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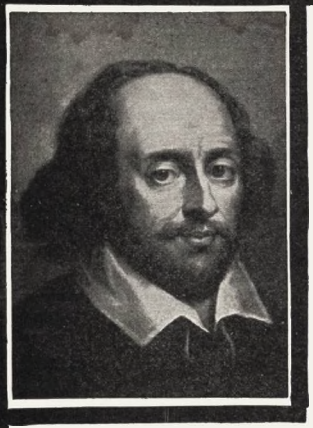

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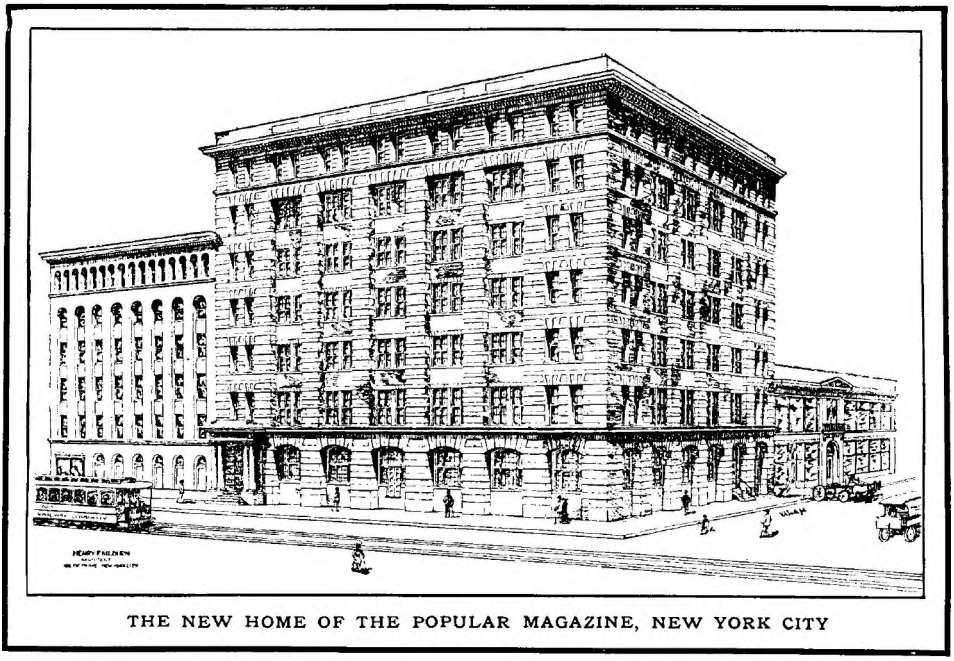


THE NEW HOME OF THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, NEW YORK CITY

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE IN 1905

WITH this number THE POPULAR MAGAZINE practically ends its first year as a magazine of general fiction. Twelve months ago the publication was enlarged to 194 pages, making it the biggest magazine in the whole world and started upon what has since proved to be the most successful year of any publication in the history of magazine circulation.

To-day it is read by almost a half million people—fourteen months ago it was merely an idea. To-day it is, without doubt, the fastest selling publication in the world—a little more than a year ago it was unborn and undreamt of.

To-day you see everywhere, on railroad trains, in clubs, on city trams, in the home, in every city and village of the country, the attractive cover of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE—this same time last year it made its first appearance, and, like all new and untried publications, was buried beneath older contemporaries. This is no magician's dream, but simply cold, plain facts. And the explanation is just as simple.

When THE POPULAR MAGAZINE was planned by the publishers, the policy selected called for no division of labor, no diversity of tasks. It was resolved to do only one thing, and to do that thing as well as a large capital, long experience and personal inclination could permit. It was resolved to publish fiction, the very best that could be obtained. The publishers' instructions to the editors were as simple and direct as the instructions given by the elder Bennett to Stanley when he said, "Find Livingston!" In the case of the editors of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE it was "Find Fiction!" But the command bore the qualification, "the best!"

How well the instructions have been carried out can be found in the fact

that in a little more than one year THE POPULAR MAGAZINE has outstripped in the race for circulation the three long established and high-priced magazines, and is practically neck and neck with many of its contemporaries that have more years to their credit than THE POPULAR MAGAZINE has months.

From this condition can be drawn two conclusions. The great reading public is not only discriminating in its selection of fiction, but also is quick to show its appreciation of a publication giving good value and plenty of it. During the past five years several hundred magazines have been started in this country. A great many suspended publication after three or four months of discouraging efforts to gain a foothold, a number fought it out for a year or two and then gave up the ghost, and a few, a very few, managed to survive. Some of these are published at a loss, the proprietors hoping that some miracle will bring to them a paying share of the reading circulation.

Only one magazine of the hundreds launched during the past five years can be called an assured success.

That magazine is THE POPULAR MAGAZINE!

And THE POPULAR MAGAZINE is the youngest in the field.

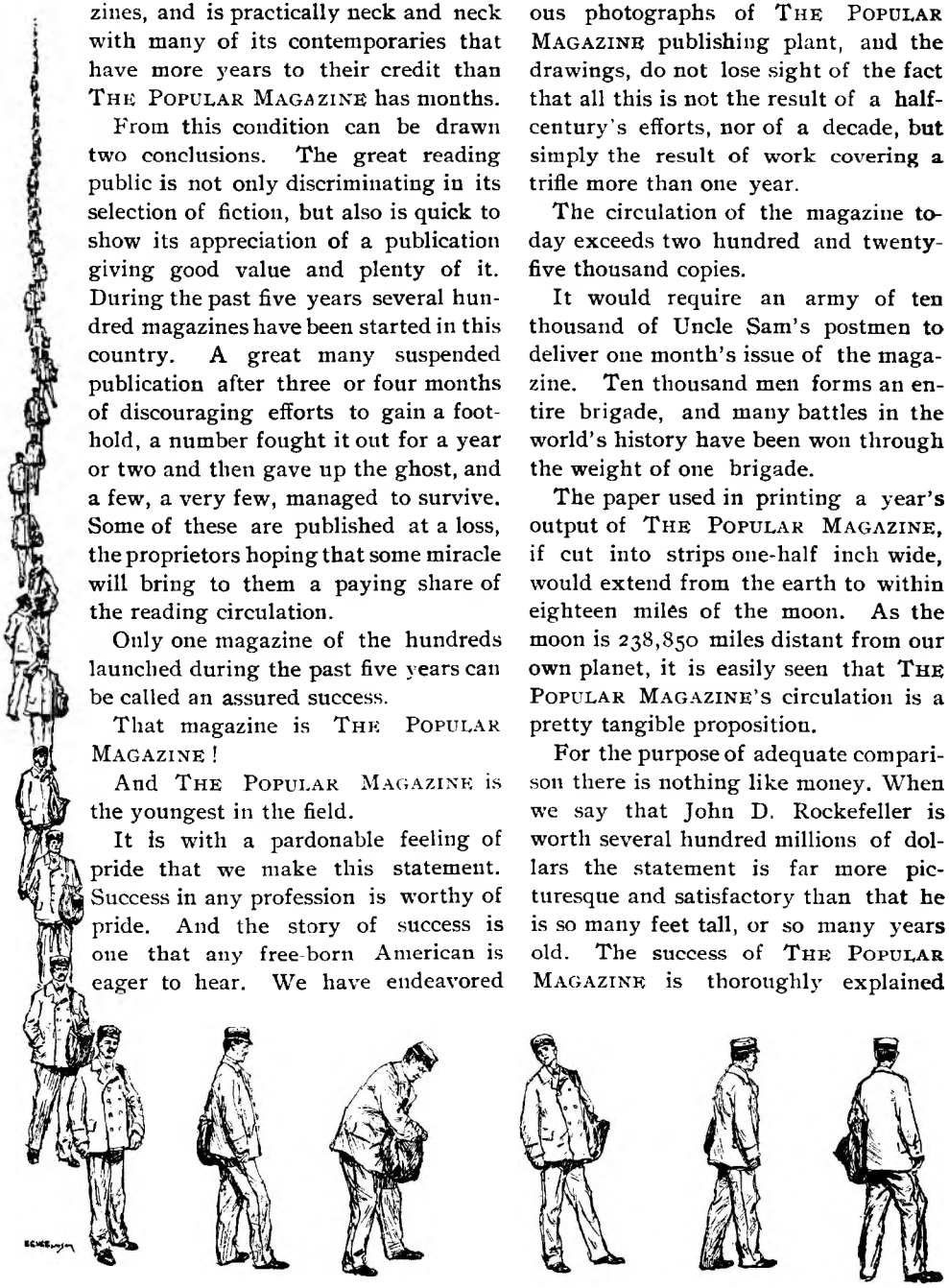
It is with a pardonable feeling of pride that we make this statement. Success in any profession is worthy of pride. And the story of success is one that any free-born American is eager to hear. We have endeavored in the illustrations accompanying this article to show you just what is meant by the success achieved by THE POPULAR MAGAZINE. In viewing the various photographs of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE publishing plant, and the drawings, do not lose sight of the fact that all this is not the result of a half-century's efforts, nor of a decade, but simply the result of work covering a trifle more than one year.

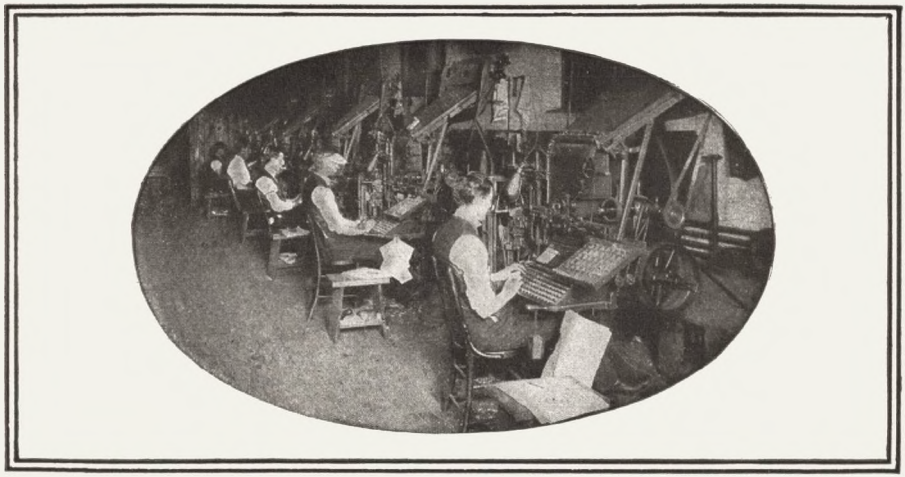
The circulation of the magazine today exceeds two hundred and twenty-five thousand copies.

It would require an army of ten thousand of Uncle Sam's postmen to deliver one month's issue of the magazine. Ten thousand men forms an entire brigade, and many battles in the world's history have been won through the weight of one brigade.

The paper used in printing a year's output of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, if cut into strips one-half inch wide, would extend from the earth to within eighteen miles of the moon. As the moon is 238,850 miles distant from our own planet, it is easily seen that THE POPULAR MAGAZINE'S circulation is a pretty tangible proposition.

For the purpose of adequate comparison there is nothing like money. When we say that John D. Rockefeller is worth several hundred millions of dollars the statement is far more picturesque and satisfactory than that he is so many feet tall, or so many years old. The success of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE is thoroughly explained





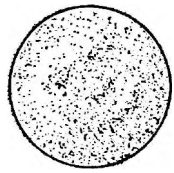
WHERE THE POPULAR STORIES ARE SET UP IN TYPE. A COMPREHENSIVE VIEW OF THE LINOTYPE MACHINES WHICH HAVE TAKEN THE PLACE OF THE FORMER HAND COMPOSITOR.

when we tell you that the money circulated each year because of the magazine's existence, if converted into silver, would make a column one and one-half feet in diameter and twenty-seven feet in height. A part of this represents the cost of getting out the publication, a part what the public is glad to pay for reading it, and it all represents a proposition satisfactory to all concerned.

So much for past performances. All this must be of interest to you as a reader of the publication, but enough has been said on the subject. What we wish to tell you now is about our plans for the coming year. As a preliminary we wish to state that, to the best of our knowledge and belief, no other magazine in the country has expended more money or used greater energy in securing material for the twelve numbers to be published during 1905.

In one feature alone THE POPULAR MAGAZINE has secured what is bound to be the most important serial scheduled for publication in the United States in 1905. This serial, entitled "AYESHA," is the long-looked for sequel to "She," *H. Rider Haggard's* masterpiece, which was the most popular novel of the Nineteenth Century. Since that time, when *Mr. Haggard* awoke to find that his story, "She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed," had made him famous in a single night, he had been importuned by publishers the world over to

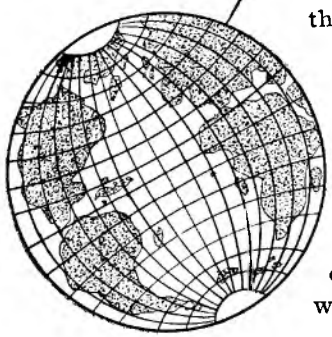
write a sequel. *Mr. Haggard* steadfastly refused until at last, feeling a desire to write something that would serve as the capstone to his remarkable literary career, he produced "Ayesha," the sequel to his best known novel.



The original "She" was read by many millions of people in all parts of the globe. It has been translated into eight languages, and is now one of the most popular novels in the libraries of America and England. The marvellous details of the journey of Horace Holly and Leo Vincey into the mysterious regions of South Africa where dwelt "She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed," the royal queen who, bathed in the flames of the Pillar of Life, had won immortality, are as fresh in the memory of the reading public of to-day as are the happenings of yesterday.

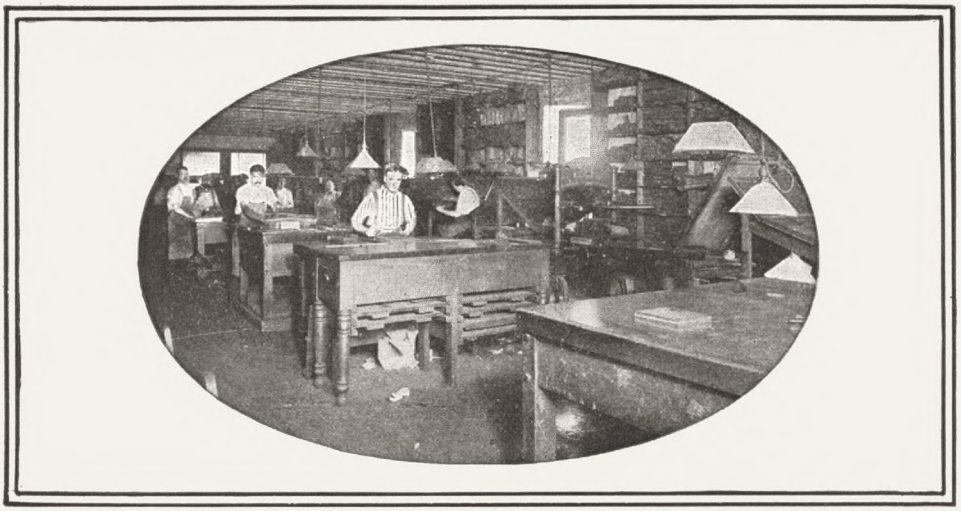
How many have forgotten that culminating scene when "She" bathed again in the Pillar of Life, and in view of her lover, Leo Vincey, dropped in the rose-colored flames her youth and wonderous beauty as one drops a garment from the body? And how many have forgotten "She's" last words, "Forget me not . . . have pity on my shame. I die not. I shall come again and shall once more be beautiful. I swear it—it is true!"

In "Ayesha" is described the reincarnation, and the further adventures of "She" and Leo Vincey and Horace Holly, their devoted friend. As a work of literature it is more mature and even more fascinating than the original book. It is indeed worthy of the talented author, and in presenting it to our readers, we feel that it is a boon for which all of us should be grateful. The first instalment of "Ayesha," fully twenty thousand words, will be published in the January number of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE. The edition will be large, but you may not get a copy — that is, if you fail to bespeak one with your newsdealer.



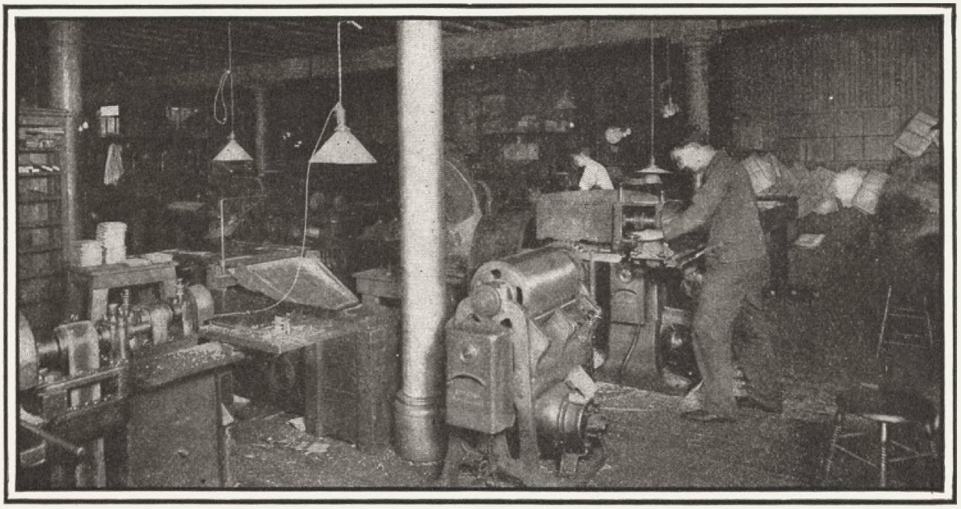
We have also secured for 1905 a serial by *H. G. Wells*, whose work must be familiar to you. His stories, "The War of the Worlds," "The Time Machine," "The Invisible Man," "The Food of the Gods," and "When the Sleeper Wakes," have won him fame wherever the English language is read. In "The Crowning Victory," the first instalment of which will appear in the February number of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, *Mr. Wells* attempts a new field. The story has been highly praised by the English critics who unite in saying that it represents *Mr. Wells* at his best.

The question of the monthly complete novel, which is a characteristic feature of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, caused us considerable anxiety. Those we have previously published have been well received, but for the coming year we wanted to do something different, to exploit some original idea that would be in keeping with our policy of giving not only the best fiction,



A BUSY CORNER IN THE COMPOSING ROOM. IN THIS DEPARTMENT THE POPULAR FORMS ARE MADE UP BEFORE ELECTROTYPING.

but also the most novel. A suggestion came from one of our readers. It was to the effect that a series of twelve complete novels, covering the year, might well be written on the important causes that have made the United States of America the greatest country on earth. The idea fascinated us. We hope we are patriotic, and we feel that our readers revere their country with an undying strength. What is more befitting a publication like THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, than an exposition in fiction of the greatness and glory of our Republic? The series will be written by those who are most capable of handling their particular subject. There will be stories of Wall Street, the army, the navy, diplomacy, railroads, invention, the cattle industry, steel, the press, cotton, etc. The first story in the series, treats of the power of the press, and is by *George Bronson-Howard*, the well-known war corres-

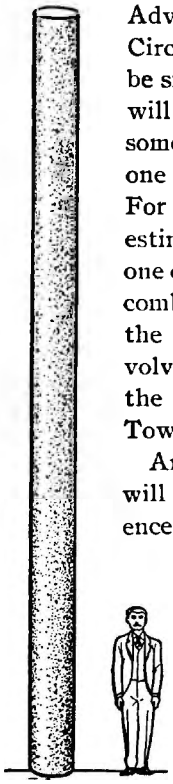


THE ELECTROTYPING FOUNDRY. IN THIS DEPARTMENT THE PLATES ARE MADE FROM WHICH THE POPULAR MAGAZINE IS PRINTED.

pondent who represented a syndicate of London papers in the Orient. It is entitled "The Ruling of the Fourth Estate," and will appear in the January number.

The great success of "Chip of the Flying U," the complete story published in the October issue, causes us to believe that our readers would be glad to see more of the happy family of the "Flying U," ranch. You will be delighted to learn that the author, *B. M. Bower*, has consented to write for THE POPULAR MAGAZINE a series of short stories describing the pranks and adventures of "Chip," and "Weary," and the rest of the cowboys. The January number will contain the first instalment of a two-part story entitled "The Lonesome Trail"

We believe we can safely promise something new in fiction in a series of complete short stories scheduled for 1905 under the general title of "The Adventures of an American Circus Abroad." There will be six of the stories and each will relate the adventure of some member of the circus in one of the European cities. For instance, it will be interesting to read of what befell one of the clowns in the catacombs of Rome, and also how the ring master became involved in an attempt to steal the Traitor's Gate from the Tower of London.



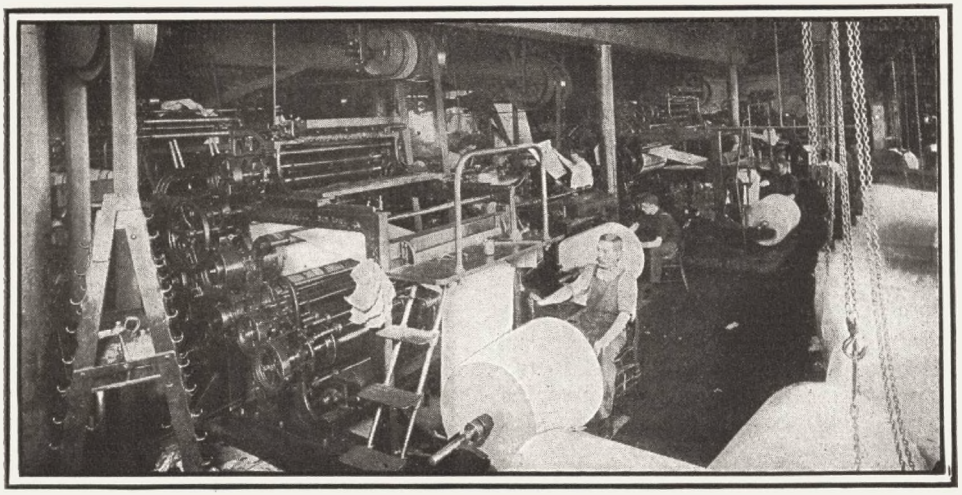
Another interesting series will be based on the experiences of a secret agent of the State Department at Washington. Questions involving the peace of the world, and some of the greatest of international mysteries, will form the subjects of the various stories. The first of the series, appearing in an early number, will reveal a part of the unwritten history of the Panama Canal conspiracy.

The POPULAR features of the previous year, such as the "Below the Dead Line" stories, and "Romances of the Race Course," will continue throughout 1905. *Mr. Scott Campbell*, author of the "Below the Dead Line" series, has planned even greater triumphs for his picturesque hero, "Felix Boyd," and the duel of wits between that astute detective and the mysterious "Big Finger" will furnish material for many more engrossing stories.

The real actors in the comedies and the tragedies of life generally scoff at the counterfeit scenes in fiction, but *Mr. Charles Steinfort Pearson* has so skillfully portrayed the imagery of racing in his "Romances of the Race Course" that the men intimately connected with the paddock and the track are his warmest admirers. *Mr. Pearson* is now at work on a new series of racing stories for publication during the Spring and Summer of the coming year.

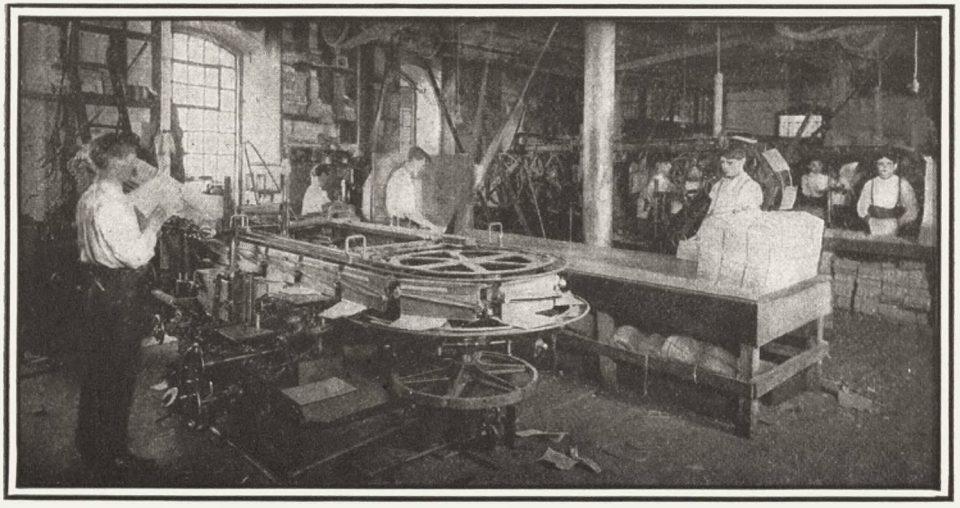
Genuine humor is as necessary to the successful magazine containing general fiction as ink is to a printer. The selection of humor is one of the hardest tasks in the editorial day's work. It is easy enough to find so-called "funny" stories, but THE POPULAR MAGAZINE does not intend to publish that class of material. In this month's issue will be found a story entitled "The Sea Serpent Syndicate," by *E. Jack Appleton*. In our opinion it is genuinely humorous, and we have asked *Mr. Appleton* to contribute more of the same kind. Several other humorists are hard at work for the magazine, and you can expect the proper seasoning of fun in coming numbers of the POPULAR.

During 1905 the POPULAR covers will receive careful attention. We feel that the external appearance of a well-



A VIEW OF THE POPULAR MAGAZINE PRESS ROOM. THE MASS OF INTRICATE MACHINERY SHOWN HEREWITH IS NECESSARY FOR THE PRINTING OF THE POPULAR'S LARGE CIRCULATION.

conducted publication should, at least, equal the contents in attractiveness. The question of a permanent cover design for the POPULAR has been exhaustively discussed by our readers through the medium of a Prize Criticism Contest, and the consensus of opinion is that a change of cover each month is preferable. We quite agree with the decision. A permanent cover design, no matter how attractive, becomes monotonous in time. A change of cover each month, although it adds materially to the cost of publishing, offers the reader a continuous series of art designs. This fact is recognised by the majority of American publications. *Harper's Magazine*, for instance, which for more than a quarter of a century, appeared in the same outward dress, now comes forth with a new design each issue. The cover of the January POPU-



WHERE THE POPULAR MAGAZINE IS BOUND. IN THE FOREGROUND IS SHOWN A MODERN COVER MACHINE WITH A BINDING CAPACITY OF 1600 COPIES AN HOUR.

LAR MAGAZINE will show marked improvement over previous numbers. The design is the work of a well-known American artist famed for his skill in drawing the feminine face beautiful. The subject selected is that of "Ayesha," the heroine in *H. Rider Haggard's* notable sequel to "She."

The question of prize contests is one that demands serious consideration. It is no part of our policy to offer prizes in unattractive or commonplace contests. Our aim will be to conduct legitimate competitions of real value to both the reader and to ourselves. The Criticism Contest recently concluded has proved of great benefit to all concerned. The average of intelligent replies received was high, and the magazine to-day is practically conducted along lines suggested by our readers in that contest. This is as it should be. It is only sound common sense to endeavor to give the reading public what it wants. And who can tell better what he wants than the person who looks to THE POPULAR MAGAZINE for his entertainment.

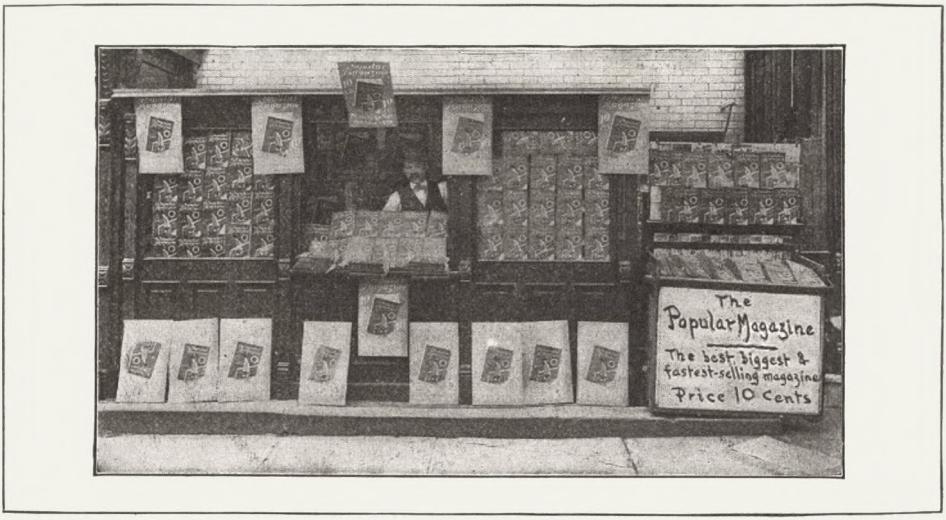
A great many more pages could be devoted to a description of our plans for next year, but we believe we have laid before you a very appetising menu as it is. The list of serial stories is particularly strong. Besides those already mentioned there will be serials by *Arthur W. Marchmont*, *Max Pemberton*, *Louis Joseph Vance*, *Richard Marsh*, *Fred M. White*, *Louis Tracy*, *Charles Carey*, *Andrew Comstock McKenzie*, *St. George Rathborne*, *William Murray Graydon*, *Arthur Morrison*, *Burford Delannoy*, *E. Philipps Oppenheim*, and many others.

As we have previously indicated in this announcement, the complete novel will be given adequate prominence. The authors already scheduled for this class of material include *Morgan Robertson*, whose intensely interesting tales of the sea have established him at the head of living American writers of sea stories, *Francis Lynde*, the author of "The Grafters," and "The Master of Appleby," *George Bronson-Howard*, war correspondent and journalist, *W. Beall Baldwin*, *George Parsons Bradford*, and *Henry Harrison Lewis*.

Short stories, selected according to the "POPULAR" standard, will form a prominent part of the contents of each number as usual.

There will be short stories by *Lieutenant-Commander Albert Gleaves*, *U. S. N.*, *O. Henry*, *Rex C. Beach*, *Charles Battell Loomis*, *Henry C. Rowland*, *Robert Mackay*, *Arthur Dudley Hall*, *Frank N. Stratton*, *Scott Campbell*, *B. M. Bower*, and innumerable others.

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE in 1905 will continue to be the biggest and fastest selling magazine in the world, and it will be sold at ten cents the copy.



"POPULAR DAY." A SCENE AT ONE OF THE 16,000 NEWS-STANDS HANDLING THE POPULAR MAGAZINE.

LIST of PRIZE WINNERS

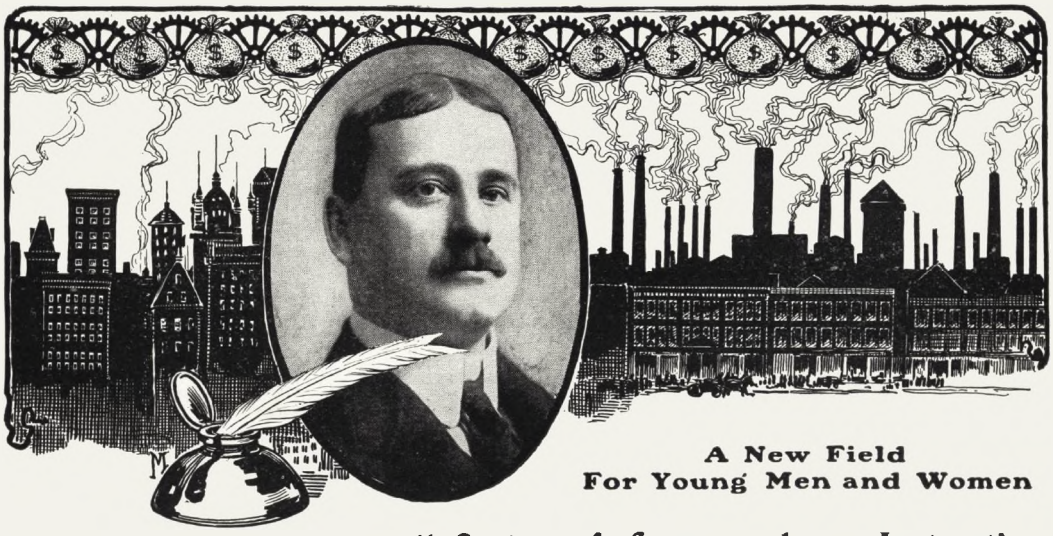
OCTOBER POPULAR CRITICISM CONTEST

FIRST PRIZE, $25.00 CASH—J. Philip Van Kirk, New York City.
SECOND PRIZE, $15.00 CASH—A. F. Chambers, Meridian, Miss.
THIRD PRIZE, $5.00 CASH—Mrs. A. Hallencrentz, Junction City, Kan.
FOURTH PRIZE, $5.00 CASH—Lester W. Herzog, Albany, N. Y.

FOR THE 200 NEXT BEST ANSWERS, 200 CLOTH BOUND BOOKS:

Chas. H. Eyles, W. Phila., Pa.
T. T. Conson, Altoona, Pa.
T.J.D.Clark, Throopsville, N.Y.
J. M. Jacobs, Milwaukee, Wis.
F. H. James, N. Y. City
J. C. Stevenson, Escanaba,Mich.
J. M. Myers, Jackson, Mich.
W. C. Rickard, Alliance, O.
E. Brown, Laredo, Tex.
S. Wilburn, Decatur, Ga.
E. Robertson, Ft. Crook, Neb.
C. C. Cousins, Montreal, Quebec
G. Abraham, Natchez, Miss.
L. Finlay, Brooklyn, N. Y.
T. A. Mason, Lancaster, Pa.
E. V. Musselman, St. Paris, O.
M. T. Nute, Troy, N. Y.
H. C. Clark, Coldwater, Mich.
John A. Dame, Jersey City, N.J.
Clifford Trembly, St.Paul,Minn.
W. N. Taft, M.D., Baltimore,Md.
Mattie Carr, Clinton, Iowa
A. L. Eggert, St. Paul, Minn.
M. E. Smith, Eagle Grove, Iowa
Wm. Gall, Clinton Corners,N.Y.
J. B. Sager, Clyde, Kan.
W. J. Miller, Des Moines, Iowa
F. H. Richardson, Boston, Mass.
G. A. Schuldt, Washington,D.C.
Mrs.K.M.Scott, Gr. Forks, N.D.
F. A. Buschman, Baltimore, Md.
W. G. Staunton, Canton, O.
V. A. Young, Charles City, Iowa
H. M. Ingalls, Worcester, Mass.
Miss M. K. Eldridge, Aldan, Pa.
Kent Knowlton, Boston, Mass.
A. R. Graser, Wissahickon, Pa.
C. E. Anderson, Toledo, Ohio
Geo. D. Fackler, Winnipeg,Man.
H. D. Howard, Pittsburg, Pa.
Miss May O'Gorman, N. Y. City
Miss V. Miller, Nanticoke,Pa.
A. H. Bayley, Montreal, Que.
Adrian Moss, Yonkers, N. Y.
Mrs. F. C. Smith, Atlanta, Ga.
Fred'k C. Brown, Brooklyn,N.Y.
C. W. Kennedy, Coaticook, Que.
R. A. Anderson, J'ksonville,Fla.
W. B. Hanna, Dorchester,Mass.
F.A.Makepeace, Brockton,Mass.
Mrs. R. H. Robinson, Middleburgh, N. Y.
P. S. Durgin, Westerly, R. I.
A. J. Faul, Philadelphia, Pa.
R.W.Hawkins, M.D., Brazil,Ind.
Will Salts, Corydon, Ind.
R. L. Sutton, Washington, D.C.
W. L. McCrea, Guelph, Ont.
W. F. Dwyer, Philadelphia, Pa.
Norman B. Hicks, Toronto, Ont.
J. R. Stafford, Jamestown, N.Y.
J. V. Vautier, Montreal, Can.
W. G. Adams, Burton, Wash.
Claude Hagan, Pittsburg, Pa.
Mrs. L. C. Alcutt, Trenton, N.J.
Miss G. Dilworth, Vermont, Ill.
True Hewitt, Williamsburg, Pa.
F. M. Bailey, Clinton, Iowa
Geo. L. Balsley, Smithville, Mo.
Mrs.L.Butterweck, Cov'gton,Ky.
Mrs.Maj.P.Dale, Indi'polis,Ind.
C. J. Bochner, W. Orange, N. J.
M. K. Theobald, St.Mary's,W.V.
T. C. Gentry, Kansas City, Mo.
H. R. Surles, Webster, Mass.
J. W. MacNider, N. Y. City
John F. Kirby, Pittsburg, Pa.
Craig Walker, Greenville, Mich.
C. E. Patterson, Bloomfield,N.J.
Aug. Seisse, Philadelphia, Pa.
Roland H. Seay, Lynchburg, Va.
M. V. A. Smith, Tacoma, Wash.
M.G.Wheeler, Springfield, Mass.
Mrs. L.A.Fretz, Revelstoke,B.C.
W.D.W.Stanford, Elizabeth,N.J.
W.H.Baldwin, Toronto Jc.,Ont.
May Tedrow, Galena, Kan.
F. F. Reiner, Cripple Creek,Col.
L.R.Durtzbaugh, Frederick,Md.
Elmo Marshall, Guelph, Ont.
August Pfaff, Middletown, N. Y.
Geo. Edwards, Hibbing, Minn.
L. R. Martin, Monmouth, Ill.
Louis Schmidt, Union, N. J.
August Niewall, Toledo, Ohio
H.P.Crawford, Greenwich,Conn.
Wm. G. Rehhan, Brooklyn,N.Y.
L. M. Smith, Marion, Ind.
W. J. Robertson, Toronto, Ont.
A. H. Silver, Jr., Red Lion, Del.
H. George, Markham, Cal.
E. G. Grupe, Brooklyn, N. Y.
J. P. Greene, Columbus, Ga.
W. L. Hawk, Trenton, N. J.
M. Waters, Lincoln, Minn.
F. H. Ridley, Bowling Green, O.
G. A. Tiffany, Milwaukee, Wis.
B. A. Wentworth, Boston, Mass.
F. A. Sparks, Cimarron, Kan.
W. G. Bertram, Brooklyn, N. Y.
W. P. McSweeney, N. Y. City
A.E.Buchenberg, Mar'burg,W.V.
W. H. Ward, Springfield, Mo.
J. W. McGurk, Philadelphia,Pa.
J. Jordan, San Francisco, Cal.
M. D. Lannan, Wilmington, Del.
E. W. Swezly, Brooklyn, N. Y.
T. C. Cross, Pittsburg, Pa.
E. J. Pegram, New York City
C. M. Agard, Danbury, Conn.
G. C. Hart, Sag Harbor, N. Y.
H. J. Brown, Norfolk, Va.
F. M. Haskell, Toronto, Ont.
L. Bell, Buffalo. N. Y.
J. S. Hitchcock, Lansing, Mich.
H. Sampson, Springfield, Mass.
L. E. Cuthbert, Toronto, Can.
E. Ludden, Schenectady, N. Y.
S. Stalberg, Philadelphia, Pa.
J. H. Van Dewark, Jr., Andover, Mass.
M.H.Humtble, NewHaven,Conn.
J. H. Doane, Toronto, Ont.
R. M. Drew, Geneva, Ind.
H.E.Williams, Minn'polis,Minn.
H. W. Turner, Lahaska, Pa.
H. G. Murphy, Lynchburg, Ohio
F. H. McCann, Boston, Mass.
E. B. Kealing, Irvington, Ind.
J. Popp, Harvey, Ill.
L. C. Bowling, Albany, N. Y.
W.P.Hopkins, Bridgeport,Conn.
A. L. Porter, Scottdale, Pa.
A. Isherwood, Almonte, Ont.
J. W. Neff, Cumberland, Md.
G. Fulton, Port Carling, Ont.
J. K. Beardwood, Montreal,Can.
J. H. Mann, Milford, Mass.
R. L. Long, Boston, Mass.
L. J. Burdock, Bridgeport,Conn.
T. R. DeVoe, Trenton, N. J.
G. A. Rhodes, Binghamton, N.Y.
V. S. Slocomb, Wakefield, Mass.
C. McAfee, Puxantauney, Pa.
G. P. Thompson, N. Orleans,La.
L. J. Spinks, Lucile, Miss.
S. G. Waitwell, Cleveland, O.
E. E. Salisbury, Moosup, Conn.
M. K. Stead, Halifax, N. S.
M. E. Williams, Bellefonte, Pa.
L. L. Reynolds, Boston. Mass.
H. Bly, Pittsburg, Pa.
G. S. Brown, New York City
W.J.Weaver, Reynoldsville,Pa.
A. Berrisford, Columbia, S. C.
M. B. Lester, Mystic, Conn.
H. C. Pearson, Concord, N. H.
L. Carde, Apponaugh, R. I.
J. P. Boyle, Philadelphia, Pa.
K. C. Batch, Winnipeg, Man.
S. E. Allgood, Lucas, Kan.
J. E. Royce, Chicago. Ill.
M. P. Hite, Cincinnati, Ohio
G. Mapes, Detroit, Mich.
P. C. Schools, Pullman, Wash.
E. P. Alton, Groton. Conn.
L. B. Marwin, Hamilton, Ohio
R. F. Simmons, Butte, Mont.
L. Burkle, Hoboken, N. J.
M. Boyd, Marshall, Miss.
G. Delaney, Omaha, Neb.
H. B. Chacee, Lewiston, N. Y.
L. Pleasants, New Orleans. La.
E. F. Harrington, Newark, N. J.
F. Emerich, Chevy Chase, Md.
J. A. Fullagan, Newburgh, N.Y.
E. Bundrick, Minneapolis, Minn.
F. M. Wilks, Woodland. Cal.
J. M. Lamont, Upper Alton, Ill.
F. Bognall, Burlington. Vt.
N. Howe, Fall River, Mass.
D. R. Winn, McAlester, I. T.
F. N. Horton, Ingersoll, Ont.
Alfred Hyslop, Pullman, Wash.
C. S. Stowell, Yankton. Ore.
Albert L. Swapp, Seattle, Wash.
Wm. Fahnestock, Cohoes. N. Y.
C. W. Goodrich, Milford, Texas
F. R. Estabrook, Detroit, Mich.
G.L.P.Chambers, Phoenix,Ariz.
E. R. Mencel, Milwaukee, Wis.

Advertising Writing as a Money-Making Business



A New Field For Young Men and Women

Great Success of the Powell System of Correspondence Instruction

From Clerkships and Mechanics to Advertising Managers—From Small Salaries to $1,200—$6,000 a Year

By GEORGE H. POWELL

THE unbounded interest that is to-day being manifested in the science and practice of modern advertising is due to a revolution in merchandising methods.

This wonderful revolution began only a few short years ago, and it has accomplished so much lasting good that manufacturers and merchants in large and small places alike are now fully awake as to future possibilities, and are therefore seeking in every way to profit by more and better advertising.

POPULAR MAGAZINE readers have for the most part noted the vast increase in the advertising carried in the magazines and local papers, but probably comparatively few have given much thought to that phase which means the employment of an army of young men and women as writers of advertising at good salaries.

And as long as America continues to expand commercially—as long as new capital finds investment in new enterprises—just so long will the demand for trained ad. writers increase.

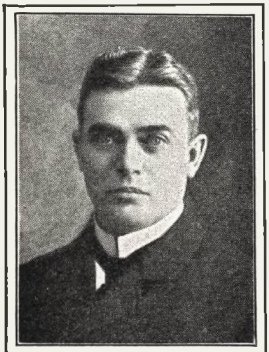
Notwithstanding the fact that scores of ad. writers have been trained to fill high salaried positions, yet the demand for GOOD ad men and women cannot be met—a condition that must of necessity exist for years to come.

Several years ago, when I established the Powell System of instruction, I did so at the suggestion of noted advertising men who saw the need of really expert teaching, and it is my purpose to touch upon the results achieved by former students and briefly point out why I have been so successful.

This may mean everything to those who have common school educations and a real determination to win the big prizes offered in the greatest business of the twentieth century—

to those who wish to qualify for positions from $25.00 to $100.00 a week and more.

I am probably safely within facts when I say that no other business can be so thoroughly and satisfactorily taught by correspondence as advertising writing. I am also equally truthful in saying that the Powell System is in a class by itself—in its conception of possibilities, in its completeness and simplicity, and in its unquestioned superiority in developing those who begin without previous knowledge of advertising.



H. J. COTTRELL
Advertising Manager
WAYNE KNITTING MILLS

From Work Bench to Ad. Desk

FORT WAYNE, IND.,
March 26, 1914.

"I can conceive of no way in which a young man can advance himself so rapidly as through a course in the George H. Powell School of Advertising.

"One year ago I was a mechanic working at the bench—to-day I am Advertising Manager of the Wayne Knitting Mills at a salary **more than double** that of a mechanic."—H. J. COTTRELL.

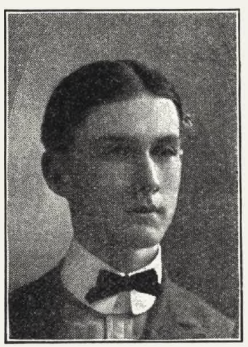
Mr. Cottrell writes from St. Louis, Sept. 25: "Have been awarded First Gold Medal for Wayne Knitting Mills products, and First Silver Medal for my managing. Have 508 new customers to my credit—more coming every day. Thanks to the Powell System."

Many have written me saying: "I read of so many prominent advertising experts who endorse your System; I have never had experience." Now, while I have possibly received far more testimonials from now noted ad writers than all other advertising instructors combined, yet every one of my stanch supporters began as a Powell student with only a keen, bright mind and a desire to be somebody—and my instruction is designed to appeal only to this class.

Two of my former students have been for some time employed in the largest advertising agency in America; another is manager of a leading advertising agency in Buffalo, and his employers personally wrote me a cordial letter of public endorsement. One student went to St. Louis about a year ago as assistant advertising manager in the largest jewelry house, and three months later was promoted to the full managership, where he has given absolute satisfaction, and after some twenty others had been tried and discharged. What more splendid endorsement could I offer in support of the Powell System?

Mr. H. J. Cottrell and Mr. L. R. May, two former Powell students, whose portraits appear herewith, are further examples of the great results achieved through the Powell System, and what they have to say to bright young men and women who are thinking of taking up the study of ad. writing will be of interest.

In connection with the increasing demand for good advertising writers I may mention one of the many requests from the publisher of a leading Louisville, Ky., daily paper, whose letter has just been laid before me. He says: "Will you not kindly put us in touch with a competent person to take charge of the advertising department of a progressive Louisville dry goods house? This house is now paying $100.00 a month for **inefficient** service." I shall make good the deficiency; but the point is plain that the scarcity of properly trained ad. writers is as much in evidence to-day as during any previous year. Every state is experiencing the same trouble, hence the golden opportunities for the deserving.



L. R. MAY
Advertising Department
EARTHMAN BUSINESS COLLEGE
WHITEWRIGHT, TEXAS

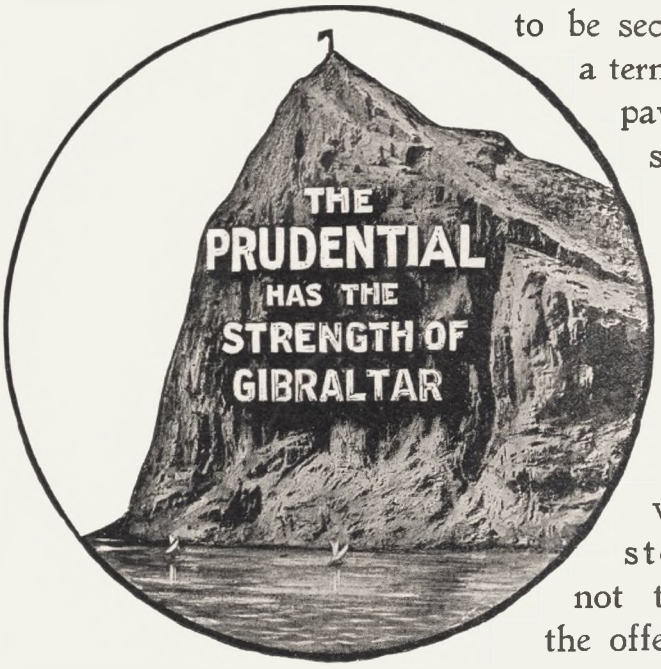
Mr. May is scarcely through his work in the Powell System, yet he has for some time been earning the equivalent of a salary by writing ads. for local advertisers. He has just been made Acting Advertising Manager of the Earthman Business College, and will doubtless soon be made chief. He adds in his last letter: "The Powell System from the very beginning was interesting and **you have fulfilled your promise to the letter.** I will never hesitate one moment in referring your course to anyone as the **best.**"

I have published an elegant prospectus that I shall be glad to mail free to POPULAR MAGAZINE readers who are interested. It is the most entertaining work of its kind ever published, and is valuable both to those looking for more salary and business men looking for more business.

Simply address me

GEORGE H. POWELL, 1388 Temple Court, New York

Suppose a National Bank Offered to Set Aside a Sum of Money for You



to be secured at the end of a term of years upon the payment of small instalments, and with the guarantee that the whole sum should go to your heirs in case of your death before that time, when your payments would immediately stop! Would you not take advantage of the offer?

This is Precisely What

THE PRUDENTIAL

Offers You, With Dividends Guaranteed

Through its Popular Endowment Policies. They are worth your immediate investigation.

The Prudential Insurance Company of America

JOHN F. DRYDEN, Pres't

Home Office, Newark, N. J.

SEND THIS COUPON

Without committing myself to any action, I shall be glad to receive, free, particulars and rates of Endowment Policies.

For.....

Name.....*Age*.....

Address.....

Occupation.....*Dept. 95*

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. III. DECEMBER, 1904. No. 2.

THE KEEPER OF THE KEYS

BY W. BEALL BALDWIN

Author of "The Dynamo Plot," "The Golden Ibis," Etc.

The story of a Western fruit ranch and of an Eastern man who fights for his own

(***A Complete Story***)

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN THEY DIDN'T KNOW.

THE conductor, slouching listlessly through the car, became aware that Rand was sleeping. He stopped in front of the young man's section and regarded him abstractedly with weary, kindly eyes that were lined about with deep, dusty wrinkles.

"I jes' naturally hates to disturb him," he remarked, softly, to himself alone; "but——"

He glanced at his watch. "Haff 'n hour," he observed, and sat himself down familiarly on the arm of the seat.

Rand roused with the man's voice in his ears. "Hello!" he said, drowsily. "What's that?"

The conductor repeated his question: "Y'u want t' git off at Hydrant, stranger?"

"Eh-yah!" yawned Rand, knuckling his eyes and stretching himself luxuriously. "Yes, I do," he announced, with more firmness in his tone.

"Dern' lucky I remembered ye. Hydrant's nothin' but a flag station. This hyah train don't stop there, less'n it's flagged, or to let off a passenger. Better git ready, m' friend."

"Thank you," said Rand. The conductor produced a plug of tobacco, seemed about to speak, changed his mind, bit off a mouthful, and moved on, his jaws working ruminatively.

Rand looked out of the window, sighing. The desert still unrolled its haze-veiled distances with insistent monotony. Its sands streaked past as if to them there was no end. Rand remembered that, in the early morning, they had been gray and cool looking; now they were a blazing yellow, their vast expanses broken only by orderly arranged growths of cactus and greasewood; or, perhaps, by a distant outcropping of rock, its outline jagged and all a-quiver in the dancing heat.

In his turn, the young man consulted his watch. "Half-past two," he said, aloud. "That gives me half an hour wherein to array my person in purple and fine linen."

He rummaged about in the interior of a battered suit case, fairly plastered with labels, and found his collars; with one of which and a soap case he made his way, swaying to the rocking of the train, up to the lavatory. Here he swabbed the alkali dust from his face and neck and hands with lukewarm water; and presently it was a very immaculate young man, considering the hardships of a journey across the Mojave Desert, who was waiting for his train to slow down and let him off at Hydrant.

The minutes lagged on as though time itself had become enervated by the unremitting fervor of the sun. Rand caught himself nodding, and discovered himself in a state of mind strangely apathetic. It was as though he were waking from a dream that he found himself, with a sensation of abruptness, standing on a rude board platform, his trunks at his side and the desolate world wide before him.

But as the Southwestern Limited, flaunting a plume-like tail of dust, racked and pounded away into the glaring west, until at length it became a mere, vibrating blur in the distance, Rand saw that he was not utterly alone.

Hydrant, he concluded, was a grim, desert jest. It was nothing more nor less than a rickety stage of sun-warped planks, set down with apparent aimlessness in the midst of a howling wilderness of sand and cactus and greasewood and prickly pear. On the one hand some misguided railway expert had caused to be set up a water tank; there being no water within a radius of many miles, it reared its gaunt, hideous head in piteous appeal to a sky of brass—a mockery as hollow as the nomenclature of the place.

But on the other hand, there lay some few hundred feet of siding, whereon were several freight cars. A wagon drawn by a team of disconsolate mules, and loaded with oblong boxes, stood by one open door. Three men had been transferring the boxes to the car, but at the unexpected advent of this stranger—this astonishingly speckless apparition from the effete East—they had paused to give to Rand their undivided attention.

Rand looked away from them, a ghost of a frown gathering between his level brows. His eyes sought the southern horizon—a line of white light—beneath which, he knew, lay Nampa and the ranches in the green of their growing lemon trees. From his feet, almost, a gray and dusty road stretched due south, straight as a ribbon laid across the desert growth. That was to be his road, Rand knew; but he had not counted upon finding such a total lack of accommodation at Hydrant; he had expected that some mode of transportation would be forthcoming upon demand. Otherwise, he would have telegraphed.

Rand's frown deepened. Was he to be forced to abandon his cherished project, his scheme of a surprise?

One of the men on the wagon sat himself down and began to swing his legs nonchalantly over the side. He considered Rand deliberately and finally yelled at him:

"Hi, there, stranger!"

Rand took his gaze from the dusty road with its border of telegraph poles and nodded to the man. At the same time his face brightened. For he had overlooked the cayuse which was languishing near the furthermost of the freight cars—a depressed animal whose ears drooped in keeping with the reins which had been carelessly thrown over its head.

"Hello!" said Rand, pleasantly. He stepped down from the platform, plunging ankle-deep in powdery dust through which he plowed over to the wagon. "Where's Nampa?" he asked, smiling broadly.

"Y'u want to go there?"

"I did," Rand confessed.

The speaker jerked his thumb vaguely to the southward. "Thar's the road, stranger," he told Rand. "Jes' step along lively, and ye'll git thar about sundown. It's about fifteen mile."

His companions laughed joyously, and Rand joined them. "I want to find a man named Wheelock," he suggested. "Any of you know him?"

This gained him their sober interest.

"Wheelock?" repeated he who had first spoken. "Know Wheelock? Y'u mean the manager of Rand's ranch? Seems to me we're some acquainted with him. We works under him."

"That so?" said Rand. "Then, I presume, these are Rand's lemons?" He nodded toward the oblong, wooden boxes.

"Y'u presoom correct, stranger. If y'u want t' wait 'round till we're quit of this job, I calculate we c'n drive y'u over."

"Well," Rand suggested, "I'm in something of a hurry, and I was wondering if I could hire your cayuse. I'll pay you five dollars——"

But it developed that he was addressing the owner of the animal, who told him, with exceeding affability and a wave of his hand: "Take him right along, stranger, and it won't cost y'u nothin', neither. I'd jes' as leave drive back, m'self."

"Thank you," Rand said. "And—would it be too much to ask you to carry my baggage over to the ranch?"

"Cert'nly not, stranger. Proud to accommodate y'u."

"I'm greatly obliged to you." Rand strolled over to the cayuse, caught the bridle, threw it over the animal's neck and mounted with a careless ease that won the owner's admiration.

"He kin ride," announced the man to his comrades.

Rand reined in by the wagon's side. "Follow the road, I suppose?"

"Straight ez a string, stranger. Y'u come to Nampa, 'n' anybody'll tell y'u whar Rand's ranch is. S' long."

"So long."

"I say—stranger!"

Rand turned in his saddle.

"Mought I ask yer name?"

"Certainly." The young man smiled; they couldn't head him off now. "I'm Rand," he explained, and struck the road at a rapid lope.

The men whom he had left gasped with amazement, the owner of the cayuse exhibiting particular affliction. "I'm damned!" he complained; and then, more cheerfully: "Damned ef I'd want t' be in Wheelock's shoes this night!"

CHAPTER II.

BY THE ROADSIDE.

A similar thought may have been in Rand's mind. As he rode on, more sedately when once he had left the siding a few hundred yards in the rear, a grimly satisfied look showed upon his face—a smile of sinister sweetness.

Dropping the reins upon the neck of the cayuse, he permitted the animal to make its own pace; the heat, indeed, was so oppressively intense as to preclude any idea of rapid motion. For Rand's part, he was content to pull down over his brows the rakish Panama he affected, and ride on with bowed head, his eyes half closed, deep in a profound pondering of the imminent.

With his hands crossed idly upon the pommel, he slouched in the saddle; a long-limbed, well-knit figure of a man, impressive with its suggestion of intense, well-conserved, latent force. The bedrock truth upon which his character was builded was apparent almost to the casual glance—in the serious businesses of life Rand wasted no energy; he waited patiently, holding his temper, striking only when the time came, and then striking but once.

His eyes were gray and keen and clear—the eyes of a man who has accustomed himself to the wide, free skies of the open spaces. His face was deep-bronzed and clean of line. One looked into it and straightway understood that the exceeding nicety of Rand's attire was an idiosyncrasy, not a weakness.

In time he became aware that Hydrant lay in a cup-shaped hollow in the plain; or, rather, in a saucer-like depression, up to one rim of which the pony was gradually carrying him. Slowly the distant peaks rose, rugged and white with eternal snows, against the brilliant yellow of the sky to the south and west.

Presently he topped the rise and commenced an infinitely gradual descent into the Nampa Valley. And now, though still the mesquit and the yucca and the gray sage brushed his horse's flanks, and though still the dreadful silence of the desert dinned into his ears

its soundless, inarticulate menace, Rand could see afar the wilderness blossoming as a rose.

The community of Nampa was spreading out its treasures beneath his gaze. Rand surveyed its formal arrangement, as though a checkerboard had been opened before him—its vast orchards, wherein the trees were set out with a geometrical exactness, its bordering fields of alfalfa, its garden plots—all green with the healthy, wholesome green of nature, and all wrested from the greedy clutch of the desert by main strength.

Even at the distance, so clear and still was the evening air, the man could see the gigantic water pipe which, running down from the Nampa reservoir in the heart of the looming San Bernardino range, had made possible by irrigation this miracle of fertility in a place of barrenness.

Rand nodded his head amiably, in evident satisfaction at the sight, and clucked to the cayuse, whose wilted spirits, now reviving at the prospect of forage and water and a night's rest, caused it to get onward with expedition.

The purple shadows of the hills stole across the landscape, shrouding alike in clear obscurity the desert and the cultivated lands. Rand rode on and passed into the heart of it. A barely perceptible coolness became apparent in the atmosphere. Beyond the hills the sky flamed gorgeously, crimson and scarlet and sapphire, yellow and blue. The last rays of the sinking sun touched the clouds with an incandescent glory. And then night lay upon the land.

A globe-like moon, ruddy and hot, sailed with dignity up toward the zenith—a moon of drought-time. It wrapped the desert in a weird, reddish light, like some soft enchantment. Rand came to the border of the tilled ground—to the barbed wire fence on one side of which the wilderness rioted, while on the other the alfalfa grew obediently under the care of man.

His cayuse sniffed the air and quickened its pace. Rand was conscious of a delicious smell of moisture, mingled with the perfume of the alfalfa. He turned to look, and saw a broad field glimmering like a still sea in the moonlight—where the water had been let in upon the thirsty acres.

A broad and dusty avenue led him on, it seemed interminably, straight as a Roman road. Rand had no need to alight and ask directions at any one of the houses which he passed from time to time. He had studied the map of Nampa with great care, and his sense of location was rather more than well developed. Moreover, he knew a lemon grove when he saw it; he would know "Rand's ranch" when he came to it.

He passed acre after acre of reclaimed fields, the pony hurrying on impetuously. Huge trees threw fantastic shadows athwart the monlit road. Rand was half inclined to believe that it was some hallucination of the moonlight which presently made the cayuse halt and snort and then begin to dance fearfully from side to side.

But the animal's ears were tensely forward, and when Rand jerked its head angrily to one side he could see the whites of the frightened, rolling eyeballs.

"Hello!" he said, softly. "Something up? Let's see. Here, you devil-on-springs, be still!"

He sawed on the bit until the cayuse was for a moment quiet, if trembling in every muscle. Rand dismounted at this favorable instant and stepped forward, thrusting his arm through the reins. The cayuse hung back and began to snort again. Rand swore at him comprehensively, and finally settled the matter by arbitration—tied his horse to a nearby tree.

Then, moving forward, he put his foot on something in a deep shadow—something soft and yielding. Disgust stirred within him and he drew back. "Dead horse!" he muttered. But it was worse than that.

A vague moan struck his ear as he was turning away. Now, a dead horse does not moan. Rand whirled about on his heel. "What's that?" he demanded.

There was no answer—not a sound. Yet he was sure that he could distinguish a barely audible fluttering upon

the silence, as of breath laboriously drawn.

"Somebody hurt!" Rand exclaimed, anxiously. He stepped over the body of the dead animal and went down on both knees by another body. "Poor devil!" said Rand, compassionately.

The blackness was dense. Rand's groping fingers found a face, warm beneath his touch—an oddly smooth cheek, absolutely still. A tangle of long hair enmeshed his fingers, and Rand's heart seemed to leap into his mouth.

"Great heavens!" he cried. "It's—why, it's a woman!"

That was true. He made out that her horse had fallen, catching one foot beneath it to hold her a firm prisoner. She had probably fainted after a long and exhausting struggle to free herself.

A dead horse is no mean weight, but there was no time to lose and nothing at hand which would serve as a lever. Rand discovered that it was no more than a foot which was held down inexorably, and somehow—he could not have said how, later; but strength comes to one wherewith to meet emergencies—somehow he lifted the dead bulk of the thing and simultaneously drew the woman free. A moment later he had her in his arms and was bearing her out into the moonlight, to put her down on a soft spot by the roadside.

She did not stir, nor utter another sound. Rand stood over her with his arms akimbo and a great wonder surging in his brain; he thought her the most beautiful thing he had ever laid eyes upon.

"Why," he said, breathlessly, "she's—she's mighty like a flower!"

But he remembered that there was a duty owing the girl higher than an appreciation of her beauty; and resolutely he took his eyes from her face and considered ways and means. His experience in the reviving of unconscious females was somewhat limited, but he was trying hard to recall the methods employed by novelists to bring back to consciousness their maltreated heroines.

Something drew him back to the horse. He bent over the animal, touching tentatively the still flanks. It was quite lifeless. "Strange!" thought Rand. "Uncommonly strange!" And he fumbled in his pockets for the match which he presently drew along his thigh.

There was a stink of sulphur and a spitting, blue light. Rand shielded it with his cupped hands, though the air was so motionless that when he held the little flame aloft, bending over the body, it flared upward without a flicker.

The light was quite insufficient for a prolonged examination, yet Rand found that which made him put his teeth together firmly, biting on a savage curse. "The filthy hound!" he cried—meaning the man who had done this thing.

A small, round hole was in the horse's head; thick blood welled from it very deliberately. The horse had been shot, either with a revolver or with a rifle of small caliber.

The match burned low and scorched the man's fingers. He dropped it and stood erect, smitten with a great amazement. "It can't have been long since," he mused. "Why didn't I hear the shot? But that girl—what about her?"

A slow, persistent drip-drip of water caught his ear. It seemed to come from the side of the road. Rand followed the sound, and stumbled over the rigid roundness of the great water pipe. The hand that he rested upon it to save himself a fall came away moist and sticky, and when he stooped and felt the surface of the ground thereabouts, he dabbled his fingers in a little pool of water. "This *is* luck," he observed; and soused his handkerchief in it.

Returning to the girl, he laid the sodden linen on her forehead for a moment, and then very gently moistened the rest of her face.

She sighed deeply, and moved. Her lips, which were full and tempting, parted ever so slightly. The long, upcurling lashes trembled on the wonderful oval of her cheek; and she was looking up at him with a serene, steadfast perplexity that took his breath away. The moonlight that sank into her eyes glowed in their depths like a slow fire that needed but the breath of romance to quicken it to flame.

He heard himself stammering: "You —I beg your pardon—you fainted."

Under his gaze a deep color burned in her cheeks. She sat upright suddenly and her quick, feminine fingers—they were brown, but slender and tapering, he noted—began to arrange the disorder of her hair.

"Thank you," she told him, a bit tremulously. "I must have—fainted, as you say. My mare fell without warning, and I was caught."

She turned her gaze to his with an impulsive movement of her head. "But how——?" she demanded, breathlessly. "You must have lifted that mare bodily!"

"It was nothing," he told her, gravely. "I'm glad that I came along in time to be of assistance. Permit me."

Seeing that she wished to rise, he offered his hand; she put her fingers for an instant into his broad palm, and was on her feet—but only to utter a little cry of pain, and to cling to his arm, when she had rested her weight upon the bruised foot.

"Oh!" she said. "*Oh!*"

"Tell me what I can do," Rand begged.

The girl smiled bravely. "I'm afraid I can't walk," she said. "But there—it feels better already. Only the shoe hurts. Have you a knife?"

She sat down by the roadside again, extending a hand for the knife. But Rand, with an "If you don't mind, I'll be very careful," bent upon one knee and began dexterously to slit the leather of the little riding boot. Because of his care and the delicacy of it, it was rather a prolonged operation; the girl set her teeth and bore the slight pain of the unavoidable wrenchings without a murmur. In the end she thanked him with an unfeigned gratitude.

"It feels so, so much better," she assured him. "But what am I to do? I *can't* walk home."

"I've a pony," Rand assured her. "He's entirely at your service. If you'll wait a moment——"

He hurried back to the dead animal, ungirthed and removed the saddle, and transferred it to the cayuse. Returning, he lifted her very gently into the saddle and gave her the reins. "There!" he cried, triumphantly.

She smiled down upon him in bewildering gratitude. "I don't know how to thank you," she said.

"Don't try to. I'll feel ever so much more comfortable if you won't. You're more easy now?" he added, anxiously.

"Entirely."

"You can stand it until we get to my ranch? I'll have a carriage fixed up for you there; and——"

"*Your* ranch?" she exclaimed. "Why, you're a stranger, sir!"

Rand lifted the saddle he had taken from the cayuse's back, and put it over his arm. "I am," he agreed, slowly. "Perhaps you can be my guide to my ranch? I'm Rand."

CHAPTER III.

THE ZANJERO.

"Rand?" cried the girl. "Why, Rand——"

There was a rattle and something fell clanking in the dust at the pony's feet. Rand stooped and, picking it up, offered it to the girl.

"Oh! my keys," she cried, gratefully. She bent her head over the bunch while she counted them. "And not one missing!"

There was exultancy in her tone. "Not one?" repeated Rand, mystified. "Did you expect to lose a key?"

Her lips opened as though she would speak. They fascinated Rand; he could not keep his eyes from them. They were scarlet now—not pale, as when she had been unconscious—and the tenderness of their curves was a thing unbelievable.

Followed a little, awkward silence. The impulsive words died on the girl's lips; Rand saw them close, and then his gaze was drawn magnetically to her eyes; she was bending upon him a look searching and inscrutable.

"You expected to lose a key?" he repeated, uneasily.

"No," she replied. "But I don't want

to—in time of drought. These are the water keys, you know."

Rand didn't know; he failed to understand in the least. But there were more interesting matters to engage him. Her throat, for instance—the full-curved throat, strong yet delicate, that rose like a column of light from the turned-back collar of her waist.

"You are Rand?" said the girl, incredulously. "Why do you tell me that? Colonel Rand is a very old man. I've been told so time and again."

"My father," explained Rand. "He — he's gone over to the great majority. That was five years ago. Didn't you know?"

She shook her head. "I—I'm sorry," she said; "very sorry, Mr. Rand."

"But you didn't know? Oh, naturally, Wheelock wouldn't tell." Rand laughed, unpleasantly. "Do you know Wheelock?"

"We are not so many here in the Nampa Valley, Mr. Rand, that one can avoid knowing all one's neighbors."

The evasive reply troubled Rand. Why had she put it that way? He scrutinized her face, but found it emotionless as that of the Sphinx. "You do know him, then?" he persisted.

"I do. My foot is hurting again, Mr. Rand."

"Wish I could do something! Would bathing it help?"

The girl did not give him a direct answer. "Bathing?" she repeated, thoughtfully. "That is so. You did use water on my face. Tell me, where did you find it, Mr. Rand?"

"The irrigating pipe leaks over there. Listen and you will hear it dripping."

"Thank you, sir, I'll have it attended to in the morning. For the present, I'm afraid we'd better go on."

Rand took up the discarded saddle and put his hand on the bridle of the cayuse. The little procession began to move silently down the moon-flecked road. The night, too, was very still—as nights are in the heart of the desert. The soft *pad-pad* of the pony's hoofs and the shuffle of Rand's feet through the deep dust were at times the only sounds, but occasionally the keys clinked at the girl's belt, and once a distant coyote howled forth the burden of his sorrow-laden soul.

Rand fell into a deep meditation, watching his shadow shifting through the cloud of impalpable dust that rose about his feet. In the end he raised his head as if startled.

"How much further?" he asked, peremptorily.

"Half a mile—to *Rand's* ranch."

There was a laugh in the girl's voice, but he was not in a mood attuned unto banter.

"Who shot at you?" he demanded, directly.

"What? Why—er—I do not know."

The invention was delivered lamely. "Yes, you do," Rand contradicted, impolitely. "But you won't tell?"

He looked over his shoulder, into her face. She endured the inspection with imperturbable serenity. "I won't," she agreed, calmly.

"Then you *do* know!"

"Possibly. Possibly I am not sure. Possibly I guess wrongly—do some one an injustice."

"Why should you be shot at?"

"I don't care to discuss it, Mr. Rand."

"But I insist——"

She laughed. His impertinence amused her, since it was partly due to his solicitude—she knew that. Rand was caring about her safety already. Inexplicably, since they were aware of each other's existence for so short a time, the thought that he should be fearing for her, angry on her account, was pleasant. She did not stop to consider that the atrocity of the thing was enough to make any man's blood boil—whoever might be the woman concerned. She was too unaffectedly ingenuous to think of that. She believed that his concern was all for her sake—and, I say, it pleased her.

"Here we are at last," she announced, after some time, halting the cayuse.

Rand bit his lip with disappointment. "Already!" he could not help exclaiming. "Very well," he added, turning the pony's head up the long avenue which confronted them, leading between rigid lines of small, darkly-foliaged

trees, at the end of which lights were glimmering.

"Oh! no," protested the girl. "I'm not coming in."

"But the carriage——!"

"I don't want it, sir—if you will permit me a choice. It's late, and I have far to ride. Daddy will be growing anxious. You'll loan me the cayuse till morning, won't you?"

Rand put a hand on the horse's neck, facing the girl. "But it won't take long. I'd much prefer——"

"Please!" she pleaded. "I don't wish to wait. I'm perfectly at home in the saddle. Won't you let me go, sir, if I ask ever so prettily?"

"No," said Rand, stoutly. He stared boldly into the soft, warm shadows that veiled her eyes. "You can have your own way only on one condition," he announced.

Her laugh was as tremulously rich and sweet as a chord struck upon a cello. Rand was strangely thrilled; he was aware, numbly, of an odd sensation —something like a little contraction in his throat.

"And that?" she inquired, lightly.

"That you tell me when I am to be privileged to see you again."

A touch of the girl's heel sent the cayuse waltzing a dozen feet away from him. She was again laughing softly.

"You'll see enough of me," she promised him. "You'll see me 'most every day. That will be one of my duties."

"Duties?" he echoed, puzzled. "At least, I hope you won't find it an unpleasant one, Miss——?"

"That remains to be seen, sir. One hardly knows you yet; you're here—on suspicion. But if you're always as nice as you—— Well, we shall see."

The cayuse began to move away. Irritated, Rand dropped the saddle he had been carrying. It crashed into the dust, and the sound of it made the girl look around, to see Rand, his hands stuck deep in his pockets, regarding her with an air of utter exasperation.

"You're not going away without telling me who you are?"

"I?" she mocked him. "Oh, you'll learn that I am a very important personage, indeed, in this community."

"That's patent," he grumbled; "couldn't be otherwise."

"And that's nice," she called over her shoulder. "So I'll tell you. I'm—what do you suppose?—of all unlikely persons—the *zanjero!*"

The cayuse broke into a lope. Rand watched it disappear into the shadows, a line of perplexity deep set between his eyes.

"The *zanjero!*" he repeated. "More mystery! What in blazes does she mean by that?"

He picked up the saddle, and turned toward the main avenue of Rand's ranch. A moment later he stopped short again, startled. The cayuse, bearing the girl, had reappeared at his side; in the soft, deep dust its hoofs had made hardly any sound.

The girl was leaning from the saddle, offering him one little, steady, brown hand. The expression on her face was different now. A moment before it had been a compound of frank coquetry and love of mischief; she had been teasing him openly, and openly enjoying his discomfiture. But this mood was now vanished; her face had softened; she even betrayed a little shrinking penitence.

"Forgive me," she begged; "I didn't mean to be rude, Mr. Rand. It was ungrateful of me, sir."

"Oh, nonsense!" But he took her hand, nevertheless.

"Believe me, I'm very, very grateful to you for what you did, sir!"

The light in her eyes confirmed her words. Rand forgot himself entirely, and the pressure that he gave her hand was perhaps unconsciously fervent. At any rate, she seemed to wince, and drew it away hastily.

"Good-night," she said.

"Good-night," he repeated, dreamily.

"Oh, hang it all!" he swore when it was too late. "She didn't tell me her name, after all!"

He turned on his heel and looked toward the lights that were glimmering in the windows of his ranch home. In an instant he had dismissed the girl

from his mind, together with the mystery with which she chose to surround herself, fascinating as it was to him; and he settled his mouth and jaw in a firm, determined cast. Also, his eyes narrowed and hardened. There was a stern purposefulness in his demeanor as he strode swiftly up the avenue between the still, fragrant rows of lemon trees.

"Now," he said, between his teeth, "for Wheelock!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN WHO CAME INTO HIS OWN.

Several hundred yards back from the road, the lemon orchard came to an end; the avenue opened out into a wide, treeless space, quite bare of grass, surrounding the house—a little cottage, of frame, with a wide veranda. Back of it loomed dimly the bulk of a huge, barracks-like structure, which Rand correctly guessed to be the quarters for the hands. In the rear of this again was a flat-roofed, one-story, 'dobe building—the stable.

From the vicinity of the barracks came the deep humming of a guitar, together with an occasional snatch of song; and as Rand neared the house, a tiny banjo added its metallic *planketty-plank!* to the concert. Rand smiled softly; these were things with which he was in sympathy. But as for Wheelock—his facial muscles stiffened again.

He stepped softly upon the veranda, still carrying the saddle on his left arm; and through the open front door passed directly into a broad hall with a polished hardwood floor strewn with rugs. Here he paused for a moment, looking about, somewhat undecided.

The hall itself was dimly illuminated with hanging lamps. Rand saw a piano in a recess under the stairway. One wall was lined in part with bookcases fairly well stocked. The chairs were not merely easy—they were luxurious.

"H'm!" considered Rand, grimly. "Wheelock has been at some pains to have everything in order for me. Uncommonly thoughtful of him. Nice sort of a place—and my money paid for it all, too!"

He threw the saddle into a corner, thoughtlessly. A second later a voice hailed him from a side room, the door of which stood open upon the hall.

"That you, Sam?" inquired the voice. "What the hell are you making such a fuss about? When did you get back?"

It was a strong, full-toned voice. "That's Wheelock," deduced Rand. He stepped forward quickly and entered the room.

"Good-evening," he said, quietly, shutting the door behind him.

There was a broad desk—a study table—in the center of this room, and on it a student lamp with a white shade. Behind the desk, in a swivel-chair, sat a man. Apparently he had been writing, or casting up some accounts; for as Rand appeared he looked up, scowling, holding a pen poised in one hand. Because Rand was standing outside the radius of the brighter illumination, the man squinted in a vain attempt to recognize him.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded, putting down the pen.

Rand said, coolly: "Don't you know me, Mr. Wheelock? Oh, don't rise on my account. Sit still, sir."

But there was more of a command than of a request in his tone—a masked command which the man unconsciously obeyed; and he sank back into his chair, still peering at the face of the intruder, a puzzled alarm evident upon his own features.

He was a man of middle age, and strikingly handsome. If anything, the contour of his face was too regular, too flawless. Most of us have our little imperfections, and we look askance, mistrustfully, upon the impeccably perfect, as beings set apart from ourselves, of another order. In Wheelock's case, one was impressed with the feeling that the coldly regular modeling of his features, though superficially attractive, was but a mask for the inner man. Which was more or less true.

For the rest of him, he was fashioned upon a generous, typically Western plan; taller than Rand himself, and proportionately broad of shoulder. The pajamas which he wore hung loosely

upon a magnificent framework, superbly muscled. In Rand's eye, as he looked him over in no friendly spirit, there was a glimmer of approbation. Beyond doubt, Wheelock was physically an antagonist worthy of his steel.

After a moment he saw the man's hand moving cautiously beneath the top of the desk, and heard him gradually opening one of the drawers. It was a signal for action. Rand stepped hastily across the room, dropping his hands into his coat pockets.

"Shut that drawer, Wheelock," he said, sharply; "and keep your hands away from that revolver, sir. I'm armed, myself—but there isn't any call for pyrotechnics, just now."

Not a line changed in Wheelock's face. He shut the drawer with a slight bang, and put his empty hands palms down on top of the desk, meanwhile keeping an unflinching gaze upon Rand's face.

"I see you recognize me, Wheelock," said Rand, tauntingly.

"On the contrary," returned the manager of the ranch, in a quiet tone, exhibiting no trace either of surprise or of temper, "I never laid eyes on you in my life. Perhaps, however, you wouldn't mind making some sort of an explanation of yourself. I can see you're not an ordinary hobo——"

"Drop it, Wheelock; drop it," Rand counseled him. "It won't wash. Your memory's fairly good, I know, and I am flattering myself that you haven't forgotten me since last we met."

Wheelock shook his head, with a tolerant smile.

"In Chicago, eight years ago to-day?" suggested Rand.

Again the negative movement of the manager's head, this time more pronounced.

"Then, if you'll allow me—the pen, if you please." Rand sat himself down on the edge of the table, reached over, annexed the pen which Wheelock had dropped and a sheet of paper; after which, swiftly, he wrote his signature across the middle of the sheet, and pushed it under Wheelock's nose.

"Maybe that will refresh your memory," he said, pleasantly. "John Reynolds Rand—no?"

Wheelock glanced carelessly at the paper, and pushed it aside, with a simulation of indifference that was a shade too pronounced. "That's very near it," he admitted; "very. To the casual glance it looks remarkably like Mr. Rand's signature. Do you do much of that sort of thing, my friend? Let me advise you to be careful. It's a dangerous gift." His look was one of interested inquiry.

"Clever!" Rand told him, appreciatively. "You're damnably clever, Wheelock—much more so than I had imagined you to be. Do you know, I had thought you merely a common thief?"

A dull red burned under the tan of Wheelock's cheeks, and he made an impulsive movement as though to rise. But Rand checked him with a firm hand, thrusting him unceremoniously back into the chair.

"Sit down!" he cried. "I'm not through with you yet, man. And understand, Wheelock, I'll have no foolishness!"

Wheelock grasped the arms of his chair so fiercely that the knuckles stood out, white and prominent. The flush gradually ebbed from his face, but the ugly glare in his eyes remained. When he spoke there was a tremor in his voice which betrayed the effort he was making to preserve his self-control.

"I suppose," he said, slowly, "that you don't realize that I've only to raise my voice in order to have you thrown out?"

"But you won't raise your voice, Wheelock," returned Rand, confidently. "It would be inadvisable on several counts, and you know it. In the first place, it would lead to an exposure—an immediate exposure, Wheelock. In addition to that, your pretended denial of my identity won't work. I've provided against that."

"How?"

"Ah! You admit that it was only pretense?"

"I admit nothing," growled Wheelock. "I want—I demand an explanation."

"You'll get it, Wheelock. Just a moment. Would you mind turning the key

in the lock of that desk drawer that tempts you so? Thank you. And hand it to me? Thank you again. Now, we're ready."

Rand selected an easy-chair, and leaned back, lighting a cigar as unconcernedly as though Wheelock were miles away. Wheelock did not move; he moistened his lips nervously, and glowered at the intruder, but he did not take advantage of the opportunity which Rand's preoccupation afforded him. His face was livid now, and his fingers were beating an incessant tattoo on the chair's arms. There was murder in his eyes, and probably in his heart. Rand, looking over toward him, met that look and interpreted it correctly.

"Wheelock," he said, tranquilly, removing the cigar from between his teeth, and bending forward, "you shouldn't think such things. Shall I tell you what you were thinking, Wheelock? You had it in your mind that it would be the easiest thing in the world to jump me and break my back across your knee—when I wasn't expecting it. Yes, you were, Wheelock. But you didn't do it while you had the chance. Do you know why? I do, Wheelock. It was because you are a coward at heart, Wheelock—not on the surface, I admit; but deep down in your heart you're a coward."

"I'll——"

"Don't make any rash promises, Wheelock. You might fall short of the ultimate achievement, you know; you've me to consider, and I'm an unknown quantity at present. Moreover, I'm not in the least afraid of *you*."

Rand sat back, crossed his legs, and blew a cloud of smoke at the shade of the student lamp.

"But, personalities aside," he told the manager, "I've serious business with you. Now, before we get on, I want to know if you are going to persist in your assertion that you don't know me?"

"Most certainly I am," returned Wheelock. "And, what's more, you——"

"Softly, sir! I merely asked as a matter of form. You see, it won't profit you anything, and for this reason: Some time ago I made up my mind that this ranch required my attention, so I engaged a man to come here and work under you, and to verify my suspicions. The man knows me—can swear to my identity. Moreover, he's an old resident of the Nampa region. Hinton—you know him, of course?"

Wheelock nodded sullenly.

"Hinton's word is as good as his bond, Wheelock. So that's settled. Now, are you prepared to deny that I'm John Reynolds Rand, owner of this lemon plantation?"

He waited patiently for his answer. Wheelock hesitated, but it came at last—a dogged "No."

"As a matter of fact, Wheelock, you knew me from the first, didn't you? Don't tell any unnecessary lies, man. What's the use?"

"I was not sure," muttered Wheelock.

"Well, perhaps you were not sure. But you knew my signature, all right—didn't you, now?"

"Yes."

Rand was silent for a considerable period; so long, in fact, that the manager, who had kept his eyes surlily upon the floor during the catechism, at length glanced up, furtively, at Rand's face. He found Rand smiling at him—a peculiar smile, blended alike of contempt and pity.

"Do you know," said the younger man, "that your 'yes' was a plain confession of guilt, Wheelock?"

"What do you mean?"

"If you did know me, as you confess you do, what made you deny it? You needn't answer, Wheelock—I'll do that for you, to spare you the shame of it. You were casting about for a way of escape; you thought that, by denying me, you could make time to get away. And what made you want to run? What on earth but a guilty conscience, Wheelock?"

"I—I don't understand——"

"Wait a minute, Wheelock; I'll make it more plain to you. Let's see, if I remember rightly, it is eighteen years ago since my father foresaw the possibilities of this irrigating scheme and started this Nampa community, here on

the edge of the Mojave Desert. Wasn't it, Wheelock?"

"About that long ago," assented the man.

"He got a number of men together, formed a limited liability stock company, and built the Nampa Reservoir, up in the mountains. That was about their only expense—the reservoir and the flumes. They used open flumes in those days, I believe; but the water's so blamed precious now that they have recently built in this pipe line to prevent loss by evaporation. But, as I was saying, the reservoir took most of the money; the land cost them little or nothing. To-day it's worth one thousand dollars per acre with trees, I understand.

"But that's aside from the point. The point, Wheelock, is you. You came a year or two after my father established Nampa, and were at once put in full charge of the Rand ranch. You claimed to be an irrigation expert, and you had some hold on the old man's tolerance. At any rate, he made you manager, and left you to your own devices. He hasn't been back here since; your devices had full sway, and I'm sorry to say that they were not of the highest order of devices, considered from a moral point of view.

"Steady, there. Better let me talk. You don't in the least apprehend what is coming, Wheelock.

"We'll say you've been manager of these two hundred acres of lemon trees for fifteen years, with full powers and no accounting of your stewardship to render to anyone save the owner—who never called you to account, so long as you sent him a check for the yearly profits—according to your own estimate. However, you were not the only one who violated my father's confidence; he had faith beyond belief in the honesty of his fellowmen, and his business interests were widespread.

"But, to get back to you, Wheelock; estimating your personal profits, to give 'em a high-class name, you made about five thousand a year, free and clear above your salary, out of this ranch. That's an average for the fifteen years; call it seventy-five thousand in all. Added to your salary, it makes eighty-five hundred each year. Not at all bad for an unmarried man of simple, if questionable, tastes, Wheelock.

"In short," Rand concluded, "you've embezzled—to put it mildly—seventy-five thousand dollars of money that is rightly mine at this minute. Don't deny it, Wheelock. I have Hinton's report for the last year, ending on the first of this month, and it has been verified by checking with the accounts of the various commission houses you dealt with; but with the statement you rendered me it doesn't agree in the slightest. Your precise profit for last year, aside from wages, was five thousand nine hundred and eighty-four dollars. And that was an off-year, too.

"Moreover, I feel personally assured that a man on a thirty-five hundred per annum salary can't buy an eighty-acre plot, free and unencumbered, paying cash one thousand per acre—as you did last year—not if he saved every cent of his legitimate earnings for fifteen years, Wheelock. You don't deny that you bought the Plant ranch, adjoining this, do you, man?"

"No." The word was wrung by main force from the man.

"And you posed as my agent in that transaction, as I happen to know. That silenced criticism at the outset. But the deeds are in your name, and—well, the case is clear against you, Wheelock."

Rand ceased speaking, and a stillness fell upon the room; he seemed to be thoughtfully inspecting the end of his cigar; but, as a matter of fact, he was keeping a corner of his eye on the manager. As for the latter, he swung miserably to and fro in the desk chair, avoiding Rand's eye. After a long time he roused as from a state almost of lethargy.

"Well," he said, slowly, "you seem to have me dead to rights. What do you want me to do? Make restitution and clear out, or—or——"

"Hold on," interrupted Rand. "I will tell you in two words: I want you to act white."

The desk chair stopped its monotonous motion, and Wheelock's two feet

were set square on the floor as he faced Rand. "What d'ye mean?" he asked, thickly, startled.

"I mean that I've a theory that no man's so far gone that he can't redeem himself. I may be a fool, Wheelock, but I'm going to give you a chance. Look here, sir; I'm pretty well off, by inheritance. I don't need your few thousands, and I don't want your plantation. You can have it, keep it, live on it and build it up—do anything you damn please from this day on, so long as you don't ever set foot on my property again.

"Understand me clearly. You're at liberty to go out from under this roof to-night, and do what you will with your life. There are only two people in this world who know of your infamy—Hinton and myself. I won't tell, and I'll answer for Hinton's silence. You've eighty acres of valuable, producing land; devote yourself to it, and it'll make a rich man of you in a few years. You'll be able to hold up your head with the best of 'em, Wheelock—and you'll not be tempted, for you can't steal from yourself, you know.

"That's all," said Rand; and he laughed lightly. He was fairly well pleased with himself—and not without reason.

Wheelock rose. "I—I don't know what to say to you, Mr. Rand," he said, unsteadily. He seemed dazed, stunned by the other's totally unexpected display of magnanimity.

"You needn't say anything," Rand told him, coldly. "I don't want any thanks. This is a purely scientific experiment with me, Wheelock. I have an unbounded contempt for you, personally, but we'll see how you turn out before we utterly condemn you."

Again the blood crimsoned Wheelock's cheeks and forehead. He stood towering over Rand for a moment, swaying, his fingers twitching; words rumbled in his throat, but he managed to hold his tongue. Finally:

"I'm to vamoose to-night, am I?" he asked, hoarsely.

"If you please."

"Very well. I'll go at once and change my clothes. You'll lend me a pony, I suppose?"

"Oh, certainly," Rand returned, indifferently.

Wheelock hesitated a moment, then turned abruptly and hurried from the room. Rand heard his feet passing up and down the length of the room above; mingled with this was the sound of a wagon coming up from the road. "Those chaps at Hydrant," Rand concluded.

In a few moments Wheelock came downstairs again, dressed. Rand heard him go toward the outer doorway, pause and turn; the owner met him at the door of the study.

"I'm ready," said Wheelock. "My trunk's upstairs. I'll send for it in the morning. I—I thank you, Mr. Rand. Good-night."

He offered his hand. Rand looked him in the eyes, shook his head slightly, and smiled—ignoring the hand.

"Good-night, Wheelock," he said; and turned his back on the man.

CHAPTER V.

A THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

By this, Jack Rand proved two things, both clearly and beyond dispute: that he was altruistic of nature, and very young in years. An older man, to begin with, would have dealt properly with Wheelock; that is to say, summarily, and according to his deserts. For which Wheelock would have borne him little ill will. For it is the nature of man that he will forgive injustice, and even strict and impartial justice, more quickly than he will a great kindness. He who shows us mercy in our stress, by that act places himself on a higher plane than that whereon we move; and through our inherent pettiness of heart, we envy and fear him accordingly. And envy and fear are the twin brothers of hate.

But had he, lacking the wisdom and experience of his years, shown Wheelock mercy, as Rand had, an older man would not have risked earning the debtor's eternal enmity by refusing to shake hands with him. Rand's clemency

had been folly; by that alone he had sufficiently antagonized his former manager. But his subsequent action had been nothing less than pure, unadulterated madness. Which will be demonstrated.

Wheelock got himself out of the house in a black rage, his heart a seething caldron of hateful thoughts. He stumbled down the veranda steps, blinded by his anger, and, careless whether or not he was observed, turned and shook a threatening fist melodramatically at his benefactor; who was as unconscious as he was invisible.

The manager paused irresolutely; the scum of his hate bubbled to his lips, and he spat an oath or two, swearing that vengeance should be his, that he would repay. And then he turned and slouched away toward the stable. Ere he lost sight of the house, however, he glanced back over his shoulder, and saw Rand's figure sharply silhouetted against the lighted oblong of the front door. Fortunately, the manager was not armed at that moment. Otherwise he would have been hanged for murder in the imminent future.

As it was, could looks have killed, Rand would have been a dead man at that moment. Wheelock was forced, however, to content himself with a comprehensive cursing of his ex-employer, which was interrupted by a noiseless shadow attempting to slip past Wheelock in the more black shadow of the stable walls.

Wheelock put forth his hand, grasped a flowing sleeve of light silk, and gathered in a prize in the shape of a scantily clad but cool and bland Chinaman.

Nothing could have been more opportune. No more than he had desired a pony to bear him away from the scene of his labors, honest and otherwise, had Wheelock wished to exchange a word with this same Chinaman. He was profanely delighted, and, seizing instantly upon the good chance wherewith fortune was favoring him, the discharged manager hastily drew the Chinaman back into the densest of the shade.

A whispered conference—mostly one-sided, and that side Wheelock's—ensued. There followed also the clinking of coined metal as it passed from one hand to another; and immediately the shadows separated, the Chinaman to go about his nocturnal business and Wheelock to enter the stables, select and saddle a cayuse, and go pounding down the avenue to the road as if he desired nothing better than to shake the dust of Rand's ranch from his feet at the earliest possible moment.

. . . . . .

Rand waited several seconds after the manager's feet had thundered his farewell across the veranda of the cottage—waited standing in the middle of the floor and smiling a grim, thoughtful, triumphant smile at Wheelock's vacant chair.

"That," he observed, softly, "wasn't half as tough a job as I had feared it would be. Nerve of the beggar, though, to want to shake hands! Characteristic, I suppose."

He wheeled about, walked to the front door, and with a certain confidence called, softly: "Hinton, are you there? I say, Hinton!"

"Howdy, Mistah Rand, sah," replied a voice; and a man appeared from around a corner of the house. "Reckon," he continued, deliberately, "ef Ah was yo', sah, Ah'd stand away from thet theah do', sah. When yo' has an enemy like this hyeh snake-in-the-grass Wheelock, sah, it ain't exactly sensible fo' to make of yo'self a shining mahk an' a temptation."

"Wheelock isn't armed, Hinton," said Rand, shortly; "besides, he's thoroughly scared."

"Ah know he's scart, sah," agreed Hinton. "Good reason why. Ah been listenin' undeh yo' window, an' Ah must say yo' talked to him in a way that did my heaht good. An' that's why yo' want to be caheful. 'Lowed 'twas yo' when I saw yo' coming up the road, Mr. Rand."

"All right," Rand interrupted, a bit impatiently. "But come inside and show me where Wheelock keeps his drinks. My throat's like—like——"

"Like alfalfa," prompted Hinton.

"That's about the most scandalous thirsty thing I know of, sah." He followed Rand into the study, picked up the lamp, and suggested a trip to the dining room, where he assured the owner of the ranch that his former manager was in the habit of keeping ardent spirits, together with water cooled in porous jars of earthenware.

In the light, Hinton developed as a heat-shriveled little man with a face burned a deep red—the dark hue of pressed brick. His keen, steady, intelligent and honest eyes were meshed about with a web of fine, deep-set wrinkles, acquired through long staring over the sun glare of the desert. He carried himself with the independence of an equal, treating Rand with a mixture of respect for his employer and the kindly tolerance of years and experience for the young and willful; and he spoke in a patois peculiar to himself—the slurring drawl of Pike County, Missouri, oddly combined with a typically Western crispness of phrasing.

Rand filled himself a twelve-inch glass brimming with cool, clear water and Scotch. Hinton had expressed a preference for "straight paint." Rand noticed him waiting patiently and courteously, and raised the glass.

"My regards, Hinton," he said.

The little man bowed ceremoniously. "Sah," he replied, precisely, "I has yo' eye." And he drank.

They returned to the study, Hinton silent, Rand thoughtful.

"I don't want to do much hard talking to-night," said the latter. "I'm pretty well worn out—traveling and all that, you know. The thing is settled, so far as I'm concerned. Wheelock's gone to his own ranch; I gave him the chance—as you heard."

"Yes, sah." Hinton did not trust himself to comment; but his disapprobation of Rand's course was quite evident—though Rand chose to ignore it.

"You'll inform the hands of the change of management," Rand continued. "I'm going to take personal charge here for a while. I may stay six months or six years; it all depends." He paused. "Hinton——" he began; and paused again. It was on the tip of his tongue to put a burning question to the little man.

"Yes, sah?"

"Hinton," he wanted to ask, "what, in Heaven's name, is a *'zanjero'?*" But something—he didn't know precisely what; possibly a fear of ridicule—made him hold his peace for the present. He colored furiously, and to his intense surprise; then went on hurriedly, in order to cover his embarrassment:

"You'll be my lieutenant, and manager during my absence; but at all times you're second in command, you understand, with Wheelock's salary, and answerable only to me."

"I'm honored, sah."

"Oh, you and I will pull together famously, Hinton. And now—anything important?"

Hinton shook his head, doubtfully.

"Nothing more important than the question of wateh supply, sah."

"Drought?"

"If it don't rain soon, up in the mountings, sah, this hyeh outfit'll dry up and blow away. Ah'm told theah's just one-fo'th the regular amount in the Nampa Reservoir, and we're edging along on half the usual quantity for the trees as it is."

"Oh, well," Rand told him, cheerfully, "that will settle itself in time. At least, I'm too weary to discuss it to-night. You'll sleep here from now on, of course, and you may as well begin to-night."

"Thank yo', sah."

"There's room for both, I take it?"

"Sho'ly, sho'ly, Mistah Rand. Yo' will be sleeping in Wheelock's room, Ah reckon, and Ah kin take the other bedroom."

"Come along, then," Rand suggested. "I'm dead fagged. By the way, my trunks." He related his meeting with the men at Hydrant.

"Yo' kin sleep easy, sah. Yo' trunks 'll be hyeh by mohnin'," Hinton assured him.

Rand ascended to Wheelock's room, found the latter's trunk packed and locked, in the middle of the floor; and, with Hinton's assistance; removed it to

the hallway; then, with a prayer of thankfulness for the coming rest, he undressed himself and went to bed.

Wheelock, he considered, had been a man thoughtful for his personal comfort. The bed Rand was resting upon was one calculated to afford the maximum of coolness and ease in a climate such as is Nampa's; and above it a punka swayed ceaselesly throughout the night, deriving its motive power from a noiseless clockwork motor.

Withal, and oddly enough, notwithstanding his great bodily fatigue, Rand was slow to sleep. He tossed from side to side of his bed and yearned most earnestly for oblivion; but it came not for hours. His nerves, overstrained by his weariness and strong excitement, refused to quiet, and his imagination kept ceaselessly creating mental visions reproducing the experiences through which he had passed during the day.

To this must be added the influence of the unfamiliar atmosphere of the desert. Rand had traveled far and long, but the desert was new and strange to him; and all that he knew of it he had gathered, theretofore, by fleeting glimpses from Pullman car windows.

Now the spirit of it entered into his soul; and, to tell the truth, it awed the young man more than a trifle. The strained, tense silence, breathless and everlasting, rang in his ears more impressively than would have the thunder of great guns. In it the long, shrill buzzing of a cicada broke with the effect of a distinct relief to Rand's hunger for sound. And when an express on the railway, fifteen miles distant or more, drummed through the stillness, it was a boon to him, who felt, in fact, like one astray in a strange land—aloof both from the world he knew and the world which he, for the time being, chose to live in.

The red moon had glided beneath the horizon, and Nampa was wrapped in unbroken darkness, ere Rand at last dropped off into an uneasy slumber.

How long that held him he would have been at a loss to guess, but it ended with a curious, unreal sensation, as he emerged from a fantastic nightmare into the consciousness of his unaccustomed surroundings and the knowledge that he was by no means alone in his room.

He found himself staring up into the black void above him, wherein the dim, grotesque shape of the punka flapped solemnly and silently back and forth, like some queer bird o' night. The window at his bedside was an opalescent square, filled with the glamour of the stars, and with the pale promise of the dawn. It seemed that a breath of coolness was stirring feebly, tentatively, over the sterile, arid face of the earth. But Rand would not have sworn to it.

Of one thing alone was he sure: that another being moved in the darkened obscurity of his room; that some man, stealthily and for no good purpose, was creeping, a step at a time, across the floor toward the bed, holding hard his breath for fear that even its slight sound might betray his presence and unmask his purpose.

Rand's breath, too, seemed to stop, and for a full minute, as he lay and listened. The roof of his mouth was strangely dry, and his tongue rasped against it like a dry bone. There was a discomposing agitation of his heart—though that was more expectancy than fear, to be fair to the young man.

In point of fact, he was not afraid; but it would be an untruth to state that his mind was easy. The knowledge that there is an intruder in one's bedroom does not make for peace of mind. And Rand was quite alone; more, he was unarmed and defenseless; the revolver of which he had spoken to Wheelock had existed nowhere but in Rand's active fancy.

Thinking rapidly in the few tense seconds that elapsed between his waking and his action, he debated with himself what that action should be. He might shout to Hinton—but that would avail him little if, as he suspected, the midnight marauder's intentions were hostile to him personally.

No, he concluded; there was but one thing to be done, and that was to spring up and grapple with the fellow—who, he felt well assured, was none other than Wheelock seeking revenge—and take

his chances. It was a bold expedient, calling for unusual courage; but desperate extremities must be met with extraordinary audacity. Rand nerved himself, and turned quietly over upon his side, facing the interior of the room.

The intruder he could see, dimly, a vague, misshapen bulk against the darkness. He was unpleasantly near—so near, in fact, that he took alarm at Rand's natural movement, and stood stock-still for many minutes, waiting, apparently, until the sleeper should be less restless.

As for Rand, a certain curiosity concerning the meaning of the business obsessed him to the exclusion of fear, just then; he, too, was quiet as any mouse, watching his man through half-closed lids in order that not even the starlight might glint upon his eyeballs and betray his wakeful vigilance.

Very gradually the man relaxed the strain of his caution. He began to breathe more freely and loudly; and slowly, inch by inch, he edged more near the presumably unconscious sleeper. Rand saw him bending over the chair whereon the young man had hung his clothing, and suddenly no longer saw Wheelock's figure in the vague outlines of the fellow.

It was a relief. He had not, then, erred in treating with his former manager; Wheelock was not bent upon his destruction—that is to say, his murder. The man in Rand's room, he thought, was no more than an ordinary thief—some hap-chance hobo of the open road thinking to pilfer this cottage in the way of his business.

Rand forgot that tramps are as scarce as the wisdom teeth of barn-yard fowls in the wilderness called the Mojave Desert. But anger seethed in his brain, and he abandoned all pretense of slumber. Three things then happened in the quiver of an eyelash.

Rand jumped from his bed, and grabbed for his man. The fellow drew his breath, a harsh, frightened hiss between his teeth, and fled silently for the doorway. And, as Rand's fingers slipped and lost their grip upon the silken sleeve of the fugitive, the young man stepped into a pitcher of water and fell sprawling.

Simultaneously yelling for Hinton and scrambling to his feet, Rand seized that jar and hurled it at the almost invisible shadow that was breaking for liberty through the doorway.

His aim was excellent—better far than his intention; the heavy piece of earthenware took the intruder squarely in the small of his back; he shrieked with pain, and fell. In another instant Rand was on his shoulders, swearing with exasperation.

But he hardly needed to hold his man. When Hinton, wakened by the uproar, had brought a lamp and Rand had turned over his captive, the light fell upon the pain-contorted features of a Chinaman, who lay pacifically, quite meek and spiritless.

"What the devil——" cried Rand, amazed.

"What-all's the trouble, sah?" demanded Hinton, confused, but courteously solicitous.

"This damned ape tried to rob me!" Rand accused.

"Hold on, sah," Hinton interrupted. "Seems to me his features are powerful familiar, as you might say. Ah kindeh believe he's one of the servants."

"Ya-as," agreed the captive, calmly. "Me Mlist' Wheelock's boy."

"The deuce you say! What do you want in my room at this hour of the morning, then?"

"Me bling Mlist' Wheelock's dlink."

"What does that mean, Hinton?"

Hinton screwed up his withered and grizzled features; he began to laugh silently and internally.

"Ah 'low this boy was only bringing a jar of water to Wheelock," he explained, between convulsions. "He didn't know yo' friend had bid yo' a fond but reluctant farewell, sah. Reckon yo' scart him as much as he scart yo', sah."

Rand got up, and looked foolish. The Chinaman arose with quiet dignity and stood at ease, his yellow claws folded within the flowing sleeves of his shirt, his eyes innocently blinking in the lamp's glare.

"Tha's light," he concurred.

"Well," said Rand, disgustedly, "tell him who I am and kick him downstairs again, Hinton. I guess I'm too quick to jump at conclusions, but I don't want that yellow-faced monkey snooping around my room in the middle of the night."

"Don't know as Ah kin blame yo', sah."

And Rand, returning to his couch by a moist and unpleasant route, heard Hinton gravely explaining the new order of things to the servant.

But as he went for a towel to dry the soles of his feet ere again wooing sleep, Rand's bare toes encountered something hard and metallic on the floor. He stooped and picked it up curiously, and found in his hand a key.

"Why, that's queer," he considered, feeling of it; "I'm not carrying around any loose keys. Maybe Wheelock dropped—— Hold on. Let's think this out."

He remembered, abruptly, that he had taken a key from Wheelock, to prevent that gentleman from using the pistol which Rand had surmised was in the drawer of the study desk downstairs. That key he had put in the little change pocket of his coat; he recalled the fact distinctly.

But when he sought for it again in that change pocket, it was not there. Rand whistled lowly. "I begin to understand," he commented, and, raising his voice, "Hinton!" he called.

"Yes, sah?"

"You fire that Chinaman first thing in the morning—if he hasn't cleared out by that time."

"Very good, sah."

Rand lay down, still holding the key; his fertile imagination cast back, reconstructing the interview with Wheelock of the evening just gone. From that, by natural process, the young man's thoughts reverted to the face of the girl, as he had last seen her, smiling mysteriously at him in the moonlight.

"By thunder!" he exclaimed, disgruntled. "If I didn't forget to ask! Hinton! I say, *Hinton!*"

This time the new manager swore vigorously, if sleepily. But after that, "Beg yo' pardon, Mistah Rand, sah," he pleaded, humbly, "but did yo' call me, sah?"

Rand smiled into the darkness.

"Yes, I forgot, Hinton, that you'd be asleep already. But, I say, what's a *'zanjero'?"*

"Hey?"

"What is a *'zanjero'?"*

"A *sankhero?* Oh, ho! I reckon yo' means the sanky, sah."

"Well? Yes?"

"That's what we-all hyehabouts call the water master."

"The water master?"

"Yes—the man what takes keer of the reservoir, sah, and the wateh pipes."

"I see," said Rand, shortly. "Thank you. Good-night."

But, after all, he pondered, did he really know any more of the girl than he did before? Obviously, it was impossible for a young and surpassingly beautiful girl to be water master for as rough a community as that in the Nampa Valley. Had she been hoodwinking him?

Debating which problematical perfidy, he fell asleep, holding fast the key in the palm of his hand.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WATER MASTER HERSELF.

But in the morning, in the press of fresh and absorbing interests which demanded his attention, Rand completely forgot the key to the study desk—the key that, he had assured himself the night before, was so precious to Wheelock.

Only once was he reminded of it; when Hinton, looking up with a slow smile from his cup of coffee, as the two breakfasted together, remarked, in a drawl:

"Ah didn't have to fire yo' slant-eyed burglar, sah. As yo' intimated, he flew the coop, sah, befo' sunrise."

"Oh, yes," Rand laughed. "I fancied he would."

"Whar would yo' suspeet he'd be mos' likely to wandeh, sah?"

"Well," Rand considered, rising and

lighting a cigar, "I don't believe you'd have to use a fine-tooth comb on anybody's plantation except Wheelock's, to find him."

"Ah 'low yo' 'bout right, sah."

But Rand's hastily formulated intention of ransacking the drawers of that desk, upon the instant, was speedily set aside in favor of a ride through his domain ere the heat of the sun became positively prohibitive.

And when he returned his fatigue had grown excessive. After a hasty and unenjoyed lunch, he went to his room and indulged in a protracted siesta, from which he emerged at about four in the afternoon.

A bath and a change of clothing had, he boasted, made a new man of him. He appeared, about half an hour later, upon the veranda of the cottage, quite impeccable as to costume; in khaki riding breeches and a negligee shirt of sheer material, light as a feather, upon his broad shoulders, collarless and with the sleeves turned back above his elbows; light canvas puttees took the place of riding boots, and a pith helmet shaded his eyes.

Altogether his attire was so picturesque and incongruous, and so plainly comfortable, that Wheelock was moved to sneer—to smile a mocking smile, which faded as his eye met Rand's.

The discharged manager had been waiting impatiently for some fifteen minutes, seated in a light buckboard drawn by two blooded horses, who pranced restively while their owner held them in the clear space in front of Rand's residence.

"Good-evening, Mr. Rand," Wheelock greeted him, with a brazen cordiality.

Rand stuck his hands in his breeches' pockets and looked calmly down on the man. "Wheelock," he said, deliberately, "I thought I gave you to understand that you were not to enter my grounds again?"

Wheelock set his jaw angrily, glancing about to see if they were being overheard. As it happened, none of the hands was nearer than the stable. He nodded, with an air of relief.

"That's so," he admitted. "But I had to return your pony, and I thought——"

"You could have sent it back by one of your boys," Rand suggested. "What you think is of no interest to me, I assure you."

"But, Mr. Rand——"

Rand turned his back. "Good-evening," he said, pointedly.

Wheelock flushed. The hand that held his whip trembled with rage, and he measured the distance between him and this young man who showed so plainly his contempt for him.

At that moment Hinton sauntered aimlessly around the corner of the house. Catching sight of Wheelock, he halted, grinned with enjoyment of the situation, and sat himself upon the edge of the piazza.

"Howdy, Br'er Wheelock," he said, pleasantly. "Yo're lookin' tolerable, sah."

Wheelock disdained an answer. With a visible effort he checked his temper and again addressed Rand's back.

"One moment, if you please, Mr. Rand," he said, not without a certain vibration of tone that made Rand turn and observe him curiously.

"Well?" asked the young man, curtly.

"You took a key from me last night, sir——"

"Ah, yes." Rand grinned. "The key to *my* desk, I believe."

Wheelock bit his lip. "Yes," he acquiesced, tremulously. "There are certain papers in that desk, Mr. Rand, and —and——"

"And you'd consider it a favor if I would permit you to go over them and select those which you would rather I did not see? Eh—is that it, Wheelock?"

"You've stated it," returned the discharged manager, trying to endure Rand's scornful stare.

"I thought as much." Rand paused, tapping the planks impatiently with the toe of his boot. "I admit," he pursued, "that it is no more than I might have expected of you, Wheelock; I mean

that it's in keeping with your insolent attitude."

"You refuse me, then?"

"You have caught my meaning marvelously well, sir. I do decline the honor. I not only refuse to let you enter this house, but I warn you that if ever again you approach me without my express permission I'll throw you off the place."

"But—but the papers? Those are mine! They're none of your——"

"I propose to inspect them personally, Wheelock. You have had a bad habit, if you don't mind my saying so, of keeping entirely too many private papers, of late. I shall go through that desk at my leisure; whatever is yours and in no way relates to my affairs, or to the amount or manner of your—shall we call them commissions, Wheelock? —I'll set aside and send to you.

"That," Rand concluded, "is final. Good-evening, sir!"

Wheelock waited a moment, his handsome features dark and distorted with suppressed emotion.

"You——" he stammered, "you'll drive me——"

"Wheelock!" Rand's voice rang with a command from which there was no appeal. "You'll drive yourself down that road immediately, sir!"

"Yo' better get home befo' the stohm breaks," Hinton counseled, gently. He cocked a weatherwise eye to the cloudless firmament. "Seems to me I heard thundeh," he observed.

Crack! Wheelock's whiplash came down, surcharged with the unbearable burden of his wrath, upon the flanks of his horses. They leaped forward furiously, well-nigh overturning the light cart as their owner swung them about in a wide curve. The buckboard sailed through the air on two wheels, perilously poised, for a single moment; and vanished down the road in a smother of dust.

"Fare thee well," Hinton waved after it, sentimentally.

Rand went into the study, his eyes thoughtful. In one hand he weighed the key, pondering.

"We may as well settle this matter now," he considered. "There's something more than is merely private in this desk."

He sat down in the swivel-chair, and unlocked the top drawer. For an instant he hesitated, generously. "I don't want to know anything worse of the man than I now do," he thought.

Nevertheless, he pulled the drawer out slowly. His gaze rested on a heavy Colt's forty-four—the first object that came into view—and he took it into his hand with a little, disapproving shake of his head.

"Big gun for a bad-tempered man to own," he said, aloud.

Beneath it was a mass of disarranged papers. "I don't care about messing with you just now," Rand told them. He leaned back in the desk chair, and toyed with the revolver. It was loaded, he discovered, by breaking it and bringing into view the rear of the cylinder.

"Every chamber full," said Rand. And then he paused, whistled and picked up from his lap one of the shells that had been ejected. "By God!" he said, his face clouding angrily.

That one cartridge alone was empty. Rand played with it, thinking deeply, then held the barrel of the weapon to his eye and glanced down the interior. It was foul with just enough burned powder to indicate that a single shot had been fired through it since it had been cleaned last.

"I may be wrong," meditated the young man, "and Heaven knows I don't want to do injustice to any man; but—but—if Wheelock did that thing, I'll——"

He did not finish the utterance of his thought; Hinton was coming into the room. Rand quietly reloaded the five chambers, retaining the discharged shell, and, returning the weapon to the drawer, relocked it.

"I'm going for a short ride," he said. "What time did you say that the water master would be around?"

"Sundown, sah."

Rand hesitated at the door.

"What's the reason for that?" he demanded. "Why do you take the water

in the evening, rather than in the morning, Hinton?"

"Prevents evaporation, sah. Wateh don't dry up so quick afteh the sun's behind the mountings, sah."

"Of course," Rand assented, abstractedly.

He plowed his way through four inches of dust to the stables, where he found and saddled a horse. Then, still with that thoughtful crease down the middle of his forehead, he rode at a swift canter down to the main highway, turning back to the south—toward Hydrant.

On either hand the way was bordered with living green—the dark green leaves of lemon trees illuminated with globules of pure gold, or with the lighter green ovals of the unripened fruit. Rand drew in his mount to one side, bending a branch down toward him; upon it he could see blossoms, buds, small, hard spheres and the full-grown, fully matured lemons.

He nodded comprehendingly. It was a miracle of fertility, this tree that had its thousands of counterparts on every hand all through his ranch; it was forever yielding, ceaselessly yielding from one year's end to the other. There was no let up, no "slack" time; the daily average of the harvest was the same, month in, month out, alike in summer and winter—or what passes for winter there in the heart of the Mojave.

A miracle of fertility, indeed! brought about by the fierce land-hunger of man—the home-building American man—who, by that passion resistlessly impelled, would carve him a home out of the arid, unfruitful desert—a veritable paradise, but to be maintained such only by unremitting labor, by eternal vigilance, by constant striving and by—scientific irrigation.

Rand let the branch spring back and rode on, thinking. The orchards now were bare of the workers, the lemon pickers; and a great peace had settled upon the place. Already the heat of the sun was lessening, already the silent shadows were creeping swiftly over the broad fields. Behind the mountains great shafts of light, rainbow-hued, were quivering aloft, painting the sky with a thousand differing tones, each more brilliant than its fellow. A single, rocky shaft seemed to pierce the very firmament itself, a needle of glowing azure shadow, edged with flame.

Rand had ordered the removal of the dead animal from the highroad, and that, he knew, had been attended to earlier in the day; but he was thinking to find again that spot and look the ground over, hoping by chance to find some clew to the girl's assailant.

Instead, he found the ground already occupied. Two horses, very much alive, were tethered to a tree trunk, and the girl herself, dismounted, was busy over the giant water pipe, tightening a loose clamp with a heavy spanner.

So absorbed was she in her occupation that she failed to remark Rand's coming. He rode up quietly—if that adjective can be applied to a man whose heart has set up a most unreasonable and untimely thumping in his breast—and as silently alighted.

She looked around with a little, startled cry, to see him at her side.

"Oh!" she cried. "You! *You!*"

"Surely," Rand heard himself say, inanely enough. "This is an unexpected pleasure—for me, I mean."

Was the flush on her cheeks the reflection from the glowing sunset? Why else should it be there?

"How did you know?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Know what, if you please?"

Surely it was no light that ever had shown on land or sea that was reflected in her eyes. Rand marveled greatly, forgetting very many important things that had been upon his mind to say to her when next they were to meet.

"Know that I was—was to be here?"

"I didn't," he confessed. "It's pure good luck, I think. I just happened along, you know."

Still with that heightened color burning over her face, she turned again to her spanner, and began to tug on it with determination, setting her scarlet lips in a line deliciously firm. Rand put his palm over her hand and gently forced her to desist.

"That's a pretty tough job," he said, quietly. "Let me tackle it."

"But, no, Mr. Rand; I am perfectly able——"

"I know you are," he laughed; "but so am I."

"But it's my business," she protested.

"It's mine now."

He swung the spanner around slowly. "That far enough?" he asked.

"You are strong," she said, absent-mindedly, watching the play of his muscles beneath the sleek, brown skin of his forearm. "And now," she smiled, "just a twist or two to this one, and I think it is done."

Rand put forth a part of his strength, carelessly. The nut bit and grated on the iron belt which encircled the heavy wooden staves of the great pipe, and one could almost see them shrinking together.

"That will do, sir," the girl gasped.

Rand removed the spanner, and handed it over.

"Why do you do this?" he asked, looking her in the eyes.

"We dare not neglect a leak in this country," she returned. "The water is more precious than anything to us."

"I understand that," he returned. "But it isn't what I meant. I want to know why you, *you*, undertake the duties of the water master."

She elevated her chin defiantly.

"I told you that I was the *zanjero*, sir."

"So you did," he agreed, cheerfully. "And *zanjero* means water master; and the water master is a man."

"Indeed, sir! and how are you so sure?"

"Hinton told me. His name is Grierson, and he lives near the reservoir. That is his charge, in addition to proportioning the water supply among us farmers down here. What have you to do with that?"

"I have told you that I am the *zanjero!*" she flashed.

Rand nodded a grave affirmative.

"Very well. I am now going to unlock the gates and give you your water supply, sir. Do you wish to see how it is done?"

Rand nodded again, without speaking. The girl turned and led the way to the horses.

"You see, I am returning your pony," she said.

"Thank you," said Rand.

He bent, offering her his hand for a step; but it appeared that she could mount unaided—and she did. From the eminence of the saddle she looked down upon Rand, with an air almost of triumph, her face glowing brightly in the twilight.

"I am late," she said; "we must hurry."

Rand mounted, taking the bridle of the cayuse in his free hand, and they set off at a rapid trot toward the lower end of the ranch. The young man rode silently, a few paces to the rear; the girl kept resolutely on, without turning, her head well up.

Rand could see no more of her than the supple back that swayed lightly to the motion of the horse. He wondered that a riding habit of cheap linen could be so wonderfully modeled to a woman's figure—wondered if it, too, was the work of those slim, brown, strong hands.

Otherwise he could see one pink ear—at times two—and the little tendrils of hair that coiled at the nape of her neck. Upon her head she wore a sombrero magically transformed by the feminine touch.

"It is blessing enough," he murmured; meaning, to watch her as she preceded him. For the rest, he was trying to be content. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that he was sulking under her rebuff—more hurt, indeed, than angry.

Perhaps she considered this; for presently she slackened her pace, so that he came on and rode abreast with her. She turned her head a bit from him, watching him in little, fugitive, sidelong glances which he always just failed to catch.

"And Hinton," she said at length, "told you no more?"

"I did not ask."

"Why?—if *I* may ask," she laughed.

"Because that would be taking an unfair advantage."

"I—don't—understand you, sir."

"I would be learning something about you, possibly, which you did not wish me to know."

"Oh!"—the emphasis of illumination.

"Whatever," he continued, smoothly, "you want to tell me about yourself, or think I've any claim to know, I'm mighty anxious to hear. But I'm not going to go around and make inquiries about you behind your back, you know."

"Oh!" she exclaimed again; and then: "My name is Marguerite."

"Marguerite," he repeated, gratefully.

"Marguerite Grierson."

"I suspected that last."

"They call me Peggy," she added.

"'They' are favored. I cannot call you 'Peggy'—Miss Grierson."

The corners of her lips twitched. "I didn't imagine such a thing," she retorted. "I merely told you because—well, if you should speak to your neighbors of Marguerite Grierson, they wouldn't know whom you meant."

"I shall be very careful," Rand promised, humbly.

"I am undertaking my father's duties," she went on, her chin a bit higher, her bearing more independent, "because he is not well."

"I am sorry."

"It's nothing serious."

"I was afraid that he would not be able to receive visitors."

She turned on him, her eyes wide, surprised.

"What does that mean, sir?"

"I'm hinting that I'd like permission to call."

"Oh!" she considered him with immense gravity.

"On your father," he amended.

"Here we are," she cut him short.

The horses drew up at the extreme limit of Rand's ranch, where the lemon groves gave place to spreading fields of alfalfa, the property of his neighbor. Hinton was there, ahead of time, awaiting them. He drew off his sombrero with a gallant flourish.

"Good-evenin', Miss Grierson," he gave the girl. And, "Howdy, sah," he greeted Rand.

"Good-evening, Mr. Hinton," the girl replied, primly.

Hinton looked anxious. "What's the matter?" he begged. "Yo' nevah called me 'mistah' befo'."

"And yo' nevah called me 'miss' befo'," she mimicked, laughing as she dismounted.

Rand was by her side a minute too late to be of assistance. Disappointed, he accompanied the girl to the water gate, where she paused, selecting a key.

"Won't you let me do that for you?" he asked, holding out his hand.

She shook her head, mirthfully. "It's against the law, Mr. Rand," she told him. "I never let the keys out of my hands, sir."

Bending, she inserted the key in the lock, and lifted the gate. The water gushed forth wildly, as though glad to be at liberty, into the broad cement channel of the main distributing ditch, from which it darted into the lateral, swiftly.

The girl waited patiently until the ditch and laterals were half full, then replaced the gate, relocking it. Hinton, at that moment, bent and pulled the slide, opening the series of outlets, one to each furrow in the orchard, of the first lateral. At the same time his action was imitated by men stationed at the head of each lateral.

Rand watched, absorbed. The water leaped forth from the outlets, filling the furrows with tiny, sparkling streams that ran swiftly down grade to the end of the sections, where alfalfa was planted to absorb the surplus moisture. In one brief minute one entire division of the ranch was partially flooded.

Almost as quickly, however, the moisture began to disappear, to sink into the thirsting earth. Rand fancied that the drooping trees seemed to revive at once. He looked down at the girl, to find her smiling at his wonder.

"It's marvelous," he said.

"To you—yes. To us, usually commonplace, now a tragedy."

"Why?"

"Because your trees are dying for lack of water—or will die if the supply is not increased."

Hinton came up.

"Didn't seem to be much pressure," he observed, panting.

"No," said the girl. "The water is very low, indeed, in the reservoir. If the rains do not come before many days, there will be trouble. But they will come—they must!"

Presently they mounted to go on to the next distributing canal, of the next ranch division. It was growing quite dark; Rand, as he pushed his horse to the girl's side, could no more than see the pure outline of her profile as she sat, gazing ahead. Hinton had dropped discreetly to the rear.

"What kind of trouble?" Rand asked, abruptly.

But her thoughts seemed to be running in the same channel as his own; she replied instantly:

"There is always trouble—envy and hatred, heart-burnings and jealousy—among the other farmers, when the waters are low."

"But why?"

"Their supply is decreased, proportionately, to the area of each man's land. And then they begin to cry out against the great holders, like yourself, Mr. Rand—the men who, because they have lands five and ten times the size of the small producers, are entitled to five and ten times as much water, thus depriving the lesser farmers of what they seem to think should be theirs."

"I see," said Rand, soberly. He rode quietly for some time. At length: "But their position is illogical," he disputed.

"There is no doubt about that, sir."

"If it had not been for the leadership, primarily, and then the active co-operation of my father in planning and building the Nampa Reservoir, they would have no water supply at all now."

"That is true."

"And I pay as big a tax, per acre, for the water rights as any of them, I dare say."

"No," she told him; "there you are mistaken."

"How?"

"Your father, in advancing a great part of the money to build the reservoir, thereby secured to himself half rate for the use of the water for the next fifty years."

"Ah! And that is the reason, the real reason, then?"

"Yes; they are ungrateful."

"Nevertheless," said Rand, "from this time forward my ranch will pay the full rate per ground foot, Miss Grierson. Will you inform your father of that fact?"

She nodded, without speaking. Rand fell into a deep meditation. The second, third and fourth canals were reached and the water turned on and off, ere he had come out of his reverie. And then it was the girl who brought him to himself.

The night lay golden in moonlight about them when she finally turned to Rand and offered him one small, friendly hand.

"Good-night, sir," she gave him. "My work is finished."

"For the night?" he asked, retaining her hand a moment longer than was, possibly, strictly necessary.

"Oh, no; I have other farms to attend to; in these times we can trust nothing to deputies, you understand."

"But—but do you ride alone, Miss Grierson?"

"Alone, Mr. Rand—but unafraid. There is no one, nothing in the Nampa Valley, that I have to fear."

She spoke carelessly; but Rand caught her up on the instant.

"It is strange to hear you say that," he commented, boldly. "After last night, one would think——"

She turned toward him again with a little, frightened gasp.

"Don't, Mr. Rand," she pleaded.

"Miss Grierson!" Rand leaned over the pommel of his saddle and put a detaining hand on the bridle of her horse. "Just one moment, Miss Grierson."

"Well, sir?" coldly.

"Why did Wheelock shoot your horse last night?"

"Mr. Rand!"

Her eyes seemed wide and terrified as she looked at him; Rand could see

that she was trembling violently. He changed his manner immediately.

"Won't you tell me, please?" he begged, contritely. "Won't you trust me, Miss Grierson?"

"I—I prefer not to talk about that, Mr. Rand."

"Very well, then. I shall have to seek that information from its source, then."

"Please!"

Her horse jumped away, jerking the bridle from Rand's grasp. At the same moment a shadow seemed to spring from the ground at their right—in reality, emerging suddenly from the shade of a lemon grove.

"Good-evening, Miss Grierson," Rand heard a pleasantly modulated voice.

The girl shuddered. The speaker halted, baring his head, and the moonlight falling athwart his features showed Rand Wheelock's face.

"'Evening, Rand," the manager nodded, familiarly. "Miss Grierson," he added, more brusquely, "you've kept me waiting. Are you"—he sneered—"quite at liberty to measure out my allowance of water now?"

The girl's horse moved forward.

"Quite ready, Mr. Wheelock," she said, composedly. "Good-night, Mr. Rand."

"Good-night." Rand, quivering with wrath, turned back toward home. "Hinton!" he called; and the man came to his side. "What's Wheelock's right here?"

"That's his land, oveh the line, sah; he was standin' right acrost the boundary."

CHAPTER VII.

RAND'S WRATH.

Rand made no comment. For some minutes the two men rode on their homeward way, in silence. Hinton had no thoughts which he deemed worthy of utterance; and so, as was in keeping with his character, he lapsed into inward communion, contemplatively chewing a quid of tobacco.

As for Rand, he, too, was wrapped in thought. Something very like a premonition of trouble possessed his imagination; he recalled continually and quite vividly Wheelock's expression when he had so abruptly put in an appearance a few minutes back.

It had not been a pleasant expression. To the contrary. Rand misliked it exceedingly, and made little doubt but that the ex-manager had overheard the latter part of Rand's conversation with Peggy Grierson.

Also, there had been in Wheelock's manner a suggestion of familiarity when he had addressed the girl—a lack of respect and a discourtesy that indicated very plainly the man's deficiency in good breeding. It made Rand's blood boil to hear the girl spoken to in any terms but those of the utmost deference and respect.

The more he thought it over, the less he liked the situation that he was leaving behind him. Wheelock, Rand now felt convinced, was the man responsible for the shooting of the girl's horse the previous night. If that were truth, there was no reason to believe that Wheelock would be any less likely to resort to such extreme measures again, and at once, if he felt that his interests—whatever they might be—demanded such a course.

"Damn!" said Rand, thoughtfully.

"Beg yo' pardon, sah?" inquired Hinton, starting from a deep meditation.

Rand looked him over, pondering the advisability of taking the man into his confidence, of informing him concerning the strange affair of the night before, and asking his advice. But, upon some impulse, the younger man refrained. For one thing, he was not sure; it was not Rand's way to condemn a man, however much he might dislike him, wholly upon circumstantial evidence.

"I don't know," he admitted to himself; "I may be totally wrong—and there's no use stirring up trouble for Wheelock, anyway, if he is disposed to behave himself in the future. But, on the other hand, I—I think I'll do something I never did before; I'll play the spy—for this once."

He halted his horse, and slipped out of the saddle, handing the reins to Hin-

ton, who regarded him with open-eyed amazement.

"Beg yo' pardon, sah," said the older man, "but what air yo' gwine to do—if 'tain't no impertinent question?"

"It isn't," said Rand, serenely. "I'm just going to walk back. I feel as if the exercise might do me good. Besides, I want to be alone for a little while and think some things out at my leisure. You take the horse back to the house, and I'll be with you before long."

Hinton hesitated a moment. Then:

"Look hyeh, Misteh Rand, sah," he said, "may I inquiah if yo' are ahmed, sah?"

"Certainly you may, Hinton. More than that, I'll tell you frankly the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Rand laughed. "I am not armed," he added.

"Will yo' except the loan of my revolveh, then, sah?"

"What for?"

"In case yo' should meet up with thet damned scoundrel, Wheelock, sah. He don't got any use for yo', sah, and he might be tempted to do something reckless, sah."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Rand. "I'm not afraid of Wheelock."

"Ah knows yo' ain't, sah, and thet's why I'm a-wahnin' yo'."

"Moreover," argued Rand, "Wheelock's too much of a coward——"

"Certainly he is, sah—certainly he is. And a coward is just the precise soht of a man who'll steal up behin' yo' and plug you in the small of the back with a fohty-fo' caliber bullet, sah." Hinton shook his head disputatively, and attempted to force the butt of his revolver into Rand's hand; but the latter smilingly refused to accept the weapon.

"You're an old woman, Hinton," he said. "There isn't any more sense in my lugging that small cannon around than there would be in my hiring a bodyguard. Make your mind easy; Wheelock's interests are all in the other direction, and he knows it."

"All right, sah—ef yo' say so, sah; but yo're suah right keerless."

And, still apprehensively wagging his grizzled head, the Missourian rode off, leaving Rand staring contemplatively down at the dust of the road, at his feet.

Presently, however, he roused from his musing, and laughed shortly.

"Hinton's like all the rest of these Westerners, I guess," he concluded. "He thinks that human life is as cheap in these regions to-day as it was four decades ago. And he's wrong. As a matter of fact, he hasn't any proof in support of his theory, to-day. The times have changed and Hinton hasn't —that's all."

He turned and strode back in the shadows of the lemon trees, toward the boundary line where he had left the girl with Wheelock. The great stillness of the night and its beauty enthralled his imagination, robbing him of the forebodings which had led him to dismount and walk back in order to assure himself as to Wheelock's docility. Rand began to think more especially of the girl herself, and of the charm of her which already had stirred his heart as no woman's beauty had ever been able to stir it before in his young life. And Rand had known many women in many lands, and, to tell the truth, had admired the majority of them.

But Peggy—already he was calling her Peggy in his inmost thoughts—but Peggy was different, very greatly different, from all of them. She was—she was—Peggy. Rand nodded silently at this astonishing conclusion.

"She's just Peggy," he said, softly; "there's no other word in the English language that describes her; when you've said 'Peggy,' you've said everything essential!"

He stopped short, in the black shadow of the trees, and swore beneath his breath. He had come, unexpectedly quickly, to the end of his lands, and simultaneously upon a most astonishing state of affairs.

This was something that he had never in the least expected. Rand's heart seemed to stop for a little while—the merest trifle of a minute; and then it was jumping furiously, and the hot blood was burning in his cheeks.

By the roadside stood the animal which the girl had ridden that evening,

contemplating with an air of sober interest its mistress and Wheelock. The latter two stood in the full glare of the moonlight, and very near together.

At first Rand's mind seemed unable to comprehend just what was toward. Then, gradually, he realized that he was unwarrantably intruding. He was spying upon a lovers' meeting; it could be nothing else than that.

For Peggy Grierson was in Wheelock's arms.

"Good Lord!" said Rand, wretchedly. "I—I never imagined that—that she cared a snap of her finger."

As yet he was too distant to see clearly more than the two figures that seemed almost as one, so closely together they stood. Unwillingly, Rand found himself stepping forward to get a nearer view, as if he were unable to believe the evidence of his own eyes.

His footsteps made no sound in the soft, damp earth. Nothing heralded his approach. The girl and the man were totally unwarned of it. But as he drew more near, Rand's understanding received another shock. And he saw that he had been mistaken.

This was no lovers' meeting—far from that, indeed. True, the girl was resting in Wheelock's arms without resistance; but the words that came to Rand's ears were not those that sweethearts might be expected to exchange.

"Let me go," he heard the girl say, in a tone instinct with repulsion and loathing. "Let me go, I say!" And her foot stamped the ground imperiously.

"And why?" asked Wheelock, soothingly. "Can't you be happy here, in my arms, now? Remember, the day's not far distant when you'll have to endure my caresses, because you'll be my wife. Be still and——"

"Let me go!"

"When I'm quite ready. It's no use struggling, Peggy, my dear, for I'm too strong for you."

That was true. The girl had made a futile effort to wrest herself from Wheelock's arms, but he had held her as easily as though she had been a child.

"You can't deny the impatient bridegroom-to-be," he continued, in a sneering tone, "the favor of one embrace, or a kiss."

"Let me go!"

"Give me a kiss, then—or the keys. Give me the keys, and I'll let you be—until we're married, dear!"

"I will not. Let me go!"—her tone dull and hopeless.

"I say, give me those keys—or I'll kiss you and take them, too!"

"You can kiss me if you will—I can't help myself. But touch those keys and I'll——"

"What? What will you do to me?" he sneered.

"I'll rouse the neighborhood. I'll tell them that you've been trying to steal water, and that you've gone to the length of stealing the keys. I don't think they'll have much mercy on you."

"But you know the penalty."

"I don't care!" she cried, passionately. "You can do what you will, and we'll suffer for it, father and I; but you shan't have those keys!"

"But I shall have them," he mocked, "and the kiss, too. Come, now, be sensible. Remember——"

Rand's hand fell upon his collar, and the fellow, releasing the girl in his anger and surprise as he turned upon the intruder, was jerked from his feet and laid sprawling in the dust two yards distant from her. And Rand stood over him, his face white with rage, his eyes flashing, his whole great frame trembling with indignation. The riding crop which he had been carrying shook in his grasp as though it required all his forbearance and self-control to resist the temptation to thrash the man thoroughly.

"Get up!" cried Rand. "Get up, you infamous scoundrel!" He seemed to be trying to talk coherently, but his anger robbed him of the power of expression. "Wheelock," he stammered, "I—Wheelock, what—— Ah! you would!"

For Wheelock's hand had gone swiftly toward his hip pocket and had come away holding something that glittered in the moon's rays. Rand recognized its nature instantly, and, far

quicker than thought, his riding crop struck out and landed sharply on the man's wrist.

Wheelock cried aloud with the agony caused by that terrific blow, and the revolver dropped from the hand that seemed for the moment paralyzed. Rand bent over him swiftly and ran his fingers into the collar of Wheelock's shirt.

"Get up, you hound!" he cried. "Get up!"

He jerked the ex-manager to his knees so roughly that he fell forward. And the riding crop rose and fell methodically for several seconds, landing upon the fellow's back with a sound like the snap of a whip.

Wheelock writhed, groaning and struggling in a vain attempt to free himself, to escape from that merciless rain of blows that fell unsparingly about his head and neck and across his shoulders and thighs with a force that made him sick with pain. He caught blindly at Rand's knees, and was rewarded by a second crack across the wrist that seemed to numb his entire arm, from shoulder to hand, and made him shriek aloud.

A moment later the crop broke. Rand flung the beaten man to one side and threw away the stump of shattered wood. "There!" he panted. "I fancy you'll behave yourself a bit better in the future. Remember this, Wheelock. What!—again!"

For Wheelock, as he palpitated there in the dust at Rand's feet, had been writhing slowly toward the revolver. Rand put his heel in the small of the fellow's back, stooped and possessed himself of the weapon.

"You're malicious, Wheelock," he said; "a most soulless cur, Wheelock! Get up, now, and listen to me!"

The muzzle of the gun enforced his command. Wheelock rose with an eagerness only tempered by the pain he was enduring and confronted Rand and the girl, his regular features contorted with a scowl of hatred and suffering—a scowl so dark that his face seemed almost black in the moonlight. He moved impulsively toward Rand, his hands opening and closing convulsively, and recoiled when Rand made manifest his intention of keeping the peace, if necessary, at the cost of Wheelock's life.

"You!" cried Wheelock. "You—I'll——"

"Hush!" Rand soothed him. "Don't call names or make any rash promises that you may not be able to carry out. And, you hound, listen to me!"

Wheelock hung his head, watching the girl with swift, sidelong glances. "Well?" he asked, doggedly.

Rand waited a full minute, recovering his self-control. When he spoke his tone was cold and passionless—the accents of a judge pronouncing just sentence upon an offender.

"I see that I've made a mistake in regard to you, Wheelock," he began. "I've given you a chance—temporized with a rattlesnake. It was foolish of me, and I give you my word it shan't occur again. I fancied you might have some lingering remnants of self-respect, Wheelock—some instinct toward decency. That's all. You haven't.

"Now, I'm going to give you just one more opportunity to redeem yourself. I suppose it's foolishness, but I'll allow you just one week from this evening, wherein to wind up your affairs in this part of the country and skip out. I don't care where you go or what you do after this, but if you do as I say there'll never be any scandal dogging you.

"Understand, you have seven days by the calendar. In that length of time you should be able to dispose of your property here and at a good price. But if I hear of your approaching this young lady, or molesting her by proxy, or if I believe that you are annoying her by word, thought or deed, I'll repeat the thrashing I've just given you, and more—I'll tell every farmer in the community just what breed of dog you spring from. I'll do that, anyway, if you are not gone by the end of the week. Now, get out!"

"You'll be sorry for this——"

"Oh, I dare say that I'll regret my clemency. I dare say what I really ought to do is to run you out to Hy-

drant and ship you instanter; but I'll chance it. Now, go!"

The ex-manager, his body vibrating with suppressed passion, turned on his heel, without so much as a word to the girl, and was about to obey, though sullenly enough, when Rand had another idea.

"One moment," he stipulated. "I quite forgot that you owe Miss Grierson an apology. Get down on your knees, you hound, and beg her pardon, and do it *now!*"

During the entire scene the girl had remained where she had been standing when released from Wheelock's embrace, a strangely silent and passive spectator, her face a beautiful mask for whatever emotions she may have been experiencing. But now she stepped forward with a protest on her lips.

"No, Mr. Rand!" she cried.

Rand stared at her, stupefied by the vehemence of her negative. But she would not meet his eye. Neither, for that matter, did she look toward Wheelock, even for an instant. She faltered, dropping to her side the hand with which she had impulsively supplicated Rand and drooping her head forward.

"I——" she said, "I—do not care to have Mr. Wheelock apologize to me. I —have no desire to hear his apology. Mr. Wheelock—has—every right—— I am to be Mr. Wheelock's wife within the week, Mr. Rand!"

Wheelock turned upon his former employer, triumphantly. Unfortunately, he did not know enough to let well enough alone. Rand was gazing from the girl to Wheelock alternately, in a daze of anger and chagrin, when Wheelock's tongue outstripped his discretion.

"You see?" he snarled. "Perhaps in the future you'll be more inclined to mind your own business, Mr. Rand. Permit me to suggest that an apology is due me from you, rather than——"

"That'll do!" cried Rand, sharply. "Suggestions from you, Wheelock, are out of order. Moreover, whether or no Miss Grierson is to be your wife—which she will forgive me for doubting, as I do most sincerely—you'll apologize to her, and, what's more to the point, you'll do it now, without further delay! Miss Grierson—if you please!"

Rand ignored the appeal in the girl's attitude. He turned again to Wheelock.

"Get down on your knees, sir!" he commanded. "I've lost all patience with you. Get down and beg her pardon, or I'll drill you full of holes!"

And Wheelock obeyed with becoming haste.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST RESORT.

Five minutes later Wheelock was skulking homeward through the rows of lemon trees in the grove that he owned by virtue of Rand's clemency; Peggy Grierson was riding hard and fast through the night, lashing her pony to its greatest speed, that she might, by making haste, leave behind her that scene the remembrance of which brought hot tears to her eyes and a burning pain to her heart; and Rand was striding swiftly and angrily down the road toward his ranch cottage.

His anger at Wheelock was yet hot within him, and the resentment which he accorded the girl for her recent behavior did not tend to cool his rage. To him her attitude was absolutely inexplicable. One would have imagined, he thought, that he had been the man whose conduct had provoked the encounter of the past half hour.

He reviewed his part therein, and, in the light of the girl's attitude, found it utterly distasteful and unwarranted. Bitterly he regretted having interfered. If she preferred Wheelock, Rand argued in his misery—well, she could have him for all that Rand was disposed to do or say to the contrary, in the future.

For he was thoroughly disheartened. When Wheelock had taken his departure, urged thereunto by the pistol which Rand had taken from him, the girl had hurriedly mounted her pony. Rand had stepped to the stirrups with a half-formed apology on his own behalf in his mind.

"Miss Grierson——" he had started to say; but she had cut him short.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Rand," she said; "but I've nothing to say to you."

"Eh? What do you mean?" he had demanded, stammering. "Nothing to say to me?"

"I mean that I can't and won't explain, sir. I—oh, I wish I'd never seen you, sir!"

There had been sincerity in her tone. Rand could not forget it, any more than he could forget her averted face and the frigidity of her demeanor. He saw her again as she had left him; bending low over her pony's neck, her hair flying in the wind and her whip rising and falling as the frantic and abused animal tore on through the night.

"I'm hanged if I understand a bit of it!" Rand swore. "But there's a limit to my endurance! One thing I'll promise you, John Rand, and that is that Wheelock will be handled without gloves from this night on."

Nevertheless, in the following week, Wheelock pursued his ways undeterred by Rand; the latter, in fact, ignored the man's existence so far as possible, carefully trying to exclude all thought either of his, or the girl's, existence from his mind.

But the first was easier than the last. Try as he would, the memory of her, on the three separate occasions on which he had known her, was ever foremost in his mental vision. Her charm, as undeniable as intangible; her beauty that was positive, her pensive sweetness and her moments of vivacity, Rand could no more help recalling than he could refrain from breathing.

By day and by night the thought of her troubled him, and a vague restlessness and dissatisfaction gathered within him, robbing the sunlight of its brightness, despoiling the nights of their still magnificence, tainting all his days.

For he did not see her again. On the following evening a new *zanjero*—or, rather, the old one—her father—put in an appearance; a gaunt, haggard, silent and careworn man, who attended to the duties of his position listlessly, answering only in monosyllables when addressed, and apparently accepting Rand without the least interest in the world. The young man rode with him all one long, hot afternoon, on an inspection of the irrigation pipe line from the fruit farms clear to the foot of the mountains, without exchanging more than half a dozen words with him.

It was from Hinton that he got some inkling of the true state of affairs. Ordinarily taciturn, when the stunted Missourian was in company that he cared for he unbent and became at times almost garrulous.

He it was, then, who informed Rand of Grierson's troubles, of the failure of his attempt to establish an orange grove the previous year—a failure brought about by the shortage in the water supply, so that the young trees, lacking the stamina and hardihood of their older and more acclimated neighbors, had withered and died in the furrowed orchards.

From this Rand deduced a fairly accurate diagnosis of Grierson's position. He suspected, and with reason, that money had been borrowed from Wheelock, and that Wheelock was pressing the old man for payment, while at the same time he was professing himself as willing to cancel the obligation in consideration of Peggy Grierson's becoming his wife.

It was a situation as old as the hills, Rand told himself, and his interference was not wanted therein. More than once he was tempted to suggest to Grierson that he would be more than willing to help him out of his trouble, but always Rand was deterred from so doing by the recollection of Peggy Grierson's attitude—that of a silent agreement with Wheelock in his stand that it was none of Rand's affair. If she had only treated him differently, Rand would have felt warranted to act on her behalf as well as her father's. But, as things stood, he considered himself powerless.

Meanwhile, the girl kept herself in the seclusion of the water master's home by the great reservoir in the mountains. Meanwhile, Wheelock went about his

business peaceably, studiously avoiding Rand. And, meanwhile, the rains came.

The news was telephoned throughout the community on the third morning following Rand's arrival at Nampa; the rains had come. In the desert, of course, there was no indication of this fact, but up in the mountains there were storms of infinite fury, deluging them with cloudbursts daily. And rapidly the Nampa Reservoir was filling up; and just as rapidly the drooping spirits of the fruit growers were reviving.

Toward sundown, on the eighth day after his encounter with Wheelock and the girl, Rand again met with his former manager. The anger that had been accumulating in his heart for several days, because of the unpleasant state of affairs involving Peggy Grierson, was brimming over in Rand's heart, even as—they told him—the water was flush with the top of the Nampa Reservoir and threatening at any moment to overflow and waste countless tons of precious moisture upon the desert sands.

The boundary line was again the scene of the meeting—that spot where Rand's ranch ended and Wheelock's began. Rand had ridden over with Hinton to inspect the canals and laterals; at the junction they found Wheelock in close confabulation with Grierson.

Upon their appearance, the conference was hastily terminated, Grierson mounting and riding away with no more than a short nod to Rand and Hinton. Wheelock stood his ground, scowling forbiddingly at the intruders.

Rand rode his horse across the boundary and reined it in upon Wheelock's land, keeping his gaze steadily upon the face of the embezzler.

"Wheelock——" he began, quietly.

But Wheelock was disposed toward insolence. "Get off my land," he growled. "Get back on your own ground. This place is mine, and you've no right——"

"You don't tell me!" Rand laughed. "I'm afraid you'd find some trouble convincing your neighbors of that fact, Wheelock, if either Hinton or I considered it advisable to tell what we know."

"But you won't," asserted Wheelock, confidently.

Rand laughed again. "On the contrary," he said. "Do you recall a little talk I had with you about a week ago—to be precise, eight days back? I told you, if you remember, that I'd give you just seven days to clear out of Nampa. I've allowed you an extra day of grace, but if you're not out of sight by sunrise to-morrow, Nampa shall know all that I know concerning you, Wheelock. I've a warrant in my pocket for your arrest on a charge of embezzlement, and I have only to hand it to the sheriff to put you where you belong, my man—behind the bars. You are not prepared to dispute that?"

"No," Wheelock conceded, reluctantly, containing his temper by a visible effort. "But you take my advice and don't you do it. Just so sure as you make a single move against me, I'll ruin you and every farmer in this section. You mark my words!"

He scowled defiantly into Rand's face, and Rand laughed at him, while Hinton fingered the butt of the revolver which he carried, watching the thief narrowly for a hostile move.

"How will you do it, Wheelock?" Rand asked.

"That's my affair. You'll know quick enough when——"

"Then go ahead, Wheelock." Rand drew from his breast pocket a folded paper and handed it to Hinton. "Hinton," he said, "take this to Sheriff Pease at once, for instant execution."

Wheelock, his eyes fixed on Rand's, nodded slowly, his lips trembling with wrath.

"That'll cost you all you own here," he said, thickly. "Go on—and be damned to you both!"

And he wheeled about and strode hastily away, down a long avenue of green and gold lemon trees.

Rand watched him in silence, turning, when the man had swerved aside and disappeared, to find Hinton still by his side.

"Why don't you do as I tell you?"

demanded Rand. "Take that to the sheriff, and waste no time about it."

His own temper was not of the best at the moment. But Hinton dared hesitate and doubt, shaking his head argumentatively.

"I wouldn't advise yo' to ack too hasty with thet yellow dawg, Misteh Rand, sah. You heered what he said, sah?"

"Bluff!" The word came explosively.

"Don't yo' be too suah of thet, sah. He ain't to be trusted."

"I've fooled with him all I'm going to," said Rand, quietly, his voice charged with his inflexible determination. "Go, and do as I tell you."

"Can't," objected Hinton, tersely.

"Why not?"

"Pease is a-gwine to 'Frisco, sah, on business—won't be back tell to-morrer mornin', sah."

"Wait until to-morrow, then, but have it in his hands as soon as he steps off the train. I'll give Wheelock the extreme limit if I have to."

"Yo're suah makin' a mis-take, sah. Tek an ole fool's advice, sah, and make up with him."

"Hinton," said Rand, utterly exasperated, "if you were any other man I'd tell you to go to the devil. As it is, I warn you that I'll stand no more interference."

Hinton drew himself up in his saddle with dignity. "Ver-y good, sah," he grumbled. "But yo'll be sorry," he could not forbear adding, solicitously.

Rand made no reply; darkness had closed about them, and so had terminated the further inspection of the irrigating system. Their ride back to the bungalow was accomplished in silence --both men thinking deeply. And in silence they shared the evening meal.

Rand retired to the library, without paying any attention to Hinton, who was palpably uneasy in his mind. The old man strolled restlessly about the house for an hour or more, staring into the starlit distances as though he feared a night attack upon his employer. In the end he went off toward the stables and disappeared for over an hour.

But when he returned it was to break in upon Rand without ceremony, his face gray beneath its coat of brick-red sunburn.

"Misteh Rand, sah!" he gasped.

Rand took one look at his staring eyes and trembling figure, and concluded that he had never before seen a man so badly scared.

"What is it?" he asked, rising.

"Misteh Rand, sah, yo' fatheh once had some notion of borin' for ile, hyeh in the desert, sah."

"Yes? Well?"

"They was some dynamite left oveh, sah, after he'd made up his mind theah was nothin' doin', and——"

"Dynamite! Out with it, Hinton!"

"It was stohed in the tool house, sah, and the tool house has been broken open, sah, since las' night, and the dynamite's gone!"

"Well, what of that?"

"I'll take my oath, sah, that Wheelock has it."

"What will he do with it, Hinton? Blow us up here? He's not such a fool!"

"No, sah; not that. Don't yo' remembeh what he threatened us with this evenin', sah? Said he'd ruin us and every farmer in this district? Well, he's a-gwine to do it."

Rand laughed tolerantly. "Blow up all Nampa, Hinton?" he jeered.

"Same thing, sah. He's plotting to blow up the reservoir!"

"Good God!" cried Rand. "You don't believe that, Hinton?"

"I mos' shorely do, sah!"

Rand jerked open the desk drawer and took out the revolver.

"Get horses!" he ordered, briefly.

"They're at the do', sah."

"Come on, then!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE DAM.

Fifteen minutes' ride through the night brought the two to Wheelock's bungalow. Five minutes more told them that Hinton had ground for his suspicions. The old Missourian ex-

plored the house and stable thoroughly, demonstrating his right so to do to the servants by a free display of his revolver.

The result of his search disclosed the fact that Wheelock was missing with two horses. The servants declared that he had saddled and ridden away to the south shortly after sundown. More than that, they certainly did not know or suspect.

"It's the reservoir, then," Rand told Hinton. "Come—we can catch him."

"Not with the staht he's got, sah, I'm afeerd."

"We can try it, anyway," replied Rand, grimly. "And God have mercy on Wheelock's soul if we win!"

Happily their horses were fresh and the greater part of their twenty-mile journey on fairly level ground, across the desert to the mountains which rose out of the sand with scarcely a foothill for approach. The Nampa Reservoir lay but a short distance in toward the heart of the hills, and the road thereto was not a difficult one.

They bent low in their saddles, riding madly through the soundless wilderness, keeping in the road that ran parallel to the great iron-bound pipe. Rand's heart was sick within him with anxiety, and in his mind there was but one thought, and that a prayer that he might win to the dam in time to save Peggy Grierson from the danger that threatened. He was not attempting to disguise from himself the fact, now, that life was worth nothing to him without her. He was only thinking of the dreadful void that would be in the world, were she gone from it. The dam might go to smash, for all he cared in comparison to his care for Peggy Grierson. A reservoir blown up is no irreparable matter. That could be fixed. But the loss to the world of one good woman is irremediable.

The soft thudding of the ponies' hoofs was maintained ceaselessly the night through. The east was pallid with dawn when they had to slacken the pace, striking into the mountain by way of a narrow gulch with a sharp upward grade. And the sun was painting the mountain peaks with pure scarlet when at length they had negotiated the final ascent and had rounded a shoulder of mountain side and come into view of the Nampa Reservoir.

It stretched before them, a broad, still sheet, its surface placid and mirror-like many acres in extent, reaching far back between two towering hills. To the east was the dam itself, stretching from wall to wall of the canyon like an arc of some mighty circle of solid stone, its convex face inward, holding back the vast quantity of water that was flush with its lip, but as yet not overflowing. Rand found time to wonder at the tremendous rains which had accomplished the filling of this immense tank in a time so short.

But there was little time for aught else. Before them was the home of the Griersons, set some distance back from the surface of the reservoir—a small house of stone, clustered about with flowers. And Peggy Grierson was standing with her father in the doorway, watching curiously the coming of the two horsemen.

"Praises be, we're in time!" gasped Rand to Hinton. "I begin to believe that you were wrong, old man. There's not a sign of Wheelock hereabouts."

"No, and there won't be, in the nature of things," retorted the Missourian. "Yo' don't calculate he's a-gwine to come up hyeh and take off his hat and say, perlitely, 'Please, Misteh Grierson, d'ye mind if I blows up yo' dam?' "

"But then what——"

"He'd come up the canyon theah, sah, and stick in his dynamite at the base of the dam, sah, and light a time fuse, to give him a few minutes to escape."

"That'd be suicide, Hinton," protested Rand. "He wouldn't dare take the risk."

"Yo' don't know thet man Wheelock as well as I do, sah. He's afraid of a gun and an hones' man, sah, but he'll take enny chances in the world to git even with yo'. Besides, if he sets his fuse right, it'll give him plenty of time to climb the ladder to the top hyeh—and then he'll be in safety. My only

hope, sah, is to lean oveh the edge, sah, and pot him while he's busy."

Even as he concluded, and in dramatic support of his reasoning, a man's head and shoulders appeared over the brink of the reservoir, up one side of which he had climbed by means of an iron ladder firmly embedded in the rock.

That man was Wheelock. Rand's heart was in his throat as he recognized him. And Hinton's revolver was in his hand as the criminal stepped off the ladder and ran along the top of the dam to the firm, rock surface of the little plateau on which the cabin was situated.

Grierson started forward with a cry as Hinton fired. Wheelock halted, stared and screamed with terror. For an instant he was running back, and then he seemed to realize that the fate that Hinton held for him was infinitely more kind than a death from the danger that lay behind him.

He turned. Hinton fired again, but the distance between them was considerable, and perhaps the old man's agitation, born of his premonition of the impending disaster, robbed his aim of its accuracy. Wheelock shrieked again in mortal terror and began frantically to run toward the Grierson home. Somehow he stumbled and fell sprawling.

At that moment a dull, distant explosion sounded—more or less like the firing of a cannon cracker under a barrel. Hinton leaped from his horse and threw himself face down upon the ground, shouting incoherently to the Griersons and Rand to do likewise. Rand himself dismounted, but stood, fascinated by the awful grandeur of the catastrophe which was taking place before his eyes.

For a brief instant the surface of the waters seemed curiously agitated about the brink of the reservoir. A second explosion, less distinct than the first, followed. The face of the dam seemed to fold in on itself, like a house of cards. A huge, roaring sound filled the canyon, and the mountains seemed to rock weirdly, thundering.

An earthquake had shaken the earth no more. Rand was thrown flat upon his face with a terrific force. He seemed to lose consciousness for a little while.

When he sat up he was within a foot or two of the edge of a precipice that dropped to the bottom of the canyon, hundreds of feet sheer—or so it seemed to Rand. And at its foot a yellow torrent roared.

He crawled a few feet away and stared about him stupidly. The face of the earth had been changed incredibly in one brief minute.

The dam was gone, swept away like a nightmare hallucination with the waking of the dreamer. So, too, was the immense sheet of water that had backed up behind it. The canyon lay clear, save for the yellow flood at its bottom, to the desert beyond, that was but barely visible in the distance.

Rand's pony, shivering with terror, nuzzled her master's hand for comfort. He took the bridle reins in his hand mechanically and stirred Hinton's prostrate form with his toe. Hinton moved and rose, swearing softly to himself.

Together they approached the Grierson cabin, which now stood within a yard of the precipice. The force of the long pent waters, suddenly released, had torn away the solid rock of the canyon's side, almost to their doorsteps. Beyond was clear air.

Abruptly Rand realized that Wheelock must have been swept away to destruction, with the crumbling of the rock whereon he had fallen. But that was a matter of slight moment to him then. The one all-important fact in his world was that Peggy Grierson lay before him, in a dead faint, by her father's side.

She recovered consciousness in his arms.

CHAPTER X.

THE END.

It was high noon ere the girl had recovered sufficiently from the shock for the little party to move on, down from the mountains to Nampa. And so slowly did they proceed, out of consid-

eration for her, that it was long after nightfall ere the four rode into the bungalow on Grierson's orange plantation —or, rather, the place that he had attempted to make an orange plantation.

For the greater part of the journey the girl had had little to say to Rand. He rode by her side, pressing her with no questions, speaking only when she seemed to desire speech with him, and then briefly, since conversation appeared to weary her.

Some distance in front of them Hinton rode with Grierson, both taciturn to an extreme, exhibiting no pleasure in each other's companionship.

At the driveway leading to the Grierson bungalow Rand stopped his horse. Grierson had gone on in; Hinton was waiting for him several hundred yards up the road.

After a slight period of hesitation the girl reined in her horse and turned to Rand, offering him her hand with a shy, wistful little smile.

"I want to thank you," she said, in a voice so low that he had need to bend near to catch her words. "You—you've been very kind ever since—ever since you came here."

"I'm glad," he said, meaningly, "that you think so—now."

She shivered slightly at the recollection of the night to which he referred—when he had thrashed Wheelock.

"I'm sorry," she said, a bit tremulously, "that you misunderstood me. I —I *couldn't* explain then—I didn't dare. You see——"

She paused.

"Yes?" Rand encouraged her.

"Father was indebted to Mr. Wheelock, very deeply indebted; and he was —was not nice about it. He began by inducing father to—oh! it's hard to say —to betray his trust and give his—Mr. Wheelock's—land more water than he was entitled to, in times of drought. And then he threatened him with exposure, to make him keep on doing that.

"He threatened me with father's shame, if it came out. Ah! you'll not violate my confidence, Mr. Rand?"

"Never!" Rand promised, fervently.

"And made me promise to marry him to—to shield father. It was terrible; but what could I do?"

She turned a tear-stained face to Rand, pleadingly. Almost unconsciously Rand's hand closed upon hers, that rested upon the pommel of the saddle.

"Poor little woman!" he whispered.

She did not seem to be aware of that hand clasp. At least, she did not resent it. And Rand dared permit it to remain.

"Then my father fell sick and I had to take his place, staying in Nampa and sleeping at the bungalow in there all the time. Mr. Wheelock tried to make me continue giving his land—not yours, only his—a greater allowance of water than he paid for, and I—I refused. I simply couldn't bring myself to do it, no matter what the consequences. He begged me to give him a key, so that he might steal it without my knowledge. But that was only a quibble. Of course I refused.

"The night you found me over there, in the road, he had set one of his men —a Chinaman—to the task of robbing me of the keys. About half an hour before you came along, I imagine, the man shot my horse. It was dark, and I couldn't see his face clearly——"

"I know that Chinaman!" said Rand. "It's lucky for him that he has left Nampa!"

"And I didn't faint at first. My foot was caught, you remember, and I couldn't get away, but I held him off with my revolver until the sound of your horse's hoofs frightened him. Then I put my revolver away, because I didn't want anyone to know about it, for fear they would suspect Mr. Wheelock, and that the whole wretched business would come out. Then I must have fainted. It was silly of me, I know, but it was very terrible, Mr. Rand."

"I don't see that it was anything but natural," argued Rand. "Your endurance has its limits. I only wish I'd known at the time. This thing"—he indicated the mountains and the dynamited reservoir with a wave of his hand—"would never have happened."

"Ah! but I wish I had told you!" she protested. "Anything would be better than this awful disaster. You, who are new to this land, can't imagine what it means to my people to be without water, Mr. Rand. Their farms will die—go back to desert—and they'll have to give up the struggle——"

She broke off, sobbing; her sympathy for "her people," and her overstrained nerves were proving too much for her composure. Rand maneuvered and obtained possession of the other hand; it rested in his broad palm very comfortably.

"But," he said, "they won't have to do without water very long."

It was the surest comfort he could have offered her. She looked at him, startled, yet hopeful; somehow, he had managed to inspire her with confidence in whatever he might say.

"Not for long?" she gasped, incredulously.

"Not for long," he repeated. "What my father, at the start of his fortunes, dared risk here, I can do, who have inherited his money and know that the profits are incalculable. More than that, I will do it.

"You wait and see. Within two weeks there'll be an army of workmen in Reservoir Canyon. I don't know how long it generally takes to build a dam like this, but this new one will be put up in about half the time considered necessary. And it won't cost the little farmers of Nampa a cent, either. The big ones will come in with me, but the small growers can keep their money to make up for the loss. Now do you feel better?"

"Oh!" she cried, her eyes glowing, "you—you'll do that, honestly?"

"I will," he responded, gravely "on one condition."

"Ah! but you're spoiling it if you make conditions!"

"But this isn't such a difficult one—Peggy. I want you to help me."

"Help you!" she cried joyfully. "If that's all——"

"As my wife," he corrected, anxiously. "Won't you, dear?"

She seemed suddenly to realize the whereabouts of her hands; and took them away from him, staring into his eyes incredulously.

"Will you?" he pleaded. "I'm not such a bad sort, little woman, and I'll do my best. Will you?"

"I—I don't know—I really don't. You—why, you must give me a little time——"

"All you wish, so long as your answer ultimately is 'Yes.' You'll think it over?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"And you won't think the wrong way—against me?"

"I—I couldn't."

"Dear!" he cried. And, groping in the darkness, found one of those hands and carried it to his lips.

THE END.

A TALE OF EDEN

A PRIMITIVE party named Adam
Saw a serpent, and thought that he "had 'em."
But the snake said: "Don't flee,
It's a real snake you see.
I have just brought some fruit for your madam."

CLIFTON B. DOWD.

THE SEA SERPENT SYNDICATE

BY EVERARD JACK APPLETON

IF it wasn't for Jimmy Raines, I wouldn't try to write this story out. It ain't the kind of thing I like to think about, any more than I like to remember the name of a horse that has burned up my money on the track; but Jimmy is a good fellow, and he asked me to do it—and what Jimmy Raines wants me to do, I do. Not that he asked me because I am an author, understand; I follow the races, and so does Jimmy. But I have been a sheet writer in my time; and I guess he figures that makes me the literary member of our partnership. "And besides," says he, "you don't spell so many words different from the way them dictionary dope-book boys do."

The reason he wants this story printed is because the people he tells it to give him the frozen look. They don't believe him, and I don't know as I blame 'em; but he thinks if they see it in print they will. I had a suspicion, at first, that he was going to get the story by heart and spring it some day as a lecture; but maybe I do him wrong.

The Sea Serpent Syndicate was a streak of luck—bad or good, I don't know which. It started in a little summer garden, not far from Latonia, and it ended on an island somewhere south of Cuba. If it hadn't been for the earthquake—— But I'm getting away before the flag drops. To start right, it was a day that was hot enough to warp you—and we have that kind in Cincinnati, let me tell you, every now and then—and Jimmy and I decided to cut the Latonia races out for an afternoon, and take it comfortable.

We had dropped into Smearcase John's summer garden, back of Newport, for a glass of beer and a cigar, and both of us was tilted back in the shade when the swing door from the street opened, and a proposition that looked like the survivor of a North Pole expedition slouched in and dropped into a chair a few feet away from us. The thermometer was batting away at the hundred mark, but Mr. Coldfeet had on an overcoat with the collar turned up and a muffler around his neck. Jimmy stared at him a minute and then gave me the wink.

"I hope you ain't got your ears frosted, William," says he to me, as old John come out to get the stranger's order. The guy had a big, round package with him, and when John leaned over the table to get his good ear near enough to catch the order, the stranger jerked the package away like it was a bunch of diamonds.

"Gimme a lemonade," says he, "and make it big and sour."

I was trying to make up my mind where I had seen him before when he looked up and straight into my eyes. The change that come over him was something remarkable. In a minute he had cleared the distance between us, and had hold of my hand, pumping it up and down like a steam engine, and saying: "Billy Martin, Billy Martin! Where did you come from?"

"I didn't come at all," says I, kind of backing up. "I was here first. Where did you come from, Alphonse Doolan? That's the question."

"From a sub-division of hell," he an-

swers, "and I ain't used to white man's weather yet. That's why I feel sorter chilly."

"We thought there must be something wrong," says I, waving my hand at Jimmy. "Mr. Doolan, shake hands with my side partner, Mr. Raines. Mr. Doolan is just back from a vacation in the middle of Arizona, Jimmy."

Doolan shook his head. "No, Billy," says he, "I left there five years ago. And I've been putting in my time in a hotter place than old Arizona. I've been surrounded by the equator and glued to an island down in the Carib. And I'm nigh dead with the heat of it."

"Won't you rest your overcoat, then?" I says. "The last I heard of you, you was sending daily reports about the temperature and barometer readings from some hole in the great American desert, for the wise guys at Washington."

Alphonse dragged up his chair and the bundle with it. "I was," he says, "but they transferred me. I got locoed one day and sent a lot of dispatches to them about the ice forming and the snowstorm freezing my instruments. As it was August, they thought I needed a rest for a couple of months, and after that they shipped me to my island. The natives call it La Deeoble, or something like that—but it's hell's side entrance, or I miss my guess! Four years I've been hanging on there, broiling to death. Four years of heat and thirst, and nobody to talk to! Nothing to look at but scrub and sand—Lord, the sand there is on that island! It's a wonder it don't sink with the weight of it!"

"Working for the government still, Alphonse?" I asks.

"Sure," he answers. "Taking the readings every day, and sending them back to Havana whenever they happen to think of me and send a scow down with grub for me. I'm nigh crazy, Billy—but I'll break ahead of the game, because——"

He stopped a minute, looking very foxy.

"Because I've got *him!*"

"Him?" says I. "Who's him?"

"Billy. I named him after you, Billy Martin, and you've got cause to be proud."

"Baby?" says I, yawning. I'd expected something more exciting from the way Alphonse had started out.

"Baby?" says he, scornful-like. "Naw! Sea serpent!" says Alphonse.

Jimmy kicked me under the table, and I sat up. Alphonse was daffier than I had thought, after all.

"Oh, I am proud," I says. "I am, Alphonse. Where do you keep him?"

"On the island," he answers, sucking his lemonade through the straw and watching me close. "In the middle of the lake the earthquake made. He come in with the 'quake, and I've tamed him. He eats out of my hand, and he's a good snake, I tell you—but I can't afford him. It takes all my supplies to keep him good-tempered—and sardines, his favorite, come high."

Jimmy was getting restless with his feet, and I sees it was up to me. I reached for my sky piece.

"Yes," I says, "it must be kind of a luxury to have a pet sea serpent, Alphonse, following you round the house and eating out of your hand. And as for sleeping with one——"

"Cut it out, cut it out, Billy!" says Alphonse, as sensible as could be. "You and I worked together long enough for you to know that I ain't a liar. This is straight goods, and here's the evidence," and he commenced to unwrap the package. He took out something that looked like an overgrown soup plate and put it down on the table. It smelled fearful fishy, I noticed, and it appeared to be made of horn, half an inch thick, and as big as a scale from the fish you didn't catch.

"Well," I says, "don't act like a rumdum, Alphonse. Go ahead with your spiel. I'll listen to your pipe dream, if Mr. Raines will."

"There ain't going to be no spiel," says Alphonse, bristling up. "That's a scale from my sea serpent—come off him two weeks ago, when he got sore at something and throwed it at me."

He reached into his insidest pocket, and pulled out a letter.

"This here letter," says he, opening

that and tossing it across the table, "is from the Natural History Society secretary across the river, and you can see what he says—'The article in the possession of Mr. Alphonse Doolan appears to be, and probably is, a scale from an ocean reptile, popularly known as a sea serpent.'"

I looked at the letter, and sure enough that is what it said, and a lot more about the value of the discovery, and wishing the authorities at Washington would take the matter up with Mr. Doolan. I read it aloud, and Jimmy's eyes got bigger and bigger. When I finished and handed it back to Doolan, Jimmy butts in for the first time.

"Mr. Doolan," says he, "how much of the cush would it take to go after that animal of yours and bring him to the States for exhibition purposes?"

"Well," replies Alphonse, "I don't know. As soon as I get to Washington, I'm going to get the Smithsonian Institute to figure on it."

"Smithsonian nothing!" says Jimmy. "Can't you see something better ahead than that? If you bring that animal here—and if he is as big as that hunk of horn would seem to indicate—there's a fortune in it for three men."

Alphonse nodded his head slowly. "But it would cost all of five thousand dollars," he says, "and I'm broke."

Then Jimmy showed for the first time how dippy he had got all in a minute. It's a fact that when a man that's down on the books as a wise proposition goes against a come-on game he plays it heavier than the plain sucker—and Jimmy was going against it.

"Mr. Doolan," says he, leaning over the soup plate thing, "when I am a sport, I try to be a game one. Billy Martin and I cleaned up a little more than the figure you name, last month. That's why we are taking the afternoon off here, in place of beating the bookies out of other people's money. Now, Mr. Martin seems interested in this story of yours, pipey as it looks to be, and I am, too. I am willing to make you a proposition. We will go back to your island, every fellow paying his own way. If that snake of yours is the real thing and not a gold brick or green goods, we'll stake you to bringing him here, and split the profits on showing him. Is that fair?"

It was a long speech for Jimmy, and plain as an old shoe. Alphonse couldn't help seeing it was straight, too.

He thought a minute, looked at me, and then held out his hand to Jimmy.

"Shake!" he says. I did the same, and the Doolan-Raines-Martin Sea Serpent Syndicate was formed.

. . . . . .

Six days later we were aboard a little fruit boat, butting around in the Caribbean Sea, looking for Alphonse's island. It was my first experience on the raging deep, and I think it will be my last, unless I am chloroformed and dragged aboard another ship. I never knew how rocky a man could feel and get over it again until that trip! When I wasn't lying in a dirty little bunk, I was flat on my back on deck, trying to forget the motion of the boat, and wishing for home and mother. The fourth day out, about ten o'clock in the morning, Alphonse let out a yell like an Indian and grabbed a chart from the captain's hand.

"That's my island, cap!" he says, pointing to a little black spot on the edge of the ocean. "Steer for her, and dump us off. I'm hungry to see that blamed little bunch of sand and lonesomeness again!"

In less than an hour we had ranged alongside the hump of sand and scrub palm trees, and half an hour later we were sitting on our traps watching the fruit boat get smaller and smaller in the distance. It was hot—hot as the hinges of the place I hope never to see—but Alphonse seemed real happy. He messed around and got something to stay our stomachs, out of his pack, and then we all lighted our pipes and waited for the sun to go down a bit.

"Alphonse," says I, as we stretched out under the biggest tree we could find, "I haven't asked you for any particulars since we started on this hike. Now I want you to tell us how you come to round up that snake of yours."

Alphonse took a long draw at his pipe and clasped his hands behind his head.

"It ain't much of a story," says he, "but you've got a right to know it. My station ain't anything but a shack of palmetto and a dry goods box for the instruments. It stands at the head of what was a ravine. One night there come a 'quake, and I got up to see whether I was on this side of the world or floating around in the Chinese Sea. The moon was shining bright, and when I looked for my ravine, I made sure I was locoed again. There wasn't none left. In place of the valley was a lake, half a mile wide and two long, boiling and churning up and down outrageous. And in the middle of the smear was the durnedest creature you ever see. He's three hundred feet long—I made him lay still once while I measured him, so you can bet on the figures—and has a head on him like a skinned cow. He was bellering, and flapping his fins, and racing around like he was bughouse and had just got next to the fact. He smelt something fearful—same as the bottom of a vessel when it needs the barnacles scraped off. That was Billy, and I soon figured out what had happened. The 'quake had opened my island from the bottom, let Billy and a lot of water in, closed up again—and left the snake and me to get acquainted. I didn't get much sleep the rest of the night, with his thrashing around and bawling for his folks, but by morning he'd wore himself out and was sleeping as peaceful as a lamb on top of the water. I took a fancy to him right then. I don't know what made me think of you just then, Bill Martin, but I did; and I named him after you before he could wake up and object."

"Maybe his eyes are blue," says Jimmy, kicking at a land crab that was investigating our outfit.

"One is, and the other's green," says Alphonse. "But that didn't cut any figure. When he opened one and seen me observing him, he got sore. He raised about ten feet of his neck out of the water, and cut loose with a twist of his head and a grunt, and this very scale that brought us three together come sailing straight for me. I sidestepped, and it buried itself in the sand.

" 'Look a-here, Bill,' I says, 'that's no way to treat the owner of this island. I didn't invite you here, in the first place; you're unexpected company, and you oughter behave yourself polite. I'm willing for you to stay, but you've got to be good-natured!'

"I don't say he understood me, but he looked as if he might. Then he opened his mouth and yawned like he was embarrassed, so I throwed him a piece of meat. He caught it and swung around, and vamoosed for the other side of the lake. From that on he acted right, and I didn't have no cause to complain. I never realized what company a sea serpent could be; but blamed if I ain't right lonesome for him now. He's an affectionate reptile, and it won't take him no time to get broke in, once we git him to the States. A few more weeks of kind treatment will make him as gentle as a kitten, and he will swim after any boat I happen to be on. You hear me!"

"But suppose he gits to cutting up?" asks Jimmy.

"Mr. Raines," says Alphonse, "I ain't teaching my snake politeness through a correspondence school. If he cuts up, ain't I there to administer the proper chastisement—and stop feeding him fish? You leave that to me. And now, as the sun is subsiding, let's hike!"

The scenery wasn't the kind any one would be apt to go crazy about, so we managed to put in the next two hours getting over the hummocks of sand, leading up to the plateau that Alphonse said occupied the center of his island. At the end of that time we come to a low hill from which we could see a little lake with a few scrub trees on the banks, and a shack at one end.

"There," says Alphonse, proud as a peacock, "there is Doolanville. Pleasant prospect, ain't it? I am thinking some of cutting it up into lots and selling it to desirable parties only. A leetle fur from the station, mebbe, but you ain't bothered with borrowin' neighbors. And as fur magnificent views, there ain't none like it anywhere hereabouts."

"I should hope not," says Jimmy, as we made for Alphonse's shack. When we reached it, Alphonse throwed the pine-door open like he was sergeant-at-arms at a National Convention.

"Welcome to the Hotel de Doolan!" says he, peering in. "But mebbe you'd rather have the lizards out before you go in. They ain't very partial to strangers."

He steps inside and raises a racket, and a menagerie of half a dozen scaly critters, not counting the land crabs and house snakes, run out. "Now," says he, appearing once more, "your apartments are ready, gentlemen. Step inside and register. Sorry all our rooms with baths attached are took; but the lake is convenient and free."

By the time we had packed our things away and fixed our bunks, the sun had almost set, and Alphonse was rustling around with his pots and pans on the outside, singing to himself. Jimmy and I watched him for a few minutes, and then Jimmy says to me, sorter quiet-like: "Am I hittin' a pipe, Billy? Or is this the real thing?"

"Don't ask me," says I. "Feels like I ought to wake up, myself, before long!"

Jimmy shook his head. "The worst of it is that we are here, and we can't get our money back at the gate. Looks to me as if we'd have to see it through. But where's the snake?"

Just as he spoke, I looked out across the lake, and my hat raised two inches off my head. Of course, I had some faith in all that Alphonse had told us, but I wasn't prepared to have it all come true so sudden and unexpected.

Before I could kick myself to see if I really was awake, the snake was almost on us. He come sailing across that lake looking like a bad dream for fair. He was as big around as the water tower in Eden Park, and I could have sworn that he was long enough to go around Latonia race track twice, and a lap or so over. He slid across the water, a giant, greased fishing worm, the last rays of the sun shining on his scales and turning them as white as silver.

When he caught sight of us, I held my breath. He raised his head out of the water twenty feet or more and back pedaled to beat the band, churning up the lake till it frothed. His eyes was bigger than a barrel, and when he opened his mouth, showing a row of teeth resembling a whitewashed picket fence, it was too much for Jimmy. He give a sort of grunt and went down and out, in a dead faint.

As for me, I was fast getting seasick myself, and wondering how I could hit the trail back to the coast again, leaving Jimmy and his faint to themselves, when Alphonse stuck his head out of the shack.

"Ah, ha!" he cries, stepping out, with his frying pan in one hand and a box of sardines in the other. "Billy has came! Now I guess you fellows know whether your Uncle Alphonse was toying with the truth or not. Ain't he a beaut, William—and ain't you proud that he's your namesake?"

I was trying to get enough breath back to express my thoughts on that and other subjects, when the snake struck the beach, stopped short and let out a roar that blowed me over against Jimmy. Alphonse seemed to think it a good joke, and snapped his fingers at the critter.

"Here, Billy; here, Billy-boy!" he calls. "Come and say howdy to your proud old boss and his friends. You mustn't forgit your manners!"

The snake ducked down a foot or two, looked us over suspiciously for a minute, and then brought his head to a level with Alphonse. It wasn't a head that you'd want a picture of in the parlor, with its big eyes, one green and the other blue, and long, white whiskers sprouting a frozen fountain out of his nose and chin! But Alphonse seemed tickled to have him so close, and shoved the open box of sardines at him—and Billy smiled!

You never seen a sea serpent smile, of course, so you can't imagine what it is. You haven't missed very much, though, so don't lose any sleep over it. The inside of Mammoth Cave, painted red—that was Billy's smile. I was glad when he closed it up again, on the dinky

box of sardines, for he seemed so tickled with them that he kept his mouth shut and laid his head down on the sand beside Alphonse like a sick kitten, waiting to be petted. Alphonse scratched him with the frying pan, and the snake lay there purring his gratitude and pleasure for five minutes.

It was the noise he made—you'd a thought a benzine buggy was getting ready to quit business—that brought Jimmy around. He come to, facing the snake, and when he clapped eyes on him, Jimmy let out a yell that would have won the prize in a college-yell contest. The snake didn't like it, though, and before Alphonse could speak to him, he had reared up, the scales standing out on his neck like bristles on a bulldog. The next minute he give his head a short, sharp bob, and one of those horn wash basins broke loose from its moorings, and shot by Jimmy's ear, close enough to cut his hair.

"Wow! Take him away, take him away!" howls Jimmy, making for the shack, followed by another little sea-serpent souvenir. Alphonse waved his frying pan at Billy, and called: "Behave yourself, Bill! Shame on you!"

But Billy was scared, too, and he kept firing scales at Jimmy until he reached the shack and got hid under the boxes and barrels inside. Then the snake's short ears laid back, showing he didn't mean anything vicious, he lowered his head again, crawled up a few feet on the beach and butted his nose in the sand at Alphonse's feet, asking forgiveness for his behavior as plain as any dog ever did.

Alphonse sat down and began to talk to his pet, and, not wishing to disturb a little family conversation like that, I sneaked away to find Jimmy, who was having a bunch of assorted fits in the furthest corner of the Hotel de Doolan.

And that was our introduction to Doolan's sea serpent.

It is hard to believe, I know, but inside a week I got so used to having that snake around that I didn't pay any more attention to him than I would to a big dog. We got to be good friends, too, although I never could find much enjoyment in his sea breath, which was strong and noticeable, him being so affectionate. Every morning when I went for a swim in the lake, he'd see me coming, and he'd cavort and do water gymnastics until I got out. He'd come to my call, just as he did to Alphonse's, and seemed to try his best to make me feel at home.

But he never did like Jimmy, I'm sorry to say. That yell he heard Jimmy give sort of prejudiced him, I guess. He didn't shy any more soup plates, but he just didn't take any interest in him; and Jimmy seemed to rather enjoy the slight. It was a mutual dislike, too. If Jimmy could have handed Billy a dynamite sandwich, he'd have done it, I reckon; but he never let on to Alphonse that the snake's vagaries hurt his feelings.

Even the night that Billy took Alphonse for a ride, Jimmy didn't look jealous. The snake was laying up on the beach, as usual, and Alphonse was scraping his head with a piece of board, when Billy seemed took with an idea. He slipped his head under Alphonse, raised up and started for the lake again, with Alphonse sitting astride his neck, same as a bareback rider in the circus. Billy took him for a fast "workout" across the lake and back, and Alphonse was so tickled with the experience that he made me try it the next night.

Every night after that Alphonse and I would have a ride or two, and all Billy asked for was a box of sardines and a three-minutes scratch of the head. I don't believe there ever lived a kinder-hearted sea serpent than Billy.

But of course this couldn't last. The end was bound to come, and it come sudden enough when it did. Alphonse had just announced to us, about two weeks after we landed, that he thought Billy was ready for his trip.

"He won't try to play hookey," said he, answering my question on that subject. "When we get him to the coast, he'll be afraid to leave me. I think we will start to-morrow, and then—across the water for us, and fortune waiting on the other side! We'll have Billy the talk of the world inside of——"

And that was as far as Alphonse got. Something broke loose under the island just then, and the lake commenced to tear around as if there was a cyclone at the bottom of it. Billy looked back at his happy home, slid up on the bank, shoved his head between Alphonse's legs and whirled out into the middle of that boiling, roaring bunch of water like he had been sent for. Alphonse grabbed him by the ears and yelled for him to go back, but it wasn't any use.

As they reached the middle of the lake there come a noise like Niagara and a dynamite factory let loose at once, and the ground under Jimmy and me began to buckle and crawl.

I closed my eyes a minute and hung onto Jimmy, trying to think of something fitting to say, and when I opened them again, the lake was gone! In its place was the long ravine Alphonse had told us about, and a big, ugly-looking crack, into which the last of the lake was pouring. Out of the crack stuck a few yards of poor old Billy's tail. Before I could say a word, that had disappeared, and Jimmy and I were alone! The lake was gone, the snake was gone, the earthquake had come and gone, and Alphonse——

"Come on!" I yelled. "That snake has kidnaped Alphonse, Jimmy Raines!"

Jimmy made some sort of answer, but I didn't hear him. I was running down the wet, slippery bed of the lake toward the hole Billy had gone into. It never come to me that Alphonse couldn't live in the water like Billy could; they had been so friendly and together so much I had forgotten they were different. But when I stumbled over a big bowlder and fell flat, the jar brought me to my senses.

"You are right," I says, when Jimmy come panting up; "it ain't no use to hunt Alphonse. He's gone, and nothing left to show it!"

Jimmy buried his face in his hands. "Ain't it higeous?" says he. "Not even a thing to bury!"

"He bragged too much," says I, "and he didn't have his fingers crossed!"

"But he ain't dead yet!" says a weak voice from the other side of the bowlder, and there was Alphonse, sound and well, though wet and weak.

"When I seen what was happening," he explained, after he could talk some, "I knowed Billy was trying to take me with him back to his home. When we got here, I jumped and hung onto this rock while the water whirled around me and sucked him down. I skun my knees and knuckles, but I ain't lost nothing but my snake!"

We all looked at the little crack that had swallowed up our fortune, but we felt too bad to talk much.

"I reckon," says Jimmy, after a while, "that it don't pay to cry over spilled sea serpents. Let's make the best of it. We played Billy off the boards, and we lost. It's back to the States for me!"

"I guess you are right," says Alphonse, "and the 'quake seems to have wound up the affairs of the Sea Serpent Syndicate. Well, gentlemen, I'm sorry, but I hope you'll hold me blameless. I could tame a sea serpent, but I ain't much on taming earthquakes."

Then we gathered ourselves up, and went back to the shack, a damp and sorry bunch of broken sports.

The next day we drilled back to the coast. Alphonse wouldn't hear to us taking him along, though. "My work is here," says he, "and here I stay." Then he added, very wistful, and the tears pretty close, I tell you: "And if Billy ever should come back, I wouldn't want him to think I had deserted him."

As luck would have it, we sighted a vessel two hours after we reached the coast, and the captain sent a small boat to take us aboard. Jimmy and I shook hands hard with Alphonse, and when we had got aboard the steamer, we watched him until we couldn't see no more.

Just before we got out of hearing, I made a megaphone of my hands.

"If Billy ever comes back," I yells, "you'll let us know, won't you?"

"Sure!" he hollers back, though sad and dreamy.

That was five years ago—and we have never heard from Alphonse. So I guess the Sea Serpent Syndicate was dissolved for good and all the day Billy went out with the earthquake.

THE TOLLIVER TANGLE

BY GEORGE PARSONS BRADFORD

No type of fiction has proved more popular with the American reading public than the story of mystery—not the kind in which the denouement can be accurately forecast by the close of the second chapter, but one in which the plot is strong and well-sustained, so that the reader is kept uncertain as to the outcome till the end. In "The Tolliver Tangle," Mr. George Parsons Bradford has produced such a story, and we cordially commend it to the attention of our readers.

PART I.—THE EPISODE OF THE BROOKLYN RESIDENCE

I.

(From the Narrative of Mr. Rodney Taliaferro, of New Orleans, La.)

AND then the manner in which I was tricked into the business, by a combination of circumstances entirely natural, if a bit unusual, and at that due in some part to my own folly—as it then seemed—was so infernally clever, that a *résumé* of the several incidents is essential, if I am to do my part toward the clearing up of what for a time loomed blackly upon our mental horizons, as one of the most forbiddingly impenetrable of mysteries in the annals of criminology.

I had just landed in New York, returning from the trip to London which certain business reasons had rendered advisable, if not imperative, and was in great haste to continue on my way home—for other reasons which will develop in the course of this narrative.

It was therefore with considerable consternation, as may be imagined, that I discovered that a severe snowstorm had completely tied up every railroad leading out of New York; trains were, indeed, running—or, rather, crawling—northward along the Hudson, and at one time I seriously contemplated making the détour to New Orleans via Chicago.

But discouraging reports as to the congestion on the tracks west of Buffalo induced me to abandon the project, much as I chafed with impatience because of the delay.

It seemed that there was nothing to be done but to wait until the New Jersey tracks were cleared. Once as far as Washington, I felt reasonably sure that I would have to submit to no further exasperating, if unavoidable, hindrances; south of that point the snowfalls are not only light, but as a rule quick to melt.

Composing myself to endure the inevitable with what philosophy I had at my command, I caused my suit case to be conveyed to the Southern Club, on West Thirty-sixth Street—of which I am a non-resident member—and arranged to spend at least one night there.

Under other circumstances, I am sure that I would not have objected to the conditions which conspired to secure my detention. I like New York; in my es-

timation it stands second only to the Crescent City of the South. It affords unequaled facilities for amusement, I believe, and I'll confess to feeling not ill pleased when I met an old acquaintance in the smoking room—Dr. Spotiswood, of Bay St. Louis—and was invited to accompany him to the theater that same night.

I accepted with the proviso that Dr. Spotiswood should be my guest at dinner; and pending that, although it was yet early in the afternoon, I repeated the celebrated remark popularly supposed to have been made by the governor of North Carolina to the governor of South Carolina, upon a historic instance.

Spotiswood was agreeable, and we drew two easy-chairs before the wood fire which blazed upon the open hearth, and prepared to while away a somewhat tedious interval—or, rather, an interval which would undoubtedly have promised tedium but for the companionship of a friend, together with an open fire and a drink or two concocted by a Southern bartender.

The day, I recall, was bleak, the streets being whipped by a wind both bitter and penetrating. A curtain of dark clouds, low-swinging, charged across the sky, obscuring all but a drear, gray light. Now and again, when I glanced out of the window, I observed a flake or two of snow, infinitesimally small, sweeping slantingly earthward. Spotiswood, I remember, gloomily prophesied more snow, and I was forced to believe him.

The date—a matter of some importance—I also remember distinctly; it was Saturday, February the thirteenth.

We had been drinking and smoking and chatting for an hour or more, when the door opened and a newcomer entered the room, which up to that time had been otherwise untenanted, save for Spotiswood and myself.

I paid him scant heed, at first; an indifferent glance had shown me that I did not know him; and it was not until he approached us, with something of hesitation and indecision in his manner, that I observed him closely.

He was a rather tall man—slightly below my own height—and apparently beyond middle age. His hair, which was scanty and brushed with a cunning to conceal its scarcity, was tinged with gray, especially above the temples.

As to his features, they were of a delicate chiseling—resembling much the ordinary conception of the Southern gentleman of the befo'-de-wah school. Both his eyebrows and his mustache were thick and white; his nose was well arched, and his eyes keen and bright—though I remarked that the left was marred by a heavily drooping lid, which gave to an otherwise distinguished cast of countenance a slightly quizzical expression.

For the rest of him, he was dressed soberly and carried himself with dignity.

He attracted my attention by a series of discreet maneuvers, evidently with the object of getting himself into a position whence he could satisfy himself as to Spotiswood's identity. And this, indeed, presently proved to have been his desire; for he suddenly abandoned all pretense of doubt and, walking briskly up, clapped Spotiswood on the shoulder.

"Why, doctuh!" he cried, with that slurring drawl of which I am so fond, and which is so distinctively characteristic of your Southerner born and bred. "Why, doctuh, this is like old times, suh, to see you again. Howdy, suh, and howdy come on? Since when did yo' remove from the Bay, suh?"

My friend arose, with evident confusion. It was plain to me that he was unable, at first, to place his acquaintance. And I admit that, upon a nearer inspection, I myself was struck with the gentleman's resemblance to some one whom I had known at some past time; but whom, or when, I would have been at a loss to say.

"Yo' don't remembah me, suh? Well, now, that's shore powerfu' strange! Have yo' fohgotten Engle—Majah Engle, of Culpepper, suh?"

Spotiswood's face cleared at the mention of the name. He seemed much pleased, indeed, at the *rencontre*.

"Yo' must pahdon me, majah," rejoined the doctor. "To tell yo' the hon-

est truth, suh, it's so long since yo' moved No'th that yo' face had just naturally clean slipped my mind, suh. I'm right sorry——"

"Not a word, suh—not a word!" protested this Major Engle. And, by the way, I failed to recognize him even when he declared his identity, but nevertheless felt assured that I had known or seen him before.

"I don't wish to intrude, doctuh," he continued, with a glance toward me.

"Not in the least," I made haste to disclaim.

And "Not at all, not at all, majah!" Spotiswood insisted. "Permit me to introduce my friend, Mr. Taliaferro, of New O'leans, suh."

We shook hands, Engle gracefully and courteously, I with—I fear—a lack of cordiality bred of my instinctive distaste for the man. This, however, he seemed not to notice; and upon Spotiswood's ringing for the waiter, he consented to sit down and join us—"fo' a minute or two, only, gentlemen," he stipulated.

Whatever his intentions, the minute or two dragged out into an hour or more, during which period we became fairly well acquainted with each other's personalities, at the least. The intuitive dislike I had felt for Major Engle gradually dissipated under the influence of a nature apparently of the kindest and most genial.

The subject of conversation shifted this way and that, under what I now recall as Engle's very skillful manipulation. Insensibly we drifted into a discussion of modern novels and novelties, settling finally into a dispute between Major Engle and myself upon the merits of the "romances" of the present day, so termed.

Engle stubbornly upheld that romances were for the romantic, I arguing to the contrary; that the influences of modern civilization had robbed our lives of the elements of the adventurous and perilous which had entered so largely into the lives of our progenitors.

"No, suh!" he declared, obstinately, toward the conclusion of a lengthy defense of his views. "I tell yo', suh, that adventures are fo' the adventurous, suh! Like as not yo' are rubbing elbows with the romantic this very minute, if yo' only knew it——"

"It's hard to believe," I smiled, incredulously.

"Not so hahd when yo' don't shet yo' eyes and refuse, suh, to recognize it. Everyone of us is toting 'round with him his own personal romance, only most of us don't know it, or won't admit it, suh. Why, I'd be willing to wager that half the people in this hyeh wo'ld call their romances 'worry'!"

I laughed outright, and after a moment Spotiswood joined me. For the moment Major Engle seemed a bit indignant, but in the end he, too, unbent and smiled.

"Still, suh," he contended, "I do maintain that my view of the case is correct. Yo' don't have to do more than step outside the door hyeh to dabble yo' fingers in some other gentleman's romance. Why, I declare I'll wager the dinners for the three of us that yo' can't stand ten minutes on the cohneh of Broadway and Thir'y-fo'th Street without having an adventure."

"Oh, *that* kind!" I said, disdainfully.

"No, suh, I don't mean what yo' mean, suh. I'm betting that yo'll put yo' finger on the pulse of a romance as absorbing as any yo' ever read about in a book."

"I'll take you," I said, on the spur of the moment.

"Done, suh!" And Major Engle rose, smiled down upon me with what seemed an over-confident anticipation of his coming triumph. "When shall we expe'iment, suh—at once?"

"Might as well, majah," I agreed, laughing. "Coming, Spotiswood?"

"Reckon I will. Breath of air will do us all good, gentlemen. Besides, yo'-all will want an umpire. I'll hold the stakes—a paht of them, at any rate, whateveh happens."

Five minutes later we were standing in the lee of one of the tall buildings on the west side of Broadway, at Thirty-fourth Street. Spotiswood glanced up at the clock of the *Herald* Building.

"Half-past fo', Taliaferro," he an-

nounced, explaining: "I'm timekeeper, too, yo' know."

"Keep ahead," I told him. "I'm winning hands down already. Why, the very weatheh is in my favor, majah."

Engle laughed and nodded good-humoredly, hugging himself within an immense fur-lined overcoat.

"Yo' wait," he stipulated. "I'm feeling powerfu' confident."

But in truth I had no fears of losing my wager; the day was most unpropitious, indeed. Broadway was bare of its customary strolling and laughing afternoon parade. Those whom necessity forced into the street strode along briskly, rubbing numb fingers and casting curious glances askance at the three of us, who chose to loiter on a corner so exposed to the nipping wind.

"Adventures!" I derided, lightly. "I calculate the only adventure we're liable to meet up with is to be arrested and sent to the insane pavilion at Bellevue."

At the moment, circumstance gave me the lie direct. A girl—or, if you will, a young woman of twenty-three or four—rounded the corner of Thirty-fourth Street and came swiftly toward us.

Perhaps I should say that she was blown in our direction; for the wind behind her gave her scant choice as to the course she should steer. It fairly hurled her into Broadway. She bore down on us as though for a haven of refuge—her head up, her cheeks blazing, black eyes snapping, skirts whipping; all in all a rarely pretty girl, very good to look upon.

I discovered the most of this in the brief moment that she struggled, gasping and blushing, in my arms; for we had been blown together before I was any more than aware of her proximity. She looked up into my face, her eyes—they were large—smiling a confused apology, and thanks still more confounded.

I lifted my hat. "Not at all," I stammered, ineptly, to whatever I imagined she had said. I had released her, and she was moving away.

But abruptly she turned. A small, daintily gloved hand came out of her muff and was peremptorily thrust under my nose. The eyes—I confess I paid the most attention to them—were laughing excitedly. She dimpled all over, as with delight.

"Why, Rod Taliaferro!" she cried, breathlessly.

"I—I beg yo' pardon——"

"You don't know me? How—jolly!" She certainly giggled, as though she thought it was.

"I—I must confess——"

"Don't you remember Ruth—Ruth Hayes, the little girl you used to play with down in New Orleans, years and years ago?"

"You don't mean it!"

"Of cou'se I mean it, Rod Taliaferro! And to think of meeting you this—hyeh—away——!"

"I'm delighted!" I cried; and I was, to tell the truth.

"So'm I—perfectly scandalous! But—it's cold. Won't you call—to-night? I'm going away to-morrow. You will? I'm *so* glad. We can talk over—— How vexatious!"

"What is?"

"I haven't a card with me, Rod. But you'll come—sholy? Remember, the number's 141 St. John's Avenue, Brooklyn. Good-by—be sure, now!"

I bowed assent; already the wind had whirled her away. But I repeated the address several times, over and over, until I had fixed it firmly in my memory.

"Well, suh?" Major Engle was at my elbow, nodding meaningly. Spotiswood, from the shelter of a nearby doorway, was laughing outright at my bewildered expression.

"Why—why——" I faltered, sheepishly. And then I saw the joke and joined in their mirth. "I must confess," I told the major, "yo've won yo' wager, suh. That *was* right smart of an adventure."

At the club he turned upon me again. "And as to the romance, suh?" he demanded.

"Well—er—that is, that little girl and I were sweethearts, long ago, when she wore sho't skirts and I knicke'bockehs, suh."

"There! What'd I tell yo'? Romance and—and all the fixings, suh!"

"You're right," I pleaded, guiltily.

"Did I understand yo' to say," Spotiswood broke in, "that yo' were going to make a call to-night? What, suh! Yo' throw my theater pahty over fo' a pretty girl? Eh, majah? I'll leave it to yo' own sense of equity, Taliaferro, if yo' didn't lose a fair and square bet?"

"Oh! I did!" I admitted. "All the same, I'm going."

The major pleading an engagement, we dined rather early—and merrily. Spotiswood's friend seemed in high good humor, and they both ragged me unmercifully. I grinned and bore it, only denying the romantic end of the story. You see, just at that time there was another young lady, down in God's country, who—well, that's to come.

I remember taking particular pains dressing myself that evening. A man who was going to call on one of the Hayeses that I had known so many years gone, had need scrupulously to look to his attiring.

Once on the other side of the bridge, to which I had traveled by the "L" to save time, I hired a cab and was pleased to note, from the respect with which the driver repeated the number, that the Hayes fortunes were evidently in the ascendant.

The cab ride was a long one; but then I had been told that it is miles to almost any place in Brooklyn, and so didn't fret. But it must have been nine o'clock, of a cruel, stormy evening, when at last I stepped out and told my cabby to call back at ten-thirty.

He nodded and drove off, leaving me perched atop a snow-covered horse-block in the midst of a raging snowstorm. And indeed the world was fairly lost in an eddying deluge of fine white flakes, through which nearby objects loomed impressively vague, as though sheeted with heavy gauze, while distant masses were dark blurs—tones of dim gray upon a chaos of whirling white.

I had to grope my way to a gate set in a fence of wrought iron which bordered the sidewalk; it yielded to my persuasions with a remonstrant squeak, loud in the stillness, and swung heavily back into place when I had passed through. After which, I followed a straight and narrow path of slippery flags that took me toward what by degrees took shape as a mansion of the old colonial type—so familiar to my Southern eyes—which Manhattan has outgrown, but which Brooklyn yet cherishes in the midst of extensive lawns.

It was such a home as suits my fancy entirely; and yet, as I drew more near to it, I began to marvel that it should show a façade so inhospitable; and I recollect wondering disconnectedly that the Hayes should keep the place so dark—the Hayes whose hospitality was still a proverb of my native city.

For not a light was to be seen at any window, save where a dim crescent of saffron illumination marked the fanlight above the front door. And nothing stirred thereabouts, that I could see, nor a sound greeted me beyond the clashing of dead and withered leaves upon the frozen stems of dead vines which clung dismally to the weather-beaten walls.

Indeed, this residence dominated its grounds with showing so stark and austere that I was conscious of a quiet depression settling down upon my spirits—a depression which I shook off—or tried to—with a laugh.

Somehow—I can't say why—I was for a moment minded to turn back. I did not, but marched, stamping, up a pair of steps to the door, and rang the bell. I had not come so far to be cheated out of a second look into those deep, dark eyes that were Ruth Hayes'.

I had to wait a minute or two; it was a test of patience. I thought that the interior of the house resounded desolately to the clangor of the bell; and again I was aware of an odd sensation, as though I were being secretly observed. I found myself uncomfortable—awkward and ill at ease.

But I smoothed myself down, fidgeted with the clasps of my gloves, and continued to concentrate my thoughts on Ruth Hayes—a rather pleasant occupation, to tell the truth.

Abruptly I was surprised. The door had opened, without an audible sound. It was really startling; nor was the prospect it disclosed especially inviting.

A manservant, in a nondescript livery which I hardly noticed, stood bowing with his hand on the knob. Behind him a great hall loomed, black and cold, its darkness little more than accentuated by the glimmer of a hanging lamp.

"Miss Hayes?" I asked, ignoring this. "Is she at home?"

"Won't you come in, sir?"

I did so, and he shut the door.

"Miss Hayes is at home, sir, and, I believe, expecting you. The house is rather quiet, because of the illness of the old gentleman, sir—Mr. Hayes."

I gave him a card. "I'm sorry to hear that Mr. Hayes is not well," I said.

"Yes, sir. We're hoping it's not serious, sir. Won't you step into the parlor? Permit me to take your coat, sir. This is the parlor—I will switch on the lights."

The servant disappeared down the hall, stepping softly, leaving me confronted with a door leading into blank blackness. I paused a second on the threshold, irresolutely, somewhat daunted by the strangeness of my welcome. But sickness is its own excuse. Remembering this, I walked cautiously toward the center of the apartment, momentarily expecting that electric lights would glare forth and save me a collision with the furniture.

They did not. Neither did I hear a sound in all the mansion. Something in the atmosphere of the room chilled me. I shivered involuntarily, sniffing air that smelt dank and close, like that of a room which has been closed for years. A swift apprehension of impending evil struck in upon me.

Realizing that I was becoming unreasonably afraid of something absolutely intangible, I stopped. A hollow echo mocked the sound of my footsteps in the stillness that trod close upon their cessation.

"Oh thunder!" I ejaculated, irritably.

Simultaneously the hall door was slammed. The tremendous bang of it smote upon my astonished ears like a clap of thunder, indeed. I jumped, and whirled around, facing the way I had come.

Utter darkness confronted me.

"Why, what the devil——?" I wondered, aloud, stepping forward.

I shut my mouth suddenly. Something had stirred near me. It was a mere trifle of a sliding noise, resembling the scrape of a shoe. But there, in the cold darkness of that strange room, it set my nerves on edge.

It put out a hand, clutching aimlessly into the unknown vacancies that lay about me, and my roving fingers encountered warm, palpitating, human flesh—the face of a living, breathing man who was standing beside me without sound or movement.

It seemed to melt from under my fingers—that face. I swore a little, uneasily, and, I think, not unnaturally. Suddenly, with a rush, fear entered into my soul like cold steel. I cried out incoherently, and made as though to run for that door—wherever it might be. To this day, I can hear my scream shrilling through that room of terror; I think I must have become completely unmanned by the uncanniness of the adventure.

I blundered on, a step or two, until a chair obtruded itself and seemed perversely to entangle its legs with mine. My shins ached with the pain, and I stumbled, throwing forward my hands to save me a fall. One hand grasped the rough sleeve of a man's coat, my fingers digging into the firm, hard flesh that lay within. The arm was jerked away.

Some one laughed, shortly—the first human sound—and I thought that he moved in front of me. I was by then mad with fear. I hit out at random and felt my knuckles landing heavily on bare flesh.

He whom I had struck spat a furious oath at me. I jumped aside. But strong hands grabbed me, clasping my wrists and ankles tightly. Another clapped itself over my mouth. I choked on the yell thus suppressed and madly bit.

My teeth sank into living flesh, and the owner of the hand made it evident that he was displeased. My feet went from under me and I fell heavily, an inert mass, the back of my skull rapping smartly on the hard, cold flooring.

At the same time one of my assailants

sat himself down, directly on my stomach—I believe with malice prepense. What breath remained to me was so crushed out. It seemed as though twelve men were handling me, binding me hand and foot, and gagging me with an ill-flavored rag.

Helpless I was hauled along the floor a score of feet or more, and unceremoniously, like so much merchandise, dumped into a corner. A door slammed by my ear. Footsteps sounded in diminuendo.

I realized that I was a prisoner, alone, powerless, in a musty closet; and for a little while, I think, went quite mad with panic terror.

In the course of time, however, I comprehended the futility of raging against bonds that had been knotted by fingers so cunning that, when I sought to ease them, I but abraised the skin of my wrists and wearied my legs. And then I lay still, pondering the unfathomable.

The inexplicable, the inconceivable, had entered into my life like a thunderbolt. Engle had been right; I had put my fingers on the pulse of romance. I cursed the business thoroughly for a while, then lay and panted in a dazed, bewildered state.

When my mind became clearer I tried to reason the matter out. I felt sure that I was the victim of a hallucination, horrible but unreal. Presently I would wake from the nightmare dream, safe and sound in my bunk on the *Kaiser Wilhelm,* or in my bed at the Southern Club. But I merely succeeded in maddening myself with inutile conjecture that explained nothing, led nowhere. My aches and pains convinced me that I did not dream, but, naturally enough in all conscience, deduction was quite baffled.

After some time I got my second wind, so to speak, began to think more coherently, and wriggled into a posture of greater ease, where I lay chewing hopelessly on my gag, wondering when *they* would come to hang and draw and quarter me. Once I had a stunning suspicion that I had fallen into the hands of vivisectionists—that beloved, ghoulish superstition of our Southern darkies; this thing was all horrible to me, terrifying in its unprecedented process, in its blank and stolid mystery.

Later I heard men passing to and fro in the room beyond. A candle was lighted, its feeble rays making luminous the crack beneath the closet door. Low voices murmured with sinister effect. A man laughed brutally.

In a distant part of the house there seemed to be a scuffling. It approached and passed on, with the sound as if a drunkard was reeling and banging from wall to wall. A voice, singularly familiar, was lifted in a snatch of delirious song, husky and untuneful, which was cut short by the opening and slamming of a door.

Some one said, aloud, clearly: "Well, he's settled. What'd I tell you?" Another replied, indifferently: "Now for number one." My closet's door was jerked open abruptly; the light streamed in, dazzling me, silhouetting sharply the burly figures of two men. They bent over me, and I understood that I was "number one."

I was hauled to a standing position, and the ropes about my ankles eased so that I might walk with some difficulty. Blinking, dazed, terrified, I stumbled out in obedience to the pressure of hands upon my arms, into the center of a great, bare, uncanny apartment. It might have been a ballroom at one time. Now the rays of twin candles did not serve even to indicate the walls, so far apart were they.

My captors marched me to the edge of a rude table, and there halted me. I gazed about at them unhappily. There were three, all told; one who stood by my side, another behind me fumbling with my gag, and a third sitting tipped back in a chair at the farther side of the table.

Upon the latter stood a whisky bottle, a dirty glass and two candles. Their flames, vibrating incessantly in some draught, threw vast, flickering shadows; their rays told me nothing. I knew none of the three men visible to me, now that I was ungagged, and the third had ranged himself at my side.

Two appeared entirely brutes; short and stocky men, with flat faces and pugnacious brows. Him opposite me seemed a little higher type—the gentleman burglar of fiction, smooth shaven, fairly well dressed, at ease, self-satisfied. To my consternation I saw that he was fingering a huge revolver—a big, glittering weapon of heavy caliber.

He looked me up and down leisurely, with a faint smile twitching at the corners of his mouth. I licked my aching gums—and maintained silence, wondering what was to come next. The gun subjected me; I have had some experience with revolvers, and respect them accordingly. I was half mad with rage, but——

Finally he said, ironically: "Feeling any better, my friend?"

I replied quickly, without raising my voice: "What the devil does this mean, yo' damned whelp?"

He smiled slowly, his eyes twinkling. "That's good; don't speak any louder than that, please. I see you're sensible."

"Untie me and yo'll see something else, I promise yo'!"

"And spirited, like a true exponent of Southern chivalry," he commented.

"Well?"

"Well, Mr. Taliaferro——" He seemed to hesitate, to think deeply. I noticed that he had pronounced my name correctly, according to the right Southern style; that is to say, "Tolliver." The Northern man generally gets it the way it's spelled—in five syllables.

It was a slight matter, but it proved conclusively that I was no come-chance victim. I had been selected deliberately by one who knew me well. My blood ran cold when I thought of Ruth Hayes, and pondered what complicity was hers in this brutal outrage.

"You'll have to forgive us for treating you so cavalierly," the fellow said, at length. "The truth is, we had no choice. You'd have put up a stiff fight if we'd handled you otherwise."

"Yo're dead right," I told him, earnestly. "And I'll put up a stiff fight when I get out of this. Yo' shan't escape, yo'——"

"Easy there; don't call names. It isn't pretty. I was going to say you'll have to submit to a detention, regrettable but unavoidable, for a few days. I'm really sorry, but it can't be helped. It's a matter of business with us."

"What's your game?" I demanded, directly.

He smiled again. "I'm desolated that I cannot consult you on that subject. It's contrary to our by-laws. Otherwise, I'd be delighted. I'm sure your advice would be of immense value to us—simply immense. I say"—after a slight pause—"I'm going to ask you to do me a favor."

"Ask and be——"

"There you go again," he complained, whimsically. "I only wanted you to take a drink with me."

"I'm a gentleman, suh." I drew myself up stiffly. "I drink only with gentlemen."

"That so? 'Fraid you'll have to break your rules, though, this time. It's part of the program." He bent forward and brimmed a thick glass from the whisky bottle. It was a thin, dark liquor, gleaming ruddy at its heart. "Drink it!" he said, curtly.

"My hands——" I began.

He raised the revolver and covered me steadily. "Untie one hand," he ordered. "And you, Mr. Taliaferro, have a care. This is not a joke."

A man at my side put the glass in my free hand. I accepted it mechanically, my eyes all for the imperturbable ruffian opposite me. And I dare say I displayed my fear plainly enough, for he remarked:

"You needn't be afraid. If we'd wanted to, we would have snuffed you out long ago, you know. Drink!" he commanded, imperiously. "It won't hurt you any; but, by God! if you don't, I'll blow your brains——"

The revolver was even more eloquent. I was mastered. Before he had done, the glass was at my lips. At least, I reflected, in a whirl of fright, if I was to die it might as well be quietly by a dose of acid—or whatever the stuff was—as by a bullet. I was helpless.

I threw back my head, tilting the glass, opening wide my gullet. A hot-flavored,

aromatic drink, not unpleasant, burned down my throat. I coughed and gasped, tears standing in my eyes.

Then, without reason, I was at peace with all the world. I remember that the glass fell, and that I leaned forward, my palms on the table, watching the man's face with an invincible curiosity. What was he thinking? He, on his part, was regarding me with an absorbed attention—so complete that he lost his wariness for a moment.

In that moment I saw, distinctly, his left eyelid droop heavily, as though released of an invisible support. A radiant warmth was coursing through my veins, but I recall thinking that support not so invisible, after all; for a tiny shred of court-plaster was dangling from the lid.

I think I laughed foolishly. Black spots began to waver between our faces. I wanted to say, "You're Engle, you infernal coward!" but the words seemed to stick in my throat.

The spots grew larger, dancing like flakes of ebony snow; then yet more large—as big as dollars; changing to red, the hue of flame, brilliant, vivid, dazzling; to a very rainbow of volatile color; and to blackness complete, hot and eternal, wherein I seemed to swim without effort, sailing dizzily through the very heart of the infinite night.

II.

(The Statement of Mr. Rodney Tolliver, of New York.)

Rather than to abate, this storm seemed to increase in violence. Towards noon, traveling had become mighty unpleasant—especially so to one whose shoes were worn paper-thin and sodden with icy water, as were mine. Even the truck horses—Lord! how I envied them their sleek, well-fed, blanketed lot!—made progress through the snowdrifts in the center of the street only at the cost of painful effort.

It was then that I definitely admitted that I had lost heart. And, indeed, I was hardly to be blamed for that; there wasn't much of promise in the outlook.

Even the skies were dull and lowering; heavy, dun-colored clouds swung low, seeming to brush the roofs of the sky-scrapers as they forged sullenly eastward, lashed on by a wind chill and searching. Snow and sleet fell gustily in great, whirling sheets. At times I could not see a yard ahead.

Otherwise, I was despondent, wet, half frozen, weary from anxiety and lack of sleep, a bit feeble for lack of proper nourishment during the past week—indeed, for lack of any nourishment at all a good part of the time—without employment; finally, and worst of all, penniless.

One may exist without friends, without health, without work, in New York. Lacking money, one perishes.

I blundered on, stupidly, aimlessly; I was bound nowhere, doing nothing intelligent beyond keeping in motion to avoid being frozen to death. What black thoughts lurked in the dark backwards of my consciousness I shrank from, shuddering, even then.

I seemed to be treading a downward path, whose every foot was marked by the imprint of many, many weary feet that had preceded me, all pointing one way—none returning. Sometimes I believed that the road would take me to the river's brink; it was from that hallucination that I recoiled, affrighted.

Desperate as was my then plight, hope yet flickered in my breast. It seemed still too monstrous to be credible that I should go under for want of work, who was only too willing to work. I was young, you know—young and passably strong, 'spite of all. It is only the old who can see no guiding light through a black fog of misfortune.

Yet all fogs pass with the rising of the wind. This would pass—this cloud that obscured the sun of my fortunes. I felt sure of it, now and again; between whiles I was not so sure.

I have dwelt thus upon my mental struggle as upon my physical distress because I am trusting that it will serve in some way to excuse what followed—that part which I played in the strange events which presently were set in motion.

I say presently, for I feel assured that not until he laid eyes upon me was his scheme born in the brain of my evil genius. But then—it was born. He saw me, merely; and the plot sprang full-fledged from the noisome recesses of his perverted imagination.

To get on to our first meeting. By noon I was in a black mood. I felt as I once felt, going under for the third time, when I was a boy, learning to swim, and ventured beyond my depth.

Then a frenzy seized upon me; every vestige of knowledge of my laboriously acquired art seemed to slip from my vainly clutching fingers. Nothing remained but the waters—and oblivion.

So now I was ready, in the hackneyed phrase, to clutch at any straw. A straw offered itself. I clutched.

It read—a battered signboard:

NEW YORK
FREE EMPLOYMENT BUREAU

I looked for a moment, shivering, my teeth chattering, my lips blue with the cold that gnawed at my vitals. I fancy it was some few minutes ere my bewildered and half-numbed intelligence grasped the import of those words. Then I turned into a mean doorway and climbed a flight of rickety stairs.

Presently I found myself in a close, dank room. But it was warm there. Little light had access through the dirty and frosted window panes. But—it *was* warm. I luxuriated in the heat, like a half-frozen puppy set down by the side of a glowing kitchen stove.

It seemed to insidiously penetrate my system, filling my veins with a soft, sweet languor. I wished much to sleep. A little while back I had regretted that I had, the night before, disregarded my belly's crying need that I might get me a shelter for my head. Now I forgot food; rest was what I most desired.

I have little idea of how long it was that I hugged that radiant stove. Presently—were the time long or short—a voice roused me, and I understood that I was being addressed.

"Well, my friend?" said the voice.

I turned around. At a desk in the farther end of the room a man sat. I remember little of his personal appearance, but he had a kindly face and an intelligent eye. He seemed to radiate a sympathy for the unfortunate as the stove threw out heat. My heart warmed toward him, and I shambled down to his desk.

When I had reached there I observed for the first time that another man sat with him; and this other I shall never forget.

He was tall; even in a sitting position I saw that his stature exceeded my own by a few inches. He was old; his temples were silvered, his drooping mustache and heavy brows were snowy white. He was a gentleman, you would have said; I later thought that I had never encountered so perfect a specimen of the landed gentleman of the South—his manners a perfection of considerate courtesy, his words and his way of speaking them eminently in harmony with his bearing.

His smile was engaging, his eyes keen but of a kindly cast. I noted particularly a peculiarity of his expression—one lid drooped heavily over the eyeball, so that he seemed to be laughing quietly at the world as he found it.

Otherwise his aspect was distinctly prepossessing. One was inclined instantly to give him one's unreserved confidence. In point of fact, throughout the inquisition that followed, I found myself addressing this total stranger as much as the official behind the desk.

But that, of course, may have been due to my immediate assurance that his interest in me was of a nature other than he would have given to any hapchance poor devil down on his luck. Why? I was too stupefied by my misery to ask.

"Well, sir?" repeated the man at the desk, somewhat impatiently. "What can I do for you?"

I attempted a smile; the result was, no doubt, dismal. I was obliged to moisten my cracked lips before I could

reply; and when I did so my voice rattled in my throat so huskily that I was fairly startled.

"You—you can find me work, sir, if you will," I said. "I understand that this is a free employment agency."

"That is right." He rustled the leaves of a little book, took his pen in his hand and barked, in the monotonous accents of one repeating a well-learned catechism:

"Your name?"

"Tolliver—Rodney Tolliver."

The second man—my Southern gentleman—seemed to start. His eye brightened. He observed me closely with a tensity of expression, a fixity of interest that surprised me.

"How do yo' spell yo' name, suh, if I may inquiah?" he said, with a slight nod.

"T-o-l-l-i-v-e-r."

"Thank yo', suh. From what part of the South do yo' come, suh, if yo' don't mind saying?"

"I don't. I'm from upper New York State, sir."

He thanked me again, seeming a trifle disappointed. Nevertheless he relaxed nothing of his regard. I observed his thin lips move once or twice, as though he were repeating to himself some phrase or other that he did not wish to forget. His eyes had taken on a queer expression—a hard, thoughtful, cold light—quite fathomless.

The examination proceeded.

"Your age?"

"Twenty-seven."

"Nationality American?"

"Yes."

"Home?"

"Syracuse, New York."

"Residence in this city?"

I stammered. "No—no matter. I—I'll call back to see you when you say."

The official looked up sharply.

"M-m-m," he mumbled. "Very well. Now, young man, what can you do?"

"A little of everything."

"Too vague. What can you do best?"

"Nothing. One moment. Let me explain. I'm—I have been jack of a good many trades. I'm fairly good as a stenographer and typewriter; I've been a reporter for a morning paper; I've written a few magazine stories. I'm a competent outdoor photographer, have been a hod-carrier, the time-keeper for a subway construction gang, salesman at a glove counter, cow-puncher, drummer, sailor, stoker——"

"M-m-m," he interrupted. "That'll be about enough. You've had a varied and interesting career in your twenty-seven years. I fancy I can find you something in that list. You're not discriminating, I take it?"

"Anything," I said, wearily—"anything to keep body and soul together."

"Very well." He turned to the calendar at his desk. "M-m-m. You come back Monday. This is Friday, the twelfth. Come back the fifteenth. In the meantime——"

I saw him run his hand irresolutely into his pocket.

"I've been hard up myself, and I know a gentleman when I see him, I think," he said, almost defiantly. "Maybe you wouldn't mind—merely as a temporary loan—till you get on your feet——"

"No," I said, wretchedly; "no, thank you. You're very kind—but—but I'll worry along."

I was miserably conscious that I hadn't the slightest notion in all the world how I was to do what I had promised; that, with another person, I would have accepted the proffered loan, and that gladly. But it was different; this man exhibited the instincts of a gentleman and treated me as an equal. I simply could not borrow from him.

And so, mumbling wretchedly, "Good-day," I turned away, buttoning my rags about me against the teeth of the merciless wind that lay in wait for me outside the door; and, with a tolerable firmness of step, I left the office.

At the foot of the stairs, however, a voice from above gave me pause.

"Mistah Tolliver, suh!"

It was my Southerner; I knew his voice, his soft, slurring drawl. I turned to see him descending briskly.

"One moment, if yo' please, suh," he said. But his request was not so much a request as a command. Whatever I

feared of his charitable impulses, I waited their development at his desire.

"Yo' want a job, suh, don't yo'?" he continued, needlessly, as he reached my side.

I made no answer. That, of course, was sufficiently apparent—that I wanted work. He peered narrowly into my eyes, and suddenly reached into his waistcoat pocket.

"I've work foh yo' to do, suh," he announced. I fancied that there was a something eager in his tone. "Yo'—yo're willing to work fo' me?"

"Anything," I declared; "anything!"

"Anything but steal, eh, my friend?"

My eyes fell before his searching gaze.

"I—I've not been put to that test," I evaded.

"It's no mo' than a question of time. Oh, no offense, Mr. Tolliver! I've been where yo' are, suh. But—but it won't come to that *now*." He produced a piece of blank cardboard, and scribbled a word or two upon it.

"Come theah to-morrow night, if yo' please, suh, at eight o'clock," he requested, earnestly, handing me the card. "Meanwhile, as a retainer——" And he offered me a bill.

I saw that it was ten dollars—more money than I had held in my hand for weeks; and I confess to hesitating.

"Take it, suh," he commanded.

Almost unconsciously I obeyed.

"But—but you've no surety that I'll——"

"Yes, I have, suh," he interrupted, triumphantly. "Yo're a Tolliver. I know the Tollivers. Yo'll come all right, suh, and, betteh than that, yo' won't take any other work until yo' see me. Yo' understand me now—this is pure selfishness. I've very impohtant wo'k foh yo'. Good-day. No, not a word, suh! Till to-morrow night. Good-day, good-day."

There was—what I had not observed before—a cab standing before the entrance to this employment bureau. My benefactor was across the sidewalk in two steps, before I could interpose another objection. In a moment more he had dived into the vehicle. The cabby whipped up smartly, and they were gone into the world of seething white ere I had time to wonder at the strangeness of this adventure.

I looked at the card, which bore half a dozen words or so in pencil, the handwriting almost illegible:

COLONEL GEO. MONTGOMERY
141 St. John's Ave., Brooklyn.

And I gazed long and thoughtfully at the bill in my blue, stiff fingers. Ten dollars! It was a godsend—a dispensation direct from Providence.

Somehow I felt sure that the tide of my affairs had turned, and for the better—I, in my blindness!

It's unnecessary to detail my movements for the succeeding twenty-four hours. Sufficient it is that I ate, was warmly clothed and housed against the rigors of the weather.

And promptly at the hour appointed I rang the doorbell of a dreary-looking mansion, set far back from the street in extensive and neglected grounds in the residence section of Brooklyn.

For some moments I had no choice but to wait outside that door. It was snowing again, and that furiously, and the night was bitter cold; but I cared little for that. My stomach was full, my back protected, and it was all due to Colonel George Montgomery, who, therefore, was at liberty to keep me waiting his convenience as long as he particularly pleased.

In the end, he himself opened to me. I heard the rattle of a key in the lock, and the door swung inward. Montgomery—as he chose to call himself—stood in the entrance, nodding courteously to me, with a pleased, benignant smile.

And yet, at first, I did not know the man. His mustache was gone—had been shaven close to the upper lip—and his eyebrows were dark that had been snowy white.

He had, moreover, changed his style of dress. His long-tailed frock coat of

decent black, his tight trousers, his ruffled shirt with the high, stiff collar, his cravat with the flowing ends—which he had affected the day before—all were vanished; their place being taken by an ordinary business suit such as any New Yorker may wear without exciting comment.

Indeed, the transformation in the man's appearance was so entire that I was embarrassed. Fancying that I recognized him, yet I could not be sure; he looked ten years younger—as if he might be his own son. I stammered:

"Colonel—Colonel Montgomery——"

"The same, Mr. Tolliver. Won't yo' walk in, suh? It's a powerful mean night, isn't it?"

The voice reassured me. I entered and followed at his heels through a series of darkened, sounding passages and deserted, echoing rooms. Later I recalled this desolate seeming of things, and wondered vaguely that this man, in conditions apparently so affluent, if one was to judge him by his prosperous manner, should inhabit a place so dank and dreary.

But at the time I was so engrossed in speculations concerning the reasons for his altered look—wherein I smelled a mystery of a certain seductive interest—that I had little attention to give to anything else. My curiosity engaged on one point, I was content to let the other considerations wait.

And presently I had my explanation. Montgomery finally halted in a small, dimly lighted room, scantily furnished. There was a fire in a grate at one end—a bed of glowing coals diffusing a grateful heat. A kerosene lamp provided the illumination—an ordinary glass kitchen lamp, set carelessly upon a broad, old-fashioned table of fine, polished mahogany, as was disclosed when its thick coat of dust, the accumulation of many years, I fancied, was disturbed by our careless hands while we conversed.

The other fittings of the room were of a nature to give it the appearance of a study. Tall, dark bookcases lined the walls, their shelves empty save for a volume or two. Easy-chairs of ancient design, upholstered with faded flowered tapestry, stood by the table and in front of the fire. Heavy, tattered portières hung before the two windows, bellying in the draught.

Montgomery closed the door tightly. My back was turned to him, but I imagined that I heard the grating of a key in the lock. I wondered why he should think it worth while to lock me in with him. Surely he understood that I was completely at his service. But, still, I might have been mistaken.

At any rate, his smile, as he motioned me into a chair, handed me a cigar and took one himself, would have disarmed all suspicions of foul play that such an action might have roused within me.

"Well," he said, with a sigh, "and heah we are at last, suh. Yo' were mighty prompt. I thank yo', suh."

"The obligation is on my side," I responded. "I don't know, to tell the truth, how to express——"

"Not anotheh word, suh! I insist. But, now, I reckon yo're wondehing a whole lot what I want of yo', are yo' not, suh?"

"Indeed," I agreed, "there are a number of circumstances that seem—well, odd. For instance——" And I glanced meaningly into his face.

His long, white, tapering fingers went as by habit toward the mustache that was not upon his upper lip. He glanced at me good-humoredly, his drooping eyelid heightening the illusion of good-fellowship.

"I calculated yo'd be rather surprised," he admitted. "It's a small matter, when yo' come to consideh it. The fact is, I find I'm due to stay No'th heah for some time, and my customary attiah seems to give folks the impression that I'm a fat-head—a fiah-eating Southe'neh half loaded most of the time. So I decided to do as the Romans do, for a while. But I do miss my mustache—that's a fact, suh."

He lit his cigar. "An old man's vanity, yo're calling it," he said, laughingly, arching his blackened eyebrows. "Well, we old duffers have got to do something to keep in the race with yo' handsome youngsters, yo' know. Howeveh, let's get down to business, suh."

"By all means."

"Well, then, Mr. Tolliver, I calculate yo' won't take offense if I ask some pretty pe'sonal questions, will yo'? Yo' see, I want yo' for some very particular business."

"I have nothing to conceal, sir," I laughed.

"Good!" He sat for a moment looking me over curiously. In the end came what I had been expecting: "Powerful change ten dollars can wo'k in a man's appearance, Mr. Tolliver. I declah, yo' look as prosperous as easy money!"

I felt that I might as well make a clean breast of the affair.

"Ten dollars was only a starter, sir," I told him. "Five of it fed and lodged me. The other five just got me into the game—and I won out."

"Cahds, suh?" he questioned.

"Faro," I told him bluntly. "I know a place. And—and—well, I needed more than five dollars to redeem my overcoat and things. The luck was with me, and I came out ahead. Hence this prosperity. I—I trust you don't mind?" I asked, anxiously.

He seemed surprised. "Me, suh? Not in the least. Gambling is a gentleman's pastime, my father always maintained. I pe'sonally like a man with good, red blood in his veins. No, suh, that's no disqualification—to the contrary, in point of fact."

He sat silent, smoking and looking meditatively into the fire. I had an impression that he was listening intently to something going on in another part of the house; but, strain my ears as I might, I heard no sound other than the mournful wailing of the wind.

Montgomery looked up and divined my thought, apparently.

"I was listening," he told me, with disconcerting directness. "My brother is lying ill in anotheh paht of the house, suh, and we're expecting the doctoh to call 'most any minute."

I murmured polite commiseration.

"Oh, it's nothing serious," he announced. "Only I'm a little worried—up No'th, heah, so fa' from our folks. This house is a family heirloom, yo' must understand. It hadn't been occupied fo' years until we took possession a month or so ago. I fancy its atmosphere isn't precisely healthy. But let us discuss our own affairs—not mine alone.

"Let me see, Mr. Tolliver; how old did yo' say yo' were?"

"Twenty-seven."

"Yes, sur. And yo're from New York State?"

"Yes."

"Any relations in the South, suh?"

"Distant connections only, if any. I believe our branch of the family came North long before the Civil War."

"I see, suh. And yo' spell yo' name——"

I told him again. He frowned slightly.

"That's unfortunate," I thought he muttered. Aloud he said: "Has yo' family always spelled it that way, suh?"

"Well, no," I admitted. "It used to be T-a-l-i-a-f-e-r-r-o—pronounced Tolliver. But, inasmuch as it was always mispronounced by others, and for the sake of convenience, also, we changed it to plain Tolliver."

"Then yo' would have no objection, I take it, to resuming the old spelling of yo' name for a little while?"

"Not in the least."

"Suppose yo' try it, once, suh. Write yo' name, I mean, on this sheet of paper —'R. Taliaferro.'"

He handed me an envelope which he took from his pocket, and a fountain pen. I said, "Certainly," and signed "R. Taliaferro" on the back, then returning it to him.

He seemed to ponder this signature for several minutes. He took other papers from his pocket and appeared to be comparing them with this envelope which bore my chirography. At length he said:

"That's all right, I calculate, suh. Now, yo' don't mind traveling?"

"Not a bit."

"Yo' can hold yo' tongue, if necessary?"

"To the last breath, sir," I assured him, fervently.

"Yo'll do, then, suh. I must tell yo' that I intend intrusting yo' with a com-

mission demanding the utmost of yo' powers of discretion."

"I shall endeavor to prove myself worthy," I said, stiffly.

"Oh, I'm not worrying a whole lot about that——"

"What's that?" I cried.

We both got to our feet simultaneously, Montgomery in evident consternation, I startled and horrified.

A scream had rung through the house —a scream of extraordinary shrillness, loud and piercing—the scream of a strong man in mortal terror. So extraordinary was the effect it produced upon my nerves that I thought my heart ceased beating for a brief moment.

As for my host, a dull flush—it might have been of anger, for he scowled blackly—surmounted his forehead. He opened and shut his month without uttering a word, moistened his lips furtively, and looked at me sharply out of the corners of his eyes.

We stood motionless for a minute or two in the complete stillness that followed that terrible cry. Then I said:

"What was that, Colonel Montgomery?"

He shook his head blankly.

"I couldn't say for sure," he said, slowly, "but I'm afraid——" He paused. "Would yo' mind waiting heah a moment, suh, while I go and investigate?"

"Certainly not, sir."

But, to the contrary, it seemed a full quarter of an hour ere he reappeared. During the interval I had leisure to ponder the perplexing aspect of this affair. There was something about it—I know not what; whether the chill atmosphere of the house, the odd alteration in Montgomery, or the sense of mystery that seemed to envelop the man and his habitation—that repelled my imagination. I found myself regretting that I had permitted him to draw me into his power. I began to fear—something absolutely intangible.

He returned, however, ere this dull fear had time to shape itself completely —came suddenly and briskly into the room, his step firm and assured, his manner confident, his eye bright and steady. In one hand he bore a decanter, in the other glasses, which he deposited upon the table at my elbow.

"It was nothing," he informed me, with a laugh that sounded forced. "My brother, it seems, has lapsed into delirium; but the doctor has just arrived, and assures me there's nothing to be feahed. Strange what horrible cries a man can utteh when he's out of his mind, isn't it, suh? I declah, he quite frightened me fo' a bit. I think a drink will do us both good."

He filled my glass, and then his own.

"We've plenty of time to discuss mattehs," he announced. "The evening is yet young, and I can recommend this liquor, suh—brought it with me from home, suh. It's prime cohn juice. Yo' health, Mr. Tolliver!"

He was standing, glass in hand. I rose, ceremoniously, and touched his glass with mine.

"Your health, sir," I said; and drank.

I remember that a slight flush seemed to mount to my brain as I set the glass down. The liquor was with a flavor unfamiliar to me; but then I boasted no acquaintance with the "cohn juice" (as Montgomery would have it) of the South.

It was also like mustard, "hot i' the mouth." I was at once very thirsty, and my judgment went back on me. Ordinarily I am a cautious drinker, and one conservative when I drink at all beyond moderation. This night, on the other hand, I hesitated not one moment when the colonel suggested another dose of the stuff. To this day I recall its flavor as very pleasant.

But I must confess that I retain no coherent knowledge of what took place after that first drink. I believe that we sat where we were for several hours —though it may have been minutes— talking madly and enthusiastically, I've no notion concerning what.

Then I observed with amused alarm that Montgomery was behaving himself in a most odd and absurd manner. At one time, while I watched him, he deliberately developed two heads. Again he had poked his face very close to mine, and his keen, clear, calculating gaze seemed to be searching the depths of

my very soul; and yet again he had receded to an incalculable distance, far beyond the limits of the room, whence his features shone upon me strangely luminous, contorted into a mocking, sardonic leer. It jarred upon my sense of the ridiculous, so I told him, I think, that he wash a ver' goo' feller—a jol' goo' feller; and, if I remember rightly, I sang it to him persistently.

There came, somewhat later, a long and fatiguing journey through a veritable maze of reeling apartments, all dark, bare and chilly, which ended somewhere in the open. I faintly recall feeling the keen night air upon my face, together with the moisture of snowflakes.

But, following that, all is blackly opaque for a very long time.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE TRIUMPH OF HAPPY JACK

A CHRISTMAS STORY OF THE FLYING U

BY B. M. BOWER

Author of "Chip, of the Flying U"

THE floor manager had just called out that it was "ladies' choice." Happy Jack backed diffidently into a corner, his eyes glued, in rapturous apprehension, upon the thin, expressionless face of Annie Pilgreen. He hoped and he feared she would discover him and lead him out to dance. She had done that once, at the Labor Day ball, and he had not slept soundly for several nights after. Some one laid proprietary hand upon his cinnamon-brown coat sleeve, and he jumped; it was only the schoolma'am, however, smiling up at him ingratiatingly, in a manner that was bewildering to a simple-minded fellow like Happy Jack.

She led him into another corner, plumped gracefully down upon a bench, drew her skirts hospitably aside and announced that she was tired and would rather talk than dance. And Happy, sending a wistful glance after Annie, who was leading Joe Meeker onto the floor, sighed a bit and walked straight into the loop which the schoolma'am had spread for his unwary feet.

The schoolma'am was sitting out an astonishing number of dances—for a girl who could dance from dark to daydawn and never turn a hair—and the women were wondering why. If she had sat them out with Weary Davidson, they would have smiled knowingly at one another and thought no more of it; but she didn't. For every dance she had a different companion, and in every case it ended in the young man looking rather scared and unhappy. After five minutes of low-toned monologue on the part of the schoolma'am, Happy Jack went the way of his predecessors, and became scared and unhappy also.

"Aw, say, Miss Satterly, *I* can't act!" he protested, in a panic.

"Oh, yes, you could," declared the schoolma'am, with sweet assurance, "if you only thought so."

"I couldn't git up before a crowd and say a piece, t' save my soul from—honest!"

"I'm not sure I want you to. There are other things to an entertainment besides reciting things. I only want you to promise that you will help me out. You will, won't you?" The schoolma'am's eyes, besides being pretty, were disconcertingly direct in their gaze.

Happy Jack wriggled and looked toward the door, which seemed a long way off, for such a small hall. "I—I've got t' go up t' the falls, 'long about Christmas," he stammered. "I—I've got a tooth——"

"You're the fifth," the schoolma'am interrupted, impatiently. "A dentist would do well to locate here, I think. From what I have heard to-night, there's a fortune to be made off you cowboys."

Every teaspoon of blood in Happy's body seemed to stand in his face.

"I—I'll pull the curt'n for yuh," he volunteered, brightening under the inspiration.

"You're the seventh applicant for that place." The schoolma'am was crushingly calm. "Every fellow I've spoken to to-night has a morbid craving to pull curtains."

Happy crumpled under her sarcasm and perspired. Though he wooed inspiration desperately, his fickle brain refused to act.

The schoolma'am continued inexorably; plainly, her brain was not paralyzed into stupid inaction. "I've promised the neighborhood that I would have a Christmas tree and entertainment. They're expecting me to keep that promise—and I've seven tongue-tied kids to work with!" (The schoolma'am was not always precise in her use of the English language.) "Of course, I relied on my friends to help me out. But when I come to call the roll, I—I don't seem—to *have* any—friends." The schoolma'am was twirling the ring Weary had given her last spring, and her voice trembled in a way to make Happy feel a low-down cur.

He swallowed twice. "Aw, yuh, don't want t' go and feel bad about it. I never meant—I'll do anything yuh ast me to." Happy had the softest heart imaginable in such a big, uncouth body.

"Thank you. I knew you wouldn't go back on your friends." The schoolma'am recovered her spirits with suspicious promptness, and patted his arm, and called him an awfully good boy—which reduced Happy to a state just this side imbecility.

Also, she drew a little memorandum book from somewhere, and wrote Happy Jack's name in clear, convincing characters that made him shiver. He saw other names on the page, above his own—quite a lot of them; seven, in fact. Miss Satterly did not seem to be so destitute of friends as the tremble of her voice, a while back, would lead one to suspect. Happy wondered.

"I haven't quite decided what we will have yet," she remarked, briskly. "When I do, we'll all meet some evening in the schoolhouse and talk it over. There's lots of fun in getting up an entertainment—where everyone is jolly and sensible, as this crowd will be. You'll like it, once you get started."

Happy tried his best to believe her, and to smile, and managed to contort his face into something faintly resembling a grin. Then he went over to the hotel and swallowed some whisky to start his blood moving again, and sat down and played poker till he was eight dollars to the bad—for which the schoolma'am was solely responsible, though Happy never dreamed of blaming her. Neither did he blame her for the nightmares that tormented his sleep during the week that followed, though she was partly responsible for that, too. For wherever Happy Jack went, or whatever he did, he could not forget that his name was written down in the schoolma'am's book, and that he was bound to do anything she might see fit to ask him to do—even to "speakin' a piece," which was, in his eyes, the acme of mental torture.

When Cal Emmett, thinking probably of Miss Satterly's book, pensively warbled:

> "Is your name written there,
> On the page bright and fair,"

Happy Jack felt the blood around his heart freeze, though he made no reply. It was.

"Schoolma'am wants us all to go over to the schoolhouse to-night—seven-thirty sharp—to help make medicine over this Santa Claus round-up. Slim, you've got t' be Santy, and come down the stovepipe and give the kids fits and pop-

corn strung on a string. Schoolma'am says you've got the figure, without any padding." Weary splashed into the wash basin like a startled muskrat.

The Happy Family looked at one another and groaned; verily, the Day of Judgment was hard on their trail.

"By golly!" Slim gulped, "you can just tell yer schoolma'am t' go plumb——"

Weary faced him, his brown hair running rivulets.

"—and ask the old man," finished Slim, hastily. "He's fifteen pounds fatter'n I be."

"Go tell her yourself," said Weary, appeased. "I told her you'd all go, if I had t' hog-tie the whole bunch and haul yuh over in the hayrack." He dried his face and hands leisurely, and regarded the group. "Oh, mamma, you're a nervy bunch of dogies! Yuh look like the mourners at a Free Methodist camp-meeting."

"Maybe you'll hog-tie the whole bunch," Jack Bates remarked, ironically, "but if yuh do, you'll sure be late t' meeting, sonny."

"That's what," agreed Cal and Happy Jack, aggressively.

"I won't need to," Weary told them, blandly. "Yuh all gave the schoolma'am leave t' put your names down, and it's up t' you t' make good. If yuh ain't got nerve enough t' stay in the game till the cards is shuffled, yuh shouldn't a bought a stack uh chips."

"That's right," Cal admitted, frankly. Cal was not troubled with shyness, anyway. "It's sure up to the Happy Family to put this business through a-whirling. We'll give 'em vawdyville till their eyes water. Happy, you're it. You be Madymoyzell de Youranuther and give 'em a toe dance. We'll all set on the roof and hold it down."

Happy grinned sheepishly, and sought out his red necktie.

"Say, Weary," spoke up Jack Bates, "ain't there going t' be any female girls in this opera troupe?"

"Sure thing. The Little Doctor is helping run the thing, and Rena Jackson and Len Adams are in it—and Annie Pilgreen. Her and Happy are down for 'Under the Mistletoe'—tableau—red fire—kiss me quick——"

"Aw, come off!" cried Happy Jack, much distressed, not observing Weary's lowered eyelid. His perturbed face and manner gave the Happy Family an idea. (An idea, in the Happy Family, was a synonym for great mental agony on the part of the selected victim of the idea, and great enjoyment on the part of the Family.)

"That's right," Weary assured him, sweetly. "Annie's ready t' stand for it, but she's afraid you haven't nerve enough t' go through with it. Annie likes you a heap, Happy, only she says you're too bashful. You always want the girl t' do the running."

"Aw, gwan!" adjured Happy, always weak at repartee when his feelings were involved.

"If I had a girl like Annie——"

"I never said I had a girl——"

"It would take me just about two minutes to convince her I wasn't as scared as I looked. You can gamble I wouldn't take a dare in the shape of a living picture with——"

"Aw, I ain't stampeding clear t' salt water cause a girl says 'Boo'! And I don't need no cayuse t' show me the road t' a girl's house——"

Weary got a strangle-hold at this point, and the discussion ended rather suddenly, as they were apt to do in the Flying U bunk house.

Over at the schoolhouse, that night, when Miss Satterly's little gold watch told her it was seven-thirty, she came out of the corner where she had been whispering with the Little Doctor, and faced a select, anxious-eyed audience. Even Weary was not as much at ease as he tried to appear, and as for the others, they would have been as contented facing twelve ponderously solemn men sworn to mete out justice as they were before this brown-eyed little schoolma'am.

She went straight at her subject without any preliminaries. They all knew what they were there for, she told them, and her audience looked her straight in the eye and never flinched. They did *not* know what they were there for, but

they were prepared to learn the worst. Cal Emmett went mentally—and rapidly—over the only recitation he knew, and which, he told the boys, he expected to "speak." It was the one beginning—according to Cal's version:

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
What in thunder are you at?"

The schoolma'am explained just what she intended to do. There would be tableaux—Happy Jack came near swallowing his tongue—and the Jarley Wax-works.

"What're them?" Slim inquired, and everyone took advantage of the interruption and breathed deeply.

The schoolma'am told them what the Jarley Wax-works were, and even reverted to Dickens, and gave a brief sketch of the original *Mrs. Jarley.* The audience gathered that they would be expected to represent wax figures, would stand still and let *Mrs. Jarley* talk about them—without the satisfaction of talking about *Mrs. Jarley*—and that they would be wound up, at the psychological moment, whereupon they must go through certain motions alleged to portray the last conscious acts of the characters they purported to represent.

The schoolma'am sat down sidewise upon a desk, swung a dainty foot unconventionally, and grew confidential, and the Happy Family realized that they were in for it.

"Will Davidson"—that was Weary—"is the tallest fellow in the lot, so he must be the Japanese Dwarf, and eat poison out of a chopping-bowl, with a wooden spoon," she said, authoritatively, and the Happy Family grinned at Weary.

"Mr. Bennett, you can assume a most murderous expression, so we'll allow you to be Captain Kidd, and threaten to slay your Little Doctor with a wooden sword."

"Much obliged," said Chip, with doubtful gratitude. "I shall be delighted."

"Mr. Emmett, we'll ask you to be *Mrs. Jarley,* and deliver the lecture."

When they heard that, the Family howled derision at Cal, who got red in spite of himself. The worst was over; the audience scented fun in the thing and perked up, and the schoolma'am breathed relief. She knew the crowd. Things would go with a swing now, and success was, barring accidents, a foregone conclusion.

Through all the clatter and cross-fire of gibes and friendly taunts that followed, Happy Jack sat, nervous and distrait, in the seat nearest the door and furthest from Annie Pilgreen. The pot-bellied coal stove yawned red-mouthed at him, a scant three feet away. Some one, coming in chilled with the nipping night air, had shoveled in coal with lavish hand, until the stove door had to be thrown open as the readiest method of allaying the furnace within. Its body, swelling corpulently out below the iron belt, glowed a real strawberry red, and Happy Jack's wolf-skin overcoat was beginning to exhale a rank, animal odor. He unbuttoned it absently and perspired; it never occurred to him to change his seat.

He was waiting to see if the schoolma'am said anything about having "Under the Mistletoe," with red fire—and Annie Pilgreen. If she did, Happy Jack meant to get out of the house with the least possible delay; he knew that no ordinary man could face the schoolma'am's direct gaze and refuse openly to do her bidding, and he was but an ordinary man who was conscious of his limitations.

So far, the Jarley Wax-works held the undivided attention of everyone but Happy Jack. To him, there were other things more important. Even when he was informed that he must be the Chinese giant, and stand upon a coal-oil box for added height, arrayed in one of the Pilgreen big-flowered calico curtains, which Annie said could be spared, he was apathetic. He would be required to swing his head slowly from side to side, when wound up—very well, it looked easy enough. He would not have to say a word, and he supposed he might shut his eyes, if he felt like it, so the prospect did not alarm even his bashful soul.

"As for the tableaux"—Happy measured the distance to the door—"we can

arrange them later, for they will not need rehearsing. The wax-works will require a great deal of practice, so we must get at them as soon as possible. How often can you come and rehearse?"

"Every night, and all day Sundays," Weary drawled.

Miss Satterly frowned him into good behavior, and said twice a week would do.

Happy Jack slipped out and went home, feeling like a reprieved criminal, and trying to argue himself into the belief that Weary was only loading him, and didn't mean a word he said. Still, the schoolma'am had said there would be tableaux, and it was a cinch she would tell Weary all about it, seeing they were engaged, and Weary was the kind that always found out things, anyway. What worried Happy Jack was how the deuce Weary found out about his liking Annie Pilgreen. That was a secret Happy had almost succeeded in keeping from himself even; he would have bet money no one else suspected it —and here was Weary grinning and telling him he and Annie were cut out for a tableau together! Happy Jack pondered till he got a headache, and did not come to any satisfactory understanding with himself even then.

The remainder of the Family stayed late at the schoolhouse, and Weary and Cal and Chip discussed something in a corner with the Little Doctor and the schoolma'am. The Little Doctor said that something was a shame, and that it was mean to tease a fellow as bashful as Happy Jack, but in the end she laughed and came to terms, agreeing with Weary that sometimes Cupid needed help, in spite of the fact that he was popularly supposed to be all-powerful.

The Happy Family rode home in the crisp starlight, gurgling and leaning over their saddle horns in spasmodic fits of laughter. But when they trooped into the Flying U bunk house, they might have been deacons returning from prayer meeting, so far as their decorous manner was concerned. Happy Jack was in bed, covered to his ears, and with his face to the wall. The Family cast covert glances at his carroty topknot and went silently to bed—which was contrary to habit.

At the third rehearsal, just as the Chinese giant stepped off the coal-oil box, thereby robbing himself of two feet of stature, the schoolma'am approached him with a look in her big eyes that set him shivering. When she laid a finger mysteriously upon his arm and drew him into the corner sacred to secret consultations, Happy's forehead resembled the outside of a stone water-jar in hot weather. He knew beforehand just about what she would say. It was the tableau that had tormented his sleep for the last ten days—the tableau with red fire and Annie Pilgreen.

Miss Satterly told him she had already spoken to Annie, and that Annie was willing, if Happy Jack had no objections. Happy Jack had, but he did not mention the fact. The schoolma'am had not quoted Annie's reply verbatim, but that was mere detail. When she asked Annie if she would take part in a tableau with Happy Jack, Annie had dropped her pale eyelids and said: "Yes, ma'am." That was all, but it was as much as the schoolma'am could justly expect.

Annie Pilgreen was an anæmic sort of girl with pale eyes, ash-colored hair that clung damply to her head, and a colorless complexion—the sort of girl whose conversational repertoire consists of "Yes, sir," and "No, sir" — or "ma'am," if sex demanded it and Annie remembered in time; the sort of girl who would have made an ideal heroine seventy-five years ago. But Happy Jack loved her; and when a woman loves and is loved she ceases to be a nonentity; her existence is justified for all time.

Happy Jack sent a glance of despairing appeal at the Family, but the Family was very much engaged, down by the wasp-waisted stove. Cal Emmett was fanning himself with *Mrs. Jarley's* poppy-covered bonnet, and refreshing his halting memory of his lecture, with sundry promptings from Len Adams, who held the book.

Chip Bennett was whittling his sword into shape, and Weary was drumming a

tattoo with the great wooden bowl and spoon from which he devoured poisoned rice upon the stage. The rest were variously engaged; not one of them seemed conscious of the fact that Happy Jack was facing the tragedy of his bashful life.

Before he realized it, Miss Satterly had somehow managed to worm a promise from him, and after that nothing mattered. The wax-works, the tree, the whole entertainment dissolved into a blurred background, against which he was to stand with Annie Pilgreen for the amusement of his neighbors, who would stamp their feet and shout things at him.

Very likely, he would be subjected to the agony of an encore, and he knew, beyond all doubt, that he would never be allowed to forget the figure he should cut—for Happy Jack knew he was as unbeautiful as a hippopotamus, and as awkward. He had not been chosen for the part because of any natural adaptation; what puzzled him most was to hit upon any possible reason. His plodding brain revolved the mystery slowly, but with a natural perseverance that would succeed ultimately.

When he remounted his wooden pedestal, thereby converting himself into a Chinese giant of wax, he certainly looked the part. Where the other statues broke into giggles, to the detriment of their mechanical perfection, or squirmed when the broken alarm clock whirred its signal against the small of their backs, Happy Jack stood immovably upright, a gigantic figure with stolid features. The schoolma'am enthusiastically pronounced him the best actor in the lot.

"Happy's swallowed his medicine, bottle and all," the Japanese Dwarf whispered to Captain Kidd, and grinned. The redoubtable captain turned his head and studied the brooding features of the giant.

"I'd tell a man! He's started the machinery of his think-works—and when he studies the thing out, in six months or a year, somebody's got it coming."

"He can't pulverize the whole bunch, and he'll never wise up enough to know who's the biggest sinner," Weary comforted himself.

"Don't you believe it. Happy doesn't think very often; when he does, though, he can ring the bell every shot."

"Here, you statues over there want to let up on the chin-whacking, or I'll hand you a few with this," commanded *Mrs. Jarley*, and shook the stove poker threateningly.

The Japanese Dwarf returned to his poisoned rice, and Captain Kidd apologized to his victim, who was frowning reproof at him; wax figures are not supposed to gossip among themselves, especially when they are upon exhibition.

That night Weary rode home beside misnamed Happy Jack, and strove to lift him out of the slough of despond. But Happy refused to budge, mentally, an inch. He rode humped in the saddle like a yearling in its first blizzard, and was discouragingly unresponsive—except once, when Weary, with the best of intentions, reminded him that the tableau would need no rehearsing, that it would only last a minute, and that it wouldn't hurt. Then Happy Jack had straightened a bit and briefly invited Weary to go where the coal trust is shorn of its power; you know the place.

After that, Weary galloped ahead and overtook the others, and told them Happy Jack was thinking, and mustn't be interrupted, and that he thought it would not be fatal, and Happy would feel better after it was over. From that night until Christmas eve, Happy Jack continued to think. On the way to the schoolhouse, on the evening of the execution (others might call it an entertainment, but Happy Jack had a different opinion, and a different name), his brain struck pay dirt. Happy took off his cap, slapped his horse affectionately over the head with it and grinned for the first time since the Thanksgiving dance.

The schoolma'am, her cheeks becomingly pink from excitement, fluttered behind the curtain for a last, hurried survey of stage properties and actors.

"Isn't Johnny here yet?" she asked of Annie Pilgreen, who had just come, and still bore about her a whiff of frosty night air. Johnny was first upon the program, with a ready-made address, beginning, "Kind friends, we bid you welcome," and the time for its delivery was overdue. Out beyond the curtain, the "kind friends" were waxing impatient, and the juvenile contingent was showing violent symptoms of appropriating prematurely the glittering little fir tree which stood in a corner next the stage. Back near the door, feet were scuffing audibly upon the bare floor, and a suppressed whistle occasionally cut into the hum of subdued voices. Miss Satterly was growing nervous at the delay, and she repeated her question to Annie, who was staring at nothing, very intently, as she had a fashion of doing.

"Yes, ma'am," she answered, at length. Then, as an afterthought: "He's outside, talking to Happy Jack." Annie was mistaken; Happy Jack was talking to Johnny. The schoolma'am tried to look out of a frosted window.

"I do wish they'd hurry in; it's getting late." She looked at her watch and frowned. The suppressed whistle, back by the door, was gaining volume and insistence.

"Can't we turn 'er loose, girlie?" Weary came up and laid a hand caressingly on her shoulder.

"Johnny isn't in, and he's to give the address of welcome. *Why* must people whistle like that, Will?"

"They're just mad because they aren't in the show," said Weary. "Say, can't we cut out the welcome, and sail in without it? I'm getting kind o' shaky, dreading it."

The schoolma'am shook her head. She had never heard of a country entertainment without an address of welcome, and it is never safe to trifle with an unwritten law. She looked again at her watch, and waited; the audience, being helpless, waited also, though it was plain they did not relish the delay.

Weary, listening to the whistles and the shuffling of feet, felt a queer, qualmy sensation in the region of his diaphragm; he was both astonished and disgusted, and yielded to a hankering for company in his misery. He edged over to where Chip and Cal were amusing themselves by peeping at the audience from behind the tree.

"How do yuh stack up, Cal?" he whispered, forlornly.

"Pretty lucky," Cal told him, inattentively, and the cheerfulness of his tone grieved Weary sorely. If Cal felt any queerness at the pit of his stomach, he certainly had excellent self-command, and made no sign. But then, Cal always did have the nerve of a mule.

Weary sighed and wondered what in thunder ailed him, anyway; he was uncertain whether he was sick or just scared.

"Feel all right, Chip?" he pursued, anxiously.

"I'd tell a man," said Chip, with characteristic brevity. "I wonder who those silver-mounted spurs, on that limb there, are for? They've been put on since we trimmed the tree this afternoon. They're the real thing, all right."

Weary's dejection grew more pronounced. "Oh, mamma! am I the only knock-kneed son-of-a-gun in this crowd?" he mused, and turned disconsolately away. His spine was creepy cold with stage fright. He listened to the sounds beyond the curtain and shivered.

Then Johnny and Happy Jack appeared, looking rather guilty, and Johnny was thrust unceremoniously forward to welcome his kind friends and still the rising clamor.

Things went smoothly after that, and Weary was so busy helping the schoolma'am that he almost forgot his fright. It is true that, as the Japanese Dwarf, he forgot what he was there for, and the alarm clock buzzed unheeded against his spine, the while he glared, transfixed, at the faces staring back at him. *Mrs. Jarley,* however, was equal to the emergency. She wound him up the second time, gave Weary an admonitory kick, and turned to the audience.

"This here Japanese Dwarf I got second-hand," she confessed. "It's about

wore out, but I guess I can make it go." She gave Weary another kick, warned him, in a whisper, to "get busy," and the dwarf ate its allotted portion of poison obediently. And everyone applauded Weary more than they had the others, for they thought he was only acting his part. So much for justice.

"Our last selection will be a tableau entitled 'Under the Mistletoe,'" announced the schoolma'am's clear tones. Then she went down from the stage, with her guitar, to where the Little Doctor waited with her mandolin. While the tableau was being arranged they meant to play together, in lieu of an orchestra. The schoolma'am was well pleased with herself, and with the evening. It had been a success, so far, and as to the tableau that would be a success also—for Weary had charge of it.

Weary went to work with energy and dispatch. "Here, Happy, this is where you shine. Come a-running—you're it."

Annie Pilgreen already stood simpering in her place, and Happy went unmurmuring forward, willing but deplorably inefficient. Weary posed him, but Happy Jack did not get the idea—he was too bashful or too awkward, or too something. Weary labored with him desperately, his ear strained to the music, which, at the proper time, would die to a murmur while the curtain was drawn slowly back, and the red fire threw a rosy glow upon Jack and Annie. Already the lamps were being turned low, out there beyond the curtain. Though it was, primarily, a scheme of torture for Happy Jack, Weary, as master of ceremonies, was anxious that it should be technically perfect.

"Say, *don't* stand there like a kink-necked horse, Happy!" he pleaded, under his breath. "You look like Whizzer after he went over the Hog's Back, last summer. Ain't there any joints in your arms?"

"I ain't never practiced it," Happy Jack protested, "and I never seen it done. If somebody'd show me, oncet, so I c'd git the hang of it——"

"Oh, mamma! you're a peach. Give me that sage brush, quick. Now, watch. Yuh want to hold it over her head, and kind o' bend over, like you was daring yourself to kiss——"

Happy Jack backed off to get the effect. Incidentally, he took the curtain back with him, and, also incidentally, Johnny dropped a match into the red fire, which glowed beautifully. The audience caught its breath—and so did Weary. But Weary was game, and he never moved an eyelash.

The red glow faded and left an abominable smell behind it, and some merciful hand drew the curtain—but it was not the hand of Happy Jack. Happy Jack had gone out through the window, and was crouching beneath, drinking in greedily the shouts and hand-clapping and stamping of feet and whistling on the other side of the friendly wall. It all sounded sweet to the great, red ears of Happy Jack—sweeter than he had ever dreamed. When the clatter showed signs of abatement, he stole away to where his horse was tied, his sorrel coat gleaming with frost sparkles in the moonlight.

"It's you and me to hit the trail, Spider," he remarked, gayly, and scraped the frost away with his bare hand.

A tall figure stole upon him from behind and grappled with him silently. Spider danced away as far as his rope would allow, and snorted, and two struggling forms squirmed away from his untrustworthy heels.

"Aw, leggo!" cried Happy, as soon as he could breathe.

"You come on back, then," commanded Weary. "You ain't going to sneak off home till you square yourself with Annie—not if little Willie knows himself. How do you reckon she's feeling, you lop-eared——"

"Annie knowed I was going t' do it," Happy retorted, loftily. "Annie and me's engaged."

Weary crumpled against the coal shed and gasped.

"Happy, you're too many for your Uncle Willie. Kick me good, and then we'll go back and get our string of popcorn."

Millionaire Marsden's Eleven

A FOOTBALL STORY

BY PHILIP C. STANTON

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Montgomery L. Marsden, a Wall Street millionaire, asserts that if a man takes good care of himself there is no reason why his physical condition should deteriorate, even under the stress and strain of business, for many years. His partner, J. Rooker Armory, claims the contrary, saying that of necessity a man's bodily vigor must wane as his mentality increases. The dispute results in a wager, the test being a football game between two elevens, Marsden's, known as the "Goths of the Gridiron," being composed of men who were college players of renown from ten to twenty years ago, and Armory's, the All-Collegiate, of the pick of the undergraduates now playing on the various college teams. Several weeks before the contest takes place, Trescott, the left-tackle of the Goths, heroically rescues Mr. and Mrs. Rouquin and their daughter, Elise, from death, or at least serious injury, in an automobile accident, and when the two elevens finally line up for the fray, at Soldier's Field in Cambridge, the young girl and her parents are interested spectators.

(In Two Parts.—Part II.)

AS the ball sailed far down the field to the five-yard line the spectators gave a roar, half rising to their feet, as does a body of racegoers when the announcement is made, "They're off!"

"Ducky" Kling received the sphere, and there was a moment of suspense. The famous "quarter," who had lost none of his cunning by his absence from the gridiron for so long a time, made ten yards before he was downed. In the first scrimmage, which was watched by the spectators with as great a show of enthusiasm as if it were the decisive one in the last half of the game, Kling plunged headlong between tackle and guard on the left of the opposing line for a short gain. Trescott was then brought back of the line and given the ball, but the sturdy tackle gained only a yard. It was evident that the Goths were meeting foemen worthy of their mettle.

A short powwow now ensued between the left tackle and Beeler. The two leaders of the Goths' board of offense and defense decided on a kick, and Finkey, left end, was sent back to do the punting. A short run, a quick drawing back of the right foot, and the pigskin went hurtling through the air to the All-Collegiates' fifty-yard mark, a Goth end downing Hale before he could move an inch.

"Good old boy, Finkey! All the ginger hasn't gone out of that leg of yours, if you are no spring chicken!" some stentorian enthusiast on the side lines yelled, and the crowd roared with delight.

Now was the moment which would reveal much to the Goths and those of their adherents who were aware of the

This story, "Millionaire Marsden's Eleven," began in the last issue. The number containing the first part can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents.

offensive scheme evolved by the "Kids," and the plan of defense arranged by Beeler and Trescott. Here was an opportunity for the younger team to put into execution the formidable "line back."

There was little difference in the weights of the teams. The undergraduates were heavy, but the set bones and hard muscles of the veterans opposing would be bound to count in a well-organized defense.

Each man of the Goths straightened himself and was alert in an instant, drawing in his breath sharply. They were watchful, but confident. A look of triumph was to be noted on the countenances of the All-Collegiates. Back went De Moine. "Line back!" was the cry which resounded from the stand.

Marsden, in one of the first-row boxes, was seen to bend forward eagerly, his figure tense with excitement. Rooker Armory, by his side, was also thrilled strangely, though he could not have told the reason. His partner murmured with set lips, and the expression on his face which Armory knew betokened the keenest interest: "Now we'll see what that great play will accomplish with my players. I rather think we will make them take to cover."

"I believe you think you are on the floor, and about to drive the bears back to the woods, Montgomery," ventured the little man, with a chuckle.

Marsden's face relaxed into a grim smile, but he did not reply.

The play commenced. Colaback, the All-Collegiates' big center, snapped the ball. Little Eckleston grabbed it for a pass, and into the crotch, formed by the bending "back's" body, it was shunted.

The "line back," which had hitherto been as irresistible as a battleship ramming an unprotected cruiser, was under way. The "full" and the "half" plowed in one after the other. The whole compact mass hit the Goths' line like a catapult. Trescott bore the brunt of the attack, and a pretty girl up in the grand stand, with a man and a woman, gave an exclamation of alarm and turned her head.

"Nonsense, Elise!" the man reassured her. "That fellow can take care of himself. I should think you ought to know that;" and the eyes of the trio were again turned on the plucky left tackle.

What they saw was Trescott diving at the human mass bearing down on him, with arms outstretched. They saw him butt in with his head and grab legs, legs, legs. The ball failed to advance.

The yells of triumph, which the "rooters" for the younger team had framed upon their lips, were changed into gasps of amazement. Something must have gone wrong, they believed. The trick had never failed to work before. They rubbed their eyes, hardly able to believe what they saw.

"How did that happen? Where's the 'line back' now?" old football experts were asking one another. They began to take a new interest in the struggle. Backers of the younger men, at the prevailing odds of ten to six, had consternation depicted on their faces.

The experts realized that a revolution in the game had taken place. The "line back," tried by experienced players, had never before failed to advance the ball. The inventor of the play himself was on the side lines. What passed through his mind no one could guess.

Trescott had foiled the effectiveness of the play, not by going at the men in sideways fashion, as always had been done hitherto, but by diving in headforemost, careless of consequences, and seizing all the legs in reach. It was a barrier which could not be surmounted.

A roar went up from the west side of the stand, the Goths' side, when out of the scrimmage crawled the man with the ball, not six inches away from where he had received it.

Again was the signal given for the "line back." Of course, there had been a mistake, but there would be none this time. The play was bound to go.

But would it? Back went the ball a second time. The two guards darted forward the instant they felt the "back's" hand on them. They already had counted how much the ball would advance.

Trescott dived again, and the lines-

man failed to move. There was no question about it now. As far as that side of the line was concerned, the ball never would be advanced by this play, which had been heralded as the greatest football maneuver since the game had been instituted. Brains had proved superior to brawn.

The All-Collegiate players were visibly disconcerted. Their sensations must have been far from pleasant when they saw the green and gold banners flaunted at them, and heard the shouts of the upholders of the contention that, with all the plays which had been originated since the Goths had felt the cuddling touch of the pigskin in their fondling arms, the elder players were more than a match for the younger.

Eckleston gathered his men together for a consultation, and they held it much as physicians put their heads together over some patient who has but a slim chance to recover. Marsden watched them with the joy of assured victory in his eyes.

"In something more than an hour from now I shall expect to receive from you a check for the benefit of my embryo athletes, Rooker," he declared.

Armory merely said: "Very well, if your men win; but the game is not over, Montgomery."

When Eckleston had finished the powwowing, the signal was heard once more. Trescott was prepared for it, though the previous rushes had winded him considerably. Once more he plunged into the tangled mass headfirst, and once more the runner failed to gain. In its three trials the "line back" had been a dismal failure, and a slight loss had been the net result. Already murmurs of discontent were heard from the backers of the team.

"It won't work, boys; try something else. That play can't be successful," was heard from the faithful "rooters." The ball was now in the possession of the Goths, and the spectators were on the tiptoe of expectation to see what their attack would be like. Certainly, players who could devise such a powerful defense were capable of inventing a plan of offense equally effective.

"Ducky" Kling gave the signal, and then stepped aside while Breadworth caught the ball.

"They are to put up a kicking game. That's it, all right. They'll win out, too, if I know anything about it," murmured one of the experts who watched the game from the side lines.

Breadworth, who had been noted for his coolness as a college player, was still more deliberate now as a "Gridiron Goth." Advancing years had taken a little of his speed, but his mighty foot was still in working order. As his toe collided with the ball, Lafferty, the speedy left end of the opposing team, burst through the line, and with outstretched arms succeeded in breaking its force, while Hevlin, whose eye always followed the ball in play, was after it like a deer. He fell on it, and then the other players, with the exception of Breadworth, fell on him, twenty brawny athletes, with an aggregate weight of nearly two tons. It was little wonder that he was stunned, and the game was delayed while the army of trainers busied themselves about him, sponging his head and working his arms and legs.

In a short while he was himself again, and took his place in the line just as if he had not been a temporary foundation for a human structure. A thunder of cheers broke out in recognition of his pluck, and the cheering continued long after the ball was in play.

Now the ball was in possession of the All-Collegiates. It was decided once again to test the strength of the "line back." The members of the younger eleven had found Trescott to be practically invincible, so this time the attack was directed against Wendell-Wendell, who was displaying the same fortitude on the field as he did as a cotillion leader. The "society chap, you know," as a callow youth described the player to the pretty girl who accompanied him, and who answered "Really now, just fahncy," plunged desperately into the jumbled mass of arms and legs. He failed to get the man with the ball, but he broke up the play, and it was a comparatively simple matter for Jefflinger

to down the runner. No gain was made, and the ball was forty yards from the Goths' goal.

One of the All-Collegiate substitutes leaned over the side lines and watched the move with a perplexed look in his eyes.

"I don't know what the matter is," he confided to a companion. "It beats me. Those fellows must be wonders. I had expected our score would be away up in the twenties by this time."

The spectators were wrought up to a high pitch of excitement. What was to be the next move of the "Kids"? Surely they must have some other winning trick in reserve. They could not have depended solely on the "line back," which had proven such a failure. It was evident that instead of the Undergraduates walking roughshod over the Alumni, the latter stood an excellent show of capturing the game. Even now the odds had dropped from ten to six to ten to eight.

It was nearly a minute after the two elevens had lined up for the scrimmage before Eckleston gave the signal. He was sacrificing the speed of his eleven in order to think. A pretty girl, in one of the front-row boxes, quoted the line, "Once more unto the breach, dear friends," as she leaned over, her eyes fixed intently on a stalwart figure in the ranks of the All-Collegiates.

As soon as Eckleston began the mystic mass of figures, De Wolf dropped back of the line, and Hale slipped into his place. The player who had been displaced for the time was noted for his kicking ability. The spectators were as fully aware as the Goths that a goal from the field was to be attempted.

" 'Rah, 'rah, 'rah! De Wolf! 'Rah, 'rah, 'rah! De Wolf!" rang out from all parts of the field.

The moment had arrived. Back came the pass. It was high, but the "Kids' " line was strong, and De Wolf had a chance to neutralize the effects of the bad pass. He dropped the ball deliberately, and it did not seem that he had even taken the distance to be kicked into consideration.

Just as it touched the turf the toe of the player met it. The sphere sailed straight and true to the goal posts. As it neared them it was seen that the ball would strike the crossbar. A wail rose from the crowd. The next instant the air was split with a clamor such as has seldom been heard at a football game. While the ball struck the crossbar, it fell over on the wrong side—from the Goths' point of view. A goal had been kicked from the fifty-yard line—a feat that would live in football history for years to come.

For many minutes the cheering continued. It was continuous. When the yelling died down in one section of the stand it was taken up in another. The hoarse shouts of the men mingled with the shrill cries of women. The ear was well-nigh split with the noise of "rattles" and other contrivances. Men with megaphones hysterically yelled the name of the player through them. The three stands on the north, south and east sides of the field were waving masses of color. The green and gold was lacking, but the west stand, filled with partisans of the Goths, added their share of shouting in praise of the mighty kick.

Marsden had risen to his feet when the result was known, and was gazing down the field with a curious, abstracted expression in his eyes. By his side was Armory, a flush of color on his thin features, yelling and clapping as madly as a freshman at his first football game, when he sees the team of his *alma mater* winning. It was a safe bet that he did not know what had taken place, but he, at least, realized that it was a winning move by his own team.

He turned to his partner with a chuckle, and slapped him on the back.

"Just a little previous about that matter of the check, weren't you, Montgomery?" he inquired, gloatingly.

But Marsden was not at all discomfited. He was too good a sportsman for that.

"Not at all, Rooker," he said, lightly. "It's just beginning to be interesting. I was afraid my eleven would have a walkover, and the spectators wouldn't have the worth of their money. Don't think for an instant that I'm worried

over what has happened. I've seen the market go against me more than once and yet finally come round to what I wanted before the bottom had dropped out."

When the whistle of the referee sounded, signifying that the first half had been finished, the Goths gathered around Beeler. It was evident that something was about to be said to him. All along he had been aware that his fellow players seemed to have a hidden joke at his expense. Now it was to be revealed. As he looked curiously from one to the other, General Munson stepped up to him.

"I believe you have a daughter by the name of Josephine?" he asked, with a mock-serious air.

Beeler appeared puzzled.

"I have a married daughter by that name," he answered.

"Then it behooves me to inform you that we, the players of the Goths' team, do hereby beseech and abjure you to exert yourself even more strenuously than you have done so far—and what man among us can say that you have been lacking?—not only for the sake of the team and its promoter, but for the sake of your grandchild.

"Your son-in-law telephoned from Chicago three days ago that the happy event had taken place in his family. We kept the news for you until we thought it was the most auspicious occasion for you to know it, so that the idea of having your future grandchild know that his grandfather had carried a football team to victory in his lifetime would inspire you to perform almost incredible deeds of valor on this gridiron."

Beeler's face was overspread with blushes, like that of any schoolgirl, and he appeared unable to speak for a moment; then he joined in the laugh of the players congratulating him, and exclaimed:

"Boys, I am proud of the fact that I am a grandfather. Following the example set by her father, my daughter married at a very early age. If it could so have happened that I could play on the same team with my grandson, then, indeed, would I be happy, and one to be looked upon as a Goth of Goths."

A yell of approval went up from the doughty players, and then the whistle blew for the second half to begin.

After the change of positions the teams lined up for the kick-off. Breadworth was very deliberate in placing the ball, and it was nearly a minute before he signaled that he was ready. Howsley caught the pigskin on his five-yard line, and was well under way before the Goths' ends were down the field.

"Finkey and Rowe are not as speedy as they used to be," remarked one of the experts to another. "I remember the time when Finkey stood waiting to down a man on the one-yard line on a kick-off."

"What a splendid imagination you possess!" was the reply of the friend. "It's a pity it's diverted in the wrong channel."

Howsley was downed after he had gone twenty yards. The men lined up for the scrimmage, and the "line back" play was again attempted. As it happened, Beeler was the player against whom it was directed, and he gave way before it, unexpectedly to himself and to his companions. Only a single yard was gained, but this afforded supreme satisfaction to the All-Collegiates.

"We have found the weak spot, at last," was their reassuring thought. They were unaware of the true Goth-like spirit which was animating the old player. It was but natural they should try again, and once more Beeler was the center of the attack. How it happened they could not understand, but happen it did—they lost a yard. Even this exhibition of Beeler's prowess did not satisfy them. They elected to try him for the third down.

"Poor generalship," murmured an old player on the side lines. "Something will happen now."

He proved a prophet.

Beeler stopped the advance instantly. The ball was the Goths' on the twenty-five yard line of the opposing team. Here was an opportunity of which the Goths could not fail to avail themselves.

They formed themselves with light-

ning-like rapidity, and the signal was given. The attack formation was rather peculiar. It resembled the "line back" in a way, but the tackles, instead of the guards, were brought back of the line. It was under way in an instant, and Trescott, who had the ball, made five yards before he was downed.

The ball was in play again before it seemed possible, and the same formation to aid Trescott was worked successfully. The gain was three yards.

Up in the grand stand, Elise Rouquin, whose eyes had never left the figure of the hero of the automobile incident since he had appeared on the field, forgot herself so far as to say some things which caused her mother to look at her suspiciously, and the girl to recover herself immediately, and blush furiously.

Only fifteen yards to be covered!

Somebody in the west side of the grand stand yelled through a megaphone: "You old fellows over there, why don't you try for a field goal?"

The Goths' formation seemed to indicate that this was to be done, and the other eleven prepared for it. They were well aware that Breadworth had been a famous kicker in his day. They dreaded him now.

The ball came back. The pass was a beautiful one, but Breadworth did not kick. Instead, he circled the left end of the opposing team, and a magnificent flying tackle, by Lafferty, was the only thing that prevented a score. Still, the ball was only five yards away from the Kids' goal, and, what was more, it was directly between the posts.

Trescott was called upon for the next play. As if anxious over the outcome, the people in the north, east and south sides of the grand stand rose as one man. No one emitted a yell or a screech. Intense silence reigned. The formation that the young men were beginning to dread was tried again. A two-yard gain resulted.

Joy shone on the faces of the Goths. Already they were beginning to taste the fruits of victory. Every movement bespoke confidence. The "Kids," on the contrary, were plainly downhearted.

Kling gave the signal, and Wendell-Wendell had a chance to show of what he was made.

The ball was dangerously close to the line when the scrimmage was ended, so close, in fact, that the measurement had to be taken to see whether it was over or not.

The decision favored the "Kids." They prepared for a desperate stand. The onlookers saw them straighten themselves and draw long breaths, their figures tense, their faces drawn.

Back went the ball. Trescott plunged forward, aided by every man on his side. In a second the twenty-two men of brawn and muscle came together, and then the compact mass started to revolve. It was nearly a minute before it fell in a confused heap. Like bags of meal being thrown around recklessly, the players were piled up on Trescott.

It was more than a minute before the squirming mass was pulled off the heroic left tackle. Just over the line was the ball. It was a comparatively simple matter for Breadworth to boost it over the bar.

Now the score was six to five in the Goths' favor.

No less enthusiasm was shown over this play of the Goths than had been shown over that of the All-Collegiates. A flaring, fluttering blanket of green and gold flags on the west side of the stand hid the spectators. It was as if a curtain, blown by a stiff breeze, had suddenly been let down in front of them. The yells and cries that went heavenward were awe-inspiring. The sound of the "rattles," the roar of the megaphones and the noise of the other earsplitting instruments were such as might be brought into requisition by the inhabitants of a Chinese village bent on exorcising a devil. The din was terrific.

Up in the Marsden box the magnate himself was strangely subdued. He was standing, his hands resting on the front of the box, the only thing showing his pleasure being a twitching of the lips. He had not joined in the oral enthusiasm displayed alike by partisans of the All-Collegiates and of the Goths.

Remarkable to relate, his partner, the diminutive Armory, was making even more of a display of delight in the game than he had when his own team had kicked the goal from the field. He was yelling like a Comanche, and his thin, piping voice seemed to have grown in strength since he yelled lustily for the other team.

Marsden looked at his partner in surprise, in which no little amusement was mingled.

"Well, well, Rooker, I am surprised at you; really surprised!" he declared, in much the same tone of voice a grown-up would adopt toward a child. "I didn't think that anything in this world could arouse such emotion in that little, lean body of yours. I always thought that if you heard Gabriel's trump, you'd make some remark about its not being very different from a fish horn, anyway, and say you were disappointed. Are you aware that it's my side you are rooting for?"

Armory paid little attention to what his partner was saying to him. He was too excited.

"I tell you, Montgomery, that was a great play, a great play," he wheezed, catching his breath, which had been sadly impaired by his yelling. "I don't care which side made it. I'd rather be the fellow who kicked that ball than be the leader in Wall Street. Bless my soul! I don't know when I have felt so much like a boy before. Not for forty or fifty years, anyway."

Play was begun again, and the forty thousand spectators settled back in their seats with a sigh of relief.

Experts who looked over the players of both teams critically, as a racing expert studies the fitness of a horse, decided that the men of the Goths' team looked fresher than those of the younger men.

When the teams lined up for the kick-off, De Moine kicked the ball, starting the play. "Ducky" Kling received the pigskin for the second time, and the doughty little quarter ran it back fifteen yards before he was downed. Janney added five and Munson three, but Wendell-Wendell made no gain, and the All-Collegiates took the ball on their fifty-yard line. Two end runs netted two first downs, and it looked as though there was to be some open playing, but Finkey nabbed the next runner just as he got started toward his end, and he was dropped in his tracks. A quarter-back kick failed, and again the Goths had the ball.

Big Beeler leaned back toward "Ducky" on the line-up and whispered. The signal was changed and the line spread out. Starface, the Indian, made an excellent pass to Breadworth for a punt.

The ball went sailing high down the field. Trescott and Finkey were down with and crouching in front of Howsley, who had planted his feet wide apart ready to receive it. De Wolf went piling over toward his full back, ready to protect or interfere for him if he attempted to run it back. The big guard had gained a fearful momentum, and he was on Trescott just as the ball landed safely in Howsley's arms. The latter, seeing the Goth go down under the fearful impact of his fellow player's flying form, started forward, but he had reckoned without the foxy Finkey. A shout of warning had come from the west side of the grand stand, where the Goths' rooters were in a state of excitement bordering on frenzy.

Finkey was on the other's heels in an instant. He fairly ran up Howsley's back. Down went the latter with his arms out ahead of him. The ball was free, and Beeler was on it, old grandfather Beeler, flying down the field with the lightness of foot of a fiancé who has a tryst with his sweetheart and is behind-time. He never heeded the referee's whistle or the little play being enacted when Trescott had gone down.

Beeler was brought back after running across the All-Collegiate goal line, and an official carried the ball to where the scrimmage started with Breadworth's punt.

Trescott lay on the turf where he had fallen after the collision, very white and still. It was evident that he could take no further part in the game. The sound of hissing came from the Goths' side of

the field, for it had hardly been clean football when he was hurt.

The hero of the eleven was lifted up by several sturdy players and carried to the side lines, where the surgeon in attendance was awaiting him.

After running his hand up under the injured player's jersey, the surgeon signaled for a quick removal of the disabled man to the infirmary.

"Torn muscles and a couple of ribs shoved in. Better get him to the hospital as soon as possible," was what he said.

At that instant an elderly man with a grave face, a woman who appeared badly frightened, and a girl whose white face showed that she was the victim of intense mental suffering, came down to where the inanimate left tackle was lying.

"He's not killed, is he, doctor?" the man inquired, in an awestruck tone of voice. The two women appeared to be waiting in breathless suspense for the reply, and a sob escaped from the lips of the younger one.

"Oh, no, nothing so bad as all that," was the surgeon's cheerful response. "Just injured sufficiently to put him out of the game and to lay him up for some time."

The man conferred eagerly with the two women for a few minutes; then, turning to the physician, he said:

"I want Mr. Trescott taken to our hotel. My automobile is outside, and I'm certain we can make him as comfortable in it as he would be in an ambulance. "My name is Rouquin," he went on, in response to the physician's look of inquiry. "My wife and daughter here are bent on nursing the young man. We want to see that he is given every attention."

"Don't refuse to let us have him, doctor," the mother said, pleadingly. "I'm sure he will have everything with us that he could possibly have at a hospital. Mr. Trescott rendered us a very great service recently, and we wish to repay him by every means in our power."

Although the girl was silent, her blue eyes were more eloquent than words could have been.

"Women are not happy unless they are nursing somebody, you know, doctor," continued Rouquin, with a twinkle in his eye. "Especially when the person to be nursed is a real, live hero. I think you would better let us have him."

Trescott sighed heavily just then, and showed signs of returning consciousness. Soon he sat up and looked around.

"I'm all right. I guess I'll get back. Why, what's——"

He left the sentence unfinished, and sank back with a groan, looking over with an agonized expression of pain on his features at his fellow players preparing to resume the game.

As the attending physician seemed to hesitate as to what should be done with Trescott, the father appealed to Marsden himself, who just then came hurrying up.

"I think it's a capital plan, doctor," was the millionaire's reply, as his eyes rested first on the injured player's face, drawn with suffering, yet wistful, turned in the direction of Miss Elise, and then on her own, in which a look of maidenly reserve and affectionate sympathy were mingled.

Trescott soon recovered sufficiently to be carried out of the grounds, with Marsden on one side, Rouquin on the other, and the ladies and the surgeon following close behind. When they reached the spot where stood Rouquin's automobile—in which Trescott already had ridden, under vastly different conditions—he was bundled into it tenderly, the surgeon and Rouquin took their places beside him, and the chauffeur was directed to return to the hotel. Mother and daughter followed in a cab.

Only Marsden returned to the game, excusing himself for so doing by the natural great interest he felt in the outcome.

No little ill-feeling had been engendered by De Wolf on account of his run-in with Trescott, whose place in the line had been taken by Upweimer. The hissing which had started when the accident first had occurred had not died down when the ball was brought back by the referee because an eagle-eyed

official had detected holding in the line at the time the punt was made. The Goths profited to the extent of twenty yards as penalty.

It was with no feelings of restraint that the Goths prepared again to wage the contest. The occurrence in which Trescott had been the sufferer had instilled in them the dogged resolve to maintain the lead which they had gained.

The plan of play was changed, and within drop-kicking distance of the posts the Goths decided on a goal from the field. Breadworth got the ball on a bad pass, but his attempt at goal was a failure.

This was the last time the goal of the All-Collegiates was in danger. Time was passing, and the older men felt that they had the game well enough in hand not to make any plays the results of which could not plainly be foreseen.

The All-Collegiates did their best to retrieve their lost fortunes, but their plays were more noticeable for wasted energy than for aught else. They bucked; they charged at the Goths' line like mad bulls plunging at a stockade, but the result was no greater. They appeared to have substituted their brain power entirely for brawn. The Goths had retained both.

But a few minutes of play remained. Kicks were exchanged. A few scrimmages netted slight gains, and then——

Sharply the whistle of the referee was heard.

From thousands of throats burst the yell, as if it had been preconceived: "Goths! Goths! Goths! 'Rah, 'rah, 'rah! Goths!"

The spectators swarmed out on the field, fairly mobbing the men of the older team, which had won by the score of six to five.

Armory was one of the wildest enthusiasts at the result, but Marsden took it as if it were a matter of slight importance.

"I told you the market would react, Rooker," he said. "I'll take that check from you just as soon as you make it out."

"I don't care which side won; it was a great game," said Armory. "You'll get my check for your physical culture school immediately. And one of the first pupils is going to be J. Rooker Armory. I wonder where I can get a schedule of the other big football games this season, Montgomery."

. . . . . .

A pretty girl, her blue eyes blazing with excitement, burst impulsively into a room where a bandaged figure lay on the bed, smiling at her appearance.

"The Goths won, Mr. Trescott!" she cried, coming up to where he lay. "Aren't you glad?"

"Very glad, Elise," he said, softly. "That is not all, though. I am more interested in finding out if *I* win—your love," he continued, his voice dropping. "Even at my best, I'm a poor hand at tackling a love matter like this. You see, I've never had any training whatever. But you won't keep a poor chap who is too badly knocked out to plead his cause as strongly as it should be pleaded, long in suspense, will you, dearest? I still have one arm which I can put around you."

The arm found its resting place, and the girl did not resist.

THE END.

THE CHRISTMAS FUND

BY WILLIAM B. M'CORMICK

The part an office boy played in the scoring of a newspaper "scoop" and the reward it brought him

THE city editor glanced up at the clock as Miss Hamilton walked into the room over which he reigned. It was half-past one on Thanksgiving Day. For the hundredth time or more the thought made a place for itself in his perturbed brain that what he liked about Miss Hamilton was that there was no sentiment about her. It was the regular hour for the staff to report, and yet not one of them had turned up save this quiet, hard-working girl, the only woman on the city staff of *The Imprint*.

"Oh, Miss Hamilton!" cried the city editor; "when you are at leisure I have something for you to do." The girl came over to his desk at once.

"That's good," she said, cheerfully. "As long as we have to work to-day there's nothing like getting started at once. Are you all alone?"

"Alone! I should say so. I had to open the office myself this morning. One of the boys is off for the day, and the other one hasn't shown up. He'll get a Thanksgiving present from me to-morrow morning. He'll be looking for a new job."

"That's too bad. Can't I look after the office while you go to luncheon?"

"Oh, no. I've got a better assignment than that for you. Did you notice that hard-luck story on the second page this morning? The one about the poor woman, with a family, who was to be dispossessed to-morrow?"

Miss Hamilton nodded an affirmative.

"I want you to go up there, and take this to them." He handed a clipping of the story to her, and two five-dollar bills with two letters pinned to them. The money had been sent to the paper for the relief of the family. "Find out how they are fixed, and write a little story about them. Mention the two contributions. The names are signed to those letters."

"You don't want me to give them all this, do you?" Miss Hamilton asked. She knew the other side of the lives of professional beggars, and was deaf to most of their importunities. Besides, she had that reputation in the office of being anything but sentimental.

The city editor waved away the responsibility. "I'll leave that to you," he said, smiling up at her. "You will know what is best to do. The last assignment I had like this I gave the family ten dollars, and learned the next day they had received not only thirty-five besides mine, but had had enough good clothes sent in to keep them for a month by selling them to a second-hand man. They played me all right. As a distributer of charity I guess I'm a failure."

The young woman laughed with him over his susceptibility, and then she tucked the clipping, bills and letters into her purse and left the room. From his window the city editor watched her as she walked across the park, until she was out of his sight.

Three hours later Miss Hamilton walked into the city room accompanied by a shabbily dressed boy. He was

about fifteen years old, and had brilliant red hair and a broad, open face that was good to look upon. The second thing that caught the city editor's eye was the air of cleanliness about the lad. His clothes, never very good at best, were worn and wrinkled, and his boots gaped in several places; but there was no disguising the fact that the boy was as clean as water could make him.

"Who is your friend, Miss Hamilton?" the city editor inquired, as she told the boy to be seated and drew a chair for herself up to her chief's desk. Then, coming at once to the business at hand, he asked: "Did you spend all the money I gave you?"

"Not all," she replied, smiling. Then her face grew grave. "It was pitiful up there, but not in the way we thought. The poor woman was almost beside herself with joy on account of the things that had been sent to her. You know four of the papers printed the story, and she told me that money in small sums had been coming in all the morning, as well as groceries and bundles of clothing. While I was there Miss Fanshawe, of *The Clarion,* came in with twenty-five dollars. I found the landlord and paid him six dollars, the last month's rent, and brought back the rest. I didn't think it wise to give it to the woman now." And she handed him the bills.

"Where does your friend come in?" the city editor asked, jerking his head in the direction of the boy.

"He's the woman's son, and the only help she has in supporting the family. They've both been ill, and he lost his place on account of it. I brought him down to see if you wanted to hire him in Jimmie's place. They'll be all right if he can get work at once." And so it was that Hughie Dolan came to be one of the day office boys in the city room of *The Imprint.*

Hughie differed from the average office boy in that he was, above all things, never guilty of the slightest impertinence.

Before he had been at work a week he had endeared himself to everyone on the staff, including even the "star" reporter, an irritable person who needed more waiting on than a newly-rich millionaire's wife.

To crown all, the leading editorial writer had taken a great fancy to Hughie. He was a middle-aged bachelor, and was very generous with his "tips," and in consequence all the boys in the office jumped to do his will the moment he spoke. But before Hughie had been in the city room a week the two other boys had suffered a total eclipse so far as the editorial writer was concerned. For if Hughie was not on hand to get him something he wanted he would go without it.

As for the city editor, his opinion of Hughie may be gathered from the fact that before the first week was over he confided to Miss Hamilton that her protégé was "all right." "Why," he declared, as if this were the supreme test, "he's changed the blotter on my desk every day since he's been here, something I've never been able to get done before even when I used a club." The city editor's weakness was for a clean and orderly desk.

"A clean blotter!" echoed Miss Hamilton. "Is that all? You should see the way he waits on me. He'd write my stories for me if he could."

"He will be doing that before long if you don't look out. Have you heard what he did last night?" Miss Hamilton said she hadn't, and the city editor plunged into his tale with a newspaper man's relish for any story concerning a "beat."

"The combination up at the Tenderloin station refused to work with our man, and so he started in alone to keep up with them. I asked him if he wanted any help, and he said that if I'd let him have Hughie for a few hours every night he could manage all right. He had learned, it seems, that Hughie used to work on the Local News Bureau, and knew a lot of things about the crowd up there. When Hughie reported at the station, Wilson told him to stay in the station house, and not to leave it for a moment if he had to go out on a story.

"Well, those raids broke out, and the whole combination started to beat Wilson, leaving Hughie alone in the house.

Five minutes after they had gone, one of the detectives came in with two howling swells, who had gotten into a row on Broadway. They wanted to keep it quiet, and both the sergeant on the desk and the detective were willing to oblige them—they were good men to stand in with. But they forgot Hughie, who was sitting over in the corner. And what do you think the little beggar did?" he added, his face shining with excitement. "He disobeyed Wilson's orders and went out of the Madison Square telephone circuit up to Thirty-eighth Street, and phoned the story in. It's on the first page, names and all, and a beat on the town. What do you suppose he went to Thirty-eighth Street for?"

"Haven't the least idea," replied Miss Hamilton.

"That's the cleverest thing of the whole story," he went on. "Hughie knew that the Tenderloin reporters made friends with the telephone girls in the Madison Square central, and that they would be apt to tell some of the reporters his story if he phoned it through them. Just think of it! A boy beating that gang."

"I hope it won't spoil him," the girl said.

"Spoil him!" exclaimed the city editor, pointing to his desk as he spoke. "He didn't forget my blotter this morning." Miss Hamilton gave a little sigh of relief as she walked back to her place by the window. She had hated to think of Hughie's growing spoiled by his success. But of this, as the days wore on, he gave no sign.

With the passing of the days came the advent of the Christmas season, and evidences of the fact that the two day office boys and the two on night duty were arranging for their annual Christmas fund. The preliminary stage of this institution consisted of a long sheet of paper, headed by an appeal in verse, which was passed around to the members of the staff, who subscribed their names and the amount of money they chose to contribute.

The city editor noticed that Hughie was not invited to take part in the nightly conferences of the other boys, and he realized that they meant to leave Hughie out of their calculations when it came to a division of the fund. He intended speaking to the oldest boy about the matter, but forgot to do so.

It was the usual custom of the boys in *The Imprint* office to have the man who wrote the editorial paragraphs and verses scratch out an appeal for them in rhyme. But the poet was away at the time, so they turned to the literary editor for assistance. He was not a poet, as these lines, which headed the subscription list, will show:

"Christmas comes but once a year"—
Only once, that isn't much.
Mark the fond, familiar strain
Of the dear old Christmas touch.

"Christmas comes but once a year,"
And the office boys as such
Pipe unto your list'ning ear
Their roundelay—the Christmas touch.

The literary editor may not have been a poet, but he had a sense of humor, and it amused him immensely, when the paper came to him, to see that the boys had edited his doggerel. In place of the words "office boys" they had inserted "young men."

If Hughie knew of this cabal, he paid no attention to it. But Miss Hamilton had been watching its progress closely, and she meant to interfere in his behalf at the right time, which she had settled was to be on the afternoon of the day before Christmas. She felt that Hughie deserved a share in the fund, and she was certain that if she appealed to the city editor and the staff they would see justice done to her protégé.

But when the time came for this interference, Miss Hamilton was not only hard at work on a story uptown, but she was also on the verge of a collapse brought about by a combination of office duties and loss of sleep occasioned by her mother's illness.

About five o'clock the city editor was called to the telephone, and when he came out of the booth his ordinarily placid face wore a look of concern. "Hughie," he called, and the boy walked over to the desk. "Go up to the Imperial, and wait in the ladies' room until

Miss Hamilton gives you her copy. If she isn't there, stay until she comes.

"Tell her I said she must go home at once in a cab," he added. "You get it for her and pay the man." He had been scribbling on a printed form as he talked, and when he had scrawled his initials at the end he said: "Take this down to the cashier, and get two dollars. Be sure and tell her I said she must go home at once."

As the boy left the room, the city editor turned to his assistant, and said, concernedly: "Miss Hamilton is sick." And then muttered, contritely: "I wonder if I have been working her too hard!"

It was an ideal day as a precursor to Christmas Eve from the viewpoint of the romantic. Snow had fallen all the morning, but late in the afternoon this had changed to sleet, and the trees in City Hall Park looked as if they were part of a transformation scene. The streets and sidewalks were covered with snow that had been turned a dirty gray under the action of wagon wheels, horses' hoofs and the feet of the throng of Christmas shoppers. It was slippery underfoot, and cold and disagreeable overhead. It made even the warm-blooded Hughie shiver as, with the collar of his thin jacket turned up around his neck and his hands thrust deep in his pockets, he crossed the square from the Thirty-third Street station of the Elevated to the hotel on the corner.

At one of the little Empire desks he found Miss Hamilton writing busily. As he came and stood beside her, she paused long enough to say: "I'll be through in a few moments, Hughie," and then bent over the paper again.

Hughie had guessed from the charge the city editor had given him, that she must be ill, and he watched her pale face with some such fear gripping his heart as he had not felt since those awful days when his mother was sick and the doctor had sat looking gravely down at the brave little woman lying motionless on the bed. Hughie wished he could do something for Miss Hamilton. He sat twisting his old cloth cap between his red hands with such force that it bade fair to be more shapeless than ever. He was glad he could get the cab for her. That was something in any case.

The story Miss Hamilton was working on was a society scandal that was stirring the newspaper world just then. *The Imprint* was "covering" it with two of the staff, one reporter working downtown among the lawyers in the case, and the other, Miss Hamilton, uptown among the society folks, where she had not only a fairly wide acquaintance, but, what was of still greater advantage to her in work of this kind, she was universally trusted as a girl who would not betray confidences reposed in her. Among her acquaintances in society was one man who knew all the details of this affair. She had been to see him, and he had told her everything he knew about it, which was all any paper would print.

There were a few reporters who knew of her acquaintance with this elderly gossip, among them Mooney, of *The Clarion.* Mooney had been on *The Imprint,* but had been discharged for trying to use the columns of the paper to help one of his friends—a lawyer—to collect a debt. He was clever in an unscrupulous way, as Hughie had heard in that extraordinary fashion boys in newspaper offices have of acquiring information of a personal nature. And so, when Mooney came to the door of the ladies' room, glanced furtively around until he saw Miss Hamilton, and then sat down by one of the tables, where he pretended to read a paper, the boy kept an eye on him. He knew instinctively that Mooney wanted something from Miss Hamilton, but he did not know that *The Clarion* reporter had just been turned away from the door of the man whose news the girl was putting into shape for the columns of *The Imprint.*

With a sigh the girl wrote the last word, and leaned wearily back in the chair. Mooney dropped his paper and walked over to her.

"How are you, Miss Hamilton?" he began, in his offensively familiar way. "Are you on the Carruthers story?" She said "Yes" coldly, and commenced to arrange the sheets of paper in consecutive order. "I suppose you've been

to see old Gailer, haven't you? Give me what you got, won't you?—and I'll give you the lawyer's end."

"Oh, no, I can't do that," she replied, in her iciest tones. Hughie had never heard her speak like that before, and he enjoyed Mooney's discomfiture; but his enjoyment changed to horror as he noticed the color of Miss Hamilton's face change to "an awful funny white look," as he afterward described it, and then she fell back in the chair in a dead faint.

Hughie and the maid in the room hurried toward her, and Mooney stealthily gathered up the sheets of paper, and was sneaking out into the corridor when the boy caught sight of him. His eye went to the desk where the story had been written. The sheets were gone!

"Say," he whispered, hoarsely, to the maid, "you look after dis lady, won't yer? Tell her Hughie Dolan as't her to wait till he come back. Be sure an' tell her Hughie Dolan as't her." And he was gone.

Hughie bolted out through the corridor on to Thirty-second Street, where he caught a glimpse of Mooney turning the corner into Broadway. Dodging carriages, wagons and pedestrians, the boy ran after the reporter, who was making his way toward *The Clarion* office as fast as his legs would carry him. Between the crowded condition of the sidewalk and the jam of vehicles on Broadway, Mooney's start gave him a decided advantage over the boy, who dodged and squirmed in and out of the throng, bringing sharp remarks of angry protest on his devoted head as he struggled to keep the reporter in sight.

In a jam at Thirty-fourth Street Hughie lost sight of him, so he ran around the crowd and headed for the office of *The Clarion*. As he ran up the stairs, his heart gave a jump. There was Mooney glancing over the pages of the precious "copy." As he disappeared behind the door his pursuer saw him stuffing it into the inside pocket of his overcoat.

The office boy on duty at the desk inside the door tried to stop Hughie. "I've got a note for Mr. Mooney," he bluffed, glibly, and made his way to the city room in spite of the boy's protest.

As he expected, he found the reporter standing at the city editor's desk. Hughie marched straight up to the two men, pulled off his cap, and addressed himself to the man in the chair.

"This man Mooney stole a story off'n Miss Hamilton, of *The Imprint*," he began, boldly. "He took it off'n the desk she was writin' on in der Imperial. He's got it in his pocket, an' I want it back, Say," he broke out, wildly, to the city editor, "youse ain't goin'. ter stand fer a deal like dat, are youse?"

The city editor looked at him in amazement. Then he looked at the shifty eyes of the reporter. "What is all this, Mooney? What does this boy mean?"

"I'll tell yer if youse'll let me," Hughie broke in, and before the reporter could stop him he had rapped out the story of what had taken place between Mooney and Miss Hamilton. Everyone in the office stopped his work to listen.

"Here, Mooney!" the man in the chair cried. "This won't do at all." His sense of honor of the paper was aroused. "Come back here!" The reporter had started for the door, but the city editor was after him in a jump. "You cur!" he growled at him between his teeth. "You cur! Come here!" and he tore the man's overcoat open, reached into the pocket and pulled out the crumpled roll of "copy." He glanced at it hastily to convince himself the boy was telling the truth; then he glowered at the man before him. "Get out of here, you sneaking hound!" he roared. "We're through with you for all time. Here, boy," he added, turning to Hughie, "this is what you wanted. I'll——"

What he was going to say Hughie never heard, for, with the precious "copy" in his hand, he made a bolt for the door. But his haste was his undoing. Just as he turned the corner of Thirty-second Street, and started to cut across to the hotel entrance, an electric brougham swirled around the corner, skidding badly over the slush-covered asphalt. Hughie tried to dodge it, but

slipped and fell. The brougham knocked him down and seemed to crush him out of sight.

When Miss Hamilton recovered from her attack of faintness, the maid repeated Hughie's message to her, so she settled herself in a corner of the big sofa on which she had found herself lying when she regained her senses and composed herself to wait for the boy's return. It was good to be here in the quiet room. It was good not to have to think for a little while. But as the minutes passed she grew restless, and presently she began to walk up and down the room.

Suddenly the jingle of an ambulance bell fell upon her ears, and instinctively she walked out to the entrance to see what was the matter. A crowd was gathered around the doorway across the street. The doorman explained that a boy had been knocked down and had his leg broken. "He looked like that boy who was in there with you, ma'am," he added.

The girl pushed through the swinging door before he could move to open it for her, and in a moment was across the street. As she elbowed her way toward the center of the curious idlers, she heard Hughie's voice pleading to be let go.

"Honest, doc, I ain't hurt. Honest, I ain't. It's only me leg. It don't hurt. Sure it don't. I got ter go ter th' office with er story, see!" And he held the package of paper for them to look at it. "It's er story th' city editor wants bad. I come up here ter get it when I wuz knocked down. Say, officer," he pleaded, "you ain't goin' ter let him take me away, are yer? You know what a story is, don't yer? It's fer th' paper, and——" His voice rose to a scream in his anxiety to carry out his mission. Then he caught sight of Miss Hamilton's face in the crowd, and thrust the "copy" at her with a look of relief in his eyes. Apparently he was quite oblivious to the pain from his broken leg.

He beckoned to her, and she knelt down in the grime by his side. Fumbling in his pocket, he pulled out the bill the city editor had given him, and repeated their chief's message about the cab. "You'll have to do it, Miss Hamilton," he added. "It's orders from th' office, yer know. I'm awful sorry I couldn't get it fer yer." The surgeon had finished his work by this time, and the boy was as comfortable as could be expected under the circumstances.

As they were lifting him upon the stretcher, he asked: "Is the story all right, Miss Hamilton?" At this she looked at him in astonishment. "Why, Hughie?" she inquired. In a few words he told her of Mooney's theft, his pursuit and the recovery.

Then Miss Hamilton did an unusual thing considering her reputation for being so practical, so lacking in sentiment. She leaned over and kissed the boy, and, turning to the officer, said: "You will take good care of him, won't you?"

The policeman nodded. "A fine boy, miss," he commented. "I've seen him in the station house with your reporter. Don't bother about him, miss. We'll take care of him all right. Sure, to a boy of his age, a broken leg is nothing. If you don't mind me sayin' so, miss, I think ye'd better be gettin' in a cab an' goin' home yerself."

Which she did. But she did not give her home address to the driver.

On the contrary, she told him to drive to the office of *The Imprint* as quickly as he could. And so half an hour later she walked into the city room as pale as a ghost. The first thing she saw was the four office boys dividing the money they had received for their Christmas fund.

"Oh, Miss Hamilton!" cried the city editor, rising from his chair. "I sent you word to go home! Didn't Hughie give you my message?"

The girl's strength was ebbing again. The shaded electric lights, hanging low over the desks, seemed to waver wildly in the air, and the faces of the copy readers, who had stopped their work to look at her in sympathetic interest, grew blurred into unrecognizable shapes. The whole room had been stricken into silence by the cry of the city editor and the sight of Miss Hamilton's white face. Then a muttered phrase came to her from the table around which the office

boys were dividing their money. "That makes thirty-eight apiece," the eldest boy declared under his breath.

At the sound of the words she felt a glow of fresh strength in her veins and a new courage to make her fight for Hughie. She handed the story she still carried in her hand to the city editor, and then she dropped into the nearest chair at one end of the copy desk. She realized that she hadn't much strength left, in spite of this refreshing of her spirit. And she wanted to conserve it at least until her victory was won.

"I want to tell you why I came down, Mr. Waters," she began, in a steady tone, "and I wish everyone would listen to what I have to say, because I want to make a plea for Hughie."

She made a striking picture as she sat, leaning one elbow on the desk, her colorless face illumined by the soft light of the lamps, her brown eyes sparkling with the memories of Hughie's act. A hush had fallen over the room, save for the clicking of the telegraph sounder.

When she came to the end of the story of Hughie's deed a sudden stir ran through the room, but she put up her hand, and instant silence fell over it again.

"What I would like you to do is this, Mr. Waters. The boys have raised their Christmas fund, and they do not mean to let Hughie share in it."

Indignant cries of "What?" "They won't, eh?" "Oh, I don't know!" rose up from around the desk, and the city editor called out sharply to the group of boys at the table: "Don't any of you boys go home till I give you permission." Then he added: "I beg your pardon, Miss Hamilton."

"The point is this," she went on, each word coming a little more slowly than the last. "Don't you think, in view of what Hughie has done for all of us since he has been here, and particularly in view of the devotion to duty he showed this afternoon, that he ought to have a small share of the fund? I think everyone signed the list with the idea that Hughie would have a share in it."

At this all the heads bending toward her bobbed an energetic assent. "I know I did. It would make him feel so good if some one would go up to see him tonight, and give him a few dollars for Christmas." And the lights began to waver again before her eyes, the faces of her listeners became mere shapes of flesh, and then Miss Hamilton fainted again.

For half an hour there was no work done in the office of *The Imprint* toward getting out the next morning's paper. In spite of that, however, a number of things had transpired. Miss Hamilton had been revived and sent home in a cab, and the office boys were the culprits at an indignation meeting of the staff. They were told that if Hughie didn't have an equal share in the fund every man would insist on his subscription being returned to him. In face of such a storm the boys gave in.

Then two of the reporters left the office, their faces beaming with the Christmas spirit; for one of them had been assigned to carry thirty dollars up to Hughie, and the other started out to buy the finest dozen of American beauties he could find, to be sent on Christmas morning, with the staff's good wishes, to the practical, unsentimental Miss Hamilton.

The Mystery of Woodoonga

BY HUGH H. LUSK

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

A young Englishman named Stevens, who tells the story, arrives in Melbourne and attends the races where he wins two thousand pounds. A casual acquaintance, Moncrieff, induces him to go to a gambling house and obtains the I O U for the money from him, denying afterward that he ever received it. Charles Horton, manager of a large estate, befriends young Stevens and takes him away with him to Woodoonga, where he is pleasantly received by Mr. Leslie, the master, and his two pretty daughters. It turns out that Moncrieff is a friend of the family and a suitor for the hand of Mr. Leslie's eldest daughter, Gerty. Horton warns his employer against the scoundrel, but he confesses his own love for the girl while doing so, whereupon the rich man waxes wroth and sends him away; for Horton's grandfather was a convict. But the manager's warning is not without its effect, and when, later on, Moncrieff and Stevens have an unpleasant scene, and the latter tells Mr. Leslie what occurred in Melbourne, the old man begins to see the fellow in his true light. Moncrieff is on his way to meet Gerty, to whom he intends to propose, when Mr. Leslie intercepts him and takes him to a secluded part of the grounds for an explanation. Not long afterward a pistol shot is heard.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WOODOONGA TRAGEDY.

THE sound that had startled Gerty Leslie with a vague feeling of alarm was but faintly heard inside the house, and even the two or three couples who had wandered into the garden remarked it as singular rather than suggestive of anything serious.

It was heard at the stables, indeed, for Tom, who was sitting half asleep on a keg, with his back resting in a corner, moved uneasily and said: "Hello! Some bloomin' hass must ha' 'ad too much of the guvnor's champagne. Wot does 'e expect to 'it in the dark, I wonder?"

Jacky and Fuzzy were lying curled up on a heap of straw in a corner of the woodshed, apparently asleep, but at the sound Jacky raised his head like a wakeful hound, and glanced slowly and suspiciously in every direction. His little eyes sparkled like glowworms in the darkness and his wide nostrils moved for a moment or two, and then he subsided as noiselessly as he had roused himself.

Far away, on the top of the first ridge, from which Mr. Leslie had a few days before pointed so proudly to the extent of Woodoonga, a solitary traveler, sitting motionless on his horse, as he had sat for the better part of half an hour, with his face turned toward the station he had left, heard the faint ring of the report, like a whisper of trouble out of shadowland. He raised his head, which had been bent, and looked steadily into the darkness, as if he expected an explanation; then, with a movement of the hand that had rested on his horse's neck, which might have been meant for a farewell, he wheeled the horse and rode off into the darkness.

One man—only one—knew what it meant, and could anybody have seen him

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then he might have doubted whether even he was sure.

It would hardly be possible to overestimate the annoyance with which Moncrieff had accompanied Mr. Leslie down the garden path. Anger, which for the moment was only the more bitter because it was so helpless, struggled with prudence and left the man pale and speechless.

Whatever it was that his prospective father-in-law wanted to say before he would let him speak to his daughter, he must submit to; he could at least make up for it afterward.

This, and a hundred other half-formed thoughts, kept him silent till they had reached the lower walk; then the natural audacity of the man asserted itself again. He stopped, and faced his companion.

"Now, sir," he exclaimed, in a voice that was low and trembled slightly with anger, "now, sir, I have come with you. What the devil is it you want with me? A nice fool I shall look in Miss Leslie's eyes—perhaps she will overlook it when she hears whose fault it was."

"Perhaps so, sir. Perhaps so. There are worse things than being a fool, let me tell you, Mr. Moncrieff," was the grim reply. "It's worse to be a rogue, sir. A low-down, mean, lying rogue, sir; not fit to associate with honest men, or to speak to an honest girl."

"You are mad, sir—absolutely insane, Mr. Leslie!" Moncrieff almost gasped in his astonishment. "I would ask what you mean, sir, but I know it would be useless. I can't stay to listen to any more of these ravings, however interesting they may seem to you, so I will just say good-night to Miss Leslie and go, till you get better."

Moncrieff had recovered himself as he went on. He had turned sharply on his heel as he finished speaking, when once more he felt the grasp of his companion's hand on his shoulder.

"Not that way, sir. The stables lie over here."

Moncrieff shook his shoulder passionately, freeing it from the hand that held it back.

"Hands off!" he growled. "No, sir; I owe it to myself at least to say good-by to Miss Leslie, even if her father has unfortunately lost his senses."

"You owe it to me to leave the place, sir, where you were received as a gentleman and a friend—and for this once you shall pay what you owe, Moncrieff. I want no blacklegs at Woodoonga, sir. I will have no scoundrels there who can tempt boys to their ruin, and then rob them of their money. No rascally confederate of professional swindlers shall darken my doors or speak to my daughter while I live."

By a quick movement, the owner of Woodoonga had passed his companion as he began to speak, and stood towering, tall and broad, in his path to the house.

For just a moment the two men stood thus facing each other—then with a fierce oath the smaller man drew something from a pocket, and the sharp, clear ring of a pistol shot throbbed through the silence of the night. For a second or two more the men faced each other like men turned to stone, and then, without a word or sound, the taller figure fell backward on the grassy bank which sloped upward to the terrace above.

The eyes of the other had followed him as he fell, but he had never moved.

To do him justice, the crime had not been committed deliberately. Till a moment before he had drawn that pistol, he had not even remembered that he had a pistol; till one instant before he drew the trigger, he had never thought of firing.

And now? Moments passed, and Moncrieff stood there still—his eyes fixed, his hand that held the pistol still outstretched, as when it had all but touched the breast of the man who had been his friend. In a way, he was conscious, too, of where he was, and what he had done—in a strange, unreal way, that was infinitely ghastly.

A clock far away in the house struck eleven, and with the last stroke the music of a waltz began.

Moncrieff started so violently that he dropped the pistol, which rolled against the foot of that silent figure on the grass.

His eyes followed it, and then he seemed for the first time to be actually conscious of what had taken place. An instinct seemed to tell him he must get the pistol, which had disappeared in the shadow. He forced himself to stoop, while the drops ran down his face and fell one by one on the grass.

He got it at last, and even as he did so he leaped back from that still shadow, as if it had been a deadly snake.

Ten minutes might have passed when a growl from Trailer roused Tom from his doze to the perception that a footstep was coming toward the stable across the yard, and a hand shook the lower half of the door, which was bolted inside.

" 'Old on a bit, sir. Wich 'oss might you be arter?"

"My own, of course—Mr. Moncrieff's."

Tom shook himself, and in another minute he had opened the door and led the horse from the stable.

"Must ha' been 'avin' a doze, sir," he said, apologetically. "Wy, I 'ardly knowed it were your voice, sir—seemed different some'ow. No more I shouldn't ha' thought o' you leavin' us so soon, neither."

Moncrieff said something hastily, in which Tom made out the words "confounded nuisance—engagement early to-morrow," and others which he was still too sleepy to follow or remember. In another moment the rein was taken hastily from his hand—almost snatched, indeed—the dark figure had mounted hurriedly, and the horse had started at a canter, leaving Tom, for the first time in his experience of Moncrieff, without the customary tip.

Tom shook his head, as thoughts of excessive drinks of champagne, or something stronger, floated through his puzzled brain; then he turned to go back again, and, if possible, finish his doze. As he did so his eyes met two little shining orbs that seemed to peer at him out of the darkness. For a moment he started, then he recovered himself.

"That you, Jacky?" he said. "Blessed if I didn't think it were another of 'em."

Jacky made no reply, but with his great head bent forward he slipped away and disappeared in the shadows.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH HORTON COMES BACK.

A very few minutes had enabled Gertrude Leslie to recover from the unexpected shock of Moncrieff's apparently cool desertion. Had she really cared for the man at all it might have been different; but as it was, after the first moment or two of surprise, her feeling was one of relief rather than annoyance.

There was still no sign of Moncrieff when the music began once more and an eager voice claimed her promise for the waltz. It certainly wouldn't have flattered the self-esteem of the Honorable Charles Moncrieff could he have known that she had forgotten to look for his reappearance.

For my own part, I had been more than fortunate in securing several dances out of Elsie's very limited stock that were not claimed by somebody or other on the score of old promises.

I was escorting my companion on a little promenade up and down the ballroom between dances, trying hard to entangle her in a promise to grant me still another, when we passed close to her sister.

"Oh, Gerty!" exclaimed Elsie, "have you seen papa lately?"

"No, I don't think so. He must be in the office, I suppose. But it *is* strange—I never knew him to stay so much away from a dance before."

The sisters looked at each other with that sort of mutual understanding I had noticed and admired in them whenever their father was concerned.

"If you would like to know where he is," I said, glancing at my companion's face, "I could go and see."

It seemed the right thing to offer, but even while I did it I felt a strong hope that it would not be accepted. If I once left Elsie's side, even for a minute or two, the place would be hard to regain. Probably my face was more sincere than my tongue, for my companion gave me

one look that contained more amusement than many a laugh.

"Well, you really do deserve something for that magnanimous offer, Mr. Stevens," she said. "If you don't mind piloting me safely through the giddy throng I'll go along with you. I can't think what he can have done with himself. Perhaps he's talking to Mr. Moncrieff," she continued, in a lower tone, as we turned away. "I'm sure I haven't seen him since supper time."

We went into the hall, and along the broad corridor, though I must admit that I was suffering from something like a cold chill as I thought of what such a conversation with Moncrieff might mean to me. If I had been alone I believe I should have hesitated to knock at the door which we found shut, but my companion had no such scruples. She turned the handle at once, and as she pushed it partly open exclaimed:

"Oh, papa, what *are* you doing? Gerty and I are both very angry that you haven't come near us to enjoy our triumphs. You really must, you know."

There was no answer, and in a moment she had pushed the door wide open. The room was empty.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "he must have gone into the garden. I dare say they are both there."

She took her hand from my arm and almost ran forward to the window, which was open. Then she stopped suddenly and started back a step with a little cry of alarm. I was by her side in a moment.

"What is it? What's the matter?" I asked, eagerly. She pointed through the window.

My eyes followed her hand and saw glittering in the light that streamed out on the veranda, and framed in a dark background of shadow, the most hideous face I had ever seen in my life. It seemed to be human, too, for no monkey was ever half so ugly as that.

"Jacky!" my companion gasped, in a voice in which alarm was tempered with relief. As she spoke I seemed to recognize him—it really was the "black," after all, but so much more hideous than usual that I could hardly believe it.

"Jacky!" Elsie repeated, indignantly. "What Jacky mean? What Jacky want—look all-the-same pig."

For a fraction of an instant a kind of spasm passed over the black's hideous face. Then a new and fiercer light came into his little eyes, as he stretched out his right hand in front of him, showing that it held the shapeless-looking weapon which Mr. Leslie had made him show me a day or two before, and had told me was a boomerang. He raised and shook the savage-looking weapon for an instant as he replied, in a wild sing-song tone:

"Come, missy, come! Jacky paint war. Missy come, see what for." Then he beckoned solemnly to us as he stepped backward from the window as if to let us follow.

"What do you suppose he means?" I asked.

"He means that he wants to show us something. I am sure it is something horrible, too, though I have not an idea what it can be. I never thought I should mind anything, but I'm afraid to go with him now."

"Let me go!" I exclaimed, as I stepped toward the window. "Don't you come; there might be some danger—perhaps some treachery."

"From Jacky? Oh, no. Jacky's been with us for years and years; he loves papa like a dog."

"Your father!" I exclaimed, impulsively. "Could there be anything wrong with him?"

"With papa?" she gasped, as if the idea had just struck her with special significance. "Oh, surely not with papa. But come, let us see what Jacky means."

Elsie paused for an instant, and I thought she shivered. I held out my hand, which she took with a quick, nervous grasp in her own, and so we went together into the shadows.

Jacky seemed to flit rather than walk before us as we went slowly down the terraced walks, and it seemed to me that the sense of something impending—some formless calamity to which we could give no name—affected us both more and more the further we went.

Jacky stopped at last and faced us,

standing with his boomerang raised above his head in a strange, savage, yet solemn attitude.

I think we both stopped for a few seconds; and then that ghostly figure raised his other hand and beckoned us forward.

We were within three or four yards of Jacky's silent and motionless figure when suddenly he lowered his boomerang and pointed to the sloping bank close beside us. Our eyes followed his motion, but for a moment I could see nothing save an apparently deeper shadow. Then, with a cry so shrill and full of terror that I shall never forget the tone, Elsie snatched her hand from mine and threw herself on her knees beside the body of her father.

For an instant I felt paralyzed, and could only stare helplessly at the strange, shadowy, dead face, which even while I looked at it seemed to come out into clearer and stronger relief. Then I recovered enough to go on my knee beside him and try to raise his head. Elsie had seized his hand in both of hers, but now she gasped out the words:

"No, oh! no. It is useless." As she spoke she let the hand she had held sink slowly on the grass, and, covering her face with both hands, burst into so wild a passion of sobs that I was terrified. I looked around helplessly for assistance, but only the motionless figure of the "black" was to be seen. I sprang to my feet.

"Go, Jacky," I exclaimed. "Quick! Go fetch man—plenty man."

For a moment he stared at me as if he scarcely understood me; then, as if it had dawned on him, he sprang past me up the path by which we had just come, with a succession of wildly piercing yells that rang through the silence and even penetrated to the ballroom, where the dance was at its height.

Help came quickly in answer to my shouts after Jacky had attracted attention, and the body of the owner of Woodoonga was carried up and laid on the couch in the room he had called his office. It was not till this had been done that a tall, elderly man, with gray hair and the bearing of an old soldier, pushed his way quietly through the crowd of men that nearly filled the room, and, waving them back, bent over the figure on the couch and looked closely at the face and then at the breast of his friend of a quarter of a century. A dozen pairs of questioning eyes besides those of the two girls who knelt beside the couch followed his movements and seemed to hang on his lips for a decision.

"Shot in the breast by a pistol not a yard away," the old soldier muttered. Then he looked at the hand of the dead man—it was closely clinched.

"There was no pistol beside him?" he asked, glancing at the faces round him.

"Not a sign of a weapon, major."

"Who could have done it?" he said, in an astonished whisper. "Leslie hadn't an enemy in the world. Horton!" he continued, after a pause, while every eye in the room seemed to glance at every other face with a look that was half questioning and half suspicious. "Horton—has anybody gone for him? He's the man to arrange things. I must hold an inquiry in the morning."

"Mr. 'Orton, sir, 'e rode off arter dark, and as 'e was a-goin' 'e says to me: 'Good-by, Tom,' sez 'e. 'I ain't a-comin' back to Woodoonga no more,' sez 'e, Major Baker."

Everybody had started when Tom's voice had answered the magistrate from the doorway where he was standing, and a sudden blush had rushed into the cheeks of Gertrude Leslie before she hid her face once more in her hands and bowed it on the couch. Then the magistrate spoke again:

"Not coming back? You must have misunderstood. Horton isn't the man to leave at a moment's notice."

"Dunno about that, major, only 'e sez, sez 'e, 'I hain't a-comin' back to Woodoonga no more, Tom.'"

There was a silence in the room, in which you could hear men breathe, while eyes turned slowly one to another in wordless questioning.

Through the silence there came suddenly the quick beat of a horse's hoofs, and next instant the deep bark of a dog. The hush that had fallen on the room seemed to deepen—not a man moved.

The sound of galloping ceased behind the house, and Trailer's bark changed suddenly to a note of welcome.

"Blowed if that ain't 'im back again. 'E took Challenger, and I'd know 'is 'oofbeats anywhere."

Gertrude Leslie must have known them, too, I thought, for she had raised her head, and though her cheeks were deadly pale again there was a strange light in her eyes as she listened. Then, as if involuntarily, she looked strangely at the still face of her father.

A minute more and the sound of a strong, rapid footfall sounded on the gravel, and ascended the steps of the veranda. It was a characteristic footfall—I knew it already. Whatever he might have said to Tom, Horton had come back to Woodoonga.

CHAPTER XV.

AN AVENGER OF BLOOD.

The footsteps stopped at the window, and the tall figure of Horton stood in the opening. Every eye in the room, except Miss Leslie's, was turned on him silently with a look of almost breathless question that was positively weird in its fascination.

There was something strange in Horton's face, too—a look of anxious expectation, and yet of doubt, as if he had expected to see something, and yet was by no means certain what it was he looked for.

As far as I could see, he hadn't started, even when his eyes had rested on the couch with its motionless figure, and on the two girls who knelt beside it. He had only stood motionless for half a minute; then without a word he stepped inside the window and stood in the room.

For a single moment I thought the look in Major Baker's eyes as he stared at him was one of doubt; then his brow cleared, as he said, in a low voice:

"I am very glad you've got back, Mr. Horton. Tom here has just been telling us you had gone away for good. I suppose he must have mistaken what you said."

The look of doubt had left Horton's eyes, but a strange look of horror, which somehow didn't seem to me to be directly connected with the figure of the dead man on the couch, had taken its place. His eyes traveled slowly round the circle of waiting faces before they came back to that of the major.

"It was true, then," he muttered to himself. Then, as if he had suddenly remembered the major's implied question, he added: "No, Major Baker—Tom was right. I *had* left Woodoonga for good. I was told to come back again."

The major looked at him as if he thought he had taken leave of his senses.

"Told to come back?" he repeated. "Who could have told you to-night?"

Instead of answering at once, Horton let his eyes rest on the still, calm features of his late employer, almost, it seemed to me, as if he were asking his leave to speak. Then he said, slowly: "*He* did."

I think the same curious, unaccountable thrill of weird expectancy that ran through my nerves must have been felt by each person in the room; even Gertrude Leslie lifted her bowed head from her hands and stared at him through her tears. The major knit his brows and looked at him for a moment without speaking; then his lips moved, and he muttered to himself: "The man's mad—or drunk." I fancy if the votes of the party could have been taken at the moment, most of those present would have agreed with the major.

Horton didn't seem to have heard him, however. His eyes had gone back to the calm face on the couch, and to judge from the expressions that chased one another across his face in quick succession, many things were passing through his mind. Then he looked up suddenly, and asked the question: "Where's Moncrieff?"

It seemed to be asked of Miss Leslie, whose eyes had never been turned from him since she had looked up at his first startling answer, for his eyes had moved from her father's face to her own, and she started.

"Moncrieff?" she gasped, as she glanced around the ring of faces. "Moncrieff? I don't know."

"Oh, 'e's gone, sir—gone an hour ago—'*e* is." And Tom, the stableman, stepped forward.

"Gone?" Horton repeated the word. "How did he go, Tom?"

"Rode off on 'is new 'oss, 'e did, sir. Said 'e 'ad an engagement, and rode away as if 'ell were arter 'im."

The look of utter amazement that passed round the circle was reflected on the major's face as he glanced helplessly from Tom to Horton.

"After the pistol was fired, Tom?" Horton asked again.

The major seemed suddenly to wake from his surprise, and it evidently came home to him that Horton was usurping his own functions as the district magistrate.

"No, no!" he exclaimed. "This won't do, gentlemen. There must be an inquiry, of course, but it must be regularly held. I shall hold it first thing in the morning—say at nine o'clock; and I must ask you gentlemen not to leave Woodoonga till it has taken place. It is most unfortunate that anybody should have gone."

The major had asserted himself, and the effort had evidently gone far to restore his dignified sense of his own importance.

"And now, gentlemen," he continued, after a pause, during which he looked first at his dead friend, and then at the figures of his two daughters, "now, gentlemen, we must no longer intrude—the claims of justice we can attend to by and by."

We slipped away as quietly as we could, most of us feeling, I think, as if we had been guilty of an intrusion in ever being there.

The major quietly closed the door. As soon as we had reached the wider part of the hall he laid a hand on Horton's arm to detain him.

"Whatever may have passed between you and my old friend yesterday, Horton," he said, "I hope you won't let it interfere with your doing what you can for these unhappy girls?"

There was something that made me shiver in the look, partly, I thought, of suffering, and partly of fierce determination, in Horton's eyes, as he returned his look for a moment or two before he replied to the appeal. Then, in a voice that was hoarse and low, he answered:

"Never! Not if I follow him to the world's end!"

I thought the major shivered as he looked at the light that blazed up in Horton's eyes as he spoke; I thought he was going to speak again, but he turned away instead. I followed Horton to the door with a feeling stronger, I think, than ever, that my fate was somehow bound up with his.

I don't know exactly how I passed the remainder of that night—it was certainly not in sleep; and in that respect, at any rate, I was like the other guests at Woodoonga.

In spite of all, the famous hospitality of Woodoonga was maintained by a breakfast that was somehow provided in the last night's supper room, and was partaken of in a desultory fashion by the visitors, only too glad of anything to relieve the monotony of waiting for the major's court. When it was held, however, it was sensational enough for anything. A jury was empaneled, and after less than an hour of taking evidence it had no difficulty in bringing in a verdict which fixed the crime on Charles Moncrieff. The circumstances, indeed, remained a mystery; but the fact that Mr. Leslie had been shot through the heart by a bullet from a pistol which was found thrown among the bushes only a few yards nearer the gate than the scene of the shooting, and which bore Moncrieff's initials, was proved.

Neither of the ladies had been asked to give evidence, as I could tell all that the younger Miss Leslie knew of the matter, and Miss Leslie herself had never left the ballroom after the supper adjournment until the alarm was given. Jacky, however, was able to say that he had tracked Moncrieff's footsteps by scent from the scene of the tragedy to the stable door, while Tom's evidence—first of having heard the shot, and then,

after a short doze, of having had his interview with Moncrieff—completed a tolerably strong chain of evidence, and even in the major's opinion justified the verdict of the coroner's jury, charging Moncrieff with willful murder.

Horton had not been called to give any evidence. The major insisted on considering what he had said the night before as very little better than temporary insanity brought on by the shock of the tragedy, and absolutely declined to ask any questions which might only renew the excitement.

When the verdict of the jury had been signed and indorsed by the magistrate, the last excuse for lingering at Woodoonga was gone, and the visitors were apparently quite ready to leave the scene of the unexpected tragedy. My position as a visitor at the house was, of course, a different one, but I confess I had never felt more awkwardly situated than I did when I had watched the major ride off to telegraph to the police authorities in Melbourne, and turned desolately away, asking myself the question: "What next?"

It was, of course, hopeless to think of either of the Misses Leslie, and yet I felt as if I couldn't bear to leave Woodoonga without seeing at least my last night's companion again. At least I must wait for the funeral, which the major had said must take place the following day, and in the meantime I was inclined to stay with Horton at his cottage if he would allow me. I should find him there, of course, I told myself, as I sauntered miserably toward the men's quarters that afternoon. I was wrong; Horton—so at least Ah Sing contrived to tell me—had been sent for by Miss Leslie half an hour before.

Strange as it sounded to me when the Chinaman told me with his inscrutable smile, it was true. Horton had been sent for, and not, as I had supposed when I came to think of it, by the sister of the dead master of Woodoonga, but by Gertrude Leslie herself.

It was the older of the two house servants who had brought the message, and Horton went back along with her. Without glancing behind her, the old woman turned into the garden till she reached the front steps of the veranda, and then paused. Horton looked at her questioningly, and for the first time she spoke since they had started:

"Sure an' it's there ye'll find her. Ye'll go to the windy, same as ye did last night."

She pointed, as she said it, to the window of Mr. Leslie's well-known room—the only one in the house, indeed, with which Horton had much acquaintance. Then she turned and left him.

The window stood slightly ajar, but the Venetian blind within had been allowed to drop nearly to the floor. For a single instant he hesitated—then he tapped lightly on the glass. He had hardly done so before the blind was moved silently aside and the pale face of Gertrude Leslie appeared in the opening.

"Come in!" she said, moving aside, but still holding the blind. He bent his head silently, from which he had already pulled his broad-brimmed hat of soft gray felt, and stepped inside. She let the blind drop behind him.

It took nearly a minute to accustom Horton's eyes to the sudden dimness of the room, and by the time they had done so Gertrude Leslie had returned to her seat at the side of the large couch, which had not been moved since the inquest had been held there in the morning.

"You sent for me?" he said, at last, in a low voice. "In what way can I serve you, Miss Leslie?"

She had never taken her eyes from his face, which she seemed to be trying to read; but when he spoke her glance grew less steady, and for a moment the eyelids seemed to tremble and fall a little.

"You said something last night—something both about yourself and—and him." Her glance rested for an instant on the silent figure on the couch with a look of appeal, which Horton felt to be infinitely pathetic. "I want to know—I feel that I must know—what you meant."

"About myself, Miss Leslie?"

"Yes; you said you had left Woodoonga before—before it happened. And that you hadn't intended to come back. What did you mean?"

"It was true, Miss Leslie; he had sent me away."

She looked at him with a glance that was charged with the same appeal he had noticed before when she looked at the couch.

"Why?"

The tone was so low that it was hardly more than a whisper, but yet it insisted on an answer.

"Because," he said, and he was conscious that his own voice trembled a little, "because I had told him something." He stopped. A feeling had come over him that in that presence, at least, he couldn't go further.

"Something?" she asked, while the slightest shade of color came into her pale cheek. "Something about yourself?"

"Yes," he said, a little desperately, "yes, about myself and—and another person."

The color grew deeper in her cheek and for a moment she looked down.

"And," she continued, suddenly, "you said he had sent you back?"

"Yes, that is true, too; I believe he did."

There was a tone of dogged decision about Horton's words, though he spoke hardly above a whisper. She only looked the question—"Why?"—but it demanded an answer.

His eyes involuntarily sought the couch as he continued.

"I saw him," he said. "He came in front of us and waved me back three times. I saw him quite well. Challenger knew him, too, for he stopped."

Gertrude Leslie's face had grown pale again, but there was a light in her eyes that was new.

"That was afterward," she said, and as if at the thought which unconsciously underlay the words the flush came suddenly back to her cheeks. Horton waited for perhaps a minute, but she didn't look up again.

"I am going away again," he said, and his voice trembled a little.

"Going? Where to?" she almost whispered, and once more there was that undefinable tone of appeal in her voice.

"To bring that man to justice. I don't know where I shall find him yet."

The words were spoken in a low tone, but they rang fierce and bitter, and as he said them Horton's eyes rested on the calm face of his late employer. It was almost as if he had registered an oath.

"And then?"

The words were almost whispered, and Gertrude Leslie didn't lift her eyes from the floor when she said them.

"Then, please God, I will see you again!"

She looked up, and even in the dim light there was something in her eyes that said he would be welcome.

"Good-by," she said.

"Good-by, till then," he answered.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEAR THE END OF A TRAIL.

"There, Stevens; that must be it at last."

Horton spoke almost with a gasp that sounded like relief; it was the first word that had passed between us for half an hour at least. We had been on the road—if the track through the soft sand could be called a road—for seven days; by far the hardest work I had ever attempted.

"I hope to goodness you may be right," I groaned. "I don't believe I can stand much more of this, Horton."

Three days ago we had reached the first of the widely scattered diggings—as they were universally called—that spread for many miles over the Coomardie flats. There we had rested one day—or at least I rested, while Horton, who seemed almost proof against weariness, made inquiries that led to our starting next morning for "Martin's Gully." And these last two days had been the worst of it. It was only eighteen miles, we had been told, from Coomardie, but they seemed to me the longest miles that had ever been made. Not a drop of

water had come in sight since we had started; and even the supply we had been warned to take with us when we set out, and which had seemed ridiculously heavy then, was all but exhausted now.

I had looked up wearily when Horton broke the long silence, and saw that "it" must mean a very rough-looking, weather-board house standing on the top of one of the long, swelling ridges of sand of which we seemed to have passed hundreds already since we left the inn at Coomardie.

It was poor enough and rough enough to be uninviting under almost any other circumstances; but now, with the reddish light of the sinking sun behind it, I had seldom, if ever, seen anything more attractive. At any rate, we could get a rest, and something to eat and drink, and at the moment these were about the greatest luxuries I could think of.

More than once since we started, and especially during these two last days, I had gone over the various steps that had at last landed Horton and me among the ridges and flats of the new Coomardie diggings in West Australia. I had acknowledged to myself more than once that if I had known all that it meant that afternoon in the overseer's cottage at Woodoonga I should have hesitated before I pledged myself to Horton. And yet, even then I wasn't quite sure. There was something in the look that shone in Horton's eyes as we stood face to face, something in the grasp of his hand, that carried me away then, and might have done it even if I had known where he would lead me.

"I'm leaving," he said, "or, rather, I *have* left. I wonder whether I could get you to go along with me?"

"Go with you, Horton?" I exclaimed. "Go where to? I must go somewhere to earn a living, I suppose, if I can—but where are you going?"

"To catch Moncrieff first!" he replied, in a low, fierce tone.

"But," I asked, "won't the police do that, Horton? Major Baker said he was going to telegraph at once."

"If he goes to Melbourne, I suppose they will—but he knows better than to go there; at any rate, I've promised to see that it's done. Will you lend me a hand?"

I stretched out my hand to him impulsively once more.

"With all my heart, Horton," I said, "if you think I can be of any use."

"That's all right, Stevens. I think I am sure to want help, and I'd sooner have you than anybody I know. I've got money enough for two, and we'll share. When we've got him we'll make a fresh start."

On that understanding—which somehow meant more than it seemed to say—we had joined hands again, and the thing was settled.

Two months and more had passed since that day.

Horton had been right about Moncrieff; he had never gone back to Melbourne. We went there first to see, but after losing ten days or so, while the police were always just going to catch him, Horton decided to work independently. It was then the work began to grow exciting, and we soon got on his traces. We were certain he had been to his cousin's place, though of course it was denied, and we traced him from there across the border into New South Wales. Of course we got thrown off the scent pretty often, but on the whole we were successful. We discovered the place where he had sold his horse, the one that was to have been first in the kangaroo hunt, in Bathurst, and then we made for Sydney.

The police in Sydney had been warned to look out for him. After a time, however, we got traces of him there, too, and at last we convinced ourselves that he had left, and that a man who had taken a steerage passage to Tasmania by steamer about a fortnight before was Charles Moncrieff himself.

Horton wrote to Miss Leslie, telling her what we had done, and then we followed the trail.

We followed it to Tasmania, and then, after some delay, from Hobart to South Australia. Here we were delayed for several weeks, until by a happy chance I found at Port Adelaide a half-

drunken sailor who told me, among other reminiscences of his career as a boatman, the story of his chase of a coasting steamer a few weeks before, that he might put a passenger on board. The man, he said, had "got 'em bad," for he thought all the police forces of Australia were coming after him, and had offered him five pounds to put him aboard. There had chanced to be a strong breeze, and he had just managed it through the steamer slowing down a bit, and waiting, and then "the bloke had climbed aboard as if the old un were after him."

When I told Horton the story he said: "That's he." We only waited for the next steamer for Coongatta, and followed, sure that he couldn't escape us at last. Now, as I raised my head, and stared with dazzled eyes at that rough-looking house on the ridge, I asked myself, wearily, could it really be true? Had we got to the end of our apparently endless task?

"It doesn't look much of a place, Horton," I said, with a new cheerfulness; "but if we could only get a wash, and something decent to eat and drink, that wouldn't matter."

"Well, they did say something about water in Martin's Gully at Coomardie; but they said it wouldn't last long, and then the diggers would have to come in. I don't suppose there's much to spare for washing. There's sure to be something to eat and drink, though."

We struggled on across the lower ground and up the slope on the further side. Before we reached the top, however, we were hailed by a voice that seemed to come from the open door of the house:

"Hello! Here's two more bloomin' coves, Jim. Blessed if ye won't have a houseful! I hope ye've got plenty o' tucker on hand. Hi! You chaps, there! What the devil brings you to this 'ere forgotten hole?"

Horton found the means of replying pleasantly without giving too much information, and in another minute or two we had reached the top, and pulled up before the door of the inn. The door was open, and a man, who seemed to be the innkeeper, stood in the entrance.

"Well, mates," was his greeting, "I ain't rightly sure as we can do much for ye here. Fact is, we're thinkin' about clearin' out, most of us, for the water's most give out in the water holes. But come in. We'll do the best we can."

The shadows lengthened by the time we had finished eating, and the evening company of "The Wallaby's Rest" began to assemble by little groups of twos and threes.

One big man had taken his seat at the end of the long table of rough boards, and was telling Horton, who sat near him, that the place couldn't hold out another week.

"No, mate," he was saying, "the gully's right enough; nor I ain't a-sayin' nothing against the gold, neither, which it's mostly in nuggets, lyin' about in the sand, same as if they'd ha' been sowed there. But it's the water that's give out—and without water where are ye?"

The question was asked of the company in general, which might now have numbered five and twenty men, most of them already provided with drinks.

The big man looked slowly round the room. "And," he continued, impressively, "this here room reperesents the popilation o' the gully, sir; and theer ain't a man on 'em as means to stay another week, onless—which ain't to be thought on nohow—theer comes rain afore then."

Horton looked across at me, and there was an anxious look in his eyes. Could we have been mistaken?

"Do you mean to say these are all the hands on the field?" he asked.

"Well, sir, not countin' of one pore devil as come up 'bout ten day back, and as isn't not altogether hisself, in a manner o' speakin', I believe I ain't far wrong when I says it's every soul on 'em."

Horton glanced at me again; this time his eyes were bright.

[TO BE CONCLUDED IN THE NEXT NUMBER.]

Romances of the Race Course

BY CHARLES STEINFORT PEARSON

VIII.—A "GETAWAY DAY" EVENT

MORNY JAMES, known to his intimates as "Jesse," and Hiram Waterhouse, proprietors of the Golden West Stable, were having very bad luck on the Eastern tracks. They had brought their crack racer, Sausalito, clear from California to contend against the best of the Eastern thoroughbreds, only to have him disgracefully beaten in the first big event in which he had run.

Waterhouse was a little, weazen-faced fellow of somewhere near the fifty mark, the perfect type of a racing man who has risen to the position of owner solely by the qualities of cunning, shrewdness and unscrupulousness. His face always wore a plausible expression—a smile which betokened deceitfulness and dishonesty. His eyes were light blue, set close together, and never appeared to rest on any one place very long, perhaps from the fear that they might make an impression which he would not wish.

James was a careless, happy-go-lucky sort of a chap, younger by fifteen years than his partner, and totally different from him both in appearance and in his methods. He was large and red-faced, talkative to a degree, and gave one the impression that he was to be relied upon in every particular, though in reality he was no more honest than Waterhouse.

The two made an excellent combination of a certain kind. They were not in racing for the mere love of the sport, for the sake of seeing their colors borne first past the finish. It was the love of the dollar, purely and simply, which had drawn them together.

Sausalito had been entered in all the Eastern handicaps long before. One in which he was to take part was scheduled for a date some three weeks hence, and James bent all his energies to getting him fit and ready for this. The horse showed promise of a return to the old form which he had possessed out West, and the two partners were secretly confident that he would run no worse than third, if he did not win. In the early morning trials he had shown a turn of speed which should enable him to be in front at the finish.

As the two owners were practically down to hard pan in the way of cash, it caused them some amount of thinking to decide what to do in order to raise the money necessary to bet as they had planned to do.

"Why not let 'Chicago Charlie' in on this deal?" suggested James. "If he thinks the horse is good enough to win, he will be willing to put up the dough in bunches, and let us have our share of the winnings. It's done often by owners who haven't the needful, but who know they have something up their sleeve for the bookies. It's a cinch for Sausages this time, I'm certain, and he don't want to overlook a bet like that. The chances are that he already knows what the horse is capable of doing, and will lay his bets without us entering

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into the proposition. What do you say, Hiram?"

The partner pondered a while; then answered:

"I don't believe in going outside for any help in such a matter, Jesse. If we've got a good thing, let's keep it to ourselves. These here plungers are so all-fired smart they'll get the better of you."

The two had a long discussion, which ended with the senior partner agreeing to the suggestion of the other, with the proviso that if Kilburn, the plunger who was known as "Chicago Charlie," acceded to their wishes, they should let him do the entire betting, the owners simply running the horse for the purse. The latter was a rich one.

The plunger evinced no surprise when he was approached on the subject. He listened quietly to what James had to tell him, and at the end of the interview said he would think the matter over, and let them know in a day or so. One evening, just as the horses were about to be locked up for the night, he appeared at the stable where the James and Waterhouse horses were quartered.

"Let's take a look at your candidate," he said to the partners, who were no little surprised at his visit, and at the unostentatious manner of his arrival.

He was detained a few minutes while the rubber was sent into the horse's stall to give him a thorough grooming.

Sausalito presented a fine appearance, no doubt of that. Kilburn's examination was most critical. He inspected the horse from the tip of his nose to the bottom of the hoof, running his hand up and down each leg.

After "Chicago Charlie" had satisfied himself as to the horse's physical condition, he inquired, casually:

"Been doing well in his workouts?"

"Did a mile in 1.39 the other evening with one hundred and fifteen up."

"Can you have a trial, say two mornings hence, and let me see it?"

Of course, they would be glad to let the plunger see it.

"We'll take him over to the other track to-morrow night," said Waterhouse, with a wink. "It's nearer the salt water—also further away from these here clockers that hang around the track every morning like a 'skeeter around a buttermilk baby. That's where we've been trying him out, so nobody would guess what horse he was. We rented a stable over there."

The plunger's face wore a peculiar smile for a fleeting second, but neither of the two partners noticed it. He arranged where to meet them on the morning of the trial, and departed as mysteriously as he had arrived.

"Got him sure!" ejaculated the senior partner. "All we've got to do is to lie a leetle about the weight the horse is carrying in the trial, and if he insists on being shown we can juggle that pair of scales so he won't be any the wiser. The horse has got to make a mighty good showing then, even if he don't in the race. I believe he can win, anyhow."

"Chicago Charlie" expressed himself as perfectly satisfied with the trial, which, over the whole route of a mile and a quarter, was made in the fast time of a fraction more than 2.04, with seven pounds less than the owners claimed. The plunger insisted on having the weight tested in his presence, but seemed to find nothing wrong.

It was understood that Kilburn would back their horse for a good amount. The owners were led to believe so, at any rate, from what the plunger told them, although he did not come right out and say so.

"I don't believe in committing yourself too much," he told them, with a wink as expressive as if it had been made by Waterhouse himself. "Just you fellows keep your horse as good as he is now up to the day of the race—that's all I ask."

They were more than satisfied with this. For one as secretive as Kilburn, they told themselves it was as much as if they had drawn up a written agreement and he had signed it.

The time passed quickly until the day of the big race, and there was no change in the condition of Sausalito. If he did not capture the big event, or at least second place, they decided they had overrated their horse's ability, all along. The

track conditions suited their candidate exactly.

"Chicago Charlie" came over to the Golden West Stable in the morning, and inspected the horse again.

"He has been keeping up to his fast trial of the other day, has he?" he questioned, anxiously, and when he was answered in the affirmative appeared most gratified. His stay was not long, but he declared jubilantly on leaving:

"Mum's the word, boys. The race is all in now. It's me for the limit today, and I won't forget you fellows. I'll see you after the race."

Together the partners watched the race. They saw their horse get away in a fairly good position, and as they stood, open-mouthed, expecting to see him go to the fore and stay there, they experienced one of the greatest disappointments which can confront the race-horse owner.

At the start a little black horse took the lead, closely followed by two others, and the further the black went, the faster he seemed to go, for he showed open daylight gaps which widened between him and the other horses as they neared the finish.

Sausalito was fifth at the start. He was in trouble over the terrific pace of the leaders before he had gone the three-quarters, when he had taken the fourth place. This was the best he could do, and the distance between him and the third horse grew greater and greater, until, by a magnificent burst of speed in the stretch, the third racer captured the place from the one leading him, by a scant head, the twain more than two lengths behind the black.

It was a race such as the assembled thousands never before had seen. The cheering, as the black horse swept past the finish the winner, was not diminished, but increased, as the horses returned to the stand. For the numbers hung out by the timer were 2.02 3-5, signifying that a world's record had been broken.

All that James said to Waterhouse after it was over was:

"That wasn't no horse race. The next time I put my horse up against one of these here new-fangled flying machines, made up like a thoroughbred to deceive the other owners and the public, I want to be told somethin' beforehand. That's all."

"Wonder what our friend the plunger will have to say about our steering him up against such a dead one," Hiram remarked, with a grin. In reality, he considered it a huge joke.

Kilburn had said he would see them after the race, and he was as good as his word. He came up to the two worthies, who were standing about their horse with anything but pleased expressions on their faces. He himself was as smiling and debonair as usual.

"For fear that you fellows are laboring under the mistaken idea that I backed your horse, and that you may lose sleep on that account to-night, I'll tell you right off that I played the winner," he began.

The partners pricked up their ears metaphorically, and were ready to have the barrier sprung.

"No, I played the winner," was his calm declaration. "Now, really, you fellows couldn't expect me to back your horse against the horse that won."

"Against a flying machine that left the ground at the barrier, and didn't touch it again till he reached the judges' stand," remarked James, sulkily.

"Well, that was it exactly," continued Kilburn. "I knew just how good the black horse was, but your own was a dark horse so far as his work was concerned. You people had me guessing by having his trials at the other track."

Waterhouse chuckled in a half-hearted manner.

"So you couldn't blame me for pretending to fall in with your proposition," added the plunger. "By that I learned just how good your horse was, and that he couldn't beat the other in any possible way. If you recollect, I didn't say outright I was going to play your horse."

"Oh, that's all right!" said James.

"Now, look here, boys," said the plunger, coming up to them. "You fellows were in earnest about your horse, I believe, and as it wouldn't have been

business for me to tell you about what horse I thought would win, I put down enough of a bet for you fellows to make it worth five hundred dollars, and here it is. This will pay you for the trouble you have taken, and kind of let you down easy for the loss of the race."

He handed a roll of bills to Waterhouse, and checked the profuse thanks of the partners with uplifted hand.

"I don't mind such a little thing as your trying to fool me about the weight your horse carried in that trial," he fired at them, and then walked away.

It was when the chill blasts of November were sweeping over the brown infields and through the grand stands, depleted of the gay throngs of summer, that Hiram came to his partner with a book containing the list of races, with the distances, conditions and all other details, which would take place at the twelve-day meeting at the race course where ended the racing on the Eastern circuit.

"Getaway comes November 23d, at Ravenwood, Jesse," he said. In the parlance of the racing fraternity, "Getaway Day" is the last day of the meeting at any particular track. The last day is popularly supposed to be a time of surprises in the way of winners, an occasion of long shots which the owners have been saving. The last day of racing in any section may, therefore, be considered a "Getaway Day" of more than ordinary significance.

Waterhouse thumbed the book carefully until he came to the races of the last day. Putting his finger on the page, he drew his nail deeply across it, with the muttered words:

"There's where we get back at 'em, pard. All I ask is that you keep Sausages fit. Don't let him go back none. Uncle Hiram will do the rest."

The race was what is known as an "overnight handicap," and was for three-year-olds and upward, one mile. The chances were some good horses would be entered in it, but none of them equal to Sausalito—that is, Sausalito in his real form. His owners had become the laughingstock of the other horsemen. It was confidently expected that the former stake winner would be entered in selling races before the season closed. The horse's appearance in even ordinary handicaps was a come-down.

Waterhouse only chuckled when any mention of the matter was made to him. He and James knew that their horse, instead of having "gone back," had improved steadily, and was then better perhaps than he had ever been. It was the opportunity for which they had long been waiting. If everything went according to their hopes, they would be able to make enough to retire, if they felt so inclined, or if they were ruled off. On one thing they were agreed. This was that, happen what might, they would race no more in the East after this season.

It puzzled them to know where to get the funds to place on their horse, for they had been at heavy expense, with no more coming in than was sufficient to pay their bills. If it had not been for their two-year-old, San Jose, they would have been forced to take some radical means to recoup themselves. Should they again appeal to the plunger? It seemed the only thing to do, but, after much discussion pro and con, it was decided they would best leave him out of it. He was too slippery an individual to trust, and it was a question whether he would consent to act with them in a crooked deal such as they were framing up.

The only alternative was to dispose of San Jose, a fine two-year-old, for which a price reaching up into the thousands had been offered. They hated to part with such a valuable member of their "string," but it was the only thing they could do.

Soon after the money was paid over, Waterhouse was missing from the track for several days. He was supposed to be ill. In reality, he was visiting a number of cities within a radius of a thousand miles, where there were large poolrooms. He was well acquainted in the places where he visited, and in each one he left a commission to be drawn upon and bet on his horse when the proper time should arrive. The man selected in each of these cities could be

trusted with the money, and would be willing to do the work of making the bet for a certain percentage. Hiram withheld the name of the horse on which the coup was to be made. It would be time enough to disclose that the night before the race. He did not even specify the day on which the race was to be run, simply giving each commissioner a key to the code by which he would send the instructions.

So careful was he that he also included the stable names of his horses—the nicknames by which the horses were known to the employees—and a duplicate of the signature he would attach to the telegram, or "wire," as he called it. Everything was so fully explained there could be no possible mistake.

To an outsider, it would have appeared foolish to have taken such extraordinary precautions. But Hiram was fully aware that a telegraphic message passes through a number of hands, and under the scrutiny of more than one pair of sharp eyes, some of them very wide open to spy out a "tip" on the races. He was running no chances.

One day he appeared at the track, apparently quite recovered, but more quiet and subdued-looking than ever. A day or so after his reappearance it was whispered about among the horsemen that the racer Sausalito had developed into a "roarer." This meant to practiced ears that the horse was windbroken—had trouble with his breathing apparatus. How such a rumor originated, nobody was just able to state, but it was the talk of the track, and it was given mention by one of the papers which paid much attention to sporting news. Nobody asked the owners about it, and they said nothing. Naturally, one is sensitive of speaking about the affliction of a member of his family. It is the same with owners and their horses.

"How will you make good when the time comes for demonstrating that 'Sausages' is a roarer, as given out unofficially by yourself, Hiram?" inquired the assistant arch-conspirator, somewhat anxiously.

"Don't worry, Jesse. When I say I've got the matter all worked out up here"—he tapped his forehead with his forefinger—"that ought to be sufficient. When the horse comes out for his warming up just before the race you'll be willin' to swear he's the worst old wheezer you ever heard. An old lady with a forty-year case of asthmy couldn't be any worse."

A few mornings later the test was applied, and James, who had not then been let in on the secret, would have bet a large sum that the horse which swept by him on the track, puffing like a small steam engine ascending a steep grade, was a pronounced "roarer."

"What you been doing to that horse, Hi? I don't like that. By——, if you've ruined that horse, I'll——" he began.

Hiram laughed until he was doubled up with the excess of his mirth. James became more indignant.

"It ain't the horse that's making that noise, Jesse," Waterhouse explained, finally. "It's the boy."

"What's that you say? It's the boy?" repeated James.

Waterhouse nodded and had another spasm of merriment. When he had recovered from his laughter he said:

"It's what the boy has on him that makes that funny wheezin' sound. I'll show you when we go over to his stall and the kid brings him back."

When the horse and rider had returned to the stall, Hiram carefully stripped the boy of his coat and shirt, revealing a cleverly-designed apparatus, something on the order of an accordion. The instrument was strapped to the boy's body, and so arranged that simply by the wearer digging his elbows into his sides the wheezing sound was produced. It was a very clever imitation.

"That thing cost me fifty dollars. I did a lot of thinking before I had it started. I went to a theatrical property maker in town, and told him I had to take the part of an asthmatic old gent in a melodrama, and I wanted something to help me out. He was a wise sort of a guy, and when we got our heads together we hatched this thing out."

"It works so good, Hi, that I'm afraid they won't let the horse run."

"Oh, yes, they will! We don't want to put it on too strong, you know. When the boy crouches over on the horse's neck coming around the paddock turn in the warm up before the race itself, I guess some of these bookmakers' touts will prick up their ears. I hope they do, for that's what I'm layin' for. We'll see if the price against 'Sausages' don't go up after that."

"You won't have the boy that rides in the race wear this here wheezer, will you?"

"Hell, no! What would be the good of it? This here kid will do the 'warm up' trick. Cadogan's going to ride in the race. You won't hear any blowing when our horse leads the others home."

On the afternoon of the day before "Getaway Day," when the all-eventful race was to be run, the partners watched for the appearance of the mimeographed entries for the morrow, and when they were given out in the paddock they took the sheet to one side and scanned carefully the names of the horses in the fifth race in which Sausalito had been entered, for they wished to see the class of racers against which their own would have to contend, and also the weights assigned.

Sausalito had been assigned an impost of one hundred and seventeen pounds, and the owners chuckled when they noted it. They were more than delighted when they discovered that, judging from the past performances of the others, their own racer could metaphorically "run rings around" any one of them.

That night Hiram composed his telegram, which told the poolroom commissioners to bet all the money on Sausalito, according to the code which had been arranged, and departed for the city to send off his message. Besides the visits he had made to his commissioners in person, he had written two or three letters to distant points. One of these missives had been to his brother in San Francisco. Pinned to the telegram was a list of the persons to whom the message was to be sent.

Waterhouse dropped into a branch office on Broadway and arranged for having the message transmitted. It was of several combinations of letters in length, and it cost no small amount to have it sent. The sender was anxious to have the message go at once, and was told that it would be rushed through as quickly as could be arranged.

"There's an important deal involved in that," he said. "I don't want to have any slip up on it."

As it happened, the message came into the hands of a young operator by the name of Grant—Winfield Scott Grant, or just plain "Winnie," as he was known to his fellows. He was a Westerner who had graduated from one of the side stations of a big railway line into a full fledged operator. He had been familiar with the tick of the telegraph key since he was old enough to toddle around after his father, who was station agent, telegrapher and everything combined. The boy had developed into a first-class operator, had gone to a big Western city, and on account of his ability had been given a place at the track where the races were going on.

That had been the turning point in Grant's life in one way. The betting spirit had become imbued in him, and, try as he would, he could not break himself of it. He made an excellent salary, but, situated as he was, with the air full of rumors concerning "good things," long shots "which cannot lose," and the like, he lost every cent he made. Coming East and being given a different line of work, he had been able to curb his betting propensities.

A year and a half before he had become engaged to the daughter of his landlady. Annie Falkner was a pretty young woman, who was deeply in love with Grant, and believed in him in every way. They were to have been married at least six months before, and Grant had saved up a sufficient sum for the couple to begin housekeeping with, when the unexpected happened. He was detailed as a track operator, and the old fever had come back to him. In a short while he had lost nearly every cent he had saved.

Although it caused him a terrible pang to do so, he had been forced to tell the girl that he had lost a large sum of money, and that their marriage would have to be postponed until he made up the amount lost. She did not doubt his sincerity, and had consented, not even questioning him as to how he had suffered the loss. Grant had gone to his chief, had told him the whole story, and begged to be transferred, even at a smaller salary. The transfer had been accomplished, the young fellow working in a broker's office during the day and at the regular job with the company at night. In this way he had saved between two and three hundred dollars.

The code message was handed to him by his head operator with the remark: "I bet that's some 'good thing' they're going to make a killing on to-morrow, Winnie. It's 'Getaway Day,' and the wire is to be sent to several big pool-room centers. If you can work out the answer to the code, there's a fortune in it for you."

It was like blowing a smoldering spark into a devouring flame.

The signature to the message, of course a "fake" name, was "High Reservoir." The combination of letters—not numbers, as generally used—was finally transmitted. In a spare moment the operator made a copy of the message. It was as follows:

Jqi. mknnkpi. Ucwuciigu. Igv dguv rtkeg. HIGH RESERVOIR.

As long as he worked that night, Winnie saw the combination of letters dancing before him. If the message was being sent out to so many points, he reasoned, there must be some good ground for believing that the horse would win. When he was through he asked the manager if he recollected the appearance of the man who had turned in the message to be transmitted. The other thought a little.

"As far as I remember, he was a little, dried-up sort of a chap, kind of sneaky-looking. Did he look like a horseman? Come to think of it, he did a bit. He seemed like he might be a racing man from the South or West."

Instead of going to bed as soon as he had reached his home, as was his custom, Grant sat in his room looking at the copy of the telegram. For some inexplicable reason, it seemed to him to be the key to a hidden fortune. He could not shake off that feeling. What if it really was a "tip" which might turn out right for once?

Taking a piece of paper, he began figuring on the letters with a view to reading the message. In the first place, he took the combination of the first three letters and substituted the preceding letter in the alphabet. Instead of the meaningless "Jqi" this gave him "Iph," just as meaningless. Then he worked it the other way without tangible result.

It was foolish for him to be wasting time at this, he concluded, and was about to stop. Then he decided to go back two letters in the alphabet. Idly he traced first a capital "H," then "o," next a "g," making the word "Hog." At least that meant something.

Starting with the next combination, "mknnkpi," he went back two letters in the alphabet, and got the word "killing." Much interested, he now pursued the same plan with the next jumble of letters, and got the word "Sausagges." That was not the way to spell Sausages, but an uneducated man might spell it in that manner.

Now for the last three words. He felt that they might explain the preceding ones. They read "Get best price." Even now that he had solved the whole thing, it was not very intelligible, being, as far as he could make out, an order for sausages: "Hog killing. Sausagges. Get best price."

The word "killing" appealed to him more than any of the others. He knew it was a favorite term of horsemen when a big betting operation was planned.

Like a flash it came to him that the signature "Reservoir" was a synonym for "Waterhouse," a Western owner whose name he had seen in a recent paper, in conjunction with that of his partner, regarding the ill luck which had attended the stable, particularly their racer, Sausalito. Feverishly he

hunted for the paper, but it had disappeared. He remembered the piece well, and it appeared to him that the given name of Waterhouse was Hiram, or "Hi," for short.

"Pshaw! I guess I'm going clean daffy over this thing," he said to himself as he retired. He could not sleep, however, for the words "Reservoir," "Waterhouse," "Sausagges" and "Sausalito" danced about unceasingly before his eyes. It was almost daybreak when he fell asleep.

When the young operator awoke, about noon, he could not shake off the impression that something was in store for him. In the list of entries for the day he saw that James and Waterhouse had three horses entered in as many different races. In the fifth race was Sausalito. Winnie finished his breakfast in a hurry, and telephoned down to the brokerage office that he could not work that day.

Feeling as if he was a fool for doing so, Grant went to the bank and drew out every cent he had on deposit. From there he took a train direct for the track.

"I'll find out whether they ever call their horse 'Sausages' or not," he declared to himself. "If they do—well, it's all my bank roll on that horse today, and, win or lose, it's the last bet I ever make. And that goes!" he ejaculated, savagely.

After some trouble and much inquiry, he discovered where the James and Waterhouse outfit, known as the "Golden West Stable," was located. Though not appearing to do so, he kept watch on the place, and before long he saw a man who answered the description of the one who sent the message. A passing stable man told him it was Hi Waterhouse. So far, excellent.

Grant remained in the vicinity for more than an hour, until after the races had started at the track, only a short distance away, and after Waterhouse and another man, whom the operator supposed was his partner, had gone off in the direction of the track.

It was not long before a freckle-faced boy came out of a stall, where he had been assisting in the rubbing down of one of the horses. Grant beckoned him over to where he was standing.

"Sonny, I'll give you a quarter if you tell me something," he said to the youngster.

"Depends what it is, mister," the boy promptly replied, looking at him sharply. "The boss don't like strangers comin' around askin' all kinds of questions. What is it?"

"Oh, I just wanted to know if you've got a horse in your string called 'Sausages,'" Grant replied, carelessly. "I bet a fellow there was, and he said he was sure nobody would be fool enough to call a horse by such a name as that. That's all."

The boy looked at him curiously a moment.

"That's not his right name, so you lose," he said, curtly. "His name is Sausalito, but we all call him 'Sausages,' just for fun."

Grant tossed him a quarter. The lad looked about him cautiously, and, coming up to the operator, said, in an undertone:

"It's reported he's a roarer." He winked. "Don't you believe it."

Grant started off to the race course, where he bought a ticket which would admit him to the grand stand and paddock. It was his determination now to see the thing through. The telegram he knew meant that a "killing" was to be made on Sausalito, or "Sausages."

Both of the James and Waterhouse horses had been beaten in the races in which they ran, and the horsemen were telling each other that the horse Sausalito, which had been brought over to the paddock, looked as if he had not been treated to a rubbing down for a week or more.

"They can't think much of his chances, when they let their former stake winner come out looking like that," said an owner who had a horse in the same race in which Sausalito was to run. He did not know that the horse had been given a thorough grooming that very morning, and that, just before he had been taken from his stall, he had been purposely made to look as much like a

disreputable, no-account race horse as possible.

"You'll have more respect for him when you see the way he throws dust in your horse's eyes all the way around the track," chuckled Waterhouse, who had overheard the remark. "I hope you'll bet every cent you've got on your horse, that's all I hope. It'll make the price the longer against 'Sausages.'"

Apparently the bookmakers did not think the Western horse had a chance, for they wrote ten to one against him at the opening, and soon after, feeling certain that he was not wanted even at that, raised the odds to fifteen.

After the track had been cleared of the racers in the fourth event, a stable boy, grinning from ear to ear, was given the leg up on Sausalito and moved out of the paddock to the track. At first he cantered slowly around to the back stretch and the boy let him out a little.

Waterhouse, watching down next the rail by his partner's side, muttered: "I hope he don't get away from that kid and show them what he really can do."

It was not a very fast clip that the horse put up, but as he came down the stretch, on the rail, the ones who had taken enough interest in the horse to watch him move heard a wheezing which increased as the boy dug his elbows into his sides and slowed up to a walk just opposite the betting ring.

Fortunately, Grant did not see the horse exercise or hear the wheezing, but he did see the price against Sausalito lengthen. Not a whit dismayed, he bet every cent he had on the horse.

It was about the time that Waterhouse and James, peculiarly alert now, considering their previous inertness and apathy, were busying themselves about their candidate, testing every strap, rubbing their horse, even speaking to him in soothing tones, that telegrams were received by members of the bookmakers' association. Every telegram was in effect, if not in so many words:

Big money going on Sausalito? Is there anything to warrant? Would like to lay a few thousands at the track.

Some of the more timid of the "bookies" cut down their odds. Others gladly accepted commissions from the poolrooms, which were hedging on the bets already made.

Grant, lurking innocently near the Waterhouse and James horse, heard old Hiram whisper to the jockey, Cadogan:

"Don't win as far as you can, boy, but if you draw it so fine as to make me think you're trying for a grand-stand finish, I'll skin you alive."

Off!

Grant, watching the start, excited but confident, saw the tall, rangy Western horse take the lead from the rise of the barrier.

Sausalito simply won as he pleased. He never appeared to exert himself in the slightest. At the finish he was two lengths ahead of the second horse. If he had been a "roarer" he had been cured in most mysterious fashion, for not a suspicion of a wheeze did he let out after it was over.

"And to think the stable didn't bet a cent on his chance, gentlemen!" said the hypocrite Waterhouse, impersonally, to the group of horsemen gathered about the horse after he had been declared the winner. "I can prove it, if you want," he declared, fiercely, now directing his remarks to a mild-looking spectator who had not opened his mouth. "All you've got to do is to look over the bookmakers' sheets." Still nobody had uttered a word of protest.

"Take him back to his stall, Jim," continued Hiram, in such a mournful tone that bystanders would have thought the horse had played a low-down trick on him by winning.

"It takes brains more than anything else to win races in this part of the country, Jesse," Hiram said to his partner, when they were alone in the stall with the winner. "Californy's a heap closer than it was a few days ago."

Grant remained at the track no longer than it took to collect his winnings. He hurried straight home to where a sweet-faced girl was waiting to welcome him.

THE END.

THE BETRAYAL

BY E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Author of "The Yellow Crayon," "A Prince of Sinners," Etc.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

I LOSE MY POST.

THE duke solemnly closed the door. "Ray," he said, "I am glad that you are here. Something serious has happened. Mr. Ducaine, Lord Chelsford and I desire to ask you a few questions."

I bowed. What was coming I could not indeed imagine, unless Ray had already made the disclosure.

"The word code for the safe to-day was Magenta, I believe?" the duke asked.

"That is correct, sir," I answered.

"And it was known to whom?"

"To Lord Chelsford, yourself, Colonel Ray and myself," I answered.

"And what was there in the safe?" the duke asked.

"The plans for the Guildford Camp, the new map of Surrey pricked for fortifications, and one or two transport schemes," I answered.

"Exactly! Those documents are now all missing."

I strode to the safe and looked in. It was as the duke had said. The safe was practically empty.

"They were there this morning," I said. "It was arranged that I should examine the contents of the safe the first thing, and take any finished work over to the war office. Do you remember who has been in the room to-day, sir?"

"Yourself, myself and the woman whom you brought here an hour or so ago."

"Mrs. Smith-Lessing?" I exclaimed.

"Precisely!" the duke remarked, dryly.

"Did you leave her alone here?" I asked.

"For two minutes only," the duke answered. "I was called up on the telephone from the House of Lords. I did not imagine that there could be the slightest risk in leaving her, for without the knowledge of that word Magenta the safe would defy a professional locksmith."

"You will forgive my suggesting it, your grace," I said, with some hesitation, "but you have not, I presume, had occasion to go to the safe during the day?"

"I have not," the duke answered, tersely.

"Then I cannot suggest any explanation of the opening of the safe," I admitted. "It was impossible for Mrs. Smith-Lessing to have opened it unless she knew the code word."

"The question is," the duke said, quietly, "did she know it?"

Then I realized the object of this cross-examination. The color flared suddenly into my cheeks, and as suddenly left them. The absence of those papers was extraordinary to me. I utterly failed to understand it.

"I think I know what you mean, sir," I said. "It is true that Mrs. Smith-Lessing is my stepmother. I believe it is true, too, that she is connected with the French secret police. I was there this afternoon—you yourself sent me.

This serial began in the June number. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

But I did not tell Mrs. Smith-Lessing the code word, and I know nothing of the disappearance of those documents."

Then Ray moved forward and placed deliberately upon the table the roll of papers which I had given up to him a few hours ago.

"What about these?" he asked, with biting scorn. "Tell the duke and Lord Chelsford where I found them! Let us hear your glib young tongue telling the truth for once, sir."

Both the duke and Lord Chelsford were obviously startled. Ray had always been my friend and upholder. He spoke now with very apparent enmity.

"Perhaps you would prefer to tell the story yourself," I answered. "I will correct you if it is necessary."

"Very well," he answered. "I will tell the story, and a pitiful one it is. This boy is watched, as we all know, for, owing to my folly in ignoring his antecedents, a great trust has been reposed in him. News was brought to me that he had been seen with his father and Mrs. Smith-Lessing in Gattini's restaurant. Later, that he had found his way to their lodging. I followed him there. He may have gone there with an errand from you, duke, but when I arrived he was doing a little business on his own account, and these papers were in the act of passing from him to his father."

"What are they?" Lord Chelsford asked.

"Your lordship may recognize them," I answered, quietly. "They are a summary of the schemes of defense of the southern ports. I was at that moment, the moment when Colonel Ray entered, considering an offer of five thousand pounds for them."

Even Ray was staggered at my admission, and the duke looked as though he could scarcely believe his ears. Lord Chelsford was busy looking through the papers.

"You young blackguard," Ray muttered through his teeth. "After that admission, do you still deny that you told Mrs. Smith-Lessing, or whatever the woman calls herself, the code word for that safe?"

"Most certainly I deny it," I answered, firmly. "The two things are wholly disconnected."

The duke sat down heavily in his chair. I knew very well that of the three men he was the most surprised. Lord Chelsford carefully placed the papers which he had been reading in his breast pocket. Ray leaned over toward him.

"Lord Chelsford," he said, "and you, duke, you took this young man on trust, and I pledged my word for him. Like many a better man, I made a mistake. For all that we know, he has secret copies of all the work he has done for us, ready to dispose of. What, in God's name, are we going to do with him?"

"What do you suggest?" Lord Chelsford asked, softly.

"My way would not be yours," Ray answered, with a hard laugh. "I am only half civilized, you know, and if he and I were alone in the desert at this moment I would shoot him without remorse. Such a breach of trust as this deserves death."

"We are, unfortunately," Lord Chelsford remarked, "not in a position to adopt such extreme measures. It would not even be wise for us to attempt to formulate a legal charge against him. The position is somewhat embarrassing. What do you suggest, duke?"

I glanced toward the duke, and I was surprised to see that his hands were shaking. For a man who rarely displayed feeling the duke seemed to be wonderfully affected.

"I can suggest nothing," he answered, in a low tone. "I must confess that I am bewildered. These matters have developed so rapidly."

Lord Chelsford looked thoughtful for a moment.

"I have a plan in my mind," he said, slowly. "Duke, should I be taking a liberty if I asked to be left alone with this young man for five minutes?"

The duke rose slowly to his feet. He had the air of one not altogether approving of the suggestion. Ray glowered upon us both, but offered no objection. They left the room together. Lord Chelsford at once turned to me.

"Ducaine," he said, "forgive me that I did not come to your aid. I will see that you do not suffer later on. But what in Heaven's name is the meaning of this last abstraction from the safe?"

I shook my head.

"The woman could never have guessed the word!" I said.

"Impossible!" he agreed. "Ducaine, do you know why Lord Blenavon left England so suddenly?"

"Colonel Ray knows, sir," I answered.

Lord Chelsford became thoughtful.

"Ducaine," he said, "we are in a fix. So far your plan has worked to perfection. Paris has plenty of false information, and your real copies have all reached me safely. But if you leave, how is this to be carried on? I do not know whom I mistrust, but if the day's work of the board is really to be left in the safe, either here or at Braster——"

"You must choose my successor yourself, sir," I interrupted.

"The duke has always opposed my selections. Besides, you have prepared your false copies with rare skill. Even I was deceived for a moment just now by your summary. You don't overdo it. Everything is just a little wrong. I am not sure even now whether I should not do better to tell Ray and the duke the truth."

"I am in your hands, sir," I answered. "You must do as you think best."

"They will be back in a moment. It is absurd to doubt either of them, Ducaine. Yet I shall keep silent. I have an idea. Agree to everything I say."

The duke and Ray returned together. Lord Chelsford turned to them.

"Mr. Ducaine," he said, coldly, "persists in his denial of any knowledge of to-day's affair. With regard to the future, I have offered him his choice of an arrest on the charge of *espionage*, or a twelve months' cruise on the *Ajax*, which leaves to-morrow for China. He has chosen the latter. I shall take steps, of course, to see that he is not allowed to land at any calling place, or dispatch letters."

Ray smiled a little cruelly.

"The idea is an excellent one, Chelsford," he said. "When did you say that the *Ajax* sailed?"

"To-morrow," Lord Chelsford answered. "I propose to take Mr. Ducaine to my house to-night, and to hand him over to the charge of a person on whom I can thoroughly rely."

The duke looked at me curiously.

"Mr. Ducaine consents to go?" he asked.

"It is a voyage which I have long desired to take," I answered, coolly, "though I never expected to enjoy it at my country's expense."

The duke rang the bell.

"Will you have Mr. Ducaine's things packed and sent across—did you say to your house, Lord Chelsford?"

"To my house," Lord Chelsford assented.

"To No. 19 Grosvenor Square," the duke ordered. "Mr. Ducaine will not be returning."

Lord Chelsford rose. I followed his example. Neither the duke nor Ray attempted any form of farewell. The former, however, laid some notes upon the table.

"I believe, Mr. Ducaine," he said, "that there is a month's salary due to you. I have added something to the amount. Until to-day I have always considered your duties admirably fulfilled."

I looked at the notes, and at the duke.

"I thank your grace," I answered. "I will take the liberty of declining your gift. My salary has been fully paid."

For a moment I fancied I caught a softer gleam in Ray's eyes. He seemed about to speak, but checked himself. Lord Chelsford hurried me from the room, and into his little brougham, which was waiting.

"Do you really mean me to go to China, sir?" I asked him, anxiously.

"Not I!" he answered. "I am going to send you to Braster."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LORD CHELSFORD'S DIPLOMACY.

I dined alone with Lord and Lady Chelsford. From the moment of our

arrival at Chelsford House, my host had encouraged nothing but the most general conversation. It happened that they were alone, and a great dinner party had been postponed at the last moment owing to some royal indisposition. Lord Chelsford in his wife's presence was careful to treat me as an ordinary guest; but directly she had left the room and we were alone he abandoned his reticence.

"Mr. Ducaine," he said, "from the time of our last conversation at the war office and our subsequent *tête-à-tête* I have reposed in you the most implicit confidence."

"I have done my best, sir," I answered, "to deserve it."

"I believe you," he declared. "I am going now to extend it. I am going to tell you something which will probably surprise you very much. Since the first time when you found your documents tampered with, every map and every word of writing intrusted to the safe, either at Braster House or Cavendish Square, has been got at. Exact copies of them are in Paris to-day."

I looked at him in blank amazement. The thing seemed impossible.

"But in very many cases," I protested, "the code word for opening the safe has been known only to Colonel Ray, the duke and myself."

"The fact remains as I have stated it," Lord Chelsford said, slowly. "My information is positive. When you came to me and suggested that you should make two copies of everything, one correct, one a mass of incorrectness, I must admit that I thought the idea far-fetched and unworkable. Events, however, have proved otherwise. I have safely received everything which you sent me, and up to the present, with the exception of that first plan of the Winchester forts, our secrets are unknown. But now we have come to a dead block."

"If you do not mind telling me, Lord Chelsford, I should very much like to know why you did not explain the exact circumstances to Ray and the duke this afternoon."

Lord Chelsford nodded.

"I thought that you would ask that," he said. "It is not altogether an easy question to answer. Remember this: The French war office is to-day in possession of an altogether false scheme of our proposed defenses—a scheme which, if they continue to regard it as genuine, should prove nothing short of disastrous to them. Only you and I are in the secret at present. Positively, I did not feel that I cared to extend that knowledge to a single other person."

"But you might have told Colonel Ray and the duke separately," I remarked. "The duke has never been my friend, and Ray has other causes for being angry with me just at present; but between them they rescued me from something like starvation, and it is terrible for them to think of me as they are doing now."

Lord Chelsford poured himself out a glass of wine, and held it up to the light for a moment.

"Mr. Ducaine," he said, "a secret is a very subtle thing. Though the people who handle it are men of the most unblemished honor and reputation, still the fewer they are, the safer the life of that secret."

"But the duke and Colonel Ray!" I protested.

"I might remind you," Lord Chelsford said, smiling, "that those are precisely the two persons who shared with you the knowledge of the word which opened the safe."

I laughed.

"I presume that you do not suspect either of them?" I remarked.

"The absurdity is obvious," Lord Chelsford answered. "But the force of my former remark remains. I like that secret better when it rests between you and me. It means, I know, that for a time—I promise you that it shall be only for a time—you must lose your friends, but the cause is great enough, and it should be within our power to reward you later on."

"Oh, I am willing enough," I answered. "But may I ask what you are going to do with me?"

Lord Chelsford smoked in silence for several moments.

"Mr. Ducaine," he said, "who is there in the household of the duke who opens

that safe and copies those papers? Who is the traitor?"

"God only knows!" I answered. "It is a hopeless mystery."

"Yet we must solve it," Lord Chelsford said, "and quickly. If a single batch of genuine maps and plans were tampered with, disparities would certainly appear, and the thing might be suspected. Besides, upon the face of it, the thing is terribly serious."

"You have a plan?" I said.

"I have," Lord Chelsford answered, calmly. "You remember Grooton?"

"Certainly! He was a servant at Braster."

"And the very faithful servant of his country also," Lord Chelsford remarked. "You know, I believe, that he was a secret service man. He is entirely safe, and I have sent for him. Now, I imagine that the duke will wish our new secretary to live still at the 'Brand'—he preferred it in your case, as you will remember. Our new secretary is going to be my nephew. He is very stolid and honest, and fortunately not a chatterbox. He is going to be the nominal secretary, but I want you to be the one who really does the work."

"I am afraid I don't understand!" I was forced to admit.

"It will mean," Lord Chelsford said, "some privation and a great deal of inconvenience for you. But I am going to ask you to face it, for the end to be gained is worth it. I want you also to be at the 'Brand,' but to lie hidden all the daytime. You can have one of the upstairs rooms fitted as a writing room. Then you and my nephew can do the transposition. And beyond all that, I want you to think—to think and to watch."

My heart leaped with joy to think that, after all, I was not to go into exile. Then the quiet significance of Lord Chelsford's last words were further impressed upon me by the added gravity of his manner.

"Mr. Ducaine," he said, "you must see for yourself that I am running a very serious risk in making these plans with you behind the backs of the Duke of Rowchester and Colonel Ray. The duke is a man of the keenest sense of honor, as his recent commercial transactions have shown. He has parted with a hundred thousand pounds rather than that the shadow of a stigma should rest upon his name. He is also my personal friend, and very sensitive of any advice or criticism. Then, Ray—a V. C., and one of the most popular soldiers in England to-day—he also is quick-tempered, and he also is my friend. You can see for yourself that in acting, as I am, behind the backs of these men, I am laying myself open to very grave trouble. Yet I see no alternative. There is a rank traitor either on the military board or closely connected with the duke's household. He does not know it, nor do they know it, but everyone of his servants has been vigorously and zealously watched without avail. The circle has been drawn closer and closer, Mr. Ducaine. Down in Braster you may be able to help me in narrowing it down till only one person is within it. Listen!"

Lady Chelsford entered, gorgeous in white satin and a flaming tiara. She looked at me, I thought, a little gravely.

"Morton," she said, "I want you to spare me a minute. Mr. Ducaine will excuse you, I am sure."

Lord Chelsford and she left the room together. I, feeling the heat of the apartment, walked to the window, and, raising the sash, looked out into the cool, dark evening. At the door, drawn up in front of Lord Chelsford's brougham, was a carriage with a tall footman standing facing me. I recognized him and the liveries in a moment. It was the Rowchester carriage. Some one from Rowchester House was even now with Lord and Lady Chelsford.

Fresh complications, then! Had the duke come to see me off, or had his suspicions been aroused? Was he even now insisting upon an explanation with Lord Chelsford? The minutes passed, and I began to get restless and anxious. Then the door opened, and Lord Chelsford entered alone. He came over at once to my side. He was looking perplexed and a little annoyed.

"Ducaine," he said, "Lady Angela Harberly is here."

I started, and I suppose my face betrayed me.

"Lady Angela—here?"

"And she wishes to see you," he continued. "Lady Chelsford is chaperoning her to-night to Suffolk House, but she says that she should have come here in any case. She believes that you are going to China."

"Did you tell her?" I asked.

"I have told her nothing," he answered. "The question is, what you are to tell her. I understand, Ducaine, that Lady Angela was engaged to be married to Colonel Ray."

"I believe that she is," I admitted.

"Then I do not understand her desire to see you," Lord Chelsford said. "The Duke of Rowchester is my friend and relative, Ducaine, and I do not see how I can permit this interview."

"And I," said a quiet, thrilling voice behind his back, "do not know how you are going to prevent it."

She closed the door behind her. She was so frail and so delicately beautiful in her white gown, with the ropes of pearls around her neck, the simply parted hair, and her dark eyes were so plaintive and yet so tender, that the angry exclamation died away on Lord Chelsford's lips.

"Angela," he said, "Mr. Ducaine is here. You can speak with him if you will, but it must be in my presence. You must not think that I do not trust you—both of you. But I owe this condition to your father."

She came over to me very timidly. She seemed to me so beautiful, so exquisitely childish, that I touched the fingers of the hand she gave me with a feeling of positive reverence.

"You have come to wish me Godspeed," I murmured. "I shall never forget it."

"You are really going, then?"

"I am going for a little time out of your life, Lady Angela," I answered. "It is necessary; Lord Chelsford knows that. But I am not going in disgrace. I am very thankful to be able to tell you that."

"It was not necessary to tell me," she answered. "Am I not here?"

I bent low over her hand, which rested still in mine.

"Mine is not a purposeless exile—nor altogether an unhappy one—now," I said. "I have work to do, Lady Angela, and I am going to it with a good heart. When we meet again I hope that it may be differently. Your coming—the memory of it—will stand often between me and loneliness. It will sweeten the very bitterest of my days."

"You are really going—to China?" she murmured.

I glanced toward Lord Chelsford. His back was turned to us. If he understood the meaning of my pause he made no sign.

"I may not tell you where I am going or why," I answered. "But I will tell you this, Lady Angela. I shall come back, and as you have come to see me to-night, so shall I come to you before long. If you will trust me I will prove myself worthy of it."

She did not answer me with any word at all, but with a sudden little forward movement gave me both her hands, and I saw that her eyes were swimming in tears. Yet they shone into mine like stars, and I saw heaven there.

"I am sorry," Lord Chelsford said, gravely interposing, "but Lady Chelsford will be waiting for you, Angela. And I think that I must ask you to remember that I cannot sanction, or appear by my silence to sanction, anything of this sort."

So he led her away, but what did I care? My heart was beating with the rapture of her backward glance. I cared neither for Ray nor the duke, nor any living person. For with me it was the one supreme moment of a man's lifetime, come, too, at the very moment of my despair. I was no longer at the bottom of the pit. The wonderful gates stood open.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY.

I called softly to Grooton from my room upstairs.

"Grooton!"

"Yes, sir."

"You are alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is Mr. Hill still up at the court?"

"He will be there until midnight, sir."

A gust of wind came suddenly roaring through the wood, drowning even the muffled thunder of the sea below. The rain beat upon the window panes. The little house, strongly built though it was, seemed to quiver from its very foundations. I caught up my overcoat and boldly descended the narrow staircase. Grooton stood at the bottom, holding a lamp in his hand.

"You are quite safe to-night, sir," he said. "There'll be no one about in such a storm."

I stood still for a moment. The raging and tearing the sea below had momentarily triumphed over the north wind.

"The trees in the spinny are snapping like twigs, sir," Grooton remarked. "There's one lying right across the path outside. But you'll excuse me, sir—you're not going out!"

"I think so, Grooton," I answered, "for a few minutes. Remember that I have been a prisoner here for three days. I'm dying for some fresh air."

"I don't think it's hardly safe, sir," he protested, deprecatingly. "Not that there's any fear of your being seen—the wind's enough to carry you over the cliff."

"I shall risk it, Grooton," I answered. "I think that the wind is going down, and there won't be a soul about. It's too good a chance to miss."

I waited for a momentary lull, and then I opened the door and slipped out. The first breath of cold, strong air was like wine to me after my confinement, but a moment later I felt my breath taken away, and I was lifted almost from my feet by a sudden gust. I linked my arm around the trunk of a swaying pine tree and hung there till the lull came. Up into the darkness from that unseen gulf below came showers of spray, white as snow, falling like rain all about me. It was a night to remember.

Presently I turned inland and reached the park. I left the footpath so that I should avoid all risk of meeting anyone, and followed the wire fencing which divided the park from the belt of fir trees bordering the road. I walked for a few hundred yards, and then stopped short.

I had reached the point where that long, straight road from Braster turned sharply away inland for the second time. At a point about a quarter of a mile away, and rapidly approaching me, came a twin pair of flaring eyes. I knew at once what they were—the headlights of a motor car. Without a moment's hesitation I doubled back to the "Brand."

"Grooton!" I called, sharply.

Grooton appeared.

"Is anyone at Braster Grange?" I asked.

"Not that I have heard of, sir," he answered.

"You do not know whether Mrs. Smith-Lessing is expected back?"

"I have not heard, sir. They left no servants there—not even a caretaker."

I stepped back again into the night and took the shortest cut across the park to the house. As I neared the entrance gates I left the path and crept up close to the plantation which bordered the road. My heart gave a jump as I listened. I could hear the low, level throbbing of a motor somewhere quite close at hand. The lights had been extinguished, but it was there waiting. I did not hesitate any longer. I kept on the turf by the side of the avenue and made my way up to the house.

The library alone and one small window on the ground floor were lit. I crept up on the terrace and tried to peer in, but across each of the library windows the curtains were too closely drawn. There remained the small window at the end of the terrace. I crept on tiptoe toward this, feeling my way through the darkness by the front of the house. Suddenly I came to a full stop. I flattened myself against the stonework and held my breath. Some one else was on the terrace. What I had heard was unmistakable. It was the wind blowing among a woman's

skirts, and the woman was very close at hand.

I almost felt her warm breath as she stole past me. I caught a gleam of a pale face, sufficient to tell me who she was. She passed on and took up her stand outside that small end window.

I, too, crept nearer to it. About a yard away there was a projection of the front. I stole into the deep corner and waited. A few feet from me I knew that she, too, was waiting.

Half an hour, perhaps an hour, passed. My ears became trained to all sounds that were not absolutely deadened by the roar of the wind. I heard the crash of falling boughs in the wood, the more distant but unchanging thunder of the sea, the sharp spitting of the rain upon the stone walk. And I heard the opening of the window by the side of which I was leaning.

I was only just in time. Through the raised sash there came a hand, holding a packet of some sort, and out of the darkness came another hand eagerly stretched out to receive it. I brushed it ruthlessly aside, tore the packet from the fingers which suddenly strove to retain it, and with my other hand I caught the arm a little above the wrist. I heard the flying footsteps of my fellow watcher, but I did not even turn round. A fierce joy was in my heart. Now I was to know. The veil of mystery which had hung over the doings at Braster was to be swept aside. I stooped down till my eyes were within a few inches of the hand. I passed my fingers over it. I felt the ring——

Then I remembered only that mad, headlong flight back across the park, where the very air seemed full of sobbing, mocking voices, and the ground beneath my feet swayed and heaved. I could not even think coherently. I heard the motor go tearing down the road past me, and come to a standstill at the turn. Still, I had no thought of any danger. It never occurred to me to leave the footpath and make my way back to the "Brand," as I might well have done, by a more circuitous route. I kept on the footpath, and just as I reached the little iron gate which led into the spinny I felt a man's arm suddenly flung around my neck, and with a jerk I was thrown almost off my feet.

"He is here, madame," I heard a low voice say. "Take the papers from him. I have him safe."

I think that my desperate humor lent me more than my usual strength. With a fierce effort I wrenched myself free. Almost immediately I heard the click of a revolver.

"If you move," a low voice said, "I fire!"

"What do you want?" I asked.

"The papers."

I laughed bitterly.

"Are they worth my life?" I asked.

"The life of a dozen such as you," the man answered. "Quick! Hand them over."

Then I heard a little cry from the woman who had been standing a few feet off. In the struggle I had lost my cap, and a faint, watery moon, half hidden by a ragged bank of black clouds, was shining weakly down upon us.

"Guy!" she cried, and her voice was shaking as though with terror. "Guy, is that you?"

I lost my self-control. I forgot her sex, I forgot everything except that she was responsible for this unspeakable corruption. I said terrible things to her. And she listened, white—calm—speechless. When I had finished she signed to the man to leave us. He hesitated, but with a more peremptory gesture she dismissed him.

"Guy," she said, "you have not spared me. Perhaps I do not deserve it. Now listen. The whole thing is at an end. Those few papers are all we want. Your father is already in France. I am leaving at once. Give me those papers and you will be rid of us forever. If you do not I must stay on until I have received copies of a portion of them, at any rate. You know very well now that I can do this. Give me those that you have. It will be safer—in every way."

"Give them to you?" I answered, scornfully. "Are you serious?"

"Very serious, Guy. Do you not see

that the sooner it is all over, the better —the safer—up there?"

She pointed toward the house. I could have struck the white fingers with their loathsome meaning.

"I shall take this packet to Lord Chelsford," I said. "I am down here as a spy—a spy upon spies. He is up at the house now, and to-morrow this packet will be in his hands. I shall tell him how I secured it. I think that after that you will not have many opportunities for plying your cursed trade."

"You know the consequences?"

"They are not my concern," I answered, coldly.

She looked over her shoulder.

"If I," she said, "were as unwavering in my duty as you I should call Jean back."

"I am indifferent," I answered. "I do not value my life enough to shrink from fighting for it."

She turned away.

"You are very young, Guy," she said, "and you talk like a very young man. You must go your own way. Send for Lord Chelsford, if you will. But remember all that it will mean. Can't you see that such stern morality as yours is the most exquisite form of selfishness? Good-by, Guy."

She glided away. I reached the "Brand" undisturbed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TRAITOR.

"I do not understand you, Ducaine," Lord Chelsford said, slowly. "You have been a faithful and valuable servant to your country, and you know very well that your services are not likely to be forgotten. I want you only to be consistent. I must know from whom you received this packet."

"I cannot tell you, sir," I answered. "It was a terribly dark night, and it is not easy to identify a hand. Besides, it was snatched away almost at once."

"In your own mind, Ducaine," Chelsford said, "have you hazarded a guess as to who that unseen person might be?"

"It is too serious a matter to hazard guesses about, sir," I answered.

"Nevertheless," Lord Chelsford continued, eying me closely, "in your own mind you know very well who that person was. You are a bad liar, Ducaine. There was something about the hand which told you the truth—a ring, perhaps. At any rate, something."

"I had no time to feel for such things, sir," I answered.

"Ducaine," Lord Chelsford said, "I am forced to connect your refusal to hazard even a surmise as to the identity of that hand, with your sudden desire to break off all connection with this matter. I am forced to come to a conclusion, Ducaine. You have discovered the truth. You know the traitor!"

"On the contrary, Lord Chelsford," I answered, "I know nothing."

Later in the day he came to me again. I could see that he had made no fresh discovery.

"Ducaine," he said, "what time did you say that you left here last night?"

"At midnight, sir."

"And you were back?"

"Before one."

"That corresponds exactly with Grooton's statement," Lord Chelsford said. "And yet I have certain information that from a few minutes before eleven till two o'clock not one member of the military board quitted the library."

I bowed.

"That is conclusive," I remarked.

"It is remarkably inconclusive to me," Lord Chelsford remarked, grimly. "Whom else save one of your friends who are all upon the board could you possibly wish to shield?"

"That I even wish to do so," I answered, "is purely an assumption."

"You are fencing with me, young man," Lord Chelsford said, grimly, "and it is not worth while. Hush!"

There was a rap at the door downstairs. We heard the duke's measured tones.

"I understood that Lord Chelsford was here," he said.

"Lord Chelsford has left, your grace," Grooton answered.

"And Mr. Hill?"

"He has been at the house all day, your grace."

The duke appeared to hesitate for a moment.

"Grooton," he said, "I rely upon you to see that Lord Chelsford has this note shortly. I am going for a little walk, and shall probably return this way. I wish you to understand that this note is for Lord Chelsford's own hand."

"Certainly, your grace."

"Not only that, Grooton, but the fact that I called here and left a communication for Lord Chelsford is also—to be forgotten."

"I quite understand, your grace," Grooton assured him.

The duke struck a match, and a moment or two later we saw him strolling along the cliff side, smoking a cigarette, his hands behind him, prim, carefully dressed, walking with the measured ease of a man seeking an appetite for his dinner. He was scarcely out of sight, and Lord Chelsford was on the point of descending for his note, when my heart gave a great leap. Lady Angela emerged from the plantation and crossed the open space in front of the cottage with swift footsteps. Her hair was streaming in the breeze, as though she had been running, but there was not a vestige of color in her cheeks. Her eyes, too, were like the eyes of a frightened child.

Lord Chelsford descended the stairs and himself admitted her.

"Why, Angela," he exclaimed, "you look as though you had seen a ghost. Is anything the matter?"

"Oh, I am afraid so," she answered. "Have you seen my father?"

"Why?" he asked, fingering the note which Grooton had silently laid upon the table.

"Something has happened!" she exclaimed. "I am sure of it. Last night he came to me before dinner. He told me that Blenavon was in trouble. It was necessary to send him money by a special messenger, by the only person who knew his whereabouts. He gave me a packet, and he told me that at a quarter past twelve last night I was to be in my music-room, and directly the stable clock struck that I was to open the window, and some one would be there on the terrace and take the packet. I did exactly as he told me, and there was some one there; but I had just held out the packet when a third person snatched it away, and held my hand close to his eyes as though to try and guess who I was. I managed to get it away and close the window, but I think that the wrong person must have taken the packet. I told my father to-day, and—you know that terribly still look of his. I thought that he was never going to speak again. When I asked him if there was a good deal of money in it, he only groaned."

Up on the top of the stairs I was shaking with excitement. I heard Lord Chelsford speak, and his voice was hoarse.

"Since then," he asked, "what?"

"A man came to see father. He drove from Wells. He looked like a Frenchman, but he gave no name. He was in the library for an hour. When he left he walked straight out of the house and drove away again. I went into the library, and—you know how strong father is—he was crouching forward across the table, muttering to himself. It was like some sort of a fit. He did not know me when I spoke to him. Lord Chelsford, what does it all mean?"

"Go on!" he answered. "Tell me the rest."

"There is nothing else," she faltered. "He got better presently, and he kissed me. I have never known him to do such a thing before, except at morning or night. And then he locked himself in the study and wrote. About an hour afterward I heard him asking everywhere for you. The servants thought that you had come here. I saw him crossing the park, so I followed."

Lord Chelsford came to the bottom of the stairs and called me by name. I heard Lady Angela's little cry of surprise. I was downstairs in a moment, and she came straight into my arms. Her dear, tear-stained little face buried itself upon my shoulder.

"I am so thankful, so thankful that you are here," she murmured.

And all the while, with the face of a man forced into the presence of tragedy, Lord Chelsford was reading that letter. When he had finished his hands were shaking and his face was gray. He moved over to the fireplace, and, without a moment's hesitation, he thrust the letter into the flames. Not content with that, he stood over it, poker in hand, and beat the ashes into pieces. Then he turned to the door.

"Take care of Angela, Ducaine," he exclaimed, and hurried out.

But Lady Angela had taken alarm. She hastened after him, dragging me with her. Lord Chelsford was past middle age, but he was running along the cliff path like a boy. We followed. Lady Angela would have passed him, but I held her back. She did not speak a word. Some vague prescience of the truth even then, I think, had dawned upon her.

We must have gone a mile before we came in sight of the duke. He was strolling along, only dimly visible in the gathering twilight, still apparently smoking and with the air of a man taking a leisurely promenade. He was toiling up the side of the highest cliff in the neighborhood, and once we saw him turn seaward and take off his hat as though enjoying the breeze. Just as he neared the summit he looked round. Lord Chelsford waved his hand and shouted.

"Rowchester!" he cried. "Hi! Wait for me."

The duke waved his hand as though in salute, and turned apparently with the object of coming to meet us. But at that moment, without any apparent cause, he lurched over toward the cliff side, and we saw him fall. Lady Angela's cry of frenzied horror was the most awful thing I had ever heard. Lord Chelsford took her into his arms.

"Climb down, Ducaine," he gasped. "I'm done!"

I found the duke on the shingles, curiously unmangled. He had the appearance of a man who had found death restful.

CHAPTER XL.

THE THEORIES OF A NOVELIST.

The novelist smiled. He had been buttonholed by a very great man, which pleased him. He raised his voice a little. There were others standing around. He fancied himself already the center of the group. He forgot the greatness of the great man.

"In common with many other people, my dear marquis," he said, "you labor under a great mistake. Human character is governed by as exact laws as the physical world. Give me a man's characteristics, and I will undertake to tell you exactly how he will act under any given circumstances. It is a question of mathematics. We all carry with us, inherited or acquired, a certain amount of resistance to evil influence, certain predilections toward good, and vice versa, according as we are decent fellows or blackguards. Some natures are more complex than others, of course—that only means that the weighing up of the good and evil in them is a more difficult matter. There are experts who can tell you the weight of a haystack by looking at it, and there are others who are able at Christmas time to indulge in an unquenchable thirst by accurately computing the weight, down to ounces, of the pig or turkey raffled for at their favorite public house. So the trained student of his fellows can also diagnose his subjects and anticipate their actions."

The marquis smiled.

"You analytical novelists would destroy for us the whole romance of life," he declared. "I will not listen to you any longer. I fear ignorance less than disillusion!"

He passed on, and the little group at once dispersed. The novelist was left alone. He went off in a huff. Lord Chelsford plucked me by the arm.

"Let us sit down, Ducaine," he said. "What rubbish these men of letters talk!"

I glanced toward the ballroom, but my companion shook his head.

"Angela is dancing with the Portu-

guese ambassador," he said, "and he will never give up his ten minutes afterward. You must pay the penalty of having married the most beautiful woman in London, Guy, and sit out with the old fogies. What rubbish that fellow did talk!"

"You are thinking——" I murmured.

"Of the duke? Yes! There was a man who to all appearance was a typical English gentleman, proud, sensitive of his honor, in every action which came before the world a right-dealing and a right-doing man. To do what seemed right to him from one point of view he stripped himself of lands and fortune, and when that was not enough he stooped to unutterable baseness. He was willing to betray his country to justify his own sense of personal honor."

"In justice to him," I said, "one must remember that he never for a moment believed in the possibility of a French invasion."

Lord Chelsford shook his head.

"It is too nice a point," he declared. "We may not reckon it in his favor. I wonder how our friends on the other side felt when they knew that they had paid fifty thousand pounds for false information? We ought to make you a peer, Ducaine. The Trogoldy money would stand it."

"For Heaven's sake, don't!" I cried. "What have I done that you should want to banish me into the pastures?"

"You talk too much," my companion murmured. "In the Lords it wouldn't matter, but in the Commons you are a nuisance. I suppose you want to be taken into the cabinet?"

"Quite true!" I admitted. "You want young men there, and I am ready any time."

"A man with a wife like yours," Lord Chelsford remarked, thoughtfully, "is bound to go anywhere he wants. Then he sits down and takes all the credit to himself."

Angela passed on the arm of the ambassador. She waved her hand gayly to us, but her companion drew her firmly away. We both looked after her admiringly.

"Guy," Lord Chelsford said, "we have both of us done some good work in our time, but never anything better than the way we managed to hoodwink everybody, even herself, about her father. Among the middle classes he remains a canonized saint, the man who pauperized himself for their sakes. Ray was too full of Blenavon's little aberrations to suspect anyone else, and our friends from across the water who might—I mean the woman—have been inclined for a little blackmail, were obliging enough to make a final disappearance in the unlucky *Henriette*. The woman was saved, though, by the bye."

"The woman is still alive," I told him, "but I will answer for her silence. I allow her a small pension—all she would accept. She is living in the south of France somewhere."

"And Blenavon," Lord Chelsford said, with a smile, "has married an American girl who has made a different man of him. What character those women have! She hasn't a penny, they tell me, until her father dies, and they work on their ranch from sunrise. She will be an ornament to our aristocracy when they do come back."

"They are coming next spring," I remarked, "if they can do it out of the profits of the ranch—not unless. Blenavon has carried out his father's wishes to the letter, and cut off the entail of everything that was necessary."

"What a silly ass that novelist was!" Lord Chelsford declared, vigorously.

THE END.

THE DELAYED PASS

BY J. PHILIP VAN KIRK

A football game which was won and lost under peculiar circumstances

EVEN Hall's most ardent admirers said he should have taken his medicine decently. The morale of the eleven demanded it. Also, slovenly work simply could not be tolerated the week before the game.

The college world knows full well that getting the 'varsity into shape for a championship contest is a mighty big task. Hence it cries: "Play no favorites; use the heroes like taskmasters, if need be; only see to it the day of the game finds our 'varsity fit!"

Well—to get around to facts—things had been promising with Durand's football camp up to Saturday, the seventeenth, when, of all men, Hall, "the Great," as many called him for his prowess at left end on the 'varsity, had refused to stand just criticism of some poor work in practice, and had finally been ordered to the scrub line by peppery "Pop" McDougall, head coach, for insubordination.

Sunday, the university at large uneasily pondered the news. They knew his absence from the lineup would weaken the team work even in a day, and no one knew how long his perverseness would keep him out. That Hall—talked of for next season's captaincy, and inventor of the university's star play, a puzzling delayed pass—should behave thus was incomprehensible. "Whatever ails him?" growled the disgusted undergraduates. "Doggone such fool work!"

Monday noon, however, they were in uglier mood. Hall had been missing since Saturday evening, when, at dusk, Duggleby, gatekeeper at the oval, had observed him at the railroad station. There, when search was instituted, news of his departure on a Monmouth special was gained; and, hearing of this, men were astounded, for Monmouth, be it known, was a neighboring State's college town, and an eleven therefrom was to meet Durand's champions the coming Friday.

That evening news flew about that a telegram of startling import had been rescued from Hall's dormitory grate; a telegram from a high Monmouth A. A. official. Men heard the rumors and wild surmises with white, grim look, and overnight they waited with a sense of an impending blow. Next morning then they understood it all. Their beloved *alma mater* had been betrayed, and by one who had been her pride these two years past.

Communication had been held with Monmouth, and Ward, the A. A. president, had admitted wiring Hall on Saturday: "Come at once. Needed badly. Keep absolute secrecy." This word preceded Hall's formerly inexplicable scene. Ah! Men saw the light. But Ward had coolly observed that there was nothing wrong in this, despite its appearance. He was unable to explain things fully then. Circumstances of a peculiar nature forbid. Durand must trust in Monmouth's honor, and wait, say a week.

Consider, will you, the effrontery of the thing! Yet the statement that Hall was related to Daly, their head coach—something unknown before—and had

desired to be called to nurse Daly, who was critically ill—not reported before—was absolutely all the enraged Durand A. A. could get from the other, until the storm of indignation that swept through the press in a day brought a noted Monmouth official into print in support of his A. A.'s integrity.

It will waste time to present every feature of the remarkable case. Suffice it to note that the belief Hall had been bribed to desert at this critical time and betray Durand's training secrets was general. Even at Monmouth the Daly story was laughed at. They had news of a sudden trip he had been forced to take out of the State. And so, as no one could get word with the two and learn the inwardness of the affair, Durand proclaimed its intention to probe it relentlessly before the Intercollegiate A. A. Board once Friday's game, which at this late date could not be canceled, was over.

Yet papers reported disgust among Monmouth students at the situation. Apparently, whatever miserable work was being done, only a few A. A. men were involved in it. To say the whole thing was remarkable is mild. The disappearance of a champion eleven's left end at such a crisis, and the wonder as to the probable effect on its ability to retain the title, absorbed public attention to an unusual degree.

Friday dawned, clear and crisp; ideal football weather. Thousands swarmed into the staid university town from early morning, to see what would prove the most eventful game in the league's five years' history. By noon, the movement to the oval was strong, and, when two squads of sturdy men trotted soberly on the greensward there, at three-thirty, a throng that jammed every available inch of Durand Stadium let forth some of its intense emotion in a roar that unceasingly rose and fell until, brief preliminary practice over, the elevens were deployed on the gridiron, waiting the signal that would set them at each other with fierce determination.

The referee's whistle shrilled, and down into Monmouth territory whirled a pigskin oval, to be brought back behind rattling interference about twenty yards, when, cutting the protection, the runner lithely dodged a frantic tackler and pelted to midfield before being downed. It was fine work, and in his honor Monmouth stands on the west rose en masse.

Filled with insufferable assurance by this, the college men began to rip their opponents to pieces, gaining twenty yards on line plunges and circling left end, Hall's sub, for ten more; altogether making that veteran eleven look like a third-rate scrub aggregation, and causing hope to drop in its supporters' breasts like plummets in the well of despair. It was terrible for Durand men! They sat in agony, not daring to shift their gaze, though each reverse was heartbreaking. Oh, if only something would happen to stave off the horrible inevitable!

But their prayers had no answer. What did speedily happen was this: about ten yards from Durand's goal, Monmouth prepared for a center play. Desperate in the extremity, Durand's ends went in to help brace their wavering line, and immediately the college backs were sent foxily around the boxed left end, and the well-nigh incredible feat of scoring on the champions in four minutes was history.

That first half finally ended with the score: Monmouth, 11; Durand, 0. But for two brilliant steals of fumbled balls and long runs by Quarter Merley, the score would have been more disgraceful. Each time the quarter, who was playing like a fiend and running his demoralized eleven in a manner that showed why he had been "All Eastern" quarter for two seasons, made his steal and run, he blocked a sure touchdown by the flushed Monmouth men.

Dazed and sickened, Durand's multitude of rooters sat during the intermission. Silent for the most part from very inability to properly express their opinion of the state of affairs, they yet shook off the wretched spell in time to cheer themselves into a creditable state of enthusiasm and hope before the elevens returned.

What had become of the team work

that football critics of yore had proclaimed Durand's chief virtue? Who ever thought that brainless left end could fill Hall's shoes? Hall! Curse him!—the cur! the traitor! Since he had betrayed Durand's plays, what hope was there for victory!

So men had fiercely said during the intermission; yet, true to traditions, they gave a mighty welcome as their gray-clad representatives went out on the white barred sward for the period of play that should—— No, they did not dare to think of the outcome. They could but bite their lips and draw painful gasps and wait! Oh! how terrible the feeling when one is in such straits, and would give his utmost, even his heart's blood, for the glory of *alma mater,* but must sit inactive, his body here, his soul there with the line of crouching men in midfield. Ah! but the game holds a man like few things under high heaven!

The game was on! Durand had the ball. As of yore, the backs started for the line; but—and the sight brought white-haired men with the young ones frantically to their feet—when the impact came, not as in the first half was the rush halted, but through the line and on into Monmouth ground a full ten yards drove a human projectile. And that was but the beginning! Like catapults men shot into or around the desperate collegians. Flogged between halves by scathing tongues, the veterans were now fighting with irresistible might to wipe out the recent bitter memories. It was impossible to halt them. There was team work! There was mighty playing! And it kept up amid pandemonium until some one crashed through a wall of fighting men and a touchdown was made. The goal was kicked and, with the score eleven to six, the game was on once more.

The next ten minutes' playing saw the storm center within twenty yards either way of midfield. Men were going out then at every rush, exhausted or with wind jammed from them, only to rise shortly and stagger back into line, with a modern Roman populace cheering them on. Time out again! A Durand man, left end, this time, and something more serious than wind, for they carried him from the field, play ceasing for five minutes.

As those attending him stamped into the dressing room, a man donning football togs in a booth gathered that some one was injured. As he bent to lace a shoe he heard:

"It's awful. They're on to every play." And a moan.

"That's Lang," he thought, and eagerly listened to the fierce comments.

"No use, man. You can't stand—see!" as there came a cry of pain and a fall.

"His ankle," muttered the listener.

"Wilks!"—that was "Pop" shouting: "Wilks, blank it! *Where's* Wilks? He'll have to go in!"

"Wilks!" thought the man. Why, that bull-headed little dare-devil, who'd sooner dive into a flying wedge of two hundred pounders than use science to break it, would be killed. And, being ready, the man stepped out; and the noisy lot of trainers and players went suddenly silent, for it was none other than Hall.

One cursed and sprang at him. The fierce blow he aimed was barely blocked when McDougall took a hand. A stride, a crushing grip on the assailant's shoulder, and, whirling him aside, the head coach was facing his old charge. On the moment there came a cry:

"Time up! All out!"

"Get out—you!" commanded McDougall. "Quick, blank it. I can handle the cur!" So four men went reluctantly, with ugly words. Meanwhile a weazened, shaking man who happened in just before Hall's appearance crouched in a corner, his gaze riveted on the five remaining.

The door had slammed behind the last player. The roar of the stands was rising; out there twenty-two heroes were being honored. Here—well, the coach began to speak, and the wonder was that any man, the veriest poltroon even, should endure such an arraignment. Yet, through to the concluding threat to kick him from the premises in two minutes, Hall listened.

"Apparently you never got my letter," said Hall, coolly, and his words were a bombshell, a master stroke, gaining their amazed attention for what he proceeded to say then. This was the tale: Daly really had been sick—with smallpox; and, fearing a repetition of a disastrous panic such as had occurred at a Northern university the year before in a like case, Monmouth officials had unwisely determined to preserve absolute secrecy, even from the university their asinine course injured. In delirium Daly had pleaded to see the chum he had somehow greatly wronged a few years previous, and, hearing of it, Hall had requested to be called if Daly's life depended on it. During this week of quarantine in the college grounds, no news had reached Hall of the furor over him until this morning, when he had been free to rush down to Durand, wild with desire to get into the game some way.

He claimed to have given Duggleby a letter at the station the previous Saturday for McDougall, explaining things.

"The old chap's better," he concluded, quietly.

One cleared his throat. It was involuntary, and hinted that the simple tale of self-sacrifice had made its impression.

But McDougall, within arm's length, looked incisively into the athlete's steady eyes and sneered.

"A clever tale, laddie, but it rings false on the letter end—to show one weakness. Duggleby never got a letter. You're a consummate——"

The word at his tongue's end was halted by a man bursting, disheveled and panting, into the place.

"Stretcher out there! Quick!" he gasped. "Wilks——" and stopped at sight of Hall. McDougall never moved his eyes, and Hall's answered steadily.

"What condition?" suddenly snapped the coach. His iron grip went to a tensed arm and leg. A light was in the other's eyes.

"Out wi' you!" growled the famous Scotch trainer and coach. "Maybe ye no have lied. If ye have——"

Out on the field, then, it happened that Captain Merley turned a moment later with advice for the substitute he expected.

"Watch that fake kick, and—— Well, what in——"

"McDougall sent me out," returned the newcomer.

McDougall, anticipating trouble, came tearing up.

"It's all right, Merley. He goes in. We'll explain later."

"Not by a blank sight!" shouted a man, glaring threateningly at Hall. His astounded and enraged mates were crowding him. McDougall was trying to make himself heard. All in a moment news of Hall's arrival had been shouted about the stands, and excited men, jumping the boundary fences, came hard across the field toward the shifting knot of players. The uproar began to be tremendous. The crowd about the Durand eleven grew rapidly, and the furious commands of their coach and captain barely forced the men to form a ring keeping abusive collegians from Hall.

At the height of the demonstration, a little, round-shouldered man came over the field sobbing painfully with every stride, but trying to run faster.

"Fur the love av God!" he implored, beating weakly on the broad backs of outermost men. Reading urgent necessity in his agonized face, they made way for him to the center, where he fell, but crawled a pace by heroic effort, to reach up to McDougall an envelope, gasping raucously: "Here ut is."

It was ripped open and read by several. Then, turning on the shouting crowd, whose abuse Hall had stood as quietly as he had endured the other ordeals of the last twenty minutes, for all these things had taken but brief time in their occurrence, Merley and McDougall shouted:

"It's all right, men! Back! He's cleared! To your seats!"

It took time to get that turbulent crowd from the field, and attend to poor old Duggleby, who had confessed to receiving the letter and leaving it forgotten in a discarded coat at the oval gate house, until, overhearing the explana-

tion back in the dressing rooms, he had gone, half dead with the horror of his deed, to fetch it.

Oh, but it was glorious work that Durand did thereafter! A perfect machine was the 'varsity again, working as one man to even or excel the score of the desperate college. Tricks had failed signally before. Believing Hall had divulged them, the men had not played them properly. Now one was tried. It worked neatly. Then the east stands were shouting wildly in applause of a beautiful tackle. What was it? Ah! Hall-l-l!"

Durand's ball! A beautiful opportunity for a long run arose, but the runner fumbled, and a groan went along the stands as a Monmouth man stole the ball.

There were but seven minutes to play, and the score stood 11-6 still. Durand's ends could not be turned, but Monmouth hammered away at center until they were at the twenty-yard line. Three minutes left as they formed for a drop kick whose success meant the champion's defeat. Comparative silence fell over the great inclosure. One could scarcely breathe in the terrible tension of the moment. Suddenly, in the east stands a melody was lifted, and, caught by loyal ears, was given swelling volume by sons and lovers of old Durand, who, with uncovered heads, filled with the fear of defeat, yet true to traditions, rose and pealed forth the anthem that often in times past had inspired bruised, despairing men to a last supreme and successful effort for the glory of *alma mater*.

As the mighty chorus rolled over the field, the ball shot back to Monmouth's dreaded drop kicker. Swift and sure he drove it away, but of a sudden the singing multitude went wild with joy. A man in gray had burst through interference, and, jumping high, caught the ball. Hall had done the trick in practice several times.

Less than two minutes left, and, heedless of the uproar, the elevens were down for the next play.

On the side line stood McDougall, his teeth clinched on a stout brier, his eyes on Merley, who was erect.

"Good! Steady 'em!" thought the watcher, intensely. He knew what was coming. Hall's delayed pass. The man's story apparently was honest. And overtraining and worry it might have been that caused his outbreak Saturday; but plays and tricks had seemed always to be anticipated this day. Why? It might have been Durand's fault, but the coming play would be conclusive proof of something. So the coach had argued. If Hall was a traitor, this play's running would show it. There! Merley was down! "99—15" those were the signals, McDougall knew, and, in his concentration, he could almost hear the following "steady linesmen" from across the field —"43." Then Durand's back field was plunging toward Hall's end.

Over to stop the play jumped Monmouth backs.

"Over! Over!" shouted McDougall, under the spur of his emotions, and—— Yes! Monmouth left end was tearing across, wild to help hold Durand for the brief moment before time should expire. A minute's delay would insure victory for Monmouth.

"Come—Hall!" McDougall yelled it, his hands clinched so the nails cut; his pipe fallen unheeded from his lips. There had broken forth a bedlam of noise, for Monmouth had ripped her opponent's formation to pieces beautifully; but just then, running low, two gray-clad men turned the unprotected left flank. One bowled a startled tackler over, and in that moment Monmouth's exultant heart was torn from her; for the second one straightened off madly for Monmouth's goal with a clear field, and a priceless pigskin jammed in the hollow of his left arm.

A few moments later, McDougall stooped for his pipe. It was an old, dear friend, so he regarded the severed stem sorrowfully, heedless of the avalanche of delirious men sweeping by him.

"Durand! Hall! Oh! oh! oh! 12-11!" shrieked one insanely from joy, again and again.

McDougall heard and grinned.

Zipp-p went the pipe far away, and he was with the rush.

The Further Adventures of O'Rourke

BY LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

Author of "O'Rourke, Gentleman Adventurer," "Milady of the Mercenaries," Etc.

IN WHICH O'ROURKE SHEATHES HIS SWORD

(*A Complete Story*)

I.

(Excerpt from a letter, written by one Colonel Terence O'Rourke, from his home, Castle O'Rourke, County Galway, Ireland, to a Monsieur Adolph Chambret, residing in the Rue Royale, Paris, France.)

AND it is the matter of three years, more than less, old friend, since the O'Rourke laid eyes on the face of you, and by that same token it is the devil of a long time for good friends to remain apart.

Not that I would be blaming you. To the contrary, it is myself who is to blame. It is the deuce of a poor hand to write letters I am, as you're noting to your sorrow, I misdoubt.

But, what with me wanderings up and down upon the face of the earth, seeking what I might devour, like the gentleman in the Good Book—bad cess to him!—and going hungry part of the time at that, and bearing with Danny, and having a good time, truth to tell, and finally winning out with a pot of money big enough to keep Danny and myself in luxurious idleness for the rest of our days, to say nothing of supporting the wife I shall marry soon or late and leaving a few thousands over and above all for my progeny to squabble about when I'm dead and gone; and what with my coming home at the end of all that to find that my poor old Uncle Peter, one of the best men that ever lived, had finally had the decency and courtesy to die—God rest his soul! —which same rest he will be needing in the hereafter, I'm thinking; for a meaner old skinflint and curmudgeon never trod Irish sod, and refused to accommodate his affectionate nephew with enough money to pay a part of his debts, thereby forcing the tender lad to go out into the world and seek his fortune, which he was a long time finding —my dear Uncle Peter, I was saying, had died and left me—because he could not help himself, the mean old miser, there being no other nearer of kin—this pile of gray rocks and green moss called Castle O'Rourke, together with two hundred acres of peat bog and a few shillings which should have been mine long ago if I'd had my rights, to say nothing of several expensive suits in litigation of which I can make neither head nor tail, and which he willed to me especially by a damnable codicil, whatever that may be——

But where at all I am in that sentence, my dear Chambret, I'll never tell you, for I don't know. What I was driving at is this: that I have been too busy to hunt you up as I've wanted to; and the real meat of the nut is that the O'Rourke has come into his own at last, praises be and no thanks to Uncle Peter, whom I verily believe lived ten

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This series began in the July issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

years longer than he wanted to, just to keep me out of what was my due!

And now I am proposing to settle down and enjoy a quiet, peaceful life for the rest of my days. Please God, I'll never again lift my hand against a man either in anger or for the love of a fight. And if ye laugh at me for saying that I give you my word I'll call you out and run you through, friendship or no friendship, Chambret!

I will be strolling across to Paris in a few weeks, and if you still love me you will meet me and have word of the one woman in all the world I care a snap of my finger about. There's no need naming names, but in case there should exist in your mind any confusion as to the particular lady in question, I'll just mention that she's Madame la Princesse Beatrice de Grandlieu, God bless her!

Where is she, Chambret? Don't be telling me she's married, for I won't believe a word of it. Faith, she promised to wait for me—and now it is no penniless Irish adventurer who is languishing for her, but The O'Rourke, landed proprietor himself, and as good a man as ever trod shoe leather.

Is she happy? Does she talk of me? Would she, d'ye think, be glad to see me? Where can I find her, Chambret? And, if so, when? In a single word—speak out, man! Can't you see I'm perishing with longing of her?—in a word, does she love me? I can't live without her, Chambret, now that I'm rich enough to support a wife, and the man that tries to take her from me will be sorry for the rest of his life!

I have on me watch chain the half of a coin, of which she has the other half. Tell her that, from me.

II.

(Copy of cablegram from Monsieur Adolph Chambret to Colonel Terence O'Rourke.)

Madame needs you at once. Come—Rue Royale. Imperative. A. C.

III.

It was a cold night and a wet one in Paris when O'Rourke arrived at the Gare du Nord; it was, in point of exactness, nearly two o'clock, on a moist and chilly December morning.

The Irishman, haggard and worn with the hardship of hard traveling, by night and day, from County Galway to Paris posthaste, darted out of the railway terminal as impatiently as if he had just been fresh from a long night's sleep in his bed, with Danny, he of the flaming red head, tagging disconsolately in his master's wake, and, since he dared not swear at O'Rourke, melodiously cursing the luggage which had fallen to his care.

The two of them piled into a *fiacre* and were whirled across Paris, and rapidly, to the residence in the Rue Royale of O'Rourke's friend, Chambret; which residence turned out to be nothing more nor less than that happily married gentleman's one-time bachelor apartments.

Despite the lateness of the hour, O'Rourke's determined and thunderous assaults upon the door finally were rewarded by a vision of a red night-capped *concierge*, from whom the information was finally extracted, with much difficulty, that Monsieur Chambret was not at home—that he had left two days since for the provinces, or for Italy, or for Germany, or perhaps for a trip around the world. The *concierge* did not know and doggedly asserted that he did not care—that is to say, his demeanor continued surly enough and altogether annoying until O'Rourke happened to mention his name.

Thereupon a distinct change was noticeable in the demeanor of that *concierge*. He prefaced all things by demanding the name of O'Rourke's valet, and the color of that person's hair, which having been declared respectively to be Danny and red, the *concierge* with alacrity invited O'Rourke to ascend to Monsieur Chambret's apartments, at the same time declaring himself to be possessed of a letter intrusted to him for O'Rourke upon his arrival in Paris.

Accordingly, O'Rourke and Danny mounted five flights of steps and were admitted to the said apartments, and, the gas having been lighted by the *concierge*, O'Rourke was permitted to peruse the important communication. Be-

ing translated, the latter read somewhat to the following effect:

MY DEAR COLONEL: Nothing could have been more opportune than the receipt of your note. Only the previous day I had received a call from a trusted servant of madame's, who gave me a message which madame had not deemed wise to trust to paper; together with the little packet, herewith inclosed, which I was requested to forward to you. I did not then know your whereabouts. There is something wonderful in the fact that I now do know.

This will be intrusted to the *concierge*, who has instructions not to deliver it to anyone save Colonel Terence O'Rourke, whose valet is a red-headed Irishman named Danny. I take these precautions for reasons which you will readily understand, as you read on.

By the time this is handed you, I shall be at Montbar, whither I trust you will follow me at your earliest convenience. Nay, I know that you will arrive there without a minute's delay—else you are not the impetuous lover that once you were.

Madame is at Montbar—I believe. Three days ago she was in Paris. Since then—since communicating with me, she has mysteriously disappeared. But I happen to be cognizant of the fact that, within the week, the announcement will be published in the Parisian newspapers of her contract to marry Duke Victor, of Grandlieu, brother of that Prince Felix whom I had the good fortune to exterminate during the Lemercier-Saharan affair, thus making madame a widow.

Duke Victor is a worthy brother to Felix. I need hardly elaborate. Probably you are aware of his reputation: since the death of Felix he has come to be regarded as the most notorious *roué* of all Europe, as well as the most conscienceless and skillful duelist.

Of course, you understand that nothing but the most persistent and the strongest pressure and your continued silence—even I feared that you were dead, my friend—would have induced madame to consent to marry this man. Victor himself is a man of undoubted charm; he has fascinations at his command which are not to be regarded lightly—even by the O'Rourke of Castle O'Rourke. His personality is at once magnetic and repellent. In other words, he is a man calculated to entrance a woman's fancy.

Moreover, I repeat, you were not upon the ground.

Notwithstanding all this, however—notwithstanding the fact that madame has put her name to the marriage contract, your influence is feared. To prevent her meeting you, madame has been spirited away to Montbar—of that there can be little doubt; her servant confided to me madame's fear that something of the sort might take place, that she might be kept in seclusion until the marriage was an accomplished fact.

For all of which you are entitled to feel complimented.

I am going to Montbar—which, as you are doubtless aware, is the capital city of the principality of Grandlieu—at once, to be upon the ground, ready to render whatever service I may be able to render madame. I shall lodge at the Hôtel des Etrangers, under my own name. I should advise you, however, to come to Grandlieu *incognito*—as an English milord. I should also counsel you to come at once, and shall look for you hourly. Possibly I may have good news for you, monsieur; for, if I can pick a quarrel with Duke Victor, he will be as good as a dead man from the moment.

I am, devotedly,

ADOLPH CHAMBRET.

O'Rourke replaced the letter in its envelope, frowning thoughtfully.

"Faith," he said, aloud, "'tis something to have made a friend like Chambret—the saints presarve him!"

And he thrust the paper into the gas flame. In a moment it was crackling; in another it was no more than a crisp wisp of black ash in one of Chambret's ash receivers.

Not until this precaution had been taken did O'Rourke open the little packet which Chambret had mentioned as an inclosure. All during the reading of the letter it had lain squeezed tight in the palm of O'Rourke's clinched fist. Now he regarded it tenderly ere breaking the seals—a round, small package, no broader than a silver dollar, though twice as thick, wrapped in heavy, opaque paper and protected by many seals of violet-hued wax, bearing above the arms of Grandlieu the initial "B." It was entirely unaddressed.

"Beatrice!" whispered O'Rourke, softly. He glanced hastily around the apartment, discovering that Danny had fallen asleep in a chair; he was practically alone, and he raised the packet to his lips and kissed the seals. "Beatrice!" he breathed.

Presently he opened the small blade of his penknife and ran it under the edge of the wrapper, so preserving the seals intact; for had she not impressed them with those hands for whose caress the heart of O'Rourke was fairly sick?

Something fell into his hand—the

half of a golden coin—a broken English sovereign, in fact. O'Rourke's eyes glowed as he fitted it to the other half, which hung dependent from his watch guard.

"Sweetheart!" he said. "You promised me you'd send it—when ye needed me sword! Please God, I'll not be too late to save ye from that black-hearted scoundrel, Victor!"

But there was something else, and it was with a rapidly beating heart that O'Rourke removed it from the wrapper and held it to the light. This was a tiny miniature, no larger than a man's thumb nail, wrought with marvelous skill by some painter who had seen beneath the face, deep into the soul, of his subject.

For the face that looked out from the dark background was very lovely—the features of a most wonderfully beautiful woman.

But it was the eyes of the woman which held him as one bewitched. Large eyes they were, and dark, and gently smiling beneath their deep fringe of upcurling lashes. And out of their depths the woman's soul flamed to greet O'Rourke; the love that she bore him gleamed and glowed therein, even as he had seen it glow when he had known her, long years past, with love undying and undoubting, faithful unto the end, whatever that might be when it should come, with love infinite and overwhelming.

"This," he said, awed, "is a miracle—a miracle, sweetheart—this portrait of you. Faith, 'tis beyond belief, so real it makes your presence seem, dearest. And d'ye think—or does Chambret think—that I can look into those eyes and believe that ye are marrying this fellow, Duke Victor, of your own choosing? Faith, no!

"The sovereign—that is to tell me ye need me. But this—this is to tell me ye love me still, sweetheart! Sure, and wild horses wouldn't be keeping me from ye now!"

For a long time he stood, looking upon the miniature with a kindling eye. The illumination from the gasolier directly above his head showed him for a man of goodly proportions, whatever way one happened to look at him. He was tall, but the effect of tallness was not impressive until one drew near to him, so broad were his shoulders and so solid his build. He was neither heavy nor under weight; there was not, in point of fact, one superfluous ounce of flesh on the man's body; he was all thew and sinew—a fact which produced in his bearing an air of lithe, active alertness.

His expression was ordinarily that of open-hearted good humor; but now he was setting his jaw aggressively and knitting his straight black eyebrows as again he hastily perused Chambret's letter.

It was with a start that the footsteps of the *concierge* on the stairway roused him; and it was with a smoldering resentment that he realized that unsentimental Danny was snoring peacefully in Chambret's armchair.

"Call another *fiacre!*" he instructed the *concierge*. "And then come back and lock up these rooms. 'Tis ourselves that won't be troubling ye ten minutes longer. Yes—run along.

"And, Danny!" He stepped across the room and stirred with the toe of his shoe his servant's recumbent form. "Danny, ye lazy gossoon, wake up before I take strenuous means to wake ye. Come, ye scut, move!"

Already his plans were formulated and solidifying into determinations. He communicated them to Danny, as the *fiacre* conveyed them rapidly to the Gare de l'Est.

And Danny, with an eye toward his personal comfort, was swift to subscribe unto them.

O'Rourke sighed. It was broad daylight now, and the train was rumbling and swaying swiftly over the plains of old Burgundy. The Irishman was alone in his compartment, and the next stop—Dijon—an hour ahead. There was plenty of time, yet——

"Faith!" he said, aloud, caressing his mustache. "Faith, but I hate to part with it!"

Still, it was the only means of disguise at his command. Reluctantly the Irishman opened his hand bag and took

therefrom a small mirror, a pair of scissors and a shaving kit.

"'Tis hard," he complained, "to part with it. Will she know me, I'm mistrustful?"

Ten minutes later his upper lip was hairless; and it speaks well for the iron nerve of the man, that he had not cut himself to pieces.

Thereafter he slept fitfully throughout the day.

At eleven o'clock that night he was roused from a nap by a hand that clapped him heartily upon his shoulder. He sat up, blinking, yawning, stretching himself, and shivering; for the train was in the mountains, and the night air was chill and penetrating in those high altitudes.

"Well?" he demanded, sourly. "What is it, now?"

The train had come to a halt. Through the open door of the compartment nothing was visible save the blank darkness of a winter's night, whose sky was shrouded with a pall of lowering, gloomy clouds. Near at hand a small hand lantern swung a foot or two from the ground, its rays lighting up a patch of sodden earth perhaps a yard in diameter, and silhouetting the boots and gaiters of a man, the upper half of his body being invisible.

But, bending over O'Rourke in the compartment, were two men—the guard and a uniformed stranger, whose hand still rested upon O'Rourke's shoulder as he continued to peer intently into the Irishman's face.

"'Tis to be hoped," growled O'Rourke, "that ye will know me the next time we meet, me friend."

But he spoke in English, which the man failed to comprehend. The look of suspicion upon his face, however, was intensified by the ring of the unfamiliar accents.

"What language do you speak, m'sieur?" he asked, peremptorily.

"English," responded O'Rourke, in execrable French—French positively mutilated by a strong British accent. "And what's that to you?" he desired further to know.

"This is the frontier, m'sieur—the frontier of Grandlieu. M'sieur will be pleased to exhibit his passport."

"M'sieur will be pleased to do nothing of the sort." O'Rourke lolled back in his chair and pulled his broad-brimmed, soft hat well down over his eyes. "If ye want to see me passport," he grunted, "ask me courier for it. He has both of them. Now, get out."

But the officer of Grandlieu's frontier guard lingered.

"And m'sieur's courier?" he asked. "Where is he?"

"How the divvle would I be knowing? In the third-class carriage—I know no more than that. Ask for the courier for Lord Delisle, and he will declare himself, probably. A small, quick-looking fellow he is, with black hair and black eyes."

"Many thanks, milord. Pardon, milord, for the unfortunate but necessary intrusion. Good-night, milord."

O'Rourke snorted and snuggled himself within his great coat, pretending to woo sleep a second time. The guard and the customs officer sidled respectfully from the compartment and closed the door. O'Rourke did not move. To all appearances he was soundly asleep when they returned, chattering excitedly.

"But, milord!" expostulated the man of Grandlieu, jerking open the door and a second time letting in a gust of icy wind.

O'Rourke brought his feet down upon the floor with a bang. He opened his eyes, and they were shining with anger. He opened his mouth, and, with a care to lose nothing of his English accent, cursed the train, France, Grandlieu and the customs official, respectively and comprehensively.

"Milord!" he snorted. "Milord, milord! What the divvle milord is it now? Cannot an Englishman have peace and privacy in a compartment which he has reserved for himself? What is it now?"

"Pardon, milord." The customs official was deferential but determined. "Milord's courier is not on this train."

O'Rourke flew into a veritable transport of passion. He grew red in the face with rage. He waved frantic fists

above his head, declaiming with vigor and rhetorical fluency—in English. The two men were visibly awed and impressed. Such profanity—at least, it sounded like profanity—had never been heard either in France or Grandlieu. It was wonderful, inspiring and typically British—to their comprehensions, at least, who were accustomed to regard every traveling boor as an Englishman.

"My courier not on this train?" he concluded. "What divvle's work is this? Why is he not upon this train? What does it mean?"

"Perhaps," insinuated the guard, "milord's courier has made off with milord's luggage."

It was so. O'Rourke, otherwise Lord Delisle, had suspected as much from the first. The man had been what he had appeared, an untrustworthy scoundrel. He had decamped with his employer's valuables, to say nothing of his clothing and his passport. O'Rourke's rage knew no bounds; and the men were correspondingly overawed.

It was truly unfortunate. But, after all, although there was an order about something which they concluded not to enlarge upon, but which evidently had to do with Englishmen purposing to enter Grandlieu, the milord would not be subjected to further discomfort. It was not necessary. One single infraction of the rule would do no harm. No. The milord could proceed to Montbar, from which place it would be possible for him to set forward inquiries after the missing courier.

And again O'Rourke found himself alone in the compartment, with the train crawling slowly on and up a steep mountain side. He was in Grandlieu at last, and at that, despite the order which Duke Victor had evidently issued calling for O'Rourke's detention at the frontier—just as O'Rourke had suspected he would.

O'Rourke hugged himself in the grateful warmth of his overcoat, chuckling inwardly at the deception he had practiced upon the two men. It had been well planned. Beyond doubt the order for his apprehension had spoken of an Irishman using most excellent French, and accompanied by a red-headed Irish servant. O'Rourke congratulated himself upon the foresight which had led him to leave Danny in Paris.

He was, in point of fact, just within the danger zone. From that moment on his life was in peril—or at least, his liberty and his heart's desire were hanging in the balance. And so—he was comfortable and well pleased, as was strictly in keeping with the disposition of the man.

But it is conceivable that, could he have known of the mark which the customs official had unobtrusively chalked upon the door of the compartment, O'Rourke would not have felt so assured of the man's stupidity, nor so sure that in the end he would win to the side of Madame la Princesse Beatrice de Grandlieu.

An hour later the Irishman left his compartment and stepped out upon the platform of the railway station at Montbar.

The midnight wind that rushed, shrieking, between the mountainous walls of the narrow, level valley which constitutes the major part of the principality of Grandlieu—an independent state with a total area of some sixty-nine square miles—was bitter cold and searching. The faces of the porters and railway officers, who were forced to attend to outdoor duties, were blue and immobile in its ice-laden breath; and upon the lighted windows of the station itself frost had formed, thick and white.

O'Rourke, noting these things, thought of the warmth of a bed in the Hôtel des Etrangers, and the comfort of a meal, with warm drinks, in the supper room of that hostelry, and was glad that he journeyed no further that night.

Runners for the three prominent hotels in the city besieged him with advice bearing upon the surpassing merits of their respective houses. O'Rourke listened to all alike stolidly, and, apparently at random, indicated him who represented the Hôtel des Etrangers, so avoiding all suspicion of having chosen Chambret's place of shelter with purpose aforethought.

Priding himself upon the neatness of this little strategy, he climbed into a hack and settled himself for what he was assured would be no more than a ten minutes' drive.

His eyes closed and he nodded, thinking dreamily of the fair face pictured in that miniature which rested above his heart. The hack plunged on through the night, rattling and bouncing over a road broad and well macadamized. At intervals electric lights illuminated the vehicle's interior with a bluish and frosty radiance. Buildings, stark and drear, without lights because of the lateness of the hour, loomed on the roadside.

Time dragged. It seemed a long ten minutes. O'Rourke had understood that the railway station was situated something like a mile beyond the limits of the city of Montbar, but still—a glance out of the window showed him that the bordering line of houses was no longer on either side of the road. The electric lights, also, seemed more infrequently placed; the intervals of blank obscurity were longer; and when the illumination did come, it showed nothing but frozen fields stretching a little ways into the darkness.

Moreover, the carriage appeared to be ascending a steep grade. O'Rourke puckered his brows, puzzled. Had he mistaken the hotel runner? Or had the uncouth French which he had affected conveyed the wrong meaning to his hearers' comprehensions?

He leaned forward and rapped smartly on the window pane. Promptly the vehicle slowed its speed, and presently it came to a halt. O'Rourke heard the driver climbing down from the box, and the rattle of a carriage lamp as it was detached from its place.

"Curse the fool!" grumbled the Irishman. "All I wanted was a word with him."

A glow of light filled the interior of the vehicle from the right-hand window. Simultaneously the left-hand door was jerked open and a man stepped in.

O'Rourke sat still, looking into the mouth of a revolver. To sit still was the course of prudence. He could do nothing else. His own revolvers were in the hand bag on the floor of the vehicle. But he was biting his lip with vexation, at the thought that he had blundered so blindly into a trap so self-evident.

The intruder was a man larger in every way than was the Irishman himself; and with the odds of the revolver in his favor, he had O'Rourke entirely at his mercy. He was prompt to press the muzzle of it, a ring of frozen steel, against the Irishman's forehead.

"Monsieur is armed?" he inquired, brusquely.

"No," returned O'Rourke, sullenly.

"Monsieur will not be angry with me for assuring myself of that fact, I am positive. Will monsieur be kind enough to remove his hands from his pockets, unbutton his overcoat and then hold his hands above his head?"

O'Rourke had no choice. He did precisely as he was bid, unwillingly but with alacrity. Still holding the gun to his head, the man patted each of the Irishman's pockets, with painstaking thoroughness, and found nothing in the shape of a weapon to reward his search.

"That is very good," he announced. "Monsieur will now be kind enough to rebutton his coat and to sit very still for the rest of the journey. The coachman will presently remove the light, but monsieur will be so good as to believe that I can see in the dark, and that any unexpected move on his part will be rewarded with a bullet through his head. François"—this to the driver—"go ahead."

The light was replaced, and in a moment or two the horses were hammering steadily up the mountainous road. O'Rourke obeyed orders agreeably enough, debating ways and means whereby he might surprise and overcome his captor. The thing was, possibly, feasible. In the long patches of darkness between the lights, he might spring unexpectedly, dash aside the revolver and throttle the man. On the other hand, he might not succeed. The game was not exactly worth the candle. It was better to wait, to see what oppor-

tunity the future might offer. When no other chance remained, it was all very well to stake everything on a single throw; but until that time, O'Rourke, for all his daring, was the man to weigh thoroughly the advisability of each least action.

"May I inquire," he said, at length, in his execrable French—it was painful even to O'Rourke to assume such an accent—"what is meant by this outrageous treatment of an Englishman?"

The man, sitting opposite him in the gloom, laughed softly.

"Monsieur the colonel doubtless is aware of our intentions," he suggested.

"Monsieur the colonel?" repeated O'Rourke. "I assure you that there is some mistake here, monsieur——"

"Pray spare yourself the trouble, Colonel O'Rourke. You did very well. Permit me to congratulate you upon confusing our man at the frontier; but still the odds were all against you. We have been expecting you daily, ever since Monsieur Chambret cabled you. Our agents in Paris watched you last night, and saw you take the train for Montbar. Even the removal of your mustache, deluding as it is, and your—pardon me—your infernal French, could not prevail against such information. Monsieur the colonel is bold, but I trust he will not be angry if I venture to observe that in this instance he has acted somewhat thoughtlessly. But, perhaps, monsieur, you did not think that we would be so vigilant."

O'Rourke did not reply. He was caught; there was no disguising that unpalatable fact. Anything that he might say would do no good; moreover, he feared to speak lest the anger in his voice should betray his deep chagrin.

"No? You will not answer me, monsieur? Believe me, I should be desolated"—the man mocked—"to be lost to your good graces, Colonel O'Rourke, merely because we have succeeded in outwitting you. In all fairness, that was our business. Could you have expected us to act otherwise?"

"No," admitted O'Rourke, caught by the fellow's tone of good-natured raillery; "but surely ye don't expect me to be pleased with meself, monsieur? Faith!" And he laughed bitterly.

"So, then, I have made no mistake, after all? You admit that you are Colonel Terence O'Rourke?"

"Admit it, me friend? Sure, and ye did not expect me to deny it? Whilst there's a fighting chance, monsieur, I am prepared to lie with the best of ye; but when ye have me, body, soul and breeches—I'll throw up me hands, just as I did when ye asked me to, so politely.

"But," he continued, talking to make time, to throw the fellow off his guard if possible, "could ye favor me with a bit of a word as to me probable fate, monsieur? . Sure, and 'tis no crime for a man, even an Irishman, to journey into Grandlieu?"

"No—no crime, monsieur. But, perhaps, an indiscretion. Shall we call it a breach of international etiquette, monsieur—taking into consideration all the circumstances?"

"Faith, would ye make me out a Power, together with that precious duke of yours?" O'Rourke laughed.

"The comparison is not unapt, monsieur." His captor bowed—and maintained the muzzle of the revolver within a foot of O'Rourke's heart. "Not unapt," he repeated; "which you are to consider as the reason why I am taking such care of you, monsieur."

"I would ye were less careful. Is there anything now, monsieur, which might tempt ye to carelessness—for one little moment?"

There was an instant's silence. Then the man chuckled disagreeably. "We are arrived," he announced, briefly, glancing out of the window for the fraction of a second, and immediately resuming his vigilance.

The carriage stopped. There were the sounds of voices, of rapid footsteps, of the jingling of bits and the pawing of hoofs, clear upon the frosty air. After what seemed an interminable wait, something clanged loudly metallic, and a face appeared at the window. The door was opened with a jerk, and a man's voice invited "Monsieur the Colonel O'Rourke" to be pleased to alight.

He was *not* pleased; but an instant's consideration of the menacing weapon induced him to give in with what grace he had to command, and, rising, he jumped lightly to the frozen ground. At once he was seized from behind, his arms twisted into his sides, and a rope passed about them and drawn tight.

"The divvle!" swore O'Rourke—but under his breath; outwardly he exhibited an impassive aspect.

Before him loomed the steep, rock wall of a castle. He had heard somewhat of this castle from the lips of Madame la Princesse herself, in former, happier days. They called it Castle Grandlieu. It was centuries old—a grim reminder of the days when from this rocky aerie the lords of Grandlieu held the countryside in meek subjection, harrying the lowlands of France and taking toll of the misfortunate passers-by.

It had been the whim of the princes of Grandlieu to live in this castle, keeping it with all its mediæval atmosphere—its moat and drawbridge, its portcullis and battlements and towers, all as it had been, frowning down upon the valley now as when first erected back in the darkness of the Middle Ages.

Something in its bleak and austere showing sent a chill to the marrow of the Irishman. It bulked as grim and forbidding as a tomb. It—who knew?—might be his tomb. It was said, indeed, that Duke Victor was a famous duelist and one invincible. If he offered O'Rourke the chance to fight, there would be an instant acceptance; of that one might feel assured. And who should prophesy the outcome?

Not the O'Rourke of Castle O'Rourke, be certain. There was a legend in his family that a penniless O'Rourke was unconquerable; and vice versa.

Was this, then, to be the end of his epic?

VI.

Under the sharp-toothed portcullis they passed; and behind them, to the rattling of chains and the creaking of rusty windlasses, the drawbridge rose. O'Rourke, as he was hurried across a courtyard, tried to smile at this travesty; but deep in his heart lurked an uneasiness.

He had not anticipated this in the least. Otherwise, he had chanced a quick death at the hands of the man in the carriage. But now, for all he knew, he was to die; and all possibility of escape had been cut off by the raising of that draw. He stood, for all he knew to the contrary, without a friend in that great pile of masonry set upon a cliff on a mountain side, concerning any part of which he knew not the least thing in the world.

Well, his part was to hold up his head and take what had been prepared for him with the easiest grace he could assume. Time out of number, he had laughed back into the jaws of death; and, after all, it was childish of him to assume that Duke Victor would dare commit a murder in order to remove from his path so insignificant a stumbling block as the O'Rourke—the empty-handed Irish adventurer.

But assuredly he might confidently count upon a fighting chance, in the end. Or—and this occurred to him for the first time—he was merely to be kept a prisoner until after the duke's marriage to Madame la Princesse had been consummated.

That, doubtless, was the real explanation of it all. Somehow, the Irishman's heart lightened in his breast.

A short wait had to be endured, while his captor entered the castle proper. O'Rourke was left in the charge of three men, who paid scant heed to what he said, but, on the other hand, watched him with a catlike interest, which O'Rourke appreciated as highly complimentary to his reputation.

But, ere long, he was conducted into the building, through a maze of echoing passages of stone, into what appeared to be the modern part of the castle—that portion, evidently, wherein the princes of Grandlieu were accustomed to live, in the infrequent periods of their sojourns at Montbar.

The walls here were paneled with a dark wood, and hung with rich tapestries; the floors were of hard wood,

painstakingly polished to a rare brilliancy, and strewn with heavy, soft rugs of somber designs. The air was warm —warm with the comfort of open fires.

His captor halted him on the threshold of a heavy door of oak, upon which he knocked thrice.

"Enter, messieurs," a clear, even voice sounded from the further side; and O'Rourke was ushered across the threshold into a great apartment that, very likely, had been the dining hall two centuries back—high-ceiled, so that the rays of the electric lights in lieu of torches in the sconces upon the walls, hardly penetrated the shadows above them; and long and deep, with a huge fireplace built in one end, and the other shadowed by an overhanging balcony draped with rugs.

The center of this room was occupied by a long table strewn with books and papers and bearing a reading lamp. The walls were lined with racks of arms, collected with the care of a lover of weapons, and representing all ages and climes. In front of the fireplace a canvas had been stretched across the parquetry flooring, to serve for fencing bouts.

It was a great room, and interesting; O'Rourke's eyes lit up as he glanced down the racks of arms, but he had little time to feast his martial spirit with the sight of them.

For, standing with his back to the fire, teetering gently upon his toes, with his hands idly clasped at his back, was a man whom O'Rourke found little difficulty in identifying as the Duke Victor himself, both from his resemblance to his brother, whom O'Rourke had known in the flesh, and from a certain air of domineering confidence in himself.

Whether or no he was a young man would have been hard to say; at least, he had the air and the look of youth—the hue of rich blood in his cheeks and the lines of youth in his figure, that was as straight and supple as any stripling's. He was something above middle height, and as good a man to look upon as ever O'Rourke had seen—save, perhaps, for a lack of breadth between his eyes—a sure index for a nature at least untrustworthy, if not positively treacherous.

O'Rourke's captor halted at the door and saluted with a military air. For the first time O'Rourke was able to have a good look at him. Now that he had thrown aside his cloak, a uniform of light blue adorned with a sufficiency of silver lace and trimmings was revealed. From the insignia on his shoulders O'Rourke calculated that he was a captain in the standing army of Grandlieu—which, in all, numbered eighty men and officers; or so the Irishman had heard.

For the rest of him, he was of a French type—a large man, blond, well-proportioned, heavier and taller than O'Rourke and well set up. He was smiling slightly, with an ironic air, as he endured the Irishman's gaze, and standing at ease with one hand upon the hilt of a saber which he had assumed since entering the castle.

Duke Victor was the first to speak.

"Colonel O'Rourke, I believe?" he said, pleasantly enough—with the air of one greeting an unexpected guest. "Captain de Brissac!"

"Your highness?"

"I observe that Colonel O'Rourke's hands are bound behind him. Surely that is unnecessary, in addition to being an indignity. Loose him at once."

The captain untied the ropes. O'Rourke moistened his lips nervously, looking the duke up and down, for once in his career at a loss for words. But the duke saved him the trouble of speaking.

"Colonel," he said, familiarly, resuming his nonchalant teetering in front of the great fireplace, "you will no doubt have complaint to make in regard to our method of welcoming you to Grandlieu."

"Faith, I have that," O'Rourke assured him, earnestly.

"As I suspected." The duke smiled. "As to why we have acted in this manner—why, monsieur, it's hardly necessary to discuss our reasons. I fancy they're evident and well understood by you and myself."

"Faith, yes," O'Rourke agreed. "I'm

not the man to deny that. But I dispute your right, monsieur."

"Oh——!" And the duke waved a slender, white hand airily. "There's no need of going into that, either, my colonel. You dispute the right—I arrogate it unto myself and shall consistently maintain it. No gain to either of us—to fight over that. The point of the whole matter is——" He paused.

"Now," assumed O'Rourke, "you seem to be getting down to business."

"Precisely, my friend," laughed the duke, amusedly. "And it's simple enough.

"Colonel O'Rourke, you were, to use the legal term, accessory before the fact of my brother's—Prince Felix's—death. Naturally, for that I hold you in no very great good will. And I understand that both before and after the mur——"

"Monsieur!"

"Oh, very well! Before and after, shall we say, the unfortunate accident, you made love to the wife of my brother—my promised wife of to-day."

"Ye may understand what ye will," said O'Rourke. "But I'll tell ye this, monsieur the duke, that when ye say that madame promised to marry ye, ye lie!"

"Strong language, Colonel O'Rourke! Upon what do you base such an assertion?"

The duke was holding himself well under control; but he had flushed darkly on hearing the epithet which O'Rourke had flung in his teeth with intent to provoke. Indeed, at present all that the Irishman was hoping for was to madden the duke into accepting or issuing a challenge to a duel. Then—well, the best man would win.

"I know that ye lie," continued O'Rourke, evenly, "from the fact that within the week madame has sent for me."

"Which means—what, monsieur, may I ask?"

"It means that madame once promised to be my wife, monsieur the duke; and that she is standing ready to redeem her pledge. Is it conceivable that she'd be promising her hand to you at the same time? I think not."

"Your judgment may be prejudiced, colonel. Madame may have changed her mind, may have wished to see you in order that she might inform you of that fact—which, by the way, happens to be the case."

It was a view of it that never before had presented itself to O'Rourke. For an instant, so confidently did the duke advance it, he was shaken by a suspicion that it might be the truth.

And then he remembered her word-of-mouth message to Chambret—that she needed O'Rourke—and the miniature that she had sent him, that intimate portrait of her whose eyes had spoken to him so eloquently of her steadfast love. And, more than all else, the remembrance of that strengthened O'Rourke and heartened him.

"That," he said, coolly, "is lie number two, monsieur the duke. Faith, if it were truth, why did ye find it necessary to spirit madame away?"

"And have we done so?" For affected surprise, the duke's was almost convincing.

"Beyond doubt, ye did."

"Ah, monsieur the colonel deceives himself. To be frank with you, madame is at this moment in Paris, for all I know to the contrary."

"Which I'll take the liberty of branding as lie number three. If *that* were truth, ye would not have troubled to capture me before I could find it out for meself."

"Very well, monsieur. Have it your own way." Assuredly the duke had his temper well in hand. He bowed his head forward, caressing his chin with his strong, slender fingers, and seemed to ponder O'Rourke deeply.

Under this meditative gaze, the Irishman grew restive.

"The divvle!" he cried, impatiently. "Will ye be kind enough to signify your intentions with regard to me?"

"Exactly what I was about to do, monsieur. I have brought you here by force, for one reason because I well knew that you would not come of your own free will. For another, I wished to negotiate with you.

"I admit that you have a claim upon

madame's hand—a claim which, perhaps, she might feel called upon to acknowledge, to be just, howsoever much such a course might be distasteful to her. So —Monsieur the Colonel O'Rourke, what will buy you off?"

O'Rourke drew himself up, and his hands clinched. For a moment he seemed about to spring at the duke's throat. Captain de Brissac started forward, and even the duke betrayed signs of uneasiness. But O'Rourke contained himself.

"Did ye bring me here to insult me, ye whelp!" he demanded, tensely. "Faith, if it's a fight ye wish, I'll accommodate ye. I could not insult ye by branding ye a liar to your face, but you, monsieur the duke, ye have managed mortally to affront *me!* Did ye mean it, dog?"

The duke's face was quite livid with rage. But his voice was steady and even as he replied:

"It is not a fight that I wish, Colonel O'Rourke. I am quite well aware that nothing could please you better than to murder me, by foul means, as you did my brother. I understand you have your fellow, Chambret, in the town, below there, and I've no doubt the two of you could end the Grandlieu line, between you.

"No, Colonel O'Rourke. I have asked you in all earnestness, and I ask you again, knowing as I do that you adventurers all have your price: For what will you consent to relinquish your claim upon madame's hand?"

De Brissac's hand moved toward his revolver, whose butt was visible above the line of his belt. O'Rourke marked the gesture, and the true significance of the scene was quite abruptly apparent to him.

He had been brought here and baited, like an animal, in order that, goaded to desperation by the duke's taunts, he might lose his temper and throw himself at the man's throat; when it would be justifiable to shoot him down, just as one would a maddened animal, in self-defense.

If that, then, was their scheme, he was determined to frustrate it. And, quickly, he swung about upon his heel, facing the door.

"Monsieur the duke," he said, "'tis your privilege to consider yourself challenged. If ye refuse to meet me, ye are a coward. If ye consent to meet me, ye are this minute as good as a dead man. But, meanwhile, I am in your power. And the divvle another word will ye get out of me till I'm free."

There was a moment's silence. Then the voice of the duke, quivering as though with amusement:

"You refuse any and all propositions, then, I am to understand?"

O'Rourke mutely nodded his head.

The duke sighed. "I am sorry, monsieur the colonel; we might have made an offer which you would have been glad to accept, had you met our advances in a different spirit. As it is, I must bid you good-night. Captain de Brissac, be kind enough to escort Colonel O'Rourke to his hotel. Messieurs, good-evening."

Something sinister in the duke's tone —O'Rourke could not see his face— robbed his words of their surprise for the Irishman. He uttered not one syllable, however; and waited patiently until De Brissac, with a mocking laugh, touched him on the arm.

"This way," he said, softly.

And O'Rourke stepped forward and out of the great room, into the hallways of the Castle de Grandlieu—of which, it is to be repeated here what has been said before, he knew nothing at all.

VII.

For some minutes the two strode on in silence, De Brissac leading slightly, O'Rourke watching his huge shoulders with a calculating glance, wondering if, upon necessity, he could overcome this man in a struggle, hand to hand. He shook his head dubiously, much impressed by De Brissac's evidently ponderous muscular development.

From the inhabited portion of the castle, they passed back into the more bleak and uninviting section, where the air was chill and damp, and great gusts of wind eddied through silent, echoing

hallways. And they followed, in the main—or, at least, so far as O'Rourke could determine—the course by which they had entered.

At length De Brissac paused before a heavy door, set deep in the walls of stone.

"Colonel O'Rourke," he said, "I regret that our carriage is no longer at your disposal. Had you been otherwise minded, it might have been a different matter. As it is, we have no choice but to consider you a determined enemy, to afford whom food, aid or comfort would be treason." He laughed sardonically. "This door," he continued, "opens upon the road. There is a little temporary bridge over the moat, which you'll find it no trouble to negotiate. After that, the road is lighted all the way to Montbar. It is a short journey at the worst. You will reach the Hôtel des Etrangers within the hour. Good-night."

He swung open the door. O'Rourke looked into his eyes, and smiled contemptuously. "A small lot," he commented; "a petty revenge. I'm pleased to be able to breathe air unpolluted by ye, monsieur. Good-night."

He turned and confronted the black, vacant oblong made by the open door. The frost-laden wind slapped his cheeks and pinched his nose. Without, there was unrelieved darkness. O'Rourke negatived the proposition, mentally. He did not know what lay out there, in the blackness. He much preferred to leave the castle and come out at once upon the lighted road. And he stepped back toward De Brissac.

"If 'tis not too great a strain upon your courtesy," he suggested, "I'd much prefer to leave the way I came, monsieur."

Abruptly he was aware that De Brissac was making for him, with outstretched, clutching hands, and an apparent intention of seizing O'Rourke and casting him forth bodily into the outer darkness.

The Irishman did not precisely comprehend; but he was quick to step to one side and to meet De Brissac's rush with a blow from the shoulder, delivered with all the strength that was in him. It struck the man's chest, glancingly, and merely staggered him. He was stopped for the moment; and that instant O'Rourke improved by grappling with him.

Neither spoke. O'Rourke was bewildered, but in some vague way aware that he was fighting for his very existence. De Brissac was straining, with set teeth, to break the Irishman's hold upon him. For many minutes they swayed back and forth and from side to side, there in the narrow, stone-walled passage in the old castle.

At length De Brissac stumbled and went to his knees. He was up again in a trice, but in the struggle to his feet his sword became in some way detached from the belt, scabbard and all, and fell clanking to the floor.

O'Rourke noticed and desired it greatly. It is a fine thing to have the hilt of a good saber in your hand, to know that you have the skill and prowess to wield it. It seemed to O'Rourke that, could he but get the weapon in his grasp, all would be well with him, despite the fact that he was in a castle infested with the creatures of Duke Victor.

Gradually, at the expense of furious effort, he swung the other in front of him, with his back to the open doorway. De Brissac seemed to sense his intention and fought against it with a desperate ferocity, his eyes protruding from his head, staring with terror, his panting as loud in O'Rourke's hearing as the exhaust of an engine. He dug his feet into the crevices in the floor of solid rock and fought as one fights who fears immediate death.

O'Rourke conceived that De Brissac supposed he could be cut down instantly, once his antagonist managed to possess himself of the saber. And he thought grimly that De Brissac was not so far wrong.

Chance aided him—or the luck of the O'Rourkes. For an instant De Brissac managed to break away; but as he did so, O'Rourke's fingers touched the hilt of his revolver in the man's belt, and closed upon it, withdrawing the weapon.

De Brissac spat an oath between his teeth and sprang. O'Rourke was too quick for him. There was no time to aim, or even to fire. There was time only sufficient for him to dash the hand that held the revolver into the man's face; and O'Rourke did that with all the strength that was in him.

The man reeled, staggering, caught his heel upon the threshold of the door, and fell backward, grabbing frantically at the empty air. He shrieked once, and disappeared utterly, with the instantaneous effect of the vanishing of a kinetoscopic picture.

For a moment O'Rourke waited, holding the revolver ready, expecting any moment to see De Brissac rise from the ground and attempt to re-enter the hall.

Nothing of the sort happened, however. The silence and quiet without continued unbroken, save for the sighing of the wind. It struck O'Rourke as a curious fact that he had not heard the sound of the fall. A dread thought entered his brain, and took possession of his imagination, and he paled with the horror of it.

Slowly, unwillingly, he picked up the sword, and advanced again to the threshold of the door. Then he unsheathed the weapon and poked about in the blackness with the scabbard, holding the revolver poised to repel an attack, should one come—as he half hoped.

None came. Abruptly O'Rourke threw the empty scabbard into the darkness, listening to catch the clank of it upon the bridge of which De Brissac had spoken.

There was no sound.

The Irishman's heart seemed to cease its pulsations for a full minute; and then, far, far below him, he heard a faint, ringing sound.

So! *That,* then, had been the fate prepared for him by Duke Victor and De Brissac—that sudden fall into a fathomless void, with a sure, swift death waiting at the end of his flight!

Faint and sick with disgust, trembling as with a vertigo, reeling and swaying like a drunkard, O'Rourke managed to close the door, and stagger away from it a dozen yards or so; and then, for a long time, he stood with one forearm to the wall, supporting his brow, the while he shuddered with sympathy for the miserable wretch who had sought his life by a means so foul—and found therein only death for himself.

VIII.

It was with an effort as of waking from a stupor that O'Rourke found himself again standing before the door of that room wherein he had met and left Monsieur le Duc, Victor de Grandlieu.

How he had managed to find it he did not know. His mind was obsessed with a vision of De Brissac as he had last seen him—toppling backward to his death. He seemed to have been thinking of nothing else for a very long period of time. And it was surprising, to say the least, to realize that, during that train of thought, he had threaded his way back through the halls of Castle Grandlieu to this particular room.

He paused, leaning dazedly against the wall, and passed his hand across his eyes in an endeavor to collect his thoughts, to marshal them into some form at least resembling coherency.

After a bit he discovered that he was listening—listening intently for some sound from within that silent hall. There was none, except perhaps the crackling of the logs in the great fireplace, as they spat, and sputtered, and crumbled to ash in the flames.

Why was he there? Why was he not attempting to break a way out of the castle? Or why was he not thinking of Madame la Princesse?

At once he understood that there was an account to be balanced with monsieur the duke—an account, it was true, of short standing, but none the less demanding an immediate settlement.

He turned the knob, pushed open the door and quietly entered.

Duke Victor was sitting before the fire, gazing placidly into the dancing flames. His face was half averted; and he did not trouble to look around upon O'Rourke's entrance.

The Irishman waited, his shoulders

against the panels of the closed door—waiting, he scarcely knew why, if it were not for monsieur the duke to assume the initiative. Meanwhile, his eyes roved the hall; and they brightened as they fell upon a rack of sabers at his side. Thoughtfully he removed one from its scabbard, and, resting it upon his arm, hilt outward, together with the sword he had taken from De Brissac, O'Rourke walked down the hall toward the duke.

The latter raised his head, languidly, at the sound of the approaching footsteps. With a half-interested, affected air, he pretended to be examining his nails, spreading his fingers out to the firelight and scrutinizing each with an excess of care.

"Well, my captain?" he inquired, drawling in a tone well-nigh of raillery. "Well, Captain de Brissac, has Monsieur the Colonel O'Rourke started upon his long journey—eh?"

"No, monsieur the duke," responded O'Rourke. "Ye will be surprised to learn that Monsieur the Colonel O'Rourke objected to being pushed into oblivion; and ye will, I doubt not, regret to hear that Monsieur the Captain de Brissac has—shall I say?—walked the plank in the O'Rourke's stead!"

At the first syllable, the duke turned. Before O'Rourke had made an end, the other was on his feet, every line in his face expressing the most complete stupefaction. Gradually, however, he regained his poise; by degrees he comprehended what must have been to him, with his unshakable faith in the might of De Brissac, the incomprehensible.

"So?" he asked at length. "So you have conquered, Irishman?"

"The O'Rourke was not made to be pushed over the edge of a cliff by a mercenary murderer, monsieur the duke."

"It is apparent." The duke's nerve was admirable; he turned away again, and resumed his inspection of his finger nails. "And—and," he asked, after a slight pause, "what do you intend to do about it, Colonel O'Rourke?"

"I propose, monsieur the duke, to give ye an opportunity to prove your right to live," returned O'Rourke, calmly.

"What does that mean, monsieur?" The duke swung about quickly.

Bowing courteously, the Irishman proffered the weapons over his arm.

"It is your choice, monsieur the *canaille*," he said, gently. "Choose, dog, and defend yourself, for, if ye refuse, by the eternal, I'll cut ye down as ye stand!"

The duke threw back his head and laughed joyously—a boyish laugh, ringing with superb self-confidence, that might well have sent a shiver quivering down O'Rourke's spine.

With a graceful gesture, the man seized the first hilt that came to his hand and led the way to the padded fencing floor.

"This," he said, mirthfully, "is the apogee of chivalry, Colonel O'Rourke. You escape from one death and willingly offer yourself on the altar of another. It is sad—sad, Colonel O'Rourke. For—well, it would not be fair to myself to permit you to live, you understand. Moreover, it would be a weary disappointment to madame, should I fall. So, then, I grant you two minutes to make your peace with God—O'Rourke!"

"Guard!" cried O'Rourke, briefly.

"You have no sins, then," asked the duke, with evident surprise, "for which to crave forgiveness ere you die?"

"Monsieur," returned the Irishman, "if ye are not on guard at once—your blood be upon your own head."

He threw himself into position, facing his antagonist, and saluted. The duke laughed evilly, and carelessly touched O'Rourke's blade with his own.

A second later he was retreating swiftly down the hall—falling back under an onslaught the like of which he had seldom experienced, in point of sheer audacity and cunning.

But he parried with amazing ease, giving ground until he had recovered from his surprise, and permitting the impetuous Irishman to tire himself to the fill of his satisfaction.

"This is not so bad," he jeered. "It is, in fact, somewhat a pleasure to cross swords with a man who knows his weapon."

"The pleasure will be short-lived, I promise ye!" retorted O'Rourke.

Clash and clang and ring of steel resounded through the hall. The firelight flickered like lightning upon the crossed blades. The stamping of their feet was like dull thunder upon the padded fencing place. Now and again constellations of sparks flew briskly out as one or the other of the combatants cut with all his strength—and felt his blade deftly turned aside.

The duke did not attempt again to speak. There was an anxious look in his eyes; he was trying to fathom the school by whose precepts O'Rourke was fighting—and trying in vain; for O'Rourke fought with the cunning and the technique of all schools, or, when occasion demanded, audaciously according unto his own inspiration of the moment. Possibly he was the most dangerous broadswordsman in the world; certainly his equal was not to be found in all Europe—not even at Castle Grandlieu in the person of the redoubtable Duke Victor himself.

And the duke was realizing that fact. He was tacitly admitting, by the conservatism of his sword-play, that he was encountering for once his master. He was making no effort to attack, but contenting himself with desperate parry after parry, and, it may be, congratulating himself that he was able to parry an attack so artful and so infernally persistent.

Mere skill would serve him not at all. If he was to escape a crippling wound, if not death itself, he must rely upon his luck, upon chance, upon the turn of fortune's wheel. And he kept himself, you may be sure, most vigilant to seize upon whatsoever opening the Irishman might carelessly offer.

But O'Rourke was not careless. He underestimated his antagonist's abilities not in the least, and he knew assuredly that one false move, one attack too strong to permit of the speediest of recoveries, would prove fatal to him. It was in his mind to wear the duke down and administer the *coup de grâce* when the man was too weary and fagged to resist.

But that was not to be. The duke had not the slightest notion of permitting himself to be worn down. Recognizing O'Rourke's superior strength and endurance, he foresaw the ultimate outcome of the combat, if it continued for long.

And he laid his plans accordingly.

Step by step, inch by inch, he gave way, retreating to the paneled wall behind him. In time he felt its unyielding surface at the back of his shoulders.

Abruptly his sword arm dropped as though wearied. O'Rourke seized the opportunity, swung his saber high and brought it down with irresistible violence. Had the duke remained where he had been standing, he would have been split to the chin.

But he had dropped like a shot, thrusting upward, but, fortunately for O'Rourke, thrusting short. The Irishman's point sank deep into the panel, and the blade snapped halfway down to the hilt.

On the instant the duke was on his feet again, agile and merciless as a cat. O'Rourke, defenseless save for the stump in his hand, leaped back a dozen feet in the twinkling of an eye. The duke, following like an avenging whirlwind, tripped and sprawled headlong, his toe catching under the edge of the canvas.

His saber blade fell at O'Rourke's feet. The Irishman promptly put his heel upon it, and the duke had perforce to regain his balance without a weapon.

It is possible that this had, in some way, figured in his calculations. At all events he hesitated not an instant, but turned and sped down the hall, toward the table, with the swiftness well-nigh of thought.

O'Rourke's first impulse was to follow. Upon a second impulse he remained where he was—having possessed himself of the duke's saber. He was slightly puzzled, but it was not long ere he divined the man's intentions.

At the side of that table monsieur the duke paused abruptly and threw open a drawer. His hand slid within it, and came out holding a shining object, small but ominous.

O'Rourke dropped the saber. "You hound!" he cried, furiously. His own hand went to his side pocket, and dropped upon the butt of the revolver which he had wrested from De Brissac.

The duke fired twice—two reports that rang as one. Probably, however, his severe exertion served to spoil his aim. He missed.

O'Rourke pulled the trigger but once. He did not miss. His shot followed like the crack of a whip lash upon the heels of the two other reports.

Duke Victor dropped his weapon. He put his hand to his forehead, smiling foolishly, and turned to O'Rourke a grinning mask of a face, smeared with blood.

He seemed to strive to give utterance to some word, but his tongue failed him. With a crash he fell forward, collapsing upon the floor as limp as the rug that broke his fall.

IX.

The castle was aroused by those three shots as by a tocsin. O'Rourke could hear shouts, cries and the drumming of men's feet as they ran hither and thither, seeking the cause of the disturbance.

The Irishman took his gaze from the dead thing on the rug at his feet and considered, aloud, abstractedly.

"Here's the divvle to pay," he said. "Faith, 'tis meself that must find a way out of this—and I'm thinking that will be all manner of hard work! Now, if I knew the first thing about this damned pile of stones, there might be a chance. But sure, I don't even know how many doors there are to this one room!"

A slight creaking noise caught his ear. He whirled about and half raised his pistol, with intent to fire at the face that had appeared, as if by magic, where a panel had rested a moment before.

"O'Rourke!" said a voice.

He lowered the muzzle of his weapon, staring in unbelief, with a fancy that his senses were tricking him.

A hand appeared, beckoning eagerly, before the face.

"O'Rourke!" said the voice again. "O'Rourke, *mon ami!*"

"Chambret—or the old gintleman himself!" cried the Irishman.

"Hasten, my friend! Come quickly, before you are discovered!"

O'Rourke stood not upon the order of his departure. He was at the panel in two steps and through it in another. It slid smoothly back into place, just as a shout sounded in the room he had left, coincident with the banging of the door as it was forcibly thrown open.

"Faith, but that was a close call!" panted O'Rourke. "Chambret, where are ye? 'Tis as black as a stack of Kilkenny cats. Give me the hand of ye that I may be sure I am not dreaming all this nonsense!"

"Psst!" Chambret warned him, in a whisper. "Not a word for ten minutes. There's my hand, monsieur. Follow—and for God's mercy tread lightly!"

"But——"

"No questions until we are out of this, *mon ami!*"

Obediently, meekly, the Irishman followed, guided by the finger tips of his friend, through miles—or so it seemed—of dense darkness. They descended steps, climbed again, felt their ways along narrow and tortuous passages, cold as the heart of death itself, and, unexpectedly, emerged from a clump of undergrowth into the free air of the mountain side.

O'Rourke hesitated, confused. The rapid succession of events within the past hour would have been sufficient to confuse anyone, he considered. And it seemed quite inexplicable to him—the manner in which Chambret had providentially put in an appearance, just in the nick of time to aid him to escape.

Above, the skies were opaque, cloaked with black clouds; below, the mountain side sloped to the lights of Montbar. Between the city and their refuge the road to the castle wound down, its serpentine course outlined by the electric lights. And the castle walls reared their ugly heads to heaven a quarter of a mile away.

"I'm the least bit in the world mystified, me friend," confessed the Irishman. "Faith, I feel as though I had traveled back to the fourteenth century

and back again to-day in a brace of hours! 'Tis impossible—what I have been through. But—but madame, Chambret?"

"Come, and come as quietly as you may."

Two minutes' scrambling down the hill brought them to the road; and there—miracle of miracles!—squatted, huge and monstrous, Chambret's automobile, coughing huskily, diffusing a certain fragrance of petrol upon the cold night air, and illuminating the downward path with a white, glaring headlight.

"Now, one moment," Chambret paused to explain. "No one knows you were with the duke, *mon ami?*"

"Few," said O'Rourke, briefly.

"That is very well. I, then, am the only witness; and I am traveling with you, monsieur. With this machine we can reach almost any given point in France within a reasonable distance by noon to-morrow—to-day, I should say. Indeed, we can get you out of France, undetected and unsuspected, in thirty-six hours, if necessary. But it will not be necessary. The hue and cry will never be raised for you, my friend. You have only to live—to marry and be happy in the bosom of your family."

"Ah, but madame! Faith, ye madden me!"

"Madame got into communication with me, my friend, through her maid, who stole away from the castle by the underground passage by which we have just escaped.

"Not knowing when you would arrive, we laid our plans for an escape whether you came or not. It was planned for this very morning, at this precise hour. I brought the motor car to this point and madame joined me. Her maid was dilatory, and I went back through the passage to hurry her, found and sent her on ahead. Passing, I heard your voice, paused, accidentally touched the lever which moves the panel. You comprehend?"

"Faith, Chambret, ye are the jewel of a man! I comprehend—yes. But what is more interesting is that I gather that madame is in the motor car yonder, and that I'm here, and 'tis an age of suffering since last I saw her. To the divvle with your long-winded explanations, me friend!"

"Ah, the impatient lover!"

"Sure and don't I mind the time when ye were no better?"

By then they had come to the car. Chambret considerately climbed into the front seat, carefully arranging the robes over himself and madame's maid.

As for O'Rourke, he was standing, hat in hand, by the step to the *tonneau,* staring hungrily into the eyes of the woman who was looking down upon him—into the eyes of Madame la Princesse Beatrice de Grandlieu, whose love for the man was so boundless that it cast aside as inconsequential every consideration of surprise and wonder at his abrupt advent from out of the night.

"Madame," stammered O'Rourke. "Madame—I——"

The woman put out her hand, and touched his fingers. "Terence," she whispered, "Terence! It is you?"

And then he found himself in the *tonneau,* by her side, sharing the robes which covered her, holding in his broad palm her hand in its glove of fur, looking long and deep into the eyes which had lighted him through many a hardship and sweetened for him many a day of adversity.

The car slid smoothly down the mountain side, debouched into the highway of the valley, streaked past the railway station with its many lights, and struck out swiftly for the frontier.

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The outcome of events was even as Chambret had prophesied. Dawn found the car racing over the level roads of Western France. Noon placed them far beyond fear of that pursuit which, as a matter of fact, was never instituted.

And the end of it all was what is properly the end of most romances, and likewise the beginning of others: marriage.

THE END.

LITTLE STORIES OF THE STAGE

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES BY

FRED C. WHITNEY, AMELIA BINGHAM, LOUIS MANN, PETER F. DAILEY, JOHN T. KELLY, CHARLES ROSS, WILLIAM T. FRANCIS, THOMAS JEFFERSON

A ROYAL AUDIENCE

IT is fourteen years ago since I toured Europe with the first Wild West show ever taken across the water. I had as my star Dr. Carver, the celebrated Indian scout and rifle shot. I will add here that this was the first American circus of the Wild West variety that ever completely circumnavigated the globe. During this tour we met with many strange experiences and entertained odd personages, but the most novel entertainment given by this organization was in St. Petersburg.

On July 16, 1890, I was waited upon by the lord chamberlain of the czar's palace, who requested that the afternoon performance be a special one for the entertainment of the czarevitch, or heir apparent to the throne, now the present ruler of all the Russias. I demurred at first, inasmuch as we had sold over three thousand dollars' worth of tickets, and besides I did not feel like being dictated to. I was soon apprised of the difference of conditions in Russia as they existed and those in the United States; that in Russia one owes his life, liberty and possessions to the graciousness of the ruling power. After this was explained to me I acceded to the request. The tents were pitched on the Champs de Mar. A regiment of Cossacks under command of the military governor of St. Petersburg were posted all around the grounds. What seemed to me another regiment of police in uniform and detectives, secret service men, were stationed in all parts of the tent. The audience consisted of the heir apparent and his two brothers, King George of Greece and the Queen of Greece, Grand Duke Sergius, the Grand Duke Paul, the present Prince of Wales and his wife.

We gave our regular performance, and where a particular act aroused their pleasure it had to be repeated. Sometimes they insisted on as many as four encores; as in all Wild West shows, there must be a Deadwood coach which is attacked by the Indians. This performance had to be repeated a half dozen times, and then this gathering of royalty insisted on riding in the coach during the attack.

After the performance, everyone proceeded to interview the Indians, and the chiefs and squaws did a thriving business with their moccasins, beadwork and feathers. A little Indian trinket was worth that afternoon a thousand times its value in America.

Chief Painted Horse and the czarevitch became the very best of friends. Five hundred rubles were given to the chief, and in return a feathered headgear composed of eagle feathers changed hands. Dr. Carver was presented with a diamond cross. Money was scattered galore among the cowboys and the Indians of lesser importance. A little papoose was offered to the Queen of Greece, and would have changed hands had I not interposed. A thousand rubles looked big to the father, who was willing to sell, notwithstanding the mother's disapproval of the barter. As they were

leaving, the lord chamberlain conferred on me the order of the Black Eagle. What I lost in gate receipts that afternoon was more than made up by the advertising that it gave my attraction. The result was that the tour in Russia was an enormous financial success.

FRED C. WHITNEY.

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NOT JUST APPROPRIATE

"PRESS agents are necessary evils," I heard a famous star say once. I don't consider them an evil, yet I do consider them necessary. I had one some seasons ago whose constant endeavor it was to keep me on the anxious seat. He would make all sorts of plans for addresses to be delivered before high schools, girls' seminaries and women's clubs, on a hundred different subjects. My constant reminder to him was: "Always give me time to fix up my discourse. Don't let me get into a town, and there learn for the first time on what subject I am expected to speak."

Several times I have had a narrow squeak and came near making a mess of it. The cruel blow fell in a Montana town. I had never been through this territory before, and the advance man's aim was to introduce me to the people by means of these addresses delivered in the afternoon before the performance. For nearly a week my subject had been "The Benefits of Women's Clubs." On arriving in this particular town where the mishap took place, he had failed to advise me as to what the subject of my lecture was, and also the nature of the organization that I was expected to address.

Arriving at the hotel, I found a note stating that I was to be waited upon by the committee who would escort me to the "Society's" rooms. Along about half-past two I was taken in charge by three ladies, and conveyed in solemn state to the meeting place. I was introduced to the gathering by the chairlady, and began my address. It was the strangest audience I ever had. I spoke of the advantages offered by women's clubs, how they broadened their mental comprehension, enlarged their scope of usefulness. I dilated on the benefits accruing both to the public at large and to the members, and all that sort of rot, and never so much as a smile or applause from the audience. I couldn't understand it. There were several pet speeches of mine where I made oratorical ascensions to the cerulean blue, and never a bit of gladness from that audience. I concluded my harangue.

The chairlady, in a set speech, thanked me in behalf of the members and herself for the pleasure afforded them by my discourse. I was then introduced to fifteen or twenty of them. One of the ladies, having more fortitude than the others, said: "That was a very nice speech you made us, but none of us could understand what analogy there was in your address and the Society for the Propagation of Christian Doctrine among the Siamese." That was the limit. A burning-hot message went over the wire to that advance agent, and what I told him is easily guessed.

AMELIA BINGHAM.

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A MODERN ANANIAS

WHILE touring in "All On Account of Eliza," I had in my company a great character in the person of an actor who was endowed with great imaginative faculties. He was a study to me. He would tell stories upon which there was no basis of truth, and endeavored to impress us with the truth of his statements.

I remember it happened in St. Joe, Mo. We had read in the paper of that day's issue of an exhibition of Fiji Islanders, and immediately this prince of Ananiases had an experience while he was traveling in the Fiji Islands. This was too much, and we proceeded to put up a job on him.

One of the boys went down on the levee, and got an old darky there. We sneaked him into the theater and dressed him up in a most fantastic garb. Our

friend now hove in sight, and for five minutes after being apprised that the dark-skinned gentleman was a simon pure Fiji, never since the world began was such a bunch of grunts and wheezes uttered. The darky looked on in amazement, but never so much as a smile. Finally, becoming exasperated, he said to the darky: "What part of the Fiji Islands did you come from?" The darky replied: "I doan' come from nowhere—I was just bo'n and raised right here."

On another occasion, we began to speak of our abilities as sea voyagers, and what tortures seasickness held out to us. Our irrepressible friend immediately cleared for action. He said: "Do you know, I never was seasick but once in my life, and that was in Lima, Peru; but I wouldn't have been then if it hadn't been for an earthquake that shook me up so." Ten minutes afterward, a discussion having arisen in regard to South American politics, he was appealed to to settle the question. I said to him: "I want to prove something by you. You've been in South America." He said: "You can't prove anything by me. I never was in South America in my life."

And then we had the laugh on him. But he got even. Miss Lipman, who was my co-star, insisted that real ivy must be used in the third act, and it did create a very pleasant appearance. This ivy was so arranged that it appeared to trail up the side of the house. It seems that in the rear of the theater there was a stable which sheltered a goat. My prevaricating friend saw the goat, and also saw an opportunity of getting back at me. In the scene where *Eliza* is being courted by the juvenile, the goat silently sneaked through the stage door and set to work on the ivy. It happened at a time when no one was on the stage but these two. The rest of us were down in our dressing rooms. We heard the applause outside, and thought it strange that the audience should keep up such an insistent handclapping at that particular part of the play. The actor thought he was making the hit of his life, and it was not until Miss Lipman happened to turn and see the goat chewing the greens that he found out his mistake. The curtain came down in a hurry. I got all the blame. I should have seen that the goat was refused admittance; and if I hadn't tried to play practical jokes on Ananias, he would not have tried to perpetrate this indignity.

LOUIS MANN.

* * *

I ALWAYS have maintained that if you are quick-witted you can get through somehow. A little ready wit pulled me out of a hole when I first started in the business.

A "BUSTED" MINSTREL

It was back in 1876, the Centennial year. I was with the Whitney Circus, which busted in Detroit. There were two kids in the show called the Hogan Brothers. They told me they had no money, and they wanted to get home to New York, and asked me to help them. I said: "Come on, I'll see you through somehow."

We got on board a train, the two of them got on the inside of the seat, and I squeezed in on the outside. Then the conductor came along. I began to plead for mercy. I said to him: "Now, these kids have been with the circus that busted over here in Detroit. They live in New York, and they haven't got any money, and they want to get home. It's an act of mercy if you'll let them ride." He said: "That all may be very true. I hear that story every day." I said: "I can appreciate that, but here are these two boys—they are very young and they want to get home to their mother, and she's a poor woman—she can't raise the railroad fare for them, and if you'll see them through you'll be the better for it. I'd pay their fare, but I was with that circus and I can't spare it. I haven't got the money to help them out." "Well," he said, "I don't like to do this, it's liable to cost me my job. But I'll go through the train, and if everything is all right, why, I'll try to take them through." In about twenty minutes he came back, and said: "It's

all right." I said: "I'm much obliged to you." He said: "Where's your ticket?" "Why, I'm with the boys." He had declared himself about the boys, so he couldn't throw me off.

But the good thing only lasted as far as Buffalo. Here I ran into a friend of mine by the name of Gail, and he said to me: "We can make some money down at the Variety Theater here. I was offered a turn, but I must have a partner. Come on in with me." I said, "All right," and we proceeded to a gymnasium to practice up some acrobatic stunts. We got to the gymnasium about a quarter after twelve, and proceeded to take off our street clothes and put on gymnasium toggery. The pride of my life was a suit of silk underwear that had as many colors in it as there is in a rainbow. I had bought it out in Chicago and paid fourteen dollars for the suit. Running through the gymnasium was a pulley belt, and as it was not in use I thought it was a good place to hang my clothes. We must have practiced quite a while when the one o'clock whistles began to blow, and in about a second that suit of underwear was whisked out of sight, as was likewise a pair of trousers. I had to stay in that gymnasium until nine o'clock that night before my friend could raise the price of suitable apparel to allow me to go through the streets without fear of arrest.

PETER F. DAILEY.

HIS FATHER OBJECTED

I STARTED in this business with Leavitt's Minstrels, and it was odd how I obtained my first engagement. I had heard that they wanted a good dancer, and the fellow who told me said: "When you go there and make application, they'll want to try you out. Now I'd advise you to get up some fancy wardrobe. You can dance, all right, but there's a lot more that can dance, and the best chance you have is to go there with a comedy make-up."

I went home and told my brother about it, and between the two of us we had about a quarter. So there was no chance to buy any wardrobe. He suggested that we sneak down some of our mother's clothes, and I readily agreed to the proposition. We stole a hat, skirt, shawl and some other things which my mother carefully treasured, having brought them over from Ireland with her. It was a great make-up, and I never yet have seen another like it.

I don't think it was the dancing. Sure I think it was the clothes that got the job, because the moment I came into the room where Leavitt was, he began laughing, and says: "You're it." I says: "No, I'm not. I'm just plain John Patrick, and I'm going to take Kelly for a stage name." I said to him: "Do you want to see me dance?" He said: "Can you sing?" I said: "Sure." "Then it's eight dollars a week and your board, and be down to the wharf to-morrow morning and bring a trunk with you. The show opens at St. John, New Brunswick."

I went away, and what bothered me most was that trunk proposition. I had no money, and not for the life of me would I have told my mother and father that I was going away to join a minstrel show. My young brother came to the front and we managed to sneak one of those old-fashioned horse-hair trunks with big brass tacks all around it, that my brother had brought over from the "ould sod," and which had for years been stored in the garret. He and I carried the trunk down to the wharf, and how I was guyed by those minstrels!

The only thing I had in it was a pair of dancing shoes, which flopped from one end to the other as we changed the position of the trunk. That trunk went with me to the first town; then it was used as a property trunk, and I carried my dancing shoes in my overcoat pocket.

In course of time the show was billed to play Boston. Naturally, I wanted to see my mother, and sneaked around to the house, taking no chances of catching my father's eye. I invited my mother to come around to the show that night, and left some seats for her and my

father. I had a big song number which I sang in white face, and it recited my troubles. The chorus started in: "My father sold charcoal, that was the cause of it." The song was a big hit, and I got encore after encore. I looked over to where my folks were sitting, and I saw that wrath was rising on the old man's face. Finally he could restrain himself no longer, and he stood up in his seat and shouted out, "He's a liar!—he is! It's all his own fault. He took it upon himself to run away from home and join the show, and it shames me to tell you that I am his father."

JOHN T. KELLY.

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IN HARD STRAITS

THE first part I ever had was *Tony Rocks,* a tough newsboy, in a piece called "The Daily News." We opened at the Chestnut Street Theater, Philadelphia. In one scene of the play, where the girl kills the villain, there were sixty-seven supers who used to rush on at this juncture and exclaim: "Right! Right! Justice!" But, sad to relate, by the time we got to Pullman, Ill., I was playing three parts, and doing the work of the sixty-seven supers.

Here I closed with "The Daily News," and, on account of my extreme aptitude in delineating so many rôles, I was engaged to play four parts and do a glove fight in a piece called "Chicks." It went from worse to "worser," and then it got "worsest" in Clinton, Iowa. No one had any money, but I had a nice suit of clothes, and I looked as if I might have money; at least, the landlord of the hotel thought I looked like money, and he was the only man in the town that I was anxious to make an impression on.

I soon discovered that he was fond of horses, and right here I was at home. I was in the horse business before I went in the show business, and he became so interested in me that every few minutes another drink was suggested, which, of course, he paid for. But the sad part of the whole affair was, we had an honest man in the company; and after I had seen that everybody was comfortably settled in the hotel, where we expected to linger until funds should arrive that would take us back to Broadway, this particular genius had a conscience, and this conscience smote him. Contrary to my advice, he went to the landlord and told him that we were all broke. The landlord said: "I shouldn't be surprised; but Ross has got money," and here he was disillusioned, because he soon found out that I had no more than any of the others, and they had nothing. We were put out of the hotel, but they kept the baggage.

I then proceeded to write a play, which took me thirty-six hours. It was entitled "The Drunkard's Dream." We made arrangements with the local W. C. T. U. to put this on for a benefit. One of the members of the company was handy with the paint brush, and upon him devolved the painting of the scenery; and inasmuch as we were going to put on this play, the manager of the local opera house allowed us to sleep in the dressing rooms.

But, alas! as each day passed another actor left us. Some kind friend away in the far, far East had listened to a tale of sorrow and sent on tickets and money, until there was none left but Billy Sloane and me. Our day came at last, tickets for Minneapolis arriving. There he and I inaugurated a starring tour in a museum, doing sixteen turns a day.

CHARLES ROSS.

❦ ❦ ❦

OVERTURE, OR WHAT?

BECAUSE you're a shoemaker, don't take it for granted that everybody knows as much about shoes as you do; and the same rule applies to musicians. I discovered this some years ago. I was spending the interval between seasons among the truly rurals in the northern part of Vermont. The fact that I was able to play a violin and piano became a matter of interest to a number of the young people in the town, who were arranging for an amateur

dramatic affair for some local charity. They came to me and asked if I wouldn't arrange to supply the *entr'acte* music. They said that there was a fellow in the town who could play on the bass viol, and there was a cornet player and a flute, and asked if I would consent to rehearse the orchestra so that the audience, which they hoped to have, might be kept patient between the acts by listening, as one of them expressed it, to "real opry music."

I rehearsed the orchestra for two weeks, and finally had them down where they could play the overture from "Poet and Peasant" so that it was just a shade better than when performed by the little German band on the corner.

The night of the performance, promptly at eight, this little band of musical warriors under my leadership took their stations in the orchestra pit, and were greeted with vociferous applause. They had so many friends out in the audience to whom remarks were addressed that it took me at least five minutes to impress them that it was time to commence. We played the music satisfactorily, at least to the audience. The only difficulty that I encountered was trying to get the bass viol player to put a little soft pedal on his work, so as to not drown my feeble efforts on the first violin.

We waited at least ten minutes for the cue for the curtain music, but no cue. I didn't know what was the matter until one of the amateurs pulled the curtain and commenced to madly gesticulate; and I, of course, took it for granted that they were not quite ready, and wanted us to disguise the wait with some more music. We again played that overture from "The Poet and Peasant," and after we had finished for the second time, and another wait, Mr. Man came out and repeated his previous performance. Again we started in and played that overture, and for the third time he came out and motioned what seemed to me that we should repeat, but here I balked.

I told him in plain but unmistakable terms that we had played that overture three times, and I wasn't going to play it any more. To which remark he replied: "Gosh! we all thought back here that you fellows were just tuning up!"

WILLIAM T. FRANCIS.

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AN INNOCENT IMPOSTOR

AN odd experience befell me a few years ago while touring the Middle West in "Rip Van Winkle." We played what seemed to be a promising town, and our receipts did not reach fifty dollars. I could not understand why our business should have been so small. I inquired of the manager, and he said: "This is the first time you have ever played this town, and it seems that Mr. Blank, who owns the large manufacturing industries, went around and told everybody in the town that you were a fake, and that it was Joe Jefferson who played 'Rip Van Winkle.'"

I got hot, and went out to look for the gentleman who had seen fit to queer our business, and after a fruitless search I learned he had gone to Florida.

A week later I received a letter from my brother Charles, which read in part: "Yesterday father and I went fishing and had, as our guest, Mr. Blank. He mentioned to father, as he styled it, an attempt by some sharper to do business with 'Rip Van Winkle.' He said: 'Just before I left home, placards were posted all around town, stating that Thomas Jefferson was coming to the opera house to play "Rip Van Winkle," and I knew you, Mr. Jefferson, and I wasn't going to let anyone impose on you, so I went around and warned all the employees in my factories and all my friends that this man was an impostor, and I'm glad to say he didn't do any business.' Father quietly remarked: 'That impostor was my son, and Charles here has an interest in the attraction.' Mr. Blank turned to me and expressed deep regret, and wanted me to wire you to go right back there, and he would guarantee you the biggest house ever played in the town." We went back there some three weeks later, and my busy friend kept his word.

THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Captain Bantam, Kingdom Jumper

BY WALTER WOOD

NOTE.—Jacob Bantam, an English sea captain, and a former special maritime emergency officer, joins forces with Curtis Webbe, an ex-officer of the royal navy, who is backed by a London syndicate in his project of establishing a kingdom of his own in Africa. Their adventures will be depicted in a series of amusing stories under the above title, each of which will be complete in itself.—THE EDITORS.

II.—SAVING THE CARGO

(A Complete Story)

THE unlovely *Dione* churned her way from the region of the outraged governor's territory, and headed north, under the guidance of Captain Jacob Bantam. Webbe, his companion and nominal employer, had not recovered his temper, which was not by nature of the sweetest, and he occasionally broke through his gloom to ask sourly if Bantam had any idea for disposing safely and to advantage of the cargo which the *Dione* carried.

"As you know," said Webbe, "it isn't the sort of stuff we can get rid of like old clothes. The looking-glasses, and white helmets, and militia uniforms, and so on, we can manage well enough—even the new whisky we can sell. It's all in the way of the commerce of this part of the globe. But what about the lots of old Martinis, and bayonets, and the ammunition? We can't afford to throw them overboard."

"I can tell you better when we get to Zanzibar," answered Bantam; "if you can trust me that length."

"I can because I must," replied Webbe. "I make the best of a disagreeable necessity."

"I think I've told you before, Mr. Webbe," said Bantam, with hardening jaws and glittering eyes, "that on the bridge of my steamboat I'll be spoken to in a proper way. If you want to spit fire at me, go on deck, and out of hearing of the men. It isn't discipline, and if you don't know it, you'd better learn that simple fact. I thought they taught it in the royal navy."

Webbe shrugged his shoulders, turned and went backward down the iron ladder, which led to the top of the engine room, and thence to the rusty deck. He walked forward, away from the shelter of the bridge awning, and stood recklessly in the blaze of the afternoon sun. He stared sullenly ahead, cursing air, and sea, and sky, as well as his fellowmen, particularly the skipper, who, up to the present, had not seen fit to explain clearly why he proposed to make for Zanzibar.

Suddenly his sharp sea-trained eye detected a dark mass on the horizon, which might be a low cloud or some small craft. The *Dione* was steaming straight toward the object. For some minutes Webbe gazed unflinchingly, then his lips compressed, and it seemed as if his long nose hooked more over the prominent

chin. He had a hawklike appearance nominally, and now, with contracting brows and eyes, and a stooping forward of the head, he more closely resembled a bird of prey than ever. His hands were loosely clasped behind his back, and his legs were opened out to allow for the motion of the steamer.

"So," he muttered, grimly, "we escape from one danger to run into another. I saw daylight more clearly through the other peril than I do through this. I hate that little ogre, but I must sink my pride and go and consult him."

Webbe turned lazily and looked up at the bridge. Bantam, he saw, was leaning over the rail, steadying his binoculars. It was not until Webbe was at his side again that Bantam was aware of his presence.

"Well," said Webbe, "what do you make of the lump?"

"You know more about the ships of the royal navy than I do," said Bantam, after a long, steady look at the stranger. "What do *you* make of her?"

"She's a destroyer," answered Webbe, with a hard laugh. "And, unless I'm mistaken, she's the *Swallow,* whose special purpose is to put down roguery."

"Goes well, of course?" observed Bantam.

"Thirty knots," answered Webbe, dryly; "so you needn't think of running from her in this." He gave a contemptuous look ahead and astern of the *Dione.*

"This dredger was your choice, not mine, I'd have you remember," Bantam reminded him, viciously. "I'd as soon have fixed on a lightship as a steamboat like this for the sort of work we've got in hand. Warships don't skulk about these parts without some object in view, and perhaps something's been heard about the *Dione.* I suppose Mr. *Swallow* will come and shove his ugly beak into everything on board?"

"He will," said Webbe, "and he'll find out everything we've got, too. The game's up, good Master Bantam, unless we can chuck the stuff overboard."

"That would take half a day, and the ugly brute ahead could be down on us in twenty minutes, without sweating. What do you reckon the reward will be if we're trapped?"

"Well," said Webbe, harshly, "remembering my own record and yours, and the performance with the governor, I should say about twelve months each."

Bantam turned swiftly upon his companion. "As for *my* record," he snarled, "it's clean. Whatever I've done, I've done in the way of serving my employers."

"I was thinking of the governor you sent adrift," said Webbe, maliciously. "Cockatoos like him don't forget insults."

"The little beast's pride would keep his mouth shut," asserted Bantam. "And if he blabs I shall put my yarn in against his, and my story will be that we were out fishing together, and he tried to drown me or make me a prisoner. That should choke his luff with any self-respecting judge. But that's wide of the mark. What do you mean by your own record?" He lowered his voice to a threatening whisper. "You were in the royal navy, weren't you?"

"I was," said Webbe, meeting the gaze unflinchingly.

"And you cleared out—with a dirtied ticket?" continued Bantam, still harshly, and hazarding a bold guess.

"True," admitted Webbe.

"What for?" demanded Bantam, bluntly.

"The accounts wouldn't square up all right," Webbe told him.

"Oh!" sighed Bantam. He was immensely relieved, and sorry, too, for Webbe. It might happen to any officer that his bookkeeping was faulty. "I thought it might have been something ungentlemanly and disgraceful," he added; "and in that case I should have had to draw a chalk mark between us. But we'll talk on this point some other time. We've got to act now, if we mean to keep out of jail."

"I'm resigned, for I see no way out of it," said Webbe.

Bantam turned almost furiously upon him. "Resigned!" he exclaimed. "But I'm not. You leave it to me. Now," he said, vigorously, going to the wheel and taking it from the steersman, "you

run below in a brace of shakes and bring up my uniform and cap—the best brass-buttoned coat with the gold braid and curl on the cuffs, and the cap with the braid on the peak, and the pair of patent boots with the shine on 'em, and the white rubber collar, and the little dickey and black tie, and the white rubber cuffs with the gold links in 'em." Captain Bantam called the metal gold, but it was dull brass, and the pair had cost a shilling in Tottenham Court Road.

Webbe stared in astonishment. "What on earth are you driving at?" he asked.

"Wait and see," snapped Bantam.

When the man returned from below Bantam assumed the uniform which he had worn as a special marine emergency officer under General Daniel Christie, and, despite the heat, he looked remarkably cool.

"Now I'm cleared for action, so to speak," he announced to Webbe, who had watched his preparations with growing amazement. "You can't tell what I'm up to, can you?"

"To be frank, I've no more notion than a hog," said Webbe.

"No; I'll defy General Christie himself to take soundings and find bottom," observed Bantam; and with this enigmatical remark he awaited developments. "All I want you to do, Mr. Webbe," he added, "is to keep your mouth shut and trust in me. As for any man on board who says a word unless he's got the tip from me—well, I'll mop the deck up with him."

Captain Bantam gave a fierce glance around, and then assumed an easy attitude as the *Swallow,* which was now quite near, turned and sheered up alongside.

The lieutenant-commander on her bridge hailed Bantam from close quarters. "Can't you give her a knot or two more?" he shouted.

"She'd perish with the shock if we tried it," answered Bantam. "She can't do more than eight."

"Then I shall have to come on board," said the lieutenant. "I can't go slow enough to steer."

"Very good—pleased to see you," said Bantam; and, without waiting to hear more, he rang the engines to stop, pulled his cuffs round so that the gold links showed, hitched his tie straight, and jerked his cap a little lower over his nose. He hoped the stranger would not notice that he was wearing rubber linen.

"We're as good as jailed—the game's up," said Webbe.

"Please keep your criticisms till the show's over," snapped Bantam; "and remember that I said I'd have no talk."

The lieutenant sprang lightly on to the deck of the *Dione,* and thence to the bridge. He was a brown, clean-shaven young man in tropical kit, and was thirsting to distinguish himself in this his first command. He gave a sharp, short glance at Webbe, who coolly returned the look, but without speaking. Then his keen eyes rested on Captain Bantam. In one quick sweep they took in the gold links, the alleged linen, the brass-bound coat, the black tie, the cap, which was pretty nearly the undress headgear of a captain in the royal navy; and the gold lace and the curl on the cuffs, which were approximately those of a lieutenant in the royal naval reserve.

"I'm on the lookout for law-breakers," he began, "and I've orders to overhaul every ship that looks suspicious. There's a lot of activity among slavers just now."

"And you think I look suspicious?" inquired Bantam, politely.

"You look the sort of man to have an interesting cargo," said the officer.

"So I have," Bantam assured him, readily. "Do you want to see my papers?"

"I prefer to see the goods," replied the lieutenant, who rather prided himself on his smartness.

A strange look crossed the face of Webbe, who thought the game was up. The lieutenant saw it. "May I ask this —er—gentleman's name?"

"Certainly," replied Bantam. "Mr. Israel Jenkins."

"Oh!" said the officer. "A passenger, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. A civil engineer on the Cape to Cairo railway; a friend of mine. I'm giving him a passage to Zanzibar."

"Oh!" said the officer again, with a look of slight contempt at Mr. Israel Jenkins. "Now, then," he added, briskly, "let's go below and overhaul the stuff you've got."

"With pleasure, sir," said Bantam. "This way," and he descended to the cabin. "It would take a day to show you everything," he added. "Now, Mr. Jenkins, will you give a lift with some of the things?"

"My men will help," said the naval officer, significantly; and he ordered two tars into the cabin.

"Thank you," said Bantam. "Some of the things are rather heavy." He swept the cabin table clear, and had a case of cheap cutlery, looking-glasses, and shoddy odds and ends displayed. The better to transact business, he took off his cap and coat, and placed them, with his cuffs, on a locker.

The lieutenant observed that he was wearing no shirt.

"Extraordinary little devil!" he muttered to himself.

"These are for purposes of barter with the heathen. No slaving, I assure you, but all in the way of honest trade," explained Bantam.

The lieutenant nodded. "Very interesting," he said, sarcastically. "Produce some more."

Bantam displayed a case of cast-off uniforms and accouterments.

"*Most* interesting!" commented the officer. "Next, please."

The two tars winked heavily at each other.

With all the readiness in life, Captain Bantam had a long, narrow, heavy box hauled on the table. With his own hands he prized up the lid, and the lieutenant uttered an exclamation of triumph.

"Martinis, by George!" he cried. "I've caught you red-handed! Now, Mr. Skipper and Mr. Moses What's-your-name, you'll be good enough to come on board the *Swallow* with me."

Captain Bantam deliberately resumed his cuffs and coat and cap. At his request the seamen left the cabin. "Now, sir," he said, "this farce has gone far enough."

"What do you mean?" demanded the lieutenant, haughtily.

"You've heard of Major-General Christie?" asked Bantam.

"Certainly," replied the officer.

"And of his maritime emergency department?"

"Yes," said the lieutenant, with a suspicion of uneasiness.

"Have you kept up to date in his performances?"

"Sorry," the lieutenant admitted, "but I'm six months behind the times. I'm serving in a region where news doesn't travel fast, even when it moves at all."

"Then you don't know that you've intercepted and delayed a little tramp steamer carrying secret supplies for General Christie's operations in Central Africa?"

Captain Bantam folded his arms as he put this startling question.

The lieutenant was too much stunned to reply.

"Or that you've put his special maritime emergency officer to a lot of trouble—not to say unpleasant questioning?" continued Bantam, severely. "I'm that particular officer, and here are my papers to prove it."

Captain Bantam produced from his pocket the document which Christie had given him as authority to act—a valuable paper, which, by an official oversight, he had not been asked to relinquish, and which he had not volunteered to surrender.

The lieutenant understood it all with unpleasant clearness. He had stumbled up against one of Christie's mysterious performances, he gathered, and his only anxiety was to get out of the tangle as creditably as possible. He was disappointed and crestfallen; but it never occurred to him, being young and inexperienced, to question Bantam's *bona fides*, and, as he had said, he was six months behind current events. For anything he knew to the contrary, Bantam was still, as he claimed to be, in the active service of Christie.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said. "I'm afraid I've put you to a lot of annoyance; but, of course, I didn't understand."

"Don't mention it, sir," said Captain Bantam, heartily and magnanimously. "Duty's duty, and must be done. Oft-times it's very unpleasant—as I know from my own experience. Of course, if you'd asked me at first, I could have told you who I was, and saved you a lot of bother, as a brother officer. Good-day, sir—unless you'll have a drink. I can give you whisky, brandy, rum, cold tea, or——"

"Thanks," interrupted the lieutenant, hastily; "but I must hurry back to my ship."

He was just about to ascend to the deck when he beckoned Bantam to lean forward. The skipper readily inclined his head.

"I say," whispered the lieutenant-commander, hoarsely, "I'd be immensely obliged if you wouldn't log this affair, or—or—mention it to General Christie."

"I'll do neither, sir," Bantam assured him, with so much fervor that the lieutenant's heart was filled with gratitude.

"Awful little bounder, but dashed decent fellow!" was his unspoken comment as he returned to the *Swallow*.

Bantam went on the bridge, followed by Webbe, and rang the engine-room telegraph. The *Dione* resumed her course.

There was no suspicion of triumph on his face as he looked steadily ahead; but there was a flash of pleasure when Webbe, the scoffer and disbeliever, came up and touched him on the shoulder and said:

"Captain Bantam, you may have bungled the affair of the kingdom jumping, but, by gad! you've more than made up for it just now. It's the smartest bit of work I ever saw—and I've seen some brilliant tricks."

"It's only a *rooze dee gur,*" replied Bantam, who spoke French on rare occasions, holding foreign tongues in contempt.

Webbe's admiration was too deep and genuine even to allow him to smile. "You're a master hand in this game of the sea," he added. "I sing very small indeed. Take the whole thing into your own keeping. I'm sure you see daylight through the difficulty already, which is more than I do. What do you propose to do?"

Captain Bantam turned and faced Webbe. "Just this," he said; "I propose to go back on our tracks, and to squat in that kingdom you jumped. I've been thinking that we can risk meeting the governor; because, whatever we did, he did worse. Solid shot! Think of it! Besides, we've got guns and powder, too."

"And the man," interrupted Webbe. "Master, you're a genius, and there's endless scope for you as a mariner on that inland lake. We shall found a dynasty, after all, and have Webbeland and Lake Bantam figuring on the maps. It never struck me to strike further north, and work down to the kingdom again, as, I take it, you propose to do from Zanzibar."

"That's my scheme exactly," admitted Bantam, proudly. "As I said before, there are more ways of killing a cat than with kindness, which means that there are other roads to the jumped kingdom besides the Mozambique route."

BELOW THE DEAD LINE

BY SCOTT CAMPBELL

[NOTE.—When Inspector Byrnes commanded the New York Police Force he found it necessary to issue an order calling for the instant arrest of every crook found day or night in that part of the metropolis lying south of Fulton Street. This stringent order quickly gained for the district the title "Below the Dead Line," at least in police circles. As the lower part of the city contains Wall and Broad Streets and Maiden Lane, where the great diamond houses are located, various efforts were made by the "under world" to evade the order. For several years a number of crooks, headed by an unknown but extremely clever criminal, succeeded in operating in the district despite the police, and it is to chronicle their doings and their ultimate capture that Mr. Scott Campbell has written this interesting series of stories. Each story will be complete in itself.—EDITOR.]

XI.—THE CASE OF THE CONVICT CODE

I.

JIMMIE COLEMAN, the Central Office man, laughed loudly as he dumped the contents of a brown paper parcel upon the office table of Mr. Felix Boyd.

"No, it's not a birthday present for you, Felix," he genially rejoined, in response to a quizzical inquiry from his hearer. "These don't look much like it, eh?"

"Not very much, Jimmie, for a fact," smiled Boyd, drawing up his chair and curiously surveying the odd lot of rubbish exposed to his view.

It consisted chiefly of old cigarette boxes, scraps of pasteboard from broken candy packages, crumpled portions of paper bags, parts of newspaper wrappers and soiled envelopes, a few leaves from a small calendar, several strips cut from the border edges of newspapers and magazines—the entire lot looking much like a collection from some old refuse barrel.

The Central Office man, with the parcel under his arm, had entered the Pine Street office of Mr. Felix Boyd only a few minutes before, and just as Boyd was lighting his pipe after returning from his midday lunch.

It was a day in September, by the way, and precisely four months subsequent to that on which had occurred the startling burglary of the great Southern Trust and Insurance Company, a crime made memorable by the vast sum secured by the burglars, amounting to nearly half a million dollars in bonds and negotiable securities. Despite that one of the thieves, the notorious Bud Rafferty, had since been caught and convicted, moreover, not a trace of the stolen property could be obtained, nor any clew leading to the identification and arrest of Rafferty's confederates.

Yet negotiations with the convict, with a view to recovering some of the stolen property, had repeatedly been tried by the authorities since his incarceration at Sing Sing, and many inviting offers had been made him, all of which had been scornfully rejected by Rafferty, whose grim loyalty to his confederates was said to be entirely in ac-

This series began in the February issue. The back numbers can be secured through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

cord with his resentful and desperate character.

At the time of the great burglary, which had occurred the previous May, many comments were made reflecting upon the judgment of the trust company directors for not having availed themselves of the services of Mr. Felix Boyd, whose secret work and constant vigilance below the dead line had averted numerous similar crimes. These comments came chiefly from Boyd's own clients, however, who alone were in a position to appreciate his extraordinary talents and peculiarly effective methods.

The victimized company not being among his clients, Boyd had felt only a cursory interest in the crime. This indifference was accentuated, moreover, by the fact that certain details of the burglary, incidentally brought to his notice by Jimmie Coleman, convinced him that the job was not the work of the organized gang of crooks which long had been operating below the dead line, directed by that obscure master criminal known only to Boyd by the name of the Big Finger.

As previously related, this powerful gang had given Boyd no end of serious trouble, and its extermination finally had become so imperative to the safety of the great financial interests served by him, that Boyd was now resolved to hazard almost any desperate move that presented even a visionary promise of success. That any advantage in this direction was to be derived from the curious contents of Jimmie Coleman's brown paper parcel, however, did not then enter the mind of Felix Boyd.

"Where did you get this lot of trash, Jimmie?" he inquired.

"Up the river," replied Coleman, sententiously, as he drew up a chair to the table.

"Sing Sing?"

"Exactly."

"What about it, Jimmie?"

"Have a look," said Coleman, tendering one of the scraps of pasteboard, the side of a broken cigarette box. "Do you find nothing worthy of note?"

"Ah! I see!" Boyd exclaimed. "It is curiously marked with fine pencil lines, so inscribed as to attract no serious attention. This might be a brief communication, Jimmie, in cipher, or a secret code."

"That's precisely what it is, Felix, and you'll find all of this rubbish similarly marked."

"How came it in your possession?" asked Boyd, with indifferent interest. "Did you bring it down from the penitentiary?"

"Exactly," nodded Coleman. "I went up there to deliver a prisoner this morning, and when coming away I observed Burrage, one of the deputy wardens, racking his thinking machine over one of these scraps of paper. A few inquiries elicited some rather startling disclosures, and brought this lot of truck from a drawer in his desk."

"What were his disclosures, Jimmie?"

"For some weeks, Felix, one of the convicts up there has been frequently receiving parcels and papers, cigarettes, candy and the like, ostensibly from a woman he is engaged to marry after his release. Under the rules of the institution all such packages are carefully examined before delivery to the prisoners."

"Ah, I see," remarked Boyd. "Burrage finally observed that all of the articles sent to the convict mentioned bore these fine pencil lines."

"He first discovered them on the outer edge of a cigarette box," replied Coleman. "As you'll observe, they are not of a character to attract much attention, and Burrage at first thought they had been idly or aimlessly made. Quiet investigation, however, revealed that each article subsequently addressed to this particular convict bore, in some obscure corner, a few of these same peculiar marks."

"That settles it, Jimmie. He is in secret communication with the woman mentioned."

"So Burrage then decided," continued Coleman. "He did not, however, reveal his suspicions to the convict. On the contrary, he continued to deliver the parcels, and afterward contrived at times to secretly remove from the convict's cell some portions of the—well, call it the convict code."

"Quite a proper name, Jimmie, I'm sure."

"There is the result," added Coleman, with a glance at the littered table. "But Burrage, after a month of quiet work upon these odds and ends, confesses himself baffled. He can make no head or tail to this secret code, if such it is, and stated to me that he next should make charges against the convict, and attempt to force him into confessing the whole business."

"Has he done so?" demanded Boyd, abruptly.

"Not yet."

"It would be a foolish move, Jimmie, and serve only to end the secret correspondence," said Boyd, decisively. "Better far interpret these communications, if possible, and discover their design. It looks as if a plot of some kind was being formed, and immediate advantage should be taken of these things to learn of what it consists, and to round up the offenders."

Coleman laughed and nodded.

"That's what I told Burrage," said he. "I also told him that you were the very man to undertake the job, and he readily consented to disclose nothing at present, and to let you examine these articles."

"Not a bad plan, perhaps."

"Other reasons, Felix, of special interest to you, led me to propose it," added Coleman, with dry significance.

"What do you mean, Jimmie?"

"Burrage has discovered that our old acquaintance, Jessie Dole, was the sender of these missives."

"The dickens!"

"And the convict who received them was none other than Paul Wykoff, sent up by you for the Trinity Trust burglary."

"Both members of the Big Finger's gang!" cried Boyd, excitedly. "By Jove! Jimmie, there may be more for us in this than appears on the surface. It may provide the very clew I long have been seeking."

"So I surmised, Felix."

"I would give half I possess to land just once more in the stronghold of that scoundrel and his gang," cried Boyd, with augmented feeling. "If I ever do, and he again escapes me, I'll throw up my vocation."

"Oh, no, you'll not, Felix," laughed Coleman, amused at Boyd's momentary display of bitterness. "You'll never quit till you have landed the Big Finger behind prison bars, I'll go my pile on that."

"Well, probably not, Jimmie, after all."

"He's no ordinary knave, or you'd have landed him long ago, and well he knows it. He would give as much to down you, Felix, as you'd sacrifice to land him."

"Very likely."

"So have a care, dear fellow, or you may be treated to a knife thrust in the back. He is capable of it, you know."

"Indeed, I do, Jimmie, and I'm never without an eye open," Boyd pointedly rejoined. "Now let's see what we can make of these hen's tracks. I'll get at their meaning, Jimmie, if it takes a leg."

With which grim observation he drew the scraps of paper and pasteboard toward him, and fell to studying the curious cipher with which they were inscribed.

The Central Office man lighted a cigar, and for nearly half an hour sat silently watching the changing expressions of Boyd's forceful, clean-cut face. Then he ventured to ask:

"What do you make of it, Felix?"

Boyd looked up sharply, much as if he had forgotten the speaker was present.

"Can't say yet," he growled, a bit impatiently. "It's a secret cipher, however, and I never yet saw one I could not interpret. I don't believe that this will floor me. What's the hour?"

"Two o'clock."

"Where can I meet you at six?"

"You say."

"At the Central Office, then," said Boyd, bluntly. "I must be alone here, Jimmie, so get out. I want precisely four hours in which to decipher these scrawls, and I'll see you again at six. Away with you, I say! I must be alone!"

Coleman nodded agreeably and withdrew, smiling broadly when he heard

Felix Boyd lock the office door behind him. He knew well what it signified—four hours of solitude and study, of brain-racking application that could endure no interruption, a period of mental concentration so strained and intense that Boyd would emerge from it in a state approaching physical collapse and utter enervation. Not, however, until the desired end had been attained.

That these impressions on the part of Jimmie Coleman were entirely reliable appeared in the altered aspect of Felix Boyd when he left his office at a quarter after six. His collar was wet and wilted, his tie awry, his features pale and drawn, his lips compressed, his hair disordered and his brows darkly knit—but the restless fire in his dilated eyes was that of mingled triumph and grim determination. As he emerged into Pine Street he still was intensely absorbed, and oblivious to all observers.

The moment Boyd appeared upon the street a man in an opposite doorway quickly drew back from view, then stole forth furtively to watch him. The same man had shadowed Coleman to Boyd's office nearly five hours before, had seen him enter and depart, and since, had patiently lingered to await Boyd's departure. Plainly enough, this man was actuated by some definite and determined design, and bent upon learning all that was in the wind.

If Boyd had chanced to observe this man, he would have needed no introduction. Despite the stained goggles hiding the cold gleam of his malevolent eyes, there was no mistaking the man's features—his hooked nose, the endowment of a bird of prey; his thin, cruel and determined lips, his square jaw and muscular neck, his slightly bowed yet rugged and powerful figure. To one man only could these belong, the man who, as Jimmie Coleman had implied, would with most hearty hatred have stabbed Felix Boyd in the back. To one man only could they belong—the Big Finger himself!

As blind to the movements of this man, however, as to those of the hundreds he passed on his way, Boyd hastened to the Central Office to rejoin Coleman, whom he encountered on the adjoining sidewalk. The latter suppressed a smile upon observing Boyd's disordered attire, merely remarking, bluntly:

"You're half an hour late, old man."

Even the voice of Felix Boyd, a harsh, rapid monotone, only reflected his mental state.

"Better a half hour late, with one's efforts crowned with success, than a half hour early with naught to report but failure."

"Eureka!" muttered Coleman. "Do you mean that you have——"

"Silence! Not a word at present—not a look! This way, Jimmie! By God! this game is already more desperate than—— Steady! We'll go this way and drop into the Woodcock for dinner. Not had your dinner yet, have you? Have it with me, dear boy. By Jove! yonder's a curious fellow, just ahead of us, Jimmie. Looks like a patent medicine ad., fit for a three-sheet poster. Tired of waiting, were you? Faugh! dear fellow, I'll repay you with a bird and a bottle. A booth in the Woodcock, Jimmie, that's our immediate destination. There we can talk it over, as snug as bugs in a rug. Will you hit a cocktail for a starter? No? Heave ahead, then, and we'll dine before dark. Days are growing short, aren't they? Winter'll soon be upon us."

There was something curiously absurd in this protracted digression, begun with a suppressed vehemence bordering upon ferocity, and terminating with a laugh vivid in contrast, the whole business having been rattled off with a volubility that gave Coleman no chance to slip a word in edgewise. The Central Office man was a bit puzzled; but Felix Boyd had him by the arm and was marching him away all the while, and Coleman knew him far too well to protest, or to venture intruding questions in his companion's obvious state of mind.

Mr. Felix Boyd, however, before they had covered fifty yards, had become as cool as an iced melon, and wore his habitual air of indifference and repose. Maintaining a cursory stream of talk, tommy rot from beginning to end, he

conducted Coleman to the Woodcock, in those days a popular restaurant in that locality, where the liquors and cuisine were of the best.

With never a backward look, Boyd entered with his companion, then glanced sharply at the long row of curtained booths adjoining one wall of the elaborate saloon. Several of the booths were unoccupied, one of which Boyd promptly entered, and drew the curtain. As its folds fell into place a man on the street peered sharply into the saloon.

It was the man in goggles. With lips maliciously drawing, he noted that an adjoining booth was vacant. Taking no chance of delay, he immediately entered the saloon and slipped into the booth next to that occupied by Felix Boyd and his companion. Having dropped the curtain, he complacently removed his goggles, inscribed an order for a light lunch, and then settled himself within a foot of the drawn curtain of the adjoining booth.

It at once was obvious to him that Felix Boyd had no thought of an eavesdropper, for he was speaking without restraint and in ordinary tones.

"Loose digging, as they say in the Klondike, Jimmie, that's what it was, and I foresaw it would be before you left me," he was remarking, over a sparkling dry Martini. "It took some little time, however, and has given me a racking headache."

"Yet you deciphered the secret missives?" demanded Coleman, eagerly.

"Each and every one of them, Jimmie, and transcribed them into plain, unvarnished English. Incomplete and disconnected though they are, and evidently covering several weeks of secret correspondence, they point plainly to a startling and most audacious scheme."

"Have you fathomed it?"

"After a fashion, let me alone for that," nodded Boyd. "Here's to the advantage it offers us, and here's to the speedy downfall of a certain knavish genius by the name of Scanlon. God willing, I'll have him in bracelets this day week!"

The short, muscular fingers of the man in the next booth absently caressed his brawny wrists, much as if he already vaguely sensed the chill of steel around them; and then his thin, cruel lips took on a derisive curl, and the malignant glow in his scowling eyes intensified.

Jimmie Coleman drained his glass, then stared perplexedly at Boyd for a moment.

"Scanlon, did you say?" he demanded. "Who the devil is Scanlon?"

"The devil himself, Jimmie, and that's no lie," said Boyd, with a mirthless laugh.

"Not the—the Big Finger?" gasped Coleman.

"Yes, the Big Finger!"

"His name is Scanlon?"

"Scanlon is his name, Jimmie. Scanlon—or mine is not Felix Boyd."

"Did you discover it in the convict code?"

Boyd vented an ominous snarl, and his lowered voice grew more hard and threatening.

"That's not a tithe of what I discovered, Jimmie," he cried. "God willing, I repeat, we'll have the Big Finger and every man of his gang behind prison bars within a week!"

"You amaze me," growled Coleman, impatiently. "Explain yourself. Is there some great game afoot?"

"Yes, and one in which I'll have a hand. Are you all ears, Jimmie?"

"Never more near it, Felix, on my word."

Boyd leaned across the table between them, and fell to speaking more rapidly, and with suppressed vehemence.

The man in the next booth strained his ears for each and every word.

"I'll describe the scheme, Jimmie, as well as I could fathom it from the odds and ends you provided," said Boyd. "To begin with, one fact is obvious. Paul Wykoff, who was the right hand of this man Scanlon, the Big Finger, when sent up to Sing Sing months ago, has in some way made friends with that notorious burglar, Bud Rafferty."

"Now doing time for the recent great break."

"Exactly. It further appears that Rafferty, prior to his arrest and conviction, had possession of and secreted most

of the bonds and securities stolen from the Southern Trust and Insurance Company. At present Rafferty alone knows where they are hidden, a fact which he has confided to his fellow-convict, Wykoff."

"Ah! I see," muttered Coleman, grimly. "Are they plotting to remove or secure them?"

"Bigger game, Jimmie, far bigger," declared Boyd, forcibly.

"Of what nature?"

"I'll give it to you in a nutshell, as I now size it up," replied Boyd. "Rafferty, as you know, is a desperate ruffian, yet one not easily hoodwinked. He is not a man to confide to others the hiding place of half a million in bonds. Nevertheless, he would snap eagerly at any scheme enabling him to escape and share the hidden plunder with his liberators."

"No doubt of it, Felix."

"From pointers gleaned from your heap of rubbish," continued Boyd, "it is plain that Wykoff and Rafferty are planning to escape. Furthermore, through the Dole girl, who occasionally visits Wykoff in prison, all of the facts have been imparted to the Big Finger, and his aid enlisted."

"Humph!" grunted Coleman. "Let him alone to tackle any game with half a million back of it."

"No doubt the hidden bonds are his chief incentive," admitted Boyd. "Yet he would take long chances, Jimmie, to insure the escape of Paul Wykoff, who was one of the shrewdest and boldest members of his gang."

"That's right, too," growled Coleman, thoughtfully. "By Jove! Felix, if we could discover of what their plans consist, and just when they will attempt to execute them——"

"We could execute a counter move, eh?" interrupted Boyd, dryly.

"Precisely."

"Well, Jimmie, their plan is stated in the cipher missives, or enough of it to serve our purpose."

"The devil you say!"

"Don't enthuse too quickly, however," protested Boyd. "The pointers I discovered were meager enough, yet I think I can guess the design. Can you inform me, by the way, whether any of the convicts up there are at present employed along the river front?"

"Yes, a big gang of them daily," cried Coleman, quickly. "There's a six-months' job being done on the docks and piers, and I saw a gang of the convicts at work there this morning."

"That convinces me that I am right," said Boyd, with grim satisfaction. "I cannot say just when the escape will be attempted, but probably at a time when both Wykoff and Rafferty are at work on the pier."

"But what is their design?"

"The design is not theirs, Jimmie, but was born in the fertile brain of the Big Finger," Boyd forcibly rejoined. "It appears in his communications to Wykoff, through the Dole girl and by means of the secret cipher. He is to await a good opportunity, slip slowly down the river in a swift steam launch, and at a favorable moment dart quickly toward the pier on which the convicts are at work. Then will come a bolt for freedom by Wykoff and Rafferty, a plunge into the river, a scrambling aboard the launch, and then a swift dash for the opposite shore and——"

"Break off, laddie!" whispered Coleman, sharply. "Here's the waiter with our grub."

"There is time enough for us, Jimmie," said Felix Boyd, complacently. "I will outline my counter move while we eat."

The man in the next booth quietly drew himself up, then reached for the bottle and glass on his table.

"Here's to your counter move, Mr. Felix Boyd!" he said to himself, with a smile in which malevolence and vicious satisfaction were strangely mingled. "I will wager my life that it proves abortive—and costs you your own! Your good health—while you live—Mr. Boyd!"

Then he drank, and waited.

II.

There was a dull gray mist hanging over the Hudson.

It was like a veil over the face of a

nun. At times it was lifted a little by a breath of air, revealing the varied features of the placid river and the adjacent landscape; but for the most part it hung listless over the broad stream, obscuring the further shore, and partly veiling the grim, merciless face of the frowning penitentiary whose barred windows commanded a view of the stirring episodes then and there enacted.

It was approaching five o'clock in the afternoon, just a week subsequent to the interview between Boyd and Coleman at the Woodcock. That the Big Finger then had overheard all that had passed between them, and since had planned with audacious daring to turn to his own advantage the designs Boyd had imparted to the Central Office man, appears in the subdued intercourse of two of a large gang of convict laborers, then engaged in the work mentioned by Jimmie Coleman.

One of the two was a burly, middle-aged ruffian, hard-visaged and powerful; the other was a slight, athletic fellow, obviously shrewd and intelligent, whose keen eyes and clean-cut features still evinced the same cold nerve and insolent assurance as when Felix Boyd finally ran him down long months before. The one was Rafferty, the burglar. The other was Paul Wykoff, the whilom chief lieutenant and adviser of Scanlon, the Big Finger.

Among a gang of about forty convicts, over whom half a score of armed guards were keeping constant watch, they were engaged in the construction of a broad wooden pier along the river bank. It was not entirely by chance, moreover, that the work then had brought these two so near that they could venture speaking one to the other, which was a serious violation of a rigorous rule.

Yet Rafferty presently snarled, with characteristic inelegance, and a furtive glance toward one of the guards:

"Curse that infernal screw! I believe he means to queer the whole business."

A faint smile curled Wykoff's thin lips.

"Not on your life," he whispered, confidently. "Trust Scanlon to know what he is about. I have his word for it, Rafferty, the way is open."

"Yet the lamps of that damned elbow are always fixed on us, the devil take him! I'd like just one crack at his ugly block before the trick is turned. Curse me if I'd not put his light out."

"None of that, you fool, or you'll queer the game," frowned Wykoff.

"Which is Felix Boyd?"

"The stripey yonder, near the edge of the pier."

"Him with red hair?"

"It's a red wig, Rafferty, and he's made up with infernal skill. He is booked at our hotel as Jim Garvey, in for seven years."

"Seven hells!" muttered Rafferty, with a scornful growl. "I wish I felt as sure of this game as you do."

"So you would, Rafferty, if you knew Scanlon as well as I know him. Trust him to be dead right, first and last."

"Dead right this time is all I care for."

"He is wise to the whole of Boyd's crafty scheme, and it suits us to the letter. It insures our escape, just as I told you yesterday, and will throw Boyd himself into our clutches. God in heaven! I can't imagine how he'll look and act when he learns how he's been duped into playing into our hands. He'll not suffer long from disappointment, however, once Scanlon again lands him under cover."

"He means to turn him down?"

"Without the least delay, and he'll be a fool if he doesn't," Wykoff bitterly muttered. "Why, man, there are nearly thirty stripeys here in Sing Sing, each of whom was once a member of Scanlon's gang, and every man of them was landed here at one time or another by Felix Boyd. Yet he never has been able to corner Scanlon, who constantly has a spy upon him, and hates him as the devil hates holy water."

All of this intercourse was little more than a succession of subdued growls, augmenting its grimness, and never a word reached the ears of the guards, nor any of the great gang of convict laborers thronging the pier and shore. It was partly drowned, moreover, by the con-

stant noise of the hammers and tools in the hands of the toiling men.

Rafferty snarled impatiently, and glanced sharply across the river.

"Where's Scanlon now?" he muttered. "Do you know?"

"I saw the launch slip up stream half an hour ago. The mist hides it just at present."

"Damn the mist!"

"Don't abuse your friends," murmured Wykoff, coolly. "But for Felix Boyd, who has made it needless, this mist might have served us very well."

"Better, maybe, than Scanlon will, unless he——"

"Faugh! he'll not fail us."

"Then he must show up damned soon," growled Rafferty, who was like a hound in leash. "In another half hour we'll be doing the lockstep for the hotel."

"Not by a long chalk, Rafferty," Wykoff quietly protested. "There'll be time enough given us for the move of to-day. Boyd himself has insured that. His game is not to prevent our escape, but by it, and his own crafty work, to land Scanlon and his entire gang. Just wait till we get him, and he learns how Scanlon has turned the tables on him."

"What if a guard stops me from——"

"No guard will interfere, I tell you, except the one who tackles me," Wykoff interrupted, impatiently. "I have it direct from Scanlon, in the last secret cipher. Then Boyd will set the ball rolling, not as he thinks, but against himself, as blind as a bat to Scanlon's crafty —easy! Watch out! Yonder's the launch again!"

"By Heaven! you're right!"

"Steady! Not a move, Rafferty, till I give the word."

"Who's at the wheel?"

"Scanlon himself. Kearney is watching us through a glass. Ha! this is the time, for there's the signal, a white cloth in the house window. They are edging the craft this way."

"When do we——"

"Silence! Hang to your work."

The occasion of these last hurried utterances was still two hundred yards away—a low-lying steam launch, not more than forty feet in length, yet evidently designed for speed, and having every appearance of a private pleasure craft. That she frequently had been seen during the past month, cruising aimlessly up and down the river, indicates the care taken to avert suspicion on the part of the prison guards, and the deliberate preparations made for the one bold stroke of that September afternoon.

As Wykoff's confidence suggests, moreover, this culminating move was made with a dash and abandon largely inspired by the operations of Felix Boyd and the ignorance attributed to him of Scanlon's fund of information and counter designs.

Out of the mist that hung like a veil over the river, the launch suddenly had emerged, bearing slowly down stream some fifty yards from the bank. Within half a minute every guard on the pier, and every convict, had discovered her. Yet only two observers, save those already mentioned, displayed more than a cursory interest in her, or in the three men discernible aboard her.

Clad in the garb of a convict, and with his features transfigured in a way evincing his exquisite art, Felix Boyd gradually worked nearer the outer edge of the partly constructed pier.

At the same time one of the guards, to whom Rafferty had so viciously referred, sauntered to a position nearer Paul Wykoff. The latter suppressed a smile when he saw the move.

Meantime the launch had drawn nearer, still heading down stream, as if none aboard her had any interest in the convict work. When fifty yards above the pier, however, she veered slightly, showed her nose more plainly, and a sudden swirl of back-wash betrayed her increased speed.

Rafferty dropped the adz with which he had been working, shaken through and through with suppressed excitement, which Wykoff quickly observed, and hissed:

"Steady, you fool! Not yet!"

"By God! I'm——"

"You're going to do what I command! Wait, I say!"

"We'll be too late, curse you, if— "

"Wait—ten seconds!" Wykoff fiercely whispered, snatching the impatient ruffian by the wrist.

"Break away there, you two!" cried one of the guards, suddenly.

His sharp command brought all eyes toward the two men addressed.

At the same moment the launch, then barely thirty yards up stream, clapped on a full head of steam and veered sharply toward the pier.

Instantly a yell rose with thrilling vehemence from Wykoff's lips.

"Now, then, Rafferty! Away with you!"

The burly ruffian needed no second bidding. With a roar that fairly drowned the immediate tumult of the startled gang of convicts, who at once saw the desperate escape about to be attempted, Rafferty leaped toward the edge of the pier, felling with a blow the guard who stood in his way, and in a moment more had plunged into the river.

As Wykoff darted in the same direction, however, the guard who had been constantly watching him dashed across his path, and succeeded in grappling him from behind.

Verbal pictures do but scant justice to such scenes as that which followed, brief though it was.

To a man, the gang of convicts dropped their tools, rending the air with tumultuous yells and jeers, and swarming out upon the pier with a frenzied eagerness to seize this possible opportunity to escape. All were quick to see that only men of their own stamp would venture to abet so desperate a design as was plainly obvious.

The prison guards instantly fell to and began to beat them back. Pistol shots rang out above the swelling uproar, and within a moment a conflict was in progress that would beggar language.

Meantime the launch darted nearer, head on, then a sharp sweep threw her broadside within a rod of the pier. Half a dozen men suddenly appeared at her port rail, ready to lend a hand to their convict friends; and Rafferty, swimming like a madman to meet her, was nearly within their reach.

At the very beginning of all this, Wykoff swung fiercely around and gripped the guard by the throat. In the struggle that followed he was hurled to his knees, and ordinarily his chance of escape would have been hopelessly lost.

At that moment, however, Felix Boyd got in his work. With his features convulsed as if with genuine fury, he snatched a crowbar from the pier and sprang toward the two struggling men.

"Drop that fellow!" he roared, above all the tumult. "Let him go, guard, or I'll brain you!"

The guard sprang quickly aside and dodged the blow apparently aimed at his head.

Wykoff came to his feet with a bound.

"Good for you, stripey! Now follow me!" he screamed, with one grateful look.

The guard snatched out a revolver and fired, but the hand of Felix Boyd beat up the weapon, and the bullet went into the air. Before the attempt could be repeated, Boyd felled the man with a single blow, hurled aside a second guard who sprang in his way, and then plunged headlong over the edge of the pier and into the river.

Rafferty already had been hauled aboard the launch. Wykoff, well in advance of Boyd, was gripping the hands outstretched to aid him. For a moment, however, it looked as if Boyd must be left astern of the swiftly moving boat.

The possibility of this brought a frenzied yell from Scanlon, in the wheelhouse window.

"A line! Throw that man a line!" he shrieked, furiously. "Don't let him fall astern! Throw him a line!"

Before the command was fairly uttered, a rope whirled through the air toward Felix Boyd, who caught it as it fell. Then he was suddenly yanked through the water with a violence that threatened to tear his arms from their sockets, as the launch swept around and away. Yet he held fast till he was hauled to the boat's rail, where ready hands drew him, panting and exhausted, to her after-deck.

Of all the pistol shots that had served to enliven this scene, not a ball had found a mark. Of all the opposition displayed by the prison guards, hardly the least restraint had been imposed upon the three men who had reached the moving launch. Both Felix Boyd and the Big Finger had expected no less than this; the one had carefully planned it, and the other had overheard him outline the plan to Jimmie Coleman.

How so daring and desperate a design would have terminated, had Felix Boyd failed to fathom the convict code, will never be known. Be that as it may, however, Scanlon now felt absolutely sure that he had Boyd securely in his power—and well he might.

As the launch sped diagonally across the river, gradually leaving the pier and the frowning prison obscured by the gray mist, Scanlon gave the wheel to his companion, and with his grim, hard features lighted by a triumphant smile he hastened aft to join the several men.

"Your hand, Wykoff!" he cried, deeply, as he approached them. "It's that of a free man again, and I'm glad to grip it."

"The pleasure is not yours alone, Scanlon," Wykoff heartily rejoined. "Freedom was never more welcome, and the trick was splendidly turned."

"That it was, and we're well away. Which of these men is Rafferty?"

"Here you, Rafferty! Come and shake hands with the Big Finger."

"Ay, I will, and gladly."

"Good for you, my man," cried Scanlon, as the burly ruffian approached. "Your looks as well as your record convince me that we shall be good friends. A square deal with your stolen bonds, Rafferty, will insure our future relations."

"We'll divide 'em this very night," Rafferty promptly declared. "Once in New York, I can quickly nail 'em."

"To-night it shall be, then."

"After this day's work, sir, trust me to act on the level with you."

"Good again, Rafferty," Scanlon cried, approvingly. "Now, Wykoff, who is yonder fellow?"

Dripping from head to foot, Felix Boyd was leaning heavily upon the afterdeck, as if well-nigh exhausted.

"He's an unexpected addition to our party," cried Wykoff. "You saw what he did on the pier. But for him, Scanlon, I reckon that cursed screw would have turned me down."

"I saw it all."

"I bade him follow me," added Wykoff, "and I'm glad you took him aboard. Freedom should be as welcome to him as to me, and it's a fair reward for the service he did me."

"He has it, then," cried Scanlon, approaching nearer to Boyd. "What's your name, my man?"

Boyd choked a little, spat a mouthful of river water over the rail, then grimly answered:

"Me name's Jim Garvey, boss. I'm a bit done up from me dousing. 'Tain't much in my line."

"That so?"

"Not over much."

"What is your particular line, Mr. Garvey?" smiled Scanlon, with a curious curl of his long upper lip.

A gleam of distrust appeared in Boyd's squinted gray eyes.

"It's a line I'm not likely to be leaky-mouthed about, boss, before I know who I'm talking to," he growled, doubtfully.

Scanlon laughed aloud, and gave his huge head a significant toss.

"You're safe enough in trusting us, Mr. Garvey, never doubt that," he cried. "I'll leave it to all hands here, and the assurance of men in stripes like your own should be good enough for you."

"So 'twill be, boss, once they have given it."

"You are safe enough with us, Garvey, my word for it," Wykoff now declared. "I'm not one to forget a turn done me, and you cannot do better than cast your lot with ours."

"Mebbe not," admitted Boyd, with a nod. "I reckon your word's good enough for me."

"Besides," cried Scanlon, "you cannot evade arrest in that garb. We'll fit you out with traps we have ready below, and will land you safely under cover to-

night, along with the rest of us. What do you say, Mr. Garvey?"

"What would any covey say to an offer o' that kind?" Boyd now rejoined, with grim eagerness. "I say yes! I'm with you!"

Scanlon quickly extended his brawny hand. Before Boyd could take it, however, a sharp cry broke from one of the several men near by, whose attention had been briefly absorbed by the interview with this man who, craftily planning to outwit and arrest them, was taking his life in his hand to discover their headquarters.

"Look there, Scanlon!" the fellow cried. "We're pursued! There's a boat after us."

Scanlon swung round with a snarl, and gazed in the direction indicated.

"It's the prison boat," he cried, quickly. "She cannot overhaul us. We can evade her in the fog. Yet we'll take no chances. Order Gibson to crowd the launch to her limit. We'll get out of sight in the mist, then make a landing on the west bank. Once ashore unseen, the rest will be easy."

"Your plan?"

"We'll break into parties of three and make for the railway, to meet at headquarters again to-night. Go below, you three fellows, and get out of those prison togs. I'll look after the launch, and the craft containing those infernal elbows. Down with you, Garvey, and get into other clothes. There'll be no time to waste."

"In a jiffy, boss, the minute I get me wind," cried Boyd, who never once had ceased his labored breathing.

Scanlon did not remain aft to enforce his instructions. As Wykoff and Rafferty disappeared below, he rushed away forward to take the wheel, while others ran to impart his hurried orders to the engineer.

His faith in the launch, moreover, was not misplaced. Within a minute she was tearing with the speed of a race horse over the calm surface of the river, and the prison boat, obscured from the first by the heavy gray mist, was speedily lost to view. Not, however, before Felix Boyd had made his next move.

III.

"Are all here?"

The voice, sonorous and impressive, broke a profound silence; and the brief question, uttered with ominous deliberation, came from the Big Finger.

The time was midnight, more than six hours subsequent to the escape of the two convicts from Sing Sing prison.

The place was lower New York, that congested section located below the dead line—the chief field of Felix Boyd's persistent labors and unrivaled exploits.

The scene was a basement storage room, that of a grim stone building long since displaced by a far more attractive and imposing edifice. Of the former, there now remain only dim memories of the evil uses to which it long was turned, undetected by the police; and of the knavery designed and the crimes perpetrated within its dismal walls.

For a brief period it was the secret headquarters—their final resort, by the way—of the notorious gang of crooks and desperadoes rigorously dominated by that obscure genius for crime, the Big Finger.

This basement room was commodious, but low studded, and only a few oil lamps in brackets here and there on the walls lighted the place with their sallow rays.

The one broad door giving ingress to the room was heavily barred. The several windows were secured with exterior iron shutters, and thick curtains within covered every chink and crevice through which a ray of light could have reached the outer world. In this under world, in fact, so obscure was its location, so devious and dark were the avenues by which it was approached, and so carefully guarded, criminals felt themselves secure from the police, and that the perpetration of crime involved no exterior peril.

In the sallow light of this room nearly a score of men were seated, some in wooden chairs near a low platform, others on benches ranged along the walls; and the faces of all, their low brows and sinister eyes, save those of one alone,

wore the unmistakable look of the habitual criminal.

The one alone was Felix Boyd, seated with his back to the wall directly opposite the Big Finger, who occupied the chair at a common deal table placed on the low platform mentioned.

Much had been said and done there that night; but only that which followed is essential to this record of the doings of Felix Boyd.

"Are all here?"

As he repeated the question, Scanlon's gaze swept sharply over this gathering of his gang, and finally rested upon a swarthy man standing with Wykoff at one side of the low platform. His reply was made with a respectful subservience rigorously imposed by Scanlon on all such occasions.

"All are here, chief."

"Every member of our body?"

"None is absent, chief."

"The two guards?"

"They have been called in, and are present. The area gates have been closed and barred, and our retreat should be secure against intruders."

Scanlon's hard features relaxed a little, and a smile of malicious exultation played about his broad, cruel mouth.

"Not only should be secure, Kearney, but is!" he forcibly declared, with a sinister glance in Boyd's direction. "We have clipped the only claws to have been feared. There now remains only to complete the good work."

Boyd's countenance did not change by so much as a shadow. Yet he inwardly smiled at the indirect compliment, which implied that he had been more seriously feared than the entire body of local police.

As he surveyed the men gathered there, all of them outlaws, some of them ruffians, many of them that worst type of criminal in whom intelligence and desperation are combined—as he surveyed them, sitting silent and grim, as if this occasion was a most momentous one, with their sinister glances turned frequently upon him, he easily appreciated the tragic significance of Scanlon's last remark, and foresaw what was coming.

It was a situation to have tried the nerve of any man—save, possibly, Felix Boyd. Yet he knew that his life hung by a thread. He knew that, despite his disguise, he was known to all, and that every man among them regarded him with a mingling of fear and vengeful hatred that could be appeased only with his life. All knew why he was there, that their arrest and punishment, which for some was death itself, was his immediate ambition; and no spy in the hands of a foe could more vainly have pleaded for mercy.

Yet Felix Boyd felt a grim sense of satisfaction never before experienced. He enjoyed this realization of the hope expressed to Jimmie Coleman about a week before—that he again might confront the Big Finger in the very midst of his knavish gang.

Before reverting to him, however, Scanlon turned briefly to Rafferty, the burglar, who occupied a chair near the side wall.

"You now have met, Rafferty, the body of men you will be invited to join," said he, with his sonorous voice dwelling effectively upon each word. "What say you? Is it your wish to become one of us, to subscribe to our covenant, to be bound by our oaths, and in return to derive equally with us the benefits of our organization?"

Rafferty looked a bit dazed, as if he failed to comprehend perfectly, or was seriously impressed with the general silence and solemnity of this dismal conclave. Yet he promptly shook his head, and grimly answered:

"I say what I've said from the first. These coveys suit me, if I suit them; and I'm ready to be one of the gang."

"That will come later, Rafferty, and also the division of this valuable plunder," Scanlon slowly rejoined, placing his heavy hand upon a cloth-covered parcel on the table.

It was valuable, indeed. It contained the bonds and securities stolen the previous May from the vault of the Southern Trust and Insurance Company, the incentive which had led to Rafferty's liberation from Sing Sing, and which had been produced by him nearly an hour before.

"Any time suits me," he growled, indifferently. "I've done my part, and brought the stuff here, and I reckon you'll do yours, as agreed."

"As agreed—yes!" said Scanlon, curtly. "But first another matter is in order, and demands the attention of all. You, Garvey, what have you to say to me, and to these men?"

As he spoke, Scanlon carelessly took a revolver from the table drawer and laid it before him, an act which plainly indicated to Felix Boyd that the ball was about to begin.

"Me, boss?" said he, coolly, with every eye in the room fixed upon him. "What would I say?"

"I wait with much curiosity to hear," declared Scanlon, with sinister significance.

"Well, I'm not one to keep a covey waiting long," replied Boyd, dryly. "Your gang is all right enough, and as gallus a lot of crooks as one could wish to see."

"You think so, do you, Mr. Garvey?"

"Ay, I do, and I'm glad to be here."

"That sounds well, Mr. Garvey, and I really hope it is true," said Scanlon, with an indescribable smile. "You may be sure that we are glad to have you here."

"Good enough, boss!" exclaimed Boyd, curtly. "This place to which you have brought me seems snug and safe, and out of danger from the police. I reckon I'm ready to remain, if you and your gang think well of it, and are——"

"Stop a bit!" Scanlon now interrupted, with a threatening ring in his hard voice. "The place is snug and safe enough. There is danger for one man only—yourself!"

"Why for me, boss?"

Scanlon laid his hand on his revolver, a move plainly indicating that, despite his recent remark, he still feared the claws of the man addressed. Leaning forward a little, with his searching gaze riveted on Boyd's face, he sternly answered:

"There is danger here for you, Mr. Garvey, because we happen to know that the name you really bear is that of —Felix Boyd."

Boyd started visibly. A look of surprise and alarm, entirely affected, leaped up in his gray eyes. He appeared to realize for the first time that his designs had miscarried, that he had been outwitted, and that a peril confronted him of which he had not dreamed. He glanced sharply about, and saw that the hand of nearly every man had reached for a weapon.

It was a strange and thrilling scene. For several moments the silence was profound, as oppressive as the stillness of a tomb. In vivid contrast with it, from some remote quarter outside there could be faintly heard the whistling of a popular air, presumably the diversion of some lad or gamin in the city street. The very liveliness of it served to accentuate the deathly stillness that had followed Scanlon's threatening declaration.

Then Boyd startled all with a short, contemptuous laugh.

"So, so, Mr. Scanlon!" he exclaimed, crisply. "It appears that I am better known than I imagined. Put up your weapons, you fellows, for I am entirely unarmed. Sorry I haven't with me that little device with which I once, on a very similar occasion, held you all at bay. At present, however, the odds are much in your favor, and I am quite harmless. A decidedly strained situation seems to exist. Let's be composed, gentlemen, and talk it over."

The audacious nerve with which he spoke amazed every hearer. Before concluding, moreover, he had deliberately removed most of his disguise, plainly revealing his stern, clean-cut features, and had perched himself upon the back of his chair, with his feet on the seat of it, where he sat surveying the startled gang as if his suggestion to consider the situation involved nothing at all serious, say nothing of his own life.

Scanlon's heavy brows knit closer over his evil eyes, and he subdued with a commanding gesture the threatening murmur that rose from his men, not one of whom, however, ventured to speak. With his gaze fixed upon Boyd, and with his fingers toying restlessly with the butt of his revolver, he said, sternly:

"You speak boldly, Mr. Boyd."

"Why not?" was the curt rejoinder. "That's my way, as you should have learned."

"True. Yet you treat lightly the situation in which you are placed. Do you realize the gravity of it?"

Boyd's lips curled a bit scornfully.

"Perfectly," said he.

"That you cannot now escape us?"

"That appears obvious."

"And that you have invited death by this last venture of yours?"

"The hazard of life never yet deterred me from doing my duty," said Boyd, bluntly. "I fully realize my situation, Scanlon, and that it is eminently essential to the safety of you rascals that I should be effectually turned down. As a matter of fact, Scanlon, you had better make sure of it this time."

"We certainly shall."

"Very possibly. You look quite capable of it, both you and your rascally gang."

"We do not forget the past, and what we owe you."

"No wonder. The debt certainly is large."

"Right—it is large!" snarled Scanlon, with vengeful malignity. "Your life scarce will balance the account."

"Yet you had better take it, or your liabilities will steadily increase," Boyd curtly retorted. "I certainly shall not let up on you until I have you, one and all, lodged in prison cells."

"You have lost your last opportunity to accomplish that, Mr. Felix Boyd," Scanlon slowly answered, with terrible sternness. "If we fail to turn you down this night, and end forever your relentless work against us, may we go from here in manacles, every man of us."

Boyd laughed coldly, still perched on the back of his chair.

"Stranger things than that have happened," he dryly rejoined. "Yet I admit that you now have the best of me. I am puzzled to account for it. Ordinarily, as you well have learned, I am not easily caught napping. This unexpected situation, and the fact that you discovered my identity, rather perplex me. Possibly you will briefly defer your sanguinary design, and consent to enlighten me. Even while recognizing your peculiar and unenviable genius, Mr. Big Finger, I never before have regarded you as my superior in acumen and cunning."

Boyd spoke with a sneer, with apparent indifference to the fate with which he had been threatened; and his obvious coldness, his derisive taunts, his attitude and air of utter unconcern, were not without effect upon his hearers, many of whom had previously encountered him and knew of what artful tricks he was capable.

Some of the ruffians were moving restlessly in their chairs. Others were gripping their weapons more firmly, prepared for the slightest threatening move. Frowns had deepened, dark looks grown darker, and low mutterings and ominous growls were audible at times. Not for a moment did any eye in the room leave that motionless figure perched on the back of a chair.

Scanlon ignored these indications of apprehension and impatience. Despite his repeated encounters with Felix Boyd, several of which had nearly cost him liberty and life, he still had faith in his own knavish sagacity, by which he now believed he finally had cornered his relentless foe. With malicious satisfaction he prolonged the interview, as a cat teases a mouse before slaying it; and with an evil smile at the left-handed compliment Boyd had bestowed upon him, he quickly rejoined, with caustic significance:

"Blind confidence in one's superior acumen and cunning, Mr. Felix Boyd, has brought better men than you to death's door at which you now stand!"

"Yet the door still is closed," retorted Boyd, pointedly.

"We shall open it."

"Possibly."

"There is time enough for that. You have played a bold game, Mr. Boyd; but you made one fatal error. It has cost you the game—and your life!"

"What error, pray?"

"The exposure of your hand."

"Impossible! In what way?"

"Men who discuss in a public restaurant their discoveries and designs," cried Scanlon, with sinister scorn, "should cease to boast of their acumen and cunning."

"Oh, ho!" cried Boyd, with a start. "So that was the way of it, eh? You were playing the eavesdropper—and for once you appear to have outplayed me."

Scanlon's hard, beardless features took on a look of vengeful bitterness.

"The past has warned me to keep a watchful eye upon you," he sternly answered. "Do you think I would have attempted this game, now so successfully played, without having a constant spy upon you, and upon that hound of the Central Office who courses in company with you?"

"A wise precaution, surely," said Boyd, crisply. "It appears to have worked very well."

"Since you are pleased to hear it, this story of your own lameness, I will go a step further," sneered Scanlon.

"Do so, by all means. I quite enjoy it."

"Enjoy it while you may, then, for at longest the time will be brief," cried Scanlon, more harshly. "I shadowed you to the Woodcock, and there overheard you disclose your designs to Coleman."

"Very lame of me, indeed, as you say."

"It was very clever, the counter move you outlined," continued Scanlon, with a sneer. "You did not wish to prevent my little scheme, nor the delivery of two convicts from Sing Sing."

"Decidedly not," cried Boyd. "Far from it."

"Instead, in the hope of locating us and our headquarters, and subsequently causing our arrest, you planned to make it easy for me to continue my communication with Wykoff, and to frame up every move made this day. It would have been more clever, Mr. Felix Boyd, and possibly more effective, had I not overheard it."

"And met it with a counter move, eh?" queried Boyd, curtly.

"Precisely!" nodded Scanlon, with grim satisfaction. "It remained only for us to do the job, made easy by your own designs, and, having got you into our hands, to escape without being followed. You have seen how we accomplished it. Yours was a bold move, Mr. Felix Boyd; a desperate game to have played against men of our cloth; and, having lost it, you must pay the price. You aimed to place yourself among us, then to insure our arrest——"

"Stop a bit!" cried Boyd, abruptly. "You've made a mistake, Mr. Scanlon. You've got the cart before the horse, Mr. Big Finger. I aimed to insure your arrest, not after, but before I entered your villainous stronghold. Stop a bit, I say! There's another side of the story!"

IV.

The quizzical scrutiny with which he had been badgering Scanlon still lingered in Boyd's keen, gray eyes. Yet his voice, when he curtly interrupted, had a subtle ring unheard before, and the unexpected declaration he had made startled his every hearer.

Scanlon glanced sharply about, checked with a gesture the apprehensive movements of several of his gang, then snarled suspiciously, with his frowning gaze reverting to Boyd's dispassionate face:

"Speak plainly, curse you! Why do you say I've put the cart before the horse? What do you mean by another side of the story?"

Boyd had not moved from his seat on the back of his chair. His attitude was still that of absolute unconcern, and only the sharper gleam of his watchful eyes betrayed that he recognized any change in the existing situation. For a moment he did not answer, and again the profound silence was broken only by the sound heard once before—that distant whistling of a popular air as of a lad in the city streets.

Then Boyd laughed lightly, as he had done before.

"Don't be alarmed, you fellows," said he, with a glance over the frowning faces confronting him. "You seem to fear me, even while having all the best

of me, as your rascally leader yonder stated. His cleverness is quite commendable, I am sure. It is true that I planned to make it easy for you to liberate Wykoff and yonder thieving ruffian. It is true that I apparently designed to aid their escape, and thus force myself among you. It is true that, having landed me here without being tracked by the police, you should feel perfectly secure."

"And so we do, the devil take you!" cried Scanlon, with suppressed ferocity. "Why do you barter words in this fashion?"

"Because, as I remarked," said Boyd, with a curious smile, "there's another side of the story."

"What other side?" snarled Scanlon, with his malevolent eyes aglow with quickened suspicion.

Boyd leaned forward on his perch, and placed both arms across his knees.

"Let's suppose a case, Mr. Big Finger," said he, with a provoking display of candor. "You'll hear me with patience, I'm sure, as I heard you. It is only a supposable case, mind you, to illustrate the other side of the story. No foundation, in fact, as you'll plainly see."

Scanlon's hand had closed hard around his revolver. He distrusted this beginning, and a certain vague apprehension impelled him to learn what it presaged. With a darker frown, with his searching eyes fixed constantly on Boyd's unreadable face, he rejoined, curtly:

"I'll hear what you have to say."

Boyd smiled again and nodded.

"I merely aim, since you have questioned my superior cunning, Mr. Scanlon, to show how you, even, might have overleaped your mount," said he, with insinuating suavity. "Suppose, to begin with, that you were not as clever as you thought. Suppose that merely by chance I discovered you on my track, that I at once suspected your purpose, that I deliberately led you to the Woodcock, and there selected one of two vacant booths adjoining, that you might overhear the disclosures and designs I confided to Coleman."

"Too far fetched!" sneered Scanlon. "Much too far!"

"Yet not impossible," argued Boyd, with insinuating pleasantry. "Suppose, to continue, knowing how readily you would take the bait, that I played the game into your hands up to the very moment you landed me aboard your launch."

The eyes under Scanlon's knit brows were glowing like balls of fire.

"Admitting even that, we still should have the advantage," he cried, savagely. "We could not have been followed. I made sure of that."

"Quite right," nodded Boyd. "The fog made pursuit next to impossible. Yet even that condition might have been overcome by a clever man."

"Like yourself?" sneered Scanlon.

"Like myself, if you will," nodded Boyd.

"In what way?"

"Suppose—for this still is supposition only," continued Boyd, still oddly smiling—"suppose that, while I leaned apparently exhausted against the rail of your launch, I had attached to it a few feet of fine, black thread, at the end of which was a small vial. Suppose I left it suspended over the side, while the launch fled across the river. Suppose the vial to have been filled with oil, which oozed drop after drop through a tube in the cork, and fell to the surface of the stream. It would have left upon the river, astern of the fleeing launch, what is known as a slick—a trail as easily followed as that of footprints in fresh fallen snow. Suppose that officers on the prison boat—stop a bit, you fellows!"

The situation suddenly had become strained. Several of the scowling gang had pulled their guns. Scanlon sat like a man silenced for the moment by his own swelling dread and suspicions.

Boyd dropped to his feet behind his chair, and laid his hands on the back of it. The move appeared aimlessly made, yet he designed to use the chair for self-defense, if the need arose.

"Lend me your ears, you fellows!" he quickly added, with more austerity

than yet had sounded in his voice. "I have a word of advice for you, one and all. If you are wise you will keep it in mind. Don't add murder to your list of crimes. The penalty is the gallows. Keep your neck out of the noose—that's my advice!"

"Stow your advice!" cried Scanlon, with a sudden savage outburst. "Do you think thus to divert us from our purpose?"

"Not at all," cried Boyd, sharply. "I have been citing only a perfectly reasonable case. It does not appear to please you, yet follow it one step further. Suppose the launch to have been tracked across the river by the prison boat; suppose that officers aboard her shadowed us to the railway by means of bits of paper dropped by me in the woods through which we fled. Would not the rest have been easy? Even now half of the local police might surround you, prepared to batter down your doors. Hark—hark for just one moment! Do you hear a lad whistling in the street? Might not the lad be my own—and the whistle a signal to me that all is ready? Let us see—let us see!"

Only a man possessed of Boyd's irresistibly magnetic qualities could have checked his excited hearers up to that crucial moment. Nearly all were upon their feet, some glaring affrightedly toward the windows and door, some staring wildly at Scanlon for instructions, while many, with weapons drawn, still hung fire over assailing this man, who, single-handed among them, too obviously had outlined the crafty work by which he now had them cornered.

Before a move could be made, however, Boyd thrust his fingers between his lips, and gave vent to a whistle so loud and shrill that it seemed to pierce the very walls.

It was answered almost instantly by a crash like that of thunder. With a huge timber the door had been dashed from its hinges. Over the threshold and into the room, with Jimmie Coleman foremost, half a hundred policemen and detectives quickly poured, in a way decidedly too business-like to have been wisely resisted.

Only one pistol shot was heard. As the door fell, Scanlon leveled his revolver and, with a snarl of fury, sent one shot in the direction of Felix Boyd. Before the trigger was pressed, however, Paul Wykoff had sprung across the low platform and beaten up the madman's arm.

"You fool!" he hissed, seizing Scanlon's wrist. "We're done for—but take his advice! Keep clear of the noose! There are other days coming!"

It was good advice, and Scanlon dropped the gun upon the table.

The scene that followed requires no description. Such scenes and like raids are enacted almost daily. Within a quarter hour every man of Scanlon's gang was in irons. Boyd himself took charge of Scanlon, bent upon making dead sure of him this time.

Upon reaching the street with him, however, he found that the two patrol wagons waiting there were already crowded. Coleman happened to observe the situation, and at once approached.

"Take him away in yonder hack, Felix," he cried. "It's the one I came down here in. I'll see you later at headquarters."

Boyd nodded, and turned to the police sergeant who had Scanlon by the arm.

"Detach one of those bracelets, sergeant, and hitch him to me," said he. "I will take no chances with him in a hack, and you'd better go along with us."

The officer readily complied, and with Scanlon's wrist manacled to his own, and the sergeant occupying the opposite seat, Boyd presently drove away with his prisoner.

Before they had covered two blocks, however, despite all of Boyd's precautions, Satan once more served his own, in a strange and unexpected way. An alarm of fire was sounding over the city, and in rounding a corner the rapidly driven carriage collided with a chemical engine tearing through the cross street.

The sudden crash, the rending of woodwork, the quick overthrow of vehicles and horses—all was over in the fraction of a second.

When Felix Boyd regained consciousness he found himself on a cot in the

Bellevue Hospital, with two fractured ribs and a damaged head, and with Jimmie Coleman seated beside him.

The Central Office man smiled fondly upon seeing Boyd open his eyes.

"Better not talk much yet, Felix," said he, rather huskily.

"Good heavens!" muttered Boyd. "What's happened?"

"A serious accident, dear fellow," said Coleman, gently. "The police sergeant was killed outright. You'll come out of it all right, however, and we landed all but one of Scanlon's gang, and all of the stolen bonds."

"All but one!" echoed Boyd, raising himself a little. "You don't mean, Jimmie, that the—the Big Finger—escaped!"

In mutely eloquent response, Coleman held up one-half of a pair of broken handcuffs, and Felix Boyd fell back with a heartsick groan.

"God above, Jimmie! is it possible? Then we have scotched the snake, not killed it!" quoth he.

The twelfth story, "The Case of the Serpent's Head," will appear in the next number.

THE SPIDER'S EYE

BY WILLIAM LE QUEUX

The extraordinary adventure of a chivalrous English attache, who attempted to aid beauty in distress

WHEN, just before midnight, last Christmas Eve, I descended at Calais Quay from the ever-grinding sleeping car in which I had spent the last forty-eight hours from Rome, I stretched my weary limbs and breathed the salt air of the sea with satisfaction, notwithstanding the gale that was blowing.

Before me glared the electric lights of the Dover mail boat, on board which my fellow passengers hurried; but, with the knowledge of an habitual traveler, I knew that we carried the inward China mail, and that fully half an hour must elapse before it was shipped. Therefore I strolled into the empty buffet, ordered half a fowl—the like of which one can get nowhere else in the world but at the Calais-Maritime—and leisurely began my supper.

Save for a small hand bag, I had no luggage, for I was crossing Europe as messenger from the British embassy in Rome, and beneath my clothes, in the well-worn belt, reposed an urgent cipher dispatch addressed to his majesty's principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. A crisis had arisen in Europe—one of those ever-recurring scares—and I was glad of it, for it gave me an opportunity of coming home for a flying visit, and of spending Christmas with my own people.

Scarcely had I commenced my meal when there entered the great buffet a tall, dark-haired, very handsome young woman in fur toque and heavy traveling cloak, whom I recognized as having been my fellow traveler all the way from the Italian capital. She was alone, and had occupied a compartment at the

further end of the *wagon-lit,* but during the previous day, as we sat *vis-à-vis* in the restaurant between Turin and Modena, I had entered into conversation with her.

She was Italian, and spoke only that language, therefore she seemed grateful for a chat that passed away those idle hours. I had found her inexpressibly charming—a lady, without a doubt. She wore a wedding ring upon her finger, and I wondered who and where was her husband. When I saw her enter the restaurant I rose, bowed and, with a word of apology, invited her to my table. Perhaps it was a liberty, but cosmopolitan life abroad is conducive to freedom of manner.

Our crossing was a frightful one. Ere we left Calais harbor my friend, Captain Birch, confided to me that had not the morrow been Christmas Day, he would not have attempted it. Yet my companion and myself sat together in the "shelter" on deck, and after three hours of misery arrived at Dover, and entered the hearse-like coaches of the train for Charing Cross.

She interested me. Her natural grace, her modest reserve and her keen sense of humor were alike delightful, while from the purity of her Italian and the slight aspirate of the "c's" I knew that she was Tuscan.

She intended to stay at the Carlton Hotel, wherever that was—for it was her first visit to London—and she was awaiting her husband to join her there. Yes; I might call if I wished. She would be most delighted to see me—to-morrow was Natale, and she would be alone, and dull. I promised to call, and on arriving at Charing Cross saw her two trunks through the customs. The officers, knowing me as a constant traveler, chalked her boxes without opening them.

At five o'clock on Christmas Day, after lunching with the governor down at Horsham, I was shown into her private salon at the Carlton. She had given me the name of Orsi, but I found that she was really the Baroness Orsi, and a well-known figure in Florentine society.

As she rose to greet me I saw that she wore a beautiful gown of gray cloth, the elegance of which spoke mutely of the Rue de la Paix, and with her hat off and her hair well dressed, she presented a figure far more brilliant than in her plain traveling gown.

"Ah! Signor Charlton, I am so pleased you have come!" she cried, gladly, in Italian, extending her hand. "I have been so lonely all day. How sad your London is! They said that there was so much bustle and traffic, and yet it seems deserted. I am disappointed."

I explained that, it being Christmas Day, everyone was either at home or away in the country.

We gossiped on until the dressing gong rang, when of a sudden she said:

"I wonder, Signor Charlton, if you would put aside ceremony and dine with me? It is so very dull for me, for I haven't even a maid to talk with."

The prospect of dining *tête-à-tête* with a pretty woman is never distasteful to a man, yet I recollected that her husband might object to such an unconventionality. The baroness recognized the reason of my hesitation, and hastened to assure me that she was desirous of introducing me to him. Therefore I took a cab round to my rooms in Ryder Street, dressed, and an hour later was eating my Christmas dinner with my pretty companion.

She had changed into a superb gown of black, trimmed with silver sequins, and around her throat wore a rope of splendid pearls. There were no rings upon her fingers save the golden band of matrimony, yet so handsome was she that every head in the room turned to look at her and to whisper in admiration.

Somehow I had entertained a distinct belief that I had either seen her photograph in some illustrated paper, or that I had met her somewhere before. But when at last I raised my glass to her, and wished her "A merry Christmas," she dropped her great, dark eyes, and, sighing, said:

"No, signore, that cannot be. Mine must, unfortunately, be a very unhappy one."

I was surprised, but made no remark. We finished our meal, and she rose, and, with her long train of shimmering sequins sweeping the carpet, drew herself up and walked down the room, all heads being turned at her departure.

Upstairs in her private salon she sank into a low chair, her bare elbows on her knees, her pointed chin resting upon her hands, gazing in silence into the fire.

I spoke to her in sympathy, offering what assistance I could, but she made no reply. She was thinking deeply, her gaze fixed upon the embers.

"I was a fool!" she cried, suddenly, turning to me. "A fool! I had no idea they would follow me here."

"Whom?"

"My enemies! Ah!" she added, in a hoarse voice, "you don't know—you cannot know my peril. I am a doomed woman. It is not your fault, but mine, for inviting you here. Only, I warn you to have a care of yourself. They are bold and unscrupulous in their vengeance."

"Doomed!" I cried. "I really don't understand you. Explain. If you feel yourself in danger, you have only to seek police protection. It is very simple in London."

She smiled bitterly, saying:

"You cannot, unfortunately, know. If I dared tell you you would pity me—you would know the awful burden of grief and unhappiness that has to-night crushed my heart—you would recognize the deadly peril in which I hourly exist."

I strove for a long time to comfort her, standing beside her, my hand laid tenderly upon her arm. She, however, seemed filled with grave apprehensions of the future.

Again and again I tried to learn the meaning of her enigmatical words, but she steadfastly refused to satisfy me. She only said:

"It is as I feared—I am a marked woman."

Suddenly a rap at the door startled us. She sprang to her feet, while I rose in quick expectancy. It proved to be a waiter, who handed her a card. At sight of it she bit her lip and turned pale as death.

"The gentleman says he must see you at once, madame," exclaimed the man.

"Very well," she answered, hoarsely. "Show him up." And then she stood white and rigid.

"Signor Charlton," she gasped, as soon as the waiter had closed the door, "I am in peril—deadly peril. You can save me if you will."

"How?" I asked, anxious to be of service to my distressed companion.

"By—by passing for one brief half hour as my husband. You will, won't you? To this man I must introduce you as the Baron Giovanni Orsi. Recollect, we were married a year ago; we live in Florence; you are English, with an Italian title; my name was Brunetti before marriage—Velia Brunetti."

"But——"

"You must," she urged, "to save me. He will want you to sign a legal document. You will do so, won't you?"

And scarcely could I reply before the door opened, and there entered a short, thin-faced, elderly man of a rather overdressed type and a Jewish cast of features. No second glance was necessary to discern that he also was Italian.

The greeting in Italian between the pair was of a formal character, but the next instant my companion introduced me as her husband, the baron, while I learned that our visitor was a notary public named Carlini, who had come from Milan.

Taking from his pocket a formidable bundle of papers, he began to arrange them with a business-like air, expressing regret at troubling me at that hour, but he had arrived posthaste from Italy only an hour before.

"The formal transfers of the property are all here," he added. "They await only the signatures of the *Signor Barone*."

"Sign them, Giovanni," urged my pseudo-wife, bringing me pen and ink. "You'll be glad afterward that you've got rid of the property."

It was one thing to assist a pretty woman in distress, but quite another to commit forgery. Our eyes met. I saw

that she was desperate, therefore I took up the pen and scrawled "Giovanni Orsi" half a dozen times on the papers the notary presented, while he countersigned them, and, after some remarks about a sale, of which I was in complete ignorance, he rose, bowed profoundly and left.

The moment he had gone I knew I had acted foolishly. Some remarkable and profound mystery surrounded my handsome companion, but what it was I had not the slightest idea. Why the fact that we had dined together should bring upon me a blood vengeance, or why it was necessary for me to pass as her husband, was an utter enigma.

I walked back to Ryder Street full of strange reflections.

Next evening, the night of Boxing Day, I returned to the Carlton, and again ate my dinner in her company, for she had urged me, in order to save her, to continue to pass as the baron.

"You shall know everything later on," she promised. "I know all this must strike you as strange, but it is not half so curious as the circumstances in which I to-night find myself."

Hers was a superb figure, in a beautiful gown of pale pink chiffon, and when, after dining, she invited me to accompany her to an evening party, I really felt nothing loath.

Upstairs she handed me a piece of paper on which was written, "Mrs. Marston, 118 Pembridge Square W.," asking me how far distant it was. I explained that it was in Kensington, and we drove thither.

An elderly man-servant conducted us up to the drawing room, and I found myself bowing over the hand of a tall, fair-haired woman, who had a host of well-dressed guests about her.

Our hostess spoke Italian, saying:

"I am really delighted to make your acquaintance, baron. We have heard so much of you."

And then I found myself tacked on to a rather pretty girl in blue, who afterward gave us some music.

Many of the guests were foreigners of a type that, abroad, I should have avoided, and the baroness seemed well known to them. Yet I recollected that in London foreign life moves in a very queer circle.

Presently I noticed the baroness standing aside speaking earnestly with a thin, consumptive-looking Frenchman, with scraggy, fair beard, who stood listening attentively, until of a sudden he raised his finger, indicative of silence, and with a glance at me turned quickly and left her side.

When I handed her into the hansom to return I found her trembling. She could scarcely speak. Something had occurred; but what it was, I had no idea.

"Misfortune has again followed me!" she gasped, when at last she could sufficiently control herself. "I must fly—to-night! We are both in peril of our lives. Ah! I had never suspected this. It was foolish to expose you to such danger, but I did not anticipate such a result. We must separate. I shall leave London in secret and go to stay where they cannot find me—with a Mrs. Beverley, who was at the convent school with me in Bologna. She lives at Houghton Manor, Grantham. Will you take charge of my luggage and go somewhere with it—say to some good hotel in the north—and there await me? I'll join you as soon as all is safe. We must aid each other. You are in the same deadly peril as myself."

I hesitated. The mysterious gesture of that consumptive-looking foreigner had aroused my suspicions. Besides, I felt sure that I had overheard her conversing with another woman in very good English, although she had affected to me not to understand it. By posing as her husband I had already placed myself in a position of considerable danger, it seemed; but her request that I should take her luggage, leave London and live openly as the baron increased the mystery. What could be her motive?

That she existed in deadly terror I could not fail to recognize, but in what manner I had imperiled myself, save to incur the just wrath of the baron, I could not discern.

She saw my hesitation, and, laying her hand upon my arm, earnestly said:

"Do me this one favor, Signor Charlton—for your own sake! When you know the truth you will see why this parting is absolutely necessary, and why I should go into hiding without my luggage to escape my enemies. You are marked down, just as I am, but if you take my trunks, and live openly at some hotel as the Baron Orsi, their intentions will be foiled. I shall telegraph to my husband in Liverpool, and he will assume another name while you pose as him."

"It really seems a very curious arrangement," I laughed. "I don't understand why——"

"Of course you don't," she interrupted, quickly. "It is my fault—all my fault—and I am only seeking to save you from the vendetta as well as to protect myself. I am a hunted woman, and I tell you plainly that you, too, may fall the victim of their ingenious plot. Therefore, I ask you most earnestly to adopt my suggestion."

So persistently did she urge me to escape from London that on arrival at the Carlton I reluctantly resolved to go to the Grand Hotel at Birmingham, and there assume the identity and title of the Baron Giovanni Orsi, of Florence. At four o'clock that morning I left the hotel with her two huge traveling trunks full of the costly costumes which I had assisted her to repack, and her husband's big, silver-mounted dressing bag, which she lent me for my use.

Only when I breakfasted alone in my private sitting room in Birmingham did I realize what dangerous ground I was treading. The silver fittings of the dressing bag bore the letter "O," surmounted by a baron's coronet, and I wondered what I should do, or how I should act, if the real baron actually turned up irate. His wife had assured me that she would arrange matters, but after hearing her speak fluently a language of which she had assumed ignorance, I had somehow begun to distrust her.

Day followed day. I had received a telegram, in Italian, from her, dispatched from Peterborough Station, with the words:

> Will write as soon as I am settled. Have patience. V. O.

But although the New Year dawned, yet no letter reached me.

I grew anxious. I was living in expensive style, amid a great retinue of bowing waiters and other hotel servants, but, knowing few people in Birmingham, time hung heavily upon my hands. I dared not write to her, as she had strictly forbidden it, so I could only wait. All her belongings were in my possession, therefore she must certainly communicate with me ere long.

Her silence was more than curious. My leave would shortly be up, and I would have to return to the embassy at Rome; therefore I resolved to run the risk, return to London, and call upon Mrs. Marston, in Pembridge Square.

The instant the cab pulled up before the house I realized the truth. The shutters were closed, and a bill announced that it was to let. I drove to the club, and wrote to my mysterious companion, addressing it care of Mrs. Beverley, Houghton Manor, Grantham; but five days later it came back to me at Birmingham marked "Unknown."

My fair companion had misled me, that was evident. I had committed forgery at her instigation. I was annoyed, and, despising myself for having been such a fool, resolved to return to London on the following day.

About ten o'clock that same night, as I entered the hotel, a well-dressed man advanced to greet me, asking if I were the Baron Orsi—to which I was compelled to respond in the affirmative.

"I wish to see you privately," he said.

"Certainly," I answered, and I took him up to my sitting room, where, the instant we were inside, we were joined by two other men, who were apparently in waiting, while the man who had first accosted me turned and said in a hard, distinct voice:

"You admit that you are the Baron Giovanni Orsi, of Florence, therefore I arrest you, under an extradition warrant from Brussels, for being an accomplice

with your wife in the murder of Henri Roux, banker, of that city."

"What!" I gasped, utterly dumfounded.

"I am an inspector of police, and I warn you that any statement you make will be used as evidence against you at your trial," he said. And, turning to one of his subordinates, he added: "Evans, search the rooms thoroughly."

"Look here, inspector," I exclaimed, now thoroughly alive to the seriousness of the situation, "I may as well tell you that I am Edwin Charlton, of the British diplomatic service, and have only assumed the baron's name. I see how I've been tricked, and I'll explain the whole circumstances at once."

This I did, one of the detectives seating himself at the table, and taking down every word of my statement in writing.

"Well, sir," remarked the inspector, "if all you say is true, the case is a much queerer one than I expected. We've had some very remarkable information about the baron and his wife from Brussels. You say that her luggage is here. We'd better open it, for we may find some clew to her whereabouts."

"Certainly," I said; and took the men at once into a small bedroom where the two trunks stood. I had no keys, but with the aid of a crowbar the lock of the first was wrenched off, and within we found a variety of feminine attire of the finest and most costly description. The second lock gave us more trouble, for the trunk was a heavy, iron-bound one; but it yielded at last, and on opening it the dresses emitted a curious, faint chemical odor. One by one they were removed until the detective who handed them out suddenly came upon a cover of zinc, which he forced open, and then, starting back with a cry of horror, ejaculated:

"Why, good heavens! what's this?"

We looked, and truly a ghastly sight presented itself to our gaze, for within, doubled up, was the fully-dressed body of a dark-bearded, middle-aged man.

All of us stood aghast at the discovery. I was rooted to the spot.

My charming companion had carried with her from Rome the evidence of some terrible crime. The zinc-lined portion of the trunk had, it seemed, been purposely constructed in order to prevent decomposition.

Our first thought was that it might be the body of the unfortunate banker, who, it appeared, had been, a month before, murdered in his own office in the Boulevard Anspach, in Brussels, and his safe rifled of cash and negotiable securities. But the inspector at once negatived that theory by telling us that the banker was aged sixty-five, and that his body had been found with a knife wound in the back.

Something glittering caught my eye within that grewsome casket, and, bending, I saw that it was a gold signet ring on the dead, white hand. It bore the letter "O," surmounted by the coronet—the same as was on the silver top of the baron's dressing case.

The body was that of the baron himself.

Our surprise and dismay may well be imagined. How the police hushed up the matter from the press in order that the ingenious baroness whom they wanted should be unaware of the discovery, and how we compared the photograph of the baron, sent by the Brussels police, with the dead man's countenance, and found it exact, need not be repeated here.

It is sufficient to say that, resuming my more prosaic patronymic, I returned to London, where I assisted the police in every way possible, and by recognizing the consumptive-looking Frenchman one day in the Strand, I was able to place the detectives on the right track. For weeks they shadowed the hollow-cheeked foreigner, until, by a letter he posted to her, it was discovered that she had taken a situation as governess in Paris in order to conceal her identity.

The Frenchman, who was named Lemaire, was, by a telegram sent by the police in her name, enticed over to Paris, where, on arrival at the Gare du Nord, he found himself arrested as an accomplice.

He declared he knew nothing of the

assassination of Roux, but to save himself he admitted that he had been a friend of the baroness—an adventuress of the worst type—in Rome, and had been dining at her flat on the fateful night when the baron expired suddenly—poisoned by his wife's dastardly hand.

It was proved by information gained by the Brussels police that the Italian woman had married the baron only to obtain a standing in the social world, and after a number of minor robberies, had planned and carried out the robbery and assassination of her friend Roux alone and unaided.

The resolve of her husband—who had found out what she was before marriage, and had discovered her crime—to expose her, caused her to seal his lips by administering poison, and afterward, by calling a notary from Milan, and boldly passing me off as the dead man, and obtaining my signatures, she had ingeniously succeeded in selling his estates in Tuscany, and taking possession of the proceeds.

Her record proved to be of the very blackest. Indeed, I held in my hand her dossier, as supplied to my friend, Monsieur Hamard, chief of the Paris detective force, and I later on accompanied the officers to the house in the Avenue des Champs Elysées, where she was hiding as governess.

On arrival, however, we found that she had been absent all day, and had not returned.

Early the following morning her body was found in the Bois, and beside it an empty bottle that had contained prussic acid.

Lemaire denied that he had warned the woman of her impending arrest. Yet I have reason to believe that one of the gang of international thieves, of which, before her marriage, the fair baroness had been one of the leading members—and who were in the habit of meeting at that corner house in Pembridge Square—had sent her word in secret that Monsieur Hamard was in possession of that incriminating file of papers, the first of which was an impression of her thumb, with her measurements, according to the Bertillon method of identification, and upon which was indorsed the expressive nickname by which she had been known to that gang of thieves and adventurers before her marriage—"The Spider's Eye."

A CHRISTMAS LAMENT

"CHRISTMAS comes but once a year"—
Once is quite enough.
It will leave me broke, I fear.
Tell you, it is tough!

Got a family mighty big,
Friends at least a score;
Gifts for all I've got to dig;
Glad there aren't more!

All will send me things, I know;
All expect 'em, too.
When one hasn't got the dough,
What's a chap to do?

ROBERT T. HARDY, JR.

THE WHISTLE OF FATE

BY RICHARD MARSH

Author of "The House of Mystery," "In Full Cry," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

George Edney, a dying convict, tells a fellow prisoner, Andrew Bruce, where a tin box containing treasure is buried, and makes him his heir. When Bruce is released he recovers the box, which contains papers showing that Francis Smithers (Edney's former name) had two bank accounts and a safe with a deposit company. The key of the safe and its owner's signature are also in the box, and Bruce resolves to assume the name of Francis Smithers. He finds that the safe contains stock certificates, jewels, and a large number of counterfeit bank-notes, together with the plates from which they were printed, and a list of eight names. Bruce, now Smithers, takes lodging with Mrs. Ludlow, and falls in love with her pretty daughter, Netta, who returns his affection and promises to marry him. But the property bequeathed by the dying convict had not belonged to him, but to a band of eight desperate criminals. The gang, it seems, has been trying to attract Smithers' attention for some time by means of a mysterious whistle, but as he was unaware of its significance, it had merely excited his curiosity. The leader of the Eight, Augustus Chaffinch, finally accosts Smithers and threatens him with death if he does not yield up the gang's plunder. As Smithers shows no inclination to obey their mandates, they send him a written reminder, which he calmly tears up.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BITER BITTEN.

THE coming wedding began to cast its shadows before. To Netta those were astounding days. She moved in a continuous atmosphere of miracles or dreams. Her future lord seemed to have made up his mind that she should go without no good thing. Jewels he showered upon her, at whose value she could only guess, but before whose beauty she stood amazed. She had not realized that such things really were, outside the fairy tales. He opened a banking account in her name —but not at the National Bank—against the magnitude of which she vainly cried. Her trousseau was in itself a dream. Amid that wealth of lovely raiment her soul was uplifted, half ashamed of herself though she was. But then, pretty clothes never before had come her way; and the heart of nearly every woman craves for them.

The purchase of the Dene Park estate was completed with a decree of expedition to which not improbably the legal gentlemen on both sides were unaccustomed in matters of such importance. The works necessary to render the house inhabitable were at once commenced. Great firms were charged to see that it was duly furnished and ready for the reception of its master and mistress by the approaching Christmas season. Mr. Glasspoole was installed in the steward's house, and endowed with the necessary authority to see that everything required was properly and promptly done.

Sidney Foster, who had already left Birchester to take up a position on the

This story began in the July issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

staff of the Rodway Power, was duly informed of what had taken place.

"I'm delighted to hear of the poor chap's good luck; I always felt that he was more sinned against than sinning. Edney was the scoundrel; it was out of him that no good thing could come. But then, if you don't mind my saying so, Mr. Smithers, I'm so off my head at my own good luck that I can't help rejoicing at anybody else's."

Margaret Foster had been duly introduced to Netta Ludlow, with whom she had struck up an instant friendship, based on a difference of opinion on almost every conceivable subject. But then Miss Foster's views were exclusively her own.

"Of course, marriage ruins a woman's career," she observed, on one occasion.

Netta promptly cut her short.

"Marriage ruins a woman's career! What nonsense are you talking? Why, marriage is a woman's career. Wait till it's on the point of ruining yours, then you'll change your tone."

"Perhaps. I'll wait. When that time comes I hope it will be ruined by the same sort of person who is ruining yours."

Already the Rodway Power was proving to be the gold mine its owners had expected. The experimental motors which had been built had realized to the full their inventor's anticipations. Their fame had traveled round the world. Everywhere men had awoke to the truth that that revolution in mechanical force for whose advent engineers had so long been looking, had at last become an accomplished fact. The Rodway Power, or some analogous substitute, had the commercial and locomotive future of the world at its feet. Orders from all parts of the globe were pouring in. It was obvious that no firm, however huge, could cope with them single-handed. Arrangements were being pressed forward, in virtue of which the process of manufacture could be carried on in various countries on terms which would produce for Messrs. Smithers & Rodway an income which in its immensity would be altogether beyond anything of which adventurous financial magnates hitherto had dreamed.

In the meanwhile they continued to be fellow lodgers in that little house at Putney.

Thither, one evening, repaired the brother of the expectant bride—Mr. Theodore Ludlow. It chanced, when he arrived, that his sister was out, having gone to spend an hour with Miss Margaret Foster.

Theodore inquired for her when he appeared. On learning where she was, he frowned.

"Where's Mr. Smithers?" He was told that Mr. Smithers was in his sitting room. "Then I'll see him."

Soon Mr. Theodore was ushering himself into the lodger's presence.

Directly he saw him Mr. Smithers perceived, by certain signs, that there was trouble coming.

Mr. Smithers opened the interview by ignoring the singularity of his visitor's bearing.

"I believe, Mr. Ludlow, that it is no use my offering you anything. You expressed your views on tobacco and what you called 'alcohol' on a previous occasion."

"I did. And in any case, were I the most bibulous of men, I should decline to drink with you, as you are well aware."

"Why should I be aware of it?"

"Men in my position do not hobnob with a thief."

"I fancy, Mr. Ludlow, that men in your position do and say rather funny things."

"They have to, when they are brought into contact with such a character as you."

"Gently, Mr. Ludlow, gently! Don't force the note too soon."

"Do you suppose that, however it may be with the rest of the world, you have deceived me for a single instant?—that I don't know who you are, and all about you?"

"I am not supposing anything."

"Do you suppose that I am not conscious that your name is no more Francis Smithers than mine is?"

"Is that so, really?"

"Do you suppose that I have not throughout been cognizant of the fact that you have been masquerading under another man's name, in order to obtain possession of property to which you have not the slightest claim?"

"You appear to be cognizant of a good many things, Mr. Ludlow."

"Not content with ordinary rascality, you have proceeded to the extraordinary by endeavoring to entangle the affections of an innocent girl."

"You allude to Netta?"

"Don't speak of her by her Christian name in my presence. I am her brother."

"A fact on which she has reason to congratulate herself, since you are so exemplary a son and generous a brother."

"You may sneer, and sneer, and sneer; but you know, as I know, that I hold you in the hollow of my hand"—to illustrate his meaning, Mr. Ludlow held out the hand in question—"and that I've but to move my fingers to crush you. In other words, I have but to speak to the constable in the street, and you'll be on the road to penal servitude."

"Shall I ring and give them instructions to communicate with the gentleman in question?"

"You may laugh as well as sneer, but you'll not find a prolonged sojourn in one of his majesty's jails amusing. I came here with the express intention of speaking plainly, of calling a spade a spade, and of making myself understood. I have carried out that intention. Now you understand me."

"I am not sure that I do; but that is by the way. If those are all the remarks you have to make, I am afraid I have no right to detain you."

"They are not; I wish they were."

"I also."

"You have inveigled both my mother and sister into an invidious position."

"That's a lie."

"I am therefore placed in the distressing situation of having to choose between doing violence to their feelings and my simple duty. Under these circumstances I have arrived at a decision which I fear does more credit to my heart than to my head. I have resolved to conceal—at least temporarily—my knowledge of certain actions of which I know you to have been guilty; to put it into another form, to show mercy."

"Then you have arrived at a decision which does you credit."

"I am not so sure of that. I can only say that I have arrived at it after careful and profound consideration of the matter from every point of view. In the first place, due and proper penitence must be shown—practical penitence. The account standing in the name of Francis Smithers must be restored to its original proportions—with interest up to date. So that when Mr. Smithers does appear it may be found intact."

"And in the second place?"

"In the second place, the sum of ten thousand pounds must be placed in my hands as a guarantee of future good conduct."

Mr. Smithers looked at Mr. Ludlow as if suspecting a jest, but the cashier's expression continued to be of wooden severity.

Then, going to a box which was on the sideboard, Mr. Smithers chose a cigar, prepared it with fastidious care, lit it, and seemed disposed to enjoy it with complete disregard to Mr. Ludlow's presence. The cashier eyed his proceedings grimly.

"I await your answer."

Mr. Smithers took his cigar from between his lips, as if surprised.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I say that I await your answer."

"My answer! To what?"

"Do you intend to accept my conditions, or to go to penal servitude?"

"Unfortunately, I don't understand your conditions."

"I will repeat them. You are to restore the account at the bank to its original proportions, with interest added; and you are to deposit in my hands the sum of ten thousand pounds in cash as a guarantee of your future good conduct."

"It is that last condition which I don't understand. Shall I tell you why?"

"Certainly."

"Because I happen to know that you yourself are in a rather tight place; and I therefore fail to see how the depositing of such a sum of money in your hands would act as a guarantee of your future good conduct."

"What do you mean? What are you daring to insinuate?"

"Nothing. I am no dealer in insinuations. I am merely wishful to remind you that you have been using other people's money in speculations which, so far, have turned out unsuccessfully. I do so, although I am conscious that the fact has no more escaped your recollection than it has mine. On the contrary, I am afraid it has cost you many wakeful nights, Mr. Ludlow."

The cashier's complexion assumed a curious hue. His expression became, if possible, harder and more rigid than before.

"What good do you suppose you will do yourself by talking such nonsense?"

"You say you knew from the first that I was defrauding the bank?"

"I did. You never deceived me for a moment."

"Then it was your duty to at once communicate the fact to your employers. By concealing your knowledge, you were conniving at a fraud on them."

"I had my reasons for keeping silence."

"Not a doubt of it. You will find that your employers will appreciate those reasons. I do. You allowed the fraud to be continued; you allowed me to finance your mother, to become engaged to your sister——"

"I had no voice in either of those matters."

"You take care not to have—you were duly advised of what was occurring. It is only when you yourself are in pecuniary straits and in imminent danger of ruinous exposure that you endeavor, by means of threats, to levy blackmail."

"Blackmail! You insolent——"

"Steady! Let me advise you, Mr. Ludlow, not to apply any more injurious threats to me, or—you may regret it. The alternative you offer—penal servitude or ten thousand pounds—is blackmail in its worst form."

"I only require that that sum shall be deposited——"

"Deposited! With a man who is worse than penniless! Your choice of words is more than odd. However, we will not pursue that matter any further. You are, of course, at liberty to take any steps you like. On a single point I should like to have an understanding before requesting you to be kind enough to leave me. I am about to marry your sister. Do not imagine that I am marrying you. As you at present appear to me, you are a type of man for whom I have no use. You seem to be a bully, a hypocrite, something closely approximating to a knave, and, I also fear, a coward. You have been a bad brother and a worse son. You have devoted your whole life to self-seeking—with results which, as you are yourself aware, are only too likely to be disastrous. With a person of such a character, understand once, and once for all, that I decline to have intercourse of any kind. Now I must ask you to relieve me of your society, Mr. Ludlow."

"One—one more word."

"What is it?"

Mr. Ludlow seemed to find some difficulty in answering. His fluency seemed to have deserted him. His attitude had undergone a marked change during the last few minutes. Anxiety had taken the place of sternness. When he spoke it was almost as if he stammered. All at once his voice had become husky.

"I—I'm afraid there's a certain amount of truth in what you say. I—I have been the victim of some unfortunate speculations. At the time I entered into them I had every reason to believe that they were sound, and that the result would be blessed by Providence——"

"Would be what?"

"Would be—would be all that could be desired."

"By you?"

"By me. Instead of which, owing to circumstances over which I had no con-

trol, I found myself confronted by a loss for which I—I was unprepared; and—and I'm sorry to say——"

"I know. You needn't go on. What was the amount?"

"It's—it's not a large amount. About—about three thousand pounds."

"You don't call that a large amount? May I inquire what your salary is?"

"Of course, in proportion to my salary, it is a large amount. I—I was comparing it in—in my mind's eye with the immense fortune with the accumulation of which you are credited."

"What right have you to make such a comparison?"

"None—absolutely none. I—I beg your pardon for making it. It—it was a most unfortunate phrase. Of course the amount is a large one; a very large—a painfully large one."

"You're a pretty sort of creature to attempt to measure swords with me. On my word, Mr. Ludlow, you are a much more insignificant creature than I imagined." He paused, as if to listen. Some one was entering the front door. "I fancy that's Netta. If so, I will request her to do me the favor of witnessing the remainder of our little interview."

"I—I would much rather she did not come in here, at least for a minute or two, if—if you don't mind."

"I do mind; I had much rather she did come." He opened the door. "It is Netta. Netta, would you mind obliging me with your company for a few moments?"

Netta's voice was heard replying:

"As a rule I do object, very strongly, to come anywhere where you are; but by way of an exception, for once in a while——"

The young lady came into the room, all radiant with smiles—and impertinence. At the sight of her brother the smiles—and impertinence—vanished. Her face fell.

"Theodore!" she said. Adding, when she perceived the singularity of his appearance, "What—what is wrong?"

To Netta this was a new Theodore. This hangdog, nerveless, frightened, anxious creature was not the family tyrant with whom she was only too familiar. That Theodore had looked a whole world in the face, bidding it contradict his smallest utterance if it dare; this cringed as if in doubt whether to plead for pity or to shun it.

The singularity of his demeanor was rendered more conspicuous by his companion's perfect ease. Mr. Smithers, taking Netta's two hands in his, regarded her wondering face with smiling eyes.

"Netta, I have to tell you something which will pain you; but for your own sake, for your mother's, and for mine, I think that you had better be told. Your brother has more than once dropped you hints that he is acquainted with something to the detriment of my character?"

"You know that I never believed him."

"Of course I know it. He came tonight to inform me that he intended to publish this knowledge—I don't quite know to whom, but we will say the world."

"He never dared!"

"He did dare. He was kind enough, however, to inform me that he would still continue to conceal the mysterious and wondrous things he knows if I would place in his hands ten thousand pounds."

"He must be mad."

"On the contrary, I fancy that he is singularly sane. But it appears that he is not actuated so much by a wish to hurt me as by a desire to save himself. He has been speculating beyond his means, and to make good his losses has resorted to irregularities which may imperil his position at the bank in more ways than one."

"Theodore!"

"You mentioned, Mr. Ludlow, that the sum of which you stand in need is about three thousand pounds. Is that the exact amount?"

"The exact amount is four thousand two hundred and fifty pounds."

"Four thousand two hundred and fifty? You use the word 'about' in a generous sense. Is that all? Will that cover everything?"

"Everything."

"Then if I give you a check for five thousand pounds, that will be sufficient?"

The cashier's eyes glistened. His figure grew suddenly straighter.

"More than sufficient! And—and you will have earned my undying gratitude."

"I will place on paper the remarks you have heard me address to your sister; how you have endeavored to blackmail me; how you have been guilty of serious defalcations. It will take the form of a confession, to which you will affix your signature. When you have signed it I will give you a check for five thousand pounds, because I am unwilling that the commencement of your sister's married life should be darkened by the shadow of her brother's shame. But you will understand, Mr. Ludlow, that this is the only assistance you will ever have from me. Are you prepared to sign a document of the nature I have described?"

During Mr. Smithers' observations his former dejected air had returned to Mr. Ludlow with almost more than its original force. Apparently the proposition did not commend itself to him.

"I—I don't think you ought to ask me to place myself in your power to the extent which you suggest. It would convey the impression that my—my attitude has been more—more regrettable than it has."

"You are, of course, entitled to hold such an opinion. Only, if you do, I must ask you to leave my room."

"I'll—I'll sign."

Mr. Smithers, sitting down to his desk, wrote something on a sheet of letter paper.

"Be so good as to read that through, Mr. Ludlow," he said, when he had finished, "and if it correctly describes your conduct, sign it."

Mr. Ludlow read it through, with a face which was a study in certain unusual forms of expression. Then, with compressed lips, he signed it.

"I will not ask your sister to act as a formal witness, but you will not fail to remember that she has seen what you have done." Taking up the paper, Mr. Smithers carefully examined it. "Is this your usual signature? It is rather hieroglyphic for a bank cashier."

"Yes."

"You see, Netta?"

"It is not his usual signature—it is not in the least like it."

"So I suspected. You hear, Mr. Ludlow. I am afraid I must ask you to sign it again. Leave this hieroglyph untouched, and under it place your usual signature, if you please." As he did as he was bidden, the set of Mr. Ludlow's mouth and lips suggested the grin of a wild cat. "That, at least, seems more in order. Is it, Netta?" The girl nodded. "Here is a check for five thousand pounds, payable to your order on presentation. And now, good-night."

Mr. Ludlow left the room, with the check unfolded in his hand, without deigning to go through any form of thanks or farewell either. Nothing could be less suggestive of undying gratitude than his proceedings when he found himself out in the street. He shook his fist at the window of the room which he had just quitted—which was not a kindly gesture. And as he proceeded on his way, he rained down curses on the head of the man whose check he was pocketing.

"He's cleverer than I thought, and carries heavier metal. I was a fool to go so unprepared; he had me at a disadvantage. But next time I'll know better—and that there will be a next time is as sure as that he's alive. If he thinks he has succeeded in throwing dust in my eyes he's mistaken; I know he isn't Francis Smithers; who and what he is I'll know before I pay him another call. That there is something badly wrong about him I need no telling. Only let me hit upon the proof of what it is, and it'll be his turn to sign confessions. As for Netta, she looks on him as a demigod, and on me as so much dirt. I'll pay her! If I show her, beyond the possibility of contradiction, that he's a scoundrel, it'll be like dealing her her death blow. I know her. It'll break her heart. And I'll break it—yet!"

CHAPTER XX.

ON PUTNEY HEATH.

It was the night before the wedding. The bride of the morrow and her mother had retired to rest. A restless fit possessed the expectant bridegroom.

"I'd not sleep if I went to bed, so what's the use of going? The night is fine. A tramp across the heath may perhaps brush away the cobwebs."

He went out. A clock struck one. Through the still, clear air the sound went swiftly. Other chimes pressed on the first. For a few seconds clock called to clock.

He had reached the heath. Although there were houses within a stone's throw, immediately on either side of him was open country, broken by trees, gorse, blackberry bushes. The turf rose and fell.

"There are fellows who'd say that it were folly in a man in my position to trust himself alone up here at this romantic hour—especially upon his wedding eve. And it's certain that if any of my threatening friends are disposed to show that they mean business, now's their time to do it. I presume there are policemen hereabouts; but if the moment is well chosen, it's doubtful if they would be likely to come my way in time. It were the part of discretion to turn back, and turn soon; but discretion is a virtue to which I never was attached. For an argument—of sorts!—I'm just in the mood. It's a prescription, properly applied, of which I stand in need. Life's gone too easily of late."

He had proceeded, perhaps, another hundred yards, when for the first time he performed an instantaneous right about face. He had noticed something which might have escaped a less keen ear.

"That was some one stumbling over a bush—I've heard a gentleman do it in a covert before to-night. Where is he? I'd like to have some one with me here, so that we might have a little bet as to his exact location. He's a seasoned hand. Although he must have been taken unawares, he's gone to earth in a flash. I say he's inside that clump of what looks like gorse, and I'm ready to support my opinion to the extent of a pony. Hello!—more sport!"

He had been contemplating a group of brambles, which were at a little distance on his right. All at once his glance traveled across the road to the more wooded ground upon his left.

"There's some one among those hawthorns, or whatever they are, and more than one. Two at least—I'll be easily convinced that there are three. I saw what looked uncommonly like heads against the sky line; I'm sure that there were two. Shall I let them know I've spotted them, and provoke an attack at the moment which suits me? They must have realized that my suspicions have been aroused. Not I. The element of uncertainty is half the fun; let them come when it suits them."

As he neared Wimbledon Common he became conscious that some one was approaching—"with measured tread and slow."

"A policeman!—as I'm a sinner! Nothing could be better. If I don't have a little amusement at the expense of my unseen friends, I'm only a relic of the man I used to be. The position is developing latent possibilities. Gentlemen of the Eight!—you're in for a bad five minutes. If I were only sure that Mr. Augustus Chaffinch is among you!"

On came the policeman—on went Mr. Smithers. They arrived within a yard of one another. Then Mr. Smithers stopped. He addressed the constable in a tone of voice which must have been audible, say, within fifty yards or so.

"A fine night, officer."

"Yes—but it's a little late."

The remark might almost have been intended as a hint. The constable was a big, burly fellow, with a heavy black mustache. He eyed Mr. Smithers with official suspicion, which was presently lulled when he perceived what manner of man he was.

"It is a trifle early. But I presume that in this part of the world one is not likely to meet with an adventure even at this hour of the morning."

"Well—it's pretty lonely."

"I've come up Putney Hill, and do you know that I've more than once had an odd impression that I was being followed?"

"Then if I was you I should go straight back down Putney Hill. You'll be safer there than here."

"You see those brambles to the left of that tree—only a second or two before you came up I fancied that I saw a man dodge down behind them."

"I'll go and see if you like."

"No—I wouldn't trouble you. It was only my fancy; you know the sort of fancies one does get in a place like this."

"You'd better let me go and see. Such things have happened, and will happen again."

"Nonsense. You make me think of the ancient spinster who makes it a nightly rule to look for the burglar under the bed. Good-night—have a cigar."

The policeman had a cigar. Each pursued his individual way. When he had gone a little distance, glancing over his shoulder, Mr. Smithers perceived that what he had anticipated had taken place—the constable had quitted the highroad to stroll toward the patch of brushwood toward which his attention had been directed.

"I fear that you are just a trifle late—I fancy the birds were alarmed in time. They were alarmed; that's something." The constable, after wandering in and out among the bushes, was returning to the road. "I thought so. Not a feather to be found."

He walked on till, as he moved round the bend in the road, the policeman passed from sight.

"Now, will they come, or will they wait till he is out of hearing, too? A shout would reach him. Perhaps their instructions are to take no risks. I, on the other hand, am taking all there are around. But the truth is, I'm curious to know what sort of gentry these are with whom I have to deal. Mr. Chaffinch's mysterious jargon has inspired me with a desire to bring the matter of the Eight to something like a test. I'll give them to the windmill. If, by the time I reach it, they've still done nothing, I'll act on Robert's advice and walk back again down Putney Hill. Who the deuce are you?"

The inquiry was addressed to a figure which seemed to rise up out of the ground itself in front of him. Almost at the same instant two other figures appeared on either side. Making no attempt to answer his question, they came at him with a rush. Laughing, he drew back.

"So there's going to be an argument—welcome, gentlemen of the Eight!"

When the first man came within his reach he dealt him a blow on the face which hurled him back on to the ground from which he so recently had risen.

"I hope I haven't hurt your nose, sir; I fear it's broken."

He met one of the others with his right. But the force of the blow was broken by his companion, who, flinging himself on Mr. Smithers, twined his arms about his neck. The man staggered backward, but, recovering himself, again came rushing on. Cumbered by the fellow who had hung himself about him with monkey-like agility, Mr. Smithers was ill prepared to encounter his fresh antagonist.

"Hold on!" muttered the newcomer. "I'll down him!"

"Will you! I think you are mistaken."

While he was still speaking something was thrown over his head from behind—something wet and sticky. He found himself struggling in sudden darkness with an unseen assailant, his head and face enveloped in what was either a bag or a sack. It was jerked violently backward. He felt that he was being borne off his feet—was conscious of a suffocating sensation, of a sickly odor which oppressed his nostrils—and then he became unconscious of everything.

. . . . . .

"Coming to, are you? Now, then, what are you up to? Don't do that."

When Mr. Smithers returned to consciousness, the first thing he even dimly realized was that a constable was in

front of him, kneeling on one knee, and that it was from him the words proceeded.

"Better have gone straight back, as I told you."

"I beg your pardon?" Mr. Smithers had not caught the allusion conveyed in the other's words. Then it dawned upon him that this was the constable with whom—in a mischievous mood—he had had that little conversation. "I think I've seen you before?"

"You have, and not so very long ago, either. When I saw you again I thought you were dead. How are you feeling now?"

"Better, thank you; practically well, indeed. Only my head throbs."

"So it wasn't only your fancy about them chaps behind the brambles. I saw nothing of them; they must have nipped off before I got there."

"Chaps behind the brambles?"

"Wasn't it them that did for you?"

"Did for me? It seems as if I must have had some sort of a fit. I feel like it."

"Fit? Do you mean to tell me that you haven't been robbed and assaulted?"

"Robbed?" Mr. Smithers was standing up by now, seeming a little tottery. He was going through the contents of his pockets with apparent method. "Money, watch, chain, pocket-book intact; there's nothing missing of intrinsic value. That doesn't look like robbery. It must have been a fit."

"Didn't you see anyone?"

"See anyone? I saw you. A fit's the explanation. Thank you, officer, again, for your assistance; there's a five-pound note to mark my sense of it. The presence of that note upon my person is sufficient testimony that I have not been robbed."

The policeman was looking from the note to its donor with doubtful eyes.

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to you, sir, especially as this is altogether beyond anything I've done for you; but I'm afraid I shall have to trouble you for your name and address. I shall have to report what's happened."

"By all means; here's my card. And now, for the second time, good-night. I don't think I'm likely to meet with any more adventures on my homeward way. I am in no danger of another fit to-night."

Mr. Smithers communed with himself as he wended his homeward way.

"What was it they were after? It wasn't money, and apparently it wasn't me. It's now half-past two. I must have lain there a good hour—on the turf, with my face to the stars; a dignified position for a man who's to be married at noon. As during that time I was wholly at their mercy, they might have done anything. They must have been after some particular thing—and found it pretty nearly right away."

An idea suddenly occurred to him. He stopped. Taking out the sovereign purse which was attached to one end of his watch chain, he stared at it with all his eyes.

"The key of the safe—as I'm a sinner! The key of safe No. 226 on the premises of the Shoe Lane Deposit Company. That was their objective—and they've got it at once. It was attached to my sovereign purse, and now it isn't. Unmistakably now it isn't."

He resumed his walk.

"What do they think they're going to do with it? They can do what they please. The idea isn't a bad one, though if I chose they'd be no nearer safe No. 226 than they were before. It doesn't follow, because they have the key, that they have the *entrée*. I suppose they'll try various little tricks of hankey-pankey to get the *entrée*, having got the key; but I've only to lift my little finger to checkmate them. But I won't lift my little finger. I would give something to see the look on Mr. Chaffinch's face when he learns what are the present contents of Mr. Smithers' strong-box."

He laughed, as if in the enjoyment of a first-rate joke. He had reached the top of Putney Hill. Turning, stretching out his hand toward the heath, with a mocking assumption of melodramatic earnestness, he said—as if addressing an unseen audience:

"This time you score, and you're wel-

come to your winnings, gentlemen of the Eight!"

CHAPTER XXI.

HASTE TO THE WEDDING.

It was a "pretty" wedding. The number of persons actually concerned in it was six. There was the bride, who looked a "picture," in a dress which would have sat well upon a queen. Then the bridegroom and the bride's mother, the latter in tears. Margaret Foster was the bridesmaid, and Mr. Rodway the best man.

One person at least was present in the church who was not in festive mood. Why he was there at all he himself could have hardly said; unless it was to make sure, by the evidence of his own eyesight, that the marriage did take place. This was the brother of the bride. He had been invited to the wedding—by his sister's wish; which invitation—possibly because he suspected it might not be warmly seconded by the groom—he had refused. He had told himself, more than once, that on no account should the occasion be illumined by the light of his countenance. Yet, at the last moment, he had excused himself for an hour from the bank, in order that he might see all that was to be seen—as it were, *incognito*. The ceremony concluded, he availed himself of his position near the door to be among the first of those who went. Finding himself in the street, he joined himself to the little crowd of loiterers which waited for the wedding party to emerge.

Immediately in front of him was an individual who one would scarcely have thought, from his appearance, could have been interested in such a function as a marriage. Although not an old man, he yet conveyed the impression of being, generally speaking, in the last stage of decay. He was clad in a nondescript array of rags, which held together he alone knew how. Strips of rag were wound round his feet in lieu of boots. An ancient, peakless cap was crammed upon his head. His hair and beard had been untrimmed and unwashed much longer than was desirable. There was no doubt whatever that misery and he had long been bedfellows.

Presently there was a stir at the church door. The crowd woke up. All turned to see.

"Here they come! Here's the bride and bridegroom!"

Mr. and Mrs. Smithers came along the winding churchyard path—the groom all radiance, the bride all blushes.

So soon as he perceived the newly married man, the dilapidated creature in front of Mr. Ludlow began to behave in an extremely singular fashion.

"My gawd!" he exclaimed, "it's him! You don't mean to say"—he turned on Mr. Ludlow with sudden ferocity of inquiry—"that that's the bloke who's been married?"

Mr. Ludlow regarded him with barely concealed aversion, while plainly struck by the peculiarity of his manner.

"Certainly. Why shouldn't he be? Do you know him?"

"Know him! Do I know him! Him! I'll show you if I know him!—and I'll show him, too!"

The fellow moved forward as if to thrust himself in the way of the little procession. Mr. Ludlow caught him by the shoulder.

"If you have anything to show, show me."

"Show you! You! Who are you? Why should I show you?"

"I am the brother of the lady he has married. For any information about him worth having I am willing to pay handsomely."

"You're willing to pay for information? You are? How am I to know it?"

"By putting me to the test."

While these questions and answers had been hurriedly exchanged, the wedding party had reached the pavement. The bridegroom had handed the bride into the carriage which was waiting; had followed himself; the door had been closed; the coachman had driven off. The ragged stranger woke to the fact with sudden fury. If Mr. Ludlow had not kept tight hold of him he would have rushed after the departing vehicle.

As it was, he began shouting at the top of his voice:

"Let me get at him! Let me get at him! You see that bloke? He was in quod with me. Now look where he is and where I am! If I had my rights it'd be the other way round! First he tried to murder me, then he robbed me after! If I was to speak a word he'd get a lifer!"

The better sort among the spectators, not knowing what to make of the man, drew back. Others pressed forward. The inevitable constable moved toward him.

"Now, then—none of that! Off you go!"

"So help me, guv'nor," shrieked the man, in evident awe of the official eye and voice and hand, "it's him you ought to be after, not me!"

Mr. Rodway, perceiving Theodore Ludlow, took in something of the situation at a glance. Into the carriage he ushered Miss Foster, speaking to her through the window:

"You go on. I'll follow."

She replied to him, an odd look in her eyes and on her face:

"Don't let there be a scene."

He nodded. Off drove the bridesmaid in solitary state.

Mr. Rodway thrust his way through the knot of people toward the excited ragamuffin, addressing him as if he were some inferior animal whose one business it was to obey. A hansom was standing by the curb. He pointed to it.

"Now, my man, get into that cab. I want to speak to you."

Ludlow interposed.

"None of that, Rodway. He's my find. I've been juggled with enough. I'm going to have no more of it."

Mr. Rodway's manner was stern; his words to the point.

"Don't be a fool! Do you want to have a disturbance here? You can come with us if you like. I'll see to this man, constable. Thank you very much."

He slipped a coin into the policeman's hand. The vagabond entered the cab, with a telltale readiness to yield implicit, unquestioning obedience in the presence of a representative of the law. The vehicle started; containing as curiously assorted a trio as, probably, even a hansom ever held.

It had been arranged that after the wedding the small party should return to the Cosmopolitan Hotel. There dresses were to be changed; breakfast —or what passed as such—was to be eaten; last greetings were to be uttered; bride and bridegroom were to be dispatched upon their duplicate way. No program could have been better arranged, only, unfortunately, when it came to the point, the whole fell flat. This was owing to the unaccountable absence of the bridegroom's partner. The meal was ready, the guests were ready, but this one was missing. Miss Foster alone was able to furnish an explanation of his non-appearance, and her account was principally remarkable for its vagueness.

"There was some sort of disturbance among the crowd outside the church, in which a man and a policeman seemed to be figuring largely. Mr. Rodway would stop to see what it was about. He said he'd come on afterward. That's all I know."

At least that was all she would tell. Nor, judging from her manner, was there any reason to suppose that she could have told more, even had she desired. Mr. Rodway was known to have his eccentric moods. It seemed that he had been indulging in one quite recently. So, since time was of importance, boat trains refusing to wait for anyone, the five sat down to table; hopeful, every moment, that the absentee would come.

Before he did appear the meal was nearly concluded, the moment being close at hand when the honeymooning couple would have to start. As he came hurrying along the corridor, looking not at all as if he were about to take a prominent part in a marriage festivity, a waiter stopped him, having an envelope in his hand.

"Mr. Rodway? I was told to give you this letter, sir, and to request you to read it before you joined the company."

Mr. Rodway tore the envelope open with a finger which seemed tremulous. It contained a note written in a small, clear, almost masculine, hand.

DEAR MR. RODWAY: Whatever you may have heard, say nothing to anyone; let them go in peace. If you have the slightest regard for Netta, you will not turn the happiest day of her life into the most miserable. I don't suppose it will have any weight, but I beg you to behave as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place, as a special favor to me. I will give you all the explanations you can possibly require afterward. Sincerely yours, MARGARET FOSTER.

Although the words were plain enough, Mr. Rodway read them through again, as if, on the first reading, their meaning had escaped him. He turned to the waiter.

"Bring me some whisky. Is there any place near where I can have it?"

"I think this sitting room is disengaged. I will bring you the whisky in a moment, sir."

When it came he scarcely touched it. It seemed that all he wanted was an opportunity for a moment's solitary reflection.

"Say nothing! Let them go in peace! That means that I'm to be this man's confederate in still another crime. If I've any regard for Netta! Turn the happiest day of her life into the most miserable! God knows I've no desire to do that, and it's because she is what she is to me that I'm in agony. One woman should understand another woman's feelings better than I can. If she thinks that it would be better for Netta that for the present I should hold my tongue, I dare say that she knows best."

Later, when the carriage bearing the newly married couple to the station had started, Mr. Rodway turned to Miss Foster, who stood a little apart.

"I've allowed her to go off alone, unprotected, at the absolute mercy of a man who, if the half of what I've just been listening to is true, must be one of the biggest scoundrels in Europe; and this I've done—from the bottom of my heart, I believe foolishly!—all owing to you."

The girl contemplated him with laughing eyes, not one whit abashed by his black looks.

"My dear Mr. Rodway, please make that bow of yours a little more presentable. Would you like me to tie it for you? It's a little public on the steps here, but I don't mind." While the gentleman—with every outward symptom of unwillingness—grappled with his refractory necktie, the lady continued: "If what you say is correct—I rather doubt the quarter from which your information comes—I can only give you the assurance of my personal conviction that sometimes in one scoundrel there is more good than in twelve just men."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MAN IN THE MUSTARD-COLORED SUIT.

Mrs. Smithers sipped her chocolate. She regarded her husband, who reclined—in a state of considerable undress—on a couch in front of her. She herself was attired in a nondescript garment, which, to the masculine eye, appeared to consist principally of lace and ribbons, and which was pretending to assist in the concealment of the fact that she had just stepped out of bed.

"I should think that I must be the laziest person in the world!"

"So long as you've an inward persuasion that you've cut the record, it's all right. This is a record-breaking age."

"How long have we been married?"

"Do you want an answer in seconds or in years?"

"This is the third of December."

"Since the second was yesterday, it's within the range of possibility that you are right."

"We've been married nearly three months."

"And you still live?"

"Still live!" She laughed as she stirred her chocolate. "It's only during those three months that I have begun to live."

"It's odd, but I've a somewhat similar—unreasonable—feeling about myself."

"Really?"

"Absolutely!"

They were at the Hotel du Quirinal in Rome, after a journeying hither and thither which had been to the young wife a continual rapture.

Netta Smithers had arrived at the conclusion that life was a fairy tale, in which there were nothing but good fairies; and that for a husband she had found the Admirable Crichton.

That afternoon an incident occurred which might have brought the first crumpling of a roseleaf, if it had not been for him.

They were in a lazy mood; had stayed indoors throughout the morning, both attending to their correspondence. Letters with her took the form of endless pæans of laudation. They were delightful things to write; but—conceivably!—only a saving sense of humor, which lighted them here and there, kept them from being a trifle wearisome to read. Afterward they decided to do some shopping. The amount of shopping which already had been done was not a little surprising. A perpetual stream of packages had been kept flowing toward their native land for which they were responsible.

They had finished lunch in their private apartment; the table had been cleared; they were just discussing the advisability of Netta's preparing for out of doors, when the door opened and some one entered. It was a large room. Mr. Smithers' back was toward the door. Netta, supposing it was the waiter who had returned, having forgotten some part of his necessary duty, did not look up. So that, as it chanced, both were taken by surprise when they found standing between them a stranger. And not a prepossessing-looking stranger, either.

He was a man of medium height, slightly built, who carried himself with a rigidity which spoke of military training. His long yellow mustache, turned up in German fashion at the ends, served to accentuate the impression of aggressiveness which his whole bearing conveyed. He wore a "ditto suit" of mustard-yellow, smooth-faced cloth, the waistcoat being cut very high in front, so as to give but a glimpse of the narrow band of black ribbon which encircled the stiff shirt collar, which fitted so closely that it seemed to confine his neck as in a vise. He carried a bamboo cane. His manners were his own, since he had not troubled to remove his brown felt hat, but retained it on his head, while he stared insolently at the pair in front of him.

The moment they had fairly realized his presence he spoke, in fluent English, flavored by an Austrian accent, and occasionally ornamented by a significant idiom.

"So I meet you at last! And this is?"

He pointed with his cane at Netta, as if she had been some lay figure. Mr. Smithers regarded him in silence before he answered, in his pleasant, easy voice:

"I fancy, sir, that you must have made some mistake. May I ask to whom I have the pleasure of speaking?"

"I am Kronberg. Do not pretend you do not know who that is. See here." He raised his finger to his black necktie, as if to call attention to a scarf-pin which was fashioned to represent what was possibly some masonic symbol. He addressed himself to Netta. "And you are—what? His wife?"

The question was pregnant with such a wealth of insolent suggestion, emphasized by the manner in which it was asked, that the blood dyed Netta's cheeks. Her husband regarded her with his sunny smile.

"I think—if you don't mind—that perhaps you had better put on your hat."

He ushered her to the door, she whispering to him as she went:

"Who is this man?"

"It would seem—some kind of lunatic."

"You won't—quarrel with him?"

"Quarrel with him! I?"

As she left the room, his laughing eyes were looking into hers, seeming to say that her suggestion was really too absurd for him to seriously notice. The visitor's courtesy did not increase when the lady had departed.

"So you keep up the game with her? They told me you were a marvel. It seems you are. It is almost a pity you are not one of us."

"Us? Pray, who are 'us'?"

"None of that fool talk for me. Keep it to bluff your wife with while you can. For me the cards are faced."

"Is that so? In that case I really fear that you have the advantage of me. May I inquire if you are a friend of Mr. Augustus Chaffinch?"

"His friend? If you like to put it like that. At least I am his—colleague. I am Gustav Kronberg. If you do not quite understand who Gustav Kronberg is, and what he is, you soon will. We have been patient long enough with you. We have given you a three months' run—you and she together—beside the time you had before. Now we are going to call you to account. The pleasant days are over. The time has come to bring you to your knees. For us, you hold yourself too straight."

The man's voice was naturally an unpleasant one. He rendered it more so by the way in which he chose to use it. He spoke to Mr. Smithers as if he imagined himself to be addressing some creature of the gutter, whom he could lash with his tongue as with a whip. His evident intention of being disagreeable had, however, no apparent effect upon his listener.

"I hold myself too straight for you? Really?"

"You can grin. I am told that you are good at grinning. But you will not grin for long. We know all about you. You have just come out of jail. You went into jail as Andrew Bruce, you came out of jail as Francis Smithers. As Francis Smithers you at once proceeded to qualify for jail again by laying your hands upon our property."

"You refer to the contents of the safe in Shoe Lane?"

"You know what I refer to. No fool talk for me."

"I asked because I rather fancied that it was your friends who relieved me of the key to safe No. 226. In which case they have possibly themselves gained access to its contents."

"Oh, yes, it was my friends who relieved you of the key, and we have had a look at the safe. We also can do a thing or two. But for us, you are altogether too clever. In the safe there was nothing; you have put it all somewhere else. You think that smart? If, my smart chap, you have spent it, or turned any of it into money, or touched it in any way whatever, you will be sorry. You will find you have been too smart. For we will strip you to the buff, and we will crucify you, and while you are hanging there we will baste you with boiling oil—after we have torn your tongue out by the roots."

"You are evidently a man of humor, Mr. Kronberg."

"You, also—for the present. You will not be so humorous later. As for your pretty girl, we will tell her what sort of an animal she has got hold of—that will please her! If it turns out that she stands in with you, then we will string her up at your side—that, too, you will find humorous! As you helped yourself to what is ours, in our turn we will help ourselves to what you think is yours—we will each of us have from her a kiss or two."

"Have the kindness, Mr. Kronberg, to keep my wife's name out of any remarks which you may desire to address to me."

"Your wife! Your——"

Mr. Kronberg gave utterance to an opprobrious epithet. Mr. Smithers moved toward him. In a moment the Austrian, falling back, was presenting a revolver at the other's head.

"Don't you try any of that!"

He possibly underrated the Englishman's agility and presence of mind. Before the words were out of his mouth his antagonist had gripped his wrist, and, with a dexterous movement, had wrenched the weapon out of his hand. There was a flash, a report—on a sudden Mr. Kronberg descended on a heap to the floor. As Mr. Smithers stood looking down at him, not a muscle of his countenance changed. The occurrence apparently served to recall to his mind an ancient saw:

"Every bullet has its billet!" He

laughed, as if the application, in the present case, was comical. "During the single moment in which the muzzle looked his way—it discharged itself. For which of us set the trigger in action I have not a notion. The predicament is an awkward one!"

He bent over the prostrate man, who was bunched up in that very ugly fashion which is only seen in cases of serious trouble.

"Mr. Kronberg! No answer, no movement. It would seem that these gentlemen of the Eight are a little unfortunate." Lifting the Austrian's head, he placed him in a less ungainly attitude upon his back. "A rascal face, though saintly features do not make saints. His mustache gives to him an unnecessary touch of the grotesque. So that's where the bullet entered, within an inch of his heart. And only that small stain upon his beautiful yellow waistcoat! So small a show of blood is in itself suspicious. No pulsation. Did it kill him instantly? It's very odd how easily that sort of thing is done."

His wife's voice was heard speaking to him from behind the door which led into the bedroom.

"Frank! Are you alone? May I come in?"

He looked up, smiling.

"Patience! I'm coming to you in half a second." He glanced back at Mr. Kronberg. "What shall I do—with this? Time's pressing."

A large couch stood against a wall, on which was a huge bearskin carriage rug —one of his gifts to his wife. He picked up Mr. Kronberg, and placed him on this couch, with his brown hat and his revolver. Over the whole he spread the bearskin rug—hurriedly.

Just as he had finished giving the couch as neat an appearance as the circumstances of the case permitted, Netta came into the room.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

How Morris Held Down the Tracks

BY GEORGE ETHELBERT WALSH

The somewhat strenuous encounter between the Roland of one railroad company and the Oliver of another

JARED SMITH, president and general manager of the Torrington Union Railway Company, grunted his disapproval as he read the letter before him.

"I wish old friends wouldn't ask such favors," he said, savagely. "We can't afford to have any deadwood here any more than Fred can in his business."

His eyes swept across the page of the brief note again. A humorous twinkle appeared in the corners of his eyes, followed by a broad smile. "Give him a chance," he read, "and if he's no good turn him loose. He is my favorite nephew, but I don't want any favors shown him on that account."

"All right! I'll give him a chance," the man said, the smile broadening on his face. Then, ringing a bell, he said, to the clerk who appeared in response to it: "When Mr. Morris calls this afternoon show him in here."

Within five minutes the veteran street railway manager was so immersed in the pile of business before him that the matter entirely slipped his mind. Somewhere stored away in a pigeonhole of his

brain it was safely indexed, however, and at the proper moment it would come to the surface in an orderly manner.

It was late in the afternoon when Orrin Morris was announced. The head of the biggest railway system on the continent gave one puzzled glance at the name, and then called forth from its corner of his brain the information he needed.

"Mr. Morris," he said, abruptly, "if you want a position where there is plenty of hard work, little pay and long hours, I can give you a chance; but if you expect an easy berth, with no dirty work, and the pay of a young gentleman, I have nothing to offer you."

Delivered in a brusque, peremptory manner, these words sounded harsher and more repellent than the man intended. At first the young applicant before him winced at the manner rather than the words of the man; but he was ready with his reply almost before the general manager had finished speaking.

"I will accept your offer," he answered, simply.

The head of the Union Railway Company hesitated the fraction of a minute, and then said: "All right. Report to Mr. Barrows at the car headquarters tomorrow morning."

The interview was ended, and Orrin rose from his seat to depart. "Thank you, sir," he said, briefly.

When he left the office, Jared Smith indulged in another one of his rare smiles, and his eyes rested a moment on the chair where the young man had so recently sat.

For two years thereafter the busy president and general manager of the road forgot Orrin Morris; but Orrin had occasion to remember him many times. When he first reported for duty he was given a position with the repair gang, whose business it was to make repairs on the roadbed at all hours of the day and night. He wielded pick and shovel for six months, and handled the live wires with gloved hands when occasion demanded.

After a long apprenticeship with the repair gang he was appointed motorman, and then conductor. His friends frequently rode downtown on his car, and remarked at the queer calling of young Morris, who had been at the head of his college class. Some attributed it to financial reverses in the family, and others to a queer streak which had always run in the blood for generations past.

Morris, on his part, paid no attention to the remarks or views of his friends. He had decided to play the game out to the end. It was more than he had expected, but he was not discouraged. His promotions came along slowly, but surely. He was next in the lighting and power house; then in the building and repair department, and finally on the clerical force attached to the office at headquarters.

It was two years after his interview with Jared Smith when he was called in as a trusted employee to do special duty. The president faced him, as before, and said, abruptly:

"The superintendent tells me that you have been all through the different departments, and that you can be trusted to make the reports I need."

Then the speaker stopped, and a smile appeared on his face.

"I believe I remember you," he added, in a kindlier voice. Extending a hand, he continued: "So you stuck it out? Well, it pays sometimes to keep everlastingly at it."

The second time Morris interviewed the general manager marked the beginning of a change in his work. It was more complex and responsible than before, but the rewards were still woefully out of proportion to the duties performed. There were no eight or ten hour days for Morris; they were more often twelve and fourteen, and some days were stretched so far into the nights that morning dawned before he had a chance to rest.

This strenuous life reached a climax in the early part of the third summer. Morris had been doing all sorts of work for the general manager, and reporting to him in person. His judgment was relied upon so implicitly that he sometimes wondered.

If he had understood the perfect sys-

tem of espionage which Jared Smith kept over those in responsible positions he would not have thought it strange. There was no one in the office whose work was not known personally to the general manager, and when he wanted a man for special work he knew better than anybody else whom to select.

It was the close of a warm afternoon when Orrin Morris was summoned into the general manager's private rooms. The usually grim, imperturbable face of Jared Smith was marked with lines of worry and irritation. Morris had never seen the man in any other than a perfectly cold, calm, dispassionate mood, and he was more perplexed than he could express. For some anxious moments the puzzled face of the manager was bent over his desk.

Then he looked up and said: "You are Fred Morris' nephew? He was an old friend of mine, and I liked him; but I didn't like it when he sent you to me for a position. I see now that I made a mistake to distrust any of the old blood."

There was a benevolent smile on the face, but Morris saw no mirth in it, for he knew that it portended something unusual. The manager paced up and down the office a few times before he continued.

"I've tested you pretty hard, haven't I?" was the next remark. "Dirt shoveler, motorman, conductor, electrician, clerk, and trusted confidential man—you've been the whole lot! Well, there is one other job for you that will make all the others seem easy in comparison. It's one that will make or break you with this road. I can't tolerate a man as smart as you are who isn't capable of going the whole limit. I'll give you the chance, if you wish it."

There was a query in the last sentence, and Morris, with his clean, square jaws shut firmly, said: "I'm ready for it. I'll do my best."

Jared Smith surveyed him quietly, and then, with a little intake of breath, he said: "It's a matter that will vitally affect the future of the Union Railway, and everything depends upon you and me. We must pull the thing through before to-morrow morning. They've stolen a march upon us, but we must not yield yet."

Intimate as he was with the company's affairs, Morris had no inkling of the truth hinted at, and he fidgeted uneasily in his chair.

"It is this way," the manager added. "The K Street line, which connects with our belt system, is the key to the whole situation. The Suburban Railway Company has recently renewed its efforts to secure control of that street. The capitalization of the company has been doubled in the past few months, and every effort has been made to corrupt the city government to secure the right of way through K Street. We have trusted too much to our charter to worry over the matter; but money and worthless politicians and corruptible city officials are a bad lot to put faith in.

"The scheme has been worked quietly and sprung on us to-day. I have just learned that the aldermen voted to-day to take the franchise away from us and give it to the Suburban Railway Company, the change taking place at midnight to-day. There is no doubt of the meaning of all this. Bribery has prevailed over the better sense of the aldermen, and they have voted as commanded."

"But it is illegal," said Morris, quietly. "Our charter protects us in our rights, and the aldermen have no power to go behind that."

"True! I looked at it in that light at first; but let me explain the trick further. At midnight the Suburban will have its men in K Street, and they will begin to tear up our tracks and put down their own. If we interfere, they can show an order from the aldermen, signed by the president of that body, giving them the right to change the tracks. What can we do?"

"Get out an injunction restraining them," promptly answered Morris.

"Exactly; but from whom can we get an injunction? The courts are all closed for the day, and every judge is out of the city. I made a special point before you came in to find out. We can't get an injunction without appearing before

a judge, and the nearest one is fifty miles away, with no trains running until the midnight express, which sometimes stops at Wayside Beach to let passengers off."

"But even if they do get their tracks down we can have them taken up, for the courts will decide in our favor."

Jared Smith, accustomed to fighting and managing, paced up and down the room again.

"No, if we lose our tracks we practically lose command of the situation," he continued. "We could fight it out in the courts; but possession is half the battle. It would take us four years to carry it to the highest court and get a decision. By that time we would be in no position to hold our rival road to their proper field. We must prevent them from entering the city with their tracks. That must be done at all hazards."

Stopping in front of Morris, he said, impressively:

"We must fight it out together. In half an hour I shall take my automobile and ride out to Wayside Beach to see Judge Emmons. I may find him at his summer home, and get back with an injunction before midnight, and I may not. I shall leave you in full charge here. It will be your duty to protect the K Street tracks and hold back the Suburban men—peacefully, if possible; by force if necessary. The whole office and resources of the company are at your command. The men will be ordered to report to you, and to obey implicitly your commands. You can make your own plans. I must leave now. You will need time to think."

When the manager turned to his desk, Morris knew that the interview was ended. He walked out of the office in a dazed condition, scarcely conscious of what he thought or intended to do. Mechanically he looked at his watch. It was ten minutes of six.

"I have six hours," he said softly to himself. "Meanwhile, I'll eat a good dinner and fortify myself for an all-night job."

In the small restaurant where he was in the habit of eating, he buried himself behind an evening paper to study the problem in seclusion. It was a full hour when he rose from his place and walked out into the open air. He felt he was no nearer the solution.

"I don't see what I can do," he reflected, "except to oppose force by force. I might hold down our rails by putting a man on them a yard apart all through K Street. I think I could muster more men than the Suburban. But then the city police will interfere. I'd soon have the whole force after me."

The thought of this crisis did not appeal to him. He preferred peace and diplomacy to war and rebellion. With knitted brows he walked along, directing his steps toward K Street, the disputed point of track which opened to the Suburban Company city privileges which they had long tried to secure. The street was one of the least built up in the city, and at irregular intervals it was lined with cheap shanties and wooden tenements. A double line of tracks ran through it a full mile, but only a few cars passed that way, as traffic was small except on holidays, when the people wanted to get into the country.

"Trouble here at midnight means a regular riot," Morris soliloquized. "The surroundings are just suited to mob rule."

It was nine o'clock when he finally returned to the office. The manager had been gone nearly three hours. A desperate hope that a telegram would be waiting for him, announcing Mr. Smith's success in reaching Judge Emmons in time to secure an injunction, made him eager to seize the yellow envelope that lay on his desk. He tore it open speedily, and read:

MR. ORRIN MORRIS: Automobile broke down in the country. No chance of getting injunction before morning. JARED SMITH.

Morris dropped the telegram. From force of habit he consulted his watch once more, and reflected aloud: "Three more hours."

The problem was still unsolved. There seemed only one way out of the

difficulty. He had to organize a regular band of warriors to fight the Suburban Railway men and the city police.

"It will cost the company a lot, if it doesn't land me in the jail before morning," he said; "but I must do it. I must stave off the inevitable."

He glanced out of the window at a long row of cars stalled there through some accident. Suddenly the gloom lifted from his brow, and he turned sharply around. In another moment he had the head of the night office at his elbow.

"Wilson, how many cars do we lay off after midnight?" he asked.

"About three hundred, sir."

"Give orders, then, for the conductors and motormen to report to me as they come off duty from now on. We'll have to use all the cars to-night, and all the extra men we can get hold of. You might pick up a lot of extra men in the street. We want several hundred of them."

"Yes, sir. Shall they report here?"

Morris thought a moment, and then answered: "Yes, let them report here and give them a free ride out to K Street. Tell them we will give them an all-night ride, and pay them for it—a dollar a night. Can you get them?"

"Plenty, sir," replied the man, smiling. "We can pack every car."

"All right. See that you have them ready. But send the motormen and conductors to me. After midnight all schedules change, and all orders must come directly from me."

It was not long before the news spread of impending trouble of some kind, but none of the employees could guess anything of its meaning. Only the conductors and motormen, as they left the main office after an interview with Morris, smiled knowingly; but they held their peace and kept the secret as they had been enjoined.

Outside of the car stables a stenciled card had been put up, announcing an all-night ride at a dollar a head for those who wished to take it, promptly half an hour before midnight. All the night hawks for blocks around were soon assembled on the scene, and long before the time for starting there was a mob of several hundred before the car stables.

A few minutes after eleven Morris looked down upon the mob and the long line of extra cars lighted up and ready to start at the word from him.

"I think that will do, Wilson," he said. "I shall go out with the first car, but I want you here at headquarters, so I can send for more if I need them. Don't get away from the sound of the telephone, for something imperative may develop."

Morris took his place in the first car and ordered the procession to move. It was a novel sight to see car after car, brilliantly lighted and carrying a fair number of passengers, run from the car house and slowly make their way through the principal streets of Torrington. Those who were abroad stared and wondered at this midnight celebration, vainly speculating as to its meaning. But when the cars turned into K Street the supposition was that it was some excursion of a club or outing association going to the country for an early morrow's celebration.

When the head car reached the end of the company's line at the circle near the lower part of K Street, Morris dismounted and made a survey of the scene of battle. It was dark out there, but the light from the cars made it apparent that a move had already been made. The street was lined in places with new steel rails. Standing around these were groups of men who seemed to be watching the procession of cars with wonder. From one of these groups a tall, burly man stepped and, addressing the motorman of the head car, said:

"What's this, anyhow? Going to have a midnight picnic?"

"That's just it," replied the motorman, who had received enough instructions to appreciate the point.

"Well, you'd better move on, then. Your switch is open."

"Oh! we don't go that way," was the answer.

Morris had whispered the word of command, and the head car turned the

circle and started back toward Torrington on the opposite track. The other cars followed after. Morris remained behind to watch proceedings.

"Well, that's a queer picnic," muttered the dark man, returning to his group of friends near the pile of rails.

As car after car appeared and passed around the circle in a never-ending stream, the idle men whistled softly to themselves.

"I guess the whole city is out tonight," remarked the leader of the group. "Seems as if they were going to celebrate the last of the Union Railway's chance to ride them on this street."

Morris, standing not far away, caught the words. Just then a distant clock struck twelve. The effect was instantaneous on the men standing near the rails. Under the directions of their foreman they began distributing the rails in sections along the track. The same activity was apparent at the other piles scattered along K Street.

But at the stroke of twelve there was a sudden closing in of the gaps between the double procession of cars. They were now only six feet apart, and moving steadily at about five miles an hour. The cars passed around the curve of track at the end of the street without a stop, and nowhere was there a break of more than eight or ten feet between cars.

"Seems to me these cars will never get past," muttered the leader of the nearest group of rail haulers.

Then one of the men ran up breathlessly to the leader, and said: "They're all coming back. They're just running around in a circle on this track."

There was a low malediction from the leader, who instantly saw through the trick. He started toward the track and tried to intercept one of the cars; but the motorman clanged his bell and refused to stop. The angry foreman jumped on the platform and started to take the controller from the motorman's hands; but a score of hilarious passengers rushed to the scene and ejected the man before he could utter a protest.

Infuriated at this rebuff, he stepped in front of the next car, with crowbar in his hand, and shouted to his men:

"Come ahead here and tear up these tracks."

The motorman clanged his bell, but did not reduce the speed of his car. In vain the big, burly foreman strove to hold back the car, but it swept him irresistibly onward, while he cursed and swore at the motorman and his own followers.

Finally thrown to one side again—dusty, grimy and bruised—he stood growling savagely. He was clearly balked in his endeavors. Then as a last resort he ordered his men to throw stones on the tracks to stop the cars. This was more effectual than the former efforts; but bringing the cars to a halt did not help matters materially. They were so close together that the workmen could not get in between them to rip up a single rail. But the halt in the procession was only temporary. The obstacles were removed, and the crowbars used to obstruct the cars confiscated by the motormen and conductors. More than that, the passengers threatened the workmen, so that they desisted.

Meanwhile, Morris, watching the proceedings which he had carefully arranged and anticipated, looked at his watch. It was nearly one o'clock. One hour at least had been gained. The next move he thought would come from the police.

The baffled foreman had recovered long enough to telephone to the headquarters of his company, and they had in turn appealed to the police department. In half an hour the reserves were on the scene. There were voluble explanation and recrimination; but Morris remained quiet until it was necessary for him to interfere.

When the captain of the police finally said, "Switch these cars back to the city, and don't let any more return on this track," Morris stepped up and said:

"Captain, these cars cannot be switched back for two reasons. One is, the switch has been torn up at L Street for repairs, and the track for three blocks is also torn up by our men to

put down new rails. They cannot finish either before morning. Another reason is, we have every right to run our cars on this track, and you have no right to interfere."

"But we have an order to tear up these tracks, and it's signed by the board of aldermen," interrupted the foreman of the Suburban Company.

"Let me see it," Morris said.

The paper was thrust before his eyes.

"This is not legal," he said. "It lacks the mayor's signature."

The police captain accepted this as evidence that he should go slow, and intimated as much to the foreman. All three repaired to the nearest telephone station, and made the wires busy with their talking. It was half an hour before the manager of the Suburban appeared, posthaste, and demanded to see the captain.

"This order is all right, captain," he said, peremptorily. "It is signed by the president of the board of aldermen, who is acting mayor in his honor's absence from the city."

Morris, looking at his watch, muttered to himself: "Two hours. I wonder if that automobile is repaired yet."

The captain was still doubtful, but the tone of the manager was authoritative, and his threats seemed to prevail.

"I would advise you to go slow, captain," Morris said, quietly. "This is a serious matter. If I were you I would call up your chief."

Time was all that Morris was playing to gain, and this he knew would mean another half hour. It proved to be an hour. The chief was in bed, and not disposed to get up, or to hurry down to the scene of the trouble. When he did appear it was after three o'clock.

Both sides had to argue and state their cases again. The chief was nearly as perplexed as his captain, but his final decision was, "This order seems plain enough and legal."

"But, chief, morning will be time enough to take action," said Morris. "Our cars are on this track, and we can't get them off until the new switch at L Street is finished."

"Put the cars off the track," interrupted the manager of the Suburban. "My men can do that, and then carry them back to L Street in the morning."

"If your men touch our cars or derail one of them, I shall appeal to the chief here for protection," was Morris' reply. "This order gives you no right to touch our cars. Chief, you exceed your right if you let them do it."

This aspect of the question could not be ignored. Both the chief of police and his captain took the view which Morris had presented.

"You say your switch and L Street track will be finished by morning?" the former asked.

"Yes, by nine or ten o'clock at the latest."

"Then, there's nothing to do but wait."

"We won't wait!" shouted the manager of the Suburban. "These tracks must be torn up to-night."

"If you can do it without interfering with our cars, or removing them from the track, go ahead," Morris answered. "But if you touch them to derail even one, I shall demand the protection of the police. It is up to you, chief, to see that we are protected."

Nonplused and baffled by the decision of the police, the irate manager of the Suburban withdrew to confer with his men. The trick the Union Company had played on them was apparent now. There was unquestionably something developing which the Suburban manager could not fathom. Time was precious, delay likely to prove fatal.

"Four o'clock," Morris muttered to himself, consulting his watch.

A few moments later the manager of the Suburban drove away in haste, leaving his men idly waiting for further developments. Some of the passengers who had been enjoying the free trolley ride were getting tired and leaving their cars. As no battle or excitement seemed to develop, it was apparent that they were losing interest.

It was five o'clock before the manager of the rival road appeared once more on the scene, driving furiously down K Street, accompanied by the president of the board of aldermen.

Morris drew a deep breath at the sight. The effect of the acting mayor's words on the police was an uncertain quantity. He could possibly intimidate them where another failed.

He was a man who had been yielding enough to the persuasions of the rich Suburban Railway to give his consent to the illegal order, and he was determined to see it carried through. The chief of police was anxious to please him, and Morris' protest seemed in vain.

"These cars must be moved off the track at once," he said, pompously.

"How will you move them?" Morris asked, quietly.

"Young man, we'll tumble them over on their sides if necessary."

"Then your own chief of police will be compelled to arrest you for breaking the laws of the city, and if he doesn't do it he will get into trouble himself."

The acting mayor stared at the speaker, and merely gasped:

"Arrest me?—arrest me?"

The idea seemed so ludicrous that it took some time for it to filter through the coarse brain of the politician. The chief of police was wiser and more politic than the choleric acting mayor, and he whispered some words of advice in his ears.

"Not a bit of it. I shall have these cars off the track, and——"

"One minute!" Morris interrupted. "Here comes Mr. Smith, the president and manager of the Union Railway Company. He may have something important to say."

"I don't care for your president and manager," snapped the acting mayor.

"I know that; but you will care for this," Jared Smith replied, stepping from his automobile, and shoving a paper before the eyes of the group.

"This injunction, restraining the Suburban Railway Company, the board of aldermen and the mayor, or acting mayor, from removing the tracks from K Street, will settle this dispute."

There was a hasty glance at the paper, then the manager of the Suburban said: "It's a forgery. There is no judge in the city."

"That's so," snapped the acting mayor. "It's a forgery, and it won't go here."

"Then Judge Emmons should have the rascal who forged his name and seal arrested," replied Jared Smith. "How is it, judge?"

Dismounting from the automobile, the portly form of Judge Emmons suddenly appeared among the excited group.

"That is genuine," he said, with one of his stately smiles. "It is a temporary injunction, gentlemen, returnable next Friday. You can all come before me in court then and argue out this dispute. Meanwhile, the tracks must not be touched."

He turned significantly toward the chief of police, who understood his duty, and touched his hat in respect.

When the manager of the Suburban and the discomfited acting mayor had moved away, Jared Smith put his hands on the shoulder of Morris, and said: "Well, I see you held down the tracks."

"Yes, sir, but it was getting rather warm. I had about played my last card."

The manager smiled, and extending a hand, added:

"You go home now and rest; I'll take charge. In the morning you can report as the new manager of the road. I'll be satisfied to act merely as president in the future."

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THE December number of *AINSLEE'S* will be first of all an interesting number; that is the primary object of the publishers and editors in making up every month's issue. There are certain seasons of the year which magazines generally recognize as a time for giving a special character to their make-up. Of these the Holiday season is most conspicuous, and *AINSLEE'S* follows the general custom in this respect. But if it were found, for any reason, impossible to combine seasonableness and *interest*, we would not hesitate about preserving interest.

Fortunately for our readers, this combination is perfect this year.

THE novelette will, of course, be one of the most conspicuous features, as usual. One of the most successful and popular authors of short stories for *AINSLEE'S* is the author of "Her Prairie Knight," and we are sure that our readers will agree with us that B. M. BOWER has never done anything better than this charming love story with its realistic atmosphere of the great Northwest.

THE short stories will give the number its character as a Christmas Number. These are by JOSEPH C. LINCOLN, RALPH HENRY BARBOUR, CAROLYN WELLS, MARY B. MULLETT, FELICIA GODDARD, MAUD STEPNEY RAWSON and MIRIAM MICHELSON, the last the author of a book—"In the Bishop's Carriage"—that created the only genuine sensation of the year. Other stories of unusual power are by FLORENCE WILKINSON, MARGUERITA S. GERRY and OWEN OLIVER. The second of VINCENT HARPER'S hunting series, a great advance on the first, will also appear.

A REMARKABLE picture of Washington society will continue the series on social life in American cities. This we believe to be the best of a notable series. Magazine poetry is not usually considered a feature, but there will be in the December number a Christmas poem by HOLMAN F. DAY, which will be, perhaps, the best thing in the whole magazine.

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	Boxes of 12	Boxes of 25	Boxes of 50
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