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The Popular Magazine

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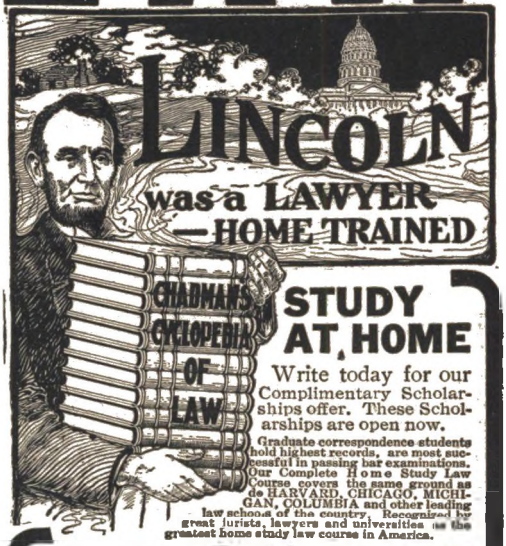

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TWICE-A-MONTH

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXV. OCTOBER 1, 1912. No. 6.

Corrigan the Tempered

By Henry C. Rowland

Author of "Corrigan the Raw," "To Windward," Etc.

In Henry C. Rowland's former novel, which appeared in the first August POPULAR, we hinted that Corrigan was too interesting a character to dispose of in one story. Doctor Rowland thought so too, and here you have a second glimpse of the high-strung youth from the Bowery whose discovery of treasure in the Philippines you haven't forgotten. He was Corrigan the Raw when he stumbled upon the ingots of gold; now he is Corrigan the Tempered, a little more sane since his marriage with Concha, the pretty mestiza, a little less anxious to "mix it" with an opponent, but just as eager to reclaim the treasure which he was forced to turn his back upon.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

IT was during the summer vacation of the university where I occupy a modest position as tutor that Corrigan told me the remarkable story* of how, while serving in the Philippines he had stumbled upon a fortune in gold ingots and jewels, half of which he had hidden on a small island in the China Sea, and half in the ancient temple where he made his find.

Now he had engaged my services to teach his pretty mestiza wife, Concha, English, and himself navigation.

Corrigan had obtained his discharge from the army owing to a fractured wrist which had become ankylosed, or rigid, and now he was eager to return for the ingots and jewels.

He knew just where the island lay, where the half of his treasure was buried, for the priest who had united him with Concha had given him the bearings; also, he could go straight to the temple where he had left the other half. His object in wishing to learn navigation was to enable him to go to Manila, charter a small vessel, and go after his treasure himself, thus to obviate the necessity of dividing with some outsider. But when he told me this I shook my head.

"Even a first-class navigator would need a local pilot to work down through those islands," said I. "A friend of mine in the U. S. medical corps who made several cruises through the archipelago on the hospital ship *Relief* told me that the place was full of uncharted rocks and nasty currents. They always had a pilot when they went around to the different islands after sick and wounded. If you tackle it alone you

*See "Corrigan, the Raw." First August POPULAR.

stand to lose your treasure, and maybe your lives as well. You'd do much better to hunt up some reliable skipper and pay him a good price, with the understanding that he's to expect nothing more."

Corrigan wrinkled his low forehead. He was not a bad-looking youngster, although his face bore the marks of hard usage. But he had a pair of keen, steady gray eyes, and a mouth that showed kindness and humor.

"Look here, perfessor," said he presently. "I guess yours is de right dope. Say, what I need is some guy dat's on de square to go along o' me to keep his eye on t'ings. Say——" He turned to me abruptly. "How would dat job strike youse?"

I laughed. "Nothing I'd like better, if I was free," I answered; "but I'm not. College opens in another month. Besides, my sister is to be married to an Eastern chap in a few weeks, and I've got to see her off."

Corrigan studied me intently for a moment, then he said:

"Say, perfessor, I'm a man o' few woids. Dere's t'ree o' dem gold bricks fer you if you'll help me pull off dis job. Dey're woit' somet'in' over five t'ousand plunks apiece. And all your expenses paid. T'ink it over, huh?"

That night I talked over the proposition with my sister, who generously told me to go. Fifteen thousand dollars meant a good deal to me, as the pay of a tutor is not a princely revenue. But there was one serious factor to consider. My sister and I had a stepsister who was a semi-invalid, and had been for two years in the Miraflores Sanitarium. Although no blood relation, we were the poor girl's nearest kinsfolk, except for some relatives in the East, who appeared to take no interest in her, and who were pleased to consider that her mother had made a mésalliance in marrying my father, a fruit commission agent.

This half sister, Alfrithe Halstead, had passed through a terrible experience only two years before. In a railroad accident she had seen her stepfather killed outright, and her own mother pinned under a mass of wreckage, and slowly burned to death before her eyes.

Alfrithe, herself unhurt, had passed through this fearful ordeal without faltering and returned to us quiet, tearless, and unemotional. But from that hour the life spirit seemed to fade, leaving its lovely earthly habitation scarcely altered. She ate, slept, and went about her usual occupations much the same, and yet we saw plainly enough that the soul was slowly withdrawing itself from the body.

Then, as if realizing our distress, she decided to go to the sanitarium, and there she had remained for the last two years. Doctor Heppel, the kindly old German, who was the head of the institution, had informed me that in his opinion the fortnightly visits of my sister and myself were all that kept his patient alive.

As my sister was shortly to be married, and to live afterward in the East, my own departure for several months meant a very serious turn of affairs for poor Alfrithe, whom we both loved devotedly. But it occurred to me that perhaps the girl's interest in my adventurous voyage might take the place of my presence, and furnish a focus for her thought. She had always loved anything touching on the picturesque side of life, and I hoped that my letters and the expectation of hearing the tale might serve as an excellent mental tonic.

To learn for myself how the plan would affect Alfrithe, I took the train for Miraflores the following day, and on arriving at the sanitarium found Doctor Heppel walking about the grounds, examining his fruit trees. He took me at once into his consulting room.

"Miss Halstead iss no better," said he. "In fact, she iss vorse, for ven cases like hers show no sign of improvement, then they are vorse. Vould you like some beer?"

Without waiting for my answer, he touched a bell, and gave the order.

"Then the recent examinations show nothing?" I asked, for I privately feared tuberculosis.

"Absolutely nodding—no microbes,

nodding pathogenic. Yet she iss getting more and more transparent. Der light shines through her ven she sits by der window. She has lost her Life Desire."

"Do you think her shock and sorrow enough to account for it?" I asked.

"No. Der shock vas terrible, und she lofed her mudder. But a yoong girl so str-rong as she does not die of shock. Der iss someding else. Vas she effer in lofe?"

"Not to my knowledge," I answered, then went on to tell him of the object of my visit. The old fellow looked very much disturbed.

"She vould die," he said. "It iss only ven you come that she seems to know that she iss still alive. She vould be better at your house den here. I t'ink she iss also bored."

"But she won't come. She has a silly idea that she makes us unhappy," I answered, whereat he shook his bushy head and sighed.

I found Alfrithe in a wicker chair on the veranda, and as she looked up there came the faintest color through her translucent skin.

To form an idea of Alfrithe it is necessary to think of some lovely visitant from another world, which is not material. She suggested a nymph, vanishing before the eyes of a mortal. Even her hair lent itself to this illusion, being of a fineness and shade which gave the sense of a color tone quite intangible.

Alfrithe was a tall girl, and by no means emaciated, in spite of which she impressed one as of the spirit rather than the flesh. It was as though all the material part of her had been dissolved in some reagent which had left her original form held in a structure of gossamer and moon mist. Color was not lacking in this impression, but it was of a faintly luminous, diaphanous quality such as the color tones of the stained-glass figure of an angel, projected dimly on the pillar of an old cathedral as the winter sun strikes through.

Alfrithe lifted a hand, which I was almost afraid to take, then offered me her cheek. Her limpid, hazel eyes rested on me inquiringly, for my visit was not on the usual day.

"Jim," she murmured, "there's nothing wrong at home?"

"No—everything is fine," I answered. "I only ran down to tell you of a new scheme of mine."

So I drew up a chair and told her all about Corrigan and Concha and our proposed expedition. I talked slowly, laying stress on the romance and adventure of the proposed voyage, and saying that she might expect lengthy bulletins every time the chance of correspondence offered. Alfrithe did not interrupt, but as I talked on I could see that her breath was coming faster, while a tinge of such color as one sees on a damask cloth as the lamps strike through a glass of port began to glow in either cheek. It deepened and faded like an ember in the draft.

When I had finished, she sat for a moment looking straight in front of her.

"Jim," said she abruptly, "I want to go with you."

"What!" I cried. "Go with us? But, my dear girl——"

"If you would take me with you," said Alfrithe quietly, "I am sure that I should get well. I am not really ill, Jim —that is, physically. It is simply this: On that awful day—in that terrible hour—it seemed to me that I was dead; that the life had gone out of me. Ever since, it has been exactly as though I were a shell. I've tried hard to get alive again, Jim. I'm not a coward, and I suppose I can keep myself alive, and I've tried very hard, because I felt that it was my duty. But I don't seem to be able to do it—especially here, where everybody is trying to do it for me. Do you believe that it's possible for a person to be—to be what you might call 'desouled'—while the body goes on pretty much the same as always? One day I overheard a patient tell the nurse that I was like a pressed flower."

"You've got the shape and substance," I answered, "and all of the fragrance, my dear."

"I've been here long enough," she declared.

"Too long," said I. "Sanitariums don't get people well. They are institutions for catering to the weaknesses of

the weak. If you want to go with me I'll see what can be done about it. If it can't be managed, I'll not go myself."

So I said good-by to Alfrithe, and went out with a number of new ideas in regard to the treatment of cases of her sort.

Before leaving the institution I looked up Doctor Heppel, and told him of what had occurred. His florid face brightened.

"Dot iss fine!" said he. "If you take her mit you she vill be all r-right in a few weeks. Dot iss excellent."

So back I went to town, and called immediately on Corrigan, whom I found in his apartments, sitting in his shirt sleeves, smoking a cigarette, and listening to Concha, who was singing some little Spanish air to the accompaniment of her guitar. To these oddly mated lovers I told Alfrithe's story, and of her wish to be a member of the expedition.

"Say, perfessor," said Corrigan, when I had finished, "dat's just de cheese. I bin tellin' Concha dat she'd have to stay in de convent at Manila while you and me goes after de bank fat. Dem punky little boats dey have out dere ain't no place fer a loidy. You bring your stepsister along of us, see? And you just tell her fr'm me and Conchca dat she's to c'nsider herself our comp'ny, see? Den de loidies can be togedder at de convent while we're on de wet hike, see? What's de matter wit' dat—huh?"

CHAPTER II.

Nothing could have been more delightful than our voyage out across the Pacific; especially for me, as I could see how each passing day was bringing its tithe of health to Alfrithe. It seemed impossible that the wraithlike creature of the Miraflores Sanitarium could be this fresh-cheeked, bright-eyed girl, who was soon taking her daily promenades on the breezy deck, or chatting animatedly with Concha and Corrigan.

There was no doubt but that Alfrithe possessed some subtle magnetism quite apart from her physical loveliness, for although by nature quiet and reserved, and inclined to avoid personalities, people whom she met could scarcely wait for more than a mere acquaintanceship before opening their hearts to her, and the girl was soon the most sought-after person on the ship.

At first people looked with a good deal of curiosity at our little party—Concha, sweet, soft, and languishing as some hibiscus-scented tropic night; Alfrithe, tall, exquisite, with her wonderful hair, which in some lights looked almost silvery, and her long, clear, understanding eyes; Corrigan, the typical "tough," with his battered face, and square, hunched shoulders, scrupulously clean, and dressed in his loud but well-made clothes, talking his slangy vernacular of the streets; last of all, myself, big, heavy, and, I am afraid, slightly pedantic of manner. It was a curious quartet, and to allay the curiosity of our fellow passengers I told one of them that Corrigan was a promoter and I an engineer, and that we were on our way to the Philippines to look into a business scheme.

At Hongkong we transhipped for the run across the China Sea to Manila, and four days later disembarked at the mouth of the Pasig.

As we were drawing in to our berth I noticed lying behind the breakwater a very stanch and able-looking vessel of about ninety or one hundred tons. She was ketch-rigged, with high bulwarks, and from her smart appearance and the fact that a group of hands forward appeared to be in white uniforms I judged her to be a yacht. I noticed, also, that she was under the Russian flag.

"If we could only get something of that sort," I said, pointing her out to Corrigan, "we could take the ladies with us."

He looked at her longingly. "Say," he answered, "dat'd be all right, wouldn't it, huh? Say, dat's de woist o' dis business, leavin' Concha and Miss Halstead. Ye see, perfessor"—he dropped his voice to a confidential tone—"Concha's just de best little goil in all de woild, and none straighter, see? But say, she c'n no more help makin' eyes at de boys dan a boid c'n help singin'. She don't mean no harm, o' course; it's on'y

dat she don't understand, havin' been cooped up in a convent all her life. You wouldn't believe how often I've had to poke some guy what tried to give her de high sign. Dat's what I hate about leavin' her behind—and all dese fly officers and de like—not dat dere's any danger so fur's she's concoined," he added hastily.

I smiled inwardly, for I could well understand his state of mind. There was no doubt of Concha's devotion to her husband, but she was a born little flirt, and her mixture of Spanish and Filipino blood made a dangerous compound. Few men could keep their eyes off her when she was about, nor did it ever occur to the casual observer that this lovely, patrician-looking girl could possibly be the wife of her hard-faced little companion. To make matters worse, Concha was apparently unable to distinguish between respectful admiration and an offensive attempt to attract her attention. I suppose that to the mind of the Oriental woman any overture on the part of a man is to be considered as a compliment.

But Corrigan certainly regarded such overtures from quite a different point of view. He was naturally of a jealous nature, madly in love with his wife, and perhaps the sense of his own social inferiority to many who tried to attract Concha's attention made him all the more bitter.

Another complication was that the would-be "masher" was not apt to realize the forces latent under Corrigan's flashy and badly carried clothes. Before enlisting as a private in the hospital corps, U. S. army, Corrigan had been the "punching bag" of prize fighters, and sparring partner of one or two middleweight champions, and was, in fact, about as ugly a little customer as one could hope to pick out.

"You needn't worry," said I. "Miss Halstead will keep an eye on Concha while we're gone. But I wish that we could manage some way to take them with us. It would be so much jollier, and they'd enjoy it."

On landing we went immediately to the hotel. I had secured some letters of introduction to several influential people in Manila, and these we planned to deliver the next day. Our object was to charter some little vessel such as the small brigs and schooners trading around the archipelago, and with a properly recommended skipper and a native crew proceed first to the island of Samar, secure the part of Corrigan's treasure which was hidden there, then run down to the Luconia Shoals, collect the ingots of gold hidden there by Corrigan and Concha, then return directly to Manila. We could clear from the port as a scientific expedition for archæological research, and on bringing in our treasure declare it as the fruits of the expedition, and pay whatever duty the government saw fit to impose.

We lunched at the hotel, then went out to look about the city. The ladies did some shopping on the Escolta, and as I observed the eagerness of Concha to get rid of all the money in her purse, I began to understand Corrigan's impatience to get the rest of his buried treasure.

Later we drove on the Luneta, and while listening to the regimental band concert I happened to notice that Alfrithe was very much interested in the occupant of a carriage on her right.

Following her eyes, I saw an extremely good-looking young chap of perhaps twenty-five, whose profile was presented to us. He was leaning back in his seat, a cigarette between his fingers, listening to the band. Beside him on the seat were two little Japanese spaniels.

"What dear little dogs!" said Alfrithe.

But I doubted that it was the dogs which held her attention. I do not think that I have ever seen a finer masculine profile than that presented by the man. There was also about him an unmistakable air of birth; a certain noble elegance which found itself in every detail of feature, bearing, and costume.

His carriage was not more than ten feet from ours, and had been standing there as we drew up abreast.

I noticed that the hand which held his gold-tipped cigarette was beautifully

shaped, the third finger wearing a great seal ring of chased gold. His skin was very clear, though tanned, and there was a rich flush on his cheek bone, which was rather high, and sufficiently prominent to give a becoming leanness to the lower part of his face. Under his creamy panama his thick but rather closely trimmed hair shone almost blue-black, slightly wavy, and he wore a short, black mustache waxed trimly upward at the tips.

"A good-looking chap," I murmured in Alfrithe's ear. He could not possibly have heard me, for the band was rendering the "Poet and Peasant" overture, but as if by some sixth sense the young man turned with precisely the inquiring look that he might have worn if I had directly addressed him.

Our carriage was abreast of the band stand, just outside of his. Alfrithe and Concha were sitting with their backs to the driver, to avoid the glare from the bay, Alfrithe herself on the inside. As the young man's eyes rested on her a sudden expression which was almost that of recognition swept across his startlingly handsome face. His long, black lashes seemed to quiver, and I saw him catch his breath. His look was so brief that one could scarcely call it a stare; then he turned his head away again. The cigarette dropped from his fingers and fell to the ground.

Glancing at Alfrithe, I saw that the blood was pouring into her face. She slightly lowered her parasol. I looked back at the man, whose profile was again turned to us; and as I studied him curiously the red glow on his cheek bone seemed to spread slowly, until his whole face was a deep, swarthy red.

As if conscious of himself, he turned his head toward the band, then reached out his left hand, and caressed one of the little dogs, which crawled into his lap.

It was a singular performance, and, very much puzzled, I leaned forward, shoving my head under Alfrithe's parasol.

"Do you know him?" I whispered.

She shook her head. The color was still in her face.

"I never saw him before," she murmured, with a little shrug. "Why, Jim?"

"He looked as if he knew you," said I.

Again she shook her head, looking annoyed. I drew back, then turned, in answer to some question of Corrigan, who was sitting next me.

Two or three times during the concert our neighbor glanced about him, as people will at a crowd, and although his eyes rested each time for a brief instant on Alfrithe, there was no repetition of that first look of almost startled intensity. But I noticed that his high color remained, and that he continued to fondle his little Japanese dogs with a manner that was preoccupied and nervous.

The military band, which, by the way, was excellent, paused for the intermission, and some of the audience began to stroll about. It was to me an interesting gathering; officers and enlisted men, local residents in smart traps, pretty mestizas in the coquettish native costumes of piño and jusi cloth, or rich, homespun silks, the camisa dropping over one bare, round shoulder, soft as satin and the color of old ivory; rich native merchants with their families; pretty American women, the wives and daughters of the army; tourists; adventurers and adventuresses, the latter not difficult to distinguish; a brightly colored crowd weaving in and out under the late, golden sunshine, the charming tropical costumes of the women a-flutter in the strong draft from the bay like flowers in a summer breeze.

I was admiring the spectacle when I saw coming toward us two distinguished-looking men, one in the uniform of a lieutenant of the British navy, and the other a captain in our own army. Both were handsome, well-set fellows; the Englishman tall, high-featured, with a fresh, ruddy skin, and the American lithe and sinewy, tanned to a saddle color by the tropic sun, keen-eyed, lean-faced, with a blond, wiry mustache half hiding his straight-lipped mouth.

The two were talking and laughing as they made their way through the press, responding promptly but automatically to the salutes of the enlisted men, and had almost passed us when they caught

sight of our neighbor. Both stopped, then passed behind our carriage, and stepped over to greet him.

"Hello, old chap!" said the Englishman. "What! All alone?"

"That doesn't speak well for the hospitality of our little city," said the American, with a laugh.

The young man in the carriage swung about sharply, then smiled.

"Hello, you fellows," said he, and his accent marked him at once for an Englishman of the upper class, but what struck me most was the singularly winning expression of his face as he smiled and stepped down from the little native victoria. "I say," he remarked to the American, "this is a ripping good band of yours."

"Coming down to the club, later?" asked the captain.

"I'll look in for a few minutes on my way back. Rather want to hear this next number. It's a favorite of mine."

"Good! The colonel wants to see you. He says that the next time he goes to one of your parties he'll wear a uniform that was made at home. More room for expansion."

"Oh, you Yankees are all for expansion nowadays."

"Well," said the American, "it struck me last night that there were certain of our European friends just as keen for annexation!"

They all laughed, then drew closer and dropped their voices. The lieutenant chuckled. There were a few minutes of what sounded like good-natured chaff, and the two officers moved off.

"See you a little later," said the captain.

Our interesting neighbor answered their parting salute, then turned, shot a swift look at Alfrithe, and stepped back into his carriage. Alfrithe leaned forward, and touched me on the knee.

"Don't you think we might go back, Jim?" she asked. "Concha and I find it rather hot."

"Certainly," I answered, and spoke to the driver, a Filipino boy in maroon livery, a top hat, and bare legs and feet. He turned his horses, and we moved out of the throng.

We had gone perhaps two hundred yards when I happened to look back, curious to see the effect of the gathering from the distance.

Just behind us came another vehicle, which I was rather surprised to recognize, from one of the native ponies, which was piebald, as that of our neighbor. Apparently he had changed his mind about his favorite number on the program.

Concha was the first to break the silence as we drove away.

"What a very handsome señor that was in the carriage next to ours!" she said, in her prettily accented English. "I was looking at him from behind my fan. But he would not look back——" and she pushed her lips poutingly against her chiffon sun veil.

Corrigan hunched his shoulders, and drew down the corners of his mouth.

"Hully gee—dere she goes again!" said he, with a sort of hopeless resignation. Suddenly he leaned forward, and tapped his wife's plump arm with one thick, stubby finger. "Say, kid," said he, "listen! Dat handsome guy looked our way, all right, all right, but he looked at Miss Halstead, see? And d'ye know what she done? She acted like she was sore, and toined her head de ot'er way, see? Now, dat's de way a real loidy acts when some strange guy tries to rubber. Listen here; you don't want all dese swells to t'ink fer a minute dat you're de sort o' goil to mix wiv strange mutts, no matter who dey are. Just keep your lamps toined on Miss Halstead and git wise."

It was gently said, but the angry color flamed in Concha's pretty face.

"I am now a señora," she said, "and with my husband. I do not care if a strange señor looks at me. Besides, you are here to protect me. Miss Halstead is a young girl; I am a married woman."

Corrigan looked at me helplessly, then at Alfrithe. Seeing no particular support on the faces of either of us, he gave his shoulders another hunch, and said dryly:

"Sure—I know dat. On'y you don't look it, and dere's no use in startin' somet'in' fer nuttin'."

Concha accepted this in silence, but with an angry face. She really loved her husband, as indeed she had every reason to, for Corrigan had taken her as a dowerless, half-caste girl of doubtful parentage, and given her all that he had to give. The boy was invariably kind and gentle with her, and I had sometimes thought that if he had leaned a little more toward the Oriental idea of managing a wife it might have been better for both.

In the present case, neither Alfrithe nor I offered any remark, and we drove on in silence. Glancing at Alfrithe, I noticed that her face was rather pale, and for the first time since leaving home wore a troubled look. Her eyes rested for an instant on Corrigan, then traveled on to the shore of the bay, and a little line appeared between her pretty brows.

I guessed at what was passing in her mind. Alfrithe was no snob, and she was taking herself to task for feeling the least ashamed of being seen in company with such a person as Corrigan. Just as well as though she had told me, I knew that this emotion was entirely a new one, and had been awakened by the proximity of our distinguished-looking neighbor and his officer friends.

We reached our hotel, and went immediately up to our rooms for a bath and change. I was about to slip off my flannels when, a sudden idea seizing me, I went to the window and looked down.

Standing in front of the door was a little victoria, on the seat of which were two little Japanese dogs.

CHAPTER III.

Corrigan and I went out the following morning to present our letters of introduction. I had decided to say in answer to any inquiries as to our need of a small vessel that the object of our expedition was a scientific one, and might take us as far as the west coast of Borneo.

One of our addresses being near by on the Escolta, we decided to walk, both my conscience and my comfort rebelling at the cramming of my two hundred pounds into a little native carriage. We were proceeding in a leisurely manner down the busy street when Corrigan suddenly stopped short in his tracks, gripping me by the arm.

I glanced around in surprise. He was staring straight in front of him, his jaw hanging, and his eyes sticking out of his head. Following his gaze I saw coming toward us a broad-shouldered man of medium height, whose manner of carrying himself suggested the seafaring person. He was neatly dressed in the usual white duck, with a small pith helmet, and carried a light, bamboo stick. Loitering along as he was, glancing into the shop windows, he did not notice us until within a few paces, when he suddenly looked up, then stopped short, with an oath.

"Captain Watkins—fer de love o' Mike!" gasped Corrigan.

And Captain Watkins it was—the Australian skipper about whom Corrigan had told me. Owner of a brig, he had helped Corrigan to remove the gold, but the brig had been shipwrecked. While the treasure was being transferred to the dinghy, José, the Spanish mate, who was in the small boat with Concha and a frail old padre, had traitorously cut the painter. Corrigan had dived from the rail, reached the boat, and knocked the mate overboard; but the boat had been swept away, leaving Watkins on the foundering brig.

Corrigan never expected to see the doughty Watkins again, and he hesitated to believe the evidence of his eyes.

But the hesitation of the other man was brief. He stepped forward briskly, and I noticed that the color had faded under his tan, and that his pale-blue eyes looked hard and dangerous.

"So it's you, is it?" said he, in a harsh, strident voice, and glared at Corrigan, who sprang forward with outstretched hand.

"Hully gee, cap," cried Corrigan, "but I'm glad to see you. I never t'ought you'd——"

He paused, struck for the first time by the ominous manner of the other. Watkins was staring at him through

narrowed lids, nor did he appear to see Corrigan's outstretched hand.

"You blarsted little cur," he growled. "You never thought to see me again, I jolly well know. But I've been 'opin' to see you again, matey mine!" and he licked his lips under his heavy brown mustache.

Corrigan's arm dropped to his side, and he stepped back.

"Say, what's eatin' youse?" he demanded, and then suddenly his voice rose so shrilly that passers-by stopped to look. "Say," he cried, "you don't t'ink it was me cut dat rope?"

"Yeou got off in the boat, didn't ye?" snarled Watkins.

Corrigan seemed suddenly beside himself. He sprang forward, and caught Watkins by the arm. I thought for the second that the sailor was going to strike him, but Corrigan's look of appeal must have prevented the act, for instead he shook himself free, and growled:

"Keep aw'y from me, blarst ye. Who cut it then—José? And what were you doin' to stand by and see it done? You were on deck when I went below——"

Corrigan interrupted him passionately:

"Say, cap, listen! Let me tell you. I was waitin' dere, and I heard Concha scream. I looked around, and seen de boat was gone. Concha screamed again, close to, and I took a dive overboard and come up alongside de boat. Say, I was inside her, and on me feet afore dat Spaniel knew what'd happened. Just two pokes *he* got—de foist on de chin and de second in de neck, and den de drink fer his'n. Aw, gee, cap, you'd otta know I wasn't de sorta mutt to leave a bloke to drown, speshully arter all you done fer me. Gee, but dat's a tough t'ing to swaller!"

He stepped back, and glancing at his face I saw that his eyes were brimming. Watkins saw it, too, and his manner underwent a sudden change.

"'Old 'ard, matey," said he, in his cockney-Australian accent, "maybe I been 'asty. I didn't want to think it of ye, but 'ow was I to know what 'appened? You was to wait to pass down the duffle and the last o' the gold, and when I got on deck 'ere was all 'ands gone, and I left to go down with the brig. Well, if that's 'ow it come about I'm sorry, and 'ere's my 'and on it. So you settled José, did ye? And 'ow about the padre and Concha?"

Corrigan stammered out briefly the story of how they had reached the island where they had buried the treasure, and of the good padre's death after making Corrigan and Concha man and wife.

Watkins listened intently. "Then the gold is still on the island?" he asked.

"Sure! Dere's a bunch of us come out t' git it. Me and Concha and Miss Halstead and my fr'en' here, Perfessor Metcalf." And, as if recalling me for the first time since the emotional meeting, he added: "Perfessor, shake hands with Cap'n Watkins."

"How did you get out of the fix?" I asked, after giving Watkins a grip. "Corrigan told me that the brig was almost awash when your skunk of a mate cut the boat adrift."

"Come inside, and 'ave a glass o' beer, and I'll tell you all about it," said Watkins. "It's 'ot 'ere."

We had stopped directly in front of a big café, so at Watkins' suggestion we entered, took our seats at a table, and ordered some beer.

"I'm sorry to 'ave 'arbored such ideas about you, Corrigan," said the sailor. "Of course, I see it all now." He turned to me. "With that wind and sea no two men could 'ave pulled the dinghy back alongside. Proper bread bowl, *she* was. Well, when I cyme on deck, and found the boat gone, and Corrigan with 'er, I was a bit 'ot. But there was no time for tykin' on, or leastwise, I didn't think there was, seein' that the brig was almost awash, so I turned to and rigged up a litter of stuff to float me when she went down. Then, d'ylight cyme, and 'ere she was, still afloat, the water not 'aving yet worked into the 'emp, I suppose. Then the weather cleared, and 'ere was a dhow workin' up my w'y. They sighted my signal, and took me off, and I found she was carrying sago from Sarawak to Manila, and 'ad got blown offshore in the gyle. Luckily for me

there was a good crowd aboard 'er; mission nytives mostly. They brought me to Manila, and I landed all right-o with my two ingots, worth about one thousand pounds each."

"Wasn't your vessel insured?" I asked.

"Yes, I 'ad a little on 'er, but 'ere's the trouble, sir. The cargo was only insured for the run stryte to Manila, and seein' as 'ow I lost the brig w'y down in the South China Sea the shippers couldn't 'ave collected, so I turned over my settlement to them. Only fair; and, besides, I'd rather lose the money than the tryde. You see, I figured on starting fresh with what the ingots fetched. But of course——" His face clouded, and he looked rather anxiously at Corrigan. "That money doesn't really belong to me, the understanding bein' that I was to get my share when the gold was safely banked. So if Corrigan sees fit to clyme it——" He paused, and took a swallow of his beer.

Corrigan did not immediately reply. His elbow was on the table, his chin on his knuckles, and from the many horizontal lines which crossed his low forehead it was evident that he was thinking deeply. Knowing the boy's free, generous nature, I was rather surprised, and a bit disappointed. Personally, I felt very sorry for Watkins, and it seemed to me that he was quite entitled to the two ingots which he had managed to save from his foundering brig.

As if feeling my unspoken sympathy, the sailor turned to me, and said:

"It's a bit 'ard on me, perfessor. 'Ere was I, doin' a decent little business with my brig, and arskin' no odds of anybody nor——"

His self-pitying monologue was interrupted by Corrigan, who suddenly raised his head, and tapped impatiently on the table with his heavy knuckles.

"Hol' on, cap," said he gruffly. "Let's git dis t'ing straight. Listen. Here was you, just like you say, doin' your little trade, an' all dat. Den I come buttin' in, and you, t'inkin' me no more'n a little mutt lost from his comp'ny, treat me white, blow me to a good feed, and offer me a passage to Manila. So fur so good. Den what? I tell you all about de treasure, and you agree to carry it to Manila, me to git two shares and you one, makin' seven o' dem gold bricks fer youse. Am I right?"

Watkins nodded moodily.

"Well, den what? You say you gotta go to Iloilo fer grub. Dat's all right, and we go. Den, leavin' Iloilo, you say: 'Singapore fer our'n.' Well, and what den? You git soused to de guards, and stay soused. Say, d'youse call dat sort o' foolishness holdin' up your end o' de contrac'? Huh?"

Corrigan's habitually good-natured voice was harsh and challenging. His keen, gray eyes seemed to bore into Watkins, whose tanned face grew a swarthy red as he looked down at the table.

"Oh, I don't pretend to s'y that I'm entitled——" he began, when Corrigan rapped the polished teak again with his knuckles.

"Me neither," said he gruffly. "You ain't entitled to a nickel—five cents—de twentiet' part of a dollar, as de fakers say. Now, listen!" Corrigan's voice raised slightly in pitch, and he leaned forward. "Dat's all I want—to hear you say it. Now dere's somet'ing else to remember. You was fixin' to marry Concha when I butted in and offered you all de bank fat dat was comin' to me if you'd give up de goil. What did you say? Huh? You says: 'If you want her as bad as all dat, she's yours, and I won't take de gold, needer.' Remember dat, cap?"

Watkins nodded.

"So do I," said Corrigan dryly. "Now, cap, I'm a man o' few woids. Dat gold's in a safe place on a little island near where we got wrecked. All you gotta do is to git hold of a little vessel, and take us down dere to git it, and five o' dem bricks 'r fer you—which, wiv de two you got, makes seven, which was de share you was to git in de foist place."

He leaned back in his chair, and reached in his pocket for a cigarette. I looked at Watkins. The man was sitting like a person in a trance. The color faded from his face, leaving it a yellowish brown. Then suddenly the blood

came pouring back, and he sprang up, holding out his hand.

"I s'y—I s'y——" he began chokingly.

Corrigan reached out, and gave the Australian's hand a grip which made the sailor wince.

"Dat's all right, cappy," said he gruffly. "And let me tell you somet'ing else. I aint' standin' to lose much on dis deal. You might not t'ink it from my mug, but I'm one o' dem wise guys dat know better'n to put all der eggs in one basket. What we had on de brig was on'y half o' dat treasure."

"What's that?" cried Watkins.

"Jus' like I'm tellin' youse. De odder half's back dere not far from de old temple. We'll go after dat de same time—on'y we don't share up on dat because I'm married now, and need de money."

Watkins' rugged face was an interesting study in expression of which the resultant was a sort of envious admiration. For some minutes he sat in silence, digesting this new piece of information. Finally, he shook his head, and remarked:

"Well, I never would 'a' thought you 'ad it in you. So you 'ad it 'idden up there all the time. But why didn't you tyke it all out at once?"

Corrigan inhaled his cigarette, then looked at the Australian with a little twinkle at the corners of his gray eyes.

"Maybe I had a sorta hunch dat you might git drunk and wreck de brig," said he.

Watkins winced a little, then laughed.

"You're a caution, Corrigan," said he. "Well, I must s'y, you 'aven't left me any cause to complyne. My eye—seven thousand pounds! I can get my little steamer with that, and 'ave enough left to buy a coffee plantation, besides."

And with glistening eyes he reached for Corrigan's hand again, then sank back into his chair, and grew suddenly grave.

"Look 'ere," said he suddenly. "I'm in a bit of a 'ole." He looked at me with an expression of perplexity. "It is jolly awkward, though."

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Maybe when you were coming in," said Watkins, "you might 'ave noticed that 'ere ketch-rigged yacht lying be'ind the breakwater?"

"The Russian?"

"That's 'er. Well, it was only yesterday I promised to go as pilot aboard 'er for a month's cruise around the islands. She belongs to a Russian gentleman; Count Rodonoff, and a very nice, fair-spoken young chap 'e is, too. A bit of a naturalist 'e is; fond of 'untin' orchids and birds and insects and the like. 'E brought 'er out 'imself, but they told 'im 'ere it was unsyfe to go down through the islands without a local pilot. The collector of customs gyve 'im my nyme, and I agreed to go, seeing as 'ow 'e offered me forty pounds for the job."

"Well," said Corrigan, "forty pounds ain't twenty-five thousand dollars, when it comes to dat."

"Ra-ther not," said Watkins. "I'll go and tell 'im that a charnce 'as just turned up for me to myke some big money, and arsk 'im to let me off. It's a bit awkward, all the syme, as I like to keep my word." He glanced at his watch. "I'd better go right aw'y and catch 'im before he comes ashore," said he. "At the syme time I'll look about a bit to see what I can find in the w'y of a vessel."

"All right," said Corrigan; "and look here, cap; dere's two loidies in our party—Concha and Miss Halstead, de perfessor's stepsister. If we c'n manage to git a hooker dat's all right inside, we'd like to take 'em along of us."

Watkins looked rather dubious. "That won't be so easy," said he. "Anything we're likely to get 'ere would be pretty bad below decks. We'd 'ave to scrape and clean and repaint, and even then 'twould be cramped and uncomfortable. But I'll do my best."

He arose to go, when I said:

"If the count is sore about letting you go, just tell him how the case stands. It's really no secret, as we're not going to try to smuggle the stuff in. Only don't say anything about the cache on Samar. Let him think it's an expedition to some of the islands in the South China Sea."

"Right-o. By the bye"—he looked sharply at Corrigan. "'Ow do you know where the island lies?"

"De priest worked out her bearin's wiv your instruments," Corrigan answered. "Say, dat priest was a wonder. He told me dat it was him made most of de maps around Mindinao."

"And 'e gyve you the bearings?"

"Sure!" grinned Corrigan. "Dey're on Concha's marriage certif'cate."

CHAPTER IV.

We did not present our letters of introduction, these being merely for the purpose of aiding us in our project. Instead, we returned directly to the hotel, where we found Concha buying tortoise shell, lace, embroideries—everything, in fact, which the sleek Oriental trader held up to her eyes, while Alfrithe stood by, vainly attempting to control her.

"Vamoose!" said Corrigan, with such a note of finality that the merchant decided it was not worth while to argue the point, and promptly betook himself off, and none too soon.

Concha frowned at her husband's brief methods, but when Corrigan told her of our meeting with Watkins she forgot her pique in her astonishment and delight. I was pleased at this, for although given to understand that Concha had never fancied Watkins in the rôle of lover or husband, he had nevertheless proved himself a good friend in a purely disinterested way.

We lunched rather early, and afterward Corrigan and I went in to play billiards, leaving word that if Captain Watkins called he was to be shown in immediately. I was watching Corrigan's skillful exposition of the game, when there came a heavy step behind me, and I looked around, to see the Australian standing in the doorway. Corrigan saw him at the same time, and laid down his cue.

"Hello," said he. "What luck?"

"Well," answered Watkins heartily, "'ere's a bit of all right. Everything's all arrynged, and we can start to-morrow, if you like."

"Sit down and tell us about it," said I.

We drew our chairs together, and Watkins said:

"Arfter leaving you this morning I went down, and got a banca, and went right out aboard the *'Alcyon,* Count Rodonoff's yacht. I found 'im over 'is fruit and coffee, and told 'im that something 'ad come up that would prevent my filling my engagement with 'im. Well, 'e didn't like it a bit, and wanted to know if I was a man of my word, or wasn't I. So I up and told 'im the whole story, arsking only that he treat it as a confidence. 'E was mighty interested, and when I'd finished 'e thought for a few minutes, and then arsked if you were the party of two gentlemen and two lydies, one of them tall and blond, stopping at the Oriental. I said that I 'adn't met the blond lydy, but that the other was rather—eh—dark and very pretty." He gave Corrigan a deprecating look.

"Dat's right," said Corrigan dryly. "What den?"

"'E said 'e thought 'e 'ad seen you driving. Then, says 'e: 'Look 'ere, captain; of course I wouldn't think of arsking you to miss a chance like this—not that you would, anyw'y. But it's beastly annoying for me,' says 'e. 'I'm sick of this 'ole, and want to get to sea. But you're the only man I'd trust to tyke the yacht down through these islands, and I certainly don't mean to 'ang around 'ere for a month or six weeks until you get back. I'll tell you what I'll do,' says 'e. 'You see your people, and tell them that I'd be very glad to 'ave them myke use of the yacht, if they like it——'"

"What?" I cried, in astonishment.

"That's what 'e said, sir. I was all tyken aback, myself. But let me explyn. It's not 'ard to understand. 'Ere's the count, who is tired of Manila, and you can't blyme 'im, but unwilling to trust 'is vessel to anybody but myself."

"And you can't blame him fer dat, needer," said Corrigan, with a faint touch of irony.

Watkins flushed a little. "Well," he retorted, "if I do s'y it myself, there's nobody knows these 'ere waterw'ys bet-

ter than I do, 'avin' rammed around 'ere 'unting cargoes as I 'ave."

"Just the same," said I, "it's odd that he should be so ready to offer the use of his yacht to strangers."

"'Ear me out, sir," said Watkins. "'E planned to go with us, of course, and 'e says that if you should feel unwilling to accept the 'orspitality of a strynger you can stand the running expenses for the time we're gone. The *Alcyon* is a roomy vessel below, and the lydies would be as comfortable——"

"He offered to take the ladies, too?"

"Why, of course, sir. There's no reason for breaking up the party. As 'e said, it would be no end of a lark. As a matter of fact, sir, I don't see 'ow we could do better. Strikes me as downright providential. It's not easy to find a proper vessel for the purpose, and 'ere's a gentleman that arsks nothing better than a little cruise in pleasant company. 'E told me that 'e always went alone for a long sea voyage, and that coming out 'e'd got rather bored with himself. Mind you, professor, 'e's not myking the offer out of sheer orspitality. It's because 'e doesn't want to stick on 'ere, nor does 'e want to leave the Philippines without seeing something of the archipelago, and looking around a bit for orchids and the like."

"What sort o' guy is dis count man, anyhow?" Corrigan asked.

Watkins' manner became enthusiastic. "'E's the real thing," said he warmly. "I've knocked around a bit, and I 'ope I know the difference between a gentleman and a cad. Count Rodonoff ain't like most o' these furrin' titled folk. More like an Englishman, 'e is. Speaks English as well as you or me, and French and Spanish, and 'e's written several books on natural 'istory. You're sure to like 'im. 'E told me to explyn the situation to you, and said that if you were inclined to favor the idea 'e'd do 'imself the honor to call at the 'otel, and myke your acquyntance."

Corrigan and I looked at each other. The offer seemed too good to be true, and yet it had its drawbacks. Corrigan voiced these with his usual blunt practicality.

"Well," said he, "all dis sounds like a cinch, on'y we don't want to be under no obligations to some strange guy we never seen." And as if struck by an afterthought, he added quickly: "Course he don't expect no share nor nuttin' like dat?"

"Not a bit of it," said Watkins warmly. "All 'e wants is the fun o' the thing."

"Say," said Corrigan, turning to me, "let's see what de loidies t'ink about it."

I clapped my hands, and when the muchacho came sent him up to say that Captain Watkins was here, and would the ladies come down immediately. This they did, and very charming they looked in their pretty tropical costumes. Concha greeted Watkins warmly, and very prettily expressed her happiness in seeing him safe and sound again. It was evident that the Australian was very much impressed at the change from the little mestiza convent girl to this *comme-il-faut,* self-possessed young person, for Alfrithe had taken Concha in hand as to the matter of dress and conduct, and this, backed by the lovely mestiza's quick intelligence, had wrought wonders.

But after the first greetings it was Alfrithe herself who caught and held the sailor's eyes, which was not surprising, for the sea voyage and its interesting objective had made of a very lonely and interesting invalid a girl that was simply radiant.

Alfrithe was only twenty-two, but her lithe, beautifully rounded figure was mature for this age, while her face and some expression about the eyes held that elusive, mysterious quality only to be seen in those who have passed through the furnace of a great spiritual ordeal. The seal of some fearful soul conflict was set strangely on those charming and girlish features, and one felt instinctively that nothing could ever again dismay the clear, understanding eyes. Yet her cheeks were rosy, her lips red, and the frequent smile showed a ravishing little dimple at one corner of her sweet, sensitive mouth.

Having watched Alfrithe grow up from a child of twelve, I doubt if I ever

properly appreciated the full extent of her loveliness, and was often surprised and rather annoyed because people stared at her. Unlike Concha, whose more sensuous beauty made its appeal principally to men, Alfrithe was equally admired by women, while children invariably surrendered at the first glance.

Acting as spokesman, I explained the situation in detail. Concha clapped her hands with a sort of childish delight, appearing to take the whole matter as settled, and finding nothing strange in the fact that an entire stranger should place his yacht at our disposal. But Alfrithe looked rather troubled.

It was not hard for me to guess what was in her mind. As Corrigan's guest—for he had insisted that she was to consider herself as such—she was scarcely at liberty to make an objection where his interests were so vitally concerned, while on the other hand she instinctively disliked accepting hospitality from a stranger. Even supposing that Corrigan paid all of the running expenses of the yacht, the obligation was still there, and it was from this that Alfrithe shrank.

On the other hand, however, she was wild to accompany us on our expedition, while Concha flatly refused to be left behind. So when Watkins assured us that it would be practically impossible to secure a vessel in Manila suitable to our purpose and aboard which the ladies could live even decently, let alone comfortably, without a very great expense, Alfrithe scarcely knew what to say.

We were in the midst of our discussion when the Chino doorboy slithered in with a card on a tray. He offered it to me, and as I glanced at it I saw the inscription:

COUNT CONSTANTINE RODONOFF

"Here is our friend himself," said I. "If you ladies will excuse us for a few minutes we will at least thank him for his kind offer."

Alfrithe rose quickly, but Concha lingered.

"May we not thank the señor, also?" she asked.

"Not now," I answered. "Perhaps you can do so later."

"Run along, kid," said Corrigan curtly, and Conchca got on her small, slippered feet.

"Ask the señor if he will be so good as to come in here," I said to the doorboy, for there was nobody but ourselves in the room. He glided out, and Corrigan gave me a questioning look.

"What's de verdic', perfessor?" he asked.

"Let's wait and see," I answered. "Maybe he's come over to say that he's reconsidered his invitation."

Watkins, who seemed rather ill at ease, pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his florid face.

"Well," he remarked, "all I can s'y is that if he saw those two lydies driving it wouldn't surprise me if he offered to myke them a present of the yacht and all aboard."

I was sitting with my face to the main entrance, and as Watkins spoke I heard the doorboy say: "Thees way, sar, if you please."

Alfrithe and Concha had almost reached the door, and as I looked up I saw a man in white clothes whom I recognized with a sudden shock of surprise as the young fellow whose carriage had been next to ours at the band concert the day before. As my eyes fell on him he paused, with a slight inclination of his head, to let the ladies pass. The next instant he had entered the room, and I rose to my feet, Watkins and Corrigan following my example.

Count Rodonoff came forward with a careless but well-bred ease, which was rather that of the English gentleman than the Continental. He gave Watkins a pleasant nod, then said, without waiting for the introduction which the captain, with a very red face, was preparing to make:

"I hope you don't mind the informality of my running in on you this way, but I've got an engagement later, and I just wanted to make sure that you understood my proposition, and what prompted it."

He looked from me to Corrigan, and Watkins said:

"Let me introduce Professor Metcalf,

sir, and Mr. Corrigan," indicating us each in turn.

Rodonoff smiled, shook the hand which Corrigan rather awkwardly thrust out at him, then offered his hand to me.

"I say," he said, "I hope you don't consider my offer a bit of cheek, but you see, your grabbing Watkins has upset all my plans."

"Won't you sit down?" I answered, and added, as we took our chairs: "It's awfully kind of you, I'm sure, and we've just been debating as to whether or not we ought to accept."

"But why not?" he asked. "It would be a purely mutual advantage. *Halcyon's* a roomy tub, and we can make the ladies thoroughly comfortable aboard. There are four staterooms beside my own, and a berth in the chart room for Captain Watkins. I say, I do wish you'd come. As I told the skipper, if you feel that you'd rather not be under obligations to a stranger, you can pay your share of the running expenses, though I'd a lot rather have you for my guests. But that's just as you like. Since I've heard your story"—he turned to Corrigan—"I haven't been able to think of anything else. What a perfectly ripping adventure!"

And as if forgetting the object of his call, he began to ply Corrigan with questions which the latter answered, at first with a bit of that gruffness which in people of his class goes with embarrassment, but gradually warming under Rodonoff's interest and sympathetic personality.

As they talked I studied the young Russian carefully. Certainly I have never seen a handsomer man, or one to whom I felt more drawn at first sight. In my professional capacity I have had a great deal to do with young men, both in lecturing before classes, and in private instruction, and it has always been a study of the deepest interest to me to examine personal traits, and then to compare them with later developments of character and ability.

Rodonoff impressed me as being an individual of the highest type so far as concerned mental and physical attainments. The contour and planes of his face and the arrangement and proportion of his features indicated virility of mind, imagination, and a swift, warm, sympathetic nature. Talking, his face lighted up wonderfully, and it was easy to see that here was a man of most uncommon personal magnetism. It was a strong, passionate, virile face, of which the greatest charm lay in the absence of any of those fugitive hints of selfishness or sensuality so frequently to be found associated with these higher qualities.

Physically, he was a little above the middle height, large of frame but lean, with a clear skin and strong, nervous hands. His eyes were of an indescribable color, and looked at different times to be brown, black, or a soft, slaty gray. They were rather deeply set, and the general shape of his features was markedly Slavic, as I have already said, the cheek bones being high, and the angles of the jaws rather wide and prominent. His chin, also, was more pointed than would be consistent with our Western ideas of beauty, and his teeth were white and strong and even.

And yet, despite all of his charm, there was about him a certain quality which inclined to put one on guard. It is hard to say in just what this consisted. Certainly there was not the slightest suggestion of treachery or guile, for one got the impression of a frankness which could be quite brutal, should the need arise.

Perhaps it was this very thing. One felt that here was a dominant nature that would brook no opposition; one which would go about its ends honestly enough, and with fair words and persuasion so far as was possible, but which would get what it wanted *when* it wanted it, and without so much as stopping to figure the cost.

Rodonoff impressed me as the atavism of some early Russian ancestor who might have carried off the fair chatelaine of his neighbor, held her by force of arms as long as he was able—a month, a week, or only for a day—and then, with his castle in ruins about him, and the avenger clamoring at his last

defense, have touched a match to the magazine, and carried all with him to destruction.

If Rodonoff was conscious of my examination he made no sign of it. Indeed, I believe that his whole attention was centered on Corrigan's narrative, for he suddenly burst out with an enthusiasm that certainly was not assumed:

"And so you were married right there on the island? My word, what a romance!" He looked at Watkins and myself with glistening eyes. "There's a proper sort of wedding—what? No fuss nor bother nor sham, with a lot of gaping spectators digging into your bride with their profane eyes. That's how it should be. That's the way I should like to be married myself when the fatal day comes." He turned to Corrigan again. "And then the poor Jesuit died, and left you two all alone with the island and the sea! George, what a honeymoon!"

Corrigan's hard little face shone with pleasure. Counts, lords, dukes, kings, emperors, all sounded alike to him, and the flood of human sympathy pouring from Rodonoff dazed while it delighted him.

Unlike Concha, his change of circumstance had never for a moment turned the boy's head. He had seen enough of life to know precisely his own place in the social scheme, and while, like many of his class, he often affected a flippant attitude toward those of higher caste, especially when they happened to be foreigners, yet the respect was there. Thus, to be hobnobbing with a foreign nobleman who lent a keenly interested ear to the great adventure of his life went to his head a little, and the first that I knew he was inviting Rodonoff to dine with us that night and meet the heroine of his tale.

"I'd be delighted, I'm sure," said the Russian. "Perhaps between us we may be able to persuade the ladies to overlook my being a stranger."

I could not but admire the deft way in which he took it for granted that our own agreement was already assured, thus making allies of us before we had the chance to decline. But so far as Corrigan was concerned, the conquest was already assured. The boy was ready to wade through blood for his new friend. Yet, though Corrigan may have been raw soil, the seeds of courtesy were planted in his nature, and he promptly asked Watkins also to be of the party. But the sailor's sense of proportion may have been keener than that of Corrigan, for he declined on the ground of some engagement, obviously fictitious.

"I'll call here to-morrow morning to learn what's been decided," said he, rising, "and if you all 'it it off together, the sooner we syle the better. One can never tell what may 'appen to 'idden treasure."

Rodonoff excused himself soon afterward, promising to return at eight. When he had gone, Corrigan turned to me, his hard little face aglow with admiration.

"Say, perfessor," said he, "dere's de real t'ing. I seen a lot o' gentleman sports, and would-be swells in my time, but dis Roosian count person leaves 'em so far you couldn't hear 'em on de long-distance telephone. T'ink of a swell guy like him sittin' here and talkin' to a little mick like me jus' like we was old fr'en's. Say, me fer him!"

But I merely nodded, for I was thinking of that thrilling first glance which had passed between Alfrithe and the Russian the day before, and of his carriage, which I had seen later standing in front of the hotel.

CHAPTER V.

When we went out we found Alfrithe alone in the reading room, Concha having gone to lie down, for it was excessively hot. Corrigan went up to tell his wife of our, or rather his talk with Rodonoff, and I drew Alfrithe into a secluded corner under the draft from the punkahs.

"Rodonof is coming to dine," said I. "Corrigan invited him."

Her face changed a little, I thought, and she gave me a curious look.

"What have you decided about his offer of the yacht?" she asked.

"I think that we will accept," I answered. "Corrigan is completely under the spell of his magnetism—which is not surprising, for I never met a more charming personality."

Alfrithe was silent for a moment, then asked:

"Frankly, Jim, why do you suppose that Count Rodonoff made this offer? Doesn't it strike you as rather extraordinary that a man of his class should put his yacht at the disposal of a party of utter strangers?"

"You know his reasons," I answered. "He says that he doesn't want to cruise about the islands without Watkins to pilot him, and on the other hand he doesn't want to wait here until we get back."

Alfrithe gave me a searching look, then asked:

"Do you approve of this arrangement, Jim?"

"Not particularly," I answered. "How do you feel about it?"

"I think it is horrid," she answered, with such vehemence that I was a little startled. "And I don't believe that Count Rodonoff suggested it for the reasons he gave you."

"Then what do you think he's after?" I asked.

Alfrithe was silent a moment, her lips pressed together and a red spot in either cheek. Presently she said:

"It's rather hard for me to say what I have in mind," said she, "and it may sound silly and vain. But I've heard of rich idlers, Europeans generally, and Russians in particular, who take a fancy to some woman they see, and then get the idea of some silly adventure. Of course, you recognized Count Rodonoff as the man in the carriage next to ours, at the band concert, yesterday?"

"Of course. What about it?"

Alfrithe flushed. "You noticed the —odd look he gave me," said she defensively. "You leaned over and asked me if I knew him. Jim, I was never so upset. There was something so queer in his eyes——" she paused.

"Then it was entirely mutual," I answered, "for he was red as a beet for ten minutes or so."

"Really?" she asked.

"Positive fact. And after that first glance he seemed to lose all interest."

"Then," Alfrithe burst out, "why did he follow us back, when he had just told his friends that he was going to wait for the next number, which he said was a favorite of his?"

"How did you know he did?" I demanded, for Alfrithe had changed seats with me on leaving the band stand, and had ridden back facing the horses.

"I felt him there. And why did he stop here at the hotel instead of at the Army and Navy Club, as he had agreed?"

"But how do you know that he came here?" I demanded.

"I looked out of my window, and saw his carriage with the two little dogs. I am sure that he came in to inquire who we were."

"Indeed?" I exclaimed dryly. "I must say, Alfrithe, that it strikes me as though Rodonoff were not the only one to have had his interest aroused."

She blushed scarlet at this, and bit her lip.

"Now, tell the truth," said I. "Did you go down afterward and ask them at the desk who it was that had inquired about our party?"

This was purely a shot in the dark, and as I looked at Alfrithe I repented having fired it. She seemed on the point of tears. Her breath was coming quickly, and her face crimson.

"Never mind," I answered. "We'll strike out that question. But even supposing that Rodonoff was so much interested by the one or two glimpses which he caught of your face that he followed our carriage back in order to find out who you might be, that doesn't say that he is a villain, or was influenced by any unworthy motive. Men of his race are impulsive, my dear, especially where women are concerned."

Alfrithe's smooth forehead gathered in a frown.

"I would call it rather more than impulse when, after learning who we were at the desk, and being told what our

errand was by Captain Watkins, he promptly puts his yacht at our disposal, and comes over here in person to urge us to accept his offer," said she.

I considered this for a moment, then observed soothingly:

"After all, when I come to think of it he looked much more often at Concha than he did at you. In fact, I was rather afraid that Corrigan might notice it and get restive. You didn't see because you lowered your parasol; but she was flirting with him outrageously."

Alfrithe's amber-colored eyes fairly flashed.

"She ought to be ashamed of herself," said she. "I noticed the way she was behaving. Fancy, and, after all, she is merely a little half-caste thing, and married, too!"

"Hold on, my dear!" said I warningly. "Remember, they are your host and hostess."

Again the angry color rose, and again she bit her lip.

"I know it, Jim. It's horrid of me. But they do get on my nerves sometimes, especially Concha. She seems to take it so for granted that everybody should admire her, and that she should have everything she wanted, as though she were 'to the manner born.' And really, she's half native. I don't want to be ungrateful, Jim, nor snobbish, but sometimes I wish I hadn't come. But I do like Corrigan, in spite of his tough way of talking. He knows just where he stands, and tries to do the best he can, and is always kind and thoughtful and polite. But it's going to be rather awful to have to sit through dinner with —with——" She hesitated.

"With Corrigan on one side, and Rodonoff on the other?" I asked, with a smile. "Never mind, my dear. Rodonoff is a man of the world, and it won't take him long to get our social status straightened out. Then you'll have a chance of making up your mind about him, and if the verdict isn't satisfactory, you really don't need to go, even if Corrigan decides to accept his offer."

Alfrithe did not look particularly pleased at this suggestion.

"You would have to tie Concha to keep her from going," said she. "Before she went upstairs she confided in me that she was sure that Count Rodonoff had arranged the whole thing because he had fallen in love with her. That's what comes of reading French novels all the time."

I smothered a smile. "Well," said I, "let's wait until we see how Rodonoff develops on acquaintance. I'll put Corrigan up to saying that the ladies have decided to remain in Manila, and we'll see how that affects his hospitality. Now, if you'll excuse me I'll write a few letters."

I do not think that Alfrithe was particularly charmed with this interview. If she was, her face did not show it as she passed me a few minutes later to go up to her room. Secretly, however, I was mean enough to be delighted, for this was the first time that I had seen her piqued at anything since we had left home, and while a calm and unruffled exterior may indicate a certain amount of contentment and tranquillity of mind, such emotions as Alfrithe had just displayed told of a healthy return of what Doctor Heppel would have called her "Life Desire."

I had finished my last letter, and was addressing the envelope when Corrigan came into the room, and the first glance at his troubled face told me that something was wrong.

"Say, perfessor," said he, seating himself on the corner of the table, and swinging one leg nervously, "Concha's just been singin' me a dope I t'ought I'd better put you wise to."

"What's that?" I asked.

"W'y, it's about dis here Roosian. Say, if anybody'd said a woid to me against him when he went out o' here, dat party would 'a' got hoit. Den Concha, just to git a rise outa me becus I chased dat Mulberry Bend guy dat was sellin' her fake toitle shell dis mornin', hands me a jolt dat gits me goin' some. I dunno what's got into Concha; she's gettin' woise every day," and a look of gloom settled on his habitually cheerful face.

"What did she say?" I asked.

"She ain't said nuttin' much, but she sorta knocked it into my nut dat dis here count has got a mash on her, and dat's de reason he's so slick and fine, and wants us to use de yacht. Say, d'you t'ink dere's anyt'ing in dat, perfessor? It makes me sore all t'rough, and me t'inkin' he was such a high-life sport. Listen—if I t'ought he was givin' me all dat bunk 'long o' Concha, I'd hand him a——"

"Nonsense, Corrigan," I interrupted. "Your wife's been trying to tease you, that's all. But see here; just to satisfy ourselves that Rodonoff is not making this offer for the sake of the company of either of the ladies, let's tell him after dinner that we've decided to leave them in Manila, and see what he says. If he looks the least bit sore, we'll call the whole thing off."

Corrigan's eyes snapped.

"Gee, perfessor," said he, "dat's de cheese. You got a head like a hammer, it's dat long. Say, you put it up to him, and I'll do de watchin'."

Rodonoff arrived that evening sharply on the stroke of eight, and the chimes were still clamoring from the belfry of the Binondo church as he came into the drawing-room where we were waiting to receive him. He wore a yachting evening costume of creamy white serge, cut something in the style of a Tuxedo, and with four white braid brands on the sleeves. I noticed in his buttonhole the little round, red insignia of an officer of the Legion of Honor, which decoration, as I afterward learned, had been conferred in recognition of certain contributions of a geographical character.

With his strong, graceful figure, handsome face, and distinguished bearing, Rodonoff was the target for every pair of eyes in the place as he came into the room.

In striking contrast was Corrigan, who, in the character of host, I had insisted must receive his guest, and present him to the ladies. Yet the boy did not do badly, and I have seen many persons who have had all the social advantages act far more awkwardly.

Corrigan could never be anything but utterly natural, and he merely shook hands with his guest, wished him good evening, and then, turning to his wife, said simply: "Concha, I wanta interdooce Count Rodonoff; Count Rodonoff, Mrs. Corrigan." Then to Alfrithe: "Miss Halstead, Count Rodonoff; Count Rodonoff, Miss Halstead, my friend Perfessor Metcalf's stepsister," and it was done.

While the introduction was being thus easily performed, I watched Rodonoff keenly. He bowed rather low, first to Concha, then to Alfrithe, and his fine face, aside from its pleasant and winning smile, showed absolutely no emotion of any character. Turning to Concha, he said:

"I'm so glad to meet the heroine of such an adventure as your husband described to me this afternoon. Really, Mrs. Corrigan, you've no idea how tremendously I was impressed by the story. The dying priest, the grotto under the cliffs, and you two alone with the elements—and each other. It is like a poem."

His resonant voice, which was rather low in pitch, held a note of enthusiasm, almost of passion, to which Concha's warm blood was quick to respond. Her long lashes swept down, half veiling her velvety eyes.

Rodonoff turned to Alfrithe. "Don't you think that it was ideal, Miss Halstead?" he asked.

"Wonderfully so," she answered, but her voice impressed me as unemotional to the point of coldness. Concha darted her a swift look.

"O' course," said Corrigan, "we couldn't help t'inkin' o' poor old Watkins. Den, dere was de fader, but it was different about him——"

"Of course," said Rodonoff quickly. "He was probably close to you in spirit, and helping you from a higher place, just as he had helped you here below."

There was a reverent tone to his voice which made me glance at him in surprise. It is not often in these profane days that one hears the expression of a religious sentiment upon the lips of a young man. But there could be no

doubt of the Russian's sincerity, and I think that it warmed us all to him.

We went in to dinner immediately after, Rodonoff being placed between Concha and Alfrithe. Concha promptly began to prattle to him in French, which I thought rather bad taste, as none of the rest of us spoke that language colloquially, but I noticed that Rodonoff seized every opportunity to relapse into English, and make the conversation general. His talk was very simple, and entirely impersonal, nor did he once allude to our proposed expedition, speaking principally about Manila and its lack of interesting things to see.

"I've been here a week," said he, "and I'm frightfully bored already." He looked across at me. "You have an awfully good crowd of fellows out here," he said, "but they are all taken up more or less with their duties, and it's only in the late afternoons and evenings that I see anything of anybody. But I don't want to leave the archipelago until I've done a bit of orchid hunting," and he went on to tell us that the Philippines were the richest in their variety of these epiphytes of any place in the world.

Alfrithe was very quiet during dinner, saying little, and looking, I thought, rather pale. But this pallor was very becoming, and her eyes, which continually and as if involuntarily returned to Rodonoff, glowed like great jewels. Concha, after a few vain efforts to engage Rodonoff in a tête-à-tête in French, grew a little sulky, and sipped glass after glass of the really excellent champagne, which was, I thought, the only really first-class thing about the dinner, unless it was the curry, which is, I believe, invariably good throughout the Orient. Rodonoff himself drank very little.

After dinner we adjourned to the palm room for coffee and cigars. Concha was by this time decidedly exhilarated, to put it kindly, and there was a seductive note to her low, rippling laugh, and a light in the low-lidded glances which she repeatedly shot at Rodonoff scarcely becoming in a young matron. She grew even playful, asking him if he liked the Filipino girls, and occasionally tapping his sleeve with her fan.

Poor Corrigan's face turned a bricky red, and I could see that he was very much worried over the behavior of his wife, even while much attracted to Rodonoff, whose good-humored indifference met and parried Concha's coquettish advances, as if unconsciously. Rodonoff even joked a little with Concha, but as one might with a pretty and amusing child, turning immediately afterward to Alfrithe, who, as though to shield Concha, grew more communicative.

I must not be too hard on Concha, who was, after all, only about eighteen, and in whose veins flowed a mixture of the purest Castilian blood, diluted or fortified, as the case may be, with Visayan. Up to this time all that she had seen of the world had been inside the walls of a Filipino convent, which existence had been abruptly changed for such phases of life as Corrigan had shown her, while her theories in regard to stylish deportment were principally culled from risqué French novels. At heart she was a good girl, with a naturally sweet if rather hot-blooded nature, and at just this time she might have been likened to a bright, multicolored moth, trying its wings in the sunshine for the first flight.

At half past ten Rodonoff rose, and begged to be excused, saying the usual polite things about a pleasant evening.

"I say," he asked, "won't you all lunch with me aboard the yacht to-morrow?"

I looked at Corrigan, then at Alfrithe.

"W'y, coitainly; dat would be fine!" said Corrigan, whose first esteem for Rodonoff had entirely returned.

"We'd be delighted, I'm sure," said I, failing to read any dissent in Alfrithe's eyes.

"Well, then, I'll have a boat waiting for you at the captain of the port's landing at twelve." He glanced at me. "Don't you and Mr. Corrigan feel like a bit of a stroll?" he asked. "Come, walk down with me. I'm going aboard."

"Sure!" Corrigan assented.

We got our hats, and went out into the soft tropic night. When we had gone a few paces, Rodonoff asked:

"Have you thought any more about my suggestion?"

Corrigan gave me a nudge, and I answered slowly:

"Yes; we talked it all over this afternoon, and finally came to the conclusion that while Mr. Corrigan and I would be delighted to accept your offer, the ladies had better remain in Manila."

Rodonoff nodded. "Perhaps that would be preferable," he said, without the slightest hesitation. "Personally I should be delighted to have them with us, but, after all, I doubt if they would be as comfortable aboard my little vessel as they would ashore. By the way, I don't suppose you'd mind stopping now and then at some suitable place to let me look around a bit for orchids?"

"On the contrary," I answered, "nothing would suit us better, I'm sure."

"Sure!" echoed Corrigan. "And say, count, o' course I insist on payin' all de running expenses while we're gone. Dat's understood—huh?"

"Oh, just as you like about that," said Rodonoff indifferently. "It's not much of an item. We live simply aboard, and I suppose my packet carries the smallest crew on record for a yacht of her size. Five foremast hands and a mate, all Russians, and a couple of Chinese as cook and steward. Then there's Watkins, of course——"

"Watkins is on'y gettin' about twenty-five t'ousand dollars for his part o' de job," said Corrigan dryly.

Rodonoff laughed. "That's so; I forgot."

"You see, count," said I, "Miss Halstead left a sanitarium to come on this tour," and in a few brief words I gave him Alfrithe's history. He listened with the deepest interest and frequent exclamations of sympathy.

"That accounts for an expression about her eyes that rather puzzled me," he said, when I had finished. "Poor girl—how awful! But she seems quite recovered now. Well, of course, you must do as you think best. If you should decide at the last minute to bring them along, and I must say it would be awfully jolly to have them, I think that we can manage to make them fairly comfortable, though of course the yacht is not a liner. Well, here we are. Good night, you chaps."

We had reached the landing, and saw below us a yacht's dinghy and the bulky figure of a sailor in white working clothes. At sight of Rodonoff he touched his cap, and started to cast off the painter.

"Good night!" we called, and turned back toward the hotel.

CHAPTER VI.

"Say, perfessor," Corrigan observed as we walked back toward the bridge in the bright moonlight, "I t'ink I'll go 'round to de quartermaster's corral fer a few minutes."

"What for?" I demanded.

"T'get a good kick fr'm one o' dem big artillery mules we seen dis mornin'. I sort o' feel like I had it comin' to me —huh?"

"Well," I answered, "you're not the only one. I had an idea myself that Rodonoff wasn't offering us his schooner on account of our good looks, or because he was so stuck on Watkins."

"What d'ye t'ink, now?" Corrigan asked.

"I think," I answered, "that he's a very nice fellow, a thorough gentleman, and that he made his offer because it seemed to him to be to the mutual advantage of all hands. No doubt he hoped that the ladies would go along and liven things up, but now that he finds we prefer to leave them behind he's quite willing to make the best of it."

"And dat bein' de case," said Corrigan, "dere's no reason in de woild why dey shouldn't go. Huh?"

I nodded, and we walked for a way in silence. Presently Corrigan said:

"Say, wouldn't de fly way Concha acted to-night jolt ye? I don't know what's come over dat goil. She never used to be dat way. I wonder what de count t'ought?"

There was an anxious note in his voice that made me sorry for him, and I hastened to say:

"If Rodonoff never saw any of the women in his own set behave worse than Concha did, then he must have gone mighty little in society."

"Well," said Corrigan, "and dat's all right, too. On'y you gotta remember dat Concha ain't 'xactly in his set. He's Count Rodonoff, and she's Mrs. Corrigan, and dat makes all de difference in de woild."

Here was a sample of Corrigan's sound sense, with very little to say in answer to it. So I merely remarked:

"Concha's very young and inexperienced, and hasn't quite got things straightened out in her mind as yet. But her instincts are good, and you needn't worry about her. Whatever she does she does before you, and more from high spirits than anything else."

Corrigan's voice was a little husky as he answered:

"Say, perfessor, you're de most comfortin' guy dat ever I knew. It's just like dat I says to myself, but it's mighty good to hear you say it, too."

When we got back to the hotel, Concha had already gone to bed. Alfrithe was waiting to see me, and when Corrigan had said good night she led me to a secluded corner.

"How did you like Rodonoff?" I asked.

"He is very attractive," she answered, and gave a little shiver. It was not a shudder, but a peculiar little ripple, which seemed to run from the top of her light, snugly coiffed hair to the toe of her satin slipper. "He—he is quite different from what I expected to find him; more boyish and natural."

"He is certainly as easy as an old friend," I agreed.

She was silent for a moment, then hesitatingly:

"Did you say anything more about our using his yacht?"

"Yes. He asked if we had come to any conclusion, and I told him that Corrigan and I would be very glad to take advantage of his kind offer, but that we had decided to leave the ladies here in Manila."

Alfrithe threw me a veiled look. "What did he say to that?"

"He said that no doubt you would be more comfortable ashore, then went on to talk about orchids, and asked if we would mind stopping here and there to give him a chance to do a little collecting."

Alfrithe tapped the polished teak parquet with the toe of her slipper.

"Of course, you said all that just to see what he would say," she observed.

"Not a bit of it," I retorted.

"What!" she exclaimed sharply.

"You see, my dear, Corrigan and I had decided that it would be better, on the whole, to leave you and Concha here in Manila. We can find some nice place for you to stop—a convent pension, or something of that sort."

"All right," Alfrithe answered, a little snappishly.

"You see, it wouldn't do for a couple of girls as young and attractive as you and Concha to stop on alone at the hotel. You know, my dear, that was the original arrangement, to which you both agreed, and I think it better to stick to it. Rodonoff's yacht is rather small, and it would be a bit cramped for so many."

Alfrithe drew herself up with a flushed, angry face.

"It's all that little Concha's fault," she declared heatedly. "I don't wonder that Corrigan doesn't want to take her, after the way she behaved to-night. She was drunk, Jim; positively *drunk*. And she tried to carry on outrageously with Count Rodonoff. She ought to be spanked. I wish that you *would* put her in a convent; one with a strict mother superior and a big high wall—and let *me* go with you."

With some difficulty I smothered the grin that was struggling for expression, then frowned.

"Now, here's a nice way to talk!" said I sternly. "Only this afternoon you were kicking and slamming because you were afraid that Corrigan might take Rodonoff up——"

"I *wasn't* kicking and slamming; and,

besides, I hadn't met Count Rodonoff then, and—and didn't know—how—how nice he was." The rich color flooded her face, and again that peculiar little shiver ran through her lithe body.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Are you getting a chill?"

"No—why?"

"I thought I saw you shiver."

"I'm tired, and I'm going to bed." She rose to her feet, and stood for a moment, surveying me with disapproval. "Really, Jim, I don't think it was very—very kind of you to make this decision without telling me."

"My dear girl, I had nothing to do with it," I answered untruthfully. "Corrigan came down this afternoon, all upset, and told me that Concha had led him to think that Rodonoff was asking us from some ulterior design on herself."

"She ought to be shaken," interrupted Alfrithe, with a little stamp of her small foot. "That girl needs a lesson, Jim; a good strong lesson that will teach her that the world and all the people in it were not created especially for her entertainment. Some day she'll get it, too. I never saw a person change so much as she has on this trip. She's not the same girl."

"I hope you are good friends," I remarked.

"Of course we are," said Alfrithe impatiently. "When she is alone with me she is as sweet and dear as she can be. I have to grab her hands to keep her from buying me things, and she is always trying to wait on me. But when other people are about, men especially, she seems to lose her head. Corrigan had better watch her pretty closely until she grows up. If I were he I would think twice before leaving her ashore—and I'm going to tell him so, too."

"You are going to do nothing of the sort," said I severely. "It would break him all up. Besides, if you really want to go, there's nothing to prevent. Rodonoff said that if you cared to change your mind at the last minute—or, at least, if we changed *our* minds, he could quickly arrange for you."

Again the little ripple, for I can call it nothing else. This time it was followed by a burning flush, which made Alfrithe's very blond hair look positively silvery. She turned abruptly on her heel.

"Good night, Jim," said she. "I'm going up."

"Good night," I answered, then stood and watched her as she swept gracefully to the stair.

Said I to myself: "Alfrithe has certainly found her 'Life Desire.'"

And a sudden sadness which I could not explain swept over me. I lighted a cigar, and strolled into the billiard room.

We were a very gay party as we went down to the landing the following day at twelve; possibly barring Concha, who had a slight headache, and whose gayety was a little forced. Also she complained of the heat and the glare, which struck me as odd, she being a native of the Philippines. She had, in fact, complained of the heat ever since we had been in Manila, but I have since learned that foreigners appear to be more resistant to the climate than many of the natives.

A long, rakish-looking whaleboat, with a crew of four men and a coxswain, was waiting for us, the sailors spick and span in clean whites, but with wild, swarthy faces which yet held a sort of bovine expression, like range cattle. We disposed ourselves on the cushions in the stern; the big coxswain gave an order in some weird tongue, and the boat shot out into the swift current which was coming down in turbid eddies bearing on its surface a queer water plant which looked like a head of lettuce.

Cutting diagonally across the stream we headed for a little cut-off which led from the Pasig into the breakwater, and a moment later shot out into still water, and saw the *Halcyon* no great distance ahead of us.

She was certainly an able-looking little vessel, but one would scarcely have taken her for a yacht had it not been for the smart way in which she was kept, as she was very heavy in build, with straight, bluff bows, and scarcely

any overhang to her stern. Also, she impressed me as rather undersparred for a vessel of her bulk, this being due to the fact, as I afterward learned, that her ballast was all inside, as it should be in a good sea boat, and there was comparatively little of it, her great beam giving her the required stability.

As we rounded up alongside, Rodonoff came to the rail, a quartermaster with a boat hook at his elbow.

"Welcome aboard," he called gayly.

The coxswain and bow oar tilted the awning of the whaleboat, and we scrambled out and up the ladder. Rodonoff shook hands with us in turn, and led the way to the shade of the quarter-deck, chatting with Concha and Alfrithe.

I took in the sweep of the decks with some surprise, for the ketch looked so much larger aboard than from a distance.

Bright work there was none, its place being supplied by galvanized iron and aluminum paint. Also, glancing about with the eye of a yachtsman of some experience, I was able to understand how Rodonoff could run a vessel of that size with so few hands. On every side were labor-saving devices; hand winches by which two men could trim a sheet or hoist sails and boats. The rails and other fittings were neatly parceled with canvas, and the deck planking was of some tough wood which resembled teak, and made constant holystoning unnecessary.

The yacht carried three boats—the long whaleboat in which we had come off, a small cutter, and a dinghy. She had a low deck house, merely a cabin trunk well furnished with skylights, and forward a similar structure apparently to cool the galley, for a stovepipe projected from one end. Her bulwarks were high, very solid, with a heavy rail and big freeing ports, but judging from her beam and buoyancy I doubted that she ever shipped a green sea or heeled at much of an angle. Altogether, she was about as serviceable-looking a cruising boat as I had ever seen, but I was inclined to believe that she would prove rather a dull sailer, especially in light airs.

"What do you think of her?" said a voice at my elbow, and I turned to see Rodonoff looking at me with his pleasant smile.

"She ought never to drown you," I answered.

"I hope not. But she's a fair sailer. I've done my twelve knots with a reaching breeze. You see, while she looks bulky, topsides, there's not a lot of her under water, though what there is manages to hold her pretty well, on the wind. I don't agree with the British idea of deep draft for seawork. But come aft; we're waiting for you."

Under the pale-green awning which shielded the quarter-deck a table was spread, and I thought that we were to lunch there. But it proved to be merely a *buffet Russe,* and contained in itself a spread of *hors d'œuvres* which might have furnished a hearty meal for the whole party—caviar, smoked salmon, *oefs farcies,* salads, avocado pears with iced mayonnaise—a host of relishes, with many Chinese appetizers, such as pickled shark's fin, thin slices of spiced raw fish, a peculiar glutenous dish which Rodonoff told us was the root of some plant which grew on the edge of a glacier and came from the Himalayas, and goodness knows what besides.

As drink there was served gorailka, a sort of vodka, and, what struck my inexperience as very odd, hot tea, this beverage distilled from the green stalk, with the leaves attached, looking like mint, and served in curious little cups, the one inverted on the other.

If Rodonoff had been charming as a guest, then there is scarcely a word to describe his personality as a host. I think that the quality which inspired us the most was the absolutely natural and unaffected ease of everything. In some subtle way, and without the slightest accent of familiarity, he managed to instill the sentiment that we were all old friends, forgathering quite casually, and with no hint of formality.

There was also the utter absence of any evidence of the machinery of entertainment. Aside from a few terse and quietly given commands on the part of the whaleboat's coxswain, not a single

order had been uttered by anybody, and when finally the luncheon was served, it was not even announced. Rodonoff suggested that we go below, which we did, our host leading, then the ladies, then Corrigan and myself.

In the main saloon another surprise awaited us, for instead of descending into a stuffy interior, as I had rather expected, the place was as cool and fresh as a glade in the forest. In fact, it was so much cooler than any place which we had found in Manila that I knew the double awnings rigged out over the skylights were not enough to account for it, and I was greatly puzzled.

Afterward I learned that Rodonoff carried a small ice machine, which he had secured more for the purpose of having cold water with which to develop his photographs than for his table, and from this he had led a pipe from the expansion chamber through the bulkhead into the saloon.

Below decks, as above, everything seemed the height of comfortable simplicity. The bulkheads were of white enamel paint with lockers, comfortably upholstered in corduroy, running the width of the room on either side, these piled deep with cushions, and just above them a double row of well-filled bookshelves. Brass lamps set in gimbals were placed in the four corners, making them comfortable nooks in which to read at night, and in the after starboard corner was a round gravity table, for use in heavy weather. Directly over the table was a telltale compass, and in the port after corner a little upright piano. The roominess of the place was surprising, thanks to the broad beam of the vessel.

What caught our eyes immedidately was the profusion of growing orchids, which were seized along bamboo withes with here and there a bit of damp sponge attached to the stems, these plants entirely encircling the saloon where the bulkheads joined the deck above.

Alfrithe, who was passionately fond of flowers of every kind, cried out with pleasure.

"They are really growing?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," Rodonoff answered. "You see, all they require is air and water, so they are really the easiest plants in the world to keep—when one knows how."

But the luncheon table was the masterpiece. The rosewood surface was bare, except for doilies of Oriental drawnwork, the service being of Russian silver, rather massive, and bearing Rodonoff's arms. The china was simple but exquisite, marked with the pennant of the Royal Yacht Squadron, and Rodonoff's private burgee, with the name *"Halcyon"* beneath. At the side of each plate as a favor was a small, black, pearl oyster shell, in the concavity of which was a charming little sketch in sepia, and beneath it the name and date. My own represented the yacht itself, flying before a gale.

"Did you do these?" I asked, as we were admiring them.

"Yes," answered Rodonoff, smiling. "They are rather banal in idea; the sort of things that one sees in the booths at Brighton and Yarmouth; but they will serve as souvenirs of my pleasure in having you aboard my little boat."

"The Señor Count is a very good artist," murmured Concha, with a languishing glance from her low-lidded eyes. "I shall have mine set in a velvet case, and place it where I can look at it always."

We seated ourselves, Concha on Rodonoff's right, Alfrithe on his left, with Corrigan on her other side.

The luncheon was the most delicious that I have ever tasted, and was rather Chinese in its great variety of dishes, each being scarcely more than a mouthful, yet the aggregate representing rather more hearty a meal than one should eat in the tropics.

There was iced consommé, a fry of little fish which suggested whitebait, a curry of chicken served in the Oriental way, with a vast platter containing countless little receptacles for every imaginable condiment, cold venison with a mastic, cold asparagus which Rodonoff said had been sent him by the depot quartermaster from a refrigerator ship, then an entrée consisting of the thinly sliced brisket of a young, well-roasted

duck, and other dishes which I cannot recall. A macedoine of iced fruit was the principal dessert, with that queen of tropical fruits, the mangosteen.

Champagne formed the principal beverage, although we were also served a wonderful Rhine wine and a red wine which Rodonoff told us came from a family estate in Hungary, and which in flavor rather suggested an old Beaume. Our party was an abstemious one, however, and Concha, the wiser for her morning's headache, drank only a glass or two of champagne.

The conversation was chiefly on the topic of Rodonoff's voyages, and we were surprised to learn that it was over two years since he had sailed from Southampton, where the *Halcyon* had been built to his order. He told us, also, that his crew was composed of Baltic fishermen who were tenants on his father's estate.

"It's a great advantage," said he, "and simplifies things wonderfully. I've known every man jack of my crew from childhood, and old Serge, the coxswain who brought you off, taught me to swim and fish and handle a boat when I was a little nipper of six or eight. Most of the hands are relatives, and they are all very religious. One of them—Boris, the quartermaster—is said to have second-sight, and perhaps he may have, for he came to me one morning all of a shake, and said that while he was at the wheel during the midwatch he had seen the face of his old mother looking at him from the belly of the mainsail. 'She is dead, master,' said he, 'and my sister will be all alone in the cottage. I ought to go home.' Sure enough, when we called at Colombo a few days later, I got a cable saying that the old woman was dead."

"I suppose," said Alfrithe, "that they are absolutely devoted to you."

"Just as dogs are to their master," Rodonoff answered. "But that does not prevent the older ones, like Serge and Boris, from dressing me down occasionally when I do something which they don't approve. Last Sunday morning some naval chaps, junior officers, came up from Cavite with some gamecocks, and we had a little main on deck. I wasn't very keen for it myself, and afterward old Serge came to me and said: 'Constantine Rodonoff, what would his excellency your father say if he knew that you had defiled the Sabbath day with profane and ungodly entertainments? Such pastimes are unworthy of you,' and a lot more in the same strain. I hadn't a word to say."

Alfrithe listened intently, a little smile on her mouth, and a soft flush in her cheeks. There was about Rodonoff a sort of childish simplicity which never fails in its appeal to women.

Our luncheon finished, Rodonoff took us about the yacht. Abaft the main companionway there was a large, comfortable room almost luxurious in its appointments—the owner's cabin.

"That is where I was going to put Mr. and Mrs. Corrigan," said Rodonoff, and flung open a door in the forward bulkhead to show a neat bathroom. "Watkins will bunk in the chart room at the foot of the companionway, and there is a nice room on the starboard side, next to the saloon, which Miss Halstead could have occupied," and he led us forward to show the cabin in question. There were two other staterooms, besides.

I turned to look at Corrigan, and caught Concha in the act of whispering eagerly in his ear. Catching my eye, she looked rather confused, and the color came into her face. Corrigan hunched his square shoulders, then looked at Rodonoff and me with a rather foolish smile. Rodonoff was surveying him questioningly.

"Aw, what's de use?" said Corrigan, drawing down the corners of his mouth. "De loidies say dey're goin' along of us, and if we don't like it we c'n do de ot'er t'ing."

I glanced at Alfrithe, and she, catching my eye, colored and looked down.

"We do not wish to stay in Manila," said Concha. "I have had enough of convents, and I did not marry to be treated like a little girl. Alfrithe does not wish to go to the convent, either. Convents are very tiresome."

Alfrithe said nothing, but as I glanced

at her face she gave me a look as if to indicate that she would leave the matter with me. A little shrug and gesture of indifference. But as I turned to Rodonoff it seemed to me that his face wore a flash of triumph, and again I wondered if by any chance this decision might not be precisely what he had counted on.

As if realizing that his face was too expressive, he smiled, and turned inquiringly to Concha, who said:

"Alfrithe and I have decided to go with you. There is no use to make the objections, because if you try to put us in the convent we will run away. So it is all decided."

Rodonoff burst into a laugh, and slapped his thigh.

"Good!" said he. "That is the way to talk."

He turned suddenly to the companionway. But in that brief instant I had caught the flame that blazed from his wonderful eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

It was all settled then that the ladies were to accompany us, and I could see that Corrigan was infinitely relieved. Rodonoff, aside from the swift, involuntary gleam of satisfaction which I had caught on his handsome face, and which furnished me food for thought, appeared politely gratified, and observed that he had hoped the ladies might change their minds, or ours, on seeing that the accommodations were really not so bad. He then went about his plans for our entertainment aboard with an almost military dispatch, summoning his Chinese steward, and ordering such extra stores as he considered necessary with a promptness which came of long experience.

"Captain Watkins is to come aboard a little later," said he, "and there is no reason why we should not sail to-morrow morning. However, as the breeze does not usually get in here before noon, there is no desperate hurry. I will look for you at the captain of the port's landing at eleven. Is that convenient?"

We assured him that it was, and shortly afterward returned ashore. Concha was in the highest spirits, but I thought that Alfrithe looked rather disturbed, and gave the impression of a person under strong, suppressed excitement. So far as that was concerned, however, we were all rather keyed up at the prospect ahead of us.

Eleven o'clock of the following morning found us embarking with such luggage as we decided to take, some of our things having been left at the hotel. Rodonoff greeted us with warm hospitality, and scarcely had we got aboard than he gave a few brisk orders, and even while we were stowing our effects in the lockers of our several staterooms there came from above the whine of the sheaves and the scuffle of feet as the crew made sail. The cable was already hove short, and in a wonderfully short time we were under way, and beating out toward Corregidor on a light, southwest breeze.

Watkins had come aboard while I was below, and on going on deck I found him standing by the wheel with a look of infinite satisfaction on his rugged, weather-beaten face.

"I s'y, professor," said he, "this beats some pot-bellied little Filipino junk—hey, what? Look at 'er slide through the water. She don't care whether there's any breeze or not."

I must say, the *Halcyon* certainly slipped along easily in the light air. Watkins, accustomed to his sluggish little brig, was charmed. Also, he was much impressed by the quick and quiet efficiency of the Finnish crew.

"It's so long since I been shipmytes with real s'ilormen," said he, "that I'd forgot how they act. Now, these jokers are worth, every man jack o' them, 'arf a dozen nytives, and at least three o' the ordinary lubbers that are rated A. B.'s these d'ys. A bit odd about 'em, too; seem to know before'and like, what you're goin' to s'y."

Luncheon was served as we were talking, and I was pleased to see that it was a very simple, unpretentious meal, though excellently well cooked. Rodonoff made not the slightest effort to entertain us in conversation, as he had

done the day before, apparently contenting himself by listening to the prattle of Concha, who, proud of her recent English, rippled along like a precocious child, talking a great deal, and saying practically nothing. Yet her little monologues were amusing, and seemed to afford Rodonoff great entertainment, while Corrigan's ruddy face fairly glowed with pride and a sort of paternal tenderness. I gathered that Rodonoff had quietly relapsed into his habitual seagoing routine, and meant to pay us the sincere compliment of treating us like old friends rather than impromptu guests.

Luncheon finished, we went on deck, when Rodonoff relieved Watkins, who went below for his luncheon. As the yacht was on the wind, the heat was not disagreeable, especially as there was a rim of shade where one caught the spill of the mainsail. And it was under these pleasant and easy conditions that our cruise began.

The breeze freshened in the afternoon, though it kept ahead, drawing directly into the bay; and shortly after sunset we came to anchor under the lee of the island of Lubang. I was rather surprised, having thought that with so able a pilot as Watkins we should keep under way, day and night. When I questioned him about it he shook his head.

"A man could 'ang up a vessel every night in the year on a different uncharted reef down 'ere," said he. "Seein 'as 'ow we're not pressed, w'y not tyke it easy and comfortable?"

Certainly there seemed no reason for objecting to this. One could scarcely conceive better conditions of well-being than aboard the *Halcyon*. Scarcely had the anchor splashed over the bow than the sails were down, the awnings rigged out, and we were sipping iced sherbert in the swiftly fading tropic afterglow.

Never shall I forget the beauty of those exquisite waters. Manila Bay itself is a flat, shallow, and rather stagnant pool, but between the islands, which are semisubmerged mountains of volcanic origin, one may carry deep water almost to the beach, the water wonderfully clear and limpid, the color of indigo in the depths, and of a pale topaz where the sun strikes up, reflected from the silvery sand carpeting a lagoon or shoal.

Sunsets and sunrises were a source of never-failing delight in these enchanted isles. As we anchored every night our decks were always astir with the first pale glimmer of the dawn. Weather conditions varied but little from day to day, yet one might witness those sunrises for a lifetime, and never miss that thrill of rapture which has in it qualities that are both emotional and devout. The still, flat water, as yet scarcely ruffled by the faint draft which springs up with the sun; the surrounding islets, vague and mysterious in the half light, fantastic of shape, and clothed in a depth of color felt rather than seen, sleeping often half shrouded in a filmy tulle of mist, and breathing, as it were, in soft, sweet respirations that wafted across the water, ruffling back the surface like a brush passed over satin to reach one faintly scented with perfumes of hibiscus, stephanotis, and other exhalations.

Then, over all, a glow at first so faint as to be scarcely perceptible, having its source not in the east, but from all about, coming as one might almost believe up through the limpid water as though the earth were a crystal globe holding a softly diffused light at its core. Swiftly it grows, not gradually, but in luminous waves; vibrations of rose and amethyst and saffron, edging hitherto invisible wisps of fleece in the high vault overhead with delicate traceries of brightening shades until gaining in strength and substance it concentrates in a mad, glowing riot of color which bursts like a great bomb on the eastern horizon, when the sun leaps up joyously and it is broad day.

Mauve, mysterious mountains flash forth in dazzling costumes of green and yellow, with purple shadows in their deeper folds. The water takes its ultramarine, and as we glide from our moorings begins to swarm with life. Translucent flying fish spatter away on their wings of gauze. Banded and gruesome

shapes undulate from beneath the keel, and deep in the translucent shadows formless hydrozoa with pendulous streamers pulsate and reflect the lights from above.

Sometimes the mist hangs a little after the day begins, and one can look into a distance of sea broken by jutting peaks and tumbling mountains, elusive, unreal, yet familiar, and suggesting the ancient interpretations which most of us remember from childhood as pictured in biblical engravings to stir the imagination, and cause us to people them with gnomes and giants and dragons and other images of childish fantasy.

All of us but Concha got up to see the start, after which Alfrithe would go below while we men took our bucket baths, then came aft, briny and refreshed, for fruit and coffee.

It was on the second morning out, when Rodonoff and I were alone, that he looked up from the mango which he was splitting, and said to me abruptly:

"Professor Metcalf, I wish to ask a permission of you."

"What is that?" I answered, not taking him seriously.

"I have the honor," said Rodonoff, "to request your permission to pay my addresses to Miss Halstead. Although I understand that you and she have no blood relationship, I presume that she is under your government."

If he had asked me if he might scuttle the yacht with all on board I could not have been more startled. The mangosteen from which I was picking the fragrant, pulpy seeds slipped from my hand, and rolled across the deck.

"My dear fellow——" I began, then paused, scarcely knowing what to say. Rodonoff looked at me with a smile on his lips and a gleam in his expressive eyes, which were of a soft, slaty gray that deepened to a hazel brown next the pupils.

"I want to marry your stepsister," said he frankly, "and I would like to have your permission to try to win her."

His voice was quiet enough, but held a deep, vibrant quality. I saw at once that he was very much in earnest, and felt myself for some inexpressible reason filled with a sudden, hot resentment. And yet I realized that the Russian was acting from a perfectly sincere and honorable motive.

"But, my dear count," I protested, "you scarcely know each other."

"Perhaps I know her better than you think," he answered. "I knew her the minute my eyes fell upon her at the band concert on the Luneta. Don't you think it possible, professor, that there may be such a thing as instinct about these matters?"

I do not think that I have ever been so much upset, though just why it would have been impossible for me to have said. But my thirty-five years felt suddenly like eighty-five, and I was conscious of a sudden bitter envy of Rodonoff's youth and wealth and attractiveness. Here he was, asking as lightly and with as much confidence in his ability to succeed in his ambition for the right to woo and marry Alfrithe, that loveliest of girls, as though he were requesting my permission to give a dinner in her honor.

And yet, I told myself, why shouldn't he? Rodonoff's rank was not so high as to place him above Alfrithe, whose family was as good as any in America. He appeared to have fallen deeply in love at first sight, and it had already struck me that Alfrithe was strongly alive to the charm of his distinguished personality. Still, in spite of this, I was conscious of a sharp sense of inward pain as I answered slowly:

"No doubt such swift, instinctive sympathy exists. But one should be guided by reason, also. To tell the truth, count, it is rather hard for me to grapple the idea of a marriage between you and Miss Halstead. You are a Russian nobleman, with all sorts of family affiliations——"

"I am quite independent of my family," he interrupted. "But so far as that goes, my father would be jolly well satisfied to see me safely married to so charming and lovely a girl."

"Then there's the question of marriage settlement," I objected. "Alfrithe's little income would scarcely pay your wine bills."

Rodonoff waved his hand. "The European idea of the necessity of a dot has always been disagreeable to me," he answered. "Besides, I've got as much as we're ever apt to need. This is not a blind infatuation, professor. I'll admit it's a bit abrupt, but you know we Slavs are rather impetuous where our emotions are concerned. However, you must remember that I'm asking only for permission to try to make Miss Halstead care for me. Very likely I may not succeed."

"Tell me," said I. "Was it on this account that you asked us to use your yacht?"

He met my look, and colored a little as he answered:

"I was determined to meet her, in some way or other. That one look at the concert did my business. Then, when Watkins came and told me of your situation, it seemed like a Heaven-sent opportunity. Anybody would have acted as I did, don't you think? And for the life of me I can't see anything underhand about it. I merely wanted to know Miss Halstead, and now that I've had a chance to see more of her I want to marry her—awfully," he added, with his characteristic boyish frankness.

I was silent for a moment, then said, as cheerfully as I could:

"Well, it seems to me that you ought to succeed. The Lord knows you have about everything in your favor, and Alfrithe is heart whole and fancy free. If I have seemed ungracious, it is only because——" I hesitated.

"Because—only you really haven't, you know," answered Rodonoff, smiling, "but I'd like to hear that 'because.'" And he shot me a swift, intent look.

"Because I'm a sort of matrimonial conservative, I suppose," I answered, "and hold ideas which would no doubt seem to you rather middle-class and provincial, and are to the effect that marriages, to be happy, should be contracted between persons of similar habits and tastes and conditions of life, and—and all that sort of thing," I finished, rather helplessly.

Rodonoff's face flashed in his winning smile.

"Precisely my idea," he answered. "But don't you see, professor, that is just our case? Miss Halstead tells me that she loves art and music and literature and science and travel, with a spice of romance and adventure. She loves the sea, and can't stand being cooped up in one place any more than I can. I'm sure that I could make her happy." His handsome face glowed, and his expressive eyes seemed to darken.

Again I was conscious of that heavy, hopeless feeling of despondency. It made me rather ashamed of myself, for I could not help but realize that the marriage would be a brilliant one for Alfrithe, and opened the way for all sorts of promise for a happy and interesting life. So I answered, with an honest attempt at heartiness:

"No doubt you are right. I am personally rather a pedantic old bookworm, Rodonoff. Go ahead, then, and my blessing go with you. And let me say that I appreciate the compliment which you have paid me in asking my consent."

We shook hands, and at this moment Corrigan came on deck, and I went below to shave and dress. After all, I thought drearily, why not? Rodonoff was really less Russian than cosmopolitan, and instead of shutting Alfrithe up among people of foreign ideas would show her the wide and interesting world. He had told me the day before that his family was an old and simple one of the lesser nobility, whose estates lay along the shores of the Baltic, and comprised a modest holding which included two or three fishing villages. He himself had been educated in England, taken a degree in natural sciences at Oxford, and had spent most of his time since then in study and travel.

I felt but little doubt of his success with Alfrithe. It seemed to me that with the return of her health and interest in life the girl must be ripe for romance, and I could not imagine a more attractive suitor than Rodonoff. In fact, despite my lukewarm approval, they seemed to be a most excellently mated pair—and I thought of that first exchange of glances at the band concert,

and of what had seemed to me afterward to be Alfrithe's instinctive, maidenly struggle against what could be nothing else than the awakening of a new and compelling force.

Wherefore, I quietly withdrew from active interference in the affair, and awaited further developments with what, I told myself, was the anxious interest of a parent. I rather expected that Rodonoff, now that his intentions had been officially declared and approved, would set himself to the wooing of Alfrithe with that dominant impetuosity which I had always understood to be characteristic of his race.

Consequently, I was rather surprised to see his attitude toward the girl grow if anything more subdued. In fact, the only hint which I ever got of his inner state of heart was in the occasional glow in his fine eyes as they rested on her for a moment.

But there was other engrossing business afoot as the end of our fourth day from Manila saw us drawing in on the north coast of Samar heading for the mouth of the little estuary where was situated the ruined temple in which Corrigan had found his treasure, more than half of the hoard being still secreted there, or so we hoped.

We came to anchor off the place about sunset, and promptly received a visit from the local presidente; a genial old fellow who told us that it was the first time that his port had been honored by the visit of a yacht. Rodonoff received him hospitably, asking him to dinner, and telling him that he was a collector of orchids.

"I would not go too far," said the old fellow. "There are still a few roving bands of robbers, and while I do not believe that there is any danger, it is not worth while to take chances. Not long ago there were some American soldiers here, but they have gone away, and some of the rascally ladrones may have returned to their former haunts. However, I will accompany you with a few armed servants."

As there seemed no way of declining this offer, we decided after the presidente had gone that Rodonoff should accept the invitation, leaving at daylight the following morning, shortly after which, Corrigan, Watkins, and I, with old Serge and one of the sailors, could go to the temple to get the treasure. Of this there were twenty-one gold ingots, weighing approximately twenty pounds apiece, with a quantity of jeweled ornaments and weapons, and as the temple was only about half a mile up the ravine from the place where we should leave the boat, it need not take but a single trip. Serge and myself, being both two-hundred pounders, might load ourselves with five of the ingots each, while the others transported the rest. The ladies were to remain aboard in the care of Boris.

This plan we accordingly carried out, and an hour after the departure of Rodonoff we five, with an extra hand as boat keeper, provided ourselves with canvas sacks which Watkins had made for the purpose, got aboard the cutter, and pulled up into the mouth of a creek where the mangoes grew to the water's edge on either side.

Coming to a bamboo bridge where a native trail crossed the stream, almost a cascade from this point on, we left the boat and clambered up the ravine, following the course of the torrent, until presently the vine-covered ruins of an ancient wall reared itself through the jungle at our right.

We passed around this wall, and climbed up through a breach to find ourselves upon a sort of terrace above which appeared to be another of the same sort.

Scaling the crumbling wall we mounted to this upper terrace, which was broader and more free of undergrowth than the first. At its rear, hewn as it were from the living rock of the mountainside, were the ruins of the ancient temple.

It was an interesting relic, with pillars of carved stone, and dated back, I thought from the character of the decorations, to some ancient Chinese occupation, perhaps to the time of the Tartar invasion under Khoubilai Khan, when there was a general exodus from

the east coast of China; an exodus, by the way, which may account for the Chinese blood in many of the islands across the China Sea, possibly also the Aleutian Islands and our own American Indians. A friend who served in the Philippines and China had once told me that in his company there was an Indian who was able to talk with the Igorrotes and certain Chinese.

Corrigan, trembling with excitement, led the way to the end of the terrace, and here, tearing aside the vines and creepers, we pried up one of the flagstones with which the place was paved, and the treasure lay revealed beneath. First a litter of ancient arms and ornaments, richly decorated with jewels, and of undoubted Asiatic origin, and underneath this the gold; rough, yellow ingots, stacked like bricks, and I must say that a sudden wave of emotion rippled through us all at the sight of this gleaming hoard. Watkins' pale eyes held a positive glare; his face was quite colorless, and as he hauled out the heavy ingots a sigh broke from his chest.

"And to think that if I'd only pl'yed the gyme I might have shared up my third of this," said he sadly. "Well, 'ere's a temperance lecture that 'ad ought to keep a chum stryte and sober."

Least moved of all, so far as one could see, were the stolid Finns, who proceeded to charge themselves with the treasure as though it were so much slag. We lingered to search the inside of the temple, going over the solid walls and stone-paved floor with hammers, but all to no purpose. The only loose slab was that which had been jarred down by the earthquake on the night when Corrigan had taken refuge in the place. So we burdened ourselves with our loads, and staggered down over the slippery stones of the ravine, to arrive hot and panting at the boat.

Rodonoff came off for luncheon, bringing with him the presidente, to whom of course we told nothing of the real object of our quest. Rodonoff was happy at having found an orchid of rare variety, in which he appeared to take more interest than in the treasure, for after the presidente had gone, and we went below to inspect the hoard, he stared at it thoughtfully for a few moments, then remarked:

"Odd that men should barter their immortal souls for stuff like that. Concrete wealth never made much of an appeal to me. There are so many other things such a lot more worth while; science, the free air, and—*the one woman,*" he muttered under his breath, and his eyes went to Alfrithe.

CHAPTER VIII.

So here was the first part of our quest affected with an ease which might have aroused my superstitious fear had it not been for a certain ill-defined sense of impending ill, the more remarkable from the fact that such a feeling seemed so utterly groundless.

We had before us a run of only about a thousand miles to the South Luconia Shoals; a simple enough undertaking for so able and well found a vessel as the *Halcyon.* The weather was settled, as the season was now advanced beyond the breaking up of the monsoon, the crew was trained to the efficiency of a perfectly adjusted machine, and our navigators were men of ripe experience, and, in the case of Watkins, thorough local knowledge.

In spite of all this, I was far from being easy in my mind, although I could not have said why. Certainly conditions aboard were quiet and peaceful enough, everybody appearing cheerful and contented—that is, everybody but Rodonoff, who was not getting on in his suit as fast as one might have expected from his talents and attractions. In fact, it seemed to me that he was making leeway, if anything, for Alfrithe appeared to have overcome the first emotion with which he had so evidently inspired her, and now accepted him on an easy, friendly footing which held no trace of self-consciousness.

Rodonoff himself felt the difference, I think, for occasionally a flash which looked almost like desperation would cross his handsome, clean-cut face, and several times I saw him grow suddenly pale when talking to her, and turn away

his head, as if afraid that she might see something to startle her.

I will admit that I was selfish enough to be glad. There was no denying that Rodonoff would be a brilliant match for Alfrithe, but the prospect of having her marry a man who would take her far away from us, so that years might pass without our seeing her was quite unsupportable.

I had never before realized how dear she was to me, and I thought that if marry she must, why could she not marry some good, stalwart American, who might be able to give her as much as Rodonoff, without dragging her to the ends of the earth?

Wherefore I watched the Russian's lack of progress with a sort of inward exultation, knowing that with such a nature as his not to go ahead, and go ahead rapidly, was equivalent to falling behind.

Yet I could not but admire his patience and self-restraint, for I was beginning thoroughly to understand the depth of his passion, and that he regarded the rest of us as mere pawns in his game for the conquest of Alfrithe. Indeed, I began to feel that he would be quite ready to sacrifice the lot of us, in any way or manner, if it would gain him half an inch in Alfrithe's favor.

The man was in love with the girl to the point of a complete obsession, and being a concentrated nature, he was playing his game to win, ruthless to all beside. While striving always to be outwardly polite, he several times failed utterly to pay the slightest heed to a question which I addressed directly to him. In fact, I doubt if he heard it. His mind was so full of this new emotion that it seemed to have room for scarcely anything else, and there was about his utter absorption something romantically medieval. But he took infinite care to do nothing which might startle and frighten Alfrithe, realizing that she was still a very young girl, and unusually sensitive to any rude impulse.

I fancy that Rodonoff, like most of his race, would be a terrific gambler for the sake of getting what he wanted, staking all on one throw, and that now, for the first time, he was in the face of such a desire that he shrank from the slightest risk of losing. Even his eyes were veiled when he looked at her; too veiled, I thought, and wondered what might be the ultimate result of such suppression in a nature unaccustomed to it.

Plainly enough he was delaying our voyage as much as he decently could, for we came to anchor early, and seldom got under way again until the sun was fairly high. Even when out in the open waters of the Sulu Sea, where we might safely have continued under way throughout the night, we always ran in under the land to anchor.

Skirting the coast of Panay, we stopped over twenty-four hours, and went in to hunt for orchids, the ladies accompanying us. We stopped again on Negros, these expeditions being little more than picnics, and a really pleasant break in our voyage.

Then Rodonoff suggested that we make a little detour, and run down to the island of Basilan, as a German collector had told Watkins that the forest on this island was particularly rich in epiphytes. So we put into Port Isabella, a charming spot, and the next morning at an early hour shouldered our knapsacks and climbed up across the stretch of meadow to where the forest grew out to the rim of the slope.

There were Alfrithe, Concha, Corrigan, Rodonoff, and myself, with two sailors to carry the luncheon hampers, for we were to spend the day in the cool of the forest.

The sun was already hot when we reached the plateau, and we entered the shady depths with the sensation of plunging into a delicious woodland pool. The great trees arched high overhead, their upper branches interlaced and so snugly woven with creepers and lianas that scarcely a ray of sunlight filtered through. Of undergrowth there was little, this consisting of mammoth ferns, fan palms, and many varieties of flowering shrubs and bushes.

Great flamboyants blazed out like living flame against the somber green; there were tree ferns and many orchids, most of the latter growing high and dif-

ficult of access because of the gum exuding from the bark of the trees and the many ants and insects which had their thoroughfares the length of the mighty boles.

From dark, mysterious glades came the raucous voices of strange birds, and high above the leafy roof was populous with a life which was noisy and disputatious, these quarrelsome colonies screened from our sight by intervening boughs.

We made our camp on the edge of the forest, where the mighty trunks rose in a way that suggested a great basilica.

Concha, hot and tired from her short climb, for the girl lacked the Northern endurance of Alfrithe, declined to go farther, so Corrigan remained with her. Rodonoff, Alfrithe, and I set out to explore, and presently, being interested in trying to learn more of the busy animal life invisible as we approached, I loitered to look about and listen.

Sitting on a rotten log, I waited for the forest folk to show themselves, and my last glimpse of Alfrithe and Rodonoff was as they moved slowly side by side straight down a glade which suggested the nave of a cathedral, and I could not help but wonder sadly if the tableau were prophetic.

Alfrithe had not discovered my desertion, as I had been following a few paces in their rear, while Rodonoff pointed out to her the different growths in that wonderful botanical garden, and telling her their names and characters.

For perhaps an hour I sat there in silence. An endless file of umbrella ants crossed the trail at my feet, each little soldier carrying its square of leaf above its head. The tolling note of a bell bird came elusively, baffling in distance and direction. From overhead rose a sudden angry chattering, and down came a shower of hard, green nuts. A toucan barked, and the monkey band made fun of him. A great green lizard scuttled past, pausing to snap at an iridescent fly.

I was thoroughly enjoying myself when from the distance I heard a sudden, confused clamor of human voices. Though far away, the sound reached me with fair distinctness, carried telephonic under the leafy canopy. I was unable to catch the words, but something in their tone brought me quickly to my feet, for there were the notes of passionate anger and protest, and a sort of fierce insistence. Then came a smothered scream, a confused, impassioned dialogue, followed by a moment of silence.

For an instant I stood listening; then, as I was about to call, there came the crashing of underbrush, and the sound of some one dashing through the stiff, crackling foliage. Alfrithe's voice rang out wildly:

"Jim—Jim—where are you—Jim?"

CHAPTER IX.

"Hello!" I shouted.

The crashing increased, and moving in that direction I saw presently the flash of Alfrithe's white gown, off to the left of the woodcutter's path which we had followed. I called again, and she turned toward me, plunging headlong, and with no regard to the sawlike edges of the rank vegetation and the dangers which might lurk in the tangle under her feet. She burst out upon the trail ahead of me, breathless, her very blond hair tumbled about her ears, cheeks blazing, but pale about the mouth.

I hurried to meet her, and as I drew near she stopped, swayed slightly, then dropped down upon a big, serpentine root, covered her face with her hands, and burst into a silent storm of sobbing.

"Alfrithe—my dear girl—what is it?" I demanded.

"Oh, Jim—Jim!" she cried. "Why did you leave me with him? Why did you? Why did you?"

"What's the matter?" I asked harshly. "What's happened? Where's Rodonoff?"

Alfrithe caught her breath, and looked up at me. I had never seen such an expression on her lovely face. She looked positively dangerous, and instead of the tears which I had expected her eyes were hot and dry, and so dark that I was actually startled. Here was an Alfrithe that I had never known.

"He is over there in the woods, I suppose. He is a brute. He's a savage. Take me back, Jim. Take me away from here. Don't let me see him again. I hate him. I loathe him. I shouldn't have come——"

So here the bomb had exploded. I looked at Alfrithe's furious face and scratched hands.

"What did he do?" I asked.

"He—he——" Alfrithe grew crimson, and began to stammer. It was a flush of pure rage, as I could tell from the way in which she set her even little teeth and clenched her fists. The stammering was rage also. "He caught me in his arms, and nearly smothered me. He kissed me—and nearly strangled me. I think he's gone crazy. Maybe it's the heat?" She looked up at me questioningly.

"Maybe," I answered. "What then?"

Alfrithe's color flamed out again. Perhaps the dryness of my tone was not what she expected.

"I fought and struggled, and finally managed to tear myself free, and screamed for you. Oh, Jim—Jim—I want never to see him again. Can't we get away from this place without going back aboard that horrid yacht?"

"Tell me, Alfrithe," said I sternly, "did Rodonoff treat you this way without a word of warning?"

"Of course." She shot me an angry look. "Do you think that if I'd guessed at the sort of man he was I'd let myself be alone with him?"

"Forgive me," I muttered. "But how did it all come about? He didn't turn suddenly and grab you, did he?'

"That's exactly what he did," she cried. "There was a great bell-shaped orchid high up over our heads, and hanging by a long, curved stem, like an artificial lamp. I never saw anything like it, and as I was watching it—the sun struck it, and I was sure it had a light inside—and it made me dizzy—so that I may have swayed a little on my feet. Maybe I brushed his shoulder—anyway, the next instant he was crushing the life out of me——"

"Listen, Alfrithe," said I, as quietly as I could, for my heart was going like a trip hammer, and my mouth felt hot and dry. "Rodonoff is madly in love with you. He told me so the second day that we were aboard the yacht. He asked my consent to try to win you for his wife."

Alfrithe lifted her chin and stared at me. The flush left her cheeks.

"And you gave it?" she cried, exactly as though I had said something to hurt her.

"Yes," I answered. "Why not?"

She continued to stare at me for a moment. It was a curious look, and the sort that I have seen in the eyes of some wild thing that I had shot, and was about to kill. It went through me like a knife, yet puzzled me. I began to stammer explanations.

"Rodonoff was very honest and manly about it," I said. "He told me about himself, and his family, and met all of my objections——"

"Then you really offered some objections?" she asked, in a clear, almost ironical, voice. "Why was that?"

"Don't be silly, Alfrithe," I answered, almost roughly. "You know perfectly well what I mean. I saw plainly enough in Manila that you were attracted to Rodonoff——"

"Oh, did you?" she interrupted.

"I did. I'm not altogether blind, though a bit dense. Your happiness means an awful lot to me, so when Rodonoff asked for my permission, *in loco parentis,* as one might say——"

"Yes, one might," this in scarcely more than a murmur.

"I naturally wanted to make sure," I went on, disregarding her interjection.

She grew silent then, and I continued, like the pedagogue which some years of teaching had made me. "I gave my consent to his trying to win you, and supposed that he would go about the business as a gentleman should. To tell the truth, my dear, I really believe that Rodonoff simply lost his head. His Slavic nature got away with him——"

"He is a beast!" she interrupted, in a hard voice.

"He is more fool than beast, and he has acted very badly. To be frank, Al-

frithe, I thought that you were beginning to care for him."

"I hate him!"

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know. I struck him in the face, and tore myself away. Oh, Jim —*must* we go back to the yacht?"

"I don't know what else there is to do; and, besides, Alfrithe, it is not so very terrible, when you stop to think. Rodonoff at this moment is probably wild with remorse. Now, listen to me. Calm yourself, and go back to the others. Say that it was too hot and tangled, and that you left Rodonoff and myself hunting for orchids. Follow this trail straight down to the edge of the woods. Let me talk to Rodonoff."

Alfrithe jumped up and stood looking at me with hot cheeks and bright, angry eyes.

"Very well," she answered. "I'll go back, but I'm going straight to the yacht, since there is no other place to go. I don't want to see him—and I couldn't stand listening to Concha's silly prattle."

"Then I'll take you back myself."

Alfrithe did not answer, and we moved off together. Presently we came out where we had left the others, and found the two sailors setting out the luncheon things, while Corrigan, a cigarette between his lips, was sitting with his back against a tree trunk, with Concha's head in his lap.

"Alfrithe seems to have a touch of sun," I said, "and I think that she'd better go back aboard the yacht before it gets any hotter."

They were full of solicitude in an instant, Concha wanting to go back with Alfrithe, who declined, saying that she wished merely to lie down and be quiet.

"Where is Count Rodonoff?" asked Concha, with a curious and questioning look at Alfrithe.

"He is still looking for orchids," I answered. "Come, Alfrithe, before the sun gets any higher."

So back down the slope we went, and out to the beach, where I managed to attract the attention of the quartermaster, who sent in the boat.

"I'm going back," I said to Alfrithe. "I want to talk to Rodonoff."

She gave me a curious look, which I didn't understand, but took to mean that she hoped I wouldn't start a row.

"There's no use in making any more of a fuss than can be helped," said I, to reassure her.

She did not answer, so I put her in the boat, and she returned aboard, and I climbed up through the hot meadow, where the tinderlike grass scorched my thighs, and on arriving at our place of bivouac found that Rodonoff had not yet appeared. I was rather relieved at this, so, telling Corrigan that I would go and look for him, I returned to where I had met Alfrithe.

Under the impression that he had probably remained where Alfrithe had left him, I called.

"Rodonoff!" I shouted.

There was no answer. I called again, when from no great distance there came a brief, answering "Hello!"

Following the direction of the voice, I waded through the jungle, presently to come upon him. He was sitting on a damp log, a cigarette between his lips, and his collecting case lying at his feet. As I approached he looked up with an expression which was half sulky, half defiant, and I noticed that his face was very pale.

"Well," said he sullenly, "what is it?"

His manner was the very last which he should have indulged. Being myself an easy-going person, with a desire for peace at almost any price, I had been prepared to do my best to patch up the unpleasant situation, wishing to close the incident with as much dignity as possible. I had expected to find him brimming over with shame and remorse, fully realizing how badly he had behaved, and eager to make any amends within his power. But the hard, ruthless expression of his eyes, and the cold anger of his face aroused in me a sudden, fierce resentment.

"I want to tell you what I think of you," I said, suddenly forgetting my olive branch. "You may be a nobleman by birth, but you are certainly a cad by nature."

His face darkened, and his teeth gleamed between his drawn lips.

"Be careful what you say," he growled.

"Careful nothing," I retorted roughly. "For just about one word from you I'd knock your sneering head off. It's a pity we're not more nearly of a size."

For a moment I was certain that he was going to tackle me, but he thought better of it, which was a good thing for us both, as I was angry enough to have shown no mercy to his lesser frame.

"If you want satisfaction you can always have it," he muttered.

"If I wanted satisfaction," I said, "I'd take it here and now, with my two hands. Now, all that we ask of you is to take us to the nearest place where we can get a vessel for Manila. Jolo will do. That's only a day's sail."

Rodonoff seemed on the point of flashing out an ugly answer, then checked himself.

"Look here, professor," said he, in a bored voice, which was plainly artificial, "what's the use of all this row?"

"You are not the person to ask that question," I told him hotly. "I confide an innocent girl to your care for a few minutes, and your mask of gentlemanliness drops from you, and you behave like a cad and a scoundrel!"

The blood poured into his face, and I noticed for the first time a contusion on his cheek bone. He did not answer.

"Yet you told me that you loved and respected her!" I went on. "And I was silly ass enough to believe you. Now, stir your stumps, you swine, and get us out of this. I've had enough of you and your fake hospitality."

Rodonoff seemed scarcely to have heard the last part of what I said. In fact, I doubt if he was thinking of me at all.

"But I *do* love her," he said pleadingly, "and I respect her. I want to marry her—and now I've jolly well gone and spoiled it all!" and he looked at me as if he expected me to make it right for him.

For the first time it struck me that I was dealing with a child.

"It got the best of me," he went on, seeing that I had nothing to say, "and then she struck me in the face!"

One would have thought from his tone that I was a nurse, listening to a dispute between children.

"Well, Rodonoff," I said, rather less angrily, "you brought it on yourself. Now, jump—get us out of here, and let's have an end of it. You've insulted your guest, and there isn't much more for you to say."

"I haven't insulted my guest," he snapped, staring at me.

"It doesn't matter. Let's get out of here."

And then, to my immense surprise, he suddenly dropped his face in his hands, and began to cry—to cry like a baby.

"I love her!" he sobbed. "I tell you I love her! I couldn't stand it any longer. I'm mad about her—the darling!" and he cried like a child.

It was so unexpected that for the moment I was all at a loss. I felt foolish and ashamed, as if I had been the one to break down, instead of Rodonoff. In fact, instead of being angry with him, I had a silly wish to make it easier for him—why, I'm sure I don't know.

"Well," I said moderately, "all I can say is that you've made an awful mess of it. One would have expected a little more self-control in a man of the world like yourself."

Rodonoff turned on me with a sort of desperation.

"See here, can't we—can't you put me right?"

"I don't see how," I said. "It's all your own doing. You seem to think that because you are Count Rodonoff, and we are simple, unassuming Americans, you can play the grand seigneur."

"I don't think anything of the sort," he answered impatiently. "I have acted honorably from the start, telling you that I wanted to marry your stepsister, and getting your permission to try. Then, just because I lose my head for a second—oh, come, where's the harm, anyhow? She was looking up at an orchid, and swayed a bit, and I thought she'd lost her balance, and threw out my arm to steady her. Then the touch of her, and her face close to mine, was

too much of a temptation. I'm not made of wood. But I'm sorry. I'll go straight back aboard, and tell her how cut up I am about it."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," I answered curtly, for although Rodonoff's words were apologetic, his manner was anything but that, and expressed neither sorrow nor repentance, but a sort of savage, sneering impatience. All of my absurd desire to straighten out his difficulty fled on the instant, and I wanted no more than to get Alfrithe and myself well rid of him. "I hardly suppose you intend to keep us prisoners aboard, do you? Because if that's your scheme you'll find that you've got your hands full."

He appeared to consider this for a moment, then said gloomily:

"Look here, professor, don't go and take it so hard. I'm really awfully sorry. To tell the honest truth, I didn't think she'd mind. I thought that she was beginning to care a little."

"Well," I answered, "even if she was, you've gone and spoiled it all by your Russian bear methods."

"Don't say that," he growled sulkily. "Give a chap another chance. Then, besides, there's Corrigan to consider. He's an awfully decent little cad. I've undertaken to do this thing for him, and I want to carry it out. If you and Miss Halstead were to leave the yacht he wouldn't stop aboard a minute."

I reflected. It was certainly an awkward situation. Here was Corrigan, who was paying me liberally for my help, and who had insisted that Alfrithe accompany us as his guest. He was now in danger of having the whole undertaking spoiled merely because Rodonoff had lost his head, and Alfrithe had taken it so bitterly.

It struck me for the first time that it would have been a lot better if Alfrithe had merely freed herself, and then stopped and talked to Rodonoff in a way that would have made him thoroughly ashamed of himself. Instead, she had hit him in the face, and torn off in a furious rage, insisting that we quit the yacht at the first opportunity—and for some peculiar reason that I could not have explained to myself I was exultant at her having done so, even while my reason told me that it was no such terrible thing for a girl to be grabbed and kissed by the man who was eager to make her his wife.

But the thing had happened, and I knew that Corrigan would be the very first to commend her act, and would not hesitate an instant to put aside his own interest in a chivalric protection of his guest. I had learned a good deal about the boy's unselfish nature, and I could not bear to let him suffer from what was no fault of his. So, after turning the situation in my mind, while Rodonoff stood sullenly inhaling his cigarette, I said more quietly:

"Perhaps you are right, Rodonoff. It's not a pleasant situation, but I don't think that Corrigan ought to suffer for it. For my part, I'm willing to consider the incident as closed. Suppose we go back to the others, and I'll go aboard and talk to Miss Halstead."

"Whatever you say," answered Rodonoff peevishly.

I turned on my heel, and we walked back, neither of us speaking until we were nearly to our place of bivouac, when I observed:

"We'd better say nothing about this to the others. Let's have lunch quietly, and then I'll go out and try to make your peace with Miss Halstead."

Rodonoff merely nodded.

CHAPTER X.

As we were walking back to join the others, it had occurred to me that I might have been unduly severe with Rodonoff. After all, I thought, he was scarcely more than a thoroughly spoiled boy, for all of his talents and attainments. Aside from his scientific abilities, he seemed immature and childish.

I could not help but wonder what his next move would be; whether he would try to gloss the whole thing over, make his peace with Alfrithe, and continue his suit, or whether he would show enough decency and manliness to be frankly sorry for what had happened, and try to make all honest amends.

To tell the truth, I was inclined to give him credit for this latter course—first, because I naturally prefer to think the best of people, and secondly because Rodonoff was really a manly sort of chap, and now, having had his lesson, would no doubt be intelligent enough to realize his mistake.

Up to this time it was probable that Rodonoff had never experienced a real rebuff. He had been made much of by all with whom he came in contact, and he was naturally of a hot, impetuous nature, I thought, but clean of life, far from self-indulgent, and a person of considerable intellectuality.

But it shortly appeared that I had still a good deal to learn about the different phases of the Russian's character. I had thought it possible that he might sulk for a while, and make our afternoon rather strained and disagreeable, and consequently I was surprised to see that on joining Corrigan and Concha he flung aside his unpleasant manner as one would throw off a wet coat.

Without so much as a glance in my direction, he remarked that he was sorry that Miss Halstead should have found the climb up the hot hillside overfatiguing, and that he trusted she would feel no ill effects. He then proceeded to serve our luncheon precisely as though nothing unusual had occurred.

But his behavior was feverish and excited, and presently he was chatting with Concha in a spirit of gayety which struck me as unnatural. For the first time since our acquaintance he drank freely, taking several glasses of vodka before commencing our meal. Concha, always quick to respond, met him rather more than halfway. I think that she was secretly rather glad to have a clear field, and presently shifted the conversation into French, which language she spoke more fluently than she did English, leaving Corrigan entirely out of the talk, and quite ignoring the fact that I was a member of the party.

Indeed, I think that she took a mischievous delight in misbehaving under the nose of the pedagogue.

Corrigan's expression grew more and more distressed, for it seemed to him that Rodonoff was merely fulfilling his duties as a host, and responding to Concha's advances. Once or twice he threw me an appealing look, as if asking for help in his dilemma.

Altogether, I don't know when I have passed a more trying hour. The air seemed charged with the high tension which precedes trouble, and a little later, more than half suspecting that Rodonoff's manner might be prompted by a spirit of schoolboy defiance directed against myself, I got up and said that I would go aboard to see how Alfrithe was feeling. Corrigan and Concha decided to go with me, when Rodonoff said that he would come down a little later, as he still wished to look about a bit for more orchids.

Corrigan was silent on the way back, but Concha prattled along, tremendously pleased with herself for what she believed to have been her success with Rodonoff. Going out to the yacht she grew silent, however, as if it had just occurred to her that she might have thought a little more of her guest. She wanted to go down to see Alfrithe, but I sent her away, and went down alone. I found Alfrithe very quiet, but showing traces of tears.

I sat down beside her, and told her of my interview with Rodonoff, omitting the unpleasant features. She agreed with me that it would not be fair to Corrigan to break up the expedition at this point. In fact, it struck me that she had experienced a revulsion of feeling, and was a little ashamed of herself for the way she had acted.

"I'm a silly fool, Jim," said she. "But I *did* like him, and I was so disappointed."

"How much did you like him?" I asked. "Enough to marry him?"

She shook her head, and her face flamed.

"Enough to forgive him?"

Alfrithe nodded. "It was my own fault," said she, and added, almost spitefully, "and yours."

"I know," said I repentantly. "I shouldn't have hung back."

"I wasn't thinking of that," said Alfrithe sharply, then got up and told me

to go out, as she was going to change her gown.

Rodonoff came aboard late, dripping perspiration, and laden with orchids, which he said were "ordinary species, like most things which are easy to get." I was beginning to hate orchids. In fact, these flowers have always impressed me as poisonous, unwholesome things, beautiful, but rotten at core, like all parasites, although I understand that they are not scientifically regarded as such. At any rate, the search appeared to have had a good effect on Rodonoff, for his nasty humor had disappeared, and one could scarcely have believed that we had just passed through a very disagreeable scene.

Alfrithe had pulled herself together as easily as Rodonoff, and came to dinner wearing a cool and quiet manner, which aroused my admiration. We sailed at daybreak, and then began a quiet but tenacious duel, which would have interested a student of psychology.

Rodonoff was determined to draw Alfrithe apart, if only for five minutes' talk, and she was equally determined never to find herself alone with him. At times there would come an expression in Rodonoff's eyes that was almost ferocious, for, as might have been expected in a man of his type, Alfrithe's resistance simply whetted his passion.

To further complicate matters he began to flirt recklessly with Concha, not, I am sure, with any idea of arousing Alfrithe's jealousy, but out of sheer perversity and as a nervous outlet. In fact, he conducted himself like a spoiled child, with the result that Concha made a silly little fool of herself, and Corrigan's face began to wear an ominous expression.

For my part, I sat stolidly and smoked, praying that our voyage might finish as quickly as possible.

Sailing only by day, we worked down through the Balabac Strait and out into the South China Sea, everything running smoothly, so far as the yacht was concerned. The breezes were light and baffling, with periods of dead calm lasting for hours at a stretch. It was the day before we counted on sighting the South Luconia Shoals that Alfrithe came up to me while I was alone on deck, and said:

"Jim, how much longer is this horrid voyage going to last?"

"It won't be long, dear," I answered. "The prevailing winds are fair for the return trip."

She was silent a moment, then said: "Rodonoff asked me last night to marry him as soon as we get back to Manila."

"Indeed! And what did you say?"

"What do you think?" She looked at me curiously.

"You haven't precisely the air of a radiant fiancée," I said, with a smile.

"Don't joke, Jim. I'm horribly uneasy. There is something in his manner that frightens me, and I have the feeling that his quietness is not natural. He seems to be watching us all from behind a mask."

I grew rather serious at this, for Alfrithe was voicing my own thought. There was something ominous about Rodonoff's extreme suavity, and at times I had caught an expression in his eyes which impressed me as being not quite sane. But it would not do to let Alfrithe become frightened, so I replied:

"He is evidently very much in love with you, my dear, and having a pretty bad time with himself. No doubt he is desperate at the thought that he may have ruined his chances by his behavior of the other day. I thought myself that you were beginning to care for him a little."

"Would it have pleased you if I had, Jim?"

"Not altogether. I have no desire to lose my little sister."

"As a matter of fact," said Alfrithe shortly, "I am no more your sister than I am Rodonoff's." She dropped her pretty chin on her knuckles, and stared out across the blue water. "Just because my mother happened to marry your father gives me no real sisterly claim, and I have often wondered why you were always so sweet to me."

"Nonsense, Alfrithe!" I answered, rather hurt at this quite unnecessary disclaimer to any actual blood tie. "No

sister could be dearer to her brother than you have always been to me."

She turned to me quickly, and her eyes filled.

"I know it, Jim. I'm a cat. Will you forgive me?" She looked at me for a moment with rather moist eyes, then smiled. "The situation has its ridiculous side as well," said she. "That silly little Concha is convinced that Rodonoff is eating his heart out through a hopeless passion for her. Only this morning she told me about it, and wanted to know if I didn't think it terribly sad. Such a little goose!"

The morning of the day we expected to reach the island I heard as I was dressing what sounded like an altercation forward. The voices were not raised; in fact, they were lowered, and perhaps it was the fierce, sibilant quality that brought them so distinctly to my ears, for over every stateroom there was a small hatch trunk with a skylight.

I recognized distinctly Rodonoff's vibrant voice speaking rapidly and with a savage intensity, in his own tongue, which of course I was unable to understand. It was old Serge who answered him, and his tone was certainly not one of respect. Then a harsher voice, which I thought to be that of Boris, chimed in.

There was apparently some heated discussion going on, and one in which Rodonoff was opposed to his elderly servitors, and although I do not believe in eavesdropping I would have given a good deal to have been able to understand their words.

Rodonoff's usually modulated speech carried a fierce impatience, which suggested a straining self-control, while the other voices were stubbornly and almost angrily protesting. This struck me as singular, for Rodonoff's men had always shown the perfection of quick and silent obedience to such few and quiet orders as were issued.

But at this moment old Serge was certainly answering his master far from respectfully, considering their relative positions. In fact, the old sailor's heavy bass suggested not only protest, but sorrow and remonstrance, and a sort of outraged astonishment. I stood perfectly still, listening to the discussion, and wondering what it could possibly be about, and finally the voices of the two old sailors grew short and sullen, then ceased altogether. Rodonoff's tones promptly changed in key and accent, growing conciliatory, like those of a man who, having gained his point, wishes to conclude the argument amicably.

I finished my toilet and went on deck. As I came up through the hatch I saw Rodonoff standing with one hand on the main rigging, facing forward, while opposite him stood Serge and Boris. The shoulders of the two big Finns were bowed, and their faces dark and sullen. At sight of me each raised his hand in a brief salute, but I noticed that their eyes avoided mine, and that they turned away immediately. Rodonoff swung on his heel, and, seeing me standing by the companionway, came walking slowly aft. His face was rather pale, and there was a red patch on either of his lean cheeks.

"Good morning, professor," said he, pleasantly enough, and with an obvious effort to assume an agreeable expression.

I gave him "Good morning," and asked if he thought we would make the island that day.

"I hope so," he answered. "We've done about seventy-five since sunset." We had kept under way since the passage of the Balabac Strait. "If this breeze freshens, as I expect, we ought to raise the island at about one o'clock."

This estimate proved fairly correct, for although the breeze freshened but little it hauled around abeam, and by the middle of the forenoon we were booming along on a broad reach over a sea that was fairly smooth, and with everything drawing.

The prospect of having reached our turning point, with every probability of a successful conclusion to our quest, had a stimulating effect upon the whole party, and the morning passed pleasantly.

Rodonoff seemed in a state of nervous exhilaration, and if it had not been

for his abstemious habits I would have thought that he had been drinking. As if seeking an outlet for his high spirits, he chatted continually with Concha, who as usual responded vivaciously. Alfrithe had come on deck, and was sitting near the two, and I could not but notice Concha's repeated glances in her direction, as if to say: "You see I am right. The poor fellow cannot leave me for a second."

Our noon observation showed the island to be close aboard, and while we were at luncheon a hail from aloft announced that it had been sighted. Abandoning our dessert, we all hurried on deck, although it was then several minutes before the pale-blue speck on the horizon ahead rose to form a faint tracery against the white sky.

We were making good time, however, and presently we could see the long, snowy line which marked the shoal stretching away to the northward.

Watkins told us that it was there that he had lost his little brig. Giving the shoal a wide berth, we approached the island cautiously, with the lead going steadily, and at a distance of about a mile and a half let go our anchor in twenty fathoms of water. The whaleboat was smartly got over, and Rodonoff looked at us with a smile.

"Well," said he, "here we are at last. I suppose you would all like to go in. For my part, I am more anxious to see the setting of Mr. and Mrs. Corrigan's romance than to dig up the gold."

Concha was of course eager to go, but rather to my surprise Alfrithe said that she would remain aboard.

"Don't you want to go?" I asked her, as Rodonoff was helping Concha into the boat.

"I'd rather not," she answered.

"Why?"

"Rodonoff said to me this morning: 'I hope that when we all land on the island you will be generous enough to give me the opportunity to say a few words to you alone.' So you see, Jim, if I were to go in and then refuse his request it would only make him angry. I will say that I have a headache, and am afraid of the glare."

She had barely spoken when Rodonoff turned and called cheerfully:

"Come on, Miss Halstead."

"Miss Halstead has decided to remain aboard," I told him. "She has a headache, and doesn't want to risk the glare."

Rodonoff's face had an expression impossible to describe as he answered smoothly:

"That's too bad! Are you coming with us, professor?"

The "with us" decided me. Since Rodonoff was going there seemed no necessity for my remaining aboard, and I was really curious to see the place. So we got into the boat, Rodonoff taking the steering oar, as the glass showed a line of surf through which it was necessary for us to pass to get into the little bight. The crew gave way strongly, and before long we had shot through the low combers and found ourselves under the shelter of a little promontory which shut off the yacht from our view.

Our boat's bow grounded on a little beach of white, coral sand. Watkins, who was in the bow, leaped out and gave his hand to Concha. Corrigan followed him, and I followed Corrigan. As we stepped onto the beach Corrigan took off his hat in a reverent manner, and pointed to a rough cairn of stones on the other side of the little cove.

"Dere's de priest's grave," said he.

"And where's the grotto?" asked Rodonoff.

"Up here," answered Concha. "We will go there first, and then I wish to visit the grave of his reverence. I have brought a little offering—a crucifix," and she motioned to a package which Corrigan was carrying under his arm.

Corrigan led the way, and we crossed the beach and climbed over the broken stones until we came to the grotto, a sort of cave in the low cliffs, directly over a deep, quiet pool. It was a charming spot, and as we entered it I saw Corrigan reach out and take Concha's hand in his.

"I s'y, gentlemen," said Watkins. "Let's myke sure o' the gold, first off."

Corrigan stepped forward, and began to scuffle with his feet at the fine, soft sand which covered the floor of the

grotto. Watkins dropped down, pawing with his hands, while Concha and I, unable to resist the excitement of uncovering the hidden treasure, followed his example. We were like a pack of terriers, scratching for moles, and suddenly Watkins gave a low, exultant cry.

"'Ere she is," said he triumphantly, and we saw a dull, yellow gleam under his eager hands.

It was an emotional instant, and, as if moved by the same thought, Concha and I looked back over our shoulders to witness the effect on Rodonoff. But the Russian was not there.

"Count Rodonoff!" I cried.

"Hey—what?" said Watkins sharply, and looked around.

"Where's de count?" snapped Corrigan, and scrambled to his feet.

I followed him, and at the same moment I heard the grind of oars against the tholepins. We rushed to the mouth of the grotto, and there, fifty yards away, was the whaleboat, backing out from the beach, and Rodonoff in the act of swinging her stern with his steering oar.

For a second we stared in silence. Then, as if moved by the same impulse, we hurried across the loose stones, and down to the water's edge. By the time that we got there the boat was thirty or forty yards offshore, and the crew resting on their oars.

"Where are you going?" I called.

Rodonoff turned and stared at us. His face was pale. Not a man of the crew looked our way.

"I am going back to the yacht," answered Rodonoff, in a hard, sullen voice.

"But—what for?" I demanded. "Can't you wait for us?"

He moistened his lips.

"You can stay where you are," he said.

There was a moment of utter silence. I was conscious of a sick, sinking feeling in the diaphragm. Then Corrigan's voice at my elbow growled huskily:

"Say, what's all dis bunk? What're you up to—huh?"

Rodonoff seemed to hesitate for an instant, then said sullenly:

"I've had enough of this foolery. If Miss Halstead agrees to marry me, we will run across to Brunei, have the ceremony performed, and come back after you."

There was another long silence. Then I shouted hoarsely, for my mouth felt hot and dry:

"Miss Halstead won't marry you!" and I swore with vehemence.

"Then you will have to get off the best way you can," Rodonoff retorted.

Corrigan was panting like a hot dog. Watkins mumbled curses under his breath. For my part, I could scarcely speak. The boat was drifting slowly out from the beach, the crew like wooden men, and Rodonoff standing motionless.

Suddenly Concha screamed, and we all started.

"You fool!" I roared at Rodonoff. "Don't you know that what you are doing is rank piracy, and enough to get you a life sentence under the laws of any civilized country of the globe? We will be off this island, and have a fleet of cruisers searching the seven seas after you before you're a month older."

"That is my lookout," he said coolly.

But Corrigan's hoarse pantings had found vent in speech.

"Say, count, are you dat low you'd steal one woman, and leave anudder here to starve?"

"You won't starve. I'll give Miss Halstead until sunset to come to her senses. If she chooses to be stubborn I'll send in a boat to leave you stores enough to last until I can send a vessel for you. If she chooses to be reasonable, I'll leave you enough for the next few days."

He turned to his crew, and gave a curt command, and the oars took the water unwillingly, as it seemed to me. The boat forged ahead, gained way, and was soon a small object of flashing white upon the blue surface of the sea.

CHAPTER XI.

What the others may have been thinking as the boat dwindled into the distance I don't know, for nobody said a word. For my part, the thought of Al-

frithe alone and unprotected on the yacht with an insane brute like Rodonoff, for I really believed the man to be off his head, gave me a feeling more like seasickness than anything else that I have ever experienced.

Standing there like a dummy on the edge of the beach, I watched the boat until it disappeared behind the little promontory that cut off the yacht from our view. Then I turned and looked at the others. Watkins was leaning against a bowlder, his jaw shoved out and his eyes the color of jade. Concha had sunk to the sand, and was sobbing against the shoulder of Corrigan, who had dropped down beside her, but was staring straight out across the water, as if oblivious of the weeping girl. He looked up at me and nodded.

"Say, perfessor," said he, "what d'ye t'ink o' dat fer a highlife guy—huh? Say, our first bunk on dis Roosian was de right dope, all right—huh?"

Watkins turned, and gave us an owlish glare.

"'E's cryzy," said he. "I never saw a Finn yet that wasn't 'arf mad. 'Ow long does 'e think it'll be before 'e finds himself all snug-o in the brig of a man-o'-war?"

I scarcely heard him. I was thinking of Alfrithe, and wondering what she would do. Alfrithe was one of those unfortunate persons who are cursed with a tremendous sense of obligation to others; the martyr type, so frequent in American women when they have really suffered, but rare until.

My meager imagination was hard at work in a blind effort to solve the ethics of Alfrithe's position, as she might see it. Rodonoff would be clever enough to leave the wretchedness of our condition to her imagination, and she had already heard from Corrigan how he and Concha had lived on their scant provisions and a few stringy mollusks while waiting for the proper weather to attempt the passage to the next island.

I was working hard at the problem of Alfrithe's probable behavior when Watkins' voice cut into my reflections.

"We've seen the larst of 'im," said he. "There's no good ever comes o' treasure 'untin'. I've tried it before. It isn't Miss 'Alstead that's in any dynger. That's all a bluff to blind our eyes, like. What 'e's arfter is the gold."

"Rubbish!" I growled.

"Not a bit of it, professor," Watkins retorted. "I won't presume to s'y that 'e's not much tyken with the young lydy, but it's the treasure 'e's arfter. And the worst of it is 'e can pull it off, too. The chances are 'e'll slip aw'y to some unknown corner of the earth, where yeou might 'unt for years, and all in vyne. I've known chaps like 'im that did the syme thing."

Corrigan looked up with a snort. His hair and eyebrows were almost together, and his mouth was drawn down at the corners.

"Aw, g'wan!" he growled. "You're talkin' like a cheese. It's all a bluff. You leave it to Miss Halstead; she'll make dat Roosian mutt wish he'd died when he was a baby."

Conchca had been sobbing steadily, but at this she roused herself, and burst into a torrent of what sounded to me like very bad Spanish talk. In fact, she was so violent that I could not follow what she said; but Watkins, who spoke Spanish far better than he did English, listened with a gradually darkening face. Concha presently paused for breath, whereat Watkins, whose face had been growing gradually harder, and his eyes paler, began to speak slowly and emphatically, directly at the girl.

My own knowledge of Spanish was sufficient to enable me to follow his discourse, for he spoke with a quiet, clean-cut emphasis, which made every word distinct. Roughly translated, his homily was something like this:

"You silly little half-caste wench, you've got only yourself to thank for this. Miss Halstead was willing to stop in Manila, but nothing would do but you must tag along, you thinking that you had made a flirt with this Russian, and the more shame to you, being as you are a married woman. When anybody with half an eye could have seen that he had about as much use for you as any man might for a cheap, silly, half-caste girl! You've needed a lesson badly that

would teach you what you are and where you belong, and now you've got it, and got it thoroughly—and let's hope you'll profit by it. Rodonoff chucks you onto the beach as he'd chuck a piece of dunnage he had no more use for, and you haven't even the decency to be sorry for the real lady out there aboard the yacht, but go ahead and use language you certainly never learned in a convent.

"Here you've got a fine husband," Watkins continued, warming to his work; "the best-hearted man in the world, and the squarest chum that ever I met, who offered me the half of his treasure for you, you having been promised to me. A lucky thing for you, my beauty, that you got Corrigan instead of Harry Watkins—and you'd better turn to and appreciate him. He's given you a wedding ring, and all that he's got in the world, and that's saying something, too. I'd have given you a South Sea wedding, and the green end of a bamboo shoot when you got fresh!"

Such were the gallant and chivalrous words which the plain sailorman addressed to the pampered Concha. While gently disposed toward womankind, and having the typical American toleration for feminine egoism, I must admit that Watkins' commentaries were not displeasing. Fortunately, Corrigan was unable to understand a word of what was being said. Otherwise our unpleasant situation might have been further complicated by an immediate fight.

Even as it was, Corrigan's ready suspicion was aroused by the sailor's voice, and he turned suddenly, his brows drawn down, and his eyes pugnacious.

"What's all dis guff?" he demanded harshly, and as Watkins merely compressed his lips and set his jaw he looked at me. Concha had become suddenly silent and subdued.

"Nothing much," I answered wearily. "Concha was using bad language, and cussing Rodonoff because she thought that he was in love with her, and he hasn't acted that way noticeably. Watkins was giving her the right of the thing."

Concha gave me a veiled look, which was not conspicuous for any great amount of affection. However, it was plain that Watkins' diatribe had done her good. The girl was intelligent enough to appreciate it.

Still, there was nothing very manly about heaping the blame for what had happened on the one unfortunate woman of the party, so as a sort of corrective to Watkins' harsh words I spoke comfortingly to Concha, and observed that I did not really believe that Rodonoff would dare carry out his high-handed project. Also, I mentioned the altercation which I had heard while dressing that morning, and expressed my belief that it was then that Rodonoff had told Serge and Boris of his intentions, and that the two honest old sailors had done their utmost to oppose it, and might yet succeed in doing so.

Watkins said that he also had heard the row.

"Trouble is, professor," said he, "these 'ere Russians ain't like us Anglo-Saxons. A Russian servant might treat 'is master to a bit o' cheek, but when it came right down to brass tacks 'e's sure to obey orders."

I felt the truth of this, especially as I knew Russians to be the most autocratic of all people.

We fell into a silence which lasted for several minutes. Then Watkins said:

"In my opinion Miss 'Alstead is in no real dynger with Rodonoff. 'E's young and 'ot-'eaded, but the chances are that arfter a d'y or two, when 'e finds she won't give in and marry 'im, 'e'll put back 'ere and take us off."

"What's worrying me," I answered, "is the fear that she may feel that she owes it to us to let him have his way."

Watkins shook his head.

"No dynger of that," he answered positively. "Miss 'Alstead is too 'igh-spirited a lydy to let 'erself be bullied by Rodonoff or anybody like 'im. I know good blood when I see it, and I'll tell you right now, professor, that she will prove 'erself more than a match for Rodonoff and 'is whole bloomin' crew. She'll soon put the fear o' the Lord in

'is 'eart, or my nyme's not Watkins. She's quiet and gentle, and no sweeter lydy ever breathed; but she's a fighter, too."

"Dat's right," said Corrigan quickly. "Now, listen, perfessor. Rodonoff says he's comin' in here dis afternoon t' bring us some chuck. De chances are he'll shoo me and Watkins back off de beach before he dares to land, t'inkin' de t'ree of us might rush de boat. Now, don't you let him jolly you into no message tellin' Miss Halstead to give into him fer de sake o' dis bunch. Say, I'd raver see dis hull treasure at de bottom o' de sea dan back de play o' dis mutt."

"So would I," agreed Watkins heartily. "You tell 'im from all 'ands to up stick and aw'y and see how far he gets before 'e's snug in chokey."

Their words touched me deeply. Here were these two honest chaps ready to make any sacrifice rather than that Alfrithe should be coerced. I found it difficult to speak.

There came another long silence. We had dropped down on the sand, forgetful of the sun, and were staring out across the sparkling water to where the low, lazy surf was crumbling across the distant shoal. My own mind was too full of Alfrithe and her distressful situation to dwell upon our own. Watkins was whistling softly through his teeth in the unconscious way of one thinking deeply, while Corrigan, sitting with one arm thrown over Concha's shoulders, was stabbing at the sand with a shell, and as I glanced at his hard little face I saw that it was puckered like a winter apple.

Suddenly he freed Concha, and rose to his feet, as if something had startled him; and as we glanced inquiringly in his direction, I observed that his face had cleared, and that his gray eyes were bright and intent.

"Say," said he, in a suppressed voice, "what's been hoitin' me is to t'ink of a slick-spoken dude like dis here Roosian puttin' de double cross on t'ree guys like us, and we never gittin' wise. Say, we must ha' looked like t'ree goops, all right —huh?"

Neither of us answered, and Corrigan proceeded, drawing down the corners of his mouth:

"Listen; it wouldn't jolt me none if he was to come in here dis afternoon, and try to fake us out o' de rest o' de treasure, we must look dat soft. Gee, to t'ink o' two lads dat's knocked around and been up against de bunks me and Watkins have, and a highbrow gent like de perfessor bein' flimflammed by such a geezer as dis Rodonoff man! It makes me sick in my stummick."

"Well," I said, a little sharply, "that may be all true enough, but what are you going to do about it?"

Corrigan gave me a tantalizing look.

"He's comin' in later on to bring us de chow, ain't he?"

"Yes. I hardly think he'd leave us here to starve. But you can bet that he'll take good care not to let us get within striking distance of the boat."

"Right-o!" muttered Watkins.

"Listen," said Corrigan. "Where's he goin' to land—huh? Right here, ain't he, becuz de beach is wide enough so's we couldn't make a rush before de boat had time to shove clear. Besides, it's handier fer settin' de stuff ashore."

"Well," said Watkins, "and what bally good will that do us?"

"I been t'inkin dat if de t'ree of us was to bury ourselves here in de sand, lettin' Concha drop a handful o' dis seaweed on our faces, we might give dis Roosian a surprise party when he comes in on his errand o' mercy."

Watkins and I stared for a moment at Corrigan, then at each other.

"Bly-me!" cried the sailor. "Why not? How's the tide?" He glanced at the rocks. "'Bout two hours on the ebb, I should s'y."

"I noticed dat," said Corrigan. "Now listen. Here's my dope: We woim down in de wet sand right on de water's edge, and de wash will smooth it like. Concha c'n see we're all covered up nice, and drop a bunch o' seaweed on our faces, like I say. Den she waits here fer de boat, and tells Rodonoff we won't have nuttin' to say to him. She keeps him talkin' like, and when he ain't noticin' she gives us de come-on, and up we come on de jump. You two gents, bein'

big guys, hops de crew, and I"—he licked his lips—"do a song and dance wiv de Roosian—see?"

Watkins made a dash for the boy, and grabbed him in his muscular arms. Corrigan shifted his hold, caught a wrestling grip, and the two rolled over on the beach, scuffling and laughing like a pair of schoolboys.

"Ain't 'e the livin' wonder, though, professor?" cried Watkins, sitting up. "Ain't 'e, though? W'y, it's easy as a dive overboard. Now, I don't want to brag, but when I was myte on the old *Glencoe Castle* I orften laid out 'arf a dozen worse larrikens than these jokers, single-'anded, too. Oh, crickey!" and he stared at the little street boy with an admiration too deep for words.

Corrigan's plan sounded good to me. It was almost certain that Rodonoff would land at the middle of the beach, and seeing Concha seated there alone and disconsolate would never expect so bizarre an ambush. There were not apt to be more than four hands at the oars, especially as Rodonoff would probably leave Serge and Boris to get the yacht ready for sea.

Certainly three active and athletic men in our position ought to have no great difficulty in handling Rodonoff and his four sluggish Finns, and as I glanced at Corrigan I was inclined to think that our late host had a very bad quarter of an hour ahead of him. But I amended the plan by suggesting that Concha be stationed as lookout on the top of the low cliffs, to give us a wave when the whaleboat left the yacht. As the distance from where the ketch was lying to our little cove was rather more than a mile and a half, we would have plenty of time to burrow into the sand as near the water's edge as possible.

The situation as it stood developed what was to me quite a new and unexpected phase of Concha's character, although neither Corrigan nor Watkins seemed to find anything odd about it. But instead of showing herself to be nervous and apprehensive, Concha clapped her little hands with delight, and the look which she gave her husband had in it a quality of fond pride and admiration such as I had never seen before.

I began to realize that the girl was only about half civilized, from the viewpoint of our Western conventions. In fact, Corrigan had already told me that Concha loved a fight, and that she had several times involved him in a row merely for the fun of seeing him in action. But in the present case she was also influenced by the desire for revenge on Rodonoff.

Taking it altogether, it struck me suddenly that here was a series of rich lessons being served out to the lot of us: Concha in her conceit; Corrigan in his unfounded jealousy; Watkins in his greed, though that is perhaps unjust, considering the loss of his brig, which was really *his* lesson; Alfrithe in her lack of diplomacy; myself in my unsophisticated confidence, and Rodonoff, I hoped, in his high-handedness. Certainly the tension of human emotions was rather high just then in the neighborhood of that small and practically unknown island in the South China Sea.

So we sent Concha to go on lookout at the top of the cliff, and then, as the shadows were lengthening, we three men stripped to the waist, hid our clothes behind a ledge, and, flopping down at the water's edge, proceeded to work our bodies into the warm, wet sand.

The wash of the waves smoothed the sand over us as we worked deeper, and physically the sensation was like a gentle massage, the temperature being about that of the body.

Finding that it did not take long to conceal ourselves, we crawled out again, and sat there like three aborigines, waiting for Concha to signal us when the whaleboat left the side of the yacht.

We were combating the tension of our wait with cigarettes, when suddenly Concha's clear voice rang out from the low cliff above our heads, and a moment later she came scrambling down through a fissure in the ligneous rocks.

"They are coming!" she cried breathlessly.

There was something funny in the

way in which we scurried down to the water's edge and wormed into the sand. Concha tore seaweed from the rocks, and distributed it artistically, assuring us that we were quite invisible.

So there we waited in silence. The sun was low by this time, and through the interstices of the seaweed which covered my face I could look up and watch the changing reflections in the high, cirrus clouds. The murmur of the surf was loud, booming into our ears, but presently I caught another sound; the rhythmic thump of oars working against their tholepins. Concha started up.

"Here is the boat," she whispered.

CHAPTER XII.

The thud of the oars grew more distinct, for the wind had dropped as the sun fell on the horizon and the air was almost breathless.

"They are coming straight for me," said Concha. "They are five, like before—Rodonoff and the four sailors."

Corrigan's voice sounded in my ear. We were lying in a row, like three corpses.

"Say," he muttered, "dere ain't no use to really hoit nobody. We'll put 'em to sleep like, wiv a paste on de jaw, 'r a straight jab between de blinkers—huh?"

A moment later we could hear the ripple of the boat, aside from the thrash of the oars, and Rodonoff's voice, apparently giving the order to hold water.

"They are stopping," Concha whispered.

It was impossible for us to see a thing, for we were lying flat on our backs, our faces covered with the wet kelp. To this day the odor of a beach at low tide, with the strong, briny odor of iodine recalls that moment as vividly as though it had happened yesterday.

Concha had apparently sunk down on the beach, playing her part of the deserted like the little actress that she was. Rodonoff's voice came sharply:

"Where are the others? I want to speak to Professor Metcalf."

"Professor Metcalf does not wish to see you," said Concha, and added, with a theatrical catch in her voice: "*Mon ami,* are you really, really going to leave us on this desolate island?"

"That depends," Rodonoff answered, indifferently and in English, for Concha had spoken in French. "Miss Halstead will do precisely what Professor Metcalf tells her to do."

From the sound of his voice I judged that the boat must be several yards from the beach, and I began to be afraid that he might insist on seeing me before landing. His next words seemed to indicate that I was right, for he said, with the same curt tone that one would use in giving an order to a servant:

"Go and find Mr. Metcalf, and tell him that I want to speak to him. Hurry!"

I was near bursting with the desire to dictate Concha's answer to this command, but did not dare, for although the girl was only a yard away the boat appeared to have approached, and I was afraid of being overheard. But there was no need for me to interfere, for, while Concha may have been silly and rattlebrained about many things, she had plenty of quick wit, for she answered in a proud, hurt tone:

"Nobody wishes to speak to you. You are a bad man and a coward. They have all said so. You had better go away. We do not want your food. We would rather starve than take it from such a dog as you have proved yourself to be."

Rodonoff snarled back something in Russian. It was plain enough that Concha had led his mind from the main issue by the personal character of her remarks. I could have hugged her for her next flight.

"You are a coward and a most contemptible liar," she went on pleasantly. "It is very possible that your father may have been a Russian nobleman. My own father was a grandee of Spain, which is much better. But my mother was a Visayan washerwoman, and I do not believe that yours was nearly so honest. Also, I think that you inherit entirely from her. Even your sailors are ashamed of you. I suppose a great many ladies have told you that you are

very pretty. It is too bad that you were not born a woman, for you certainly are not a man. At this very moment you do not dare to come to the beach in your boat, because you are afraid that the others might rush on you from behind some rocks. You need not be alarmed. They would as soon rush at a dead pig left for two days in the sun as at you."

All of this prattled off in a perfectly clear and monotonous voice was very funny to hear, and I was conscious of a sudden, almost irrepressible desire to laugh. The situation certainly had its humorous as well as its serious side; we three planted in a row just under the surface of the wet sand, and only waiting for the boat to ground to spring forth like fish fried in crumbs leaping from the pan; then Concha, like a little stool pigeon, abusing Rodonoff with all the ingenuity of her bright, mischievous mind, and the candid frankness of a contemptuous child or a native.

Rodonoff himself, for all that he was a man of the world, was still enough of a boy to lose his temper at Concha's biting remarks. He gave an angry snarl which sounded like a Russian oath, and answered heatedly:

"Be still, you impudent little fool! I've a jolly good mind to go back aboard and leave you all here to eat limpets."

"We don't care if you do," Concha answered contemptuously. "For my part, I would rather eat limpets than to take anything from *you*. And you needn't think that Miss Halstead will have anything to do with you, either. She would rather marry a Tagal boy or a Chino porter, than you. She told me so herself."

This was obviously untrue, but apparently did not fail of its effect, for there came another growl from Rodonoff. I felt a peculiar jar in the wet sand, and guessed that it came from a convulsive movement of Watkins' diaphragm, for he was lying close beside me. Despite the tension of the moment there was something very laughable about Concha's airy impudence.

"Look here," said Rodonoff impatiently. "Suppose you drop all that, and go after Metcalf. I want to speak to him, and I'm not going to stop here the rest of the afternoon."

"Then turn and go back where you came from," retorted Concha. "No doubt you think your face very handsome, but people who know you find the look of your back much more agreeable."

Came a short, angry order, and the sound of oars taking the water. For a moment I was afraid that Concha might have overplayed her part, and that Rodonoff was about to return to the yacht without landing the stores. But the next instant there was a slight grinding sound in the sand almost at my feet.

"Señores!" cried Concha sharply.

What immediately followed was swift, savage, and fantastic, and from Rodonoff's point of view must have been fearful and grotesque. With a snarl and a sputter the wet beach spewed up three furious and desperate figures, naked to the waist, their bodies caked with damp sand. From the actual weight of the stuff and the suction under us it was impossible to rise with anything approaching a bound, but we broke out in a heavy, wallowing fashion, like three loathsome gnomes bursting through the earth's crust. Yet up we came, and our appearance must have been frightfully horrid, the kelp still streaming across our wild faces, and the loose sand flying from our chests and arms.

Concha screamed wildly, and a yell of startled terror burst from Rodonoff. The men at the oars twisted about on their thwarts, their wild, shaggy faces contorted with horror, and the next instant we were among them. They dropped their oars, flinging up their arms as though to defend themselves as we fell upon them. They had no time to reach for any weapons, whether knives or even the oak stretchers under their feet, and for a moment there was only the sound of hard, thudding blows, mingled with howls of pain and fright.

Watkins and I found them easy victims, planting our blows with precision and dispatch, and the first clear consciousness I had of the mêlée was of standing with feet planted in the middle

of the boat glaring down at the huddled forms, while Watkins, who had torn an oar from the trail line, had swung the butt in air, and was poised ready to strike down the first man that dared move.

I looked around for Corrigan. Both he and Rodonoff had disappeared. Grabbing up a stretcher, I leaped over the gunwale and swashed through the water to the stern, and here was Corrigan in the act of drowning our late host a good deal as one would drown a dog.

I grabbed him by the shoulder, and hauled him to his feet, when up came the limp body of Rodonoff, Corrigan's two muscular hands gripping him by the throat. The Russian's eyes were closed, and for an instant I thought that he was dead.

"Hold on!" said I. "You don't need to drown the fellow."

"Aw, why not?" growled Corrigan. "Drownin's too good fer dis purp. Did you hear de way he spoke to Concha?"

"Give him here," said I sternly, "and stand by to lam the first man of the crew that dares to move."

But there was no fight left in the crew after the way in which we had laid them out. One man was, in fact, unconscious, and lay in a huddled heap in the bottom, breathing stertorously. The other three were peering up fearsomely at Watkins, who was brandishing his oar, the sand flying in showers from his muscular torso, giving out a steady patter of threats and curses. He looked like some prehistoric cave man.

I dragged the limp form of Rodonoff up onto the beach, and started to drain the water out of him. Presently his body heaved convulsively, aiding my efforts to rid it of the brine. I rolled him onto his back, and examined his face. It was very pale, and there was a gash at the side of his temple, made no doubt by Corrigan's heavy seal ring. He began to gasp for breath, then opened his eyes.

"Well," said I, "you're a nice sort of a host, aren't you?"

He stared at me for an instant, then groaned.

"Serves me right," he muttered, and closed his eyes.

"There's no mistake about that," said I. "Now you lie there, and try to behave yourself. If you make one shady move I'll smash your head in."

Glancing at the boat, I saw that Corrigan had relieved Watkins, oar, curses, and all, while the sailor was deftly binding the disgusted crew. Not the slightest protest did they make, either by voice or action, in which they were wise. But I fancied that aside from their fear the stolid but honest fellows had no heart to resist. They had no doubt hated the business from the start, and were perhaps content to escape a compulsory act of piracy.

The most cheerful member of our party was Concha, who was skipping about like a delighted child. I had, in fact, caught a glimpse of her during the scrimmage, hopping up and down, and clapping her hands like a child at a pantomime. I am afraid that Concha was not an ultra-civilized product of our new possessions.

Glancing back at Rodonoff I saw that he had raised himself on one elbow, and as his eyes met mine he actually grinned, in a shamefaced way.

"Well," said I, "and what do you think of yourself now?"

"I fancy I lose," he replied, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Will Serge and Boris make trouble for us when we go aboard?" I asked, for I had already observed that the two old chaps were not in the boat's crew.

"No blooming fear. They refused point-blank to have any hand in the business—and I imagine they were right."

"Will you give me your word not to make any more of a row? Or shall I have to tie you up, like the others?"

"I'll be good. I know when I have got enough."

"You don't appear as much ashamed of yourself as you might be," I said, looking at him doubtfully.

"Oh, there's nothing to complain of on that score," he answered quietly. "What are you up to now?"

"We are going back aboard the

yacht," I told him. "How is Miss Halstead?"

For the first time a look of real shame and remorse crossed his pallid face. He dropped his gaze.

"Furious—as well she might be," he said. "Aside from that, she's none the worse. I haven't seen her since I went back aboard and told her my plan. She went below and locked herself in her room. Wouldn't answer me. I say, professor—I think I must have been off my head."

"Sure of it," said I.

Concha had gone to fetch our outer garments. We all looked at each other rather foolishly, and Watkins broke suddenly into a roar of laughter. Then we washed off the sand, and struggled into our shirts.

"What now?" Watkins asked.

Rodonoff had pulled himself together, and was standing, none too steadily, on his feet.

"See here, you chaps," said he, "I've been a bit balmy, but Doctor Corrigan seems to have brought back my reason with his hydropathic cure. It served me jolly well right, and I don't bear any malice. Now, let's make the best of a bad business, and carry out our first plan. When we get back to Manila, if you want to have me up for piracy and abduction you are free to do so. To tell the honest truth, I'm jolly glad this business has turned out as it has. I couldn't have pulled it off, anyhow. My crowd has been in a state bordering on mutiny all day, and I doubt that they would have sailed off and left you here. I'm downright sorry, and ashamed of the whole silly business, and I really believe that I was off my chump."

"Let's let bygones be bygones," said Watkins; "that's why I s'y. Count Rodonoff 'ad a touch of sun—eh, what?"

"That seems the best way to look at it," said I. "Come, let's got out of this; it's growing late."

Rodonoff walked with us to the grotto, and we four men carried down the rest of the ingots, and stowed them in the boat. At the last moment I missed Concha, and, looking across the little cove, saw her on her knees beside the lonely grave. Corrigan ran around to join her, and presently the two returned hand in hand under the purpling cliffs. As they joined us I noticed that Concha's eyes were still wet, and there was an expression on her face such as I had never seen there before.

"I have been making some vows," said she, then turned to Corrigan, put her arms about his neck, and stood for a moment with her forehead resting against his shoulder. He lifted her chin and kissed her.

We got into the boat, when Watkins, at a sign from me, drew the edge of his knife across the lashings which bound the sailors. Not a man was hurt, though all showed bruises. Rodonoff gave a brief order when we shoved off, and headed away from the little island which had been the scene of such primitive passions.

As we rounded up alongside of the yacht, old Serge, with a gloomy but expressionless face, came to the side with his boat hook. We went up the ladder in silence, when the boat was hooked on, hoisted, and secured for sea.

I went immedidately below, and tapped on the door of Alfrithe's stateroom.

"It is Jim," I said. "Everything is all right, dear. Rodonoff has come to his senses."

There came from inside a sudden rustle, a low, gasping breath, and the door was opened. I stepped inside, closing the door behind me. Alfrithe, with a pale face and bright eyes, looked at me eagerly. I dropped my two hands on her shoulders, and drew her to me, shocked at the haggard lines about her eyes.

And then a wonderful thing happened, for all at once I felt her arms about my neck, and her sweet face crushed to mine, and instead of the comforting, brotherly kiss which I had often given her I felt a pair of hot, quivering lips against my own, and my face wet with her tears. Tighter and tighter she clung, her lithe body quivering in my arms—until suddenly, as though some opaque curtain had been raised, I found

myself looking with awe and rapture straight into such a heaven world as I had never been able to imagine. It was overpowering, and for an instant or two I was like a person in a trance.

Yet, in that moment, I realized fully that I had loved Alfrithe from our first meeting, when she came to us as a shy and timorous little stranger of twelve years, sensitive, self-suppressed, and suffering an anguish of dread of possible rebuffs from the sister and the big, new brother whose blood was not of hers.

In this brief second, when I was in my trance state, as one might say, tableaux of our past flitted before my eyes with a swift distinctness such as my rather heavy nature had never experienced, even in dreams and moments of danger.

I am absolutely truthful when I say that I had never thought of Alfrithe as a mate; she seemed always to me as one destined for some brilliant future such as it was impossible to include in the life scheme of a pedantic tutor of mathematics and assistant professor of engineering science.

Presently she dropped her hands on my chest, and pushed herself gently away, as if to look into my face. She must have been content with what she found, for she whispered softly:

"Jim—is it true? Are you awake at last?"

My answer must have been convincing, for a flood of what old Heppel might have called "Life Desire" flooded Alfrithe's face, and she returned to the place which was destined to become her permanent abode.

"If I had known," said Rodonoff, with his charming smile, "that you and Miss Halstead were in love with each other, I would not have acted such a fool."

"I did not know it myself," I answered. "I have you to thank for having opened my eyes."

He looked at me with a peculiar smile. "You owe me a lot really. I suspected, but I was not sure."

"Of two masculine fools," said I, "it seems to me that I win the palms."

"I could debate that," he retorted, "but it's hardly worth while." He got up and turned to go on deck. "Serge and Boris have asked permission to speak with you privately," said he, and turned his back.

There came a shuffling outside, and the two big sailors stood on the threshold, their caps in their hands, and their eyes on the deck.

"Come in!" said I. "Count Rodonoff says that you wish to speak to me."

They came into the saloon with an air of sturdy self-respect, which I could not help but admire.

"Sir," said old Serge, "we are very sorry."

I did not answer.

"The honor of our master's house has suffered," he went on, in excellent English. "We are all very sorry."

"My friends," said I, "there are moments in the lives of all of us when for a short time we are not masters of ourselves. The devil is always on watch, and ready to profit by a moment of weakness."

"That is what Boris and I told each other," said Serge, "and the gentleman is very generous to see this matter as we do."

"I think," I answered, "that everybody sees it in the same way. Your master is still very young, and his blood is hot and quick. At any rate, and I speak for my friends as well as for myself, there is no longer any ill will. What has happened had better be forgotten, like some bad dream."

"We thank you, sir," said Boris. I shook hands with them both, and they went out.

The rest of the tale scarcely needs to be told, as it is obvious. Nothing further happened which seems necessary to chronicle. Rodonoff is off for Borneo; Corrigan and Concha have returned to the Eastern States. Watkins is, I believe, about to form a little trading company.

As for Alfrithe, she has found her Life Desire.

The Secret Exploits of Paul Darraq

By Jacques Futrelle

Author of "The Thinking Machine," "The Diamond Master," Etc.

Paul Darraq promised to be as famous a creation as The Thinking Machine; Jacques Futrelle had planned a long series of stories about him; but he had only written three of the tales when disaster met him on the way home from Europe. This is the first of the three, a noteworthy story even if another man had written it, doubly noteworthy because of its brilliant author who has laid down his pen for an æon or two, till the Master of all good workmen shall set him to work anew.

INTRODUCING MR. PAUL DARRAQ.

MY first meeting with Paul Darraq occurred in Washington a few days after Grover Cleveland's Venezuelan message had sent a flame of war talk around the world; our subsequent meetings, in all sorts of remote corners of the earth, under circumstances sometimes strange, sometimes strenuous. In a way, these meetings reflect the high lights of history during the last fourteen years. Yet I had known Darraq for eight years before I knew his profession, or, indeed, knew that he had a profession; and I had known him a dozen years, two years of that time intimately, before he ever let drop in my presence any reference whatsoever to anything he had ever done. And first and last and all the time Darraq is a man who does things.

It was in 1895 that the Venezuelan message was sent to Congress. At that time I was connected with the Washington bureau of a great New York newspaper. Darraq had just returned from Caracas, and I tried to get a statement from him as to existing conditions there. At my question, he looked at me as if astonished, then denied flatly, albeit pleasantly, that he had ever been in South America. My information had come from no less a source than a member of Mr. Cleveland's cabinet. Foolishly, I told him so.

"He has made a mistake," he replied simply.

In after years that casual remark came to mean more to me than it did then, because it was not a great while before that particular member of the cabinet was permitted to resign. Now I am convinced, although he has never referred to the matter again, that Darraq had something to do with that resignation. The cabinet member *did* make a mistake—a mistake in telling me that Darraq had ever been in Caracas; a mistake in even mentioning Darraq's name to me; a mistake in allowing to escape anything which would associate Darraq with the government, in my mind.

Twice after that, within a few months, I met Darraq in the streets of Washington. Each time I nodded to him and each time he nodded to me and smiled his recognition. Finally he passed beyond my ken, the whirligig of time revolved, and I became a special correspondent for my paper. It was in that capacity that I was hustled off to Havana in 1898, immediately after

the disaster to the battleship *Maine* in the harbor there. I had been in Havana only a few hours when I ran across Darraq and another gentleman, this last of a pronounced Castilian type, in the Malecon.

It had been only a little more than a year since I had seen Darraq, and I remembered him perfectly. I nodded to him. He stared at me and passed on, still talking, with not one sign of recognition. My impression at the moment was merely that he had forgotten me. True, there had been a nodding acquaintance in Washington, but here, fifteen hundred miles away, in a foreign city, meeting me unexpectedly—there was no particular reason why he should have remembered me. This first impression was dispelled, however, when I returned to my hotel. I found a note there, just a couple of lines, signed "D." It ran like this:

Please do not recognize or address me unless I address you. I don't want to seem discourteous, but believe me, this is of the highest importance.

Naturally, the note piqued my curiosity, but it was several years later that that curiosity was satisfied. Now I know that Darraq is the only living man who *knows* what happened to the *Maine;* the other man who knew was assassinated at the Buffalo Exposition in 1901.

I didn't see Darraq again until some time in July of 1898—the day I remember that Hobson and his seven men were exchanged by the Spanish admiral Cervera for some of his own men held prisoners by the American blockading force. On the afternoon of that day a small boat put out from shore three miles west of the entrance to Santiago harbor and made for the flagship—the *New York.* Darraq was in the boat. He was closeted with Admiral Sampson for four hours, and when he came out I met him face to face on deck. Remembering the note, I waited for him to speak. He didn't. Instead, he reentered the boat and returned ashore.

Our next meeting occurred in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, in 1899. I was one of three war correspondents who had managed to get that far before we were stopped and compelled to remain there cooling our heels while the Boer-British war was raging. The three of us were at dinner one night when Darraq sauntered into the dining room and dropped into the odd chair at our table.

"Hello, Lester," he greeted me familiarly.

We were knocking about there together for a week or more, the four of us, and it was then and there that I began to understand the man and like him. In all of that week there was not the slightest reference between us to the circumstances of either of our previous meetings. I think it was in Pietermaritzsburg that I first got a glimmering of an idea as to who and what Darraq really was; but it was four years later before I really knew.

The world whirled on, and at the end of another year I found myself in Peking, being one of the foreigners who were besieged in that city during the Boxer trouble. We "foreign devils," as the Boxers classically dubbed us, were huddled about the embassies and legations—American, English, French, German, all of us—awaiting the inevitable with differing degrees of equanimity. Of necessity, every foreigner in Peking at that time was known to every other foreigner; and Darraq was not one of us. Yet one day I spied him standing upon the alabaster steps of the Temple of Heaven staring down thoughtfully into the streets below.

"Hello, Lester," he said again, much as if he had seen me an hour or so before. "How are you?"

My astonishment must have been obvious.

"Where did you come from?" I demanded. "You haven't been here all along? How did you get in?"

Darraq smiled that ready smile of his and shook his head.

"I have just delivered some good news to the embassies," he replied.

"You mean that we are to be relieved?" I asked.

Darraq smiled again. Forty-eight hours later the Indian army corps,

headed by its British officers, came rattling into Peking, sweeping a path ahead of them by a continuous, spitting fire of rifles and—well, the world knows the rest of it. In some way, and alone, Darraq had penetrated that line of yellow-skinned murderers who for weeks pounded at the gates of the Chinese city with the lust of blood upon them; in some way he had run the gantlet ahead of the relieving force and slid through the encircling talons. Some day he will tell me how he did it; I have never asked him. It would be useless, because he answers fewer questions than any man I have ever met.

For many months after that I lost sight of him. Several of those months he had spent in Berlin, I learned later, but he managed to be in Servia at the time of the assassination of Alexander I. and Queen Draga. I next met him in a geisha house in Tokyo during the Russo-Japanese war; next, four months after that, in Moscow, when that Russian city ran red with rioting. A month passed and I came upon him in Pall Mall, and two days later, quite by accident, we had dinner together in a cozy little student place in the Latin Quarter of Paris—Café d'Harcourt, it was—one of those familiar places where the waiter is always willing to correct one's French. I know he put himself to a good deal of trouble with mine. A few weeks later I sailed from Liverpool for New York, and the last man I saw on Prince George's Dock was Darraq.

Shortly after this the character of our relations changed; the barriers of his reserve melted, and I came to know him for what he was. I had believed him to be connected with the secret-service bureau, but this I found to be incorrect. His was a power beyond that, and greater. I suppose secret diplomatic agent would give a better idea of his profession, but it was beyond even that.

Perhaps the best way to make it clear would be to explain that the president of the United States is allowed each year by Congress about one hundred thousand dollars as an emergency fund, and there is never any accounting to be made of the manner in which the president utilizes this fund. Each year the bulk of it is turned back into the treasury minus a sum which, if we allow for a liberal salary and traveling expenses, would be fair payment for a man of Darraq's ability.

At the beginning of our intimacy Darraq had returned to New York—I wasn't aware of it—and hailed me one day from a taxicab in Forty-second Street. I hardly knew the thin, wan face peering at me from the window; a face marred ruthlessly by lines of suffering, the eyes sunken, the lips pale. There was the same ready smile, but obviously it came with an effort. I grasped his hand heartily; it was waxlike, flabby.

"Hello, Lester," he greeted me as always. "I am glad to see you; get in."

"What's the matter?" I inquired anxiously. "Have you been ill?"

"More than that," he replied. "I got a pistol shot out West a couple of months ago, and I am just pulling myself together again. I am afraid I am out of commission for some time to come."

"Who shot you? How did it happen?"

Darraq smiled and shook his head. I might have known that would be the answer.

When we reached Darraq's hotel and I assisted him out, I was amazed to see the change in him, a change which had not been entirely apparent in the cab. The broad, well-set-up shoulders were drooping now; the elasticity of his walk had gone, and he tottered feebly; the vitality and glow of health was no more, and he seemed old, old.

Soon after this Darraq took an apartment adjoining mine, and there began our friendship. We were together a great deal in those days, and, in a way, Darraq was dependent upon me, for I represented the greater outer world and he had no other callers. There I did my work, and there, as months passed, the color came back to Darraq's face, the sparkle to his eyes, his lips grew red again, his smile lost that suggestion of suffering—and he became himself.

So it was I came to know Paul Darraq, know him, I believe, as no other man ever did or ever will. At times he has taken me into his confidence and has told me things casually that illumined as if by daylight a dozen dark mysteries and sinister tragedies in high places. In my writings there have been times when I have required exact information upon all subjects on the earth and above it. I have never hesitated to ask Darraq a question when I thought I was not encroaching upon forbidden ground, and he has never hesitated at such times to answer.

His fund of knowledge is as varied as it is astounding. He knows as much about the fighting strength of Britain's navy as her prime minister; he knows more about Germany's huge army and her forts and her ordnance than the kaiser; he knows more about Japanese trickery as related to the United States and its future than the mikado; he knows more about the Dreyfus case than high officials were ever permitted to learn, and he knows—he *knows*—what happened to the *Maine* in Havana harbor.

There is no mystery as to Darraq's profession, for the simple reason that to the world at large he has none; he is merely a gentleman of leisure who travels extensively. Nor is there, in his physical make-up, the slightest thing to suggest the glamour of mystery which surrounds him. He is of medium height, clean-shaven, well set up, with frank, friendly eyes and a charming smile. He speaks many languages, and is of that neutral complexion which, while it fails to stamp him as a native of any country, would at the same time aid him in passing as a native of either. As a matter of fact, he is French-American. His father came to this country about the time of the Civil War, and married a Miss Calvert, of Maryland.

I.—TWO GENTLEMEN INCOG.

ON the seventeenth of May, 19—, it was officially announced by the press of a northern capital of Europe that the sovereign was slightly indisposed and probably would not be able to leave his room for several days. It was nothing serious—a cold or some other trivial thing—and, while assurance was given that there was not the remotest cause for uneasiness, yet bulletins as to his majesty's condition would be issued from time to time. On the afternoon of that same day Paul Darraq, at his apartments in New York City, received a cable dispatch in the code from Paris, and eight days later he appeared upon the docks of the Blue Star Line in the uniform of a customs inspector. At his own request he was assigned to the A-B-C inspection division.

It so chanced that the great transatlantic liner due that afternoon from Cherbourg, Southampton, and Plymouth was delayed a dozen hours by wind and storm, therefore she was not warped in until the following morning. Immediately the gangplank was cleared, there was a rush of impatient, travel-tired passengers, eager to know again the solid feel of earth under their feet; a clamor and a hubbub, a kissing and embracing, a laughing and weeping, and a scurrying for baggage. For a moment the customs inspectors were the most important individuals in the world—the objective point of an insistent flood of persuasion oddly mingled with invective.

Two gentlemen, who had been among the first down the gangplank, paused uncertainly at its foot, asked a question of a porter, then hurried over to the A-B-C inspector division. One of them, a man of perhaps fifty years, was of medium height, sturdily set up, square as a soldier across the shoulders; and there was that in the unwavering eyes, the straight nose, the positive chin, the hauteur of his manner, which marked him as a man of distinction, of power even. His hair was slightly gray at the temples, his face clean-shaven, his complexion of that ruddiness which is char-

acteristic of northern Europe. In his right hand he carried a heavy cane; his left was thrust idly into a pocket of his light overcoat. The other gentleman was shorter, grosser, coarser, and typically Teutonic.

They paused beside Darraq.

"Will you tell us, please," the shorter gentleman inquired in faltering English, "if baggage for Von Arnim will come to this division or to the V division?"

"It will come here," Darraq replied, without looking around.

The shorter man turned to his companion, and now he spoke in French.

"Your baggage will come to this division," he translated, and he bowed slightly. "Mine will go farther down in the H division. If you will pardon me, I will go immediately and attend to it."

The taller man made an impatient motion of assent.

"Is there no way to hurry up the inspection?" he asked brusquely in French. "I should like—I *must*—get away from here as soon as possible. We've already lost twelve hours." His eyes darted hither and thither through the crowd. "And there's always a chance of being recognized, you know," he added significantly.

"I understand, sire," his companion agreed hurriedly. Peculiarly enough, he was speaking English now.

"S-s-sh!" warned the other suddenly with a quick, meaning glance at Darraq. "Be careful!" And this, too, was spoken in English, very excellent English.

But Darraq was paying not the slightest attention to them; he was busily turning over the contents of a couple of hand bags. The taller gentleman's cane rattled a nervous tattoo on the dock; the shorter gentleman addressed Darraq.

"If it would be possible to oblige us by examining Herr Von Arnim's baggage immediately——" he began tentatively.

Darraq straightened up suddenly and faced the tall man. For one scant instant there was an expression of astonishment on his face, and the other must have noticed it, for his eyes were fixed in an unwavering stare. It was a challenge.

"Is this Herr Von Arnim?" Darraq inquired.

"Yes," was the unhesitating response in English. "You seem to be astonished?"

"Do I?" Darraq questioned evasively. "Perhaps it was your startling resemblance to—to some picture or some person I have seen somewhere. I beg your pardon. Here is your baggage now, I believe; if you will give me your keys?"

He turned away to open the trunk. Herr Von Arnim shot an exultant glance at his companion.

"You had better hurry up your own baggage, Hauptmann," he said measuredly—this, too, in English. "I'll be ready before you are."

To the accompaniment of the cane's restless tattoo Darraq finished the inspection of the baggage, and looked up to find Herr Von Arnim graciously extending a bank note.

"We are not permitted to accept gratuities," Darraq told him courteously. And then, curiously: "Did any one ever tell you, sir, that you greatly resemble one of the reigning monarchs of Europe?"

"I have been told so, yes," was the steady reply. "Why?" And again there seemed to be a challenge in his eyes.

"I was merely struck by a resemblance that is perfectly amazing," and Darraq shrugged his shoulders. "I believe, though, the pictures show this particular monarch with a mustache; you are clean-shaven, of course."

Herr Von Arnim and Herr Hauptmann entered an automobile on the dock and were driven away. For a minute or more Darraq stood staring after them with a puzzled, bewildered expression.

At the end of another hour he was in possession of the few facts concerning them to be picked up aboard ship. They had taken passage at Cherbourg at the last moment and had occupied adjoining suites connected by a door. During the trip they had held aloof from the remainder of the ship's company, having their meals in their suites, rarely

appearing on deck, and then only at night. Further, Herr Von Arnim was accompanied by his secretary and a valet.

"I should like to have seen them," Darraq mused when he heard of it.

In his hotel on the following morning Herr Von Arnim received a letter dated Washington, D. C., and signed by Chief Campbell of the secret service. Briefly, it said:

Out of consideration for the personal safety of certain distinguished visitors to the United States, this bureau has made it a rule to delegate men to attend them, inconspicuously, of course. This precaution has been taken in your case. My men will in no way embarrass or annoy you—probably you will never even see them—while, if there should come an occasion when you need them, they will be at your service.

Herr Von Arnim read the note and, laughing heartily, tossed it across the breakfast table to Herr Hauptmann.

"We have drawn the enemy's fire, Hauptmann," he remarked.

And meanwhile Darraq had utterly disappeared.

Against a languorous, deep-toned background of blue a woman sat studying with velvet-amber eyes the thoughtful face of the man before her. It was a striking rather than a strong face, deeply bronzed, with straight nose, full lips, and dark, moody eyes. Gradually her scarlet mouth curled into a smile of amusement, and finally she laughed outright, a little rippling laugh that dispelled instantly the shadows which had settled down upon Lieutenant Ralph Stuart's countenance. Impetuously he stretched out one hand toward her.

"No," she laughed, and drew back her slim, white fingers. Her eyes met his fairly, daringly, and the shimmering head was tilted. "No," she said again.

The man arose suddenly, and paced back and forth across the room half a dozen times. He stopped in front of her at last with clouded brow, and she looked up at him soberly.

"But, Carline, it's treason," he declared bluntly.

The woman raised her brows in astonishment.

"No," she objected. "It's only——"

"And knowing it's treason, you don't hesitate to ask what you are asking?"

The woman regarded him earnestly for a long time; the smile had gone.

"Suppose, Ralph," she interrogated slowly, "suppose you and you alone had access to some great commercial secret which had been permitted to lie dormant for years, would you hesitate to take advantage of it?"

"That would merely be dishonesty," Lieutenant Stuart explained. "This is treason."

"It would not be dishonesty even," she denied. "According to standards of to-day, you would merely be taking advantage of an opportunity. I am offering you an opportunity," she went on rapidly, "an opportunity to exchange your minor rank of lieutenant in the United States navy for the rank of commodore in one of the greatest navies of Europe. I fail to see——"

"With conditions," he interrupted, "conditions which I hardly believe you would ask me to accept if—if you understood them fully."

"Certainly with conditions," she agreed readily. "One cannot expect extraordinary promotion without some extraordinary return for it. It *would* be treason for a man to sell his country, or do that thing which would weaken or endanger his country if, for instance, his country was engaged in or on the verge of war. The United States is not even remotely threatened with war; my country is." Her eyes were aflame; her voice thrilled with earnestness. "For more years than you would believe we have been preparing for it. It may come to-day, to-morrow, or next week, or it may not come for five years, but it *will* come."

Lieutenant Stuart was staring at her, startled; he dropped into a seat facing her.

"You mean war with——" he began.

"I mean war with the country that you think," she ran on hurriedly. Her hand fluttered a little and came to rest on his sleeve. "So, you see, this thing which is of no great immediate value to your country because you are beyond

the possible reach of war at present, will make my country invincible. You can give it to us; my sovereign will pay your price because we need it immediately, not two or three years from now. We *could* get it, of course, in that time by other methods, so we *will* get it whether you give it to us or not; but if you give it now, there is promotion waiting for you, promotion, too, without dishonor, because tracings of the plans could be delivered, the originals left where they are, and in a few weeks you could offer your resignation to accept this higher rank in the naval service of my country."

The amber-velvet eyes were raised to his eagerly; his hands were working nervously.

"Treason, nevertheless," he said again.

"No," she denied. Then, suddenly, her manner changed; the ivory-white of her face flushed to rosiness, a filmy mist obscured the limpid eyes, and the lids were lowered. "You have asked all of me, Ralph, and yet you refuse this single thing which would mean so much to both of us. I am ambitious for you—there's no limit to my ambition—and it's so simple, after all." Timidly her eyes were raised again. "It will be ten, perhaps twenty, years before you could hope to reach the same rank in your navy, and——"

She stooped under the steady, hungry gaze of the man, and the shimmering head dropped wearily. Her hands lay quiescent in his own, limp.

"Look at me, Carline," he commanded. Slowly she raised her face. "I have asked you to be my wife because I love you more than any other thing in this world. Do you want the man who gives you a love so holy as mine—do you want *me*—to go hand in hand with dishonor? Even a dishonor that is hidden?"

"You won't understand me, Ralph," she argued pleadingly. "It isn't dishonor. The secret is useless to your country now; it is of untold value to mine. In return for a service of such value my sovereign is prepared to honor you as no foreigner was ever before honored by my country. I am ambitious for you," she smiled sadly, "and perhaps for myself, too. And, please don't misunderstand me, I am not mercenary, but you are not rich, and I have always been accustomed to every luxury. It seems so sordid to put our love upon such a basis, but you understand, don't you? Why make me go on?"

She was pleading now, her misty, moist eyes upraised to his face. Suddenly he arose, lifted her to her feet and held her close, close to him for a dozen heartbeats.

"You love me, Carline?" he whispered.

"With all my heart and soul," she said softly.

"Then why does—does it all matter?"

"Because I *do* love you so," she explained. "Because I should want my—my husband to be a great man among great men." She was silent a moment. "You will do it, Ralph?" she begged hurriedly, pantingly. "You will? You will for my sake? It wouldn't take an hour to trace the plans. They are in your custody alone, and no one need ever know. You will? You will?"

"It is treason," the man said again earnestly; "no argument will make it anything less; but, after all, treason is a little thing compared to your love."

"You mean you will?" she asked quickly, eagerly.

For a long time he stood motionless, staring at her. The lights were at play in her tawny hair; the glow of the poppy was on her cheeks, and the perfume of her breath went to his head like wine.

"You want me to, don't you?" he asked in turn.

"If you would—if you only would?" she pleaded.

"There's nothing in the world that I wouldn't do for you," he said fiercely between clenched teeth. He bent forward and pressed his lips reverently to her own.

After a moment she slid out of his arms.

"When?" she queried eagerly.

"It's only a matter of hours," he re-

plied absently. "I could have duplicate plans ready by to-morrow night."

The woman stretched out both hands to him and laughed gleefully, triumphantly. His powerful fingers gripped her white wrists savagely and he dragged her to his arms.

"Don't laugh!" he commanded harshly. "I don't want you to laugh. You have made a traitor of me."

She laughed again.

"Ungrateful wretch!" she taunted. "I have made a commodore of you."

That night Lieutenant Stuart returned to Washington. On the following morning a New York newspaper carried a semijocose article in which it brought Herr Von Arnim and Herr Hauptmann into a sudden glare of publicity. The point of it was the startling resemblance between Herr Von Arnim and a certain willful monarch of northern Europe who was supposed to be ill and confined to his palace. As the newspapers pointed out, the only real difference in photographs of the two men was Herr Von Arnim's lack of a mustache. Purely as a coincidence, it was pointed out that Herr Von Arnim always carried his left hand in his pocket, and the emperor in question, as is well known, is afflicted with a distorted left arm.

While the press of New York was assimilating this odd little newspaper story, there came another development which might or might not have been significant. The German ambassador left Washington suddenly and called upon Herr Von Arnim at his hotel. He remained with him for an hour or more, all of which led to vivid conjectures in the afternoon papers. Herr Von Arnim, either wittingly or unwittingly, complicated the situation by utter silence.

Lieutenant Stuart, on his way to New York that afternoon, read the newspapers in so far as they related to Herr Von Arnim with blankly incredulous eyes. Of all men in the world perhaps he could best understand the motive which might perhaps bring the emperor of —— to America. It would be, of course, to get possession of those half dozen thin tissue sheets which the lieutenant carried in his pocket. But why had he not intrusted the work to an agent?

Lieutenant Stuart found no direct answer to that question, but it was possible to reach a hazy general conclusion that the emperor would not dare trust any one else on a mission so delicate that the least misstep might precipitate unpleasantness with the United States.

His brow still clouded, the lieutenant went straight to a small hotel in Fifth Avenue and sent his card to Miss Wessels. She received him in her private parlor, and there, as he held her in his arms again, he forgot that hideous sense of shame which had tormented him mercilessly; forgot the emperor and Herr Von Arnim; forgot everything save this woman who had given herself to him as a price of his dishonor.

"Carline!" he whispered, as he kissed her lips, her hair, her slim, white fingers. "Now you are mine, mine!"

The woman held him off at arm's length the while she studied his face with searching eyes.

"Did you bring the—the tracings?" she asked eagerly.

He nodded and touched his breast; there was the crisp crackling of paper. Dumbly, moodily, he stood for a long time with her hands held prisoner in his own.

"I would have killed a man who dared to say that I would ever do such a thing," he said slowly, "and yet for you there is nothing I would leave undone."

"Nonsense!" She laughed a little nervously, and there was a peculiar exultant note in her voice. "You have taken advantage of an opportunity, and now, immediately, you shall receive your reward. You shall personally deliver the plans into the hands of my emperor—now within the hour."

Lieutenant Stuart was staring at her, startled, dazed even. "You mean he is here? Here in New York?" he asked breathlessly. "The emperor of——"

The word was stifled on his lips by one white hand. She nodded.

"This Herr Von Arnim story, then, is correct?" he went on.

"Not altogether," she replied soberly. "But come, we are wasting time," she continued gayly. "In half an hour now you will be a commodore in one of the greatest navies of the world."

They left the hotel in a cab, and a few minutes later ascended the steps of one of the small, old-fashioned dwelling houses in East Thirty-second Street. Lieutenant Stuart was left downstairs for ten minutes while Miss Wessels was ushered into a reception room on the second floor. Seated near a window was a man of perhaps fifty years, of medium height, sturdily set up, square as a soldier across the shoulders, and there was that in the unwavering eyes, the straight nose, the positive chin which marked him as a man of distinction, of power even. His hair was slightly gray at the temples, his face clean-shaven, his complexion of that ruddiness which is characteristic of northern Europe. In his right hand he held a heavy cane; his left was thrust idly into a pocket of his coat.

It so happened that at just that particular moment Herr Von Arnim and Herr Hauptmann were at dinner in their hotel, a score of blocks away, directly under the eyes of a dozen reporters and half that many photographers.

Miss Wessels bowed to the floor; the man inclined his head, but did not rise.

"Well?" he asked impatiently.

"The plans are ready to be placed in your hands, your——"

The man raised his right hand quickly, and she stopped.

"All of them?" he asked.

"All of them."

"And the price?"

"Lieutenant Ralph Stuart will, within a few weeks, resign from the American navy with the expectation of accepting a commission as commodore in your navy."

The man's white teeth closed with a snap; avaricious dreams of conquest long cherished were near to realization; a great island nation, bound hand and foot, was about to be laid at his feet.

"There will be no unpleasant consequences?" he asked curtly.

"There can be none. When Lieutenant Stuart learns that I do not love him, there will be an end of it." The woman shrugged her shapely shoulders. "He will kill himself."

"A traitor can do no less, in decency," the man commented tartly. "But he will not betray us before that? He will not be piqued to the point of confessing what he has done?"

"He is a coward," the woman sneered. "Cowards never confess. He is below awaiting your pleasure."

"Very good!" The man extended his hand, and Miss Wessels curtsied low as she touched it with her lips. "You have done well, fräulein."

Miss Wessels went out, and he arose as the door opened again to receive Lieutenant Stuart. The lieutenant brought his hand to salute and remained rigid, motionless, his face chalk-white. If there had been in his mind the slightest doubt of the identity of this man, it was dissipated at that moment when their eyes met.

"I, the ruler of a great empire, have traveled far to meet you, Lieutenant Stuart," his host said at last in English. "You will realize that that necessity must be overwhelming which brings me here secretly, against all precedent, to meet you, a private citizen." There was a mocking note in his voice.

"I believe I understand your——" Lieutenant Stuart began. A gesture halted the phrase of courtesy.

"Miss Wessels has acted with my authority throughout. Whatever promises of promotion or reward she has made I will myself assume, in the event, of course, the duplicate drawings are correct."

"They are correct." Lieutenant Stuart placed the thin tissue tracings in an eagerly outstretched right hand. "I would like you to understand," he went on, as if in justification of the thing he had done, "that it is not alone

promotion that prompts me to this action. It is——"

"The heart of a woman, perhaps?"

"The heart of a woman."

"You will report to me in my capital at your leisure, lieutenant. Every promise that has to do with anything more substantial than the heart of a woman I will fulfill."

One raised hand indicated that the interview was at an end. The lieutenant bowed and withdrew. As his sturdy figure melted into the night the shadows opened and from the void came—Paul Darraq. He ascended the steps Lieutenant Stuart had just gone down, and handed a sealed envelope to a servant. Five minutes later he entered the room Lieutenant Stuart had just left, and bowed low before the man he found there. There was a bewildered, puzzled expression on this man's face, which gave way instantly to an expression of utter amazement as the light of recognition flashed in those eyes which, only a minute before, had been feverishly aglitter in a hurried scrutiny of the plans Lieutenant Stuart had left. For the moment the plans were hidden in a desk drawer.

"Herr Darraq!"

"Your majesty!"

Again Darraq bowed low. They had met before, these two; the strange manner of their meeting is a story for another time.

"Is it necessary for me to say that I am astonished, mein herr, to see you here now?"

"I can well believe that, your majesty," returned Darraq. "I am here to tender the felicitations of my government to the most distinguished visitor our country has ever had, who is none the less welcome because he chooses to come secretly, and whose obvious desire to remain incognito will be most scrupulously respected. The note I bring from Washington is merely an excuse for me to extend congratulations to your majesty in person upon a speedy recovery from the illness which, according to daily bulletins in your majesty's capital, has afflicted you, and at the same time to offer my government's hospitality. Coming in any other manner or through any other person, as your majesty will readily see, the expression of my government's pleasure at your presence might have attracted that attention which your majesty is evidently so desirous of avoiding."

The unwavering eyes were searching Darraq's impassive face with mingled apprehension and curiosity. What did he know? What was being veiled behind this mask of courtesy? The duplicate plans! No. Stuart would not be such a fool as to leave his path open behind him.

"My appreciation of your government's solicitude in my behalf is equaled only by my embarrassment that by some unwitting act I have disclosed my presence here and made an expression of that solicitude necessary."

"Our chiefest regret is that your majesty did not choose to come at a time and in a manner which would have enabled my government to offer such entertainment as befitted your rank," Darraq continued. "And permit me, also, to express our regret that circumstances are such that your majesty must hasten back to your own country on the steamer which sails to-morrow."

The courteous little comedy was being played gravely.

"May I inquire, Herr Darraq, in what manner your government became aware of my presence? And how you happen to be acquainted with my intention of sailing to-morrow?" There was frank curiosity here.

"Your majesty's coming was made known to us by cable from a foreign agent of my government," Darraq elucidated readily. "Because I have the honor to be known to your majesty, I was on the dock. To my surprise, the man whom we supposed would be your majesty was, instead, Herr Von Arnim, whose startling resemblance to your majesty has in the past been utilized to draw attention from your majesty, thus insuring you a greater degree of freedom. I don't believe I am incorrect in assuming that your majesty foresaw the possibility of your trip to this coun-

try becoming known, and, therefore, Herr Von Arnim and Herr Hauptmann came with instructions to draw attention to themselves. They acted their rôles well, your majesty; their affected clumsiness in the alternate use of English and French in speaking to each other in my presence, and Herr Von Arnim's deep concern at the possibility of his assumed identity becoming known were, to put it mildly, quite sufficient to compel one's attention."

"But how—how does it come that you found me, mein herr? There has been absolutely no communication between us?"

Darraq didn't answer the question.

"As to your majesty's intention of sailing for home to-morrow," he went on, "that was easily established through the steamship offices once we had located your majesty in this house, and had convinced Herr Von Arnim by a note from the chief of our secret service that we actually believed him to be your majesty. To use a colloquialism, we permitted him to think he had drawn the enemy's fire, because we knew it would conduce to your majesty's peace of mind; and it fitted in perfectly with the call on Herr Von Arnim by the German ambassador."

Darraq met the perturbed gaze of the other man for one long, tense minute, but whatever he read in it brought no change of expression in his face.

"I dare say," came the tentative question at last, "that my presence in your country incognito has aroused a good deal of speculation as to my motive?"

Again Darraq bowed low.

"It is not for us to question your majesty's motive in so honoring us," he replied. "It is enough for us to know you are here, and, knowing it, express to you our welcome, and our pleasure at being convinced that your reported illness was incorrect."

Here was dissimulation, plus evasion. Bowing low, Darraq craved permission to go, and it was granted curtly. He went, leaving behind him here in this modest little house in Thirty-second Street, deeply perturbed, a reigning sovereign of Europe. They met again aboard ship on the afternoon of the following day, fifteen minutes—before the great liner cast off her hawsers. Miss Wessels, from the window of her stateroom, watched them curiously.

Darraq bowed with deep courtesy.

"I dare say you have come to express your government's regret at my departure?" the emperor queried ironically.

However disconcerted he had been the night before by the sudden realization that all efforts to keep his identity hidden had failed, his journey had been a success; the tracings were safe, and in an hour America would be a penciled line, fading into the horizon. He was returning home with arms strengthened incalculably against that great island nation of Europe with which, some day, war would come.

"And to wish you bon voyage," Darraq amended. The nearest of the moving crowd compelled him to drop the formal manner of address. "Permit me to express my regret that your visit has been fruitless."

"Fruitless!" The emperor laughed exultantly.

"Yes," replied Darraq steadily. "You will find the tracings of the plans and specifications which you were at such pains to secure, which you came to this country to purchase at the cost of Lieutenant Stuart's honor, have vanished from the receptacle in the body of the heavy cane in your hand and—that is all. Permit me to again wish you bon voyage." He bowed ceremoniously.

"Vanished!" The word came in a burst of amazement.

"Vanished is the word I used," remarked Darraq coolly. "A man entered your apartments as you slept last night and removed them. You will find in your cane several thin, tissue sheets, blank as the open sky. I will add that my method of locating you was simplicity itself. What one thing in all the United States could be of such importance that it would bring you to this country? Obviously, some instrument of war. But every improvement in every airship, every man-of-war, every

submarine, every gun, every secret of armor making, is shared in common by all civilized countries. But suppose your secret police had learned of some invention held by my government which, in your possession, would make your power upon the seas beyond dispute? That would be the answer to the hypothetical question hanging upon your presence here. Lieutenant Stuart was in charge of plans of an invention which, when announced, will revolutionize warfare. I followed Lieutenant Stuart from Washington to your very door in New York, and, incidentally, became aware of Miss Wessels' part in the affair."

For an instant the emperor, nonplused, stared at him, then without a word he turned away and entered his suite, slamming the door behind him.

Just before the big liner sailed Herr Von Arnim and Herr Hauptmann arrived breathlessly in an automobile and ran up the gangplank.

The steamer's great whistle bellowed a warning across the busy bosom of the Hudson, and she moved out majestically.

Six hours later Paul Darraq sent a telegram to Chief Campbell of the secret service in Washington. It ran like this:

Lieutenant Ralph Stuart may attempt suicide to-night. Take steps to prevent it, if possible.

The telegram was too late. They found Stuart dead with a bullet in his brain. Gripped in his left hand was a telegram, signed Carline Wessels, coldly, brutally announcing her departure for Paris, where, she explained, she was to join her husband.

It was several months later that Darraq looked up from his reading one day and addressed me.

"Don't you think," he asked, "that suicide is the most merciful manner of escape for a man who has been tricked into treason; who has sold the secrets of his country?"

"It strikes me so," I responded.

"I'm glad you agree with me," he remarked. "I could have sent a telegram once in time to prevent a man's suicide, but it seemed more merciful not to send it—and I didn't."

Whereupon he resumed his reading.

The second exploit of Darraq will be related in the next POPULAR, on sale two weeks hence, September 23rd. It is called "The Death Woman."

AN INQUIRY FOR MR. JAMES

FRANK P. MORSE, one of the best dramatic press agents and the most incessant talkers in the world, walked into a fashionable hotel in Chicago one evening and wrote on the register the set of peculiar hieroglyphics which he is pleased to call his signature.

"How much will you charge me for a room and bath?" he inquired, with an air of a man to whom money was not a question.

The clerk told him.

"Yes, yes," said Morse, with extreme urbanity. "Quite so. Now I would like to see Mr. James."

"What Mr. James?" asked the clerk.

"Mr. James, the proprietor of this hotel," explained Morse. What was more to the point, he grew very peevish when the clerk insisted that Mr. James was not proprietor of the hotel, and that no Mr. James was in the house.

"You can't kid me," said Morse angrily. "I want to see Mr. James, the proprietor of this hotel, and I want to see him quick. I mean Mr. Jesse James, the most notorious robber of modern times—brother of Frank."

The Rajah's Vacation

By Harold MacGrath

Author of "The Carpet from Bagdad," "Half a Rogue," Etc.

A short story by the author of several of the "best sellers" among recent novels. A funny story, cleverly written and most ingenious, of a young newspaper man with an elephant on his hands, a real live elephant, the chief attraction of a traveling circus, attached for the non-payment of a debt.

(A Novelette)

HENNESSY was thin and fibrous; he was also red-headed, and freckled, and dynamic. He was an orphan, and wasn't afraid of anything or anybody, if one excepted his landlady, who chanced to be as red-headed as he was and far more vigorously built. He was, besides, one of the best authorities on sports in the State. He could tell you offhand anything you wanted to know, from prize fighters to champion ping-pong players. At the time of this veracious chronicle he was the sporting editor of the *Evening Herald*, and reveled in the fact that he had interviewed John L. before Corbett had knocked him out.

It is proverbial that sporting editors shall be improvident. Thus Hennessy was always in debt, always looking around to add a few dollars to his pay envelope. Once he had gone so far as to edit a book of poems by a local poetess. With the check he had purchased a diamond stickpin, and up to the Rajah's advent had reclaimed it from one Moses Cohen one hundred and thirty-six times. There were lean months when it represented both his capital and income.

Early on the day of the fifteenth of May—never mind the year—he sat before his typewriter. He was grouchy, for the aforesaid landlady had issued an ultimatum that morning, between prunes and ham and eggs, and had plainly indicated that his room was better than his company, eight dollars the week better. In the parlance of the office boy, who admired Hennessy next to the star pitcher, he was having a "stiff go" with the machine. He jabbed viciously, uppercut, swung right and left, and had the typewriter "going," when the bell rang.

Hennessy took advantage of the intermission to refill his corncob pipe, and then began round two. Any one standing behind him could have traced the words "punk" and "piffle" and sundry other inelegancies of the English language which pass muster on the sporting page, but nowhere else. He was retorting to the persiflage of the sporting editor of the *Morning Standard*. They never agreed. They warred upon each other's decisions with a vindictiveness which, in earlier times, would have had its climax in the death of one or the other, but which, in these unromantic days, resulted in nothing more serious than a complimentary drink at Schmidt's, over the way, when work was done.

Hennessy was taking exception, violent and abusive, to Morris' decision in

regard to the "scrap" between two local lightweights at the Elks' Club the night before. Morris had given the decision to "Kid" Dorgan, while his rival was determined that justice should be done to K. O. Henkel. Not because he really believed Henkel won, but to give the "rag," as the phrase goes, to the betting cliques. As referees were—and still are—utilized only to separate the fighters when they threatened to fall asleep on one another's shoulders and "to count ten," betters had to depend upon the newspapers. And a fine time they had settling their monetary arguments.

"Hello, Hen!"

"That you, Morris?" Hennessy looked up at the clock. He had moved his desk so that he could always see the clock without having to turn his head around. "You had a fine hunch last night. How much did you get for giving that boob the decision?"

"Aw, you know Dorgan won by a mile. Come on over to Schmidt's. I've got a bit of cheerful for you."

"In ten minutes."

Morris glanced over the files of newspapers while Hennessy finished his story and devoted the remaining minutes to scissors and paste pot. He folded his "copy" once and carried it over to the city editor's desk.

"How about that tennis tournament?" asked the city editor.

"Rained last night. Nothing doing until to-morrow."

"Well, I don't suppose I'll lay eyes on you again to-day. But if you don't bring in that bowling match at eight by the clock you're always looking at, a. m., I'll fire you. There's no use paying you twenty per and letting Morris there do all your work."

"Piffle!"

"That's right," said Morris. "I ought to be drawing your pay, Hen. Come on."

The two young men, deadly enemies in public life, but Damon and Pythias in private, passed out of the building and crossed the street to Schmidt's. Schmidt owned what he called "The Press Café." He edited choice hops, and rye, and barley, and American grape, and loaned half of his profits to the improvident reporters who frequented his bar. His "business men's lunch" was the only thing that kept him from becoming a county charge.

"Two, and no collars," ordered Hennessy.

"And a couple of Pessimist cigars," added Morris generously.

"Now, what's your grand news?"

"Remember Hobart?"

"Sure. He was a kind of four-flusher, who did drama and books on your sheet, some years ago. Got a job last year, I understand, as press agent for the Rigtop One-ringed Circus. What's he want us to do—lend him money?"

"No. He broke his leg day before yesterday, and he has offered me fifty to do the press work for this town and see about the lot. *And* distribute free tickets to the boys and the city fathers." Morris beamed.

"Fifty dollars!" murmured Hennessy. "That's a lot of money for a bum sporting editor to make. What do you want to break the news to me for? Grudge?"

"Bum, eh? If I was in your class I'd hire out to teach parrots. You never wrote anything in your life that I didn't write the night before. Forget it. It's like this: I'm in wrong with the old codger who owns the only available lot. If I go to him, he's likely to soak me; and two-fifty is all the circus will stand. Now, I'll be decent, and give you twenty-five to make the deal with him, and I'll handle all the hard work, *as* usual."

"What could I do with a measly twenty-five?"

"You could square up with your landlady. Say, I'd like to see you two bricktops do a ten-round 'go.' It would be worth watching."

Hennessy frowned and fumbled with his collar. "Moses has my pin this month. Got twelve until Monday?"

"Twelve! You're an hour slow. Make it one. Why, Hen, I haven't the price of a shine."

"What do you do with your salary? You never have any money," aggrieved.

"I have a family to take care of."

Hennessy's beer went down the wrong way. "Whose?" he sputtered.

"My landlady's. Oh, it's the old yarn. I've been exercising the ponies."

"They never got a bone out of me. No blackboards for mine."

"I notice you're always trying to fill in a four-flush."

"I filled last week."

"I heard about that. Bentley caught his full house."

Hennessy tacked. "Got any contract from Hobart?"

"His letter."

"Let me see it." Hennessy read it carefully. He had had some experience with fighters' agreements, and thought he knew something about contracts. "Don't see Rigtop here anywhere. Better telegraph him and find out if he backs Hobart in this deal."

"Good idea."

"You can get a reply by three this afternoon, and I'll hike out to old man Warren and lease the lot. Two-fifty is the limit. All right. Twenty-five will pay for my vacation. Huh? Oh, charge it, Schmidt."

"Chee, how easy you fellers say dot! Charche it! Vy nod say forged it?"

"Aw, Schmidt!" said the two newspaper men in chorus.

"Some tay, ven somepody ties und leafs you money, I ged mine. It's a tough pusiness to haf cheniuses hanging arount a saloon. Ven you fellers come in, nopody hears der cash rechister make any music." Schmidt returned to the bar.

"Peeved, eh?" was Hennessy's comment.

"He's all right. He's only working himself up to ask some cub to settle his account. See you at the game this afternoon. So long."

Alone Hennessy fished out an envelope—which contained the bill for his winter suit—and began to do some figuring on the back. Twenty-five would hold off his landlady and take him up to Lake Ontario for the opening of the bass season. He knew a hotel where he could get board and boat and bait for twelve per. With the remains of the twenty-five and his two weeks' pay he could live like a prince. The circus would arrive the tenth of June. Next week he would pay the landlady something on account and let the tailor whistle. Tailors and undertakers always had to wait.

A few days later "the greatest one-ringed circus in the world" awoke the interest of the small boy. Posters and "three-sheets" and cotton banners began to appear on barns and fences. Dozens of beauteous ladies could be seen flying from trapeze to trapeze, five or six hundred feet above the ring, which was as large as the town reservoir, and some were leaping through paper hoops from the backs of wild dray horses; and strong men held up incredible weights; and there were fierce lions, and tigers, and gorillas, and toothsome hippopotamuses, and crocodiles, and boa constrictors, all cavorting in the loveliest jungle.

But standing aloof from all this bewildering scenery was a "single-sheet," portraying "the most learned elephant in captivity, Rajah, the royal Udaipur mastodon, mate in size to the lamented Jumbo, but vastly his superior in intelligence. Watch for the parade! June tenth!" What Udaipur meant even the erudite Hennessy never found out. It must have been a disease, or a brand, or a locality.

The days went on. Morris toiled like a beaver. He harried the local billposter until that gentleman began to mix the "three-sheets"; and no human being, even in the clutch of the most horrible nightmare, ever saw such a menagerie as bedecked some of the boardings.

Hennessy pursued the even tenor of his way, watching the clock, which not only told the hours, but the days and months as well. His vacation had been arranged. He had varnished his rods and had purchased new tackle. There was nothing now but baseball, and that was easy, for Morris was always to be relied upon for the percentages and the averages. All Hennessy had to do was to write the story of the game, which he did interestingly well. His vernacu-

lar was marvelous. He never repeated. It was as easy as falling off a log to state that "Doyle picked up a hot biscuit and browned it to the first sackerino, from whence Miller took the hammer up and nailed Morgan on the all-but bag. The umpire said he was safe. Murphy then sprained three layers of new-mown air in trying to connect with Johnson's airship to the official stand. What's the matter with making umpires wear mourning?"

Yes, Hennessy was getting along nicely. He had invented a fine tale for his landlady, which was so good that she had concluded to let him believe that she ate it, rind and all. For she wasn't a bad landlady, not by any means; only she was like the boy, swift to anger and swift to forget.

Red hair is all right. Napoleon didn't have any, to be sure, but nine-tenths of Wellington's men wore plenty of it. Nobody knows what the color of George Washington's hair was, for in all the death scenes he died under a wig. But it has been duly recorded that he had freckles.

So, but for his fiery top, Hennessy would never have stepped upon a pedestal in the local hall of fame. True, he wasn't always to remain there, but it was something to have climbed that far. Seventy-five years hence his name will be bandied to and fro by the oldest inhabitants, whenever a circus comes to town. When they die, oblivion. See any old poet on the longevity of fame.

II.

On the evening of the ninth of June Hennessy and Morris foregathered at Schmidt's for a game of pinochle. The former had nothing to do except to secure a copy of Professor Meyerbeer's lecture on "The Life of Prehistoric Granite," while Morris intended to witness "The Wife"—as given by the local stock company—from the program only. In fact, he had already written his criticism, and the office boy was carrying it around in his pocket until eleven o'clock should arrive.

In a provincial city, such as I write about, the sporting editor had other dignities thrust upon him. There were nights and days when nothing happened in the sporting world, and, in order to keep him from growing rusty, the city editor would give him general assignments, such as church fairs, weddings, fires, interviews with persons of importance who stopped the night at the best hotel, and Sunday sermons.

The sporting editor would accept these assignments without feeling any great loss of prestige; he was still the idol of the office boy; he was still the man who could go up to the ex-champion—when he came to town with a show—and ask him what he thought of "Lanky Bob's" chances with the "Boilerman." No newspaper man lives who, at one time or another, hasn't wanted to be a sporting editor; unless, indeed, he was cut out for the ignoble job of writing book reviews.

The boys sat down at their usual table and started the game. There was a deadly side bet attached to-night. It was to settle the question as to who should collect the fifty from Mr. Rigtop. At eleven Morris laid down a "hundred aces," and the game was done. In other words, the ticklish job of corralling Mr. Rigtop and extracting fifty dollars from his funereal frock coat was left to Hennessy.

"I guess that'll hold you, Hen. If you hadn't been in such a hurry to 'meld' those sixty queens, you'd have won out on double pinochle."

"That was Schmidt. He was jawing over my shoulder," said the disgruntled Hennessy.

"Vy, I vanted you to vin," asserted the abused Schmidt. "Putt you blay pinochle like a pullhead."

"What's Rigtop look like?" asked Hennessy.

"Search me," answered Morris. "Hobart'll have to point him out to us. He wrote he'd be in here at nine to-morrow."

"Supposing he balks?"

"How can he? I've got Hobart's letter and Rigtop's telegram. Nothing more is needed."

"You made the contract with the billposter?"

"Nix. The telegram was enough for him. He went ahead on that."

"I guess that fifty looks good," sighed Hennessy. "Say, how do you ask a man for fifty dollars?"

"Quit kidding. Here, Schmidt," said Morris, reaching into a pocket; "here are four complimentaries for the circus to-morrow night. Take the frau and the whatchamucallits."

"Dot's fine! Vot'll you poys haf?"

If Morris had paid cash for the tickets and had emphasized the fact, Schmidt would have accepted them without comment. But there was something irresistibly magical in the word "complimentary." Somehow, it made him feel that he was intimately acquainted with Mr. Rigtop, and that he was lifted out of the common rut. Anybody could *buy* a ticket, but only a chosen few—about three hundred—were accorded the compliments of the showman. Schmidt added the name Rigtop to his vocabulary, and used it for months.

Promptly at nine the next morning Hennessy and his friend met Hobart. He carried a crutch, and the boys agreed that he looked rather seedy.

"Morris," he began, "I'll introduce you to Mr. Rigtop this afternoon. Get a voucher from him and hand it into the ticket-wagon window after the crowd gets in."

"You're lookin' kind of punk," said Morris.

"And punk's the word." Hobart glanced around cautiously. "The truth is, we're up against it stone-hard. If it wasn't for our private train we couldn't move. Sheriffs are getting interested in our route."

Morris grew pale, while Hennessy bit off the wrong end of his cigar.

"Our fifty doesn't look good, eh?"

"Honestly, it doesn't."

Hennessy eyed his perfecto, a real Havana. Sadly he replaced it in his vest pocket. This was not the occasion, after all.

Hobart eased his leg. "I'm putting you fellows wise because we used to work together. If Rigtop refuses to pay, hike back to town as soon as you can and fix up paper for levying on the Rajah, the only thing in the show worth looking at. That's all I can say. I'll see you at the big top at two. It's up to you chaps to get your money."

"How about the billposter?"

"Same boat for him, too." And the ex-newspaper man hobbled out.

"Ain't it fierce?" breathed Morris hoarsely.

"Fierce? Morris, I'll get the hook into this Rigtop person if it's the last thing I ever do. We'll attach the elephant."

"Hobson will stretch a point for us, after all we've done for him. We'll have the papers ready in case Rigtop renegs."

"He'll have to wake up milkman time to put this over on us. Let's get a move on." Hennessy was boiling with wrath.

At half after two they were introduced to Mr. Rigtop. Hobart, after the introduction, disappeared. Mr. Rigtop was very glad to see any of the newspaper boys. What? A telegram from him offering fifty for press work? Some mistake. His man Hobart had charge of that end of the business.

"I guess you'd better pay it, Mr. Rigtop," said Hennessy, the hair stirring at the base of his neck. "We've worked like nailers to boost this show, hired the lot and seen to the billposting."

"Let me see that telegram."

"'No's' the word," replied Morris. "You'd probably say that the signature was a forgery. We want fifty dollars, peacefully if possible."

"What! You threaten?" Mr. Rigtop looked around for his "Hey-Rubes." "I tell you that I sent no telegram. I'll fire Hobart for this. If you two chaps took charge of the billing, you did it on your own. No blackmail for mine." And with a flourish of his arm Mr. Rigtop entered the ticket wagon and slammed the door.

"The sneaking hound!" cried Hennessy, giving the door a kick.

"All right, Rigtop!" shouted Morris. "Come on, Hen. We'll show this duffer

that there are some live ones in this town yet."

They boarded the trolley and rode back to town. Morris was strongly in favor of Nero, the lion, but Hennessy held out for the Rajah.

"I tell you, the elephant's the whole show, or Hobart wouldn't have tipped us off. We'll get Hobson to body-snatch the Rajah to-night. We can get fifty for his feet as umbrella stands any day in the week."

"All right. We'll attach the elephant. Rigtop'll come across when he sees his whole show walking off. The elephant for ours."

Which was the very thing Mr. Rigtop prayed and hoped for.

Hobson, the sheriff, in view of past favors, agreed to levy on the elephant until the affair could be settled in court. So, at eight that night, the three of them went out to the grounds and started a still hunt for the showman. They found him as he intended they should. The demand for fifty dollars was made again, and refused. Then the sheriff informed Mr. Rigtop that he would immediately attach the Rajah.

"We'll take your elephant!" bawled Hennessy, for the band was banging out a ragtime and he could hardly hear his own voice.

"The Rajah?" dismayed. "Why, gentlemen, you'll ruin my show."

"Fifty dollars!" cried Morris.

"I refuse to be blackmailed," returned the showman angrily. "If you take that elephant out of the tent you'll have the hottest time you ever ran up against." Mr. Rigtop reëntered the ticket wagon.

So far as he was concerned, the matter was closed. All the sheriffs could come if they wanted to. The only thing in the animal tent he could call his own was the llama, and nobody wanted the beast because it had the habit of puffing its food into the faces of the spectators.

Once out of this State he could get on his legs again. He did not worry about the Rajah. Indeed, he began to whistle a popular air from "Wang." He knew more about elephants than a thousand and one sheriffs. It had rained for weeks, and he was broke. It did not hurt his conscience—tough as a rhino's hide—that two improvident newspaper men would be held responsible for the lot and the billposting.

Said Hobson as they entered the animal tent: "Kinda seems too easy. He didn't make no great hullabaloo 's I suspected he would. Maybe th' elephant is dyin' or sick."

"He's all right. Old, maybe; but he was spry enough in the parade this morning. We may have some trouble," Hennessy added.

"Not with me," said Hobson, pulling his Colt. "I've seen circuses before." Then he lamented: "Wish I'd seen th' show this afternoon. We'll have a chat with that Mohammydin—what d'y' call him—mayhoot? If we get an elephant on our hands we want t' know how t' feed him."

"There's truth in that," assented Morris. "Come along."

They found the Mohammedan mahout. He was taking off a bright red harness studded with brass nails. They introduced themselves and made known their business.

"My name is Cassidy," returned the mahout. He knew what was in the wind. "So ye're after the Rajah? Poor sowl! Well, well, so it's come at last? Ye'll be kind t' him till we kin sind fer him?"

"We'll get him a high chair and a fine nursing bottle," Hennessy agreed, in fine feather. Wouldn't the town sit up and take notice? His glance ran over the Rajah. So close he looked fifty feet high and two million pounds, for he was a big elephant, as elephants go. Came a day when these were trifling figures.

"An' don't lave him out av doors at night. He ketches cowld aisy. The show business has a har-rd world t' face. It's a wonder ye didn't levy on the side shows. They's more money in thim."

"The Rajah's our meal ticket."

"Aye, he will be." Cassidy patted the huge trunk. "Salaam, ye infant!" The Rajah curled up his trunk and made a noise like a rusty hinge in the wind.

"Can't you get any bigger noise out of him than that?" asked Hennessy, touching the elephant gingerly. Morris stood ten feet away.

"Not when he's peaceful. Whin do ye have yeer county fair?"

"In September. Why?"

"Well, if ye kape him thot long, ye'll be makin' a wad. Eh, owld flabby sides?" poking the elephant playfully in the side with the butt end of the goad. "Ye'll be nadin' this shtick. Touch him as ye would a cavalry horse. Lift side, he goes right; an' vicey versy. Gintle as a lamb. He's niver gone *musth*. They'll be the car-r at the sidin'. Ye kin put him aboord whin we sind fer him. An' ye'll want this rid harness, too. Now, mind, ye kin ride him as ye would the back shteps av a stame roller, he's thot gintle. Don't be afraid av him. A pail av wather or two in the marnin' an' the same at night. I've bin with him fer sivin years now, an' he's niver so much as shtepped on me cor-rns. Fifty dollars is a shmall sum agin' the bist iliphant thot iver ate his ton av hay; ate thousind, if a cint."

"Is that all you feed him?" asked Hennessy. Away down in his soul somewhere he was worried. This was going to be a bigger job than he had calculated; but he'd die rather than back down at this late hour.

"Oh, he'll ate paynuts an' benannies an' grane stuff.". And Cassidy went on to explain the caretaking.

"Too easy, too easy," muttered the sheriff under his breath. There was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere, but just where he couldn't fathom.

"Where do you sit on him when you get on him?" asked Hennessy.

"Behint his ears. 'Tis aisy. Any ladder'll do the job. He won't move."

At twelve o'clock that night the Rajah was in the big box stall of the barn in the rear of the Grangers' Hotel. The mahout tenderly bade him farewell, and then hot-footed it for the train.

Three o'clock the following afternoon the local team, having won the toss, marched to the field. Hennessy and his partner, in the press stand, received the guying congratulations of the other reporters. They took it all good-naturedly. After all, they *had* waked up the town. Hennessy was sharpening his pencil, when Morris nudged him.

"There's your boy."

"Where?"

"Coming down toward us."

When the boy espied Hennessy, he made a megaphone of his hands and bawled:

"Hey, Hennessy, your elephunt hes broke loose!"

III.

The two returned to town as soon as the trolley could take them. They saw a great crowd in Jones Street, a respectful crowd, be it added, packing the far side of the street to the curb, and leaving the thoroughfare itself free and unobstructed. In front of the Grangers' Hotel was the Rajah, fondling the contents of several ashcans and impatiently tossing aside the sardine tins. He was no goat. Three or four policemen kept—or pretended to keep—the public from getting within the danger zone. Hennessy and Morris were appalled. Nobody seemed to know what to do. The care of elephants evidently was not down on the police regulations.

"What's happened?" gasped Morris of the hotel proprietor.

"Happened?" roared that indignant person. "Why, your darned elephant simply walked out of the barn about an hour ago, carrying the box stall and the doorframe with him. Happened!"

"Maybe he was lonesome," suggested Morris. "Did you feed him?" turning upon Hennessy.

"Feed him?" cried Hennessy. "I thought you'd given orders for the hay. The old brute is hungry."

"I told you to take the lion," whispered Morris.

"Shut up!" hissed Hennessy. He was Irish and possessed a fertile imagination. "You run around to the wagon maker and get some chains and a stout post, and bring him along, too."

Morris rushed off, grasping the idea. Chains, anything to hold the elephant. On his part, Hennessy ran back to the

barn, or what was left of it, and secured the goad, returning breathless and hatless. Which end should he use first? Should he be conciliatory or peremptory? The elephant now looked as high as the hotel. When this was all over he would tell Morris just what he thought of him. *He* was to blame for all this muddle. Fifty dollars! Both of them would remain in debt for the rest of their lives. They couldn't sell the elephant, they couldn't rent him; he was simply an attachment, a legal proceeding by which they protected their fifty dollars. And they might have to keep him until Rigtop died, which Hennessy hoped would be on the morrow.

He paused about ten feet east of the Rajah's port. His coarse red hair shone fiery in the sunshine. Silence fell upon the spectators. The little murmurings died away. They waited expectantly for the tragedy to begin. Here was going to be something they could hand down to their descendants, along with the antique furniture, the wax flowers, and the family albums.

The Rajah eyed that red head. It was the only familiar thing he had seen since yesterday; for Cassidy had a red top also. Next, the Rajah espied the goad. He waggled his frayed ears. Red-headed Irishmen with goads were bad propositions. Nevertheless, he was hungry and thirsty. He lifted a hind leg. The young man with the goad did not stir or speak. The Rajah lifted his fore leg. Still the young man made no move. The elephant was puzzled. He began to sway irresolutely. Then an idea entered his pachydermous-bound skull. He rolled up his trunk and let out that hingelike noise.

Then Hennessy did a truly brave thing. He knew that he was going to his death. He vaguely wondered whether the elephant would throw him over the post office, a block away, or trample him. The fact that there were a thousand pairs of eyes upon him screwed up his courage to the Homeric point. He murmured a long-forgotten prayer, stepped briskly forward, and poked the Rajah amidship. The Rajah wheeled and shuffled toward the alley-way out of which he had come. Hennessy, laughing hysterically, followed with a good batting average on the hind-quarters of the Rajah. The *vox populi* rang wildly up and down Jones Street.

Morris, followed by the wagon maker, both staggering under a load of chains, any one of which would have tethered a drove of wild elephants, let alone a peaceful one, hove around the corner. Such are the moods of fickle fame. He had arrived too late. The hero of the hour was one Hennessy, sporting editor and mahout, pro tem.

"Hay!" shouted Hennessy.

The Rajah had gone directly into what remained of the box stall.

Somebody dashed up to the loft and dropped down a pressed bale. Hennessy broke the wires with his goad. The Rajah reached for a mouthful.

"He's eating!" cried Morris, waving his hands toward the crowd, which gradually dissolved, now that the Neronic possibilities were vanished from the scene.

"Aw, he's all right," said Hennessy. "The beggar was hungry, that was all. If you'd have given him his hay this morning, all this fuss would not have happened." He patted the Rajah's starboard side. "Salaam!" he bawled out, with sudden recollection. Up went the trunk, still curled about some hay, and out came the incredible squeak.

Morris wiped the perspiration from his brow and backed away.

"Drive the stake there," commanded Hennessy, pointing to a spot of earth.

The wagon maker obeyed energetically. He was greatly desirous of returning to his shop. He felt it in his bones that customers were just filling the doors, calling for axles and hubs and spokes.

"Now, put that chain around it so it won't come off."

It was done.

"And help me to tie it around his leg."

"Not me," said the wagon maker.

"What are you afraid of?" jeered Hennessy. "You, Morris, anyhow. I'm danged if I'll do all the work myself."

Morris had always been bragging

about his revolutionary ancestors; but he hesitated.

"Huh!" said Hennessy. "I bet your great-grandfather was a sutler. Get a gait on you."

After a quarter of an hour's labor the two succeeded in adjusting the chain; and for the present the Rajah was safe. True, he might take the whole barn with him the next time; but that was on the knees of the gods.

On returning to the office, Hennessy applied for his two weeks' vacation. He felt that he was going to need fourteen days right away.

Morris wrote a great story for the *Morning Standard,* which was wired to the press association. From Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon, Hennessy's deed became known. Morris made his friend one of the heroes of modern times; but he could not resist a joke or two, which Hennessy, from his lofty pinnacle, declined to notice. He bought the *Mirror* and the *Clipper,* and hunted "dates ahead." The Rigtop was "billed" for Erie on the eighteenth. Hennessy wrote a letter, stating that he would keep the elephant exactly fourteen days. If, after that time, the fifty was not forthcoming, he would immediately procure authority to sell the elephant to the first man who wanted one. This was final. There was no reply.

Every morning for a week Hennessy went over and visited the Rajah. He gave him bananas and peanuts, and the great beast, while he mourned the absence of his keeper, took a fancy to the slim young man who could say nothing more intelligent than "Salaam!" But he knew, deep down in his big heart, that there was a bond between him and the blue-eyed, red-headed young fellow, the bond of loneliness. On the third day Hennessy unchained him and exercised him up and down the alleyway. The Rajah obeyed every move of the goad. He recognized two other things besides the loneliness—that his new master was kind and unafraid. Moreover, he had not had so much hay in all his circus days. He "whuffed" along the dust. His first vacation in forty-four years. Of course, he missed the music and the routine; but what were these compared to the present peace and quiet?

The Rajah was not jungle-born. He had come into this world of sin and care in the Antwerp Gardens, and from the time they had hoisted him aboard the big freighter until now he had had no rest. Sometimes, in the hot afternoons, when the band in the big top had stopped, he had dreamed, and in these dreams he had seen great reaches of rolling land, covered with vast forests, stretches of desert and blinding sand, wonderful birds, screaming monkeys, sleek tigers—unlike those in the cages—and shallow streams wherein his brothers and sisters lolled all the day. Then, into the heart of these pleasant dreams would come that abominable harness and the disgraceful exhibitions, such as standing on his hind legs on barrels, ringing a bell, sitting at a table, and pretending to drink from a battered bottle made of wood. *Whuff!*

The whole town was on the "who lives," as the French say. The circulation of the morning paper had increased, for everybody arose in hopes of learning that the tragedy had taken place. The new left-handed pitcher had arrived without creating more than a flutter among the fanatics. The temperance agitation didn't agitate. On Saturday Hennessy boldly paraded the elephant around the post office, and came near being arrested for not having a circus license. On the eighth day, so far as the public was concerned, the interest began to wane. The Rajah up to date hadn't killed anything but time.

Hennessy used to drop into the office about noon. The boys had ceased to whistle:

> When the band begins to play
> And the elephant goes around!

The pastime threatened to prove unhealthy. For Hennessy had promised to "knock the block off the first man who whistles that tune again." He was sitting at his desk, idly musing, when the proprietor of the Granger Hotel entered and laid down a sheet of paper, upon which was neatly written:

To hay for one elephant at $20 the ton	$40
Carpenters and lumber, repairs	32
	$72

"What's this?" demanded Hennessy, laying down his pipe.

"Can't you read?" countered the proprietor.

"Send it to Rigtop. The Rajah isn't *my* elephant."

"But I guess you'll pay this bill, though. The elephant's yours until Rigtop sends for him. Seventy-two dollars to-morrow night, or no more hay."

"But I may get a draft from Rigtop any day now. I guess you can hold your horses until I get my end. Besides, there's Morris. He's in on this for half."

"Where'll I find him, then?"

"Oh, about two, in the editorial room of the *Morning Standard*."

But Morris had gone directly to the ball grounds upon leaving his hall bedroom. The proprietor of the Granger Hotel found Hennessy at Schmidt's later.

"I'm going to give you twenty-four hours to settle. If you don't, out goes that elephant."

"All right. Put him out. Fine job. Look here; be a sport. You don't pay your bills but once a month. Why do you jump on me?"

"Well, I don't want that brute in the barn. He frightens the horses; and guests can hear the chains rattling all night. I'll tell you what I'll do. Take him somewhere else and I'll split the bill in half."

"I'll make a stab at it," Hennessy agreed.

But a large and resonant negative met him in the other fourteen wards of the city. And no mail from Rigtop. It began to look serious. Morris and Hennessy practically "roomed" at Schmidt's trying to figure out where they stood.

"Vy don't you raffle him?" suggested the saloon keeper.

"No joshing, Schmidt," growled Hennessy, rubbing the callouses on his palms. Carrying water twice a day for the Rajah was no sinecure.

"Vell, you haf an elephant on your hants alreaty, und you vant to ged rit uff him. Vy don't you?"

Hennessy ignored him. "And there's that old skinflint Warren; *he's* after me now. But he can go hang. He got his voucher from Rigtop, and it's not my fault if the ticket wagon had disappeared when he got around to it."

"Let him holler."

Castle, the billposter, came in, flushed and out of breath. He made for Morris.

"Say, looky here. Where's that dub Rigtop? I've sent me bill to him five times and not a rise. He told me that he'd send a money order from Erie. Three hundred dollars."

Morris and Hennessy gazed sadly at each other. It was a hard world.

"Do you mean to tell us that you let him put you off?" demanded Hennessy. "You've handled circuses for ten years, and ought to know that you get your cash before they take down the tent, or you don't get it."

"You're the dub that made me so easy," volleyed the billposter, shaking his finger at Morris. "I took your word for it that I'd get my pay."

"Say, sit down," urged Hennessy. "Three, Schmidt."

Schmidt brought three very small ones. Hennessy eyed him savagely, but said nothing.

"Let's get together on the thing. Morris here and I were promised fifty to see that you did your work well, feed the deadheads, and lease the lot. Rigtop has shied the whole shooting match."

"I told you to attach the lion," said Morris sadly.

"You wall-eyed pike! What! A lion on our hands and sirloins at thirty-four the pound?"

"You wouldn't have had to feed him sirloins."

"No; but as soon as the butchers saw how we were fixed, meat bones would go kiooting. Be joyful; cheer up. Hay is steady at twenty the ton. Now, listen. The bill for hay is forty. Perhaps we give him too much. I don't know. Anyhow, it keeps him quiet. The dam-

age to the barn is thirty-two. Fifty and three hundred and seventy-two make four hundred and twenty-two dollars. The Rajah's got to dig that up for us."

"Lord's name, and how?" asked Castle.

"I don't know; but something's got to be done. I don't like this business. There is something shady about it. That four-flusher Hobart was surely in on it. It was he who steered us into the elephant. Hobson says it was all too easy. And, on top of all this, the district attorney is hunting up the law to see if the city can't get something out of the Rajah's hide. He claims we ought to pay a license fee of some kind. And the chief of police has warned me that if any one gets hurt I'll be held responsible. That's because I'm taking care of him. What can we do? My lawyer says I can't sell the elephant without hearing from Rigtop first."

"Three hundred!" wailed Castle, for there would not be any more fat contracts until the regular theatrical season opened in the fall.

"I've got it!" cried Hennessy, banging the table with his fist. "We'll use old rubber sides for advertising purposes."

"How?"

"Listen."

IV.

The manager of the Imperial Drygoods Store listened attentively. He had heard all about the elephant.

"Not half bad, Mr. Hennessy; but a hundred a day is pretty stiff."

"All right," said Hennesy, getting up. "If you can't recognize a good thing when it's passed up to you, that's your affair. Why, the free advertising you'll get out of it is worth a hundred alone. The whole State has heard about it. One hundred or nothing."

"Wait just a moment until I call up Mr. Hann." The manager caught up the telephone and talked lowly for a minute. He turned with a smile. "Very well, Mr. Hennessy. We engage to pay you one hundred for the Rajah tomorrow. We'll have the side banners painted at once. You agree to lead the elephant up and down Main Street, once in the morning and once in the afternoon, the hundred to be paid at five o'clock."

"There's the contract. If the Rajah kicks, you can. I'm taking that chance."

From the Imperial he started over to the Sheehan-Cort Company. He met Morris coming out, beaming.

"Got a bully contract from them; two-fifty for Friday, day after to-morrow."

"But I only said a hundred," was Hennessy's protest. "We can't charge one price to the Imperial and another to the Sheehan people."

"Yes, but this is an extra contract. Cort——"

"Oh, yes; I know Cort. Some snide game. He's got it in for me. I guyed him in the paper the time his auto broke down between town and the country club, and he and his chorus girls had to walk in. What did you agree to?"

"Two-fifty if you'd ride the elephant from Jones' up to the canal."

"You blamed jackass!" exploded Hennessy.

"Well, what are you afraid of? You've been bragging about what you could do. Do it." Morris was crafty.

The Irish blood in Hennessy began to mount. "All right, you fish. I'll ride him if it breaks my neck. But when we're squared up, you see a lot of *your* share of the cash."

"I'm only looking out for our interests."

"And I'm looking out for my neck."

They walked along the street, arguing, with a crowd of newsboys at their heels. They were almost as popular as a pair of prize fighters. By the time the two had reached the barn Hennessy had forgiven. He went into the stall, and the Rajah "salaamed," lifted his hind leg and fore leg, and was as amiable as could be.

"I don't see how you do it, Hen," said Morris, in frank admiration.

"I guess I can ride him."

"Telephone call for you, Mr. Hennessy," said the bell boy, coming into the barn.

It was from the chief of the police.

"This you, Hennessy?"

"Yep."

"What's this I hear about you riding that elephant up and down Main?"

"Has Cort been phoning you?"

"Never mind how I found out."

Hennessy put his hand over the phone and turned to Morris. "Cort has told the chief, thinking he'd stop the thing, so he could break the contract. I'll fool him." Into the phone he said: "Aw, chief, there isn't any danger. He's as gentle as a lamb. Children used to ride him as they did Jumbo. He minds me as if I'd always been his trainer. Don't queer us, chief. We're only trying to break even."

"Forget it. Supposin' he runs amuck, as they say?"

"He's got rheumatism," lied Hennesy, "and can't run."

"I'll tell you what. To-night at seven I'll drop over. If you can ride him up and down the alleyway without killing any one, I'll let you go ahead."

"That's fair enough. Be here prompt at seven, then." Hennessy hung up the telephone and mused. He was like a bather. The water was cold. Should he take a plunge or not? They were closing in on him. If he backed out now, he'd have to leave town. He would never hear the last of it. But it was hard to die so young.

At seven the chief and two patrolmen stood at the entrance of the alleyway, ready to hike, should the situation warrant hiking. The alleyway was hazy with the soft dusk of summer twilight. They squinted, but could not see very well, for the Rajah was of the same weather-beaten drab as the barn. They heard a squeak and a "Hey, old rubber sides!" And then they saw the elephant's bulk take form as it came forward. They did not recognize the white patch over the elephant's head, but they knew it to belong to Hennessy. It was his face, pale as the new moon. The Rajah passed the uneasy officials, swung to port, and went as far as the post office; then he came about, and three minutes later was securely chained for the night.

"All right," said the chief. "But don't take any chances. From Jones Street up Main to the canal and back. How'd you get on him?"

"Ladder."

"You can't beat the Irish," admitted the chief, as he climbed into his buggy and drove away.

Hennessy sat down on the curb. He was glad that he was alone. His legs would no longer support him. He had actually done it; he, Hennessy, had got upon the elephant all by himself. The church steeple wasn't in it. He had died ten thousand deaths, and yet here he was, alive and actually hungry.

I repeat, this is a veracious tale. Like Æneas, I may say that I saw all of it and was of necessity part of it. As a matter of fact, I was the cub who first started to whistle:

> When the band begins to play
> And the elephant goes around!

I was also the first to cease firing. Hennessy is to-day a power in politics, honest and fearless, and Morris is piloting a budding prize fighter toward the goal of championship, and making more money than Hennessy and myself put together. They never mention the Rajah. As a subject it is *taboo*. But whenever Hennessy goes to New York—— There! I am wandering away from the tale proper.

The parade began at ten-thirty. The Rajah shuffled up Main, the huge side banners showing vividly.

THE IMPERIAL DRY-GOODS STORE HAS NO ELEPHANT ON ITS HANDS

SPECIAL
HOUR SALES UNTIL FIVE

Hennessy, his heart full of bitter pride, marched along, touching the elephant encouragingly from time to time and passing out a banana whenever the long drab proboscis turned to the rearward. Grimly he recognized that there was one bright spot in all this; he wasn't in love. Any girl would have given

him the go-by, or she would have rushed out into the street and wept upon his shoulders, which would have been far worse. One thing was certain: this punk town would know a man hereafter when they saw him. Besides, if he could work this game for a week, he'd be richer than he had ever been before. A thousand boys formed the main procession. When the Rajah tacked and reversed the order of his going, they scattered like water bugs when you drop a stone into the pool. But presently they formed and followed as far as the barn.

The proprietor of the Granger Hotel mused upon the ways of humanity. Never had his luncheons been so popular. The diners not only wanted to see the elephant at close range, but they wanted a near view of the amateur mahout who had had his picture in the New York Sunday papers.

That night Hennessy and his friend fondled the check from the Imperial. It was handsomely lithographed, and was worth exactly what it called for, one hundred dollars. Meanwhile, Castle had delivered his ultimatum. He would hold Morris liable for the three hundred, if by the first of the week he did not hear from Rigtop.

"You see how it is, Hen."

"Yes, Morris. If the Rajah doesn't break my neck Saturday, I think we can pull out of the rut. But you hand it out to the bunch that I'm going to take no more joshing. I'm just aching for a fight."

"All right; I'll tip 'em off when you're peevish."

"And you tell Sheehan-Cort that Friday will have to be Saturday. The Bellevue Real-estate Company has closed for to-morrow and Friday at one-fifty a day. All I have to do is to lead the Rajah out to their dinky park and fed him hay. Chain him, you know, and make him salaam a few times. Thousand'll take the trolley out. Cash at night each day."

"By Jingo, Hen, it looks great. If this keeps up, we'll have some real money."

"If we can get rid of the Rajah quick enough. What's worrying me is, supposing Rigtop never sends for him?"

"We can go to law, then. Sell him to some zoo. If he's worth eight thousand, we can surely sell him for half that. Let's see. One hundred to-day, three from the Bellevue people, and two-fifty from the Sheehan-Cort—six hundred and fifty. And suppose we pay Castle; that'll leave one-seventy-five apiece."

"It would be great, if I was sure it wasn't going to end in my funeral. These elephants are queer birds. They always kill those they love best, and I don't know but old rubber sides is beginning to take a shine to me. He salaams every time I enter the stall. Well, what's the difference?" philosophically. "There's no one to care but my landlady, and her affections are worth just three weeks' board. The hired girl put an extra prune in my dish this morning for breakfast. That's fame!"

Saturday was a memorable day. The morning paper had carried a full-page advertisement, stating that at ten o'clock "Hennessy, the mahout," would ride the Rajah from Jones Street up Main to the Erie Canal. There would be special bargains every hour until eleven that night. The Sheehan-Cort Company never missed a chance to instruct and benefit its patrons.

A score of policemen lined Main Street. The Saturday bargaining crowd is always large in a provincial town, but on this occasion it was abnormal. The country people had come in for the markets, the schoolchildren and the unruly urchins, everybody in town who was anybody, waited and watched the clock in the savings-bank tower. "There he comes!" echoed and re-echoed. But it was eleven before "the extraordinary spectacle" hove in sight. There were cheers. Hennessy, in order to give full measure, had contrived to put on the Rajah's gaudy harness. It had taken some time and some mathematics. The Rajah was interested. This meant parade, and formerly his one happy hour was shuffling through the crowded streets, out in the sunshine.

How Hennesy got behind the Rajah's

ears is history. The ladder broke. For a while the redoubtable amateur was stumped. Finally he and Morris succeeded in tying a rope from the hayloft. Down this Hennessy slid to the broad back of the elephant.

"Gimme' the goad," said Hennessy. He shook it triumphantly, but as he did so the steel barb fell off and left in his hand nothing more dangerous than the end of a broomstick. He didn't appreciate this at the time, but the Rajah did. He was a wily old boy, and, aged as he was, was not without his pachydermous humor. Besides, he felt Hennessy's legs tremble behind his ears. Elephants are like horses. A man of courage may do as he pleases, and it is not well that the brute should sense fear in his rider. Now, Hennessy was not afraid. He was terribly nervous. The breaking of the ladder had shaken him, and he hadn't been sure of landing on the Rajah's back, via the rope. Once in the street, however, his courage was of a high order.

But if the Rajah had seemed a hundred feet high the other night he was miles high in the daylight. Hennessy recalled some pictures he had seen of the Alps. He hung somewhere between the Matterhorn and the Gornergrat. There was, however, the blood of County Antrim backing him in his exploit, and he was confident of both himself and the elephant.

The Rajah obeyed the erstwhile goad, turned into Main Street, and slowly and solemnly made headway toward the canal, which was about six hundred yards to the north. He cocked his ears up now and then, wondering why the band didn't begin. Hennessy's long legs saved him; otherwise he would have lost his balance and gone overboard. By putting his left hand back he could catch hold of the harness, and there was a sense of security in that.

The parade was a huge success as far as the Erie Canal. In the public square, which faced the canal, there stood a fountain. It was not as wide as a church door nor as deep as a well, but it was sufficient for the calamity which followed. The Rajah scented the water, and he headed for it, impervious to the whacks of the now useless goad. The Rajah arrived. So did the crowd, the police, and the ambulance, which, ghoul-like, saw a possible emergency case.

The Rajah drew in several gallons of water and washed out his mouth. Then he drew in several more gallons and squirted it along his sides. The crowd yelled delightedly. Hennessy might as well have attacked a carpet as the Rajah's skull. He rested his aching arm, and waited. Not for long. Once more the Rajah drew in water. Blash! Hennessy yelled this time, but the crowd shrieked. And again, blash! Hennessy, half strangled, laid down with his face against the elephant's raspy, warm head. One could hear the laughter for miles.

And then Hennessy had his revenge. The Rajah, as if sorry for the ridicule he had heaped upon his friend, turned his attention to the crowd. My! but there was a scattering and a tumbling to get out of range. The Rajah could throw water like a fire tower. A fat lady fainted, and the funeral directors who owned the ambulance were rewarded for their foresight. After this, the Rajah washed his feet, like the good Mohammedan he was.

And then, into the silence which had suddenly fallen upon everybody, the Rajah heard music. Somehow or other he must have missed the main parade. He swung westward, toward the sound, along the street which faced the canal. Boom-boom-boom! went a bass drum. There was also the tinkle of a tambourine and the umpaha of a jaded trombone.

Now it came to pass that the Salvation Army, realizing the possibilities of such an enormous crowd, had come out with the intent of making conversions on a magnificent scale. They had as usual taken their stand in front of a saloon. Next door, east, was Desimone's fruit and vegetable shop.

Behind the bass drum the Rajah paused. The Salvationists, who had not expected to bring an elephant around to their way of thinking, fled simultaneously and precipitately down the street toward the towpath. All save

the drummer. Boom-boom-boom! He went on banging away with closed eyes. He was making so much noise that he did not notice the sudden cessation of the tambourine and the trombone. A puff of moist, hot air, such as might come from a clothes boiler on Monday, stirred the hair at the base of the drummer's neck. He looked around peevishly. That one look was enough. The quickest thing he ever did was to get rid of that drum; the second quickest thing was the air-line route he selected for the first canal bridge.

As for Hennessy, he had "put his house in order," as the saying goes. At any moment the Rajah might throw him off. And he dared not slip off himself. So he waited.

Meanwhile the Rajah eyed the oranges and bananas and crisp lettuce. He selected carefully—after the manner of shrewd housewives—the largest and crispest bunch of lettuce and ate it with supreme relish.

Desimone shrilled: "Poleece!" He shook his fist at Hennessy. "Poleece! He steala my lettuce! Poleece! *Subito, subito! Villanzone!*" As this did not suffice, he appealed to all his Calabrian saints.

"Forget it!" snarled Hennessy, tossing down a ten-dollar bill, the only one he had in the world. He threw it away thus carelessly because he knew that he was never going to need ten-dollar bills any more. Having prepared to die, he had recovered his nonchalance.

Desimone waved his apron. *"Va, va!"*

The Rajah took up a fat beet, swung it to and fro, like a hammer thrower at a track meet, and flung it far into the canal. He was having the time of his life. He did not mean any harm; he was merely full of that mischief which besets a puppy. Next, he began to juggle the oranges. He caught hold of a leg of the stand and drew it toward him. A golden torrent flowed into the gutter. By this time the Italian was weeping. He was ruined, now and forever after. The Black Hand was back of this, somewhere.

"Hennessy," shouted a policeman, from a safe distance, "get that brute back to the stables or I'll arrest you."

"Arrest me? Kerry, I'll give you ten if you will. I can't do anything with the old codger. Get the hook-and-ladder and take me off."

The Rajah ate all the lettuce in sight, and then looked for further amusement. He espied the drum. He picked it up, and of his own accord wheeled and shuffled for Main Street. Hennessy whacked him on the left side, and the elephant turned down the thoroughfare, willing enough. He had had his fun, and he was now ready to obey the man behind his ears.

So, why speak of the thousands that followed the pair to the barn? Why refer to the undignified descent of the amateur mahout? Or that the Rajah took the bass drum with him into the stall and declined to surrender the mellifluous souvenir?

But Hennessy's troubles weren't over yet, not by any means. The chief of police gave him twenty-four hours to rid the town of the elephant. On Monday morning he would be shot as a menace to public safety. Morris sent a dozen telegrams, but none "scared up" Rigtop. The telegraph company, however, assured him that all the wires had been received.

The *Evening Herald* published a Sunday paper. Hennessy came into the editorial rooms about nine that night. He looked careworn. Seated by the city editor's desk were three men. But Hennessy, usually so curious, gave them no heed. How was he going to save poor old rubber sides? To be shot Monday morning, when he hadn't hurt any one! Why, he was going to miss that old elephant like sixty. He hadn't done anything but squirt water on the crowd, and many of them needed it. And as for Desimone's shop, the ten would cover all the damages. It wasn't square——

"Hennessy!"

"All right," mechanically. "What's wanted?"

"These gentlemen here want to see you."

"What about? More bills?"

"It's about your blasted elephant. You take another two weeks to-morrow. Don't poke your nose into this office until I send for you. Get out of town. Fade away. This gentleman here," indicating the dapper man of the three, "is the attorney representing a Mr. Tredwell. The other two are from the Brinx Zoo."

"What?"

"Yes, Mr. Hennessy. We'd like to talk with you."

"All right. Come over to Schmidt's."

Hennessy called up Morris and Castle.

The story was simply told. Rigtop had mortgaged the Rajah to Mr. Tredwell for four thousand, and the elephant belonged to him by default. In turn he had sold the elephant to the Brinx Zoo, and the two dark-bearded gentlemen were trainers. They would put the Rajah on his car Monday morning.

Hennessy reached into his pocket and exhibited the bill from the proprietor of the Granger Hotel. "When did this go by default?" he inquired cautiously.

"On June tenth."

"In that case your zoo will have to foot this bill. We are not responsible."

"Hm!" said the attorney, adjusting his glasses. "Forty for hay——"

"There's twenty more not down there," interposed Hennessy.

"Ha! Well, sixty and thirty-two make ninety-two. Very well, Mr. Hennessy. We'll pay that. But, on the other hand, we'll have to ask you for the six hundred odd dollars you've made, as the elephant was ours at the time of the transaction."

Hennessy looked at Morris; Castle looked at the two. Hennessy, almost a nervous wreck from the strenuous day, laid his head on his arms. He was all in.

The attorney reached over and patted the young man's shoulder. "Cheer up! You've got the right kind of stuff in you, my boy; and any time you're out of a job, write Mulligan here, and he'll fix you up. I have in my pocket here one thousand as a maximum for damages, and so forth. I'll pay the bill, and you chaps can keep the six hundred, and welcome."

"Hey, Schmidt!" yelled Hennessy. "Bring the silver bucket!"

LAMENTATION

By Walt Mason

THEY have gone from view, all the things we knew, in the brave old days of yore, and the mournful note of the lean coyote is heard on the hills no more. The sun shines down on the modern town, and the fences far are strong, and the postmen go where the buffalo was known when we all were young.

And the motors honk where I rode my bronk through oceans of prairie grass; ah, that sawed-off steed was a jo, indeed, but he's gone to the dump, alas! He was fourteen hands; he was scarred with brands, from his eyelashes to his tail; he had withers high, and a wicked eye; he was thin as a cedar rail. But his heart was strong and he'd lope along all day like a steel machine; oh, the brave old chap! He is off the map, and all of his kind, I ween! They raise horses now for the dray and plow, and trotters and saddlers, too, but the broncho's feet do not hit the street to-day as they used to do!

You have got things down in this modern town so liberty has no chance; a brass-bound "bull" will come up and pull a man if he tries to dance. Why, they had me jailed 'cause I merely wailed two bars of an old-time song! And a man is fined by your justice blind if he carries his gun along! In the good old days, why, the boys would raise ten kinds of a howdydo, and the village cop never made a yawp, but hid till the fun was through!

Oh, the good old days and the brave old ways, and the boys that I used to know! For your modern game is a thing too tame, and I sigh for the long ago!

Hands Up!

By Frederick Niven

Author of "Lost Cabin Mine," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS.

A young Scotchman, who tells the story, drifts out to the sagebrush country following a hot-headed encounter at home in which he thinks he has killed his opponent. He gives his name as John Williams, and obtains work with the Italian gang in a construction camp. The Italians resent his coming and a series of petty annoyances end in a general fight in the gravel pit. In the midst of the fracas comes a whoop and a slither of stones, and Apache Kid, a picturesque Western character, mounted on a cayuse, slides down the incline, gun in hand. That ends the fight, for Apache has a reputation for quick and accurate shooting. The young Scotchman meets Panamint Pete, a cowboy, who offers him a job at the Diamond K Ranch. Riding off on a ranch errand "Alias Bill," as the young Scotchman is now called, comes upon Apache and a guard of two soldiers who are about to shoot him. Apache has held up a train, been caught, and sentenced. He has managed to get a pardon with the understanding that he will show where he has hidden part of the loot. The soldiers have secret instructions to shoot him when they have gotten the bonds. But Bill's arrival on the scene turns the tables and the two soldiers are killed. Apache is telling his story when the foreman of the Diamond K rides along, and seeing Bill in Apache's company gives the Scotchman his time. Then Bill and Apache drift into town.

CHAPTER XI.

APACHE FEELS "TIRED."

DOUBTLESS you know that whimsical feeling, if not of proprietorship in a place, of belonging to it. On this return to Black Kettle, when I came down to breakfast in the morning, I found myself wearing quite the air of an old inhabitant—of being a citizen of Black Kettle. The railway meant less to me. I had seen a little way into the country beyond—and I was known. True, of cattle I knew just about as much as Apache Kid had told me as we rode in. The cowboy's life had been for me, so far, grooming horses, splitting wood, mucking stables, and mixing flour. I could at least say: "I have worked with the Diamond K outfit," if I could not say: "I've been riding the range for the Diamond K outfit;" and here I was in from the ranch, back in Black Kettle.

The charm of new countries, for the pilgrim, is that he feels himself very much playing a part in them. It is all so new to him that, looking round on all things, he stands outside himself and sees himself, too, in the new setting.

Biting a toothpick, in the fashion of Black Kettle, I sat in the hotel sitting room, very content, with the dollars from the Diamond K hardly touched. I was so much an "old resident" (!) that when the westbound came in I did not trouble to go and look out. I was in the position to size up quietly any one that might drop off the train.

I wandered, instead, over to the colonel's store, and strayed round there, considering various interesting objects: saddles with silver-mounted pommels; saddle ropes; saddle blankets, chaps, of leather, plain; of leather, fringed; of sheepskin with the hair outside. The colonel paid no heed. He never stepped forward and rubbed his hands and said: "What can I do for you?" He had the air of taking it for granted that one always came into his store simply to look round and blow smoke up into the low rafters.

I considered that when I got my next

This story began in the first September POPULAR. News dealers can supply back numbers.

job I would buy a pair of chaps. As it was, I had had to stitch laboriously a seat of leather into my ordinary pants.

The colonel, using his pursed lips for a pen rack, was fussing deliberately with accounts.

I saw a curiously patterned blanket among a heap at the end of the counter.

"What kind of blanket is this?" I asked.

The colonel looked up, looked at the blanket over his uneven spectacles, which he always put on, to look at a paper or an account, with an air of being unfamiliar with them.

"Navaho blanket," he said; "a twenty-dollar one."

"Oh! A Navaho blanket! I've heard of them," I said. "Is this, then, a genuine Indian-woven one?"

He looked blankly at me.

"A twenty-dollar one," he repeated, more deeply.

The colonel, I felt, was going to rob me of that sense of being an old inhabitant. I could feel that. Evidently the fact of saying it was a twenty-dollar one was tantamount to saying it was not an original Navaho. There is one trait in my character that I never condone. It is, to me, quite disgusting. I kick myself badly for possessing it, and one of these days I'm going to cut it out, destroy it. This trait: it is a way of trying to look as if I know things that I don't know. It has made me not know things sometimes, for a man has begun about something, and said: "You know?" and I have nodded my fool's head, and said: "Oh, yes!"—and he has simply said no more at all, instead of going on and letting me gather the facts of which I was ignorant.

"Oh! Twenty dollars, you said," said I, as if I had thought he had said "ninety." That is the strategic way of one with that absurd trait in his nature such as I have.

He looked at me again blankly.

"Yes, that's what I said," said he.

These quiet old men do make a greenhorn, when he is just beginning to play act to himself that he is in the swim, feel he is a greenhorn indeed—and so I retired. But I was to astonish the colonel later, that very evening, and show him that, after all, it does not follow that because a man is not posted on Navaho blankets he does not know a Colt from a derringer, a forty-four Remington from a Savage.

I walked back to the hotel. The train had evidently dropped some human freight. There was a stranger, to me at least, on the veranda. That was enough to make me think of Apache Kid.

"What does Apache keep staying around for?" I thought, for I had seen him, after breakfast, showing no sign of departure. "Sooner or later those two troopers are going to be hunted for—when they don't return."

I considered, however, that the newcomer might be the original founder of the place, who was just looking in again on it, and not a first, solitary sleuth, come gently and blandly to Black Kettle to make inquiries about the troopers. I did not, at any rate, advance on him and welcome him to Black Kettle, and invite him to a drink, as Black Kettle was lonely to a stranger. The Navaho-blanket incident had stuck in my mind. I left such hospitality to others.

I went into the barroom, and sat down to wait for dinner, hungry already. I sat meditating and staring at the blank face of the nickel-in-the-slot hurdy-gurdy. And presently Apache Kid came in from the sitting room, and sat down beside me.

The man outside had looked in once or twice already, while I sat there alone, and now he looked in again, rose, entered, and walked over to us.

"How do you do, Apache?" he said.

"How do?" said Apache. "What are you drinking?"

"I don't know that I am drinking," said the man.

"Sit down, then," said Apache, "and get your trouble off your chest. I've been expecting you."

I looked from one to the other. There was a grimness in the air.

"Expecting me?"

"Sure!" said Apache.

"Friend of yours?" asked the man, indicating me, and sitting down heavily;

he was a heavy man, heavy-handed, heavy-browed, heavy-cheek-boned, and heavy-mustached with a mustache like walrus tusks.

"Yes," said Apache. "Let me introduce you—Buck Johnson—Alias Bill."

"How do, Alias; pleased to meet you."

"How do, Mr. Johnson," said I.

"Er—could I have a word with you, Apache?" said Buck Johnson, and pulled his long mustaches.

"Right here," said Apache. "I have no secrets from my friend, Alias Bill."

"Oh!" said Johnson, and raised and lowered his brows, and nodded, and darted a quick, slanting glance at me again. Apache, I hasten to say, did not mean to drag me into his troubles. This was just his easy, insouciant, cheeky way.

"Well, I guess everybody knows," said Buck Johnson. "The papers don't say—but everybody knows."

"Knows what?" thought I. He shot a glance at me again, and I looked at the table.

"And I came along over to see you," he went on to Apache. "I want to know why my brother ain't setting here in Black Kettle along of you."

"Yes," said Apache, "it's quite an understandable question. From anybody but Jake Johnson's brother it would be a question too much; but from Jake Johnson's brother it shows a fine brotherly spirit—and a genuine spirit of that kind is a thing I admire."

"There ain't no need to butter me about it. But I'm glad you take it that way, for I bin feelin' mighty bad about it; and I feels——" He paused, and he looked heavy indeed. "I bin feeling I want an explanation, bin feeling as between brother and brother, and man to man, an explanation's reasonably expected."

"Sure!" said Apache, but at the phrase "between man and man" our eyes met.

"Well, sir," he said to Johnson, "I fought the governor first—and then I fought Judge ——, and then I rode no less a man than Senator ——. I rode him as you might say on a hackamore. If he'd been bitted I'd have got your brother out, too."

"Well, why didn't you, Apache Kid? You was both in the trouble. Couldn't you both pull out on the same deal?"

"I tried it," said Apache. "It was my fault. I set out determined to do it, and we played a few games, government and I. The governor set in first, and I just looked at his hand, and he quit. Then Judge —— sat in to the table, and he dropped out. Then along comes Senator ——."

"Yes, I know. He *is* the railway."

"He *is* the railway pretty nearly, as you say; and he's the roof of the White House, too, you might add."

"Yes? I ain't disputing it must have been an all-fired tough game."

"It was. I've kicked myself a bit. I set out to win, but I didn't know the game was to be so tight. I knew it was going to be tight, but I didn't know just how tight. In the last deal I had a good hand, too. I had three queens, and I reckoned that was enough; but the senator had four aces."

"I know. The table was strange to you, and the cards was a new pack in your hands, and you hadn't ever played a senator before. But I see three queens was somehow strong enough to get you off against his four aces. Why in heck didn't it get off Jake, too?"

He paused, and then with the air of an inquisitor he said: "He wasn't in the pot, Apache, he wasn't in the pot. That's what it is."

"He was in the pot, all right," said Apache.

"Well, he didn't come out," said Buck Johnson.

"No—and this is why: now I talk quite straight to you. Another man might consider that we should have put up our own game. We didn't. Jake had not the savvy to put up such a game. So I did. And, as I say—— Wait a minute!" for Buck Johnson was about to interrupt. "I put it up for both, and I won every deal but the last; but it's the last that counts when you're playing all your belongings, down to your saddle. I was right up to the place where we were both to get a pardon,

and then come out and take some men to where the bonds were, and say: 'There ye are, boys, and damn ye!' I was right up to there. But what was the posse to be?" He paused for Johnson to see the position, to let it soak in. "I said two troopers—he said eight. I considered, and said: 'Make it eight men picked by me, just ordinary citizens that will see the thing through.' 'No,' he said. 'Eight troopers or nothing.'"

"I wonder," said Johnson, "you didn't think of that before you sat in to the game."

"I'd point out," said Apache, "with all respect for your brotherly love," and he smiled, "for all your solicitous interest in Jake, that he didn't even think out a game at all."

"Um! Still you was both in for the thing, and you should both ha' come out."

"Well, I'm very patient, and I'm explaining to you, because I appreciate the brotherly spirit."

Buck Johnson was bulging his lips.

"And the last deal?" he asked.

"That was the last deal. It was just this—take it or leave it. 'We don't play again. We've played the last game, and you and Johnson leave here with eight troopers—that's your guard. The government is very easy about this, but the government can't run the chance of the scandal of two armed train robbers moving about like that. If you don't like it so I tell you what I'll do. I'll make it two troopers, and you alone.' Which would you have accepted, Buck Johnson?"

Buck said nothing.

Apache put his hands on the table and glared at Johnson.

"You! You'd never have tried to get your brother off," he said.

Down went Johnson's arm—and Apache's darted across the table, and he caught Johnson's wrist.

"I'm not armed now, Buck Johnson," he said, clutching the wrist, "and Black Kettle is pretty free, but if you pull on me when I have no gun—— Besides, Buck Johnson"—they were wrestling across the table, Apache still gripping Buck's wrist—"besides, Buck Johnson, if I was out of it where would you get any one to tell you where the dough was hid? You're not the man"—Johnson ceased to struggle—"you're not the man to force me to show you the dough—not to force me—as I forced the government to show me a pardon. And what you really want is a share of that wad."

He sat back. The bartender leaned on the counter, staring, watching intently.

"Now you're talking," said Buck Johnson.

"Of course, the other way is for me to keep Jake's share till he gets out," said Apache.

Buck gave an ugly laugh.

"He'd be an old man then," he said.

"And ready to retire," said Apache, and laughed back at Buck. "Now, Mr. Johnson, I've explained all that I think you are entitled to know, and——"

"Dinner's ready, gents. Come in and eat," came the proprietor's voice.

Dinner was eaten in silence, and after it was "through" Apache rose.

"Going up to my room for a siesta," he said. "I feel tired."

Johnson sat glaring after him; then, ignoring me, he rose and marched into the barroom and called for a drink.

I sat there considering that I liked Johnson not at all. If his brother, Jake Johnson, were anything like him he would be much more what I thought the typical holdup man than was Apache Kid. Not but what Apache Kid was a very unusual man, and with a streak of something almost crazy at times in his composition.

Ah Sing came in to clear away the last dishes, so I passed to the barroom.

I had another look at Johnson. He was drinking and thinking, leaning heavily against the bar. He half turned and glanced at me.

You know that feeling of being aware when a man is thinking of offering you a drink, weighing up the chances of being able to pump you? I felt that then, and so I decided to move away and settle Johnson's argument with himself as to whether I was open to be useful to him by absenting myself. I rose abruptly and marched off.

Then it struck me that there was going to be bad trouble for Apache Kid.

"I'll go and advise him to go off today," thought I. "How long will they give these troopers? How long will they defer a search for them? It is at Black Kettle that inquiries will first be made. Apache will be found here, and arrested, to begin with—till they are heard of."

I went upstairs. I found Apache's room, and knocked.

"Come!" he called, and I walked in, and was confronted with a revolver.

He was lying down on the bed, fully dressed.

"Wasn't sure of the step," he said, lowering the gun. "Sit down. Cigarettes?" He tossed tobacco bag and papers to me.

I sat down on the one chair, and rolled a cigarette.

"Have you thought," said I, "that it is only a few hours' journey from Fort Lincoln to here—and that, at any time, troopers may arrive?"

He lay looking at me, an arm supporting his head as well as the pillow, which he had pulled from under the coverlet.

"I told them we would take nearly a week," he said. "There's plenty of time. I was waiting to see how many spongers would want me. I have four days yet in Black Kettle to receive personal enemies."

"Oh, yes, of course," I said. I rose, blowing smoke.

"Look here," he said, and he spoke very quietly. "Remember, I killed them both. But, seeing you are so much interested in me taking care of my neck, you could do me a favor."

"What is it?" I asked.

"To take a packet for me up to Mrs. Johnson."

"Where?"

"At Johnson's ranch."

"Mrs. Johnson! There's no one there."

"Yes, there is. She is back there again now. She only left on the day of the holdup because Johnson told her and she would have nothing to do with it. But she's back now. You see, legally, she can sit in that ranch shack for six months. The place was rented—for an experimental farm, money paid down, too—for six months. She's back there by now."

"But she didn't come by Black Kettle. How do you know?"

"Well, I'm willing to bet she is there, anyhow," said Apache. "She'll be longing for some news. And she knows me a little bit. And she knows that I know no other place, bar one, where she might be. And as she has friends at the other place, I expect she's up at the ranch, so as to have both houses open to me in case I have anything to communicate."

I considered.

"And are others not likely to watch for you at these places?" I was really thinking of his safety, not of my own in the chance of me going up to the ranch as he wanted. His quick look made me add: "Oh, of course you can't go up yourself."

"Yes—but so long as I stay here Buck Johnson stays here, too. You can take a horse and go for a little pasear, and he will think nothing. I'm here—that's all he'll think of. He's going to watch my movements."

"I'll go," said I.

"Good!" said he.

And I don't think that it was just a memory of the help he had given me at the dago camp that made me eager to help him.

CHAPTER XII.

A TRAIN ROBBER'S WIFE.

Mrs. Johnson was a large, hard-looking woman, or perhaps I had better say strong-looking woman, with kind eyes. She must have been a very resolute woman to live alone here—that is, judging her from the standards of the old country. I had ceased to judge men from these standards, but she was the first woman round Black Kettle with whom I had come in contact, and I think my first thought on coming in sight of the ranch—with the afternoon shadow of the great fir tree opposite it running across the wagon road, up the wall, and resting on the roof—and seeing her pass round the gable and then look up, hear-

ing me, was that she was a very resolute woman indeed.

Of course, it was hardly to be expected that Jake Johnson was the kind of man to marry a timid little mouse. When I saw that tall, square figure fold its arms and stand rigid at the gable end, I decided that I was to meet a virago.

A dog plunged out of the ranch, and came baying toward us, and I heard the woman's voice calling it back. It was a pleasant kind of voice, and caused me to pull up and doff my hat in an open frame of mind.

"Good day, ma'am," I said, reining up.

"Good day, stranger," said she.

"Are you Mrs. Johnson?" I asked.

"That is my name, young man," said she.

I passed the little packet to her, and said I:

"The Apache Kid sent me to you with this."

Her face lit, and then she frowned. She held the parcel and looked at it, and turned it over, undecided. Suddenly she looked up at me, and said:

"Do you know the contents of this parcel, young man?"

"I do, ma'am," said I.

"Friend of Apache's?" she asked.

"Well," said I, "considering that Apache practically saved my life a week or two ago, I do not suppose I am an enemy."

"Very well put," said she. "I see you're a white boy. You'd better tie your horse up and come in and drink tea before you go back. And say, young man, you can put your hat on again."

I slipped off the white horse, who lowered his head to exchange, I presume, some greeting of what we call the "lower animals" with the mongrel dog. They exchanged breaths, and I followed Mrs. Johnson into the shack.

A black teapot stood on the stove, the veritable black teapot that had invited Pete in here so short a time ago, and yet it seemed ages ago. So much had happened since he and I passed here; it all flashed through me as I followed Mrs. Johnson—the swirling arrival of Apache and Jake Johnson, the recognition, the departure, the bucking wood and mixing flour, and reading the garish accounts of the holdup, the queer position of the "John Williams or William Barclay" incident, the pleasure of being ordered on "the range," the flutter of the incident of the hollow tree, the strained talk with the foreman of the Diamond K, the thoughtful mien of the Diamond K owner, the kind of flurry that had filled my heart during the last two or three hours, the sense of unreality to one but recently come from classrooms and lectures, and policemen regulating traffic at the corners.

A *tap, tap, tap* gave me a little jump, and brought me back to Johnson's ranch and the knowledge that a woodpecker was at work in some tree near by.

"So you're the young man that worked with the dago push on the railway," said Mrs. Johnson. "There's some folk would think the less of you for that, but I ain't one of them. A young man, green from the old country, who can hold down a job like that—he's got the real thing in him. Have I to open this parcel?"

"Perhaps you'd better," said I, "in case there might be an answer."

"Just in a minute."

She took a dipper from a bucket, filled the kettle, and put it on the stove. Then she undid the packet, and out rolled wads of bills and gold coins all over the table.

"For the land's sake!" she cried, and, sitting down on the stool, fell into thought.

"There's a note in the bag," I said.

She fumbled and drew it out.

"Read it to me," she said. "I ain't got my glasses."

I unfolded the paper and read: "Jake Johnson's share," and put the paper down on the table.

Suddenly she got up.

"Well," she said heavily, "every nickel of that goes in the bank. I told Jake what—I told him that if he kept on at these kind of things I wouldn't touch a nickel of it. There's wives would leave a man for the like of this. I told him that if he went through with that holdup I would go down into Montezuma and

start a laundry. I reckon Montezuma would rally to a white woman and let the chink to go somewheres else. It's real white this of Apache—that's the worst of it. A woman like me that's seen a lot sees all that side of it, too. I was a nurse in the Civil War, I was. Man is queer. When you come right up against that kind of thing, men screamin' and swearin' and dyin', and men not lettin' themselves scream and swear, and askin' you to write letters to their folks and all that, it shows you right inside. I was never the same after the war. I got a different idea of men. I got to see men more like a man sees them—good and bad—don't seem to matter much so long as a man is white. Apache Kid, he's white, and my man, Jake Johnson, he's white, too. Do you like it strong or weak?"

"Not too strong."

"Not too strong," she said, "no. Well, kid, you take an old woman's advice—you keep on the rails. Here's this Apache Kid now—I've bin swearin' at him these last few days, and now he plays up white. Well, you take him my good wishes. I was through the war, you see, and a woman who's bin a nurse through the war, she gets a different view of things. If Apache's white to my husband he's white to me. Maybe I don't like my husband's ways, maybe I threaten to leave him, and I reckon I would have left him, too—and you don't find no other man come cavortin' round me. That's his affair and mine, and this here holdup, that was Jake Johnson's and Apache Kid's."

She sat and looked at the money—at the heap of gold and paper.

"Where did you see them after the holdup?" she asked.

It suddenly dawned upon me that she did not understand.

"I've come from Apache just now," I said.

"What do you mean?" she said.

"Apache's out," I said.

"Out!" she cried. "Escaped?"

"No," said I. "He's pardoned."

"Pardoned! And Jake?" She had poured out the tea. "I got to sit down," she said. "You tell me about it," she said.

"Well," said I, "there were some government bonds in that train, and after the holdup they put them in a hollow tree. Now, Apache saw that he could not use these bonds as a lever before the trial, or at the trial; the country would have to know all about the trial. He waited until they were sentenced, and then he asked to see the governor, and the governor sent for him."

"For the land's sake!"

"And then Apache said: 'Now, you want these bonds; I know where they are; you will have them if you give me a full pardon.'"

"For himself?" broke in Mrs. Johnson.

"For both," I said.

She leaped up and cried out: "Then Jake's a-comin'? You're a-breakin' it to me? This here's a surprise party?"

"I would to God it was," I said, for the affection of this hard, kind woman, who had been through the war and had her outlook changed, who looked like a woman in her prime, but who must have been on the threshold of old age, touched me very deeply. "If you will compose yourself," I said.

"Compose myself!" she cried. "And me through the war before you was born! The way you men do go on! Women that don't know men all says that every man is a child to a woman, but you men treats every woman like a child. You tell me your story, young man."

The voice was very hard, and I said: "Believe me, Apache Kid did his best to get Jake off—Mr. Johnson, I mean."

"Well," said she, "I ain't decided yet that he didn't. But you tell me, and I'll see what I think myself."

So I told her the whole story, she interjecting little exclamations as I told, now concentrating her brows, very thoughtful, anon nodding her head and keeping up the nod-nodding. After I finished she sat frowning. She was chewing the cud of the story. Then she rose, and pushed the money into one heap.

"Apache Kid did his best," she said

quietly. Suddenly the dog gave voice outside. Mrs. Johnson started. I ran to the door, and the first thing that struck me was that the white horse had gone.

"Where's the horse?" I cried.

"There he is—in the bottoms," said she, just as I caught sight of his white head raised among the long grass of the bottoms, and his ears pricked to the sound of the dog's voice.

Mrs. Johnson thrust me suddenly back into the shack.

"You go in there," she said, and pointed to the little rear room, curtained off by two hanging blankets. Scarcely had I entered and dropped the curtains behind me than I heard a subdued chink of gold. She had only time to push it to the back of the table beside the wall, and throw her apron over it, and then a horseman pulled up at the door, and the dog barked afresh, and a man's voice hailed: "You there, Mrs. Johnson?"

"Come right in," called Mrs. Johnson. "I ain't got no matches."

"Good evening, ma'am; no more have I. Want a light for the lamp? Allow me, ma'am," and he opened the door of the stove. "Got a piece of paper?"

Peeping through, as it was safe to do, the shack being now so much in shadow, I saw her take up Apache's note and twist it into a spill which she handed to the newcomer. He lit the lamp. I saw the glow striking upon his heavy face, the long mustaches making him look like a walrus. He turned up the wick as the mist cleared in the funnel.

"Just come up to see how you were getting on, Mrs. Johnson," he said suavely. "It's the least a brother-in-law can do."

Mrs. Johnson snorted.

"Well, it's real good of you, Buck," she said; "but I don't think I stand in need of any consolation."

He sat quiet for a long time.

"Ain't you going to be sociable?" he said.

I think she had sat down to some sewing. Said she:

"Did any one know you was coming up here?"

"Why, sure," he said. "I says to the pro-prietor of the hotel: 'Well,' I says, 'I'm goin' up to see Mrs. Johnson. She's liable to be wantin' somebody up there, and train robbery or no train robbery,' says I, 'it's the least a brother-in-law can do. I'll go up,' says I. 'She might want a man to stop with her overnight. It's a kind of lonesome place.'"

There was another long pause. I could hear the faint sound of Mrs. Johnson's stitching. Also the dog growled.

"You can go right back, Buck Johnson," said she, "and tell the pro-prietor of the hotel that Mrs. Johnson said: 'Thank you kindly for comin' up, but she'd rather be alone. It's a gossipy country, and there's no Buck Johnsons coming around to take care of a lonesome woman!' Do you hear me, Buck Johnson?"

And then I heard a long, low whistle from Buck Johnson.

"Oh!" he said. "He's been and gone, has he, then?"

I heard his quick step across the floor, and the sound of his hand crunching a bunch of bills. The dog, roving round the room, sniffed at the blanket curtains, wondering why I hid there.

"I'll just take a handful of these, Mrs. Johnson," said Buck Johnson.

I slipped my gun from the holster and stepped right out.

"Put up your hands, Buck Johnson!" I called. I was absolutely alert and calm, and saw my whole plan of campaign.

"If you move," said I, "I fire." I stepped more close to him. "I'm going to take your gun off you."

"Don't you!" he said.

"Don't you move," I said quickly. I took his gun, I undid the buckle of his cartridge belt, and I put both on the table.

"Now, Mrs. Johnson," said I, "Mr. Buck Johnson was so solicitous on your behalf that he left you his gun and his cartridge belt. Do you think you could get my horse, Mrs. Johnson?" I added.

"I guess I could," she said, and passed out.

"All right," said Buck Johnson to me sourly. "You have it on me this time."

"I have," said I.

"I'll have it on you one day," he said. "And you won't get off easy."

"You're tempting Providence," said I. "Better not discuss this affair any more."

"I've got him!" came Mrs. Johnson's voice from outside.

"Thank you," I called; "we're coming. Now then, Mr. Johnson, step out!"

He marched to the door.

"Now," said I, "you're going to mount, and you're going to ride a length ahead of me; and if you make it two lengths," I went on determinedly, "my gun goes full cock. And if you make it three——" said I.

"His name's Dennis," put in Mrs. Johnson, "and I don't blame ye. Don't you trouble to raise your hat, sir; and my compliments to the pro-prietor of the hotel."

And so we mounted and rode off from the "Hollow Fraud."

CHAPTER XIII.

A JOB AT THE PUEBLO WALL.

The scene, when we came to Black Kettle, was laid in such a way as to appeal to Buck Johnson.

The eastbound was just drawing into the station, slowing up, the bell clanging.

Johnson evidently decided that he would rather not have me tell the Apache Kid, while he was "in town," what had happened at Mrs. Johnson's shack. When we gained the metals at the crossing he slipped from his horse, gave it a thump on the haunch, and ran helter-skelter to the platform, a black shadow in the blue night.

Very well—if he wished to go he could. Knowing Apache Kid somewhat by now, I decided that it was a good way out—otherwise Apache might get into more trouble; for if Apache heard from me of the occurrence at the ranch there would be trouble between the two, and Apache had probably found out by now that Johnson had not stayed soaking in the barroom.

I reined up, and saw Johnson board the train, and then I rode wildly on to the colonel's. The old man was at his stable door, opening it for the horse Johnson had ridden.

"Back again?" he said.

"Back again," said I.

"You didn't see the gent that had this horse, did you?"

He was looking up at me keenly. I suppose it is what you would call chivalry that came up in me then. I remembered what Mrs. Johnson had said about gossip. I never thought that Buck Johnson had not told the hotel proprietor where he was going when he hired the horse to follow me, remembered only that he had said that he had done so.

"Colonel," said I, "if you are interested, I can tell you a whole lot about the man that rode that horse."

He looked more sharply.

"You haven't killed him, have you?" he asked.

I thought again that he had wind of the story in some way—but I was wrong, as I found out later.

"He's just gone out on the eastbound," said I.

"Oh!" said the colonel. "You saw him?"

"I waited to see him board her."

"You did?" thoughtfully.

"I did."

"Did you see where he come from?"

"I did. He came from Jake Johnson's ranch, in front of me, all the way. And I want to tell you, the oldest inhabitant of Black Kettle—whose word goes here, as they say—that if you hear any story about Buck Johnson having gone up to the ranch and stayed there to protect Mrs. Johnson, it's all lies. I suppose he told you that was what he was up to?"

"He told me nothing. He just hired a hoss for the arternoon and evening. You met him, you say?"

"I had to carry a message to Mrs. Jake Johnson. I brought Mr. Buck Johnson back into Black Kettle in front of my gun, and he elected to take the train. I didn't stop him. I thought it better not."

"Say," said the colonel, leading in

the white pony, I having dismounted, "Black Kettle seems to be getting to be a storm center. I think you know a heap, but I think you'd better keep tight holt of it till you're more posted up on what's been happening in Black Kettle since you've been away these few hours."

"What has happened?" I cried. It struck me that perhaps Apache and Johnson had fought, after all, when I went off. "What has happened?" I cried.

"Two dead troopers brought in on a wagon from the old trail this side of the Diamond K."

"Oh!" I said.

"And they're the two troopers that went out with a man you're becomin' tolerably friendly with. And he's lit out."

"He's gone?"

"He's gone. Now, young man, you've got some tall thinking to do; and be thankful you didn't get more friendly than you did with that gent. He's a man I admire. But he's a whole jag of danger to a bosom friend."

He closed the door, and seemed by his manner to signify that the talk had finished.

"You come to me, young man, if you see a square deal of a way out; but you want to go around and have a look at the play before you take a hand. It ain't fair to let you buck into a game like this with the idea that the table lies just the way you left it."

"Thank you, colonel," I said, and crossed to the hotel with a great deal in my mind to consider, and a certain trepidation.

There was no one in the hotel. A hushed air reigned supreme in the barroom. The barman sat at a table, writing arduously, with a bad pen, and tongue going in and out in time with the pen's scratching. The proprietor looked sharply at me when I entered the room, and the tone of his "Good night, sir," was reserved.

I asked no questions. I merely awaited developments. Supper time came. Scotty's supper time came. But Scotty did not arrive. At the meal—and I was the only supperer—what I wanted to eat was all that the proprietor seemed to be interested in. I might have been a new arrival. I thought that perhaps I was about to be tabooed; but I did not know the proprietor. This was no taboo. He simply was not going to talk—for my own sake, too. Black Kettle was as desolate as on the night I first struck that deceptive "city." The nickel-in-the-slot machine stared with blank face on the winking leaden spittoon; the stars looked under the eaves; the dim lamplight shone outward and cast an orange slab on the veranda.

With a queer feeling of being on the edge of a volcano, waiting for bad news, a sense of suspense, I sat in the dim-lit sitting room; then I passed to the dim-lit barroom; then to the veranda; then back to the bar. I did not want to go over to the depot. I knew that the troopers lay there.

The troopers were brought in on a wagon, so much the colonel had told me. But who had brought them in? What had been said? What had been done? I had plenty of questions to ask, but I asked none, and barman and proprietor evaded me Perhaps to-morrow would speak, of its own accord. I went to bed, with my gun under my pillow, and slept, being quite tired.

I ate a lone breakfast. The proprietor was mute. Scotty came over for his breakfast, and merely nodded his head to me, snapped "Morning!" and sat down to eat, morose and wolfish. He was really too excited to speak at all this time.

Then there came—after breakfast, when I stood on the veranda asking myself what my plan of campaign was to be—trudging down the benches, a man packing blankets. It was my old friend, Panamint Pete, of the Diamond K.

"Hallo, Pete!" I hailed, as he marched up to the Palace.

I could have fallen into his arms. This mute Black Kettle was telling on me.

"Hallo, Bill!" and he flung his blanket down and came up the steps and pump-handled me. "Still here?"

"Still here," I said. "But I'm getting sick of being idle. Do you know of any jobs?"

"Looking for one myself," said he.

"Quit?" I asked.

"Sure! I can't stand that foreman. What are you drinking? Let me stand. I got my time with me."

We passed into the bar and liquidated. Then, plump and straight to the point, I asked the barman, unable to stand any more silence, whether patience and reticence were advisable or not: "Do you know what's become of the Apache Kid? What happened yesterday?"

He shook his head slowly.

"And I don't want to know," he said. "That Apache Kid is all right. As a man I got no kick against him. I never saw him any other than a white man; but he's a storm center. Yesterday afternoon, just after you rides up the benches, two dead troopers comes down here on a wagon; wonder you didn't meet them," and he looked at me, as I thought, suspiciously. "They goes aboard a freight passing through." So I was wrong in thinking they were at the depot. "And now I ain't interested. I don't want to hear anything more. There's things I am interested in. There's boys I don't want to know no more about. Them two troopers is of that brand. I ain't got no use for them. They was the two troopers who went up in the hills with Apache Kid. Now —what I say—it stands to reason he didn't shoot them like that. He had just got out of trouble. He wasn't looking for fresh trouble. There's a heap of questions goin' to be asked in Black Kettle mighty soon—and—and I said enough. I'm trainin' for silence—no savvy, that's my motto right now."

"Just you tell me this," said I. "Did Apache have a gun when he went out with the troopers? I wasn't around then, you know. I was at the Diamond K."

"Gun? A gun? Say! I don't think he had! No—by heck, he hadn't! I'll swear he hadn't—but I don't want nothing to do with that case. Apache should have stayed on here. Them two troopers brought in on the wagon sent him off. He should have stayed on here and proved himself innocent."

"Not necessarily," said I. "He may have had business in Black Kettle, and just finished it."

"What kind of business could he finish so sudden—that he was right there on the depot when the wagon came down, and when Scotty turned to look at him he had plumb evaporated."

"Oh—it was like that?"

"It was like that. You mark my word, there's going to be inquiries in Black Kettle, and Black Kettle is going to get a name for a hot burg. You pulls out maybe about two o'clock. Ten minutes after Buck Johnson pulls out. Apache comes down about an hour after. He asks for you——"

"For me?" I cried.

The barman looked a little amazed at me, or curious.

"For you," he said. "I tells him I see you ride over to the benches—guessed you had gone back to the Diamand K. 'Oh, yes,' he says. Then he says: 'See Friend Johnson around?' 'No,' I says; 'I ain't seen him around for some time. Maybe he's at the depot.' He strolls over to the depot, and as he goes over the wagon comes down. Scotty gets plumb excited. Scotty suggests sendin' 'em—that's the two corpses—to Lincoln on first freight. In comes the freight right then, and Scotty and the teamster look sideways for Apache Kid—and he has plumb evaporated. Train pulls out. Now I'm quit! I've said all I'm goin' to say!"

In bounded Scotty. I thought it was some fresh turn of Apache's affairs that brought him hither. But no. He was mute about Apache still.

"Hello, you boys! Want a job?" he cried.

We turned about.

"I do," said I.

"If horses is its name," said Pete, "I'm open."

"Well, Henry has wired to me to see if I can send him up some men."

"Henry? Oh! That's for roundup."

"Who's Henry?" I asked.

"Henry & Stell," said Pete.

"Yes, I've heard of them."

"Well, he's wired to say that if I hear of any men looking for a job he's sending in a wagon for some stuff—and to send them out to him. There you are, boys."

"Have something on me," said Pete, and nodded his head to the bar.

"No—no—no! Excuse me this time, Pete. I want to keep on the water wagon. If I take one glass I might take two—and then I talk."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Pete. "Can't you get off once, and jerk 'way the whip?"

"No—nothing. You'll excuse me," said Scotty.

"What! You scared you blab something in your wild moments—something of your wild past?" asked Pete.

"I say, Scotty," said I, "can I have a word with you?"

He looked at me, and then shook his head.

"You go to Henry's, and get to work," he said, and dived out of the hotel.

"Bughouse!" said Pete. "Time he was on the water wagon." Then suddenly—— "Say," he said, and startled me as if he had fired his gun, "did you see that there pardon of Apache's?"

"I did," said I.

Another long pause.

"You cast your eye over it?"

"Yes—I read it."

"It was straight goods?"

"What do you mean?"

"It wasn't a bluff of Apache's?"

"No—it was no bluff. It was a genuine pardon."

"Well, you wouldn't be fooled. You're a college man. You were satisfied about that pardon?"

"I was, absolutely. But I'll tell you what I wasn't satisfied about."

"Oh! What was that?"

"Well, the pardon was all right, but it was a tall story——"

"The pardon makes the story true, don't it? If you believe the pardon you believe the whole story."

"It's not that. These bonds were wanted very badly. Good! Give him a pardon—get the bonds—and then ——" I left it in air.

"Government wouldn't play a game like that."

"That's what even Apache Kid was not sure of," I fired off at him. "I had better tell the story," said I, and I told him, as rightly as I could, the whole affair of the hollow tree, just as you know it.

"Say—this is a curious story," said Pete, when I had ended. "But it has the brand of truth to any man who knows the curious ways of life——"

"Well," I said, "you know it all now."

"One thing I settle, anyhow," said he, "and that is that I don't throw no lariat in this contest. I lay off and look on. I see all the various possible moves, but I says right now that the game is a crooked game to begin. It begins with a holdup. There you are! When a game is crooked I reckon the turn of the cards is crooked, too."

After a long pause—in which he had been considering the whole affair, and my part in it, and Apache's determination to be responsible for both, which had brought from Pete a cry of: "That was a white man, but only right!"—he extended his hand.

"This here holdup," he said, "ain't no or'nary holdup. This here holdup is an almighty business—and I want to shake your hand. As a friend of civilization you was plumb wrong. But as a gent and a man you was white, and I want to shake. But don't you tell everybody."

"I've told no one else," I said.

"So far as that goes you ain't told me," he said.

He gave my hand another pressure—and then we discussed Henry & Stells, otherwise known as "The Triangle," because of its brand, or "The Pueblo Wall," because of the remains of what was regarded as an old pueblo beside it. That subject waned, and his mind reverted again to Apache Kid; abruptly he turned to me, and asked me to repeat the story of the hollow tree; and interjected many questions regarding details. When I ended, said he:

"Now, remember Apache Kid's

words: 'You didn't shoot anybody.' He shot them both. They're goin' to get Apache sure—and there ain't no sense in swingin' with him only because you happened to be on the trail that day, and because you was friendly enough to chip in on that deal, the way any gent would do. No, sir. Don't you forget, there ain't a gent from Idaho to Arizona would say you killed one of them troopers. When a marshal shoots a holdup man he ain't a murderer, but the State is dispensing justice. Well, when you shoots that trooper you was only preventing him from committing a murder. You ponder on that, and get it fixed proper in you; no hair brand, but plumb well in. And don't you go trying to help Apache with evidence, for you'll be cross-questioned. You want from now on to have only heard of Apache Kid casual, and be very little interested in him."

Good advice, but——

CHAPTER XIV.

"COW SENSE."

It was riotous and dirty work.

Always fond of horses, at the Triangle Ranch I grew to love one or two.

I know it is the fashion to say that the cow-puncher is dead. But he is not. True, he does not trail herds now from Texas to Dodge City; also he pays more heed to his stock nowadays in the way of breeding; also he puts up at least a little hay for some animals. Yet he is not dead. It was not only at the Triangle that I decided the cow-puncher was not dead; later, as I shall tell, I had ample proof that he was not.

Cattle ranching on the old-time scale is, of course, only to be found in Mexico. They say that General Terrazo, the cattle king, owns a million head of cattle. But I fear it will be little use for the cow-puncher of these States, when sheep have finally ousted him, to hit the trail for Durango, and strike the bosses—*El Padron*—in Chihuahua and Sonora; for the vaquero draws but ten dollars a month, and is always "in the hole," tied to his store bill.

At the Triangle, at any rate, I learned to love a horse. I remember well the one that, at four of the morning, my first morning at the Pueblo Wall, I selected from the saddle bunch. He stood on his hind legs, and pawed the air as soon as I got my rope over his neck. Perhaps he thought, seeing that I cast the rope a good dozen times before I attained my end, that I was as poor a seat on a saddle as a hand with a rope.

It was, at the moment, all very fine to remember how Catlin, in his "North American Indians," tells of the Cheyenne Indians lassoing wild horses, tightening the noose, and then coming closer and closer to the horse, still tightening the noose, and at last getting the lassoed horse's head down, and "taking its breath." It reads as possible. I quite believe that the Cheyennes did the trick. A cat or dog will smell a man's breath to gain an understanding of him. A horse may very well know that a man is friendly, although he is half throttling it, by smelling his breath.

But I decided that I was not built after the pattern of the Cheyenne Indians of Catlin's day. I merely hung on, dodged him when he came down, hung on again; two men came to my aid then, and we threw the brute, and saddled him where he lay kicking on the ground. Then I straddled him, all of a tremble with the struggle—as excited as he. Then a yell—and up he rose—up we rose. But that was the worst of him.

It was another horse, on another occasion, one who let me saddle him as if he was a rocking-horse, who unseated me. He hung his head, and looked round and watched me saddling in the most lugubrious fashion; so dejected did he seem to be that I determined to practice roping, and thus be able to pick what horse I fancied, instead of taking what horse came nearest. But he was bluffing and smiling at me. As soon as I was on his back he trotted forward, still bluffing, and then suddenly bucked the glorious buck that flung me over his head and under the lowest bar of the corral. I spent that first day in doing

nothing else but riding these two bronchos. I christened the first Submissive, and the second Meek—and sat in a bucket at supper time, to the intense delight of the outfit.

"Pete's partner is sure an original gent," I heard one say.

But the trick was not mine. My Quixote-loving father had told me, when I rode a donkey once in Arran without a saddle, which, for discomfort, is like riding a cottage roof in an earthquake, that he had lived in the saddle by day when first he went to Venezuela—that was before his Chilean days—and sat in a bucket to his meals, and slept on his face!

But the incident gave me a new name. I was "Bucket Bill" thereafter, so far as the Triangle was concerned. An unfortunate nickname it was to become, when later I struck a saloon with the boys, for it gave strangers the impression that I drank neither from glass nor bottle, but from—a bucket.

Cowboys, in the old days, obtained more wages than sheep-herders. Sheep-herders, indeed, very often obtained a bullet. But now, when the sheep-herder has his caravan, and can run a home around with him, on wheels, and has sixty dollars a month, the cowboy has only forty. I have heard folk say that the fact that there are still plenty of men to ride the range shows that the old romance of the riding calls, and twenty dollars more a month does not, as they say, cut any ice.

But, though there is something in that, I think it is not all. Miners say: "As crazy as a prospector;" but cowboys say: "As crazy as a sheep-herder." And plenty of men fight shy of the sheep-herder's lonely life—"Baa! Baa! Baa!" from morning to night; and nothing but the hills, and the sky, and the clouds coming up, and going over, and going down, and the sun going up and going down—and the Great Dipper circling round, and Sirius a blue flame, and Mars a red, and nothing else but little winds, and silence, and sniff-sniff-sniffing of sheep. It is not every man who can hold down a sheep-herder's job.

The cow-puncher's life is different. A man may be alone for hours; but he is hunting cattle, yelling to them, following them—to meet another man with another bunch. And then there is the dinner, all together, about noon; after that work all together; and then at night there is the company—the rise and fall of cigarette glow around the fire, the cans of tea that are like nectar, the beans, and flapjacks that are fit for kings—eaten in company. People condemn solitary drinking. But solitary eating is enough to drive a man to solitary drinking.

At the Triangle, as at any ranch, there were discomforts—you do not ride uphill and down dale from four of the morning till noon, driving cattle, without getting hot, nor do you get hot without sweat; you do not work in, or around, the corrals, without more sweat. A round-up outfit knows the meaning of "the dust and heat of the day."

There were representatives from half the ranches in the State, although the Triangle practically conducted its own round-up, its herds numbering well over the forty thousand.

One day I would be sent out on a near ranch, and be in before noon. Another day I would be on the farther circles, and proud, too, of it, and come in late, drop off my horse, and seize a tin plate with the best of them—but mighty happy, and "feeling good," if the bunch I had added to the day herd was a worthy one.

Tea! Tea has been my tipple ever since these days. It has never been the same tea, but I drink it, nevertheless. I remember one night, as I took up the pan of tea, feeling so "good" and happy, recalling a phrase of Heraclitus, and I spilled some of that nectar on the ground before drinking, and looked up at the stars. My shirt was sticking to my shoulder blades, and I was cold after the day's work, but I poured a libation to the gods—all on my lonesome there.

There was a funny little pang the moment after—one gets sentimental, too on the range—the pang was at the thought that I was quite alone in the camp, that "Bucket spilled his tea," if

any noticed at all; I doubt if any did. Certainly that Bucket was worshiping, none would know. Perhaps all worship should be like that; and the worship that has most flummery and pomp and circumstance, and takes place at stated times and hours, and to stereotyped words, is not worship at all, but a kind of attempt at a bluff on God.

The fearfully quiet, reserved, thoughtful, impenetrable boss of my wagon gave me my first congratulation that night—the night of the libation.

"You're breaking in well, Bucket. You never rode the range before, did you? What was you doing at the Diamond K? Cook's bitch?" and he smiled—or his gray eyes did—in the firelight.

I nodded and laughed.

"I mind a man in Oregon," he said, "called himself an engineer. The engineer on the stern-wheeler was sick, and he got the job. He got us up all right, with a hundred and forty-five pounds of steam, and her certified for eighty; and when we were squattering in to Columbia Landing he come up on deck and asks for his wages. 'Anything wrong?' asks the captain. 'Why,' he says, 'I've got up this length, but I've had enough. I never seen a stern-wheeler in my life before.' 'Ain't you a' engineer?' says the captain. 'Well,' says he, 'I stoked a lifting crane in Portland, Oregon, for one day, loading wheat. But this gauge on this here boat puzzles me.'"

My wagon boss laughed and turned away, and I went, perfectly contented, to help myself from the Dutch oven. But my head was not swelled. I knew that after the round-up was over there would come other work, when I would be expected to do more than sit a horse.

I confess that by now I was forgetting home, and the face of my mother was fading farther from me. In the dago railway gang I was never free of it; it haunted me in a most heart-rending way—for when what is done cannot be undone one would not forget the loved—and yet to remember is anguish. When I read, at Black Kettle, of the hobo's recovery at the Western Infirmary, I kicked myself; and the misery I suffered at the Diamond K, because of feeling the utter lack of any necessity for ever having fled from Glasgow, and broken my mother's heart, tortured me.

Here I began to relish life again; sadder and wiser, and often philosophizing that I would never again tangle myself up with mortality—with other lives. I was feeling miserable still, but I fear that, in contrast with the recent agony, I was almost happy.

Thinking that all that was necessary to make life perfect was a bath in the evening, and a suggestion to some of the boys not to pick their teeth with a fork—both changes absurd to hope for!—I fell asleep under the stars, the saddle, smelling of horse, for my pillow, a gray blanket round me like a cocoon, and so—I fell asleep.

Some time in the night I wakened, and saw the stars, and far off in the valley a deeper darkness of the herd; and, sitting statuesque across the dip, on a ridge, one of the night herders.

Then asleep again—and I wakened abruptly in gray haze to the cry:

"Tumble out, you sons of guns! Tumble out!"

The oven was the only brightness, the cook working before it, with illumined face and hands. A scent of wet sage would be in the air, wet sage, and coffee, and biscuits. Out of the wonderful mystery of haze, before the day would come, came the herd of ponies with the "horse wranglers"—and another day's work was open before us—and another day had dawned on the great Dry Belt.

To you it is not as to me—you are waiting for the Apache Kid. I had nearly forgotten him in writing of these first range days. He was, of course, discussed about the fire, but as often as not his name only led on to some tale of another brigand, train robber, holdup man; or some horse thief, brand faker. Or townsmen, for I was not the only man at the Triangle who had begun life in a city, would tell of some Raffles.

These townsmen interested me, but not so much as the men who had been at the life all their days. They had drifted to the range for this or the other reason,

mostly for love of space, and chance to waggle an elbow without jostling some one—other reasons, too, doubtless moved some, to judge by their expressions. There were one or two who looked mighty tough, and talked little.

Pete, knowing what would be coming anon, gave me many a wrinkle. When we had the opportunity, as once or twice when he rode in with me during the days of "circle riding," he would tell me the ages of some animals, and then let me state what ages I believed others to be.

"Your wagon foreman," said he, "is pretty good to you. Shouldn't be surprised if he would allocate you a cow pony one of these days, and put you off that lonesome holding the herd, put you to do some cutting out; but he's stuck on you, and he'll allocate you a pony that will do half the work for you. Some folk try to scare men off the range by telling them none but an expert can lass*oo*. No others need apply, they says. You wait and you'll see. Half the lass*oo* throwing ain't throwing at all. You get a good cow pony and he'll see where you're heading, and carry you there, through a hull herd. Then you just drops your lariat over the horns, and the pony walks out. It's all right. He'll come."

I feel that I must interject a comment here that an old cow-puncher was speaking, and these are not my sentiments. Pete, with a long enough rope, could lass*oo* the moon, I believe. He was always the kind of man to make light of his work—and also he was an encouraging man, perhaps because he was successful himself at his work. I have noticed in all professions and callings that the bluffers—they who are really incompetent and hold their jobs by bluff—are generally the ones to advise a beginner to go back to where he came from.

"Well," said I, "I suppose I've to report to the boss that a cow with the Triangle brand got away back from me today."

"What was that for?"

"Well, you know how they all start going, heads down, tails up, as soon as they hear you yell—the longhorns, I mean. All you have to do is to ride along the tops of the buttes."

"Yes, that's right, with longhorns; different from them wrong-headed Suffolks and Surreys and Jerseys."

"Yes, you can run them down two gulches at once if they're Texans, just by coming from one side to the other, and whooping——"

"Sure! But where does the eloping cow come in that you mentioned in last week's number?"

"Oh! She ain't calved yet," I said. "I'm coming to her."

Pete wagged his head, appreciating, hardly smiled, and remarked:

"You're learning the cattle industry, sure thing. You're getting repartee, and you'll be a credit yet to the Pueblo Wall. Well, what about the curious cow?"

"Oh, she was up on the top, and I came quite close to her, and drove her a bit. She didn't run."

"I see. She was lonesome—not with a bunch."

"That's right. She was on top. I had to drive her and drive her—a cow, Pete, a cow—drove her and drove her, and then she turned bang round and charged me. This pony just jumped."

"Sure thing. Wiser than you."

"And when we dodged she charged again. The pony wanted to run——"

"Didn't you take his advice?"

"Why, no! I got back again at her. The end of it was that we dodged her again, and the pony slipped on the edge—and we did a somersault."

"A somerset?"

"Yes. It's a wonder I didn't get my neck broken."

"It is, sure. You want to go down to Mexico City and be a toreador—oh, toreador!—and stick rosettes in the bulls and get bookays from the señoritas. Well, go on—I'm interested. It's only this invigorating air making me pert."

"I rolled to the bottom after the somersault, and the pony came down to meet me—and I left her—I left that infernal cow, because when I got up again farther along I found that the bunch

in the next gulch had turned and was straying away back again."

Pete smiled and considered.

"It's a wonder to me," he said, "that a man like you, self-educated in cows, so to speak, enough to run two bunches thataway with crossing from one to the other, didn't have the savvy to leave that cross-grained cow alone."

"I did."

"Yes, eventooally. But you needed a tumble first, and had to see, with your own eyes, the ninety-and-nine a-straying. You didn't ever go to Sunday school, if you did go to col——" He stopped, for joshing is joshing, but it is not considered according to Hoyle to chip a man too much about being a college man. There are men on the range, as everywhere, who announce that they are "college men"—but the real "college men" don't like too much "college man" slung at them.

"You want to learn by sad experiance," he ended.

"Well, what about the cow?" I asked.

"Oh, you can mention her if you like, but I wouldn't mention your draw-poker game with her—not unless you want to be amusing."

"I never though a cow would behave like that," I cried, wheeling aside to gather in a steer that was trying to lead away a section of the herd, and riding back again.

"Only cows will, my son," said Pete paternally, when I rode to his side again, "at least, generally speaking. A bull will argue it with you right there, sometimes, but when a cow gets that way—argumentative—leave her; she'll come in at the next round-up, or she'll go into another round-up, and be cut out and drove where she belongs; or she'll think it over and follow on later, when she gets lonesome. Never argue with a woman, my son."

It was late on the night of the day of these lessons when a screaming of wheels announced the arrival of another wagon into the plain from the home ranch.

The steers rose—they had already settled—and the clicking of horns began again. We tumbled out, we who had already loosened belts and boots, and caught what ponies we could, and rode over to help the herders, riding round and round the herd till the outsiders, that were trying to break away, milled again and lay down with many grunts.

Then we came circumspectly back—no whooping it up with a night herd of that size and nervousness, left them with a thought like that in the old song:

Lay nicely low, cattle,
Don't heed any rattle.
But quietly doss till the dawn.
For if you skedaddle
We'll jump in the saddle,
And head you as sure as you're born.

We left the herders singing to the herd, and drove quietly back to camp, the herders' voices following us, fading, mellowing with distance, dying away—to find a cluster standing at the fire—an excited group, around the new arrival, glimpse of fire darting between their legs, lighting up the under sides of their faces, giving a wild, almost eerie look to the camp.

I really think it is such pictures that constitute half the lure of the round-up camps to-day, even as yesterday.

As I dismounted and unsaddled, I heard, from the crowd:

"Well, I'm sorry for Apache Kid. I ain't got no use for holdups, no more'n for horse stealers—but he ain't no or'nary, low-down horse thief. I was working at Colonel Nye's when he went out after that there 'lost cabin' that I guess you all hears of; I heerd all that story, and I heerd how he was suspected of two holdups, but got off. Reckon he was guilty——"

I became irritated at the long-windedness. I passed over to the group.

"Well, he's up against it now," I heard. "They're going to fill him full of lead this time."

CHAPTER XV.

ON BEING "AGIN' THE GOVERNMENT."

Side on to the camp fire stood a teamster reading out the news about Apache Kid. I do not remember the exact words of that latest published informa-

tion regarding the train robber; I do not keep copies of the newspapers; but they went something like this—and were thus read by the teamster:

"The worthy train robber or holdup man, who rejoices in the—rejoices in the—in the —— Oh, in the name of Apache Kid, has leaped again suddenly to the forefront in the public eye. Only the other day he was safely ensco—ensco——"

He stopped and swore.

"Ensconsed," prompted a man who sat nursing his knees by the fire and looking up on the reader, listening with open mouth and some contempt.

The teamster yelped: "Am I reading this blank-blank paper, or are you?"

"That's all right. Don't you interrupt," the wagon boss said. "Do you think you could read it any better?"

The corrector quailed at this implied threat, dreading a request to give an exhibition of his power to read a newspaper more accurately.

"I don't say that," he fired off.

"Well, go on," to the teamster, and then to the corrector: "There's college gents here, content to listen without correcting. And if a college gent can get the savvy without interruption I reckon there ain't nó call for any gent to correct." To the teamster again: "You go on, sir; you're doing very well."

Thus appeased, the teamster continued. It was a queer story that he read. It would appear, according to the newspaper version, that the jailers had brought some pressure to bear upon Apache Kid; but what manner of pressure was not stated. There was a clever suggestion, which the reader could take or leave, that gentle torture had been perhaps employed, or maybe threatened. At any rate, Apache Kid had gone out, under some compulsion, with two troopers, to show them where certain valuable stolen property had been hidden. And now they were dead—and he was wanted. A reward of one thousand dollars was offered for the capture, alive or dead, of Apache Kid.

"Oh!" cried out one; "but there's something behind all this. You ain't been to Black Kettle recent, or you would know. Apache Kid was in Black Kettle. Now, he must ha' been in Black Kettle after shootin' up the two troopers. Scotty, the brass pounder, over at Black Kettle, the agent, he says Apache went out with them all right. They came down there all on the jump, in a special train, with their own horses, and Apache rides a horse that Scotty went across to the livery stable and got for him. Then Apache went up to the hills with them. Next thing he comes back."

"Alone?" asked somebody; and I waited for the reply from this man, who had the real news to add to the newspaper news.

"Yap, alone," he said. "Scotty says that he asks the Apache Kid about the troopers, and Apache says as how they had hit the trail over to Lone Tree instead of coming back to Black Kettle—fearing celebrations there. But Apache Kid had a pardon for the holdup, all right," he fired off, as a final crusher.

"A pardon!"

"A pardon?"

"Sure thing! Everybody in Black Kettle heerd of that. He had a pardon for the holdup, a full pardon, on consideration that he would show where these here government properties was cached. Now, Apache ain't goin' to shoot up the men that come with him to git that property—and him with a pardon in his pocket!"

My heart gave a series of clutches. I felt like one about to take a plunge on a chili day.

"Did any one see this here pardon?" asked the boss.

Something told me to be silent: and then everything went hazy; and with a feeling of being unwise and yet, somehow, right, I stepped forward.

"Sure!" cried Pete. "He waved that pardon about considerable," and he thrust me back, and shook his head at me.

"Did any man read it?" asked the boss.

"I did," said I, and came clear into the cluster, which fell apart. Pete let out a long, great sigh, and stood back. "And more than that—I saw the shooting of the two troopers," I continued.

Pete fell back with a hopeless toss of his head and gesture of his arm.

It was a thunderbolt for them.

I had decided to talk; and I told them the whole story, all except the part of it relating to my journey to Mrs. Johnson with her husband's share of the holdup takings. I told them all about my shooting of one of the troopers, and what Apache had said on that head. At that point I knew, by the cries of admiration, that they were Apache's friends.

"And now, gentlemen," I ended, "what I want to know is: Where do I come into this? If Apache is captured have I to give myself up and tell the story as I've told you?"

The boss stared.

"What!" he yelled.

The crowd circled closer. There was an odor of singeing trousers and scorched sheepskin leggings. They forgot the fire in their eagerness.

"Well," said I, "I'm a witness to the thing—to tell how they tried to kill him. But I shot one of the men."

"Say," said the boss, "if you do anything so foolish we'll put you under restraint, we will. What do you say, boys?"

"Sure!"

"Sure!"

"Sure! We'll cache you where you'll not be heerd of till Apache has played his game."

"Sure! Apache is playing a lone hand from now on. You just stepped in where he was liable to lose, and says you: 'These gents have got their cyards stacked,' and you gave him a fresh chance. But he plays a lone hand all the same."

"Sure! He'd have passed in his checks then if you had not stepped in. Now—just you leave off chipping in. He's the kind of man any gent is liable to help, but he is dangerous as a friend. He's a road agent and train robber, and when you chips in with him as a man, you are sure preparing for getting locked up later as a brother road agent. You leave it to somebody else to save him again——"

"Ain't you a white man?" a gruff voice demanded of me, and one of our toughest hands—an old-timer, with mahogany face, and heavy tusks of mustaches that looked cream color against his bronze—gripped my shoulder.

"I want to be," I said.

"Well, just you be! A crooked man may want to be white; but a white man, if he goes around splitting hairs to be white, is going to get plumb pallid and ghostlike."

"That's right, and put like an expert orator," said Pete. And then to me: "I tried to keep you from talking at all to begin with—if only you could have seen."

Said the wagon boss: "Oh, I saw you signaling, so I knew he had some card in reserve for play when it was wanted. Well, my son and college gent, I'm glad you showed us that card before you played it, for now we threaten you that if you show any signs of going into the game we are sure going to put you under restraint. Ain't that right, boys?"

It made my eyes haze a second to hear the unanimous: "Sure thing!" and to see the faces—that I am sure, in the mass, would have terrified a New York, or Boston, drawing-room—bronzed and blackened, and with the firelight playing tricks on them, all turned on me determinedly.

There was not a man there who would make a bid for the thousand dollars offered for the arrest of Apache Kid. But they were determined to keep me out of his story, considering that I had gone just deep enough to rescue, but that if I went deeper I might drown with him.

CHAPTER XVI.

"WHERE IS ALIAS BILL?"

The life and adventures of the Apache Kid were not to interfere with the work on the range.

I did my share in the exciting and dirty work, even taking a hand, on occasion, at the actual cutting out, as well as holding the herds; and sometimes I was told off to help at the branding during the succeeding days.

I think the foreman was giving me a

chance to learn all there was "to it," as he would say. The old-timer I have mentioned remarked to me once, in a lull:

"Which I don't know what wages you're gettin', my son, but you are sure ropin' in experience."

The cutting was in full progress; steer cut, which is for experts only to be in the thick of; in a steer cut I was among the herd guards; and cow and calf cut, in which the boss allowed me to take a hand—to "rope in experience," as the old-timer said.

There was a certain air, among the boys, of watching me, as if they feared I might stampede, stricken by some sudden mad idea to throw in my lot with the fortunes of the Apache Kid. But I saw by then, quite clearly, that it would do no good for me to make any public confession. Apache had killed one trooper, anyhow. It was his trouble. The arguments of the outfit had convinced me. And if a generous cowpuncher advises a man to turn no cards in a certain game, you can be sure that the game is bad indeed. A cowboy is not the kind of man to advise merely a "safe deal."

Work in the corrals will put all other thoughts out of any man's head. Here is where you will see the real roping. Here you will see a calf noosed by the horns and snubbed, and, next moment, a rope twirl before him, just where his forefeet are going—and then there's a flick, and his forelegs are roped, and down he goes. When the ropes caught the calves by the hind legs the work of throwing and holding was far easier than when the neck was caught.

It is wild work: a lariat spins near you and disappears. You wrestle a calf, and as you wrestle it a tautened rope, between some other saddle horn and roped calf, appears before you, ready to trip you. You learn to be a sooty, ensanguined gymnast.

All day the work went on to the sound of calves and cows bawling each to each, shouts of the tallyman sitting on high, where the revolving gate gave entrance to the large corral, shouts for the iron, shouts when calves rose, cut loose, indignant at the treatment accorded them. Representatives from surrounding ranches sat on the top rail beside the tallyman, smoking and at ease.

I soon learned how to kneel on the head and grasp the forelegs of a downed calf. Then would come the shout for the branding iron, the sound of it, the sizzle, the smell. On some ranches there is a man told off at the swing gate between the corrals to earmark, cutting the ears with the ranch's cut, as the calves pass through. On others this is done by a man who is in the actual branding corral beside the iron man. It is all very slick work. Even the gateman has a very lively job swinging the gate—now left, now right, according to what animals come along, according to whether they be for branding, or for running aside into the neighboring corral where the strays of other ranges bawl.

By sundown every one in the branding corral was splashed to the eyes, black with dirt and soot. I had several knuckles a-bleeding, and my nails were torn with grappling. Outside the corral the roar rose and fell all day—and calves and cows calling to each other, upset by the sundering of them.

I have no doubt that I was far more tired than necessary by night, because there is a trick in throwing calves—as in most things—and though I watched it performed intently, and imitated it eagerly, I often had to put on much more muscle than necessary to compensate for what I lacked in the jujutsu of the business.

I can quite understand the stories one hears of dukes' sons and the sons of "belted earls" going back to the range. I know, by my own experience, how the range calls its lovers back. Once, years after, a visit to the old country was shortened for me because, out of an old country open grate a spluttering coal discharged a red-hot fragment on to the hearthrug. And the vision of my prosaic hostess posing before me like a Sargent portrait, and the sound of her inane and ceaseless laughter, and her "Ah, doncherknow?" became, instead of pathetic, revolting. A picture had been conjured

up by that odor of singed rug—not a picture of the branding corral only. The corral was but the jumping-off place to which the smell of singeing took me, the jumping-off place for the flooding pictures of space, rolling land, foothills, bastions of the Bad Lands. I went home early from that house, mighty ashamed that I had ever strayed into such an outfit of poseurs—and I cut short my visit home, too.

Perhaps six weeks later, when the round-ups in our vicinity were over, and many of our men were away attending other neighboring round-ups, the foreman told me to hitch up a team and go into Black Kettle.

"You come from Black Kettle," he said, "so you may as well take this job. We get our supplies mostly from Lone Tree, but there's a consignment at Black Kettle for us."

So at sunup next day I was gathering the reins and rolling out for Black Kettle, and thus again sat, content and tired, on the following afternoon, on the Palace Hotel veranda. Who should come into my half-sleepy content, but my old railway boss, Douglas. We leaped at each other, and pump-handled vigorously.

"Well," said he, looking me up and down, "how do you enjoy shoveling dung instead of shoveling gravel? I mind my young brother was terrible eager to be a soldier—thought it was all riding around in a dinky tunic. When they put him scrubbin' floors and carryin' wood he quit. There was some spirit of rebellion in his troop at the time, and he joined in with the mutineers, stalled on doing chores instead of bein' a picture soldier. They were stationed up at some fort near the boundary, and they just stepped across to a Canadian Mounted Police depot over the line, the whole bunch of malcontents, and they all stripped their clothes and gets a receipt from the police boys, and was sitting around in civilian's clothes when the rest of the troop came to take them back. There was nothin' to do but laugh. By the time that any red-tape arrangements could be made for liftin' them across the boundary my brother was in Australia. Next I hear of him he's in the New South Wales police. Kids is funny when a uniform is concerned."

I thought Douglas was pulling my leg with a tall story, but the barkeep—yes, we had wandered subconsciously into the barroom while Douglas spoke—chipped in:

"That's right—'extradition' they calls it. I remember that fracas—up in Montana it was. But that was half a troop that deserted. There was a funnier thing with one of the police boys. He had got a kick against the force—which ain't usual. I ain't stuck on Canucks; but these Canuck police boys is the most proud of their profession of any soldiers I ever knew. I was up at Pincher Creek when it happened, and so I heard all about it. One of the boys at a post right near the boundary had a grudge against his corporal, or his routine, or something, and one day he pikes out of the R. N. W. M. P. shack in his birthday garments, and he runs like hell for the boundary. The corporal runs after him, and then stops when there was no doubt that the police boy was in Ammurican territory. The mother-naked young man borrows a blanket from a Blackfoot squaw what was standing by, and he executes a dance, and spans his nose at his late corporal. If there had been no folks around, I surmise that corporal would have been liable to step over into America proper and pull the police boy back again, and arrest him."

"Pardon me," I said. "You said 'American' just now. Is Canada not in America?"

The barkeep looked me up and down, smiling.

"Not yet," he said.

So off we went into a pleasant wrangle, in which the American eagle spread his wings until he might have split his chest—and time flew past. At last I asked Douglas how he was getting on.

"Have you still got that dago gang?" I asked.

"Sure," he said.

"And find them satisfactory?"

"Sure! I'm satisfied all right. I've just been down seeing the superintend-

ent of the division. It seems that the dago agent who supplies them says he's heerd from them that they want to quit badly. They've filed a petition to him —kind of round robin. He's been agitating so severely that the superintendent sent for me to run down to see him. Am I not satisfied with them? You bet your life I am."

"The white gang is up beside you now," I suggested.

"Not yet," he said. "They delays coming. I'm the only white man up the line—and I am surely enjoying myself. Say," his voice dropped. "Dunnage, the section boss, tells me he was working away on the line and they stands aside to let a freight go past. It was a grade. They was going very slow, just crawling past, and Dunnage and his gang standing by. And so they could see under all the cars. And who do you think was playing hobo, stealing a ride, lying underneath on a brace rod?"

"Who?"

"Apache Kid," he said quietly. He looked at me attentively.

"Look here, Douglas," I said. "I've been waiting for some one to mention him. I was advised to say little about him till I was spoken to. Do you know —I like that man."

"So do I," said Douglas, and nodded.

"He may be a train robber, but——"

"He never robbed a train of mine!" said Douglas, and laughed. "And, besides, there's a story going around here about him having a pardon. Now, that day Dunnage saw him tangled up with the train trimmings that was the day that the two troopers was brought in here. I read the papers, but there's something crooked there. Everybody here tells me that he said he had a pardon—took it out and flourished it, too. But then Apache is deep."

"I saw the pardon," said I.

"To read?"

"Sure! I read every word of it, all the 'Whereases' about the holdup, and trial, and conviction—and a full pardon."

"On condition?"

"No. No condition. It was just a full pardon."

"Um! That makes me believe the story I heerd all the more. They would not put the reason for the pardon in cold print."

"No—of course not."

"Then why in glory did he shoot the two troopers who came with him?"

"Did he shoot them?" I asked.

"Well, he ran, didn't he, when they came in? He was underneath the very same train that carried them back to Lincoln! Dropped off somewhere on the line, and vamoosed."

"True," I said; "but then he had been up against the government—and he was going to be blamed whether he did kill them or not."

"Um! But I don't seem to find the story quite satisfying. There's something behind it. So far as I'm concerned I've nothing to say to it. If Apache Kid came right into my camp I would give him a meal, and pass him on without a word. I want to have the pros and cons of the thing—even if government is at the back of it—before I budge one way or another."

We retired to the veranda to discuss further the case of Apache Kid; and we were so employed when Colonel Kemp came over and said, peering up:

"May I have a word with you, young man?"

"Certainly."

I stepped down to him, but he urged me back up the steps by my elbow—and led me into the barroom, glanced round to see that we were alone, and then held forth a newspaper, pointing to a paragraph.

"Read that," he said.

What I read was by no means pleasing. It told a pretty story indeed of some sleuth's cleverness. Apache Kid was still abroad in the land, a free man; but "our special correspondent" had probably got a clew that would hasten his capture. The foreman of a well-known ranchman had informed him that, on a trail above Black Kettle, he had seen Apache Kid in company with one of his hands, had seen him there on the very day that the two troopers—

after found dead—loped out from Black Kettle with the Apache Kid. There was, he said, no sign of any trooper on the trail. He saw no bluecoat. But he discharged his cowboy on the spot—for the cowboy had been sent out to some distant work that morning, and should not have been in that neighborhood. Knowing the name that Apache Kid had, and not wanting undesirables in his outfit, the foreman had fired his cowboy. Interviewed as to his reason for his suspicion, he had told that it had been roused by the fact that the cowboy in question had signed on to his outfit as William Barclay, and, later, a letter had come for him as John Williams.

"Where is William Barclay—alias John Williams, or John Williams—alias Will Barclay?" ended the column. "Can he shed a light on the mystery of the two troopers?"

"He can!" I cried. "Come here, colonel," and I caught him by the coat lapel, so hastily that I caught an end of beard also, and apologized. "Come along!" and I marched him to the corner table, and shouted to Douglas to join us, and shouted for the proprietor, and forced them—they all much astonished—into chairs, and sat down confronting them.

"Now!" I said. "I know you gentlemen are all white. I have a story to tell you."

"And the title is what?" asked the amazed proprietor.

"Apache Kid," said I.

"Um!" he said.

"This Apache Kid," said I, "is a train robber—but——"

I paused.

"You would remark," said the colonel, "that there is more in this Apache Kid trouble than meets the eye!"

"Barkeep!" said the proprietor.

"Sir!"

"Set 'em up on me."

And then, very deliberately, I told them the story of the Apache Kid from the day he had come to my aid at the dago camp, leaving out only the matter of the money I had carried to Mrs. Johnson for him, which only the colonel knew. When I told of the attempt on Apache at the hollow tree, the colonel held out his hand and shook mine.

Douglas at that sat back.

"Do you mean to tell me that the government would tell these troopers to ——" began the proprietor, puzzled-looking.

"No, sir," said Douglas, "but luck plays into the hands of railways and governments. I still has faith in the United States, but there's individuals I don't trust no more than a spread rail."

"Here's to Apache Kid, anyhow," said the proprietor, and lifted his glass.

"The point for us," said the colonel, "is that the city of Black Kettle don't have any connection with corralling the Apache Kid, or attempting to corral him. What's this?"

A wild whoop sounded without, a howl—and entered that cowboy who had been told by the foreman of the Diamond K, "I'm looking for ropers," to which he replied: "You'll find heaps of them."

He dashed up to the barkeep without seeing us as we sat in the corner, as it was in shadow.

"Say!" he said, "is there a gent name of Barclay, or Williams, or Alias Bill, in Black Kettle?"

The barkeep was mute, and so heated was the cow-puncher's manner that I slacked my gun in the sheath before I coughed and said:

"Here I am, sir!"

TO BE CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE, ON SALE SEPTEMBER 23RD.

A GREAT MAN'S ECONOMY

Representative Morris Sheppard, of Texas, who is one of the prominent candidates for Joseph W. Bailey's seat in the United States Senate, is a poor man and has to be economical in all things. He even carries his lunch to the capitol every day, and eats it in the cloakroom—which greatly peeves the janitor, who has to sweep up the crumbs.

The Fear of Fernando Fria

By Mayn Clew Garnett

Author of "Off No Man's Land," "The White Ghost of Disaster," Etc.

You look for realism in Garnett's stories. In "The White Ghost of Disaster" he pictured what *might* happen, and alas! *did* happen to an ocean liner when icebergs come sweeping out of the North. You get the same strong sense of realism in this dramatic narrative of two men in a lonely lighthouse on the Liu Lee Shoal. Men wondered why the light failed—but they ceased to wonder when they knew of the awful fear of the lighthouse keeper.

THE heat in the passage was intense. The tide whirled past the light which stood like a huge spider upon its iron legs, resting upon the sands of the Liu Lee Shoal. The hot breeze from the China Sea swept softly over the glassy ocean, and ruffled the surface into streaks of dark blue. Far away the hazy horizon showed the mainland with its tangled jungle above the white sand, showing green and solid, almost a wall of vegetation.

The Liu Lee light was Spanish, built by the earlier Spanish, and tended by Fria, a relic of the old régime. A second keeper, Hernandez, slept upon a couch upon the platform about the lens. The two together tended the light which showed the dangerous Liu Lee Shoal in the track of passing ships bound for Yokohama to the northward or Shanghai and Canton in Chinese territory.

The reef showed plainly, even at high water, for the eye could follow the track of fish clear down into six or seven fathoms, and the light stood in less than three. Sand covered the higher points of the coral bank, but the crevasses and caverns showed darkly in the deeper water when the sea was very still. Millions of fish infested the reef, and the blow of a sperm whale was not an uncommon sound coming from the deeper ocean whence the monsters often came to scratch their barnacled bellies upon the grateful rocks.

Fria stood gazing down into the depths while lounging in the shade of the lantern. The platform upon which he stood was thirty feet above the water, and far above the reach of the heaviest seas that the passage bore even in the breath of the typhoon, for they broke upon the bank a good quarter of a mile seaward before the iron pillars were reached. The platform was entered from below by means of a trapdoor, which was heavily weighted by a balanced gear which, being unhooked, could keep a thousand men from forcing their way upward.

Many pirating junks stood past the light, but Fria and Hernandez watched them with unconcern, knowing that with four modern Mausers and unlimited ammunition, together with a few heavy dynamite bombs the government contributed, no Malay or Moro would be foolish enough to find a way to heaven through that door.

A ten-pound shell on one occasion having been dropped near an approaching boat of about seventy tons, and holding eighty Moros whose intentions were uncertain, the effects upon the iron piling had been such as to bend the one nearest the explosion.

Incidently the proa or junk had been shattered into a sinking condition, and the eighty howling pirates had been put to it to keep afloat long enough to gain the shore in the distance. This they did, however, while some of their number kept up a furious fire upon the iron shield behind which Fria and Hernandez sat and smoked unconcernedly.

The light was considered fireproof, gunfire-proof, and the dull monotony of the life up there was undisturbed.

While Fria gazed over into the blue depths the sun shone brightly. The light penetrated through the clear liquid, and he found he could see the branching, many-colored growths with amazing plainness.

One darker spot on the edge of the sloping submarine cliff showed where a giant grotto or cavern split the side of the reef, and penetrated an unknown distance into the ocean bed.

Fria had wondered at this deep, dark hole, and often speculated what it might contain. It was a large and apparently darksome ocean cave, that might penetrate the reef for a mile or more. Things might live in the gloom that never showed in the sunshine of the outer barrier.

During the year he had been in the light nothing more than huge barracuda or albacore came and went from the opening. This morning he leaned and watched the hole listlessly in the heat.

Fria's attention was suddenly arrested by the appearance of a giant, snakelike form emerging from the cavern below him. The depth of water was fully fifteen feet over the opening, but as the hot breeze barely ruffled the surface, the form could be clearly seen. It snaked out slowly, sluggishly, paused, and continued to move outward. Then another monster snake appeared alongside it. Together they slowly emerged, growing thicker and heavier as their bodies came forth.

Fria was interested. The two forms were now fully twenty feet in length, and he watched them for some time as they lay sluggishly moving along the bottom, hardly disturbing the sea growths. Then he let his gaze wander back to the opening of the cavern.

A monster eye was gazing straight up at him, apparently right into his own.

Fria crossed himself piously.

"Sacred Heaven, but what a thing!" he muttered. "It may be the god of the sea himself looking at me—but just the same I'll get a rifle."

This he did with some haste, considering the heat, and when he returned to the side of the platform he was further amazed by the appearance of two monster eyes staring right up at him through the clear water. From the giant bulk between them a huge parrot beak of bone opened and closed viciously. Other monster arms radiated from the huge mass until the entire reef about the piling was covered by the feeling, creeping reach of snakelike arms.

"A sea devil, but out of bullet reach," he commented softly. "It's a pity a Mauser won't drive through two fathoms of sea water and kill afterward. Maybe a harpoon might drift down into that soft body and hold. Anyhow, I'll try him."

By the time he had the iron rigged the huge thing had come just beneath the piling, and one mighty arm was feeling its way up the eight-inch iron pillar.

"I get you now," said Fria, grinning and driving the iron straight downward into the bulky mass. He saw the iron sink into the body. Then the sea was suddenly dyed purple, and his sight was shut off. The iron had struck fair.

The line began to go slowly out. Fria held it, but found the strain becoming too great. He took a turn about a stanchion, and the next minute the line sagged. He hauled up the iron. It had drawn.

"Sacred son of the sea!" muttered Fria. "But that was too bad—I'd have had the beggar but for that useless iron."

He gazed down again, and waited until the current carried away the inky tinge to the water. Then the bottom showed plainly. There was nothing upon it. The monster had gone.

Hernandez slept throughout the

morning. Fria told him nothing until that night. The duties of the light were continued as before; the incident was almost forgotten within a few days.

Nearly a week later Hernandez hung among the iron bracing of the light, smearing on the red paint furnished to protect the iron from the weather. He was close to the sea, and his platform hung from the crossties near the side of the cavern, which was between two or three fathoms below him beneath the surface. He thought nothing more of the incident related by the head keeper, and he paid no attention to the movement at the dark opening. The sunshine was strong, and the day bright and hot. Fria was sleeping above upon the platform.

Hernandez had just reached the lowest part of the iron bracing when he felt the peculiar nervous dread that instinctively enters the mind of many upon the approach of grave danger. He turned and saw beneath him a massy form of huge proportions. The giant eyes gazed up into his own. He shivered with the suddenness of the sight, and tried to clamber up the bracing.

This he managed to do, and he hung there, looking in amazement and horror at the form below.

"What a monster—what a monster!" he muttered. "It is a mysterious sea, this span of the China Gulf—it holds much that is unknown—my, what a sight!"

For a long time he watched the devilfish below, and when he looked about him again he was aware of a native canoe coming with the tide from the direction of the distant point of the cape to the westward. He had not seen a native canoe for some time, and he was interested, the more so as there seemed to be no one in the craft.

In a few minutes the canoe approached near enough to show the sole occupant. It was a young woman, a native girl, who paddled slowly, but with a certain vigor that showed her practice in the art. She came nearer.

"*Bien venida*—welcome!" he sang out.

The girl looked up, but paddled slowly on.

"Come up and see us—we won't hurt you, my pretty—it's a long time since we had a woman aboard here—and so beautiful——"

The girl flung up her hand in disdain, turned her head, and shook her long black hair. She was not a fool. She would have as soon trusted herself to the devilfish as to the man in the light. Then something roguish seemed to possess her. She showed her white teeth.

"Come and get me—swim," she called out, in a wonderfully sweet voice.

"Ah, now, by the Virgin, that I will not—not to-day," muttered the man.

"But why—I like white men," said the girl, smiling with huge enjoyment at her own humor. "I like the white men—far off, yes, very far away. See, I am not afraid——"

She swung the canoe toward the piling, coming almost over the opening below. She was so much a master of the paddle she feared nothing from Hernandez. With a few sweeps of the blade she could soon put a distance between herself and the light, a distance that was perfectly safe. Before either boat could be lowered from above she would be halfway to the junk that showed upon the land in the distance. It amused her to taunt the keeper, for she was Malay, and very much unafraid of anything alive.

Hernandez watched her, and wondered at her comeliness. He would have given much for such a girl. He would have married a Malay without hesitation, for he knew the women made good wives.

While he studied her he realized her sudden position of danger. There was that monster below. It might at any moment throw up a tentacle that would quickly swamp the craft, and drag the girl below to a horrible death.

"Ah, *amiga mia*—go away—go quickly! There is a monster below there in a cave, a deep hole below the ocean bed—look out——"

His cry was not finished. A long arm shot upward, and a tentacle swept

the canoe. The girl felt the clammy hold upon her bare brown flesh, and screamed wildly.

"Ah, just Heaven, what may I do—what, oh, what?" mumbled Hernandez, watching.

The long tentacle closed about the girl's waist, the canoe was suddenly lifted violently, then upset, and the girl was struggling in the calm sea.

Something rose up within Hernandez. Something swelled within his throat. The girl was doomed to an awful end if he could not rescue her at once. He hesitated. It was a terrible thing, a horrible chance he ran, yet within him arose that something that made him a man.

"I cannot let her go—not like that," he cried.

With shaking hands he drew his sheath knife. Then, with a long, pitch-pole plunge, he shot outward and downward into the sea.

The next instant he was cutting and slashing with all his strength at the arms that rose and sank about him and the girl.

Holding to the canoe with one hand he finally forced the craft away in the current, and dragged the girl with him, cutting and slashing with his knife all the time.

The girl struggled also with amazing power. She tore the tentacles loose wherever the knife severed them, and with amazing coolness swam and fought herself away from the dread vicinity. Slowly along the bottom the monster followed, sliding its great bulk below the surface, and keeping close enough to reach out time and again with a long disk-studded arm which Hernandez ripped and tore frantically with his knife.

"Keep up a good heart, *amiga mia*—I will save you," panted Hernandez.

The girl answered with a look and a flash of white teeth. Then she suddenly flung herself half out of the sea, and with swift strokes swam away, leaving Hernandez to fight the battle alone.

The canoe floated away from him, and he found himself struggling with a monster that pulled him now and again from below, pulled him so hard that he went under at each effort, yet he cut away each time, and came up for breath.

Suddenly the thing below ceased to grasp him. He watched over the calm surface for the first signs of an arm rising to grasp him again. He heard a whale blow in the distance, heard the "blow" repeated, and it seemed nearer. He was growing exhausted. If the monster grasped him again he was panting so hard he must necessarily breathe in sea water.

A "blow" sounded close to him. The thing below made no further effort, and Hernandez swam weakly, with his head bent forward to see below the surface.

"Ah, what a thing—what a thing!" he panted.

Then something suddenly seized him about the neck, and he was pulled violently backward.

"Ferd, help! Ferd—help!" he yelled. Then he lost consciousness.

Fria heard the cry in his sleep. He knew something was the matter, but the heavy drowsiness from the heat made him sluggish about awakening. He turned over and slept on for half an hour or more.

Then he finally rolled out of the hammock chair and called for his mate. There was no answer. The hot sunshine was all about him. The torrid silence of the equatorial daylight. It was very still. There was no wind at all, and the hazy mist from the China Sea hung brassily in the distance.

Fria finally aroused himself enough to enter the light.

"Hey, Hernandez," he yelled, "what's the matter—you called."

Only silence. His voice sounded loud in the hot morning. Fria began to wake up. Never had his mate failed to answer a hail from any part of the structure. He went to the steps leading to the light above. He called up to the lantern. The door was open, and there was no one up there. Then Fria began to feel that something serious had occurred. He ran through the store-

rooms built about the main room of the structure, rushed around the platform, and into the doorway again. Hernandez was not in the light.

At first Fria thought he might have fallen overboard. There was the paint, the platform slung below in the bracing, and the man had evidently been at work but a short time before. It seemed to Fria that the call had come from the house above, and that Hernandez had come up to rest. He reasoned that it could not have been very long from the shout for help to the time he searched for his mate. If overboard from above the splash would have attracted his attention. Anyhow, the man would have been struggling below in the sea, and probably climbing up the bracing. He could not have been struck insensible from the fall, for there was the cry, the wild yell for help. He might have uttered it once before striking below, but it was well fixed in Fria's mind that it had been repeated two or three times.

Fria searched the surface about the light for some time, some disturbance. A shark passing at the time might have made off with his mate. The shark is sluggish, but the teeth of a man-eater are sharp. The keeper felt a strange feeling coming upon him. It was uncanny to be left there alone in the hot sunlight. Hernandez had vanished as if melted into the air.

Fria spent the morning searching every hole and corner in the structure. He was so obsessed with the idea that he looked into places that would not have sheltered a mouse. As the day wore along a feeling of terror crept upon him. He began to look into the hot, blue sky, to search even the air about him. The strange disappearance had gotten upon his nerves, and he began to lose his head, muttering and calling to Hernandez, sometimes cursing his mate harshly for hiding from him.

The light was tended that night as before. Fria calmed down as the darkness came on, and a feeling of responsibility overcame the terror in him. He decided to set a signal for help to stop the first steamer coming through the passage. It was impossible to remain alone there any longer. He would ask to be relieved from the job.

For several days Fria kept watch for a ship. None came through the passage. It was the dry season, and freights were low, so low that rice was hardly worth carrying save in bulk. He tended the light regularly, but slept during the night in fitful naps. Several small steamers that crept through after dark he failed to notice, and they, of course, failed to see his flag hanging at half mast from the pole upon the platform.

In a few days the keeper recovered from the first shock of the strange disappearance. He began to study the situation. Being an ignorant man, of no imagination, the real facts did not dawn upon him. He finally went to work at the job Hernandez had left, determined to occupy his time until a relief steamer came along and took him off.

The paint and brush were still upon the lower platform where his mate had left them, and as the weather was hot and still with a burning sunshine Fria went down the bracing with nothing on him but a pair of cotton trousers, which reached from his waist to his knees. Brown and sun-tanned, he was more like a monkey than human, and long residence upon the light had let him fall back into the primitive manner of existence.

He cooked his breakfast that morning upon the oil stove, drank his coffee, and, after lighting his pipe, slipped over the rail, and so on down the rods until he reached the lower platform. Here he took up the paint and brush and began to daub lazily upon the iron.

All the time his mind was fixed upon one idea. That was the disappearance of Hernandez. He would watch his paint for a time and then gaze out over the smooth sea and try to find something that looked like a vessel—just anything that seemed to bring him nearer human beings. He had begun to mutter to himself, a bad sign when one is forced to remain alone for an indefinite time.

Suddenly, while he watched the sea, he was aware of a giant eye gazing up at him through the clear water. Far below him a monstrous shape lay upon the reef, a massive, pulpy body with seemingly endless arms branching from it. The two huge eyes were set upon either side of the parrot beak.

While he looked he shuddered. The thing was a horror, a monstrous being. And while he hung there an arm suddenly shot upward from the sea and fell about him like the coils of a line—soft, clammy, but with something so amazingly powerful underlying all that he shrieked outright with fear. The tentacle set taut upon him, and he was aware of a cutting, a fixing of the suckerlike disks with their mouths upon his naked body.

The pain and horror of the thing made him frantic. He struggled wildly, but with a certain amazing strength that prevented the drawing arm from tearing him from his perch. He held grimly to the iron braces.

A wild terror rushed through his brain, and at first stunned him from sane action. Then his mind began to work quickly, and he thought of his sheath knife, which he always carried, sailor fashion, in his belt. It was there, and the hilt was in his hand in an instant.

Frantically cutting and hacking at the tough cartilagelike arm, he managed to sever it, but the disks still held to his skin, and caused him excruciating agony. He started upward to get away, when another arm shot out, and grasped his bare leg about the ankle. He hung between death and safety by the iron grip of his hands. To let go with one hand now and cut away meant to lessen his hold. He still held the knife in his right hand, and the hilt was pressed down to the iron rod upon which his weight hung. The pull from below was growing greater and greater. Slowly but surely the creature beneath was exerting his immense power.

The moments dragged like hours. Fria screamed in agony. He felt that his hour had come. The giant shape below would surely get him, for he could neither let go nor hold on with any hope of conquest. It was high water, and there was a full two fathoms under the iron pillars, while seaward the reef was submerged to fully twenty feet and more.

Fria was growing weak. His breath was coming in short gasps, and he had held out for perhaps ten or even fifteen minutes. He could never quite tell. It always seemed to him that the whole day had passed in the frantic fight.

He was aroused from the coming lethargy of exhaustion by a snore from below and seaward. The loud "blow" of a sperm whale broke upon his ears. Almost instantly the pressure below began to relax. In an instant the arms withdrew from the ankle, and when he gazed down into the depths below the sea was turning into a purplish hue, with nothing distinguishable below a few feet.

Gasping and trembling, he dragged himself to the platform above, and sat panting with the terror of the thing, while his eyes watched half fascinated the disturbance below.

He was aware of a terrific commotion beneath him. The sea whirled upward, and boiled into furious foaming swirls. The flukes of the whale broke water with a smack like a cannon, and the roiled sea shut off the view of the bottom. Fria was aware that the greatest commotion came from the opening of the submarine cavern.

Soon a piece of tentacle floated upward in a swirl, and then the sea quieted down again. The tide swept past slowly now, and carried the purpling water away. He was aware that the monster had spat forth some coloring matter to hide his retreat, and that the thing had escaped into the cavern again. The giant cachalot had probably nipped an arm in the rush for the opening, but the devil had made good his escape into the dark and impenetrable recesses of the ocean cave.

Soon a "blow" far to windward out over the China Sea told of the whale's presence a full mile off. He had failed to get the monster, but had saved the keeper's life.

"Oh, thank you—thank you—oh, whale!" muttered Fria, half insane from the fright he had been through.

"Mother of Heaven, what a horror—what—what a thing! And that's where Hernandez went—Hernandez?"

The truth came to Fernando Fria at last. He knew where his mate had gone!

For the next two days and nights Fria sat with a rifle in one hand, and a harpoon rigged alongside of him. He watched the cavern. Nothing showed at the dark and mysterious opening into the bowels of the reef.

"Maybe that whale killed him—maybe?" said Fria, as he watched. But all the time he was uncertain, and the uncertainty filled him with a nameless dread, a horror of the thing below.

A vessel passing reported that the light was out. Fria had remained on watch upon the platform, hardly leaving it to eat. The light, the importance to navigation, faded with the fury and horror growing in him since his fracas with the monster.

Once when the sun shone strongly into the opening below, he saw the movement of a giant tentacle. An arm shot forth and retreated again, but the huge eyes failed to appear. Fria tried to coax him outside of his lair. He even clambered down the irons and howled curses at the thing, always ready, however, to clamber back again at the first signs of the monster coming forth.

For days he sat and fired at the dark cavern mouth, using the Mauser. The crack of the rifle sounded strangely human to his nerves. He liked to hear it. It soothed him. It gave him a feeling of power against the monster. Of course the projectiles failed to penetrate the depth of sea above the hole.

Three weeks after his encounter with the sea devil, Fria had another chance for revenge. The monster came out of the cavern, and showed the eyes and beak of his head. Fria watched him for hours, and finally, by clambering down the braces, coaxed the thing forth. Then he threw the iron, and it sunk deep within the gristly mass. The end of the line tied to the light drew the iron after a strain had been put upon it.

While the purplish liquid was coloring the sea, an arm shot upward, and almost reached the keeper, standing as he was upon the upper platform. It shook his nerves greatly, and he no longer took his sleep out there, but went higher into the lantern, closing the door. Here he now began to stay all the time, going down only for food and ammunition.

The inspectors at Canton had heard of the light failing at various times, and the steamer which acted as tender to the lights in the passage was made ready for her quarterly round a fortnight before her time.

Captain Brownson James commented upon the peculiar behavior of the keepers. Sometimes the light was all right, and sometimes again it was out. Liquor was not allowed, and as there was no way of getting any except from passing native craft, the affair looked to him as somewhat remarkable, and one that needed attention at the earliest possible moment.

As a matter of fact, the flag that was hanging at half mast had never been seen, owing to the fact that no steamer had been through the passage during the daytime. The native craft reported nothing, for a light to them was a thing of no importance.

It was now a full month since Hernandez had met his end. Fria, with the fear of a horrible death lurking below, would not go even to the platform. He sat and watched the dark opening of the sea cave from the higher part of the lantern itself. Sometimes he would run below, and get food, but he never remained in the main part of the light. His mind was in a state of panic. All the rifles were brought up to the light above, and all the cartridges. The man was growing into a dangerous state. He began to curse and rave at the neglect of the white men. He grew furious at the sight of a junk. A Malay came along one morning, and hailed him. The answer was a rifle shot that

stretched the fellow out with a broken leg.

Two days afterward the tender appeared, coming up the passage, and Fria recognized her. He was wild with fury at her approach.

"They leave me—they leave me—I'll show them," he howled.

The boat that came over the reef was met with a sustained rifle fire that quickly abated the zeal of the officer in command. He returned to the steamer and reported the affair.

Captain James had of course seen and heard the whole thing, lying by as he was within half a mile of the light. He tried blowing his whistle. He tried setting signals. The answer was always the same—the sharp crack of a Mauser, and the furious "spat" of the bullet as it struck the ship. The ship was withdrawn out of range.

"I don't know, sir—what had we best do?" asked the officer who had gone in the boat.

"Well, we've got to get the fellows out of the light. They're crazy as bugs. Probably a touch of the sun—God only knows what it is—we must get them out. The light must be set at night. Some of the P. & W. ships full of passengers come through here, and they might go on the reef and kill five or six hundred souls. Get them out," said the captain.

But to get Fria out was another matter.

All day the tender lay off and on. The first approach of darkness gave her a chance to close in again, and she was met as before by a rifle fire that was dangerous and rapid.

"We've got to get that rifleman—somehow," said James.

That night they kept Fria awake by blowing the whistle at intervals, and making an attempt to land. No ships were due, and of course the tender was ready to warn any one approaching the reef from the southward. By morning they hoped the mad marksman would be tired out.

After breakfast the officer in charge of the boat called away his men, and started in again.

Fria was waiting for them, and shot repeatedly into the boat. What was peculiar was the fact that he seemed not to care whether he hit any one or not. The boat was pulled off out of range.

Later two boats were sent in. One going close up was met by a furious fire, but the other was apparently not seen, for she gained the light from the opposite side, and the men clambered into the bracing and rushed the door above.

Fria adroitly dropped the weight and shut them off. They were marooned below in the bracing.

"What is the matter with you, you fool?" roared the officer who came up with his men.

"Why didn't you come when I set the signal?" asked Fria.

"We did; we came at once—just as soon as we heard you needed us," said the officer.

"Well, stay where you are, and watch the hole there—watch it, I say—maybe you'll come quicker the next time after you see what comes out of it."

"Crazy as a bug!" commented the officer. "What hole does he mean?"

One of the men, seeing the line from the harpoon where it had fallen when the sea devil had gone away with it in him, noticed that it led to the bottom a few fathoms distant. His eyesight followed it until he noticed that the end led into a grotto, or sea cave out in the deeper water of the reef.

"Maybe he's got something fast to the end of it," said the seaman.

"Haul it in, then."

The men did so, but only the harpoon came from the dark opening.

"He evidently ironed something out there, and it went into that cave below," said the officer.

The hauling of the line from the opening seemed to disturb the waters inside of the cavern. A man's cap floated out of the opening, and after drifting slowly along the bottom arose to the surface. The men noticed it while they waited for some action from Fria.

"That's his cap—get it, that's his cap!" yelled a voice from above them.

Fria had seen Hernandez's cap leave

the hole, and the effect upon his unhinged brain caused the outcry. He dropped his rifle, and rushed to the rail of the platform.

A man below in the bracing saw him. This seaman passed the word to his mates across on the other side of the piling. The way was clear for a few minutes for them to try to rush the light, to rush the platform from the bracing which was overhung all about by a full three feet of the outer edge of the platform itself.

One sturdy fellow, Douglas, a first-class sailor, climbed rapidly upward. He reached the far side of the structure while Fria stood yelling and pointing at the floating cap. It was a desperate chance for the sailor, but he reached upward and outward—and sprang forth over the gulf below. His finger tips grasped the outer edge, and his sinewy hands set to the strain of his weight while he swung to and fro for a time, swung slowly back and forth over the sea.

For a few moments his companions saw him hanging with the result in doubt. Then Douglas gradually drew himself upward while his mates yelled frantically to keep Fria's attention fixed upon the floating cap.

Douglas managed to get a foot upon the edge, and drawing himself up the next instant he sprang over the rail. The rush of his feet told his waiting companions that he was within the light.

A terrific pounding overhead was evidence of the sudden scuffle and frantic fight of the crazy keeper. This kept up while the men crowded to the trapdoor and cheered on their companion with yells and promises of help. Then the noise died away, and the trapdoor was lifted. Fria was bound and helpless, lying raving upon the platform, while Douglas wiped the blood from his face and hands where the maniac had bit and scratched him. After matters had quieted down, the keeper was taken aboard the tender, which lay by waiting.

Far away in the hazy distance they saw a canoe approaching. It came along rapidly, propelled by two people, who paddled strenuously to get to the ship before she weighed and left the place.

As the canoe approached Brownson saw it contained Hernandez and a very pretty native girl, a Malay. The keeper came up to the side ladder, and called for a line. Then he and the girl clambered on deck.

"My wife," he announced tersely to Captain Brownson, who was looking at the girl with some wonder in his expression. "She saved me from that monster below there. There's a devil-fish right under the light, sir, that got us both, and only this girl's ableness saved us—she saved me——"

"There are several kinds of sea devils," sneered Captain Brownson, with meaning, looking straight at Hernandez. "And I'll hold you as one of them for the desertion of the light. You may take him forward." This last remark to the quartermaster, who stood waiting for orders.

It was a long time before the captain managed to get a coherent account of what had really happened at the Liu Lee light.

Fria eventually recovered, but was a very much shaken man, who started at sudden noises, and who hated sunshine and silence above all things on earth. Twenty pounds of dynamite was let into the cavern after the facts became known of the whereabouts of the sea devil. After the explosion, which shook the light to its foundations—a huge cephalopod came to the surface. It was much hacked about the tentacles, but was a most monstrous thing, weighing fully three tons.

Hernandez refused to give up his native wife, and was put ashore with her at the settlement below the straits. She had pulled him backward into the boat just in time to save his life, and he felt he owed her everything for that act. Also she was a very pretty and good-natured girl, good enough for any seaman, and he was satisfied with her—which is the main point, after all, in making a choice.

The Peculiar Gifts of Mr. John T. Laxworthy

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

Author of "The Tempting of Tavernake," "Peter Ruff and the Double Four," Etc.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE SERIES.

MR. JOHN T. LAXWORTHY: Chief of the trio of investigators. In appearance he is both unremarkable and undistinguished; he is of somewhat less than medium height, of unathletic, almost frail physique; his head is thrust a little forward, as though he were afflicted with a chronic stoop; he wears steel-rimmed spectacles; his hair and mustache are iron-gray. "My chief aim," he tells his two associates, "is to make life tolerable for ourselves, to escape the dull monotony of idleness, and incidentally to embrace any opportunity which may present itself to enrich our exchequer."

MR. W. FORREST ANDERSON: Assistant to Mr. Laxworthy. A thoroughly British, self-satisfied gentleman; his figure is distinctly corpulent; he wears scarcely noticeable side whiskers, and his chin and upper lip are clean-shaven.

MR. SYDNEY WING: Assistant to Mr. Laxworthy. From the tips of his shiny tan shoes to his smoothly brushed hair he is unmistakable; he is young, he is English, he is well-bred, he is an athlete. His face is pleasant, unintelligent.

X.—MR. GREENLAW'S FORTY THOUSAND POUNDS

MR. LAXWORTHY took quite a fancy to the grillroom at the Milan. He followed his usual practice of making friends with the director, who reserved for him always a small table in a retired but advantageous position. Here for three days Mr. Laxworthy lunched and dined, watching with keen interest from behind his concealing spectacles the constant coming and going of one of the most cosmopolitan crowds in Europe.

Young ladies from the theaters lunched here with their juvenile escorts, and supped at the same tables later on, in the half lights, with more serious admirers. Men of affairs brought their wealthy clients here to complete a deal. The foreign theatrical element was strong, and, rather a curious thread in the tangled skein, there was always a thin little stream of genuine American tourists, with their quaint ways and Baedekers in their hands.

Mr. Laxworthy, from his table against the wall, and with his strange gift of reading the spoken words from the lips of those whom he watched, skirted the edge of more than one romance, peered over the brink into several strange little tragedies, and learned something of the methods of a very well-known financier.

On the fourth morning, toward the completion of his luncheon, an incident occurred which brought him for the first time into actual touch with one of the figures in this peepshow.

A lady entered the restaurant, and, deserting the main passage, began to slowly thread her way through the maze of tables toward the side of the room where Mr. Laxworthy sat. She came so slowly and her appearance was so unusual that nearly everybody turned to gaze at her as she passed.

She was tall, slim, and exceedingly dark. Her complexion was absolutely colorless, but seemed to be more the natural pallor of the Frenchwoman

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than any evidence of ill health. She was plainly dressed, but in the height of fashion. There was not a woman there who did not know that her hat and her costume came from the neighborhood of the Rue de la Paix. She walked, too, with a natural grace which was entirely un-Saxon. All the time her large black eyes swept up and down the corner of the room which she was approaching.

The maître d'hôtel, who had seen her enter, came hurrying to her side.

"Madame desires a table?" he murmured, with his best bow. "Unfortunately, on this side, as you see, we are full. I will arrange something, if madame will be so good as to follow me."

The lady shook her head a little petulantly. She was looking at Mr. Laxworthy's table, by the side of which she was now standing, with the air of a spoiled child.

"I prefer to sit here," she said decidedly. "It amuses me to watch the people, and, as you see, I am alone."

The maître d'hôtel shrugged his shoulders.

"But, madame," he protested, "all the tables here, as one can see, are already occupied."

The lady looked at Mr. Laxworthy's disappearing omelet and up at Mr. Laxworthy. He promptly interposed.

"If the lady would like my table," he said, speaking with his usual quiet precision, "it will be at liberty within five minutes. I have already ordered my coffee."

"You are very kind," the lady answered softly. "Your table is just the one I covet. I will certainly wait."

Now, in an ordinary case, the chief maître d'hôtel would have escorted the lady to the small reception room adjoining the restaurant, would have kept his eye upon Mr. Laxworthy's table, have had it speedily rearranged on the departure of Mr. Laxworthy, and have himself fetched madame at the earliest opportunity. It happened, however, that at that precise moment quite his most important client touched him on the elbow. With a word of excuse he hurried away. The lady stood for a moment irresolute. Mr. Laxworthy rose to his feet.

"If you will honor me by accepting the vacant seat at my table until the arrival of my coffee," he said, with a little bow, "it will give me great pleasure."

She thanked him with a very soft and brilliant smile. She deposited her velvet bag and the trifles which she was carrying upon the table, and, seating herself, took up the menu. She laid it down almost at once. Mr. Laxworthy was watching her quietly. She looked at him and smiled. He smiled back again. They talked banalities until the arrival of the coffee.

"You do not mind," she asked him, "if I order my luncheon? I am hungry."

"Certainly not," Mr. Laxworthy replied. "If you are fond of omelet, let me recommend the *Omelette Espagnol*. It is excellent to-day."

"Thank you very much," she said; "I will try it."

Mr. Laxworthy's coffee was hot, and they talked more banalities. The question of nationalities arose. Mr. Laxworthy was invited to guess the birthplace of his companion. With commendable chivalry he suggested Paris. The lady smiled.

"I am South American," she told him. "I am over here on business. I have immense estates there which I wish to sell."

Mr. Laxworthy's eyes twinkled behind his glasses. He was beginning to have a genuine admiration for his beautiful companion.

"A very interesting country," he murmured.

"A paradise," she replied.

"I lived there for some seven years," Mr. Laxworthy remarked.

"In that case," the lady exclaimed, with a little shrug of her shoulders, "I must rearrange the locality of my estates!"

"Ah!" Mr. Laxworthy said softly. "South America is rather a dangerous country. People travel so much nowadays."

She smiled.

"Of course, you know who I am really. I come from the Royal Opera House at St. Petersburg, and I am going to dance in the ballet at Covent Garden."

Mr. Laxworthy nodded approvingly.

"If you will permit me to say so without impertinence," he declared, "your statement is easily to be believed. You look the part. I scarcely see, however, its practical advantages—at any rate, as compared with your position as a South American lady with immense estates to sell in a city of susceptible men."

Madame poured herself out a glass of claret from the half bottle which he had ordered, and laughed at her companion.

"You live, I perceive, as a recluse," she remarked. "To dance at Covent Garden one requires jewels, beautiful dresses, an electric brougham, a motor car in which to seek the fresh air. Alas! I have discovered your city, but not your susceptible men."

"Your imagination," Mr. Laxworthy decided, "is excellent, but you lack precision of detail. I never in my life saw a dancer with an ankle and instep like yours."

She sighed.

"They told me," she said, "that you were a man of observation and peculiar gifts. You make me feel quite clumsy."

"Not at all," Mr. Laxworthy insisted. "As a matter of fact, you have an immense advantage over me. Remember, you know all about me, and for some mysterious reason you have accorded me the privilege of your acquaintance. Whereas I haven't the slightest idea who you are or where you come from. I have only my instinct to tell me whether you come, indeed, as a friend or a foe."

"And what does your instinct say?" she asked.

Mr. Laxworthy poured himself out some more coffee.

"Madame," he replied, "look around you. Indulge for a moment, if you will, in a little speculation of a quasi-philosophical nature. There are fifty small parties of men and women lunching in this room. Let us say that half of them are doing so from the pleasure they find in one another's society. The other half is composed of men and women who are each seeking something from the other. On our right a gentleman is seeking to sell a patent to a financier. Over there a German merchant is trying to impress his London agent with the superiority of his goods over all others. The little lady with the black hair behind you is indeed a dancer. She lunches with the manager of a great 'variety' house, from whom she needs an engagement—on her own terms. We come to ourselves. We, too, are human beings in temporary juxtaposition. It is you who have sought me—not I you. It is not for the pleasure of my society, therefore it is something else you want."

"Oh, Mr. Laxworthy!" she sighed. "You are much too clever for a poor, inexperienced young woman! The man who sent me here warned me. I fear that you are not even susceptible. I could be very nice to you, indeed. I could say all manner of nice things, and look them, and even mean them a little, for that is the supreme art of my sex. Shall I try? Would it be any good?"

"I have been slandered," Mr. Laxworthy declared. "I have not, alas! those personal qualities which attract such attentions as you have suggested, but it is nevertheless a fact that I am exceedingly susceptible. I have drunk two extra cups of coffee for the sole pleasure of sitting here with you."

"I am so afraid," she murmured, "of bestowing my affections where they are likely to be slighted."

"Then supposing," Mr. Laxworthy suggested, "you tell me in what manner I can be of service to you, and from whom you come?"

She leaned a little across the table.

"I come," she said, "from Mr. Daniel Greenlaw."

Mr. Laxworthy showed no surprise.

"I was inclined to suspect," he admitted, "that that was the case. I trust that Mr. Greenlaw is well?"

"He is in excellent health, I believe," the lady replied.

"And enjoying," Mr. Laxworthy continued, "that measure of liberty and control over his actions from which the prejudiced authorities of this country sought to debar him."

"Assisted," she murmured, "by you."

Mr. Laxworthy coughed.

"I," he explained, "am an adventurer, a free lance, one of those whose hobby it is to pore over the mysteries of human conduct. As regards my—er—campaign against Greenlaw, he brought it upon himself. You have probably heard the history of my railway journey with Mr. and Mrs. Stetson!"*

She leaned back in her chair and laughed, laughed so that little lines spread from the edges of her eyes, which themselves became for a moment closed.

"And the telegram," she reminded him.

He nodded.

"The telegram hurt," he confessed. "Nevertheless, these little affairs are good for one. I bore Greenlaw no real grudge, but it certainly put me in the field against him."

"You were robbed of your triumph," she said, "but it was not your fault. Somehow, I do not think now that they will ever catch him."

"He appears," Mr. Laxworthy admitted, "to be a man of remarkable gifts."

"He is the most versatile person who ever breathed," she agreed. "To look at he is as delicate as a girl, but he has the muscle of a Sandow. His body is like flexible steel. Then I do not think that any actor in the world has ever surpassed him in the art of making up."

"I have myself," Mr. Laxworthy said gloomily, "had ocular proof of his capacity."

She, too, had arrived at the stage of coffee. Mr. Laxworthy ordered liqueurs.

"Ours has been a pleasant chat," he remarked, "but you have not yet told me the object of your coming. I have watched you very closely, and I am quite sure that you have not slipped poison into my coffee. Besides, I do not think that our friend Mr. Greenlaw is that sort of man."

She laughed softly.

"You might at least do me the compliment to believe that I am not that sort of ambassador," she murmured. "Daniel Greenlaw has not the least desire to do you harm. It is, indeed, something in the nature of an alliance which I am here to propose."

Mr. Laxworthy lifted his spectacles for a moment and replaced them.

"I am a man of over middle age," he said, "and I am moderately wealthy. Of my principles I will not speak, but such as they are, although I claim for myself a considerable latitude of action, I am on the side of the law."

"In the enterprise which I am about to propose to you," the lady declared, "you will remain in that very desirable position."

"I am all attention," Mr. Laxworthy assured her.

"It is a matter of money—a great deal of money," she continued. "Less than a year ago Daniel Greenlaw intrusted a sum of forty thousand pounds to a Mr. Wills, who was a stockbroker in the city. He intrusted it to him without conditions because a man in Mr. Greenlaw's position, as you can readily understand, is obliged to trust some one. Mr. Wills was a man of honor, and there is no doubt that, while he lived, not only was the money perfectly safe, but he would have gone out of his way to let Daniel Greenlaw have it, however difficult the circumstances may have been. Unfortunately, three or four months ago Mr. Wills died, and his partners are very different people to deal with. They need the money in their business, and they have no idea of parting with it if it can be helped. In reply to the indirect applications that have been made to them, they have declined to communicate or to pay over any money to any one else except Daniel Greenlaw himself. The police know this, and so do Messrs. Lewitt & Montague know that they know it. It is

*See "The Stetson Affair," in September month-end POPULAR.

almost impossible for Daniel to go to law, but he wants the money."

"Quite an interesting situation," Mr. Laxworthy admitted. "Legally, of course, there are many ways of obtaining payment, but, on the other hand, I can see the difficulty. These men have only to object to the amount or the terms or something and take the matter into court. Greenlaw cannot appear. Any one holding an authorization from him would be cross-examined as to its source."

"I see that you grasp some of the difficulties," the lady remarked. "Now, you may believe this or not, as you choose. My name is Lena Destime. I am not an intimate friend of Daniel Greenlaw. On the other hand, I have seen quite a good deal of him at different times, and I have a most sincere admiration for him."

"Admiration?" Mr. Laxworthy murmured, a little questioningly.

"Precisely," she assented. "The greater part of my life has been spent in bohemian circles, not only from necessity, but because I prefer their society to any other. Daniel Greenlaw has many friends, although not all of them know his real name. He is a criminal from absolute excess of sporting instinct. He must have excitement at any price. He has no fear of death, nor any respect for other people's property."

"Charming qualities," Mr. Laxworthy interposed.

The lady shrugged her shoulders.

"You are a citizen of the world, Mr. Laxworthy," she said. "You in your time must have had some experience with the order of so-called criminal to which Daniel Greenlaw belongs. If so, you must have learned to regard them with, at any rate, tolerance."

"I have no hard feelings against the man," Mr. Laxworthy admitted. "We have brushed up against one another, and honors are even."

"In your favor," she objected. "Daniel only got a laugh out of you, whereas you very nearly ended his career."

"It seems to me," Mr. Laxworthy remarked, "that a great many law-abiding people would have been rather obliged to me if I had. That little affair in the train de luxe between Marseilles and Toulon was a trifle cold-blooded, wasn't it? Nothing to be proud of, at any rate."

She shuddered slightly, and lowered her fine eyes from Mr. Laxworthy's face.

"Those are the things," she confessed, "which I do not care to talk about. However, there is one consideration which should always be borne in mind in judging this man. He chose invariably for his victims the unworthy. This man Simonds, the bookmaker, was one of the worst characters in London, a man whom I remember Daniel once said that it pained him to see alive. You are not a sentimentalist, Mr. Laxworthy. You would not accord it an equal sin to set your foot upon vermin as to shoot a nightingale."

Mr. Laxworthy signified his approval.

"We might now venture, perhaps, to discuss," he suggested, "the enterprise to which you have alluded?"

"The enterprise is simple enough," she replied slowly. "Daniel Greenlaw wants you to collect his money for him. I have here an authorization, properly signed and witnessed."

She passed a paper across the table. Mr. Laxworthy studied it carefully and put it into his pocket.

"Does Mr. Greenlaw," he asked, "suggest any scheme whereby I am to profit in this enterprise?"

She shook her head.

"He offers you nothing but the adventure!"

Mr. Laxworthy signed his bill and, with a word of apology, his companion's also. He thereupon rose to his feet.

"My only recompense, then," he remarked, "is to be the pleasure of this luncheon?"

She laughed softly at him.

"Why not of others?" she murmured. "I fancy that we should amuse one another. We both move along the outside paths."

"You will do me the honor, then," Mr. Laxworthy begged, "of lunching

with me here a week from to-day at the same time?"

"I shall only regret, dear Mr. Laxworthy," she whispered, as they passed down the room, "that it takes seven whole days to make a week!"

Mr. Forrest Anderson was received, a few mornings later, at the offices of Messrs. Wills, Lewitt & Montague with all the consideration due to a prospective client of satisfactory appearance. Mr. Lewitt, who was a small man, with thin, dark features, and indications of Semitic amiability, sat at a desk, with a telephone on either side of him. He motioned his visitor to an easy-chair opposite him, and read from the card:

MR. FORREST ANDERSON,
FOXTON MANOR,
LEICESTERSHIRE.

"Delighted to see you, Mr. Anderson. What can we have the pleasure of doing for you?"

Mr. Anderson glanced around the room as though to make sure that they were alone, and moved his chair a little closer to his companion.

"I have called," he began confidentially, "on behalf of a client of yours—Mr. Daniel Greenlaw."

Mr. Lewitt started, and snatched a speaking tube from his desk.

"Excuse me for one moment, sir," he begged. "I should like my partner to be present. Montague," he went on through the speaking tube, "step this way at once, if you please."

Mr. Montague, spruce, well groomed, dark, oily, also Semitic, appeared almost immediately.

"Close the door, Sam," Mr. Lewitt begged. "Here's this gentleman's card. He had said one sentence only when I whistled for you. He comes on behalf of Mr. Daniel Greenlaw."

Mr. Montague's lips became for a moment pursed.

"What ith his business?" he asked quickly. "What doth he want?"

They both looked at their visitor anxiously. Mr. Anderson hesitated for a moment. He spoke in some affected embarrassment.

"I am sure," he said, "that Mr. Greenlaw's fears have no real foundation. However, as you know, Mr. Wills was his friend, and he has only the pleasure of a very slight acquaintance with either of you gentlemen. To put the matter to you plainly, Mr. Greenlaw has been disturbed by rumors as to the stability of your firm."

"Goodneth gracious!" Mr. Montague exclaimed.

Mr. Lewitt only extended his hands in dumb amazement.

"I have heard it said," Mr. Forrest Anderson continued suavely, "that the death of the senior partner will sometimes affect the credit of the most substantial firms. Mr. Greenlaw, let me hasten to assure you, only requires assurances of the safety of his investments with you."

A marked air of relief was immediately apparent in the countenances of the two partners.

"Anything we can do," Mr. Lewitt hastened to say—"we can, without the slightest difficulty, prove to you the stability of our position. We should not even object to taking you to our bankers. Try one of these cigars, Mr. Anderson, while we discuss the matter amicably."

Mr. Anderson accepted one graciously, and lit it from the match which Mr. Montague offered.

"Mr. Greenlaw's position," he went on, "is a somewhat peculiar one."

The partners laughed outright.

"Very good!" Mr. Montague exclaimed.

"Excellent!" Mr. Lewitt echoed.

"At the same time, gentlemen," Mr. Anderson proceeded, "I am sure you will be relieved to hear that several recent—shall I say affairs?—which have been attributed to Mr. Greenlaw have been attributed to him quite erroneously."

"Delighted to hear it," Mr. Lewitt

declared perfunctorily. "Let me ask you, Mr. Anderson, is Mr. Greenlaw thinking of withdrawing his money?"

"Not that I am aware of," Mr. Anderson replied. "That, at any rate, is not the object of my visit."

The faces of the partners again expressed the liveliest satisfaction.

"There ith interest and dividenth," Mr. Montague remarked, "amounting to a conthiderable sum. Perhapth Mr. Greenlaw would like a check or noteth for this?"

Mr. Anderson shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. Greenlaw," he explained, "is in no need of money. The object of my visit is simply this: Mr. Greenlaw wishes to assure himself of the safety of his capital. He is a peculiar man, and he wishes to do so in a manner of his own."

"Very good, very good," Mr. Lewitt murmured softly. "Pray go on, Mr. Anderson."

"Mr. Greenlaw," Mr. Anderson continued, again glancing around the room, "requires ocular demonstration of the safety of his investment, and for that purpose is willing to run a not inconsiderable risk. He proposes to present himself here at half past twelve next Tuesday morning."

"What! In thith office?" Mr. Montague exclaimed.

"Exactly," Mr. Anderson agreed. "There is risk, of course, but, as you have doubtless heard, Mr. Greenlaw is the cleverest man at a disguise on the face of the earth. He will come as an elderly gentleman, and he requires to see upon your desk forty thousand pounds' worth of bank notes or government bonds, payable to bearer, and made out in his name."

The two partners looked at one another.

"But surely, Mr. Anderson," Mr. Lewitt protested, "a visit to the bankers would have an equally satisfactory effect?"

Mr. Anderson shook his head.

"Greenlaw," he said, "is a man of cranky notions. He is also the most obstinate person I ever knew in my life. If I might venture to offer you any advice, I would suggest that you humor him in this matter. Mr. Greenlaw would, of course, expect to pay the commission upon any necessary transference of stock."

Mr. Lewitt rose from his seat.

"If you will excuse me," he begged, "I should like to consult with my partner for a moment."

"By all means," Mr. Anderson agreed.

The two members of the firm left the room. When they returned in about five minutes, their accustomed sleek amiability was once more visible in their countenances.

"We have dethided," Mr. Montague declared, "to humor Mr. Greenlaw'th whim."

"Mr. Greenlaw," Mr. Lewitt added, "is an old and valued client. We regret the eccentricities of his career, which have prevented our ever making his acquaintance. We shall be delighted to see him on Tuesday morning at half past twelve, and will show him his money in Bank of England notes. The commission will be somewhat heavy, but I presume there will be no objection to that. We shall debit it to the account due for interest and dividends."

Mr. Anderson shook hands with both the partners.

"I am sure," he said, "that you have decided wisely."

At precisely half past twelve on the following Tuesday morning Mr. Laxworthy and Mr. Forrest Anderson entered the offices of Messrs. Wills, Lewitt & Montague. They were shown without an instant's delay into Mr. Lewitt's room, where the two partners were waiting.

"This," Mr. Anderson announced, having shaken hands himself, "is Mr. Greenlaw."

"Care to shake hands?" Mr. Laxworthy asked briskly.

"My *dear* Mr. Greenlaw, delighted!" Mr. Montague exclaimed with effusion, holding out his fat, white fingers. "Only *too* delighted," he added with empresse-

ment, "to have the pleasure of meeting at latht tho valued a client!"

"We have often spoken of you," Mr. Lewitt added, also offering his hand, "and I think we may say that we have taken great interest in your investments, Mr. Greenlaw. Mr. Wills was always most particular what he put you in for. Have a cigar?"

Mr. Laxworthy accepted it, smelled it, and thrust it into his waistcoat pocket.

"Where's my money?" he demanded.

"In a moment—in a moment, my dear sir," Mr. Lewitt replied. "Now, if you will come over to this table. We thought it best, in order to remove all possible ground for suspicion, to show you the money in Bank of England notes. How do you like the look of these, eh?"

He thumped down two packets of bank notes upon the table.

"Thomething tholid about that, eh?" Mr. Montague remarked, with his hands in his trousers pockets. "We've arranged it in two pileth, tho that you can count one and Mr. Anderthon the other. Take your time about it. No hurry."

"Perhaps not for you," Mr. Laxworthy retorted. "Can't say I'm too comfortable here myself."

"No need to detain you a moment longer than you care to stay," Mr. Lewitt assured him suavely. "Mr. Montague would only have liked the opportunity of taking you to our bankers. I can assure you, my dear sir, that we could put on the table, of our own money, more than that useful little amount of yours which you are just counting."

"Glad to hear it," Mr. Laxworthy replied. "Can't think why people ever bother to try and make money honestly. You and I know something better than that, eh, Mr. Montague?"

Mr. Montague grinned a little feebly.

"We do not conthider——" he began.

"Twenty thousand pounds in my pile," Mr. Laxworthy interrupted.

"Same here," Mr. Forrest Anderson echoed.

Mr. Laxworthy thrust both bundles of notes into his pocket.

Mr. Lewitt started. "Here!" he exclaimed. "What's that?"

"My money," Mr. Laxworthy announced. "I'm leaving the country. I'm going to take it with me."

Mr. Lewitt stared at him, aghast. Mr. Montague hurried up to the scene of action.

"What'th this?" he exclaimed. "What'th this, eh? Not tho fast, if you please, with that money!"

"Why not?" Mr. Laxworthy asked. "It's mine."

Mr. Lewitt turned to Mr. Anderson with outstretched hands.

"This gentleman here," he cried, "told us particularly that you were going to leave the money here—with us, that you only wanted to see it. We've shown it you, it's quite safe, you can have your interest and dividends in cash now, if you like. But the forty thousand pounds has got to stop with us."

"Oh, has it!" Mr. Laxworthy replied. "You'd better try and take it away from me."

Mr. Montague struck the table with his fist.

"I wath in the room myself!" he almost shrieked. "That gentleman there—that friend of yourth—he gave uth his word that you would not take the money away. We cannot spare it just now, I tell you! It would ruin uth!"

"Sorry," Mr. Laxworthy said coolly. "Good morning!"

He turned toward the door. Mr. Lewitt leaned over his desk.

"Mr. Greenlaw," he whispered hoarsely, "be wise!"

Mr. Laxworthy turned and faced him.

"What do you mean?"

Mr. Lewitt was exceedingly pale. The hands which continually clasped one another were damp and shaking.

"Mr. Greenlaw," he begged, "now be reasonable. Be reasonable, my dear sir. We cannot afford to let the money go like this. We must protect our own interests. Now, come. If a few thousand pounds——"

"Thank you," Mr. Laxworthy inter-

rupted, "I've no time for silly discussions. I've got my money and I'm off."

"You don't underthand!" Mr. Montague exclaimed, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "We mutht protect our own intereths."

"And I mine!" Mr. Laxworthy answered, turning swiftly around, with his right hand in the pocket of his overcoat.

There was very little cover in the room, but what there was Mr. Montague and Mr. Lewitt promptly took advantage of. Mr. Lewitt slid from his chair on to the ground behind the roll-top desk at which he had been seated. Mr. Montague squeezed himself tightly against the wall, and held out a heavy office chair in front of his face.

"What's the game?" Mr. Laxworthy demanded fiercely. "Have you laid a trap for me?"

The glittering little piece of steel which Mr. Laxworthy held so firmly in front of him seemed to exercise an almost paralyzing effect upon the two partners. He reiterated his question:

"Have you communicated with the police? You may just as well answer me. I'll shoot you if you don't."

Mr. Lewitt's head appeared timidly from behind the desk.

"Mr. Greenlaw," he stammered, "we don't want any trouble here. You just leave that money with us, put it down on the corner of the table. You'll get your interest, all right. You can't have safer investments."

"It's my money," Mr. Laxworthy declared. "Supposing I insist upon taking it away with me now. What then?"

Mr. Montague moved the chair cautiously from before his face.

"Your money is as thafe with us, Mr. Greenlaw," he protested, "as in the Bank of England."

Mr. Laxworthy's arm swung round —and up went the chair.

"Answer my question," he insisted. "Have you communicated with the police? Am I going to walk into a trap when I leave this room?"

Mr. Lewitt's head and shoulders appeared from behind the desk. He felt much more comfortable while Mr. Laxworthy's arm was pointed toward his partner.

"Mr. Greenlaw," he pleaded earnestly, "we have no ill will against you. We want to see you get away quite safely, but there is always a risk. Take my advice, now, my dear sir, do! Leave that money here, and you can go just whenever and wherever you please."

"And supposing I refuse?" Mr. Laxworthy asked.

Mr. Lewitt's head and shoulders disappeared out of sight. Mr. Montague held the chair squarely in front of his face. A voice came from behind the desk.

"For our own protection," it said, "we were compelled to ask a policeman to occupy the anteroom. We shall not communicate with him at all unless—unless we are obliged."

Mr. Laxworthy turned quickly to the door.

"Come along, Anderson," he directed. "These fellows think too much of their lives to play that sort of game."

Mr. Anderson and Mr. Laxworthy walked steadily down the stairs, regardless of the ringing of electric bells, the whistling, and the tumult of voices. Before they were out of the building, however, they heard the sound of pursuing footsteps. A policeman and a detective in plain clothes were on their heels. Mr. Montague and Mr. Lewitt hung over the banisters.

"That'th your man," Mr. Montague called out. "He'th got forty thouthand poundth of our money. Be careful—he'th got a pithtol."

Mr. Laxworthy and Mr. Forrest Anderson stood at the door of the motor car. Detective Marlin stepped out on to the pavement just as the inspector's hand touched Mr. Laxworthy's shoulder.

"You had better explain to these people who I am," Mr. Laxworthy said to Marlin. "They are trying to arrest me. Seem to have got an idea into their heads that I am Daniel Greenlaw."

The inspector and his subordinate recognized Marlin, and saluted.

"We are here upon private information, sir," the former asserted.

"No good," Detective Marlin answered, shaking his head. "This gentleman is Mr. John T. Laxworthy. He is personally known to me."

Emboldened by the presence of the guardians of the peace, Mr. Montague and Mr. Lewitt stood on the outskirts of the little group. The inspector turned toward them.

"Some mistake here, sirs," he said. "This gentleman's name is Mr. Laxworthy—friend of Inspector Marlin, one of our chiefs at Scotland Yard."

"He told us himself," Lewitt protested excitedly, "that he was Greenlaw!"

"He'th got Greenlaw'th money!" Mr. Montague cried wildly. "He'th got it in hith pocket."

Mr. Laxworthy produced some documents, which he handed to Mr. Marlin.

"Will some one take these excitable gentlemen away?" he begged. "You will find there complete authorization for me to collect the money which they have just paid me."

Mr. Marlin examined the documents upon the pavement.

"So far as I can see," he told Mr. Lewitt, "these papers are absolutely in order. Mr. Laxworthy was fully empowered to receive this money on behalf of Mr. Greenlaw."

"But he thaid that he wath Greenlaw!" Mr. Montague protested.

Detective Marlin shrugged his shoulders.

"It scarcely seems probable," he remarked. "In any case, if you have any claim against Mr. Laxworthy, I can assure you that he is a gentleman of large means, and he is to be found at any time. A matter for civil action only," he added, turning toward the inspector and policeman, who were still standing by.

He stepped into the car, which promptly drove off. Mr. Laxworthy sat in his corner, smiling grimly to himself.

"What I should like to know is," Mr. Marlin said slowly, "where I come in? Are we allies?"

Mr. Laxworthy shook his head.

"Not this time," he replied. "I am thoroughly grateful to Mr. Greenlaw for this morning's amusement. If I can arrange it, he is going to get his money safely."

The detective sighed.

"Then you'd better let me out at the Embankment," he said.

Mr. Laxworthy lunched at his usual table, and with his charming companion of a week ago.

"Your friend," he remarked, as he produced the notes—"your brother, if one might venture to take note of a certain similarity of features—has done well to get his money. Thorough scoundrels, those fellows."

She looked at him admiringly.

"I shall not ask you any questions," she murmured. "You are a wonderful man, Mr. Laxworthy."

"The forty thousand pounds," Mr. Laxworthy continued, "is there upon the table; but tell me how you are going to pass it on to Greenlaw? The notes can be traced, remember."

She smiled.

"I will tell you," she declared. "It was to have been a secret, but with you it does not matter. I buy jewels. There is no one, not even an expert, who understands diamonds as I do. Daniel carries the jewels with him, and when he has an opportunity he sells. As for the notes, they trace them to me. Very well. If through me they can discover Daniel Greenlaw—they are welcome."

Mr. Laxworthy grunted.

"We can't do better than the *omelette espagnol*," he suggested, "with *Riz Diane*, Stilton cheese, and coffee to follow."

"Excellent!" the lady decided. "I feel that I am going to enjoy my luncheon immensely!"

Phillips Oppenheim tells about "The Disappearance of Mr. Colshaw" in the Month-end POPULAR, on sale September 23rd. In that issue you will also get a novel by NORTON and the first part of a serial by RIDEOUT.

The Bull Moose of the Bleachers

By Charles E. Van Loan

Author of "The Ten-Thousand-Dollar Arm," "Three and Two," Etc.

The Bull Moose in politics can stir up a lot of trouble; but he is a really peaceful citizen when compared with the Bull Moose of the Bleachers. Ask Ty Cobb. Intoxicated with his own bellowings, the Bull Moose can demoralize the finest aggregation of ball tossers on the planet.

ANDY ANDERSON, left fielder for the Bantams, discovered the "Bull Moose," a distinction which remained peculiarly his own. No other ball player ever coveted it.

Andy found the Moose the day he lost "Bush" Hawley's fly ball in the sun. This sort of an accident happens to every outfielder, for there are days when the keenest eye betrays its owner and the most brilliant ball player goes wrong.

The situation was a critical one, and Andy was up on his toes at the crack of the bat. The Ponies, fighting for the leadership of the second division, had managed to get two men on the bases, with two hands out. Then up came Bush Hawley, a desperate youth, with a habit of breaking up ball games.

Andy had one glimpse of the white speck as it rose against the dark background of the stand, but when it passed beyond and soared into the bright, blue sky, the speck disappeared completely, swallowed up in thin air.

The home fans, who had heaved a sigh of relief when Bush chose aërial suicide, saw the reliable Andy come dashing in toward the diamond. They did not hear the shrill warning given by Louie Crabbe, the center fielder, but they witnessed its effect when Andy hesitated an instant, and then, whirling suddenly, plunged back toward the fence.

Andy did the best that was in him, but the ball which he should have caught "in his teeth" dropped to the turf twenty yards in front of his drumming spikes, and two runs careened across the plate, Anderson's present to the Ponies.

To misjudge a fly ball is a capital crime in an outfielder, and the bleacher jury brought in a verdict immediately, without recommendation to mercy.

"Aw, rotten! Rotten!"

"Buy him some smoked glasses!"

"Wipe the tears out of your eyes, and watch the ball!"

These and many more remarks rained down on Andy in a perfect storm, but he retained sufficient presence of mind to hold Bush on second base. This duty performed, Andy began to walk in short circles, bewailing his luck and cursing the "high sky" which had tricked him. The jargon of condemnatory outcries sounded in his ears, with no friendly voice to shout: "Hard luck, old b-o-o-y! Hard luck!" Nobody cares to encourage an outfielder when he loses a fly ball in the sun. He is paid to have an eye like an eagle.

Gildersleeve was preparing to pitch to the next batter, and by degrees the noise died away so that it was in comparative silence that the Bull Moose in-

troduced himself. Andy heard a preliminary rumble in the crowd behind him, as it might have been a pipe organ warming up, and then a roaring blast of sound beat down all lesser disturbances—a blast of vocal dynamite, deep pitched, resonant, and filling the air with tremendous vibrations.

It was truly a remarkable voice—one that might have moved a regiment of cavalry or stampeded a national convention. It halted the ball players in their tracks, and it caused Andy Anderson to cock both sunburned ears in the direction whence it came. And this was the message it conveyed, each syllable reverberating across the field:

"Bean head! Bean-head Anderson! Take him back to Copenhagen!"

The bleacherites greeted this brilliant sally with laughter and cheers. The humor of the baseball fan is crude and elemental in the extreme, consisting for the most part of ear-worn phrases and jests as old as the game itself. It is very seldom that originality finds its way into the bleacher seats, and the crowd, at first startled by the booming tones so near at hand, recognized the reference to Copenhagen as "new stuff," and applauded accordingly. Andy, stung by the insinuation, choked down a desire to proclaim that he was born in Sioux Falls. Andy was young—not quite two seasons in the big league—and bleacher condemnation was a new thing to him.

The commotion died away when the next batter smote weakly and was thrown out at first, and Andy trotted back to the bench, meekly presenting himself to the grilling which he expected to receive from his teammates. He was not disappointed. They told him exactly what they thought of a man who would lose a ball in the sun with two on and two out.

Andy made feeble excuses out of the far corner of his mouth and busied himself at the bat pile. It seldom fails that when a player has distinguished himself in one way or another he comes to bat immediately afterward. George Kehoe, third baseman, was also raking over the bats. To him Andy put a question.

"Did I hear him!" exclaimed Kehoe. "You don't see any cotton in my ears, do you? Everybody heard him! What's the use of a telephone when a man like that can stick his head out of the window and talk with people in the next town? If I had pipes like that, I'd lay for an umpire's job! Why, Silk O'Loughlin would sound like a croupy baby beside me!"

"I wonder where he got that Copenhagen stuff?" said Andy. "First thing you know he'll have these people thinking I'm a Norwegian or something like that."

Then, armed with the short black bludgeon already famous in the big league, Andy advanced to the plate. Handsome Harry McCarter was pitching for the Ponies that day. He was a master of sarcasm, as well as of three methods of delivering the spitball, and he grinned at Andy in friendly fashion, for Handsome believed in talking to his victims.

"I see you've got your press agent here to-day," said McCarter genially. "How much are you paying him to boost you, kid?"

"Aw, shut up!" growled Anderson.

Just at this critical point the unknown on the bleachers exploded into language a second time.

"Pity the blind!" rumbled the booming tones. *"Throw him high balls, because he can't see 'em!"*

Even the ball players laughed, and the stands fairly rocked to the merriment of the multitude. McCarter, being a shrewd pitcher, took advantage of Andy's disturbed mental condition, whipping over two strikes in rapid sequence. Then, having the batter deep in the hole, Harry proceeded to polish him off at leisure.

"Get him a tin cup and a sign!" was the next contribution from the unknown critic. By this time the man with the big voice was the star of the afternoon, and grand-stand customers were craning their necks in an attempt to locate him. So were the ball players. Every spare man on the Bantam bench had his eyes glued on the left-field bleachers.

As Andy walked away from the plate,

having been called out on a third strike, Handsome Harry yelled after him.

"I take it all back!" he shouted. "That ain't no press agent. That's a bull moose!"

Thus Andy discovered the Moose; Handsome Harry McCarter christened him with a name which stuck, and the Bantams began to take a deep interest in his vocal eruptions, little dreaming how well they were fated to know him or how heartily they should come to loathe his rumbling bellow.

The Ponies defeated the Bantams that afternoon by a score of 3 to 1, and in the clubhouse after the game was over a great part of the blame was shifted to the shoulders of the Moose.

"He got the crowd after us," complained Charlie Gildersleeve, who was naturally sore over his defeat. "One guy like that with a pair of leather lungs can sick a thousand other loud-mouths onto you. And then, of course, Andy had to go and lose that fly ball."

"Say, lay off of me, will you?" snapped Andy. "I've had enough people riding me to-day, and I'll state right now that I won't stand for any more of it. A fellow would think, the way Gildersleeve beefs around here, that he never kicked one in his life—or walked a man with the bases full!"

This remark was scarcely diplomatic, for only the week before Charlie Gildersleeve had issued two passes in the ninth inning of a tight game, and the second one forced in the run which beat the Bantams. Gildersleeve insisted that the umpire had "missed the big one" on him, and with this still rankling in his breast he retorted warmly, mentioning Copenhagen and the reputed thickness of the Scandinavian skull.

In two minutes the atmosphere of the clubhouse tingled with the electric thrill of approaching battle. The Ponies, dressing peaceably on the other side of the wall, heard voices lifted in anger.

"Somebody's getting a good cussing out," remarked "Dutch" Orendorff. "If they get fighting among themselves, we ought to take all four games from 'em."

"Guess the Moose must have stirred 'em up," said McCarter. "A fellow with a voice like that could stir up any club in the league. If I knew who he was, I'd hire him to travel around with this bum club and talk to the other fellows while I pitch to them. Never lose a game that way. But I couldn't spot him in the crowd. Thought I had him pegged once, but I was wrong."

The Bantams continued to wrangle loudly, with the inevitable result that nearly every player on the club was dragged into the mêlée. Old scores were brought out and footed up; old sores were opened anew. Each man, as he departed, banged the door after him, and altogether it was a very acrimonious session. The cheerful family spirit which should be a part of the make-up of every successful ball club vanished, and the dove of peace took flight with most of its tail feathers shot away by a raking cross-fire of recrimination and downright abuse.

The next day, when most of the players were willing to forgive and forget, Charlie Gildersleeve marched into the dressing room with a chip on his shoulder. Charlie had the disposition of an Indian. "Silent" McCloskey, the second baseman, who was laid up with a gashed shin and an ugly sliding bruise, and was, therefore, not in the best of humor, promptly gave Gildersleeve a "call," and the battle was resumed where it had been dropped the night before.

It was raging full force when Dan O'Hara arrived on the scene. Dan was the bench manager, but he was no disciplinarian, and, instead of stamping out the disturbance, he added to it by a few sarcastic remarks of his own devising. When the time came for the Bantams to take the field they went out growling, and woefully lacking in that necessary quality known as "pep." They had left their game in the clubhouse.

Under the circumstances it was not strange that the Ponies stole the jump on them, and in the very first inning piled up enough runs to win the game. As the figure "4" went up on the score board the Bull Moose, in the right-field bleachers this time, saluted it with his initial remark of the afternoon, and the

Bantams looked at each other, as much as to say, "There he is again!"

"One! Two! Three! Four!" bellowed the Moose. *"And that ain't all! The game is young yet!"*

It is never a hard matter to encourage baseball fans to slip the skids under a sliding team. Most of them are only too willing to lend a hand at the rollers, and by the end of the second day the Bull Moose was the head and front of a hostile rooting faction. All any crowd needs is a leader. The Moose struck the keynote, and the others followed him. His tremendous voice controlled the attack upon the home boys, and the faintest rumble from that foghorn throat was enough to start a thousand lesser tongues to clacking.

The Moose turned out to be a competent prophet of evil, for the Ponies laced the Bántams by the scandalous score of 14 to 2, and each addition to the heavy end of the count was the signal for a fresh outburst from the human megaphone, so craftily concealed on the bleachers.

On the third day the Bantams expected to hear from the unknown, and awaited his opening salute with tense nerves. On the fourth day they dreaded him, and after that he became a nightmare, a pest, an abomination, and any man on the club would have poisoned the Bull Moose with all the pleasure in life.

Day after day the Bantams lost, and day after day the terrible voice gloated over their defeats and led the increasing anvil chorus. In the minds of the ball players, the Bull Moose was the personification of hard luck, the symbol of the losing streak, and the cause of the woeful slump into which they had fallen. The very fact that they did not know what he looked like added to their discomfiture, and, though the extra men on the bench watched the crowds carefully, they were unable to pick out the storm center in the sea of faces.

The Bantams boasted a modern ball park, with seating accommodations for thirty thousand, and from the home bench a face on the bleachers was no more than a tiny red speck. Silent McCloskey, still on the invalid list, put in a whole afternoon with his wife's opera glasses, but the identity of the Bull Moose remained as much of a mystery as ever.

After the Bantams dropped their eighth straight game—Gildersleeve pitched it, and the Moose had been, if anything, more insulting than ever—Dan O'Hara called a council of peace in the clubhouse.

"Now, here," said the manager. "I won't stand for any more of this fighting on the bench and jawing in the clubhouse, d'ye get me? Gildersleeve, if you can't keep your mouth shut, I'll suspend you till you learn how. You, too, Anderson, and the same thing goes for Kehoe and McCloskey. If you'd fight the other fellows half as hard as you fight among yourselves, we'd win a game once in a while.

"About this loud-mouth who's been getting the crowd after us, well, I've got a plan. I'm going to have him spotted and trailed, and maybe something will happen to him that'll keep him away from this place for a while. I don't know yet just what it will be, but I won't have one man bust up my ball club if there's any way to stop him short of murder. We'll get him, boys, and we'll get him *right*. Now, then, let's bury the hatchet and play baseball again! The first fellow that starts anything is going to lay off for a month without pay, d'ye get me?"

That very night Dan took the first step toward the unmasking of the Bull Moose. The manager looked up Lenny Austin, a shrewd, thin-faced young man, who had performed many anonymous services for O'Hara's ball club.

"It's like this, Lenny," said Dan; "this fellow has got our goat, and I want to get *his*, see? I want him spotted, and trailed. I want to know who he is, where he works, and all about him. Get out there on the bleachers to-morrow and move around until you've got him pegged. Then trail him after the game. Make a report to me here to-morrow night, and we'll try to frame up some

way to put a silencer on him, d'ye get me?"

Twenty-four hours later the report was made, as follows:

"Well, I've got your man," said Lenny.

"Fine!" said O'Hara. "Who is he?"

"Did you ever eat at the Metropolitan Grill?" asked the amateur detective.

"What do you think I am—a millionaire?" demanded Dan. "That ain't any place for a ball player to eat!"

"Well," said Lenny, "I eat there once in a while, and I knew this bird the minute I got where I could see his face."

"Does he own the joint?" asked Dan.

"Not yet," said Lenny. "He's a waiter there. He has four tables over in the far corner of the room."

"A waiter!" ejaculated O'Hara.

"Yes, and the last man you'd ever pick out to be carrying around a voice like that. He's a little guy, about forty, I guess, bald, and fat. He lives over on——"

"Never mind where he lives," interrupted the manager. "I've got an idea. A *waiter*, eh? Gee! This is going to be good! This is going to be immense!"

There was a long, thoughtful silence, during which the manager of the Bantams sucked vigorously at his unlighted cigar.

"I don't suppose," he remarked, at length, "that any of the boys have ever been in that joint. Nobody there would know 'em by sight. It's a little too swell for 'em; too rich for their blood, but still—Crabbe, Kehoe, Gildersleeve, McCloskey, and Mulholland, *they've* all got spike-tail coats, I know. That ought to help some." With this rather rambling and ambiguous conclusion, Dan rose and clapped Lenny Austin smartly on the shoulder. "You and me," he said, "will eat at this milionaire joint to-morrow night, see? In our moonlights, d'ye get me?"

"I don't yet," said Lenny cheerfully, "but I'll bet you I return any lead you make!"

II.

Aloysius Reagan, at forty-five years of age, regarded life as a bitter disappointment. Fate gave him a militant spirit and a filibustering disposition, and then played him the sorry joke of elbowing him into an occupation where it was necessary to smother these natural tendencies under a pall of obsequious politeness. With a firm belief that he was born to give orders, Reagan had been forced to spend nearly thirty years of his life in taking them.

Gifted with the voice of a commander in chief, Aloysius Reagan's hard lot was to find himself a murmuring, mumbling servitor, with one foot pressed hard on the soft pedal and his vocal output cut down to "Yes, sir," "No, sir," and "Thank you kindly, sir."

He had been a waiter for nearly thirty years—a good waiter—but in his profession he had found no satisfaction save that which arose from a few private and unreported battles with French chefs and German head waiters.

As time went on he felt himself becoming more and more of a puppet, a trained automaton who answered to any name which came first to the tongue of the patron—Emil, Fritz, George, and, worst of all—Alphonse! Is it any wonder that at forty-five Aloysius was sour and crabbed and ready to quarrel with destiny? Is it any wonder that he should welcome any outlet for the feelings so long penned up within him?

It was a chance patron of the Metropolitan Grill who gave Aloysius the key which unlocked the floodgates.

"I've a ticket for the ball game," said the stranger, who had lunched well, and was, therefore, mellow, "and I can't use it. You have your afternoons off?"

"Yes, sir," said Aloysius, wondering if this was some new kind of a tip.

"Perhaps you would like to go, George," said the patron, upsetting Aloysius' mental operations by waving away forty cents in change.

"Yes, sir; thank you kindly, sir," said Aloysius, taking away both ticket and small change, and wishing he might be permitted to strangle the next man who should call him "George," that name being applied almost exclusively to negro waiters.

Aloysius went to the game and sat in

the grand stand. He recalled that in the days of his youth he had played center field for a hash-house team in St. Louis and had been more than a little interested in the national pastime. He wondered what had become of Ward, Connor, Brouthers, Anson, Clarkson, and Kelly, the National League stars of his recollection. He bought a score card, but the players' names were strange to him, and even the game itself seemed changed in many particulars.

Only one thing remained as it had been. The same old cries still resounded from the bleachers, evidently handed down from father to son. Aloysius recalled that when he was twenty and "slinging hash" in St. Louis he had been a famous fan. There was very little noise in the grand stand that day, and, after the second inning, a small, fattish, smooth-shaven man who might easily have been mistaken for a priest, appeared in the midst of the white-shirted congregation on the bleachers.

As he listened to the uproar around him, it came to Aloysius that there was his chance to take his foot off the soft pedal, pull out all the stops, and speak his mind. For years other people had been speaking to him, and he dared not answer back. Why not criticize these ball players, who also dared not make reply? As he thought of his silent years, rage took hold of Aloysius Reagan, resentment burned within him. He was not unlike those men of his race who fought the English under the lilies of France at Fontenoy.

> How fierce a look those exiles wear
> Whose wont was to be gay;
> The treasured wrongs of thirty years
> Were in their hearts that day.

Aloysius had no quarrel with the ball players; his quarrel was with the general eating public, and it was to that public he spoke when Andy Anderson lost the fly ball in the sun. The voice so long attuned to whisperings and polite murmurings rose in all its power. Aloysius noted with satisfaction that he had aroused interest; the other bleacherites watched him covertly and with a certain amount of respectful admiration.

"Gee, bo!" said one youth enviously, "you cert'n'y got a swell set o' pipes! Hit 'em again! They're a lot o' lob lollys, and they got no friends. Go to 'em!"

Aloysius hit them again, and then again, and between times he babbled. Having been silent, he became discursive. His tongue, taking its first real holiday in many years, wagged merrily as a child's upon a picnic morning. When he boomed at the unfortunate Bantams he experienced all the sensations and thrills of a great soloist; the laughter which rippled through the stands after one of his vocal forays intoxicated him like champagne.

That night a fat man from Duluth destroyed four dollars and sixty-five cents' worth of food, carefully picking all the change off the tray before he waddled forth into the night. Aloysius scarcely noticed this crime. He had just thought of something to say to Andy Anderson about Copenhagen.

On the second day Aloysius perceived that he was recognized as the leader of a turbulent faction; that his voice had all the potency of a signal, and for the first time in years Reagan felt real happiness.

On the morning of the third day a newspaper spoke of "the Bull Moose," idly speculating upon his identity and calling him "the director of the anvil chorus." Aloysius cut out the article with his penknife and put it away in the top drawer of his dresser, along with his life-insurance policy and the menu card of a banquet at which he had served a president of the United States.

For many days Aloysius lived in the clouds, touching earth only at rare intervals.

On the evening of the day when the Bantams broke their losing streak two gentlemen in evening clothes arrived at the Metropolitan Grill. Henri, the head waiter, did his graceful best to steer them to the table of his pet François, but they chose one of Aloysius' tables instead, and ordered liberally of the best the house afforded.

They began with Martini cocktails. Aloysius brought them at once in a lit-

tle silver shaker, frosted with moisture. The man who had given the order sniffed at his glass suspiciously.

"What is this thing?" he demanded.

"A Martini cocktail, sir," answered Aloysius.

The man leaned back in his chair and looked at his friend.

"Well, if that isn't the limit!" he remarked. "Didn't we say we wanted Manhattan cocktails?"

"We certainly did!" answered the younger man.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," said Aloysius, "but I understood you to say you——"

"Take these away and change them!" growled the one who seemed to be acting as host. "And try to keep your ears open!"

That was the beginning of a nightmare which lasted one hour and twenty minutes by the watch. The two gentlemen complained about everything—the soup, the fish, the condition of the steak. Aloysius broke into a gentle perspiration as he raced back and forth between the dining room and the kitchen. When he returned from one of the many trips Henri, the head waiter, was bending respectfully over the table and listening with regret stamped upon every line of his bland countenance. Aloysius caught snatches of the indictment.

"Without question the most careless, inattentive, and incompetent waiter in America—— Even if the man *is* drunk, he should not be insolent—— Steak ordered rare; look at it! As dry as a trunk hinge! Bring me my bill at once!"

Henri spread his hands and apologized profusely. He was desolated that such a thing should happen in the house where everything was of the best. The waiter was a good waiter; he was usually satisfactory. An investigation should be made, and certainly if the steak was spoiled in preparation another should be brought at once. But no! The gentlemen refused to tarry; they went away complaining loudly, with Henri tagging at their heels, spouting apologies.

After they had gone, Henri gave Aloysius a bad fifteen minutes. Of course, the only thing Aloysius could do was to enter a sweeping denial, which was the very worst thing he could have done since Henri believed him to be lying.

"This time I warn you!" said Henri. "The next time the big fine! You have driven away custom from the house!"

"But I tell you they *ordered* the steak well done!" protested Aloysius. "If you ask me, I think they were both crazy!"

"Be silent!" said Henri.

The next night a handsome young man in a dinner jacket strolled through the grill and came to rest at one of Aloysius' tables. He also ordered largely, but said nothing to the waiter. Henri, being as much detective as he was head waiter, made it his business to inquire if monsieur had found everything quite to his satisfaction.

Monsieur bowed, and with a smile replied in excellent French. (Not for nothing had Charlie Gildersleeve been "raised" in New Orleans!) The food, ah! that was excellent. The grill was to be complimented upon its chef. The service? Monsieur regretted from the heart that he should be requested to give an opinion concerning it. He would have preferred to say nothing; perhaps the unfortunate man had a family depending upon him. No? Henri insisted; he demanded the truth. Well, then, said monsieur, the waiter was forgetful and at times lacking in civility. No first-class establishment should permit a lowering of its standards. As for monsieur, he would carefully avoid this waiter in the future; to enjoy the evening meal, one must be free from petty annoyances.

That night Aloysius was fined five dollars and threatened with dismissal. In vain he raved and protested that he had done nothing, said nothing, forgotten nothing! The next day at the ball park the Moose spoke but three times, and the Bantams, once more on friendly terms, looked at each other with delight in their eyes and commented upon the feebleness of his repartee.

"He's got something to think about now besides ball players!" said Andy Anderson. "I'd like to be in on your

party to-night, Mulholland. It would almost be worth the price of a hard-boiled front!"

That evening there was a sudden commotion in a far corner of the Metropolitan Grill. Four gentlemen who had been dining together rose and marched toward the entrance, grumbling loudly. Henri, who had been watching their table with the eyes of a hawk, fluttered after the quartet, fairly twittering in his excitement and agitation.

"Gentlemen!" he panted. "I entreat you! I insist that you shall tell me what has happened!"

Jim Mulholland then found use for his college education, while Crabbe, Kehoe, and McCloskey listened with admiration.

"You say the man—*cursed* you?" gasped the astounded Henri. "Ah, impossible, gentlemen! *Impossible!*"

"I wouldn't have believed it myself if I hadn't heard it," said Mulholland. "My friends are all strangers in the city. I brought them here to show them that we have a grill which in every way compares favorably with the best in New York City. It seems I was mistaken. I owe my friends an apology."

Kehoe nodded and murmured what purported to be a quotation. Henri's face turned scarlet.

"He dared to say—*that?*" demanded the head waiter. "Send the Irish pig of a Reagan to me at once!"

In a few seconds Aloysius appeared. There was a wild gleam in his eyes and his fists were clenched. Once such a thing might happen, even two times, but false accusations three nights in succession! Aloysius did not wait for Henri's question.

"What nonsense is this?" snarled the tormented one, forgetting that he was a waiter in the presence of his chief, aware of nothing, save that he was being persecuted without rhyme or reason. "You were all setting there as quiet as you please, and everything satisfactory. No kick about anything. Then all at once up you get and make a break for the door. What it's all about I don't know any more'n the man in the moon! What did I do to you that you try and show me up this way?"

Mulholland stepped forward and leveled a forefinger at the furious Aloysius.

"Do you deny that you swore at my friend here because he said the coffee was cold?"

The training of thirty years availed not in this crisis. The shell of obsequious politeness, already cracked, dropped from Reagan at this monstrous charge. He raved and used language which amply sustained the original indictment.

"You see," said Mulholland to Henri. "The man is violently abusive. I should say that he is insane and not accountable. Come, gentlemen. I regret that you should have been subjected to this annoyance."

Ten minutes afterward Aloysius Reagan crept out at the back door of the Metropolitan Grill, a bundle under his arm. He was drunk with conflicting emotions, but not so drunk that he failed to appreciate his position. He had been discharged for the first time in fifteen years—discharged for insulting the patrons of the grill, and in his agitated state of mind he found slight comfort in the thought that Henri would be off duty for at least a week, nursing a split nose and a black eye.

"What's the meaning of it?" thought Aloysius. "Is it a conspiracy? Or am I going crazy?"

The next afternoon the anvil chorus on the bleachers lacked a conductor. Aloysius Reagan was hunting a new job. At the end of three days he found one. The Albemarle Café was not strictly first class, and the tips were not so generous as at the Metropolitan Grill, but Aloysius was not in a position to pick and choose. The damaged Henri, foregoing police-court publicity, had used the underground wireless against him, and the head waiters of all the best houses gave Aloysius the frozen face when he presented himself.

Four nights later Aloysius was again walking the streets, talking to himself. History had repeated itself. Three pa-

trons of the Albemarle had reported him to the management—one alleging negligence, one drunkenness, and a third impertinence.

"So I guess you'd better travel," said the head waiter of the Albemarle, "and don't make the mistake of taking *me* for a Frenchman, because if you do you'll go away feet first—in the wagon."

Aloysius tramped the streets and wondered if he was losing his mind. He had not been conscious of giving offense, yet one by one these patrons had turned up to accuse him. Who were they? What was their quarrel with him that he should be hounded so relentlessly?

In time he found another position. Aloysius was slipping down the ladder fast by this time, and even a short-order house was not to be despised. He hustled steaks and chops from morning until night, accepted ten-cent tips without turning up his nose, and in his rare intervals of leisure wondered if this could really be the same man who had once been called the best waiter in the Metropolitan Grill.

In the meantime the Bantams went on the road, and the ball park was empty for one entire month. When the team returned Aloysius secured an afternoon off, and the first voice which was lifted in greeting was the bellow of the Bull Moose. This time there was vitriol under Aloysius' tongue. He knew the difference between a fancied grievance and a real grudge against fate, and it showed in the outpouring of his wrath against society in general and ball players in particular. Had he known the inside story of his downfall, Aloysius could not have been more insulting and bitter.

"I guess we'll have to look this fellow up again and put the roller skates under him," said Gildersleeve. "Lenny can find out where he's working."

Three days afterward the short-order house dispensed with Reagan's services. He had engaged in a fist fight with a customer who accused him of "holding out" thirty cents in change—and that customer was Andy Anderson.

During the entire month of September Aloysius was out of work. Several times he considered leaving the city, but he was never able to bring himself to the point of doing so. There was a streak of the bulldog in Reagan.

"Never let it be said that you quit!" was the motto he chose for himself.

So he lived upon his savings, growing more bitter with each outgoing dollar. The Bantams finished their last home series, untroubled by the voice of the Moose. A man who earns nothing and lives upon a shoe string cannot afford to pay out fifty cents a day for the privilege of remaining a public character.

The Bantams, dressing after the last game of the season, chuckled over the downfall of their persecutor.

"We got him all right!" they said. "Pity it couldn't be tipped off to him how it happened."

But fate was already arranging this matter. That very night the owner of the club gave his players a banquet at the old Union Hotel. The manager, finding himself short of waiters at the last minute, sent out a hurry call, and Aloysius, reduced to one-night stands, was grateful for a two-dollar job.

"Get a move on you!" said the captain in charge of the banquet arrangements. "The soup is just going in. Grab a tray and get in line!"

"What kind of a show is this tonight?" he inquired of a veteran beside him.

"Stag party," said the man. "It's the ball players' banquet. They come here every year at the end of the season. Last time they left twenty-five dollars on the table to be cut up among us. Good bunch."

"Must be!" said Aloysius absently. He was thinking of a time when he had amused himself with these same ball players; made them jump to the lash of his tongue; a time when for a short space he had been king of the bleachers and dubbed in the paper "the Bull Moose." It seemed very long ago.

The captain clapped his hands softly, and the line moved forward through an open door into the banquet hall. Aloysius, treading softly with an eye upon

the near-turtle soup, did not catch a glimpse of the guests at table until he was well into the room.

Suddenly a face leaped out at him, and recognition came with all the force of an unexpected blow. It was the face of the man who had started the entire campaign of persecution—the man of the Martini cocktails and the steak! Aloysius hesitated, and his eyes traveled down the long table, mental shocks coming at the rate of ten a second. There they were, every last one of his persecutors! There were the men who had destroyed his reputation, and he had never for an instant suspected them of wholesale retaliation.

Something seemed to burst inside Reagan's head. Perhaps it was the mystery which had puzzled him for months.

Then for the last time the Bantams heard the voice of the Bull Moose lifted in a roar which made the chandeliers quiver and tinkle. What he said could best be indicated by dashes and exclamation marks. What he did was more to the point.

The startled guests looked up just in time to see a small, fattish, smooth-shaven man leap to the end of the long table, his face purple with fury, a tray of near-turtle soup poised high above his head.

"Now, —— you! Here's something you *can* kick about!"

They say that ball players are quick thinkers. Then why were seventeen suits of evening clothes—eleven of them hired for the occasion—sent to the cleaners the next morning?

At midnight a small, fat man boarded the Chicago Express. A slouch hat was pulled down to the tip of his nose, but as much of his countenance as was visible under the electric lights evinced an account balanced with destiny.

Be nice to "The New Ump." You will meet him on Monday, the twenty-third, in the POPULAR. Presented by C. E. Van Loan.

GENTLEMEN AND CUFFS

REX BEACH was at the dress rehearsal of one of his plays, and he was there to see that everything was done exactly right. In one scene a member of the cast failed to pull down his cuffs as was stipulated in the stage directions.

"Wait one minute!" exclaimed Beach, prancing out to the middle of the stage and interrupting the rehearsal. "Halt right where you are! Haven't I told you to pull down your cuffs? Doesn't the book tell you to pull down your cuffs?"

"Yes, sir," said the actor.

"Well, you haven't done it," objected the playwright. "Pull them down! Down, down, down! Every gentleman pulls his cuffs down."

"I fear," replied the actor coolly, "you go too much by hearsay."

THE EGGS THAT CLOTWORTHY ATE

HARRY CLOTWORTHY, who is an expert on military affairs, entered the dining room of the National Press Club one morning and carried with him a ravenous appetite. Having eaten one breakfast, which consisted largely of eggs, he ordered another breakfast, which consisted even more largely of eggs. After his repast he went to the writing room to get off some letters. Half an hour later the steward of the club found the colored waiter loafing about the entrance of the writing room and asked him what he meant by being absent from his post.

"I got a good excuse," exclaimed the waiter, exhibiting the check for the egg breakfast. "Mr. Clotworthy done eat two dollars' worth of eggs, and I ain't goin' to let him git away from here without payin' for them, high as eggs is now."

Sledge's Way

By George Randolph Chester

Author of "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford," "He's a Corker," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

$250,000 surplus has accumulated, and Frank Marley, president of the street railway company, suggests that it be used to build proposed extensions. But Marley is "in bad" with Sledge, the Big Boss, and when the matter is put up to Tom Bendix, Sledge's go-between and legal adviser, he wants to cut the melon among the few favorites of the Big Boy. Before anything is decided the news of this easy money leaks out, and three suave individuals, Messrs. Timbers, Bozzam, and Moodson, arrive in town with a perfectly good scheme for unloading a fake street railroad proposition on the unsuspecting populace and extracting the $250,000. As they outline the scheme to Bendix they show him that Sledge's crowd will divide the spoils and that Frank Marley will go to the wall. Sledge has just seen and fallen in love with Molly Marley, and when Bendix reports the scheme to the Boss he finds that, thanks to the Big Boy's interest in Molly, her father has been reinstated in Sledge's estimation. Bendix is directed to break with the newcomers and devise some plan for the disposition of the surplus that will include Marley. Through Bert Glider, a young society man and friend of Molly, Sledge finds out that the girl likes red roses. He gets her to invite him to a little party that she is giving, and when she reaches home that afternoon she finds florists' vans unloading bales of red roses at her house. Sledge appears at the party with a thirty-dollar box of candy, and more red roses. He hands Molly season tickets for the opera and the athletic club fights as favors for her young guests. Sledge also supplies impromptu music by a celebrated band, and finally brings the party to a stunning close with a spectacular display of fireworks that ties up traffic and arouses that part of the city. And then, when her guests have gone, the "instantaneous" Sledge proposes. Molly promptly refuses him, but he calmly assures her that she'll "come around to it." To prove her independence Molly promptly agrees to marry Bert. Sledge sees the announcement in the paper and telephones to Molly about it. Bert, who is there and realizes that the Boss will surely break him if it is true, denies the story in Molly's presence. She promptly returns his ring in disgust. But when a later edition contains the news that the Boss is to be "Cupid's candidate," she immediately reinstates Glider. Marley tells his daughter that they will all be "broken" unless she marries Sledge, but she declares that she will marry Bert in spite of the Big Boss. The three promoters get Marley and Bert to combine in an effort to overthrow Sledge. They are apparently successful, and are indulging in mutual congratulations when the Big Boy turns and with one move pins them all to the wall.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PRESIDENT MARLEY PRESIDES.

FERRET-EYED and restless reporters discovered the great secret of the clandestine street-car convention. There was no fooling them! They besieged the delegates in their rooms, waylaid them in corridors, followed them in the streets, bent over them unexpectedly at table, and pursued them almost into the privacy of their baths. The iniquitous controllers of one of the most indispensable public utilities had banded to fight the fine bit of restrictive legislation proposed by that sterling friend of the people, State Senator Allerton; so there!

President Marley, of the Ring City Railway Company, in a finally secured official interview, admitted the truth of this, and pointed out, at great length and with much heat, just why the proposed legislation was iniquitous.

"It would be a burden," he contended, "upon the already overburdened transportation companies, and would reduce the inducements for investment in this form of much-needed enterprise to a minimum. The people do not seem to realize that they cannot have the improved street-car facilities for which they clamor, unless a proposition is made which would be attractive to investors."

There being eight active-minded in-

This story began in the first August POPULAR. Back numbers from news dealers.

terviewers about him at the time, in the lobby of the Abbot, Mr. Marley posed smilingly, in the innocent belief that he would be correctly quoted, and stroked his Vandyke with complacent assurance.

"What percentage does an investor need to make a proposition attractive?" inquired a young man who made disbelief a profitable profession.

Frank Marley had him that time!

"Four per cent, or even three, where there is no risk," he laughingly replied, with quite justifiable pride in his quick penetration. "The constant threat, however, of competition, of adverse legislation, of city-improvement expense, renders street-railway investment a speculative one, except"—and here he cleverly bore the stock market in mind—"except in a rapidly growing municipality like Ring City, the transportation facilities of which are vastly inadequate."

"You think there's room for two companies in Ring City, then?" suggested the young man, who, because he believed nothing, had been elected spokesman of the interviewing party by voiceless consent.

"Plently," asserted Mr. Marley quickly.

He bore the balance of that inquisition flawlessly, and the by-standing W. W. Wakefield listened in quiet approval. Marley, by common consent, had been permitted to be the one to give out this interview, and all that the reporters surprised out of him was everything that he knew—namely, that the street-car interests of the State were in jeopardy by reason of Senator Allerton's unexpected and drastic bill. It was even hinted, by a coarse and meanly suspicious anti-Allerton organ, that the State senator had framed this bill merely as a holdup of the street-railway corporations, and that, after the senator had achieved his nefarious purpose of clubbing the companies into submission and tribute, the bill, which was a boon and a blessing for the downtrodden public, would die in committee, and never be heard of more.

Now that the bars were down, and the secret out, the car magnates were bold in their defiance. No matter what the ultimate purpose of the bill, whether for buncombe or blackmail, they meant to fight it tooth and toe nail, and they even allowed the reporters a seat at one of their meetings.

Mr. Marley presided, and half a dozen street-car magnates made intemperate speeches denouncing the unfairness of the measure, which was grand material for the literary geniuses who had to have news, whether there was any or not. It was a clear case. If the street-car magnates were against Senator Allerton's stern but just bill for the Protection of Municipalities Against the Monopolistic Perpetuity of Street-Car Companies, the newspapers were for it—on behalf of the people! Sledge sat in the back corner of the room, and listened in expressionless abstraction. He never said a word.

At a late hour, after an impromptu banquet, Frank Marley went home, and then the real meeting took place—just an informal gathering in the apartments of W. W. Wakefield. Nobody presided at this meeting, although Sledge made a few very brief remarks; and there were no reporters present.

Marley found Molly waiting for him, and she slipped down to join him in the den when she heard him.

"I've been trying to get you all afternoon and evening," she told him, full of an urgent fear which would not down. "I phoned to the hotel for you several times."

"Yes, I received the call," he acknowledged; "and more than once. On one occasion I was in the very midst of a speech. I wish you would not intrude your personal affairs upon me, Molly, when you know that I am very busy."

"This is not personal, except in that it affects all of us," she patiently explained. "It is business."

He smiled.

"A pretty girl and business don't mix," he kindly reproved her. "One of them has to suffer."

"It's usually the girl," she agreed. "Father, can you sell your stock?"

"I could," he informed her, too complacent and well pleased with his per-

formance of the day to be annoyed. "I see no reason for doing so, however."

"To whom could you sell it?"

"An up-State syndicate has made me an offer."

"Good!" she replied. "I wouldn't want poor people, like Jessie Peters' father, to buy it."

"What's the occasion of all this?" demanded Marley.

"I wish you would sell your stock to this syndicate immediately," she urged him.

"If I were you I would not attempt to mix into affairs which I could not possibly understand. Since you seem to be genuinely distressed, however, I don't mind telling you that the company, since I have become the absolute controller of it, has a brighter future than ever, and it would be very foolish in me to dispose of my stock at the tremendous loss such a course would entail at this time."

"How much could you get?" she wanted to know.

"Not to exceed fifty thousand dollars, Molly."

"Oh!" she replied faintly. "You owe more than that, don't you?"

"I meant fifty thousand, clear of all my obligations," he explained. "Was Bert here to-night?"

"Yes. Father, Mr. Sledge will never stop until he has absolutely ruined you."

"Oh, it's Sledge, is it?" he laughed, relieved. "Sledge has done his worst, and has failed. You'd better go to bed."

"Mr. Sledge has never done his worst," she persisted. "I met him to-day, and he frightened me dreadfully."

"Did he make any threats?"

"No; he just smiled," and Molly shuddered. "He is awful!"

"He's not so bad," Marley soothed her. "I've spent most of the day in his company, and we're all working together for the common good of the street-car business. Sledge has invested very heavily in the new company, and he is not so foolish as to parallel my lines merely to ruin my business, when there is so much better territory open."

"I don't know," she doubtfully objected.

"I do," he triumphantly assured her. "I saw a list to-day of the streets which the city council has ordered improved, and not one of them parallels the routes of my car lines."

He poured himself a glass of whisky, in calm enjoyment of her blank expression.

"I don't see what that has to do with it," she acknowledged.

"That shows how little you know of business," he informed her. "Now, I'll tell you a little secret. There is an ordinance which compels street-car companies to pay half the cost of whatever improvements are made on the streets over which car lines run. Well, when Sledge thinks it time to build a new street-car line, he has those streets paved first, at the city's expense. As soon as those streets are paved, you'll read some morning that the city council has granted franchises over these routes for Sledge's new company."

"Is that the way all business is conducted?" Molly asked, aghast at the world of speculation which this opened up.

"Nearly," he replied, with the pompously smiling fatuity of the man who believes such an absurd supposition.

"I don't like men very well," she decided. "I suppose, though, that, since they're all alike, the strongest one is the most satisfactory, after all."

"I think so," smiled her father, accepting that as a compliment. He paused, and picked up an engraved card from the table. It was a sample of Molly's wedding announcement. "These are very neat," he commented. "Thanksgiving Day. Are you going to announce the date through the papers?"

"No," she hastily assured him. "Father, I don't want you to say a word about the date of my wedding. I am confident that if Mr. Sledge finds it out he will create trouble. I don't want him to know it, anyhow."

"There isn't very much that he can do now," he told her, laughing, manlike, at her foolish feminine fears.

"He'd burn down the house if he took a notion," she insisted.

"He must have scared you properly with a mere smile," he chided her.

"A short time ago he scared you to death with a mere newspaper announcement," she retorted. "You were so frantic with fear that you wanted to force me to marry him."

"I can protect you from him now," he vaingloriously affirmed, big, still, with the importance of having at last the final say in his own car company.

"You wanted the protection then," she reminded him. "You need it now. Even if I don't know anything about business, I wish you'd sell that stock. I know Sledge!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FRIENDLY CHAT ON THE PEACEFUL SABBATH.

Marley, as president of the Ring City Street Railway Company, and as chairman of the impromptu convention of street-car magnates, was so full of business that he felt stuffed like a sausage. To his mind, the fund they had raised to fight Allerton's iniquitous legislation was woefully inadequate, and the men who should have been most interested were strangely optimistic. He suggested to several of them that they appoint a committee to see Allerton, and arrange some sort of a compromise, but here again he found an unexpected lukewarmness. Nobody seemed to think that Allerton could be "reached," and, as a matter of fact, every time he broached that subject he found his fellow magnates evasive. The newspapers need not have blazed so much about the probable corruption fund, because there positively was none. The subscription secured was only for the conduct of a publicity campaign, and to pay for the services of a perfectly legitimate lobbyist, who would explain the reasonable rights of the street-car men.

On Saturday morning the visitors all went home, looking fagged about the eyes, without having done much more than pass some frothy resolutions and raise the feeble fund referred to, and investigate, by electric light, whatever the keys of the city would unlock; and President Marley, staggering under the burden of his position, was very much worried.

He confided his fears to his future son-in-law after he had seen the last tired, hard-working magnate on a train headed for home and remorse.

"I don't think these men appreciate, as I do, the need of controlling street-car legislation," he complained. "Allerton's bill looks like a menace to all my interests, and I am a little bit surprised that Sledge, since his entrance into the game on a big scale, does not seem more concerned about it."

"It was Sledge who arranged to have these fellows come together," Bert reminded him.

"Yes," admitted Marley; "but he seemed to have such feeble ideas about what to do after he had them here. It wasn't like his usual vigorous methods."

"Then he has something up his sleeve," decided Bert. "I wish that fellow would drop dead. I'm afraid of him."

"You've been talking to Molly," laughed her father.

"No; I've been talking to Sledge," denied Bert. "I had just as leave have a rattlesnake devote its life to the ambition of sinking a fang into the calf of my leg as to have Sledge fussing in with me. If I can find a buyer for it, I'm going to unload my stock in that amusement park while the public still thinks it will be built."

Marley frowned his crushing displeasure.

"You are expressing very small confidence in me," he reproved. "I don't see why your nervousness about Sledge should extend to an operation which depends on my judgment alone. The Ridgewood Avenue extension is to be built as fast as it can be pushed through. I have already ordered the rails, the franchise cannot be disputed, and even if Sledge were to parallel the Ridgewood Avenue line, it would only bring more patronage to your park."

"Not mine," corrected Bert hastily. "I'll get my money out of it as quick as I can, and I'll put that money where Sledge can't reach it."

"You're scared blue," charged Mar-

ley contemptuously. "How did you come to get tangled up with Sledge?"

"I met him down at the City Hall. He was wearing one of his fool red roses, and I think he saw me looking at it. Perhaps I did grin. At any rate, he stopped, and asked me when I was to be married to Molly."

"What did you tell him?"

"Christmas. Molly, yesterday afternoon, warned me not to tell any one, and particularly Sledge, that it is to be Thanksgiving."

"What did he say that scared you so?"

"Nothing," confessed Bert. "He only smiled. I felt as if I had been in a cold rain."

"Same smile Molly described," Marley laughed, though he was quite out of patience. "I can understand Molly's taking a whimsical fright based on nothing, but I didn't expect it of you, Bert. I have myself found Sledge to be rather decent in the past few days, and I am only annoyed because he does not seem to see the necessity of using his influence with Allerton to stop this street-railway bill. I think I shall see Allerton myself to-morrow. He comes home every Saturday night."

Pursuant to that happy idea, the president drove out to Allerton's house the next morning, and found the senator in the luxury of pajamas, easy slippers, and lounging robe, amid an extravagant confusion of Sunday papers. At his right hand was a taboret, on which bubbled an electric coffee percolator, and at his left hand was a feather-weight serving table, on which was a comfortable supply of cigarettes. In front of him sat Ben Sledge.

"Hello, Marley," greeted the senator. "You're just in time for coffee."

"Had mine hours ago," returned Marley, nodding his return to Sledge's grunt.

"Then it's time again," insisted the senator pleasantly, ringing for another cup. "Or would you prefer a cocktail?"

"A little of your exclusive rye, I think, if you insist on anything," accepted Marley, drawing a chair into the cozy little circle. "You're trying to save that rye, or you would have offered it in the first place."

"No, only trying to promote sobriety," bantered Allerton. "I suppose, however, that a memory of that good Kentucky stock is what brought you out here on this peaceful Sabbath morning."

"Hardly," denied Marley. "Frankly, I suppose I came on the same errand as my rival and competitor here."

"What's that?" asked Allerton, with a glance at Sledge.

"To find out what the dickens you mean by that infamous street-railway bill, of which you are the disreputable parent."

Allerton gazed at him blankly for a moment, and again glanced quizzically at Sledge. There was a low rumble down in Sledge's throat, but neither his face nor his eyes betrayed any sentiment or emotion whatsoever.

"I mean to protect the honest workingman, to save our houses and firesides, and add honor and glory to the American flag," responded Allerton solemnly.

Marley accepted that merry quip with the courteous chuckle which it deserved.

"Outside of that, and drying the tears of the widows and orphans, what do you propose to accomplish by it?" he persisted in like vein. "If I didn't know you were above spitework, I should think that you had it in for the street-car interests."

Again the senator looked at him with a puzzled air, then he turned to Sledge.

"Don't he know anything?" he queried.

"Naw!" rumbled Sledge.

"I see," answered Allerton coolly. "I supposed you all knew that before the bill was passed it would be amended to conserve the important financial interests."

Marley pondered that statement a while, and then he laughed.

"Of course," he said. "It's only political claptrap, intended to make the voter think you are eternally on the job in his interests."

"I wouldn't put it in exactly that

way," soberly reproved Allerton, justly offended by this coarse method of impugning his motives.

"I apologize," laughed Marley. "I should have said 'the bill displays that you constantly have the interests of your constituents at heart.' We were rather exercised about it, but we should not have been; for in your long service for the public I do not think you have ever promoted or fostered any legislation which would be destructive of capital."

"Certainly not," agreed Allerton, who never let down his pose in the presence of a man who had not proved his right to sit within the sacred circle. "Without the proper and legitimate fostering of enterprises requiring extensive financial support, there can be no national prosperity."

"That's sound enough doctrine," commended Marley. "What are the amendments which are to soften the blow?"

With kindly patience the senator explained to him the amendments, one by one, being careless enough, however, not to mention the fifty-year franchise clause.

At the end of an hour, Marley, much relieved in his mind, took his departure, regretting that Sledge was not ready to accompany him.

"It's strange how easily a man in control of important investments takes fright," he acknowledged, as he arose to go. "We can be put on the run with a penny's worth of firecrackers. Not long ago, our friend Sledge, here, had me stampeded, but I checkmated the old villain. As a matter of fact, the only result of his campaign against me was to put me in control of my own company, and now, I fancy, I have the thing so well tied up that I can't be hurt. I beat you at your own game, eh, Sledge?" and he chuckled down at his defeated oppressor with forgiving triumph.

Sledge looked up at him and smiled. His thick lips parted, displaying his teeth. The under side of his upper lip showed a sharp roll of vivid scarlet, and his cold, gray eyes combined to give that facial distortion an expression of malignity startling even to Allerton, who knew the man even better than Tom Bendix.

Marley was conscious of that strange sensation which those who had run afoul of Sledge had desecribed as an actual physical chill, like the sudden opening of a window to the cold rain; and the smile upon his own face froze. He was conscious that his lips were still in the contour which his bragging chuckle had given them, and he felt the embarrassed awkwardness in restoring his features to their normal expression, which a man does who has committed some atrocious social blunder.

The horror and the menace and the malignity of that smile increased upon him as he drove into the city. In front of the telegraph office he abruptly stopped, and, hurrying in, sent this message to his up-State syndiate:

Wire best offer controlling interest

CHAPTER XXX.

TWO GUYS MAKE WAY FOR A LADY.

Bert Glider, a necessary adjunct to the Sunday dinner, came just in time to sit down at the table with the family, and he was so preoccupied that Molly was half vexed with him.

"Now, who has won part of your marbles?" she chided him, attempting to conceal her annoyance with him under the guise of gay raillery.

"Bert already looks like a married man," laughed Fern. "I'd be frightened half to death, Molly. Think what he'll look like at a breakfast on the first of each month!"

"He'll never see the meat bill," declared Molly. "I intend to begin with alimony."

"I hope I can pay it," responded Bert, catching the all-too-jovial spirit of the assemblage, and pretending to gayety himself. "I think my first step toward making a living, however, will be to move out of this State, where I can buy and sell a piece of property without asking the permission of some alderman or ward thug."

"I think we'll all go," suggested Marley, who had been looking studiously

into his soup. "What has happened to worry you, Bert?"

"Since Sledge smiled?" queried that neatly mustached young man, in order to head him off from that reproach. "I think I have good cause this time. I took a drive out Lincoln Road this morning, and they're going ahead with their amusement-park project."

"Impossible," asserted Marley, straightening in outraged dignity. "While the Ring City Street Railway Company has a Lincoln Road franchise, which would prevent our competitors from obtaining one, it has not announced any intention of building in that direction, and will not do so."

Bert laughed quite without mirth.

"You remind me of that good old standard story of the man who was arrested for some trifling offense. He sent for his friend, and explained the circumstances. 'Why, it's confounded nonsense!' exclaimed the friend, holding the bars and looking through the grating of the cell door. 'No policeman on earth can throw you into jail for that.'"

"Why, he was in jail at that very minute!" protested Fern.

"I think that's supposed to be the point of the story," guessed Molly. "Of what is it apropos, Bert?"

"Of the impossibility of building an amusement park on Lincoln Road," he answered. "They're digging a lake out there. They're erecting the scaffold of a roller coaster. They've built a big work shed, which is later to be turned into a Tannenbaum Hall, which, just now, is stacked with the gaudy parts of a three-story merry-go-round. It may be utterly impossible for them to build an amusement park out there, but they're doing it."

Molly glanced quickly at her father. He motioned that his untouched soup might be taken away, and toyed, in nervous embarrassment, with an almond.

"I've already done it," he half-shamefacedly explained.

"Sold your stock?" she eagerly inquired.

"Not quite," he hesitated. "I did, however, stop at the telegraph office on my way back from Allerton's this morning, and I wired the people who have been after my stock to name their best offer."

"Good!" she responded. "Will you take it, whatever it is?"

"I can't bind myself to that," he replied. "I must confess, however, that, whatever the offer is, I shall be tempted."

"Allerton must have given you very little satisfaction about that bill," surmised Bert.

"Quite the contrary," stated Marley. "The bill is absolutely harmless. It is only a bit of political flapdoodle, intended to convince the voters of the State that Allerton is constantly on the job."

"Something must have happened to make you change your mind so quickly," pondered Molly. "Whatever it was, I'm glad of it. You must have met Sledge," and she giggled.

"Sledge must have smiled at him," laughed Bert, keeping up the joke.

"I have excellent reasons," Marley concluded, with becoming business gravity. "The future of street-railway investment in this city is too uncertain."

"Father," said Molly suddenly, in the midst of the silence which followed, "if Mr. Sledge finds you have sent that telegram, he will do whatever he is going to do before you can turn around."

"He'll have to move quickly," answered her father, with a superior smile, his self-approbation returning on the slightest provocation. "I sent my people that telegram to-day, so they would have it the first thing Monday morning. They were very eager, while they were here, to acquire possession, and I shall doubtless hear from them by ten o'clock."

"I wish I could sleep until ten, and when I wake up find that it's all right," Molly worried. "If you and Bert are not entirely out of all business deals in this town by our wedding day, Sledge will see to it, if he has to move heaven and earth to accomplish it, that we none of us have a dollar; and by that I mean absolute pauperism, in the best and most thoroughly melodramatic sense."

"He has the most absurd way of making love," commented Fern. "It's like the old cave-dweller plan of killing off the family, batting the fair maid in the head with a club, and letting her wake up in her new home."

"Not Sledge. He does his love-making with red roses," laughed Molly; "tons and tons of them. This is a different proposition. He has reduced everything in life to dollars and cents, and he thinks that if he can only break Bert and father, there'll be no wedding bells for us. Bert and I will each be compelled to seek a more lucrative match."

She glanced smilingly at Bert, and surprised on his face a curious expression, which plunged her into deep and not overly pleasant thought.

"He'd have bluffed me long ago," confessed Fern. "I'd have been so scared to death that by this time I'd be sending out afternoon-tea invitations on his business stationery."

"You spiritless wretch!" chided Molly.

"It might not be so bad, after all," returned Fern, persisting, now that she had started, in revealing the entire depth of her depravity. "I suppose I ought to be ashamed to acknowledge it, but I like Sledge."

"You may pack up your things and go home," laughed Molly, not really blaming her for the sentiment, however. "You're positively hopeless, Fern."

"All right," insisted Fern. "I don't think there'd be any more fun than taming and managing a big brute like him."

"Throw her out," begged Bert. "She's dangerous!"

Molly's anxiety was by no means feigned, for the next morning, at ten o'clock, she called up her father at his office, and asked him if he had received an answer to his telegram. In rather a worried tone, he replied that he had not, but that he would let her know as soon as he had done so.

She wandered about the house, quite ill at ease; then, unable to content herself, suggested to Fern that they make ready for a drive. When they were ready, she hesitated a moment or two in front of the phone, but conquered that temptation. Instead, she made their first stop at her father's office, and, with a curious degree of consideration, waited in the little red reception room, to be announced. She was told to come right in, and found Bert with her father.

Marley silently handed her a telegram. It read:

Our Mr. Coldman will see you in two weeks from to-day.

"Two weeks," she worried. "Can't you possibly hurry them up?"

Marley handed her another telegram:

Impossible to arrange earlier date.

"Hunt's resignation was in my mail this morning," stated Marley, with forced quietness. "He has taken a position of secretary with Sledge's company, and I suppose half my office force will follow him."

"Two weeks," speculated Bert; then he added impatiently: "Confound it, Marley! I'm in a pretty pickle if we can't clear our skirts of this thing! I borrowed the money to buy up Moodson's stock, from some friends of mine, and on my unsupported note. To lose would mean the absolute end of my social standing, here or anywhere."

"We'll see that you get yours first," offered Marley, whose respect for his son-in-law-to-be was only superficial.

"I didn't mean to urge my personal claims above yours," Bert hedged, his impatience, however, only slightly modified. "The fundamental fact is that we must gain time."

"I don't see how, unless Molly marries Sledge," suggested her father, with a laugh.

Molly started to laugh, also, but found Bert looking at her speculatively.

"She don't need go that far," he mused.

Molly looked at him in sharp incredulity for a moment; then, without a word, she turned to leave the room.

"Where are you going?" asked her father.

"To see Sledge," she responded. "I think you told me that he is always at

the bank between eleven and twelve in the morning."

"Molly!" commanded Bert sharply, recalled to his senses by her bearing, "you mustn't see him. I forbid it!"

"I am taking your advice, but I refuse to take your orders," she calmly informed him, surprised to find in herself an inclination to giggle over her use of that splendidly ringing remark. "Molly will shield you from all harm," she added, and she was snickering when she rejoined Fern.

"What's the joke?" asked that young lady. "I've been dying all morning to hear somebody giggle."

"You're to chaperon me while I go over and make love to Sledge," Molly gayly informed her.

"You're not really!" protested Fern, delighted, nevertheless.

"I am really," retorted Molly, her eyes flashing a trifle more than a mere jest would seem to warrant. "I must, Fern. I plunged both father and Bert into this trouble, and Bert seems to think it's up to yours truly Molly to fool Sledge along until they have time to get out of it. Besides that, it's sort of a game between Sledge and myself, and I'm not going to have that big bluffer win it."

"This is too delightful for anything," applauded Fern. "I'm perfectly mad about it, Molly. I hope Sledge is in."

Sledge was in. He was closeted with Senator Allerton and Governor Waver on a most important conference, one involving the welfare and prosperity of half the voters in the State; but, nevertheless, he promptly stifled his conscience, and allowed the interests of the sovereign people to suffer when Davis whispered in his ear that Molly Marley wanted to see him.

"Bring her right in," said Sledge. "Gents, you'll have to go. It's a lady," and he opened the rear door for them.

"Just one moment," parleyed Governor Waver, his hand on the doorknob. "I'm returning to the capital this afternoon, and——"

"I'll see you up there," interrupted Sledge, pushing the door, and the governor with it.

"By the way, my coat," called the senator from the rear corridor.

The knob of the other door rattled.

"All right," grunted Sledge, closing them out in the draft just as Molly and Fern came in. "Hello, girls!" said Sledge. "Sit down. Excuse me a minute till I poke a guy's Benny out to him."

CHAPTER XXXI.

SLEDGE GOES SHOPPING.

Sledge walked into Marley's office with his parlor smile, the recently outlived one which belonged of right to the red rose he wore, and he sat down before he began to speak. His usual method was to deliver his messages standing.

"We ought to figure a consolidation," he suggested.

Marley considered that statement carefully. He was beginning to learn that he really needed caution in dealing with Sledge.

"One of us might be gobbled up," he sagely concluded. "As I understand it, you own seventy-five per cent of the new company, while I only hold a bare majority of the old one. It would scarcely be possible that in a consolidation I would still have control."

"We'd have to pool our stock for either one to hold it," agreed Sledge.

Marley looked at him wonderingly.

"I don't quite understand the advantage to you in this," he puzzled. "Frankly, Mr. Sledge, I'd have to see that advantage before I could consider the matter."

"There ain't any," Sledge confessed. "I want to protect you, if everything's all right. Molly was just over."

"Yes, she said she was going to see you," replied Marley, clutching eagerly at the straw.

"I thought she'd get enough," stated Sledge, and he chuckled. "She's a smart girl."

"Yes, she is," assented Marley, wondering just how much she had said to make such a remarkable change in Sledge. "A consolidation would probably be a very sensible thing. It would

enable us to plan extensions, lines, and loops which would increase our revenues tremendously, with no possibility of dividing the patronage. Moreover, a mere announcement of such a move would add immediately to the market value of the stock in both companies."

"We consolidate after the marriage," amended Sledge. "We get all ready now."

"Any time you say," readily consented Marley. "I'll meet with you and arrange the details to-night."

"Naw!" refused Sledge. "Theater to-night."

"With Molly?" inquired Marley, wanting to smile.

"Molly and Fern. Fern's a nice kid."

"All right; to-morrow night, then," suggested Marley, his mind firmly fixed on the commercial opportunity.

"Daytime," corrected Sledge. "I'm busy nights. Say, Marley, is that game between Molly and Bert called clear off?"

"Did Molly say so?" evaded Marley.

"No," Sledge hesitated. "Is it?"

"That's entirely Molly's affair."

"I believe you," coincided Sledge, and again he chuckled, as he arose to go.

"Is there any objection to giving out a hint of this consolidation?" asked Marley, with an instant thought that, at the very least, this new turn would enhance his price with the syndicate which had proposed to buy him out.

"Huuh-uh!" assented Sledge. "You better see Davis about your mortgage. He won't extend, but he'll hold off."

"I'll go over right away," answered Marley, anxious to take advantage of that offer also, as quickly as possible.

"Wait till to-morrow," ordered Sledge, and stalked out, having but very little time to waste.

His way lay directly past the Grand Opera House, and he stopped at the ticket window.

"Give me a box for to-night," he grunted.

"Sorry, Mr. Sledge," replied the ticket seller, sincerely apologetic. "The only ones we have left are on the gallery floor, and those are so undesirable that we never make any attempt to sell them."

"I got to have a downstairs box," insisted Sledge. "Fix it."

"I don't see how I can," protested the ticket seller.

The treasurer of the theater, talking in the rear end of the lobby with the manager of the Avon Shakespearian Repertoire Company, came forward with calm authority.

"Anything we can do for you?" he offered to the man who had settled his difficulties with the fire commissioner.

"Mr. Sledge wants a downstairs box for to-night, and we have none left," explained the ticket seller.

"Who has them?" the treasurer wanted to know.

"Governor Waver's family has Box A; G. W. Horton has B; a party from the Hotel Abbot——"

"Did they take up their tickets yet?" interrupted the treasurer.

"No," returned the box-office man, displaying the envelope which held them. "The Abbot telephoned for them, as usual, and——"

"Hand 'em a gallery box," directed the treasurer, and passed the tickets into Sledge's hand.

"Thanks!" grunted Sledge, and stuffed the tickets in his pocket.

"Don't mention it," returned the treasurer as nonchalantly, and walked back to the manager of the company.

"What kind of a show is this?" asked Sledge.

"Rotten!" the ticket man informed him, tucking the impossible gallery-box seats into an envelope for the Hotel Abbot party. "It's highbrow stuff. 'Hamlet.'"

"Hunh!" grunted Sledge. "Any music?"

"Orchestra. *Ophelia* sings, but you'd think she was having her teeth fixed."

"Hunh!" observed Sledge again, and walked out.

Two blocks up the street, on his way to the Occident, he stopped at an automobile salesroom.

"This working?" he inquired, pointing to the shining big limousine which occupied the center of the floor.

"All it needs is gasoline," replied the salesman.

"Put some red roses in that flower thing, and send it up," Sledge directed.

"About dinner time?" surmised the salesman. "Possibly I'd better send it up before, Mr. Sledge. It has some improvements your man might want to look into."

"I'll send Billy down," decided Sledge.

He had turned to go when, in the adjoining window, he caught sight of a little, low, colonial coupé, with seating capacity for three. It was of an exquisitely beautiful shape, with small, latticed windowpanes and dainty lace curtains. He walked slowly toward it, his habitually cold gray eyes brightening, and, as he stood before it, he thrust his hands deep in his pockets and positively laughed aloud.

"That's our newest ladies' car," explained the salesman, following him. "The women are crazy about them; self-starting, electric lights inside, shopping flaps everywhere, adjustable satin seat coverings, and all the latest boudoir improvements."

Sledge scarcely heard him. He was still laughing. Nothing he had ever seen had struck him so humorously as the "cuteness" of this car.

"It's a swell!" he chuckled. "Got a red one?"

"No, they're only made in black," the salesman told him. "The color effects are obtained by the cushion coverings and the silk curtains."

"Put red ones in this. Got another one?"

"There's one just being set up in the shop," stated the overjoyed salesman. "It's an order."

"Make that one blue."

"Do you want them this afternoon?" asked the clerk, figuring that it was worth while to put off the other customer.

"Sure!" said Sledge. "Right away."

"I'll get busy immediately," promised the salesman, delirious with happiness. "Where do they go?"

"Molly Marley gets the red one. The blue one's for her friend Fern. Nix on who sent 'em."

"They'll want to know," the salesman insisted.

"Aw, tell 'em Frank Marley."

He dropped out as stolidly as he had come in, and headed for the Occident, but, halfway there, he turned back, and stopped at a florist's.

"What are they wearing to 'Hamlet'?" he wanted to know.

"It depends largely on the lady's costume," the florist explained.

"I get you," returned Sledge, with a worried expression. "Say, you make up eight or ten fussy bouquets, all different kinds. Send 'em out to Frank Marley's house in time for the theater."

Just across the street from the florist's was the largest jewelry shop in town, and the display in its windows gave him an idea. He strode in, asked for the proprietor, and got him.

"I want a rock that weighs about a pound," he stated.

"A diamond? Yes, Mr. Sledge. Something for an emblem?"

"Naw! Lady's ring. Solitaire."

"We have some beauties," bragged the jeweler, immediately aglow with enthusiasm. "Here is a nice little three-carat stone, which is flawless and perfectly cut."

"Is this the best you got?" inquired Sledge, looking into the case.

"We have some larger ones unset, but they are not usually mounted in ladies' rings," responded the jeweler, struggling between his artistic conscience and his commercialism.

"Let's see 'em."

Reverently, the jeweler produced from his safe a covered and locked tray, in which, on white velvet, reposed a dozen sparkling white stones.

Sledge poked a stubby forefinger at the largest one.

"Is this one right?" he wanted to know.

"It's a very good stone," the jeweler told him. "The one next to it, however, though a trifle smaller, is of much finer quality; in fact, we have not one in the shop of any size which I consider so

perfect as this one. It is worth five hundred dollars more than the large one."

"That'll do," Sledge decided. "Put it in a ring."

"Very well," agreed the jeweler, trying to be nonchalant, as he consulted a slip of paper in the edge of the tray. "This stone weighs six and three-eights carats, plus a sixteenth, Mr. Sledge. Have you the size of the ring?"

"Naw!" he returned, in disgust at his own thoughtlessness. "I'll take it loose," and he slipped the stone in his vest pocket.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MOLLY INSISTS ON PROTECTING BERT.

Bert Glider strode through the Marley gate, and trod on the Marley porch, and punched the Marley doorbell in a fine condition of manly indignation, and he demanded of the emaciated butler with the intellectual brow that Molly Marley be brought into his presence at once. He waited in the library while the butler went upstairs with that hasty message, and it was no comfort to his soul whatsoever to hear the girls devoting painstaking attention to an apparently endless job of giggling.

With scant consideration for the importance of the occasion, Molly, her face flushed, and her eyes glistening with moisture from her recent earnest efforts, came down when she was ready, and she was still tittering, while Fern, upstairs, could be heard in the throes of frantic laughter.

"Hello, Bert," laughed Molly, holding her hand to her jaw, and she sat down weakly. "What's the mad rush?"

"What did you say to Sledge?" he sternly demanded.

Her most immediate reply to that was another half-hysterical outburst.

"I'm not quite sure," she giggled. "Fern and I have just been trying to recall it all, but we can only remember the funniest things."

"You've made a fool of him and of me!" charged Bert hotly.

"We don't deserve any credit for that," snickered Molly. "It's so easy."

"The man has taken too much for granted," went on Bert, unsoftened by all this hilarity, and, indeed, made only more indignant by it. "From what your father says, Sledge seems to believe that our engagement is off, and that he has been practically accepted."

Molly put her hand over her mouth to suppress a shriek, and, running out into the hall, called Fern. The girls met halfway up the stairway, where Molly explained the glad news, and Bert, stalking stolidly out there, found them holding to the balustrate, in order that their enjoyment of Sledge's obtuse understanding might not tumble them down the steps. He strode back into the library, and barked his shin on a rocker. Molly returned to him presently for more.

"I've been missing my red roses," she confessed. "Now I suppose I'll get some more. What else does he think?"

"Heaven knows," snapped Bert. "He says he's going to the theater with you to-night. Is that correct?"

Molly gleefully nodded her head.

"Did you forget that you were going to the club dance with me?" he indignantly went on, feeling like shaking her.

This time Molly shook her head, her eyes gleaming with devilment, and from Fern, still on the stairway, there arose a wild peal.

Bert closed the library doors.

"I forbid it!" he commanded.

The change in Molly was so abrupt that it startled him into barking his other shin. First of all she threw open the library doors, knowing, however, that Fern by this time was back in the boudoir.

"You may do your forbidding to Mr. Sledge," she told him, with blazing eyes. "You were thoughtful enough to consider seriously sending me to him, and now whatever follows is up to me. I am going to the theater to-night with Mr. Sledge."

"Molly! Molly! Molly!" shrieked Fern, half running and half bumping down the stairs. "Run to the window, quick, and see the parade! O-o-o-oh! It's coming here!"

Molly laid aside her just indignation

for a moment, feeling intuitively that a Sledge miracle was some place in the neighborhood, and glanced out of the window, as Fern, gurgling incoherently, flashed by on her way to the door.

Up the winding driveway, one following the other, were two of the most beautiful little colonial coupés in the world, such cars as would make any girl go stark, howling mad with ecstasy. They were exactly alike, except that the one in front was hung with lace and filmy red silk curtains, and the other had blue with its fluffy white. Both the cars were empty, except for the hard-featured men who were driving them, looking as much out of place as a coal heaver in a lingerie bonnet.

"The blue one's mine!" claimed Fern, dancing up and down in a delirium of joy as Molly joined her at the door, through the hangings of which the girls now peered out in frantic impatience.

"I wonder what brings them here?" speculated Molly, dreading the worst.

"I don't care!" returned Fern. "That blue car's mine, and I know it. Molly, do you really suppose it could be a present?"

"Certainly not," decided Molly promptly. "Oh, but aren't they exquisite!"

"Exquisite? They're the dearest, sweetest, darlingest little things I ever saw!" cried Fern. "The only thing that's missing is that there should be a band leading them. Say, Molly," and here she sank her voice to a giggling whisper, "I'll bet you that Sledge——"

"Certainly not!" interrupted Molly, almost fiercely, and then she, too, giggled, and the two girls scattered away from the door as the chauffeur of the red car, who was the gentlemanly salesman in disguise, dismounted and came up to the door.

They waited in the library, with the frowning and bewildered Bert, while the thin butler with the tall brow answered the bell, and they distinctly heard the chauffeur ask for Miss Marley and Miss Burbank. They waited in half-frightened decorum while the thin butler solemnly brought that message, and then, with no more trace of excitement than if they had been dragged away from a tiresome French lesson, they walked sedately into the hall to meet the menial.

"Miss Marley?" observed that person, nodding to the right girl. "I have the pleasure of bringing out a very beautiful little gift to yourself and Miss Burbank," and here he nodded to the other young lady, who was holding her toes to the floor by gripping them. "The red-lined one is for Miss Marley, and the blue one for Miss Burbank."

"I said the blue one was mine!" half-shrieked Fern, unable to contain herself any longer. "I want to ride in it—now!"

Molly looked longingly past the person's shoulder out at the red-curtained car, and she felt that sick, sick sensation of self-abnegation clamoring within her.

"Who sent them?" she asked faintly.

"Your father," replied the conscienceless salesman, looking her more clearly in the eye than any honest man could have done. "If you have the time, we shall be pleased to give you a lesson in running them."

Fern was halfway upstairs.

"Do you want your gray coat or your furs, Molly?" she called as she went.

"Something light," replied Molly, equally excited, running out to inspect the car, with the gentlemanly salesman right at her elbow, and highly pleased with his job. The chauffeur in the blue car waited with bright eyes.

Fern, followed by Mina and another maid, both of them too slow to be of any service, came clattering on the porch with two afternoon coats and two bonnets, selected with less discrimination than she had ever used, and tossed them to Molly. "I'll bet it was Sledge," she whispered, as she ran and popped into the blue car.

Her coupé was the first to whirl down the driveway, but the red one followed in close order. Bert stood on the edge of the porch, with his hands rammed in his pockets, and watched the end of the world. Being a young man of keen thought, however, after fifteen minutes of numbness, he curled his mustache,

took up the telephone, and called Frank Marley.

"Did you make a present of two automobiles to the girls?" he inquired.

"Did I what?" gasped Marley, out of the midst of his plans for making the proposed street-car consolidation worth twenty points' advance on his stock to the up-State syndicate.

"I thought not!" returned Bert, with a very near approach to profanity. "I didn't think you'd weaken our capital by a five-thousand-dollar extravagance of that sort."

"I don't understand you," puzzled Marley.

"Two small, inclosed cars came out here about fifteen minutes ago, and the man in charge of them said that you sent them. Personally, I think Sledge has been getting fresh."

"It's barely possible," agreed Marley, feeling a dangerous indignation rising within him. "Leave that to me, Bert. As Molly's father, it is my affair. I'll investigate it at once."

Palpitating with all a righteous father's jealous care, Frank Marley kept the telephone busy until he located Sledge.

"I say, Sledge," he blurted. "Did you send out a couple of automobiles to my house?"

"Naw, Marley," chuckled Sledge. "They're toys. You sent 'em. Do they like 'em?"

"I haven't inquired," returned Marley, still standing by his fatherly dignity. "Really, Mr. Sledge, you know I can't allow my daughter to receive extravagant presents of that sort from any one other than myself."

"Aw, cut it," advised Sledge. "I get you. If they don't like 'em, I'm the goat. If they do, close your trap. You sent 'em."

"Well, but——"

"I say you sent 'em," insisted Sledge, with a gruff loss of the cordiality which had been apparent in his former tones, and Marley heard the click of disconnection.

Nearly an hour later, two shining little colonial coupés, the red-curtained one in front, drove up to the Marley porch, where Bert Glider gloomed in the doorway. They were driven by a happy girl each, and had no other occupants.

"Come and take a ride with me, Bert," hailed Molly, so full of delight that she had absolutely forgotten her quarrel with him, which was a blow indeed. "You can't drive, though."

Fern had emerged from her car.

"I'm going to have my dinner here," she laughingly announced. "I think I shall go to the theater to-night in mine. Jump in Molly's car, Bert, and try it. It rides like a rocking-chair."

"No, thank you!" returned Bert coldly. "Those cars are going back to the salesroom. I felt sure that your father had not given them to you, after our business arrangement of this morning. They are a present from Sledge."

"Oh, please, no!" pleaded Molly, with a heartsick glance at her red-curtained car. She had loved it at sight, but now, since she had learned to know it, she adored it. "How do you know that they are from Sledge?"

"I suspected it from the beginning," he sternly informed her. "So I called up your father."

"I said they were from Sledge!" cried Fern. "Molly, it was awfully crude of him, but I love him for it—don't you?"

"What did father say?" demanded Molly.

"He is investigating."

Molly marched straight in to the telephone, and called up her father. He talked to her kindly, wisely, and with deliberation; also like a man who had given himself plenty of time for thought. Bert stood at her elbow, listening to one side of the conversation, and piecing out the other with painfully knotted intellect. Molly turned to him with calm satisfaction.

"Father says that I am to consider the cars as gifts from him," she pridefully announced.

Fern executed the full figures of a minuet, and sang a merry tra-la-la all the way through. Molly helped her sing and dance the last figure.

"Three cheers!" she exulted. "Now we may keep our cars."

"I never intended to give mine up," Fern affirmed. "I couldn't!"

Bert walked Molly back into her father's den.

"I have nothing to say about what Fern does," he firmly announced, "but I have something to say about your conduct. You can't shut your eyes to the fact that Sledge has given you this car, and he has no right to do so."

"My father says that I am to consider the car as a gift from him," repeated Molly primly, but with a snap in her eyes.

"That is only an evasion," Bert insisted. "You have willfully misled Sledge into the belief that you intend to put yourself in the position of receiving presents from him, and either this thing must be stopped, or there will be unpleasantness between you and me."

"There is one way to head that off," Molly quietly assured him. "We can break our engagement."

"Impossible!" immediately declared Bert, frightened. "I didn't mean anything like that, Molly," and he attempted to take her hands and perform a little of the love-making which he had rather neglected.

"I mean it, though," she insisted, drawing her hands away from him. "Our engagement has only brought trouble to everybody concerned, and has subjected me to more than one insult which I had no right to expect. If we declare it off, both you and father can go right back to where you were in a business way."

"It's too late for that," he assured her, sitting down to reason it out with her on the commercial plane, since she seemed to insist upon it. "I could never regain the political friendship which is necessary to my style of business. My commercial career in this city is at an end, and my social standing would be also. Knowing this, I have been in correspondence with my people in Baltimore. They have a magnificent business opening there for me, but it takes a hundred thousand dollars to obtain control of it. I laid the matter before your father, and he investigated it. Our conclusion is this: If we can close up our business satisfactorily here, and he can sell this place, we shall have in the neighborhood of a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, clear, between us. You and I are to marry, go to Maryland with your father, enter into business, and take up the social position to which we are entitled. When I take you there as my bride, Molly, everybody's going to be very proud of you, and I am quite sure that you will like the social atmosphere there much better than here. I've dwelt on this so often to you that it must seem like an old story, and yet this is the first time that it has seemed very near to us."

Molly felt herself wondering why this glittering promise failed to thrill her as it had used to do.

"Murder!" called Fern. "Molly! Oh, Molly! Come, and see who's here!"

Molly hurried out to find Fern surrounded by florist's boxes, and nothing could stop the waves and surges and great gales of giggling which ensued as they uncovered one elaborate corsage bouquet after another. Even Bert had to laugh as he surveyed this embarrassment of riches.

"Sledge does things wholesale," he admitted. "But he is certainly lacking a few points in taste."

"I don't see why," instantly defended Fern. "Every bouquet here is a flawless beauty."

"Yes, but why such a crude display of his financial resources?" insisted Bert, laughing at the man's vulgar lavishness.

"The true explanation has its foundation in a very thoughtful instinct," Molly quietly informed him. "He wanted to be sure to send something we would like, and he didn't know what gowns we were to wear."

Fern surveyed the riot of beauty before her in sheer joy.

"Whatever he is, he's no piker," she insisted.

TO BE CONCLUDED IN NEXT ISSUE, ON SALE SEPTEMBER 23RD.

Con Larrigan's Pal

By William Slavens McNutt

Author of "A Real Square Guy," "Modest," Etc.

A pal's a pal till the gossips get busy. After that, there's liable to be a reaching for one another's throat. It happens in the grim North just as it does in the sewing circle. This is a story of the North, a strong story of a friendship shattered by the tongues of busybodies—and happily welded again by a deed of violence that made the enmity of the two old-time pals of small consequence.

THE feud began in the cluttered, ill-lit, smelly hold of an Alaska-bound steamer the while she throbbed her way across Dixon's Entrance.

It was early in May, and the boat was crowded with its usual quota of the annual influx of old-timers—laborers, prospectors, and claim owners who go into the North every spring.

In the hold a dozen different gambling games had been in full blast ever since the boat had sailed from Seattle. Blackjack, poker, roulette, chuck-a-luck went on uninterruptedly, presided over in relays by the gamblers, who slept and dealt in turn.

A slit-eyed, claw-fingered Chinaman sat behind a chuck-a-luck outfit of painted canvas, spread on a convenient packing case in an unoccupied area among the piles of freight, like a mechanically operated statue of a degenerate Buddha, invisibly equipped with a very poor phonograph and only one monotonous, singsong record:

"A'light! a'light! Evelybody coom! C-o-o-o-m! c-o-o-o-o-m! E-e-e-e-vely-body tly luck! Evely-body beat 'em. E-e-e-e-vely-body! A-a-a-a-ll bet? Heh? Hah! Black s-e-e-e-x! Ah pay you, pay you, pay you. 'Las all. A'light! E-e-e-e-vely-body coom——"

In another place, standing behind a portable roulette outfit set up in the circle of feeble light cast by a swinging ship's lantern hung from a deck beam, a little stoop-shouldered, hawk-nosed man, with a wide, leather-lipped mouth, whose contortions expressed unalloyed evil to an extent almost unbelievable of any single feature of a human face, "tinhorned" raucously.

In every empty space that would admit of a blanket being spread, blackjack and poker games were in progress. The players squatted about in a circle, each with a sputtering candle set in a holder of tallow melted onto the blanket and molded about the base of the stick.

Prospectors, with grubstakes and outfits aboard, rose from their places about these blankets, stripped of their last dollar of cash; walked about aimlessly for a time, sold their outfits and grub at a tremendous sacrifice to some lucky laborer who had held out a "shoe string" and drawn back the equivalent of a half year's pay. The sale price of their outfits lost, they wandered away to some dark corner to puzzle over the problem that vexed Adam: "What did I do it for?" and wonder whether day labor was in greater demand on the creeks around Dawson or on the new railroad out of Cordova.

For two nights and two days the hold had seethed with a nerve-shattering

atmosphere of suppressed excitement that at last boiled over the confining sides of caution and restraint and spattered the deck with blood to the crackling roar of the "forty-fives."

Squatted opposite each other beside a blanket on which blackjack was being dealt were Billy Wendel and Con Larrigan. Both were long of the North and its ways.

Billy was little, and black of hair and eyes; as wiry and tough as a mountain mustang and cursed with a hair-trigger temper.

Con was big and blue-eyed, and slow in his movements when speed was not imperative. When it was, the response of the big Irishman's body to the demand evoked such comments as, "Greased lightning," and, "Quick as a rattlesnake." To quote from a friend's description of him: "He's easy goin', but when he starts he's gone!"

Billy held the deal and had "stood" on sixteen. In consequence, he was busy paying off several winners out of the carelessly piled heap of silver, gold, and crumpled bills on the blanket in front of him. Con showed nineteen, and held out his hand for his winnings. Billy knocked it aside savagely, at the same time leaning over to count Con's bet.

"Keep your hands where they belong —you." He snarled at him in a voice that trembled a little. "I'll pay your bet with my own mitt. You're too—— What are you bettin'? How much you got there, huh?"

Con looked at him through suddenly narrowed lids. "S-a-a-a-y! You're gettin' a little bit fractious, friend," he said slowly. "Just what do you mean by——"

"Aw, shut up! Put that talk on ice! How much you bettin' there?"

"Somebody's right liable to put you on ice. That tongue o' yours needs coolin'! My bet was a hundred flat; five twenties. It does hurt you to lose a——"

"Hundred nothin'! What are you tryin' to hand me? You been bettin' fifty—yes, an' twenty-five an' ten. You ain't bet a hundred since you sat in. You ain't bet higher'n fifty any time! What are you——"

"Hold on there, friend! Don't sell any talk you can't take back till you're right sure you want to get paid for it. My bet was a hundred. There she lays. Pay me!"

Billy sprang to his feet. "You lie!" he screamed. "You pressed that bet on me! You——"

The roar that came with the tongue of flame that licked the darkness by Con's side cut Billy short. He spun about as though twirled by a mighty, invisible hand, and fell; but his answer barked from the throat of his own gun even as he dropped to the deck, and the leaden message stretched the half-risen Con flat on his face.

The mate was on top of Larrigan almost as he fell, pinioning him; and a deck hand wrenched the smoking gun away from Billy Wendel as the little man struggled to rise.

They picked the two wounded men up and carried them above to their staterooms.

Wendel fought his bearers wildly, screaming epithets and threats at Larrigan, who was being brought up just behind him.

Con lay limp and unresisting in the arms of the men who bore him, making no retort to the little man's torrent of abuse until they reached Wendel's stateroom. Con's room was farther aft; and, when the men who were carrying Billy stopped to open his door, Con was borne on past him. He rolled his head slowly toward the raging Wendel as he was being carried past in the narrow passageway, and nodded shortly.

"You're on, kid," he said. "I'm shootin' whenever we meet. I'll get you!"

A few minutes later the mate stormed down into the hold. "Listen! The whole bunch of you," he bellowed. "That's *all!* Hear me? No more gamblin' on this boat. I'll knock the liver an' daylights out o' the next one o' you I catch lookin' like he ever seen a deck o' cards! Give you tinhorns a half an inch an' you'll frame things right for a killin' in twenty-four hours! It's all

off. And if any of you want to land in Skagway with a whole bone in your body, don't forget it. I certainly will bust up the next one of you I catch gamblin'!"

"How's the boys?" some one of the crowd called out. "They bad hurt?"

"Naw," the mate answered disgustedly. "The little fellow got it through the shoulder, an' Larrigan got his leg smashed just below the hip. Too bad you boobs an' tinhorns couldn't do some real good to the world, an' thin each other out a little when you do get shootin'! Remember, now! No more gamblin'—an' that goes!"

"They'll finish it," one of the men declared as the mate walked away. "I know Wendel—an' Larrigan, too. Billy's a mouthy little sport; but he's game, an' he'll back his talk; an', believe me, Con Larrigan ain't goin' to buy no busted leg from no man 'thout payin' for it. Yes, siree! They'll finish it, them two."

Larrigan was the worse hurt of the two; and, while Wendel was able to be up and about when the boat reached Skagway, it was necessary to carry Con ashore on a stretcher. It was well along in July before his leg was mended so that he could have the practical use of it; but as soon as it was Con left for Dawson, whither Wendel had gone. He could glean no definite knowledge of the little man's whereabouts; but his questioning revived talk of the affair, and news of it reached Wendel that fall when he came into Valdez after a summer in the Kuskokwim country.

"All right! I'm ready for him any time," he boasted. "I ain't goin' lookin' for him, 'cause I got other business to 'tend to; but I ain't runnin' away from him, an' the sooner we get together the better I'll like it. I'm out for him. I'm goin' to winter in Seattle, an' anybody that sees him can tell him he'll find me there any old time till next spring."

A man who heard this speech was just starting for Fairbanks, and he repeated it there to a man who was going down over the trail to Dawson, where he retold it to many; and one man who heard it went outside over the trail in January on his way to New York; and this man met an ex-sourdough friend in Chicago, and to him he repeated Wendel's speech along with other gossip of the North; and this friend went to San Diego on business in February, and happened to meet Larrigan, who was wintering there, and from him Con heard Wendel's message.

"Got other business, hey?" he said. "Well, so've I. He ain't no more important to me than I am to him. I ain't huntin' him no more; but I'll run acrost him some time, all right, an' when I do I'll get him!"

In the spring of that year Billy got very drunk after booking his passage North, and missed the boat. The boat he missed was the one that carried Con Larrigan to Skagway. When Wendel reached Dawson, Con had left on a prospecting trip.

That fall, when Con came outside, he stopped over in Juneau to see a friend. He meant to leave Juneau on the *Bertha* from Valdez; but a stud game claimed him, and he waited over for the *Princess May*. The *Bertha* carried Wendel south.

And all the while the feud grew in notoriety and bitterness. Wherever men of the North congregated it was gossiped of. It was rumored that Wendel was afraid of Con; that he had lost his nerve and was dodging him.

This report sprang from such a vague source, and traveled such a circuitous trail of careless tongues, that by the time it reached Billy it was in the form of a slanderous statement made by Con himself, and repeated word for word as he had said it.

A counter rumor started in the same way, to the effect that Larrigan was dodging Wendel; and after the same process of evolution came to Con labeled as an utterance of Wendel's. Hatred of the other grew to be almost an obsession with each. The Sourdough Fraternity fed this hatred with constant talk of the feud in the presence of each man, and awaited their meeting with eager anticipation.

One day in August of the third year after the encounter on the boat, Billy Wendel, heading for Valdez and traveling light, stepped out of the brush into a small clearing on the banks of a little creek a few miles above where it emptied into the Susitna.

A small log cabin stood in the shelter of the steep bank only a few yards to his left. A number of broken shovels and picks were scattered about. The door had fallen from its leathern hinges and lay across the pathway just before the threshold.

It had every appearance of a long-deserted shack; but, as Wendel stood idly looking at it, he heard the sound of something moving within, and, startled, instinctively stepped back into the brush.

As he did so, Con Larrigan appeared in the door of the shack, and, leaning against the log jamb, stood frowning thoughtfully at an irregularly torn piece of brown wrapping paper that he held in one hand.

Wendel stepped from behind the protecting screen of brush with his gun leveled at the man framed in the doorway.

"Stick 'em up, you!" he called out.

Con raised his hands high above his head. "Don't shoot!" he begged. "Don't! For God's sake! Not now!"

"That don't sound a whole lot like the talk I hear you been makin' behind my back," Wendel sneered. "Tellin' it around you'd make me back water! I'm here. Make some o' that talk now."

Con flushed. "We'll talk o' that later," he said. "I reckon you an' me got somethin' else to do right now. You knowed Al Williams?"

"The big red-headed guy from Oregon? Yes."

Con lowered the hand that held the sheet of paper, keeping it extended arm's length from his body. "I run onto this shack about half an hour ago," he said, "an' I run acrost this when I started to get dinner. It was layin' in the stove. Read it."

Wendel approached him cautiously, keeping him covered all the while; took the slip of paper and backed away a few paces to read it. On one side of the paper the words, "HELP! READ THIS!" were penciled in large letters. The other side was well-nigh covered with a shaky scrawl. It bore a date but three days past, and read:

TO WHOEVER FINDS THIS: I am Al Williams. I have been shot. Jess McConnell did it. Three men with him I don't know. My wife lives 417 Spring Street, Portland, Oregon. I got eight thousand in dust on me. Met Jess and his gang on the trail. They shot me for my poke. I got away to this shack. I'm dying. They are outside shooting at me. They will get my poke with eight thousand. My wife has no money. I will slip this in the stove, and whoever—— They are coming; 417 Spring Street, Portland, Oregon.

Wendel mechanically slid his gun back into its holster as he finished reading the note. He looked up at Con and drew a long breath, muttered an exclamation, and fell to scanning the note once more.

Larrigan lowered his hands and stepped up behind Billy to peer over his shoulder. "I knowed Al right well," he said. "An' his woman, too. Awful nice little woman. I went outside with him one fall—about six years ago it was—an' stopped over at his place in Portland to visit with him a spell. They got a couple o' little kids, too; girls, both of 'em."

Billy looked up, made the same comment as before, and went over and sat down on the doorstep of the cabin.

"I reckon maybe I feel it more'n you," Larrigan went on. "Knowin' him as I did an' havin' visited with him in his home."

"Yeh? Mebbe. I never knew Al overwell; but his wife come from my old home town back in Nebraska. It ain't my fault she wasn't my wife instead o' his. I played for her hard enough for three years! I reckon I got some feelin' about it myself. Did you find his body?"

Larrigan shook his head. "In the crick most like," he said. "It's no josh, though. There's bloodstains all over the floor inside, an' the shack's shot up like a sieve."

Wendel nodded. "McConnell, eh?" he mused. "This ain't the first job o' this kind Jess' pulled off, either. Nobody ever got the goods on him; but there's been a whole lot o' pretty good guessin' done." He got up suddenly with an air of decision. "They'll make for Valdez an' a boat outside," he continued. "They ain't better'n three days gone, an' Valdez is a good two weeks' hikin'. Any old time you an' me can't make up three days in fourteen on a rounder like Jess McConnell, I reckon we'll stay below an' hug stoves for a livin'! Get your pack an' we'll mush. This thing's goin' to take two good men; an' I reckon that's us. We'll tend to our own scrap when we get through this."

Larrigan eased his arms into his pack straps. "Sure," he said. "Any old time you say. We'll hike on down to the Big Su an' stick a raft together. It's rough ridin'; but it's the quickest way out. I got enough rope so's we can line her through some o' the bad cañons. I've rode her before; an' there's one place you got to line through."

Wendel nodded. "I know where you mean. The Double S we called it. Crookeder'n a coiled snake an' about thirty foot wide. I went through comin' out from in back o' Mount McKin five year gone. Come on, let's mush."

Seven days later, crouched on their raft, an affair composed of four medium-sized logs about eighteen feet in length lashed together, they shot around an abrupt curve in the river, and beheld in front of them, between two high peaks a half mile distant, the narrow entrance to what both recognized as the Double-S Cañon.

The current had carried them close to the outer bank of the curve, and Larrigan grabbed the line and leaped ashore.

"That's the bad boy," he said, pointing ahead. "We've rode the others on fools' luck; but we've got to line through this one. There's a good-sized ledge about thirty foot high runs halfway through on the left wall. You can handle the rope from there. You come take the line an' I'll get aboard an' use the pole."

"You're ashore. Stay there," Wendel answered. "I'll ride her through."

"But I poled when I went through here before," Con expostulated, "an' I know better how to handle her, Bill. The water's away high now, an' it's an outside chance for any man to get through there on a raft, even with a line on her."

Wendel shrugged stubbornly. "I reckon I'm game to take it. I'll pole."

"I ain't goin' to let you ride that alone, Billy."

"Well, get aboard an' we'll both ride. To glory with the line!"

Con stepped back onto the raft, shoved her out into the current with his pole, and settled himself beside Wendel.

The momentum of the raft gradually increased as they neared the narrow entrance of the cañon ahead, and the roar of white water reverberating in the narrow space between the sheer rock walls grew louder.

"Say, I never said I'd make you back water, Billy," Con yelled in Wendel's ear as they neared the entrance. "Somebody's been stuffin' you. I said I was out to get you; but I never said I'd make you back water. They told me you said I was dodgin' you."

"Lie!" Wendel screamed back. "Never said it; playin' us for a couple o' fools. Zow! Look ahead there! Chuck your pole. Never use it in there with the water this high. She'll smash into that left wall at the first turn where you see that spray, an' hit the right wall at the second. See where that——"

One corner of the rushing raft touched on a submerged rock, and the whole spun like a pinwheel, the two men lying prone, clinging desperately with arms and legs. It lifted on the top of a wave; seemed to halt altogether momentarily as it felt the check of a back flow that boiled up under it, and suddenly shot forward as though hurtled from some mighty catapult, to spin and pitch in the roaring swelter of a throttled river between the choking walls of the cañon.

It disappeared from sight under a great smother of foam from which it issued to shoot into the air ten feet clear of the water, tossed out of the swirl by the sudden surge of some one of the millions of madly battling currents that had obtained a momentary supremacy in the wild moil; and it fell back into the myriad-handed grasp of the water still burdened with the clinging forms of the two men.

The spot on the left wall of the cañon which Billy had pointed out as the place they would strike was just at the beginning of the abrupt curve to the right. The predominant current of the stream, focused by its rush through the straight channel of the first hundred yards of the cañon, lunged directly into the deflecting curve creating the curious phenomenon of a solid and sharply slanting wall of water. For a distance of perhaps fifty yards in the hollow of the elbow the river sloped like a shed roof; the incessant drive from behind piling one side against the cliff on the outer curve.

The raft skimmed up this sloping incline head on, smashed into the rock wall, reared on end from the force of the shock, turned completely over, and fell back on the rushing slope to shoot around the curve as a racing automobile skims about a steep-banked circular track; and, when it rose to the surface from its backward plunge, the forms of the two men still clung to one of the outer logs.

Their limbs gripped by the mighty clutch of cross currents that dragged like great sensate hands; smothered under a chaotic swelter of high-flung waves; nipped with the teeth of hidden rocks; numbed into incapability of aught but instinctive action by the dazing whirl of their flight, and the crushing power of the awful roar that seemed like a great vise crunching their ears, they stuck to the wildly plunging raft.

Shifting from side to side as it smashed into first this wall and then that; clinging to the outer logs, astraddle, like a rider clinging to a bucking horse as the raft reared—catching a back flow as it shot over a steep wave—and spun on end ere it fell forward to continue its wild course.

The shock of its impact against the rock wall of the fourth and last of the curves rent the strained lashings asunder, and the logs flew apart.

Larrigan, with arms and legs tight wrapped about one, saw Wendel torn loose from his grasp on another. An instant later a speck of black flecked the white of the churned water by Con's side as the log he clung to turned end for end from the shock of the smash against the cliff and fell back toward the center of the cañon.

Con's right hand flashed out toward the speck, and his fingers twined in Billy's hair and clung. He felt Wendel's hand clutch his wrist, and a moment later the little man was astride the log behind him.

They shot out of the cañon as suddenly as they had entered it.

Ahead of them the river stretched wide and placid, bordered on either side by gently sloping meadowlands. The current swept them with ever-slackening speed toward the left bank where a wide gravel beach formed a whitish stripe between the river's edge and the grasslands.

Con's dragging limbs touched bottom. He slipped from the log, dragged Billy after him, and the two struggled ashore to fall prone on the beach just free of the water's edge, and lie silent but for their hoarse breathing.

Their guns were gone; grub, rope, everything! Valdez was more than a week distant to a traveler equipped with a good boat. To one without guns, grub, a boat, or the material for constructing one, it was as far away as the moon.

It was several minutes after their landing that a voice from the low bank above them startled the two men into action.

"Hello, there!" it called out.

Both men struggled up and turned to look. A big, shock-shouldered fellow with a full black beard stood on the edge of the bank among the reeds peering down at them. Wendel found his voice first.

"Hello, McConnell!" he said easily. "How's every little thing?"

McConnell slid down from the bank. "I thought I see somebody come out o' the cañon," he said. "Couldn't see very well from camp, an' the boys said I was nutty. You never come through there without linin'?"

"Sure," Wendel answered. "Where's your camp?"

"Right down the beach here. You can see the smoke just over that drift log. We been four days makin' the carry up over the mountains. Didn't reckon a man could line through there with the water up like it is now. We just got our boat stuck together again. An' you come through without linin'?"

Wendel got to his feet and advanced toward him. "Sure," he said. "Shake hands with the only man beside Con here that ever turned the trick."

McConnell held out his hand, and Wendel was on top of him with the quickness and fury of a wild cat. The big man went to the ground under his unexpected onslaught, and for a moment the two were an indistinguishable whirl of intertwined arms and legs. Then Billy's hand found the butt of McConnell's gun; and, clubbing it, he struck him fair between the eyes. The big man's gripping arms relaxed, and he fell in a heap on the beach.

Billy kneeled over him.

"That's for the little woman you put black onto," he grated.

He ripped McConnell's shirt open, disclosing a sagging buckskin money belt about the big man's middle.

"Here's Al's stake, all right," he said as he unstrapped it from him. "Now we'll hike on down an' land the rest o' this bunch."

"Man! You took an' awful chance!" Con gasped. "If he'd o' beat you to that gun he'd o' had us both. He wasn't thinkin' about us bein' after him. You ought to o' salved him along till we had him sure."

"I know it. It's my dog-gone temper," the little man complained querulously. "It's always gettin' me in bad."

There were three men sprawled around the camp fire smoking when Con and Billy reached it.

"How, boys?" one of the men greeted them. "McConnell claimed he see some one come out o' the cañon. He mooched up that way to take a look. Didn't you meet him?"

"Yep. We met him," said Billy. "Here's his gun. Han's up, you! Get their guns an' grub an' stick 'em in the boat, Con."

When this was done, the little man spoke again to the three men, who clamored profanely for an explanation of his conduct.

"You didn't figure on leavin' no callin' cards back inside where you croaked poor Al Williams for his poke, did you? Well, there was one left for you. I reckon it was Jess did the shootin'; but you was in it with him. We got Jess. I'm goin' to give you a chance for your white alley. I'm goin' to leave you here without guns, boat, or grub. You got about one chance in a million; an' if you can get out alive, why, get."

Ten days later Con and Wendel stood together in front of a bar in Valdez surrounded by a wondering crowd. Billy was very drunk and very noisy.

"Me—me an' Con Larrigan can lick any man says we ever said an'thing 'bout each other," he declared. "We can lick any two men says we was ever sore at each other. We can lick any five men in the whole territory. We can lick any ten men in this room right now, an' that goes. Ain't that right? Don' that go, Con? Don' it?"

He turned to the bar to swallow his drink, and a man in the crowd plucked Con's sleeve. "He'll be gettin' his face punched off in a minute," he said. "He's too darn mouthy!"

"Y-e-e-s?" Con questioned. "Well, anybody's lookin' for trouble with Billy can come see me. He's drunk, but I ain't; an' I'll back any talk he makes, drunk or sober. He's game, an' he's square; an' if he talks too much there's them got worse faults. He's my pal, an' I go good for him. Go out an' spread that news around town, you splay-faced, scandal-peddlin' mutt!"

The High Kibosh

BEING THE SIXTH IN THE SERIES OF RAILROAD MYSTERIES INVESTIGATED BY CALVIN SPRAGUE, SCIENTIST AND CRIMINOLOGIST

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Taming of Red Butte Western," "The Fight for the G. V. & P.," Etc.

(In Two Parts—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

SINCE it is a Western boast that the West does nothing by halves, the Brewster Town and Country Club owns two houses—a handsome pink lava home in one of the quieter business streets of the city, and a rambling, overgrown bungalow at the golf links on the north shore of the High Line reservoir lake, rechristened, in honor of Colonel Baldwin's pretty daughter, "Lake Corona."

Saturday afternoons, which are bank holidays in the progressive little intermountain city, the links at Lake Corona are well patronized; and on a certain Saturday in early September, in the year written down in the annals of the intermountain region as "the year of the railroad fight," one of the players was the big-muscled athlete who figured for the Brewsterites as an expert soil tester in the government service, and whose nickname in the Timanyoni country was "Scientific Sprague."

Sprague's opponent on the links on this particular Saturday afternoon was Stillings, the railroad lawyer; and at the conclusion of the game, which had been a rather easy walk-over for the big athlete, Stillings offered the winner a seat in his runabout for the return to Brewster.

"Sorry, but I can't go with you this time, Robert," said the heavyweight, when he had tipped his caddie and struggled into his coat. "Maxwell is coming out to dinner, and I promised to wait for him. He thinks he is up for another match game with the big leaguers."

Stillings paused with his hand on the dash of the runabout. "That so?" he queried. "More piracy?"

"Nothing actually in sight as yet. But Dick has been getting fresh tips from the New York headquarters. The big-money people who want your railroad have been keeping pretty quiet since the Mesquite fizzle; possibly they were afraid you folks might have the evidence on them. But now the air seems to be full of lightning again, and nobody, not even President Ford himself, appears to know just where it is going to strike."

The lawyer reached over and retarded the spark on the racing engine of the little car.

"It's a queer fight," he commented. "I never heard of anything just like it before. Of course, we all know what it means: The Transcontinental needs our five hundred odd miles of Nevada Short Line to put in with its Jack's Cañon branch for a short cut to the southern coast. Ordinarily those things are fought out on the floor of the stock exchange, and the people who are operating the railroad never know what hits them till they're dead. If the big

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fellows want the Short Line so bad, why don't they go in and buy it up?"

The large man who had played such a successful game of golf winked one eye solemnly.

"You wouldn't expect a government chemist to find you the answer to any such conundrum as that, would you?" he asked, in cheerful irony.

"I'll bet you know, just the same," asserted Stillings confidently.

"I do happen to know, Robert," was the even-toned reply. "A financial transaction entered into in the early summer by the Ford management—a transaction having nothing whatever to do with the fight—makes a break in prices absolutely necessary before the control can be acquired. What the Ford people did was to build a solid wall of protection without knowing it or intending to. They deposited something like sixty per cent of the Short Line stock with a syndicate of New York and Boston banks as collateral for a loan to be used in double tracking."

"Still I don't see," said the lawyer.

"Don't you? That sixty per cent of the stock—which is the control—can't be touched by any fireworks business on the exchange. The big-money people have played the market up and down with the forty per cent which is not pooled, and nothing has happened. The loaning banks have merely sat tight in the boat, knowing that they held the joint control of a good paying property, and that no amount of skyrocketing on the Street could make any difference—any real difference—in the value of their collateral so long as the property itself was earning dividends."

"That is good as far as it goes," said Stillings, with a frown of perplexity. "But it doesn't explain why the big-money crowd, or somebody, has been turning heaven and earth upside down all summer to wreck, not the stock, but the property itself. You know that is what has been done. No stone has been left unturned, from demoralizing Maxwell's force to dynamiting tunnels and planning forty-mile washouts. If big business wants the road, why is it trying to wreck it physically?"

The big man who was fond of calling himself a government chemist grinned amiably.

"It doesn't agree with your mentality to get beaten at golf, does it, Robert?" he said jokingly. "It is plain enough when you get hold of the right end of it. Big money's play is to throw a real scare into these loaning bankers, don't you see? If the road's earnings fall off, and it has bad luck enough to make these creditor bankers really nervous about the value of their collateral, the trick will be turned. The Ford people will be immediately asked to make good or pay up—and there you are."

"Why, sure!" said the attorney. Then he climbed slowly into the driving seat of the runabout. "I don't see why some of the rest of us haven't caught on long ago," he went on. "I suppose any of us might have had the simple facts if we had taken the trouble to dig for them." Then abruptly: "You're looking for more trouble, Sprague?"

"Maxwell is; and so is Ford apparently," was the evasive reply.

"You're the man," snapped the lawyer.

"No, I'm not," was the decisive denial. "It's true I have been willing to help out and take a hand in standing off a few of the attempted smashings; but that was only because Dick Maxwell is my friend, and it suited my humor to ride my little reasoning hobby in his behalf. I'm not a sleuth, Stillings; I'm a government chemist, and I am out here for the ostensible purpose of making a technical report on the soils of this charming valley of yours. You forget that every now and then."

"Pardon me, old man; I did forget it," was the hearty apology. "Just the same, you mustn't throw us down while the fight is still on. Maxwell put it about right the other day when he said that the Nevada Short Line would have been dead and buried two months ago if it hadn't been for you."

"Nevertheless, I can't help out this time, Stillings. That is why I am staying here this evening—to meet Maxwell and tell him that he'll have to fight

for his own hand if the New Yorkers come after him again."

"Great Scott, Sprague, what's happened?"

"A thing which nobody could have foreseen, and for which nobody is to blame. At the same time, it lets me out. I've got to quit you."

The attorney adjusted the spark and throttle of the little car preparatory to the start.

"I can't very well argue with you—not having any grounds," he said. "But I hope you won't decide finally until after you've had another talk with Maxwell. Think it over between now and dinner time, and weigh the consequences to Dick, Sprague. If there's another earthquake on the way, and you throw him down, he's a ruined man. I know what you will say—that he is well fixed and doesn't have to be a railroad superintendent. That's all right, but his job means more to him than it might to a poor man; it's his ambition. If there is anything I can do——"

The big chemistry expert shook his head. "There isn't anything that anybody can do, Robert," he said soberly; and at that Stillings kicked in the clutch and drove away.

CHAPTER II.

Two hours later Maxwell was sitting out the after-dinner interval with his friend and classmate on the broad lake-fronting veranda of the bungalow clubhouse. It was a fine night, and the Saturday evening crowd was larger than usual. There was a dotting of canoes on the reservoir lake, and the verandas were filling slowly as the great dining room emptied itself. For a time the two men had let the talk drift into college reminiscences; but it took a more strictly personal turn when the superintendent said:

"Do you know, Calvin, I've often wondered how you came to be assigned to this job of soil testing—this particular job, I mean—for the department. It has been a sort of special Providence to me, but things don't often happen that way unhelped."

"This thing didn't happen that way—unhelped," was the big expert's quiet rejoinder. "I asked for the job."

"I've wondered if you didn't. It was mighty good of you to maroon yourself out here in the tall hills for the sake of helping me fight the money pirates, Calvin."

Sprague was silent for a full minute before he said: "I wish I could claim a motive as disinterested as that, Dick; but, if I should, it wouldn't be honest. I had quite another reason for wishing to return to the Timanyoni after my flying trip through it last July on my way back from California. I can't tell you what it was; it's too idiotic for a grown man to own up to."

The superintendent's curling mustaches took a grinning uplift, and he laughed joyously.

"When you talk that way you don't need to tell me," he chuckled. "It was a girl."

"It was," admitted the self-confessed simpleton, matching his accuser's grin. "Since you've guessed that much, I'll tell you a little more: I saw her first on your eastbound train, the train that took on the sham dead man at Little Butte and afterward picked up your private car. You'll remember you asked me to stay over for a day or two with you in Brewster, and I did. As a matter of fact, your persuasion wasn't needed. I would have stopped off, anyway, because the girl stopped off there."

"Heavens and earth!" ejaculated Maxwell, in ecstatic appreciation. "How the mighty have fallen! Lord of love! I never expected to see the day when Cal Sprague, the idol of the football fans, would fall for a pretty face just seen, as you might say, in passing. Oh, gosh!"

"Have your laugh, you old married hyena!" grunted the late comer in the sentimental field. "I can't get back at you because I didn't happen to be around when you were making seventeen different kinds of a donkey of yourself over the late Miss Fairbairn—as I have no doubt you did. But that's neither here nor there; the young woman I'm speaking of tagged me, and I'm

It; I've been *It* ever since that first day on the eastbound train."

"And you say she stopped off in Brewster?"

"Yes."

"But you didn't meet her?"

"No. You've been calling me an amateur detective, Dick; I'm a fake! That girl and the people she was with just vanished into thin air the minute they hit the platform at the Brewster Station. I lost them as completely as if they had stepped off into space."

"So you came back later to hunt her up?"

"I did; or to try to get some trace of her—just that."

"Of course, it says itself that you have found her."

Sprague's mellow laugh rumbled deep in his chest.

"Richard, I have been here seven weeks, and I found her—just three days ago! In all my knocking around with you and Starbuck and Stillings and the rest of you, not one man in the bunch has thought it worth his while to tell me that there is a cottage settlement of Eastern summer people up on Lake Topaz. I had to blunder around and find out for myself, as I did last Wednesday, when Starbuck took me up to your mine on Mount Geechy."

"Great guns!" exclaimed the superintendent. "How in the name of common sense was anybody going to suspect that you needed to know? That summer colony is as old as Brewster. But go ahead and tell me more. I'm interested, if I don't look it."

"There isn't much to tell. I found her; met her. She is stopping with an aunt of hers, and, by chance, good luck, you'd say, I have something a little better than a speaking acquaintance with the aunt—through some common friends in New York. There's nothing to it, Richard. The girl can have her pick—she has already turned down a couple of English titles—and she isn't going to pick any such overgrown slob of a man as your humble. Let's talk about something else."

"If I branch off, it will be into my own grief," said Maxwell half reluctantly. "I had another wire from Ford this afternoon. The big-money people are getting ready to swat us again, and Ford admits that he can't find out where it is to come from, or what it is to be. If it wasn't for the name of the thing, and what I owe Ford, I'd be about ready to throw up my job, Calvin. I've money enough to live on, and this business of dragging along from day to day with the feeling that any minute you may get a knife between your ribs isn't very exhilarating."

"You say Ford can't give you any hint of what is coming next?"

"Not the slightest. But there is something in the wind. You know Kinzie, the president of the Brewster National Bank? He cornered me last night at the club, and asked a lot of queer questions that didn't seem to have any particular bearing on anything."

"What kind of questions?" inquired the expert.

"Oh, about our right of way through the town of Copah, and about our outstanding floating debts, and finally about a ridiculous damage suit that has been dragging its way through the courts."

Sprague sat up, and relighted his fat black cigar.

"What about the damage suit?" he asked.

"It's a piker's graft," was the half-impatient rejoinder. "We have a little branch line over to the bauxite mines in the western edge of the county. The telegraph company doesn't maintain an office, and our agent is authorized to handle what few commercial telegrams there are. It seems that one came for a man named Hixon, a prospector, whose exact whereabouts could not be ascertained at the moment. The message was three days old when it was delivered, and Hixon sued for ten thousand dollars damages; said he'd lost the sale of a mine by the delay."

"You are fighting the suit?"

"Of course; it's point-blank robbery! Stillings has had the case postponed two or three times in the hope of wearing Hixon out. It comes up again next week, I believe."

"And you say Kinzie was curious about this lawsuit?"

"Yes. It seems that Hixon is, or has been, a customer of the bank; and Kinzie suggested that we ought to compromise."

"Um!" said the big-bodied man thoughtfully. "In whose court does the case come up?"

"In Judge Watson's."

"Has Hixon a good lawyer?"

"He has the Kentucky colonel, suh," laughed Maxwell, "our one original, dyed-in-the-wool, fire-eating spellbinder from the blue grass. When Colonel Bletchford gets upon his feet and turns loose, you can hear the bird of freedom scream all the way across Timanyoni Park."

The big chemistry expert with the athletic slant was moving uneasily in his chair. After a little interval of silence he said: "I can't be with you in any more of these little two-steps with the money trust, Richard. I'm going back to Washington to-morrow."

Maxwell's start carried him halfway out of his chair, and he dropped his short pipe and broke the stem of it.

"Great Scott, Calvin, don't say that!" he implored. "You can't throw us down that way! Why, man, if it hadn't been for you and your brains—— But pshaw! There's no use in talking about it; you simply can't go and leave us hanging over the ragged edge."

"I can—and I guess I must," insisted Sprague gently. "And the worst of it is, Dick, I can't tell you or anybody else the why. It's just up to me, and I've got it to do."

Maxwell's perturbation had cleared his brain like a bucketing of cold water. "Tell me, Calvin," he broke out, "is the girl mixed up in it?"

"She is," was the brief admission.

"Is she gone, or going—back East, I mean?"

"N-no; not immediately, I believe."

Maxwell sat back in his chair, and began to twist nervously at the charm on his watch fob.

"I suppose I haven't any kick coming," he said, at length. "What you have done for me this summer couldn't be measured in money, and I've no right to ask you to go on giving your time and your brains on the score of friendship."

"There isn't any bigger score in this little old round world of ours, Dick," said the other gravely. "I'm a cold-blooded fish, and I know it. I ought to stand by you; every decent thing in me but one urges me to stand by you. But that one exception queers me. I hope you'll win out, Dick, but I can't be the man to put the club into your hands this time."

The snappy little superintendent took his defeat hard. For some further time he used every argument he could devise to persuade Sprague to change his mind. But at the end the big man was still shaking his head regretfully.

"It's no use, Richard," he said finally. "If you were in my place, you'd do just as I am doing—and for the same reason. Let's go back to town. It's too cheerful here to fit either one of us just now."

CHAPTER III.

Maxwell had driven out to the clubhouse on the shore of Lake Corona in his small car, and when he returned to town Sprague occupied the mechanician's seat beside him. It was a run of only a few miles over the best driving road in the country, and there was neither time nor the occasion for much talk.

When the car had trundled across the Timanyoni Bridge and the viaduct over the railroad tracks, Maxwell would have set Sprague down at his hotel across the plaza from the station; but Sprague himself objected. "You are going over to your office? I'll go with you if you don't mind. It's my last evening, and I'm not in the humor to sit it out alone. I won't interfere if you want to work," was the way he put it.

It was thus it happened that they climbed the stair to the second story of the railroad building together, and together walked down the corridor to the door of the dispatcher's room. Connolly, the fat night dispatcher, was at

his glass-topped table behind the counter railing, and when he saw the superintendent he held up a pudgy hand.

"Benson's been trying to get you from Copah for an hour or more, Mr. Maxwell," he said. "I didn't know where to raise you."

"Is he on the wire now?" asked Maxwell, letting himself and his companion through the wicket in the counter rail.

"No, but I'll get him for you." Followed a sharp rattling of the key and a few broken snippings from the sounder, and then the dispatcher got up out of his chair. "Here he is," he said. "He wants to talk to you personally."

Maxwell took the vacated chair and key, and Connolly stood aside with the big expert. "Seems right good to have you dropping in every now and then, Mr. Sprague," said the fat one. "You'd ought to belong to us out here. We'd sure make it warm for you in the Short Line family."

Sprague looked the dumplinglike dispatcher over in mild and altogether friendly criticism.

"Speaking of families—you got married yourself a little while ago, didn't you, Dan?" he asked.

"You bet I did!" was the enthusiastic reply. "Sadie ain't got done talking yet about that set of knives and forks you sent her from Philadelphia."

Again the big-muscled man was looking the dispatcher over critically, this time with a quizzical twinkle in his gray eyes.

"Tell me how you did it, Dan," he urged soberly. "You're fatter than I ever dared to be. How did you manage to make a girl believe that there might be a man inside of a big body as well as in a medium-sized one?"

The night dispatcher laughed until his moonlike face was purple; until the car-record clerk in the distant corner of the room looked up from his typewriter to see if he, too, might not share the joke.

"G-give me a little time," wheezed Connolly; and he was presumably going to tell how it had been done when Maxwell got up from the glass-topped table and broke in.

"Twenty-six is asking for orders, Dan," he said; and when Connolly had resumed his chair and his key: "That's all, Calvin. We'll go over to my office if you like."

It was behind the closed door of the superintendent's room, after Sprague had chosen the easiest of the three chairs, and settled himself for a smoke, that Maxwell said:

"I'm going to miss you like the devil, Calvin; I'm missing you right now."

Sprague blew a series of smoke rings toward the disused gas fixture hanging from the center of the ceiling.

"Something that Chief Engineer Benson has been telling you over the wire from Copah?" he suggested.

"Yes."

Another series of the smoke rings, and then: "Well, I didn't tell you you couldn't talk, did I?"

Maxwell did not haggle over the inverted terms of the permission to talk. The necessity was too pressing.

"Benson has struck something that he can't account for. For a week or more the Transcontinental people have been gathering a working camp at the Copah end of the bridge on which their Jack's Cañon branch crosses the Pannikin. Nobody seems to know what they are going to do, or where they are going to do it. At Leckhard's suggestion, I sent Benson over to pry around a little."

"And he hasn't found out what the T. C. folks have in mind?"

"No, he hasn't. But it is plainly some sort of a track-building job. He says they have a hundred or more scraper teams in camp, a trainload of new steel, and forty carloads of crossties. And this afternoon they brought down a mechanical rail layer—a machine much used nowadays for rushing a job of track laying."

The big chemist smoked reflectively for a full minute or more before he said: "No jangle with the Copah city authorities about any trackage rights in the town, or street crossings, or anything of that sort?" he queried.

"Not that I've ever heard of. The T. C. has its own Copah yard, and has a switching connection with the Pacific

Southwestern yard tracks, though naturally there is little exchange of business between the two competitive systems."

"Do they connect with you?" asked Sprague.

"Not directly. Our yard was originally an independent layout, lying a mile to the west of town. When the Short Line became a grand division of the Pacific Southwestern, the two yards —ours and the P. S. W.—were operated as one, though they are still separate layouts."

"I see. What else does Benson say?"

"He has been asking questions and chewing the rag with anybody who would talk, he says, but we all know Jack. He is too downright and bluff to be much of a detective."

Maxwell turned to his desk, and began on the ever-present pile of waiting work; and the big expert settled himself more deeply into his chair, and smoked on, with his gaze fixed upon the ceiling gas pendant. After the lapse of many minutes, he said: "Have you a blue print of the Copah yards, Dick?"

Maxwell rose and went to a filing case in the corner of the office. After a little search he found the required blue print, and gave it to Sprague, explaining the locations and the relative positions of the three railroad yards. The expert studied the map thoughtfully, even going so far as to scrutinize the fine lettering on it with the help of a small pocket magnifying glass.

"And right over here by the river is where you say the new camp has been pitched?" he asked, indicating the spot with the handle of the magnifier.

"Yes: Benson says it's at the south end of the bridge, and just west of the T. C. bridge siding."

Sprague looked up quickly. "Did Benson say they had an electric-light outfit for night work?"

"Why, no, I don't remember that he did."

"Go and ask him," said Sprague shortly; and the superintendent, who had learned to take the expert's suggestions without question, left the office to do it.

He was back in a few minutes, with the light of a newly kindled excitement in his eyes.

"By Jove, Calvin, you're a wizard!" he exclaimed. "Your guess is better than another man's eyesight. They've not only got the light outfit—they've strung it up and gone to work! Benson says they're laying a track out across the valley of the Pannikin like this," and he traced a curving line on the blue print, which Sprague was still holding spread out on his knees.

Sprague nodded slowly. "That is move number one," he said. "Dick, you're in for a fight to a finish this time. They've got you foul in some way, and they are so sure of it that they are already beginning to take possession. Don't you see what this new track means?"

"No, I don't," Maxwell confessed, with a frown of perplexity.

"You will see before to-morrow night. Pull yourself together, man, and do a little clear-headed reasoning. Why are these people starting out to build a railroad at ten o'clock Saturday night? Surely you've had experience enough in crossing fights to know what that means!"

Maxwell straightened up, and swore out of a full heart. "They are going to cut a crossing through the Southwestern main line, and do it on the Sunday, when our people can't stop them with a court injunction!"

"You've surrounded at least half of it," said the expert. "The other half will come later. If I wasn't going away to-morrow——"

Maxwell walked to the window, and stared across at the flaming arc light hanging in front of the Hotel Topaz on the opposite side of the plaza. When he turned again, Sprague had rolled the blue print into a tube and was laying it on the desk.

"Calvin, you've had time to think it over," said the man at the window. "You haven't made it very plain for me, but I can understand that it's friendship against—against the girl. I'm human enough to know what that means, but——"

Sprague was holding up one of his big, square-fingered hands in protest.

"I have been thinking it over, Dick," he admitted gently. "I'll stay—for the line-up, anyway. But it's only fair to warn you that I may drop out at any minute; perhaps when the game is going dead against you. Now we'll get action. You go back to the wire and keep in touch with Benson. We want to know at the earliest possible moment exactly what it is that the T. C. people are trying to do. While you're wiring, I'll go out and try to find Stillings."

CHAPTER IV.

This was the situation at ten o'clock on the Saturday night.

At the nine-o'clock Sunday morning breakfast in the Topaz café, when Maxwell, hollow-eyed and haggard from his night's vigil at the wires, next had speech with Sprague, the news from the seat of war at Copah was sufficiently exciting.

As Maxwell had predicted, the Transcontinental track layers had built up to the Southwestern main line, and had finally succeeded in cutting a crossing through it, though not without a fight. The Southwestern force, with Leckhard, the division superintendent, at its head, had resisted as it could. Since it was past midnight, with no hope of obtaining legal help until Monday morning, Leckhard had "spotted" a locomotive on the crossing, and when the man in charge of it were overborne by numbers the engine had been "killed" and derailed before it was abandoned.

The stubborn resistance had purchased nothing more than a short delay. The marauders had a huge steam crane as part of their equipment; and half an hour after its abandonment the derailed Southwestern engine had been toppled over into the ditch, and the track layers were at work installing the crossing frogs.

"And after that?" queried Sprague, when Maxwell had told of the losing fight at the main-line crossing.

"After that they went on building across the valley and heading for the western end of our yard. At the last report, which came in about eight o'clock, they had less than a mile of steel to lay before they would be on our right of way. Benson is crazy. He is yelling at me now to petition the governor for the militia."

"You haven't done anything?"

"There isn't anything to do. They are on neutral ground now, and will be until they reach our right of way—if that is what they are heading for. We have no manner of right to interfere with them until they become actual trespassers; and as for that, no physical force we could muster would stop them. Benson says there are between four and five hundred men in that track gang, and many of them are armed."

Sprague nodded. "It is a fight to a finish, as I told you last night. And they have the advantage because we don't know yet where or how they are going to hit us. Have you communicated with Ford?"

"I've tried to; but I don't get any reply."

"Tally!" said the big man on the opposite side of the table. "I've been having the same kind of bad luck. I can't locate Stillings."

"Did you try his house?"

"I tried that first. His family is out of town, and he has been stopping at the club. But nobody there seems to know anything about him. A little after midnight I found your division detective, young Tarbell, and put him on the job. We're needing Stillings, and needing him badly."

"Tarbell hasn't reported back yet?"

"Not yet; it is beginning to look as if he had dropped out, too. But the day is still young. You'd better go upstairs and get a little sleep. I'll stay on deck, and call you if you are needed."

Maxwell had finished his simple breakfast, and he took the good advice.

It was nine hours later, and the electrics were twinkling yellow in the sunset pinks and grays flooding the quiet Sunday evening streets and the railroad plaza when he came down and found Sprague just ready to go in to dinner.

"News!" demanded the superintend-

ent eagerly. "I had no idea of wasting the day this way."

Sprague made him wait until they were seated at a table for two in the corner of the café.

"The Copah fight is over, and the T. C. people have broken into your yards with their new track," Sprague announced briefly. "Benson had to give up and go to bed about noon, but Leckhard has kept us posted. The track is in and frogged to a connection with your main line; and the entire attacking force has camped down at the two points of trespass, presumably to keep you and Leckhard from interfering and tearing up their job. Move number one, whatever it may mean, is a move accomplished."

"I can't understand—I can't begin to understand!" said Maxwell, in despair. And then: "No word yet from Ford?"

"No; and, what is more to the point, there is none from Stillings, or from Tarbell. I'm beginning to think that this is a bigger game than any we've played yet, Dick. I dug up Editor Kendall, of the *Tribune*, this afternoon, and had a little heart-to-heart talk with him. There is big trouble of some sort in the air; he has smelled it, but he can't tell what it is. He has his young men out everywhere 'on suspicion,' and he has promised to keep in touch with us up to the time his paper goes to press."

"That ought to help us to get at the facts," said the superintendent. "Kendall is our friend, and he has some mighty keen young fellows on his staff. By the way, there's one of them now—just coming in at the door. He's looking for somebody, too."

The young incomer was not long in finding his man. With a nod to the head waiter, he came across to Sprague's table. "A note for you, Mr. Sprague—from Mr. Kendall," he said. "There's no answer, I believe;" and he went on to another table, and began to chat with two young men, strangers to Maxwell, who had come in on the evening train.

Sprague glanced at his note, and passed it across the table. Maxwell read it, and found that it merely added to the mysteries without offering anything in the way of enlightenment:

DEAR SPRAGUE: Have followed your suggestion, and our young men have spotted at least a score of the strangers at the different hotels. Nobody seems to know any of them, and they won't talk. You will find a list of names, copied from the hotel registers, on inclosed slip. It has occurred to me that Maxwell might know some of them, if your suspicions are well founded. KENDALL.

Maxwell frowned over the list for a moment before handing it back.

"A few of them are familiar," he said. "Tom Carmody is a division superintendent on the west end of the T. C., and this man Hunniwell used to be in their legal department. Vance Jackson is, or used to be, Carmody's chief dispatcher; and—why, say, this is a T. C. crowd! Here's Andy Cochran, their Cañon Division trainmaster."

"Any more?" asked Sprague quietly.

"No; the other names are all strange to me."

Sprague took the list, and pointed to one of the names.

"This man Dimmock—you don't know him?" he queried.

"No."

"Well, I don't know him, either, but I happen to know something about him. Two years ago I was doing a little soil work down in Oklahoma. It was during the time they were having the scrap with the oil companies. Mr. Dimmock was there, ostensibly as an independent capitalist from the East looking for bargains in oil wells, but really as a representative of the trust."

"Is this the same man?"

The expert held his fork pointing diagonally across his plate. "Follow the line of this fork," he said, in a low tone, "and you'll see him—at the farther table by the door."

Maxwell looked, and saw a generously built, smooth-shaven, cold-featured man who looked like big money dining at a table alone. The big-money look was not obtrusive, but it was sufficiently apparent in the city cut of the Sunday broadcloth, in the spotless linen, and not less in the attitude of the obsequious waiter who hovered around the great man's chair.

"I took the trouble to look Mr. Dimmock up in the Oklahoma period," Sprague went on. "I found that he was pretty well known in New York as the right hand of a certain great money lord whose name we needn't mention here. That being the case, it is hardly necessary to add that his presence in Brewster at this particular crisis is a bit ominous."

"Have you told Kendall this about Dimmock?" asked the superintendent.

"No; but he'll be pretty sure to trace the gentleman for himself. Where a question of pure news is involved, Kendall is apt to be found running well ahead of the field."

"But that doesn't help us out any," Maxwell objected.

"No. We seem to be forced to await developments; and that, Richard, is always a mark of the losing side. I wish to goodness Stillings would turn up!"

"It's odd about Bob. He doesn't often drop out without leaving a trail behind him. Have you finished? Then let's go over to the office and see if there is any further word from Benson or Leckhard."

It was when they were leaving the dining room together that they came upon Tarbell, the ex-terror of Montana cattle thieves. The young man was wayworn and dusty, and his eyes were red from want of sleep. Sprague's question was shotlike:

"You've found him, Archer?"

"Yep; as good as," was the short rejoinder.

"Turn it loose," commanded Sprague.

"He's at the bottom of an old prospect hole up on Mount Baldwin—him and Mr. Maxwell's brother-in-law, Billy Starbuck. I had to come back to town to get a rope to pull 'em out."

"What!" said Maxwell. "How did they get there?"

The young special deputy shook his head.

"I don't know the whys an' wherefores any more'n a goat," he said simply. "I got onto it through the barkeep at the road house out on the Topaz Pike. He said a bunch o' fellas came along in an auto late last night, and stopped for drinks. They come in two at a time, and two of 'em didn't come in at all. Just as they were startin' off there was a scrap o' some sort in the auto, and the barkeep, who was lookin' out o' the window, swore to me he got a glimpse o' Mr. Stillings. I found the auto tracks and followed 'em. They left the road this side o' the lake, crossed the Gloria on the bridge, and shoved that machine up an old wood trail on Baldwin."

"Well, go on," said Maxwell impatiently.

"I found where they'd stopped and took Mr. Stillings and Billy out o' the car; and it sure looked as if there'd been another scrap the way the bushes was tore up. About a quarter back from the trail I found the hole. Starbuck hollered up at me when I peeked in. I couldn't see 'em none, but Billy he said they was both there, and wasn't hurt none to speak of—only in their feelin's. He told me to chase back and get a rope."

Maxwell looked at his watch. "How deep is this hole, Archer?"

"'Bout a hundred feet, or maybe more."

"We'll get a car and go after them," was the superintendent's instant decision. "You say this was last night—have they had anything to eat?"

"Yep; Billy said a basket o' grub had been lowered down to 'em a little spell after they was chucked in."

"All right. Go over to the shops and get a coil of rope out of the wrecking car, and I'll get an auto. Want to go along, Calvin?"

"Sure!" was the prompt reply.

Maxwell, being a millionaire mine owner as well as the superintendent of the railroad, kept two cars—a runabout and a big touring machine, which latter, in the absence of his family, was housed in a downtown garage. In the big car the twenty-mile drive over the Topaz Lake Pike was quickly made.

Just before they came to the bridge over the Gloria, they passed an auto with two men in it going toward town. Oddly enough, as it seemed, the inbound car gave them a wide berth, steering

almost into the ditch at the passing, and speeding up to a racing clip as soon as the ditched machine had been yanked back into the roadway. Tarbell, who was driving the Maxwell car, stopped, jumped out, and examined the tracks of the other car by the help of a lighted match.

"That's them," he said laconically, when he resumed the steering wheel. "That was the same car. It's got a set o' them newfangled tires with creepers on 'em."

"Hurry!" snapped Maxwell. "We don't know what they've been doing to Stillings and Billy this time."

Happily they soon found that the evening visit of the two unknown men to the abandoned prospect shaft had been charitable rather than malevolent. Stillings, who was the first of the two captives to be hauled out of the dark pit on the mountainside, told them that another basket of food had just been lowered by a string into the shaft. And when Starbuck came up he brought the basket with him.

Singularly enough, the two rescued ones had no explanation to offer—or, at least, none that served to explain anything. It transpired that they had dined together in the town house of the club the evening before, and had afterward gone to the theater together. Beyond the play, they had taken a taxi to go to Stillings' house in the suburbs to sleep. An auto had followed them, and when they had dismissed the taxi they had been set upon by a number of masked men who tumbled out of the following car. Since they had no weapons, they were quickly overpowered, thrown into the car, carried off to the mountains, and dumped into the prospect hole, the rope by which they had been lowered being thrown in after them. That was all.

"And you don't know what it was for?" asked Sprague, when they were rolling evenly back to the city, with Starbuck at the steering wheel.

"No more than you do," was the lawyer's answer. "Billy and I have speculated over it all day, having no other way of amusing ourselves, and it's a perfectly blind trail. Billy says he knows I must have been the one they were after, and I say he must have been the one. So there you are."

At the club town house the two rescued ones were set down, and Tarbell was released to go and get his well-earned rest after the twenty-four hours' task of shadow work.

"Get yourself in shape to go on an advisory committee with us as soon as you can, Robert," was Sprague's admonition to the attorney; and then Maxwell drove down to the railroad building, and the expert was with him when he went up to the dispatcher's office.

There was no more news from the Copah seat of war, two hundred miles to the eastward, or, at most, nothing different. The huge alien track-laying force was still guarding the crossing through the Southwestern main line and the new junction with the Nevada Short Line in the western yards. Leckhard reported that Benson was sleeping off his fatigue of the previous night, and said that all was quiet on the late battle-ground.

"And still no word from Ford!" said Maxwell, as he and Sprague, having put the car up at the garage, walked back to the hotel. "By and large, Calvin, that is the most mysterious thing in the bunch. I can't understand it."

"Unless I am much mistaken, we shall all understand many things to-morrow that we can't appreciate to-night," was Sprague's prediction; and long after Maxwell had gone back to his office to put in a make-up period at his desk, the big-bodied man from Washington sat out on the loggia porch of the hotel, smoking in thoughtful solitude, and staring absently at the unwinking eyes of the masthead electrics in the railroad yard opposite.

CHAPTER V.

The Monday morning dawned bright and fair, as a vast majority of the mornings do in the favored intermountain paradise known as Timanyoni Park. Notwithstanding his long Sunday sleep,

Maxwell came down late to his breakfast, and the café waiter told him that Sprague had eaten at his usually early hour, and was gone.

While he was waiting to be served, the superintendent glanced through the morning *Tribune*. There was a rather exciting first-page news story of the track-laying fight at Copah. The story was evidently an Associated Press dispatch, and was carefully noncommittal in its reference to the Transcontinental's purpose in rushing the new trackage through to a connection with the Nevada Short Line yards. None the less, the impression was given that the Southwestern's opposition to the move had been only perfunctory, and for public effect. Also, the impression was conveyed that the Copah public, at least, believed that there was a secret understanding between the two railroad corporations.

Turning to the inside pages, Maxwell found no editorial comment on the news story, and he was still wondering why Editor Kendall had missed his chance when Stillings came in and took the chair at the end of the table.

"They told me I'd find you here," said the lawyer, "and I wanted to have a word with you before the wheels begin to go round. This is our day in court on the Hixon damage suit, and we'll have to fish or cut bait this time. In all probability, we shan't be able to get another postponement, and if we let the case come to trial it's all off. The jury will give Hixon his verdict, if only for the reason that he is one man fighting a corporation. The only question is: Shall I try to compromise before it is too late?"

"It's a holdup!" snapped the superintendent shortly. "I haven't changed my mind."

"All right," said the attorney, rising to go. "I thought I'd give you one last chance at it. The case is called for ten o'clock in Judge Watson's court. If you're foot-loose, you might come up and see us lose ten thousand dollars. I guess that is what it will come to."

Quite naturally, the hard-working superintendent had no notion of wasting his forenoon in a courtroom, and he said so tersely. And beyond Stillings' departure and the finishing of the late breakfast, he went over to his office, and plunged into the day's tasks.

There was an unusual quantity of the work that morning, it seemed, and no sooner was he through with one pile of referred papers than Calmaine, the chief clerk, was ready with another. Only once during the forenoon was the steady desk routine broken by an interruption from the outside world. At ten o'clock Benson wired from Copah, saying that the T. C. track layers were at work again, carefully surfacing and ballasting the new track, as if it were to be a permanency. Also, the chief engineer asked if any legal steps had been taken looking to the prevention of further trespass.

Maxwell held up the desk drive long enough to dictate to Calmaine the reply to Benson's asking. It stated the facts briefly. No legal steps had been taken as yet. A full report of the intrusion had gone to the Pacific Southwestern headquarters in New York, and no action would be taken until New York had spoken.

It was a little before noon when Calmaine carried away the final files of claim correspondence with the superintendent's notations on them, and Maxwell sat back in his chair and relighted his cigar, which had gone out many times during the morning's drive.

In the act, the door of the private office opened, and the heavy-set, neatly groomed gentleman whom Sprague had pointed out at the hotel dinner table the previous evening walked in and took the chair at the desk end, removing his hat, and wiping his brow with a handkerchief filmy enough to have figured as the *mouchoir* of a fine lady.

"Mr. Maxwell, I believe?" he said, tossing down a card bearing the single line:

C. P. Dimmock.

"That is my name," returned Maxwell, bristling with a wholly unaccountable prickling of antagonism.

"I have come, as an officer of Judge

Watson's court, to take over your railroad," announced the cold-featured man calmly; and as he said it, the telephone buzzer under Maxwell's desk went off as though a general fire alarm had been sounded from the central office.

Maxwell reached for the desk set, and put the receiver to his ear. It was Stillings who was at the other end of the wire, and he was frantically incoherent. But out of the attorney's coruscating babblement the superintendent picked enough to enable him to surround the principal fact. In the face of all precedent, in defiance of all its legal rights, the Nevada Short Line had been practically declared bankrupt, and a receiver had been appointed!

Notwithstanding his nerve, which was ordinarily very good, the snappy little superintendent's hand trembled when he replaced the earpiece on its hook and turned to his visitor.

"So you've got us at last, have you, Mr. Dimmock?" he said, constraining himself to speak calmly. "It was on the Hixon case, our attorney tells me."

The visitor nodded blandly.

"You should have compromised that case, Mr. Maxwell, if you will allow me the privilege of criticizing. But we needn't come to blows over the purely academic question. Judge Watson has appointed me receiver—temporary, of course—for the railroad property. I am here to take charge in the interest of all concerned, and I am assuming that you won't put yourself in contempt of court by any ill-considered resistance."

For the moment Maxwell was speechless. Then he slowly straightened up and took a few packets of papers out of the desk pigeonholes marked "R. Maxwell, Private," putting them into his pocket. That done, he removed the desk and door keys from his pocket ring, and laid them upon the desk.

"I think that is about as far as I have to go personally," he said, rising, and reaching for his hat. "And, of course, I have nothing to ask for myself. But for the staff and the rank and file, Mr. Dimmock—— I hope you're not going to make a clean sweep? We have a mighty good working organization, and it will cause a great deal of hardship if you take the usual course of discharging and replacing all heads of departments."

The new head of all departments smiled, and in the smile much of the cold hardness of his face disappeared.

"That is a matter with which I shall have very little to do, Mr. Maxwell," he returned. "Mr. Carmody, lately in charge of the Transcontinental's Pacific Division, will be my operating chief, and I am sure that you yourself, as a practical railroad man, would counsel me to give him a free hand."

Maxwell took the additional bitter dose of the medicine of defeat like a man; but he made one more attempt—an attempt to save Calmaine's head.

"My chief clerk, Mr. Dimmock—the young man who admitted you here—I hope you can provide for him. Apart from any personal relations, I have found him the most faithful, the most painstaking——"

The new receiver lifted a faultlessly manicured hand in genial protest.

"You know I couldn't do that, Mr. Maxwell," he objected. "Your young man has probably been much too close to you to make it possible or prudent. You are a rich man yourself, and you can very easily provide for your secretary, as I make no doubt you will. Must you go? Don't be in a hurry. We needn't make this a personal fight, I'm sure."

The ex-superintendent looked at his watch, and told a lie for the sake of keeping the peace.

"It is my luncheon hour," he said. "If there are any routine matters upon which you may wish to consult me, you will find me over at the hotel." And he went out, with his blood boiling and his hat pulled over his eyes. To have stayed another minute would have been to risk an explosion.

TO BE CONCLUDED IN NEXT ISSUE, ON SALE SEPTEMBER 23RD.

Watered Stock

By George Frederic Stratton

Author of "The P. Y. I. H. P. Club," "Showing Slackville the Way," Etc.

Water in the stock often means water in the wages. It did in the case of the Simplex Northwestern, and a mighty hard year confronted the wives and children of the mechanics, till Hargreaves, the brains of the Put Yourself In His Place Club, got to work on the problem.

A SMALL group of men sat in the committee room of the P. Y. I. H. P. Club, and gloom was with them, surrounding them like a fog. It mingled with the smoke from their pipes; it dulled the remarks which they made at infrequent intervals; it puckered still deeper the furrows on their brown foreheads, and it clenched their upper and lower jaws tightly together.

Even the normally cheery jovial Hargreaves was obsessed by it, although an occasional bright twinkling of his eyes showed that his thoughts went beyond the gloom.

"Why ain't you sayin' somethin', Hargreaves?" growled Strogan, the Hercules of the great forge department. "You're 'most allus as ready to talk as a green man is to drop a sledge. Spit it out!"

"It's little use a man's saying anything if he hasn't anything to say," smiled Hargreaves. "It's thinking that's needed just now."

"Go on with your thinkin'," grinned Strogan. "I'm goin' to talk. See here! Our piecework rate contract runs out in a month. What's goin' to happen then?"

There was no response, and he did not wait.

"An' there's a business doctor takin' hold now; one of them fellows that hands out bonuses an' premiums an' other promises to the men, an' gits 'em welded into limousines an' yachts for the stockholders. What're we gittin' up against? What's comin' to us—men's work, or drop-forgings?" And his great palm smashed down on his knee.

"You've got it sized up pretty well," grinned Hargreaves; "but you haven't struck the keynote, Strogan."

"Git it on the anvil," roared the blacksmith, "an' we'll strike it!"

"It's all in the consolidation of our company with the Northwest Electric; but it's below the surface. You've got to look into the true inwardness of the arrangement to get the keynote of what's coming, and that true inwardness isn't published in the papers."

"Don't see how doubling up the plants is going to do us any harm," ventured Marvin. "It'll give bigger opportunities for the good men."

"That isn't the keynote, either," declared Hargreaves. "Here it is: All the stock of both companies was exchanged for six-per-cent preferred stock in the new consolidated company—the Simplex Northwestern. So far, good! But, with every share of that preferred stock, they've given away, as a bonus, two shares of common stock. Given it away—you understand—without one dollar payment. The actual total capital of the new company is one million

dollars; the stock capital is three million."

"What've we got to do with common stock, an' preferred stock, an' all that rot?" growled Strogan. "That's finance, not labor; an' labor an' wages is where our business comes in."

Hargreaves' eyes lighted up. His whole attitude showed an energetic earnestness as forcible as Strogan's and much deeper.

"It means," he declared, in deep, steady tones, "that we've got to earn dividends on three millions of stock, with a one-million-dollar plant! That's the keynote of the tune that's going to be played here before long."

Strogan was glaring expectantly, and every man showed the same feeling.

"The par value of that common stock is one hundred dollars," Hargreaves continued. "To-day, in the papers, it is quoted at twenty-one, and it'll not go above twenty-one until we—we workmen, mind you—have shown that we can earn dividends on that two millions of stock that hasn't produced one dollar of money! That's the keynote, boys! That's where we're sure to get a slashing cut on the piecework rates when our present contract runs out. That's why that new business doctor has been engaged. That's why we'll get a promise of a share in the profits, to sugar coat a ten or fifteen-per-cent drop in wages, and a ten or fifteen-per-cent increase in the day's work!"

Whitfield, a shaft-shop man, sprang from his chair; then he dropped back, and exploded hoarsely:

"That's what they did at Cumber & Smith's; an' the profit sharin' amounted to only five per cent on the wages! And at the Silverheim Loco Works we got three per cent. I worked to the bone for a year on close wages, an' pulled in twenty-four dollars as my share of the profits. Twenty-four cold dollars!"

Hargreaves' old cheery good humor was with him again. "That's it!" he grinned. "We'll get a share of what's left, after they've paid six-per-cent dividend on that common stock that was given away—after *we've* earned that dividend. Seems to me that we get mixed in with finance whether we want to or not. Eh, Strogan?"

The blacksmith made no reply, and Hargreaves went on:

"And why not mix in? We workmen are like a party at whist. We're playing partners with the company, and they deal every hand, kick us signals how to play, under the table, and scoop in every trick. We're just about wise enough to slip out our spot cards, but we don't know trumps when we see them!"

It was a scathing charge, but not a man there—not even Strogan—substituted resentment for appreciation.

"What's comin'?" demanded the big blacksmith. "Anythin' in the furnace?"

"I propose to mix in," said the carpenter quietly. "We have seventy thousand dollars in the lodge treasury. Let us invest it in the common stock at twenty-one, or as near that as we can buy. Then, if they put the screws on us—if they handle us so as to force a dividend on that stock, it'll go to par; and we shall pull out a share of the profits we earn that'll make any share the company gives us look like thirty cents!"

Every man gasped. Strogan growled: "It isn't hot yet, Hargreaves. Keep on blowin'." And Hargreaves kept on.

"Seventy thousand dollars would buy about three thousand shares; and when they boost the stock up to par, those shares will mean three hundred thousand dollars! How's that for a return for our seventy thousand?"

"But how long will that take?" demurred Marvin.

"A couple of years, perhaps, if business holds fair, and the officials work their brains as hard as they always do to put watered stock to par. And that's where we come in on the game. We get the benefit of all the wonderful tricks and schemes of great financiers, of great officials, and of great business doctors; for it's dead certain that every bit of brain and energy and skill—and they've got big chunks of it all—is worked to the limit every time to make dividends on watered stock. And, if

we're in on that stock, they're working for us, just the same as we're working for them!"

Marvin shook his head gloomily. "All the same," he muttered, "it doesn't look good to me to spend our fund in stock speculating."

"What're you kicking at?" growled Strogan. "Speculatin'! If there's any man in the works more ready than you to chip into a pool on anythin' happenin'—from the runs the ball team'll make to the time when a new-married man'll be buyin' his first cradle—I've never set eyes on him. Let's hammer it out, an' see the quality of the metal!"

"There's something else besides the profit on the stock," urged Hargreaves. "There's another big trump for us; a corking big one!" As he explained, the chairs grew closer together, the gloom went farther away, and all eyes flashed with enthusiastic amusement. "It's got the true ring!" yelled Strogan. "An' the true temper. There isn't a flaw in it!"

The contract on piecework rates had expired, and a new schedule been bulletined by the manager, reducing those rates ten per cent, with the gracious explanation that the reduction was regrettably necessitated by sharp advances in the prices of materials, and sharp competition on sales. The author of the regretful explanation, Franklin F. Horncliffe, general manager, and one of the heaviest stockholders of the new Simplex Northwestern Electric Company, was beaming on Mr. Simpson, one of the directors.

"The reduction has been accepted," he said, with congratulatory dignity. "The men have, thanks to our firm and progressive attitudes, come to a realization that the rights of capital have to be considered as much as the rights of labor—that there are wives and children of stockholders to be protected, as well as wives and children of mechanics."

Mr. Simpson's eyes filled with appreciative amusement. "You do it remarkably well, Horncliffe. Sometimes you almost enthuse me."

"What do you mean by that, sir?"

"Your rattling good platitudes about rights of labor and capital," laughed the director. "Isn't it a pity that the rights of stock speculators can't be worked in sometimes? But we work them on the quiet, however; very effectively, too. This wage reduction is going to count big toward a dividend on the common stock. That's sure! Our pay roll runs to about a million a year, and ten-per-cent saving on that means a hundred thousand dollars. That'll nearly pay six per cent on the whole two millions of common stock."

The deep scowl on Mr. Horncliffe's face, which had met Mr. Simpson's first remarks, mellowed as the probability of a dividend was mentioned.

"Er—yes! Of course. The reduction is in line with our advanced policy of economy of production, and increased efficiency of men and machines. The true principles of industry are developing fast, Simpson; but not so fast as they would were more good men obtainable."

"More business experts, you mean, I suppose," laughed the director.

The manager scowled again. "More business experts—more good executives and more good employees," he grunted.

"We're not feeling the want very much," chuckled Simpson. "We've got the right bunch of directors and the right manager. They could give points to the Reverend Mr. Jernegan on transmuting water into gold, all right. They've even got the parable of the changing of water into wine rather outclassed."

The manager's scowl deepened. "Really, Mr. Simpson, your jocularity is not in good taste; nor is it well timed. There are matters more important than the—er—details you mention, which call for the exercise of real brain work."

"I fail to see it!" retorted the unabashed director. "I had a hundred thousand dollars in the old Simplex Company, and now I've got that, and two thousand shares of common stock; and when that common reaches par my assets will be three hundred thousand. You're in deeper, Horncliffe, and consequently the dividend on the common

is worth all the brainwork you can give it. Every bit!"

Again the manager scowled reprovingly, but Simpson went on:

"I like the prospects; and I wish I could pick up some more of the stock. I was hoping I'd get Rackstraw's block. He was willing to sell, but I didn't jump quick enough. A fellow named Bellingford got ahead of me. Do you know him?"

The manager considered, then shook his head.

"He's a Statenville man, I understand," said Simpson. "I'll get in touch with him. Perhaps he'll feel tired soon." Then, approaching closer to the manager, he murmured:

"Horncliffe, isn't there some way to put a little depressing appearance on that common stock?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you've probably got some idle cash. I know I have. Any of that stock which could be bought before any rise—bought at twenty-one, or thereabouts—would be good investment; very good indeed! Go to par in two years, at least. Four hundred per cent in two years would be some dividend—eh, Horncliffe?"

The manager smiled grimly. "Well," he murmured, "of course, business meets with many little setbacks. Expenses climb, and unexpected difficulties occur." The grim smile spread.

"I understand," laughed Simpson. "Leave the buying to me, and I'll leave the pessimism to you; and we'll divide what stock I can pick up."

Modern business is quick, but not so quick as love; so in the telling of this story time must sometimes elapse. The first year of the new Simplex Northwestern Company's career was approaching its close, when Mr. Simpson, jaunty, good-humored, and smiling, approached Mr. Bellingford, of Statenville, with whom he had formed some acquaintance.

"About your block of S. N. W. common?" he smiled, after the first greetings. I've got some funds to invest for a friend, and if you're still thinking of selling, perhaps we can get together."

Mr. Bellingford shook his head. "I am only holding that stock in trust, Mr. Simpson; and I have no authority now to sell at any price. But I can put you in touch with the owners if you care to see them."

"Thank you! I might as well look them up."

"Here is the man you want to see," smiled Bellingford, and he scribbled a name and address on a slip of paper.

Robt. Hargreaves, 34 Tapley Street, Baldwinbury.

"Hargreaves!" exclaimed Simpson. "One of our men! Do you mean to say that this man owns three thousand shares of our stock?"

"His club does, and he represents it."

"What club is that?"

"The P. Y. I. H. P. Club. 'Put Yourself in His Place,' you know."

"Well—I'll—be—hanged!" was the astounded reply. "Yes, I'll see him. Much obliged, Mr. Bellingford."

The second day after that, he received Hargreaves in his room at the Brunswick. The men had never spoken together, but Simpson was, of all the directors, the one cordially liked by the men. No appeal of individual misfortune was ever made to him without instantaneous and hearty response; and Hargreaves grasped the hand outstretched to him with very comfortable feelings.

"If those cigars look too mild, Hargreaves, try one of these," was the director's opening speech. "Say, you're looking at one of the most astonished men that this old Brunswick has ever sheltered. I haven't recovered since I heard that your club—the club with the alphabetical name—owned three thousand shares of the company's stock!"

"We're a social club, with fraternal trimmings," laughed Hargreaves. "Our dues have piled up till we had a fund of seventy thousand dollars, drawing only two-per-cent interest at the bank; so we decided on investment which would pay more."

"Then, of course, you've no idea of selling?" Simpson ventured.

"At what price, Mr. Simpson?"

"Well, the quotation to-day was fifty-three. It's gone up pretty well since you bought, I guess."

"We wouldn't sell at fifty-three," replied the carpenter; "nor at less than par, unless we're obliged to."

The director shrugged his shoulders. "I think you are wise, although I'm sorry for it. Who votes your stock, Mr. Hargreaves?"

"Mr. Bellingford will, perhaps. We placed the stock in trust with him because we didn't want, before, to make any show of prosperity."

"But Bellingford will vote as you direct, of course?"

"Yes, sir! Our club has talked it over, and they have practically left the affair in my hands."

The director could not help comparing the modest dignity of this carpenter with the rather egotistical quality of the general manager. "I'll be perfectly frank with you, Hargreaves. I should like to be intrusted with your proxy if there's any way I can vote it the way you want it voted."

"I don't know that there's any one special that we want voted for," smiled Hargreaves. "What we want is something before the annual election."

"And that is?"

"A return to the old wage scale, sir! Put the piecework prices back where they were a year ago, and you can vote our stock as you please."

Simpson gazed into the frank blue eyes of the other, trying to see what there was beneath; but although he was of great experience in such scrutiny, he could make out nothing—nothing to back the suspicion there was in his mind. At a venture he inquired pleasantly:

"I'm very doubtful about that, Hargreaves. If I try, and fail, what will you do with your stock? Will you sell?"

"No, sir! We shall not sell, but we shall probably give Mr. Lancaster our proxies."

"Lancaster!" It came almost as an expletive from Simpson. He again glared searchingly at Hargreaves; and although he met only a smile of innocence, he felt certain that there was something beneath and beyond it.

"He's a pretty heavy stockholder," said the carpenter, "and I hear that he's a big-hearted man. Perhaps he'll use what influence he can to get us fair treatment."

Simpson smiled genially, and held out his hand. "I'll do my level best for you, Hargreaves. But I want your word that, if I succeed, I'm to have your proxies. Give me your hand on that."

"There it is, Mr. Simpson!"

The director strolled into Mr. Horncliffe's private office the next morning, pulled a chair up close to the desk, and murmured:

"Horncliffe, if you have any desire to continue as general manager of this big plant, you'll have to write a little essay at once."

The manager looked up in indignant amazement. "What does that mean?"

"You'll have to post a bulletin, putting the wages back to where they were before the reduction!"

"Simpson, you are always welcome at my house. I wish you'd defer your jocularity to the evenings. It doesn't come in well with business—that is, with a busy man."

"You'll also," grinned the director, "have to sign a two years' contract on the new schedule."

The manager turned to his desk disgustedly, and commenced examining papers. Simpson went on:

"Lancaster is going to be the next president here if you don't heed me!"

Papers dropped from the manager's hand, and he glared: "What! Lancaster?"

"Exactly! You know how we stand. Nine thousand shares in the hands of friends of the present directors; eight thousand in the hands of the opposition, of which Lancaster is the leader; and three thousand that we thought we were sure of, and which would give us a fine majority."

"*Thought* we were sure of!" exclaimed Horncliffe, with fierce indignation. "I understood you *were* sure!"

"I never got as far as that, Horncliffe. Bellingford led me to believe that he would sell those three thousand shares, and now, two weeks before the annual election, I find that he doesn't own them!"

"Who does?"

"The P. Y. I. H. P. Club!"

The manager sank back in his chair, and gasped: "That club! Some one has filled you up, Simpson!"

"Bellingford did; and that man Hargreaves corroborated it. He seems to be the business expert of the club. Anyway, he's got the handling of the proxies, and he suggests that if you make the contract I've spoken of, his proxies will be given to me to vote. Otherwise they go to Lancaster! There's nothing for it, Horncliffe. That club's got us! The Lancaster crowd'll clean every one of us out if they get the majority."

There was no remark from the manager. He was just then incapable of finding adequate language, but the director went on:

"Those fellows have played a splendid game. They figured that the reduction of wages would put the common stock on a dividend-paying basis; which it has! More than that, the work has come through unusually well this past year. The directors have been surprised at the improvement and increase. Those men were working for profits, all right; and they've made 'em. Big profits! And they knew that they held the balance of power, and they kept that dark until the psychological moment to use it. There's some captain of finance in that bunch, Horncliffe!"

Still there was no response, and Simpson stayed but a few moments longer, feeling that Horncliffe had better be left alone. He sauntered from the office, carelessly humming: "There are moments——" while the gentleman he left had slid down in his chair, his legs stretched at full length before him, his hands grasping the chair arms, his eyes red and flaming. He was a composite picture of uncontrollable rage, ignominious defeat, and supreme, overwhelming disgust.

Within a week the room of the P. Y. I. H. P. Club was filled with joy. Strogan was the center of attraction, as he swayed in his chair and slammed his knees with his great sinewy fists.

"It's the finest piece of work ever seen!" he roared, with an aggressive glare round the party for any who would contradict. "The finest! An' Bob Hargreaves is the man that done it. Wages back to the old rates on a two-year contract, an' three thousand shares of company stock in our treasury that Simpson offers seventy-six for—one hundred and fifty thousand dollars more than we gave for it! Guess that more than makes up what we lost in wages this past year."

"And are we going to sell?" inquired Marvin.

"Not on your life!" roared Strogan. "We're stockholders now, an' it's up to us to protect the wives and children of stockholders, same as Horncliffe an' the directors have allus done. They can shove water into the stock, but Bob's shown us how to shove water into the wages. Here's to him, lads! Make it hearty, now!"

Moonshine

By William Hamilton Osborne

Author of "The Red Mouse," "The Running Fight," Etc.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Savage came to his senses he was conscious of a sharp and throbbing pain at the base of his skull—a symptom which he diagnosed at once. It was due to that heavy, crushing weight which had landed on him from above.

With the instinct of the trained fighter, he immediately assumed an attitude or defense—or attempted to. His attempt was unsuccessful. His hands were bound behind his back, and a dozen men were jerking him roughly to his feet.

How long he had been unconscious he did not know. He looked about him uncertainly. Darkness had settled down in dead earnest. Three spluttering torches lit up the still. The fire had again died down, but the odor of alcohol was strong upon the evening air—and still another odor.

Savage, his senses now alert, sniffed the air eagerly.

"Who is using chloroform?" he demanded suddenly.

There was no answer. He cast a startled glance toward a little group not fifty feet away—Moonshine Parlamon, still prostrate and inert; Tacy Ann Jarrett on her knees beside her.

Savage sniffed the air again. "It is chloroform," he said aloud, and dropped his chin for an instant upon his breast. He was trying to determine whether he had been the victim of the drug, but he lacked all the sensations. There was no odor clinging to his shirt, and the odor in itself was much too faint. It was that movement of his head, however, that brought to him the knowledge of another thing. Something pricked his throat in a hundred places. He looked hastily above him. He was standing with his back against the only tree in the inclosure, and about his neck, and a bit too tight even as he stood upon his feet, there was a knotted rope, the other end of which had been slung across one of the high branches of the tree.

Savage smiled a grim smile. Before him, with folded arms, with whitened, flabby face, stood Welch Honaker.

"Honaker," said Savage, "who has been using chloroform?" He jerked his head once more to the right. "Tacy Ann!" he cried sharply.

Tacy Ann, as though in answer to a rifle shot, sprang to her feet, and stared through the murky darkness at Savage.

"What are you doing with that cloth?" he demanded. "What is that lying over Moonshine's face?"

Tacy Ann blinked. "It's to make her come to," she muttered. "Welch poured it out on a piece of rag."

"It's ammonia," Welch deigned to explain.

"It's chloroform!" cried Savage, with a sudden appeal to the men about him. "Tacy Ann, unless you want to be a party to the murder of Moonshine Parlamon, you'd better stop right where you are. Throw that rag in the fire; no, bring it here to me."

"Throw it in the fire," ordered Welch.

Tacy Ann tore the cloth from Moonshine's face, and, creeping to the fire, threw it in.

Savage glanced into the faces about him. "I want you all to understand this thing," he said; "no matter what happens, you'll find out that I speak the

This story began in the August Month-end POPULAR. News dealers can supply back numbers.

truth. The instant Moonshine Parlamon recovers consciousness she will denounce this man Honaker. It is to his interest to keep her silent, even if he has to kill her. Even now she may be dead. Give me one chance—let me find that out for myself. I have some remedies with me—I'll make no effort to escape. Take this rope off for a minute, then you can bring me back."

"No!" roared Welch. "Tacy Ann has got your kit. You told her what to do, and she's doin' all she can."

"I'm not talking to you, Honaker," retorted Savage. "I'm talking to your friends."

"We'll stand by you, Welch," chorused the others.

Savage shrugged his shoulders, though there was still anxiety in his face.

"I have done what I can," he said. "Now what do you intend to do?"

Again that grim smile settled on his lips. He was once more the alert, self-possessed individual that his instinct and experience had made him.

"What have you got against me?" he demanded.

"Against you!" snarled Honaker. "You're a foreigner—you're a secret-service man, a gov'ment hound."

Savage glanced in a puzzled sort of way at Honaker.

"I remember now," he said, "that is what you accused me of being before something hit me. Where did you get the idea, Honaker—what's the game? You know why I came here—to protect Moonshine Parlamon from you."

"Protect nothin'," growled Honaker. "That's your excuse. You came here to get evidence. You're a gov'ment hound."

"Search him!" cried a voice.

"Search him?" echoed Savage, with a laugh. "You don't mean to say you neglected that important function. You had plenty of chance while I was unconscious."

Honaker was not slow to observe the composure of his captive. "What's the good of searchin' him?" he demanded. "I tell you he's a gov'ment man. It hain't for us to prove it—it's for him to clear his skirts."

"Search him!" yelled the crowd.

The majority ruled. A committee of three was appointed to conduct the proceedings. It is due to this committee to say that its duty was performed in an orderly and scientific manner—but without result. There was no incriminating evidence to be found upon Mr. Richard Savage.

As this fact became apparent, murmurs of doubt, of disappointment, were heard among the mountaineers.

"You haven't searched his boots," cried Honaker, in desperation.

"Right!" said Savage. "A secret-service man always carries papers in his boots." He laughed again.

Once more they jerked off his boots, tried to detach the insole from within, and found it impossible.

"Slit 'em with your knife," cried Honaker.

"Wait a minute," exclaimed Savage. "Who's to pay me for those boots?"

He said it in a plaintive tone, but in that plaintive tone there was derisive laughter.

"Slit 'em with your knife," said Welch again.

Mul Byington obeyed. He took his hunting knife, and slit the soles from toe to heel, and the committee carefully examined them. There was nothing there. Byington scratched his head.

"Welch," said he, "we don't want to make no mistake. He hain't got nothin' on him that shows he's a secret-service man."

"That's right," acknowledged the other members of the committee.

Welch did not answer. Instead of speaking he bounded ponderously across the inclosure, and slumped for an instant on the ground beside Moonshine Parlamon.

"No more chloroform," cried Savage sharply. "I warn you, Honaker."

"Chloroform nothin'," retorted Welch. "It hain't chloroform nor ammonia either I'm after. You've got another guess comin'."

For a full half moment in the dim shadows he bent over the girl, and then

came back triumphantly to the mountaineers, bearing a bundle in his arm.

"We clean forgot his coat," said Honaker. "He's a cute proposition, this gov'ment hound, sassy as they make 'em, but we hain't through with him. Perhaps you'd better have a look into that coat."

The committee took the coat, and searched it in the illuminating presence of one of the spluttering torches.

"What's this?" growled Mul Byington.

He drew forth from the pocket of the coat a leather-covered flask. He unscrewed the cap, and sniffed the contents. Then he lifted the flask to his mouth.

"Red licker!" he shouted. "Good gov'ment licker as was ever made!"

"Ah," said Welch; "let's have a look at that flask."

He held it close to the torchlight. It was pocket-worn and weather-beaten, but upon its leathern cover, stamped or burned, appeared the branded letters—"U. S."

"Looks like some of the gov'ment supplies," said Welch. He plunged his hands into the breast pocket of the coat. "Mebbe, though," he mused, "there's somethin' else. Let's have a look."

In an instant he drew forth a folded bit of heavy paper, also soiled and pocket-worn. With shaking fingers he opened it to the light of the torch. A grin overspread his features.

"Mul Byington," he said, "get behind me, and read this thing with me."

"Let me read it, too," Savage cut in.

Welch snorted. "You know it by heart, I reckon," said he. And then he held it before the torch while Mul Byington spelled it out:

To any State or county magistrate, constable, or officer.

This is to certify that the bearer is in the employ of the secret-service bureau of the United States of America, and is known as operative No. 405. Before arresting him or interfering with his operations, notify either the governor of your State or the nearest United States marshal or district attorney. Any person interfering with the operative does so at peril. BIRDSELL.

Secret-service Bureau, Washington, D. C.

When Mul Byington had finished, Welch wheeled once more upon Savage.

"So you say you're not a secret-service man?" he sneered.

Savage laughed—dangerously this time. "Honaker," he said, "I wish you would tell your friends here from whose body you got that flask and that certificate."

Welch stared at Savage, and his jaw dropped. They were relics of the late Jim Eccles, and Savage knew them for the things they were. Savage followed up his charge, for he saw that the truth was staggering Welch Honaker.

"You never killed a secret-service man, Honaker, did you?"

Welch took one tremendous grip upon himself. His fingers bent and crooked, as though to avenge this insinuation on the spot. A sudden fury came into his face. He leaped for the loose end of the rope, and caught it in his grasp.

At the instant that he did so, however, a dozen men were upon him. They dragged Welch into a far corner of the stockade, and there they held a whispered conference.

"There's to be no hangin'," exclaimed Mul Byington. "I tell you, Welch, it was understood. I hain't never hung no man yet, and I hain't goin' to be a party to it. Shootin' is good enough for me when I kin meet a man face to face, but I hain't goin' to hang any livin' man. If you wants to hang him then I leave—that's all."

He looked around upon his fellows. They nodded in confirmation of his words.

"It was understood no hangin'," they repeated. "We were only to scare him, and make him confess. If Mul goes, we all go."

Welch's eyes bulged in anger and offense. "You've got the proof," he almost screamed, "that he's a gov'ment hound, and yet you won't kill him on the spot."

There was silence. Mul Byington shrugged his shoulders. "We're with you, Welch," he said, in conciliatory tones, "except in the matter of hangin'."

"Are you goin' to let him go scot-

free?" demanded Welch. "You know what'll happen, don't you? He goes straight from here to the U. S. district attorney, and the U. S. district attorney lifts up his hand and smashes Crooked Run—smashes every one of us. You don't seem to sense this thing, Mul Byington. Who is this here Savage? He's a snake—a snake in the grass. You know now he's a secret-service man. Why didn't he come out like a secret-service man? Why didn't he hunt us down like the rest of them? Nothin' of the kind. He comes here as a schoolmaster—and he takes Welch Honaker's place—forces Welch Honaker out of the place that Welch Honaker has held for years, and he sails round here flirting with all your girls, and makin' out he's the smuggest, greatest schoolmaster that ever lived. He's a snake, I tell you, and a snake is fit for one thing, and only one thing—to die. I tell you this here is Crooked Run against the gov'ment, and if you let this snake go away from here, Crooked Run's got to go."

The mountaineers looked into each other's eyes. Welch Honaker's impassioned speech—made all the more effective because delivered in low, tense tones—had clearly moved them. They saw the thing now in all its grim reality. If Savage got away there was no hope for them. It was Savage's life or their liberty.

And yet Mul had it right. It was one thing to shoot a man in the heat of the chase; it was another thing to kill him in cold blood.

"What do you propose, Welch?" asked Mul Byington.

"I don't propose nothin'," returned Honaker. He drew his fellows still farther into the dark corner. "It's a question of whether you're with me or agin' me."

"We're with you," answered Mul promptly.

"Will you do as I say?"

"If there hain't no hangin' in it," murmured a tremulous voice in the darkness.

Welch wheeled upon the speaker. "There hain't goin' to be no hangin'," he exclaimed savagely, in ominous tones, "only you must do as I say. Do you promise?"

Mul spoke for the rest. "We're with you," he kept repeating.

Welch gripped his arm. "You'll follow my directions?"

"Yes. What shall we do, Welch?"

"You'll do nothin' at all!" And Welch Honaker swung about on his heel. "I'm goin' down the trail to Jeff Parlamon's. Arter I go you can set this spy free."

"What!" gasped Mul.

Welch held up his hand. "You heard what I said. After I go you can set him free."

He picked up his rifle from the ground, and walked heavily across the inclosure, unbarred the door, and disappeared into the night.

A sigh of relief broke from the lips of his followers. Once more they looked each other in the eye.

"Welch is a mighty fine man," said Mul, in awe-struck tones. "He takes the hull responsibility, and there ain't none left on us."

At the head of his fellows he strode to Savage, and untied the noose about his neck; then with a hunting knife severed the bonds that held the prisoner's arms behind him.

"We've had a consultation about you, schoolmaster," he explained, "and this here consultation has ended in one thing—you kin go where you like. You're free to go. You understand."

Savage eyed the leader and the downcast countenances of the other mountaineers. He cast one fleeting glance at the opening through which Welch Honaker and his rifle had disappeared. He knew well what this thing meant.

"I came here," he said evenly, "to take care of Moonshine Parlamon. I prefer to stay."

"You *cain't* stay," stormed Mul impatiently. "You're a trespasser in this here place. You're free to go; and, what's more, you've got to go. If you don't go 'twill be the worse for you."

Savage moved three paces to the right, and then fell back. "I decline to go," he said.

Mul lifted his arm as though by way

of signal, and again Savage was seized and bound; again the coil of rope was about his neck. A dozen hands laid hold of the loose end that hung from the tree branch.

Savage saw that this coterie of gaunt-faced men had become angry and excited. So far he had calculated on the things that had happened. So long as these men remained cool-headed he felt that there was only one among them liable to commit cold-blooded violence—Welch Honaker. The stimulant needed by the ordinary man before he wreaks bodily vengeance is the stimulant of anger and offense. By the mutterings about him, Savage understood that these mountaineers were working themselves up into a fury.

"Welch was right," said Mul Byington, thrusting his face close to Savage. "You're a snake in the grass, that's what you are, and you'll do as we say or we'll string you up."

As though their emotions had until now been held in leash, the mutterings grew to loud-voiced threats.

Savage was uncertain, and being uncertain he preferred to take no chances.

"All right," he said to Byington; "give me your word that you'll take care of Moonshine Parlamon—that you'll keep Honaker away from her—and I'll leave. I agree with you that I have now become a trespasser. I will go."

They released him, and he stalked slowly and deliberately toward the opening, a dozen bristling rifles at his back. He well understood the program. He knew that somewhere in the darkness without, with his rifle trained upon that entrance, lurked Welch Honaker—that the instant he stepped beyond the confines of the inclosure he would be shot down.

He had one chance in a thousand to escape. Was his agility, his cleverness, a match for the dead shot that Welch Honaker had proved himself to be?

He reached the opening and halted for an instant before crossing the threshold of that uncanny place. Behind him he could feel the tightening of throats, the expectant intake of breaths. He gathered all his muscles together for a spring, and started forth.

He made absolutely no progress. At the very instant that he was stepping out into the night, a heavy body lurched against him, and drove him back among the mountaineers—almost bore him to the ground. There were a dozen exclamations as a long, lanky individual tottered for a moment upon staggering limbs, and then pitched headlong to the ground.

"Harney Leveridge!" exclaimed a dozen men at once.

Harney, supine, nodded his head weakly, and tried to rise.

"It's me, all right, fellows," he whispered hoarsely, his breath coming heavily as he spoke. "It's Harney Leveridge. I'm dead beat—all in. I had to hide some place—and there was no other place——"

He was interrupted by another figure that filled the opening—a bulky figure whose face was livid with rage. Welch Honaker entered and stood menacingly over Harney.

"Curse you!" he cried. "You fool—you idiot! I told you yesterday you must keep away from here. Have you gone plumb crazy?"

Harney raised a pleading face to Welch. "They're after me, Welch," he said, in hoarse appeal. "I have hid in every place in and out of Crooked Run, and there hain't no other place that's safe. Nobody dares to hide me, Welch, exceptin' you. It seems I hain't got no friends no more—I hain't even got the dawg." He sank back upon the ground, exhausted.

Welch leaned over him and shook his arm. "You must get up and get out of here," he said. "There's no time to lose." He drew him by main force upon his feet and thrust him toward the door.

Mul Byington laid his hand upon Welch's arm.

"Listen, Welch!" he whispered. "What's that?"

They listened silently. Upon the night air there was wafted to them the wail of a lost animal—the call of a faithful friend to its master.

"It's my dawg, Welch," said Harney,

with a pleased smile upon his face; "it's my dawg. I lost him for two days. I knew he'd find me. It seems like he's the only friend I've got."

Nearer still and nearer came the whimpering, whining bark of Harney's dog. Apparently the animal, too, was well fatigued, for he came slowly, as though picking his way carefully along an unknown trail.

At last, while they stood there waiting, they heard him just outside, whimpering and scratching at the concealing boughs upon the heavy oaken door. Finding no means of entrance, he set up a despairing howl that seemed to have no beginning and no end. Welch looked in disgust at Harney.

"If he keeps that up," he said, "the whole United States gov'ment will hear him. We got to let him in."

He drew back the heavy bars and pushed the door open gently to the width of six inches.

In an instant the door was wrenched out of his grasp, and with the momentum of a forty-horse-power machine some thirty men catapulted into the interior of the stockade, sweeping the mountaineers before them as a scythe mows grain.

The foremost of these thirty men held Harney's dog in leash. Half of them were county men looking for a murderer; the other half were government sleuths looking for a still. They had joined forces. Their history had been one of successive failure until they had captured Harney Leveridge's dog. With this faithful instrument, they had accomplished the impossible.

The dog, with the unerring instinct of his kind, had led them along an untraveled trail through an impenetrable wilderness. There was a rifle shot or two on the inside of that stockade, a few tremendous scuffles, and then peace settled down as suddenly as the tumult had begun.

The leader of the secret-service men stood his rifle up against the wall, and looked about him. He walked over to Welch Honaker, who stood bound and hobbled against the tree, and stared into his face long and earnestly.

"We got Harney Leveridge," he said, turning to the squad, "and we've got another bird here that looks good to me. This Honaker has all the earmarks of a main guy—I'll bet he's one of them that——"

He stiffened suddenly. He had caught sight of a little group on the opposite side of the stockade—of a girl lying full length upon the ground, of another girl kneeling by her side, and of one other figure—still unbound.

With a signal to his men he dashed quickly across the intervening space, and caught this other figure. It was Savage. The leader of the squad jerked him swiftly to his feet, and looked into his face.

"By George," he said to his men, "this looks like the cleverest rascal of them all. Truss him up. He's probably the most dangerous of the lot."

In an instant Savage was bound—helplessly bound.

"There's only one thing, officer," he said to the leader of the squad. "I wish you would do your best to bring that girl out of her faint. She's been that way for hours."

The leader knelt over her, and then thrust his face close to Savage's.

"You've chloroformed her, you scoundrel!" he exclaimed.

He took a little phial from his pocket, and held it to the girl's nose. While he was ministering to her a sound behind him brought him to his feet.

"George," drawled another of the squad, who was training his rifle upon the opening, "we've bagged the lot. If here ain't Parlamon!"

Framed in the opening stood the towering figure of Jeff Parlamon. He had heard the guns, and his instinct had brought him to the rescue of Welch Honaker. In a trice the secret-service men had his arms bound behind his back.

"Couldn't have happened better," exclaimed the leader of the squad. "Now that we've got Jeff Parlamon on the premises, we've got the owner of the still; what's more, he wouldn't be here—he couldn't get here without he knew about it."

Under the ministerings of the leader, Moonshine Parlamon opened wide her eyes. She saw but one figure—the figure of Richard Savage. With a shriek she sprang from the ground, and threw her arms about his shoulders.

"Don't let him come near me!" she cried. "Don't let Welch Honaker——"

She stopped suddenly, and looked about her with a bewildered air, clinging the more tightly to Savage. Out of the murky glare there hobbled toward her a tall, gaunt figure that leaned weakly against the stockade when halfway, and stared stupidly at her.

"Moonshine!" gasped Harney Leveridge.

Moonshine returned his stare. Pity for him suddenly possessed her. Fever had laid its mark upon him, a mark that the shadows intensified.

Moonshine stretched one hand toward Harney, clinging with the other to Savage, for the strength that her terror had lent her had begun again to ebb.

"Harney," she cried tremulously, and in her voice was the tenderness, the longing of a mother for her child.

In another moment Jeff, bound, but not yet shackled, sprang from his captors, and reached her side.

"You have been hurt, honey!" he exclaimed, in anxious tones.

Moonshine glanced again about her. Her senses were coming back. She saw that her father's hands were bound, and that two strangers held him by the shoulders.

"Pap!" she shrieked suddenly. "Pap, what does it all mean?"

The complacent leader of the secret-service squad smiled at the county men.

"It means, ma'am," he said, "that we've caught the whole b'iling at one sweep." He brought his hand down roughly upon the shoulder of Richard Savage. "And this here smug-faced school-teacher," he added, "is the cleverest scoundrel of the lot."

CHAPTER XVI.

Major Moses Swackhammer sat in his spacious but disordered private office, his feet cocked upon his desk, prodigiously at ease. Beneath his windows the street of the Southern city was aswarm with life. To every hitching post there was a team attached. Busy merchants and their customers pressing in and out of stores moved hither and thither.

But to all this bustle Major Swackhammer, at one end of a long and very fine cheroot, was quite oblivious. He was serene. Anon he rubbed his hand over his closely shaven poll; at times tugged ostentatiously at his handsome gray mustaches, or twirled his goatee reflectively.

As he sat there, gazing out through the haze of smoke, he was aware that some individual had entered his outer office, and was glancing furtively about.

"Come in, suh!" said the major.

The figure stealthily approached, and laid a hand upon the lintel of the doorway of the private room, and then stood still. The major, without altering his position, spoke once more:

"Come in, suh!"

For the first time the stranger spoke—his voice sunk to a stealthy whisper:

"Are we alone?"

The major's lips twitched—his nostrils dilated. This voice was one that he had heard before—its tones stirred some vague memory within him. The very words themselves dovetailed with that memory.

The major, a bit startled, leaped to his feet, and stared at the newcomer.

"Heavens and earth!" quoth the major, staring through the smoke.

The newcomer put his finger to his lips, and advanced to the desk.

"Is this Major Mo Swackhammer?" he inquired.

The major extended his right hand across the battered desk, and seized a box of cheroots with the other.

"I declar'," said Major Mo enthusiastically, "the sight of you, suh, is good for sore eyes, suh! Have a chair, suh; have two, have three——"

The stranger still stood. "Is there anybody within earshot?" he inquired.

"Not so you can notice it," replied Major Mo.

"Then, if you don't mind I'll take this

chair where I can keep my eye on the outer door."

"Right!"

The stranger lit one of Major Mo's cigars. He leaned forward, and tapped the desk lightly with his fingers.

"So you remember me?" he asked.

"Huh!" said the major warmly. "You're one of the few men, suh, that I do the honah nevah to forget. Your name is Savage, suh——"

"The Lorimer tobacco case," interposed the other man.

"Right! It was your operations that won that case, suh."

Savage shook his head. "Your eloquence did it, major, and it's because you won that case that I have come back to-day. I've got another case."

"Tobacco?"

"Moonshiners."

"Who are you for, suh?"

"The government."

"The government is to be congratulated," said the major, with a courtly bow. "And where, suh, was this here still?"

"Crooked Run. It's a giant still, and the biggest haul in years."

"Gad!" exclaimed the major. "I read about it in the papers. When was the capture made?"

"Last Wednesday."

"And have you got the goods, suh?"

"I should say so! Not only the goods, but the whole of Crooked Run."

"You represent the government?"

"Exactly."

The major was puzzled. "The United States district attorney takes care of the government. Where, suh, do I come in?" he asked.

Savage smiled grimly. "I desire to retain counsel for myself."

"Yourself?"

"I was caught in the raid. I am one of the defendants only," he added; "I happen to be out on bail."

The major looked long and earnestly at his visitor, and then gave vent to a series of low chuckles.

"Suh," he exclaimed admiringly, "you certainly are slick. Slick, suh, is the word for you."

Savage rose, walked to the window, and beckoned to the major. "There are other defendants in this case that I would like you to defend." He stretched out his arm, and pointed to a bench across the street that rested against the side of a feed store. "Kindly observe," he laid his hand on the major's arm, "the old lady with the pipe."

The major flung up his hands. "Heavens and earth! She's as ugly as sin, suh. She's guilty, suh—guilty of every offense on the calendar of crime."

"That," retorted Savage, with twitching lips, "is one of the aristocrats of Crooked Run—Aunt Tildy Moberly. But it is not to her that I desire to direct your attention. You see the girl next to her, with the white bandage on her head."

The major looked. His eyes widened. His nostrils dilated. And yet, withal, his expression softened. He brushed the cigar ashes from the lapels of his long coat.

"Heavens and earth!" quoth the major, with enthusiasm. "Here is something quite different, suh. She's an angel, suh. She's as pretty as a red wagon, suh, and what man can say more?"

Savage took from his pocket his white handkerchief, and waved it energetically in the air. It caught the eye of Aunt Tildy Moberly. She stretched one lean and withered claw toward it, and gripped her young companion's arm with the other lean and withered claw.

The girl had been sitting listlessly staring at the life and bustle all about her. Now her eyes brightened. Savage waited until he caught her glance, and then he beckoned them to come, indicating with another gesture the ground-floor entrance of the building. Then he slumped back into his chair.

The major glanced at him in well-simulated horror. "The hag, suh, isn't coming to my office!" he queried, in apparent alarm.

"They come together or not at all," said Savage, smiling. "I can assure you, major, that the one will quite counteract the effect of the other."

The two men puffed leisurely in si-

lence. In a few moments there was a feeble tap upon the outer door.

"Come in!" roared the major.

Savage sprang to the door and opened it, and the young woman and the old one entered. Savage introduced Aunt Tildy Moberly with elaborate courtesy, while the major deftly looked the other way.

"And this," said Savage, with a sudden note of gentleness in his voice, "is the daughter of 'Crooked Run' Parlemon, the man the government charges with the ownership of Crooked Run still."

This time the major bowed with an excess of gallantry. He swung his chair about so that his range of vision was limited to the figure of Moonshine Parlamon, quite shutting out Aunt Tildy Moberly and her well-cared-for beard.

"And what, Miss Parlamon," said the major, "can I do for you?"

Moonshine rose and stretched her hand across the major's desk, and clutched his sleeve.

"I want you to send pap back to Crooked Run," she said, her voice vibrant with appeal.

Major Mo settled himself professionally in his chair, and divided his glance between Moonshine Parlamon and Savage.

"Tell me the whole story, if you please," he said.

As the girl told her story, and as Savage amplified, constantly changing emotions became evident upon the major's highly expressive countenance. From time to time he cast glances of suspicion toward Savage, and when he had finished he was ignoring Savage altogether—he was listening only to the girl.

Half an hour later, after the women had left, and as Savage was about to leave, Major Swackhammer caught him fiercely by the arm, and swung him about.

"Suh," he demanded fiercely, "what kind of double-dealing is this here? Suh, I had supposed you were a man of honah, but this, suh, is a game—a government game. You are the spider, suh, and these poor creatures are the flies."

"I don't think you understand," said Savage.

The major snorted. "The government, suh, through you, suh, retains me for the defense—and that defense, suh, is a means of playing into the government's hands."

Savage flushed hotly. "You don't understand, major," he said earnestly. "I—well, to make a long story short, I'm a heap more interested in that little Moonshine Parlamon than you are yourself."

The major stared at him, and then chuckled. "So the wind blows that way, suh!" he exclaimed.

"It does," admitted Savage.

"You're speaking as an honorable man?"

"I certainly am."

"And yet——" protested the major doubtfully.

Savage pushed him back in his seat. "Let me tell you all about it; or, rather, let me tell you what you don't already know. There were four important men caught in this raid. One man was Parlamon—he, as you have already heard, is the owner of Snake Hill, although he claims he is not; the chances are he is, but he may not be. Understand? The second was Harney Leveridge——"

"The murderer of your colleague," commented Major Mo.

"Yes. He's the chap that is charged with killing Jim Eccles."

"Right there is a crime against the State. And he broke jail, too, didn't he?"

"He did."

"How then does the county prosecutor give him up to the United States court?"

"The county prosecutor came over with him from Buchanan. The county prosecutor wants him charged first on this moonshining charge, and when he is convicted on that charge that conviction furnishes the motive—the best possible motive—for the murder of Eccles. Meantime, the prosecutor can afford to sit back and wait. He'll be here taking notes."

"When is the examination here, suh?"

"Day after to-morrow, and the government is ready."

"Who are the other men?"

"Myself, and a man of the name of Honaker—Welch Honaker. In my opinion he's the king pin of them all, and what I want to do is to prove that fact."

"What about the government?" persisted the major.

"Major Mo," said Savage, looking him in the eye, "the United States government is not a thing, it's a man—wherever it acts it resolves itself into a man—into just one man. In this case that man is myself. I am engineering this thing from start to finish, and the district attorney is doing as I say. I have got a theory about this case, and yet I give you my word I don't know how it's going to work out, but if my theory is correct, then, by George, it's a theory that will satisfy the government, and will protect the man or men you are going to represent. You've got to believe, major, that I'm telling you the truth. I think when I outline the scheme of defense that you will agree with me that I am right."

The major leaned back with a sigh. "Well, suh," he said helplessly, "you are the only man that can serve God and Mammon—that can be on two sides of a case at once."

"Major," said the other man, "this is the kind of case that cannot be won in any other way."

The major tugged professionally at his mustaches. "Why not waive examination? Your codefendants may be able to get bail."

"Not a bit of it. The iron is hot now, and I'm going to strike it while it's hot, before too many scheming people have had a chance to think things over."

Savage left with additional assurances, which the major accepted on his word of honor.

At the corner of an alleyway he paused, and looked carelessly up the street and down. Then he turned swiftly into the alleyway, pressed on to the next block, turned two other corners, and stepped into the dingy side entrance of a still dingier building.

He climbed the stairs to the fourth floor, and without rapping stepped jauntily into another suite of offices. A man at a desk in the outer office looked up at him without nodding. Savage passed on into the farthest office of the suite, sank down at a table, and touched a bell.

"Anybody there?" he queried of the messenger who answered it.

"Yes," replied the messenger. "Operative number sixty-three. Been waiting for an hour to see you."

"All right," said Savage. "Show him in."

The messenger retired, and presently the door opened, and operative number sixty-three entered sheepishly.

It was Keg Ferguson, of Ellenbogen. He stood facing Savage, fumbling with his cap.

Savage spent the next few minutes in examining papers on his desk, and then swung about.

"Well, Ferguson?" he said.

"Mister Savage," said Keg Ferguson, with the life all gone out of his voice, "they said you wanted to see me."

"I did. I sent for you."

"They said that you wanted me to be a witness at the examination of Jeff Parlamon and the rest."

"I did," said Savage. "I want to talk to you about it."

Keg stretched out his cap pleadingly toward his superior. "Mister Savage," he went on, "I want to go home. I want to go back to Ellenbogen."

"Why don't you go?" snapped Savage. "Nothing prevents you."

"Everything prevents me. I'm a disgraced man, a renegade, ever since the gov'ment sent Jim Eccles to me with a pocketful of money. I cain't go home."

Savage shook his head. "Ellenbogen don't know anything about you, Ferguson."

"They suspicion a mighty lot, and if I have to take the witness stand in this here trial, they'll know."

"Sit down, Ferguson. What are you whining about? You have taken the government's good money—you're in the government's pay. You walked into it with your eyes open. The work has been easy, and the pay good. Now, when the government wants results, you

want to go back on the government. What did you take the money for?"

Keg tugged at his trousers pocket. He drew forth a matted mass of bills and coin.

"I give it back to the gov'ment," he said, in desperation, "there it is, every cent of the money. I have been savin' it agin' the time when I could give it back. I don't want none of the gov'ment money. It's blood money. I hate the gov'ment, and all the gov'ment men."

Savage flushed. For the first time during this interview something like admiration struggled to his face. He glanced at Ferguson with pity in his eyes.

"You're all right, Ferguson," he said. "You're a better man than I gave you credit for. I'm not going to harm you."

He tossed a sealed bit of paper across the table, and planked down a coin on top of it.

"When you go out, Ferguson," he said, "tell Bill to serve that on you. You're going to be a government witness in this case, but your testimony is not going to do the government a bit of good. You're going back to Ellenbogen, and in a way and under circumstances that will surprise you. That is not really why I sent for you." He looked Ferguson squarely in the eye. "Ferguson," he went on, "down in Ellenbogen you are a mountaineer, and nothing else; up in Crooked Run I'm a school-teacher and nothing else. There are just two men in the world that know what you and I are—you are one of them and I am the other. You scratch my back, Ferguson, and I'll scratch yours."

Ferguson stared uncomprehendingly. "As to how?" he queried.

"You keep my secret with the folks at Crooked Run, and I'll keep yours with those at Ellenbogen. Is it a go?"

"It's a go," said Keg Ferguson.

"Right!" said Savage. "Come back here to-morrow afternoon, and be ready to take the stand at the examination Thursday morning. Don't fail me, and I won't fail you."

Savage left the building and the neighborhood by the same circuitous route by which he had entered it. It was past noon now. He pressed on through the noonday crowd like any other denizen of the sunny city until he reached the railroad station.

Across the way was a tumble-down hotel. He stepped into the office, and peered into a little room upon the left—a room furnished with plush furniture of the vintage of half a century before. There was a lone figure in this room—Moonshine Parlamon was waiting for him. Savage, with heightened color, strode to her, and took her by the hand.

"Aunt Tildy?" he said questioningly.

Moonshine laughed, and shook her head. "She won't come with us; she is upstairs shivering in her room."

"Shivering?"

"Yes. She is so plumb afraid of the street cars she cain't hardly think."

"Then we go alone."

"Yes."

"I'm glad of that, somehow," murmured Savage, half to the girl and half to himself.

"Why?" faltered Moonshine Parlamon.

"Never mind," he answered briskly. "Let's go up to Covington's, and have the best the town affords."

Side by side they left the weather-beaten old hotel, and stood for a moment on the curb. Savage beckoned to a cabman.

The girl drew back. "Mr. Savage," she pleaded, "do you mind giving me a *real* treat? Aunt Tildy Moberly may be afraid of street cars, but I'm not. Would you mind taking me for just one ride in one?"

She was still aglow with the wonder of that short journey in the trolley car when she and Savage seated themselves facing each other at a table in the remotest corner of Covington's.

In bewilderment she watched the waiter fill her glass with chunks of ice, and waited eagerly until she could lift it to her lips.

"Got anything to say?" queried Savage briskly. "Do you want anything in particular, or shall I order for you?"

Moonshine sipped her glass of water

with nervous eagerness. Do they have this every day?" she asked.

"What?"

"Glasses chock-full of ice."

"'Most every day," laughed Savage.

Moonshine held her glass toward him. "Can you fill it up again?"

Savage nodded and obeyed.

"I don't know," she went on, "as I want anything 'ceptin' this. How many times will they let you fill it, Mr. Savage?" She sighed in a sort of ecstasy. "There ain't anything like a glass chock-full of ice. I ain't ever heard of it before, not even at the new tavern at Red Oak."

Savage smiled indulgently. "If you travel in trolley cars and live on ice water, it won't cost you much to get along, even here in town."

However, nervous and excited as was Moonshine, Savage insisted upon her eating a good square meal. He intended to see to it personally that she kept her nerves and her lithe, graceful body well supplied with fuel. She had an ordeal before her, the result of which he himself could not now foresee.

When they had finished Moonshine sighed wistfully. "I don't believe New York has got such a lot of good things in it as we have had to-day," she said. "I wish pap could have some of it up to the jail—pap and Harney Leveridge."

"They're all right," responded Savage. "They've got lots of good tobacco, and I've seen to it that they've got fairly decent food. The time has not yet come to worry over them." He hesitated for a moment, and then leaned toward her across the narrow table. He speculated vaguely on what was going to happen on the eventful Thursday morning. He knew well the things that he was trying to accomplish. The question was whether they were susceptible of accomplishment.

His heart sank as he thought of it. He wondered whether as the years went on this girl would spend them in solitude—waiting for the freedom of her father. But it was not pity that assailed him now. It was something more. He touched her hand gently. She started back with a half-frightened glance in her eyes.

"Moonshine," he said hoarsely, his voice sounding strange and unnatural, "do you know what Major Swackhammer said of you—I have heard them say it of you hundreds of times."

"Anything bad?" asked Moonshine.

"'Pretty as a red wagon,' that's what he said," returned Savage.

Moonshine laughed a bit gayly. "Pretty as a red wagon—painted green!" she ventured lightly, cracking an old Kentucky joke.

"What he says," went on Savage boldly, "I say, too."

Moonshine wrinkled as much of her forehead as was visible. "Not with this bandage on my head," she faltered.

"You don't know how it becomes you," said Savage, his tones a bit more firm, his eyes a bit more steady. He stretched out his hand again, caught hers, and held it, tremulous and fluttering as it was, within his grasp. "Moonshine," he whispered, "I want you to look at me. I want you to listen to what I have to say."

He told her. He felt somehow that his hour had come—the hour that comes but once in the life of any man. He was fortunate. He was able somehow to put into words at least half the things he felt. He wanted her—that was the whole story. It lay within her power and the power of no one else to give him perfect happiness. With her at his side he could accomplish anything. That was all he wanted out of life—to go down the years with her.

Only two people know all the things that Savage said to her that day, and, when he had finished, Moonshine's lips were trembling—her eyes moist.

"I will do anything you say," said Savage. "We'll live in cities, we'll travel around the world, or we'll go back to Crooked Run. There is no other ambition now in life but this. I want you to marry me, Moonshine—that is the only thing that counts. I will give up all the rest for you."

"All the rest," she faltered, puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"All that I am doing."

"School-teachin'? You must never give up that; never, do you understand?"

"Just as you say." There was hope now in his voice. "I started out a school-teacher, and I'll end my days as one, in Crooked Run or anywhere you say."

He opened his wallet and took out a little tissue-paper packet, grimy with age. He opened its folds, and produced a ring of gold, a very antique ring.

"Moonshine," he said, "this was my mother's. Tell me I can put it on your hand."

Moonshine, still under his spell, and under the spell of her own emotions, gazed at him wistfully for one moment, then she firmly drew her hand away, and shook her head.

"I know you mean it," she whispered tremblingly, "I know you want me, and I thank you for it." She shook her head again. "But it cain't never come to pass—it cain't never come to pass."

Savage's face clouded. "I don't understand," he said doubtfully. "Tell me why. You are not drawing comparisons now, are you? You are not saying to yourself that I am a schoolteacher and you are only a schoolgirl. You are not telling yourself that I am of the world, and you are only of Crooked Run. There's no argument in that. You can hold your own, Moonshine, with any woman in the world, and any man that looks at you knows it. Don't make any such mistake."

Again Moonshine shook her head. "If you had spoken in a different way before," she said, "I might have made such a mistake, but you didn't leave it open for me to make mistakes like that. It is only that it cain't never come to pass."

Savage thought deeply for a moment. "You are surely not afraid," he said, "that you would shame me in case anything happens to your father."

"I hadn't thought of that," she answered, "but what you said wiped all that out, too."

"You have already told me," went on Savage, "what you thought of me, so I am assuming you have no objection to me."

"I only partly told you," said the girl, "but I didn't tell you all. Over and over again, ever since I first met you, I have been keeping one thing that I thought about you to myself. Shall I tell it to you now?"

"Do," returned Savage, his glance holding hers.

"I have always thought about you, and I think about you now," said Moonshine, "that if your name wasn't Savage it would be John Halifax—John Halifax, Gentleman. I will always think of you as that."

Savage, deeply touched, rose and bowed to her. "Then why in Heaven's name," he pleaded, "can't this ever come to pass?"

The girl's face went white and red by turns. She placed one hand against her throat. She seemed unable to speak. When she finally found her voice it was as strange and unnatural as Savage's had been.

"It is a matter between me and Harney Leveridge," she faltered, with a new and added wistfulness in her glance, and then she stopped.

Savage stared at her. "You mean," he demanded suddenly, "that you are in love with him?"

"I have been in love with Harney Leveridge all my life, I think, and Harney has been in love with me all of his. There cain't be nobody, not at any time, for me, but Harney Leveridge."

CHAPTER XVII.

The United States commissioner yawned wearily.

"It seems to me," he remarked to the assistant district attorney, "that you've got about enough. It strikes me you've made out a case."

The United States assistant district attorney in charge of the examination bowed in assent.

"I have but one more witness, Mr. Commissioner," he said, "and then I'm through." He swung about and looked behind him. "I will call Kegley Ferguson."

There was a sudden movement in the rear of the room, a shuffling of feet, the murmur of sullen voices. Some fifteen prisoners, handcuffed, side by side, growled in their throats. The name of Keg Ferguson had become anathema.

Keg shambled forward, holding his right arm halfway in the air, as though to ward off some possible attack. He was sworn, and took his seat. From the moment that he began his testimony he kept his eyes fixed pleadingly on Richard Savage. The assistant district attorney himself glanced for one fleeting moment at Savage. Savage being the only prisoner out on bail was seated at the counsel table next to his counsel, Major Mo Swackhammer.

"Ferguson," said the assistant district attorney, "you come here unwillingly, I am told."

"I reckon I do," responded Keg plaintively. He drew forth a subpœna from his pocket. "Wouldn't have been here but for this. Some day I hope the United States government will stop hounding a poor critter like me."

"Never mind about the government," snapped the attorney. "I want you to tell the commissioner what you know about Crooked Run still."

"Reckon I don't know nothin' about it."

"You remember the occasion of your calling at the house of Jefferson Parlamon with a man named Eccles?"

"A gov'ment hound! I reckon I do."

"Will you fix the date?"

Keg fixed it. "It happened on what you might call a Tuesday. This here Jim Eccles had been in Ellenbogen for a week. He went around Ellenbogen makin' out he was a distant relative of mine that I hadn't never seen. He was a gov'ment sleuth, he was——"

"You went to Parlamon's," persisted the district attorney.

"We did—on our way to Red Oak."

"Now, one minute. Don't answer this next question until Major Swackhammer places his objection upon record. Tell the commissioner what happened at Jefferson Parlamon's that Tuesday."

Major Swackhammer had started to his feet, but Savage laid a hand upon his arm, and the major slumped back once more.

"Major," said the attorney, "the stenographer is waiting for your stereotyped objection; so is the witness."

Major Swackhammer smiled inscrutably. "There's no objection, suh, either to the question or to the testimony of this witness. Suh, you may proceed."

"Very well," said the attorney; "go on, Ferguson."

And Keg Ferguson took up his tale:

"We was on our way to Red Oak, and Jim Eccles he was pow'ful dry. Along the trail we met Jeff Parlamon, and Jeff told us to stop in to see his darter Moonshine, and she would give us a sup of white licker. When we got to Parlamon's Eccles planked out two ten-cent pieces from his pocket, and slapped them down in front of Moonshine. You see, it was jest a trap for Jeff Parlamon's gal. You know as well as me what the gov'ment's game was. Jim Eccles told Moonshine he wanted to buy some white licker, and Moonshine Parlamon she said if he wanted to buy white licker she would sell him some. She fetched two glasses and a jug——"

The commissioner glanced from the witness to the girl with the white bandage on her forehead. A sudden wave of pity, of commiseration, seemed to sweep over him. He looked uncertainly at Major Swackhammer.

"Major," he said, "this surely comes within the line of your objection, but I won't rule unless you ask me to."

"No objection, suh," was the major's curt rejoinder.

"What happened then?" droned the assistant district attorney.

For the first time Keg Ferguson seemed at his ease. His lips twitched, his eyes twinkled.

"Moonshine Parlamon," he went on, "poured out two full glasses from the jug, one for me and one for this here Jim Eccles, and Eccles and me we started in to drink——"

He paused and glanced with wide-eyed solemnity at the commissioner.

"We didn't git far," he sheepishly exclaimed.

"Well," impatiently said the attorney, "was it liquor? Don't take all day about it. Was it white liquor, or wasn't it, Ferguson?"

Keg drew his hand across his mouth. "It was the whitest kind of white licker that you ever see, judge, your honor. What d'you think that jug contained? What d'you think Jeff Parlamon's gal poured out into them glasses at the price of ten cents each? Water," he spluttered, his merriment bubbling over; "water, just the plainest kind of water from the well."

There was silence for a moment, and then the courtroom burst forth into chuckles.

Keg glanced once more at the manacled men. There was a difference in their attitude now. They were nodding toward him with good-fellowship in their eyes.

The assistant district attorney looked reproachfully, not at Keg Ferguson, but at Richard Savage.

"What in thunder do you mean by this?" was the unspoken message that came to Savage, seated at the counsel table.

The commissioner rapped for order, but behind his hand his lips were twitching, too. He gazed wonderingly at Moonshine Parlamon. Keg Ferguson wiped his mouth and waited.

"Shall I tell the rest?" he asked.

The attorney dropped into his seat disgustedly.

"Cross-examine if you like," he said curtly.

But Major Mo Swackhammer only shook his head. "No questions, suh," he answered.

A moment later Keg Ferguson had left the witness stand, and was once more an atom of the aggregation of spectators in the courtroom, only this time he boldly assumed a place directly in the rear of the prisoners.

"I did the gov'ment all the harm I could," he whispered to Mul Byington.

Mul Byington, taking advantage of an interval when the marshal nearest him looked the other way, whispered back to Keg:

"You sure give the gov'ment a stingin' slap in the face, Keg."

The assistant district attorney drew himself up. "The government rests," he announced.

Major Moses Swackhammer arose to his full height. "Suh," he said to the commissioner, "I desire to offer testimony on behalf of the defendants whom I represent. I appear here for Jefferson Parlamon, Harney Leveridge, and Mr. Richard Savage."

The commissioner, who doubted the wisdom of Major Swackhammer's course, shook his head.

"Now, major," he said, "it is not for me to dictate, but you understand that this is only an examination, and not a trial. There has been sufficient evidence now to hold several of these men —not all of them, perhaps—for the United States grand jury. Unless your testimony is of a very remarkable and very unusual character, I shall have to hold them. The government has made out its case. My suggestion to you is that you withhold your evidence until the trial. It seems to me that in this case discretion is the better part of valor."

"Suh," responded Major Mo, "I understand the practice perfectly, but it is my intention to offer evidence that will change your honah's views. It is impossible, and you must concede it, suh, to hold all these men upon this charge. After your honah has heard the testimony of the defendant Savage —practically a stranger in Crooked Run —a man of education and of honah, you will nevah hold him, suh. It is useless to deny that this giant still exists. Crooked Run still is an accomplished fact, and I admit it, suh; but, suh, there is only one question in this case—who owned and operated Crooked Run still last Wednesday night, when this raid was made? That is the government's charge, suh, and there's no other question in this case. Mr. Savage, suh, you will take the stand."

Savage took the stand, and identified himself as the new school-teacher of Crooked Run. He told his story. He explained briefly about the finding of

the Harney Leveridge note; described his difficulty in finding the trail; his following it when once he found it, and his advent at Crooked Run just in time to rescue Moonshine Parlamon.

"It's a lie!" croaked Welch Honaker, from his place in the foremost ranks of the prisoners. "It's a lie. He's tellin' *my* story, judge, your honor. It was Welch Honaker found *him* jest in the nick of time."

The commissioner rapped with his gavel, and Honaker was silenced. Savage went on:

"I found Welch Honaker there, and I found the still in operation. There was no one else at that time save Moonshine Parlamon and a young girl of the name of Jarrett. They are both in court."

As it was no part of the government's case to hold Savage for the grand jury, the assistant district attorney cross-examined him at length for the purpose of strengthening his story rather than to weaken it.

Savage sat down, and Jeff Parlamon took the stand.

"There's only one thing, your honor," said Major Mo, "that I want to prove by this witness. Let me remind you, suh, again, that the issue, so far as Jefferson Parlamon is concerned, is this—did he own or operate the still on the *night of this raid* last week? Suh, I am going to show that he did not."

The commissioner shook his head. "The real-estate records from Buchanan offered here," he said, "show him still to be the owner, major. How are you going to prove he is not?"

"I *expect* to prove it, suh," rejoined the major.

Jeff was sworn.

"Confine yourself, Jeff Parlamon," warned his counsel, "to the questions that I ask you. Did you ever execute a deed to anybody of the tract of land in Crooked Run known by the name of Snake Hill?"

"I did," responded Jeff.

"And to whom, suh, did you make it?"

"Wait a minute," interposed the commissioner. "Major, where is the deed?"

"Suh," responded the major, "we have given the government every chance to produce this deed, and we have served a subpœna upon the grantee. It has not been produced. We claim the right to testify orally as to its contents, suh."

The commissioner nodded. "Go on," he said to Jeff, "and tell us all about it."

Jeff told of the making of the deed to Welch Honaker, and of the exchange of property.

Major Swackhammer sat down. "You may cross-examine, suh," he said.

The assistant district attorney smiled. "Now, Jefferson Parlamon," he said, "you admit that you were once the owner of Snake Hill. Tell us whether you ever operated this giant still *before* you sold out, as you claim, to Honaker?"

Jeff gazed dumbly at the major, but the major had leaped to his feet before the attorney had reached even the middle of his sentence.

"Objection!" thundered the major. "Not proper cross-examination, suh—and a more serious objection: the government, suh, cannot go back of the operation of this still last Wednesday night. I hold your honah to that ruling. I insist upon it."

The commissioner bowed. "Besides that, Mr. District Attorney," he said, "you can hardly make this man incriminate himself."

The attorney did not argue the point. He realized the futility of his position and sat down.

"I call Miss Moonshine Parlamon," said Major Swackhammer.

Moonshine, tremulous, excited, took the stand. It was for her advent that Savage had waited. Savage had told Major Swackhammer that in doing his duty toward certain defendants he was doing his duty toward the government. He had a theory, and he felt that somewhere was the proof to sustain that theory. So far the proof had failed. From this point on, however, the situation would be most critical. Nothing had happened that he had not foreseen. Nothing had happened that had not been arranged for between himself and the

assistant district attorney. Savage knew at every point in the examination every step that the attorney would take.

There was one thing he did not know and could not foresee—the climax of the drama that he had so carefully rehearsed.

When Moonshine took the stand Savage left Major Swackhammer's side, and strode to the front row of the benches devoted to spectators. He sat down beside a woman who crouched in the corner of the bench. The woman was Tacy Ann Jarrett. Where she had been since the raid on Crooked Run still only one man knew—that man was Savage.

Moonshine told her story about the transfer of the title; and to the commissioner, hardened as he was, it seemed to have the ring of truth. There was no cross-examination.

Major Swackhammer sat down. "That is all the testimony, suh, I have to offer," he exclaimed.

The commissioner directed his glance toward the batch of prisoners.

"Is there any defendant here," he said, "who desires to be sworn in his own behalf?"

A burly individual broke away from the ranks of prisoners. Two marshals led him up before the court. This individual was Welch Honaker.

"Your honor," he said, "there's a pack of lies been told about me, and I want to contradict them; and, what's more, I got a witness to back me up."

"Who is your witness?" demanded the commissioner.

"Squire Penrod is my witness," answered Welch. "There's a pack of lies been told about him, too. Squire Penrod, I ask you to take the witness stand."

What power Welch may have had over the squire none but the two men knew. The squire was sworn, and without an instant's hesitation glibly denied the story of the transfer told by Moonshine Parlamon and Jeff. Welch followed him, and blurted out his own denial of all that had been said about the deed—all that had been said against him on the witness stand.

When he, too, had stepped back into his place the district attorney rose.

"Mr. Commissioner," he said, "I ask your honor for a summary commitment. We have produced here the records from Buchanan, showing Parlamon to be the owner of Snake Hill. Parlamon and his daughter testified to the transfer of this property on a certain day. They are flatly contradicted by two witnesses. Parlamon is a defendant here, and I shall make no motion at this time with reference to him, but his daughter is flagrantly guilty of outrageous perjury. I ask your honor summarily to commit her to jail!"

The commissioner seemed startled for a moment. He glanced pityingly at Moonshine, and then looked at Major Swackhammer. That gentleman was gazing at the top of the counsel table. He made no move.

"She is your witness, major," said the commissioner. "What have you got to say?"

Still the major kept his seat. "Nothing, suh," he answered, "not a word to say."

The commissioner, surprised, pondered for a moment. "You insist upon your motion?" he asked the district attorney.

"I do, sir," responded the latter. "Perjury in this court has become a scandal and disgrace. I want this girl committed."

The commissioner shrugged his shoulders. "There are the records, major," he said, "and the testimony of two witnesses in direct contradiction to her testimony. It is not a case where a mistake could have been made. Either she told the truth or she lied. Two witnesses and the records say she lied." He beckoned to a marshal. "Bring her to me," he said.

Savage, from his point of vantage in the ranks of the spectators, drank in the proceedings with consuming eagerness. He explained in whispers to Tacy Ann what it all meant. Tacy Ann turned upon him frightened eyes.

"What are they gwine to do to Moon-

shine?" she whispered back. Fear and terror were written on her face.

"They're going to send her to prison," said Savage indifferently.

"What for—tell me what for?" exclaimed Tacy Ann.

"For lying about that deed."

"What deed?"

"The deed from Jeff to Welch."

By this time Moonshine, a look of complete bewilderment upon her face, despair shining from her eyes, was being led away from the commissioner.

"Are they gwine to take her to prison now?" asked Tacy Ann.

"Yes," replied Savage.

"Have you got a knife?" she cried. "Have you got a knife? I want a knife, and want it right away."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Never mind what I want it for. Give me your knife."

Savage, wondering, complied. Tacy Ann suddenly tore her waist open at the throat, and opening the penknife she slashed quickly at her bodice.

Savage watched her. Nobody but himself had even noticed her. The eyes of every man and woman in the courtroom were turned upon Moonshine, as she was being led away. The path to prison lay past the spectators. As Moonshine was swept in front, Tacy Ann rose and clutched the marshal.

"Don't you take Moonshine to prison," she shrieked. "I tell you you cain't take her to prison. Moonshine, I hain't gwine to let you go to jail; you don't have to go to jail. Come back." She tugged for an instant at something concealed in the bosom of her dress, and then, wrenching it free, she held it aloft in the air. *"I got the deed—I got the deed!"* she shouted. "Your honor, Moonshine Parlamon has told the truth. I got the deed."

Hardly had the words left her lips before she was swept off her feet, and the deed snatched from her hand. Welch Honaker, eluding the marshal, had charged across the room, and clutched the deed. In another instant he had torn it twice, thrice, across its folds.

A moment later he was held, panting, in a chair, half stunned by a blow that an officer had dealt him, the mutilated paper now torn from his grasp.

"Bring those pieces up to me," said the commissioner. They were brought, and the deed was pieced together. "Now, put that woman on the stand."

Tacy Ann was brought forward to the witness chair. She took the oath.

"Tell us where did you get this deed?" went on the commissioner. Then —— "Wait!" he cried, and rising in his seat pointed to the benches. A wiry little man was slinking along the wall toward the exit. It was Squire Penrod.

"Don't let that man get away!" shouted the commissioner. "Do you understand? Don't let him get away—we're not through with him yet."

A marshal seized the squire, conducted him inside the rail, and pinned him in a corner.

"Now," said the commissioner, seating himself again, "tell us where you got that deed."

Tacy Ann stared as if fascinated at Welch Honaker. "Don't you let him get at me," she said, cowering. "Don't you ever let him get at me. He is plannin' to murder me, and if you let him get away he'll do it. He'll murder me jest as he murdered Eccles."

The county prosecutor from Buchanan, who had come down to pick up stray crumbs of evidence against Harney Leveridge, started to his feet.

"Who murdered Eccles?" he exclaimed. He bowed deprecatingly to the commissioner. "I am out of order, your honor," he said, "but I am naturally interested here."

Before the commissioner could inform him that he *was* quite out of order, Tacy Ann, gripping both arms of the witness chair, and still staring at Honaker, had answered:

"Welch Honaker killed Eccles—killed him with Harney Leveridge's gun, and he beat me like a dawg to make me tell that Harney Leveridge done it." She stretched forth her right arm, and pointed an accusing finger toward Welch Honaker. "I tell you I seed him do it; I seed him shoot this here Eccles down

in cold blood. Thank God I got a chance to tell about it at last."

She rose to her feet, and stared at the faces all about her. The court raised a gavel in the air, but held it there, without bringing it down upon the desk. The girl went on:

"I want you all to know what this man Welch Honaker has done to me, and to everybody else. I want you all to know that he has got worse things than murder in his heart. I want you to know what the schoolmaster, Savage, told you here was God's own truth. Welch Honaker did write the name of Harney Leveridge to that there note. He's done it lots of times, and he has done it for a purpose—he has done it to get Moonshine Parlamon, jest as he got me. You sh'd have been there, all of you, to see it all that day. You sh'd have seed me tryin' to kill Moonshine to save her from Welch Honaker."

She held her hands out toward Moonshine pleadingly.

"Moonshine," she said, "there's worse things than runnin' Crooked Run still that Welch Honaker has done; there's worse things than killin' Eccles that he's done. Oh, he killed Jim Eccles, all right, and he has run Crooked Run still, and he has carted the white licker to Ellenbogen and Red Oak, and sold it all around the country. I can testify to that, Welch Honaker, and to no one else; not Jeff Parlamon, not Harney Leveridge, not none of them as was caught there that night. They come there at Welch's call to save him from the schoolmaster. But I know all about it ever since Welch carried me there and kept me there. Everything that has been done I seed him do. Everything he asked of me I had to do. There hain't been nobody in that still but me and him—jest me and him and the horsewhip that he beat me with."

She lowered her voice. "But there's worse things than that, Moonshine Parlamon. He stole Harney Leveridge's ring, and made you believe that Harney had give it to me. Everything that Welch Honaker has done he has tried to put on Harney Leveridge." Her voice rose to a shriek. "I tell you I'm glad my day has come—I'm glad there was a chance to speak when Welch Honaker couldn't get at me. I'm glad I stole the deed from Welch Honaker, for the deed makes you believe me. You know now that Welch Honaker's a liar and a thief and a murderer, and you knows that all the others told the truth. I tell you if you got a horsewhip in the jail you want to use it on him. I tell you if you've got tortures in the jail that you don't spare Welch Honaker—I tell you that if you got a gallows in the jail, the gallows and no other place is the place for Welch Honaker. I know him, and you never knowed him—but you know him *now* for the thing he is."

She sank back into her seat, and covered her face with her hands. Savage's eyes glittered with excitement. His program had been carried through—just as he arranged it.

"Are there any questions?" asked the commissioner of Major Moses Swackhammer and the assistant district attorney.

There were none.

"The witness can step down," said the commissioner gently.

Tacy Ann Jarrett crept from the witness chair, her hands still before her face, and made her way back to her seat. Before she reached it, however, a withered old crone with a broom point held between her lips, and smelling fearfully of Crooked Run tobacco, darted down the aisle and caught Tacy Ann Jarrett in her arms.

"I'm proud of yer, honey," she whimpered, "proud of yer. I hain't blamin' yer a mite. No matter what you've done, Tacy Ann, you've wiped it out today. Your Aunt Tildy Moberly is proud of yer," she kept whispering, "and has come to take yer back home."

The commissioner now rapped loudly with his gavel. "Major Swackhammer," he said, "a suggestion from the court. It is a question in my mind whether, in view of this surprising but probably truthful testimony, you had not better put upon the witness stand the man Leveridge, and such of the other witnesses as care to take it. I will say now, Mr. District Attorney,

that the judgment of the court is severely shaken. If it is true that one man, and one man only, owned and operated this still last Wednesday night, then it is a crying shame to hold fifteen other men for trial. If you desire to offer testimony, Major Swackhammer, the court will hear it. You may proceed."

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was two hours later that Savage was closeted with the United States assistant district attorney and with the county prosecutor from Buchanan in a remote room of the courthouse.

"Savage," said the attorney, "do you think we have done enough? What about indicting Parlamon for his former ownership of the still?"

"You can't do it," returned Savage, "on this complaint."

"We can swear to another one."

"You can, but your difficulty is that you can't prove it. I don't care what you say, but I will defy any man to get any evidence anywhere at Crooked Run or Red Oak or Ellenbogen that Jeff Parlamon ran that still. If there hadn't been a woman in this case you wouldn't have had this evidence against Honaker —— Now, wait a bit; let me have my say. I went up to Crooked Run to break up this still. That's all I went there for —that is all I have been trying to do. I couldn't get within forty rods of it—for all I knew within forty miles of it—until that night. Now that still is broken up; you've got the man who more than any other man was responsible for its continuance. I don't know whether Parlamon ever ran it, or whether he didn't, but if he did he gave the thing up voluntarily, and mark my words it was something more than mere fear of the law. He won't get his head into a noose again. From now on Crooked Run is going to be all right. I'll stake my reputation on it."

The district attorney shrugged his shoulders. "You might get advice from headquarters on the thing," he said. "I don't suppose this man Parlamon will run away. The commissioner isn't going to hold him on this charge, at any rate."

"He won't run away," responded Savage. "And, what's more, headquarters will take my view. However, I'll do anything you say." He turned to the county prosecutor from Buchanan. "What about Leveridge?" he asked.

"Leveridge," said the prosecutor, "has got to go back to jail."

"There's no evidence against him," retorted Savage. "You arrested him on mere suspicion." He pondered for a moment. "Look here," he said suddenly, gazing frankly at the prosecutor. "I am just as much interested in this man Leveridge as I am in Crooked Run. It is so much easier to knock a man down than it is to help him to his feet. Crooked Run, Mr. Prosecutor, has been struggling to its feet for a quarter of a century. Harney Leveridge is on his feet; there are things about him that you don't know and that I do. I want you to do things for Crooked Run and for Harney Leveridge, and, mark my words, it will keep your taxes down."

The prosecutor, with reluctant willingness, stretched forth his hand.

"There's a murder charge and a charge of breaking jail against this man," he said. "The thing is out of my power. I tell you what you had better do, however, if you like. Go over to Buchanan and have a long talk with the judge."

"Good for you!" said Savage, returning his grasp. "I'll see the judge. Shall I see him when he's drunk or when he's sober?"

"Both!" laconically replied the prosecutor.

"What about bail for Leveridge, meantime?" persisted Savage. "Jeff Parlamon can furnish it."

"Well," said the prosecutor slowly, "seeing it's you, I think that I will fix bail." The prosecutor nodded to the assistant district attorney. "You chaps over here must see to it that you keep your hooks on Honaker," he said. "As soon as you get through with him over here we need him in our business at Buchanan."

"Where is Leveridge?" asked Savage.

The prosecutor shook his head. "Two of my constables have got him," he returned. "Now that it's all over here they're going to fetch him back."

"I want the three of them to come with me before they take him back," said Savage. "I'll see that nothing happens."

Moonshine, in the little plush-furnished parlor of the ramshackle railroad hotel, clung with peculiar insistence to her father's shoulders.

"Pap," she sobbed, "I'm so glad, so mighty glad you're free."

"It was Tacy Ann that did it," he said gratefully. "Where would we all have been if it hadn't been for Tacy Ann? Moonshine, you and me and Harney Leveridge have got a debt to pay to Tacy Ann, even if it takes us a whole long life to pay it. Pore, mis'ble critter, we've got to make her happy, Moonshine."

"We'll do it, pap," answered Moonshine, "we'll do it; you and me and Harney Leveridge." She was silent for a moment, quivering, tremulous. "Pap," she suddenly exclaimed, "there's somebody else I want to talk to you about, beside Tacy Ann. It's about Harney Leveridge. You don't know the trouble that Harney Leveridge and me has been through, pap—you don't know the trouble Welch has made for us. You never knew until to-day about the ring, and you never knew another thing, pap, that I'm goin' to tell you now; that once when they were houndin' Harney Leveridge I hid him in my room to home."

Jeff uttered a sharp exclamation, and drew her hands roughly from his shoulders. She looked up earnestly, frankly into his eyes.

"You needn't be afraid, pap," she went on bravely. "There was nothing ever betwixt Harney Leveridge and me but true and honest love, pap. I don't suppose anybody ever loved each other like Harney Leveridge and me, and that is why I am talkin' to you about him now. If there was ever anybody needed anybody else it is Harney that needs me now, pap. He's been sick, and he has got the fever in his bones, and he's got a wound in his shoulder. He needs somebody to take care of him, and I have got to take care of him somehow. I cain't take proper care of him, pap, unless me and him is married."

"But, honey," protested Jeff, "Harney Leveridge is goin' back to the Buchanan jail. He may have to go to prison. He broke jail, even if he didn't murder Eccles."

"I don't care," answered Moonshine fiercely. "I don't care if he goes to jail —I don't care if he goes to prison. I want him to know that he's got me, and that I have got him before he goes; to know, no matter what happens, I am waitin' for him when he comes out. I wouldn't care if they killed him, and he wouldn't care either, maybe, jest so long as he knows that we belong to each other. Pap, no matter what happens, I tell you this, Harney Leveridge and me has waited long enough. We've been through troubles, Harney Leveridge and me, and I want to marry Harney Leveridge to-day."

There was a knock upon the door, which Jeff had closed. He released himself gently from Moonshine's clinging grasp, strode to the door, and opened it.

Richard Savage stood before him. He beckoned to one of two men that stood at his back.

"This room," said Savage, "is a parlor with one window. The window and door are the sole means of egress. One of you stand outside at the window, the other man can guard this door without. Leveridge, walk in."

Harney Leveridge asked mute permission of his captors. The Buchanan constables nodded. Harney darted into the little parlor, and shut the door behind him. Savage laid his hand upon Jeff's arm.

"Mr. Parlamon," he said, "come into the hotel office. I want to talk to you."

It was just at dusk in another parlor at the other end of town that a little group of people stood before a grave-faced clergyman.

"Who gives this woman to this man?" queried the clergyman.

Jeff stepped forward. "It's all right, parson," he exclaimed, "and mighty kind of you."

The parson turned to Harney Leveridge. "And now," he said, "the ring."

Harney stared at him aghast. "Gosh!" he exclaimed sheepishly, "I hain't got any ring. I had a ring once, but it was stole, and I clean forgot to get one. What can we do, parson? We cain't get along without a ring."

Richard Savage took from his breast pocket a leather wallet. Out of the leather wallet he took a little time-worn tissue-paper packet; from the packet he unwrapped an old-fashioned ring.

"If you don't mind, Leveridge, I would like to have you use this ring," he said.

Harney stared at him gratefully. "I'm sure obliged to you, schoolmaster—only," he added, "don't be too hasty; you cain't never get it back."

Savage brushed the suggestion aside. "Ask Moonshine if she minds," he requested.

Moonshine looked at the ring, and raised her eyes to Savage's face. There was a look of understanding between them—a look that even Harney could not understand.

"I don't mind, school-teacher," she murmured, "and I'll always thank you for it, and think of you when I look upon it."

A few moments later Harney squared his shoulders. "I'm ready now," he said to the two constables, "to go back to Buchanan jail."

Jeff caught Savage by the arm. "I suppose," he faltered huskily, "that you and me can go back to Crooked Run."

Savage shook his head. "I may never go back to Crooked Run," he said.

Harney Leveridge uttered an exclamation of surprise. Moonshine looked at Savage in astonishment.

"Why, you're the school-teacher there," she said.

For answer Savage drew forth a telegram, and passed it around. Moonshine read it in bewilderment. It began:

> Very urgent. Meet me Louisville University. Most excellent prospects. School superintendence open for you western part of State. BROWNE-STELLE.

Savage smiled as he watched the girl read. He had read that dispatch over several times to himself. He had compared it carefully with his code. They little knew that that message, when translated, read like this:

> Operative 10. Report at once Detroit. Fur-smuggling case. Sealed instructions at headquarters on arrival. WILKIE,
> Chief Secret-service Bureau, Washington.

"What is goin' to become of the school?" wailed Moonshine. "What is goin' to become of Crooked Run?"

Savage reassured them with a smile. "You'll have a good man for your school. I'll see to that; and as for Crooked Run," he went on, "why, you and Harney Leveridge will look out for Crooked Run. I want you to remember one thing, Moonshine Leveridge," he said, "that a woman like yourself can do more for Crooked Run than fifty men can do."

The clergyman interposed. "I claim my right to kiss the bride," he said, half humorously, half pathetically.

One of the constables grinned sheepishly. "It don't stop at the parson," he exclaimed. "It's a right that belongs to everybody here."

Harney, digging his finger nails into the palms of his hands, looked on in dudgeon while the others kissed the bride.

At last it became Savage's turn. He bent over her for one instant, and looked into her eyes. Then, without kissing her, he turned away abruptly.

Moonshine understood. She held out her soft warm hand and seized his.

"Good-by, John Halifax," she said.

THE END.

The Yellow Spot

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "From the Ranks," "The Woman Speed Demon," Etc.

An out-of-the-ordinary story of an out-of-the-ordinary present given by an out-of-the-ordinary aunt to a very ordinary and very matter-of-fact and very unromantic nephew. The present, however, transforms the nephew into a highly imaginative and ultra-romantic young man. An entertaining story to read in a hammock in the shade of the old apple tree.

CHAPTER I.

A ROUGH-MANNERED expressman had slammed and jolted a coffin-shaped box into Tug Lawson's bachelor apartment early in the morning. The big, clear-eyed young fellow had sat before the thing, staring, for an hour before prying off the cover with a hatchet. He had known well enough what the case contained. He had realized, with a sinking of his heart, that the cheap pine boards covered his Aunt Betty's idea of a New York bachelor's needs. The thing inside was the substitute for a fourth part of two hundred thousand dollars. A paragraph in Aunt Betty's will had read:

Insomuch as my nephew, Tugston Lawson, is firmly established in the very remunerative profession of literature, and has, to my knowledge, cleared as much as two hundred dollars a week therefrom, I consider his future provided for. He shall not participate in the distribution of my financial effects, but it is my wish that certain of my household treasures be given to him, to wit—

Tug hau'ed the most valuable of the "to wits" out of the case, and sighed. Lines of disappointment were apparent in his fine, broad forehead; the emotion was clearly evident in his alert blue eyes. A touch of dejection sagged the wide shoulders that had mightily bumped the opposing lines in the old football days. That morning, Tug presented six strong and healthy feet of cheerlessness. He cut loosely with his pocketknife at some cord that bound the cloth wrappings of his inheritance, meanwhile muttering:

"And, in this town, they keep telling you to boost your own game."

He had done that during his last visit to his Aunt Betty. Proudly he had pointed to the few successes that had been his. He had told her of the checks the editors had sent him, and had waxed eloquent in his accounts of other writers who had won fame and affluence by means of a head full of ideas and a trusty typewriter. Now it was quite clear to him that he had overdone the thing. Better had he bewailed his lot; better had he set up a wail of a hand-to-mouth existence. Then the dear old lady might have been moved to dump the household "treasures" into more appreciative quarters. A fourth part of two hundred thousand dollars holds in it more appeal to a rising young author in expensive New York than any number of heirlooms, no matter how old or encrusted with tradition they be.

Yes, Tug Lawson was sincerely disappointed at his lot. He had been disappointed, weeks before, when he learned the contents of the will. And now the arrival of the coffin-shaped box was a hammering home of misfor-

tune, as it were. It clinched the statement in Aunt Betty's will that Tugston Lawson's claim on a neat, little estate must be satisfied with old-fashioned junk. Tug lifted the thing out of its box, stood it upright, and tore away the remaining wrappings. He brushed the hair back from his forehead with a quick, light movement of his right hand that was characteristic, and then stood regarding his newly acquired property with his arms folded across his chest.

"They say," he mused, "that an old thing like that is worth several hundred dollars."

He was gazing at an oblong, mahogany case, perhaps eight feet in height. It was the shell of a grandfather's clock, slightly dented here and there, where strenuous incidents of bygone years had left their marks. Halfway up, in front, was a wooden door; a door of glass was fitted in the bonnetlike top to protect the face, which was not then in place. Tug searched about among the paper wrappings in the packing case.

"I suppose the old man's giblets are here somewhere," he said. And they were. The young fellow found a square box nailed inside the packing case, and pried the cover off. The face of the clock met his gaze. He lifted it out and turned it over. At the back was the clock movement, a queer assemblage of wooden wheels and cords. A folded bit of paper was tacked to a portion of the woodwork. Tug opened it, and read:

> This clock is in good running order. It has been keeping time in my shop for a week. To set up, slide the face and works into position, attach pendulum, and put on the bonnet. To wind, pull the strings that draw up weights. The small weight operates the striking mechanism, the large one the clock. Give clock plenty of oil and it will run as well as it ever did.
>
> J. Dobson, Jeweler.
>
> Boston, Mass., May 28, 1910.

Tug untwisted the tangled cords, and, following the directions on the paper, soon had the face and works in their proper place. Then he searched in the pine box again until he found two cylindrical weights. These he hooked to the ends of the cords. He discovered a place where the pendulum seemed to belong and attached it there. Within fifteen minutes, the tick-tick that had begun more than a century ago was stridently clicking its message of time's flight in the little, living room of the metropolitan apartment, and the young writer was standing back, proudly regarding the skipping second hand as it traced a visible account of his unaccustomed work successfully completed.

It was a quaint old timepiece, that clock, and singularly out of place in young Lawson's modern apartment. After he had got it to running, he carried it to a corner, and managed to set it plumb by inserting bits of pasteboard under its lower corners. Close to it, on the right, was Tug's piano, with a phonograph proclaiming modernity from the top of it. To the left, between two windows, was the writer's workbench—his desk and typewriter. Tug, who had a well-developed sense of the incongruous, took in the spectacle, and laughed. The visitor from the nineteenth century—perhaps the eighteenth—had little in common with these fellows of a later day. A long gap of time lay between the first tick of that clock and the click of the writing machine. Tug laughed again, went close to his ancient timepiece, and began a closer inspection.

"Cheer up, old man," he said, grinning. "You'll get used to it here. Everybody does. Everything goes as long as you don't kick out the windows. Make yourself at home." He passed his hand downward over the velvety mahogany, opened the door in the long, slim body, peered inside, closed the door, and then examined the stout, square base. All at once his hand paused in its investigation. He stooped, and closely scrutinized the woodwork. Then he stood up, jammed his hands into his trousers pockets, and exclaimed:

"Cracked!"

He stooped again, presently getting frankly to his hands and knees.

"It's cracked, all right," he declared. "And when they're damaged, they aren't worth as much as they ought to be."

He was right. The base of the old clock was cracked. Three irregular

lines down the front told that damage had been done there at one time or another. One was almost exactly in the middle, the others being near either edge. The fissures were so thin that they were apparent only under close inspection. But they were there. And, as Tug had said, their presence detracted from the commercial value of the timepiece as an antique. The young man's hand again swept the brown hair back from his forehead with that quick, deft movement. He always did that when something bothered him, or when he was not entirely at his ease. And now he was face to face with a more or less disquieting truth. His inheritance had been calculated at a fourth of two hundred thousand dollars. It had shrunk to one grandfather's clock and a pair of andirons, which would arrive in due time. And now the clock had cracks in it! If this thing were to keep up, there would be no inheritance at all!

Tug stared at the cracks and at the boxlike base wherein they appeared. This base was about eighteen inches across. Above it, the body of the clock, containing the pendulum, arose some three feet to the bonnet. This body was about fourteen inches across the front. Tug opened the wooden door again and looked down inside of it. The space extended downward, almost sheer. There was but a slight offset on either side to account for the four inches of difference between the body and the base. Tug concluded that the wood in the base must be very thick. He closed the door again.

The cracks bothered him. He ran a finger down the one on the left, pressing the wood in here and there. His lips moved as muttered words issued forth. It was not that he was small enough to cavil at the shrinkage in value represented by those cracks. Indeed, not! But he had construed the whole circumstance of Aunt Betty's will and the rifts in the mahogany to indicate a streak of bad luck. And he did not like it at all. Therefore, as the feel of the crack came against his finger, he muttered darkly.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation, and slid hastily away from the old clock. For something had happened. In an instant, a long, narrow slit, extending from the top of the base to its bottom, appeared to the left of where the crack had been. Tug stared. And then the meaning of it suddenly dawned. He had unwittingly pressed a spring that had opened a secret hiding place in the century-old clock.

CHAPTER II.

Tug Lawson had read of secret drawers in furniture, but he had never seen one. Such things had always seemed to him an artful dodge, used by writers only, for story purposes. He had never stopped to think that the concealed recess had fulfilled a demand of an early day—a day when banks were few and far between, and the safety-deposit box was unknown. Sliding panels, spring-operated drawers, and the like were much in vogue then. Their counterpart exists in modern apartment houses today, when one can push aside a picture on a wall and come upon a combination knob that locks a jewel case set in the plaster.

The young fellow stared hard at his find for a minute or so before he fully realized what had happened. He saw before him a long, narrow drawer partly shoved out. It had seemed suddenly to jump toward him. Doubtless the rear of it had been pressing against a spring that had shot it forth upon its release. Tug studied this release arrangement, and found that the pressing inward of the thin mahogany to the right of the supposed crack pushed down a wooden dog by means of a steel pin. The dog locked on a similar pin in the side of the drawer when it was closed. The mechanism was very simple, but wonderfully effective. There was nothing about it to get out of order, and, as the wear was trivial, it would undoubtedly be in working order up to the last tick of that clock.

Having assured himself that he was familiar enough with the workings of the drawer to open it again should he accidentally close it, Tug caught the

front end gingerly between a thumb and finger and pulled it clear out. It was a very narrow drawer, the recess in it being scarcely a half inch across. Its length and depth, though, were ample. And so, when the writer turned it upside down, he was not at all surprised to see a long envelope drop to the floor. A torn scrap of paper followed it, fluttering, scarcely noticed, to the rug. Tug caught at the envelope, and tore it open.

There were two sheets of legal-cap paper inside, both of them covered with Aunt Betty's neat, precise chirography. The fact that she had used the stationery of the law led Tug to believe that the writing had been done about the time the lawyers had invaded her home to draw up the will. And, as he read, he realized that this must be so. The two sheets were a letter to him—the most extraordinary letter he had ever received. It began with an endearing salutation, went on to mention the will and its provisions, and then continued into a remarkable explanation of the bequest of the old clock and the andirons.

Now, my dear Tug, you're an out-of-the-ordinary young man. You are, indeed. I might have rewarded you for the entertainment your stories have afforded me, and the pride you stirred up in me by being my nephew, by permitting you to share what I leave, with your brothers and your sister. But I know about something that will turn out to be a better thing for you than any amount of money I am able to give you. It all rests with you, though. If you are content to believe that your old Aunt Betty doesn't care any more for you than to leave you an old clock and two battered andirons, then all the fuss and bother I went to, minding you when you were a young scalawag in kilts, has gone for nothing. The secret that the clock holds will fall into the hands of some one else, and I shall not care. But, Tuggy, you know that your old aunty loves you and that she wouldn't cut you off with old bric-a-brac. I know you will reason that way and that you will go over every inch of the clock. I feel that you will find this letter and that it will give you some riches and much happiness. I have been back to the old town and I have seen the girl who lives in the bungalow. I could not do better than to choose her, if you had commissioned me to locate a life partner for you. There is everything to commend her. She has family, and she is pretty and winsome and good.

But let me get to the meat of all this. Of course, you will find Uncle Slocum's directions after you find this. Follow them. I recall very clearly the time he speaks of and the excitement that caught the town at the time. The wealth is on the old place, but nowhere else, as the people proved then. Find it, Tug, and prove your aunt's theory is not wrong.

The reader paused here to turn to the next page. As he brought it from behind the first one, he gasped. For, neatly pinned, crosswise, on the sheet, were three five-hundred-dollar notes, one below the other. He regarded them, open-mouthed, for a moment, then unfastened them, and began to read again.

I feel so sure that you will follow the little hints I wrote on the clock, that I feel safe in inclosing enough money to finance your operations. I know that you will see my "don't sell" warning in time to forestall that persistent man who wants the clock. If he comes to see you, take a good look at him and, afterward, watch him closely. I feel it in my bones that he knows something and is not an antique hunter at all.

Follow Uncle Slocum's directions, Tug, and may fortune be with you. And when you have come into your own, say an occasional prayer for Aunt Betty—or write something in one of your stories that you know would tickle her, if she were alive, and make her laugh so hard she'd forget the rheumatism.

The young fellow went on to the end of it, growing more completely puzzled at every line. What in the world was Aunt Betty driving at? He looked closely at every square inch of the two sheets of paper, but he could find no directions from Uncle Slocum. What did it mean?

After long meditation, he went to the clock again for a more minute inspection of it. The first thing of importance he found was a line on the back of the pendulum. It was written in ink, in Aunt Betty's unmistakable hand. This was it:

Don't sell me.

Tug looked on the back of the body door. There was more writing there. He read:

Touch the spot and learn my secret.

The young man laughed in spite of himself. These were messages from the grave, to be sure. But how like a romantic old maid! The writer realized

that Aunt Betty had read not only his own magazine stories, but others as well, that are usually marketed between paper covers. That last melodramatic line was as good as an exposé on the dear old soul! Tug laughed; and then he grew serious again. He felt certain that the letter and the inscriptions were not meant as a joke. Aunt Betty wasn't the kind to arouse hopes in those of whom she was fond in order to jolt them with a rude awakening. No, Aunt Betty wasn't that kind. The letter and the rest of it meant something. And it was up to Tug Lawson to find out what that something was.

He was mightily bothering his brain in an attempt to solve the mystery, when the old colored woman who cooked for him and cared for the apartment poked her head in the door to announce a visitor.

"Who is it?" asked Tug.

"De gemman's name is Woods," came the response.

"What does he want? I'm busy."

"He wants to see yo' 'bout some clock, he done say."

The clock again!

Hastily cramming Aunt Betty's letter into the breast pocket of his coat, Tug pushed in the secret drawer and ordered the visitor to be admitted. There came into the room, then, a pudgy, red-cheeked man of about Tug's age. The newcomer was quick in his actions. He had little eyes, which immediately rested upon the clock.

"Well?" began Tug.

"Woods is my name," came the words. "I'll state my business at once, for I realize that a writer's time is valuable. You have just come into possession of a grandfather's clock?"

"Yes."

"Inherited it from your aunt, Miss Elizabeth Rowland, of Boston?"

"Quite right."

"I have begun a collection of antiques," Woods went on. "I learned of your clock some time ago and tried to buy it. Miss Rowland would not sell. She valued it as an heirloom. I have hopes, however, that you can be induced to listen to an offer for it."

Tug considered.

"How much do you consider it worth?" he asked.

"Three hundred, as it stands."

The writer shook his head.

"No," he said, "I'm afraid I'm not in the market."

"Five hundred," snapped Woods.

"No."

"Eight hundred."

Tug stared.

"Why," he exclaimed, "you can get the best clock that ever ticked for that much money. And this one is only an ordinary family timepiece—not so very old, I take it—not extraordinary. Washington didn't go to bed by it, or anything like that."

Woods did not smile. Instead, he uttered the words:

"One thousand dollars—spot cash!"

But the clock's owner had by this time resolved to heed that cautionary sentence jotted on the back of the pendulum:

Don't sell me.

"No, Mr. Woods," he decided, rising, to indicate an end of the interview, "my clock is not for sale—now. Perhaps some time I may change my mind, and, in that case, I shall be glad to communicate with you."

Woods took a card from a case and scribbled on it with a pencil.

"I don't live in New York," he said. "That is my home address." He gave the card to Tug, who read this:

BENSON WOODS,
Farmdale,
Ohio.

"All right," said Tug. "I'll let you hear from me when I feel like selling." He ushered Woods out. It was evident that the little man did not want to go. He moved toward the door slowly, and, as he went through it, his eyes were on the steadily ticking clock.

When his visitor was gone, the young man went toward Aunt Betty's legacy further to examine it. As he did so, the scrap of paper that had fluttered from the drawer containing his aunt's letter caught his attention. He picked it up, regarding it curiously. There

was some faded writing on it. Going over to a window, he began to puzzle it out. And at last he made of it just this much sense:

From the center of the Stratton Road, due north—two hundred and twelve paces back along Kline's—then fifty paces east. It is marked by a yellow spot.

CHAPTER III.

More readings of this and a little reflection convinced Tug that it was Uncle Slocum's set of directions referred to in Aunt Betty's letter. But certainly it was incomplete. The paper on which the words appeared was a torn slip of yellowish hue, about as important looking as a discarded dusting cloth. There was no date, no signature; and nothing to tell what it was all about save the mention of a certain yellow spot. Tug Lawson was quite unable to understand why an otherwise sane and responsible aunt would donate fifteen hundred dollars toward the sleuthing down of a yellow spot, or why she should insist that he follow Uncle Slocum's brief directions for getting there.

He remembered that the good woman had mentioned wealth and happiness—and something about a girl. Tug was not interested in the girl. He shrugged his wide shoulders at the thought of her. She lived in "the old town," as his aunt had put it; and no doubt she was a dowdy country person, who made butter, gathered up eggs, and dug her toes into the ground whenever spoken to by a man. Impossible, decided Tug.

But the yellow spot. What could it be that would give him wealth and happiness? Yellow—yellow—yellow. What was yellow? Gold was yellow! But gold didn't thrive in the soil of that Ohio town—let's see, what was the name of it, anyway? Where had Aunt Betty and her brother, Uncle Slocum, lived during their sojourn in that territory. Where? Where?

Suddenly an expression of wonderment spread over the young man's face. His right hand went to the pocket where he had placed Woods' card. He drew forth the bit of pasteboard and looked at it long and earnestly. Then he said "Gad!" under his breath. Woods lived in Farmdale, Ohio. And that was the town, a hamlet near one of the large cities, as Tug had always known of it, where Aunt Betty and Uncle Slocum had passed many of the years they had lived.

Here was, indeed, a queer state of affairs. Aunt Betty had willed away an old clock with a secret drawer in it that contained Uncle Slocum's directions. These directions, according to the aunt, would bring wealth and happiness. Comes now Woods from Aunt Betty's old home town offering one thousand dollars for that clock. A thousand dollars was much more than it was worth. Woods must know something.

Tug Lawson put in most the remainder of the day cogitating. And as his brain worked at the situation, the appearance of that man Woods took on a sinister aspect. Evidently Woods had been following that clock like a hound. He had invaded Tug's apartment on the very day the timepiece had arrived; and this promptness suggested that he had, no doubt, watched its travels from Aunt Betty's house to the shop of the clock repairer, and from there to New York. The persistence of the man was disconcerting. It was especially so, as Tug was so thoroughly in the dark regarding the motive behind it. That Woods knew something about that clock—something worth a thousand dollars to him—was quite plain. But what did he know?

Later in the day something further happened to give the clock and its contents added importance. The postman brought a letter with a Boston post mark. This ran as follows:

Mr. Tugston Lawson, New York City.

DEAR SIR: Shipped to you, two days ago, one grandfather's clock, in good running order.

Shortly before the death of your aunt, Miss Elizabeth Rowland, I was called to her house to see the clock. She told me to call for it when she was gone, put it in good condition, and ship it to you. I carried out her instructions.

Miss Rowland also told me to write you as soon as the clock was shipped and instruct you that you are not to sell it, on any account, or let it get out of your possession. Also, you are not to let any strangers examine it. I went over the clock thoroughly and I desire to add my advice to hers. Do as she says. I hope you will *examine every inch of it.*

I have instructions to write you again in sixty days, in case I do not receive a letter from you containing information that I expect. Yours truly,

J. Dodson, Jeweler.

Tug read this carefully, and then exclaimed:

"She wasn't taking any chances."

That was true. The thrifty old lady had been at pains to see to it that the letter and the money would be found by the right person. No doubt she had told Dodson about the secret drawer, feeling that he would come across it in his overhauling, and thus safeguarding the contents of it. Dodson would have reasoned that he would be blamed if the letter was not in the drawer when the clock was delivered. He would not have dared to open it and abstract the money, for there was no telling how many people Aunt Betty had told about it.

Tug resolved to set Dodson's mind at rest, and thereupon dropped him a brief note to the effect that he had discovered the hidden drawer and its contents.

More deep thinking followed. Then suddenly it occurred to the young man that, perhaps, the quickest way to the bottom of the mystery was to make a journey to Farmdale and apply the fifteen hundred dollars to a search for the yellow spot. Accordingly, he was abroad early the following morning. Remembering Woods, he reboxed the clock and summoned the janitor.

"I'm going away for a short time," he told the man, "and I want you to take care of this old clock for me. Keep it in your rooms, and don't let anybody know you have it. Can I trust you?"

"Yes," the fellow replied, eying the dollar note in Tug's hand. "It will be safe with me."

"If anybody calls and asks to see it, don't let 'em."

"All right, sir."

"It's valuable," Tug went on. "If there should be a fire, you'll try to save it, won't you?"

"Leave that to me," the janitor said. So Tug helped him to lug the unwieldy thing to the elevator. That evening he boarded a limited train for the city to which Farmdale was suburban. And the next morning he looked out of his window upon a grimy, smoke-domed city that skirted the sandy shore of one of the Great Lakes. An hour later he was breakfasting in a hotel and questioning a waiter about the geography of the place.

Like most men born in New York and brought up there, Tug Lawson believed that civilization stopped just west of the Hudson River. Beyond, he had been taught, were mountains and prairies and Indians, together with a sprinkling of bad men and cowboys. Therefore, he was more than surprised to find the mid-West city nothing less than a pocket edition of New York. The hotels and taxicabs charged prices that were just as exorbitant. The food was of the metropolitan storage brand. In the streets, the crowds were not as dense, but the people were quite as rude and jostling.

The waiter had told him that Farmdale lay about six miles to the east.

"You'll find a trolley marked Farmdale on Stratton Avenue," he had said. "It's one block from here, sir." So Tug sauntered out into the busy street and waited on a corner for his car.

It carried him through the business district and out into a residential section which was made up of stone and brick and wooden houses, with park-like stretches of lawn in front of them. On and on the car traveled; and the houses were the same and the lawns were the same. At the end of a half hour, Tug stepped to the rear platform and questioned the conductor.

"How far is it to Farmdale?" he asked.

"About fifteen minutes' ride from here," the man said. "What street do you want?"

"I don't know," came the reply. "Is there a Stratton Road there?"

"We're on it," the conductor ex-

plained. "It used to be Stratton Road, but it's Stratton Avenue now."

Tug turned back to reënter the car.

"I'm a stranger here," he said. "Would it be too much trouble to let me know when we get to Farmdale?"

The man promised to tell his passenger when the suburb was reached, and in a short time he was touching Tug on the shoulder.

"We're in Farmdale now," he announced. The writer looked out of the window. On both sides of the street were the same brick and stone and frame houses. The avenue was asphalted.

"Why," Tug exclaimed, "I thought Farmdale was a village!"

"It used to be," explained the conductor, "but the city grew out to it. Fine-looking suburb, eh?"

Tug nodded.

"I suppose I may as well get off here and hunt," he remarked. "You see," he added, "I'm going somewhere, but I don't know where." And with the remark he swung himself off the moving car, took Uncle Slocum's direction slip out of his pocket and looked at it. Then he set out to walk. For several blocks he continued on his way, looking at the street signs on the corners and referring back to his paper. The names of the cross streets were family names, such as Thompson Street, McDougall Road, and the like. Uncle Slocum's directions mentioned "Kline's." That was probably Kline's farm, or place, in the vernacular of the district. But, as Tug walked along, he came across no street named after the Kline family. He felt that he ought to stop some one on the street and make inquiries. A policeman was handy.

"Naw," he replied when questioned. "I don't know nothin' about this part of town. I ain't been walkin' post here but a week." Tug was turning away when the officer seemed to recollect something.

"Say," he said, "there's a bunch of stores about six blocks up the avenue. Mebby they can tell you something there."

"Thank you," said Tug. "I'll try there." He set off in the direction indicated by the policeman, and presently came to the "bunch of stores." And, as chance would have it, he saw an old man coming out of one of them carrying a basket. The old fellow had the look of an old resident; that is, he went on his way unhesitatingly, as if he had been traveling that avenue for years. Tug approched him.

"I'm looking for the place where the Kline Farm once was," he began.

The man stopped and looked searchingly out of keen old eyes.

"They're gone, those Klines," he vouchsafed.

"But the farm—where was it?"

"Right up yonder, where you see that white house. The street at the corner is Cummings Street. Used to be the Whitehall Road. The old Kline place lay along it and the avenue here."

"Do you remember who lived next to it?"

"Man named Slocum Rowland. His property began about a quarter of a mile beyond that white house. But he's gone, too. Went East, years ago, after selling the farm to some syndicate. The place was made into an allotment about ten years ago. It's all built up now."

Tug thanked the man, and walked thoughtfully to the white house that marked the beginning of the Kline property. Then he proceeded along the quarter mile of the old frontage, which now held pretty, modern, suburban homes. He reached a point where, in his judgment, the boundary line of the old farm must have been. And he was struck with the fact that the next house before him was a large, red bungalow, set on a plot that stretched back an unusually long distance. Tug estimated it at six or seven hundred feet.

He was standing still, thoughtfully contemplating the building and grounds, when an automobile, coming from behind him, drew up before the place. The young writer glanced casually at it; and his attention was at once held by one of the occupants. This was a girl of twenty, perhaps—a healthy-looking, active young person, who climbed down from her seat unassisted, and did it with

the precision and confidence of one accustomed to looking after herself. A light veil hid her face. Her clothes, though, were so well cut, and fitted her slender, graceful figure so perfectly, that she was good to look at, even in her mask.

She stood beside the car, and began to talk animatedly with the driver. Tug's glance went to him. And the next instant his hand instinctively sought the side pocket of his coat, wherein had been the card of the man who had wanted to buy his old clock. For the driver of that motor car and the antique hunter were one and the same person. That trig young woman was talking to Benson Woods not more than a hundred feet from the bungalow mentioned in Aunt Betty's letter.

CHAPTER IV.

Woods now caught sight of the man on the sidewalk, and instantly recognized him. He hastily whispered something to the girl, who turned and looked at the New Yorker, her eyes alight with interest. Woods beckoned with a gloved hand.

"Oh, Lawson," he cried, "come here! I suppose you're looking for me. My offer still holds good."

Tug went to the side of the car. The driver turned to the girl.

"Miss Sawyer," he said, "this is Mr. Lawson, the author. I guess you've heard of him. Met him the last time I was in New York."

The young woman smiled.

"Of course I've heard of him," she rippled. "I'm one of the million who have."

Tug laughed.

"The seventeen would be a more correct estimate," he corrected.

Woods hastily entered into the conversation.

"I've just brought Miss Sawyer home from a shopping cruise," he said. "Get in here, Lawson, and we'll go to my club in the city for luncheon. We can talk over that little matter there."

But this invitation did not appeal to the writer. He stood still, looking through the girl's veil at the dancing blue eyes he saw there; at the full, vivacious lips; at the waving brown hair that escaped from under her hat.

"I didn't come here to see you, Woods," he remarked. "I haven't changed my mind yet."

"Then what——" Suspicion instantly leaped into the eyes of the dumpy, little man.

"Oh," carelessly explained Tug, "I'm after material." He didn't tell the nature of it.

Miss Sawyer guessed the obvious.

"Local color?" she asked.

"I'm looking up some data. This place was once a country village, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"So I've learned. And it has grown into a big suburb. There are always stories in a place like this—stories that go away back into the yesterday of things."

Woods cut in.

"What's this story about?"

Tug grinned. The words of Aunt Betty came back to him. "If he comes to see you, take a good look at him, and afterward watch him closely." Surely this was the man; and he was very inquisitive. No doubt he would bear watching. So Tug grinned, and answered:

"You can't very well give a story a title until you've got it all worked out. This one promises to be interesting, though. Perhaps I'll tell you more about it later."

A quick scowl flitted across Woods' brow. It was a look of annoyance, apprehension, and disappointment.

"Anyway," he persisted, "you can come to luncheon with me. I'll bring you out here, afterward, and help you run down your facts."

Tug looked hard at the girl. In her eyes he saw puzzlement. She realized that a tilt was on between the two men. It was clear to her that Woods was trying to press something on the author that was not desired. Of course, she didn't understand it; but possibly she reckoned that here was a case of genius being stalked—that Woods wanted to

shine before his downtown friends in the reflected glory of recognized ability.

As Tug looked, he thought he read sympathy in the clear eyes that presently were turned full upon him.

"I'm sorry, Woods," he evaded; "but I can't go with you. I've an engagement out here."

The man in the machine gave him a searching look, then speeded up his motor.

"All right," he said sharply, sliding in his clutch, "some other time?"

"Certainly."

Woods and his machine departed. Tug turned to the girl, who had started for the bungalow.

"I haven't any engagement—yet," he told her. He squared his big shoulders as if he were about to tackle some tremendously difficult proposition. "I'd like to have one, though, with you."

"With me?"

"Yes. You see, I've heard about you through my aunt, Miss Rowland. Perhaps you know her."

Miss Sawyer's eyes brightened.

"Indeed I do," she exclaimed. "She is a lovely old lady, who used to live where my bungalow is now. I remember her calling on me. She was visiting in Farmdale—she had come from the East to see the old place once more."

"That was Aunt Betty," Tug agreed. "She wrote of you in a letter. And I'm quite sure that if you'll let me talk to you a while, you can help me to clear up something that's been a guessing contest for three days now. Will you?"

The girl puckered up her brow.

"I'm sure I can't imagine what it's all about," she said; "but, of course, I'll be glad to help you if I can. Come in the house with me. I live here with my aunt, and she will be glad to meet the popular Mr. Lawson."

Tug frowned.

"Let's cross the celebrity act off the bill," he suggested, "and be plain friends. What do you say?"

She smiled.

"The guest's will is our law," she told him. And so they passed up the path to the bungalow, and into it. When they were inside, she abruptly faced him.

"I suppose you'll be prowling about this neighborhood more or less," she said; "and, if that is the case, you'll surely hear about me." She removed her veil, and Tug saw a wonderfully clear complexion, daintily pink with health. The cheeks seemed to glow in sympathy with the almost appealing expression that suddenly had come into her eyes.

"They talk and talk," she continued. "The people out here seem unable to understand why I should try to make my own living. I paint things on china and burn the ware in a little kiln. You see, Mr. Lawson, this lot and my bungalow are all that is left of what was once a considerable estate. It belongs to me. I'm telling you the simple truth, so you won't think me eccentric when you hear the neighbors talking. Painting things on china isn't revolutionary enough to upset the country, is it?"

The young fellow laughed.

"Please remember," he admonished her, "that I live in New York, where a girl can paint houses for a living if she chooses, and nobody comments. I know a princess who teaches music, and a senator's daughter who runs an egg farm on Long Island. The china-painting dénouement wouldn't get a gasp out of me."

The girl seemed relieved. Then she flushed.

"I know that I shall spend the rest of my life," she burst forth, "trying to explain to myself why I am burdening you with my woes. I've known you all of twenty minutes."

"It's good to get acquainted so quickly. Now I feel more like telling you about the spot."

"About the what?"

"The spot." Tug crossed one long leg over the other and leaned forward in the chair he had dropped into. His manner was confiding. "You see," he went on, "I'm out in this part of the country on a strange errand. I'm hunting something, but I don't know what it is."

"How am I to help you?"

"I don't know. Maybe you can't. Tell me, first, who is this man Woods? I had a visit from him in New York three days ago. Now I find him here, motoring with you."

Miss Sawyer gave the writer a keen look, then began to stare at a neatly shod foot, which commenced to tap the rug nervously. It suddenly came over Tug that he had said something he should not have said.

"I'm sorry——" he apologized. But the girl interrupted.

"There's nothing to be sorry for. Mr. Woods is a friend. I've known him all my life, and he's nice to me, and——"

"Does he collect antiques?"

A quick laugh was the answer.

"Antiques! The idea! He knows a thousand times more about motor cars than art in any form. And they do say that he gets cheated every time he buys a motor. Whatever made you ask such a question?"

"I wanted to know," Tug answered her. "Can you tell me any more about him?"

"Lots. He's thirty-four years old, I believe, and his people have always lived here. His father inherited a big tract of land, and made oodles of money by cutting it up into lots. His mother used to live on the next farm to the one of which this place is a part."

"Her name?"

"It was Kline."

Tug fished Uncle Slocum's direction's from his pocket to make sure of the name.

"Are you sure it was Kline?"

"Of course. Everybody around here knows that. Your aunt could have told you so, though she never met Benson. She said during her talk with me that she and the Kline family were very intimate. They visited back and forth a great deal, like country people used to do. They knew all about each others' affairs."

Tug was silent for a moment, considering. Then he spoke.

"Miss Sawyer," he began, "you're just the person I'm looking for. You know all about the neighborhood, and your house is located exactly where it should be. I may find something, with your help. I've got the information; you have the rest that is required. I may find something worth while. Are you open to bargaining?"

"I really can't imagine what all this means."

"Neither can I; but perhaps we can find out. Will you go halves with me if we should uncover forty cents' worth of Spanish doubloons, or something like that, on your property?"

She laughed.

"Do I have to dig, too?" she coquetted.

"No," Tug replied. "I'll do that. But you couldn't be expected to make a bargain when you don't know what it's about. I'm going to trust you, and take you in on the ground floor. However, you must promise me to say nothing to anybody about this—least of all that fellow Woods. I have every reason to believe that he knows of something valuable that exists in Farmdale—probably in this property—and that he has been trying to buy an old clock from me to get a secret out of it. You won't tell Woods?"

For a moment the girl hesitated. Then she sat up straight in her chair.

"No, I won't tell him," she declared. "Why should I?"

Tug smiled.

"If there is a why, you are the one to know it," he said, with banter in his voice. Then seriously: "It's a bargain?"

"Yes; I'll keep quiet. And I won't let you outdo me in having confidence. I'll go halves with you if we find anything."

Tug's immediate move was to take the letter from Aunt Betty out of his pocket and extend it to her. His hand stopped before the motion was completed, though, for suddenly he recalled, with heightening color, his aunt's reference to the girl in the bungalow.

"I'll read this to you," he told Miss Sawyer. "My Aunt Betty is dead, and I found this in a secret drawer that jumped out at me from the base of an old clock she left me." He briefly sketched the story of the note, and then

read it, omitting the part about the bungalow girl.

"Now," he said when he had finished, "I found a slip of paper in that drawer which is undoubtedly the set of directions alluded to in the letter." He extended the slip of paper toward her. "Read it," he said.

The young woman read. Once she read it, and then again. And then she turned upon Tug a face that was almost distorted with awe.

"The yellow spot!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," said Tug eagerly, "the yellow spot. Have you ever seen it?"

"Seen it!" She gave a hurried, nervous laugh—the kind of a laugh that foretells hysterics. "Seen it! Why, Mr. Lawson, that spot is out in my back yard. We never could get the grass to grow green on it. Come, I'll show you."

CHAPTER V.

In her eagerness, she caught Tug by the hand and ran, with him tagging after her, through the house and out into a rear inclosure. Although it was early in the season, many green flower beds prophesied future bloom. Here and there were sturdy fruit trees; and away in the rear was a trellis from which tempting bunches of grapes would hang in the autumn. It was a pretty, suburban garden into which the story writer had been dragged. He looked about him.

"Did you plan all this?" he asked.

"Yes; but come. The yellow spot is right over there." She pointed toward a corner of the garden, and Tug followed obediently. A few steps, and then the girl stood still, pointing at the ground. She looked up into his face.

"There it is," she said.

Tug stared at it. Sure enough, there was the yellow spot; or, rather, it was a discoloration. The grass in the garden was vividly green—bright with the caresses of dawning summer's moisture and sun. But near that back corner was a circular patch about two feet in diameter that tended toward a yellowish hue. Miss Sawyer repeated her words.

"There it is, Mr. Lawson," she said.

"Yes," he admitted, "it's a yellow spot, all right."

"*A* yellow spot?" Her accent was on the "A."

"Yes. You see, there can be more than one yellow spot."

She pondered.

"Well," she decided at length, "we can soon settle the question. We can pace off the distances mentioned on the paper. Come, let's do it."

She began walking toward the house, and he followed. They went around one side of it, across the front lawn, and out to the middle of the street. Then they started slowly back, counting their steps. Proceeding in a straight line, they found that they had taken two hundred and fifteen steps. Miss Sawyer clapped her hands.

"It's almost right," she exclaimed; "and if we were farmers, used to hopping over clods of dirt, we'd have taken longer steps, and the answer would be the one in the back of the book. Now, let's measure from the old Kline line. The boundary between this lot and that place is marked by the big tree over there. I know, because the surveyor told me about it when I was building the bungalow." She ran swiftly to the tree; and, before Tug could overtake her, she was pacing the distance to the yellow spot and counting one-two-three-four. By the time she had counted forty-eight, she had arrived at the spot. Again she grew enthusiastic.

"There's no mistake about it," she cried. "Whoever wrote those directions meant this spot right here. Since I have lived in the bungalow, it has been right where it is now. I've planted new grass seed, and raked and done everything. But the grass there never grows like it does in the other parts of my garden. It fades and fades, and by the middle of July it is almost brown. Now, what do you think the matter is?"

"Can't imagine," Tug answered.

"What are we going to do?"

"Dig."

"When?"

"This afternoon, if the time suits you."

The girl considered. All at once her face brightened.

"I knew it," she said triumphantly. "I knew it!"

"What?"

She grew grave.

"All this yellow-spot business coming on so suddenly has upset me. I knew we couldn't dig this afternoon; but for a moment I couldn't remember why."

"Why can't we?"

"Because," she told him seriously, "my sewing club meets with me at three."

Tug went back to his hotel marveling at the ways of women. Even possible buried treasure was powerless to interrupt that girlish gabfest scheduled for three o'clock in the afternoon. Inwardly the young man was impatient at the delay, though he had taken a laughing departure. On the way to town, he thought deeply over the happenings of the morning. There came a little quake within him when he remembered how readily and completely he had trusted the young woman, whom he had met that day for the first time. He felt, somehow, that Woods had more than a slipping grip on her affections; and he found himself resenting this. Having the analytical mind of the writing folk, he presently discovered that his resentment was not based on the apprehension that she might bring forth the clock's secret for Woods' inspection. On the contrary, when he recalled her open, winsome manner and her vivid personality, the clock and the yellow spot vanished from his mind completely. The disturbing element was Woods.

But several times, as the car rolled cityward, the wisdom of his instant confidence in Miss Sawyer came up in the form of a question. It bothered him. But each time he considered it, he conjured up the lithe, frank, almost boyish individuality of her for mental inspection. And by the time the trolley had deposited him in the avenue, near his hotel, he had decided that he had not made any mistake. There could be no guile in a girl like that. Anyway, he wanted to believe that there wasn't any.

He entered the hotel and went to the desk for his key. While he waited for the clerk to hand it to him, his eye ran down the names on the register. The third name from the bottom of the list caught his attention. He looked at it twice, wondering. Why was it there? The clerk gave him the key to his room, but still his eyes remained glued on

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What did it mean? Woods had a home in town. Why had he registered at a hotel in the middle of the day? Perhaps it was instinct that prompted Tug to look at the number on his key. Before, he had paid no attention to it, having been shown up by a bell boy. After making himself tidy, before breakfast, he had locked his door, and had carelessly thrown the key across the hotel desk that the clerk might put it in his mail box. But now he looked at the number stamped in black on the fiber tag that dangled from the key. And he gave a low whistle as he saw what it was. The figures were 402.

He walked rapidly to the elevator.

"Fourth floor," he told the boy; "and hurry!"

The car shot him up. At the sliding back of the door he rushed out.

"Which way is number four hundred and two?" he questioned.

"End of the corridor," the boy replied. Tug recalled the location then, and speeded there as fast as he could walk. As he was about to slide the key in the door, a chambermaid hurried up to him and caught his arm. He turned quickly and looked into a white face, out of which frightened eyes stared.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"The room, sir," she stammered. "It ain't ready yet."

"What's the matter with it?"

"It's being cleaned, sir. It will be ready in fifteen minutes——" Her voice trailed away, and stopped. She began to tremble. From within the room came unmistakable sounds of a window being hurriedly raised. Tug tried to insert the key, but the hole seemed blocked. He turned the knob,

and the door swung inward. It had not been locked.

A man was crawling out of the window onto the fire escape. Tug ran to him and jerked him back by the shoulders. At first the fellow fought; but Tug was much the larger man, and had little difficulty in subduing the intruder. He had pinned him, face downward, upon the floor. Now he turned his squirming victim over, and beheld the face of Benson Woods.

For a moment neither man spoke; then the captor demanded:

"What are you doing in here?"

There was no reply. Tug glanced quickly about the room. Over on a table was his Gladstone bag, wide open. Its contents had been scattered on the floor.

"What were you trying to steal?" Tug insisted. "Answer me!"

Benson Woods was silent. The writer considered. After a moment he said:

"I think I'll have to try a little football." Reaching back, he gripped Woods' right ankle and slowly twisted it. Woods squealed:

"Ow—stop—ow!"

"Why did you come in my room?" Tug asked. The under man grunted as the twisting stopped.

"I guess you know," he said.

"Tell me—what?"

"The papers that were in the clock," Woods answered. "And," defiantly, "I have as much right to 'em as you have. My uncle was in on it."

"In on what?"

"Don't you know?"

Tug did not answer. He didn't know; but there was no use in telling Woods that he didn't know. So he tried bluffing.

"You've got to make a complete confession, Woods, or I'll have the police send their little, black wagon around here."

Woods squirmed, for Tug's weight was something to acknowledge.

"Then you don't know? The papers weren't complete, maybe?" There was something in the pudgy fellow's voice that rang a good deal like hope. Again Tug did not immediately answer. He thought of making good his threat of calling in the police. Further reflection, however, caused him to abandon the idea. Woods might be forced to tell what he knew in police court, and thus give publicity to the yellow-spot business. And no one could tell to what complications such a revelation might lead. If there were treasure under that discoloration, a horde of bogus claimants might arise. So Tug took another tack. He arose, and bade Woods do likewise. When the two were on their feet, Tug went to the telephone and summoned the clerk. Then he turned to Woods.

"How did you get in here?"

"My room is next door," readily explained the intruder. "I tried to get in by the fire escape. It runs near my window, too. But your sash was locked. So I went out in the hall and hollered for a chambermaid. I gave her a dollar to open your room with a pass-key." He grinned. But Tug's face remained serious.

"I could jail you for this," he declared; "but I'm not going to. You've got to promise me, though, to keep out of my way hereafter. The clerk——" At that moment there came a tap at the door. The clerk was outside. Tug briefly explained the situation, ending thus:

"I don't want to prosecute him now, but I shall if he tries anything like this again. Please take a good look at him so you'll recognize him. I may need you as a witness."

The clerk scowled at Woods, remarked that he would surely remember that face, and went away. He became a party to this case of cheating justice in the same spirit that he would order the housekeeper to put two extra chairs in Room 911. Anything to please guests.

When the clerk had gone, Tug again questioned Woods.

"I'd like to find out," he said, "just how much you know about the contents of my clock, and what your interests in this thing are?"

Woods looked at the carpet.

"I know everything," he answered, "except the one thing I want to know—the thing I'm going to know before I'm through with it."

"And what is that?"

"I'll not show my hand. No, by George, I won't show it! But I'll tell you this much: The stuff belongs to anybody that can get it as much as it does to you. Your uncle and aunt can't hand you something that's on somebody else's property, can they—something they quit claim to years ago?"

Tug could not answer this. Woods went on:

"My uncle knew about the papers in the clock, and his knowledge has come down to me. I'm going to get the stuff if I can. I have as much right as you have."

Tug's answer was a grin.

"No," he said, after a little thought.

"Why?"

"You committed a piece of housebreaking to gain your end. That's unlawful. You didn't play fair. If you interfere with me in any manner, I'll have you arrested. That will keep you out of my way, at least, until I'm through with this business. And Woods——"

"What?"

"That goes!"

CHAPTER VI.

The next morning, at ten o'clock, Tug called Miss Sawyer on the telephone.

"Does the going-to-work whistle blow this morning?" he asked.

"I've had a spade all ready for you," she replied, "ever since nine. You are late."

The young man hastily abandoned the telephone and engaged a taxicab for the journey to Farmdale. The cars were too slow. When he arrived at the bungalow, he found the girl in a state of impatience. She looked wonderfully fresh and charming in spotlessly white duck. It was just the thing to go digging holes in, Tug reflected, with a chuckle. One was sure to get spots on it, which would go far toward proving that there are other than idlers in the world. Miss Sawyer quickly ushered the young fellow through the house and out into the garden.

"I grew so anxious about the spot," she told him, "that I almost dug it up myself." She hurried to the corner of the lot. A spade lay across the yellow place. "I went out this morning and bought it," said she.

Tug picked it up and was about to dig, when suddenly he looked at the girl.

"You'd better make the start," he told her.

"Why?"

"For luck. Don't women always christen ships? I guess they do lots of things like that. And it seems to me that there's some superstition about driving the last spike on a railroad and digging out the first shovelful of earth when buildings are begun. I don't know whether women get into that hard-labor class or not; but let's take a chance. You start the thing going."

A gay, little laugh answered him.

"Good!" she exclaimed, taking the spade out of his hands. "I'm quite as superstitious as you are. Here goes!" She pushed the spade some two inches into the soft earth with a little, white-shod foot, wiggled it about until there was a semblance of a load on it, and cast the sod and earth to one side, in a heap, that one could see quite plainly, if one looked closely.

"There!" she triumphantly cried.

The young man took the spade from her and went on with the work. In five minutes he had carefully scraped away the sod. A hard mass of shale clay lay a few inches beneath it. Tug studied this formation for a moment. Then he said:

"I believe I know what keeps the grass from growing properly here."

"You do?"

"Yes. Notice that clay. It's very hard, and it slants a bit toward the house. Don't you think that the water drains away over it? If it does, there wouldn't be enough moisture retained to keep the grass alive under a hot sun. I believe we've found out why the yellow spot is a yellow spot."

Miss Sawyer gravely poked into the

shallow hole with a stick that had been doing duty in a near-by flower bed as a plant support. When she spoke there was disappointment in her voice.

"Then we've got excited all for nothing?" she questioned. For answer, the young man sank the spade into the earth a few feet away from the spot, and threw up a quantity of brown loam.

"See," he exclaimed, "there's no clay here!"

At first the girl did not understand.

"What does that prove?" she asked.

"It makes me reason that there was a big hole, at one time, where the clay is. The clay came from lower down; and it must have been dug up. It isn't clay habit to come to the surface of its own accord. Now boss the job."

"What shall I do?"

"You might chant 'Drill, Ye Tarriers, Drill,'" suggested Tug, laughing. "Or take some other way of telling the deck hands to get busy." He attacked the tough clay with the spade. "This is hard digging, you know. We men need encouragement."

His levity drove the perplexity and disappointment out of her face.

"Don't they have water boys, or something like that, on a regular job?" she inquired. "I feel that I ought to do something."

"Yes," he answered; "but we don't need one here. We need a boss who will order the hands to remove his coat."

Miss Sawyer entered fully into his gay spirits.

"I'll be that boss," she declared. And Tug's coat came off.

"Now," he said, "we shall see what we shall see." He began to dig rapidly, his big, muscular arms driving the spade through the hard earth formation as if he were working in cheese. At the end of fifteen minutes he had cleared away all of the clay and was working in softer soil.

"You see," he told the girl, "whoever filled up this hole used the clay to seal it with. Now we ought to get to something."

He worked on steadily, tossing out big spadefuls of the comparatively loose earth from the hole. It was now about two feet deep. Suddenly he stopped his toil.

"Did anybody ever examine this spot?" he asked.

"No," Miss Sawyer replied. "Nobody ever did anything about it except tell me what a shame it is that the grass doesn't grow on it as it should."

"Nobody ever came around here investigating?"

"Nobody—— Yes, Mr. Woods has been here a number of times with an iron rod. It was a long, thin one."

"What did he do with it?"

The girl put her finger to her lips, as if in deep thought.

"He never did anything much with it," she told Tug. "All I ever saw him do was to push it into the ground as far as it would go."

"What did he tell you he was doing?"

"He said he was trying to locate an old well that had been boarded over."

"Why?"

"Because he was afraid that the top might cave in some day, and some one might fall in and drown."

"Anything else?" Tug looked the girl full in the eyes as he asked the question. It was as if he expected a confession of some sort. One could not be closely associated with this girl for long without feeling the attractiveness of her. Aunt Betty had been a pretty good judge of girls. Of this Tug was now thoroughly convinced.

However, he learned no secrets. Miss Sawyer said:

"I'd planned to go to Europe this summer. But I'm not going. When Mr. Woods heard of it, he offered to lease my back yard."

"What was he going to do with it?"

"He wanted it to raise chickens on the idea!"

Tug laughed.

"Mr. Fox!" he exclaimed.

"What?"

"Nothing. Keep your eyes on the willing spade, boss. Don't let me overlook any bets." He fell to digging again.

Another five minutes passed. Then of a sudden Tug's spade grated against something hard. He glanced at Miss

Sawyer. She had heard the scraping sound, and she drew nearer to the hole. The fact that she quite neglected to pull aside her white skirts, and was entirely careless as to the effect of soil on canvas shoes, told of her excitement.

"What was that?" she eagerly asked.

"I've struck something," he answered, pausing in his work and staring questioningly into the excavation. The girl bent expectantly forward.

"Oh, Mr. Lawson," she pleaded, "don't stop! Dig—please dig!"

The spade struck into the earth again. Repeatedly it gave forth that metallic, scraping sound. Presently something that looked like a piece of rusty iron came into sight. Miss Sawyer cried:

"Oh, look! You've found it!"

Tug said nothing, but went on with his digging. In a little while he had uncovered the top of what appeared to be an iron cylinder. It was as large around as he could span with the fingers and thumbs of both hands. Down along the sides of it he excavated until he had bared more than a foot of it. Then he threw aside his spade, gripped the thing, and threw his weight against it. He pulled it toward him. But it would not move. In perplexity he regarded it for several minutes, the girl looking on with eyes wide and lips parted.

"What can it be?" she asked, in a voice that was little better than a whisper.

The young man shook his head.

"I don't know," he replied. "It looks to me like a big pipe with the end stopped up."

"But what would it be there for?"

"I wish I could tell you. Maybe we might find out if we could unscrew the top." He stepped out of the hole and stood at her side; and both of them stared, uncomprehending, at the stubby cylinder. After a while, the girl said:

"There are some tools in the basement—some wrenches and things."

Tug immediately started for the house.

"Perhaps we can find something there," he suggested, "that will do to turn the top of that pipe around. It might screw off." Miss Sawyer followed him, and showed him the way to the basement. In the room occupied by the laundry tubs was a rough pine table. The girl pulled out a drawer in this, and triumphantly produced a screw driver, a gimlet, a tack hammer, some assorted nails, and a bundle of wire for the hanging of pictures. There was some string in the drawer, too, and an advertising cook book.

"There," Miss Sawyer said, "I knew that these tools would come in handy some time!"

Tug looked them over.

"They won't do," said he. "What I need is a big pipe wrench—the kind of a wrench the plumbers use."

Disappointment came into the young woman's face.

"I'm sorry," she told Tug. Then her features brightened. "There's a plumber down the street where the stores are. He's in a basement. Several times I've had him out here to fix the water taps when they leaked." She regarded Tug expectantly. "He might have a big wrench," she finished.

The young fellow accepted the suggestion.

"I'll go out in the garden and get my coat," he announced, "and have that plumber here in fifteen minutes if I have to drag him."

"Perhaps you'd better bring the wrench," said the girl.

"You're right. This is our secret. We don't want any plumbers, or anybody else, in it till we know what we've found." And the two went out into the garden, where Tug slipped into his coat and was off along the avenue for the wrench.

He returned with the long, steel tool, to find Miss Sawyer seated on the grass beside the hole and studying the end of the pipe. It did not require much time to adjust the wrench to the proper size. Tug gripped the rusty iron with it, and began to yank. For a time, the plug stuck. But repeated efforts loosened it, and it began to turn.

Round and round went the handle of the wrench. Suddenly, after a long section of threading had been bared, Miss

Sawyer clapped her hand to her nose, and exclaimed:

"P-h-ew!"

Tug stopped turning.

"Echo!" said he.

"Goodness," cried the girl, "what a dreadful smell!"

The young man looked reflectively at the pipe.

"Do you know," he remarked, at length, "I think I'll call it a day."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm thoroughly convinced that I'm not going to give this wrench another turn."

"Why?" There was impatience in the girl's voice.

"Because," solemnly answered Tug, "I haven't the least idea what is going to happen." He removed the wrench and climbed out of the hole. "This business is out of my line. Do you know what that smell is?"

"It's like gas."

"Yes," Tug agreed, "it is like gas. And gas is escaping from that pipe, but not the gas you burn in the house."

"Then what kind of gas is it?"

"Natural gas." Tug's words had an important ring. "That pipe is the top of a well that must go down fifteen hundred feet or so. There's pressure enough in it to force the gas around the threads of the pipe." He leaned over toward it, and bade her do so. "Listen," he said. And in the silence there came to their ears a long, low, sputtery "s-s-s-zzzztt," as the vapor in the pipe circled the threads and angrily resented the presence of sand particles temporary blocking its way.

And as the two young people stood there, something more happened. The pipe began to jerk slightly; there was a faint vibrating of the earth under their feet. Again and again it happened. The girl drew back.

"What can it mean?" she questioned.

"I don't know," answered Tug. He caught her arm and drew her back from the hole. "We can't tell what is going to happen. We'd better stand farther away. And if it lets go—the pipe—don't stop to look on. Run! Run as hard as you can!"

She nodded assent. The iron tube continued to vibrate. Minute after minute the young people stood by and watched it. Miss Sawyer was the first to notice a new development. Pointing at the pipe, she exclaimed:

"Look—look, Mr. Lawson! Something is running down the side of it!"

There was no denying it. Something dark and viscous had begun to ooze from the threads and was slowly rivuleting down the rusty iron. Tug went closer, put out a finger, and touched the stuff. He worked it between thumb and forefinger, and smelled it. Then he turned to the girl.

"Miss Sawyer," he said, "if I am not greatly mistaken, I've got to the bottom of the mystery."

"What do you think we've found?" she breathlessly asked.

For a moment he did not speak. Then he hastily grabbed up the wrench, and began to turn back the iron fixture that stopped the opening at the end of the pipe. He screwed it tightly down; and the oozing stuff no longer flowed. Then, his eyes fixed on hers, he said gravely:

"Miss Sawyer, I'm almost certain that we've come upon crude petroleum."

"You don't mean——"

His tone was positive.

"Yes. We've struck oil!"

The idea was too big for her.

"Oil—oil?" she questioned, in an awed voice.

He smiled, and went close to her.

"You've heard of oil strikes?" he asked. "People drill holes and find lots of oil and get rich. Well, we've found one of those holes, and petroleum is coming out of it. If enough of it comes, when the hole is opened, you've got a treasure mine on your land. That is what Woods was looking for with his long iron rod. He was trying to locate this pipe."

Miss Sawyer was still somewhat dazed, but the state was passing. It was a moment before she spoke. Then she said:

"I understand. Oil! Perhaps I can bank the fires in my china kiln now."

"I shouldn't wonder," assented Tug.

"And Mr. Woods—oh, the mercenary

thing!" She began to laugh, somewhat excitedly. Her companion waited. There was a giggle in her voice when she resumed.

"He was always so fat and funny-looking—Mr. Woods. I wanted to take him seriously, but I just couldn't!"

"Seriously?"

"Yes. He asked me to marry him—and, of course, it was impossible. What do they say about people like Mr. Woods? Nobody loves a fat man?"

Tug grinned.

"I've heard that," he chuckled. Her words had a mightily satisfying ring.

CHAPTER VII.

A man and a girl entered a long-unused apartment in New York. The girl paused and looked about her. The man said:

"It needs digging out, I suppose. I've been away a long time." The girl dusted off a chair and dropped into it.

"I'm anxious to see the clock," she said. "Please have it brought in, Tug."

The man vanished by way of the hall. Within ten minutes he had returned, accompanied by the janitor. The two men carried the boxed clock. It was soon set up; and Tug, getting to his knees, released the secret drawer, so that Miss Sawyer, that was, might see. He began to explain how he had discovered it. Pressing a finger on the crack at the right of the base, he proceeded:

"I was fooling with it, like this, when the blamed drawer flew out in my face. It scared me. You see, I hadn't expected anything to happen. I was just pushing my finger along the crack as I'm doing now." He jabbed his big forefinger repeatedly at the fissure. And then suddenly he started back and stared ahead of him in surprise, even as he had done that day, months ago, when the hidden drawer leaped out at him. The girl started, too.

"Oh!" she cried.

Then both of them were silent. For another drawer, the exact counterpart of the first one, had appeared in the clock's base. The compartment that had concealed Aunt Betty's letter was on the left-hand side. This new drawer was at the right edge.

The two young people glanced from the opening to each other. The new Mrs. Lawson was the first to speak.

"Is there anything in the drawer?" she questioned, leaning farther forward. Tug inverted it. A long, yellow envelope, bearing in the upper left-hand corner the address of the Farmdale National Bank, dropped out. The envelope was soon torn open.

"Looks as if some people had had a business deal on," Tug remarked, with his eyes on the bank address. He spread out the inclosure and glanced hastily through the writing. All at once he turned to the girl at his side, and exclaimed:

"Well, by thunder!"

She reached out a hand.

"Let me see it!" she cried.

"I'll read it," he told her. "This paper, please know, contains Uncle Slocum's directions."

"Why, you had them!"

"Yes; but Aunt Betty meant that I should get this paper instead. That slip in the other drawer must have been some bit torn from a previous document. Listen. This paper is headed: 'The Slocum Oil Well.'" He shifted his position so that a strong light from the window fell upon the writing, and read:

"Having this day, July 10, 1890, sold my farm to the Metropolitan Realty Company, and intending at once to move from here to the East, I deem it wise to set down a complete account of the Slocum Oil Well, for the possible benefit of others in the family who shall survive me. While the well is not now productive, my experience with it leads me to believe that it will yield more oil with the passing of years.

"Said well is located on my farm, as follows: From the center of the Stratton Road, walk due north, two hundred and twelve paces along the boundary line between Kline's farm and my own. At the two hundred and twelfth pace, turn east and walk fifty paces. At that point there is a spot in the grass, of a yellowish color, which becomes more pronounced as the summer season passes. The well is under this spot. It is capped. Unscrew this cap and the fumes of the natural gas that is present in oil territory will be the first indication that the

well is alive. A flow of petroleum should follow.

"I sank this well ten years ago. A man came on my property with a divining rod one day. He told me that where the wand was deflected downward, as he walked over the land with it, I would find oil. I paid him a small amount and he told me to dig at the spot where the discoloration now is. The wand dipped sharply there. I put down a well, which was later torpedoed. When it was shot, the oil and sand spouted into the air for sixty feet or so. I had what the drillers called a gusher.

"The effect of this was to cause many of my neighbors and a horde of oil speculators to sink wells. One or two of these produced some little oil, but most of them were dry holes. My well, however, continued to pour out oil for a month. Then it ceased. I decided that there was no more oil under my farm and plugged the well. Several years later I uncapped it and was surprised to find a good flow of petroleum. Acting on the advice of experts, I had the well reamed out and sunk to a greater depth. Good results followed; but, in a little while, the oil again stopped issuing forth, and I definitely abandoned the hole. My neighbors advised me to spend more money on it, but I refused. My good friend Kline was especially insistent in the matter. He held a theory that the well would continue to yield, now and then, through a long period of years. I did not believe that until a short time ago, when I again opened it. Now I have every reason to agree with Kline. While the amount of oil in the well is not great, still I think it would pay some one to investigate at some future date.

"The men who bought my property took it over as a real-estate speculation. They will sell off lots. It is my idea to profit those of my relatives who shall come into this information. The expenditure of a small sum should place the lot containing the well in their possession, either through lease or outright sale. While such action is, of course, speculative, still I believe that it would be profitable. The well, being covered, is not likely to fall into the hands of an outsider. Chance alone could bring this about.

"These directions I shall place in the old clock, where I have kept my valuable papers for years. The existence of the drawers are known only to my sister, Elizabeth Rowland, and my friend and confidant, Kline. I shall tell both of the existence of this paper.

"(Signed) SLOCUM ROWLAND."

The girl smiled.

"He was a good old soul," she remarked.

"A crafty old soul," corrected Tug. "He wasn't keen about letting go of anything."

"Don't be critical," admonished the young Mrs. Lawson. "Remember, we've got a wonderful bank account because he was that way. And even if the well has quit, I'm sure it will start flowing again—maybe just when we need it."

"Perhaps right away," the young fellow said. "The man told me that if we shoot it with nitroglycerin again, we ought to pump profitably for a long time." He paused, and slowly produced Aunt Betty's letter, which he insisted on carrying about with him as a lucky charm. "Somehow," he went on reflectively, "I feel that I'm getting more than is coming to me."

"Please explain."

"Remember what she said about the lady of the bungalow?"

There was a pretty glow in the girl's eyes as she nodded.

"Well," Tug continued, "I've been thinking lately that Aunt Betty wasn't very crazy about having me find oil. She probably didn't have much confidence in Uncle Slocum's well—he wouldn't have bet more than a million on it himself. I believe she had quite another notion in her head."

"Tell me. What was it?"

"The last few times I saw her," came the words, "she was worrying because I lived alone. I had no responsibility—no anchorage—no motive for doing my best work. She said it was no good way for a young man to live. And it looks to me as if she held that oil well out as a lure to get me to Ohio. I'm sure now that there was only one idea in her head."

"And that was——"

"She'd been skirmishing 'round for—for—um-m——"

"Yes?"

Tug stared his admiration until the color came into his wife's cheeks.

"For the only girl," he bluntly told her.

And the look in Mrs. Lawson's face showed that she liked that kind of talk.

The Broken Deadlock

By Clarence L. Cullen

Author of "At the End of the Cruise," "The Lady and the Man For'ard," Etc.

A piquant illustration of how some notable men in national affairs are screened and guarded and justifiably handled as impulsive, irresponsible, grown-up children by their shrewd, seasoned secretaries

"THE presumptuous scoundrel!" exploded the fiery old senator.

His youthful, good-looking secretary, poising his fingers over the typewriter keys, glanced up with an expression of calm, incurious inquiry. He was accustomed to these outbreaks. This was the hour to expect them—when the rumbling, ruddy-faced old gentleman groaningly tackled the task of wading through the forenoon mail from his constituents.

At breakfast on this particular morning the senator had partaken heartily and defiantly of two different kinds of hot bread, washing down the smoking soda biscuits and corn bread with three cups of strong coffee; heartily because he had felt that way, and defiantly because his medical man on the previous day had forbidden him to eat any kind of hot bread, and solemnly limited him to one cup of coffee at breakfast. The secretary knew these things because he lived at the senator's home, as the secretaries of senators from the South often do in Washington. At the table that morning the secretary, observing his senator's voracity for proscribed food, had mentally forecasted a stormy forenoon. Now the forecast was coming true.

"The intrusive, impertinent, thick-skulled puppy!" raged the kindly faced old gentleman, tousling his thick, snowy hair with a trembling hand. He threw the letter down on his desk, and made an earnest, if not convincing, attempt to scowl terrifyingly. "The infernal, inquisitive, impudent ruffian!" he rumbled on, glowering through one of the open windows of the committee room at the young spring verdure of the capitol grounds, where the birds twittered happily in the mellow vernal sunshine.

"Who, sir?" inquired the imperturbable young secretary.

He had opened, read, and assorted the senator's mail an hour before the senator had arrived at his committee room in the Senate office building. Anticipating a squally day, he had been careful—at least, he had tried to be careful—to pigeonhole such letters as seemed calculated to arouse the senator's doctor-defying breakfast to a state of resentfulness or rebellion. But it now appeared that one epistle of a highly disturbing character had escaped his cautious eye.

"Who in thunderation is J. Marion Craddock, of Pickensville, Jefferson County?" demanded the irritated old senator, whirling in his swivel chair to glare questioningly at his young secretary, who did not appear to mind it in the least. "I never heard of the bullet-headed Bœotian boor before. Is he on our list, Arthur?"

"Never heard of the party, sir," tranquilly replied the secretary. "Only Craddock I know anything about down in Jefferson County is State Senator Thomas Middleton Craddock." He paused for an instant, and then, passing a hand over the lower part of his face to screen a mischievous smile, he added: "And of course you know all about that Craddock, sir."

The old senator shot a meant-to-be

baleful glance at his secretary. The young man had named a man—a rich and influential State senator from Jefferson County—with whom his chief had been at political loggerheads for years.

"None of your nonsense, young man!" broke out the old senator, for the youth's grin in mentioning the name of that particular Craddock had not escaped his sharp eyes. "You know perfectly well, you young rascal, that I know all about that Craddock. But who in the name of the body servant of John C. Calhoun is J. Marion Craddock? It isn't humanly possible, is it, that in my declining days I've got to begin to contend with *more* Craddocks down yonder in Jefferson County?"

"I hope not, I'm sure, sir," replied the secretary appeasingly. "I'll see if we've got any Craddock like that on our list."

He stepped to a file case, and sped with deft, practiced fingers through the "C's" of a card-index system comprising the names of thousands of the senator's constituents.

"We haven't any other Craddock except—well, the *one* Craddock, sir," said the secretary, keeping his face straight this time. "Is that the letter from some party named Craddock who asks for some data to use in a debate?"

"It's the insolent epistle from some numskull by the name of Craddock who has no more epistolary manners than a razor-backed shoat!" growled the old senator, picking up the letter and glaring at the signature. "Did you read it? If you did, I am amazed that you should permit, knowing as you do that I am under medical treatment"—the digestively disturbed old gentleman patted with an attempt at appeasement over the middle button of his ample waistcoat, and went on—"that you should permit me to scan such an outlandishly impudent, such an imbecile——"

"I merely glanced at it, sir," put in the secretary soothingly. "Let me go over it again." And he picked up the neatly typewritten letter from the desk upon which the senator again had tossed it with a snort of disgust, and reread it.

The letter did not, on its face, appear to be a document calculated to arouse such intense agitation on the part of its recipient. It was perfectly typewritten on an unheaded sheet of paper, dated "Pickensville, Jefferson County, March 26, 19—"; and the signature, "J. Marion Craddock," was appended in the neat but somewhat characterless vertical style of penmanship. It was addressed to "The Hon. Leonidas J. Melthorpe, United States Senate," and it read as follows:

RESPECTED SIR: On the 15th proximo the debating society of which I am a member is to have a debate on the following subject, viz.:

"*Resolved*, That the Senate of the United States, having become notoriously subject to predatory interests which openly exploit the people of the United States, no longer is a deliberative legislative body, and therefore should be abolished."

The undersigned is one of three members of the debating society appointed to take the negative side in the debate on this proposition.

The undersigned would greatly appreciate it if, beset as you no doubt are by your arduous and fruitful labors for the State of —— and the nation, you could nevertheless find the time to provide whatever data may be immediately available upon which a logical and convincing argument on the negative side of the above proposition could be based. Most respectfully,

J. MARION CRADDOCK.

The old senator, out of the corner of an angry eye, furtively watched his secretary's face as the self-possessed young man glanced hastily through the letter. But the secretary, although his head was averted, felt conscious of the sidelong gaze; wherefore he was careful to efface his grin before turning to replace the letter on his chief's desk.

"Well, sir," thundered the senator, "did you ever see such an example of epistolary impudence?" He got out of his chair, and began to pace back and forth on the rug in a sort of half stride, half waddle, continuing to tousle with both hands his fine hoary hair. "This is what the United States is being brought to by these confounded cheap magazines, with their penny-a-line muckrakers!"

The secretary gazed drearily out of a window. He knew by experience that

when the fine old boy got into the full swing of his favorite harangue about the "penny-a-line muckrakers" of the "cheap magazines," nothing short of an earthquake or some other cataclysmic visitation could stop him. The thing to do was to make an effort to sidetrack the senator from the subject before he got into his full swing.

"Well, sir, it might be worse," the secretary put in appeasingly when the senator paused for breath. "This Craddock person is taking the negative side of the proposition that the Senate ought to be wiped out. Perhaps you overlooked that, senator?"

"Bosh—humbug—nonsense, sir!" the senator stormed. "What difference does it make, you young jackanapes, *what* side of the question the bumptious, addle-pated writer of this scoundrelly letter takes? I am speaking, sir, of the benighted, befooled, bedeviled condition of the national mind, due to the turbid torrents of misinformation that are being poured out month in and month out of these idiotic nincompoops of the cheap magazines that——"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, sir, that there's to be an executive session at eleven o'clock this morning, and it's a quarter of now," put in the secretary, glad to seize upon a legitimate excuse to switch the senator from his committee-room speech on the subject of the muckrakers, virtually every word of which the young man knew by heart. "I'll run off replies to this batch of mail during the executive session, and——"

"Don't you attempt to sway me from my purpose of answering *that* letter myself, sir!" broke in the aroused old gentleman, wagging a warningful finger at the young man. Arthur Laurens was not only the senator's secretary, but he was somewhat remotely "kin to" the senator, which was a convenient excuse for the old gentleman, in moments of testiness, to treat him "like one of the family." "Get out your shorthand book, sir. I'll not permit any soft-soaping, blarneyish epistle of the kind you write, sir, over my name, to go from here in reply to such an audacious, outrageous——"

"But," anxiously put in the young man, looking at his watch, "the executive session is——"

"Take this dictation, sir, and never mind the executive session!" commanded the senator, plumping into his desk chair.

"*J. Marion Craddock, Pickinsville, Jefferson County.*

"SIR: I am in receipt of your impertinent communication of the twenty-sixth instant. An individual capable of addressing a communication of that character to a member of the Senate of the United States is, in my deliberate judgment, incapable of comprehending words of advice or of admonition offered from any source. But, sir, I beg to inform you that, during a service in the national House of Representatives and in the Senate of the United States covering a period of twenty-four years, I have never before received from any constituent or pretended constituent of mine such an utterly presumptuous, arrogant, bumptious letter as the one to which I now reply. I beg further to go on record as saying that your letter denotes the possession on your part of a Scythian depth of ignorance, a Cimmerian blackness of mind, a Stygian profundity of——"

The sudden tinkling of an electric bell fastened to the committee-room wall interrupted the old gentleman just as he was getting into his swing in the search for stinging similes.

"Call for the executive session, sir," cut in the secretary, poising his pencil over the shorthand notebook.

"Never mind, sir!" sharply replied the senator. "I shall finish dictating this letter in spite of all the executive sessions from here to——"

"But, senator," the secretary again interrupted, feeling very sure of his ground, "this executive session is for the confirmation of presidential appointments, and the appointment of Bullman, that collector of customs that you're so set against, is coming up, and——"

"So it is—so it is!" exclaimed the senator, darting out of his seat, and clapping on his hat. "I wouldn't have that scoundrel of a Yankee carpet-bagger confirmed for—— Where are those papers in that Bullman case?" He stared helplessly about while his secretary—"my head and hands," as the old gentleman referred to the secretary in moments of expansion, when praising

the young man's ability to his colleagues —found the neatly arranged and docketed papers. "Reply as you like to the rest of that mail, Arthur, and I'll finish dictating *my* reply to the communication of that Pickensville oaf when the session's over. And don't you dare to forget to remind me to finish replying to it, you young scamp!"

"No, sir," replied the secretary; and the senator bustled out and over to the Senate wing of the capitol to attend the executive session.

As soon as he had gone, young Laurens heaped the letters of the forenoon mail on his typewriter desk, and, bending over the machine, began the job of replying to them as he came to them. When he reached the letter from J. Marion Craddock, of Pickensville, he leaned back in his chair, clasped his hands back of his head, and, staring at the ceiling, pondered a reply.

The letter which he finally rattled off in reply to J. Marion Craddock was a gem of epistolary courtesy. It did not bring into question the right of any constituent of Senator Leonidas J. Melthorpe to submit to him any question of general interest; and, in succinct and trenchant sentences, the requested data was supplied; about a dozen excellent reasons were given why the Senate of the United States should not be abolished. Had J. Marion Craddock been assigned to take the affirmative side of that proposition, young Mr. Laurens would have been able to present a dozen or more reasons quite as excellent, and expressed with equal brittleness and brevity, why the Senate of the United States *should* be abolished.

The secretary realized the responsibilities of his position. His fiery old chief soon would be coming up for reelection. A number of influential aspirants to the toga, all of them younger and imbued with far more modern political ideas than those of Senator Melthorpe, already were in the field. The secretary took pains in seeing to it that no letters of a sort that might be calculated to alienate the good will of constituents, no matter how obscure the latter might be, left the committee room.

The senator might dictate such letters —very frequently he did when he was engaged in his favorite pastime of disobeying the mandates of his medical man—but they never got into the mails. The secretary could attend to that part of it; so that he was willing enough that his impetuous old chief should have the satisfaction of "letting off steam" by the letter-dictating method.

Statesmen of renown have openly admitted that they owed everything to the guardianship of competent, discreet secretaries. Nobody familiar with the inner workings of the legislative machine at Washington can have failed to observe how many notable men in national affairs are screened and guarded and justifiably handled as impulsive, irresponsible, grown-up children by their shrewd, seasoned secretaries.

Young Laurens hoped that the old senator would have forgotten the Craddock letter by the time he returned from the Senate chamber, late that afternoon. It was an ill-founded hope. The senator had at the executive session succeeded in holding up the appointment of Bullman, one of his political enemies, as collector of customs of the main seaport of the State. This had inspired within him so intense a feeling of satisfaction and triumph that in partaking of his luncheon at the Senate restaurant he had been moved to celebrate. He celebrated by eating two large slabs of apple pie, with cheese, and two large cups of powerful coffee. His doctor had adjured him to avoid pie as he would poison. The senator was in an aggravated state of digestive unrest when he returned to the committee room.

"Get out your shorthand book, son," he said to his secretary, "and I'll finish dictating that letter to—what's the name of that Pickensville lout? Craddock? —to that Craddock churl."

The secretary's letter to J. Marion Craddock, signed with the senator's rubber stamp, which couldn't be distinguished from the penned signature, had been placed in the mail hours before; but young Laurens obediently got out his stenographic notebook and took

down the notes while the old gentleman swayed up and down the room and declaimed stinging, alliterative phrases. He even went through the motions of beginning to transcribe the notes on the typewriter. But the senator went home before he had finished writing out his notes, and the secretary pulled the uncompleted letter from his machine, tore it into little pieces, and tossed the fragments into a scrap basket.

About ten days later the senator chanced to reach the committee room before the arrival of his secretary in the forenoon, and himself opened the morning's mail. Young Laurens strolled in just in time to see the old gentleman's face take on a sort of purplish, apoplectic tinge. The senator was staring unbelievingly at a letter which he held out before him with both hands.

"What in the name of all the ragamuffins of Falstaff's army is the meaning of *this*?" he was rumbling to himself when the secretary walked in. "Look here, you young knave," darting a scrutinizing glance at the young man, who looked mystified, "here is another communication from that Craddock reprobate down in Pickensville."

"Is that so, sir?" inquired the secretary.

That information sounded like more trouble. He was sorry he had not reached the committee room in time to open the mail before the senator's arrival. He had been fearing that a letter of thanks would be coming along from the Caddock person, and he had meant to consign it to the wastebasket without permitting his chief to see it But he was quick to pull himself together.

"What seems to be troubling the Craddock person now, sir?" he asked.

"The Craddock swineherd, sir, seems to be dealing in sarcasm, and it isn't troubling him half so much as it is troubling *me*, sir!" broke out the old gentleman. "Not that the words of such a pulp-headed groundling have any disturbing effect upon me, sir. It is not that. Nothing whatever like that. But it is infamous, sir, that a man occupying the position that I do should be the target for the cheap, uncouth, crude sarcasm of a——" He broke off suddenly, and glanced keenly through slitted eyes into the innocent face of his secretary. "Look here, you, boy, did you mail that letter that I dictated to this malicious, malevolent, malignant individual in Pickensville?"

"Why, sir, the messenger, as you know, attends to the actual mailing of the letters," replied the secretary, striving manfully to keep within the boundaries of veracity. "Let me see what the troublesome Pickensville party has to say this time." And he took the letter from the senator, and read it. The letter, typewritten, dated, and addressed in the same style as the previous one, was as follows:

RESPECTED SIR: I beg to acknowledge, with sincere thanks and genuine appreciation, the receipt of your valued favor of the 28th ultimo, furnishing me with all needful data to enable me to take the side assigned to me at the last meeting of our local debating society.

It may interest you to know that, owing in great part to the facts thus furnished me, I was enabled to contribute no small share of the victory which the negative side won. Perhaps it will be as well for me to recall to your mind that the question under discussion was the abolition of your great and revered body, the United States Senate.

Thanking you, sir, no less for the kindness and civility of your reply to my communication than for the aid you thus rendered me in a matter in which was involved a great deal of local pride and spirit, I beg to remain, gratefully and sincerely and most respectfully yours, J. MARION CRADDOCK.

"Odd sort of a document," the secretary murmured, as if to himself, when he had finished reading the letter.

"Odd!" hoarsely exclaimed the senator. "What's odd about it? The poor, pitiful princox in Pickensville imagines that he is being sarcastic and satirical at my expense, that's all!"

"Maybe it's not that, after all, sir," said the secretary. "Perhaps your letter—it was couched in somewhat classical terms, you may remember, sir—was so far 'over his head,' as the saying is, that he didn't catch the meaning of it, and thought you really were complimenting him, or——"

"That's a very soothing and subtle deduction, young sir," interrupted the senator; "but it is ridiculous on the face of it. How about his allusion here to the 'facts' which he sarcastically says I 'furnished' him, which enabled him to win his side of the fool debate? No! The invertebrate imbecile imagines that he is ladling out sarcasm to me—*me!*—and I suppose he pictures me breaking out in a perspiration of mortification and misery under the lash of his scathing words. I'd give a quarter section of a good swampy rice land to know just who and what this Pickensville individual is. Like as not he's one of those Yankees that have been building winter homes in and around Pickensville of late years. Get out your shorthand book, son. I don't care if he's the governor of the commonwealth of Massachusetts, I'll write him a letter this time that will——"

"Don't you think it would be better, sir, first to write to somebody we know in Pickensville, inquiring who this J. Marion Craddock is? Maybe he's somebody we won't care to clash with. The election's not far off, and we don't stand any too strong down yonder in Pickensville, and you know how strong State Senator Thomas M. Craddock is with the Pickensville folks. What's the use of wasting time and letters on this unknown Craddock, anyhow, sir, until we get some kind of a line on who he is?"

The old senator had his moments for listening to advice, as well as for rejecting it.

"Oh, well, have it your way, son, have it your way, although I don't approve of such a chicken-livered way myself," he said, shaking his head. "Just write, over my name, to three or four of our own people down in Pickensville, asking them to let us know at once if they know who this J. Marion Craddock letter writer is. It certainly is odd," he went on ruminatively, "that another of these Craddocks should pop up to plague me in Pickensville, the town where that other Craddock has been amusing himself spiking my political guns for the past fifteen years or so; it certainly is."

"Well, the Craddock that we know about has been letting us alone for a long time now," said the secretary. "Haven't heard a cheep or a chirp out of him for six months."

"He'll make up for the deficiency of cheeps and chirps, as you call them, son, when the legislature meets and I come up for reëlection," replied the old senator, a little dismally. "It is going to be a closer fight for me this time than any I ever had before to retain my seat. And I'd hate to have it fall out that State Senator Thomas Middleton Craddock would have the deciding vote. If it should happen that way, I'd be bidding good-by to my seat at the end of this session. And I've always hoped to die in my Senate harness. I'd hate to give it up after so many years." He paused, and his old eyes grew reflective. "So many years," he said again after a while, as if to himself.

The secretary stole out of the committee room. He felt sorry for his old chief. And he knew even better than did the senator how very close a thing it was going to be for the honest, gallant old gentleman—a Southerner of the old régime—to retain his seat when, a month or so hence, he would come up for reëlection by the legislature of his State.

In due course, replies were received from friends of the senator in Pickensville to whom inquiries had been addressed as to the identity of J. Marion Craddock. None of them knew anything about any individual so named. One of them, a very old friend and familiar of the senator's, added this bit of information:

But the Honorable T. Middleton Craddock—to adopt J. Marion Craddock's stylish way of splitting up a perfectly good name—still abides with us. Probably it is superfluous for me to tell you this: He is not saying much about politics of late months. It has been a long time now since he has risen to remark that what this State needs is a pair of young, up-to-date, "progressive"—whatever that means—men to represent us in the Senate of the United States. Maybe he is relenting. What was it that caused the old breach between you and the Honorable T. Craddock, anyhow? None of us

down here ever understood it. We never figured that the difference between you two really amounted to anything—that it reached down to the fundamentals, as it were. Some of us who are keenly concerned about your reëlection have been wondering if that difference couldn't be patched up. Craddock, as you know, is pretty strong with the party, and grows stronger; he doesn't want the United States senatorship himself, and those of us who have had business and political dealings with him have always found that he is amenable to reason. Why not think this over, Leonidas? I suggest it now because several dependable polls of the legislature have been made by those of us interested in your chances for reëlection. I don't want to say just how close a thing you are going to have of it, according to these reliable polls. But I do say, if the matter is at all adjustable, that it would be a pretty desirable thing for you to patch it up with State Senator Thomas Middleton Craddock. You won't need to bother about the mysterious J. Marion Craddock—who, as I say, nobody here has ever heard of—if you can manage to come to an understanding with *the* Craddock, of Pickensville.

The old senator, who still was engaged in defying the dicta of his doctor, and taking keen gustatory delight in partaking of all of the forbidden articles of diet, rumbled wrathfully when he read this friendly letter. He was compelled to acknowledge that his Pickensville friend and partisan, the writer of the letter, meant well, but——

"What! Trim and twitter and titivate," he exploded, "to win the favor and good will of Tom Craddock! I'd see myself——"

He did not finish saying how or where he'd see himself first, for just then a snub-nosed, pink-cheeked Senate page entered the committee room with a message for the senator, and the old gentleman never uttered strong language in the presence of the young.

But the secretary had a very good working idea of where the old gentleman meant that he would see himself before he took the initiative in patching up his old political disagreement with the Honorable Thomas Middleton Craddock, of Pickensville, Jefferson County.

The secretary, with the offhandedness and nonanalytical cocksureness of youth, felt certain that his chief, political sage though he might be, was all wrong in this matter. He was too wise to say so. But as the date for the convening of the State legislature drew nearer and nearer, young Laurens became more and more possessed by the naïve idea that the Honorable Leonidas J. Melthorpe, United States senator, who had been a national figure in the councils of his party many years before the secretary was born, stood in urgent need of political guidance; and the secretary concluded that he might as well do the guiding as anybody else.

When Congress adjourned there remained but three weeks before the convening of the legislature of the senator's State. Young Laurens left Washington with the senator for the latter's little home town. After remaining at the senator's home for two or three days, cleaning up odds and ends of correspondence overlooked during the final days of the Senate's session, the secretary brought his bag down with him when he appeared for breakfast one morning with the senator's family.

"Where are you going, son?" the old gentleman asked him, looking up from his newspaper.

"Just going to move around the State some, sir, to see how things look," replied the secretary.

"Are you coming back before the legislature convenes?" the senator inquired of the young man.

"I reckon not, sir," replied the secretary. "But I'll meet you at the capital on that day."

"Well, go ahead and enjoy yourself, boy," said the old gentleman. "But look here, Arthur, and remember what I'm telling you: No electioneering for me, understand?" He stiffened a bit as he went on quietly: "I don't want anybody attached to me to do any electioneering for me. If I can't be reëlected to the Senate on my record I don't want to be reëlected at all. And I want you to say this for me, son, to all of our people whom you may meet while you are away. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied the young man, with a perfectly straight face; and he bade the senator and the senator's family good-by and took his departure.

Young Laurens went direct to Pickensville, Jefferson County.

Almost immediately after convening, the legislature went into joint session for the election of a United States senator. At once, after the taking of the first ballot, it was found that the legislature was deadlocked as to its choice for a successor to the Honorable Leonidas J. Melthorpe. The latter, a candidate to succeed himself, was tied with Honorable Edward S. Chatham, a wealthy and decidedly assertive "young banker of forty-eight, and a child in politics," as the partisans of the older candidate somewhat contemptuously pronounced him, who lived in pomp in the metropolis of the State, and who had allied himself with the rapidly growing progressive faction in the State's politics. The other aspirants to the senatorial toga had been eliminated before the legislature convened.

After a recess a second ballot was taken. The vote remained a tie. Then, amid intense excitement, the Honorable Thomas Middleton Craddock, the well-known and influential State senator from Jefferson County, arose to make a statement. Those who were watching him observed that before beginning to speak he glanced up at the gallery used by members of the families of the legislators, and nodded smilingly.

A profound hush fell upon the floor, and in the galleries as well, when the senator from Jefferson County, addressing the chair, announced that he desired to change his vote. On both ballots, he said, he had voted for the Honorable Edward S. Chatham. Now, for reasons in no way reflecting upon that gentleman, whom he held in the highest political consideration and esteem, but for reasons altogether personal and private, but none the less well considered because they were private and personal, he desired that his vote be recorded for the Honorable Leonidas J. Melthorpe.

The sensation was tremendous. Pandemonium broke loose. The deadlock, which it had been thought might last for weeks, was broken. Amid the wild cheering of the Melthorpe phalanx on the floor, all of them members of the older wing of the party, the chair announced that the Honorable Leonidas J. Melthorpe had been elected to succeed himself as the State's senior member of the Senate of the United States. The floor leader of the Chatham forces made the usual motion that the election be made unanimous, and the motion was carried with a whoop.

The old senator, his snowy hair very much tousled, was pacing the parlor of his hotel suite at the State capital. He was quite alone. All of his friends and followers were at the capitol building to participate in or watch the balloting.

The old gentleman looked nervous and careworn. He had served his State well and faithfully for more than thirty years. He was what is known as "a poor man in politics." No "agent of the predatory interests" had ever dared during his long service in both branches of Congress to "make a proposition" to him. He was an old man. He had hoped to "die in the Senate harness."

It had been a tense, anxious day for him. Word of the immediate deadlocking of the legislature had been telephoned to him by several of his supporters. All of them had expressed the fear that the deadlock would be a protracted one.

There was a sharp, businesslike tapping on the parlor door of the suite.

"Come in!" called out the senator.

Young Laurens, smiling very broadly, stepped into the room. The old gentleman's anxious expression vanished instantly. He loved the lad, and had missed him sorely during the three weeks of his absence from his side.

"Well, you rascally truant, sir!" he broke out, gripping both of the young man's hands in his own. "Where have you been, and what have you been doing all this time? Answer me, sir, at once! I surely was thinking of having a police alarm sent out for you."

"I'm just now straight from the capitol, sir," replied the young man, visibly controlling his excitement. "Have you heard, sir?"

"Heard what? That they're dead-

locked over there, and liable to be for weeks to come? Yes, son, I've heard that."

"Why, you're reëlected, sir!" broke out the young man in a tone hoarsened by excitement.

"Sho', boy, stop yo' nonsense!" exclaimed the senator, who always relapsed into his agreeable Southern way of speaking when wrought up.

"Elected not five minutes ago, sir—I raced over here in an automobile—and by the changed vote of Thomas Middleton Craddock, sir!" fairly shouted the young man.

The old senator stared mystifiedly at him, then plumped into a chair and stared at him again.

"I don't want you to come running here to me with such wild, impossible stories as that, son," he said, in a muffled tone. "You mustn't do it, boy. It isn't right. I am not feeling in a mood for jests to-day, sir!"

Just then the telephone bell rang. The senator bounded out of his chair and took down the receiver. For about two minutes his share of the talk with his partisan over at the capitol building consisted in saying: "Sho', sir, you don't mean it!" and "Impossible, sir! Tom Craddock changing his vote for me? Out of the question, sir!" and so on. But when he hung up the receiver and turned to his secretary his face wore a smile, even though the smile was a puzzled one.

"Well, of all humanly impossible things, who'd ever have imagined that the day would come when Tom Craddock would give me his vote?" the old gentleman murmured to himself as he sat down again.

"I thought that there was a chance that he might do it, sir," said young Laurens quietly.

"*You* did!" exclaimed the senator. "How, sir, could you ever entertain such a——" He did not finish the sentence. He was too much stirred and mystified by all that had passed, and was passing, to be capable for the moment of cohesive speech.

"By the way, sir," said the young man then, as if suddenly remembering something, "do you recall those letters addressed to you in Washington a month or so ago by a J. Marion Craddock, of Pickensville, Jefferson County? The letters annoyed you, sir, if you remember."

"Yes," replied the old gentleman, gazing fixedly into the eyes of his secretary, "I recall those letters of the J. Marion Craddock person. Have you found out that there *is* such a person, and, if so, what in the world has he got to do with——"

"Yes, sir, I've found out that there *is* such a person as J. Marion Craddock," replied the young man, obviously making an immense effort to hold his excitement in check. "Not only that, sir, but she is outside your door at this moment, waiting for me to bring her in and introduce her to you. And I'm right smart keen that you should know and like her, senator, because she is going to be my wife!"

By this time the old senator's face was a study. He strove to open his lips, but he was manifestly incapable of framing words. Perceiving which, the young man went to the door, opened it, said "Come in Julia; I reckon the senator is ready to listen to an explanation now," and ushered into the room as ravishingly pretty a dimpled, smiling, dark-eyed daughter of the South as ever blushed her way through a momentarily embarrassing situation.

"Permit me, Miss Craddock, to present to you my respected chief, Senator Melthorpe," said young Laurens, ceremonious, but smiling. "Senator, permit me the honor, sir, of introducing to you my wife-to-be, Miss Julia Marion Craddock—J. Marion Craddock, as you have known her epistolarily, sir—the daughter of the Honorable Thomas Middleton Craddock, of Pickensville, Jefferson County."

Whatever explaining remained to be gone through was contributed by the Honorable Thomas Middleton Craddock himself when he arrived, a few minutes later, to complete the reconciliation which his vote, changed at the demand of his imperious but smiling daughter, had forecasted.

A Chat With You

FOR some time now, we have, for the most part, forborne to talk much of the stories in the magazine in these pages which we always reserve for our chat. We don't know which you prefer, a little talk on some topic of general interest, or some detailed information about the next issue. We always talk as the spirit moves us, speaking of the thing uppermost in our thoughts at the time. We think this is the best way between friends. We feel also that the last few issues of THE POPULAR spoke for themselves, and we know that the next issue, out in two weeks, needs no advertisement to attract attention to it as a collection of wonderful fiction. At the same time we are so much interested in it that we want to say a word or two about it now.

IN the first place we think it absolutely the best number of THE POPULAR we ever sent to press. Continuous improvement is not always possible. We know that we have hung up some high marks in certain numbers in the past, but this time we sincerely believe that we have broken the record again. We've hung up a new mark, set up a new standard. Of course you are the final judge, but we know already what the verdict will be. When a man runs a hundred yards in anything much under ten seconds, he doesn't need a stop watch to tell him that he's been going some. We've been doing our harvesting a little early this year, and you are going to get a bumper crop in the October month-end number, out on all news stands two weeks from to-day.

IT opens with a complete dollar-and-a-half length novel, by Roy Norton, called "Arroyo Jones." You remember the "Willow Creek" stories, "The Cross of Gold," and a number of other fine things of Norton's. No one writing in America to-day has a greater sympathy and sureness in describing the human nature of men and women of the frontier, no one is better able to make us laugh, and sorrow, and live with his characters. When we say that "Arroyo Jones" is the best story he has ever written, it is not a perfunctory statement. We mean it. It is the biggest thing he has ever done, and the best, a romance of the mining camp and outdoors, a blend of realism and idealism, whimsical humor, stirring action, and appealing human nature. If you don't grow to love "old man Beebe," whom you will meet in its pages, your heart is not in the right place. The story is long enough and certainly of sufficient strength and holding power to make a splendid serial. We suppose it might be more shrewd and economical to string it out a little. Stories like that don't come often. But you are going to get it all in one installment, and if we are not very much mistaken, a great many will read it through at a single sitting. It would be a simple matter to get a literary hack to string together sixty or eighty thousand words of narrative and

print it in one issue and tell you that we were selling a dollar-and-a-half book for fifteen cents. To put a novel like "Arroyo Jones" in a single issue of any magazine is something of an achievement. You get in it more than a dollar and a half's worth of quality, as well as the quantity. We know of few recent books as well worth reading.

THE next item on the October month-end table of contents is the first section of a three-part story, "The Far Cry," by Henry Milner Rideout. Rideout is a graduate of Harvard who has traveled all the quarters of the globe and written about them for the last ten years. The first thing of his we ever noticed was a book consisting of three short stories, which we read about six years ago. Since then he has written two or three novels of adventure, "Dragon's Blood" and "The Siamese Cat" among them. Rideout is an artist who works in words instead of pigments. He works slowly. A book of his is something of an event, but it is worth the waiting. He has an instinct for the one best way of saying a thing. He knows, too, what to leave out. It has grown to be a habit with some when they find a writer of adventure stories who has real distinction, accuracy, and charm to compare him at once with the late Robert Louis Stevenson. So many have been compared with R. L. S., and so few have deserved to sit beside him! And yet, reading Rideout's "The Far Cry" it is hard to resist the temptation. It is a story of the South Seas, filled with a strange glamour and enchantment, with an exotic vividness of color and a magical stir of swift adventure. In it you will find struggle and high endeavor, tragedy and pathos, a new company of gallant people, a new wonderland of adventure. It is worth reading and reading again.

IN the way of short stories we have to offer you in the next number "Curly of the Range," one of the best Western stories Emerson Hough has ever written. We know of no one who catches the rough humor and intelligence of the real cow-puncher as well as Emerson Hough. "Curly" is no stagy, poster cowboy, he is a real man. He is more than a character in fiction. He is a guide, philosopher, and friend. You will hear more about him in later issues. James B. Connolly contributes to the same number the best story he has written in years. Connolly is the man whom Roosevelt put in the navy for a season, because he could describe those in the navy better than any one else. He has done in some measure for the American navy what Kipling did for the British army. "Killorin Swears Off," which you will read in two weeks, is the story of an able seaman and a ship that was nearly lost. You'll find the reading of it something of an event.

THEN there is Daniel Steele's short story, "The Monster of Middleditch," which is so strange and baffling a mystery as to put it in a class by itself. There is Van Loan's baseball story, "Oh, Genevieve!" ther is a war story of today, "The Crossbuck," by Donal Hamilton Haines, there is another tale of the Southwest, by George Pattullo, there are stories by Oppenheim, Jacques Futrelle, Clarence Cullen, and Charles R. Barnes. These are only a few of the things in the best issue yet. Be sure to get it and to tell your friends about it.

MAN'S STRUGGLE FOR EFFICIENCY

INTERESTING METHODS HE IS USING TO MAKE AND KEEP HIM ENERGETIC AND CAPABLE

BY WALTER GRIFFITH

Perhaps the most interesting phase of the present-day struggle to realize our ambitions in whatever direction they may lie, and one indeed on which it were well for everyone to be informed, is the different methods adopted by Americans, both men and women, to keep themselves physically fit to stand the strain of keeping constantly up to "concert pitch."

They are not by any means always adopted until Nature has cried quits and the subject is struggling to recover his efficiency, but whenever employed they are well worthy a study and ofttimes ludicrous to the looker-on, though perhaps not to the performer.

If you were to arise at six o'clock some fine morning and visit Central Park and Riverside Drive, New York, you would be amused by viewing, among a number of others, some stout gentleman who looks very dignified after nine A. M.; now, however, he is on a horse (part of the time), or even running on foot, and looks hot, uncomfortable and funny. This is a consistent practice at the present time of many New York business men, as well as those of other cities.

In convenient proximity to several large cities there are Health Institutions that could perhaps be aptly called "Training Institutions." Those who visit there are placed in the hands of a veritable "Trainer" who runs them, rides them, trots them, exercises them, and supervises their diet. They are under strict discipline which does not always set well, but accomplishes what they are there for—puts them in good physical condition.

There are many gymnasiums and physical culture schools located in convenient places in the large cities where an opportune hour a day is taken in giving the body its much-needed exercise.

Osteopathic Treatment might be termed, in a way, "exercise without effort," or, better still, "involuntary exercise," for certainly the manipulation exercises the subject though not of his own volition.

Many and diverse kinds of massages, Swedish, German, etc., combined Diet and Exercise, Sour and Sterilized Milk Treatments, Raw Wheat, Fruit and Nut Diets, etc., are being liberally patronized to the end that men and women, under our present mode of living (which is hardly natural) may maintain or even increase their capacity for strenuous effort with its attendant reward.

All of these methods have their advantages—some undoubtedly greater than others—I am not competent to choose.

But mark this:

Every one of them that is effective, has for its primary purpose and ultimate result the elimination of waste from the system.

This can not help being the fact, for the initial cause of probably 90 per cent. of man's inefficiency is the inability of the system, under our present mode of living, to throw off the waste which it accumulates.

The result is a partial clogging of the colon (large intestine) which is the direct cause of sluggish livers, biliousness, slight or severe headaches—and with these, or any one of them, comes inability to work, think or perform up to our usual standard.

That eminent scientist, Professor Metchnikoff, states unqualifiedly that the poison generated in the colon is the chief cause of our comparatively premature old age.

Now if these exercises or diets were entirely successful in eliminating this waste from the colon, they would be, with their strengthening and upbuilding properties, wonderfully resultful—but they do not and can not.

One might as well chop a tree down from the top or try to pump a lake dry by starting at one of the brooks that feed it.

When you are ill, and a physician is called, the first thing he does is to purge the system—why—first, because the waste has to be disposed of before any medicine will take effect—second, because if there was no waste, you probably would not have been ill at all.

Also remember that healthy blood will destroy almost any germ that is known to science, but unhealthy or contaminated blood welcomes them with open arms and says, "Come and feed and multiply."

Our blood can not be healthy unless our colons are kept pure and clean; the blood is constantly circulating through the colon and will immediately take up by absorption the poisons of the waste which it contains, distributing it throughout the entire system.

That's the reason that biliousness and its kindred complaints make us ill "all over." It is also the reason that if this waste is permitted to remain a little too long the destructive germs, which are always present in the blood, gain the upper hand and we become not only inefficient, but really ill—seriously sometimes if there is a weak spot.

This accumulated waste is the direct, immediate, specific cause of appendicitis, for instance.

Now the first help that we have been calling to our aid when this waste becomes unbearable, or lays us out, is Drugs. These have some effect, but there are a few vital reasons why they should not and need not be used.

Drugs are violent in their action and convulse and sap the vitality of other functions before they reach the colon. The colon is the last spot they reach, therefore it is impossible for them to clean it thoroughly—and last, but not least, the using of Drugs for this purpose must be persisted in—making one a slave to them and constantly weakening parts of the body that should not be touched at all.

So great an authority as Prof. Alonzo Clark, M.D., of the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons, says: "All of our curative agents are poisons and as a consequence every dose diminishes the patient's vitality."

No, none of these are necessary or effective for the specific purpose of defeating this greatest of all foes to man's efficiency, for Nature herself has provided a means which, if applied in the proper way, will, without any evil effect or inconvenience whatever, keep the colon sweet, pure, clean, and healthy.

That "Nature Way" is Internal Bathing with warm water properly applied; but it must be properly applied to be effective.

It would perhaps be interesting to note the opinions of a Physician, an Osteopath and a Physical Culturist on this subject:

"The results that I have had from the use of the Internal Bath in my own family are marvelous." Geo. H. Davis, M.D., Springfield, Mass.

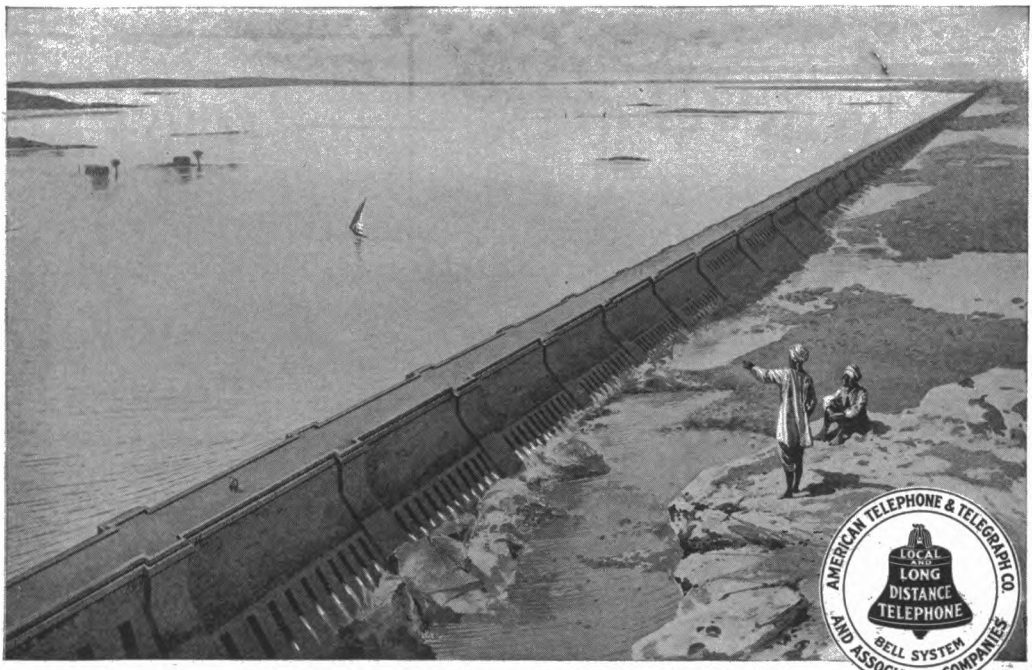
"I have two Internal Baths, one for myself and one for a patient. I am an Osteopath and find in connection with my work that it does wonders." G. L. Bowdy, D.O., Denver, Colo.

"I find the Internal Bath of immense benefit to me. I look upon it as an absolute necessity to the attainment of perfect physical development, and think every person, especially those engaged in physical culture, ought to use it." Anthony Barker, Professor of Physical Culture, New York.

A New York physician of many years' practical experience and observance of the colon and its influence on the general health, has made a special study of Internal Bathing, and has written an interesting and exhaustive book on the subject called, "Why Man of To-day Is Only 50% Efficient."

This he will send without cost or other obligation to anyone addressing, Charles A. Tyrrell, M.D., 134 West Sixty-fifth Street, New York City, and mentioning that he read this in *Popular Magazine*.

It is surprising how little the great majority of people know about this particular part of their make-up; and inasmuch as it plays so important a part in the general health and the maintaining of 100 per cent. of efficiency, it seems as though every one should at least enlighten himself by reading this little treatise on the subject, by one who has made it his life's study and work.



Assuan Dam, part of the Nile system, one of the greatest engineering projects of its kind.

The Nile System—The Bell System

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Primitive makeshifts have been superseded by intelligent engineering methods. Success has been the result of a comprehensive plan and a definite policy, dealing with the problem as a whole and adapting the Nile to the needs of all the people.

To provide efficient telephone service in this country, the same fundamental principle has to be recognized. The entire country must be considered within the scope of one system, intelligently guided by one policy.

It is the aim of the Bell System to afford universal service in the interest of all the people and amply sufficient for their business and social needs.

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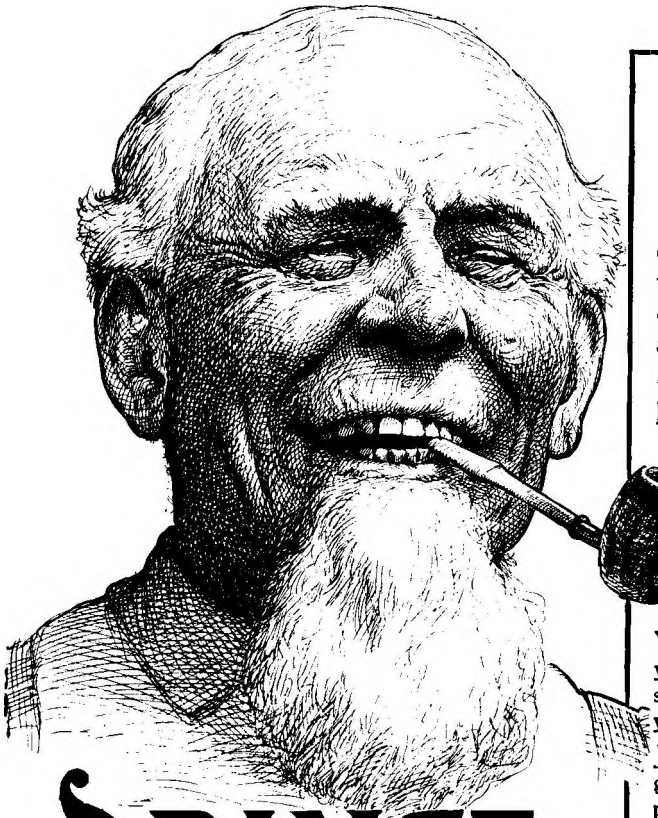
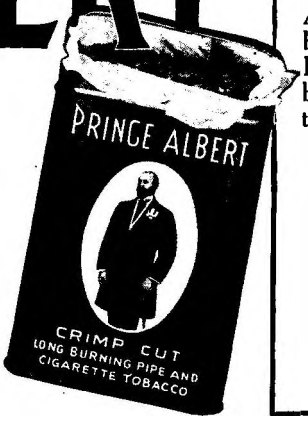


PRINCE ALBERT

the national joy smoke



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Oh, stop a-wishing about it! Go to it!

And listen, P. A. makes the best cigarette you ever rolled. Fresh, sweet, delicious — as bully good as in a pipe! And that's trotting *some!*

Buy Prince Albert everywhere —St. Paul, New York, Tampa, Winnipeg, Seattle, Five Corners, Kankakee—it's just the same glorious smoke. In 5c toppy red bags; 10c tidy red tins; handsome pound and half-pound humidors.

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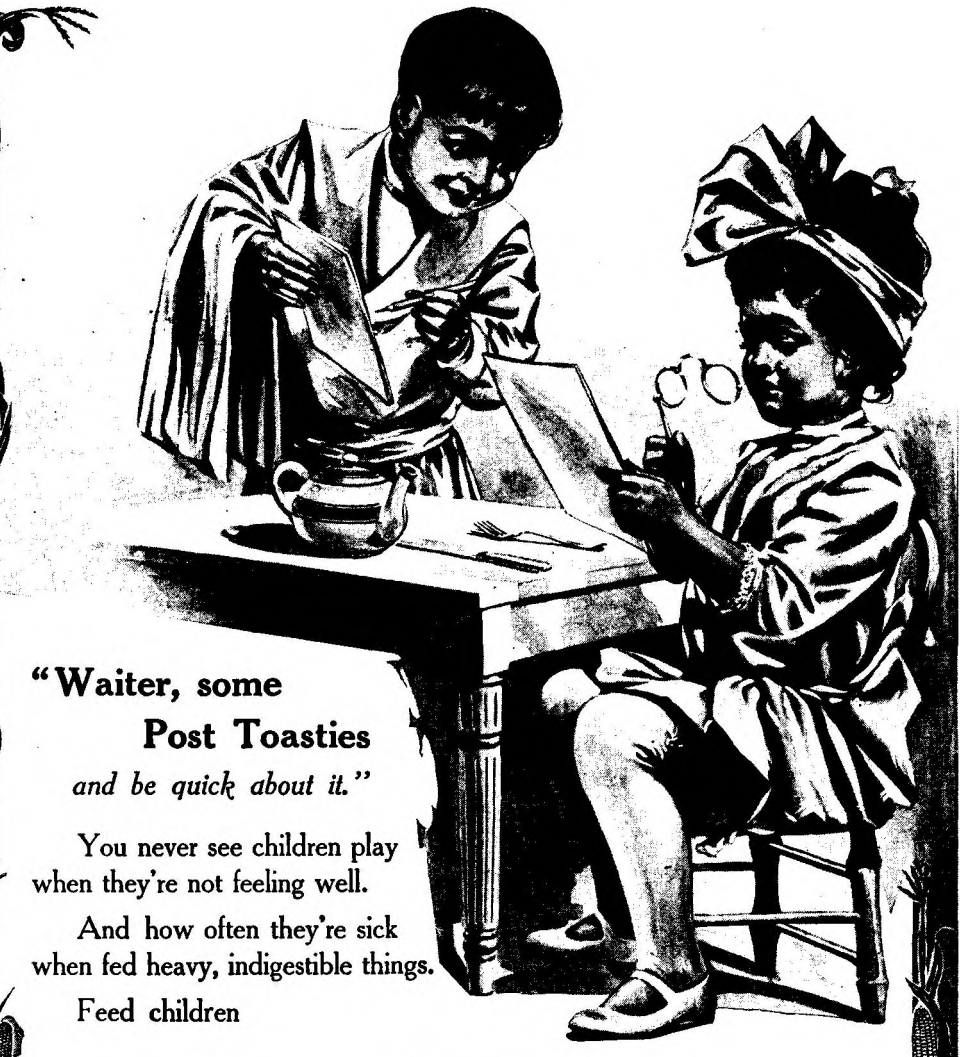
Pipeology

Here's a popular pipe—a corncob fitted with a wooden stem and a bone mouth bit. It's just a little niftier than the ordinary corncob, but costs no more. It imparts the same satisfaction to the smoker.



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And how often they're sick when fed heavy, indigestible things.

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Then note how much they feel like playing.

They'll eat Post Toasties, the crisp, delicately browned, sweet bits of corn, three times a day—if you let 'em—for

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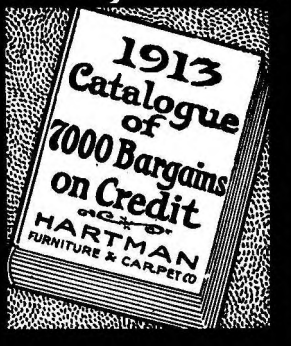

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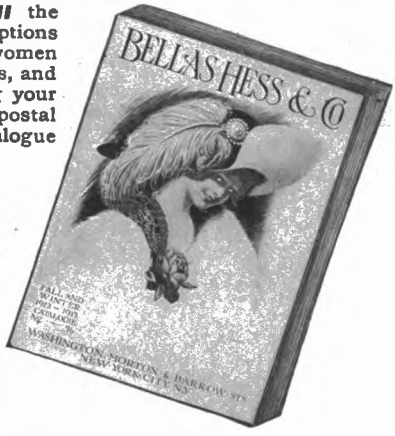

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The Dress can be furnished in sizes 32 to 44 bust measure, skirt length 40 inches; also to fit small or short waisted women, 32 to 38 bust measure, skirt length 38 inches. The skirts are finished with deep basted hem to permit adjustment of length at home if necessary.

1R115—Stunning New Paris Model Tailor Made Suit, of fine all-wool two-toned Diagonal Cheviot; semi-fitted coat is cut on the very newest lines, made with the new style back showing a slight fulness gathered at the waist line where there is a velvet piping and two velvet and braid covered buttons. Coat has a rounded cutaway front and fastens with silk braid loops and five velvet and braid covered buttons. The long graceful draped rever effects in front are a feature of this beautiful model, giving an added touch of style, and are exceptionally becoming. The collar is of plain velvet finished on front edges with velvet piping embellished with silk braid ornaments. The cuffs are of velvet trimmed with braid to match collar. Coat is 32 inches long and is lined throughout with Belding's guaranteed satin. The pretty graceful girdle top skirt is made with double stitched box-plait panel in the back, closing is concealed under left side of panel, and in the front there is a stitched fold effect extending from the waist line to below the hips, and from there running diagonally around to the right side seam. Skirt also shows three deep side plaits as pictured. Colors: navy blue and black, brown and black, gray and black or a rich wine and black two-toned effect, with velvet collar to match. See note above about sizes. **Price, all mail or express charges paid by us..... $15.00**

35R116—This Beautiful Robespierre Dress is made of a fine quality Satin Charmeuse, a new and popular material for Fall and Winter. It is a pure silk, similar in appearance to Duchesse satin and noted for its splendid wearing qualities. It is without doubt the most beautiful silk fabric yet produced by the high art silk weavers of the world. Blouse is perfectly plain in the back and is finished with a yoke effect in front, formed by a deep tuck. The dress fastens invisibly with hooks and eyes in front, and is trimmed down entire length as pictured with velvet covered buttons. Dress has the new Robespierre standing collar lined with white messaline and trimmed with tiny black velvet covered buttons. The little jabot effect in front is of cream color shadow lace. Collar may be worn as pictured or the bones may be removed and it may be worn flat in sailor effect if preferred. Long set-in sleeves with ruffles of shadow lace. The skirt is a plain gored model with a plait down the front and a triple box-plait effect in back which is stitched to a little above the knee, and from there to the bottom falls in graceful fulness. The crushed girdle and the Directoire sash at the side are of self material. Body of waist is lined. Dress comes in black, navy blue, brown or taupe (mouse grav). See note above for sizes. **Special price, mail or express charges paid by us..... $12.98**

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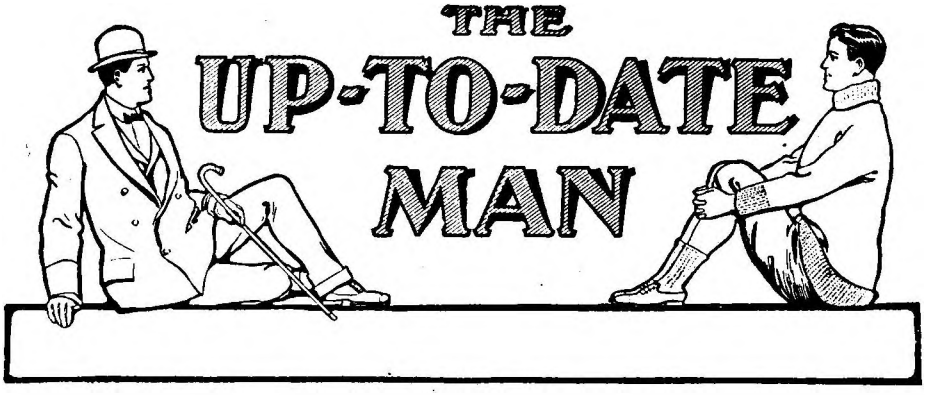


The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress. Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

AUTUMN fashions have crystallized into definiteness. The sack coat has the high waist, and English tendencies still govern. The unpadded, close-clipped shoulders, the unstiffened chest, guiltless of haircloth, and the soft-roll lapels that "melt away" when the jacket is unbuttoned and thrown back continue to denote the well-cut garment. The art, knack, trick, or whatever you choose to call it, of cutting the fashionable lounge jacket is to have it all ripples and curves that dissolve into the figure. It should show no trace of the pressing iron. The back of the jacket curves into the back of the wearer, and then curves out again, with a shade of fullness—not too much—at the skirt.

The Frenchy, flattish-brimmed "toppers" with conical-shaped crowns are hats to look at or to laugh at, according to who wears them. There's no "in-between."

Extreme hats of this type—decidedly a foreign type—are very becoming to some and very unbecoming to others. It all depends on the man.

It isn't everybody who can be an "ultraist" in dress. Height, poise, "air," and cast of features count mightily in suiting the mode to the man.

Just now there is a mild furor for Continental fashions, English and French, and many unthinking persons are prone to rush headlong into eccentricities that haven't the saving salt of becomingness.

Overshadowing mere fashion is becomingness to the individual. That supersedes everything. The type of man you are must determine the type of clothes you wear. Otherwise fashion is foppery.

Golf is a game that cannot sunder itself from its Scottish ancestry. It was "born with a bur," and no matter where played it is redolent of the "Land o' the Leal."

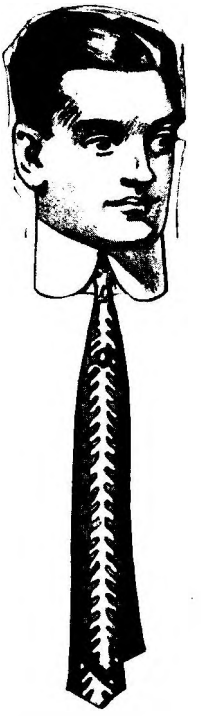
New Style Autumn Overcoat.

While our own golfing dress has been Americanized, having shed knickers and wool stockings, there is fitness as well as picturesqueness in the wearing of things that smack of the game's pedigree.

The tam-o'-shanter is a "smart" cap that is being revived for the links. It is quaint, appropriate, and becoming to both youngsters and young oldsters.

In England royalty, peers, and men of fashion are very partial to the tam-o-shanter for golfing. It has a rough-and-rugged look that chimes capitally with the spirit of the sport.

Besides, the tam-o'-shanter is an easy cap to



New Autumn Collar and Scarf.

keep on in the wind, because it fits snugly to the head. Moreover, it is the only cap that may be brilliantly colored—scarlet, green, and the like. Indeed, the more vivid the color, the better it looks.

Silk hose are not well suited to golf, tennis, or any of the summer sports which necessitate much running or heavy hitting. This exercise causes perspiration, and silk is not absorbent. Moreover it slips in the shoe.

Instead of silk hose, the seasoned sportsman wears wool hose. Wool is absorbent, as well as easier on the feet, giving them a firmer brace within the shoe. White is the best color, because it contains no dye to rub off on the skin as it perspires.

English sportsmen believe that the sock is as important to dress as the shoes, and do not wear silk hose on the links or at the nets. American sportsmen fall in with this view.

Golf shoes, either tan or buckskin, are "smarter" without the toe cap than with the "punched" or indented cap usually seen. The sole has rubber disks to keep it from sliding.

Something of the knightly air of the bygone cavalier hovers around the Inverness evening coat. It is worn more on the Continent than here, because Europeans are idealists by tradition and temperament, whereas Americans are in all things, even dress, intensely practical.

We are prone to regard the Inverness as too "fussy"; we like a coat to fit trimly; we have a distaste for garments that swirl up and flutter. Yet the Inverness is by long odds the most dis-

tinguished-looking coat of all for the evening.

Visiting foreigners are reviving the vanished vogue of the Inverness. One sees more of the cape coat about the lobbies of the theaters. Americans are discovering that it has an "air," and that it is uncommonly becoming to tallish slender men who know how to wear their clothes.

The Inverness usually consists of a four-button coat that reaches below the knee and a three-button cape that covers the pockets of the undercoat. The coat is skeleton lined, and the cape is lined with satin or wool.

Cape coats are cut in both light and heavy stuffs, and, of course, are always black. Worn with the inevitable silk hat, white gloves, and patent boots, they lend a courtly charm and an Old-world grace to evening dress.

Black ebony sticks with gold tops only befit evening dress, and should never be carried with afternoon or morning clothes. This decree is inflexible.

With sack suits the only hitherto collar tolerated was the double-fold shape. The "wing," however, is winning a place in informal dress.

While many fashionables go pinless, simply because the scarfpin has been done to death by "the crowd," there is no objection to a pin, not too large, set with a genuine stone. Single pearls are always high caste, though diamonds should be used for embellishment only.

Despite the fact that the fur-lined greatcoat has been cheapened even down to the "ten, twent', thirt' " level, it is still one of the most distinguished of evening coats. It breathes luxury; it has "an air"; it gives evening dress the final flick of elegance.

The coat is usually made of black broadcloth or kersey, lined with mink, muskrat, or marmot, and has the familiar Persian lamb collar. It is cut with fashionable amplitude, and with no attempt at fit, as this coat depends for its "aspect aristocratic" wholly upon a sort of flowing drape.

BEAUNASH.

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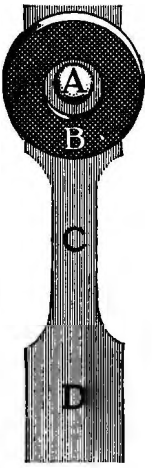
Can be Ended in Two Days

Your oldest corn—pared and doctored since you can remember—can be forever removed in this simple way.



Apply a little Blue-jay plaster. It is done in a jiffy, and the pain stops instantly.

Then that wonderful wax—the B & B wax—gently undermines the corn. In two days it loosens and comes out. No pain, no soreness, no inconvenience. You simply forget the corn.

A million corns a month are removed in that way.

And they never come back. New corns may come if you continue tight shoes, but the old ones are gone completely.

All this is due to a chemist's invention, which everyone should know.

A in the picture is the soft B & B wax. It loosens the corn.
B protects the corn, stopping the pain at once.
C wraps around the toe. It is narrowed to be comfortable.
D is rubber adhesive to fasten the plaster on.

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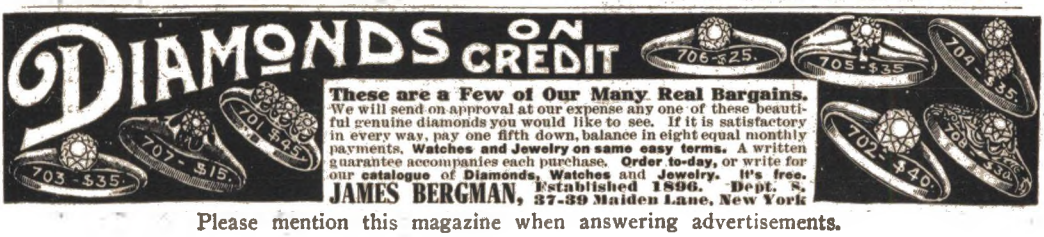

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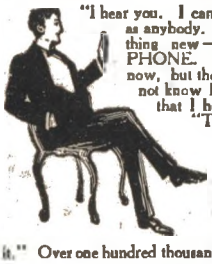

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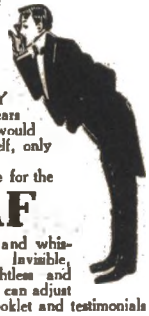

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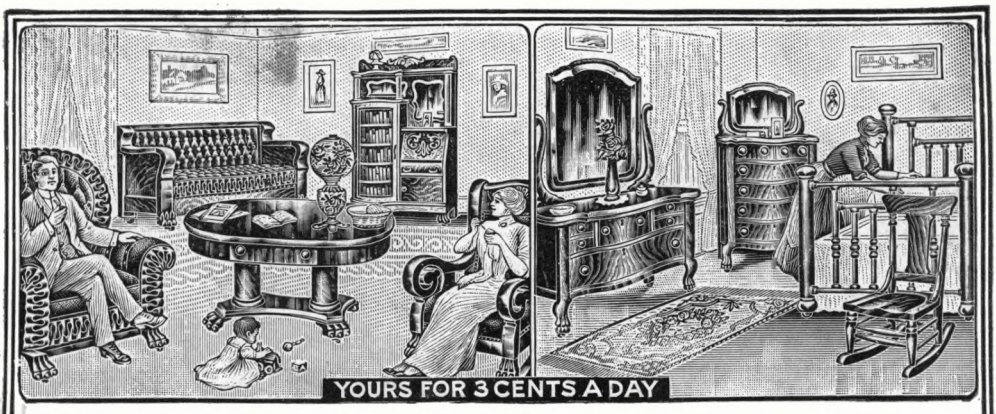

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