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No. 3 Vol. 27 TWICE-A-MONTH 15 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

FEBRUARY MONTH-END EDITION
OUT- JAN. 23, 1913

PAINTING BY W. HERBERT DUNTON

Each a Lucky Car

By R. E. Olds, Designer

In every make an occasional buyer gets a lucky car.

No repairs, no breaks, no troubles. Every part stands every strain.

In Reo the Fifth such things are not luck. I spend $200 per car to insure them. And this is how I do it:

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I know, in the first place, after 26 years spent in building cars, how much strength is needed.

To that needed strength I add 50 per cent. Each driving part, by actual test, is made ample for 45-horsepower. That leaves a big margin of safety.

To make sure of this strength I twice analyze every lot of steel.

I test my gears in a crushing machine of 50 tons' capacity.

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I use a $75 magneto to save ignition troubles.

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And nothing is ever hurried. Our output is limited to 50 cars daily, so no man is ever rushed.

These things are expensive. They add to the necessary cost of this car about $200, I figure.

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So we save by factory efficiency, by building only one model, by making all our own parts. And we put that saving, for your sake, into these hidden parts.

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Reo the Fifth has a center control which you won't go without when you see it.

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There are high-priced cars built with equal care. That's why they cost so much.

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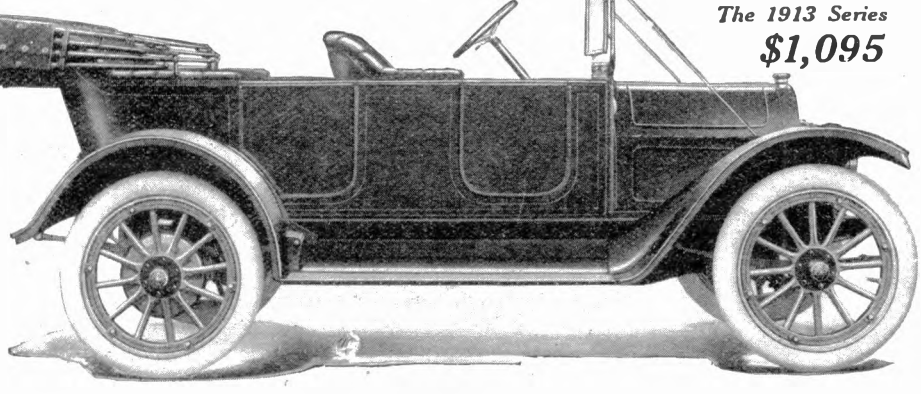

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MONTH-END EDITION

VOLUME XXVII NUMBER 3

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS

FEBRUARY 15, 1913

Twice-a-Month Publication Issued by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York.
ORMOND G. SMITH and GEORGE C. SMITH, Proprietors.

Entered at New York Post Office as Second-class Matter, under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.
Canadian Subscription, $3.72. Foreign, $4.68.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION $3.00 SINGLE COPIES 15 Cents

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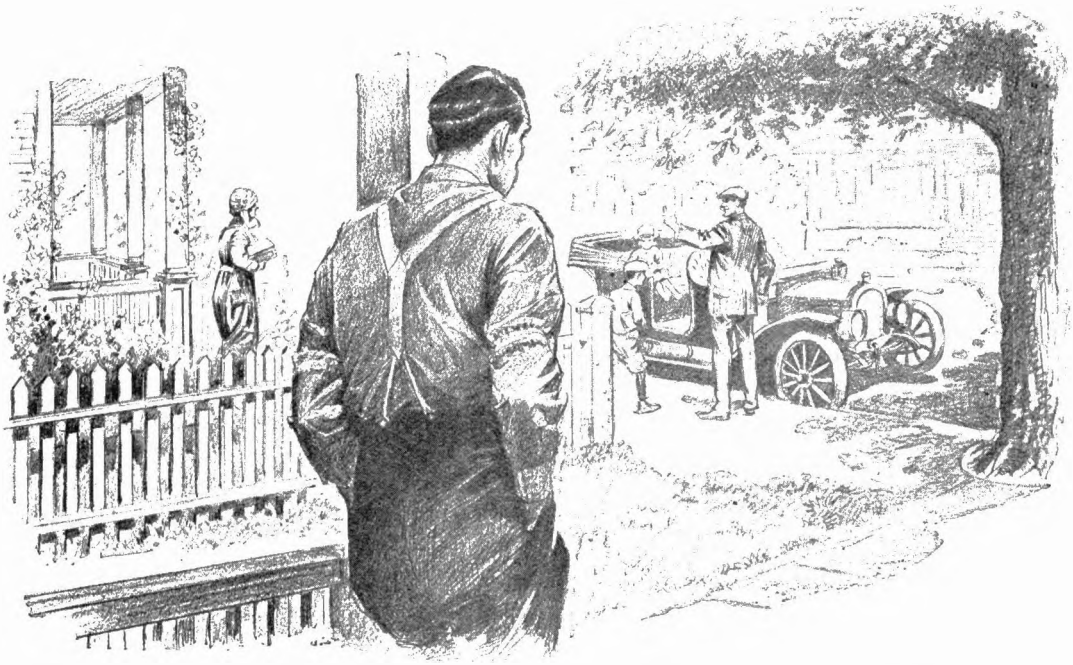

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXVII. FEBRUARY 15, 1913. No. 3.

The Branded Man

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Quest of the Golden Table," "The Guests of Captain O'Shea," Etc.

We cannot think of any story by Ralph D. Paine that opens more alluringly than this. He has caught the spirit of Longfellow's "Discoverer of the North Cape":

"I plowed the land with horses,
But my heart was ill at ease;
For the old seafaring men
Came to me now and then
With their sagas of the seas."

It is Captain Mike O'Shea who comes with his saga of the sea to his old shipmate who has turned his back on the hazardous life of the mariner and settled down to the peaceful task of tilling the soil. But Captain O'Shea's saga was as nothing compared with the coming of the Branded Man whose story was the prelude to a voyage across the oceans and desperate deeds in the Celestial kingdom.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

THE SAILOR-FARMER.

An elderly man of ample girth was plying a hoe in a very neat and tidy vegetable garden. His battered, good-natured visage reflected pleasure in the task and contentment with existence. Blue overalls were hitched to his shoulders by a pair of straps. A lock of gray hair poked itself through a hole in his ragged straw hat. His shirt sleeves were rolled up to display a pair of ponderous, sunburned arms, upon which were tattooed an anchor and a pink-eyed mermaid. Ever and anon this bucolic person turned his attention to a boy who was weeding the onion bed on his hands and knees, and thundered admonitions at him in a voice that carried across the pasture and startled the grazing cows.

The youth thus bombarded showed no signs of terror. In fact, he grinned quite amiably, as if hardened to threats of being skinned alive or triced up by the thumbs. Obviously he considered his employer's bark worse than his bite. At length the latter leaned on his hoe to remark with heated candor:

"Say, Bub, those weeds grow faster than you pull 'em up. Is there anything slower than you in this part of the country?"

The boy turned from watching a woodchuck meander toward its hole,

and promptly answered, with a touch of pride:

"It runs in the family, Mr. Kent. My pa is the slowest man in the village, an' my granddad was slower than he be—so ma says. Us Perkinses is all slower'n molasses in January."

"Well, if I could find another boy, I'd lift you off this farm by the slack of your pants," snorted Johnny Kent. "You make me peevish in spots, and I aim to be the happiest man on earth."

"You can't find another boy," was the unruffled reply. "They're all off hayin'. Say, Mr. Kent, it's a great day to go fishin'. An' this garden is jes' full of fat, juicy angleworms."

"Dog-gone it, Bub! I'll have to go you!" cried the elderly gardener, with smiling animation. "You dig the bait, and we'll start right after dinner."

He forsook the vegetables, and moved at a leisurely gait in the direction of a small white cottage with green blinds, in front of which blazed a gorgeous profusion of hollyhocks. At the porch he halted, to drop into a canvas hammock, the ropes of which were spliced sailorwise, and sought his ease for a few minutes while he fondly contemplated his landed possessions. The green fields, rolling and pleasantly diversified by patches of woodland, were framed by ancient stone walls. In the foreground loomed the capacious barn, flanked by the henhouse and woodshed. To the right of the cottage extended an apple orchard, whose gnarled trees were heavy laden with fruit.

It was here that Johnny Kent had cast anchor, in the haven of his dreams, and he roundly swore that the sea should know him no more. He was done with nursing crippled engines and hammering drunken stokers. The hazards of his calling were for younger men. A stroke of good fortune during his last voyage with Captain Michael O'Shea had given him the cash in hand to pay for the longed-for "farm in the grand old State o' Maine," and a surplus to stow in the bank.

"Here I am!" he said to himself as he swung his legs in the hammock. "And it's too blamed good to be true—honest, it is. Fightin' potato bugs is all the excitement I pine for, and when the red cow lets go with her hind foot and capsizes me and the pail and the milkin' stool it's positively thrilling. No watches to stand, and nothing to pester me, barrin' that lazy, tow-headed Perkins boy. And I'm going fishin' with him this afternoon just to show myself how independent I am of skippers and owners and charters and such foolishness."

With this the retired chief engineer entered the cottage and passed into the kitchen. The floors had been scrubbed white with sand and holystone. The brass doorknobs and andirons were polished like gold. The woodwork glistened with speckless white paint. What furniture there was consisted of solid, old-fashioned pieces such as Windsor chairs, a highboy, a claw-footed table or two, and a desk of bird's-eye maple. No bric-a-brac cluttered them. Habit had schooled this nautical housekeeper to dispense with loose stuff which might go adrift in a heavy seaway.

Kicking himself out of his overalls, he tied a white apron about his waist, and bent his attention to the kitchen stove. The green peas were boiling merrily, and the potatoes were almost baked, and it was time to fry the bacon and eggs. He cooked his own dinner with as hearty good will as he had hoed the garden. It was all part of the game which he enjoyed with such boyish zest.

Stepping to the back door, he blew a blast on a tin horn to summon the Perkins boy. That lazy urchin sped out of the onion bed as if he had wings, and Johnny Kent was moved to comment:

"Be careful, Bub, or your family'll disown you. You came bowlin' along to your vittles as if you were actually alive. Right after dinner you wash the dishes and scour them tins, and if you leave a spot on 'em no bigger than a flea's whisker I'll nail your hide to the barn door. Then we'll hitch up the mare and jog along to East Pond with our fish poles."

"Folks in town think it kind o' queer you don't hire a woman to keep house,"

said the Perkins offspring as he took the washbasin down from its hook.

"You can tell 'em, with my compliments, that they're a gabby lot of gossips, and ought to have stoppers put on their jaw tackle," returned Johnny Kent, with surprising heat and a perceptible blush. "I can look after myself without any advice from the village."

Young Perkins snickered, and thought it wise to change the subject. When they sat down to table the host was in the best of humor as he declaimed with tremendous gusto:

"Did you ever taste such peas? Raised 'em myself. Cooked in cream from my own cow. Early Rose potatoes from my own garden. Eggs from my own hens. They lay 'em every day."

"Hens have to lay or bust this time o' year," prosaically replied the youth. "An' peas is peas."

"Romance was plumb left out of your system," sighed the mariner. "All the years I was wandering over the high seas seem tame and monotonous alongside this."

Before the meal was ended there came an interruption. Johnny Kent dropped knife and fork and suspiciously sniffed the breeze which blew through the open windows. "Bub" Perkins likewise showed uneasy symptoms, and cocked his freckled snub nose to sniff the air. It was a tableau evidently of some importance. Presently they both arose without a word and hastened out of doors to scan the peaceful landscape far and near.

"I smelled wood smoke, sure as guns," said Johnny Kent.

"So did I. I bet a cooky it's another fire," excitedly cried young Perkins. "I can't see anything, can you?"

"Not yet. The woods have been afire seven times in the last week, and it ain't accidental, Bub. The buildings will begin to go next. My farm has been spared so far."

The boy was climbing into an apple tree, from which perch he was able to gaze over the hill beyond the pasture. He could see a hazy cloud of smoke drifting among the pine growth of a neighboring farm, and in the undergrowth glowed little spurts of flame like crimson ribbons. The fire had gained small headway as yet, but unless speedily checked it might sweep destructively over a large area.

"No fishing trip to-day," sorrowfully muttered Johnny Kent. "Pick up the shovels and hoes and some empty grain sacks, Bub, while I put the mare in the buggy. It's a case of all hands turnin' out again."

The call of duty had never found the stout-hearted mariner indifferent, and a few minutes later he was driving down the country road under forced draft, the vehicle bounding over rocks and ruts, and the Perkins boy hanging on with both hands. Already the alarm had spread, and farmers were leaving their mowing machines and hayracks in the fields to hurry in the direction of the burning woodland. Wagons loaded with men came rattling out from the village. Two or three of the recent fires, so mysteriously frequent, had done much damage, and the neighborhood was alert to respond.

Experience had taught the volunteer force how to operate. They dashed into the woodland and fought the fire at close range. Some wetted sacks in a near-by brook and beat out the flying embers and the blazing grass. Others shoveled sand and earth upon the creeping skirmish line of the conflagration. The most agile climbed the trees, which were just beginning to catch, and chopped off the flaming, sizzling branches. They toiled like heroes, regardless of the wilting heat and blinding, choking smoke.

Johnny Kent was not a man to spare himself, and he raged in the forefront of the embattled farmers, exerting himself prodigiously, shouting orders, taking command as a matter of habit. The others obeyed him, being afraid to do anything else, although they knew more about fighting forest fires than he. The stout, elderly marine engineer had grown unaccustomed to such violent endeavor, and he puffed and grunted hugely, and ran rivers of perspiration.

So promptly had the neighbors mustered that the flames were conquered before they could jump into the thickest part of the woodland and swirl through the tops of the pines. Leaving a patrol to search the undergrowth in search of stray sparks, the farmers withdrew from the blackened area, and gathered together to listen to the excited story of a young man armed with a shotgun.

"This ain't the first fire that's been set on my farm," said he. "My pasture was touched off in three places last Saturday night, but a heavy shower of rain came along and put it out. Next mornin', just before day, my cornerib was burned to the ground. Since then I've been lookin' around in the woods whenever I could spare the time——"

"It's spitework, or there's a lunatic firebug roamin' the country," put in the first selectman of the village.

"The spite ain't aimed at me in particular," resumed the young man with the gun. "Mark Wilson's wood lot has been set, and the Widow Morgan's back field, and nobody knows where it will happen next. As I was about to say, when I fust seen the smoke this afternoon I was on the other side of the young growth, and I put for it as hard as I could. And I saw a man sneakin' away from the fire. I threw up my gun to give him a dose of buckshot, but he dodged among the trees, and was over the hill and down in the hollow before you could say Jack Robinson. I ain't very speedy since I was throwed out of the dingle cart and broke my leg, and the strange man got away from me"

"He's the crittur that's been settin' all the fires," exclaimed the first selectman. "What in thunder did he look like, Harry? Give me a description, and I'll call a special meeting of the board to-night, and we'll offer a reward—mebbe as much as twenty dollars."

"I can't say exactly. He was six feet tall—or five, anyhow—and sandy complected, though he might have been dark, and he had on brown clothes, but I ain't quite sure about the color. Anyhow, he's the man we've got to ketch before we can sleep easy in our beds."

Johnny Kent was too weary to take much interest in a man hunt, even with the magnificent largess of twenty dollars in prospect. Summoning the Perkins boy, who was heaving rocks at a small turtle on the bank of the brook, he clambered heavily into the buggy, and turned the mare toward the road. The afternoon had been spoiled, and the worthy mariner was in a disgruntled mood. A serpent had entered his Eden. Likely enough the scoundrel who was starting conflagrations all over the landscape would soon give his attention to the beloved farm with the white cottage and the very neat and tidy vegetable garden.

The owner thereof ambled to the porch with the gait of one utterly exhausted, and dumped himself into the nearest chair. His face was well blackened with smoke and soot. His raiment had been torn to rags by the thickets through which he had so gallantly plunged. He looked like an uncommonly large scarecrow in the last stages of disrepair. Moreover, his eyes were reddened and smarted acutely; he had a stitch in his side, and his stomach ached.

While he reposed in this state of ruin, his legs sticking out straight in front of him, there came briskly walking through his front gateway a ruddy, well-knit figure of a man, young in years, whose well-fitting suit of blue serge became him jauntily. Halting to survey the trimly ordered flower beds and vine-covered portico, he ceased whistling a snatch of a sea chantey, and nodded approvingly. Following the path to the side of the cottage, he beheld the disreputable person seated in a state of collapse upon the porch. Instead of expressing courteous sympathy, the visitor put his hands on his hips and laughed uproariously.

Stung by this rude levity, Johnny Kent heaved himself to his feet, and hurled the chair at the head of the heartless young man, who dodged it nimbly, ducked the swing of a fist big enough to land him in the middle of

next week, if not farther, and shoved the engineer into the canvas hammock, where he floundered helplessly and sputtered:

"Howdy, Cap'n Mike! It's a low-down Irish trick to laugh at a man that's all wore out and tore up the way I am."

Captain Michael O'Shea, shipmaster, strove to check his unseemly mirth, and thumped his old comrade affectionately as he explained:

"So this is the happy, simple life that ye cracked on about for years! You look it, Johnny! Was it an explosion that wrecked you, or have ye been cleaning boilers? And is every day like this on the dear old homestead?"

"Not by a darn sight! I had to take a turn of extra duty. I'm the happiest man in the world, Cap'n Mike. And I'm tickled to death to clap eyes on you. Wait till I wash up and change my clothes."

"Sure, I'll wait, Johnny. 'Tis a visit I have come to pay. You are sensitive about the terrible condition I find ye in, so I will say no more. But if I was surveying you for Lloyd's I would mark you down as a total loss. And how are the pigs and chickens?"

The portly farmer brightened instantly, and wheeled in the door to exclaim:

"You just ought to see 'em! Now, how did I get along at sea all those years without 'em? Can you tell me that?"

"'Twas the lack of them that made ye so thin and melancholy," said O'Shea, with a grin. "Clean yourself up and fill the old pipe with the wicked brand of cut plug that ye misname tobacco, and we will sit down and talk it over."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n Mike! And there's some bottles of beer in the ice box in the woodshed. It's just abaft the galley. Help yourself."

The shipmaster enjoyed exploring the cottage while his host repaired damages, and presently reappeared in a white duck uniform, gilt buttons and all, which he had worn as chief engineer of the big English cargo steamer, *Tarlington*, on a voyage to the South Atlantic.

"There, now, you look more like a man and less like a fat coal heaver that has blown all his wages for rum," said Captain O'Shea. "And will you rummage in the lockers for a bite to eat? The train that fetched me had difficulty in finding this cute little town of yours. I mistrust 'twas not on the chart at all, and we wandered for hours and hours looking for it, and stopping to take soundings at ten million way stations. Where is the cook?"

"I'm the whole crew," replied Johnny Kent as he convoyed his guest into the kitchen. "You see, Cap'n Mike, I found it wouldn't do to have a woman workin' for me. All the old maids and widows in the township seemed anxious to get the berth. But a solid man like me, with money in the bank, has to be careful. Confound it! They pestered me. I don't want to talk about it."

Until sunset the comrades yarned and laughed, sprawling in the shade of an apple tree, or ambling, arm in arm, over the farm. Then the mariner had his chores to do, which consisted mostly in bullying the Perkins boy, while O'Shea chuckled to think of the tempestuous scenes in which he had beheld Johnny Kent play the dominant part. The shipmaster had a purpose up his sleeve, but he had artfully delayed disclosing it until he could discover how firmly the engineer was anchored to his pastoral existence.

After supper, which O'Shea helped prepare with the handiness of a sailor, they walked slowly to and fro in the garden, falling into step by force of habit, for thus they had passed many an hour on bridge and deck beneath the stars of many seas. The tranquillity of the place, the sense of comfort and repose soothed the restless temper of O'Shea, and turned his mind to thoughts of a home and fireside of his own. But he was well aware that this mood would pass.

"'Tis sad I am that I cannot tarry long with you and your intelligent pigs

and hens, Johnny," said he; "but I have a bit of business in hand."

"What is it? Does it look good to you, Cap'n Mike?" demanded the other. "We've been so busy livin' our fights and frolics all over again that I haven't had a chance to hurl questions at you. Why don't you stay ashore and take it easy for a while? You've got money—plenty of it. Blow it like a gentleman."

"And what would be the fun of that? I have a charter in mind. Would ye like to hear of it?"

The contented farmer cocked his head alertly, and stood in his tracks. The light in his eye was not inspired by his neat rows of beets, carrots, and cabbages. O'Shea perceived that he was curious, and hastened to add in the most winning accents:

"'Tis the kind of a game you used to like, Johnny. I have looked over the steamer, and she would please you. Politics are stewing in the Persian Gulf, and intrigues are as thick as huckleberries. The British and the Russians have locked horns again, do ye mind, and the poor, deluded Persians will be prodded into a revolution, and divil a bit of good it will do them. When the smoke clears the two benevolent powers will try to beat each other to the plunder. Just now they are maneuverin' for position."

"Pshaw! Cap'n Mike, haven't you recovered from them delusions about the Persian Gulf?" growled the engineer.

"'Tis no dream, Johnny. I have met a man in New York. He came from Europe to find me. The proposition is copper-riveted. I take the steamer, and load her with arms and munitions in a Mediterranean port, and deliver them to certain parties somewheres the other side of Aden. The British gunboats are patrolling the gulf to put a crimp in this industry, so there will be a run for me money."

Johnny Kent was silent while he meditated and listened to the whisper of temptation. Then a pig grunted in his straw litter, a chicken chirped drowsily on its perch, and the breeze rustled among the luxuriant pole beans and tomatoes. And O'Shea had come to coax him away from this enchanted place. He would hear what the blarneying rascal had to say, and convince him of his folly. The shipmaster liked not the stolid silence of his companion. He knew it of old for a stubbornness that nothing could budge. However, he went on with the argument:

"I need an engineer, Johnny. And will ye not take one more fling with me? You are an old rover, and this messing about a farm will not content you for long. 'Tis no place for a bold man that knows his trade. Wait a bit, and come back here when ye have seen the green seas tumbling over the bows once more, and felt the swing of a good ship under you, and heard the trade winds singing in your ears, and watched the strange faces in ports that are new to ye."

"I've heard you talk before, Cap'n Mike, and your tongue never gets hung on a dead center," was the deliberate reply. "You'll have to dish up something more attractive than the blisterin' Persian Gulf to drag me from my moorings. Do I act restless?"

"About as much so as that old barn yonder," admitted the other.

"See here, Cap'n Mike, the farm next to mine can be bought cheap. It cuts a hundred tons of hay, and pastures forty head of stock. I meant to write you about it soon. Why don't you buy it and settle down alongside me?"

"You are the hopeless old barnacle!" laughed O'Shea. "'Tis plain that I waste me words. If my seductive persuasions have missed fire entirely I must bid ye farewell in the morning and lay a course back to New York."

"I wish I could hold you longer," sighed Johnny Kent. "The Grange picnic comes right after hayin', and there's other excitements to keep you busy."

"And this is the talk I hear from a man that used to enjoy risking his neck between the divil and the deep sea! Maybe you can offer me the mad intoxication of a husking bee?"

"They're out of season just now," seriously returned the agriculturist.

"Well, we will not quarrel, Johnny. I have taken notice that it made you fretty to ask why ye were so mussed up and dirty when I strolled in this afternoon. Have you cooled off by now, and do you mind explaining yourself? You were an awful sight, and I was near moved to tears."

"You laughed at me like a darned hyena," grumbled Johnny. "It wa'n't friendly, Cap'n Mike. I'd been fightin' a fire till I was wrecked fore and aft. And for all I know we may have to turn out again to-night and fight another one."

"Then I will stand watch and watch with you, and keep lookout. And why have ye turned prophet? Can you predict them same as you read the weather signs?"

"Pretty near," dolefully answered Johnny Kent. "Some miserable scoundrel has been settin' the woods afire to burn us all out. He was sighted to-day, but the lunkhead that caught him in the act wasn't quick enough to shoot him. Settin' fires in a dry season like this is as bad as murder."

O'Shea had found something to interest him. There might be a spice of adventure in this drowsy region. And his friend seemed so genuinely worried that he was eager to help him. With a thrill of gratitude, he recalled a certain night off a tropic coast when Johnny Kent had led the gang that descended into a blazing hold and saved a ship from being blown to atoms.

"Maybe my business in New York can wait a day or so longer," said he. "'Tis unmannerly of me to leave you accumulating more white hairs in that frosty old thatch of yours."

"You'd sooner hunt trouble than a square meal," gratefully exclaimed Johnny. "I ain't as spry on my feet as I was, and my wind is short, or I'd go after this firebug and scupper him by myself. I haven't felt real worried over it till to-day, but he's worked nearer and nearer my place, and I'm blamed if I can set up all night watchin' for him."

"'Tis a tired man I know you are to-night, so I will tuck ye in, and then I will wander a bit, and keep an eye lifted. It would please me to run afoul of this unpleasant gentleman with the bonfire habit."

"The fires have been coming in couples, Cap'n Mike. If there's one the daytime it's a good bet that another one will break loose the next night."

He yawned, and confessed, with an air of apology:

"I'm tuckered, and no mistake. Suppose I turn in now, and you rouse me out at eight bells of the first watch."

"Right enough! Where's your old pair of night glasses, and have ye a gun? If I find the disturber I may want to bend it over his head. I would sooner catch him than kill him."

"It ain't a mite hospitable to treat you this way, Cap'n Mike."

"Pooh, man! You do me a favor. 'Twould reconcile me to buying the next farm if there was a chance of a ruction now and then."

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY OF THE PYROMANIAC.

An hour later Captain Michael O'Shea was climbing the long, easy slope of the barn roof. One end of it supported a water tank built upon a platform of stout timbers. Here the enterprising lookout found room to sit and scrutinize the surrounding woods and fields. The sky was starlit, but the darkness had a duskier, more impenetrable quality than a clear night at sea. O'Shea's keen vision, accustomed to sweep large and lonely horizons, was rather baffled; but the powerful glasses enabled him to distinguish the vague outlines of the woodland and meadow and pasture boundaries.

In a blithe humor, he smiled at the odd situation in which he found himself. Good old Johnny Kent had actually achieved a farm, and here was his commander perched on top of the barn like a weathercock, and enjoying it forsooth. His nimble wits had framed the most effective strategy possible. It would be futile to go blunder-

ing through the woods on a blind trail. From his elevated station he could see the first spark of fire to glow in any direction. The incendiary would linger to make sure that the fire had fairly caught, and O'Shea hoped to catch him unawares and overpower him.

The silent hours wore on, and drew near to midnight, when he had promised to arouse Johnny Kent. Nothing suspicious had been descried. A whip-poorwill sounded its call with such breathless, unflagging persistence that the sentinel amused himself with counting the sweet, monotonous notes, and concluded that a vast deal of energy was going to waste.

"That bird is overengined for its tonnage," he reflected. "Well, I have stood me watch in worse places than this. 'Tis a shame to turn poor old Johnny out of his bunk. I will stay up here a while, and listen to the long-winded bird, and enjoy the pleasure of me own company."

His back against the water tank, he could not walk to ward off the drowsiness that was borne on the wings of the soft night wind, all laden with the smells of trees and earth and hay fields. His vigilance relaxed, and his thoughts drifted away to other climes and places.

He came out of his reverie with a sudden start, convinced that he had been caught napping, for his eyes had failed to detect anything moving in the direction of the barn. But he could hear some one groping about close to the side of the building. A stick snapped, the bushes rustled, and there were other sounds very small, yet significant. Captain Michael O'Shea gingerly forsook the little platform, and began to slide down the roof, fairly digging his fingers and toes into the shingles with the tenacity of a cat.

The overhanging eaves made it difficult to observe what was going on below. In order to peep over the edge of the roof, the shipmaster was compelled to sprawl upon his stomach, with his heels higher than his head, and with no purchase by which to maintain his grip. It was a wide-angled old roof, or he would have tobogganed off into space before his laborious descent carried him as far as the eaves. However, in his trade a man who could not hang on by his eyelids was a lubber of a sailor, and the bold O'Shea wriggled into position an inch at a time.

The mysterious noises might have been made by Johnny Kent prowling in search of him; but O'Shea was afraid to call out lest he might frighten away the object of his vigil. His trousers catching on a nail and holding him fast for a moment, he ceased his precarious exertions long enough to listen. This time his ear caught the crackle of crumpling paper, and a succession of sharper noises as if some one were breaking dry wood over his knee. He smelled the unmistakable odor of kerosene. Almost directly beneath him, and not more than a dozen feet distant, an attempt was well under way to set fire to Johnny Kent's barn.

With more speed and less caution, O'Shea managed to poke his head over the edge of the roof, intending to get his bearings before launching the attack. He found himself directly above a shadowy figure, which flitted to the woodpile and back again with quick, furtive movements. Captain O'Shea had never found himself in a more embarrassing situation. He disliked the idea of letting go and diving headfirst, which was the quickest method of coming to close quarters. And even if he should try to turn about and launch himself right end to, he was likely to hit the earth with the deuce and all of a thump, and perhaps break his leg on a stick of cordwood. The ladder by which he had climbed to the roof was on the other side of the building, and he had no time to scramble in search of it.

While he hesitated the man beneath him scratched a match. Startled and flurried at sight of this imminent danger, O'Shea let his grip loosen for an instant, and the law of gravity solved the problem for him. With a blood-curdling yell, he slid over the brink, his fingers clawing wildly at the shingles and the wooden gutter. Head downward he plunged, and by rights

should have broken his neck. His own theory to explain his survival was that an Irishman always lights on his feet. The fact was that the incendiary stranger happened to be in a stooping posture, and O'Shea's hard head smote him squarely between the shoulders.

The impact was terrific. Both men rolled over and over like shot rabbits. There followed an interval during which the one took no thought of hostilities, and the other had no interest in flight. O'Shea sat up at length, grunted once or twice, and rubbed his head in a dazed manner. The pile of kindling had been scattered, but a fragment of newspaper was burning, and he brought his heel down on it. His quarry now began to realize that his back was not broken, and showed signs of life. The pair of them sat glaring at each other, speechless, endeavoring to regain the wind that had been knocked out of them.

As tough as sole leather was Captain O'Shea, and not to be put out of commission by so trifling a mishap as this. His head was spinning like a top, and he felt sick and weak, but he had a job on hand, and he meant to finish it. The revolver was missing from his pocket. It had been dislodged by his tumble, and it was useless to grope for it in the darkness. By now the other man had found his feet, and was moving unsteadily toward the end of the barn. O'Shea made for him, and they clinched in a clump of burdocks.

Neither was in the best of condition to make a Homeric combat of it. To O'Shea's dismay, he discovered that he had caught a tartar as collision proof as himself. He tried to grip the fellow by the throat, and to throw him with a heave and a twist, but a pair of arms as muscular as his own flailed him in the face and hammered his ribs. Then the brawny young shipmaster let fly with his fists, and broke his knuckles against a jaw which seemed to be made of oak.

"If the both of us was shipshape we could make a grand fight of it," panted O'Shea, with the shadow of a grin. "'Tis no time for etiquette, and I will stretch him before he does the same for me."

"Wait till I set my teeth in you!" growled his adversary, finding his speech for the first time. "I'll tear your windpipe out!" And he followed the horrid threat with a string of oaths that chilled O'Shea's blood, although he had heard profanity over all the Seven Seas. The accents were so hoarse and savage as to be even more alarming than the words. The shipmaster ceased to regard the fight in the light of a diversion. He was convinced that he had a madman to deal with. Keeping clear, he turned and made for the woodpile, a few yards distant. Groping for a moment, he was fortunate enough to catch up a four-foot length of hickory sapling, as handy a bludgeon as he could desire.

As if at bay, the other man made no effort to escape during this respite, but lunged after O'Shea, who wheeled in the nick of time, and found room to swing his hickory club. It rose and fell only once. The madman toppled over and collapsed among the burdocks.

"He will stay there for a while," said the weary O'Shea. "I caught him fair over the ear, and 'tis a safe bet that I put a dent in him."

Thereupon he turned his lagging footsteps in the direction of the cottage. A lantern came bobbing out of the woodshed door, and its light revealed the large presence of Johnny Kent, simply clad in a flowing nightshirt and a pair of slippers. At discerning O'Shea advancing through the gloom, he shouted:

"Why didn't you wake me up at eight bells? I just come to, and turned out to look for you, Cap'n Mike. All quiet, I suppose?"

"Yes. I made it quiet, you sleepy old terrapin," returned O'Shea, with a laugh, before they had come together. "Didn't you hear me yell when I fell off the barn roof?"

"Nary a yell. I do sleep sounder than when I was at sea." And Johnny Kent waddled nearer, and held the lantern higher. "Gracious saints! What have you been doin' to yourself? Your

nose is all bloodied up, and one eye is bunged. What do you mean by falling off my barn roof? You must have tapped that barrel of hard cider in the cellar."

"I tapped a harder customer than that, Johnny. It was a gorgeous shindy while it lasted, but I had to wind it up. I caught your firebug, and I laid him out in the barnyard. You can hold a wake over him, or send for the police."

The engineer swung his lantern in excited circles as he pranced toward the barn, unmindful of the chilly breeze that played about his bare shanks.

"You're not jokin', are you, Cap'n Mike? The situation is too blame serious for that. You landed him—honest? You're the man to turn the trick. Where did you ketch him?"

"I got the drop on him, as ye might say, and it was a divil of a drop. My neck is an inch shorter than it was, but me collision bulkhead held fast. He is a broth of a boy, and he will be hard to hold when he comes out of the trance I put him in."

"And I missed the fun," mourned Johnny. "I'm surely getting old, Cap'n Mike. But I guess we can handle him without sending for the village constable to-night.

"I have seen you tame some pretty tough tarriers. This is a bad one, and no mistake. Fetch the lantern closer, and we will look him over."

They plowed through the burdocks, the prickly burs causing Johnny Kent to stride high and wide. The stranger lay as he had fallen. The light revealed him as a powerfully built man of middle age, with reddish hair and a stubbled growth of beard. The dilapidated shirt and trousers were stained with earth and grass, and held together by a leather belt. His captors were about to scrutinize him more closely when he opened his eyes, groaned, and raised himself upon his elbow with an unexpected display of vitality. Bidding Johnny Kent stand by with the lantern, O'Shea caught up the hickory club, and flourished it as a hint that unconditional surrender was advisable.

The prisoner blinked stupidly at the lantern, and made no effort to rise. His aspect was not in the least ferocious. O'Shea could scarcely believe that this was the madman who had threatened to sink his teeth in him and discommode his windpipe. Rough-featured he was, and unkempt beyond words, but he conveyed a most incongruous impression of kindly and harmless simplicity, and O'Shea was the more amazed to hear him mutter in his hoarse, curiously thickened accents:

"Can you spare a chew of tobacco, shipmate?"

"Well, I'll be scuppered!" exclaimed Johnny Kent, absently feeling for his trousers pockets, which were not there. "You certainly did tame him a whole lot, Cap'n Mike."

"'Tis a riddle I cannot fathom at all," was the reply.

Indignation got the upper hand of the engineer's generous impulse, and he explosively demanded:

"What do you mean by tryin' to set fire to my barn, you addle-headed, misbegotten, murderous son of a sea-cook? I wish Cap'n Mike had knocked the block clean off you."

The queer stranger showed no resentment, but smiled in an amiable sort of fashion, and rubbed a large, red welt just above his right ear. Never a word did he say, although the twain plied him with questions. His demeanor was as friendly as if they had done him some signal service.

"If you can't talk, maybe ye can walk," gustily shouted O'Shea. "We will clap you under hatches for to-night, and investigate you by daylight. We have caught an odd fish this time, Johnny."

"Prod him into the woodshed and lock him up," grumbled the other. "He's plumb twistified in his mental works, and I can't make head or tail of him."

At a beckoning gesture, the prisoner meekly tried to get on his feet, but he had been shorn of his strength, and fell twice before O'Shea and Johnny Kent grasped him by the arms and steered him in the path that led to the cottage. He stumbled along like a

drunken man, and had to be half dragged over the low step at the woodshed door. Calling himself a softhearted old fool, the engineer bustled into the house, and dragged forth a spare mattress. O'Shea obtained a lamp in the kitchen, also cold water, and a towel to bathe the hurt that his hickory weapon had inflicted.

The red-haired man sat forlornly upon the mattress, leaning against the coal bin, his hands clasped over his knees. He had the dumb, wistful look of a beaten dog, and his eyes, remarkably blue of color, followed Captain O'Shea with no ill will, but like one who recognized his master. It was clear enough that he was to be dealt with as a man with a disordered mind, and it was unmanly to hold him accountable for his arson and violence. Attacked unawares in the darkness, there had been provocation for his bestial outbreak, and it was to be concluded that his usual mood was harmless, excepting a fatal fondness for playing with fire.

"I have a strong notion that he is a seafaring man," said O'Shea as he gave the captive a stiff drink of whisky from the bottle kept in the hall cupboard. "Maybe this will buck him up and set his tongue going. That's a sailor's belt he has on, Johnny. And he has the look of it."

The engineer had put his spectacles on his nose, and was examining the litter of small objects which he had fished out of the man's pockets. One of them was like a leather thong thickened in the middle, and he cried excitedly:

"You're right, Cap'n Mike! Here's a sailor's palm—a sea thimble—and the cuss has mended his clothes with it. See the patch on his shirt, and he has stitched the holes in his shoes with bits of tarred twine."

"He called me 'shipmate' when he asked for a chew, but many a landlubber uses the word, and I did not lay much store by it."

"It's only twenty miles to the Maine coast," said Johnny Kent, "and he may have wandered inland from one of the ports."

"I have a hunch that he didn't come out of a coasting schooner. The beggar has sailed deep water in his time. I wonder if he is hungry? Better introduce him to some grub. He is rounding to, but he has about as much conversation in him as an oyster."

The engineer rummaged in the kitchen, and brought out a plate of biscuits, cold bacon, potatoes, and pickles, which the red-haired man ate with the fearful avidity that betokens starvation. The sight almost moved Johnny Kent to tears. The last spark of his animosity was quenched. There was no more awful fate than to be separated from three square meals per day.

"We'll swab the dirt off him and shuck those ragged, rotten clothes before we batten him down for the night," said Johnny. "I can't leave a sailor in this fix, even if he is flighty in the maintop, and has tried to smoke out the whole darn neighborhood."

While he departed in search of a shift of raiment, Captain O'Shea removed the man's shirt. At the first tug it tore and came away in his hands. The prisoner had been sitting in the same posture, but now he moved and lazily stretched his length upon the mattress, lying on his stomach, his face pillowed against his arm. His hunger satisfied, the desire of sleep had overtaken him, and his heavy breathing told O'Shea that the extraordinary guest had carried his riddle to dreamland.

Johnny Kent had taken the lamp into the house, and the lantern, which had been left standing on the floor, cast a long, dusky shadow athwart the recumbent figure. The shipmaster stood looking down at the massive shoulders and knotted, hairy arms of the stranger, when his attention was fixed by something which caused him to stare as if startled and fascinated and perplexed. The man's broad back bore some kind of a design, an uncouth, sprawling pattern, such as no artist in tattooing could ever have traced to please a sailor's fancy.

It was a huge disfigurement, composed of bold lines and angles which stood out in black projection against

the white skin. Even in the dim light, Captain O'Shea could discern that these rude markings had been done with a purpose, that they composed themselves into a symbol of some sort. They looked as if they had been laid on with a brush, in broad, sweeping strokes, which ran the width of the back and all the way down to the waist. The man could not have made them himself. They were mysterious, sinister.

O'Shea was neither timid nor apt to be caught off his guard, but his pulse fluttered, and his mouth felt dry. He was in the presence of something wholly beyond his ken, baffling his experience. This red-haired derelict whose wits had forsaken him brought a message hostile, alien, and remote. Presently O'Shea bethought himself of the lantern, and made for it with nervous haste. Holding it close to the back of the sleeping man, he stared with horrified attention and pitying wrath that a human being should have been so maltreated.

The great symbol or design had been slashed in the flesh with strokes of a sword or knife. The edges of the scars stood out in rough ridges. Into the wounds had been rubbed India ink or some like substance which the process of healing held indelibly fixed. The pattern thus made permanent and conspicuous was that of a character of the Chinese or Japanese language.

Johnny Kent came out of the kitchen, and O'Shea beckoned him. The engineer stood open-mouthed and gazed down at the tremendous ideograph that had been so brutally hacked in human flesh. O'Shea had nothing to say. What was there to say? The thing was there. It spoke for itself. What it meant was an enigma which neither man could in the smallest degree attempt to unravel. When Johnny Kent spoke, it was only to voice the fact or two which required no explanation:

"He was chopped and branded proper, wa'n't he, Cap'n Mike? And it was done for some devilish purpose. I've knocked about most of the ports in the Orient, but I never heard of anything like this."

"They made a document of him, Johnny. 'Tis Chinese workmanship, I'm thinking. How could a man live through a thing like that? For the love of Heaven, look at those scars! They are as wide as my thumb, and some of them are better than a foot long. And they stand out so black and wicked that it gives me the creeps."

"It means something, Cap'n Mike. And it's up to us to find the answer. One of them Chinese characters may tell a whole lot. Their heathen fashion of slingin' a pen is more like drawin' pictures. A few lines and a couple of wriggles all bunched up together, and it tells the story."

"And what is this story, Johnny? Answer me that!"

"You can search me. It's almighty queer business to happen on my peaceful farm in the State o' Maine."

"Let the poor beggar rest here till morning, and then we will consider him some more. I guess we don't want to turn him over to the constable, Johnny."

"Not till we try our hand at translatin' him. I wish I had a Chinese dictionary. Say, Cap'n Mike, you're as welcome as the flowers in spring, but as soon as you set foot on my farm things begin to happen. Trouble is a stepbrother of yours. It's like harborin' a stormy petrel."

"'Tis not fair to blackguard me," laughed O'Shea. "You and your neighbors can sleep easy in your beds, for I have caught the bogy man."

"I wish I knew what it is you've caught," sighed the engineer.

O'Shea bent over the sleeping man in order to raise his head and slip underneath it a rolled blanket to serve as a pillow. His fingers chanced to detect on the top of the skull a curious depression or groove, over which the red hair was rumpled in a sort of cowlick. Examination convinced him that this was the result of some violent blow which had fairly dented the bony structure and pressed it down upon the brain.

"That is where he got it," said O'Shea. "And 'tis what made a lunatic of him."

"It looks like they tried to kill him with an ax, but he was too tough for 'em, Cap'n Mike. No wonder that crack you gave him over the ear didn't bother him much."

"And whoever it was that put their mark on his back was the same party who caved in his lid, or I'm a liar," was the conclusion of Captain Michael O'Shea.

CHAPTER III.

THE MENACE OF THE BRANDED BACK.

The only inmate of the place who slept soundly was the vagabond in the woodshed. His guardians stood watch and watch as a matter of habit, but the early morning found them both astir and drinking mugs of coffee very hot and strong. Their guest had not moved from his outstretched position on the mattress. He slumbered like a man drugged or utterly exhausted. O'Shea had spread a blanket over his naked back and shoulders, partly for warmth, but another motive also prompted him. He wished to hide the cruel disfigurement. It seemed unfeeling to expose it.

Now, by daylight, he moved on tiptoe to the mattress, and twitched the blanket aside. O'Shea had lived among hard men, and fought his way through battering circumstances in which physical brutality still survived to uphold the rude old traditions of the sea. But this sight made him wince and shiver, and he did not like to look at it. Covering it with the blanket, he fell to wondering, with an intensity of interest that gripped him more and more strongly, what tragedy was concealed behind the curtain of this luckless man's past.

Johnny Kent had agreed that he must be harbored in the cottage for the present. Their surmise that he was a seafarer made it seem a duty to befriend him by all means in their power. To spread the tidings in the village that the pyromaniac had been caught would arouse a storm of anger and resentment. Amid clamor and disorder he would be handcuffed and tied with ropes and triumphantly lugged to the county jail. The farmers were in no mood to condone his misdeeds on the score of mental irresponsibility. On the other hand, kindly treatment and association with those accustomed to follow the sea might awaken his dormant intelligence and prompt him to reveal something of his shrouded history.

"It's an awkward proposition," sighed Johnny Kent, "but we'll have to work it out somehow. Of course, I'm sorry for the poor lunatic that has been manhandled so abominably, and so long as we don't give him matches to play with I guess he's safe to have around. But how can I keep him hid from my neighbors? They're as gossipy and curious as a hogshead of cats."

"I mean to find out who branded him, and why," was the vehement assertion of Captain O'Shea.

Shortly after this the stalwart waif in the woodshed awakened, and his captors were pleased to note that he was still tractable. Indeed, he greeted them with his confiding, good-natured grin, and sat pulling on his shoes. To their words of greeting, however, he made no reply. Apparently the plaintive request for a chew of tobacco had been the end of his conversation.

"He used up all the language in his system," commented O'Shea. "Maybe he will not burst into speech again unless I hit him another crack over the ear."

Johnny Kent filled a tub with water, and indicated the clean clothes which he had left on a chair. The derelict nodded gratefully, and the others withdrew.

"It wouldn't do to trust him with a razor, Cap'n Mike," said the engineer.

"Pooh! Fetch me the tackle, and I will shave him meself. It will make him look saner, anyhow, and I want to see what he is like."

The guest seemed delighted with this thoughtful attention, and submitted to a dose of lather with all the good grace in the world. Bathed, shaved, in one of Johnny Kent's white suits, he was astonishingly transformed. A strap-

ping big man he was, and he held himself with the easy poise of one whose muscles had been trained by hard work on rolling decks. Strolling into the kitchen, he passed through, and entered the other rooms, his guardians following to see what he would do.

At sight of the white, scrubbed floors, the polished brasswork, the barometer on the wall, and the simple furnishings so like the cabins of a ship, his blue eyes showed a flicker of interest, and he paused and absently shoved an inkstand back from the shelf of a desk lest it slide off. The trick was so significant of his calling that O'Shea needed no more proof. A tin box filled with matches caught his glance, and he instantly made for them. His demeanor was furtive and cunning. He had become a different man in a twinkling.

Johnny Kent jumped for him, and O'Shea was at his elbow, ready for a tussle. But he permitted the matches to be taken from him without resistance, and forgot all about them in fingering the spliced hammock ropes on the porch. A gesture from O'Shea, and he returned to the kitchen and took the chair assigned him for breakfast. The prudent engineer kept an eye on the knife and fork which the stranger used with the manners rather of the cabin than the forecastle.

O'Shea studied the rugged, honest features of this red-headed mystery, and earnestly expounded various theories, which wandered into blind alleys and led nowhere at all. The only conjecture which seemed to hang together was that in some way or another the man's propensity for setting fires harked back to the time and scene of the terrible blow over the head which had benumbed his memory and jarred his wits. Before this disaster overtook him he must have been a fellow ready and courageous, able to hold his own in the rough-and-tumble world.

"What shall we call him? It'll be handy to give him some kind of a name," suggested Johnny Kent.

"He reminds me of Big Bill Maguire that was mate of the *Sea Bird* bark and fell through a hatch and broke his neck when he came aboard drunk at Valparaiso. He was a rare seaman when sober."

"Let's call him Bill Maguire, then, Cap'n Mike. He likes us, and I guess he intends to sign on with us and hang around."

"Why don't you try setting him to work, Johnny? He would make a jewel of a hired man."

"Yes? On a fireproof farm that was insured for all the underwriters would stand for!" dubiously returned the engineer. "I can't watch him every minute."

Captain Mike O'Shea banged the table with his [illegible] and decisively exclaimed:

"'Tis in my mind to visit you a day or two longer, Johnny. Curiosity is fair consuming me. I can see the ugly, wicked marks on this poor beggar's back whenever I shut my eyes. It haunts me like a nightmare that is too monstrous to talk about."

"I'd give a thousand dollars to fathom it," roared Johnny Kent. "And Bill Maguire just sits across the table and grins like a wooden figgerhead."

"I suppose ye have no Chinamen in your village?" ventured O'Shea.

"Nary a chink. I'll bet the children never saw one."

"And where could we find the nearest one, Johnny? 'Tis our business to dig up a cock-eyed lad that will impart to us the meaning of the message that was carved into the back of Bill Maguire. Nor will I know an easy minute till we have the information."

Johnny pondered a little, and then spoke up with sudden hopefulness:

"Once in a while I'm so sagacious that I surprise myself. The Chinese ambassador spends his summers on the coast, at Poplar Cove. It's no more than an hour from here by train. He's a fat, sociable old party, so they tell me. And where could you find a better man to solve the riddle of Bill Maguire?"

"You score a bull's-eye!" cried O'Shea. "And he will have secretaries and such, and we will let them all have a try at it."

"But how will you show 'em Bill's back? Draw it on paper, or get a photograph made?"

"Nonsense! Bill will take his back along with us. We will produce the original human document."

The engineer was inclined to object to this, but the edicts of Captain O'Shea were to be obeyed, and to argue was to waste words. The Perkins boy was summoned from the barn, and instructed, by means of thundering intonations, to stand guard over the farm on peril of his life. He spent his nights at his own home, and had missed the excitement of the capture of Bill Maguire; wherefore the secret was safely hid from his inquisitive eyes and ears. He gazed at the robust, silent stranger with rampant curiosity, but learned nothing beyond the fact that his employer proposed to be absent for the day with his two guests.

The young Perkins drove them to the railroad station in the two-seated democrat wagon, Johnny Kent sitting at his side and smothering his questions. The ticklish business of conveying Bill Maguire through the village was accomplished without the slightest mishap. He behaved himself with flawless dignity, and seemed contented with the society of his escort. During the brief journey by train to Poplar Cove he slouched in his seat as if half asleep until the railroad swung across a wide belt of salt marsh and turned in a northerly direction to follow the coast. There were glimpses of rocky headlands fringed with surf, of wooded inlets and white beaches, and now and then a patch of blue ocean and a far-distant sky line.

The red-haired man from nowhere was mightily moved by the smell and sight of the sea. His heavy, listless manner vanished. His rugged face became more intelligent, more alert. It reflected tides of emotion, poignant and profound. It was painful to watch him as he scowled and chewed his lip, or brushed away tears that came brimming to his eyes. It was evident that he struggled with memories and associations that came and fled like tormenting ghosts before he could lay hold of them. Again for a moment he broke the bonds of his dumbness, and loudly uttered the words:

"Make for the beach! Don't mind me. The swine have done for me!"

To O'Shea and Johnny Kent the words were like a flash of lightning against the black background of night. They revealed the man for what he had been in his prime, in the full stature of heroic self-abnegation, thinking of others, and not of himself, even in the last extremity. They understood this kind of manhood. It squared with their own simple creed. Aglow with sympathy, they plied the derelict with eager questions, but he only muttered, wearily shook his head, and turned away to gaze at the sea.

At the Poplar Cove station they hired a carriage, and were driven along the cliff road to the pretentious summer place occupied by his excellency, Hao Su Ting and his silk-robed retinue. To escort a crazy sailor into the august presence of the distinguished diplomat and demand a translation of the brand upon his naked back was an extraordinary performance, taking it by and large. However, the stout old engineer had no notion of hanging back. He had the fine quality of courage which is not afraid of ridicule.

As for Captain O'Shea, he was in a wicked temper, and it would fare ill with the man that laughed at him. His smoldering indignation at the barbarity inflicted upon the seaman had been just now kindled by the words which leaped so vividly out of the clouded past and were winged with so much significance. Bill Maguire had unflinchingly played the cards as the Fates dealt them, and had paid a price as bitter as death. The game was unfinished; the account had not been settled. At this moment O'Shea detested the entire Chinese race, and would have gladly choked the ambassador in a bight of his own pigtail.

The trio walked slowly across the wide lawn, and drew near to the rambling white house of a colonial design to which the Chinese dignitary had transferred his exotic household. It

was for O'Shea to explain the fantastic errand and gain admittance; wherefore he prepared to dissemble his hostile emotions and make use of that tact and suavity which had carried him over many rough places.

Alas for his plan of campaign! It was overturned in a twinkling. The red-haired sailor followed obediently to the pillared portico which framed the entrance of the house. O'Shea rang the bell, and his quick ear detected the soft shuffle of felt-soled shoes. The door was swung open, and there confronted them a Chinese servant in the dress of his country. At sight of the shaven head, the immobile, ivory-hued countenance, and the flowing garments of white and blue, the demented sailor became instantly enraged.

Snarling, he leaped forward with clenched fists, and his face was black with hatred. The wary O'Shea was too quick for him, and managed to thrust him to one side, so that his rush collided with the casing of the door. The frightened servant squealed, and scuttled back into the house. Instead of trying to pursue him, the red-haired man was taken with a violent fit of trembling, seemingly compounded of weakness and terror. Before O'Shea and Johnny Kent could collect their wits in this extremely awkward situation, he wheeled about, dashed between them, and made for the lawn as if the devil were at his heels.

O'Shea was after him like a shot, the engineer puffing along in the wake of the chase. The servant's outcries had alarmed the household. Out of the front door came spilling a surprising number of sleek attachés, secretaries, domestics, and what not. Behind them waddled at a gait more leisurely none other than his excellency, Hao Su Ting, in all the gorgeous amplitude of his mandarin's garb. In a chattering group, they paused to watch poor Bill Maguire flee with tremendous strides in the direction of the roadway, the active figure of Captain O'Shea steadily gaining on him. Far in the rear labored the mighty bulk of Johnny Kent.

The fugitive was not in the best of trim for a sustained effort, and he tired rapidly, swaying from side to side as he ran. Just this side of the outermost boundary of the ambassador's grounds O'Shea was able to overtake and trip him. Maguire fell headlong, plowing up the turf, and was so dazed and breathless that O'Shea was kneeling upon him and shoving a revolver in his face before he could pull himself together. Then Johnny Kent came up, and between them they subdued the man's struggles to renew his flight.

He made no effort to harm either of them. His befogged mind seemed to recognize them as his friends and protectors. The one impelling purpose was to escape from the Chinese. These latter gentlemen now came hurrying over the lawn to offer aid, evidently surmising that a madman had broken away from his keepers, and possibly had sought the place to do harm to his excellency. Poor Maguire groaned pitifully, and renewed his exertions to release himself; but the weight of two uncommonly strong men pinioned him to the sod. At a word from the ambassador, several of his retinue hastened to sit upon the captive's arms and legs. A dapper young secretary acted as spokesman, and inquired in precise, cultivated English:

"May I trouble you to inform his excellency why you make all this commotion on his premises? It is an insane person, or perhaps a burglar, that you have in your custody?"

"It is an American seafaring man, and he is a friend of ours," gravely answered Captain O'Shea, still keeping a firm grip on the prostrate Maguire. "He has behaved himself very well till now, but he is impolite enough to dislike the Chinese."

"He is not correct in the intellect? Then why have you brought him here?" asked the secretary.

"To show him to his excellency," quoth O'Shea. "'Tis information we seek, and the man himself is the document in the case."

"He turned obstreperous most unexpected and sudden," anxiously put in Johnny Kent. "And now it's blamed

unhandy to show him to you. I'm kind of stumped. What about it, Cap'n Mike?"

The secretary might have looked puzzled had he belonged to any other race, but his face remained polite and inscrutable as he smoothly protested:

"Your explanation is not clear. I advise you to remove all yourselves from the premises of his excellency. He has no interest in you."

O'Shea was oblivious of the absurd tableau in which he played the leading rôle. The red-haired sailor was still stretched upon the grass, and his brace of stanch friends held him at anchor. He was quieter, and the tempest of passion had passed. The Chinese servants who had been roosting on the outlying parts of his frame withdrew from the scene of war, and rejoined their comrades. As soon as they were beyond the range of his vision, Maguire subsided, and seemed as docile as of yore.

His excellency, Hao Su Ting, showed his august back to the turbulent intruders, and paced slowly toward the house. Several of the party turned to follow him, but the secretary aforesaid, together with a few of the staff, tarried in order to be sure that the trio of invaders left the place. Captain Michael O'Shea was not to be thwarted by the disadvantageous position in which he found himself. Hustling Maguire to his feet, he tried to drive it into him with strong words and meaning gestures that he must be obedient, and no harm would come to him. The revolver was an eloquent argument, too.

Sensible Johnny Kent turned the sailor about so that he could see nothing of the Chinese and was facing the cliffs and the sea. In this position the engineer held him while O'Shea, seizing the opportune moment, dragged the coat off the man, and pulled up his shirt to bare his back. It was dramatically done, and the effect was instantaneous. Not a word was said in explanation. None was needed. The great Chinese character that spread between the man's shoulder blades and down to his waist showed black and scarred and livid.

The secretary and the other Orientals stood gazing at it without moving so much as a finger. They said nothing, but one heard their breath come quick. A kind of whistling sigh escaped the dapper secretary, and his eyes glittered like two buttons of jet. He was striving to maintain a composure which had been racked to the foundations. His blood was of a finer strain than that of the underlings who stood near him, and he held his ground while they began to edge away in retreat. Presently one of them broke into a run. The others took to their heels in a panic rout, and scampered toward the house, their baggy breeches fluttering, queues whipping the wind, felt shoes fairly twinkling. From one of them came back a shrill, wailing "Ai oh!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SYMBOL OF DEATH.

The terrified Chinamen raced past his excellency, Hao Su Ting, who stood aghast at the gross disregard of etiquette, and vainly commanded them to halt. Nor did the mad pace slacken until the last of them had dived to cover. O'Shea forgot his business, and grinned with honest enjoyment; but the face of the secretary, now haggard and parchmentlike, recalled him to the task in hand. This lone Chinese who had withstood the desire to run away was moving nearer to examine the branded back of the red-haired sailor.

"Ye have all the marks of a man that is sick to the soul with fear," grimly observed O'Shea; "but you are too brave to give up to it, and I admire ye for it. Tell me, have you ever seen a man scarred like that before?"

The secretary spoke with a visible effort, and his voice had the rasping edge of intense excitement:

"Yes, I have seen that character—symbol—whatever you will call it—in my own country. It is most shocking, amazing, to behold it in this way, inflicted upon an American."

"Do you need to look at it any longer? Can ye remember it? Will I

show it to his excellency?" demanded O'Shea.

"I cannot forget it," slowly replied the other. "No, it is not necessary to show it to the ambassador. I assure you, it is not necessary. I shall inform him that I have seen it. He will know what it is. I wish very much that it may not be seen by his illustrious self."

The words and manner of the secretary conveyed the weightiest earnestness. He was in an agony of dread lest Hao Su Ting should return and view the spectacle of the branded man. O'Shea pitied his distress, and was shrewd enough to perceive that nothing would be gained by opposing him. Maguire was restless, and Johnny Kent had trouble in sticking fast to him.

"Walk him along toward the railroad station," said O'Shea to his comrade. "He will give you no bother once he makes his offing and goes clear of this Chinese colony. Here's the gun if ye need to persuade him a bit. Wait for me there, Johnny. This young man from Cathay will have a talk with me."

"It looks as if you had sort of started things, Cap'n Mike. Aye, aye, I'll take Bill in tow, and run to moorings with him till you throw up signal rockets."

With this reply, which betokened excellent discipline, the engineer grasped the sailorman by the arm, and, helping him into his coat, marched him off. O'Shea and the secretary were about to resume their conversation when the latter's attention was caught by the beckoning gesture of the Chinese ambassador, who seemed impatient.

"His excellency wishes to ask me why there was so much unseemly excitement by his servants," said the young man. "I would prefer first to talk with you, but his command must be obeyed. Your name? Thank you. I shall have the pleasure of acquainting Captain O'Shea with the ambassador of China to the United States."

"'Tis no pleasure for any one concerned, to judge by the symptoms," replied the shipmaster.

"I agree with you, my dear sir. But it is something to have spared his excellency the sight of the disfigurement which is written on the back of your most unfortunate friend."

"Maybe the ambassador could see it from where he stood," suggested O'Shea.

"No. His eyes are not of the best without spectacles. He is not a young man, and his health is inferior. To shock him by the sight of something dreadful to see might have unhappy consequences."

"But what is the answer? Why was every man of you bowled off his feet?" exclaimed O'Shea. "'Tis not the way of your people to be afraid of scars and wounds. Ye deal out some pretty tough punishments to your criminals."

"It is advisable that you should pay your respects to his excellency," evasively returned the Chinese.

The ambassador regarded Captain O'Shea with an unfriendly stare until the secretary, with many low bows, held rapid converse with the personage in his own language. The elderly statesman and diplomat grunted incredulously, shook his head in vehement contradiction, and O'Shea conjectured that he was roundly scolding the young man for bringing him such an impossible yarn. At length he yielded, with a frown of annoyance, and briefly addressed the shipmaster:

"I speak not much English. Come into my house, please."

He preceded them into a large library with many long windows screened by bamboo shades. Passing through this, he entered a smaller room more convenient for privacy. The threshold was a boundary between the Occident and the Orient. The library looked for the most part as if it belonged in a handsome summer place of the New England coast, but this smaller room was as foreign as the ambassador himself. The air was heavy with the smell of sandalwood. The massive table and chairs were of teak and ebony, cunningly carved. The walls were hung with embroideries of crimson and gold, on which grotesque dragons writhed in intricate convolutions. The pieces of porcelain, jade, and cloisonné were not

many, but they had been fashioned by the artists of dead dynasties, and were almost beyond price. Upon a long panel of silk was displayed a row of Chinese characters cut from black velvet and sewn to the fabric. They were merely the symbols of good fortune commonly to be found in such an environment as this, a sort of equivalent of the old-fashioned motto, "God bless our home," but to Captain Michael O'Shea they carried an uncomfortable suggestion of the handiwork done upon the back of Bill Maguire.

His excellency, Hao Su Ting, seated himself beside the table, deliberately put on his round spectacles with heavy tortoise-shell rims, and tucked his hands inside his flowing sleeves. The deferential secretary stood waiting for him to speak. O'Shea fidgeted and yearned to break the silence. The air had turned chill with an east wind that blew strong and damp from the sea. Nevertheless the ambassador found it necessary to take a handkerchief from his sleeve and wipe the little beads of perspiration from his bald brow. O'Shea made note of it, and wondered what powerful emotion moved behind the round spectacles and calm, benignant countenance of the diplomat.

At length he spoke to the secretary in Chinese, and indicated O'Shea with a slow wave of the hand. The young man translated with some unreadiness, as though endeavoring to bring the words within the bounds of courtesy:

"His excellency says that it is impossible—that you are mistaken. He is not convinced."

"He calls me a liar!" And O'Shea's sense of humor was stirred. With his easy, boyish laugh, he added: "'Tis your own reputation for veracity that needs overhauling, my lad. Your own two eyes have seen the thing. I had the proof, but ye would not let me take the two-legged document by the collar and fetch him to the house."

The ambassador turned to the table at his elbow. Upon it were an ink box and a soft brush used for writing his own language. From a drawer he withdrew a sheet of rice paper. Shoving these toward O'Shea, he said something, and the secretary explained:

"He wishes you to write what it is like—the thing that I also have seen. Please be good enough to oblige."

The brand was etched in O'Shea's memory. Without hesitation, he picked up the brush, and blazoned the character in broad, firm strokes. For perhaps a minute his excellency gazed at it. Then he caught up the sheet of rice paper, and tore it into small fragments.

"He is now convinced that you and I speak truth," the secretary murmured in O'Shea's ear.

"Well and good. He looks as if it made him unwell. Now, can we get down to business, and tackle the mystery of it? It is Chinese writing. What does it mean? That is my errand."

Hao Su Ting no longer resembled a round-faced Buddha seated in reposeful meditation upon a throne of teakwood. The words came from him in a torrential flow, and the harsh singsong intonations were terribly earnest. It was a harangue which warned, expostulated, lamented with all the fervor of an issue that concerned life and death. It startled O'Shea to behold a man of his unemotional race, and one so hedged about with the dignity of rank, in this stormy tide of feeling. It ceased abruptly. The old man sank into his chair and closed his eyes. The secretary rang a gong for a servant, and ordered tea. Presently the ambassador signified that he wished to retire to a couch, and others of his staff attended him into the library, and thence to an upper floor of the house.

The secretary returned to join O'Shea, and began to explain, in his measured, monotonous way:

"I will now inform you as much as it is permitted to know. It disappoints you, I am aware, that his excellency is unable to translate the writing character which has made so much disturbance. Nor can I translate it, either into Chinese or English words. My language is what you call arbitrary, built up of symbols, not letters. This particular character has been invented to

signify some secret purpose. It has the root sign for 'man,' and also the two curved lines which mean a 'sending,' a 'message.' The rest of it is hidden from us. His excellency is a scholar of the highest grade among the literati of China. This character, as a whole, he has never been able to find in the classics or the dictionaries."

More puzzled than ever, O'Shea broke in to demand:

"But if nobody knows what it means, why does the sight of it start a full-sized panic?"

"Many men in China have been found dead, and upon their backs had been hacked with a sword this strange character. It was thus that the own brother of his excellency was discovered in the courtyard of his house."

"I begin to see daylight," said O'Shea.

"Ah, there is only the blackest darkness," gravely replied the secretary. "The branded men have not been coolies, but officials, merchants, people of station. No precautions avail. It smites them like the lightning from the sky. The fear of it walks everywhere. And now it has crossed the sea like an evil shadow."

"That is not quite right," was the matter-of-fact comment. "Poor Bill Maguire got it in China, and brought it with him. 'Tis not likely to trouble you."

"Never have we heard of a man who lived and walked with this mark upon his back, Captain O'Shea. All those to whom this fate has happened were infallibly dead. When they beheld it this afternoon some of our people believed they gazed upon a red-haired ghost. I am an educated man, a graduate of Oxford University, but I tell you my blood turned to water, and my heart was squeezed tight."

"My friend Maguire is hard to kill," said O'Shea. "I tried to do it meself. So he was put on the list by this damnable whatever-it-is, and the autograph was carved on him, and he was left for dead? Can ye tell me any more?"

"It is not in my power to enlighten you. I have known of men who found this character painted on the posts of their gateways. They surrounded themselves with soldiers and hired guards. They moved not from within their own walls. And they could not save themselves. They died as I have described it to you."

"I have listened to pleasanter yarns. I am greatly obliged to ye." And O'Shea was ready to take his departure. "I am afraid I will know no more unless Bill Maguire uncorks himself and confides the story of his life."

"When that time comes it will interest me greatly to be informed of it," said the secretary, offering his hand.

"Pass my kind regards to his excellency, and give him my regrets that I jolted his nervous system. He is a fine old gentleman."

CHAPTER V.

BILL MAGUIRE'S MONOLOGUE.

The shipmaster hastened on foot to the railroad station, where Johnny Kent was patiently and peacefully awaiting orders. The red-haired sailor was sitting on a baggage truck and munching peanuts. At sight of O'Shea he grinned in recognition, and waved a greeting hand. The engineer was eager for tidings, but a train was almost due, and he was briefly assured:

"'Tis a bugaboo tale, Johnny, and we will digest it at our leisure. And how has Bill behaved himself?"

"As good as gold, Cap'n Mike. But there's something goin' on inside him. His eye looks brighter, and he has mumbled to himself several times. I dunno whether he's primin' himself for another explosion, or kind of remembering himself in spots. Anyhow, he has symptoms."

"We will steer him home as soon as we can, Johnny. He has enjoyed an exciting afternoon."

The locomotive whistled, and a few minutes later they filed into the smoking car. O'Shea fished out a black cigar, and his comrade rammed a

charge of cut plug into his old clay pipe. No sooner had they lighted matches than their irresponsible protégé reached over and snatched them away. Instead of trying to set fire to the car, or to the abundant whiskers of the old gentleman across the aisle, he flung the matches on the floor, and stamped them with his heel. His guardians regarded him with puzzled surprise, and were not quick enough to restrain him before he surged among the other passengers and plucked from their faces every lighted cigar, cigarette, and pipe. These he also rudely made way with by grinding them under his feet or tossing them through the window.

The persons thus outraged were for assaulting him until they perceived the width of his shoulders, the depth of his chest, and the color of his hair. The shipmaster and the engineer tackled him like a brace of football players, and yanked him back to his seat, and calmed the ruffled travelers with explanations and offers to pay damages. The blue eye of Bill Maguire was alertly roving to detect the first sign of smoke, and during the remainder of his journey no one dared to burn the hazy incense of tobacco.

"You're a great man for theories, Cap'n Mike," quoth the bewildered engineer. "Can you figger what's happened to Bill?"

"I am on a lee shore this time, Johnny. I would call him a firebug no longer. He has turned himself into a fire department."

"That's precisely it," excitedly cried the other. "And here's how I explain it: He's had some mighty violent experiences during the last twenty-four hours, what with your tryin' to knock his head off, and his running afoul of those Chinamen which is his pet aversion. His intellect has jarred a mite loose from its dead center, but one cog slipped into reverse gear. Instead of startin' fires, he wants to put 'em out. His machinery ain't adjusted right, but it's movin'. Instead of starting ahead on this conflagration hobby of his, he goes full speed astern."

"You are a knowing old barnacle," admiringly exclaimed O'Shea. "This ought to make Bill an easier problem to handle. The strain of keeping up with him begins to tell on me."

"Pshaw, Cap'n Mike, I'll set him to work on the farm if this latest spell sticks to him."

They drove home from the village in the twilight. The Perkins boy had tarried to do the chores and kindle a fire for supper. He fled without his hat when the big, silent, red-haired stranger, marching into the kitchen, halted to look at the blazing grate, and promptly caught up a pail of water from the sink and flooded the stove. Johnny Kent entered a moment later, and gazed aghast at the dripping, sizzling embers. Then his common sense got the better of his annoyance, and he shouted to O'Shea:

"Bill's gear is still reversed. Coax him out on the porch, and hold him there while I get supper. He just put the stove awash."

O'Shea laughed, and took charge of the derelict while Johnny locked the kitchen doors and windows and rekindled the fire. Freed from the fear that the cottage and barn might go up in smoke, the comrades enjoyed a quiet evening. Maguire was disposed of in the attic bedroom, and insisted on going to bed in the dark.

"He will not wander away," said O'Shea. "His wits are in a sad mess, but he knows he has found a friendly anchorage."

They felt the need of sleep, and Johnny Kent was yawning before he had heard the end of the interview with his excellency, Hao Su Ting. It entertained him, but the edge of his interest was blunted. The hapless sailor in the attic had been struck down and mutilated by some secret organization of Chinese assassins, and there was no finding out the meaning of the brand upon his back. It was their trade-mark. This was explanation enough. It satisfied the engineer's curiosity. He had no great amount of imagination, and although he was ready to share his last dollar with the help-

less Maguire he felt no further call to pursue the mystery of his wrongs.

Captain O'Shea was very differently affected. He had not forsaken the quest of adventure. His soul was not content with cabbages and cows. The world beyond the horizon was always calling in his ears. As children are fond of fairy stories, so his fancy was lured by the bizarre, the unexpected, the unknown. Your true adventurer is, after all, only a boy who has never grown up. His desires are wholly unreasonable, and he sets a scandalous example. If you had asked him the question, this rattle-headed young shipmaster would have frankly answered that nothing could give him more enjoyment than to sail for China and try to discover how and why the brand had been put on Maguire. Besides, he had an Irishman's habit of taking over another man's quarrel.

"Poor Bill cannot square it himself," reflected O'Shea. "'Tis the duty of some one to undertake it for him. It makes an honest man's blood boil to think of the black wickedness that was done to him. As long as the heathen are contented to murder one another, 'tis no business of mine. But an American sailorman—and maybe he is not the only one!"

When he went downstairs in the morning Johnny Kent was in the barricaded kitchen, and Maguire paced the porch with the air of a man physically refreshed. He paid no heed to O'Shea, who was amazed to discover that he was talking to himself. The sounds he made were no longer inarticulate, but words and fragments of sentences curiously jumbled. In the stress of great excitement, he had previously spoken with brief coherence, only to lapse into dumbness. Now, however, with no sudden stimulus to flash a ray of light into his darkened mind, he was beginning to find himself, to grope for expression like a child painfully and clumsily learning to read. To the listening O'Shea it sounded like heaping phrases together in a basket and fishing them out at random.

The sailor's voice had lost much of its harshness. Its intonations were rather deep and pleasant. Swinging his long arms as he walked, he kept repeating such disjointed ideas as these:

"Heave her short—eleven dollars Mex—no, Paddy Blake—a big wax doll—all clear forward, sir—stinking river—roll the dice—the painted joss—a year from home—way enough—Wang Li Fu—die like rats—sampan ahoy—no more drinks—good-by, Mary, dear—in the paint locker—the head devil—fish and potatoes."

It made O'Shea feel dizzy to listen to this interminable nonsense, but he followed it most attentively, and stole behind a lilac bush lest Maguire should spy him and be diverted from his mad soliloquy. For some time there was no catching hold of a clew, but at length the shrewd shipmaster began to sift out certain phrases which were emphasized by reiteration. They were, in a way, the motif of the jargon, hinting of impressions most clearly stamped on the man's mind.

He mentioned again and again "the painted joss," and occasionally coupled it with reference to "the stinking river." Stress seemed to be laid also on the proper name "Wang Li Fu." Many of the other fragments O'Shea discarded as worthless. Some of them related to routine duties on shipboard. He hazarded a guess that the sailor was a married man. At any rate, he had left a "Mary, dear," and it was a plausible conjecture that he had promised to bring home "a big wax doll."

When Maguire became silent O'Shea made for the kitchen, and hammered on the door.

"Is that you, Cap'n Mike?" responded the perturbed accents of Johnny Kent. "If it's Bill, he can stay out till breakfast's cooked. I don't want my stove drowned again."

Reassured, he cautiously admitted the shipmaster, who pounded him on the back and shouted:

"Bill has been leaking language from every pore. 'Tis all snarled up most comical, but I seem to get hold of a loose end now and then."

"Hooray, Cap'n Mike! It's just as

I said. When you hit him over the ear it sort of jarred his brain loose. It ain't fetched clear yet, but he's begun to make steam in his crazy fashion. What does he say?"

"Wait till I tow him in to breakfast, and maybe he will start up again."

But Maguire ate in silence, and O'Shea could not persuade him to pick up the rambling monologue. Johnny Kent therefore escorted the sailor to the garden, gave him a hoe, and thriftily set him at work. He fell to with the greatest good will, and showed an aptitude which betokened an earlier acquaintance with this form of husbandry.

After a discussion of some length, the engineer exclaimed:

"You're a bright man, Cap'n Mike, but you haven't knocked around the Chinese ports as much as I have. Bill mentioned one or two things that I can elucidate. Paddy Blake, eh? So he knows Paddy Blake? The blackguard runs a sailor's rum shop in Shanghai. It's just off the Bund, as you turn up the street that's next to the French Concession. I've rolled the dice for drinks there myself, and blown my wages, and mixed up in some free-for-all fights that would have done your heart good."

"'Tis a glimpse into the fog, Johnny. Maybe this rapscallion of a Paddy Blake would know poor old Bill if he had a description of him. We can guess at some of the rest of it. Bill went up a Chinese river somewhere, and got in black trouble ashore. It had to do with a temple and a joss, and he was knocked on the head."

"One of them big, carved wooden idols, Cap'n Mike, painted all red and yellow and white."

"And it looks to me as if he stumbled into a headquarters of this bunch of thugs that has been dealing out sudden death to prominent Chinese citizens, Johnny. Anyhow, he ran afoul of some kind of a 'head devil,' as he calls it. And the brand was put upon him after he was left for dead."

"Maybe they carved him first. They are ingenious cusses when it comes to torments and such."

"No, for he would have had no strength to fight his way out, and he made a try for it."

"Then it's possible that Bill knows the secret of this organization of cock-eyed murderers," excitedly cried the engineer.

"The same notion is in my own mind," replied O'Shea.

A dusty man just then rode a bicycle into the dooryard and dismounted to give the shipmaster a yellow envelope.

"I guess you're Captain Michael O'Shea," said he. "The station agent got this telegram for you, and asked me to stop and deliver it, seein' as I was passin' this way. How are you, Mr. Kent? Seen anything of that pesky firebug? I see you've got a new hired man in the garden."

"I'm thankful to say the firebug is letting me alone," gravely answered the engineer. "I guess he heard the selectmen had offered a reward for him, and he lit out of this neighborhood."

The messenger departed, and Captain O'Shea, glancing at the telegram, crumpled it in his fist, and vouchsafed, with a laugh:

"'Tis from the man in New York—the agent in charge of that voyage to the Persian Gulf. For political reasons, the job is postponed a matter of six months or so, and maybe it will be declared off altogether. The charter is canceled, and my contract along with it."

"I suppose you're disappointed," sympathetically began Johnny Kent.

"Not so I shed tears. Something else will turn up. And 'tis me chance to take a vacation, Johnny. Thanks to our last salvage job, I have more money than is good for me."

"Now's your chance to buy that next farm, and get it under way." And the portly mariner was elated.

O'Shea eyed his comrade as if suspecting that he shared the melancholy affliction of Bill Maguire.

"You mean well, Johnny," said he;

"but you are subject to delusions. I will enjoy a vacation after my own heart. With the money that burns holes in my pockets I will go frolickin' out to China, and do me best to find out what happened to Bill Maguire. I suppose I cannot coax ye to go with me?"

"Pshaw, Cap'n Mike!" And the honest farmer looked surprised. "I've engaged a gang of men to begin cutting my hay next week. And who's to look after poor old Bill? I can't seem to beat it into your head that I've turned respectable. The wilder the job the better you like it."

"I have taken quite a fancy to this one." And O'Shea's eyes were dancing. "It has been haunting me, in a way, ever since I caught sight of the cruel brand and listened to the yarn of those Chinese gentlemen. As one seafaring man to another, I will do what I can to square the account of Bill Maguire. And I need a vacation."

"It's the first time I ever laid down on you," sighed Johnny Kent.

"I do not hold it against ye," warmly returned Captain O'Shea. "And maybe you ought to stand watch over Bill. It would be cruel to lug him out to China, for the sight of a pigtail gives him acute fits. And he would turn crazier than ever. Well, I will go it alone this time, Johnny. 'Tis a most foolish adventure, and by the same token it pleases me a lot."

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN O'SHEA IN THE FAR EAST.

Steamers flying the flags of many nations were anchored in the Woosung River, off the water front of Shanghai. High-pooped junks tacked past them, and cargo lighters manned by half-naked coolies drifted with the muddy tide. In a handsome, solidly fashioned perspective extended the European quarter of the city, as unlike the real China as London or New York. Turbaned Sikh policemen, tall and dignified in soldierly khaki and puttees, strolled through the clean, well-paved streets. English, French, and German merchants clad in white were spun around corners in rickshas pulled by sweating natives muscled like race horses. Tourists lounged on the piazzas of the Astor House, or explored the shops, filled with things rare and curious. Unseen and unperceived was the native city of Shanghai, incredibly filthy and overcrowded, containing a half million souls within its lantern-hung streets and paper-walled tenements.

Near the river, at the end of the English quarter farthest removed from the parks and pretentious hotels, was a row of small, shabby brick buildings which might have belonged in Wapping or the Ratcliff Road. There was nothing picturesquely foreign about them or their environment. Two or three were sailors' lodging houses, and another was the tumultuous tavern ruled over by Paddy Blake. Here seafarers swore in many tongues, and got drunk each in his own fashion; but Paddy Blake treated them all alike. When their wages were gone he threw them out, or bundled them off to ships that needed men, and took his blood money like the thoroughgoing crimp that he was.

On this night the place was well filled. A versatile cabin steward off a Pacific liner was lustily thumping the battered tin pan of a piano. Six couples of hairy seamen, British and Norwegian, were waltzing with so much earnestness that the floor was cleared as by a hurricane. Cards and dice engaged the attention of several groups seated about the tables by the wall. In blurred outline, as discerned through the fog of tobacco smoke, a score of patrons lined the bar and bought bad rum with good coin. For the moment peace reigned, and never a fist was raised.

Captain Michael O'Shea sauntered in during this calm between storms. The dingy room and its sordid amusements had a familiar aspect. It was precisely like the resorts of other seaports, as he had known them during his wild young years before the mast. The bartender was a pasty-faced youth who replied to O'Shea's interrogation concerning Paddy Blake:

"The old man has stepped out for a couple of hours. He had a bit o' business aboard a vessel in the stream. Will you wait for 'im? If you're lookin' for able seamen, he can find 'em for you."

"I have no doubt of it," said O'Shea, "and he will bring them aboard feet first. Fetch me a bottle of ginger ale to the table in the corner yonder, and I will wait a while."

The wall of the room was broken by a small alcove which made a nook a little apart from the playful mariners. Here O'Shea smoked his pipe and sipped his glass, and was diverted by the noisy talk of ships and ports. At a small table near by sat a man, also alone, who appeared to be in a most melancholy frame of mind. Discouragement was written on his stolid, reddened face, in the wrinkles of the worn gray tweed clothes, in the battered shape of the slouch hat.

O'Shea surmised that he was a beach comber who had seen better days, and surveyed him with some curiosity, for the man wiped his eyes with the back of his hand, his lip quivered, and once he was unable to suppress an audible sob. To find a sturdidly built man of middle age weeping alone in a corner of a sailors' grogshop led one to conclude that alcohol had made him maudlin. But he did not look intoxicated, although dissipation had left its marks on him. O'Shea conjectured that he might be suffering the aftermath of a spree which had broken his nerves and left him weak and womanish. In such a pitiable plight, the contemplation of his own woes had moved him to tears.

Tactfully waiting until the man had recovered his self-control, O'Shea nodded, with a cordial smile, and indicated a chair at his own table. The stranger shifted his place with a certain eagerness, as if he were anxious to be rid of his own miserable company. His tremulous hands and the twitching muscles of his face prompted O'Shea to say:

"Will you have something with me? I dislike sitting by myself."

"A small drink of brandy, if you please. I am trying to taper off. God knows I welcome the chance to talk to somebody that is clean and sober."

The man's heavy, morose eyes regarded the shipmaster approvingly. Presently he began to talk with fluent coherence, and a kind of headlong manner. He felt that he had found a kindly listener, and yet he seemed afraid that O'Shea might desert him before the tale was done.

"I am on the beach, and all to pieces again, as you may have guessed," said he. "My name is McDougal, late of the American Trading Company; but I couldn't hold the job. This time I went to smash in Tientsin. It was queer how it happened. I had been sober and making good for nearly six months. Ever see a Chinese execution? Well, this was an extraordinary affair. A high official of the province had been condemned for treason, and the government decided to make a spectacle of him as a sort of public warning. The place was the big yard of the governor's yamen. I joined the crowd that looked on. First came a covered cart with black curtains. A strapping big Manchu crawled out of it. He was the executioner, and a dingy apron covered with dark-red blotches hung from his chin to his toes.

"Then came a second cart, and in it rode an old gentleman who climbed out and walked alone to the cleared space in the middle of the yard. He was bent and feeble, but he never flinched, and his dignity and rank stood out as plain as print. A guard said something to him, and he took off his long fur-trimmed coat, and knelt on the flagging and the wind whirled the dust in his face. He knelt there, waiting for a long time, motionless, except when he put his hand to his throat and pulled his collar around it to keep off the wind.

"A pompous official read the death sentence, but that wrinkled old face showed never a trace of emotion. Then a pair of the executioner's understrappers jumped on the old gentleman like wild cats. One jumped on his back

and drove his knees into him, while the other tied a bit of cord to the end of the trailing queue and yanked forward with all his might. It stretched the old man's neck like a turtle's. Then the big Manchu with the red-stained apron raised his straight-edged sword, and it fell like a flash of light."

McDougal paused for a gulp of brandy. His voice was unsteady as he resumed:

"I guess my nerves were none too good. A man can't go boozing up and down the coast of the Orient for a dozen years without paying the price. That sight was too much for me. I had to take a drink, and then some more, to forget it. The old man was so patient and helpless—his head bounced off like an apple—and what broke me up worst of all was seeing him pull that coat up around his throat so he wouldn't catch cold—up around his throat, mind you. It was a little thing, but—but what did it matter if he caught cold? And the way they hauled and yanked him about before his neck was—well, I wish I hadn't seen it.

"Once started, the old thirst took hold of me, and I wandered down the coast until I came to, sick and broke, in a dirty Chinese tea house in Chifu. There I lay until one day there came from the street a long, booming cry that crashed through the high-pitched clatter of the crowd like surf on a granite shore. By Jove, it stirred me like a battle chant! It sounded again and again. I knew it must be a peddler shouting his wares, you understand, but it surged into my poor, sick brain as if it was meant for me. It was buoyant, big, telling me to take heart in the last ditch. The words were Chinese, of course, but the odd thing about it was that they came to me precisely as though this great, deep voice was booming in English: 'Throw-w all-l regrets away-y.'

"I presume I was a bit delirious at times, but this was what I heard very clearly, and it helped me wonderfully. As soon as I got on my legs I looked for the peddler until I found him, and followed him through the streets. Even at close range, his call seemed to be telling me to throw all regrets away. It was summoning me to make a new start, do you see? He was a giant of a fellow, in ragged blue clothes, a yoke across his broad shoulders, with many dangling flat baskets. When he swelled his chest and opened his mouth the air trembled with that tremendous call of his. I trailed him to his tiny, mud-walled house, and we got quite chummy. I could speak his dialect fairly well. He earned ten or fifteen cents a day, and supported a family of nine people by selling roasted watermelon seeds. He sang loud because he had a big voice, he said, and because his heart was honest, and he owed no man anything. He did a lot to help me get a grip on myself, and some day I mean to do something for him.

"I had somehow hung onto my watch, and I sold it, and beat my way to Shanghai in a trading steamer, and here I am, shaky and no good to anybody, but I still hear that cheerful peddler thundering at me to throw all regrets away. One has some curious experiences on this coast, and I have had many of them——"

A hand gripped McDougal's shoulder, and he turned with a nervous start to confront a hale, well-dressed mariner with a blond beard, whose eyes twinkled merrily as he loudly exclaimed:

"It was mein old pal what I haf last met at Port Arthur! Ho, ho, McDougal! How goes it mit you?"

The speaker drew up a chair, pounded on the table to summon a waiter, and told him:

"A bundle of trinks, or I eat you in two!"

"I'm delighted to see you again, Captain Spreckels," stammered McDougal, at which O'Shea introduced himself, and the mariner explained, with a jolly laugh:

"McDougal vas a king among men! We haf met only one hour in Port Arthur when I haf told him things what was locked so deep in my bosom dot they haf never before come up. Per-

haps we vas not so sober as now—so? What you do with yourself, McDougal? American Trading Company yet already?"

"I am on the beach, Captain Spreckels, and not fit to work at anything for a while."

The skipper appeared vastly disturbed. Stroking his beard, he reflected for a moment, and then shouted:

"My bark, *Wilhelmina Augusta*, sails for Hamburg to-morrow morning early. She ist now at the mouth of the river. I vas come up in a tug to find if Paddy Blake haf three more men for me. McDougal, you comes mit me! It was the great idea, eh? The sea voyage will do you so much good you will not know yourself. I vish to haf your good company. My cabin is as big as a house. It will cost you noddings. If you want to come out East again I can bring you back next voyage. Listen. Give me no arguments. You vas seedy, and down on your luck."

McDougal lacked the will power to resist this masterful mandate. And perhaps here was a fighting chance providentially offered. On the sweet, clean sea, far from the dissolute ports which had wrecked his manhood, he might build up health and strength, and throw all regrets away. A fit of nervous weakness made the tears spring to his eyes, and he faltered unevenly:

"You quite howl me off my feet, Captain Spreckels. I haven't thought of leaving the East. But I will go with you, and I can never thank you enough. About clothes and an outfit, I——"

"I haf more clothes than aplenty for two of us, McDougal. There is beer, but no whisky, in my wessel. I do not trink liquor at sea. Come! Paddy Blake haf left word mit his man here dot my sailors vas already sent to the landing mit a boarding-house runner. We will go aboard the tug."

With this the energetic master mariner tossed down a gin rickey, said adieu to Captain O'Shea, and whisked McDougal out of the place with an arm across his shoulders.

CHAPTER VII.

PADDY BLAKE'S YARN.

The episode made O'Shea feel slightly bewildered. The unfortunate McDougal had appeared and vanished with an abruptness that savored of unreality. His confession was the sort of thing that might come to a man in a nightmare. McDougal had painted the scenes with a few broad strokes, and yet, as O'Shea sat musing, they seemed astonishingly vivid—the aged Chinese official pulling his coat about his neck just before his head bounced off—the ragged colossus of a street peddler flinging afar his resonant call—McDougal, wretched and forlorn, huddled in the tea house and fighting off the horrors. He had opened the book of his life, and let O'Shea read a page of it, but there must have been many more worth knowing.

These reflections were interrupted by a violent dissension in the vicinity of the bar. A British tar smote a Scandinavian over the head with a bottle, and stretched him on the floor. Somebody plucked the piano stool from under the musical cabin steward, and hurled it at the aggressor. The missile flew high, and swept the bartender into his glassware with a most splendid crash. Then hostilities became general.

The combatants were too busy to observe the entrance of a wizened, clerical-looking little man in a black frock coat and a rusty tall hat. With a shrill whoop, he pulled a slungshot from his pocket, and pranced into the thick of the scrimmage. He was as agile as a jumping jack, his coat tails seemed to be flying in a dozen places at once, and whenever his weapon landed a seaman promptly lost all interest in the row, and made for the street with his head tenderly held in his hands. In the wake of the active little man peace hovered like a dove.

With magical celerity, the floor was cleared of disorder, and the promoter of harmony calmly put on his hat and coat and assisted the damaged bartender to clear away the wreckage. Cap-

tain O'Shea accosted him when the task was finished.

"Paddy Blake is me name," the little man replied, in a jerky, rasping voice, cocking his head to one side. "The boys will have their fun, and I hope they didn't annoy ye. The place will be quiet for a bit. What can I do for ye?"

"'Tis a matter of private business," answered O'Shea.

"Then come into the back room, where we can be sociable. I take ye for a shipmaster."

"Right you are! But I have no ship at present. You might call me a tourist."

Paddy Blake briskly led the way into a cubby-hole of a room with a very strong door, which he made fast with a bolt. There was a window whose shutters were of iron. O'Shea suspected that fuddled seamen might be tucked in here for safe-keeping when the occasion required. The two Irishmen studied each other with a kind of cheerful, candid appraisement. Each recognized in the other certain qualities to be admired. Paddy Blake was a hardened old ruffian, but he was a two-fisted little man with the courage of a terrier.

"I have come a long way to find you," said O'Shea. "And it was imparted to me that the business that has brought me to China had best be discussed in whispers. 'Tis a mighty queer yarn and——"

"Ye need not fill and back. Steam ahead. I like your looks," broke in Paddy Blake. "Whatever passes betwune us stays inside the door. Are ye in throuble?"

"Not me. This is about a friend of mine. Tell me, Paddy Blake, and think hard—do you recall a strapping big man with red hair and blue eyes, and a deep voice, that used to roll the dice in your place? Hold a minute! I have not done with him. One front tooth was broken so you would notice it when he talked. And he had a crooked little finger that must have stuck out when he held a glass or waved his hand about."

Paddy Blake puckered his brows, and pinched his long upper lip between a grimy thumb and forefinger.

"What was he—a Yankee?" he asked, sitting straighter in his chair and gazing at the shipmaster with puzzled, groping interest.

"He was an American seafaring man—a mate most likely. You could not forget him if you cast eyes on him only once. Yankee sailors are scarce in deep-water ports. This one should stick out in your recollection like a lighthouse in a fog."

"A whale of a man with a red head and an eye as blue as a bit of the Inland Sea!" vehemently exclaimed Paddy Blake. "And when was he in me place? How long ago was it?"

"'Tis yourself that must answer that question. At a guess, it was more than a year ago."

The spry little man bounded to his feet and clutched the tails of his coat with both hands as he bent forward with his face close to O'Shea's, and rasped out:

"He has popped into me head like a flash! And a mushy-brained dunce I was not to know him at once. Eldridge ye mean—Jim Eldridge that was mate in the China Navigation Company's steamer *Tai Yan*, chartered to run coastwise. A whoppin' big beggar he was, but mild-mannered and good-hearted—the quietest red-headed man that iver I saw in me life."

"Are you sure of that?" demanded O'Shea. "Could you swear to it?"

"I remimber him as plain as I see you," testily returned Paddy Blake. "He was not in me place often. 'Twas too rough for him."

"And did you ever chance to hear what had become of him?"

The little man tapped O'Shea's arm with an eloquent finger, and replied in lower tones:

"It comes back to me that there was a yarn about him. 'Twas gossip, ye understand, nawthin' that ye could put your finger on. Shanghai is a great place for wild stories. The Shanghai liar is a special breed, and he is famous all over the worrld. Annyhow, there

was a voyage of the *Tai Yan* steamer when he didn't come to port in her. Shortly after that she broke her back on a reef in the Formosa Channel, and all hands was lost, so I never heard anny news from her people about this Jim Eldridge."

"That was most unfortunate," said O'Shea; "but I am in great luck to get track of the man at all. And have you anybody in mind that might have known Eldridge when he was sailing on this coast?"

The volatile Paddy Blake, who saw so many mariners pass through his place during the year, was mentally sifting his recollections, which were many and confusing. The big, red-headed man had steered clear of rum and riot, and was no steady frequenter of this unholy resort. Obviously he had made no more than a passing impression on Paddy Blake, but the old man was honestly anxious to splice the broken ends of the story, and, after painful cogitation, he broke out again:

"There is one man that ye should find, by all means. He may be dead by now, for the liquor had harrd hold of him. I have not seen or heard of him in a long while, but he wint north from here. I mind the last time he come in me place. Pretty well pickled he was, and some o' the lads were yarnin' with him, and there was talk of this Jim Eldridge. Be gob! 'Twas then I heard the queer gossip, in bits, d' ye see? There had been a ruction somewhere up beyant"—and Paddy Blake waved a hand to the northward—"and this man I mintion had been mixed in it with Jim Eldridge. But when they would urge him to unwind the story he would turn ugly and shut up like an oyster, half seas over though he was. He was a great one for messin' about among the Chinese, and could patter two or three dialects. A scholar and a gentleman was McDougal."

"McDougal!" roared O'Shea, taken all aback by the coincidence. "Why, man alive, this same McDougal was in your place to-night, and left not an hour ago. He has just come down the coast from Tientsin and Chifu."

"'Tis a pity ye let him get away. If he wanders into the Chinese city among some of thim native friends of his, 'twill be the divil and all to find him again. So he's still alive?"

"I sat and talked with him, and he discoursed nightmares."

"He has lived thim," said Paddy Blake.

"I had him, and I lost him," was O'Shea's melancholy exclamation. "An oakum-whiskered Dutchman by the name of Spreckels breezed in under full sail, and welcomed this McDougal like a long-lost brother, and carried him off to sea before he could blink. It was comical. And I sat there like a wooden figurehead and let him go."

"In the *Wilhelmina Augusta*—a four-masted steel bark, bound out to Hamburg. It was a lucky stroke for McDougal."

"And most unlucky for me," sighed O'Shea. Then he laughed good-naturedly, pulled himself together, and spoke in his hearty, masterful way: "Come along, Paddy Blake, and find me a tug. We will chase McDougal downriver for the sake of a conversation with him."

"Captain Spreckels had the *Arrow*, and she's fast," said Paddy Blake. "He has a good start of ye, and his bark will be ready to sail as soon as he boards her."

"Then we'll chase him out to sea. I have come too far to lose McDougal by letting him slip through my fingers." And the demeanor of Captain Michael O'Shea discouraged further argument.

Paddy Blake jammed the tall hat on the back of his head, unbolted the door, and whisked through the barroom with such speed that the shipmaster's long strides could hardly keep up with him. They turned into the street that led to the water front, and hastened to a lighted corner of the Bund, where stood several rickshas. Paddy Blake darted at the drowsy coolies, who were squatted on the pavement, cuffed a couple of them, and gave an order in pidgin English. They jumped into the shafts, the passengers climbed aboard,

and the vehicles went spinning along the wide thoroughfare.

As they drew abreast of the lights of the anchored shipping, Paddy Blake looked along the landing berths of the smaller steamers, and exclaimed, with an explosion of profane surprise:

"There's a tug in the pocket where the *Arrow* ties up. I can't see to make her out in the dark, but we will stop and take a look. Something or other may have delayed Captain Spreckels. I hope to St. Patrick thim seamen I sint him has not hooked it before he got 'em safe aboard the bark."

Leaving the rickshas to wait orders, they footed it down to the wharf, and were convinced that they had found the *Arrow* even before she could be clearly made out. The darkness was shattered by the troubled Teutonic accents of Captain Spreckels, who was proclaiming to the skipper of the tug:

"I cannot wait for McDougal no longer. The tide ist turned already. My wessel must go to sea mit the morning flood. It gives me sadness to lose dot scalawag, but he has runned away mit himself."

O'Shea climbed over the guard rail and cried:

"How are you again, Captain Spreckels? What's this I hear about McDougal? I am after him meself."

The master of the *Wilhelmina Augusta* swung his arms, and made answer:

"McDougal was a slippery customer, so? I haf an immense fondness for him. By the landing here he left me to go in a ricksha to a room what he haf hired for to-night, und fetch some little t'ings what belonged to him, mostly books und some papers mit writings on 'em. He haf come to Shanghai, he tells me, mit a small bundle which he never loses, drunk or sober. While the tug is making steam and hauling her lines aboard he will do his errand. It vas an hour ago. I do not understand, but I must not wait."

"Changed his mind," suggested Paddy Blake. "Sorry ye are shy a shipmate, but the news will please me friend O'shea here. You lose; he wins."

The hull of the *Arrow* was trembling to the thrash of the screw, and her skipper was bawling the order to cast off. Captain Spreckels shouted farewell as the two visitors jumped ashore, and the tug moved astern into the fairway. As they walked toward the rickshas O'Shea remarked:

"'Tis no use to go rummagin' around to-night in search of McDougal, I suppose?"

"No; but I will find him for ye tomorrow," replied Paddy Blake. "If he has a room in the English quarter, ye can gamble he will drop into my place. If he don't, I will sind a bright lad to round him up. 'Tis easy findin' him as long as he is not livin' in the native city. What do ye suppose become of him, annyhow?"

"Maybe he flinched from the notion of quitting the East. When it gets in the blood of these tropical tramps the grip of it is not easy to break."

"And he lost his nerve at the last minute," said Paddy Blake. "I've seen cases like it. I'm that way meself."

Declining a cordial invitation to have a "nightcap," O'Shea told his ricksha coolie to take him to the Astor House. It seemed extraordinary that his quixotic pilgrimage should have so soon disclosed the identity of the derelict who had drifted into the comfortable haven of Johnny Kent's farm. This, however, did not greatly astonish O'Shea, who knew that the steps of sailormen in alien ports are not apt to stray far from the waterside. The singular feature of the business was that he should run across the sodden beach comber, McDougal, who was the needle in a haystack of prodigious size. The hand of destiny was in it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE UNKNOWN EUROPEAN.

At breakfast next morning Captain O'Shea enjoyed overhearing the talk of a party of American tourists at a nearby table. In their turn, the younger women did not fail to observe with in-

terest the clean-cut, resolute shipmaster, smartly turned out in fresh white clothes. After they had left the dining room he picked up a copy of the Shanghai *Mercury,* and carelessly turned to the shipping news, where the line caught his eye:

Bark *Wilhelmina Augusta,* Spreckels, master, cleared for Hamburg with general cargo. Sailed Woosung this a. m.

This turned his thoughts to McDougal, and he was impatient to find Paddy Blake and begin the search. He was about to toss the newspaper aside when a paragraph seemed to jump from the page and hit him between the eyes. He read it slowly, his lips moving as if he were spelling out the words:

UNKNOWN EUROPEAN MYSTERIOUSLY KILLED.

Late last night the body of a middle-aged man was discovered in the Rue Pechili by an officer of the French municipal police. The place was only a few yards from one of the gateways of the native city wall in a quarter which is largely populated by Chinese, who have overflowed into the French quarter. The man had been dead only a short time. He is supposed to have been an American or Englishman, although his identity was unknown at the hour of going to press. He was clothed in gray tweeds badly worn, and had the appearance of one who had suffered from dissipation. He had been stabbed from behind, in addition to which his body was savagely gashed and mutilated. The British police were notified, and Inspector Burke immediately took charge of the case.

Captain O'Shea's second cup of coffee stood cold and neglected while he continued to gaze abstractedly at the front page of the Shanghai *Mercury.* He was reading between the printed lines. His sun-browned face had paled a trifle. He was not afraid, but he was conscious of that same feeling of physical abhorrence which had taken hold of him when he first beheld the scarred and branded back of the man dubbed Bill Maguire.

He was absolutely certain that he could identify the "unknown European" found dead near a gateway of the native city. It was McDougal, and he had been slain because, in some manner as yet unrevealed, he had played a part in the tragic mystery of the red-haired sailor. Intuition welded the circumstances together. With this premise, O'Shea framed one swift conclusion after another. McDougal had suddenly veered from his purpose of going to sea with Captain Spreckels. With the morbid impulse of a man whose nerves were shattered by drink, he had been afraid lest the German skipper might find him and carry him off whether or no. Therefore he had fled to cover, making for the native city, where he doubtless had Chinese friends. Perhaps he had been watched and followed by hostile agents from the moment he landed in Shanghai.

"I have seen others like him," said O'Shea to himself. "They will run from their own shadows, and their friends can do nothing with them. And I must be getting a bit flighty myself, or I would not sit here and take for granted things that are no more than guesswork. How do I know that the dead man is McDougal? The answer is this: 'Tis one of me very strong hunches, and they seldom go wrong."

He passed out of the dining room, and delayed in the office of the hotel to ask a question of the clerk. The atmosphere of the place was so wholly European that the China with which O'Shea had come darkly, gropingly in touch seemed almost as far away as when he had been on the farm in Maine. The clerk went to the porch, and gave instructions to a ricksha man, and Captain O'Shea rattled off to the headquarters buildings of the English police. A Sikh orderly conducted him into the small room where Inspector Burke sat at a desk scanning a file of reports. He was a tall, dark, soldierly man of about forty. The slim-waisted khaki tunic, the riding breeches, and the polished brown puttees gave him the air of a dashing trooper of light horse. Glancing at O'Shea's card, he nodded pleasantly, and said, with a singularly winning smile:

"And what can I do for Captain Michael O'Shea, of New York? I am very much at your service."

"'Tis about the man that was found

murdered close by the native city last night," was the reply.

"Ah, by Jove!" exclaimed the inspector, and his pencil tapped the desk with a quick tattoo. "An odd case that. Most unusual. I was potterin' about on it a good part of the night. My men report that he was in Paddy Blake's place during the evening, but the old rip denies knowing him, of course. He wants to steer clear of the case. I'm rather stumped so far. You are at the Astor House? I fancy I saw you there at dinner last night."

"Right you are, sir! I am more than a little interested in this dead man," pursued O'Shea, in a straightforward manner. "And I will first describe him to ye"—which he proceeded to do with the detail of an observer whose eye was keen and memory retentive.

"That's the Johnny, to a dot!" cried Inspector Burke, alertly interested. "And when did you last see him?"

"I talked with him last night, but before we go further I will prove an alibi," hastily answered O'Shea, suddenly realizing that his position in the matter might look compromising.

"Don't trouble yourself," was the easy assurance. "You are jolly well out of it, and satisfactorily accounted for. This was a native job—not a bit of doubt of it. Suppose we take a look at the body. It is packed in ice in the godown just back of this building. Your identification must go on the records, you know. Then we can have a chin-chin, and I hope you'll be good enough to stay for tiffin with me."

O'Shea took from an inside pocket of his coat a leather bill case, and drew out a sheet of heavy paper folded several times. Spread open, it covered half the desk. Upon it he had drawn with a brush and stenciling ink a life-sized reproduction of the great Chinese character that scarred and discolored the back of the red-haired sailor.

Inspector Burke flung his cigarette aside with a quick gesture, and stared first at the desk and then at O'Shea. His pleasant composure was evidently disturbed, and he spoke abruptly:

"My word! You know a lot more about this job than I do. Where the deuce did you get that? The poor beggar that was butchered last night had the mark on him."

"I know he did, Inspector Burke. I was sure of it when I read about the thing in the newspaper this morning."

They went into the shed, and viewed what was left of the ill-fated McDougal, who had tried, too late, to throw all regrets away and make a new start at the difficult business of existence. O'Shea was keenly distressed. The man had won his sympathy. He would have liked to befriend him.

Inspector Burke said kindly: "Did you know him at all well? He must have amounted to something once. Was he ever a chum of yours?"

"I never laid eyes on him till last evening in Paddy Blake's," answered O'Shea. "And now I will sit down with ye and spin the yarn of the sailorman that I called Bill Maguire for convenience."

The inspector listened gravely, nodding comprehendingly now and then, as if his own experience might have crossed the trail of this same story. When O'Shea ceased talking, his comment was as follows:

"Most extraordinary! I fancy we can help each other a bit. But, mind you, I don't pretend to know much about this mysterious murder society that goes about chopping people up. I have heard of it, of course, but until now its activities have been confined to the Chinese. We don't pretend to police the native city. The Chinese governor runs his own show. There are native detectives on my staff, but their work is mostly in the foreign municipality. The case of this McDougal is the first of its kind. And I rather think you have supplied the motive. He knew too much."

"But what did he know?" demanded O'Shea. "There was this sailor, by the right name of Jim Eldridge, ye understand. He got his in the same way. They were mixed up together at one time or another."

Inspector Burke withdrew from a drawer of his desk a large envelope,

and emptied out several torn sheets and fragments of paper, which looked as if they had been trampled under foot. Some were covered with handwriting in English, while others held columns of Chinese characters. They were so mud-stained and crumpled, however, that only a few lines here and there were at all legible. O'Shea gazed at them eagerly, surmising what they were before the inspector explained:

"My men picked them up in the street where McDougal's body was found."

"Yes. He must have had a bundle of books and papers under his arm, for I heard mention of the same," cried O'Shea. "Like enough, it was ripped apart in the scrimmage, and the blood-thirsty heathen made off with whatever they could lay their hands on in a hurry. If they spied any Chinese writing they would grab at it. What do ye say, Inspector Burke?"

"There are bits of some sort of a diary here, Captain O'Shea, and odds and ends that only a native could make head or tail of. I looked them over early this morning, and one of my Chinese did what he could to help. It is impossible to arrange the fragments in any sequence, but the story you tell me dovetails rather curiously with some of the sentences."

"There was many a queer thing stowed away in that noddle of his," said O'Shea, "and he was an educated man, so he would be apt to take notes of them. And does he make any mention at all of this Jim Eldridge, alias Bill Maguire?"

Inspector Burke carefully smoothed a torn sheet of paper, and laid a finger on a few lines scrawled in a shaky hand. They held no reference to the sailor, but several of the phrases were startlingly familiar to Captain O'Shea. The mutilated passage ran thus:

Very horrid dreams last night—brandy failed to drive them away. Was in a steamer on the Stinking River—the Painted Joss came through the cabin porthole, squeezing itself small as if made of rubber, and then expanding to gigantic size. It strangled me slowly, making hideous faces. This is a warning. When I dream of the Painted Joss, I am on the edge of seeing things while awake. The fear of violent death is——

Captain O'Shea was vividly reminded of the disjointed monologue of Bill Maguire, who had shown symptoms of a similar antipathy to the "Painted Joss."

"McDougal wrote down the Stinking River as if it was a real name," he said to Inspector Burke. "I thought Maguire called it that because it smelled bad. If it is on the map, can ye locate it? And is there by any chance a town with the title of Wang Li Fu on the banks of the same?"

Inspector Burke summoned a fat, drowsy-looking interpreter, and put several questions to him. After poring over an atlas for some time, this owlish Chinese gentleman vouchsafed the information that a navigable stream known as the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells did, indeed, flow through a coastwise part of Kiangsu province, emptying into the wide estuary of the old mouth of the Yellow River. There was a city in that region which had been great and flourishing until the Tai Ping rebellion laid it in ruins. It was now no more than a wretched hamlet, although in local usage it had retained the name of Wang Li Fu, the last syllable of which signified a chief city of a province.

"I say, this is interesting!" exclaimed Inspector Burke. "I am inclined to think that you and I have picked up a warm scent, Captain O'Shea. I say, here's another bit of paper we can manage to read."

They pored over a muddy page of McDougal's diary, and discovered, alas! that it was no more than a fragment of a little Chinese farce called "The Mender of Broken Chinaware." McDougal had picked it up from some troop of strolling players, and jotted down a rough translation of his own, beginning:

Seeking a livelihood by the work of my hands,
Daily do I traverse the streets of the city.
Well, here I am, a mender of broken jars,
An unfortunate victim of ever-changing plans.

To repair fractured jars is my sole occupation.
'Tis even so. Disconsolate am I, Niu Chau.

The two investigators laid this page aside, and scanned the remaining scraps of paper. The Chinese writing consisted almost wholly of quotations, lines from the classics, racy proverbs of the common people, and so on. They contained nothing whatever that might throw more light on the mystery of McDougal. In much the same way, what he had written in English concerned itself with his wanderings from port to port and his pitiful failures to hold a position.

"What we want most was lost in the scuffle," said O'Shea. "The earlier part of this diary may have told the story that you and I are anxious to know."

"I fancy we know more than any other two white men in China," drawled Inspector Burke. "If a chap is really keen to find out something about this blackguardly organization, he will make a voyage to the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells, and go pokin' about the ruined town of Wang Li Fu. It's out of my bailiwick. Now, whether I ought to lay this information before the Chinese officials of the provincial government——"

"Excuse me for meddling," O'Shea broke in, with a boyish, eager smile; "but I have come a long way to go rummaging about in this mess on me own hook. And do ye think the Chinese government could be trusted to go ahead and accomplish anything at all? This evidence of ours is no more than guesswork——"

"I have thought of that, Captain O'Shea. And the thing would not be done quietly. There would be a lot of chin-chin, and clumsy preparation, and a gunboat, and pigtailed soldiers, and Shanghai getting wind of the expedition. It would be better to do the trick off one's own bat."

"My friend—the sailorman with the cracked top—remarked most emphatic about the 'head devil' when he was spilling disconnected language," thoughtfully observed O'Shea. "'Tis me strong opinion that he tangled himself with the main works of this busy fraternity of man-killers."

"What are your plans, may I ask? You are welcome to all the information my men may pick up in the native city. What a lark! I wish I might get a leave of absence and go with you."

"I would ask no better partner," warmly returned O'Shea. "Well, I will buy charts, and study the coast of this Kiangsu province, and learn what I can about the inland waters. And then I will find a few good men that will go to hell for wages and fight for the love of it. And I will charter a little steamer that is fit to navigate rivers, and we will be what you might call an expedition."

Inspector Burke gripped the hard hand of Captain O'Shea, and exclaimed with a laugh:

"Here's luck to you! My word, but you're the most refreshin' man I've met since I came off frontier service in India! I will help you find your men. Nothing easier. Shanghai can furnish you gentlemanly remittance men from England, stranded American soldiers from Manila, time-expired bluejackets from Hongkong, broken shipmasters from God knows where, and assorted scamps who will follow any one that will buy the drinks."

"'Tis cheerful news, Inspector Burke. I will have a council of war with you to-morrow at this time. I wish that you would see that poor McDougal is buried decent in a Christian churchyard, and I will be glad to pay the bills. He was a good man once."

CHAPTER IX.

INTRODUCING THE DAPPER CHARLEY TONG SIN.

The same evening Captain O'Shea remained in his room at the hotel until after nine o'clock. For one thing, he wrote a long letter to Johnny Kent, acquainting that doughty farmer with the encouraging progress of the enterprise, which promised "to deal out enough trouble to satisfy any reasonable man."

Then he took his letter of credit from the leather bill book, and made sundry calculations. After leaving Inspector Burke, he had rambled along the water front, and made random inquiries concerning charter prices. Freights were low, and the river trade dull. His funds could stand the strain. Fighting men of the kind he wanted were cheap, and he would ship coolies as stokers and deck hands. However, O'Shea was ready to see the thing through if it took his last penny. What man with blood in him wouldn't be glad to pay the price of such a picnic as this?

Having jotted down his estimates of the cost of coal, stores, wages, arms, and so on, he cocked an eye at the total, and said to himself:

"'Tis the first time I ever backed an expedition of my own, and was not pulling some one else's irons out of the fire. I feel like the minister of war of a revolutionary government."

Gathering up his papers, he was about to restore them to the leather wallet when he caught sight of the folded sheet containing the great Chinese character which he had displayed to Inspector Burke. It was not a thing to be carried about carelessly, and perhaps exposed to view in the course of his business dealings with banks or shops or shipping agents. Some association with this sinister symbol had cost poor McDougal his life. And Chinese were to be found everywhere in the European settlement. With an unusually prudent impulse, Captain O'Shea thrust the folded paper between the layers of clothing in his trunk and put the key in his pocket.

The night was young, the air warm and close within doors, and he felt not in the least like turning in. Strolling through the wide corridors, he passed into the street, and moved idly in the direction of the Bund, attracted by the music of a band which was playing in the park near by. The place was like a lovely garden, with wide areas of lawn, and a profusion of foliage. The large number of men and women who walked to and fro or chatted in groups were, for the most part, English, American, and German exiles of a fashionable and prosperous air, who appeared to find life in the Far East quite endurable and success in their commercial enterprises not harassingly difficult.

Captain O'Shea found a seat on a rustic bench, and watched the passing show. Presently he smiled as he descried the incongruous figure of a wizened, little, elderly Irishman in a black frock coat, with a rusty tall hat firmly jammed on the back of his head. In this smart company, Paddy Blake was a fish out of water; but he had lost not a bit of his brisk, devil-may-care demeanor, which dared any one to tread on the tail of the coat aforesaid. O'Shea hailed him, and he halted to cackle cordially:

"I was lookin' for ye to drop into me place all day. There was a magnum on ice and a brace of cold roast Chinese pheasants that 'u'd make a king lick his chops. I had something important to impart to ye in the back room."

"'Twas about McDougal, no doubt," said O'Shea. "I found him, and dead as a mackerel he was."

"I had the same news this mornin'," exclaimed Paddy Blake. "One of me Chinese barboys lives in the native city forninst the French gate. He was bound home last night whin the body was found, but the likes of him 'u'd scuttle away and say nawthin' to the police."

"Inspector Burke tells me that you were not too free with information yourself," dryly observed O'Shea.

Paddy Blake vehemently thumped his knee with his tall hat, and returned:

"Me place has a bad enough reputation, God knows, and the domned British police is biased agin' me. Would it do me anny good to be dragged into court as witness in a murder case, and the inspector makin' out that the man got drunk on my booze, which is wrong entirely, for McDougal was sober when he went off in tow of Captain Spreckels, as ye well know. But 'tis no use holdin' post-mortems. Thim Chinese divils done for McDougal, same as he

was afraid of. And are ye makin' anny headway in the matter of the big, red-headed man that I informed ye was Jim Eldridge, mate of the *Tai Yan* steamer?"

"I will have no easy weather of it without McDougal," said O'Shea, who had no intention of showing his hand to Paddy Blake.

An electric lamp illuminated the path in front of them, but a large tree cast a shadow past one end of the bench, which was why they did not sooner perceive a young man who stood scanning the crowd as if he had nothing more to do than listen to the music. Now he stepped into the light, and was about to move on when he caught sight of the tall hat of old Paddy Blake. As though recognizing this ancient landmark, he made a mock pass at it with his lacquered stick, and exclaimed, in accents easily familiar:

"Hello, old sport! I was betting you the price of a new hat on the arrival time of the German mail boat last week. You won, Paddy. But why have you not got the hat—what?"

O'Shea was surveying the jocular young man with considerable interest. Here was a type new to him—the dapper, blasé, slangy Chinese of Shanghai, wearing European clothes and manners, ardent patron of the club and the race track, and forsaking his countrymen to live in a foreign-built villa on the Bubbling Well Road. An English tailor and an English haberdasher had adorned this young man regardless of expense, but O'Shea surmised that he was something more than a gilded rounder. He looked quick-witted and efficient, and very wise in worldly knowledge. Moreover, there was an odd quality of respect in the manner of the unterrified Paddy Blake as he replied to the greeting:

"An' what's the good worrd, Charley? Can I do annything at all for ye? I was waitin' to buy the new hat whin this one wore out. 'Tis a shame to toss it away. I want ye to know Captain O'Shea, a seafarin' fri'nd of mine from New York. Captain, this is Misther Charley Tong Sing, comprador for Jordan, Margetson & Co., an' the smartest comprador that ye will find between Tientsin and Singapore, if I do say it to his face."

O'Shea shook hands with the affable young man, who laughed and retorted:

"Paddy is a great chap for the blarney—a first-chop jollier, you bet. We do some business together when my firm wants sailors for its ships. Sometimes Paddy beats me; not so often I skin him."

"Listen to him!" chuckled the old man. "If iver I got the best of him just once it 'u'd make me too proud to live with. Well, I must be trottin' along to me own dump. I wandered to the park on the chance of pickin' up a couple of stray sailors. If ye can be of anny service to Captain O'Shea, I will count it a favor, Charley. He's a stranger, and he's Irish, and he has made a hit with me."

Paddy Blake departed in great haste, and Charley Tong Sin offered O'Shea a cigarette from an ornately jeweled case, remarking:

"You are in Shanghai for business or pleasure? It is a bully good town for fun, not as swift as New York, but not so slow, either. I went to college in America."

"Which is more than I did," confessed O'Shea. "Oh, I am just looking about Shanghai, not to find out how swift the town is, but to invest a bit of money, maybe. Jordan, Margetson? That is a big shipping house."

"The same. I am in charge of the native business," chirruped Charley Tong Sin. "Anything in the shipping line you want, you come to see me, and I will put you wise. You have done business in these ports before, captain?"

"No; mostly in the Atlantic trade. I was in the office of your firm this afternoon, asking some information about a possible charter."

"Ah—but your did not see me. Too bad!" And the compradlor added with bland self-satisfaction: "It must have been after three o'clock. Then I am in the club, drinking gin cocktails every

day until I go home to dinner. It is my custom. There is no man in Shanghai that does more business and drinks more gin cocktails, but I do not mix the two things. I am the wise guy, eh? What tonnage do you want to charter, and where to?"

"I am not quite ready to say," replied O'Shea, who preferred to keep his affairs to himself even when offered the assistance of so capable an adviser as Charley Tong Sin.

"I beg your pardon. Come to my office when you have made up your mind, Captain O'Shea. For the sake of the jolly sprees I had in little old New York, I will see that you are not stung in Shanghai. What do you say to a drive on the Bubbling Well Road before you go back to your hotel? My carriage is waiting a little way from here. I came to the park to meet a friend, but he has not arrived."

The invitation was attractive, and the acquaintance of the comprador worth cultivating. O'Shea accepted with thanks, and presently they climbed into a very shiny victoria, with two Chinese grooms on the box. The spirited little horses, admirably matched, danced through the paved streets of the settlement, and out into the wider spaces of the countryside. The shipmaster found pleasure in new places. With him sight-seeing had never lost its zest, and the Bubbling Well Road was one of the things that no voyager to the Orient ought to miss. To view it by night was rather unsatisfactory, but the air was deliciously sweet and cool, and the handsome, embowered residences of merchants and diplomats and Chinese officials appeared quite magnificent when duskily discerned by the glimmer of the stars.

"You have seen the native city? No?" said Charley Tong Sin. "It is very dirty, but picturesque to beat the deuce. What you say? To-morrow morning I go to have an appointment with his excellency the governor at his yamen. It is on business. Perhaps you would like to meet me there and have an audience? It is rather good fun, much red tape, a big bunch of officials, and plenty of kotowing. Not many foreigners have admittance to him in this way."

It occurred to Captain O'Shea that he should very much like to learn what the government of the native city, or the police department thereof, had discovered in connection with the murder of McDougal. And to gain an entrance in company with the influential comprador, himself a Chinese, was to make his inquiries under the most favorable circumstances.

"I will jump at the chance," he exclaimed. "A man like me that may do business in China in a small way should make himself solid with the powers that be."

"I am sorry that I cannot meet you at your hotel, and take you to the yamen," explained Charley Tong Sin; "but to-morrow I must be very early at my office to make up the accounts of a ship that will sail for Hankow, and then I will have to hurry into the native city like the very devil. If you tell your ricksha man to carry you to the governor's yamen, I will be there and see you at eight o'clock."

"I can find my way, and many thanks to you," cordially returned O'Shea. "The native city is strange water, but no doubt the ricksha pilot will know his course."

It was drawing near to midnight when the shiny victoria left Captain O'Shea at the Astor House, and the obliging Charley Tong Sin bade him adieu. The shipmaster went, yawning, to his room, agreeably refreshed by the outing, and ready for bed. He was a tidy man by habit, having stowed himself and his belongings for much of his life in a space no larger than a respectable closet. Even in a hotel room, he left nothing strewn about.

He had no more than pulled off his coat when he observed that things were not arranged exactly as he had left them. His eye noted one trifle, and this led him to look for others. The Chinese servant had been in to turn down the bed, leave fresh towels, and pick up burned matches and scraps of paper; but something other than this

routine handiwork had been busy in the room. His things had been examined hastily, but with careful endeavor to leave them as they were. Opening one bureau drawer after another, he found confirmation of this suspicion. The articles therein had been not so much poked about in disorder as moved from their places by exploring hands.

If a thief had been in the room, he found no booty for his pains, for there was neither money nor jewelry to be looted. Captain O'Shea thoughtfully picked up a leather hand bag which was locked as he had left it. Inserting the key, he looked inside. He had been careful to slip a box of revolver cartridges into a leather flap pocket because the pasteboard covering was broken, and they were apt to spill loose in the botom of the bag. Evidently it had been ransacked, for the box of cartridges was not in the pocket, but lodged in a fold of a raincoat which half filled the bag.

O'Shea whistled softly, and moved straightway to his trunk. This also was locked. Flinging back the lid, he instantly searched between the layers of clothing for the folded sheet of heavy paper on which he had drawn with a brush and stenciling ink the ominous Chinese character which was branded into the back of the red-haired sailorman.

The paper was missing. Something had already told him that he should find it missing. He made no further search, but sat himself down on the edge of the bed, and stared very hard at the blank wall. The night was as warm as before, but he felt curiously chilly.

"'Tis like as if some one had jammed an icicle into the small of my back," he reflected. "I will not cry before I am hurt, but there's more to this diverting adventure of mine than Johnny Kent and I ever dreamed of on the farm."

Certain conclusions were boldly obvious. His real business in China had been discovered by the same agency which had tried to slay the red-haired sailor, and which had murdered McDougal. The paper had been stolen because it was a clinching proof of his active interest and interference, and perhaps also to terrify and intimidate him with the realization that intelligences—hostile and secret—were spying on him. It was futile to try to guess how the knowledge of his purpose had been disclosed. McDougal may have been watched and followed, as O'Shea had already surmised, and they had been seen talking together in Paddy Blake's place. Some listener may have been unseen during the interview at the headquarters of Inspector Burke.

To make complaint either to the hotel management or to the police that his room had been entered seemed a silly proceeding. To catch this kind of a thief was as hopeless as chasing a phantom. It was decidedly unpleasant to think of going to sleep in this room, for, as Captain Michael O'Shea admitted to himself, with a very serious countenance:

"The lad that did that trick is likely to sift in through the keyhole if he takes the notion, and chop the brand into my back after slipping the knife into me before I can wake up to find out how dead I am. I would like to sleep in the same bed with Inspector Burke and a battery of the Royal Artillery this night, but if I lose my nerve Johnny Kent will disown me entirely."

With this he looked over his defenses like a seasoned campaigner, and assembled the chair, the crockery, and the large tin bathtub, together with the heavier articles of his own kit. Two chairs he placed against the door, one balanced on top of the other, so that if dislodged they would topple over with a good deal of noise. The cord of the mosquito canopy he cut in twain, and so ingeniously suspended tub and crockery just inside the two windows that the wariest intruder must certainly set in motion a clamorous little avalanche. Then, having tucked his revolver under the pillow, he prudently commended his soul to his Maker, and composed himself to slumber of a hair-trigger kind.

CHAPTER X.

THE LONE RICKSHA.

The night passed without alarm, and Captain Michael O'Shea roused himself out soon after daybreak to smoke three strong Manila cigars and organize himself as a strategy board, or one might have said that he was clearing for action.

He decided that he would keep the appointment to meet Charley Tong Sin at the yamen of the governor of the native city. No mischance was likely to befall him in broad daylight, and, given the opportunity, he would seek a private interview with that official. This business dispatched, he proposed to show the water front of Shanghai how speedily a river steamer could be manned and taken to sea.

Having eaten breakfast early, and with good appetite, Captain O'Shea went out to find a ricksha. Only one of them happened to be standing in front of the hotel, and he had little trouble in making the swarthy, sturdy fellow in the shafts understand where he wished to go. The coolie set off at a racing trot, whisking the vehicle along with amazing ease. The passenger had not outgrown the idea that it was rather absurd and unfair for an able-bodied person to be pulled along in this fashion by another man no stronger than himself. Therefore he nodded approval when the coolie slackened his gait and yelled at another stalwart Chinese squatted on the curbstone, who picked himself up and ran behind the ricksha as "push man," making a double team of it.

Moved by two-man power, the light vehicle made a speedy passage through the British settlement, and turned into the French quarter to reach the nearest gateway of the native city wall. Soon the order and cleanliness and modernity of European territory and dominion were left behind, and the ricksha had spun into the swarming, filthy streets of the immemorial China.

"The River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells can be no worse than this," said O'Shea to himself. "And, for the love of Heaven, was there ever such a mess of people jumbled together?"

No more than eight or ten feet wide, the alleys were crowded with peddlers and street merchants, selling cakes, fish, pork, vegetables, porcelain, furs, embroideries, pictures, bamboo pipes, their wares displayed on little wooden stands or spread upon the rutted flagstones. Jostling among them were laden mules, top-heavy wheelbarrows, bawling coolies sweating beneath the burdens of the shoulder yoke, hordes of idlers, screaming children, until it was to wonder why traffic was not wholly blockaded.

Into this ruck of humanity, this immense confusion and noise, the two ricksha men hurled their vehicle like a projectile. They shouted incessantly, threatening and reviling, nor tried to pick a way through the press. Those who got in their path were knocked head over heels. Peddlers' barrows were upset helter-skelter. The onward course of Captain O'Shea was as destructive as a typhoon.

He yelled at his headlong chargers to slow down. They were likely to cause a riot. Already a mob was buzzing angrily in their wake, and several missiles were hurled at the ricksha. Captain O'Shea had the sensations of a man who was being run away with. This brace of pigtailed fiends had gone mad, and bolted hell for leather. He was of a mind to jump out and let them go their own gait, but this enlarged baby carriage of a ricksha was awkward to disembark from while under way, and he was reluctant to risk landing on his head. If he menaced them with a revolver, the mob would be apt to join forces with them against the foreigner. Still, this might be the peculiar fashion of conveying a gentleman to the governor's yamen, and perhaps he had better sit tight and hold hard until the ship struck a rock.

Presently, however, he observed that several big, swarthy men in blue cotton blouses were running alongside the coolie in the shafts, and holding shouted converse with him. They appeared to be friends of his, and Captain O'Shea

did not like their looks. They were harder, more truculent of visage than the pasty-faced Shanghai coolie class. The tough has the same earmarks the world over, and these fellows were ruffians whom one would not care to meet in the dark.

A few minutes after these had joined the company the ricksha turned abruptly from one of the crowded streets, and moved, with undiminished speed, into a wider, but much less-frequented, thoroughfare lined with stables, straw-littered courtyards whose buildings were in ruinous decay, and hovels used as slaughterhouses, where mangy dogs prowled in search of offal. The ricksha tilted and veered sharply in the direction of one of these disreputable courtyards, and Captain Michael O'Shea, quite certain that he was not headed toward the governor's yamen, acted decisively and on the spur of the moment.

Things were going all wrong, and very probably he would alight from the frying pan into the fire, but this was nothing less than an abduction. The coolie in the shafts had coiled his queue under his cap, possibly to guard against the very maneuver that O'Shea executed. But the wind and the rapid motion had loosed the end of the thick black braid, and it bobbed between his shoulders and whipped free as he ran.

Bending forward, O'Shea clutched the queue in a tremendous grip, and lay back as if he were hauling on a mainsheet. The rascal's head was fetched up with a dislocating jerk, his feet pawed the air for an instant, and his hands lost their hold of the shafts. Then, as he came down and tried vainly to get a footing, the careering ricksha rammed him from behind, and sent him sprawling on his face. Shot out from his seat went Captain O'Shea, his feet in front of him, a revolver in his fist, ready to bound up from the pavement and open the engagement on the instant.

The "push man" had been violently poked under the chin by the hack of the suddenly halted ricksha, and he lay groaning and doubled up several feet away. The ruffianly escort, taken by surprise, ran a little distance before they could wheel and return to the scene. Captain O'Shea had a moment in which to get his bearings and take stock of the situation. Darting for the nearest wall, he braced his back against it, and stood waiting, a stern, steady man, with a quick gray eye. The big, swarthy rascals in the blue blouses fiercely jabbered together, gazed up and down the almost deserted street, and, with no more delay, drew knives from their baggy breeches, and charged with heads down.

O'Shea threw up his revolver for a snapshot at the foremost of them. The hammer clicked. There was no report. He pulled trigger again, with the same result. For the third time the hammer fell, with the safe futile, sickening click. This was his finish. The thing was absurd, incredible. Raging, he grasped the weapon by the barrel, and ran forward to swing the butt against the nearest shaven head. A long knife ripped at him, and slashed his sleeve. He cracked the man's head like a nut, but the others were at him like wolves. He dodged, and tried to take to his heels, but the two ricksha men blocked his path.

One of the assassins had worked around behind him, and was trying to trip and get him down, so that they could cut him to ribbons at their leisure. The knives hemmed him in. He slipped and fell upon one knee. The ruffians laughed.

Then, lo and behold, they were scampering frantically away, yelling in fear, scrambling over walls like monkeys, diving into the stables and courtyards, flying for the lower end of the street. In a twinkling Captain O'Shea was alone, magically snatched from death. White and shaking, he stood and gazed at a near-by corner of the crooked thoroughfare. Filing past it came a squad of British bluejackets in white clothes, and the sun winked brightly on the polished metal of their rifles and cutlasses. Beside the lieutenant in front of them strode a tall, slim-waisted man in khaki uniform, whom O'Shea recognized as

Inspector Burke. O'Shea's assailants had been warned in time to scurry to cover before the British party had more than a flying glimpse of them. At a quick order shouted by the lieutenant, the sailors scattered into the yards and squalid buildings, but the fugitives had escaped by a dozen dark and devious exits, to vanish in the labyrinths of the teeming, mysterious native city.

Inspector Burke was pounding O'Shea on the back and exclaiming vigorously: "My word, old chap! What sort of a bally row is this? The beggars nearly did for you. Lucky we happened along, wasn't it?"

"'Tis all of that," earnestly replied the shipmaster. "And who are ye, anyhow? Is this a fairy story or a play right out of the theater? You came on the stage about one second before the curtain rung down."

"Lieutenant Kempton-Shaw—ah, here he is!—allow me to present him, Captain O'Shea; as I was about to say, he came ashore from the *Warspite* gunboat this mornin' with a batch of Chinese pirates, the real thing, don't you know. He took them out of a junk after a rather nice little shindy last week. He marched them to the Chinese prison just now; it's in this quarter of the native city, and their heads will be cut off to-morrow. I'm awfully pleased that we were takin' this short cut home. In close quarters, weren't you?"

"I have never found them a closer fit," said O'Shea. "I was on my way for a chat with the governor, and a gang of bad citizens tried to wipe me out. I will walk along with you if ye don't mind. There is enough Irish in me to waste no great love on the British flag, but I will say, Lieutenant Kempton-Shaw, that I never laid eyes on a finer, handsomer lot of men than these lads of yours from the *Warspite*."

"Thanks—and I fancy you mean it," smiled the naval officer. "This is extraordinary, by Jove! Foreigners are fairly safe in the native city as a rule, are they not, Burke? What do you make of it?"

"I shall have to hear Captain O'Shea's report."

"I have no long-winded report to offer," incisively declared the shipmaster. "I have my suspicions, and you can guess what they are, Inspector Burke. 'Tis the same business that we talked about in your office. But I wish nothing to do with any police investigations. You will report this row of mine to the native government, I have no doubt, and I hope ye will try to collect an indemnity for my distressed emotions; but I have no time to dilly-dally about in Shanghai. I will go to sea. Will you help me to find the men?"

"From the tone of your voice, I infer that your business is not precisely pacific, my dear sir," put in Lieutenant Kempton-Shaw. "Do you mind letting the *Warspite* in on this cruise of yours?"

"Thank you, but I have set out to handle it as an affair of my own. I may have bit off more than I can chew, but I will try to see it through."

"Meet me at my office at noon, and I'll have some men for you to look over," said Inspector Burke. "I'll pick up a crew for you if I have to make a general jail delivery."

CHAPTER XI.

THE CREW OF THE "WHANG HO."

As they trudged along, Captain O'Shea became silent and abstracted. He was not in a mood for conversation. Conjecture pointed one way. He had been a gullible fool, who deserved to have a knife stuck in his ribs. It had been as easy to trap him as though he were a lubber on his first voyage out from home. It had been with design that only one ricksha stood in front of the hotel that morning when he was ready to go to the native city. And the pair of coolies were hired cutthroats, who had steered him into the disgusting street among the slaughter-houses in order that he might be put out of the way, leaving never a trace of his fate behind him.

Reasoning back from this link to the next preceding, his room had been entered and ransacked while he was safely out of the way in a carriage on the Bubbling Well Road. Some time had been required to make that careful examination, and to fit keys to his hand bag and trunk. Also, he had just now investigated his revolver, and discovered that the firing pin of the hammer had been filed, not enough for the eye to notice it, but sufficiently to cause the impact to fail to explode the primer of the cartridge.

The affable, gilded young gentleman who had invited him to drive on the Bubbling Well Road was the same kind acquaintance who had suggested that he take a ricksha and visit the native city in the morning. The finger of coincidence pointed in the direction of that smartest of compradors, Charley Tong Sin.

"That kind of coincidence is unhealthier than the cholera," said O'Shea to himself. "Maybe this sport with the college education and the taste for gin cocktails is a good friend of mine, but I will give him no chance to prove it again. I have been on the jump ever since I met him. If he is not crooked he is a hoodoo. And 'tis not impossible, after all, that he is mixed up with this band of murderers that I am gunning after."

He would keep these suspicions to himself. They lacked tangible proof, and he held to the view that the business was entirely his own. He had plunged into this befogged maze of circumstances like a boy on a holiday, and it was for him to extricate himself like a man. With the warmest expressions of gratitude, he parted from Inspector Burke and the naval lieutenant as soon as they had come to the British municipality, and hastened in the direction of the water front.

Less than an hour later he was inspecting a light-draft steamer called the *Whang Ho,* owned by the China Navigation Company. She was old, sadly in need of repairs, and about as seaworthy for rough weather as a packing box. But O'Shea felt confident that she could be nursed along to serve his purpose, and the larger, better vessels available for charter at short notice were not so handy for exploring muddy rivers and strange corners. Having put to sea at one time and another in craft which were held together only by their paint, Captain O'Shea asked no more of the *Whang Ho* than that her boilers should make steam and her engines turn over. He dared not examine the machinery too closely lest he might lose confidence in his steamer, but the owners' agent assured him that she was fit for service without tinkering, and he took his word for it.

"Start her fires going at once," said O'Shea, "and if enough pressure shows on the gauges to turn her wheel over as she lies at her moorings I will sign the charter party and insurance papers, and slap down the two thousand dollars for a month's use of the venerable relic."

"That is fair enough," replied the agent. "And it is as good as done. You can go ahead with getting your supplies, Captain O'Shea. I take it that you want to do a bit of exploration work for one of the American syndicates? We have done quite a lot of business with your people and their concessions."

"It may be something like that," briefly returned O'Shea. "And now will you be kind enough to tell me where to order a hundred and fifty tons of steam coal to be put in the bunkers this very day?"

"Our company will be pleased to let you have it, and I can guarantee prompt delivery from lighters alongside the steamer. Or I presume that Jordan, Margetson will do the same for you."

"I think I will not deal with Jordan, Margetson," and O'Shea's voice was smooth and pleasant. "The comprador is a very able young man."

"Charley Tong Sin? Well, rather. A smart chap that."

"Yes, very. I wish I could keep my razor as sharp."

Captain O'Shea next visited a ship chandler's, and submitted his list of stores, making it a condition of pay-

ment that the stuff should be in the steamer before sunset. The elderly German who served him had the tact and discretion bred of long experience with the seafarers of the unexpected Orient. It was his business to sell them whatever they might want, to take his profit, and ask no questions. Yes, he could find thirty service rifles and revolvers, also cutlasses of the best steel. They were of patterns discarded by a certain European government, but excellent weapons. He would be glad to sell to the captain one, five, or ten thousand of them. The captain was not a man to wag a foolish tongue—one could see it at a glance.

"You and I might do business some day," quoth O'Shea; "but I am too busy to start a revolution at present."

He sent a note to Paddy Blake, asking him to find a dozen Chinese firemen and sailors, and a river pilot, and to muster them ready for signing articles in the afternoon. He believed the old Irishman to be a ripened scoundrel at his own trade, but suspected him of no complicity in the maneuvers of Charley Tong Sin. The comprador had merely used Paddy Blake as a means of making the acquaintance of Captain O'Shea.

Five minutes after noon the shipmaster—he had taken a decided dislike to riding in rickshas—trudged into the headquarters building of Inspector Burke.

"I have a choice collection for you to look over," said the latter. "They are waiting in another room, and I should call them a worried lot. I sent my men out to pick them up, do you see, and they have not been told the reason why."

"I cannot afford to be particular, Inspector Burke. Let me at them, and I will see whether I am safer ashore among the Chinese or at sea with your exhibit of beach combers."

"Oh, they're not as bad as that," the inspector assured him. "I should scarcely call them desperate characters. However, while I wish you the best of luck, old chap, I shall shed never a tear if you lose your shipmates somewhere beyond Shanghai. Let us call them soldiers of misfortune if you like."

He led the way into the large drill room, where a score and more of men stood in uneasy attitudes, and appeared not at all comfortable in this environment. O'Shea let his glance rove in swift, appraising scrutiny, and smiled to himself as he recognized one familiar type after another. He had recruited such men as these for unostentatious ventures in the waters of the Spanish Main. Here was the red-faced, burly shipmaster ready with a glib speech and fluent curses to explain how he happened to be without his papers; the shambling ne'er-do-well with the slack mouth and the weak chin who had fled from a scrape at home to lose himself in foreign ports; the tanned adventurer, brave and resourceful, who was fit for nothing else than the life of a rover; the battered old seaman worn out by the hardships of the forecastle, who had been turned adrift from the hospital; the cashiered army officer with the hall mark of his caste blurred, but still visible; the sharp-featured young man with the furtive eye, who lived by his wits, and found it very hard living indeed; the bleary tropical tramp, who would sell his soul for a drink of brandy.

These and the rest of them were seedy in various ways. They conveyed a sense of failure, of having lost their grip. Their clothes did not convey this so much as what life had written in their faces. Several, in fact, were dressed in clean white duck and linen, and had been freshly shaven. They were fighting hard to preserve the outward guise of self-respect. And yet every man of them had marched to police headquarters at a word from Inspector Burke with the sick fear in his heart that his past had overtaken him, or that he was to be deported for the good of the community, or that he was to be locked up as a vagrant.

Inspector Burke felt pity for them. It was heartless to keep the poor devils in this painful suspense. With a curt nod, he addressed them in a group, for

they had unwittingly drifted together, as if finding some small comfort in solidarity.

"This is not police business," said he. "I sent for you to oblige my friend, Captain O'Shea. He will explain what he wants, and I advise you to play square with him, and I'm quite sure he will make it worth while."

At this the company brightened, and looked so immensely relieved that the inspector could not forebear to smile. The hangdog manner fled. Shoulders were braced, heads held erect. They were like different men. O'Shea had a less pessimistic opinion of them. He had already concluded to show no finicky taste by picking and choosing. He would take them in a lump, good, bad, and indifferent. Those who were really competent would soon disclose it on shipboard, and they could help him hammer the others into shape.

"My speech to you will be short and sweet," said he. "I need men for a voyage coastwise, and my steamer will be ready to sail to-night. Ye will live well, and I expect you to obey orders. 'Tis not sailors' work, or I should not take on your kind. The fewer questions ye ask the more popular you will be with me. The pay will be at the rate of five dollars a day, gold, but I will give no advances. I want ye to come aboard sober. If you handle yourselves like men I will pay you a bonus at the end of the voyage. Those that want to go will give me their names."

Not a man hung back or asked a question. They whispered softly among themselves, as if afraid to make a slip that might break the spell. Captain O'Shea had one thing more to say, and they listened with the most devout attention:

"I took note of the small Hotel London, down by the waterside. 'Tis a clean, decent place, and I have had a word with the landlord. I will give every man of you my card. If you show it to him he will be pleased to entertain you at dinner at once, and he will hand ye out cigars and three drinks apiece—no more. And I will meet you there for supper at six to-night."

"Excellent strategy!" murmured Inspector Burke.

"By the way," cried O'Shea to his pleased followers, "I overlooked something. I need a chief engineer. Can any one of you qualify?"

It appeared that none of them was sufficiently acquainted with the internal works of a steamer to pass as an expert, although a young man of a very cockney accent thought he might do as an assistant.

Inspector Burke made haste to remark:

"I say, let me give you the very man for the job. Kittridge is his name. It's rather awkward, for he is in clink at present—the British jail. But his time expires to-morrow; he was given thirty days—and I dare say the magistrate will be willing to sign release papers if I explain the situation."

"I am not asking my men for references," observed O'Shea; "but, as a matter of mild curiosity, what did ye put this Kittridge away for?"

"He tried to whip my entire Sikh police force, and he made a jolly good beginning. Then his ship sailed away, and left him in quod. He was engineer in a Cardiff tramp. A very good man, I understand."

"He sounds like it. His references are most satisfactory, especially what he did to your turbaned cops," O'Shea cordially affirmed. "Send this Kittridge to the Hotel London, if you please, and give him this card of mine, and tell him to wait for me there."

CHAPTER XII.

THE VANISHED CHINAMEN.

Through the afternoon Captain Michael O'Shea, now master of the aged river steamer *Whang Ho*, was the busiest and most energetic of men. A hundred and one things presented themselves as necessary to be done. When at length he hurried into the Hotel London, shortly before the supper hour, his men were waiting, hopeful, expectant, cheerful, smoking his cigars, and with the three drinks apiece tucked under their belts. Among them was a lanky,

solemn person with a pair of gray side whiskers and a leathery complexion criss-crossed with a network of fine wrinkles. His whole appearance was eminently decorous and respectable, and he seemed to have strayed into the wrong company. It was not far-fetched to conjecture that he might be a missionary from some station in the Chinese hinterland, who had kindly concerned himself with the souls of this congregation of black sheep.

Captain O'Shea bowed to him with a puzzled, respectful air, at which the pious stranger remarked:

"Inspector Burke told me to report here, and be quick about it. I am Kittridge, and I hear you are wanting an engineer."

"Excuse me, Mr. Kittridge. I came near mistaking you for a sky pilot. And so your favorite pastime is beating up Sikh policemen! I have a job for ye at double the wages you got in your tramp steamer, whatever they were. Are you willing?"

"I would sign on with the devil himself to get clear of this blankety-blank pig hole of a blistering Shanghai!" promptly exclaimed Mr. Kittridge. "Where's your ship? Shall I go aboard at once?"

"I will be obliged to you if you will take a look at the engine room and report to me here. She is the *Whang Ho,* tied up at the China Navigation Company's wharf. Don't be too critical, but if there's work that is absolutely necessary I will send ye machinists to work all night."

"I know the condemned little hooker by sight," bitterly quoth Mr. Kittridge, with a tug at his starboard whisker. "Very well, sir. I will take a squint at her, and make out my list of engine-room stores. Can you get them tonight?"

"The ship chandler is waiting to hear from me, and I have sent word to the machine shop," briefly answered O'Shea.

Paddy Blake had very promptly raked up the required number of Chinese hands, and was ready to deliver them on board whenever required. To the Hotel London he came, towing by the arm a most extraordinarily bent and shriveled anatomy, with a wisp of a white queue, whom he turned over to Captain O'Shea with the explanation:

"Here is a river and coastwise pilot for ye that is as wise as Confucius. An' by the same token, I have no doubt that he was once pilot aboard the junk of that grand old philosopher himself. Or maybe he was shipmates with Noah."

The ancient mariner croaked a phrase or two in a grating, rusty voice, and O'Shea dubiously observed:

"If he talks no English at all, how will I tell him where I want to go?"

"I have sent ye a Chinese bos'n that can sling the pidgin," said Paddy Blake. "Dearly would I love to know where ye are bound, and what bobbery ye are up to, Captain Mike O'Shea; but a man in my business has learned to ask no more silly questions than he can help."

"Keep that magnum on ice till I come back to Shanghai, and I will spin ye the yarn in the little back room of yours, Paddy."

"May ye come back right side up," warmly exclaimed the old man. "By the look of the friends ye have mustered to go wid you, I w'u'd say that ye are bound out on what the Shanghai diplomats calls a policy of binivolint assimilation."

The report of the aggrieved Mr. Kittridge was to the effect that while the engines of the *Whang Ho* would probably take her to sea without breaking down, a night's work on the condenser, not to mention a leaky cylinder head, would considerably improve her health. Captain O'Shea told him to drive ahead with these repairs, nor was the delay worth fretting about. Things had gone amazingly well thus far, and the *Whang Ho* would be ready to sail in the morning. He had no desire to spend another night ashore, and he would take his company on board at once, assign them to quarters, and make a tentative organization for sea duty.

The *Whang Ho* had been fitted for passenger service on the Yangtsze, and there were staterooms on the upper

deck to hold twice the number of O'Shea's recruits. In the Chinese draft sent aboard by Paddy Blake were a cook and a steward trained to their business, and they put things to rights in their quiet, deft way. The mood of Captain O'Shea became normally cheerful and confident. He had a deck under his feet, his word was law, and it was good to hear the lap of salt water and the swirl of the tide against a vessel's side.

He was awake and about until midnight. The work in the engine room was progressing rapidly under the vehement direction of Mr. Kittridge. Feeling the need of sleep, for the preceding night had been a broken one, Captain O'Shea set a watch in charge of the burly shipmaster of his company, whom he had appointed first mate, and went to his bunk in the cabin just abaft the wheelhouse. At three o'clock Mr. Kittridge, very hot and grimy, rapped on the door, and gruffly announced that the machinists had gone ashore, and he proposed to turn in and sleep until sailing time.

At six o'clock Captain O'Shea went on deck in his pajamas to order the steward to fetch him a cup of coffee. He saw no reason why the steamer should not get under way at once. The Chinese steward came not to his call, and he betook himself to the galley. A fire was burning in the range; rice and potatoes were cooking in the pots; bacon sliced on the table, ready for frying—but there was no cook. O'Shea looked puzzled, and started for the forecastle. On the way he met his first mate, whose demeanor was distressed and excited.

"I was about to call you, sir," exclaimed the mate, his red face working with emotion. "You will think I've made a hash of my first night on duty, but this insane business happened like a shot out of a gun, sir. There was no stopping it. Not ten minutes ago the Chinamen—every last one of 'em—came boiling on deck and went over the side to the wharf like so many rats. And they never did stop running. They were scared—it was a panic—but they didn't stop to jabber. They just flew, and most of 'em left their dunnage behind."

"The divil you say!" muttered O'Shea, and he rubbed his head in slightly bewildered fashion. "That must have been just before I stepped on deck, Mr. Parkinson. And ye have no idea at all what it was about?"

"Not the slightest, sir. I hope you don't blame me. I'd have sailed into the thick of them with my fists, but it was like chasing so many greased pigs. They vanished before you could more than wink."

"What about the fires?" snapped the captain. "Have you been below?"

"Yes, sir. The first thing I did was to find Mr. Kittridge. He was in the engine room, and he told me to send down half a dozen of our white men to keep up steam."

"Good enough! Now, sing out for a volunteer cook, and I will investigate this comical performance. Did anybody get aboard to talk to these Chinamen?"

"Not a soul, sir. I'm sure of it. I had a reliable man at the gangway and another on the wharf."

"I believe you. While I look around a bit, get the ship ready to go to sea, Mr. Parkinson. 'Tis not in my mind to be hung up in port very long."

A sailing junk was attempting to reach with the morning breeze across the wide stretch of river. Hauling close to the wharf at which the *Whang Ho* was moored, the junk attempted to come about, but missed stays in lubberly fashion, and hung in the wind as she slowly drifted past the steamer's stern. The Chinese who clung to the long tiller, the others who stood upon the poop, or hauled on the cordage were gazing with signs of excitement at the *Whang Ho*. Several of them gesticulated, and their fingers were aimed at the rounded, overhanging stern of Captain O'Shea's vessel. He caught sight of these antics, and walked aft.

There was no good reason why the crew of the passing junk should make such a fuss over this commonplace

river steamer. Their singular interest in her might be worth trying to fathom. Without delaying to seek the gangway, he threw his leg around a tautened hawser, and slid down to the wharf. Running out to the end of it, he commanded a clear view of the stern of the *Whang Ho*. Upon the white woodwork, just above the counter, was painted in broad strokes of bright vermilion the sprawling Chinese character which had been gashed in the back of the sailor named Jim Eldridge.

Captain O'Shea hastily returned on board, and climbed over the after rail, belaying a loose end of heaving line, and resting his foot in the loop, so that he was able to let himself down until he could touch the uppermost smear of vermilion paint. It rubbed off on his hand, fresh and wet, and must have been applied during the night. His Chinese crew had discovered it there. Perhaps some one had sung out the information from a passing junk or sampan. At any rate, this was what had made them quit the steamer. A charge of dynamite could have made their exodus no more expeditious. The word had flown from mouth to mouth, and they fled from the ship as from the plague. Even the incredibly aged pilot, a dried-up, twisted knot of a man, had hobbled away with the rest of them, fear restoring an agility long since departed.

"The hoodoo again!" reflectively exclaimed O'Shea. "I thought I had got clear of it. 'Tis not so much to frighten me this time as to delay the voyage. Somebody is anxious to send word up the coast ahead of me to let some one else know I am coming. That is a guess, and 'tis good as the next one."

He would find Paddy Blake at once and discuss the matter with him. Perhaps he could ship another crew and leave port before the news had time to spread among the Chinese seafarers. Telling Mr. Parkinson to see to it that the vermilion paint was instantly removed with waste and turpentine, he set out on foot along the water front. At this early hour there was no stir of business among the foreign shipping houses. Passing a substantial brick building, Captain O'Shea's eye was held for an instant by the brass sign on one of the doors: "Jordan, Margetson & Co." He happened to be thinking quite assiduously just then of the courteous comprador, Charley Tong Sin. He halted and stared hard at the door in front of him, which was ajar.

It was too early for any of the clerks to be about. With an impulse which had no definite purpose behind it, Captain O'Shea pushed open the door, and quietly stepped into the hallway, and thence into the main office, with its row of desks. The room was empty, and he moved in the direction of the smaller detached offices in the rear, still treading softly.

The shrewd and zealous comprador, so faithful to his employers' interests, was already at work. When the visitor caught sight of him he was bending over a table littered with papers, intent on arranging and filing them. Possibly his ears were as quick as his wits, and he had heard Captain O'Shea before he saw him. Unruffled and smiling, with an air of delighted surprise, the comprador exclaimed, advancing with hand outstretched:

"How glad I am to see you again! The top of the morning! Were you looking to find me? Ah, I am the early bird, you bet!"

"I expected to sail by now, but there has been a bit of trouble with my native crew," replied the shipmaster, wary as a hawk. "I saw your place was open, and I dropped in on the chance of bidding ye farewell. You mentioned the other night that you sometimes came down early."

"That is the deuce of my business, captain," easily returned Charley Tong Sin. "Trouble with your crew? Can I help you? Do you need men? I am sorry you didn't come to me in the first place."

"I wish I had. 'Twas old Paddy Blake I first turned to, as one Irishman to another. And maybe I was wrong in not asking your advice about a steamer."

If this was a fencing match, then

O'Shea had scored the first point. His bold, ingenuous features expressed not the slightest change of emotion, but in an instant he had discovered that which clinched and drove home his suspicions of Charley Tong Sin. The comprador put a fresh cigarette to his lips, and held a lighted match between his fingers, unaware that the flare conveyed a certain fleeting translucence. Underneath the beautifully polished nails of his thumb and forefinger there showed a line of vermilion which the most careful scrubbing had failed to eradicate. It was the color of the paint which had been smeared on the stern of the *Whang Ho* in the form of a sprawling Chinese character.

The luck of Captain Michael O'Shea so ordered it that he should observe this phenomenon before the flare of the match died out. Thereupon he lied swiftly and plausibly, the purpose hot in his heart to find a pretext that would coax the comprador to accompany him on board the *Whang Ho*. To a sympathetic query, Captain O'Shea smoothly made answer:

"I am the kind of a man that will own up to his mistakes. I thought I could go it alone, when I ought to have been glad and thankful for the help of a man like yourself. Between us, I am not anxious to go to sea in this old tub that I have chartered from the China Navigation Company. And now that I am delayed for lack of a crew, maybe you can show me a way to slip out of the bargain. My chief engineer finds the vessel is not at all what she was represented to be. I took her subject to certain conditions, and she cannot make good."

"I told you you would be stung in Shanghai without me," laughed Charley Tong Sin, in the greatest good humor. "Better chuck up the *Whang Ho* and let me find you a steamer."

"That I will, and gladly," affirmed O'Shea. "Have ye time to step aboard with me now, and I will show you how I have been bunkoed. Then ye can advise me how to break the charter. I have a good case."

"Of course I will," cried the comprador. "Pooh! We will bluff the China Navigation Company out of its boots. I will make them look like thirty cents."

"You are the smartest comprador between Tientsin and Singapore, according to Paddy Blake, and I have no doubt of it," sweetly murmured Captain O'Shea.

"That's what everybody says," affably rejoined Charley Tong Sin as they walked into the street. "What is the trouble with your crew?"

"You can search me. I cannot find out for the life of me. They up and jumped ship without warning."

"I will get more men for you. Leave it to me. You have come to the right place this time, Captain O'Shea."

Chatting amiably, they came to the wharf, and climbed the gangway of the *Whang Ho*. That anxious first mate, Mr. Parkinson, pitiably afraid lest he lose his billet and be turned adrift because he had failed to prevent the desertion of the crew, brightened perceptibly at sight of Charley Tong Sin, and concluded that this influential young man had been persuaded to mend the troubles.

"Come into my room, if you please," said Captain O'Shea to the smiling comprador, "and I will summon my chief engineer. He will tell you that the steamer is not fit to make three knots an hour, and then we will go below."

The shipmaster beckoned Mr. Parkinson to follow. The trio were passing through the wide hall of the main cabin when Captain O'Shea halted. Swinging on his heel, he stood facing Charley Tong Sin, who started slightly, for the visage of Captain O'Shea was stern and lowering. What followed was instantaneous. The shipmaster's fist shot out and collided terrifically with the jaw of the comprador, who measured his length on the floor, and appeared to be wrapped in slumber. Only the toes of his neat patent-leather shoes oscillated gently. The expression of his face was singularly peaceful. The oblique eyelids were closed.

The aghast Mr. Parkinson sputtered in great dismay:

"Good Heaven, sir, what have you done? We'll all go to jail for this. This is Jordan, Margetson's right-hand man."

"I have given him a sleeping powder," said O'Shea. "Take him by the heels, while I carry the other end of him, and we will put him in a spare stateroom. Put a guard over him. If he squeals hit him again, and keep him quiet."

The mate was about to renew his protests, but his voice died in his throat. Perceiving that he wavered miserably, Captain O'Shea spoke once more, and his accents were hard:

"You can make your choice, Mr. Parkinson. Ye sail with me, and you play my game, or you can go ashore to rot and starve on the beach, same as when I picked you out of the gutter. I have given this young Chinese blackguard a taste of what is coming to him. Will ye fall to, or shall I kick you out of the ship?"

"I—I will take your orders, sir," stammered the other.

"Then help me get this steamer to sea. We will wait for no more Chinese sailors. Muster all hands on the upper deck."

They came piling up from the hold and the dining room abaft the galley, where most of them had been at breakfast. The inanimate comprador was no longer visible.

"Will you sail with me at once, or lose the chance of making the voyage?" demanded O'Shea. "Some of you will have to shovel coal, and others wash dishes and do seamen's duty on deck. But I will pay you extra for it, and we will take this old box of a steamer to where we want to go."

The response was hearty and unanimous. The adventurers could think of no worse fate than to be once more stranded in Shanghai. They were well fed, they had slept in clean beds again, and their employer was a man who could be trusted to deal with them fairly. With a spirited cheer, they scattered to their various stations. The chief engineer spoke briefly, his gray whiskers standing out in the breeze:

"Nobody but a wild Irishman would have the nerve to take this painted coffin to sea with a gang of misbegotten greenhorns to man her. I have steam enough to give her steerageway whenever you're ready to cast off, Captain O'Shea."

"Then let go, fore and aft," roared the master. "Are you pilot enough to take her down the river, Mr. Parkinson?"

"I could do it with both eyes shut; but I'm not so familiar with the coast to the north'ard."

"I have a pilot for the part of the coast and the river we are bound for," grimly returned O'Shea. "He is locked in a spare stateroom just now. He will know that part of China very well, for 'tis my opinion that he has been there before."

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE MOUTH OF THE FATAL RIVER.

Over a mournful, muddy expanse of the China Sea wallowed a top-heavy river steamer, whose engines raised protesting clamor like an assemblage of threshing machines. The gods of the air and water were in a kindly mood or else she would have opened up and foundered ere now. In the spray-swept wheelhouse stood Captain Michael O'Shea, swaying easily to the crazy roll and lurch of the *Whang Ho,* and scanning the low, dim coast with a pair of glasses. Clinging to the window ledge beside him was a young man of a Chinese countenance, whose raiment, the handiwork of a fashionable British tailor, was sadly rumpled and soiled. The whole aspect of the young man was rumpled, in fact, not to say excessively forlorn, and now and then he pressed his hand against a painful jaw. It was difficult to imagine that he had been an ornament of clubs, a pattern for the gilded youth, and the smartest comprador between Tientsin and Singapore.

The plight of Charley Tong Sin was made poignantly distressing by the fact that in the process of acquiring the vices of the Occident he had lost his grip on

the essential virtues of the Orient. His native stoicism had been sapped, and the fatalistic attitude of mind which faces death without so much as the flutter of an eyelid was eaten with dry rot. In other words, the comprador was willing to pay any price to save his own skin, although his father before him would have suffered himself to be sliced to death by inches sooner than "lose face" in the presence of a foreigner.

Captain Michael O'Shea's method of extracting information from his kidnaped passenger had been brutally simple and direct. Charley Tong Sin was informed that he could make a clean breast of it or be shot through the head and thrown overboard. And the shipmaster, when he was thoroughly in earnest, had a way of conveying the impression that he meant what he said. He believed that he knew his man. The comprador was strongly reluctant to have his head lopped off by the sword of a native executioner, which was very likely to happen if this terrible shipmaster should turn him over to the Chinese authorities. Given the promise of immunity in exchange for a confession, he could flee to Japan, or the Straits Settlements, and live handsomely in the society of other Chinese exiles with the funds that he had piled up during his brief and brilliant business career. Likewise, there would be opportunities in shipping and commerce for a comprador of his uncommon ability.

"I would honestly enjoy killing you, Charley," said Captain O'Shea as they stood together in the wheelhouse of the *Whang Ho*. "You are a smart lad, but you got too gay with me, and you overplayed your game when ye slipped under the counter of this steamer in a sampan in the dark of the night and got busy with the red paint. That sort of silly jugglery was the Chinese of it, I suppose. Now, I have tried to make it plain that your life is not worth a pinch of snuff to any one of us. There is not a man in the ship that wants to clap eyes on Shanghai ever again. They will be only too glad to quit the country if they have the price in their pockets, and I will give them the price. So ye must not hold to the notion that we are afraid of getting in trouble on your account."

"I am worth more to you alive than if I am dead," sullenly muttered Charley Tong Sin. "Is it not so? You think I will be handy as a pilot, as an interpreter? I have been doing a deuce of a lot of thinking. I am no fool, Captain O'Shea. I know pretty well when I am licked. I made a botch of it in Shanghai. You went blundering about like a buffalo, and I thought it was a cinch to get you out of the way."

"'Twas the luck of the Irish that pulled me through," said O'Shea. "Now we understand each other, Charley, me lad. I am staking all I have—my life and my money—to get at the bottom of this infernal secret society you have mixed yourself up with. 'Tis an instrument I am for the good of humanity. And if ye turn State's evidence to enable me to make a clean, thorough job of it, I think I am justified in giving you a chance to hotfoot it out of China."

"Let us call it a bargain, Captain O'Shea. As we used to say in New York, I am up against it good and plenty. To commit suicide, as many Chinese would do in a fix like this, is all tommyrot. Charley Tong Sin could have no more gin cocktails—what!"

"You can begin the confession right away," exclaimed the shipmaster.

"One thing at a time," cheerfully replied the comprador. "I will take you to the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells and the village of Wang Li Fu. Then you will find many very interesting things to ask me to talk about."

"And you hope to give me the slip in the meantime." And Captain O'Shea showed no ill will. "Very well, Charley. One thing at a time. Now, take these glasses, and have a look at the coast. By my reckoning, we are far enough to the north'ard to begin to haul inshore."

The *Whang Ho* was laboring abeam of a monotonous expanse of marshy islands and ragged shoals made by the silt of river floods. The shifting chan-

nels were poorly charted, for trade sought the inland waterways. The fact that the *Tai Yan* steamer, with McDougal and Jim Eldridge on board, had somehow found a passage leading from the sea convinced Captain O'Shea that he could do likewise with a considerably smaller vessel. Charley Tong Sin had admitted that he knew the way in, and he was no more anxious to be drowned than the rest of the company.

"With good luck we can scrape over the sand bars on the afternoon tide," said the comprador, "and anchor in deep water for the night. I cannot show you where to go in the dark. There are no lights."

The *Whang Ho* edged steadily nearer the coast. Her crew gazed ahead at the frothing breakers that tumbled over the far-extended shoals, and appeared unhappy. By a miracle, their steamer was still under them after struggling through rough winds and high seas, and now they were to be wrecked, so all signs indicated, in a God-forsaken region of sand and swamp and mud. However, there was no whimpering. Captain O'Shea, their overlord, had a trick of knocking a man down and then listening to his complaints. And he was as ready with a word of commendation as he was with his disciplinary fists.

"Mr. Kittridge, if we hit bottom, put it to her, and jam her over," he remarked to the chief engineer. "A chum of mine by the name of Johnny Kent that sailed with me, and held your berth, used to clamp his safety valves when he had urgent need of steam. Did ye ever try it?"

"God forbid!" fervently ejaculated Mr. Kittridge. "But in this crazy hooker a man will do anything. If you find yourself flyin' to glory with a section of boiler pokin' the small of your back don't lay it against me, sir."

"I like the way ye talk, Mr. Kittridge. And this old Johnny Kent I speak of would warm to you like a brother. Stand by your engines, if ye please, for we will be in the white water before long."

The *Whang Ho* sheered to one side, and shouldered past the outermost shoals. O'Shea took the wheel, and Charley Tong Sin, cool and quick-witted, told him how to follow the turbid, twisting channel that wound its course between the sea and the wide mouth of the estuary. More than once the steamer scraped the oozy bottom, hung and shivered while the breakers pounded her, and then stubbornly forged ahead, timbers groaning, boilers hissing, propeller kicking up clouds of mud astern. It was evident that the channel had shoaled in places since any other steamer had made the passage, and it was not at all certain that the *Whang Ho* could stand the strain of forcing her way to sea again.

"I have not been here since two years ago," said the comprador. "It is worse than I expected, you bet. Ai, oh, a man that sails with you dies a dozen deaths, Captain O'Shea."

"I find it more comfortable than living in the best hotel in Shanghai," very pointedly returned the shipmaster as he climbed the spokes of the big wooden wheel with hands and feet, and wrenched the *Whang Ho* clear of a hungry sand spit. By now she was fairly in the midst of the marshy islands that extended from the watery mainland. The violence of the surf was broken, and the tide moved in broad, sluggish currents. Mr. Parkinson, who was swinging the sounding lead, shouted that the channel had deepened to five fathoms. The steamer had survived the passage.

Two miles farther inland she let go anchor in a wide lagoon. The afternoon had waned. A cloudy twilight was closing down. On every hand stretched a flat, unbroken region of swamp and creeks and rivers. No villages were visible, nor groves of trees, against the sky line to mark the situation of a temple. A few small fishing boats with ragged sails fled at sight of the foreign steamer. The comprador waved his hand to starboard, and exclaimed:

"Yonder it is—the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells, as you call it in English. Wait till the tide goes down,

and you will find out pretty quick why the Chinese give it that funny name."

"'Tis a filthy-looking country," quoth Captain O'Shea. "It looks like one great big sewer, with the yellow water and the sludge and the slime on the banks."

"It was all very well drained one time —long ago," explained Charley Tong Sin. "Then there were many people and towns. The Tai Pings destroyed the canals, and played the devil with everything. And nothing has been repaired, so the people don't live here any more."

"And where is this place called Wang Li Fu?" demanded O'Shea.

"Six miles up that stinking river. You think you will see the Painted Joss to-morrow, captain?"

"The Stinking River and the Painted Joss! You are loosening up, Charley. I am near the end of my journey when you say things like that. I have heard them before."

"Two other foreign men—only two —have seen the Painted Joss, and it was unfortunate for them." The comprador said this softly, and with an evil grin. He had overstepped the mark.

Captain O'Shea gripped him by the neck, and shook him savagely as he thundered in his ear: "Any more of that, and I will forget the bargain we made. One of those men was a friend of mine, and by rights I ought to drill ye with a bullet as a favor to him."

Between chattering teeth, Charley Tong Sin, suddenly abject, begged for his life. Presently he moved restlessly from one deck to another, but always a man followed and kept watch of him, as Captain O'Shea had ordered. The ship's company, most of them off duty, and wearied with the stress and hardships of the voyage, gathered under an awning stretched between the deck houses, and talked in low tones. This melancholy, empty landscape had a quality curiously depressing. With the falling tide, the swamps and the muddy banks were laid bare, and the air became foul and heavy with the smell of decayed vegetation, of ooze, of dead fish. The ebb and flow of salt water failed to cleanse and sweeten these sluggish streams, stagnant lagoons, and abandoned canals.

The men who had followed Captain O'Shea to this place were no longer so many vagabonds and failures struggling for survival. They had been welded together, in a way. They were an organization with something like *esprit de corps*, and could be depended on to act as a unit. Such a feeling as this brings to life dead self-respect and shattered confidence. They knew not at all what the morrow might bring forth, but every one of them was anxious to play the man, to stand the test, to redeem himself in his own sight, to justify Captain O'Shea's faith in him.

It was not a night to invite sleep. The adventurers felt the immense loneliness of this loathsome anchorage. It was unlike the populous China which they had hitherto known. One might believe with the natives that ghosts and demons had power to curse and blast a region in which some violation of the *fung sui*, or secret rites of wind and water, had angered the supernatural influences. The breeze died to a dead calm. The lifeless air reeked with the stenches from the mouth of the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells.

It was drawing toward midnight when Mr. Kittridge came on deck and said to Captain O'Shea, who was sitting with a group of his men:

"I shall have to start the pumps, sir. The vessel is leaking much worse than when I first reported it."

"Um-m! I was hoping we could lay her on a beach after we have finished our business up the river and calk her plates," replied the master of the *Whang Ho*. "Is she making water faster than you can handle it, Mr. Kittridge?"

"She acts to me as if a plate dropped clean out of her a few minutes ago, sir. The pumps may help, but I have a notion that the whole rotten, blankety river is runnin' into her."

Captain O'Shea jumped below, and was promptly convinced that the

gloomy diagnosis of the chief engineer had a large basis of fact. The water was fairly rushing into the holds and gurgling over the ballast. Likely enough the battering passage in from sea had sheared and wrenched away enough rusty rivets to weaken the junction of two or more plates, and they had been unable any longer to withstand the pressure. It really made no difference whether or not this theory was the correct one. The fact was that the venerable *Whang Ho* had suddenly decided to lay her bones in the mud with six fathoms of water above her keel. Mr. Kittridge pensively caressed his gray whiskers, and remarked with a sigh:

"I mentioned the pumps from force of habit. It's really ridiculous to stay below any longer, captain. We gave the bloody old tub more than she could stand, and she's peacefully chucked it up. She's sinkin' very quiet and decent—I'll say that for her."

"'Tis time we said good-by to her," quoth O'Shea. "Draw your fires if you can, Mr. Kittridge, and I will get the boats ready."

"I do seem to find trouble wherever I go," sadly murmured the chief engineer.

The men on deck took the news with no great show of excitement. This was the kind of voyage which one could not reasonably expect to be commonplace. To have to escape from a sinking steamer was an episode, not a disaster. In a few words, Captain O'Shea assured them that he had no intention of letting this uncomfortable little happening interfere with the business for which he had employed them. The insurance underwriters would be out of pocket, but who cared a rap for them, anyhow? Thereupon he issued orders swiftly, intelligently, with masterful vehemence. The two boats which appeared most serviceable were swung outboard and held ready to launch. They would hold a dozen men each without the least crowding. Water kegs were filled, the galley and storeroom ransacked for tins of meat and biscuit, bags of potatoes and rice. The firearms and cutlasses were served out, and the cases of ammunition divided between the two boats. Meanwhile the *Whang Ho* continued to sink with a certain dignity and decorum. One could find nothing dramatic in this shipwreck. Every one moved with haste, but there was no outcry.

Only one mischance marred the exodus from the *Whang Ho*. All hands were absorbed—and quite naturally—in delaying their departure as little as possible. Delay meant something worse than wet feet. In fact, the main deck was almost level with the water when the boats were ready to shove clear. For once the *Whang Ho* had moved rapidly, although in a lamentable direction. With so much to do in so short a time, it was not extraordinary that the vigilant espionage which surrounded Charley Tong Sin should be relaxed, not to say forgotten, for the moment. Even Captain O'Shea neglected to keep an eye on him, the business of abandoning ship on a dark night at excessively short notice being calculated to tax the resources of the most capable commander.

The comprador took advantage of these distractions to erase himself from the scene. The boats were held against the side of the steamer while the captain took tally of the men in them, scrambling from one boat to the other with a lantern swinging in his fist. Charley Tong Sin was indubitably missing. O'Shea leaped on board the moribund *Whang Ho*, which was now sobbing and gurgling tremendously, and made a flying search of the cabins and staterooms. It was obvious that this elusive young Chinese had not vanished below decks, where by now nothing but a fish could exist. And unless Captain Michael O'Shea wished to join the fishes, it was time for him to go.

Chagrined and anxious, he returned to his boat, and the men frantically plied oars. A moment or two later the *Whang Ho* went under with very little fuss, meeting her end with the calm of a Chinese philosopher. The boats rocked in the waves that rolled away from the place where she had been,

and the rays of the lanterns revealed many large and greasy bubbles.

Captain O'Shea wasted no time in sentimental regrets. The *Whang Ho* was a dead issue. What vitally concerned him was the whereabouts of that valuable passenger, Charley Tong Sin. It was absurd to suppose that he had fallen overboard and given up the ghost. A rascal of his kidney had as many lives as a cat. It was much more plausible to surmise that he had unostentatiously laid hold of a life belt, slipped over the stern, and made for the nearest shore. The boats moved to and fro, looking for him; but the darkness, damp and opaque, made it hopeless to discover the head of a swimmer, who by this time might have left the water and concealed himself in the marsh.

"I misdoubt that my policy was sound," said Captain O'Shea to Mr. Kittridge. "Maybe I ought to have shot him, anyhow."

"It would ha' done him a lot of good," grunted the chief engineer. "And now he'll streak it hell bent for this village of Wang Li Fu, and give the alarm."

"Precisely that. But unless he can pick up a sampan or a fishing boat he will make slow headway floundering through the swamps and swimming the creeks. 'Tis up to us to beat him to it."

CHAPTER XIV.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

Mr. Parkinson, who was in command of the other boat, was ordered to steer alongside for a council of war. It was promptly agreed that the party should first find the mouth of the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells, and then move upstream without delay. It would be slow and blundering navigation, but if three or four miles could be traversed before daylight they might tie up to the bank and reconnoiter within striking distance of their goal.

"I do not know what kind of a mess we will hop into," O'Shea told them before the boats separated. "We may have to fight our way, thanks to that slippery divil of a comprador, and I am not asking ye to go anywhere that I will not go meself. Some of you are not trained to use weapons, but if ye will cut loose and blaze away and not think too much about your own skins, we can make it uncomfortable for a slather of Chinese. There is plenty of ammunition, so don't scrimp yourselves."

The boats slid slowly into the entrance of the wide, sluggish stream. The lanterns were extinguished. The only sound was the cadenced thump of the tholepins. If any of the men felt the prickly chill of cowardice, they kept it to themselves. Now and then the keels furrowed the mud, and if the boats stranded hard and fast the crews waded overboard and shoved them ahead. Thus the little flotilla progressed until dawn flushed the eastern sky and the vapors streaming upward from the marshes curled and drifted like filmy clouds. Higher ground was discernible a short distance ahead, and the green, checkered squares of tilled fields.

The boats turned into the mouth of a tiny creek, where the tall rushes curtained them from observation. This was a favorable halting place, and a cold breakfast was hastily eaten. O'Shea had a poor opinion of fighting on an empty stomach. He addressed himself with marked deference to a very neatly dressed man with iron-gray hair who had said little during the voyage. His face was haggard, and his eyes were tired with weariness of living.

"You have seen service, sir, and ye have led drilled men," said O'Shea. "The cards are dealt, but from now on you can play them better than I. I will be obliged to you for advice."

The cashiered officer looked grateful. This kind of recognition had power to move him. With a diffident manner, as if his professional opinions had long since ceased to interest any one, he replied:

"Most Chinese villages are walled. There will be at least one gate facing

the river, and two or three on the inland side. It is often awkward to make a landing under fire from boats. I suggest that we divide our force. If you approve, captain, I will take ten of the most active men, and disembark here. We can fetch a wide circuit of the town, and it will not be difficult to make our way across the rice fields and ditches. You can put the rest of them in one boat, and row up in front of the town, waiting in the stream until we are in position to make a rush. Then we will drive home a simultaneous attack in front and rear."

"Napoleon could not beat it!" heartily exclaimed O'Shea. "And if ye shoot fast enough, and kick up a terrible racket, they will think ye are an army. What will the signal be?"

"Three rifle shots."

"Aye, aye, Mr. Bannister. 'Tis the sensible plan that ye take command of the army while I hoist the rear admiral's pennant over the navy. We have no reserves, but many a famous victory would have been missing from history if the lads that won had waited for the reserves to come up."

The chosen ten forsook the boats, and tramped off behind their soldierly leader. A few minutes later the expedition of Captain O'Shea got under way, his boat hugging the muddy shore and dodging behind its ragged indentations. It was not long before a wide curve of the river disclosed to view the tiled roofs, the crumbling brick wall, and the towered gateways of a village. In front of it were several rickety wharfs, or stagings, built of bamboo poles lashed together. At the outer end of one of these lay a two-masted junk, her hawse holes painted to resemble huge eyes. The tide had begun to ebb, and the junk was heeled so that the deck sloped toward the river. This craft appeared to be deserted. No pigtailed heads bobbed behind her heavy bulwarks.

"Pull like blazes for the junk yonder," shouted Captain O'Shea to his men. "We will pile aboard her and take cover."

The junk was directly in front of the gateway in the village wall, and perhaps a hundred yards distant from it. The intervening space was beach, a miry roadway, and a disorderly row of shanties made of driftwood, with a few boats hauled out for repairs. The heavy timbers of the junk made her a nautical fortress, and the high sides would be difficult of direct assault.

The men swung lustily at the oars, and the boat shot out into the open river. O'Shea steered wide of the village until he could turn and make directly for the junk. It was an admirable bit of strategy, but wholly wasted on this sleepy, shabby Chinese village. There was never a sign of a hostile demonstration. As an anticlimax the thing was absurd. A crowd of men, women, and children streamed out through the gate in the wall and stared with much excited chatter at the foreign invaders. Apparently their behavior meant no more than a harmless curiosity. Several garrulous old gentlemen squatted upon fragments of timber, and pulled at their bamboo pipes while they discussed the singular visitation with the oracular demeanor of so many owls.

The bold O'Shea grinned sheepishly. His sensations were those of a man who beheld a heroic enterprise suddenly turned into low comedy. He glanced at the amused faces of his followers, and said:

"'Tis not what ye might call a desperate resistance. Let us promenade ashore, and look the town over."

They quitted their fortress, and moved along the narrow, swaying staging of bamboo, their rifles ready for use in the event of an ambuscade. The Chinese crowd promptly retreated in noisy confusion. O'Shea ordered a halt. After some delay, three signal shots came down the wind from Major Bannister's force. He was about to attack the village from the landward side. Now the shopkeepers and coolies scuttled madly away from O'Shea's party, to seek shelter within the walls, and discover what all this extraordinary excitement could mean.

Behind them tramped the naval bri-

gade into streets down which the inhabitants were vanishing as rapidly as possible. Somewhere near the center of the town O'Shea and Major Bannister joined forces. This pair of valiant leaders eyed each other with mutually puzzled chagrin.

"We just walked in without the slightest trouble," confessed the army man. "What do you make of it?"

"I had the same experience," observed O'Shea. "And I do not know what to make of it at all. 'Twas my firm conviction that we were prancin' into a hornet's nest. The information all pointed that way. I would call it a funny kind of a surprise party."

"The villagers have no intention of making it unpleasant for us. They have been giving my men eggs and melons and chickens, to keep us good-natured, I presume."

"Well, we will find quarters and fetch our grub from the junk, and I will buy the drinks, if ye can locate them, for the joke seems to be on me."

They found the village tavern, consisting of several detached buildings, set in a large courtyard. The agitated landlord kotowed himself almost black in the face, and in trembling accents expressed his desire to bestow all his goods upon the warlike foreigners, if only his miserable life might be spared. He summarily ejected a few native guests of low degree, who fled without delaying to argue the matter. The invaders set the tavern coolies to sweeping and scrubbing the filthy buildings, and took charge of the kitchen with its row of earthern fire pots. There was no lack of room for men to sleep three or four in a row upon the *k'angs*, or brick platforms used for the purpose, and the ragged quilts were hung outside to air. In short, the tavern was transformed into a camp which had no serious discomforts.

Having taken care of his men, Captain O'Shea found leisure to ponder over the situation, a process which left him with a headache. He rambled unmolested from one end of the village to the other, searching for clews which might link themselves with the Painted Joss and the tragedy of Bill Maguire. There were two small, dilapidated temples—one of them inhabited by a few Buddhist priests in yellow robes. O'Shea was permitted to enter them and explore to his heart's content. They were nothing more than village shrines, however, in which the perfunctory rites were held and offerings made, such places as might have been seen in a thousand Chinese towns. Nor did the village itself, excepting for an air of general decay, differ from the hamlets of a dozen provinces.

"I have a harrowing suspicion that Charley Tong Sin made a monkey of me," ruefully sighed O'Shea, "or maybe I have been all wrong from the start. The Chinese proposition has too many twists in it for a white man to fathom."

As a person of considerable confidence in his ability to master difficulties, his self-esteem had been dealt a hard blow. His imagination had pictured a large, stirring climax of his pilgrimage, and here he was all adrift in a wretched little village of no consequence whatever, the last place in the world to find the headquarters of a secret organization so mysteriously powerful as to cast its sinister shadow throughout China and even across the seas. And yet the evidence had been by no means vague and misleading. Beginning with the fragmentary revelations of the demented sailor, coming next to the disclosures of poor McDougal's diary, he had been led straight to the town of Wang Li Fu, on the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells. He had felt that the hand of destiny was guiding him.

Returning to the tavern yard, O'Shea found his men cheerfully making friends of the villagers, and accepting the situation with the ready adaptability of true soldiers of fortune. They looked to the leader for orders, but he had none to give them. He had been placed in the ridiculous position of providing wages and rations for a perfectly superfluous expeditionary force.

"Just what did you expect to turn up in this pigsty of a settlement?"

gloomily inquired Mr. Kittridge, who seemed disappointed that he had not broken a few heads. "Whatever it was, it fell flat."

"It did that," frankly admitted O'Shea. "'Tis a painful subject, Mr. Kittridge, and we will not discuss it now. But I am not done with the riddle of Wang Li Fu."

CHAPTER XV.

THE PAINTED JOSS.

Three days passed, and singly and in squads the invaders ransacked the village and its suburbs, poking into shops, alleys, dwellings, and courtyards, and taking stock of the inmates thereof. That the people were very poor and very industrious was about all that one could say about them. And they were no more to be suspected of plotting deeds of violence than so many rabbits. Doggedly persistent, unwilling to confess himself beaten, O'Shea shifted his quest to the open country for miles outside of Wang Li Fu. It was a region of green fields gridironed with ditches and rutted with paths and dotted with toilers in blue cotton blouses and straw hats, who tended their crops from dawn to dark.

It was obviously useless to extend the investigation any considerable distance away from this region. If the secret was not to be unearthed in the vicinity of Wang Li Fu, then his conclusions had been all wrong. The villagers assured him that this was, in truth, none other than Wang Li Fu, and the baffled, perplexed O'Shea could not let go of the opinion that the goal was somewhere near at hand. Otherwise, why all the elaborate stratagems in Shanghai to thwart his voyage to the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells?

He had imagined himself attacking a stronghold of some sort, a headquarters of desperate criminals, who must be wiped out. But if that slippery comprador, Charley Tong Sin, had carried a warning to the men of the Painted Joss, he must have fled elsewhere than to this commonplace, harmless village. At any rate, it seemed absurd to tarry much longer in Wang Li Fu with a force of armed retainers.

At the end of a fortnight O'Shea was of the opinion that his loyal legion had better seek to mend its fortunes in some other quarter. He was ashamed to look them in the face. The fiasco cut him to the quick. He had been as mad as poor Bill Maguire. In future he would stick to his trade as a shipmaster.

Meanwhile, the malarial poison of the marshes found its way into his blood. He failed to realize that he was ill, and paid no attention to the little flashes of fever that came by night, and the creeping, chilly feeling that troubled him in the morning.

There came a day when he was unable to rise from the brick sleeping platform. The fever increased suddenly, violently. It caught him unprepared. His plan of retreat had not been announced, and now he was incapable of leadership. His mind alternated between delirium and stupor. When he talked, it was of many inconsequential things. One might have said that the evil spirit of the Painted Joss had laid its spell of misfortune upon him. In the courtyard of the tavern his lieutenants held a conference.

"Can anybody make head or tail of this infernal situation?" gloomily inquired Mr. Kittridge. "What in Hades are we going to do about it?"

"Try to pull Captain O'Shea through this fever before we think of anything else," stoutly affirmed Mr. Parkinson. "We jammed into this crazy voyage with our eyes shut. With all of us it was anything to get clear of Shanghai. And it's useless business to sit and growl about it as hard luck. What do you say, Major Bannister?"

The army man smiled at sight of their discouraged countenances, and quietly answered:

"What else can we chaps expect but hard luck? Really I should be surprised to find anything else. I can tell you one thing, gentlemen: I have campaigned in the tropics, and I know something about this swamp fever. We had

best get out of here, and take Captain O'Shea with us. If we don't, he will die as sure as sunrise, and the rest of us will be down with it before long. It caught him first because he was fagged with worry."

"We agree with you there," said Mr. Parkinson. "But we seem to have overlooked a line of retreat. That was the Irish of it, I suppose. O'Shea had never found himself in a hole he couldn't fight his way out of. If we go downriver in our two boats we'll have to work 'em out to sea over those nasty shoals, and then run the chance of being picked up adrift. We might get away with it, but it would kill a man as sick as O'Shea."

"Why not go upriver?" suggested Major Bannister. "By means of a few words of Chinese and a great many gestures, I have evtracted from the village headmen the information that there is a European mission station about a hundred and fifty miles northwest of here. We can make part of the journey by boat, and then hike overland. With a litter and coolies to carry it, we may be able to take Captain O'Shea through alive. It's better than letting him die in this pesthole."

"That's the most sensible speech I've heard since we signed on," grunted Mr. Kittridge. "And you can pull out of this rotten Wang Li Fu not a minute too soon to please me."

The village headmen were summoned, and these venerable worthies declared themselves anxious to aid the sick leader of the foreign soldiers. He had played with their children, paid the shopkeepers their prices without dispute, and sat with the old men in the tea houses. Nor had his armed force committed any abuses, although they held the village at their mercy. It was wisdom to try to carry Captain O'Shea to his own people. The village would gladly furnish a guide and plenty of coolies, a covered litter, and a small house boat in which the sick man could be made comfortable.

The evacuation of Wang Li Fu was a dismal business. The adventurers were oppressed by a sense of failure and discouragement. Their enterprise had fizzled out like a dampened match. This final act was inglorious. Their plight was worse than when they had been stranded as beach combers in Shanghai. They carried Captain O'Shea to a sampan, or flat-bottomed boat, with a tiny cabin of bamboo and matting, which could be towed against the sluggish current of the river. The men disposed themselves in the two boats saved from the *Whang Ho* steamer, and a squad of half-naked coolies strung themselves along a towing rope to haul the sampan upstream.

The sick man lay stretched upon his quilts, and showed little interest in the slow progress of the flotilla. Between spells of heavy drowsiness he watched the slimy shore and fringing marsh slide past. Through the first day the wind was cool and the air bright, and the boats trailed upriver until after nightfall before they were pulled into the bank to moor. As the part of caution, no fires were made, and conversation was hushed. The foreigners had an uncomfortable suspicion that this might be hostile territory although they had discovered nothing to warrant the conjecture. But O'Shea had been babbling about the Painted Joss while flighty with fever, and Charley Tong Sin was still unaccounted for.

Between midnight and morning the sick man came out of his uneasy dreams. As it seemed to him, he was clear-headed, his senses alert, his judgment normal. Just why he should be cooped up in this native boat was a bit difficult to comprehend, but why try to understand it? There was only one problem of real importance. And now was the time to solve it. O'Shea laughed to think of what a stupid, blundering fool he had been to recruit an armed expedition and come clattering into this corner of China with so much fuss and noise.

If a man wanted to find the Painted Joss, all he had to do was listen to the friendly, familiar voices that whispered in his ears. O'Shea could hear them now. He accepted them as a matter of course. His eyes were very bright

as he pulled on his shoes and fumbled for the revolver in its holster under the pillow. Curiously enough, he was no longer conscious of great physical weakness. It was tremendously urgent that he should go to find the Painted Joss without a moment's delay. His men would not understand if he should tell them about the friendly voices that were offering to show him the way. They might try to restrain him. He must leave the boat quietly, unobserved.

Crawling beneath the matting curtain, he gained the river bank. His knees were exceedingly shaky, and his hands trembled uncertainly, but he was confident that he had found the trail of the Painted Joss, and that his vigor would soon return. Charley Tong Sin outwit him? Nonsense! O'Shea would have been startled beyond measure to know that he was wandering off in delirium. He would have taken a shot at any one rash enough to tell him so.

Undetected, he moved along the shore, silent as a red Indian, and was presently lost in the darkness. It was muddy walking, and he turned into the tall marsh grass, where a carpet of dead vegetation made firmer footing. Frequently he was compelled to halt and regain his labored breath, but his purpose was unwavering. The voices drove him on. He had no sense of fear. After some time his erratic progress led him back to the river. There he stumbled over a log, and sat down to wait for daybreak, which had begun to flush the sky.

His head throbbed as though hammers were pounding it, and waves of blurring dizziness troubled him. What was more disquieting, the guiding voices had ceased to talk to him. He felt crushing disappointment and sadness. His eyes filled with tears.

Dawn found him seated dejectedly with his back propped against the log, his head drooping, while he stared at the muddy river. Here he would wait on the chance that his friends might find him. As the day brightened, his aimless vision was caught by something which powerfully awakened his weary, befogged perception. It acted as a stimulant of tremendous force. Sitting bolt upright, he gazed at a footprint, cleanly outlined, which had become sun-dried and hardened in a stratum of clay.

It had been made by a leather sole and heel. The outline was pointed and narrow. Into O'Shea's quickened memory there flashed the picture of Charley Tong Sin stretched upon the cabin floor of the *Whang Ho* steamer, his patent-leather shoes waving gently as he went to sleep under the soporific influence of a knock-out blow. He felt absolutely certain that this particular footprint had been left by the fashionable footgear of the vanished comprador. The voices had guided him aright. It was here that Charley Tong Sin had come ashore after making his way up the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells in some kind of a native boat.

There was one chance in a million that O'Shea should have halted to wait in this precise spot where his eyes might see the thing. He dragged himself to his feet, and scanned the melancholy landscape. There were no villages in sight—only the marsh and fields and a vast mound of débris to mark the place where once had stood a city. Even the walls surrounding it had been leveled. It was scarcely more than a widespread excrescence of broken brick and tiling partly overgrown with vegetation. The landscape could have held no more desolate reminder of the wreckage left in the wake of the Tai Ping rebels.

In his irresponsible condition, O'Shea was unable to reason it; but it was plausible to surmise that this was the real Wang Li Fu, the city which he had set out to find. The squalid village much lower down the river might have been founded by refugees, who gave the same name to their new abode. And the villagers had been too ignorant to explain the blunder. To them there was only one Wang Li Fu. How Charley Tong Sin must have laughed at leaving O'Shea and his men to waste themselves in a chase that led nowhere.

It was a pallid, unshaven, tottering ghost of Captain Michael O'Shea that

mustered strength to walk very slowly in the direction of the ruined city. Once he paused, and was irresolute, but a little way beyond he found the imprint of a narrow shoe of European workmanship on the soft bank of a ditch. His stumbling steps led him, as by an unerring divination, toward the highest part of the great mound of débris where tall trees grew from the crumbling masonry. His painful advance became less difficult when he found a path from which the obstructions had been removed.

Presently he stood looking across a cleared space in the midst of the ruins, invisible from river or highway. In it were several small buildings, and one much larger. The timbers set into its walls were carved and gilded, the curving roofs of dull, red tile. There was no living thing in sight. This isolated community was so situated that it was wholly concealed from strangers, and the natives of the region were apt to shun the blasted city as haunted by demons. No watchers were posted to guard against intrusion.

O'Shea crossed the open space, and made for the large building, which had the aspect of a temple. Unhesitatingly he approached the massive wooden doors, which were ajar. He walked like a man in a trance, muttering to himself. Passing within, he entered a sort of anteroom, partitioned by means of screens wonderfully embroidered. The stone pavement rang to the tread of his heels. The place echoed with emptiness. He pressed on, and came into a room of greater extent. Its corners were lost in shadow. Rows of pillars supported the dusky rafters, upon which gilded dragons seemed to writhe. The windows were small, and set close to the roof, and the light of early morning had not dispelled the gloom.

In the center of the floor was an altar. Behind it towered an image of Buddha, and yet it was unlike the images of the bland and contemplative Buddha commonly to be found in the temples of the East. It was a monstrous thing. Only an artist with an inspiration from the devil could have so handled tools as to make those wooden features seem to lust after all abominable wickedness. The color of this seated statue was crimson. Amid the shadows, it glowed like fire, or blood. On the breast, above the folded arms, stood out in broad black strokes a Chinese symbol or character which O'Shea recognized with a sensation of creeping repugnance.

"The Painted Joss!" he gasped.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TEMPLE OF DEATH.

Captain O'Shea's attention was so strongly caught and held by the malevolent image that for the moment he had eyes for nothing else. Presently, however, he became aware that another figure confronted him—a living presence. It was a man sitting in a massive chair of teakwood by the side of the Buddha. The bulk of him was enormous. He was both fat and mighty of frame, and not even the towering amplitude of the image could dwarf his proportions and belittle the impression he conveyed. His face was broad and heavy jowled, the mouth sensual and cruel. With folded arms, he sat and gazed at the foreign intruder. This unflinching, scornful immobility had a certain distinction. He believed that he must instantly die at the hands of this European with the white, savage face and the blazing eyes, who covered him with a revolver. It was futile to cry out and summon help. As is customary with Chinese in positions of authority, this high priest of iniquity had gone to the temple to have audience with his servitors very early in the morning. They had not yet joined him, and O'Shea was quick to read his own advantage.

It was right and just that he should slay this huge man in the crimson robe who ruled the temple of the Painted Joss. He had come ten thousand miles to be judge and executioner. He was ready to kill, and he killed in his turn. But the revolver was strangely heavy,

and it wavered so that he could not seem to hold it at arm's length. A haze bothered his vision, and he could not brush it from his eyes. Something was the matter with his knees. They were giving way. With an incoherent exclamation, O'Shea fell unconscious upon the stone flagging, and the revolver clattered from his limp hand. He had paid the price of exertion beyond his strength.

When his senses returned there was in his mind only the dimmest recollection of how he came to be in this dreadful place. The vagaries of fever no longer possessed him. Clear-headed, but wretchedly weak and nerveless, he gazed about him, and discovered that he was alone in the unholy temple. The shadows were not so heavy on the pillars, the gilded rafters, and the marble altar. The crimson image of the seated Buddha loomed flamboyant and portentous, and the Chinese symbol painted on its breast was boldly outlined.

There was no way of escape. The building was a most effectual prison. His revolver had been taken from him. He could not even fight and die like a man. The fact was that this desperate extremity lacked the proper sense of reality. It was so contrary to reason, and he had such shadowy, confused ideas of what had preceded that this was more like nightmare or delirium. And it seemed impossible that he should not presently find himself awake.

What most tenaciously persisted in his memory was the image of the huge man in the teakwood chair. He was a vision which could not be denied. Such a one as he had power to sway the wills of others to his desires, to create and direct great enterprises and send his influence afar, but never for good. If he ordered that murder be done in distant places, his secret edicts would be obeyed, nor would his agents dare to thwart him. If there was such an organization as O'Shea had assumed, then he had stood face to face with the dominant personality, the compelling force from which radiated infernal activities.

"I saw him, whether I am myself or somebody else," the prisoner muttered, with a groan. "And he will come back and the brand will be chopped into me, same as was done to poor Bill Maguire. 'Tis a tough finish, if all this is really true. I wish I knew what had happened to me. Yesterday I was going upriver with my men, and now——"

He struggled to his feet. A supreme effort of will conquered physical weakness. A man condemned to die is capable of forgetting bodily ills. Just then a young man appeared from the direction of the doorway. He wore native garments, but O'Shea recognized him. It was Charley Tong Sin, whose smile was unpleasant. In his hand was O'Shea's revolver, which he was careful to hold ready for use. The jaunty, affable manner of the comprador had returned. He appeared very well satisfied with himself as he exclaimed by way of greeting:

"It is an unexpected pleasure, you bet, Captain O'Shea! I have waited till you were gone from Wang Li Fu. It was reported that you were very sick and went up the river yesterday with your men. You decided to come and see us, to visit the Painted Joss? You wished to make some trouble?"

"'Tis the last day I will make trouble for any one, by the looks of things," replied O'Shea. "You win, Charley."

"You are a smart man," grinned the other. "But you had too much curiosity. I am a good fellow. I will tell you what you want to know. You will not give it away. They are getting ready to cut your visit pretty short."

There was the chatter of voices somewhere outside, and the brazen mutter of a gong. O'Shea kept silence. He was not as resigned to his fate as Charley Tong Sin inferred. He was watching every motion of the gloating young man, and his eyes measured the distance between them.

"You will feel better if you know," tauntingly cried the Chinese. "You have seen the Painted Joss. You have seen a man sitting beside it—the great and terrible Chung himself, the ruler of the Pih-Lien-Kiao, the Sect of the Fatal Obligation."

"Much obliged, Charley," grimly interrupted O'Shea. "Tell me some more. I am sorry I could not have words with the terrible Chung. And the brand that ye chop into people—your trademark?"

"It is the mark that means the Dreadful Messenger of Chung. It is a favor to tell you, Captain O'Shea. No other foreigner, no Chinese except the servants of Chung, have heard it spoken. But you will not speak it anywhere."

"There's more I want to know," said O'Shea, "though precious little good the information will do me."

"Ha! Why did you not have so much sense before, and mind your own business?"

It was absurd to carry on such a dialogue as this, as O'Shea perceived; but Charley Tong Sin was enjoying this session with the rash shipmaster, who had formerly held the upper hand. Before the victim could be subjected to further taunts, he heard the massive doors opened, and other sounds to indicate that bars were sliding into place to fasten them on the inside. The huge man in the crimson robe, the great and terrible Chung, lumbered into view, and seated himself in the chair of teakwood. Charley Tong Sin humbly bowed several times. The personage beckoned the twain nearer, and spoke briefly. He desired to conduct a cross-examination of his own, with the comprador as interpreter.

"He wishes to know why you have come to this place?" was the first question addressed to O'Shea.

"Because ye butchered a friend of mine—a red-headed sailor by the name of Jim Eldridge," was the unflinching reply. "He told me about your deviltment as well as he could, and I saw what ye did to him."

The huge man showed signs of consternation when this was conveyed to him. He uttered a bellowing interrogation.

"He is not alive? You have talked with his ghost?" shrilly demanded Charley Tong Sin.

"'Twas him that sent me here," declared O'Shea. "Ye can impart it to the big, ugly mug yonder that I have had visits from the ghost of the red-headed sailor that he killed and branded."

With an excited, heedless gesture, Charley Tong Sin raised the revolver. He had been long accustomed to wearing European clothes, and the flowing sleeves of his Chinese outer garment impeded his motions. A fold of the silk fabric fell over the butt of the weapon, and he tried to brush it aside with his left hand. The other sleeve was caught and held for a moment by the sharp firing pin of the cocked hammer.

It was a trifling mishap, but it gave O'Shea his desperate opportunity. With a flash of his normal agility, he leaped across the intervening space. The comprador strove frantically to free the weapon, but only entangled it the more. The episode was closed before the crimson-robed personage could play a part. O'Shea's shoulder rammed Charley Tong Sin, and sent him sprawling, and the revolver was instantly wrested from his grasp.

"The doors are locked," panted O'Shea, "and before your men break in ye will both be as dead as the idol. Sit where you are, ye terrible Chung. You overplayed your game, Charley."

The comprador seemed to shrink within his clothes. His mouth hung open, and his face was ashen. He was eager to clutch at any straw which might give him the chance of life. Shrinking from the scowling presence in the chair, he began to talk a singsong babble of words that tumbled over each other:

"I will help you get away alive if you do not kill me, Captain O'Shea. I will explain about Jim Eldridge. I will not lie to you. All the secrets I will tell you. There was a steamer, the *Tai Yan*, and she came over the bar from the sea in a big storm at the time of a flood. It was do this or go to the bottom, because the engines had broke. A boat with sailors rowed up the river. They were foolish men, who believed the stories that gold and silver treasure

was hidden in the ruins of this old Wang Li Fu. And they found this temple, and they knew too much.

"All but two of the men were able to run quick to the river, but Eldridge and one named McDougal ran into this place, trying to hide. They ran into the temple before they were captured. There was a little building, but now it is ashes and much sticks of burned wood. In that building those two men were locked to be killed next day. The red-headed man was a demon, I tell you. Walls could not hold him. In the night he set fire to the building, and it was a great blaze. But he was caught and punished."

"Ye left him for dead, and he came to," growled O'Shea. "And so McDougal got away?"

"I can tell you more secrets," wailed Charley Tong Sin; but his services as an informer were suddenly cut short. The huge man in the chair had raised his voice in a tremendous call for help to his followers without. Otherwise he had sat composed, glaring at O'Shea. It was his hand that slew Charley Tong Sin as a traitor. He was on his feet, the heavy chair raised aloft. He swung it with amazing ease. It was no longer a massive article of furniture, but a missile in the hands of a man of gigantic strength. His movements were not clumsy.

The chair flew through the air. O'Shea dodged, but Charley Tong Sin flung up his arms, taken unawares. The impact would have brained an ox. The whirling mass of teak smote the terrified comprador on the head and chest, and he crumpled to the pavement. He was as dead as though he had been caught beneath the hammer of a pile driver. The tableau was an extraordinary one. O'Shea stood staring at the broken body of the young Chinese. The man in the crimson robe stirred not from his tracks. Implacable, unafraid, he had executed the last sentence of the Sect of the Fatal Obligation.

The people outside were clamoring at the doors, and O'Shea heard the thud and crash of some kind of an improvised battering-ram. He sighed, and found the thought of death at their hands very bitter. But he would not go alone. He faced the great and terrible Chung, and slowly raised the revolver.

The arch assassin bade him wait with a gesture so imperious, so mandatory, that O'Shea hesitated. The bearing of the man held some large significance. His dark, evil countenance expressed sadness rather than wrath. He slid a hand into the folds of his robe, and raised the hand to his mouth. Whatever it was that he swallowed wrought its work with swift and deadly virulence. Swaying like a tree about to fall, he strode to the marble altar, and fell across it with his head buried in his arms. In this posture he died, in front of the image of the glowing Buddha.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE OVERTHROW OF THE CHUNG SECT.

O'Shea managed to walk to a corner of the temple, and slumped down upon a marble bench, where the Painted Joss cast its deepest shadow. His strength had ebbed again. Listlessly, almost inattentive, he heard the assault upon the doors renewed, and the splintering of plank. When the Chinese mob came tumbling in, he would try to shoot straight and hit a few of them, and then they would close in on him. It was the end of the game.

A few minutes, and the servitors of Chung came jostling and shouting through the anteroom. Then they halted abruptly. Their noise was hushed. The light that fell from the windows near the roof showed them the lifeless figure in the crimson robe, doubled across the marble altar. In the foreground lay the battered body of Charley Tong Sin, but they had eyes only for the tragedy of the altar. They stood dumfounded, like men in the presence of something incredible.

At length the boldest shuffled forward. The others followed timidly. They appeared terrified in the extreme. It was as though they had believed their

master to be invulnerable, a superman. And he was dead. Possibly they conjectured that he had been slain by an agency more than mortal. The group of Chinese clustered about the altar, whispering, regarding the body of Chung. Apparently they had not bethought themselves of the foreigner who had been held a prisoner in the temple.

O'Shea rose in his shadowy corner, and moved wearily past the Painted Joss. It was better to have the thing finished. He came upon the Chinese like an apparition. Their wits were so fuddled that the sight of him had the effect of another shock. If he had been powerful enough to slay the mighty Chung, then the demons were his allies. Perceiving their dazed condition, he forbore to shoot, and advanced abreast of the altar. The path to the doorway was clear, but he had not the strength to make a run for it. The hope of life, miraculously restored to him, was in the possibility that they might stand and gaze at him a little longer.

He had walked a half dozen steps farther when one of the crowd yelled. The spell was broken. They broke after him like wolves. He turned and steadied himself, and pulled the trigger until the revolver was empty. The onset was checked and thrown into confusion. O'Shea had summarily convinced them that whether or not the demons were in league with him, the devil was in this ready weapon of his. They were no longer massed between him and the exit, and for the moment the advantage undeniably belonged to this mysterious, devastating foreigner.

He stumbled over the broken timbers of the doors, and was in the blessed daylight, the temple behind him. He must be overtaken ere he could flee the ruined city, but he reloaded the revolver as he followed the path at a staggering trot. The mob poured out of the temple, yelling in high-keyed chorus. As a foot racer, the hapless Captain Michael O'Shea was in excessively poor condition. In fact, it promised to be the easiest kind of a matter to overtake him and leisurely pelt him to death with bricks as soon as he should have expended his ammunition.

He swerved from the rough path, and crawled to the top of a low ridge of débris. Standing erect for a moment, he pitched forward, and fell against a bit of wall. His figure had been outlined against the sky, and it was discerned in a fleeting glimpse by a scattered band of men in khaki and linen clothes who were tramping the marsh. They raised a shout, and raced toward the ruined city, converging until the force was mobilized within a short distance of the prostrate O'Shea.

The Chinese mob, pursuing full tilt, found itself confronting a score and more of rifles, which enthusiastically opened fire until the air hummed with bullets. There was a hasty, unanimous retreat of the followers of Chung to the temple and the adjacent buildings. Major Bannister halted to bend over O'Shea and say:

"We thought you were drowned or bogged in the marsh. What sort of a rumpus is this?"

"The Painted Joss!" murmured O'Shea. "I found it. Don't bother with me. Go to it, and clean out the place."

The adventurers, at last earning their wages, proceeded to make things most unpleasant for the household of Chung. The resistance was brief, and those who were not penned within the temple fled in panic, and sought cover in the marsh. They were taken by surprise, for the community had found the visit of Captain O'Shea sufficient to engage its attention. To him returned Major Bannister, hot and dusty, his cheek bleeding from the cut of a Chinese sword, and smilingly announced:

"Bully good fun while it lasted! What shall I do with the devils we cornered? Take them out and shoot them?"

"No. The boss of the works is dead. And I have a notion that the Sect of the Fatal Obligation died with him. Lug me to the temple, if you please. I'm all in, but 'tis my wish to see the whole wicked business go up in smoke."

Before the torch was applied that

experienced man of war, Major Bannister, suggested that he had never seen a more promising place in which to poke about for loot. The search amounted to nothing until it occurred to the major to pull the Painted Joss from off its pedestal. After much heaving and prying, the great image fell crashing to the pavement of the temple. Investigation revealed that underneath it were several compartments accessible by means of cunningly fitted panels. Many papers or documents were found, wrapped in silk, and it was assumed that these were the records of the black deeds of Chung and his organized murderers. They were thrown aside, to be bundled together and taken to the boats.

It was the astute Major Bannister who smashed the bottom of one of these compartments with a rifle butt and rammed his arm through the splintered hole. His groping fingers came in contact with closely packed rows of metal bars. In this manner was discovered the wealth of the temple, the blood money stored and treasured by the infamous Chung, the price of many assassinations.

The gold was in stamped ingots, the silver in the lumps or "shoes" of the clumsy Chinese currency, and there were baskets of English sovereigns, Mexican dollars, and a variety of the coinages which pass over the counters of the money changers of the Orient. Murder as a business had paid well. The Sect of the Fatal Obligation was a flourishing concern. The loot belonged to those who found it. They were troubled by no scruples respecting the heirs of the departed Chung, nor did they consider it their duty to surrender the spoils to the Chinese government.

That night a conflagration reddened the ruins of the dead city of Wang Li Fu. It was the pyre of the Painted Joss. And when the little flotilla again moved upriver early the following morning, a cloud of smoke rose lazily in the still air. Captain Michael O'Shea was still alive, which was rather surprising, for he had passed through experiences extremely disturbing to a sick man. There was tonic, however, in the fact that he had redeemed his failure, the expedition was no longer a sorry jest, and the account of Bill Maguire had been squared.

He slept with tremendous earnestness through a night and a day, and when he awoke it was to roar for food and to display the peevish temper of a genuine convalescent. When off duty his comrades became absorbed in the odd occupation of arranging piles of gold bars, silver "shoes," and minted coins on the deck of the little house boat, like children playing with blocks. They smiled a great deal, and talked to themselves. Captain O'Shea looked on with an air of fatherly interest. After all, this happy family of his had made a prosperous voyage of it. Dreams of rehabilitation cheered these broken wanderers. They would go home. No more for them the misery, the heartache, the humiliation of the tropical tramp. Their riches might slip through their fingers, but they would make the most of golden opportunity. Like poor McDougal, they had thrown all regrets away.

"'Tis share and share alike," said O'Shea; "but there is a red-headed sailorman at anchor on a farm in Maine, and I think he has a wife somewheres. With your permission, we will deal him a share of the plunder. 'Twas poor Bill Maguire that gave us the tip."

Unmindful of labor and hardship, this contented company slowly journeyed to the head of navigation on the River of Ten Thousand Evil Smells, and then trudged overland, while O'Shea rode in a covered chair and sang old sea chanteys in a mellow voice. When at length the English mission station was reached, it was stretching the truth to call him an invalid. The senior missionary, a gentle, very wise old man, who had lived for thirty years in the back country, heard the tale told by these tanned, ragged travelers, and was horrified that such things should have existed. But he had news for them, and it supplied a missing fragment of the puzzle of Bill Maguire.

"The man came here, and we took care of him. But there was no finding out how he had been so frightfully hurt. He was dumb and stupid. Later I met a native boatman who had found him on the river bank near Wang Li Fu. Evidently he had been thrown into the water as an easy way to get rid of the body. Reviving a little, he splashed his way ashore, or the tide left him there. He stayed with us until he was fairly strong, and one morning he was gone."

"And did he set the house afire?" inquired O'Shea.

"Why, there were two accidental fires in the compound at that time, but we laid it to the carelessness of the kitchen coolies," was the innocent reply.

"It was Bill Maguire, all right," declared O'Shea. "Now, will ye be good enough to look over the Chinese documents we found hid away under the Painted Joss?"

The missionary pored over the papers for several hours. And his painstaking translation revealed all that O'Shea cared to know concerning the operations of the Sect of the Fatal Obligation. It had worked in secret to remove enemies for a price. If a merchant wished a business rival removed, if an official found others in his way, if it was advantageous to create a vacancy in some other quarter the murder guild directed by the departed Chung would transact the affair smoothly, without bungling. And those who knew and would have disclosed the secret were frightened into silence by the sight of the brand that was called the Dreadful Messenger of Chung.

"It will interest you to learn, as an American, Captain O'Shea," said the missionary, "that among these documents is a list of persons proscribed, or sentenced to be slain. The most conspicuous name I find to be that of the Chinese ambassador to the United States, his excellency, Hao Su Ting. It is probable that this terrible fate would have awaited him upon his return to his own country."

"They potted his brother," exclaimed O'Shea. "And he was sick with fear of the thing, for I talked it over with him myself. Well, he can thank Bill Maguire for letting him die in his bed when his proper time comes."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN QUIET WATERS.

Three weeks later Captain O'Shea sat at his ease upon the piazza of the Grand Hotel that overlooks Yokohama Bay. He was thinner than when he had put to sea in the *Whang Ho* steamer, but he appeared to find the game of life quite worth while. It was his pleasure to enjoy the tame diversions of a tourist before boarding a mail boat for the long run home to San Francisco. He smiled as he reread a letter written in the crabbed fist of that zealous agriculturist, Johnny Kent, who had this to say:

DEAR CAPTAIN MIKE: The Lord only knows what trouble you'll be in when this gets to China. My advice is to quit it and come home. I'm worried about you. Bill Maguire has rounded to, understand? His busted main hatch sort of mended itself by degrees. He had symptoms before you left, and you ought to have waited, but I suppose you can't help being young and Irish.

He was terrible melancholy at first, and he ain't real spry yet. I found his wife and little girl for him in Baltimore and made them come on here. You guessed right about the wax doll. I bought the darndest, biggest one I could find. Bill feels that the family is living on my charity, and being morbid and downhearted, he frets a whole lot about being broke and stranded. He'll be no good to go to sea again. It gives him the shivers to talk about it. I don't need him as a farm hand in the winter, and as for having his wife as a steady housekeeper, I'm fussy and set in my ways.

Bill got up against an awful bad combination in China. I won't tell you where it was, for I don't want you to find it. Maybe you'll run across a man named McDougal out there. He was with Bill when they got in trouble. Bill saw a chance to get away in the night, but he stood the crowd off somehow to give McDougal leeway to join him. And this McDougal lit out with never a thought for Bill. There was something wrong with McDougal, as I figure it out. Maybe he was a good man, but here was one time when he fell down on his job. None of us say much about it, Captain Mike, but we all pray we won't get caught that way. You know what I mean. We're afraid there may be a weak

spot in us that we don't know is there until we have to face the music. Anyhow, as I gather from Bill, McDougal was a quitter. If I know anything about men, he has wished a hundred times since that he had stayed to take his medicine with Bill. We would a heap sight rather see you come home alive than to go monkeying with the Painted Joss. Nothing much has happened except a dry spell in August and corn and potatoes set back. Hens are laying well. Your friend,

J. KENT.

Captain O'Shea chuckled, and then became thoughtful. Paddy Blake and McDougal! Charley Tong Sin and the wreck of the *Whang Ho!* Wang Li Fu and the terrible Chung! Much can happen within the space of a few weeks to a man that will seek the long trail. Presently he took from his leather bill book several slips of paper which he had received from the Yokohama Specie Bank in exchange for his gold bars and silver "shoes." After making sundry calculations with a pencil, he said to himself:

"The share of Jim Eldridge, alias Bill Maguire, is nine thousand eight hundred and sixty-two dollars and eleven cents, and 'tis here all shipshape in two drafts on New York. My piece of the loot is the same. But the red-headed sailorman will never be the lad he was, and he should not be worried by the lack of money to live on. And could any money pay for what he went through? 'Tis easy to know what I should do. I will not take a cent of the plunder. My share I will give to Bill, and with his bit of it he will be comfortably fixed."

An expression of boyish satisfaction brightened his resolute features as he added:

"A man would be ashamed to take money for such a pleasant vacation as this one has been. Now I will send a cable message to Bill Maguire, and it will cheer him a lot. His account is squared. And I think I have put a crimp in the Sect of the Fatal Obligation."

"The Strange Adventures of Alphaeus Mee, B. Sc.," a novel of the Caribbean, by Francis Lynde, will be published complete in the first March POPULAR, on sale two weeks hence, February 7th.

HE GAVE HIS WIFE A VACATION

THE hero of this story believed in vacations, particularly vacations for his wife. Every time he heard somebody talking about the hardships of spending the hot summer months amid the din and dust of the crowded city, he had to pay money to his tailor because he wore out his sleeve laughing into it. He loved his little freedom, and made no secret of it.

One day a friend asked him:

"Jack, where is your wife?"

"She's up in the Thousand Islands," he replied lightly, "and I hope she'll spend a week on each one of them!"

CROWDING THE WHITE HOUSE

MORE than a thousand people, newspaper men, politicians, and society leaders, were invited to attend the ceremony and a White House luncheon on August first last, when President Taft was officially notified of his renomination.

The evening before the notification Harry L. Dunlap, chief of the Washington bureau of the New York *World*, received this telegram from his paper:

Understand that several big Ohio politicians are invited to lunch at White House to-morrow. Please verify it and wire us whether they are really invited.

Dunlap replied:

Everybody is.

Little Sister of the Stars

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "Precious Water," "The Winning Game," Etc.

In this idyl of the North Mr. Chisholm has dared to present a heroine widely different from the sort that usually figures in romances. Little Sister of the Stars is no "winsome divinity," but, as Mr. Chisholm describes her, she is "flat-faced and built like a barrel." And yet around this unattractive dusky Indian maid he has fashioned a story that one of our critics well described as "beautiful." There is nothing of the sickly sentimental about the tale. If there are the tender musings of Little Sister of the Stars there are also the hot passions of men fired with the lust for gold. An unusual and artistic story.

(A Novelette)

CHAPTER I.

IN THE TEPEE OF THE SEERESS.

HER very unchristian name, being translated, was "Little Sister of the Stars"; but her mission and, consequently, near-Christian name was Agathe, or Agatha, to give it the English pronunciation. And she was the daughter of Potlatch Joe by Rosalie, his wife. She was of unmixed Babine stock, which is to say that such charms as she possessed were hidden from the casual eye.

Beauty is only skin deep, but being so, a dark-brown epidermis failed to reveal any in her. That is, as to facial configuration. As to person, she was short, broad, muscular, and—if you like realism in your heroines—bow-legged. The which, whether you like it or not, was very evident from a costume that ordinarily stopped short to allow greater freedom of action. Slim effects were not for Agathe. The hobble, the harem, and similar obsessions had not yet emerged; and if they had, she would have been immune. But, coming to qualities as apart from mere beauty, Agathe was there with the goods. She was as strong as a young bulldog, short, squat, thickset like a bulldog, and she was always in the best of condition. For her father had patriarchal ideas concerning the necessity of rest for men and corresponding activity in women to make up the general average; and Rosalie, having given her birth, had done all that might reasonably be expected. She superintended her education and enforced the practice of the precepts she taught. Which is, after all, about the sum of the performance of ordinary parental duty.

And so it came about that Agathe's education was liberal. Reading and writing, being in the nature of superfluities, were not among her accomplishments. But she could make a paddle or a canoe, and use both with the skill of an expert; cut moccasins, gloves, and mittens, and adorn them with silk, beads, or dyed porcupine quills; cure meat and fish, tan hides so that they were soft and golden-cream in color, web the long snowshoes of the north country, drive a dog team, and make a good camp expeditiously. Her cooking might not have passed any school of domestic science, and might possibly

have been condemned on sanitary grounds; but it was filling, odorous, and satisfying, delivered in a minimum of time, and men tramped and paddled forty miles a day thereon.

Her glove-and-moccasin making was her chief accomplishment. It was encouraged because it meant revenue. These articles, as she made them, could be sold anywhere and everywhere. There was always a market for them. They were easy to transport, and, so far as Potlatch Joe was concerned, easy to make. His responsibility was to slay the beast that wore the skin. Agathe did the rest.

Much of her time was passed in this remunerative and ladylike pursuit. In their permanent camps, when she had much time—having then merely to cut wood, cook, set snares, and draw the fish net—she spent long hours cutting and stitching the hide of buck and moose. With ingenuity rare in an Indian, she had procured a pair of gloves of modern manufacture, which she used as a pattern, so that her product was well-fitting, and not, as in the majority of squaw-made gloves, apparently designed to fit the victim of manual encounter with a bevel gear. And it was this, apart from skill in finish, that accounted for the good prices which her work invariably commanded.

Not that Little Sister of the Stars herself reaped the rewards of her industry, save indirectly in the form of food and raiment, which she shared as one of the family. Because the mind feminine is not adapted to grapple with the business problems of buying and selling, her father relieved her of this embarrassment—also of the profits therefrom. For, when you come to consider it, the selling end of any business is that which calls for the greatest talent, versatility, quick decision, and knowledge of human nature.

Broadly speaking, any squaw can make gloves of buck and moccasins of moose because it has been so arranged in the scheme of things. But when it comes to dealing with white men, who are supreme lords of vast log emporiums, measuring twenty by thirty feet floor space, with shelves crowded with goods, why, that is a different matter, calling for the presence of mind and matured experience of a man of the world—such a man, in fact, as Potlatch Joe. So that the gloves and moccasins passed from Agathe's deft fingers into the smoky paws of her father, and that was the last she ever heard of them, save for occasional grumblings at the hard bargains driven by the white men. Thus Potlatch Joe occupied a dual position. He furnished the raw product—that is, the skin on the beast; and, after it had gone through the process of manufacture, he sold it.

In the long hours that Agathe bent over the pungent, smoke-odored skins, cutting and sewing, her mind was supposed to be wholly upon her task; her eyes to behold nothing but the patterns, the lines of neat stitches, and the intricate designs of ornamentation of silk, bead, and quill. But this, like many time-honored hypotheses, was founded on a fundamental error, namely, that the tasks set youth by its elders necessarily engross its mind.

Not that Agathe would have "watched the clock" even if there had been one to watch. On the contrary, this employment was the one most to her liking. It occupied her hands, but not her thoughts; it gave time for the dreaming of daydreams.

Heaven knows where she got her imagination. Not from Potlatch Joe, who was cunning, but entirely material; not from her mother, who lived as the cow moose lives, satisfied with food and shelter, and such raiment as it pleased Providence to throw in her way; not from any one in the unwritten chronicles of her family history. She was built like a barrel; her forehead executed a masterly and speedy retreat beneath black hair as coarse as a horse's mane; her face was nearly as flat as a platter, and ordinarily as expressionless. But, nevertheless, she dreamed of the coming of a Prince Charming, and, for choice, a white one!

And he came in many ways—by canoe, on snowshoes, appearing in the nick of time to rescue her from great

peril, just as it was in the books she had never read. Always he was great and tall, strong and very wise. When he spoke men hearkened; when he frowned they trembled. But to her his voice was as soft as the ripples kissing the sands of an inland lake; and for her no frown ever sat on his brow. He would love her, with eyes for no other, and they would be very happy.

Once when she was a growing slip of a girl—though the phrase is deceptively suggestive of slenderness and, perhaps, grace—her family's wanderings took her across from the Pelly to the Nisutlin. There they met a band of Indians, and, with them, an old hag, whose wisdom was popularly supposed to be in direct ratio to her ugliness and dirtiness. Her reputation as a seeress was more than local, and, to do her justice, she occasionally hit the bull's-eye with her predictions. On the strength of which, as has been the case with prophets from time immemorial, she got away with the misses. Also, her wisdom led her to couch her prophecies in beautifully ambiguous language—as obscure, say, as the decisions of a very high and learned court of appeal. To this old lady, then, went Agathe by stealth, and demanded to know what lay on the knees of the gods for her.

"I can see a man and a maiden," announced the seeress. "The man is tall and broad, as strong as a great bear, as swift as the deer. I cannot see his face, for it is turned from me. I think he is a white man, but he may be an Indian. The maiden—and, perhaps, she is not a maiden, but a wife—is yourself. You are on a long trail together. Mountains are on either hand. You are following a river. I see behind you the smokes of many fires, for you have traveled far. I cannot see the end of the trail, for it is hidden by a red curtain that the gods have dropped before my eyes. A red curtain is a bad omen. Otherwise the luck is good."

"Let the gods speak to me themselves through your mouth," said Agathe. "Ask them when this man will come."

The old lady was silent for a time. Then——

"Thus say the gods," she declared, "putting the words in my mouth. Hear and remember, for the gods do not speak twice. These be the words of the gods: 'When all is prepared, one will come. Until all is prepared, none will come. He who is sent by the gods will be known when he comes. Be patient, but ready; wait, but be prepared. The gods have spoken.'"

And so Agathe departed from the tepee of the seeress, and from the waters of the Nisutlin, taking with her the material for more dreams. And her primitive and uncramped imagination worked this material into fantastic garments, in which she clothed herself and all the people who entered her life. But the years went on, and he who was to be sent by the gods did not come. She found favor in the eyes of no man. And yet she did not lose the faith that was in her. Sooner or later the prophecy would be fulfilled, and her trust justified. Thus, lonely, ugly, but a dreamer of secret dreams, she grew to womanhood.

CHAPTER II.

SECRET GOLD.

Although Potlatch Joe preferred to linger in the vicinity of the trading posts, and usually did so until his credit was exhausted, the cruel necessity of gathering furs to pay his debt forced him afield. On one of these occasions, in a sudden access of energy, he penetrated far beyond his accustomed stamping grounds into territory entirely new to him, accompanied by the fat and groaning Rosalie, and by Agathe, sturdy, uncomplaining, doing a man's work with paddle, setting pole, and pack.

Joe was hunting a fur district, and his wanderings took him far up the Liard, past the Dease, into the Frances Lake country. The traveling was hard and rough. Ordinarily he would not have attempted anything so strenuous, but the threats of the fur trader whom he owed a large amount spurred him on; and the whimperings of his wife aroused a streak of cussedness in his

nature. More than once he silenced her with timely application of a stick, forcing her to bear a share of the labor with Agathe. Through the unwonted physical exertion the fat fell away from her, and she resumed long-lost outlines of the human form divine.

At last they came to a point where Joe, looking around, decided to abandon his canoe and strike inland. A large, nameless creek joined the river, which here ran through a broad valley. On either side were low hills; back of them mountain ranges. This creek, Joe's experienced eye told him, in all probability led back to the ground of marten, beaver, bear, and the lesser furred kindreds. And so he cached his canoe carefully, on general principles, and not because there was much likelihood of any one interfering with it; did the same with part of his outfit, and, making the rest into three packs, of which he took the lightest, struck off up the creek to see what the country looked like.

Following the creek proved to be hard work. There was no trail, of course, and in places there was much thick brush and down timber. Therefore, their progress was slow.

But Potlatch Joe and his family had all the time there was. They were merely on a prospecting trip for a fur district, you understand. The whole summer was before them, and they were bound to strike something ere the end of it. And so they did not hurry. Joe's haste evaporated the moment he shouldered a pack himself. They made up the creek by easy stages, and when it forked in the hills, they took the south prong as apparently leading into the more favorable country.

Here, up toward the head of the prong, they came to a wooded basin some miles in extent. Into it, out of the hills, fell five small streams which, uniting, formed the south branch itself. It was a virgin basin. Never, perhaps, since the beginning of time had wanderers in the vast waste of woods and waters set foot in it, or, if they had, they had left no traces.

No camp smoke had risen from its timbered bottom, no ax had rung the echoes of the surrounding hills, no human foot had bruised the lush summer growth of its herbage. It was a little world in itself, in all the shades of green, brilliant with mountain flowers, musical with the song of birds and the laugh of running waters, fresh from the hand of Nature, with no man-made improvements—or disfigurements, as you choose to look at such things. Here were fish, meat, and fur in abundance by the sign. And here Potlatch Joe threw off his pack and sat down upon it.

"We stop here," he announced with finality.

How long they were to remain he did not say; nor did he invite suggestion as to a camping spot, or anything else. It suited him, and that settled it. And so he sat on his pack, smoking, and watching his women make a camp, for such employment was beneath his dignity.

Presently he picked up his rifle and sauntered off into the woods. It was typical of his kind that the moment he was out of sight of camp his laziness vanished. He was instantly alert, soft-footed, springy-muscled, moving lightly but swiftly. Half a mile from the camp his pace slackened; but he was more alert than ever. He went slowly, silently, with now and then a long pause and a fixed stare at some object, until it resolved itself into a part of the scenery. Joe was out for meat, and he had no desire to go farther than was necessary.

Suddenly he stopped dead, for he had found what he sought. In the heart of a patch of greenery appeared something different in shade. It was brown, and yet, to a casual inspection, it blended with the greens. Joe's foot, upraised for another step, came down by fractions of an inch. He stood absolutely still, without the movement of a muscle, not even the wink of an eyelid. For minutes he waited, motionless. He was sure that he saw part of a deer's body, but he was not the man to burn a cartridge on a chance shot. He liked to know that he was holding on a vital spot when he pulled trigger; not from

any humane motive, but because cartridges cost money, and a wounded animal meant exertion in a chase.

In this instance his patience was rewarded. A young doe appeared where the indistinct blotch of brown had been, and stood, ears pointing forward, soft muzzle sniffing the air suspiciously. The range was point-blank, and Joe killed the doe, dressed her, hoisted her across his shoulders, and returned to his camp, from which he had been absent less than half an hour. He threw the carcass on the ground for the women to skin, cook, smoke, or make into jerky, as they pleased. His part in the business was finished.

And so they established their camp and rested comfortably from their labors. There were meat and fish, early berries and edible roots. It was a summer camp good enough for anybody. Later on they would lay in a stock of necessaries, return, build a cabin or a good tepee, and skim the fur from the district in the long winter. That was the program as Potlatch Joe mapped it out in his head, and as his women knew without being told. They had been through the mill so often that they understood its operation perfectly.

Man proposes—and you know the rest of the adage. One day Potlatch Joe, following one of the little streams a couple of miles from his camp, with a watchful eye for sign of fur, came to where the creek emerged from cañonlike walls of rock. It fell from the mouth of the miniature cañon into a deep, eddying pool, hung with drifting mist, ran out of this into a succession of shallower, broader pools, and finally resumed its course again.

Joe sat down beside one of these lower pools, lit his pipe, and prepared to meditate. He stared down into the pellucid water, watching the play of the swarming little trout against the white sand and smooth, waterworn pebbles. It was very pleasant, the sun was warm, his tobacco was good, and he did not care whether school kept or not. Idly scanning the bottom of the pool, a small object of a dull-tarnished yellow lying close at hand in a few inches of water caught his attention. Stooping with a grunt of surprise, he scooped it up. It weighed heavy in his hand, being nothing less than a small nugget of gold.

Now, Joe knew gold when he saw it, and knew that it had value. It was for this that white men stampeded all over the North, braving cold, and hunger, and scurvy; and where they found it in plenty they built towns, and there was much whisky. They paid in gold for everything, weighing it out of moose or buckskin sacks into little scales which every store and saloon possessed. Joe had seen it done. You got so much flour, and tobacco, and pork, and the storekeeper took your sack and weighed out enough to pay for it, and gave you back the rest.

It was as simple as falling off a log. So much grub for so much gold—and there you were. There was no haggling, no chaffering, no talk of it being off color or not prime, as was the case with furs. Gold had furs beaten every way. The man who had gold, be he white or red, was to be envied. Instead of tramping a forty-mile trap line in the bitter cold of winter, he lived indoors, beside a stove, ate, and smoked, and talked of what he would do in the summer. Fine! Joe was very strong for such an existence. And so he stood, with the little waterworn nugget in his dirty palm, while a delightful vista of possibilities opened before him.

The next step, naturally, was to ascertain the extent of his find. He stripped, conquering his racial dislike for cold water against his hide, and waded out into the pool. He found nuggets large and small. Entering the next pool, he found more. He gathered them, dumping them in his old hat until the icy water numbed his legs and cramped his toes; and then he waded ashore, unwontedly clean, but otherwise happy, as he had every right to be.

But wealth, as the philosophers tell us, invariably brings worries; a statement which most of us are forced to take on trust. And Potlatch Joe, sitting wrapped in bright visions and a tattered shirt, while the hot sun re-

stored the normal temperature of his brown legs, began to feel the embarrassment of sudden riches.

These pools he looked upon as his. There was enough gold there to give him everything he wanted for all his life. But gold draws white men as molasses draws flies. Suppose somebody else stumbled on it! Horrible to contemplate. And then, as soon as he produced a nugget to pay for his purchases, he would be asked where he got it. If he told, a dozen old stampeders would race for the spot where he now sat. If he lied, as he would, of course, it would have to be artistically. He knew nothing whatever of mining laws, and if he had he would not have troubled about them. White men's laws were complicated, embarrassing, and, so far as he had observed, framed expressly to make trouble for Indians. His idea of security for property was a well-hidden cache.

But these little, lonely pools were very well cached as they were. Nobody had found them, or the gold in them, before. The land was vast, empty. The chances were that nobody else would find it if he kept his own counsel.

There was no doubt of his ability to do that. Indeed, he would have kept the secret from even his wife and daughter, but that it was necessary to warn them against answering questions. A careless word and the country would be overrun with white men looking for gold which they would inevitably find sooner or later.

That night, therefore, he produced a handful of nuggets.

"These," he said, "be gold. Such gold as the white men seek for, the gold with which they buy what they will. It is mine, because I have found it. Therefore, I will no longer trap, for the gold is of the value of many years' catch of skins. I will take it to the trading posts and buy me what I want, and I will work no more. And I will also buy you a present each."

Rosalie received this generous offer with gratitude. But her daughter was less impressed.

"A canoe load of fur will buy food for the winter, and a handful of gold may do the same," she said. "But it will not last forever. Is there more?"

"There is more," her father replied. "I will take what I want, and when that is spent I will come again. It has been my fortune to find it, and it is mine. Wherefore will the gods curse whomsoever robs me of it. But because there are men who care nothing for the gods, and much for gold, be silent concerning it, both of you. By cunning questions some may seek to learn where we have been that they may find our trail, and so come to this place. To such give a crooked answer. For if others find it we are undone."

Within three days they were on their way to the outposts of civilization, where the spectacle of an Indian with gold in his possession properly scandalized every right-thinking white man. More especially, as Joe would give no satisfactory account of where it came from. His statements in that behalf were rightly considered entirely fictional.

McNicol, the fur company's man at Liard Portage, stared when Potlatch Joe desired to pay his debt; and when the Indian produced a buckskin sack heavy with nuggets, the shock nearly stopped his heart action.

He weighed out the amount of the debt, reluctantly returned the poke to its owner, and fingered the little nuggets curiously.

"Where did ye get these?" he asked.

Potlatch Joe let a preoccupied eye wander along the shelves.

"Smoke-um cigah," he suggested.

McNicol snorted, but gave him a cigar, and a good one at that, such a one as he himself smoked on Sunday. Joe stuck it halfway down his throat, licked it all over, and bit off the end.

"Match!" he demanded grandly.

McNicol, repressing an inclination to hit him with an ax handle instead, shoved a box across the counter. Joe fired up and blew the smoke of the company's rich, dry manila through his flattened nostrils, which up to date had been acquainted only with the fumes of

a powerful blend of kinnikinnick and molasses-and-copperas soaked plug. But he did not answer the question.

"Where did ye get these nuggets?" McNicol repeated with strained patience.

Joe took warning from his tone. "Me trade um," he replied.

"You lie," said McNicol, without circumlocution. "What have *you* got to trade for a pokeful of stuff like this?"

And Joe saw fit to modify his statement.

"Me win um," he said. "Siwash me win um from him trade um."

McNicol grunted doubtfully. He knew the Indian propensity for gambling, but on general principles he never believed anything one of his red brothers told him.

"Where did he trade it?" he asked.

"Trade um Coast Siwash," Joe replied. "Coast Siwash sick, come to this Siwash tepee. Bimeby him die. This Siwash bury um. Keep um gun, keep um blanket, keep um gold."

"Call that trading, do you?" said McNicol. But this was reasonable enough. The Coast Indian might have stolen the gold from a white man, and if he thought suspicion apt to fall on him, he would be very likely to put a safe distance between himself and consequences. Only McNicol had not heard of any placer strike which would be likely to yield such a bunch of nuggets.

He handled them again. Obviously they were waterworn and sand-ground, and the color was different from any gold McNicol had seen. Where had they come from? Had some prospector stumbled across one of the fabled placer deposits in the great waste of the North? It was possible. It was also possible that he had been killed by the Indian who had the gold. And if that Indian was dead also, the secret was lost until chance revealed it again. These were possibilities. Also there was the possibility that Joe himself had found the rich placer; and if he had, he would be very likely to invent some plausible tale, such a yarn, in fact, as he had just told. McNicol, having an extensive experience of Indians, was quite in accord with the sweeping biblical statement that all men are liars; and he was aware, too, that an Indian will grunt, look solemn, and stick to an absurd story in the face of every disproof. And so he forebore to question him further just then.

A week later, when opportunity offered, he endeavored by casual questions to find out where Joe had spent the last month or two. Joe was quite ready with this information. But McNicol decided that he was much too ready, and ended by disbelieving him entirely.

CHAPTER III.

THE EMBARRASSMENT OF SUDDEN WEALTH.

McNicol was by no means the only man who attempted to cross-question Potlatch Joe. Others tried to discover his secret, if he had one, but with no more success. He and his family lived through the winter in luxury, the envied of all.

By spring, however, Joe's treasure had melted almost to the vanishing point. He was another victim of the higher standard of living. Much of it had gone that way; but more had gone with cards and dice, for his luck that winter was bad. It became necessary to renew the sinews of war.

It was then, when somehow it became known that he contemplated leaving the Portage to recuperate after the season's festivities in strictly rural surroundings, that Potlatch Joe was pained by a sudden, widespread interest in his movements. Also shocked by the indelicate curiosity of his neighbors, which he naturally regarded as a reflection upon his veracity. From leading questions they descended to spying upon his movements. Therefore, he was driven to match craft with subtlety. He feigned sickness, and set back the date of his departure, until he should be entirely recovered. In the midst of this illness he vanished between two

days, without even the Arabic ceremony of folding his tent.

Water leaves no trail, according to the good, old "Leatherstocking" series; but, in spite of that, half a dozen canoes left the Portage the next morning, their occupants hitting up a pace guaranteed to develop any back and shoulder muscles that stood in need of it.

And Potlatch Joe and his family, cached in the bushes five miles above the Portage, watched them sweep by on their wild-goose chase and return some days afterward at lesser speed. After which he went about his own business.

Once more he attained the little basin of the five streams, and refilled his buckskin sack with the gold which the gods patiently guarded for him, emerging from the wilderness after many days, once more organized for the pursuit of happiness.

Now, Joe's original story accounting for the possession of gold was ingenious, and not too improbable; and, such as it was, he got away with it. But when he turned up again, after an extended absence following a very obvious get-away, with more gold in his possession, he emerged entirely from obscurity, and became notorious. The fame of him ran from the Ominecas to the Tananas, entirely by word of mouth, and grew as it ran, until the cold facts were lost in a maze of circumstance highly creditable to the imaginations of the narrators.

It was said that he had found a placer that knocked anything in the history of mining cold. He had used nuggets in an old muzzle-loader to shoot deer before he knew the value of his find. He brought down a canoe load of gold every summer. The sinkers of his fish nets were nuggets. But the deuce of it was that nobody knew where he got it, and attempts to pump him and to follow him were alike vain. He possessed the cunning of an old fox, and the elusiveness of a flea. Also, he possessed a daughter, beautiful as an artist's dream, who had gold on her fingers and toes, and was having a golden crown hammered out for her by a blacksmith. All these yarns and more circulated through a territory in which half Europe might have been dumped down and lost.

But the stories were so highly colored that no old-timers believed them. They scoffed openly, derided, and classed them as fables. Still, locally, Joe paid the penalty of celebrity.

One form of penalty—but one to which he had no objection—was an unprecedented abundance of alcohol. Ordinarily it is hard for an Indian to procure liquor. Joe did not need to procure it; it was procured for him. Many a crafty white man plied him with beverages ranging from "Travelers' Friend" to Jamaica rum that would almost float an anvil.

But Joe possessed the absorbent qualities of a light, sandy loam. He sucked up moisture without overflowing. No puddles stood on his surface. Neither was he talkative. When thoroughly lighted up, he sometimes broke into a melancholy caterwauling, which he intended for song; a little farther along, at the stage technically known as "pickled," he invariably went to sleep. But, steamed, lighted, soused, plastered, or pickled, he preserved the silence of a sphinx as to his gold, and where he got it.

The greatest difficulty he had was in secretly replenishing his sack when it ran low. Each time this was harder of accomplishment. He was spied upon, dogged, followed. He was forced to plan elaborately, to employ almost every traditional ruse, and to invent some for himself to throw off pursuit. He learned to go fireless, to land on rocky shores, to sink his canoe with stones, to travel by night. And, somehow, with good luck to aid him, he always managed to lose his uninvited attendants. Which finally discouraged most of them, and made things easier for him.

Naturally it was useless to stick to his original story. He admitted shamelessly that he had found gold, but neither threat nor favor could induce him to give any hint as to its whereabouts. Offers to buy his secret he rejected with lofty scorn. There was

plenty of gold for him, and he could get it whenever he wanted it. Moreover, it was all his. Why should he tell anybody? No reason why. He stood pat, opposing a solid and stolid front of indifference to argument and persuasion. Nor were his womenkind more pliable. His wife was silent through well-founded fear, and his daughter because she realized the benefits of discretion.

For Agathe these years had brought slightly better times, but no fulfillment of her secret dreams. The old winters in the loneliness of the great snow a hundred and more miles from any other human beings were things of the past. Instead, she lived in comparative comfort near the Portage, and her raiment was as variegated as Joseph's coat, and as bright as Solomon in his glory. But she remained solitary of habit, dreaming her own dreams, waiting for one who did not come.

But there came an afternoon when she sauntered aimlessly down toward the river. Her tasks were light, and she found more time to let her mind stray where it would. She sat down on a log, watching the smooth flow of the current, the fish rising lazily at the flies, the shadows and the sunshine. Her material world was one of woods and waters. The beauties of them seldom attracted her, because she was accustomed to them. They were merely a part of her natural surroundings.

Far up the long, silver reach appeared a canoe. It approached swiftly, the dripping paddles flashing in the sun. The two men in it were not extending themselves; they were merely hitting a pace they could keep up, and, in fact, had kept up, all day, but that pace would have broken the hearts of many who fancy themselves experts. They paddled with the straight-armed body thrust of the North, and at each swing of the muscular torsos the canoe seemed to leap its own length.

The frail, slender craft, worn and dingy from long, hard usage, turned to the shore, and its nose took ground gently. The man in the bow stepped out. But Agathe scarcely saw him, for her eyes were riveted on the other, who rose, great and tall, in the stern, stepping lightly and softly along the keelson, scarcely rocking the canoe, so steady was his balance along the exact center line of it.

"It is *he*," she said to herself. "It is he whose coming was foretold. The gods have sent him to me at last!"

CHAPTER IV.

A SIWASH AND A GUN.

Possibly the finger of Fate directed Skookum Bill Hutchins and Sam Dobbs to the Portage. But if so, neither of them recognized it. They came down the river in a sixteen-foot Peterboro from a fruitless prospecting trip somewhere up the Turnagain, or possibly the Kachika, and they were disgusted with themselves and the world at large. The place was strange to them, but they turned the Peterboro bottom up on the bank, picked up a roll of blankets and a scanty outfit, and made for the company's store with the certainty of homing pigeons; for they knew that there a white man's drink could be procured. Neither of them condescended to notice the young squaw, whom they passed.

Now "skookum" in the Chinook signifies strong, powerful, healthy, and the like. And Skookum Bill justified his prefix. He stood one inch over six feet in his moccasins, and he was built like a sculptor's dream. Every line of him was drawn by Nature for grace and strength, and for neither of them at the expense of the other. He was as hard and tireless as a six-cylindered engine. He had the face of a masculine, if possibly fallen, angel, and the courage of a hashish-mad dervish. He feared nothing, and reverenced little. All his hard life had been spent in the great wastes of the North, and he knew them as you know the route to your office. He had been prospector, riverman, dog musher, fur trader, gambler, bouncer, and the Lord knows what besides. He had made money occasionally, and blown it in wild orgies. He was,

in fact, nothing more than a handsome, tremendously strong, vicious, not overly intelligent brute, whose only law was the satisfaction of his own desires.

Skookum Bill was in the prime of life; but his side partner, Sam Dobbs, was well past it. He was a gaunt, old rascal, with an iron constitution, wily as a fox, and he carried about the same weight of morals as his partner, for whose general cussedness he had much admiration, and whose undiminished capacity for excesses he envied.

Having struck the Portage, they proceeded to satisfy a thirst six weeks long. It took them several days to do it. At the end of that time they felt slightly better disposed toward the world, sobered up, and began to investigate their new surroundings. These included Potlatch Joe.

It was Dobbs who made the interesting discovery, and he straightway brought the news to his partner.

"'Member this yarn we heard 'bout a Siwash that had found big pay somewheres?"

"Sure," Skookum Bill replied indifferently. "I been hearin' them yarns ever since I remember. Nothin' to 'em. What did they call this Siwash—Kamooks Pete?"

"Potlatch Joe," Dobbs corrected. "He's here. This yarn about him is straight."

"See him with any gold?"

"McNicol showed me a nugget he got in trade from him."

"He's stringin' you," scoffed Skookum Bill.

"No, he ain't. I told him he was, and he showed me the entry he made in his books. This Siwash hikes out every summer and comes back with a stake."

"Rats!" sneered his partner. "I thought you had some sense. How long do you figger a Siwash would last at that game? Somebody'd have trailed him up long ago."

"They've tried that, but they can't make it stick," Dobbs affirmed. "He's too cute for 'em. He leaks out every summer, just like I'm tellin' you, and he comes back with gold—not dust, mind you, but nuggets. You know what that means."

"I know what it means if it's true," Bill admitted. "It means he don't have to pan—just picks chunks out of the gravel somewheres." In spite of his expressed skepticism, his voice began to show interest. "And that would mean he's got one of the richest propositions on earth. Oh, what's the use?" he broke off. "It's a beaver's dream, I tell you. All these Siwash yarns are."

But his disbelief was not proof against the solemn asseverations of half a dozen men who had actually seen Potlatch Joe paying for goods in gold. Also, there were samples of the gold itself.

"It sure looks like the real thing," he was forced to admit thoughtfully. "They all tell the same lie, anyway. Huh! Sam, it ain't right for a Siwash to keep a strike all to himself—if he has one."

"Certainly it ain't," Dobbs agreed heartily. "It ain't right for him to have gold at all. It makes him lazier'n ever, and learns him bad habits."

"That's so," Skookum Bill concurred virtuously. "Drink's a curse to a Siwash. They can't hold it like a white man. The government done right makin' against the law for 'em to have it. D'you s'pose if we filled this Potlatch Joe up we could get him talkin'?"

"That's been tried, and it don't work," Dobbs told him. "He don't talk when he's tanked; he don't talk at all."

"No harm tryin'," said Bill. "We'll get to know him, anyhow."

And so, at an early date, they filled Joe up to his back teeth with the quickest poison they could obtain, and had for their trouble the pleasure of listening to an atrocious rendering of an Indian chant; after which he lay down on the ground and went to sleep.

"A drunk Siwash's disgustin' sight," said Skookum Bill, who was himself several sheets in the wind, owing to a slight miscalculation of the strength of the poison aforesaid. "Snores like a hog. Le's throw him in the river."

"Might drown him," Dobbs objected prudently.

"Well?" said Bill.

"I mean, if he drowned we couldn't get nothin' out of him," Dobbs explained.

"We ain't got much as it is," Bill returned. "Still, maybe we'll have better luck some other way."

Thereafter, in various ways, they attempted the confidence of Potlatch Joe, to the amusement of others who had been through the same mill. They even condescended to visit his tepee, thereby losing caste in their own eyes, and so they met Rosalie and Agathe.

To the old squaw and the girl they paid no attention whatever. There were no introductions. Rosalie now puffed and panted even when doing nothing, and her laboring heart shook her fat sides. Agathe sat with downcast eyes, occasionally upshooting quick glances at the one sent by the gods, who was magnificently unconscious of them. She did not expect to take part in the councils of men, nor did she expect the immediate notice of this great and beautiful being. That would come later, in good time. But she noted furtively his hands and feet, and, after pondering, set to work to manufacture gloves and moccasins for them which should excel in design, beauty, and workmanship any previous work of her hands.

But Bill and Sam, after weeks of earnest, if unconscientious effort, failed to entrap their quarry into either confidence or unwary admission. In which they fared no better than had others.

From being somewhat skeptical as to the existence of Joe's reputed strike, they had come to believe in it much more firmly than they did in the gospels. They thought of it, brooded over it. It obsessed them; they talked of little else. And it made them furious to reflect that a dissipated old Indian should have knowledge that would make them rich, but which he refused to share.

"Some places I've been at," said Skookum Bill gloomily, "this here Potlatch Joe would give up what he knowed mighty quick, or it'd been choked out of him. What business has an Injun got with gold—keepin' white men away from it?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Dobbs agreed.

"It's a blasted shame, that's what it is," Bill continued, in aggrieved tones. "He acts like the gold was *his.*"

"So he does," said Dobbs. "The gall of him! He ain't never staked it, nor recorded it, nuther. And, anyway, I dunno's a Siwash *can* own land or claims. I've heard the law won't let him. It shouldn't."

"'Course not," Bill concurred. "This here Siwash is a wise, old rooster. He won't give up nothin'. S'pose we make him a proposition to show us where the gold is? Say we offer him a third interest—take him in even? That ought to suit him if he ain't a hog."

"I don't like the idea of goin' partners with no Injun," Dobbs objected. "It ain't that I'm proud, nuther. I just sorter gag at it."

"'Course we wouldn't work the ground *with* him," Bill explained. "This partner business would be a bluff. If we get him to show us where the gold is, that's all we want. Then we hits him a kick and lets him go. You bet I don't have no Siwash for a partner no more'n you."

"That way it might be all right," Sam admitted. "Let's try him."

But Potlatch Joe refused to fall for this eminently fair proposition, set forth as attractively as possible by Skookum Bill.

"No good," said he. "Him all mine now. S'pose me tell you where *pil chikamin* stop, you catch um. Bimeby no more stop. Heap big fool, me."

"You don't *kumtuks,*" Bill explained, holding his temper with difficulty. "Look a-here now, Joe: You find *pil chikamin,* you go there once every so long, you catch little bag of gold. No good. You no *kumtuks* how to work placer. We know how to work her—*delate kumtuks mamook.* We work her right, pretty soon, *alki,* you *hiyu* rich Siwash. Have *hiyu* whisky, *hiyu* grub, *hiyu* smokin'. Big man, you savvy, all same *tyee*—chief. No more work, no more trouble. You just sit back and

take things easy. You're dead lucky to get an offer like this. Only that we like you we wouldn't make it."

But even this clinching condescension and outline of an *otium cum dignitate* existence failed to move Potlatch Joe.

"*Halo,*" said he, signifying that there was nothing doing. And Bill was wroth.

"Why, you miser'ble, selfish, old, copper-skinned Siwash," he cried, "you don't know your own luck. You don't seem to get it through you that it's just our *kindness* offerin' to take you in as a partner. We don't have to do it. We can get that gold ourselves if we want to. If we was as darn' selfish as you we would. You'd orter be ashamed of yourself!"

"Sure he ort," said Dobbs, as indignant as his partner. "Lots of Siwashes has been shot for less."

Potlatch Joe, understanding partially, and not relishing the black looks cast at him, laid his hand on the butt of a very serviceable six-shooter, a recent purchase of which he was extremely proud.

Like a flash, Skookum Bill sprang. He caught the Indian by the wrist and throat, almost breaking the former with a savage wrench, and cutting off air from the latter. Dobbs jerked the revolver away. And Skookum Bill, after shaking Joe until his tongue was almost severed by his clattering teeth, whirled him around, and proceeded to administer a terrific kicking, somewhat chastened in effect by the circumstance that he wore moccasins instead of boots.

"Draw a gun on me, would yeh?" he roared. "Why, you ongrateful, dirty, fish-eatin' heathen, it'd serve you right if I was to tear your heart out and feed it to the dogs. Draw a gun on me! I'll learn yeh!"

It was five minutes before his rage gave way to the growing ache in his toes; and it was a very unpleasant five minutes for Potlatch Joe. Skookum Bill flung him away, administering an open-handed cuff on the ear as he did so that rang like a pistol shot and half stunned the recipient.

"There!" said Skookum Bill, glowering at him, "that'll learn you to get gay with a white man. Next time I'll kill you. I'll just keep that gun, too. A Siwash ain't got no business with one. And as for this pay dirt of yours, I'm goin' to find it. And when I do, if I catch you *nanitchin* 'round, I'll put a hole clean through you. Now git! You're lucky to be alive."

Potlatch Joe "got," and quickly. It was not the first time he had experienced the masterful methods of white men. And he was quite aware that this specimen held him in no higher estimation than a dog, and would be very apt to carry out his threat.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRAIL OF POTLATCH JOE.

Diplomacy had failed, but the partners were by no means downcast. They were more determined than ever to find the site of Joe's treasure, and they had every confidence in their ability to do so.

"What he's got here won't last forever," Bill argued. "He goes for more every summer, and he's about due now. We'll keep cases on him, and when he makes a move he's our meat. He maybe fools these chechahcos, but he don't get away from us none. You bet!"

And so they kept Joe under secret but close observation, taking turn about at watching his tepee until the small hours of the mornings, lest he should escape them as he had others.

Thus one night—or, rather, about two o'clock in the morning—Sam Dobbs, who was just about to abandon his watch, became aware of movement in the tepee. There was no light, but a shadowy figure emerged, bearing a large pack, and moved off in the direction of the river. Ten minutes later Sam awoke his partner from sound slumber.

"He's hikin' out," he announced. "Packin' his outfit down to the canoe. He has it cached upstream a ways. Get a move on."

There was nothing slow in the way Skookum Bill obeyed. His toilet was complete by the addition of pants and moccasins, and he jumped into these with the celerity of a fireman responding to a general alarm.

"Get back and keep cases while I hustle this stuff down," he ordered. "When they make a start, come down to where our canoe is. I'll be there."

Their grub was already in a sack for just such an emergency. Bill roped two blankets in a square of canvas, thrust cooking utensils into another sack, picked up his rifle and his partner's, and swung the whole outfit up on his massive shoulders. Down at the river he stowed it in the canoe, got in, and shoved off into the darkness. He held it in midstream with occasional slow strokes of the paddle, his eyes, keen in the night as an owl's, scanning the stream and banks. Then he noiselessly shot the craft toward a figure that appeared on the bank.

"Gone upstream," said Sam.

"Take the stern and gimme the bow," said Bill. "My eyes are better'n yours in the dark. Move that dunnage aft to trim her. All set? Come on."

They shot away into the darkness with smooth, noiseless strokes. It was a ghost of a canoe that split the slow current, phantom paddles that propelled her soundlessly save for the little drip from the blades. Soon they drew in close to the bank, where the darkness lay deeper, and from that friendly shadow Bill's keen eyes made out the faint outline of a canoe ahead. Like their own, it was being driven noiselessly, but at little more than half their speed.

Bill immediately ceased paddling.

"There they are," he whispered back to the stern.

Sam cursed softly in admiration. "You got the eyes! I can't see nothin'. Guess I'm gettin' old."

"Take it easy," directed Bill. "Hug into the bank."

Sam obeyed, leaning his weight on the paddle in long, easy, soundless strokes. Bill crouched in the bow, devoting his whole attention to keeping the other canoe in sight. But a few miles up the stream he checked the craft with a sudden, powerful back thrust of the paddle.

"They're goin' ashore," he whispered. "Pull in behind that sweeper."

The "sweeper" was a treetop that, uprooted, had fallen into the river. They lay behind it, holding to the branches. Sam could see nothing. Bill kept him advised.

"They're liftin' the canoe out, near as I can tell," he whispered. "Yes, that's what they're doin'. Now what in blazes is that for? Have they hit a snag?"

But no gleam of fire among the trees told him that the pitch pot was being heated to stop a leak in the frail craft. All was dark and quiet. His brow corrugated in painful thought. Sam behind him also puzzled. They were still holding to the sweeper when the darkness began to lighten, and objects to grow more visible. Then Bill let go, and the canoe drifted gently downstream. A quarter of a mile below Bill thrust it ashore.

"I savvy," said he. "This is the way the old skin fooled up them chechahcos before, and he's tryin' it again. He'll lie there cached till he's sure there's no one after him. Then he'll go on. We got to play the game his way. We got to keep cached till he makes a move, and we got to be dead certain he don't move without our knowin' it."

And so they cached their canoe, and when it was light made a cautious reconnaissance, locating Potlatch Joe's temporary camp. Joe himself, as they ascertained with infinite pains and patience, occupied a natural watchtower in the form of a high bluff on the bank, whence he commanded an unobstructed view of the river both up and down. And they rejoiced that they had cached their canoe so carefully.

Ensued two days of weary waiting, divided into day watches for Sam and night for his partner. Then Potlatch Joe put forth boldly in the morning. They gave him two hours' start, and followed leisurely. There was no need for hurry, since they had the speed of him, but much for caution. Therefore, they reconnoitered each turn of the stream carefully before taking it; and by suiting their pace to his, and remaining a couple of hours' time behind him, they were able to mark his

night camps by his fire. After which they would drop back quietly to a safe distance, and build their own in the shelter of thick brush, being careful to extinguish it the moment they were done cooking, and to have no trace of smoke by dawn.

They met no one. Day after day passed to the measured dip and swish of paddles, and the faint murmur of water beneath the sharp stem. The shores seemed to glide past in endless, slow-moving panorama. River reaches opened up before and receded behind. Of bird and animal life there was plenty; of human life none.

They had Potlatch Joe timed to a nicety. They knew just when he would roll out of his blanket to eat the breakfast prepared for him by the women, when he would get into his canoe, when he would go ashore at midday, when he would go on again, and when he would stop for the night. Things could not have worked out better. He had no suspicion whatever of their presence on his trail. With fair luck and continued caution they had no doubt but that he would lead them to his private Eldorado. It was a cinch.

And then they lost him! He vanished—to use the time-honored simile—as if the earth had opened up and swallowed him. More mysteriously, indeed, for in that case one might reasonably have expected signs of recent seismic disturbance. Here there was no sign. It was a shocking culmination.

They had passed the dying smudge of his noonday fire, and that evening they paddled on into the dusk with perfect confidence, looking for the gleam of light against the dark shores, listening for the sound of an ax. They neither saw the one nor heard the other.

"Makin' a long day of it," Sam commented.

"Yep," said Bill, keenly watchful.

Dark came and brought no sign of a camp.

They paddled on for another hour, and then went ashore, much puzzled and more disgusted.

"Where d'you s'pose he's gone to?" asked Sam.

"He ain't ahead of us on the river, that's sure," Bill replied. "He couldn't be—not the way we've been hittin' her up the last two hours. We've passed him somewheres, and he's seen us, of course."

"Then it's off," said Sam.

Bill's response was blasphemous, but apposite. No Siwash could put it all over them. They would find out where he had gone, anyway.

In the morning they retraced their course, landing occasionally to investigate suspicious-looking spots, and they finally came to where Joe had stopped at noon of the preceding day. There, when they landed and nosed around, they found his canoe and part of his outfit, neatly cached in the brush.

"Ho-ho!" said Bill, "he's quit the river. Now we got him dead to rights."

A couple of hours afterward he was forced to modify and even reverse this conclusion. For they could find no trail. The ground was rocky, and though they cast for it industriously, and occasionally thought they had found it, there was no certainty about it.

"What are we going to do?" asked Sam.

"How do I know?" growled his partner. "He may be anywheres. Let's take a hike back a ways. We may happen onto him. That's the only chance."

But the chance failed to come their way. They spent a week prowling up and down, during which they covered a great deal of ground, but they failed to find Potlatch Joe, his trail, his camp fire, or, in fact, any trace whatever of him. And so, at the end of that time, they got into their canoe and slouched downstream, much disgusted with themselves, and particularly bitter toward Potlatch Joe.

CHAPTER VI.

GOLD, THE ACCURSED.

Really, the explanation was absurdly simple, and its very simplicity deceived Bill and his partner. Joe had not abandoned the river at all. A year before he had found a canoe, ownerless, but

in excellent condition, stranded near that point. He cached the canoe thriftily. He had early discovered that he was being followed, and had ascertained the identity of his pursuers by the simple expedient of going ashore and waiting until they passed, while his wife and daughter paddled on. Later he rejoined them by land.

If he had not been afraid, he would have shot both men from the bank. But, being afraid, it became necessary to shake them off by a less direct method. The cached canoe offered the solution. When he came to where it was, he simply transferred to it, leaving his own canoe and a part of his outfit, and lighting a fire to show where he had landed. Then he paddled across the river, and cached himself and the second canoe, lying there until the men returned and started inland. After which he resumed his journey, in due course coming to his place of disembarkation.

And here Fate, who had proven herself for years a kind mistress to Potlatch Joe, suddenly changed her attitude and became a cruel jade. Fat old Rosalie, toiling uphill behind him, burdened with a pack, suddenly staggered and fell. Nor did she ever rise again. Potlatch Joe looked at his daughter across his wife's body.

"At last thy mother's fat has stopped her heart, as was foretold by the white doctor at Fort Simpson," he said. "It is a pity. Also it is a pity she could not have endured a few miles farther, for now we must carry what she bore. And here the ground is but stone, so that it will be much work to dig a grave. It is no fitting place to die."

"She had no choice," said Agathe, looking down at the still shape.

"That may be, but she had little thought for others while she lived," grumbled her husband. "Well, the ground is but stone, but the stones are loose. We will build a tomb of them to keep her from the wolves."

And so they built a rude cairn of round hill stones above poor, old, fat Rosalie, and when their task was done they divided her pack and went on. Once more they camped by the site of their dead fire in the basin of the five streams.

But Fate had been merely playing with Potlatch Joe—merely showing him vicariously how frail and uncertain was the tenure of life, even within his own family circle. Now she struck him *in propria persona.* There was nothing uncertain about the blow, which gave him little time to make his peace with the gods ere he was flung into their bosoms.

For Joe, Fate took the form of a bear, and—perhaps out of anticipatory deference to Kipling's opinions—a she-bear at that. She was a gaunt old lady, of a subvariety of grizzly, and Joe blundered on her cub. He had no designs against it, but the cub did not know that, and sent in a hurry call for help. Answered the old bear, peaceably scratching a rotten log for ants and grubs. She came like a four-legged, rusty cyclone, and Joe had no time to tree. He shot once before his rifle was knocked from his hand. After that it was merely an old Indian with a skinning knife against six hundred pounds of muscular, saber-pawed mother fury.

Joe was game, because he had to be—as an Indian is always game when matched to a finish against a hereditary wild-beast foe. But in the end the old bear sniffed scornfully of the ripped and broken thing upon the ground, licked a few superficial gashes in her loose-hung, brown hide, nosed her cub, and then cuffed it, and shuffled off.

Fifteen minutes after she had gone, Potlatch Joe stirred, moaned, and brushed a fretful, feeble hand across his eyes. He sat up, and finally began to crawl. An hour later he crept on all fours into his camp. His life's flame was flickering low in the socket. He was all in, and he knew it. But speech was left him, and he refused to allow Agathe to tend his hurts.

"For the little time that is left me it matters not," said he. "My strength has gone from me, and with it the desire for life. I am as the old buck that lies down to die when the herd has left him—as a dying fish that is flung on the shallows by the waves. The

pain is nothing; the desire for rest is much. Beneath my blanket there is rum. Hold it to my mouth that I may drink before I die."

He sucked down the liquid fire surreptitiously procured, and it gave him momentary strength. He demanded his pipe. He lay on his blanket, smoking, with closed eyes, his mind, perhaps, wandering back through the long reaches of the year to the days of his boyhood. Once more he drank deeply.

"When one treads a trail it is long," he said oracularly. "But to look back upon, when it is trodden, it is but a little way. And so is life. To youth, looking forward, there is no end to the trail; but to age, or when one comes to die, the ends are very close together, so that one sees clearly what lies between, both of good and evil."

He paused, gathering strength.

"Gold is evil," he continued. "This our forefathers knew, and they shunned the places where it lay. It is accursed, and being accursed, it is guarded by the gods so that few find it. They who find it would do well to leave it where it is, lest the curse light on them. If I had done this, all would have been well. I would have lived as our people have lived since they stepped from the Great Canoe on the Smoky Waters to the shores of this land, and I would have seen the trees bud and the leaves fall for years that are yet to come. As it is, the displeasure of the gods has fallen on me, and I lie broken and dying. The bear was sent by the gods whom I have angered, else I would have killed her as I have killed many of her kind.

"I say unto you, this gold is accursed; and to the curse of the gods I add my own. Wherefore, my daughter, touch it not, nor reveal to man or woman the secret of this place, lest the curse fall on you as well as on them. But take with you what I have already gathered, which is in the buckskin bag; for that is mine, and I bear the curse which rested on it. And when I die, which will be when the sun goes down, bury me so that my bones shall not be scattered by the wolves."

And so Potlatch Joe finished the rum and fulfilled part of his prophecy very neatly by dying before sundown.

"And there," said his daughter, "is the end of him. Now I have no father and no mother. If it were not so far I would carry his body to be buried beside hers. But it matters little, for they are done with their bodies, and their souls are doubtless gone to the same place—wherever that is. And so I will bury him here at once."

She dug a grave with an ax and a stick, and brushed and stoned it to defeat the efforts of the wolves. She finished her task in the dark. Afterward she cooked and ate, sitting long beside the fire, pondering the changes the last few days had brought to her.

She was alone in the wilderness, but she was no more afraid than a man would have been. There was food, and when she should find her father's rifle, lost in the combat with the bear, there would be arms. There was a canoe, and the way out was all downstream. It would be very easy.

Of grief she felt little. Her parents had been hard taskmasters. They had shown small affection, and they commanded no more.

The future did not disturb her. Her skilled hands could provide for it. And then there was the little bag of nuggets which, according to her father, was exempt from the curse that attached to the rest of the gold. That would last for a long time, since she did not drink and gamble. Finally, there was Skookum Bill Hutchins—he who was sent by the gods.

And this opened up a field of speculation which would have amazed Skookum Bill. He had paid her no attentions whatever. He had, in fact, almost ignored her existence. But she never doubted that in his good time and in the gods' good time her dreams would be fulfilled. At last she wrapped herself in her blanket, and lay beside the dying fire, looking up at the stars. And as she drifted into slumber, her hand was in Skookum Bill's, and they trod the Long Trail together—the trail that is an enchanted path for man and woman so long as love endures.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE.

The return of Little Sister of the Stars alone was productive of a mild sensation. But in Skookum Bill and his partner it produced bitterness.

"Talk about your rotten luck!" growled the former. "Wouldn't it skin you? If that old Siwash hadn't shook us we'd have been right there when he cashed in, with nobody to kick at whatever we done. But it's always the way. I never had no good luck in my life."

"Nor me," said Dobbs lugubriously. "Where d'you s'pose he went after we lost him?"

It was the hundredth-and-odd time he had asked that question. Bill had asked it quite as often, but the repetition just then made him wroth.

"If I knew, would I be sittin' here?" he snarled. "Try and have some sense. With the buck and the old woman dead, the young klootch is the only one's got any idea where the gold is. And they say *she* don't know. Anyway, she won't talk. It looks like we're clean out o' luck."

"She must know about where her old man got it," argued Dobbs. "She can't help it."

"What's the good of that if she won't tell?" Bill returned.

The answer was so obvious that his partner did not reply. Agathe was no more talkative than before. She kept her little bag of nuggets cached against a time of need, and resumed her glove and moccasin making, of which the profits were now hers. She lived alone, but her tepee was in close proximity to others, and she enjoyed the superfluous chaperonage of a dozen squaws.

"We got to make her talk some way," said Dobbs.

"How?" asked Bill.

This time the answer was not so obvious. To make an Indian talk unwillingly is in the nature of performing a miracle, and both men knew it.

"We can try, anyhow," said Dobbs vaguely. "If we could only get a line on where her old man went to——"

"There you go again!" snapped Bill. "If! If! If the dog hadn't 'a' stopped to scratch, he'd 'a' caught the rabbit. Sure. If we knew we'd know. That's what it boils down to."

Nevertheless, he and Sam waylaid Agathe one afternoon when she was fishing from the bank. They made their presence seem the purest chance.

"*Klaho-wya,* Agathe!" Bill greeted. "You catch *hiyu* fish, hey?"

She glanced at him shyly.

"*Tenas*" (a few), she replied.

"We was sorry to hear your old man go *mimoluse,*" Bill proceeded in what he intended for sympathetic tones. "Your old woman, too. Tough luck. Them was fine old people. Your father and we was gettin' so we understood each other real well. Whereabouts was it he died?"

"*Sia-a-ah!*" she replied, the prolongation of the word signifying that the melancholy event had occurred very far away, indeed.

"Too darn' bad," said Bill. "And you was on the way home when he ran into this bear?"

No, she replied, they had not started for home. They were camped.

"Tough luck," Bill commented again. "And you had to bury him yourself. That's sure hard on a girl, to have to plant her old man—and him all messed up by a grizzly. It sure is. Ain't it, Sam?"

"You bet," Mr. Dobbs agreed, with lively sympathy. "You got *hiyu* nerve, Agathe. Bet you made a good job of it, too. D'you put up a cross or somethin' to mark the place?"

No, she had not done that. Brush and stone, to keep the wolves from the body, that was all.

"Huh! that's too bad," said Bill. "It don't seem right for even an Injun to be salted down that way. And your father made a bluff at bein' a Christian Siwash, too. Used to hear the priest preach when he came round. It's a shame, come to think of it, that he don't have a priest to start him off right, and he sure ought to have a cross set up over him, anyway. Seems like he'd rest better. Keep bad spirits away, you savvy. Now, me and Sam is

thinkin' some of goin' up that way, and if you like we'll stick him up a *hiyu* big cross."

"He is dead," said Agathe. "The dead rest no better for a cross."

"Why, I thought you was a little Christian klootch!" exclaimed Bill, properly shocked. "Sure, he rests better with a cross. Anybody knows that. You ask the priest. Me and Sam will fix him up in good style. We don't mind a little trouble for an old tillikum like him. You just tell us where you got him planted, so's we won't lose time looking for the spot."

But Agathe shook her head, refusing this kind offer. And the partners, after urging in vain, retired, baffled.

"She ain't got no proper feelin's, darn her," said Bill, in disgust. "I sure thought she'd fall for that cross racket. Any Mission klootch would. She's nothin' but a heathen at heart, like all the rest of 'em. Anyway, she's the only card left, and we got to play her. We got to get friendly with her. Sooner or later we'll find out something."

"That's up to you," said Sam. "You're younger'n me."

"I'm always gettin' into trouble with women," growled Bill, flattered, nevertheless.

He contrived to meet Agathe almost every day, usually along the river, where she fished or pretended to fish. Sometimes he brought her presents, feminine trifles purchased at the trading post, which she received gratefully. To Bill these hours represented the acme of boredom; but to Agathe they were freighted with bliss.

At last her dreams were coming true. He who was foretold had come at last, and, as was foretold, he loved her, else why did he spend these hours by her side? He never mentioned gold; that was forgotten. He had paid her compliments—something no one had ever done before. By and by, in his own good time, he would tell her that he loved her, and all would be well. She walked in a haze of golden dreams, of rosy hopes. How could she see the raw brute beneath the handsome shell? To her Skookum Bill Hutchins was a king among men, her fate, her affinity, if she had known the word, the one who was foretold. He was more than a man; he was a god.

It was McNicol who thought he saw her danger, and one day, when Skookum Bill had purchased a particularly gaudy squaw's handkerchief, his sense of duty made him step in where an angel might have feared to tread.

"Who are you buying this for?" he asked.

Skookum Bill stared at this breach of etiquette.

"If I pay for it, that's all you need to know," he asserted.

"You're hanging about that poor, little klootch, Agathe," said McNicol. "She's got nobody in God's world to look after her, and if you mean harm by her—and I hope you don't—you're a whole lot less than a man."

"Is that so?" sneered Bill. "I'm man enough to jump over that counter and lick you!"

"We weren't talking about that," said McNicol.

"I'm talkin' about it," Bill asserted, with an oath; "and what's more, I'll do it."

"No, you won't," said McNicol flatly.

"Why won't I?" Bill demanded.

"Because I'll kill you if you try it," said McNicol. "I never could fight, and I learned to shoot instead."

"Pity you didn't learn to mind your own business, too," said the big man, eying McNicol's right hand, which lay beneath the counter. "I gave you ten dollars, and there's change coming to me."

McNicol gave him his change without more words. He had said what he had to say, which, after all, was not much. He had no authority to act as Agathe's guardian. In the long run she must look after herself. Later he spoke to her, conveying a well-meant warning, which she received unresponsively. Therefore the trader, having done all he could, washed his hands of the affair.

In this instance, however, he had wronged Skookum Bill, who was not in

the least attracted by Agathe. She had information that he wanted, and he intended to get it, but as to making love to her, it never entered his head. Therefore, he was indignant at McNicol.

One day Dobbs handed him a package.

"What's this?" asked Bill.

"Agathe give it to me to give to you," Sam explained. "She give it to me and skipped."

Bill undid the package, revealing a pair of moccasins of finest texture and tan, gorgeously worked and ornamented with intricate designs. With them was a pair of gauntlet gloves, fringed, beaded, silk-worked. They represented the labor of months, and both men knew it, and the meaning of the gift.

"Why, Bill," said Sam, "blamed if the little klootch ain't stuck on you!"

"The nerve of her!" growled Skookum Bill. "What sort of a looker does she think she is? Why, darn her, she ain't got *no* looks. And to get stuck on *me!* Talk about gall!"

"My old grammaw used to say a cat c'd look at a king," said Sam. "It don't hurt you. And if she's stuck on you, she'll loosen up about that gold if you work it right."

"Maybe she would," Bill admitted, "but I'm partic'lar about what squaws I make love to. They got to have *some* looks. This one ain't got no more shape than a washtub, and her face'd stop a clock. Darn it, Sam, she's plain *ugly!*"

A very level-headed gentleman, to wit, Henry of Navarre, who formerly cut considerable politico-religious ice in France, is said to have remarked at one stage of his career that Paris was very well worth a mass. Sam had never heard this aphorism, but the principle —or lack of it—had come down to him intact through the ages. So he said:

"Aw, what do you care. You don't have to tie up to her. A klootch that knows where there's a placer where you can pick up nuggets is worth makin' love to, and makin' love to *hard*. I wish she was stuck on *me*, that's all."

"So do I," said Skookum Bill. "You could have her. This klootch game is no good. It don't bring nothin' but trouble. Take that there woman of Sitka George's. Kelly sent me word he's gunnin' for me now."

"He don't know where you are," said Sam. "Anyway, this klootch ain't got no folks."

Which was true, if cold-blooded. Not that Skookum Bill would have cared for a whole tribe of masculine and warlike relatives, if he had desired Agathe. His nerve was beyond all dispute. As for Sitka George, a half-breed whom he had supplanted in the affections of his wife, he held him in contempt.

"Well," he said, with resignation, "if I have to I have to, and that's all there is to it. It's tough luck she ain't better lookin', but it can't be helped."

Ensued golden days for Little Sister of the Stars, wherein she tasted perfect happiness. Her king among men had become a lover at last. There was no doubt of his attitude. Her dreams were coming true.

Bill had made love to so many women that he thought he knew the whole procedure. They liked flattery, they liked presents, they liked a masterful attitude. These things were common to women, red and white. But Agathe demanded something more. She demanded that he make love, as Bill phrased it to himself, "like one o' them blame fools in a book."

"Your coming was foretold," she sighed gently, nestling to him when the love-making process was well advanced. "For years I have waited, and now all is well. I have dreamed of you by day and by night. Have you ever dreamed of me?"

Bill looked at her and shuddered. But he replied aloud in the vernacular: "I dream little. My dreams are as the mist upon the river, which is gone with the sun. I cannot recall them."

"It matters not," she sighed. "Ever it is the woman who waits and dreams. But now that you have come, it is as the sun rising upon waters that have been dark and cold, so that they sparkle and dance with joy in its light. You are the sun of my life."

"Gosh!" Bill breathed in amazement, staring at her, "she's either lyin' or got

it bad. I guess she's got it bad." And he answered: "It is fitting that a man should be as the sun to a woman."

"It is so," she agreed submissively. "For a woman there is one man out of all the world. To some he comes, and to some he never comes. But you have come to me. The gods did not lie."

In the midst of his distasteful love-making Skookum Bill puzzled how to introduce the subject of Potlatch Joe's placer. It would never do to give her an inkling that this was the attraction. He was afraid that she might suspect if he were too precipitate. And so he allowed matters to drift, awaiting an opportunity. It came one day when she showed him the last nuggets, which her father had gathered.

"Where do these come from, anyway?" he asked.

"It is best that I do not tell," she replied. "There is a curse upon the place. Of the curse my father died, and likely my mother also."

"Well, they were Indians," said Bill tolerantly. "There's no curse on gold for a white man."

"My father said nothing of that in the hour of his death," she replied. "He spoke of all, and on it he laid his curse, as well as the gods'."

"Backed their play, did he?" said Bill. "That's nonsense, Agathe. Now, see here. You know as well as I do that men find gold and get away with it. It don't do them no harm. Look at the big camps. Who has the best luck and the easiest times? Why, the men that has the best claims, of course; and their women wear the best clothes. This curse talk is all rot—*cultus wawa.*"

"That gold is not this gold," she persisted. "I know nothing of the camps. But I do know that my father and my mother died, and that he warned me when the hand of death lay heavy upon him, so that his eyes were clear. Therefore, I believe him."

"Well, I don't," said Skookum Bill, with decision. "I'll risk any curse his old two-bit gods can hand me."

"The gods may hear!" she said apprehensively.

"Hope they do," said the white man contemptuously. "This god business is getting played out. I tell you straight, Agathe, no Siwash god nor bunch of gods is going to bluff me away from pay dirt. You just tell me where it is, and we'll give them gods a whirl. We'll let 'em get action on that curse, and your old man, too, if he stands in on their system."

"Such words are not good words," she reproved him gravely. "Who are we to defy the gods, and the dead who are as the gods, seeing that which is hidden from our eyes?"

Skookum Bill inwardly cursed every god in the Indian Pantheon, but had the sense to perceive that he was on the wrong tack.

"The darn' little fool stands pat on this curse proposition," he told Dobbs. "She knows where the stuff is, all right. I've got to talk her into giving up, somehow."

"Speakin' as a Christian an' a white man," said Dobbs, with heavy dignity, "these here Injun superstitions is both sinful an' disgustin'."

"You're drunk," Skookum Bill accused him.

"Not drunk," old Dobbs denied. "Slightly 'toxicated, maybe, but not drunk. Speakin' as a Christian——"

"Aw, shut up, you old fool!" rasped Bill. "You make me tired. You're a whale of a Christian, you are!"

"I was brung up in the fear an' admonition of the Lord," protested Dobbs tearfully. "My ol' man licked it into me. We all have gone astray like sheep. We've done what we oughtn't to of done, an' we've overlooked bets that was sure winners. We ain't lived right at all. I'm a miser'ble ol' sinner, but you're worse than me. An' you're slow, Bill, you're slow. You wanna show this klootch the error of her ways. You wanna overcome them sinful superstitions she's the victim of. Take 'n' club 'em out of her. As a Christian an' a white man——"

But Skookum Bill threw a pail of water in the old sinner's face, and left him sputtering language that cast doubt on his Christianity, but none at all on

his Caucasian extraction. Finally he evolved an argument calculated to appeal to Agathe's superstition.

Briefly, it was to the effect that a very wise fortune teller had predicted that a great treasure of gold should be revealed to him in a remote place by a woman of another race, whom he should love and live with happily for many years. There were a number of fancy trimmings, but that was the main fictional structure. It was so plainly built to fit the circumstances that it would have imposed on nobody but Agathe, who had lived in a world of dreams, and, moreover, regarded him as one sent by the gods themselves.

"It may be so," she said doubtfully. "This teller of the future—had he, indeed, the gift? Are his words words of truth? And why did you not tell me these things before?"

"Because I did not think of them before," Skookum Bill replied truthfully. "You see, this was when I was a baby, and the fortune teller was a very old man. What he predicted was told me by my people. Much of what he foretold has come true. The rest will come true in good time. If it is foretold that I am to find gold through a woman with whom I am to mate, then I shall find her."

"I am the woman with whom you are to mate," said Agathe, without hesitation or false modesty.

"Then you will show me the gold, that the prophecy may be fulfilled," said Skookum Bill, with a great show of confidence.

"I fear," she replied. "For there are my father's words, and did not evil fall upon him because of this gold?"

"The evil has died with him," Bill argued. "For me there is no evil in it. If you are the woman who was foretold, then lead me to the gold, and it shall be a sign."

She considered this proposition from her own standpoint.

"First we should marry," she suggested.

"Not so," said Bill; "for that was not the prophecy. It was foretold that I should find the gold before I married. Besides, there is none here to marry us after the custom of my people, and I will not have an Indian wedding. By the woman who led me to the gold I was to know the woman who was to be mine, and not otherwise."

"I should be shamed before my people," she said.

"Take one of the old women with you," said Skookum Bill. But, to his surprise, she negatived this proposal promptly.

"I will take no old woman on the journey. I am the woman who is to be thine. You are he who was to come—who was foretold by the gods. I will go with you alone. When I have shown you the gold we will go to where there is a priest, and be married after the manner of your people. And we will return here no more."

Nothing could have suited Skookum Bill better. He had no earthly intention of marrying her. When she had shown him the placer he would record it and laugh at her. But he intended no harm to the girl. Her ugliness made him a perfectly safe traveling companion. He salved the remains of an atrophied conscience with virtuous determination. He didn't want the girl—merely the gold. He would give her some of that. And she should have no moral claim whatever on him.

It would have been useless to explain this to Dobbs, and he did not try. He merely told him that Agathe had consented to guide him to the placer.

"Bully for you!" cried Dobbs. "You're sure a winner with the klootchmen, Bill. When do we start?"

"You don't go," Bill told him.

"I don't?" exclaimed Dobbs, in amazement. "Why don't I? Ain't we partners? Don't you try to hold out on me, Bill Hutchins!"

"If I want to hold out on you I'll do it, and twist your cursed neck, too," said Skookum Bill grimly. "But this ain't a hold-out. She won't have you. She's flat-footed about it. She won't have no one along but me."

"She'll have me," said Dobbs, with

determination. "I may overlook a bet now and then, but not one of this size."

"I should think you could trust me, Sam," said Skookum Bill, in injured tones.

"I'm surprised you should ask me to," Dobbs retorted.

"Are you?" said Bill coldly. "Well, here's the proposition. The klootch won't stir a foot out of here if you come. What are you going to do about it?"

Because there was nothing he could do about it, old Dobbs was forced to agree to Agathe's terms.

"I tell you what I'll do," said Bill. "I'll leave sign along the river where we camp. Look for a peeled stick. If we quit the river anywheres I'll leave a note by it. That way you can trail along and know I'm playing straight. But, mind you, keep out of sight. Don't come buttin' in spoilin' the hand."

"All right," said Dobbs grudgingly. "I'll do it because I can't help myself. But if you hold out on me, Bill, so help me, I'll chase you clean round the world and shoot you in the back."

And so Agathe and Skookum Bill metaphorically shook the dust of the Portage from their moccasins, and departed—at different times for appearance's sake—upon the trail that Potlatch Joe had traveled aforetime. After them, working hard because one paddle does not drive as fast as two, went old Sam Dobbs, the prey of deep distrust.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATE OF WOMAN.

Now, while Skookum Bill and Agathe were paddling up the Liard, there came down it a person who called himself George Salt, but who was known principally as Sitka George, the prefix being derived from the place of his nativity.

Sitka George was sometimes called a half-breed. But, as a matter of fact, he was about a sixteenth-breed. The one-sixteenth was seal pirate and the fifteen-sixteenths Coast Siwash. It would be a joy to picture him as glitteringly black-eyed, sinewy, catlike—a low-browed, malevolent, relentless, ruthless incarnation of evil passions and hatred. He was low-browed enough, but otherwise he had no stage presence—which is possibly why his wife had preferred Skookum Bill.

He was chunky, and solid, and sulky, and dirty, and his always flat nose was flatter than Nature intended, because Skookum Bill had smashed it when Sitka George had remonstrated with him—with a knife—on his disregard of a husband's proprietary rights. Also, he had inflicted other injuries, which had limited Sitka George's activities for some months.

But, in spite of the fact that he did not look the part, Sitka George spelled revenge for his family honor and his nose with a capital R. The erring wife had been drowned by the oversetting of a canoe—as he had had some difficulty in explaining satisfactorily to the authorities. But his nose he still had with him, and his chief end in life ever since had been to split Skookum Bill's heart with a nine-inch buffalo knife. He would have preferred to burn him alive, with the amiable dallyings more particularly described in Fox's "Book of Martyrs," but he recognized that the country was not what it used to be, and he limited his hopes and ambitions accordingly. He had heard that Skookum Bill was to be found somewhere in that district, and he came into it cautiously because he had no desire to advertise his presence, or to risk another personal encounter on even or anything like even terms.

Therefore, when he beheld a canoe approaching up a long reach, as he sat on a little point consuming the cold breast of a grouse for his midday meal, he quietly stepped down on the far side of the point, lifted his own canoe ashore behind the bushes, and lay down in concealment to see what he could see.

When he recognized Skookum Bill in the stern of the strange canoe, with a young squaw in the bow, he was of the opinion that the gods had delivered his enemy into his hands. He thrust forth the muzzle of an out-of-date but very serviceable single-shot rifle, tech-

nically known as a forty-five seventy, and held the sights in line with the base of Skookum Bill's ear; but he did not press the trigger, for the Fates were not yet ready to snap up Bill between their claws.

The one-sixteenth of seal pirate would have shot and killed; but the fifteen-sixteenths of Indian hesitated. They doubted the weapon. And they wished to slay in more primordial fashion as with the knife—to hear the sodden chuck of it in the meat and muscle, and feel the haft and the heel of the hand drive in against the body, just under the ribs, where it is soft. There would be infinitely more satisfaction in such a killing. And satisfaction was what Sitka George was looking for. Anyway, there was no hurry. So he did not crook his finger.

When Skookum Bill had passed with a wide margin, George put his canoe in the water and followed leisurely and cautiously. Thus, by the purest chance, he thrust himself between Skookum Bill and Agathe, and old Sam Dobbs.

Sitka George knew nothing about Dobbs, and it never occurred to him that somebody else might be interested in Skookum Bill's doings. He was a marvel in a canoe, and he shot it along at a pace that held the two paddles in front of him. Dobbs toiled along behind, but, like the slow dog, never losing or overrunning the trail.

Which order, after a time, gave rise to certain discoveries on the parts of Sitka George and Dobbs.

The former found little signs left at every camp of the pair he followed. A bush would be broken by the shore, a piece of dry stick with a fresh-broken end would be stuck in the bank a little way downstream, a tree would be blazed. Why? Obviously, to Sitka George, because Skookum Bill wished to leave a trail for some one to follow. Whom or how many, or when, he had no means of knowing. But it meant that he must watch his rear as well as his front; and it showed the necessity of striking at the first opportunity, while Skookum Bill was alone. For Sitka George did not count the squaw at all. One knife thrust in the dark would be all that was necessary. She could not see him, and it would be rather pleasant to hear her wailing on the death of her man. Her presence did not embarrass Sitka George in the least.

Dobbs, on his part, discovered that some one was between him and his partner. In the sand he found where two canoes had been beached, and moccasin tracks that were not those of Skookum Bill or Agathe. He drew the natural conclusion that some one suspected the object of their journey, and was trailing them, as he and Skookum had trailed Potlatch Joe. And here was his partner, playing fair, and leaving sign for him to read, which was being read by some one else, and blazing a plain trail to the rich placer for somebody else to follow. He must be warned. And yet he had a big lead, and it is hard for one paddle to overhaul two.

Still, it is not impossible. Progress in a canoe depends rather upon how long you paddle, than upon how hard you paddle. Dobbs had a large fund of endurance, and now he drew upon it to the limit. He swung his body against the paddle day and night, with only the briefest pauses for food and sleep. When leg and shoulder cramps attacked him, he simply kept going until they stopped. He became a human marine engine, dependable, reliable, devoid of vagaries. He thought he could overtake Skookum Bill if he could stay with the game long enough, and he was willing to let out the last links of his chain of vitality to do so.

Meanwhile Skookum Bill and Agathe kept on their unsuspecting way. To Agathe it was as the bliss of heaven upon earth. The sullen river was glorified, the slow-moving shores beautiful beyond compare. The soul of her sang for joy, as a bird sings for very happiness of being. In the long days, in the bow of the canoe, she dipped her paddle steadily, whispering little love songs to herself—songs of mythical lovers of tradition handed down the generations of her people—and her heart throbbed to every lift of the canoe as the great

man behind her put his strength into the paddle blade.

When camp was to be made, she would have done all the work herself cheerfully, according to custom; but he would not have it so. Some spark of chivalry of a kind survived in Skookum Bill. To her fell the cooking, the camp housework. Wood, water, and smoothing the ground to sleep upon were his care. Tent they had none. They lay in their blankets beneath the stars. And never, to Agathe at least, had these swung so low, never had the heavens been so glorious.

At night, beside the fire, she talked, pouring out the secret treasures of her strange heart to him who did not comprehend. He listened and marveled, not being able to understand all she said, but, apart from that, incapable of following the flights of fancy which for the first time she put into words.

"Nutty!" he said to himself. "That makes it bad. She's sure stuck on me, too. She'll raise the devil when I tell her to go chase herself. I wish old Sam was here. Might hold her down some."

More than once he asked her where the gold was, but she would tell him nothing, not even how many days' journey it was distant.

"I will show you the way," she would reply. "I am the woman who was foretold by your teller of fortunes. To you I will show it, and to no one else. Nor will I so much as whisper where it is to be found, lest the ears of the forest hear."

"Batty!" thought Bill, shaking his head. "'Ears of the forest!' Huh! What's she gettin' at? No other klootch ever sprung such a line of talk on me."

Came an evening following an all-day battle with fast water and a stiff head wind. They went ashore earlier than usual, and made camp. The sun, sinking early behind the mountain ranges, hung smoky-red in a haze through a rift of sullen cloud. The wind had died, and a great calm succeeded. It was as if the forces of Nature were taking breathing space, gathering themselves for some effort. And when the sound of ax on wood and the first crackle of the fire had died away, the silence of the hushed wilderness infolded the little camp.

"Change coming," said Skookum Bill.

Agathe nodded, her eyes fixed dreamily on the lurid tints of the west.

"All day I have felt it coming. Now it seems near at hand. See, straight away over the ranges where the light shines between the clouds. It is like a trail—a trail to where the sun sinks—to the hereafter."

"A long trail that would be," said Skookum Bill, humoring her mood, for the silence had touched him too.

"Perhaps not so long. How can we know? A small thing—a blow, a fall from a high place, a little time beneath the surface of the river—and our feet have trodden it. Look, now, how the sun hangs like a red curtain across the bed of the sun. A red curtain is a bad omen. So said the wise woman of the Nisutlin, who read the future so clearly. And when my father came to his death, a red cloud hung in the west."

"The sun sets red for fine weather," said Skookum Bill practically. "This talk is folly."

"It may be," she agreed. "You have more wisdom than I. And yet—behold how the cloud changes. It is like a great hand reaching out to clutch us in its fingers. I fear!"

"Cease this folly!" said Bill masterfully. "The sun will set and rise, and the clouds will change their shape, and it is nothing to us. What have we to do with the sun and the clouds?"

"The hand points to me," she replied. "I have little knowledge, but I can feel. The hand lies heavy on my heart. I am cold, as with rain from gray skies. It is a bad omen. I fear lest the curse of the gods and of my father fall on us. Shall we turn back, my lover? It is not too late. What is all the gold in the world to us, who have each other?"

Skookum Bill ignored the sentiment. "Come, now, Agathe," he said, "you've paddled too hard, and cooled off too sudden. You've got a chill. Put a blanket about your shoulders and sit by the fire."

She obeyed him and ceased to voice her forebodings. Bill began to nod above his pipe. He wrapped himself in his blanket, lay down beside the fire, and was asleep as his great muscles relaxed.

Agathe sat long, staring at the fading coals. At last she, too, lay down. Reaching out a timid hand, she touched the big man's cheek. He brushed at it impatiently in his sleep, as if it had been a fly, and a moment after drew the end of the blanket across his face.

Agathe lay wakeful, staring up at the stars glinting occasionally through a gathering mass of cloud. They seemed very near, to beam kindly upon her, Little Sister of the Stars, as if she were their little sister in fact as well as in name. Never before had they seemed so near, so bright, so like tender eyes of heaven. She wondered if they were the souls of the dead, looking down pityingly upon the sorrows of earth. And so, at last, she dropped to sleep.

She awoke suddenly. The fire had burned down to a few coals. The cloud had passed, and the stars shone. A few feet away Skookum Bill's deep, untroubled breathing told that he slept. Slowly, soundlessly, she turned her head to look at him as he lay.

And she saw something that made the hair roots of her scalp tingle with cold, awful fear. Just above Skookum Bill crouched a dark bulk, squat, bloated, immense, at first sight scarcely human. She would have cried out in terror, but her parted lips uttered no sound. The bulk rose higher, and she knew it for the shape of a man. He was peering at the blanket-shrouded sleeper in front of him. His arm swept up, and the light of a vagrant star twinkled against steel. For a moment it poised aloft, hesitating, while the eyes made sure of the mark.

In that moment Agathe rolled clear of her blanket and sprang at him like a wild cat defending her young. The knife came down, but the impact of her body deflected it. It slashed through Skookum Bill's blanket, and gashed the great pectoral muscles, instead of the heart.

The midnight assassin would have fled, but Agathe clung to him. She was almost as strong as a man, and he could not break loose. He drove the knife into her bosom, and then turned to run.

But he was too late. A roaring demon with bared teeth and clutching hands was upon him. He struck, but his wrist was caught, and the knife twitched from his grip. Clamps of steel clutched his throat. He felt hot breath in his face. It was whirled up to the starlight.

"It's you, is it?" roared Skookum Bill. "It's you, Sitka George, you tidewater dog! Once wouldn't do you, but you must try again!" He drew the blackening face to him, struck it, and thrust it away. "Agathe! Agathe! Has he hurt you, girl?"

She moaned from the ground, and Skookum Bill gritted forth a blasphemy that fairly crackled in the night. He shook Sitka George in wild fury.

"Thought you'd play even with me on that klootch of yours, did you? I treated her decent, and that's more than you ever did. You murdered her. I know. You fooled the police, but you can't fool me. And now you've knifed a girl that never done you no harm. I should have killed you two years back, but I'll do it *now*."

With his bare hands he killed him swiftly, without noise, and flung the lifeless body in the river.

He threw dry wood on the fire, and blew the coals to a flame before he turned to Agathe, for he must have light to see. But the great gashes of the nine-inch buffalo knife told him the answer plainly. Her eyes were already dimming, but they were steady.

"I must tread the long trail whereof we spoke," she whispered with difficulty. "Truly the gold is accursed, for of my family none remain, and I am about to die."

"I wish to God I could do something for you, little girl," he said. "You saved my life. It ain't worth much. Come to a show-down, not as much as yours. If I could change places with you now I'd do it."

She smiled at him faintly.

"A woman's life—what is it? Ever she gives her life to give life. To die for a man a woman loves is to die well. I do not fear now. I have dreamed my dreams, and some of them have come true. You came to me as was foretold, and I have been happy in your love."

He was silent, for it is hard to lie in the face of death. Her body relaxed slightly in his arms.

"Kiss me now," she said, "and say 'I love you, Little Sister of the Stars,' for the trail is opening to my feet!"

"I love you, Little Sister of the Stars!" he said, and kissed her.

Gaunt and worn, weary of face and of body, old Sam Dobbs drove his canoe through the dreary gray of the rain. And when he saw a column of smoke standing straight up in the damp air, and the figure of Skookum Bill Hutchins on the bank, he croaked joyfully.

"Where's the klootch?" he demanded as he unlimbered his cramped legs.

"Cashed in," Bill replied briefly.

Sam Dobbs swore.

"Cut that out," said Bill. "Come on over here."

On a little knoll overlooking the river stood a rude, new cross, at the head of a mound of fresh earth topped with stones.

"There's the klootch," said Bill; "and here's how she's there and how I'm here talkin' to you."

When he had said what he had to say, old Sam Dobbs took off his hat and stood bareheaded in the rain.

"Bill," he said, "I'm a *cultus* old devil, but I know parts of some prayers. How'd it be if I said 'em?"

"If she ain't in heaven, it's because it ain't good enough for her," said Skookum Bill. "She don't need 'em."

"No," Dobbs agreed. "I guess she don't."

In silence they went back to the fire. It was noticeable that neither of them had mentioned the gold. Dobbs did so shamefacedly.

"I don't s'pose she told you where that placer was?"

"No," said Bill.

Dobbs sighed resignedly.

"I dunno's I'd want to go there if she had," Skookum Bill said, after a pause. "If it hadn't been for me, she'd have been alive now."

"You don't need to feel bad about it," said Dobbs weakly.

"If it hadn't been for her I'd have been dead now, too," Bill continued.

"I guess that's so," Dobbs agreed.

"I treated her rotten, pretendin' to be stuck on her," said Bill. "But, honest to God, Sam, that's all. If it was any worse I b'lieve I'd shoot myself."

Dobbs nodded and held out his hand. His partner shook it, and they smoked in silence.

"Let's get out o' here," said Skookum Bill.

He threw their scanty dunnage in the best canoe, took the stern, and picked up the paddle. Dobbs squatted in the bow. They shot away down the current. Behind them the klootch, Agathe, Little Sister of the Stars, lay dreamless at last beneath the soft, gray rain.

SOMETHING GOOD ON GOODWIN

ON one occasion in his career Nat Goodwin was bumping over the gasoline circuit as the star in a play which was so bad that the only good thing in it was the last curtain. Naturally, the public evinced no desire to patronize it. Finally, however, the brave actors and actresses played in a town which, for some mysterious reason, turned out a good crowd to see the dismal performance.

It was too good to be true. After the first act Goodwin sought out the stage manager and said:

"On the level, are those real people out there?"

"Certainly, a whole lot of them," replied the manager.

"Well, that's one on me," replied Goodwin. "I thought that crowd was a painted drop curtain."

The Honor of the Service

By Peter B. Kyne

Author of "Short-Bred," "A Brave Man," Etc.

There is a rule in the Blue Book against impersonating an officer, but Sergeant John Ryan put the rules out of his reckoning when it came to befriending his troop commander whom he loved like a son. Besides the honor of the service was at stake

TO look at me now," said my friend, Sergeant John Ryan, B Troop, —th United States Cavalry, "ye'd niver guess that wanst, for a night, I was an officer and a gintleman, would ye? But, faith, I was, though have a care if ye mention what I'm goin' to tell ye, an', by the same token, there's a rule in the Blue Book agin' impersonatin' an officer. Well, anyway, here's the story."

Ye must know, sir, that me and Chippie Marlowe had had a run-in with the alcalde of Parang over a cockfight we promoted; and our colonel was good enough to turn his blind side to us and hustle us out of reach of the wrath of the alcalde, when he might aisy enough have called all bets off and made us give back our winnin's. He sent us to B Throop, at Zamboanga, with a letther of recommendation to our new throop commander, Captain Hinery Clay McPike, a wild man from Sout' Carolina. There was a strain of Scotch in Hinery, mixed with backslidin' Puritan. Also, he had certain characteristics which led me to believe that his family tree had been scandalized through bein' grafted to a shamrock, for he was very fond of tellin' the guard, when they'd lift him out of his carromata, pleasantly drunk, and carry him away to bed in his quarters, how his great-great-great-grandfather, Jedediah Marcus McPike, upon bein' reproached by a Protestant minister in Salem, Mass., for not comin' to church, spurned the ecclesiastical coat tails with such grand effect that he outlawed himself on the spot, and had to take refuge in the swamps of Sout' Carolina. Sure, that alone was sufficient to make me love Hinery Clay McPike like a son.

"We're a hard lot, us McPikes," Hinery would say, makin' the guard set down on the foot of the bed while he towld them the sthory, "but we've been soldiers for three hundred years, and divil a McPike of us ever brought disgrace on the name or the service in which we drew our pay. When we get drunk, we get drunk like officers and gintlemin, in a club, and come home in a hack; and when we're mustered out of the service, we go sword in hand. Thank ye, bhoys, for bringin' me to bed. Ye'll find a five-dollar bill in the inside pocket of my fatigue blouse; take it, and to-morrow mornin', when ye come off guard, take the auld guard over to the canteen, and give them wan and all a beer on your throop commander. Tuck the mosquito net in around me now, my lads, turn out the light, and step softly as ye go out."

And this was the man that commanded B Throop when I first joined it. At the very first look at him, thinks I to myself: "Hinery Clay McPike, I've seen ye before." That was at retreat the night me and Chippie joined the throop. Bein' newcomers, we was on guard the next day, and that night Captain Hinery Clay McPike, bein' due for his quarterly celebration, wint downtown to the Army an' Navy Club, and

stayed late. 'Twas two o'clock in the mornin' when a carromata pulled up at number one post.

"Corpril of the guard!" comes a voice from inside the carromata. "Sind me a B Throop man."

"Come with me, Ryan," says the corpril. "'Tis your C. O."

So we wint out to the carriage. Poor Hinery was too far gone to walk, so the corpril clumb up in the carromata and got him under the arms, whilst I executed "Back-step March!" up agin' the stheps and bent my back to receive Hinery when the corpril of the guard should lift him out to me. He come, the wild divil, laughin' and crackin' jokes. By the same token, liquor always affected his legs long before it did his brain.

"Ho-ho!" says he. "What's this I see? A new mount, eh? Very well, my man, I'll climb up and ye may gallop with me to my quarters."

So I took Captain Hinery Clay McPike on my back, and walked away with him across the parade ground and up a flight of stairs to his room, and laid him on his bed. The corpril come along to show me the way, and as soon as he saw the C. O. safe on his bed says he to me, says he:

"Undress him, Ryan, and put him to bed. Place a pitcher of ice water by his bedside, pull down the mosquito net, and tuck it in around him, and turn out the light before ye come away." And with that he goes back to the guardhouse.

So I undressed Hinery Clay McPike, got him into his pajamas, and tucked him in bed, wonderin' all the while why his rascal of a dog robber wasn't there to do it. 'Tis agin' my grain to be a valet to an officer. He lay there, wide awake, watchin' me, and when I had him comfortable I went out for ice water.

"I'll be after goin' back to the guardhouse, sir," said I then, "unless there's somethin' I've overlooked."

"Sit down, my man," says he; "I've a notion to talk to ye."

I stood at attintion.

"Ye have somethin' on your brain," says he.

"I have, sir," says I; "I was wonderin' why your dog robber—I mean your sthriker—didn't set up to wait for ye."

"For the very good reason that I have niver had a sthriker, or, as ye call it, a dog robber, and I never will. An enlisted man is a soldier, and no officer that's a gintleman'll degrade an enlisted man by makin' a body servant of him. Faith, ye made a fine face at doin' me this favor to-night, and I like ye for it. 'Tis only sorry I am that the corpril of the guard didn't call a B Throop man for the job. The B Throop men don't mind carryin' me in."

"Beggin' the captain's pardon, sir," says I, "but he did. I'm a B Throop man."

He sat up in bed at that. "How the divil did ye manage to slip into my throop without me knowin' it?" says he. "I'll have ye to know I'm particular about B Throop."

"And I," says I, bridlin' a bit, "am particular about my throop commanders. 'Twas by no choice of mine I came here. The colonel sent me."

"Ah-hah!" says he, more kindly. "That's different. And what might your name be at reveille?"

"Private Jawn Ryan, sir," says I.

"How many enlistments have ye to your credit?"

"Three, sir. Wan five-year hitch under the auld law, and two three-year hitches. I have two years and a butt to serve on my fourth enlistment."

"What character did they give ye on your three discharges?"

"Service: 'Honest and faithful.' Character: 'Excellent,' sir."

"Can ye shoot?" says he. "Unless ye can qualify as a marksman, ye're out of luck in B Throop."

"I have two sharpshooter's medals and wan expert rifleman's medal. I was second, sir, in the race for the champeenship of the army. Private Marlowe, sir, who thransferred with me to B Throop, is the champeen. We qualified when we were in the dough bhoys."

"Where are ye from?" says he.

"Never mind my legs," says he; "I'm sober in the head. Speak up!"

"From H Throop, at Parang."

"And did Captain Bidwell, of H, know what he had?"

"He did not, sir," says I. "We was new to H Throop, havin' took on in the cavalry but four months ago. Nayther Private Marlowe nor meself are given to braggin' and showin' our discharges. By the way, sir, Colonel Grimshaw gave me a note to present to you when we should arrive in B Throop. I have it with me."

"Give it me, please," says he, reachin' out his hand.

I give it to him, and he read it. I have the original letter in my trunk at barracks. I stole it from Hinery Clay McPike after he fell asleep, and I can give it to ye word for word. It read:

PARANG, Decimber 24, 1899.

MY DEAR BHOY: I am sinding to ye by the *Callao* Privates Ryan and Marlowe, of H Throop. Treat them well, for they are the flowers of the flock. In a mild, ladylike outfit like Bidwell's throop, their talents would be wasted. It has remained for me, their colonel, to find out what they are, and they're too good for Bidwell. Therefore, I send them to you, who will appreciate them. Accept them with the season's greetings from your devoted father.

THOMAS GRIMSHAW.

Well, sir, Captain McPike read the auld man's letter, and a smile bruk out on the face of him.

"Gawd bless his dear heart!" says he to himself. He lifted his eyes to me, standin' at attintion. "I thought I towld ye to sit down, Private Ryan," says he kindly. "Here," says he, tossin' the letter over to me; "read this."

So I sat down, and read the auld man's letter, and sure 'tis more than I was able to do to kape from showin' how plazed I was at the compliment.

"Well?" says he when I'd finished and handed it back to him.

"The grief of leavin' Parang, sir," says I, "is only exceeded by the joy of findin' myself in B Throop. I had no idea that the throop commander was Colonel Grimshaw's son."

"We're a family of sogers, Private Ryan," says he. "My great-great-great-grandfather was Jedediah Marcus McPike——"

I'd heard there was no stoppin' him wanst he got started on his ancestors, so I sat there and listened respectfully whilst he towld me the story of every McPike that ever fingered a sword knot. It seems that Colonel Grimshaw was his mother's brother, and Hinery's father and mother havin' died when he was a babe in arms, Grimshaw adopted him as his own son; but out of pride in the name of McPike he forbore to saddle Hinery with the name of Grimshaw. 'Twas aisy for me to see that there was great love bechune them. Hinery was a lad risin' thirty, and wan of the youngest captains in the service. He'd been sportin' the two bars a matther of sivin months when I met him.

"And so ye see," says Captain McPike—sure, he was very far gone, or he'd niver talked to an enlisted man like he talked to me—"my adopted father loves me still, for all my wild ways. Has he not proved it by sindin' me you and Private Marlowe, the two best rifle shots in the service? I shall qualify for the team myself, and with you and Marlowe, the champeen, and wan or two more of my B Throop men 'tis a mortal certainty we'll be sint back to the competitive shoot at Riley in the spring, and, Gawd willin', we'll retain the champeenship of the army in B Throop for many a day. Thank ye for bringin' me to bed. Ye'll find a five-dollar bill in the inside pocket of my fatigue blouse; take it, and to-morrow mornin' when ye come off guard take the auld guard over to the canteen, and give them wan and all a beer on your throop commander. Tuck the mosquito net in around me now, Private Ryan, turn out the light, and step softly as ye go out."

That was my inthroduction to Captain Hinery Clay McPike. He was around in the mornin' at nine o'clock, as fresh as a pansy blossom, to look over the mornin' report. Then, as it lacked ten minutes of drill call, he sint for Chippie Marlowe, and looked him over.

"Sure, that's a fine man!" says Chip-

pie when he come out of the orderly room. "There's a vacancy for corpril, and he asked me to get ye and bring ye in to him whilst we draw straws for the chevrons."

"Very well, Chippie," says I; and in we went.

"Men," says Hinery, "I have but wan vacancy, and eighty odd men in B Throop ready and competent to fill it; but out of compliment to my father, who sint ye to me, I shall give it to wan or the other. So we'll draw straws to see who gets it."

"We will not, sir," says I firmly. "Private Marlowe goes up for his commission in the spring. He must be a corpril before he can take the examinations; I'll wait till the next vacancy." And I saluted and walked out. So he made Chippie a corpril, and niver spoke to either wan of us agin' except in the line of dooty—which was as it should be.

We had our monthly shoot a week after we joined the throop. Arrah, that was the throop for ye! 'Tis no longer what it was in them days. Ninety-three men, and ivery man jack of them qualified. 'Twas then I learned what the captain meant when he towld me I'd be out of luck in B Throop unless I was a marksman. Unless a man could shoot, Hinery—we all loved the bhoy, and called him by his first name behind his back—would call him into the orderly room, and ax him to apply for a transfer to another throop, and what with the secret support of the colonel and first chanst at ivery auld sojer about to be discharged and reënlist, Hinery had filled his throop with veterans, and what few rookies he had to take was kept at the butts until they learned to shoot.

"For," says Hinery to the throop, "if we waste good governmint ammunition in practice we make up for it in action. Wan straight shot into the midriff of a Moro is worth a hundred over his head, and I'll have no shennanigans o' that kind in B Throop. Ye'll shoot like sogers in action, not like militiamen."

He was a good, kind officer, overlookin' ninety per cint of the little things in an enlisted man that do be drivin' most young officers crazy. Hinery had no desire to show his authority over wan, so he got from the men, through kindness, what few of thim get by "blinds," fines, and summary courts. 'Twould break his heart to see a B Throop man lookin' through the bars of the guardhouse, and so, to kape him from grievin', we behaved ourselves and stayed out. Let a B Throop man get into throuble, and 'twas Hinery Clay McPike that definded him at the court-martial, right or wrong. Let a man go to hospital, and 'twas Hinery Clay McPike that called on him ivery blessed day and questioned him to see that the poultice wallopers were doin' their full dooty by him. He was as clost to his "bhoys," as he called us, as a twin brother—an' as far away from us as the secret'ry of war. And we niver marched to the butts for the monthly shoot without two pack mules loaded with good American beer for the throop—at Hinery's expinse, Gawd bless him.

We had no first or second lieutenant with us in them days. Officers was scarce, and the noncoms had more to do then than they have now. So there was no presumptious shavetails intervenin' bechune Hinery and us. We were a unit for Hinery, and when we took the field 'twas the Moros found it out, double time. We made a great name for Hinery and ourselves in the spring of nineteen hundred. We were the divil's own, and good care he took of us. Sorra shot did we fire at any time at more than five hundred yards, for 'twas Hinery's policy to get close and end the agony.

Says he: "A long-drawn-out fight is the plague of life. The more powder we give them time to burn the more I'll have to recruit, and a rookie is not an auld soger. They have no pride in the service."

In April, Chippie left us to go up to Manila for his preliminary examination for a commission. He passed, and took ship for home, to the finals at Governor's Island, New York. In the

meantime, the Moros had considered the matther, and sued for peace, and a gineral order come down to Hinery to take three av his throop that'd qualify in the regimental shoot, and come up to Manila with thim for the semifinal tryouts. "Rat" Hosmer—he was killed afterward at Muntinpula—myself, and Hinery himself was the only three to qualify, so the throop was turned over to a shavetail for the time bein', and the three of us went up to Manila.

"Private Ryan," says Hinery to me, goin' up on the boat, "ye must promise me on your word of honor as a soger that ye'll not touch wan drop of liquor bechune now and the day the champeenship of the service is back in B Throop." For with the loss of Chippie we'd lost the champeenship, or would lose it when he got his commission.

"I promise, sir," says I; but I give him a look for all that.

"Ye needn't look so," says he, "my nerves are as steady as a German drill sergeant at a parade rest. I want a trip home, and this competition is as good an excuse as any. I can qualify for the team without goin' into trainin', but 'tis you that must qualify for the champeenship of the service. See that ye don't fail me."

In the semifinals at Manila we qualified, all three of us; and, to the great joy of Hinery, we were the only three to represent the regiment at the national competition. Hinery celebrated by gettin' stavin' drunk, but I followed him through ivery saloon on the Escolta, and finally I cornered him in the Alhambra Café, 'atin' little German sausages and drinkin' beer at wan o'clock in the mornin'. He was fightin' drunk whin I found him.

"Come with me, sir," says I; "I have a room for ye in the Hotel de Oriente."

"I will not," says he. "How dare you presume to address your throop commander without first axin' l'ave of your top sergeant?"

"Sir," says I, "if ye stay here ye'll get yerself into trouble. Come with me, allanah——"

He hit me in the face with a plate of sauerkraut. I looked at him, and says I to Hinery: "That insult to an enlisted man, sir, will cost B Throop the champeenship of the arrmy."

He comminced to cry. "Gawd forbid!" says he; and, jumpin' up, he wiped off my face with a napkin. "Forgive me," says he; "I'm ill-tempered in my cups."

I took him by the arm, and led him to a carromata I had by the door, and between hoppin' and jumpin' I got him to bed in the Hotel de Oriente. I'll say this for Hinery: If he fell by the wayside to-night, he picked himself up at seven o'clock to-morrow mornin' and stayed sober three months, as a rule, when he'd shlip off ag'in. 'Twas his only fault—that and the curse of spendin' money. 'Twas common gossip that Hinery owed iver'body. Auld Grimshaw had paid his debts more than wanst, and sure 'twas little enough the auld man had himself, let alone helpin' Hinery out of the hole.

In the mornin' when Hinery awoke the first thing he did was to go down on the Escolta an' buy a nice goold watch. He had it inscribed: "From Hinery to Jawn: For Merit."

He give it to me the same day, and sure 'twas a little joke bechune us——

The sergeant paused. His voice had grown a little husky with his recital; his great, warm Irish heart was throbbing with pain at the remembrance of that gift—the joy, the sorrow, the comedy, the tragedy that the memory evoked. He passed his brown hand across his eyes, and continued his story.

We nayther of us referred to the sauerkraut matther ag'in until we got to Hongkong. We left Manila for home on wan of the O. & O. boats that touched in at Hongkong; otherwise I would have no story to tell ye.

Hinery went ashore in a sampan the minute we'd passed quarantine, and Rat Hosmer and meself followed in another.

"Rat, my son," says I to him, "what do ye feel like doin' for the next twinty-four hours?"

"I feel," says Rat, "like runnin' loose and carryin' on now that I find meself in a furrin city, with nobody watchin' me, and no calls to answer."

"Exactly," says I. "'Tis the way I feel meself, and I misdoubt me if Hinery don't feel the same. Hinery is young, and predisposed that way, and 'tis worried I am for fear he'll take the bit in his teeth and run away with himself. In consequence of which, Rat, my son, we will now lay a plan of campaign. In the first place, our headquarters while we're ashore shall be the Hongkong Hotel. Hinery will go there first, and 'tis the two of us'll watch the door till he comes out. When he does, you, Rat, will follow him wherever he goes, and report to me at the hotel at ten o'clock to-night. If he drinks he'll not be out of hand until that time. Then I'll take up the trail, and do you go to bed and l'ave the rest to me."

"Very well," says Rat—he was a good little man, Gawd rest his sowl—and so 'twas settled. When he landed, Hinery took a ricksha up the Queen's Road, with me and Rat peltin' along behind them, also in rickshas. True to my prediction, he went at wanst to the hotel, whilst me and Rat went to a pub across the sthreet and sat down in the window to watch. Rat had a scuttle of ale, and I smoked a Sumatra cigar, for my promise was give to Hinery not to touch liquor.

In the course of an hour, Hinery come out with a young British army officer from the Royal Welsh Fusilers, the Royal Welsh bein' stationed in Hongkong at the time. A sociable young man was Hinery, and a great lad at hobnobbin' with his social equals. Him and young Johnny Bull went up the Queen's Road arm in arm, and Rat shlipped out and followed them, whilst I went over to the hotel, engaged a room, went upstairs, took off my shoes, and lay on the bed in my stockin' feet, and smoked. Soon I had a telephone from Rat.

"They're in the British Officers' Club in the Lyndhurst Road," says Rat.

"Then, Rat, my bhoy," says I, "ye may go abroad in Hongkong and enjoy yerself accordin' to your nature and inclination. He's safe in the club. I'll stand the rest of the guard meself."

In fifteen minutes I was up at that club and howldin' converse with a cockney mess sergeant that appeared to be in charge. Sure, I knew his brand well—a born dog robber, willin' to take a tip from whoever'd give it to him.

"Tommy Atkins," says I, "there's an American army officer in this club." Here I drew the cockney to wan side. "I'm his man," says I, "and as 'tis a gay young blood he is, I must kape my eye on him and see that he gets back to the steamer before sailin' time. He's a grand gintleman, but a divil on wheels once he gets started." And I winked at the cockney.

"Hi twig," says he; "Hi recall him perfectly. 'E give me two yen for a-'owldin' the door an' a-takin' av his 'at, so 'e did. A rale gentleman is yer marster, old top, an' no mistyke."

"Then, Tommy, my bucko," says I, "here's two more yen for ye, and see that ye watch him like a cat watches a rat hole. My name's Ryan. Telephone me at the Hongkong Hotel ivery blessed hour. He'll stay here to lunch, and they'll all get pickled. When my young gintleman gets well soused I'll come and take him away."

The cockney took the two yen, with a wink, and I went back to my hotel. At two o'clock he telephoned me. Hinery and half a dozen British officers was just gettin' up from lunch, and Hinery was talkin' loud and braggin' about the shootin' of B Throop. At three o'clock he was smokin' cigarettes in the loungin' room and havin' Scotch and soda beehune puffs. At four he and another buck had taken down a pair of foils from the wall and were fencin' for the edification of the rest. At five Hinery was so happy he had announced his determination to let the boat l'ave Hongkong without him, and catch her ag'in at Nagasaki or Yokohama. At six he had commenced signin' chits for drinks and cigars, and this was a bad sign. Hinery was goin' broke, then, it seemed. At seven he

sat down to dinner; at eight he was still 'atin; and at nine he was finished. At ten he was playin' bridge at tin cints a point, and fairly sober in the head, but far gone in the legs. At the end of each game he was a loser, and give his I O U to cover. I cautioned the cockney, who was servin' drinks in the cardroom, to get a line on Hinery's losses if he could, and at eleven o'clock he telephoned that Hinery was in the hole two thousand dollars gold, more or less, probably more.

"That'll do, Tommy," says I; "I'll send afther him about wan o'clock in the mornin'," and I hung up. At half past eleven I was back aboord the steamer; at eleven-thirty-five, by the use of my native eloquence and a big American dollar, I was in Hinery Clay McPike's stateroom; and at eleven-forty-five I come out, dressed in wan of Hinery's olive-drab uniforms. I helped meself to the cord of his campaign hat, wrapped it around mine, strapped up his pigskin puttees on my auld legs, and pinned on all the medals I'd won at the butts. They looked imposin' enough, Gawd knows. And when I was the nicest little officer ye iver clapped your two eyes on, barrin' the commission, I went overside ag'in into the waitin' sampan, and at wan o'clock a. m. I was ringin' the hell at the club where Hinery Clay McPike was makin' a star-spangled, spread-eagled monkey of himself.

A flunky come to the door, and I stepped in like I owned the place.

"Is Captain McPike, of the United States army, here?" says I. "If so, I'd like to see him."

"Whom shall I announce, sir?" says he, very respectful.

"Captain John Ryan, United States army," says I, givin' a twist to my mustache like I'd seen auld man Grimshaw doin'.

"This way, sir," says he; and I followed him to the cardroom. He pulled open the door, and sings out:

"Captain John Ryan, United States army!"

Ivery officer in the room stood up, includin' my brave Hinery, who was weavin' a little. He had to howld to the table to steady himself. I felt like a fool, standin' there in the doorway, lookin' at them, and cursin' Hinery for not comin' to my rescue. Instead, he stood there glarin' at me.

"I apologize, gintlemin," says I, "for breakin' in on your pleasure; but the immediate presence of my brother officer, Captain McPike, aboord the steamer must be my excuse. Mac," says I, walkin' over to him, "the colonel'd like to see ye at wanst. I believe he's got some notion of layin' over in Hongkong a day or two and joinin' the ship ag'in at Nagasaki, and he has some orders for ye. Ye know we sail with the tide at six o'clock in the mornin'." An' wit' that I laid my hand on his shoulder friendlylike, and give him a pinch that left him black an' blue for a week. He woke up thin.

"Glad to see ye, Jawn," says he, as sweet as sugar. "Gintlemin, permit me to presint to ye my auld Irish friend and brother officer, Captain John Ryan." And with that he inthroduced me all around. 'Twas tough pullin' for a plain auld soger; but, praise be, I was niver wan of the kind to sag in the knees and duck my head in the prisince of my superiors. Smell out the auld soger, the enlisted man in me, I knew they would; but I wore the uniform, and Hinery Clay McPike had inthroduced me, and they give me a rousin' British welcome.

"Mac, me bhoy," says wan av them, "why in blazes didn't ye bring the captain along with ye this mornin'?"

"I tried," lied Hinery; "but the captain's the most bashful man in our service. Havin' won a medal of honor twice by conspicuous gallantry in action, he was not satisfied until he had poked his impudent nose into more trouble and brought himself to the attintion of Congress a third time. So they could do no more nor pull him out of the ranks, where he was servin' as a sergeant major, and give him a commission as second lieutenant. Like all the Irish, all he needed was an openin'. He's just hacked his way to his captaincy with his good right arm, but he served so

long in the ranks 'tis a bashful man he is socially."

"Captain Ryan," says a fine, soldierly-lookin' auld major of horse artillery, "I should like to shake hands with you ag'in, sir." And he did, more power to him; and so did they all. Somebody rang for a drink, and the first thing I knew I found meself with a Scotch and soda in my hand wan minute, and inside of me the next. Then, before things could get too sociable, says I:

"Gintlemin, I have orders to steal McPike away from ye, but only for a few hours. I'll grant ye he'll be back for breakfast. Hinery, clane up your game, and come along with me." And I throd on his toes.

Well, sir, there was great expressions of grief at losin' Hinery; but dooty is dooty with a Britisher, and they fell to work sthraightening up their accounts. Sure, the room swum around me at the size and number of Hinery's I O U's. They come from all sides, and they totaled five thousand four hundred and thirty-two dollars goold. I was near to faintin', and Hinery was as white as a regimint paradin' in ducks.

"'Tis lucky for you, McPike," says I, carelesslike, "that ye were born wit' a silver spoon in your mouth. Two nights of this kind of luck with me, and I'd be a corpse."

"I'll be back shortly, and take up those chits, gentlemin," says Hinery, tryin' hard to control his voice. "I came away unprepared——"

"Me dear man, don't mention it," says the British officers with wan voice. Upon me word, they were gintlemin to the marrow av their bones; and, bein' gintlemin, it never occurred to them that Hinery wasn't wan, too. They niver doubted for wan minute that Hinery wouldn't pay—and didn't intind to. There was the look of death in the back of his eye—I'd seen too many men facin' their finish with that look not to know it when I saw it; so I says:

"Have ye no check book with ye, Mac?"

"No," says he; "I left it aboord the boat."

"I have mine," says I; "and, as ye well know, 'tis at your service night or day. If ye'll permit me—my check's on the International, in San Francisco—if ye'll permit me, Hinery, me dear fellow, I'll take your I O U for the bunch, and issue my check to our friends here. You can settle with me when we're aboord again. Ye well know, McPike, what a changeable auld fox the commandin' officer is. He may have somethin' for ye to do that'll prevint ye from comin' back here——" And with that I give Hinery a kick in the shins.

"Thank you, Jawn," says he; "I believe I will let you do that." And so 'twas done.

"Wait a minute, Jawn!" says Hinery. "I have a bar bill." So I give the club a check for that, too. Then the flunky brought our hats, and, after another drink all around, and with many a promise to look in the next time we passed that way, Hinery Clay McPike and meself left that club and walked down the sthreet arm in arm.

"Well," says Hinery presently, lettin' go my arm the minute we turned the corner, "and what is the m'anin' of this damnable piece of effrontery? Man, do ye know ye could be bobtailed for impersonatin' an officer of the army or navy?"

"Troth I do, sir," says I, as blithe as ye plaze; "troth I do, Hinery Clay McPike. But did ye happen to know that ye could be bobtailed for impersonatin' a gintleman?"

"I'm rooned!" says poor Hinery, coverin' his face with his two hands. "In Gawd's name, why have ye done this?"

"For the honor of the service, sir," says I. "Look at this lovely little bunch of I O U's, all with your name on them." And with that I tore them into fragments, and chucked them into the sthreet. "As for the uniform, 'tis yours, Captain McPike. The check book—I dunno who owns it, but I found it in the stateroom. Ye can niver be traced by an I O U that don't exist; and as for Captain Jawn Ryan, he, poor, misfortunate man, shall die the

minute he can change into his own private rags."

Poor Hinery turned on me, lookin' so pitiful that my heart was fair bruk in two lookin' at him.

"How did ye know?" says he in a whisper.

"I followed ye when ye left the ship. Ye owe me two yen that I give that mealy-faced mess sergeant at the club for spyin' on ye and reportin' to me by phone at the Hongkong Hotel."

"Two yen," says he, very soft; "two yen. That's one dollar American. I'll give ye my I O U."

"I'll take it, sir," says I.

"If ye do," says he, "ye can collect it in eternity, for that's where I'll be this night. I thank Gawd for one human bein' that tried to save me; but I—I can't be saved that way, Jawn Ryan. The checks will come back, and those British officers'll laugh and tear them up, thinkin' there was two fakers sneaked into the club instead of one."

"Two, sir," says I firmly; "there was two fakers, not wan."

He passed his hand over his face, and wiped away the sweat. "I must have gone crazy," he moaned, like a child. "I don't know why I did it, but I thought I could play bridge betther nor any Englishman that iver drew the breath of life. I thought I was sober when I was drunk. I was in two thousand at eleven o'clock, when I come to; and the knowledge all but druv me crazy. I stuck then, hopin' to come out ahead before mornin'; but I lost my nerve—I couldn't think——"

"And then, sir," says I, "you made up your mind to go the limit, and if ye didn't quit winner, to go down to the hotel and blow out your brains. Is that not it?"

"It was. 'Tis the only thing left to me now."

"Botheration on ye, sir!" says I. "If I'd known ye was such a child, I'd have left ye to finish the job ye started. Ye need not worry about them checks."

"Ryan," says he, "there niver was a McPike but me that iver floated a piece of queer paper, and as I'm the last of the McPikes there'll niver be another. Gawd help me!" says he. "This'll kill Colonel Grimshaw. I'll be the death of that good, kind, brave man that's been more nor a father to me——"

"Hinery," says I, "ye make me feel bad. I have a matther of six thousand dollars with the paymaster, the proceeds of a bit of a cockfight that me and Chippie Marlowe promoted in Parang. 'Twas for that Colonel Grimshaw exiled us to Zamboanga, when he might have played he was Solomon, and made us give back the money to the alcalde. But, seein' as the alcalde was a bad lot himself, the colonel let us keep our winnin's; and for that Chippie Marlowe and meself are under obligations to him. 'Tis a proud man I am to be even with him by savin' his son. Come back to the ship with me, allanah, and don't be makin' mountains out of molehills. I have my book with the paymaster's receipt, and while I can't touch it until I'm discharged 'tis bankable security anywhere. When we get to San Francisco we'll find some wan we can hock it with, deposit the money in the International, and have it waitin' there when the checks come in to be paid. Sure, Hinery, bhoy, 'tis as aisy as——"

He put his arm around my shoulder and looked at me. The look of death had gone out of his eyes, and he was our own dear Hinery ag'in. The big tears come to my eyes—I'm a soft-hearted scut with two Scotches under my belt.

"D'ye remimber," says he, "a plate o' sauerkraut in your Irish mug in the Alhambra Café?"

"D'ye remimber," says I, "a goold watch with a bit of writin' in it?"

"D'ye remimber a promise ye made me to touch no liquor until the champeenship was back in B Throop?"

"D'ye recall the scoundhrel that put me in the way of havin' to break my word?"

He laughed, like the gay, wild divil that he was. "And so ye'll lend me this money?" says he finally, with wonder in his voice.

"I will."

"On no security?"

"Hinery," says I, "I'm not a fool. I must have security. Ye must give me your word of honor, as an officer and a gintleman, that from this day forward the divil a dhrop of intoxicatin' liquor'll iver pass your lips without my say-so."

"I give ye my word," says he. "On my honor as an officer and a gintleman—seein' that ye're goin' to make a gintlemin out of me ag'in. As for your money, ye great fool of a man, I can niver pay ye back in life. Now, if ye die before me——"

"I shall not need it then," says I. "Praise be, there's always room in the bottom of a trench, and 'twill be a crool day when they can't blow taps over me and give me the volleys. I ask no more. And I wouldn't have this found on my body—to embarrass ye when I'm gone." And I took out his I O U for five thousand four hundred and thirty-two dollars and tore it up. "I shall not suffer," says I. "Aisy come, aisy go; come Sunday, God'll send Monday, and I'll always have somebody to take care of me. 'Tis the wan great comfort of a soger's life. When my service is in, there's always the Auld Sogers' Home."

He slipped his arm in mine. Sure, 'twas his way. He was a man of few words, but he felt much, and 'twas I that understood. Presently, as we reached the sampan, says he:

"Jawn, confound ye, I'm black and blue where ye pinched me and kicked me."

"'Twas for the honor of the service and the good o' your sowl, sir," says I.

"And so, sir," continued John Ryan, "I lost the money I won from the alcalde of Parang—some day I'll tell ye about that same alcalde—but I saved Hinery Clay McPike, and he was worth it all, and ten thousand times more. Gawd rest his poor sowl, and may the heavens be his bed! He paid me back in time, but I wish he hadn't. He was a man, and I loved him."

NOT TRUE TO LIFE

THE son of a man who had been a great philanthropist welcomed a visitor to his office. The talk turned on the career of the father of the young man.

"It was a great blow to everybody—my father's death," lamented the youth. "By the way, here's the last portrait painted of him."

He led the visitor to where hung on the wall a large portrait of the dead philanthropist, depicting him as standing erect with his right hand in his pocket.

"A fine piece of work," said the visitor grimly, "but it's not true to life. Nobody ever saw your father with his hand in his own pocket."

AUNT DELIA AND WOMAN SUFFRAGE

MISS DELIA TORREY, of Milbury, Mass., enjoys two great distinctions. One is that she is President Taft's favorite aunt, and the other rests on the fact that she is the champion long-distance, variegated, and highly seasoned pie maker of the United States. She frequently goes to the White House in Washington, and there makes no secret of the fact that she is old-fashioned in her views and by no means in sympathy with all the newfangled ideas of the younger generation.

She proved this not long ago to Doctor Harvey W. Wiley, who went down like a ninepin when confronted by her wit. The doctor, whose wife is a suffragist, has become an ardent advocate of woman's rights, and he began to try to convert "Aunt Delia" to the cause. She listened attentively to the food expert's fulminations, and dismissed the subject with this comment:

"Shucks, doctor; if there is one thing a man can do without the help of a woman, for goodness sake let him do it in peace."

The Other Fellow's Job

By Frank L. Packard

Author of "The King of Fools," "Serpent's Cut," Etc.

Envying the other fellow's job—that was Jimmy Beezer's disease. He was a fitter, but he wanted to be an engineer. And there's a lot of people like Beezer. The less they know of what the man they envy is up against the more they envy—and the better they think they could swing the other job themselves

THERE is a page in Hill Division history that belongs to Jimmy Beezer. It happened in the days of the building of the long-talked-of, figure-8-canted-over-sideways tunnel on the Devil's Slide, that worst piece of track, bar none, on the American continent.

Beezer, speaking generally, was a fitter in the Big Cloud shops; Beezer, in particular, wore a beard. According to Big Cloud, Beezer wore a beard because Mrs. Beezer said so; Mrs. Beezer, in point of size, made about two of Beezer, and Big Cloud said she figured the beard kind of took the cuss off the discrepancy.

Anyway, whether that is so or not, Beezer wore a beard, and the reason it is emphasized here is because you couldn't possibly know Beezer without it. Its upper extremity was nicotine-dyed in spots to a nut brown, and from thence shaded down to an indeterminate rust color at its lower edge—when he hadn't been dusting off and doing parlor-maid work with it in the unspeakable grime of a "front-end." In shape it never followed the prevailing tonsorial fashions. As far as any one knew, no barber was ever the richer for Beezer's beard. Beezer used to trim it himself Sunday mornings, and sort of half-moon effect he always gave it.

He was a spare, short man, all jump and nerves, and active as a cat. He had shrewd, gray, little eyes, but, owing to the fact that he had a small head and wore a large-size, black, greasy, peaked cap jammed down as far over his face as it would go, the color of his eyes could hardly be said to matter much, for when you looked at Beezer, Beezer was mostly just a round knob of uptilted nose—and beard.

Beezer's claims to immortality and fame, such as they are, were vested in disease. Beezer had a disease that is very common to mankind in general. There's a whole lot of men like Beezer. Beezer envied the other fellow's job.

He was an almighty good fitter. Tommy Regan, the master mechanic, said so, and Regan ought to know; that's why he took Beezer out of the shops where he had grown up, so to speak, and gave him the roundhouse repair work to do. And that's where Beezer caught the disease—in the roundhouse. Beezer contracted a mild attack of it the first day, but it wasn't bad enough to trouble him much, or see a doctor about, so he let it go on, and it got chronic.

Beezer commenced to inhale an entirely different atmosphere, and the more he inhaled it the more discontented he grew. An engine out in the roundhouse, warm and full of life, the steam whispering and purring at her valves, was a very different thing from a cold, rusty, dismantled boiler shell jacked up on lumbering blocks in the erecting shop; and the road talk of specials, holding orders, tissues, running time, and what not had a much more

appealing ring to it than discussing how many inches of muck No. 414 had accumulated on her guard plates, the incidental damming of the species wiper, and whether her boxes wanted new babbitting or not.

Toiling like a slave ten hours a day for six days a week, and maybe overtime on Sundays, so that the other fellow could have the fun, and the glory, and the fatter pay check, and the easy time of it, began to get Beezer's goat. The "other fellow" was the engineer.

Beezer got to contrasting up the two jobs, and the more he contrasted the less he liked the looks of his own, and the more he was satisfied of his superior ability to hold down the other over any one of the crowd that signed on or off in the grease-smeared pages of the turner's book, which recorded the comings and goings of the engine crews.

And his ability, according to Beezer's way of looking at it, wasn't all swelled head, either, for there wasn't a bolt or a split pin in any type of engine that had ever nosed its pilot unto the Hill Division that he couldn't have put his finger on with his eyes shut. How much, anyhow, did an engineer know about an engine? There wasn't a fitter in the shops that didn't have the best engineer that ever pulled a throttle pinned down with his shoulders flat on the mat on that count, and there wasn't an engineer but what would admit it, either.

But a routine in which one is brought up, gets married in, and comes to look upon as a sort of fixed quantity for life, isn't to be departed from offhand, and at a moment's notice. Beezer grew ardent with envy, it is true, but the idea of actually switching over from the workbench to the cab didn't strike him for some time. When it did—the first time—it literally took his breath away. He was in the pit, and he stood up suddenly; the staybolts on the rocker arm held, and Beezer promptly sat down from a wallop on the head that would have distracted the thoughts of any other man than Beezer.

Engineer Beezer! He had to lift the peak of his cap to dig the tears out of his eyes, and when he put it back again the peak was just a trifle farther up his nose. Engineer Beezer—a limited run—the Imperial Flyer—into division on the dot, hanging like a lord of creation from the cab window—cutting the miles on the grades and levels like a swallow—roaring over trestles—diving through tunnels—there was excitement in that, something that made life worth living, instead of everlastingly messing around with a hammer and a cold chisel, and pulling himself thin at the hips on the end of a long-handled union wrench. Daydreams? Well, everybody daydreams. Why not Beezer?

It is not on record that any one ever metamorphosed himself into a drunkard on the spot the first time he ever stepped up to a bar; but, as the Irishman said, "Kape your foot on the rail, an' you've the makin's uv a foine bum!"

Of course, the thing wasn't feasible. It sounded all right, and was mighty alluring, but it was all dream. Beezer put it from him with an unctuous, get-thee-behind-me-Satan air, but he purloined a book of "rules"—road rules—out of Fatty MacAllister's seat in the cab of 1016. He read up the rules at odd moments, and moments that weren't odd, and gradually the peak of his cap crept up as far as the bridge of his nose. Beezer was keeping his foot on the rail.

Mrs. Beezer found the book. That's what probably started things along toward a show-down. She was, as has been said, a very large woman, also she was a very capable woman of whom Beezer generally stood in some awe, who washed, and ironed, and cooked for the Beezer brood during the day, and did overtime at nights on socks and multifarious sewing, including patches on Beezer's overalls. The book fell out of a pocket one evening. Mrs. Beezer examined it, discovered MacAllister's name scrawled on it, and leaned across the table under the paper-shaded lamp in their modest combination sitting and dining room.

"What are you doing with this, Mr. Beezer?" she inquired peremptorily; Mrs. Beezer was always peremptory with Beezer.

Beezer coughed behind his copy of the Big Cloud *Weekly*.

"Well?" prompted Mrs. Beezer.

"I brought it home for the children to read," said Beezer, who, being uncomfortable, sought refuge in the facetious.

"Mr. Beezer," said Mrs. Beezer, with some asperity, "you put down that paper and look at me."

Mr. Beezer obeyed a little doubtfully.

"Now," continued Mrs. Beezer, "what's got into you since you went into the roundhouse I don't know; but I've sorter had suspicions, and this book looks like 'em. You might just as well make a clean breast of what's on your mind, because I'm going to know."

Beezer looked at his wife and scowled. He felt what might be imagined to be somewhat the feeling of a man who is caught sneaking in by the side entrance after signing the pledge at a blue ribbon rally. It was not a situation conducive to good humor.

"There ain't anything got into me," said he truculently. "If you want to know what I'm doing with that book, I'm reading it because I'm interested in it. And I've come to the conclusion that a fitter's job alongside of an engineer's ain't any better than a mud-picking Polack's."

"You should have found that out before you went into the shops ten years ago," said Mrs. Beezer, with a sweetness that tasted like vinegar.

"Ten years ago!" Beezer flared. "How's a fellow to know what he's cut out for, and what he can do best, when he starts in? How's he to know, Mrs. Beezer, will you tell me that?"

Mrs. Beezer was not sympathetic.

"I don't know how he's to know," she said; "but I know that the trouble with some men is that they don't know when they're well off, and if you're thinking of——"

"I ain't," said Beezer sharply.

"I said 'if,' Mr. Beezer; and if——"

"There's no 'if' about it," Beezer lied fiercely. "I'm not——"

"You are," declared Mrs. Beezer emphatically, but with some wreckage of English, due to exceeding her speed permit—Mrs. Beezer talked fast. "When you act like that I know you are, and I know you better than you do yourself, and I'm not going to let you make a fool of yourself, and come home here dead some night, and wake up same as poor Mrs. Dalheen got her man back week before last on a box-car door. Don't you know when you're well off? *You* an engineer! What kind of an engineer do you think you'd make? Why——"

"Mrs. Beezer," said Beezer hoarsely. "Shut up!"

Mrs. Beezer caught her breath.

"What did you say?" she gasped.

"I said," said Beezer sullenly, picking up his paper again, "that I'd never have thought of it if you hadn't put it into my head, and now the more I think of it the better it looks."

"I thought so," sniffed Mrs. Beezer profoundly. "And now, Mr. Beezer, let this be the last of it. The idea! I never heard of such a thing!"

Curiously enough, or perhaps naturally enough, Mrs. Beezer's cold-water attitude had precisely the opposite effect on Jimmy Beezer to that which she had intended it should have. It was the side-entrance proposition over again. When you've been caught sneaking in that way, you might just as well use the front door on Main Street next time, and have done with it. Beezer began to do a little talking around the roundhouse. The engine crews, by the time they tumbled to the fact that it wasn't just the ordinary grumble that any man is entitled to in his day's work, stuck their tongues in their cheeks, winked surreptitiously at each other, and encouraged him.

Now it is not to be implied that Jimmy Beezer was anybody's fool, not for a minute. A first-class master fitter with his time served is a long way from being in that class right on the face of it. Beezer might have been a little blinded to the tongues and winks on account of his own earnestness; perhaps he was for a time. Afterward—but just a minute, or we'll be running

by a meeting point, which is mighty bad railroading.

Beezer's cap, when he took the plunge and tackled Regan, had got tilted pretty far back, so far that the peak stood off his forehead at about the same rakish angle that his upturned little round knob of a nose stuck up out of his beard, which is to say that Beezer had got to the stage where he had decided that the professional swing through the gangway he had been practicing every time, and some others, that he had occasion to get into a cab, was going to be of some practical use at an early date.

He put it up to Regan one morning when the master mechanic came into the roundhouse.

Regan leaned his fat little body up against the jamb of one of the big engine doors, pulled at his scraggly, brown mustache, and blinked as he listened.

"What's the matter with you, Beezer?" he inquired perplexedly, when the other was at an end.

"Haven't I just told you?" said Beezer. "I want to quit fitting and get running."

"Talks as though he meant it," commented Regan sotto voce to himself, as he peered earnestly into the fitter's face.

"Of course I mean it," declared Beezer, a little tartly. "Why wouldn't I?"

"No," said Regan; "that ain't the question. The question is, why would you? H'm?"

"Because," Beezer answered promptly, "I like a snap as well as the next man. It's a better job than the one I've got, better money, better hours, easier all around, and one I can hold down with the best of them."

Regan's eyebrows went up. "Think so?" he remarked casually.

"I do," declared Beezer.

"Well, then," said Regan, "if you've thought it all out and made up your mind, there's nothing I know of to stop you. Want to begin right away?"

"I do," said Beezer again. It was coming easier than he had expected, and there was a jubilant trill in his voice.

"All right," said Regan. "I'll speak to Clarihue about it. You can start in wiping in the morning."

"Wiping?" echoed Beezer faintly.

"Sure," said Regan. "That's what you wanted, wasn't it? Wiping—a dollar-ten a day."

"Look here," said Beezer, with a gulp; "I ain't joking about this."

"Well, then, what are you kicking about?" demanded Regan.

"About wiping and a dollar-ten," said Beezer. "What would I do with a dollar-ten, me with a wife and three kids?"

"I don't know what you'd do with it," returned Regan. "What do you expect?"

"I don't expect to start in wiping," said Beezer, beginning to get a little hot.

"You've been here long enough to know the way up," said Regan. "Wiping, firing—you take your turn. And your turn'll come for an engine according to the way things are shaping up now in, say, about fifteen years."

"Fifteen years!"

"Mebbe," grinned Regan. "I can't promise to kill off anybody to accommodate you, can I?"

"And don't the ten years I've put in here count for anything?" queried Beezer aggressively. "Why don't you start me in sweeping up the roundhouse? Wiping! Wiping, my eye! What for? I know all about the way up. That's all right for a man starting in green, but I ain't green. Why, there ain't a year-old apprentice over in the shops there that don't know more about an engine than any blooming engineer on the division. You know that, Regan."

"Well," admitted the master mechanic, "you're not far wrong at that, Beezer."

"You bet, I'm not!" Beezer was emphatic. "How about me, then? Do I know an engine, every last nut and bolt in her, or don't I?"

"You do," said Regan. "And if it's any satisfaction to you to know it, I wouldn't ask for a better fitter any time than yourself."

"Then, what's the use of talking about wiping? If I've put in ten years learning the last kink there is in an engine, and have forgotten more than the best man of the engine crews'll know when he dies, what's the reason I ain't competent to run one?"

Regan reached into his back pocket for his chewing, wriggled his head till his teeth met in the plug, and tucked the tobacco back into his pocket again.

"Beezer," said he slowly, spitting out an undesirable piece of stalk, "did it ever strike you that there's a whole lot of blamed good horse doctors that'd make mighty poor jockeys, h'm?"

Beezer scowled deeply, and kicked at a piece of waste with the toe of his boot.

"All I want is a chance," he growled shortly. "Give me a chance, and I'll show you."

"You can have your chance," said Regan. "I've told you that."

"Yes," said Beezer bitterly. "It's a swell chance, ain't it? A dollar-ten a day—*wiping!* I'd be willing to go on firing for a spell."

"Wiping," said Regan, with finality, as he turned away and started toward the shops; "but you'd better chew it over again, Beezer, and have a talk with your wife before you make up your mind."

Somebody chuckled behind Beezer, and Beezer whirled like a shot. The only man in sight was Fatty MacAllister. Fatty's back was turned, and he was leaning over the main rod poking assiduously into the internals of the 1016 with a long-spouted oil can; but Beezer caught the suspicious rise and fall of the overall straps over the shoulders of Fatty's jumper.

Beezer was only human. It got Beezer on the raw, which was already pretty sore. The red flared into his face hard enough to make every individual hair in his beard incandescent; he walked over to Fatty, yanked Fatty out into the open, and shoved his face into Fatty's.

"What in blazes are you grinning at?" he inquired earnestly.

"H'm?" said Fatty.

"Yes—*h'm!*" said Beezer eloquently. "That's what I'm asking you."

Whether Fatty MacAllister was just plain lion-hearted, or a rotten bad judge of human nature isn't down on the minutes. All that shows is that he was one or the other. With some labor and exaggerated patience, he tugged a paper-covered pamphlet out of his pocket from under his jumper. It was the book of rules Beezer had "borrowed" some time before.

"Mrs. Beezer," said Fatty blandly, "was over visiting the missus this morning, and she brought this back. From what she said, I dunno as it would do any good, but I thought, perhaps, if you were going to take Regan's advice about talking to your wife, you and Mrs. Beezer might like to look it over again together before you——"

That was as far as Fatty MacAllister got. Generally speaking, the more steam there is to the square inch buckled down under the valve, the shriller the whistle is when it breaks loose. Beezer let a noise out of him that sounded like a green parrot complaining of indigestion, and went at MacAllister head on.

The oil can sailed through the air and crashed into the window glass of Clarihue's cubby-hole in the corner. There was a tangled and revolving chaos of arms and legs, and lean and fat bodies. Then a thud. There wasn't anything scientific about it. They landed on the floor and began to roll, and a pail of packing and black oil they knocked over greased the way.

There was some racket about it, and Regan heard it; so did Clarihue, and MacAllister's fireman, and another engine crew or two, and a couple of wipers. The rush reached the combatants when there wasn't more than a scant thirty-second of an inch between them and the edge of an empty pit—but a thirty-second is a whole lot sometimes.

When they stood them up and got them uncoupled, MacAllister's black eye was modestly toned down with a generous share of what had been in the packing bucket, but his fist still clutched

a handful of hair that he had separated from Beezer's beard, and Beezer's eyes were running like hydrants from the barbering. Take it all around, thanks mostly to the packing bucket, they were a fancy enough looking pair to send a high-class team of professional comedians streaking for the sidings all along the right of way to get out of their road.

It doesn't take very much, after all, to make trouble, and once started, it's worse than the measles in spreading.

Mostly, they guyed Fatty MacAllister at first; they liked his make-up better owing to the black eye. But Fatty was both generous and modest; what applause there was coming from the audience he wanted Beezer to get, as he wasn't playing the "lead."

And Beezer got it. Fatty opened up a bit, and maybe drew on his imagination a bit about what Mrs. Beezer had said to Mrs. MacAllister about Jimmy Beezer; and what Beezer had said to Regan, and Regan to Beezer, not forgetting the remark about the horse doctor.

Oh, yes, trouble once started makes the measles look as though it were out of training, and couldn't stand the first round. To go into details would take more space than a treatise on the manners and customs of the early Moabites; but, summed up, it was something like this: Mrs. Beezer paid another visit to Mrs. MacAllister, magnanimously ignoring the social obligation Mrs. MacAllister was under to repay the former call. Mrs. MacAllister received Mrs. Beezer in the kitchen over the washtubs, which was just as well for the sake of the rest of the house, for when Mrs. Beezer withdrew, somewhat shattered, but in good order, by a flank movement through the back yard, an impartial observer would have said that the kitchen had been wrecked by a gas explosion. This brought Big Cloud's one lawyer and the justice of the peace into it, and cost Beezer everything but the odd change on his month's pay check when it came.

Meanwhile, what with a disturbed condition of marital bliss at home, Beezer caught it right and left from the train crews, engine crews, and shop hands during the daytime. They hadn't anything against Beezer, not for a minute, but give a railroad crowd an opening, and there's no aggregation on earth quicker on the jump to take it. They dubbed him "Engineer" Beezer, and "Doctor" Beezer; but mostly "Doctor" Beezer, out of compliment to Regan.

Old Grumpy, the timekeeper in the shop, got so used to hearing it that he absent-mindedly wrote it down "Doctor Beezer" when he came to make up the pay roll. That put it up to Carleton, the super, who got a curt letter from the auditors' office down East, asking for particulars, and calling his attention to the fact that all medical services were performed by contract with the company. Carleton scowled perplexedly at the letter, scrawled Tommy Regan's initials at the bottom of the sheet, plus an interrogation mark, and put it in the master mechanic's basket.

Regan grinned, and wrote East, telling them facetiously to scratch out the "Doctor" and squeeze in a "J" in front of the Beezer, and it would be all right; but it didn't go—you can't get by a high-browed set of red-tape-bound expert accountants of unimpeachable integrity, who are safeguarding the company's funds like that. Hardly! They held out the money, and by the time the matter was straightened out the pay car had come and gone, and Beezer got a chance to find out how good his credit was. Considering everything, Beezer took it pretty well, though he went around as though he had boils.

But if Beezer had a grouch, and cause for one, it didn't make the other fellow's job look any the less good to Beezer. Mrs. Beezer's sharp tongue, barbed with contemptuous innuendo that quite often developed into pointed directness as to her opinion of his opinions, and the kind of an engineer he'd make, which he was obliged to listen to at night, and the men—who didn't know what an innuendo was—that he was obliged to listen to by day, didn't alter Beezer's views on that subject any, whatever else it might have

done. Beezer had a streak of stubbornness running through the boils.

He never got to blows again. His tormentors took care of that. They had MacAllister as an example that Beezer was not averse to bringing matters to an intimate issue at any time, and what they had to say they said at a safe distance. Anyhow, most of them could run faster than Beezer could, because nature had made Beezer short. Beezer got to be a pretty good shot with a two-inch washer or a one-inch nut, and he got to carrying around a supply of ammunition in the hip pocket of his overalls.

As for MacAllister, when the two ran foul of each other, as Fatty came on for his runs or signed off at the end of one, there wasn't any talking done. Regan had warned them a little too hard to take chances. They just looked at each other sour enough to turn a whole milk dairy. The men told Beezer that Fatty had rigged a punching bag up in his back yard, and was taking a correspondence course in pugilism.

Beezer said curried words.

"Driving an engine," said they, "is a dog's life, it's worse than pick slinging, there's nothing in it. Why don't you cut it out? You've had enough experience to get a job in the *shops*. Why don't you hit Regan up and change over?"

"By Christmas!" Beezer would roar, while he emptied his pocket and gave vent to mixed metaphor, "I'd show you a change over if I ever got a chance; and I'd show you there was something to running an engine besides bouncing up and down on the seat like balls with nothing but wind in them, and grining at the scenery!"

A chance—that's all Beezer asked for—a chance. And he kept on asking Regan. That dollar-ten a day looked worse than ever since Mrs. Beezer's invasion of Mrs. MacAllister's kitchen. But Regan was obdurate, and likewise was beginning to get his usually complacent outlook on life (all men with a paunch have a complacent, serene outlook on life as a compensation for the paunch) disturbed a little. Beezer and his demands were becoming ubiquitous. Regan was getting decidedly on edge.

"Firing," said Beezer. "Let me start in firing: there's as much in that as in fitting, and I can get along for the little while it'll be before you'll be down on your knees begging me to take a throttle."

"Firing, eh!" Regan finally exploded one day. "Look here, Beezer; I've about enough from you. Firing, eh? There'd have been some firing done before this that would have surprised you if you hadn't been a family man! Got that? Now forget it! The trouble with you is that you don't know what you want or what you're talking about."

"I know what I want, and I know what I'm talking about," Beezer answered doggedly; "and I'm going to keep on putting it up to you till you quit saying 'No.'"

"You'll be doing it a long time, then," said Regan bluntly, laying a few inches of engine dust with blackstrap juice; "a long time, Beezer—till I'm dead."

But it wasn't. Regan was wrong about that, dead wrong. It's queer the way things work out sometimes!

That afternoon, after a visit from Harvey, who had been promoted from division engineer to resident and assistant chief on the Devil's Slide tunnel, Carleton sent for Regan.

"Tommy," said he, as the master mechanic entered his office, "did you see Harvey?"

"No," said Regan. "I didn't know he was in town."

"He said he didn't think he'd have time to see you," said Carleton; "I guess he's gone back on Number Seven. But I told him I'd put it up to you, anyway. He says he's along now where he is handling about half a dozen dump trains, but that what he has been given to pull them with, as near as he can figure out, is the prehistoric junk of the iron age."

"I saw the engines when they went through," Regan chuckled. "All the master mechanics on the system cleaned up on him. I sent him the old Two-

twenty-three myself. Harvey's telling the truth so far. What's next?"

"Well," Carleton smiled, "he says the string and tin rivets they're put together with comes off so fast he can't keep more than half of them in commission at once. He wants a good fitter sent up there on a permanent job. What do you say?"

"Say?" Regan fairly shouted. "Why I say God bless that man!"

"H'm?" inquired Carleton.

"Beezer," said Regan breathlessly. "Tell him he can have Beezer. Wire him I'll send up Beezer. He wants a good fitter, does he? Well, Beezer's the best fitter on the pay roll, that's straight. I always liked Harvey—glad to do him a good turn—Harvey gets the best."

Carleton crammed the dottle down in the bowl of his pipe with his forefinger, and looked at Regan quizzically.

"I've heard something about it," said he. "What's the matter with Beezer?"

"Packing loose around his dome cover, and the steam spurts out through the cracked joint all over you every time you go near him," said Regan. "He's had me crazy for a month. He's got it into his nut that he could beat any engineer on the division at his own game, thinks the game's a cinch, and is sour on his own. That's about all, but it's enough. Say, you wire Harvey that I'll send him Beezer."

Carleton grinned.

"Suppose Beezer doesn't want to go?" he suggested.

"He'll go," said Regan grimly. "According to the neighbors, his home life at present ain't a perennial dream of delight, and he'll beat it as joyful as a live fly yanked off the sheet of fly paper it's been stuck on; besides, he's getting to be a regular spitfire around the yards. You leave it to me—he'll go."

And Beezer went.

You know the Devil's Slide. Everybody knows it; and everybody has seen it scores of times, even if they've never been within a thousand miles of the Rockies. The road carried it for years on the back covers of the magazines printed in colors. The Transcontinental's publicity man was a live one, he played it up hard, and as a bit of scenic effect it was worth all he put into it—there was nothing on the continent to touch it.

One thing the pictures didn't show was the approach to the Devil's Slide. It came along the bottoms fairly straight and level, the track did, for some five miles from the Bend, until about a mile from the summit, where it hit a long, stiff, heavy climb, that took the breath out of the best-type engine that Regan, representing the motive-power department, had to offer. And here, the last few hundred yards were taken with long-interval, snorting roars from the exhaust, that echoed up and down the valley, and back and forward from the hills like a thousand thunders, or the play of a park of artillery, and the pace was a crawl—you could get out and walk if you wanted to. That was the approach to the Devil's Slide on a westbound run, you understand?

Then, once over the summit, the Devil's Slide stretched out ahead, and in its two reeling, drunken, zigzag miles dropped from where it made you dizzy to lean out of the cab window, and see the Glacier River swirling below to where the right of way in a friendly, intimate fashion hugged the Glacier again at its own bed level. How much of a drop is that two miles? Grade percentages and dry figures don't mean very much, do they? Take it another way. It dropped so hard and fast that that's what the directors were spending three million dollars for—to divide that drop by two! It just *dropped*—not an incline, not by any means—just a drop. However——

When it was all over the cause of it figured out something like this—we'll get to the effect and Beezer in a second. Engine 1016 with Number One, the Imperial Limited, westbound, and with MacAllister in the cab, blew out a staybolt one afternoon about two miles west of the Bend. And, quicker than you could wink, the cab was all live steam and boiling water. The fireman screamed and jumped. MacAllis-

ter, blinded and scalded, his hands literally torn from the throttle and "air" before he could latch in, fell back half unconscious to the floor, wriggled to the gangway, and flung himself out. He sobbed like a broken-hearted child afterward when he told his story.

"I left her," he said. "I couldn't help it. The agony wasn't human—I couldn't stand it. I was already past knowing what I was doing; but the thought went through my mind that the pressure'd be down and she'd stop herself before she got up the mile climb to the summit. That's the last I remember."

Spider Kelly, the conductor, testified that he hadn't noticed anything wrong until after they were over the summit—they'd come along the bottoms at a stiff clip, as they always did, to get a start up the long grade. They had slackened up almost to a standstill, as usual, when they topped the summit; then they commenced to go down the Slide, and were speeding up before he realized it. He put on the emergency brakes then, but they wouldn't work. Why? It was never explained. Whether the angle cock had never been properly thrown into its socket and had worked loose and shut off the "air" from the coaches, or whether (and queerer things than that have happened in railroading) it just plain went wrong, no one ever knew. They found the trouble there, that was all. The emergency wouldn't work, and that was all that Spider Kelly knew then.

Now, Beezer had been out on the construction work about two weeks when this happened, about two of the busiest weeks Beezer had ever put in in his life. Harvey hadn't drawn the long bow any in describing what the master mechanics had put over on him to haul his dump carts with. They were engines of the vintage of James Watt, and Beezer's task in keeping them within the semblance of even a very low coefficient of efficiency was no sinecure. Harvey had six of these monstrosities, and, as he had started his work at both ends at once, with a cutting at the base of the Devil's Slide and another at the summit, he divided them up, three to each camp, and it kept Beezer about as busy as a one-handed paperhanger with the hives, running up and down those two miles, answering "first-aid" hurry calls from first one and then the other.

The way Beezer negotiated those two miles was simple. He'd swing the cab or pilot of the first train along in the direction, up or down, that he wanted to go, and that's how he happened to be standing that afternoon on the track opposite the upper construction camp about a hundred yards below the summit, when Number One climbed up the approach, poked her nose over the top of the grade, crawling like a snail that's worn out with exertion, and then began to gather speed a little, tobogganlike, as she started down the Devil's Slide toward him.

Beezer gave a look at her and rubbed his eyes. There wasn't anything to be seen back of the oncoming big mountain racer's cab but a swirling, white, vapory cloud. It was breezing pretty stiff through the hills that day, and his first thought was that she was blowing from a full head, and the wind was playing tricks with the escaping steam. With the next look he gulped hard—the steam was coming from the cab—not the dome. It was the 1016, MacAllister's engine, and when he happened to go up or down on her he always chose the pilot instead of the cab. Beezer never forced his society on any man. But this time he let the pilot go by him—there was something wrong, and badly wrong at that. The cab glass showed all misty white inside, and there was no sign of MacAllister. The drivers were spinning, and the exhaust, indicating a wide-flung throttle, was quickening into a rattle of sharp, resonant barks as the cab came abreast of him.

Beezer jumped for the gangway, caught the rail with one hand, clung there an instant, and then the tools in his other hand dropped to the ground as, with a choking gasp, he covered his face, and fell back to the ground himself.

By the time he got his wits about him

again, the tender had gone by. Then Beezer started to run, and his face was as white as the steam he had stuck his head into in the empty cab. He dashed along beside the track, along past the tender, past the gangway, past the thundering drivers, and with every foot the 1016 and the Imperial Limited, Number One, westbound, was hitting up the pace. When he got level with the cylinder, it was as if he had come to a halt, though his lungs were bursting, and he was straining with every pound that was in him. He was barely gaining by the matter of inches, and in about another minute he was due to lose by feet. But he nosed in over the tape in a dead heat, flung himself sideways, and, with his fingers clutching at the drawbar, landed panting and pretty well all in on the pilot. A minute it took him to get his breath and balance, then he crawled to the footplate, swung onto the steam chest, and from there to the running board.

Here, for the first time, Beezer got a view of things and a somewhat more comprehensive realization of what he was up against, and his heart went into his mouth and his mouth went dry. Far down below him, in a sheer drop to the base of the cañon wall, wound the Glacier like a silver thread; in front, a gray, sullen mass of rock loomed up dead ahead, the right of way swerving sharply to the right as it skirted it in a breath-taking curve; and with every second the 1016 and her trailing string of coaches was plunging faster and faster down the grade. The wind was already ringing in his ears. There was a sudden lurch, a shock, as she struck the curve. Beezer flung his arms around the handrail and hung on grimly. She righted, found her wheel base again, and darted like an arrow into the tangent.

Beezer's face was whiter now than death itself. There were curves without number ahead, curves to which that first was but child's play, that even at their present speed would hurl them from the track and send them crashing in splinters through the hideous depths into the valley below. It was stop her, or death; death, sure, certain, absolute, and quick, for himself and every man, woman, and child, from colonist coach to the solid-mahogany, brass-railed Pullmans and observation cars that rocked behind him.

There was no getting into the cab through the gangway; his one glance had told him that. There was only one other way, little better than a chance, and he had taken it. Blue-lipped with fear—that glance into the nothingness almost below his feet had shaken his nerve and turned him sick and dizzy—Beezer, like a man clinging to a crag, edged along the running board, gained the rear end, and, holding on tightly with both hands, lifted his foot, and with a kick shattered the front-cab glass; another kick, and the window frame gave way, and, backing in, feet first, Beezer began to lower himself into the cab.

Meanwhile, white-faced men stood at Spence's elbow in the dispatcher's office at Big Cloud. Some section hands had followed Number One out of the Bend in a hand car, and had found MacAllister and his fireman about two hundred yards apart on opposite sides of the right of way. Both were unconscious. The section hands had picked them up, pumped madly back to the Bend, and made their report.

Carleton—"Royal"—Carleton, leaning over Spence, never moved, only the muscles of his jaw twitched; Regan, as he always did in times of stress, swore to himself in a grumbling undertone. There was no other sound in the room save the incessant click of the sender, as Spence frantically called the construction camp at the summit of the Slide; there was a chance, one in a thousand, that the section hands had got back to the Bend before Number One had reached the top of the grade.

Then, suddenly, the sounder broke, and Spence began to spell off the words.

"Number One passed here five minutes ago. What's the matter? What's——"

Regan went down into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"Wild," he whispered, and his whisper was like an awe-stricken sob. "Running wild on the Devil's Slide. *No one in the cab.* Heaven help us!"

There was a look on Carleton's face no words could describe. It was gray, gray with a sickness that was a sickness of his soul; but his words came crisp and clear, cold as steel, and without a tremor:

"Clear the line, Spence. Get out the wrecking crew, and send the callers for the doctors—that's all that's left for us to do."

But while Big Cloud was making grim preparations for disaster, Beezer in no less grim a way was averting it, and his salvation together with that of every soul aboard the train came, in a measure at least, from the very source wherein lay their danger—the speed. That, and the fact that the pressure MacAllister had thought would drop before the summit was reached, was at last exhausting itself. The cab was less dense, and the speed whipping the wind through the now open window helped a whole lot more, but it was still a swirling mass of vapor.

Beezer lowered himself in, his foot touched the segment, and then found the floor. The 1016 was rocking like a storm-tossed liner. Again there came the sickening, deadly slew as she struck a curve, the nauseating pause as she hung in air with whirring drivers. Beezer shut his eyes and waited. There was a lurch, another and another, fast and quick like a dog shaking itself from a cold plunge—she was still on the right of way.

Beezer wriggled over on his back now, and, with head hanging out over the running board, groped with his hands for the levers. Around his legs something warm and tight seemed to clinch and wrap itself. He edged forward a little farther. His hand closed on the throttle and flung it in. A fierce, agonizing pain shot through his arm as something spurted upon it, withering it, blistering it. The fingers of his other hand were clasped on the air latch, and he began to check—then, unable to endure it longer, he threw it wide. There was a terrific jolt, a shock that keeled him over on his side as the brake shoes locked, the angry grind and crunch of the wheel tires, and the screech of skidding drivers.

He dragged himself out and crouched again on the running board. Behind him, like a wriggling snake, the coaches swayed and writhed crazily, swinging from side to side in drunken, reeling arcs. A deafening roar of beating flanges and pounding trucks was in his ears. And shriller, more piercing, the screams of the brake shoes as they bit and held. He turned his head and looked down the right of way, and his eyes held there, riveted and fascinated. Two hundred yards ahead was the worst twist on the Slide, where the jutting cliff of Old Piebald Mountain stuck out over the precipice, and the track hugged around it in a circle like a fly crawling around a wall.

Beezer groaned and shut his eyes again. They say that in the presence of expected death sometimes one thinks of a whole lot of things. Engineer Beezer, in charge of Number One, the Imperial Limited, did then; but mostly he was contrasting up the relative merits of a workbench and a throttle, and there wasn't any doubt in Beezer's mind about which he'd take if he ever got the chance to take anything again.

When he opened his eyes, Old Piebald Mountain was still ahead of him, about *ten feet* ahead of him, and the pony truck was on the curve, but they had stopped, and Spider Kelly and a couple of mail clerks were trying to tear his hands away from the dead grip he'd got on the handrail. It was a weak and shaken Beezer, a Beezer about as flabby as a sack of flour, that they finally lifted down off the running board.

There was nothing small about Regan—there never was. He came down on the wrecking train, and, when he had had a look at the 1016, and had heard Kelly's story, he went back up to the construction camp, where Beezer had been outfitted with leg and arm bandages.

"Beezer," said he, "I didn't say *all*

horse doctors wouldn't make jockeys—what? You can have an engine any time you want one."

Beezer shook his head slowly.

"No," said he thoughtfully; "I guess I don't want one."

Regan's jaw dropped, and his fat, little face puckered up as he stared at Beezer.

"Don't want one!" he gasped. "Don't want one! After howling for one for three months, now that you can have it, you don't want it! Say, Beezer, what's the matter with you, h'm?"

But there wasn't anything the matter with Beezer. He was just getting convalescent, that's all. There's a whole lot of men like Beezer.

Tonopah

By Robert V. Carr

SLUNG his money like he knowed
He had staked the mother lode;
Wine and song and all the rest—
Everything the very best.
Said he wanted to get rid
Of his excess dust—*he did!*
Wildest spender ever saw;
Struck it rich, had Tonopah.

Friends had he—fair-weather kind;
But he did not seem to mind.
Said that he proposed to live
While he had a chance, and give
Every kind of sin a test,
So he'd know which was the best.
Swiftest sport I ever saw,
That prospector, Tonopah.

Throwed his coin across the bars;
Smoked them dollar-each cigars;
Buys of diamonds 'bout a peck,
This and that girl to bedeck.
"Sparkler for a smile," says he;
"Nothin' cheap now goes with me."
And the beat I never saw
Of that there young Tonopah.

Then one day the cuss went broke;
Put his watch and chain in soak;
Friends began to drift away
And to dodge the sad-faced jay.
See that poor bum over there
Beggin' for two bits? I swear!
That's the *young sport* I once saw,
Down and out—*old Tonopah!*

Gun Smoke

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "The Lady from Missouri," "The Miracle," Etc.

The friendship of the range is a very real thing. When a range-raised man is your friend everything he has got is yours for the asking. And if you are range raised he takes it for granted that you will go through gun smoke for him

DOC STRATE tells me one time that while he scrapped his way through the war from hell to breakfast, he never does get used to the zippin' of them bullets of the Southern boys. Doc showed me one of them tintypes of himself and his little old color guard. There they had the flag between 'em, and they'd been through more battles and skirmishes than they had fingers and toes; but none of 'em looked old enough to be out of their mother's sight.

Doc tells me he's sixteen when he puts on the blue and grabs one of them muskets that shoots a croquet ball.

"But," says Doc, "I never did get used to bein' shot at. Of course, I quit dodgin' exteriorily"—that's the word he used, and it's a bird—"but interiorily, Johnny, I sure ducked every time the lead started a-whizzin'. Many's the time I've been so scared I'd 'a' burnt up the road a-runnin' if I could. The only reason I stayed in many a fight was because I was too scared to run. You never do get used to bullets. Still," adds Doc, as his mind travels back, "I wouldn't mind to hear a little shootin' once more. Wouldn't mind to move forward, guidin' center, with the officers a-cussin', and the smell of gun smoke—well, Johnny, after all's said and done, a man can't forget his fightin' days."

Doc then cracks another bottle of Dutch joy, and we drink to the past. I agrees with Doc, for he's as wise an old boy as you'll meet in a day's ride.

And, like Doc, I, too, am strong for a little excitement now and then; but that hain't sayin' I'd waltz into a gun fight passin' myself bouquets.

What little brushes I have been in, I recollect that I seemed to have an icicle for a backbone, a piece of space for a stomach, and a heart that wanted to shake hands with my tonsils.

It was only my foolish pride that kept me from makin' a jack rabbit look like a tree for speed. Run? I've seen the time when, if it wasn't for cussed pride, I'd 'a' run plum' out of my clothes. I'm a natural-born coward, and it's only pride that holds me. And I'm not ashamed of it, either. In fact, I feel good over it. A man who stays because he don't know fear hain't entitled to no praise. He don't run because he don't know enough to. Them kind of men, once they learn fear, make a straight shoot for a hole, and pull it in after them. What stayin' I've done has been because I knew I'd run if I give myself a show.

This leads up to the time when I was so foolish as to take my gun out of the grip, where it had been sleepin' ever since I started to work for Billy Dayton, and go out lookin' for trouble. Believe me, I got what I was lookin' for.

I had just romped into a cow town spread out on a sagebrush flat, and was figgerin' on havin' a nice run of business. Everything looked peaceable, and as quiet as a church. To look at that town you'd think that a man could unhook a cannon on Main Street, and

not wake anybody up. There was three big stores, some six or seven saloons, a dance hall, and a lot of other joints, includin' a bank, that made up the business section of that peaceful village.

As is my system, I started out to get close to the man with the most influence. When you're rustlin' live-stock shipments, you want to get one good man pullin' for you. When you get him, the rest are easy. So in goin' over my list I finds that I know Tom McCrew, the marshal of the burg. Tom and I rode the range together, and naturally I turns to him first.

Thinks I, "Tom, bein' marshal, will have a lot of drag in this burg and the country around it. He'll head a bunch of shipments my way. I want to see him, anyway, and talk over old times. He was a right good friend of mine in days gone."

So I looks Tom up, and he is glad to see me, and we go into a saloon he owns, and has a friendly drink.

"Johnny," says he, after we'd talked a spell, "anything I can do for you will be did. I'll see that my friends ship to you if it's the last thing I do on earth. I hain't forgettin' that we rode the range together in them days when it took something besides a pair of chaps and a set of leather cuffs to make a cow-puncher. From now on consider me your right bower. I'm glad to play just as strong as you say, and just as long as you say."

"That's good enough for a setter dog," I comes back. Then we has another drink.

After a good, friendly visit, I makes a start to break away from the chief of police, but nothin' doin'. He insists that I go to dinner with him. I see nothin' wrong in that, and follers him into a restaurant, where we twines ourselves around some food.

I'm glad to see Tom, although I can't bear any man's company too long. I tire of people quick. It's a habit you get on the road. But I sees nothin' wrong in puttin' in a sociable night with him. It's apparently a wide-open town, and in a quiet way we could have a nice little evenin'. Maybe some poker, reasonable limit, and a good little visit all around. Of course, the dance hall is barred. That's with the past now. I cut that all out long ago—that is, since Leona accepted my name and me for better or worse. At times I would like to cut loose, like in cow-punchin' days, carefree and reckless, and get out a bucket of red paint, and get busy. But when I'd think of the little lady back in the Chicago flat, a-lovin' and a-trustin' me, I'd say, "Johnny, forget that red-paint idea." Then I'd go up to my room and write Leona, and feel like a saint who's just had himself laundried.

Well, when Tom and me had wore the edge off'n our appetites, the marshal lays back in his chair, and sort of posts me as to town affairs.

"Johnny," he opens up, "I'm right glad you come. I've been a-wishin' that some old cow-puncher I could depend on would drift in. And no sooner do I get the thought out of my mind when here you be. It's sure great luck."

I didn't say nothin', as I couldn't exactly see what he was drivin' at.

"As I was a-sayin'," he goes on, "there hain't nothin' I won't do for you. I know every cowman in this country, and you can gamble they are my friends. Also, you can bet the limit that I'll see that they throw their business to you."

He made it so strong that I begin to feel uneasy. He was a right good friend of mine, but I had learned that even when the best of friends begin layin' on the salve it's the opener to askin' for something. Even Leona is sweeter than usual when about to make me do something for her. I wonders if Tom is a-figgerin' on borrowin' some money, or what. I'd let him have my roll in a minute, and felt he ought to say so if he wanted it. Still, it hain't money he wants, for his saloon is a regular mint.

I finally says: "I sure appreciate your kindness, Tom, and am ready to play any reasonable come-back you name."

'That's the idea!" he puts out, happy

and pleased. "I'll help you get shipments, and you can set in on my game here in town. I sure need a reliable assistant—a man who, as the feller says, won't hand you a cactus when you ask for a chew."

"What-for kind of game?" I asks him. Tom was a good friend, but, then——

He leans toward me, after looking around, and says, in a low voice: "The town's against me, Johnny. The tinhorns want my scalp. I've tightened up on 'em, and they're sore. They think because I'm in the business—you know I have a game or two in my place—that I ought to let 'em run wild, and trim every cow-puncher that comes to town."

I began to see daylight. Tom was marshal, and owned a saloon and gamblin' joint besides. Naturally the gamblers thought he would let 'em do as they pleased. Findin' that he wouldn't, they begin makin' arrangements for his funeral. I could see that bein' Tom McCrew's friend had several points that had barbs on 'em. These here shootin' tinhorns don't figger things very fine. All they wants to know is whether I'm seen with Tom. If I be, I'm his friend. If I'm his friend, I hain't theirs, and that's a cinch. Consequently when the ball opens I'm due to share in Tom's luck, good or bad, if present. I felt pretty much like leavin' town. Still, I'd started in to be his friend, and my pride wouldn't let me quit. I had to stay.

So I says: "What is it you want me to do, Tom?"

"Just stay in town a few days, and stick by me. For, to tell the honest truth, there hain't a man here I can trust. The thing will come to a showdown in a day or two. I've already been sent word that Con Neill is layin' for me."

"Who's this Con Neill?" I asks, feelin' some uneasy.

"A bad actor," returns Tom. "Sort of takin' the lead of the tinhorns. Come to town three weeks ago, and wanted to open a game to get the overflow of sucker money. I wouldn't let him, as I knew he was crooked. He now says he is goin' to get me."

"Well," says I, "that hain't no cheerful outlook. What do you figger on doin'?"

"Wait for him to open," declared Tom, "now that you've agreed to help me play my hand. It sure is a piece of good luck your droppin' in. Why, I can't even trust my bartenders, and I know my deputy is carryin' water on both shoulders. But I can trust you, for you're an old cow-puncher, and will stay with a friend."

I looks at Tom for quite a spell. He's a light-complected feller with faded eyebrows and mustache. And the backs of his hands are covered with big freckles. But there was always something about him I liked. He had that tame, sad look on his face that tells of the man who will grab the naked blade of a knife, or kill you after he is down. Them hard Western fighters always have that tame, sad look, but don't go makin' any bets that they are easy, for they're bitter and bad to the finish.

"I'm sure glad to hear you talk that way, Tom," I tells him, a little slow, as my scalp was beginnin' to raise, "and I'll stick around, as you say."

He reaches over and shakes my hand. "You're my visitor from now on. I'll order my bartenders to refuse your money. You are the same boy I knew on the range."

I didn't say anything. I had joined the army for the war, and felt helpless. I was a married man, too; and what if one of them tinhorns beefed me? That would make Leona a widder, and we hadn't been married long. Say what you mind to, gettin' married makes a man careful. Before I was married I would 'a' run miles to a fight; after I got Leona I sort of tamed down. Still, in this case, I could not back out.

"I'll deputize you," Tom informs me, cheerful enough, as we goes out of the restaurant and over to the hotel. Then he adds in a brisk whisper: "There goes Con Neill now—across the street."

As I was on the outside, and between

Tom and the gambler, I felt like a man about to start to his own funeral. But Neill ducked into a saloon, and I breathed easier.

"The time hain't ripe," explains Tom. "He can't place you, and don't want to start nothin' unless he has the best of it."

"Well," says I, sorrowful and mighty sick, "come on up to my room until I get my gun."

Tom goes to my room with me, and while I'm a-fillin' my gun he talks sociable and pleasant of his affairs.

"This is the first time I've been without Betsy for several days," he says.

That "Betsy" surprised me.

"Betsy?" asks I. "I thought you were a single man, Tom."

He laughs a laugh with no sound to it.

"I hain't talkin' about a woman, to say nothin' of a wife. That's a name I has for the best sawed-off, muzzle-loadin' shotgun in town. I done left it with my bartender just before I met you. I been a-packin' it for Neill. But as he hain't offered to open up, and avoids me, I laid Betsy aside for a spell. It's tiresome packin' a shotgun thataway."

"I should say so," I agrees with him. "Not only tiresome, but nervous work."

I finished loadin' my gun, strapped it on, saw that it didn't stick in the holster, and turned to Tom. "Whatever happens," I tell him, mournful like, "I'm lookin' to you to see that the news is broke to my wife easy."

"Johnny," he says, mighty earnest, "you can depend on me doin' the right thing if you get hurt. As a friend, you are backin' my game; and, as a friend, I'll make good whatever you lose. If everything goes O. K., I won't rest until your firm gets every hoof in this country."

While I'd do anything short of burnin' a city to get business, the idea of becomin' a target so as to drag down the shipments of that neck of the woods made no strong hit with me. Yet I couldn't very well refuse Tom. I knew if I quit him he wouldn't say nothin', just get polite all of a sudden, and look at me. I hate to have a man look at me the way I knew Tom would if I showed I was afraid. As a matter of fact, he didn't think he was askin' much of me. If it was turned around, and I was a Chicago police officer huntin' a bunch of holdups, I knew I couldn't stop Tom from helpin' me. You will understand that range-raised men are different than the usual run. When a range-raised man is your friend, everything he's got is yours for the askin'. And if you're range raised he takes it for granted that you're the same way. No, there wasn't no way I could leave that town and feel decent.

With near the same feelin's as those of a man about to be hung, I follers Tom back on the street.

Just then there came a little indication of what I might expect as Tom McCrew's friend. A desperate-lookin' critter on a hoss was foggin' up and down Main Street, shootin' and yellin'. As we start to cross the street the bad actor charges toward us.

"That's a Sundance sport," says Tom. "The tinhorns are puttin' him up to worry me. Well, I hain't a-goin' to be worried."

Tom jerks his gun and walks toward the bad one, who's just let a yell you can hear for miles.

"Stop that bawlin', and get off the street!" yells Tom, hard and cold.

But the Sundance sport waves his gun, sets the spurs in his hoss, and acts like he's goin' to run us down. He thinks that Tom won't shoot. It was the mistake of his life. Tom breaks one of the rooster's wings, his gun falls to the ground, and he loses his bridle reins. His hoss turns and trots up the street, with him a-weavin' in the saddle. Some men run out and grab the hoss, and help the bad actor down and into a saloon.

Growls Tom: "That's just the way they've been botherin' me the last three weeks. If it hain't one thing it's another. They're baitin' me like a bear in a cage."

I begin to see more and more the drawbacks to bein' a friend of Tom

McCrew's. Friendship is all right, and a road man has to do a lot of queer things to get business; but a hunk of lead hain't no theory nor sentiment—it's a hard-boiled fact. And to stay in Tom McCrew's vicinity meant that I stood a good chance of becomin' a lead mine.

After the subduin' of the Sundance sport, we goes into Tom's saloon, and things begin to shape up. While Tom had said he couldn't trust his bartenders, it seems that he was mistaken about his day man.

As soon as he could, the day bartender gets Tom's ear, and they have quite a talk.

Then Tom turns to me, and explains: "Neill has done made his first move. He sent a scout in here with a bundle of money to fix my bartender. Neill's idea was to get my bartender to plug the nipples of my shotgun, so it wouldn't speak its piece when called on. Bill here"—he nods toward the barkeep—"takes the Neill money, and pretends that he's against me, and will plug the shotgun accordin' to Neill's idea. Neill's scout hangs around until Bill plugs the gun, and now Con Neill is waitin' for yours truly to show up on the street with a gun that won't fire. Hain't it a caution what some men will do?"

"It sure is," I replies, breathin' hard, and keepin' my eyes on the door.

"You'll excuse me," says Tom, "until I slip Betsy under my coat and go in the back room and fix her so she can talk."

I nods, but with my eyes on the door. I would have hated to have Con Neill suddenly fill that door, and me alone. I believe I'd 'a' broke out the side of the buildin'. While a gun fight is cleaner work than a knock-down and drag-out, it has a feelin' of suspense hung to it that makes you nervous. Gun smoke hain't no soothin' narcotic, believe me.

Pretty soon Tom comes back, with Betsy all ready to speak her little piece.

"Now," plans he, "we'll go out on the street. You keep a little to my rear, so no one can get me in the back. Neill is now ready to open on me as soon as he sees me. He thinks he's safe, and don't know that I've just fed Betsy a handful of buck. Watch my back, Johnny, and down the first man what flashes a gun. I'll take care of Neill."

Says I to myself: "Johnny Reeves, you're the biggest fool west of the Missouri. Here you are, young and happily married, and a-buttin' into a gun fight just because a man happens to be your friend. You hain't got a thing in the world against this Con Neill. He never done you any harm. What a cheap chump you be, anyhow, runnin' into useless trouble. Let Tom skin his own polecats. Tell him you cannot take the chances; tell him your wife is sick; tell him anything, but get out, Johnny, get out!"

Then says I to myself: "You poor, cowardly fool! It hain't the idea of what you got to lose or win, but it's a question of whether you've the nerve to foller Tom or not. If you haven't any nerve this time you won't have it when it's your own fight. A man either stands up to the iron or bawls and breaks and runs. What are you goin' to do? Speak quick, for time's passin'!"

Then says a little, cheepin' voice to myself: "I guess, Johnny, you'd better stay with Tom. It's always easy to find excuses to desert a friend, or to be careful of your little life. Besides, you hain't so much. You're only one of millions. You put too high a price on your little mosquito life. That, too, is easy to do. Any dub thinks his ten-cent life is worth a million, and it's generally the cheapest men that value their soft, shrinkin' bodies the most."

"That bein' the case," says I to myself, "I will see this little affair through to the finish. I know I am scared, and for that reason I will stay."

Then to Tom: "When you're ready, lead on; I'll foller."

He looks at me, and grins slow. "It's sure good luck to have a friend like you, Johnny."

I don't say nothin', and Tom cocks his buckshot scatterer, throws it in the hollow of his left arm, and heads out

of the saloon. I foller, my voice all gone, my stomach against my backbone, and my feet a-weighin' two ton apiece.

It was a nice, bright day, and I could hear a meadow lark a-singin' some place. The street seemed deserted. The town looked like some sleepy Eastern village, only for the mountains to the west, and the sagebrush a-stretchin' away to the east. I noticed every little thing. There was a chicken a-scratchin' away in the middle of the street, and a cur dog fightin' flies under an old wagon in a vacant lot next to the bank.

I felt hot and then cold. There were a lot of queer thoughts surgin' through my head. I remembered settin' in a Chicago café with Leona. "Was it years ago," I asked myself, "that I set in that Chicago café, listenin' to the music and admirin' the sweetest woman on earth, or just a few days?"

It's well enough to talk or read about gun fightin', but I want to tell you that when you're goin' against the real thing you certainly feel like you hain't nothin' inside of you—plum' vacant.

But Tom—if he lived—would make that country solid for Billy Dayton; and besides I'd started in to be Tom's friend. I never did like to do things halfway. I hate a cheap man. If a man is my friend, regardless of what he expects to win off'n me, I want him to come all the way through. And for my part, when I go up against the game of friendship I play as long as I've a chip left. I was range raised, and didn't know no better.

It seems like a million years, but it was only a minute or two when Con Neill slips out of a saloon on the other side of the street, and—brisk, deadly, and certain—bounds down off the sidewalk.

My heart comes up in my neck, and, like a man with the nightmare, I reach for my gun. I see the shine of steel in Neill's hand, then to my left a man reachin' for a gun. I throws my gun down on him, for I knows he's a Neill man posted to get Tom in the rear, and cuts loose. He pitches forward to the edge of the sidewalk, grabs a hitchin' post, and hangs to it, weavin' back and forth. I think I see another man gettin' a line on Tom. I lick two loads at him, and he dodges back out of sight.

Then, like a man in a dream, I hear Neill's gun crack, and the beller of Tom's shotgun. I turn to find Tom staggerin', with a chunk of lead in his shoulder.

Neill is a-layin' in the street on his back, strainin' upward with his chest, and beatin' the earth with the backs of his hands. The life is comin' out of him hard.

"Watch him!" yells Tom. "I give him both barrels."

He drops his shotgun, and reels against me. I catch him with my left, and my gun ready in my right. And, with Tom a-hangin' to me, I wait for what may come.

The street is quiet. The chicken has fluttered away, the dog hit the trail, and there hain't a man but us two, the man hangin' to the post, and the dyin' Neill in plain sight. I see several heads peekin' around corners of buildin's, and men standin' to the side of open doors, but everybody keeps off the sidewalks and the street.

Tom gathers himself and breaks away from me, and staggers across the street to Neill's side. I go with him, watchful and strung up to the last notch.

Tom grabs me again and looks down at Neill.

"What you got to say, Con?" he asks, in a low voice.

The gambler looks up at him with big, black, burnin' eyes. "Double crossed!" he gasps, reaches up his chest tryin' to get air, collapses all of a sudden, and passes out.

I help Tom back to his saloon. He was hard hit, but got well. So did the feller I winged.

But although Tom made Billy Dayton's name a household word in that country, it was my last gun fight. Still, like Doc Strate, I sometimes think I'd like to hear a gun crack again, for it's in gun smoke that you find out whether you're a man or a mouse, a stayer or a breeze-splittin' excuse maker.

Inca Gold

By Ledward Rawlinson

The strange story of adventure told on the lonely plains of Bolivia by a tattered visitor who, though appearances were decidedly against him, insisted that he was the richest man in the world, and to prove it exhibited a portion of the lost gold of the Incas

IN a tent on the lonely, wind-swept pampas of Bolivia, Jabez B. Carter, gambler and filibuster, sat in the dim light of a tallow candle practicing sleight of hand with a pack of cards. He was a large, middle-aged man, with a big head and a bulgy, red neck, embedded between a pair of massive shoulders. His face was hard and dissipated, and a cruel look lurked in the corners of the shifty gray eyes.

Occasionally he sat back in his chair deep in thought, and at such times he puffed savagely on a long, black cigar. He was in particularly bad humor that evening, for instructions from the general manager of the Bolivia Railway Construction Company had compelled him to pack up his portable roulette wheel, and crap table, and sever all connections with the company's employees.

An hour passed. The gambler still toyed with the cards and brooded over man's inhumanity to man. There was no sound but the crackling of the dried tundra moss in the stove, and the ticking of a cheap German clock hanging on the tent pole.

Suddenly he jumped from his chair, his hand on the butt of a big revolver. For a second he waited.

"Anybody at home?" asked a voice weakly from the outside.

"I reckon there is," was the gruff reply. "What is it?"

"Let me in, please."

Without volunteering an answer, Carter unfastened the ropes in the flap of the tent and crawled awkwardly out to where the moon shone clear and white over the barren land.

Seated on the ground by the side of his pack was the ragged specter of a man, his teeth chattering with the cold.

"What d'you want?" bawled the gambler.

"Food," muttered the specter piteously.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came over from the Cordilleras."

"I think you're lying, but come on in, anyway," said Carter, with an ominous hardness in his voice as he stepped back into the tent.

The specter staggered to his feet and followed, dropping wearily down on the edge of the little camp cot. He was not pretty to look at. His hairy face was sunken, and haggard, and ghastly white. His right eye was closed. His lips were cracked and bleeding.

From a box under the table the gambler took out a tin of corned beef and cut off a heavy chunk. This he handed to the specter who fell upon it with a snarl like a hungry tiger.

For ten minutes not a word was spoken. With his hands buried deep in his pockets, Carter stood surveying his unwelcome guest with contemptuous deliberation.

"Now, if you could give me some hot coffee," said the stranger feebly, as he chewed on the last mouthful of beef, "I'd be ever so——"

"Hot coffee!" roared the gambler, waving his arms and cursing viciously. "What d'you think this is, anyway—a hotel?"

"Well, will you sell me some?"

Carter's big, red face lighted up with an amused smile. He had entertained

many tropical tramps in his wanderings south of Panama, but this was the first one who offered payment for anything, and the idea tickled him.

"Yes, I will," he agreed, "when I see the color of your money."

The specter fumbled among his rags, and, after some difficulty, pulled out an India coca bag made of llama wool.

"Well," said Carter, and he grinned, "what you got there—jackstones?"

For answer, the ragged one took out a small bar of yellow metal and threw it on the table.

With a gasp of astonishment the gambler sprang upon the ingot. "For the love of Mike!" he cried, as he took out his knife and scraped it top and bottom. "That's the pure stuff, all right." Then he turned and looked at the specter. "Have you any more like this?" he asked, in a whisper, his face shrewd and eager.

"A few samples in my pack," was the reply, "but there's hundreds of tons where that came from."

"Honest?"

"On the word of honor of the richest man on earth," asserted the specter, with a princely air.

A strange light twinkled in Carter's eyes. "I think I'll give you a drink of pisco instead of coffee," said he.

The ragged one made a gesture of assent, and Carter quickly produced a bottle of the fiery liquid of the lower country, and a long glass, which he filled to the brim. "Take a good drink," directed the gambler. "It'll warm you up."

The owner of the ingot seized the glass. "This is great," he exclaimed, gulping down the contents, "simply great.

"I'm the richest man on earth, I am," he went on, in a low, deliberate tone. "It's a bold statement, I know, but I can buy out them Astorbilts and Vanderfellers any time I want. Just fancy me, who started life drivin' a wagon for a dry-goods store in Arizona, givin' away free saloons, free libraries, battleships, and skyscrapers, and havin' my name on the front page of the papers every mornin'. It's great, I tell you, it's great."

"Tell me all about it," said Carter, sinking slowly down on the folding chair.

"Two months ago," resumed the specter, deeply in earnest, "I was workin' as helper for Dick Stevens on the construction of the new smelter at Oruro. One day Dick had a row with the superintendent, and quit. The rest of the contract men from the States quit with him, and, to be sociable, I got a time check and did the same. I never knew just what the row was all about, but I think it had somethin' to do with a Chola woman from Ventilla. Well, I went to La Paz on the stage, and hung around the Hotel Americano for a few weeks, and was about to hit the trail for Lake Titicaca and Peru, when Joe Bollard came up from the Yungas country, rollin' in money. He had a contract to build a wagon road for the Englishmen that run the Buenaventura Dredgin' Company. It was a cinch, that contract. When it came to makin' estimates, the officers of the company was all too busy playin' bridge, and poker, and tennis in La Paz, so Joe said he'd make 'em himself if they'd pay him extra, and, sure enough, they said they would. Joe got real busy all of a sudden, and classified nearly all his loose earth as solid rock, and got rock prices, to say nothin' of the bonus for the extra work makin' the estimates. Extra work, that's a joke. It was just like makin' up your own pay roll or gettin' money from home."

"That sure was a joke," the gambler observed, with a smile. "I'd like a contract of that sort myself."

"Of course you would. Well, to get back where I left off, Joe and me bein' lifelong friends—we was together on the Mexican Central, and the Denver & Rio Grande—we hit the cup that cheers pretty hard, for we hadn't seen each other in years. We took hack rides down to Obrajes, sat in boxes at the Teatro Municipal, and escorted ladies in black mantillas to bullfights. We had champagne dinners at the Hotel Guibert and canned lobster suppers at

the Americano. The *coroncls* and *capitanos* in the army saluted us as we walked around the Plaza de San Pedro, list'nin' to the music, and the *diputados* and corregidors raised their shiny, high hats. We was caballeros, señor, caballeros of the first class, and one day Joe came into my room at the hotel with an invitation for two for the president's ball. Fancy me, that once drove a dry-goods wagon in Arizona, at a president's ball! Well, next day we went over to Herschel's and ordered swell evenin' clothes lined with silk, and believe me, when we walked up the grand staircase on the night of the hop, to meet el presidente, we was all fussed up like society swells, with bows on our shoes and bay rum on our hair.

"Of course, Joe hit for the cantina the first crack out of the box to get a drink, but not for me, no, señor, I was in the ballroom with the dark-eyed señoritas in pink, and green, and yellow. By and by I was sittin' underneath a paper-palm tree, tellin' a politician's daughter about the elephants I had shot in Tucson when a plain-clothes detective came up and said my friend wanted me outside. I bowed the regulation forty-nine and three-quarter times to the señorita, and went into the next room. There stood Joe, handcuffed and covered with blood, under arrest!"

"For what?" inquired the gambler, as he inserted a fresh cigar between his teeth, and bit off the end.

"For bein' drunk and disorderly, and breakin' the minister of the interior's jaw! They took me along as an accomplice, and marched us both off to the old dobe jail on Calle Yanacoche, that the railroad boys call the American Club. Fancy two gentlemen in silk-lined evenin' dresses in a dirty South American calaboose. It wasn't right. They put us in a cell without a bed or a chair, so Joe toppled over in a heap on the floor. Along about one in the mornin' he woke up sober, and I explained the situation. 'I s'pose I'll get shot at dawn for lèse-minister-of-the-interior,' says Joe, holdin' his head in his hands and sighin' for an absinth frappé to brace him up. I told him I hoped the least they would do would be to boil him in cod-liver oil or fry him in pork grease. Then I asked him if he happened to have a knife in his glad rags, and, sure enough, he pulled out his big jackknife. The bars of the cell was only set in dobe, and in about half an hour I had hacked 'em all away. We wiggled like snakes out into the patio, knocked a soldado on the head with his own Martini, and crawled through the deserted streets.

"The dawn was just comin' up when we climbed up the hill to the Alto and threw ourselves down on the ground for a rest. It was mighty hard goin' up that hill, and the mornin' sun was cold and raw. But we was afraid to wait long. After a little while we tracked across the pampas in the direction of Ayoayo, and pretty soon we met an old Cholo leadin' a bunch of llamas loaded with *takki*. When he saw two gringos dressed up as caballeros, one covered with blood, and both without hats, he fell down on his knees and trembled like a man with the jimmies."

Carter's great sides shook with laughter. "I don't wonder the poor, old Indian was scared," he exclaimed.

"Scared?" said the other. "He was almost petrified. Then the sun came up; it was like a furnace—blist'rin' hot. We was in a big valley. On one side there was the mountains all white with snow, and on the other purple and rose-colored hills dancin' in the glare. About three in the afternoon we came in sight of a cathedral set in the middle of a little town perched on the side of a hill—I think it was Calamarca—so we branched off about a mile south to avoid bein' seen. Then the pampas got white and ripply like a desert, and we suffered for want of water. There was lakes all round us, but they was only mirages. Joe had been very quiet all day. Suddenly he got noisy, and said he wasn't goin' to run away from no half-breed Bolivianos, and was goin' to spend the night in comfort in the little inn at Ayoayo. I argued with him, but it was no use—Joe was always that way—and in the end I gave in, and we switched

off to try and find the old stage road that Jimmy Hutchins uses goin' to Oruro by way of Sicasica and Patacamaya."

"You must have been near the Corocoro trail," interposed the gambler.

The specter sat for a moment in thoughtful silence and stroked his beard with a bony, emaciated hand.

"I don't know where we was," he said, raising his voice a trifle. "We staggered on till the sun went down red as blood, and then a cold, bitin' wind came blowin' over from the snow-capped ranges and made us quit. We crouched together on the pampas all night in a bright moonlight, sufferin' tortures from thirst and cold. We was nearly froze, and didn't sleep a wink. At last mornin' came, and we started out again. Not a bird, or a beast, or a human bein' crossed our path the whole day, and all we had to eat was some dried grass like the llamas nibble on. The drivin' sand cut our hands and faces, like snow from a blizzard. Night came on once more, and next mornin' Joe was off his head. He said he was the Duke of Dublin, and accused me of stealin' his aëroplane. Before noon he was dead of pneumonia—it gets a man quick in these altitudes—and there he lies to-night, dressed in a silk-lined full-dress suit, with a thin layer of alkali dust over him for a coverin'—one of the best gringos that ever plugged a greaser."

There was a short pause. With his lone eye, haggard and hollow, the stranger gazed solemnly at the big form in the chair.

"After it was all over," he continued, with emotion, "I sat for a couple of hours on the hot pampas, thinkin' I was back in Arizona. There was the same blue haze, and the same little whirlwinds of sand jumpin', and twistin', and racin' each other to the black volcanic mountains. But there was no rattlers, no tarantulas, no Gila monsters, no lizards. It was deader'n hell.

"Along in the afternoon I said good-by to poor, old Joe, and started off—alone. I was pretty near crazy then. There was voices singin' in my ears, and the mountains kept risin' up and hittin' me in the face. I knew if I didn't get somethin' to eat and drink before long I'd cash in, too, and it was that feelin' that spurred me on. I only went a few yards at a time, and then my legs sank under me, but I kep' a-goin'. Night came on again, and the stars bobbed out. Some of 'em was twinklin' and jumpin', and the others stood still and laughed at me. The cold chilled me to the bone. I couldn't stand up no longer and down I went. I tried to sleep, but the cold and the lonesomeness wouldn't let me. It was as still as death, and, try as I would, I couldn't drive poor, old Joe from my mind.

"I sat up for a minute—and imagine how I felt when I saw a man sittin' in the sand about twenty yards away! I knew I was only seein' things, so I turned my head. A little while later I took another peep. He was still there, and had turned 'round. I could see his face in the bright moonlight—he was an Aymara Injun. 'Well,' says I to myself, 'I'm a-goin' to crawl over there and investigate. If there's a real, live Injun there, I'm still sane. If there ain't, I'm just plumb crazy.' So crawl I did. He was real, all right, and was chewin' on a bone of charqui—that's Aymara for dried mutton—but he wasn't very much alive. His cheeks was sunk, and his lips was swollen, and his eyes rolled about awful. He looked about a hundred years old."

"What then," inquired Carter eagerly.

"I lay down on my stomach about a yard away, and watched him. I wanted that charqui. I was thinkin' he might offer me a bite, but he didn't. I crept nearer. He growled like a dog, and showed his big teeth all discolored from chewin' coca. Then I got a whiff of the meat, and that settled it. It was food, and I had to have food. There wasn't enough for two, and he didn't have any more in his pack, for it was lyin' empty by his side. I put my finger to my mouth to show him I was hungry, too, but he only muttered '*Inneeca.*' I waited a little while longer, and then I took Joe's big jackknife out of my

pocket and crawled closer. In about half a minute I was chewin' on that bone."

The gambler stared with horrified eyes. He was by no means chicken-hearted, but the cold-blooded tale of this weird, one-eyed creature of the night sent a chill to his heart, and he lifted a big, protesting hand. "I think we both need a drink," he said, as he rose to his feet.

"Sure," replied the specter, with a sickly smile.

There was only one glass, so the stranger drank first, and proceeded immediately with his story. "That charqui saved my life," he declared. I've eaten in Bernardi's in Arequipa, and the Maury in Lima, and the Tivoli in Panama, but when I've forgotten their à la Españolas I'll remember that charqui. I didn't eat it, though; I just gobbled it, and eased the pain in my stomach for a while. I hunted all over for his coca bag, thinkin' there might be a few leaves left, but there wasn't, so I crawled a few yards away, and gnawed on the bone all night. I broke two teeth doin' it, but I ate that bone before dawn. When the sun turned on the heat, I got slowly up on my feet again and went a mile or two farther. There wasn't so much pain in my stomach, but my tongue was swollen and furry, and hangin' out for water.

"About noon I reached the Cordilleras as near dead as any man ever was. Somehow I managed to find water, just a little trickle from the meltin' snows above, and for hours I lay there, and lapped it up like a dog. Talk about wine! Soon I began to feel a little easier, though I still had some pain in my stomach through boltin' the charqui. Six different times I started out to get the lay of the country, only to come rushin' back for a last drink. Eventually I got away, but I hadn't gone more than a few yards when I came to a hole in the side of the mountain just like a prospect hole. I don't know what made me do it, but I struck a match and looked in. But it was no prospect hole."

"What was it?" Carter asked keenly.

"It was a cave, a natural cave with a floor as flat as that table, dressed and trimmed by hand," answered the specter, placing his hand to his side as if pressing back a sudden pain. "Of course, that got me guessin', and I went down on my hands and knees, and crept in. Then I lit another match. The cave was about fifty feet long, and about thirty feet high. The entrance had once been walled up with a big bowlder of solid rock, but it had fallen in at some time, and lay on the floor just inside. When I struck the third match I got a terrible shock."

"What——"

"Don't interrupt," retorted the stranger. "There on the floor sat three figures, all dried up like mummies, with ornaments round their necks and bracelets on their arms. They had skin like cracked parchment, and thin strands of black hair on their heads, and they was all grinnin' horrible. I was so scared I beat it back to the open air again; I hadn't calculated on anythin' like that. After another drink of water, I decided to go back. I was a little bit shaky when I got inside, but I kept my eyes away from the corpses, and walked farther down the cave, expectin' to run across the devil himself any minute. And it was then that I—I, an old hobo that worked my way down to South America on an old sugar tramp from Frisco—discovered somethin' that they've been huntin' for round these pampas for ages and ages, the same that the Englishmen tried to fish out of Lake Titicaca with a dredge and irons."

"What's that?" exclaimed the gambler, with intense interest.

"The lost gold of the Incas! By the saints above, I swear that it's there, hundreds of tons of it, from the temples of Cuzco and Tihuanaco. There's big heathen gods, twenty feet high, made of solid gold, some with red and some with green stones in their eyes; there's life-size llamas of gold, goblets, plates, and dishes. There's sheaves of corn made of gold with leaves of silver; there's gold vases with gold snakes crawlin' round their sides, gold chairs, gold ornaments, and ingots. The fa-

mous gold chain weighin' ten tons, that everybody says the Incas threw in the lake when the Spaniards was after them, is right there, too—solid gold, and all mine every ounce of it. I'm on my way to Oruro now to hire fifty teams to bring some of it in. I'll hire a special train to Antofagasta—me ridin' in a special train, honest, it's funny, and go over to Europe—to Monte Carlo and Paris. I'm a dog-gone multimillionaire, I am, and I'll make the minister of the interior a present of a year's salary, and buy him a stone house on the Prado, so he can live among the swells. I'll buy the whole blasted republic, and give it to the president of the United States. I'll buy battleships for Peru, and help 'em lick the hide off of Chile. I'll——"

"Before you do that, let's see the samples," said Carter, relighting his cigar, which had gone out.

The specter leaned forward, and opened up the heavy bundle on the floor. His face was even paler now than it had ever been, and he trembled violently as he spread out a glittering collection of rings, bracelets, necklaces, goblets, vases, and plates, all of solid gold, and crudely carved.

The excitement that had flushed the face of the gambler went out like a flash, and he smiled contemptuously.

"Well, what's the game?" he asked sharply.

"Now, that's just the point," whispered the specter. "They must be worth ten thousand pesos at least, ain't they?"

"About that," answered Carter.

"Well, you let me have two thousand for 'em so I can get some teams in Oruro and go back to the cave and get more, and they're yours."

For a full minute there was silence. Then the gambler shook his head. "I wish I could," he said, with an ugly laugh, as he unholstered his revolver and laid it gently down on the table, "but that's impossible. I agree with you that the stuff's worth at least ten thousand, but if I give you up to the police agents that have been searching the hills for the unknown gringo who stole the priceless Inca relics from the museum at La Paz six weeks ago, I shall get a reward of twenty thousand, and earn the everlasting gratitude of the Bolivian government. But that cave-in-the-mountains yarn of yours is a corker, nevertheless. Have another drink?"

A NEW BRAND OF JUSTICE

WHEN the big-hearted T. T. Williams was in charge of a San Francisco newspaper, he was much annoyed one time by constant thefts of the iron tanks used to carry the ink for the presses. Vagrants were continually stealing them and using them as scrap iron.

At last, an eighteen-year-old boy was caught red-handed in such a theft, and Williams decided that an example should be made of him. He gave Al Murphy, who worked on the paper, charge of the case and ordered him to see that it was pressed and the boy given the maximum limit of the law.

After the youth had been in jail a few days awaiting sentence, an old Irish woman entered the office and encountered Murphy, who was playing the rôle of the hard-hearted prosecutor. She told him the boy under arrest was her only son and support, and wound up with a storm of tears that would have made Niobe look like a laughing bride with her arms full of roses.

"See that door over there?" asked Murphy. "Walk right in and tell the man you see sitting there what you have just told me."

The old lady disappeared, and after a while came out. A moment later Williams rushed out, shouting for Murphy.

"Murphy!" he yelled. "What in thunder did you send that woman in to me for? Don't you know we have to have justice done in this case? Go up and tell them to let that boy out right away."

The Green Finch

AN EXPLOIT OF YORKE NORROY, DIPLOMATIC AGENT

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "An Enemy to Society," "Snobs," Etc.

(In Two Parts—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

THE CARBON KING ARRIVES.

IT was one of those dark, rainy nights when theater managers groan and head waiters are polite to the humble table d'hôter who takes water with his meals. Not a night certainly for any one to trot the streets in a pelting rain, peering at dark shop fronts in that London neighborhood formerly known as the Ratcliff Highway, where destiny decreed dark deeds enough for the whole of London town.

Yet on this particular night there was a man doing these things in that sinister neighborhood—a man careless of the fact that the rain was softening his expensive hat, drenching the Persian-lamb collar of his fur-lined coat, and spotting the soft, rich lavender tie which he wore, secured by a black pearl. Following him at a snail's pace was a taxicab with a surly driver.

The man turned out of the Ratcliff Highway into another and darker street—a something-or-other causeway—and as the gaslight of a near-by lamp-post fell on him it would have given any passer-by—there were none—a curious picture. The man seemed to have been in the rain for days. His clothes, well cut and of good cloth though they were, had lost their original pattern in masses of wrinkles. His necktie was a wet rag, and his linen collar a shapeless bit of dirty white. Little rivulets of water ran from his coat, and his hat was broken in three places. It did not seem that it could have rained long enough for him to have achieved so dismal a wreck of his clothes.

Over in the Commercial Road—they were not far from that part of Limehouse—the boys were crying out the tragedy of "The Lost Ship." The wet man shuddered a little. "Channel steamer *Prince George* sunk! Forty-five lives lost! Heroic action of one passenger!" came their cries.

"Oh, shut up!" shouted the man irritably. "Be still, you little beasts!"

"Sir? Wot, sir?" asked the surly taxi man, who, having caught a sight of the white, drawn, wolfish face above the drenched garments, was seeking safety in respect.

The man turned abruptly, and stared at him—a wild look, as wild as the night. He had the air of one who is hunted, hunted until he shows teeth at friend and foe alike. But whatever harm he was about to wish the cabman was forgotten as the flickering gaslight of a small and greasy flame in the window of a little Chinese shop revealed the name of "Sing Fat" painted on the glass.

The man paid the chauffeur, and peremptorily ordered him to go. He passed inside the shop, its doorbell jingling mechanically, an unusual-looking, dark, and smelly Chinese shop, where the selling of fans, litchi nuts, joss paper, and Oriental toys is used as a mask for the retailing of opium. A flyspecked show case held numerous ingenious devices likely to appeal to children; be-

hind it sat an Oriental with eyes of great intelligence peering through spectacles in tortoise-shell frames.

The newcomer wetted his lips, the only portion of him that was dry. "Quick!" he said. "I'm dying!"

No doubt he imagined he was, but the Chinese of the intelligent eyes knew better. He put down his volume of Weininger on "Sex and Character," unfastened the hutch door beneath the iron grating, and, in the dim light of a street lamp, searched the causeway for traces of constabulary surveillance. Finding none, he raised his oblique eyes slightly, and waved a creased palm. The white man, who knew his way well into the depths beneath the shop, crept under the iron grating, and disappeared. The intelligent-eyed Oriental closed the door.

"Back again, eh?" he thought. "Mr. Raphael King, I thought Scotland Yard was hotfoot on your trail. Two hundred thousand francs from a jeweler's in the Place Vendome. Lucky, lucky—maybe!"

He resumed his book, however, without the least trace of envy upon his placid countenance.

In the cellar of the house, guarded by a door with Judas hole through which a second watcher peeped at every knock, and identified his callers or turned them away, was Sing Fat's palace of the Oriental pleasure. The cellar was long and low, and heavy, dead smoke hung thick and cloudy about a dim lantern that was suspended from a central beam.

Built into the wall were two tiers of padded bunks, where the little, steady flames of many opium lamps burned, obscured occasionally when the thin needles holding the opium were held over the wicks. Above the hum of conversation sounded the steady drawing in of the drug through the long bamboo stems—a sound caused by the heated opium leaping into the little holes through which it was consumed.

The place was crowded, mostly with Americans who made Aldgate their headquarters, and who might be seen in the vicinity of the Three Nuns any sunny day after four o'clock in the afternoon, their average time for rising. To them Sing Fat's was like a club. Few English crooks came there, and once inside one might have imagined himself back in the Seventh Avenue cellar where Sing Fat, of Amoy, first became known to denizens of the underworld. This was a branch of the Seventh Avenue shop, and was run by Sing Fat's son, the intelligent Oriental aforesaid, a graduate of a university.

Raphael King took the first vacant bunk, rolled up his wet overcoat for a pillow, and lay down beside his little lamp. "The Ferret," who had the next bunk, pointed him out with a jerk of his head, and whispered his name.

"I'll bet there's no crime committed in London to-night," said the Ferret.

His companion, dubbed "the Wise-cracking Kid," wanted to know why.

"Everybody's here," returned the Ferret.

"Ah!" said the Wise-cracking Kid, much gratified.

"Not you," the Ferret corrected him. "You're a bluff, Paul. What makes you so dead stuck to be took for a crook, hey? Fellow with a good education, too! You give me a pain—and, say, that's my pill you're smoking!"

"Oh, is it?" asked Paul, apparently surprised, and passing the long bamboo stem over to his companion.

The Ferret held the bowl over the flame, and poked at the opium with the thin steel needle until it was entirely consumed.

"Anything I hate it's a fellow who smokes out of his turn—a hop hog! But, as I was saying, Paul, crime is plentiful down here to-night. Just look this bunch over—wire tappers, p. p.'s, pete men, moll buzzers, lemons, creepers—— And thank Heaven there's no bunch of stool pigeons along with them. Or there'd be a lot of new faces in the police line-up to-morrow who wouldn't know how they got there. How crooks do love to talk! Just talk themselves right into the hoosegow. Just you remember that, Paul, and whenever you commit a crime you keep your little

trap locked, and throw the key into the river."

"Whenever *I* commit a crime?" expostulated Paul. "Where do you get that stuff, Ferret?"

"Out of me nut, kiddo. Why don't you stop cracking wise, and go back to the ribbon counter?"

"Why," said Paul angrily, "just look at this!"

He reached up for his coat, and pulled from its inside pocket a cheap leather bill fold, from which he extracted three half-crown pieces.

"I beat a boob for this on a Baker Street bus," he said, with some pride. "Rubbed up against him, and 'nicked' this poke with a bobby right on the platform. Some work, hey?"

The Ferret took the purse, and examined it closely, throwing a reproachful look at his companion.

"Nix on all that!" he protested, for Paul was going to explain the maneuvers that secured the loot. "Nix, I tell you—nix! You about bought that leather and put the dough in it. You couldn't steal a milk can off a blind man's doorstep. Go on cooking, and talk less, or I'll bend this meal ticket of mine over your nut."

The Ferret referred to a piece of lead piping which he carried, handy for emergencies.

His companion threw down his cooking needle angrily. "Bought it, indeed!" he almost shouted. "Why, that's the fourth leather I've nicked in a week."

"Yes," retorted the Ferret lazily; "and every one of them was new, and had just a few shillings inside. I'm onto you, kiddo. Go on cooking."

"Of all the crazy things I ever heard of!" said Paul sullenly. "Want to be thought a crook—hunh!" He sniffed contemptuously.

"If you do," whispered the Ferret, raising his head from his improvised pillow, "there's the guy to cut your pattern by—'The Carbon King' there. Oh, he's some guy, is old Carbon. Get onto those eyes of his—he's about croaked somebody. Gee! I'd hate to mix up with that guy!"

The newcomer, Raphael—or, as his associates called him, the Carbon King—was staring about with that same wild, unseeing look. Others beside the Ferret noticed it, and, as King's face was familiar to almost every one there, although he had spoken to none tonight, the same feeling of fear and unrest fell on them all. Conversation ceased. The dull pitter-patter of rain, driving hard, was heard on the cellar windows.

"Water! Water!" said King suddenly. "Water! Oh, stop it! Water! Water!"

He dropped the bamboo stem and the yen-hok, and closed his ears with his palms. His voice had risen high. A soft-footed Chinese attendant hurried to him.

"You want water, sir?" he asked.

The Carbon King stared at him dully, then broke into a peal of wild laughter that chilled the bones of even so hardened and courageous a criminal as the Ferret.

"Water! Want water! Do I look as though I wanted water? Here!"

And he slapped his coat and trousers until little rivulets ran.

"Water! Water! I'm soaked in water! Inside and out! Water on the brain, too, I guess. Get away! Talk, everybody. Somebody sing! You, there, Eddie Reynard, sing! Drown that horrible sound of dripping until I've smoked myself deaf, dumb, and blind. Sing! You——"

And he added curses, wilder even than his look, or his previous words.

"He's gone screwy," whispered the Ferret as Eddie Reynard, commonly known as "The Listen-to-this Kid," because of his propensity for buttonholing friends and reciting his verses to them, lifted his voice in a ballad written by one "Tip," the Kipling of the underworld.

"Screwy, sure," the Ferret repeated.

"Who is he?" asked Paul.

"Who is he! Who——"

The Ferret paused for want of breath.

"You never heard of the Carbon King? Say, you ain't stringing me?"

Paul looked ashamed, but nodded.

"Never heard of the guy that invented the carbon pencil that'll burn out the combination of a safe so quick it's like kicking your way in in your stocking feet? You take your electric attachment, put on rubber gloves and a rubber mask, and—blooey!—there ain't no combination! See! And that's him who done it—who's made pete work one glad, sweet song, if you've got the nerve to use one of them pencils, which is some nerve, 'cause at times they burn wrong and take your hand off to keep the combination company. That's him—and he's got the nerve of a Sioux Indian. Nothing scares him. Nothing!"

Sang the Listen-to-this Kid, in his high tenor:

"He backed it three ways off the board,
Gambled, drank, and sang.
From Hector's down to the Gem Saloon,
Through the click of the dice, to the big wheel's tune;
Where the early dawn comes all too soon,
To the hustlers in the gang."

The Carbon King had closed his eyes. Opening them again, he saw the Ferret apparently for the first time, and beckoned him.

"Cook for me, Ferret," he said, his eyelids drooping wearily. "I'm tired—dead tired."

The Ferret, not questioning the right of his hero, climbed down, and Paul followed him as a matter of course. For some time the silence was unbroken, Raphael King lying with eyes closed, and using the bamboo stem mechanically. Paul, the youngster, relieved from his task of preparing the drug, lay restfully, and stared at the King, opposite, a lean, dark, sinewy fellow, with a hawklike profile, glistening white teeth, and closely cut, crisp brown hair.

CHAPTER II.

A GREAT DEED AND A PURPOSE.

Such a night at Sing Fat's was a sight Paul had seen often in the past few weeks since chance had thrown him in with another opium smoker, and he had followed up the acquaintance with the eagerness of all young literary men on the outlook for new material; hence his affectation of dishonesty and the continual use of criminals' slang, through which the Ferret had so easily penetrated. The boy found a weird Oriental something about the place, with its rows of quiet, wide-awake smokers, conversing mildly of dark doings, their faces silhouetted by the little, steady flames that dotted the darkness.

Quieted by the drug, Raphael King raised a hand, refusing more, and lay, his eyes still closed, breathing heavily.

The boy watched him, wondering what terrible thing this man had done or witnessed that he should have been so overcome by the remembrance of it—wondered, too, what secrets the Ferret had on his mind that he should start so fearfully at each knock on the door of the Judas hole—wondered as to the lives and exploits of all these desperate adventurers who surrounded him.

The boy had considerable dexterity with his fingers, which had enabled him to learn the difficult feat of preparing opium for consumption—an accomplishment that made him welcome among such people as these; and he now found himself cooking again mechanically for the Ferret, who in return gave him sound and solemn counsel against the danger of the drug.

"Here's a horrible example coming now, kid," added the Ferret by way of peroration. "He'll try to mace us, I'll bet. Don't give him no hop if he lies down. It jest encourages him."

"Evenin', mates," said a husky voice.

He was quite as disreputable as a man could well be; his hair in a frowzy tangle, his collar of celluloid broken in two places. He was known as "Yen-shi Smith," from his oft-repeated requests to all smokers that they save him the "seconds," meaning that he took the residue remaining in the pipe bowl after the opium had been smoked—the *yen-shi*—boiled it down, and mixed it with brown sherry, then peddled it as a cure for the habit, although the real use to which it was put by the slaves of the lamp was to deaden

their desire to smoke when the materials were not handy.

"I'll cook for you," said this person, coming closer.

"A fat lot!" objected the Ferret. "I don't want you around my layout, you bum! Git away from here!"

To which the newcomer paid not the slightest attention, divesting himself of his coat, and motioning Paul to the other side.

"I don't want to smoke," he said, smiling blandly. "I'll cook for you ginks. Your arms must be tired, bo. And I got to lay down somewhere. Got a lamp habit."

"A lamp habit!" jeered the Ferret, by which was meant an incontrollable desire to watch the steady little flame. "A lamp habit! What you been doin' —curing yourself with your own medicine?"

"Yep," agreed Yen-shi, taking up the pipe. "An' I done it, too."

"Slaves of the lamp!" It had been Paul's phrase. The boy could not control a little shudder as he watched the wasted hands of Yen-shi Smith, the fingers so white, so dexterous as they applied the sponge to the bowl of the pipe and twirled the yen-hok about and tested the cooking opium.

Raphael King had opened his eyes to note the nervous twitching of Yen-shi's fingers, and the water in his eyes. "You poor old bum!" he said. "Cook yourself a few."

Yen-shi thanked him dumbly. "I got to apologize fer seeming to be always broke, Carbon," he said. "Seems like I always am when I see you. But since you was here last I made some money —me and Yen-hok Annie. Exhibition smoking, you know—smoking for the slummers at a sovereign apiece to see such wickedness, us taking a couple of pills and then laying back and asking one another if we heard the little goldfish a-singing in Regent's Park. Wonderful how the suckers a-seeing the town fall fer that there stuff."

"A sucker," said Raphael King harshly. "How I hate that word! I suppose you're a wise guy—you with your dirty collar and your broken finger nails, and no place to sleep except when a chink's kind enough to let you doze off around a layout!"

"I was a-telling you, Carbon," explained Yen-shi, with the same wan smile, "Yen-hok Annie and me was doing well with this here exhibition smoking of ours when the coppers closed us up. By order of some nut or other that I'm glad to say ain't on earth no more to bother nobody," he ended viciously. "Went down on that boat this afternoon—the *Prince George*."

"Shut up, you rat!" snarled King. "Shut up! Have you ever seen men and women drown that you talk that way? No! Well, I have! Don't let me hear you say that again."

"I didn't mean nothing, Carbon," apologized Yen-shi, rather frightened. "I didn't wish him no harm. I was just reading in this hyer newspaper"—he pulled an evening edition from his hip pocket—"all about how the ship was rammed into a floating wreck. Gee, it's *some* story, boys! Seems the passengers aboard, or at least most of 'em, acted like rats—tried to rush the lifeboats and crowd the women out—when one feller, somebody nobody never heard of, flashes a gun on 'em, shoots some of 'em down like dogs, and holds 'em off until the captain and officers got the crew into some kind of shape and gets all the women off safe. Even then this hyer fellow kep' holding off the rats, makin 'em take their turns, and not crowd into the boats and swamp 'em. And he done so well that when the last lifeboat pulled off there wasn't no room left in it fer him, and he went down with the captain and the officers and some of the crew. Some guy that! Read it, Ferret."

He shoved the paper into the Ferret's hand.

"Some guy—I should say so!" said Paul, trembling with admiration. "How did he ever have the nerve to do it?"

Raphael King wetted his dry, chapped lips, and spoke in a hard voice, his eyes glittering:

"Suppose that fellow was a crook—a low-down grafter like me and you.

And suppose he'd just met a girl who was all a girl ought to be—a girl that liked him and talked to him as if he were one of her own kind. Suppose he knew he didn't have a chance to grab her because his scalp 'u'd get you a reward in any State in the Union, in almost any country in the world. Suppose even at that minute the coppers were hot on his trail, waiting to arrest him the minute he set foot in Folkestone, and he'd been tipped off to it by wireless too late. Suppose he knew the girl 'u'd see him pinched. Suppose all those things, and then suppose he got a chance to be a man—a real, live man—and sell out knowing he'd saved her life and a few hundred others—hey? Are you all supposing like I tell you to?"

Paul, quicker of comprehension than the others, took in King's sopping clothes and bedraggled air. Reaching over, he pinched water from a corner of the older man's waistcoat.

"I'm glad to know you," the boy said suddenly and simply, and grasped King's limp hand; then to the puzzled Ferret and Yen-shi he exclaimed almost rapturously, for it was men such as this he had hoped to find in the underworld: "Don't you see, fellows? *He's the man*—the man who *did* it—the one who held the others off—who saved them all—gee!"

"You—you, Carbon!" ejaculated the Ferret. "You done that! But you ain't croaked! You're here! The paper says the guy who done all that gun play went down."

"I guess they didn't want me even in hell," said King surlily. "I got picked up by some fishermen twenty minutes after she struck. I was holding onto a plank. Curse the dirty luck of the whole thing!" he added, his eyes taking on the wild look they had had when first seen by them that night. "I was all ready to croak, resigned, even happy about it. Maybe I felt that what I'd just done might have wiped off the slate up there—made me sort of halfway square and ready to die. But it wasn't fair to let me go on living after I'd been so sure I was going that I never even went down to my cabin to get the touch I made in Paris—two hundred thousand francs' worth of 'ice' down at the bottom of the Channel by——"

He went off into fierce profanity again.

"I was so sure I was going to sell out," he finished. "It ain't fair. And here I am in London with ten pounds to my name. Not enough to buy myself a new outfit even, after just tossing away a fortune!"

"Forty thousand bucks!" said the Ferret, awed despite himself. "Forty thousand bucks!"

"Funny, ain't it?" said Yen-shi, after a long pause. "Funny how the Almighty jest don't pay no attention at all to what you personally want to do. Them as don't need hop—pleasure smokers—has lots of hop. Them as has got to have it—like me—ain't never even a shell ahead. Them as didn't want to croak—orficers with famblies dependent on them—jest sunk like stones, while you, Carbon, who didn't have nobody, and didn't want nothing, floated like a blooming cork. Hereafter I'm going to wish I may never smoke another pill; then maybe somebody ull hand me a whole can."

The Chinese attendant, creeping softly up on his felt-padded shoes, slipped the Ferret a folded piece of paper, on which was scrawled in a crude code a reminder from one of his pals that he had remained away from "The Snare" beyond his time limit, and that it was his turn to keep watch over a certain Douglas Pierce Fassidy, millionaire, whom the Ferret & Co. were holding in custody until a ransom should be collected without risk—a feat of kidnaping which had, as his excellency, the assistant secretary of state, had prophesied, "stood every policeman in the civilized world on his head." So the Ferret, with little ceremony, took himself off from Sing Fat's, steering a direct course for the river, where a boat was waiting to pick him up, and which was presently lost in the fog.

Back in Sing Fat's cellar the boy, Paul, hung on the words of Raphael

King, and Yen-shi Smith glutted himself at another's expense. King, his nerves quieted by his smoking, and his mind calm again, was telling the shameful story of other men's cowardice, dwelling lightly on his own bravery. Of his rescue by the fishing smack he also said little, explaining only that he had paid the skipper half of his slender store of money to keep the secret of his safety. To the girl he alluded once or twice as hopeless people speak of things beyond their reach.

Paul, with glowing cheeks, interrupted him.

"You forget," he said, laying a hand on the other man's arm. "You're dead. Dead—don't you see? Those policemen who were waiting for you at Folkestone—they'll find you're not among the saved. Your picture in the rogues' gallery will be turned to the wall. The Carbon King—Raphael King—whatever they know you as—is no more. You're a new man—anything you like. All you've got to do is grow a mustache, cut your hair differently, and keep track of her; and then some day—who knows?"

The somber eyes of Raphael King lightened; little by little the darkness disappeared from their depth.

"The Carbon King *is* dead," he murmured softly. "Drowned—dead—done for. No coppers looking for him—nothing to fear even. No chance her ever knowing. I never thought of that. Why, what a fool I am! I've got a new life in front of me—a new life! And a chance for her!"

He held the boy's hand so tightly that it hurt; then his grip relaxed, and his expression became doubtful.

"If I only had capital to take advantage of my start," he said. "But ten pounds! If I had that junk that is at the bottom of the Channel——"

"We can't have everything," the boy reminded him sagely.

"Right you are, youngster!" said King, almost laughing. "Right you are. It only means one more touch—a big one. Time enough to change my appearance a little, to make another carbon pencil, to sound a big joint, and pull off my last trick. Then for honesty—a new name—and her!"

He got up and slipped into his wet coat.

"How much money can you lend me for a couple of weeks?" he asked. "You can have it back as many times over as you say."

For the moment the boy forgot the character he was playing, and spoke from his heart.

"You can have all I've got, and I don't want anything back for it at all," he said, his eyes shining with remembrance of King's heroism. "But don't try to make another touch; don't be crooked again. God only gives a man the chance for a new life once. He didn't want you to start out with any crooked money. That's why that two hundred thousand francs is at the bottom of the Channel. Start square, Mr. Carbon King. Be worthy of her!"

"I can't start without capital," said King lightly. "I'm not a clerk, a bookkeeper, or a mechanic. I've got to have money to swing my schemes—there's an idea for a patent I've got in my head that'll make a fortune for me—and her—if I had ten thousand dollars to swing it with; and with the police off my trail I'll get that ten thousand in a week—easy!"

From the manner in which he lit a cigarette and smiled, one might have imagined Raphael King was speaking of an action as trivial as writing a check on a bank for that amount; but despite his apparent carelessness, one sentence of the boy's kept running through his head:

"He didn't want you to start out with any crooked money. That's why that two hundred thousand francs is at the bottom of the Channel."

CHAPTER III.

NORROY PLANS A COUP.

Two weeks previous Douglas Pierce Fassidy, the American millionaire, while in London, had mysteriously disappeared. Rumor had it that Fassidy had been kidnaped, and Yorke Norroy,

chief of the diplomatic secret agents, was supposed to have had the matter under investigation. But in those two weeks Yorke Norroy had done nothing, according to the view of the assistant secretary of state, who was then in England. That official, who had been booked to sail home long since, still remained in London to worry Mr. Norroy and to hamper his progress, until finally he made the recommendation to his chief that Norroy be removed from his position as head of the underground service. This was the assistant secretary's letter, following several frantic cables:

I have to report that on the evening of the nineteenth instant, Mr. Norroy told me that Mr. Fassidy had in his possession one of the six plates of Chinese jade on which are carved the formulæ for making opium, and which your excellency commissioned Mr. Norroy to secure. It seems that he had neither the ingenuity nor the diplomacy to obtain this plate from Mr. Fassidy, his only suggestion for securing the plate being a scheme to kidnap the gentleman, and hold him until he gave the plate up as ransom. I forbade emphatically that he do any such thing, for Mr. Fassidy is one of the staunchest supporters of the party, and one of the most liberal contributors to the campaign fund.

After reading the last sentence his excellency, the secretary of state, felt overcome with nausea; and, lifting the telephone receiver, asked that his office in the State, War, and Navy Building be connected with the White House, and that the chief executive be informed of the state department's pressing need of speech with him.

"A man like Norroy being emphatically forbidden by that puppy!" groaned the secretary of state. He read on with angry eyes:

Mr. Norroy defied my instructions. I then told him I should take up the matter of his insubordination with you—see my cabled reports—also that I should personally instruct every United States secret agent in London not to assist him, on peril of being instantly discharged from the service. It appears that I was obeyed in the latter matter, Mr. Norroy not caring to match his authority against mine—no doubt knowing that, if it came to an issue, the other secret agents would prefer disobeying him to disobeying me——

"And every one of them would follow Norroy through a fiery furnace if he said the word!" thought the secretary, madly tugging at his mustache. "Oh, the fool! The matchless, terrible, self-opinionated fool!"

The report continued:

Mr. Norroy, nevertheless, carried out his kidnaping as he had arranged, disregarding me and all the decencies of civilized conduct, hiring a crew of professional thieves to do the work I had forbidden the agents to do. The consequences were, as you know—see my cables of the twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-second—disastrous; for while Mr. Norroy was at the safe-deposit vaults, masquerading as Mr. Fassidy, and opening Mr. Fassidy's vault with the key he had purloined from Mr. Fassidy's person, he left Mr. Fassidy in charge of his helpers, the thieves he had hired, who promptly took a leaf from Mr. Norroy's infamous book, and carried Mr. Fassidy to parts unknown.

Mr. Norroy, as might be supposed, expresses no regret at Mr. Fassidy's position, caused by his criminal action, but informs me casually that he will rescue him. But he belies his words by his actions; dawdling for hours at his tailors, boot makers, and haberdashers, attending the theater, and, only last night, taking Miss Holly Lea to the Countess of Buckley's reception, to which I had asked him to secure me an invitation, which he failed to do. He has, in fact, treated me slightingly whenever possible, and encouraged other secret agents to do the same, particularly Miss Lea, who seems to pay more attention to her stage career than to her government work. I think, therefore, if you have not already acted on my recommendation to dismiss Mr. Norroy from the service, that when you do you include Miss Lea in the dismissal, as I consider both these persons not to have the best interests of the United States at heart.

I have the honor to be, sir, respectfully yours, GERVAISE KIMBALL SUTTON,
First Assistant Secretary of State.

"No, you haven't," said the secretary of state; "you have the honor to be an ex-first assistant, little man—— Hello!" He had answered the telephone's call. "Is this the president?" And when the reply came in the affirmative he continued: "You remember Kimball Sutton, your appointee, my first assistant? I always told you he was no good. A little snob, a pronounced party man, who mixes up national politics with world politics—a thing that mustn't be done. He's got to go, sir. I must have another man. He's made a blunder over in London that'll cost us Lord knows what."

"What do you mean?" the president asked, none too well pleased. He was not admired by the secretary, who was apt to take the high hand with him, just as Norroy had done with his appointee.

"I mean that Yorke Norroy is the prop and mainstay of the state department," returned the secretary. "You and I, and every one else who owes his position to politics, are only temporary, at best. This man is a fixture. He's given up his whole life to perfecting a wonderful organization, and without him I shouldn't know which way to turn. Sutton has antagonized and humiliated him by his blatant egotism, and he's responsible for a serious mishap. If Norroy is to overcome all this he must be sure of our support. Please wire Sutton to return home and resign."

"You don't realize what you're asking," returned the chief executive. "Sutton's father and his relatives represent a large force that has always been stanch in the party's support."

"That's just the way Sutton looks at things," said the secretary, in a tired tone. "How many times must I tell you that sort of consideration must be eliminated from this department? Put Sutton somewhere else, but get him out of here. Yorke Norroy would never forgive me if he stayed."

"It would appear," said the president, in icy tones, "that Norroy runs your department, not you."

"It doesn't appear that way at all," was the secretary's retort; "but, as a matter of fact, it is true. Incidentally he has just secured the sixth jade plate —you know what I mean—and placed this country under another heavy debt of gratitude. The fact that he doesn't like you, and that you reciprocate his lack of affection, mustn't interfere in the matter. Will you wire Sutton?"

After prolonging the conversation until he could turn over in his mind the various exalted offices open and within his gift, and finding one to which he could transfer Mr. Sutton, the man of the White House consented grudgingly.

The secretary hung up the receiver, satisfied, and dictated a code message to his invaluable ally, Yorke Norroy, who at the moment he received it was explaining to his London tailor from Cork Street that his clothes in future must be made entirely different, since all existing fashions in cutting garments had been duplicated by America's "ready-to-wear" manufacturers.

"We shall have to go back half a century," said Mr. Norroy, so earnestly that one might have imagined that sartorial worries were all that he had. "Make the collars of my coats quite high hereafter—high and peaked, the shoulders sloping and joining the sleeves sharply, the trousers almost fitting the curve of the leg, and heavy weights at their bottoms to keep them down, the skirts of the coat scalloped and at a decided angle, the pockets on the same style and at the same angle —get the idea?"

The interview with the tailor was taking place in Mr. Norroy's London house, hired from a Scottish peer for the current month only, while Lord Cairves took some guests to his Highland castle for the grouse shooting. The house was on one of the most expensive streets in Mayfair, and not far from Park Lane, being turned over to Norroy with servants, plate, linen, and all et ceteras necessary to its proper maintenance intact on the day Holly Lea gave up the Rohan place, in Chetwynd Square, and returned to the Savoy Mansions.

The secretary's cable in code being handed to Norroy at this moment by the peer's second man, who wore old, but striking, livery, and had a powdered head of hair, Norroy waved the tailor to sit down, which the tailor was far too conscious of his station to do, especially when the presence of such a creature as that six-footed servitor testified so eloquently to the gulf between the tailor and his patron. Norroy read the secretary's practical dismissal of Gervaise Kimball Sutton, onto which was tagged a request to be informed as to the way Norroy intended to effect the release of that much cari-

catured and wholly disliked trust magnate, Mr. D. P. Fassidy.

Norroy smiled, and scribbled on the return blank that was appended to the envelope two words: "Tautonless Mercury," which, literally translated from the code, signified that the explanation was too long and complicated to be transmitted over a cable in an inflexible ciphergram; but with the footman gone, and forgetting the patient tailor, who stood within the velvet-curtained bay window, peering out at the lights and shadows of Mayfair, Norroy found the explanation too humorous to keep longer. Reaching for a pile of newspapers, all of the same date, and that date this particular day, he clipped one-half a column of news that concerned himself and one of those seemingly freakish actions that were apt to further confirm the world in its belief that Yorke Norroy, Esquire, leader of cotillions, originator of men's fashions, amateur actor, and languid, bored dilettante, was a man whose money exceeded his brains at a ratio of about a hundred to one.

Shorn of its headlines, the account read, in part, as follows:

The Rajah of Kahlinpor's diamond necklace of one hundred and seventy-two pure white stones, to which as a pendant is attached the famous but ill-starred cinnamon diamond, known as "The Little Brown Bear," has been sold to the American millionaire, Yorke Norroy, esquire, for one hundred thousand pounds. The Dreyfuss Corporation first held the necklace at a valuation of one quarter as much again as the price paid for it by Mr. Norroy, but on account of the ill luck constantly attending the successive wearers of "The Little Brown Bear," Dreyfuss grew impatient of having tied up so much money in something apparently unmarketable, and closed with the highest bid at auction to-day, which was that of the American gentleman aforesaid.

Mr. Norroy was immediately approached by the Assurety Loan, Insurance & Annuity Co. with an offer to insure the gems against all losses for the full amount paid—an offer immediately closed with in almost every other case where such a value is involved—but Mr. Norroy is reported to have said, with a smile:

"I shall neither insure the necklace, nor put it in a safe-deposit vault, but shall take it home to number thirteen Wilmerding Street, and lock it up in my desk until I am ready to sail for America. My belief is that the ill luck the necklace has caused its owners is due principally to the fact that they let its possession worry them out of their minds. I shall pay no more attention to it until I get ready to sail."

Mr. Norroy's remarks were almost in the nature of a sensation, and those who heard them predicted that the world would soon hear another tale of the famous necklace.

Mr. Norroy has taken Lord Cairves' house, in Wilmerding Street, for the remainder of the season, where he gives to-morrow night a dinner and dance for the young American singer, Miss Holly Lea, who recently closed her engagement at the Vaudeville as *The Devonshire Maid*, a part she originated in America, and in which she was no less successful here. Among the invited guests are the Duke and Duchess of Angus, Lady Chicketherly, Viscount Newlands, Captain R. K. Strathness-Ker, V. C.——

The article ended in a glory of noble names.

"You may perhaps ask," Norroy wrote on the sheet of paper to which he pinned the newspaper clipping, "whether I have suddenly taken leave of my senses by answering you with so frivolous an article; more than likely you will wonder where the money came from for the necklace, why I have advertised myself as an ass to all London town, and what the dickens the whole thing has to do with Fassiday, anyway.

"Putting you under the seal of strictest confidence, I will answer, in a word, 'Everything,' and explain as follows:

"I had utilized every means in my power to gain some knowledge of the whereabouts of the five men—Anthony Herries (called 'Tony Harris'), William or 'Willie' Rye, 'The Ferret,' 'Doctor Tack,' and Chilvers—who kidnaped Fassidy from me; but, although they have been reported as seen by various police informers, all efforts on the part of Scotland Yard, the private agencies employed by the Fassidy connection, and of myself and men have been without reward. These five men have found for themselves and for Fassidy some hiding place so remote, so untrackable, that the means at our disposal are quite inadequate to locate it.

"For the past week I have been of the opinion that from some noted criminal—and from such a one only—was it possible to gain the information we

sought, for that it is necessary for such people to trust one another when involved in an affair as big as this is notorious. But to gain information from such a one is almost as difficult as locating Fassidy here in England, where the police methods used in America are—quite rightly—not tolerated. How then to arrange something that would approximate 'the third degree' for some noted criminal? Obviously it was to get him to commit some crime, and then promise him immunity if he discovered for me where Fassidy was hidden.

"It was while I was in the frame of mind consequent upon turning over so knotty a problem that I drifted into Dreyfuss', and stood next to a friend of yours, as well as my own, whose name for obvious reason I withhold, and should you guess it in the future I must beg you do not use the following information against him.

"His wife was with him—a very charming woman, but greedy for gems. She was clamoring that he bid in the necklace for her, but he refused, saying that it would cost him a cool million, counting the enormous customs duties upon it. There was a treasury secret agent among the crowd whom I knew—Allan—and even had the sale been kept from the papers he would have had access to the records afterward. The idea for snaring my noted criminal came to me in that instant.

"I said to our friend: 'But if you didn't have to pay any customs duties, how about it then?'

"His wife pressed the point, and he finally said good-humoredly—he's worth fifty million—that he'd buy it for her under such circumstances.

"'Not at all,' I returned. 'Not at all. I'll buy the necklace for you, giving my check on the Credit Lyonnaise. You go to that bank while I am writing the check, and deposit your check to meet it. I will stand for—even court—an interview with the reporters who are standing around eager for the story of a new possessor of the rajah's diamonds. Your wife can remain behind here, and I will slip her the case in the crowd. Be careful when you reënter the United States to declare everything else you have bought, and as the customs spies have a record of all big jewelry sales, and you have bought no other jewels, your wife's person will not be searched, and she can wear the necklace under her clothes.'

"Well, as they've known me for years and had no doubts of my honesty—anyhow, I made it easy for them, so that he need not deposit his check, or bond, or whatever he *did* deposit to meet my check, until his wife turned up with the jewels—also, as it was a clear case of cheating somebody without risk, and as Mrs. Millionaire persisted, things turned out as described in the newspaper clipping. You will note with what care I gave my address, my intentions of not insuring the gems, my declaration that I should not put the necklace in a safe-deposit vault, but should keep it carelessly disposed of in a desk or escritoire. The number of diamonds in the necklace is enough to tell any jewelry expert—of which thieves are the greatest—that no one of the stones except the pendant is of a traceable size, and they may therefore be disposed of easily.

"Think over these details so carelessly carefully set forth in every newspaper in London. Aren't they alluring enough to draw to my new abode—which is not difficult to enter—the boldest buccaneers? I am sleeping in the day hereafter, and keeping watch at night with a specially detailed lieutenant from Scotland Yard, who is taking my valet's place for the time being, with young 'Jack' Bok, 'Van' Luyties, and several other of the corps on duty in and outside the house, some over the way at Chisholm's Private Hotel, and others as my guests. One day and night have elapsed since the publication of the article, but as yet no burglar. However, men of this stripe, the aristocracy of crime, tempted only by big chances of loot, study over the proposed field of action as generals do the country of their enemy ahead of them, sending out spies and deployers to bring them materials for their maps. Several times

to-day our scullery has been approached by gentlemanly persons who are not above making ardent advances to domestics in the pursuit of their art; and many have rung the tradesmen's bell, representing themselves as purveyors of bookish information, collectors of rates, inspectors of gas meters, and so forth. Our staff has been instructed to admit all, and accord them the fullest information.

"No doubt before this letter begins its transatlantic voyage my house shall have been feloniously entered, and I shall have had speech with the felon; while long, long before this somewhat light-headed screed shall have reached you Mr. Fassidy will be free to dishonestly gather more plums for his further enrichment. I have passed my word, and he shall go free, but save for the element of humor in my scheme I approach Fassidy's rescue with no noticeable enthusiasm. The only difference between him and his captors is that he steals with the protection of the law, the Ferret & Co. without it. Cowardly stealing—Fassidy's kind—I call it. I hate your Fassidies. However, I love to keep my word——"

The secretary of state, when he read this remarkable document some time later, smiling all through, could imagine Yorke at this point shrugging his lean shoulders and twisting his mobile lips into a wry smile. The letter ended hastily:

"Forgive my prolixity. Try to find some way to make Fassidy pay the customs duties my friends will evade—a small fortune. Really I must collect it from Fassidy myself, I think. It isn't fair the government should forfeit three hundred thousand dollars or more in duty to have Fassidy alive. He isn't worth it. Y. N."

As a matter of fact, Norroy concluded so abruptly because a slight noise from the window, caused by the patient tailor taking his weight from one foot to put it on another, attracted his attention from his private joke. With an imperative movement of his hand, he forced the tailor to sit down, then apologized.

"Now, as I was saying, about those clothes—where was I? Oh, yes—the pockets at an angle, and scalloped exactly as the skirts of the coat are; the collar high and peaked—I showed you that, didn't I? Perhaps I'd better draw it. Like this, you see, which brings the sleeves up to meet the shoulders—so."

To see him bend over the slip of paper on which he was dashing off line drawings, wrinkling his brow and biting his lips, taking it all more seriously than he had taken matters involving life, death, and the welfare of many, was only one of those curious paradoxes by which the lives of great men are marked, or marred, according to the angle of thought in viewing them. Napoleon with his dream book, Paul Jones powdering his hair before going into action, and Yorke Norroy, one hand drawing the models of clothes, the other writing history.

CHAPTER IV.

ENTERS AN EXPECTED BUT UNINVITED GUEST.

Had a careful compilation of the most desirable names in the "Court Guide" and "Who's Who" been made and compared with the list of those who attended Mr. Norroy's reception for Miss Holly Lea, there would have been found a striking similarity between the two. In England, where Society is quite sure it *is* Society, and not semisociety; where people know one another so well from childhood that they have little in the way of novelty to say to one another, Society relishes affairs very little at which no celebrities or new and amusing persons are to be found; so that, if you would be popular, invite the lions first, and the crowd will follow, providing also you have a butler who sees to it that your wines are of passable vintages.

While it would seem absurd that a resident of Fifth Avenue, New York, would expect "nice" people to attend a reception given in honor of a "musical-comedy girl," it is different near Park Lane, where such girls are greatly ad-

mired, and where débutantes' mammas like to study them at close range and instruct their daughters in the airs and graces that win the young ladies of the Gaiety so many titles.

Speaking of titles, there is no doubt that fully one-quarter of Mr. Norroy's guests were so equipped; another quarter were the sons, daughters, and relatives of titles; while a third quarter were writers, musicians, sculptors, and people of the stage. The remainder were Americans, the majority of them the "best" Americans, if the "Social Registers" of various cities could be depended upon, while those not so distinguished were, as Polly van Reypen put it, "some of those nice young friends of Yorke, who came from goodness knows where, and do the Lord knows what."

Meaning, although she did not know it, the younger members of the underground service of the state department, whose object in life, it would appear, was to convince all outsiders that they had no ambition more exalted than to knot their ties as gracefully as Norroy, and to be seen frequently lounging about the cafés, clubs, theaters, and other more or less public places in London, Paris, Berlin, New York, and Washington, although you were apt to run into one or all of them anywhere on the globe.

It was noticeable to-night that at no time were all these correctly garbed young men present en masse, but that one would slip out for half an hour or so, and after he had been gone for a few minutes another would return. This sort of thing had been going on since nine o'clock, and it was now well after one, and the dancing was over. As the people began to move in couples toward the dining room, Van Luyties, who was distinguished for having hair almost as sleekly groomed as Norroy's own, excusing himself to a certain Lady Mary Lovell, who had felt a certain pleasure at the thought that this nice-looking boy was to be her companion through the affair of pâté sandwiches, salads, and champagnes, disappeared from the crowd. He ascended swiftly the gilt-rodded blue velvet stairs, reaching the library on the next landing, which was dark, but where, nevertheless, sat John Baedeker Bok, a young man of only a few more years and a little more experience, whose wheat-colored hair refused to look like anything except that of an unruly college boy's.

Baedeker, as he preferred to be known, and who was called "the luckiest man in the corps," uncrossed one of his silken-clad ankles, yawned, and gave up his post by the garden window to Luyties.

"My luck still holds," he said. "No burglar during my trick, and I'm relieved just in time for supper. Where's that lovely Marjorie Humboldt I was talking to? I'll take her into supper or burst a vein."

"Better save money for the governor and burst it here, then, where the carpet isn't so expensive," returned Luyties, laughing. "Because she went in with Captain Tremorne, Jack."

"Oh, I'll horn myself in some way," returned Baedeker, undismayed. "I always did have a way with women, didn't I? Except—I don't know why—I'm violently in love with Holly Lea, and she insists that I'm just like a big brother."

"Does she, Jack?" smiled Luyties, well pleased.

"And how many times must I ask you not to call me 'Jack'?" asked Baedeker, annoyed by Luyties' pleasure. "Privately I believe she's in love with the governor, though the Lord help her if she is—for Yorke Norroy's the same to all of them. I believe he was the originator of that 'big-brother' thing. But she seems to have acted altogether differently of late—ever since she was in that *Prince George* disaster. Wonder if she fell in love with that fellow who stood off the cowards with a gun? Wouldn't blame her if she was, would you?"

"He's drowned, poor devil," said Luyties, in a tone that he strove to make regretful.

"But the memory of a fellow like that would be enough to keep off all

the other men for a while, wouldn't it?" asked Baedeker. "I wonder who he was? Well, hope you aren't hungry, old fellow. I'm off."

Left alone in the darkness, Van Luyties lighted a churchwarden pipe which he had taken down from a wall rack and filled from a jar on the table while he talked to Baedeker Bok. Pulling his chair close to the window, so that he could see all that passed in the garden below, yet remain unseen to any one prowling there, he fell into a deep and protracted meditation. He had met Holly Lea some months before, and loved her devotedly, but from a distance—humbly, as befitted the youngest of the corps when aspiring to the attention of the prettiest woman ever on the pay rolls of the department of state, and consequently the most successful. Moreover, there was her sudden success on the stage.

She had carried Luyties with her into the atmosphere of fashionable clubs, afternoon teas, motor cars, morning coats, and evening dress. He wondered he dared to expect more, and the fear of losing her frank comradeship had kept him silent. If he loved her hopelessly, there was no reason why he should make her sad by telling her of his love. After all, it *was* preposterous to think of winning so radiant a creature as Holly for himself when millionaires and noblemen wanted her, when she had completely captured the greatest composer of light music since Offenbach, and who was rewriting his newest operetta with her in mind.

But although the young man's mind was elsewhere, his eyes had not ceased their careful scrutiny of the garden, and now it seemed that the gray mantle that lay on it was being disturbed, that something or somebody was moving below.

Luyties felt gladness throbbing through him. At last, then, he was to have his opportunity—the one he had waited for so long. True, he had at various times been useful to Norroy in gaining information; it was he who had traced the Fassidy plate. But never before had he been placed in one of those situations of which he had heard so much from his comrades of the corps, when a steady brain and a cool head were necessary in the face of great danger. Baedeker Bok, who next to him had the briefest term of service, had plunged into a remarkable series of adventures almost immediately after his appointment. Van had hoped for some such distinguishing episodes to come his way to put him in a favorable light with Holly Lea. Here at last the chance had come. He must be worthy of it.

Crowded near the window on his knees, he peered into an arrangement of small mirrors that showed all angles of the garden and the rear of the house. He saw that a dark figure was flattened against the trelliswork below. Now it was climbing up by means of the window gratings, but on the other side of the house from where Van stood. Van's hot breath obscured the mirrors for a moment. When he looked again, he saw that the man had slowly and painfully drawn himself up to the window sill of the next room; he could see the man's legs and light tennis shoes in the dull light. But the man made no attempt to enter the window, but drew himself up to the next story, the attic. In an instant Van remembered that in the attic there was an open window. He bolted out of the room where he stood, and up the soft-carpeted stairs. He reached the outside of the door upstairs in time to hear the lightest of thuds, and he knew the burglar had dropped on the floor.

Van crowded close to the wall so that the hangings covered him. Once or twice a quick flash of electric light shot out of the attic room and into the hall; there was a sound, also, as of heavy articles being turned over for examination, but the burglar wasted little time in so unprofitable a room, and soon Van heard him tiptoeing toward the hall.

Before the intruder's first foot had been placed over the threshold three short, sharp shrieks from a police whistle sounded almost in his ear, and as he started involuntarily from the shock the powerful muscles of a sinewy and

determined youth were being strained to hold him helpless. They toppled over together, and their fall seemed to start into life all the electricity in the house, for from all points in brackets and above the wainscoting, in hall lamps, and electroliers lights flowered out of the darkness.

The man with whom the burglar struggled seemed to be an octopus, with all-embracing tentacles, some of which were holding his throat, others his legs, while yet again others bound his hands tightly. It was not until his eyes grew accustomed to the sudden light that he realized he was surrounded by a number of men who were looking at him with apparent satisfaction. One man, who wore metal buttons on his waistcoat, he recognized immediately despite the servant's attire.

"So you had me pegged all the time, eh, lieutenant?" he asked bitterly.

"Why, no," returned the other, somewhat surprised. "I never saw you before in my life."

It was hardly surprising that the lieutenant should fail in such recognition. The man who had just been helped to his feet looked more like a guardsman than a thief, with his small, upturned military mustache, his bronzed skin and closely clipped, wavy hair. The weeks King had spent as Paul's guest had been devoted to turning out quite a different person from the man who had been wanted at Folkestone; and in Starley Street his ears had been brought closer to his head, and many of the hairs in his eyebrows had been pulled out until those eyebrows were no longer bushy, as Raphael King's had been, but thin and penciled, as befitted one who posed as Ralph Kingsley, a former captain of volunteers during the Philippine insurrection.

"Now, sit down," said Yorke Norroy, who had been studying his captive closely, and with a certain amount of doubt. "Sit down."

He turned to the others, dismissing them with a wave of the hand.

"Better get back to the party," he advised. "All except you, Van. He's your captive, and you're entitled to see this through. Lieutenant, you may as well take off those valet's clothes now, and wait for me below in the library until I tell you what we will do with our interesting prisoner here. As for *you*, sir"—he spoke to King—"I have rather an interesting proposition to make to you."

Save for the sound of the music and laughter below, there was only silence when Norroy concluded his "proposition." King did not appear to have heard him, but was staring away into the mist of the garden. Norroy interpreted his thoughts:

"Of course, if you refuse, why, the whole thing resolves itself into a commonplace housebreaking case, and the lieutenant will see that all the gentle mercies of Scotland Yard are shown you. Which means Old Bailey and ten years in Dartmoor with pick and shovel."

"Give me a cigarette," said King, betraying no emotion.

Van Luyties lighted one, and placed it in his mouth. King, whose hands were bound tightly behind him, sat twirling the cigarette between his lips, seemingly absorbed in nothing save keeping the smoke out of his eyes.

"Send for the lieutenant," he said presently. "That kind of stuff isn't exactly in my line. Let's not jaw about it any more."

"You see," persisted Norroy softly, "we aren't asking you to send your friends away in your place. We wouldn't make such a proposition to a man like you. All we want to do is rescue *our* friend; don't you see? Nothing will be done to any of yours, I give you my word——"

"No use, sir," said King; "not a bit of use. I'm not that sort. I've played the game, and, according to my lights, I've played it square. This was going to be my last touch. I'm sorry I've got to fall, but I'm not going to keep out by turning up my friends. It was a good frame-up, this was—the best-baited mousetrap I ever saw—and your logic was good. That honor among

thieves is a josh. But you just happened to strike one fellow who believes in it. Send for the lieutenant."

Again the silence fell. Norroy had no wish to imprison this man, whom he had deliberately enticed to the house, but he was reluctant to believe he had failed, and was turning over in his mind further arguments, when a canary in a small gilt cage, who had been contemplating the proceedings sleepily, now gave a little chirp. King's gaze involuntarily followed the sound. At the sight of the bird a sudden burning came into his eyes, and he gulped back something.

"I'm going to make an appeal to you," he said, turning his eyes to Norroy and winking hard. "Seeing that bird's weakened me—I couldn't have asked otherwise. But you can't be hard-hearted if you love birds."

"Does that prove I love them?" asked Norry, pointing to the cage. "Shutting him up, making him a prisoner, just to give me pleasure? It is horrible to shut up either birds or men. I don't want to shut you up, but I'll have to unless you do what I tell you to."

"Let me tell you about what the bird there brought back to me," said King slowly. "I bought a bird for a girl only a few days ago—a green one—a green finch."

Norroy started, and looked at his prisoner more closely, and Van Luyties' eyes widened, and his fingers gripped the arms of his chair.

"It was in Boulogne—I was hiding out there, afraid to take the boat for England until I knew just how I stood with the police. I met a girl; she was stopping in my hotel. She wasn't *my* sort. But she didn't know that, for I was on my good behavior, and I was wild—crazy—about her, although she never knew *that*, either. We used to have tea at the Casino, and walk by the sea at sunset. I was going to bed at nine—you see, I wasn't taking anything but the air at Boulogne. Those days don't seem real now; I'm forgetting them as fast as I can."

He was winking harder than before, but despite it some moisture glistened in his eyes—glistened, too, in those of Van Luyties, while Norroy had leaned forward, his slender fingers on his knees, gazing at the man with a fixed, inscrutable look. But King was not looking at him; he was staring into the past, seeing the beach of Boulogne at sunset, perhaps, and remembering the vows he had made to himself when the girl's eyes had met his in the afterglow.

"But I *can't* forget them," he went on. "I can't ever forget them. That was why this was going to be my last touch. I was going to use the money I got out of this to go straight. Straight—and maybe some day meet her again, and be able to ask her to marry me. I bought her a little green bird at Boulogne—a green finch. I hunted all over London to get another one like it to keep in my mind all I had promised myself to be for her sake. Let me go this time. I'll run straight hereafter. As a friend of mine said: 'I guess God didn't want you to have any crooked money. That's why the two hundred thousand francs you stole went to the bottom of the Channel when the *Prince George* was sunk.'"

"I thought so!" said Norroy. He did not explain, but arose, and, without further words, went out.

Van Luyties, knowing what Norroy had in his mind to do, started suddenly after him, but stopped uncertainly, and, unable to bear the scrutiny of the bound man's eyes, crossed to the window, and turned his back. Norroy reëntered and locked the door. Again the silence fell.

King had found himself in many situations before that defied his nerves, but this one was surcharged with a sinister something that chilled him; so that when a knock came to the door he jumped as any woman might.

"You sent for me, Mr. Norroy?" came in Holly's clear, almost childish tones from the other side of the door.

King groaned, and struggled to his feet, twisting at his bound hands. "Oh, that voice! Don't let her see me like this! Don't tell her about me! Don't

let her know I'm a thief! Don't ruin her memory of me."

Van Luyties, unable to bear the strain longer, strode across the floor, and grasped Norroy's arm.

"Mr. Norroy," said the boy, "I love Holly. You know that. Love her better than anything in the world. It's to my interest to see this man ruined in her eyes, for from what she told of him I've been afraid she cared—cared more than a little. But, thief or not, he's the man who saved five hundred men and women, and went down like a hero himself. Thief or not, he's a better man than I am. And if she cares for him, and he for her, and he wants to be something else beside a thief, I can't stand by and see him tortured. Let's wait for some one else to swing our scheme with, and let this man go."

Again Holly's voice was heard:

"Mr. Norroy! Mr. Norroy! They told me you wanted me."

Norroy looked at the despairing eyes of King, the pleading ones of Luyties. Knowing that he had pledged his word to rescue Fassidy, feeling that the man was almost certainly saved when Holly's first words came from the other side of the door, he yet could not pronounce another threat in the face of self-sacrifice as great as King had shown on the lost ship, and as Luyties was showing now. Self-sacrifice was in the air, and he became infected with it, and so he sacrificed for the moment his reputation for success. Crossing, he unfastened King's hands and straightened the collar of his coat.

The action was done kindly, with no thought of results, but Norroy's brain did not long admit the possibility of defeat. Another way to gain King to his ends came to his mind almost instantly. He unlocked the door, and let the girl in.

She entered, radiant in white and pearls, her child's brow wrinkled in curiosity.

"Holly," said Yorke Norroy, "this gentleman assisted us in capturing the burglar. The burglar gave him all the information as to how we could rescue Mr. Fassidy."

"Oh, you're going to help us?" she asked, her eyes shining as she caught his extended hand; then, when she saw his face: "You—you!" Women are not fooled as easily as men, and despite its changes she saw only the face of her hero.

She swayed, and fell into a chair.

"You! Oh, I *will* thank God tonight on my knees! You are saved! Saved! Saved!"

Norroy broke in suavely:

"Yes; and Mr.—Mr.——"

"Kingsley," said the man, in a thick voice.

"Kingsley is going to save Mr. Fassidy, I think. At least, I'm sure he will if you insist, Holly."

The girl took King's hand.

"Oh, I can't think of anything except that you're saved——"

"Except that we must rescue Mr. Fassidy," Norroy put in again.

"Yes, oh, yes," said the girl. "We mustn't forget our duty, must we? No matter how glad we are! You *will* help us, Mr. Kingsley?"

With her hands warm in his, his heart leaping, and his brain awhirl, Raphael King gulped back something.

"What did you say?" asked the girl.

"I'll help you—*you*," said the Carbon King. "Anything for *you!*"

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The second and concluding part of this story will be published in the first March POPULAR on sale February 7th.

THE AMUSEMENTS OF LAWSON

THE amusements and recreations of Thomas W. Lawson, the great financial magnate, are as strenuous and bewildering as the many kinds of work he does. Three of his most famous fads are collecting ivory elephants, yachting, and riding blooded horses.

The Policeman and the Baby

By Clarence L. Cullen

Author of "The Nurse and the Gentleman Burglar," "An Incident of Alcatraz," Etc.

To take a lost baby to the station house—an easy task for this good-hearted officer, himself a happy father. There didn't seem to be anything strenuous about the task, but as it fell, the policeman had seldom experienced a more exciting evening

THERE are many persons who maintain that all babies do not look exactly alike. Mothers of babies, it may have been noticed, cling with particular tenacity to this peculiar view. The question really is as unanswerable as that other baffling one as to whether all Chinese persons look alike except to Chinamen.

Patrolman Jim Mulvihill knew as much about Chinamen as he did about babies—more, indeed; for, having served with the American army in the Boxer campaign, he—or his bayonet—had come into contact with many thousands of Chinamen, whereas the only baby with whom he ever had got on genuinely chummy terms was the one at the foot of whose cradle he now stood. And, since his friendship with and knowledge of this one baby had extended only over a period of four months—that is to say, since the baby's birth—there were many things in connection with the habits, manners, and mental processes of babies in which he could not, and did not, profess expertism.

One thing he knew pretty well, however, and that was that this baby—his baby—looked pretty good to him as she lay in the cradle, extending her unimaginably tiny roseleaf fingers toward him and crooningly requesting him to take her.

"Oh, take her for a minute, anyhow, Jim," beseeched his wife, who sat beside the cradle. Whether all babies look alike, this baby certainly had the eyes of her mother—which is a sly way of saying that the mother's eyes were pretty. "She's begging you to take her!"

"And be late again reaching my peg post! No, I guess I'll play foxy, and keep out of that kind of trouble this time," said the policeman. He shook an appeasing finger at the baby, took his pistol from a bureau drawer, and stuffed it into his pocket, and got into his uniform coat.

"Oh, just for a teeny half minute, then, Jim. Can't you see how wild she is to have you take her?" implored the rosy-cheeked little woman bending over the cradle.

"She's no wilder for me than I am for her," replied this determined father, who already had acquired plenty of experience in these last-minute partings with a baby. "If I take her now, when I'm already late—and it's hard enough to resist taking her without your chiming with her—I might as well report in sick for the day; for if she didn't set up a howl when I wanted to go, why"—he took a sidelong glance at the baby's still-extended hands as he buckled on his belt, and grinned—"why, I'd set up a howl myself about having to go, and probably stick around the flat for the rest of the afternoon, with that roly-poly hanging onto me. Which is no way to keep on the pay roll for holding down a cop's job on a peg post, if you're asking me."

The baby vindicated his victory over himself in determining not to take her by setting up a vigorous howl the instant he started to leave the room. He was forced to accomplish his exit by strategy and stealth, the mother winning and holding the baby's attention while the policeman dropped to his hands and knees, and so made the door without coming again within his infant's range of vision.

Patrolman Mulvihill's abbreviated beat—one of the "peg posts" despised by old-timers of the force who like to indulge their wanderlust and their thirst while on duty—was nevertheless a pretty good one for a young policeman who had worn the uniform for less than two years. It comprised the block in front of one of the great downtown department stores.

Mulvihill had been doing "goat duty" in the far Bronx when, several months previously, his well-set-up, characteristic army build and the intelligence of his face had caught the eye of no less a man than the police commissioner, who was prowling up that way in his automobile. The automobile slowed down and pulled up at the curb near which Mulvihill was standing. The young patrolman never had seen the commissioner before, but recognized him at once from his newspaper portraits. He stood to attention, army-wise, and saluted. He was familiar with the young police commissioner's enviable record as an officer of the American army in the Philippines.

"Fine day, Mulvihill," said the commissioner.

"Honolulu weather, sir," replied Mulvihill.

The commissioner smiled reminiscently. "Did you serve there?" he asked.

"Went from there to the Boxer breakout, sir," said Mulvihill.

"What branch of the service were you in, Mulvihill?"

"Doughboys, sir," and Mulvihill named his regiment of infantry.

"Oh, you made the Philippines, then, didn't you?" asked the commissioner. "Your outfit was there several times."

"I was with it in Mindanao when you were with your fitout down in Luzon, sir," replied Mulvihill.

"Did you have the stripes when you quit the service, Mulvihill?"

"Top sergeant, sir."

"Odd you didn't stay along in the service."

"With New York beckoning, sir?" asked Mulvihill. He added, flushing: "And the girl waiting back here?"

The commissioner laughed, and his car started ahead. On the next day Mulvihill was transferred to the lively downtown post, while the stodgy old-timers of the force growled over the "masonry" existing between "tin soldiers."

On this afternoon, while Mulvihill trudged close to the curb up and down in front of the department store, nothing unusual occurred. He did not even have his usual number of "mashers" to handle. The "mashers," in fact, were beginning rapidly to disappear from this, formerly one of their favorite beats, since Patrolman Mulvihill had been put on peg post there.

But when the hour arrived for the closing of the great department stores of this shopping district, things began to happen to Mulvihill in clusters. He was relieved shortly before six o'clock to get his bite of supper at a near-by lunchroom. As he passed another of the big department stores a few blocks from the one the front of which was his own post, he noticed that the patrolman who should have been on duty there was not in sight. This not being his business, he kept on in the direction of his lunchroom. But as he passed the main entrance of the department store in front of which the absent patrolman should have been trudging, he was summoned by the doorman. The huge store was closing.

"Leftover kid inside for you, Jim," said the doorman.

"Where's Gannon?" asked Mulvihill, naming the patrolman who should have been on the post.

"Had a little bet down on a horse at Pimlico, and he went to the pool room

over the way to see if the horse won," said the department-store doorman. "Fat chance!" he added satirically.

Mulvihill intensely disliked to "ring in," as the police saying has it, on another man's post. But now the superintendent of the store appeared at the door. He had the calm imperiousness of the twenty-five-thousand-dollar-a-year man.

"Officer," he said to Mulvihill, "an infant has been left in the crèche. And we are closing."

The inference was sufficiently plain. It was Mulvihill's business to take charge of the baby. He wished that Gannon had not left his post. But wishing did no good. It was Gannon's own fault that he, Mulvihill, was compelled to "ring in" on the absent patrolman's post. Broadway patrolmen do not turn deaf ears to the requests of department-store superintendents.

The superintendent led Mulvihill through the long main aisle on the ground floor of the store to the dimly lighted crèche in the rear. It was not so much a crèche as it was a sort of check room for babies. Shopping mothers who could not leave their infants at home checked their babies there, leaving them in charge of the uniformed nurses, until they were through with their buying. The system had been found a great convenience by callous or troubled mothers desirous of abandoning their babies without resorting to the heartless doorstep method. Many times babies had not been called for. But there was no check room for babies in the department store which was Mulvihill's post, and the experience was new for him.

"I don't know whether it is a case of child abandonment or not," said the superintendent to Mulvihill as they entered the pleasant room, around the walls of which were ranged the rows of cradles.

The one nurse remaining with the "leftover" baby held up a warning finger. The policeman had become familiar with the significance of that kind of a warning. The baby was asleep. The baby had remained asleep even while the nurse had put on its little coat, cap, leggings, and mittens.

"Maybe he'll remain asleep while you're carrying him to the station, officer," said the superintendent. "Nice-looking little chap, isn't he?"

"She, sir," corrected the nurse, with a twinkle in her eye.

"Oh!" said the superintendent, embarrassed. "Pretty little girl, eh?"

But Mulvihill was so deeply occupied in wondering how he could "square" Gannon for being off post that he saw the infant sleeping in the nurse's arms with an abstracted eye.

"The gocart will have to stay here," the nurse said to the policeman as she deposited the baby in his arms. "Unless you'd rather push her to the station in the gocart?"

"I'd rather carry her," said Mulvihill.

"Well, you're not one that doesn't know how to carry a baby, that's plain," said the nurse admiringly. It is natural for a woman to think well of a young man who shows expertness in carrying an infant.

"I ought to know how; I've had enough night duty in walking post with one—and the teething yet to come," said Mulvihill.

A throng of young saleswomen, the word having got about that a good-looking young policeman was taking a "left-over" from the check room for babies, invaded the crèche. They were putting on their hats and coats to leave for the day, and they were gay with the lifting of the strain they endured in the huge hive. They gathered encouragingly around the policeman, upon whose wide chest the baby still slumbered peacefully.

"Don't papa hold it nice!" commented one of the girls.

"Well, you know, policemen are taught how to hold babies—it's part of their first-aid-to-injured lessons," said another, with a serious face but twinkling eyes.

"Most unmarried men, like him, hold 'em upside down, don't they?" chimed in another.

It became a rataplan of raillery, the

salesgirls whirling about the policeman in a sort of Maypole circle, and sending in their good-natured thrusts, criticizing his ability as a handler of babies, and commenting upon his good looks as if he had not been present.

Mulvihill took it dauntlessly. "You might have got my goat joshing me this way a year ago, girls," he told them, finally breaking through the cordon. "But nothing like that now. The only place where I ever took any lessons at this was at home—and you ought to see me warm the milk."

He strode toward the door, the salesgirls trooping after him and commenting regretfully, for his hearing, that all of the good-looking men, including the "cops," were married.

The shopping district still was jammed, though all of the stores were closing, and the inevitable New York crowd gathered about the tall young policeman with the pretty, sleeping baby in his arms when he emerged from the department store. Mulvihill hoped that Gannon might be back on his post. But he was not. The men and boys who formed the sudden ring around Mulvihill caused him to push toward a crosstown car that would take him near his station house.

The humorists of the crowd were asking him why he wasn't calling the patrol wagon for so desperate a case, and their rough and foolish chatter became tiresome. Moreover, he feared that their noise would awaken the baby. He had become used to the crying of his own baby, but he could not picture himself as a figure of happiness going through New York crowds carrying a baby squalling at the top of its lungs. Mulvihill believed—as probably all men, even experienced fathers, believe—that all babies cry the instant they emerge from sleep into whatever consciousness they possess. Probably this belief is correct. It remains to be proven that it is not.

The crosstown car that Mulvihill boarded was jammed, and the jostling to which he and his charge were subjected in gaining the cluttered rear platform caused the baby to awaken. Instantly it justified the male belief or superstition which has persisted through the ages. It began to howl with a vigor and a persistence exhibiting a most astonishing robustness of constitution. The men and boys on the back platform made suggestions of things that might be done to relieve the infant's anguish. The consensus of opinion appeared to be that there was a pin sticking in the baby. Others expressed the belief that it wanted a drink of some sort, though no beverages were named.

Then Mulvihill, who was not being entertained by the comment, and began to show it, heard an agreeable voice say close to his ear: "Don't pay any attention to these comic-supplement jesters, officer." The speaker was a stout, smooth-faced man, whose features were familiar to Mulvihill, although he could not "place" him. "The way you're handling yourself, not to mention the young one, is a good deal of a hit with me, and——" He broke off suddenly when the noise of an uproar inside the car reached the back platform.

"Stop that thief! He's got my pin!" a man's hoarse voice broke out. Then there was the thud of a heavy blow, followed by the shrieks of women and the shouts of men inside the car. Mulvihill saw a squat, flashily dressed, evil-faced fellow, with powerful shoulders, making his way down the aisle toward the back platform with the force of a catapult, knocking standing women and men aside as if they were manikins of papier-mâché.

"Hold the kid," said Mulvihill to the smooth-faced man standing alongside who had spoken the civil words to him.

The stout man stretched out his arms to take the baby just as the man with the thug's face succeeded in battering his way to the rear door of the car. At that instant the car came to a halt, and the pickpocket balanced himself on his toes for a flying leap through the crowd of men on the platform, none of whom showed the least inclination to stop him.

Mulvihill caught the man around the middle just as he made the spring. The momentum of the thief's leap pulled the

policeman off the car, but Mulvihill held on. He was on top when they hit the pavement, and with the experience gained at some rough-and-tumble work in the army he planted both knees in the thief's chest before the man had a chance to roll over or even to squirm. An automobile going at a rapid pace was stopped by the chauffeur when one of the wheels was about an inch from Mulvihill's head.

"I'm through!" gasped the pickpocket, and Mulvihill, quickly passing his hands back of his man and securing the pistol that he knew he would find there, jerked the thief to his feet. The patrolman from the beat ran up, and Mulvihill turned the pickpocket over to him.

"He just frisked a man in that car for his pin—here comes the man now," Mulvihill said to the other policeman, as the man who had been robbed of his piece of jewelry and then knocked down came scrambling off the car. "It's your job, eh? I've got a lost kid on the car that I'm taking to the station."

The other policeman nodded, and backed the pickpocket up against a stanchion to await the patrol wagon, while Mulvihill jumped back to the platform of the car. The smooth-faced man to whom Mulvihill had given the baby to hold not only had performed that duty faithfully, but he had succeeded in stopping the infant's yells even during the midst of the uproar.

"Good police work, officer," said the stout man to Mulvihill, as he handed the quieted baby back to Mulvihill's custody. "Never saw better. I've got your number, and you're not liable to be sent to the goats for your evening's work," and the man whose features were bafflingly familiar to the policeman stepped off the car and disappeared in the crowd.

Mulvihill reflected that, while it was all very agreeable to be patted on the back by a substantial-appearing man whose features he vaguely recalled, he would nevertheless be a profoundly relieved patrolman when he should deposit the "leftover" baby in the fat arms of the station matron.

Amid all of the tumult the infant again fell asleep a moment after the policeman resumed possession of it. He could feel the soft little breath on his neck. He thought of his own kidlet, and experienced a glow of satisfaction when he reflected upon how snug in her cradle that rightfully pampered young one was bound to be at that hour of the evening.

The humorists on the rear platform of the car did not resume their flow of comic suggestions to the policeman when he returned among them after having tackled and downed the thief. The car bounded ahead under the motorman's impatience to make up the time lost by the incident, and, as his station was only a few blocks away, Mulvihill began to see the end of his custodianship of an overlooked baby. But a huge truck, broken down from overloading, and stretched directly across the car tracks, caused Mulvihill's car to pull up with a jerk at the next corner. There was every prospect that the blockade of cars would last for half an hour or more. Mulvihill stepped off the platform with the sleeping baby. The streets no longer were crowded in this neighborhood, and the policeman decided to walk the rest of the way to the station.

He had not trudged more than a hundred feet on the sidewalk when, just as he swung directly in front of a brilliantly lighted saloon, well known to the police as a resort of crooks and gangsters, he was brought suddenly to his toes by a loud volley of shooting within the saloon. The indescribably brittle ping of bullets through plate glass closed the quick volley, and Mulvihill, glancing sidewise, saw that at least three of the bullets had come through the glass door of the saloon on a first-rate level with his body. He wondered why he had not been hit.

His quandary as to what to do with the baby before getting into the thick of this mix-up lasted only about two seconds. An empty taxicab was drawn up at the curb in front of the saloon. The chauffeur, who had been asleep on his seat, was rubbing his eyes at the loud sound of firing within the saloon.

Mulvihill made three strides of it across the pavement to the taxicab, turned the handle of the door with his loose hand and jerked the door open, and deposited the baby on the seat. There was no time for him to do this gently. The main thing was to get the infant out of the danger of the next volley. The baby, suddenly waking, and finding itself alone in the depths of a pitch-dark taxicab, began to howl as a matter of course. Mulvihill remembered that later. But he had no time to attempt to soothe the infantile anguish. He got out his pistol as he bounded across the pavement from the curb, and threw open the saloon door. He was expecting another volley to begin at any instant.

When he got inside the saloon, he found it deserted, save for the self-contained-looking barkeeper, who was calmly engaged in wiping glasses behind the bar. But the acrid smell of the powder was heavy upon the air of the place.

"Which way did those gun boys go?" Mulvihill demanded of the barkeeper, quickly recovering from his mystification over the deserted appearance of the place so soon after the firing.

"They lammed out the back way," composedly replied the barkeeper, himself a man with the convict's face and the prison pallor. "I guess they're in Harlem by this time."

Mulvihill ran to the back of the place, and was just about to pull open the back door when he heard a sound as of stealthy, scampering footsteps from the direction of the bar. He wheeled. He saw a lightly built fellow vaulting over the front of the bar. The man had been crouched behind the bar at the feet of the barkeeper when Mulvihill entered the place. He made but two strides of it to reach the door, which, after jerking it open and letting himself out, he slammed violently after him.

Mulvihill, acting upon the theory that a bird in sight was worth several presumably on their way to Harlem, raced to the front of the saloon, and reached the door just in time to have it slammed in his face by the man who had leaped over the bar. The violence of the slamming brought down the catch of the door, so that Mulvihill, in a fume over the delay, had to fumble with knob and catch for about thirty seconds before he could open it.

He made the sidewalk just in time to see the taxicab in which he had deposited the baby scurrying for the middle of a clear street about two hundred feet away. He could not know at the moment, although the chauffeur told him about it later with a livid countenance, that the man who had vaulted over the bar and slammed the door in Mulvihill's face had bounded into the taxicab and placed the muzzle of a magazine gun in the small of the chauffeur's back, at the same time ordering him to get away from there instantly or "take a boring." The chauffeur had wasted no time. The taxicab, straightened out in the street, was making record time of it for an overworked vehicle when Mulvihill caught sight of it, and realized that the baby had got away from him.

The policeman had no means of knowing whether the man who had escaped from the saloon had jumped into the taxicab and forced the chauffeur to drive him away, or whether the chauffeur simply was making off on his own hook on account of his fear of being involved in a shooting scrape. In any case Mulvihill did not have to take two thoughts of it to figure that the baby was a good deal more important than the gunman. And the baby was being jounced breathless in a flying taxicab that was gaining momentum with every turn of the wheels.

The policeman cast a swift gaze up the street in the opposite direction. A big, yellow-wheeled touring car was coming toward him at a leisurely rate of speed. It was a private car, driven by a French chauffeur with a highly waxed mustache, who was taking his time in guiding the empty car to the garage.

Mulvihill stepped into the street and stopped directly in front of the car as it bore down upon him, holding up a staying hand. The French chauffeur, with the instinctive Gallic obedience to au-

thority, pulled up, and Mulvihill leaped into the seat at his side.

"That taxicab turning the corner down the street—go get it, and tear your machine open—but get it!" he gasped to the chauffeur, pointing to the distant corner around which the taxicab was making the turn on two wheels.

"*Oui,* M'sieu Cop!" replied the French chauffeur with a grin. This French chauffeur had been arrested on three occasions for speeding through the streets of New York. So that now he found it a source of satisfaction not only to be privileged but to be ordered to race through the streets, with the law back of him in the person of the tense young policeman who sat at his side. The big touring car suddenly shot ahead, and fairly ate up the ground in gaining the corner at which the taxicab had turned north.

When the car reached that corner, Mulvihill strained his gaze forward, and saw the taxicab bounding across the car tracks a square above. The touring car made that corner in something less than ten seconds. But this happened to be a traffic post, and the traffic officer had given the whistled signal for the vehicles going both ways across town to make their start. This necessitated a pull-up on the part of the French chauffeur. Mulvihill ground his teeth.

"Hey, Dink!" he called to the traffic policeman, whom he knew. "Give us a push through here—there's a taxi with a prisoner getting away from me."

Instantly the traffic officer stopped the crosstown procession of vehicles with a lordly hand, and the French chauffeur sent his car through the narrow space left open with a bound that forced Mulvihill to hang on. Mulvihill could not see the taxicab when the car reached the other side of the crossing, but he told the chauffeur to keep right ahead. They were on Eighth Avenue, and Mulvihill correctly figured that the chauffeur of the taxicab, no matter what motive impelled him, probably would not drop off the avenue into any of the crowded and narrow side streets, but would continue at least up to Columbus Circle at the entrance to Central Park.

The policeman's already pumping heart gave a thump of pleasure when, the Frenchmen beginning to "get everything" out of his car, drove it with such smooth, silent velocity that the back of the runaway taxicab came into his view before half a dozen squares had been covered. The backs of all taxicabs may look alike to the average citizen. But they do not so look to New York policemen who have any particular reason for remembering the conformation of any especial taxicab. And Mulvihill, even in his crowded moment, had fixed the back of that taxicab as an image in his mind so that he knew that he was on the trail of the right one when its rear came into view.

It was at this stage of the chase that Mulvihill became certain in his mind that the gunman who had leaped over the bar had taken refuge in the taxicab, and sent the chauffeur thereof off at top speed probably under the compulsion of a gun. He knew that, desperate as a certain class of taxicab drivers in New York are in circumstances involving their own risk or interest, there was no taxicab driver in New York who would adopt such a speed in making a mere "get-away." The gunman must have placed something pretty hard and compelling in the middle of the taxicab chauffeur's back to work him up to such speed.

Mulvihill also felt certain that the gunman, through the little glass window in the back of the taxicab, knew that he was being pursued, or the chauffeur would not ignore the lifted hands of traffic policemen, and turn into Central Park at Columbus Circle, still going at top speed, as he did.

Mulvihill, sitting tight alongside the French chauffeur of the touring car, who visibly was enjoying the chase without the least understanding of what it was all about, gave the Frenchman a nudge to let out the last link when the car shot into the park road after the taxicab. The road was clear. Few automobiles were in the park at that time, it being the fashionable dinner hour. The rocking taxicab, always in sight now, was doing its best, but its best was

not half good enough. On the smooth park road the touring car quickly began to overtake it. When the taxicab reached a comparatively dark, bowlder-lined part of the road, and the touring car was only about four hundred feet behind it, it suddenly came to a quick, grinding stop that Mulvihill felt certain must have thrown the baby off the seat.

"Now!" said Mulvihill to the French chauffeur, and the latter toyed with the clutches, and the big touring car was alongside the halted taxicab in what might be described as one long stride. Not, however, before the left-hand door of the taxicab had been thrown open. The lightly built man who had overleaped the bar jumped out of the taxicab and started to scramble up the smooth bowlders on the other side of the road. Mulvihill caught the gleam of a gun in the man's hand. He had his own pistol out before leaping from the touring car, and advancing in the dim light upon his man.

"You're covered, bo!" called out Mulvihill as he shot forward toward the man on his toes. "Remember that, if there's going to be any gun stuff!"

The man, who had halfway scrambled over the roadside bowlders at the left of the road, stopped and stood up. He permitted the pistol to drop from his hand. His nerve had failed him in the pinch.

"All right," he called back; "my hands are up," and they went up with the words. Mulvihill walked up to him, picked up the pistol that he had dropped, and pocketed it, and felt quickly to see if the man had any other weapon. He had none. So Mulvihill put his own pistol back where it belonged.

"Seeing that you like this caloosh so much," said Mulvihill to him, nodding toward the taxicab, "into it again for you, and we'll have another ride."

The man obeyed silently. Mulvihill held the door open for him. Then he stepped into the taxicab, and picked the baby off the seat where he had deposited her. She was snugly nestled back in the cushions, still howling lustily. Mulvihill called out of the taxicab window his thanks to the French chauffeur who had given him the lift. The chauffeur of the taxicab turned his machine around and drove it to Mulvihill's station house.

Arrived there, Mulvihill, with the baby in his arms, got out first, and then his captive, the gunman, stepped out, the policeman taking a clutch on his arm with his loose hand.

The lieutenant had gone to dinner, and a sergeant was on the desk. The sergeant grinned when he saw Mulvihill with the baby and a man who obviously was a prisoner.

"Your busy day, Jim?" he said to the policeman, and Mulvihill nodded.

The gunman gave a John Doe name, and was sent back on the charge of carrying concealed weapons until the shooting in the saloon could be investigated. Mulvihill, in giving the baby's "pedigree," told the sergeant that he had got the baby from the department store in front of which he, Mulvihill, had his post, instead of from the department store in front of which Patrolman Gannon, who had been missing from his post, did his day's walking. The sergeant's eyes twinkled when he heard this. He already knew differently. But the sergeant had been on the force too long to think ill of a policeman who did a bit of white lying for another man in the uniform. Mulvihill placed the baby in the arms of the matron.

"Not a bad day for you, Mulvihill," the sergeant said to him when he reappeared in front of the desk on his way out. "Now go get your supper, and then back on your post."

Mulvihill came upon Gannon in walking back to his post.

Gannon gripped him by the arm. "Have you turned that kid in yet?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mulvihill.

"Where did you tell 'em you got it?" asked Gannon.

"From the store on my beat," replied Mulvihill.

Gannon looked at him out of glistening eyes. "I thought you would, old horse," he said. "But I owned up to the sergeant by phone when I heard

you'd got the kid from the store here on my beat. Told him I was off post for a minute. And so your trying to square it for me goes for nothing. But it won't hurt you at the station. It won't ever hurt you anywhere, matey—remember that!"

Mulvihill, with plenty to think about, strolled away, swinging his night club, and soon reached his now all but deserted beat.

About an hour later, still reflective, he was standing close to the curb in the glow of an arc light on his post, wishing that his two remaining hours were "in," when a large limousine car crept silently up alongside the curb, and stopped almost directly in front of him. Mulvihill recognized the chauffeur as a police driver. Then he recognized the car as a department automobile—one of the dignified headquarters cars.

Mulvihill's lieutenant, looking very much amused, was the first to step out of the car. Then came the stout, smooth-faced man who had held the baby for Mulvihill while the latter had tackled the pickpocket on the crosstown car. The civilian looked rather amused himself.

"Well, well, here's that new sergeant we were talking about, commissioner," said the lieutenant to the stout man, speaking of the startled Mulvihill as if he had not been present.

"Sergeant!" thought Patrolman Mulvihill. "I guess the lieutenant's had a pretty good dinner for himself somewhere."

"Nice little evening, Mulvihill, eh?" said the lieutenant, when the policeman had saluted. "Busy this afternoon, weren't you?"

"Sort of, sir," said Mulvihill.

"Oh, just 'sort of,' hey?" said the lieutenant, laughing. The stout man joined in the laugh.

"Mulvihill," went on the lieutenant, "what's your idea in making a deputy commissioner of police help you do your work?"

Mulvihill stared, blinking.

"I don't think I make you, lieutenant," he replied.

Again the officer with the gold braid on his coat laughed amusedly, as did the stout civilian.

"Well," said the lieutenant, "here's the gentleman that can prove it, Mulvihill. He's the first deputy commissioner, and he told me that you made him hold a lost baby for him early this evening while you tackled a pickpocket on a street car."

"Oh, that!" said Mulvihill; and, looking into the face of the smiling deputy commissioner of police, he remembered why that gentleman's face had seemed familiar to him.

"The pickpocket you grabbed around the middle, Mulvihill," went on the lieutenant, "was Dipper the Blink, and we've been hunting for him for quite a bit."

Mulvihill was glad to hear that, and said so respectfully.

"And," went on the lieutenant, who was expansive with his fine budget of news, "that gunman you chased through the park, and nabbed, was quite somebody, too, if you're inquiring. He's Wabash Dave, the quite-some-important Chicago stick-up man, and you don't do a single, solitary thing but grab the one thousand dollars reward that's been on tap for him at Chicago headquarters for the past three months, Mulvihill."

A thousand dollars! Here was something tangible. Mulvihill blinked, but he was a policeman of few words when on duty.

"As to that—er—kid that you turned in, Mulvihill," went on the lieutenant, and then he caught himself. "I should say Sergeant Mulvihill, now that you've got that grade, or are going to get it to-morrow—as to that baby you turned in, Sergeant Mulvihill, did you have any sort of an idea whose baby that was?"

Mulvihill's mind began to wabble. He figured that he'd be coming to presently, and finding it all a poorish dream. Things were unfolding so fast that he didn't know but that the baby might have been found to belong to the head commissioner.

"No idea, sir," he replied.

The lieutenant turned and opened the door of the limousine car, reached in,

and brought out the selfsame baby that Mulvihill had worked so hard with a few hours before. The baby had been handed to the lieutenant by unseen arms within the limousine. The lieutenant handed the baby to Mulvihill, who took it as a matter of course and duty, but whose eyes expressed great wonderment. The lieutenant and the deputy commissioner looked enormously amused. In fact, they laughed with all their might. It was all too deep for Mulvihill. He grinned by way of accompanying their laughter. But it was pretty deep.

"Well," said the lieutenant, coming for a moment out of his laugh, "it's an entertaining little story. A wife and mother visits a department store, and, having some other errands in that neighborhood, checks her baby in the department store. She overstays on the other errands, and when she returns to the department store she finds it closed—and she without a living idea in the world what has become of her baby. Well, this lady, being the wife of a policeman——"

Mulvihill held the baby out squarely in front of him, and took a good, long, square look at it. The baby cooed at him. Mulvihill stood agape.

"And may well your jaw drop, James Mulvihill—a man who hasn't the grace to recognize his own child!" Mulvihill heard a voice, none the less sweet and welcome to hear for all its being a familiar voice, saying to him. His wife was getting out of the limousine car, and she took the baby from his arms. But she really did not look angry.

The lieutenant and the deputy commissioner each gave Mulvihill a great whack on the back, and ordered him to get into the limousine car and accompany his wife and child home—and to stay home for the night, seeing what a busy time he'd been having of it.

Mulvihill listened as a man in a dream listens to what his wife had to say as the car sped over the pavements. Then he had an idea that he thought ought to make a pretty fair excuse. Men in tight circumstances often do.

"I never saw the young un all dolled up this way," was what Mulvihill said to his wife. "When I see her of mornings, isn't she always in the cradle, with her toes in her mouth?"

It sounded like a pretty weak excuse even as he made it. But he never has told his wife, and never will tell her, the details of all the dangers their baby had been through that day.

PENCE AND EXPENSE

TOM PENCE is the man who did the publicity work for Woodrow Wilson for the presidency. Whenever Mr. Pence goes into anything, it is with all his heart. Brandishing a walking stick and twirling the black mustache, which mars the beauty of his roseate face, he will undergo any privation to achieve results. Incidentally, during the preconvention campaign, he contributed all his own money to the Wilson campaign fund, which was never large.

After the convention, Pence, proud and dressed up as a prize pony, returned to Washington. On the street he met Fred Steckman, who said:

"Tom, I believe you bet me eight dollars to five some time ago that Clark would not have four hundred delegates on the first ballot. I merely remind you that you lost the bet."

Tom wrote out his check for the money and handed it to Steckman with the remark:

"That's the only election bet I've had to pay."

A few days later Steckman's bank notified him that Pence's check had been returned because of insufficient funds to meet it.

"Great heavens!" said Pence, when he heard of it, "I was so full of victory that I had forgotten that it cost me all my money to nominate my man."

Then he replenished his bank account.

The Mediator

By Roy Norton

Author of "The Vanishing Fleets," "The Willow Creek Stories," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Longing for peace and the decencies of life, Lish Henley, a prospector from Arizona, comes to Peaceful Hill camp in California, thinking he has found his ideal community. But almost the first thing that happens to him is a fight, forced upon him by Big Bill, the town bully, in which the latter is sorely beaten. At supper that night the red-headed waitress, Maggie, warns Henley that he is in great danger from Big Bill's gang, and lends him a pistol to protect himself. The next day being Sunday, Henley, wishing to renew old and almost forgotten emotions, attends church service in the tiny meetinghouse. Some of Big Bill's gang, drunk, break into the congregation to have fun. Unfortunately for them the fun takes the form of a pointed gun in the hands of Henley, and under it the rowdies are forced to kneel. Another score against the stranger who insists on having peace. One of the purposes that brought Henley to Peaceful Hill was to find Mrs. Higgins, who is cook at the Canada Hill Mine, that he might give her the good news about her husband's reformation in Keswick, Arizona. Martha Higgins, however, is skeptical on hearing the story, and treats Henley coldly.

CHAPTER V.

WHOSE CLAIM?

"SURE we can spare you a slab of bacon, and some flour, and any other little stuff you need," Murdock answered Lish the following morning, when asked for the opportunity to purchase those necessities; "but what I can't see is why you didn't get the stuff when you started from Peaceful."

Lish smiled at him with that frank air of an open-faced watch and said: "Well, you see, the fact is, I left right early."

"What is your name, by the way?" asked the superintendent.

"Henley. David Elisha Henley."

The superintendent leaned against the wall of the blacksmith shop and roared.

"Oh, you're the man that polished off Big Bill, then assisted at the services down in the camp, are you? One of the boys was down there and brought the story back."

The prospector shook his head dubiously. "I couldn't help it, you see," he drawled. "It does seem to me as if I'm the most unlucky man that ever walked. But about that bacon——"

"You can get anything you want at this mine! The little you'll need doesn't cost us anything for teaming. Mrs. Higgins runs the storehouse for the grub. Here." He tore out a leaf from a memoranda book and gave him an order, which Lish took with a nod and walked away, calling back: "Thanks."

"And you don't need to pay for it now unless you wish," the superintendent shouted.

"All right," said Lish, without turning his head, as he made his way to the scene of his dismissal. But if anything rankled in his mind it did not show in his face as he stood for the second time at the kitchen door, and placidly said: "Good mornin', Mrs. Marthy Higgins!"

She turned and looked at him. "I though I told you that you needn't come around here any more!" she snapped, with a frowning stare at him.

"On business, ma'am," he said, and smiled amicably. "Just on business. The boss gave me this."

Reluctantly she took the paper from his hand and read it. "All right. I suppose I'll have to give it to you. Come this way."

She led him out to a primitive storehouse in the opening of what had evidently been a prospect drift in the hill-

side, unlocked the door with a key which she had brought from the kitchen, and said: "Well, what is it?"

Considering the small amount he took, Lish was evidently hard to satisfy, and kept up a running fire of what was meant to be polite conversation.

"Of course, up at Keswick," he said, "a feller can get anything he hankers for in the way of grub. Fresh vegetables up there, ma'am. You never saw anything like 'em! And fruit? Lawsee! Finest fruit I ever saw. Cheap, too. Guess it don't cost much to keep house up there. I says to a friend of mine: 'This is the place where every man orter have a wife to look after him. She'd be so all-fired happy trampin' around these fine stores and spendin' his money.'"

"Suppose you hurry up a little, will you?" she interrupted. "I haven't got all day to stay here."

He hurriedly pawed over some more of the supplies, and appeared quite oblivious to her speech.

"Of course, I ain't talkin' about the kind of men that drinks, or blows in all they make, ma'am. That kind don't have nothin' to spend. I mean fellers that really have somethin', like Bill Higgins, your no-account husband, ma'am!"

"You can lock that door when you get through talking to yourself," he heard a voice outside, and, peering out, saw that she was hastening back to the kitchen. He grinned knowingly, and after that seized the first slab of bacon at hand, the first sack of flour, the first can of baking powder, and followed, with a solemn air of respect.

Her anger was so apparent when he told her the weight of the bacon and gave her the money in payment for the supplies, that he did not venture to say anything beyond an extremely polite "Good day, Mrs. Higgins. Hope to see you again some time. I'll stick around here a while, I reckon, in this here vicinity."

It was to Jack that he confided as he threw the pack over that beast's back, and made his preparations:

"Sorry to have to make you tote this stuff when I've already got bacon and flour enough to run a month; but this is deeplomacy, old pardner; hey, you!"

He gave a vicious shove with his knee into the burro's belly as Jack, with palpable effort, swelled and blew himself up until he threatened to become a balloon and blow away. Jack gave a grunt, laid back his ears, pretended to bite, and snapped his teeth together with a sidewise twist that brought them within an inch of his owner's leg.

"Some day," said Lish plaintively, "you and me'll have the dag-gondest fight about that! I never saw a place yet that you didn't like well enough to try to stay there. Be good now before I knock seventeen kinds of cussedness out of your hide!"

He paused at the top of the hill, where the last view of Canada Hill Mine was losing itself, and smiled back at the mess house.

"Good-by, Mrs. Marthy Higgins," he said, whimsically doffing his hat and sweeping it toward the ground. "Bill Higgins'll get you yet, if you don't watch out!"

He plodded his whistling, singing way over the two miles to the cut-off leading to the trail which Channel Smith called his own, and turned into it, on the general principle that the world was wide, and one place as good as another when it came to seeking gold. It was still early in the forenoon when he found the veteran's cabin, and gazed in amazement at the work which the patient, old plodder had done. There were trenches and crosscuts scattered over a shallow valley, in the center of which meandered a swift-running stream, and the trees seemed to have made way for it and formed a phalanx to shelter the glade. He found Smith bending over, his back as round as a rainbow, in the latest trench, and watched the old man straighten painfully with hands on knees when hailed from the clay bank above. He was made certain of his welcome by the greeting.

"You see, it's right lonesome up here, evenin's," Channel said, in explanation. "So I'm sort of glad to have somebody for neighbor. A yaller dog would be better than nothin'."

He sat down on the edge, wiped the sweat from his brow and nose with his faded shirt sleeve, and prepared to be hospitable, although Lish scarcely knew whether to feel complimented.

"I patched up that cabin, there on the edge of the woods, nigh on to twenty year ago," Channel went on. "I always knowed there was somethin' in this gulch, and, by golly! I'll find her yet if I have to live to be two hundred year old!"

"Got any prospects?" queried Lish sympathetically.

The patriarch put a horny hand up to his mouth and mumbled into Lish's ear as if the whole world were filled with rapacious ears, instead of there being no one nearer than two miles:

"Got one pan that run forty cents. Yes, sir, forty cents!"

The prospector was instantly interested to the point of excitement—that is, as far as it seemed possible for him to be excited.

"Never got no more," the old man went on; "but she's here some place. They ain't nobody put their stakes on that ground up there, that I know of. You can stake that, and you can bunk in my cabin, young feller! You couldn't want nothin' better'n that, could you?"

And Lish proved that he could not by beginning with that arrangement. In less than a week he discovered, by painful experience, that the ancient was probably the worst cook that ever put baking powder into water, then mixed the flour on top. Also, that his idea of cleansing a frying pan from bacon grease was to swab it out with anything that came handiest, be it a rubber-boot leg or a discarded sock. So he assumed the functions of cook. Likewise, the forty-niner's ideas of measurement were distorted; for when he cut wood for the stove, it was either from one to six inches too thick to go into the stove door, or from one to six inches too long for the fire box. So Lish cut the wood. Moreover, the veteran was nearsighted, and when he brought water from the creek, he frequently scooped up considerable mud, dried leaves, and gravel. So Lish uncomplainingly became the water boy. But if he felt any injury over these trivialities, he concealed them behind an immobile face and twinkling eyes.

"Jack, you're havin' it pretty soft," he communicated to the burro one day, as that person stood with his head in the door, blinking, and patiently waiting for bread scraps, while carelessly brushing flies. The burro, as if by invitation, calmly walked inside, his little hoofs clattering on the floor. Lish, leaning back with his hands behind his head, blew smoke in Jack's face, and added: "Say, who asked you to come on in? Ain't you afraid that old skeesicks, Channel Smith'll come and lam you? Well, don't you mind him. He's all right. He sort of amuses me. He's a right good old feller."

And, as if by prearrangement, steps were heard outside at that moment crunching over the gravel, and Jack, with a switch of his tail, abruptly turned in a panic, bolted for the door, and almost bowled over the owner of the cabin, who happened, inopportunely, to be entering.

Channel Smith snorted in disdain.

"That there Jack orter be sold," he declared wrathfully. "We ain't got no use for him here nohow, and we might just as well get shed of him."

Lish grinned, but made no reply, as the old man began preparations to wash his face.

"I think," he went on, "I'll unload him the next time I'm down to camp. I orter get sixteen dollars for him. I wouldn't take no less."

Lish continued to watch him, as he performed that operation he called "sprucin' up."

"Now," he said benevolently, turning toward the man who owned the burro, "if you'll hustle and get the supper ready, I'll be right obleeged. They's a team from the Canady Hill goin' down to Peaceful, and it'll pass my trail in about an hour. If you move quick, I'll let you go down to the camp with me."

Highly amused at the assumption of Channel Smith, Lish hastened to comply, and stood with him at the roadside

when the big wagon came grating along over the bowlder-strewn road.

Lish had not been in the camp for a week, and was glad for the opportunity. He sat on a seat by Channel Smith, and, therefore, in that flood of crack-voiced garrulity, had no occasion to speak during the progress of the drive. The wagon rolled into the camp in the moonlight of the early evening, and stopped in front of the Happy Home, with a loud "Whoa!"

The driver turned to the back seat and spoke to the prospector in a friendly voice.

"We all know about you," he said, "and don't you be scared to come in with us and get somethin' to wash the dust out of your throat. We'll stick by you."

Lish looked at him with a peculiar gleam in his eye.

"Say," he said, "I'm not much of a fighter, and I'm right obliged to you; but I don't reckon I'll need any help. I'm not goin' in. You fellers can find me, when you want me, sittin' down around the Peaceful Hill house. I drank all that was comin' to me long before some of you old gents had graduated from square patches of tarpaulin to short pants. And, besides, I don't like lemonade."

He wandered on down the street, stopping at every shop to look in the window, until he came to the largest in the camp. Its most prominent display was a highly polished brass grocer's scales, on which the light of the kerosene lamp glowed with soft brilliancy. For a long time he stood and admired the beauty of workmanship, the clearly printed figures, the nickel-plated dial pointer, the solidity of the varnished iron table, and the cleanliness of the tin scoop. He had seen others in the storehouses of different mines, but never one so beautiful as this. A sudden glowing impulse seized him to buy it. He hastened in, asked for it regardless of price, and gamely met the demand by unrolling a worn leather wallet which he had kept concealed somewhere in close proximity to his skin.

"Want to take it with you?" asked the storekeeper, "or can I send it somewhere?"

"Sure I'll take it," asserted Lish. "And, say, can you wrap her up in some fussy kind of paper? Got any tisher?"

The salesman assented, wondering at his customer's peculiar tastes, and fifteen minutes later Lish stood at the kitchen door of the Peaceful Hill Inn. He asked for Maggie. She happened to be there in person.

"Hello," he said, by way of greeting. "How are you gettin' along? I brought you a little present."

Quite proudly he carried it over to the table, and began unwrapping it while she stood and watched him. He turned to her with such an unconcealed pride that she bit her lip to keep from laughing.

"There," he said. "Did you ever see anything finer than that? Look at her dial. She shines like an angel. And her trimmin's! Ain't they all right? Pretty enough to keep on a table with flowers in her, ain't she?"

The waitress saw that whatever he lacked in taste, he made up in seriousness, and so strove to appear grateful. Perhaps the gift accomplished a result, however, for she permitted him to sit on the edge of the back porch and roll countless cigarettes and tell in his broken sentences of his work.

"I got the gun yet," he asserted. "You don't mind if I carry it a while longer, do you? It feels kind of comfortin' and homelike. Makes a man so peaceful to feel her nestlin' there under his arm."

Neither of them referred to his good-by note; not even when a loud call from the front of the hotel warned him that the team from the Canada Hill was ready to return. He got to his feet and put on his hat. At the foot of the steps he turned and said, "Well, so long, Maggie," and went away, rather proud of that step gained, for he had willfully dropped the "Miss," and entered upon familiarity which she did not resent.

In the wagon on the way home he rode with the driver, who finally turned to him, when the conversation behind was warm, and said: "Say! Has that

old shellback, Channel Smith, got anything good up there? He's been spoutin' his head off like a geyser about how good his showing is. The first thing you fellers know he'll have a stampede on up there. You ought to tell him to keep his mouth shut."

Lish dismissed it with a laugh, and he did not refer to it when he assisted the rather unsteady footsteps of the forty-niner up the winding trail to their cabin. But it was recalled to him the next forenoon when he heard a voice above him and looked around to see a stranger standing alert, and calmly inspecting him. Something in the man's attitude warned him of trouble, and before he spoke he climbed up to the bank to be on equal footing.

"Whose ground do you think you're workin' on?" the man demanded abruptly, without preliminary.

"Mine as near as I can calculate," asserted Lish, fixing the stranger with his eye.

"Better calculate again, then," hotly asserted that individual. "This claim's mine. I don't know who you are, or where you came from; but I want you to get off this ground right away."

Lish looked him over quite calmly before he spoke.

"Got anything to prove it beside your word?" he asked.

This appeared to anger the other man. His face turned white, then purple.

"I don't need anything but my word!" he asserted.

"You do for me," was the steady retort. "I want to see the papers, before I move off. Better run along and get 'em."

At this the claimant lost his temper completely, and shook a threatening fist under the prospector's nose.

"You'll get off this ground, and now!" he declared. "If you don't, I'll put you off!"

The prospector appeared to almost wither under that threat, and his drawl became quite plaintive.

"Pshaw, now! Pshaw! Don't do nothin' like that to a greenhorn like me, pardner. There ain't no use in me and you lockin' horns. You go get your papers, and if they're right, I'll walk on off as quiet as Mary's lamb."

"I told you I didn't need any papers," snorted the other man.

"I'm sorry; but I'm right afraid you'll have to have 'em before I go. I'm too lazy to run unless I get a head start, and I ain't got one now."

The claimant launched a quick blow at the prospector, who ducked like lightning, and, without ever shifting his feet, whipped his right arm upward. It was as rigid as an iron bar driven by steam, and met the point of a chin. The claimant's arms suddenly whirled up into the air, and he fell backward. Lish, entirely unruffled, stood and looked at him for a moment, then dropped down into the creek bed, filled his hat with water, returned, and dumped it over the upturned face. He rolled a cigarette and quietly watched the recovery. The man finally rolled over to his hands and knees, and then got shakily to his feet.

"Now, as you were sayin' a moment ago, mister," Lish said, lighting his cigarette, "it's the papers that counts. I'm glad you're so willin' to go and fetch 'em, because there ain't no use in you and me havin' any fuss over nothin'. If you've got indigestion, or are feelin' weak, you can put your hand on my shoulder and I'll try and support you to the cabin down yonder, where 'most always that old pirate, Channel Smith, has a bottle of brandy cached away somewhere. We're hospitable and peaceable up here, if we ain't nothin' else. Then, after that, you'll probably want to go and bring them papers, eh?"

The claimant appeared dazed, and obeyed in a perfunctory manner, until the cabin was reached and the brandy found, and absorbed. It appeared to revive him, and he thought the situation over. Finally he laughed, as he stared at Lish, who sat, a picture of solicitous timidity, on the opposite side of the crude, little table.

"Say," he said, "you're all right! I don't want to, but I've got to admit I like you. It was my fault, and I got just what I needed. On the level, I own this ground; I've got a buckboard

down on the road, and if you'll come and ride over to the Canada Hill with me, Dick Murdock, the superintendent, will tell you I own it, and that he saw me stake it, and that he owns the ground above, and that we registered together. There's not a foot of open ground on this gulch, unless it's due to lack of assessment work."

At this concise statement, so palpably true, the prospector for the first time looked his disappointment.

"You come along over with me, and I'll bring you back," the claimant insisted. "I have no papers here, or there. They are away over at my home in Placerville. Will you come?"

For answer Lish got up, walked to a peg on the wall, and got his coat, stopped to wash his hands in the basin outside the door, and said: "All right."

He paused long enough to yell to Channel Smith that he would be gone for an hour or two, and led the way to the waiting buckboard.

His late opponent climbed in and picked up the reins in a thoughtful way, glancing sidewise now and then at his passenger.

"My name is Martin," he said. "I don't think I had time to tell you before."

Lish looked up at him as if thinking of something.

"Same name as the man that runs the Cricket," he remarked.

"Yes, he is my brother. I'm opening up another property back on the divide."

In all the two miles they did not again refer to their recent combat, and Lish appeared to have forgotten it, although now and then Martin rubbed his hand over his chin, as if in his case it was not so easily dismissed. At the Canada Hill they stopped in front of the superintendent's office, and went in.

Murdock, who was looking over some assay slips, and comparing them with mill tabs, stared at them and greeted Martin with boisterous friendliness.

"What's the matter with your jaw, Harry?" he asked.

Martin grinned and turned a thumb in the direction of Lish, who stood quietly inside the door.

"We had some little difficulty in getting acquainted this morning," he said. "I made a mistake. I lost my temper, I don't think he did, and I don't care to be around when he does."

Murdock rolled backward in his office chair and let out a howl of laughter that could have been heard as far as the mess house. In his paroxysm he leaned too far and the chair toppled over, and then he got to his feet and laughed louder than ever. And all this time the prospector stood, solemn-faced, looking at him as if astonished at his finding anything humorous in the situation.

"I brought him over here," Martin added when the mirth had subsided sufficiently to permit of speech being audible, "to prove to him that I own the ground adjoining Channel Smith's on the upstream side, staked from rim rock to rim rock, and recorded."

The superintendent sobered instantly, and confirmed all that the claimant had stated.

"I did own the ground above that," he added, "but traded it to John Martin last week for some ground he had up above us here that I want for its water rights."

Lish's face expressed his chagrin.

"I'm sorry," said Murdock, with simple frankness. "I've heard a good deal about you since you were here, and it strikes me we need a few more men like you around these hills. I think that most of the people down in Peaceful would vote to give you a medal. If a job will do you any good, there's one for you here at the Canada."

The prospector shook his head. "Nope," he said, "I don't work for nobody."

"Then why don't you take a lease on that ground of mine," Martin hastened to suggest. "You've done a lot of work there. It's to my interest to have it opened up. I'll make a deal with you. I'll give you two-thirds of anything you take out in the next eighteen months."

Lish shook his head. "Nope. Can't

tie myself down for that long! But I'd sure like to know what's in the ground up there. It's right interestin', and, besides, if I made good it would help out Channel Smith. He's a fine old fellow, is Channel, and he's so dag-goned old, and so poor, that it'd be a godsend to him if somebody could find somethin' on the next claim above."

Martin and Murdock smiled at each other. They saw that the prospector was wavering, and all because he wanted to assist the querulous, queer, old Smith.

"You don't have to bind yourself to stay a day longer than you wish," Martin insisted, and that proved the deciding argument.

"All right. You're on," Lish said, turning toward the door as if that were the end of it. Suddenly he faced back and held out his hand toward Martin. "There ain't no hard feelin's, is there? I'd be right sorry if there was. I've got an orful rotten disposition. There ain't nobody tries harder'n me to be peaceable; but it just does seem like as if ever since I come here to this neck of the woods nobody'll let me tend my own business."

Martin shook the outstretched hand, at which the prospector evinced a pathetic pleasure. He announced that he would be back in a moment, and walked down the trail to the mess house. He poked his head inside the door and discovered Mrs. Higgins at her work. His reception was not cordial. She did not even answer his cheerful "Good mornin', ma'am." But it did not alter his demeanor.

"Thought maybe you'd like to know, ma'am, that I got a letter this mornin' from that old bum that married you. I understand they've raised his wages again, but what for, God only knows, because if there ever was a no-account slob it's that same Bill Higgins, ma'am!"

Before she had time to vent her fury in words he was hurrying rapidly off up the trail, grinning to himself and saying, "Lord! What a liar I'm a-gettin' to be! But I'll bet I'll make Marthy and Bill make up, or bust a suspender and the seven commandments tryin'!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE TROUBLE-MAKING BURRO.

The philosophy of the prospector would not permit him to be downcast for any great length of time; so it was that, after the first pang of disappointment at finding that he was not working on free ground, he accepted the situation with equanimity. He did not even treasure any ill feeling against Channel Smith for having misinformed him, and made reference to it but once, on the day after his return from Canada Hill.

"You ain't been here very long, have you, Channel?" he asked solicitously.

"Nope, not very long," acquiesced the old veteran. "Lemme see." He sat and laboriously calculated on his fingers, checking off time by important events. "Nope, not very long. I located this ground forty-five year ago this spring. By cracky! I thought it were longer ago than that!"

"Well, you sure kept good tab on what was goin' on around you!" exclaimed Lish, but without much enthusiasm. "Didn't you ever get time to browse up and down the gulch a little? Didn't you ever see stakes, the bright, shiny kind, with notices on 'em, when you were gallivantin' off on one of them big towers as far as the next claim? I sort of thought you was some walker. You got the trail in the other direction worn two feet deep—the one that led to pie!"

The old man did not answer, but his air expressed so much of penitence for his blunder, that whatever sarcasm Lish had at the end of his tongue was silenced.

"You don't need to feel bad over that claim above, Channel," he said. "It's all right. If she's good, two-thirds is enough. If she ain't, it's just two-thirds more than any man wants. And anyhow, there ain't nothin' more to bother me now. Everything's peaceful and pleasant, and this is the country I've been lookin' for."

On the following morning Jack came gayly tripping into the cabin, thrust his nose deeply into a batch of bread which

Channel was preparing, and snorted loudly in sheer enjoyment. The batter blew out and spatted over the floor. Simultaneously with this Mr. Smith attempted to chastise the burro with a chair hastily seized for the occasion, and the burro, evidently annoyed, elevated both heels with remarkable deftness. Quite accidentally they landed on the big, tin dish pan of batter, which sailed upward, and with astonishing lack of forethought swatted Mr. Smith on his whiskers and forefront. Mr. Smith was annoyed. David Elisha Henley, forgetting diplomacy, rolled over and over on his bunk, voicing an untimely merriment.

The old man disappeared outside the cabin, and the cracking of his joints as he threw the most convenient missiles at the retreating burro, and his storm of quavering epithets, seemed to amuse Lish still further. He got up and went to the door and looked out. Jack would turn his face toward the enraged Channel, and blink at him and switch his tail. Then, when a two-pound stone came hurtling in his direction, he displayed a good judgment of distance by standing still if it fell short, or bounding out of the way and kicking up his heels if it threatened to be well aimed. At sight of Lish in the doorway, he sobered. Lish ran out, thinking it time to interfere lest Channel Smith die of heart failure, and shook his fist at Jack.

"You hit it up for the hills!" commanded the prospector, reaching for a pebble. And the burro, knowing from painful experience that if he wished to save a swift thump on some part of his hide, he must retreat, hastily laid his ears back, his tail between his legs, and sprinted away until swallowed from sight by the forest.

Channel Smith turned and took an angry look at Jack's master, and then, mumbling profanely, turned toward the basin beside the cabin door.

Smiling gently to himself, Lish tramped away up the gulch to his work.

"It's a fine old world to live in as long as a feller can have somebody like Channel to amuse him," he decided, some two hours later, and stopped to look around at the high hills, sleeping peacefully in the forenoon haze, the motionless patches of green leading away toward the timber line, and the belts of white on the peaks where rested the perpetual snows. His acute ear, attuned to strange sounds, caught a soft noise from below. He turned his head in that direction to discern a man plodding up the trail and looking to right and left as if searching for something. The man came closer. He was a sun-tanned individual, with stooping shoulders.

"Hey," he called, "seen anything of a burro around here?"

"Sure," replied Lish, leaning on his pickhandle.

"A little, mouse-colored one, cross on his back quite plain. His name's Jack," went on the man, coming closer and still looking around.

"Sure I've seen him. What did you want with him?"

"Why, I've seen him several times when comin' around this way, and I just bought him," explained the stranger.

"Bought him?"

"Yes. I paid Channel Smith sixteen dollars for him down there on the trail. He says he ain't got no further use for him, and told me he'd come if I called him Jack," the man stated with admirable simplicity.

Lish threw his pick up on the bank with an exclamation of annoyance. It was all very plain to him that the man was telling the truth. He stood and stared at the ground for an instant, not quite knowing what to do, and lacking his customary decision. It was plain to him that the doddering old man had sold the pet burro, and that, at least, would never do.

"Look here, mister," he said, "I'm goin' to tell you somethin'. That burro don't belong to Channel Smith. He belongs to me, and I'd sell the best friend I've got just about as quick as I'd sell Jack. The old feller's sort of queer, so you don't want to pay any attention at all to him. You say you gave sixteen for the burro. Well, here it is back."

He fumbled inside his shirt, drew out a belt, opened it, and counted out six-

teen sweat-stained, worn dollars, in faded currency, which the stranger hesitated to take.

"I'd like the burro," the man said; "but if he belongs to you and you don't want to sell him——"

"Which is exactly the case!"

"Then I reckon I'd better go to that old codger and get my money back."

"Never mind that," Lish said emphatically. "I'll get it back from him, and this'll save time."

The man took the money, shook his head with a great show of bewilderment, and turned back down the trail. Lish stood on the bank and watched him go, then followed along after him until he saw him turn into the road where the trail ended. He went back to his work with a troubled spirit.

"It just does seem as if it's one thing after another botherin' me," he said to himself with a show of wrath. "No sooner do I get one thing straightened out and think everything's all right, before another happenin' comes to make a fuss."

At noon he waited for Channel Smith to speak. The patriarch shoveled in his food industriously, but for a long time did not look up. He finished his meal, and then took sixteen dollars from his pocket and laid them on the table.

"What's this for?" demanded the prospector, looking at him.

"That's what I got for that pesky burro," the old man growled. "I got rid of him this mornin'. You can have the money."

"That's right good of you," answered Lish, pocketing the money.

Something in his tone caused Channel to look at him more closely. Feeling a trifle ashamed of himself, the patriarch hastened out of the cabin and over the little trail leading to his trenches. Quite anxiously, throughout the afternoon, he looked up at intervals, waiting to see if the prospector was coming; but always there was the same stillness and lack of life in the scenery. He began to regret his sale of the burro, and to wish he had suffered that animal's pranks more patiently. He dreaded returning to the cabin, and worked later than usual, to at last throw down his shovel and climb stiffly out and plod up the trail. He came around the bend and saw the cabin. There was no smoke curling from its stovepipe, and the door was closed. The old man sustained a terrible fear, and went more rapidly toward it, and threw the door open. The place was empty, as it had been before Henley came to join him. A note on the table caught his attention, and he went to the shelf and fumbled around for his steel-bowed glasses, which he adjusted to his eyes with trembling fingers, after which he carried the note outside where the light was stronger, and read:

me and Jack aint goin to bother you no more. he is a mischeevus little cuss and I dont blame you for wantin to get shed of us. we cleaned the cabin and left her just as she was when we came.

DAVID ELISHA HENLEY.

A great sense of outrage swelled in Channel Smith's bosom. The idea that this prospector should take the loss of a burro so much to heart was incomprehensible. It would have been different if he had sold Jack and kept the money; but to desert in this fashion, and leave him to cook his own meals, and cut his own wood, and carry his own water, was certainly a rank injustice! And that, too, after he had been so kind to the prospector, and assisted him to locate on another man's claim! He asserted loudly that times and men weren't like they used to be in forty-nine, and consigned Lish and his burro to an unpleasant hereafter.

For the first time in weeks he prepared his own supper, and ate it alone. Stubborn as he was, he had to admit it was lonesome again, and his sense of outrage dissipated itself by the time he had shoved the table back against the wall and walked to the bench outside for his evening smoke. He began to be curious as to where Lish had betaken himself, and decided to walk up the gulch to the claim above. He trudged away in the early gloom of the evening to the bend of the road, entered the cut-off which trailed through the heavy timber where it was quite

dark, and emerged above the prospect holes that had been sunk by his erstwhile companion. He stooped and emitted a soft exclamation.

Down below him was a worn tent, well lighted by candles inside, and two shadows were thrown through its wall in distorted shape; but they were plainly those of a man bareheaded and a burro with very long ears, and now, straining his eyes, he could see that another gray, old burro was standing with his head inside the tent fly, and calmly watching the scene.

Mr. Smith turned angrily and tramped back, cursing in time to his footsteps.

"Well, if he'd rather associate with a mule than me, he's blamed good and welcome!" he remarked audibly, as he swung in toward his own cabin. "There ain't no accountin' for tastes!"

On the following morning, however, Channel appeared to have business up at the head of the creek. He passed along the bank above where Lish was energetically toiling away in a trench, and the latter looked up at him.

"Good mornin', Mister Henley," said the forty-niner, with a great assumption of dignity.

"Good mornin', Mister Smith," the prospector answered.

The one did not stop walking nor the other working; but Lish looked up with a grin as the bent, old back disappeared in the bend above.

"Poor, old cuss!" he said, with commiseration. "I s'pose I orter be ashamed of myself goin' off that way. He's sure too old to be left alone to do all the work; but I couldn't go back on Jack."

He stood for a full minute as if thinking of something, then climbed out of the trench, grumbling, and went back to his tent, where he picked up his ax from a log in front, threw it over his shoulder, and started down the trail.

"It just does seem as if everywhere I go, I got to do somethin' I don't want to!" he mourned, as he came in front of the cabin that had so lately been his domicile. He sighted something looking at him, with due caution, from around the end of that homely shack, and opened his mouth in astonishment. It proved to be a pair of long ears and a burro's face, with just a part of one eye peering at him. He made an angry dash at it and shouted, "You Jack! Git home! Go on up the gulch!" He waved his arm, indicating the direction, gathered a small stone, and threw it with quick precision.

Jack, who was already on his way, kicked as the rock caught him on the ribs, and tore madly off toward the tent. Then, still grumbling, Lish fell upon a log with his ax and worked with determined haste to accumulate firewood. The wood fell around him in a scattered pile, and this he collected and heaped carefully up with the small stack outside the cabin.

"That'll run the poor old son of a gun for a couple or three days!" he declared, and then, as if ashamed of his philanthropy, avoided the trail and took a roundabout course for the claim above. And Channel Smith, doddering down the gulch past the prospector's trenches, wondered where that gentleman could have gone to spend the afternoon.

On the following day Channel came to the claim above, "just to see how the work was gettin' on," and said he hoped Lish was "right comfortable." He expressed great solicitude, however, as to whether the tent would shed rain later in the season. The next day's advances were more open, Channel arriving at the tent just in time to be invited in to partake of pork and beans. He stayed quite late that evening, and departed with obvious regret. On the next day he got around in time for breakfast, disappeared for the noon meal, and cheerfully poked his head through the tent fly in time for supper. Lish watched him good-naturedly from the corner of his eye; but made no comment.

"To-morrer," said Channel, "I think you'd better lay off work in the afternoon. I'll let you come with me over to the Canady Hill. It's pie day."

Lish accepted with alacrity, for reasons known to himself. And it was

with the same alacrity, as if assured of his welcome, that he walked into the mess house of the Canada Hill Mine when the hour came for the quest of pies.

"Channel, he asked me to come, Mrs. Higgins," he said, cheerfully depositing his hat on the floor. "Says I to Channel, 'Maybe that woman over there, havin' so many troubles of her own, won't want a feller like me stickin' his nose into the kitchen;' but Channel he says he knows you'd like to see me again, so I came over. And I'm right glad I'm here. Seems kind of homelike for all of us to be here with the smell of the cookin' around us, don't it, ma'am?"

Channel Smith, in the meantime, sat and stared at him in open-mouthed amazement. It was the first time he had heard of the conversation, and his wits were too slow to catch the broad wink that accompanied the speech.

"What on earth are you winkin' at me that way for, Lish Henley?" he burst out; but Mrs. Higgins, angrily intent on her work over the oven at the moment, lost the significance of the question and passed it over. For half an hour the prospector sat there, apparently unaware of Mrs. Higgins' animosity, devoting his conversation to Channel Smith and exploiting the beauties of Keswick, and abusing a man he knew up there, who bore the name of Bill.

He even had the effrontery to insist on shaking hands with Mrs. Higgins when they made their departure, and chuckled to himself on the homeward trail.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROSPECTOR PROPOSES.

It was Saturday afternoon, and the prospector made elaborate preparations. He puttered around his tent, blacking his boots, cleaning spots from his clothes, painstakingly pressing his necktie, and selecting divers articles of wearing apparel with which to bedeck himself. He packed his effects into a bag, and sauntered over to Jack, who was sleeping in the shade of a big tree, caught him by the muzzle, and brought him to the tent, where he threw on a pack saddle to which he lashed his light burden. He tied the strings of the tent fly, gave a last look to be certain that the fire had died out of the camp stove, and jauntily started down the trail, with Jack following obediently behind.

Channel Smith looked up as he passed. "Where do you reckon you're goin' now?" he shouted.

"Down to Peaceful," was the response. "To-morrer's church day, and I said I'd be there. I ain't a-goin' to miss no services. I've turned over a new leaf. Besides, I sort of like it. It gives me a chance to sing along with other folks, and I'm right tired of singin' alone."

The ancient gave a grunt of disgust. "What you got in that there bag?"

"Duds."

"That all?"

"Yep! That's all."

Lish kept moving down the gulch as the conversation progressed until he was out of earshot with his last remark, and out of sight in the twist of the trail. He smiled with a slow, humorous smile, and spoke to Jack.

"I was afraid that cantankerous old cuss would want to come along," he said, "and out of deeference to your dislikin' of him, am glad he didn't."

But Jack, pretending to be terribly overworked, and staggering under the bundle of ten pounds' weight, did not answer. The prospector, apparently happy in his mind, whistled and sang, and walked so rapidly that now and then the burro had to trot to keep pace. The road was so little traveled that it seemed an isolation, and they met or passed no one as their journey progressed and the miles slipped behind them. It was not until they came to the open top of a little hill, wind-swept and bowlder-strewn, that Lish stopped for a breathing spell. Something in the burro's attitude attracted his attention, and he eyed the beast suspiciously for a moment.

"What's ailin' you now?" he asked,

and Jack tried to look unconcerned and merely thoughtful.

Lish got on a little bowlder by the side of the road, and looked back. Just appearing where the trail emerged from the timber he saw something move, then halt. His eyebrows frowned for a moment, and then he laughed.

"So that's it, eh?" he again addressed Jack, and then called loudly: "Hey, you, Pete! Come here!" He followed this with a long series of coaxing whistles, and at last, from the woods, trotting forward, came Pete, who had refused to be left behind.

"It certainly does look to me," declared Lish, resuming his journey, "as if I have to take my whole blamed family with me no matter where I go. I reckon I'll have to corral 'em again to keep 'em from follerin' me plumb into the meetin'house to-morrer."

But his annoyance was merely assumed, as he proved by petting the ancient Pete when, with confidence fully regained, that animal joined Jack at his heels. It was well into the evening when he corralled his animals at Peaceful Hill and took the bag on his shoulder and headed for the hotel, wondering whether he would be too late for the supper hours in that hostelry where dwelt the girl with red hair. Out in front was the usual crowd of evening loungers, which he ignored as he strode through to the desk. The clerk told him he was too late. He calmly explored the house in the direction that he thought would lead him to the kitchen, and, being a good explorer, came at last to his goal. He opened the door and poked his head through to discover Maggie talking to the Chinese cook. He lost no time in going through the rest of the way and shaking her hand.

"Say, Maggie," he opened, "I've come a right long way to 'tend the meetin' to-morrer. I was afraid you'd miss me."

"Miss you?" she laughed. "Miss you! What for, I'd like to know?"

He assumed a very hurt air, and leaned weakly against the door jamb.

"I'd talk to you about that," he said, "if I wa'n't so weak. You see, the grub was gettin' mighty short up there at the claim, and I've been workin' so hard, that this long walk down here has kind of taken all the tucker out of me. I'm afraid I'll have to go now and rustle some cheese, and crackers, and sardines, before I'll have my strength back."

"Rustle some cold stuff? You'll do nothing of the kind!" she asserted in angry haste. "You just sit right down on the porch out there, Lish Henley, and I'll get something for you right here, if the cook won't."

He did not dare smile until he was by himself in the dusk of the porch, and then he grinned joyously as he heard the sound of sizzling ham and eggs inside.

"You better go into the dining room to eat," Maggie called to him from the door.

"Would you mind if I ate out here?" he promptly returned. "I'm sort of used to eatin' where the cookin' is. I've always been right partial to takin' my sustenance in the kitchen."

She turned and threw a tablecloth over the kitchen table and placed the food there for him, turning the reflector of a wall lamp downward so that he might have the full benefit, and he walked in and washed himself under the faucet of the kitchen sink, and dried himself on the kitchen towel.

"Humph!" she asserted. "You certainly do have a faculty of making yourself at home. I never saw the beat of your nerve."

"Yep," he responded cheerfully. "I can sure feel comfortable and peaceful in any surroundin's where there's so much good society."

"Meaning the chink, I suppose," she retorted.

He looked at the cook, who had calmly seated himself in the window sill, where he sat swinging his legs and dangling his embroidered slippers.

"I hope as how I'm not keepin' you up, John?" asked Lish solicitously.

"Nope," was the laconic answer.

"And I also hopes that you ain't too tired to go to bed?" went on the prospector.

"Me vellee well. Thlanks," replied the cook, with a grin of amusement.

Lish still looked at him suggestively; but the cook insisted on ignoring his palpable desire to be rid of him. The prospector then took a silver dollar from his pocket and flipped it toward his deftly opened fingers.

"Go play fan-tan with that," he said. "It ought to be your lucky night."

Maggie at first opened her lips as if to speak, and then appeared flustered into silence. Lish did not look at her, and she pretended not to have heard the conversation, and to be very busy with minor duties. The cook winked and grinned, and got down from the window. He coiled his queue around his head, picked a big, black hat from the wall, and disappeared with a "Vellee good. Me play."

Maggie relented sufficiently to take the seat in the window which the cook had vacated, and smiled at him with amusement.

"You certainly do have a way with you," she observed with admiration. He did not pause to answer, being totally absorbed in his food. "Sometimes you remind me quite a lot of Ross." He ate faster, and appeared to be thinking rapidly. "You ain't a lot unlike him," she added, and then, finding it useless to talk to him until he had finished his meal, subsided.

He suddenly lifted his head, with the last fragment of ham, with which he had scoured his plate, poised on his fork, and listened to some sound outside which her ear had not caught. It became audible, and resolved itself into heavy footsteps that clumped up on the porch, then across it, and to the door. They both looked up curiously, and the prospector gave a grunt of disgust; for there, calmly grinning, stood Channel Smith.

"Well," he said cheerfully, as if certain of his welcome, "I got here! Come down with a wagon from Canady Hill. Had quite a passel of trouble to find you."

He walked in, deposited his hat on the floor, and sat down.

"That fool mule of your'n, the gray one, he went hellbent for election down the trail about ten minutes after you," Channel quavered on placidly. "I reckon we'd orter sell him. We ain't got no use for two burros hangin' around on my gulch."

The prospector stared at him thoughtfully for a full half minute, and then came as near to shrugging his shoulders as was possible.

"First thing I know," he said, "you'll be wantin' to sell me off'n your gulch. Nope. Me and my burros stick together."

Channel opened his mouth and looked at him; then, with a quick reversal, said: "Sure you do! Don't blame you a bit. You know I always argued against your sellin' that Jack. Says I to you: 'Don't sell him! He ain't nothin' but a little friendly cuss, what don't give nobody no bother at all. I likes to have him around!' I was right glad you didn't get shed of him. It does me good the way you've come to your senses."

For an instant Lish stared at him in sheer astonishment, then slapped his leg and declared: "By jingoes! I reckon you're right! We won't sell my burros."

"Now about eatin'?" ruminated Channel, rubbing his hands. "I see as how you've been havin' ham and eggs. They allays have been favori-ites of mine. I wish I'd of got here sooner."

"Ham and eggs, eh? Well, it is a pity you didn't come sooner," declared Maggie, staring at him with a sarcastic look. "If you think this is a meals-at-all-hours dump, you've got a few more thoughts coming."

Channel looked up at her with rheumy eyes, and shook his head sadly.

"I don't know what this younger generation's a-comin' to," he said plaintively. "I'm powerful hungry, I am. It's right hard on an old feller like me to be so hungry. I could get plain things like canned tomatoes and such at the stores, but it does seem as if I——"

"Oh, shucks!" she interrupted.

"Say, Miss Maggie," Lish said, studying her face with anxiety, "you

ain't the kind that would see an old feller like this hungry, are you? He ain't so bad, Channel ain't. Go ahead and get him somethin', won't you? Do it for me."

Her wrath subsided, and she said she supposed she would have to. The prospector unmasked none of his disappointment at the patriarch's arrival, but thanked her profusely and tried to appear interested in Channel's discourse. It got to be too much for even him, and he withdrew himself to the edge of the porch and sat there, discouraged, until she put the food before the ancient, then came out, and sat down beside him, but at a respectful distance. He lost no time.

"Maggie," he declared, "I ain't seen you many times, but I've been doin' a heap of thinkin'. I guess we better get married."

"You think—you guess! Pshaw! Why, you're crazy! Don't you ever talk that way to me again, Lish Henley. I can take care of myself, I can. I don't want any idiot like you around, bothering me with talk of that kind. You just stop it, if you want me to be decent to you any more. Do you understand?"

She had got to her feet; but the prospector sat steadily.

"All right," he declared. "I'm just tellin' you what I thought, Maggie. I didn't go for to say nothin' to make you sore. There ain't no offense. If you don't want to hitch up with me, all right! And what's more," he declared, in a sudden burst of generosity, as if to prove his forgiveness, "you don't even need to give them scales back to me, either!"

She leaned against the post and laughed; but he did not join her merriment.

"Now we'll talk sense a while," she said, relenting a trifle. "Do you know that eggs has gone up ten cents a dozen?"

And thereupon he plunged into a long discourse on eggs he had eaten, found, and seen, as if they were the only things in the world worth considering, until Channel Smith emerged, wiping his beard with the palm of his hand, and satisfied.

But he showed a frank desire to be certain that the old man did not miss the wagon back up into the mountains, and stuck to him closely, when they left the back porch of the Peaceful Hill Inn. He even accompanied him to the Happy Home, examining his gun in the interests of peace, however, before entering. He was greeted with apprehension on the part of Holliday, and black scowls from the men around the tables, to all of which he turned a careless grin. He even noted the presence of Bill, but did not speak to that worthy, who calmly ignored him. One or two men who did not know him, and whom he did not remember seeing before, observed the entrance of Channel Smith with much enjoyment, and hilariously began badgering that worthy.

The smile on Lish's face appeared to deepen, but it had different lines in its composition. He sidled in between Channel Smith and those who were passing facetious remarks. He whirled suddenly at the sound of something that was said, and stared straight at the man speaking.

"Say," he said calmly, "you ain't pokin' fun at an old chap like this here Channel Smith, are you? I'd hate to think anybody'd be mean enough to do that. Why, he's one of the nicest men that ever walked. More'n that, he's old enough to granddaddy anybody in this crowd. I surely am surprised some."

The hilarious ones nudged one another, and in the meantime the prospector stood languidly leaning an elbow on the bar and staring at them, a picture of peaceful intent and innocence. Holliday nervously rushed into the breach.

"Hey, you fellers," he said, "just chop off this familiarity in here. You mind your own business, or I'll get busy with a bung starter." He hurriedly beckoned to the leader of the trio, and held a big hand over his mouth as he hoarsely whispered: "Better leave that little cuss alone! He's a box of dynamite with the fuses all cut short. For Heaven's sake, don't start nothin' with

him, because the devil himself, turned loose, wouldn't muss this place up half as bad as that feller if you get him going, and it don't take as much breeze to start him as it does to blow a thistle tassel off'n a dry road!"

"Channel! Channel Smith!" a voice hailed outside the Happy Home, and the prospector seized the old man's arm and gently pushed him toward the door.

"I reckon that's your wagon, pardner," he said, and before the veteran could remonstrate, had fairly hustled him out and into it. "Good night, Channel," he called. "See you some time to-morrer. Don't fret yourself none because I'm not there. So long!"

He turned just in time to see a woman hurrying past the place with a determined air, and suddenly hailed her.

"Good evenin', Mrs. Callahan," he said.

She turned and looked at him, and gave a toss of recognition.

"For the love of Mike!" she exclaimed, "you weren't long in findin' Holliday's on that day you showed up here, were you?"

She stood with both arms akimbo for a moment, and then laughed at him, for he had removed his hat and stood scratching his head. She started off down the street, and he started in her wake with his usual quickness of decision.

"I found Mrs. Marthy Higgins," he declared, by way of conversation, shouting it at her back.

"Well, you don't need to tell the whole camp about it!" she snapped, turning her head over her shoulder; but he hastened to gain a place by her side. For an instant she threatened to decline to walk with him, and then, as if thinking of something, her attitude changed.

"Say, Henley," she said, "you're a funny man. What makes you such a fool?"

He placidly explained that he was just naturally born that way.

"Well, not that I'm blamin' you for what you did down there at the church, and havin' small interest in it myself, me bein' a Catholic, and by the same token likin' you for goin' after the likes of them, but don't you know that Big Bill's a bad man? It's a black-browed, thievin' blackguard he is. I'm tellin' you, Mister Henley, have a care for yourself!"

He assured her that there existed no man who had more care for David Elisha Henley than that same estimable gentleman; that he was scared till he could not sleep nights; that he visited the camp only to protect his friend, the poor, old man of the gulch, and that he had come to the metropolis only because he hoped to sow broadcast the seeds of peace and good will to all men—and women, too! He slowed his pace and talked more earnestly as they passed the Peaceful Hill Inn, and his heart gave a glad and exultant leap when he saw Maggie, the waitress, standing at the corner and looking at them. He put his hand on his breast, and lifted his hat to her and called: "Good evenin', Miss Maggie. Nice evenin', ain't it?"

But Maggie appeared lost to the amenities. He saw her no more that night, although he bade the Widow Callahan good night at her own door and hastened back, and tramped round the hotel bravely trying to decide which window blind sheltered and screened the young lady to whom he had so abruptly proposed marriage but a few hours before.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE TROUBLE FOR THE LOVER OF PEACE.

Arrayed in all the finery at his command, Lish attended church that Sunday, and, although it was well filled, there was scarcely a rustle throughout the services. He sustained a sense of disappointment despite the peace that must have been as deep and perfect as he could have wished, for there was not a hymn save the doxology that he knew.

Maggie refused even to speak to him; every one stared at him and whispered when he entered; and the preacher added to his embarrassment by hastening down from the pulpit at the conclusion of the service, and loudly thanking him for his attendance.

Lish recovered sufficiently to put his big, hard hand up to his mouth and whisper loudly: "Say, parson, when I come next time, sing some of them good old tunes I used to know when I was a kid—'Pull for the Shore, Sailor,' and 'Rock of Ages,' and 'Shall We Get Together at the River.' They're the only ones I know, and Lordy! you ain't no idea how much more I enjoy singin' than I do preachin'. Not that you ain't all right, even if you ain't very strong on the hell-and-brimstone stuff. You don't skeer 'em enough, parson! You try hard enough, but you want to make 'em think they're goin' to have a hell of a time if they stack the cards or play a crooked game here! That's right, parson! But I'm with you, just the same!"

He broke off abruptly, to the preacher's amazement, and bolted through the meager crowd. He had just discovered, in the midst of his religious enthusiasm, that Maggie, the red-headed girl, had escaped. She was far down the street when he gained the front of the church lot and looked anxiously down the tree-bordered way. And hasten as he did, he could not overtake her before she reached the hotel, although in the last lap of his pursuit they were almost running a foot race.

"Howdy, Miss Maggie," he saluted her, when she came to take his order at the table, but she frigidly refused the amenities. It did not appear to have any effect on him. "Fine service we had this mornin', wa'n't it? That part where the parson spoke about bein' led through green pastures and——"

"I said there was roast beef, mutton stew, and corned beef and cabbage," she interrupted.

"Maggie," he said humbly, "I think I'll have to eat some of the sheep." She was gone before the echo of his voice had died away, and he did not have another opportunity to speak to her before he made his regretful departure, an hour later. He communed doubtfully with himself as he trudged over the road, followed by his burros.

"With most of 'em, the best way is to make 'em jealous. Then there's others that a feller has to be spoony with, and still some more, mavericks, I call 'em, whose affections is dependent on how big a bank roll a feller flashes; but I'm beginnin' to be afraid she ain't none of them kind, and I'm just plumb discouraged! A man can't have the whole shop full of peace unless he's got the right kind of a wife for full measure, and this here Maggie's the first one I ever saw whose lookin's I liked. So here I am at Peaceful Hill, and got everything but the woman."

He was surprised when he arrived at Channel's claim to see that its owner was nowhere in sight, and went up to the cabin to see if any ill fortune or accident had befallen him. But the cabin was unoccupied, although it gave evidence that the ancient had stopped there overnight. Lish surmised that he had gone over to the Canada Hill Mine for some foolish reason, so began his work. It was almost noon when he heard a shout from the bank above, and saw Channel standing there with an unusually troubled look on his face.

"I been to the Canady," said Channel, squatting down on the nearest rampart of dirt, "and Miss Higgins, she's right sick."

Lish gave instant and undivided attention.

"Everybody over there's sort of fussed up over it," the old man added. "Not about the cookin', because they can get along with the boy; but because Miss Higgins won't let Murdock send her down to Peaceful, and there ain't no woman they reckon they can get to come and set with her."

Lish immediately crawled up out of the pit in which he had been working, and got to the bank. "I'll go right over there and see about that," he declared. "You see, she's a sort of a friend of a friend of mine, and I feel I orter look after her some."

Without pausing to get his coat he stalked away over the trail, and Channel, with a melancholy sigh, followed after him to his own claim, and watched him from sight.

Just as Lish came out into the road a man driving a buckboard came along,

and the prospector, without hesitation, asked him for the privilege of a ride, which was granted. He climbed in and explained his reason.

"I'm goin' over to the Canady Hill to see a sick woman," Lish said, "or I'd just as soon hoof it."

"That's where I am going," the man said. "I'm a doctor. They sent word down to the camp for me to come up."

Lish looked relieved; but was, none the less, determined to visit Bill Higgins' wife and form his own conclusions. At the door of her cabin he decided it might be wiser for him to remain outside, which he did, with rare patience, until the doctor emerged. Murdock came also, and looked gravely at the physician.

"That woman in there threatens to be pretty ill," the doctor announced. "She ought to have some woman with her to act as nurse; but to save my life I don't know of any one we can get in Peaceful. I'm afraid we shall have to send out to get one, maybe to Sacramento, and that means, perhaps, five or six days, maybe longer. Nurses from down there don't like to come this far away."

The prospector interjected himself into the conversation.

"Excuse me, doc," he said, "but I got an idea I can get a woman, if Murdock will lend me a rig to go and try."

The superintendent did not hesitate a minute, but bawled to a yardman several hundred yards up the creek to hitch up his own horse to his buckboard, and bring it out to the flat.

"There," he said; "that fixes you. You can go straight down and have a try at it. My mare's skittish, sometimes, and she has a tender mouth; but I have an idea you know horses."

Lish nodded. "Know 'em?" he said. "I know 'em as well as if I was of the hoss family. I'll watch her, and she and me'll get along all right."

The doctor was already climbing into his vehicle. "Come to my office before you start back," he said, "and I'll send some more medicine up, and if you get a woman, I will tell her what to do."

He drove away, and Lish walked with Murdock to the flat. As he climbed in and picked up the reins, the superintendent spoke to him.

"Don't let any reasonable amount of money stand in the way," he said. "But if you can make it, get a woman."

Lish nodded again, and drove away. He found the mare just as described by her owner, but his voice pacified her and steadied her, with its quiet, "Whoa-a, girl! Whoa-a!" Once he got out, and walked around, and caressed her, and she put her muzzle out and made friends with him, as did all animals with whom he came in contact. It had been no vain boast he had made to the superintendent when he told him that he was a horseman. He had gone so rapidly that he trailed almost at the tail of the doctor's buckboard when that professional man, whose horse was speedy, entered the streets of the camp.

Lish drove on past the doctor's office until he came to the stage station, where he asked if the mare could be taken out and cared for until his return. He then walked away toward the Peaceful Hill Inn with a well-defined idea, and around to the rear door. His knowledge of the hours told him that Maggie would probably be through with the midday work, and this surmise he found correct.

"Hello!" he said, climbing the steps to the porch.

She looked at him with a far-away stare. He held out his hand, and she took it with as much nonchalance as if he were not quite, but almost, a stranger.

"I reckon you'd better get some duds together and come with me up to the Canady Hill Mine," he said, without any hesitancy.

"Oh, you do, eh?" she replied, and then he appeared to realize that he had not yet given any reason why.

"It's Mrs. Marthy Higgins," he said. "Don't s'pose you know her, but she's a woman."

"Why, how strange! She's a woman, is she—Mrs. Marthy Higgins?"

Lish persisted in ignoring any sarcasm. "Yes, she's some woman, is Mrs. Marthy. And she's sick."

"Do you keep track of all the women on the divide?" the waitress asked. "If you do, you've got more time than I have. I've got my own business to attend to, and I find it keeps me pretty fairly busy."

For the first time he had confidence in himself. His earnestness overcame his embarrassment. He stepped up to the last step of the porch, and looked at her gravely, his gray eyes having lost their twinkle and appearing deep and warm.

"Maggie," he said, "this ain't what I'd expected of you. You disappoint me. If you feel that way, and ain't just talkin' because you're sore about somethin', I'm mighty sorry; because, Maggie, I want to tell you that there ain't none of us so big we can keep from rubbin' elbows with the others, and there ain't no place in the world so lonesome and far away that it ain't made a little bit nicer by havin' some one else to think about. Sometimes it's only a stranger, as far as names and such go, but nobody's a stranger to me, or to anybody else who's decent, when they're in trouble. It ain't what you do for other people that does them good, so much as it is the good you do for yourself by doin' it. I've done a heap of things in my life, but the things that stick was the ones I did for somebody else—even if I forget 'em, Maggie, because I sort of reckon a man or a woman can't do anything that's good and kind for some one else, no matter how small it is, without its sort of makin' 'em sweeter themselves."

His earnestness had carried him along until the soft light in his eyes had deepened to a glow. The man was preaching a doctrine of life, all mixed up with illiteracy, and incongruous with one capable of extreme cold and strenuous decision. His very homeliness had been glorified, and the red-headed waitress gasped, and stared at him in astonishment, discovering that a new man stood before her, of whom she was a trifle afraid, and, moreover, she sustained a sense of shame as if she had been chastised.

"Well?" she faltered.

"That's all," he said, smiling gently and looking out across at the far-distant peaks. "That's all. Mrs. Marthy Higgins is a woman, and she's sick in a camp where there ain't no other woman to help her, and she needs a woman! She's got to have one, Maggie. I want you to fix it up somehow so's you can go."

"Go!" she gasped. "Why, what on earth would they do here at the hotel?" It was as if all her life revolved around it. "Why, I've been here for eight years! Some one must wait on the tables, and 'tend to things."

He ran his fingers through his hair, forgetting that they were still covered with the dust of dried clay, and looked perplexed.

"Do you reckon," he asked, brightening with resource, "that I could get the Widder Callahan to go?"

Maggie shook her head.

"No, she has three children to look after. They go to school."

He slapped his leg with his battered hat and exclaimed: "Bully! I see how. The widder can come over here and sling the grub. The boss can tell the boarders that she ain't no great shakes as a hustler in an eatin' house, but that she's here because you went to nurse a sick woman. Then, if there's any man that kicks up ugly, the boss can send for me, and I'll just naturally load up that gun of yourn and come down here and shoot his cussed head off! Easy, ain't it?"

Somewhat bewildered by the prospector's ideas of humanity, the waitress agreed, and Lish, intent on his mission, hastened away, after telling her he would let her know within the hour. He found the widow over her washtubs. He looked at her shrewdly and attacked her from a different angle than he had adopted with Maggie. He was learning diplomacy, and exercising all previous knowledge of the sex.

"You work for a livin', I take it," he said pleasantly, "and it's good to work, ain't it?"

"You don't suppose I'd be scrubbin' clothes for fun, or excitement, or joy, every day I can get 'em to do, do you?"

she asked, favoring him with a broad grin.

"I've been sort of wonderin' sometimes, when I see you workin', how much more you make than the shift boss of a mine, or a packer, or a storekeeper?" he said, staring at the calloused spots on his hands. "I suppose you make sometimes as much as five or ten a day, don't you?"

The Widow Callahan, plunging her hands into the tub, laughed heartily, a big, strong, Irish laugh.

"If I could make three a day," she said, lifting and rinsing a garment, "I'd be buyin' a patent wash machine, a new wringer with double rolls, and that fine set of books for which I got an advertisement the other day—'Father Cassady's Lives of the Blessed Saints.'"

"I know where you can get them Saints without lookin' very far," he bravely asserted, seeing his opening. "A friend of mine has a set I could get for you, I think. He's read 'em."

He lied as unblushingly in his good cause as if he had never met Truth. Her face broadened with delight. He felt that he was gaining ground.

"And I think I know where you can make five dollars a day for maybe a week, maybe ten days, maybe two weeks," he added, hastening to lose no iota of his advantage.

The wet garment was dropped back into the tub with a splash.

"Here?" she asked.

"Sure. Takin' Maggie—Maggie—— Well, wouldn't that beat you! I swan I don't know her other name! It's a cinch she's got one. Most people has. Anyhow, she's that lady that works down at the hotel."

The widow laughed contemptuously, and told him to quit his blarneying.

"Dead earnest!" he declared. "I think they'll want you down there."

"But I'm not knowin' how," she explained. "They do tell me that waitin' on a table is the same as doctorin'. You have to know how. Not that I couldn't get the stuff on the table. When Mike Callahan, that was—Heaven save his hold Irish soul—would see me bringin' the things on, he used to say, 'You got all of it here you didn't drop, Kitty!' but he was a jewel, was Mike, and never kicked at eatin' things that had fallen on the floor—'specially baked potatoes. I never knew him to holler but once. That was when the stuff that fell happened to be noodle soup. But it's a Dutch dish, anyhow!"

Lish told her in his direct fashion that the reason was because there was a sick woman who needed assistance. This as an after argument, and yet he flattered himself on his adroitness when she abruptly asserted that she would go to the hotel and work her hands off in such a cause, and wondered why, as he departed, she looked at him and said, "May the Lord bless your big, fat heart! There was but one better, and that was Mike Callahan. It's a shame that most good men can't hold more than a quart!"

Lish walked away down the street with a highly troubled look on his face, and grumbling.

"Talk about peace," he declared. "I'm always a-gettin' my cinches twisted! Now I reckon I'll have to spend the rest of my life tryin' to find them Cassady's Saints!"

He plunged into the hotel and up to the desk.

"You're the boss, ain't you?" he demanded of the man he had previously supposed to be the clerk. On receiving an assurance that this was the case, the prospector drew a deeper breath, and said: "Well, I don't s'pose you know that Maggie is goin' to take a layoff, and that so's the house won't stop, the Widder Callahan is goin' to help out till Maggie gets back?"

The proprietor's mouth hung open as if he had lost muscular power.

"Say, you're Henley, aren't you?" he asked.

"David Elisha Henley."

"Well, you're a-feelin' right, are you? Nothin' the matter with your head? Sun ain't been too hot, or anything like that, has it?" There was actual anxiety in his tone.

Lish leaned across the counter and grew confidential as he repeated his tale of the sick woman back in the hills with

none around her but men to minister to her wants.

The hotel man appeared sympathetic. "Have you talked to Maggie and the widder?" he asked. "Because if you ain't, you'll have to. I ain't got the nerve. That's a man's job, that is!"

Lish assured him that he had. "All you got to do," he said, "is to let the widder think she's gettin' five a day. I'll pay the difference between her and Maggie's wages. Then you stick around the dinin' room, and if anybody kicks about the way the widder dishes it out, call 'em down. If you need help, put a man on a cayuse and send him up to me. Does it go?"

The proprietor of the hotel shoved his hand across and grasped the prospector's.

"Say," he said, "I began to suspect you were a sort of a man when you first showed up here in Peaceful, and now I'm just beginnin' to be sure. Of course it goes. Go and tell the women it's all right."

Lish was more embarrassed at this open praise than he had been the whole day, and was glad to go to the kitchen and explain it to Maggie, which he did in a direct way.

"Get what duds you need rolled up," he said, "so's we can hit the trail as soon as I can get my hoss and go down and tell the widder. That boss of your'n ain't such a slob, after all. He's like most folks—get on the right side of 'em and they'll do the right thing. Get on the wrong side, and there's old hob to pay. Get a hustle now, Maggie!"

He brought the word that the widow would appear at the hotel as soon as the rest of the wash was hung out on the lines, and the children had returned from school, and, with Maggie by his side, drove to the doctor's office, where she was duly instructed. He breathed his first full breath after the camp was left behind them, and then remarked: "They call this camp Peaceful Hill; but there's more kinds of trouble to walk out and meet a man here than in any place I've ever been in, outside of an Apache war camp, and yet they do say that even the Apaches get quiet and straightened out after a while. That's because they was such peaceful men shootin' at 'em!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

The continuation of this story will appear two weeks hence in the first March POPULAR, on sale February 7th.

CHARITABLE CHARLIE MANN

CHARLES H. MANN is noted for his charity and geniality. But above these qualities is his pride in discharging his duties according to the letter and the spirit of the rules which govern him. He is the superintendent of the press gallery of the House of Representatives in the national capital, has a total of twenty-one silver hairs on his head, and is believed to have been the first white baby born in the District of Columbia.

Last summer charitable Charlie, on account of his wide acquaintance with the newspaper correspondents and editors throughout the country, was asked to guard the door leading to the newspaper men's section at the Baltimore convention, and to admit no one unless he exhibited a certain white card entitling the holder to a seat in that section.

After one of the evening recesses of the convention, when the correspondents were rushing back to their seats, a finely built, snappy-looking young man brushed by Charlie and left with him a white card. Later on Charlie looked at it and read all there was on it, which was as follows:

"Please make a small donation to buy me a wooden leg."

"And me," said Charlie, in great self-disgust, "a wooden head."

The Unpardonable Sin

By Morgan Robertson

Author of "The Tyranny of Sin," "The Locked Cabin," Etc.

One of the rules on board ship is that the man at the wheel must never change the course without orders from a superior. To transgress that rule is to commit the unpardonable sin of the sea

AMONG sailors there are a few aphorisms born of their experiences, and oft-quoted in the way of explanation, admonition, or advice to tyros, such as: "One hand for yourself, the other for the ship;" "It's a good sailorman that can do what he's told;" and "Obey orders, though you break owners."

There are others as well, of no real moment in this story, but there is also a principle of seafaring, more vital than any indicated above, which has never been crystallized into a maxim; and this is, that the man at the wheel *must never change the course without orders from a superior*. It is the unpardonable sin of the sea, and at one time in his life Jack Fleming committed it.

He had gone to sea at thirteen, with a bare knowledge of the three R's, but with a keen intelligence, and a high spirit. He had a sensitive soul, which writhed under the ill treatment that all greenhorns receive at sea, but which survived it until he had learned enough to escape it; then he was immune. Though undersized, he was active; though weak of body, he was strong in mind, readily assimilating each new lesson in seamanship, never needing to be told or shown twice the proper and shipshape way to do this task or that.

Before he had acquired his growth he was an able seaman, and could sign as such with any skipper he had made one voyage with, but always, in a new ship, he could rate no higher than ordinary seaman, because of his youth and small stature. Yet many a bullying mate was surprised into admiration at his skill with a marlinespike or serving mallet, his efficiency aloft, his first-class helmsmanship, and his readiness to apprehend and obey an order. Had he studied navigation, and stuck to a good skipper, he would have been a first mate, and, perhaps, a captain, at twenty-one; but the Fates decreed that he should hear of the high wages paid to sailors on the Great Lakes, and thereupon he packed his bag and took the train for Oswego, the nearest lake port.

Here he found the same difficulty in getting a berth: he was small and youthful. Also, he found conditions strange to him, straight-stemmed, snub-nosed, shallow-draft schooners, with centerboards instead of keels, with short lower masts and long topmasts, small mainsails and foresails, and big gaff-topsails, heavy booms and light gaffs, diamond screw steering gear and jib booms so rigged that they could be topped up on end for facility in passing through the locks of the Welland Canal. Canallers, they were called, and they were so near alike that only the men who manned them could tell one from another at a distance.

And these men were different from the sailors he had known; they were intelligent men, who talked politics, who, when ashore, wore good clothing, clean linen, and tasteful neckwear, who drank little, and smoked cigars oftener than pipes. With his natural intelligence he adjusted himself to these conditions, and when he found a skipper who wanted a man, candidly expressed his

limitations, asking for a chance to make good. The skipper was in a hurry, and Jack Fleming was signed on as able seaman.

But he was not an able seaman in this kind of craft, and he did not make good. His skill with a marlinespike was not called upon; there were no square sails to furl or reef, nor yards to send up or down; he did not know the ropes, for throat and peak halyards were reversed, all the jib halyards and downhauls led to the opposite sides, the spring stay between the fore and mainmast heads was called the triatic stay, and the top burtons, of which there were two—one for each anchor—were called fish tackles.

He could shift the gaff-topsail sheet and tack, and furl the heavy gaff-topsails as well as the next man, but his steering was bad. He had been accustomed to standing keel craft, and these shallow schooners, hanging to a centerboard as to a pivot, were as hard to keep straight as a washtub.

The captain was a mild, easy-going man, and his shipmates were kind to him; but the mate, a big, illiterate French Canadian, shriveled his soul with profane and abusive criticism.

"Name of a dog! Why you no steer, hey?" he would roar at the youngster, as he ground the wheel up and down, perspiring like a longshoreman. "Bah! You no more use zen a wash lady."

To which young Jack would answer respectfully, and then steer worse.

Big Frank, as the mate was called, could not sign his name, nor read a word of any language; yet he carried in his head a comprehensive knowledge of every rock, shoal, coast line, light, course, and distance from one end of the Lakes to the other, and would have scorned the use of a chart even had he been able to understand one. He seemed to have an extra sense of locality; in fog or snow he knew where he was, and no craft on which he was aboard ever came to grief from mistakes regarding position. He was a valuable mate, and had sailed many years in this capacity, but could not acquire a command because of his illiteracy. He was a seaman up to the requirements of the Lake schooners, and could oversee the bending and shortening of sail, setting up rigging, and such work; but many foremast hands could teach him things with a marlinespike; for his exceptional memory and native shrewdness had lifted him, early in life, from the forecastle, where marlinespike work is learned.

Naturally, Jack hated him, and as soon as Big Frank became aware of it, the hatred was returned. It became hardened and fixed on an occasion when Jack, at the captain's tentative suggestion—for he was the only man available, his watchmate being at the wheel—put a neat, long splice in a parted river towline, a job that Frank had essayed and given up. A river towline, used in towing through the Detroit and St. Clair Rivers, is a rope of four-inch diameter, and it takes not only strong fingers, but long practice and skill, to keep the twist in the hard strands and crowd them neatly into place.

The captain laughingly joked his mate about the boy's victory; and the mate had responded hotly: "Does zat make heem a good sailorman? Just wait. We'll see in ze canal."

The Welland Canal is a ditch feared and abhorred by Lake sailors. It connects Lake Ontario with Lake Erie; it is about thirty-six miles long, with twenty-eight locks; and schooners at this period went through it pulled by horses on the towpath, and steered not only by the inefficient rudder, but by lines from bow and stern, pulled ashore at the right moment, and placed upon spiles, or posts, which, tautened on the bitts and slacked away to prevent parting, would drag the schooners, bow or stern, toward the towpath, and thus keep her straight.

Two men of the crew were always detailed for this towpath work, and always the weakest was given the "stern line ashore." Thus Jack carried his end of a heaving line leading to the after bitts, or timberheads, ready at the order from the mate on the forecastle deck to pull the stern line ashore and place it over the nearest spile.

Big Frank was a skilled "canaller." At every opportunity in that thirty-six-mile trip through the canal he deviled the boy; he allowed the schooner to swing, bow in, toward the towpath, and then sent roaring orders to the boy to "put zat line in zat spile," to "fleet up and put it on ze next," to "hurry up, an' look alive."

It was all malicious, for Frank could have run that schooner through the canal without using the stern line at all. Yet the captain understood; he helped the youngster in dragging the heavy stern line along the towpath, and when it was placed on the next spile, sent a few sharp remarks to his big mate that silenced and subdued him for a time. But he did not silence nor subdue the boy. At Port Colborne, at the far end of the canal, they lowered the jib boom, hoisted over the boat, and rigged the davits; then, at some adverse criticism from Big Frank, Jack broke loose.

"I'm a boy yet," he said, "but in a few years I'll have my growth; and I'll lick you, you big coward, just as sure as I can reach you."

To which Frank replied with a derisive grunt.

The devilment continued until the schooner reached Chicago, where the men were paid off.

"You've got to go, Jack," said the skipper, as he handed him his pay and got his receipt. "The mate don't like you, and he's a good mate—a better mate than you are a sailor, though I admit you're a whole seaman except in weight and strength."

"All right, sir," answered Jack. "My weight and strength will come to me in time. Meanwhile, sir, I'll simply have to grow."

"That's right. And when you're grown up you can have a berth with me at any time."

Jack's steering had improved on the passage up the Lakes, and he held enough of self-confidence to ship in another schooner bound to Detroit; but his steering was still inadequate, and he was paid off, with no assurance of reshipping.

He signed on as wheelman in a river tug—one of the large, powerful steamers that go down Lake Erie, or up Lake Huron a hundred miles or so, to gather in a convoy of from three to seven schooners, and tow them through the rivers. Here Jack had one of the seafaring maxims mentioned at the beginning strongly impressed upon his soul.

The tug was out on Lake Erie, creeping up alongside a big three-master, whose captain, shouting through his hands, haggled over the size of the tow bill, and the weakness of his river towline, demanding that he be the stern vessel in the tow. There was a brisk breeze blowing; the big schooner, under all sail, was making ten knots at least, and the man at the wheel was busy—as was Jack, who had the wheel of the tug. A slight shift of the wheel on the part of either helmsman would bring the two craft perilously near, or send them so far apart as to make the conversation difficult.

Jack's captain stood on the small bridge forward of the pilot house, and, practically, as captains will, did the steering himself. "Starboard a little," he would say, and Jack would answer and shift the wheel. Then it would be "Port a little," or "Steady as you go." Jack did his part, answered every order, and shifted the wheel as directed. But there came a moment, when the captain was deep in his argument with the schooner captain, that the tug sheered dangerously near to the schooner. Jack would have put the wheel to port, had he been free to act; but he was not.

Anxiously he watched, and waited, and was just about to "sing out," when the wakening captain yelled "Starboard, quick." He should have said "Port," but that was not Jack's business. He put the wheel to starboard, and stepped out of the pilot house; for the tug shot under the big schooner's head gear, and the pilot house and smokestack went overboard. The engine was still working—for engineers also wait for the bells, or orders—and the tug charged across to leeward, and only straightened up when Jack, who had jumped to the main deck, had clambered back to the wheel, which, secure

in its strong stanchions, had not given way to the pressure which had carried away the flimsy pilot house and smokestack. Then the captain broke loose.

"You all-fool son of a sea cook," he yelled. "Why didn't you put that wheel as I told you?"

"You said 'starboard,' sir," answered Jack, "and I obeyed. I'm brought up to 'obey orders if I break owners.'"

The captain's face went through a varied play of emotions, then he said: "That's right, my lad. I'm to blame. Hard o' port. We'll go under her stern and get back to where we were. Say, boy, you've got it right. Always obey orders, even though you know the man givin' them is a darn' fool; that's me."

But, with no smokestack, the tug could not make steam, and the captain lost his tow, leaving the schooner to some other tug, and creeping in to Amhurstburg to refit. Then he paid off Jack, the man who obeyed orders.

"Don't question your principles, my boy," he said; "but if you had more common sense and less principles, I wouldn't have a thousand-dollar repair bill to pay. Get back to sailing craft, where principles are wanted."

So, again out of a berth, Jack shipped in a schooner. She was easy to steer, and he remained through the season in her; then he wintered in Oswego, where he talked with the experienced craftsman of the Lake-faring fraternity, and learned a few things not included in books on seamanship, or in the vocabulary of skippers to unsatisfactory seamen. It went into the soul of the boy, and later bore fruit; but his present problem was to learn to steer the flat-bottomed, wabbly washtubs that looked like schooners above the water line, but were not.

When navigation opened he shipped again in a schooner, and though she steered hard, he held his own, and was never relieved, even in the hardest of strains. Slowly, through the season—for he held to this schooner—he mastered the sense of touch, and feeling, and resistance to vagrant seas on the rudder, and could keep the craft on a course satisfactory to the skipper or mate. Criticism ceased; he was allowed his place as an able seaman. Now and again his marlinespike work was called upon, and he aroused the respect of lesser workmen, and often gave tutelage to others, who could down him in a rough-and-tumble fight, or outweigh him at a pull on the halyards.

But he put in three seasons on the Lakes before he got his growth, his weight, and chest measurement. He grew to six feet; his arms assumed the dimensions of a small man's leg; his shoulders squared out to about eighteen inches; his legs, straight and symmetrical, never wabbled or gave way under any stress of strain or excitement. When he moved toward a rope, the rigging, the capstan, or to the wheel, he sprang or ran. His exuberant strength and vitality required quick movements, and he seldom walked. And the men who once could have downed him would have hesitated now at the test.

Jack was a man, and knew it. And all through the course of his development he remembered Big Frank, the bully who had misused him when he was weak and helpless. He had heard of him occasionally, as the highly efficient first mate under this skipper or that—had heard of his feats in shortening sail in a blow, or clawing off a lee shore, or of his intuitive knowledge of wind, weather, or position that enabled the skipper to bring his craft safe to port.

All of this brought bitter and revengeful thoughts to the mind of Jack. He wanted to meet Big Frank, and thrash him—that was all.

And in this frame of mind, late in November, he shipped, first man of the crew, in a schooner bound down to Oswego. He brought his bag aboard at the elevator dock and waited. The first and second mate appeared—two doddering imbeciles; then the crew, a boy, fresh from home, and three sailors, one of whom was Big Frank. Frank, as he explained, had been paid off for the season, and, wanting to save railroad fare to the little town outside of Oswego, where he lived, had shipped before the

mast for the run down, thus not only saving fare, but making wages. Jack gritted his teeth, and repressed a strong inclination to challenge him. Under the stress and strain of hard work, the mood left him, and he met Frank halfway in the ethics of forecastle life.

Frank made good; he dropped all assumption of superiority to the rest of the crew, was respectful to the two old figureheads who held the berths of first and second mate, and did his best to fraternize with the men before the mast. He even told stories in the dogwatches when all hands were together.

And the schooner, the last out of Chicago, watched by the ship-news reporters, and worried about by mothers and wives, went down the Lakes alone; for at that time of the year everything else had tied up to the dock, and gone into winter quarters.

There was fair weather and wind down Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, with no friction, external or internal, to disturb the crew. Jack and Big Frank were in the same watch, and relieved each other at the wheel with the customary charges as to the course, "by the wind," or, in the event of a compass course, "weatherly course," or "looward course." They passed through the rivers, the only schooner in the tow, and dropped the towline in Lake Erie to fight the battle under sail power.

It came down—a nor'wester from the wilds of upper Canada, a freezing, whistling fury of wind and cold rain, that compelled shortening of sail; and the men, with ice on their hair and on their oilskins, got the schooner under double-reefed foresail, close-reefed mainsail, staysail, and jib. Steering was difficult, and Big Frank, at the wheel, made hard work of it—so hard, that the captain called Jack, his watchmate, aft to help.

When two men are at the wheel the rightful incumbent holds to the weather side, and when he needs help he says "up," and the helper heaves with him, or "down," or "steady," and the helper responds. But Frank made bad work of it. He was an efficient mate, but a poor sailor, and the watching captain soon said: "Let Jack take the weather wheel, Frank, and see if he can do better."

So they changed places. Jack had the wheel, and the right to command, "up," or "down," or "steady." For a while he used his prerogative, then found that he could handle the wheel without help from Frank, and the sight of the poor, incompetent giant by his side, shivering in his oilskins, filled him with a pity that was new to him.

"Captain," he said, "I can handle her, and Frank can go forward, if he likes."

"Sure?" asked the captain, glancing at the compass. The schooner was dead on her course, but yawing a point or so each side—still making the course good. "All right. Go forward, Frank, and warm up. If we want you, we'll sing out."

Frank went forward, but he was not wanted, and the captain did not sing out. Jack steered Frank's trick and his own, and at eight bells went below, too utterly exhausted to even taunt the man who had once deviled him for bad steering. At four in the morning he again took the wheel—for so the captain decreed—and kept the schooner steady until, running into Buffalo, for they could not make the canal in that weather, the physical agony showing in the young fellow's face aroused the captain to relieve him.

Two men from the other watch came to the wheel, and while they did not steer so straight as had Jack, they took the schooner into port, while Jack sagged down in a coil of rope hanging from a belaying pin and rested. He was a physical wreck, but in his soul was the glory of victory and triumph over his enemy. But some curious manifestation of pride—something left of the pity he had felt for the shivering incompetent, prevented his boasting, or even commenting on the changed conditions.

And he became satisfied, for soon there were other small victories that must have brought to the limited mind of Frank all the humiliation which it was capable of feeling. When the gale

died down, the schooner sailed for Port Colborne, the upper entrance of the Welland Canal, and, in furling sail as they towed in, it devolved upon Frank to go aloft and stow the main gaff-topsail—work that so far he had managed to evade, because of the presence in the crew of younger, more active men. But there was no evading this task; the others were forward, busy with the headsails, and Jack was at the wheel.

So Frank essayed the climb, only to fail; he was a large man, his feet were large and clad in heavy boots; the ratlines at the eyes of the rigging were few and far apart, merely scattered lumps on which a man could rest the toe of his boot while he lifted himself by his arms into the crosstrees. It had been many years since Frank had been aloft, and, after a few mighty struggles, he gave it up.

The captain watched him descend, and said sarcastically, as he reached the rail: "You're a good man in your place, Frank, but you're out o' place here. Take the wheel. Jack, stow that gaff-topsail."

Frank made no answer, but his face was black with rage as he relieved Jack, who, easily and quickly, danced aloft and finished the task.

On the trip through the canal, Frank, an efficient overseer of the work, yet failed at each station. He could stand on the forecastle deck and direct the movements of each man at the lines, and, by word of mouth, steer the craft better than could the average helmsman. But there was a legitimately shipped first mate on board to fill this position, and Frank was placed at the "snub." This is a heavy rope, as long as the schooner, and as big around as a river towline, used only in the locks, and used only to check the schooner's headway, and bring her to a stop, safely clear of the lock gates.

Frank, with mittens on his big hands, for it was cold and snowing, bungled the job at the first lock, nearly carrying away the gates. He was then placed at the head line aboard, but made equally bad work of it. He had given orders for so long that he could not obey them, and parted the line by holding it too hard to the timberheads, allowing the schooner to ram her nose into the "heel-path," on the opposite side of the canal.

After an hour they got her afloat, and on the way, but the original stations were resumed by the men, except that Jack, carrying the head line ashore, was called on board to care for the snub, the boy of the crew, who had carried the stern line, was given Jack's place, and Frank took the boy's place—carrying the stern line down the whole thirty-six miles of towpath.

Frank made no comment on his disgrace when he came on board at mealtimes, and no one else cared to—not even Jack. Somehow, his hatred of the humiliated bully had altogether given way to pity and sympathy.

They left Port Dalhousie for the last reach down the Lakes to Oswego, under clear skies and with a brisk, all-sail breeze from the west. All hands were exhausted after the drill of canal work, and, after supper, as is allowed in these Lake craft, sat in the forecastle smoking and resting. Frank was sullen and quiet, the other men were somewhat nonplused over his bad showing, but did not care to discuss it in Frank's presence; only the boy, fresh from home, saw fit to remark:

"'Tain't always your good mates that make good sailors. Guess they forget, or maybe never learned."

With an incoherent bellow Frank seized the youngster by the throat; then he himself was seized by Jack in the same manner.

"Stop it, Frank," said Jack, "or you'll deal with me. You remember, don't you, my first season on the Lakes? I've tried to forget it, but you leave this boy alone, or I'll remember, and make you remember, too."

He had not exerted an ounce of pressure on Frank's windpipe, yet the ugly look in Frank's face softened. He released the boy and looked at Jack, who still held his grip.

"Zat's all right, Jack," he said in a queer tone. "You're right, and I guess ze boy's right. I'm a mate, not a sailor. I didn't have no time to learn ze tricks."

"Well," said Jack, taking his hands away. "No fighting. I had my share of that on salt water, and it isn't needed here. And I guess the boy'll shut up. We'll make him."

At eight bells the watch on deck mounted the stairs, while the watch below turned in. But not for long; snow began to fall, wind and sea arose, and, with a falling barometer, the skipper decided to shorten down. Jack was the first man to mount the stairs in answer to the call; but Frank, big, tired, and stiff in his joints from the unusual fatigue, came some moments later.

"What's the matter wi' you?" yelled the highly indignant old person who had signed first mate. "You're no good at anything, and you can't even come when you're called."

"I can come when I'm called," answered Frank thickly, "and I can call, too."

"Get aft to that main-reef tackle," the mate ordered, "and stop talkin'."

Frank obeyed without response; but in reefing the mainsail, the second mate paid him his compliments. Frank passed the reef platt, or earring, wrongly. He could have directed a man to do it properly, as could the second mate, but, with the rope in his hands, he bungled.

"Come down off that boom, you farmer," shouted the second mate, who had charge of this part of the work. "Jack, get up there and pass the reef platt," he said, the first mate and the rest being busy with the tack lashing and halyards. "Now, get forrard," he continued, as Frank climbed down to make way for Jack, "and man the throat hal'ards. You've got beef, if you hain't got brains. I've heard o' you for years, and what a wonder you were, but——"

"Perhaps," answered Frank, in his guttural voice, "you'll nevair hear o' me again, but maybe, some time, somehow, ozzer men will hear of both of us."

He went to the halyards, leaving the second mate to think out what he meant.

They close-reefed the mainsail, for green seas were now lifting over the stern, and then double-reefed the foresail. In the threshing that this sail received as it was lowered down, about six feet of the boltrope—a rope sewed to the edge of the sail to strengthen it, as a selvage strengthens cloth—carried away. It is an axiom of seamanship that repairs must not be delayed. The break was at the leech, just above the reef cringle, and, to sew it on, a man must mount the boom with palm, needle, and twine.

Frank, smarting under his failures, forced himself forward, climbed the foresheet, and asked for the materials and a lantern. The materials were brought from the lazaret, and a lantern was lit and passed up to him. But Frank, big and clumsy, could only thread the sail needle with the necessary six parts of twine; he could not twist, nor wax it, because of his cramped position. To sew up that six-foot gap he needed about nine feet of twine, of six twisted parts, and well waxed. He could have prepared it on deck, by stretching it out from the rail, with two lanterns to help; but up on that boom, hanging on with his legs to prevent tumbling to the deck, he made no progress.

The disgusted captain watched for a while, then said: "Come down out o' that, and let a sailor do the job. Jack, you're a salt-water man. Can you sew up that boltrope?"

"Yes, sir," answered Jack, with a strong tendency to defend Frank and tell him what to do. But there is an etiquette among sailors, and he hesitated. Frank came down, handed the palm, needle, twine, and wax to Jack, and sought the shelter of the weather rail, while Jack climbed up and took his place.

He knew the easy trick of twisting and waxing six or eight parts of twine while aloft, and did it quickly. He threaded the needle, held it close to his thumb, and wound the whole length of twine around both; then he pulled the needle through the coil, waxing as he pulled, and found himself prepared to sew. It was a small trick of the sailor's trade, easily learned, but seldom taught, and he had the boltrope secured to the sail as neatly as had the

original sailmaker before Frank had got the chill out of his fingers. Then he came down, and the skipper silently clapped him on the back. Jack was happy, yet sorry for Big Frank.

But Frank suffered no further humiliation on that trip. Indeed, he had not only paid his bill, but before the night ended thoroughly redeemed himself. Wind and sea increased, and there was no sleep for any one. The wind, that had hauled to the northwest, now backed around to the west, and, as the schooner's course was due east, this necessitated the taking in of the mainsail, to give the wind a bearing on the foresail and prevent broaching to. Even so, Jack was the only man of the crew who could keep the schooner safely before the wind, and, with a man to help him, was mercilessly worked through the night.

Now and then, as occasion permitted, he sent his helper to the galley, where the woman cook, stretched upon the floor, and praying, would rouse herself and pour a cup of coffee for the man, and one for Jack; then she would replenish the coffeepot, and lie down to further prayer.

The coffee kept Jack on his feet, though they were numb with cold, while his arms and shoulders were warm and perspiring, in spite of the coating of ice on his oilskin coat and sou'wester. But this ice finally became a help: it was when the frozen curtain from the rim of his sou'wester reached and froze to the ice on his shoulders. It was a welcome shield, and, as he could move his head slightly within its icy helmet, he allowed it to remain.

At midnight it was his watch below, and he should at least have been relieved from the wheel; but he could not be spared, and he steered through the four-hour watch, while the other men, who helped at the lee wheel, relieved each other every hour and brought him coffee. At four o'clock, however, through a lull and a clearing of the snow, the skipper saw Big Sodus Light, squarely abeam. Oswego was thirty miles to the east; his foresail, with its five parts of sheet frozen together, and the size of a tree trunk, was to starboard, and to make Oswego it would be necessary to gybe. He decided that it would be too risky, if not utterly impossible, and, after an inspection of his chart in the cabin, decided to haul across the Lake and anchor under some lee in the St. Lawrence River.

"Bring her up carefully," he said to Jack, "and keep her nor'-nor'east—true."

Jack answered, and brought the schooner up to the course; the skipper watched the compass for a while, and, finding that Jack made the course "true"—that is, that if the schooner swung a point and a half to leeward, he could balance it by making her swing a point and a half to windward of the course—he went down into the warmth of the cabin; for there was now a long thirty-five miles of good sea room ahead, and there was nothing else out on the Lake that night. Frank, who was at the lee wheel, had little to do; for the schooner, with wind nearly abeam, steered much easier.

The second mate came aft, peered at the compass, asked the course, and said: "Better make it a loowardly course, Jack. We're headin' purty high to pass clear o' the Ducks."

Jack answered respectfully, and prepared to obey the last order. Then the second mate crawled forward on the ice-covered deck, and descended to the warmth of the forecastle, where the crew had preceded.

The old first mate came aft and asked the course. Then he said: "Make it a weatherly course, Jack. We're makin' leeway, and we don't want to hit the Galoups."

"Yes, sir," answered Jack, "but how many courses must I steer? The captain said nor'-nor-east, true; the second mate said a loowardly course, and you say a weatherly course."

"Do as I say, Jack," said the old fellow, shaking an icy mitten in his face. "I know this Lake better than he does. I was raised on it. Weatherly course, now. I'm goin' forrard to warm up. Sing out, if anything happens."

He departed for the forecastle, and

Frank grunted: "Ze skipper ees right, Jack. You steer one true course."

"Got to obey orders, Frank," answered Jack. "Go forward, if you like. I can handle her."

Frank grunted some more, but he also departed for the forecastle, and Jack, aching in every bone of his body, steered on through the morning watch —an hour, an hour and a half, an hour and three-quarters, until a quarter to six, when, in that wintry season, it was still as dark as at midnight. Then, lifting his eyes from the illuminated compass card, he saw, through the darkness and snow, a shadowy form slowly ascending the icy fore rigging. He watched it, the light from the binnacle still in his eyes, and before he had made out that it was a man, there came a shout in Frank's mighty voice.

"Land! Land ho!" he bellowed. "Right under ze bow. Land ho. On deck, everybody. Call ze cappen, Jack."

Jack, able to see better now, looked ahead as the schooner plunged into a sea. There was a huge lump of blacker darkness dead ahead. Holding the wheel, he hitched himself around forward of it, and sent his boot crashing through the cabin window; but it was some minutes before the sleepy captain appeared. Meanwhile Jack had resumed his position abaft the wheel, and looked at the compass. In that brief moment since he had lifted his eyes the schooner had swung off to northeast, and was still swinging—as though possessing a soul of her own that impelled her to escape danger.

Jack held the wheel tightly, and allowed her to swing, thinking, even at this tense moment, of his experience with the tug captain who had discharged him for obeying orders.

The lubber's point passed the compass point of east-nor'east, then east, when, at a heavy roll to port, the foresail gybed with a shower of broken ice.

Meanwhile the captain had appeared, and the deck was filled with excited men, running about and shouting; but Frank, still in the rigging, not knowing that Jack had squared away, was still shouting, "Land ho. Land ahead."

The land was now on the port quarter, for Jack had steadied the schooner at east-sou'east, and no one could see any land. But it now occurred to Frank to call out from the rigging: "How you heading, Jack?"

"East-sou'east," answered Jack, not caring who had called out. Then the captain and two mates came running aft, but, before they had arrived, Frank again sang out from the rigging: "Light ho, right ahead. Zat's Galoup Light, cap'n."

Then Frank descended, and Jack had just time to make out a light ahead when his three superiors were upon him.

"Who told you to shift the course?" they demanded, almost simultaneously.

"I didn't," said the captain. "I was below." Both mates loudly denied the responsibility. They were very indignant.

"No one told me," answered Jack sullenly. "There was land under the bow, and I swung her off. And there's more land ahead. See that light?"

"Galoup Light, cap'n," shouted Frank from amidship.

"That's what it is," responded the captain. "I know just where I am, now. Put your wheel up, and get back to your course, nor'-nor'east. Stand by that foresail when it gybes, you men."

Jack obeyed, but the foresail required little attention. It came over with a crash, luckily carrying nothing away, and Jack steadied the schooner at the old course, still a true course to the entrance to the St. Lawrence. Then the three mustered around Jack at the wheel, and expressed their disapproval of a man who would shift the course eight points without orders. Jack stood it meekly, for he did not know the land he had escaped, nor whether or not the course was correct. But in the heat of the triple lecture on seamanly ethics, just as the captain had declared his intention of landing Jack as soon as the anchor was down, Frank appeared among them. He was highly excited, and evidently cared little for seamanly ethics.

"Let ze boy alone," he said, in a

growling sort of roar. "He did right. He was ze only man on deck till I come up in my watch below an' tak' ze look for land. I saw ze land—Yorkshire Island it was—and I sing out. Where was ze cappen, where ze mate and second mate, where ze lookout? Hey? All down by ze fire, and ze boy zat steer all night put ze wheel up. I tell you, two minutes more and we hit, and off we go to sink in twenty fathom. What good ze boat—all froze up? What good all you? Nothing—bah!"

"Now, that will do you, Frank," answered the captain angrily. "You're 'fore the mast here, with nothing to say. And I'll pay you off quick as Jack."

"You pay me off now, eef you like," answered Frank. "And I must not talk, here, hey? Well, I talk when I get on shore. You pay me off when you like, and you pay Jack off when you like. And next spring I go out first mate of ze big *David Vance,* and I always ship ze men and ze second mate. You hear me now. I ship Jack second mate of ze big *David Vance,* out of Milwaukee; and if Jack stays by me t'ree seasons I have him captain over me. You hear me?"

CORRALLING CARROLL'S CAROL

CARL CARROLL is a song writer, with a sublime confidence in his output. Last spring, inspired by eight cups of black coffee and seven whiffs of the young spring air, he dashed off a little thing setting forth in happy measures that Taft was the greatest president and the finest candidate concerning whom Mr. Carroll could possibly carol. The next step was to get publicity.

The caroling Carroll, packing his grip with manuscripts and courage, journeyed to Washington, looked the field over, bought a tuning fork, advertised in the daily papers for five husky men, and set forth that he would pay them a dollar a minute for five minutes' work. Then he taught them the Taft song.

"Now, fellows," he explained, "all I want you to do is to go with me to the public gallery of the United States Senate and sing this song. You see here my trusty tuning fork. It shall be the pitchfork which will toss you to the dizzy heights of fame. The Senate will listen to us. The success of the song will be assured. We will all make much money. Are you ready?"

The faithful five said they were ready.

Arrived in the Senate gallery, Carroll played with fate and his tuning fork. Senator Heyburn was speaking. The senator hates newspapers and all publicity dodges. It was a crucial moment. Right in the midst of the cruciality Carroll found himself looking into the steely eyes of Colonel Ransdell, the sergeant-at-arms, and felt on his shoulder the impelling hands of five policemen. After several frantic contortions of the throat muscles, he decided not to swallow the fork. Speaking of the occurrence later, he said:

"I would have sung that song, but I knew old Heyburn's objections to publicity methods, and I was just waiting for him to get through his speech. But it's an even bet that the piece would have enthralled even him."

P. S.—That Taft song is not yet the national anthem. Still, there is some consolation for Carroll. He's not in jail.

THE RIGHT NAME FOR HIS COMPLAINT

THE young physician, who was working for the city and doing good among the poor, was called to examine a little Hebrew boy. The doctor tried to be as gentle and kind as possible.

Finally, in order to make the boy forget his troubles, he asked:

"Are you ticklish?"

"No," answered the boy; "Yiddish."

The Mind Master

By Burton E. Stevenson

Author of "The Marathon Mystery," "The Boule Cabinet," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

While summering in the Bronx, Godfrey, a reporter, discovers strange neighbors in an adjoining mansion which is surrounded by a twelve-foot wall. At twelve o'clock each night he has witnessed the fall of a mysterious star that regularly bursts over two white-robed figures standing on the roof of the secluded house. Godfrey invites his lawyer friend, Lester (who tells the story), to view the midnight spectacle. Seeing it together leads them to decide to solve the enigma during Lester's four days' visit. Godfrey has already ascertained that the mansion is the property of a rich, queer old man, Worthington Vaughan, who lives there with his only child, a daughter. Perched in a tree next day, Lester witnesses an extraordinary pantomime enacted by three white-robed figures in the wall-inclosed premises—Worthington Vaughan, his daughter and a swarthy man who appears to be forcing the father and daughter to some serious issue. The girl, Marjorie Vaughan, espies Lester, and throws a letter over the wall to him. It is addressed to one Frederic Swain, who happens to be then in Lester's office studying law. Lester telephones Swain to come to him in the Bronx. When he arrives the revelation is made that Marjorie Vaughan and he had plighted troth in earlier days, and now the girl begs him to meet her in the garden some night within three days, or it will be "too late." Ladders are procured and Swain scales the wall that night, while Godfrey and Lester wait in the darkness. Swain returns to them, evidently bewildered; also his wrist is bleeding. A woman's scream is heard and Swain again rushes up the ladder and over the wall. Godfrey and Lester follow. A scene of horror greets the two men upon reaching the Vaughan mansion. Worthington Vaughan has been strangled to death by means of a knotted cord; Swain, apparently out of his senses, is administering to Marjorie, who has fainted. Upstairs, Godfrey and Lester searching for help, come across a Hindu mystic and his cobra staring in a trance at a huge crystal globe. A doctor and the police are sent for, and Coroner Goldberger appears with the latter to direct investigations. Clews to the murderer are found in a bloodstained handkerchief at the dead man's side and bloody finger prints upon his white robe. Thorough search of the house reveals three servants and a Thuggee named Mahbub, who is companion to Francisco Silva, the mystic. At the inquest none of these seems to know aught of the murder, but the bloody finger prints under microscopic examination prove to be those of Swain, and he is sent to the Tombs charged with murder. Lester and Godfrey use every effort to solve the impenetrable mystery, which grows deeper when Miss Vaughan suddenly seems to abandon the cause of her lover and become the disciple of the Hindu mystic, putting herself and her property into his keeping.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE VISION IN THE CRYSTAL.

SILVA laid a hand tenderly upon the bowed head, as though in benediction, but I could have sworn there was unholy triumph in his eyes. I caught but a glimpse of it, for he veiled them instantly, and bowed his head, and his lips moved as if in prayer. The kneeling figure was quivering with sobs; I could hear them in her throat; and my heart turned sick as I saw how she permitted his caressing touch. Then, suddenly, she sprang erect, and, without a glance at me, hurried from the room.

There was silence for a moment, then Silva arose and faced me.

"You see how it is, Mr. Lester," he said.

"Yes," I answered dryly, "I see how it is."

I refolded the will, slipped it back into its envelope, restored it to the drawer, made sure that all the packets were there, too, replaced the drawer in the safe, closed the door, twirled the knob, swung the shelves into place in front of it, and, finally, my self-control partially regained, turned back to Silva.

"Well," I said, and my voice sounded very flat, "let us sit down and talk it over."

He wheeled his chair around to face me and sat down. I looked at him in silence for a moment. The man was virile, dominant; there was in his aspect

something impressive and compelling. Small wonder this child of nineteen had found herself unable to stand out against him!

"I know what is in your mind," he said, at last. "But, after all, it was her father's wish. That should weigh with you."

"Her father was mad."

"I deny it. He was very sane. He found the Way, and he has set her feet upon it."

"What way?" I demanded. "Where does it lead?"

"The way of life. It leads to peace and happiness."

He uttered the words as with finality; but I shrugged them impatiently away.

"Don't float away into your mysticism," I said. "Let us keep our feet on the earth. You may be sincere, or you may not—it is impossible for me to say. But I know this—it is not fair to that child to take her at her word. She doesn't realize what she is doing. I don't know what it is you plan for her, but before you do anything, she must have a chance to find herself. She must be taken out of this atmosphere into a healthier one, until she has rallied from the shock of her father's death, and emerged from the shadow of his influence. She must have time to get back her self-control. Then, if she wishes to return, well and good."

"To all your 'musts,' Mr. Lester," retorted Silva, "I can only say that I am willing. I have not lifted a finger to detain her. But what if she will not go?"

"Then she must be made to go."

"Another 'must'!" he rejoined lightly. "I would remind you that she is mistress of her own actions. Neither you nor I can compel her to do anything she does not wish to do. It has been a great happiness to me that she has chosen as she has; it would have been a great sorrow to me had she decided differently. But I should have acquiesced. Now it is for you to acquiesce. After all, what claim have you upon her?"

"I admit that I have no claim," I said, more calmly. "But there is one who has a claim, and to whom she is bound, at least, to listen."

"You refer, I suppose, to that misguided young man who is now in prison."

"I refer to Frederic Swain, yes," I retorted hotly. "It is true he is in prison. And how did he get there? By coming when she called him; by trying to assist her."

"Was it assisting her to kill her father?" queried Silva, and his lips were curled with scorn.

I paused a moment to make sure of my self-control, for it seemed again to be slipping from me.

"Señor Silva," I said at last, "how her father came to his death I do not know; but I do know that Swain had no hand in it."

"Yet he is in prison," he reminded me.

"Innocent men have been in prison before this. I will get him out."

"In what way?"

"By finding the real murderer!" I said, and looked at him with eyes which I know were bloodshot.

He returned my gaze steadily.

"You mean you think I am the murderer?" he asked quietly.

I got a grip of myself—I saw that I had gone too far.

"I do not know what to think," I answered. "I am seeking light. In any event, Swain merits some consideration. Miss Vaughan should, at least, listen to what he has to say. She promised to marry him."

"She has taken back that promise."

"She has never said so."

"She has taken it back in choosing as she has chosen. They who serve in the temple of Siva turn their backs on marriage."

I put the words away from me with a gesture.

"That means nothing to me," I said. "I know nothing of the temple of Siva. I wish to know nothing, for mysticism repels me. But I do know that she gave her word; I do know that she loved him."

"Earthly love fades and passes," said

the yogi solemnly. "She has given her heart to the Master," and he made his gesture of reverence.

There was anger in my eyes as I looked at him. How was one to reply to such jargon?

"I would point out to you, Señor Silva," I said, "that Miss Vaughan is little more than a child, and ought to have a guardian to protect her interests. I shall ask that one be appointed at once."

"To that," said the yogi mildly, "I have not the least objection. In fact, Mr. Lester, I do not know why you should tell me your plans. But, for some reason, you seem to regard me as an adversary. I am not—I am no man's adversary. I object to nothing; I have no right to object to anything. I am simply Miss Vaughan's friend and well-wisher, and seek her happiness. I should like to be your friend also."

"And Swain's?" I queried, a little brutally.

"The friend of all men. They are all my brothers. We are parts of the same Great Spirit."

I was silent for a moment. Then I took Swain's letter from my pocket.

"If you are sincere," I said, "you can easily prove it. I have a letter here from Swain. He gave it to me to-day, and I promised to give it to Miss Vaughan to-night."

Without a word, he crossed to the bell and rang it. The maid answered.

"Mr. Lester has a letter which you will give to your mistress," he said.

"And you will wait for an answer," I added.

The girl took the letter and went away. Silva sat down again, and when I glanced at him, I saw that his eyes were closed. Five minutes passed, and the girl appeared again at the door.

"Miss Vaughan says there is no answer, sir," she said, and let the curtain fall into place again.

I made a gesture of despair; I felt that the game was lost.

"After all, Mr. Lester," said Silva kindly, "what is this fate that you would prepare for her? You seek her marriage with a young man who, when I saw him, appeared to me merely commonplace. Admitting for the moment that he is innocent of this crime, you would nevertheless condemn her to an existence flat and savorless, differing in no essential from that of the beasts of the field."

"It is the existence of all normal people," I pointed out, "and the one which they are happiest in."

"But Miss Vaughan would not be happy. She has too great a soul; that young man is not worthy of her. You yourself have felt it!"

I could not deny it.

"Few men are worthy of a good woman," I said.

"Faugh! Good woman!" and he snapped his fingers. "I abhor the words! They are simply cant! But a great woman, a woman of insight, of imagination—ah, for such a woman the way that I prepare is the only way. There she will find joy and inspiration; there she will gain insight; there she will breathe the breath of life! Mr. Lester," and he leaned forward suddenly, "have you the courage to consult the sphere?"

"What do you mean?"

"You saw how I spent the White Night of Siva," and he made his gesture of reverence. "Will you gaze for an hour on the crystal?"

"For what purpose?"

"I do not know what may be revealed to you," he answered. "That is in the keeping of the Holy One. Perhaps nothing; perhaps much. Will you make the trial?"

His eyes were distended with excitement, his lips were trembling with eagerness.

"I feel that it will not be in vain!" he added.

There was something compelling in his gaze. After all, why not? I struggled to my feet.

With a strange smile, he held back the curtain, and I passed before him into the hall and up the stairs. As I hesitated at the top, he opened the door into the entry, and again my senses were assaulted by a heavy, numbing odor. In

the middle of the room the crystal sphere glowed softly.

"Take your place upon the couch," he said; "sit thus, with your legs crossed, and your hands folded before you. And first, listen to me. There is in this no magic; this sphere is merely a shell of crystal, in which is a small electric lamp. It serves only to concentrate the mind, to enable it to forget the world, and to turn in upon itself. The visions which will come to you, if any come, will come from within and not from without. They will be such visions as the Holy One may will; and by the Holy One I mean that Spirit which pervades the universe, even to its farthest bound; the Spirit which is in all of us alike; the Spirit which is in good men and in bad, men like you and me, and men like the one who slew my pupil. It is with this Spirit, if the Holy One so wills, that you will commune, so that you will see no longer with the poor eyes of the body, but with eyes from which nothing is concealed, either in the past or in the future. Do you understand?"

"I think so," I murmured, unable to take my eyes from the glowing circle.

"Then to the Holy One I commend thee!" said the yogi, and sat down on the couch opposite me.

I felt that his eyes were upon me, but mine were upon the sphere, and in a moment I was no longer aware of him. I was aware only of the glowing circle, which seemed to grow and grow, until the whole universe revolved within it. The sun, and the moon, and the stars were there, and I gazed at them as from a great distance. I saw stars glow and fade; I saw great nebulae condense to points of light, and disintegrate to dust; then, slowly, slowly, a single planet swung into view, a million miles away, at first, but growing clearer and more clear, until I was looking down upon its seas and continents; and, suddenly, as it turned before me, I recognized the earth. Europe, Asia, the broad Pacific swung below me; then land again—America! I saw great mountains, broad plains, and mighty rivers.

The motion ceased. I was gazing down upon a great city, built upon a narrow spur of land between two broad rivers, with towering buildings and busy streets; then upon a single house, set in the midst of lofty elms; then I was in a room, a room with books against the walls, and a door opening upon a garden. From the garden the light faded, and the darkness came, and a clock somewhere struck twelve. Then, suddenly, at the door appeared two white-robed figures, an old man and a girl. The man was talking violently, but the girl crossed the room without a backward glance, and passed through a door on its farther side. The man stood for a moment looking after her, then flung himself into a chair, and put his hands before his face.

With creeping flesh, I looked again at the outer door, waiting who would enter. And slowly, slowly, the drapery was put aside, and a face peered in. I could see its flashing eyes and working mouth. A hand, in which a knife gleamed, was raised cautiously to the cord, and, when it was lowered, it held a piece of the cord within its grasp. I could see the eager fingers fashioning a knot; then, with head bent, the figure crept forward, foot by foot; it was at the chair back, and even as the old man, conscious at last of the intruder, raised his head, the cord was cast about his throat and drawn tight. There was a moment's struggle, and I saw that the hand which held the cord was red with blood. From the wrist, a stained handkerchief fell softly to the floor.

And then the assassin turned to steal away; but as he went, he cast one awful glance over his shoulder. The light fell full upon his face—and I saw that it was Swain's!

I opened my eyes to find myself extended full length on the divan, with Silva standing over me, a tiny glass of yellow liquid in his hand.

"Drink this," he said, and I swallowed it obediently.

It had a pungent, unpleasant taste, but I could feel it running through my veins, and it cleared my mind and

steadied my nerves as though by magic. I sat up and looked at the crystal. The other lights in the room had been switched on, and the sphere lay cold and lifeless. I passed my hand before my eyes, and looked at it again; then my eyes sought Silva's. He was smiling softly.

"The visions came," he said. "Your eyes tell me that the visions came. Is it not so?"

"Yes," I answered; "strange visions, Señor Silva. I wish I knew their origin."

"Their origin is in the Universal Spirit," he said quietly. "Even yet you do not believe."

"No," and I looked again at the crystal. "There are some things past belief."

"Nothing is past belief," he said, still more quietly. "You think so because your mind is wrapped in the conventions amid which you exist. Free it from those wrappings, and you will begin really to live. You have never known what life is."

"And how am I to free it, Señor Silva?" I questioned.

He took a step nearer to me.

"By becoming a disciple of the Holy One," he said most earnestly.

But I was myself again, and I rose to my feet and shook my head, with a smile.

"No," I said. "You will get no convert here. I must be going."

"I will open the gate for you," he said, in another tone, and led the way down the stairs, through the library, and out upon the graveled walk.

After the drugged atmosphere of his room, the pure night air was like a refreshing bath, and I drew in long breaths of it. Silva walked beside me silently; he unlocked the gate with a key which he carried in his hand, and pulled the gate open.

"Good night, Mr. Lester," he said. "The sphere is at your service, should you desire again to test it. Think over what I have said to you."

"Good night," I answered, and stepped through into the road.

The gate swung shut, and the key grated in the lock. Mechanically I turned my steps toward Godfrey's house; but I seemed to be bending under a great burden—the burden of the vision.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SUMMONS.

I was confused and shaken; I had no idea of the hour; I did not know whether that vision had lasted a minute or a thousand years. But when I blundered up the path to Godfrey's house, I found him and Simmonds sitting on the porch together.

"I had Godfrey bring me out," said Simmonds, as he shook hands, "because I wanted another look at those midnight fireworks. Did you come up on the elevated?"

"Yes," I answered; and I felt Godfrey turn suddenly in his chair, at the sound of my voice, and scrutinize my face. "I had dinner in town, and came up afterward."

"What time was that?" asked Godfrey quietly.

"I got up here about eight o'clock. I had an engagement with Miss Vaughan."

"And you have been with her since?"

"With her and Silva," and I dropped into a chair and mopped my face with my handkerchief. "The experience was almost too much for me," I added, and told them all that had occurred.

They listened, Godfrey motionless and intent, and Simmonds with a murmur of astonishment now and then.

"I'm bound to confess," I concluded, "that my respect for Silva has increased immensely. He's impressive; he's consistent; I almost believe he's sincere."

"Have you considered what that belief implies?" asked Godfrey.

"What does it imply?"

"If Silva is sincere," said Godfrey slowly; "if he is really what he pretends to be, a mystic, a priest of Siva, intent only on making converts to what he believes to be the true religion, then our whole theory falls to the ground, and Swain is guilty of murder."

I shivered a little, but I saw that Godfrey was right.

"We are in this dilemma," Godfrey continued; "either Silva is a faker and charlatan, or Swain is a murderer."

"I wish you could have witnessed that horrible scene, as I did," I broke in; "it would have shaken your confidence, too! I wish you could have seen his face as he glanced back over his shoulder! It was fiendish, Godfrey; positively fiendish! It made my blood run cold. It makes it run cold now, to remember it!"

"How do you explain all that crystal-sphere business, anyway?" asked Simmonds, who had been chewing his cigar perplexedly. "It stumps me."

"Lester was hypnotized, and saw what Silva willed him to see," answered Godfrey. "You'll remember he sat facing him."

"But," I objected, "no one remembers what happens during hypnosis."

"They do if they are willed to remember. Silva willed you to remember. It was cleverly done, and his explanation of the origin of the vision was clever, too. Moreover, it had some truth in it, for the secret of crystal gazing is that it awakens the subjective consciousness, or Great Spirit, as Silva called it. But you weren't crystal gazing to-night, Lester—you were simply hypnotized."

"You may be right," I admitted; "the last thing I remember was his eyes staring at me. But it was wonderful—I'm more impressed with him than ever."

"It isn't the fact that he hypnotized you that bothers me," said Godfrey, after a moment. "It's the fact that he has also hypnotized Miss Vaughan."

I stared at him.

"You think that's the reason of her behavior?" I asked quickly.

"What other reason can there be?" Godfrey demanded. "Here we have a girl who thinks herself in danger, and summons to her aid the man who loves her, and whom, presumably, she loves. And two days later, when he has been imprisoned for a crime of which she declares it is absurd to suspect him, instead of hastening to him or trying to carry out his wishes, she turns her back on him and deliberately walks into the danger from which, up to that moment, she had shrunk with loathing. Contrast her behavior of Saturday, when she declared her faith in Swain and begged your assistance, with her behavior of yesterday and to-day, when she throws you and Swain aside, and announces that she is going to follow Silva—to become a priestess of Siva."

"We must get her away from Silva," I declared.

"I don't know how we can do that," said Godfrey. "But we might get Silva away from her. Couldn't you arrest him on suspicion, and keep him locked up for two or three days, Simmonds?"

"I might," Simmonds grunted.

"And while he's away, you can work with her, Lester; take Mrs. Royce to see her, give her a hint of what Sivaism really is—or get Mrs. Royce to. If that doesn't have any effect, we can try stronger measures; but I believe, if we can get her away from Silva's influence for a few days, she will be all right again."

"I hope so," I agreed, "but I'm not at all certain. She didn't behave like a hypnotized person, Godfrey; she seemed to be acting of her own free will. I couldn't see that Silva was trying to influence her in any way. She said she was trying to carry out her father's wish. And it certainly was his wish—the will proves that. If anybody is hypnotizing her, I should say it was he."

"Well, I can't arrest him," said Simmonds, with a grin.

"Her father's wishes may have had some weight with her at the outset," admitted Godfrey, "but they couldn't have driven her to the lengths to which she has gone. And about the will. If Vaughan had not been killed, if he had been found insane, the will would have been at once invalidated. Don't you get the glimmer of a motive for his murder there, Lester?"

"It can be invalidated now, if Miss Vaughan contests it," I pointed out.

"Yes; but unless she *does* contest it, it will stand. But if Vaughan had been

declared insane, the will could never have been probated—no contest would have been necessary. Do you see the difference?"

"I see what you mean; but I don't think it amounts to much. Silva declares that if Miss Vaughan contests the will, he will not defend it."

"But he knows perfectly well that she will not contest it. The surest way to prevent a contest is by adopting just such an attitude. Besides, if we don't save her, he'll get her share, too. Vaughan's estate and Vaughan's daughter and everything else that was Vaughan's will disappear into his maw. Oh, he's playing for a big stake, Lester, and it looks to me as though he were going to win it!"

It looked so to me, too, and I fell into gloomy thought.

"You've got your men watching the house, I suppose?" I asked, at last, turning to Simmonds.

"Yes; and we managed to score one little point to-day."

"What was that?"

"I found out that Annie Crogan, the housemaid over there, had a cousin on the force, so I got him out here, and he managed to have a talk with her. He didn't find out anything," he added; "that is, anything we don't know; but she promised to leave the door of her bedroom open at night, and, if anything happened, to show a light at her window."

"Splendid!" I said. "And, of course, she'll keep her eyes open in the daytime."

"Sure she will. She's a bright girl. The only thing I'm afraid of is that the Hindu will get on to her and fire her. But she's been warned to be mighty careful. If they don't suspect her, maybe she'll have something to tell us in a day or two."

"Perhaps she will," I agreed; and I drew a breath of relief.

Surely, with all these guardians, inside the house and out, Miss Vaughan was safe. The least outcry would bring swift assistance. Besides, I could not bring myself to believe that Silva was such a brute as Godfrey seemed to think him. I had been attracted by him, not repelled, and I have always believed in the accuracy of these instinctive feelings.

And Godfrey himself, I reflected, did not seem to be very clear in the matter. If Silva was merely a faker and a charlatan, there was no reason why he should wish to induct Miss Vaughan into the mysteries of a religion which he wore only as a cloak, to be dropped as soon as his plans were accomplished. On the other hand, if he was sincere and really wished to convert the girl, it was only reasonable to suppose that he was sincere in other things as well.

"It reduces itself to this," I said finally to Godfrey. "If Silva is a charlatan, there is no reason why he should hypnotize Miss Vaughan; but if he really wishes to make a priestess of her, then, by the same token, he is sincere, and not a charlatan at all."

Godfrey nodded.

"There's a twist there which I can't seem to get straight," he admitted. "We'll have to watch Silva a little longer to find out what his game really is. Of course, it's just possible that he'd be glad to get rid of the girl, but that she really is obsessed by the idea of carrying out her father's wish. If that's the case, Silva is rather up a tree."

"That's where we'd better be getting," broke in Simmonds, who had taken out his watch and held it up to the light. "It's nearly twelve o'clock, and I don't want to miss the fireworks. Besides, you fellows don't gain anything by all that jawing. You've been at it for an hour, and you're more tangled up now than when you started. My motto with a case of this kind is just to sit quiet and watch it; and pretty soon the rat thinks the coast is clear, and pokes out his head, and you nab him."

"There's a good deal in that," agreed Godfrey, with a little laugh. "I admit that our arguing doesn't seem to lead anywhere. Come along," and he led the way out among the trees.

"Now, take these fireworks," went on Simmonds, in a low tone, when we were sitting side by side on the limb. "I don't

understand what they mean; but they must mean something. Am I lying awake nights worrying about them? Not me! I'm just going to keep on watching till I find out what the meaning is. I know you're a great fellow for theory and deduction, and all that sort of thing, Godfrey, and I know you've pulled off some mighty clever stunts; but, after all, there's nothing like patience."

"Yes—'it's dogged as does it,'" agreed Godfrey. "Patience is a great thing. I only wish I had more of it."

"It would be a good thing," assented Simmonds candidly; and then we fell silent, gazing out into the darkness.

"Surely," said Godfrey, at last, "it must be twelve o'clock."

Simmonds got out his watch and flashed upon it a ray from his electric torch.

"Yes," he said, "it's four minutes after."

I felt Godfrey's hand stiffen on my arm.

"Then there's something wrong," he whispered. "You remember, Lester, what happened the other time that light failed to appear. A man was murdered!"

The darkness into which I stared seemed suddenly to grow threatening and sinister, full of vague terrors. Even Simmonds grew uneasy, and I could feel his arm twitching.

Godfrey put his foot on the ladder, and began to descend. Simmonds and I followed him silently.

"I'm going over the wall," he said, when we were on the ground. "Something's wrong, and we've got to find out what it is."

"How will we get down?" asked Simmonds. "There's no ladder there."

Godfrey considered a moment.

"We can stand on the top of the wall," he said, at last, "and lift this ladder over. It won't be easy, but it can be done. Go ahead, Lester, and be careful of the glass."

I mounted the ladder, felt cautiously along the top of the wall, and found a place where I could put my feet; Simmonds followed me, and then came Godfrey. His was the difficult part, to draw up the ladder and lower it again. As for me, it was all I could do to keep from falling. I felt absurdly as though I were standing on a tremulous tightrope, high in the air; but Godfrey managed it somehow, and started down.

And at that instant there shrilled through the night the high, piercing note of a police whistle. It rose and fell, rose and fell, rose and fell; and then came poignant silence. The sound stabbed through me. Without hesitation or thought of peril, I let myself go and plunged downward into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DEADLY PERIL.

There must be a providence which protects fools and madmen, for I landed in a heavy clump of shrubbery, and got to my feet with no injury more serious than some scratches on hands and face, which at the time I did not even feel. In a moment, I had found the path, and was speeding toward the house. Ahead of me flitted a dark shadow which I knew to be Godfrey, and behind me came the pad-pad of heavy feet, which could only belong to Simmonds. And then, from the direction of the house, came the crash of broken glass.

I reached the lawn, crossed it, and traversed the short avenue, which ended at the library door. Three men were there, and Simmonds came panting up an instant later. The detectives had their torches in their hands, and I saw that they had broken one of the glass panels of the doors, and that one of them had passed a hand through the opening and was fumbling about inside. There was a sharp click, and the hand came back.

"There you are," he said, threw the door open, and stood aside for his superior officer to lead the way.

"What's wrong?" Simmonds asked.

"I don't know—but the girl showed a light at her window."

"You heard nothing?"

"Not a sound."

Simmonds hesitated. No doubt the

same thought occurred to him as to me; for the lawyer-Tartarin in me suggested that we scarcely had warrant to break our way into a sleeping house in the middle of the night.

But no such doubts seemed to disturb Godfrey. Without a word, he caught the torch from Simmonds' hand, and passed through the doorway. Simmonds followed. I went next, and the two other men came last, their torches also flaring. Three beams of light flashed about the library, and showed it to be empty. One of them—Godfrey's—lingered on the high-backed chair, but this time it had no occupant.

Then Godfrey switched on the light, passed into the hall, and switched on the light there. The hall, too, was empty, and only the ticking of a tall clock disturbed the silence. I was faltering and ready to turn back, but, to my amazement, Godfrey crossed the hall at a bound and sprang up the stairs, three steps at a time.

"Make all the noise you can!" he shouted over his shoulder, and the clatter of our feet seemed enough to wake the dead.

The upper hall was also empty; and then my heart gave a sudden leap, for the circle of light from Godfrey's torch had come to rest upon a white-robed figure, which had stolen halfway down the stairs from the upper story. It was the maid, holding her nightdress about her; and her face was as white as her gown.

Godfrey sprang to her side.

"What is it?" he asked. "What is wrong?"

"I heard a cry," gasped the girl. "Down here somewhere. And a shuffle in the dark. A woman's cry. It was choked off short."

Godfrey leaped down among us, and, as the light of a torch flashed across it, I saw that his face was livid.

"Who's got an extra gun?" he demanded, and one of the detectives pressed one into his hand. "Ready, now, men," he added, crossed the hall, threw open the outer door into Silva's room, and flung back the drapery beyond.

My heart was in my throat as I peered over Godfrey's shoulder at what lay within; and then a gasp of amazement from my companions mingled with my own.

For the crystal sphere was glowing softly, and seated, cross-legged, on the divan, his hands folded, his eyes fixed in meditation, was Silva.

We all stood for a moment staring at him, then Godfrey passed his hand dazedly before his eyes.

"You two men stay on guard here," he said. "One of you keep your torch on this fellow, and the other keep his torch on the floor. There's a cobra around somewhere."

An arc of light swept shakingly across the floor, as one of the men turned his torch toward it. But I saw no sign of Toto.

"Lester, you and Simmonds come with me," Godfrey added, stepped back into the hall, and tapped at the door of Miss Vaughan's bedroom.

There was no response, and he tapped again. Then he tried the door, found it unlocked, and opened it. He sent a ray of light skimming about the room; then he found the switch, turned on the lights, and entered.

The room was empty, as were the dressing room and bathroom adjoining. The covers of the bed had been turned back, ready for its occupant, but the bed was undisturbed.

Godfrey glanced about the room again, a sort of frenzied concentration in his gaze, and then went out, leaving the lights burning. It took but a moment or two to look through the other suites. They were all empty.

"If Miss Vaughan was anywhere about, and unharmed," said Godfrey, "the noise we made would have brought her out to investigate. There's only one place she can be," and he led the way resolutely back to the door of Silva's room.

The yogi had not moved.

Godfrey contemplated him for a moment, with his torch full on the bearded face. Then he crossed the threshold, his torch sweeping the floor in front of him.

"Let's see what the Thug is up to," he

said, crossed the room, drew back the drapery, and opened the door into the little closet where we had seen Mahbub once before.

There was a burst of acrid smoke into the room, and Godfrey stepped back with a stifled exclamation.

"Come here, you fellows!" he cried, and Simmonds and I sprang to his side.

For a moment I could see nothing; the rolling clouds of smoke blinded and choked me; I could feel the tears running down my cheeks, and my throat burned as though it had been scalded.

Then the smoke cleared a little, and I caught a glimpse of what lay within the room.

In the middle of the floor stood an open brazier, with a thin, yellow flame hovering above it, now bright, now dim, as the smoke whirled about it. Before the brazier sat Mahbub, his legs crossed with feet uppermost, his hands pressed palm to palm before his face.

"But he'll suffocate!" I gasped, and, indeed, I did not see how it was possible for a human being to breathe in such an atmosphere.

And then, as the smoke whirled aside again, I saw the snake. Its head was waving slowly to and fro, its horrible hood distended, its yellow, lidless eyes fixed upon us.

Simmonds saw it, too, and retreated a step.

"We'd better keep out of there," he gasped, "till that little pet's put away in his basket."

But Godfrey seized his arm and dragged him back to the threshold of the door.

"Look, Simmonds," he cried, rubbing his dripping eyes fiercely, "there against the wall—is there something there—or is it just the smoke?"

I looked, too, but at first saw nothing, for a cloud of smoke rolled down and blotted out the light from Godfrey's torch. Then it swirled aside, and against the farther wall I fancied I saw something—a shape, a huddled shape—grotesque—horrible, somehow——

I heard Godfrey's startled cry, saw his hand swing up, saw a tongue of yellow flame leap from his revolver.

And with the echo of the shot came a scream—a scream piercing, unearthly, of terror unspeakable.

I saw the Thug spring into the air, his face distorted, his mouth open—I saw him tearing at something that swung from his neck—something horrible, that clung and twisted.

He tore it loose—it was only an instant, really, but it seemed an age—and, still shrieking, flung it full at us.

I was paralyzed with terror, incapable of movement, staring dumbly—but Godfrey swept me aside so sharply that I almost fell.

And that horrible shape swished past us, fell with a thud, and was lost in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

KISMET!

Words cannot paint the nauseating horror of that moment. Fear—cold, abject, awful fear—ran through my veins like a drug; my face was clammy with the sweat of utter terror; my hands clutched wildly at some drapery, which tore from its fastenings and came down in my grasp.

Three shafts of light swept across the floor, and almost at once picked up that horrid shape. It was coiled, with head raised, ready to strike, and I saw that one side of its hood had been shot away.

I have, more than once, referred to Simmonds as hard-headed and wanting in imagination—not always, I fear, in terms the most respectful. For that I ask his pardon; I shall not make that mistake again. For, in that nerve-racking moment, he never lost his coolness. Revolver in hand, he crept cautiously forward, while we others held our breath; then the pistol spoke, once, twice, thrice, and the ugly head fell forward to the floor.

At the same moment Godfrey sprang to the door from which volumes of heavy, scented smoke still eddied, and disappeared inside.

I scarcely noticed him; I was staring at that foul object on the floor; and

then I stared at Francisco Silva, motionless on the divan, his eyes fixed on the crystal sphere, undisturbed amid all this terror and tumult. It is impossible for me to remember him, as he was in that moment, without admiration—yes, and a little awe.

But Godfrey's voice, shrill with excitement, brought me around with a start.

"Lester!" he shouted. "Lend a hand here!"

Wondering what new horror lay in wait, I fought my way into the other room, stumbled over the body of the Thug, barely saved myself, my scalp pricking with terror, from falling upon it, and pitched forward to where Godfrey was bending above that huddled shape I had glimpsed through the smoke.

"Catch hold!" he panted; and, choking, staggering, suffocating, we dragged it into the outer room. "Get a window open!" he gasped. "Get a window open!"

And Simmonds, whom nothing seemed to shake, groped along the wall until he found a window, pulled the hangings back, threw up the sash, and flung back the shutters.

"Quick!" said Godfrey. "Over there. Now hold the torch."

And as I took it and pressed the button with a trembling finger, the halo of light fell upon a bloodless face—the face of Marjorie Vaughan.

Simmonds was supporting her, and Godfrey, with frantic fingers, was loosening her robe at the throat. My terrified eyes, staring at that throat, half expected to find a cruel mark there, but its smoothness was unsullied. The robe loosened, Godfrey snatched his cap from his head, and began to fan the fresh air in upon her.

"Pray Heaven it is not too late!" he murmured, and kept on fanning, watching the white lips and delicate nostrils, so drawn and livid. "We must try artificial respiration," he said, after a moment. "But not here—this atmosphere is stifling. Take her feet, Lester."

We staggered out with her, somehow, across the hall, into her room, and laid her on her bed. Godfrey, kneeling above her, began to raise and lower her arms, with a steady, regular rhythm.

"Open the windows wide," he commanded, without looking up. "Wet a towel, or something, in cold water, and bring it here."

Simmonds threw open the windows, while I went mechanically to the bathroom, wet a towel, and slapped it against her face and neck as Godfrey directed. The moments passed, and at last the lips opened in a fluttering sigh, the bosom rose with a full inhalation, and a spot of color crept into either cheek.

"Thank God!" said Godfrey, in a voice that was almost a sob. "Now, Simmonds, go out and bring that Irish girl, and send one of your men to phone for Hinman."

Simmonds sent one of his men scurrying with a word, and himself dashed up the stairs to the other floor. He was back in a moment, almost dragging the frightened girl with him. Her teeth were chattering, and she started to scream when she saw that still form on the bed, but Simmonds shook her savagely.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," Godfrey assured her. "Your mistress isn't dead—she'll soon come around. But you must get her undressed and to bed. And then keep bathing her face with cold water till the doctor comes. Understand?"

"Ye-yes, sir," faltered the girl. "But—oh—oh!" and a burst of hysterical sobbing choked her.

Simmonds shook her again.

"Don't be a fool, Annie Crogan!" he said. "Get hold of yourself!"

Godfrey stepped off the bed and picked up one of the limp wrists.

"Her pulse is getting stronger," he said, after a moment. "It will soon—hello, what's this!"

Clasped tight in the slender fingers was something that looked like a torn and crumpled rubber glove. He tried to unclasp the fingers, but when he touched them, they contracted rigidly, and a low moan burst from the uncon-

scious girl. So, after a moment, he desisted and laid the hand down again.

"You understand what you're to do?" he asked the maid, and she nodded mutely. "Then come along, boys," he added, and led the way back to the hall. His face was dripping with perspiration, and his hands were shaking, but he managed to control them. "And now for Señor Silva," he said, in another tone, taking the torch from my hand. "I fear he will have a rude awakening."

"He sat there like a statue, even when I shot the snake," remarked Simmonds. "He's a wonder, he is."

"Yes," agreed Godfrey, as he stepped into the entry, "he's a wonder." Then he stopped, glanced around, and turned a stern face on Simmonds. "Where's the man I left on guard here?" he asked.

"Why," faltered Simmonds, "I remember now—he helped us carry the young lady. But we were all right there in the hall—you don't mean——"

Godfrey stepped to the inner door and flashed his torch about the room. The divan was empty.

Simmonds paused only for a single glance.

"He can't be far away!" he said. "He can't get away in that white robe of his. Come along, Tom!" and, followed by his assistant, he plunged down the stairs.

I saw Godfrey half turn to follow; then he stopped, ran his hand along the wall inside the door, found the button, and turned on the lights. His face was pale and angry.

"It's my fault as much as any one's," he said savagely. "I might have known Silva would see the game was up, and try to slip away in the excitement. I ought to have kept an eye on him."

"Your eyes were fairly busy as it was," I remarked. "Besides, maybe he hasn't got away."

Godfrey's face, as he glanced about the room, showed that he cherished no such hope.

"Let's see what happened to Mahbub," he said. "Maybe he got away, too," and he crossed to the inner door.

The flame in the brazier had died away, and the smoke came only in fitful puffs, heavy with deadening perfume. The Thug had not got away. He lay on the floor—a dreadful sight. He was lying on his back, his hands clenched, his body arched in a convulsion, his head drawn far back. The black lips were parted over the ugly teeth, and the eyes had rolled upward till they gleamed two vacant balls of white. At the side of his neck, just under the jaw, was a hideous swelling.

Godfrey's torch ran over the body from head to foot, and I sickened as I looked at it.

"I'm going out," I said. "I can't stand this!" and I hurried to the open window.

Godfrey joined me there in a moment.

"I'm feeling pretty bad myself," he said, putting the torch in his pocket and mopping his shining forehead. "It's plain enough what happened. I caught a glimpse of Miss Vaughan on the floor there, realized that we couldn't do anything with the snake in the way, and shot at it, but I only ripped away a portion of the hood, and the thing, mad with rage, sprang upon the Hindu. Nothing on earth could have saved him after it got its fangs in his neck."

He shivered slightly, and stood gazing for a moment down into the garden. Then he turned back to me with a smile.

"It's a good night's work, Lester," he said, "even if we don't catch Silva. I fancy Miss Vaughan will change her mind, now, about becoming a priestess of Siva!"

"But, Godfrey," I asked, "what happened? What was she doing in there? What——"

He stopped me with a hand upon my arm.

"I don't know. But she'll tell us when she comes around. I only hope they'll get Silva. That would make the victory complete."

He paused, for the hum of a motor car came up the drive, and an instant later we caught the glare of the acetylenes. Then a voice hailed us.

"Hello, there," it called. "Shall I come up?"

"Is it you, doctor?" asked Godfrey, leaning out.

"Yes."

"Come right up, then, to Miss Vaughan's room."

We met him at the stairhead.

"Oh, it's you!" he said, recognizing us. "What has happened now?"

"It's Miss Vaughan—she's been half suffocated. But how did you get in?"

"The gates were open," Hinman answered, "so I drove right through. Is Miss Vaughan in here?" And when Godfrey nodded, he opened the door and closed it softly behind him.

"Open!" repeated Godfrey, staring at me. "Open! Then that is the way Silva went!"

"Yes, yes," I agreed. "He had the key. It was he who let me out."

"And locked the gate after you?"

"Yes—I heard the key turn."

Without a word, Godfrey hurried down the stairs. At the foot we met Simmonds.

"We've searched the grounds," he said; "but haven't found any one. I've left my men on guard. I phoned for some more men, and notified headquarters."

"He's not in the grounds," said Godfrey. "He went out by the gate," and he told of Hinman's discovery.

"I'll stretch a net over the whole Bronx," said Simmonds. "I don't see how a fellow dressed as he is can get away," and he hastened off to do some more telephoning.

"Well, we can't do anything," said Godfrey, "so we might as well rest a while," and he passed into the library and dropped into a chair.

I followed him, but as I sat down and glanced about the room, I saw something that fairly jerked me to my feet.

A section of the shelving had been swung forward, and behind it the door of the safe stood open.

In an instant I had flung myself on my knees before it, groped for the locked drawer, pulled it out, and hurried with it to the table.

The five packets of money were gone.

"What is it, Lester?" asked Godfrey, at my side.

"There was—fifty thousand dollars—in money in—this drawer," I answered, trying to speak coherently.

Godfrey took the drawer from my hands and examined its contents.

"Well, it isn't there now," he said, and replaced the drawer in the safe. "Sit down, Lester," and he pressed me back into my chair and flung himself into another. "I wish I knew where Vaughan kept his whisky!" he murmured, and ran his fingers furiously through his hair. "This is getting too strenuous, even for me!"

He fell silent for a moment, and sat looking at the open safe.

"What astonishes me," he mused, "is the nerve of the man, stopping at such a moment to work that combination. Think what that means, Lester; to work a combination, a man has to be cool and collected."

"A man who could sit without stirring through that scene upstairs," I said, "has nerve enough for anything. Nothing Silva does can surprise me after that!"

"I wonder how he knew the combination?"

"I was sure he knew it. I had to stop Miss Vaughan to keep her from telling it to me."

"Well, he lessened his chance of escape by just that much. Every minute he spent before that safe was a minute lost. Ah, here's Simmonds. What do you think of that, Simmonds?" he added, and pointed to the safe. "Señor Silva stopped on his way out to gather up fifty thousand dollars in cash to pay his traveling expenses."

Simmonds walked over to the safe and looked at it.

"Fifty thousand?" he repeated.

"In long green."

"But Vaughan must have been a fool to keep that much money here."

"Oh, I don't know. It's a fireproof safe, and mighty well concealed."

"I'll tell you what I think," I said; "I think he intended to give the money to Silva. He was going to give him a million—left him that in his will, you know."

"So Silva was only taking what be-

longed to him, eh?" and Godfrey laughed. "Well, I hope you'll get him, Simmonds."

It was at this moment that Doctor Hinman entered, a curious, repressed excitement in his face, and his eyes shining strangely.

"How is she, doctor?" Godfrey asked.

"She'll be all right in the morning. She is still pretty nervous, so I gave her a sleeping draft and waited till it took effect."

Godfrey looked at him more closely.

"Did she tell you anything?" he asked.

"Not much," said Hinman; "I wouldn't let her talk. But she told me enough to let me guess one thing—she's the bravest girl I ever knew or heard of!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," cried Hinman, his eyes glowing more and more, "that she stayed in this house and faced the deadliest peril out of love for that man Swain; I mean that if he's cleared, as he's certain to be now, it will be she who clears him; I mean that if the real murderer is brought to justice, it will be because of the evidence she stayed here to get, and did get!"

His voice had mounted shrilly, and his face was working as though he could scarcely keep back the tears.

"Wait a minute, doctor," broke in Godfrey. "Don't go too fast. What evidence?"

For answer, Hinman flipped something through the air to him. Godfrey caught it, and stared at it an instant in bewilderment; then, with a stifled exclamation, he sprang to the light and held the object close under it.

"By all the gods!" he cried, in a voice as shrill as Hinman's own. "The finger prints!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BLOODSTAINED GLOVE.

I do not know what it was I expected to see, as I leaped from my chair and peered over Godfrey's shoulder; but certainly it was something more remarkable than the soiled and ragged object he held in his hand. It was, apparently, an ordinary rubber glove, such as surgeons sometimes use, and it was torn and crumpled, as though it had been the subject of a struggle.

Then I remembered that I had seen it crushed in Miss Vaughan's unconscious fingers, and I recalled how the fingers had stiffened when Godfrey tried to remove it, as though some instinct in her sought to guard it, even in the face of death.

"But I don't understand," said Simmonds, who was staring over the other shoulder. "What's that thing got to do with the finger prints?"

"Look here," said Godfrey, and held the glove so that the ends of the fingers lay in the full light.

Then I saw that against the end of every finger had been glued a strip of rubber, about an inch in length and half as wide; and, bending closer, I perceived that the surface of each of these strips was covered with an intricate pattern of minute lines.

"Forged finger prints! That's a new idea in crime, isn't it, Simmonds?" and Godfrey laughed excitedly.

Simmonds took the glove, got out his pocket glass, and examined the finger tips minutely.

"You think these reproduce Swain's finger prints?" he asked skeptically.

"I'm sure they do! You see, it's the right hand; look at the thumb—you see it's a double whorl. Wait till we put them side by side with Swain's own, and you'll see that they correspond, line for line. Yes, and look at those stains. Do you know what those stains are, Simmonds? They're blood. Did you notice the stains, doctor?"

"Yes," said Hinman. "I think they're bloodstains. That will be easy enough to determine."

"Whose blood is it?" asked Simmonds, and I could see that even his armor had been penetrated.

"Well," answered Godfrey, smiling, "science isn't able, as yet, to identify the blood of individuals; but I'd be willing to give odds that it's Swain's blood. My idea is that Silva got the blood for the finger prints from the blood-soaked

handkerchief, which Swain probably dropped when he fled from the arbor, and which Silva picked up and dropped beside the chair, after he was through with it, as an additional bit of evidence."

"That's reasonable enough," agreed Hinman, with a quick nod, "but what I can't understand is how he made these reproductions."

Godfrey sat down again and contemplated the glove pensively for some moments. Then he turned to me.

"Where is that book of finger prints you spoke about, Lester?" he asked.

I went to the bookcase and got it out. Godfrey took it and began to turn the pages quickly.

"Swain's name is in the index," I said, and he glanced at it, and then turned to the place where the page had been.

"Which reminds me," said Hinman, with a rueful smile, "that I concocted a very pretty theory to account for that missing page. I felt quite chesty about it! I'm glad it didn't throw Miss Vaughan off the scent!"

"So am I!" agreed Godfrey, "for it must have been this missing page which gave Miss Vaughan her first suspicion of the truth. Perhaps it was pure inspiration—or perhaps she knew that Silva could reproduce finger prints. We shall learn when we hear her story. In any event, it's a clever trick—and easy enough when you know how!"

"Like standing the egg on end," I suggested.

"Precisely. Every trick is easy when you work it backward. But just think, Simmonds," he added, "what problems the police will have to face, if gloves like these become fashionable among cracksmen!"

Simmonds groaned dismally.

"You haven't told us yet how it's done," he said.

I bit back a smile, for Simmonds' tone was that of pupil to master.

"Well," said Godfrey slowly, "it might be done in several ways. The first thing is to get a good set of the prints to be reproduced. That Silva got from this album. The molds might be made by cutting them in wood or metal; but that would take an expert—and, besides, I fancy it would be too slow for Silva. He had a quicker way than that—perhaps by transferring them to a plate of zinc or copper, and then eating them out with acid. Once the mold is secured, it is merely a question of pressing india-rubber mixture into it, and then heating the rubber until it hardens—just as a rubber stamp is made. The whole process would take only a few hours."

Simmonds drew a deep breath.

"It may be simple," he said; "but that fellow's a genius, just the same. He's much too clever to be at large. We've got to get him!"

"Be sure of one thing," retorted Godfrey. "You'll find it harder to catch him than it was to let him go! He won't walk into your arms. Not that I blame you, Simmonds," he added; "but I blame those muckleheaded men of yours—and I blame myself for not keeping my eyes open. Here's the glove—take good care of it. It means Swain's acquittal. And now there is one other thing I want to see before we go to bed. Suppose we make a little excursion to the roof."

"To the roof? What for?" demanded Simmonds, as he wrapped the glove in his handkerchief and put it in his pocket.

"You know how fond you are of fireworks!" retorted Godfrey, smiling, and started for the door.

"I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about," said Hinman, "but I'm as curious as an old woman—and I like fireworks, too!"

"Come along, then," laughed Godfrey, and led the way up the stairs. "This time we'll go as quietly as we can!" he added, over his shoulder.

In the entry at the top of the stairs leading to the attic story was a heavy, closed door, and Godfrey looked at it with a smile.

"Do you suppose those two German servants have slept on through all this excitement?" he asked; and we found afterward that they had!

The flare of Godfrey's torch disclosed

a third flight of stairs at the end of the entry, and, when we reached the foot of these and looked up, we found ourselves gazing at the stars.

"Ah!" said Godfrey; "I thought so! The stage was set, ready for the curtain, and then the leading lady failed to appear. So the villain went in search of her, found her with the glove in her hand, and started to suppress her, when our timely arrival interrupted him! Gentlemen, I think I can promise you a most interesting demonstration. What did Miss Vaughan call it, Lester?"

"An astral benediction," I said.

"That's it!" said Godfrey, and led the way up the steps.

There was a wide, hinged trapdoor at the top, lying open, and we stepped through it out upon the roof. Here had been built a platform about eight feet square, with a low railing around it. I saw Godfrey's torch playing rapidly over the boards of the platform, then he marshaled us in the middle of it.

"Stand here in a row," he said, "facing the west. Extend your arms to the heavens, and concentrate your gaze upon that big star up there. Go ahead, doctor," he urged, as Hinman hesitated. "We're trying to persuade an astral visitor to pay us a call, and it takes teamwork."

We stood silent a moment, with our arms above our heads, and I could hear Godfrey shifting his feet cautiously along the boards of the floor.

"What's that!" cried Simmonds, for from the darkness at our feet had come a soft whir as of a bird taking flight.

"Look!" cried Hinman. "Look!"

High above our heads a point of flame appeared, brightened and burned steel-blue. For a moment it hung there, then it grew brighter and brighter, and I knew that it was descending. Lower and lower it came, until it hovered in the air just above us; then it burst into a million sparks and vanished.

For a moment no one spoke; then I heard Hinman's voice, and it was decidedly unsteady.

"What is this, anyway?" he demanded. "The Arabian nights?"

"No," said Godfrey. "It's merely a device of one of the cleverest fakers who ever lived. Take the torch, Simmonds, and let us see how it works."

He dropped to his knees, while Simmonds lighted him, and I saw that there was a hole in the floor about three inches in diameter. Godfrey felt carefully about it for a moment, and then, with a little exclamation of triumph, found a hold for his fingers, pulled sharply, and raised a hinged section of the floor, about eighteen inches square.

"Now give us the light," he said, and plunged it into the opening.

In line with the little hole was an upright metal tube about a foot long, ending in a small, square box. Beside the tube, a slender iron rod ran from the platform down into the box.

"That's the lever that sets it off," remarked Godfrey, tapping the rod. "A pressure of the foot did it."

He pulled the rod loose, seized the tube, and lifted the whole apparatus out upon the platform.

"Let's take it down where we can look at it," he said, and, carrying it easily in one hand, led the way back to the library, cleared a place on the table, and set it down. Then, after a moment's examination, he pulled back a little bolt and tilted the top of the box, with the tube attached, to one side.

A curious mechanism lay revealed. There was a powerful spring, which could be wound up with a key, and a drum wound with filamentlike wire, and connected with a simple clockwork to revolve it. Two small dry batteries were secured to one side of the box, their wires running to the drum.

"Why, it's nothing but a toy catapult!" I said.

"That's all," and Godfrey nodded. "It remained for Silva to add a few trimmings of his own, and to put it to a unique use. Instead of a missile, he loaded it with his little aërial shell, attached to the end of this wire. Then he shot it off with a pressure of the foot; when it reached the end of the wire, the pull brought this platinum coil against the battery wires, and closed the circuit. The spark fired the shell, and the drum began to revolve and pull it

down. That explains, Lester, why it descended so steadily, and in a straight line. The fellow who could devise a thing like that deserves to succeed! Here's health to him!"

"He ought to be behind the bars," growled Simmonds. "The cleverer he is, the more dangerous he is."

"Well," retorted Godfrey, "I admire him, anyway; and he isn't behind the bars yet. No doubt you'll find some of his shells to-morrow about the house somewhere, and you might amuse yourself by shooting one off every night at midnight, on the chance that he sees it, and comes back to see who's stealing his thunder!"

But this brilliant suggestion didn't seem to appeal to Simmonds, who merely grunted and continued his examination of the catapult.

"Silva had loaded it for to-night's performance," Godfrey went on, "but, as I remarked before, the leading lady failed to answer her cue, and it remained for us to touch it off. There it is, Simmonds; I turn it over to you. It and the glove will make unique additions to the museum at headquarters. And now," he added, with the wide yawn of sudden relaxation, "you fellows can make a night of it, if you want to, but I'm going to bed."

I glanced at my watch. It was half past four. Another dawn was brightening along the east.

Hinman ran upstairs, took a look at his patient, and came down to tell us that she was sleeping calmly.

"She'll be all right in the morning," he assured us; "and, while I don't want to butt in, I'd certainly like to hear her story. Adventures like this don't happen very often to a country doctor! May I come?"

"Most surely!" I assented warmly. "I think we were very fortunate to have you in this case, doctor."

"So do I!" echoed Godfrey, while Hinman flushed with pleasure. "And don't forget, Lester, that it was I who picked him out, with nothing better than the telephone book to guide me! That was my infallible instinct!"

"Suppose we say ten o'clock, then?" I suggested, smiling at Godfrey's exuberance—but then, I was feeling rather exuberant myself!

"I'll be here!" said Hinman. "And thank you," and a moment later we heard his car chugging away down the drive.

We listened to it for a moment, then Godfrey yawned again.

"Come along, Lester," he said, "or I'll go to sleep on my feet. Can I give you a bed, Simmonds?"

"No, thanks," said Simmonds. "I'm not ready for bed. I'm going to comb this whole neighborhood, as soon as it's light. Silva can't escape—unless he just fades away into the air."

"You've found no trace of him?"

"I've had no reports yet," and Simmonds walked beside us down the drive to the gate; "but my men ought to be coming in pretty soon. There's a thick grove, just across the road, where he may be hiding."

He stopped, for a man was hastening toward us, carrying under one arm a small, white bundle.

Simmonds quickened his pace.

"What's that you've got?" he asked.

The man saluted.

"I found it just now, sir, in the bushes near the gate. Looks like a dress."

Simmonds unrolled it slowly. It was the robe of the White Priest of Siva.

Godfrey looked at it, and then at Simmonds, whose face was a study. Then he took me by the arm and led me away.

"I'm afraid Simmonds has his work cut out for him," he said, when we were out of earshot. "I thought so from the first. A fellow as clever as Silva would be certain to keep his line of retreat open. He's far away by this time."

He walked on thoughtfully, a little smile on his lips.

"I'm not altogether sorry," he added. "It adds an interest to life to know that he's running around the world, and that we may encounter him again some day. He's a remarkable fellow, Lester; one of the most remarkable I ever met. He comes close to being a genius. I'd give something to hear the story of his life."

That wish was destined to be grati-

fied, for, three years later, we heard that story, or a part of it, from Silva's lips, as he lay calmly smoking a cigarette, looking in the face of death, and without flinching. Perhaps, some day, I shall tell that story.

"But, Godfrey," I said, as we turned in at his gate, "all this scheme of lies —the star, the murder, the finger prints —what was it all about? I can't see through it, even yet."

"There are still a few dark places," he agreed; "but the outlines are pretty clear, aren't they?"

"Not to me—it's all a jumble."

"Suppose we wait till we hear Miss Vaughan's story," he suggested. "After that, I think, we can reconstruct the whole plot. There's one foundation stone that's missing," he added thoughtfully. "I wonder if Miss Vaughan used a blotting book? It all depends upon that!"

"A blotting book?" I echoed. "But I don't see——"

He shook himself out of his thoughts with a little laugh.

"Not now, Lester. It's time we were in bed. Look, there's the sun!" and he led the way into the house. "I'll have you called at nine," he added, as he bade me good night at my door.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MYSTERY CLEARS.

Godfrey's powers of recuperation have astonished me more than once, and never more so than when I found him at the breakfast table, as fresh and rosy as though he had had a full night's sleep. But even I felt better by the time the meal was over. It is wonderful what a cup of coffee can do for a man!

"I phoned a message to Swain, as soon as I was up," Godfrey said, "telling him, in your name, that we had the evidence to clear him, and that Miss Vaughan was safe."

"I must go down to him," I said, "and start proceedings to set him free. I'll get Simmonds to go with me before Goldberger, and then before a magistrate. We ought to get an order of release at once."

"You've got something to do before that," Godfrey reminded me. "We're to hear Miss Vaughan's story at ten o'clock. I'm taking it for granted," he added, with a smile, "that I'll be welcome, as well as Hinman."

"That doesn't need saying," I retorted, and ten minutes later we were on the way to Elmhurst.

There was a man on guard at the library door, but he allowed us to pass when we gave our names, having evidently had his instructions from Simmonds. In answer to Godfrey's question, he said that, so far as he knew, no trace had been found of Silva.

We went on into the room, and found that some one, Simmonds presumably, had closed the safe and swung the section of shelving back into place before it. It was not locked, however, and I opened it and went through its contents carefully, with the faint hope that the money might have been thrust into some other compartment. But I found no trace of it, and was replacing the contents, when a voice at the threshold brought me to my feet.

"Mr. Lester!" it said, and I turned to behold a vision which made me catch my breath—a vision of young womanhood, with smiling lips and radiant eyes —a vision which came quickly toward me, with hands outstretched.

"Miss Vaughan!" I cried, and took the hands and held them.

"Can you forgive me?" she demanded.

"For what?"

"For treating you so badly? Oh, I could see what you thought of me, and I longed to tell you it was only make-believe, but I didn't dare! I could see your grimace of disgust, when I fell on my knees beside the chair yonder——"

"Miss Vaughan," I broke in, "whatever my sentiments may have been— and I was an idiot not to suspect the truth!—they have all changed into enthusiastic admiration. You were wiser and braver than all of us."

A wave of color swept into her cheeks.

"I might add," I went on, "that I thought white robes becoming, but they were not nearly so becoming as this gown!"

"It is of the last century!" she protested. "But anything is better than that masquerade! And when—when——"

"I think I can get Swain free this afternoon," I answered. "I'm going to try, anyway. Mr. Godfrey phoned him the good news the first thing this morning. This is Mr. Godfrey, Miss Vaughan," I added, "and very eager to shake hands with you."

"Very proud, too," said Godfrey, coming forward and suiting the action to the word.

There was a step on the walk outside, and Doctor Hinman appeared at the door.

"Well!" he cried, coming in, his face beaming. "There's no need for me to ask how my patient's doing!"

"I'm afraid you haven't got any patient, any more, doctor," I laughed.

"I'm afraid not," agreed Hinman. "I'll have to go back to my office and wait for another one. But before I go, Miss Vaughan, I want to hear the story. Mr. Lester promised me I should."

Miss Vaughan looked at me.

"We all want to hear it," I said; "how you came to suspect—how you got the glove—everything."

Her face grew sober, and a shadow flitted across it.

"Suppose we sit down," she said, and just then the sentry at the door saluted, and Simmonds stepped into the room.

I saw him shake his head in answer to Godfrey's questioning look, and knew that Silva had not been found. Then I brought him forward to Miss Vaughan, and introduced him.

"Mr. Simmonds," I explained, "has been in charge of this case; and it was he who arranged to watch the house, for fear some harm would befall you."

"I know," broke in Miss Vaughan, clasping Simmonds' hand warmly. "Annie told me all about it this morning. I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Simmonds."

"Oh, it wasn't me, especially," protested Simmonds, red to the ears. "It was really Godfrey there, and Mr. Lester. They were worried to death."

"We *were* rather worried," Godfrey admitted; "especially after we saw you at that midnight fireworks party."

"You saw that?" she asked quickly; "but how——"

"Oh, we had seen the show every night for a week. It was its failure to come off last night which first told us something was wrong."

"Well," said Miss Vaughan, with a deep breath, sitting down again and motioning us to follow her example, "it seems to me that you have a story to tell, too! But I'll tell mine first. Where shall I begin?"

"Begin," I suggested, "at the moment when you first suspected the plot."

"That was when you were telling me of Fred's arrest. When you told me of the handkerchief and then of the finger prints, I knew that some one was plotting against him. And then, quite suddenly, I thought of something."

"You jumped up," I said, "as though you were shot, and ran to the bookcase over there and got down that album of finger prints, and found that Swain's were missing. That seemed to upset you completely."

"It did; and I will tell you why. My father, for many years, had been a collector of finger prints. All of his friends were compelled to contribute; and whenever he made a new acquaintance, he got his prints, too, if he could. He believed that one's character was revealed in one's finger prints, and he studied them very carefully. It was a sort of hobby; but it was, for some reason, distasteful to Señor Silva. He not only refused to allow prints to be made of his fingers, but he pooh-poohed my father's theories, and they used to have some terrific arguments about it. One night, after a particularly hot argument, Señor Silva made the assertion that he could, by hypnotic suggestion, cause his servant Mahbub to reproduce any finger prints he desired. Mahbub's finger tips had been manipulated in some way,

when he was a child, so that they showed only a series of straight lines."

"Yes," I said, "his prints were taken at the inquest."

"Father said that if Señor Silva could show him proof of that assertion, he would never look at finger prints again. Señor Silva asked for a week in which to make a study of the prints, in order to impress them upon his memory; at the end of that time, the test was made. It was a most extraordinary one. Señor Silva, father, and I sat at the table yonder, under the light, with the book of prints before us. Mahbub was placed at a little table in the far corner, with his back to us, and Señor Silva proceeded to hypnotize him. It took only a moment, for he could hypnotize Mahbub by pointing his finger at him. He said that Mahbub was a splendid subject, because he had hypnotized him hundreds of times, and had him under perfect control. Then he placed an ink pad on the table in front of him—nothing else. My father wrote his name and the date upon the top sheet of a pad of paper, and Señor Silva placed it before Mahbub. Then he sat down with us, selected a page of prints, and asked us to concentrate our minds upon it. At the end of a few moments he asked me to bring the pad from before Mahbub. I did so, and we found the prints upon it to be identical with those on the page we had been looking at. My father touched them with his finger and found that they were fresh, as the ink smeared readily. His name was on the corner of the page, where he had written it. There could be no doubt that in some way Mahbub had been able to duplicate the prints.

"Señor Silva repeated the experiment with another set of prints, and then with another. I think there were six altogether, and every one of them was successful."

"Was Swain's one of them?" asked Godfrey.

"No; but when Mr. Lester told me that Fred was suspected because of those finger prints, the thought flashed into my mind that if Señor Silva and Mahbub could imitate those of other people, they could imitate Fred's, too; and when I looked at the album and found that sheet torn out, I was sure that was what had happened."

"And so you decided to stay in the house, to win Señor Silva's confidence by pretending to become a convert, and to search for evidence against him," I said. "That was a brave thing to do, Miss Vaughan."

"Not so brave as you think," she objected, shaking her head. "I did not believe that there would be any real danger, with the three servants in the house. Only at the last did I realize the desperate nature of the man——"

She stopped and shivered slightly.

"Tell us what happened," I said.

"It was on Sunday afternoon," she continued, "that I went to Señor Silva and told him that I had decided to carry out my father's wish, renounce the world, and become a priestess of Siva. I shall never forget the fire in his eyes as he listened—they fairly burned into me."

"Ah!" said Godfrey. "So that was it!"

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Except upon one hypothesis," he explained, "that action on your part would have embarrassed Silva, and he would have tried to dissuade you. He had left him by your father's will this valuable place and a million dollars. If money had been all he sought, that would have satisfied him, and he would have tried to get rid of you. That he did not—that his eyes burned with eagerness when you told him your decision—proves that he loved you and wanted you also."

A brighter color swept into Miss Vaughan's cheeks, but she returned his gaze bravely.

"I think that is true," she assented, in a low voice. "It was my suspicion of that which made me hesitate—but finally I decided that there was no reason why I should spare him and let an innocent man suffer for him."

"Especially when you loved the innocent man," I added to myself, but managed to keep the words from my lips.

"As soon as I told him of my decision," Miss Vaughan continued, "he led me to the room where the crystal sphere is, placed me on the divan, sat down opposite me, and began to explain to me the beliefs of his religion. Meditation, it seems, is essential to it, and it was by gazing at the crystal that one could separate one's soul from one's body, and so attain pure and profound meditation."

"Was that your first experience of crystal gazing?" Godfrey asked.

"Yes; both he and my father had often tried to persuade me to join them. They often spent whole nights there. But it seemed to me that the breaking down of father's will was due to it in some way; I grew to have a fear and horror of it, and so I always refused."

"The change in your father was undoubtedly directly traceable to it," Godfrey agreed. "During those periods of crystal-gazing, he was really in a state of hypnosis, induced by Silva, with his mind bare to Silva's suggestions; and as these were repeated, he became more and more a mere echo of Silva's personality. That was what Silva desired for you, also."

"I felt something of the sort, though I never really understood it," said Miss Vaughan; "and as I sat there on the divan that Sunday afternoon, with his burning eyes upon me, I was terribly afraid. His will was so much stronger than mine, and, besides, I could not keep my eyes from the crystal. In the end, I had a vision—a dreadful vision."

She pressed her hands to her eyes, as though it was still before her.

"The vision of your father's death?" I asked.

She nodded.

"With Swain as the murderer?"

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

"Because he induced the same vision in me the next evening. But don't let me interrupt."

"I don't know how long that séance lasted," she continued; "some hours, I suppose, for it was dark when I again realized where I was. And, after dinner, there was another; and then at midnight he led me to the roof and invoked what he called an astral benediction—a wonderful, wonderful thing——"

Godfrey smiled dryly.

"You were overwrought, Miss Vaughan," he said, "and straight from a spell of crystal gazing. No wonder it impressed you. But it was really only a clever trick."

"I realize, now, that it must have been a trick," she agreed; "but at the time it seemed an unquestionable proof of his divine power. When it was over, I had just sufficient strength of will remaining to tear myself away from him and gain my own room, and lock the door."

"You mean he tried to detain you?"

"Not with his hands. But I could feel his will striving to conquer mine. Even after I was in my room, I could feel him calling me. In the morning I was stronger. I lay in bed until nearly noon, trying to form some plan; but I began to fear that I must give it up. I realized that, after a few more nights like the night before, I should no longer have a will of my own—that what I was pretending would become reality. I decided that I could risk one more day—perhaps two; but I felt very weak and discouraged. You see, I did not know what to look for, or where to look. I wanted evidence against him, but I had no idea what the evidence would be. I wanted to search his room, but I had not been able to, because he was scarcely ever out of it, except when he was with me; and, besides, Mahbub was always squatting in the little closet next to it.

"I got up at last, and after breakfast he met me here in the library. He suggested another séance, but I pleaded a headache, and he walked with me about the grounds. I remembered that you were to come in the evening, Mr. Lester, and I determined to leave you with him, on some pretext, and search his room then. I told him you were coming, that I had asked you to take charge of my affairs; and it was then he told me of the legacy he believed my father had left him, adding that

whether the legacy should stand or not was entirely in my hands. Then I began to feel his influence again, and managed to excuse myself and go indoors.

"You know what happened in the evening, Mr. Lester. As soon as I left you, I flew to his room, determined to search it at any cost. But I was scarcely inside, when I heard the outer door open, and I had just time to get behind the curtains in one corner, when some one entered. Peering out, I saw that it was Mahbub. He looked about him for a moment, and then sat down on the divan, folded his feet under him, and fell into a contemplation of the sphere. I scarcely dared to breathe. I was always afraid of Mahbub," she added; "far more so than of Señor Silva. About Señor Silva there was at least something warm and human; but Mahbub impressed me somehow as a brother to the snake, he seemed so cold and venomous."

"You knew he was dead?" I asked, as she paused.

"Yes; Annie told me," and she shuddered slightly.

"The cobra, too, is dead," added Godfrey. "I agree with you, Miss Vaughan. There was a kinship between them—though the cobra turned against him, in the end. How long did he sit there?"

"I do not know—but it seemed an age to me. Finally, in despair, I had made up my mind to try to steal away, when I heard steps in the entry. Mahbub slipped from the divan and disappeared behind the curtains, and then the door opened and Señor Silva and Mr. Lester entered. I saw, at once, that there was to be another séance, and that I could not escape, for Señor Silva sat down, facing the corner where I was. I could only brace myself against the wall and wait. It was a dreadful ordeal. But it had its reward," she added, with a smile.

"And that was?" I asked.

"The discovery of the glove. Señor Silva suddenly switched on the lights, and I knew that the séance was over; but he had some difficulty in arousing you—the trance must have been a very deep one—and finally, leaving you lying on the divan, he went to the wall, drew aside the hangings, and pressed his hand against a panel. A little door flew open, and I saw that there was a cupboard in the wall. He filled a glass with some liquid, pulled the hangings into place, and went back to you and made you drink it. It seemed to do you good."

"Yes," I said; "it brought me around at once. And then?"

"And then, as soon as you went out together, I ran to the cupboard and looked into it. But for a moment I was confused—I saw nothing which seemed of any importance—some bottles, and decanters, and glasses, a glass tray or two, a pile of rubber gloves. I couldn't understand. I picked up one of the gloves and looked at it, but it was just an ordinary glove. Then, farther back, I saw some others—their finger tips were stained with ink—and then another, lying by itself. I looked at it, I saw the patches on the finger tips—I saw the stains—and then I understood. I do not know how I understood, or why—it was like a flash of lightning, revealing everything. And then, as I stood there, with the glove in my hand, I heard Señor Silva returning."

She paused a moment, and I could see the shiver which ran through her at the recollection.

"It was not that I was afraid," she said; "it was that I seemed to be lost. I let the draperies fall, ran to the divan, and sat down before the sphere. I could think of nothing else to do. I can still see his astonished face when he entered, and found me sitting there.

"'I was waiting for you,' I said, trying to smile. 'You remember I was to have another lesson to-night.'

"'Yes,' he said, and looked at me, his eyes kindling.

"I was trembling inwardly, for suddenly I began to fear him; I knew that I must keep my head, that I must not yield to his will, or I would be swept away.

"'I thought Mr. Lester would never go,' I said.

"He came to the divan and sat down

close beside me, and looked into my eyes.

"'Did the time really seem so long?' he asked.

"'It seemed very long,' I said.

"He gazed at me for another moment, then rose quickly and turned off the light.

"'Sit where you are,' he said, 'and I will sit here. Fix your eyes upon the sphere and your mind upon the Infinite Mind—so shall great wisdom come to you.'

"I felt my will crumbling to pieces; I closed my eyes and crushed the glove within my hand, and thought of this man's villainy, and of the part I must play, if I were to defeat him. His voice went on and on, but gradually I ceased to hear it—I was thinking of the glove, of escape, of Fred——"

Yea, love is strong, I told myself, and it giveth to the dove the wisdom of the serpent, else how had this child come victorious from such an ordeal!

"I do not know how long I sat there," Miss Vaughan continued, "but Señor Silva rose suddenly with an exclamation of impatience and switched on the light.

"'There is something wrong,' he said, coming back and standing over me. 'Some hostile influence is at work. What is it?'

"'I do not know,' I said. 'I cannot lose myself as I did last night.'

"'Something holds you to earth—some chain. Perhaps it is your own wish.'

"'No, no!' I protested. 'Let us try again.'

"He switched off the light and sat down, facing me, and again I felt his will trying to enter and conquer me. And again I clasped the glove, and kept my mind upon it, thinking only of escape.

"At last, Señor Silva rose again and turned on the lights, and I shivered when I met his gaze.

"'You are defying me,' he said, very low. 'But I will break you yet,' and he struck his hands softly together.

"Mahbub appeared at the inner door, received a sharp order, and disappeared again. A moment later, there was a little swirl of smoke from the door of his room, and a sharp, overpowering odor, which turned me faint.

"And then Señor Silva, who had been pacing up and down the room, stopped suddenly and looked at me, his face distorted.

"'Is it that?' he muttered. 'Can it be that?'

"And he strode to the curtain which hung before his secret cupboard and swept it back.

"I knew that I was lost. I sprang for the outer door, managed to get it open and set a foot in the hall, before he seized me. I remember that I screamed, and then his hand was at my throat—and I suppose I must have fainted," she added, with a little smile, "for the next thing I remember is looking up and seeing Doctor Hinman."

I sat back in my chair with a long breath of relief. My tension during the telling of the story had been almost painful; and it was not until it was ended that I saw two other men had entered while Miss Vaughan was speaking. I was on my feet as soon as I saw them, for I recognized Goldberger and Sylvester.

"Simmonds telephoned me this morning that I was needed out here again," Goldberger explained. "But first I want to shake hands with Miss Vaughan."

"You have met Mr. Goldberger, Miss Vaughan," I said, as he came forward, "but Doctor Hinman didn't tell you that he's the cleverest coroner in greater New York."

"He doesn't really think so, Miss Vaughan," Goldberger laughed. "You ought to read some of the things he's written about me! But I want to say that I heard most of your story, and it's a wonder. About that glove, now, Simmonds," he added, turning to the detective. "I'd like to see it—and Sylvester here is nearly dying to."

"Here it is," said Simmonds, and took it from his pocket and passed it over.

Goldberger looked at it, then handed it to Sylvester, who fairly seized it, carried it to the door, and examined it with gleaming eyes. Then, without a

word, he took an ink pad from his pocket, slipped the glove upon his right hand, inked the tips of the fingers, and pressed them carefully upon a sheet of paper. From an inner pocket he produced a sheaf of photographs, laid them beside the prints, and carefully compared them. Finally he straightened up and looked at us, his face working.

"Do you know what this does, gentlemen?" he asked, in a voice husky with emotion. "It strikes at the foundation of the whole system of finger-print identification! It renders forever uncertain a method we thought absolutely safe! It's the worst blow that has ever been struck at the police!"

"You mean the prints agree with the photographs?" asked Godfrey, going to his side.

"Absolutely!" said Sylvester, and mopped his face with a shaking hand.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE END OF THE CASE.

To Sylvester, head of the identification bureau, it seemed that the world was tottering to its fall; but the rest of us, who had not really at the bottom of our hearts, perhaps, believed in the infallibility of the finger-print system, took it more calmly. And presently we went upstairs to take a look at the contents of Silva's secret cupboard.

Its contents were most interesting. There was a box of aërial bombs, which Godfrey turned over to Simmonds with the injunction to go and amuse himself. For Sylvester's contemplation and further confusion were the gloves with which Silva had managed his parlor mystification scheme, six pairs of them; and there was also the very simple apparatus with which the finger-print reproductions had been made—an apparatus, as Godfrey had suggested, similar in every way to that used for making rubber stamps. There, too, were the plates of copper upon which the impressions of the prints had been etched with acid. And, finally, there were sundry odds and ends of a juggler's outfit.

Godfrey looked at the gloves carefully, as though in search of something, and at last selected one of them with a little exclamation of satisfaction.

"I thought so!" he said, and held it up. "Look at this glove, Sylvester. You see, it has never been used—there is no ink on it. Do you know what it is? It's the prints of Swain's left hand."

Sylvester took it and looked at it.

"It's a left hand all right," he said. "But what makes you think it's Swain's?"

"Because Silva expected to use both hands, till he learned that Swain had injured one of his. But for that, the blood needed to make the prints would have come from the victim, and Silva would have worn this glove, too; but Swain's injury gave Silva a happy inspiration! Wonderful man!" he added, half to himself.

Goldberger and Simmonds went on into the inner room to arrange for the disposition of the body of Mahbub; but Godfrey, and Miss Vaughan, and I turned back together, for we did not wish to see the Thug. At the boudoir door Godfrey paused.

"The case is clear," he said, "from first to last, provided you can supply us with a final detail, Miss Vaughan."

"What is that?" she asked.

"Did you write that note to Swain in your own room?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And will you show me the table at which you wrote it?"

"Certainly," and she opened the door. "Come in. I wrote it at that little desk by the window."

Godfrey walked to it, picked up a blotting book which lay upon it, and turned over the leaves.

"Ah!" he said, after a moment. "I was sure of it! Here is the final link. Have you a small hand mirror, Miss Vaughan?"

She brought one from her toilet table and handed it to him in evident astonishment.

"What do you see in the mirror?" he asked, and held a page of the blotting book at an angle in front of it.

Miss Vaughan uttered an exclamation

of surprise, as she read the words reflected there:

MR. FREDERIC SWAIN,
1010 Fifth Avenue,
New York City.

If not at this address, please try the Calumet Club.

"'Tall oaks from little acorns grow,'" quoted Godfrey, tossing the book back upon the desk. "But for the fact that you blotted the envelope, Miss Vaughan, young Swain would never have been accused of murder."

"I do not understand," she murmured, staring at him.

"Don't you see," he pointed out, "the one question which we have been unable to answer up to this moment has been this: How did Silva know it was Swain you were going to meet? He had to know it, and know it several hours before the meeting, in order to have those finger prints ready. I concluded, at last, that there *must* be a blotting book—and there it is."

Miss Vaughan stared at him.

"You seem to be a very wonderful man!" she said.

Godfrey laughed.

"It is my everyday business to reconstruct mysteries," he said. "Shall I reconstruct this one?"

"Please do!" she begged, and motioned us to be seated.

"Where did you first meet Silva?" he asked.

"In Paris."

"What was he doing there?"

"He was practicing mysticism. My father went to consult him; he was much impressed by him, and they became very intimate."

"And Silva, of course, at once saw the possibilities of exploiting an immensely rich, old man, whose mind was failing. So he comes here as his instructor in Orientalism; he does some very marvelous things; by continued hypnosis, he gets your father completely under his control. He secures a promise of this estate and a great endowment; he causes your father to make a will in which these bequests are specifically stated. Then he hesitates, for during his residence in this house, a new desire has been added to the old ones. It had not often been his fortune to be thrown in daily contact with an innocent and beautiful girl, and he ends by falling in love with you. He knows of your love for Swain. He has caused Swain to be forbidden the house; but he finds you still indifferent. At last, by means of his own entreaties and your father's he secures your consent to become his disciple. He knows that, if once you consent to sit with him, he will, in the end, dominate your will, also.

"But you ask for three days' delay, and this he grants. During every moment of those three days he will keep you under surveillance. Almost at once he guesses at your plan, for you return to the house, you write a letter, and, the moment you leave your room, he enters it and sees the impression on the blotter. He follows you into the grounds, he sees you throw the letter over the wall, and suspects that you are calling Swain to your aid. More than that, Lester," he added, turning to me, "he saw you in the tree, and so kept up his midnight fireworks, on the off chance that you might be watching!"

"Yes; that explains that, too," I agreed thoughtfully.

"When he realizes that Miss Vaughan is asking her lover's aid," Godfrey continued, "a fiendish idea springs into his mind. If Swain answers the call, if he enters the grounds, he will separate him from you once for all by causing him to be found guilty of killing your father. He hastens back to the house, tears the leaf from the album of finger prints, and prepares the rubber gloves. That night he follows you when you leave the house; he overhears your talk in the arbor; and he finds that there is another reason than that of jealousy why he must act at once. If your father is found to be insane, the will drawn up only three days before will be invalid. Silva will lose everything—not only you, but the fortune already within his grasp.

"He hurries to the house and tells your father of the rendezvous. Your

father rushes out and brings you back, after a bitter quarrel with Swain, which Silva has, of course, foreseen. You come up to your room; your father flings himself into his chair again. It is Silva who has followed you—who has purposely made a noise in order that you might think it was Swain. And he carries in his hand the blood-soaked handkerchief which Swain dropped when he fled from the arbor.

"Up to this point," Godfrey continued more slowly, "everything is clear—every detail fits every other detail perfectly. But, in the next step of the tragedy, one detail is uncertain—whose hand was it drew the cord around your father's throat? I am inclined to think it was Mahbub's. If Silva had done the deed, he would probably have chosen a method less Oriental; but Mahbub, even under hypnotic suggestion, would kill only in the way to which he was accustomed—with a noose. Pardon me," he added quickly, as she shrank.

"Please go on," she murmured. "It is right that I should hear it. I can bear it."

"There is not much more to tell," said Godfrey gently. "Whoever it was that drew the cord, it was Silva who moistened the glove from the bloodstained handkerchief, made the marks upon your father's robe, and then dropped the handkerchief beside his chair. Then he returned softly to his room, closed the door, and waited. I think we know all the rest. And now, Lester," he added, turning to me, "we would better be getting to town. Remember, Swain is still in the Tombs."

"You're right," I said, and rose to take my leave, but Miss Vaughan, her eyes shining, stopped me with a hand upon the sleeve.

"I should like to go with you, Mr. Lester," she said. "May I?"

The color deepened in her cheeks as she met my gaze, and I understood what was in her heart. So did Godfrey.

"I'll have my car around in ten minutes," he said, and hastened away.

"I have only to put on my hat," said Miss Vaughan; and I found her waiting for me in the library, when I entered it after arranging with Simmonds and Goldberger to appear with me in the Tombs court and join me in asking for Swain's release.

Godfrey's car came up the drive a moment later, and we were off.

The hour that followed was a silent one. Godfrey was soon sufficiently occupied in guiding the car through the tangle of traffic. Miss Vaughan leaned back in a corner of the tonneau, lost in thought. It was just six days since I had seen her first; but those six days had left their mark upon her. Perhaps, in time, happiness would banish that shadow from her eyes, and that tremulousness from her lips; but nothing could restore the impalpable bloom of carefree maidenhood.

At last, we drew up before the gray-stone building, whose barred windows and high, encircling wall marked the prison.

"Here we are," I said, and helped her to alight.

Godfrey greeted the gatekeeper as an old friend, and, after a whispered word, we were allowed to pass. A guard showed us into a bare waiting room, and Godfrey hastened away to explain our errand to the warden.

"Won't you sit down?" I asked, but my companion shook her head, with a frightened little smile, and paced nervously up and down, her hands against her heart. How riotously it was beating I could guess—with what hope, what fear——

There was a quick step in the corridor, and she stood as if turned to stone.

Then the door was flung open, and, with radiant face, she walked straight into the outstretched arms of the man who stood there. I heard her muffled sob, as the arms closed about her, and she hid her face against his shoulder; then a hand was laid upon my sleeve.

"Come along, Lester," said Godfrey softly. "This case is ended!"

THE END.

Shifty of the Sure Thing

By Courtney Ryley Cooper

Author of "Bears and Bystanders," Etc.

The circus men will tell you that once upon a time there was a little extra money to be made, apart from the box-office receipts. Shifty Bill, owner of the Great Consolidated Shows, makes a prodigious effort to bring back the good old times

TEN thousand dollars in glaring yellow and green-tinted bills were shunted across the table as Shifty Bill Thomas leaned forward and grasped the paper the other man had signed.

"Well," he said, and there was a wealth of satisfaction in the tone, "the show's mine."

"All yours and then some!" The somewhat taciturn Mr. Bertie Scott allowed his cigar to droop, and the corners of his mouth to follow the example. "Shifty," he continued, somewhat lugubriously, "what you're going to do with it's more'n I can see. I've been in the show business fifteen years, and, take it from me, now that you've put in your cash where you can't get it out, there ain't nothing to the game. Don't I know? Ain't I tried to buck the big guns? Ain't I got patches in my pants a-doing it? There was a time when a decent guy with a one-ring show and a couple of elephants could go out and clean up—but that time's out in the cemetery now with a ton of rock on top of it. Why——"

Shifty Bill had leaned forward and interrupted with a gesture. "Looky here, Bertie," he began, "how long have I been boss canvasman?"

"Fifteen years—why?"

"Just wanted you to remember, that's all. Didn't I come to you the first year we were together, and tell you to put in a graft crew?"

"Yes." Bertie made the admission against his will.

"And you said you could get along without it, didn't you?"

"Yes," came slowly from the other man. "But that ain't got nothing to do with——"

"Ain't it?" Shifty broke in. "You're broke, ain't you? Remember what I used to say, that if I'd ever get the money, I'd show you something about running shows? Well, I've got the money now. From to-day the Great Consolidated's going to be a grafting bunch. There's going to be a carful of pickpockets, a ton of short-change guys, a gang of ticket sellers that can swipe ninety-nine cents out of a dollar without blinking an eyelash; there's going to be roulette till you can't see straight; I'm going to work every gambling game that ever came over the pike, and I'm going to be surrounded by everything that ever looked like it was crooked. When I get through they'll be putting graft in the dictionary with a capital 'G.' Keep thinking about that, Bertie."

Mr. Scott sneered: "Think you can do that in a civilized country?"

"Civilized?" Shifty Bill's voice grew loud. "It ain't civilized where I'm going. Ever know there was twenty counties in Arkansas where there's never been a circus? Ever know there's half of Tennessee that ain't ever saw an elephant? Ever know they've just got through building a railroad down in Oklahoma where there hasn't even been a stagecoach route? I've been reading up," he added. "I've got five thousand left over from buying the

show. I guess that'll carry us to the happy hunting grounds, and then watch me start doing things to the sheriffs. A hundred-dollar bill'd make most of those geeks go blind. When I get through with this season, Bertie," he supplemented enthusiastically, "I'll be writing books for the trusts on 'How to Get the Money.' You wise, Bertie?"

For his part, Bertie said nothing. He was retiring from life with "the big top" after fifteen years of stormy existence, twelve years of which he had made money, three years of which he had lost, and lost heavily. Bertie Scott was of the straightforward style of showman. Even in the old days, when thievery by pickpocket, short changers, and confidence men was a recognized feature of the business, he had held aloof, building his reputation upon the fact that the person who visited his circus was sure of protection. But now, after fifteen years of effort, in which he had seen his little attraction grow from an affair of a few small wagons which hurried from town to town between midnight and dawn, to at least a creditable one-ring show, he had been forced to recognize the competition of the greater circuses which swept the country—and to sell out at a loss. Five years before, no one could have told Bertie Scott he would some day sell out to Shifty Bill, Shifty of the Sure Thing, who had lauded year after year the money-making powers of the grafting and thieving circus—but strange things happen in a lifetime. Bertie placed the money in his pocket.

"I hate to see the old show go like this," he said slowly, "but I guess it's got to."

And thus it was that two weeks later Shifty Bill Thomas, former boss canvasman, looked benignly at his plaid suit as he strode majestically up the main street of Pingtree, Ark. His shoes bore a twinkling shine. The cigar which stuck from his mouth leaned skyward like the bowsprit of a millionaire's yacht. His eyes gleamed with a peculiar satisfaction, nor did he even deign to notice the admiring, interrogating gaze of the groups of loungers in front of every store. Now and then, however, he did stop in front of some rickety barn to reflect upon the beauties of word and color in the flaring announcements that the Great Consolidated Shows, displaying all the marvels of Europe, Africa, and Asia, together with the only human Bosco in captivity, would visit Pingtree the following day. Shifty Bill had known all this for some time, but just the same he took satisfaction in realizing it further. Pingtree looked good to Shifty. Particularly since he had just inquired as to crops, money conditions, desires for amusements, and every other subject his mind could conceive. Shifty Bill, of the Great Consolidated, let it be known, had just paid a strictly private visit to the sheriff's office, and was well pleased with the results.

Just what had been done and said during that little interview was not for publication, but certain it is that Shifty's roll was lighter by several hundred dollars, and his spirits were high in comparison. One does not give a sheriff yellow-backed bills merely for the sake of distributing them. And when one is depending for his money-making upon certain games of chance and illicit ways of making change, the giving of money more than likely must have something to do with a slothfulness on the part of public officials. But Shifty was making no confidants.

He was, however, on a still hunt for a certain person whose name had been given him by the gentleman of star and authority. Soon he found him, a downcast mortal, sitting gloomily in front of the town bank, as though the proximity of money might aid his pessimistic turn of soul. A tap on the shoulder, and Shifty had led him gracefully aside to a convenient doorway.

"You're 'Hardluck' Stevens, ain't you?" the circus owner questioned. There was no need for worded answer. Shifty went on: "How'd you like to do a little job as a schilliber?"

"A who?" Hardluck bent forward.

"Schilliber—schilliber," Shifty went on in his circus slang. "Capper, then, come-on getter, you know——" Then,

in half disgust, he descended to the language of ordinary life: "I'm Bill Thomas, see? I'm fixing up a little trick for the boys that run the show that's coming here to-morrow, and we'd kinda like to have somebody to make business good. Now, we're going to run a few little games of chance, and we want somebody to start things—see? Somebody that'll come up and win, just to keep things going. 'Course, you don't keep the money, understand—just act like you win once in a while——" He stopped for the final blow. "There's ten dollars in it for you."

Ten dollars! Hardluck Stevens, who had not seen a five-dollar bill out of captivity in a decade, seemed to tremble a bit. He waved one hand aimlessly.

"A schilliber's a fellow what keeps the game goin' by actin' like he's winnin'?" he questioned.

"Yep," said Shifty Bill.

Hardluck shoved his hands deep into ragged pockets. "I'll schilliber," he returned with determination.

Shifty drew a heavy cigar from his pocket, and held the match for Hardluck while that individual's eyes bulged in the puffing. Incidentally, did he know some one else who would like to make a little easy money of the same sort, and who could keep his mouth shut? Hardluck assuredly did, and some one else besides, and another and more after that. Shifty went back to his circus by the evening train. The world was good.

Pingtree, Ark., isn't the biggest place in the world, but the next morning it strove for that honor. From every direction, farm wagons poured into the town square out of a radii of roads; buggies stood hitched in long lines, while horses, saddled, or merely adorned with a meal sack, were gathered in ever-increasing numbers, left by hastening owners, eager to see the first circus of their lifetime in the process of unloading. Business had stopped. The stores were closed. Children, dressed in their best, strutted awkwardly and anxiously along the street, or climbed trees or sought the roofs of the little one-story structures for a three hours' wait before the parade. The Great Consolidated had arrived, arrived in a glaring halo of glory, and Shifty Bill was tasting the enjoyments of life. Through it all he wandered, complacently now and then, or thundering out his orders as canvasmen, loaders, animal men, and razorbacks, the lowest strata of circus life, sought to hurry the mechanism of entertainment to its place on the grounds. Money was in sight. Scads of it lay loose about Shifty Bill. The lemonade stands seemed to grow with the pace of sick snails. The fluttering canvas of the side show, being rushed into position by sweating canvasmen that it might shield at once the games of chance, seemed to Shifty to have become strangely rebellious; more intricate and harder to handle than ever before.

He watched a while fretfully, then turned in the direction of the privilege car, the carry-all of the circus grafters, and sympathized in the delay with those who loafed about its steps. He caught and echoed the eager luster in the faces of the "strawberry shortcake" men, those experts in palmistry who seem to count out all the money due you before your eyes, turn it all gracefully into your waiting hand—yet keep half of it. He sympathized with them all, those short-change artists, as they waited for their opportunity to take their places at the various ticket and refreshment stands, and begin the thieving of the day. The restless gamekeepers, as they paced to and fro before the car which was their home, found a place in his heart. Even the pickpockets, yet afraid to risk themselves in the somewhat scattered crowds, were lolling, and resting, and waiting. It all touched the tender heart of Shifty Bill; it seemed a shame to keep such good men idle when so much was to be done. But the kid show—affectionate name in the jargon of the ring for that side attraction of freaks and monstrosities—grew into being no faster for all the hopes and all the sympathies. Shifty looked about him for something to occupy his time—then hurried away.

For a while he hastened around wagons and through piles of canvas, finally to halt as he came to a small gathering of men, apparently resting from a view of the turmoil of unloading. Shifty bent to one knee and began to scratch the ground abstractedly with a bit of stick. Strangely enough, Hardluck Stevens was one of the group.

"Now, you've all got this dope straight?" he asked shortly. "All you want to do is to stand around and look wise, and play the games, see? Keep ten or fifteen dollars in your pockets to play with, but when you win, kinda drop around casual behind the dealer's back and slip it in his pocket. Keep the cash going, you know."

They appeared a bit dubious. Shifty started into further details, then paused as he saw the increasing crowds that neared him. He rose and pointed to the grafter's car, now deserted by the men of trickery.

"Drop in over there, one by one, and I'll tell you all about it," he mused. "All the machines are there. 'Twould not be a bad idea if you sorta stuck around in there till things start," he added, scratching his head thoughtfully. "Don't like to have you mixing around the grounds too much before things start up good."

But in an hour there was no further need for keeping the cappers in seclusion. The side show was up. Its banners were fluttering in the morning wind. The raucous voice of the ballyhoo man, or side-show lecturer, as he gave his talk, echoed over the circus grounds, vieing with the shout of the short-changing song-book seller and the howl of the popcorn and lemonade man. Group by group, the crowds were lured from the free exhibition of raising the main tent. One by one they turned from contemplating the gaudy wagons, or the engrossing sight of the cook tent's preparations for meals.

The ballyhoo man was discussing wonders which never before had visited Pingtree, and which never again would be seen in the span of a human existence. Within the portals of this dingy tent, ladies and gents, lay education, enlightenment, amusement—hear 'em laugh! hear 'em shout! hear 'em cry! All for one dime, ten cents, all for the infinitesimal sum of two nickels, ten pennies——

But behind it all there seemed to come a droning, a singsong of many voices, a muttering. The side show was there, of course. The human and animal wonders of five continents were displayed for view—but they were for women and children. Behind a little partition of canvas, "sidewall" in the circus jargon, there was something else which lured the men, and kept them there. The pickpockets, now threading their way here and there through the surging crowds, might work to their heart's content. The song-book man, the lemonade man might change a five-dollar bill, and keep half of it. There was something that was worth the risk of all this—although Pingtree apparently did not even know of that risk—the fact that behind this little strip of canvas there waited the Goddess of Chance.

But perhaps it would not be well to use that title of "goddess." Little reverence for the even break was within those canvas confines. Beneath the shiny, prettily decorated roulette wheel lay concealed magnets which controlled every motion of the spinning ball. The three-card-monte man, drawling out his words as he handled his cards, had learned his lessons in trickery through long years of experience. The dice man, standing behind his long, green playing board, rested comfortably in the knowledge that his instruments of fortune were loaded; the drop case, long a circus favorite of mental torture, inviting coins of every description into a maze of obstructions, needed no watching to keep the players from winning: the delicately attuned mechanism attended to that.

Even the shell-game keeper, shunting his three scooped-out pieces of English walnuts here and there upon the smooth table, made his extravagant pleas without a tremor. For, while he asked the crowd to find the little pea beneath one of the three shells, he

rested secure in the knoweldge that this same little pea would not lie under anything until he drew it from its place of crafty concealment between the tips of two fingers and placed it there. And so, in a voice that was high and strident, as the crowd packed closer, he sang out:

"Watch th' little pea, boys, watch th' little pea. I'm here to win or I'm here to lose. Two for one, now—who'll be th' first. Any-y-y-y one now—any-y-y-y one now. Any-y-y-y one a-tall!"

Some one had stepped forward, drawing an old purse from a straggly pocket, and began counting forth the dimes as he made a bet of five dollars against ten. The crowd snickered—it did more, it laughed, and laughed hard. Old Hardluck—the most unfortunate man in seventeen counties—was going to spend his earnings of goodness knows how long, and the joke was good. But Hardluck said nothing. He merely watched those three shells as they moved about the table, watched them with an eye that was like that of an eagle, with a face that was tense and hard. Then one scrawny finger went out and placed itself hesitatingly upon the middle shell. The keeper gave a noncommittal little smile. The crowd gasped. The pea was there! Hardluck had won!

It was not long after that before the exhilarated voice subsided to a drone. The example of Hardluck had done its work, and business was too good to necessitate a waste of effort. Far to one side, another example of the luring contingent had staked his pile in opposition to the little ball which spun around the roulette wheel. The crowd had waited breathlessly, then had rushed forward at the cry of the wheel spinner:

"You win! High red an' even! All on th'——"

Again to the left there sounded the rattle of the drop case as coin after coin, placed in the apertures at the top by eager farmers, clattered down through a maze of nickel-plated nails and other obstructions into the slot marked: "You Lose."

But what of it? Some one had won, right in the beginning, some one had placed a quarter in the top of the machine and taken five dollars from the bottom as the winning level had been struck. How was the crowd to know that this some one had been the participant in a little interview with a gentleman of checked suit and shining shoes the day before? There was no way, and so the call of chance had been heard—heard by eager ears.

Assuredly, business was rushing. About the three-card-monte man the crowd grew three deep, then four, then five. Here and there the watchful faces of the pickpockets might be seen by those who knew them, their sharp eyes darting glances in every direction, their deft fingers working with all the quickness of years of training. Now and then a popcorn man would worm his way through the packed humanity, dispensing his wares, counting out the change, and then crooking his hand in a strange fashion as he poured it out into the waiting paw of some farmer. Certainly the victim placed it in his pocket without recounting it. Had he not seen it doled out before him, a coin at a time? Was he a mind reader that he was to know that the coins had been held in cramped muscles in the cupped hand of the grafter as the change was poured out? Certainly not.

All had resolved itself into one great mechanism of organized theft, that churned on and on like an engine on a smooth track, or a snowball on a hill, gaining impetus and reënforcements as it hurried along.

All was well. All was lovely, and Shifty of the Sure Thing, standing by the entrance to the shielded gambling place, glanced idly out at the parade beginning its trip through the little town—then turned his gaze within again. After all, the parade did not amount to much. Nor did the big show, with its animals and its trained horses, or any of the rest of the glitter, with its blaring band and grimacing clowns, make much of an impression on Shifty Bill at that moment. His means of money-making were before him. His joy in life and his road to riches lay in the song:

"Watch th' little pea, boys, watch th' little pea! Now yuh see it and now yuh don't. That's th' game, everay-y-y-y-b-od-ie-e-e-e, that's th' game. Under th' middle one? Yuh lose!"

Here was the life, here was the money, under the yellow gleam of the side-show canvas, with the ballyhoo man and the snake charmer on the front platform, luring the inhabitants in to the spending of their money. The parade, with its screaming calliope, might blare on; it was only a press agent for the main attraction, anyhow. The elephants could frighten the populace, and the bear cage cause wonder and astonishment, but here——

Suddenly William of the side-stepping prefix stopped in his reverie and started forward at a wink from the shell man. He ambled close that he might get the words that were being whispered from one side of the gambler's mouth.

"How many schillibers did I have?"

"Huh?" Shifty Bill did not quite hear.

"Watch th' little pea, everay-y-bodi-e-e-e-e-e——" Then, in a whisper again: "How many cappers? Can't you hear me? Can't you——"

Shifty began to count on his fingers.

"Three at your table," he answered, after a moment of computation. "Why?"

"One's gone."

"Gone?"

"Gone with the cash."

Shifty hurried a glance around the crowd before him. Hardluck Stevens had disappeared neatly, expeditiously, and some sixty or seventy dollars had gone with him. A second later the circus owner was fighting his way to the entrance. For a moment anger flared in his heart at the realization that the man had escaped beyond capture—then his equanimity returned, and he allowed his cigar to again turn heavenward.

"I'll get him," he mused. "That guy can't stay away from the lot and——"

He ceased his thought and again took his place of vantage where he could watch the crowds at their various diversions of losing money. It was good to watch men do that—especially when everything that was being lost was coming to him. He gazed gratefully at the drop case, still with its throng about it, at the roulette wheel, with its little ivory ball (steel-lined) spinning gracefully about according to the dictates of the magnets beneath, at the dice table where men were endeavoring to throw something beside losing numbers, at the——

A second wink—a plaintive, appealing wink, a wink such as a drowning man might give if his saving depended on it, flashed to Shifty Bill from the shell table. This time the gambler's voice was hoarse.

"Another one's gone," he muttered. "Swiped fifty beans when he ducked out. I'd turned my head and——"

Shifty Bill had left his side and was moving into the crowd. His eyes were gleaming like those of the hunter, stalking game, his hands were hanging loose by his sides, yet ready for immediate action. He was watching the third capper of the shell table as he stood a bit away, a roll of bills in his hands, ready to run. And as the capper moved outward, so did Bill, his great voice rumbling in his throat, his big paws clawing forth to grasp the man by the shoulders. His face was angry—the thieves were trying to rob him!

"What d'you mean——" he began loudly, as he started after the disappearing capper, but he ceased just as suddenly. An interruption had caused him to turn his head. Loud voices were coming from the gambling table where the shell man was indulging in heated arguments with an old man whose beard was white and long.

"You a-goin' to gimme that money?" the old man had demanded.

"Give you money?" came the angry voice of the shell man. "What do you suppose——"

"What do I suppose? Say, didn't I reach over there and find you didn't have that pea under no shell a-tall? Didn't I pull it out o' your hand? Didn't I—didn't I? This ain't no square game!" he shouted out. "It's

a-being run by a bunch of sharpers, that's what, and——"

"Shut up!" came the low appeal of the shell man. "I'll give you five dollars."

"You'll gimme everything that's a-coming to me. Didn't I find that pea——"

"Naw, you didn't!" the shell man retorted. "You knocked it out from under another shell. Shifty!" The shell man's voice was angry as he summoned the circus owner. "Throw this guy out."

Shifty hesitated. He looked at the growing crowd and began to make mental notes of the tent stakes within easy reach. He moved forward.

And it was then that the cyclone burst. Just as the old man, with one wild grasp, reached forward and corralled all the money in sight, there came a rattling, whirring roar from the drop-case machine across the tent. Something had gone wrong with that finely attuned mechanism. In every direction, nickels, quarters, dimes, and dollars were spilling forth upon the ground, while laughing, jostling men scrambled for the coins. Like an elevator giving forth its wheat, the money streamed out and the howls of the multitude grew louder.

Shifty left the argument at the shell table, where the confidence man and his white-haired adversary were shaking their fists in each other's faces, and hurried to more important business.

"Drop that money!" he bawled. "Let go that——"

"Drop nothin'," came a voice beside him, as some one dived for a handful of half dollars. "That's what we've been a-doin' all day."

"You drop that money or——"

He did not finish the sentence. A chorus of voices had broken in from the stand where the three-card-monte man held forth. And they, too, were angry.

"You know I won, dag-gone you! Gimme that thousand dollars!"

Thousand dollars? Shifty gasped, and somewhat dazedly whirled from the smaller fry of the drop case to a place of real excitement. The three-card-monte man and a tall, angular person, whose pocket bulged with whisky, or something more dangerous, were glaring at each other.

"You didn't win!" came snarlingly from the three-card man.

"Didn't I?" asked the tall person. "Didn't I, huh? What d'you think I bet every cent I had for if I wasn't a-goin' to win? Now, you gimme that money!"

He started to reach for the bulge in his pocket. Slowly the three-card man pulled out his money and began to peel off the bills, just as Shifty rolled up, his face glaring, his cigar rapidly turning to masticated shreds.

"What are you doing?" he shouted. "Don't give that gink nothing! You idiot——"

A third shout. A scrambling sort of shout as of many men pressing forward; wild cries. They carried to Shifty's ears only one refrain:

"I win—I win!"

He whirled again and beheld the roulette man's face—it was ghastly.

"They've cleaned me out," he gasped. "Something's went wrong with the magnet, and——"

Shifty's hands went into the air. His cigar traveled far away.

"Nix on that stuff!" he yelled. "Don't pay a cent!"

A hundred—two hundred—voices were shouting and yelling at once. There was laughter, there were angry threats, there were appeals and demands. Shifty cast one hurried glance about the turmoil, and then hastened for the entrance. Something, he knew not what, had gone wrong, and there was only one way out. On the circus grounds were the trainmen, and loaders, and canvasmen, ready for what they always loved most—a fight. The signal would carry far, there would be a rush for tent stakes, and then——

His whole being flaming at the thought of lost money, Shifty rushed to the forward part of the tent, his lungs filling for the battle cry of the circus that would bring to him the aid he desired. Once, twice, again it came:

"Hey, Rube!"

He heard the cry echo far outside and go traveling on, from mouth to mouth. Again he burst forth in his bellowing voice:

"Hey-y-y, R-u-u-u-be!"

Then, his brawny fists doubled, he circled to attack the first man that attempted to leave the side show. He rushed forward, his eyes gleaming, his face red and muscle-knotted.

A dead calm faced him—the calm of eight or ten grafters, backed against the sidewall, their hands in the air, while before them stood twice as many men, one revolver steady, the other swinging playfully for whatever might happen. Stars of authority were gleaming everywhere. Shifty noticed rather vaguely that he was looking at the muzzle of a revolver, and that a face he recognized was smiling into his.

"Git there to the door and tell your men there ain't going to be no hey rube," came quietly. "That is, if you don't want a hole in you. Now, git!"

And a few moments later the same voice went on, very pleasantly, very calmly:

"Now that's over, I'm thinking it'd be a wise sorta thing to notify everybody who lost money to-day, got their pockets picked, or any little thing like that, can git their money back from the ticket wagon. Here's a couple o' hundred to start with. Been keepin' it for you since yestiddy."

Shifty could only gasp:

"I—I——"

"Was kinda sudden, wasn't it?" the sheriff asked. "There's goin' to be a little fine after while, just as soon as we can get hold of the judge. Not much, though—we'll make it light, jest to show we're sports. Y'know," he continued, "I didn't know how this thing was goin' to work, but I kinda thought I could fix them machines so we'd have a little fireworks for a sort o' grand finallie. Nearly caught me when you brought the boys in the car there, but——"

Shifty Bill's face was working convulsively. At last the words came:

"You—you fixed 'em?"

"Sure," said the sheriff happily, "y' see, I used to be in the same business myself once—in the good old days. But get a fellow out of a thing though, and he's jest plumb jealous about anybody else goin' into it. That's why I butted in. Better make that announcement."

For a moment Shifty Bill Thomas stood and stared. Then, his face deep in his collar, his dreams of gold turning to clouds of reality, he strode slowly forward and took his place beside the lady of the boa constrictors on the ballyhoo stand.

THE WEARY HOURS OF THE NIGHT

BRAND WHITLOCK, who is writing stories and books when he is not mayoring and reforming, hates, with all the vindictiveness that is in his heart, clocks that strike the hour and throw out on the silvery air of night their bell-like chimes.

One evening he went to Columbus and put up at a hotel near a church tower, which was some tower when it came to chiming. Brand got into bed, and, after tossing restlessly about for a long time, heard the big clock strike "one." After what seemed an interminable hour, during which his brain was teeming with ideas for uplifting the human race and taking money away from publishers, the bell rang twice.

"Two o'clock!" groaned Whitlock. "I'll never get to sleep."

Three o'clock struck.

"Insomnia!" wailed Brand. "I'm going mad!"

He sprang out of bed, turned on the light, and looked at his watch.

It was a quarter to one o'clock in the morning, and his agile brain had changed the quarter chimes into hour bells.

A Dollar's Worth

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "The Sweeny Stories," "Little Dixon's Speed Fright," Etc.

From Automobile Row comes this dramatic story of a man's struggle with himself—a struggle aided by a ragged denizen of the underworld who was eager to earn a dollar

EVERYBODY along Automobile Row knew George Curtis; and they knew what was the matter with him. They would point him out as the man who had made the racy-lined German six, handled by the Schwartzmann Brothers, the most popular of all the imported cars. The advertising matter he produced was brilliant, snappy, and convincing. It made sales. And his schemes for getting free space in the newspapers were wonderfully clever. During his stay with the Schwartzmann Brothers every newspaper in the metropolis was continually printing items in which the name of that graceful, powerful German six appeared. At twenty-nine George Curtis was an astonishing success. At thirty he was a failure.

In the days of success he had been a fine figure of a man. He was slender and straight as a column rule, and his movements were quick and accurate. His hair was brown and wavy, and in his bright blue eyes was a constant friend-making laugh. There was a magnetic personality about him which contributed much to his progress. Men found it difficult to reject any proposition which he put up to them. They felt as if they were refusing a request from a lifelong comrade.

That was Curtis in the time when the sunshine of his existence was blazing brightest. Now, as this story opens, the film speeding through the picture machine shows a slovenly fellow, run down at heel, shabby as to his clothes, and irresolute in manner. There was a dull expression in his eyes; the laugh had gone out of them. His hair needed trimming. In his cheeks were long, deep lines of dissipation. Day by day he shuffled shamefacedly into the automobile shops along the Row looking for employment. But the answer was always the same. All of the places were full. No one would have anything to do with the broken, wrecked George Curtis. Sometimes one of the alert, snappy dealers would explain to an inquirer:

"That man was, perhaps, the best publicity man in the New York motor-car world. But Broadway put him down, and drink is keeping him there. He's tried to master his failing—he's tried to come back—but he can't. The poor fellow is gone."

He managed to eke out an uncertain existence by doing occasional brilliant bits of advertising work which originated in his whisky-fogged brain and flashed forth intermittently. Now and then he would locate a customer and receive a commission on the sale of a car. After these strokes of luck he would vanish from the Row, and spend the days in miserable drunkenness as long as his money held out. Afterward he would resume his rounds of the automobile offices, asking for work and begging small change.

If it were not for the crowded intimacy of New York home life, the main facts in this narrative doubtless never would have been known. They came out because Charlie Dunn, a salesman in the offices of the Armagnac Motor

Car Company, moved on the first of October, as all good New Yorkers do. He and his wife and their three-year-old boy emerged from Harlem, and took up their abode near Broadway, in the eighties. One of the sleeping rooms in the new flat had a window opening on a court, and on the night of the first of October Charlie slept in it, because the little boy had some sort of pain, and cried like time. Charlie Dunn explained to his wife that if he were to be fit for business the next day he must have some sleep. So he retired to the court bedroom, closed the door against the juvenile din, and prepared to rest.

The evening was warm, so he left the window which faced on the court wide open. Ten or fifteen feet away was the white-painted wall of another building. There was a window directly opposite the one ventilating Charlie Dunn's room, but it was dark. For ten minutes or so it remained that way. Then suddenly a light flamed up in that opposite room, and Dunn, from his bed, looked across the court at an unusual spectacle.

George Curtis had entered that other room and lit the gas. It was evidently the poor cell which he called home. There was a narrow bed in it, a bureau with a cracked mirror, and a chair. Curtis walked to the window, and threw it wide open. Then he called to some one:

"Come in, you poor bum!"

Entered then the most wretched specimen of humanity Charlie Dunn had ever seen. The man might have been thirty-five; he looked fifty. His clothes were in tatters. They were greasy looking—unclean. A week's growth of beard hung like matted fuzz on his face. Compared to him, the run-down George Curtis was as a fashion-plate model.

But the strange man's face, more than his clothing and general appearance, impressed the eavesdropping Mr. Dunn. It was a face to excite horror. Bloated and blotched it was, and suffused with an unhealthy, loathsome, pinkish flush. The lips continually twitched and grimaced. The eyes rolled about. They were small and bloodshot, and set above gray-blue puffs. Now and then the whole miserable countenance broke into an idiotic, alcoholic grin. Charlie Dunn instinctively recoiled from the hideous sight. Then he arose and went close to his window, the better to hear. For Curtis had taken a roll of bank notes from his pocket, and had peeled off one. He handed it to his pitiable visitor.

"Here's your money," he said. "Now it's understood that I can say anything to you that enters my mind."

The man gave an affirmative nod.

"You won't get up and start a fight?" questioned Curtis.

"No," answered the man, in a shaky voice. "Go ahead."

Curtis shoved the money back into his pocket. "I ran into a little streak of luck to-day," he said, as if to explain his possession of so much money. "I used to live in a streak of luck. But things are different now. Say, how long have you been drinking?"

"Ten years," was the reply.

"Well, I must say that the booze has been a competent little worker. You're absolutely the most contemptible, rottenest-looking bum I ever saw. You're the limit! You're not a man any more. You're a beast. Ugh!"

The fellow teetered forward, and his mouth opened as if to protest. In the lowest of us there is a spark of manhood. But Curtis held up a hand, palm front.

"You promised to let me bawl you out all I pleased for that dollar bill I just handed you. Stick to your bargain."

Slowly the outcast sank back in his chair, and his attitude became submissive. Charlie Dunn, across the court, realized that he was witnessing a vagary of a man who had won commercial fame and a high salary because he had made it a point to do the unusual, the original. George Curtis had doubtless run across his companion somewhere in the streets. And for some reason he wished to scold and abuse him. Dunn drew a chair to his win-

dow and seated himself to watch the strange scene work out.

"You're clear gone," Curtis went on. "You are a ruin, a sot, a thing that men kick. I suppose you were a human being once, but you couldn't believe that now yourself, or make anybody else believe it. You've hit the bottom."

The man muttered: "I was successful once. My wife ran away with another man. It broke my heart—and me."

"Oh, yes," sneered Curtis, "there's always an excuse. It's easy to blame things on women. That's what they seem to be for."

"I loved my wife," said the outcast simply. "If you'd ever loved a woman and gone through what I went through you'd understand."

Curtis stared. "There's a real reason back of your abominable condition?" he asked.

"Sure! You don't think I'd be this way for the fun of the thing? Being like I am isn't any fun." The man seemed to gather himself together. He clenched his teeth, and the tremor went out of his jaw. "Not so long ago," he declared, "I was just as much of a man as you are. I was hit hard, and I wasn't strong enough to stand it. You've heard about men in battle, haven't you? Two fellows get the same kind of a wound. One pulls through. The other cashes in. I'm the other. But go on. I agreed to let you tell me what you thought of me for a dollar. I need the money. Talk, friend, talk! I'm beyond sensitiveness. You can't hurt me. Go ahead; get your money's worth."

Curtis jammed his hands in his trousers pockets, and thoughtfully regarded his visitor. There was no levity or cynicism in his face. His expression was serious. "Do you know why I brought you up here?" he presently asked.

"No," replied the wreck.

"Because," Curtis told him, "I saw in you my own self a few years from now. I'm disgusted with myself, and I'll be more disgusted as the years go by. I wanted to tell myself what I think of myself—what I'm going to think of myself. Maybe you can understand that. If you can't, I can. Have a little drink?"

He went to a wardrobe, and brought forth a quart bottle of whisky. It was almost full. From a bureau drawer he produced two glasses, and set them on the bureau, within easy reach of his visitor. The vagabond eagerly picked his up, held it out, and waited for the red gush from the bottle. Curtis filled both glasses.

The frowzy one gulped his potion, and leaned back in his chair contentedly. "That's good stuff!" he commented.

Curtis said nothing. He again slipped his hands into his pockets, and stared at his companion. Then he looked at the whisky in the remaining glass.

"I have no reason like yours," he said at length. "I have had no great trouble. Things went too well with me. I guess that's all there is to it. I was what they call a good fellow. I believe that I worked too hard at the job." He began to walk up and down the floor. Several times he paused before the glass of poison which awaited him, but did not touch it. Always his eyes were on the human ruin who occupied the lone chair in his room. A fascinated gleam came into his eyes. And he walked and walked and walked.

The man in the chair offered a suggestion. "I could stand a little more of that stuff," he said.

Curtis poured more of the red liquid into the empty glass. "Drink it," he said, "and then get out."

"You got your money's worth?" asked the man anxiously.

"Yes," replied Curtis; "and I want to be alone now."

The fellow grinned. "I get you," he tittered. "You're one of those solitary drunkards. You sit up alone with a bottle. That's the worst kind." He gulped his whisky, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and stumbled to his feet. "I'll ramble along. To-night I'll sleep in a flop house. That's better than the park benches. And I'll have something to wake up

with." Unsteadily he made for the door.

Curtis closed it after him, and dropped into the vacant chair. He sat there a long time. Charlie Dunn grew tired at his vigil, and was about to leave his chair when Curtis leaped suddenly to his feet. He went over to the glass of liquor, picked it up, and looked at it. Then he put it down again, stared at it, and smiled. He went back to his chair, and became absorbed in thought. Soon he went to the bureau and looked at the glass of whisky. Afterward he took the chair again, but he did not smile.

From his window Charlie Dunn watched like a man under a spell. He was not a stupid fellow, and it had not required a long time for him to get at an explanation of the proceedings in that other room. Curtis had come in perfectly sober, and he had a pocketful of money. Logically he should be distressingly drunk. That was one point to consider. Then there was that interview with the human derelict. Curtis had, of course, had an object in paying that man to come to the room and listen to harsh statements about himself. Charlie Dunn recalled the words "I saw in you my own self a few years from now." It was perfectly clear that Curtis had entered upon a battle to the finish with the red demon. His observer forgot about sleep. His interest in the happenings across the court grew so intense that he hitched his chair closer to the window. He found himself breathing carefully lest he attract attention.

Curtis sat for a while and looked at the whisky in the glass. At length he spoke.

"I'm not playing the game fair," he exclaimed. "I haven't got all the props on the stage." Going to the bureau, he caught up the empty glass, held it gingerly between thumb and forefinger, as if in disgust at its late foul possession, and rinsed it in his water pitcher. Then he half filled it with water, and set it beside the glass of whisky.

"Now I've got the chaser—everything's complete." Placing the bottle behind the two tumblers, he again went to his chair, and looked at the outfit. He tried to smile, but Charlie Dunn saw the expression end in a nervous contortion. Curtis was suffering the awful mental and bodily torture of an alcoholic abruptly deprived of his stimulant.

An hour passed. Three times during that period the fighting man approached his enemy. Once he lifted the glass of liquor, deliberately sniffed the contents, and, with a slow-moving arm, put it from him. The lines in his face seemed to deepen. His lips became almost colorless.

As Charlie Dunn watched Curtis win that skirmish, he became so enthusiastic that he muttered in a tone almost loud enough to carry across the court: "Snappy work, old man! Keep it up!"

Curtis kept it up. At two o'clock he was walking the floor with hands clenching and unclenching. At half after two he suddenly stopped, raised his arms in the air, and an agonized cry came from his lips.

Totteringly he approached his narrow bed, and threw himself upon it, face down. Charlie Dunn heard him groan several times. After another hour had elapsed Charlie went to bed, for he could hear easy snoring in the room across the court. Curtis had won the first round, but the morrow would come, and the tempting bottle and glasses would be the first things the fighter would see when he awoke.

It was eight o'clock when Charlie Dunn opened his eyes. Gradually the events of the night before repeated themselves in his sleepy brain. He arose, went to the window, and looked across. Curtis was lying on his bed, still fully dressed. He was awake. The bottle and glasses were as he had left them. Through one glass the red showed at the level of the night before. Curtis was still winning.

That morning Charlie Dunn did much thinking. After a while he went into the office of Murdock, manager of the Armagnac company.

"You remember how that man Curtis boosted the Schwartzmann car?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Murdock.

"Could you use a man like him?"

"Lead me to him!" enthused Murdock. "But I guess you can't. There never was but one Curtis."

"That's right," agreed young Dunn. "There never was but one Curtis, and I think you want him."

Murdock laughed, but Dunn earnestly went on. "I know what you're thinking," he said, "and I don't blame you. But Curtis is going to come back." He briefly told of the man's fight of the previous night. "It was awful, Mr. Murdock," he finished. "And it seems to me that a man who is strong enough to do what Curtis did is strong enough to keep it up. You see, he means it this time."

"Go up and see him," suggested Murdock. "If he isn't drunk by the time you get there, I authorize you to send him to a sanitarium, or to the country, or some place where he'll have good care and won't be tempted. I'll spend a little money on him as a sporting proposition. If he'll straighten out and work for us, the risk will be worth while. But, my boy, you're going to be disappointed. When you get to Curtis' room you'll find him apologizing to that bottle for neglecting it. One of the traditions of Automobile Row is that he can't come back."

"He made a man's size try last night, though," protested Charlie Dunn as he went out.

It was nearing noon, and, remembering Curtis' alcohol-soaked condition, the young fellow began to figure on the awful craving for stimulant which by this time must have become irresistible to the fighter. He was extremely doubtful of finding the man as he wished to find him. And it was with a quaking heart that he tapped at the door to which a slatternly rooming-house landlady led him.

"Mr. Curis has company," she said. "It ain't for me to criticize my roomers, but I must say that I ain't strong for 'em fetchin' burglars and the likes round here." Her nose went up, and she left, evidently highly indignant.

Dunn entered the room, and stopped short in astonishment. For there, lolling easily in the chair he had occupied the night before, was the derelict. He grinned leeringly at Dunn. "Frien' of yours?" he inquired of Curtis, who was sitting on the bed.

"Yes," replied Curtis.

"Sit down," cordially invited the fellow, pointing to a space beside Curtis. Dunn accepted the seat, and the man went on. "I'm working at a regular trade," he explained. "I'm being a horrible example. Last night I was paid a dollar to be one. I came back to see what was doing."

Charlie Dunn looked closely at both men. It was clear that Curtis was still winning in his battle. He was in a constant nervous tremble, but there was a clearness about his eyes which bespoke abstinence. Briefly Dunn explained his mission, ignoring the presence of the wreck.

Curtis, however, declined to consider Murdock's offer. "I've got to fight it out right here in New York," he argued. "I'll live here—afterward—among all the temptations, and I've decided that I must fight it out right here. I've won so far with that"—he pointed to the bottle—"so handy that I don't even have to leave the house to gratify the horrible desire that's on me. It's a hard fight, son, but I'm winning, and I intend to win——"

A chuckle came from the individual in the chair. "Sure he'll win!" he said. "All he's got to do is to look at me now and then. Leave him to me. I'll cure him. You see, last night when I left here I thought our friend was going to drink up all there was in that bottle. But I got to thinking it over, and it struck me that he was trying to quit. So I told myself that I'd go back today and help him. Look at me, old pal—look at me. Down and out—a bum—everybody kicking me round. Look at me. I'm better than a hundred doses of whatever they give you in the cures." He tittered sillily.

"I'll come up here every day," he continued, "and stake you to a couple of good, long gazes. They'll do you good. And I'll tell you stories of what

my life is—tell you how it feels to have a plug-ugly throw you out of a barroom the minute you stick your head inside. I'll tell you the sensations a fellow gets when he meets his old-time friends, and sees the looks of pity and disgust in their faces. I'll tell you all about those things, because I've got the information at firsthand. I know what I'm talking about. You'll get your dollar's worth, all right."

Curtis turned to Dunn. "Please thank Murdock for me," he said, "and tell him that I intend to fight it out for myself and win. And I am not at all convinced that my friend here will not prove a great help." A violent fit of trembling seized him. "When you can see what you're coming to," he added, "the fight is easier."

The announcement that a seven-hundred-and-fifty-dollar car had won the Vanderbilt Cup would have caused no more commotion along Automobile Row than did the announcement, a month later, that George Curtis had taken charge of the publicity end of the Armagnac people's business. Denizens of the Row would not believe the news at first. Many of them casually dropped into the Armagnac offices, and loitered there until they caught a glimpse of Curtis in the flesh.

And it was a very different man they saw from the one who had been shambling along the streets not so long ago. For Curtis was neatly, even nattily, dressed. His linen was fresh and spotless. Though his face still bore the markings of his old life, there was a very apparent difference in his complexion. It had a healthy look; and his eyes were bright with the returning laugh, which eventually kindled the old friend-making fires therein. Even at that early stage, there were signs of his one-time vigorous, snappy personality.

Plenty of dealers predicted a relapse, and set down the Armagnac people in the foolish column for having anything to do with Curtis. But as time passed and the Armagnac cars began to receive wonderfully frequent mention in the papers, and the Armagnac advertising grew surpassingly potent in "pull" and selling power, these critics became silent.

Curtis knew of the unfavorable talk that followed him, but he said nothing. Day after day he was at his post, working as if for his life. He gave all that was in him to his new employers, and with the passage of time had the satisfaction of seeing the Armagnac cars selling so rapidly that the factory was put to it to supply the New York demand.

Almost every evening after the day's work is done the resurrected man takes a stroll through Madison Square. There on the benches one always can see human driftwood in great variety. Curtis walks along the path, closely scanning the faces of the bench warmers. Occasionally he comes across a dilapidated, altogether unlovely specimen of the genus man. It is the individual who styled himself the "horrible example." The meeting is always the same. Curtis plunges a ready hand into a well-filled pocket, and produces a coin.

"Here," he says, "you may be able to find use for this."

"Thanks," returns the outcast. "But I hope you understand that I didn't come and exhibit myself to you for three weeks just for money. I wanted to set you on your feet."

"Can't I do something like that for you? Won't you go to an institution at my expense?"

"No; you've heard about men in battle, haven't you? Two fellows get the same kind of a wound. One pulls through. The other cashes in. I'm the other."

A Chat With You

SOME time ago in talking about good stories of the past, we mentioned "Robinson Crusoe," by Daniel Defoe, as being probably the father of all English novels, and still one of the best. John Michie, of Ravenna, Nebraska, writes about it. He says that if it were a new story now and submitted to us we would not publish it. We have heard statements of the same nature from disappointed authors, who, after the rejection of a manuscript, declare that we cannot see a masterpiece when it is put before us, and that we would have rejected all the great stories of former days because of inability to see their merits. Mr. Michie, however, bases his statement on grounds widely different. He doesn't say that "Robinson Crusoe" is too good for us, but indicates that it isn't good enough.

HE criticizes the work of Defoe because of several inaccuracies. Bears attack Robinson in the Pyrenees Mountains in the dead of winter—a time when all self-respecting bears are hibernating, as every modern nature faker knows. Also Robinson made an inefficient spade out of wood when he had plenty of old iron taken from the wreck. He wastes also a lot of time trying to float the ship's boat when he had all the tools necessary to take it apart and put it together again at the water's edge. All these things, we think, are pardonable. When Defoe wrote, the habits of bears were not as well known, even to the learned, as they are now. As for the mistakes Robinson made, we think he might be forgiven. Any man cast away on a desert island is apt to do things the wrong way. We all make mistakes. Mr. Michie neglects to point out the most glaring inaccuracy in the book. Robinson strips off his clothes and swims ashore, and it afterward develops that he has brought some things with him in his pockets.

THIS is only one of the great number of blunders into which well-known writers have fallen. In "Rob Roy," Sir Walter Scott has two horsemen traveling on urgent business in a great hurry, and take six days to cover one hundred miles. Even a suffragette bound for Albany can walk almost as fast as that, and any one west of the Mississippi knows that a very ordinary horse can cover seventy miles in a day. Stevenson points out that in another novel of Scott's the sun is actually caused to set in the eastern skies, but Stevenson himself found that pride goes before a fall, for he, in one of his novels, had the moon rising in the west. Victor Hugo has Charlemagne talking about the Sorbonne, which was not founded till four hundred years after the death of the Frankish king. Rider Haggard, in "Jess," has a man the father of grown-up children while still in his teens. Of course we can carry criticism too far. Charles Wolfe wrote a celebrated poem describing the burial of Sir John Moore, the English general, at Corunna. If you remember the lines you know that Wolfe describes "the struggling moonbeam's fitful light" on that occasion. Some one taking day and date proved that as an historical fact there was no moon shin-

ing in Spain on the night when the general was buried!

AFTER all, it is not the absence of slips like these that makes the story great, nor does their presence necessarily prevent it from being essentially true in the things that count. Verisimilitude is a splendid thing, but it is the underlying truth of a story to the principles of human nature and character that determines its permanent value. The realist, who spends his time on ugly external details, will soon be forgotten, while the writer of romance, who can see the depths and nobility of human character, and feel the thrill and wonder of human life, will be remembered. We think that the really great writer is the man who knows romance, and who can tell it to us with conscientious accuracy in the matter of the essential details. You don't have to describe everything, or tell everything. There are nonessentials better left out. If you grasp the knee or arm of a classical statue, you will imagine for a wonderful moment that you can feel the human bones inside the hard marble. The statue would not be a bit better if it had a carefully articulated skeleton concealed beneath its marble surface.

IN the stories in THE POPULAR we feel that we should have all the realism possible. If the masters made mistakes, it is for us lesser ones to profit by them. If a man writes about a motor boat, he ought to know something about what makes it go. Francis Lynde, in his new novel with the odd title, "The Strange Adventures of Alphæus Substitute Mee, B. Sc.," which opens the next issue of THE POPULAR, out in two weeks from to-day, lays many of his scenes in a fast power yacht at sea. He doesn't bore you with technical descriptions of cylinder heads, or spark plugs—but at the same time, whether you know anything about gas marine engines or not, you get the impression that Mr. Lynde knows what he is talking about. The knowledge of a subject which a man gets by actual use and experience is worth more to the writer than the forced artificial acquaintance gained by study. In this new story of Lynde's, he takes you with him to sea. You can smell the oil, and hear the throb of the engines, and when the race is over you feel as if you had been in it. It is one of the best novels Lynde has written for us—a thoroughgoing tale of romance and adventure.

IN the same issue of THE POPULAR, Zane Grey comes back with the first installment of a new serial, "Desert Gold." If you have been reading the magazine for any length of time you will remember at once "The Heritage of the Desert," by the same author. It was a big book, worth reading more than once. It made an unusual success when published by Harpers in book form, and is still selling. "Desert Gold" is just such another big, stirring romance, with adventure and a splendid love story woven together in its fabric. The scene, as in his former novel, is the desert in the Southwest. Grey can picture it, can convey its atmosphere through the medium of the printed page as no one else can. It is a long story, but you will get it complete in four large installments. You will have the whole thing in two months.

IN the same number is a great story of the Northwest Mounted Police, by Bertrand W. Sinclair, and a brilliant detective story, of novelette length, by Daniel Steele. There are also stories by Frank Chase, Damon Runyon, Theodore Goodridge Roberts, and others.

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Just One Moment, Please—

YOU remember with great pleasure, we dare say, the story by **ZANE GREY** in the POPULAR MAGAZINE, a year or so ago, entitled "The Heritage of the Desert." If you want a similar treat, begin reading "Desert Gold," by the same author, which opens in the next issue of the POPULAR, on sale February 7th.

FRANCIS LYNDE is responsible for the complete novel in that issue. It is entitled "Strange Adventures of Alphæus Substitute Mee, B. Sc.," and was written to delight the lover of strange seas, picturesque lands, and mysterious people.

In addition, there are some rattling good short stories in that number—stories that you are sure to hear mentioned enthusiastically, and that you would have been sorry to miss. There is "A Man's Job," by **Bertrand W. Sinclair,** which brings blood into the cheek and fire into the eyes as you read it; there is "The Outcast," by **Francis Parsons,** a dramatic, stormy tale of tremendous odds overcome by one desperate man; there is "The Emerald Snake," by **Daniel Steele,** quite the best detective tale that the author has written in a long while; there is "Good Men and True," by **Courtney Ryley Cooper,** an old-time traveling circus yarn that will leave you chuckling; then there is humor predominant in "The Initial Event," by **James French Dorrance;** in "Getting Rid of Jud Tarr," by **Henry Oyen;** in "The Power of the Drama," by **Damon Runyon.**

But why continue to point out the fine things to be found between the covers of the coming POPULAR? Our "constant" reader knows our quality. Our "inconstant" reader will soon come to know it.

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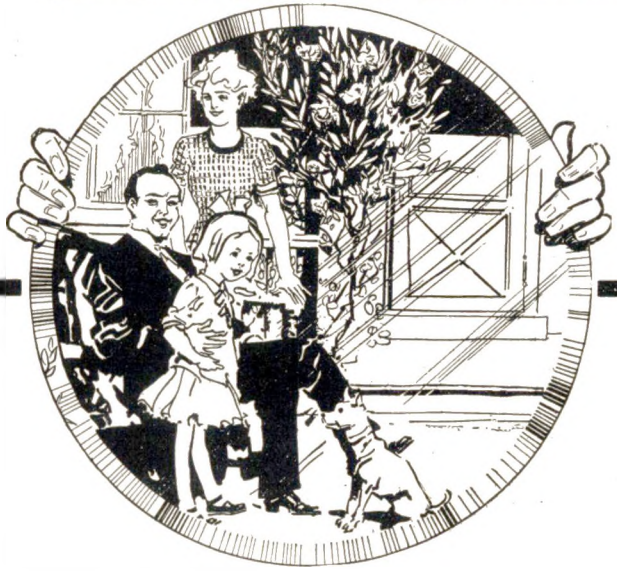

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Novels from the "Popular" in Book Form

We have met with a great many requests for information concerning novels from THE POPULAR MAGAZINE which have been subsequently published in book form. There are over 150 titles in all, and only a partial list can be given here. Other lists will appear from time to time.

Rex Beach.	"Going Some."	Harper, $1.25.
Richard Washburn Child.	"The Blue Wall."	Houghton, Mifflin, $1.25.
E. Phillips Oppenheim.	"The Lost Ambassador."	Little, Brown, $1.25.
	"The Tempting of Tavernake."	Little, Brown, $1.25.
	"The Malefactor."	Little, Brown, 75c.
Anna Katherine Green.	"Initials Only."	Dodd, Mead, $1.30.
Louis Joseph Vance.	"The Private War."	Appleton, $1.50.
	"Cynthia of the Minute." ("The Crimson Rambler.")	Dodd, Mead, $1.25.
H. G. Wells.	"Tono-Bungay."	Duffield, $1.50.
	"Love and Mr. Lewisham." ("The Crowning Victory.")	Stokes, $1.50.
Jack London.	"Adventure."	Macmillan, $1.25.
H. Rider Haggard.	"Ayesha."	Doubleday, Page, $1.50.
B. M. Bower.	"Lonesome Land."	Little, Brown, $1.25.
	"Chip, of the Flying U."	Dillingham, 75c.
Ralph D. Paine.	"Sandy Sawyer, Sophomore."	Scribner, $1.50.
	"The Stroke Oar."	Scribner, $1.50.
	"Campus Days."	Scribner, $1.50.
Emerson Hough.	"The Purchase Price." ("The Grapes of Wrath.")	Bobbs, Merrill, $1.50.
Maurice Leblanc.	"Arsène Lupin."	Doubleday, Page, $1.50.
Dane Coolidge.	"Hidden Water."	McClurg, $1.35.
Holman F. Day.	"The Red Lane."	Harper, $1.35.
Carter Davison. (Charles Agnew MacLean.)	"The Mainspring."	Little, Brown, $1.25.
Lincoln Colcord.	"The Drifting Diamond."	Macmillan, $1.25.
Charles E. Van Loan.	"The Ten-Thousand-Dollar Arm."	Small, Maynard, $1.25.
W. B. M. Ferguson.	"Zollenstein."	Appleton, $1.50.
H. B. Marriott-Watson.	"The Devil's Pulpit."	Dodd, Mead, $1.50.
George Bronson-Howard.	"Norroy."	Saalfield, $1.50.
	"An Enemy to Society."	Doubleday, Page, $1.20.

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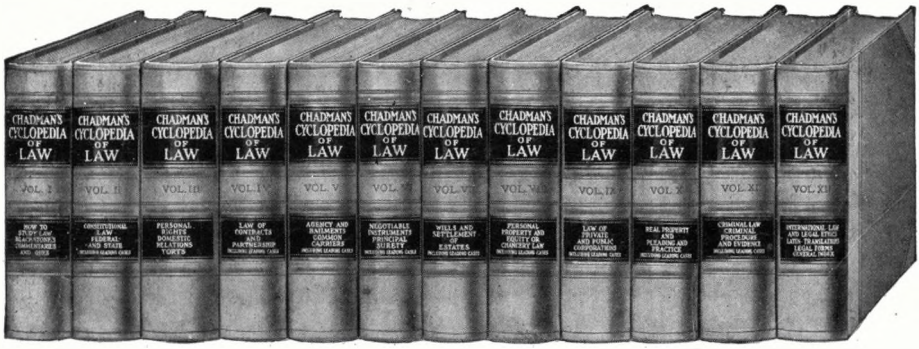

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