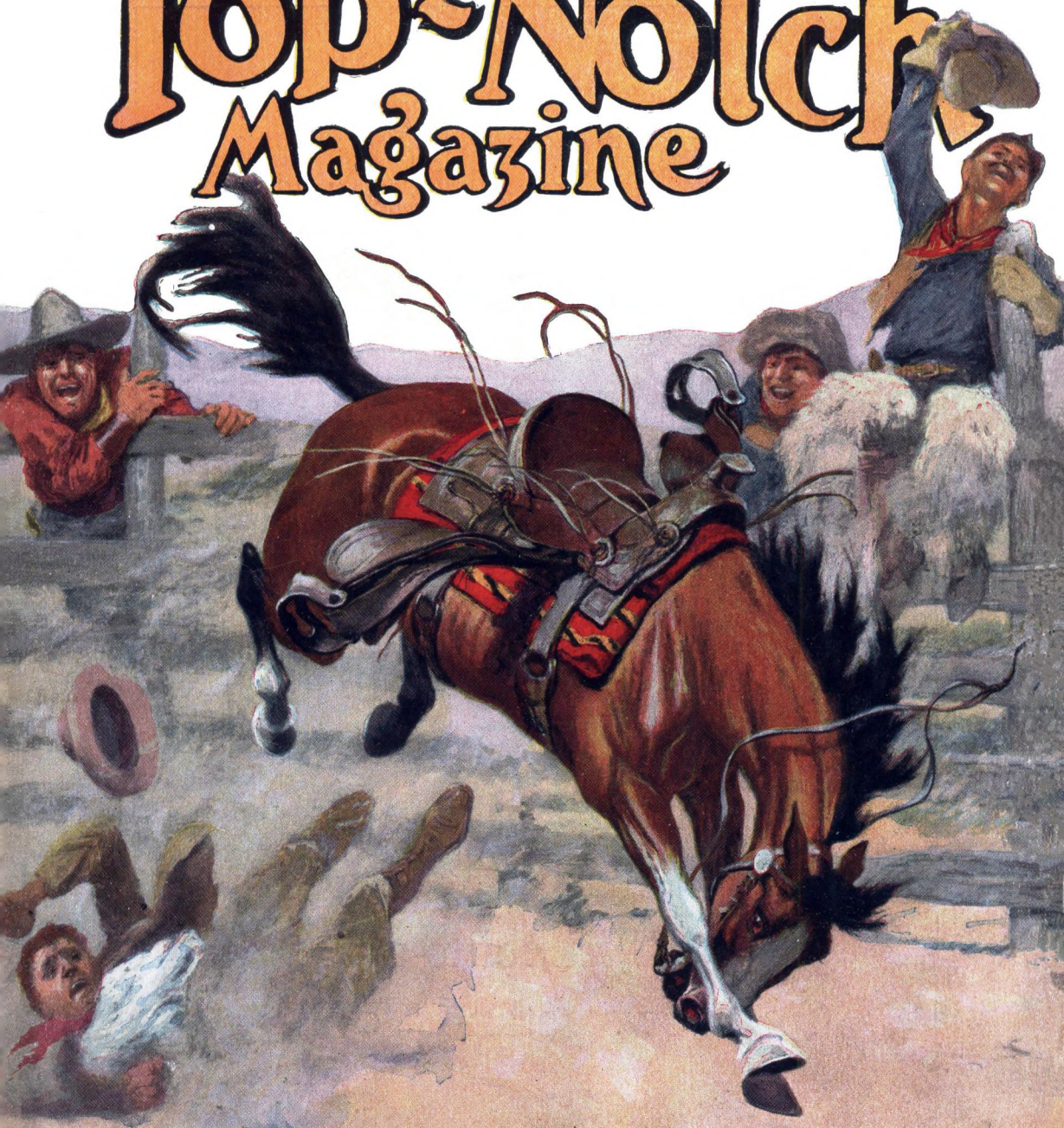
SEPT. 1913 TWICE-A-MONTH 10 CTS.

Top-Notch Magazine



WAYS THAT ARE DARK

Dramatic Novel of the Southwest

Stanley L. Wood

Beginning in the next issue. *Delightful Story of Circus Life,* entitled "Martingale the Magnificent," a serial novel, by James French Dorrance, author of several big hits in this magazine. Make sure of the opening chapters, which will appear in the September Mid-month Top-Notch, out August 15th. Ten cents a copy. On news stands everywhere.

ISSUED THE 1st AND 15th OF EVERY MONTH

VOL. XIII NUMBER 5

TOP-NOTCH

TWICE-A-MONTH MAGAZINE

September • CONTENTS • 1913

COMPLETE NOVEL

NOVELETTE

LONG AND SHORT COMPLETE STORIES

SERIAL NOVELS

MISCELLANEOUS

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.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $2.00. SINGLE COPIES, 10 CENTS

NEXT ISSUE, THE SEPTEMBER MID-MONTH, OUT AUGUST 15th

Thermozine

A FRENCH DISCOVERY
ABSOLUTELY SANITARY

MEDICATED
WAX APPLICATION

Used for over ten years in the French Army and Navy.

A new discovery with almost miraculous powers for drawing out poison and healing inflamed and suppurating sores of the skin.

Makes an airtight antiseptic cover for a burnt surface and heals quicker than any other method.

Retaining heat for many hours makes it ideal for Pleurisy. Severe Burns, Boils, Carbuncles, Ringworms, Rheumatism, Neuralgia, Sprains, Aching Muscles, Eczemas, yield almost instantly to this wonderful application.

Produces healing in one-half the time of other remedies

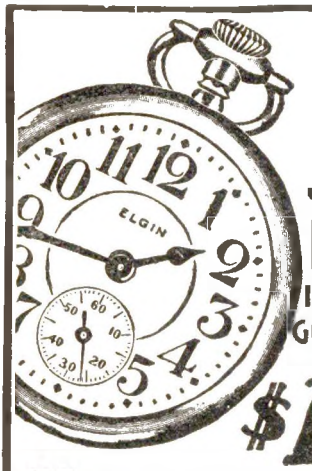
It is a clean application and does not stick to nor soil the clothing. Easily applied—simply heated and put on with a brush.

Many recent testimonials on file open for inspection.

Outfit, consisting of a can of Thermozine, with proper accessories, prepaid, $1.00

SOLD ONLY BY THE MANUFACTURERS

Pasteur Chemical Co.
98 Beekman Street
New York City



THIS 17 JEWEL ELGIN IN 25 YEAR GOLD CASE ONLY $12.75

30 DAYS FREE TRIAL

Now—during this Special Sale—is a splendid time to buy a fine Watch. We would like to send you this 17-Jewel Elgin in hand engraved 25-year gold case for your inspection. It sells regularly at $20.00. We save you nearly one half. If you answer this advertisement you can buy it for $12.75.

NO MONEY DOWN

We don't want you to send us one cent. Not a penny. Merely give us your name and address that we may send you this handsome Watch on approval. If after you receive it and want to keep it, then you pay us only

$2.00 A MONTH

If you don't want to keep it, send it back at our expense. You assume no risk whatever in dealing with us. You do not buy or pay a cent until we have placed the watch in your hands for your decision. We ask **NO SECURITY, NO INTEREST.** No red tape—just common honesty among men. If this offer appeals to you **WRITE TODAY for**

Our Big Free WATCH and DIAMOND BOOK!

HARRIS-GOAR CO.

Dept. 960 **KANSAS CITY, MO.**

THE HOUSE THAT SELLS MORE ELGIN WATCHES THAN ANY OTHER FIRM IN THE WORLD.

FREE BOOK ON MOTORING

A NEW IDEA OF TEACHING BY MAIL WITH DYKE'S WORKING MODELS CHARTS, MANIKINS, ETC.

Explains how we can start **YOU** in the Auto Business as Repairman, Chauffeur, Salesman or Auto Mechanician with **DYKE'S NEW IDEA WORKING MODEL SYSTEM** of teaching by mail and our new idea **EMPLOYMENT PLAN.** Let us tell you the names of some of our students and the salaries they are drawing today—more than you are making. Don't miss it—**Send for Booklet NOW!**

Beware of imitators. The original and only system of its kind.

Dyke's School of Motoring, Box 90, Roe Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

BOUND VOLUMES of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

Now ready. **PRICE $1.50 per volume.** Address Subscription Department, STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY

SONG POEMS WANTED

THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS PAID FOR SONGS. You may be able to write a HIT that will make you wealthy. PAST EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. NEW song writers are earning BIG MONEY. Greatest opportunity for success by our NEW and UNEQUALLED PLAN. Send US your Poems or Melodies. Publication GUARANTEED if acceptable, and copyrighted in your name Free. WE PAY 50 PER CENT. Washington only city to secure copyright and publish, for BEST success. WE ARE THE LARGEST RELIABLE SONG PUBLISHERS IN THE WORLD OWNING OUR OWN LARGE PUBLISHING PLANT. HUNDREDS of Song writers delighted with our work. UNLIMITED reference and testimonials as to OUR reliability. PUBLISHERS FOR 18 YEARS. HAYWORTH'S MUSICAL MAGAZINE and BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED BOOK, explaining our SQUARE DEAL PLAN, FREE. Send US your work for FREE examination and advice. Write us TODAY. HAYWORTH MUSIC PUB. CO., 560, WASHINGTON, D. C.

MUSIC

One Year Guarantee Certificate!

MERIT Fountain PEN

14-kt. gold pen point, tipped with the Hardest Russian Iridium, the most expensive metal known.

Will not Blot, Scratch or Skip.

Holders made of pure rubber, fitted with **Automatic Back Flow Feeds,** insuring against leakage.

Special Guarantee Certificate

with each pen. It signifies merit, dependability and perfect construction.

Money refunded if not satisfied.

Price, $2.00 Each

SENT POSTPAID

Ladies' pen of Para rubber, hand turned with 14-kt. gold ferrule. Hands fitted with a 14-kt. solid gold nib with Iridium tip.

ADDRESS:

THE COTTIER CO.

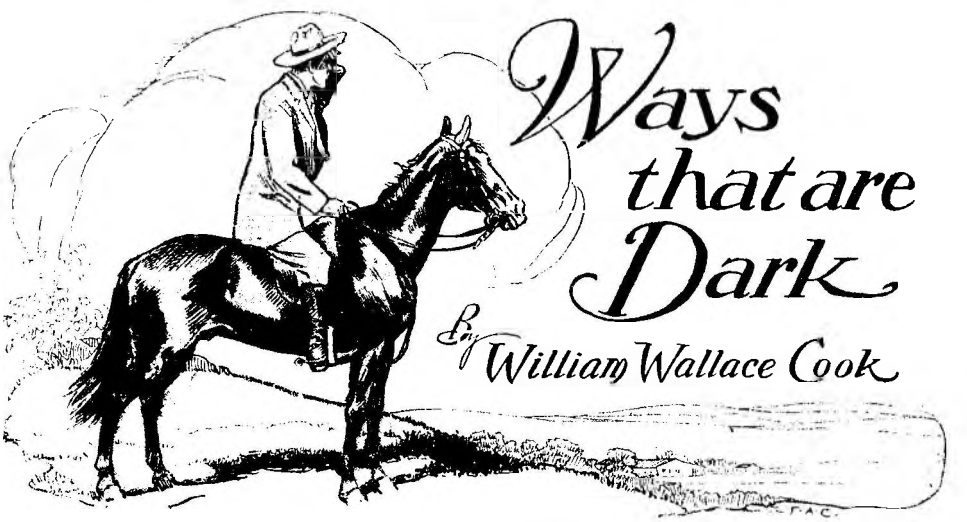
Second National Bank Building

Fifth Ave. at Twenty-eighth St.
New York City, N. Y.

Made of finest quality Para rubber, beautifully chased and highly polished. Fitted with a large 14-kt. solid gold nib with Iridium tip.

TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

VOL. XIII SEPTEMBER 1, 1913 No. 5



Ways that are Dark

By William Wallace Cook

(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

A LETTER AND A THREAT.

"WELL, well, what does this mean?" It was nine o'clock in the morning. Henry Jones, just from a cold plunge and a brisk rubdown, was enjoying his soft-boiled eggs, his buttered toast, and his pot of coffee. The edge of his appetite was keen, and had surprised him. For three months he had abjured breakfast altogether, had pecked at his noon meal, but had contrived to do tolerable justice to a very late supper. The little devils that had hammered at his stomach and had made eating a torment, seemed suddenly to have flung aside their instruments of torture and to have declared a truce. And he had been no more than three days in the Southwest.

The Eastern doctor had refused any further prescriptions in which pepsin was combined with tonics for a run-down system.

"Get away somewhere," said the doctor, "and cut every telegraph wire and wreck every mail train behind you. Busy yourself in the open. Hire out as a day laborer and do pick-and-shovel work for ten hours a day, six days in the week. Or, if chance offers, meddle a bit with Romance and Peril in some God-forsaken spot where the law is lax, the air pure and invigorating, and an occasional 'bad' man still totes a forty-four. Try and do something worth while—for somebody else. Forget every confounded detail of the

work you have left behind you. If you don't do something like this for at least six months—well thirty-five is a youthful age, and you're too capable a man to be cut off in your youth and bloom. That's my advice. Take it or leave it."

Jones had taken it, after some hesitation. Life was pleasant, even when burdened with a disordered anatomy, and he wanted his full share of it. So he had gone back to the scenes he had known when he was very young, where the atmosphere happened to be dry and the situation remote. And already he was beginning to lose the ache at the back of his head and to take an interest in his breakfast.

He had been pleased to discover that fifteen years had blotted his face from the memory of the few who might have known him. He was a stranger in a land that was more or less familiar—and he had cut the wires and wrecked the mail trains. There had been no telegrams, and no letters until this morning. Now here was a communication, thrust under his door by the boy from the hotel office, and as he read it and swallowed the last of his coffee he wondered what the deuce it could mean.

BUENAS NOCHES, Ariz.

Henry Jones, Esquire, Phoenix, Ariz.

DEAR SIR: So you have come back? Some people have a lot of nerve. If you don't want your nerve to prove your undoing, you'll run down to Buenas Noches, and see me at once. I've a job for you, and if you take hold of it you can square yourself. Better that than a long term in the penitentiary at Yuma, eh? I thought so. Here it is the twelfth. You'll get this the thirteenth. If you're not here by the fifteenth, at latest, I shall put certain documents, now in my possession, into the hands of the authorities. A word to the wise, et cetera. Yours truly,

CHESTER BANNOCK.

"Bannock, Bannock," mused Jones. "Who the dickens is Bannock? The clouds of fifteen years are rolling between me and that name. It doesn't seem possible that I ever knew the man. I guess," and he smiled to himself, "that Chester Bannock is wide of his trail, as they say out here."

He pushed his stockinged feet into his slippers, got up, and moved over to a telephone.

"Where is Buenas Noches?" he asked of the clerk, at the other end of the wire.

"Fifty miles away, Mr. Jones," came the answer. "Train to Maricopa, stage the rest of it."

"Do you know any one who lives in the place?"

"Well, people from there drop in on us once in a while. Want a line on somebody?"

"I want a line on Chester Bannock."

"I've heard of him, but I don't know him. Say, Hiram Lee is in the office, right now. He hails from Mesa, but he knows everybody between here and Mexico. If you'll come down——"

"Please ask Mr. Lee if he'll spare ten minutes and come up. It will be a favor. You see, he might escape before I could finish dressing and get down to him."

"He'll come, you bet."

Jones hung up the receiver and turned away. From a dresser drawer he removed a box of cigars of his favorite brand, opened it, and set it invitingly forth on the table. The letter he folded and pushed into a pocket of his dressing gown. By then a heavy step had halted at his door. Anticipating the knock, Jones flung the door wide.

"This is mighty good of you, Mr. Lee!"

"Mr. Jones?"

"That's what they call me. Come in, sir."

A shaggy-haired, shaggy-whiskered man in worn corduroys pulled off his wide-brimmed hat and tramped into the room. Jones pushed out the easiest chair, took the hat of Hiram Lee, and laid it on the table, tendered him a cigar and held a lighted match to it, then dropped into another chair vis-a-vis.

Lee was broad and solid, and his weather-worn face was flushed with the hues of health. Through a haze of smoke he surveyed the thin, sallow features of the Easterner, and sympathy rose in his eyes.

"Lunger?" he queried, in the harsh but expressive idiom of the place.

"Stomach, not lungs, Mr. Lee. Then there's a smattering of neurasthenia, the doctor says."

"Huh! Stay out here for a year, fuss around in the open, and you won't know you've got a stomach—or nerves, either. Jim Tucker, the clerk, said you wanted a line on Chet Bannock, of Buenas Noches."

"I'll be obliged to you if you'll tell me something about the man," and Jones lighted a weed for himself, and hung one leg easily over the arm of his chair.

Lee puffed at his cigar and eyed Jones keenly. He also displayed some reluctance.

"I reckon you're new in these parts?" he observed.

"Reached Phoenix three days ago."

"Then don't."

"Don't what?"

"Why, invest in that there little mine Chet Brannock is throwing in your face. He's a wildcatter, Chet is, and he has stung a lot of Easterners. Give your time to getting back your health. I believe in this country, but I don't believe in bunko games that give the country a black eye. That's how I stand."

Jones laughed. "I haven't the remotest idea of planting any money in a hole in the ground, Mr. Lee," he answered. "So that's the sort of man Bannock is, eh?"

The other looked relieved.

"It is," said he. "He's a criminal barnacle on the ship of our young statehood. Chester Bannock is smooth and wily, and he's able to make two dollars grow where none ever grew before. And how does he do it? By ways that are dark and tricks that are vain—that's how. Cunning, too. If he wasn't, he'd have been sent over the road long before now. Gunman—or was, in the eighties, when the Territory was a bit wilder. He got out of Wickenburg once just ahead of a lynching party. Another time he shot a man, and the jury disagreed; at the second trial he went clear, although everybody knows he ought to have been hung."

"That's a pretty bad record," commented Jones.

"Well, I should say so. He's a broker in mines, Bannock is, but principally mines that never carried a trace of 'color.' Oh, I know that juniper! I've lived pretty much all over the map in these parts, and I've crossed trails with Bannock a good many times. I'm what they call a 'hassayamper'—old-timer. Not many things have got away from me during the years I've hung around this land of sun, sand, and solitude. I'm trying to give you a straight tip, Mr. Jones. I'd rather speak well of a man than say the other thing, but truth is sure mighty, and will prevail. If you didn't get the facts from me, it wouldn't take you long to get 'em from somebody else. Bannock has written himself pretty large into the crooked work of the Southwest."

"So I should judge."

"Keep away from him. Whether it's mines, Mr. Jones, or something else, you keep away from him. I've got the good of this country at heart, and I shall——"

The telephone jingled. "Just a moment, Mr. Lee," said Jones, and got up to answer. It was the clerk. Jones turned to his caller. "There's a man in the office waiting for you," said he.

"He's the one I've been expecting." Lee got to his feet and took his broad-brimmed hat from the table. "I reckon I'll have to make tracks, Mr. Jones, for that will be Cy Larson, of Prescott, and he hasn't much time to linger. If I can tell you anything more——"

"You've told me enough, Mr. Lee," interrupted Jones gratefully, "and I'm obliged to you."

"Don't have any dealings with Bannock, one way or the other," urged Hiram Lee, as he moved toward the door, "for he's the kind that would stand up a stage or snake a game at faro, and after he did it you'd never get the goods on him. Adios, and good luck."

The door closed, and the heavy tramp of Hiram Lee's feet echoed in diminishing volume along the hall.

Jones resumed his chair and whiffed reflectively at his cigar.

"Appetite is coming back," he said to himself; "but that's just the dry air and the change. Doctor said I had to be in the open. If you have to take a stage from Maricopa for this Buenas Noches, then the place must be as far outdoors as I could hope to get. I'm to take physical exercise and stalk Romance and Peril." Jones chuckled. "I can't see much romance in this matter of Bannock's, but there's mystery and a hint of danger. If I hang around a Phoenix hotel, hemmed in by all the luxuries, where will the exercise or anything else come in?"

Puffing the slow, dreamy smoke wreaths, he threw back his head and revived scenes to which he had long been a stranger—stretches of sandy desert picked out with bunches of cactus and dusty clumps of greasewood; bleak, brown hills over which the morning sun trailed its golden glory from a sky as blue and cloudless as that of southern Italy; white trails ribboning off into the far horizon; dim peaks burnished with sunset gold—— And then the thin, sweet air, the lure of the silent places, the joy of a camp by some water hole, even the soaring flight of a lone vulture, watching him and hoping for the moment when he should lie down and be no more——

The charm of those early experiences rushed over Jones in a gathering flood. Not alone did they hold him spellbound, but they aroused another sort of hunger—a soul hunger for just one more taste of the days he had known and thought he had forgotten. Presently he pulled himself together with a jerk, drew a hand across his eyes, and laughed softly.

"I guess I'm hooked," he murmured half foolishly, half delightedly. "But shall it be Bannock and Buenas Noches?"

If anything were needed to draw him toward Buenas Noches it was that letter from Chester Bannock. Here was a spice of mystery, alluringly offered him with just an added spice of personal peril. He pulled the crumpled letter from the pocket of his dressing gown.

"'So you've come back?'" he murmured, reading. "So I have," he commented, "after fifteen years, and almost a stranger. 'Some people have a lot of nerve.' That's where he begins to go wrong. Possibly I have a fair share of nerve, but certainly not along the lines of his implication. 'If you don't want your nerve to prove your undoing, you'll run down to Buenas Noches and see me at once.' There's a threat in that. I suppose I ought to be frightened, but somehow the threat is a drawing card. Bannock has got a job for me, eh? And if I take hold of it I can 'square myself.'"

With another laugh he flung the letter aside, and jumped to his feet.

"I hope there's no mistake," he went on, "and that Bannock won't change his mind about the job when he sees me. For he's going to see me, all right, and before the fifteenth. I hope this stomach of mine won't go to pieces entirely under its load of fried bacon and frijoles, and that my trend toward anæmia will be violently checked. And oh, how I hope there's a chance to do something worth while—for somebody else! I'm coming, Chester Bannock! To-morrow morning, my festive promotor of wildcat schemes, my gentleman with the shady past and the notches. I shall start for Good Night to bid you good morning. Instead of marking your letter *'Not for Henry Jones at the Plaza Hotel,'* I'll just slip it into my pocket and carry it back to you. Maybe it *is* meant for me, after all."

CHAPTER II.

DOWN BY THE RIO GRANDE.

HENRY JONES did not take the stage from Maricopa on his way to Buenas Noches. Having traveled as far as he could go by rail, he discovered that the mountain wagon and the four-horse team of mules, which gave Buenas Noches communication with the outside world, came and went at weekly intervals. It came, he learned,

out of a rugged and portentous south that was crowded with bleak hills and gory traditions; and the driver tarried in Maricopa only long enough to eat his dinner and change his mules, then vanished into the mysterious fastnesses whence he had come.

The stage had arrived in Maricopa from Buenas Noches on the twelfth, undoubtedly bringing in a very thin mail bag the letter of Bannock's which had reached Jones, at Phoenix, on the thirteenth. Jones, with stomach and nerves in open rebellion because of the excitement, the hurry, and the rough diet of railroad restaurants, arrived in Maricopa on the fourteenth. So, in addition to his physical ills, he had a mental problem to rack him.

Missing the stage by forty-eight hours, how was he to come into Buenas Noches on the fifteenth when he had still to wait five days for transportation? Chester Bannock had specified the fifteenth in no uncertain terms, but he had seemingly demanded the impossible, and he must have known it when he penned his ultimatum. Evidently he had left a large and important detail of ways and means to Jones entirely, insisting on his point, and caring little how it was brought about so long as it was really accomplished.

On the afternoon of the fourteenth Jones took to his bed, in the squalid little Maricopa hotel, with a temperature of a hundred degrees and a fraction. All he had gained in Phoenix he had lost on the way to Maricopa. His face was pale, his eyes were wide and glimmering uncannily, and he tossed in torment on his hard mattress.

For a few hours he was afraid he would die, then for a few hours he was afraid he would not. By and by he slept, and during his slumbers the magic of a good constitution, sadly abused during his later years, wrought its best for him. He awoke with the sun in his face, and the dry, crisp air of the country filling his lungs. Sitting up, he stretched his arms luxuriously, and realized that life and the ways of men were once more appealing to him.

Those quick shifts from the gloom of despair to the full brightness of hope were peculiar to his malady. The doctor had feared that, in one of his spells of fever and torment, Jones' own hand might work his undoing. This may have been a grave possibility, for at such moments Jones was never clearly himself. When the black hour passed, however, the patient's mood went to the other extreme. His spirits mounted, and he was prone to overdo and bring on another relapse.

Jones surprised the landlord of the hotel by appearing at the breakfast table. The landlord had felt that he was to have a sick man on his hands, and had planned to learn from him the address of his next of kin, so as to be prepared for eventualities.

Jones called for his soft-boiled eggs, his buttered toast, and his coffee. While he ate, he asked many questions of the landlord, who sat anxiously near, and watched him with wonder. The questions concerned Buenas Noches.

To a peaceably disposed traveler, all that the landlord said would have been anything but reassuring. But to Jones, eager to be following the strenuous advice of his Eastern doctor, the information held a distinct appeal.

Buenas Noches was a ragged double file of shacks stuck on a hillside. It was inhabited by those who did pretty much as they pleased, and showed small regard for the law of "mine and thine." A spring—the only water south of Maricopa on that particular trail—offered the sole excuse for the town's existence. The place had a past, of course, but the less said about that the better. It was a maverick hamlet that had strayed far from the haunts of legal authority and civilization, and it was not worth roping and branding by any law that had a decent regard for itself.

Its situation was remote, and for this the rest of the new State was to be congratulated. Perhaps it was nowhere near the Gadsden Purchase, but, if it was, then Gadsden deserved universal obloquy for not leaving it with the Mexicans. And as Buenas Noches was, so was the country adjacent. The

landlord did not know for sure, but it was his opinion that in the making of it the ragged ends of creation had been tossed into a scrap heap with Buenas Noches in the midst. With the refuse a few reefs of gold had been hopelessly mixed, and ever since the town had broken out on the map, its inhabitants had fought and killed each other for the precious metal.

In conclusion, the landlord expressed a hope that Jones was not of a mind to visit Buenas Noches. Jones was a sick man and a stranger, and even a native, without courage in his heart and strength in his limbs and folly somewhere else in his make-up, would give that Gehenna of the settlements a wide berth. The landlord did not say "Gehenna." He used the shorter and uglier word.

By nine a. m. Jones had bought a horse equipped with riding gear and generous saddlebags, had inquired his way carefully, and had plunged recklessly into the bleak hills. That was the fifteenth, and he wished to keep his appointment with Chester Bannock. At Jones' saddle horn swung a pair of flannel-covered canteens, filled with water; and, as soon as he had cleared the peaceful confines of Maricopa, he removed a six-gun from the breast of his sagging coat and slipped it into the leather belt about his waist.

"Now, then," he said to himself, chuckling, "bring on your peril! I don't believe I could shoot at anything and hit it, but I can try."

And this is the way Henry Jones, late of Chicago, started in to recover his health. Perhaps, in the end, the words would be mixed. Considering his fitness for this excursion, they might very easily come to read: "The late Henry Jones, of Chicago."

One who has never found himself at large in a choice bit of desert, will have difficulty in realizing the loneliness of the thirsty levels and uplifts. It is a loneliness that grips the soul, and, if long continued, brings madness.

Not that there is no life in the arid waste, but it is the sort of life that intensifies rather than ameliorates the human feeling of loneliness. A vulture wheels slowly in the brazen sky, suggesting disagreeable things to the traveler. The winged scavenger of the desert is not the only one, for there are the long, lean coyotes, flashing a length of tawny hide over the hilltops. A roadrunner may dart across the path, or a "side-winder" uncoil its short, venomous length and crawl away, or a tarantula leap across the hot sand, or a disturbed scorpion race for shelter.

There are plants which can go a whole year without a drink. The great Sahuara cactus, and that other member of the thorny family, the creeping cholla, and the slender poles of the okatea with its butterfly blossoms. And, of course, there is always the dusty greasewood, the paloverde, the ironwood, and the mesquite.

Something of all this Jones had known years before. But his fancies in the hotel were rudely jarred by this actual experience. Time, he found, had dimmed the hard realities, and left only the poetry in his musings. Now, in the hot, sandy trail, the hard realities were crystallizing at the expense of the poetry.

The sun was a scorching ball of fire, and the breeze shriveled him like a breath from a furnace. His horse, a wiry cayuse that had traveled those trails all his life, struggled onward with drooping head and a manner abject and spiritless.

By noon Jones had covered he knew not how many miles. He was saddle weary, and ready to drop from exhaustion. In a small barranca he fell rather than dismounted from the horse, and crawled into a scrap of shade. For half an hour he was too tired even to lift one of the canteens to his lips. When he finally mustered the strength for it, the tepid, brackish water was anything but satisfying.

"I've got to get out of this," he muttered, with sudden determination, "if not for my own sake then for the sake of the horse. I wonder how the poor beast stands it to plow through this blistering atmosphere for so many hours without water?"

Acting upon a charitable impulse, he emptied the canteen into the crown of his felt hat, and let the horse drink. There was so little water that it merely tantalized the cayuse, without doing him any particular good.

"Best I can do for you, Sport," murmured Jones. "This country doesn't seem at all like it used to be. Maybe it's changed—or maybe I have. Wonder just how much of a fool I am for trying to get to Buenas Noches? Now that we've started, though, Sport, we'll have to see the thing through."

The brief rest had benefited him, and he climbed back into the saddle with more vigor than he had thought he possessed. Then again he urged the horse on toward the end of the trail.

The low, barren hills continued to rise on either side. Here and there his course led him through a bit of a gulch, where the heat was tempered somewhat by the shadow of rocky walls.

It was two o'clock, and he had left a few more miles behind him, and was jogging through a rough seam in the hills, when fate most surprisingly threatened him with the thing he least expected—romance. From behind a mass of jagged bowlders a form stepped quickly into the trail. It was the form of a woman—a young woman.

Jones had believed himself utterly alone in that stretch of desert. Had the trail opened and allowed the young woman to pop into view like a jack-in-the-box, Jones could not have been more startled. The cayuse halted at once, no doubt glad of an excuse. Jones and the woman surveyed each other.

Her face was brown, yet symmetrical in every feature. Her eyes were dark and shining, and a lustrous braid of black hair fell over her shoulders. She wore a dingy sombrero pulled down almost to her eyebrows. Her throat arose in a graceful brown column from the folds of a yellow silk handkerchief. A faded blue blouse, short brown riding skirt, and tan shoes and leggings completed her costume. Looped about her right wrist was a quirt, and in the hollow of her right arm lay a small but businesslike Remington.

"Please, stranger," said she, in a soft, drawling voice, "I'm in trouble, and I want you to help me. Mercy knows I never expected any one would be riding the trail, and your coming, right at this time, looks like a providence."

Here was a chance to do something for somebody, and Jones was not too weary to take hold of it promptly. He doffed his stiff new Stetson, and managed a bow.

"The pleasure is mine," he returned chivalrously. "Command me!"

She started to speak, then smothered the words, and surveyed him narrowly. "You don't look real well," said she doubtfully, "and maybe it's rough work that will have to be done. Do you think you're able?"

"The rougher the work, the better it will suit me," he said eagerly. "That is what the doctor said when he sent me West. I am to recover my health by roughing it in the open, and—er—doing several other things. You appear mysteriously—I might almost repeat your remark and say providentially—and offer me my first chance to follow the doctor's prescription. Don't disappoint me!"

"Then you are an invalid!" There was sympathy in the soft voice and in the girl's bright eyes.

"Not at all!" he assured her hastily. "But I am in a fair way to become an invalid if some charitably disposed person doesn't give me a chance to be of real service."

She stared blankly at him for a moment, and then laughed softly. "I'm going to take you at your word," said she. "For really there is nothing else I can do. There may be no real danger—I hope there isn't—but I must work quickly. If I don't hurry, the danger will surely come. My name is Lasca Benning," she went on, becoming very grave and serious, "and you are to understand that what I am doing is honest and right. You look like a man who would take the word of a lady about *that!*"

"You are right. I think," he observed calmly, "that I would take your word for anything, Miss Benning. Is-

sue your orders," he went on, "and Henry Jones will do his best to execute them."

"You are mighty kind, and this is about the first time I ever told my name to any one who knew books without having something said about 'Lasca, Lasca, down by the Rio Grande.' I've got so I just about hate that name, Mr. Jones. If you'll come this way, I'll show you what I want done. Better get out of the saddle; it's rough going, and you'd better lead the horse."

She started to retrace her way in the direction of the heap of bowlders. He dismounted, pushed one arm through the looped reins, and followed.

CHAPTER III.

THE CENTER MONUMENT.

TO Henry Jones, this incident of the girl and her request for aid did not seem at all extraordinary. In the Arizona that he had known, so many years ago, it was possible for anything to happen. Familiarity with the unexpected lent a matter-of-course light to even the weirdest experiences.

Since his first surprise at her sudden appearance, Jones had fallen back into the mood of his old Arizona days. Had Lasca Benning rubbed a lamp, conjured a jinni from the bowels of the earth, and asked for a castle in Spain, Jones would have waited passively for the order to be executed.

The heap of bowlders concealed a gap in the wall of the little gulch. It was a V-shaped gash, floored with a jumble of rocks. Miss Benning mounted with a sure-footed agility that claimed Jones' admiration, and when she had reached the top of the difficult ascent she turned to watch his progress with the horse.

He ascended more slowly, and made harder work of the climb than did the animal he was leading. But at last, dizzy, and breathing hard, he found himself at the girl's side.

"This is pretty violent exercise for you, I guess," she remarked, "and if there wasn't so much at stake, and nobody else within miles, I'd change my mind and send you on to Buenas Noches. You're going there, I suppose?"

"Yes," he panted, "that's where I'm bound for. But don't lose confidence in me, please, just because I'm making hard work of the gulch wall. You'll find I'm handy at a good many things."

"I like your spirit, anyhow, Mr. Jones, and I'm going to be mighty grateful to you for your help." She turned and continued on through the gap. "We haven't much farther to go, and when we get to the claim you can sit down and rest."

The gulch bank proved to be a ridge, and the gap was a sort of pass to the opposite side and no more than a hundred yards in length. The traveling was easier, and when they emerged on the farther slope of the ridge a bit of level plateau lay under their eyes.

The small plain was ringed around by the low ridges and hills. Perhaps fifty feet from where he and the girl were standing, Jones saw a conical heap of stones. Well to the left of this heap was another, and beyond both piles were two more, the four cairns marking the corners of a great oblong square. In the center of the square rose a fifth heap, much larger than the others, and with a pole rising from it. The pole was short, and to its end was nailed a board on which flashed a scrap of white paper.

"Do you know what those stone piles are, Mr. Jones?" inquired Miss Benning.

"I ought to," he answered, with a faint smile. "They're monuments, and have been heaped up to mark the boundaries of a mining claim."

"You're not so much of a tenderfoot as I thought. Over to the right, there"—and she pointed—"you'll see a dead horse. That's the pinto that brought me here, an hour ago. He was a good pinto, and I had him for years, and thought a heap of him, but he stumbled and broke his leg, and I had to shoot him."

There was a catch in her voice, and her eyes had grown misty. Resolutely, conquering her emotion, she went on:

"That's my notice on the center monument, Mr. Jones, and here"—she touched the breast of the blouse—"is the duplicate notice I must file at Florence. What I want you to do is to let me take your horse for a quick ride to Buenas Noches. I'll get another horse there for the rest of my ride, and I'll send back some of my friends to look after you."

"What's the matter?" queried Jones. "Is somebody trying to jump the claim?"

"I'm jumping the claim in order to save it from another claim jumper—a man with not a shadow of a right to it." A hard note crept into her soft, drawling voice, and the lines on her brown face set resolutely. "It was less than three hours ago that I heard the other claim jumper was on his way, so I hurried to get ahead of him. When the pinto went down I was afraid I hadn't a chance, but your appearance in the trail with a good riding horse gave me hope."

"Take the horse, Miss Benning," said Jones, pushing the reins into her hand. "I'll stay here and fight off the other claim jumper. The longer I delay him, you know, the more time you will have to get your location safely to Florence."

"That's just what I wanted to ask of you," returned the girl, "but I didn't feel that I had a right to ask you for anything more than the loan of the horse. It's five miles from here to Buenas Noches, and inside of an hour friends of mine ought to be back with your cayuse."

"If that is the case, Miss Benning, your friends are likely to get here before the other claim jumper presents himself. That means I shall be denied a few thrills and a little wholesome excitement. Couldn't you keep reënforcements away for an hour or two longer?"

He said this soberly enough, and the girl seemed at a loss how to take him. She did not smile, but shook her head firmly.

"Just as quickly as reënforcements can come, Mr. Jones," she answered, "they will be here. You underestimate the danger, I think, else you are joking, and only pretend to take it lightly. I thought I should have to stay here and defend the claim myself—that was before I caught sight of you from the top of the ridge—and I made a sort of fort out of the center monument. I think you'll be fairly comfortable there for an hour or so. I want you to know that I am very grateful to you."

She turned as she spoke, and vaulted lightly to the back of Jones' horse. A moment later she reached down and handed him the rifle.

"Take the gun," she added. "In a pinch, you know, the revolver would hardly do. I might take the six-shooter, if you don't mind."

They made the exchange, and Jones faced about to descend to the level and walk to the center monument.

"Just a moment, Mr. Jones," called the girl. "You haven't asked a single question about all this work. Isn't there anything you'd like to know?"

"Why, no," he replied, pausing. "You said everything was honest and right, and that's enough."

"It's my brother's claim I'm jumping," she continued. "He has been dead two years, and the assessment work has lagged. What was his ought to be mine, don't you think?"

"I—er—most certainly," agreed Jones.

"If anything happened here, and you should be injured, I'd never forgive myself. Be careful, won't you? Adios, Mr. Jones, and good luck!"

"A beauty, by Jove!" he murmured, as he watched her ride swiftly out of sight into the gap. "She's a brick, too," he added, descending the slope with the Remington over his shoulder. "She makes this adventure the more alluring. And Buenas Noches is only five miles off! That means that I can report to Chester Bannock before the day is over. I mustn't let side issues, no matter how attractive, get me away from the main business that brought me here. Chester Bannock, and not Miss Benning, is the one with whom I am mostly concerned."

The center monument, Jones discov-

ered, had received an addition of a half circle of stones piled shoulder high at the west side of its base. This undoubtedly was the "fort" which the girl had made ready when she believed she would have to stay at the claim and resist invasion. The construction of the breastworks certainly had cost her a lot of hard and trying labor. The building of the defenses, no less than the motive back of it, spoke volumes for her courage and determination.

Jones climbed into the stone pit and found there a saddle and bridle, a canteen of water, and a haversack of food. A saddle blanket, stretched across the top of the semicircular wall, and weighted with stones to hold it in place, shaded the interior of the makeshift fort and lowered the temperature by several degrees.

"Here are creature comforts I hadn't looked for," said Jones to himself, sitting down on a projecting rock in the side of the stone heap. "I have an appetite, but I wonder if it's wise to eat anything?"

He decided that two soft-boiled eggs, three slices of toast, and a cup of coffee were insufficient nourishment for the amount of work he had already done and still had in prospect, so he made a raid on the haversack. He found roast-beef sandwiches and a bottle of cold tea, and ate with relish.

Usually, whenever he allowed his appetite full sway, the bogy of after-effect arose to haunt him. He always imagined that there would be trouble in such cases, and the trouble rarely failed to materialize. There at the center monument he was just beginning his gloomy speculations, when a clink of hoofs against stone drew his attention to other and more important matters.

Over the top of the rude stone barricade he caught a glimpse of three horsemen at the mouth of the gap. They were not pleasant-looking horsemen, either, but were blue-shirted and sombreroed riders with grizzled, hairy faces, large spurs at their hoot heels, and large guns lying across their saddles in front of them.

They had pointed their horses for the center monument. Apparently the white paper on the board supported by the pole was a disagreeable surprise to them. Jones could hear them swearing angrily and making husky comments.

One of the trio—a sandy-haired ruffian on a claybank cayuse—held a fluttering paper in his left hand. This was no doubt a location notice. Before he could tack it to the board he would have to tear down the notice put up by Miss Benning.

If this were done, and if the sandy-haired man rode like the wind to Florence, and recorded a duplicate notice ahead of the girl, then that mining claim would pass out of the hands of the Bennings forever. Lasca had possibly half an hour's start, but the trail to the county seat was long, and her race would be against resourceful rascals as desperate as they were determined.

Jones must fight the men off; or, if that was impossible, he must delay them and give the girl more time. He had expected only one man to dispute Miss Benning's right to the claim, and three claim jumpers had shown themselves. The difficulties of protecting the claim, therefore, had been multiplied by three, but this did not discourage Jones.

He laid the rifle across a projecting stone and sighted along the barrel. His nerves were steady and his faculties not at all confused. This coolness rather surprised him, for it was the first time in his life he had ever brought a firearm to bear on a human being.

"Halt!" he shouted. "Keep away from this claim or I'll fire!"

The claim jumpers had been so taken up with the notice, flashing white and new from the crest of the center monument, that they had not even caught a glimpse of the guardian of the claim. The summons from Jones startled them, and instinctively they drew rein. Three horses sat back in the sand under quick pulls at the bits, and three pairs of vicious eyes sought Jones and glared at him in hatred and defiance.

"Beat it!" yelled Jones. "Get off this property *muy pronto*, or I'll turn loose the fireworks!"

Out of old memories, long since buried, he dug this vigorous language. It came to his lips naturally, as befitting the occasion, and fifteen years of the peaceful East could not smother it or keep it down. A stage wait followed—a pause while Tragedy awaited her cue in the wings.

CHAPTER IV.

DOING HIS BEST.

THE man with the sandy hair appeared to be the leader of the trio. He stood up in his stirrups, and while he scowled and considered the troublesome situation, his two companions held back, savagely impatient for orders.

"Allowed it mout be that Pedro person, but it ain't," Jones heard the leader remark huskily. "Who d'you reckon it is, Luke?"

"No sabe," came from the man on the right. "Is he on yore visitin' list, Amos?"

Amos was the man on the leader's left. He wagged his grizzled head negatively.

"Can't see much o' him, but what I do see is plumb strange," was his comment. "Opine he's new in these parts, Cargill; and, bein' new," he finished significantly, "it ain't likely he'll be much missed."

Cargill, it seemed, was the man on the claybank. He pushed out one arm and leveled an authoritative finger at Jones.

"You come out o' that!" he ordered.

Jones laughed recklessly. "I'm the one to give orders, not you," he called back. "Point your horses the other way and make off."

"How long since that fresh location was put up?" shouted Cargill.

"Some sort of a while, and——"

"Who done it?"

"Never mind who did it. You and your outfit walk chalk before I cut loose."

That was a time for action, and words were altogether useless. Cargill dropped his lifted hand. With a swiftness that almost baffled the eye, the rifle was lifted from in front of him and discharged. He did not bring the piece to his shoulder, but shot from his hip, the bullet nearly scorching his horse's ear as it went past.

Jones felt a tug at his hat, as though some one had cuffed the crown. The Stetson had cost him five dollars in Phoenix, and he knew the venomous Cargill had made a hole in it. With that bullet placed an inch lower, the head inside the hat would have suffered; yet, strangely enough, Jones was not thinking of that. Cargill's lack of respect for the personal belongings of another was what caused the Easterner's temper to mount. His own peril was temporarily obscured by the excitement of conflict.

Lasca Benning's Remington dropped a remark with an edge to it. The gun roared while the echoes of Cargill's shot were still bounding back and forth between the hills. A yell, in which pain and fury were equally mingled, escaped the man on the claybank. Cargill's horse reared, his rifle clattered to the ground, and he swayed in his saddle like a drunken man. His left arm swung limply, his right hand clutching the biceps and slowly showing the sudden crimson flow.

That touch of color brought realization to Jones like a blow in the face. Tragedy had received her cue, and was taking the center of the stage. For the space of a heart's beat the Easterner was appalled. A woman he scarcely knew was back of it all, and he had taken her word for a situation that was unfolding gruesomely. And at the most, even with right and justice on the woman's side, the possession of a few square yards of miserable ground was the only point at issue.

The die was cast, however, and Jones was on the firing line. Retreat was out of the question, and there was no time for regrets. Blood had flowed, and the sight of it had made ravening wolves out of the three on horseback. If they had had any intention of sparing the man in the rock pile at the beginning,

which is doubtful, that slant toward mercy was now buried under a raging desire for retaliation.

Both Luke and Amos were throwing lead at the center monument. The bullets crooned a lullaby for the long sleep, spatted viciously on the bowlders, and rang with chagrin as they glanced harmlessly into space. Bits of stone, slivered from the parent rock, flew about the place where Jones had shown himself, but from which he had suddenly vanished.

The Easterner's courage had not failed, but he was giving more thought to his own safety now than he had done at the outset of the encounter. Kneeling on the sand within his breastworks, he hunted for a gap in the roughly heaped wall, and peered out curiously at the three men.

Cargill, steadying himself in his saddle, had folded a red cotton handkerchief, and was bandaging his left arm above the elbow. He used his teeth and his right hand for knotting the handkerchief in place. After all, it could only have been a slight wound. Having finished the bandaging, Cargill dismounted and recovered his gun. He did not get back into his saddle, but pulled the reins over the claybank's head and turned to Luke and Amos.

"Stop wastin' your ammunition!" he called. "We'll make front on that coyote on foot, and——"

What else Cargill said Jones did not hear. The sandy-haired leader drew close to his companions, and finished his instructions hurriedly and in a hoarse half whisper.

"I'll bet I'm in for it!" muttered Jones. "I came out here to get back my health, I'm following Doctor Carew's prescription as closely as possible—and now look at me!" He laughed grimly, and poked the muzzle of the Remington through the stone loophole. "If those fellows are bound to stand there," he thought, "they'll have to take the consequences. It's my life or theirs."

Jones was wondering how he had happened to hit Cargill. As a matter of fact, he was more surprised at the result of that first shot than Cargill was. He had small hopes of repeating that initial success, for it was clear to him that it had been an accident.

But he was not allowed to make a fresh attempt on his enemies while they stood in group formation. Luke and Amos had tumbled from their saddles, and while Cargill talked they watched keenly for developments at the stone pile. The sight of that protruding rifle muzzle sent them scurrying away in different directions.

They abandoned their horses, and while Luke ran to the right Amos hastened to the left. Cargill, staggering a little as he hurried, laid a course that carried him out of sight around the center monument.

Bowlders of various sizes were strewn over the surface of the ground. Behind two of these, widely separated, Luke and Amos had taken shelter. The monument itself was sufficient cover for Cargill.

These tactics placed Jones at a tremendous disadvantage. He could climb the side of the stone pile, and look over its top to watch the sandy-haired ruffian, but the maneuver would expose him to the fire of Luke and Amos. If he remained where he was and watched Luke and Amos, the problem of what Cargill was doing would have to be left unsolved. Yet, as he had more to fear from two enemies than from one, caution held him at the bottom of his barricade.

Luke's gun barked spitefully, and the bullet smacked against the stones. The moment Jones tried to get into position to return the fire from that quarter, Amos took up the fusillade from another direction.

"I'm handicapped by not being able to be in two or three places at once," murmured Jones, "but I'd better stick to Luke, and merely watch Amos and make sure he doesn't attempt to rush me."

He presented Luke with his compliments, but where the bullet went he was at a loss to conjecture. It must have flown wide, however, for Luke, in no wise intimidated, left cover, and

plunged forward to a second rock a dozen feet nearer the monument. Amos, at the same time, executed a similar movement.

"They're closing in!" thought Jones. "And they're coming closer from three directions. Wonder if I explained fully to Needham about those land contracts before I left home? If I didn't, the office will make a mess of that deal if I never get back to see it through."

Needham was chief clerk in the office where Jones was junior member of the firm. So, in spite of the doctor's orders, Jones persisted in thinking of the affairs he had left behind. In the circumstances probably he might be excused.

Three desperate men had posted themselves in triangular formation, and two of them, at least, were advancing to take the center monument by assault. What Cargill was doing continued to be a matter of speculation.

"Looks as though I was going to disappoint Chester Bannock," said Jones to himself. "Well, anyhow, I hope I don't disappoint the girl, and that she gets to Florence with her notice while I'm delaying these claim jumpers. Now, I'd give a thousand dollars, right this minute, if I could know what Cargill is up to."

He had hardly finished the words before the plans of the mysterious Cargill were revealed. A stone was loosened on the opposite side of the big heap, and a hoarse imprecation followed the sound of the tumbling bowlder. Then Jones knew. Cargill was climbing the opposite side of the monument, and would quickly be in place to catch the defender of the claim with a drop fire.

In the face of certain destruction, Jones had to leave the shelter of his protecting wall. He began at once to climb the rock pile, and the gun fire behind him rattled in his ears as he made his way upward.

He gained the base of the pole just in time to reach down and grasp the barrel of Cargill's rifle. Then something happened. Jones felt as though he had been struck in the shoulder with a red-hot iron. His muscles crumpled under the blow, the face beneath him, distorted with pain and rage, faded into a pall of blackness, the world slipped away, and he slid and tumbled into a motionless heap at the base of the center monument.

CHAPTER V.

LA VITA PLACE.

JONES opened his eyes slowly. At first, he thought he had had a very bad dream, and then it flashed over him that the clash at the center monument had not been a dream, but an actual experience.

He remembered climbing the stone heap, bending over to snatch at Cargill's gun, the withering pain in his shoulder, and finally the black pall that descended and closed him in. Just here his laboring faculties grew confused. He thought he was still at the claim, and fighting for life with the three claim jumpers. Starting up to a sitting posture, he looked around for the rifle that had dropped from his hands.

Some one hurried to him and tried, gently but firmly, to get him down on his back again. His sight blurred with a rush of pain and weakness, and he thought the man was Cargill, and struggled against him. Finally he gave up, fell back at full length, and waited for the end.

Minutes passed, and the end did not come. Jones, wondering at the delay, slowly opened his eyes once more. The man he thought was Cargill was not Cargill at all; nor was he Luke or Amos. He looked like a Mexican, and he was seated in a chair and was fanning Jones with a bell-crowned hat. Furthermore, his face wore a smile and a look of sympathy. Then Jones became aware of a number of other things that were new to him.

He was lying on a comfortable cot. A cottonwood spread its branches overhead, and through the leaves fell a shifting tracery of sun and shade. There were other trees at a little distance, and a small adobe cabin whose

walls were brightened with trumpet vines and morning-glories, and from somewhere came a whisper of running water and a twitter of birds. It was all very pleasant and very hard to understand.

There was a throb and ache in Jones' right shoulder, and he discovered that it was crisscrossed with bandages. About him, too, there was an odor of drugs which suggested medical attention.

"Where am I?" he inquired of the man who was beating the air with the sombrero.

"La Vita Place, señor," was the answer.

"Where the deuce is La Vita Place?"

"Two miles to the east of Buenas Noches, señor. But I would not talk if it is difficult."

"I've got to talk," insisted Jones. "I've got to understand what's been going on. Hang it, man, if you were in my place I guess you'd want to know what sort of enchantment had lifted you out of Hades and laid you on a cot in paradise. Where's Cargill?"

"No sabe."

"This isn't the fifteenth of the month, is it?"

"No, señor; it is the morning of the sixteenth."

"For a good many hours, then, my wits have been woolgathering. Who are you?"

"Pedro."

"You look like a Mexican in some ways, and in some other ways you don't. Your name and your talk, though, come from the other side of the Rio Grande. In just as few words as possible, Pedro, tell me what happened."

"The señorita rode your horse in to Buenas Noches, and sent some friends to the claim that was being jumped. I was of the party. We arrived in time —right in the nick of time. *Por Dios!* had we been one second later you would not have survived. As it was, the señor had a bad injury of the shoulder. We brought you here and sent for the doctor. The doctor says the hurt is serious, but not mortal. You must be quiet for many days, señor, but you will get well."

"How about the girl? Do you happen to know whether she got that location notice safely to Florence?"

"Thanks to the señor, the señorita saved the claim."

"There's some satisfaction in that, anyhow. What happened to Cargill and the other two?"

"Nothing, señor. They leaped for their caballos and fled. To pursue was of no consequence."

"Of no consequence?" repeated Jones. "The law has a bone to pick with those scoundrels."

"Law?" murmured Pedro, and he shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands. "Every man is his own law —around Buenas Noches."

Jones had forgotten, for a moment, the evil reputation of the country. He was very weak. Thinking was an effort, and conversation tired him. Through half-closed eyes he watched the languidly moving sombrero and the face behind it—a face that was dark, but which otherwise had few of the racial characteristics of the Mexican. He looked at the gold rings in the man's ears, and smiled. Very likely this soft-voiced Pedro was a "breed." With this vague notion flitting through his mind, Jones fell away in slumber, and did not waken again until well into the afternoon. He had turned on his left side so that he could not see Pedro, but when he awoke, as when he had fallen asleep, he felt a movement of the air about his face.

"Cut out the fanning, Pedro," said he. "You don't have to keep that up. I believe I could eat something," he added.

"That's splendid, Mr. Jones! I was hoping you'd say something like that."

It was not Pedro's voice, and Jones turned his head quickly. Lasca Benning had left the chair at his side, and was hurrying toward the adobe cabin.

"Jove!" murmured Jones. "Here's another surprise."

Nor was it an unpleasant surprise,

for Jones was conscious of a thrill of pleasure in again meeting the girl.

"She has just stopped at La Vita Place to find out how I'm getting along," he thought. "It's only natural, in the circumstances, that she should be somewhat interested in my welfare."

When Lasca returned she was carrying a bowl of steaming broth. She smiled at him gratefully, then set the broth on the chair, and began arranging the pillows so as to brace him in a sitting posture.

"I'm mighty glad you didn't get killed, Mr. Jones," she said, drawing a long breath, "and I'm sorry you had any trouble at all. I hoped to get some of my friends out to the claim before Cargill and the others showed up, but they must have hustled. You're worth a dozen dead men yet, though, and you're going to be all right by and by. While you are getting that one foot out of the grave, and taking a big, two-handed grip on life, Pedro and I are going to boss the operation, and do whatever we can to help."

"That will be fine," answered Jones. "But I don't want you to put yourself out coming over here to look after me."

"Coming over here?" returned the girl, puzzled.

"Yes. You live in Buenas Noches, don't you?"

"Well, I should say not! I live right here at La Vita Place, with my mother and Pedro. There are placerings down the creek, and since we lost Sam we have been able to pan enough color to keep us in grubstakes as we go along. Now, eat this, and if there's any talking to be done, you leave it to me."

Jones' right arm was not of much use, and Lasca held the bowl for him. As he wielded the spoon, the charm of the girl's personality grew upon him. She was beautiful, but it was a wild, free beauty almost barbaric. Courage and independence were hers by right of the environment in which she lived. Her character was at once sweet and wholesome, even as strength and resourcefulness were its dominant notes.

"Who was Sam?" asked Jones, after a period of silence. "You said you'd do the talking, and why don't you begin?"

A cloud obscured the brightness of the girl's face. "Sam Benning was my brother," she answered, "and one of the best men that ever drew the breath of life. It's two years now since he was trapped in the hills, and——" She paused, stirred by some deep emotion. "Well," she finished, through her set, white teeth, "it was a plain case of murder."

Jones was astounded. His experiences among those bleak hills were bearing out the information regarding the country which had been given to him in Maricopa. But had no good at all ever come out of that "maverick" land? Was everything connected with it black, and sinister, and forbidding?

"That's what I call pretty hard, Miss Benning," he murmured. "I'm sorry I asked a question that revived such memories."

"Never mind about that. The man who sent Sam to his long account went clear, just as we all expected would be the case. And he's the same man who tried to get that mining claim away from us."

"Cargill?"

"Not Cargill. He's only a tool, like Amos Budlong and Luke McGinn. Those three are hirelings and bravos, and this other man owns them body and soul. It's been a fight for us here to hold our own against him, but I reckon," and she tossed her head defiantly, "we'll be able to stand it."

Her spirit was up in arms, but she suddenly controlled her agitation, and her face cleared with a smile.

"This isn't the sort of talk a sick man ought to hear," she went on. "You want to know about your horse, I reckon? Well, he's in the corral, and Pedro is taking good care of him."

"I hadn't thought of the horse, but if he was of any help to you, that is enough."

"But for you, happening along as you did, the claim would have been lost. I know you put up a good fight"—her

eyes sparkled—"for Cargill showed the effects of it. And there were three of them against you—three of the worst desperadoes in these parts! Certainly, Henry Jones, you are the clear quill, and we owe you a debt of gratitude that we can never repay."

"It's the other way around, Miss Benning," he returned hastily. "The doctor sent me to Arizona to recover my health, and he said I must find a place where I could rough it, rub elbows with danger, and unselfishly work in the interests of others."

Her face went a little blank at that. "Queer prescription, wasn't it," she said, "for a man who's trying to recover his health?"

"Desperate diseases require desperate remedies. I guess the doctor knew."

"Well, you've begun taking your medicine like a man. I didn't get back from Florence until early this morning."

"It must have been a hard trip."

She laughed. "Eight hours in the saddle a hard trip?" she returned. "Why, I could ride from sunup till dewfall, and then go to a baile, and dance every set. If I hadn't been able to hold my own, Mr. Jones, how could I have stood out against Chet Bannock for so long?"

"Chet Bannock?" he repeated, staring.

She nodded. "Yes, Chet Bannock, of Buenas Noches, the coyote who tried to jump that claim——"

"And who killed my boy!" came a strident voice, as a worn, lean face showed itself suddenly beside Lasca's, and a knotted, toil-calloused fist beat savagely at the air. "Oh, there'll come a time, there'll come a time!"

"Mother," said the girl gently, "don't let this pester you. Of course, there'll come a time when the score will be settled, but you don't need to be in a taking. This is Mr. Jones, mother. I reckon you haven't seen him since he came to."

The older woman bent over Jones and pressed her hard, dry lips to his forehead.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WOLF ON THE SKY LINE.

JONES felt a deep sense of gratitude must have prompted the elder woman's action, and that back of the gratitude must lie a wound which mention of Chester Bannock had opened afresh. What else there might be in the gruesome pages of Benning history Jones did not know. He wished that he did.

Bannock, it seemed, was the wolf on the sky line of the family fortunes. Rightly or wrongly, he was suspected of having slain Sam Benning; and now, two years later, he had tried to steal a mining claim from his victim's sister. And this Bannock was the man Jones was going to Buenas Noches to meet!

Startled thoughts were coursing through his mind. Ordered to Buenas Noches by Bannock, on his way Jones had fallen in with the girl, had loaned her his horse, and had protected her claim against Bannock's mercenaries. Thus had matters been finely complicated. The vials of Bannock's wrath might now be expected to spill themselves upon the head of Jones.

The Easterner was "doing something for somebody else" with a vengeance. His own selfish striving for dollars, which had brought his health into a decline, had been put away from him utterly. He had become involved in a network of plot and counterplot that had not even remotely concerned him until he had stood his ground at the center monument. Now he was "enlisted for the war"—and his articles were the terms of a doctor's very singular prescription.

Jones was looking upward into the eyes of Mrs. Benning. The eyes were moist, and the woman's lean face twisted with an expression of mingled sorrow and savage desire for revenge.

"Against me and mine," quavered the thin, choking voice, "this beast of the pit has been fighting for years. Never, since we first struck this scarred and blistered wilderness, has he let us alone. He has set himself in the way of whatever we tried to do, and his spirit is

bitter and his ways are godless. But there'll come a time, there'll come a time!"

She was tall and gaunt. Her hands were knotted with toil, and the flesh was drawn tightly over her high cheek bones. As she finished speaking, she flung up her arms and lifted her face skyward.

A silence fell. The girl turned away and looked absently off across the flat and into the cottonwoods. The whisper of running water was broken by the early call of a whippoorwill.

Suddenly the woman lowered her arms and bowed over Jones once more. Her face was transfigured by a gentle smile, and her calloused hand rested lightly on his brow.

"You are the good Samaritan, Mr. Jones," she went on, her voice low and almost musical, "and you could not pass Lasca by in her need. But for you we should have lost Sam's claim, and what you have done for strangers has touched an old woman's heart. We are going to take care of you, and nurse you back to health. The doctor says it will be a month or six weeks before you are yourself again, and it makes us happy to think that you are with us, and that we can give you our care."

She turned abruptly away, and walked slowly to the house. Lasca seated herself in the chair at the head of the cot.

"She's the best mother that ever lived," commented the girl, "but the thought of Chet Bannock stirs her to anger. And she has full cause to hate and despise that human coyote. If you knew the whole story, Mr. Jones, you wouldn't blame her."

He wanted to be told the "whole story," but hesitated to ask for it. Sooner or later, he felt sure, it would come.

For a month Jones was in complete retirement at La Vita Place. Never before in his life had he passed a month so quietly, so peacefully, so contentedly. The home of the Bennings was like a place cut off from the world. The hot, thirsty deserts guarded it against intrusion. During the four

weeks of recovery from his wound, there were but two visitors at La Vita Place. The doctor from Buenas Noches came twice, and a sly Mexican came once.

After the first week, Jones was able to sit up. For his comfort, a rocking-chair, upholstered with pillows, was brought from the adobe. The third week found him taking short walks in the cottonwood grove, and during the fourth week he was able to walk down the creek to the placerings and watch Pedro "pan" the black sand and the gravel.

His living room, all this time, was the open. The horizon was his wall, and his roof the sky and the outstretched arms of the cottonwoods. In a land where three hundred and sixty days out of every year are bright and sunny, and the temperature is almost tropical, alfresco living has its advantages.

The little stream, which transformed an acre or two of desert sand into a small paradise, was a wonderful affair in its way. Two or three never-failing springs formed its source, and it rilled away across the "flat," irrigating La Vita Place, furnishing a pool for the gold washing, and then, after a losing fight with sun and soil, the hot sand soaked it up like a hungry sponge. From its source to the place where it vanished in the earth its windings measured no more than half a mile, and yet it accomplished marvels in that brief distance.

Jones was made much of by the hospitable Bennings. Had he been one of the family he could not have been treated with more consideration.

The simple, almost primitive, life of the little household held a charm for Jones. The needs of life were washed from the soil, and Pedro, with a bag of gold dust, would make weekly trips to Buenas Noches for supplies. He never went to the post office, for there was nothing to go for. Sometimes he would buy newspapers and magazines in the camp, but the papers were a week or two old, and Jones had little interest in them.

The Easterner tried to feel as though

he had been cast away on some lost island, and dealings with the outside world seemed almost like a sacrilege. He wished his round of days at La Vita Place to be unruffled by any of the cares and worries he had left behind him—and he came near to realizing his wish.

Lasca took a firm and unexpected hold upon his fancy. The elder woman and Pedro were devoted to him, but it was Lasca's voice he was most eager to hear, and her sun-browned face he was most eager to see. They were much in each other's company, and their friendship grew rapidly.

Pedro was something of a mystery to Jones. In a quiet, unobtrusive sort of way he seemed to enact the rôle of provider and protector. Why this should be was a problem. Pedro was about the age of Jones himself, and it was odd that he should be content to dream away a possible career at La Vita Place. Perhaps, Jones reasoned, he had no ambition, and was sufficiently Mexican to be satisfied with the "mañana" policy of his swarthy brothers.

As the days passed and the four weeks drew to a close, Jones discovered something that filled him with happiness and surprise. Not only had his wound healed nicely, and his strength returned, but the troubles that had sent him into the Southwest were mending as though by magic. He was taking on weight, the thin lines of his face were rounding out, and he could eat what he would and without fear of after effects. No longer was he an invalid. A few weeks more, in which he could knock about the hills, would complete his rejuvenation.

His association with the Bennings and Pedro inspired frankness, but not of the sort that lifted the veil upon the bitter story of the past. They kept silence upon the wrongs they had endured, and gradually Jones ceased to be curious regarding Bannock and the evil he had done. In fact, Jones had almost forgotten Bannock and his own reasons for penetrating the hills in the direction of Buenas Noches.

One morning, four weeks to a day from the time he had been borne to La Vita Place, Jones was sitting in his rocking-chair under the cottonwoods. He was alone. Pedro was at the placerings, Lasca was abroad breaking in a half-tamed cayuse which she had bought to take the place of the saddle horse she had lost, and the elder woman was busy in the adobe.

Soft-footed as a specter, a form stole out of the shadow of the cottonwoods and stood for a moment before Jones. Surprised out of his reveries, Jones half started from his chair.

"Buenos, señor," said the man, with a faint smile.

"Buenos," answered Jones, settling back in his chair. "What do you want? If your business is with Mrs. Benning, you'll find her at the house."

"I haf sometang for de señor," said the Mexican. "No one is to know dat I haf come. Sabe? Say nothing of me, señor. Take this, and I go." He pressed an envelope into Jones' hand. "Adios!" he finished, and backed away into the shadows as noiselessly as he had come.

Jones felt an impulse to call to him, and ask him to return and give further account of himself. But the impulse passed before he could frame a word. He stared at the envelope. It was addressed simply: "Henry Jones, La Vita Place." He tore it open, and drew out a note bearing these words:

> You interfered with my plans—in fact, you played the devil with them, and my first hope was that you had got your gruel. Later, I changed my mind about that. As matters have progressed since the claim jumping, I am beginning to understand how you can be more useful to me than ever. You are now strong enough to travel, and it is high time you were traveling toward Buenas Noches for an interview with me. I shall expect you in town this afternoon; and I shall expect you to keep from the girl and the old woman and that prying greaser of theirs your real reason for coming to town. You know what I can do to you, and you had better walk chalk, and follow orders.
>
> CHESTER BANNOCK.

"By George!" mused Jones. "I came near losing sight of Bannock entirely. Now the wolf is on the sky line and demands attention. Shall I go, or shall

I stay here and let him play his next card?"

The note suggested action, and a course of events. Work of some sort was what Jones needed, and this curt command from Bannock had made him suddenly realize how monotonously slow existence was at La Vita Place. He could not linger indefinitely with his generous friends. Some time he would have to cut himself adrift, and why not now?

Besides—and this thought grew prominent in his mind—by playing into Bannock's hands, fate might help him to be of still further service to the Bennings. Jones' path had strangely crossed Bannock's, and Bannock's fortunes seemed inextricably mixed with those of the Bennings.

"Bannock is a good bet," he concluded, "and it's my business to play it for all it is worth."

He put away the note carefully, for he saw Lasca coming briskly from the corral, riding gear under her arm. Her face was flushed with exercise, and her eyes glowed with happiness.

"Henry"—she had been calling him that in a sisterly way for some time—"that sorrel cayuse is a regular hun! Pedro knew what he was doing when he picked him out for me. The brute was a handful at first, but before I was through with him we got pretty well acquainted, and——" She checked herself, and glanced at Jones curiously. "What's on your mind, Henry?" she inquired. "First time I ever saw you look just like that."

"I'm leaving here this afternoon, Lasca," he answered.

A quick shadow crossed her face. "Not for good?" she said.

"I hope not. You've treated me handsomely, and I hope I know how to be grateful and——"

"Bother that!" she interrupted. "You were hurt helping us, and we did no more than we ought to have done." Solicitude crept into her voice as she added: "But are you able to sit a horse and ride? You might have a backset, you know, if you get too ambitious all at once."

"Thanks to the care I have received here, I'm in better health than I have been for two years. I hate to go," and here his eyes dwelt on her face so intently that she flushed and looked away, "but I feel the call."

"Where does the call lead you?"

"To Buenas Noches."

She laughed. "Then we'll surely see more of you, for you'll be only two miles away. After you get your fill of the town, Henry, come back and stay a spell longer with us. You haven't had all that the doctor prescribed for you yet," and with that, still laughing, she passed on to the house.

It was the middle of the afternoon when Jones climbed to the back of Sport, saddlebags at the cantle, and equipped for the trail. Mrs. Benning, the girl, and Pedro, were grouped about him.

"I'm forgetting something, Lasca," remarked Jones. "That revolver of mine, please."

A shadow of distrust ran through the gaunt face of Mrs. Benning. Lasca threw back her head quickly, and her eyes narrowed. Pedro seemed startled for a moment, then whirled toward the open door of the adobe.

"I will get the six-gun, señor," said he.

He returned with it, and placed it in Jones' hand. Jones slipped it into his belt, under his coat.

"If I have any advice to give you, Henry," observed Lasca, "it's this: Look out for Chet Bannock. It can't be that he loves you for the way you have helped us."

"Look out for Bannock, señor!" repeated Pedro, a flash in his eyes.

The elder woman lifted her arms. "Beware of the wolf, Henry!" she called shrilly, "and don't forget that we are always your friends. There'll come a time, there'll come a time!"

He spurred away in the direction of the trail. In making a turn that would hide the "flat" and the cottonwoods from his eyes, he cast one rearward glance at the group by the adobe, and waved his hand; then he set his face resolutely toward Buenas Noches.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOLF'S TEETH.

A FEW of the business houses and dwellings in Buenas Noches were shake-sided and shake-roofed, but the majority of the structures were of adobe. Wind and weather had gnawed at the adobe, and in the course of years had bitten off the corners and torn at the walls. Wooden shakes, too, had split and curled in the hot sun, and there were gaps in places showing where they had been lifted out bodily and carried off by the many sand storms that afflicted that region.

On the whole, Buenas Noches presented a dingy, squalid, and worn appearance. Perhaps, at one time, the residents may have taken pride in the town, but that was far from being the case now. It was as though the place had become tired after a long reign of lawlessness, and was bent on lying down, wishing everybody a cheerless "good night," and going to sleep for an indefinite period.

In front of every structure, whether devoted to business or to mere living purposes, there were sure to be projecting rafters, covered to throw a shade and form a porch. No matter what happened to the rest of the building, the porch was always kept in good repair. Shade meant some degree of comfort, and little items of comfort were hugged jealously to the bosoms of the townspeople.

At the corral, Jones had to arouse the proprietor from an afternoon siesta on his porch in order to get him to take care of Sport. The man grumbled at being disturbed, but languidly took the horse's bridle and started through the corral gate. Jones stopped him to inquire as to the whereabouts of Chester Bannock.

"Gee!" muttered the proprietor, stifling a yawn. "Don't you know where Chet hangs out? Last buildin' on the left, right down the street. Opined ever'body knowed Chet's place."

The town was baking slowly in the terrific heat. Life seemed dormant, and even the town dogs lacked ambition to stir around and bark at a stranger.

The last building on the left, down the street, occupied a position that was rather isolated. It was of thick adobe, not of shakes, and the porch was deep and wide, and floored with beaten clay. On the wall, beside the open door, was tacked a sign whose legend had faded until reading it had become difficult. After a few minutes' study, Jones made out of it the following: "Chester Bannock. Real Estate and Loans. Mining Property a Specialty."

At one end of the porch hung an olla, or earthen water jar. Its top was covered with a bit of dirty canvas, its porous sides were sweating with moisture, and a gourd dipper hung conveniently by on a porch post. At the other end of the shaded area a grass hammock swung from the rafters. Within reach of the hammock was a chair, on whose seat had been placed a corked bottle and two glasses. One of the glasses was half filled with water. The hammock was heavily weighted with a form that claimed the most of Jones' attention.

The form was that of a man who must have measured full six feet over all. He was bowed to conform with the "sag" of his swinging bed, and this brought his head and feet into prominence. The feet were bare. The head was a grizzled tangle of grayish hair, thinning at the temples. The face was like tanned leather, with a protruding lower jaw, a drooping mustache, a prominent nose, a scarred right cheek, and an expression, even in repose, of malevolence and trickery.

Jones removed the bottle and glasses from the chair and seated himself. His ride from La Vita Place, through the hot sun, had made him a little tired. But it was no more than the natural weariness of one so lately out of a sick bed.

"Is your name Bannock?" he asked.

"Clear out, Cargill," said the man in the hammock, without opening his eyes, "and don't bother me. Take a drink, and mosey."

"It's not Cargill," returned Jones.

"Hey?"

The eyes opened with a start, and the grizzled head turned for a quick glance at the caller. In an instant the man in the hammock was wide awake. His bare feet described an arc in the air, and he hastily arose to a sitting posture on the hammock's edge. He peered keenly at Jones.

"My old friend, Henery, if it ain't!" he murmured, with an ill-omened chuckle.

"You're Chester Bannock?" persisted Jones.

"Shucks, just as if you didn't know! Of course I'm Bannock. Fifteen years haven't made the change in me that they have in you, I reckon. You're thinner, Henery, but maybe that's because of the nick you got during the claim jumping. It must have been an ugly wallop, eh? But you better be thankful it wasn't any worse. I'm thankful, whether you are or not, old boy."

He leaned down from the hammock to pick up the bottle and the empty glass. Pulling the cork with his teeth, he poured out a generous quantity of brown fluid and offered it to his caller. Jones shook his head.

"No? Water wagon, I suppose? Different Henery, mighty different, from what I used to know. Well, anyway, here's to old times, and the gov'ment paymaster!"

Bannock leered significantly over the edge of the glass as the drink went down. After that he reached for the other glass, drained it, and recorked the bottle with a long sigh of satisfaction.

With his hair in disorder, his face ominous, an ugly smile playing about his lips, and his bare feet curling over the hot, beaten clay, Chet Bannock looked in every detail the disreputable schemer he was. Loathing of the man arose in Jones' soul, and he tolerated him only with the greatest effort.

"This isn't the time of day, Henery," proceeded Bannock, "when much business is transacted in Buenas Noches. But I reckon you and I can shoo custom off the reserve at a time like this. Queerest thing in the world how I happened to hear of your being in Phoenix. Cargill was in Maricopa when a Phoenix paper came down. Your name was in that paper as being a guest at the Phoenix Hotel. Cargill brought the paper over to me, so I called your little play with a letter. Reckon that letter kind of bumped you, didn't it? Fifteen years is a long time, Henery, and you probably thought everybody in Arizona had forgotten about you. But not me. I never forget. To be honest with you, I thought you was dead. But you're too tough to die, ain't you? Well, at that, there are others. I'm still on the turf. But times has changed, and that's no lie. Around Buenos Noches, after a fashion, we still manage to preserve a little of the old independence, but things ain't hardly like what they used to be, not hardly."

"What do you want with me, Bannock?"

The other started at the sharp tone. Then he laughed huskily. "That's you, Henery, to be sure. What do I want with you? Well, you ought to guess that it's help. Some things have been made plain to me, during the last fifteen years—things that I never dreamed of. There was a man with you when the paymaster was held up, but I couldn't pry that information out of you. Remember? Oh, you was right loyal to Sam Benning, but two years ago I got wise."

"Benning?" echoed Jones.

"Certainly," smirked Bannock. "Sam Benning died two years ago——"

"He was shot down," struck in Jones.

"Maybe you was close enough, at the time it happened, to hear about it, or maybe you wasn't close enough to hear, and the women at La Vita Place told you. I can just about hear the old woman throwing it into me. I was brought up for that. Beats all," he complained, "how a man has to have a jury trial, these days, on account of a little thing like that which wouldn't have been noticed in the old times. They didn't do a thing to me, though, but make a lot of trouble. At the time Sam died, he had with him an old

satchel. It was Major Gray's satchel, Henery, and the major, no doubt you recollect, was the paymaster that was treed by you and Sam."

This revelation took Jones' breath. While he sat and listened, spellbound, Bannock's little eyes twinkled diabolically, and he showed his teeth in a leering grin.

"Seems like it wasn't no more than yesterday," he went on, "and yet it's all of fifteen years ago. Gray was in the ambulance, with four mules to the pole and a driver up front. The escort had dropped behind. Either you or Benning blazed away at the driver and shot him off the seat—snuffed him out like a candle; then you came down on Gray, and Gray opened on you with an army revolver. You crumpled under his fire, but Sam Benning slid for the open with the satchel and part of the pay money—ten thousand in bills. The little safe in the ambulance with Gray contained the gold, and it was too heavy for Sam to handle. Gray got a bullet in the chest, Henery, and he never got over it. How much of all that do you remember?"

"None of it," answered Jones.

"No?" grinned Bannock. "Maybe it'll come back to you. Some, I admit, you don't know, being down and out at the time it happened. I heard the firing, and while I was galloping toward the scene of it, the team of mules came tearing past me, lines trailing on the ground, and the major and his strong box rolling around inside the ambulance. I couldn't stop the mules, and didn't try. I got to you ahead of the escort, and snaked you out of the way. When you came to, you was right here in Buenas Noches, in the back room of this adobe, and nobody knew anything about it but me. That's right. There wasn't any doctor here, then, and I tried to fix you up; but you allowed you was going to die, and you was sorry for what you had done. I thought there wasn't much hopes of you, myself. You confessed your part in the affair—not saying a word as to who the other fellow was—and I wrote it down. You signed that confession, Henery, and I put it away in my safe. Then you fooled us both and got well. And what d'you think? That confession has been in my safe for all these fifteen years. It's there now, and, by thunder, it's hanging over you this minute, and is going to drop, and wind up your ball of yarn, if you don't help me and play square with me!"

Bannock's eyes snapped, and his leathery face grew hard and merciless. Jones remained silent, watching and listening as in a daze.

"You ran away from me one night, after you got able to travel," continued Bannock, "and I wasn't ever able to place you. Then came Cargill with that Phoenix paper, and, after fifteen years, I had you in my grip. I knew it, Henery! I knew you'd jump when I cracked the whip. It was a plain case of have to. The gov'ment would like to settle that old score with you. There can't be any settling done with Sam Benning—he's out of it for good—but the old woman and Sam's sister can still be made to put up for the ten thousand. The gov'ment could turn 'em out of house and home. The money that bought La Vita Place was gov'ment money, Henery, and the gov'ment could get it back. Do you follow my remarks?"

"What do you want me to do?" asked Jones quietly.

"These Bennings have pestered me a lot," was the reply. "When that claim I tried to jump a month ago was twisted out of my hands, with your fool help, right and justice got a blow squarely between the eyes. I was the one that found that claim, three years back, but Sam Benning got wind of it and put up his monuments and beat me to it. No assessment work was done after Sam died, and I started in to get back my rights. Then the girl heard of it, and beat me to it again. Now I've made up my mind to have that claim, Henery, and La Vita Place along with it, just for my trouble. Get me? That's the work, and you're to help; and if you don't help, I'll put the case in the hands of the gov'ment, and that means the 'pen' for you, and a lot of

notoriety for Sam Benning's folks, and I'll buy in La Vita Place when the gov'ment sells it. Maybe you remember what a hand I am to show my teeth when I'm r'iled? I've got the trump cards, this round, and you're to help me play 'em, Henery. It won't be healthy for you if you don't."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ACT OF REVOLT.

IT may be said in all truth that Henry Jones, when first deciding to fall in with the plans of Chester Bannock, had no conception of the depths of duplicity into which he might be carried. Now he was beginning to understand that phase of the matter, and the finer instincts of his nature were in revolt.

But Sam Benning had been mentioned, along with other matters that were of vital concern to his sister and the aged mother. In the hope that he might still further serve those two devoted women, Jones kept his chair and managed to dissemble his real feelings toward the man in the hammock.

"Just what do you want me to do, Bannock?" he repeated, in a low voice.

"What I want," and the wicked eyes of the other gleamed spitefully, "is that you make that confession of yours full and complete. There's room between the text and your signature for that. Put in how you and Sam hatched the plot against the paymaster, and how Sam was the leadin' spirit in the conspiracy. The idea is, you see, to bring this home to Sam as hard as we can. I reckon I can show up that young whelp in a way to make those women sorry he was ever born."

Jones recalled how Sam's memory was cherished by those at La Vita Place. A crayon portrait, framed in cactus wood, hung on the living-room wall, and two or three times Jones had seen the old mother grieving her heart out before it. He recalled, too, the intense pride of the women. They held their heads high, and the integrity of the Bennings was to them at once hallowed and priceless. Their rough life was glorified by ideals as finely spun as threads of gossamer. To have it appear, now that Sam was dead and gone, that he was no more than a common thief, would have struck at the roots of all that they deemed of abiding worth in this life. Bannock had leveled many a plot at the Bennings, only to have it fail. If anything could succeed against them, it was this contemptible design which involved shame and humiliation. Jones writhed inwardly, and longed to take Bannock's throat in his two hands and strangle the evil breath in his body. How was it possible for such a scoundrel to have lived and plotted so long?

"I doubt very much, Bannock," said Jones, "whether a confession which you have held back for fifteen years would be seriously considered by anybody. By making use of such a"—Jones was about to say "damnable," but smothered the word—"scheme you would be sowing trouble for yourself. The government would naturally want to know why you did not give up your information before. The government might also ask why you so carefully shielded Henry Jones at the time of the robbery."

A laugh rumbled in the scrawny throat of Chester Bannock. "I'm wise enough to side-step responsibility," he answered. "I found Jones wounded in the road, see, and didn't know until later what he had been up to. Then I got his confession, but mislaid it among a lot of old papers, and it only came to light recently. Oh, I can pull the wool over the eyes of the government, all right. Anyhow, Henery, it won't be necessary to have any dealings with the government. My transactions will be with the old woman entirely. I'll show her the confession, and the satchel I took from Sam at the time he cashed in. Do you think she'll let me go to the authorities with all that proof? Not so you can notice! She'll give up the claim, and she'll give up La Vita Place in order to keep the whole business dark. All I need is just for you to add a few words to the document about Sam."

"If I do that, what will become of me?"

"There you go, Henry. But don't think for a minute I'm not planning to look out for you. I'll just let it be known you died as we both expected, after making the written confession. I can even show the mound under which you're supposed to be lyin'. That part is plumb easy."

"Easy! And here, as Henry Jones, I've been staying a month at La Vita Place!"

Bannock cackled jubilantly. "That ain't so hard a nut to crack as you suppose. I'll just explain that you're another Henry Jones. Get me? That name ain't so uncommon, I reckon, that it can't be duplicated."

For the first time a shadow of a smile crossed Jones' face. It passed instantly, however. "Suppose I refuse?" he asked.

A look so replete with malevolence and deviltry twisted Bannock's features that Jones shuddered. Leaning forward, Bannock shook a crooked finger as he said:

"You know the sort of hairpin I am! Hang fire on this, and I'll have my fit. I'll let it be known through this country what sort of a two-faced dog this Sam Benning was! I'll trail the pride of them two women in the dirt! What's more, Henery, you'll be sent up for life." He paused, sat back in his hammock, and went on reflectively: "There's something else I might do."

"What's that?"

"I might fix up that confession myself, and play out the game just as I have planned it."

"Suppose I happened around and dropped in a word?"

"If I do that," and murderous fury flamed in Bannock's eyes, "you'll not be where you can happen around." Lifting his hands, he clenched them in front of him. "I've been a notary public and justice of the peace here for years. What little law there is in Buenas Noches I've got in my grip with a strangle hold. Your confession was sworn to before me, and witnessed by Cargill and another man. When that document is added to, nobody'll know but the last paragraph was part of the original. Every point is covered. Henery, you're standin' where the trails fork. Take one road, and it spells a finish for you mighty sudden. Take the other road, and all you've got to do is to fall out of Arizona and into that other place where you've been for the last fifteen years. What do you say?"

Jones got up from his chair calmly. "I'm much obliged to you, Bannock," said he grimly, "for the way you have let me into your secret plans. I'm a friend of the Bennings, and now I have a chance to prove my friendship. You've made a mistake—and I wonder you didn't discover that the moment you saw me."

Bannock jumped clear of the hammock. "Don't you try to put over anything on me, Henery," he growled. "It won't be healthy for you."

"Listen!" proceeded Jones. "You jumped at a wrong conclusion when you read in the Phoenix paper that Henry Jones had returned to Arizona. I spent most of my early life in this part of the country, but I went East fifteen years ago. I got into business in Chicago, and prospered tolerably well. My health failed, and the doctor advised me to get away somewhere, forget business, and live in the open air for a time. So I returned to this country, where the air is pure save in places where it is defiled by scoundrels of your ilk. Part of the doctor's orders made it necessary for me to cut every thread that bound me to my old business life. In order to accomplish this more thoroughly, I took another name. This robbery of the paymaster must have happened at about the time I left Arizona for the East, and it may be that I heard, and somehow vaguely remembered, the name 'Henry Jones.' Or possibly, because it is not an uncommon one, I hit upon it by chance. Be that as it may, I registered at the Phoenix Hotel as Henry Jones. My real name, however, is Clyde Wrayburn."

This was in the nature of a bombshell, and it affected Bannock queerly. At first his face went blank. Surprise quickly gave way to disappointment, and disappointment to chagrin. Then

through these various changes crept desperation and cunning, with a lawless will paramount.

"Henery," was the sneering response, "you can't renege. That cock-and-bull story won't hold water. You can't dodge your responsibilities. Of course, fifteen years is some sort of a while to remember a face, but you was with me here for quite a long time, and I'll take my solemn Alfred that you and Henery Jones are one and the same."

"I don't know anything about this robbery of the paymaster," said Jones, or Wrayburn, coolly. "Personally, I have my doubts about Sam Benning being mixed up in it. It doesn't seem possible, after coming to know Benning's people as I have known them during the last month. I choose to think that you're a cur and a coward, and that you've hatched this black scheme because all your other schemes have failed. But, remember this: I'm going to remain in this vicinity for a while, and, if you ever attempt to play the game to a finish, I'll be around to backcap you. You contemptible hound! Why, I never set eyes on you before to-day, or—— Keep back, or I'll drill you!"

With an angry roar, Bannock had flung himself forward, hands outstretched. Wrayburn jumped back, drawing and leveling his revolver as he did so. Bannock's hands clawed the empty air.

"Here's a go!" came a voice from the open door of the adobe, pitched between a chuckle and a snarl. "Easy, there, or I'll do a little drillin' myself!"

Out of the tails of his eyes Wrayburn caught a glimpse of Cargill, leaning against the door casing, and looking at him over the sights of a blued barrel.

CHAPTER IX.

HELD BY THE ENEMY.

FOR Wrayburn the situation had become acute. Before hurling his defiance, it would have been wise to determine whether any one was lurking in the house. His anger and indignation had secured the upper hand of his judgment.

One revolver has been known to command two enemies, but only when in the hands of an experienced man. Wrayburn, even if it were possible, lacked the necessary training to turn the unpleasant situation to his profit. To swerve the point of his weapon from Bannock would have invited disagreeable consequences from the open door.

"I reckon that pulls your fangs, Henery," said Bannock, with a savage leer. "I forgot to tell you that Cargill was around." He turned to the hulking, ill-omened figure of the mercenary. "Take his gun," he ordered. "If he tries any funny business, plug him."

"P'int that gatling at the roof o' the porch!" called Cargill, stepping clear of the door.

Wrayburn reasoned that Cargill had no cause to love him, or to hang back in executing Bannock's orders. Here certainly discretion was the better part of valor. Slowly the threatening muzzle of the "gatling" was lifted.

Cargill, with a husky laugh, came close to Wrayburn's side, and reached upward for the lifted weapon. It was his left hand that reached for the gun, while his right, with laudable caution, snuggled his own six-shooter against the Easterner's ribs. This left Wrayburn's left hand swinging at his side, and suddenly he pushed it across his body, seized Cargill's revolver, and gave it a jerk.

The weapon exploded, and a jet of sand puffed out of the dooryard from beyond the porch. Cargill exploded at the same moment—a particularly vicious oath. Revolvers dropped as hands freed themselves for a struggle. If Cargill's arm was lame, Wrayburn's shoulder was none the less so. But, these considerations apart, Wrayburn was hopelessly outclassed in the set-to.

Other inhabitants of the town may have heard the report of the revolver; if so, the sound was not sufficiently startling to arouse them and bring them to the scene. Very likely if any towns-

people had come they would have taken sides with Bannock, and have kept hands off.

Wrayburn, in spite of a desperate resistance, was pinned by Cargill's big hands against the side of the house. "I could bat out your bloomin' brains for that!" shouted the sandy-haired ruffian, wild with fury.

"Don't do it, Cargill," interposed Bannock. "I need Henery in my business. Just move aside, will you?"

Bannock had gathered up both revolvers. He held them in readiness for use as Cargill removed his hands and backed away from Wrayburn. The latter, pale, and breathing hard, held to his place at the wall.

"I tell you, Bannock," said he, "you've made a mistake."

"Not so you can notice it, Henery," returned the other easily. "If you're not really Jones, why in Sam Hill did you blow down here after you got my letter? You're making a beautiful bluff, but I'm going to have my way in this, bluff or no bluff." His voice softened to a purring undertone as he added: "You've called me names, Henery, and you've made threats—two things that I won't stand for. I ask you again, will you fix up that confession?"

"I don't know anything about this so-called confession, and I refuse to have anything to do with it—or with you."

Wrayburn left the wall, and started to cross the porch to the street. Cargill barred his way, and Bannock made suggestive movements with the revolvers.

"You can't leave us, Henery," said Bannock, in mocking tones. "You're valuable to me, and I can't bear to think of parting company with you."

"What you goin' to do with him, Chet?" demanded Cargill.

"I think a little pick-and-shovel work at the tanks will about bring him to time, Cargill," was the answer. "Budlong can make him toe the scratch, and he won't be long in making up his mind to do the right thing by me."

An unholy light flamed in Cargill's face. "That's the ticket, Chet!" he approved. "When'll we take him out?"

"Right off. You take these and move him into the house. I'll have the buckboard here inside of an hour."

Wrayburn knew it would be merely a waste of words to protest. Cargill took the revolvers from Bannock, and the prisoner backed through the open door and into a squalid apartment that was evidently half office and half living room. With one revolver Cargill indicated a couch covered with a tattered Navaho blanket.

"Sit down!" he ordered gruffly.

Wrayburn made himself as comfortable as he could, in the circumstances. Bannock reached through the door, a crooked grin on his face, and picked up a pair of boots. He chuckled gleefully as he withdrew from the opening.

"Where are you going to take me, Cargill?" inquired Wrayburn.

"Out to the cyanide plant, if it does ye any good to know," was the ill-natured rejoinder.

Cargill had seated himself in a rocking-chair facing the couch. The weapons lay across his knees, and his vigilant eyes kept constant watch of Wrayburn.

"What's going on at the cyanide plant?" the prisoner asked.

"What gen'rally goes on at a place like that?"

Bannock again appeared at the door, stamping into his boots.

"Mind you don't let him give you the slip, Cargill," he called. "I'll have the rig here in short order."

"I can handle him," was the sullen response.

"And don't be rough—not yet."

Bannock left the porch for the street, and was quickly out of sight. Wrayburn could gather no information from Cargill, and he leaned back and busied himself with his reflections.

That there was a rod in pickle for him he knew well enough. He had deliberately placed himself in Bannock's hands, and the very weapon he had hoped to use in puncturing the villain's plans had been turned against him.

Bannock did not believe, or pretended not to believe, Wrayburn's assertion that he was another than Henry Jones.

Held by the enemy at a cyanide plant, what recourse had Wrayburn in the event that Bannock pressed his advantage? The care with which Wrayburn had concealed himself from his Eastern friends made it impossible for them to do anything for him. Such a hue and cry would have been raised by his business associates, could they know of the lawless treatment he was receiving, that even Buenas Noches would have proved too hot for Bannock. But Wrayburn, on the advice of his doctor, had painstakingly obliterated his trail. Things might happen to the supposed Henry Jones and not cause so much as a ripple in the placid waters of Wrayburn's home city.

To Wrayburn there was something positively alluring in thus finding himself so completely out of touch with his old life. With returning health came a buoyant desire for adventure. He was conscious of a certain negative satisfaction in the wily cunning of Bannock and the coarse brutality of Cargill. His nerves were tingling with a vague wish to meet them on their own ground, and to cut a way through the net of their plotting by sheer force of his own ability. Thus he would be following the doctor's strenuous prescription. By serving others unselfishly he would be best serving himself. And Lasca and Mrs. Benning were sorely in need of aid!

"If I had my way, by thunder," came the raucous voice of Cargill, "I'd hit ye over the head and drop ye into some hole in the hills. What business you got buttin' inter Bannock's plans?"

"As much business, I guess," returned Wrayburn, "as Bannock has butting into mine."

Cargill, as Wrayburn read him, was a very primitive person. He had the savage instincts of an Apache Indian. There may have been redeeming traits, but, if so, it was difficult for the Easterner to find any trace of them.

The glint in Cargill's eyes as he hung over the prisoner was vengeful and murderous. As an exponent of the lawlessness of that benighted section, the sandy-haired ruffian was no doubt the equal of Bannock in everything save shrewdness and guile. Bannock devised, and Cargill was his right hand.

A sense of relief came to Wrayburn when he heard a grind of wheels and a beat of approaching hoofs from without. Although these suggested a deeper and more desperate entanglement in the wiles of the plotters, they could hardly involve more imminent peril than Wrayburn was conscious of while alone with Cargill.

"Bring him out, Cargill!" called the voice of Bannock, from the road.

Cargill started up and jerked his head grimly toward the door. Wrayburn passed at once to the porch. A team of scrawny cayuses stood in front of the adobe building. They were hitched at the pole of a rattling old two-seated buckboard. Bannock sat in front, gripping the reins.

"Get in behind, you!" snapped Cargill to Wrayburn.

"Just a moment," said Wrayburn, pausing by a forward wheel. "Bannock," he went on. "I suppose you understand that this is a high-handed proceeding. You are taking me somewhere against my will. Your schemes against the Bennings, so far as consequences are concerned, have nothing to do with this. You will be called on to settle the score for this outrage, that I can promise you."

Bannock laughed jeeringly. "I do as I please, Henery," he answered, "and I settle no scores on account of it. The only way you can back up is by doing what I said. I'm boss in these parts. Will you fix that document accordin' to the facts?"

"I don't know the facts, so I can't juggle with that document you say you have in your safe."

"When you change your mind, Henery, I'll change mine. Load him in, Cargill."

Wrayburn climbed aboard the vehicle, and Cargill followed him. The two occupied the rear seat. Bannock started the horses, and buckboard and

passengers plunged into the bleak, dusty hills.

La Vita Place lay to the east of Buenas Noches, and the course taken by Bannock was to the west. A grim, forbidding silence settled down over the three travelers.

Perhaps half an hour passed, and then the buckboard rolled into a shallow valley. Here there were a few wretched buildings, rows of cyanide tanks balanced on a hillside, and a vast level space covered with mounds of what seemed to be gray sand. Half a dozen sweating Mexicans were at work under the supervision of one of the men who had come with Cargill to jump the Benning claim.

The buckboard sped past the tanks and the gray mounds, and drew up at the door of a shanty.

"Hello, Amos!" called Bannock.

The third of the trio of claim jumpers appeared in the door of the hut. His eyes rested ominously on Wrayburn and questioningly on Bannock.

"Here's another man for the work, Amos," went on Bannock, jerking a thumb over his shoulder at Wrayburn. "Put him through till he says, 'I'll do what Bannock wants.' If he don't say it"—and here the scoundrel leaned forward over the wheel, and his voice filled with venom—"you know what to do. Take him out, Cargill."

CHAPTER X.

THE WORK AT PALOS VERDES.

IN the mining and milling of gold a certain refuse results known technically as "tailings." These tailings are what is left of the ore after it has been ground to powder by the stamps and the fine gold captured by the quicksilver of the mill plates.

How to dispose of the tailings, so they would not clutter the vicinity of the stamp mill or interfere with operations, had long been a problem. The water that was turned into the battery boxes and carried the powdered ore over the silvered plates, later flowed through long troughs and bore the tailings beyond and below the mill where they were dropped into piles.

It was long known that a certain amount of gold escaped the quicksilver, and went off into rubbish heaps with the tailings. In some cases, the value of gold in this waste was small; but, in other cases, it amounted to as much as five or even ten dollars to the ton. Until the so-called "cyaniding process" was developed in South Africa there had been no profitable way of recovering this gold from the waste. The use of cyanide of potassium, however, inspired a new activity in the mining regions of the West. Old mines, whose gold-bearing veins had been exhausted, still had their acres and acres of tailings piles. These were taken over by speculators, and the gold was gleaned from them by the cyanide process.

The mine known as Palos Verdes, west of Buenas Noches, had been abandoned. Bannock had bought or simply appropriated the right to work over the tailings. And it was to this place that he had taken Wrayburn. Budlong was in charge of the work. He was the master slave driver, and his efforts were ably seconded by Luke McGinn and Jeptha Cargill.

Palos Verdes was no place for a weakling. Such a person, thrown into the heartbreaking toil, and subjected to the brutalities of Bannock's men, would either sicken and die or harden into a muscular activity and a physical health poisoned mentally by the conditions that surrounded him. The laborers were few, and they were all poor devils who had, one way or another, fallen into Bannock's debt. The cost of the labor represented merely the hire of guards and overseers.

In all the five weeks Wrayburn was at Palos Verdes, he learned from only one of the Mexicans the way in which the Wolf had secured a whip hand of his services. The others were too savagely cowed to take any one into their confidence. Tadeo Salinas, however, had a spirit that could not be broken. He nursed his grievances, and in his primitive soul burned a desire to kill and to escape—but first to kill.

Chester Bannock had grubstaked Salinas; that is, he had furnished the Mexican prospector with a few dollars' worth of provisions, and was legally entitled to a half interest in any mines that should be discovered. Salinas had located a fair prospect, and had sold out for one thousand dollars; then he had sent the whole amount to his family in Sonora, and had been caught by Cargill and Luke McGinn, and brought before Bannock.

The dealer in mines had forced Salinas to put his mark to a note for five hundred dollars, and had then sent him to Palos Verdes to work it out. Salinas was a rogue, no doubt, but he had already been six months at the tanks, and Bannock refused to consider his debt discharged. The Mexican was wondering if he was to be kept for the rest of his life in a state of peonage to pay that miserable obligation of half a thousand dollars. In the case of Salinas, there was a shadow of right on Bannock's side. Perhaps with all the other Mexicans this was equally true. But the scheming Americano pressed his advantage to limits that defied all right and justice.

Wrayburn, under the revolver's point, was made to put aside the clothing he had brought with him to Palos Verdes and to don a cotton shirt and trousers. Bareheaded and barefooted, he was sent to the tanks and the tailings piles. He revolted at such brutality, and a five-thonged quirt in the hands of Luke McGinn laid him half dead on the floor of the jacal in which he and his fellow workmen were herded at night.

Five of the Mexicans turned silently on their blankets and went to sleep, and only Salinas gave Wrayburn any attention. The indignities heaped upon the Easterner caused the blood to run hot in his veins. He wondered how, even in that lawless region, Bannock dared go so far. Wrayburn, in his own place, was a man of affairs, and one to be reckoned with, yet here he was treated as no one had the right to treat even the poorest *cholo*.

In the first flush of anger and humiliation, Wrayburn was for using his bare hands and fighting his way to freedom. Salinas argued with him, counseled patience, and declared that an opportunity would come if they only bided their time.

Wrayburn berated the recklessness that had brought him to such a pass. For the moment, the interests of the Bennings became obscured in his mind, and he thought only of his own humiliation.

Bannock's belief that he was really Henry Jones, a self-confessed thief, was the only warrant for such high-handed treatment. Perhaps it was sufficient, and perhaps Wrayburn had only himself to blame for falling into the trap.

At any rate, the cautious words of Salinas had their effect. The folly of trying to run the gantlet of armed guards with only bare hands for weapons was a bit of logic that appealed to Wrayburn as his temper cooled. Yes, he would bide his time. It might be possible for him later to find some one who would carry a message to Maricopa. In that event, he would make even Buenas Noches too hot a place for Mr. Bannock.

Stiff and sore, Wrayburn went sullenly to his work the following morning. Budlong and McGinn stood over the six Mexicans, and watched them with catlike vigilance. Cargill was a special guard for Wrayburn, and hectored him on the slightest provocation.

For a week the Easterner loaded his wheelbarrow with tailings, and trundled it up an incline of planks to the top of the battered old vats. There he dumped the load and returned to the tailings piles for another. It was a weary round. Then followed a week during which the vats were emptied. A solution of cyanide had run through the powdered ore, and dissolved and carried off the particles of precious metal it had imprisoned for so long. The tailings, becoming worthless, had to be replaced with a fresh supply.

During the fortnight no chance had offered to escape, or to send a message to Maricopa or to La Vita Place. But,

during that time, a wonderful truth had dawned upon Wrayburn. His body was hardening under the bitter toil. The exhausting labor gave him an appetite for three meals a day, and his meager allowance was never enough to satisfy him.

His skin browned in the sun, his beard grew, and he put on flesh. There was no glass in which he could survey himself, but he felt that he was rapidly degenerating into a wild man among those primitive surroundings and conditions. He had always been a fastidious person, and this thought came to him as a distinct shock. Rising paramount to every other consideration, however, was that marvelous fact that this back-straining labor was completing the work so well begun at La Vita Place.

Palos Verdes was making a man of him! He had come to the tanks a weakling, and the orders of Bannock were that he was to be killed, or "brought to time." But he was fooling Bannock and taking a fling at fate. In a way, this growing power tended to reconcile Wrayburn to the disagreeable situation. As the days passed, he became obsessed with an idea. He recalled how easily Cargill had laid hands on him and pinned him to the front wall of Bannock's adobe. What he pined for, now, was to gain the strength which would make him Cargill's master in a hand-to-hand fight.

He trained for it like a pugilist scheduled for a bout that was to make or break his professional career. Solicitously and with pride he tested, from time to time, the hardness of the biceps under the sleeves of his cotton shirt.

Close by the wheelbarrow track that led to and from the tailings piles lay a bowlder. When he could lift that bowlder, Wrayburn told himself, his strength would be ample to cope with his sandy-haired tormentor and guard.

At first, he could not stir the big stone by so much as a hair's breadth. Then, after a few days, his heart swelled when he found that he could move it slightly. It was four weeks before he could lift it from the ground, and five before he could get under it with raised arms. But a week before this was accomplished, something else had happened.

The jacal in which he slept with the Mexicans had a break in the wall. This break was close to the floor. It was narrow, but Wrayburn had long had it in mind as a possible means for escape. If chance offered, the opening could be broken into a hole large enough for the passage of a human body. The vigilance of the guards, however, gave no such chance.

Following supper, each day, the door of the jacal was secured, and from dark till dawn a tramp of feet could be heard circling the hovel. Wrayburn had preempted the favored spot by the opening, and there spread his blankets. Here he could inhale the pure outside air, and now and then catch a glimpse of the shadowy feet going by on their regular rounds.

One night he lay there, awake while all his fellow workers save Salinas were sleeping. Salinas, some time before, had picked up a rusty old file near the solution tank, and each evening he spent a laborious hour whetting it to an edge on a piece of flinty rock.

Just when the feet of the guard failed to pass that little opening in the wall Wrayburn did not know, but he suddenly realized that the hole was darkened. A sharp hissing sound came to his ears:

"Jones! Señor Jones!" The sibilant warning gave way to this call.

On the other side of the room the rasping of Salinas' file on the stone ceased abruptly. He also had heard the words from outside, but he was to be trusted.

"Who is it?" whispered Wrayburn.

"Pedro. We are watching, señor; your friends have not forgotten you. Have courage for a little while."

"Look out for McGinn!" warned Wrayburn. "Some one is walking around this hut every night, and——"

"Bannock has come, señor, and Budlong, Cargill, and McGinn are talking with him. It is safe out here for now. What does Bannock want you to do?"

"He says I stole government money from a major—I forget the name—and——"

"Gray?"

If Wrayburn had had time he would have wondered how Pedro could know the paymaster's name. But moments were precious.

"He says, too," continued Wrayburn hurriedly, "that Benning, when he was killed, had the paymaster's satchel, and that Benning helped in the holdup. He claims to have a confession of mine, and he wants me to write into it that Sam Benning helped. Bannock intends to make me stay here until I agree. But I can get out! You take word to Maricopa——"

An exclamation of anger had escaped Pedro. "No, señor," he begged; "you stay here for a little while longer. It is best—it will help the Bennings, and will not hurt you. Tell Bannock you will do what he wants. Ask him to bring that paper here——"

Pedro's voice died into silence, and his face vanished from the opening. There was a sound at the door.

Wrayburn turned away from the hole in the wall, and Salinas straightened out on his blankets. Both pretended to be asleep.

CHAPTER XI.

A LEAP IN THE DARK.

THAT was the first time, to Wrayburn's knowledge, that Bannock had called at his cyanide works since he had brought the supposed Henry Jones and turned him over to the tender mercies of Budlong, Cargill, and McGinn. Something of importance must be afoot, the Easterner thought, to bring Bannock to the tanks at that hour.

The door of the shanty opened, and Cargill came in with a lighted lantern. Bannock followed him. Budlong and McGinn were at their heels, but remained in the open door.

Cargill and Bannock picked their way among the sleeping forms, and halted beside Wrayburn. "Wake up!" ordered Cargill, and kicked Wrayburn smartly in the ribs.

The Easterner was not yet handling the bowlder as easily as he hoped to do later. Otherwise he might have precipitated a clash with Cargill then and there. Smothering his anger, he sat up, blinking in the light.

"What's wanted?" he inquired, feigning a discouraged and spiritless air he was far from feeling.

"Hello, Henery!" came the mocking tones of Bannock. "I haven't seen you for some sort of a while, and you've failed to send any word to me yet. Ain't it about time you made up your mind? If you haven't, I reckon I'll fix up that paper myself, and put the deal through while the boys are keepin' you here."

Bannock's visit had followed Wrayburn's brief talk with Pedro so quickly that the prisoner had had no time to think over and assimilate the Mexican's advice. These words of Bannock's, however, brought vividly to Wrayburn's mind the threat the wildcatter had made in front of his adobe at Buenas Noches.

If the supposed Henry Jones refused to supplement his original confession with the matter of Sam Benning's complicity in the robbery of the paymaster, then Bannock was to attend to that himself. At the time the threat was made, Wrayburn believed he would be free to interfere with this precious scheme. But, if he was to be held incommunicado at Palos Verdes, Bannock could go as far as he liked, and there would be no bar to his villainy.

"For a sick tenderfoot," went on Bannock, failing to get any response from the prisoner, "you're panning out to be a remarkably tough specimen. I reckoned you'd either be dead, or seeing things my way by now. If the work hasn't taken the heart out of you, then maybe the boys are too easy."

"You allowed we wasn't to go too far, Chet," growled Cargill.

"I allowed, Jep," answered Bannock, whirling on his assistant, "that you was to go far enough to wring him dry of what I wanted. Have you done it?"

"Well, if I haven't, there's still plenty of time. See how he stacks up."

"What's the word, Henery?" demanded Bannock, turning again to Wrayburn.

"I want a little more time to think it over," was the answer.

"You're hopin', maybe, that a small crowd will come out from Buenas Noches and take you away from here. Don't build too high on that. The friends of the Bennings, who went out and helped you at the time of the claim jumping, are away in the hills. Every one else in the town swears by me. You can't put anything over by hanging fire. D'you know what happened in town yesterday, Henery?"

"How can I know what's going on anywhere, except right here at the cyanide tanks?"

"That's so. I'm glad to hear the boys are obeying orders and keeping close-mouthed. Well, Henery, while I was away on business some one got into the adobe and blew up my safe with a stick of dynamite. Can you guess what the safe crackers wanted?"

"No."

"Oh, yes, you can, Henery, if you try. They wanted that paper I got from you, fifteen years ago. Friends are tryin' to help you out, but they didn't sabe Chet Bannock a whole lot. What I miss in the original deal I make up in the draw. The document wasn't in the safe. I thought best to put it somewhere else. I'm mighty thoughtful about such things as that. I don't like this meddling, Henery, and there's no two ways to that. I've waited long enough on you, and things have got to come to a show-down between you and me right away. You've had all the time I'm going to give you. What's the word? Say it now."

There was deadly menace in Bannock's voice. Leaning forward in the dim light of the lantern, his malevolent features stood out starkly against the gloom.

"You've treated me like a dog!" exclaimed Wrayburn. "I'd like to live to see the law take hold here and clean out this devilish hole at Palos Verdes. I'd be here——"

"Henery, you'll never live to see much of anything if you don't stand by me," put in Bannock. "Once and for all, what have you got to say?"

Wrayburn bowed his head. He was thinking of what Pedro had said: "Tell Bannock you will do what he wants. Ask him to bring that paper here."

Wrayburn could not say that. Nothing on earth could hire him to write Sam Benning into any scheme that was to dishonor his name. For all that, though, a little playing with the truth might be permitted.

"Take me to town, then," said Wrayburn, "and I'll——"

"Don't try, Henery, to play off your wits against mine. Smarter chaps than you have got that bee in their bonnet, and all they did was to get stung themselves."

"Bring the paper out here," said Wrayburn, "and we'll attend to it."

Cargill laughed exultantly. From the door, Budlong and McGinn echoed his mirth.

"Now you're shouting, Henery!" exclaimed Bannock, in husky approval. "I reckoned we'd get together. It took a month at the tanks, and that was about three weeks and six days longer than I expected." He turned and directed his words at Cargill and the two in the door. "He's come around, boys, so it won't be necessary to overwork him between now and the time I get back here. It may be to-morrow, and it may not be for several days, but don't come down too hard on him in the meantime. Good-by, Henery," he added. "I didn't think you had any sense, but I'm beginning to change my mind. We'll make those Benning women think that something has dropped before we get through with 'em. I'll show 'em they can't ride roughshod over me without payin' for it."

He turned and left the shanty. Cargill followed him with the lantern. The door was closed, and the rattle of hasp and padlock could be heard on the outside. Voices died out in the distance, and feet could be heard resuming the interrupted patrol about the jacal.

The five sleeping Mexicans had been

disturbed. They now settled themselves once more for slumber. Salinas, however, crawled over to where Wrayburn lay.

"*Caramba!*" murmured Salinas, in Wrayburn's ear. "You play dat Bannock like a feesh, eh? Dere ees some't'ing behind it all I not know. Bymby we get our chance. *Por Dios*, me, I feel it, I know! *Es verdad, señor.*"

"You know more than I do, then," whispered Wrayburn.

"You not onnerstan' w'at is told by de Mexicano outside?"

"I understand what he said, but I don't understand why he said it. I suppose we'll have to wait and let that develop."

"Sure, señor," answered Salinas cunningly; "we wait. I wait long already; w'at ees two, t'ree day more, eh? W'en de time come, den all happen *pronto, muy pronto*. A few day more and de knife ees made from de file!" and Salinas laughed grimly in his throat.

The Mexican crawled back to his own place, and the low rasping of his steel on the rock was resumed. The crunching feet of the guard accompanied the eerie sound, beating out a sort of tempo. Wrayburn shuddered. He was taking a leap in the dark certainly. Why Pedro had advised him to agree to Bannock's plans and ask that the important paper be brought to the cyanide works, the captive could not know. Yet it was a comfort to be informed that friends were watching, even if from a distance.

Another week went by. Every day was expected to bring Bannock, but he did not come. During that week Cargill watched all the laborers, for Budlong and McGinn were busy with a "clean-up." The cyanide solution, after washing the tailings in the tanks, drained off and, by gravity, flowed into a long receptacle called a zinc box. Here the gold in the solution was precipitated upon shavings of zinc. The clean-up consisted of removing the zinc shavings, treating them with sulphuric acid, and then melting the residue into base bullion in an assayer's furnace. It was a long and monotonous task for the two men, and rendered them surly and ill-natured.

Cargill's treatment of Wrayburn varied not a whit from what it had been at first. The hours of labor were as long and as trying as they had been before he had, as Bannock believed, consented to help blast the reputation of a man whom he had never known. Wrayburn hated these black cross-purposes into which he had allowed fate to shuffle him. If he could see any benefit to the Bennings coming out of it all, he would have been more reconciled to the course of events.

He was trusting Pedro, and there was something about Pedro that had always been a mystery. How did Wrayburn know that the Mexican was not another hireling of Bannock, placed at La Vita Place to act as a spy? It was even possible that Pedro had made his visit to the jacal and given his advice at the instigation of Bannock.

Wrayburn was in troubled waters with his doubts and fears. But he was resolved that, come what might, he would add nothing to that confession of Henry Jones. If he once got the paper in his hands, no matter what the consequences he would make an end of it.

Tadeo Salinas was in better mood that last week than at any time since Wrayburn had come to Palos Verdes. Whenever he passed Wrayburn on the work he would flash a meaning smile and significant glance at him. In both glance and smile there was something deadly, and a chill ruffled Wrayburn's nerves.

The Easterner kept up his attempts on the bowlder. At least once a day, when opportunity favored, he tested his growing powers. The Mexicans saw him at his training, but all save Salinas were too dull to wonder at what must have struck them as useless toil. What Salinas thought did not appear.

With Cargill watching alone over the seven men, it seemed strange to Wrayburn that Salinas and his countrymen did not rise and strike for their liberty. One evening he asked Salinas why he did not take a chance? Seven desper-

ate men should be able to get the better of one armed guard.

"*Madre mia!*" murmured Salinas. "Dat Cargill he got twelve lives swinging at hees belt, señor. So queek he draw and shoot, we not have time to do one t'ing before we die. De odder Mexicanos dey not good for fight—dey got broken heart wit' de work. No, señor, we wait for dat Pedro to geeve us de tip. Eh?"

McGinn and Budlong finished the clean-up. That left them time and inclination to wonder at the cause of Bannock's delay in returning to Palos Verdes. Wrayburn heard the two discussing the matter with Cargill, and it was evident all three of the ruffians were puzzled. And then, two days after the clean-up was done with, Bannock came galloping wildly into camp. For some reason or other he was beside himself with fury.

It was mid-afternoon. That morning Wrayburn had lifted the bowlder to arm's length above his head, and the evening before Salinas had finished putting a point and an edge to the old file.

CHAPTER XII.

PEDRO'S RUSE.

BUDLONG was in charge of the Mexicans, and Cargill was keeping an eye on Wrayburn. McGinn had been napping in the shade of the adobe where the guards had their headquarters, but he roused up hastily when the tattoo of galloping hoofs struck on his ears.

Bannock flung the looped reins over his horse's head, and jumped from the saddle. Work stopped among the tanks. All the Mexicans, save Salinas, were staring fearfully at Bannock, speculating, no doubt, as to whether his wrath was aimed at them. Salinas sat down on his wheelbarrow, following developments keenly with eyes and ears, and fingering the breast of his cotton shirt where the rude knife was concealed.

"What's to pay, Chet?" inquired Cargill.

"I fell for a frame-up," answered Bannock, his voice choked with passion. "Some of Benning's friends came back from the hills for supplies, and I had to wait till they got what they wanted and went back to their diggin's. That was this morning. I started early this afternoon for Palos Verdes. Half a mile from here I was waylaid."

The mercenaries were startled. They exchanged quick glances, then again focused their attention on Bannock.

"Waylaid?" they echoed.

"Yes," Bannock almost shouted. "That infernal Pedro from La Vita Place was hiding out in the brush with some of the junipers I reckoned had gone back to the mines. They was on me before I had a chance to draw. Two grabbed the horse, three more laid hold of me, and pulled me out of the saddle. Pedro went through my pockets, and he got what I was bringing here. After that, they went away, taking my guns and the satchel Gray was toting at the time of the holdup."

Cargill seemed more wrought up by this information than any of the others. An imprecation fell from his lips. Something in what Bannock had said had lashed him to fury.

"Where does the frame-up come in, Chet?" he demanded.

"Jones told me to fetch that paper out here and he'd fix it up," barked the Wolf, his own anger feeding on that of his principal aid. "Why was that? It was just to give the skulkin' greaser from La Vita Place a chance at it!"

Cargill whirled, and his baleful eyes rested on Wrayburn. With an angry roar he leaped forward, but was stayed by a quick move of Bannock.

"Wait!" ordered Bannock. "That can come later. Just now we've got to think of something else, and there can be no delay. Budlong!"

"Well?"

"Saddle up. Hit the breeze toward Buenas Noches. Get Kildare, Wygant, O'Brien, and Sargeant—they're all in town, and we can depend on 'em to a man—and ride for La Vita Place. The greaser must have gone there. Get that document away from him at any cost."

Budlong started for the little corral where the riding stock was kept. He paused to call back:

"S'posin' the greaser ain't at La Vita Place?"

"Then pick up his trail and run it out. You know what to do, I reckon."

Budlong raced on to the corral. Bannock faced Cargill and McGinn.

"Bring Jones," he ordered between his teeth. "Bring him here!"

Bannock had stretched to his full height. His wide-brimmed hat was pushed well back of his head, his leathery face was set in fierce lines, and the scar on his cheek was glowing a dull red.

Salinas got up from the wheelbarrow. Seemingly he was cowed, like the rest of his countrymen, but a whisper came from his lips as he fell back a few steps.

"We get our chance, *compadre*. Me, I watch, I help. But wait."

Cargill and McGinn charged down on Wrayburn and seized him roughly. With violent hands they dragged him to a spot in front of Bannock.

"Henery," said the dealer in mines mockingly, "you put it over on me. But how did you work it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Wrayburn.

He was not underestimating his danger, but a sort of joy came to his soul with the thought that he was at the end of his work at Palos Verdes, and confronting Bannock for the last time. He was glad, too, that his "leap in the dark" had helped Pedro, and, through him, the Bennings.

"Oh, yes, you do, Henery," purred Bannock. "You was in cahoots with Pedro, of La Vita Place. You asked me to bring that confession of yours to Palos Verdes, so Pedro could lay for me along the trail and catch me with the goods. Don't lie to me. I want to know how you and the greaser was able to get together and hatch this little scheme. How was it?"

"See here, Bannock," replied Wrayburn; "when I say I didn't know what Pedro was planning I'm giving you the straight of it. If you had brought that paper here, and I could have got my hands on it, I intended to tear it up. But I doubted whether you had such a document, and I'm in doubt as to whether there ever was such a man as Henry Jones. You're equal to cutting such a scheme out of whole cloth and manufacturing evidence. For all I know that is what you're up to."

"You're the wise one, ain't you?" sneered the other. "But what you think don't cut much of a swath with me. I can prove a few things, and the old woman and the young un, over at La Vita Place, are due for a few eye-openers. Even with that paper gone I can make out a tolerable case. There *was* a Henry Jones. That's the name you used fifteen years ago, and I'll take my solemn Alfred."

"You're wrong," insisted Wrayburn. "I'm from Chicago, and that isn't my right name at all. I've already told you that."

"You knew Jones, Jep." Bannock appealed to the sandy-haired scoundrel on Wrayburn's left. "Is he Jones?"

"If he ain't Jones, by thunder, he's a dead ringer for him!"

"He wouldn't have hustled for Buenas Noches in answer to the letter I sent to Phoenix if he hadn't been Jones. Would he?"

"Not hardly, Chet."

"I'm goin' to get at the truth of this if I have to cut out his heart. Where's your quirt, McGinn?"

McGinn started for the headquarters adobe. Wrayburn would die before he would again yield tamely to the lash. The time had come for resistance. Quick as a flash, he turned half around and flung himself upon Cargill. The latter was taken by surprise, and the revolver was wrenched out of his hand before he could make use of it.

"If that's what he wants, Jep," said Bannock calmly, "let him have it."

Cargill exploded an oath. "I'll twist his neck for him!" he panted.

The sandy-haired ruffian no doubt recalled the ease with which he had handled Wrayburn on a previous occasion. Losing sight of the weeks that had intervened since then, he must have

cozened himself with the belief that he was still the better man.

With hands fighting for the breath in each other's throat, the two twisted and strained back and forth across the sand. Bannock watched like a man fascinated. McGinn came up with his five-thonged quirt, but held back and likewise watched. Five of the Mexicans huddled together like sheep, but Tadeo Salinas, unnoticed in the excitement, crept stealthily forward. His advance was destined to bring him to a point directly behind McGinn.

"How does this happen, Jep?" called Bannock. "Looks like he was givin' you a handful."

Cargill did not answer. He was amazed at Wrayburn's showing of skill and strength. Could this be the same man with whom he had come to handgrips on Bannock's porch? He tried to fling Wrayburn from him, to free himself and bring into play a knife which he had at his belt. But Wrayburn clung to his throat like a leech.

The Easterner's hands, calloused and hardened by the rough work at the tanks, were exerting a steady pressure at Cargill's throat. The latter fought to tear the hands away, for he was gasping, and there was a blur before his eyes. At the moment when the battle seemed Wrayburn's, and the strangled Cargill was about to be forced to his knees, Wrayburn slipped in the wheelbarrow track leading from the tailings piles to the tanks. His hands relaxed. With a desperate effort Cargill tore away the gripping fingers and stood, dizzy and swaying.

"Now's your chance, Jep!" cried Bannock.

Cargill drew a deep breath and roused himself to action. The fallen revolver lay near, and he bent to recover it. Wrayburn plunged at him before he could catch up the weapon, and the shock of collision threw both of them from their feet. Together they rolled in the sand. But Cargill had managed to pluck the short, ugly dirk from his belt. He struck with it, and in the nick of time Wrayburn clutched the descending wrist. Over they went, and the murderous steel fell from Cargill's nerveless fingers. From that moment the battle was Wrayburn's. In a twinkling he came uppermost again, his hands at his antagonists' throat.

In far-away Chicago there was a decorous, well-groomed office force which would have been highly edified at the spectacle presented at that moment by Clyde Wrayburn, junior member of the firm of Scott & Wrayburn. But these clerks, who knew so well the immaculate Mr. Wrayburn, would hardly have recognized him. Now he was barefooted and bareheaded. His clothing was in rags, his hair was overlong, and his face unshaven. His thin face had filled out, and every line of his alert figure suggested strength and power.

No longer was it necessary for Wrayburn to select with care from a bill of fare and have recourse to tablets for nerves and digestion after a meager meal. The exertion of walking from his car to the elevator and from the elevator to his office from now on would cease to be a trial. The click of typewriters would cease henceforth to drive him wild. For he had lifted a bowlder which, three months before, he would have thought would demand a derrick. And he had met and bested a bravo whose pride was his strength and whose might was his law.

Slowly, under Wrayburn's grinding fingers, Cargill's struggles weakened. His eyes bulged, and a purple hue by degrees overspread his face. It was for this hour that Wrayburn had been patiently waiting. His brain was poisoned with wrong and brutality endured for five weary weeks. He gloated over his conquered foe, and had no desire to leave him until he had exacted the utmost price.

But Bannock and McGinn were of another mind. Cargill was valuable to Bannock, and must not be blotted out in that miserable fashion.

"Give him a hand, Luke," ordered Bannock. "Henery will snuff him out if you don't. Didn't think Cargill needed any help. By gorry, who'd have thought such a thing possible?"

Before McGinn could take a hand in favor of Cargill, he had matters of his own that claimed attention. The quirt had been snatched out of his hand. He whirled in surprise to see who had come up behind him. He met the blazing eyes of Tadeo Salinas, and then, a second later, the weighted quirt handle crashed down on McGinn's head.

Quietly, without sound or cry, McGinn lay down as one who is weary and in need of sleep. A shout of consternation escaped Bannock, and he jumped to hurl Salinas aside. The Mexican fell against Wrayburn, and the two lay tangled in the sand near the motionless form of Cargill.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SOLUTION TANK.

THE cyanide process of gold recovery—one of nature's beautiful mysteries—was the same at Bannock's plant as at other works. There are two known solvents of the yellow metal, but cyanide of potassium is the more practical. It has been called the White Death, for it is one of the most deadly poisons known to man.

In snow-white lumps, carefully cased in tin, and further protected by a packing case of wood, it came to the cyanide works. Naturally, great care was necessary in handling the cyanide.

From one huge vat, elevated above the tailings tanks, flowed the cyanide solution. Mixed with water, in a fixed proportion settled by the work it has to do, the cyanide dropped through pipes to the bottoms of the loaded tanks below. In these tanks it rose slowly, filtering upward through the powdered tailings and greedily drinking the minute particles of gold.

Overflowing the first tier of vats, the deadly fluid, now carrying much gold in solution, fell to another tier in a gigantic step downward. Thence, still by gravity, it rippled musically into the zinc box, where the wealth was wrested from it by the zinc shavings. Another descent carried the cyanide into a sump tank, whence it was pumped back into the big vat that overtopped the others, and was the source and origin of the wonder work. In the solution tank, after making its round, the cyanide was tested, and the drug lost in its labors was replaced, bringing the solution up to the "standard" required for its further work.

Plank gangways spanned the tops of all the tanks. Inclines led up from one tier to the next. These toe paths were for the convenience of the wheelbarrow men, who pushed their loads of tailings over the tops of the tanks, and there dumped them.

From one end of the upper tier of tailings tanks a flight of steps led to a plank spanning the solution tank. Here is was not necessary for the laborers to come. Only one man, the overseer, ever dealt with the solution, and his work was merely to reach into it with a long-handled dipper and fetch up a sample for testing purposes.

Wrayburn and Salinas had fallen over the Cargill's body at the foot of the lower tier of tanks. Bannock, a so-called "gunman," had suddenly been bereft of the aid of his two mercenaries, but so long as he could grip the stock of a six-shooter he felt that he commanded the situation.

"A mutiny, eh?" he yelled, with an oath. "Salinas, you was always a two-faced oiler, and I guess we can check up our account now as well as any other time."

Salinas had regained his feet. He leaped nimbly over the sprawled-out form of Cargill, and pressed toward the man he hated. It was as reckless and daring an act as Wrayburn had ever seen. In one hand the Mexican gripped the handle of the weapon which he had ground down to a point and an edge. Over the sights of a revolver Bannock's flashing eye watched his approach. On the Wolf's leathery face was a smile, confident and murderous.

"Stand where you are, Salinas!" ordered Bannock.

Salinas taunted him with a laugh.

"Shoot, *gringo maldicho!* Me, I radder die dan stay longer at Palos Verdes. Shoot w'ile you got de chance! Dog

of a Americano, your time iss come—somet'ing tell me!"

The words, "your time has come," beat ominously upon Wrayburn's excited brain. He recalled the old woman at La Vita Place, and her often-repeated remark: "There'll come a time, there'll come a time!" Could it be that here, just as Bannock's most fiendish scheme was being launched, the hour was to strike?

In a revulsion of feeling, a sort of slow horror was gripping at Wrayburn's nerves. A sickening sensation ran through him as he glanced at the two forms sprawled on the ground, and a quick, stabbing fear for Salinas touched his heart as he watched the Mexican advance steadily upon the leveled revolver.

"Last call, you fool!" bellowed Bannock.

Salinas gave no heed. Wrayburn was chained to the spot where he stood—he could not have moved hand or foot if his own life had depended on it. In the background hovered the five stricken Mexicans, making no move to come to the aid of their countryman.

Bannock held the revolver steadily. He was still smiling as his finger flexed upon the trigger. The distance between him and Salinas was less than two yards, and there could be no missing the target at such close range.

Click! A sharp, metallic sound echoed weirdly among the tanks. In a breath the confident smile passed from Bannock's lips. His face became a study in horrified surprise and craven fear. The trigger had descended upon an empty cartridge.

The desperate forefinger flexed rapidly. Click, click, click!

Bannock had neglected the weapon. His carelessness in failing to reload after exhausting its ammunition was likely to cost him dear. "Gunmen" at heart are arrant cowards when weapons fail them. Bannock proved no exception. The desperate Salinas, daring to face what seemed the inevitable, was spared being an instrument of fate. He laughed again, a laugh filled with such exultation and mockery that it froze Wayburn's blood. The Mexican hurled himself forward, and Bannock leaped backward to evade the edged and pointed file.

"Capture him, Salinas!" shouted Wrayburn, rousing at last.

The Easterner's desire was to avoid bloodshed. His finer sensibilities were stirred by the Mexican's plain purpose to settle with Bannock *a l'outrance*. Salinas showed his teeth in a quick look at Wrayburn. That was his answer, and it was enough. Salinas was between Bannock and the horse. The dealer in mines cast a hopeless, despairing look at the animal, then whirled and dashed up the plank incline leading to the tops of the first row of tanks. Yelling like a demon, the Mexican raced after him. Wrayburn followed, calling on the enraged Salinas to stay his hand.

Across the teetering planks Bannock ran, his boots slipping and retarding his speed, while the barefooted Salinas pursued more swiftly and surely. The Mexican almost reached his intended victim on the incline that led from the first row of vats to the one above. Fortune favored Bannock momentarily, however, and he recovered himself and went on. The full length of the upper tier of tanks the chase proceeded, and in wild desperation Bannock jumped to the steps leading to the plank that spanned the solution tank from rim to rim. The purpose of the pursued man dawned upon Wrayburn. If he could evade Salinas, and leap from the farther rim of the solution tank, it would be possible for him to reach his waiting horse.

With one bound, the sure-footed Salinas cleared three of the steps. Bannock was at the top, balancing on the plank. The Mexican reached out and caught him by the coat. Bannock, with a wild effort, wrenched clear, but only to lose his foothold and plunge downward into the cyanide solution beneath. A wave splashed upward and spattered over the sides of the tank, and Salinas avoided it by falling backward the full length of the steps.

A hoarse cry of amazement and hor-

ror was wrenched from Wrayburn's lips. He stood for a moment, stunned and stupefied; and then, hoping to be of some service, he hastened onward. Salinas, kneeling on the planks, barred his way.

"*Caramba!* Not wit' de hands you touch heem! Maybe it iss to die if you do. I go for a rope, señor, yet it iss useless."

Wrayburn, like a man in a dream, stood over the solution tank, watching the wretched, struggling form below. It lifted a hand. He could not refuse that silent plea for aid, and he knelt and reached down. As he supported Bannock, the dripping face below lost all expression by swift degrees. Wrayburn closed his eyes against the sight as he continued to cling to the hand. Presently one Mexican came with a rope, others of the same race at his heels. Then Wrayburn relinquished his post and leaped down on the crest of the low hill.

He was sitting on the sand, his brain whirling, when the dripping form of Bannock was lowered from the tank. The Mexicans were chattering excitedly, and five of them were doing what they could to restore Bannock to consciousness. Salinas took no hand in the work. He had turned from it with a shrug, only to give a sharp cry on finding himself face to face with Cargill and McGinn.

The two men, left to their own devices, had recovered somewhat from the effects of their rough treatment. They brought revolvers with them, but the sight of Bannock left them in no mood to continue hostilities. The hands holding the weapons hung limply.

"Who—who done that?" asked McGinn, wide-eyed and staring.

"He slipped from de plank into de solution," answered Salinas, watching the two Americanos warily. "*Por Dios*, dat iss de end of my time here, at Palos Verdes. Now I go, we all go, and you not keep us."

"You sneakin' hound!" yelled Cargill, suddenly coming out of his apathy. "You're the cause o' what happened to Chet! You and Jones, there! If ye think ye can do a thing like that and get away with it, ye're shy a few. Luke, here's where we——"

But McGinn was staring toward the trail. Slowly he lifted a hand and pointed. There was no need of words. A dozen horsemen were galloping in the direction of Palos Verdes, and they were so near that flight would have been impossible even if Cargill and McGinn had considered such a move.

"Swatties!" gulped Cargill.

"Pony sojers from the border!" added McGinn wonderingly. "What d'ye think o' that?"

Wrayburn could scarcely credit his senses. He peered at the approaching party, then rubbed his eyes and peered again.

Lasca Benning and Pedro rode at the head of the column. At their heels came an erect, soldierly figure riding alone. Behind, two and two, followed the rest of the riders.

CHAPTER XIV.

FORCING THE ISSUE.

AT last the forces of law and order were trooping into that benighted region. But it was martial law, and care would be taken not to give offense to civil authority. These troopers would not come except on government business, and Wrayburn was puzzled to account for the nature of their errand. In what way could Lasca and Pedro be mixed up in it?

The girl and the Mexican pointed their horses straight toward the group by the solution tank. Lasca, drawing rein, passed her eyes from Wrayburn to Cargill and McGinn, thence to Salinas, and finally to the five cowering Mexicans who stood in front of the form of Bannock and effectually concealed it.

"Cargill," she demanded, her flashing glance again seeking the sandy-haired ruffian, "what has become of Mr. Jones? You had better tell the truth, for there are those here who'll make it go hard with you if you don't."

For a moment Wrayburn was

stunned. But of course he was changed, he reflected; of course, the girl could not recognize him.

"I'm the man you knew as Henry Jones, Miss Benning," said he, and not with a sense of humiliation for his sorry plight.

The girl started. Leaning forward in her saddle, she studied Wrayburn for a moment.

"Merciful heavens!" she gasped.

In a moment she was on the ground, and had hurried forward to catch Wrayburn by the hand. She led him to the officer in charge of the detachment.

"Lieutenant Fortescue," she went on, her voice quivering with indignation, "this is Mr. Jones. They have treated him brutally—so brutally that he has all but changed out of my recognition."

"Jones," explained the lieutenant, "we were brought here to rescue you. I should think it quite possible that you are vastly changed from the Henry Jones known to Miss Benning, but you don't seem to be in immediate danger."

"Teniente," interposed Pedro, waving a hand in the direction of Cargill and McGinn, "his enemies are there. You will see that they are armed."

The lieutenant hooked one knee over the front of his saddle, and settled himself comfortably. It was evident that he still found it impossible to see anything serious in the situation.

"Jones," he went on, "we came up from the border after a bunch of Mexican raiders who are deucedly hard to find. Miss Benning overhauled us, and begged us to come this way and get you out of the hands of a shark who she told us was killing you by inches. Pardon me, but—er—you look remarkably fit for a man of that description. Leave it to you, Miss Benning," and he smiled and touched his hat to the girl.

"But you do not know everything, lieutenant!" exclaimed Lasca. "You don't——"

"I reckon he don't know everythin'," interrupted Cargill, pushing forward. "Lieutenant, d'you recall a little holdup over Huachuca way, fifteen years ago? Have you ever heard how Major Gray was robbed, and——"

Fortescue stiffened in his saddle. "What has that to do with this business?" he said.

"It's got a hull lot to do with it! There's the man that held up the army paymaster—or one o' the men. The' was two on the job. Henry Jones was hurt, and Chet Bannock, of Buenas Noches, rode off with him. He thought he was goin' to go top-side, and signed a written confession. That was fifteen years ago, and Bannock hung onto that there confession until to-day."

"That holdup was before my time," said Fortescue, "but of course I've heard of it—it's one of the stock yarns at Huachuca. Strikes me Bannock was in pretty poor business, harboring one of the robbers, and then keeping a written confession all these years. Where's that confession now?"

Pedro sat his horse to one side. His head dropped, and a few mumbled, incoherent words came from him. Suddenly he straightened, flung a look of hate at Cargill, and plunged a hand into the breast of his shirt. When the hand reappeared it held a folded paper, yellowed by time and soiled by handling.

"Here, Señor Teniente," said he, "is the written confession of Henry Jones."

No one seemed able to grasp this move of Pedro's. Cargill and McGinn must have wondered why, if Pedro was a friend of the supposed Henry Jones, he should bolster up Cargill's argument with the document taken from Bannock. Wrayburn had been under the impression that Pedro had captured the paper to save one whom he thought to be the guilty Jones; yet, if this were so, why was he passing the incriminating document over to an agent of the government?

Lasca, bewildered and wholly in the dark, withdrew a little from Wrayburn. She watched with strained attention while Fortescue unfolded and read the old paper.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "This seems to be straight enough. It's acknowledged before Bannock, and witnessed by two others. Jones didn't really die?"

"Well, not so's you could notice," put in Cargill flippantly. "That's him, over there."

"What have you to say, Jones?" questioned Fortescue.

"Just this," was the answer. "Jones is not my name. I'm Clyde Wrayburn, of Chicago, of the firm of Scott & Wrayburn. A telegram to my home town will very soon settle that."

"Then why all this fuss and feathers? If you're not Henry Jones, why the deuce is our sandy-haired friend trying to make out that you're the author of this confession?"

"I came into the Southwest for my health," said Wrayburn, and described the nature of his malady, and noted briefly the doctor's prescription.

Fortescue smiled at the odd character of the physician's advice. "Gad," he commented, "that's what I'd call heroic treatment. But go on, Jones—or, I should say, Wrayburn."

The latter continued his recital, setting forth at some length just why he had taken the name of Henry Jones. That name may have been echoing in his memory, or he had seen it somewhere, or he had blundered upon it subconsciously. At any rate, in order to make his isolation more complete, he had used it in registering at the Phoenix Hotel.

"Go on," jeered Cargill; "tell the lieutenant how ye happened to come to Buenas Noches."

Wrayburn complied with the request. He had received, as Henry Jones, a letter from Bannock demanding his presence in Buenas Noches. The letter carried a vague threat as to what Bannock might do if Jones did not come. "The letter hid a mystery, and promised excitement," said Wrayburn, "and that is the reason I followed it up."

"That listens mighty fine," taunted Cargill, "but he can't dodge the fact that he come to Buenas Noches because he was afeared of Bannock. And he wouldn't have been afeared of Bannock if he hadn't been really Henry Jones."

"Oh, blazes!" grunted Fortescue, "what's all this to me, anyhow? Where's Bannock himself? A little information from him might lend weight to the argument."

"Get away from there, you greasers," called Cargill.

The five Mexicans drew off to left and right, leaving in plain view the dripping, lifeless form of Chester Bannock. Lasca gasped and paled, a startled exclamation escaped Fortescue, and the troopers drew in closer.

The lieutenant handed his reins to one of the men, dismounted, and went to Bannock's side. One close look was all he needed.

"Why don't you take him away?" he demanded. "This is no place for a thing like that."

McGinn advanced and gave an order. The Mexicans picked up the form, and bore it away in the direction of the jacal.

"This begins to look serious," went on Fortescue. "What happened to Bannock?"

"Jones and one o' the greasers mutinied," explained Cargill. "They ketched McGinn and me off guard, and then tossed Bannock inter the solution tank. I reckon you can sabe why Jones wanted Bannock out o' the way."

Wrayburn looked around for Tadeo Salinas, but the Mexican had disappeared. So it was left for Wrayburn to tell what had really happened.

"We're getting deeper and deeper," murmured Fortescue, frowning.

"Jones can't dodge," put in Cargill. "Ye've got this on him, lieutenant, and his squirmin' won't do any good."

"Well, I don't know," returned the officer. "I'm inclined to take his word."

The red rushed into Cargill's face. "Wait till I get through," he cried. "The' was two pulled off that holdup. One of 'em was Jones, and t'other was Sam Benning, the brother o' that girl there."

Lasca moved toward Cargill. Pedro spurred forward and reached down to lay a restraining hand on her shoulder.

"He lies!" exclaimed Lasca. "He's trying to blacken the good name of one of the best men that ever lived!"

"Where's your proof of that?" asked

Fortescue curtly, bending a stern look on Cargill.

"Bannock was bringin' the proof with him early this afternoon. It was Major Gray's satchel, and Sam Benning had it with him the time he was killed."

"No!" came quiveringly from Lasca. "Who says Sam Benning had the satchel with him?"

"Bannock said so!" declared Cargill.

"How did he know?"

To this there was no answer. Bannock's lips were forever stilled, and Cargill seemed to have no further knowledge.

"Teniente," remarked Pedro, "here is the satchel."

The Mexican turned half around on his horse. From under a blanket at his saddle cantle he took a small grip—a grip that was old and battered, but which bore on its side, in characters still legible, the words: "John Gray, Maj., U. S. A., Denver."

"This satchel," observed Fortescue, "looks old enough to have figured in the holdup, and if circumstantial evidence is to be believed it certainly belonged to Major Gray. If I am not mistaken, Gray is now retired, and lives somewhere in New York. Possibly he could identify the bit of luggage, but that's a nut for others to crack, and not me. I'd like to know, though, how this got into your hands?" and the officer looked at Pedro.

"I took it from Bannock early this afternoon," said Pedro calmly, "along with the paper I just gave you, Señor Teniente."

"He wanted to destroy the evidence, by thunder!" snarled Cargill. "He didn't want it to come out that Sam Benning was mixed up in the robbery, and he wanted to help Jones out o' the scrape, too."

"Then why didn't he?" said Fortescue. "If that was his idea, why is he passing all this evidence over to me?"

"To save the name of a good man," returned Pedro, "of the brother of the señorita here. To bring justice out of all this."

"We'll pass that part of it for now," said Fortescue. "Bannock had the satchel. He cannot tell where he got it. A good deal seems to hinge on the manner in which the grip came into his hands, and——"

"I can tell where he got it, señor," put in Pedro.

"Where?"

"From Jep Cargill, over there."

What was it appeared in Cargill's face at that moment? There was amazement, and hate, and unreasoning rage as his eyes rested on Pedro.

"You—you——" What Cargill had it in mind to say did not appear. Suddenly lifting the revolver in his hand, he discharged it.

The Mexican's hat twisted half around on his head. Before Cargill could fire again, he was in the hands of a couple of troopers, and was quickly disarmed.

"That sandy-haired scoundrel has a guilty conscience!" exclaimed Fortescue. "Keep watch on him, boys."

Pedro had had a close call. He removed his hat and surveyed it grimly.

"Yes, Señor Teniente," said he, replacing the hat on his head: "Cargill's conscience is guilty. It was he who got the ten thousand dollars taken from the paymaster. Henry Jones got nothing. Bannock invested the money for Cargill, and for fifteen years Bannock has had a hold on Cargill because he knew the man was one of the thieves. This talk of Sam Benning having a hand in the robbery is moonshine. Bannock knew it, and he lied about it, so he might force Benning's mother and sister to give him what he wanted—La Vita Place and the claim on the Maricopa Trail."

Cargill glared at Pedro, but the latter met the hateful glance unruffled.

CHAPTER XV.

PEDRO HURLS A BOMB.

"LET'S get in the shade somewhere," suggested Fortescue. "I don't know whether we can get to the bottom of this or not, but I guess we'd better try. In order to waste as little time

and talk as possible, we must pursue our inquiries with some sort of system."

He ordered his men to dismount and find water for the horses. The two men in charge of Cargill were to keep close to him, and see to it that he did not bolt. Presently the lieutenant, the two troopers, with Cargill, Lasca, Wrayburn, and Pedro, had betaken themselves to the shade of the headquarters adobe. Here there was a bench on which Fortescue, Lasca, and Wrayburn took seats. The others stood.

The troopers, glad of a period of rest, were uncinching their saddles and leading their mounts to the spring which supplied water to the cyanide tanks. Lasca's bewilderment, temporarily banished by the monstrous accusation of Cargill, had returned. It was clear that she, no less than Fortescue, was completely mystified.

"I believe, Wrayburn," said the lieutenant, "that you have something of importance left to tell us. We know why you came to Arizona, and why you left Phoenix for Buenas Noches. Take up the yarn from there—will you?—and bring it down to this moment, leaving out the chase over the tanks and the fatal mishap to Bannock."

Wrayburn told of the claim jumping, of the month at La Vita Place, of the call on Bannock, and of what transpired during the interview—and this threw additional light on Bannock's wily schemes. Followed, then, the humiliating weeks at Palos Verdes, the coming of Pedro in the night, his advice, and the "leap in the dark," during the talk with Bannock. The struggle of the day was sketched briefly, although Wrayburn dealt with some pride on his success with Cargill.

"You came to this place," breathed Lasca, a wondrously soft light in her fine eyes, "and you suffered all these indignities and hardships just to help us! Mr. Wrayburn, there are two women who will never forget!"

"That doctor of mine," returned Wrayburn lightly, "said that I must do something for somebody else. You see, I was merely following the prescription."

"You make light of it," murmured the girl, "but I am beginning to realize all that your generous kindness to us has cost you. We knew that you were here, although we did not understand how or why. Pedro watched the work at these cyanide tanks from a safe place in the hills. He tried for a long time to communicate with you, and at last he succeeded. I do not know why he advised you as he did, nor why he waylaid Bannock and took from him that paper and the satchel. All I know is that some of our friends in Buenas Noches—they are not many—had returned from the hill diggings to the town for supplies. Pedro watched Bannock when he left for Palos Verdes, and he secured a few of these friends, and they helped him get what he wanted from the Wolf. Meanwhile, I had gone to find Lieutenant Fortescue. Pedro had heard that the lieutenant and his detachment were chasing raiders south of Buenas Noches, and it was he who told me to find them and bring them at once to the town. I did not understand—I do not understand yet—why the same friends who gave their aid in waylaying Bannock could not have helped in your rescue. I found the troopers, and when we rode into Buenas Noches Pedro joined us and we all came here. My part in the work was small; but, for your sake, I wish it might have been greater—and that we could have taken you sooner from this awful place."

"I'm glad I could stay here until now," said Wrayburn. "Instead of killing me, Cargill and the others have made me a well man. They put me through a course of sprouts that brought back my health. The work so well begun at La Vita Place has been polished off at Palos Verdes."

"Great Scott, Wrayburn," exclaimed Fortescue, laughing, "you take a pleasant view of it. Pedro," and he turned to the Mexican, "I guess we're down to you. You haven't said a great deal, but what information you've given has been right to the point. If you have any-

thing more to tell, fire away. Incidentally, a little proof that you know what you are talking about will be favorably received."

Pedro had rolled and lighted a cigarette. He had been whiffing at it calmly while Cargill stabbed him with malignant glances.

"Teniente," answered Pedro, "I will tell what I know first, and then I will give proof that what I know is true. I understood well that Señor Wrayburn was not—could not be—the Henry Jones who had written that statement so many years ago. I knew Bannock had the statement in his office safe, and, for reasons of my own, I wanted it. But I blew open the safe a week ago, and found I had been fooled. The paper wasn't there. When I talked with Señor Wrayburn at night, I requested him to agree to do what Bannock wanted, and to ask Bannock to bring the statement to Palos Verdes."

Pedro smiled cunningly.

"Do you understand why that was, Señor Teniente?" he went on. "The paper was not in the safe, but had been taken out and hidden somewhere else. If I could induce Bannock to take the paper from where it was secreted, and ride with it to Palos Verdes, I should have my chance to get it. Well, I did get it—and Major Gray's satchel, too.

"Now I will tell you a few things I happen to know about Henry Jones. He was a pretty decent sort of a fellow until his trail was crossed by Cargill, fifteen years ago. It was Cargill who told Jones about the army paymaster, and how he was going to Huachuca, and could easily be held up. Cargill urged Jones to help in the robbery, and Jones finally agreed. There's not much use going into details regarding the holdup. Jones was wounded, and Cargill left him where he fell, and bolted with the ten thousand dollars. But Bannock was close enough to get a good look at him as he fled.

"Jones really thought he was close to the end of his trail, and wanted to make his peace with men as a help toward making it with God. So he told what he had done, but shielded Cargill. Then Jones got well, and Bannock began using the confession as a club to make Jones do more evil. Jones fled into Mexico, and was there for thirteen years. All the while he wanted to come back to the other side of the border, and at last he ventured. He hoped Bannock was dead, or that he had forgotten. But Bannock was not dead, and he was one who never forgot.

"He was a man, Señor Teniente, who loved evil for its own sake. He loved the night and all ways that are dark. It was his habit to hunt up the blackness in a man's past, then hold it over him as a spur to do lawless things. He could kill without remorse, and in and around Buenas Noches he knew no law but his own will. For years he was the enemy of the Bennings. He murdered Sam Benning, but escaped without punishment. When Sam was gone, he made war on Sam's mother and sister. For two years I have been at La Vita Place, and I have done what I could to help the señoras. I did this because I hated Bannock, and because I had a community of interest with those whom he warred against. Today the solution tank at Palos Verdes has done its best work."

"No orficer in the U. S. army ort to take the word of a lyin' greaser ag'inst a white man," spoke up Cargill.

"That depends on the greaser," said Fortescue, "and a little on the white man."

"He allows right out he hated Bannock," persisted Cargill. "He's doin' what he can to help them wimmen at La Vita Place, and to side in with this juniper here, who is the real Henry Jones."

"He says he knows what he is talking about, and that he will give proof."

"Why don't he make good with his proof, then?"

"Pedro," said Fortescue, "we're now ready for that."

"Just a minute, teniente."

Pedro walked into the headquarters adobe. When he returned, he was minus his mustache, which he had removed with a few strokes of a razor. The earrings, which had given him

such a pronounced Mexican appearance, also were missing. Despite his natural darkness of complexion, these changes had transformed him into an American—had proved that he was white, not Mexican. Without a mustache, his resemblance to Wrayburn was remarkable.

"Pedro!" cried Lasca Benning, rising from the bench. "What did you mean by that masquerade? Mother and I, we never guessed!"

"I was careful that you should not guess," said Pedro. "I wanted the old writing, so that I might save myself from Bannock and his schemes. Then, señorita, when I had it in my hands, I found that I must shoulder everything in order to protect your brother's name, and save you and the madre from the disgrace of Cargill's revelations. It is all right." He turned with a smile to Fortescue. "Lieutenant, I am Henry Jones."

An exploding bombshell could not have startled Wrayburn or Lasca more.

"Oh, hang it!" exclaimed Fortescue regretfully. "I was expecting something better of you than this, Pedro, or Jones."

"How could a man do better?" said Wrayburn warmly. "Bannock was dead, and Jones had the incriminating evidence in his hands. He could have destroyed it and kept his liberty. But he did not. He has sacrificed himself for the sake of his friends. Jones," and he turned to the self-confessed thief and grasped his hand, "it is an honor to shake hands with you."

Lasca flung her arms about Jones' neck impulsively, and kissed his cheek.

"Gad!" exclaimed Fortescue in an aside to Wrayburn, "I wouldn't mind being a robber myself. Perhaps, after all," he added, "Jones may not lose his liberty. I shall have to send him and Cargill to headquarters for further examination, but this robbery happened so long ago that I rather think that Jones, who got none of the loot, will be dealt with mercifully."

"What influence I have," said Wrayburn, "I shall use in his behalf."

By the terms of his doctor's prescription, Wrayburn had to remain away from business for six months. The remainder of the interval he passed at La Vita Place. But he did not abstain from business. He gave his attention to the claim on the Maricopa Trail. At his expense, a mining expert came from Los Angeles and made an examination. The result was a report that proved the claim a small bonanza. Through Wrayburn's efforts it was sold at a good, round figure, and the two women at La Vita Place found themselves in comfortable circumstances.

Wrayburn also exerted himself in behalf of Henry Jones, but a soldier had been killed at the time of the holdup, and this called for punishment. Cargill received the heaviest part of the penalty, but some of the responsibility had, of course, to fall upon Jones.

The final days of Wrayburn's sojourn at La Vita Place raised a question regarding the doctor's advice. That prescription called for romance as well as peril. So far romance had been missing, but Wrayburn hoped it might come later. The basis of the hope lay in Lasca's smile and the words with which she bade him au revoir.

Arranging a Rescue

"LOOK here," he said to the groom, "are you the man who put the saddle on Miss Jennie's horse?"

"Yes, sir. Anything wrong, sir?"

"It was loose—very loose. She had no sooner mounted than the saddle slipped, and if I hadn't caught her she would have been thrown to the ground."

"I'm very sorry, sir."

"But I did catch her," went on the young man meditatively. "I caught her in my arms, and—here's fifty cents for you, John. Do you suppose you could leave the girth loose when we go riding again to-morrow?"

Weeping Rafferty

By J. A. FITZGERALD

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

BUCKETS OF WOE.

BILL RAFFERTY'S great grief puzzled his fellow players just as much as it did the fans of Evergreen and the other three towns in the Tucker County Baseball League. He resisted all their efforts to ascertain the cause of his lachrymose condition, but so far as any one knew there wasn't a single reason for his continual crying. Evergreen was leading the other teams by a safe margin, he was the most popular and successful pitcher on the circuit, had good health, good looks, and good friends to spare, but, notwithstanding this cheerful environment, he went around giving a splendid imitation of a human cascade. It was the most natural thing in the world that the fans should have dubbed him "Weeping" Rafferty.

He arrived in Evergreen with the tears streaming down his cheeks, and no one had ever seen him when he didn't look as if he had been caught in a cloudburst. Manager Tim Hickey and a delegation of rooters met him at the train, and noticed his showery expression, but attributed it to a cold in the head.

They escorted him to the Griswold House, introduced him to "Pop" Haswell, the proprietor, Mrs. Haswell, and her two pretty daughters, the other members of the club, and many of the leading citizens, and gave him a cordial welcome. Some of them were amazed when the big pitcher kept his handkerchief to his eyes, but ascribed it to various reasons, the one about his having a bad cold getting most of the votes.

"Did you get a cinder in your eye?" asked Mrs. Haswell.

He shook his head in the negative, and Mrs. Haswell decided that the grippe was responsible for his watery appearance. She gave him some motherly advice about taking care of himself, and he thanked her and retired to his room. One of the chambermaids reported a few hours later that the new boarder was sobbing as if his heart would break, and the next morning other boarders on the same floor with Rafferty hunted up the landlord and protested that they had been kept awake all night by the moaning of the new guest.

"He's got a fearful cold, the poor

chap," said the proprietor. "You'd feel sorry for him if you could have seen him when he arrived yesterday. The water was coming out of his eyes in a stream."

This mollified the complainants, and they expressed the fervent wish that he would get back to form in a few days. Rafferty wept freely while eating his breakfast, and drew sympathy from all the other guests.

"You ought to stay in bed to-day," suggested Manager Hickey. "I don't want to start you until you're right, because the fans expect a whole lot from you, and I don't want to disappoint them."

"Is there a game to-day?" came in a choking sob.

"Yes, we play Thursdays and Saturdays," said Hickey.

"I want to pitch to-day," said Rafferty. He was using two handkerchiefs by this time. Some of the players and fans were standing about the corridor of the hotel, watching the colloquy between the manager and the new player, and sympathizing with the latter.

"It's the celestial league for that guy if he doesn't get rid of that cold," volunteered "Dug" Lindsay, captain and first baseman of the Evergreens.

Manager Hickey left Rafferty alone in his sorrow for a few minutes, and joined the group.

"Is he any better, Tim?" asked Captain Lindsay.

"He says he never felt better in his life," said Hickey. "He insists on pitching this afternoon. He's liable to die if he goes in the box, but he's pleading so hard I don't know what to say to him."

"Maybe he's worrying about a chance to make good," said Jimmy Todd, the shortstop. "Did you tell him he'd get a good show?"

"Sure thing. I told him to take it easy for a few days, but he won't hear of it. Come on over with me, and we'll try and persuade him."

They started toward where Rafferty was sitting with his head buried in his hands, a picture of misery.

"All the bunch say it will be suicide for you to try to work to-day," began the manager.

"Why, I'm—I'm as strong as a b-bull," sobbed Rafferty. He worked his right arm up and down with great vigor to emphasize his statement. "I'll go in there and stand the other fellows on their heads. Who do we play to-day?"

"The Cobb's Run team," said Captain Lindsay. "There's a bunch of wicked hitters on that outfit, and they'll sail into you if you aren't right."

"Mighty lucky the Cobbs got such a bad start," remarked Hickey. "If it wasn't for that, we wouldn't be so far in front now. They've got a corking club. That Scheutzen, the third baseman, is a second Wagner. He's a maniac with the bat."

"Where are the other teams in the league?" asked Rafferty, mopping his red eyes.

"We're leading," said the manager. "The Cobbs are second, Martinburgs third, and the Penningtons are carrying the water bucket. Pennington won the county calico two years ago, and Martinburg grabbed it last year."

"I'd just like a crack at those Cobbs," groaned Rafferty. "I tell you, I'm in grand shape."

Manager Hickey threw up both hands and strode up and down in front of the group, his manner indicating that he was deeply perplexed. The spectacle of a pitcher pleading for a chance to work was brand-new to him. Most of the twirlers he had met had a habit of framing up an alibi before they went in the box.

"If I send you in there this afternoon and anything happens, the fans will drive me out of town," he went on.

"We'll win the game," said Rafferty. "That's the only thing that will happen."

"What are you going to do with a fellow like that?" asked the manager, turning in despair to the other players.

"Go ahead, take a chance, boss," advised Lindsay. "He knows how he feels. We heard how you tried to persuade him to go to bed."

CHAPTER II.

DISTURBING THE PEACE.

A LITTLE later the team started for the ball park, the new pitcher sitting on the front seat of the bus, to have the points of interest shown him. He cried all the way, much to the driver's displeasure.

Evergreen and Cobb's Run always put up a stiff argument, and there was a large crowd on hand to see the struggle. When the fans saw Rafferty warming up, his huge frame trembling with emotion, they began to criticize the manager.

"Hickey must be crazy to put that fellow in the box," was the universal comment. "He's more fit to be in a hospital with that cold."

Manager Hickey scented the criticism, and cleared his skirts with a public announcement that Rafferty insisted on pitching. "I wanted him to go to bed until he felt better, but he refused," he said. "He insists on beating the Cobbs."

A wild cheer greeted this exhibition of gameness, and Rafferty entered the box with the good will of the Evergreen rooters. Manager Hickey had two physicians in readines to rush to the pitcher's assistance. A wave of sympathy swept the crowd when Rafferty, his eyes filled with tears, shot the first ball over the plate at a mile a minute. Evergreen had never seen such speed. But each ball seemed to open the floodgates of his grief a little farther. The harder he pitched, the harder he cried.

"Mamma, that man is crying," remarked Dorothy Haslett.

"I think so, too," said her sister, Jessie.

"Nonsense," said her mother. "Men of his size don't cry. It's that awful cold. What a stubborn fellow to insist on pitching in such a condition!"

By the fifth inning Mrs. Haslett and a majority of the fans were inclined to agree with her daughters. Rafferty was bawling in an audible manner now. No cold could make a man weep like that unless he was in great pain.

The Cobbs and the delegation that accompanied them from home were on the verge of tears, but they had good reason. Rafferty was mowing the heavy hitters of the visiting team down every time they faced him. The slaughter was appalling. Most of the faces in the crowd had taken on an agonized expression from watching the suffering of the new Evergreen star. He won the game without any trouble, fanning fifteen of the Cobbs, allowing but two scratch hits, and walking but one man. The Evergreen fans flocked about him when the game was over, and found him drenched in his own grief.

"What's the matter with him, Tim?" was the question hurled at the manager from all sides.

Hickey wasn't any too sure himself, but he had to make some explanation of the new player's strange conduct. "He's got the worst cold I ever saw in my life," he said. "On top of that he has become hysterical, worrying over his new job. I'm going to rush him home and get him to bed right away. Ain't he a wonder?"

All the fans agreed that it was the greatest pitching performance they had ever witnessed.

"Look at my hands," said Hughey Ford, the catcher. "I was never up against such speed. Just like catching red-hot coals."

Manager Hickey and the other players wanted to bundle Rafferty into the bus, but he wouldn't hear of it. He lighted a cigarette and announced his intention of walking back to the hotel to get a look at the town.

"Better stick with him, Tim," cautioned one of the players. "He's liable to collapse."

Manager Hickey took his arm, and they started for the hotel, followed by a score of small boys, the latter regarding the weeping giant with questioning expressions.

"What's he howling for?" asked one urchin. "He won his game, didn't he?"

"If you were as sick as he is, you'd howl!" came the reprimand from another youngster. He said it loud enough for Rafferty to hear him, and

felt important when the pitcher shot a saturated look at him.

Manager Hickey introduced him to Captain Bob Hackett, head of, and most of, the Evergreen Hose Company, and the latter took him into the engine house and showed him the apparatus. He was made acquainted with half a dozen of the prettiest girls and matrons in the town; he saw all there was to be seen; but none of the persons or objects could dry his tears. Manager Hickey was hoarse, whispering to every one they met that Rafferty was more fit to be in bed than outdoors.

"What under the sun is he crying for?" asked one old lady.

"He's got a cold," said Hickey, for the thousandth time.

"So have I," she replied, "but I don't go bawling my head off about it."

"Pile right into bed after supper," advised Hickey. "Take a few hot drinks, and you'll get that cold out of your system. You'll be better in the morning."

With this bit of advice, Hickey patted Rafferty on the back and dashed away. He had spent one of the most strenuous afternoons of his life, and was glad to be rid of his weeping charge. He was haunted by the fear that a cold might not be the cause of Rafferty's weeping. The latter sobbed through his supper, to the annoyance of the other diners; then, instead of hurrying to bed, planted himself in the reading room, and allowed his tears to trickle all over such papers and magazines as he chanced to pick up. He shot a few games of pool, and left a damp trail around the table. His great victory of the afternoon made him immune from criticism, but there were indications that some of the guests—the ones not interested in baseball—were getting tired of the incessant downpour.

"We all feel sorry for him," said Judge Willis, an ardent fan, "but his crying is getting monotonous. Why don't he go to his room?"

The following morning there was an unbroken line of boarders at the desk, all waiting to register an emphatic protest against Rafferty's nocturnal wails.

"If you don't get rid of that banshee I'm going to move," announced Judge Willis. He banged the desk with his fist. Bloodshot eyes on all sides showed that Rafferty's whining had played havoc with the other guests' slumber.

"What can I do with him?" asked Pop Haslett.

"Tell him to get a room at the reservoir," snapped a woman.

"You wouldn't turn a sick man out of doors, would you?" pleaded Haslett. "And, besides, he's a wonderful pitcher."

"Make him sleep at the ball park, then," said the woman. "You've got to choose between him and me."

"Me, too!" came in a chorus.

The proprietor pounded one hand with the other, ran his fingers through his hair, and gave every evidence of being disturbed. He didn't want to lose his permanent guests, and he was afraid that if he asked Rafferty to vacate, all the other members of the team would get out.

"They're right, father," said Mrs. Haslett. "There's something the matter with that fellow. If he was sick, he couldn't have pitched the game he did yesterday. He's in the dining room now, weeping over his oatmeal. I don't think it helps the place to have a man like that around. He acts as if he didn't like the hotel."

This got a rise out of Pop Haslett. The idea of anybody not liking his place, noted as one of the best hotels in that part of the country! He let himself out from behind the desk, and dashed into the dining room. Going straight to the table where Rafferty was sobbing quietly, he almost shouted:

"What are you crying about? Don't you like this hotel?"

Rafferty raised his watery eyes in surprise. "I think it's the best hotel I was ever in," he replied. "Who said I didn't like it?"

"Well, you don't act as if you liked anything," said the proprietor. "People look in here and see you crying, and think we're trying to poison you. It don't help the hotel to see you acting that way."

4A

"I can't help it if—if I feel badly," sobbed Rafferty.

"Yes, but you should have some consideration for those around you. Do you know that you have kept everybody on your floor awake for two nights?"

"I'm awfully sorry," wailed the pitcher. "I'll go and apologize to them if you want me to."

"You'd better not," he replied. "They're in no mood to meet you right now; it might go hard with you. Isn't your cold any better?"

"I haven't any cold," moaned Rafferty. "I was never in better health."

"And you wasn't sick yesterday?" gasped Haslett.

"That game didn't look much like it, did it?" asked the pitcher.

This was too much for the proprietor. He left the room, firmly convinced that he was harboring a lunatic. He went straight to the telephone and called up Manager Hickey, and told him to come downstairs at once. When Hickey made his appearance Haslett stated the case to him in plain terms.

"I'm awfully sorry, Tim, but you've got to get that nut out of here," he said. "The other boarders on his floor are up in arms. They threaten to run out on me if I don't turn him loose. He's no more sick than you are; he says so."

"How do you account for his tears?" asked Hickey.

"Just his natural condition," said Haslett.

CHAPTER III.

A REMARKABLE CASE.

MANAGER HICKEY finally assured the hotel proprietor that he would have a talk with the new twirler, with a view to finding out what ailed him. He was loath to offend such a valuable player, and he thought the matter over for several hours before he decided on a line of action. He enlisted the services of three of the town's leading physicians, men who had the interest of the team at heart. It was agreed that they should examine Rafferty in Hickey's room. The manager sent for the big pitcher, and when he stepped into the room his face showed that the flood had not receded.

"We want to have a little talk with you, Bill," began the manager, "and at the outset we want to assure you of our friendship. These other gentlemen are physicians and thirty-third-degree fans. Yesterday we had an idea that you were suffering from a cold, but the owner of the hotel says you assured him you were in perfect health. Is that right?"

"That's correct," said Rafferty, wiping his eyes. "I never had a bad cold in my life."

"Then what's the matter with you?"

"What do you mean?" inquired Rafferty, with a show of surprise, as if he hadn't been doing anything to attract attention.

"What makes you cry so much?"

"Oh, that!" exclaimed Rafferty. "I can't help it if I feel badly."

"Tell us the reason," urged one of the doctors. "Maybe we can help you."

"There's no help for my case," he sobbed, "unless I help myself. Isn't my pitching satisfactory?"

"The best ever!" came in a chorus. "That's why we want to make you happy."

"Only one thing can make me happy," he blubbered. "I've tried hard to accomplish it, but I haven't succeeded. I'll keep right on trying, but I'll keep my troubles to myself. I'm ready to quit any time you say, Mr. Hickey."

He flung himself face downward on a couch and cried bitterly.

"No one wants you to quit," said Hickey. He was almost in tears himself. "Get that notion out of your head. There must be something we can do to relieve your distress. Do you need money or something like that?"

"I've got all I need," said Rafferty.

"Has some girl gone back on you?" asked Hickey, in his gentlest manner.

"Not a chance," said the pitcher, straightening up. "Here's her photograph," he went on, opening his watch, and showing the face of an extremely pretty girl. "Ain't she a pippino?"

All hands agreed that a girl like that ought to make any man happy.

"She says she won't marry me till I stop crying," he explained.

"And can't you stop?" asked one of the doctors.

"It doesn't seem so," said Rafferty.

"Well, you've either got to dry up or change your room," declared the manager. "The other guests are complaining that you keep them awake, and threaten to leave the hotel unless the manager gets rid of you."

"I guess we can straighten things out all right," he said. "I don't want to keep anybody awake. I sleep soundly myself, and I want other folks to."

"Do you mean to say you cry when you're asleep?" asked Hickey.

"I didn't know it until now," said Rafferty. "Let him put me in some other part of the house, where I won't bother any one."

The sensible manner in which he accepted the situation made a big hit with his audience, and a bigger one with the owner of the hotel. Pop Haslett transferred him to a room in a distant part of the house, near the stable, and told him to cry just as hard as he liked. Rafferty's willingness to isolate himself won back the sympathy of the guests he had disturbed, and they became his warmest supporters. He won most of his games with ease, and was feared more than any pitcher in the league. The fans got accustomed to his weeping after the first few games, and got a barrel of fun out of the situation. They cried instead of applauding every time he made a good play.

Association with him made the rest of the players more or less solemn, if not actually peevish, and in a short time the team was known as the "Cry-babies." Opposing pitchers protested that Rafferty left the ball in such a moist condition they couldn't control it, but he paid no attention to them. Other managers tried to coax him away from Evergreen, but he stuck to Manager Hickey. News that he was ordered out of the hotel because of his weeping reached Cobb's Run, and the owner of the team sent him the following wire:

Understand you are having trouble with Evergreen. Will give you fifty dollars a month more, and all the handkerchiefs you want if you will join my club.

Rafferty declined the offer, and went right on weeping. After a while the players and fans gave up trying to find out the cause of his grief.

"He has had a great shock," said one of the doctors. "It is a remarkable case."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ENTERTAINMENT BUREAU.

THERE was a great deal of speculation as to where the big pitcher went every pay day. He left Evergreen early in the morning, and did not return until the following day. Once or twice Manager Hickey endeavored to draw him out, but as Rafferty showed no inclination to discuss the trips, he ceased his investigations. Some one suggested following him, but the manager wouldn't hear of such a thing. As long as the pitcher tended to his work, no one had a right to pry into his personal affairs. It was noticeable, however, that, after each trip, he came back crying harder than ever. But his splendid work for Evergreen endeared him to the fans, and along about the middle of August a movement was organized to cheer him up.

"It seems a pity that such a fine big fellow should be going around that way," said Judge Willis one night in the lobby of the hotel. "I think we ought to do something to rescue him from a watery grave. He can't go on like this much longer."

The campaign was organized right then and there, Judge Willis accepting the chairmanship. All the leading merchants went on the committee. Mrs. Haslett called a meeting of the women and girls of the town, and systematic arrangements were started for driving the dampness and gloom out of Weeping Rafferty's system. The campaign began with a dance at the hose company's house in his honor. He led the grand march with Mrs. Haslett, who looked as if she wished she had worn a raincoat and brought an umbrella after they had made one round of the hall. Pretty girls danced with him, and

announced afterward that it was just like waltzing with a diving seal.

"The dance didn't seem to tickle him to any great extent," admitted Judge Willis. "We'll have to try something else."

Rafferty accepted all the invitations that came his way, but kept right on crying. His woe was proof against moving pictures, lawn parties, the circus, the funniest comedians, and the funniest stories. The campaign was an absolute failure.

"I'm through!" announced Judge Willis, in disgust. "He can cry himself to death for all I care. What we ought to do now is give him reason to cry."

"I guess it's useless trying to cheer him," said Manager Hickey. "I can't imagine what it is that's bothering him."

"Where did he play last year?" asked Mrs. Haslett.

"With Holyoke."

"Why don't you find out if he cried when he was there," she urged.

"I made inquiries, and found out that he cried so hard they had to let him go. The other members of the team wore earlaps whenever he pitched. As near as I can find out, he hasn't had a dry season in three years."

"How did you get that information?" asked Judge Willis.

"I wrote to his home in Brooklyn," said the manager.

"What reply did you get?" some one asked.

"His mother sent me the following message," said Hickey. "'We haven't the slightest idea what ails him, and have given up trying to find out. He's been crying steadily for three years. We keep him in the yard when he's home.'"

"When his own people can't help him, we don't stand much chance of succeeding," said Mrs. Haslett. "I don't intend to waste any more time on him."

The Weeping Rafferty Entertainment Committee went out of business without any further ceremony. All hands admitted that the pitcher was the hardest audience they had ever met. Two weeks of continued merriment prepared for his special edification had failed to dry his tears. They left him to himself pretty much after that. Manager Hickey and his fellow players passed him up as a social proposition. Interest in his future as a player was revived when an agent of the Buffalo team in the International League dropped into town and opened negotiations for his purchase after seeing him pitch one game.

"I'll give you two thousand five hundred dollars for him," said the scout.

"You're on," replied Hickey, "provided Rafferty is willing to go. I want to be fair with you. He never stops crying, and it is right that the Buffalo club should know about his peculiar failing."

"They know all about it," said the scout. "I wrote the boss last night. He says he doesn't care how much he cries, if he can pitch winning ball. He says it's better to have a crying pitcher than crying fans."

Rafferty readily consented to go along as soon as he had been assured a part of the purchase price. He wept all through the proceeding.

"Niagara Falls won't have a thing on that guy," said the scout, when Rafferty left them. "I'd give a whole lot to know what's the matter with him."

"He's been raining for three years," said Hickey. "I hate to lose him, but, believe me, I've had some job handling him this season!"

Evergreen had the pennant sewed up tight, and the last game of the season, to be played that Saturday with Cobb's Run, had little interest for the fans beyond the fact that it was to mark the farewell appearance of Weeping Rafferty in those parts. Every rooter turned out to give the big pitcher a send-off.

CHAPTER V.

A BREAK IN THE CLOUDS.

RAFFERTY pitched his usual brilliant game for six innings, then, to the surprise of the onlookers, the opposing batsmen began hammering him all over the lot. The onslaught was so sudden that the fans could not realize

that it was Rafferty who was getting massacred. Home runs, triples, doubles, and singles followed each other in rapid succession, until the Evergreen fielders were going around with their tongues dangling near their belts. Cobb's Run tore off eight tallies and the lead in that inning. Rafferty kept right on pitching, and crying as hard as he knew how.

"He's got good reason to cry to-day," observed Pop Haslett.

No one thought of taking him out, because the game wasn't needed anyway. The bombardment continued during the seventh and eighth innings. The Cobbs had a twelve-run lead when they came to bat in their half of the ninth inning. They wanted to humiliate the man who had been rubbing it into them all the season, and they worked as hard as if they had been twelve runs behind. The bases were full, and two men were out, when Scheutzen, the most dangerous hitter in the league, stepped to the plate.

"Knock another sob out of him, Heinie!" advised a Cobb rooter.

Rafferty took an extra wind-up and shot the ball over the plate at frightful speed. It looked like a shoe button when it passed the batsman. He swung and missed it. The second strike was called on him. It was the greatest speed Rafferty had shown. He was seen to pat the ball affectionately and whisper something to it. He poised himself on his right leg for several seconds, kissed the ball, then hurled it toward the plate. Scheutzen went after it, but was twenty minutes late.

"Batter out!" yelled the umpire.

A wild yell of exultation came from the pitcher's box. The fans looked in that direction, and were stunned.

There was Weeping Rafferty executing a Highland fling and laughing in a hysterical manner. The man who had cried bitterly after twenty victories was choking with merriment after the worst defeat of the season. The fans looked at each other in amazement. Rafferty's remarkable transformation, and the one-sided score, made them forget that Evergreen had another inning. They crowded about him, waiting for an explanation, but it was five minutes before he could control his hilarity.

"I've won, Tim! I've won!" he shouted, rushing up to Hickey.

"Seventeen to four in favor of Cobb's Run doesn't look like it!" growled the manager.

"Oh, I don't mean that," said Rafferty, grabbing the manager, and forcing him to do an involuntary turkey trot to the great delight of the onlookers. "I mean that I've beaten the jinx."

"What jinx is that?" asked Hickey. The crowd pressed about the pitcher.

"Three years ago, when I was pitching for Passaic," Rafferty began, "I was the happiest ball player in the world. One Sunday a bunch of us went to Coney Island. I visited a fortune teller, and she told me something which started me on my crying career. She said that I was going to be a successful ball player, but that I was going to meet with one bitter disappointment: I was never going to strike out a Dutchman. I laughed when she told me this, but when one Dutchman after another faced me, and banged the ball into the next county, her prediction got on my nerves. I brooded and brooded over the situation until I couldn't think of anything else. I kept the tears back for the first few weeks, but after that I couldn't control them. I just naturally had to cry."

"Do you mind telling us where you've been going every pay day?" asked Pop Haslett.

"To visit fortune tellers," said Rafferty. "They've got a large part of my salary. And they all corroborated the Coney Island seeress. I've had two strikes on Dutchmen at least two hundred times, but I never was able to get the third one across."

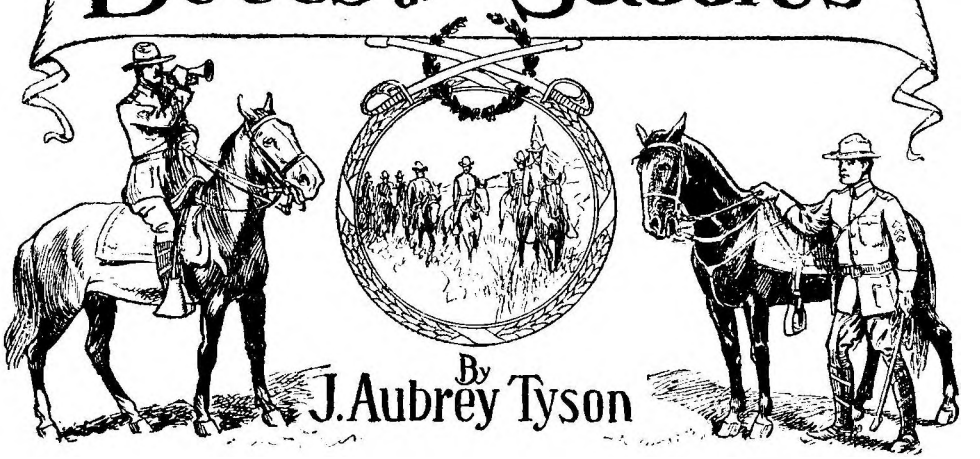
"And I'm the first one you've fanned in three years?" asked Scheutzen, a tinge of bitterness in his voice.

"You're the very first," said Rafferty.

"But what have you got against the race?" inquired Hickey.

"Nothing," said Rafferty, with a smile; "at least, not now!"

Boots and Saddles



By J. Aubrey Tyson

FORMER CHAPTERS.

Read them in this abridged form, then enjoy the rest of the story.

SERGEANT BRIGMAN TEAKE, of the Twenty-second U. S. Cavalry, stationed at Fort Tilton, has taken examinations for promotion, and is expecting a lieutenant's commission. Mary Scoville, his sweetheart, daughter of the post paymaster, tells him that her father is in financial straits, and asks him to obtain a loan for her on a diamond sunburst, which is a family heirloom. Teake takes the jewel, but draws money of his own from the bank to give to her.

Teake is assigned to guard the paymaster's cash box, and while on duty is decoyed from his post by a forged note, apparently from Mary, and during his absence the cash box is stolen. He finds a clew to the identity of the robber, and Captain Pengrove, whom he believes to be his enemy, tells him to leave the fort and search for the stolen money.

Near the ranch of the disreputable George Tichborne, Teake discovers evidence which leads him to believe that Captain Pengrove is in league with the thieves. He picks up Corporal Bayne, and the two ride to the ranch. George Tichborne tells them that Pengrove has been shot, and he accuses Teake of the murder, and locks him in the cellar, firmly bound.

"Honest" John Welliver, one of Tichborne's outlaws, liberates Teake and proposes that they ride away with the money which was taken from the fort. They escape from the ranch, but are overtaken by Tichborne and his men and forced to fight. Captain Pengrove and Corporal Bayne arrive unexpectedly, and help Teake and Welliver, putting the outlaws to flight. Welliver then attacks Pengrove and Bayne, and Teake, astounded at his treachery, turns on him and shoots him. Pengrove and Bayne disappear, but Teake presently finds them with a detachment of cavalry from the fort. Teake is arrested and taken to the fort a prisoner.

All of the men involved in the affair tell their stories, and Colonel Hurleigh announces that he will hold Major Burton, Captain Pengrove, Captain Scoville, and Teake under observation for twenty-four hours, after which, if they have not found a solution to the mystery, he will place them under arrest. He then informs Teake that his commission has been sent by the war department, and that he is a second lieutenant.

Teake looks with suspicion on Fing Lee, the Chinese servant, and assures Mary and her father that he will soon find a clew. Teake goes to the barracks, and puts on his new uniform, then returns to the Scoville cottage and prepares to show Mary that Fing Lee had something to do with forging a letter in her name, and with other details of the great puzzle.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CAST OF A DIE.

AS Mary hurried from the room to get the writing materials for which he had asked, Teake crossed to the door of the dining room, and threw it open. The room was unoccupied. Leaving the door ajar, he began to pace the floor of the parlor. Mary soon re-

turned, and Teake seated himself and quickly wrote a note. He gave the sheet to Mary, who read:

MY DEAR CAPTAIN PENGROVE: When I met you on my way from the barracks this morning, you were good enough to tell me that you would give to me any aid I might need in the course of the day. Therefore, I am sending to you with this letter, Fing Lee, the Chinese servant, who is employed in the house of Captain Scoville. It is of the greatest importance that this man be kept away from Captain Scoville's house for the half hour following the receipt of this letter by you. At the expiration of that time I hope to be able to offer evidence which will show that it was he who was responsible for the robbery of the paymaster's safe the other night. If you will contrive some means of keeping him away from the place I have mentioned, and under strict surveillance, I think the mystery of the robbery will be solved. Sincerely yours, BRIGMAN TEAKE.

"You—you are going to send Fing to Captain Pengrove?" Mary exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, but I think I shall wait a little while," he answered. "However, I guess I'll give Fing the letter and his instructions now," said Teake. "Just call him in."

Mary looked at him dubiously. In his words and manner was something that baffled her. It was clear that, despite his apparent abstraction, he was acting in accordance with a fixed purpose, and that he was in no mood to have it questioned. Accordingly, with a little shrug, she again left the room. When she returned, Fing Lee was with her.

Teake, who was seated at the table, was counting the nine one-hundred-dollar bills which he had taken from his wallet. As he gathered them together, he laughed.

"They've been in several hands since I saw them last," he said, "but the nine hundred is here. It's a pretty big sum of money for a fellow to be carrying around where there is no place to spend it, isn't it, Mary? I think I'd better leave it with your father, until I go into town again. I dare say his desk will be safe enough, won't it, dear?"

Mary, looking at him wonderingly, did not reply.

"Hello, Fing!" exclaimed the lieutenant cheerfully, as he turned to the smiling Chinaman. "Fing, I have a letter here which I want you to give to Captain Pengrove—Captain Pengrove. Do you understand?"

"Yes—yes—Captain Plengove—yes, me know."

"He's at Major Burton's house. You know where Major Burton lives?"

"Yes—back of big tlee—big tlee that hang drop."

"Yes—that's it—just back of the willow tree. It's half past nine now. At ten o'clock you go there and give letter. See?"

"Ten 'clock—Captain Plengove—Major Blurton house—back big tlee—ten 'clock?"

"That's it. Be very sure. It must go, you understand. Ten o'clock."

"Me know."

"That's all, then, Fing," said Teake, as he placed the letter in the hands of the Chinaman.

Fing Lee, chuckling, trotted out to the hall. As he did so, Teake said to Mary:

"While I had that sunburst of yours, I never got a good look at it. The first time I saw it unwrapped was when it was in the hands of Tichborne. The second time was while the colonel was fingering it. Would you mind letting me see it again?"

"Now?" asked Mary, slightly frowning.

"Yes," Teake answered.

"Of course, but——" The young woman faltered.

Teake leaned back in his chair. "I have a reason," he said, speaking louder than was his wont. "While it was being examined at the ranch, there was a difference of opinion concerning its value. Tichborne fancied it was worth about twenty thousand dollars, while John Welliver had an idea that it was worth not more than half that sum. Being something of an expert in the valuation of precious stones——"

"Twenty thousand!" exclaimed the astonished Mary. "Why, Brig——"

"I thought that was nearer the mark

than ten thousand," Teake went on quickly, raising his hand to silence her. "However, you will let me see it, won't you?"

"Certainly—if——"

The deepening frown on the face of her companion mystified her, and, glancing at him over her shoulder, she left the room. Teake again looked thoughtfully at the letters he had taken from his pocket a few minutes before, then he folded them carefully, and yawned audibly. Glancing at the door of the dining room, he fancied that it was wider ajar than he had left it.

When Mary returned, she carried a small black leather box. Opening this, she held it toward him. "Here is the sunburst, Brig," she said wearily.

"Why, how wonderfully beautiful it is, Mary!" Teake exclaimed rapturously. "If this is worth a dollar, it is worth every cent of twenty thousand. It's rather risky keeping a thing like this around your house, though. How have you managed it?"

"Father usually kept it for me in his office safe," the young woman explained perfunctorily. "Sometimes I kept it in my trunk."

The lieutenant laughed quietly.

"Suppose, then, in view of the fact that the office safe is temporarily unavailable, that you let me slip the sunburst into this wallet, before I put it into your father's desk. You can put the box in your trunk, or somewhere else, where it will not be likely to attract attention."

Flushing and paling, Mary looked at him quizzically.

"You are acting very strangely, Brig," she said, in a low voice, which shook a little.

"Say 'yes,'" he muttered peremptorily.

"Of course—if you would have it so," she answered dully.

"Good!" Teake said cheerfully. "Then into the wallet it goes—with my nine hundred. Now, let's get up to your father. Is he in his study?"

"I believe so."

"Then let's go," said Teake. "But, by the way, I have something else to ask of your father. I'm about fagged out. Since the robbery I haven't had an hour's real rest. In another half hour I won't be able to see across this room. When I left the barracks this morning it was——"

The light of sudden understanding appeared in the young woman's eyes.

"Oh, Brig, of course!" she exclaimed sympathetically, as she grasped one of his hands. "You have had no chance to sleep, and you cannot go to the barracks now. Has the colonel assigned you no quarters?"

"No—not yet. I appear to be only on waiting orders now, and, in one sense, I am an interloper here, where there is no vacancy for a second lieutenant. Doubtless, later in the day, quarters will be found for me. Meantime——"

Mary laughed. "Why, Brig, you're a man without a home," she said. "Yes, you poor fellow, we must take you in. Wait here. I'll be back in a minute."

Once more she ran out of the room. When she returned, she was accompanied by her father, who looked more haggard than when Teake had seen him last. He glanced coldly at Teake; then, turning to his daughter, said irritably:

"Why did you come down? I told you to get my study ready. Get Fing to help you. Where is Fing?"

"In the kitchen, I think, father."

"Find him, then, and get him to put the study in order."

There was a slight expression of vexation on Mary's face as she crossed to the door of the dining room. When she was gone, Scoville turned to the young officer.

"Mary tells me that no quarters have been assigned to you, Teake," he said abruptly. "In the circumstances, you'd better put up here. I am having the study prepared for your use. You've had rather hard going for the last two or three days, and you'll have to get some rest in order to be put right. The couch in the study will meet your requirements for to-day, I suppose."

The lieutenant laughed quietly. "Not quite," he answered.

Scoville gave a little start and frowned.

"The study will not be sufficient," Teake went on. "I must have full and undisputed possession of the house."

The paymaster's face grew crimson, and his widening eyes flashed wrathfully.

"Indeed!" he muttered.

"Yes—in order that I may entertain here a visitor whom I have some reason to expect—one who, I am sure, will be able to throw a flood of light on the mystery which has given us so much trouble this morning."

Scoville's pallor returned as he said: "I don't like riddles, Teake, and I am in no mood this morning to be kept guessing. Naturally, my mind can know no rest until the mystery of which you speak is solved in a manner that will prove that neither I nor any member of my family has been implicated in any way in the robbery of my office safe. But, when you ask me to turn my house over to you for the reception of a visitor who would find the presence of myself and the members of my family objectionable, I feel warranted in asking some sort of an explanation."

"Naturally," Teake assented thoughtfully. "But when I tell you that, in the interest of yourself and each member of your family, it is essential that I play a lone hand in a certain game that must be played in this house before noon today, I think you will understand that no obstacle should be placed in my way. In granting my request, you have everything to gain, and nothing to lose. A full explanation will be made to you afterward. There is no time for this now. If I am to be successful, prompt action is imperative. Within half an hour I must be alone."

Scoville regarded the young officer doubtfully. "You believe you have some sort of a clew to the person who robbed the safe—to the one who took that slip from my desk?" he asked.

"I do."

The paymaster hesitated. In the eagerness of his guest was something that both reassured and mystified him. Scoville cleared his throat; then he said deliberately:

"You do not doubt the good faith—the innocence of any member of my family?"

"No. It would be as easy for me to doubt my own."

The paymaster, turning away, shook his head helplessly. "I scarcely know you, Teake," he muttered sadly. "While I have respected you in a way—I never have really liked you. Until you got your shoulder straps, you should have let Mary alone. But all that is different now, I suppose. Anyhow, since hearing you tell your story to the colonel this morning, and explain the manner in which that sunburst came into your hands, I have found it impossible to doubt your integrity and strength of purpose. Having seen my desk opened this morning, you probably know more about the circumstances of the robbery than any one except the men who committed the crime. You will have to have your way now, I suppose, but I don't quite see how I am going to manage it."

"Mrs. Scoville and Mary might go over to Mrs. Hurleigh's," Teake suggested.

Scoville looked at him sharply.

"I'm afraid they'd be scarcely welcome there—this morning," he said. "Then, too, Mrs. Scoville must not know that I am under suspicion. Why, man, the shock would kill her."

"Mrs. Hurleigh and Mrs. Scoville always appeared to be good friends," replied the lieutenant. "Why could not Mrs. Scoville go with you to your office for a few minutes, thus giving Mary an opportunity to precede her to Mrs. Hurleigh's, and prepare her for a visit from her mother?"

"That might do," sighed Scoville. "But Fing? What are we to do with Fing?"

Teake hesitated. Slowly stroking his chin, he gazed thoughtfully at the floor.

"Well, Fing might stay," he said. "Yes, let him stay. I'm rather inclined to think I may find Fing useful here."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A LONE HAND.

FROM a window of the Scoville parlor Lieutenant Teake watched the paymaster and his wife and daughter walk slowly in the direction of the office. The young officer had affected a cheerful attitude as they went out, but now there was a cloud on his face, and his heart grew heavier and heavier.

For the last ten minutes Teake's watch scarcely had left his hand. Before returning it to his pocket, he saw that it was five minutes after ten o'clock. With a sigh, he turned and walked to the hall. He hesitated; then strode slowly into the dining room.

"Fing!" he called.

A shuffling sound came from the kitchen, then the Chinaman, smiling as if he had been listening to one of the greatest jokes in the world, appeared in the doorway.

"You haven't started with that letter to Captain Pengrove," Teake said.

"All light—all light—all leddy. I go velly queek. All leddy."

"Wait half an hour," directed Teake suddenly. "Half past ten—go at half past ten. Do you understand?"

Fing Lee nodded joyously. "Yes—yes," he answered eagerly. "Laf hour—laf plas ten. All light—all light."

"That's it, Fing—you've got it right," said Teake approvingly. "And now there is another thing. I've been up two nights. I'm tired—sleepy, Fing. I'm going to sleep, in Captain Scoville's room. Don't wake me up when you come back."

"All light—all light."

And, while Fing was chuckling, bobbing his head and rubbing his hands, Teake left him. Passing slowly through the hall and up the stairs, the lieutenant drew from one of his pockets a key that had been left with him by Scoville. It was the key to the desk in the study.

Upon reaching the second floor, Teake halted and looked over the banisters. All was still below. As the lieutenant entered the study, which was in the rear of the house, he took from one of his pockets the wallet which contained the nine hundred dollars and the sunburst. Moving quickly, he opened the desk and thrust the wallet into one of the pigeonholes. This done, he closed the desk and locked it.

Glancing behind him to assure himself that the door communicating with the hall was closed, Teake passed through that which opened into Scoville's bedroom. This he left ajar.

In the paymaster's room the lieutenant removed his coat, threw back the bedspread; then, still wearing his collar and shoes, stretched himself on the bed. Lying on his side, he crossed his arms over his face in such a manner that, while they would conceal his eyes from any person who might enter the room, he still was able to command a view of the door that opened into the study.

Teake had occupied this position on the bed for less than five minutes, when he began to realize that he would have serious difficulty in fighting off that sleep which cheated nature was trying to force upon him. So heavy did his lids become, that he feared that if he once closed them, he would be unable to keep awake. Time and again, however, the lids closed against his will, but when they did so, he roused himself with a start, and lay blinking at the study door. Once, fancying himself again talking with Welliver, he began muttering incoherently, and his arms moved from in front of his face. As he tried to rouse himself, he weakly wondered why it was that he was trying to wage this desperate struggle against natural rest. He had been unable to find a reason for this, when it seemed to him that Pengrove, sitting beside him on the bed, was laughingly threatening him with a tennis racket.

In another moment the figure of Pengrove faded, and the drowsing man imagined that Mary Scoville was trying to urge Colonel Hurleigh's horse through the door.

"Whoa!" Teake murmured faintly. "Whoa!"

Again, almost involuntarily now, he tried to rouse himself. With a powerfull effort he raised his lids—ever so slightly.

Mary and the horse—mere fancies of a brain that was disordered by exhaustion—had disappeared, but where Teake had seemed to see them in the doorway, now wavered something more startling and strange. At first it seemed to be a shadow—dark, impalpable, and sinister—a shadow like that of death waiting at a sick-room door.

Then, quickly, the impresion of darkness was dispelled, and Teake, with all his senses now alert, saw a man standing there—a man whose face was neither white nor yellow, but which was suggestive of both—a man with slightly slanting eyes that had the effect of the glow of a lighthouse lantern, suddenly seen through a storm by the captain of a rudderless ship.

It was a Chinaman, slightly crouching, and with hands hidden in the wrinkled junction of his long, black sleeves. But was it Fing? Fing's round face always had been bright with smiles. The face of this man was hard as flint; the searching dark eyes, which burned so strangely, were cruel, merciless. Yet the man was Fing.

Now thoroughly awake, and with every nerve aquiver, Teake knew that a gaze as keen as that of a hawk was watching him with an intentness that would permit no movement or change of color, however slight, to escape his scrutiny. Fearful lest he should see something that would bring a telltale expression to his features, he closed his eyes tightly and shifted his position a little as a man might do in his sleep. He dared not move the arms, which, in an unconscious moment, he had withdrawn from his face.

As the seconds passed, Teake fell to wondering what it was that was concealed in the invisible hands of the intruder—a knife or revolver, perhaps—it might be both. Not for a moment did the lieutenant doubt that the Chinaman had opened and read the letter he had been instructed to deliver to Pengrove, for it was, of course, written only for the purpose of being read by Fing, being so phrased, however, that it could have done no harm had it been delivered to the person to whom it was addressed.

But now, for the first time, Teake realized that he had blundered. He had reasoned that Fing, listening at the dining-room door, and understanding that the nine hundred dollars and the sunburst were in the paymaster's desk, would take advantage of his first opportunity to get them and escape from the fort while the only occupant of the house was asleep. The lieutenant had thought that Fing would be satisfied with this, but now he began to suspect that the Chinaman, knowing that all evidence against him was in the possession of Teake, would be tempted to go to greater lengths. Even at the risk of being known as the perpetrator of the act, he would try to take the life of the man whom he regarded as his arch-enemy. Then, too, Fing might suspect that a trap was being laid for him, and that so soon as he should succeed in getting away from the house, Teake, who only had feigned sleep, would rise from the bed and overtake him.

Teake, who had not suspected that an attempt would be made to take his life, now was unarmed, and therefore was wholly at the mercy of the man who had appeared in the doorway. At close quarters he would have a chance, but if Fing carried a revolver he would be master of the situation as long as he should remain beyond the reach of his intended victim.

Into the mind of Teake there now flashed the hope that the Chinaman would approach closely enough to use a knife, instead of a noise-making revolver, if, indeed, he came for the purpose of assassination. This would afford an opportunity for self-defense. But scarcely had this idea entered his mind, when it was dismissed. He knew that even if he felt the point of a knife at his breast, he must give to Fing Lee no cause to suspect that he was not sleeping. By overpowering the Chinaman, the lieutenant might be able to save his life, but the moment he made a move in self-defense he would bring to an unsuccessful end the game he was playing. The successful working out of his carefully prepared plan could be accomplished only by causing the China-

man to leave the house with the wallet and its precious contents in his possession. Then it was essential that some person other than Teake should bring to light the contents of the pockets of Fing Lee. So long as there was a single chance that the Chinaman would make off with the wallet, leaving the young officer unharmed, the man on the bed must make no move to protect himself.

Once more, as Teake lay with closed eyes, the intruder seemed to be moving as a shadow. For more than a minute the room was as silent as the tunnel of a deserted mine. Then a creepy feeling worked upward along the lieutenant's spine to the roots of his hair as a board creaked in the middle of the floor.

The slant-eyed man was stealing toward him.

Trying to keep from breathing quickly, Teake cursed his folly. Why, he asked himself, had he not arranged to watch the house from some place of concealment without? Why had he not taken one or more men at the fort into his confidence?

Again the creaking of the floor set his blood tingling. The intruder was only three or four paces distant now. Teake knew that a single leap would bring them together. Involuntarily his muscles seemed to be setting themselves for quick action. Lying still, however, he continued to breathe regularly.

And now to the young man's nostrils came an odor that there was no mistaking—an odor suggestive of kitchen cooking and Chinese tobacco. Then a change seemed to come over the atmosphere of the room, which made it close and stifling. It was only with an effort that Teake continued to breathe with the regularity that had been natural before.

As the seconds passed, the lieutenant feared that the throbbing of his temples would be observed by the man he could not see, but whose burning gaze he seemed to feel. Then, suddenly, a great fear seized him, and almost changed his purpose. Into his nostrils stole an odor that he was quick to identify—the odor of chloroform—and at that moment he heard a faint, gurgling sound which indicated that the intruder was emptying something out of a bottle—probably onto a sponge.

Ever so faintly, Teake raised one of his eyelids. Just below his chin he saw the sheen of a keen-edged knife. He lowered the lid again. He knew that it was with only one hand that the intruder was manipulating the bottle. The other was poised for a death-dealing stroke. Death, or life with a prolonged period of unconsciousness, was the choice which Fing Lee was offering to his victim.

But, even at this moment, the fire of defiance flamed fiercely in the mind of Brigman Teake, who did not doubt that two or three quick movements, followed by a heavy blow or two, quickly would free him from the peril that threatened him. Discretion soon regained its ascendency, however. He doubted whether Fing had opened the desk, and, even if he had done so, and the wallet was in one of his pockets, the absence of a witness to the finding of the sunburst and money would render valueless all that had been accomplished. By the use of chloroform Fing might get a three or four hours' start from the fort, but it still was so early in the day that he either would have to keep under cover for a long period, or expose himself to the risk of speedy capture, for in that section of the country Chinamen were few, and rarely failed to attract curious attention.

Stronger and stronger grew the odor of the chloroform; then, as his senses began to reel, Teake knew that in this brief period of indecision fate had marked his course

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE GHOST TRAIL.

WHILE Teake, fresh from his bath, had been donning his new uniform in the barracks, a creaking farm wagon, drawn by a couple of sturdy mules, had stopped in front of the post hospital. From the wagon descended Doctor Lowe, the post surgeon. A minute or two later a stretcher was

brought out from the building, and to this Corporal Bayne was transferred from the blanket on which he had lain on the wagon floor. Half an hour later, washed, and with his wound carefully dressed, he lay on an immaculately white cot.

Overcome with fatigue and faintness, incident to loss of blood, Bayne had slept long and deeply while he was being borne from Mission Creek to Fort Tilton. Now, refreshed by the ministrations of his attendants, and a large glass containing a combination of milk, raw eggs, and whisky, he lay at ease.

It was not long before Dobson, who had learned of the wounded man's arrival, called at the hospital to make inquiries concerning his condition. The attendants did not want to admit him at first, but Bayne heard his voice, and pleaded for company. So Dobson, being admitted, sat beside the cot, and was told all that had befallen the corporal after he and Teake had started north from the gully at Mission Creek.

Dobson listened, with ever-increasing wonder, to the narrative of the wounded man. Bayne described how, soon after he left the ranch, his horse went lame, how he suspected that the animal had been doctored by Tichborne's order, so that its rider might be pursued and relieved of the valuables which had been intrusted to his keeping; and how he had been led to believe that Pengrove, still alive, was a prisoner at the Cross-bar-star. Then had followed the story of Pengrove's rescue from the silo, where, guarded by two drunken men, he was nearly smothered in a mass of grain; of the flight from the ranch, the delayed pursuit, the appearance of Teake and Welliver, the fight with Tichborne's men, and, finally, of the conduct of Welliver, who, turning suddenly on the corporal, had shot him through the shoulder.

"And then, Dob, there happened the strangest thing, I think, I ever seen," Bayne went on. "I was hard hit, and the shock of that there ball in my shoulder sort of stunned me, and set me tremblin' so all over it seemed like I couldn't keep my seat. But, somehow, I kept my eyes on John Welliver, and my sight was clear. I heard the sarge call to him—sharp and kind of hollow-like—and John wheeled quick and turned his gun on sarge. But Teake was too quick for Honest John. He drew his bead, and the ball went true. John wilted, and dropped his gun. As he rode away, sarge looked toward the captain, who was just clear of his horse. I saw the captain fire, and sarge's mount went down. I yelled to the captain, who ran toward me. When he come up, he was swearin' at the sarge. I told him how sarge shot Welliver, but he didn't seem to believe it, at first. Then, when he looked for sarge, he was gone. On his dead horse the captain found the missing box. The captain got me on my horse again, and, somehow, things got so mixed up after that I don't remember 'em. First thing I knew, the doctor and a couple of the boys were pilin' me into a wagon. Now, what's been happenin' since?"

Dobson soon told the little that he knew. He described the return of Burton, Pengrove, and Teake, how he had found the lost money packages in the blanket roll, the scene he had witnessed in the colonel's office, and how, later, he had seen Teake, in the uniform of a second lieutenant, cross the parade ground to the Scoville cottage, stopping on the way to talk with the major and captain, who had accepted cigars from him.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" the corporal muttered moodily. "The captain wouldn't have took no cigar from sarge if he thought—— But what about the Scoville end of it, Dob? Has anything happened to let the paymaster out? For a while it did look mighty like the old man was crooked, and his daughter and the sarge might be in on the deal."

Dobson shook his head gravely. "It's mighty funny, Bayne, and the boys aren't able to make head or tail of it yet," he said. "Teake and the old man look pretty rocky this morning, and Teake is with him now. What's more, signs are plenty that they're being watched."

"What about Broderick?"

"Tom Broderick still says the paymaster's chink gave him the letter he took to Teake, but he's all-fired worried. They've still got him locked up in the guardhouse."

"Chinks is mighty peculiar customers, Dob," Bayne said reflectively. "It's funny, Dob, but it seemed like, whether I was sleepin' or wakin' in that there wagon, I was hikin' along the ghost trail."

"The ghost trail!" Dobson muttered wonderingly.

"Yes—along with a chink."

"What the deuce is the ghost trail?" Dobson asked.

"The back trail, Dob—that there trail that winds along among the things that used to be, and folks we used to know. It's——"

"I know," Dobson sighed. He paused, then asked: "But how about the chink?"

The wounded man looked thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"Well, Dob," he said, "there's a lot about that chink, and I can't get it off my mind none too quick. That's one reason I was so dead anxious to have them let you in to me this mornin'. Once I shot at a chink, and the ball went through John Welliver."

"You shot John Welliver!" exclaimed Dobson incredulously. "You never spoke of that before."

"I'll tell you know. Three years ago it was—while I was down in New Mexico with the second battalion of the Seventeenth—and Lieutenant Growder was assigned to help a secret-service man named Linfield run down Jim Wong. Jim was the son of a rich Chinese merchant of Honolulu, who had a German-American wife, makin' Jim only a half-breed, you see. Jim was sent to school over here, but got fired; then he mixed in with a New York crowd, which put him more to the bad. At last he went in for forgin', and also took a whack at blackmailin' a rich feller that hired him as a butler. Hong got off on bail, and, first thing you know, the rich feller was found dead, stabbed in the back, at his country place. It then come out that several other chaps who had got in bad with Hong had died mysteriouslike; but, somehow, the folks that was after him couldn't never put over the evidence that the court required. Next thing that was heard of Wong was that he had hooked up with a bunch of Western counterfeiters, and that the secret service was after him. Then the secret-service feller that was closest on his trail suddenly disappeared. I tell you, Dob, that feller Wong is death's own shadder."

The corporal stopped; then, after a little pause, he asked for water. When he finished drinking, he went on:

"Well, as I was tellin' you, Dob, Lieutenant Growder, of my troop, was detailed to help Linfield dig Jim out of a dobe village, and he took me along with him. When we got to that village, we found chinks was somewhat numerous, and Linfield soon got reason to believe he wasn't far from the particular chink he was after. We'd only been in the place a few hours, when, while I was sort of scoutin' around, I run across Honest John Welliver, sittin' by himself and drinkin' booze in a corner of a gamblin' hell.

"I didn't know John by sight, then, but one of the fellers in the place pointed him out to me. I knew him well enough by reppertation, though, and that reppertation was peculiar. Honest John had the snakiest and most roundabout way of gettin' what he wanted, and foolin' the law, of any man what was engaged in the art of annexin' other men's property in the West. Nobody ever could get Honest John with the goods, though everybody seemed to know he got 'em.

"The very night I seen John Welliver, that feller Linfield was found dead in one of the stalls of the stable where he was keepin' his horse—knifed in the back. Lieutenant Growder, who was game as they make 'em, Dob, already had a line on Wong, and got some sort of information that made him know it was Wong who knifed Linfield. Then he located Wong in a little bunch of dobe houses just outside the village, and just before dawn the two of us went out to get him. I had a pretty good

description of Wong, who, if it wasn't for a slant to his eyes, would seem more like a white man than a Chinee, and I was the first to see him in the window of a dobe house. He was drawin' a bead on the lieutenant, and I fired at him. But, just as I pulled the trigger, he disappeared, and I saw a white man's head. My bullet dropped the white man, and I run forward. At that moment the lieutenant fired, and I saw Wong disappearing from another window.

"With our revolvers in our hands, the lieutenant and I entered the house. On the floor of the room into which we had fired, lay John Welliver. Wong had disappeared, but a little line of blood that led into an adjoinin' room showed he had been hit. Try as we would in the next two days, we couldn't find a trace of him.

"The ball from my revolver had gone through Welliver, just missin' his heart. We got him to a hospital, more than sixty miles away, but we couldn't prove anything against him. He'd gone to the dobe, he said, as he'd gone several times before, to get a chink to cook him a Chinee dish he was somewhat partial to. He got well, and the government let him go. A short time after this, Lieutenant Growder was shot while he was ridin' all alone, about six miles from our post, and I've always had it in my mind he was killed by Wong."

"And the shooting of Welliver out yonder started you to thinking of that chink?" Dobson asked.

"In a way it did, Dob," Bayne answered. "Just before I come to Fort Tilton, I met one of the old boys of the Seventeenth, and he told me he had run across Welliver, travelin' with a chink down Fort Leavenworth way. I've seen a whole bunch of chinks, Dob, since I had that run-in with one down in New Mexico, and nearly all chinks look alike to me, but when I was comin' across the parade ground, a couple of weeks ago, I got a good look at the one the paymaster has in his cottage. There was somethin' about that feller that struck me queer, but I didn't think much of it just then. All the thinkin' come to me after Honest John Welliver lodged that bullet in my shoulder last night."

Dobson, on whose face the light of new intelligence was beginning to dawn, looked anxiously at the wounded man.

"You don't think, Bayne, that——"

"You know, Dob, when a ball plows its way into a feller, he's likely to get feverish, and fever brings on strange thoughts. And so, first thing I know, I was hikin' along that there ghost trail, and somethin' sort of give me an idea that there was a chink runnin' after me, always dodgin' out of sight when I looked around. At last I seemed to get a good look at him. Then I saw it was the chink at the paymaster's, but just as I said this to myself, I got another peek, and I saw the feller was Jimmie Wong. That give me the idea they was one and the same."

"You believe that now?" Dobson demanded earnestly.

The corporal nodded solemnly. "Just as sure as the Creator of this great universal plan made little apples, Dob," he said. "That there chink at the paymaster's is Jimmie Wong—the foxiest criminal and blackest murderer west of the Mississippi."

Dobson whistled softly, and was about to speak when Doctor Lowe appeared. As the surgeon saw Bayne's visitor seated beside the cot, he frowned and walked toward him.

"This won't do, Dobson," he said curtly. "Bayne has a fever, and should be allowed to rest. You'll have to leave him now."

The visitor rose quickly, and he flushed as he patted a shoulder of the wounded corporal.

"Good luck, old boy," he said, and left the room.

Upon leaving the hospital, Dobson halted on the walk in front of the building and looked thoughtfully across the parade ground to the barracks. He was about to start in that direction, when his gaze wandered to the Scoville cottage. There, on the porch, he saw the flutter of feminine apparel, and a moment afterward he recognized Mary Scoville

and her mother. Then the paymaster appeared.

"Teake will be coming next," Dobson muttered.

But only the three Scovilles left the cottage and started in the direction of the post offices. They had proceeded only a little way when Mary, leaving her parents, cut across the parade ground toward the hospital.

Dobson, moving closer to the roadway, took out his pipe and tobacco pouch, and, as he filled the pipe, looked meditatively toward the barracks.

"Confound the surgeon!" he muttered. "Bayne had something more on his mind that he wanted to get off of it. Why couldn't Lowe have let us alone? It looks to me as if the corporal has some sort of suspicion that the paymaster's chink knows more about that robbery than he's willing to tell. Broderick says he got that letter from him."

The thoughts of Dobson were thus employed when the daughter of the paymaster drew near. She nodded pleasantly, then stepped toward him.

"You have been in to see Corporal Bayne?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," the private replied, as he touched his hat.

"From one of our windows I saw him being taken into the hospital, and I thought I would drop in to see how he is getting along," Mary said. "How is he? Is the wound serious?"

"It is thought not—only through the shoulder, Miss Scoville," Dobson replied. "He has a fever, though. A fever always follows a wound like that."

"I'd better not go in to see him, then, perhaps," the young woman said. "When you see him again, will you tell him I called?"

"Certainly, Miss Scoville."

"I suppose they soon will be making a sergeant of Corporal Bayne," Mary went on, with a smile. "There is a vacancy in your troop now, you know."

"Yes, ma'am," Dobson answered thoughtfully. "I saw Sergeant—Lieutenant Teake go by in his new uniform a while ago. He won it fairly, ma'am."

"Yes," said Mary.

"I sort of have it in my mind to find him now, Miss Scoville," Dobson explained.

"He's pretty busy now, I'm afraid," replied Mary, flushing slightly. "Is it concerning a matter of any great importance, Dobson?"

The trooper hesitated.

"Well, Miss Scoville, I hardly know," he said. "Bayne, who came back pretty feverish, has some queer ideas about a chink—a Chinaman—and it may be it would be better if Lieutenant Teake——"

Mary Scoville started, and the color faded from her cheeks. For the last hour Brigman Teake had been responsible for keeping a Chinaman uppermost in her thoughts.

"What Chinaman, Dobson?" she asked wonderingly.

"One Bayne used to know—a pretty dangerous sort of fellow when he was caught in a corner."

"He isn't here—at the fort?" she demanded quickly.

Dobson looked uncomfortable as his gaze fell to the ground.

"Well, why do you not speak?" asked Mary.

"Bayne's fever may have made his mind wander a little," the trooper said. "He thought, though, he had seen the fellow at the fort."

"The only Chinaman at Fort Tilton is the one employed by us," said Mary.

"I know," Dobson answered diffidently.

"In what manner was the Chinaman Bayne had in view regarded as particularly dangerous?" the young woman asked.

"Bayne says he was a forger, counterfeiter, robber, and was pretty handy with his knife and gun—when the man he was after wasn't looking for him. His specialty seemed to be getting his enemies in the back."

"Oh!" Mary gasped, and, white as chalk, she gazed with frightened eyes toward the house which she had left less than ten minutes before. After a little pause, she turned quickly to the trooper. "Do you think Lieutenant Teake knows anything of this?" she asked.

"I'm afraid not, Miss Scoville. That's why I thought I'd better tell him what Bayne told me."

Mary Scoville was trembling now. Teake had told her he suspected that Fing had been eavesdropping at the study door. She remembered, too, that it was in Fing's presence that the young officer had placed in the wallet the nine hundred dollars he had been counting. Was it not possible that the Chinaman had found some reason to believe that he was under suspicion, and that it was from Teake that he had most to fear? In that case, he might be tempted to leave the fort at the earliest possible opportunity, with all the valuables he could carry with him. He had learned that the nine hundred dollars was to be locked in the study desk. And it was in the study that Teake was going to sleep while the Scovilles were out of the house.

Dobson, who was watching her furtively, saw her face grow haggard. "You are ill, Miss Scoville?" he said apprehensively.

"No—no!" she faltered. "But you must go there—quickly—to our house, and tell him all that you have told me. He is there—alone—with Fing."

While the agitated young woman was speaking, a clattering sound came from the roadway, near the entrance to the fort. Both turned sharply.

"What is it, Dobson?" Mary asked.

"It's Lieutenant Markley, with the detail that went on to the Cross-bar-star," replied the trooper. "They've got Big George Tichborne with them, and something in a wagon."

"Don't let that stop you," Mary pleaded. "Go! Wake Lieutenant Teake, who is sleeping in father's study, in the rear of the second floor of the cottage. Go!"

CHAPTER XXX.

A FATEFUL HOUR.

BEWILDERED by the startling effect that the revelations of Bayne's suspicions had produced on Mary Scoville, Dobson, impressed by the young woman's earnestness, started at once in the direction of the cottage. Walking briskly, he was well on his way across a corner of the parade ground when he saw a figure waving to him from a window of Major Burton's quarters. A moment later he recognized Captain Pengrove.

Quick to understand that Pengrove wanted to speak with him, Dobson had no other course than to proceed in that direction. He was ascending the steps that led to the porch when the door of the cottage opened, and the captain appeared.

"Come in here, Dobson," Pengrove directed.

When the trooper entered the hall, Pengrove, who was frowning darkly, closed the door behind him.

"What's the trouble, Dobson?" the captain asked.

"Lieutenant Markley is back with the detail, sir," Dobson answered.

"I know that," Pengrove said irritably. "But you were talking with Miss Scoville just now. Through my field glasses I saw that she seemed to be a bit upset, and you seemed to be heading for her house. Has anything gone wrong? Did Lieutenant Teake send for you?"

"No, sir. The fact is, sir, Bayne, who is quite a bit feverish, got a strange sort of notion in his head as he was being brought back to the fort. When Miss Scoville was questioning me about Bayne's condition, she led me on to tell her what it was he said. When I told her, it seemed to alarm her."

"What was it you told her?"

"I told her that on the way back to the fort, the idea had come to Bayne that the Chinaman who is employed in her house was a man he met before he came to this post—a Chinaman who had killed an army officer in New Mexico, about three years ago."

Pengrove gave a start, and a pallor suddenly overspread his face.

"You don't mean Growder—Lieutenant Growder—of the Seventeenth?" he demanded quickly.

"That was the name Bayne said, sir."

"The name of the Chinaman was Wong?"

"Jim Wong, sir."

A low exclamation issued from the lips of Pengrove, and he seemed to hesitate.

"Miss Scoville was agitated when you told her this?"

"Yes, sir. When I told her that Wong was a desperate character, she said that Lieutenant Teake was sleeping in Captain Scoville's study, and must be informed of what Bayne had told me."

"Sleeping, eh?" Pengrove muttered. "Heavy as they were, there was no sleep in Teake's eyes when I saw him last. Unarmed, perhaps, and thinking he is dealing only with an ordinary Chinaman, he's stacking up against the trickiest cutthroat in forty States. Get up to Major Burton's room, at the head of the stairs. Go right in and shake him until he wakes. He sleeps hard, so don't be afraid to go at him as if you meant it. Get him down here at once."

Pengrove then hurried to a telephone that hung on the wall. As he called the number of Scoville's house, Dobson bounded up the stairs.

A minute later Burton, followed by Dobson, hurried down. The major, red-eyed and stupid from heavy sleep, was sullen.

"Well, Pen, what is it?" he demanded, when he was only half the way downstairs. "What's happened?"

Pengrove, who still was standing at the telephone, placed a hand over the transmitter..

"Major, when we met Teake a few minutes ago, he told me he had some sort of a lead in this affair of the robbery," he said.

Burton quickened his pace, and soon was at the captain's side. "Well?" he demanded eagerly.

"Since then, he's got all the Scovilles out of the house, and is alone in there with the Chinaman," Pengrove went on.

"What of it?" Burton growled wonderingly.

"Bayne thinks that Chinaman is the 'Copperhead'!"

White-faced, the major drew back, aghast.

"The Copperhead!" he muttered. "Jim Wong?"

"Yes. Teake, apparently not knowing who he is, seems to have him under suspicion. You know Wong's reputation for quick work and mysterious get-aways. Stop!"

Turning quickly to the telephone, the captain called:

"Hello!"

A moment later he snapped the receiver on the hook.

"I've been trying to get the Scoville cottage," he explained. "The operator says he can get no answer. But we know that Teake and Wong are there."

Over both officers had come a sudden calmness. Dobson saw that both were thinking quickly.

"We've got to get that chink—alive!" Burton muttered. "If the three of us go armed to the house——"

"I'll go alone," said Pengrove. "But we'd better have some of the boys spread out around the Scoville place, in a manner that won't excite suspicion."

Burton frowned thoughtfully. "All right," he replied, after a pause. "I'll find a gun for you. Wait!"

As the major ran up the stairs, Pengrove, followed by Dobson, moved quickly to a window of the parlor which commanded a partial view of the Scoville cottage. Scarcely had the captain looked out, however, when he stiffened suddenly.

"For the love of Heaven!" he exclaimed. "Mary Scoville is going in!"

It was plain that the young woman, who now was only a few yards from the house, had seen Dobson, whom she had urged to hurry to Teake, turn aside and enter Major Burton's cottage, and, therefore, she had determined to rouse the lieutenant herself.

In a moment Pengrove, calling to Burton, was in the hall again. Without pausing, he crossed to the telephone and took down the receiver. To the operator who responded he said:

"Miss Scoville is just entering her house. Keep ringing until you get a response, then let me have her immediately. Don't lose a second."

"What's up now?" asked Burton, hurrying down the stairs with three belts and as many holstered revolvers.

Dobson explained the situation quietly and quickly. The major looked anxious.

"If that chink is the Copperhead, he's not likely to have much consideration for any woman who gets in his way," he muttered.

In a few minutes Pengrove, with his ear to the receiver, heard a woman's voice on the wire.

"Hello!" it said.

"Is that you, Miss Scoville?" the captain asked.

"Yes, it——"

"This is Captain Pengrove, Miss Scoville—Miss Scoville!"

A quick, half-smothered cry had sounded in the receiver, then all was still.

Pengrove, slamming the receiver on its hook, turned a livid face to his companions.

"The Copperhead's at work!" he said hoarsely. "Come, Burton!"

With a low imprecation, Dobson seized one of the belts from the major's hands. The distinctions of rank had disappeared. Three horrified but resolute American men were thinking as one.

It was Captain Pengrove who gave the first order. "Dobson," he said, "watch the back of the house, while the major and I go in."

Immediately after leaving the Burton cottage, Dobson took a course that would lead him to the rear of the Scoville home. He had gone only a short distance, however, when he saw something that caused him to halt suddenly, and glance quickly toward the major and captain. They, failing to see him, moved on.

The object of Dobson's attention was a figure that just had issued from the rear of the Scoville cottage—the figure of a man of medium height, and who wore a dark shirt, and a pair of rusty-looking trousers which were tucked into well-worn boots. On his head was a discolored sombrero. In the appearance of the stranger was something suggestive of a saloon hanger-on or a cowboy out of employment. Dobson, however, had no recollection of ever having seen the man before.

But what had the stranger been doing at the Scoville cottage?

The man, appearing to look neither to the right nor the left, was taking a course which would lead him past the water tower and over the northern line of the post reservation—a course which was at right angles with that which Dobson, moving eastward, was following.

For several seconds the trooper was in doubt as to how to proceed. The three men had started out after the Chinaman, and Dobson had been ordered to watch the rear of the house. Was this stranger who was walking away a confederate of the desperado who was suspected of being Jim Wong? Or might this be Wong himself?

Again Dobson glanced helplessly at Burton and Pengrove. Now, however, he saw that Burton was running rapidly toward the cottage, and that the captain was proceeding northward. Pengrove, too, had seen the stranger, and was undecided as to what he should do. At length, halting, he beckoned to the trooper. As Dobson ran to him, the capitain called:

"After him—after him, man! Keep him in sight, but don't try to get up with him. I'll be with you presently."

As the captain hurried after Burton, who had now reached the cottage, Dobson looked toward the little group of office buildings. In front of the commandant's office were clustered the mounted men of Lieutenant Markley's detail. A glance in the direction of the barracks showed, here and there, an unmounted but saddled horse.

"A shot or two in the air will bring somebody quick enough," the trooper muttered, as he set out after the briskly walking stranger.

The man in the discolored sombrero now looked over his shoulder; but, though he could not have failed to see that the trooper was following him, he did not change his pace. He was heading for the stone heap at which Teake had met Mary Scoville on the night she

had given him the sunburst. Around one side of this he finally disappeared.

Again Dobson looked behind him. He saw that men were leaping into the saddles of the horses near the barracks, while those who had been in front of the commandant's office were spurring their tired mounts in his direction. Pengrove was running toward him from the cottage.

That telephone messages had been sent from the Scoville cottage was apparent, and these had stirred the garrison to sudden activity.

At full speed now, Dobson ran around the corner of the stone heap. Scarcely had he made the turn when he saw the fugitive, with one hand in the bosom of his shirt, crouch down among the stones. Seeing his pursuer so close at hand, the man rose and faced him. He was grasping a revolver.

The trooper halted, then advanced slowly.

"Good hunting, stranger?" Dobson called.

There was no answer, but from the other side of the stone heap came the sounds of hoarse commands and hurrying hoofbeats.

Captain Pengrove, mounted now, was the first to reach the scene. When he came to Dobson, he reined in suddenly. Then, clutching his revolver, he leaped from his horse, and, followed by Dobson, strode quickly to where the stranger stood, silent and sinister, like a wounded grizzly at bay.

Pengrove had taken only a few steps when he halted abruptly. At first the fugitive, whose sombrero shaded his face, had appeared to be a Caucasian, pale and with close-cropped black hair. Now, however, the slanting black eyes betrayed the Mongolian, and the captain was quick to see that the man before him, without a queue, was none other than the one who had been known to him as Fing Lee, the household servant of the Scovilles.

"The game's up, Fing!" Pengrove called. "Raise your hands! Be quick!"

The fugitive hesitated. The grim-visaged captain was looking at him over the barrel of a revolver, but the features of the Chinaman were as expressionless as if they had been carved of wood. His gaze wandered to the troopers, who, in twos and threes, were appearing around the ends of the stone heap. Then, with a little flourish, he flung from him the small revolver he had drawn, and raised his hands.

"Come here!" the captain commanded.

The Chinaman, with hands still upraised, stepped forward. At a signal from Pengrove, Dobson and two other troopers seized him and strapped his hands. Then all started for the guardhouse. Arriving there, they found Colonel Hurleigh, and some officers who had gone in with Big George Tichborne and other prisoners.

The commandant looked wonderingly from the Chinaman to Pengrove.

"What's that fellow doing here?" the colonel asked. "You telephoned for men to help you chase a fellow who had broken into the Scoville house. This is Scoville's servant."

"He's chloroformed Miss Scoville and Brigman Teake," Pengrove explained. "What's more, his name is Wong—Jim Wong."

The Chinaman started as if he had felt the lash of a whip. The colonel's usually florid face turned white.

Pengrove smiled grimly, as he addressed his prisoner: "I suppose that if you had suspected I knew this when I asked you to raise your hands, you wouldn't have dropped that gun of yours so quickly," he said.

Wong was silent. The loud, husky laugh that echoed through the guardhouse was from the black-bearded lips of Big George Tichborne.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE WELLIVER WAY.

A GLANCE from the commandant quickly ended Tichborne's mirthful outbreak; then Colonel Hurleigh turned to Pengrove. "Has your prisoner been searched?" he asked.

"Not yet, sir," the captain answered.

"Then search him now. When that is done, lock all the prisoners in sep-

arate cells, and allow no communication between them."

To Dobson was assigned the task of searching the garments of the Chinaman. As this proceeded the eyes of those who watched grew wider. The first object found was taken from inside the prisoner's shirt. It was the wallet that had been on Colonel Hurleigh's desk only a few hours before. Upon opening it now, the colonel found nine one-hundred-dollar bills and a diamond sunburst.

"It seems as if the fort wasn't big enough to hold these things," he muttered. "I wonder who is going to get them next. If they were mine, I'd nail 'em down."

When one of the hip pockets of the prisoner was reached a worn pocketbook of black leather was found. This, too, was opened by the commandant. From it he drew a slip of paper and two keys. As he examined these curiously, his face lengthened.

"Send for Captain Scoville," he said shortly.

The other objects found appeared to be unimportant.

"That's all," said the commandant, when the search was finished. "Now lock up all of them. Pengrove, when Scoville gets here, bring him round to my office. Teake has been chloroformed, you say?"

Pengrove replied in the affirmative.

"Get Lowe to him at once."

"He has been notified, and probably he is already there."

Shortly after the commandant reached his office, the surgeon telephoned that Teake, having been aroused, was recovering rapidly from the effects of the drug, and was anxious to see the commandant as soon as possible. He would be able to be at the colonel's office within half an hour, Lowe said. The doctor also reported that Miss Scoville, who had failed to see her assailant before she succumbed to the influence of the drug with which she was overpowered, soon would be herself again.

Having learned from Pengrove and Dobson all that had occurred after Dobson's visit to Bayne in the hospital, the commandant had the Chinaman taken before the wounded corporal, who looked at him long and searchingly.

"He's Jim Wong, the Copperhead," Bayne said at last, with conviction.

Handcuffed now, the Chinaman was taken to the guardhouse to await the arrival of Teake and Scoville, who was permitted to escort Mrs. Scoville to her home.

When the colonel, Burton, Pengrove, Teake, Scoville, and Markley assembled in the room which had been the scene of the inquiry that had been held earlier in the morning, Dobson and three other troopers brought in Wong and Tichborne.

Teake was the first to tell his story. After describing how his suspicion first had been excited by the discovery that the Chinaman was eavesdropping outside the study door, he went on to tell how, by opening the door between the parlor and dining room in the Scoville house, he had contrived that the soft-footed servant should hear enough to inspire him with a desire to open again the study desk and make off with the valuables it contained. The letter addressed to Pengrove, which was so lightly sealed that Wong would have no difficulty in opening it, was written for the purpose of giving the Chinaman to understand that, being under suspicion, he would have to get away quickly, as his arrest was imminent. The lieutenant also explained that, as soon as he was able to shake off the effects of the chloroform, he had found that the desk still was locked. Upon opening it, however, he discovered that the wallet and its contents had been removed, thus proving that the robber had in his possession a duplicate key.

"But whether or not he was caught with the goods, I do not know," Teake added anxiously. "Though I am convinced that the wallet was taken by him from the house, it is possible that he succeeded in concealing it somewhere in the course of his flight."

The young officer's face cleared as Colonel Hurleigh took the wallet from

his desk and emptied its contents on the table.

"Found on the person of Jim Wong by Captain Pengrove," explained the commandant, who then produced the shabby pocketbook and held it out to the paymaster. "Did you ever see this before, Scoville?" he asked.

The paymaster shook his head. Opening the pocketbook, the colonel took out a slip of paper and a couple of keys.

"Are you able to identify these?" he queried.

The face of Scoville blanched.

"The keys are duplicates of those of my office," he replied, when he had examined them. "This slip is one that I had in a secret drawer in my desk. It contains the combination of the office safe."

"Well, Teake, that lets us out!" exclaimed Pengrove. "The League of Mutual Distrust that was organized in this office this morning——"

"There is more that must be explained," interrupted the colonel grimly. "We still have to learn how this man, even though he possessed keys to the office and the combination of the safe, found it possible to enter the paymaster's building while it was supposed to be guarded by a man of the Twenty-second. Bring in Broderick."

Impressed by the sternness which still dominated the words and manner of the commandant, the members of the little group sat in silence until a couple of orderlies brought in Broderick, who was haggard and unshaven.

"Broderick," the commandant began severely, "the money which was taken from Mr. Scoville's safe while you were on guard the other night has been recovered, and the man who took it from where it belonged is under arrest. The evidence we have against him is overwhelming, but we still lack information concerning the exact part you played in the affair. It will go easier with you, perhaps, if you make a clean breast of all you know before others are asked to make clear your relation with the crime. From whom did you get the letter you gave to Sergeant Teake?"

"From that chink there," Broderick answered doggedly, as he nodded in the direction of the Chinaman.

"You lie!" the prisoner said quietly.

Broderick looked at the speaker sneeringly.

"You still persist in saying you got that letter from Wong?" asked Pengrove.

The face of Broderick clouded suddenly, and he gave a start. "From Wong!" he exclaimed wonderingly.

"Yes, Jim Wong," the captain said.

Broderick's face was livid now. "The Copperhead!" he gasped. "No—no!"

"Who gave it to you, then?" the colonel questioned.

Broderick seemed on the verge of collapse. "I got it—an hour before Teake went on duty—from a man I never saw before—a man who met me near the stables," he faltered. "He knew something I had done before I enlisted—something that would have got me into more trouble than I could get out of in many years. He told me if I didn't give to Sergeant Teake a letter that was to take him from his post, and then take his place if he asked me to, he would have me broke—worse than broke. He also told me that when Teake went away I was to keep to one end of the office building, and not to see or hear anything until the sergeant came back. If I could do all this, he said, he'd give me fifty dollars. But if I failed, he would have me broke. I did it, sir. That's all."

"What sort of a man was the one who gave this letter to you?"

"A tall, thin-faced man, with long, brown, stringy hair."

"Take him out to the wagon, Markley," the commandant directed quietly.

Teake looked perplexed. Pengrove glanced at him significantly. All were silent until Markley and Broderick returned. Broderick's face was almost as gray as that of the dead man he had been taken out to look upon.

"Did you see your man?" the colonel asked.

"Yes," Broderick answered hoarsely.

The commandant glanced interrogatively at Markley.

"It was John Welliver," Markley said.

"While Teake was away did you see or hear any one enter the office?" the colonel asked.

"I heard some one go in the door; then I heard sounds at the back of the building. I had promised, though, to keep to the north end of the building, and I kept my word."

"Why did you say this Chinaman gave the letter to you?"

"Because I had seen him give a letter to Sergeant Teake, in the barracks washroom, after he came back with Wendell. I thought it would sound more natural, and I had an idea the Chinaman wouldn't——"

"Wouldn't have sense enough to deny it, I suppose," put in Pengrove.

"That's all for Broderick," said the commandant. "Take him back to the guardhouse, and bring Tichborne here."

Lieutenant Markley and Dobson undertook this task. When the three were gone, the colonel turned to Wong.

"I'm afraid, Wong, that, as you are wanted on charges that are even more serious than the one against you here, we scarcely will be able to get at you for this," he growled. "That we have you with the goods is plain enough; but, naturally enough, we are a little curious to know just how far Welliver was mixed up in this thing. He's dead, you know, so nothing you say here can hurt him."

"It can't hurt—much," replied Wong, with a grin. "I'll tell."

Teake smiled faintly as he realized that this was not the sort of English he would have expected from Fing Lee.

"Why did you come to this part of the country—with Welliver?" the colonel asked.

Pengrove, rising quickly, placed a chair for the Chinaman, who had remained standing.

"You are very kind—because I talk," said Wong laughingly, as he seated himself. He turned again to the commandant. "Yes, I'll tell. Welliver and I came here because we thought no one knew us—so much as in other places. Welliver was always afraid to be seen with me. And I was afraid, for everybody must not know Welliver and Chinaman work together. Alone, nobody suspect Fing Lee. Alone, nobody suspect Honest John. Together, everybody suspect Welliver and Jim Wong. So when world got hot, Welliver went to Tichborne. Fing Lee got job at fort.

"Fing Lee's mind got to keep busy. He like to listen—to learn much. Keyholes very good, and doors not all shut. Then desks is good. When desks keep locked all night and all day, Fing Lee know something mustn't come out. Something very good. Maybe money. Fing Lee want to know. While Captain Scoville sleep, Fing Lee get keys. Stuck in wax. Make more keys. That pretty good. Open desk. That better. Found paper in little drawer. Fing Lee know safes, and paper was safe talk. He tell Welliver."

The opening of the door interrupted the speaker, and immediately afterward Markley and Dobson entered with Tichborne. When the newcomers were seated, Colonel Hurleigh nodded at the Chinaman, who continued:

"I tell Welliver, and we put up job. Welliver alway so shy of trouble, trouble and Welliver never meet. Some other man alway get stung—never Welliver. Welliver great joke while cover his track—but never Welliver get stung—alway some other feller get stung for Welliver. So Welliver find Sulloway. Sulloway easy mark. And Private Broderick have bad record which Welliver know. Good.

"Now, see. At keyhole I hear Captain Scoville very hard up. Need money. Lot in safe. Why he not take from safe? He a fool. We make people think he take money anyway. But how get in office past guard? Broderick there sometime. Must wait. Then Welliver get mad. Come out with Sulloway, and want me and Sulloway to kill guard. Then some one say Sarge Teake guard paymaster office to-night. I see way. Get Broderick to take his place. Letter from Miss Scoville to sarge. Good. That let Broderick out. Teake never say he away from post. But who write letter? I write like any-

body—beautiful write—but bad English. I see. I tell trombone man's daughter to write letters for joke. I give her other people's names, but I tell what must go in English. So she write it right way. I copy like Miss Scoville write—very good at that. I give to Welliver one for Broderick to give Teake. I throw one for Miss Scoville in Mrs. Hurleigh window at reception. Man pick up, and give Miss Scoville. Good? Very good."

The narrator paused as he rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Then Welliver sneak off," he went on. "I know why. He Honest John—not want to be seen and get into trouble. I get in office, open safe, take box, give box to Sulloway through window, then we both run. I know when Welliver get box he kill Sulloway and hide box lone tree on Buffalo Hill. We get later. Welliver and Jim Wong very good pals—long time. All off now. Very well. Very good. Welliver dead. Jim Wong hang. All right. Very good. That's all."

All started and stiffened suddenly as a loud, raucous laugh issued from the bearded lips of Tichborne.

"All of which is just one hoss on me!" the ranchman cried; then, sobering suddenly, he growled: "Well, blast his hide! And just to think of me—George Tichborne—bein' done by that long bonebag I could have crushed in the holler of my hand. Honest John! Bells of Gehenna, boys, just think of me—me expectin' and callin' on Honest John to help me keep that there box of yallerbacks he'd lifted plum out of the center and midst of the peerless army of the U. S. A. My, but that there honest feller sure did lay the lather onto me—with all his talk about the power of the army. He weren't afraid of no sheriffs—— Oh, no—not Honest John! But he always kinder prided himself on keepin' from doin' anything that would get the army or secret-service fellers on his trail. That was Honest John—his theories. And then, at the last, to be bowled over by a army feller what was wearin' civilian breeches belongin' to Fred Sulloway! Oh, it was too bad! Well, honesty may be the best policy, after all, but it took them there breeches of Sulloway's to ride on to victory after Honest John climbed out of them, didn't it, colonel? Hey?" And Big George laughed uproariously.

Teake, frowning, rose and crossed to one of the windows. Again he seemed to see the sunken face of the man who had freed him from the cellar at the Cross-bar-star, and whom he afterward had been compelled to shoot in self-defense. In Welliver's relation to the robbery and its resulting situations there still was something that baffled him. Then a thought came to him, and he turned to Wong.

"You have said that the box was to be hidden on Buffalo Hill," he said.

The Chinaman nodded. "Lone tree—Buffalo Hill—back of Buchanan's," he replied. Scarcely had the words left his lips, however, when the smile faded from his features, and he asked quickly: "You not know?"

"The box was found in Red Stone Hollow," Pengrove explained.

Wong frowned, looked at the speaker searchingly, then shook his head.

"Red Stone Hollow!" he exclaimed. "I not know. Welliver told me lone tree. Buffalo Hill."

"Five miles beyond the Buchanan ranch house," Markley explained.

"I know the place," Pengrove muttered meditatively.

"How did it get to Red Stone Hollow, then?" asked Teake moodily.

"Tichborne, what do you know of the shooting of Sulloway?" the commandant inquired.

"Well, Fred Sulloway was always a bit of a mystery to me, colonel," the ranchman drawled. "Welliver come to the Cross-bar-star 'bout two months ago. He'd had a bunch of detectives on his trail, and they was pressin' him pretty close, he said. I'd heard there had been a chink mixed up with him from time to time, but I never knew for certain about that, and Welliver never said nothin' 'bout no chink to me."

"Was Sulloway with you at the time Welliver arrived?" Pengrove asked.

"No. Sulloway didn't show up at

the ranch till about three weeks ago. He had done a lot in the holdup line, but Fred never was no good by himself. He tried to get next to Welliver, and they seemed to be good friends. Sometimes they would go off together for a day at a time—usually bein' gone most of the night. Welliver always made folks believe he was sort of strong on women. He told me once he had a dame out this way—at Buchanan's—and he only could see her after dark. I reckoned that was what brought him south so often.

"Night before last, Welliver and Sulloway didn't show up for supper. Havin' hit the booze pretty strong, me and most of the boys turned in early. 'Bout dawn some of us started to look up an outfit of mine that had been workin' northeast along Mission Creek. Close by the gully on the trail, we come up with Welliver, ridin' alone, and with his face 'bout the color of night. Welliver was mad clean through. He said Sulloway had done him dirt, then had gone bughouse, and tried to shoot him. He had a notion he had put a ball into Sulloway, but he wasn't sure. Anyhow, Sulloway had made a clean get-away on his mule. We fellers hadn't seen Sulloway, and I didn't see him again till, ridin' with Captain Pengrove, I see his body, half undressed, lyin' in the gully, with a cavalry uniform beside it. And that's all I can tell you of the shootin' of Fred Sulloway."

"Then what you said about seeing Sulloway with the box——" began Pengrove.

"That was all lies," confessed the ranchman cheerfully. "Looks like Sulloway tried to get off with the goods, and, after John shot him, kept right on north and buried the box in the holler."

"After which he made a note of it," muttered Pengrove.

For more than a minute the silence was unbroken. Then the commandant spoke.

"All seems fairly clear—now," he said musingly. "Does any one want to question the prisoners further?"

"There still is one thing that is not clear to me," replied Teake. "I cannot understand why Welliver, having secured that box, should have released me from the cellar, and then allowed me to ride away with the box, even though it was full of worthless papers."

"I've thought of that," said Pengrove. "Already I have a theory. According to what has been said of him this morning, John Welliver had a peculiarly roundabout way of keeping out of trouble. If it had been known that he skipped out with that box, he would have had after him, not only Tichborne, but the government as well. He then planned to have it thought that you had escaped with the box and money. With the money rolled up in the blanket on his saddle, he would take part in the pursuit, and, in the excitement, make his own get-away. He told you to keep to the east of the trail. When he got his chance, he went to the west, but there he met you. He had killed one Tichborne man, and had reason to believe that he had all of them against him. Accordingly, the appearance of the man with the paper-stuffed box was welcome, for two could put up a better fight than one. Fortune further favored him, for Bayne and I, also pursued, increased the defending party to four. When Tichborne retreated, Welliver had no further use for friends. More than this, he would have some reason to believe that, after the box was opened, we would suspect that he had got away with the contents."

A soft chuckle caused all to turn to the Chinaman.

"Yes, yes," he said, nodding delightedly. "That like Honest John. Great man—Honest John—very great man."

"That's all, then," the colonel said, as he rose and stretched himself. "Major, see that the prisoners are taken back to the guardhouse. Pengrove, you will return to duty. Teake——" He paused and looked at the young lieutenant thoughtfully, then went on: "Teake, with your commission came an order granting you a week's leave, after which you will be required to report for duty as second lieutenant in the Seventh Cavalry—the 'Fighting Seventh.' Teake, during your furlough, we should be

glad to have you here, and I have reason to believe that we have some one at the post who may be able to persuade you to stay. In the matter of quarters——"

"There's a room in my cottage——" Pengrove began.

"And mine," Burton said.

"But you're to be my guest at mess to-night," called Markley, as he urged the prisoners to the door.

Teake started as he suddenly realized that the hand which was grasping and shaking his was Pengrove's.

"And now I want you to let the colonel try one of those cigars," the captain said.

Fortunately, Teake was well supplied, and, while the cigars he passed around were being lighted, he looked for Captain Scoville. At this moment, the paymaster, whose face was fairly beaming, entered from the hall into which he had slipped. Taking the lieutenant's arm, he said quietly:

"You'll have to put a stop to these mess invitations, Teake. You will dine with us to-night, of course. I've been talking with Mary over the wire. She is quite recovered, and is jubilant over the turn events have taken. She insists that you send the officers of the Twenty-second about their business, and come to her at once."

Teake turned suddenly as a hand fell on one of his shoulders, and he looked into the twinkling eyes of Colonel Hurleigh.

"Yes, go where you belong," the colonel jocularly urged. "And take this wallet with you. It contains nine hundred dollars—and a diamond sunburst. Being a woman, she will know what to do with the money; but I, being a man, am getting a little tired of having this sunburst boomeranging back to me. Let us hope that when it flashes its radiance on the social functions of the Seventh, it will have conquered its reprehensible impulse to travel."

THE END.

It Couldn't Be Worse

CRUSTY OLD GENT (to restaurant keeper, after sampling the special brand of "delicious pie"): "I see you advertise that you make your own pies."

"Yes, sir," proudly replied the proprietor, anticipating a flattering testimonial.

"May I offer a suggestion?" said the other.

"Certainly, sir; pleased to hear it."

"Well, then, let some one else make 'em!" was the unexpected retort.

Pat Scores One

AN Irishman with a very thick head of hair was one day the center of a ring of English farmers, who were endeavoring to crack jokes at his expense.

"Why," exclaimed one of them, "you've got a head of hair like a stack of hay."

"Ah!" returned Pat, unruffled, "that's just what myself was thinking. That accounts for my having so many asses around me."

Leaves Hope Behind

PA, what does it mean when it says a man has arrived at years of discretion?"

"It means, sonny, that he's too young to die and too old to have any fun."

The Sea Decides

by Frank A. Shaw

(A COMPLETE NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW SKIPPER ARRIVES.

THERE were some who said that Edginton lacked ambition. He seemed always content to remain aboard the *Breeze*, a sailing ship of a somewhat antiquated type, in preference to aiming for the higher prizes that were obtainable aboard the big passenger steamers. But the fact was that existence on a crack mail boat had never appealed to him—there was not enough of the eternal combat that his soul loved in such an environment. He used the sea because he loved it in all its varying moods, and he knew that only on a sailing vessel could one get down to real grips with the element.

"Gold lace and white paint don't hit me," he had told Frodsham, lately captain of the *Breeze*, on one occasion, when the future was under discussion. "Might as well be manager of a swagger hotel as officer of a big liner; got mighty little to do but look pretty; the ship finds her own way. No, this tub is good enough for me, and here I'm going to stay for a bit."

"You wait till you meet the right girl," Frodsham had warned him. "Then you'll think of the money and the time ashore—same as I'm doing. I've got a chance in a big line, and I'm going to take it—windjammers haven't any fascination for me."

But Edginton had reminded him of one or two fights they had fought in company, and the skipper's eyes had grown dim with memories.

"Aye, it isn't a bad life—but when a woman shares it, you've got to make it better than this." Such had been Frodsham's pronouncement.

This morning, while pacing the disordered poop deck, Edginton found his thoughts turning to the words of his late shipmate. "I wonder if he was right," he said thoughtfully. "No, I don't think so; a man can't expect as much from a woman as he gets from the sea. Only—Frodsham would say it's a question of giving, not taking, with a woman; but then he's in love. Must be funny to be in love.

"I'll miss him," his thoughts ran, returning again to Frodsham. "But—I don't think he's chosen the better part—oh, no!" He glanced aloft, and saw a rigger employed on the main-topsail yard. From where he stood he made out a deficiency in the man's work, which he criticized with some pungency. The rigger bellowed an incoherent reply, and Edginton's eyes dropped to the deck—to see a big, broad-shouldered man stepping gingerly over the accumulated refuse that littered the planking.

"Wonder who this is—seafaring man?" he said to himself. And a moment later he received the first slight shock. He had hoped that his previous service might be reckoned in his favor; the vacant berth as captain attracted him, for it is no inconsiderable thing to know that for stretches of many months at a time you are absolute arbiter of the destinies of some score men, and of a ship that is almost a living thing.

"I am Captain Haigh, the new captain," said the big, broad-shouldered man, mounting the poop ladder. "Are you the mate?"

"Yes, sir. My name is Edginton." He was studying the newcomer with the cool criticism of the man who knows that a whole year must be spent in another man's almost unbroken society. Captain Haigh was a magnificent specimen of manhood; there was no doubting that. His chin was square, but there was a cleft in it; his eyes were wide, of a singularly limpid blue. He was very handsome. There was the suggestion of a viking about his appearance; and Edginton, who had read a good deal, found himself thinking that with the winged helmet on his bronze hair, with a double-bitted ax in his right hand, and the gleaming armor plates rising and falling on his splendid chest, he must approach the actuality of an artist's dream of virile manhood.

"I'll take over straight off," the newcomer announced. "They tell me Captain Frodsham isn't here. Suppose you'll have the inventory and all the rest?"

"Yes, sir. Frodsham is getting married. Got a berth in steam. Hadn't much time to waste." Edginton was thinking that he had allowed himself to dream falsely—the command was not for him. Of course, he was quite young still. Perhaps he had been a fool to hope as he had done; but he was conscious of a bit of a pang, nevertheless.

"It would have been easier if Captain Frodsham had waited for me," said the new commander, laying stress on the "Captain," as if to show the mate that he had taken a liberty. "However, I've no doubt we shall manage. Shall we get started?"

During the going through of the inventory, Edginton found himself more than once studying his new superior, and wondering what there was about him to dislike. Superficially Haigh was pleasant enough—breezy, seemingly good-natured; but there was a suggestion of unreliability in him; he did not ring altogether true. Edginton upbraided himself for his severe criticism, but he was a judge of men; much intercourse with Frodsham had helped him to build big ideals, and he was not satisfied.

"Expect it's my disappointment, though," he told himself. "Hang it! I believe I am disappointed at not getting the command." He was disappointed; there was no doubting the fact. Not that the extra pay appealed to him in the least, although a captain's stipend was more than double his own. He was entirely alone in the world, and knew that not a single living soul depended on him to any degree whatsoever. What money he made was his own, and he did not spend it all, because a trace of refinement in his nature kept him clear of the unseemly orgies which deep-water men occasionally indulge in when ashore. The truth was that he was so essentially a sailor that the land had but scant attractions for him; and after he had replenished his kit, and eaten a civilized meal or two ashore, he was ready, nay, anxious, to fare forth again upon the bosom of that ocean which satisfied his every need.

"Everything seems to be all right," said Captain Haigh, checking off the items on a lengthy list. "Have a drink, Mr.—what did you say your name was?"

"No, thanks, sir. My name is Edginton." He gazed straight into the skipper's eyes, and those big, innocent orbs appeared to flicker ever so slightly. And yet, Haigh was so handsome, so abounding with power, tall and big, that he should have been able to return stare for stare.

"It's no use; I don't like him," said

Edginton. "I don't! Can't tell what it is about him, but there it is. Hope it'll wear off. This doesn't promise well for the voyage."

CHAPTER II.

A FEW CHANCE WORDS.

FOR a brief moment the thought occurred to Edginton that it might be a wise plan to resign there and then, and seek a fresh employment. But he had served all his time as an officer aboard the *Breeze,* and, while acknowledging her many imperfections, she had endeared herself to him in many ways. It is so with a ship that you have humored and striven with, that you have wrung from the jaws of destruction after many a hard-fought fight. You seem to have given her a bit of yourself; and she seems to know it.

Captain Haigh reached for the spirit bottle, and helped himself somewhat liberally; his hand was not oversteady, the neck of the bottle chattered a little on the rim of the glass.

"If you're through here, sir, I'll go on deck; there's a good deal to be attended to," the mate said, and went away on receiving a nod. Out on deck he breathed more freely; the sense of constraint and half dislike had left him.

"It's because it comes hard to see another man in old Frodsham's place; that's the trouble," he told himself. "He's a fine lump of a man, too—not a skinny rat like Bob. Ought to have any amount of pluck, a man of that size; and he'll probably need it."

Although he did his utmost to maintain an optimistic outlook, Edginton had to confess that he had miserably failed. The times had changed; there would be no more of the old camaraderie; no more standing shoulder to shoulder, as a tried and trusted shipmate, with the new skipper; this man would keep him in his place, never ask his advice. He sighed deeply, and recognizing the hopelessness of these musings turned to at solid work, seeking forgetfulness.

At dinner Captain Haigh, who quite evidently had applied himself more than once to the grog bottle, waxed loquacious. "I'm a bit sore at having to come down to a windjammer," he observed. "It isn't much of a catch; but it's a beginning. Burton & Halyard are going in for steam—perhaps you've heard; and a skipper from a sailing ship is pretty sure of getting a decent command in time."

"I hadn't heard," said Edginton, to whom the private matters of his owners did not appeal.

"It's this new partner who's tuning things up—getting the firm to march forward a bit. It's been a stagnant concern for too long, he says. I know him very well; as a matter of fact, he's married to a cousin of mine. Between ourselves, I shouldn't be surprised if he—well, if he wasn't—I don't exactly know how to put it—he wouldn't be ill pleased if this old tank didn't keep afloat forever. She's a bit of a wreck, isn't she?"

"Oh, she's a good old thing," said Edginton warmly. "I've seen a great many gales through aboard her, and in a way I'm fond of her. Lots of work in her yet, sir." He had not liked the placid stare with which Captain Haigh had favored him when he mentioned the ship's comparative uselessness to the new owner.

Haigh shrugged his shoulders, and seemed to give a plainer hint: "She'd be worth more to Mr. Lanyard at the bottom of the sea than on the top of it, though. Well, who knows? She can't float forever."

Edginton said nothing, because there was really nothing to be said.

"A good man could take her anywhere, I dare say," went on the skipper. "And I'm that—a good man. If you ask about at some of the ports they'll tell you that Isaac Haigh is a pretty tough nut to crack. I killed a man out in Chile with a single blow of my fist. There's another man who'll never walk again—it was a bit of wrestling. I'm a terror when I'm roused, Mr. Edginton, I can tell you. It's a case of stand from under when my dander's up, let me assure you."

Edginton had met this man's type before in all the ports of the world, and he did not admire it. For his own part, he was a silent man, never given to bragging about his own exploits, which were extremely well worth bragging about. He knew, too, that the loudest voice does not always represent the stoutest heart and the most unflagging courage; but he mentally decided that Captain Haigh had imbibed too freely, and whisky has much the same effect as wine with regard to evaporating the bibber's wits.

"Yes, mister, let me tell you this: my word goes aboard this ship," continued Haigh, slamming his fist on the table with unnecessary violence. "Steward, fill my glass; you're as slow as—as slow as the doldrums. Get a move on, confound it!" The steward was an elderly man, of a meek and retiring disposition, and Edginton began to wonder if Haigh would have addressed the late cabin servant in a similar manner—but then the last man had been a buck mulatto, standing six feet six in his socks, and as big as the side of a house.

"Believe in keeping these swabs up to their work," said Haigh, opening his eyes widely. "Expect that chap's been allowed too much of his own way—spoiled, that's it."

"No, sir; not exactly. Frodsham didn't spoil those under him. He gave them fair treatment, that's all." He gazed squarely at the skipper as he spoke, and Haigh did not pursue the subject.

"Lanyard's coming down aboard before we sail," he went on at a tangent. "I'll introduce you to him—and let me give you a word of advice, Mr.—what did you say your name was—Eglinton?"

"Edginton, sir."

"Keep in with Lanyard; he'll have this company all to himself before another year's out. Burton and Halyard are both old-timers, ready to retire, anxious to go, if you'll believe me. And when Lanyard takes hold there'll be a lot of changes. The good men, like you and me, will go up; the rotters will go out. Mark my words, and back me up. I'm not one to forget a friend—or an enemy."

Edginton was glad to get out on deck and back at work. His feeling of dislike was rapidly growing. Two days later Mr. Lanyard appeared on board. Edginton was introduced to him. The new partner disappeared below in company with the captain.

It chanced that the mate, requiring a ball of marline, which he kept in the locker in his own room, went below. What he required was beneath the seat of his settee. He dived in head and shoulders first, and while groping about among a raffle of gear, heard Haigh's voice. Only a thin maple-wood paneling separated him from the main cabin, and the jointing of the panels was not perfect, for the *Breeze* was old, and she had wrenched herself violently in her twenty-odd years of service.

"No, I don't think we can count on him," said Haigh. "But that doesn't matter. It doesn't take an army of men to do a bit of a thing like that." And then, before Edginton could get his head clear of the locker: "And I've got your word that you say no more about that trifle. I get a quittance if the thing's done?"

"Yes, you'll get your notes back, every one; only make sure of it. Now, don't bungle the job. People get darned cute these days. You've got to stick to your story whatever happens."

"Trust me to do that."

That was all the mate heard, for having secured the marline, he extricated himself, and returned to the deck. At the moment the words he had overheard held no particular significance; later they assumed huge proportions.

The morning before sailing day arrived, and Edginton was extremely busy. In the afternoon the crew would sign on, but meanwhile the riggers must be inspected and the stores got aboard. It was while he was engaged in the latter task that he was hailed from the shore. Looking up, he beheld Evans, a man he had rescued a few nights earlier from some land sharks who had tried to cheat him out of his pay at the

gambling table, Evans having been in a decidedly tipsy state at the time.

"Can I come aboard, sir?" asked the man, and, receiving permission, he slipped nimbly over the narrow gangplank. He took off his hat, which is not a common occurrence among merchant seamen, and, fingering it sheepishly, he said:

"It's like this, sir: When I got home I found my young un—a little gel, no higher'n that—mighty ill, mighty ill. And—if it hadn't been for that money you saved for me, she'd have died straight off—as sure's fate. But it saved her life, sir. We got a good doctor; t'other wouldn't come again, as he hadn't been paid; and she's gettin' better fast—out o' danger. I'm uncommon fond o' that kid, sir—uncommon fond."

"Well, I'm glad to hear things went well, Evans. And now, I'm a bit busy here——"

Evans fumbled afresh with his hat. "Hang it, sir," he blurted out at last, "I'm grateful; I'd like to show it, too. I thought p'raps you'd let me sign on aboard here, sir. Lookin' at you at times like would remind me of that night when I was a blarsted fool, sir, and so —well, sir—you know what it is. I'd remember, and——"

He had no gift of lucid expression; but Edginton thought he understood. "I'll give you a chance, yes," he said. "Be up at the shipping office at three o'clock sharp." He turned away to his tallying of stores, and so did not observe the glow in the sailor's eyes.

CHAPTER III.

A COWARD'S ORDERS.

HALFWAY down the Channel the *Breeze* ran into a stiffening westerly blow that caused her to writhe and groan in misery. Edginton had much work to do, for her new crew was not shaping well. Evans, one who had never stood head and shoulders above the rest of his shipmates, now, by comparison, became a very man of valor. Perhaps, in his unthinking way, he was grateful to Edginton in that he had saved him from the results of his own foolishness, at considerable personal risk. At all events, he now worked well. He was the only real sailor among all the hands forward, the rest being dock rats and nondescripts, who, having failed in all other walks of life, had drifted to the sea, not knowing that she is an exacting mistress who demands a man's best, and even then is not satisfied.

Edginton had too much to do in rubbing his hopeless ones into shape to trouble himself much about his new commander. Haigh appeared to be an accomplished seaman, and the mate's fear that he was a drinker seemingly had no actual foundation, for, once away from port, the captain stayed perfectly sober. He was, in common with many merchant seamen, abominably nervous while in narrow waters, and he seldom left the deck. He interfered with the mate's management more than the mate liked, but Edginton explained at some length to himself that he could not expect the days of Frodsham's régime to be repeated.

It took ten days to drop the Lizard Light decently astern, and in that time the mate had done much to lick his crew into usefulness; although he admitted in conversation with the young second mate—a first-voyage officer—that he had no great hopes.

"Once we strike real bad weather—and we're in for it—they'll stow themselves away in the lockers and refuse duty," said Edginton. "We haven't enough of a stiffening of good men—the old shellback's dying out or going into steamers; times are too hard for him in sail. Meanwhile, we must do what we can."

The second mate, full of pride in his new capacity, had not the trick of handling men, and did not seem likely to learn.

It was now, when the ship was settling down, that Edginton devoted more than one hour or two to thinking over Captain Haigh and his manners. He did not trust the man; try as he might to like and respect him, he could not.

The man was by way of being a cheap bully—an appalling poseur; always striking attitudes on the poop, and roaring out commands in his Bull of Bashan voice, for the mere pleasure, so it would seem, of seeing the dock rats run and skip to obey.

"No, I can't size him up," confessed Edginton to himself one evening, when, the blackness of night having fallen over the face of the waters, he leaned across the pinrail and stared into the white-streaked immensity that burled and hissed overside. "And then—I wonder what he meant by his words that day—about the owners not breaking their hearts if the ship never came back? There was that conversation between him and Lanyard, too—a man might think that fishy. Well, well, it's no use making mare's-nests, and there's enough to worry a man in the ordinary course of events, without his seeking trouble."

He dismissed that thought, and allowed his memory to carry him back to other days, when Frodsham and he had worked together with a glad accord for the welfare of the ship, spending themselves in cheerful service, careless of the fatigue that grew upon them—glorying in the combat for combat's sake. But Frodsham was married now—Edginton had dispatched a telegram of congratulation a few hours before the ship sailed—married and settled down in steam, to lead an orderly life. Funny, thought the mate, why men should marry.

"I wonder," he said to himself, "what it is that makes a man fall in love with a woman? They do it—even the best of them."

He straightened and walked aft, the rustling sob of wind in the straining canvas aloft sounding in his soul like a lullaby of peace. Let other men tear their minds with abstruse problems; the sea was his mistress—his first love and his last.

"Don't shake her, Evans; let her go full and by."

"Full and by, sir," chanted the helmsman. "Beg your pardon, sir"—the spokes shifted slowly beneath his capable hands—"beg your pardon, sir, but—you wouldn't be above accepting a word o' thanks from me, sir?"

"Why, what bee's in your bonnet now, Evans?"

"No bee at all; but I'm uncommon grateful about that time you got me out of Happy Jack's den, sir. Got a note from my missus just afore sailing. The kid's better, going to be well soon—and it's you, sir, you. Uncommon fond of that kid, I am. She's a cunning little devil. Feel her hands clasp round your finger, sir, it sends little shivers up your arm, and down your back."

"So it's worth while being married, is it?" Here was a chance for the gaining of information.

"Blowed if I know, sir. It's got drawbacks, right enough. A man can't spend his money to suit himself altogether, but—it's when the kids grip your fingers, and laugh into your face, then it's—why, sir, it's better than a big spree ashore. I ain't got a lot o' words, but—it seems worth while then. And when that kid of mine smiled at me, an' her eyes was that heavy she couldn't hardly open 'em—why, sir, it got hold o' me by the throat, like as if I'd drunk a glass o' neat whisky; an' I couldn't help thinking as how if it hadn't been for you, sir—she'd have—she'd have—died." The last word came hoarsely, and the rough sailor furtively drew his jerseyed arm across his eyes.

"I wouldn't bother about it if I were you, Evans; and I wouldn't play the fool again."

"No fear, sir; I've signed the pledge now. No more grog for me; I've had my lesson." Once more the spokes twisted under his hands.

Edginton walked forward, glancing aloft at the shadowy swell of the sails on the main. What was this love of wife and child that gripped so closely at a man's heart? Was it a real thing, or was it only imaginary? He started to walk back, intending to question Evans again, but the squall broke with lightning suddenness. The *Breeze* swung over and over. A feather of spray whisked aboard; aloft was a loud cracking and straining.

"Luff, man, luff; shake it out of her!"

He ran to the wheel and lent his weight. Together the two men ground the helm down; but the ship remained heeled sharply, and the thudding clamor aloft increased. With the crack of a pistol shot the main royal parted, split from headrope to foot like a woman's handkerchief.

"Clew up fore and main royals; look smart there!" Edginton's voice pealed along the decks like a trumpet call. He left the wheel and hastened forward. The watch were moving slowly toward the clew lines; he sprang down into the waist among them, and hazed them until they quickened into a run. Two men in five knew where the ropes were to be found, but the men shrank away from the weather side. Sprays were whistling aboard.

"Get at it, you pack of soldiers; get at it!" He forgot matrimonial considerations in the rush of work. The royals must be stowed, and their stowing occupied his close attention; but when the fluttering canvas was reduced to quietude on the spidery yards aloft, when the men had started up the rigging, he walked aft again, thinking. Could a woman's kiss be sweeter than the embrace of a keen nor'wester? Could a woman's clinging arms be more desirable than the mad tussle with slamming, wetted canvas?

"Er—that the mate?" It was Captain Haigh, clinging to the mizzen swifter and peering into the darkness.

"Yes, sir."

"Get her shortened down. Look alive! Do you want the sticks out of her, man? Quick, for Heaven's sake, quick!"

"But—it's only a passing squall, sir—it's almost over now; and she'll stand up to more than this."

"Do as I say! Hang it, man, do you want us all sent to the bottom? Take those t'ga'nts'ls in at once; make the mainsail fast!"

Edginton could not but remember how he and Frodsham had, out of sheer devilment and a belief in the qualities of their ship, kept every stitch set through a stiffer squall than this, and had gloried in the *Breeze's* stoutness. They had not even started the flying jib; but here was the new skipper, a giant of a man, quailing before a capful of wind, and shortening down as though the tail end of a cyclone had struck them.

He roused the watch along, and the night grew full of the rumble of falling yards, the unmusical clamor of toiling men. The sailors grumbled, because that was their nature, and for once, conscious of something approaching disgust at his commander's pusillanimity, Edginton did not endeavor to instil a more cheerful feeling into them. The work was done, but slowly. Before the mainsail was bunted up and secured, the freshness of the wind had died away, and only a comfortable breeze was blowing.

"Keep her as she is; I don't believe in taking unnecessary risks," said Captain Haigh, when the mate walked aft and asked if he should cast the furled canvas loose again.

Edginton went to leeward of the poop to laugh in comfort. A royal breeze was blowing, and the ship was down to topsails. It was ludicrous; evidently Haigh was a cautious man. He would never set the seas on fire, and the mad delight of battle was not in his heart.

"There's one point I forgot to mention, Mr. Edginton." Haigh had walked over to leeward. "The boats—what about them?"

"They're all right, sir; sound, you know. I always keep them half full of water, to prevent the seams opening out."

"Yes, yes; but that isn't enough. There's not half enough attention paid to the boats in the merchant service. They should be swung out twice a week, and provisioned; the crew should be exercised; the carpenter must overhaul them regularly. Let that stand as an order. Keep water and biscuits in them constantly. If the ship went down we'd probably all lose our lives just for want of a little precaution."

"She's not going down, sir—trust her for that," said Edginton cheerfully.

Why, the old *Breeze* was fit to roar her clumsy way through the biggest snorter that ever blew. They'd proved it in the past. They could do it again.

"Never mind; attend to my orders. The boats must have special care. Who knows what a day or a week will bring forth? I must have the boats shipshape. I shall inspect them to-morrow."

The man was a coward, of course, and that in spite of his commanding appearance. He was a huge voice and an important figure, nothing more. Frodsham had more pluck in one of his delicate fingers than this giant possessed in the whole of his vast body. But he was his superior, and there was nothing to be done save bow to his dictates.

"Very good, sir; I will attend to it."

"Yes, do it in person; don't leave it to subordinates. The boats must work like a liner's, like a man-o'-war's. We will take no risks."

Eight bells sounded as he spoke, and Saunders, the second mate, appeared to take over the deck. Edginton informed him of what had happened, of the state of the ship, and went below. Turning in, he smoked a contemplative pipe, and as he watched the smoke wreaths curl to the deck beams above him, he found his thoughts turning to Haigh's womanish precautions. Then what he had overheard on that day when the owner came aboard inserted itself into his memory. He removed the pipe from his lips, and sat up, a look of consternation growing on his square, fearless face.

"He couldn't mean—no, no, that's ridiculous. Barrantry's too big a risk these days; it means professional damnation for the man who does it. But Lanyard is paying him for something, something under the rose at that. He doesn't want the truth to come out; people are getting darned cute these days, he said. Then there's what Haigh said about the boats. By Jove, if he tries anything of the sort——"

Edginton did not complete the thought, but his face grew very stern. And when, later, he fell asleep, the smile on his lips was still very stern.

CHAPTER IV.

A COWARD'S WAY.

GRAY, livid clouds drooped down to meet a gray, angry sea. Beneath the overhanging crests of the waves, topped as they were by crowns of dirty yellow foam, the hollows loomed blackly and full of grim terror. The wind boomed and clamored in urgent spite; it smote down on the *Breeze* as though consummating the enmity of a full score of years, and the fabric shuddered throughout her length at the impact.

She was weary from much striving. Ever since her bow had forced itself clear of the harrowing doldrums she had been called upon to battle fiercely for her life. The first sprays that she threw over her deck in latitude twenty-three degrees south had been only the forerunner of continuously pouring water, that stripped and bleached her like a bone.

She was shortened down until a casual glance might have read her spars stripped clean; but arching across the swinging, creaking mainmast was a ribbon of canvas that, in a smaller breeze, might have shown as a topsail. Now the fury of the wind lifted its foot out on the same plane with the yard that bore it. The chain sheets were strained to their utmost; but even so the area was enough to give the *Breeze* a considerable speed, for the wind was aft. She rolled across the watery mountaintops with a peculiarly distressful motion. Her rolls were angry jerks; it was as though she protested against this bridling. She was held in by the hand of her master, not allowed her full strength and speed; she could not do battle on equal terms. Like a restive horse chafing at the curb, she bucked and lashed out viciously; and the fashion of her going caused Edginton's heart to grow sick within his breast.

"She ought to be carrying topgallant sails," he muttered, expelling the salt from his lips. "And she's down to a topsail—in this. Heaven help us all." He had long ago been convinced that Haigh was a poltroon. Only a coward would see danger at sea where none

was to be feared, and for two easeless months Edginton had learned the measure of a man's caution, when that caution is born of fear. Yes, Haigh was a splendid sham; unlike his magnificent prototypes, the vikings, in all save his floating, tawny hair, and his golden mustache. The monumental edifice of his body held within it a soul as small and shriveled as a withered pea.

Full knowledge had been borne in upon Edginton's mind on a day in the tropics, three weeks back. The crew had come aft in a body, demanding to interview the captain over a question of food. They had come unexpectedly and swiftly; so swiftly, indeed, that Haigh had been unable to drag himself upright from the long deck chair which was his usual abiding place when the weather was fine. They had stormed up the steps, and the spokesman, a big, soft-fleshed Swede, had flung a kitful of pea soup at the captain's feet. The yellow liquid had splashed Haigh's drill trousers.

"Dot slumgullion vasn't fit for dogs!" shouted the complainer. "Ve ain't pigs here aboard, vas we? Mein fader's pigs gits better grub dan dat."

Edginton had paused beside the corner of the chart house, intent on the scene. He remembered occasions when men had come aft with similar complaints, and he remembered Frodsham's manner of handling them and reducing them to satisfied quiet. Would this man adopt the same measures?

No! Captain Haigh flinched; even Edginton, who was on his flank, could see that. The crisp pink of his cheeks faded a little. A hand that lay on the arm of the chair trembled nervously. He coughed and cleared his throat.

Edginton moved forward a pace, the fighter in him very much in the ascendant. At a word he would have rubbed the refractory spokesman's nose in the mess, and compelled him to eat it then and there. But the word was not spoken, and he was only second in command. The issue lay with the skipper, and none might interfere until the great one had had his say.

"What is the matter?" asked Haigh, in a voice that was peculiarly unlike his usual stentorian bellow. He removed his feet from their close proximity to the soup kit, and, bending low, wiped away the stains from his drill trousers. Edginton wondered if he had concealed his face from the gloating men to hide its uneasiness.

"Der matter—ve ain't pigs! Dat's pig swill," growled the Swede, and a chorus echoed his words. Haigh coughed again, and paid particular attention to his nether garments. Then, in a quavering voice, he shouted:

"Steward!" The old steward, weak-limbed, shortsighted, a wreck of a man, but good at his work still, was bellowed for in three or four different languages. He came falteringly. Then did Haigh's voice take on something of its old, resonant loudness.

"This mess here—you're to blame! What do you mean by feeding such swipes to the men? You, I mean, confound it—you!" He was working himself up into the weak-willed fury of a small-souled man. "You, blast you! Giving the men cause for complaint like this. I'll log you; I'll rub it into you. I'll make you sit up and take notice."

Edginton, disgusted, looked on, noting the glance the skipper cast at the men, as though asking for their approval. He saw those men interchange smiles of satisfaction, and his gorge rose. He made a forward movement.

"Wouldn't it be fairer to examine the soup, sir?" he said.

"No, no—certainly not! I'm sure these men wouldn't complain without reason—quite sure. It's the steward—blast his eyes! I've had my eye on him for a long time. We're fed in the cabin like pigs! But I'll make him sorry for it—you see if I don't!"

"I'm doing my best, sir," said the steward nervously, his eyes twitching. "The soup's the same as you get in the cabin——"

"Silence! I'm speaking now! You do your work. If there's another complaint of this kind, I'll break you—send you on deck; disrate you, you—you dishwasher!"

The steward cringed. He was an old

man, and he, like others, had given hostages to fortune. To be disrated meant the impossibility of his ever securing any remunerative employment.

"There you are, men! That's the culprit. Your complaints shall be attended to. Now, go forward, please."

The men grinned and went, leaving the kit of soup lying at the captain's feet—at the feet of the man who, less than two months before, had expressed his intention of running the ship like a tyrant; the man who had bragged of killing another man with a single blow of his fist.

Edginton, hardly able to conceal his disgust, walked aft to the wheel, where Evans stood.

"What's wrong with the soup today?" he asked quietly.

"Nothing, sir; good soup. Ask me my opinion, sir, it's a try-on."

The mate walked forward, and met the captain face to face. Haigh was white and trembling, entirely unnerved, but he broke out at once:

"Never heard such insolence in my life! It's damnable!"

"Say the word and I'll make them pretty sick, sir—the dock rats!"

"I mean the steward, of course," said Haigh. "The men are quite right to complain. That miserable flunky is robbing them and putting the saving into his own pocket. I'll straighten him out, though. I'd have done it then, but I'm not feeling very well. I've got a headache. That whisky was bad."

"I think the men ought to be brought up, sir," said Edginton. "They're out for trouble. If you give in to them now they'll go farther and farther." He saw the captain flinch again at his words.

"No, no; they're right. Men must be fed to work hard. I'm glad they brought it to my notice. That steward needs a lesson. I'll make the ship hot for him now that I've got a handle."

The steward was old, feeble, almost a cripple—one who would not retort if driven to desperation. Edginton's disgust grew deeper and deeper, but he could say nothing. The laws of discipline sealed his lips.

"I'll go below now—this headache of mine——"

Haigh went away, drawing in deep breaths, swinging his right arm like a sledgehammer, posing always. Edginton waited until he had got safely below.

"Send Bergsen aft!" he shouted then to a man who was working in the main rigging.

The man came, walking bombastically. He had been patted on the back, and congratulated on his behavior; he had come to look on himself as a very fine fellow indeed.

"You vants me, mister?" He swaggered abominably, and Edginton's anger blazed out.

"Yes, I want you. That kit there. You left it?"

"Vell, s'pose I do? Der sgipper he say ve haf a right——" Crash! Edginton's fist took him in the jaw. He reeled away, his face puckering with the pain.

"Tell that to the skipper if you like. Now, pick the kit up, and eat that soup—stop, don't move! Go down on your knees and lick it up." The Swede cast one glance in his face, quailed before the steely glimmer of his eyes, but still stood where he was. A hand like the jaws of a vise closed on his neck and forced him downward. He protested, but his face was forced to the deck, and there he was held until the unsightly splashes were removed.

"If I hear another word of it I'll make you wish you'd died before opening your mouth," said Edginton. "Now, finish what's in the kit. And when you've done that tell the rest about it—and I'll attend to them."

CHAPTER V.

THE GIFT OF THE SEA.

EDGINTON heard nothing more of the incident of the soup. His momentary firmness had shown the foremast crowd precisely where they stood, and what grumbling took place afterward was effected out of his hearing. But the episode had served to quench the last spark of respect that he had for

his superior, and although he did his best to purge his thoughts of suspicion, time was when even against his better judgment he was compelled to the belief that Captain Haigh had some sinister secret on his mind.

However, the incident was over, and the crew were working well. Edginton paced the deck thoughtfully, now glancing aloft at the booming canvas, now casting an eye overboard at the white masses of foam that flew all-whither like fairy snow. And quite suddenly, his eyes roving from the level of the main-topsail yard to the horizon, he checked in his stride and seemed to stiffen in every limb. There was a box in the companionway containing glasses, and he made a sharp step; returning with a pair of binoculars, he focused them on the tiny object his trained vision had discerned.

"A boat," he said. "Yes, a boat." He polished the object glasses with the end of his muffler, for the flying spray dimmed his outlook, and gazed again. No doubt about it; the object was either a boat or some fragment of wreckage fashioned in the likeness of a boat. He threw a command over his shoulder, and the helmsman ground his wheel down a little. But the trifle that was well-nigh lost in the boiling waste of waters was too far to windward to be brought much nearer. The *Breeze* refused to lie higher, and the surging combers roared aboard with a zest that augured ill for the continued safety of the ship's fittings. The increase in her motion, the thunderous riot of the pouring water, and the slamming of the topsail brought Captain Haigh on deck.

"What is it?" He was a trifle red-rimmed about the eyes; his face was a peculiar gray color; he spoke through a husky throat. Edginton pointed, and as the skipper blinked unseeingly the mate said:

"There's a boat out there, sir."

"Oh, is there? I can't see it." A wisp of foam smote the captain in the mouth. He spat swiftly, and shivered where he stood. Perhaps he was affrighted by the clamorous immensity of the outlook. "Well, what of it? A bit of wreckage—that's all."

"It might contain people, sir. This gale's traveling with us. Some ship may have been lost—survivors." Conversation was at best but a disjointed matter; half a speaker's words were lost. Haigh clutched hold of a swifter and stared afresh.

"You've imagined it; I can't see anything," he said, and Edginton knew that he lied. He had seen the momentary narrowing of his superior's gaze. Haigh had stiffened as a man does stiffen when his attention is secured.

"It's there, sir, plain enough."

Haigh stumbled away, after a short stare aloft, and clung to the binnacle, peering into the compass bowl. "Off your course, aren't you?" he shouted to the helmsman, Evans. The sailor jerked his chin in the direction of the mate, to signify that he was acting under orders. Haigh motioned for the helm to be put up that the ship might resume her course, and the smoothing of the ripples in the topsail drew Edginton's attention to the fact.

"Mind your luff," the captain thundered. "Don't let her off—steady; luff, man, luff!" Evans grimaced and remained inactive; Edginton swung toward him.

"We'll never get a close view——"

"I ordered him to let her go off, Mr. Edginton." Haigh drew himself up with dignity. "The ship is uncomfortable——"

"But—good Heaven, sir, we've got to see if that boat contains anything. It's our plain duty. There may be people in her, dying—starving. It's a miracle she's still afloat."

"My orders are to keep your course," said Haigh. "If that thing is a boat, which I doubt, any one aboard her must be dead long ago." And then, not liking the gleam of contempt that came into Edginton's eye, he scuttled below. Evans grinned again, and looked to the mate for fresh orders.

"Steady as you go, Evans."

"Steady it is, sir."

The *Breeze* planed a wave top cleanly away, and threw it over her catheads

in a miniature Niagara. The white lane astern broadened and became more pregnant of speed. Edginton anchored himself to the weather swifter, and stared with all his eyes at the dim-seen object amid the flying spray. Of course, Haigh might be right. The boat's company, if indeed it had ever contained a company, would be dead of exposure or starvation long ago; but surely it would have done no harm to any man to halt for a moment to make sure.

He rubbed the glasses afresh, and concentrated his gaze. The white fabric was becoming more plainly visible as it drew abeam. He could see, too, a slight upheaval ahead of the boat's bow, as though indicative of a sea anchor; the craft was riding fairly well. And then—his heart began to pound; a curious flush heated him. He knew he had seen a minute fragment move above the spray-washed gunwale—something that might have been a signal. And, again, in his heart was a curious feeling, a strange, drawing sensation, as though spirit hands were outreached to pluck him toward the forlorn piece of flotsam. He was no believer in the occult; but the high tension of the air, charged as it was with electricity, and striving, worked on his feelings. The conviction grew that some one still lived aboard the boat.

"I must see for myself," he said. "I must! Hang it, there might be living people aboard her!" He shouted to Evans to luff once more, and the *Breeze* grew mad at the check. "If I ask the skipper's advice he'll tell me to go on," went the mate's thought. And he remembered the advice of some great man who said he preferred the man who knew when to disobey an order. "I'll chance it," he muttered. "Yes, by Jove, I'll chance it! Watch, lay aft!" His voice bit through the tumult as an electric flash bites through massed clouds; and the men came stumbling and sliding toward the poop. "Stand by to wear ship!" he shouted. "Square the main yard. Boatswain, get that foretopmast staysail loosed and run up; look alive." The *Breeze* swung away to the impulse of her helm, the broad lane of white that was her wake strayed well on the beam. The main yards creaked round; the fore yards followed—she began to gather way before the wind. "Get those fore yards pointed."

As the ship hung uncertainly Haigh reappeared on deck, and a glance told him the condition of affairs. His face grew purple, his eyes began to bulge. "Good Heaven, mister, what are you trying to do?"

Edginton had been so intent on his work that the captain's advent had passed unnoticed. As Haigh's hand closed on his arm he turned with a start. Then, without answering the skipper, he resumed his commands to the crew.

"Hands aloft; down with your helm!" he roared.

Evans obeyed, and ground down the helm. The *Breeze* shivered and leaped. A foaming mountain of grayish-green hurried over the bulwarks, and fell with the crash of thunder.

"Ease her, man, ease her!" Edginton had no thought now save for the skillful handling of the ship. His every care was for the fabric. He was fighting a battle against mighty forces, pitting his own puny skill against massed strength. And he saw that he was doing well. Deftly humored, the *Breeze* was creeping up to the wind on the other tack. The castaway boat was now to starboard and ahead; by dint of careful seamanship it would be possible to send her ahead until the boat was plainly within view.

Haigh was babbling weakly, his small soul shriveled within him at the appalling immensity of the raging sea. "I insist—I'll log you! What does this mean?"

The clamor attracted Edginton's attention after a while. He turned to face the captain, and the glint of tempered steel was in his eyes, changing to contempt swiftly.

"I thought I saw a signal, sir—thought it best to make sure. May be people alive in that boat."

"I forbade you; I said to go your

course!" yelped Haigh hysterically. "I'll have you disrated. I'll have you logged. This means—this means——"

"It would have meant something like murder if we hadn't tried," declared Edginton. "See, she's coming into view now." He did not stay to bandy further words. He sprang up the mizzen rigging, and the spray bathed him cruelly. He did not care; the curious exaltation of his soul was growing amazingly. A mad excitement that was not altogether born of the battling filled his being. From aloft it was possible to see almost into the interior of the boat, and the excellent glasses disclosed dark forms lying over the thwarts.

"There *are* people in her," he called down to the deck. And he descended like a squirrel. Face to face on the deck with Haigh, he spoke his mind, careless of consequences. "There are people there; they are probably alive. Will you order a boat away, sir?"

"No, no; I will not. It is death to make such an attempt. We are not required to imperil——" The steely stare of Edginton's eyes caused him to waver.

"They have a name for that sort of thing ashore," said the mate. "Cowardice. If you don't call a boat away I'll do it myself, on my own responsibility, and chance the rest."

"You dare not; I forbid it!"

A bigger sea than any before swept over the deck, and Haigh shuddered. Edginton felt a wave of disgust surge up to sicken him; the man was entirely abject now. Then—the boat was drawing abeam too swiftly. "Luff!" he shouted, and the *Breeze* shuddered into the wind and checked her way.

"I ask your permission to take a boat out there, sir," said Edginton, pointing.

"I refuse. A boat cannot live."

"That boat is living, and ours are bigger." The stronger will bore down the weaker; Haigh's eyes flickered. But he made a last attempt to assert himself:

"You will be responsible, sir, and I shall report this to the consul at——"

"I'll chance it," cut in Edginton. "Clear away that lee boat! Call all hands out!"

The men went to the boat; they cast its covering adrift; it was swung out. Edginton remembered the caliber of the crew when it was too late to turn back. These men were not cast in heroic mold, but if they would not go willingly to the rescue he would compel them to go unwillingly. He would drive them like slaves. It was no time for niceties of conduct. The sea was in its wildest mood, calling to the wildness in his veins.

"Five men!" he bellowed. "In you get—you, Bergsen; you, Hoffmann!" The two named shrank back a little. Edginton caught Bergsen by the collar and dragged him to the rail, pounding at him with his fist. "Ready enough to grumble—fine weather; go on, you swab!" he panted, and cast the man into the boat. The carpenter volunteered. The rest of the men growled like caged wild beasts, and breathed deep threats.

And then, skipping along the decks, cursing as he came, Evans appeared. He had flung the wheel into the skipper's hands, and deserted his post, because it had come to him that his tried and true friend Edginton might be in need. At that moment Evans reached heroism, for normally he was nothing of the hero.

"Here's one, mister; I'll go!"

The sailmaker made a hesitant step forward. He was bundled over the rail before he had time to change his mind; and then, only half conscious of the blows he had struck and the oaths he had volleyed, Edginton found himself in the boat's stern, throwing out an oar. The boat itself was screaming through the startled air. Her keel kissed the water, a wave dashed her upward. The tackles unhooked. She was away, soaring high, diving deeply. The ship swayed down as though to crush the tiny vessel, but the men, strengthened by fear, tugged at the oars; the lifeboat scrambled away. Followed a wild nightmare, when towering waves leaped up hungrily, when darksome caverns yawned; when the boat was tossed this way and that like any cork,

when the dank stench of the under seas was strong in the nostrils. Edginton awoke from his mood of mad daring, and felt the first twinge of fear bite at him; the sea was so immense, the boat so puny. Only by a miracle could the victory be won.

Then the fighting lust awakened to new vigor. He bent forward, hurling words of cheer and blame intermingled at his rowers, daring them to fail him now. Evans, tugging at a weighty oar, swore roundly, but worked hard. The man knew that if he looked over his shoulder his heart must turn to water; therefore, he kept his eyes fixed in an unseeing stare on his locked hands.

The other rowers were working automatically, creatures of habit. Oars were in their hands, and they pulled; but their souls were petrified within them.

Edginton stood up and stared through the spume. Somewhere ahead was a tossing white fragment that drew him forward like a magnet. He reached for the bailer as green water broke aboard, and bailed like a maniac. He shouted and swore. His voice grew husky, but his gestures were as threatening as the wildest of his words.

"In bow—steady all!" he croaked, and realized that he had gained a victory, for the boat was there ahead, almost within reach. And as the bowman reached for it something flickered again. There was life in the derelict craft. It was a woman—a girl. Her hair was dark with the water. Her clothing was saturated and clung about her. There were still, twisted shapes lying in the boat, but the girl moved slightly.

It required delicate manipulation to effect the transfer, but it was done somehow. The rest of the boat's crew were dead; a moment's examination was sufficient to draw that conclusion; but Edginton understood why he had been compelled to take the monstrous risk.

"Pass her aft," he said. "Pull the plug out of that boat. Sharp's the word!"

He hardly realized the dangers that beset him as he piloted the boat back to the *Breeze*. His heart was in a mad tumult of joy, in that he had given life to one on whom death had set its mark.

"You'll suffer for this," said Haigh darkly, when the boat was hauled up and the ship again stood on her course. "I'll have you broken, mister. You mutined."

"Time enough for that when we get to port," returned Edginton. "If ever we do." And he saw Haigh flinch suddenly. The captain did not continue the conversation.

CHAPTER VI.

HALF A SAILOR.

EDGINTON was aware of something in the nature of an actual shock when he entered the cabin. It was several days since the rescue, and so far he had not again set eyes on the girl. He had carried her aft, and delivered her over to the ministrations of the old steward. He had inquired frequently concerning her welfare, to be told she was slowly recovering, although her bitter experience must have tried her sorely; but not until now had he seen her face to face.

His first impression was that she was beautiful. A ray of sun shot down the skylight, and brought gleams of gold into her piled hair; next moment he thought she was not beautiful; then she smiled slowly.

She had contrived to clothe herself in some miraculous fashion. Her dress, though stained and worn, showed evidences of taste and care.

"Oh, how do you do?" he said lamely.

The sight of her had taken away his breath completely. When first he saw her, draggled and soaked, there was nothing of sex about her. She was hardly human—merely a bit of flotsam thrown up by the sea. But now he saw she was a woman, and beautiful. Her smile was a wonderment, and his pulses began to hammer. He had done a good thing to give life to this helpless piece of femininity. If he never performed

another meritorious action his life had not been lived in vain. Thoughts surged through his brain, but his lips could only voice lame sentences.

"They didn't tell me you were better. Hope you're none the worse—er—it is a fine morning," he stammered.

She watched him out of clear, gray eyes. She was appraising him in womanly fashion; and after a close survey she smiled again. Indeed, she gave a queer little nod, as though he had passed muster.

"Are you Mr. Edginton?" she asked him.

"Yes, my name's Edginton."

"I am Jocelyn Hargreaves. You are the officer who saved my life, after that terrible boat—— Oh, that boat! The steward told me all about it. Captain —I think his name is Haigh, is it not? —told me something about it, too. It was very brave of you to volunteer when he called."

"Oh, it wasn't anything; nothing at all."

She smiled again, leaning her chin on her clasped hands, her elbows on the none-too-clean cloth. "It might not be much to you, but it's a lot to me. I want to thank you for saving my life. I—I—it is not easy to put into words, but I am so grateful."

"You'll show your gratitude best by not saying anything about it," he managed to tell her. "It wasn't anything, really—the saving you, I mean. That is, it was something to save you, but the action itself—if you can understand what I mean. I fear I'm stuttering like a fool."

She nodded her head again. Seemingly she did understand. In fact, her next words shed light on her powers of understanding.

"You see, I'm half a sailor myself," she explained. "I was born at sea. But father was killed something over a month ago; and then—the ship was lost. Mr. Myers, the mate—my godfather, an old man—saved me. He made me eat his share of food, too, and I think he gave me water that he should have drunk himself. In a little while I shall be very miserable, because I've lost everything in the world—father, Mr. Myers, everything; but I want you to believe that I'm grateful."

"Oh, that's all right; and now, shall I ring for breakfast?"

Haigh entered at that moment. Evidently he had known the girl was to appear, for he had donned a collar and tie in her honor. He had shipped a blue coat with brass buttons, and his likeness to a viking was more pronounced than ever before. He greeted the girl with ponderous empressement, bowing over her hand; but his eyes were on Edginton's face the while, as if seeking there an answer to a question.

"I cannot tell you how delighted I am to see you recovered," was his greeting to her. Then he turned a compliment that brought a flush to the girl's face. "The ship seems brighter than ever she did before," he said.

It was evident that Haigh was at his ease with women. He talked well to the girl. He offered her sympathy in her plight, and declared that the entire ship must be racked for materials wherewith to clothe her. From time to time Edginton, studying her features without appearing to do so, decided that she was interested, and felt disposed to berate himself for a slow-witted fool, who had no gift of small talk.

Haigh made no attempt to disclaim the girl's praise of his own conduct, though when she did so praise him he glanced at his mate as though entreating him not to expose his real part in the affair. And, now that the need for disgust was over, Edginton allowed him to take the weight of gratitude to himself without great resentment. After all, what did it matter? He knew himself that he had been the instrument by which the girl had been saved, and that was reward enough.

"But it seems strange that you should have been in that boat," said Haigh, passing the marmalade, and apologizing for the scantiness of the fare.

"If it hadn't been I should be at the bottom of the sea now. And after

hard-tack and raw salt horse, this is luxury," she said. And then, without warning, she burst into tears, laying her face in her hands, sobbing bitterly. Edginton felt uncomfortable. He half rose, as though to leave, but a warning glance from the captain kept him in his seat.

"I know it's silly of me, but—but I can't help thinking about poor Mr. Myers and those others. Oh, the poor, poor men!' Father died, and I was getting used to that; but—the others!" Fresh tears troubled her, and the men were helpless in presence of her grief. But after a while she dried her eyes, and made some pretense of resuming her meal.

"My father was captain of the *Storm Zone*," she said. "Captain Hargreaves. Do you know him?"

Haigh shook his head; but Edginton, searching in his memory, remembered stories he had heard. "I've met men who knew him—a good man. Didn't he pick up the crew of the *Thunderer* off the Horn?"

"Oh, you heard of that? Yes, that was father. There were other things he did, too. But the gaff fell from aloft, and killed him a month ago, when we were two months out. It was a slow passage. I don't think he was sorry to go. He'd always been fond of mother, though she'd been dead a long time. And Mr. Myers was old, and the ship was old, too. We got bad weather; we were dismasted, and we sprang a leak. We had to abandon her. I don't know how many days we were in the boat; it seemed like eternity. The food was getting short; we had no water. And a man died; he went mad, and tried to kill me, but Mr. Myers stopped him. He jumped overboard afterward. I saw his face as he sank, but no one had strength to save him." A violent shudder shook her frame, and a curious bleak pallor overspread her countenance.

"I wouldn't go on with it, if I were you," said Edginton, breaking the silence. "It will only hurt you."

"Quite right, quite right," boomed Haigh. "You are weak, unstrung. Your nerves are out of order; you must take care. Now that we have saved you we must take great care of you."

"I haven't any nerves; if I had I must have died. Poor Mr. Myers! He died of thirst, because I drank the water that was his share. He had saved a little every day, and he gave it to me. I didn't know; I didn't know."

And so the sorry tale was told in fragments, punctuated by sobs and tears. It was simple enough—not an uncommon story at sea. An old ship, a weak crew, heavy weather, and the rest. Edginton could imagine the much that was not told—the hours of agony in the boat when death menaced in every crested wave, the hunger and the thirst, the bitter pangs of sorrow when an old, tried friend dies in one's arms.

Duty called the mate to the deck. He dragged himself away, and for the rest of the morning found himself pondering strange matters in his mind. His thoughts swept from the girl below to his former shipmate, Frodsham—Frodsham, who had told him that in the coming days some woman would dawn upon his horizon and give him a glimpse of a greater life than any he had ever known. He shook the thought aside.

"I'm a fool," he assured himself. "She's just an ordinary woman. It's because she's alone that she's interesting. And a man has a right to be interested in the woman whose life he's saved; of course he has. But as for anything else—that's rubbish. Still, I'm glad I did save her."

There was not much work to be done that morning, for the *Breeze* had run out of the gale, and was now creaming her way toward Tristan D'Achunha, the taking-off place for the Easting. A bright sun shone overhead, the sea was laughing joyously. The crisp hum of swelling canvas, the thud-thud of swinging ropes, and the hiss of the flying water alongside bred up a lightness of heart that made the mate want to laugh in sympathy with the world about him.

"I wonder if what Frodsham said

was right?" he mused. "About a woman being a necessity to every man. He seemed to know, and he did change after he met Minnie. Um! This is a new tack for you to be on, my son—that girl's probably engaged to two or three men already."

But he could not drag his thoughts away from her; and when, an hour afterward, she appeared on deck, a little pale, seen in the full light, walking weakly, he found himself stricken dumb.

Haigh accompanied her and tended her very carefully. He found a deck chair for her and a stool for her feet; a pillow did duty as a cushion. She was seated aft beside the wheel, and a curious thought had birth in Edginton's brain as he watched. To be master of a good ship, and to be able always to feast his eyes on such a picture!

Now he liked the skipper less than ever. If he had searched deeper into his consciousness he might have named the phenomenon for jealousy, but Edginton was seldom introspective.

A few days later he faced the issue squarely, and forced himself to deny the questions that rose uppermost in his mind. "This is real life, not a page out of a sentimental novel," he assured himself. "Men don't fall in love like that; this isn't love. I was the means of saving her life. I've a right to feel interested in her; but love—pooh!"

It was blowing hard again; the *Breeze* was once more down to her regulation canvas when the wind blew anything more than a moderate gale. She was diving and crashing into a wildish sea, and the graybacks rolled in their world-encircling stride everywhere. The elusive sea fog drooped down to meet the livid anger of the waters, as though anxious to hide them from view. Edginton, hugging the mizzen rigging as the hull towered and swooped, tried to convince his own heart that the glorious striving was sufficient in itself for any sane man's needs. He opened his nostrils to inhale deep gusts of the poignant air. He laughed as a spray soared upward and shot across the deck like a lash, cutting him in the face. What more could a man desire?

And, thinking thus, he heard behind him a low, soft laugh that reached his ears through the clamor of the storm. Turning, he saw Miss Hargreaves balancing herself lightly to the erratic motion of the ship. The wind had blown her hair loose, to frame a face that returning health was filling with warm, rich tints. She betrayed no sign of fear as the *Breeze* swung her weather rail beneath a monstrous wave and lifted a hundred tons of water on her deck.

"It's glorious," she said, steadying herself toward him. "I was born at sea, you know. I think it's in my blood, this sort of thing."

"She's throwing herself about a bit," he remarked. "Wouldn't you be better below?"

She smiled at him, and Edginton decided that women should not be permitted such beauty—it was unfair; it tended to weaken man's allegiance to his early love—the sea.

"The cabin's stuffy, and I love this," she said. "Father used to say I was a regular stormy petrel—never so happy as when the weather was at its worst. Do you know, a gale like this makes me want to fight—it fills me with a very lust for combat. Oh, if I hadn't been a woman—to defeat the sea at its own game, to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat—that's what I'd pray to do!"

The women Edginton had met before had shivered when he spoke of the sea in its vicious moods. They had not understood the deep craving and the clinging affection for the wind-swept spaces that come to the man who has in his heart the real sea love, which leaves the love of woman at the starting post. But here was indeed a phenomenon—a woman who thought as a man could think, a woman who understood. His blood tingled; his heart warmed toward her. He might have enveloped himself in a rush of words, but Haigh's booming voice broke in upon his thoughts.

"You must let me rig up something for your comfort, Miss Hargreaves, if you will persist in remaining on deck,"

said the captain. "Here—a chair under the lee of the house, eh? Mr. Edginton, those fore yards need pointing a little more."

It was the mate's dismissal. Haigh was attracted by the girl, and he was the sort of man to use his authority to keep the course clear of possible rivals.

Edginton went forward along the sluicing decks, with no good grace, and as he drove the unwilling watch to labor found himself shedding his old-time prejudices one by one. Frodsham had been right. A man was incomplete in himself; he needed a companion, a mate who could see eye to eye with him, who could enter into the sacred repository of his thoughts; who could complete the unfinished sentences he would speak.

When he returned to the poop, Haigh had monopolized the girl; he was describing some wholly fictitious encounter with overwhelming odds, in which he posed as chief hero. The girl listened eagerly to his words; her experience of the men who use the sea had told her that in the main they were straightforward, and not given to undue boasting when on their natural element, however much they strained their hearers' powers of belief ashore. Edginton took a comprehensive survey of the vikinglike Haigh, saw his statuesque posings, heard the deep growl of his voice, and shook his head in silent dismay.

"I wouldn't have a dog's chance there. He's fascinated her already," Edginton told himself.

CHAPTER VII.

TRICKERY AFOOT.

"I DON'T like it, sir; I don't like it. There's trickery about." It was the old, tremulous steward, closing the door of Edginton's cabin behind him stealthily, speaking in a hushed voice.

The mate of the *Breeze*, smoking a reflective pipe before wooing slumber, somewhat weary after four hours on deck in the baffling weather that succeeds a gale, removed the brier from between his lips, and stared in amazement.

"What for does he want to be sneaking away below every night, when the watches is set, after the young lady's gone to her room? 'Tisn't nateral, sir."

"What on earth are you driving at, steward?"

The man of service came a little closer to the bunk, and laid a gnarled, trembling hand on the weather board. It came to Edginton then that the man was very old, and a wave of sympathy careered through him. Of late the sailor's thoughts had grown softer; much of the hardness which the sea breeds was slipping from him. He was learning the old lesson of humanity that love teaches to all who come beneath his sway. "What is it? You're not well——"

"I'm well enough, sir—as well as ever I'll be. What with rheumatiz, forty-five years at sea doesn't leave a man spry and ready. But there's trickery afoot. He's up to no good. Haven't I thought it out for myself? Here's him, the big, booming bully, related to the new partner—him as owned the *Patrocolus*, and she was lost. Nose to nose they was, the skipper and Mr. Lanyard, every time I comed into the cabin, and when they see me, away they starts. Money in it, too—that big, booming bully——"

"Steady, there; I can't listen to you, steward, if you mean Captain Haigh."

"Who else should I mean? Him what calls me down cruel; throws things at me, knowing I'm weak and old. If I'd been twenty years younger I'd cram some of them words down his throat. 'Hash slinger,' 'dishwasher,' 'no-good son of a sea cook,' them's only mild ones. But I've watched him when he thought I was asleep. I'm an old man, and I don't need much rest; and he's up to no good—allus slinking below, and my hammer's gone from its place, yes, and a chisel, too. And the emergency provisions—they're all ready. I know what he's after, and it's barratry."

Edginton sat up suddenly, the pipe dropping from his lips. After all, the steward had only voiced his own early

suspicions, though the advent of Miss Hargreaves and the new emotions that followed her arrival aboard had set the other thoughts away in the remote background of his mind.

"That's a nasty accusation to bring against any man," Edginton said sharply. "You haven't been drinking?" He was up in arms for the honor of his cloth. That a cabin servant should dare to criticize the actions of his commander was an unbearable thought.

"'Have them emergency provisions constantly ready,' was his words," said the steward, with the senile stubbornness of an old servant. "'There's never any one can tell what'll happen at sea, and there's been many a life lost for want of a bit of precaution.' His very words, no longer than a week ago."

The mate could not fail to remember the captain's constant desire that the lifeboats should be kept in a state of readiness and perfection constantly—an unusual thing aboard a sailing ship, where the boats are generally the accepted stowing place for a litter of gear.

Edginton refused to listen to more, because his old doubts haunted him. He dismissed the steward without ceremony, and found that sleep was banished from his eyelids. Haigh wouldn't do such a thing as cast away his ship willfully, of course; too much depended on him for that. Besides, there was the girl; her safety must surely be a consideration to the skipper, who was openly fond of her, as Edginton saw daily to his heart's bitterness. No man who loved a woman would throw unnecessary risks in her way. No, Haigh could not be guilty of such a thing. The steward's brain had been turned by his sufferings. Haigh had been a bit too autocratic in his dealings with the man, bullying him unnecessarily, in an evident desire to win Miss Hargreaves' approval, and this was the steward's way of taking revenge.

"No; I won't believe it," said Edginton to himself. "Though the man's a coward, thoughts of his own safety will keep him from running such a risk."

For the rest of the watch the mate tossed and tumbled excitedly, and when four o'clock arrived, bringing with it the call to the deck, he welcomed the relief.

"Have you noticed, sir," asked Saunders, the second mate, "that she seems to be very sluggish lately? She doesn't—I can hardly describe it—she doesn't seem to be anxious to get on."

"Why should she be sluggish? The ship's all right." Lack of sleep had not improved the mate's temper.

"Oh, perhaps it's just my fancy, sir. A man does have fancies." Saunders went below, leaving Edginton with a fresh crop of doubts to ruminate on before the dawn brought the further relief of work.

He looked over the side once or twice as the day lightened, and it seemed to him that the ship was floating lower in the water than usual. He sent for the carpenter, and ordered him to sound the wells. The man returned with the information that beyond the normal quantity the ship was empty as a drum. Edginton sighed with relief. Undoubtedly the steward's mad mutterings had affected his own cold sanity. There was nothing wrong with the ship.

He reasoned with himself the absurdity of his suspicions. The *Breeze* was far from the land, although not so far as she might have been under another commander's guidance, for Haigh had not run far south in search of strong winds. As a matter of fact, the ship was almost in the direct track of steamers. This fact struck Edginton with a new significance. Nearly all sailing-ship men went well south, whereas only the previous night he had sighted the lights of a steamer, an unusual occurrence enough down the Easting.

And then Miss Hargreaves appeared on deck, and once more he forgot all his doubts and fears. She was as bright and sparkling as a tropical dawn. She had contrived in some miraculous fashion to attire herself from such odds and ends of material as the ship's stores afforded, and her rig was so eminently suitable to her environment that its roughness passed unnoticed. Ashore,

her clothing might have aroused a smile of derision; here it formed the necessary component of the picture, and made for harmony of a complete character. She greeted Edginton with laughing camaraderie, which was very different from her manner with Haigh, had the mate but known it. She betrayed a desire for his companionship. She drew him into halting conversation, but Edginton was no maker of small talk. He felt his tongue tied by her radiant beauty; and though he kicked himself afterward for a dumb fool, that did not alter the fact that he had acquitted himself but ill in her presence.

There was a new nervousness about Haigh's manner at breakfast. He talked a lot, somewhat foolishly, and seemed to be holding himself constantly on the alert. Ascending to the deck, he took comprehensive observations. The day was moderately fine, although there was a long-barreled swell running from east to west, and the ship was rolling considerably.

"She'll strain herself badly if this continues," said the skipper. "And she is an old ship, too. I shouldn't be surprised if she's leaking now. Have you sounded her lately?"

"Yes, sir, a few hours ago; but she was dry then." Edginton did not notice the cunning smile on the captain's face at that remark.

As the day progressed it seemed as though Haigh's nervousness grew more pronounced. He could not remain still. He was down in the cabin, up on deck, roaming here and there like a dog in a new environment.

"I've always had a presentiment that we should never complete this voyage," he declared toward evening. "The ship's floating lower in the water. I'm sure she has strained herself. She's leaking." He summoned the carpenter himself, and bade him sound the wells. The man returned to report two extra feet of water in the holds.

"There! What did I tell you? The ship's sinking under our feet!" chattered Haigh. "Man the pumps! Man the pumps! Good Heaven, mister, do you want us all to lose our lives?"

Edginton gave the necessary order, and the sullen clank-clank of the pumps arose above the whimpering of the freshening breeze.

"She'll be all right now," was the captain's verdict at midnight. "I'll go below and turn in, I think. If it breezes up as it's threatening to do, we might need all the sleep we can get."

Edginton visited the main deck, where three of the watch toiled at the pumps. A tiny stream of water proceeded from the machine—so tiny that the efforts of the sailors seemed wasted. They reported that the pumps had appeared to lose much of their effect some time before, although the carpenter had done his best for them.

Edginton fetched the sounding line himself, chalked the long steel rod, and lowered it down the pipe. The cord ran through his hands nimbly, and slackened in a remarkably short time. He hauled it up; the water had increased a little in the well.

"She'll be all right until morning, though," he thought. "No need to worry, but we'll have those pumps fixed then." He turned in when Saunders relieved him, and sheer weariness compelled him to sleep at once. And yet the sleep was of short duration. He was soon wide awake, listening to a strange, distant sound to which he could fit no name. It was a slow thudding, as though a great insect were tapping at the metal work of the ship's hull. He tried to locate the sound, without success.

"I'm full of fears," he said; "chock-full of 'em. There's nothing wrong. If Haigh were up to any deviltry he'd wait for a gale." And he went to sleep again.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO LOYAL HEARTS.

NEXT morning things seemed almost normal, but the tenseness of the atmosphere remained unchanged. If anything, Haigh's nervousness had grown. He did not look his first mate in the face once, and when the conversation turned to the hazards of the sea he sidetracked it carefully.

"I believe we've struck a piece of submerged wreckage," he said once. "Isn't the ship floating lower than before?"

Edginton went to the side. Without a doubt the *Breeze's* freeboard had diminished. He ordered the carpenter to sound the wells again; and the report was alarming. The water had increased another three feet.

"She's going to sink beneath us!" cried Haigh. "Get those boats provisioned and ready."

"She's far from sinking, sir." It was in the mate's mind to voice his suspicions then and there, but he reflected that those suspicions might have no foundation in fact. The pumps were still under repair. The carpenter had not yet discovered where the fault lay, and the hand pumps were shipped; ineffectual things they were, but they fetched up a thin stream of water.

Edginton went below in the second dogwatch, and to him came the white-faced steward.

"There's devilment!" declared the man. "What for does he want to talk in secret with the carpenter? I've seed him sneak in when every one was asleep, and they'd talk and talk, with the door locked, so I couldn't hear a word clearly."

Edginton dismissed the man abruptly, and ten minutes later was summoned to the deck by a loud cry of "All hands!"

A black squall was smiting down on the ship. She was creaking and clamoring aloft; her upper sails were flying wildly. Almost as he emerged from the companionway there came an ominous crack. There was a wild shout; the battering smash of falling spars.

"Main topmast's gone by the board!" shouted some one, and almost before the words were spoken the mizzen topgallant mast followed suit.

"Great Heaven! We're done for!" cried Haigh, running wildly up and down the deck, wringing his hands. "Clew up everything for'ard; put your helm down. Quick's the word."

Edginton flew to his side. Haigh swung about sharply at his voice—so sharply, indeed, that the mate slipped and shot away to leeward like a helpless log. The rails gaped here; the falling mizzen spars had broken them away, leaving a breach. It was only by a miracle that he was prevented from going overboard. But he got to his feet again, and staggered to Haigh's side.

"Get those boats clear!" yelled the skipper. "Don't lose time, man! Get the boats clear!"

"Not yet—there's lots of life in the ship," replied Edginton.

Haigh bellowed something incoherent, and then—— "I'll be back in a moment. Let's have no insubordination. Get the boats clear," he said, and disappeared.

Edginton busied himself in doing what he could—not much, for the ship was in entire confusion. A dozen men were shouting different directions, which no one seemed disposed to obey. Sheer panic held most of the crew in thrall. The wind boomed and screamed. The clamor aloft was well-nigh deafening. A wave broke aboard, and threw a little group of men into the scuppers. The darkness grew greater and greater.

From below there came a loud, shrill cry; it was followed by racing footsteps. Haigh reached the deck. He shouted as he came: "Miss Hargreaves! Jocelyn, Jocelyn!"

"I'm here," said the girl, in a composed voice. She had taken up her post on the lee side of the chart house. She appeared to feel no fear.

"Quick, get ready!" said Haigh. "We must abandon the ship. She's sinking fast."

Edginton thought he heard her laugh, but he was not sure. Evans had come to his side, and the two of them were laboring hard at the wheel, the original helmsman having abandoned his post.

The second mate had obeyed the captain's orders, and was already casting the boats adrift. The scene was one of the wildest confusion.

"For'ard, and tell the carpenter to sound the well!" shouted Edginton to Evans. "I'll look after this. Off you go."

The sailor disappeared, to return

with the report that the water was increasing.

"Are those boats ready?" clamored Haigh. "Confound it, are we all to be drowned?"

A chorus of voices from the main deck assured him that the boats were ready.

"Take the wheel, I'm going for'ard," said the mate. Haigh was hustling Miss Hargreaves toward the head of the poop ladder; she seemed reluctant to go. Edginton heard her say:

"Not yet, not yet—not in the boats!" Her voice was tremulous with what might have been fear, and the lightning thought crossed Edginton's mind that only once had he known her to betray concern; it was when she talked of the agonized days in the *Storm Zone's* boat.

And then everything seemed to happen at once. Some one flashed up out of the darkness, some one with shrill voice and clawing hands.

"The damned murderer! The damned murderer! I seed him go down the lazareet. I seed him knock the connection away; he's scuttled her." It was the steward, clinging to Edginton hysterically. "He floored me; he slung me down the lazareet, but he couldn't kill me, not him. I'm here—the murderer!"

Edginton understood it all now. But it was not yet too late. The *Breeze* had been Frodsham's ship, dear to that loyal captain's heart. She was dear to Edginton's heart, too, and now she was being murdered.

"The starboard boat!" sounded Haigh's voice from the darkness. "Quick!"

Edginton ran forward to the head of the ladder, and saw the huge figure of the captain there. "We shall not abandon her!" the mate thundered. "You've scuttled her, but, by Heaven, you'll stay and see it through, you hound!"

Edginton no longer recognized the ties of discipline. This man was no master of his; he was abandoning the good old *Breeze* like the poltroon he was. But Edginton would put up a fight still; he would bring this scoundrel to book. He heard the sharply indrawn breath of the skipper; he felt the arm he had grasped twitch and swell beneath his hand.

"We're going to stay!" he roared. "Move and I'll drop you!"

Haigh swung sharply; something was in his hand. There came a swift rush of feet behind the pair; the skipper threw up his arm and struck savagely.

"God, I'm all in!" coughed Evans, and slid slowly to the deck. Haigh lifted his hand again, and something warm dripped on Edginton's face. Fear, the double fear of death and detection, had well-nigh unseated the captain's reason. He had primed himself liberally with drink for this momentous hour, all of which had been planned beforehand, and he recognized that Edginton's knowledge threatened to destroy all his plans. The mate grabbed swiftly at the armed hand; he clutched a wrist and tugged at it as a man at a rope. The knife fell to the deck.

"So it's murder!" panted Edginton, and said no more, for Haigh struck him on the temple, a sledge-hammer blow, that laid him stunned in the scuppers.

With blind fear burning him, Haigh ran down the ladder to where the boat hung at the rail. Already the crew were clambering aboard, leaving everything, totally careless of consequences.

"Miss Hargreaves!" cried the skipper.

"Here," she called. The second mate had lifted her into the boat, forcing her there, for some of the men were crying out against her presence. Haigh paused to steady himself, and leaped.

Evans came scrambling along the deck at this moment. The knife thrust had turned on his shoulder; he was bleeding considerably, but even so he did not realize all that had passed. He felt upon him the urgent need for safety; no matter how obtained, he must have safety. There were his wife and children at home, looking to him for bread. He was no hero; he had flung himself between Haigh and Edginton on an impulse. No thought of

sacrificing himself for another's safety had crossed his mind.

"Mr. Edginton!" cried the girl sharply, as the boat began to sing from the rail. Evans steadied himself to leap downward.

"He's dead; something fell from aloft," boomed the captain's voice. "Lower away."

Some one shouted to Evans to jump, but an idea had come to his mind. He remembered a day long past, when Edginton had brought life and happiness to those he loved; there was a debt outstanding that he had never been able to repay.

"Be damned if I do!" he said stubbornly. "Go and leave him—not me!" And then he staggered back as an upleaping figure clung to the rail.

"Come back, Jocelyn, come back!" roared Haigh; and as he spoke there was the twang of a severed rope; the boat clattered from view into the darkness. A frenzied sailor had hacked the after tackle through. The man in the bow who was lowering let go with a run. The sea lifted and whisked the boat outward, and Jocelyn Hargreaves dragged herself painfully aboard.

CHAPTER IX.

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER.

"LET'S look at the thing squarely," said Edginton. "There are four of us, and the ship's half sinking. There's Evans, the steward, you, and myself; not much of a crew. It would be wise to abandon her in the remaining boat, but——"

"But—what?" asked the girl. She was studying his face with keen eyes, and it would seem that what came she was expecting, for as he spoke again she smiled in a satisfied manner.

"But—the ship's the *Breeze;* and I'm fond of her. Also, I want to bring that murderous swab to his knees. And so—I'm all for fighting it out. It's going to be a fight, too."

"I'm glad," she said, and again wild throbbings beset Edginton's heart. "I—when I was in the boat there it seemed to me such a cowardly thing to leave the ship that—that I couldn't do it."

"The ship's still afloat, that's one thing," said the mate. "Evans isn't a dead man yet; and there's the steward—not much good, but he's here."

"And there's me," said Jocelyn. "I'm half a sailor, remember. What do you intend to do?"

"Why, take the ship to port; to put a spoke in the wheel of Haigh, yes, and Lanyard, too! The scoundrels! I've never been associated with barratry before, and I don't like it now I've come across it. If we can take this ship to port we can dictate terms—knowing what we know. But that isn't the real reason. You won't be able to understand me; but it's the ship—my ship. I can't leave her to die when there's a chance to save her."

"Oh, but I do understand," said the girl. "I felt that way about the *Storm Zone;* but then we *had* to leave her. There was no treachery about it; she was dying fast. Let me help you. I'd like to think that I'd been of some use." Her hand stretched out to his. Edginton grasped the fingers tightly, and felt pleasurable thrills shoot up his arm. What a comrade she made!

"We'd better make a start, then," he said. "There's a lot to do."

Indeed, there was much to be done. The *Breeze* had lived through the night as by a miracle. The squall had blown itself out soon after the boat left, but the sea ran high, and the ship rolled sluggishly and wearily, as though anxious to lay her weary bones to decent rest on the sea floor.

Edginton was aware of an aching head, and in loss of blood, for in falling he had struck his temple against a ringbolt. He looked back on the last few hours as on a nightmare. He had aroused from unconsciousness to find Evans pouring water over him. He had groped to his feet and swayed there, trying to realize what had happened, and not until the girl's voice came to him from the gloom did he begin to understand.

Consciousness brought its need for action. Edginton had remembered the

steward's words; he had gone below in hot search. There he found the steward, cringing and whimpering in his own pantry, resolutely refusing to trust himself in any boat with the man who had tried to kill him. Under his guidance Edginton went to the lazaret; from there he penetrated still deeper, until he came upon the seat of the mischief.

Haigh had done his work skillfully; the many connections here that ran through the ship's side had been knocked away; water was gushing in at a terrific rate. Each aperture possessed its own spouting flood; if these connections had been destroyed for long the wonder was that the ship had remained afloat at all. Already the water was high in the after part; assuredly Haigh had worked well.

There followed what was veritably a nightmare of toil. By dint of utilizing bales of oakum and broad planks, shored up by awning stanchions and the like, Edginton contrived to check the first full inrush of water; and not until the leaks were reduced to something approaching order did he allow himself a breathing space. Now the day had come, and the ship still floated. He was winner in the first round.

Evans was asleep: the sailor had worked to the best of his ability until he dropped from sheer exhaustion; and the steward was of but little use. True, he had shaken off his half-insane manner, and even now, as the man and the girl stood at the break of the poop, staring into the gray of the day, he moved out from the cabin, picked his way among sluicing water and débris, and entered the galley, his primal instinct asserting itself. He was the ship's steward; the food of those aboard was his concern.

"We'll get steam on the donkey engine, first thing," said Edginton, still athrill to the firm clasp of the girl's hand. "We'll need that help. I think we ought to repair the pumps easily enough, and the ship's not making any great amount of water. Come to think of it, I dare say there's been trickery everywhere. I've been a fool to allow so much to go on. The steward said the skipper and the carpenter were always conniving. I know the pumps were all right in the tropics. Ten to one they've been willfully put out of action. Now's the time to make sure."

"You must rest and eat," said the girl, the maternal element that is every woman's birthright showing in her voice. Edginton laughed, though wearily.

"Time enough to talk of that when the ship's safe," he said, and went to the pumps. So far as he could see, there was nothing absolutely wrong there; but further examination was necessary, and meanwhile—he wished Evans were not asleep, for there was so much to be done. He threw open the door of the donkey room, and found there a small quantity of coal. He raided the galley—where the steward labored at the stove—for fuel, and soon a roaring fire was blazing beneath the donkey boiler. This engine, berated frequently in the past, in that its presence was supposed to stand in lieu of five men, promised now to be their salvation.

He took a run below to the lazaret, and found that his bulwarks were holding securely. He returned to the deck, to find the girl at the wheel, standing there capably; and the fair readiness of her made his heart leap with joy. She was a sailor's girl if ever there was one—a woman to be proud of; and—the thought struck across his brain searingly—her life was in his hands. Upon his efforts depended her existence. She was given to him in precious charge, and he must be worthy the great trust.

He did not deny now that he loved her. He understood that he had loved her ever since that morning when he had seen the sun glinting in her hair; but now he must conceal his love carefully, he told himself, lest she should fear him in her solitude. But it was his plain duty now to bring the ship into safe haven, not from motives of retribution for Lanyard and Haigh; they had suddenly faded into insignificance in the scheme of things; but because by so doing he would worthily

fulfill his trust. The girl looked to him for life, and life should be hers, he vowed grimly.

He had not asked the girl why she had remained aboard; mentally he said that it was fear of the boat that kept her on the *Breeze*. He knew nothing of the tears she had shed as he lay unconscious. All that he knew or cared just now was that they were shipmates with a mighty fight before them. So he attended to the pumps and found them repairable; he slaved at them, and before high noon had them in workable shape. The steam had risen in the donkey boiler, and he coupled up the chains with a light heart, saying the victory was already half won.

From then on the rattle and clank of the winch was incessant. The swish and suck of the pumps, the cool trickle of gushing water, became sounds as familiar to them as the hiss of parted water beneath the bow or the hum of wind in the canvas aloft. Only by steady pumping of this nature might they hope to win the ultimate victory; and it was full dark before everything was in smooth working order.

They ate as best they might, fitfully, in the intervals of work, but when night closed down they knew the first grim danger was past, and turned their thoughts to those who had stolen away like rats. Not for long, however; the subject was an unpleasant one; and Haigh, his cowardice, was no concern of theirs just now. What did concern them was the necessity for making port in safety, handicapped as they were, and when the girl slipped below, leaving Edginton at the wheel, something of despondency fell upon his senses. The forces they could oppose to the elements were so puny and insignificant that he wondered at his temerity in venturing on the combat. Evans was still sleeping the deep sleep of utter exhaustion. He had lost much blood, and it would be amazing if he lived. The steward was almost a negligible factor; he was only a steward, nothing of a sailor; but he must do what he could.

"Go below and sleep; you're worn out," came the girl's voice at his elbow, and he started, for she had come upon him unawares. She had donned a thick pea-jacket belonging to the second mate; a sou'wester was on her head tied beneath her chin; she presented a picture of capability.

"Rubbish! Go and sleep yourself, Miss Hargreaves; you've done far more than a woman should."

She laid her hands on the spokes with a mutinous expression on her face. "I haven't worked like you; go below." And she stamped her foot imperiously.

Edginton had contrived to cut away the fallen litter of wreckage that had towed overside; and the ship, stripped of most of her upper spars, was not so unmanageable as might have been expected; but it was cold, and a thin rain was falling. The sea was booming angrily, and the incessant clank of the pumps seemed to cry a note of dread to the night.

He was very weary. His strength had gone from him. The effects of the rough treatment he had received at Haigh's hands were showing now. But he would not take her at her word; he would slip below and secure a dry change of clothing—only now did he realize that he had been soaked through for hours—and then he would return to the wheel and take charge of the ship. He went into his room and sat down on the settee.

He awoke to the summons of a loud knocking, and, opening his eyes, got to his feet in amazement. It was broad daylight; he must have slept many hours. With an imprecation at his own folly and selfishness, he opened the door, to find the steward there with information that breakfast was ready. It was eight o'clock. He raced to the poop deck. There was the girl, wan and weary, with dark rings round her eyes, but she threw him a piteous smile as he burst forth into self-recrimination.

"It was nothing—you were so tired," she said; and speaking, pitched forward into his arms in a swoon. For a moment, a precious moment, he held her so, her heart beating on his. Then he

laid her down and called for the steward. They carried her below and laid her in her bed; and for the rest of that morning Edginton sought the whole vocabulary of his sea language for epithets sufficiently strong to condemn his carelessness.

But nothing was to be gained thus. The girl had endured the trial of the night while he slept, and it behooved him to bestir himself in further effort for the ship's safety and hers. Evans was better, able to move about, though only weakly; still, he could take the helm and allow Edginton to devote himself to more fruitful labors. He drew up a quantity of coal from where it was stowed in the fore peak, and installed the steward as engineer in charge of the donkey engine. This done, he busied himself in countless ways, making the ship more orderly.

He went aloft up the fore and cast loose the topsails, because the breeze was not too strong; descending again, he sheeted the sails home, and hoisted the upper yard, using the donkey winch for the purpose. It was cruelly hard work, but he persevered, using the steward when necessary; and presently the ship was careening purposefully to the added weight of wind.

"Heaven send we don't hit a gale," he muttered, glancing aloft at the swelling bosoms of the sails.

He went aft, because he felt that he needed some companionship. When alone the task grew in magnitude. Evans was leaning over the wheel, poring over the compass.

"Feeling better, Evans?"

The man removed his cap and scratched his head. "Yes, sir; a bit weaklike, but nothin' to complain of. It looks nasty to wind'ard there, sir."

Edginton glanced in that direction; the weather signs were somewhat ominous. "Why didn't you go with the rest?" he asked.

"Blowed if I know, sir. It was thinkin' of you lying there—thinkin' of what you did that night at Happy Jack's. The kids was saved through you, sir. I couldn't—it wasn't right. Thinks I: Mister Edginton saved them kids, my lad, an' it's up to you to do your bit for him. That's all, sir."

Edginton held out his hand. "We're going to win yet, Evans," he said. "We're shoulder to shoulder in this."

CHAPTER X.

AGAINST TREMENDOUS ODDS.

THE *Breeze* was rolling sluggishly, and above her the ragged clouds drooped in merciless ominousness. Elemental anger clamored and shrieked about the ship, green water bathed her decks without a break. Edginton was at the helm, peering through the driving spindrift, praying hard that the masts would hold. It had been impossible to shorten the ship down. The gale had sprung up suddenly, ferociously, and the *Breeze* was unkindly under her new rig.

Edginton had paid a visit to his defenses down below—he had strengthened them a score of times—and had seen that they were still holding out. The amount of water pouring into the hull was not greater than the power of the pumps that dealt with it, but if the ship suffered any more damage in the storm there was small hope of winning to safety.

There was a roar like the report of a heavy gun, and the fore topsail blew into ribbons. The ship shook and quivered, she squirmed and plunged in agony; she was full of complaints. Before Edginton could get the wheel down a sea shot high above the rails, hung there for an appreciable interval, and fell. When next he looked, dashing the brine from his eyes, the only remaining boat had vanished; it was lying in fragments over the sea.

"We're on our own now," he said grimly. "There's no get-out."

Jocelyn came toward him, balancing gracefully. "Can I do anything?" she asked.

He gave the wheel into her hands. "Keep her going as she is; I must go for'ard," he said, and slipped down the poop ladder. He had run the ship up to the wind. Her way was almost stopped, but the seas beat with added

force against her arrested bulk; they towered and fell unmercifully.

Jocelyn saw the figure of the mate appear from a seething torrent of foam; she saw him jump nimbly to the lee rail; and then—the *Breeze* rolled sickeningly; a sea smote across her, and Edginton had disappeared.

Her shrill cry brought Evans from the chart house, where he slept, to be within call. He saw her pointing hand; he read the terror of her face. Then he ran to the side, and saw more—Edginton's face among the spray beneath him.

Once again that strange sense of gratitude smote at him. The man out there, drowning fast as he was, had brought life to those he loved. Evans was but an indifferent swimmer—to plunge into that hell broth seemed a certain way to death.

"Blimee, I cawn't let him drown," he said, and without another thought he leaped overboard. Edginton was sinking; the sea had well-nigh stunned him; the death thunders were rioting in his ears when the sailor reached him and bore him up.

It was terrible work. The sea was an angry fiend, clamoring for their lives; the odds were many. Time after time the sailor felt he must relinquish his grasp of his salvage, and endeavor to save himself, but always when such thoughts came, the other thought returned—this man had saved his child. But the fight was too big; he was sinking, his strength—never properly recovered after the wound—was ebbing fast. What was this? Something was striking him between the shoulders—something hard and buoyant. He turned and gripped a floating buoy.

After that his senses reeled, and he had small recollection of being hauled aboard by the combined efforts of the girl and steward.

Jocelyn, driven to desperation at what she had witnessed, had snatched a life buoy from the rail, had hitched a line to it—the end of the deep-sea lead line which Edginton had brought on deck—and exerting all her strength, had thrown the life-saver skillfully toward the struggling pair. After that she drew them toward the side, slid down another rope, and slipped the bight of still another under Edginton's shoulders; and so the work was done.

Half an hour afterward the mate came back to consciousness. He was very weak still, aching in every limb; but life still remained within him; and, too, he caught a glimpse of Jocelyn's face which stirred his sluggish blood.

The fight went on afresh, as though no interruption had occurred. They dared not abate one single effort now; every faculty and every ounce of strength they possessed were necessary if victory were to be won.

The salt lay thickly on their skins, their hands were lacerated from much hauling on unkindly ropes. Their heads were bowed in weak self-pity; but always, when the horrors of the storm were worst, they contrived to find some faint vestige of hope. Edginton watched the girl, and saw how that she always forced a cheerful word when the odds were heaviest; he saw how this clean striving was a joy to her, as it was a joy to him, although the weariness was ineffable; he saw how Evans had become more of a man than ever he had been; how the steward, forsaking his fears, worked as stoutly as any of them; and he knew that the work was good.

CHAPTER XI.

BRIGHTNESS TO WINDWARD.

IT came to the fourth day of the gale. Jocelyn had gone below to snatch a fragmentary meal, conveyed at great risk from galley to cabin, when Edginton, shielding his aching eyes with his hand, saw that which caused his heart to leap in his breast. Ranging through the smoking spume was a powerful steamer, stemming the gale as though it were but a gentle zephyr, throwing the thunderous waves proudly aside in showering whiteness. He looked at the sea that tossed between, and a thought was born in his brain. His shout brought Evans to his side.

"Get the signal book and the flags,"

he said, and promptly busied himself. A string of bunting soared aloft, to stand out stiff like boards upon the gale. Presently an answering pennant soared to the steamer's span, and Edginton fumbled with the spray-wet pages of the code.

"What are you doing?" It was Jocelyn, clinging to the thudding wheel. He threw his thumb over his shoulder to indicate the steamer, and stared at the dim pages.

"But—you're signaling. What is it?"

"I'm asking them to take you off; this isn't fit for you. There's comfort for you over there—life, everything."

"You're going to give up the fight now? Now, after all we've done together! Oh, shame!"

He blinked wearily. "No, I'm staying; so's Evans; so's the steward. But you're going off to that steamer. This is no place for you."

She stared at him until his eyes fell. Then she laughed, and without spoken reply she laid hold of the signal halyards. The flags dropped to her quick tug, and lay in confusion on the deck. She placed her foot upon them, and looked at him defiantly.

"I'll not go," she said. "I won't go. Tell them not to send a boat."

"You must go; it may be death to remain here."

The steamer's pennant was moving up and down agitatedly; those aboard were asking for further information.

Jocelyn sought among the litter of flags until she discovered the thing she needed. She snatched the first signal from the halyards, and bent on another flag. It soared aloft, it broke, and the red ensign stood out on the breeze.

"That's my answer," she cried. "We'll fight it through to a finish, you and I."

Edginton laughed. She had told the steamer that all was well.

At length the steamer's ensign was hoisted and dipped; she proceeded on her way complacently; the sea fog hid her.

"You can put those flags away; we shan't need them, Evans," said Edginton, full of a curious elation. And when the man had gone—— "There's one thing I want to know," he said. "Why didn't you leave the ship before, when you had the chance? Was it because of the fighting?"

She turned away, because a dull flush would persist in creeping up beneath the grime of her face. Edginton reached for her wrist, and compelled her to meet his eyes.

"It was—it was because I couldn't leave—you," she said.

"Thank Heaven!"

Later they were to know many things—that Captain Haigh never reached safe haven, that those with him starved and fought among themselves until only two remained—the second mate and one sailor—to be picked up by a chance steamer. They were to know also that Lanyard absconded when news of the ship's arrival in port was signaled to him, taking with him such funds as he could lay hands on; but these possibilities did not enter into their thoughts at present. A riot of happiness, that by reason of their surroundings was almost grotesque, filled them. Edginton retained his clutch of her wrist and drew her slowly toward him.

"You mean—that?" he said breathlessly. She looked at him as though he had become transfigured before her eyes, as indeed he had in the light of the great revelation. Then she nodded her head.

"Yes, I mean—that."

"Seems to me the gale's breakin'; there's a show of brightness to wind'ard," Evans announced. "Fair weather, sir."

They returned to the fight afresh, but now their strength had come back to them in full measure; warm joy filled their hearts. The striving was almost over, the skies were clearing; ahead lay the land and life.

"What a sailor's wife you'll make!" was Edginton's enraptured exclamation.

"I'll need to, considering what a sailor I shall marry," she returned, with a sweet defiance.

Billy Boner's Booking

By George Edgar

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

THE BIG SMILE.

IN the office of the Paradise Music Hall, which, as every one knows, used to be situated in the vicinity of Waterloo Station, sat Claude S. Maurice, a well-dressed man of portly habit and in the prime of life—about the age of forty-five. His prematurely gray hair was long, and it curled almost frivolously. His thick mustache was also gray, and this curled, too, making a series of complete circles about the waxed ends. Mr. Maurice had a cheery, chubby face; his cheeks were high-colored; his manner was genial, and his laughter comagious.

It was in the year 1885. Mr. Maurice was the manager of the Paradise and its owner. The music hall had risen with a boom from the smoking-room concert days, to the level of a popular public entertainment. Every night the London public swarmed to the doors of the house, to sit in stalls, pit, or gallery at the feet of red-nosed comedians and the twinkling slippers of coy and saucy comediennes. The Paradise had become an institution.

Mr. Maurice had reason to look portly and prosperous. He was one of the lucky ones in life. He was making a fortune with one hand and spending it with the other. The gold flowed to him easily, and he managed that it should flow from him. He enjoyed his prosperity, and was considered by the profession to be the easiest-going, most open-handed manager in existence. He had a big laugh and a hearty greeting for every one at any hour of the day or night. His buoyancy was contagious, and he reigned like a king in a little bohemian world of his own creation.

Mr. Maurice was concluding a conversation with a long, lean man of dismal aspect, whose name appeared on the billboards of that day as Jack Merrilee, "the legmania comedian," with the further suggestion that he would "make a cat laugh."

"That's a go, governor," said Jack. "Two weeks in April."

"Sure; what do you ask?" Maurice said, with a laugh.

"Well, I've been getting twenty at the old Mogul," the gloomy man said timidly, knowing that the real figure was ten pounds.

"Oh!" exclaimed Maurice, "if they can pay you twenty pounds at the Mogul, I can. And if you knock 'em, I'll make it twenty-five pounds for the second week, and you can have a third week, a month in August, and another in December—what?"

Stunned by his luck, the sad-looking merrymaker closed with the offer, his eyes brightening as he took his contract. After accepting an opulent-looking cigar, he drifted out of the room.

Mr. Maurice touched a bell, and a precocious office boy appeared.

"Bottle of the best, Bill," commanded Mr. Maurice. "The Paradise is booming and the boomster must be inflated, too. See to it, Orlando, and at once, or empires will fall and no man's head will be safe."

The cheeky boy grinned familiarly and disappeared.

He returned a few minutes later with a large bottle, whose neck was amply covered with gold foil. The manager, with the manner of an expert, cut the wires, and the cork, under a slight pressure from his thumb, shot across the room with an explosive pop. The wine bubbled a fragrant invitation in the big, open glass, and Maurice, raising it, looked with a smile and one eye shut through the golden fluid.

He was thus pleasantly, if not wisely, occupied—the hour was about noon—when he heard a tap on the door.

"Come in!" Maurice shouted. The door opened and revealed the theatrically smart figure of Otto Bunstead, the stage manager of the Paradise.

"Ah," growled Maurice severely. "What a nose you have for good things! Sure as I tap a bottle, you are certain to appear, as mysteriously as vultures on the battlefield. Gadzooks and codfish! thou art a cunning knave. Help yourself."

Bunstead twirled his waxed, reddish mustache.

"There's no mystery about it," he said, promptly pouring out a glass of the champagne for himself. "As you drink most of the time you are at business and all the time you are about the theater, it's difficult to catch you without the open bottle. Chin, chin, guv'ner; my love and respect, and in case it's your birthday, many happy returns!"

Maurice laughed. "They are good times, these," he said boisterously, "and they deserve a little good wine by the way. After all, there ain't much in life for a music-hall manager. Good wine, a few friends, and a full house every evening, and, if possible, an appetite for breakfast in the morning. It's very wearing, Otto."

The other poured himself out another glass. "I help you all I can," he remarked, "and if you always saw I had half, you'd drink less and live longer. You are one of nature's darlings, guv'ner, and you've got the silver spoon all right, but I'm afraid you'll lose it. Come out of the golden rain."

They laughed together—these two men who knew each other well, who had come from appalling theatrical poverty to prosperity through Maurice's enterprise, and were now closer friends than ever, in Easy Street.

"Jonah," growled Maurice, at last, lighting a huge cigar. "Whatever I do, I know what you'll become. You'll end by being a preacher in Hyde Park. It's born in you. I used to see it come out when you were a half-starved acrobat. What's your trouble, pippin?"

The two men, mellowed by their wine, hobnobbed across the table, crowded with a mad litter of letters, cigar boxes, photographs of pretty music-hall women, day bills, and posters.

They discussed several matters involving considerable expenditure, Maurice sipping his wine and laughing as he pledged himself casually to several contracts. They had finished their business and the bottle at the same time.

"I suppose you are not going to crack another?" Bunstead said, rising.

"Not while you are here," Maurice answered, smiling genially. "I don't like to set a bad example to the staff."

"Then I suppose I shall have to do some work," Otto added with a sigh, and walked toward the door. Then he suddenly stopped as if something slipping his memory had recurred.

"How about it?" Maurice asked promptly. "You're going to ask me for something. It's 'no,' anyhow. I'm giving nothing away no more. To-morrow I'll be a teetotaller and you won't even get a drink."

"I've got Jess Mack waiting," Bunstead said seriously.

"Who's Jess Mack?" Maurice asked with a smile.

"You've got your faults, guv'ner, like most fat men," Otto said serenely. "But you have never turned the cold shoulder on old friends yet. Think with your head—hard. Jess Mack, of the old Liverpool Grand! There was no gold foil on the bottle for you or me in those days. Have you got it?"

"Sure, I have," Maurice said heartily. "A good little girl, I remember. She gave me a pair of boots, with soles on 'em. She was song and dance, wasn't she? I remember her; she married Walker, the human serpent. Good fellow, Walker. What's their game now?"

"Bad times, guv'ner; she's called to collect for the boots she gave you."

"Right-o. Does she want the boots back or real money? We can find room for the human serpent next week if he can still bend. I suppose he is getting like me—too fat to bend."

"He's dead—this fortnight," Bunstead answered.

"Left the usual showman's fortune, eh?" Maurice said, his eyes brightening.

"Yes—an I O U for his last fortnight's lodging. His friends paid for his funeral.

"Poor old Walker," Maurice said, not unkindly. "Same old world, same old seesaw—up one day, down the next. They were up when *we* were down—what?"

"They were," said Bunstead. "And now we're up in the air and she's down in the dust. What do we do about it?"

"What would you do?" Maurice asked.

"What you are going to do, guv'ner," Otto answered, with a grin. "You and I, we've seen things together. We've been through it. There is a heap of better men than we are in this world, Maurice, but we've not yet got the cast-iron cheek for the old friend that's down."

"Put it there," Maurice said simply, holding out his hand. "Where is she?"

"Sitting on a property doorstep, reading a last week's *Era*, and waiting for me to tell her you haven't changed."

"Bring her up," said Maurice.

As soon as Bunstead had gone, the manager tapped a bell.

"Ah, Orlando," he said to the boy, with his buoyant smile in full force; "another bottle, old friend, and three glasses. And find some sandwiches. If you don't find some really eatable sandwiches in ten seconds and a double shuffle, off with your head!"

Orlando grinned. "Right, guv'ner," he said, and disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

FOR OLD TIMES.

OTTO BUNSTEAD reëntered the office with a woman who carried a baby. Almost at the same time the office boy laid a tray on the littered table. As he withdrew, Maurice dragged forward a heavy gilt chair, vividly but shabbily upholstered.

"Ah! on my life, it's Jess," he said gayly, kissing his hand to the woman. "What a little world it is! Why, you make me think of old Liverpool and the Grand; in the days when I and Bunny turned flip-flaps. Sit down, my dear, and let's have a chat about old times."

The woman was taking a shabby wooden chair.

"No, indeed!" Maurice said vehemently; "not that chair. I keep that for deadheads and people who want fifty pounds a week for going on the stage for the first time. This is the chair, Jess; the best in the house. Phelps used it when the Paradise was in the legit'. It came from Old Drury and Kean sat on it there. We keep it for its memories, and the only people who are fit to use such a chair are my old friends."

The woman sank into the big stage-property seat.

"You are very kind," she said, and a tear welled in her eye and furrowed the rouge on her pale cheek. "They do not all remember like this!"

"We know 'em all," Maurice said boisterously. "The world's full of shortsighted memories. But, there, there, Jess, old girl, don't cry. You know Mack's toast: 'Chin, chin, old boy,

and better weather.' And never come to see a manager without a breakfast. It's bad for your looks, my dear, and we who live to please must—you know the rest."

As he spoke, he had settled the woman in her chair, patted her shoulders with a rude, brotherly familiarity, and was pouring out a glass of wine.

Maurice stood over her while she drank it. He noted that she was typical of the women who have seen grinding poverty in the lower walks of the stage. Jess Mack was about thirty-five, but the last years of her husband's illness had been lean for both of them. The child she held was scarcely six weeks old. She bore the signs—mental and physical—of a woman who has gone through the strain of watching the beginning of one life and the end of another. Once beautiful, her face was thin and her eyes were frightened, as if the specter of poverty and hardship haunted her. Her lips quivered, for her shaken nerves were but barely under control. Shabbily dressed in black, relieved by a touch of color about her throat, she sat nervously swaying to and fro, the baby pressed against her heart. With the pride of the old player, she had made the best of herself. She was neat and well put together, though very shabby and poor. Her face, which would have been deadly pale, was slightly rouged.

"Thirty-five and looking fifty," Maurice was saying to himself as he held out the glass. He did not say this aloud, for such a verdict from a manager is a death knell on the stage. In fact, he said the opposite.

"Why, Bunstead, old boy, it does us good to see her, doesn't it? Like old times it is to drop across pretty Jessie Mack, a good looker always and better looking than ever."

"I was sorry to hear about Walker," Maurice said later, when the woman had grown more composed. "He was a good fellow."

"And a good husband," Jess answered, hugging the baby tightly.

"Well, here's to him," said Bunstead, raising his glass. "A man who is a good fellow and a good husband, and both at once, cuts a lot of ice with me. How about it, Jess? Tell the old man. He's bulging with money. Tell him what you want."

"He is just the same," the woman said brokenly. "Just the same old Maurice we all knew."

"Jess, old girl," Maurice said earnestly, "years do make a difference. When you've got a wad of bullion in a world of ear-biters, and a taste for champagne, it is difficult to be just the same. But old Walker was real good to me, and you were an angel. Those boots, they were—well, what about it, my dear? How do we come in?"

"I want work," the woman said eagerly.

"Surely! When?" Maurice asked.

"At once," she urged, for her needs were pressing.

"Right-o—open next Monday. Send your bill matter to Otto and make it hot. What d'ye do? Song and dance?"

"Yes," she faltered.

"How much?" Maurice asked.

"Well, I haven't worked for a year. I got five at the last."

"Well, make it fifteen," Maurice said glibly. "Four weeks off the reel—open Monday. And you can have two weeks to follow, in my place at Manchester. Then you can come back twice this year, and three times next. It's as much as I can do. Otto will fix you if you need the ready."

"Heaven bless you," she said brokenly, and the tears again stole down her cheek.

Maurice fussed about, pouring champagne and offering the woman sandwiches—anything to avoid tears. Maurice hated tears.

The baby began to stir, stretched itself, and cried.

Maurice seized on the incident eagerly to bridge the embarrassment caused by the woman's tears.

"Hullo!" he called gayly. "Come to grandpa! Let's have a look at the little chap."

He took the baby, held it up in the light, grinned into its puckered face,

and made fierce noises through his curled mustache.

The infant smiled and seemed to stretch out a hand at the big, genial, red face, trying to clutch the well-trained mustache.

"Ah, the bounder!" the manager said radiantly. "Surprising how we good fellows know each other. Stifle me, if he hasn't got funny old Walker's glad eye! And may I perish if I don't give the little beggar a contract on the spot. I've worked with his father and his mother. What's the matter with booking him as well, Otto?"

"Sure," said Otto, catching the spirit of the suggestion and eager to stave off the dreadful interval during which a woman cried before them both.

Maurice handed the baby back and quickly filled in a contract for the mother. Then he took another form, elaborating his good-natured jest.

"What's his name?" he asked jovially.

"Billy," she faltered. "Billy Mack."

"Billy Mack," he said gayly, "I've engaged you. At twenty, you come to me for six weeks every year until you are tired. I'll be there, for your mother's sake, and we'll say a tenner per week. We'll put it down to the boot bill, Otto. Have another glass to celebrate Billy Mack's first engagement. Pass the bottle, Otto."

When Jess Mack rose to go, she carried two contracts: one for herself for work she needed at once, at pay three times more than she hoped to get; the other, for her son in swaddling clothes, six weeks old.

When she had gone, Maurice, after his kind, was pleased with himself. He had a big heart, an open hand, and a lot of money, and there were no cares on his horizon. He laughed loudly and chuckled in his fat way about doing a good turn to old Bill Walker's widow.

"And strangle me, Otto," he added, "if the nipper comes along at twenty and I'm not planted, I'll put him up on the terms of his contract, just as freely as I've set his mother going. I will, upon my soul, if my trouble and strife is not ended, as sure as my name is Maurice and for the sake of old times."

CHAPTER III.

AT ANY COST.

YEARS went by; a good part of twenty years. The music-hall business waxed and waned, but mostly it waxed. The whole character of this class of enterprise altered. It changed from the type of theater run by Maurice, in the "rule of thumb" manner, to chains of theaters run by shrewd business men, alert on questions of contract. The newer men drank less champagne by day. With them, a sovereign was twenty full shillings, and each sovereign was expected to buy a full pound's worth of service.

Chains of music halls arose, bigger, brighter, holding more people. These groups of theaters were in the hands of syndicates, who roped in the best of the genius available on the stage, and could employ the biggest stars thirty or forty weeks in the year.

New stars rose and fell, but when they twinkled successfully they shed the joys of their personalities only in the syndicate halls. The men behind the syndicates had the money, they had the business sense, they made the music halls pay, and—they employed all the stars.

In 1905 Billy Bones was the rising star. He had come from the provinces with some reputation, and haunted agents and syndicate magnates until one, in sheer despair at the man's pertinacity, had put him up as an "extra," to play out the house after the last star turn—the most thankless task that can be allotted to a music-hall artist.

The house was rising to go home, but Billy Bones made the most of his opportunity. Many resumed their seats to hear the odd new man. When he had finished his brief turn, the unusual thing was happening. The audience were crying for more of the last turn, while the band vainly strove to disperse them with the national anthem.

That was the beginning of Billy

Bones' sway. The grotesque, unknown comedian rapidly came to his own. He was engaged years ahead, but only worked forty weeks in the year. The grotesque one was fond of long holidays. His business was to make London laugh, and he did—about five times nightly. All London, tired, weary of the dead monotony of life, smiled at his feet and found surcease in his contagious humor. And Billy drew a hundred and twenty pounds per week and did not hesitate to tell the music-hall magnates that they were starving him.

That year, Claude S. Maurice and his henchman, partner, and friend, Otto Bunstead, lingered on at the old Paradise, but it was paradise only in name. People had got into the habit of staying away. The place, compared to the newer halls, was shabby and uninviting. For years it had not been decorated. The gold moldings were tarnished, the stalls did not tip up and were badly upholstered, the "popular" seats were but rickety benches. The band was thin, shabby, and unshaved. The stage was badly lighted, and the street scene showing the Elephant and Castle had a tear running right across both the elephant and the castle.

The entertainers were second rate, of the raucous, red-nosed male type, further depressed by the introduction of the short-skirted sisterhood of a generation before, who dropped their H's, winked vigorously, and with cracked voices and heavy movements went through the conventional simplicities of the song and dance. The whole place, by night or day, seemed dead. People wondered how long it would last.

Claude S. Maurice was not quite the Maurice of old. He was thinner now and his face was not so flushed. Indeed, he had to work harder, for in the last seven years he had been fighting a losing battle. Money ceased to roll into the Paradise. The attractions of the syndicate halls were too strong. The Paradise worked sometimes at a profit, more often at a loss. Old Maurice, at the age of sixty-five—no age to fight losing battles—seemed at the end of his career and hard put to it to keep his head above water.

Yet he remained much the same in temperament. He was still buoyant, spruce, white-headed; and he curled his mustache fiercely, though he did so with a quiver in his heart.

Bunstead, a little threadbare, stood by his chief. Together they were backing a single idea—to hold on at the Paradise and keep it open. With a sincerity amounting to despair they hoped that some one of the wealthy syndicates would be deluded into believing there was still money in the old Paradise, and buy them out at a better figure than the meager price already offered by one contemptuous music-hall man.

The pair were just as brave, as simple, and as foolish as of yore, but they were not so self-indulgent. They were still well dressed, but not so fashionable. Maurice could still laugh heartily. He was even ready with the nimble "half a bar" for the needy brother, but his easy charity often left him with barely the price of a dinner for himself. Always they were anxious.

"This is a nice little place," Maurice said one day, facing Bunstead. "But old Paradise is becoming a loser. Whatever we do, they don't seem to come."

He looked round the dingy office, a trifle dashed in spirits, and lighted a cheap cigarette.

"We give a good show," Bunstead said; "one of the best. But you are right, guv'ner; they don't come in hundreds and dozens with their uncles and cousins."

"Ah!" exclaimed Maurice, "it makes my head ache when I think of the old Paradise, with real gold flowing in at night and real wine flowing all day. All my box-office men built rows of houses in those days. We had the people, then."

"We had," Otto replied. "But we had the names, too. You could get a star for twenty-five pounds at a week's notice in our heyday."

"Yes, and now you can't get anything under seventy-five pounds per, and a booking a year ahead. That's our

trouble. They want names. The people follow the stars."

"Can we go on?" asked Otto anxiously.

"Not long at this rate," Maurice answered. "We are sure broke if a miracle doesn't happen this next two months, and the notices will be going up at the poor old Paradise."

He thought heavily for some minutes.

"I wouldn't mind if we could make a show," he said at last. "The Crosby Syndicate want the site. If we were looking good to the eye, we might get out at a price that would keep you and me going for the rest of the time coming to us. Now, if I could put a real star or two up, things might look better, but the cost is too high."

"Yes, it means what we haven't got—real money," Bunstead suggested.

"Yes, real money! And if I got one of these hundred-a-week top liners and he didn't fill the house, we'd bust a month sooner. We dare not do it, Otto; we've got to stick on and wait in the old way."

A knock sounded on the door—a heavy, confident knock.

"Come in," growled Bunstead.

A young man entered. He was plainly but well dressed in a blue suit. From his hat to the soles of his boots "music hall" was written on him. He had a face that made one think of race-course tipsters, pugilists, vendors of medicine in market places, and bull dogs. It was all character—gleaming eyes, big nose, and a mouth like the opening in a postal letter box. The hair was cropped so close that the color of the scalp showed through it. He was singularly modest in his choice of jewelry: he wore only one diamond ring—worth perhaps a brace of hundreds. As real diamonds did not come to the Paradise in those days, both Maurice and Bunstead agreed mentally that the bauble was paste.

The young man looked at Maurice. Then the letter box he used as a mouth suddenly crinkled into the most grotesque smile either man had ever seen. When he spoke, his voice was so pathetic that he seemed to be on the verge of crying.

"Say, are you the guy running this hall?" he asked crisply.

"I'm the manager," Maurice said, with some dignity.

"Well, I'm Bill." The younger man grinned. "I want to open on Monday."

The two men looked startled.

"Have you got a contract?" Bunstead asked.

"Sure; look it over," he replied, handing them a folded piece of soiled paper.

They looked the document over together. The words danced before their eyes: "Billy Mack Walker, six weeks every year from the age of twenty, at ten pounds per week."

Bunstead grew faint.

"But we can't do it," Otto said, gulping. "It was a joke to help your mother—Jess Mack. You were a cub in the bib-and-bottle stage, and times were good to us. We can hardly pay any one a tenner a week now, let alone a stranger with an unknown act."

"You've got to, anyway," Bill replied, and his India-rubber under lip stuck out. "A contract's a contract."

Maurice suddenly looked his old self again and brought his fist down on the table.

"So you're Jess Mack's lad—Bill Walker's son?" he said.

"That's me," the young man answered.

"Humph!" grunted Maurice. "Well, you've got the breed, whatever you stand for as an act. Your father had a big heart and would share his last leg of mutton with any one. But old Jess had even a bigger heart than Bill's, and she gave me a pair of boots when boots were as necessary to me as full houses are now."

"Yes?" said Bill Walker. "I didn't know the oldster—he died before I could stand up. But mother is the prize pebble—the real bit of sunshine."

"Good!" said Maurice, though not so easily. He was thinking of the ten pounds per week he had to provide, for a stranger. "Is Jess still going strong? Is the dear old girl all right?"

"Sure!" the young man answered. "What about it?" He pointed to the contract.

"We simply can't," Bunstead wailed.

"No, we can't," Maurice agreed; "but we will." His eyes suddenly gleamed purposefully. "Otto, we've met all our contracts in the last twenty-five years. A bit difficult lately, but we've done it. And when we can't keep on we are going out. I wrote it, you witnessed it; what we stood for then, we'll stand to now. This contract of Bill's goes! It's funny, though, that we should get cold feet on a tenner, but it's all in the game. Up with you to-day and down—— Anyway," he said soberly, "Jess was a good sort and the lad goes."

The visitor jumped up.

"You open Monday," Otto said dolefully. "I hope you've got some act. Send in your bill matter, will you?"

"Right," young Walker answered crisply. "I understand why ma's got a soft spot in her heart for you. Don't worry; I'll send my bill matter to-mor- act. It will be as good as anything you two evergreens will touch down here for a ten-spot."

He was gone.

Maurice looked at Bunstead, and Bunstead, shaking his head, looked at Maurice.

"How could you?" Bunstead groaned. "Stuck for six weeks at ten, and we ain't going to live that long in the old Paradise."

Maurice stood up and slowly lighted a cigarette.

"Otto," he said jerkily, "you know me, and I know you. We don't alter—it's the other fellows who are leaving us. Jess was a good sort—one of the best. Good luck to her son. He's got it all to come. We've passed our word, and besides our clothes our word is nearly all we own. We'll go down honest—you and I—and we'll keep our word, whatever it costs us. This is the last of our old contracts."

"Good old Maurice," Otto said suddenly, his eyes glistening. "I'm just beginning to understand what the two-a-penny nuts about nowadays mean when they talk about white men."

CHAPTER IV.

NO MISTAKE.

THE next morning at eleven Maurice and Bunstead sat opposite each other in the office of the Paradise, going through the morning's correspondence. Bunstead rose to open a big bundle of printed matter, and, as he did so, started back, aghast.

"What's this they're giving us?" he cried, as he unrolled poster after poster.

They all disclosed, either by illustration or pungent statement of fact, that Billy Bones, the fashionable grotesque comedian, was booked to show at the house lucky enough to put out his bills.

"Some agent has the address wrong," Bunstead growled.

Maurice did not look up. He was puzzled by the letter over which he was poring. The words danced before his eyes.

DEAR SIR: Our client, Mr. William Walker, desires the manager of the Paradise to arrange for him to appear at nine o'clock sharp, on Monday next and after. Only by the strict observance of this time can he complete his turn and get away in time to fulfill his last engagement at ten-fifteen. Yours faithfully,

CARTER & REECE.

Maurice was a study, as he sat back, allowing this autocratic message to soak into his mind.

"The cheeky young pup!" he said, over and over again.

Bunstead looked up from the bill matter he had been surveying with a watering mouth, and saw the astonished expression of the manager.

Almost mechanically, Maurice handed him the letter.

"This lad is a sort of mogul," Bunstead said as a first comment. "He seems to think he owns the theater."

Then his eyes narrowed, as he read the signature to the letter.

"Carter & Reece!" he said suddenly. "They're mixing it. They are

Billy Bones' agents, and his printing has come on here by mistake. There's some mistake and——" He stopped. The alternative seemed too good to be true. With a heart rapidly beating, he rang up the agents' telephone number.

"Say," he shouted, "we've got some printing belonging to Billy Bones here, by mistake."

"By what?" boomed a voice.

"By mistake."

"We don't make mistakes at Carter & Reece's. Who is it?" the same voice snapped.

"The Paradise—Waterloo."

"Sure; that's right. Billy Bones opens on Monday for six weeks. What's biting you?" the voice insisted.

"Nothing's biting me, but——" began the bewildered Bunstead. Then he suddenly remembered the face of their caller of the day before—the elastic mouth and the odd, pugnacious humor that was dominating the music-hall world of that moment.

"There are no 'buts,'" the voice drawled at the other end of the wire. "We make no accidental contracts for Billy Bones. But say, Paradise, you have us guessing. How did you get Bill at ten pounds per?"

Bunstead hung up the receiver.

"Maurice!" he cried, "talk of Providence! Well, of all the luck! We've got a little tin god feeding from the hand. As sure as death, Maurice, old image, we've struck it good and fair. Either I'm clean crazy, or we have a cinch on a gold mine. Do you know what we did yesterday?"

"Leave it," said Maurice, without comprehending. "I keep my word, and should he be the stiffest dub on earth, I'll pay him ten for six weeks if the house keeps open."

"Keeps open!" howled Bunstead. "We'll not have room enough for all the money coming to us! Do you know, on my solemn word of honor, we have booked a star—*the* star. We've got the biggest draw in London for ten pounds a week, and he's worth every penny of one hundred and fifty pounds to us. Jess Mack's son is Billy Bones!"

Maurice put out his hand and touched a bell.

"You may be mad!" he said, scarcely believing what he heard; "but I've known you forty years, and you've never given signs of complete insanity. I'll chance it."

"Orlando," a new office boy as perky and shabby as all the music-hall boys who had gone before him, entered with the grin that seems to be the mark of his order.

Maurice frowned upon him and gave him an order in a mysterious stage whisper.

"The usual, sir?" Orlando asked, grinning.

"No, the best!" Maurice roared. "And if you are not back in five minutes, I'll have you flayed by me trusty guards and exhibit you as the boy who was born without a skin."

On Monday night the house was packed from floor to ceiling. Maurice beamed from the front of the house. Bunstead stood pompously behind. Billy Bones turned up at a quarter to nine and occupied the biggest dressing room. For the first time in ten years there was heat in it.

Bones was never in better form. The whole house rocked. At nine-twenty, when he had finished his turn, the huge audience rose at Billy Bones, and with their shout of glee prosperity came back to the old Paradise, and to Messrs. Maurice and Bunstead.

The two waited for the comedian outside the big dressing room to escort him to the motor car standing at the stage door. He came out with a slight, elderly woman, beautifully clad and still sprightly.

Maurice bent low before the little woman. "Jess," he said brokenly, "Heaven bless you!"

"And bless you, dear friend," she said, without a touch of self-consciousness. She was leaning on the arm of her son, Billy Bones, obviously proud and happy. "This is Bill," she added; "he's grown, hasn't he? And doesn't he go? Ain't he a wonder?"

"Nix on that, ma!" said Billy Bones, the son of Walker, the acrobat, with becoming modesty.

"You've saved me, Billy," Maurice whispered hoarsely.

"Sure," he answered frankly. "Ma keeps an eye on old friends. That's why she looks so good to me. I'd work for five shilling a week if she said so."

"And did she say it?" Maurice asked eagerly.

"She said if I didn't come along and work out my first contract, she'd spank me," chuckled the amiable comedian.

"Your debtor, madam," Maurice said, holding the hand of the little woman, as she sat in the waiting car.

"Quits," she murmured, smiling. "There are more things in a contract than the written word. Cheero! dearie," she added, waving the hand Maurice had released, as the car swept away to carry Billy Bones to his other call in the Strand.

Simple Rural Tastes

I'M a confirmed dyspeptic; that's why I look so pale," said the city man, gazing almost enviously at the ruddy face of an old friend from the country, who had called at his office.

"What you need is simple country food, man," said his visitor, clapping him heartily on the shoulder. "Come and visit me and my wife on the farm for a while, and we'll set you up. It's rich town living that's too much for you. Now, take breakfast, for instance. All I have is two good cups of coffee, a couple of hot rolls, a bit of steak with a baked potato, some fresh muffins, and either cake or a bit of meat pie to top off with. What do you have?"

The town man looked at his red-cheeked friend, who stood waiting for the confirmation of his idea.

"A cup of hot water and two slices of dry toast," he responded soberly. "But if you think a simple diet like yours would help me, I will make one more attempt to be a healthy man."

Public-Spirited Citizen

IN one of our New England cities the chief post office is in a side street, and very difficult to find. A gentleman called one day and inquired for the postmaster. He was told he was very busy.

"Will no one else do?" asked a clerk.

"Certainly not," was the answer.

"Very well. Will you wait, sir?"

"With pleasure."

Presently the postmaster appeared and inquired the stranger's business.

"Well, it's simply this, sir," was the answer. "I've been having a look round some of the back streets, and I have discovered a place where you could hide the post office even better than it is hidden here. Good morning."

Nuts to Crack

OH, tell me, does the setting sun e'er feel a sinking pain? Why is—inform a "Puzzled One"—a weathercock so vane? Do stars require a gun to shoot? What makes a bucket pail? What tailor makes the chimney's soot? Who writes the comet's tail?

And why are dogs so lovable, however much they whine? Pray tell me, Mr. Editor, what makes the fir tree pine?

Why is a vessel's hind part stern? Who sings an old hen's lay? Please tell me, for I'd like to know, who wears the close of day?

Tale of the Football Field—

In Their Own Coin

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

FINE POINTS.

THE sun was setting in a golden glow. The last rays, driving through the innumerable dust motes that filled the air, touched almost into a thing of beauty the gray-brown gridiron, scarred by the September drought, and softened the hard nakedness of the stands above. Scrimmage was breaking up, and the scattered groups on the bleachers bunched together as the singing of the Alma Mater song began.

It had been hard, hot practice—the last real work before the first game of the season—and the players, dusty, bruised, and weary, scattered joyfully in the direction of the gym. As a tall fellow, unusually big-framed and long-armed, passed him, Huntington, the coach, turned from the newspaper man with whom he had been talking and called:

"Oh, Kennett!"

The latter turned and came toward him.

"I want you to come to the gym at seven-thirty to-night, Kennett," said the coach. "O'Rourke and I, and, perhaps, one or two others, will be there. We want to give you a little special coaching for Saturday—show you something of the fine points of the game."

"Very well, sir," answered Kennett, his eyes sparkling with eager enthusiasm.

"We're going to make a tearer of you, Kennett," put in O'Rourke, the captain, who was standing beside the coach. "You did fine work to-night."

Kennett smiled, shrugging his shoulders deprecatingly, as he moved away.

"That fellow ought to make a big noise, if we can put the right spirit into him," remarked O'Rourke. "Look at those arms and shoulders."

"Well, we'll give him some new ideas to-night," replied Huntington. "He'll need them Saturday."

Kennett was the find of the new season at Stanton. Outside work had kept him off the gridiron in his freshman year, but this fall he had managed to get out at a sacrifice. He had never played football before, having lived most of his life on a ranch in Montana, but he took to the game as an Indian boy does to ponies, and seemed to have the football instinct. Within a week he was put on the varsity squad, and he appeared to be just the man to fill the shoes of Dick Harris, the last year's

captain, at right guard. With a physique still in the promise of its fulfillment, as it was, he was one of the most powerful members of the squad, and, with development and experience, there was no telling what he might not become.

At his boarding house, Kennett, munching rather ruefully his late supper of cold potatoes and tough steak, came to the conclusion that the meals there did not go well with football, either as to fare or convenience of time of service. He looked joyfully forward to the prospect, after Saturday's game, of being at the training table.

The meal over, he put on his hat and sauntered down the street toward the gymnasium through the dusk. Fireflies glinted in the air, groups of coeds strolled back and forth under the elms; from across the street came the notes of a bugle—some one was practicing calls. College life seemed very sweet to Kennett. He was tasting now the first of the adulation accorded so extravagantly to football heroes; new friends, honor, and prestige were coming to him; the future was surely full of good things. The glamour with which he had invested college life during his years at the ranch, and which had been sadly dispelled in the course of his hard, matter-of-fact freshman year, had come back in full.

"Oh, where, oh, where, does a ping-pong ping?" It was Cooke's tenor, softly subdued, floating out from the arched blackness that marked the gateway of the gray gymnasium.

"On the dummy, on the dummy line." Heavier voices took up the chorus.

Kennett quickened his pace, his pulses thrilling in time to the song.

"Hello, Kennett! You looked big as a house coming up the walk there in the dark," called O'Rourke out of the blackness.

Kennett smiled. These things were pleasant to him.

"Well, we're all here now," said Huntington; "let's get to work."

The lights were turned on for the main floor, the mats pulled out, and, in stocking feet and undershirts, the men began. There were Huntington and O'Rourke, Cooke, the assistant coach, and Redfern, a promising candidate for end, besides himself. He was pitted against his captain, who played the other guard, at blocking and breaking through; Cooke undertook to reveal to Redfern some of the secrets of end play.

"Now, I'll show you the first thing," said O'Rourke, after a minute or two of warming up; "it's the 'body box.'"

He demonstrated it, and Kennett was somewhat surprised. It was flagrant holding, though skillfully, covertly done.

"Why, isn't that against the rules?" he asked O'Rourke.

"No," replied the captain, with deep scorn in his voice. "Anyhow, everybody does it; we weren't penalized once on it last season."

Kennett did not know what to think. He had very high ideals of football, gathered mainly from what he had read before coming to college, and speeches he had heard at football rallies. Still, the captain must be right; it was hardly in his heart to think him other than infallible where the game was concerned.

Next, O'Rourke showed him a neat trick of grabbing his man by the inside of the trousers leg, holding him an instant, or lifting him to the right or left, if a hole was to be made, then letting go again.

"Is that allowed, too?" queried Kennett, more nonplused than ever.

"Of course," answered O'Rourke, a little contemptuously; "the umpire'll never see you. You keep your arms close down to your sides, and he can't tell what you're doing with that inside hand; and by the time things open up you've let go."

Kennett said nothing, but he was doing some hard thinking. All his life he had been taught that fair play was a cardinal rule in everything. From the cowboys he had learned the rough ethics of the square deal; his father, who had taught him to conquer outlaw broncbos, to use the gloves, to wrestle, to shoot, had constantly hammered it home that to be square was the only thing worthy of a man, and the thing that enabled

him to conquer in the long run. This surely was not square; it was not fair play.

There was an innocent, unsophisticated look in Kennett's blue eyes that often led others to think him easy to influence. O'Rourke made this mistake. He interpreted his silence as acquiescence—he had occasionally had them a little squeamish before. So he warmed up to it, showing his pupil how to give the point of the elbow if a man played too high, how to uppercut him, or lift him from below with interlocked arms when he played too low.

Huntington, watching Kennett, noted a growing hardness in his expression, a steady gleam in his eye, and several times looked warningly at O'Rourke, but the latter did not take the hint.

"Whenever you can," he was saying, "throw a scare into your man—make him afraid of you. Hit him with the heel of your hand, upper——"

"Well, if this is the way you play football, I don't think I want any of it in mine!" Kennett's voice sounded harsh and different.

"What! Why, what do you mean, you overgrown cub?" asked O'Rourke hotly, as he recovered himself and grasped the import of the other's words.

"I mean that you've been teaching me nothing but dirty work, and I don't care to play if that's what you want me to do."

"Dirty work! You're a pretty one to tell me what dirty work is," roared the captain, losing his temper completely. "Quit, then, if you don't know any better!"

"Hold on, O'Rourke," interposed Huntington, who had considerable skill in dealing with men, and did not wish to lose Kennett; "go slow.

"You don't quite size up the situation, Kennett," he continued, turning to the tense sophomore. "We haven't been teaching you dirty work; we've only been showing you football as it is played. It's like a lot of other things—mighty different in fact from what it is on paper. We don't stand for really dirty work—laying a man out, and that sort of thing; but these other things are just everyday football. If you don't do them, you'll have them done to you, and then where will you be? Why, the first experienced man you get up against will make a monkey out of you in no time, unless you use some of these dodges on him! If I coached my men not to hold, and to do the rest of the stuff the rules call for, we'd lose every important game this season. Then I'd be fired, and the whole student body'd be down on you and the rest of the team for your rotten playing.

"Experience will teach you the truth of what I'm saying, Kennett," he went on. "It's a condition you've got to meet. Next Saturday you'll be up against a hard man, and a rough player. If you don't do him, he'll do you, and if, before you get through with the game, you don't agree with me, I'll quit my job. Now, you and O'Rourke do some good straight work, then go home and think it over."

Kennett was somewhat abashed. After all, perhaps he had been a little overscrupulous. He had a good deal of the football novice's reverence for a coach; and Huntington had always treated him with great consideration and courtesy. Had he made an ass of himself over something he knew nothing about? Redfern was learning from Cooke a way to box the tackle that looked shady, and doing it as if glad of the chance. He decided that he had better go slow in making up his mind about this.

At it he went again with O'Rourke, practicing now the things he had been taught on the field. The captain was still in a temper, yet he managed to compliment his pupil once or twice. In the straight work the sophomore had held him well.

CHAPTER II.

AGAINST THE GRAIN.

ON the way home, Cooke overtook Kennett. "I say, old man," he began, clapping him on the shoulder, "don't be too fussy about that little matter to-night. I've been through the same thing, but I had to come to it. I

found it just as the coach says. He told you the gospel truth."

But, out in the moonlight, things looked different to Kennett. Something within him revolted at the coach's logic. If the rules were for anything, they were to put both teams on an equal basis to insure fair play, and if every one was breaking them, that was only a case of both sides trying to get all the advantage they could, and win in every way possible—of putting victory above fair play.

Yet he found himself strongly tempted. He felt that if he refused to play the game as the coach wished he would be put off the team, and this would mean not only disappointment, and the loss of all that was making this year so glorious, but disgrace in the eyes of his fellows. His dismissal would be given out as insubordination, failure to serve his Alma Mater. He would be sent to Coventry.

His head was turned a little by the hero worship he had already received; it was hard to thrust this and all its pleasant accompaniments from him, and accept the alternative. The possibility of compromise, of yielding enough to keep his place on the team until he learned the game better and could hold his own by perfectly fair play, occurred to him. If he were called upon to take this stand, could he not do more good by keeping in with the coach and the others, until he himself became captain, or possibly coach, then stand for the cleanest, squarest kind of a game?

Recollections of the past came to him. Fair play and a square deal, the only things worthy of a man, seemed to reiterate themselves in his mind.

"I'll be hanged if I will!" he said aloud, as he entered the house where he roomed.

CHAPTER III.

THUMBS DOWN.

THERE was an unusually large attendance at the game the following Saturday. A wave of football enthusiasm was at its height at Stanton. It had first been aroused when, three years ago, the wearers of the gold and black had suddenly emerged from obscurity and become a factor in the running for the Western championship; and now, with a veteran team which had last year tied Sheldon for first honor, every one looked forward to an ever-victorious eleven, and the whole student body was winning mad.

The bright pennants tossed and flaunted themselves almost as at a championship game, the cheering was full-voiced, continuous, insistent on victory—glory for Stanton. The visitors from St. Mary's, a little college in the North, were apparently easy, although report had it that they were in unusually good condition. The rooters hoped that they would make it decently interesting for the varsity.

All this enthusiasm failed to arouse response in Kennett, even when his own name was coupled with the Stanton long cheer. He had a feeling of alienation from it all. He waited for play to begin with a sense of disgust with things in general, irritated and uneasy with the nervousness of the novice going into his first game.

Things opened with a rush. The visitors started by circling Redfern's end, worked a fake buck, and an onside kick in quick succession, almost taking the badly overconfident Stanton off its feet and actually threatening its goal line inside five minutes!

Kennett was against Armstrong, the best man in the St. Mary's line. He was a veteran who had been named as a substitute for the All Western the year before, fast, resourceful, not too clean in his style of play. He quickly grasped his opponent's inexperience and unfamiliarity with the tricks of the game, and began to hold, worry, and foul him in every way possible.

The sophomore, unable to get the jump on him, could do nothing at breaking through; the St. Mary's man always managed to grab him and hold him until it was too late to spoil the play, or to drag him to one side, or lift him back when a hole was to be made.

Humiliated at the ease with which he was being handled, infuriated by the unfairness of the means his opponent

employed, and rattled by the momentary demoralization which had fallen on his team, Kennett grew desperate and went up in the air a little, making him all the easier a mark. St. Mary's was going through the whole Stanton line more or less, but most consistently through him. He struggled with a growing desire to strike his opponent, which increased every time the other fouled him.

After the visitors' full back had shot for five yards through a gaping hole between Kennett and the center, O'Rourke ran over to him, pulled him to his feet, and whispered savagely:

"Rough him, you fool! Smash him when he grabs you. Hurt him a little, and he'll quit holding. You've got to stop him!"

Kennett, who would not put into use his knowledge of the "fine points" of the game, gritted his teeth hard. At this rate the other team would soon score—through him, probably. Should he give up? He did not know that the blame for what was happening lay on incompetent and insufficient line coaching, the system of which depended on holding and "roughing it" as fundamentals of the rusher's game. It seemed to him that fair play, according to the rules, had been found wanting; that to play the game thus could mean only defeat. If things went on as they were going, he would be blamed for disgracing his university, he would stand as a fool in the eyes of his teammates. Besides, a consuming desire to give his opponent some of his own medicine possessed him. As he was carried out and back again, and the opposing full went through for four, the decision that it was no use, that he might as well come to it, gained ascendency. But then, from somewhere, there came into his mind the old lines that he had used to say to himself:

> "Go lose or conquer, as ye can,
> Be each, pray God, a gentleman."

After all, what did victory or defeat, blame or praise, matter? Fair play, the square deal, to be true to himself—those were the things.

"I'll be hanged if I will!" he said again.

Squaring himself, with a mighty effort he got past his man on the next down, spoiled the play, then repeated the performance again, and it was Stanton's ball.

But Kennett did not know the game well enough; his adversary was too cunning. On the first down, Armstrong broke through, blocking Stanton's kick.

A water boy came tearing out from the side line. Running up to Kennett, he whispered:

"The coach says hold your man—grab his legs any old way; take a chance at being penalized."

Kennett's lips set. Scattered exhortations of "Stop that man, Kennett!" "Get into the game!" were coming from the bleachers; one of the backs behind him was roaring savagely about some one's "rotten work." Again he charged into his man with all his might, but with hands close to his sides; and the arms of the other caught him like outshooting pistons and pushed him to the side.

His man had this time not only spoiled the play, but somehow managed to steal the ball, and it was only twenty-five yards in front of the goal. A cry of "Take him out!" came from the stands.

O'Rourke came over and said something to him, but he shook his head. A moment later St. Mary's kicked a field goal, and a substitute trotted out and touched Kennett on the shoulder. "The coach told me to go in for you," he said.

Kennett nodded and started wearily toward the side line. Hisses greeted him, the faces of the subs on the bench were cold and averted. He did not remember much of the rest of the game, save that Stanton won only with difficulty, and that everybody seemed disappointed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUR OF DEFEAT.

AT the boarding house, that night, the others were cold and distant. Next day this grew worse. Those who had been so warmly his friends, hardly

seemed to see him. At practice, Monday night, his name was not called when the varsity line-up was told off. As scrimmage went on, sub after sub was sent in, still he was ignored. Dumbly he sat on the bench, unheeded, unnoticed.

This happened for three nights in succession. Gradually he gathered that it had been given out that he was "yellow," that he had "laid down" in Saturday's game, that he was a quitter. The whole university looked upon him with contempt.

Bitterness welled up chokingly within him as he thought it over. He first resolved to turn in his suit, then it occurred to him that this was what was wanted, that Huntington and O'Rourke wished to drive him from the game. It would be, in a measure, vindication for them—proof of what they had charged him with.

So, next day, he joined the scrub squad. No notice was taken of him there, but the following evening he was sent into scrimmage, and pitted, not against the man who had superseded him, but O'Rourke.

If the St. Mary's man had been rough, the captain was much worse. With all the fierceness he could muster, he went into Kennett, roughing him, slugging almost openly, taunting him, calling him a yellow dog.

Kennett took it so quietly that the captain had no idea of the tempest boiling within him. The sophomore thought of calling O'Rourke out that evening, but felt that this would not do. It was a moral victory he was after, and that alone he would have.

The following afternoon he went through this again. Near the close of scrimmage, O'Rourke, watching his chance, grabbed his left arm and twisted it until it dropped limp and almost helpless at his side. Had it not been for his stubborn purpose, his pride, and the consciousness of the gratification it would give his enemy, Kennett must have left the field, but he fiercely choked down the pain and stuck out the practice, not even allowing himself a grimace.

That night he could not sleep; for a week he suffered excruciatingly. Yet, each day, he went through the torture of scrimmage unflinchingly. In spite of himself, O'Rourke came to feel secret respect, almost awe, for the man who, in spite of all he could inflict, confronted him so indomitably, with such unchanging, immovable grimness.

And Kennett learned the game until O'Rourke had his hands full, notwithstanding all he could do, with this young giant, who always played cleanly, yet with a rigidly controlled fierceness that he had never met with before.

One night Huntington said to him:

"O'Rourke, Kennett's playing a mighty good game, if he does stick to his high and mighty notions. I believe he's better than Davis."

"Well, he'll never play on the team as long as I'm captain," answered O'Rourke.

Nevertheless, a week later, Kennett was overtaken on his way home by the coach. After they had walked for a while in silence, Huntington began:

"If you'd only drop that nonsense, Kennett——"

"Never!" interrupted Kennett shortly, and no more words passed between them.

The season ended with Kennett still on the scrub. He saw Stanton defeated in the championship game, and it was Davis, the right guard, who was pounded to pieces, and through Davis that the victors scored. The sophomore found it hard to keep his sentiments of loyalty to his Alma Mater that day; to feel as he should in the hour of her defeat.

CHAPTER V.

THE OTHER WAY.

IN the summer, Kennett went to a neighboring city to work in the iron and steel works there. In the room in which he worked a Harvard man, who had been one of the best linemen the Crimson had ever turned out, and an All-American guard, was in charge.

One evening, after hours, he stopped to talk with Kennett, and the conversa-

tion fell on football. Before it was over, Kennett had told him his story.

"They said you were yellow, did they?" said the Harvard man, in a serious tone.

He had seen Kennett run across a girder over a vat of molten metal, while the other men stood still, and, at imminent risk to himself, pull off a belt and stop a machine that was grinding a fellow workman's hand to pieces.

"And you stuck it out through the season?" he continued.

"Sure," answered Kennett; "I didn't want to make what they said about my being a quitter true."

"And you're going out again next year?"

"Yes."

The Harvard man thought a minute.

"Look here," he said suddenly. "Can't you come to the house after work for an hour every evening for a while? We might try working out some of these things we've been talking about."

Kennett's face shone. "Yes, but I——"

"Oh, don't say it," interposed the other; "I'll be glad to have you; it'll be a pleasure to do a little of the old work again."

So it was settled, and every day Kennett and the Harvard man worked, the consummate master and the eager, grimly earnest pupil. Kennett had filled out since the previous fall, and his shoulders and arms, developed by the heavy work in the foundry, were becoming like those of a Titan. The Harvard man was surprised at his tremendous power, and delighted at the quickness with which he learned and the fervor with which he entered into the work.

Kennett came to know things of which he had not dreamed: that, after all, brains were of the most importance in the lineman's game; how to size up every pose of his opponent, selecting unerringly the always present point of least resistance for the impact of his charge; how to make of his arms and body a catapultlike battering-ram; to secure leverage and purchase by skillful use of hands and arms on an opponent's neck, and to steer a blind-charging adversary in or out, turning the momentum of his rush into his own undoing. He learned to look at blocking and breaking through as both a science and an art—a game where, as in chess, there is an answer for every move of the opponent. Also, the two went through the simpler things of the game, the fundamentals, over and over again, constantly threshing out the theory of the guard's position and duties, his relation to the rest of the line, and the whole team.

So Kennett learned to play his position as an individual, giving attention to a thousand points of its fineness, and not merely as part of a blind-charging, fouling, and battling line, as he had been taught at Stanton. Occasionally he was shown things that looked very much like jujutsu.

"Use these, if your man tries to lay you out, Kennett," said the Harvard man; "it's simply self-defense. I don't mean to wait your chance and then do him because he tried to do you five minutes before—that's dirty work as much as anything else—but when he tries anything on you, if you can, let him have it then and there, and give him enough to keep him from trying it again. It will probably save your having to go out of the game, and may put it into somebody's head to play cleaner football."

At first the Harvard man simply played with Kennett, in spite of the latter's great strength, but in three weeks' time the pupil was holding his own.

"We'd better drop this now, Kennett," said his teacher; "I'm afraid you may go stale next fall if we keep it up too long. Besides, right now, you're one of the best-coached guards I ever turned out. Keep up practicing quick starting; that's all you need now; it's about half a 'lineman's game.

"What Huntington told you last fall," he continued, "was stuff and nonsense. There are men on all the teams here who play a decent game, and, at Sheldon, they play pretty clean football; but then, Brooks knows some-

thing about coaching. When you do get up against the O'Rourke or Armstrong type, try some of the things I've shown you."

CHAPTER VI.

TO THE TEST.

IT was the second day of scrimmage work for the Stanton squad, and the groups on the bleachers were watching with unusual interest. Kennett, on the scrub, was tearing up the varsity line, ripping through and spoiling plays, making holes like open doors for his own backs, getting out and heading the interference in a way no guard had ever before done at Stanton; but the coaches seemed to be persistently ignoring all this. He was playing easily with Davis, the best of the two varsity guards, yet there he was, still on the second eleven, although another man had been changed from it to the varsity squad not fifteen minutes before.

"What's the matter with Kennett?" yelled some one.

"He's all right!" came in full, prompt chorus, followed by a Stanton cheer, with his name on the end of it.

O'Rourke, assistant coach this year, scowled.

"Davis," he said gruffly, "if you can't keep that scrub from making a monkey of you like that, let me in for a minute."

Kennett felt himself suddenly grow tense, rigid; then something within him seemed to sing for joy.

O'Rourke crouched before him, glowering, and sprang as the play started, trying to grab a leg. Then Kennett's long, powerful arms caught him, sending him over and back into the oncoming formation, upsetting it woefully. The ex-captain picked himself up and looked at his opponent dazedly. He had intended beating the ball and carrying Kennett off his feet, but the latter had got away with him, and those arms —they had struck him like bars of steel. Again he faced Kennett, and again was carried back. The third time, the latter's outside arm seemed a trifle exposed, and, lunging forward, he caught the wrist, drew it beneath his own body, and started to twist, when—something happened that sent him to the ground, his own arm throbbing with pain.

Slowly O'Rourke got up.

"I don't think I can play any more, Huntington," he said thickly; "I've hurt myself, somehow."

Huntington looked around. Davis, pretty well used up, had gone to training quarters. Whom should he put in?

The bleachers, grasping the situation, took the matter in hand.

"Kennett! Kennett! We want Kennett!" they sang out.

Huntington wavered, then gave way. The pressure of student opinion, his consciousness of Kennett's value to his own interests, to the prospects of the success of his team, were too much.

"Get in on the varsity in Davis' place, Kennett," he ordered.

After practice the coach walked over to where Kennett was pulling on his sweater.

"Come to the training table tonight," he said curtly.

Kennett hesitated. "How about the fine points of the game?" he asked grimly.

"Oh, you can play the game as you please," replied the coach, without glancing at him. "By the looks of O'Rourke, I guess you've got a few fine points of your own up your sleeve."

Always Downtrodden

THERE's a difference in time, you know, between this country and Europe," said a gentleman in New York to a newly arrived Irishman. "For instance, your friends in Cork are in bed and fast asleep by this time, while we are enjoying ourselves in the early evening."

"That's always the way!" exclaimed Pat. "Ireland niver got justice yit!"

The Entente Cordiale

By William Holloway

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

A STRIKING PRESENCE.

THROUGH flimsily curtained windows the little French restaurant on the edge of the Canadian Rockies diffused a warm, inviting glow into the heart of the winter night. Alonzo Stubbs, shivering in the intense cold, paused as his eye fell upon the battered sign: "Le Cage D'Or." There was nothing to see in the one-horse town, he told himself, and the bitter wind had chilled him to the heart. His train would not be along for three hours, and he had to dine somewhere. Why not dine where he would probably spend not half as much as in the station restaurant?

He came a step or two nearer, and examined the sign. "The cage of ore," he repeated, with a knowing air, translating the French as it looked to him. "H'm, probably iron ore. Maybe there's a deposit in the neighborhood. I'll bet, if there is, those jays haven't touched it."

Le Cage D'Or was a little two-story frame house a few feet from the main street. In the dim light it seemed very quiet and respectable, just the place a chance wayfarer might choose if his purse was no heavier than that of Stubbs. From the door, which a waiter opened, a delicious smell of cooking rushed out, and was swallowed up by the hungry night.

Stubbs approached the door with a swagger. The swagger was not due to any remarkable achievements of Mr. Stubbs, either in business, philosophy, or art. It simply represented his outlook upon the future. Some men are entitled to swagger when talking of their past. Stubbs, whose past for the most part consisted of a ridiculous series of petty failures, evened up matters by flaunting himself in the face of to-morrow.

He approached everything and everybody with the same swagger, and, as he had a solemn, flabby face and a dignified presence, the unwary were often deceived; as witness the solitary waiter at the Cage D'Or, who received him with every mark of approval and delight.

"Monsieur will have ze deenair?" he said excitedly, bowing the way into the narrow, low-ceiled room. "Ah, ze cold make monsieur 'ongrey, and ze Cage D'Or look ver' good to him."

Stubbs nodded gravely as he allowed

the waiter to remove his coat. It was one of his rules that waiters, like bill collectors, were best treated with impressive silence. And in the present case the rule worked like a charm. The waiter, awed by the stranger's silence, hung up his coat and hat with alacrity, convinced that the Cage D'Or was harboring no unimportant personage. He watched him with curiosity as he sank with dignity into the chair held out for him. Then, head inclined a trifle forward, he waited for orders.

But Stubbs was in no hurry to oblige the waiter. He had been buffeted by the bitter wind, and his hands were still cold. So he rubbed them softly together, and looked negligently about him.

The small table, set for two, to which the waiter had led him, was placed at one side of a cracked chimneypiece, and commanded an excellent view of the room. It was a square, low-ceiled apartment, papered in red, and heated by a funnel-shaped wood stove, around which a dozen small tables clustered closely. French chromos and mottoes lined the walls; odd-shaped sardine tins littered a battered mahogany sideboard to the left; rows of smoked hams dangled from the ceiling in dangerous proximity to the waiter's head; and between the hams swung old-fashioned brass lamps which tossed the shadows to and fro in time to their oscillations.

Besides Stubbs himself there were only two other diners—swarthy fellows, who sat drinking wine in the far corner. For a moment they looked curiously, expectantly, at the newcomer, then turned their eyes away.

"I'll bet I'm the first real human they have seen," Stubbs said to himself wisely, if not modestly.

The waiter moved the table a sixteenth of an inch to the right, then moved it back again; after which he brushed some imaginary crumbs from the cloth, as waiters have done from time immemorial. "Monsieur will have ze apéritif—ze cocktail?" he suggested.

Stubbs shook his head. "Not any," he replied coldly.

"Absinth, maybe?" the man persisted.

"Nothing at all." Stubbs' eyes were fastened on one of the men in the corner, who had drawn a long knife from his pocket, and was feeling its edge with a satisfied smile.

"Maybe monsieur like a *mêlée-cassis?*" said the waiter insistently. "I mix heem good; joose ze black couran' wine an' ze cognac. I mix heem vair' good."

Stubbs shook his head impatiently. He gazed earnestly at the man with the knife, then turned to the waiter with a stately wave of the hand. It was a gesture he had once seen a great statesman employ in one of his speeches, and much practicing before mirrors had made Stubbs' imitation marvelously correct.

"Have you any Château Lafitte?" he asked loftily.

The waiter sighed sorrowfully. He was desolated, he explained, but the customers of the Cage D'Or could not afford such wine. Would monsieur be content with another wine?

Monsieur refused kindly. Château Lafitte was the only wine he cared for—the one he drank every day. If it could not be supplied, monsieur would take the ordinary red wine.

"Ah, ordinary wine!" The waiter was very humble now. "Monsieur will take ze *vin ordinaire?*"

"Yes, yes." Stubbs waved him aside, and returned to his contemplation of the man in the corner.

That individual, knife in hand, was talking earnestly with his companion, their voices sounding strained and excited in the still air. For the first time in his life Stubbs found himself regretting his lack of the knowledge of French. He was immensely curious to discover the reason of the little drama now passing before him. Nor was his curiosity lessened when he saw the man with the knife produce a small whetstone from his pocket, and pass both knife and whetstone to his companion, who began sharpening the knife with clumsy motions of his strong, weather-beaten hands.

"Now, wouldn't that jar you?" said Stubbs to himself. "What are those fools doing?"

At this instant the waiter ambled forward and placed upon the table the usual supply of bread, and the usual bottle of claret. Stubbs pushed the bread aside.

"That's Canadian bread!" he said sharply. "Bring me French bread. And see that it is not too brown."

The waiter went through the doorway into the kitchen in a state of great excitement. He had a customer out there, he told his employer, who was worth seeing. Nothing was too good for such a customer; a man who drank only the rarest vintages every day. These Americans were coming into Canada all the time, and many of them were rich. Certainly this one was a millionaire.

The waiter's voice was shrill, and his words carried into the outer room, where they beat unheeded against the ears of Alonzo Henry Stubbs, only to be greedily absorbed by the two men in the corner. With wide-open eyes they listened to the waiter's report, turning occasionally to cast quick glances at the rich American, seated languidly at the table by the chimney-piece.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

ALONZO STUBBS was engaged in his favorite occupation of posing. With one hand supporting his temple, he assumed an attitude of profound thought, calculated to deceive even the sophisticated. In his own part of the world his poses had long since been worn threadbare, which was one reason why he had joined the so-called American invasion of Canada; but here, before these simple people on the last frontier, they made, he felt sure, a great impression.

Presently the waiter reappeared with French bread, which he set upon the table with a flourish. "Monsieur will have ze soup?" he asked.

Stubbs nodded abstractedly, and the waiter returned with a thick earthenware pot filled with a kind of cream soup.

Stubbs helped himself to soup, and slowly uncorked the wine—one of the bottles filled with red wine which do duty day by day. He had the bottle in his hand, preparatory to filling his glass, when a light touch fell upon it.

"Put that bottle down, and act as if nothing had happened," a low voice whispered in his ear.

He looked up, startled, to find a tall, gray-eyed man, enveloped in furs, bending over his chair.

"There's death in that bottle," the whisper went on. "Put it down and act as if you knew me."

Mechanically Stubbs did as he was told. There was a thrill in the speaker's voice that went through him like an electric shock. On the instant a deadly sickness swept over him. Without a word he placed the bottle on the table, and, leaning back in his chair, tried to appear unconcerned.

He had been a fool, he told himself bitterly—a fool not to stick to the big towns like Winnipeg and Edmonton, instead of coming to the frontier. Who knew what might happen in one of these little settlements on the edge of the wilderness? And a dozen wild-border tales, each more unpleasant than the other, surged through his brain.

The newcomer, meanwhile, nodded brightly to the two men in the corner, while the alert waiter relieved him of his coat and cap. Then, seating himself on the other side of the table, he said gravely: "I am glad to be in time—more glad than I can say."

The whole thing had happened so suddenly that Stubbs still sat dumb with amazement and alarm. The other eyed him kindly an instant, then shrugged his broad shoulders. "It was rather a close shave," he said reflectively. "But then, you Americans are used to taking big chances."

Stubbs, whose sole idea of big chances consisted in taking subscriptions for a religious periodical he did not represent, giving an engrossed receipt, then vanishing, wiped the per-

spiration from his forehead and assumed a careless air. "We don't mind a little risk sometimes," he said, with a trace of his former dignity. He leaned across the table. "What does it all mean?" he questioned.

"Wait till we get a chance to talk, and I'll explain," was the whispered answer. "Meantime, just act as if you knew me."

Thus advised, Stubbs leaned forward, rubbing his plump hands, and smiling with what he understood to be a friendly air, but which, owing to his terror, had in it something of the grotesque.

"Very glad to see you, old man," he said clumsily.

"And I to see you," was the hearty reply. The newcomer was about to speak again, when his glance apparently fell upon the bottle.

"*Vin ordinaire*," he exclaimed, with a ripple of laughter. "Surely, old man, you don't expect us to drink that?"

Stubbs took his cue. "Oh, it isn't so bad," said he, laying a protecting hand upon the bottle.

But the newcomer was not to be denied. "Here, waiter," he called; "take away this rubbish, and bring us a bottle of your best St. Julien. I'll open it myself, waiter."

As the waiter shuffled away with the old bottle, the newcomer's face grew grave again.

"Pretend you like the St. Julien when it comes," he said warningly. "It won't be drugged, anyway. And just talk in a natural tone. Above all, don't lose your nerve. I've been in a dozen tighter places than this," he added reassuringly.

Stubbs listened dubiously to this somewhat doubtful consolation. It is one thing to sit at a table, posing for the ignorant mob, and quite another to sit at the same table and feel one's self a target for a thousand unknown dangers.

"Suppose I—I—leave?" he suggested.

"Personally, I wouldn't advise it for *three* very good reasons. You can see them outside if you care to look out."

Stubbs took in the situation with a sinking heart. "You saw three men outside?" he asked.

His companion nodded. "That is why I shouldn't advise a sudden abandoning of the Cage D'Or." He helped himself placidly to soup. "Besides, you are safe enough in here. I don't recall that any one was ever seriously hurt in the Cage D'Or. Sometimes little accidents have happened, but that's all. It's when a man gets out into the street, so dazed he doesn't know his own name ——" He shrugged his shoulders suggestively.

"Why isn't the place closed up?" asked Stubbs, with rising indignation.

"Because nothing has ever been proved against it," was the shrewd answer. "And because it is useful to the police. Now, don't blame the police," he went on cheerfully. "I began life as a police detective, and though I have since entered the secret service of his excellency, the governor-general, I always have a good word for the old trade. Oh, the Cage D'Or has its uses. There is one of them," he added quietly.

Stubbs looked up. A short, thickset man, wearing moccasins, had come noiselessly into the room, and was standing by the door. His dark, smooth-shaven face was disfigured by a scar that ran from below his left eye to the corner of his mouth; there was a suggestion of bravado in the swing of his shoulders. As his eyes met those of Stubbs' companion he bowed politely, and smiled, the smile distorting his scarred face into a frightful grin.

"You mean?" asked Stubbs breathlessly.

"I mean that that fellow was Louis Riel's chief lieutenant in the rebellion nearly thirty years ago. And even now his hold on the half-breeds—he's one himself, as it happens—is so great that the government pays him to keep quiet. Oh, he is clever in his way, I tell you, and fit for something better than the life he leads. He got that scar at the battle of Duck Lake."

Stubbs watched, fascinated, as the man took a seat at a near-by table, and

began reading a French newspaper which he produced from his pocket. As he read his face showed, grim and forbidding, in the lamplight.

"What does he do here?" Stubbs asked.

The Canadian shrugged his shoulders once more. "For one thing—one important thing—he reports to the police every week. For the rest—what he will. And if he should fail to report promptly the police would probably ask unpleasant questions of the proprietor of the Cage D'Or."

CHAPTER III.

THE GATHERING CLANS.

THE waiter placed upon the table a bottle of St. Julien claret, which the secret-service agent surreptitiously examined. "Excellent!" he declared, with a meaning look at Stubbs. And to the waiter he added: "The entrée now."

The Canadian poured the St. Julien. "My name," he went on, "is Darsy—Jean Darsy. And I am always glad to be of service to an American—especially now that Canada and the United States have ceased snarling at each other. What," he continued, "does a small thing like reciprocity matter as long as our two countries stand together on the great question that affect the white race?"

Stubbs nodded. "I'm a great believer in the *entente cordiale* myself," he said hurriedly. "I think we should always help one another in trouble."

A little smile of appreciation went over Jean Darsy's face. "I admire your way of looking at it. There is no question that with Canada and the United States standing shoulder to shoulder on the Pacific, the yellow races will have to play second fiddle there. And, more than all, I admire your nerve in dining here so coolly. Not that there is real danger," he hastened to add, "but a good many men would think so."

Stubbs put on an air of bravado to hide his increasing alarm. The man in the corner was still sharpening his knife, and once or twice had glanced, he fancied, toward him. At the opposite end of the room a tall, burly fellow swayed rhythmically from side to side as he chanted an old French song. To the right, two young men were talking excitedly together, their black, nervous eyes fixed intently on Jean Darsy and his companion.

"What do you think is likely to happen?" asked Stubbs, in a voice that quavered despite his best efforts.

Darsy busied himself with the ragout the waiter had brought. "That's just what I don't know," he said abstractedly. "Nobody ever knows exactly what is going to happen here. Some surprising things have been pulled off in this dingy old room."

He gazed thoughtfully about him. "What I can't make out," he continued, "is why the big men don't put in an appearance."

Stubbs motioned toward the two young men who had just come in. "Are they——" he began.

Jean Darsy was amused. A little twinkle appeared in his eyes, and presently his whole countenance—clean-shaven, alert, frank—was irradiated by a smile. "Those two boys? Why, bless you, those boys never hurt a man in their lives. They are professional homesteaders—take up land on speculation. They were mixed up in some queer transactions with a young Englishman last year, and the Englishman was found dead one morning with a bullet in his head. But no blame attaches to the boys, as it was shown at the inquest that the Englishman got drunk and was trying to shoot them up."

"They look all right," admitted Stubbs, in a careless, offhand manner, though inwardly he made a resolution not to respond to any overtures the young men might make. "Any one will fight in self-defense."

Darsy nodded approval. "This ragout is excellent," he said, with an air of satisfaction. He took up his fork, then laid it down again. "I'll be hanged!" he muttered, in a tone of surprise.

Stubbs looked up. A broad-shouldered, athletic man of about thirty, roughly dressed in backwoods costume, had come into the room. The tassel of a red toque dangling beneath his ear gave a look of singular boldness to his strongly marked face. In his left hand he carried a pair of snowshoes.

Passing through the dining room, with a curt nod, he made his way into the kitchen beyond, whence his voice presently issued, high-pitched, strident, angry.

Jean Darsy lifted a finger to the obsequious waiter. "Who is that man?" he questioned.

The waiter answered with some surprise. Did monsieur not know André Lavaivre, the superintendent of the Warhop Mine?

Oh, yes, of course, monsieur remembered perfectly. André was a very good fellow. Then the waiter departed, and Darsy whistled softly.

"The Warhop Mine! Isn't that a joke?"

Stubbs was eating with remarkably little appetite. 'I don't see the joke," he said.

The Canadian leaned forward over the table. "You know the story of the Princess Mine? That rascal was the ringleader in all that went on there. Only his name wasn't Lavaivre." He was silent an instant. "I wonder what's under way at the Warhop?"

Stubbs, who did not know the story of the Princess Mine, was about to ask for information, when the conversation in the kitchen came to an abrupt end. The door was flung open, and Lavaivre appeared, his face black with rage, followed by the black-browed proprietor of Le Cage D'Or.

The two men advanced to the middle of the room, where Lavaivre paused by one of the tables to pour forth a torrent of French, emphasizing his remarks by blows upon the deal table that made the crockery rattle as if in a storm. Then, with a final shrug of his broad shoulders, he flung himself through the door, leaving the owner of the Cage D'Or standing with a puzzled frown upon his sullen face.

Suddenly from one corner of the room came a quick laugh, and a little, dried-up man, occupied in rolling a cigarette, began to sing. Another joined in, then another, until the room was alive with a rollicking chorus. To and fro beneath the waves of light went the waves of song, the diners keeping time with the clatter of knives against their plates, their eyes flashing as the melody rose and fell.

Darsy laughed quietly. "That's what I call well done," he said admiringly. "An old French chanson—a sort of battle song. The little beggar evidently knows there may be something doing."

"Excellently done," Stubbs admitted. He looked uneasily about him at the rapidly filling room. The strange faces, swarthy, animated by a life so foreign to his own, began to weigh upon him like a nightmare. He was conscious of a wild desire to fling himself from the room into the friendly shelter of the night. Then, with a start, he remembered the dark figures lurking just beyond the threshold. To hide his confusion he beat a tattoo upon the table with trembling fingers, while with a voice he vainly strove to keep even he asked Darsy his opinion of the newcomers.

But Darsy was not at all impressed. "Small fry," he said contemptuously; "hangers-on of the big fellows." He looked thoughtfully down the room, responding absently to several salutations. "I can't understand it," he went on. "They know that the Cage D'Or is safe enough, yet none of them shows up. There's Louis Dunoie, Batiste, and Sicart, to name only three." He stared thoughtfully at the swinging lamps. The wind was rising outside, and the lamps swayed in response to the incessant gusts, tossing tumultuous shadows. "I half think there may be bigger game than you afloat to-night," he said musingly.

There was a stir at the door, and a short, broad-shouldered young man bustled in, shaking hands with half a dozen friends in turn. From his pocket protruded a French newspaper, damp with snow. He flung the paper upon a

table, whence it was eagerly caught up and held aloft. On the front page, under glaring headlines, was a picture of Batiste, the famous rebel of Peace Valley, whose extraordinary project of a French Canadian republic in the frozen north had just been nipped in the bud by the mounted police. Stubbs had noticed an account of the affair in an English newspaper earlier in the day, and had promptly passed it over. But here in the Cage D'Or it took on a new and decidedly unpleasant meaning.

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIENDLY HAND.

THE chanson died away as the newspaper passed from hand to hand, and the dark faces, peering at it, lighted with a savage joy. The name Batiste, flung from mouth to mouth with a certain pride, echoed with a sinister sound through the room.

Stubbs moved restlessly in his chair. "What do you think——" he began, when his companion interrupted.

"There's the man," whispered Darsy in triumph. "That's Sicart. Now the band will soon begin to play. Just watch him."

A giant of a man, clad in rough furs, was standing by the door, looking about him with eyes half blinded by the snow. His lean face, bitten hard by wind and storm, had in it something quick, vital, powerful. From beneath his fur coat a red handkerchief lent a touch of color to his costume.

"That's Sicart," whispered Darsy once more. He watched the blue flames creep over the delicate cognac-covered French pancakes to which the waiter had that instant applied a light. "He's not going to stay," he added meaningly.

Stubbs attacked his pancakes valiantly for an instant. Then he pushed away his plate. "What does the fellow do?" he asked.

"A *voyageur*—kind of trapper," the secret-service man explained. "But the Hudson Bay Company dismissed him years ago. Since then he has been a sort of guide for strangers who wish to go hunting in the wilderness. And there is an absurd prejudice about him. People say too many accidents happen on his trips."

Stubbs looked critically at the desperado's hard, sinewy face, as he stood by the door. Then a flash of comprehension came to him. The two men, who had been sitting in the corner, one sharpening a long knife on a whetstone, arose quietly, nodded to the assembled company, and passed to the door. As they came abreast of Sicart they paused, Stubbs thought he noticed, for the fraction of a minute; after which silently, in single file, they passed out into the night.

Sicart, meanwhile, was standing by the door, apparently impassive. From time to time his eyes roved up and down the room as though in search of something, but otherwise he might have been a statue, so still was his massive figure in the midst of the swaying shadows.

Jean Darsy, watching him, frowned meditatively. "I don't want to make you uneasy," he said slowly, "but that fellow is beginning to get ready for some move. He's watching you, too."

Stubbs cast a fleeting glance at the giant by the door, and his face grew white. For he had caught a quick, furtive gleam of a pair of coal-black eyes, and the sight had not been pleasant. He drew out his handkerchief, and mopped his damp forehead. "I see," he said, with a little gasp.

"The trouble will come when you leave," Darsy went on. "With me you are perfectly safe, as they know I am what they call a 'government man.' But I can't go with you. You know we secret-service men have to avoid rows at all costs. And I don't mind telling you," he added, "that I am here on a very important mission, and that a good deal depends on my not coming into collision with this very gang."

Stubbs nodded. "I understand."

Darsy helped himself to another pancake. "Ah," he whispered softly, "here he comes."

From the kitchen the black-browed proprietor of the Cage D'Or came slow-

ly down the room toward the silent figure at the door. There was a momentary conversation, inaudible in the noise; the proprietor's hand disappeared an instant in Sicart's capacious palm, and in another instant Sicart had vanished.

Jean Darsy pushed back his plate, and watched the proprietor of the Cage D'Or as that individual went back to his sanctum. Then, as though he had suddenly come to a decision, he took a bill from his pocketbook and handed it to the waiter. "For two," he said briefly.

As the waiter disappeared in search of change, the Canadian sprang to his feet. "I'm going to help you. But we must be quick if you intend to get away."

His eyes, sparkling with French vivacity, were no brighter than Stubbs' own, as the latter grasped his outstretched hand. "Thank you!" gasped Stubbs, a little tremor in his tone.

CHAPTER V.

RECIPROCITY EXEMPLIFIED.

"PUT on my coat and cap before they notice," ordered Stubbs' new friend. "The disguise will protect you long enough for you to get away. The mounted-police station is three blocks away. In five minutes I'll follow in your coat and derby. They won't dare to bother me."

Stubbs hesitated. "I have to pass three, you said?"

Darsy nodded. "It's perfectly safe. Now, hurry."

Thus admonished, Stubbs flung himself into Jean Darsy's fur coat, and pulled his fur cap over his forehead. Lest curious eyes might see, they exchanged only a hurried handclasp. Then the Canadian raised his glass of benedictine to his lips.

"To the *entente cordiale!*" he murmured.

"To the *entente cordiale!*" responded the American in turn.

He had barely closed the street door behind him when three men, who had been lurking outside, flung themselves upon him. There was a sharp struggle, for Stubbs' bulk made him difficult to handle. Then one of his assailants said, with authority: "Rough him a little, Bill."

A giant hand seemed to meet him flush upon the point of the jaw, and he remembered no more; but it seemed, as his senses left him, that he saw a police badge on the coat of one of his assailants.

The coast was quite clear five minutes later when Jean Darsy Batiste, dreamer of a vanished dream, and fugitive from justice, emerged from the Cage D'Or. He was dressed in a cloth overcoat, and wore a derby hat. He was smiling.

"A stroke of genius, Jean," he told himself. "And all under the inspiration of a bottle of *vin ordinaire,* in a quiet family restaurant."

He had gone a few steps forward, when a hardness in one of the overcoat pockets caught his attention, and he paused beneath an electric light long enough to see that Stubbs' pocketbook and papers were in his hands. "Maybe I got something for my fur coat, too," he said cheerfully.

His road to the station led past the headquarters of the mounted police. There was a little commotion in front. A lounger explained that the famous outlaw Batiste, the man who wanted to drive the English into the sea, had been taken inside, a little "done up."

Jean Batiste's gray eyes clouded for an instant. "I'm sorry for the fellow," he said meditatively. "But life is a game. And it's lucky they decided to wait for me outside. Had they come in"—he shook his head—"then good-night, Jean!"

He looked at his watch. "Half an hour till train time," he said aloud. He felt in his pocket for a cigar, found none, and with a careless smile went back to the Cage D'Or. There, in the kitchen, he helped himself to a handful of the proprietor's best Havanas.

"You don't remember me?" he questioned. "Why, I know you well. Yes, it's true," he admitted; "I have been

away lately." He lighted a cigar. 'Who was that big man you spoke to at the door?"

The proprietor explained. "It was Big Jean. His little boy was very ill. He needed money."

"And the man with the whetstone?"

"He has many customers," said the black-browed one. "His whetstones are good."

Batiste puffed leisurely at his cigar. "You had a quarrel with that fellow from the mine," he said carelessly.

"If he is not suit with my sardine, he can buy somewheres else," said the owner of the Cage D'Or curtly. "An' your rich American frien'," he inquired; "will he stay here?"

"Maybe," answered Batiste, with the glimmer of a smile.

"Zat is good," said the proprietor. "I belief in the Americans comin' here. now we have *entente cordiale*."

Jean Darsy Batiste smiled again. "So do I," he agreed. He looked at his watch. "Just time to make my train," he thought, "thanks to my American friend."

And aloud he added, as he closed the door of the Cage D'Or behind him: "Thanks also to that charming *entente cordiale*."

For So Slight a Cause

MANY times it has happened that a great and costly war has been caused by an incident trivial and even ridiculous. Thus the War of the Spanish Succession is said to have been caused through a glass of water. A lady, Mrs. Masham, was carrying a glass of water, when she was jostled by the Marquess de Torcy. A slight scuffle ensued, and the water was spilled. The marquess thereat took offense, and bad feeling ensued between the English and French courts, with the ultimate result that a war was declared. The campaign cost France many severe battles—Blenheim, 1704; Ramillies, 1707; Oudenarde, 1708; and Malplaquet, 1709.

Quite as absurd in its origin was the war that took place during the Commonwealth of Modena. A soldier stole a bucket from a public well belonging to the State of Bologna. Although the value of the article did not exceed a shilling, its annexation was the signal for a fierce and prolonged war. Henry, the King of Sardinia, assisted the Modenese to retain the bucket, and in one of the subsequent battles he was made a prisoner. The bucket is still exhibited in the tower of the Cathedral of Modena.

A third instance of a war resulting from a trifling cause was that between Louis VII. of France and Henry II. of England. The archbishop of Rouen decreed that no one should wear long hair upon his head or chin. Louis submitted to the decree, whereupon his wife Eleanor teased him upon his appearance. A quarrel ensued, which resulted in the dissolution of the marriage and Eleanor's marriage with Henry. By this marriage the broad domains in Normandy, formerly belonging to Louis, passed into the possession of Henry. Louis, hotly incensed, made an attack on Normandy, and henceforth for nearly three hundred years arose those devastating wars which cost France upward of three millions of lives.

An Absent-Minded Skipper

THE steamboat came churning along her course at full speed, and the first thing the passengers knew, she had crashed head on into the pier.

"Mercy!" cried a passenger, as the bow crashed and the splinters flew. "I wonder what is the matter?"

"Nothin'," said Pat, one of the deck hands. "Nothin', ma'am; it looks to me as if the captain just forgot that we shtop here."

The Voice in the Night

By W. BERT FOSTER

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Read them in this abridged form, then enjoy the rest of the story.

JACOB WOOLWORTH, keeper of the Waycross Tavern, near Charleston, South Carolina, sits alone in his inn on a windy night just after the beginning of the American Revolution. He is disturbed by a voice calling out the word "Liberty" outside his door, and a rough sailor enters the inn and introduces himself as Jock Boldrigg. Jacob resents his rough manners and his talk against the king, and turns him out.

The riffraff of Charleston, committing depredations in the name of liberty, burn the mansion of the Tory, Phillip Sarony. Jacob Woolworth dislikes Sarony and his daughter Lluella, and blames them for the estrangement of his son Payson, who has left him and gone to join the rebels at Boston, but he permits his man, Long Joe, to go to help them in their escape from the mob.

Two travelers come to the inn—Mr. Hallowell and Captain Price—and they respond to Lluella's call for help, and go into the woods, where they find the ragamuffins pursuing the wounded Sarony. Price takes Sarony to the inn, while Hallowell stays to face the mob. A stout blacksmith and his followers overpower Hallowell, and Lluella fights courageously to save him.

CHAPTER VI—(*Continued*).

LLUELLA, with one delicately formed foot thrust into her slipper again, burst upon the cooper and his crew with a suddenness and vigor that drove them back from the prostrate Hallowell.

Into the foot of her stocking she had thrust two or three large pebbles, and with this improvised slungshot she delivered a blow upon Michael's pate that made the cooper roar.

"Catch the little fury!" he cried. "I'll pay her for that blow, if ever gal was paid! Catch her!"

But for the moment that was easier said than done. Standing over the fallen swordsman, she swung the weighted stocking as bravely as Hallowell had used his sword. More than one of the fellows was bruised by her weapon. Roaring, laughing, half inclined to admire her pluck and strength, and hesitating to do her serious bodily harm, the cooper's mates held back.

He—half fiend, wholly villain—threw them aside at last with his sound hand and advanced upon the maid with plain intent of wresting the stocking from her grasp. He would have had no mercy upon her had he seized her.

Providence, however, intervened. So busy and riotous had been the ruffians, that the approach of a horseman from the direction of the burning mansion was unnoticed. In the nick of time there burst into the torch-lit glade the tavern-keeper's great horse and its giant rider.

Unaccompanied was Long Joe; and he was likewise unarmed save as nature had supplied him with two huge fists.

He leaped from the horse's back into the midst of the fray. With no battle cry, or word of warning, he was upon the mob.

Two he seized by the napes of their necks, and, swinging them from either side, cracked their skulls together like ripe nuts. The first who ran at him with a club he did not even seek to elude. Catching the blow aimed at his head upon his bent arm, he smote the deliverer of the blow upon his jaw with such force that he broke it, and cast the injured fellow a dozen feet away.

He cleared the space about the girl and the senseless Hallowell in a breath. Michael, the cooper, was indeed the first to show his heels. As though Long Joe were a host of rescuers, the villains fled, leaving their sorely wounded comrades upon the ground.

For the first time the giant spoke to the panting girl:

"Where is thy father, Mistress Lluella? Have those devils——"

"He is safe!" she cried. "The other gentleman started with him for the inn, and though he is so sorely wounded, I am sure he is sheltered by now."

"What other gentleman, mistress?" asked Joe, in his dull way.

"See! this young man at our feet has been hurt in my defense. His companion escaped with my father."

The gigantic youth turned Hallowell over, and shook his head slowly when he observed that he was a stranger.

"Is he badly hurt, Joe?" she demanded, with anxiety.

"We'll find that out at home," grunted the giant, and, stooping, took Hallowell in his arms with as much ease as Captain Price had displayed in lifting the frail body of Phillip Sarony.

As they started up the path, the horse following, nose to Joe's shoulder, Hallowell stirred, moaned, and opened his eyes. He saw the dark face of the innkeeper's man above his own, and he struggled feebly to escape from his grasp.

"Once more, give me another chance at ye, villain!" murmured the young swordsman. "An' ye harm that maid I'll have your life!"

"I am here! You are safe!" cried Lluella, coming closer to the injured man. "Hush, now! Joe will take us safely to the inn."

He smiled upon her. It was a sad grimace at best, but a brave heart prompted it.

"Grieve not for me, mistress," he said. "I shall be all right directly——"

And then he lost consciousness again. Mistress Lluella looked upon his pallid, blood-streaked countenance with tear-wet eyes. Pity for the gallant youth welled in her heart—and pity is love's kinsman.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FACE.

THEY reached the Waycross without further disturbance, for the Charleston rioters had made for their haunts along the water front of the town after doing their worst at the Outlook, as Phillip Sarony's plantation was called. The unsettled condition of the public mind and the factions in the city for and against the confederation of colonies which had been formed for mutual protection against the mother country, was, of course, at the bottom of all such riots; but the cooper and his crew of ne'er-do-wells were no more affiliated with the patriot cause than were the Tory cattle stealers loyal and trusted subjects of King George.

Master Phillip Sarony, aristocrat born and bred, was one who had drawn upon his head the hatred of the opposite party by his scornful attitude and his many speeches against the cause of liberty. The mob had attacked the Outlook in hope of plunder, however.

The planter had lacked neither courage nor decision in striving to beat off the attack; but he was notoriously a hard master to his slaves, and the blacks would not fight for him. At their defection the rabble had burst into the house, driving the women servants before them, and stopped to loot the premises and set them afire before following on the trail of Sarony and his daughter.

This fact had doubtless saved Phillip Sarony's life. Indeed, the planter

was much less injured than was Hallowell, who had espoused the cause of the American gentleman and his daughter.

The tavern was in a great bustle when Long Joe and his burden, with Mistress Lluella, arrived.

The girl attended closely upon her father, who had been laid in the best room Woolworth's house afforded; yet she found time anon to tiptoe softly into the smaller chamber given over to the use of Hallowell and Captain Price, where the younger man lay still in a senseless condition.

But the officer made light of Hallowell's injuries. It was evident that Captain Price was an army man of long experience, and was used to wounds and their nursing. He had bandaged both his friend and Phillip Sarony in a masterly manner, and, with the aid of such simple remedies as the house afforded, made both patients comfortable.

"The boy has only scratches, Mistress Sarony," said the captain brusquely. "His head's a bit soft, that's all. Wait till he has a beard and has suffered as many cracks as I—then he'll not faint for the loss of an ounce or two of blood."

Mistress Lluella liked the captain none the better for this callous speech. She admired young Hallowell's prowess, as well as pitying his condition. When her father had been wooed to slumber by a soothing potion as well as by her own soft attentions, she left one of the women of the inn to watch by his bedside and went again to learn how young Hallowell was.

"He's asleep, belike," grunted Jacob Woolworth, from his seat by the fire of the public room. It was now long past midnight, but the innkeeper was too disturbed—too fearful, in fact—to seek his bed. "At any rate, mistress, that bold captain who is with him has left him alone."

"It is cruel!" exclaimed Mistress Lluella, with a stamp of her little foot. "The young man should have attention. Where is Long Joe?"

"God bless ye, mistress! It's not I could tell ye that," growled Jacob. "This night's work has set us all by the lugs. I cannot control that big oaf more. He's got the bit in his teeth for sure."

"But he might be of use here," said she. "He could sit by the young gentleman."

"An' I've not seen him this hour agone," growled Jacob, showing little interest—so she thought—in Hallowell's case.

"Then where are the serving women?" she demanded insistently.

"They've gone to their beds," said Jacob. "Tongues can't be a-clatter all day an' all night, into the bargain; the women must rest 'em."

His ungraciousness made her angry. She held her head high, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes flashed as she looked upon the lean old man.

"There used to be one about this house who would do my bidding," said Mistress Lluella; "but since your son has gone, you are losing your patrons, Master Woolworth."

"Aye? And who lost me that same son?" he flared up. "Had Payson Woolworth never been pampered by Master Sarony—and made much o' by ye, mistress—he'd never got bigotty ideas in his head. He was too good for serving in an inn——"

"He served you faithfully, Jacob Woolworth," interrupted the girl.

"Was it to show his duty he traipsed off to Boston to join them rebels?" demanded the old man.

"And were you not nagging him continually, Master Woolworth?" she shot back at him, for Mistress Sarony had a caustic tongue, being a true daughter of Eve.

"'Twere never naggin' thet drove him away," growled Jacob, wagging his head. "His head was turned—that was it! First Master Sarony, thy father, would have him over to th' Outlook to read Latin, forsooth. Faugh! A common lad like Payse would better be a farrier than a Latin scholar."

She watched him closely, her cheeks still burning, but never said a word.

"He studied wi' thee an' thy tutor. He was made much of. An' then—like

a young chap would in like mind—he presumed upon thy mistaken kindness to him. Was not that it, mistress?"

His sly, keen look made her gaze fall at last, and the color flooded her throat and brow. "You must not lay Payson's departure to me, or to anything between us, Jacob Woolworth," she said hurriedly. "There is no cause——"

"No cause, say ye?" he exclaimed, delighted to have troubled her. "An' this very Long Joe swears to my face he was commanded by Payse to watch and guard ye whilst he was away to the wars. Faugh! But I'll go call the wastrel, if ye like," he added, with suddenly assumed suavity, rising to go to the door.

"Indeed you shall not!" exclaimed the girl haughtily. "I do not need Long Joe as a bodyguard. And you are quite right; your son presumes too much."

She left the room at once, left it haughtily; and she left old Jacob Woolworth chuckling and mouthing to himself. That he had stirred her anger delighted him.

She waited a moment in the hall—the room in which Hallowell lay was on the ground floor of the inn—until her cheeks cooled. Yet there was but a single dimly burning lamp in the room when she opened the door and stepped within.

The young man lay with his eyes closed, breathing heavily. She had no reason to suppose him dangerously wounded, but she was angry that his companion should have left him unattended.

There was a cooling draft upon the table by the bed's head; likewise a bowl of balsam for his wounds, with bandages.

She set these things in order, drew a curtain so as to shield his eyes the better from even the dim light of the lamp, and sat down beside the bed, facing him.

At her right hand was a window, looking out upon the side porch of the house. The shutter was not closed. Although her gaze dwelt upon the pallid face of the young stranger who had so bravely espoused her cause, it must be confessed that her thoughts were of an entirely different person. Old Jacob had aroused her mind in a direction to which it trended often: Payson Woolworth! It had always puzzled her that such a youth should be the offspring of this old curmudgeon, Jacob.

The innkeeper and his son had naught in common. When Jacob had come to Charleston he was a widower with but one young son. Mistress Sarony's first remembrance of Payson was of a dark-haired, dreamy-eyed boy who held her pony when she rode with her father to the inn. Payson was five years her senior, and when he began coming to the Outlook, under Master Phillip Sarony's fitful patronage, she, a child of eight, fell desperately in love with him.

He had been her companion and faithful friend until she was fifteen. During those years of growth, Payson Woolworth had absorbed knowledge and the refinements of life, as they were taught at the Outlook, as though born to an equal position in life with Mistress Lluella.

In all appearance and in every act, he was a gentleman. Phillip Sarony, watching him with sardonic eye, noted all this. It pleased the wry mind of the exquisite to graft upon the rough stock of the innkeeper's son the niceties of deportment and graces of character belonging only to gentlemen of the times.

Then, finally, the cold eye of the planter likewise noted Payson's attitude toward his daughter. He watched the two all one evening in the great-house drawing-room when there was company from the city. It had delighted him to introduce Payson Woolworth to the high and haughty of the town, and then, when it was remarked by these guests that Master Woolworth was quite the gentleman, to tell them that he was the son of an innkeeper.

When the guests were gone on this night, however, and Payson was about to take his own departure, having bidden Mistress Lluella good night with a warmth of manner that had set her heart aflutter, Phillip Sarony came upon them in the hall.

"Going, Payson?" he had drawled.

"Yes, an' it please you, sir," said the youth.

"Ah! And we shall miss you—quite," said the exquisite, raising his eyeglass and peering through it at the handsome, dark face of the young man. "But it is time you saw something of the world. We shall not expect to see you again at the Outlook for some years—perhaps never. Good wishes! I shall always be happy to learn of your progress." And he squeezed the startled young man's hand with his own bird-like claw.

But they knew what Phillip Sarony meant. Neither his daughter nor Payson could doubt the intent of his dismissal. And the peculiar cruelty of it was altogether in keeping with Master Sarony's character. Indeed, it was quite what might have been expected.

His daughter, too proud to show either her father or her friend that she, too, felt the wound, offered her own hand and chimed in haughtily with Payson's dismissal. But it must be confessed that her good-by was said faintly, and, when he kissed her hand and let it drop, she turned swiftly and mounted the stair to be free of her father's sarcastic watchfulness.

Payson Woolworth stood facing the man who had been both his benefactor and his enemy. She glanced back from the head of the flight and saw them staring each other out of countenance. When Payson spoke his voice was as controlled as Phillip Sarony's own:

"I shall give myself the pleasure of calling here at a later day, sir. You will be glad to see me. I can only thank you for all that you have done for me, and wish it had been done more kindly."

"Poof!" ejaculated the exquisite, lightly waving his hand to dismiss both the subject and the man. "That is almost your only failing, Payson. You believe in the old fallacy of the existence of such a thing as 'the milk of human kindness.' Nonsense! Every person is inspired by self-interest, and self-interest alone."

"I cannot subscribe to such a doctrine, sir!" declared Payson firmly.

"Then I have no hope that you will ever return to the Outlook—to be welcomed by me, at least," declared the older man. "One in your position going into the world with the purpose of getting the best of that world, might, perhaps, succeed. But with your milk-and-water sentiments? Never!"

Lluella had seen the strong, dark face of the young man work for a moment; but he stifled any further reply. He bowed instead, turned slowly, and walked out of the house.

She knew that he had lingered about the tavern for some months. She knew, when it was noised abroad that he had gone north to join Mr. Washington's army at Boston, that it was partly because of the long, serious talks they had held together regarding this coming trouble between the colonies and the king.

In the abstract, Mistress Lluella had espoused the cause of liberty. Her ready sympathy was with the people who had hewn themselves a place in the wilderness of the new world, and were being so ill-treated by the mother country. But now that the opposing parties had really come to blows—that battles had been fought and blood shed—she was not at all sure that she could hope for the success of the American arms.

Besides, see what had happened to her home, and to her father and herself on this night! True, the mob that had burned and looted the Outlook would have burned and looted a rich patriot home as quickly. But the dastard act had been in the name of liberty, and Mistress Lluella was sore at heart.

Heretofore the actual seat of war had been at a distance; but it threatened now to be close at hand. The fleet was coming. General Clinton's army was near. And many of the people of Charleston, under Master Gadsen, Colonel Moultrie, and Master Rutledge, were actually plotting to defend the city from the British attack. It seemed to Mistress Lluella a most ridiculous idea. A trained soldiery was approaching, and these hotheads would throw a mob of untrained men across the advance of the British. She suspected

that this handsome youth upon the bed, and his gruffer comrade, were agents of the British. The opposing forces might clash, for aught she knew, at this very tavern. Her father should be removed. This wounded youth ought, too, to be taken to a place of safety.

And who was there to help her in this emergency? She raised her eyes, as the query formed in her troubled mind. She looked straight at the unshuttered window, and there, pressed against the glass, was the face of a man!

She was stricken with amazement at the sight. She saw the dark, smoothly shaven face close to the pane for a second. Then, seemingly aware that he was observed, the spy darted back and disappeared.

She sprang up, hand on heart, the breath choking in her throat. "Payson! Payson Woolworth!" she gasped, gazing wild-eyed at the now blank pane.

Was it merely because her mind had been upon him that she believed the man at the window resembled the innkeeper's son?

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER GUEST.

LLUELLA SARONY had left old Jacob chuckling in his chimney corner. The innkeeper displayed no fatherly consideration for his absent son in seeking to stir the young woman's ire against Payson. Indeed, affection was something Jacob Woolworth had yet to show his son.

Payson had done his duty at the inn until conditions became quite unbearable. Then the cause of the patriotic colonists seemed to call him insistently, and he left the Waycross and the old man who had ever whetted his caustic tongue upon him.

It pleased Jacob mightily that he had been able to "strike fire" over the subject of Payson with Mistress Lluella. He knew that she was, to a degree, as haughty as her father; and the suggestion that she had formed an attachment for the innkeeper's son, or that Payson had displayed his affection for her, Jacob knew would gall the proud-spirited maid.

He stooped from his chair, seeking to kindle the dead tobacco in his long-stemmed pipe from the flame on the hearth; and, as he did so, his ear caught a faint tapping at the door—that door which had opened to so much strange company. It startled Jacob. He was nervous already, and this summons made his nerves jump. A second broken pipe lay upon the hearthstone when he staggered to his feet, and he cursed it roundly.

The knock was repeated—this time more insistently.

"Wait! Wait a bit, will ye?" snarled the innkeeper, and hobbled to the door.

Unbarring the portal, he peered out into the wind-driven darkness. Still did the rain hold off; but now that the fire at the Outlook had burned down, one could see scarcely a hand's breadth on the rocky path.

"Who's there?" exclaimed Jacob, trying to put a bold front upon it.

And the answer that was whispered almost in his ear so amazed and startled him that he fell back from the door and allowed to enter a new guest that he would—with all his wits about him—have barred out.

A shrill voice whispered "Liberty," and immediately the bulk of a single man stood in the doorway, and so pushed in past the shaking innkeeper, and stood just within the door.

"Who are ye, to push into a man's house at this hour?" gasped Jacob. But he could not keep the quaver out of his voice. The man was cloaked, and wore the brim of his storm hat so low as to shadow his face. Indeed, betwixt the hat which he did not remove, and the collar of his cloak that he kept turned up, little but the point of his nose and his mouth were visible of his countenance.

"You were expecting me?" queried the new guest, in the same sharp whisper.

"Now, strike me if I was!" groaned the innkeeper. "I do not even know ye!"

"What company have you here, sir?" queried the stranger.

"There's not many under my roof," growled the old man. "A gentleman from the neighborhood and his daughter—the gentleman's hurt. And we have another wounded man. That's all."

"Wounded men, eh?" demanded the stranger. "From what cause?"

"Cause, forsooth!" cried Jacob, with sudden heat. "For the cause o' that same thing ye whispered to me just now —that password."

"Surely, there has been no battle here——"

"Battle? Pshaw!" snarled the innkeeper, peering first this side and then that, the better to view the hidden face of the stranger. "A mob of cutthroat wastrels came up from Charleston, and are burning and ravaging the countryside in the name of that same liberty!"

"You are still unfavorably disposed to the American cause, sir," said the man in the cloak gloomily.

Jacob was not too angry to remember to put a curb upon his tongue. "I don't stand wi' thieves and pillagers," he growled, shaking his head.

"Nor do any good men and true," said the other vigorously. "But now! Has there been no messenger of our cause here this night? Is he not here now? A bold sailorman, if ever there was one, captain of a shallop, and named——"

"Jock Boldrigg, egad!" exclaimed the startled innkeeper.

"Then he has been here?"

"Aye, he's been here."

"And gone?"

"And gone," admitted Jacob Woolworth, beginning to feel qualms as to the end of this interview.

"And he left no message?" cried the other, in surprise.

"'Deed and he did! If that's all you're wishful of, master," Jacob replied. He was beginning to see that he had made a mistake as to the person to whom he had intrusted the news regarding Admiral Parker's fleet.

"Then," cried the cloaked man, with an impatient stamp of his foot, "why do you not give it to me?"

"Shall I give it to everybody who comes to my inn and asks for it?" exclaimed the older man, in turn exasperated. "How do I know you are the person whom Boldrigg meant?"

"Surely he told you the password?"

"Ha! And did not those others use the password?" demanded Jacob.

"Of whom do you speak?" asked the stranger suspiciously. "Who else has been here——"

"I have told you of Master Hallowell and——"

"Hallowell! Who is he?" cried the other sharply.

"Plague on ye!" snarled the innkeeper. "wi' thy questioning. I have other guests. I told ye so. Master Hallowell is the young man who is wounded."

"A stranger?" demanded the insistent visitor.

"Aye; and so are you."

"How wounded?" went on the guest.

"By facin' down them same rascals from Charleston.

"Hallowell!" muttered the other again. "There is an ensign upon Admiral Parker's own flagship named Hallowell——"

"And if it's about the fleet of his honor, the admiral, that ye air so anxious," interrupted the innkeeper, "why, Jock Boldrigg said it was off Hatteras at ten of the clock last night."

"Ha! It is morning now!" said the guest quickly.

"But Boldrigg was here early in the evening."

"Then 'twas night before last," muttered the stranger. "Near! Colonel Moultrie should hear of this."

Jacob had gradually moved toward the fire. He was creeping toward the bar as though he expected to serve his visitor.

It is certain that he began to see that he had said either too much or too little. He knew that Hallowell and Captain Price must be of the British side—one from the fleet, the other doubtless of General Clinton's army, whereas this stranger was unmistakably for the

American cause. Jacob had got himself in a web of trouble, and he was afraid.

He watched the stranger with evil eye as he paced to the fire and stood there a minute, his hands spread over the leaping flames. The lean old man had some measure of personal courage, after all. A rat will fight, if cornered, and the innkeeper saw that he was in a corner.

Creeping softly, while the guest's back was turned, he reached the end of the counter. Behind it hung the horse pistol in its sling, fresh primed only a few hours before.

His lean claw seized upon the weapon; he cocked it softly; he laid the barrel upon the counter for a rest, and turned the muzzle of the weapon full upon the man standing at the fire.

Suddenly the latter turned, flung aside the cloak, and pushed back the hat from his face. His glittering eye held the innkeeper entranced.

"Father," he said calmly, "do you propose to shoot me?"

CHAPTER IX.

AT WAR.

OLD Jacob clung to the edge of the counter and glared across it at the son he had not beheld for months, and whom he believed to be hundreds of miles away.

Payson Woolworth was a handsome man. His age was belied by his manly and serious countenance; and there was a decision in his bearing that made him seem a stranger, indeed.

"Payse!" blurted out the old man at last. "What d'ye mean, coming here in this disguise? Egad! D'ye call it respectful to me?"

"And do you call it fatherly on your part to aim a deadly weapon, like that old pistol, at my head?" returned the young man, grimly smiling. "Put it back in its sling, sir. I've often warned you it would be the death of you if it were ever fired."

The old man came out from behind the counter, sobered by this sudden discovery, and took his accustomed chair in the chimney corner. He scowled at his handsome son.

"So ye're back again—like an evil penny?" he snarled.

"No, I am here secretly, and on business of moment. I have not returned to trouble you, father," said Payson coldly.

"I'd ought to have ye apprehended and whipped like a runaway 'prentice," said the innkeeper.

Payson only smiled again. "Now, now, father," he said. "Wait till we have beaten back the red-coated minions of King George, and freed these colonies of his misrule. Then you may say what you please."

He spoke bitterly, and Jacob only glared the fiercer at him. It seemed as though the months of separation had bred only hatred between them.

"And now, what of this Hallowell?" said Payson, with sudden briskness. "He is overbold to come thus close to the city—especially if he's the man I believe him to be. Is he alone?"

"There was one with him, but he is gone now."

"So Hallowell lies here wounded, and unattended?"

"Nay!" cried Jacob, with sudden thought, and his delight apparent in his sparkling eyes as he reflected how it was in his power to hurt his son. "He has the best of attendance."

"Old Betty, I presume? Possibly Long Joe—though the boy said nothing about this stranger," added Payson to himself.

His father did not notice the aside. He was quivering with ill humor, and licked his lips to think how he should immediately cut Payson's pride to the very quick.

"Nay, nay," he repeated, shaking his head. "I tell ye the young man, Hallowell, has been fighting that mob from Charleston. The wastrels 'tacked one of our neighbors, an' he a loyal subject of the king—God bless him!"

Jacob's eyes twinkled as he noted his son's heavy brow, and he went on:

"The mob drove forth the gentleman and his daughter. They hurried through the wood toward the Waycross for shelter. The gentleman was wounded, and

fell to the ground. He lies in the best chamber at this minute."

Payson listened gloomily, but said nothing.

"The maid ran and warned us here," pursued Jacob. "Master Hallowell ran back with her, as bold as could be. He 'tacked the scoundrels single-handed, I believe. They was drove off, but Master Hallowell was hurt. And Mistress Lluella is sore troubled about his condition. She is wi' him now——"

"Who?" cried the suddenly startled young man.

"Mistress Lluella Sarony," declared his father, wickedly enjoying the barb he had placed. "She is quite taken up with the brave young man—and no wonder. He saved her life, and mayhap her father's. She has left Master Sarony's bedside to nurse young Hallowell——"

"Where does this Hallowell lie?" demanded Payson sternly.

Jacob pointed with his new pipestem toward the room on the lower floor in which Captain Price and Hallowell had been domiciled.

"Then it was she I saw—and watching beside this British spy," muttered Payson, with face averted.

A spasm of delight distorted Jacob's visage. He pursued his topic mercilessly:

"An' can she be blamed? A handsome man, indeed, is Master Hallowell. And the way to a maid's heart is the way he's taken—aye, aye!"

Payson strode once across the taproom and back again to the fire impatiently. He interrupted his father's running comment with a harsh demand:

"When did this Hallowell come to the tavern?"

"This very night."

"Before Jock Boldrigg was here?"

"No—or how should I have given him the message the sailor left for ye?" asked Jacob easily.

"Ha! You did make that mistake!" muttered Payson.

"Oh, Master Hallowell had the password the same as ye—for sure!"

"The spy!" exclaimed Payson. "And it is likely he carries dispatches for General Clinton. We must have them; that's all there is to it!"

"What's that?" cried his father. "D'ye dare interfere wi' a guest in th' Waycross Tavern? Ye young limb! I'll strike ye down——"

"Be still, father!" commanded Payson, with a sternness that silenced the old man, for his manner was threatening. "In this thing I am not your son. I am a servant of the confederation of these colonies. We are a nation now; we are at war with another nation. I hold a commission—the commission of captain—in the Continental army. Were you twice my father—and a better parent than you ever desired to be—I should hold your commands as naught in this emergency."

Jacob looked on him with jaw fallen and a fishy eye. This outburst was so unlike the mildness of the youth he had browbeaten for years about the tavern, that he cowered before him.

Payson turned toward the door leading to the rear. Out of the hall opened the room in which he knew Hallowell to be—with Mistress Lluella Sarony in attendance upon him. He strode toward it.

Then old Jacob rose up suddenly, with an oath on his lips. There, confronting his son, was the piquant, flashing face, the haughty figure, and all the proud spirit of Phillip Sarony's daughter.

The meeting must have surprised Payson, but he had command of his features. He bowed with as much grace as young Hallowell had shown in performing that ceremony of good breeding.

"Your servant, Mistress Lluella," he murmured. "I have just now heard of the misfortune that has overtaken your father and yourself——"

"And I have overheard," she admitted proudly, "enough to assure me that you mean evil to this wounded man who lies yonder. Your heartlessness amazes me, Payson Woolworth."

"If I display any measure of heartlessness," retorted the young man, but quite calmly, "you know, mistress, where I went to school for that art.

This is no time for splitting hairs, however. The man you speak of is, I believe, a dispatch bearer from Admiral Parker to General Clinton. He is the enemy of my country. It is my duty to apprehend him, wounded though he be, for he may carry important writings. The rules of war, mistress——"

She stamped her foot impatiently. "Fie, for shame!" she cried. "Payson Woolworth never spoke so ungallantly before. The young gentleman is injured."

"For which I admire him, as I learn he was wounded in your cause," said Captain Woolworth. "He is, nevertheless, an enemy to liberty."

"Faugh! I am minded to say I hate that word after this night's work!" she cried. "In the name of liberty, those villains destroyed the Outlook, and all but took my father's life. And now you, Payson, would shield a dastardly action with the same phrase."

Payson grew pale, but his gaze remained steady. His carriage was not one of shame, and the heat of her wrath seemed not to scorch him.

"You mistake my reasons, Mistress Sarony," he said. "I would be a traitor to the cause I have espoused, did I not do all in my power to apprehend this man and seize his papers."

He took another step toward the open doorway; Mistress Lluella spread her skirts and blocked the opening.

"Don't you dare, Payse Woolworth!" she cried angrily, if childishly. "I forbid you to enter the room."

"I am sorry, mistress, that your word is not a law to me in this particular," said the young Continental officer. "I must displease you."

"You shall not touch him!"

"I must."

"You dare not!" she cried, so fiercely that her sweet voice was hoarse, and all the anger that possessed her shook her frame. "You—you have been taught as a gentleman. You at least are a man. Dare to put me aside!"

"And even that I must do if you insist!" declared Payson steadily, never once flinching before her scorn and rage.

"Strike me! I am defenseless—and so is the man you would harm."

"I need not strike you, mistress," returned the young officer, still with that exasperating and unshaken calmness. "And I would rather not put you aside. To yonder room, however, I must go, and interview this Master Hallowell."

Another stride brought him directly before her. As though she were a small and naughty child, Payson caught her firmly by her two elbows and set her out of his path, lifting her as easily and lightly as Long Joe himself might have done.

Then he went on into the passage, and to the door of the chamber into which Hallowell had been taken. But when he opened the door and looked within, the bed was empty. The wounded man was gone. The window looking upon the porch of the tavern was wide open.

CHAPTER X.

THE NEW MAN.

POSSIBLY two more startled and amazed people could not have been found that morning along the coast of the Carolinas than Jacob Woolworth, the keeper of the Waycross Tavern, and Mistress Lluella Sarony, the pampered daughter of the wealthy planter. At least, the two had that much in common.

And the thing which so amazed them was the changed manner of the innkeeper's son. His decision, his sternness, the calm superiority he had shown to petty emotions in the interview that had just transpired, showed Payson in an entirely new light.

Jacob had browbeaten him from childhood. Therefore Payson had long since learned to suppress his emotions in his father's presence; and he had ever shown the old curmudgeon a filial respect that Jacob by no means deserved.

Mistress Lluella, spoiled beauty that she was, had been used to commanding her old playfellow and friend in a most despotic manner, and seeing her every desire carried out by Payson. She had but to speak, and he obeyed.

The few short weeks since March, when the Continental army had encompassed Boston, and driven the British forth, had taught the young patriot his worth, and made him an exceedingly manly fellow. He had arrived at the siege of Boston in season to take part in the intrenchment of Dorchester Heights, and from that day had made himself of value to his superiors until even General Washington himself had taken note of the young Southerner.

Now the dignity of his commission as a captain in the army, and the responsibility of his errand to Charleston, sat well upon him. He was the slave of duty; even love had ceased to sway him when he set pretty Mistress Luella aside and marched to the door of the chamber in which he believed the British dispatch bearer from Admiral Parker's ships lay.

The moment he discovered the absence of Hallowell, he realized that the maid whom he had known and loved so long had interfered with his progress toward the Britisher's door with the deliberate intent of allowing Hallowell time to escape.

Not half an hour earlier Payson had peered into the window, before approaching the tavern door, and seen Mistress Luella watching by the bed of the wounded man. Old Jacob had intimated that Hallowell was seriously hurt.

These facts sharply pointed, in Payson's mind, to an accomplice of Master Hallowell aiding in the Britisher's escape. And who was this accomplice?

The innkeeper had spoken of another man who had come to the Waycross with Hallowell. The removal of the wounded man and his clothing—every mark and trace of him—must surely have been the work of the ensign's comrade.

Payson spent a minute in viewing the empty chamber, and in coming to the above conclusion. The way of departure was plainly by the open window. He drew his sword, which, up to this time had been hidden beneath his cloak, and sprang out upon the side porch of the tavern. Dark as ever was the night; not a single finger of morning light yet streaked the east. And the wind still soughed in the pines, and drove the breakers high against the rocky coast. With the thunder of the sea, and the soughing of the wind in the forest, he could hear no other sound. There was no light other than what shone from the tavern windows.

But stay! There was a glimmering point of fire beyond the clearing at the back of the inn. And it moved!

Payson clutched his sword hilt tightly and ran with all speed across the well-remembered stable yard to the gate through which Mistress Luella had led Hallowell and Captain Price much earlier on this eventful night. There was a lantern ahead; he saw it swinging in the hand of some person approaching. The American officer crouched beside the huge bole of a tree, and awaited the approach of the unknown.

The swinging lantern merely revealed the shanks of the man coming down the path, and at first all Payson could see was a pair of dusty and torn leggings, with brogans to match. Yet the size of these articles of foot and leg apparel prepared him quickly for recognition of the man. He stepped from behind the tree and demanded sharply:

"What are you doing here at this hour, Joe?"

"Ha, Master Payson!" ejaculated the giant gruffly. "I thought ye long since abed."

"In my father's tavern?" responded Payson quickly. "I doubt if I should be invited. But you do not answer me. Where have you been?"

"Mistress Luella lost some'at at the spot yonder where those fellows set upon her and her father. She sent me to look for it," said Long Joe, in his dogged way.

"How long since did she speak with you?"

"It was mebbe a matter o' half an hour."

"Ha!" grumbled Payson. "She got you out of sight and sound whilst that friend of Hallowell's got him away. Joe, that wounded man has gone."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Aye. He was whisked away after you left the inn. Is this the way you stand on guard?"

The young giant hung his head and swung the lantern, muttering: "Was I not always to obey Mistress Lluella—be at her beck and call if need be?"

"True!" groaned Payson. "And it seems she is no longer a friend to the cause of liberty. This Hallowell, is he a handsome fellow?"

"So one might say," answered Joe. "And a gentleman."

Even in the darkness the dull flush showed in Payson's dark face.

"And must a man be born with a silver spoon in his mouth to be a gentleman?" he said sharply. "By the way," he added, wheeling again upon the other; "what was the thing for which Mistress Lluella sent you?"

"Something she fancied she dropped upon the path near where I came upon that gang from the city."

"What was it, man?"

"It was her hosen," growled Joe.

"What?" gasped the amazed Payson. "Her stockings?"

"One of 'em."

"Why, you are, indeed, a nanny—as my father says," cried Payson, in disgust. "And so silly an errand! How could she have lost a stocking on the path?"

Long Joe glowered at him like an angry bull.

"I'm no such a fool as ye'd make me out," he declared, shaking his frowsy head. "You do not know the partic'lars of that fight. Mistress Lluella is no weakling!"

"Well?"

"When the cooper knocked Master Hallowell down, and his crowd was for killing him, she stripped off her hosen, dropped in a pebble, and used it to beat back the scoundrels. 'Tis then I come upon them—and she was wielding the hosen like a good un!"

Payson listened with clouded brow. "Did ye find it?" he inquired.

"No. And them wounded men be gone, too."

"Well, the minx sent you on the errand to get you out of the way!" declared the Continental officer. "Hallowell's friend has returned and smuggled him away. There may be others of the British in the neighborhood. I am off to Sullivan's Island, Joe. This must be reported to Colonel Moultrie and Master Gadsen. Watch you here—keep run of things. And if Jock Boldrigg returns with any message, be sure to see him. My father is not to be trusted, Tory that he is. I'd take you with me, for we need such strong arms as yours to help us build the fortress; but it is best you stay here, perhaps," he added wistfully. "Let no harm befall Mistress Lluella."

"E'en though she be for the king, eh?" queried Long Joe, but with an expression in his countenance that belied any intended guile.

"She is a woman, is she not?" replied Payson sharply. "And she is practically defenseless—her father, at the best, is not a man of the sword. And they tell me he is wounded?"

"Aye, he is hurt," grunted the young giant.

"Then be ye her steadfast friend," commanded the officer, and strode away along the dark forest path.

The shaggy youth stood, still swinging the light, and listened to the departing footsteps of the innkeeper's son. On his own face there dawned a softened expression which seemed quite out of keeping with its usual wildness.

"'Her steadfast friend,'" he whispered, and his smile transfigured his bleak countenance.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COUNCIL OF WAR.

IT was daybreak of a black morning when Payson Woolworth, captain in the Continental army, arrived at the fort that was being hastily strengthened on Sullivan's Island.

He had crossed near the Breach Inlet from the mainland, having a boat hidden near that point, and a pony belonging to a free negro who squatted on land near the Breach carried him at a broken-legged trot to his journey's end.

Charleston harbor was as well situ-

ated for defense from an attack by sea as New York, in the North; and, indeed, the Carolina city was by no means unlike New York in its geographical aspect. Set down between two rivers—the Ashley and the Cooper—the south battery commanded the sweep of the bay, while the points of Morris Island and Sullivan's Island seemed ready to close upon the mouth of the roadstead, like the nippers of a huge crab. Sullivan's Island had been chosen by Colonel Moultrie and his coworkers for the freedom of Charleston, Gadsen, and Rutledge, as the better point to fortify. The local companies of militia which, like those of the more northerly colonies, had been training for months, were prepared to give desperate resistance to the British advance.

It had been known in a general way for weeks that Admiral Parker's squadron from England, aided by a force under Clinton, would endeavor to take Charleston and make the queen city of the Carolinas the headquarters of a force which should subdue the whole South.

Seeing unerringly how important this movement was, his excellency had sent General Charles Lee to aid the Charlestonians in their preparations for defense, and it was with this ambitious Welshman that Payson Woolworth had returned to the neighborhood where he had lived as a child.

General Washington could have chosen no officer whose advice would have been more valuable to Colonel Moultrie and his aids; but this same General Lee was already disappointed in the conduct of the war, and in the slow advance of the American arms. Lee, born in Wales, had first served in the British army, and had brought his experience and natural ability as a military expert to the American cause some months before. Apparently he was heart and soul for the cause of liberty; later issues, however—notable at Princeton, and in the cabal against General Washington—showed plainly that General Charles Lee, unlike those Lees of Virginia who did so much for freedom, was for self only, and may have been as traitorous as Benedict Arnold at heart, though lacking that arch-traitor's opportunity.

Payson chanced to arrive at the site of the fort in the midst of a hot discussion between General Lee, as Washington's emissary, and Colonel Moultrie. The latter was no patient man, and the palmetto-wood fort was the child of his invention. General Lee was for building a much more elaborate fortress, and one which would take considerable time to construct.

"Meanwhile, what will our friends the enemy be about, general?" asked Mr. Rutledge, seeking to stem the tide of Moultrie's rising wrath by bringing Lee to a more reasonable mind.

"And they say Admiral Parker is not far off our coast even now," declared another of the Charleston gentlemen.

"This is all hearsay," observed General Lee, and his sneering tone stung more than one about him to the quick. "We do not even know for certain, gentlemen, that the fleet now coming from England will touch this coast——"

It was at this juncture, and before Colonel Moultrie's temper warmed his tongue to speech, that Captain Woolworth rode in from the Breach.

General Lee scarcely noticed his comrade, who had traveled the entire distance from the North with him; but Moultrie saw instantly that the innkeeper's son brought news of moment.

"What is it, captain?" he inquired hastily. "Your face is momentous."

"Thirty-six hours ago, colonel, Admiral Parker's fleet was off Hatteras. When this gale blows out, she will run in again, without doubt——"

"You were to report to me, I believe, Captain Woolworth," interposed General Lee haughtily. "And this statement you make—— Who vouches for it?"

Payson's cheek flushed, but he had experienced a taste of Lee's bitter tongue before. He only said, respectfully enough:

"Jock Boldrigg. He reports that he saw the British at ten o'clock night before last."

"And who might Jock Boldrigg be?"

demanded General Lee. "Are ye at the mercy of loose-tongued fisherfolk and the like for information regarding the movements of the enemy? Haven't ye a proper scouting ship?"

"Boldrigg knows these waters as a clerk knows his book, general," observed Colonel Moultrie. "We can trust to both his eyes and his tongue."

"Bah!" was the general's comment. "Very loose matters, indeed. And this fort ye are building—— Why, it will not take the British guns ten minutes to demolish it!"

Colonel Moultrie was a Southern gentleman, and no quarrelsome person. He had much at heart, too, the patriot cause. But Lee had rubbed him on the raw too often now for him entirely to control himself. His eyes flamed as he turned upon the supercilious Welshman.

"Sir!" he cried. "We expect to take the chances of war. We will defend our hearthstones from overwhelming odds, if need be. We are prepared to fight—we expect no other issue. The British guns may demolish these walls in ten minutes, or ten hours! But in that case we will lie behind the ruins, and still prevent the enemy from landing."

The speech thrilled every heart within hearing save that of the sneering Lee. The council of war ended abruptly. Even the officers went to work with their bare hands to assist in the construction of the palmetto-wood fort.

All these brave spirits realized that with the British ships once past Sullivan's Island, the city would be lost. But without the heavy guns of Admiral Parker trained upon Charleston, Clinton's land force could not hope to reduce the city to submission.

Later Colonel Moultrie, and his principal aids, Gadsen and Rutledge, called Payson Woolworth to them. They had observed that the captain was of no mind with the haughty General Lee, although having come direct from his excellency with the Welshman. Payson had pulled off his coat and gone to work manfully on the fortification. It was Moultrie who questioned him regarding the news from the scouting shallop of Jock Boldrigg. And, in answering these queries, Payson let fall something regarding the two suspected British spies who had been at Jacob Woolworth's inn.

"Messengers, or spies, by my life!" cried Colonel Moultrie. "Ye did well to strive to apprehend them, captain."

"I believe this Captain Price is related to some of the Whig families in the neighborhood," said Master Gadsen. "If I mistake not, an officer of that name visited Charleston some few years back. The knowledge of the city and her environments he then gained doubtless stands him in good stead now."

"Aye; but how about this young Hallowell?" queried Moultrie.

"An ensign on Admiral Parker's flagship, I feel sure," said Payson. "With all due respect to him, I made a report of these matters to General Lee, but he is inclined to pooh-pooh the business."

"He believes we are whipped before a shot is fired," growled Rutledge.

"He believes too much!" exclaimed the angry Colonel Moultrie. "'Tis a foul bird that fouls its own nest. Now, let us put our minds to other matters. It seems a fact that emissaries of the fleet and of General Clinton are meeting along this coast."

"They might easily make their headquarters at Master Woolworth's tavern," said Gadsen. "It is no secret that the old man likes not our cause."

"Is this a fact?" queried Moultrie of the young captain.

Payson flushed and bowed. "He is an old man—and obstinate. Old people are hard to change."

"Aye," said the colonel. "But you have not fallen out with him?"

"Why, no more than commonly," said Payson.

"You can return to the inn?"

"Certainly."

"Then do so," directed the colonel quickly. "Boldrigg may get in as far as the Breach again. It is well to have somebody at the Waycross in touch with us. What say you, Captain Woolworth?"

"At once, colonel!" responded the young officer. "I am at your com-

mands. I came here to serve the cause; and you, I hold, have that cause at heart."

"Good! And ye catch any of those sorry knaves that are runners 'twixt the fleet and the army, so much the better. Put them in pickle, I pray ye," said the colonel, and so sent Captain Woolworth on his way again.

Nor was it a way he shrank from following. Truth to tell, Payson had in his mind the vision of Mistress Lluella Sarony's sweet face; nor did he forget that the planter's daughter was, in all probability, still at the Waycross Tavern.

CHAPTER XII.

AMONG THE ROCKS.

THE day had not borne out the promise of the night, for before noon the clouds broke, and the last blasts of the wind drove away the scattered mists. Upon the land and sea the blue of heaven smiled.

North of the tavern the road turned its back on the sea, leaving a strip of high and rocky headland between it and the roaring waters. Among these rocks, but so near the inn that a strong man could have tossed a pebble into either of its great chimneys, there was a flat table of stone in front of a narrow opening leading down into some subterranean depth. Indeed, the cave had been used years before by smugglers; before Jacob Woolworth purchased the inn its proprietors undoubtedly had ventures by sea among a class of craft that were wont to run into the cove behind the Breach by night, and hoist their cargoes up the rocks and into this cave. But of late the cave—the other opening of which was in a brush heap behind the tavern yard—had been used for the storage of prosaic potatoes and roots.

As the sun swung toward the horizon, the wavelets dancing under its dazzling light as one looked out upon them, two persons occupied the rock shelf before the cave's mouth.

Hallowell, his head bandaged, and his arm in a sling, reclined upon a couple of wolfskins for a couch. Beside him, sitting tailor fashion, and with a billow of skirts about her, was Mistress Sarony—rosy, eyes shining, sweet, and dimpled; but gowned most abominably in old Betty's best green-and-white poplin.

Lluella had been forced to flee with her father from the Outlook, with neither maid nor portmanteau. And Phillip Sarony was not to-day well enough to stand the fatigue of traveling by any conveyance the inn boasted to Charleston. Besides, there might be danger in the way to town. The British were drawing near. The Carolina riflemen were coming hastily in from the surrounding country to take part in what the Tories believed to be a ridiculous attempt to hold Charleston against occupancy by the king's troops.

Master Phillip Sarony had experienced trouble enough the night before; he would not rush blindfolded into peril. His daughter had come up to this overlook to see her patient. And, by all appearances, Hallowell was making the best of his opportunity to impress the young woman with his own graces. Gratitude is a sweetener to humanity; and the young man and the maid had cause to be grateful each to the other.

It was true that Long Joe should have been the main recipient of their individual benisons; for it was he who had driven off the cooper and his cutthroat gang, and saved Hallowell's life, and the maid.

"I am happy to see that you escaped serious injury in my cause, Master Hallowell," she said, with drooping eyelids, for the ensign's glances were as ardent as they were respectful.

"And to you, mistress, do I ascribe my safety at the present moment," responded Hallowell, his handsome face alight. "With Captain Price absent, that meddling oaf of an innkeeper's son might have interfered much with our plans."

At mention of Payson Woolworth, Mistress Lluella's gaze sought the sea again. If her cheek was tinged with a deeper rose at Hallowell's careless coupling of the Continental captain's name with the innkeeper, she said no

word. But it was, perhaps, to change the trend of the conversation that she observed:

"You should thank Long Joe's strength and willingness to serve you, Master Hallowell; for without his aid you could never have reached this old cave, I verily believe."

"Quite true, mistress," agreed the man. "But it was his willingness to serve you that was a spur for him. Ah! It is easy to see how sets the wind. Every man in the neighborhood is your slave—even to the hostler at the inn."

"Poor Joe! He is a good-hearted fellow," said Lluella, ignoring the flattery of her companion. "And how brave he is!"

"And how brave was that doughty rebel captain—the innkeeper's son!" exclaimed Hallowell. "Never have I been so sorry for being disabled in a good quarrel. I would have thrashed him well for so roughly handling you, Mistress Sarony."

"How do you know that?" she demanded quickly, and now the red of anger flashed into her cheeks.

"Oh, mine host has been to see me in my retirement. He seems quite at odds with his rebel son. The old man is loyal."

"Yes? And I believe I should consider you both my enemies," said Mistress Lluella demurely. "For, although my father is a strong Tory, I am inclined much to espouse the cause of these brave men who are making headway against such great odds."

"Pshaw, mistress!" exclaimed Hallowell; "you are surely joking with me. Large bodies move slowly. The colonies are a long way from those who govern our armies, and those same gentlemen do not understand the conditions here. We shall soon wipe out every collection of ragamuffins who dare bear arms against his majesty and——"

"That is what I have been hearing since fighting began. But all these fighting men are not ragamuffins. General Washington——"

"Do not dignify him by such a title, I beg!" cried Hallowell hotly. "He is a fortune hunter. He has taken advantage of circumstances——"

"And does that make him any less a general?" interposed Mistress Sarony, smiling wickedly to see how easily she had ruffled the ensign. "And some of our most respected Southern gentlemen have joined the cause. Colonel Moultrie, for instance, swears that he will keep the British soldiery from marching into Charleston."

"And how about the man-of-war's men?" asked Hallowell quickly, and with his inimitable, cheerful smile once more appearing.

"Oh, that!" she cried, "will be equally impossible. They have to take to caves in the woods and hide in the forest to escape our riflemen."

"And we depend upon rebel ladies to aid us," he responded, rising to bow to her. "Ah, mistress, your heart is loyal—like your father's—I trust. At least, it is kind."

"I have ever been weak in that way—too kind to the undeserving," she returned, smiling.

"Weak! And you as brave as a lion, Mistress Sarony?" he cried. "I have learned the full particulars of our fight with that mob in the wood. After I had lost the day, you attacked them like another Joan of Arc."

She laughed and blushed. He thought her, in her confusion, sweeter to look upon than ever.

"You should not blame yourself for having failed," she said demurely. "The odds against you were ten to one—and more. And when you were at bay—and so cruelly hurt—and lost so much blood——"

"And in the engagement, you, mistress, lost something—is it not so?" Hallowell interposed, interrupting the catalogue of his own activities in that famous battle.

As she talked with him, a pretty little foot and its trim ankle had crept out of the folds of the balloonlike gown of old Betty. Even the coarse-knitted stocking which clothed the ankle in question could not hide its delicate lines.

Mistress Lluella saw his momentary glance in the direction of the foot, and

she sprang up with countenance suddenly and furiously aflame. Yet she could only laugh, too, as she gathered her skirts about her and poised like a bird for a moment before her flight.

"That is the great fault with you young men—especially with seafaring young men. You are so bold! Personalities are not in good taste, Master Hallowell!" And, dropping him a curtsy, she scampered away among the rocks.

The young man watched her de-departure with a look of ecstasy in his face. He drew from the breast of his coat a little article, which, upon being unfolded, proved to be a silken stocking.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INSULT DIRECT.

LUELLA ran back to the Waycross, and almost collided with Captain Payson Woolworth as he strode to the door, having left his boat again at the Breach.

"Your servant, mistress," said the innkeeper's son, bowing with elaborate courtesy. "I am happy to see you in better spirits. From that fact I conclude that your father is improved, and has suffered no serious injury because of the rioters?"

She strove to stem the tide of color that flooded her face, and to look upon him angrily. But here, before her, stood her companion of years, and her loyal friend. Their changed attitude toward each other was a matter of circumstances; their friendship was of long standing.

"He is better, Payson," she said hurriedly. "But is it safe for us to journey toward the city? The roads are infested with the same men who burned the Outlook about our ears, or so we are told."

"I can, perhaps, find you a guard to Charleston, mistress," he answered. "If Master Sarony can be moved——"

"Oh, thank you! But will Charleston be a safe spot—a place of refuge—after a few days?"

"We hope to keep the fleet out of the harbor. Alone, the land force will not dare attack the town."

"Ah, but that is so uncertain!" she cried. "The fortunes of war—you yourself mentioned them last evening," she said wickedly. "There may be fighting in the very streets when the army enters the town."

"You look for failure to our arms—nothing less?" he said sadly.

"I can see little hope of success for these rebels," she replied cuttingly.

"Yet, not so long since, you were enthusiastic for what you call now the rebel cause."

"Ah, but a woman has a right to change her mind!" And she laughed lightly, and turned her face aside.

"Whilst a man remains steadfast," said Payson gloomily. "'Tis true!"

The color in her cheek showed anger now. She was no longer afraid to look straight at him. It seemed as though their two natures were doomed to strike sparks like flint and steel.

"How ungallant you have grown, Master Woolworth, since being away to the wars," she said scornfully. "'Tis true, I presume, that a soldier must be half a ruffian!"

And she swept past him into the tavern.

Captain Woolworth's countenance was a mask. She found no satisfaction in looking back at him to see how her shot rankled. He was already beckoning Long Joe from the stable yard, and with him he spoke in a low voice directly beneath Mistress Luella's window.

She, looking forth, could but compare this American captain, with his serious aspect and gloomy brow, with the bold and dashing Hallowell. The naval man revealed his ardent nature in every word and action. Payson Woolworth repressed his feelings like a stoic.

Meanwhile the innkeeper's son asked of Long Joe: "Has either of the Britishers returned to the Waycross since their escape last night?"

"Nay," responded the young giant gruffly. "I have not set eyes upon them hereabouts."

"Nor seen Jock Boldrigg?"

"Only some of Master Sarony's negroes have come to the inn. The place be almost deserted these times, Master Payse."

"Loyal men are too disturbed to go junketing about the country," said the captain; "and the other kind had best keep close."

Long Joe's sullen aspect never changed, but Woolworth was well used to the fellow's moods.

The captain went into the house, to meet his father's grim visage as the old man looked up from the chimney corner.

"And what may you wish, sir?" snarled Jacob. "Captain Woolworth, forsooth! 'Tis a high-sounding title. Ye have always desired to get above thy station, Payse; and now ye have done it—a captain of ragamuffin infantry—an officer in 'Foot and Leggit's line'—eh?"

"Let us not quarrel about trifles, father—or titles, either," said the son patiently.

"I want no ungoverned son like you about the Waycross," growled old Jacob. "'Tis not filial affection brings ye here. More like 'tis a petticut. And she wants nothing of ye, I'll be bound. She tell it me as much—said ye were presumin'." And the innkeeper chuckled. "'Tis always the way with gentles; while ye amuse them they bear wi' ye. When they tire of thy antics they set ye aside. Ye played clown for them long enough, I should think. Had ye a spark of manliness, ye'd cease followin' at Mistress Lluella's skirt. She considers ye not much of a conquest, I'll be bound. She has a handsomer and braver man at her beck and call now. Ye should see Master Hallowell! He is of noble family, that I know; and the real air to him! If he's not a lord himsel', I'm much mistook in my judgment."

"You seem vastly well acquainted with this Hallowell," said Payson suspiciously, "for having seen him a short hour or so last night."

Jacob shut up quickly. His tongue was betraying him again, and he was secretly more than a little afraid of his son. The innkeeper was heartily for the king; but it was well to have an anchor to windward, too. Those rascals from the city might aim to do him and his household damage; it would be well to be able to call on a captain in the Continental army for help, should the mob attack the Waycross.

Nevertheless, Jacob could not refrain from baiting the young man; that had been his pastime all through the boy's growth. It was second nature to him to whet his tongue upon Payson. The knowledge that he could hurt Payson's feelings, even though the latter gave no sign, delighted him. He sat in his great chair and chuckled, thinking up and repeating the sharpest phrases of which his brain was capable.

The afternoon dragged to its close, and the sun, setting redly, promised a fine if windy day on the morrow. Payson wandered about the tavern uneasily. He felt that there was something going on which was deliberately being kept secret from him.

Long Joe kept out of his way as much as possible; even old Betty, who had been his nurse when he was a youngster—indeed, had been all the mother he ever knew—eyed him askance.

His espousal of the cause of liberty was approved no more by Betty than by Jacob Woolworth himself. And now, he was quite sure, Mistress Lluella had forgotten all their discussions in which she had been so vehemently in favor of the struggling colonists.

He shared his father's supper, but he knew that the meal was begrudged him. In the kitchen was great bustle and preparation, for Mr. Phillip Sarony had recovered sufficiently from his hurt to bethink him of the inner man; and such delicacies as the Waycross could supply were being prepared for the gentleman and his daughter—who supped in their own apartments.

Payson, however, who had a shrewd eye for small matters as well as great, noted that there was being prepared more food than the planter and Mistress Lluella could consume. Old Betty, who supervised the cooking, "shooed" him

out of the kitchen when he glanced in, but not before the captain noted a hamper being packed in readiness to take out of the inn.

To whom were these cooked supplies to be sent? The Waycross was set on too lonely a road to cater to the needs of any of the neighbors. It was seldom if ever that food cooked in the inn kitchen was taken to any of the plantations.

The captain shrewdly suspected that all about the tavern were in a plot to befool him. Long Joe hung about the back door of the house, in evident readiness to take away the hamper. Payson became extremely alert; nevertheless, he hid his interest in these proceedings and retired again to the taproom, where he shared the evening lamp with his father.

He knew, however, by the way old Betty poked her head in at the door every few minutes, that the plotters distrusted his presence. Their anxiety would have amused him at another time.

Quite unexpectedly the door of the tavern opened, and there strode into the public room a fierce-looking man, with a waxed "pigtail" sticking horizontally out over his cloak collar behind, and wearing both spurs and a sword.

Payson got up quickly, seeing at once that the newcomer was not one of the neighboring planters, but a stranger.

Old Jacob's involuntary and frightened exclamation revealed the man's identity.

"Captain Price!" he gasped.

"Aye. I have returned. Where is——" He spied Payson then, and broke off immediately to ask: "Whom have we here, landlord?"

"My son," croaked Jacob, losing no chance to sneer at Payson. "My brave son, home from the wars."

"What! Is this the fellow of whom it is said he joined Mr. Washington's forces at Boston?"

"The same," said Jacob, while Payson said never a word, but stood eying the stranger quite as earnestly as Captain Price eyed him.

"Ha! Back again, like a whipped cur, with its tail 'twixt its legs, eh?" exclaimed Captain Price.

"Nay," said Payson quickly; "only returned to the old kennel to find other dogs in possession—and, perhaps, to question their right."

Captain Price failed to stare the younger man out of countenance; therefore, he turned upon his heel and strode to the fireplace where Jacob sat. In a low voice he questioned the innkeeper, and Payson overheard the name of Hallowell spoken more than once.

More than ever was he confident now that this Captain Price had had no hand in the naval officer's escape. That was a matter which lay, he believed, between Lluella and Long Joe.

The newcomer leisurely removed his cloak and cocked hat. Although he wore no uniform, a sword hung at his side, and he carried pistols, too. He had evidently ridden to the inn, and ridden rapidly and far.

"And how long are we to have the pleasure of this young man's company, landlord?" asked Price, turning again to eye Payson.

Again the latter intervened before Jacob could speak:

"It lies not within my father's power either to enjoin me to remain, or forbid me his door—at present."

"How's that?" demanded the older captain roughly.

"You, I take it, Captain Price, know that you are on dangerous ground," said Payson calmly. "I wish to take no unfair advantage of an enemy. I believe you are an agent of General Clinton, as your wounded comrade is an agent of Admiral Parker. You are too near an armed enemy to be so bold."

"Why, you young dog!" growled Price, striding toward him, hand upon sword hilt. "Ye need a cut across the face for presuming to advise me——"

He was met by no sign of fear on Payson's part. Instead, the younger man drew his own sword an inch or two from his scabbard, and allowed the weapon to slide back only when Price halted and dropped his own hand.

"Ha! Here is a dog that needs whipping!" declared the British officer.

"Have a care, sir," said the younger man, in a low voice. "I do not carry this sword for appearances only. I hope I am a fair enemy, however; this tavern is, perhaps, a middle ground between my friends and yours, but I fancy that mine are somewhat nearer."

"Your friends being, I take it, this mob of yokels who burned a neighboring planter's house last night?" sneered Price. "Why, had I remained with my friend, Hallowell, we should have beaten the gang soundly with our swords."

"And quite right, too," said Payson quickly. "My friends are of quite different kidney. And, believing you to be a go-between for the British general and admiral, it would be their duty to apprehend you, Captain Price."

The British officer laughed. "Pooh! Ye crow loudly enough. I believe I may safely take my chance here for the night. If all these rebels were callow youths like unto yourself, we could sleep peacefully in our beds, I trow, till Gabriel's trump!"

Perhaps the cheapest form of wit is to sneer at the years and inexperience of youth, and Payson Woolworth was of high spirit. He had endured just such browbeating and baiting from old Jacob; the same caustic phrases from this scornful soldier were not to be endured.

"Hold, sir!" he commanded, as Captain Price was about to turn from him again. "You are, I take it, a man of honor. I am your equal in military rank, bearing a commission as captain from the Continental Congress. You have deliberately insulted me. Give me the satisfaction that one gentleman owes another, here, or in some more fitting place!" And he drew the sword fully from its scabbard.

Price eyed him for the moment in sneering amazement.

"What!" he cried. "Fight an innkeeper's son? You are mad!" And he burst into rude laughter. "Master Woolworth," he said, addressing old Jacob, who sat shivering with fear in his chair, "you would better clear your house of this young fool. He will be getting his weasand slit in a pothouse brawl, in one of his valiant moods."

Payson strode forward and touched the officer's arm. His eyes blazed with rage none the less evident because so well controlled.

"Think twice, captain!" he exclaimed. "You may refuse to fight me now, but I will find means of meeting you yet where you will be obliged to cross swords with me."

"That would be only in the thick of a sharp fight, Master Woolworth," said the British officer coolly, "and I doubt if I shall ever find ye there."

"And I pray that I may meet you there, then!" exclaimed the younger man; "and that right soon."

As he spoke, the inn was hailed half a dozen times in rapid succession, and by as many voices:

"Ahoy the Waycross! Ahoy!"

Old Jacob started to his feet. Payson wheeled from his enemy and approached the door. It was plain that the newcomers were seafaring men, and probably more or less familiar with Jacob and his house of entertainment.

BE CONTINUED.

The September mid-month TOP-NOTCH will contain the next section of this serial. It will be on sale at all news stands on August 15th, so you will not have long to wait. Back numbers will be supplied by news dealers or the publishers.

Every Little Bit Helps

AREN'T you the boy who was here a week ago looking for a position?"

"Yes, sir."

"I thought so. And didn't I tell you then that I wanted an older boy?"

"Yes, sir; that's why I'm here now."

The Finny Tribe's Treasure

By George Commodore Shinn

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

"THAT ends the fresh-smelt business," said Oliver Brewer, surveying the three hundred boxes of fish which the steamer *Kellog* had unloaded on the old wharf. It was a consignment Oliver had shipped the day previous to Hanson & Co., in Portland.

"Aye, aye," agreed Empty Smith.

"More of Bradigan's work," decided Oliver, opening one of the letters that Captain Nelson had given him. "Brad has us independent fishermen in pretty close quarters." He paused to read the letter, while his gang of five men stood by. They were a rough, angry lot, and all were grumbling, eager to wrest from Bradigan his power over the rivermen. Oliver raised his hand, and then went on: "The letter says Bradigan bought the building from under Hanson, and moved him into the street. Brad had our fish returned."

It was a terrible blow to the men. They voiced every swear word in the fishermen's code in denouncing Bradigan. Some threw off their slickers and made for the boats, but Empty, a boat hook in his huge, hairy hand, blocked the way.

"We are still in the ring, boys," cried Oliver, after reading the second letter. "Kohanic & Co., the Frisco firm, have signed the contract to buy all the smoked smelt we can ship them. I figured they would come to our terms, but they were so slow in answering my letter I'd about given up hope. It's lucky Brad never thought of smoking them for market. If he had——"

"Wow!" cut in Empty. "If he had, we wouldn't be in the game to-day. Wouldn't do him any good now, 'cause we got the only smokehouse on the river. Just wait. Soon as Brad finds out we didn't dump the fish back into the river he'll be wondering, and then we got to watch our knittin'."

"Well, boys," said Oliver, "we know where we stand now. We've won the first point. It will be a long, hard fight to the finish. It's going to take money. What little I borrowed from the Portland bank has been used, and where we'll get more to help us over is a hard question."

The old cannery, which had not run for years, soon showed signs of new life. Cords of hardwood were stacked in the large cellar, the salt vats were cleaned and polished, the trays in the smokehouse scoured, and tons of salt laid in. Only the fact that it was isolated on an island in the Cowlitz, a

few miles from the Columbia, kept unfriendly eyes from discovering what was going on.

It was a hopeful crowd of men who cast off their slickers a short time later, and took up the work of unpacking the returned smelt and depositing them in the salt vats.

Late that evening Oliver was in the old cannery office gazing at a picture, when Empty opened the door and stepped in. The stocky seaman drew up a chair. He saw the picture, although Oliver attempted to hide it under some papers.

"The boys are getting restless," he said, after wheezing on his pipe a while. "They are suspicious; all independent fishermen are. They're afraid if we get pinched for money that you will let Brad in on the deal, and we all know what that means." He stopped to apply a match to the tobacco in his black pipe. Suddenly he looked up. "As I was saying," he went on, "the boys want to know where you got the money to stock this thing. I ain't speaking for myself, understand. It takes money to run this; they savvy that."

Oliver shuffled the papers on his desk a moment. "I see what they are driving at," he admitted. "You may tell them Brad has nothing whatever in this outfit. It's funny, this money business. I got the cash from the National in Portland. You remember you told me they sometimes staked fishermen. Didn't ask for much interest, either—only four per cent. I borrowed every cent on the outfit I could get, so don't think they would let me have another dollar."

Empty shook his head doubtfully. "If I'd rustle around right smart," he said, "I might get a little cash."

Oliver laughed. He had never known Empty to have more than fifty dollars at one time. Brewer was even suspicious of him. So many crooked moves had been made on the river that every fisherman was afraid of the other.

Empty got to his feet, took a few steps toward the door, then paused. "Another thing," he said—"Red Looney claims he saw a bunch of boats drifting around in the dark to-night. He thought they was Siwashes. Too dark to tell. Can't be Injins, though. Must be the Murdeck bunch."

"Let the men stand watch," Oliver ordered. "Give them shells for their guns. We want no one, white or red, to set foot on this island."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Empty, as he closed the door behind him.

Oliver pushed back the papers, uncovering the photograph. It was the picture of a young woman, perhaps not so beautiful as some, but to him she had been the dearest girl in the world, for she was his friend—or, rather, had been. He had saved for three years, intending to marry her, but her father, old hogging Bradigan, had kept him down. Oliver had known them in their days of poverty, had helped them, but that counted for nothing with Bradigan now. She had told Oliver many things at their last meeting some weeks earlier. Her father had admitted to her that he needed a manager for his interests on the rivers, and Ethel Bradigan had told him all depended on the smelt season. Her father inteuded then to pick the man best fitted for the position. She had promised to wait until spring, and Oliver, greatly encouraged, had rushed into the fight. He was holding the picture in the light of the yellow oil flame, gazing at it, when a loud cry, followed by the crack of rifles, startled him.

II.

OLIVER picked up his electric flash light, shoved a revolver into his pocket, and ran out into the darkness. Several flashes reflected on the black water some distance from the lower dock, and the sharp cracks broke the silence. Suddenly Big Red Looney ran up.

"Bradigan's men!" he panted. "They're shootin' out the window lights in the bunk house. Can't find our men. Hello! There they are. Shooting from the lower dock."

When they reached the lower wharf they found a few of Oliver's men

squatting behind boxes in the darkness, occasionally firing at the black objects on the water. Brewer crouched among them.

"Where's Empty?" he asked.

Some one said he had gone to Kelso. For a few seconds all was silent, then a boom came from the river. Their sharp ears told them it was a shotgun. Suddenly another flash of fire rent the darkness; another, and then another, and next startled cries came from the river.

"She's a goner," some one in the boats shouted. "So's mine," shouted another voice. "The whole bow's blowed off'en my boat. Quick! Give a hand! Come 'longside!"

There was a deal of swearing, and several boats were heard leaving the cannery a few hundred feet upstream. Every one wondered what they were doing there. Then the clump of gum boots against the hollow boat floors satisfied Oliver the men were safe. There was no more firing, and Bradigan's men quickly rowed away. This surprised the independent fishermen.

As the men waited, listening for the last sound of splashing water and clinking oarlocks, a skiff slipped up to the wharf. Oliver flashed his light on it, and found Empty grinning up at him.

"Talk about fish pirates," cried Empty. "It's lucky I was on the river. I expected this, but I thought you boys would handle things better than you did. They just wanted to get us to chasing 'em. Can't quite figure that out."

The men turned and made their way toward the smokehouse. It was a mystery to them. When they got there, they found Shorty Crab in a great rage, stalking back and forth, swearing like a past master, which he was, and nursing a swollen eye.

"She's all off," he shouted. "Old Brad slipped in here while you scissors was pottin' them fish pirates. His men dumped about a ton of smelts into the river. You oughter knowed what they was up to. I mauled Old Brad all over the joint, but he saw enough of what was doin' here."

"Aye, aye," agreed Empty. "With Bradigan onto our game, it puts us about fifteen minutes ahead of the buzzards, and that's a fact!"

"Were there any Siwashes in the bunch?" asked Oliver.

"Not a Siwash," said Empty. "Brad has lost his holt on 'em, I heard, cause he's charging them three prices for grub and licker. Injins won't stand that only about so long."

"Empty," said Oliver, turning to the hard-featured seaman, "we got to get the Siwashes in our gang."

"You bet!" eagerly shouted Empty. "I'd like to know who can get them if I can't."

"You'll never get 'em," declared Big Red Looney.

"Smelt are running again," said Oliver. "We better get out the boats and start fishing. Empty, get Old Chinook's gang if you can. It may take a day or two, and some money, and we have no money, so you'll have to do it without."

"Money!" cried Empty. "I'll get the cash and the Injins, too, and you kin lay to that!"

With this parting remark, Empty made for his skiff. Oliver wondered. Where would Empty get the money? Would he tell Bradigan their plans, and get it from him? Oliver did not dare think of that. The sailor was so mysterious that Brewer suspected he would work the game from both sides if he was given the opportunity. But there was but one course left now: he must chance it with the rest.

A few of the men were left to guard while Oliver and the others dipped smelt. The fish ran, huddled together, in schools forming a pathway a few feet wide. Beside these pathways the men anchored their boats and commenced dipping the little shiny creatures into them. The large fish boats were soon overflowing with smelt, and the men rowed to the wharf, where they deposited them. All night and far into the next day they worked, and when at last the smelt run slackened, they shoveled the fish into the salt vats, and later spread them on the trays in the smokehouse.

Only half of the salt vats had been filled; they had hoped to fill them all. The men grumbled because Empty had not fished, and they thought it useless to get the Indians into the outfit, for all fishermen know them to be trouble makers. But when they were busy on the wharves, a familiar voice from up-river met their ears: it was Empty, and he was singing the old chant of the fishermen:

"You're in the navy now,
You're not behind the plow——"

The men paused in their work, and Oliver slipped over to the lower dock. In the dull light of the night he saw a long string of boats.

"Hel-l-o-o!" exclaimed Big Red. "Here comes Empty, his boat empty, as usual, and—and——"

"He's got the Siwashes!" shouted another.

When Empty's boat slipped up to the wharf, the men eagerly caught his line and fastened it, and several lanterns lighted up the small circle. He slipped his oars into the boat and got to his feet.

"Gee cly!" he puffed, clambering onto the wharf. "Whew! That's some pull—five boatloads trailing back there and——"

"Loads of what?" shouted Oliver.

"Smelt."

"Smelt?"

"Aye, aye," answered Empty, with a grin. "Five boatloads, sure as Hades is no place for a meetin'house!"

"Where'd you get them?"

"Picked 'em up. They was drifting around."

"Look here, Empty," snapped Oliver. "Did you get them from Bradigan?"

"Wow, wow!" the stocky sailor replied quickly. "I should say not. Their owners is back there—ten boatloads: the toughest bunch of Siwashes you ever clapped eyes on. Brad was getting them livened up so as to raid our camp to-night. Part of the crowd wanted to come with me, so we—Chinook and me—we laid out the o'nery ones. Had to do it. No other way 'round it."

The outgoing tide had brought the long string of boats alongside the dock. Old Chinook was the only one awake; he could stand an unknown amount of bad whisky. Empty shouted to him in jargon, asking where he wanted his gang landed. He replied in the same tongue that he would land them on a sand bar which was a few hundred feet downstream.

"Boys," said Oliver, "we better take some flour and bacon down to them—salt and sugar; whatever they need, 'cause they'll be a hungry lot in the morning."

"Sure thing," agreed Empty. "We got to do the right thing by them. Old Chinook's got twenty-five of the best boatmen on the Columbia. I got money now, and will dish out a little to them. I know Injins better'n they know themselves."

"Where you getting this cash?" asked Big Red.

"Never mind; I didn't hold up any one," said the fisherman.

The five boatloads of smelt were disposed of by bringing into service all the vats in the cannery, and then all hands ate supper. Empty, fired by the liquor, talked like a rapid-fire gun.

"Old Brad is trying every way to corner us," he said between bites. "He's fixed the river steamers so they won't stop here any more. That cuts off our grub supply. They've shut down on us in Kelso—Kalama is same way. Brad owns the dog-goned towns. Rainier is all right, but it's too far away, we'd lose valuable time paddling over there for supplies and box shooks. The smelt season is so short, and we only got a handful of men. Brad's got the whole thing figured out, and seems like we were cornered again."

"That's the reason we need the Siwashes," said Oliver. "They are good boatmen, and can get our supplies from Rainier and help with the smelt while we are fishing."

For several days the Cowlitz was again full of smelt: there were millions of them. The swells from river steamers washed them ashore, farmers came for miles, and returned with wagon-loads of them to be used as fertilizer,

and the price dropped to nothing. Bradigan became discouraged. His men grew angry. Almost any time of day or night Empty might be seen pulling up to the wharf with a string of ten or fifteen boatloads of fish. Being a grafter by nature, he was too lazy to dip the smelt, so he paid four bits a boatload for them, and kept the smokehouse swamped most of the time. The others were too busy handling the fish to wonder where the old salt got his money.

Finally the rivers cleared, and the run of smelt stopped as quickly and mysteriously as it had begun. But the work in the cannery did not stop; there were still tons of fish to be taken from the smokehouse. The old storehouse groaned under the great weight of fish, but the men kept adding boxes to the huge piles. Not a shipment as yet had been made.

"The *Beaver* ought to be along in a few minutes to load our fish," remarked Oliver, pausing beside Empty, who was gazing down the river.

"Aye, aye," murmured the seaman, "but will she stop?"

"Of course she will," said Oliver decidedly. "I arranged that a week ago."

III.

THE San Francisco steamer did not stop. She merely halted long enough to deliver a letter to one of the Siwashes who happened to be near the passing steamer. He paddled to the dock, and turned it over to Oliver.

"Couldn't land on account of dangerous water," growled Brewer, after reading the note. "Cap Johnson says he understands a sand bar has formed around the dock, and his company wouldn't allow him to chance it."

"Yeow!" ejaculated Empty. "Musta cost Brad a hundred to bribe Johnson."

"See here, Empty," said Oliver, "the main issue is to get the smoked smelt loaded into cars at Rainier, and get them moving south. Our money is in number one storehouse, and as soon after dark as possible we must start them toward Rainier. Bradigan is pestering me with letters to take him in as our partner. He figures on making the clean-up and leaving us in the lurch.

"Empty, you get the Siwashes ready to start at dark, and attend to that part of the work, while I row over to Carroll's to telephone Bradigan. Think I can hold him off a day and night, and then, if we don't agree to accept his offer, he will put us out of business."

Oliver was no longer suspicious of Empty, although he was sure the seaman was working both sides of the game, for he felt it was for their gain and Bradigan's loss.

A gale swept up the Columbia River at forty miles an hour that night, driving belated fishermen to the warmth of their boathouses; but Oliver's men did not rest. Empty had returned from one of his mysterious trips up the Cowlitz, and Oliver came back an hour later. All the smelt, excepting a few tons which were still smoking, were loaded into the boats, and the Siwashes stood ready to make the run to Rainier. It had been decided to load all available boats with fish, and make two trips, thus leaving on hand only those in the smokehouse. Even one trip in such a night would take four hours.

Empty found Oliver on the lower dock shortly after supper. "Did you get Brad on the phone?" he asked. "Cars set?"

"Yes," replied Oliver; "and the cars are set for loading. Frank Sherman, the railway's agent, will be there to seal them and issue bills of lading as fast as we get loaded. Brad agreed to give me until ten o'clock to-night to find out what the boys wanted to do. He knows on such a night we can never get the fish over in five hours, so I guess he's got us. I'd figured we could stand him off, but it doesnt' look favorable now. I'm afraid they'll catch us on the second trip; the trip that means profit to us."

"That's so," admitted Empty, wrinkling up his nose. "But I thought you was going to leave some of this business to me. I'll have every smoked fish in the cars before ten o'clock, and you kin lay to that!"

When darkness settled in for good, and the wind and rain seemed determined to wrench from under the old cannery the piling which supported it, the Siwashes, led by Oliver and Chinook, slipped out into the boiling Cowlitz and were shot down to the Columbia in record time. Reaching the Columbia, the Indians labored like demons, but the heavy loads and growing storm impeded them, and, after the first thirty-minute struggle, Oliver decided they would never make it across.

"We'll never make it, Chinook," he said sadly. "Where is Empty?"

The Siwash stared straight ahead into the darkness in silence a few minutes, then swung his arm to the north.

"Empty," he grunted, "him klatawa; catch 'um——"

His voice was drowned by the storm. Oliver did not question him further, for he realized it was useless. He wondered what had possessed Empty to leave at this particular time. Perhaps he had not had time to explain beforehand; or could he have gone to inform Bradigan? He strained his eyes, but could see nothing ahead of them save the inky darkness.

Several minutes passed, and the Siwash pointed ahead. "Choo-choo," he said. "Brad's choo-choo."

Again Oliver strained his eyes in the direction of the pointing finger, and after some time discovered not far away the outlines of Bradigan's powerful launch. His heart fell within him. Empty had played the game into Bradigan's hand. Quickly he told Chinook to order his men to get their guns ready; he even raised his own rifle to his shoulder, and drew a bead on the fast-approaching boat.

"Ahoy!" came a voice above the wind.

The Indians quickened their strokes. "Huh," grunted Chinook. "Him Empty."

Sure enough, it was Empty Smith, and when he had worked his boat close to Chinook's, he shouted: "Lash the boats together, and I'll snake 'em over to Rainier quicker'n you can say klatawa."

With the aid of the Indians, who now worked as they had never worked before, the powerful launch pulled the long string of fish boats through the water at a good clip. On their last trip a huge ball of fire, some distance upriver, attracted their attention. It shot into the sky, and then burst the inky blackness of the night, and an instant later a roar like that of thunder met their ears.

"Holy mackerel!" shouted Empty above the wash of the waves. "That's dennymite!"

IV.

THE men quickened their strokes, staring with bulging eyes into the sheet of rain. A short time later they drew up to the wharf, and found storehouse number one had been wrecked. Fortunately the last trip had emptied it of fish. In the glare of several torches on the dock, Oliver made out his men fighting with Bradigan's. The Siwashes took in the situation, and uttered a cry which was snatched from their mouths by the wind and whirled down the valley. The independent fishermen were outnumbered five to one, but they were fighting desperately with clubs and knives, trying to keep the others from reaching the largest smokehouse.

"If they set fire to smokehouse number one," puffed Empty, as he ran alongside Oliver, "the whole plant will go up in smoke. Here you!" he shouted to the Siwashes, "grab a boat hook! A club——" But he might as well have saved his breath, for the stocky Indians swept past him, bearing their long, dirty fish knives as they ran.

Bradigan's men were nearing the huge smokehouse with gasoline and lighted torch. It loomed up even larger in the flaring light, and Oliver felt sure they would set fire to the buildings before the Siwashes arrived, but a second later he saw them throw themselves into the thickest of the fighting. The Indians fought as had their ancestors when the Bridge of the Gods was reduced to ruins, and Chief Multinomah no longer had control of the tribes.

Oliver and Empty were soon lost in the center of the clashing knives, muffled blows, and cries of rage. It made his heart swell with pride to see his men fighting for him. Suddenly Big Ed Murdeck and his Brother Mike, roaring like enraged bears, rushed through the crowd toward him, felling men right and left with their huge fists, as they went. Oliver backed into a clear space, ducked his head, and Big Ed missed a heavy swing. Quick as light, Oliver smashed his own fist against the other's jaw.

Then Mike clinched from the rear. Big Ed quickly staggered to his feet. Oliver had very powerful arms and shoulders. One wrench threw Mike from him, then righted himself, and found Big Ed making for him with a boat hook in his hand. It is a wicked instrument, a boat hook, like a baseball bat with a sharp iron hook in the end. They were again in tight quarters, with the others swarming closer to them.

The smash of clubs and muffled cries were at every hand; with a spring Oliver had Big Ed by the throat, wrestling with him and warding off the club. Presently he discovered the burly fisherman was working loose, and at the same time hearing him downward. With all his strength he grasped the hairy throat and twisted. A heavy blow caught him on the head, and he remembered suddenly that Mike was behind him. Half turning, he received another blow which glanced to his shoulder. Instantly the two brothers encircled him with their arms and were forcing him to the plank wharf. The others were swaying, crowding, fighting on every side. Another blow stretched him senseless.

When the cries of victory had stopped, and Bradigan's men were far out in the Cowlitz, Oliver got to his feet weakly, staggered a few steps, and clutched the bunk-house door. Suddenly he was aware of Empty helping him inside to a bunk.

"By thunder!" exclaimed Empty. "They mighty nigh got you, that shuffle!"

"It was that crack on the head," said Oliver, his eyes still glassy. "I am coming around all right. Where's the gang? Brad's men gone?"

"The fightin' is all over," said Empty.

"Give me a dipper of water to pour on my head. It's burning up."

V.

SEVERAL days later Oliver and Empty were in the cannery office finishing up the work. The division had been made that morning, and all were satisfied. Each man had made more in the smelt season than in any four or five years of fishing under Bradigan. Each had a prospective purchase in view—one a salmon trap on the lower Columbia, another a ranch near the river, and another a launch and salmon outfit; and Empty had secured a half interest in the towboat *Samson*. The Siwashes had spent their money, and were hunting Bradigan and his crew, with little chance of finding them.

"I'm thinking things will be different on the rivers now that you are going to manage old Brad's fish business," observed Empty. "Suppose Brad sailed for Europe to-day. This was the day he intended to leave."

"Yes, it will be a square deal to rich and poor," Oliver replied. "Brad sailed this morning. He'll be gone about a year."

"Aye, aye," said Empty, "but when're you and Ethel Bradigan going to get married? I want to be at the weddin'."

Oliver shook his head sadly. "Don't think she cares for me now," he replied. "Haven't seen her since the big fight."

"That's right," Empty suddenly remembered; "Brad sent her to visit friends in Portland. He didn't want her to hear about the fight."

"I know she's in Portland," said Oliver, "but I think she has turned me down. Bradigan left between night and morning, so we had no time to talk over matters. Most of the fishermen on the river are after his scalp—that's one reason he took the trip."

"Lookie here," blurted Empty. "Don't I know that girl? I use' to trot

her on my knee when she was a kid, and her old man was living in a scow-house hard by the shingle mill in Kelso. Don't care for you? Man, what you talking about? She don't know the change in things, that's all. How'd I get the big launch that night? She figured it out. Whose money started this outfit? It was from her private bank account. I told you to go to the National, and that's where you got the coin; and she gave me all the cash that was needed after that. She helped us all out. It's no more than we've done for her when she was poor. She told me not to tell, and now that you've made me do it I want you to keep this little matter under your hat."

Oliver was staring straight ahead, unable to speak. Empty chuckled.

"Aye, aye, a good hand; it was that, all of Bradigan's millions to draw to, eh?"

Suddenly Oliver jumped to his feet, slung on his coat and hat, and made for the door. "Off for Portland," he called over his shoulder.

"Bully for you," responded Empty. "We'll all be wishin' ye good luck, though you've no need of it, for I'm as sure of the news we'll be gettin' as if I'd already got the engraved invite."

Playing Safe

IT came to the ears of a village constable, who yearned to distinguish himself, that a local innkeeper was serving game out of season. So the chance that P. C. Bumble had so long waited for had come at last. Here was an opportunity for asserting his authority and throwing out the long arm of the law. Like the bright ornament to his profession that he was, P. C. Bumble visited the inn in plain clothes and ordered a partridge for dinner. He dispatched it with the utmost relish and washed it down with a glass of something with water in it. Then he summoned the waiter, and, with the force of all the law and superiority he could muster, said:

"Send the manager to me immediately."

"Why, sir," asked the waiter, "have you any complaint to make?"

"I wish to notify him to appear in court to-morrow for selling partridges out of season. I am a police officer in plain clothes, and have secured evidence against him."

"Ah, but it weren't partridge you 'ad. It was crow!"

To Phone William the Conquerer

THE teacher asked: "When did William the Conqueror invade England?"

After the silence had become painful, she said: "Open your history books. What does it say there?"

A boy answered: "William the Conqueror, 1066."

"Now," said the teacher, "why didn't you remember the date?"

"Well," replied the boy, "I thought it was his telephone number."

Convincing Drama

DURING a performance of J. Pitt Hardacre's version of the well-known drama, "East Lynne," in a Dublin theater, an amusing incident occurred.

In the thrilling scene in which the polished villain is trying to persuade *Lady Isabel* to leave her husband and home, the excitement became so intense that one of the occupants of the gallery called out, in a hoarse voice:

"Don't go wid him, ma'am; he's a rale blaygard!"

How to Wire Electric Bells

The accompanying simple diagrams illustrate several different ways of connecting up electric bells so that a novice may install two or more push buttons, or two or more bells, on the same circuit.

In Fig. 1 a single push button is employed to ring two or more bells at the same time. The bells are connected up in parallel, as it is called, and may be any distance apart. In Fig. 2 two or more push buttons may be placed anywhere and connected up so that any button will ring the bell. These buttons

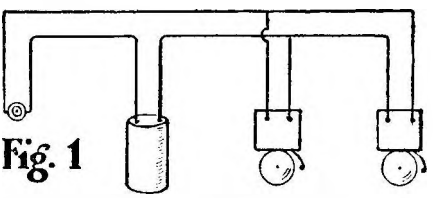


Fig. 1
Bells in Parallel

are likewise connected up in parallel. Of course, two or more bells can be operated, but all of them will ring when any of the buttons are pushed.

How to wire a bell in the servant's room so that it will ring continuously until she gets out of bed and switches it off is shown in Fig. 3. It will be seen that two switches are employed. One is placed conveniently where madam can throw it on, while the other is

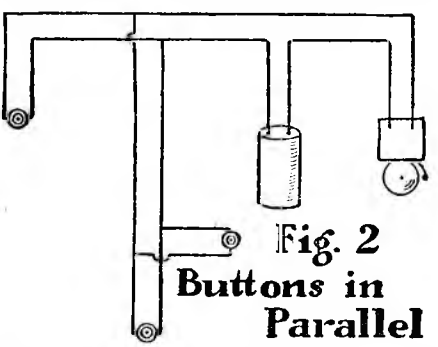


Fig. 2
Buttons in Parallel

placed in the servant's room along with the bell. Of course, each switch would have to be set back to its original position during the day, to be ready for the following morning.

Fig. 4 shows how to wire a bell which

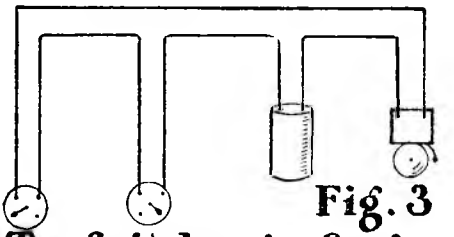


Fig. 3
Two Switches in Series

is a long way from the push button. In this instance only one wire need be used, the earth being substituted for the usual return wire. It is not often necessary to connect wires with metal plates and bury them in the earth as shown; it can generally be done by connecting the wires on to water or gas mains, as these are good conductors,

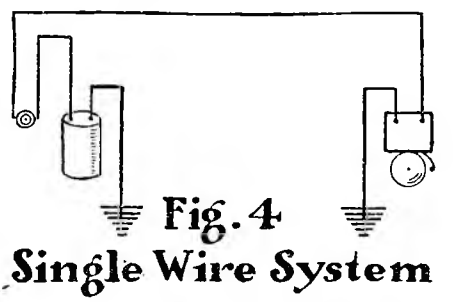


Fig. 4
Single Wire System

and lead to the earth as a matter of course.

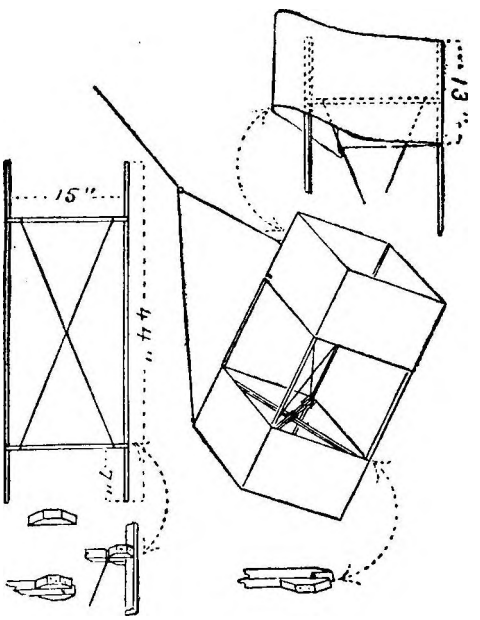
For ordinary bell work, No. 18 annunciator wire is used. Joints are made by scraping off the insulation with a knife and twisting the ends closely together. The joint should then be soldered, using resin as a flux. The joint is then covered with tape.

How to Make a Box Kite

The four corner sticks are 44 inches long, ¼ inch thick by ⅝ inch wide. Two of these are used in making a

frame 44 by 15 inches. Two spreaders 15 inches long are made with cleats that hold these corner sticks firmly in place. A brad awl and thin wire nails, clinched, will make the work of putting these cleats on the spreaders and fastening them to the corner sticks, without splitting, a sure and neat process. Wire braces are stretched diagonally from spreader to spreader to keep this frame from twisting. Stovepipe wire will do. The spreaders are fastened 7 inches from the ends of corner sticks.

Two strips of cloth, preferably percaline, 38 inches long, hemmed on each



side to a width of 7 or 13 inches—preferably 13 inches—form the sails of the kite. These strips are joined at the ends, lapping about an inch, and fastened with the sailor or overhand stitch. They are marked with a pencil, across their width, into four equal parts, care being taken that the two joined strips are the same width and length. The strips are first nailed along opposite pencil marks to the corner sticks of the frame; the two corner sticks not yet used are then nailed in the same way to the strips along the remaining opposite pencil marks. The long spreaders brace these free corner sticks apart, and are ½ inch square, and long enough to stretch the cloth strips tightly around the completed frame—about 38 inches. One-half of the wood is cut away to form one side of the groove in these long spreaders, and when they are filled, the remaining side or cleat is nailed on. They are finally pushed down until they touch the short spreaders, to which they are tied with waxed thread. They are then made to cross the kite at right angles, and nailed through the cloth at their ends to the corner pieces. Small screw eyes, one at one end, the other 6½ inches from the other end of any of the corner pieces, are set in for the bellyband. The bellyband is about 66 inches long, and divided somewhere along its length with the ring for the retaining cord, this "somewhere" is decided best by experiment—the weights of kites make a difference in the flying tilt of them.

Paper Roofs

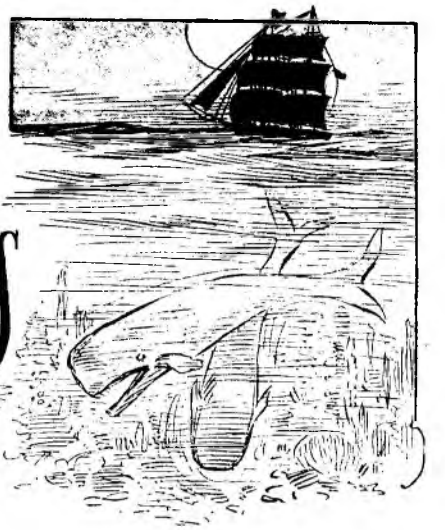
To cover any wooden roofs, such as those of dog kennels, summerhouses, etc., get a large piece of strong, brown paper, and tack it down. Make sure there are no holes in it for the wet to get under. Then give it two coats of paint. This will last several years, and is almost as good as tarpaulin, and much cheaper.

Ornamental Garden Tubs

Purchase a lard tub from your grocer. Wash well with soda and water; when dry, stain with oak stain. Next buy some thin sheet copper, which is easily cut with strong shears. Cut three bands about an inch wide, bore some holes for copper nails, and fix round the tub. These hoops will strengthen it and add much to its appearance. When filled with earth and planted with geraniums, marguerites, heliotrope, et cetera, or pretty shrubs for the winter, the tubs make very beautiful decorations for the garden.

Strategy of the Depths

By Harold de Polo



THE great, battle-scarred leader of the mighty school of sperm whales felt no pleasure as he swished this way and that, around the rocks at the bottom of the sea, filling his maw with as many succulent cuttlefish as his tremendous appetite craved. The deliciously tender morsels, the depths that were shimmering with wondrous colors, the magnitude of the large school over which he ruled—all these, to-day, failed to make his heart swell with pride and content, as it formerly had.

He thought only of his huge enemy, who aspired to the position which he himself now held. The other animal, fully as long as himself, fully as crafty, and even stronger, would before long challenge him to open combat for the leadership of the mighty school. Of this he was certain; so certain that it caused him to have grave fears for his life. For the other whale, being younger and stronger, would naturally have the odds in his favor to quite an extent. So it was; such was the law of his kind; the law of life—the leader was always open to the attack of a younger bull who deemed himself capable of ousting his chief and taking command.

It was this very knowledge of the inevitable law of things, indeed, that caused him to worry about it. He had been a good leader, a strong leader, a just leader; and he had fought off many pretenders in his career. And now, to think of giving all this up pained him sorely, for he felt that he was a trifle too old for his antagonist. Possibly, in the fight that was bound to occur soon, he would be killed; and possibly, also, he would be but maimed, and left to roam the seas in loneliness until some inferior creature ended his helpless existence.

A tempting cuttlefish flashed by him, making for a crevice in the rocks. Yet the great leader, although he might easily have captured it, made no effort at all to grasp it between his powerful jaws. Instead, he watched it get to safety, then cast his eyes reflectively about him, looking at the dozens of huge, slate-black forms of his subjects that were intent only on filling their maws. There, a little to the right of him, was his enemy. How big, how strong, how fearsome he looked. The battle would be a hard one when it came; and come it would, without doubt, before very many days had passed—perhaps it was but a matter of hours!

For the last month, indeed, the

younger brute had been taunting him and testing his power, trying to show him up as unfit to rule. Many times, when he had given an order, the younger one had utterly disregarded it; many times, when he had given a warning of the man-creatures, the younger bull had recklessly stayed behind and showed that he was not afraid. Once, though, the youngster had been caught a glancing blow by one of those sharp things that the man-creatures fire, and the school had seen that he lacked caution. Since then, however, the pretender to the throne had been more careful, satisfied in finding out as much as possible about his prospective antagonist, and nursing his strength for the great tussle. Only that morning, indeed, he had once more disregarded his chief's advice, and stayed behind when the man-creatures were near—and this time he had not been touched. All of which had caused a greater pride for his valiance and prowess to spring up within his own breast; and the old leader had seen—seen and wondered whether or not he could cope with him.

Then, as he once more looked over the long, formidable bulk of his opponent-to-be, his heart surged up, and he felt a great anger arise within him. What! Would he practically admit himself defeated before the battle? Would he, who had won so many long, hard fights, now break under the strain? Would he, considered one of the greatest monsters of the sea, give up his place without a terrific combat?

No! He would fight as he had never fought before; fight with all the strength, and endurance, and strategy of which he was master. Yes, he would fight and win! So, once more feeling himself the great chief that he was, he gave his order that it was time to rise for air, and slowly and majestically moved his immense flukes and cut gracefully through the water toward the surface.

II.

THE sagacious old leader had not gone far before he found an obstacle in his path. Suddenly, after he had shot out in front of the rest of the school, the younger whale swung deftly about and faced his chief, informing him, in that silent way his kind have, as he assumed a certain attitude, that he wished to put in his claim for leadership, and wished to prove his right to the position immediately.

The old chief stopped abruptly, noticing that the entire school, sensing the coming battle, had got away from the participants, and were lying at ease in a wide circle, ready to view the conflict. And he remembered, very vividly, that so it had been on the day when he, many years ago, had won his fight and the right to lead the school; but then he had been young. Now, although older and a bit less powerful, he had what he did not possess then: a cleverness that few were gifted with.

All these things took but a moment to rush through his quick brain. Then, still as rapidly, he deliberated on the best mode of battle to pursue. In a moment he had decided. The one who struck first, and without being suspected, provided the blow was sufficiently powerful, always stood an excellent chance of coming off the victor. That he had learned from much experience; it had, in fact, been one of his most valuable assets—an unexpected rush, a mighty blow, and a furious spurt of rage and strength. Many, many times had this carried him off the victor.

Drawing in his powerful, cablelike muscles and sinews, he bent his whole form in a bow, let the tension loose, and hurled his herculean body with all the strength he possessed straight out for his young opponent, seeming as if some great battleship were rushing through the water on a mission of devastation.

But the pretender to the throne was no beginner at the art of fighting, for he had conquered many of the stripling bulls. With a sudden swish of his tail, and an easy sweep of his flukes, he shot out far to the left. His dexterous leader, nevertheless, had been a trifle too swift for him, and he felt the lash of the huge tail sting him across the end of his back with a force that

stopped his flight and sent him whirling.

The memory of the other fights now surged through the chief, and again he tried the method of combat that he had so long trusted. Stopping his rush and turning about with an ease and rapidity that seemed wonderful in one of his apparently awkward bulk, he launched himself straight forward, once more, at his slightly puzzled antagonist. And this time his monstrous tail caught the young bull on the side of the head.

The youngster, feeling that this first raging charge of his sagacious leader was something that he could not stand against, made a hasty retreat, and shot far down into the translucent depths with as great a speed as his aching head would allow. He knew, indeed, that it was his only safety; for the old leader, with his blood up, would be a terrible thing to meet, for the next few minutes, at least. After that, he believed, the older one would tire, and his strength would wane.

But the young bull was mistaken in this. The battle-scarred veteran pursued with fury, speed, and endurance that he had not thought him capable of. He followed him fiercely for the space of a good half hour or more, rushing and lashing, yet only twice landing that fearful tail of his across the younger whale's jaw. Once, after a strong blow, the old leader had come straight for him, his mouth open, in the hope of gripping the lower mandible, breaking it with a wrench, and leaving his opponent as good as dead; for in that condition the whale cannot eat.

The young one, however, had sensed the great danger, and, in sheer desperation, turned about to fight. Then, thinking of his own prowess and power, he became angry at the way in which he had been forced to retreat. He drew in his own muscular body, shot ahead at his opponent, and lashed out with his tail like a very demon. And so swiftly and unexpectedly did he do it, indeed, that he managed to strike the old leader a resounding, vicious slap across the head, which stopped his charge and caused him to stay quiet for a minute.

The young bull, confident and feeling stronger than ever as he saw how he had turned the battle for the moment, followed up his lead with a rapid, angry rush, again catching the great whale a stunning blow directly over his sturdy backbone. Then, fighting with a fierceness that was born of youth, strength, and extreme conceit, he launched himself out for the lower mandible, which hung there so temptingly, and which would give him the victory should he find himself able to break it.

But the veteran, although feeling a bit stunned for the moment, saw the need of flight and felt the desire for air. He gathered himself together and hurled his body through the water with all his force, the knowledge of the peril behind him spurring him to a speed that kept him just a trifle in advance of his adversary. Only once, indeed, did he feel the sting of that lashing tail; but then, the next instant, the sun streamed warmly down, and he knew that he was close to the surface.

III.

RISING to the surface with a pressure that was terrific, the great leader bounded straight up from the sea, and cut through the air for a good twenty feet, striking the water, when he landed, with a noise that sounded louder than a clap of thunder. But right after him, in less than a minute, came his pursuer, throwing himself from the water, and through the air, in the hope of landing upon the form of the leader and rendering him insensible from the very weight of the blow.

Here, again, the old leader was wise; for at various times, during his eventful career, he had found it necessary to cope with the same situation. He lay quite still on the water, saw the great, slate-black shape descending upon him, and very neatly shot ahead out of harm's way. Then, with a sudden flap of that tail that could sink boats, he whistled it through the air and landed it cleanly and squarely on the under jaw of the oncoming animal as the latter was just about to touch the water.

After a while the realization came to the veteran chief, with more clearness than ever before, that there was no doubt that he was getting old. Seeing his antagonist lying there a trifle stunned, he swam hastily away in order to fill his lungs with the air that he needed so badly. And not until it was too late did he remember, painfully, what he should have done under the circumstances.

Seeing the other helpless for an instant, he should have turned about and renewed the attack with a strength and a fury which would undoubtedly have enabled him to come off the victor. But no; instead of that, he had gone in search of peaceful air. Years ago, he knew, he would have ended the battle then—he was sure of it! Now, however, enough time had elapsed to allow the young bull to regain his strength and start again on the pursuit. So the huge leader, thinking sadly of his lost opportunity, darted down into the translucent depths with the thought of trying to tire the other by a long chase.

The race was of short duration. The younger whale, wilder than ever at having been bested in the attack on the surface, was cutting through the sea with a swiftness that was appalling to the chief whom he was following. Soon, indeed, the young bull caught up with him; and this time, instead of trying to beat him with his tail or body, he began making sudden spurts, in an effort to grip the lower mandible between his capacious jaws.

The old whale cleverly managed to evade him, circling and turning, ever keeping just out of reach of those deadly jaws. Every moment, nevertheless, he knew that the strength and endurance that he had formerly had were more than equaled by the younger bull. So he was satisfied to do his best to keep away from those fearful rushes, and to rack his brain for some trick whereby he might turn the tide. This he could not do, but yet he managed to keep away from danger. It made him glad, indeed, to see that in that, at least, he had his stronger opponent utterly outclassed. He was by far the craftier of the two, and that was where his age and experience counted.

After what seemed to the wily old whale an interminably long time, his age was once more brought home to him as he found that his lungs were sadly in need of air. So, gathering a new burst of speed, he cut through the water and made directly for the surface, with the maddened young bull coming closely after him. Yet, again, as before, he was fortunately able to travel just fast enough to stay out of reach—just fast enough, indeed, so that his tail was barely ten feet from the head of the pursuing brute.

Again, with a mighty rush, he came to the surface, shooting through the air, and landing on the water with a thunderous slap; and again, very swiftly, he managed to evade the furious descent of his maddened antagonist. Also, as he swam on the surface, taking in deep breaths of the wonderfully invigorating air, he saw something that he knew the younger whale had not noticed during the excitement of the fight.

Not more than a mile away, riding quietly on the tossing sea, was one of those great, strong wooden things filled with his mortal enemies, the man-creatures! One of those things that shot something through the air which buried itself in one's body, and refused to come out or allow one to break the thing that held it there; one of those dreaded things that had caused the death of so many of his brothers and sisters.

IV.

THE wily old cetacean used his brain quickly. And suddenly, with hope in his stout heart, he made a powerful sweep of his flukes and shot down into the depths. But now, instead of traveling on an almost straight line, he made his way through the water at a decided slant—a slant that would take him, before very long, somewhere in the vicinity of that great, ugly wooden thing that was the terror of his species.

Down, down he went, ever in the direction that would take him under those

man-creatures, finding it necessary, now, to use all the strength that was in his immense body, in order to keep away from the inexorable, indefatigable pursuer. And he knew that, without a doubt, if he failed now, he could not longer continue the fight; his strength was rapidly waning, and his lungs were every moment feeling the need of air. Yes, this was practically his last chance, and he must win it!

Finally he started on his upward course, the pain in his head and the fatigue that was steadily creeping all over him making him wonder whether he would be able to hold out long enough to reach the surface. His head felt like bursting, and his muscles and sinews as if they would snap at any moment and render him helpless. Again he took on a burst of speed—how, he did not know—and shot upward, ever upward, in the direction that he thought the man-creatures must surely be.

Could he reach them? If he were to do so, it would have to be very soon. His head, his body, his lungs! He felt as if his last moment had surely come. And there behind, coming closer and closer, was that maddened young bull that had, now, easily two or three times his strength.

Presently, not a hundred feet above him, he saw a dark, somber splotch on the otherwise sunny surface, and he knew that his destination was at last reached. Now for the chance!

Straight as a dart he made for a spot about eighty or ninety feet to the right of the man-creatures, every second slackening his speed, and allowing the younger whale to come closer and closer to him.

Then, when not twenty feet from the surface, he executed what he hoped would be the stroke to end the battle. Just as the young bull, with all his force behind him, rushed up to his side, the old leader suddenly shot out to the side with a rapidity that was wonderful, and evaded his charging foe.

His pursuer, traveling at such a speed that he could not stop himself, passed by him like a flash, with such terrific force that he went clear up to the surface of the sea.

Then the old leader, with a sweep of his large flukes, swam away for fifty feet or so, and cut down through the water for double that distance, then waited expectantly.

It was not long before the youngster followed him; but he was going in the other direction. Also, he was traveling as if death were after him; and, sticking securely in his body, and held by a stout thing that the veteran chief knew could not be broken, was one of those horrible implements by which the man-creatures were able to kill his kind. And the frightened, desperate charge of the young bull told the chief that it would be his last.

For a while the old chief watched his stricken antagonist. Then, after seeing him tossing about in his death throes, he calmly and triumphantly swam off to the school and ordered them to move on from danger, feeling a great pride in his heart as he saw them, one and all, obey him with the readiness they had shown for many years.

The Wonders of Saturn

THE PROFESSOR (with the telescope—a nickel a peep): "You are now gazing, sir, on that wonderful planet, Saturn."

Motor Cyclist: "And what is the broad belt running round it?"

The Professor (rising to the occasion): "That, sir, is the racing track of the Saturn Motor Cycling Club."

Shortening His Misery

DO you believe in long engagements?"

"Of course. The longer a man is engaged, the less time he has to be married!"

Good Enough for Jerry

by Harold C. Burr

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

A GLOWING EXPECTATION.

THE boss had sent an office boy into the big outer room to summon Jerry Gaylord to him. The young fellow got down off his high stool and passed through the empty cashier's cage. Something throbbed against his left ribs—fluttered. It might have been hope, but it was probably his heart. He felt that he was next in line for the cashier's berth and the eighteen hundred a year that went with it. It would make marriage with the girl he wanted a possibility. A little wistfully he thought how nice it would be to tell Selina Brokaw that night of his good luck.

One of his fellow clerks jocularly stopped him halfway across the customers' room. "Jerry," he said, with mock seriousness, "the old man wants to see you to raise your salary from eighteen a week to—er—er—fifteen!"

But Gaylord didn't think it anything to wax flippant about. He had set his heart on Miller's vacant job. Ever since Miller had been forced to throw it up and grapple with a bad cough out in Colorado, he had been preening himself for the place. Opportunity wasn't knocking; it was battering down the door. It would be years before another opening would occur. It would be making good with Selina, too. And here it was the end of the year, and the boss sending for him. It looked pretty rosy to Jerry Gaylord.

So he went confidently into Thaddeus Ruskin's little cubby-hole that was all finished in walnut, even down to the roll-top desk. In a swivel chair sat the mighty boss. He wore rimless glasses and a close-clipped black mustache. He knew where he was at every minute, and Miss Jenks, the stenographer, said he never hesitated over his dictation for the right word.

"Sit down a minute, Jerry," he said in a pleasant tone, while his pen continued to scratch; "and shut the door after you."

Thus counseled, Gaylord obeyed, strangely cool. Ruskin was signing the firm checks for the day in quick, jerky letters with a flourish at the end of each signature, boldly executed. The pen gave a final protesting splutter, and was still. The waiting young man looked up with a slight start. The boss was looking at him thoughtfully, his shrewd gray eye appraising, calculating. Jerry got the impression he was being sized up mentally to determine if he could

fill poor Miller's official shoes all right.

"Jerry, how long have you been with us?" Ruskin asked musingly.

"Five years, sir."

"Um-m!" The boss was still meditative. "And during that time you've always given complete satisfaction. You've been faithful, conscientious. We want you to understand we appreciate your services."

"Thank you, sir." Jerry wanted to fidget, because he had never seen the boss so hesitant.

Ruskin rolled a stray morsel of tobacco leaf around his tongue. "But we've got to cut down running expenses January first. This has been a bad year with us. The public hasn't bought stocks. These government investigations of corporations are choking our business. We've decided to curtail our office force. Do you think you could find something else to do around the Street?"

Jerry gulped down his keen disappointment. "I'll—I'll try, sir," he contrived to articulate, "if there's nothing more for me here."

He comprehended now why the boss had beat around the bush. Ruskin, senior partner of Ruskin & Haswell, was trying to let him down easy. Gaylord was bitterly grateful. In plain, unadorned English, he was fired. Fired! The word had a sickening, obliterating sound. He tried not to speculate as to how Selina would take the news. And he had answered Ruskin's summons, expecting promotion, counting on it! He grinned ruefully at the irony of it, then gritted his teeth. But Ruskin was droning on, in self-satisfied explanation, vindication:

"There isn't work enough in the outer office any more to keep you boys warmed up. I've consulted with Mr. Haswell, and we've decided to sacrifice you. Bar the office boys and Rollins, you're the only one of us here unmarried, Jerry. The rest can't afford to lose their positions. We've all got families to support. But you'll easily find something else. You're young, unencumbered. I'll be glad to give you a letter of recommendation around."

Gaylord hadn't been listening very attentively. He was busy reconstructing his future—and Selina's. It would be a case of getting his start all over again, plus five years' business experience. He would release Selina from her promise first thing, with the proviso that once he secured for himself a fresh footing he could reclaim her. Meantime she would be free to choose from the other young men she knew. It would revert to the old open competition for her, and let the best chap win. No; Jerry Gaylord wasn't the sort of a loser to bemoan his defeat.

"Who's going to get Miller's place, sir?" he asked boldly. There would be a grain of morbid satisfaction in knowing the lucky man.

The boss shot him one of his decisive, penetrating glances that seemed to read and tabulate a fellow's very soul for future reference. "Peters," was all he said, but there was a half challenge in the word.

Gaylord's mouth twitched, then straightened respectfully, silently. It was as near as a young man of his normal make-up could come to a downright sneer. The boss saw, but made no attempt to follow up this slight show of disapproval.

Evidently Jerry lost no love on Peters. None of the office force did for that matter. Miss Jenks loathed him, was afraid of him. Once in the hall, she had deliberately slapped his face without explanation, but it was Gaylord who had come upon her afterward sobbing softly into her handkerchief, and he guessed he knew what that meant. Yes, Peters was a thoroughgoing sneak. He stole the firm's pencils, postage stamps, et cetera, steadily, without detection. After hours he hung around the cafés with the riffraff of the financial district. More than once Jerry had surprised him in low-voiced confabs with shyster promoters of mining stocks, cheap tipsters, and other shady gentlemen. But the wonder of it—to Jerry—was that he had the firm's confidence.

"You can stay on here until after New Year's," Ruskin said, and ended

the interview with a half revolution of his desk chair. "That will give you two weeks to look around for another place. I'm sorry, Jerry, because we all like you here."

"All right, sir," said Jerry, game still. "Thank you for the two weeks' grace."

CHAPTER II.

A LINE ON THE CONSPIRACY.

IT was well for the peace of the office that the jocular clerk did not attempt to "josh" the young man who came out of that sanctum of dismissal. Had he attempted any guying now, Jerry wouldn't have been responsible for the consequences. His fist did ball dangerously for him, but that airy jester didn't materialize.

Peters had gone out to lunch, for which Gaylord was duly thankful. It would give him a respite, and he would have time to practice being civil to him. Not that he considered it anything save the fortunes of war all around, but he would have been more the paragon and less the man prone to human weakness if he hadn't resented this tossing of the spoils to the unworthy. But despite it all, he essayed to go about his work as if nothing had happened to discourage him. He even managed a weak, spiritless whistle of ragtime.

It didn't fool Miss Jenks, though. "Just listen to that game chap!" she said to Rollins, the customers' clerk, while she fastened her parasol of a hat to her rat with ten-inch stilettoes sometimes called hatpins. "Whistling to keep up his nerve, eh! If I was him I'd have told the old man all I knew."

"What's up?" put in Rollins restlessly, trying to get up enough gumption of his own to ask the stenographer to forego her noon hour at her Ladies' Midday Eating Club, and lunch with him instead.

"You wouldn't ask that if you'd seen him come out of Ruskin's private office," she sniffed. "He was as white as his record in this rotten office, and that's some white; get me? And the way his mouth was closed was grand to look at. I bet you couldn't have pried his teeth apart for snitching purposes with a crowbar and a gang of laborers. Peters ought to give him a vote of thanks."

But Rollins was a mere stupid man, who marveled at woman's intuition. "I haven't heard a word," he told her, shamefaced at his denseness. "Reduce it to plain English, and I'll listen again. Somebody been trying to frame up something on Jerry?"

"Trying to!" Miss Jenks had a scornful method of address while talking to Rollins, which may have been her way of showing that she liked him. "Why, it's been brewing for weeks. And this morning the boss touched off the explosion. Use your eyes, man! Say, I'll quit cold if they crowd out a fellow like Jerry Gaylord! Peters has got something coming from me, anyway."

Rollins heard the one-o'clock whistles blowing his lunch hour, and he got desperately off the table whereon he was perched. "We'll all stick to Jerry, little girl, if it comes to a show-down!" he declared, in one of his rare bursts of affection that made Ruskin & Haswell's stenographer more than tolerate him. "But we've got to watch out for our own jobs. At least, I have, if I ever get so I can ask you to run double harness with a duffer like me."

"It's an outrage!" Precisely what Miss Jenks meant by that it would be hard to say. Perhaps she didn't mean anything at all, because she blushed furiously in saying of it. Again she might have been expressing loyalty to Gaylord.

But Rollins wasn't the sort of a suitor to let the grass grow under his feet once he got his start. "Let's go into details at Howard's over an oyster stew," he proposed, taking her arm and piloting her toward the corridor before she could protest.

The girl was still full of the injustice that was being done Gaylord and chattered about it all during the meal Rollins footed the bill for.

"He's such a little gentleman!" she exclaimed. "I don't believe he ever tried to get fresh with a girl in his life.

Why, he's never tried to get hold of my hand once since I've been hammering the old typewriter keys for Ruskin & Haswell! And he offered to type off all the boss' letters one day I was low-spirited and had a headache. I was sick enough to let him, and I found out afterward it kept him downtown until after six o'clock."

Naturally it irritated Rollins to listen to a monologue on another man's virtues from her lips. "Perhaps you're wasting your time not setting your cap for him," he suggested, a trifle stiffly.

She was up in arms at him instantly. "Here, you, Dick Rollins, cut out that line of talk! If you want me to like you at all, you'd better get down to brass tacks and help me all you can. Don't be ridiculous about Gaylord. I admire him for a little white man, and I'm grateful, but I don't love him. Love doesn't come to a girl that way; more's the pity. Will you help me?"

"Yes." Rollins mumbled an apology in the bargain.

"Then get this down and see what you can make of it," she went on quickly. "Dick, it's a big surprise I've been holding back until I got your promise. All we'll have to do will be to wise Gaylord up and let him do what he likes about it. But here's the swell part of it—it'll cook Mr. Peters' goose to a cinder, and maybe save Jerry's job for him! Do you get me?"

"We'd all like to see some one get after Peters," he said equivocally. "He's insufferable."

"Insufferable isn't the word!" she declared. "It takes several words as long as that to describe that man's character, and none of them complimentary."

"What have you got on him?" Rollins put the question point-blank.

"The facts," answered Miss Jenks quickly; "and they're always reliable. It happened at the theater one night. I was in back under the balcony, where the light was dim. Three men came in late and took the empty seats behind me; started right in to whisper among themselves. I recognized Peters' piccolo tenor. He was taking a lovely little scheme out of the incubator of his diseased mind, and airing it under his breath. Oh, I heard a lot of names of people and things familiar around our office! The safest place to talk is in a crowd—sometimes. But I was scared stiff that Peters would see my face and tip the other two the wink. I kept looking straight ahead, and holding my hand beside my cheek—so; but I guess it was the dim light that helped me out. I beat it for an exit as soon as the lights went down and the curtain went up."

"Are you sure they didn't spot you?"

"Positive! Only the other day Peters invited me out to see the same play with him. Said I ought to see it before it leaves town."

"Oh, that settles it then."

"At first I thought I'd go to the old man with the story," she continued. "But I've been sort of sitting tight and playing a waiting game. I've decided to confide in Gaylord and see what he does with it. He can reap all the credit. And the next time I get one of those fierce headaches of mine I'll think of how maybe I've squared myself with him, and feel better."

"But what did you hear Peters say?"

She ate the last little bit of cheese with her final mouthful of apple pie before replying. "That can wait until we get back to the office," was her decision. "We can corral Jerry, and the three of us will go into executive session. There hasn't been any carbon copy taken of this conversation, and there's no business sense in going into details twice in the same day. Besides, the story doesn't improve with the telling."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT MISS JENKS HEARD.

SELINA BROKAW lived, and waited for Jerry Gaylord to make good, in an old-fashioned section of New York. It was a red-brick building with rusty iron railings and balconies, and a musty back parlor, in which she lived. Intermittently the neighborhood was dotted with the steel-ribbed stone towers of business. Those giant structures were marching up from the south-

ward in ever-increasing numbers. The sky line was thickly spiked with them. The peace and quiet of shady old Jefferson Park were punctuated with the roar of incroaching commerce.

But then Miss Brokaw was an old-fashioned girl herself. She had good, old-fashioned ideas about marriage, home, and children, and the simple things that make for contentment. Take, for instance, the night Jerry called on her to break the bad news about his business connections with Ruskin & Haswell. Gaylord told her the whole miserable history of what he bravely called by its true name of failure. He spared not himself by attempting to gloss over his own shortcomings. And at the conclusion of the humiliating recital he released her as he had promised himself he would do. She had listened to it all unblinkingly, disappointment big in her eyes. But they were brave, loyal eyes.

"Jerry," she said quietly, "I won't release you—you great, big, chivalrous boy! It only means that we'll have to wait a little longer for each other. You'll make good—in the end. You've got the makings in you."

And the man, taking her impulsively, gratefully into his arms, felt that it would be easy to make the proud world itself bow down now.

"There's still a slim chance of delivering right there with Ruskin," he told her. "There's a trump of a stenographer at the office. She thinks she owes me a good turn, and she put me next to what looks like a wholesale robbery of Radium Gas stock."

"What does that mean to you—to us?" she asked.

"A lot or nothing," he answered enigmatically. "Miss Jenks found out a lot, and made a shrewd guess at the rest. Lately we've been buying Radium Gas in shoals for another concern in the Street. It's the roundabout way the game's played down there, Selina. It makes it just that much harder to trace the original buyer. Well, we've been taking hundreds of shares of Radium into our office every day. The cashier puts it in a handy drawer of his desk, and, after the close of business, sends it around in a lump to our people."

Selina's brow puckered. "Oh!" she murmured vaguely.

"Now here's where the rough work starts," Jerry went along precipitately, full of his topic. "Peters is going to get the cashier's job after the first of the year. It's the job I've been counting on, but no matter. We won't nurse a grouch. You've heard me speak of Peters. None of the fellows at the office loves him. He's a sneak, Selina."

"Jerry, can you prove that?" she demanded gravely. "It's a serious charge."

"I'll get the proof against him, all right!" Gaylord declared. "He's hand and glove in this deal with a couple of crooks. One of them's planted at the Radium Gas transfer office. He has free access to all the new certificates he'll need. Another's an expert forger. Oh, they're a pretty nest of birds, and Ruskin doesn't suspect a thing—not a thing! But it's distinctly up to Jerry Gaylord to put a flea in his ear, thanks to the stenographer's friendly tip."

"Be careful, dear," she warned him. "If they're as desperate a crowd as you've painted them, they'll stop at nothing."

"Oh, I'll watch out, little girl," he promised carelessly. "I've got an ally in Dick Rollins, too. He's Miss Jenks' future husband, though she hasn't admitted it yet."

"Tell me the rest of the plot."

Jerry was too excited over the prospect of his big coup to be seated for long. "I suppose Peters figures that by the time he goes out for his lunch some fine day he'll have quite a block of stock collected in his drawer. It's certain, anyway, that every share of Radium Gas that's in the office will go out with him. Once outside, he'll meet his two fellow conspirators. The one from the transfer office will have a pocketful of blank certificates. Then the forger will get busy doing the copying."

Selina's eyes were as big as saucers now. She took up the details of the nefarious scheme breathlessly. "When

Peters returns to the office he'll substitute the bogus stock for the bona fide!"

"That's it exactly!" exclaimed Jerry. "If I can't win back my old job, you can hire out as a female sleuth," he added, laughing. "But I haven't told you all yet. The forger's task will be as simple as that of a child tracing on his slate. The Radium certificates are done on very thin, but tough, paper. All he'll have to do is to place the phony over the real thing, and every scratch of ink will show through. You or I could follow the signature of the owner and the witness as easily as rolling off a log."

"And afterward?" asked the girl.

Jerry laughed. "Nothing but the getaway. I'll wager the Radium Gas people will be looking for a transfer clerk the next day. I know Ruskin & Haswell will be on the market for a cashier."

"But I always thought," she objected, "that stolen stock was risky to negotiate."

"So it is, Selina—when it's known to have been stolen. But don't you see how this gang intends to protect itself? No alarm will be sent out to apprehend it. Peters will resign; so will that other clerk. The counterfeit certificates will be duly delivered by Ruskin & Haswell, and paid for. Who will be the wiser? It may be weeks before they miss the blanks up at the Radium office. Those transfer books are thick, and, depend upon it, the faked-up shares will be taken from the back. Why, it'll take days to work down to the mutilated stubs! Meanwhile the gang will move quietly over to Philadelphia, Boston, or Chicago—any one of the other financial centers, and sell what they've stolen."

"Hadn't you better warn Mr. Ruskin?" she said timidly.

"Not unless I'm taken sick," Jerry announced confidently. "No, Selina; it's my big opportunity to put a good, hard lick across. And I'm going to make another bid for that cashier's berth when Mr. Peters is gone, bag and baggage. Miss Jenks is keeping her own mouth shut for me, and I won't fail her!"

Selina looked up at her boldly talking lover, pride in her face. He was going to put up a splendid fight, she knew. And in that moment she sighed to herself, and was very glad.

CHAPTER IV.

A BORROWED NEWSPAPER.

JERRY GAYLORD was under a fearful strain every minute during office hours, watching Peters like a hawk lest the quarry slip off ere the trap was sprung. He had, however, an able assistant in Miss Jenks. That vigilant young business woman tipped Jerry off to the identity of the remaining conspirators. That was where luck played into their hands. One day they called for Peters, and the trio went out together to lunch. But those worthy gentlemen are not described here, for they really don't enter this story at all except to be talked about behind their backs.

Peters suspected that nothing was amiss. He swaggered around the office as loud-mouthed and detestable as of yore. When no one was looking, he patronized the office boys and soldiered at his routine work. He treated Gaylord with the open contempt he thought a beaten rival deserved.

Well, the planned looting of Radium Gas hung fire. Peters was doing his daily trick in the cashier's cage, but the raise in his stipend wouldn't go into effect until January first, which is neither here nor there. Gaylord hung around that part of the office as much as he dared. He always watched closely the unsuspicious Peters make his preparations for lunch. And each day he was ready to swear to it that he hadn't got off with a scrap of paper. He would verify that by going over to the stock drawer himself and taking a reassuring look at the accumulated vermilion certificates. But there was a bad feature to the delay—for Jerry Gaylord. All the while his two weeks' grace with Ruskin & Haswell was growing nearer and nearer to expiration. He was worried. It was going to be a close call making connections.

But the day before New Year's the new cashier of Ruskin & Haswell smugly accosted Gaylord as he was quietly working his arms into his overcoat, preparatory to leaving for the day. "So you're going to knuckle down to the old man, after all!" he sneered, leaning against the partition, and thrusting his hands, nicotine-stained, composedly into his pockets. "I hear you've asked to be taken on as head office boy."

Jerry bowed coldly. "You're right there," he said. "Nothing like picking yourself up, brushing off the dirt, and buckling down at the bottom with a grin! It's a good tonic for quititis. I'll start in Monday taking orders from—you. Any objections?"

"N-n-no."

"Good night, then. Happy New Year!"

Gaylord didn't waste his time waiting to see how that confession of complete defeat would be received. He didn't care particularly. But he left behind him, nevertheless, a somewhat disconcerted would-be tormentor. That curt speech of the other young man hadn't given Peters much leeway to rub in Jerry's humiliation. He was a trifle disappointed. To the victor belongs the spoils all right, but when the other fellow doesn't feel even sore over losing them—why, that's another matter altogether.

This new, if humble, opening had come to Gaylord like a windfall and an inspiration combined. It was the best of excuses for staying on at the office within eyesight of Roy Peters' movements. The young man in charge of the office boys had providentially left in a huff, disgruntled like Gaylord at no raise in his salary. Jerry had been quick to take advantage of the vacancy. The boss had first frowned at the suggestion, then said that it would be satisfactory. He had admitted that Gaylord was still worth the salary to them! And he couldn't help admiring the young man's nerve that had no alloy of foolish pride to tarnish it.

So on Monday morning Gaylord gravely reported for his new duties. He could keep Peters under surveillance as well now as before, except that he had to be out a good deal on errands to other brokers' offices. But once again the breaks in the luck were with him. He saw Peters when Peters didn't see him. For the meat of that short and commonplace sentence you will have to read further.

It was half past eleven, a slack period in Ruskin & Haswell's office. At noon Peters would go out to lunch; the only time during the day he got outside on the street. Radium Gas had been delivered steadily all the morning. Jerry saw him carelessly toss his newspaper into the stock drawer, then rummage around there for half a minute perhaps. At length he fished the paper out again, folded it, and thrust it hastily into the side pocket of his overcoat that hung on a peg in the wall immediately behind him; an innocent enough proceeding, one would say, yet the very thing that was meant by the remark that Gaylord saw Peters when Peters didn't see him.

Gaylord was in a quandary as to what to do when Ruskin unexpectedly rang for him and dispatched him on some errand out of doors. Gaylord was loath to leave just then, but there was nothing for it but to obey the boss' orders. No Mercury ever flew faster than he, and at the stroke of noon he was back, breathless. But before he had returned he had paused long enough to pass something more than the time of day with a certain plain-clothes officer of the law he had spoken to before on important business. Anxiously he gave one sweeping, comprehensive look about the office. Peters was just taking down his overcoat from the peg. As Gaylord came rushing in he paused in the act of getting into it, one arm awkwardly aloft, the partly empty sleeve flapping grotesquely. He was looking intently, almost suspiciously, at his enemy, Jerry Gaylord.

It took, perhaps, half a dozen steps for Gaylord to reach him, and, with a quick movement, to whip out an automatic from the region of his hip. "Peters," he said, with a cold, deadly calm,

bringing his weapon to the horizontal. "I haven't seen to-day's paper. Would you mind letting me read yours?"

The frightened cashier made as if to duck his precious body out of bullet range, but resorted to bluster instead. "What is this—a joke?" he piped weakly, his voice shaking. "Put up that popgun and quit your fooling! Does it squirt water?"

"I bought it out of my first week's salary as head office boy," replied Jerry evenly, inexorably. "It's a pretty big price to pay for a morning paper. Usually they cost only a cent. And it's a roundabout way to get at it, too. But I've a burning curiosity to read the news, and I can't stop for explanations. So just hand it over."

"Why should I encourage highwaymen?" temporized the cornered Peters, nervously trying to laugh himself out of the hole.

"Peters, do you know the big policeman that stands at the junction of Nassau and Broad Streets?" Jerry went off at a tangent.

"Yes," answered Peters sulkily.

"Well, I've taken him into my confidence about you and your Radium raiders. He's got a plain-clothes friend up at headquarters he wants to see advanced. He tipped that friend off. Together we located the chap who works in the Radium transfer office. He's raw at the business of thievery. We found his boarding house, and talked to him nearly all one night in his little hall bedroom with the door locked. The detective put him through the third degree. He broke down, and now he wants to turn State's evidence. He's got cold feet. He blubbered like a baby. But I wanted to get you with the stuff right on your person, so Mr. Ruskin could see the sort you are at first hand. Won't you let me see your paper? I think there's something in it about Radium Gas. That detective will be here in a minute. I told him to follow me up. He's probably telephoning for the patrol wagon on the way."

Peters had whitened and backed off precipitately. But he wasn't quick enough on the retreat to elude Gaylord. That energetic young man's hand shot out with the speed and sureness of grasp of automatic fingers. Those fingers closed over what they were searching for without wasting any time in aimless groping. They found the cashier's pocket, and flipped forth the paper that Peters had made such a fight not to surrender. Then he shook out the paper with his left hand, since that was the only one still not engaged. On the floor at his feet showered the capital stock of the Radium Gas Company!

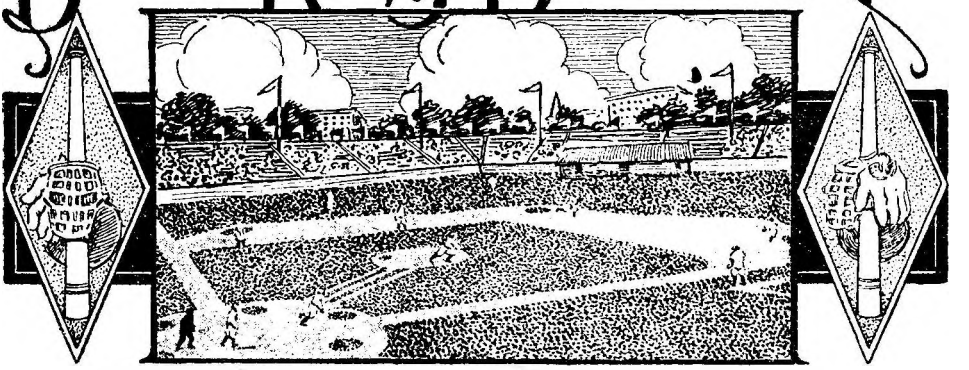
Peters' color had changed to a sickly mottled green. After all, he was the veriest of cravens. Gaylord looked at him pityingly. Shaking, he tottered over to one of the big leather chairs and sank into its depths. He dropped his head in his hands, and began to sob. In the crisis his backbone had gone back on him. The office force stood around and conversed in hushed whispers.

Ruskin came striding quickly out of his sanctum. Some one waylaid him; it was the stenographer, Jerry's good fairy to the last. She talked to the boss rapidly, earnestly, and to the point. With sparkling eyes she nodded toward Jerry and his poised revolver. At first Ruskin was incredulous, then angry, then relieved.

He went straight up to the young fellow he had fired once, and wrung his hand. "Jerry, my boy, that's striking your gait!" he said unreservedly. "Miss Jenks says Peters over there was making off with an even thousand shares of Radium. Roughly computed at the market price, that means about fifty thousand dollars you've saved for us. She says you deserve all the glory. And I guess, Jerry, we'll have to give you a try at that cashier's job."

Gaylord looked gratefully, well-nigh protestingly, into the satisfied eyes of Miss Jenks, and squeezed her hand in a way that meant a lot. And Rollins, pressing forward to congratulate him, too, forgot to be jealous.

Brick King, Backstop



BY BURT L. STANDISH

CHAPTER I.

CONFLICTING JUDGMENT.

STONE, the talented and versatile shortstop of the Wolves, halted in the doorway of the locker room, his eyes twinkling as he surveyed the gloomy, silent gathering of his teammates. "Where's the remains of the dear departed?" he inquired, with moving solicitude. "Don't tell me that I'm too late!"

Larry Cottrell paused in the midst of his leisurely preparation for the fray, and looked up.

"Oh, dear, no," he drawled. "You're in plenty of time, Peb. The obsequies won't begin for another hour, and they're scheduled to last till about five-thirty."

"Obsequies!" snorted Tug Manny, who held down the keystone sack to admiration, in spite of a pessimistic temperament which always made him expect the worst. "Landslide, you'd better say."

Stone crossed the room to his locker and opened the door. "Bad as that?" he inquired lightly, "or is it only your happy disposition, Tug, to see everything through a rosy glow?"

"Disposition be hanged!" retorted Tug with heat. "Wait till you've heard who the old man's picked for the battery to-day, and you'll be like a bear with a sore ear, same as the rest of us."

He paused, gulping down his wrath. Coat in hand, Stone stood regarding him with the philosophic calm of one who had survived many dire predictions from his quarter.

"Well," he said, "don't keep me too long in suspenders, Tug. I have a weak heart, you know. Out with the fatal news, and let my tears trickle into the briny pool I see before me."

"Can that!" growled the disgusted Manny. "Ain't you never serious? Frazer's going to put Mace Russell on the mound, and the 'Cabbage' behind the pan. If that ain't a jinx-inviting combination, I'll eat that new lid of yours raw."

Without perceptible change of expression, Stone removed the article in question, surveyed it with frank approval, and placed it carefully in his locker. His coat was then hung up with a care worthy that wonderful product of the tailor's art.

As a club the Wolves were noted for their love of personal adornment. Certain unkind censors in the home town had even gone so far as to intimate caustically that if they spent less time and mental ingenuity over slant pockets,

startling neckwear, and monogrammed silk shirts, they might manage to work their way into the first division, but that was a palpable slander. Whatever their penchant for dress off the field amounted to, the Wolves never allowed it to interfere with their efficiency on the diamond.

"So Brick's going to have another chance," the shortstop mused, turning away from the locker.

"A chance to throw away another game, you mean," grumbled Slug Kipper, the big left fielder. "It'll be like the first and only time he buckled on a chest protector in a real game—only worse. Chick was pitchin' that day, an' he saved it from being a regular massacre. But you all know what Mace is!"

There was a general nod of agreement. In a corner a big, square-shouldered chap, with a heavy, rough-hewn face, turned away from the window out of which he had been staring, felt absently of his right shoulder, and winced slightly. He was "Biff" Callahan, the reliable, heavy-hitting regular catcher, whose injury in the game of the day before had been the primary cause of the hole from which the manager of the Wolves was endeavoring to extricate himself in a manner so unpopular with the team.

"Sure, we do!" he agreed emphatically. "Mace has speed and control, all right, when he's in shape, but his top piece is mostly solid ivory." Biff never did mince matters. "He's got to be handled by somebody that knows how from the ground up. Of course, the old man had to use the Cabbage, with Joe on the sick list, and me put out of business yesterday by that gink on third. But it looks as if he was plumb nutty to put a fellow on the mound that has to have his thinking done for him. With a twirler like that and a backstop who's yellow—good night!"

"I always thought you were color blind, Biff," remarked Stone lightly; "but now I'm sure. Brick King's no more yellow than you are."

"You think so, do you?" scoffed the burly backstop. "He showed up pretty good in practice, didn't he, when he was first bought from the minors?"

"Sure."

"Was all right when nothin' depended on what he did?"

"Yep."

"But the first time he got up against the real thing he went all to the bad. He pegged wild, pulled the boys off the sacks, and played like a kid in the back lots. More bases were stole off'n him than I'd lose in a dozen games. Why, he was a regular joke; an', as Tug says, it was only Chick O'Brien that saved us from a landslide. You can't deny that, can you?"

"No, but——"

"There ain't any buts to it," interrupted Callahan dogmatically. "When a man gets cold feet an' throws a game like he did, he's yellow. The fans got his number quick enough when they called him the Cabbage, an' the fans is generally right."

With his ability to produce the goods, and his rough-and-ready good nature, Biff himself never had any trouble with these leather-lunged, sometimes impulsive, and slightly biased autocrats of the national game. "What's more," he continued, "you know yourself the old man never gave him another chance to make bums out of us—he was too wise. An' there he's sat on the bench ever since, drawin' his three thousand bucks for doin' a turn at the bat about once a month."

For a second the shortstop stood motionless, shirt dangling from his brown hands, his slim, lithe, well-muscled body standing out like a statue against the darker background of the lockers. His face was faintly flushed. His eyes held momentarily the gleam of combat. Then, all at once, he laughed, and suffered eclipse in the folds of the woolen garment.

"You make me smile, Biff," he chuckled, towsled black head coming into view again with much the effect of a diver cleaving the surface of the water. "I thought you'd learned the rudiments of baseball, anyhow."

"Huh!" growled the frowning Callahan noncommittally, scenting a trap.

"You never played the part of a pinch hitter, did you, Biff?" pursued Stone, in his drawling, inconsequential manner, dragging on various garments the while.

"I've allus had something better to do!" was the emphatic retort.

"I thought so, or you wouldn't have accused King of lacking nerve."

"What's that got to do with the price of beans?" demanded the backstop crossly. "Anybody with a fair batting eye—I've got to hand it to him there—can clout the ball on the nose once a month when there ain't anything else on his mind."

The shortstop flung back his head, and laughed a clear, mirthful, infectious laugh which brought involuntary smiles to several faces, and deepened Callahan's frown into a scowl.

"Nothing else on his mind!" cried Stone. "Biff, you sure are a funny cuss. Don't you know that a pinch hitter has to be grit clean through?" His tone was that of one patiently instructing a particularly stupid child. "The rest of us go to bat several times every game. If we draw a hit, all right. If we don't it's mostly all right, too—without the bouquets. But how about the man who sits on the bench day after day, twiddling his thumbs and waiting for the pinch when his team's got to have a hit?" Into the light, drawling voice there came suddenly a faint, vibrant note. "How do you s'pose he feels when he comes up to the rubber knowing that maybe the game depends on his making connections with the pill? If he slams it out the fans give him a yell or two, and then forget he's on the face of the earth. But if he fails—well, say, what they don't call him nobody's ever thought of." Stone stamped one spiked shoe emphatically, and pulled the laces tight. "You see, Biff," he concluded, his voice careless and patronizing again, "that sort of a fellow can't be yellow."

With a flushed countenance, Callahan arose, scowling. Save in the rougher, more obvious sort of repartee, he could never seem to get back at Pebble Stone. The shortstop's barbs were so delicate—often, as now, consisting in mere inflections—that there was nothing he could take hold of. But they got under his skin, nevertheless, resulting in moments of extreme irritation. Bitter experience, however, had taught him the futility of giving this irritation expression.

"Quite a little orator, ain't you, Peb?" he sarcastically inquired, stalking toward the door. "You can talk yourself black in the face, though, without making me believe anything good of that dope, King."

The shortstop sighed, and slowly shook his head in a discouraged manner. "And he was the one who made that crack about Russell's ivory dome," he murmured whimsically. He pulled his belt to the right hole, and reached for cap and glove. "At that, he wasn't far wrong," he went on, with a sudden sharp, incisive accent. "Mace never was much in the brain department. What's Ben's idea in putting him in, Larry?"

Cottrell rose and slammed his locker door. The others followed his example, and there was a general movement toward the passage.

"Smoke Jordan pitched yesterday, and Chick's got a bad arm," was the reply. "It's either Van, Bill Sweeney, or Mace. I reckon, after the way the Blue Stockings hit Smoke yesterday, the old man's taking a chance on Russell's getting away with it on speed alone, like he has once or twice before. He might, at that; you can't tell. But I'd feel a lot easier in my mind if Biff was going to handle him, or even Joe."

The faces of the other players showed their perfect agreement with this sentiment, but into Stone's eyes there flashed a sudden glint of stubborn purpose.

"Rot!" he exclaimed, punching his glove vigorously. "Don't let's start losing games in the clubhouse. It's up to us to go out there with the idea we're going to lick the pants off 'em. If we're on the job every minute, even a bum backstop can't queer us altogether. Besides, maybe he won't be bum; maybe he's—come back."

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN WHO WAITED.

OUT in the shadow of the swiftly filling stands two men faced each other, and between them a soiled baseball passed and repassed. Both were tall, clean-limbed, and supple—fine types of that most perfect piece of human mechanism, the trained athlete. The fellow with the catcher's mitt had the advantage of an inch or two in height, and several more about the shoulders. He was, in fact, a rather noticeable figure, with his thick, close-cropped hair, the color of old Domingo mahogany; his thin, strong face—the strength of level brows, straight nose, and square chin.

It was a somewhat somber face, with lines of repression around a mouth which seemed made to smile more often than it did. The past year had taught Christy King the necessity for repression. A man cannot hold down the bench day after day, waiting for the order which sends him scurrying to the plate for the first time in weeks, perhaps, to win or lose the game, and still retain an air of smiling, careless nonchalance. The uncertainty, the sense of responsibility, the nagging, dragging waiting is what wears on the pinch hitter. Sometimes he could see the crucial moment coming long before it actually arrived, and would have given much to hurry it, only at the last second to find himself cold with the nervous fear of failure. A sudden crisis to be faced swiftly without preparation was not so bad, but even then, as he snatched up his stick, he was mentally bracing himself for the frenzied, biting jeers which he knew would greet a strike-out.

It was all bitterly distasteful to him. He longed for steady, regular work like the other men, with a chance to redeem an error made one day by exceptional playing the next. Not long ago he had figured out that each time he had come to bat during his recently completed year with the Wolves cost Manager Frazer exactly one hundred and fifteen dollars and thirty-eight cents. If he failed to make a hit it was like throwing that money in the gutter—and he was a conscientious person, with a desire to give full value for his salary.

Under such conditions it was astonishing that he lasted at all; some men would have gone completely to pieces under the strain. But Christy was helped materially by two things. He could hit; there was no question about that. Once at the pan all that preliminary nervousness seemed to vanish, and he could be depended on three times out of five to smash the horsehide into that part of the diamond "where they weren't." But what helped him to this end even more than his natural ability as a stickman was a cool, indomitable determination to live down the memory of that ghastly day which had marked his inglorious début with the big league.

He could never think of it without a shudder. Frazer had purchased him in mid-season, and during the two weeks of holding down the bench waiting for his chance King had looked forward with eager impatience to the time when he could show his mettle. Perhaps he was too eager. Perhaps the papers had featured him too extensively, giving the fans a distorted idea of his ability, and leading them to expect too much. At all events, the awful reality—so vastly different from what he had been expecting—was like a horrible nightmare, the memory of which must haunt him forever.

It was the effect of the vast crowd that struck him first—overwhelming in its immensity, ominous in the dull, grumbling, continuous roar which swept from end to end of the wide stands and back again. From the bench it had not seemed at all like that. His high-strung nerves grew tenser. Then came that first error which let in a run. Kipper's wild throw from the field was really to blame, but the irate fans paid no attention to that, and their fierce yells of disgust struck on his raw nerves like vitriol. He tried to steady down, but presently a wild throw to second precipitated the explosion.

What followed was happily vague in King's mind, though neither press nor

public allowed him afterward the slightest doubt of his flagrant delinquencies. Through all the miserable performance he was conscious of little else save the scathing taunts, insults, and yells of derision from the stands, which finally culminated in a crashing, brutal chorus of: 'Cabbage! Cabbage! Cabbage!" The sound pursued him from the field. He heard it in the clubhouse, and even to this day he dreamed of it at night.

Frazer never let him go back again, save on rare occasions as a utility fielder. Another catcher was opportunely secured, and but for his ability as a pinch hitter King would long ago have been returned to the minors.

He had long since grown callous to the fans. Their taunts and gibes meant no more to him than their fickle praise or the name by which they had christened him, which stuck fast after that fiery baptism. In his mind the patrons of the game, as a body, had been ticketed with a distinct personality, which he hated and despised with a fierce intensity more bitter than any individual could possibly have aroused in him. If they stimulated him to better work it was not because he wished their approval, but from a cynical delight in depriving them of an opportunity to jeer at him.

It was this feeling, as much as anything, which made him long for another chance at that coveted position behind the pan. He wanted to show the fans what fools they had been—yes, and what merciless brutes. The notion was wild, absurd, the product of a mind made oversensitive by much brooding, perhaps; but it was very real to him—so real that when his chance came at last, after a year of waiting, the discomfiture of that cocksure crowd who thought they "had his number" was his first thought.

"Well, I reckon it's about time to quit, Brick."

It was Russell speaking, and with a slight start King realized that for the past few minutes he had been handling the pitcher's swift ones with mechanical perfection, while his mind was occupied in quite another direction.

12A

Out on the diamond the Wolves were still indulging in snappy practice, but the umpires had appeared, and there was every indication that the game would shortly begin. A swift side glance at the near-by stands showed them filled to the very roof with row upon row of massed humanity. The dull, concerted rumbling of their voices was like the sound of some vast machine in operation. Out on the crowded bleachers wadded papers were being hurled about, while the empty wicker basket of a sandwich man traveled up and down, kept constantly in motion by the ready hands of the rougher element.

King's jaw hardened, and a curious gleam came into his eyes as he knotted the sleeves of his sweater loosely about his throat and turned to Russell. It had been his own suggestion that they come out ahead of the others to warm up. He wanted to reach a perfect understanding with the pitcher regarding signals and the like. There even remained a few further details to be discussed as they walked slowly around toward the bench, and King was still talking earnestly when the manager hailed him.

Ben Frazer was short and thickset, with silvered temples and keen, blue eyes; the latter just now held a faint touch of anxiety in their depths.

"All ready, Chris?" he asked briefly.

King nodded. "Sure."

The manager hesitated an instant, searching the man's grave, impenetrable face for signs of nervousness.

"Don't let 'em get your goat," he cautioned. "They're sore because we've lost two straight, and they may try to break you up."

A curious, bitter, scornful look came into King's eyes, and his lips tightened.

"Very likely," he said indifferently. "They won't, though."

Frazer said no more, but as he turned to Russell he was thinking of that expression—and wondering.

The Wolves were romping in from final practice as Christy sought his mask and body protector. Most of them passed by him indifferently with-

out a word or glance. From the bench he caught Smoke Jordan's eyes fixed on him with a sort of pitying contempt which made his jaw harden. The star pitcher was not obliged to show up today, but it was like him to be on hand for the sole purpose of witnessing the humiliation of the man he had taken pains to sneer at from the very first.

A moment later the catcher felt a hand drop on his shoulder, and turned to see Pebble Stone standing beside him.

"This is the time we turn the trick, old man," the shortstop chuckled. "I've got a hunch we're going to lick 'em to a show-down. How does Mace show up?"

King's grim expression relaxed. It was impossible to doubt the heartening purpose of Stone's elaborately casual remarks.

"Fine!" he said readily. "He's in great shape. Never saw him better."

Pebble grinned. "Good! Looks like some of these knockers around here would get a jolt, eh?"

Christy's lips curved in an odd, twisted smile. "Shouldn't wonder," he answered briefly.

There was a general movement toward the field, and Stone hustled off. King hurriedly adjusted the chest protector, and stood, cage in hand, the umpire's singsong voice sounding in his ears:

"Bat-trees for—to-day's game—blup-blup-blup-blup, Russell an' King for blup-blup! Play!"

A hush followed; then a restless stir.

"The Cabbage!" came in a shrill, staccato voice from directly behind the plate. "Oh, thunder! Why don't you hand 'em the game on a platter?"

"The Cabbage!" swept in a gathering roar over the crowded stands. Then there was a hush.

Behind the Blue Stocking batter crouched a man whose thin, strong face seemed like something carved from marble. The eyes were hard and cold and glittering. The mouth was set in scornful, bitter lines of indomitable purpose.

Presently he gave a signal, and set himself to handle the delivery.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHANCE.

FROM his accustomed place near third base, Ben Frazer listened with frowning brow to the storm of abuse and sarcasm hurled down from the crowded stands.

"Sufferin' Moses!" he growled, between his clenched teeth. "You're about the bummest lot of poor sports I ever ran up against. Howl your heads off when you're winning, but let the boys lose a game, and anybody'd think they were a gang of criminals from State's prison. It's a wonder to me we ain't at the tail end of the list, instead of scrappin' for fifth place. Hope to thunder that fellow don't go to pieces with all this nagging. If he holds out——"

Russell had pitched at last, sending over a fast one which clipped the inside corner of the plate with deadly accuracy, and was pronounced a strike. Rufe Hyland, the Blue Stocking batter, looked faintly surprised, and took a fresh grip on his stick. The turmoil from the stands and bleachers died down. The game was on.

Frazer's keen eyes veered swiftly from his pitcher to the immobile figure behind the plate. King signaled, and the ball which followed was so wide that the batter did not wiggle his hickory.

When another ball was called, the manager shifted his position a trifle, so that he could get a better view of Christy King.

"Rotten!" shrilled a raucous critic from the front row of the stand. "Get 'em over, and put something on it if you've got anything."

"Make 'em be good, Rufe," advised Dalton, the visiting captain. "If he finds the groove, hit it a mile!"

Hyland squared his shoulders, and a faint, confident smile curved the corners of his big mouth. Evidently he had little doubt of his ability to hammer something out of this twirler,

whom nobody had so far found very dangerous. Even when a swift drop fooled him into swinging vainly he did not seem disturbed. With that same easy nonchalance that characterized his every movement, he presently reached for a wide one, caught it on the end of his stick, and sent it humming safely into the "east pasture."

The fans, ever ready to blame their own team instead of the efficiency of opposing batters, vented their disapproval in a brief storm of invective which brought a slight frown to Ben Frazer's brow. His face cleared swiftly, however, as he observed its lack of effect on Mace Russell.

Apparently oblivious to the momentary outburst, the pitcher calmly toed the rubber, and proceeded to tease Kid Lewis, the opposing shortstop, with two balls which looked tempting, but proved to be bad ones. The Blue Stocking batter came near biting at both of them, but managed to check himself in time.

Hyland had been leading well off first, but Russell, taking the throwing signal from King, pivoted suddenly, and snapped the ball to Cottrell. The runner flung himself back to the sack and was declared safe, thereby turning the wrath of the fans upon the umpire's head, for it was one of those close decisions so hard to judge correctly from the stands.

Hyland was on his feet in a second, dancing down the base line, but once more Russell drove him back to the sack before handing up another ball to Lewis. This throw was so high that the station keeper was forced to stretch for it.

"In a hole! Keep him throwing!" chanted the coachers. "Play the game, Kid!"

Frazer had ceased watching the catcher closely, and fixed his frowning glance upon the apparently reckless twirler. Was the young fool going to turn careless at this stage of the game?

"He'll put a swift one over now," thought the manager. "But after that he——"

Contrary to expectations, Russell did nothing of the sort. To be sure, his delivery seemed to indicate great speed, yet when the sphere left his hand it wabbled slowly up to the plate, as if undecided how far it meant to travel. That Lewis expected a smoker, and had every intention of lacing it out, was perfectly evident from his action. He could not seem to check his swing, and struck too soon.

"One," murmured the manager mechanically. "Never saw Russell use the snail ball before."

A moment later it was two, for the pitcher, taking a signal from King, whipped over a hopper which took the batter as much by surprise as had the slow one.

Into Ben Frazer's eyes there crept a faintly puzzled look. Critically he watched his man wind up for the crucial delivery. When the horsehide finally left Russell's fingers it seemed as if it must pass far above the batter's head. Frazer quite expected to see King leap high in order to catch the ball, and his teeth came together with a click. To his surprise, the backstop scarcely stirred from his half-crouching position, and the sphere shot downward in a marvelous manner, striking his mitt with the familiar thudding impact. The umpire flung up his right hand.

"Three! You're out!"

The manager straightened up and folded his arms lightly.

"He hasn't worked the high drop for a strike-out ball in a month," he muttered, turning an ear to the applause of the fickle fans.

There was no trace of carelessness in the pitcher's manner of handling Max Duoro, the visiting center fielder, who followed Lewis on the batting order. In the midst of his delivery he changed his pace, and handed up a slow ball which the batter reached for far too soon. Russell using a slow ball and getting away with it! Was it possible that he was really thinking?

A second strike was swiftly called when Duoro swung eagerly at a wide one for the sole purpose apparently of aiding Hyland in his dash for second.

Unruffled, King caught the ball in perfect throwing position, and whipped it the length of the diamond with a snappy, short-armed swing which was a joy to see, but which Manny's carelessness rendered useless. Overconfident, the latter dropped the ball, Hyland slid safely, and the spectators instantly and most unjustly laid the blame on the unpopular Cabbage.

Frazer observed that the scathing remarks passed completely over King's head. Absolutely undisturbed, the backstop crouched and gave a signal.

Again Russell started the ball high, and instantly Duoro decided that the fellow hoped to deceive him as he had deceived his predecessor by that surprising drop. He had seen the ball shoot downward across Lewis' shoulders in that amazing manner, so he braced himself to swing when it began to drop this time.

But there are drops *and* drops; and it is far from simple for even the most experienced batter to judge in the fraction of a second just how fast a ball is falling. Duoro sought to judge by what had happened to Lewis. He struck under the horsehide at least a foot, however, for the drop was small indeed, and the sphere actually passed higher than the batter's shoulders.

"You're out!" again bawled the umpire.

"Headwork!" murmured Frazer thoughtfully, his puzzled expression deepening. "Thought he'd be looking for a wide drop, and used a small one to fool him. Hanged if I knew the man had it in him!"

He was destined to be even further surprised. Joe Welsh was up—Welsh, feared by all pitchers, whose hitting had been a sensational feature of the past two seasons, and who was popularly supposed to be without a single weakness.

"Now we'll see what happens," muttered the manager, the color deepening in his bronzed face.

He was oddly excited for a man who usually viewed the shifting fortunes of the game with outward nonchalance, at least. It was absurd to imagine that Welsh, who had hammered two singles and a three-bagger out of the peerless Jordan only yesterday, could fail in pounding this infinitely less reliable twirler. Yet, somehow, Frazer could not quench the faint spark of hope within him. If Russell could make some sort of a show against this mighty hitter it would be a triumph indeed for the manager who had taken such a big chance in using him.

The keen, blue eyes veered toward the plate, and again the perennial marvel of the batter's appearance made itself felt. To look at the slouching figure with those drooping shoulders and lazy, half-closed eyes, one would never suppose the fellow half awake, much less able to make connections with the ball.

"You've been hit by a bag of horseshoes, old man," sang out Larry Dalton confidently, "but here's where you get bumped."

Frazer knew it was more than likely. Still, he couldn't blame Mace for not being able to stop a man who hit Jordan and all the others almost at will.

Russell's face was serious, but there was no hint of nervousness in his manner. Taking his time, yet without being too slow, he planted his feet, and teetered on his toes for a moment. Backward he swung upon one pin, his left foot lifted high above the ground. Forward he threw his body with a broad, sharp swing of his arm, and the sphere came sizzling over the inside corner of the rubber, seeming almost to graze the batter's knuckles.

The mighty Welsh stepped back, bringing his bat almost clumsily around —and missed cleanly.

There was a rumbling, concerted sigh from the crowd. Frazer sat like the Sphinx, watching stonily.

A high ball followed, and close upon its heels came another of those swift inshoots. This time the sphere carromed off Welsh's bat, a foul.

Once more Russell poised himself on his right foot, and took that long, balancing swing which seemed to indicate great speed. Then he proceeded to pass up one of the prettiest slow bend-

ers the manager had ever seen. Once more a slow ball by a pitcher who never before had seemed to have any idea but smoke!

Welsh struck a bit too quick, but managed to check himself in the midst of the swing until the ball was near enough. He hit it with a dull, punky sound on the end of his bat, however, and sent it bounding toward first base, a couple of feet inside the line, and straight into the waiting hands of Larry Cottrell.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE NINTH.

THE roar of approval which arose from the semicircle of stands scarcely penetrated to Ben Frazer's consciousness. He watched the young pitcher come in from the field accompanied by two of his teammates, who were congratulating him on the manner in which he had handled their opponent's heaviest hitters. Russell carried it off with that air of nonchalance which professional ball players so often assume when well satisfied with themselves. Curiously enough, however, before the young pitcher reached him the manager turned and walked over to where the tall, somber-faced backstop was shedding body protector and shin guards.

"You're doing well, Chris," he said briefly, with that straightforward frankness which had made Ben Frazer liked as well as respected by his players.

King looked up, his gray eyes expressionless. "As a contrast to my first performance, I suppose it seems encouraging thus far," he said.

Frazer's lips parted, only to close again without a sound. For a second he hesitated. Then he moved his shoulders slightly.

"Russell seems to be in particularly good form," he remarked. "Think he can keep that pace up?"

The backstop shook off the second shin guard and stood up.

"I shouldn't worry. He's not the sort to blow up."

The conversation ended here, but there was something about the backstop's tone which heartened the manager as he hurried off to the coaching line.

Pete Grist was pitching for the Blue Stockings, and from the very first the wily veteran twirler showed that he was still able to deliver the goods. He began by fanning Buck Loutrel, and succeeded in getting two strikes on Slug Kipper, the slashing left fielder of the Wolves. At the last moment, however, Slug redeemed his reputation by catching a curve on the end of his bat, and lining the ball out for two sacks.

But it was a wasted effort, for Manny fouled out, and Zumsteg drove a hot grounder dancing into the hands of the Blue Stocking third baseman, who scooped it cleanly and sent it over to Ogan for the third out.

As the Wolves took the field again old Jack Kennedy, the Blue Stocking manager, strolled up to Frazer.

"When did you put Russell wise that he had anything besides speed?" he asked good-naturedly.

Frazer grinned. "That's all right," he returned. "Pretty little dope ball of his, hey?"

"Somebody's going to lean against one of them, and knock the cover off," said Kennedy.

"I should worry!" chuckled Frazer. "When they do that he'll show you something else. He's got plenty up his sleeve. He's developed a whole lot since I bought him from the Internationals."

"Rather!" Kennedy's tone was emphatic, and just a little puzzled. He hesitated an instant, then went on frankly: "Pop Hennifer looked him over for me last fall, and told me he was a bonehead. Either Pop's losing his grip, or else you've got a system of handling men that ought to put you up in the race. There ain't much the matter with this boy's headpiece that I could see in the first round."

As the game progressed Jack Kennedy was not the only person on the field to comment on the extraordinary ability shown by a hitherto unconsidered pitcher. Instead of deteriorating,

Russell's skill at fathoming the weaknesses of the opposing batters and playing on them by every artifice at his command seemed to increase with each successive inning. Most astonishing was his wonderfully shrewd use of a puzzling slow ball. Not once did he hand it up when the batter was guessing that it would come. In the opening inning he had pitched slow ones at critical times, but thereafter for five innings he smoked the sphere over when it was dangerous, mixing in a "dope" when nothing short of a homer or three-bagger could do much damage. Then suddenly, in the seventh, with a runner on third, two out, and a dangerous hitter up, with all the movements for his speediest delivery, the man on the mound worked a strike-out with three pitched balls, two of which were "snails." Thenceforth, to the finish, the Blue Stockings looked vainly for the slow one when a hit might bring disaster to the Wolves.

During the course of the struggle Russell was hit now and then—as what pitcher is not? But, thanks to the splendid support of a team heartened and filled with ginger by the unexpected showing of the twirler, those scattered bungles availed the Blue Stockings nothing.

The second, third, and fourth innings passed with a shut-out score. The fifth ended abruptly with the fanning of the redoubtable Welsh. By this time the crowd was shrieking Russell's name in frenzied choruses, quite as if it had not tried to drive him out of the box two weeks before with anathema and hisses. At the press stand telegraph instruments clicked ceaselessly, conveying to all fandom news of another star risen in the baseball firmament.

Languid sporting writers, hardened by years of the daily baseball grind, were galvanized to life, and sat discussing Ben Frazer's latest find with an animation they had shown only once or twice during the entire season.

Down on the visitors' bench the Blue Stockings spent most of their leisure moments on the same absorbing topic. By dint of constantly comparing notes concerning Russell's methods, they more than once reached the conclusion that at last they had his number, only to discover when those conclusions were put to the test that the pitcher was following a completely different system.

"He's sure one slippery duck," complained Bill Meserole. "You think you're wise to him at last, and then he ups an' fools you."

"What I don't understand," put in Dalton perplexedly, "is how he's onto every batting trick in the whole crowd. He's only been with Ben this season, and it's the first time he's ever pitched against us, but he's got the bunch down as pat as if he'd been born in the big league. Where'd he get it all, that's what I want to know; and why hasn't Frazer used him more before?"

No one seemed able to answer the question, and the Blue Stockings were forced to fall back at last on the doubtful consolation of having so far prevented their opponents from scoring.

As inning after inning rolled by, with the zeros crawling into position on the scoreboard, and not a figure to break the monotony of the "horse-collar" score, the fans worked themselves into a frenzy of delirious excitement. As each man came to bat they alternately stormed and wheedled. Sometimes both methods of stimulation were practiced at one and the same time by two different cliques of rooters, and the noise became ear-splitting.

The seventh inning passed, and the eighth, in agonizing suspense, with both teams battling furiously, but in vain. During the first half of the ninth Russell nearly gave the fans heart failure, almost marred what would otherwise have been an exhibition of nearly perfect pitching by a momentary lack of judgment which swiftly put him in a bad hole. He pulled up at once, but only luck and the brilliant support behind him averted disaster for the Wolves.

"He's weakening," observed Jack Kennedy to Grist as the visitors took the field. "Hold 'em down, Pete, this inning, and give us another chance to

get after his scalp! We've got to take the conceit out of that kid now. He'll have a head as big as a bushel basket if we don't."

The veteran twirler nodded and strode out to the mound, determination written on his tanned face. More than any of his teammates, perhaps, he felt the humiliation of being mowed down by this youngster fresh from the minors. He was approaching too close to that fateful line of demarcation himself not to care particularly. He knew how ready many would be to lay the blame of an unexpected defeat upon his failing powers, and how swiftly the fans would take up and pass along the rumor, whether it was true or not. He was a man under suspicion, who must be on his mettle every minute.

Pitching with all the skill he possessed, Grist succeeded in fanning Betts, the opposing right fielder, and the excited fans promptly emptied the vials of their wrath upon that luckless player's head.

Pebble Stone was the next batter for the Wolves. The snappy little shortstop was a clever stickman at all times, but one of those who showed up particularly well in a pinch. He enhanced his reputation now, and endeared himself to the volatile fans by jogging jauntily forth and bumping the second ball handed up by the Blue Stocking pitcher. It was a hot grounder that stung the fingers of Meserole at third, and squirmed out of his grasp, giving Stone time to reach first.

While the crowd was still shrieking its approval, Larry Cottrell bunted cleverly, and did his best to beat the ball to first. He failed by a yard, but accomplished his purpose in sacrificing the shortstop to second.

And now, with two out, a man on second, and the excitement at white heat, it was Brick King who was seen stepping stolidly to the pan.

Groans came from portions of the stand and bleachers, but they were swiftly drowned by cries of encouragement and pleading. Whatever his ability or lack of it as a backstop, experience had taught the more observing spectators that this tall, red-headed, silent chap who never joshed or laughed or tried to win their favor as some other players did, could at least make connections with the ball three times out of five.

"Give us a hit, old man!" they begged hysterically. "Just one little single! You can do it."

Oblivious alike to taunt and desperate pleading, Christy squared himself at the plate, and waited, keen-eyed and motionless; yet every line of his well-knit body was expressive of dynamic energy, held in perfect control.

Grist's first ball to King looked good; nevertheless, it took a little jump, rising over Christy's bat as he struck.

"Strike!" snapped the umpire, with an upward jerk of his hand.

A groan, gathering volume as it swept over the stands, arose from the spectators, most of whom were on their feet, bending forward in breathless suspense.

Without a change of expression, King recovered himself, and coolly watched the veteran pitcher receive the ball. His manner was as impersonal as that of the most indifferent spectator.

Again Grist wound himself up and let fly with a peculiar whiplash motion, and the sphere left his fingers with the speed of a bullet. It looked wide—so wide that Christy made no effort to reach for it. When the umpire called a second strike King's face showed neither anger nor regret; his lips tightened a little, and a curious glint came into the gray eyes.

"Robber! Robber!" screamed some of the fans.

"Do something, you Cabbage!" howled others. "Why don't you try for 'em, anyhow?"

They did not know that the man down there with the cold, impenetrable face was waiting with every nerve tense, fairly quivering with a desperate determination to lash the ball out. He cared nothing for the bawling mob. They stirred only contempt within him, and if they had been the only ones to consider he would have felt a vindictive delight in seeing them disappointed.

There were his teammates—or, rather, a few of them—and Ben Frazer, who had given him this chance to make good. He wanted to make good. But, even more than that, he was filled with a keen desire properly to complete a workmanlike job, to add the right climax to a day which would always stand forth in his mind in red letters.

Grist pitched. His delivery seemed to prophesy a swift one, but in reality he had handed up the slowest sort of a slow ball. He knew King could "eat speed." He had seen him tense and eager, apparently waiting for a "smoker." He had played Russell's card with the "dope ball." Christy was ready to swing, but checked himself for the fraction of a second, then lashed out suddenly as the horsehide spun lazily over the plate.

The clean crack of leather meeting wood was drowned in the yell which split thousands of throats. No need to watch the whirling speck of drab humming out on a line to deep center, though not one straining eye in the whole vast throng lost sight of it for a moment. No need to follow the swift, hopeless dash of the two opposing fielders. No need, even, for Pebble Stone to thud over the base line at the speed he took instinctively.

A clean single would have brought in the winning run. Brick King's amazing wallop was good for three sacks, at least.

CHAPTER V.

TALKING IT OVER.

BEFORE he reached second base Christy swung toward the clubhouse. He had crossed first; he was not forced; there was no Merkle play in this. He was no longer the cold, impenetrable individual whose admirable work behind the pan had been characterized by such an utter lack of emotion that it might almost have been the performance of some amazingly perfect, incredibly accurate, but wholly insensate, machine. His eyes sparkled; the color glowed darkly under the bronzed skin. A smile played around the corners of the relaxed mouth, transforming his face into something very human, very likable, full of the charm of buoyant youth.

But not for long. Nearing the clubhouse, he passed along the rear of a throng from the bleachers, shoving and crowding through the exit gates. A babel of contending voices rose and fell ceaselessly as the mob discussed various features of the game with characteristic, blatant arrogance.

"Of course, he's some pill slinger," asserted a stocky, square-shouldered person, the frayed butt of a cigar gripped between his teeth. "Ain't I been tryin' to drive that inter your bean all season? First time I seen this Russell work I sized him up as a comer. 'You watch that guy,' I says to Pete Duffy. 'Afore September he'll be crowdin' Smoke Jordan close.' Believe me, you can't fool your uncle!"

Christy passed on, lips curling and eyes scornful. That was the fan all over—blatant, cocksure, arrogant, always claiming credit for a judgment he did not possess and never would. Hundreds more in that crowd were undoubtedly proclaiming the fact that they had always known Mace Russell would make good, when in reality they had been leaders in the storm of hisses and abuse which had greeted the majority of the young pitcher's infrequent appearances on the mound.

With frowning brow, King entered the locker room, and began hurriedly to strip off his uniform. He was pulling at a stubborn knot in the laces of one spiked shoe when the rest of the Wolves appeared, laughing, joshing, and generally happy at their victory over the first-division team.

Russell's name was on every tongue, and Russell's face was so full of pride and delight and pure joy in what he had accomplished that for a second a pang of what was much like envy stabbed the man bending over the bench across the room.

A moment later it vanished as he felt the grip of Pebble Stone's hand on his shoulder, and glanced swiftly up in time to catch a gleam of something

deeper than admiration in the keen-black eyes.

"Perfectly rotten, ain't you?" the shortstop chuckled. "I always said you couldn't bat or throw—or anything." He hesitated an instant, his eyes sparkling. When he went on again his voice held a deeper note: "What a wallop that was—and just in the nick of time. It grabbed the game for us, all right. Put it there, old man!"

King's face relaxed in a smile as he gripped the slim, muscular fingers thrust at him. There were a number of things he might have said, but they happened to be the sort one does not give voice to, and the result was more or less commonplace.

"Don't give me a swelled head, Peb," he begged. "That hit just happened to come at the right minute. I didn't do anything more to win the game than the rest of the bunch."

"Think so?" grunted Stone, watching him in an odd, questioning manner. "I wonder."

Christy kicked off his shoes and stripped the damp upper garments over his head, revealing a torso and shoulders beautiful in their perfect development.

"Of course," he said, "no one man ever wins a game by himself. You know as well as I do that it's teamwork that does it generally. And if ever a crowd backed up a pitcher better than you fellows did to-day, I'd like to see 'em."

He slid out of the rest of his clothes, and pulled a towel from his locker. Stone looked as if he meant to say something more, but the impulse evidently passed. With a shrug of his shoulders and a brief suggestion that they go back to the hotel together, he turned away, that puzzled, questioning expression still lingering in his eyes. A moment later, as he sat down before his locker to undress, the strident voice of Smoke Jordan broke upon his unwonted abstraction.

"Playing to the gallery, are you, Peb?" sarcastically inquired the star twirler.

The shortstop looked up quickly, his eyes wide and childlike.

"The gallery?" he repeated blandly. "Lord, no, Smoke! I wouldn't flatter you by imitation."

Jordan frowned and bit his lips. "You know what I mean," he said sharply. "What's the use of getting that dub all swelled up? Pretty quick he'll be fooling himself with the idea that he did something this afternoon."

"But I thought he did," persisted Pebble, in that same extreme innocence of manner. "That crack of his looked like something to me."

"Bah!" sniffed Jordan irritably. "I couldn't see anything very wonderful in it. It's a cinch for any free hitter to kill an easy ball like that."

"Think so?" queried Pebble blandly. "I s'pose that's why Brick is put in so often to bat for you. You don't want to bother with anything so commonplace and easy—eh, Smoke?"

Across the room some one snickered, and Jordan's face flushed an angry crimson. His notorious weakness with the stick was a sore point with Ben Frazer's prize pitcher, and the shortstop's taunt rankled as nothing but the unpalatable truth ever can.

"You lay off that, and stay off!" he snapped, with an angry impulsiveness which was swiftly regretted. "If you're aiming to start in as a reformer," he added, with a palpable attempt to shift the issue, "why don't you get after your tightwad friend, and make him shell out like a human being once in a while?"

"Meaning by that?" questioned Stone, with ominous gentleness.

"Oh, you know well enough who I mean," retorted Jordan. "There's only one man in this outfit who gets a salary of three thousand a season, and soaks away about ninety per cent of it. He don't drink or smoke or go to the theater, because it costs money. He won't even sit into a little game, for fear he might lose the whole of fifty cents. That guy's such a cheap skate he never spends anything but the evening. He's a disgrace to the club. Far be it from me to use the hammer——"

"Then why do it?"

The words came cold and brittle from the doorway leading into the showers, and caused the half dozen players grouped around Jordan swiftly to turn their heads. The person under discussion was standing there, straight and lithe, his body glowing a delicate pink from the tingle of the showers, a huge bath towel draped about his hips.

"Talking to me?" Jordan inquired insolently.

He was no coward, but a very pretty knowledge of scientific boxing strengthened his natural pugnaciousness not a little.

"You don't have to guess again," answered King, looking him straight in the eye. "Knocking is your special forte—off the diamond. But you let up on me!"

Jordan was tingling with anger, but he forced a laugh. "Did I mention your name?" he asked. "However, if the shoe fits, you know what to do with it."

His manner was that of indifferent banter, such as the players sometimes indulged in to a really dangerous extent; but, knowing the tenseness of feeling between the star pitcher and the hitherto discredited catcher, there was a general impression that this verbal bout might lead at once to one of a fistic nature. The backstop's eyes narrowed ominously, and every muscle seemed suddenly to grow tense and hard as he glowered at Jordan's sneering face. His pose was something like that of a panther crouching to spring, and more than one onlooker felt a tingling along his spine. Then, abruptly and with a palpable effort, King relaxed.

"A word to the wise," he said a bit huskily. "If you're half as wise as you think yourself, you know what I mean." He strode over to his locker and began to dress.

He missed the contemptuous shrug and that unpleasant, significant grin Jordan cast about the circle—a grin which brought the angry color into Pebble Stone's face and a queer, hurt disappointment to his soul. For a moment hot words trembled on the impetuous shortstop's lips, but in time he choked them back and hurried in for his belated shower.

It was none of his business, of course. Brick King was old enough and big enough to manage his own affairs unaided. But why hadn't Chris obeyed his evident impulse to have it out with Jordan then and there? It was far from being the first time the ill-tempered pitcher had deliberately set himself to goad into violent retaliation the man he so palpably disliked, and, if Pebble rightly sized up the fellow, it would not be the last.

"He's just itching to start something," the shortstop muttered, as he hustled from under the shower and reached for a towel, "and he will sooner or later. Why in thunder don't Brick sail into him? Even if he don't know how to handle his dukes, I'll bet he'd give Smoke a few busy minutes." He shook his head regretfully. "He's sure one queer duck. Hanged if I can understand him."

CHAPTER VI.

BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND.

THERE were a good many things about Brick King besides his seeming disinclination for a fistic encounter with Jordan that the volatile shortstop failed to understand. The ordinary baseball club is like a big family, each member of which knows nearly as much about another's affairs as the individual himself. On tour a photograph of his better half can usually be found in the tray of every married man's steamer trunk, while at home those same ladies are in evidence frequently enough for the rest of the team to make their acquaintance. Proud fathers carry in their pockets snapshots of their offspring, and are ready on the slightest pretext to retail the latest side-splitting remarks of little Johnny. That Jim's girl in Elmira writes but once a week, while Mike receives fat daily epistles from the attractive little brunette in St. Paul, are matters of general knowledge and comment.

Christopher King had been with the

Wolves for over a year, yet Stone, who was on decidedly better terms with the pinch hitter than any one else, knew scarcely anything of his personal affairs. It was understood that he hailed vaguely from "the West." The few letters he received were in masculine chirography, and bore the postmarks of small towns in several widely separated States. King himself volunteered nothing, but, though Pebble was possessed of no more than a normal amount of curiosity, he could not help wondering now and then what might be the cause of such unusual reticence.

And there was King's extraordinary closeness in money matters. Though he had been ready to take up Jordan's sneers as a personal affront, Stone could not deny in his own heart that those sneers were in a measure warranted. Chris was undoubtedly "careful" to a degree approaching the penurious, and in a club of notoriously free spenders that trait alone was enough to get any man in bad with the bunch.

Had he not grown to like King so well, the matter would have been one of perfect indifference to Stone. But he did like the big, silent, red-headed chap, whom he had found under that shell of reserve to be such a thoroughly good sort; and more than once he had nerved himself to the point of giving a bit of advice on the subject, only to fall down at the last moment.

Friendly, almost boyishly fun loving at times, and without the slightest trace of superiority, there was, nevertheless, an intangible something about Brick King which discouraged anything approaching a discussion of personalities. He was the type of man who seems entirely capable of managing his own affairs without the help of outside influence; and, in spite of feeling that he simply must unburden his soul of a few pungent suggestions, Pebble ran up against the usual stone wall, and followed his accustomed habit of postponing the talk to a more favorable occasion—knowing full well that such an occasion was not likely to materialize.

"I'll put it up to him to-morrow, sure," he decided, with deliberate self-delusion. "There'll be plenty of time before the game."

Of course there wasn't. Even under ordinary conditions something would have turned up to prevent it, but when Stone reached the grounds next day he found his friend already dressed, and on the point of going out on the field.

"In again to-day?" he asked eagerly, every other thought vanishing in the interest of the moment.

King nodded. "Yes. Biff put up a howl, but I reckon the old man wants to see if I can keep on making good."

His cheeks were faintly flushed, and his eyes bright. There was no trace in his face of the somber immobility which had characterized it during his wearisome apprenticeship as a pinch hitter. He seemed buoyantly, flauntingly alive from the ruffled crest of reddish hair to the big, shapely fingers beating a noiseless tattoo on the mitt he carried. As he took in the transformation an idea suddenly gripped Pebble which had occurred to him once or twice the afternoon before.

"Who's on the mound?" he asked quickly. "Not Mace again?"

"No; Bill Sweeney."

At the mention of this brilliant but frequently erratic southpaw Stone's eyes widened and his lips parted swiftly. They closed an instant later as Sweeney himself appeared, looking slightly out of temper, nodded briefly to the shortstop, and stepped out into the open with King beside him.

From the doorway Pebble watched them interestedly.

"Peevish, eh?" he murmured presently; "and going to pitch the last game of this series against the pennant winners. The plot certainly thickens to the consistency of oatmeal."

He relapsed into a state of deep cogitation, utterly impervious even to the cutting remarks of Jordan and Callahan a little later in the locker room. These were directed against the absent catcher, but in reality were meant for Pebble's ears. Upon the thoughtful shortstop, however, they made no more impression than water on a duck.

Stone was one of the first to leave the

clubhouse, and, strolling over to a point where he could get a good view of Sweeney warming up, he observed that process for some little time with the keenest attention, accompanied toward the end by a doubtful pursing of the lips.

Sweeney's sulkiness did not wear off with action. In fact, he finally went into the box with much the same expression as that of a spoiled child performing a distasteful penance. Pebble executed a jig step out on the field, and punched his glove several times with great spirit. It was a little mannerism he displayed only at moments of unusual worry or tension.

Kid Lewis started things auspiciously—for the Wolves—by flying out on the third pitched ball. His successor, however, reached first on an error, and the great and only Joe Welsh then proved himself to be still in the ring by smashing the ball just over the third baseman's head for a single.

An anxious wrinkle dodged into Pebble's smooth forehead, and his right fist pounded into his glove. A second later he caught King's signal for a straight one, and the moment the horseside left the pitcher's fingers Stone shot a dozen paces to his right like a streak of light.

The batter missed, and Pebble slid back to his old position, eyes never leaving the red-haired backstop. The call for a bender brought about no shift save a scarcely perceptible edging toward second. The chances were all in favor of a hit going to the right of the base into Manny's territory, leaving him to cover the sack.

Stone was a first-class shortstop, keyed up to big-league pitch. His playing had reached a state of perfection, where he did many things from instinct, thus eliminating that priceless fraction of a second necessary for even a flash of thought which often makes or mars a play. His actions so far had been mainly prompted by a sort of subconscious self, for his mind was still occupied with the problem of the young catcher.

Would King make good again, or had yesterday's performance been merely a sort of lucky fluke, assisted by an astonishing display of unexpected headwork on the part of Mace Russell? Knowing the latter as he did, Pebble found such a proposition hard to credit. Yet it was almost equally difficult to understand how King, with his meager experience behind the pan, could be altogether responsible for that surprising showing.

At any rate, to-day would decide it. If the erratic Irishman, starting out under the handicap of sulkiness, should by any chance win his game, the shortstop would know what to believe.

Al Ogan, of the Blue Stockings, had swung at the curve and missed. With two strikes and no balls called, it would be natural for Sweeney to try a coaxer or two. But King signaled for a straight one, and, after a second's hesitation, the pitcher sneaked over a fast "whisker trimmer," catching the batter napping, and filling Pebble's heart with joy.

He was still more delighted at the manner in which Max Duoro was lured into popping up a weak infield fly that Manny smothered without moving from his tracks.

"That's the stuff," he chuckled, as the Wolves streamed in from the field. "That's the way to handle 'em. If he can only keep it up, we'll grab another game from this cocky first-division bunch."

CHAPTER VII.

BREWING TROUBLE.

THE fans seemed to be in high good humor. They cheered Sweeney long and loud, and even condescended to give a yell for King, to which that young man paid no more attention than a deaf mute. Then, having eased themselves of a few sarcastic witticisms at the expense of the visiting team, they settled down to root for runs.

Nels Savage, a clever youngster from the West, noted for his astonishing command of the elusive spitball, was in the box for the Blue Stockings. He soon showed himself to be by no means

a one-card artist by retiring Buck Loutrel without once having recourse to his famous specialty.

Scrappy Betts, a left-hand batter, was more difficult, however. Savage pulled him twice with his erratic twisters, only to have him smash a hot grounder toward third.

Meserole leaped for the daisy-cutter, got his final "meat hand" on the ball, dropped it, picked it up hurriedly, and threw it ten feet over the first baseman's head. Betts scuttled to second, where he paused, jeering.

"Wough!" yelled Stone, hustling to the pan. "It's a shame to do it, but we can't help it."

Unruffled, Savage passed up a teaser, at which Pebble merely sniffed in derision. Another wide one followed, then came an erratic twister that seemed actually to curve around the shortstop's bat as he swung. Finally, with three and two called, Stone made connections with a high, close one—"picked it off'n his ear," as Manny expressed it—and sent the ball humming over the shortstop's head.

As Betts flung himself across the rubber a fraction of a second before the horsehide plunked into the catcher's mitt, a roar of delight rose from the crowd.

"Got him going!" was the jubilant cry. "Got him going! Put the blanket on him now!"

The appearance of King, shouldering his war club, brought forth a barking chorus of admonition.

"Lam her out, Brick, old bo-oy!" begged a shrill-voiced rooter.

"Hi, you Cabbage! You know what you done yesterday," howled another.

Some of them still called him Cabbage, but their intonation had changed it from an epithet of derision to a term full of friendly confidence. Christy noted the difference, but gave no heed. All he had to do was to fan at this juncture, and the shift back to that old, unreasoning abuse would be swift and grilling.

TO BE CONTINUED.

A Man of Few Words

MANAGER: "Trimble won't give us any more orders, eh?"

Salesman: "Well, he didn't say so in so many words, but that's what he gave me to understand."

"How so?"

"He kicked me out."

Rather a Large Order

HE was a buyer in a large wholesale house, and he was in love. One night he snatched a kiss.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I am so well pleased with this sample that I should like to negotiate for all you have."

He was accepted on the spot.

Before and After

WHAT'S the gloaming, Uncle Tom?"

"Well, before a man is married it is the time to take a walk with the girl he loves; but after he is married it is the time he falls over rocking-horses and building blocks on the parlor floor."

Talks With Top-Notch Readers

By BURT L. STANDISH

ON THE FIRING LINE

A CRITICAL reader who covers considerable ground is John Bredehaeft of St. Louis; he sends this:

I liked your stories in nearly all of the numbers that I have read. In the March 15th edition "His Double Rôle" was good; also, "Merely a Hero" was fine. Such are the stories that ought to be published; they give men a better view of life as it is.

In the April 1st edition, "Wished on Him in Washington" was fine—just great. Have Mr. Baker write another—a sort of serial or continuation. "For the Planter's Cup" was also good. But "The Kit Kirby Campaign" was poor. I thought that Mr. Phillips could write better stories than that.

"Boltwood of Yale" was one of the finest stories I have yet read. It showed the stuff that every man should be made of. In my estimation, Mr. Patten has rapidly risen above Mr. Lebhar, who, I think, is getting monotonous with the Camera Chap. "The Camera Chap" is very popular at present, but it will soon die out. Hoping that you do not take my criticism too seriously, I remain, your constant reader, JOHN BREDEHAEFT.

The popularity of the Camera Chap stories is not yet on the wane, if we may judge from the mention of that series made in recent letters from readers. We have one in the safe, and it will be published as soon as room can be found for it. We think you will find it one of the best Mr. Lebhar has turned out.

"The Woodbine Mystery," by William Bullock, which we expected to publish in this issue, has been crowded out, along with some other interesting stories, which you will get in due course. In the next issue will begin a serial of circus life, by James French Dorrance, entitled, "Martingale the Magnificent." Another big feature is "The Man of the Minute," by Tom Gallon, which will be the leading complete novel. It is a delightful tale of New York.

In the same issue Mr. Lebhar will have a novelette entitled "Burglaries Bewildering." It is in this popular author's best vein.

A LETTER which shows what close attention readers give to details in their TOP-NOTCH stories has been received from H. M. Fisher, of East Pine Street, Atlanta, Georgia. It is as follows:

Just another word from one of your readers, who can't help complimenting you on your marvelous publication, especially when you get same out twice a month for the small sum of ten cents.

I can very truthfully say that I can find nothing wrong with your magazine. Of course, you understand that there are some stories that do not appeal to me, and which I do not like; however, I take into consideration the fact that there are probably several thousand readers to whom the story that I would not care for would appeal. I read several other magazines of fiction, and

Top-Notch is directly on the firing line with the others.

Now, not criticizing, but I would like to call your attention to a slight error in the first installment of Mr. Tyson's great serial, "Boots and Saddles." In your last number, on page 27, if I remember correctly, Mr. Tyson stated that Sergeant Teake "sat on the porch and smoked until half past nine," and in the next paragraph he stated "that it still lacked a few minutes to nine," when the sergeant left to keep his appointment. This is just to show that some of us notice the small details, and this point struck me at once. Give us a good baseball serial, which would incidentally give us another of your own great stories. Best wishes to yourself and the Top-Notch family.

A baseball serial is begun in the present issue, as most of you have found out, doubtless, before reading this tale. Now and then a reader tells us that the talk is the first thing he turns to, but we suppose that such cases are rare. On that account we seldom tell you anything about the stories in the number that you hold in your hand. The stories are their own best spokesmen.

"A Hide-away Headliner" is the title of a particularly clever theatrical tale by Roland Ashford Phillips that will appear in the issue of Top-Notch to come to you in two weeks.

Will Gage Carey will have a bright story in that issue—somewhat daring in theme, but ingeniously worked out and delightful to read. It is called "An Angel of Los Angeles."

Editor Top-Notch Magazine.

Dear Sir: I am not a regular subscriber to Top-Notch, but I take it regularly from my news dealer. I am taking the liberty to write to you, and give my opinion of your splendid book.

I am a reader of many other magazines, but fail to find any to compare with Top-Notch. Who would want a better drama than J. F. Dorrance's "Roped Rivers," or Levison's horse-race story, "The Crucial Mile"? For a book with a mixture of Western, humorous, dramatic, or pathetic stories, Top-Notch is a sure winner forty ways, especially for Western stories. In other words, where can a thin dime be invested to more advantage by readers of to-day's weekly and monthly magazines? Hoping this carries my opinion of your magazine to you perfectly, I am, respectfully yours,

Arthur W. Williams.

Third Street, Chelsea, Mass.

From Alameda, California—the writer being Mr. W. Danvers, of Paru Street—we have this:

Editor Top-Notch Magazine.

Dear Sir: I have been an interested reader of Top-Notch for over two years. It seems to have a very good circulation in this part of the United States. I like most all of the stories. Among my favorites are "Boltwood of Yale" and the Camera Chap stories, but for real funny fiction I think the "Ruby of Roo" and its sequel, the "Bass Drum Soloist," are hard to beat. If Mr. Carey has any more along this line let us have them. I wish you continued success.

Mr. Carey has more "along the line." He is at work upon the longest story he has ever written, with this fascinating South Sea setting. It will appear as a serial novel, running through three numbers at least.

A stirring bit of fiction that awaits you in the next issue is a motor-racing tale by M. Worth Colwell, entitled, "Hinky's Top Speed." In the same number will be a Mexican border tale by Clinton Dangerfield, author of that big Top-Notch hit, "A Knight of Tennessee." This latest contribution from the author is called "In Every Crisis."

Editor Top-Notch Magazine.

Dear Sir: I have been a reader of your magazine for over three years, and

have never expressed my opinion before. In all the time I have been reading this magazine, I have never read a good horse-racing story—one of the flat ones. I think that the author of "The Crucial Mile" should be able to write a good one, as that was about the best harness story I have ever read. Hoping I will soon have the pleasure of reading such a story, I remain, yours very truly, P. J. CAMPBELL.

E. Preston Street, Baltimore, Md.

Editor TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: This is my first attempt to get into the "Talks with T.-N. Readers." I have read your magazine since Lee Blake appeared in the "Trolley Man." At that time "Aladdin's Lamp of 1911" appeared, and I must say it was one of the most enjoyable stories I have read. Your Lefty tales are peachy. I also wish to praise W. H. Hamby, who wrote the neatest little serial I've ever read; it was "The Boneville Shake-up." A. P. Terhune's a bear, as is Mayn Clew Garnett, and the fellow who wrote that delightful summer tale, "Over the Plate." I've read all of the great animal-story writers, but Harold de Polo is the king of them all.

And now is the point in which I which to "bawl out" Floyd Vernon, who wishes that you publish no more "Gentleman of the Road" stories. Let me say that the author, Ward Ostrom, is one of your best writers, and his old-English tales are wonderfully gotten up. Please let us—for my friends are in love with them, too—hear from Mr. Ostrom soon.

I have just finished another delightful tale, "With Rapiers Drawn." Thomas Barr, you are a wonder. "The Fathers of Jeanne" is another dandy.

I'm sorry I've taken up your good time, Mr. Standish, but I had to argue with Brother Vernon, *"that's all."*

M. STEUER.

Editor TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have read your magazine for quite a time now, so I must let you know what I think of it. To say the least, TOP-NOTCH is the best magazine for a red-blooded American that I have ever come across. Every story in it is splendid, and especially the stories by yourself, Bertram Lebhar, Albert Payson Terhune, and Ralph Boston. I would like to see another story of theatrical life by Roland Ashford Phillips. I remain your well-wisher for continued success.

MAURICE A. GROSS.

Cleveland, Ohio.

Editor TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I think the TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE is the best magazine that is published to-day in the United States. I can scarcely wait till it comes every first and fifteenth, and nearly worry the news dealer to death. Please put more sporting stories in it, either in the form of baseball, football, rowing, basket ball, or any other American sport. The stories by you, Bertram Lebhar, Gilbert Patten, and David Skaats Foster cannot be beaten, and the only fault is there are not enough of them. Yours truly, THOR MADERN

Burnet, Texas.

Editor TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

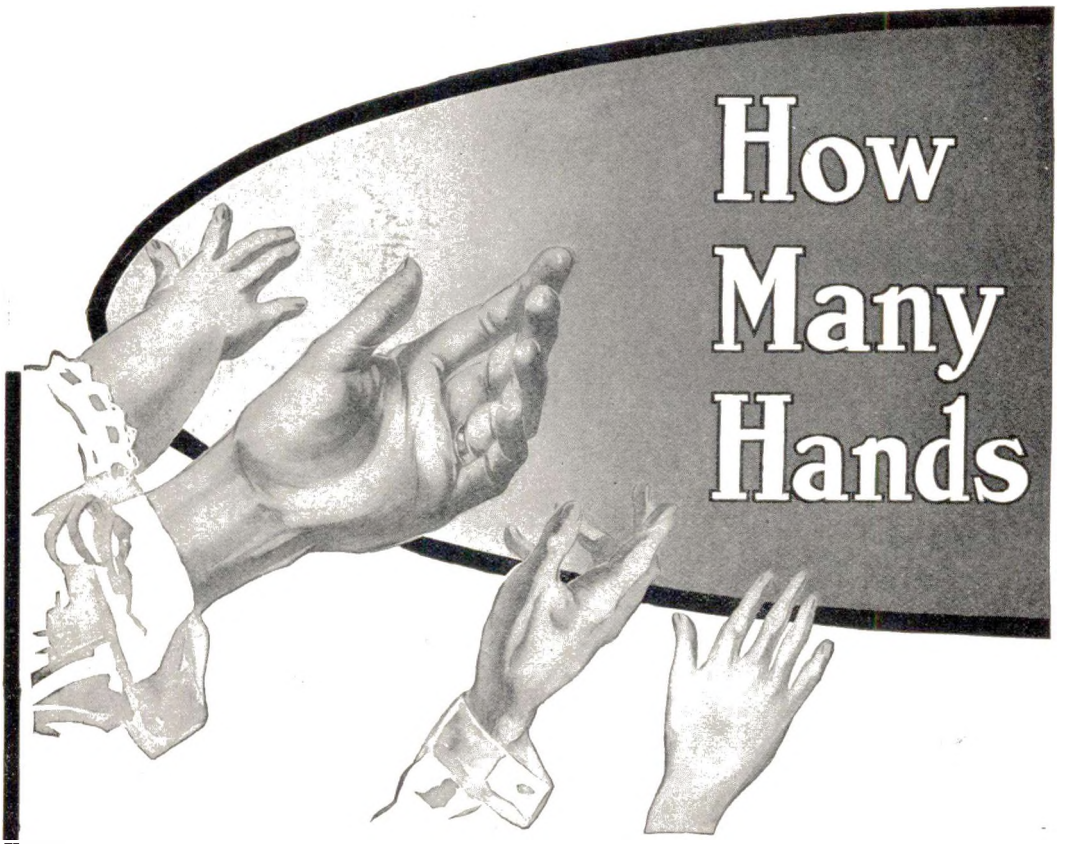
DEAR SIR: I thought that you would not mind if I dropped you a line or two from Los Angeles. By the way, just a suggestion—if there is any way to get a hold of James Barr, author of "The Price of a Life," just have him shot at sunrise, or, if possible, before. Mr. Barr calls this story a dramatic effort on the part of himself.

Shades of Moses! I certainly am in sympathy with him, and would not say anything to hurt his feelings, but if he has any more visions like this story, I think, from a humane standpoint, please don't shoulder them on the readers of TOP-NOTCH.

"With Rapiers Drawn" is a fine story, and "The College Rebel," by Mr. Patten, are good, and there is a lot of other fine reading in TOP-NOTCH; in fact, I like it better than any of the other magazines, and always am glad when the first or the fifteenth of the month rolls around.

W. MONTAGUE KENDALL.

Los Angeles, Cal.



The Hands at Home are Reaching for Every Man's Salary

As his family grows, his needs are greater—as prices rise, his struggle is greater.

The cost of living is no respecter of Salaries. ***You must advance*** to keep ahead of your needs, and the only way to advance is, to ***keep learning more and more about your work.***

The untrained man's value is absolutely fixed—certain work at a certain wage, regardless of family or prices of food, rent and clothing.

The trained man's value has no limit. His salary increases with his knowledge.

You can have the training that will put you in the class of ***advancing men,*** whose rise to success is ***faster*** than the growing needs of home and family.

Thousands of men have read other messages of advice like this, have acted upon them and have risen to high-salaried positions through the aid of the International Correspondence Schools.

Get Rid of Your Money Worries

Over 400 men each month voluntarily write to the I. C. S. telling how they have had their salaries increased, due directly to I. C. S. training.

Missing Page

Inside back cover

Missing Page

Back cover