rather try to gouge some one who knows the ropes and thinks himself pretty wise. That's straight.

"Somerville gave it out that he understood from Brown I lived in Philadelphia, so that you wouldn't be looking for me in New York. It's just one of those queer freaks of fate—or whatever you like to call it—that you and I should happen to meet like this; that you should happen to drift into my home town of all places and be employed by my uncle of all people. Otherwise you might never have found me; and if I hadn't confessed voluntarily, you couldn't have made me; you could never have proved your innocence."

"That's true enough," said Steele. "But I think you'll agree with me that, after what you did, setting me right before the world is the least you can do now. You stole my good name, and, not being a hopeless blackguard like Somerville, you're going to return it."

"Well, I'm glad I told you, anyway," said McAllister, shifting his gaze. "I'm glad to get it off my mind. But—but you realize, I hope, what public confession would mean to me, and—and the folks? I think I deserve some consideration, Steele, for confessing——"

"Look here, McAllister, I'm no Sir Galahad! Perhaps if this had happened, say, yesterday, I'd have been willing for the sake of your folks—especially your sister—to let it slide and say nothing about it; I don't say I *would*, understand, but at least the doing of it would have come easier. But to-day a great big something has come into my life, and I'm dead anxious to make that life clean and whole before the world. I guess maybe you know I care everything for Miss Overton; if you didn't, then you know it now."

McAllister's weak face flushed. "I —I guessed from my sister's letters she seemed interested in Mr. Smith, the company's secretary," he said, in a low voice, "but, of course, I didn't know that Smith and you were one and the same."

"Well, then, you see how it is," retorted Steele grimly. "I'm no story-book hero, McAllister, and I can't let you off for the sake of your sister; I owe something to myself and her. You're the only person in the world who can clear me, for I can expect nothing from Somerville; I need your evidence to drag the truth from him, and you must do it no matter what it costs. I'm only too anxious to give you all the consideration possible; you needn't be

afraid of that charge Somerville's been holding over your head, for after I'm done with him he won't be in any position to prove it. Your folks needn't know about *that,* but I don't see how your part in this affair can be kept from them, for it's got to be made public—as public as the false charge made against me. You've got to go with me before the United States League board, and tell the story just as you've told it to me."

McAllister paled. "Wouldn't it do just as well if—if I wrote it out here and signed it?"

"No, it wouldn't; they'd say I made it up. You've got to show yourself."

The other drew a deep breath. "Very well, then," he said, with compressed lips, "I'll do it. I'll—I'll do anything, Steele, to wipe out what I have done. That's the way I feel, and I want you to believe I'm sincere."

Steele turned to the window. "I'm sorry, McAllister, I'm forced to ask you to pay the full price, but I see no way out. It's possible——" He turned and eyed the other. "Look here, I'm just as anxious as you to keep your part in this from your folks, and I think, after all, it may be possible. If you leave for New York, say, to-morrow, I'll meet you there. You don't have to tell Hardman and the others where your home is; you live in New York, and Claypole and your folks needn't be dragged into it. Of course, it will all come out in the papers, but nobody will know that the McAllister, alias Deeping, is *you.*"

The other shook his head. "What about Somerville? You may be sure he'll make it his business to let my folks know, pay me back in any way he can."

"No," said Steele, "leave that to me. Somerville professes to think a good deal of Miss Overton, and I believe, in that respect, he's sincere. For her sake he may say nothing; anyhow, if he insists on giving you away, I know how to shut his mouth. I know something about Somerville he wouldn't want a certain person to know any more than you and I want your folks dragged into this. But leave it to me; you needn't be afraid—nor about that burglary charge, either.

"And now," finished Steele, "I'll return with you to the house, for I must see Mr. Claypole to-night."

McAllister paled again, and a momentary suspicion flashed in his eyes. "Why do you have to see him?"

"Because I prefer to tell him who I am before Somerville does it for me," replied Steele. "You needn't be afraid of my dragging you into it; none of your folks will ever learn it from me, McAllister. You can be quite sure of that. All I ask is that you meet me in New York, and tell the truth to President Hardman. I'll guarantee that Somerville won't give you away to your folks. Nor have you anything to fear from the bribery charge, for if I don't choose to make a kick, it's nobody else's business. You see that, don't you?"

McAllister nodded. "You're treating me pretty white, Steele," he said, in a moved voice, "and don't think I don't know it. I guess maybe you think I'm all kinds of a sneak because I don't want to come out in the open and tell Mr. Claypole the truth. But the fact is I'm down for a good bit in his will, and if he ever suspected——" He paused, suddenly conscious of the look in the other's eyes. "I mean," he added hastily, "the truth would pretty near kill him and my aunt and sister. They're all-fired proud of the family name——"

"Come along," said Steele curtly, picking up his cap. "It's time we were traveling if I'm to have it out with Mr. Claypole before he goes to bed."

As they left the room together Steele thought with a sort of dumb wonder of all that had taken place since his

leaving the Claypole factory that afternoon for the ball field; it seemed almost incredible that so much could have happened, events of such profound moment to him. And yet, on reflection, it was all entirely natural and plausible, for ever since his coming to Claypole—yea, even before that—everything had been tending toward this focal point; events had been leading him and others by the hand toward these crises in their lives. It had been one wonderful day—as "Madame Butterfly" sings—but it was not yet over. For as McAllister and he opened the street door they confronted Howard Murtha.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Murtha looked very pale and his eyes glowed as with a febrile fire; he paid absolutely no attention to James McAllister, never having seen him before, nor, in fact, did he guess the other's identity. Nor did McAllister know Murtha's, distantly related by marriage though these two were. For McAllister, unlike his half sister, had never been in Nashville, and, as with Somerville, this was his first visit home since Howard Murtha had come to live in Claypole.

"Good evening, Mr. Steele," said Murtha, thus showing he had heard of Steele's public confession at the ball field after Murtha had left. He spoke with a forced composure. "Just going out? Can I have a word with you first?"

Steele hesitated, glancing at his watch; it was eight-thirty. "I've an appointment," he said, showing no resentment in voice or manner over the "beaning" he had received. "Can you wait until I return?"

"No," said Murtha deliberately, "I can't. I must see you now—and alone."

"What is it you want?"

"I'll tell you that when we're alone."

Steele looked at him in silence a moment, noticing the extreme pallor, the sunken, burning eyes, the whole air of repressed agitation and passion about the man.

"I—I have just left Mr. Somerville," added Murtha, in a low, trembling voice; yet not so low that McAllister, standing some little distance off, did not hear. And he turned and eyed Murtha curiously.

Steele's face did not betray the sudden surprise and perturbation he experienced at these words. What had passed between Somerville and Murtha? How had they met?—these two who had not known each other; these two whom he had done his best to keep from meeting. Murtha's whole air and manner betrayed that something had happened, something that even spoke of tragedy. Could it be possible he had learned the truth?

Steele turned abruptly to the waiting McAllister. "Do you mind going on and saying I'm coming? I won't be later than nine, anyway."

McAllister nodded, and, after another curious, meditative look at Murtha's white face, set out for Redroofs, not far distant.

"Come in here," said Steele, showing his visitor into the little homely front parlor and carefully closing the door. "You may speak out," he added. "Boggs and his mother are downstairs in the kitchen. Now what's up, anyway?" He tried, and successfully, to speak quite naturally. It was no use asking how Murtha had stumbled on an inkling, at least, of the truth; it was clear he suspected Somerville and had paid this visit with the purpose of forcing the whole truth from Steele. And Steele knew he must accomplish some adroit lying if a tragedy were to be averted, for he read murder in those sunken, febrile eyes. The situation which he had feared and outlined to Peggy only that afternoon had come

about with alarming and unexpected swiftness.

Murtha pulled up a chair facing Steele, sat down, and stared at him with burning, unwinking eyes. "I happened to take a short cut through the park tonight," he said slowly, his voice sounding like a croak.

"Yes?" replied Steele calmly, pretending he didn't see the terrible significance of this seemingly simple statement, or that he suspected what was about to follow. But his heart sank as he remembered acutely the snapping of a twig to which, at the time, he had attached but too little meaning.

"I saw you and Somerville near the fountain," pursued Murtha, in the same measured, croaking voice. "You didn't see me. I didn't know, of course, what the big fellow's name was until I heard you call him 'Somerville.' You see, I was listening, for I'd caught my own name, or, rather, my sister's; I heard quite distinctly one of you say 'Alice Murtha,' and I stopped to listen, for I was curious to discover what you two knew about her."

For a moment, as he looked into the burning eyes, there flashed before Steele the horrible picture of a golden-haired man, all bloody, lying in the white moonlight before a little tinkling fountain.

"I couldn't hear all that passed," continued Murtha, speaking with an impassive, mechanical precision, "for I was some distance off and afraid to come nearer for fear of discovery. Also, I'd arrived near the end of the quarrel—for I saw there'd been one of some sort, and that you held a club which, as I arrived, you threw away."

Steele began to breathe easier; he had not discarded his impromptu weapon until the end of the dialogue, and thus Murtha could have heard nothing definite.

"You left," added Murtha, "but Somerville remained. I'd heard enough to convince me that both of you had known my sister, and that one of you had known her too well. So I stepped out, made myself known to Somerville, and demanded the truth. And at last he told me. So I went home and got —this!" Murtha whipped a revolver from his pocket and gazed unwinkingly at Steele.

And, suddenly, Steele knew that the murder he read in those sunken, flaming eyes had all along been for *himself*, not Somerville. He saw Death in the room, Death sent by the man he had tried to save. He saw he was confronting one who, for the moment at least, was a homicidal maniac.

"And so you see that's what I came for—to kill you!" added Murtha, in the impassive, croaking voice infinitely more terrible than the wildest outburst of fury. "I'm going to shoot you like the dog you are, Steele. I'm going to give you precisely the mercy you gave my sister. The law doesn't punish animals like you, and so men who have sisters, wives, and daughters must make a law of their own—the unwritten law, Steele, which you're about to find exists south of the Mason-Dixon line. Mothers with daughters, brother with sisters, husbands with wives will thank me for what I'm about to do, for you and your kind are a menace to every decent community. I'll have no more compunction in killing you than I would a mad cur. You'll never betray another girl; you'll never impose on another with a false name; you'll never have a chance to treat Miss Overton as you treated my—my sister!"

The blood came into Steele's face at that, but he kept an iron countenance. He knew that now, if ever in his life, he would have need for any mental and physical gifts he possessed; he would need both swiftness of mind and muscle; he would need absolute coolness and self-control. And so though

his heart was racing like an engine, he spoke calmly while his steady eyes calculated the distance separating him from Murtha, and his well-trained muscles, unseen, contracted for sudden and stupendous effort. For better the taking of the most forlorn hope than to meet death supinely where he sat.

"Look here, Murtha, don't you think you've let prejudice and dislike for me run away with your judgment and fair play? I only ask fair play and a chance of proving my innocence. You're taking the mere unsupported word of one man about this thing; if I'd said, for instance, Somerville was guilty, would you have believed me so implicitly without first investigating, and——"

"I would not!" said Murtha very grimly. "I wouldn't believe you under oath! You're an impostor, a bribe taker, a man who's been kicked out of professional ball, a betrayer of women, a thorough paced scoundrel, while Somerville's reputation speaks for itself. You needn't try to fog the issue that way. Somerville was at college with you and knows the whole story; he knows you boarded in the same house as my sister. You may be sure he didn't want to tell me the truth, but I forced it out of him. I know why you quarreled in the park to-night; Somerville threatened to expose you if you didn't leave town at once; threatened to even tell me you were responsible for my sister's death. But, because you were a college mate, he wanted to give you a chance——"

"That's not so, Murtha. It's quite true I was at college with Somerville, true I knew your sister, but simply as a friend. Somerville's entirely mistaken. I ask you to be fair about this thing; bring Somerville here or come with me to him, and I'll convince both of you it's all a bad mistake——"

"Enough!" cried Murtha, his voice now booming hoarse and passionate, his lips twitching. "Talk won't get you out of this—— Ah, you dog!" For it was here that Steele, crouching low, suddenly launched himself on the other.

The revolver roared, and Steele felt as if something had broken inside him; then his arms were about Murtha, and he had thrown him heavily. The gun roared again, and the room seemed all acrid smoke and wildly gyrating furniture, walls, and ceiling. Locked in each other's arms, Steele holding like grim death to his opponent's pistol hand, they writhed and thudded over the floor, smashing chairs and table right and left, and, with a final crash, Mrs. Horatio Boggs' cherished glass sepulchre of wax flowers that reposed in the fireplace. Murtha, much the bigger, was fighting like a wild cat gone mad, but Steele, though tiring fast, was fighting for his life. As in a dream he was conscious of riotous footsteps flying down the hall; as in a dream conscious that Murtha had, at least, succeeded in wrenching free the weapon. There came another flash and roar, and, following this, blessed oblivion.

Meanwhile the prime cause of the tragedy, having seen Murtha off on his mission of death—though Somerville told himself he had no idea where the other was going or what he meant to do—had left the park and bent his steps toward Redroofs. At that moment Steele was listening to McAllister's confession in Mrs. Boggs' boarding house; it was but eight o'clock, and Somerville determined to carry out his abortive attempt at seeing Peggy Overton alone, for he had much of importance to say to her.

As a general rule, villains—even the bloodiest—are made, not born, and that state of mind where one can sit down calmly and at leisure and plot murder is achieved by natural progression. Thus through the progression of circumstance Somerville found himself, owing to that first piece of blackguard-

ism in his college days, committed to a campaign of villainy which he had neither foreseen nor thought possible. His actions, viewed in another, would have provoked his profound anger and scorn; he would have said the author of them was a born scoundrel doomed to penal servitude from the cradle. Yet, as applied to himself, he shut his eyes to their turpitude and blinded himself to all but necessity. Necessity had driven him, was driving him, and he must obey. He overlooked the fact that his own actions had made both circumstance and necessity.

It was absolutely necessary, he told himself, that Steele should be crushed completely, once and for all; he must be forced to leave Claypole before meeting with McAllister. And he, Somerville, had seen his chance at accomplishing this during the unexpected and startling interview with Howard Murtha; at first struck to the heart with retributive fear, he had seen and seized the opportunity of discounting Steele's damning knowledge and turned what at first seemed a Waterloo into an Austerlitz. Since Murtha had overheard part of the truth, and demanded the whole, since his, Somerville's, acquaintance with Alice Murtha had become known to the brother, since Steele's was also known, what else was there to do but reverse positions with Steele?

The night was unreasonably warm, and on reaching Redroofs Somerville found, to his surprise and satisfaction, Peggy Overton pacing the wide veranda. She was waiting for Steele, impatient of his arrival, wondering why he had not come. For she had asked her brother to be sure and deliver the message before attending to his own errand.

Approaching footsteps in the plaza brought her hurriedly to the head of the steps, and she could not wholly conceal her disappointment on seeing it was Somerville, and not him for whom she waited. She forced a formal welcome to eyes and lips, but did not offer a chair, hoping he would go.

"It's so warm," she said. "I came out for a breath of air before retiring."

Somerville did not take the hint. "But it's only a little after eight," he replied.

"Is it?" she asked innocently, stifling a yawn. "I'm sure I feel tired enough for midnight. You'll have to excuse me, Bob; I know I'm not acting a bit hospitably, but really I don't feel like talking to-night. Somehow it isn't in me."

He sighed. "I do believe, Peggy, you aren't a bit glad to see me," he said reproachfully.

"I am, Bob. You know I always am." But her eyes were hunting the broad, moonlit avenue, hungering to pick out Steele.

Somerville advanced a step. He looked up at her bareheaded, his fine hair gleaming like spun gold; he made a very handsome and arresting picture as, perhaps, he knew. "Are you really glad, Peggy? Do you mean that?" He tried to take her hand, but she drew back.

"Please don't be sentimental, Bob. Of course, I'm glad to see you—as a friend, always as a friend. I hope you aren't going to ask me to marry you again——"

"I am, Peggy! Peggy, I'm in dead earnest——"

"Please don't!" she interrupted, distressed. "I told you in New York it was quite impossible; if it was impossible then it's—it's more so now."

He caught his breath sharply and his eyes suddenly flamed. "You mean you care for some one else?"

"Perhaps," her foot tapping the steps, "though I don't recognize your right to ask that."

"Is it this Mr. Steele?"

"And if it is?" she replied.

"If it is," said Somerville, with great deliberation, though his hands were clenched, "then I am compelled to tell you the man is a blackguard and a scoundrel. Peggy," he added hurriedly, passionately, "I came to save you from just this; you'll believe that, won't you? My aunt wrote me enough to convince me that you and your family were in danger of being made the victims of an unscrupulous scoundrel and impostor! Do you know who this fellow Steele really is——"

"I do, thank you," interrupted the girl, with dangerous composure. "I know quite well he is the person who was expelled last fall by the United States League. You see, he told me all about it. I thank Mrs. Daintree for her kind intentions, and you for your attempted intervention, but really they're not at all necessary. And if you value my friendship at all, Bob, you'll never repeat what you've just said about Mr. Steele. If you think him guilty of that bribery charge and other things, I don't and never did. But, at least, you can keep your thoughts to yourself, for I want you to understand Mr. Steele is my friend, that I value that friendship, and that anything said against him I consider as said against me."

"This is worse than I thought!" exclaimed Somerville, with compressed lips. "Peggy, this fellow has bewitched you! Where is your common sense? Don't you know in your heart what he is? How can you say he is innocent of that bribery charge? He stands convicted before all the world! He's an outcast, a pariah; no decent man will take his hand! Is it conceivable you believe his barefaced lies—credit his word in preference to every one else's? Do you believe him and not me whom you've known from the cradle——"

"Very well, Bob; so long as you insist on speaking like this you may stay here and talk to yourself, for I'm going in the house! Good night, and please don't come around here any more. I'm sorry, but I warned you fairly——"

He caught her fiercely by the wrist as she turned away. "See here, Peggy, this won't do at all! I've known you all your life, I've done a good bit for you and your folks, and I deserve better treatment than this. You're not going to throw me out of your life simply because I must speak the truth. You must and shall listen to me! I'm not going to let you go until you hear me out, until I make you understand. I'm going to save you from ruin in spite of yourself. I tell you that man's a thorough blackguard. Listen! You *shall* listen! You make me say what I never meant to tell a living soul. I never spoke of your cousin, Alice Murtha, because it was an unpleasant subject that I knew would only distress you. But I know all that happened in Ithaca, and I tell you now this man Steele is the one responsible for Alice Murtha's death. Now, perhaps, you'll understand and believe just what sort of character he is!"

Peggy caught her breath and her eyes dilated; white-faced and silent she stared steadily at the man standing on the step beneath her.

"I didn't want to tell you this, but you've made me!" exclaimed Somerville. "Steele was my college mate, and I didn't want to give him away, even though he's a thorough going blackguard."

"I'm very glad you've told me," said Peggy, most quietly, her eyes glowing in the shadow lent by the veranda's roof. And those eyes never left the man's face which shone clear in the moonlight. "So you knew Alice Murtha? Did you know she was distantly related to me?"

"Yes." He must answer in the affirmative for, otherwise, why should mention of the subject have distressed Peggy Overton? He saw that clearly

enough; but he hadn't bargained for any cross-examination, nor did he desire one.

"I'll tell you all about it some time —if you wish," he said hurriedly. "But it isn't a story fit for your ears——"

"Never mind my ears," interrupted the girl, in the same quiet voice. "I'm curious to learn some things now. I'm curious to know, for instance, how you knew Alice Murtha was my cousin, seeing I never mentioned it to you."

"Why, she told me," said Somerville impatiently.

"Why?"

"Why? Why, when she learned I came from Claypole she mentioned having relatives there—you and your folks."

"Oh, then you knew her so intimately as that?"

Somerville's face showed red in the moonlight. "Yes, if you call that being intimate," he said, with a short laugh which he attempted to render natural.

"And so you knew her intimately, knew she was related to me, and yet did nothing to prevent the tragedy? You didn't write home to us or her people, and say it would be advisable if her mother, for instance, should pay a visit to Ithaca? You knew she was absolutely alone up there, that she was very young and unsophisticated; you must have known that if you knew her intimately——"

"I didn't know what was going to happen," said Somerville, the sweat now suddenly pearling his brow. "I'd have interfered if it was possible. Why do you talk like that, Peggy? Surely you believe what I've told you——"

"I do not!" said the girl; and her eyes and lips flamed. "Not if you and every soul in the world swore it on all the Bibles in the world! *That's* how much I believe you! You see, I've the advantage of knowing Mr. Steele; I *know* him. I know he'd be one of the very last men in all the world to betray anybody—even an enemy! Let me tell you that Mr. Steele, despite all you've said about him, would never have done what you have done this night. He doesn't fight that way, Mr. Somerville!"

She came from the shadows and stared down at the man on the steps. "You've been lying to me, Bob Somerville," she said, in a tense, trembling voice. "I read it in your face; I see it now in your eyes! You've lied to me. I'm not stupid, and I'm beginning to see a whole lot I—don't want to see——" She put her hands before her eyes as if to shut out some horrible vision.

Somerville stared at her, his lips moving, but no words issuing forth. And as they stood thus, James McAllister joined them.

Peggy spoke, addressing her brother, as if Somerville were not present: "Well, did you see Mr. Steele? Why didn't he come?"

At this, Somerville was unable to repress a start; and his face showed ashen white in the moonlight. So Steele and McAllister had met!

"Yes, I saw him," replied McAllister, refusing to look at Somerville. "He was coming with me, only a visitor called as we were leaving; a man who insisted upon seeing him alone. He wouldn't take a refusal."

"What did he look like?" Peggy rapped out the question.

"A big fellow, tall and dark. To tell you the truth," added McAllister, in a troubled voice, "I didn't like his looks. He seemed awfully excited about something, and as if he were trying to hide it; I wouldn't fancy meeting him on a dark night if he had anything against me. You must know him," he finished, turning with an effort to the silent Somerville, "for I heard him say he'd just left you."

Somerville made an inarticulate reply.

"Howard Murtha!" exclaimed Peggy.

She seemed gifted with a sudden prescience and her eyes flamed into those of Somerville. "What did you tell Howard Murtha? Did you tell him about his sister? Did you accuse Mr. Steele?"

"N-no——"

"You did! You did!" cried Peggy. "I know it, I feel it! It's stamped all over you! . . . Oh, you cad! You —you murderer!"

She turned and flew down the plaza, and McAllister, after a moment's bewildered hesitancy, followed, leaving Somerville with pallid face and furtive eyes to gaze upon the wreck and ruin of his life. For he knew that somehow Peggy Overton had guessed all. Nor could he tell what had passed between McAllister and Steele during that meeting which he had striven vainly to prevent.

Thus Peggy and her brother reached Steele's boarding house quite too late to avert the tragedy; for, on entering the little front parlor, that looked as if it had been struck by a cyclone, they found Jimmie Boggs, torn and dishevelled, bending over the prostrate form of Richard Steele, while sprawled in the room's center, the revolver still clenched in his stiffening hand, and that dark and impassioned face now looking strangely peaceful, was Howard Murtha with a bullet through his heart.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Many dreams, strange and wild, came to Richard Steele during the ensuing days; many awakenings that seemed no less strange. Many faces he saw, from time to time, grouped about the bed whereon he lay, but whether they existed in fact or fancy he neither knew nor cared. Often he spoke only to have the face fade to nothing or suddenly change its identity or become something else. Often did he see Howard Murtha's face as he had seen it last, pale and wild-eyed and with maniacal murder stamped upon it; Somerville's was present, too, sneering and triumphant. He had many long and abortive dialogues with this particular face; over and over he tried to tell it that Murtha had become a homicidal maniac, and that it, the Face, had better heed the warning and leave town at once; but the Face always interrupted and he could never complete his advice. This troubled him much.

Much, indeed, could be set down concerning Steele's fight for life; for though he knew it not he was very near solving the Great Secret, and there were nights when it might be truly said his life hung in the balance, balances swayed by the merest breath. There were dawns when a white-faced girl, heavy-eyed but dauntless, crept away before the coming sun and snatched a few brief moments of oblivion before resuming the grim battle with Death. For if in such extremities an outside spiritual force be necessary to turn the delicately balanced scale toward victory —and so physicians hold—then, indeed, did Peggy Overton win back that life which she prized far above her own. She would *not* let him die; she gave him the will to live; she breathed into him anew the spirit of fight, sustaining and triumphing through every crisis. *This,* to Steele, was the one face that persisted, the one of them all which seemed real, surcharged with abounding love and hope and life.

And so at length there came a day when fever and delirium gave place to long and untroubled sleep; a day when the battle was pronounced won. And on that day, the tension gone, Peggy had her first unbroken sleep in weeks.

And then followed a day when Josiah Claypole blew his nose violently by the bedside, held Steele's bloodless claw, and said "Dev-il take me!" several times running without apparent relevance; and when Steele, in a halting, piping

voice attempted the long-deferred confession, Mr. Claypole blew his nose all the harder and told him sternly to be quiet. "For," added he: "I knew it all along, and—dev-il take me!—you're not allowed to talk. You've nothing to do but get well. But let me say, my boy——" Here Mr. Claypole blew his nose harder than ever. "Well, dam' me, Dick, I've always wanted a son, but never so much until I knew you!"

And Steele, falling asleep in the middle of the thought, wondered if the delirium had not returned and the visit had never been.

And then came the day with evening sunlight pouring through the open windows, the vespers of birds and Peggy coming to him, a glory and sudden shyness in her eyes. And what happened immediately then concerns but them alone; in good time, however, he learned all that took place that terrible night—which now, it developed, was two months past—and what followed.

He learned, for instance, of Boggs' heroic fight with the maniacal Murtha—before the latter could complete his murderous task—and how in attempting to dispose of this new opponent Murtha had accidentally killed himself. How James McAllister, conscience-bitten, had confessed all, and how Somerville, learning of the tragedy, had quietly left Claypole that same night, taking conscience and his shattered reputation with him into some far land or the waste places of the earth, for none knew whither he had gone or what had become of him. How Josiah Claypole had made a hurried trip to New York in company with James McAllister, and how before President Hardman, the board, and a representative gathering of newspaper men, the whole bribery story was related and sworn to by McAllister. Of how——

But here Peggy produced a truly formidable array of newspapers on whose front pages Steele saw his name in great staring type precisely as he had seen it one memorable morning in what now seemed the very long ago; here was the same double-leaded type, here the same scareheads, but how vastly different the text; all the difference between damnation and salvation, honor and dishonor, a splendid career, and a wrecked life. Here was the sworn statement of James McAllister, alias Harry Deeping, side by side with an account of Somerville's disappearance; here was such corroborative evidence as Josiah Claypole could supply; for instance, the sinking of the *Jefferson,* the rescue of his niece, and Steele's subsequent employment, under the name of Smith, in the sewing-machine factory. For Mr. Claypole had concealed nothing, had spared no pains in his effort to see tardy justice done; nor had McAllister, strong in his new resolution, striven to shirk one shred of guilt.

As may be imagined, the whole remarkable story and the exposure of such a public character as Honest Bob Somerville produced a tremendous sensation, and the press of the country had risen to the occasion with its customary enthusiasm and thoroughness; there were pictures of everything and everybody down to Mrs. Horatio Boggs wearing the inevitable blue-check apron and a line cut of the putative baseball with which the ill-starred Howard Murtha had "beaned" Richard Steele. There was a picture of the famous Claypole Simplexes in full war paint, another of little Miss Armitage at her typewriter, and one of the conventional schoolhouse which it was reputed Somerville had attended at a remote period. But through the sea of printer's ink Steele grasped the one tremendous fact that vindication had come full and complete, that his innocence was established beyond all cavil.

And so because he felt much, words were denied him and he could only sit

and stare dumbly at the sea of printer's ink while, born of physical weakness and great emotion, a lump rose in his throat and he felt an absurd desire to break down and cry like a little child. And Peggy, seeing this as she seemed to see all things, snuggled her hand into his; and so for a time they sat in silence while twilight came and the shadows fell.

"I'm sorry about Murtha," said Steele slowly at length.

She nodded. "It's strange the amount of evil one person can do in this world—I mean Mr. Somerville. And yet he's the only one who got off scot-free."

"I don't think it. His life is ruined and he will always have memory; I've found that that can hurt the most."

"I suppose you're right," said the girl. "And yet I could almost wish—when I think of all he did and tried to do—that justice in his case had been more poetic."

"But he honestly loved you, Peggy; I'm sure of that. And the losing of you is punishment——"

"Flatterer!" And then she grew sober-eyed again. "No, I can't call that love, Dicky; it's not my idea nor yours, either. If Mr. Somerville had ever cared for me in the way a woman wants to be cared for, he could never have forced my brother into further dishonor; he simply couldn't have done what he did. He posed all along as Jim's benefactor while holding the threat of exposure over him; he made him his tool, his jackal! I may seem bitter and unforgiving—and I am. Mr. Somerville is as morally responsible for Howard Murtha's death as he is for Alice Murtha's. And it's not his fault that *you* aren't in Howard's place. If ever a man planned indirect murder it was Bob Somerville that night—and *that's* the sort of man you shielded until the last! Dicky, if you weren't sick I could scold you within an inch of your life for that! Yes, I could!"

"I'm feeling very well," said Steele humbly, "so fire ahead."

"No, but I really am mad," protested Peggy, trying to look it. "You knew all along it was Somerville, and yet you wouldn't tell me. And if I hadn't guessed the truth that night when he tried to make me believe it was you; if I hadn't seen it stamped on his face; if all this hadn't happened, you never would have told me?"

"No, I suppose I wouldn't."

"You mean you're quite sure you wouldn't?"

"As you will, O Princess. But really I don't see what good it would have done."

"And yet it all but cost you your life, Mr. Quixote! Do you realize that? And doesn't your life mean something to—to me if not to yourself? Did you think of that? And supposing I had believed Mr. Somerville's lies?"

"But then, you see, you didn't—and I knew you wouldn't," replied Steele.

"I might have," retorted Peggy. "And I'm sure it would have served you just right if I had. Dicky, let me tell you your code, your idea of honor is out of date, and I only wonder you've survived as long as you have. It may do all very well in romantic books, but it's no use whatever in real everyday life. Your man's code is the essence of foolishness. You had no earthly right to shield such a character as Somerville, and certainly you should at least have told me. I suppose you knew all along the bribery charge had been engineered by him?"

"No, I didn't. I simply had a suspicion which gradually became conviction."

Peggy sighed. "And to think 'Harry Deeping' should turn out to be my—my brother!" she exclaimed. "It's all been very wonderful, and—and terrible, Dicky."

"I'm sorry your brother had to face the music, Peggy. You see, I'm far from being the storybook hero you try to make me out. A real hero would have stolen away silently into the night when he learned James McAllister was the brother of the girl he loved; he would have gone away and lived quietly under his unjust disgrace rather than expose the brother and thus cause suffering to the sister. Oh, yes, he would; real heroes always do it. But I'm not a real hero, Peggy, and I simply couldn't give you up like that; I stipulated that James McAllister should tell——"

"You weren't quite a fool, you mean?" interrupted Peggy. "I'm glad you had a glimmering of common sense in that respect, at least. I know all about it and how you planned to keep the truth from us all. But, you see, it was ordained otherwise, and it was far better for Jim to make a clean breast of it. He did all he could to undo what he had done, and I'm sure he's had his lesson. Thanks to my uncle he's had a fresh start in New York, and I know he'll go straight to the end of the chapter."

"Amen," said Steele. "Peggy," he added, "do you know your uncle came in here the other day and said some ridiculous things? For instance, when I tried to apologize all over the place about imposing on him with an assumed name he told me he had known my identity from the first! You didn't tell him, did you? Then how did he know?"

"Why, my dear," said Peggy calmly, "that's just one of my dear old uncle's habitual prevarications where baseball is concerned—but don't let him see you know it. I'm sure he didn't know anything of the kind, though he may have begun to suspect—though I doubt even that. But, you see, as an infallible baseball critic and judge of players, it would never do for him to admit that such a well-known player as Steele, of the Badgers, lived under his nose and worked side by side with him, day in and day out for over two months, and he never knew it. That would be a fatal blow to his baseball prestige. And so when your speech at the ball field that day leaked all over town, my uncle calmly declared your identity was no news to him, and I even heard him joke Mr. Boggs about the latter never suspecting who you were. He actually made it appear as if he had been quietly playing an elaborate joke on poor Mr. Boggs. But whether the latter believes it or not is quite another matter; however, unlike his mother, Mr. Boggs knows when to keep quiet. You know my uncle's reputation as a baseball critic is something of an institution in this town, and no one has the heart to undeceive him. For that matter, however, nobody else suspected your identity—except myself; and, of course, as Mr. Greenlees suggested, I know absolutely nothing about baseball or its players.

"At all events," concluded Peggy soberly, "you may be quite sure my uncle has forgiven you long ago. The truth is, Dicky, he thinks a great deal of you—says he never had a secretary like you; he's proud of you, and I know he's hoping you'll give up baseball and take your old position with him. What he would like—and I, too—is for you to go back with the Badgers, for, say, a season just to make your vindication all the more real, and show yourself before all these people who hadn't words bad enough for you. There are heaps of letters and telegrams, which I haven't bothered you with, from managers and owners of the major leagues, and you may be sure they contain all sorts of offers. Why, even Mr. Morganthal, of the Badgers, made a special trip here in person last week, hoping he might see you; isn't that in itself enough to show that your services are still in great demand, and that they think you

as good as ever? They want you, Dicky, but—so do I! So do I! You made me promise once not to tell my uncle what—what happened at Nowhere in Particular until you could come for me clean and unashamed; and I promised because—because—well, because, you see, he knew long ago how it was with me. And so, though Mr. Morganthal and the others want you, I—I want you far, far more, dear——" Here the rest of the sentence, for some unaccountable reason, became hopelessly smothered.

Then as the hush of the coming night fell upon the room and the vespers of birds died out, Peggy's contralto came faint and obscure—for, after all, it is somewhat difficult to articulate clearly with two pairs of lips.

"And, Dicky, I want you to know I'm really awfully glad you wouldn't tell me about Mr. Somerville; really glad all my coaxing and bullying couldn't budge you an inch. For, though your man's code is the essence of foolishness, dear, it takes a *man* to be true to it!"

FORETELLING BATTLESHIP SPEED

IN a long, low building, down near the river in Washington, there is a man who plays with toy ships on a toy ocean. And, as a result of his play, he can foretell exactly how the big battleships of the United States navy will behave in a storm at sea, and he can predict to a nicety how much horse power will be needed to drive the great transatlantic liners laden with their passengers and freight. He does this before even the keels of the ships have been laid down.

He is Lieutenant Commander D. W. Taylor, naval constructor in the United States navy, and the toy ocean on which he works is the United States experimental model basin. The sheet of water in the basin is five hundred feet long and fifty feet wide, with a maximum depth of fourteen feet. But, in this limited space, Commander Taylor, working with a wave maker, a dynamometer, a towing bridge, and other apparatus, can solve all the mechanical problems connected with the construction of a ship, its probable roll when struck by giant waves, and the horse power needed in its tremendous engines to drive it through the water. He works with wooden models twenty feet long. Some of them weigh a thousand pounds, none of them more than two thousand. The other countries of the world use paraffine models, but he works entirely with the miniature ships of wood.

For this substitution there was a very good reason. In the summertime it is so hot in Washington that a model made out of even the best paraffine showed signs of melting. If it did not melt entirely, it changed its shape in an alarming degree.

One of the most important things in experimenting with the models is to be sure that in the beginning they have the exact lines and dimensions proportionately of the big ships, and that the lines and dimensions shall not change a hair's breadth.

The drawings and plans of the battleships to be built by Uncle Sam are turned over to Mr. Taylor by the navy department's bureau of construction and repair. In a little shop adjoining the building which covers the model basin the models are made and painted. Bags of shot, each weighing twenty-five pounds, are kept on hand to bring the model up to the corresponding weight of the big ship. The final tests are made in the "toy ocean" near by.

A Thousand a Plate

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "A Winning Game," "Precious Water," Etc.

Reintroducing Skookum Bill and his prospector-partner, old Sam Dobbs. The gold seekers turn trappers, and as one result of their memorable trip share in a meal that cost a thousand dollars a plate

AND why," said McNicol, the storekeeper at the Portage, eying Skookum Bill Hutchins and his partner, old Sam Dobbs coldly, "why should I give ye a winter's grubstake on credit? What have ye done with the bag of dust ye washed out of yon bar on the Kachika?"

Skookum Bill, standing on the floor scales, slid the weight along the beam until it balanced. "Two hundred and seventeen I weigh," he said, with satisfaction, for he was proud of his big, hard body and the tremendous strength which had earned him his sobriquet. "What did we do with that dust, McNicol? Why, we blowed it. How long d'you expect one little poke to last two growed-up men? She wasn't no Bonanza nor Forty Mile, that bar. Come on, McNicol! You know us. We're good for it. We ain't out to do you."

"Ye'll no doubt know the proverb concernin' good intentions and the Pit," said McNicol skeptically. "I'll not grubstake ye to lie in idleness all winter, so that ye may strike me for a spring outfit on the same terrums."

"You got an awful suspicious mind, McNicol," said Skookum Bill, in injured tones. "I s'pose, bein' Scotch, you can't help it. But you wrong us."

"I couldn't," snapped McNicol. "I'm under no delusions whatever respectin' the pair of ye."

Which was so true that old Dobbs interposed diplomatically.

"Bill didn't mean nothin', McNicol." said he. "He'd orter told you what we're goin' to do. We don't aim to hole up for the winter. We want to git us an outfit and trap."

"Ye might have said so at first," said the trader. "And where will ye trap?"

Dobbs hesitated and shook his head.

"We'd tell you if we told any one, but we ain't givin' that away," he said, with an air of honest regret. "We know a district that's simply crawlin' with fur, and don't look like it's never been trapped. Only she's a long, hard trail; and as there ain't no comin' out in the winter we want a pretty fair outfit, and we want to start right away."

McNicol looked him in the eye, but Dobbs met his gaze squarely. He was a hard old bird was Dobbs, lean and cunning; and though the chickens of a sinful youth and prime were beginning to roost upon his bald head and stooping shoulders—to say nothing of certain internal pains perhaps attributable to their scratching claws—he was still able to keep the pace which was set by his partner, Bill Hutchins. And Skookum Bill, in a land of hard men, was noted for strength, activity, endurance, and especially "cussedness." McNicol suddenly shifted his gaze to the face of the latter.

"That's right," Bill corroborated. "She's a long trip, like Sam says."

"Pick out what ye want," said McNicol. "But remember if there are no furs to show for it ye'll never get another dollar of credit from me."

And so, when Hutchins and Dobbs emerged from the store they were the possessors of sufficient general supplies to last until the next spring; which, considering that they were flat broke and had reputations that would ignite safety matches, was a striking testimony to the elastic credit of the country.

"Easier'n I thought!" grinned Skookum Bill, as he sliced tobacco from a huge new plug.

"What did you want to make that crack about him bein' Scotch for?" Sam remonstrated.

"Well, he is," Bill replied.

"That ain't no reason for remindin' him of it," said Dobbs, " 'specially when you want credit."

"Why, Scotchmen is mostly proud of just bein' Scotch," said Bill. "But darned if I ever could see why," he added.

"Nor me," Dobbs said. "Anyway, you near queered the deal. If I hadn't jumped in right then he'd have turned us down."

"You're a good, offhand liar," his partner conceded frankly. "But what are we goin' to do with all them traps? Course, we might trade them off for something we want."

"What's the matter with usin' them ourselves?" Dobbs suggested.

"Who? Us?" said Bill, in amazement. "Traps?"

"Sure," said Dobbs. "Why not?"

"No reason why not," Bill returned, "only I hadn't thought of it. I ain't trapped for a good while, and I was thinkin' we'd put in an easy winter. Fur's scarce around here, and I ain't goin' to kill myself for a few skins."

"Course not," Dobbs agreed, "but here's the proposition, Bill: We've made the bluff to McNicol, and you heard what he said. We may need him to stake us again. We've sure got to show him some fur in the spring. Now we've allus wanted to git up into that country around the headwaters of the Frances early in the year when the water in the creeks was low, so's we could wash gravel from the bars. We've allus figgered they was gold there. We can hit there before freeze-up and winter, all right, and have a look around. Likely there's as much fur there as they is anywhere. And, anyway, when you ain't got no money for the winter, it's just as well to go some place where you won't need none."

Now Hutchins and Dobbs were prospectors—or rather gold seekers—first, last, and all the time. The uncertain game held them in the grip of its fascination, and though they cursed and grumbled at the life, they loved it. Occasionally they were forced to turn their versatile hands to other things, and had even, when times were very hard, indeed, descended and condescended to regular employment for wages; which they considered a degradation to be excused only by stern necessity. But their hearts were in the hills and valleys and basins and nameless creeks where a man might chance upon yellow fortune among the sand and gravel; albeit the chance was less than one in ten thousand. No rumor was too will-o'-the-wispy for them to chase; and on the well-known theory that far-away fields are the greenest they were continually making long, hard trips into unknown country, whence they usually returned cursing bitterly and outrageously, only to try again elsewhere with little better success. And so Skookum Bill found his partner's suggestion alluring.

"That's so," he said. "You're right about them creeks. I'll bet there's bars that'd pay big if they could be got at. And as you say we have to winter

somewheres. Might as well do it there, and be in for the spring low water."

Neither mentioned nor, indeed, thought of the circumstance that the district referred to was in the very heart of a frozen wilderness; that it was hard to get into even when the waterways were open and practically impossible to get out of when these were closed by frost; and that in the event of sickness or accident a man must depend principally upon Providence and his own constitution to pull him through. Neither Bill nor Sam leaned very strongly upon Providence—though Sam, when drunk, exhibited religious tendencies, or rather a tendency to mourn his lack of them through life—but each had a well-founded and abiding faith in his own physical powers, and so neither saw anything out of the way in the prospect of a winter of remote loneliness.

A couple of days later they left the Portage in a sixteen-foot Peterboro, loaded to within two inches of the gunwale, and so almost as unstable as a floating log. But since both were used to the vagaries of such craft, they felt as secure as if it had been a York boat, and paddled up the long reaches without undue exertion, camping when it suited them, and living royally on fish, flesh, and fowl, aided by a supply of rum so much overproof that it would almost have floated a horseshoe. But this luxury was also in the nature of medical stores, and in the long winter ahead contingencies might arise in which it would prove very valuable, indeed.

"No more after to-night," said Bill, at the end of a week, pouring a frugal portion into a tin cup. "No more till Christmas, bar accidents."

"That goes," Dobbs agreed regretfully, duplicating the action. "But, anyhow, Bill, here's to accidents!"

But though at first their rate of progress was slow and its manner indolent, as the days went by a change came upon them, especially noticeable in the younger man, Skookum Bill.

This manifested itself in stiffer thrusts of paddle against the current, in a gradually increasing tension of body and mind against the natural obstacles to their progress, in later goings ashore at night to camp, in earlier uprisings. They were, in fact, in the grip of the long trail, and Bill Hutchins' magnificent muscles seemed to string themselves to meet an added demand.

In the stern of the low-laden canoe his paddle swished steadily and powerfully, with thrust of straight, stiff upper arm backed by a twisting swing of the body from the waist, and with every stroke the little craft leaped as if a giant hand had shoved her forward. In the bow old Dobbs fought the stream cunningly, twisting the nose into eddies and backwaters, taking advantage when he could of set of current, and when he could not paddling doggedly, not so powerfully, perhaps, as his partner, but with equal steadiness.

And so in due course they approached the destination. The nights were now cold, gemmed with a multitude of bright stars, uncanny with the querulous wail of coyotes and the occasional deep voices of wolves. In the mornings hoar-frost lay thick upon the ground, and thin ice formed in currentless shallows and overlay the muskrat runways. In the sloughs and ponds the rush-and-mud houses of these little workers were bound solidly. Along the river freshly felled and barked trees told of the activity of beaver, and in slow current and in eddies the tops of their winter's food supply lay like submerged brush fences projecting above the surface. Day by day the trees became barer and the stream was littered with yellow, wind-stripped leaves. Geese passed overhead, and wild fowl from the breeding grounds of the farther North

wisped along the lonely waterway. Plainly winter was at hand.

"Just as well we started when we did," said Bill. "No tellin' when she'll tighten up."

"May do it any time," Sam agreed.

They turned up the Frances where the water was shallow and swift. Creeks were numerous and timber was plentiful. On either hand were hills and more hills, in waves of unknown ranges, seamed by swift waterways, notched by passes. And here the adventurers went ashore, unloaded, turned their canoe bottom up in the shelter of thick brush, and cached their supplies temporarily on a pole scaffold, out of reach of prowling depredators.

They had never been in that precise country before, and they had not the least idea of the surrounding topography save that it seemed to have considerable ups and downs, but nevertheless they felt quite satisfied and at home.

"For fur," said Dobbs, "we ort to get back in them hills. There's better timber, and if there's pay in the creeks she'll be higher up."

"All right," Bill acquiesced. "We'll take a couple of blankets and some grub and *nanitch* round for a couple of days till we find a place to suit us."

Carrying light packs they left camp at daylight the next morning. Trails there were none; but they followed the general course of a small creek, crossed a divide, and dipped down into a beautifully timbered valley watered by a swift, large creek of almost riverlike dimensions. They were thus between the first range of hills and the second, and much higher up than where they had landed. Looking to right and left from the summit, before they had begun the descent, the valley had lain as far as they could see in thick timber and open, natural meadows, and they could see also gaps in the hills, probably indicating tributary streams.

"Looks good to me," said Bill. "We'll just go up her to-morrow, and see what we can find. There ort to be fur here."

Now, fur-bearing animals are the shyest of living things, and one may very easily wander for days in their natural habitat, and see none of them. And yet most of the time one will be under the observation of beady, little eyes, and twitching, pointed noses, and small, furred ears. It is one thing to be morally certain that one is in an excellent fur district and quite another to prove it, apart from actual results in trapping. Beaver and rats have visible habitations, and their fecundity is their chief guarantee against extinction. But the fox, the marten, the mink, the otter, the lynx, and the weasel do not advertise their abodes. For the most part their habits are nocturnal, and their trails, before the snow, usually invisible. Now and then an odd member of the clans may be seen for an instant; but, as a rule, the would-be trapper, cruising for a good district, draws general conclusions from the lie of the land, the timber, the streams, and its remoteness or otherwise as bearing on the likelihood of its having been trapped before.

But Skookum Bill and old Sam, although they were primarily gold seekers, knew the angles of the trapping game very well, and in a couple of days' cruising up and down the valley they found sufficient sign to render them jubilant.

"Course it's mighty hard to tell till we've put out a few traps," said the former, "but it looks to me like we've struck it lucky."

"You bet," Dobbs agreed. "I don't believe this here valley ever *was* trapped. We ain't come across no sign of any old camp—not so much as a blazed tree. I wouldn't wonder if we was the only white men that ever was in here—or Injuns, either. I'll bet we'll take out a canoeload of prime fur. Mar-

ten ort to be dark in here among this timber."

"She'll be some chore packin' the outfit in over that summit," Bill observed. "There's snow there now, but there ain't enough for a toboggan. And then she's blame steep. We'll have to pack it on our backs. Two trips ort to do."

"Well"—old Dobbs clawed his beard dubiously—"I'm gettin' a leetle short in the wind, Bill, with a load. They's times when my back don't feel right. I can't pack like I could twenty years ago, or ten—nor even five."

"I can," said Skookum Bill, with the proud confidence of wonderful and undiminished strength. "I ain't never hit my limit yet. I could pack three hundred in over that summit if I could get it to set right. Course, though, I ain't goin' to try for no records. We'll both go over, and you take what you can pack easy, and I'll take a good load, and we'll both come back. Then I'll fetch over the outfit in two or three trips while you're buildin' a cabin. We'll build her right here. This'll be our home camp. If we have to we'll string two or three line camps up or down as we need 'em."

They returned from their canoe heavily laden, and Dobbs set about building a cabin in a sheltered spot near the creek. His tools were an ax and an auger. The sides of the building were of small logs, chinked with grass and moss, and the roof was of shakes split from straight-grained wood. Having no stove, they were forced to depend for heat on a fireplace made of sticks laid in clay. Dobbs added two bunks, a table, and two stools, and surveyed his work with some pride.

"She'll do," he said.

"Good enough for a millionaire," Skookum Bill agreed. "And now let her snow and be durned!"

But for a time "she" refused to snow. Day after day was bright and breathless, the air dry and clear. Ever the nights grew colder. The ponds were skinned over with new ice, clear and tough, which rang musically to the impact of a blow as a thin goblet rings when tapped gently with the knife blade. The ground was a carpet of leaves, rustling noisily beneath the softest foot. But Bill killed a blacktail, and so they had meat. Fish were plentiful. And so with the larder full they waited for the snow; for until it should come, revealing the telltale trails and runways of the furred peoples, it would be waste of time to set many traps.

This waiting was of a deadly monotony. Skookum Bill, full of restless, tireless energy when on the trail, now passed to the other extreme. He slept like a dog, sixteen hours a day, rising to eat and smoke, and then falling back in his bunk, where he coiled himself very much like a hibernating bear. He was stupid with sleep, drugged with it, and he did absolutely nothing, leaving all the work to his partner.

Dobbs, whose advancing years had diminished his capacity for sleep, did not grumble, even inwardly. He was accustomed to his partner's extremes, of sloth, of action, and of dissipation. And he knew that sooner or later the big man would do much more than his share of work. And so he cooked and cut wood and washed up and played solitaire and lay sleepless for hours in his bunk. It would be very pleasant and strictly conventional to state that in these hours of darkness and sleeplessness his mind reverted to the days of his innocent childhood, and that he sighed bitterly over the years of his misspent life. In fact, however, he did nothing of the sort. If he had ever had an innocent childhood he had forgotten all about it. Save when drunk he was unsentimental, unrepentant, and irreligious. And instead of regretting his somewhat lurid past he occupied himself in building air castles which

should have been promptly closed by the air police.

At last the snow came, on the wings of a northwest wind which had switched suddenly from southerly gales. Old Dobbs, lying in his bunk, noted the short lull in the whining, straining aëolian notes and their recommencement from another quarter. Later he found himself cold, and drew another blanket over him. In the morning it was still blowing great guns, and when he had made up the fire he opened the door on a world of swirling, wind-driven whiteness. Whereat he cackled joyously and informed his comatose partner that it was snowing like perdition; a simile which, though possibly inaccurate according to accepted authorities was fairly descriptive of weather conditions.

Skookum Bill opened gummed eyes, and profanely commanded him to shut the door. He stretched, yawned profoundly, heaved himself out of his bunk and dressed himself, a process which was confined to and completed by the drawing on of trousers and moccasins. After which he ate a huge breakfast of flapjacks and venison, lit his pipe, and had a look at the weather.

"Blizzard," he announced. "Can't do nothin' till she stops." And having stated this obvious fact he lay down, and went to sleep again.

For two days the storm raged; and when it ceased and the sun shone again, they seemed to be in a new world, dazzlingly white, wiped clean of familiar landmarks. The swift river was frozen across. The cabin itself was no more than a mound in the snow. Traveling thenceforth must be done on the webs.

But with the snow, trails before invisible would be plain to read. And so they loaded themselves with traps, bait, blankets, and started to lay out their line. They had brought a good supply of steel traps of assorted sizes, but they used also the old-fashioned, primitive deadfall which, though it takes time to construct, is just as effective and much more humane, though the latter consideration did not operate on their minds at all.

As they progressed they found sign in abundance. The trails of the fur bearers, from the huge, muffled pads of the lynx to the dainty, mouselike feet of the weasel, were everywhere. Never had either of them seen the like.

"Fur!" swore Skookum Bill. "It's here to burn!"

"A reg'lar Garden of Eden!" said old Dobbs, whose scriptural recollections were somewhat misty. "Don't look like it's ever been trapped, and nobody knows of it but us. We'd orter make a clean-up."

"It'll beat prospectin'," said Bill.

And it did. In the weeks that followed they gathered store of fur, not only in quantity, but in quality beyond their wildest dreams. And when one day they took a veritable black fox from a trap, they felt that at last fortune was treating them according to their deserts. The animal was large, his coat perfect, and they skinned him carefully and reverently; and that night they celebrated fittingly in the precious rum.

"That there black dog," said Skookum Bill, nodding at the stretching skin, "don't know his own luck. He's due to wind himself round the neck of an empress or a princess or a dancer or somethin', and have her rub her cheek onto his hide. And that's a durn sight more than you or me will ever have, Sam."

"I don't want none of 'em rubbin' up to me," said old Dobbs virtuously. "I don't go none on them European she high-rollers, nor noovo rich. I ruther have a klootch that can cook."

"I never had one that could, and I've had sev'ral," Bill stated judicially. "And their ideas of what's grub is a lot too liberal for me, and I ain't got no

tender stummick, nuther. I've saw a klootchman build a mulligan out of stuff that would poison a white man's dog."

"Never watch the cook," said Dobbs solemnly, "'specially when it's a mulligan she's makin'. And about them klootchmen of yourn, Bill, you're my partner, and I think a lot of you; but it's my duty to tell you you ain't lived a moral life a-tall."

Bill's comment on this obvious truth was not verbal. He picked up the rum, shot the cork tight with a blow of his fist, and placed it behind his bunk.

"What you doin'?" Dobbs asked. "I want another drink."

"You won't get it," Bill replied, with finality. "You're drunk."

"I ain't!" Dobbs denied indignantly. "Me? Why, I ain't said a word about religion yet. I guess I know my own stages by this time."

"When an old rooster like you gets to talkin' about a moral life it's time he quit drinkin'," Bill observed. "And, anyway, we ain't goin' to mop up all we got. We want to save some for Christmas, and in case of sickness."

"We're both healthy," Dobbs urged.

"That's all right," said Bill. "Some time you come in wet and froze and played out; and the first thing you know you got a shakin' chill and a pain in your chest and the makin's of pneumonia. What you goin' to do if you haven't any liquor?"

"Chrishun Science!" said old Dobbs resourcefully.

"Christian blazes!" snorted Bill. "Don't talk back to me. I got you siwashed right now. Go to bed and sober off!"

II.

It was a week after the taking of the black fox that Skookum Bill, on a short exploring trip a few miles west of their cabin, came across a deadfall which held a dead marten. He took the marten, and, when he returned, said to Dobbs:

"I didn't know you'd built any deadfalls in the timber past the big draw?"

"I haven't," said Dobbs.

"Hey!" Bill exclaimed. "Sure you have. That's where I got this marten."

"Can't help it," Dobbs returned. "I ain't got a trap there. I ain't been in that timber a-tall."

"Somebody has," Bill stated flatly. "There's the marten, and I seen snowshoe tracks. Course I thought they was yours."

"Well, they ain't," Dobbs said positively.

"Then," Bill declared, with an oath, "somebody's trapping on our ground."

The first statement was obviously true, though the partners' proprietary rights might be open to doubt. But custom has arranged a trapper's modus vivendi by which a man's right is ordinarily recognized to the territory covered by his traps; and such right is jealously guarded. Seemingly here was an intruder who was violating custom. Moreover, the partners had come to look upon this exceedingly rich district as their exclusive property. And so their indignation was extreme.

"The low-down, ornery cuss!" said Dobbs. "The nerve of him, crowdin' in on us, just as if there wasn't lots of other places for him to go!"

"I sh'd say so!" Bill concurred. "Here we go to all the trouble of findin' a new district where we won't interfere with no one, and this blasted wolverine comes in and sets his traps right on top of us. Well, he's got to roll his blankets, that's all. There's some things I won't stand."

"Sure," said Dobbs, "he ain't actin' right. There's plenty of men been shot for less."

"So there has," Bill agreed. "Only we don't want to shoot him unless we have to. It's got so lately that there's trouble about such things. Same time

we ain't goin' to let him keep on stealin' fur from us. To-morrow we'll go and run him to his hole, and find out whether he's a Nitche or a white man."

Early in the morning they shouldered light packs, took their rifles, crossed the big draw, and entered the timber where was the deadfall.

"It ain't mine," said Dobbs positively. "I never notched a stick that way in my life. And look at them snowshoe tracks. They're longer 'n' narrower than mine, and the webbin's different."

Proof conclusive. And so they took up the stranger's trail. It led west, and when darkness fell they had not reached its end. On the way they found half a dozen traps, which they destroyed. That night they slept out uncomfortably. And the next day about noon they found a cabin very similar to their own, standing in the shelter of thick spruce. There was no smoke, and Bill's hail met with no response. They lifted the wooden latch and peered in. The owner was not at home, though the cabin was evidently occupied.

"One white man," said Bill, after a brief inspection. "Out on his line, I s'pose, and there's no tellin' when he'll be back. So we won't wait. We'll just serve notice on him."

The ultimatum which Bill indited, and which they jointly and severally subscribed, was succinct, lucid, and peremptory, and read:

> No traping alowed east of that washout creek. That is our ground kepe of it. By Order
>
> W. HUTCHINS
> S. DOBBS, ESQ.

Leaving this on the table weighted with a stick of firewood they returned to their own camp. Having thus declared themselves, they considered it up to the intruder. And so they were not surprised when he appeared at their camp two days later.

He proved to be a somewhat hard-faced gentleman of about Dobbs' age, with a cold eye and a bent mouth. He carried a rifle of a recent model, and it was noticeable that every loop of his cartridge belt contained a shell. Without preliminaries he introduced himself as Jake Flint.

"I s'pose," said Mr. Flint morosely, "you're the two pelicans that put it up I can't trap east of that washout creek?"

"And you s'pose dead right," said Skookum Bill truculently. "That's our ground."

"Homestead?" queried Mr. Flint, with elaborate irony. "When do you prove up?"

"Right away—for you!" Bill retorted. "That's our ground because we're trappin' that district, and we ain't goin' to stand for no one else there."

"And so," said Mr. Flint, "you go and bust up my traps."

"You bet we do!" Bill replied. "And what you goin' to do about it, hey?"

The older man eyed him for a moment balefully. "I'm goin' to set 'em again," he replied, "and don't you touch 'em. I'm goin' to trap where I durn please. There's two of you, but you don't bluff me out, not any."

"Bluff, hey?" said Skookum Bill. "If you got her sized up for a bluff, go ahead. But don't holler at the showdown. What we said in that notice goes."

"I'm goin' ahead," Flint stated calmly. "I wasn't born in the woods to be scared by no horned owl. You go lookin' for trouble round my *illahee*, and you're durn apt to get it. And that's all I got to say to you."

With which flat declaration he departed. Three days afterward the partners discovered traps which were not theirs east of the washout creek which was the dead line. These they destroyed, with curses and threats. But to their vast indignation a short time after a like fate befell a dozen of their own traps. Thus it was evident that Flint was not afraid to play even.

"And that settles it," said Bill wrath-

fully. "He's callin' for a show-down, and he'll sure get it. I'm goin' to *nanitch* down around his *illahee*. You keep camp. I may be away some nights."

"What you goin' to do?" Dobbs asked.

"I ain't goin' to shoot him," Bill replied. "I'm just goin' to give him a sorter hint to move out."

Without further explanation he departed, and did not return till the end of the third day.

"Well?" Dobbs asked somewhat anxiously.

"Well—what?" Bill growled.

"What did you do?"

"Burned him out."

"Gosh!" old Dobbs exclaimed in awe, for in that remote wilderness such a deed was little less than murder. "Not—not the whole jing-bang, Bill? You left him something?"

"I was fool enough to," Skookum Bill admitted. "I waited till he was out on his line, 'cause I didn't want to shoot him. I held him out some grub and his bed and all the matches he had. He has part of a deer hung up, so he has lots of meat, and he has a little toboggan with him. With luck he ought to make somewheres if he starts right away. I could."

"You're young and stronger'n a moose," Dobbs pointed out. "Durned if I believe I could make it alone, and he's about as old as me."

"He's got a chance," his partner replied doggedly. "He had fair warning. Lots of men would have shot him. An Injun would, in a holy minute."

"That's so," said Dobbs, "but now he'll go on the prod. He's just the kind to lay for us and shoot us."

"Not him," said Bill. "He'll figger we're watchin' for him. And as there's two of us he'll beat it for the outside."

The next two days brought no sign of Flint; and when a week passed uneventfully they began to relax their watchfulness.

"What'd I tell you?" said Bill. "The old wolverine was tryin' to run a blazer on us. All he needed was to be showed we meant business. And he can't make no trouble for us when he gets out, 'cause our two words are better'n his."

And so they went about their business once more in comfortable security, quite untroubled by thought of the lone refugee toiling through the deep snows toward the abodes of men. As they looked at it he was lucky to have the chance which had been vouchsafed him; for they knew those who would not have given it at all. Their consciences were quite easy, and they enjoyed once more the feeling of sole ownership.

"Only we got to rip the heart out of her this season," Dobbs pointed out, as they sat one night before the fire. "'Cause if Flint makes the riffle, even though he don't raise no war yell on us, next year he gets him a partner, and if we want to trap in here we got to do it in the smoke. And I ain't that fond of trappin'."

"Nor me," Bill admitted. "It ain't our business. We'll just take what we can get and quit. We ought to have enough right now to pay McNicol and live for a year, with some fun throwed in."

"We'll get more and better fur after Christmas," said Dobbs. Suddenly an idea seemed to strike him. He got up, stirred the fire, and inspected a line of cryptic marks upon the wall. "Say," he said, "do you know what day this is?"

"Wednesday or Sunday or s'm' other day," Bill replied indifferently.

"Twenty-fourth of December," said Dobbs.

"Well, what about it?"

"Christmas Eve!" Dobbs told him.

"And what about *that?*" Bill asked. "You ain't figgerin' to be Santa Claus, are you? 'Cause I'm longer on duffle than socks."

Dobbs licked his old lips sinfully, and

his jaws waggled like those of a cat which sees a bird almost within springing distance.

"Christmas Eve," he repeated. "We was to have a leetle celebration Christmas Eve." And he added somewhat anxiously: "You aint' forgot about that, Bill? It's an awful long time since we had a drink."

"Last time you had too many," Skookum Bill reminded him.

"What if I had?" Dobbs asked, in injured tones. "I get durn little fun in life, and I'm gettin' old. About the only time I feel good and like I used to is when I'm tanked up. Wait twenty years and you'll know."

"Oh, all right," said his partner, somewhat apprehensively, for he had the horror of the young and absolutely healthy for the dismal forebodings and outlook of age. "I dunno but I feel like a drink or two myself. And as you say we was goin' to celebrate a little. Only we'll go light on the stuff, 'cause as I told you before we want to have a little left in case of sickness."

Dobbs agreed hypocritically. For weeks his whole being had craved liquor. Once he had furtively helped himself to a drink; and had shaken in his shoes lest his partner's nostrils should detect the strong-odored rum. In which event he would have had a severe manhandling, for Skookum Bill brooked no infraction of the camp rules which he laid down.

But as it happened that night Bill was in a more or less free and unbelted mood. Also, but in a lesser degree than his partner, he craved alcohol; not so much physically, for his nerves were as yet quite untouched, but mentally, as a change from the monotony of their existence.

Now the rum, as has been said, was criminally overproof, and they had had no intoxicants for a long time. And so a couple of stiff drinks produced a beautiful and generous expansion of soul. The mean cabin became larger, the fire warmer and more cheerful, and life generally of a more roseate hue. They began to feel the prodigal Christmas spirit, and to regret their limited opportunities for satisfying it.

"I wisht we was somewheres," said Bill. "Look at all them skins and think of what they'd buy. And what good are they to us here?" Rising, he searched out the pelt of the black fox, held it up, and stroked the glossy coat lovingly. "What's this black dog worth, Sam?"

"Whatever you can get," Dobbs replied bitterly. "We never get nothing like what they're worth. But this here is a beauty. I don't s'pose there's a better pelt in the world, or ever has been. McNicol will get near twenty-five hundred if he holds out. And we ort to hold out for two thousand."

"You bet we will," Bill affirmed. "If I had my share of that to-night down in Vancouver or Seattle, things'd move some."

"They sure would," Dobbs agreed. "I remember once I hit Seattle with a little stake, and——" He embarked on a lurid narrative of his deeds on that historic occasion.

Bill piled wood on the fire with a prodigal hand and took up the tale. Later he essayed song, roaring forth unprintable ballads in a tremendous, harsh bass which drowned his partner's sadly cracked tenor. By this time his determination to "go light" on the rum was quite forgotten, and Dobbs, who had never in all his long and sinful life denied himself anything which was ready to his hand, was not the man to remind him, even if he, Dobbs, had not reached a composite condition which may be described as the sentimental-philosophical-religious-despondent, in which a corresponding variety of mental kinks became evident.

"'S funny world," he announced solemnly, "when you size her up. Some

folks allus has the best of it, 'n' accordin'ly, others gets the worst. 'S logic, and you can't beat it. Me, I allus got the worst. 'S the Scripture says I ask for bread and I get the laugh, like the Prodigal Son."

"You don't know your own luck," said Bill. "What you kickin' at? Here you got a fire and blankets and booze and eats. You're blame lucky, if you ask me. How'd you like to be mushin' along in the snow, campin' under a tree somewheres like that durn old wolverine, Flint?"

"Proves what I was sayin'," Dobbs argued. "He gets the worst of it. I ain't sure we done right about that, Bill. The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. An' we're wicked—we're good 'n' wicked. If it was to do over again I'd say shoot him tenderly. It'd be safer."

"He can't do nothin'." Bill asserted.

"Something might happen to him and he'd die—in the snow," said Dobbs tearfully. "'S 'n' awful death, Bill! I'm 'fraid of it. An' he's old, like me. He won't never make it. He'll freeze 'n' die. Shockin'! But then he won't never tell nobody how he was burnt out, nor get a chance to play even on us. So it's all for th' best, an' we shouldn't doubt 'n inscrutable Providence. But 's 'n awful thing to kill a fellow bein', Bill!"

"Not when he needs it," Bill said grimly.

"I killed a fellow bein' once—with an ax," his partner whimpered. "He needed it, too. He knifed me an' I near died. Promise you won't let me die in the snow, Bill!"

Thereafter he became unintelligibly maudlin, and staggered to his bunk. Skookum Bill sat alone, his head singing with raw rum, the prey of a thousand devils of desire which he could not satisfy. The happy stage had passed. He was morose, sour of temper as an old bull. In any companionship he would have picked a quarrel, fought, and thus worked off his ill temper. But as there was no one to fight with he merely drank and scowled. Being cold he threw more wood on the fire recklessly. At it blazed the heat working on the alcohol made him sleepy. He blinked drunkenly at his bunk, but lacked the energy to rise to get to it. Instead he leaned forward and laid his head on his folded arms which rested on the table beside the skin of the black fox. In a moment he was asleep.

How long he slept thus he never knew. He awoke gasping, choking, in an atmosphere which bit his throat and lungs and stung his eyes. In his ears was an ominous crackling and snapping, and a glare met his sight from which he shrank like a frightened animal. For a moment his sodden senses refused to comprehend, but instinctively he sprang for the door.

With its opening, and the admission of fresh air, the interior of the cabin leaped into flame. Red tongues ran up the heat-dried resinous walls and roof. Smoke billowed out at him through the door.

The break into the air of the winter's night was like a plunge into ice water. He sobered suddenly. He was not overly intelligent, but all his life he had been accustomed to dangers, to emergencies which must be met by instant bodily action. And so he did not hesitate. Drawing his great lungs full of pure air, he plunged back into the smoke, dragged his stupefied partner from his bunk, and flung him out in the snow.

Thereafter his actions were of the whirlwind variety. He made no useless attempt to fight the fire. Whatever he could lay hands on in the choking smoke he flung through the door; and finally emerged with racked lungs, blinded eyes, and scorched hair and flesh. Gasping and cursing he watched the flames

burst through the roof, and roar, wind-driven, in a mighty, licking tongue which seemed to reach out toward him hungrily.

But in a moment the frost nipped at him. Immediately he pounced upon his prostrate partner and shook him violently.

"Lemme 'lone!" Dobbs muttered. And Bill cuffed him with the earnestness of a she-bear admonishing a cub.

"Wake up, you old stiff," he shouted, "or you'll wake up in hell!" And Dobbs, catching the concluding words, opened uncomprehending and dazed eyes upon a red glare and smoke which eddied around him and soaring sparks.

"In hell," he croaked, "jus' 's I've allus expected! An' Bill's along, too, 'n' I ain't s'prised at *that!*"

"You ain't, hey!" growled his partner, and shook him again so that his old head snapped to and fro perilously. "Lemme tell you hell's tame to this. We're burnt out—burnt out, d'ye hear! And if you don't wake up and get your blood to movin', you'll freeze so solid you'll never thaw!" And he smote him again.

"Burnt out!" Dobbs repeated stupidly. "Burnt out?"

"You got it!" snapped Skookum Bill, and hauled him to his feet. "Get some more clothes on you. I don't know what I pitched out yet. I hadn't no time to be partic'lar."

Luckily they had been fully clad, even to their moccasins, and Bill had rescued their heavy outer garments which had hung near the door. Dobbs got into his coat, shivering with cold.

"How'd she start?" he queried.

"I dunno," his partner replied sullenly. "Hot coal, I s'pose, or chimbley. I had on a big fire when I dropped asleep."

"This is what we get for burnin' Flint out!" whined Dobbs. "You shouldn't have did that, Bill. It's a judgment!"

"Aw, shut up!" growled his partner. "You make me sick. Judgment my neck! There ain't no such thing!"

"Yes, there is," Dobbs insisted. "This proves it."

"Cut it out!" roared Skookum Bill, in sudden fury. "Another word out of you, and I'll throw you on that fire!"

Dobbs, cowed and shaken, wisely refrained from further observations. They passed the remainder of the night miserably, and with daylight they took stock of their belongings.

These were few. There was a rifle with but three shells in the magazine, and these constituted their entire stock of ammunition. There were two blankets stripped from the bunks, part of a sack of flour, and a box of matches. Their snowshoes and ax and a light toboggan had been outside, and so were uninjured. Unfortunately they were low in venison, part of a quarter only remaining. And last, but of little immediate value, was the skin of the black fox, which had been lying on the table. All the other pelts were gone. It was a very scanty outfit, indeed, and they regarded it gloomily.

"There's only one thing to do," Skookum Bill observed, "and that's to beat it for the outside. Sooner we start the better."

"Ain't there no grub in the line camp?"

"Not a smell. This is the outfit right here, and it ain't much."

"You're right, it ain't," said Dobbs. "I was sayin' I didn't believe I could make the outside, and now I'll have a chance to see."

"Sure you'll make it," said Bill, who knew the importance of a stout heart on a long, hard trail. "We'll travel along easy, and make good camps."

"We ain't got enough grub to take it easy," Dobbs pointed out. "And just when you need meat is the time you don't see it."

Which was so true that Skookum Bill went to loading the toboggan without

reply. This done he adjusted the loops of his snowshoes and dropped the line of the sled over his shoulders.

"All set?" he asked.

"Gimme a rope of the toboggan," said Dobbs.

"I will when I get tired," said Bill.

III.

Day after day they plodded steadily in a white wilderness. By day the hard exercise kept them warm. But camping in the snow under even the most favorable conditions is not fun, and when one is short of food and blankets it is miserable. In spite of all they could do in the way of shelters, and no matter how cunningly they arranged their reflecting backlogs and fires, they shivered from dark to dawn. Thus they had little real rest. The very exercise which kept them warm by day burned up the food which they ate and demanded more. Not getting it, it consumed the body tissues. They grew gaunt and haggard and sunken of eye, but there could be no rest.

As Dobbs had feared they found no red meat. At any other time they would have chanced on deer or moose. But now, in their necessity, they saw neither. It seemed an off year for rabbits. They caught two in snares, and had the luck to kill three grouse with sticks, for they were reluctant to waste their precious cartridges on such small game. These eked out the small supply of venison and flour, but the time came when they were forced to cut down their scanty daily rations.

"It's a case," said Bill. "It's twelve days, givin' ourselves the best of it, to the Portage, and it looks like there was a hoodoo on us for meat. We got to cut right down."

And then a piece of the worst possible luck befell. Dobbs, descending a steep place, caught the toe of his snowshoe in brush, tripped, and fell twenty feet, bringing up among rocks sticking out of the snow. When he tried to rise he sank back, stifling a groan.

"You ain't hurt yourself?" cried Bill.

"Leg," said Dobbs briefly. "She got a bad crack and a twist. I—I can't walk on her, Bill!"

"We'll camp and have a look at her," said Bill quietly. "A little rest will do us good."

He made a fire, and, stripping his partner's leg, examined it. It was already swollen and discoloring, and just above the ankle it was painful to the touch.

"Looks to me like the little bone's bust," said Bill, referring to the fibula. "You sure can't walk on her." He was silent for a moment. "Hell!" he added justifiably.

Into Dobbs' old eyes came the expression of a stricken animal. But he said nothing, waiting. Bill scowled at the fire.

"Hard luck, but it can't be helped," he said, at length. "I'll fix it up the best I can with splints. We won't go no farther to-day."

"If it's broke I won't be able to walk to-morrow," Dobbs ventured.

"You won't be able to walk for weeks," his partner told him. "I'll haul you on the toboggan."

"You can't—not in this soft snow," said Dobbs. "It's white of you, Bill, but it's too much."

"I never quit a partner yet," the big man announced. "I ain't no smear heel. I can do it, all right. I'm skookum, and I ain't never struck my limit yet." He stretched his great body with a sudden, rippling heave of muscle and sinew. "Don't you worry 'bout me, old-timer. We'll pull through somehow."

He cut a thick bough bed, and splints from a straight-grained sapling with which he bound his partner's leg, but not too tightly lest the impeded circulation should cause the foot to freeze. And in the morning he made him as comfortable as possible on the tobog-

gan, looped the line over his shoulders, and started.

Though Dobbs was lean his weight in that soft snow made a heavy load. Bill was forced to pick his way carefully. Now and then on crust the going was good, and he made better time; but on the whole, progress was alarmingly slow. Even on downward slopes it was a pull; up them it was a strain. The exertion wrung the sweat from his hard body. Now and then he was forced to rest.

"I'm too durn heavy," said Dobbs sadly.

"No, you ain't," his partner replied. "You're lighter than I thought. Wait till we get down along the river, where the snow is packed, and we'll just burn up the trail."

Magnificent lying, and Dobbs knew it. He could tell by the sinking of his partner's webs in the snow, by his heavy breathing, by the heave of his chest, and the running sweat when he halted. A good judge of distance and pace, he knew that the miles of a day's march were being cut in less than half. Which meant that instead of being twelve days from the Portage they were, in fact, more than twenty-four. And even on rations reduced to the starvation point they had enough food only for six.

Over these things Dobbs brooded, sitting helpless on the toboggan watching the pistonlike, tireless, driving stride of the magnificent human mechanism in front of him. And one night he looked at his scanty meal with a tolerable imitation of repulsion.

"I don't want no supper," said he.

"You ain't feelin' sick?" asked Bill apprehensively.

"No, not sick," Dobbs assured him. "I just ain't hungry. I guess my stummick's sorter turned against this grub. It'll do me good to go without a meal or two." Which was uttered with the best intentions, but was a distinct overplay of his hand.

"You old liar!" said Bill, with something approaching emotion. "I'm onto you bigger'n a house. You eat that grub!"

And Dobbs, finding his scheme detected, gave up the pretense.

"I won't," he said "You're doin' all the work, while I'm just settin' still. You need the grub, and I don't. I don't have to keep strong, and you do. You've got to have it to pull me. Besides," he added, with a brave attempt at humor, "the less I eat, the lighter I'll get, and that'll help some."

"And that'll be all from you," said Bill. "Think I'm goin' to see a partner with a busted leg starve himself? Not much. Eat it, or I'll ram it down you."

And so Dobbs ate unwillingly, while his partner predicted a change of luck which should give them meat. Sooner or later, he maintained, they were bound to find deer.

But the only change was one of weather, which had been fine, though cold. Now a blizzard descended on them, driven by a wind from the arctic wastes, which cut the skin like a knife. Skookum Bill battled with it for two hours before he gave up, with frost spots on his face and his lungs aching from the thirty-below air that he had pumped into them, which was yet insufficient for his exertions.

They camped in the thickest spruce they could find, and the blizzard raged two days, which reduced their stock of food to the vanishing point. Also it made new, fresh snow, and harder going than ever.

"But, anyhow," said Bill, "we've had a good rest. Now watch me hit her."

And he did "hit her," tearing along in a knee-high flurry of snow, while Dobbs watched him with hollow-eyed, bitter longing, and self-reproach. The next day the grub gave out!

"Bill," said the older man, "it's no use. You can't get me to the Portage, and you'll have an awful job gettin'

there alone. Still, you got a chance. Right here we split the blankets."

"Guess again," said Bill.

"I don't need to," said Dobbs. "I've seen this comin' from the first, and now it's here. When luck sets against you, you can't change it. You can't make the Portage with me. You've done more than any two men could do already. There ain't no sense in both of us dyin', and I'm elected. I'm an old dog, and my time's mighty nigh up, anyhow, so it don't matter so much."

"I said we'd make the Portage," said Bill, with an oath, "and we'll make it together or not at all. I wouldn't quit a partner while he's alive. I said I hadn't hit my limit, and I ain't hit her yet. When I do I'll tell you." And nothing that Dobbs could say shook his resolution.

But Dobbs was not deceived. He knew that his partner's strength was rapidly running out—that even his splendid muscles and wonderful endurance could not stand up much longer against the double strain of exertion and hunger. Now Dobbs was an old reprobate, hardened in wickedness, without noticeable conscience or principle; but nevertheless he had one soft spot in his heart, and that was for his partner. Also he had his peculiar ideas of honor, and finding argument unavailing he decided that it was up to him.

And so, very gently, he lifted the rifle which lay on the toboggan beside him, levered a cartridge into the chamber with great care lest the crank of the magazine action should betray him, reversed the weapon, rested his forehead upon the muzzle, shut his eyes, and slid his hand down the barrel for the trigger.

But at that moment Skookum Bill chanced to look over his shoulder. He leaped backward, caught the groping hand, and snatched the weapon away.

"No, you don't!" he roared. "Think I've packed you all this way to have you blow the top of your head off now? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Dobbs, after a futile attempt to regain the rifle, sank back, shaking, for at that moment he had fully intended and expected to be dead.

"I couldn't see no other way!" he whimpered, his nerve suddenly deserting him. "You said yourself you wouldn't leave me while we was both alive. I wanted to give you a show, Bill. What did you stop me for? I was all keyed up to it, and now I dunno's I can!"

"I know durn well you won't get the chance," said Skookum Bill, levering the shells from the magazine and putting them in his pocket. "So that was why! You blame' old stiff!" But his tone held a certain admiration and affection. "Don't try no such play again, for I'll pack you along livin' or dead, and so it won't do you no good. I'll copper it from the start."

Dobbs knew that he would do exactly as he had said.

"I won't," he promised, "but it means that we'll both die."

"Not a die!" said Bill doggedly. "We'll pull through, I tell you. Luck's goin' to change. I can feel it comin'."

But for days they had been on starvation rations. Thus Bill in particular had almost exhausted his reserve of strength and vitality. Now, when food was cut off altogether, he weakened rapidly. The first day he held to the work, but he did so on his nerve alone. On the second day, in the afternoon, by a small, frozen stream, he stopped.

"I've hit my limit at last," he said reluctantly. "There ain't another mile in me without grub or rest—but mostly grub. I'd eat my moccasins, only my feet would freeze, and I'd die, anyhow."

"Take mine!" said Dobbs eagerly. "Take mine, and go ahead alone. It won't make no difference to me, Bill."

"I won't," Bill refused. "I said we'd

make the riffle together or not at all. If we only had something to hold us over till we could find meat! Any old chunk of hide would do." Suddenly he started. "Why didn't I think of it before? But maybe it's just as well I didn't. We got the skin of that black fox. We'll eat that!"

"Eat it!" Dobbs exclaimed. "But, Bill, it's worth from a thousand up!"

"Not here it ain't," said Skookum Bill, stating a fundamental economic principle. "Here it ain't worth a tinker's curse. Nothing is that ain't grub. We'll stew her up right here. You take a knife and sorter shave the fur off while I'm rustlin' wood."

And so, while he sought dry wood and split it and got water, old Dobbs cut away the priceless fur with the keen, small blade of his knife; and finally held up a scraped, parchmentlike, hideous hide in place of the glossy black robe which, had all gone well, would have adorned the beauty of some woman who had never known hunger or cold or privation in any form. Old Dobbs, starving as he was, almost wept at the sacrilege.

"Cut her into strips," said Skookum Bill practically. "She'll stew better, and be easier to chew on."

They boiled it for an hour, and then, their hunger driving them, ate, worrying it down to the last morsel. It was tough and springy, and tasted like carrion; but it was food, and their stomachs rejoiced thereat. At any rate, the evil hour was set back, and that was something.

"If we ever get out o' this," said Bill, "we can blow that we've et a meal that cost us a thousand a plate. And that's some high-priced *muckamuck*. I wonder what old McNicol would say if he knew!"

"He won't never know," said Dobbs despondently, "because we won't never get——"

He broke off, for his partner had bounded to his feet and dived for the rifle. Dobbs turned. Behind him, at a distance of perhaps two hundred yards, ran a buck, laboring in the snow. Evidently the animal had come upon them unaware, for it had turned off at a sharp angle.

"Shoot!" yelled old Dobbs rashly, beside himself at the sight of meat. "Shoot, Bill, shoot quick! He's gettin' away!"

Whereby Dobbs violated both etiquette and common sense. For quick, accurate shooting demands both confidence and concentration, and his frantic yell was destructive of both. Under ordinary circumstances Skookum Bill would have paid little attention. But he was exhausted, his nerves worn raw, and he was practically starving. And so he behaved like a novice instead of the veteran that he was.

Barely waiting to catch his sights he fired, and the bullet threw up a spray of snow ahead and to the left. Instantly he pumped another shell, and fired again, and again he missed; with his last cartridge he drew a fine sight, dwelt on his trigger, and consequently shot behind. From force of habit he pumped again, but the hammer clicked down on an empty chamber.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Dobbs. "You missed him, Bill! He's got away!"

His partner whirled the useless rifle above his head and flung it far in the snow. He turned on him, his face black with rage.

"You made me miss!" he roared in fury. "You yelled in my ear when I was aimin'! Don't you know nothin'? Ain't you got no sense at all? I been haulin' you days and days, pumpin' the heart out of me to save your worthless old life, and here's what I get for it. All you had to do was to keep your fool mouth shut—and you wouldn't! You ——" The remainder of his speech was fervid blasphemy, which seemed to crackle about Dobbs' miserable ears.

The latter made no attempt to reply or to palliate his offense. Under the torrent of bitter words his lips began to quiver. Suddenly he buried his face in his hands and sobbed, and the sound shocked Skookum Bill into sanity. He eyed the pitiful, old, broken figure for a moment, and the blaze of fury died from his eyes.

"Quit it, for God's sake, and be a *man!*" he said. And Dobbs raised a face contorted with abject misery.

"I can't be, because I ain't," he whimpered. "I ain't a man no more. I'm just a poor, broken-legged old dog, starved and froze and kicked and cussed. An' I'm goin' to die an' be damned, an' it serves me right. Take 'n' hit me on the head with the ax, an' then you won't be bothered with me no more!"

His misery was so abject and his nerve so plainly broken that Skookum Bill repented of his hasty words.

"Brace up, Sam," he said. "I sorter flew off the handle, but you know how I am. I don't mean all I say."

"You meant it, and it was comin' to me," Dobbs mumbled sadly. "It don't matter, Bill. You'd orter let me use one of them ca'tridges on myself when I wanted to."

Bill, being somewhat of the same opinion, said nothing. For the first time he lost hope. Now it would avail them nothing to find deer. And without the chance of procuring meat vanished also the faint chance of making the Portage, even alone. The grisly vision of death in that frozen wilderness, which had stood half curtained in the back of his mind for days, now stalked boldly into the foreground.

A long silence fell. They sat by the remnants of the fire, looking at the trodden snow sprinkled with shreds of the fur of the black fox, heedless of the waning afternoon and the increasing cold.

Suddenly from upwind, from the direction in which the buck had vanished, there came a sound, and the heads of both men jerked upright as if actuated by one string sharply pulled. As their eyes met in unspoken query the sound was repeated. This time it was unmistakable, crisp, and clear, though far away—the smacking report of a rifle.

"A gun! Two shots!" Dobbs breathed. "Who d'you s'pose——"

But Skookum Bill was shoving his feet into the loops of his snowshoes hurriedly.

"I'll find him," he said. "I'll bet he's got that buck. Keep the fire goin'."

He took the buck's trail at a run, for the prospect of aid in their dire need lent him energy. The trail led straight upwind. For a mile or more he followed it, and suddenly came to its end.

Before him, in an open space, lay the buck's body; and above it, knife in hand, a man was skinning busily.

Bill hailed, a hoarse, joyous shout, for here was both meat and human assistance, and ran toward him. But the stranger picked up a rifle from the snow, and Skookum Bill, as he faced him, recognized the forbidding features of Jake Flint.

"Don't come no nearer," Flint warned, his finger on the trigger. "I been lookin' for you for some time," he added.

"I'm here," said Bill. "And as I ain't got no gun you can calm down your nerves."

Flint eyed his wasted features for a moment curiously.

"You fellers," he stated coldly, "burned down my cabin. What have you got to say about it?"

"That was a mistake," said Bill.

"You'll find it was," Flint returned grimly.

"Sure," said Bill. "The way it's turned out I ought to have shot you."

"You got a cold nerve," Flint commented, not without approval. "I s'pose you savvy I'm goin' to shoot *you?*"

"Of course," Bill admitted. "I figgered you would if you got the chance. I can take my medicine. Only Sam, my partner, he hadn't nothin' to do with it."

"He didn't, hey?" said Flint skeptically.

"Not a thing," Bill asserted. "It was me, and you know durn well there was only one set of tracks."

"I know that," Flint returned. "And there's only one set of tracks on this trail of yourn that I've been follerin', but there's been two men in camp."

"I'm packin' Sam on the toboggan because his leg's busted," Bill explained. "It's a hard deal on him to be shot for what I done, but, of course, he's durn near starved to death, anyway."

"You don't look as if bein' burned out agreed with you, either," said Flint.

"Never mind that," growled Skookum Bill. "Here's the proposition: Sam ain't done nothin' to be shot for, and he can't walk. You shoot me, and there ain't no one to haul him, without you do, and you c'n believe me when I say that pullin' a man in this snow ain't no cinch. Now, if you was to give us a hunk of that meat we could make the Portage, and any shootin' you wanted to do could come off afterward."

"Think you'd beat me to it, hey?" sneered Flint.

"Naw!" said Bill, with some contempt. "Can't you get it through your head that I'm tryin' to make a deal with you?"

"You mean you'd let me shoot you afterward?" said Flint incredulously. "Do you think I'd believe that?"

"All right," said Bill, "then you don't have to. I've put up my talk. You'll find Sam along my back trail. He ain't got no gun nor nothin'. And now you can get this shootin' over any time you're a mind to."

Flint and he looked each other in the eye. The former raised his rifle slowly.

Skookum Bill stared above the black ring down the line of the sights.

"Why don't you shoot?" he demanded. "Tryin' to raise a yellow streak in me? Well, you're wastin' time, for I ain't got none!"

And Flint, with an oath of reluctant admiration, lowered his rifle.

"I ought to, but I can't," he admitted. "If you'd weakened I would. And any time I can't play a thing the limit I don't play it at all. I'm willin' to call this off—if you are."

"Am I?" said Bill. "What do you think? Shake on it!"

They shook, each knowing the other for a hard man and respecting him accordingly.

"I can say now," said Bill, "that I'm durn sorry I burnt your shack."

"Of course I should have moved my traps from east of that crick," Flint admitted, "but you come at me so bullheaded, smashin' them and warnin' me off, that it sorter put up my back hair. When I found the shack burnt I struck back a ways and built me a new one, I had some grub cached, and I was goin' to get even. That's how I didn't know you was burnt out for some days. Soon as I found out I loaded up and hit your trail. I sure intended to get both of you. Now I'm glad I didn't. We can trap that valley next winter. There's room for all of us, and we can do it friendly, like we should."

"We could—but we won't," Skookum Bill told him. "We'll make you a present of that valley. Me and Sam won't trap no more. It ain't our business."

McNicol, smoking a blackened clay comfortably beside the huge round stove in his store at the Portage, stared at two scarecrows who entered to him, at first scarcely recognizing them. One living skeleton hobbled with the aid of a homemade crutch, and the other was merely a giant rack of bones. The black finger marks of the frost were on

their faces, and their bearded cheeks were sunken, pasted in flatly against the teeth so that the cheek bones almost protruded through the stretched skin.

"Save us!" McNicol exclaimed. "So it's you!"

"It's us," Skookum Bill replied. And with his customary directness he added: "And we want another grubstake."

"Ye look as if ye did," McNicol commented sourly, recovering his accustomed poise and manner of speech. "I thought," he continued, "ye were goin' to a district that was fair crawlin' wi' fur, from which there was no comin' out in the winter."

"We was burnt out and we had to come," Bill told him. "We had the furs, too, but they was all burnt except one. We saved that."

"Very provident of ye," McNicol commented sardonically. "And that one'll no doubt be a muskrat. In the nature of things ye'd no save anything that would help pay what ye owe."

"It wasn't no muskrat," said Bill. "It was a black fox."

"A black fox!" McNicol exclaimed. "Ye have the skin of a black fox?"

"Not now," Bill admitted sadly.

"What have ye done with it?" the trader demanded.

"We et it," Bill replied calmly.

"Ye—what?" McNicol almost shrieked.

"Et it," Bill repeated. "We was sorter hungry at the time."

"We was starvin'," said Dobbs.

"And so we ain't got no furs nor money nor nothin'," Bill pursued downrightly, "but, all the same, we got to have grub and things. We'll pay up in the spring, soon as we can wash some dirt we know of."

McNicol shook his head.

"'The way of the transgressor is hard,'" said he. "Also all men are liars—at times. Ye'll admit the relevancy of the quotations, which ye'll scarce recognize, bein' from the Scriptures. Prove to me that ye ate the skin of a black fox, and I'll grubstake ye afresh. But not unless."

Skookum Bill walked over to the floor scales, and stepped upon the platform.

"You saw me weigh myself when I was in here last," he said. "Two hundred and seventeen I weighed. Well, look here!"

The two-hundred-pound weight was on the drop. Removing it he substituted the one hundred. Back and back he slid the balance weight on the beam. Even his face expressed surprise. The beam tipped, quivered, and balanced.

"Look!" said Skookum Bill.

"Gosh!" said old Dobbs.

"Pick out your grubstake!" said McNicol.

The scales balanced at one hundred and twenty-nine pounds.

A TIP FROM A PRIZE FIGHTER

RICHARD BENNETT, the actor, was a prize boxer when he was a young man, and, as a result of this accomplishment, he has many friends in the ranks of pugilism.

One evening, during a performance in the Middle West, Abe Attell went behind the scenes and called on Bennett in his dressing room.

"Are you going to play San Francisco?" asked the pugilist.

"Yes," replied the actor. "I think we'll put on the play in the Greek Theater over at Berkeley for one or two special performances."

"Take a tip from me, Bennett," cautioned Attell, not getting the real significance of the theater's name; "don't do that. If you do, you'll lose a lot of money. There ain't enough Greeks in that town to fill a moving-picture house."

The Bribe

By Hastings MacAdam

"Every man has his price," is the motto of the professional politician. And given the proper circumstances, a bribe will tempt any man. Mr. MacAdam gives a dramatic instance of a Congressman whose whole nature was shaken by a ten-thousand-dollar bribe. Through just such fiery ideals some men still have to pass, though the crusade of the last ten years against corruption has worked encouraging improvement in both our State and our national politics.

OFTEN of evenings, Congressman Gordon—as serviceable a pseudonym as any other—disposes his limbs as best may be in one of the easy-chairs in the rotunda of a certain Washington hotel which is chiefly patronized by congressmen. This best-may-be usually consists of hooking one leg over an arm of the chair and of extending the other a prodigious distance—for he's six foot two—straight out and down until the heel meets the floor. At the favorite abrupt congressional angle, a cigar generally protrudes from a corner of his mouth. At intervals, globules of blue smoke steal from under a black mustache and mount toward the ceiling in gradually vanishing spirals.

More likely than not, two or three such chairs will be grouped together—congenially occupied. Then there follows, between emergences of smoke, conversation which may be reminiscent, anecdotal, of current affairs; or, if Gordon has the floor, may be in a strain of political philosophy far more personal than it seems. He will say, for instance:

"The crusade of the last ten years against corruption has worked an encouraging improvement in both our State and our national politics. It does not follow, however, that the coming decade will witness a corresponding improvement. The issue is an individual one. The 'national conscience,' so often talked of, is a mere figure of speech. It is the personal tabernacle within each of our twenty million voters which is real and important. The doors of these inward sanctuaries, where men sequester and question themselves, must be kept open to public considerations. If our better selves sleep, as they are prone to do, our worst rule the land."

Which is tantamount to outright autobiography. Gordon's is a case of conscience.

Of the thousands in the building, only a safe few knew that Senator Cross and "Flint" Sullivan were together. They had slipped separately from the drill hall of a certain State armory, where a great political party's national convention was being held, and where the fifteenth ballot for a nominee for president was in progress.

They met in a small room that opened onto the corridor surrounding the drill hall. The door was locked.

A domineering, brutish strength shone through the bloat of Sullivan's lower face and gleamed in his pig eyes. Of the two, Cross—a square-faced man of large build, whose white mustache, very stiff and wiry, bushed straight out from his lip—was the superior. They met as a greater monarch might meet the lesser: the one boss of a great nation's politics; the other boss of a great city's politics.

"It's high time to act," Cross was saying. "With your ninety votes, Chandler will be within fifteen votes of the nomination."

"Shure," Sullivan croaked, "but what about the fifteen? Have you got 'em?"

"Know young Gordon of Georgia?"

"Heard of'm. Old fam'ly proposition—a holy roller."

"Just the point. Listen to a bit of a story. The first Gordon settled in Georgia in 1708. They've lived there, upon the same estate, generation after generation, ever since. The original colonist laid the foundations of the house; his descendants completed it. It stands now virtually as it was a hundred years ago. It's a pretty place, I'm told—built upon a hill and facing the Savannah River. There are to-day only Tom Gordon and his mother, an invalid. She's a little cracked, the mother; and spends her days in her room sitting in an old hickory chair which her favorite slave made before the Civil War. She sits there hour after hour, staring across a little pasture to another knoll which is crowned by a grove of cedars. Originally, the Gordons owned some four thousand acres; now the estate has dwindled to thirty, and consists chiefly of the house itself and the grove of cedars. Within the grove is——"

"One of those private boneyards," interrupted Sullivan, grinning.

"Yes—the burial ground of two centuries of Gordons. The slab commemorating General Lucien Gordon, of Civil War fame, Tom's father, is plainly visible from old Mrs. Gordon's window. She's an aristocrat, this old lady, the genuine article; and her pride of family and the love of her son are all that's left alive in her. She sits there, praying, and, when not praying, writing to her boy to save the old place."

"Mortgaged," remarked Sullivan.

"For ten thousand dollars, and due next month."

"And you——"

"I came to know Tom Gordon," Senator Cross continued, with apparent irrelevance, "some ten years ago. Heffernan, then congressman from the district, brought him to Washington as his secretary. A lad all sentiment and no sense—no business sense."

"You've bought up the plaster," croaked the king of a hundred wards.

"He must choose between his tomfool political notions and a considerable sum of money."

Sullivan reflected a moment, then said: "I don't trust the breed, senator. They ain't gaited right for the game. You hook 'em an' land 'em; then, first thing you know, they go batty and commit suicide. Then the papers get busy, and there's general hell to pay. But, senator, this is your party. I'll join you any time you say, for three ballots. Find fifteen more votes and you win."

A moment later Cross remarked, closing the conference: "We'll adjourn after this ballot. Vote with us tomorrow on the seventeenth. Gordon will follow."

It was a very brief message which reached Tom—then merely Delegate Gordon—just before the adjournment. Simply this:

Call at the Bellaire between eleven and eleven-fifteen to-night.

He scented the source, and suspected the purpose. No such ambiguous, anonymous message could have orig-

inated from the men who were battling the "Chandler combination." Besides Chandler, there were five other candidates, among whom Governor Stanton, to whom Tom was bound, had the largest backing. Gordon knew, as every man in the convention knew, that Chandler, instead of one hundred and five, was really fifteen votes short. He knew, also, he was one of a half dozen other minor leaders among the one thousand and ninety delegates who could furnish these votes.

Gordon had joined the Stanton campaign for better things in politics honestly. Stanton's intellectual attainments and record as governor had appealed to him irresistibly. Still young, possessing high ideals, a respected name, and the magnetic quality that accompanies sincere enthusiasm, Gordon had won a place of leadership among the progressives of his State. Now, largely due to his efforts, he headed a group of twenty delegates, all instructed for Stanton.

But the moment had arrived when it seemed that the fight had been fought and lost. If not he, others would be found to bridge the narrow gap in the convention. By deserting Stanton, he reasoned, he would merely yield to the inevitable!

Unable to afford the twenty-five dollars a day which was the Bellaire's special convention rate, Gordon had quarters in a smaller hotel. Thither he went at nine o'clock, the hour of the adjournment. In his box he found two letters from his mother. Cross had not exaggerated; she wrote daily, and, forgetting she had written in the morning, often wrote again in the evening. Like scores which had preceded, these latest letters dwelt, with many affecting repetitions, upon the subject which pressed so heavily her weakened mind. One passage read:

Your father used to say that some people made money in politics. Isn't there a way, Tom? This worry hangs over me like a great black cloud. It seems to come nearer and nearer until it almost stifles me. When I think all these things dear to us—even this chair I am sitting in, the one Uncle Isaac made—must go to others, it seems as though the end of the world were coming But surely, *surely* this cannot happen. I trust in God. I pray hourly; I am sure He will not desert us. He will show you a way.

Tom read and reread the letters, then looked at his watch—ten o'clock. He read and reread them again—eleven o'clock. Two long, heavy hours, spent in staving off the thing he meant to do!

At five minutes after eleven, he leaped to his feet. Too nervous to wait for an elevator, he ran down three flights of stairs and hurried toward the Bellaire. He bored savagely through the typical convention crowd that, as gnats swarm around a light, had gathered in the lobbies and at the entrances of "headquarters."

When, after frantically squirming and pushing through the jam, he reached the hotel desk, his brain seemed to spin. Was he dreaming? He glanced at the clock—eleven-fourteen. The room clerk, an acquaintance, beckoned. No, it was not a dream.

The clerk leaned close and whispered: "Here's a message which I was asked to give into your hands personally. Besides, this telegram has just come."

Tom fingered the two envelopes dully. The clerk thrust a paper, Gordon receipted in a dazed way, for the telegram, he supposed. This act roused him; he whispered to the clerk anxiously:

"Who left it?" pointing to the so-called message, an envelope of the hotel stationery marked personal.

The clerk gazed with obvious meaning toward the elevator—Gordon turned. He recognized, wriggling

through the crowd, Joey Critchell—a notorious handy man of dirty politics.

"The planted witnesses—of course," Tom groaned to himself.

He glanced at the envelope of the "message"—addressed by typewriter. He looked furtively around; the lobby had cleared somewhat. He wheeled into a shallow recess between a pilaster of the wall and the corner of the cashier's cage.

He could not wait. Tearing open the envelope, he found a smaller envelope inside, from which, in the script of the same typewriter, blazed the words:

Seventeenth ballot.

Then, in the lower left-hand corner:

Inclosure—open in private.

Not more than six inches deep, the recess was not a hiding place. He peered around again. No one was looking. Stepping back into the recess, he tore the flap of the inner envelope quickly. Crisp, new, a single bank note:

Ten thousand dollars!

No other word appeared. It was a bargain resting wholly upon implication. "At least they think me an honorable scoundrel," the young Southerner muttered.

A trembling, as though of ague, came upon him. Though but seconds, it seemed minutes before the money was tucked into his breast pocket.

Then, suddenly, he became conscious of men cheering near him. Some forty young fellows, college boys from Stanton's home town, had entered the lobby. They had formed single file and, in the lockstep, were circling around and around their leader, who held a banner. All were shouting, and repeating over and over, the words upon the banner:

We Fight! Fight! Fight!
For Stanton—BECAUSE
He's Right! Right! Right!
HELP US!

Gordon gazed and listened as one in a trance.

Only instinct recalled the telegram. Even a smothered consciousness obeys a telegram's urgent call. So, when Stanton's boomers were filing out, Tom opened the telegram fumblingly. In his shaken state of mind he stood seconds with eyes pinned upon the brief sentence. Then the meaning burst.

What! Released! The ten thousand free of a traitor's stigma! Stanton had quit the fight.

Gordon was aroused by a pull at his sleeve.

"Hey"—Critchell's hoarse voice—"Cross wants you. Sent me to tell you to come up at once."

A tone of fellowship and intimacy on Critchell's part conveying possession and command on Cross' part! Gordon shrank from Critchell as from a snake; and shuddered at the thought of meeting Cross.

"Tell him—tell him," Tom stuttered, "I'll come presently," and turned away.

"Too big a roll—it gags him," chuckled Critchell, as he reëntered the elevator.

Gordon had paled to a sick green; he felt shaky at the knees.

"I need a drink, and a stiff one," he told himself.

It was the usual barroom scene at national-convention time. The air was as thick with tobacco fumes as the brains of nine-tenths of the men with alcoholic imageries. Cigar and cigarette stubs and burned matches littered the floor. A makeshift board counter running the length of one side of the nearly square room joined the regular mahogany bar at right angles, and doubled the serving capacity. Large printed signs admonishing customers to "Pay Over the Bar"; and the special cashier's desk rigged up behind the main counter, after the fashion of a judge's raised

seat, gave ample evidence of rush trade.

The patrons ranged from extreme to extreme, from Stetson-hatted Westerners to frock-coated Southerners, with a sprinkling of the rats of city politics. But young, smooth-shaven, nervous, jaded faces predominated.

Drinking had been interrupted. As he entered, Gordon overheard a man going out talk laughingly of a "Crazy Stanton Man."

In the corner, where the temporary and permanent bars joined, rising fully half a head above the mêlée surrounding him, stood an extraordinary person. A flannel, cream-colored suit, a blood-red tie, and a hat of foreign pattern, with a little feather protruding cockily at one side, added to the conspicuousness of his rangy, six-foot-four figure. Gordon recognized him—young Quigley.

Old Quigley, as thorough a scrooge as ever lived, had departed this world some years before, leaving ten millions and a son whose chief aim in life was to live down his father's reputation. Under young Quigley, old Quigley's soap business continued to flourish; but the proceeds, as the temperamental young gentleman freely admitted, were now used in ways calculated to make old Quigley feel wriggly in his coffin.

Though but thirty, young Quigley had become a director in, and a financial contributor to, every quixotic scheme of philanthropy in the land. More than that, he had caused an industrial sensation of profound proportions by introducing a liberal scheme of profit sharing in his factories; and by building for his employees an entire town, including hospital, gymnasium, library, playgrounds, theater, and rows of neat, modern houses which rented at ridiculously low figures.

His latest adventure had been a plunge, with his accustomed impetuosity and financial generosity, into Stanton's campaign for the presidency.

Young Quigley at times amused himself in ways not sanctioned by many of the good people who approved his charitable proclivities. In fine, he had a passion for betting—especially upon the success of his own enterprises.

"Any more at one to five?" Quigley was shouting, as Gordon entered.

Silence.

"One to four?"

Still no response.

"One to three on Stanton against the field I offer; any takers?"

A palsy seized Tom Gordon. Upon the counter behind Quigley rose an imposing stack of yellow bank notes; he had plunged deep—on Stanton!

The whisky glass three-quarters full of straight Scotch, which Tom had lifted halfway to his lips, slipped from his trembling hand and broke to bits on the bar. Bad nerves are common; no one noticed.

"One to three; any takers?" Quigley was repeating, when Tom regained his self-control.

"Gimme a slice," spoke a voice.

"Me too."

"Same here."

"Tenners, twenties, hundreds, or thousands?"

Tom had refilled another glass to the brim, and now gulped the fiery liquor. The shock revived him; he watched and listened with the fascination of hypnosis.

Two wanted tens, though the first better spoke boldly for hundreds.

"Give me thousands," broke in an aggressive, red-faced person in the back row.

"How many?" still unperturbed.

"How many'll you take?"

"Go as far as you like."

"I don't want to break you, young man——"

"You'll have to go some if you do."

"Well, I think I need about five thousand from you."

"I can spare ten or twenty—my name's Quigley."

The red-faced man, however, was in deeper than he had expected to go at the odds. "Five thousand'll do," he said.

"Gentleman offers fifteen thousand to five thousand that Stanton is not nominated—take you," said Quigley, without showing a trace of excitement. He went on:

"Step up, one at a time, please. Name and address and banking reference—or cash. As for me, Quigley, room six-nineteen this hotel."

The legal closing hour being near, the bartenders prepared to shut down the bar. Quigley gathered in the pile of cards and cash.

"I'll deposit these at the desk," he announced.

At the head of a considerable procession, Quigley started for the lobby. Tom heard a man ask:

"How much have you bet altogether?"

About ten thousand dollars," Quigley carelessly replied.

While, over at the desk, the betters and the night manager of the Bellaire debated ways and means of depositing the stakes without involving the hotel company in a violation of the local laws against gambling, Gordon watched curiously from about the center of the now deserted lobby. He had followed from the bar dejectedly, much as a whipped dog follows his master. He felt an impulse to rush among them and cry:

"Stop! cancel your bets! There is crooked work going on. Look at this ten-thousand-dollar note which I have been offered if I will desert Stanton and vote for Chandler—and which I have accepted!"

He felt the impulse, but lacked the courage. His sense of shame had completely paralyzed him.

While standing thus, the salutation of a youthful voice at his elbow, thrice repeated, at last aroused him. Turning, he recognized the confidential messenger of John Redd, Stanton's manager.

"Note from Redd," whispered the youth. "It must be important. He gave me a dollar to hurry."

Gordon read the note—firm, penciled writing:

DEAR GORDON: The messages in circulation as coming from Stanton are forgeries. I have the following from the governor, written at midnight—"There can be no compromise. I shall remain in this fight to the last ballot and after that." Another thing—a report came to me just now about you which I will not repeat. I told those who brought it they were liars and turned them out of my room. J. R.

Tom stared at Redd's note as though he could not decipher it. Then, suddenly, he lost consciousness of things around him. During an interval scarcely momentary he stood dead on his feet.

He did not think; did not reason; he *saw*. All around him, it seemed, were mirrors reflecting his guilt as though from the eyes of all good women and all clean men; as though from the eyes of his mother, his dead father, of all his ancestry; as though from the eyes of his own better self; and, too, as though *with* the eyes of God. It would have been less awful had the mirrors revealed him in convict stripes.

Then—first waking, living fruit of the "dead" interval—a thought as dazzling as a flash of lightning through a black, oppressive night:

"I must be rid of that ten thousand dollars or find the highest window of this nineteen-story hotel, and jump out!"

Panic, bred of self-hatred, dictated his next act. He well-nigh ran into

the hotel's writing room, and swiftly penned the following to Senator Cross:

DEAR SENATOR: There is some mistake. This was not intended for me. Very truly yours, THOMAS H. GORDON.

Two days subsequent to Stanton's nomination, the most urgent summons of any man's lifetime recalled Tom Gordon to Georgia.

Sitting at her window alone—gazing at times across the familiar acres to the clump of cedars, and then gathering her strength again—she had written:

I feel clearer in mind now than I have for years; hence I feel lighter in heart. If it must be, if the home of the Gordons must go to others, I can bear it. I have harped too much upon this in my letters to you. I have spent forty years resenting the changes that have gradually stolen into my life—and have erred. I would prefer to know, Tom, that, when I am gone, you and yours would be living here, happy, honorable, and honored—leading a life such as your father's and your mother's people lived for so many generations. Yet I feel now that I am writing of the shadow, not the substance. I would rather, far rather, see the old place go—as the old life has long since gone—than that, to retain it, you should do a thing you would afterward regret. Not that I think you would do a dishonorable thing; I say it merely to show my mind. Keep the name clean, Tom, that will be enough.

The letter lay upon her lap, addressed, stamped, and sealed, when she was found—dead.

Now, years after, out of his salary as congressman, Thomas U. Gordon has bought back Gordon Manor, and, when not at Washington, lives there, happy, honorable, and honored.

GETTING A DIVIDEND FROM A HOLDUP

RALPH R. GRAVES, whose real vocation is doing half of all the work for a big daily newspaper, took a year off and went out as the manager of a theatrical company, his real idea being, as he expressed it, "to get a look at the country." Incidentally, it may be remarked, he got a look at a lot of other things—two of which were the business ends of revolvers.

It happened in San Francisco on a deserted side street one dark and stormy night. In the middle of the block, two gunmen held him up, marched him into an alley, and went through his pockets.

They got away from him a gold knife, a souvenir gold watch, and one hundred and twenty-five dollars and ten cents in cash. This pained Graves, and he said so, which resulted in his being pained still more, for at the end of his protest he received an emphatic blow somewhere in the vicinity of his right ear.

After the gunmen had taken everything they could find except his prayers, they marched him out to the street-car track and informed him in low but earnest tons that, if he let out so much as a peep, they would kill him then and there. By this time the situation began to strike Graves as being funny.

"At any rate," he suggested, "you fellows will give me car fare, won't you?"

The big man said all he had consisted of five-dollar bills, and he could not see his way clear to parting with one of those. The little man, however, moved by a subtle fit of generosity, frisked himself carefully and produced the dime they had taken from the victim.

Graves thanked him effusively, and, when they had disappeared, walked to his hotel.

An Angel in Disguise

A WILLOW CREEK TALE

By Roy Norton

Author of "Threads," "Arroyo Jones," Etc.

Things ain't always what they seem,
If there's a woman in it.
Thin skim milk may look like cream,
If there's a woman in it.
All your gold become mere brass;
All your diamonds only glass;
All her goo-goo eyes and sighs,
Prove new ways of telling lies;
Glue of love plain flour paste;
Pay-dump ore be barren waste;
All your dreams just fancy bunk;
All your hopes a bunch of junk;
If there's a woman in it!

SHAKESPEARE GEORGE.

THIS effusion Shakespeare George regards as confidential, but if any one does see it, he declines to give the cause of its being, and changes the subject to the latest find of ore in the Willow Creek district or the price of drills; but I know why he wrote it, and sometimes smile when I remember everything surrounding its cause.

We had made a trip to Lower California, landed at San Diego, and were on the northbound train when we first met the "angel in disguise," as George called her from that time forth.

Pullman cars don't exactly agree with most of us fellows from Willow Creek. They smell too stuffy, and there isn't room to take a good stretch, and it's embarrassing to hop out into the aisle to drag on your trousers. Also it's most amazing how many people snore in their sleep; so when we had but one night to travel, usually we rode in the day coach, enjoying the open windows and fighting cinders. We were never quite certain at what time or station the "angel in disguise" came into our car and got a seat immediately in front of the one that George and I were sharing. The other fellows were in another coach. We must have been asleep for hours, but she was there when we woke up, and it was just coming on dawn, and the dim lights in the day coach looked sickly, yellow, and tired, like the faces of the passengers around us.

A fat man strangled in his sleep and coughed so loudly that it seemed as if every one in all twelve cars must have been awakened by the noise. A flashy dressed young fellow, in more jewelry than John D. Rockefeller would ever think of wearing, patent-leather shoes with yellow tops and pearl buttons, and a hat with a violet band, sat up with a jerk, and, regardless of the other passenger's smiles, proceeded to primp himself in the glass at the forward end of the car, after which he sauntered slowly down the aisle looking from right to left until he sighted the occupant of the seat in front of us.

Now, up to this time neither George nor I had paid any attention to this traveler, but all of a sudden we observed that there was something queer about the hair and the slope of the shoulders. If this traveler was a boy, he should have been ashamed of himself for his good looks; but if she was a girl, she should have been ashamed of

This new series of Willow Creek tales began in the August month-end POPULAR.

herself for wearing men's clothes, and either a very comely-looking girl she was or a very unboyish-looking boy. As the sporty young gentleman stopped with a grin and an insolent stare, the lone traveler turned a face toward the window. Also she blushed, which definitely settled it as far as we were concerned. At the same moment George gave me a dig in the ribs with his elbow that almost doubled me out of the seat.

"Bet fourteen dollars that's a young woman in men's clothes," George whispered in my ear, lifting a heavy hand from which idleness had not cleared the marks of toil.

"What of it?" I protested. "Is that any reason why you should break one of my ribs?"

The sport, in the meantime, had gone back to the forward end, made a bluff at fixing his tie, and now returned with eyes glued on our fellow passenger. This time, however, he stopped and draped himself carelessly over the back of the vacant seat in front of her, and remarked insinuatingly: "Hello, kid! What you doin' in that get-up? Goin' far?"

The girl did not answer, but again looked out of the window. The gentleman with the loud clothes was not to be rebuffed, however. He calmly swung round and planted himself in the seat beside her, whereupon she stood up, crowded past him into the aisle, and went into the vacant seat; but, as she did so, both George and I had a good, full look at her.

There was scarcely any doubt at all of her sex, despite the store clothes she was wearing and her attempt to appear boyish. She was good looking. That is, while her face might have been strong-featured, it was regular, and her eyes were far too pretty to belong in a man's head. They were very dark, the kind you see sometimes that, no matter how much you look into them, you never quite reach the bottom. Troubled eyes they seemed to me; but that might have been due to her annoyance at the flashy young man's attentions.

He laughed to himself, said "Oh, you kid!" and no sooner had she settled herself in the vacant seat than he promptly got up and moved toward it.

She had seated herself on the outer end; but the gentleman with the yellow-topped shoes came crowding in front of her and took the side next to the window. Immeditely she arose, despite his attempt to catch her by the hand and restrain her, and resumed her former seat, and immediately Mr. Lothario followed after and sat down; but he did not stay so long this time, for George suddenly leaned over and tapped him on the shoulder, and said: "Hey! Can't you see that you're annoyin' this person?"

The chap was of the kind that looked on us fellows from the hills as a lot of jays to be easily bluffed; so, with a show of great indignation and bravado, he turned around, scowled at George, and told him to mind his own blankety-blank business.

In the next moment he was about as surprised and chaste a subject as there was in that car; for before he was aware of the sequence of events, he had been jerked to his feet by his coat collar which had been torn loose and split halfway down his back, and then suffered three vigorous and well-planted kicks that drove his head like a billy goat's butting into the forward end of the car.

Before he had done rubbing himself to soothe his pains, George was back in his seat, grinning amicably at the rest of the passengers and winking at me. The sporty gentleman gathered himself together, and went out of the car without daring to say anything, and we enjoyed a chuckle, thinking we had seen the last of him; but one never can tell.

In about ten minutes the chap returned accompanied by the conductor,

and George was pointed out. That was really the beginning of our trouble, for this smart Aleck had had the nerve to try to get even, with the result that, before we knew it, the "angel in disguise" was dragged into the controversy by him, and the conductor, in a huff, walked out of the car as if washing his hands of the entire matter.

Again George and I smiled at each other thinking this was all of it, but when, in the course of half an hour, the train pulled into the station at Oakland, we stopped laughing; for three big policemen, evidently summoned by telegraph by the conductor from our train, met and promptly arrested not only the sporty young man and George, but our disguised fellow traveler as well.

There was no use in resisting. We knew enough for that. At different times in our somewhat reckless careers both George and I had been taught the futility of trying to lick a police force. Besides, unlike some other occasions, we knew we had money enough to pay the fines, otherwise we might have tried a run for it. George surrendered and they let me go along. Behind us, gaping and questioning, trudged the other boys from Willow Creek, bound to see us through, even though it might necessitate their breaking into jail to release us.

The cause of all this rumpus again proved that she was not a boy by bursting into tears, sniffling plaintively, and wiping her eyes on her coat sleeve in lieu of a handkerchief which she did not seem to possess. George loaned her his, and the only protest he made was on her account.

"See here, men," he said to the police, halting to make his argument, "I don't see what you're bothering this kid for. He didn't do anything. He was attendin' his own business. It's only me and this other guy you folks want. What have you got against this boy here?"

"Boy nothing!" growled one of the officers. "That's a girl! It's against the State law for a woman to run round with men's clothes on. Something crooked about this, or she wouldn't be wearin' pants, and you wouldn't be so infernally ready to smash anybody that spoke to her."

George looked angry, and the girl sniffled louder. The procession moved on another block and stopped.

"What do you fellows want?" demanded the officer in charge, turning to scowl at Sympathy Smith and Stinger Johnson, who were leading the van from Willow Creek.

"Goin' to see our partners through with this, don't you suppose," Sympathy rumbled.

"You beat it!" remarked the policeman, and, for the first time, Sympathy lost his temper.

"This street," he said, fixing the policeman with a cold eye, "belongs to us as long as we don't interfere with you cops. We haven't said a word, and we haven't got in your way. You undertake to run any ranicavoo on us, partner, and we'll bash your noodle in and lug you the rest of the way to the police station, just to show what kind of a mess we can make out of a bunch like you are. Now, unless you want to start something, you move on!"

Most of the froth disappeared from the officer's attitude when he discovered that all of us fellows from Willow Creek had closed in on him. Moreover, it was very plain that Sympathy's threat would have been quickly carried out, so quickly, in fact, that the policeman would not have had time to summon assistance.

"All right. Come along," he said, "but if you do, I'll pinch you the minute we get to the station."

"Go to it! You're welcome," was Sympathy's retort, and once more we moved.

This time we succeeded in reaching the station where, sure enough, they

promptly arrested Sympathy. Tom and I, to make sure that all of us were not to be shut up, hurriedly made our departure to telephone to Curtis Hillyer, a distinguished lawyer in San Francisco, giving him such a hurry-up call that he promised to come immediately. He knew who we were, having done all the legal business we had ever had done, so we were not a bit sore when he laughed over the telephone, and seemed to take it as a huge joke. Then we waited for him at the ferry dock, and when he landed took turns telling him all that had happened, which seemed to amuse him still more.

"But you haven't told me who the girl is," he insisted.

"We don't know," we chorused, and he said "Humph!"

"You wouldn't sit still and see a poor devil get the worst of it from a mucker like that shine with the kid shoes, would you?" I demanded.

Hillyer shook his head.

"Can't say about that," he replied. "I've done a good many things just as foolish."

"Now, of course, we've got to see the girl through, too——" I began, when he interrupted with, "Hang the girl! You don't want me to mix up with that case, also, do you? I should think you men had about trouble enough on her account."

Then, seeing that we looked rather indignant, he added: "However, that's your affair. I'm not a police-court lawyer, you know, but I suppose I can do something."

When we got to the station we found that Stinger, too, had been arrested for offering to maul the desk sergeant if he would come out on the floor, and that there was also a charge of carrying concealed weapons against him. Fortunately there had been no blows struck, so the sergeant was inclined to laugh at the caboodle of us; but was nevertheless intent on teaching all concerned a lesson. Dignity of the law, majesty of the police, and all that sort of stuff. He became very polite, however, when he learned who Hillyer was, and began to look at us a little differently. He accepted our words of honor that we would raise no disturbance and wouldn't try to run away if he didn't lock our three men in a cell.

The girl had already disappeared, and Hillyer, finding that we were determined to get her out of jail, got permission to talk to her. He took me along as a witness, inasmuch as I had seen all that happened, and we went into a little waiting room where the lady in disguise was brought by a sour-faced matron who was bigger than a house and looked as if she could whip Jack Johnson. Hillyer knew how to manage her, and suggested that as he was the attorney for the girl, she, the matron, would have to retire. The matron sniffed scornfully and went out, locking us in as she went.

At first the girl was terribly frightened. She didn't look so pretty as she had before, for her eyes were all swollen from crying, and altogether, she was rather a pathetic-looking little thing. It took Hillyer about a minute to get her story, and of all the fool things that girls can do, that seemed about the foolest. She said her name was Clara Wellyns, and that she was brought up on a farm near Tulare. Her mother was dead, and her father didn't get along with her only brother, named Frank, who was older than she, and he had run away to San Francisco. Her father found out that Frank had gone the pace, and had been seen hanging around a lot of Barbary Coast dumps. Now what does this fool girl do but decide that if she could just see and talk to her brother, she could straighten him out again and start him on the right path. Her father shuts her up whenever she mentions the subject, and she

broods over it, and worries over it, until she makes a plan.

The first time her father goes away, which he does about every other month on sheep business that keeps him from home three or four weeks at a time, she will leave the ranch and go to San Francisco and search for this brother Frank. She had sense enough to know that she couldn't go as a girl to those Barbary Coast palaces, but not enough to know that it's next to impossible for a girl to disguise as a boy and pass inspection; particularly if the girl happens to be more than passably good looking, and has a good figure. Hence, all the mess she had got herself into.

Hillyer fired questions at her until I was a little bit ashamed. He acted as if he thought she might be lying. That's a way most lawyers have, I've noticed, under such circumstances. Mighty suspicious men—lawyers! I could see that she was telling the truth without all that fuss, as she sat there, looking at the floor, and now and then dabbing her eyes with George's handkerchief, or looking at me as if appealing to have Hillyer let up. Her intuition told her that he was against our wasting time on a silly girl who had got herself into a scrape.

"Well," he said, at last, as he got to his feet, "we'll see what we can do. Of course, this girl will probably have to pay a fine, at least."

"Leave that to me," I said promptly. Also, it made me think of something else. "Don't it seem best that—er—that you, Miss Clara, had better have some—er—different clothes than those you've got on?"

She looked hard at the floor and twisted George's handkerchief. The matron came in just then in answer to Hillyer's pressure of a button, and I turned to her. I knew here was a case where I must use diplomacy. I got up and bowed to her, and said all I had to say before she could stop my flow of language. I didn't know I could talk so well.

"Madame," I said, "I know I'm asking a heap of you, but I want you to send out to the best place in this town where they sell women's clothes, and have the best one for all-round, knock-about wear that money'll buy fitted to Miss Clara here, and better get a bonnet, too. I'll be outside to pay the bill, and I want you to accept this for your trouble."

I slipped a ten-dollar bill into her hand, and she grew as sweet as molasses right then and there. A ten-spot does oil the way to lots of things in this greasy world of ours! The old dame smiled at me as if I might be her long-lost son just back from Klondike.

When she let me out, after volunteering a lot of advice about what kind of duds Clara ought to have, Hillyer wasn't to be seen. I nosed around and found him in another room, and he held up his hand for silence. A police captain was using a telephone on his desk, and yelling at the top of his voice, as if either very angry with the machine, or speaking to some one no nearer than Hongkong, China.

"Chief of police of Tulare? This is Captain Donovan, of the Oakland department. We got a girl off the owl express this morning in men's clothes. Yes. Get me? She's about twenty-two or three, dark-haired, fine eyes, and says her name is Clara Wellyns. Wellyns! No, Wellyns! W-e-l-l-y-n-s. Yes. that's right. Says she lives on a ranch near your town, father's name Sam Wellyns, and that——"

Central bothered him a while by breaking in, and when he once more got the Tulare chief, things went better; but what he said to the telephone operator proved that his ideas of "dignity" and "majesty" were all tripe. He told the girl's story, and I wondered what he was going to all this trouble

for. He was as suspicious as Hillyer, and they made a good team.

"Well," he said, hanging the phone up, and leaning back in his chair, "the chief down there says there is such a man, such a girl, and such a boy; that the man does go away to look after big bands of sheep he owns, and that he's away now. The boy hasn't been home for six months, and one of his men thinks he saw Miss Ciara boarding the train the other day, carrying a suit case. So, maybe, after all, she's handin' us the straight goods."

Hillyer nodded, as if satisfied; but the chief looked at me rather sharply.

"What do you propose to do with the little fool?" he asked.

"Do with her? Take her out to a restaurant, buy her a square meal, give her some good advice, buy her a ticket back home, and see that she goes," I remarked, annoyed that he should think there was anything else to be done.

"You may trust Mr. Davis, captain," Hillyer said, as if to avoid anything further. "He and his partners are not only honest, straightforward men, but men of means, as well, and able to carry through anything they may undertake."

The captain thawed a little, and said he would see that the case was called at once when the police court opened. "But," he added, "that fine young shrimp that caused all this trouble won't have it quite so smooth. We've been wantin' him for about six months. State warrants out for him. That's French Louie who makes a business of unprotected girls. Get me? We'll just put him where he can pound rock for about a year or two. We do owe that much to the ruction."

The suit of clothes and a hat for the "angel in disguise" cost me ninety-five dollars; but when I saw her in them I didn't mind it a bit. Of course, her hair looked badly with all those jagged ends where she had trimmed it herself; but otherwise she was tiptop. Good enough, anyhow, to set Shakespeare George's battered old heart thumping, as could be seen before he had talked across the room to her more than five minutes. Maybe mine worked a little bit overtime, too. I'm not saying, because I don't cut much ice in this story, anyhow! It's about how foolish George was.

If you've got to have a lawyer, it pays to have the best. We saw that the minute Hillyer came into court, by the way the magistrate treated him. It wasn't any time at all until we were all out in the corridor, except Mr. French Louie who was gnashing his teeth like a rock breaker at full speed, and detained. I hope he's in San Quentin yet, and that would mean that he'd been there a good many years. I never did like him, anyhow..

The girl was about as relieved as I have ever seen any one, when we started to find a restaurant; but looked at us all as if we were the strangest lot of men she had ever seen brought together, and I noticed that she appeared to think that George had done it all. It didn't seem quite fair to some of the rest of us—me, for instance, who had paid out altogether one hundred and five nice, hard dollars for her and her outfit. Of course, George had paid her fine. I've got to admit that much. Also George, showing what an old fox he is, was the one who suggested, as we passed a hair store, that maybe she would look better with a switch, or some of those things women wear when shy on hair. And he did pay for that. I was sorry I hadn't thought of it, but she looked pretty nice to me just as she was.

We waited on the pavement outside till she came out of a sort of dressing room, and then got us altogether, as if to ride herd on us, and looked very sweet and bashful, and bit her lip as she talked to us.

"It isn't right for me to accept your money," she said, "without telling you that I'll pay every cent of it as soon as I get to the hotel. I have some with me, but it's not easy to get at. I was afraid of being robbed, and—and sewed it in!" she ended, with another blush, and we laughed and told her there was no one hurt if she never paid. That seemed to ease her mind considerable, and made us think all the more of her. It showed that she was on the level, all right. I wished that Hillyer had been there with us; but he had lost no time in hurrying back to San Francisco.

Everything went smoothly until we told her she would have to go back home; then she balked and threatened to cry some more. She had her mind made up that she was going to find and talk to that brother of hers, if the heavens didn't fall and blot all creation out. We argued and scolded and coaxed and threatened, but she was determined. We couldn't budge her decision any more than we could have budged a balky burro. If we built a fire under her in one spot, she just sidestepped a few feet and planted herself again.

Then she made a compromise. If we would help her look for her brother, "Frankie" she called him, just two or three evenings at most, she would agree to go back home. She was certain we could find him in that time, and she asserted that she was old enough to go with us and keep her ears closed to all the rough stuff she might hear.

We agreed to undertake this new job, with many misgivings. Most of these places weren't exactly nice ones to invade with either a decent girl or man. It's best for any one with self-respect to steer clear of them; but George insisted in her behalf, and we had to do the best we could. Besides, it was hopeless for us to search for the boy alone, because none of us knew him, and, moreover, we felt sorry for her. Yes, and for the young fellow, too, after she, getting more friendly and less frightened, told us all about him. If he was half as nice and lovable and reckless as she described him, he was just the sort who can go very high on the good road, or very deep on the bad one. And for such a sister any fellow ought to make an effort, we felt. If any one could brace him up, she would be the one, George and I agreed, and the other boys grumbled they "guessed that was right"! We even got to discussing plans for Frank's benefit when we did find him, and told her that we would take him with us to Willow Creek and get him a job down at Two Forks. She was so happy that I feared for a minute she would forget to be a lady and kiss George—instead of me. But she didn't do either.

We crossed the bay and took her to the hotel where we always stopped, and saw to it that she had the swell suite, front, on the ground floor. Top and back was good enough for us. George sneaked out and sent some flowers to her room. I'd never thought of that, and so got even by sending her a silver manicure set in a red velvet case. Tim blabbed on me and George went one better by sending her a set of Sir Walter Scott's poems, bound in calf, and by the time I found that out it was time to get supper, and start out on our hunt for the brother. We hadn't seen her all day, because the poor little girl was tired out and said she had slept like the dead. When it came time to go she almost wilted. It didn't seem quite so easy now that she was face to face with entering a lot of places where anything from cadging to murder might be seen; but she fought bravely, and wouldn't give in. So we went.

There's no use in my trying to describe the places we visited. We thanked Heaven that Clara had a veil

to hide her face, and were sorry, sometimes, that she didn't have ear muffs; but nowhere did we find that fellow Frank. She fairly walked us to death, and that is saying a good deal, for we were as hard and seasoned a lot of old timbers as ever tramped hills for a business. And all the time she got more plaintive and more discouraged. We could see that she was disgusted with the places we went to, and the people in them, and was fast learning that it isn't so easy to find any one in a big, strange city. She had thought she knew all about the town, but the part she knew, or any one else who merely stops at a hotel with father and gets as far as Golden Gate Park and the theaters, is quite different from the water edge of things. Once she wondered why we always ordered soft drinks instead of the awful whisky those places sell, and naïvely admitted that father always took one before going to bed at night, mixed with hot water and a lump of sugar.

It was George who finally told her that there was no use in our walking any more that night, and that our best hope was to go to the best known of the coast resorts, and sit there until, perhaps, her brother might come in. By this time she was agreeable to anything. Poor little girl! Her feet were tired, I am sure, from trapesing over so many cobblestones and so many sawdusted floors! The place we got into was pretty lively, for already it was late. Drunken sailors on shore leave, with crimps boisterously urging them on and watching them with appraising eyes; hard-faced harridans of the coast, lolling against drunken consorts; toughs looking for some drunken men to pick or sandbag; and once a group of prize fighters from south of Market Street who were escorting the night's victor on a tour. And always, through the smoke, the girl from Tulare peered, and looked for the lost brother. Every time the door opened she turned to see who entered, until at last she got around to the side of a table where she could watch it. It was rather pitiful, I thought, to see her making this desperate effort to find the lost one.

I blush yet to remember the lot of guff we stood from a crowd of yeggmen that spotted us and talked for our benefit. We had to hold Stinger Johnson down in his chair, and tell him it wouldn't do to raise a rough-house when we had Clara with us. Besides, being arrested once that day was enough; but if ever we see any of that merry party, or all of it, out in the hills where there's not a cop in sight, I'll be so thankful that I'll become a philanthropist and found a library or a free ham and eggery. Clara was scared until she shrunk two sizes, and begged us to do nothing to bring the police down on us again. It was probably more trying to her than us, because, you see, she was different. She'd been arrested only once. People do get used to such things, some of us had learned.

A woman came in, saw us, and sat down at our table, there being no other place vacant. She stared at us from cold, distrustful eyes, taking us in from head to foot, and I didn't like her for a minute. She wanted nothing to drink, but accepted a glass of mineral water that George, who was sitting between her and Clara, ordered, and asked us what we were doing there. It makes a whole lot of difference who asks such questions. One might have answered a pretty girl like Clara Wellyns, but to have a hard-featured, mannish-looking person like this other woman ask, is not the same. We almost told her it was none of her business, and she seemed to like us all the more for that. She began to try to talk to Clara, and wanted George to change seats.

"Two women always like to gossip, you know," she said, and George, in spite of the fact that I tried to kick his

leg under the table, did as she asked. I boiled inside, for the hard-faced woman leaned across to the girl and began to whisper, sort of insinuatingly, and coaxing her to do something, although I couldn't catch what she said, and Clara seemed to watch her as if fascinated. I made up my mind to interfere. I got up, upsetting the table as I did so, and when we got it straightened out Miss Hard Face found that I was sitting between her and Clara, and if looks could have stabbed any one, I would surely have slept in the morgue that night. Sympathy Smith edged around and got the seat on the other side of Clara, with a sharp look at the woman, and got the girl interested so the woman couldn't get a chance to talk across the table; but she persisted until she got around on Sympathy's side, and leaned close to and in front of him to try to say something more to Clara, who by this time began to fidget, and showed an inclination to give up for the night and go home. I was glad of that, and made the first move. We all grinned at the strange woman; joyfully, as we felt, just to show her that we were considerable smarter than she'd given us credit for being, and she merely turned her back to keep us from seeing how sore she was as we went out into the night.

All we could get were the small horse cabs, and I tried to outmaneuver George for the privilege of riding to the hotel beside Clara, with the result that both of us got left, and she rode with Stinger and Tom. But we all did our best to be gallant and bade her good night at the door of her room. She shook hands with each of us, and told us we never could understand how much she appreciated our kindness, and her voice was like innocent music. We could have fought in behalf of the "angel in disguise," then and there, and so went to bed happy because we had actually rescued her.

All of us were early risers from habit; so the fact that it had been after two o'clock in the morning when we went to bed did not prevent us from being up at seven. We did not expect the tired little lady to appear before noon, so went down to the mineral exhibit, then out to the Cliff House to kill time. And it was at the Cliff House, where Stinger wanted to buy an expensive curio to take back to Willow Creek for Marietta, that he discovered that his wallet was gone.

"That's funny," he said, frowning, and slapping his pockets. "Must have left it under my pillow at the hotel; but I don't remember putting it there. George, lend me thirty dollars."

George ran his hand to the inside coat pocket, and his face looked as if he had been sunstruck. Something prompted me to reach for my own bank roll, and I joined the mystery party. Tom Evans was the only one who had a wallet left, and of a sudden it dawned on us what had happened. In protecting our young lady from the hard-faced woman, we had failed to protect our pocketbooks from that same hard-faced dame, who, as she leaned in front of us, ostensibly to talk, had profited thereby! For us to shift places had been just what she wanted. We had taken turns in putting ourselves in her hands, as we circulated around that table to keep her from getting too confidential with the little miss from Tulare; all but Tom, who hadn't moved. And we had grinned at her to show how smart we were! I remembered now that those shoulders of hers twitched rather oddly when she turned her back as we left. Also noticed how cleverly she had worked it by not going through us clean; so we would have change left for cab fares and incidental small things the next day! It was like leaving a nickel for car fare in a man's pocket after sandbagging him in an alley. We were the biggest set of chumps that had ever got skillfully handled, and looked

as shamefaced at one another, out there at the Cliff House, as it is possible for full-grown men to look. And up in Alaska they had called us "The Competents!" Competent, my eye!

Well, she had made a pretty good haul—about thirty-eight hundred dollars, as near as we could calculate, and we grabbed the next car back, hoping the police could do something to help us recover our money. The chief detective laughed loudly when we described the hard-faced woman, and said: "Silk-fingered May, eh? That's nothing for her. She picked my pockets one night on the way to the station when I was a plain-clothes man. I'll see what can be done; but it's doubtful. With that amount she'd probably hit hard and fast for other fields. Let me see. You left her before two o'clock this morning, and now it's noon. One can do a lot of get-aways in eleven hours. Whose place were you in?"

None of us could tell him the name, but knew we could show him, so he detailed a couple of men to go with us, and we took a Market Street car toward the ferry nave. We found the place, all right, just as the head bartender, a man with a broken nose, came on duty, and after him, discreetly, the two detectives went. Evidently the chap tried to make them believe that we were bluffing, and hadn't lost a cent. Then in came another man to begin his day's work, and we recognized him as the waiter who had served us all that ditch water at fancy prices, and who had been solicitous to get George's liberal tips. The case was explained to him, and he let out a yell that jarred the glassware.

"The woman wot sits wid 'em, and chins the goil," he said, "were Sister Mary Kelly, wot folks calls de angel of de coast. You knows her, de missionary woman wot tries to make the bad goils good!"

The detectives looked at us rather queerly, and said: "Let's go to your hotel."

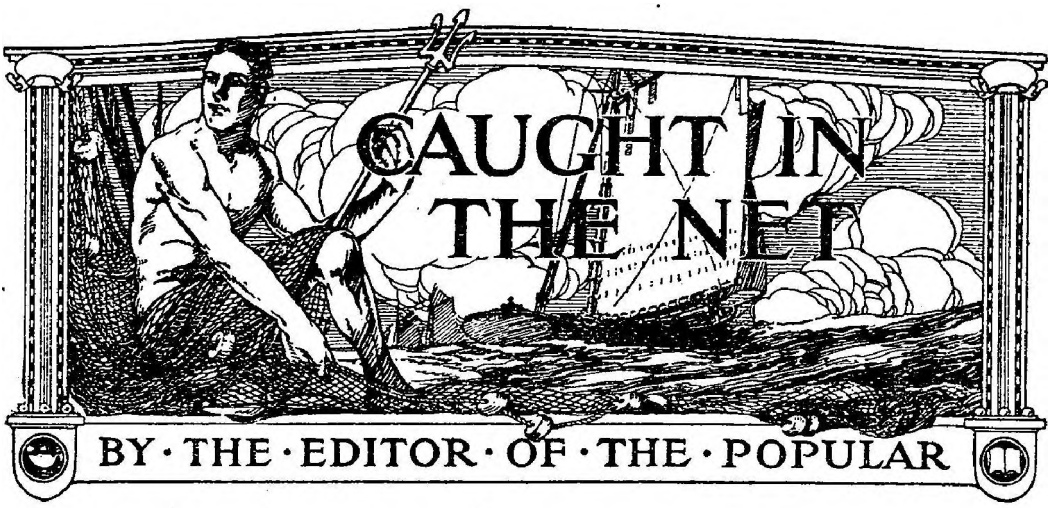
We hadn't much to say on the way. We were sort of down-hearted. Not even the plain-clothes man who met us at the hotel door could surprise us any more.

"I'm looking for Nell the Bird," he explained to our officers. "Made a get-away in men's clothes from down near Tulare, where she conned an old rube named Sam Wellyns out of fifteen hundred dollars. Police down there just heard of it, and we've tracked her through the Oakland police court here. Clerk says she must have left the hotel through the window mighty soon after these men bade her good night, because her bed hadn't been slept in. Heard anything about her?

The detectives admitted they had, and so did we; but it was the last we ever heard or saw of the "angel in disguise," on whose salvation we and Sister Kelly had wasted some time and money. Anyhow, wherever she is, we from Willow Creek are sorry for her, for sometimes she must remember and think about it, and feel a little bit ashamed. She ought to!

A HANDY REFERENCE TO CRIME

A CATALOGUE of murder and murderers is one of the curiosities in the offices of the United States secret service in Washington. In this catalogue all the cranks, nuts, and bugs in this country are listed, first alphabetically under their names and aliases, secondly under the particular forms taken by their obsessions and ideas. The catalogue is kept up by contributions from the police of every town and city whenever a new crank is discovered in the act of trying to approach people in authority or threatening to kill rulers.



WHEN THE RED GODS CALL

ANSWERING that primeval summons from the heart of the autumnal wilderness to the ancient hunting instinct of man, between three and four million males go forth annually to slay their legal—and, alas! their illegal—share of what remains of the game in these United States. Our authority for the amazing figures is Doctor William T. Hornaday, the eminent naturalist, and he also estimates that among these followers of the Red Gods there probably will be hundreds of thousands ready to kill and devour our rarest birds despite the most rigid governmental restriction, and whenever they feel secure from detection. To deter such pitiless hunters, if that were possible, but particularly to enlist the services of true sportsmen, who may prevent such crimes on the ground or at least bring down just punishment upon the offenders, we permit ourselves a few reflections on a subject that is an ineradicable blot of shame on our country.

The history of the eternal warfare between civilization and nature presents no more bloody chapter than that of the wanton destruction of animal life in America. Originally a paradise of creatures of the wild—the forests, plains, and waters teeming with a beautiful variety of fauna—in less than three hundred years it has been fairly depopulated of bird and beast. The colonists began it by a wholesale killing and cruelty that seems incredible, such as burning a cane-brake to secure a bag of game. And as the nation grew the slaughter increased, more and more hands being lifted to destroy.

Let us see for a moment with the eyes of Adriaen van der Donck, honest Dutch chronicler. In 1653 he wrote that the swans in the migrating season covered the shores and bays of the New Netherlands as with a white drapery! What is now known as Harlem was a happy hunting ground of ducks, geese, pigeons, ruffed grouse, and quail. Wild turkeys were as common as sparrows are to-day, and could be bought for the equivalent of twenty cents apiece. A good-sized buck might be had for a dollar. Bobwhites and ruffed grouse were

too insignificant to waste powder on! Indeed, as recent as the beginning of the nineteenth century, Harlem abounded in game, and Long Island was overrun by denizens of the wild. But as man settled the land its furred and feathered inhabitants were annihilated, their haunts turned to new uses. Of course, the same holds true of the whole country as it became peopled and the forests and plains and swamps were transformed into cultivated tracts or stony cities. During the past century this once rich land has been ravaged of its animal life as a ruthless conqueror might devastate a hated territory, until, at the present time, the most important game of America is almost gone.

Of the big game only deer and moose have survived in any appreciable numbers, and they are far too few. Elk and antelope are on their last legs, so to speak. Buffalo, as is well known, that formerly ranged in vast herds from central New York to Oregon—virtually the length and breadth of the land—are reduced to several carefully guarded reserves. Of the birds, the water fowl have lasted best, though they are sadly depleted. The wild turkey, once so plentiful, is vanishing. Ruffed grouse, once rated as pests to crops in Massachusetts, are now rated at something like five dollars a brace. Prairie chickens, once in myriads, are now but a pathetic remainder. Woodcock are disappearing. And the passenger pigeons which, according to old accounts, used to obscure the sun in their migratory flight, are no more. The last one was in captivity in Cincinnati a few years ago. So we might reflect ad nauseam.

To keep the remnant of game remaining to us we need more stringent restriction, especially on trade in game. Much as they have done, State laws and national government measures have not saved the day by any means yet. Generally speaking, States have not kept pace with the increasing need for protective measures—they have waited and still wait until *compelled* to act.

We would abjure the three or four million servants of the Red Gods that go forth this year and in the years to come, to play square, and remember that they are true-hearted sportsmen, not seeking to destroy to the full measure of the law, and pledged against cruelty and overt killing. They can do more for the preservation of game than the State minions, if they determine to give the game a fair chance. We could wish that more of the hunting tribe had some of the tenderness expressed by Blake in the lines:

A robin prisoned in a cage
Puts all Heaven in a rage;
A skylark wounded on the wing
Doth make a cherub cease to sing.

ENGLAND'S GREATEST WEAKNESS

FOR foodstuffs imported, Great Britain pays in excess of $1,350,000,000 a year—nearly $4,000,000 a day. John Bull pays tribute to the rest of the world for everything he eats—for his beef, his bread, his vegetables, his fruits, even his bitters. Last year for foodstuff he paid $175,000,000 to the Argentine, $165,000,000 to the United States, $125,000,000 to India, $105,000,000 to Denmark, $100,000,000 to Canada, $85,000,000 to Russia, $70,000,000 to Holland, $65,000,000 to Australia, $50,000,000 to Germany, $45,000,000 to New Zealand, and $45,000,000 to France. Each year Great Britain's production of food

shows a decline. Each year, with increase of population, the levy upon the outside world for supplies becomes greater. There is no quarter of the globe that is not drawn on.

Without cold storage the feeding of Great Britain to-day would be difficult indeed. As it is, the United Kingdom practically lives from hand to mouth. Any breakage in the wonderfully well-organized system of supply and distribution would be calamitous, for the country never has more than ten days' stock on hand.

With the tremendous increase in the cost of all other items of food, the Britisher has neglected one of the cheapest and best sources of his supply. He eats fish, but the per-capita increase in the consumption of fish does not rise despite the tremendous toll the Englishman is paying for other articles of diet. It is a thousand pities that with a large percentage of the population of the great cities of England always on the verge of starvation more is not made of England's fish supplies.

England's mighty fleet is maintained no more to protect England's prestige than England's lines of food supply. No other nation is placed so precariously in this respect. No peril that war threatens is greater to Great Britain than one that would break these channels of communication.

CHECKMATING THE LOAN SHARK

THE largest shipping concern in New York, if not in America, a corporation that has many piers, a dozen or more great warehouses, and its own private railroad, was bothered considerably through the number of its employees who got into the hands of loan sharks. It employs several thousand persons, and as it maintains a social service the president thought this loan-shark evil should be overcome or the social-service department would be falling short of its mission. After mature consideration he established a loan fund from which any employee who had been with the company one year could borrow. That was three years ago. Loans, except in cases of extreme misfortune, were limited to twice the weekly salary of the borrower. If the employee was married, his wife had to consent to the making of the loan, and the immediate superior of the man had to indorse the application.

The company charged six per cent interest. No security was required. The pay envelope in a sense was security, but a dishonest borrower could defraud the lender by drawing an amount equal to two weeks' pay and then quitting.

Almost every nationality is represented on the company's pay roll, and the bulk of the employees rank little above the grade of the common laborer.

In the three years the company has had to charge off twenty-two dollars as unpaid. One person out of all those to whom loans were made proved dishonest.

The records kept by the company show that at first most of the loans were made to clear up old debts. Since then they have been for purchases of furniture, rent, expenses of illness, and for vacations. Vacation loans are made with greater pleasure than any other.

One of the causes of dread and worry has been removed from the minds of

those who work for that concern. That tends to better service. Incidentally, the loan shark has been put out of business in that neighborhood.

"MATTY"

THE boy of to-day is the man of to-morrow. To mold his mind, develop his body, spur his ambition, save him from error, inspire him with love of right for right's sake—these have been the aim of teachers through all the ages. Better than a thousand sermons is one living illustration. Youth is the time of play. To the player who appeals to his imagination, youth pays the greatest tribute he has to offer—the tribute of imitation; of trying to fashion himself according to the style or the ways of his idol.

The game of baseball has developed one towering figure. It is that of an athlete, not remarkably strong, not particularly fleet of foot, fairly gifted in one single line, but combining through muscle and through mind perhaps more of the elemental science of the national sport than ever displayed by any other one man. Year after year, he has been tried in the crucible, and every year has stood the test. The game is hard. Only the fittest survive. As age is counted in play this man is old. But, like old wine, he seems to improve with age. In lieu of a more fitting title the baseball world has come to term him affectionately "The Old Master."

Consciously or unconsciously America typifies in this one man the ideal in national sport. It knows that he would have withered as an athlete long ago but for a life of clean living. It realizes that even with clean living, he probably would have worn himself out but for the intelligence he has employed to conserve his energies. It sees in him the coördination of brain and body, of sanity and strength, of good temper and fair play, and it rejoices. In all his long years of action, he never has been guilty of an unworthy act, and never has committed an offense despite the passion the play sometimes develops. Great as he is as a player, he is greater as a type of the man who is master of himself.

Who can measure the value of such an example to the youth of America?

SMOKE

WHEN you see smoke you see waste. Where there is perfect combustion there is no smoke. Perfect combustion has been the aim sought by scientists for many years. It is near at hand. Recent experiments have demonstrated that coal pulverized to so fine a powder that it will go through a mesh two hundred to an inch ignites instantly and turns to gas when sprayed on fire. The heat from such powdered coal is much more intense than that generated in the present-day fire box, and if smoke is to be eliminated one of the problems that will have to be solved will be to provide fire brick and metal capable of withstanding the greater strain. That should not be a problem sufficient to halt so important an economy, for now most of the energy there is in coal goes up the stack.

Out of the Miocene

By John Charles Beecham

SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE

While working for the United States geodetic survey, mapping a desert tableland in the great Southwest, Bruce Dayton, scientist and authority on the Jurassic reptilia, meets with a strange, half-mad individual by the name of Eugene Scott, who has lived for years in a hidden cave. Scott has chosen this hermit existence that he might better devote himself to the study of evolution, and so contribute to science knowledge that would place him beside Aristotle and Darwin. He claims he knows how to send back through the ages to the first forms of life, a man such as Dayton, and asks the young man's permission to dispatch him upon that amazing journey. Dayton humors the old fellow and, in a fever, falls asleep. In a bewildering daze Dayton finds himself living in trees, an ape man, known as Aka, the sentinel. Among his tribe are two that are to play important roles in his destiny—one Gru, his chief, a brutish gorillalike creature, and his mate Baba, the "pretty one." Because he has indulged in a prank, Aka is snarled at by the tribe and Gru punishes him mercilessly. Baba expresses sympathy for him because of his hurt. Gru comes upon them in a tender moment and is blood-mad instantly. Enraged, he almost crushes the life out of Aka, but Baba flies to help her lover against her fierce mate. Gru, filled with hate and murder, pursues the pair as they swing their way through labyrinths of trees. They escape only to be confronted by terrors and dangers of an unknown world. Baba is happy in her chosen lover, but he, struggling with higher impulses, repels her. She leaps away from him and vanishes.

(In Two Parts—Part Two)

CHAPTER IV.

BABA remained in the trees all day. I should have left her, but could not find justification for leaving her to Gru's mercies. As an ape man, such moral considerations did not trouble me. But the ape-man desire for companionship and attraction for her, working subconsciously, kept me hovering near. I brought her some berries in one of these ape-man states, but she refused them. Toward evening I made a shelter in the trees, modeled after the old camp.

All day I kept a wary eye busy searching the dense glade for a sign of our enemy. That Gru would come, I was positive. When night fell, dread and fear of the darkness came upon me. I had felt some of this terror before in the old camp, but not so acutely, for there I could huddle with the others, and that reassured me. When I was alone during the past week, with the human soul ascendant, I felt no fear. But now a primitive, childlike horror of darkness and the unknown and known terrors it concealed possessed my half-brute soul. From every copse and thickly leaved branch I saw the face of the gorilla king. At every rustle I shrank farther into the hut.

Baba, whose return darkness compelled, was no less afraid. All that night we crouched and shivered until the breaking of dawn brought relief.

With the first faint light filtering through the treetops, Baba left me. There was no formal leave-taking. She merely ignored my existence and swung away through the treetops, not toward the old camp, but toward the slope that terminated in the distant mountain chain. My ape-man self, piqued, curious, and still desiring her, compelled me to follow. At first she quick-

ened her pace, so that I could scarcely keep up. But she did not intend to run away from me, I know, or she would have. Gradually she traveled more slowly, and I followed just behind.

We must have been a strange pair, even for that primitive wilderness. She, the ape woman, scorned; I, the scorner, half of me desiring her, the other half abhorring. I was like a man in the grip of morphine; I knew it was poison, but could not stop.

At noon we rested for a few hours. We kept apart, were companions, but no more.

A sudden rustling, as if some heavy creature had swung on a limb that bent beneath his weight, caused us both to leap ahead in wild panic. One idea possessed us—Gru. For an hour we raced. All that time my ape-man mind was instinct with a something that could help us in this terrible need and deliver us from Gru. It was the same illusive something I could not recall or summon the day before, but I did not know it. Like an "infant crying in the night, an infant crying for the light," my brute intelligence groped about through the intense blackness of its world for that other self, my human ego. A metaphysician, striving to penetrate the abysses of infinity with the searchlight of thought for some explanation of the eternal mysteries of life and after-life, can realize the dead void, the darkness, the dense nothing upon nothing through which my primitive intelligence labored to rise to attain consciousness of that other ego.

Baba realized that something was wrong, as she had the day before. When we finally stopped, she hovered quietly about, trying to efface herself, yet always near, keeping her face turned from mine.

I might have lost the human at that time but for Baba. I was becoming querulous again, when she restored normal intelligence, not purposely, but by accident.

She was bending down a young sapling, when it slipped from her fingers and straightened. The impetus detached a leaf and sent it whirling.

My brute mind, just learning to reason, caught the import of that whirling leaf. Like Newton deducing the laws of gravitation from a falling apple, it perceived that a missile could be thrown that way. My human intelligence returned, and I knew that what I needed to protect us from Gru was a bow and arrow.

The terrible fear of losing the human element again possessed me. I realized, too, that by permitting the human mind to lie dormant, it became torpid and refused to react to the sensations I experienced. I must think, think, think—or become brute. First, I must make arms, a bow, arrow, and spear. Then I must have shelter and fire. Fire and weapons—with these two I was safe from Gru.

A stout branch of yew gave me the wood for a long bow. But I had no string. First I thought of a rope of tough grasses. I made several, but they snapped. Others were too thick to be serviceable.

I killed a rabbitlike creature that afternoon, and the skin, lying on the ground, gave me an idea. With a sharp stick I cut it into ribbons. These, spliced, made the string for the bow.

By nightfall the bow was completed, but I had no arrows. Afraid that Gru had spied us out and waited for night to trap us, we traveled several miles before sunset.

It was another night of terrors and broken sleep. At every sound we were tense for a bound into the higher treetops. But nothing disturbed us, except a little wild cat, whose green eyes flared fire from a neighboring tree.

In the morning I found some splendid sticks for arrow shafts. There was

nothing to scrape or shape them with, and nothing to tip them so they would penetrate a tough, hairy hide. I searched carefully for a sharp bit of stone, but the ground was carpeted with cones and leaves, and fine white sand or mud formed the floor.

All this time we were gradually ascending, and the vegetation became less rank. The atmosphere was also sensibly colder. I shivered at night, and but for the warm sunlight, I knew I would be shivering now.

The mountains! I suddenly recollected the glimpse of lofty peaks I had from the treetops. On those bare rocks I would find at least shale, perhaps quartz, granite, or, best of all, flint.

Now I took the lead and pressed upward. I forgot Baba. The joy of making something, of creation, of labor, was mine. Other emotions were stifled. She might have turned back, and I never realized the parting.

In making this confession I feel no shame. It marked another advance, the birth of ambition and love of accomplishment. The best-loved wife in the world cannot expect to be in her husband's thoughts during business hours.

But Baba did not forget me. Puzzled and piqued, I think, by this new mood, she followed. There was also another reason—the mother instinct was strong in her. Although she recognized that we could not mate, that something in me must always be alien to her, she realized also that I needed some one's care to guard me from the many dangers of our wild existence. She recogniged further that this protection could only come from her. So with feminine self-sacrifice, knowing she was abhorred, although she knew not why, she watched over me.

We were now in the region of the evergreens. It was becoming very cold. Still we pressed upward. There were no longer any trees, and we were forced to travel on the ground. The underbrush dwarfed as we advanced. It was below our shoulders. Now we found it only in scraggly patches. Moss succeeded the scrub growth.

Finally we reached the crest. It was the edge of an almost impassable plateau of arid, conglomerate rock, cut and scarred by endless seams and fissures and outcropping ledges, and sloping upward to a still loftier ridge. The lava formation was like an immense lake, instantaneously congealed while lashed by a terrific hurricane. At some dim and distant epoch, while the land below was quaking and belching gases from innumerable pores, this huge torrent of molten rock must have swept down from those distant ridges that now reposed so peaceably. Yet it had seemed to me, when I first awoke to a realization of my presence in the Tertiary, that I had gone back to the birth of the world. What an infinity stretched before and after!

Not that such thoughts occurred to me then. I was petulant, and hugely disappointed at my failure to find flint hard enough for arrowheads. That search, for the time, was the absorbing purpose and aim of life. I forgot that I was in an arid country, where there was no water and no food. I forgot the danger of getting lost in its mazes. I forgot the dangers of this era. It seemed as if my mind could grasp but one idea, and that idea, the need for flint.

Baba, with doglike fidelity, followed.

Yet at that time my human consciousness dominated. I did not realize then the grave danger that threatened me, the gradual dimming of the divine light of reason. It was as if this gross body and gross mind were too coarse fuel to keep the flame burning; air devitalized of oxygen. The spirit was losing its power to shine through, to control and direct. Eventually this must mean——

Finally I found what I wanted. It

was a gaunt spur of metamorphic rock, rising from the broken sheet of lava like a derelict mast from a shoal. Surviving the ancient flames, it must have been swept along irresistibly until it finally found lodgment here.

I almost hugged the rock in pure ecstasy. Then I looked at it blankly.

I had no tools. Not until that moment had the need of any occurred to me. A fatuous fool, I had dreamed that arrowheads of flint must be common wherever the rock was.

Carefully examining the stone, I strove to find some crack or crevice. There was no trace of cleavage. Everywhere about was the soft lava, rotted by frost and rain for thousands of years. There was nothing hard enough to chip off a segment of stone from this spur. I searched in ever widening circles, first walking, then running, as the sinking sun impelled haste. I came back to the rock, beating it with my hands in vain impotence. As wrath grew, and the peevishness common to simple-minded creatures, I screamed, kicked, and cursed, foaming at the mouth. Baba's solemn, questioning eyes at length calmed me.

The thrill that the lone prospector in an unknown creek feels as he gazes into his pan and sees pay dirt for the first time after years of gold hunting, the keen joy of the pearl hunter in finding a gem of purest water, were mine the next moment. Hardly had I taken ten steps from the rock before I saw nestling in a niche, not one, but two pieces of stone, undoubtedy chipped from the rock. I swooped down and dug them out.

Baba shrilled a warning. One more pull, and one of the rocks would be loose, so I did not look up. She screamed again piercingly, and leaped ahead of me, her face instinct with terror and self-sacrifice. I caught a glimpse of her as she swept past me, but that glimpse was enough to call me to my feet.

Not ten feet from me was a man. Not an ape man, but a human. Clad in the skin of a bear, about five feet six inches tall, he walked with a carriage as free and erect as man ever walked. He had just emerged from a ravine, and he came toward us slowly, threatening with a huge club and a stone ax caught in a scabbard of rough leather at his side. Baba was ahead of me, menacing with growls and sweeps of her arms, but the fear of death was on her, and I knew it.

What I should have done was make friends. I was human; he was human. He was an earlier progenitor of the later race of men, my race. My place was with him and his people. There the human in me might expand and cast off the ape-man incubus that was stifling it.

But I made no overture of friendship. In that moment of danger, like other moments, the human reverted. The ape man came to the fore and saw his mate threatened. With my precious rock in my hand—how I came to hold it I cannot explain, for that was not our ape-man mode of fighting—I sprang ahead of Baba.

My show of fight must have intimidated the hunter. It must have been different from what he expected. Probably the ape-man race always fled, as an inferior before a superior people. At any rate he stopped, holding his club lightly in readiness.

I shoved Baba back. We began retreating, she first, slowly, then more rapidly, finally in a panic. We were awkward on these rough rocks, confused, and ignorant of the road; the hunter was agile and familiar with his surroundings. Constantly he threatened, worrying us; and repeatedly I charged him, but he easily eluded me. Baba was slower than I, and I had to wait for her.

I did not realize that the cave man was skillfully driving us. It was not until I saw an impassable ravine just ahead that I perceived we were trapped.

A flood of rage possessed me. With the madness of beasts when they are cornered, I turned on him. He saw me coming, dropped his ax and skins, and backed against a rock, swinging his club. I stopped short in my charge.

Then he came slowly toward me. Never was I nearer death than that moment, even when Gru's arms were around me, yet I was not afraid. I was only savagely angry. Not an evolution of his club escaped me, and I calculated, even in the frenzy of madness, on a chance to jump in and get my fingers on his throat before he could swing. All the time I growled and spat and whirled my arms intimidatingly.

As he pressed closer, he kept a wary eye upon Baba. He had us in a pocket where a lateral gully met the big ravine nearly at right angles, both sloping down in acute precipices for over a hundred feet.

With the fury of desperation, Baba lumbered toward him. He struck at her, but she fell as the club descended, and her skin was only barked. He whirled the club to dash out her brains. A bellow of rage, and I was almost upon him. He stepped back to escape my charge. That step was his last. Leaning backward, with the oddly curious look of a man who has lost his balance and strives to recover equilibrium, he slipped down. It seemed ages before we heard the dull thud of his body striking the rocks below. I dared not look over the cliffs to see.

But one emotion possessed us, to escape from there. The place was full of terrors. To get back to the trees again, where we had refuge, where we could move as we were made to move, through the branches, was our supreme desire.

Before we left, I picked up the cave man's dress of skins that he had thrown aside as he warily approached us, and his ax. Why I did this, I do not know. It may have been a primitive instinct for loot, the spoils that fall to the victor. It may have been a vague stirring of the human, or that instinct for development that made man from the ape.

Baba watched me with huge distrust. In fact, she feared me. Adoption of the cave man's garb made me cave man to her, and therefore a potential enemy, at least some one to be watched. The careful manner in which she kept out of reach, the suspicion alert in her keen black eyes, plainly revealed this. I began to understand the deadly enmity of ape man for cave man, and cave man for ape man, of the superior race for the inferior and the inferior for the superior. It is that kind of feeling that made the Versailles of the fifteenth Louis possible, I think, and the French revolution; Newport and nihilism.

But though Baba distrusted, her devotion did not waver. Out of reach, but never far away, she toiled after me. It was nearly dark before we found the edge of the plateau again. We had unknowingly made a considerable detour. In that rough country it was impossible to follow a trail.

As the sun set I picked a sheltered gully for the camp. The shadows began to cluster, and with the dark returned my ape-man fears. I dropped the flints and the skins, and whined softly. Baba came swiftly toward me, and whined, too. We crouched there together, two lost children, while the chilling night wind gathered strength and howled above. It became cold, bitterly cold, and our teeth chattered, but I never thought to cover us with the skins.

There was a touch of red in the dense shadow of the opposite cliff wall. I do not remember that the phenomenon made any impression upon me. As an

ape man, I accepted conditions as I found them, without striving to reason causes. But I do remember that, cramped from long sitting, I stepped upward and saw——

A crescent of fires, brightly blazing, far down the cliff, and men and women about the fires. Men and women, children, too, eating and sleeping and mating, unashamed and without restraint.

I could almost hear the crackling of the flames. I could almost snuff the smoke. I looked, saw every detail of the scene with a vividness that memory will always retain, and burrowed back into the gully in a pandemonium of fright. Baba understood, and her whining ceased, as did mine. All night we skulked there, too frightened to sleep.

In the morning, weak from hunger and lack of sleep, we silently fled along the rim of the plateau, away from the village of cave men, and retreated to our native forests.

I was too much of a beast to meet men.

CHAPTER V.

Our panic lasted until we reached the treetops. Curious how the trees were home to me, and the restful security they gave. Yet when I first swung from limb to limb, I shrank before every leap. So familiar had these surroundings become.

In my flight I carried the two flints with the cave-man dress and the stone ax. The single idea that I must have those stones, which carried me so far up the plateau, persisted. My ape-man mind was incapable of other thought while this purpose was unfulfilled.

But now that I had the flints, what should I do with them? I looked at them stupidly. The idea remained tantalizingly out of reach. My simply constructed ape-man mind could not reason the analogy between the bow and flints. Its inability aroused a dull sort of fury that made me gnash my teeth and work myself into a frenzy. I snapped off branches in a black rage, and threw the bow aside.

Exhausted, I became calmer. The violence of emotion subsided. The distant idea came to me, seeping through the walls that separated my human consciousness from my ape-man consciousness. I only know that I suddenly knew, the dark was light, and I perceived that I must have small pieces of stone to make arrowheads.

But how to break the flints? I pounded them together. That was futile. I climbed a tree and let one drop on the other. Both flints were broken. After three days of infinite toil rubbing the pieces together, I had arrowheads. Another day's work gave me a quiver of six arrows.

Those four days were the most wonderful of that strange life. I do not recollect that the human ego dominated a single moment during all that time. Of course, it suggested and advised, but I was scarcely conscious of it. The sharply defined transition from one state to the other was gone. There was no violence of emotions to accentuate the differences between my two stages of life, as a civilized man, and as a creature of the primitive.

My ape-man intelligence, undoubtedly absorbing strength from the human spirit that dwelt within, developed tremendously. It was wonderful how I could reason. Without suggestion from the human spirit, my ape-man self understood that arrows must have hard points to penetrate and kill. It understood that a bow and arrows lengthened my arm and enabled me to kill my enemies before they could reach me.

This power of thought came from tremendous concentration for days upon one problem—how to kill Gru. I knew that, brawn against brawn, he was my master. My strength, though more than common, was no match against his.

I must kill him before he could reach me.

The bow and arrows enabled me to do that. Thinking constantly the one thought—to kill Gru—I was able to recognize the potentiality of the weapon.

So those arrows were made by me as an ape man, with fingers whose only training was making shirts from leaves. The shafts were crude, and the heads not firmly fastened, but practice perfected skill.

A little opossumlike creature, running along a branch, was the first victim of the world's first bow. I shot two shafts, and the second brought it tumbling to the ground. The arrow snapped in two, and this cost me considerable time in duplicating it, but I was happy. I had proved my skill. For a week I practiced assiduously.

Baba kept more and more away from me. I could see her daily, watching me with wondering eyes, eyes that testified of a pathetic devotion. But I was outstripping her in the race toward the human, and she sensed it. I saw her finger one of the arrows once. I had carelessly left it in a tree. She handled it fearsomely, feeling the barb, and stroking the feathered shaft. When she saw me she quickly put it down.

Poor Baba! Hers was a bigger problem than mine. Mine only to meet my enemy and kill him. Hers to hold a man to whom she had given herself, but who had never been hers, whose world was new and unknown to her, very mysterious, and full of things inexplicable to her simply organized mind. I have seen wives like that, wives of the ordinary sort, with brilliant husbands, and, oh, their hopeless devotion, their helplessness and their fears!

Day after day I gained in skill. Had we the means of making a fire, I could have kept us plentifully supplied with meat.

Meat! How the craving for it grew. Roots and berries we had plenty, but the flesh hunger made me long to rend and tear the carcasses of things I killed, while they still dripped blood. Yet something always held me back. It was as if my human self, now almost obliterated from active consciousness, guarded me from those grosser sins that would have made me all beast.

With the meat hunger came a vague dissatisfaction with this elysian life. Day by day it grew. The weather possibly accentuated it. The nights were colder and longer. The rains were more frequent. Below, all the earth floor was in a constant ferment, steaming and laboring in the mighty travail of stupendous production. Thick mists gathered morning and evening, and at length even the noonday sun could hardly dispel them. It seemed as if all the world above was dripping moisture, and the ground became a steeping, quaking, soggy quagmire, fouler every day.

Recollections of the sunlit plateau, of the camp on the mountainside with the crescent of fires, began to obtrude. I became more and more restless. The instinct toward migration was also upon Baba. A couple of times she had started southward, and looked to see if I would follow. When I did not, she came back sulkily.

Possibly it was only a seasonal instinct, common to all these creatures, to escape to a sunnier clime while the rains lasted, that possessed me with this fever to move. Yet I think the craving for human companionship had something to do with it. For when I finally did turn toward the hills, I was dressed in the cave man's skins and carried his stone ax.

Baba objected, but vainly. A sort of companionship was developing between us, tolerant on my part, humbly submissive on hers. How her fierce nature had changed! When she saw I was determined to go, she followed.

I struck a more easterly course this time, away from the plateau, and to-

ward the cliff. I wanted to see these humans at close range and meet them.

The approach was carefully planned. There was a little creek running not far from the camp, bordered by a grove of trees. The creek ran into a considerable forest, to which we could escape if threatened. Following the belt of trees, I reconnoitered the camp of the humans.

Again that mystery—fire! But now no longer a mystery. The phenomenon so new, so strange and fear inspiring to my ape-man self, so transcending all previous experience when I first saw it, was no longer novel. Intuitively I recognized it. It was fire. Nothing to be afraid of, tool and servant of man—fire. I, an ape man unacquainted with fire until a short time before, now knew it, and understood its purpose—to give warmth. Yet I had never been near it.

Whence this knowledge? To me it is the convincing proof that the old struggle between my ape-man soul and my human soul for possession of this body was at an end. The two had merged. I was an ape man, but a super ape man, with a human intelligence of many things.

Of course I did not know these things then. My mind was not attuned to abstractions. It was too simply organized, too primitive. But at that moment I stood on the threshold of a new and wonderful life. My dual personality was made one. There were to be no more transitions from one state to another. I was an entirely new creature, different from any that has ever been in this world before or after, a compound of the Tertiary and the twentieth century.

The change must have occurred while I was struggling to make my arrows. My dominant aim in making the arrows is the dominant aim of men in all stages of their evolution—self-protection. The single purpose was the flame that fused the two natures.

When I left the heavy forest for the lower growth fringing the creek, Baba expostulated. First she scolded in shrill warning and stamped her feet. When I persisted she changed to short, sharp cries of distress and low whining. So typically feminine that mood, so much the woman trying to coerce her man, and when that fails, cajolery. She was afraid, womanly afraid, and womanly she tried to hold me back.

The camp was a gently sloping open place at the foot of a precipice of soft, weather-worn rock, pitted with small black openings in and out of which the cave dwellers wriggled. In a broad arc, inclosing the group of caves, were a series of fires so close that they made practically a ribbon of flame encircling the camp. Only in one place was an opening, with a sentinel on guard. Better than walls of stone was the barrier of flame against the dangers of the primitive world. No invading army of tree dwellers and no wild beasts could penetrate it. The cliff was accessible in only one place, where the rock had been worn smooth in a zigzag ascent for about a hundred and fifty feet.

There were eight grown males, about twice that many females, and thirty or more children of both sexes in the camp. The males lolled about indolently, and the females replenished the fire, chattering volubly. The busy clack-clack of the women and the bored air of their mates was so deliciously human and funny that I laugh each time I recall it. But I lacked a sense of humor then.

Without attempting concealment, I left the shelter of the trees, and walked several steps into the open. Baba kept in the outskirts of the forest, but near enough to watch proceedings.

The camp was instantly in an uproar. At the alarm of the sentinel the men jumped to their feet and grasped

their axes, stone-pointed spears, and clubs. The women fled, shrieking, to the caves, bundling in their children before them. Two ran out again and picked up youngsters forgotten in the rush.

I stopped, and whined ingratiatingly. Whined, I say, for the sounds made by my lips can only be classified as whines. In our primitive language there was no word for peace or friendship. Our vocabulary only expressed rancor and hate, and the primitive wants of food and shelter. There was a cry that meant we were cold and miserable, and a different cry to express our gratification at food. There was also the mating cry. These, with variations, constituted our language.

When they saw there was only one enemy, and he dressed in the garb of a cave man, three of them advanced cautiously outside the circle of flame and came toward me. I stepped a little nearer, whining again. Their alert eyes twinkled from the tree growth to me, as if they suspected treachery. One of them discovered Baba, and stopped the others quickly.

I placed the bow on the ground, and that nearly cost my life. For one of them, the chief of the camp, threw a spear at me. As I bent it whizzed by, flecking a piece of skin from my shoulder.

Baba again saved me. With a fierce cry of rage she launched out of the trees, snarling and foaming. They stopped, and, in the moment's respite, I picked up the precious bow. I fled for the trees with Baba, but they were fleeter. The chief was only a few steps behind me, when, fitting a shaft to the bow, I whirled around and shot. The arrow penetrated the fleshy part of his throat, the barb going through. Spurting blood, he fell headlong.

That made it two and two. They were a cowardly breed, those ape men, for they left their leader and raced back to the shelter of the flames. Unmindful of the ax in my belt, I jumped toward the wounded man to beat out his brains by butting his head against the rock. As I reached him, he raised himself. He was a gruesome sight, the blood pouring from the wound, and the arrow imbedded in the flesh. He tried to rise, but sank back helplessly. Although he must have read my purpose, and could not have expected any other fate in that savage time, he faced me courageously. Scorn of death, pride that disdained to ask mercy of a foe shone from his eyes and ennobled him.

Something stirred within me. Probably it was the call of the human, the spontaneous admiration for courage which was one of the earliest human attributes. I leaned over him, and, to his astonishment, broke off the barb and pulled out the shaft. With some healing herbs and a bandage of leaves and vines I bound the wound and stanched the flow of blood.

Curious eyes from the camp watched this performance. It must have been utterly inexplicable to them, utterly in variance with the code of eye for eye and tooth for tooth, which was the only law the Tertiary knew.

Baba, too—how she stared and mistrusted! Yet all the time she was studying me, striving to understand these odd moods. Nothing I could do would amaze her. But she must know my every act, and endeavor to piece it into the new scheme of things.

A startled fawn leaped out of a thicket across the stream just as we finished bathing. Before it could disappear, my bow twanged. A couple of steps, and it sank to the ground, in plain view.

There were shouts of amazement from the camp. Baba looked on with fond pride. I exulted, for it was the biggest thing I had shot. My new acquaintance trembled. This new way of killing was a fearful mystery to him.

I motioned to him to help me carry

the deer to camp. Together we dragged it to the fire and skinned it with rude knives that he produced. The other folk still kept to the caves, although I could see eyes peering curiously, and vague outlines of forms that retreated swiftly into the blackness the moment my glance questioned.

While we skinned the deer and roasted parts of it over the flame, the cave man and I became friends. Our languages were practically the same, although his vocabulary was bigger. He possessed a greater variation of sounds than I did, and could express more ideas to his kind. But I acquired these new sounds readily. There was no reason why a confusion of tongues should exist, since both of us expressed with elemental sounds our elemental wants. There was no more reason why our speech should differ than why one infant's cry should differ from another's.

Klo, the Bold One, was his name. I told him mine, and we repeated each other's. Then we rubbed dirt on each other's faces to show that our friendship was undying. Before this happened some one in the caves had thrown a stone at me, but Klo leaped after him and cuffed him roundly.

The fragrant smell of cooking venison brought the cave dwellers out one by one. First they smelled the rich aroma, snuffing loudly. Then the bolder ones, particularly the youngsters, came nearer. I held out pieces of meat toward them. By and by one of the more courageous snatched a piece out of my hand. After that it was easier, and we were soon acquainted.

Baba still kept to the forest. Not because I was ashamed of my neglect for her, or because I was grateful, for such emotions were unknown at that time, but because her companionship was pleasant, I went to the creek and called her. She still distrusted, and refused to come. It was not until night began to settle, bringing with it all the terrors of darkness, that she tremblingly emerged into the open. I led her to the camp.

Her fears were quickly observed by the others. With the instinct of small creatures for meanness, they attempted to pester her and intimidate her with petty cruelties. But after I had beaten a few soundly, her position in the camp was secured. They recognized my mastery because Klo did.

I was bigger and stronger than these cave men. They were short of five feet high, and I was a couple of inches over that height. They lacked my depth of chest and my heavy muscles. In fact, I was quite a giant among them, and by far the strongest and most athletic being in the camp.

But they were swifter than I on the ground. They had a cunning, a thievish, cruel cunning that had Baba and me at a disadvantage. We of the tree people were honest with each other. We fought our enemies as hard as we could, and used every crook and wile to overcome them, but we were true to our friends. These cave folk had no knowledge of camp unity or loyalty to their fellows. Every man's hand was against every other man's. They never fought in the open, but struck from behind. In our tree colony, each man had his mate. If an ape man was away from the camp on a hunting expedition or at sentinel's post, the others left his mate alone. When a tree man was killed, somebody else took the widow to wife. We were not monogamous, for if we had been half the females would have been without mates. The men, the hunters and the warriors, were killed off the most rapidly. Some of them, therefore, had several wives. But no female was coerced to dwell with any male; it was her own voluntary choice that gave her a mate, be she maid or widow.

But here it was different. The fe-

males were the weaker, so they did all the work. No man's mate was safe from the other men. The women were common property. Only the stern hand of Klo, who was greatly superior to his fellows in courage and the moral virtues, kept order in the camp and prevented anarchy. They had banded together for mutual protection, yet were it not for Klo would have been their own worst enemies.

Outside of Klo there was not a virtue in the camp, not the faintest stirring of an altruistic impulse. The women were shallow, vain, chattering, unchaste creatures; the men debauched and enervated by their own excesses, thieves and liars, boastful idlers, fond of strutting around, treacherous to the last degree.

Into such company had I fallen. Yet these folk lived in caves and had stone tools and weapons, and were consequently far advanced of the tree people. They had fire—were these our ancestors?

I am convinced that they were not. History shows repeated instances of barbarian peoples advancing to a high civilization to be corrupted, lose the racial vigor which gave them such tremendous impetus above their fellows, and succumb to barbarians whose only superiority was a physical one, and who after several generations adopted the civilization of the conquered and advanced it. Witness the Greeks triumphing over the horde of Persia, and the Germanic tribes conquering Rome.

The tree people, only ape men yet, would wipe out this race eventually as the Teutons and Goths wiped out Rome, thus acquiring fire and weapons and tools of stone. The bow and arrow would follow, and some one would discover how to fashion tools from molten metal. After that decay, and another new race.

I cannot place Klo. Sometimes his odd gait makes me think he was what I was, a renegade tree man. Perhaps he was one of those rare characters that nature sometimes plants among a degenerate race, a Hannibal among the Carthaginians. Loyalty, courage, honesty, morality, the virtues his fellows lacked were his. He was the leader because he alone was fit; because he dared more than the others, and because he was the only one they could trust.

Baba and me they accepted for two reasons. The first and most potent was the bow. I could kill at a greater distance than they could. The second was Klo. His influence in the camp would have secured us toleration, even if the bow had not compelled fear and respect.

The thievish propensity and treachery of these human beasts I learned the first night. Baba and I were sitting beside the fire when I felt a sharp tug at the bow I was lightly holding. I whirled around as a cave man pulled it from me. A single leap, and I had him. If he had escaped, I might have chased in vain; I beat him cruelly, until he howled for mercy, and none of the others, who clustered around, dared stop me. If I had lost the bow, I am sure they would have rushed in and killed me. But when I recovered it they cackled in glee over the thief's discomfiture, prodding him and filling the night with their discordant clacking. The incident taught me never to let my fingers off my weapons.

When we retired into one of the caves which Klo assigned us, a heavy rock, from the plateau above, shot down and narrowly missed us. Luckily I saw it start, and hurled Baba against the cliff. The rock splintered where we had stood. It was useless to shoot, and useless to try to find the treacherous wretch who loosened the stone. Baba and I retired to the cave, whose entrance was just large enough for us to crawl in. We pulled the rock against

it. It took our combined strength, which assured me that no cave man would be likely to move it quickly. I explored the cave to make sure it had no back door.

That was the beginning of many days in the camp and nights in the cave. Baba and I kept aloof from these people, except Klo, who had no wife, and who shared our councils and taught our clumsy fingers the fashioning of stones and how to build a fire by rubbing sticks and many other arts.

Baba found the women as frivolous and nauseating as I did the men, and they reciprocated her feeling heartily. There was also more or less jealousy. The women tried desperately to flirt with me, and the men strove to make advances to Baba, but both of us were impervious to these wiles.

But the life was a miserable one. Many times I resolved to leave the camp and live again in the open, but as the cold rains increased and the warm fires became more congenial, it was harder to break away. We realized the discomforts we would suffer living in the trees with the rains penetrating our flimsy shelter and the cold winds chilling us. There was Gru to consider, too, but we were no longer afraid of him now that I could shoot. It was Klo, however, who kept us in the camp, for his companionship began to mean much.

One of the arts we learned was to snare animals and catch them in pits. The cave men were too lazy to hunt small game and too cowardly to chase the larger animals, but they had the cunning to get both.

So the winter passed. We saw no snow, for this was before the glacial epoch, and although we were in what is now the temperate zone, it had a climate like that of southern California to-day.

When spring came, and the rains ceased, and the sun smiled daily and dried up the bubbling quagmires that covered all the low ground, the vague stirring of unrest and migration that had filled us before and led us to the cave men again developed. It was no longer pleasant for us to live in a cave. Fires were unnecessary, except to cook food. It was a pleasure to swing from limb to limb again.

One day a party of the cave men, out hunting, caught us swinging about in the trees. That evening, when we returned, there was hubbub in the camp. Familiarity had worn off the edge of their first fear of us, and when we came into the open, a threatening, gesticulating throng received us. I was astonished, but the constant reiteration of "Ru, ru," their word for tree people, explained the situation. They had accepted us as cave men. Now we proved to be tree folk. Hence we were spies and traitors. How they gnashed their teeth and foamed at the mouth as they stood in the entrances to their caves, ready to slip out of sight if I so much as reached for an arrow! Klo alone tried to defend us, but his authority was ignored.

We were sick of the camp, so we did not dispute them or try to fight our way in. We turned back to the forest, and camped in a tree that night.

Where to go was the problem the next morning. No home, and the big wide world stretched before. Baba yearned for old associations, the trees where we lived while I made the bow and arrows, and all that region of splendid forest.

But my heart was turned toward the highlands. From our treetop we could see the mighty mountain chain, peak after peak, stretching before. In the shadows of those snow-clad peaks I knew were pleasant vales where there was water and food in abundance. The explorer's fever was on me, and I urged pressing eastward—away from

the old life and Gru. Baba yielded as usual.

The decision meant retracing our steps and skirting the camp. As we neared the creek I saw a cave man waiting by the stream. In those days every stranger was an enemy, and we approached cautiously. He turned around, and I saw it was Klo.

How we embraced, and rubbed dirt in each others' faces to testify our joy in meeting! With the uncanny intuition of a savage, Klo had divined that we would cross the creek, and planned to meet us. He was as weary of the camp as we, so we three set out together. I caught a final glimpse of the cave men through the trees, quarreling and gorging and lusting as usual when Klo was gone. It was the last I ever saw of them.

CHAPTER VI.

The whole world was migrating. Cave people and tree people, swamp people and hill people, all were seeking new homes. The cave people kept to the barren slopes, while we of the tree folk clung to the timbered valleys. Fear of beasts lurking in the jungles and bogs drove them to the hillsides; fear of the cave folk and their stone weapons kept us in the trees. The jungle carnivora we had no difficulty in avoiding.

The trend was largely northward, although it diverged east and west in greater or less angles. We were heading nearly due east, and crossed fresh trails three or four times each day.

Spring, the call of a new year, was responsible for this tremendous migration. As the warm sun sapped the moisture from the forest, and the world budded out in fresh green, and all the myriad voices of the woodland and the marshes, stilled during the rainy period, were heard again, a spontaneous instinct for new fields and new forests filled every breast. Man followed the birds north, east, and west, and peopled the whole earth.

We proceeded carefully. Our first day's experiences taught us caution. We were mounting the crest of a naked hill when a score of cave people came from the other side. Luckily Klo saw them first. We backed toward a patch of forest, but they discovered us before we could hide. It was nip and tuck to the trees, and a stone hammer whizzed over Baba's shoulder. That so angered me that I wheeled and let go an arrow. It scratched one of the cave men, and his scream of pain made the whole tribe scamper. The trees hid us.

Later a tribe of tree people chased us, but by dodging from forest to glade repeatedly we eluded them. Looking back as we finished crossing a particularly long open space, nearly half a mile wide, I saw a huge ape man just emerging from the patch of forest we had left and toiling along in the rear of the tree people. He towered among the others and beat his chest with his hands in his rage.

It was only a glimpse I had, but before me rose the picture of Gru when I first saw him coming toward me through the trees. The cruel blow he struck me then rang again in my ears. Even at that distance I recognized the thrashing arms and shambling gait of the avenger. The single glimpse was enough. A snarl of warning to Baba, and we were off at a breakneck pace through the trees that left the tree men far behind. Every crackling branch nerved us to a more rapid pace that Klo could hardly maintain. Now to the right, then to the left we swerved, now we doubled, and again leaped a watercourse to hide our tracks. I felt in anticipation Gru's terrible arms around me, and the bones bending, and the horrible suffocation. In my panic I never once thought of the bow and the liberation it might bring.

When the darkness gathered, we picked out a big tree for shelter. Klo, who did not know Gru, ridiculed our fears. The rapid pace must have upset his usual poise, for he became quite noisy and boastful. Night gathered, intensely black, wonderfully still. At length I sank into a troubled sleep.

Next I remember a terrible dream of Gru bending over me, fiendish malice distorting his face into the wildest nightmare of brute passion.

I shrieked, and in the hisses and discordant croakings and the quavering cry of tigers and the crashing of thickets as some frightened creature fled through them did I hear a strangled cry? I leaped upward, somebody just behind. A smothered gasp told me it was Baba. As we jumped I heard branches snap, followed by a thud below, as though a big limb had fallen. We fled on the wings of the wind through the intense darkness, risking our lives in every swing, instinct our only guide. A hundred times I leaped ahead without knowing whether there was a branch beyond or not, springing straight into the blackness with hands outstretched to catch the first support. Sometimes I dropped twenty or thirty feet before my fall was arrested. I never once thought of the risk, for just behind was vengeance incarnate, unseen and unheard, but remorselessly pursuing. Though our straining senses were unable to hear a rustle or detect a smell that revealed Gru, we felt him stalking us, and the feeling spurred us on. Once we stumbled upon a sleeping python, and only quick wit and the thin branches of the higher treetops saved us. Dawn found us, utterly exhausted, still laboring ahead.

Although Baba was with me, Klo was missing. We waited in a lofty tree until nearly noon. By this time I had learned that our wild flight of the night before had been in a circle. Eyes and ears alert for every suspicious sound, we proceeded to the place we had slept the night before. The tree was in a wide bend of a creek, so that it was not difficult to find it, once we located the stream.

We found Klo where I feared we would find him. He was lying at the base of the tree, dead. His throat was blue and swollen, and blood and foam frothed his lips. Both of his legs had been broken by the fall, for they were grotesquely bent under him, as if a giant force had hurled him down.

For some moments we were so paralyzed with terror that we could not stir. A distant crashing in the branches recalled us. Again we fled, speeding breathlessly through the trees until several miles separated us from Klo's remains.

Did Gru come, as I dreamed, and in the darkness seize Klo instead of me and hurl him to the ground? Or was it some other ape man or gorilla who found us in his lair?

I think it was Gru. Monkeys and men do not roam the jungles at night.

Baba and I traveled many leagues that day, still steadily upward. We reached a table-land that stretched with a few breaks to the base of a smoking mountain. Our love for the tree-clad valleys was gone. They were too full of the terror—Gru. Fire no longer had any terrors for us, and our only hope of safety lay in dwelling in some inaccessible cave.

When we reached the table-land, the mountain seemed only a few hours' journey away, but it took us four days to reach its base. Twice only rapid running and my bow and arrows saved us from the cave people. Every man's hand was against us. Food was scarce, and water scarcer. Rage and bitterness filled my heart, making me more savage every day. Is it any wonder that I sank to the beast, and that practically all the human in me disappeared.

On the fourth day, I remember, I ate raw flesh for the first time. It was a little four-footed creature, with four toes on each foot, and no bigger than a fox, I had shot. Now I know it was a hyracotherium, ancestor of our horse. The raw meat was nauseating, but it nourished. We drank the blood, too, in our terrible thirst, for all the springs were sulphurous. But it did not relieve us much, for our parched throats soon craved water with tenfold intensity.

Baba made no complaint. She was content to follow where I led. Behind, both of us believed, was Gru, and death. So great was my fear that my former feeble trust in the bow and arrows was utterly gone. If only we could cross this mountain chain and find a pleasant valley opposite, we would be safe, I thought.

Huge precipices, rising sheer for hundreds of feet, finally balked our farther eastward progress. We turned south, following the cliff wall, and leaving the smoking mountain behind. The plateau was cleft, on our second day's journey since we changed directions, with a deep valley through which a creeklet ran, tumbling down the mountainside in a sparkling cascade, and scattering a million shining pearls as it daringly leaped.

How deeply we drank! How delicious it was to splash water at each other! We were like children together. It was the first water we had tasted in six days. The blood of the hyracotherium and some eggs Baba had found that we sucked raw had been our only drink during that time; and hyracotherium meat and young bark our only food. In the valley were succulent roots and stalks, berries, and plenty of animal food to be snared or shot. I rubbed sticks together as the cave men had taught me, and built a fire.

We rested three days. On the fourth day I discovered that the creek was only a tributary of a larger stream that flowed through a pass in the mountain chain. Through the door thus opened to us, I did not hesitate to pass. We followed the windings of the river almost to its source in the region of snows. I found a huge crack in the ridge, as if the peaks, in cooling, had contracted and left this break. The waters in this cleft flowed eastward, instead of westward, as they did before. We had crossed the watershed.

From now on traveling was easier. The forests were thicker, and the rill grew to a creek, the creek to a rivulet, and the rivulet to a river as fresh streams swelled its waters. We found plenteous evidences of life, too, but previous unpleasant receptions had made us cautious. We traveled slowly, feeling our way, and avoided colonies. It was easy enough, for there was always chattering about a camp to warn us when we came within close proximity to it. We were seen several times and chased, but by this time we were sufficiently adept in the art of avoiding pursuit to foil our enemies.

One chase nearly proved our undoing. Our narrow escape brought us up another notch in our evolution.

There were two colonies of ape men, a mile or two apart, on the same bank of the river. When we stumbled on the first and were discovered, we did not know the proximity of the second. We followed our usual tactics, breaking for the higher open ground. But the river made a sharp right angle just below, and before we realized it we were hemmed in between the stream, the town below, and our pursuers just behind. I could hear their shrill shrieks of warning to the downriver colonists, the answering cries, and the whoops of triumph as they penned us in.

In desperation we broke into a tangle of canebrake lining the river. Ordinarily we would not have dared risk the cane for fear of snakes, but the

worse fear of the tree folk conquered the other.

As we huddled together in the thick cane, I saw the nose of a dugout in a little inlet. Some fishermen had probably hidden it there. The use Klo and his cave men had made of hollow logs to cross streams instantly recurred to me. I bundled the protesting Baba in the boat, where she lay prone on the bottom, too frightened to move and I beside her.

We drifted by the town before the dugout was observed. Then an excited female leaped into another boat and tried to recover the supposedly runaway craft. It was not until she was near enough to perceive us that I sprang up and began paddling desperately. By this time we were below the village. While she shrieked the alarm and paddled desperately back, I drove our clumsy craft ahead with awkward strokes. If there was any pursuit, the tree folk must soon have become discouraged, for we did not see them again.

It took me a couple of days to acquire the knack of paddling, and Baba even longer to accustom herself to water about her, but it saved us many weary miles on foot and in the trees. We also learned to fish. The discovery was purely by accident, and the credit is Baba's. A marsh fowl had formed our dinner, and Baba had thrown the bones overboard. Her fingers, always itching for something to do since we were no longer in the trees, had wound a long creeper about a sharp-pointed, crooked bone, to which some flesh still adhered. Holding the vine, she felt a sharp tug at it. She let it go with a little, frightened cry, but I caught it and pulled it in. We had hooked a fish. After this we fished daily. The river teemed with finny creatures, and experience rapidly taught us to improve our methods. We no longer had starvation to fear.

It was largely a hill country we were going through, although the hills constantly decreased in size, and were more largely of clay and marl formation than of rock, as the foothills. One evening we stopped at the base of a lofty bluff. We always camped ashore at night, for the river held many monsters.

In the morning Baba and I climbed the hill to get a view of the country ahead, for by this time our many dangers had taught us the savage's caution to proceed warily in a strange country.

The slope was heavily wooded. Forests meant danger of beasts, so Baba and I kept to the trees. The growth we were familiar with dwarfed after a succession of undulations until we came to a small glade.

Before us, like a vast, many-pillared cave, was the shadow of a mighty forest. Giant trunks, twice a man's length and more in thickness, rose in solemn grandeur for hundreds of feet to the heavens. Ahead of us their outlines grew fainter and disappeared in an immense blackness. The only light in this Cimmerian wold was reflected from the side. The huge canopy of branches and thick needles that stretched above effectually shut out every ray of sunlight. The silence was tomblike. Whatever secrets nature had burned in these recesses were sacred from human eye.

Gazing into the black depths, a sense of awe overcame us. My feeble mind filled it with unknown terrors, strange beasts and stranger shapes, goblins and demons, creatures of the night that slew and devoured silently. I shrank away, shuddering. Baba was even more frightened, for she whined plaintively and clung to me. Her voice profaning the awful silence rang like an alarm bell to all the demons of the wood to my distraught mind, and I silenced her with a strangled snarl.

I know the forest now. It was the sequoia, California's giant redwood, of which a few lone specimens remain to-

day to be the wonder and admiration of man. But if men of to-day could see that forest they would not marvel at the dark dreams of spirits and goblins, sprite and demons that haunted the primitive savage.

A lone redwood, like a picket on guard duty, loomed among the familiar deciduous trees some distance downslope. The neighboring trees made it easy to climb. For a hundred feet or more we remained on one side of the thick trunk, and then I worked around and saw the country we were entering.

Less than six miles away stretched a mighty sea. No mere inland lake lay before us, but an ocean. Far as eye could see it stretched, the horizon alone limiting it. Distant as we were, I could see the restless heaving of its surface.

The sea! We had reached the sea!

To my simple mind at that time it marked the end of the world. This was the only fact I could grasp. We had come to the end of our journey. Beyond lay nothingness.

What sea was it?

Little that question troubled me then. The human, absorbed in the ape man, and the ape man united with the human had no capacity for such cogitation. But since my return to my proper sphere, the question has persisted.

I have no doubt that the wonderful body of water which I saw is the Kansas Sea of the Tertiary, the mighty ocean that covered the whole Mississippi Valley from the Rocky Mountains to the Alleghenies. The wonderful sequoia forest is one proof of this, for it is only in the Rocky Mountain region that these trees are found. The Rockies were also the early home of the hyracotherium, ancestor of the horse. It was somewhere in Colorado or in Wyoming that I lived during those wonderful days. As I now travel about Denver, Pueblo, and neighboring towns I almost recognize some of the hill and valleys I passed through so long before civilization began.

In the days when the world's face showed none of its present lines, when it differed from this present world as much as the butterfly differs from the cocoon, the Kansas Sea separated the towering peaks of the Alleghenies from the huge mountain chains of the Pacific region, destined to become the backbone of a vast continent. Beside the lofty ridges of those days our present Rockies and Alleghenies are only foothills. Majestic Pikes Peak is only a shadow of its former self, its once inaccessible slopes now man's playground. So nature has dwarfed.

In those days Atlantis, mother of nations, occupied the bed of what is now the Atlantic, its northernmost shores west of the Bay of Biscay, and its southernmost coast line below the equator. East and west it stretched, joining the Americas and Africa. The Pillars of Hercules had not yet been placed. There were no icebound poles, for the interior heat was still sufficient to keep the earth warm when each pole's yearly long night prevailed. Everywhere was intense, brooding heat and excessive moisture, limitless production, cataclysm of storm, violence and destruction. Building up and tearing down, the process was ceaseless; all making for nature's crowning creation, man.

Of all places where life at that time abounded most, and, consequently, death; where the stress of production was heaviest and the period of life, on account of the fierce competition, shortest, was the borders of that old Kansas Sea, with its wonderfully blissful climate, its beauteous hills and plains, its tumultuous rivers, its sunlit beaches and glaring chalk cliffs, and its dark forest glens.

In such a country I lived and knew it not until I left to take my place in my own world again.

CHAPTER VII.

Had I climbed the sequoia during the first days of my life in the Tertiary, the human in me would instantly have responded to the mystery—"What sea?" and tried to discover its identity. It is the unknown that fascinates and leads men to sacrifice comfort and even life.

But now the human had quite succumbed. Mingled inextricably with the brute, it could exercise no independent thought as at first. It was only a leaven toward better impulses, and gave me a more facile mind than my fellows. Consequently the sight of those reaches of tumultuous ocean meant to me only the end of our journey. This, I am sure, was all that it meant to Baba, plus her nameless fear of all that was unknown. In all our wanderings she trembled and hung back while I adventurously led. In that day the fundamental principle of man boldly leading and woman timorously following, that some equal-rights advocates to-day assume to ignore, already existed.

We descended the tree, and returned to our canoe. A few miles, a final turn around a sullen slope, the river's last barrier to the sea, and we broke into a sandy plain that declined almost imperceptibly into the ocean. The river widened and forked. Like a tired workman almost home, its eddying currents ceased their swift flight, and sauntered lazily to meet the ocean.

Our boat began to rock. So fascinated was I by the spectacle of the huge seas beating in thunderous surf upon the beach that I had no thought of our own situation. A big wave smote us, and I tried to head for shore.

The clumsy boat was struck by a surf as it lay broadside to the sea, and we were spilled into the water. Down I went into the green depths. There was a roaring in my ears, a nauseating taste of bitter waters, a sense of suffocation, and I was above again.

I had never been in deep water before to my knowledge—not with this body. But instantly I seemed to know what to do. Baba and I struck out for shore together, nimbly and confidenly, as though we had been swimmers since babyhood.

The primitive man did not have to learn to swim. Knowledge of that art was as much his heritage as knowledge of tree life. Like other mammals he was able to take care of himself in the water. It is only since civilization reduced our lung capacity that swimming became an acquired art.

Our boat was gone, and the paddles, but by and by the waves tossed them back to us. Night was falling, so we hastened to the nearest forest.

Beautiful was that sunset, the fiery globe of the sun sinking into a haze of purple grays, leaving a trail of glorious colors that played hide and seek on the scudding clouds. Yet the beauty did not impress me. For with the coming of night those old terrors of the darkness, the terror that gripped me during my first nights in this world and after we fled from Gru, recurred. We huddled in the trees, breath hushed, muscles tense. The gnats buzzed around us and drilled fiendishly, the fog grew thicker, and the cold chilled to the marrow, but motionless we clung to a lofty branch. Every faculty was alert to perceive the hidden horror that somewhere, we felt, roamed the dark night and might stumble upon us.

In the nights just gone before we had no such fears. They were part of the forgotten days on the other side of the Great Divide. Why should they reappear?

Because this was a dead land. On all that vast shore, as far as eye could see, there was no vestige of animal life. Not the chirp of a bird, not the splash of a fish leaping at sundown from the river's mirrored surface, not the croak of a frog or the startled scurry of a

wood mouse broke the dread monotony. The ceaseless roar of the surf, pounding out its endless sermon on the wrath to come, and the whir and buzz of the insects were the only sounds on that silent shore. It was as if Death had walked through here and laid its cold hand on all that breathed.

In this darkness, before our tortured minds, there formed strange shapes, leering faces, goblins that mocked us. Hour by hour the agony increased, and we held each other with grips that dug to the bone. Still the awful silence endured, age after age, a seeming eternity.

Is it any wonder that when a pale, ghostly moon pierced the mantle of fog with feeble beams that she was to us a deliverer, a beneficent deity? Is it strange that we should silently address to her thoughts which if clothed in speech would be prayer?

At last morning came. It found us wet with the marsh damps and shivering. The sun warmed and dried us. The shapes of the night fled, and, cramped and miserable, we descended to face each day's first problem—food.

In the trees there was none. They were all low shrubs, compared to the trees of the uplands that we knew, although many of them would be thought of respectable height in these degenerate days. Some lifted branches eighty feet high.

All the trees near the river were stripped of their foliage for some thirty feet up. It was as if a terrific windstorm had shorn away the twigs and leafery of the lower branches and left them like fleshless bones.

Oddly enough, as I observed this, the terror of the night, the fear of the silence and all it might portend of some dread presence, obsessed me. The cunning of the wild creatures that was our heritage could not explain the mystery of these gaunt branches to us, but we trembled and feared.

There was no food in the scanty vegetation, so we turned to the river. I paddled out, and Baba waited ashore. For a half hour I tried every one of my favorite lures without getting a nibble. The eyes of a decaying fish Baba found on the beach supplied me with bait. I tried out the weedy patches, fished inshore and out, deep and on the surface, but not the flash of a fin could I detect, or was there the faintest suspicion of a pull on the line. It looked like a breakfastless morning.

The utter absence of fish life would ordinarily have made me foolishly, childishly angry. But this morning it frightened me. What mystery could these waters hide, that all life fled from them as it did from the shore? There was not even a bird overhead to tell us "God's in His heaven, all's right with the world." Zeal to prove the panic ridiculous urged me to the utmost skill in angling. Eyes that detected the flash of a fin long before the fish saw the bait searched the turbid waters with tragic intensity.

I was fishing near shore when suddenly I felt that somewhere, close behind me, something was watching. Perhaps it was intuition, perhaps a suspicious splash of the water that caused me to turn around swiftly.

Not two hundred feet away two enormous saucer-shaped eyes, cupped in a flat forehead that rose only a few inches above the surface, were fixed upon me. Green fires flashed in each iris. Their cold ferocity hypnotized me. Almost instantly the creature revealed itself. A long snout, armed with double rows of huge fangs, sharply serrated, shot up. Then a huge neck, thick as a horse's body, followed, rising ten feet above the water's surface, while I quaked in the boat, unable to move. As forty feet of tail in three immense undulations clove the water the creature splashed with its mighty flukes, leaping across twenty feet of space with the single drive. Screaming, I jumped

ashore. I already felt the huge maw closing on me, the crunch of teeth, and bones snapping.

The water foamed behind me. Faster than I had ever run before I bounded up the beach, but it seemed as if my legs were frozen stiff. I heard a shrill hiss of rage, and an answering hiss; a great splashing of water, weird sounds, half screams, half hisses, the thrashing of gigantic flukes; but I sped on without looking around.

Baba stopped me with a pointed finger. From the depths of the green river, where it had been silently spying me, perhaps, while I was fishing, waiting the favorable opportunity when it could spill the boat and take me, had risen a second forty-foot monster, a short-necked mosasaur. Balked of its prey, it had turned on its hereditary enemy, zeuglodon, the long-necked creature. The two kings of the Kansas Sea were at battle.

I could hardly see them. The water was upheaved as though by an eruption. Columns of spray were hurled in the air, hiding the combatants. Through the haze I saw the long, arched neck of the zeuglodon curved down, and its huge teeth in the mososaur's shoulder. I saw the mososaur's spikelike teeth gripping the zeuglodon's throat with a bulldog hold that not even death could release. The powerful flukes and tails of both the forty-foot brutes pounded the water in a thunderous diapason.

For a half hour they fought. Their fury was indescribable. The waters were stained red. Now they were under the surface, and only the wild eddying above revealed where they struggled. Again they were on top, lashing the waters to froth in leviathanic frenzy. The green of the river turned red, the minutes dragged by, but there seemed to be no diminution of the struggle. But gradually the mosasaur's teeth sank deeper, and the zeuglodon cut through its enemy's thick hide and tore away huge strips of flesh. The action of the flukes became weaker. The zeuglodon's neck lost its fine arch, sagged flabbily, and dropped. Its white belly turned upward.

The mosasaur, its teeth imbedded in its enemy's throat, floated seaward with it. A little offshore the two bodies floated together, and then I saw the leathery dun of the mosasaur's hide replaced by a dirty yellowish white as the huge carcass turned over. The sea scorned the remains, and washed them shoreward. But already the pikes, the swordfish, and the sharks of that sea had found prey. We could see the huge bulks agitated as the fish pulled at the flesh. Sick of the sea and its horrors, we fled inland.

No longer following the course of the river, we headed north, leaving our canoe. In the distance the sunlight glinted on a dazzling cliff, and primitive curiosity moved us to see what it was like. We found some turtles' eggs on the shore of a big bay jutting several miles inland. They were Archelon's undoubtedly, for that huge creature, a dozen feet long, with a head a full yard long, lived in that sea. How puny our biggest turtles of to-day would have looked beside it. By and by the sandy beach disappeared, and the country once more became rugged and barren. The rock was soft and a light gray, almost white. We had found the chalk cliffs.

We traveled inland again, for there was no food except eggs in this land. We were soon back in the forests. The slope was steadily upward, precipitous hills succeeding each other.

Baba was climbing a hill, looking for berries, when I heard her shriek. Both of us jumped for the nearest tree. The tree Baba got was a rod or two ahead of mine. At its base, clawing the bark, was a thoroughly angry bear. I opened my quiver. The first arrow brought a snarl of pain and rage. The second

brought the bear to the ground. In falling, it dropped on the shaft, which drove the flint nearly through its body before it snapped off. We descended cautiously. The bear was quite dead.

Here was meat for many a day. But Baba had news. Gesticulating, she urged me to follow her up the hillside. Snugly concealed in a bramble of bushes was a cave, warm and dry. Inside were a couple of cubs, only a few weeks old.

My first thought was to kill them. But Baba objected. When I threw them out, she brought them back. We had quite a tiff about them; I struck her on two occasions, and she bit me in the arm. The upshot was that I went away sulkily and she kept the cubs. Thus they came to live with us, and we had a family to care for.

To keep the meat away from tigers or other beasts, I hung it in a tree. It happened that we built our camp fire under the same tree. After several days I discovered a distinct flavor in the meat, quite unlike that of fresh bear steak. Baba and I both decided we liked it. The art of smoking meat was discovered.

One day I wandered toward the south again. Gradually the trees thinned. Topping a rise, I saw the sequoia forest. I presume it is the same one I saw before, for these trees were not very plentiful. In somber majesty, like a colony of austere religious devotees in the midst of a great city who keep their own little community free from the world, the tall redwoods towered heavenward. Not a sound came from their secret depths, but the gloomy avenues suggested untold mysteries.

It was a new world. With all the lure of a new and unknown domain, it challenged exploration and conquest. Something of the explorer's zeal thrilled me as I stood wonderingly before it, shivering in dread of what might be concealed there, but already decided to learn its secrets.

First I built a fire. Gathering several pitchy knots, I lit one of them, and ventured cautiously into the shade. From above came a low murmur, like the roar of the sea heard miles away. It was the wind stirring in the treetops. Save for that the sound of my footsteps was the only thing to break the silence.

A feeling of awe came over me. Dimly I felt in my savage breast something of the sensation man experiences when he enters hallowed precincts. The unexpected crackling of a twig sent shivering spasms along my spine. Teeth chattering, eyes striving vainly to pierce the blackness that inclosed me on all sides except for the few feet my feeble light illuminated, I ventured on.

Suddenly I became aware of another creature beside me in this cavernous blackness. First it was the shuffling, stealthy slide of a huge body trailing me that I heard. Then, close behind, there was a series of sharp sniffs, of an animal guided by its sense of smell toward me.

I looked for a tree to hide in, but there was none. Straight and smooth as the face of a brick wall the huge trunks reached upward, without the sign of a friendly branch. I circled about in extremity of terror, fleeing at top speed. Behind, nearer and nearer, came the persistent snuff, snuff, and the sound of a great bulk leaping after me.

And then I saw it. A huge cave bear, twelve or thirteen feet high, not a dozen feet behind, and coming straight for me. With a yell of terror I dropped my light, and leaped ahead into the blackness.

Almost instantly, it seemed, I crashed against a giant trunk and fell, half stunned. I was up again in a moment knife in hand, to chance one slash at the brute before it could strike me.

But the beast had stopped over the

light. Amazedly I watched it snuff the air over the still brightly blazing torch. Its huge arms swung vainly through the smoke, like a magician conjuring. I guessed the situation at once—the beast was blind. It was hunting the smoke, not me, for the smoke hid my smell.

One foot lumbered forward and rested on a part of the torch. The bear roared in pain, jerked its foot upward, and beat the air frantically. It ran ahead, and crashed into a tree, as I had done. Able to find its way about with ease in darkness, it was utterly helpless in the light.

Courage returned. I almost chuckled. Fitting an arrow to the bow, I let it fly. It pierced the skin, for the beast roared with pain again, and whirled its paws around. Emptying my quiver, I shot a dozen arrows at close range. The last one was carefully aimed at only a few yards' distance, and struck the bear's right eye, penetrating to the brain. It fell beside the torch, expiring with a grunt. The first cave bear probably ever killed by man had fallen a trophy to my bow.

I took along no evidence of the killing. Not knowing what other dangers lurked here, I cut away my arrows as quickly as possible. Following the track I came, I fled pell-mell, and did not breathe freely until I had crossed the borders of the sequoia forest.

CHAPTER VIII.

Twilight hovered deeply over the woods, and all the feathered folk were cheeping and twittering good night when I reached the home range. The darkness made me cautious, and I took to the trees. That is how, less than a mile from our cave, I blundered into a camp of tree folk.

I was almost in the midst of them before I discovered them. Only a thin screen of leaves separated us. They were huddled together around the main stem of a big tree. The lack of shelter and order showed they had just arrived and were camping for the night only.

One of them crowded another. A torrent of ape-man abuse followed in a harsh, dry, female voice. No need for me to peer through the leaf screen and recognize Kuku, the hag. There beside her was Ai-yai, the swift one, superbly oblivious of her angry clacking, and clinging comfortably to the desired branch he had stolen from the old ape woman. There, too, were the others of the colony: Long-nosed Mog, Kush, Gur, Go, Hiki, Roo, and Sur, and all the smaller apes, besides several additions to the colony.

Unwilling to betray myself, I hid. I heard their muttering, and gathered that they were waiting for some one, the chief of the band. In his absence they were afraid. As they whined their fears, a clammy terror began to creep upon me, too. I dreaded to learn whom they were waiting for.

Presently I heard a crashing of branches. The ape-man colony below stirred expectantly.

There came a low growl. An electric thrill of anticipation tingled my nerves. Those low gutturals, that peculiar intonation, whose were they but Gru's? His fingers on my throat, the snarl of vengeance in the night, and Klo's broken body the next morning, those nights of terror that we waited for him poured on my terrified soul, submerging every sense but that of awful fear. Numbness overpowered me, and I shrank into the branches.

Out of the murk there loomed a huge form. The bulging chin, the massive, stooping shoulders resting on a barrellike chest, proclaimed Gru. No need for a second savage growl or the others to shrink from him. I knew him from the way he buffeted an ape child that blundered in his way. The same Gru I had known, only more savage, more cruel, more bestial.

There was blood on his hands. In a flash I realized that he had come from the direction of our cave. Dazed, sick at heart, visioning a scene too dreadful for utterance, I fled toward the hidden hollow. In reckless disregard of prowling tigers I stormed through the berry patch that concealed the entrance. The cave was empty!

Every nook and corner of it I searched. I had no light, but my fingers traveled over every inch of floor and side wall. There was no one there. Yet I could detect a smell, foreign to the cave, but familiar. Gru had been there. What had become of Baba?

Outside again I stood in the bright starlight, a mark for any prowling beast, striving with crude, brutish intellect to imagine what had occurred. The fear of Gru was dead. I was a savage, robbed of his mate. I was a brute. Hate and murder lust; murder lust and hate, the two prime passions of the primitive, burned fiercely within me. Their flame consumed whatever last lingering vestige of human virtue remained. I kept reasoning power, but I lost the divine spark that knows and seeks good.

There was a cautious hiss from a near-by tree. I whirled toward the voice. The hiss was repeated. I leaped upward, and found—Baba!

In delirium of joy I pressed her toward me until she gasped. It was our first and only embrace.

The merest accident saved me, she told me. Gru's barbarous cruelty frustrated his own vengeance. He stopped to kill one of the cubs playing outside the cave. That moment, Baba, rushing out, made the trees. He tried to follow, but she dodged and circled until he lost her. When he left, and I did not return, she thought we had met and he had killed me.

As she told the story, my fury increased. Every incident of our hunted lives, the hunger, the thirst, the dangers, the sufferings we had undergone, recurred. I lived them all again; the waterless days in the desert when my swollen tongue hung raw and cooked from my mouth; the chill nights when we clung, wet and shelterless, to the branches while pitiless, ice-cold rains drenched and froze us; the hunted days and nights of agony and fear and the dreams of his cruel fingers on my throat and his fangs gleaming yellow in the mid-light. As I lived them mind and body fused under the scorching flame of a rage and ferocity so terrible that the blood charged to my head and pounded in my temples like the beating of a thousand drums.

In that rage, some slight glimmer of intelligence remained. I could purpose and reason. A resolution was formed. I must kill Gru.

I had thought of it before. Ever since I first saw him I knew the time must come when we must meet, fang to fang, his strength against my wit, and one of us remain. But then I thought only of defending myself. This was different.

I did not look upon Gru as a wild beast to be slaughtered. I did not consider him a menace to any society but my own and Baba's. But because he menaced us, I made up my mind to remove him. In this thought I considered him no different type of creature than myself. That made my purpose murder.

I planned the killing with deliberation. Baba did not object. Her first need was protection, and the means of that protection she left to me.

Gru, I guessed, would come to the cave in the morning, hoping to find us there, or near there. I would lie in ambush, concealed by the branches of a tree near the entrance. At the first favorable chance I would shoot him.

With diabolical care I cleaned my arrows and looked after the heads. I tested the bow. There was no sleep that night. Intoxicated in the anticipa-

tion of the greatest of all killings, the murder of one of my tribe, I could not sleep. The first faint glimmering of sunrise found me alert.

I had not long to wait. Hoping to surprise us in the cave, perhaps, Gru came stealthily through the forest almost before the light filtered through to the ground. He came as a gorilla, walking on the earth floor. We watched him from our ambush. I could feel the limb quiver slightly with Baba's tremblings, but my old fear of him was gone. This morning I felt master. The stern pleasure of killing a hateful thing filled me as I grimly waited.

Curious to see what he would do, I forbore to shoot when he passed within a few feet of our tree and crossed the berry patch. Then he peered inside. First to the left, then to the right, he craned his head, striving to interpret the blackness. He made a fair mark, his broad back turned toward me, but I delayed a shot.

The cave's mouth swallowed him. A minute, perhaps, though it seemed longer, and he was outside again. Shooting quick, penetrating glances, he studied each tree. Full and fair he looked at the branch that hid us. I could see his inflamed eyeballs and the wicked fires that played within, but he failed to see us.

He turned, and looked inside the cave again, as if half doubting his own search. As he leaned in, he lifted his right arm to steady himself, placing his hand against the cliff that roofed the cave. The tender skin under the armpits was revealed. I saw my chance and let drive.

The arrow went true. Three inches of the shaft was buried in his chest. He turned stupidly, not yet realizing he was struck. He tugged at the shaft and snapped it off. A second arrow struck him in the shoulder. He looked up and saw me.

With a roar of murder madness he straightened and leaped toward me. I was fitting a third arrow to my bow. The shaft flew, but he lurched, and it only scratched the side of his head.

Then he understood I could kill him before he could reach me. For a moment's space, while I loosened another arrow, he looked at me, calculating his chance to reach me before I could strike. I expected a charge, and had my arrow ready, but he turned and dove for the cave. Before I could shoot, he had disappeared. I roared a challenge at him that was half a bellow of triumph, but got no answer. Gru knew I was his master.

Oh, the keen joy of the victor! I realized it then. Spurning concealment, I jumped to the ground, roaring challenges, taunting Gru. Baba, still afraid, implored me to stay in the trees, but I knew my mastery. I did not care to try conclusions in the cave just yet, and waited, a grim besieger, knowing that thirst would drive Gru from his lair.

It was nearly noon when Gru showed himself again. The heat was intolerable. Baba and I drank from the spring near by, and gurgled tantalizingly as we drank, that Gru might hear and suffer.

I was a little distant in the wood when he appeared. He painfully tottered a few steps out of the cave. His body and limbs were crusted with blood. His form seemed shrunken, and immeasurably weakened and aged. As I ran forward, in answer to Baba's call, I instinctively felt that I loomed more powerful than he; that man to man, with fist and fang, I was his master now.

When he saw me he dropped back into the cave. His wounds and the intense heat must have created a raging thirst. Another hour, perhaps, and he came out again. This time he tried to make a feeble dash to the woods. Carefully picking my arrow, without moving a step, I shot. It caught him in the back, and he fell. I rushed forward, stringing another shaft. A glance told

me he was dead. I turned him over. The glassy eyes stared heavenward.

There lay the abysmal brute who had made existence dreadful for us. Mightier than I with nature's endowments, he was victim of the intelligence that produced civilization and made the weaker man equal to his stronger brother.

A surge of savage frenzy that obliberated every spark of the divine swept through me. The whole world was red and black, and Gru's corpse and Baba and I all that filled it. In a delirium of savage delight, screaming, leaping, tearing my hair, whirling in dizzy circles, I gloated over my victory. And Baba?

Her madness surpassed mine. In passionate abandon she tore away the corded cloth wound around her waist. Naked as she was when I first saw her, she raved about her dead mate's body.

Hand in hand we danced, whooping, beating ourselves, then apart again, tearing our hair. We kicked the corpse and spit at it. We roared vain challenges, and I pounded my bulging chest. The blood throbbed in my head. The bloodshot eyes hardly saw in the scarlet haze that inclosed us thickly. Every passion and appetite clamored for satisfaction.

Already the ants were gathering about the body. We left them to their prey, and went to our cave, reeling in exhaustion.

The darkness settled. Baba seized me, and drew me toward her. Her arms held me tight. Her voice sank to a hoarse whisper, and her breath burned my face.

A sense of horrible suffocation and overpowering nausea, and I broke from her grip. At the instant the scarlet haze was split. Understanding came back. The human and brute souls were cleaved, and the human saw the brute in all its nakedness.

Running in letters of fire through my brain was every thought and act of the afternoon. Like a drunken murderer, shocked into soberness by the still, dead body before him, I perceived what I had become.

I was a savage; worse than savage—brute.

Oh, the gathering horror, the disgust of self. Remorselessly it crept upon me, the light growing brighter every moment. I saw the gradual descent into savagery, the constant retrogression, culminating in the beast pæan.

Again Baba strained me toward her.

I burst from her twining arms and dashed into the outer air. Of what followed I have no distinct recollection.

The black of night hid everything. Dense clouds obscured the stars. In the jungle the tiger called, and the huge, carnivorous lizards, and all the fierce beasts of that era. But unhearing and unheeding, I dashed on, on—through swamp and jungle and prairie, always on foot, with burning lungs and half choked, but answering the cries of jungle and grass plains with shrieks that made them skulk and slip away with drooping tails as I dashed madly by. Stumbling, panting, raving, with limbs aching, I raced on, and purged the gross savagery from my body.

For that night I was quite mad.

CHAPTER IX.

How many hours or days I roamed the woods in this state, I do not know. One morning I awoke in a new and unknown country. I was quite rational and human again. Memory harked back after a spell to Gru's death and the night in the cave, but I quickly found new subject for thought.

I was thin, almost emaciated. My bones showed gauntly everywhere, and I was terribly weak. I could guess at some terrific strain upon this body, and possibly sickness, but I had no recollection of it.

I was a stranger in a strange land. It was again as that first morning of my awakening in this world, but now I had knowledge. The ape-man habits and instincts persisted and kept me safe, but I slept on the ground and lived as nearly like a human as I could in that wilderness. My body was all that was ape-man of me, the ape-man soul was now as submerged as the human had been.

For a month I lived that way. During that time I learned to reflect and even philosophize on my experiences. I saw that they, though unique, were remarkably similar to those of every man who faces life in the raw. Every man who yields to passion or indulges himself sinks that much into the brute. Repetition of the offense confirms it into a habit. So a chain of circumstances may eventually make a murderer. All men have their weaknesses, and centuries of civilization have not elevated us, emotionally, much above the ape-man.

One day I saw a strange sight. I was resting in the shelter of a grove of Lonchopteris, a giant fern, whose huge fronds effectually concealed me, when I saw two ape people swing through near-by trees. The first was Baba. The second was Ai-yai.

I could hardly believe. But they were near enough to make recognition certain. Baba had returned to her tribe and mated with Ai-yai.

Two days later, when I awoke in the morning, it was to find myself under a roof. Williams sat beside me, and the others were cooking breakfast outside. I tried to rise, but he pushed me back.

"You've been sick a long time," he explained, when I questioned him. "Smallpox. Strangest case I ever heard of."

"But Professor Scott?" I asked. "What became of him?"

"He caught it, too, and died a few hours ago."

Had his disappearance anything to do with my return, I wondered.

"Did he say anything before he died about my case?"

"That's funny, too, your asking that question. He was a lot worse than you were, but he fought against dying to give you time, he said. I couldn't make out what he meant, and we thought he was crazy. This morning, when he felt the end coming, he wrote a message for you, and just got through some hypnotism business when he fell back, dead."

He gave me the message. It read:

Smallpox got me and I am dying. I am calling you back so you can tell your story to the world. I gave you all the time I could. A Moses on Nebo, I cannot reach the promised land, but do not forget Eugene Scott when you tell your story. It was for the good of science.

He wronged me, but I accept his plea of extenuation—"for the good of science."

Whether Scott actually accomplished what he claimed, degraded me to some remote ancestor, and endowed me with that ancestor's body and brains, or whether my life in that other world merely reflected Scott's crazed mind while I lay in a fever under his hypnotic influence, I do not know.

Williams and the others found me the second day after I left the camp. They say I was sick nearly two months. Certain it is that those sixty days have made me a creature of moods, estranged from my fellow beings. My constant fear is that some trace of the ape-man soul still persists, and may some time make its appearance. Then the world will say: "Poor fellow. Gone mad on too much learning."

Little it will guess Gru's body on the hillside and the ape-man revel over it.

THE END.

The House that Disappeared

By William Hamilton Osborne

Author of "Caught," "Moonshine," Etc.

Putting one over on the real-estate sharp whose plan to enrich himself through the strange disappearance of a house which he had mortgaged for $7,000 was a wonderful success—but there was an aftermath which he did not relish, though you will

MISS MARCELLA WITHERSPOON regarded her visitor with more or less distrust. There was good reason for it. He was a man.

"My name, ma'am," said her visitor, "is Tunnicliffe."

"Take this chair, Mr. Tunnicliffe," said Miss Witherspoon politely.

Miss Witherspoon herself was seated at her little, old-fashioned mahogany desk in her library, with her back to the light. Behind her was a window. The chair which Mr. Tunnicliffe took faced the light. The light brought out effectively all his attractive qualities, particularly the deep lines in his face and the remarkable cast in his left eye.

"I heard, ma'am," went on Mr. Tunnicliffe, "that you had money to loan."

"I have," said Miss Witherspoon sharply, puzzled to know out of which eye he was regarding her. "What about it, Mr. Tunnicliffe?"

Mr. Tunnicliffe rubbed his lean chin with his hand. "I want seven thousand dollars," he remarked, "on my place on Cypress Avenue."

"What kind of a place is it?" she demanded.

"Seventy-five feet of ground," said Mr. Tunnicliffe, "two story and a half, fourteen-room house with all improvements."

Miss Witherspoon nodded wearily, but positively, at the same time.

"In the first place," she said, "I won't loan more than fifty per cent on a fair valuation."

"The place is worth seventeen thousand, if it's worth a cent," said Mr. Tunnicliffe.

"Why don't you go to a savings bank?" asked Miss Witherspoon. "If that's true you can get the money."

Mr. Tunnicliffe opined that he was afraid of corporations; he didn't like banks, and all such; they didn't have no souls.

"In the second place," went on Miss Witherspoon, "I won't loan any money on a place that I wouldn't buy."

"This would be a bargain at foreclosure sale," vouchsafed Mr. Tunnicliffe.

"In the third place," proceeded the lady, "I won't loan any money on any house that is not good enough for me to live in."

"This here is a grand house," returned Mr. Tunnicliffe. "It's a house fit for a queen."

"I won't loan on a grand house," retorted Miss Witherspoon. "I won't loan on any house that's too good for me to live in. It's got to be just right."

"This here house," said Mr. Tunnicliffe, "is just right, ma'am, I assure you."

"Is it a family homestead?" asked Miss Witherspoon. "If it is I won't touch it. I don't foreclose mortgages over the heads of widows and orphans."

Mr. Tunnicliffe assured her that it was not a family homestead; that he owned it himself, and he had no family except himself. Not but what, he opined, fixing Miss Witherspoon with his right eye—or was it his left?—that if some time or other he found a good-hearted woman with money, nobody could tell but he might have a family some day. But he hadn't any now, more was the pity.

"And," added Miss Witherspoon, "I want a title policy."

"A title policy you shall have, ma'am," said Mr. Tunnicliffe. "I want to do everything that is right. Only, ma'am," he added, "can you come and look at this here property of mine?"

Miss Witherspoon sighed wearily. "Don't know that I'll look at it at all," she said. "There's only about one application in five hundred that's worth looking at."

"This is the five hundredth one, ma'am," said Mr. Tunnicliffe.

"Cypress Avenue sounds all right," conceded Miss Witherspoon. "Dear me! Yes. I suppose I'll have to go and look at it."

She went and looked. She found Mr. Tunnicliffe on the premises. She was agreeably surprised to note that everything was as he had represented it. Miss Witherspoon knew value when she saw it, and the value was there. She acted as her own appraiser. She went through the house from attic to cellar. She was satisfied.

"I tell you," said Mr. Tunnicliffe proudly, "there ain't a firmer built house in the United States. There ain't a board that creaks or a timber that gives. It's as solid as they make 'em."

"I will loan you seven thousand on it," said Miss Witherspoon. "Three years at five per cent. You go to the title company and tell them to get busy. You can have the money in two weeks."

Mr. Tunnicliffe got his money in two weeks.

"Now, ma'am," he said, when the transaction was completely closed, "every six months you'll get your interest like clockwork. You needn't bother calling for it. I'll send a check to your address."

"You'd better," said Miss Witherspoon. "If you don't, why, I'll foreclose."

At the end of six months it occurred to Miss Witherspoon that Mr. Tunnicliffe's interest was due. But there was no check from Mr. Tunnicliffe. This did not worry Miss Witherspoon—it merely annoyed her—for he had, under his mortgage, still thirty days of grace.

The thirty days went by, and still no check. Miss Witherspoon dropped him a note demanding instant payment. There was no reply. She dropped him another note, threatening instant foreclosure. Still there was no reply. There was nothing left to do but to foreclose.

"Dear me!" said Miss Witherspoon to herself. "I suppose I'll have to go to Cypress Avenue and see him. I do hate to sell the poor man out."

She went to Cypress Avenue forthwith. When she got there she did not see Mr. Tunnicliffe.

What was more, she did not see the house. What had been a house before was nothing but a vacant lot. *The house had disappeared.* Miss Witherspoon changed her spectacles. She looked back in the direction from whence she had come.

"This is the spot," she said to herself, "two and a half blocks from the trolley car, and it was next door to that house with the yellow paint. The house must be here."

Miss Witherspoon pinched herself, to make sure that she was awake. She found that she was very much awake—more so than usual. Still no house loomed up before her. She tripped up the graveled walk as one who would enter a house. She thought, perhaps, that when she reached the place where the steps should be the steps actually would reappear.

But there were no steps. Save for the graveled walk, with its box hedge, the lot was a green sward. Unkempt and patchy, it is true, but still a vacant lot. Miss Witherspoon looked at the house next door, the house of yellow paint. That, thank goodness, was still there. She ascended its porch and rang the doorbell

"I should like to see the lady of the house," she said.

"Sorry," said the lady of the house, "but I'm not buying anything to-day."

"Thanks for the insinuation," commented Miss Witherspoon. "I am inquiring about the house next door."

"There's no house next door," said the lady of the house.

"There was," remarked Miss Witherspoon.

"Dear me, yes," replied the lady, "there was a house, but it was moved away."

"How long ago?" queried Miss Witherspoon.

"I remember perfectly," said the lady of the house. "It was the day our kitchen boiler burst."

Miss Witherspoon inquired as to the exact chronology of this explosive tragedy.

"Let me see," said the lady reflectively, "the kitchen boiler burst the day after the last of my three teas."

Miss Witherspoon inquired as to the date of that enjoyable affair. By careful calculation she reached the first of the three teas, and the lady produced an engraved invitation. By putting two and two together, and dividing it by six, and performing other mathematical gymnastics, Miss Witherspoon concluded that the house had disappeared some five months and a half before.

"How did it disappear?" she demanded.

"The old man that lived there moved it," said the lady.

"His name is Tunnicliffe," remarked Miss Witherspoon.

"He got some one to move it," returned the other woman.

"Five months and a half ago," mused Miss Witherspoon.

She had loaned Mr. Tunnicliffe seven thousand dollars just seven months ago.

"You're not Mr. Tunicliffe's wife?" queried the lady of the house pleasantly.

"I am not anybody's wife," returned Miss Witherspoon.

"May I inquire," said the lady interestedly, "what interest you may have in the matter?"

"I am merely interested," said Miss Witherspoon, "in rapid-growing grass seeds. I wondered what kind he had sprinkled on his lot."

As the lady did not know, Miss Witherspoon followed the example of the house—she, too, disappeared. But not until she had made inquiry in the neighborhood as to the present whereabouts of Mr. Tunnicliffe's house. There was plenty of evidence to establish the fact that the house had gone, but whither it had gone deponents said not. They did not know.

At the end of three days Miss Witherspoon found herself in an attractive dwelling neighborhood, some three-quarters of a mile away. Again she pinched herself; again she found herself awake. In front of her, in all its pleasing coziness, stood the house that disappeared. It was changed, somehow, too. There was an air of life about it that it had lacked before. Dainty net curtains bedecked the win-

dows; a servant bustled about in the rear; children were playing on the side lawn.

Miss Witherspoon ascended the porch steps. She pressed the button. The door was opened by a menial.

"Is Mr. Tunnicliffe at home?" queried Miss Witherspoon.

"There ain't no Mr. Tunnicliffe here," vouchsafed the servant.

"Is your mistress in?" queried Miss Witherspoon.

Her mistress was. Her mistress entered the arena of events.

"I am looking," said Miss Witherspoon, "for a gentleman of the name of Tunnicliffe."

"Oh!" exclaimed the mistress of the house. "He is no longer here. He used to be, but that was weeks and months ago. We—my husband bought the house from Mr. Tunnicliffe."

"I am not only interested in finding Mr. Tunnicliffe," said Miss Witherspoon, assuming businesslike tones, "but I am also interested in this house."

"It is a pretty house, isn't it?" said the other woman. "We wouldn't think of selling. We bought it for a home."

"Ahem!" went on Miss Witherspoon. "And is it free and clear?"

"Oh, yes," responded the lady. "My husband pays outright for everything he buys."

"Ahem!" proceeded Miss Witherspoon. "You are very much mistaken, madam. This house is not free and clear. I hold a seven-thousand-dollar mortgage on this house."

The lady opened wide her eyes. "Why—it can't be possible!" she exclaimed. "We procured a title policy, and I'm sure it's free and clear."

"You will find yourself very much mistaken," said Miss Witherspoon. "I hold a seven-thousand-dollar mortgage on this house."

She found, however, that it was she who was mistaken. That very afternoon she sought Major Vermilye. Major Vermilye was her counsel. He occupied old-fashioned offices in the Vermilye Building.

"I loaned seven thousand dollars on a house and lot," she told him, "and the house has disappeared."

"Destroyed by fire?" said the major blandly. "Did you get your insurance money on it?"

"It was not destroyed by fire," said Miss Witherspoon. "It disappeared—only to reappear in another part of town."

Major Vermilye sat up and began to take notice. "Disappeared—and reappeared," he echoed.

"It was moved," she added, "by the mortgagor, a man named Tunnicliffe."

"Tunnicliffe," mused the major. "I've heard of him. He's a real-estate sharper here in town. Occasionally crawls through holes too small for him—but he crawls through just the same."

"He borrowed seven thousand dollars of my money on this house," went on Miss Witherspoon. "The interest is overdue, and I desire to place the mortgage in your hands so that it may be foreclosed."

"Where is the house?" demanded the major.

Miss Witherspoon told him.

"And Tunnicliffe is there?" he queried.

Tunnicliffe was not there, she informed him, and, what was more, Tunnicliffe had sold the house upon the lot it occupied at present.

"Humph!" said the major grimly. "Pretty small hole, but it looks to me as though Tunnicliffe had crawled out the other end."

"I suppose," said Miss Witherspoon, "that he has run away."

"No," said the major, "he hasn't run away. I saw him yesterday. He's around town still. He gets his mail, I guess."

"I can foreclose?" said Miss Witherspoon.

"You can foreclose on the vacant lot," answered the major.

"Why not on the house?"

"My dear madam," explained the major, "you took a mortgage on premises on Cypress Avenue. This house is on Llewellyn Place, almost a mile away. Besides, if what you say is true, it has been bought by an innocent third party, who had no notice of your rights. When he searched his title he searched against property on Llewellyn Place. If he bought it free and clear, he gets it free and clear, that's all."

"The vacant lot on Cypress Avenue is worth two thousand dollars. I loaned seven thousand."

"You're out five," added the major, performing the mathematical operation with calmness.

Miss Witherspoon was not through. "The title company guaranteed my title. I can collect from them."

The major shook his head. "The title was O. K. when they handed you their policy. They said the title to the Cypress Avenue premises was O. K. There is nothing the matter with the title; the record is all right, only the house has disappeared. There is no thoroughfare with the title company, Miss Witherspoon."

"I can sue Tunnicliffe for the deficiency on the bond," went on Miss Witherspoon.

"Don't you imagine," returned the major, "that a man who can crawl through a hole like this one is apt to be execution proof? You can't get blood out of a turnip."

"He sold the house for cash," she said.

"Yes," said the major, "and he's got the cash up his sleeve, but you'll never get up his sleeve to look for it; see if you do."

"Well, then," proceeded the now thoroughly indignant mortgagee, "I can put Tunnicliffe in jail."

"Ha!" said the major, "that's what I've been thinking of since the very start." He swung about in his revolving chair, and looked out of the window. He was silent for a moment. Then he swung back again. "I've been thinking about that all along," he added, "about putting Tunnicliffe in jail. My view is—you can't."

Miss Witherspoon actually spluttered. "He's a criminal!" she cried.

"Not if he hasn't committed any crime," said the major.

"But he has committed a crime. He got my seven thousand dollars under false pretenses."

"Not at all," said the major. "He gave you absolutely good security, and his title was all right."

"He's guilty of grand larceny," she said. "He moved my house.'

"No he didn't," said the major. "It was his own house, with your mortgage on it. It must have been a well-built house," he added, with a smile, "to travel three-quarters of a mile or so."

Miss Witherspoon gnashed her teeth. "He told me it was a well-built house," she exclaimed.

"I suppose," went on the major, "that that is why he bought it. Now," he went on, "in the first place, when he moved this house off his lot he was moving real estate, and you can't steal real estate. In the second place, whether it was real estate or not, it was his own property, and it's no crime to move your own."

"He depleted my security!" screamed Miss Witherspoon. "He destroyed my property rights."

"Ah!" returned the major, "then if we had known that, if we had been there when he did it, we could have gone into a court of chancery and got an injunction. We could have tied him

up. We could have prevented something that we cannot cure."

"I must have some remedy," said Miss Witherspoon.

"You have," said the major, "and you have outlined it. You can foreclose your mortgage on the lot; you can get a deficiency judgment against him, and you can try to collect it, but you can't hold him for a crime. To make sure of it, I'll look it up and see."

The major made sure of it. So did Miss Witherspoon.

"And to think," she exclaimed sadly, "that he has swindled me out of five thousand dollars! Why, I put Lomax in prison for swindling me out of less!"

The major nodded. "Lomax," he said, "was guilty of a crime. Lomax sold one piece of property to three different people at the same time. That is fraud. But Tunnicliffe is not guilty of any fraud; he is not guilty of the commission of a crime. By the way," he added, "I met Lomax in New York the other day. He says he's trying to earn an honest living. He says he's trying to pay you back for the five hundred he did you out of. He's looking pretty seedy. He'll never pay you back."

Miss Witherspoon foreclosed her mortgage. Tunnicliffe only smiled. She sued him on the bond, and obtained a deficiency judgment against him for five thousand dollars. Tunnicliffe laughed. He went into bankruptcy, and Major Vermilye examined him to determine the disposition of his assets.

Tunnicliffe, with many thousands of dollars up his sleeve, submitted to examination with tears in his eyes. He had gone down to Wall Street after wool. He had come back shorn. He produced a bushel of wildcat stocks—and when the major saw them he knew that Tunnicliffe had bought them by the bushel—and explained in choking voice how his money had all gone. He was discharged in bankruptcy, still with his thousands up his sleeve.

One day Miss Witherspoon met him on the street, gripped him by the collar, and energetically shook him. Tunnicliffe howled in pure joy.

"The timbers in that there house ain't give a quarter of an inch," he informed her as he made his escape.

Miss Witherspoon went back home and thought. She thought hard. There must be some way to get back at Tunnicliffe. Suddenly she thought of Lomax. She ascertained the whereabouts of Lomax in New York from the major, and sought Lomax out.

Lomax was an attractive little man, very frank and open-faced, but very, very shabby. Miss Witherspoon felt sorry that she had ever sent him to State's prison.

"There are only two things in the world that I want to do," said Lomax contritely to her. "One of them is to pay you back, Miss Witherspoon."

"And what is the other?" queried Miss Witherspoon.

"To go back to Australia—to my home."

"Ahem!" said Miss Witherspoon. "Lomax, you can pay me back."

"How?" demanded Lomax.

"Did you ever hear," said Miss Witherspoon, "that old adage, 'set a thief to catch a thief'?"

Lomax sniffed the air and smiled. It was almost good to see him smile.

"What can I do for you, Miss Witherspoon?" he said. "No trouble to show goods, you know. You can have anything I've got."

A few days later a very prosperous real-estate man of the name of Fairfax called on Tunnicliffe. Tunnicliffe had a disreputable desk room in a dingy office building. Mr. Fairfax was a dealer in real estate, lately come from Providence, so it seemed. He had established himself in somewhat spacious offices in the center of the town. He

bore with him a clipping from a newspaper.

"I think, sir," he said to Tunnicliffe, "that this is your advertisement."

Tunnicliffe examined it, and nodded. "It is," he admitted, "but I'm not operating on my own account. I've just been discharged in bankruptcy, and I'm trying to start over in a little real-estate business. I've got a few friends left—friends that trust me still. But," he added, "there's no use of my dealing with any other real-estate men. I'm only out for bargains—nothing but."

"That's what your advertisement says," said Mr. Fairfax, "and I wouldn't have come to you if I didn't have a bargain. I've got a woman who's going to leave town for good—in fact, she's left already. She's disgusted with the place; she's been stung a good many times. She wants to sell her house."

"Where is the house, and who is the woman?" queried Tunnicliffe.

"I have no objection," said Fairfax, "to giving you her name." He drew forth a paper. "I have the sole, exclusive right to offer this property for sale, and my commission is bound to be safe. The house is a dwelling house in one of the most fashionable parts of town, and the woman is a woman of the name of Witherspoon."

He laid down a typewritten authority, at the bottom of which was affixed a scrawling signature, "Marcella Witherspoon."

"Don't think much of the property," said Tunnicliffe. "Old-fashioned house."

"Finest neighborhood in the town," said Fairfax.

"I know this Witherspoon party," said Tunnicliffe. "I've had some dealigs with her. I don't wonder she wants to leave this town. So she's gone already, has she? What does she want for her shack?"

Fairfax told him. "She'll take a mortgage back," he added, "but she wants the bulk in cash."

Tunnicliffe grinned again. "She won't take *my* mortgage," he said. "She took one once, and she don't want any more."

"Oh," said Fairfax, "*you* have no money, anyway."

"That's so," said Tunnicliffe. "Still, the friend I'm dealing for may not want to appear in the transaction. He may want me to take it in my name. You know how folks feel about those things. He can trust me, and I can trust myself. However, I wouldn't touch that shack of hers unless she knocks a couple of thousand off the price."

"Suppose," suggested Mr. Fairfax, "you come and look it over. She's out of town, and she'll never know the difference. I'll meet you at her house this time to-morrow. What do you say?"

At that time to-morrow Mr. Tunnicliffe lifted the brass knocker at Miss Witherspoon's. The door was immediately opened by Mr. Fairfax. Mr. Tunnicliffe's inspection of the premises took three whole hours. At the end of that period of time he sat down in Miss Witherspoon's library, in her chair.

Mr. Fairfax sat facing the light, which brought out all the character in his fine, frank, open face.

"Closed house is awful stuffy," said Mr. Tunnicliffe. "How long has she been gone?"

"Just a week," said Mr. Fairfax. "Her furniture goes out next month. What do you think of my proposition, Mr. Tunnicliffe?" he added.

"Knock off two thousand, and I'll take it," said Tunnicliffe.

"What do you say," said Fairfax, "to seven thousand cash and five thousand on purchase-money mortgage. How about it, eh?"

Tunnicliffe brought his hand down

upon Miss Witherspoon's little mahogany desk.

"Done!" cried Tunnicliffe.

When he reached his shabby little office it was dusk. He sat down at his shabby desk and literally hugged himself. He was about to acquire an eighteen-thousand-dollar piece of property for twelve thousand dollars. He immediately drew up a contract, mailed it to Fairfax, and Fairfax had it signed. It was arranged that the title was to close inside of ten days.

"Though look here," stipulated Fairfax, "she's got to have a month to get her traps out. You'll agree to that?"

"I'll agree to it," said Tunnicliffe, "but by rights she ought to pay me rent."

"Rent," returned Mr. Fairfax, somewhat contemptuously. "Man, if *I* had had the ready cash, do you think this place would ever have gone to *you?* It's worth twenty thousand dollars, if it's worth a cent. You're getting it for twelve. Eight thousand ought to be enough to pay you rent for a month or so."

"Well, let it go," said Tunnicliffe. "She can keep her things there for six weeks for all I care."

In the meantime he had the title searched. The title was all right.

"Miss Witherspoon is in Maine," explained Fairfax. "She'll have to sign the deed up there. I don't see any other way—and I'll have to get a power of attorney from her to take the cash and put the whole thing through."

"Be sure," said Tunnicliffe, "that you get your deed and power properly executed before the proper officer in Maine and that you get proper county clerk's certificates attached. My lawyer has got to pass on everything, you know."

"All right," said Fairfax. "I think I'll go to Maine myself, and have her sign the papers, and close it at my office on Friday of this week, at noon. What do you say to that?"

That evening Mr. Fairfax, with a huge grip, went to New York. He did not go to Maine. He went to an obscure hotel on the East Side of town and took a room; then he locked the door and unpacked his grip.

He laid upon the table a blank form of deed, a blank form of power of attorney, a number of certificates which he had had carefully and properly printed for his private use, a few old title deeds that had been steeped in coffee to improve their complexion, a set of rubber stamps, a typewriter, a few bottles of ink, and a multitude of pens. Then he set to work.

On Friday, in his spacious offices in Tunnicliffe's town, he met Tunnicliffe and his lawyer, selected various instruments out of his grip, tossed them carelessly across the table for inspection, waited anxiously while they were inspected, and then closed the deal.

"Sorry," he said, as he pocketed the seven thousand dollars and the purchase-money mortgage, "that I had to trouble you to get this in cash, but she is a woman, and she is Miss Witherspoon." He held out his hand. "Gentlemen," he said, "you've got a bargain. Make lots of money now. Good day."

Tunnicliffe and his lawyer went to the courthouse and recorded the deed. Tunnicliffe stowed away the old title deeds in his safe and then took his lawyer down to look at the property.

"By jinks!" he said, when he got there, "we forgot to ask for the keys. I'll go back and get them if you'll wait."

The lawyer declined to wait. "I can see the inside of this house at my leisure," he said to Tunnicliffe. "Let us look at the outside. I can judge by that."

He was a good judge of valuations, was the lawyer, and he raked the Witherspoon homestead fore and aft, with a speculative eye.

"Sound as a dollar," commented he.

"Tunnicliffe, you've got a bargain. She's worth nineteen thousand dollars if she's worth a cent."

"Hey!" exclaimed Tunnicliffe. "What's this here?"

He was examining a window sill at the rear of the house. The sill and the window frame above it had received usage that was rough.

"Hey!" exclaimed Tunnicliffe, "There's been burglars around this house!"

His counsel inspected the window. "Signs of a jimmy," he said, "as sure as you're born."

They pressed up upon the window, but it failed to open.

"Locked it after he got in," said Tunnicliffe. "Maybe he's in there now, having a laugh on us."

"Don't make any difference," said the lawyer. "He can't steal your house."

Tunnicliffe howled. "There's only one man in town that knows how to steal a house," he said. He shook with silent laughter. "Five and eight is thirteen thousand dollars—fourteen thousand—out o' two deals—I'm making out of this old maid. Good enough, I say!"

"Too good!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Let us go on."

The lawyer went back to his office, and Tunnicliffe went back to Fairfax. Fairfax was not there, and there was a sign upon the door that he had gone to Maine, and would be back next week.

"Oh, well, what's the odds?" said Tunnicliffe to himself. "Under my agreement I've got no right in there until she gets her goods out. I've got lots of time to get the keys."

Nevertheless, he watched his bargain as a cat watches a mouse. In due course of time Miss Witherspoon came back. She had no sooner settled herself than Mr. Tunnicliffe made his appearance. He brought his lawyer along.

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Tunnicliffe, as he sat once more facing the light in her old-fashioned library, "but Mr. Fairfax didn't give me the keys. I thought I'd come for them myself."

Miss Witherspoon stared at him. "Mr. Fairfax?" she exclaimed. "The keys? What Mr. Fairfax? What keys?"

It was Tunnicliffe's turn to stare. "Maybe," he said, "you don't remember his name. Maybe it's new to you. He's the agent that transacted the business; the agent that I bought the house from."

"What house?" demanded Miss Witherspoon.

"This here house," said Tunnicliffe.

Miss Witherspoon sat up very straight. Her face was in the shadow. Mr. Tunnicliffe's expression was bathed in light. She scrutinized his countenance quite closely. She had the air of a person who did not want to miss anything that was going on among those wrinkles and in those eyes.

"This house?" she returned. "What about this house?"

"Nothing about this house," said Tunnicliffe, "except, of course, you have the right to stay in it until you move your things, and then I get possession, only I should like to get the keys. If you haven't but the one set, let me have them, and I'll get duplicates."

"I have the right to stay in this house?" echoed Miss Witherspoon. "I should think I had—since I am the owner. Are you crazy, Mr. Tunnicliffe?"

"Only for the present, I give you the right in the agreement to stay here until you move your things——"

"But I'm not going to move my things," she said, "and I am the owner." She turned to Tunnicliffe's lawyer. "Perhaps your client had better be examined as to sanity," she ventured. "He's *done* queer things before. He's *saying* queer things now."

"It's you who are saying queer things," returned the lawyer. He produced some documents from his pocket. "Here is the provision, Miss Witherspoon, and the contract about your staying here rent free for a month after Mr. Tunnicliffe took title. And here is your deed to him."

"Contract?" repeated Miss Witherspoon. "I—to him—my deed?" She held out her hand. "Let me see the deed," she said.

"There it is," said the lawyer, passing it over. "You signed it before an officer up in Maine. You recall Mr. Fairfax fetching it to you, don't you?"

Miss Witherspoon took the deed. She scrutinized it carefully. Then she pointed to the signature.

"The *name* there," she said, "is Marcella Witherspoon. I don't know whose *signature* it is." She wrote hers upon a piece of paper. "This is *my* signature," she added.

The lawyer compared the two. There was not a particle of similarity between them. One was a scrawl and the other was a bold, large signature.

"But," spluttered Tunnicliffe, "you acknowledged yours before a notary in Maine."

"And," added the lawyer, "the county clerk certifies to his signature."

Miss Witherspoon leaned back weakly in her chair.

"Have you any more documents with signatures of mine upon them?" she said. "What have you there?"

Tunnicliffe handed over some coffee-colored instruments. The impress of the ages were upon them.

"Only your title deeds," he said.

"My title deeds!" exclaimed Miss Witherspoon. She stepped to her safe and unlocked an inner drawer. She drew forth half a dozen documents.

"Here are my title deeds," she said. "Those you have are forgeries. Everything you have is forged."

"But the county clerk's certificate!" protested the lawyer.

"Probably also forged," said Miss Witherspoon.

"But Fairfax!" exclaimed Tunnicliffe. "You saw him up in Maine!"

"I saw nobody in Maine," returned Miss Witherspoon, "except aborigines—the natives. I don't know any Fairfax. I never heard the name of Fairfax." Which was true.

Tunnicliffe rose in his amazement. He searched his memory.

"But," he exclaimed, "Fairfax has your keys. You must have trusted him."

"Fairfax has my keys?" she returned. "I know no Fairfax."

"Why, Miss Witherspoon," said Tunncliffe, "Fairfax met me in this house. How did he come in if he didn't have keys?"

It was Miss Witherspoon's turn to spring to her feet. "A man was in this house!" she exclaimed. "Perhaps I am robbed. Come, I beg of you, come with me. I'm glad you are here. Perhaps he's hiding now."

In a dazed condition Tunnicliffe and his lawyer followed her. She went from room to room; from window to window. Everything was sound and tight. She began at the top of the house and ended at the bottom. Finally she threw up a window on the ground floor in the rear. She fell back against the wall.

"A burglar has been here," she gasped. "Look, he has used a jimmy. He broke the catch. I've been robbed."

But she had not been robbed. Nothing was missing. Everything was in the order she had left it. They went back to the library.

"When do you leave town?" said Tunnicliffe, in desperation.

"I'm not leaving town," cried Miss Witherspoon. "I will never leave this town. This is my home town; I love it."

"But Fairfax said——" protested Tunnicliffe.

Miss Witherspoon put her hands to her ears. "I don't understand you when you talk of Fairfax," she exclaimed. "I don't understand anything you have said. Go to Major Vermilye. He is my lawyer. Tell everything to him."

They went to Major Vermilye and told their story. Major Vermilye only smiled.

"Why, Tunnicliffe," he said, "that trick has been played a dozen times. You're caught, that's all. It has cost you seven thousand dollars. Miss Witherspoon goes off to the woods and closes up her house. This chap reads it in the social columns of the newspaper. He breaks into her house and meets you; he offers to sell it; gives a good reason why she wants to sell it; shuts himself up in his office with a lot of seals and red tape and does the trick."

"He got seven thousand of my money, the infernal scoundrel," said Tunnicliffe.

"Oh," exclaimed Major Vermilye, "it was *your* money, was it? You'd have done better to have paid it back to Miss Witherspoon—the money that you owed her."

"You go to thunder!" returned Tunnicliffe.

Whether Major Vermilye went to thunder does not much matter here—but over in New York a frank, open-faced individual named Lomax packed up his belongings and went to Australia. He probably is in Australia yet. Tunnicliffe sought for him, but never found him. Before he went, however, Lomax inclosed in an envelope a slip of paper and a letter. The slip of paper was quite genuine. The letter read as follows:

Here is a certified check for five thousand dollars that is good. I got more than that, but I kept the balance to square my conscience. Beside, it paid for some offices I rented and is paying for my trip out home. You may be glad to know that this is the last queer job I will ever do, but there is nobody I would rather have done it for than you. I hope you will call it square. Sincerely.

LOMAX.

Miss Witherspoon burned the letter and deposited the check.

"Lomax," she said, as she contemplated her own comfortable surroundings, "I don't blame you for going to Australia. There's no place like home. Lomax, we shall call it square."

TIPPING OFF THE READERS

SOL HATHAWAY was a stirring and fiery writer who got out a weekly paper in Indianapolis. Every seven days he wrapped the Star-spangled Banner about himself, climbed up on a mental stick, set a figurative match to himself, and blew up in a storm of patriotic pyrotechnics. When it came to yelling about human rights and bawling out existing authorities, Sol was the big and effective megaphone.

He had the habit, however, of going around among his friends and acquaintances and telling them at great length what he would say in his editorials in his next issue. Some of the victims of these predictions objected.

"Oh, it's all right," a more kindly sufferer suggested. "You know, Sol has to spread these ideas around, and he's got a bigger circulation than his paper has."

Man

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "Mr. Hendelworth & Co.," "The Man Who Didn't Care," Etc.

The spirit of the poet breathes in this story of an old-timer of the desert who was a greater hero at the end of his life than he had ever been in the gay days when he followed the flag, "the crackin'est young wildcat in the whole brigade." It is one of those startling snapshots of real life that you don't forget for a long time.

OVER tiny twin fires, nursed with greasewood twigs, Pap Miller, desert rat, aged eighty-four, was preparing his supper of warmed-over beans and bitter, black coffee.

The beans warmed to his satisfaction and the coffee boiled to suit, Pap fell to eating. He made no pretense of daintiness, conveying the beans directly from the battered frying pan to his mouth with a broad-bladed knife. The scalding coffee he poured into a tomato can to cool, and, after a period of profound meditation, drank the bitter mess with gusty sighs of satisfaction.

Then from a pocket in his greasy vest he drew forth a small plug of chewing tobacco, and with great care whittled off a corner. He placed the dry chips of tobacco in his toothless mouth, and for a time his beard wagged rapidly. The quid settled, the beard wagging ceased, and over his seamed and wrinkled face crept an expression of perfect content.

It was a gray, moonless night. The desert was gray and the sky was gray. Pap was gray, except where the firelight gleamed upon his ancient vest, slick with grease and grime. Back in the gray gloom, beyond the touch of the caressing fingers of firelight, stood a gray burro, his great homely head drooping disconsolately. The silence was absolute; no cheery cricket's chirrup, no buzz of restless insect, no call of night bird—just a vast, brooding silence.

Alienists aver that the man who talks to himself is on the road to the madhouse. Yet alienists are merely human, and may be insane themselves even as they voice their long Latin words and look particularly wise and solemn.

No doubt an insanity expert would take one cursory glance at Pap Miller and pronounce the little, withered ancient insane. Pap talked to himself, or rather to his youth. When he was not talking to his youth he talked to his God.

Just now he was talking to his youth.

"Young scamp, you know you stole them chickens Cap Brimmer had back of his tent. Cap was killed at Shiloh, or he'd 'a' found you out—you young pelican, you—and give you what's what. You seen your sinful ways, though. Grace come to you in the fall of sixty-five."

Silence. Then the burro, as if in

rebellion against the all-encompassing stillness, lifted his head and brayed. His vast, lugubrious voice held a note of grating sorrow.

Pap arose slowly, poured out a little water in the frying pan, and permitted the burro to wet his eager lips. Then the desert rat returned to the fire, squatted down, Indian fashion, and resumed his talk with his youth.

"You always wondered why Mary didn't write. Said she loved you, but something went wrong. Weren't her fault—Mary was a good girl. Guess she kind o' liked the leftenant, too—Leftenant Hawkins. Him and you never got along. One way and 'nother he dogged you; you jes' naturally had to hit him. Hadn't been for Cap Brimmer, you'd got what's what fer strikin' your s'perior off'cer. Had to take the chevrons off you—made you a private. Guess Mary heard 'bout it from Hawkins when he went home on furlough. Mary married the leftenant—you went West. In the fall of sixty-five grace come to you—in the fall of sixty-five."

He lifted his face to the dim stars, and launched forth into a sort of crack-voiced chant:

"Grace come to you in the fall of sixty-five—in the fall of sixty-five.

"You saw the light—you saw the light.

"You gave body and soul to Him—body and soul.

"Through the mountains and deserts He guided you—guided you.

"You became one with Him—one with Him."

Again the brooding silence, and then:

"Fergave her long ago—long ago. Nobody to blame—jes' His will—His will."

For a time Pap stared into the dying embers of his little fires, and then arose and began gathering up his belongings. With childish unreasonableness he had suddenly decided to break camp and journey to Rattlesnake Well.

Breaking camp was no great undertaking. He had only to pack his burro, squint up at the friendly stars, and then, with unerring instinct, strike straight across the gray waste to his goal.

The patient burro packed, Pap fumbled for a canvas pocket sewed on the inside of his shirt, and drew forth a packet securely wrapped in oilcloth. He knelt in the sand, and wasted a precious match in a careful inspection of the contents of the packet; then replaced it in the canvas pocket. The packet contained a faded letter, signed "Mary," a tintype picture of a girl, his pension papers and discharge, and a tiny Bible, on the flyleaf of which was written, in cramped script:

From mother to her darling soldier lad.

It seems that mothers have little regard for years, since Pap was in his early thirties when he received that little Bible.

Having buttoned his shirt securely over the precious packet, the desert rat clucked to his burro, and started on the journey to Rattlesnake Well. He walked with the peculiar high step of the desert wanderer, the burro meekly following.

At long intervals he halted, and stood leaning on his stick, the burro resting his great head against his master's side, nosing the man for comfort. At such times they seemed interfluent with the almost palpable gloom—gray man, gray burro, and gray desert.

Pap did not touch his big, canvas-covered canteen. He had sufficient water to last him and the burro until they reached Rattlesnake Well. For fifty years he had schooled himself to endure thirst. In the morning he would have a can of strong coffee, and at intervals, when the blazing sun made of the sandy wastes a white hell, he would take "jes' a sup." The burro would occasionally be permitted to "jes' wet his whistle." By that Pap meant that he would pour a little water into the frying pan, and hold it up for the ani-

mal to wet his pendulous lips and eager tongue.

And thus they pressed on through the silence—silence unbroken save for now and then the scuff of the old man's shoes in the sand, or the click of the burro's hoofs.

Once, Pap nearly stepped on a rattler, a night-chilled "sidewinder." The snake sounded his dread warning faintly, but Pap gave no heed, for he was again possessed of the spirit. In a quavering voice he began chanting:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters.

II.

Pap sighted the mesquite bordering Rattlesnake Well at noon. The burro quickened his snail's pace, and the desert rat sniffed the hot air in anticipation of a drink of brackish water.

The burro passed the man, and made his way through the mesquite, only to whirl with a snort and return to his master at a rattling gallop.

"Here, you scoundrel, what's up?" Pap whined feebly, but with a great show of anger. "Cal'late muddyin' up the water, do you?"

He shook his stick at the burro. The animal stood braced, monstrous ears inclined stiffly forward, looking intently in the direction of the water hole.

Pap muttered mild imprecations. He could not bring himself to wrangle with his burro, as had been his habit yesterday—or was it a year ago, or ten, or twenty-five?

He leaned heavily on his stick.

"One of them dizzy spells," he muttered. "Must git some gin and make a mess o' bitters. Greasewood bitters will fetch me right out—right out."

Then, his attention again attracted to the burro, he remarked: "A burro's the dod-dingest fool animile in the world." An old desert joke came to him. "Fifty years in the desert, and forty-nine of 'em spent lookin' fer burros," he added, with a senile sniffle.

The night journey had been a severe drain on the old man's strength. He would not admit that he was nearing the end of the long trail, but his withered body was merely traveling on the momentum given it by a youth superbly virile. "Yes," he reiterated, "a burro's the dod-dingest fool animile in the world." He had made that remark at least once a day for the last fifty years.

Pap approached the water hole, the burro cautiously following. Again the animal whirled and retreated.

"You thunderin' fool!" Pap squawked. Then he glanced down at the water hole.

Rattlesnake Well was dry, and in it, clawing at the dried mud, cracked by the heat into geometric figures, was *a woman!*

For a moment Pap was stricken dumb. *A woman in Rattlesnake Well!* The wonder of it surpassed the wonder of the water hole being dry.

He hobbled down into the depression, called a well for want of a better designation, and gasped: "Who—who be you?"

The girl turned up to him a face that told poignantly of the first agonies of thirst: fever-bright eyes, swollen lips, and thickened tongue.

The desert rat bestirred his old bones and hobbled back to the burro. Securing the big canteen, he essayed a brisk run back to the girl, but midway halted abruptly. "Dizzy ag'in," he muttered. Then, gathering his strength, he hobbled down to the girl's side.

When it dawned upon the girl that there was water in the big canteen, she clutched at it frantically, but Pap restrained her mad efforts.

"Jes' a little sup," he crooned. With difficulty he dropped down on one knee and drew her head over on the other. Then, manipulating the big canteen, he

attempted to just wet her swollen lips, but with a sudden gurgle the water gushed out upon her face.

She gasped, and then eagerly attempted to assist him; but Pap, wise with fifty years of desert wandering, held the canteen out of her reach.

"Now, you jes' lie still," he advised soothingly. "Jes' a little sup now and then."

As she revived, the old man studied her face with the peering intentness of some friendly gnome. A great conclusion throbbed and thrummed in his mind—a great conclusion prompted by the memory of a face that had never ceased to haunt him.

"Why, it's Mary," he whispered. "My Mary."

Though his mind was now crowded with many strange and shifting images, it was all very easy to understand. It had all been a mistake; she had not loved the lieutenant. It was Sergeant Miller she had loved—aye, loved now! He was that same Sergeant Miller—straight-backed, clean-limbed, athrill with vibrant youth.

With a gnarled, trembling hand he smoothed back the disheveled brown hair of the girl.

"I knowed it—knowed it," he laughed senilely. "Knowed it was me, and not the leftenant. Ought to have written her—jes' too headstrong—jes' too headstrong."

The girl, having a reservoir of youthful strength to draw upon, revived quickly under the old man's ministrations. She sat up and stared at him, but did not speak for some time, since her swollen tongue made articulation painful.

Pap made a clumsy effort to bathe her face, thereby wasting much of the precious water. In his joy he was oblivious to the supreme tragedy confronting them—the failure of the spring. The great fact of his sweetheart seeking him in that land of despair blossomed in his heart like some gorgeous flower, and all else mattered not.

Doubtless, Pap's mind was not working smoothly and accurately; he had forgotten that some fifty years had elapsed since that memorable day his Mary had stood at the gate and waved her handkerchief at him—Sergeant Miller, on his way to the front.

During the afternoon they rested as best they could, and ere the coming of the gray night the girl told the old man her story.

She and her father had started for the Pacific coast overland. Coming into the desert, they had wandered from the main road. The mules had got away in a sand storm, and her father had started in search of them. He had taken a canteen of water with him, leaving her a limited supply. Days passed, and he failed to return. Her water supply exhausted, she had started out across the desert. She had sighted the green bushes growing about the water hole; and then the mockery of that dry depression rimmed with leprous alkali!

Pap listened intently to her story, for the sound of her voice fell upon his ears like heaven's own music; but her account made no impression upon his mind, utterly engrossed with the thought of his sweetheart seeking him in the desert wastes.

Yet he retained sufficient sanity to guard her welfare. It was not seemly that her sweet lips become blackened and swollen with thirst; she must have water. To him the contents of the big canteen were now sacred; only Mary might now drink from that canteen.

The habit of years strong upon him, he prepared supper. Yet his faded eyes scarcely ever left the girl's face.

To the dead spring he gave no heed. In the firelight the alkali rimming the depression took on a ghastly, corpselike tone. Indeed, the soul of the spring

had fled, even as the souls of men flee into the unknown, leaving behind them only the clay, seamed and cracked with life's vicissitudes.

When Pap had prepared supper he sought his little pack, and, after much fumbling, drew forth a dirty salt box containing a few ounces of sugar. That and tobacco were his only luxuries.

Mary must have sugar in her coffee. It was almost as precious as gold dust, but a girl like Mary—his Mary—must have sugar in her coffee. Also, Mary was a woman, and it was a man's part to pet and protect a woman—to give her the best of everything always.

The girl smiled wanly, as the old man poured out the scalding coffee in the ancient tomato can, and handed her the little bag of sugar.

"Sugar," he told her softly; "it's all fer you, Mary."

The girl had not questioned the old man's sanity. Her name was Mary, and he had been very kind and very gentle.

"He is old," she thought sadly, "very, very old."

Pap did not eat, nor did he permit himself even a swallow of the coffee.

"Why do you not eat and drink?" asked the girl solicitously.

"Had early dinner," Pap evaded. "Don't care fer nothin'. It's all fer you, honey."

As soon as the girl had finished eating, the desert rat sought his patient and long-suffering burro.

"Got to be movin', Jack," he told the animal, with pathetic gayety. "Mary's come, and we got to git her where there's folks, while it's cool. Mary's come, Jack—Mary's come."

Calling upon his youth for strength, Pap prepared the burro for a burden infinitely precious—Mary.

He cached his meager camp equipment, placed his ragged coat over the pack saddle, and then turned to the girl.

"Come, Mary," he said tenderly; "we'll be goin' now."

Trusting him implicitly, she managed, after several futile efforts, to mount the burro. Clumsily but reverently Pap arranged her skirts. Then he slung the canteen over his lean old shoulder, grasped his stick with an unwonted firmness, and once again launched out into the gray, interminable wastes, the burro, with his precious burden, meekly following.

At intervals during the night he halted and gave the canteen to the girl, admonishing her weakly, "Jes' a sup—jes' a sup."

And, realizing her position, she obeyed him, though it seemed she could drink the canteen dry and then not quench her thirst.

As the night dragged on, the girl became faint and worn. She leaned forward, her hands resting on the burro's narrow shoulders. At times she aroused from her apathy to ask the plodding shape in front of her, "Why don't you drink?"

Always would come the faint reply: "Never you mind, honey; I'm lookin' out fer you."

Toward dawn she heard him chanting:

"The Lord is my shepherd——"

III.

Came the merciless sun, and the countless devils that dance across the barren sands. Still the old man plodded on, although his feet scuffed long troughs in the sand. His old knees sagged slightly, and there was a glaze over his eyes, through which he viewed a hazy but awful world.

Distance mocked him. The mountains were just over there; he could almost touch them with his stick. Yet a strong man could scarcely reach them in two days of hard plodding.

But for Mary's sake he must endure.

He must not let the mountains mock him. He must hold his sense of direction. Mesquite Springs lay directly to the south, in line with the distant purple peak; he must reach those springs!

Why, what foolish talk! The idea of him weakening! There wasn't a better soldier in the whole brigade than he; he was as hard as nails—couldn't kill him with a club.

Fear? He croaked derisively, his throat muscles working convulsively.

Why, consarn it, he had carried the colors at Shiloh, and won back the chevrons he had lost after striking his superior officer. Colonel gave 'em back to him on the field—yes, siree, on the field.

Pap Miller, desert rat, aged eighty-four, warped, withered, and dried by fifty desert suns, and nearing the end of the long, long trail, actually shouldered his stick, as if in obedience to some ghostly tenor twang of "Right shoulder shift—*arms!*"

Talk about your men! If he wasn't the crackin'est young wild cat in the whole brigade, then the war never happened. Wasn't scared of nothin'. Little bullheaded, though. But when it come to fightin'——

The aged face took on a look of supreme exaltation. He had called upon his glorious youth in this hour of desperate need, and it had responded. Mary was with him. He was young and strong, and would shield her from all harm. Women were weak and men were strong. Women must be loved and protected. Why? Because, because—— At last the sweet answer came. If the woman perished, the race perished. At all costs the woman must be saved.

The girl sprawled upon the burro's back, the packsaddle cross gouging her tender flesh. When Pap halted to give her the canteen, she noted dully that he experienced great difficulty in unslinging it. She did not now urge him to drink. Dimly it came to her that she was confronting a will that was like tempered steel.

The visions of martial glory had now given way to peaceful pastoral dreams. He could see the spring in the south meadow, distinctly hear its childish gurgle. Mary was with him, and he was playfully fashioning her a cup out of leaves. He dips up a cooling draft of the sparkling water, and she drinks deeply. Then they wander beneath the shade of an ancient tree to carve their initials in the rough bark.

Groping its way back from the pleasant past to the cruel and implacable present, Pap's mind turned to the needs of the girl asprawl on the burro's back. He roused her and gave her a drink from the rapidly dwindling water supply. The burro made a frantic effort to get at the canteen, but Pap summoned sufficient strength to ward off the thirsty animal. Then once more, weaving and staggering considerably, he took up the soul-trying march.

Above them the spirit of the desert seemed to hover, waiting—waiting with infinite patience for the end.

Pap was concentrating on one thought: to save the woman he must keep straight ahead. He must beware of the dread circle. He had found many men who had trod the circle of death. First, it was a wide circle, then it gradually diminished in circumference until the thirst-tortured victim fell to earth, clawing at his garments, tearing his shirt from his body in his ghastly death throes.

But thirst had not so much to do with Pap's ever-increasing weakness as old age. The machine had just run down. The body was kept erect now only by that all-important thought—the woman must be saved.

He stumbled, and lurched forward, falling on his face, and bruising his leathern cheek on the pebbly ground. He made a feeble effort to rise, but his

strength had fled. In vain he called upon his indomitable youth—there was no response. The burden of years pressed him down remorselessly. Yet he still clung to that all-important thought—the woman must be saved. Perhaps it was Mary—his Mary—but that did not matter so much now. He was a man, and this woman looked to him for protection. She must be saved.

The girl dismounted, or rather fell, from the burro, and came up to the prostrate man. He managed to turn over on his back. She knelt down and endeavored to pull the canteen strap over his shoulder. It was trying work, but she finally lifted the canteen clear of the man, uncorked it, and attempted to give him a drink. But his shrunken lips closed resolutely.

With a last final effort he raised up on his elbow, pointed at the canteen, then at his mouth, and shook his head. Then he pointed toward the purple peak to the south, and fell back, the glaze thickening over his eyes.

"I will not leave you," chokingly whispered the girl, pressing his gnarled hand to her soft breast.

Into the fading eyes of the desert rat crept the light of an ineffable joy. Yes, it was true; she loved him, after all.

To the woman there came a God-given comprehension. He had no one to love him, and she would voice that sweet old story. He had done so much for her, and was now near death.

She pressed her cheek against his grizzled face, and whispered close to his ear, "I love you, dear."

He looked up at her, as if to impress upon his soul, impatient to be gone, an eternal memory of her face. Then the spirit of Pap Miller took flight.

As she stared down into the dead face, her hand rested for a moment on the sunken chest. Curiously she groped inside the shirt, and drew forth the packet. Evidently he had greatly prized that packet. She could do no more than to guard and cherish it; perhaps there was some one in the wide world who loved him and called him father. She cried a little as she thought of the fate of her own father, and placed the packet in the bosom of her waist.

Then she drank sparingly, for her terrible experience had taught her the great desert lesson, and hung the canteen on the packsaddle. She concluded to walk as far as her strength would permit. She glanced back at the shape in the sand, and shook her head helplessly. There was naught that she could do to prevent the desert from claiming its own.

With the coming of the blessed dusk the distant mountains became swathed in a deeper purple, lifting their royal heads to a sky barred with orange and crimson; and here and there timid stars shone faintly.

She gave an exclamation of joy as she sighted the fire of a prospector camped at Mesquite Springs. She staggered forward, crying hysterically. The prospector, startled from his usual desert calm, ran to meet her, and received the fainting girl in his brawny arms.

She was dimly aware that the man was caring for her, that he had bathed her face, given her a drink of water, removed her shoes, and covered her up in warm blankets. The desert was cruel, but desert men were kind; she had only to lean upon them, and they would care for her.

Weeks later, when she had found her father—he had been rescued by a party of prospectors—she opened the packet. She gazed in wonderment at the little tintype Pap Miller had carried next to his heart for more than half a century.

"Why!" she exclaimed, "it's a picture of grandma, like the one I have—grandma as a girl!"

The Unscrambling of T-C.R.

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Taming of Red Butte Western," "My Uncle Bodfish," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

To avoid government investigation the edict goes forth that the T-C.R. system shall "unscramble"—that its subsidiary lines shall become independent units. Mellish, the third vice president of the T-C.R., selects young Burdick as general manager of the G. V. & P. branch of the West. Burdick, an enthusiastic worker, is elated at his promotion, but soon learns in Green Butte, whither he is sent, that his position is more or less of a dummy one; in short, that the T-C.R. people mean to still exercise full control to the detriment of the stockholders of the G. V. & P. The newly elected general manager gets into communication with his president, Bancroft, and tells him he means to fight the issue. But Bancroft is skeptical of success, calling the G. V. & P. a dead investment. Their conversation is overheard by an eavesdropper who reports it to Dickson, the division superintendent, and a strong T-C.R. man. Dickson plans to send Mellish the details of Burdick's attitude. The young general manager feels that he is doing the right thing, and in his stand is sturdily supported by Rhoda Clayburn, the girl he loves. Among other things, the T-C.R. has taken to itself all the best rolling stock and engines belonging to the G. V. & P. Burdick plans to get them back, but to do so has to make a midnight raid on the roundhouse of the T-C.R., which results in bitter enmity between Dickson and himself, and the former resolves to thwart the young general manager in all ways. Rhoda Clayburn applauds the courage and action of her lover, but fears for his safety. Her fears are well founded for the G. V. & P. attorney, Shapperton, senses the same danger, and has Burdick shadowed secretly; once saving his life from thugs by taking this precaution. Meanwhile the G.V.&P. road, under the new and vigorous management, shows signs of unexampled prosperity. But its hope is quickly overshadowed when Dickson endeavors to block a "special" and, in the fracas ensuing, Burdick, to all appearances, delivers a blow to the bully and fells him to earth, with the consequence that the youthful head of the G. V. & P. is clapped into jail, a possible murderer.

(A Four-Part Story—Part Three.)

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE TOBOGGAN.

IT is a saying as old as Epictetus that there is nothing so ingeniously fickle as public favor. On the day following the raid on the T-C.R. roundhouse, Burdick had been the hero of the moment in Green Butte. But almost immediately the enthusiasm had begun to cool. With the chief raider bound over to await the action of the grand jury, public sentiment had apparently taken a second thought. Were there not courts in the land to which this impetuous young man from the East could have applied for relief? Was the fair fame of the city to be held up to derision merely because a young and hot-headed railroad official chose to take the law into his own hands? Not so; not even measurably so, now that Green Butte came to think of it soberly—and minus enthusiasm.

Fryar Shapperton had noted the change, and was attributing it to a natural reaction. He had heard some of the stories that were going the rounds; stories evidently set afoot by Burdick's enemies; and had given them their due in accounting for the change. Yet he was optimistically refusing to believe that the people as a whole would either credit or be influenced by them.

The eye opening came on the morn-

This story began in the first September number.

ing of the clash at the G. V. & P. crossing, and Shapperton got it at his breakfast table. Happening long after the two morning papers had gone to press, there was no mention of the affray in the regular edition of either. But the *Herald* had printed an "extra" which was folded in with the papers delivered by the city carriers. The "extra" was nearly all headlines, and it carried a sensational account of what it called "the brutal and unprovoked murder of a prominent citizen."

Shapperton read the flaming insert with his heart in his mouth. That Burdick should attack and kill Dickson seemed grossly incredible and grotesquely out of character; and yet there it was, in flaring type, with no "alleged's" or "it is said's" to soften it. Dickson was dead, or dying, in the hospital, and Burdick was locked up in a cell at the police station.

The lawyer let his second cup of coffee go by default, and took the field at once. His first visit was to the hospital, where he had speech with the chief surgeon. Dickson was not dead, but he was still unconscious. There had been finger marks on his throat when he was brought in, but his condition was not due to the choking. In his fall, the surgeon said, he had struck his head upon some hard object—probably the point of one of the crossing-frog rails, and he was suffering from concussion.

Shapperton left the hospital in a daze. The lawyer sprang into the first cab that offered, and was presently set down at the police station. A glance at the blotter showed him Burdick's name and charge. The night sergeant, taking the word of the arresting officers, had made the entry read "Murder."

The chief was in his office, and Shapperton went in to protest against the blotter charge, saying that Dickson was not dead, and adding, with the hope fathering the thought, that he was not likely to die. After some little argument the charge was changed to "assault," and then Shapperton was admitted to his client's cell.

Burdick was sitting on the iron bed, with the breakfast, which had been brought in from a near-by restaurant, standing untouched on the little cross-legged cell table. The lawyer drew up a stool and sat down. "Begin at the beginning, and tell me all about it," he commanded, and Burdick did it, stopping now and then to make sure that he remembered.

"You didn't know Dickson was going to be there when you went to the crossing?" queried Shapperton, at the conclusion of the broken story.

"No; I don't remember thinking anything about him. I spoke to a yardman first, and asked him why he was blocking us. He made some sort of an evasive answer, and then I turned and saw Dickson coming."

"You say there was no quarrel?"

"Not as I recall it. I seem to remember that I asked Dickson to have the crossing cleared. I can't tell you what he said in reply, but it was something that made me crazy. The next thing I knew, two policemen were pulling me off him. I had him down and was trying to choke him."

"I'm not blaming you overmuch for the flare-up," Shapperton said, after a pause. "Dickson meant to hold your train and so give your new time card a black eye right at the start. And you needn't harrow yourself needlessly over the way it has turned out. It was Dickson's fall that knocked him out. Doc Raglan told me, just a few minutes ago, that if he should die it wouldn't be for your choking."

"That's all right," Burdick cut in quickly. "You may talk all you please, Shapperton, but at the time I meant to kill him. That is the one clear thing that I can dig up out of the crazy chaos."

"But you don't feel that way now?"

"How can you ask that! I'd give my own life to save his this minute, and do it gladly. I know he has lied about me, at the club and elsewhere, and I have been feeling sore about it. But I never wanted to hurt him until that moment a few hours ago when something snapped in my head."

"Well, we're going to hope for the best and prepare for the worst," was Shapperton's summing-up. "There is sure to be no end of dirty capital made out of this, no matter what happens to Dickson. It will be twisted and turned in every way to make you lose friends. Also, it will be put on the wires and urged as another reason why you should be promptly removed from your position as general manager of the G. V. & P."

"If Dickson should die, my removal would be a very small matter," was the sober reply.

"Oh, hold on; you don't want to begin looking at things from that angle!" protested the lawyer. "The fight for a square deal for your railroad is just as important now as it was yesterday or the day before. Besides, there are the others to think of. If you are forced out, Hazlitt, Kelso, Kimberley, Acklin —every man who has stood by you will be made to walk the plank."

Burdick's eyes were bloodshot when he looked up.

"I suppose I ought to forget my own wretchedness and do what remains to be done, Fryar. But it's hard; so hard that it seems utterly beyond me just now. I can't think of anything but that crossing, with the electric light sputtering overhead and Dickson lying there with his eyes wide open and his jaw hanging loose."

"The less you think about that, the better. As I have said, you will be only constructively culpable, even if he should die, though quite possibly a jury might not look at it that way. But that's another story and one we needn't anticipate. What we have to do now is to provide for the present."

"You are a mighty good friend, Shapperton. I'll do whatever you tell me to."

"You'll get your examination some time to-day, and I'm afraid you'll be remanded to jail to await the outcome of Dickson's injury. Remson and Colburn will fight a good deal harder this time for a commitment without bail, and quite possibly they'll win out. In that case your railroad is going to be left without a head for a little while, anyway. Can the gap be bridged?"

"Oh, yes; Hazlitt and Kelso can handle things—if the T-C. people don't make it too hard for them."

"I'm inclined to think there won't be any more scrapping; at least, not until we get you foot-loose again. You're the man, Burdick—as I've been telling you all along. They've got the best chance in the world to obliterate you officially now, and that's all they need."

Burdick was holding his head in his hands.

"Give me all the time you can, Fryar," he begged wearily. "By and by, if it can be arranged, you may send Hazlitt and Kelso to me, and I'll tell them what to do."

"That's the talk," said the lawyer, rising and reaching for his hat. "One more thing, and then I'll quit you and get busy. You don't want to begin by dropping out on your meals. Hit that breakfast before it gets too cold to be worth while. Is there anything I can do for you outside?"

Burdick thought a minute, and again lifted the bloodshot eyes.

"I don't like to trouble you with a purely personal matter at such a time as this, but—you've met Miss Clayburn, haven't you?"

"Both of them. We had the whole

family over to dinner two evenings ago."

"That makes it easier, Shapperton. I've asked Rhoda Clayburn to marry me. She hasn't said 'Yes,' but as matters stood up to five o'clock this morning, she was going to say it some time. Of course, it's all off now, and I wish you'd go and tell her that she is to forget she ever knew me. Don't, for God's sake, let her mix up in this. That is the one thing that would break my heart!"

Shapperton looked away to hide a grimace which was not altogether satirical.

"You don't know women very well, Burdick," he returned, with a married man's fancied superiority. "I'll go to Miss Rhoda and tell her what you say. But I shall be the worst mistaken man this side of the big river if it doesn't have precisely the opposite effect to the one you have in mind."

"You mustn't let it," protested Burdick anxiously. "And above all things, you mustn't let her come here. That would be worse than anything the courts or the sheriff could do to me!"

The lawyer promised to do his best, and when he had seen Burdick picking at the breakfast and trying in a manful sort of way to pull himself together, he called to the corridor man. There was much to be done before Dickson's possible death might set the tide of prejudice running too strongly against Burdick, and Shapperton was anxiously impatient to be about it.

His next call was at the G. V. & P. headquarters, and behind the locked door of Hazlitt's office he told the traffic manager and Kelso all there was to be told. Both of them had seen the *Herald's* "extra," and they also had Morissey's version of the tragedy, or near tragedy. Shapperton talked chiefly of business. The two subordinates were urged to keep things moving, and by no means to let any chance of gaining an inch in the fight for success get away from them.

"After Burdick has had his examination, I'll get you admitted to him, one at a time, and he'll give you your running orders," said the attorney, when the situation had been threshed out in all its bearings.

"Which means that Burdick won't be admitted to bail?" queried Hazlitt.

"I'm afraid not, in the circumstances. The court will be obliged to take cognizance of the fact that Dickson may die, and Remson will make a hard fight to have Burdick held without bail."

After Shapperton had gone, Hazlitt got up and walked to a window. When he turned to face Kelso his eyes were suspiciously bright.

"I couldn't feel worse if Burdick were my own brother, Kelso," he broke out. "He has told me a little about that red-headed temper of his, and how he had to fight, as a kid, to keep it in hand. I know just how the thing hit him up yonder at the crossing, and how he is suffering for it now."

"Well, we'll stand by him, anyway, Hazlitt," was the loyal rejoinder. "Our job is to hold things together until we can get him back, and I reckon we're going to come pretty near doing it."

Hazlitt was shaking his head despondently.

"Here is where the T-C. people get us on the run," he predicted gloomily. "If Dickson should happen to die, Mr. Bancroft couldn't possibly refuse to let Burdick go. And if Burdick goes, we all go."

Kelso's hard-lined face grew soberly reflective.

"I had a little glimpse of Mr. Bancroft that night he was here," he offered. "He didn't look like a man who would take snap judgment on anybody."

"Maybe he wouldn't. But if Dickson dies and Burdick is held on a charge of murder—it's unthinkable, Kelso.

Mr. Bancroft would simply be obliged to take action."

"I know. But I've got an idea rambling around in the back part of my head that Mr. Bancroft is something of a scrapper himself, if he's pushed to it. He looks it, anyhow. If he is convinced that Burdick wasn't righteously to blame, I believe he'd fight for him until the last dog was hung."

Hazlitt sat down, and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"You've passed the idea along to me now, Kelso. Do you know Miss Rhoda Clayburn?"

Kelso nodded. "I know her when I see her, and she knows who I am."

"That's good enough. Take a cab and go out to the house; it's number 920 Wyoming Avenue. Get a word with Miss Clayburn, and ask her for Mr. Bancroft's California address. While you're doing it, I'll cook up a message that will put the president in right on this scare-head business of the *Herald's,* which is probably already on the wires. Maybe your guess will hold good; maybe Mr. Bancroft will break in and help us out—though I don't see just how he can."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MIDNIGHT CRY.

It was while Kelso was gone on his errand to Wyoming Avenue that Burdick had his preliminary examination. As in the case of the riot charge, the proceedings were formally perfunctory. Burdick was bound over, and this time Remson's plea for commitment without bail was effective. The prisoner was remanded, "pending the result of the injuries inflicted." Shapperton did what he could, but the magistrate was firm. There was no demonstration of any kind in the crowded courtroom when the decision was given, and, in marked contrast with the other arraignment, there were no enthusiastic sympathizers to surround the culprit when the inquiry was over.

Burdick heard the bolts of his cell door shoot behind him after his commitment with the feeling that the solid earth had yawned and swallowed him.

It was some little time after noon when Hazlitt gained admittance to the prison cell. Primed beforehand by Shapperton, the traffic manager refused to talk about the near tragedy, and in sheer self-defense Burdick was obliged to thrust the unnerving depression aside and let the benumbed business instinct have a chance.

"We just wanted you to know—Kelso and I—that we are going to do our level best to get along without you for the time being," was the ground Hazlitt took. "We shall miss you like the dickens, but that doesn't mean that we're going to lie down in the harness or give up the fight. Things are coming our way beautifully. The new card is working like a clock, and Number One made her run from Castleton to Copah to-day strictly on time and without a hitch."

"That's right," Burdick approved, trying to put a little of his old-time enthusiasm into the commendation, and making a sorry failure of it. "Keep it up as long as you can, and when you go down let it be with the band playing."

"But we're not going down, I tell you," insisted the comforter. "We're going up. You ought to see the telegram I got from the manager of the Gracchis, thanking us for making the N. C. connection for them this morning. He adds a line to say that he'll advertise us wherever he goes. And that isn't all. We have four big ore trains moving out from the Burnt Hills to-day, billed to Swansea on the P. S-W., with good net money for us in every ton of the stuff. And that's only the beginning."

"Listen, Hazlitt," Burdick broke in.

"It's mighty good of you to talk off this way, and I know you are doing it to help pull me out of the hole. But we may as well face the music. Mr. Bancroft will let me go—he'll have to let me go—and that will mean a new general manager, and a new deal all around. Don't delude yourself for a single minute with the idea that Mr. Mellish and the others will fall down on the job a second time. The next man who comes here will be double-riveted and copper-lined, so far as his loyalty to T-C.R. is concerned."

Having said what he had come to say, Hazlitt thought he had better go while the going was good. But once out of Burdick's sight he called himself a coward and a shirk, and cursed his own irresolution painstakingly and reproachfully. For on the way to the jail he had seen a bulletin displayed in the window of the *Herald* office, and the bulletin had said that Dickson was slowly sinking.

"I ought to have told him—it's his right to know," Hazlitt was saying to himself with remorseful interlinings, as he drove back to his office. "It'll hit him a thousand times harder if it comes all in a bunch. Suffering jehu! why can't that little girl of his brace up and go to him! He'll never need her worse if he should live to be a hundred years old!"

If Hazlitt had delayed his leaving of the jail a very few minutes he would have seen a taxi drive up with a man and a woman in it, and the implied charge against Rhoda Clayburn would have fallen to the ground. Shapperton had kept his promise, postponing the visit to 920 Wyoming Avenue until afternoon in deference to other and more important things, and the net result was exactly as he had prefigured: Miss Clayburn would listen to nothing. She would go immediately to the jail—alone, if nobody would go with her.

Shapperton stood in the steel-cage corridor while the turnkey opened Burdick's cell door to admit Miss Clayburn, and he charitably turned his back on the meeting. Under less trying conditions he might have been considerate enough to step aside out of hearing, but the truth of the matter was that the lawyer was exceedingly anxious for his client, was ready to catch at any straw which might serve to float a hopeful clew, and there was a chance that Burdick's talk with the girl might furnish the straw.

Burdick had seen Shapperton through the grating, and had not risen from his seat on the cot at the opening of the door. But when he saw who the admitted visitor was, he sprang up quickly enough, and Shapperton came in for the blessing of those who serve not wisely, but too well.

"You needn't blame Mr. Shapperton," said the girl, calmly taking her seat on the lately vacated cot. "He didn't want me to come, and didn't want to come with me." Then she added: "The idea! As if every friend you have in the world wouldn't want to stand by you at such a time as this!"

"But you can't come here as my friend!" Burdick protested hotly. "Good heavens! don't you know that it will be in the *Herald* to-morrow morning, in type an inch high!"

"Much I'd care about that!" was the cool reply; "and, besides, we don't take the *Herald*. It's yellow!" Then she came to the point—her point—with disconcerting directness, and Shapperton, listening in the corridor, wondered why he had been calling her frivolous and light-minded. "Nobody who knows you could think for a single minute that you meant to hurt Mr. Dickson, but he *is* hurt, and you've got to be able to prove that you didn't do it, meaning to. I am here to see if I can't help you to prove it."

"It can't be proved," said Burdick quickly. "I was crazy mad and hardly

knew what I was doing, as Shapperton has probably told you. But that doesn't matter; the only thing that matters is your coming here and the wretched publicity you'll get."

"Sit down here and be reasonable," she pleaded, patting the cot at her side. "I can't talk to you when you're ramping up and down that way. There; that is much better. Now tell me every least little thing that you can remember. I made Mr. Shapperton explain just how it would be if—if Mr. Dickson doesn't get well, and we've got to be able to prove that at the very worst it was only a kind of—of accident."

At this, Burdick, warming gratefully to her straightforward loyalty, and, quite naturally, loving her more than ever in this newest of all the changeful revelations, retold the story of the clash with the T-C.R. superintendent. At its conclusion the dark eyes were brooding in deep thought.

"You pointed Mr. Dickson out to me once," said the owner of the eyes, after the thoughtful pause, "I remember I said he looked like one of the giants in the old fairy books. Is he really that big?"

"He is big enough."

"Could you guess his weight?"

"I don't know; but it's probably a good bit over two hundred pounds; possibly two hundred and fifty."

"And yours is——"

"A hundred and sixty-five—or it was when I left Cleveland."

"Think a minute," she urged. "I know you say you can't remember, but is it at all likely that you could throw a man of Mr. Dickson's weight if you were wrestling with him?"

Shapperton, listening avidly now, applauded in dumb show, snapping his fingers silently as one making discoveries.

"I hadn't thought of that," Burdick was saying. "It doesn't seem probable, now that you mention it."

"How far were you from him when you—when you——"

"I don't know; not more than four or five feet."

"So you didn't have a chance to run at him?"

"No."

"There was nobody else around?"

"Nobody but the yardman I had spoken to first."

"What was he doing?"

"He had moved off when Dickson came up. I remember that he was crouching down, as if he were trying to get out of sight."

"You say you had asked him first to move the train out of the way; what did he say to you?"

"I don't remember exactly; it was something about his not being to blame, and that I ought to 'scrap' the man who was giving the orders."

"What did he mean by 'scrap'?"

"Fight him, I suppose. That's the common meaning of the word."

"But he is one of Mr. Dickson's men, isn't he? Why should he tell you to fight his superintendent?" persisted the small inquisitor.

Burdick answered the question readily, saying that it was only the yard man's way of shifting the responsibility. But Shapperton, with his eyes snapping, was rapidly jotting down a string of memoranda on the back of an old letter, and saying over to himself something about "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings."

"Somehow, Fred, I feel sure that this yardman can help us, if he will," the girl went on. "He must have seen what happened, and exactly how it happened. Give me a little time to think. You'll let me think for you, won't you?"

Burdick was up and pacing the cell again, but at the pleading question he stopped and looked down at her.

"You say 'us' and 'we,' Rhoda, and you say you came here as my friend. That won't do, you know. To-morrow

morning we two will be blazoned over the whole face of the earth as lovers—engaged lovers. Can you stand for that—with things as they are now?"

She rose and smoothed the wrinkles out of her gown.

"I must go and begin to think," she said; and then, with a glance at the grated door: "How do you call the man when you want to get out?"

"I don't," said Burdick, with grim humor. Then: "You haven't answered my question."

"About what the newspapers will say? What difference can it make?"

"All the difference in the world—to you."

"To be 'blazoned'—that's what you said, wasn't it? It isn't the usual way, I know. I've often seen just how it would look on the engraved card: 'Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Morton Clayburn announce the engagement of their daughter, Rhoda May, to Mr. Something Something Somebody.' I'd like the cards, too, but——" the sentence ended in a patient little shrug, as if it were a part of the common human lot to be denied some of the likings.

Burdick put his hands on her shoulders and turned her around.

"Look at me, Rhoda," he commanded. "Shapperton must lie you out of this, some way; to the newspaper men, I mean. You are trying to pass it off as a mere nothing, just to spare me; but what I said was the simple truth. If Shapperton can't choke them off they'll be playing you up to-morrow with double-column headlines and a snapshot photograph as the fiancée of a——"

"No; you sha'n't say it," she broke in quickly. "You are *not* a criminal; and if they want to say the other thing, why, let them. It's—it's so, isn't it?"

It was at this conjuncture that Shapperton moved away quietly, going to the farther end of the corridor to kill time in talk with the turnkey. After a lapse of some ten minutes or more, a small gloved hand was thrust between the gratings of Burdick's cell door and waved as a signal for the man with the keys.

Shapperton tried hard to make his companion talk on the short drive back to Wyoming Avenue. Miss Clayburn had given him a wholly incredible clew—or at least a part of one—and he desired above all things to pry into her inner consciousness for the purpose of determining how much or how little basis there had been for her minute questioning of Burdick.

But Miss Rhoda refused to talk; in other circumstances, Shapperton would have said she was too happy to talk. For the better part of the drive she sat staring at the chauffeur's back in a kind of ecstasy of detachment, and the only time she spoke was when Shapperton was handing her out of the taxi. What she said then was not said to any one in particular, least of all to him, Shapperton thought. In fact, it sounded more like a fervent little heart prayer slipping unconsciously into words: "Oh, dear God—if the Dickson man only won't die!"

Unhappily the prayer, if it were a prayer, like so many ardent human beseechings, must have been lost in the great void. At twelve o'clock that night, Shapperton, getting out of bed to answer his house phone, found Editor Halkett, of the *Examiner,* at the other end of the wire. The newspaper man had called up to say that Dickson had just died—without regaining consciousness.

CHAPTER XV.

JUDGE CULLAM DECIDES.

If Barker Dickson had been one of its most prominent and public-spirited citizens, instead of a subordinate and distinctly unpopular operating official of a monopolistic railroad, Green Butte could scarcely have been more deeply

moved at the announcement of his death in the hospital.

The *Herald* ran inverted rules above and below the obituary notice, the chamber of commerce passed resolutions, and even the *Examiner* carried an editorial deprecating the ready appeal to violence which was coming more and more to be the trend of the times, and was giving the West a name for lawlessness which was unjust to a vast majority of its law-abiding citizens.

Street gossip was even less charitable to Burdick. It was said again, and with accusing emphasis, that his raid on the T-C.R. roundhouse had been unwarranted; that there was always the law, and if the G. V. & P. had been wronged in the division of property, the legal remedy should have been sought first. Curiously enough, there was a total misapprehension of the facts in the crossing affray which had resulted in the tragedy. There were many to say that there was nothing provocative in the circumstances which had led to the assault upon Dickson; that the T-C. yard crew was merely making up a regular freight at the same time and in the same place as usual; and that in any event the delay to the G. V. passenger train would have been only momentary. If Burdick were not a man of lawless impulses and ungovernable temper, there would have been no tragedy.

Shapperton, dismayed as he had good right to be, rose to the demands of the occasion like a man, and it was due largely to his efforts that the G. V. & P. struggle for existence did not become at once a demoralized rout. Hazlitt had told the attorney of his wire appeal to President Bancroft. There was no reply at ten o'clock in the forenoon when Shapperton called up the general offices, and the president's silence was ominous. Hazlitt admitted frankly that the demoralization was getting into the rank and file; the men were saying that they had lost their leader, and with him had gone the G. V. & P.'s only chance of winning out.

The attorney hammered new nerve into the traffic manager, by telephone, and fought for a breathing space in the thickening difficulties. Wise in his generation, he did not allow the reactionary change in public sentiment to weigh too heavily. It was the T-C.R.'s chance for making capital, and he knew it would be improved to the utmost; but if the court did not decide to summon a special grand jury to indict Burdick, there was good hope that a second reaction would set in and Burdick would at least be assured a fair trial.

Meanwhile the lawyer was actively struggling to stem the tide of public censure, which was setting so strongly against his client. As a man who had already made his mark, he had a respectable following of his own; and during the better part of the forenoon he kept his office telephone busy, arguing his case, as Colburn would have said, before it came to trial.

Between the telephonings he was setting many defensive inquiries afoot and was ransacking the town for the man Rodney, who had unaccountably disappeared. Also, he was dreading, as a good friend might, the moment when Burdick would have to be told of Dickson's death. There was good reason to fear that the news would unman Burdick completely, and if the special grand jury should be summoned at once, the accused man might practically indict himself.

It was during this forenoon rush that Shapperton found time to do a thing which could not be put off; or rather to make one of the preliminary moves suggested by the overheard talk between Burdick and Rhoda Clayburn the previous afternoon. The result was the delivery at his office, just before noon, of a heavy and carefully wrapped package, with a note from the chief surgeon

on the hospital staff. Shapperton locked himself in his private room before he opened the package. It contained a plaster-cast of the back of a man's head, or rather the matrix and a cast. In the center of the part representing the head there was a jagged indentation accurately reproducing the wound from which the man had died.

The attorney examined the mute witness of the tragedy with thoughtful care, and once again his impatience flamed out.

"Confound that fellow Rodney!" he muttered. "If he'd only turn up and attend to his business, we might get somewhere!" Then he locked the double plaster cast in his safe and plunged once more into the crowding necessities.

It was not until after luncheon that he compelled himself to face the ordeal of telling Burdick what the night had brought forth, and even then he put it off as long as he dared. Under less trying conditions he might have asked Rhoda Clayburn's help, but the morning *Herald* had made that impossible. True to Burdick's prediction, the opposition newspaper had "featured" Miss Clayburn's visit to the jail, and the sensational blazoning was enough to make any modest young woman run away and hide.

But in applying the conventional test, Shapperton made a mistake, simply because Rhoda Clayburn did not happen to be the conventional young woman. Just as he was closing his desk preparatory to going to the jail, she walked in upon him, with the pretty lips trembling and the big, dark eyes holding fathomless depths of sorrow.

"I've been waiting and waiting all morning for you to come for me, Mr. Shapperton," she said. "Will you go with me to the jail? Or are you going to make me go alone, as you threatened to yesterday?"

"You are an angel, Miss Clayburn—no less," declared the lawyer gratefully. "Burdick is going to need carefuller handling than I could hope to give him, and I've been on the point of telephoning you more than once since this day began."

"You ought to have done it immediately," she said reproachfully. "Perhaps he has already heard it from some one else."

"I took care of that much, at least," Shapperton explained, in self-defense. "I phoned the sheriff the first thing this morning, and got his word for it that nobody would be admitted to see Burdick without a note from me."

On the short walk to the jail the girl was silent and abstracted; but when they had been admitted to the steel-cage interior of the prison, she turned short upon her escort.

"You listened yesterday afternoon, Mr. Shapperton," she said, in tones too low for the turnkey to overhear. "I didn't mind then, but this time——"

The lawyer nodded understandingly; and when Burdick's cell door had been opened and closed, Shapperton turned and walked away with the jailer, saying to himself that he was only too glad to be well out of it.

Pacing the office end of the corridor in front of the turnkey's tilted chair, the attorney put in a rather anxious quarter of an hour while he waited. It was not beyond the possibilities that a man of Burdick's temperament would go to pieces under the added stress, refusing to defend himself, and all that. But Shapperton was betting heavily on the young woman in the case. If Burdick appreciated her devotion at anything like its true value——

The lawyer's musings were cut short by Miss Clayburn's hand-waving for release, and when the turnkey brought her down the corridor Shapperton read two things in the big eyes that were lifted to his: the fight had been heartbreaking, but she had won it.

"You are to put me into a cab and send me home, and then you are to go to him," she said, trying hard to keep the revulsive tears out of her voice. Then: "It nearly killed him, but he is going to be brave and not give up."

"And you?" queried Shapperton, when they had reached the street; "this is harder for you than for any of us, Miss Clayburn. I realize that. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Oh!" she gasped, with a little gesture of despair. "My small world has gone completely to smash. Father is telegraphing me to come home, and mother is sick with worrying, and Joyce thinks I have disgraced the family and ought to be ashamed to show my face on the streets. But there is nothing that you or any one can do."

Shapperton found Burdick sitting on the cot with his head in his hands and some of the left-over stare of horror in his eyes. The news of Dickson's death had been a crushing blow, as Shapperton had known it would be; but the girl had done her work faithfully and well.

"I'm going to fight to the last gasp, for her sake, Shapperton," was the low-toned declaration, made after the lawyer had drawn out the stool and put his back against the wall. "I'm guilty—as guilty as hell; but I'm not going to let them hang me if I can help it."

"Hold on!" Shapperton broke in sharply. "You've got to take a better shot at it than that. You are welcome to your own private opinion—which in this case happens to be altogether wrong—but you mustn't force it upon anybody else; least of all, upon your attorney. I say you are not guilty of anything worse than a hot-tempered flare-up, which was as nearly justifiable as such things ever can be. But let's get down to business. The town is a good bit stirred up, as you'd expect, and pressure is being brought to bear on Judge Cullam to impanel a special grand jury."

"So much the better," was the quick reply. "The sooner it begins, the sooner it will be over."

"There is something to be said on both sides of that question," was Shapperton's comment. "Things are pretty warm just now, as I say. A little time for the cooling-down process would give us a much better chance with the trial jury. And we're not so bad off as we might be. Raglan will go into court as a medical expert and swear that your choking had nothing to do with Dickson's death."

"But he wouldn't have died if I hadn't thrown him upon the crossing frog."

"There are two or three holes in that skimmer, too," asserted the lawyer. "I've been digging hard to-day, Burdick, and I've turned up quite a number of things. For one, Dickson wasn't lying on the frogs when the ambulance men picked him up; he was on the plank platform of the street crossing, and his head wasn't within six feet of either set of tracks. I've had the place carefully examined, and there are no spike-heads sticking up, or anything of that sort. Nevertheless, Dickson's head had a hole in the back of it that you could lay your thumb in."

"Go on," said Burdick.

"The wrestling match comes next. I overheard Miss Rhoda's questions yesterday afternoon, and your answers. She's as sharp as a tack—that girl is. She was right when she hinted that you couldn't have thrown Dickson if you had tried—you haven't the weight."

"Let that stand for what it is worth," Burdick allowed. "The fact remains that he was thrown, and that the fall killed him."

"Apparently," Shapperton admitted. "We'll leave that hanging on its own hook and take up another line. It is the town talk—quietly pushed along

by the T-C.R. people—that there was no provocation. We are going to be able to show that there was; that the switching at that particular time on your railroad crossing was done by Dickson's order, and for the sole purpose of delaying your passenger train."

"How can you prove that? The T-C. yardmen won't give it away."

"You can't tell what a man will admit until you get him under oath on the witness stand. But apart from that, I've had a day and a half, and I haven't been loafing on the job. Two of the yardmen have already talked, before witnesses. They say that Dickson gave the order, and that everybody knew pretty well why the train was being made up at that particular place. That makes the offense plain, and before I get through with it, I'm going to make your provocation plain, too."

"I don't see how you can. I don't remember, myself, what it was that Dickson said to me."

"No; but there was at least one man who heard—both what you said, and what Dickson said. I'm hoping that he hasn't run so far that we can't catch him."

"You mean the little fellow that I spoke to first? You are right; he was near enough to hear. Has he run away?"

"He was a new man on the night shift, and nobody seems to know much about him. He has dropped out, probably for fear he might be dragged into court as a witness and forced to testify against the man who gave him his orders. But I have faith enough to believe that a better man than he is chasing him, and that we shall know where to look for him when he is needed."

"Who is the 'better man'?"

"You may as well know now. Two days ago I had a pretty strong hint given me that a certain dive keeper of the town had set two of his thugs on you. The ostensible reason given was that you were putting up a job with Boss Delahan to make another raid on the T-C.R., and you were to be caught red-handed. I suspected a worse thing, and immediately carried out my threat of providing you with a bodyguard."

"That was all nonsense!" interrupted Burdick.

"It was not. I found a man in your shops who had once been a railroad train-robber specialist on the N. C., a fellow named Rodney. On the evening of the day he was set to work, you went out to Mrs. Clayburn's. When you left the house at ten o'clock two men stalked you and tried to sandbag you, but Rodney was on the job, and the thugs got the worst of it."

At this Burdick sat up and took notice.

"I saw it!" he exclaimed. "Hazlitt had telephoned for me and I was in a hurry. I thought it was an ordinary street fight. There were three men mixing in it, but before I could take a hand, two of them broke and ran, with the third chasing them."

"The third man was Rodney, and he had express orders to keep you in sight whenever you needed watching. He made his report to me that night after you went down to the headquarters building, and I told him to go back and keep cases on you until he had seen you safe in your rooms at the hotel."

"I didn't go to the hotel that night. I slept for a little while on the lounge in my office; and, after that, I stayed with Kelso and Hazlitt in the dispatcher's office until just before Morissey came to tell me that the T-C. people were blocking the crossing."

"I know," said Shapperton. "What I am hoping is that Rodney was somewhere in your neighborhood when you had the tussle with Dickson. If so, he was a witness. Also, if so, he is probably chasing another witness—the yard man who has disappeared."

Burdick sat staring gloomily at the

small barred window high up in the end wall of the steel cell.

"After all, Shapperton, the dreadful fact remains," he said, beyond the little silence that intervened. "Dickson is dead, and directly or indirectly, I am his murderer. We can't get away from that."

"But we can and will solve some of the mysteries, Burdick. We're not at the bottom of this thing by a good mile or two, yet. And we haven't lost all of our friends, either. I've been rallying a few of them this morning. Keep your courage up, and don't go on calling yourself a murderer. No good can come of it, and, besides, it isn't true."

Shapperton had at least one of the small mysteries cleared up for him that afternoon before it came time for the day's office closing. Just before dusk a small man, with a steady gray eye and the reticent manner of a plainsman, scrawled his name on a bit of paper for the clerk in the anteroom, and was presently admitted to the private office. Judson, the clerk, did not know the man or recall the name; but later, when his employer was going out with the visitor, he overheard a word or two which seemed to connect the unknown man with the recent tragedy.

"You did perfectly right, Rodney," Shapperton was saying. "We shall need that fellow, and need him badly, at the trial. I suppose you didn't find out why he jumped the outgoing G. V. train and ran away before he really knew how serious it was?"

"No; I didn't find that out; I only saw that he was the nearest man to the ruction, and that he was makin' a break to get away."

"You say he is on a ranch?"

"Yes; forty miles north of Castleton. That's what took so much time. He's got a job o' range ridin', and he's changed his name. I put it up that he's been on the queer somewhere, and was afraid that somebody would pipe him off if he was pulled into court as a witness."

"All right. Get your supper and then come back here. There are two or three other things I want you to smell out for us before the trail gets too cold."

Judson, the clerk, heard no more; but an hour later, when his employer returned, he had a bad piece of news to impart.

"Jefferson, the deputy court clerk, was in a few minutes ago, and he left word for you, Mr. Shapperton," he said, as Shapperton was passing through the anteroom. "Remson has got what he was after. Judge Cullam has decided to impanel a special grand jury in Mr. Burdick's case, and it will be summoned to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVI.

A TRUE BILL.

It was on the third morning of the G. V. & P.'s headless career that Hazlitt burst into Kelso's office with a telegram in his hand.

"Look at this, Kelso, and throw up your hat!" he exploded. "Mr. Bancroft's on the job, and we've got our breathing space, in spite of all the crookedness and yellow-press work this side of Hades!"

Kelso read the long telegram, and his somber face lighted up visibly. The message was dated at Pasadena and was addressed jointly to Hazlitt and the superintendent. Until further notice, the office of general manager would be abolished, and its duties would devolve upon the addressees, each for his own department. A circular was to be issued at once over the president's signature, authorizing this change, and copies were to be posted in the company's offices and mailed to all concerned.

There was no comment on the tragedy, and no mention of Burdick by name. But the catastrophe which both subordinates had been fearing was post-

poned, at least for the time. There was to be no new general manager to step in and undo all that had been done.

"I call that mighty white," was Kelso's commentary and tribute. "It's the same as saying that we may go ahead and pull our wagon out of the mud if we can. And it proves that Mr. Bancroft is at least neutral in Mr. Burdick's case."

"It proves the other thing, too, Kelso. It's just as Burdick has always said: if we succeed, we're all right; and if we don't, we're all wrong. Mr. Bancroft is evidently determined not to mix up with us any more than he can help. His general manager is clapped into jail, so he abolishes the office. But at the same time he virtually tells us that we are at liberty to make good if we've got sand enough to play the string out."

"We're playing it, and playing it to win," said Kelso. "The men had a meeting last night in Concordia Hall, and they called me in to give them a talk. I let 'em have it straight from the shoulder; told them that it was up to them—to all of us—to put the fight through, just the same as if Mr. Burdick hadn't been caught and knocked out by a T-C. frame-up."

"You had your nerve to call it that," said Hazlitt.

"That is what it was in effect," was the quick reply. "If the T-C.R. hadn't been trying to knock us out, there would have been no scrap and nobody killed. And Mr. Burdick is going to come clear in the end. I'll never believe he was responsible for the killing—meaning to be."

Hazlitt was fingering the president's telegram, which Kelso had returned to him.

"Here's hoping that it will turn out that way," he responded warmly. And then: "I stopped at Shapperton's office a minute on my way down this morning. The T-C. people have scored their first point. A special grand jury will sit to-day; which means that Burdick's case is to be rushed to trial before the excitement has had time to die out."

A boy came in with a message from Kimberley, asking if Kelso could come over to the shops, and the superintendent got up to go.

"They'd better not put any G. V. men on either the grand jury or the other one," was his comment; and Hazlitt nodded and went upstairs to prepare the printer's copy for the president's circular.

It was a little later than this when a veiled young woman made her appearance in Judson's anteroom and asked if she might see Mr. Shapperton. Judson pleaded a press of business for his superior, but when the young woman would neither be denied nor go away, she was admitted to the private office under protest.

The clerk's protest was not repeated by the man higher up. On the contrary, Shapperton hastened to welcome his early-morning caller.

"You are bringing good news of some sort, Miss Rhoda," he said, placing a chair for her. "I can feel it in my bones, and I'm willing to pay for it in advance by telling you that Burdick slept some last night—for the first time since the—er—accident."

"That is better," she sighed gratefully. "He promised me yesterday that he'd try. And your bones are telling the truth, Mr. Shapperton. I have a bit of good news. Sadie—Mr. Bancroft's daughter, you know—has telegraphed me. She has talked with her father, and a message has been sent to Mr. Hazlitt and Mr. Kelso, telling them to run their railroad without any general manager until further orders."

"Good!" applauded the lawyer. "It is a roundabout way of saying that Burdick isn't to be discharged or superseded—not at present, at all events."

"But that isn't all," the girl went on. "Sadie says her father can't very well

take sides openly, as he'd like to, but he doesn't want Fre—Mr. Burdick's defense to suffer for the lack of money. I was to tell you to draw on Mr. Bancroft, through his private secretary in New York, for what would be needed. I am to telegraph your name to Sadie. Mr. Bancroft has forgotten it, if he ever knew it."

Shapperton looked away, out of the window and across to the cliff-crowned butte backgrounding the city. It was very much like the burly multimillionaire, as public gossip was fond of portraying him, to do a good deed under cover, and as a boon of his daughter's asking.

"You may thank Miss Bancroft for all of us, Miss Rhoda, and take heart for yourself. I am glad Mr. Bancroft is with us, in sympathy, at least; but if he wasn't, we should work just as hard to prove what you and I both believe; that Frederic Burdick is no more guilty of murder than we are."

"I know," she said, with a little catch in her voice. "But it is all against him; they are not going to give him the least little morsel of a chance if they can help it."

"You have read the morning papers?"

She nodded.

"Judge Cullam has allowed himself to be unduly influenced in the matter of haste," Shapperton went on. "I was at first disposed to regard his action in summoning the grand jury at this time as an added misfortune, but perhaps it may prove to be our salvation. If the verdict of the trial jury goes against us, as I am a little afraid it may, with the public mind in its present state of excitement, we'll have the best possible grounds upon which to ask for a new trial."

Now a masculine partisan of the accused man might have found some comfort in this, but in the veiled young woman it bred instant panic.

"Oh, no, *no!*" she burst out. "It would kill him by inches! Think of it—to have this dreadful horror hanging over him for months and months, and then to have it all to go through with again! Oh, Mr. Shapperton, *please* get him clear this first time. If you will, I'll never, never ask you to do anything for me again!"

The lawyer left his chair and made the latching of the door an excuse to hide his smile. After all, she was only a woman, a very young woman, with a refreshingly naïve outlook upon the graver matters of life.

"There are times when every lawyer wishes it might lie with him to dictate the verdict, Miss Rhoda, but our forefathers made that impossible when they gave us the trial by jury—a jury 'of our peers.' If we could have even that, I should feel easier; but a man of Burdick's standing and intelligence seldom has the privilege of an appeal to like intelligence in the jury. You don't know anything about that, of course; and it's just as well that you don't. Have you heard anything more from your father?"

"Yes; another telegram came this morning. I—I'm afraid he is coming out here."

"To take you back home?"

"Y-yes."

"Don't cross that bridge until you are obliged to. If he comes, turn him over to me."

She got up and gave Shapperton a hand which trembled a little.

"You are awfully good to me—to us," she said. "I am sorry to bother you so much, but—but a woman's part is so hard, Mr. Shapperton. We are expected to sit down and fold our hands and wait—just wait. I want to be at work—to be doing something. I know, just as well as if I had been looking on, that there is *some* explanation; something that we haven't found out yet, and that we ought to find out. But it's just groping, groping!"

"You have helped," Shapperton put in quickly. "You accused me of listening, in the jail that first day. I did listen. If I hadn't, I might never have realized the importance of following up the one man who heard and saw it all —the yardman to whom Burdick spoke first."

"He ran away?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes. He boarded the outgoing G. V. & P. train as it passed over the crossing. Luckily, a man of ours was quick-witted enough to follow him and find out where he went and what he did with himself."

She freed the hand which Shapperton had forgot to let go and reknotted her veil. After a moment she said:

"Mr. Shapperton, why did that yardman run away?"

"In all probability because he saw that Dickson was badly hurt, and he didn't want to testify in court."

"Why shouldn't he want to testify?"

"For excellent reasons of his own, most likely. If you had lived longer in the West you would understand. Many men come out here to lose themselves and their identity. Nobody seems to know much about this man who called himself James Martin, except that he was a newcomer who had been working only a week or two on the T-C.R. night yard crew."

"And you say some man of ours followed him? Who was our man, Mr. Shapperton?"

The lawyer gave Rodney's name and former standing as a specialist in train-robber chasing, and explained his presence at the crossing on the morning of the tragedy. She seemed only vaguely interested, but when he had finished and she was turning to the door, she made a sudden request.

"I should like to meet this Mr. Rodney and talk to him. Do you suppose it could be arranged?"

"Certainly, if you wish it. Shall I send him to you at the house?"

She hesitated a moment and then shook her head. "No; there would be no privacy there; and, besides, mother and Joyce——"

"I see," said Shapperton. "We'll arrange it here. If you will be downtown again this afternoon, say at three o'clock, I'll have Rodney here to meet you."

She promised and went away, and then Shapperton drew a long breath and took a deep dive into the work of the morning. There was much to be done if the grand jury should begin its sittings at once, and little time for the doing of it.

It was nearing the noon hour when the small man with the steady gray eye and the reticent manner once more made application to Judson, in the outer office, for permission to break into the consultation room. This time Judson did not make him write his name.

"Just a minute, Rodney," said Shapperton, when the door opened to admit the caller; and after a swift bunching of documents and a hurried rearrangement of the desk a little: "Now I'm with you. Is there anything new?"

The small man unbuttoned his coat and produced a package rolled in a newspaper. With the wrappings removed, a rusty bolt, evidently a piece of scrap from some railroad shop or yard, was brought to view. The bolt was about ten inches long, and the nut was lacking. Rodney had tied his pocket handkerchief about the square head, and in taking this final covering off, he handled the bolt as if it had been made of the fragilest glass.

"Careful," he cautioned, when Shapperton took the piece of iron. "Keep it that side up, and don't lay it down on anything hard. Got a magnifyin' glass of any kind in your outfit?"

Shapperton found a reading glass in one of the desk pigeonholes.

"Look close at the head o' that thing —on the side that's up," Rodney directed. And then: "What do you see?"

"Something that looks like black glue, with a few of the hairs of the brush sticking in it. Say, Rodney; where did you find this?"

"I found it down by the crossin', not ten feet from where Dickson was layin' when Mr. Burdick was grabbed off of him."

"I believe it's the identical thing," said Shapperton, curbing his excitement as he could. "That black stuff is blood, and the hair is Dickson's! Come in here a minute."

He led the way to the private office in the rear and gave Rodney the bolt to hold while he opened the safe. When the plaster cast was taken out of its wrappings, the square bolt head was tried in the depression representing the wound in the back of the dead man's head. It fitted exactly.

Shapperton put both bolt and plaster cast in the safe and locked them up. Then he sat down with a frown of abstraction furrowing itself between his eyes. Rodney strolled about the room with his hands in his pockets, looking up at the dusty ocean-steamer lithographs on the walls. In due time the lawyer's thoughts began to set themselves in words.

"You didn't find that bolt on the crossing, of course; there were a good many people around a few minutes after the blow-up, and the thing was probably kicked aside. What's your notion, Rodney?"

The ex-machinist turned to face the questioner.

"I hain't got any, Mr. Shapperton, an' that's the Gawd's truth. I been tryin' f'r the last hour to see a man—even a man as heavy as Bark Dickson—fall down hard enough to jam a hole like that in his own head."

"And you can't do it?"

"No; I'm dogged if I can."

"That's just what I was thinking, Rodney," was the quiet reply.

Again a silence fell between the two men. As before, it was the lawyer who broke it.

"Rodney, you haven't told me all of it."

"No; an' I wish I didn't have to! Lemme ask: you've seen Mr. Burdick an' talked with him since he was jugged. Does he tell you he didn't hit Dickson?"

"He says he doesn't remember anything except that he found himself, after it was all over, trying to choke him."

"I've seen men get that crazy mad, oncet 'r twicet," said the specialist. Then he went off at a tangent. "Do you know what that bolt is, Mr. Shapperton?"

"No."

"It's out of a car-truck brake beam; the wooden brake beams that are still in service on some o' the older cars. When the threads get worn out or rusted off, the car repairers knock 'em out and put in new ones. You can find 'em anywheres around the yards where the car tinkers 've been at work."

"Go on," said Shapperton.

"I'm keepin' you from your dinner, but I reckon it's worth it. There was an old, worn-out bolt just like that one" —with a side jerk of his head toward the locked safe—"on Morissey's engine the night o' the rumpus. Petie Smith, Morissey's fireman, used it f'r a prop to hold the front cab window open. It just fitted in the hole in the window slide."

"Well?"

"I was ridin' up from the shops on Morissey's engine about an hour ago, and just as I was droppin' off at the crossin', Pete says, pointin': 'There's my window bolt that I lost the other day. Pitch it up to me as we go back.' That's how come that I found it."

Shapperton was slowly shaking his head.

"I don't want to believe it, Rodney. You see what it implies. And you, yourself, say that bolts of that description are common enough in the scrap piles."

Rodney jammed his hands still deeper into his coat pockets and stared hard at the picture of the *Mauretania* on the opposite wall.

"I wasn't there," he said, as if he were talking to the lithograph, "and I didn't see Mr. Burdick take that bolt out of the cab window and carry it with him when he jumped down from Morissey's engine that mornin'. I got left behind when Morissey backed down and picked him up, and just about then I was sprintin' along up the yard to catch on ag'in. But I can tell you this much: Mr. Burdick wasn't no ways at himself any time that mornin'. He'd been up the biggest part o' the night, and when he come down from the dispatcher's office about quarter o' five, he looked like he could bite a nail in two."

"I know," said Shapperton.

"I hung round and watched him while he was trampin' up and down the station platform," Rodney went on. "He was mighty near off his cahoop right then. I could hear him mutterin' to himself; and two or three times he bumped up ag'inst people that got in his way just like he didn't see 'em."

For the third time Shapperton set the pace for a silence which drew itself out into minutes. At the end of it he rose like a man suddenly stricken with weariness.

"My God, Rodney!" he grated. "I don't want to take the road you're pointing out! You're asking me to believe that Mr. Burdick took that bolt from Morissey's engine, carried it over to the crossing, and hit Dickson with it—all without knowing, or without realizing, what he was doing. I can't follow you that far; I simply *can't*. Either one of two things I've got to believe: Burdick didn't do it at all, or else he did it knowingly."

Rodney was slowly edging toward the door.

"I was kind o' hopin' you could see it my way—just to sort o' help me along," he said, with a ghost of a smile flitting across his expressionless face. "If you can't, I reckon I might as well say that I can't, neither."

"But, man alive, see where that leaves us!" snapped the attorney.

"I know; but lemme ask: hain't you told Mr. Burdick that he's got to plead 'Not guilty'?"

"Of course I have."

"Well, I reckon he couldn't do that—not if he told you the straight of it. Then there's the girl. I've seen her, and she's the kind that you just nachurly *have* to lie to if you've been doin' anything shady. He couldn't tell her the truth."

It was just then, out of the black shadows of the new doubt, that an idea leaped at Shapperton.

"That reminds me, Rodney," he said. "The girl—Miss Clayburn—wants to meet you, and I have told her that you'd be here at three this afternoon. I want you to keep that appointment."

"I ain't much on the skirts," was the half-embarrassed protest of the specialist.

"Never mind that. I want you to meet her and tell her what you've just been telling me. She won't believe you, not for a single minute. But never mind that, either. You tell her, and take your blessing, and then listen to what she has to say. Maybe she will be able to see what we can't see. It is given to a woman of her sort sometimes to get a clear sight of the target when it's nothing but a blur to a man. You'll know what I mean when I tell you that she has given me the only lucid idea I have been able to salvage out of this crooked

tangle. I'm going to luncheon now, and I may not be here at three. If I'm not, Judson will let you have my office."

So it was left, and as it came about, Judson was the one who had to do the three-o'clock honors, Shapperton not having come in since luncheon. Miss Clayburn was prompt to the minute, and Judson ushered her into the consultation room in his best manner—memorized from Everhard's Easy Essays in Etiquette. But when he would have bowed himself out, the young woman brought him up with a query:

"I was to meet a gentleman here; where is he?"

Judson came down out of the Easy Essays clouds and answered in usable English:

"He hasn't come yet. When he does, I'll send him in."

Five minutes later Rodney turned up, and Judson stopped his typewriter clatter long enough to jerk a thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the closed door.

"She's in there, waiting for you," he said; and Rodney crossed to the door, opened it, and let himself in with the fine courage of a man walking up to the muzzle of a loaded machine gun.

After that, Judson heard nothing more significant than his own noise makings for the better part of an hour. At four o'clock his chief came in, looking as if he had been fighting with the beasts at Ephesus—at least, that was Judson's unspoken figure fitting itself to the chief's deep-cut frown and heavy eyes.

"Did Miss Clayburn come down?" was the query shot at the clerk.

"Yes; they're both in there now."

Shapperton's hesitation measured but a fraction of a second. When he entered his workroom he found only Rodney sitting in a chair by the window.

"Miss Clayburn is gone?" said the lawyer.

The specialist nodded and got upon his feet. "She went half an hour ago. I let her out of that hall door, so she wouldn't run a chance of bumpin' up ag'inst anybody that happened to be waitin' f'r you in the other room."

"Well?" said Shapperton, sinking wearily into his desk chair.

"I was just waitin' till you come back, so I could put you next," Rodney explained. "It shaped up about like you said it would. I reckon if blazin' eyes and hard words could 'a' killed me, I'd 'a' been deader 'n Dickson by this time. When she let me get a word in edgeways, I told her I was plumb anxious to see it her way, too, on'y I couldn't. Then she burnt me up ag'in, askin' me if I was callin' myself a man and couldn't recognize truth an' honor an' high-mindedness an' them things in another man when I saw 'em."

"You convinced her at last?" queried Shapperton.

Rodney hung his head.

"I always thought I had my share o' horse sense, but I dunno; maybe I done lost it, workin' in a machine shop. It's t'other way round, Mr. Shapperton. Before she got thoo, she'd roped me over to her side o' the fence—drug me over by the neck. Here's what she said, sh' she: 'I *know* Mr. Burdick is innocent; I am so sure of it that I'd stake my life and his upon the proof. Go and find the man that saw it all and make him tell the truth. We're willing to stand or fall by what he says, if you can make him say it straight.' That was the way she got me."

Shapperton sat staring moodily at the papers on his desk.

"It's a horrible risk, Rodney," he said, at length.

"It is, if you don't see it the way she does."

"Say we bring this man Martin in and give him the third degree. He'll do one of two things: make it a case

of measurably accidental homicide, or else——"

"Or else he'll hang Mr. Burdick higher'n Haman," Rodney put in.

"That's it, exactly. You may say that we don't need to put him on the witness stand unless we want to; that we can get his story before we go to trial. That is very true; but it is leaving me out of it pretty savagely, Rodney. What kind of a defense can I put up if I know beforehand that our man is guilty?"

The ex-machinist thrust his hands into his coat pockets and once more stood staring up at the picture of the great steamship. "You're the doctor, Mr. Shapperton. I reckon it's up to you," he said, and so left it.

For five full minutes Shapperton sat with his elbows on the desk and his face propped in his hands, and the silence in the closed room gnawed like the acid which etches the darkest shadows in a somber picture of life and death. Finally, with a deep sigh that was almost a groan, the lawyer made his decision.

"They've got us cornered, Rodney; hung up by the thumbs to roast over a quick fire. With only one day's sitting, the grand jury has found a true bill against Burdick; and Judge Cullam, in defiance of all precedent and in spite of all protest, has announced that he will convene his court in extraordinary session a week from next Monday to try the case. That gives us only nine days, and two of them Sundays, in which to prepare our defense."

The man who had figured in many trials nodded understandingly.

"That's what we get f'r havin' a good big railroad like the T-C.R. to elect the judge," he remarked.

"We've got to take a chance—the one horrible chance," Shapperton went on. "Go and find the man James Martin and bring him in, Rodney, and we'll stand or fall by what the day may bring forth."

Rodney turned the doorknob as noiselessly as if he expected to pounce upon a listener in the outer office.

"I'm gone," he said. "You call up Mr. Kelso and have him give me a light engine to run up to Castleton. 'Bout Monday mornin' I'll be back with Jim Martin, *alias* Jim Tyner, *alias* a dozen other things, maybe, if I have to bring him in at the end of a lariat."

CHAPTER XVII.

KIMBERLEY'S THEORY.

When it became known on the lines of the G. V. & P. that the road's young general manager had been indicted for the killing of Barker Dickson, and that his trial was coming on almost immediately, the rank and file instantly forgot its late consternation and panic and was stirred quickly to generous wrath.

In the giant corporations, where the man at the lathe or the throttle, at the station desk or on the section-gang hand car, is merely a number on the pay roll, esprit du corps may easily become a lost art. But on a "pocket railroad" like the Grass Valley, where the highest official is daily in sight and is a man to speak and be spoken to, the deathless craving in human nature to be loyal to a leader finds its legitimate outlet—joyously, if the leader be a man in his various inches and able to lead.

So it came about that in roundhouse tool rooms and switch shanties, at station train desks and in the repair sheds, wherever there was a man to declaim and others to listen, the fire of loyal indignation was kindled and the sparks flew. On all sides the charge was freely made that the jailing, the indictment, and the threatened trial were only so many steps in a T-C. plot to kill the G. V. by the "highbinding" process; and before the news of the grand jury's finding was twenty-four hours old, there

were hotheads to propose a dash to Green Butte and a jail delivery.

"They're aimin' to hang the Little Big Boss, 'r else give him a life job in the pen," was the way Andy McPherson put it to a roundhouse gathering in Grass Valley on the Monday night following the spreading of the news. "I heard the boys talkin' about it at the Butte yesterday. Mr. Burdick's got just about as much show as a runaway train on Dead Man's grade with the brakes gone bad."

"And they wouldn't even let him out on bail!" rasped Kennedy, the night hostler. "That's T-C.R. again: they're figurin' that Kelso and Mr. Hazlitt'll fall down runnin' the road by theirselves!"

"The road's runnin' yit, anyway," Barlow put in. "We're haulin' more freight off'm the branch in a day than we used to in a week. I heard Mr. Bosterly, of the 'Little Alta,' tellin' Judge Crow this mornin' that the new rates to Swansea was movin' the low-grade ore all along the Burnt Hills. And there's millions o' tons of it on the dumps that ain't been touched because it couldn't stand the tariff by way of Green Butte and the T-C."

"Well, gettin' back to this here sham murder business," broke in little Exton. "What I'm a-sayin' is, that if they go to bringin' in a verdict ag'inst the G. M. next week, this here whole railroad push ort to move up to the Butte and tell them lawyers and judges and juries where to git off!"

With this fragmentary glimpse at the wrath of a loyal rank and file—the upbubbling of one of the many pots that were boiling wherever the militant two or three were gathered together in the week of suspense—we may look in for a moment upon Shapperton, keeping, upon this same Monday evening, his usual late hours in his office in the Lawson Building.

There had been little change in the situation since the Friday afternoon when the specially impaneled grand jury had returned a true bill against Burdick. On the Friday evening Rodney had vanished on his light engine to the northward, and nothing had as yet been heard from him. But Shapperton had not expected to hear, since Rodney's errand would take him forty miles from the railroad and out of touch with the telegraph wires.

Though he still had six days of the critical week before him, the attorney was hard at work reading up and studying for the difficult defense. Wherefore, he looked up with a frown of impatience when Judson came in to announce a caller.

"I'm busy and can't see anybody," he began crisply, before Judson could give the caller's name; but when the clerk said it was Kimberley, Shapperton pushed his work aside and nodded acquiescence. Taking suggestive help wherever he could find it, the lawyer had already made a confidant of the sober-faced, keen-witted young mechanical engineer who was so fully justifying his promotion at Burdick's hands.

"Come in, Gardner," was Shapperton's welcome. "You find me digging away, as usual, but the potatoes are small and mighty few in a hill. What's new?"

"I don't know that I've got anything that is worth while," said the young master mechanic, taking the chair at the desk end. "But there are some few little items that I'd like to pass along. I persuaded Torget to let me have a talk with Mr. Burdick yesterday, as you suggested, and I've gone over to Miss Clayburn's and Rodney's point of view. If Burdick hit Dickson with that bolt, he doesn't know that he did it."

"That's utterly incredible, Kimberley," returned the lawyer reluctantly. "Your own good sense must tell you that it is."

"It does, and it doesn't," was the con-

tradictory reply. "I can just barely conceive of a man's being so wrought up that he might do such a thing without being able to recall it afterward."

"I know; and I'm only too anxious to climb over to your side—yours, and the little girl's and Rodney's, if I can, Kimberley. What else have you got?"

"Being bred up to it, I can always understand a thing better if I can make a sketch of it," Kimberley went on, taking a paper from his pocket and spreading it on the desk. "Here is the layout as I have built it up from Mr. Burdick's story and what Morissey and his fireman could tell me." Then he explained, with a pencil for a pointer:

"This is a plan of the crossing, with the T-C. freight standing on its own track and blocking ours. 'A' marks the place where Burdick stood, and this point 'B,' four or five feet farther from our track, is Dickson's position. In the beginning, the two men were facing each other; that came out very clearly in the talk. Dickson had come over from the switch shanty 'D,' and Burdick would naturally face that way while he was waiting for him to come up."

"I don't see what you are driving at, but go on," said Shapperton.

"It's this: with the two men facing each other, and only four or five feet apart, I don't see how Burdick could possibly have struck Dickson in the back of the head with anything short of an Australian boomerang."

"That is ingenious—mighty ingenious," was the lawyer's comment. "But it is only a theory, and pretty easily disposed of. Let us suppose that Dickson, having answered Burdick's demand, turned away to make the contempt or the insult, or whatever it was, dig a little deeper. You'll admit that it's altogether likely that he might?"

"Very well; let us suppose that he did," Kimberley countered, with the light of triumph in his eyes. "Which way would he turn? Would he put his back to the train which was being made up, or would he turn to face it?"

Shapperton answered, with some hesitation: "I don't see why he mightn't turn one way just as well as the other."

"That is because you are not a practical railroad man," was the quick response. "It's just as natural for a man familiar with yard work to face toward the thing that is doing as it is for him to breathe."

"Well, say that Dickson did turn that way: wouldn't that make the back of his head a fair mark for a man standing almost within arm's reach?"

The young master mechanic smiled gravely.

"You are theorizing now, and you are evidently not giving your good judgment a chance," he retorted. "Your theory is lame in two very important particulars. Imagine yourself with the bolt in your hand and striking at the back of my head as I sit here. If you should hit hard enough to leave the impression of the bolt head, the long way of the impression would be up and down, wouldn't it?"

"By Jove—you're right! And the dent in Dickson's skull was crosswise—or nearly so."

"That is point one; and point two isn't any less convincing to me," Kimberley continued. "Following out the diagram, and the assumption that Dickson would naturally turn to face the train, instead of turning more than halfway around to put his back to it, you'd have to imagine the bolt in Burdick's right hand, wouldn't you?"

"Of course."

"Well, Burdick isn't a right-handed man. In some ways he is almost ambidextrous. But I've noticed that he always writes with his left hand, and gives it the preference when he picks anything up. I tried him with a dropped pencil no longer ago than yesterday. And once in the shop, when he was showing me a hammer trick that

he had learned as a boy, he swung the hammer left-handed."

"You've got me going—a little," Shapperton admitted. "If you haven't convinced me entirely, you have at least given me a few good points to put before the jury. Though we have found the bolt ourselves, and only four of us know that the real thing is locked up in my safe in the other room, Remson is doubtless figuring along the same line, and will reach the same conclusions. I happen to know that he, too, has a plaster cast of the back of Dickson's head, taken at the same time ours was."

"I'm done," said Kimberley; "all but one little thing. Any theory which presupposes one of those brake-beam bolts in Morissey's cab and another on the crossing needn't fall down over the coincidence. I counted seven of those cast-off bolts in our yard this morning in half an hour's walk."

"I know; Rodney told me they were common enough. Have you got anything else?"

"Nothing but a couple of chance snapshots. I happened to be down at the T-C. station to-day when the Overland came in from the east. Miss Clayburn was there, with her mother and the invalid sister."

"To meet a man?"

"You've guessed it," Kimberley affirmed. "A quick-spoken, businesslike gentleman with iron-gray mustaches and an eye like a hawk's. Miss Clayburn flung her arms around his neck and called him 'daddy.'"

"More trouble," said Shapperton soberly. "He has come to break it off between Burdick and the girl, and probably to take the girl home with him."

Kimberley nodded. "I thought likely that was it. And Burdick isn't needing any more grief. He's leaning hard on that young woman; you can see it every time he speaks of her."

"I shall put a spoke in Mr. Clayburn's wheel if I can, Kimberley. I've been counting upon the moral effect of having Miss Clayburn with us at the trial, and I'm not going to lose out on that. But we needn't cross that bridge until we come to it. Miss Clayburn will bring her father to me when the pinch comes. What was the other snapshot? You said you had two."

"The Overland had other passengers for Green Butte, among them Beaswick, general counsel for the T-C., and two of his assistants. They're here to help Remson and Colburn. Which means that we've got to fight not only the State, but the State plus the influence and backing of the entire T-C.R. company."

"Let them come," gritted Shapperton. "The more the merrier."

Kimberley stayed a little while longer, long enough to make a copy of his tragedy sketch for the lawyer, and then went his way to his boarding house in the eastern suburb. Shapperton worked on until nearly midnight, but before going home he called up the night operator in the G. V. yardmaster's office. Had Morissey, engineer on the second-night switching shift, come on duty yet? He had, as it appeared, though he was not due to go to work for half an hour or so.

"All right; send him up to Room 614 Lawson Building: tell him Mr. Shapperton wants to see him," was the order given; and in due time the small Irishman came tapping deferentially at Shapperton's door, and was admitted.

"It's a little more of the same, Morissey," said the lawyer, pushing out a chair for the engineer. "I know you've told us about all you could, but there is still one little point that I'd like to settle. How far did you say your engine was from the blocked crossing that morning when you stopped to let Mr. Burdick get off?"

"Four thracks, an' maybe a little more; say, three car len'ths 'r so."

"You stayed in the cab while Mr. Burdick was climbing down?"

"I did."

"Did he have anything in his hand when he left the cab?"

"Not as I was seein', sorr."

"You watched him as he went across to the block?"

"I did that same—yis, sorr."

"And you didn't see anything in his hand then?"

"I'm thinking he'd have his hands in th' pockets av his overcoat, but I'm not that sure av it."

"You could see him quite well, could you, all the way across?"

"As plain as day. There'd be a masthead at th' crossin', if you'd remimber."

"Good! What happened then?" queried the cross-questioner.

"I saw Bully Dickson comin' out av the switch shanty, an' I hollered at Pete, th' fireman, that there was goin' to be throuble, an' jumped down fr'm my side o' th' cab."

"Go on," said Shapperton. "What then?"

"I'd got no more than a car len'th, 'r such a matter, wid Pete at me heels, whin I heard Number Two comin'. I knew, at that, I'd have to go back an' get me engine out av her way. Dickson had come up wid Misther Burdick, an' they was shtandin' as close as fr'm you to me. I can't tell afther that—me bein' in a sweat to know which to do first; but whin I saw Two's headlight comin', Dickson was turnin' his back on Misther Burdick, in the dhirty way he had av givin' everybody the slam."

"Ah!" said the lawyer. "Now pull yourself together, Tim, and tell me this: When Dickson turned away, did he turn with his face toward you, or toward the blocking freight train?"

Morissey scratched his head with a meditative finger. "If ye hadn't come at me so shortlike and onawares," he demurred. And then: "Is it wan o' th' things I'd have to swear to on th' shtand, Misther Shapperton?"

"It may be."

"Then I'd say he turned wid his face toward me."

"You are sure of that?"

"I saw um," said the Irishman, apparently somewhat surer of his ground now. "How else would I know he had the shtump av a cigyar in his mout'?"

"You knew that—that he was smoking a cigar?"

At this, Morissey hesitated again. Beyond any question of doubt he knew that Dickson had been smoking at the fatal moment. Others had spoken of the fact, and he had corroborated it. It is only the philosophic mind that can distinguish clearly among the sources of information. Morissey shut his eyes and tried to visualize the picture of the burly superintendent standing with his back to the blocking train. It came, and with it he saw, or made sure he saw, the red glow of the cigar between Dickson's teeth.

"Sure, I am, Misther Shapperton. Didn't I see the red shpot av it burnin' in the bush-bearded face av him?"

It was conclusive, and Shapperton sent the engineer back to his duties.

Later, when the lawyer was plodding through a driving autumn storm to catch the last car for the Wyoming Avenue suburb, he saw a fair half of Kimberley's well-constructed theory falling to the ground. If Dickson had turned as Morissey said he did, he had placed himself in the only possible position in which he could have received the bolt blow given by a left-handed man standing at his right.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The fourth and last installment of this story will appear in the October month-end POPULAR, on sale September 23rd.

The Old West

By Berton Braley

HE'D read of the West in stories, of how it was rough and wild,
And he'd swallowed those bright romances with the faith of a little child,
And when he came out among us he wouldn't believe it true
When he found we were mostly acting like civilized people do;
The stories don't fit us rightly—so what does he do instead
But make us fit in the stories with which he had filled his head,
And out of our simplest doings, he managed some way to find
The fuel to feed the fiction that lingered within his mind,
In spite of our humdrum living, in spite of the way we dressed
He thought we were desperadoes and this was the woolly West.

But he got his little lesson the night of the Masons' dance—
He went in a battered Stetson and a cowboy suit and pants,
And up to my dying moment I'll never forget the roar
Of wild, demoniac laughter that greeted him on the floor,
For the men were in evening outfits, the swallowtail's black and white,
And the women in low-necked dresses and jewels that glowed with light;
He gave one look of wonder, one glance of a wild surprise
Then ducked and hiked for cover away from those laughing eyes,
And I reckon his wild West stories went glimmering there and then
For he was in proper costume whenever he danced again.

And yet for all his folly in letting his fancy range
He wasn't so far mistaken in spite of our boasted change,
For though we are up on fashions and all that sort of stuff
'Way down, 'way down inside us there's something that's wild and rough,
Something that's big and vital, that never grows wholly tame
Whatever the kind of glad rags we hang on our outer frame,
For the old West still is in us, and we mention the fact with pride,
But it's not in the outward semblance, it's hidden—'way down inside!

The Ivory Hunters

By Holworthy Hall

Author of "The Terrible Freshman," "Social Service," Etc.

The desperate endeavors of two Harvard men to beg, borrow or steal an ivory skull which a Kentucky beauty had expressed a desire for. There was romance in the quest, but Pepper McHenry made it a matter of business as well

THE June day was at its fairest, and, also, if the truth be told, its hottest. John Phillips, whose dignity was such that no one ever called him Jack, sprawled on the window seat of his room in Westmorly, thinking doggedly of frozen ice packs at the poles, of the snow-clad steppes of Siberia, and of tall, tinkling glasses, shining with white mint. Across the room, Ted Sewall, who was so jovial that no one ever addressed him as Theodore, smoked a particularly venomous new pipe, and thought of romance and adventure and knighthood and Billie Burke. At the center table, idly toying with a little heap of colored chips, sat J. P. McHenry, thinking how he would have saved thirty-nine dollars if he hadn't been so confident in the efficacy of three aces and a pair of kings. They were all sophomores, and they were all very hot and uncomfortable.

Phillips readjusted himself more carefully to the cushions, and yawned with the utter frankness of youth in repose.

"I wish—I—had a drink!" he remarked, patting his mouth tenderly.

"Gee! Women are funny people," said Sewall, under the impression that he had contributed something original to the conversation.

"Just found it out?" inquired Pepper shortly. "Now about this game——"

"It was a cash game, Pepper," Phillips reminded him. "You made that rule yourself last fall. Cash in twenty-four hours; twenty to me, and eighteen to Ted; *nineteen* to Ted."

"This girl," mused Sewall, "is funny, even for a Wellesley girl. She *collects* things." McHenry looked up, and instantly returned to the pile of chips.

"Autographs, bugs, or postage stamps?" asked Phillips. "I knew one once who was daffy over butterflies. It was positively sickening to listen to her talk."

"No; she's a very unusual girl. She's gathering up little ivory ornaments to sit around in a cabinet, you know. She showed me cats and dogs and elephants and all sorts of sickly little microbes. And like a plain idiot, I said I'd get her something to add to the outfit. What do you suppose she wants?"

"An ivory skull," said Phillips, with disconcerting promptness.

Sewall gasped. "Why—why, how did *you* know?"

"Simplest thing in the world," grinned Phillips. "I didn't know who you meant until you got as far as the collection. It's that little Kentuckian, isn't it? Well, the last time I went out there to call she asked me if I knew where she could find an ivory skull. I just put two and two together."

"Sweet little fancy, isn't it? I'm

hanged if I believe in women's colleges, anyway."

"*I* think," said McHenry, "you're darned lucky she isn't collecting pearl necklaces, if you want to know."

"Well, I had to say something, so I said I'd find one of the fool things for her; and she said, of course, I was joking, so, of course, I said I wasn't. Now I've got to go in town and buy one. Want to come along?"

Phillips glanced out at the sun-baked vista of Arrow Street, and hesitated.

"The answer is No," stated McHenry.

"Well, you come in, anyway, John. I know it looks hot, but you think of the cool, cool game room of the Touraine, and the cool, cool theater, where there's a sprightly show this afternoon at the witching hour of about ten minutes late. We'll buy the fool skull, and then we'll go to the Touraine and drink cooling drafts, and then we'll go and sneer at the actors. Are you with me?"

"As a matter of fact, Ted, I was thinking of chasing up one of those skulls myself."

"Oh, you were?"

"I sure was. I wonder how much they cost?"

"Somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty dollars," opined McHenry, building a leaning tower of patriotically hued chips.

"Ouch!"

"I was planning to buy mine out of what Pepper owes me," said Sewall. "When are you coming across, Pep?"

"To-morrow morning."

"I'll have mine sent out to-morrow C. O. D. That is, if you're sure you'll pay up then."

"I'll settle," agreed McHenry, smiling down at the leaning tower. "Only I think it's pretty middling idiotic for both of you fellows to start out after the same thing. Only one of you can get there first. Why don't you match for it?"

"Well——" said Philips.

"Well——" said Sewall.

"I promised her I'd make a try for it——"

"I said I'd bring one out to-morrow night," said Sewall.

McHenry shrugged his shoulders.

"I see," he conceded joyously. "Lots of romance in this deal, isn't there? Well, let's make it a sporting proposition. I'll give you two to one."

They shook their heads simultaneously.

"No, but John's so blamed slow that I'll give him an hour's start, and bet I'll beat him to it."

"Let me in on that, too," begged Pepper. "I've got to get that thirty-nine back some way."

"Not a chance, Pep."

"This is my last offer," he warned them. "You've got to give me a chance to get back at you, or else I'll do it, anyway."

"I'm going in now," declared Sewall, completely ignoring McHenry. "I happen to want to make a hit with that Wellesley person, and this looks like a good way to do it. I'm sorry for *you*, John, because when I show up with the trophy she'll think you're a pretty languid sort of detective."

"Joke away, brave boy, joke away," said Phillips kindly; and as soon as Sewall had set out to take a trolley car in Harvard Square, he hurried to the neighboring garage and chartered a taxicab. In the meantime McHenry sat at the table and continued to grin. It began to appear as though he wouldn't lose his thirty-nine dollars, after all!

II.

Stepping briskly from the car at Park Street, Sewall strolled into a famous jeweler's, where he expected to find the best assortment of ivory skulls in all the city. The salesman, however, shook his head.

"Never heard of one," he responded. "You'd better try the department stores."

"I'll try Bigelow's," said Sewall scathingly. "This joint was never up to date, anyway."

He went down the heated cañon of the next street, and stated his errand to a sympathetic clerk.

"No, we haven't any ivory skulls," said the man, "but we have several animals. Perhaps you'd care to look at them?"

"I wouldn't, thank you," retorted Sewall, and he retraced his steps to Washington Street with the consciousness that it was certainly growing hotter. He proceeded with somewhat less jauntiness and assurance to the next shop, where the manager apologized for the hiatus in ivory goods, and sent him to the Arts and Crafts. He toiled manfully up the steep hill to the tiny showroom near the state house, only to receive the sincere regrets of the Arts and Crafts, who offered to make the trinket to order in six weeks at a cost of forty-one dollars and a quarter.

"Much obliged," said Sewall, "but I couldn't wait even as long as six days."

Yes, the sun was certainly growing warmer. Sewall's collar was rapidly liquefying, and little beads of perspiration stood out on his resolute countenance, but he advanced firmly against the battle line of the department stores, and picked out the biggest of them for his initial attempt. A floorwalker sent him to the second-floor front; and a haughty cynic in a lace shirt waist sent him back to the ground-floor rear. At length a kindly errand boy directed him to an obscure corner where some delicacies in carved ivory rested under glass, awaiting esoteric purchasers.

"Good morning," said Sewall bravely. "I want a small ivory skull."

"Well," soothed the presiding expert, "I don't know that I've got one. The —the ivory carvers struck last fall. But wouldn't you like to see some of the animals? The bears are very charming. Fourteen-ninety-eight for the largest."

"A skull was what I wanted," said Sewall.

"I *did* have some elephants. Perhaps you'd care to look over the Swiss bears while I'm hunting."

"Hunt your blamedest!" commanded Sewall, shifting his weight wearily. He was absent-mindedly fingering the carved animals when he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder, and turned to behold Phillips, much wilted as to linen, and flushed as to face.

"Hello, John! Got him yet?"

"Not yet. I was up in the jewelry department, and they sent me down here. Got yours?"

"I'm sorry," reported the salesman at that moment. "The skulls are out of stock, but these bears——"

"Good morning," said Sewall, with scant courtesy.

"Good *night!*" said Phillips.

They walked away together; they neared the revolving doors; and they heard a gentle voice behind them.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen, but would you mind stepping into the manager's room for a moment?"

"*I* would," said Phillips belligerently, "unless he's got better air in there than he has out here."

"I hope you won't cause me any unnecessary trouble," volunteered the store detective.

"Trouble!" repeated Phillips, feeling his underwear cleave stickily to his ribs. "Trouble! Why, *I* don't see where there's any trouble coming! Do you?"

Already a circle of avid bargain hunters was forming around them. Wide eyes surveyed them curiously—whispers penetrated the armor of their modesty —some one in the background said very distinctly, *"Shoplifters!"*

"Perhaps we'd better trot along with him," suggested Sewall apprehensively.

"It's a mistake somewhere—but look at this crowd! I'm hanged if *I* want to get into a mess——"

"Not by a darned sight!" flashed Phillips. "See here, you! My name's John Phillips, and I live at Westmorly Court, Cambridge. If the manager's so blithering anxious to see me, he can come out there and see me!"

The crowd pressed closer—the crowd is always on the side of the law when there's any fun in it—and trade languished in the vicinity as merchandisers and customers alike flocked to join the swelling, sweltering circle.

"Search 'em!" advised a courageous little hundred-pound bookkeeper well out of reach.

"They're shoplifters!"

"Don't they look depraved!"

"Oh, mercy! They're a-going to fight!"

"What hangdog faces!"

"Ooooh! Ain't they rough lookin', though——"

"You come along with me," ordered the store detective, putting out his hand.

"You lay that paw on me just once, and I'll change your map for you!" promised Phillips, backing against the ribbon counter. He had lost his temper completely; and his hat felt like a fireless cooker on his head. He saw red—it was the detective's hair—and he focused on it steadily. The crowd drew in its breath sharply, when a tall, important-looking man came shouldering his way through the press, and arrived just in time to prevent justifiable homicide.

"Mr. Kelly!" he said. "Mr. Kelly!"

"Yes, sir."

The man lowered his voice to a harsh whisper.

"You get this mob away from here somehow! It's an asinine blunder! The clerk found the elephant under the counter! Break up this crowd somehow! And if any apology can be made to these gentlemen——"

Phillips eyed him evenly, and turned his back.

"Get out of my way!" he said deliberately to the bargain hunters.

Once on the sidewalk—a button ripped from his coat, his shirt clinging to his skin, his collar hopelessly gone, and his tie spotted where the color had begun to run, he paused long enough to tender Sewall a lingering gaze of appraisal.

"You shouldn't be so cocky," Sewall explained, in the tone of a philosopher. "We might have got into a whale of a mess, and it doesn't pay."

"Across the street," stated Phillips, "I seem to see a portal which beckons to me, and says, 'What's yours?'"

"Even now I'll bet I beat you to it," said Sewall, skipping over the car tracks. "Gee! Women are funny people!"

"Funnier than that," agreed the football man, as the swinging doors closed behind them.

The bartender was a man of parts. He shook things in a frosted cooler until the joy of life returned, and the adventurers began to realize that sufficient unto the day is the refreshment thereof. They each took two long, greenish, satisfying drafts, and returned to the trail of the miniature ivory skull, but before they parted, they stopped at a haberdasher's and bought clean collars.

III.

At one o'clock the thermometer in the kiosk on the Common registered ninety in the shade. John Phillips, however, was very rarely in the shade. He had applied in vain at all the department stores, and was checking off the curio shops as rapidly as he could. Carved ivory animals, skeletons, birds, and reptiles he found in great profusion, but regardless of the demand for skulls, the supply was strictly a minus quantity.

"Skulls!" said Phillips to himself. "If she wants a genuine, life-sized, *solid* ivory skull, why in thunder didn't she simply tell me to come out and call on her?"

It was already matinée time, but instead of dropping into a convenient theater to sneer at the actors, he chartered another taxicab, and headed for the Old Curiosity Shop. First, however, he stopped at a haberdasher's, and bought another clean collar.

"I want a miniature ivory skull," he said to the antiquarian.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I haven't one in the place. Would anything else in ivory do? Here are some quaint novelties. Take this Swiss bear, for instance; carved all by hand, and very tasty."

"Pardon me," observed Phillips, mopping his face with a very damp handkerchief. "I thought I mentioned a skull?"

"Why, yes—but these bears——"

Scorning the Swiss bears, he left. At the door he ran headlong into the arms of Ted Sewall, who brightened wearily at sight of him.

"Nothing doing," Phillips told him. "But you wouldn't be here if *you'd* found one!"

"No. Had anything to eat?"

"Sandwich."

They were on the sidewalk; where a buxom young woman peered intently at Phillips, and suddenly flung herself into his arms.

"Oh, Spike, Spike!" she sobbed, almost strangling him with the vehemence of her affection. "Oh, Spike! Where *have* you been this week?"

"For the love of Mike!" roared Phillips, struggling to disengage himself.

The young woman wept bitterly, withdrew a step to gaze into his eyes, and clutched him again. Sewall stood paralyzed and impotent.

"Oh, I've looked for you everywhere!" she cried. "Spike, darling, *how* could you be so cruel!"

"Good Lord!" howled Sewall, coming to his senses. "Here's *another* crowd coming!"

They broke away from the uncomforted lady and bounded into the waiting taxicab.

"Drive like the devil—*anywhere!*" bawled Phillips, while still on the wing.

The taxi drew out from the curb, gathered speed, and left the Old Curiosity Shop and the lonely lady far in its wake. As Phillips essayed to arrange his tumbled attire he suddenly discovered that his watch was missing, and he announced the fact in terse but vivid terms. Some of them were hitherto unpublished.

"Not much use going back," said Sewall feebly. "Gee! This is a great little tea party! I smelled something like that when she first nailed you."

"We'll stop at headquarters," said Phillips grimly. "No use going back there. Christmas! It was only a ten-dollar watch, but gee! how I do hate to be stung! And by an old gag like that, too! Only I was so surprised I never thought of anything but getting away."

"Here's a Japanese joint," burst out Sewall. "I saw it first."

"Stop the car!" shrieked Phillips. "The deuce you did!"

Side by side they made the door, and in unison they demanded an ivory skull.

The Japanese was obliging. He tried to direct his remarks halfway between them, and ventured to suggest that although he didn't have any ivory skulls, nevertheless he was willing to sell them a carved Swiss bear in imitation ivory. He further befriended them by the intimation that pawnshops in Castle Square cater to the cosmopolitan trade.

"Your Wellesley friend is a great little joker," observed Phillips, but he swabbed his face thoroughly, and gave instructions to his chauffeur. Sewall hesitated in the offing.

"Say, John," he remarked diffidently, "it's getting hotter and hotter all the

time. There's no need of our going over the same ground, you know. Let's compromise."

"You mean that you'll tell me where you've been if I tell you where I've been? It's a bargain," said Phillips promptly. "Well, I've covered the antique shops from A to Z."

"So have I. And the jewelers and the department stores."

"Yes, and the Jap places and the novelty joints."

"Did you go down Charles Street? Holy smoke! Wasn't it hot?"

"Hotter than by and by," agreed Phillips willingly. "I've bought four collars already to-day, and I'll bet I've taken off ten pounds."

"Three collars and a clean shirt," said Sewall. "Well—we still have the pawnshops."

"Bet I beat you to it," offered Phillips, with determination writ large upon his moist features.

"Well, give me a lift to Castle Square, anyhow, will you?" Phillips pondered.

"I'll tell you what I'll do. We'll go around together, and stop everywhere we think there's a chance. And we'll take turns asking. I've got enough of this solitaire sleuthing on a hot day to last me several centuries."

"The only regret I have," said Sewall, clambering into the taxi, "is that we couldn't ring Pepper McHenry in on this. I'd give a lot to get *him* humping around town on a wild-goose chase. Serves him right. Do you suppose—do you suppose we could get him started on this thing, John? He's put it over on us so many times that I'd darned well like to get back at him."

"Let's take care of our own picnic first," said Phillips sententiously.

Three o'clock came, and four; and at a quarter past the hour a taxicab stopped with much squealing of brakes before a loan broker's on Columbus Avenue. Two disheveled Harvard undergraduates descended therefrom, and limped painfully over the hot bricks, and in under the symbolic cluster of gilded balls. They were footsore, ill-tempered, sticky with ineffable stickiness, but still of inflexible determination. They leaned gratefully against a show case, and Sewall, whose turn it was to ask, asked for ivory skulls.

"Never seen one," alleged the broker, "but I got some of this here Swiss stuff—I got a carved ivory bear, and a shess set——"

"Let's go home!" panted Sewall, conscious that the last vestige of loyalty to the cause was boiled out of him. He had entered this place with unswerving resolution; but the dead, heavy air and the grinding fatigue in his bones had in the twinkling of an eye metamorphosed him to a confirmed antisuffragist. He solemnly vowed, also, that he would never marry anybody who collected things. He professed great love for J. P. McHenry, who had suggested that it was idiotic for two men to search the same town for the same trinket on the same day, and that they had better match to see who would undertake the quest. He believed implicitly that he would have lost the match—he hoped so. Then Phillips took his arm, and together they went slowly from the display of Swiss bears which the broker had set out for their inspection.

As they emerged from the pawnshop in sodden discomfort they encountered a half dozen descendants of the knight-errant species—those doughty warriors who scour the streets in pursuit of whatever manner of escapade seems commensurate with the risk. These undesirable citizens regarded Sewall's club hatband with astonishment, and guffawed.

"Why, *Cuthbert!*" shrilled the leader, in a falsetto meant to be insultingly feminine.

"What's that?" asked Phillips eagerly.

"Ooooh! Little pugdog, ain't he?"

"Look at his fists, boys! Maybe he's another one o' them white hopes! Don't get excited, Cuthbert—there's seven of us!"

"Yes," said Phillips calculatingly, "you seven—and who else?"

At the first onslaught the taxi chauffeur retired within his car, and held the door with both hands. By and by, when the occasion seemed ripe, he slipped from the other side, across the street, and rang the police call. When the reserves arrived they saw six pairs of heels disappearing around the nearest corner, and two badly battered Harvard men nursing their bruises as they sat on the largest hoodlum, who was carefully explaining their pedigrees to them. To make sure of equal justice for all, the reserves requisitioned the taxicab, and took the entire party to the station house, where the desk man hailed the hoodlum fraternally as "Jimmy," booked charges and countercharges of assault and battery, and remarked that he intended to teach these Harvard roughnecks a good lesson.

"My uncle," said the ragamuffin called Phillips, holding his clothes together modestly, "my uncle happens to be the lieutenant governor of this State, so perhaps you'd like to be a little careful in your language!"

"My father," said Sewall, twirling the ring of straw which he fondly supposed was still a hat, "happens to be the district attorney of——"

"Well," said the sergeant generously, "my mother's Queen Cleopatry—what of it?"

Here the chauffeur, hot on the scent of his bill, ranged alongside the desk, and nodded familiarly to the sergeant.

"Hello, alderman!" said the visible manifestation of the law. "Know these guys?"

"Sure I know 'em," admitted the ex-alderman from the ninth ward, and he bent far over the railing and held conference. While the boys trembled with utter exhaustion and the suffocating atmosphere of the room, the sergeant shook his head soberly from time to time, but at last he made a gesture of concession, and said dryly: "All right—if you say so—if they didn't start it. All right, anything you say. We'll let 'em *all* go!"

"You *what?*" demanded Phillips, straightening himself.

"You're discharged."

"Discharged from *what?* For the love of Mike, man, you don't think you're a *judge*, do you? And—and we *insist* on prosecuting this fellow——"

"You shut up!" snapped Sewall. "I've had enough trouble to last me the rest of my natural life. I'm going back to Cambridge."

Accordingly, the ex-alderman drove them out to Westmorly at a pace not quite ten miles an hour better than the speed limit. Three times on the way they shouted through the flexible speaking tube for him to halt. On two of these occasions they were passing doors of "What's yours?" variety and the other time they had caught sight of an antique shop, and wanted to see if the owner had any ivory skulls. He hadn't, but he had a good stock of carved Swiss bears, and couldn't understand why they were so impolite to him.

IV.

Upstairs to Sewall's room the two men stumbled. Their clothes were torn and soiled, their faces were red and bruised, their hats were gone, and they were very, very tired. With one impulse they sank into chairs and swore long and heartily. Sewall was the first to move. He rose languidly, peeled off his garments, arrayed himself in a gaudy dressing gown, and started for the door.

"Wait!" panted Phillips.

"Can't!" said Sewall.

Shortly afterward, when the football man limped down the tiled steps to the swimming pool, he saw Sewall floating on his back in four feet of water. Phillips was too exhausted to dive—he merely fell over the side, and floated, too. In the course of a few minutes he felt renewed enough to attempt a feat of strength, so that he swam toward his friend and painstakingly ducked him.

"Quit that!" said Sewall, feebly splashing water in his face.

"Cooler?"

"Lots!"

"Admit you're an ass?"

"Long ago. Do you?"

"Sure I do," conceded Phillips, standing on his head. "*Woosh!*"

"Feeling better, old top! The old ginger's coming back! I can feel it! I can feel it!"

"Cheerful little day, wasn't it? How do you like Kentucky girls, Teddy?"

"Come on to the manager's office," retorted Sewall. "Oh, Spike, Spike, how I *love* you!"

"Ted," the big man warned him, "some day you'll get me all peevish, and I'll slay you! Women are prunes, anyway! Gee! I'm beginning to feel civilized again! Where'll we have dinner?"

Ted Sewall was putting the finishing touches to his costume, and rejoicing in the contact of fresh linen when Pepper McHenry wandered into his room, and sat down on the table.

"What luck, old hound?" he inquired genially.

"Luck!" retorted Sewall. "Don't mention it!"

"Didn't find what you wanted?"

"No," said Sewall abruptly. "I don't believe there *is* such a thing."

"Is it anything like this?" asked Pepper, producing a bit of carved ivory from a waistcoat pocket, and placing it on the table. Sewall fell upon it ecstatically.

"You wizard!" he shouted. "Why—*Pep!* Why, you old bloodhound! Where in *thunder* did you get that? What do you want for it? You'll sell it to me, won't you? It isn't any use to *you*."

"Why, I thought it would make a nice watch charm——"

"Get *out!* Look here, Pep, be a good sport! I'll buy it from you! What's the price?"

"Those things are pretty expensive, Ted——"

"Come on, Pep, come on! Name a figure!"

"Well—there's that little poker debt that——"

"Oh, be reasonable!"

McHenry waved his hand indifferently.

"I'm not awfully anxious to get rid of it," he said. "If you want it, you can have it, Ted, and we'll just cancel that little debt of this morning——"

"Give it to me!" exclaimed Sewall, fastening upon the little ivory skull, and gloating. "We'll call it off, Pep! This belongs to me, and the debt is off! Gosh! I'm glad I've got this thing! And won't John Phillips be sore as a hound when he finds it out!"

"I'll bet my bootware he will," agreed McHenry, departing hastily.

The two ivory hunters, freshly clothed, bathed, and razored, strolled arm in arm out into the cool air of the June evening. In their hearts was peace, and in their viscera was an overwhelming, human hunger. Yet somewhere in Sewall's cosmos lurked the germ of a deeper, more permanent satisfaction—for he knew that the little Kentuckian at Wellesley was worth pleasing, and that he had in his pocket the means of pleasing her.

"Before we eat," said Phillips, "let's walk down to Leavitt's. I've got to get some tobacco."

They rounded the corner of Westmorly, and turned toward the square, when Phillips suddenly grasped his friend's arm with a grip which wrung a muffled howl from the luckless Sewall.

"There!" he gasped. "Right there! Right under our noses!"

Just around the turn from their own dormitory was a tiny novelty shop, and in the window, facing the world with expressions of marvelous contempt on their finely carved features, a dozen miniature ivory skulls rested on a narrow strip of black velvet. A small card flanking them announced the selling price as two dollars!

"The r-robber!" stuttered Sewall, holding out the skull which McHenry had sold him for nineteen dollars to compare it with those in the shop window.

"The—the *crook!*" blurted Phillips, fumbling in his own pocket for the skull which McHenry had given him in consideration of the cancellation of a twenty-dollar debt. And there were a dozen more skulls in the window of a shop under their own dormitory.

"Stung!" they said together, and made for the nearest telephone.

"Oh, Mr. Sewall," said the little Kentuckian breathlessly, when she heard Ted's shaking voice over the wire. "Oh, how *sweet* of you—oh, what a *shame!* You see, Mr. McHenry spent all day yesterday in town looking for one, and couldn't find one *anywhere*—but early this morning he found one right in Harvard Square, and sent it out by special messenger—it's a *darling* —I'm *so* sorry, but it was perfectly *dear* of you—but, Mr. Sewall, what I really want most of anything is one of those *sweety* little Swiss bears!"

There are some things you simply can't say to a lady; but the worst of it was, that Sewall and Phillips couldn't even say them to McHenry. Their vocabularies weren't large enough, and furthermore he had locked his door. They had to content themselves with vituperation through the keyhole, but finally McHenry began to play his banjo, and there was no use! Even at that he needn't have added insult to injury. There wasn't the slightest excuse for his protruding his head through the window as they passed under it, and shouting "Boneheads!" Now was there?

CALLING IN THE SUBORDINATES

WHILE Mr. Bryan, the secretary of state, was talking to twenty-five or thirty newspaper correspondents in his office, he half reclined against his big mahogany desk, thereby giving to the conference an intimate and familiar air. The conversation, however, was slightly disturbed by a terrific hubbub in the anteroom.

One after another, chiefs of divisions and chief clerks came bounding into the anteroom as if they were in pursuit of their last hope of salvation. One of Mr. Bryan's secretaries, anxious to maintain quiet in the outer room while the great diplomat communicated to the journalists the moving truths about Mexico and other foreign countries, asked all the subordinates to explain their haste and hubbub.

"Mr. Bryan sent for us," they replied in unison, and out of breath. "He wants us right away."

They were so insistent that the secretary went into the sanctum. After surveying the situation carefully, he approached Mr. Bryan, and let this diplomatic whisper fall against the diplomatic eardrum:

"Excuse me, Mr. Secretary, but you're sitting on six ivory push buttons."

Professor Pringle's Pennant

By Hugh S. Fullerton

Author of "The Hero Medal," Etc.

The unparalleled performance of a professor of psychology who left his guinea pigs one day and saw a ball game, discovering to his surprise that a ball is thrown, not kicked; farther than this he never progressed—yet he holds the batting record of the world

PROFESSOR SYLVANUS K. PRINGLE, A. B., Ph. D., M. D., D. D., LL. D., D. Sc., et cetera, et cetera, would not know a three-base hit from a fungo stick, yet he won the pennant for the Battlers. If the records had been complete for that season you would find Professor Prinble leading Ty Cobb, Joe Jackson, and all those sluggers, in the batting averages. If you do not believe that he won that pennant for us, and broke all batting records ever made in baseball, just go up to his laboratory at the university on the Heights, some morning.

You will find him sitting among a lot of strange instruments. He probably will have a guinea pig in a trap, with a dewdadlum like that which a telephone operator wears tied over its head, and some wires attached. Then he will pinch the guinea pig's tail, and tell you exactly how many ten-thousandth parts of a second elapsed before the guinea pig felt the pinch, and how long it was before its brain realized whether the tail had been pinched or cut off. Ask him about baseball, and he will smile, and show you a huge diamond set in a wreath of gold. Engraved on the reverse side is the professor's name, and "Batted .526."

The medal is exactly like the one given to the members of the world's champions that fall, and the boys who won that pennant will tell you proudly that "that old bug won it for us," meaning, of course, Professor Pringle. Professor Pringle is very proud of "his boys," and for their sakes he left his guinea pigs one day and saw a game, discovering, to his surprise, that a baseball is thrown, not kicked. Farther than that he never progressed—yet he holds the batting record of the world.

Morley was not hitting, nor was he acting naturally. That was the beginning of it. When a major-league ball player is not hitting he usually is about as companionable as a carbuncle. So long as he is getting his one or two hits a day a critic can call a player anything, libel him, even accuse him of bigamy, without receiving a protest. But the instant the base hits refuse to materialize, a player becomes strangely sensitive.

The first symptom is when he commences to accuse the scorers of cheating because they failed to give him a safe hit on a pop fly that the second baseman dropped. But Morley wasn't that way. He had gone for nearly two weeks without a hit. If he had been kicking the peel loose from that old onion, and driving it straight at some one, no one would have said a word. But he was pulling away from the plate and pushing the bat feebly toward the ball, until, from above the three-hundred mark he had slumped so one

had to hunt among the pitchers to find his batting record. If he had been kicking and yelling about hard luck, or even alibiing, it would have been different. But he was sitting around like a left-handed pitcher who has lost a twelve-inning game, moody and hopeless.

The situation was getting desperate. The Battlers still were leading the league, but both the Buccaneers and the Rowdies were coming fast. We knew the Battlers had been winning only because of their terrific batting, and that the pitchers were weaker than those of either of their rivals. It was Morley's hitting that had put us up there at the top of the race, and here he was in a hopeless slump; the team slipping backward every day, and panic in the ranks. When a team that has been out in front all season gets scared early in August, with the hardest two months yet to come, and then gets into panic as it sees all that world's series money slipping away, the prospect is not bright, and every one commences to think of some of the grievances contracted in May and long since forgotten.

Every one, of course, was "riding" Morley, blaming his hitting slump for the disaster. If he had fought back it would have been different, but he accepted all the abuse heaped upon him, and meekly agreed to all the charges made against him.

The fellows overlooked the fact that Morley had put us out in front by his batting. He was a queer hitter, one of those "streaky" fellows. He would start and knock the trade-mark name off the horsehide for a week, making three or four hits a game. Then he would stop suddenly and swing like Jack Pfiester for three or four games, then start hitting again harder than ever. When he was in one of his batting streaks, Walter Johnson and Joe Wood looked like the bushers to him. He hit them all, and anything they offered.

It was Maroney who got the first inkling of what the secret of the slump was. We all had been speculating as to what had made Morley stop batting; advancing every theory from failing eyesight to a love affair, but Maroney hit the right clew.

He was rooming with Morley. We had just lost a tough game to New York—6 to 5 I think the score was—and Morley had struck out three times, with runners on the bases. Naturally, Maroney was in a mood to give Morley a bawling out, and he did, while they were going to bed that night. It certainly was a real bawling out, for neither had Maroney made a hit, and, besides that, the umpire had called him out as he was trying to steal third, and when he returned to the bench, Hackett, the manager, had ripped into him for trying to steal at that stage of the game. Maroney had to pass it along, so he was taking it out on Morley.

"You're hitting like a schoolma'am whipping her pet pupil," he declared finally. "When I'm coaching at third I'm scared to death that you'll spike me. What's the matter?"

"I haven't had a letter for two weeks," replied Morley, without hope or resentment. "I can't hit until I get a letter."

Maroney could have stood anything but that.

"Skirt, eh?" he demanded. "Say, if you're sucker enough to let one of them country wrens trouble you——"

"It isn't that," said Morley meekly. "You don't understand. I don't mean a letter from a girl.

Maroney snorted unbelievingly, and disgustedly turned over to sleep.

The rumor spread through the team that the hobble had been put on the team; which, being translated, meant that a "skirt"—i. e., a female of the

species—was at the bottom of the trouble.

Two days later, Morley danced a war dance in the room, wakened Maroney, and disturbed the entire squad.

"I got a letter," he declared. "I'm off again. Two or three this afternoon. Watch me!"

During the entire morning he polished his bats, and warned the other athletes that he was going to clean up the bases that afternoon.

As Eddie Plank was pitching against us, faith in his boasts was weak. In the first inning he ripped off a two-base hit, in the fourth he tied up the score with a line drive to left, and in the eighth, with the score even, he broke up the game with a smash that caromed the ball off the right-field wall for three bags.

"If that doll of his would write to him once a day we'd win this rag hands down," growled Cassiday. "Why don't Buck hire a stenographer for her?"

For two days in succession, Morley received letters, and continued to pound the pill lopsided. Then he slumped again until he couldn't have hit a buzzard with a fly swatter. For one whole week he could not have hit a baby buggy with a six-cylinder auto. All the time he was mourning because he had no letters, and the Battlers were ready to assassinate the girl they supposed was causing all the trouble by neglecting to write.

Maroney was in bed the night after the Battlers had slipped back into second place. He had exhausted his vocabulary in striving to explain to Morley what he thought of him as a batter, for Morley had popped up a fly with the bases filled, had struck out with a runner on third and one out, and had missed a hit-and-run signal that destroyed a batting rally. Maroney was disgusted, and went to sleep sore.

It must have been toward daybreak that Maroney awoke with a sudden start. The moonlight was streaming through the window, and he shivered. He shivered into complete wakefulness.

As his eyes, straining through the half light, became accustomed to the darkness, he saw Morley seated at the writing desk by the window. The moonlight fell upon the paper on the desk, but Morley's form was indistinct.

Maroney, twisting noiseless between the sheets, shifted position, and, open-eyed, watched his roommate. Morley wrote slowly and laboriously, frowned as he appeared to study the writing, sighed with deep relief, and rolled back into his bed with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Bugs!" commented Maroney to himself. "Bugs—com-pletely bugs!"

Then he turned over and slept.

He was awakened at seven-fifteen, an hour ahead of his rising time, by Morley doing a war dance and waving a letter.

"Three to-day, old scout!" yelled Morley. "Two of them for extra bases. This letter is a pippin!"

He waved the sheet of writing paper, and danced, while Maroney wondered.

"Say," said Maroney, later in the morning, to Buck Hackett, the manager. "That guy's got hallicillations. Get me another roommate."

"He's got what?" demanded Buck.

"Hallicillations," repeated Maroney. "He writes letters to hisself."

"Keep your mouth shut, and watch him," ordered Hackett. "Not a word to any one about this."

"He got a letter this morning," growled Maroney. "Says he will get three hits to-day. Wish to Murphy some one would write me a few like that!"

That afternoon, Morley hit a two-base hit in the second inning, a single in the sixth, and drove home the winning runs with a two-base hit in the eighth. Then he slumped again. For

five days he went to the plate as if hopeless, and while his fellows groaned he struck out or poked an easy fly to the infield. The Battlers dropped to third place, still struggling desperately to keep within striking distance of the leaders, and Hackett fought and cursed and strove to rally them.

During the final week of August, Morley's hitting became so wretched that Hackett sent him to the bench. Morley did not even resist.

"You ought to have done it a week ago, Jerry," he said. "I won't hit until I get a letter. Put me in when I get a letter."

"That guy is bugs!" commented Hackett. "If he gets a hunch he is going to hit, he hits. I've known fellows to have dreams that came true, but this is the first one I ever found who thought a letter would bring good luck."

It was nearly daylight the following morning when Maroney waked from a sound sleep, aroused by some noise he had heard in the room. The moonlight was coming through the window curtains, and Maroney saw Morley again sitting at the writing desk, writing. Maroney raised himself on one elbow and watched. Morley was scratching away, all the time making odd, little sounds, like a child whimpering. He held the sheet of paper toward the moonlight, whimpered, as if frightened, and Maroney saw tears rolling down his face. Still making odd noises in his throat, Morley crept back to his bed, while Maroney, perplexed and wide awake, listened to his sobs, which presently ceased, and became snores. Then Maroney slipped silently from between the covers and appropriated the letter. Holding it to the growing light at the window, he read:

Don't play to-day. You will be hit in the head by a pitched ball and hurt. No hits.

More deeply puzzled than ever, Maroney crept back to bed, and remained awake until long after daybreak, studying the problem. When he awoke, Morley was half dressed, and was searching through the papers on the writing desk, frowning and puzzled.

"That's funny," he said aloud to himself. "Whenever I dream I get a letter, I get one. There must be a letter."

"What's the matter?" demanded Maroney, sitting up.

"I was looking for a letter," said Morley.

"What kind of a letter?"

"I don't know. I dreamed there was a letter; there always was one before. I wanted some base hits; a base-hit letter."

"Maybe this is it," remarked Maroney carelessly, pretending to pick up the paper from the floor.

Morley read it, and started, then paled, as if from fright.

"What does it say?" inquired Maroney.

"I'm going to be hit in the head and hurt—maybe killed," replied Morley.

"Reulbach don't pitch in this league," sneered Maroney. "No one else is wild enough to bean you while you're sitting on the bench."

"That's so—I won't be in the game," said Morley, brightening. "That's a lucky thing for me."

The team was playing in Boston that afternoon. Morley was on the bench. In the eighth inning, with two out and a runner on second, Hackett took Bailey, the pitcher, out, and sent Morley to bat for him. When he was ordered to bat, Morley's face turned white. He shook as with ague while he chose a bat, and his legs trembled until his knees struck together as he stood at the plate. The first ball that Curran, the Boston pitcher, hurled, was fast and high. Morley did not dodge, did not move, unless to stick his head toward the ball. The ball struck him above the ear, and he dropped like a

poled ox. The boys carried him under the stand, and as he recovered consciousness, he repeated again and again:

"I knew it. The letter said I would be hit."

He was better when the game was over, and by dinner time was all right save for a headache.

"I got off lucky," he told Maroney. "When I got that letter I thought sure I'd be killed. I was scared to death when I went to the plate."

"I suppose if that letter had said you'd be killed, you'd be dead now?" demanded Maroney.

"Of course I would," replied Morley earnestly.

That evening, Maroney drew Manager Hackett aside and told him the story.

"He's a bug," said Maroney. "Plumb bugs—I'm off him. Get me a new roommate."

Hackett remained thoughtful all evening. At eleven o'clock, he whistled softly to himself, and when the train pulled out for New York at midnight Hackett was sitting alone, whistling softly to himself and smiling as if he had an idea.

At eight o'clock the following morning, Professor Sylvanus Pringle was deeply engrossed in tickling the nose of a puppy to learn how rapidly the puppy's brain dictated that the nose should sneeze, when his investigation was disturbed by the maid, announcing a caller.

"Professor," said the caller, eclipsing the scientist's hand in his gnarled paw, "I'm Terry Hackett, manager of the Battlers. I've got a bug on my team. I've heard you were a sharp on bugs, and thought maybe you could cure him."

"Pardon me, sir," said the professor, with dignity. "My researches in entomology have nothing in common with the insect world. My experimentation is with the higher forms of animal life, in the interests of psychic research."

"I get you," said Jerry. "This bug of mine is a nut; a ball player with bats in his belfry. See?"

"I deduce that you mean a specimen of the genus homo, not entirely compos mentis; subject to slight mental disturbance, due, perhaps, to overindulgence in athletics?"

"You're hep, professor," agreed Terry. "You said something, even if the words are different. I want you to wise me up what to do with this specimen of the lower order of hexapoda—as you would put it."

"Very interesting, very interesting," interjected Professor Pringle during the recital of the case of Morley and the letters. "An extremely interesting case of subconscious mental suggestion."

"What I want to do," snorted Terry, "is to cure him."

"There should be no extreme difficulty as to that," said Professor Pringle, beaming. "I would suggest that to-night, while he is sleeping, you place several slips of paper between his toes. I find in cases in which I wish to investigate the stimulation of subconscious mental activity, this method is extremely efficacious. It excites a nerve flow to the brain, without producing the undesired awakening.

"Now, in this case the subject is extremely sensitive to suggestions. To-night place folded strips of papers between his toes while he sleeps, and move them gently to produce a tickling sensation. When he stirs, repeat aloud several times exactly what you desire him to do. Subconsciously, his brain will receive the orders, and, in all probability, will achieve the desired result."

It was one a. m. when Maroney gave the signal, and Terry tiptoed into the room. Morley had turned over on his back and was snoring lustily. Maroney

deftly drew the covers from off the feet, while Terry leaned over the sleeper. Maroney cautiously slid one of the paper slips between two toes. Morley jerked the foot away a trifle, and moved. Slowly Maroney drew the paper slip up and down, and Morley wriggled the toes, and muttered in his sleep.

"You're going to hit five hundred," said Terry, in husky whispers. "You'll hit five hundred. You'll get three tomorrow, one a triple. This is the last letter this year. You'll keep right on hitting."

Maroney twisted uneasily in his sleep and muttered. Then, with a quick motion, he got out of bed, feeling his way, as if blind, toward the writing table, while Hackett and Maroney crouched behind the bed, watching.

Morley wrote slowly, as if feeling out the letters, as the room was lighted only by the night glare from the streets. For five minutes he sat at the table, writing and chuckling to himself. Then he crept back into bed, grunted joyfully, and in a few minutes was snoring.

Hackett and Maroney crawled across the room, secured the paper, and crept into the hallway. Morley had written exactly as Hackett had dictated. They shook hands silently, and tiptoed to bed.

Maroney was awakened at nine o'clock by a joyous whoop, and sat up in bed to watch Morley dancing a war dance around the carpet, waving a paper.

"Gone clear bugs?" demanded Maroney growlingly.

"Watch me from now on, old scout!" yelped Morley. "Hit? Why, say, look out for me! I'm going to cripple some outfielders and kill a few pitchers with line drives. The slump is over. I'm going to pound that old pill for five hundred."

"What's come over you? Got another letter?"

"Best one I ever had," gloated Morley. "I'll hit five hundred or better from now on. Watch me! I've got to dress and go down and tell Terry to put me back."

That afternoon, Morley got three hits, and the next day hammered out four. From that to the end of the season he smashed his way through the league, hitting all kinds of pitching, while the Battlers rushed to the front and captured the pennant, and it was Morley whose crashing drives decided the world's championship.

Which explains why the little man, up in the hilltop laboratory, wears a medal proclaiming him a world's champion, which he treasures even above his guinea-pig research awards.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

WHEN Thomas R. Marshall, the vice president, was governor of Indiana, the city authorities of Indianapolis opened up a grand young bathhouse and swimming pool. The first thing the men in charge did was to send the governor a card entitling him to free admission to the establishment.

A few days after receiving the first pass, he found a second in his mail. Thereupon, he dictated the following letter:

GENTLEMEN: Your first pass I received as a courtesy. Your second I regard as a suggestion. If you send me a third, I shall take it as a personal insult.

A Chat With You

IF a man's body has to grow and thrive he has to eat, and what he eats will have a great deal to do with how it grows and how it thrives. Similarly a man's brain and spirit need regular stimulus and nourishment. Most of us get the greater part of our mental pabulum in the form of reading matter, and what we read is going to make us in some measure—or mar us. We have talked before more than once in regard to the value of sound fiction in any scheme of mental diet. There isn't a doubt in the world that a man can learn more of history and more of that philosophy which history teaches, and which determines the real value of history, out of some of Scott and Victor Hugo and Charles Reade, than out of the great majority of formal histories. Compare what you remember out of your school textbooks and what you remember of your favorite historical novel, and you will at once realize the difference. Solid history and solid philosophy is a little too concentrated food for most mental digestions, no matter how adroitly it is prepared and set forth.

THERE are bad habits about reading, as well as good habits. There's nothing worse for the physical digestion than a continued gobbling of trifles like candy and nuts. And there is nothing worse for the peace, power, and serenity of the mind than a continual absorption of mental titbits and condiments. If you are fortunate—or unfortunate—enough to live in a large city where you may be easily beguiled into spending ten cents or so in buying various unnecessary editions of the evening paper, you know, before we say it, that there is a kind of mental colic and febrile condition superinduced by a too liberal indulgence in war extras. Evening newspapers have their place, though with rare exceptions the morning papers are much more worth while, but scare extras about the war or other hectic subjects are like pink lemonade and circus peanuts—to be indulged in sparingly, if at all. Let a man buy his fill of them once, and glut himself on them, and he knows the unpleasant mental emotional results. The same statement is made and contradicted within an hour. You are asked to believe a whole set of things one moment, and to believe a denial of them the next. Rumors are mixed up with official reports, and it is hard to tell which are which. If your feelings are at all engaged in the matter you are reading, you are finally too upset and excited to be good company, either for yourself or any one else. It is possible to stimulate the mind to healthful activity, but it is also possible to lash and goad it into a useless turmoil—and too many war extras do the latter. We think that in offering you the complete novel which opens the next number of the magazine, we are giving you something not only better for you, but a great deal pleasanter than all the wild rumors we could collect in a month in Germany and France. It is good to remember that here at least things will go on much as usual, and that a story like this will take your mind off disturbing things and make you fitter for a good day's work the next day.

THE story we are speaking of is called "The Film Hunters," and was written by Henry C. Rowland. In it you will find some of the characters you have met before in "Léontine, the Mysterious," "The Rubber Man," "The Movies Man," and other stories of Doctor Rowland. Frankly speaking, it seems to us the best of the lot. As indicated by the title, it is a story of the moving-picture impresario and his search for material for the films. This time the action takes place on an island off the Atlantic coast, somewhere near Charleston. The "movies man" is trying to stage a play which he calls "Pirate Gold." We won't try to describe the plot or action, but "Pirate Gold," as the manager had planned it out, would have made a moving-picture show that we would pay something to see on the screen. It worked out differently, and a great deal better even than he had planned. There were real pirates appearing before the machine, or at least their modern equivalents; there was far more plot, and far more at stake, than the manager had ever dreamed, and, what is more, there was a real live heroine, who had never dreamed in all her life of appearing before a motion-picture camera, but who made a stunning picture, nevertheless. If all this seems a little mysterious, remember that "The Film Hunters" is a mystery story, as well as a romantic story of action. We can give you no idea of its intensity, its reality, the thorough enjoyment you will get from reading it. What excitement it arouses is of the pleasurable, sound kind. If you sigh once or twice while reading it, it will be because the delightfully smooth narrative is flowing all too fast, and will be too soon over. If you sit up a little late, as you may well do, to finish it, your dreams, if you have them, will be fair and golden, and your slumber sounder and more refreshing than if your mind were full of scares and rumors.

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"THE FILM HUNTERS," being a full-size, book-length, dollar-and-a-half novel, makes the next number of THE POPULAR worth buying at least six or seven times for itself alone, but it is only a part of a big, vital, living magazine. Just to mention a few of the other things is to prove what we say. There is the novelette of the famous "happy family" by B. M. Bower. It is called "Pink and the Little Green Devil," and brings you back to old days on the Flying U Ranch. There is the great railroad story, "Opportunity," by Frank L. Packard, which is the best yet in the remarkable series of tales this well-known author has been writing for THE POPULAR. There is another story by Holworthy Hall, with a Harvard background. There's a thrilling tale of the sea, "The Missing Submarine," by Giles Lebrun, there's a humorous story by Peter B. Kyne, a business story by George Randolph Chester, and a baseball story by George Pattullo. There's a detective story, with Shawn, "the dancing master," for a hero, by Wells Hastings, and a gripping story of the lumber camps by W. D. Chandler. Each of these stories is an exceptional one, worth talk and comment—and these are not all. Surely, however, they are enough to convince you that if there is one number of THE POPULAR you absolutely cannot afford to miss, it is the one out on the news stands two weeks from to-day.

"On a cold and stormy night!"

To the modern child blessed with home and school that are radiator heated, there is much wonder at the stories told of the fierceness of by-gone Winters. And to his thinking elders there is greater wonder as to why anybody in these enlightened days still puts-off enjoying the cozy-comfort and the fuel economy *forever guaranteed* by

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5R58—**Smart Winter Coat** in the new fashionable Redingote effect. This stunning model is made of a very high grade imported All-wool Astrachan Cloth, which is very stylish this season for smart outer wraps of this type. Coat is cut on the newest lines conforming to the figure at the waistline where the lower part is joined, giving the effect of a skirt. At waistline on each side is a wide pointed flap trimmed with buttons of plush. These flaps give the effect of pockets. A smart feature is the Gladstone collar, which may be worn turned down flat or rolled up, and the wide pointed revers. Collar, revers and cuffs are made of rich plush. Coat fastens with large plush buttons, and is lined with high grade guaranteed satin. Skirt of model is constructed with graceful rippling fullness. Length of coat is 52 inches. Colors black, Russian green or gray with black plush trimming, also in a rich shade of brown with brown plush. Sizes 32 to 44 bust, also to fit Misses and Small Women 32 to 38 bust. **Price, All Mail or Express Charges Paid by Us** **$14.98**

6R59—**Smart Sailor Shape** of medium size, with brim of lustrous heavy pile Plush and crown of polished plush. It is trimmed with grosgrain ribbon band ending in a bow in back. Brim measures 13 inches in diameter. Colors: all black or navy blue, also in black with white crown. **Price, All Mail or Express Charges Paid by Us** **$1.98**

1R60—**Faultlessly Tailored Suit,** cut on the latest fashionable lines, designed in the new Redingote effect. This model is made of high grade All-wool Mannish Serge. The coat of the suit has a wide stitched belt which fastens at front with fancy enamel buttons. It is a graceful semi-fitted model cut 40 inches in length extending to well below the knee as pictured. The collar which may be worn turned down or rolled up at back as preferred, is inlaid with velvet and trimmed in the back with a row of small self covered buttons. The cuffs of self material and the belt are also trimmed with serge buttons to match. The skirt of coat in the back is arranged in two side plaits at each side extending from waist to hem. Coat is lined with high grade guaranteed satin. The skirt is made with a yoke to hip depth. Front is plain, and in the back is a double panel box-plait from yoke to bottom of skirt. Suit comes in Russian green, navy blue, black or prune (the new dark purple shade so popular). Ladies sizes 32 to 44 bust, 37 to 44 skirt length; also to fit Misses and Small Women 32 to 38 bust, 37 to 40 skirt length. **Price, All Mail or Express Charges Paid by Us** **$15.00**

6R61—**Stunning Hand-made Dress Turban** made of silk Velvet combined with Satin. The high oval crown is fitted with satin with a velvet top, and the brim which rolls up at the left side and is dented in point effect at back, is trimmed on left side with plaited satin cockade, holding in place the high Ostrich fancy in French tip effect. Comes in all black, black with white fancy, black with Russian green fancy, also in solid navy blue. **Price, All Mail or Express Charges Paid by Us** **$3.98**

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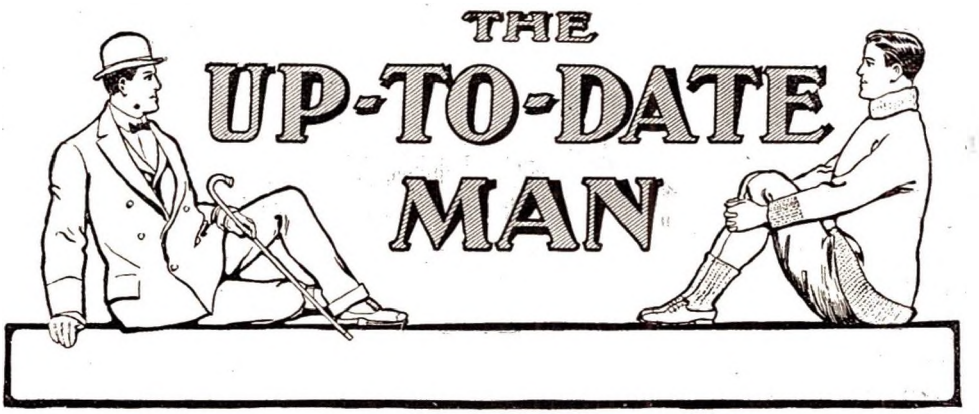


The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress. Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

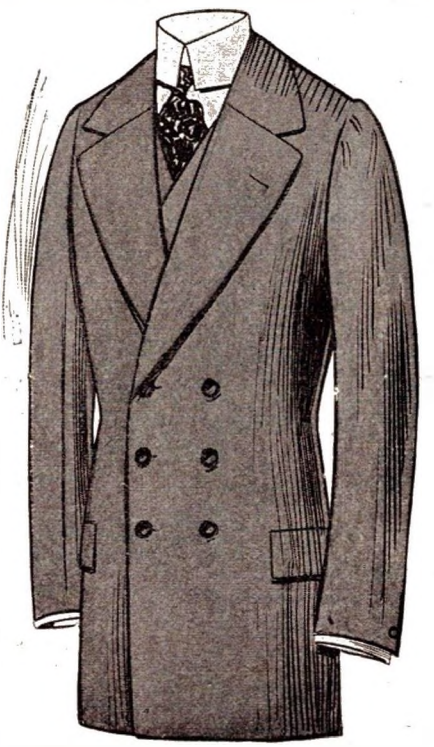
IF one characteristic looms above another in the cut of clothes this autumn, it is the substitution of *drape* for *fit*. During the last few years sack coats have been tight-fitting, with a sharply defined waist and chest line, and a noticeable snugness all over. Indeed, tailors and clothiers could not make coats too figure-curving, especially for young men.

This season, however, the best tailors incline toward the draped coat, which swings from the back rather than clings to it. In order to achieve the correct draped effect it is necessary to omit the center vent in the back, and let the skirts ripple naturally to the hem. This does not mean a wrinkled coat, but one that falls freely and easily into a half-gathered effect similar to that of the frock coat.

The lapels on the fashionable sack coat are broad and, in most cases, are level with the waistcoat opening, which does not protrude above, as heretofore. Instead of being straight, the lapels are cut with an outswing which emphasizes the inswing at the chest and waist.

It should not be understood that sack coats are to be loose. They should seem loose, while being really figure-fitting. You may accept it as settled, though, that exaggerated and dandified "English Clothes" (sic), which were in fact totally un-English, have been dropped.

Coat shoulders should be normal, which means neither overpadded nor close-clipped. The inserted or "set-in" sleeve, which brings the seam above the shoulder in the form of a welt or raised effect, is the "smartest" of all. This gives a trim, clean-cut, military finish impossible to obtain in the type of shoulder which runs into the sleeve in the ordinary way.



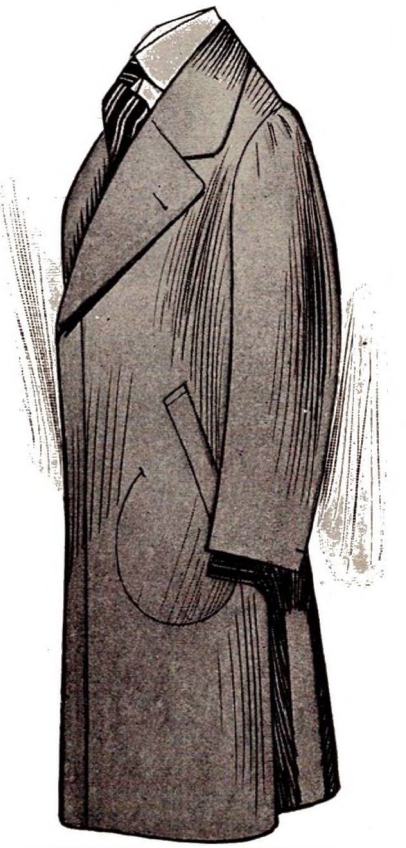
Double-Breasted Autumn Coat and Waistcoat.

Coats are still very high-waisted in the back, as this conduces to make a man seem longer-limbed, and has the look of adding several cubits to his height, a thing for which every young man and many no longer young are keen.

While the fash-

ionable autumn coat is cut without a flare to the skirts, they should yet be a trifle "spready" so as to break gracefully when one sits. This effect is accentuated by the full draping, already described.

Three buttons are usual on the coat, and they are placed close together, with



Autumn Topcoat.

the bottom one as high up as possible to allow the skirts to hang freely and to draw in the waistline.

Waistcoats have collars, many flattened down and others softly rolled. Sometimes the top button is made "to skip"—that is, it is not fastened. This heightens the "loungy" look of the garment, just as having the bottom button "to skip" does.

The elongated points at the bottom of the waistcoat are cut to diverge sharply in the shape of an inverted "V." This causes the garment to form a deep groove at the waistline and the

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20

points to flare out and curl up, as fashion dictates.

Trousers are wider than heretofore, and cut straight down the calf, but not snug. Very narrow trousers are outmoded. Bottom turn-ups are omitted, except on trousers confessedly for sports and the country.

To prevent trousers from "kicking up" behind, as they have an annoying trick of doing, if you are a habitual leg-crosser or have a well-developed calf, they are shaped at the bottom with a forward flare which counteracts the backward pull.

The double-breasted coat, together with the double-breasted waistcoat illustrated here, is "smart" for slender men who are average height or above, but it should not be worn by those below normal stature, as it makes them look undersized and "stubby."

The loose, swishy topcoat with slash pockets, also shown, is a type much in vogue this autumn among men who like a comfortable town or travel coat that does not rumple easily. This is in no sense a "dress-up" coat, but just an all-day, everyday topcoat for rough-and-tumble wear.

Formal topcoats are cut in the Chesterfield shape, with a high-waisted, form-tracing back and full-draped skirts. In truth, the tendency of fashion this season is away from loose overgarments toward those which outline the figure.

Among the "smartest" colors in autumn sack suits are "mahogany brown" and "spinach green," two shades which are self-explanatory. There are many others, of course, but these and variations of them are the most exclusive. To be sure, blue is just as fashionable as ever, and so is gray.

Stripes have been done to death. Small checks and faint plaids are newer, and sometimes plain-color coats accompany check or plaid trousers.

Within the last year Londoners, who set the mode, have befriended different-pattern suits—that is, suits with trousers of a separate design from the coat. This fad is spreading, simply because men are growing tired of the monotony of the one-pattern suit.

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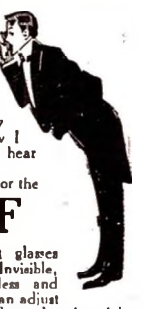

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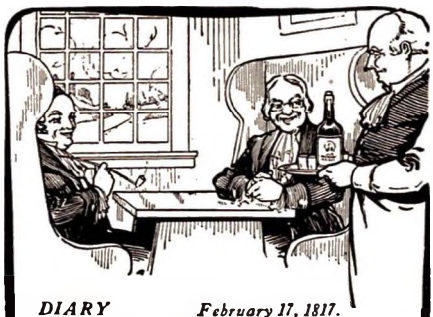

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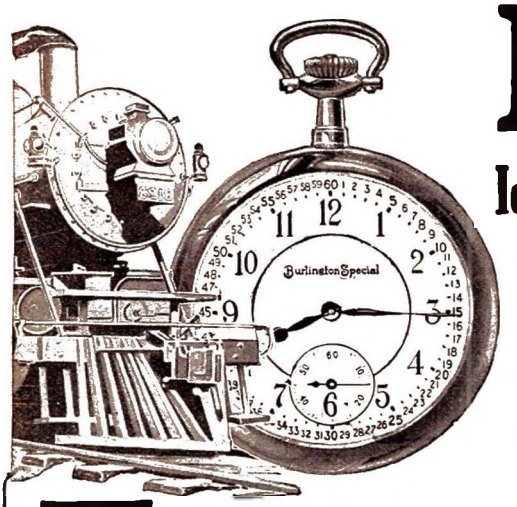

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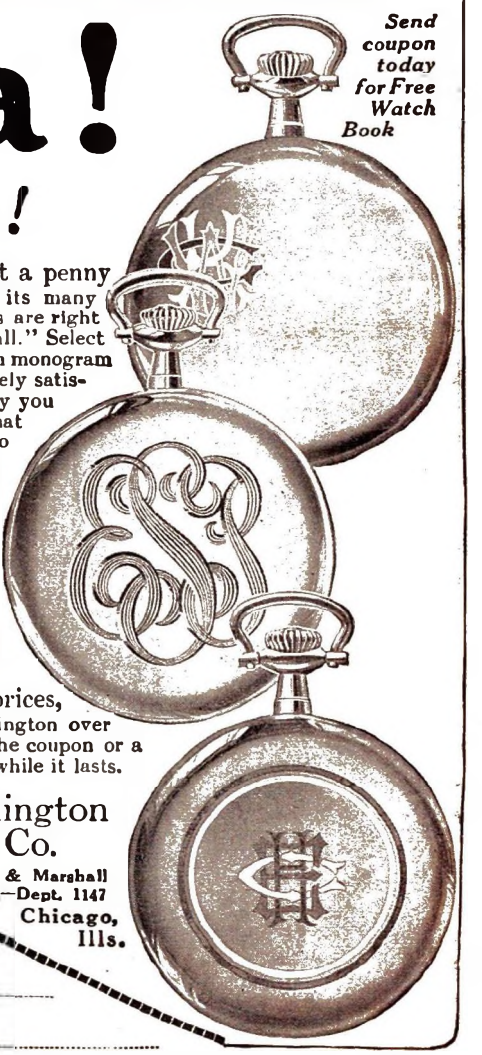

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